

Dark Suns

**A One-Round Living Jungle Adventure for heroes of
all levels**

by Tom Prusa

A journey to a strange land. A quest for learning, so says Roshink, the earth elemental noble. "You will see what magic can do if it runs amok. You will see what beings as callous as the Tamara can do to a land, when they can ravage unchecked. Seek out this knowledge, and return wiser, and better able to fight for your lands". An adventure for heroes of all levels.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, D&D, and RPGA are registered trademarks of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. RAVENS BLUFF, MALATRA, LIVING CITY, LIVING DEATH, LIVING JUNGLE, LIVING GREYHAWK, and LIVING VERGE are trademarks of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. Scenario detail copyright 2002 by Wizards of the Coast, Inc. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. This scenario is intended for tournament use only and may not be reproduced without approval of the RPGA Network.

This is a RPGA Network adventure game. A four-hour time block has been allocated for playing the game (or this round of the game), but the actual playing time will be about three hours.

It is a good idea to ask each player to put a name tag in front of him or her. The tag should have the player's name at the bottom, and the character's name, race, and gender at the top. This makes it easier for the players to keep track of who is playing which character.

Scoring the game for RPGA points: The RPGA has three ways to score this game. Consult your convention coordinator to determine which method to use:

1. *No-vote scoring:* The players write their names and numbers on the scoring packet grid, you fill in the top of the grid. That is all. No one is rated. This method is used for people who are just playing for fun.
2. *Partial scoring:* The players rate the game master and the scenario on their player voting sheet, and provide personal information, but don't vote for other players. The game master rates the scenario and completes personal and event information, but does not rate the players as a team or vote for players. This method is used when there is no competition, but the convention coordinator wants information as to how the game masters are performing, or the game master wants feedback on his or her own performance.
3. *Voting:* Players and game masters complete the entire packet, including voting for best player. If this method is used, be sure to allow about 15-20 minutes for the players to briefly describe their characters to the other players, and about 5-10 minutes for voting. This method is used when the players want to know who played the best amongst them, or when the adventure is run in tournament format with winners and prizes. Multi-round adventures usually required advancing a smaller number of players than played the first round, so voting is required for multi-round adventures.

When using Voting, rank the players in order of your voting choice while they are completing their forms, so that you are not influenced by their comments on your abilities.

The players are free to use the game rules to learn about equipment and weapons their characters are carrying.

Some of the text in this scenario is written so that you may present it as written to the players, while other text is for your eyes only. Text for the players will be in ***bold italics***. It is strongly

recommended that you paraphrase the player text, instead of reading it aloud, as some of the text is general and must be adapted to the specific situation or to actions of the player characters.

The Living Jungle Campaign

Players bring their own characters to Living Jungle events, and are responsible for keeping records of the characters experience, wealth and possessions. Look over the characters that are brought to your table, both to familiarize yourself with them and to check for unusual magic items or discrepancies. Magic in the Living Jungle is very rare, with permanent magic items being very, very rare. Most Living Jungle possessions will be ornamental, symbolic, or items carried for barter. If a player has an unusual item or items, question them where they got it. If you are not satisfied with their answer, you may disallow the item for the round.

During the course of the adventure, the PC's will earn experience points based upon completion of the story. If time does not permit the completion of this module, award 50-75% of the story award, depending on how far the heroes got in the adventure.

DM's please note: The maximum experience points available for this tournament is 2000. This is attainable only if the PC's do everything correctly and make it through the entire scenario.

This module is designed for characters of any level. Low tier refers to parties with an average character level of 1-5. High tier refers to parties of 6-12th level.

At Death's Door

Living adventures use a version of the Death's Door rule for the duration of the tournament. If a PC is reduced to zero or less hit points, he/she does not die immediately. Instead, the PC continues to lose one hit point at the end of each round until aided by another PC or NPC, or unless they are able to stabilize themselves. Each round there is a 10% chance they stabilize on their own. PCs die when they reach -11 hit points.

Adventure Summary and Background

In this tournament the heroes are transported to Athas, the land of the Dark Sun. Roshink, the earth elemental noble, wants the heroes to truly see what Malatra will become if the Tamara are not stopped. He also wants to test the mettle of

the heroes, and he knows that the land he fled will do it. He reveals that all of the elemental nobles in Malatra fled here from Athas, where their very survival was in danger.

As soon as the heroes agree to go, Roshink forms a gate with his body. As they step through, they are greeted by heat, dryness, and elves. The elves are slavers, and assume the heroes are some sort of wizards who have teleported here to escape from the arenas of the cities. The heroes are quickly captured, and brought before the elf chieftain to explain themselves.

After some role-playing with the elves, most or all of the heroes are consigned to be sold as slaves. The elves have done this for a long time, and the heroes have only their differences as Malatrans to aid in their escape. That is, until the elves are attacked by a sand worm, which draws off their guards. The heroes should seize the opportunity and make their way off into the desert. They may be able to take an ally, a thri-kreen who was taken as a slave. He can give them a few clues about the world they find themselves in.

The lack of water is the next challenge they face, as the thri-kreen needs only a little, while some of the heroes may need a lot. Their skills and spells may or may not prove to be enough, but either way, their survival won't be easy. They then encounter the thri-kreen's pack, or clutch. He saves them from being eaten by the thri-kreen, explaining what they did to help him. The thri-kreen are not that sentimental, but they do hate elves, and the knowledge of the elven caravan is enough to send them off running, thus eliminating any pursuit the heroes may fear.

As they are running out of water, they are discovered by a pyreen, a being of some elemental and magical power. The pyreen cannot stay to help, but she does question them and offer some advice. The heroes must make it to the Ringing Mountains, and the forest beyond. She can offer guidance, and warnings.

Next the heroes have an encounter with a watery plant, but the plant attacks them. They may defeat it and gain some water, but it is likely they'll be weakened by the encounter.

Stumbling across some ruins, the heroes may trigger an ancient magical trap, one that would be simple for normal D&D adventurers, but could prove quite complex for Malatrans.

Reaching the mountains, the heroes have a steep climb, or an encounter with guards at the pass. The guards expect bribes that the heroes cannot pay, but some fast and skilled bartering can get them through.

Finally in the forest, the heroes can recover con points lost due to lack of water. As they do, they see something that at last looks familiar. Halflings, even tattooed halflings, just like the shu from home. These strange shu are friendly, willing to help, and of course, cannibals. A fight probably ensues, where the key to winning is to give up. The heroes must return through the dreamlands, and the shu are using sleep poison on them. As they succumb to the sleep poison, they find themselves transported home.

Introduction

The summons came strangely. You were walking along through the jungle when the earth formed a mouth. "Come to the River of Laughing Idols, to the idol at the base of the Mountain of Fire. I am Roshink, keeper of the earth pact, and I have need of your wisdom and experience. For while you are wise, there is much you must learn if Malatra is to survive. Come with all haste, if you care about the life of the jungle".

With a summons like that, you soon found yourself two days north of the village of the Saiyama, at an idol that sits on an outcropping of Fire Mountain. Waiting for you there, with the patience only the earth can show, is Roshink, the earth elemental noble. "I am glad you came. While the heroes of Malatra are unswerving in their fight against the Tamara, many of Malatra's people do not understand the need for the sacrifices they must make. I call upon you to go and learn. Learn what the consequences of the Tamara invasion could be. It involves a journey to a strange land, one I and the other nobles of the elements had to flee from. Your quest is simple. You will be delivered to a spot in the desert of a strange land. Head for the mountains that you will see. When you reach the mountains, cross them until you come to a great forest. There you must find an oak tree that is too big for a saru to put his arms around. When you find such an oak, I will be able to bring you back, through the dreamlands."

"Some advice I have for you. Take plenty of water, for water is scarce on Athas. Avoid the cities, most are held by beings called the Dragon Kings. The Dragon Kings are in their own way even more powerful than the tamara, and every bit as evil. If you enter a city, it is likely you will never see Malatra again. And

finally, keep your eyes open and your senses alert. Nothing may be what it seems on Athas, and I would that you learn from this trip, not perish from it."

"A word of advice to the katanga, saru, lizardmen, lacerials, and plantmen among you. Katanga should go in human form, if this is acceptable to you. If not, you should go in animal form, but do not reveal that you can speak, or even that you are more than an animal. Shapechangers are rare where you are going; this could prove to be a valuable asset for you. Likewise, lizardmen, saru, and lacerials may not be seen as anything more than a monster of limited intelligence. Such a misconception could prove invaluable."

Give the heroes time to get ready. Roshink has arranged with the Saiyama for two water skins per hero, as well as what they normally carry. He advises them to take all they can carry. He has also arranged for trail rations for two weeks for each hero (trail bread, dried fruit, dried meat, and roots that will keep well in the heat).

At this time, make sure the heroes define exactly what they are carrying with them. Many heroes have canoes, wheelbarrows, multiple weapons, and lots of stuff they would not need to carry on an expedition like this. In game terms, Roshink wants to be sure that if they must flee from some danger, they are able to move quickly. In real terms, if the heroes lose stuff, they shouldn't lose it all. The exception is spell fetishes, since those are not used, they will be seen only as trinkets or keepsakes, and should all be taken.

When the heroes are ready, Roshink opens a gate.

Roshink takes a last look at you. "Go now heroes, I am counting on you to bring back the wisdom that Malatra needs. Be wary and watchful, and do what you must to return." Roshink then bends over, forming an arch with his rocky body. The arch begins to glow with a dark shine, which then brightens. Somehow you know that stepping through the glow will take you.. somewhere else.

When the heroes step through, continue with Encounter One. Note: They must all step through before any of them are transported. The gate actually leads through the dreamlands, and Roshink effectively 'holds' them there until all are ready to go.

The world of Athas is much different than what the heroes are used to. The major differences are spelled out in the DM – Aid #1.

Encounter One: Elves

As the swirling sensation stops, you are disoriented for a few moments. Then your sense return. Three things strike you at first glance. The first is the sun, it is red! The second is the heat. Well, it is no hotter than you are used to in Malatra, but the air is so dry. You can feel the moisture being sucked out of you as you stand. Last are the beings that surround you, and the nets that are settling over you.

Surrounding you are several hands of hands (50-75) of tall beings that resemble gaunt tam'hi. They are throwing more nets upon you, nets that are weighted at the ends to slow down attempts at escape. You have appeared in the middle of a camp, and the inhabitants do not seem friendly.

Note: oscray recognize these beings as something other than tam'hi. They are elves, the beings that the oscray fled from when they came to Malatra. This is not a good race, at least by oscray standards. And in this case, the oscray are right, the heroes have appeared in the middle of a camp of elvish slavers. While surprised at the heroes' appearance, they assume it is a magical transport spell gone wrong, and are quick to capture the possible merchandise.

About the nets: The nets are designed to capture beings with strengths in excess of 25. Heroes have two nets thrown upon each of them initially. Break difficulty is 35; escape artist DC is 30. The nets are made of an incredibly tough woven plant rope; with a hardness of 1, and 10 hit points. So a hero may be able to cut through. To foil this, the elves wait with blunted arrows, spells, and psionic powers.

Elves-Athasian: NA (100), medium humanoid; Fighter 4; Hit Dice: 4d10+12 (40 hp); Initiative: +6 (dex); Speed: 60 ft; AC: 18 (+2 leather armor, +6 dex); Attacks: +9 melee, +10 ranged; Damage: 1d6+5 (subdual – padded club) or ranged 1d6+1 (subdual – blunted arrows) or 1d6+5 (spear); Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft; Special Qualities: Low-light vision, Psionics; Saves: Fort +6, Ref +6, Will +2; Abilities: Str 21, Dex 22, Con 17, Int 12, Wis 14, Cha 10; AL NE;

Skills & Feats: Hide +8, Survival – Desert +4, Survival – Steppes +4, Survival – Salt Flats +4, Spot +5, Listen +5, Water Find +3; Alertness, Dodge, Endurance, Point blank shot, Precise shot.

Running: All elves may add twice their constitution to their running speed on any long run.

Psionics: All of the elves have a wild psionic talent. Each elf has one of the following (50% chance for each one)

Burst: 0 level talent, cost – free for the first 3 uses, 1 point thereafter. Adds 10 to speed for one round.

Slide: 0 level talent, cost – free for the first 3 uses, 1 point thereafter. Add 15 to speed, allows them to skate as though they were on ice.

In addition, 1 in 10 have one of the following powers:

Concussion: 2nd level psionic power, cost 2 – does 3d6 points of damage, Fortitude save (DC-18) for ½. The damage may be subdual; in this encounter the elves always use subdual damage. Range is 100’.

Brain lock – 3rd level psionic power – cost 3, victim gets a Will save (DC- 16), or all higher brain functions are locked. Effectively paralyzes victim, no spells or movement possible. The *brain lock* lasts for 3 rounds. Range is 130’.

The elves have 6 power points each; those with Concussion or Brain lock have 12 each.

Note: rather than roll for each elf, assume that 5 have *concussion* and 5 have *brain lock*. If someone tries to determine who is using these powers, a Spot check (DC 15), lets the hero determine where these attacks came from.

Athasian Elvish Priests of Air: NA (2); medium humanoid; Priest of Air 6; Hit Dice: 6d8+18 (56 hp); Initiative: +5 (dex); Speed: 60 ft; AC: 17 (+2 leather armor, +5 dex); Attacks: +8 melee, +8 ranged; Damage: 1d6+6 (subdual – padded club) or ranged 1d6+1 (subdual – blunted arrows) or 1d6+6 (spear); Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft; Special Qualities: Low-light vision, Psionics; Saves: Fort +6, Ref +5, Will +8; Abilities: Str 20, Dex 20, Con 16, Int 13, Wis 20, Cha 14; AL NE;

Skills & Feats: Hide +8, Survival – Desert +4, Survival – Steppes +4, Survival – Salt Flats +4,

Spot +5, Listen +5; Alertness, Endurance, Point blank shot

Running: All elves may add twice their constitution to their running speed on any long run.

Domains: Air, Travel; Domain powers – *freedom of movement* for six rounds per day, turn or rebuke earth elementals.

Domain Spells: *expeditious retreat, wind wall, fly.*

Spells available: (5/7/5/3) – Save – DC 15+ spell level: 0 Level: *create water x2, cure minor wounds, detect magic, read magic*, 1st level: *bless, curse, cure light wounds x2, cause light wounds x2, messenger*, 2nd Level: *cure moderate wounds, hold person x2, silence 15’ radius, wyvern watch*, 3rd level: *cure serious wounds, create food & water, searing light*.

Psionics: The priests both have 12 psionic points, and the same power, *brainlock*.

Brain lock – 3rd level psionic power – cost 3, victim gets a Will save (DC- 18), or all higher brain functions are locked. Effectively paralyzes victim, no spells or movement possible. The *brain lock* lasts for 3 rounds. Range is 160’.

Dealing with the Elves:

The heroes are most likely going to be captured. Let them fight for a while, if they wish, but their options are limited.

Cutting through the nets: This may work, but it is opposed by many elves. First, they throw more nets (another for each hero). Then, they’ll fire blunt arrows, attempting to knock out the heroes with subdual damage. If this does not work immediately, psionics are used. Those with *brain lock* attempt to paralyze the hero. Those with *concussion* use that to help subdue the heroes. At worst case, up to six elves will grapple with the hero. With their strength, it shouldn’t take long to subdue the hero.

Shapechanging: Katanga’s may use shapechanging to try to get an advantage. A snake might be able to squirm through the net, for example, or a pangolin dig out from under it. Any heroes who shape change are given special notice. Shapechangers are rare and feared on Athas, and giving notice of this ability gets the

hero a LOT of attention. At least a dozen elves fire blunt arrows, and the priests will try *hold person* spells, not knowing if they will work, but willing to risk it to capture such a valuable prey.

Escaping. A high level party may be able to use magic and strength to actually get out of the nets. Once that is achieved, some of them - with the power to fly – may think that they can simply fly away to freedom. The problem with that is that fly speed is 90 (60 if encumbered), the elves move almost that fast. If they run, they can be well ahead of the heroes. Of course the heroes can fly up out of range, but until they do get out of range (at least 2 rounds, probably closer to 4), they are targeted by up to 40 blunt arrows per round (divided among those heroes who attempt this escape route). If somehow everyone is able to take this route, the number rises to 80 blunt arrows per round, as well as spells and psionics.

Others may choose to run away. Impala katanga, for instance, are likely to be sure they can speed away from the elves. This causes great merriment among the elves. They'll even wait a round or two, and then a dozen or so simply outrun the heroes, surrounding them. They'll literally run rings around the heroes while tossing nets and bashing them with padded clubs.

Other complications: The heroes can probably come up with something not covered here. Remember that the elves do this for a living. They should be prepared for about anything the heroes try that is not unique to Malatra. The heroes may be able to get out and do some damage by attacking, but the numbers and abilities of the elves should allow them to capture the heroes.

Handling the captured heroes: The heroes are stripped of weapons. Any obvious spell casters are searched for magical items. For these purposes their fetishes do not radiate magic. In fact, unless the fetish has inherent value (a gem, for instance), they are not even taken. The elves do examine the lining of any clothes that spell casters wear, saying something about 'looking for any spells you might have stitched into your clothing'. This should be a mystery to the heroes, but the elves do not explain.

Once they have their weapons, the heroes are bound securely. The ropes have the same strength as the nets, Break Difficulty 35, Escape Artist difficulty 30. Tigers, lizardmen, and others with claws have leather bags tied over their paws/hands to prevent them from using their claws on the ropes, or their captors. Plantmen are

a bit of a mystery to the elves, but the chance to sell a mobile plant for use in the arena is too good to pass up, they are trussed up especially well.

There is one, and only one exception to this. Any female tam'hi are treated differently. They are asked if they are a villichi. If they looked surprised or deny knowledge of who or what those are, they receive the same treatment as the rest of the heroes. If they say that yes they are (and they should use a good haughty air while doing so), they are released. A pair of elves stays with them everywhere they go. They are also handled differently in the interviews (see below).

What's a villichi: The villichi are a retreat of female psionics. They are highly trained, extremely tough, and very protective of their own kind. The elves do not want to enrage this powerful group, and will release any of them they capture. However, the villichi are not known for loyalty to friends or anyone other than another villichi. Therefore, a female tam'hi carrying out this deception can secure only her own freedom.

Encounter Two: The interviews

Assuming you have managed to capture some or all of the heroes, the chief of the elves is interested in questioning them. He needs to determine whether they are fit to fight in the arena – making them worth a much better price – or if they should just go to work in the mines.

Athasian Elf Chieftain: medium humanoid; Fighter 10; Hit Dice: 10d10+60 (156 hp); Initiative: +10 (dex, improved init.); Speed: 60 ft; AC: 25 (+4 hide armor, +6 dex, +5 *ring of deflection*); Attacks: +18/+13 melee, +17/+12 ranged; Damage: 1d8+9 (Crit 19-20/*long spear* +1) or ranged 1d6+1 (short bow); Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft; Special Qualities: Low-light vision, Psionics; Saves: Fort +10, Ref +10, Will +5; Abilities: Str 22, Dex 22, Con 20, Int 15, Wis 23, Cha 15; AL NE; Languages: Trade tongue (common), Elvish (oscray), sign language.

Skills & Feats: Barter +10, Bluff +4, Diplomacy +4, Hide +4, Knowledge – Athas Trade Routes +5, Sense Motive +7; Survival – Desert +6, Survival – Steppes +6, Survival – Salt Flats +6, Spot +5, Listen +5, Water Find +10; Alertness, Improved Critical – Longspear, Point blank shot, Precise Shot, Run, Weapon Focus – longspear, Weapon Specialization – Long Spear, Skill Focus – Barter,

Running: All elves may add twice their constitution to their running speed on any long run.

Wild Psionic Talents: Ramok has 6 Power points and the following power.

Burst: 0 level talent, cost – free for the first 3 uses, 1 point thereafter. Adds 10 to speed for one round.

Ramok Firehar has been chief for seven seasons. He earned it honorably; he slew the former chief during a battle with a group of thri-kreen. He has successfully resisted all challengers for longer than most chiefs, and generally enjoys the support of his tribesmen. He is a shrewd bargainer, skilled at getting the best deal for his tribe. His loyalties are to his tribe alone, and anything (including slaves) that aids his tribe is seen as a good thing.

Ramok wants to see and talk with all of the heroes. He is interested in learning their skills, backgrounds, and story. The more he knows, the better price he gets for them.

The only exceptions are those even Ramok does not recognize as intelligent animals. In spite of what Roshink says, he tries to talk to everyone but those in animal form. He'll even question plantmen – using sign language. If they refuse to answer, he'll eventually give up, on plantmen. Lizardmen and lacerials are a different story, Ramok has seen such before, and knows that they are at least smart enough to communicate. Besides, they were carrying weapons. If someone absolutely refuses to talk with him under any circumstances, he tells them that he'll see how they do after they've gone without water for a day or two, and has them bound and thrown into the cage.

Ramok's questions:

Who are you and where are you from?

He takes the truth with laughter. He'll accept the name Malatra, claiming to have heard of a little town like that out past the Ringing Forest. He does not believe they came from another plane. If someone insists, he shrugs it off with a simple "Well, I guess you won't be going back then, will you?"

What are you?

Or

What kind of an elf/dwarf/halflings are you?

This question is directed to all he doesn't recognize. Tam'hi males are seen as elves, dwarves here are hairless, and halflings here go naked with many tattoos and sharply filed teeth. Other races he inquires about.

Note: At this time, any katanga in human form have their shadows noticed. A guard points this out. Ramok questions them most persistently about this, but never comes close to the truth, that that is their real shape. He assumes it's either a magical effect (his priests check but detect no magic), or a psionic one. If no other explanation is given, he'll put it down to the hero having *animal affinity* (a psionic discipline), and order his guards to watch this one especially well.

What can you do? Can you fight?

He's trying to determine if they'll make a decent sale for the arena. If they deny any fighting prowess, he'll ask if they are spellcasters or 'users of the way' (psionicists). If they admit to it (or have shown spellcasting ability before), he'll order their clothes searched again for any holy symbols or spell writings. Naturally enough, they find none. Some of the higher level witch doctors in the jungles have a lot of fetishes. He'll ask about all the trinkets, but still won't connect this with spell casting.

What is this stuff?

As he questions each hero, the heroes' weapons and other items are brought forth and picked over. Any gems or other items of intrinsic value will be placed in a small wagon, pulled by some insectoid creatures. The heroes' weapons are also placed there, for the time being. The only item Ramok might help himself to is a set of raptor hide armor, since it is actually better than his own hide armor. Also, all water skins are taken and distributed amongst the tribesmen. The elves are not terribly concerned with junk, so if it is not worth money, and cannot be used to aid in escape (as they recognize it), the heroes get to keep it.

Potions, brews, salves, special stuff like that are treated as potential water supplies, and tossed into the wagon with their weapons and other stuff.

Into the cages:

The elves have four cages mounted on wagons. These are made of incredibly hard wood – break difficulty 35. The lock has a difficulty of 35 to open. One cage is already occupied by a thri-kreen. Another is where the animal PCs will be placed, although a monkey won't be placed with a tiger, one cage is used for predators, the other for novelties. The heroes are then either all forced into one cage, or separated into two (depending on the party make-up).

A snake katanga could squeeze through the bars (Escape artist check of 10). If the elves are

aware of a hero's ability to do this, they post an extra two guards whose responsibility is to watch the hero with that power.

The locks open with a key. Both air priests and the chieftain carry keys to the cages. The heroes probably have never seen keys used before, but since they'll get to watch the cages being locked, they should have a pretty good idea how to unlock them.

Note: if there are halflings in the party, they are put into a separate cage if at all possible. This happens even if this means crowding a large group into the other cages. If asked why, the elf just replies, "Well, you have to sleep sometime. We'd just as soon have all the slaves make it to market. You know what they say about the short ones." Assuming the party professes ignorance, the elf just rolls his eyes and moves on.

The Reason: On Athas, halflings are notorious as cannibals, and the elves don't want to take any chances.

The Villichi: A female tam'hi may be able to pass herself off as a villichi, given good bluffing skills. Ramok questions her, but not too closely. He's had a run in with the villichi before, when he was just a warrior. The chief at the time took a villichi child as a slave. A group of four of these women showed up, rescued the child, and blasted the chief to pieces with their psionics. Then they were gone. He apologizes for any bad treatment she has received. If she insists on his freeing the heroes, he laughs. He claims he knows enough about the villichi to be sure that she has no real feeling for these beings that are not of her race. If she wants, he offers to sell them to her as slaves, but his asking price is probably higher than she can meet.

Asking price:

Anyone deemed worthy to fight in the arena: 100 gold or a steel weapon

Plantmen or lacerials – twice that

Animals that look like predators (includes caiman and tiger katanga, sarus, or lizardmen) – 50 gold or a small steel weapon.

Those fit only to work in the mines – 10 gold each.

If she has some 'shiny stones' – gems, she may be able to buy the freedom of one of the party. Make sure that the asking price is more than enough to preclude any female tam'hi from buying the whole parties freedom. Since most gems don't have exchange rates listed on them, he uses her lack of knowledge about money to his advantage.

She won't be able to buy the freedom of more than one of the party. Of course, if she has lots of gems, she might be able to barter for a more valuable member – valuable in Ramok's estimation, not to make value judgments here.

The price also applies only to the person, not to any of their stuff. Ramok claims that is rightfully taken booty, and besides who would give a slave a weapon? A villichi has no need of any protection that these slaves could provide. She is capable of protecting herself. If she denies it, Ramok makes a sense motive check against her bluff. He may be able to pierce her bluff. If he does, he doesn't order her captured, he just calls off any dealing and has her put outside his camp. *"I do not know if I believe you or not, but I will not take the chance. Take your water and go. If you return, I take that as proof you are not one of the Sisterhood, and you'll join these. Go, before I make a decision I could come to regret!"*

He won't take a chance, but he won't deal with her anymore. If she persists in returning to the camp, he becomes convinced she's not a true villichi, and has her thrown in the cage with the others.

If she and possibly one other win their freedom, about all they can do is follow the elves until the escape opportunity comes. They won't be able to sneak into camp, the elven priests cast *wyvern watch* and *alarm* spells every night. There are also patrols circling the camp constantly. This is Athas, and the elves are ready for trouble at any moment. If they attempt to sneak into the camp, have a patrol of four elves make spot and listen checks. If they avoid the patrols, they can get to the cages, when the *alarm* spells cast on the cage doors goes off. A priest and several patrols show up to inquire what they are doing. If they avoid a confrontation, they are ushered to the outskirts of camp and asked to leave. A 2nd time gets them in the cages with the others.

Encounter Three: Captivity:

The cage is a hot stuffy place, and the large insects that the elves have pulling these strange things are not smooth. You are all covered with bruises from jouncing around in the cages.

But even worse is the water, or lack of it. The elves have come by with water skins, but the amount of water they let you have is pitifully small. Some of you (if there are

lizardmen, river tam'hi, or plantmen in the party) are starting to suffer, and you haven't even made it for one whole day.

It was midday when you appeared here, and the heat got steadily worse until dusk. The elves started to move then, traveling until well after dark. Now, in the dark, it is almost chilly. The lack of moisture makes the wind cut, and your parched throats are coated with dust.

A quartet of guards is posted near your cages, with several other patrols making their rounds near the outskirts of the camp. The guards look alert, and watch your cages and the surroundings with steady vigilance. Nothing relieves the boredom until a small elven girl approaches the cages. Her eyes are wide as she comes within two nubari lengths of your cages. "What are you? You don't look like any people I ever saw?"

She addresses whoever looks strange to her - saru, the reptilian races, plantmen, whomever stands out in the party.

Mressa is young, curious, and susceptible to being bribed. Not to help the heroes escape, she has no idea how to open the cages. But she might be able to get them some more food and water. She won't do this with theft; theft of water is a very serious offense on Athas. Rather she'll complain to the guards that the *'weak little slaves are really thirsty, I think they're dying. Couldn't we please give them a little more water?'*

She'll take anything that she thinks is pretty, or strange. She's willing to talk, and she has the inevitable child-like capability of asking 'why' to almost every answer.

If the party bribes her, she can get them some more water, the guards come up with a stingy ½ gallon each (1/4 gallon for shu and other small heroes). It probably won't be enough to stave off constitution loss for the high water use heroes, but it should help.

The guards ignore Mressa as long as she doesn't get close to the cages. The guards have the same stats as the elves listed above. One of the guards has the *concussion* power, and another has the *brain lock* power.

The Thri-Kreen – Ka'cha. Ka'cha was captured by the elves a few days ago. He is on his way to the arena. He is a six foot long insect, complete with full purple carapace and four clawed hands. The elves give him a wide berth, because thri-kreen and elves are traditional enemies. At first,

Ka'cha ignores any overtures from the heroes; he has never been separated from his pack before and is in shock. After a day or two, the heroes should be able to coax him to talk. His speech is interspersed with a lot of clicks, common is not easy for him to speak.

Ka'cha is part of a clutch, his family, his reason for living. He mourns his separation from the "Windrunners", as they call their pack. If the heroes want to speak of escape, he'll listen. He has no ideas of his own. He already spent his considerable strength trying to break out of the cage. It has resisted all of his efforts.

Ka'cha Thri-Kreen Fighter 5: medium insectoid; Hit Dice: 5d10+15 (50 hp); Initiative: +7 (dex); Speed: 90 ft; AC: 22 (+5 natural, +7 dex); Attacks: +13 melee (4 claws); Damage: 1d4+4 (claws); Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft; Special Qualities: Low-light vision, Psionics, never sleeps; Saves: Fort +7, Ref +9, Will +4; Abilities: Str 19, Dex 24, Con 17, Int 12, Wis 16, Cha 8; AL N;

Skills & Feats: Hide +5, Survival – Desert +4, Survival – Steppes +4, Survival – Salt Flats +4, Spot +5, Listen +7, Dodge, Weapon Focus – claws, Weapon Finesse – claws, Run.

Psionics: Ka'cha has the wild psionic power of *see sound*) It costs 3 points to use, and allows him to 'hear' with his eyes. Thus, he can hear things even if surrounded by a *silence 15'* radius spell. He has 12 power points per day.

Escaping:

If the heroes come up with a good plan, it should be judged on its merits. Remember that the elves do this for a living. They won't be easily distracted or fooled. On the other hand, if the plan is sound, give it a chance to work. Remember that the cages are locked, and none of the guards carry a key. The chieftain never bothers himself checking on the cages. One of the air priests does come by at every changing of the guard (six hours), to check on the health of the slaves. He may notice that high water use heroes are weakening, and order more water for them. This depends entirely on how weak they look. A perform or bluff check of 15 or a hero whose con dips below 5 are needed to get more water.

Enduring the cages.

If no good plan presents itself, the heroes are stuck in the cages for three more days. Then a good opportunity does present itself. In the meantime, have the heroes worry about water, talk

to Mressa and Ka'cha, and generally be miserable. The temperature climbs to 120 during the day, and the cage provides a little shade, but not enough.

Also, while the nearest of the Ringing Mtns was about five days travel when they arrived, they are steadily moving away. At the time of the next encounter, they are approximately seven days travel from the Ringing Mtns.

Encounter Four: Sand Worm!

It has been four hot dry days since you were captured by these elves. According to your guards, you should reach a trading post in only two more; there you are to be sold! Some of you are headed for the arena, some for the mines.

It is just before dawn, the heat has not started up yet, and in fact it is still a bit chilly. Then there is a cry from one of the elves on point. He comes running back with the incredible speed that these elves have, and is shouting and gesturing to the chieftain. The chief gives out some quick orders, and you can make out only the words "Sink Worm!" from those nearby. Everyone is gathering weapons and racing towards the front of the caravan.

Suddenly a huge form, bigger than a gnasher, explodes from the sand! It is indeed a worm, but what a worm! The part that you can see must tower as high as 10 nubari, and you don't see it all. It is chewing on an elf, while others run up and hurl spears, or stand in concentration using their mysterious mind powers on it. Just as suddenly, it dives back into the sand, to disappear for a round. Then it is back, exploding from the sand near you. Your cages tumble over and over. Your world is spun about. One of the elvish shamans is caught and crushed by a cage, dying just inches from you!

Have each hero make a reflex check (DC 16, 20 for high tier) to see if they avoid damage. Those who fail take 2d6 (4d6 for high tier) subdual damage.

This is the obvious escape opportunity. The cage that crushed the air priest should be one with some heroes with hands. That is, it is not the one with the animal forms of the heroes. Remember that tigers, lizardmen, and other clawed heroes have tough leather bags over their hands.

The cages:

The cage that crushed the air priest ends up upside down. The heroes can reach through and get the keys from the air priest. It takes one round to do this (no roll needed), and at least one round to unlock the cage (Open Lock DC 5, or Dex check DC 10).

The cage with Ka'cha in it has not been touched yet. Once the heroes have opened their own cage, they can open the others with no roll required. (They know how, now).

One of the cages with the heroes in it ended up with the door facing the ground, the other with the door facing the sky. Someone can climb up to the cage to unlock it in one round (DC 0), but strength is required to lift the cage that is facing down. A Strength check (DC 20) is required to lift the cage. As many heroes as are available can aid in the attempt. (Including heroes in the cage who can reach out and push). Ka'cha will help if they free him first.

The wagon with their weapons and other stuff is lying nearby, tipped over and broken. The heroes can gather all of their stuff in two rounds. Of course this assumes they just grab their armor and go, if they stop to strap it on they deserve to be recaptured. If someone actually starts to do this, Ka'cha, if no one else, asks him or her if they mean to stay here or if they could put that on somewhere else. All of the heroes missing items are here, with one possible exception.

If someone has raptor hide armor, or something similar, Ramok the chieftain is wearing it. To retrieve it would mean running into the middle of the battle, and defeating the chief, the Sink worm and the remaining tribesmen. It's gone. Don't worry; the hero should have a chance to get some replacement armor before the end of the module.

The Battle: As the heroes break free, they can see Ramok and a number of warriors leaping onto the Sink Worm's back. They stab at it with spears and knives. The Sink worm is eating two or three elves every other round. It is clearly hungry and plans to feed on the whole tribe. Whenever someone gets in a good shot, the sink worm dives back into the ground, to reappear a round or two later. Most of the elves leap off when it dives down. Those who don't are killed or gravely wounded. During the escape, the heroes see Ramok make the leap on and off again at least twice. Anyone who takes a round to observe can tell that while the sink worm is hurting the tribe, the elves should have it driven off in a matter of minutes, maybe less. It's time to go.

The heroes are in fact noticed by more than one elf, but the sink worm has precedence. Most of those who notice assume they'll just run down the heroes after the battle. After all, they're unarmed and helpless. When they begin to grab their weapons and other stuff, they wait until the chief can lead a patrol after them. An individual elf doesn't want to take on this rather strange bunch, as well as the thri-kreen, by him/herself.

The sink worm managed to eat about 10 elves and gravely wound another 20 before a particularly effective blow from Ramok killed it. One of those killed was one of the priests, so the tribe is low on healing. Therefore, they won't mount a determined search for the heroes. They'll just send out a few patrols, thinking at first that the heroes should be easy to capture.

Water: Ka'cha is not used to worrying about water, as thri-kreen need only a gallon a week. The heroes had better think about it or they'll have a real problem in the desert. Have those who mention it make spot checks (DC 10). Everyone who succeeds can find one water skin of one-gallon capacity. Everyone who gets a 20 or better (18 or better for low tier) can find two water skins, although only one is full. (empty water skins will be important later).

Ka'cha If the heroes do not free him, he asks, then offers his help in the desert. He is not too proud to beg. He can't cry, it's physically impossible. This should not be a problem, but don't let them leave without him. His knowledge is important in the coming encounters.

Encounter Five: Fleeing through the desert.

Freedom, at last! Ka'cha leads you out into the desert, away from the elven slavers. Behind you the sounds of their battle with the sink worm echo for quite some time. Then the sound dies down. You can hear cries of pain from wounded elves. Soon enough the elves will be after you. Their chieftain has told you how valuable he thought you were; now you must see that he does not realize that value.

The country ahead of you is what Ka'cha calls stony barrens. It looks like the most lifeless stretch of sharp rocks you have ever seen. It does offer many hiding places, in small cuts in the stone and spikes of sharp rocks. The country continues this way for a few hours travel, and then changes to endless sand. You

have basically run along the back trail, which is the direction you were told to go. Roshink said to head for the Ringing Mountains. While they do ring around in a gigantic half circle, the closest ones are along your back trail.

The heroes can get almost a mile away before the battle ends. It takes at least ten more minutes for the elves to regroup. The heroes are safely out of sight, but they'll need to lose the elves or else they face recapture.

Possible means for losing the elves.

1. Flight – even for a short distance, can make the party untraceable.
2. Tracking rolls can be used to obscure tracks. Ka'cha can help here, but he shouldn't take the lead, it's up to the heroes.
3. Certain spells might allow the heroes to disguise or cover themselves so as to escape observation.

Let the heroes worry about it, and let them travel through as much of the day as they wish. Later on they will face one of the patrols. At first, they should be on the run.

Water: This is going to be mentioned a lot. They don't have enough, or they have barely enough for a little more than a day. They had received only 1/3 of their daily ration so far, each medium sized hero needs another 2/3 of a gallon for the day, small heroes need 1/3, and susceptible heroes need 2 gallons.

Ka'cha attempts his water find skill, but even with a success, he can only find about 1/4 of a gallon (enough for him). The skill water find is only about finding enough water for one person, not for other people. So he won't take any of the party's water, but he won't contribute any either. He does volunteer that he knows of an oasis where a trading group of nubari (he calls them muls) have an outpost. It is two days travel away. That's two of his days, almost five of the heroes. They don't have enough water for that.

Shamans with *create water* spells can stretch this out. At higher levels they might even have enough to care for the party. They have had several days to memorize spells, so they can have nothing but *create water* spells memorized at 0 level.

Rest: The heroes probably don't want to stop the first day; the elves should be on their minds. By

nightfall, they are exhausted. Of course they should post a watch. Here is where the dubious value of Ka'cha first shows up. Since he never sleeps, he assumes that heroes who do have died. He'll agree to be on watch all night, but the party should certainly share the watch. After the party has time to settle down to sleep (say an hour), Ka'cha comes to the other watchers. He is very concerned.

He reports that everyone else is dead. He is only convinced they are not by waking them up. He'll repeat this several more times during the night. He just can't understand why these folk have to die every day. It doesn't seem healthy. Have him do this as long as you and the players are having fun with it. After a few rebukes, Ka'cha decides to go off into the desert to hunt, promising to return in a short while. While he is gone, the elves make an appearance.

Recapture?

Have heroes on watch make Spot and Listen checks against the elves Hide and Move Silently (which is unskilled at +5). At the same time, the elves get to make Spot and Listen checks against the heroes Hide and Move Silently. (Hide is for the whole camp, so have the person with the worst hide roll for the camp, move silently is only for those on watch.)

Elves-Athasian: NA (2-7), medium humanoid; Fighter 4; Hit Dice: 4d10+12 (40 hp); Initiative: +6 (dex); Speed: 60 ft; AC: 18 (+2 leather armor, +6 dex); Attacks: +9 melee, +10 ranged; Damage: 1d6+5 (subdual – padded club) or ranged 1d6+1 (subdual – blunted arrows) or 1d6+5 (spear); Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft; Special Qualities: Low-light vision, Psionics; Saves: Fort +6, Ref +6, Will +2; Abilities: Str 21, Dex 22, Con 17, Int 12, Wis 14, Cha 10; AL NE;

Skills & Feats: Hide +8, Survival – Desert +4, Survival – Steppes +3, Survival – Salt Flats +3, Spot +5, Listen +5, Water Find +3, Wilderness Lore +3; Alertness, Dodge, Point blank shot, Precise shot, Run.

Running: On any long chase, elves can add twice their con to their run speed.

Psionics: All of the elves have a wild psionic talent. Each elf has one of the following (50% chance for each one)

Burst: 0 level talent, cost – free for the first 3 uses, 1 point thereafter. Adds 10 to speed for one round.

Slide: 0 level talent, cost – free for the first 3 uses, 1 point thereafter. Add 15 to speed, allows them to skate as though they were on ice. Balance is perfect.

Of the elves, #3 also has brain lock, #7 also has concussion.

Concussion: 2nd level psionic power, cost 2 – does 3d6 points of damage, Fortitude save (DC-18) for ½. The damage may be subdual; in this encounter the elf always uses subdual damage. Range is 100'.

Brain lock – 3rd level psionic power – cost 3, victim gets a Will save (DC-16), or all higher brain functions are locked. Effectively paralyzes victim, no spells or movement possible. The *brain lock* lasts for 3 rounds. Range is 130'.

The elves have 6 power points each; those with Concussion or Brain lock have 12 each.

The number of elves that finds the party is dependent on the strength of the party.

All 1st & 2nd level: 2 elves
Around 3rd-4th level: 3 elves
5th or 6th level: 5 elves
High level: 7 elves.

If possible, the elves get within 50' and then charge the party. Remember that with their speed, this means they can close and still get an attack. If the party is surprised, and four or more elves are present, the one with *brain lock* uses that power on Ka'cha.

The elves first action is to demand the heroes' surrender. If they have surprised the party, they'll move in and point spears at sleeping heroes, while threatening those on watch. Since it is unlikely the heroes want to return to their cages, combat probably starts now.

The elves spend at least one round bashing at the heroes with padded clubs, attempting to capture them. When one or more elves start to take serious damage, one of them shouts, "*This is your last chance. If you will not surrender, you will not be allowed to live*". At that point the elves begin attacking for real. (If they can't take them as slaves, they'll just kill them and take their stuff.)

These elves do not fight to the death. If one third of them are killed or subdued, the others flee. As long as the party keeps moving, they'll face no more trouble from the elves.

Ka'Cha: Ka'cha is the joker in the deck. If the party is having no trouble with the elves, he returns after the battle. If they are all being subdued or captured, he can appear and attack the elf using the *brain lock* or *concussion*, distracting them. The party should carry the battle, but he can help see to it that they don't lose it. In addition, Ka'cha is easily considered the most dangerous in the party by the elves. If possible, several of them concentrate on him.

Treasure: The elves have a vast treasure. They have a total of five gallons of water (same total no matter how many elves attack). This is stored in six water skins (two are only half full). Otherwise, if a hero is missing her raptor hide armor, he can pick up some leather. There are spears available, but no other treasure is present.

Some of the water was for the prisoners to be brought back, which is why a lesser number of elves are carrying more water than they normally would.

Prisoner: If the heroes subdue or capture an elf, he has little to say. The presence of Ka'cha makes him believe he won't be allowed to live. And as far as Ka'cha is concerned, he's right. If the heroes want to let him go, Ka'cha will take some convincing. He has trouble understanding why you'd let perfectly good food just leave! But he considers the heroes part of his clutch now, and does bow to their wishes.

Any prisoners only know that the heroes were going to be slaves, and came to recapture them. They see nothing wrong with slaves and would gladly recapture them if possible. If pressed, they admit that the heroes could sell them as slaves. It's a fight of strength and survival, and they make no bones about it.

Encounter Six: On their own again.

The party has to deal with two days of travel. Water is the primary concern. Have them make their adjustments for con loss if needed. There is absolutely no sign of water. Ka'cha keeps them from traveling during the heat of the day. He instructs them to set up cloaks or whatever they can to provide shade during the worst of the heat.

Then they spy a pack of thri-kreen moving across the desert. It's Ka'cha's pack. This is hardly a coincidence, since that is the way that Ka'cha has been leading them for the last few days.

The heat and dryness are incredible. Water is on your mind every step of your journey. As the sun sets, you take a break from your journey. The mountains are slowly getting closer, although Ka'cha doesn't seem to be leading you on the straightest path to the mountains. (If anyone asks, he tells him or her that he's looking for his pack).

In the distance, a small cloud of dust indicates passage of a number of creatures. Ka'cha is up looking that way with his strange many colored eyes. "It is them;" he clicks, sounding as excited as he ever has. "Come, it is my pack!" He starts off towards the pack of thri-kreen, which has now veered in your direction. As they get closer, you can see that Ka'cha, while a large insect, is far from the largest of his pack. About two dozen of these insectoid creatures are headed to you. Most carry long two-handed weapons of a type you've never seen before.

They come to a halt in front of your party. Some of them gather around Ka'cha, clicking excitedly. (only Comprehend languages could understand this. They're getting the story of the elves, his escape, and the heroes aid in it.) Others keep weapons at ready and watch you carefully. It is impossible to read the emotions on an insect's face, so you don't know how they are regarding you. From the set of their body, you have the distinct feeling it might be as prey.

Ka'cha finishes his conversation, and turns to you. "This is Ki'rik'ku, leader of the Windrunners. I have told him that you are not prey, that in fact you were my clutchmates, for a little while."

Ki'rik'ku turns to you "I thank you for aiding our little brother. These elves have no shame, no heart, no morals, to so take a clutchmate of ours from us. Since Ka'cha says we cannot hunt you, we go to hunt them. May we aid you in any way before we go?"

If the party doesn't mention water, they have a real lack of foresight, or an awful lot of shamans with them. Assuming they do, the thri-kreen click among themselves for a while. They don't usually carry much water..

Note: In the following text, the thri-kreen offers four erdlu eggs. Adjust the actual number based on the party's current condition. If they have no shamans capable of *creating water*, the pack could offer up to six. If they have several shamans, and are

almost holding even on water, cut it back to two. The idea is to keep them alive while allowing them to appreciate the bounty they have back home.

Finally Ki'rik'ku turns back to you. "We have little to spare, but what we have, is yours." Another thri-kreen brings forth four large eggs and two apples. "These are the eggs of the erdlu. They will provide both food and drink for such as you. The apples are magical, and can provide some healing. We can also aid you in another way. To the north about three hours travel (1 day for the heroes) is a patch of spider cacti. (He indicates a direction, approximately north by northwest) You will know them by their purple and green thorns. If you brave the cacti, they can be tapped for liquid that acts much as the erdlu eggs. Beware their thorns, for they can pierce even the carapace of a thri-kreen."

Unless the heroes jump in immediately with questions, the pack takes off and is gone in a few moments.

Possible questions:

Why do we have to 'brave' the cacti. Don't we need to just avoid the thorns?

Yes, but that may be harder than you think. The cacti can throw its thorns a fair distance, and draw you back to its feeding needles.

Will you come with us?

No, we have a score to settle with this band of elves.

Can we go with you?

Ka'cha has told us of how you crawl across the desert. We thank you, but you are too slow for the Windrunners.

Do you know anything about the mountains?

They are even more dangerous than the desert. Beware of everything that moves in the mountains, and even more wary of the forest over the mountains. Fearsome creatures dwell there. If a shu is in the party, he points at her. "She would know, her kind rule there. Beware the short ones."

Why should we 'beware the short ones'.

Because their poison works even on a thri-kreen, and they see everything as food. Before you ever see them, you may wake up in the cook pot.

Ki'rik'ku is chafing to go. He is not particularly interested in being polite, it's not like any of the heroes mean anything to him. Only if the party is persistent and forceful with their questions can they get that much information out of him. After each question and answer, he'll start to move off. If they stop him with another question, his body language clearly indicates impatience, but he answers. If they stop to discuss things among themselves, the thri-kreen move on. Once they start, they do not stop, nor can the party chase them down.

Combat: There is no reason for the heroes to fight the thri-kreen. If they choose to, Ka'cha intervenes, and tries to end hostilities. If they persist, use Ka'cha's stats for all 24 of the thri-kreen, this is probably where the adventure ends.

Erdlu eggs: These eggs can be tapped for one gallon of liquid food. They satisfy a hero as well as one gallon of water, and also take care of any food needs for the day.

The Apples: Potions on Athas are created in fruits. These are *apples of healing*, containing a *Cure Moderate Wounds* spell in each.

Encounter Seven: Spider Cactus.

The sun is just rising as you head in the direction indicated by Ki'rik'ku. You have come to stonier ground. A small valley cuts through the rocky steppes here. A group of plants grow at the head of the valley. They are situated right where a river would run, if this barren world had such a thing as a river. As you draw closer, you can see that there are a dozen of them, scattered in a loose group. They are covered with distinctive green and purple needles. You don't know why they are called spider cactus, as they do not resemble a spider in any way that you can see. Instead, they are thick bodied plants, with lots of those sharp needles all over them. Other plants also grow in the area, mostly the dry thorny bushes that look as if they haven't had water in your lifetime.

Depending on how much information they were able to get from the thri-kreen, the heroes may or may not take precautions. Either way, they are unlikely to be completely prepared for the spider cacti.

If they take precautions, approach suspiciously, they are not caught flat-footed. If someone just runs up to the cacti to start tapping the water, let them have it with all eight needles.

Spider Cacti: (NA 12); medium plant; Hit Dice: 3d10+6 (24 hp); Initiative: +0; Speed: 0; AC: 13 (+3 natural); Attacks: +5 ranged (8 barbed needles), +10 melee (1-4 feeding needles); Damage: 1d4+grab (8 needles), 1 point of con (feeding needles); Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft; Special Qualities: Psionics, Plant immunities, needles, feeding needles; Saves: Fort +8, Ref +0, Will NA; Abilities: Str 17, Dex 11, Con 14, Int -, Wis -, Cha 2.

Skills & Feats: None applicable..

Plant Immunities: Immune to mind affecting spells, paralysis, poison, and stunning attacks. Not subject to critical hits.

Psionics: Spider Cacti have the following psionic ability, as an innate power. This always functions, and has no cost.

Life Sense: Spider cacti can sense when a living being comes within 60'. They prepare their needles for launching whenever a being gets this close.

Needles: A spider cacti can launch up to 8 needles at a single target up to 15' away. Each successful hit lodges in a target. The needle is barbed, and causes 1d4 points of damage. Removing a needle takes a strength check of 14, and causes another 1d4 points of damage. The barbed needle must literally be torn out of the target. Multiple cacti may hit the same target, and literally tear it apart as they fight for the same victim. The cactus with the most barbed needles in a victim always ends up winning, tearing the barbed needles of the other plant out.

An edged weapon can cut the strands attached to the needles. Each has hardness 2 and 8 hit points.

It takes the spider cacti three rounds to drag a victim in with the purple needles. At that time, the cactus may hit with its feeding needles. From 1d4 green feeding needles may hit. Once they hit, each causes one point of constitution damage per round, as they drain the moisture from a target's body. When the hero reaches zero con, his body is a dried out husk, and the body is released to fall at the base of the cactus. Note that the initial roll of how many feeding needles may hit (1d4) is not repeated. In other words, if the target may be hit

by three feeding needles, that's all that are available in that area, no more may hit. Those that miss may try again the next round, however.

A target that manages to cut the tendrils on the purple needles, or pull them out, may back off of the green needles with no additional damage. The green needles are not barbed.

Tiering this encounter:

No matter what the level of the party, they'll all need the water that the cacti can provide.

The way to tier this encounter is not to adjust the number of cacti that the heroes encounter, but the number that are within 15' of each other. Thus;

All 1st-2nd level: only three at a time within 15' of each other.

3rd-4th level: four at a time within 15' of each other

5th & 6th – six or more within 15' of each other.

7th + - They're all bunched together.

This does not mean that a 7th level party will be subject to 96 attacks, just that there are no smaller groups that are out of range of the other groups. A hero who gets within 15' will at first be targeted by one plant, the closest. Assuming he is hit and grabbed by the needles, he is dragged to the plant. Each round thereafter, another two plants can fire at her, or at heroes who rush to save her by cutting the needles. As you can see, this could quickly lead to a chain reaction, as more heroes rush to help, while more plants fire at them.

Special note for Witch Doctors: Since *magic missiles* in Malatra manifest as thorns, this spell can be used to help cut the tendrils from a safe distance. They do not ignore hardness, but it only applies to the first missile. This assumes that all missiles are directed at the same tendril, and all hit the same spot.

Using Spears on the tendrils: Since many heroes in Malatra may not have a slashing weapon, it is possible to hit a tendril with a spear or arrow. This requires a hit on AC 17.

Possible out for the party: If everyone is being dragged in, allow one of the heroes to notice the obsidian scimitar at the foot of one of the plants. This weapon could be very effective in slicing through tendrils.

Killing the plants.

Obviously, the plants can easily be killed if the heroes just stand back and pour spears and

arrows and other missiles into them. There is one problem with this. It wastes all of the water in the plant. Be sure to describe this if someone does this, or rushes in and stabs the plant with a spear several times, bringing it below zero hit points. The water rushes out in a few seconds, there is no way to capture it before it is gone. In order to obtain the water, the heroes need to get rid of the needles so they can tap the plant while it is still alive.

Killing the plants with magic;

If the heroes have discovered how arcane magic works, a high level sorcerer may decide he can get within 20 or 30 feet, and just cast enough spells to kill the plants. While this works, it also turns the plants to ash, destroying any water in the plants. For purposes of this, each plant can survive 8 total spell levels before turning to ash and blowing away. This might be an effective way of destroying tendrils that have grasped a hero and are dragging him to his death, however. If the area of any arcane spell includes the tendrils, the tendrils dry up and turn to ash. The needles remain in the hero and must still be removed.

Getting rid of the needles:

There are two ways to get rid of the needles. One is to lure the plant into shooting at a hero, and cutting all the tendrils. (Needles that miss take three rounds to be pulled back into the plant, and may not fire again for one full day). The other, and most common, is to use fire. Fire causing ten points of damage to the plant (from *burning hands*, *produce flame*, *minute meteors*, or just from torches), effectively burns off the needles until they can grow back. This takes several weeks.

Note: There is no way to get rid of the needles before they shoot, without using fire. In other words, an arrow that precisely hits a needle while it is still in the plant also causes damage to the plant. Eight of those almost certainly kills the plant, and causes the loss of all the water in the plant.

If the party has no fire magic, they may have to resort to torches and other fire. A bush can be pulled up and lit, then thrown at a plant. Each torch or bush causes 1d4 points of damage for 3 rounds, and then it goes out. This same damage can be used to burn tendrils that have snared a hero, possibly burning them free before they are pulled in. Up to three tendrils could be caught in the same burning torch or bush.

Blocking the needles with something, like a shield:

This could be effective. Check the hardness of the item in question, as well as the hit points. For

generic purposes, a hide shield has hardness 3, with 10 hit points, and a turtle shell shield has hardness 10, with 10 hit points. The needles are extremely sharp, able to pierce even a thri-kreen carapace. Thus, they ignore the first eight points of hardness. If the damage from a needle exceeds the hardness (not possible for a turtle shell, but possible for a hide shield), the needle has gone through and may hit the hero.

Check for the total damage to the shield. If it exceeds the hit points of the shield, this item is destroyed. (Rendered too full of holes to be an effective shield any longer). However, it can counter all the attacks from a single plant. This is a very effective way to trade a shield for water, a deal that might sound pretty good right now.

Anything of lesser construction won't be effective. For instance, holding a cloak in front of one to snare the needles has no effect at all, except to get eight holes in the cloak as the needles shoot right through.

Tapping the plants:

Once they have dealt with the needles, simply cutting a hole in the bottom of the plant causes up to a gallon of liquid to gush out. It can easily be gathered into a water skin. It has the same effect as the erdlu eggs above; it can provide both water and sustenance.

Treasure: Up to 12 gallons of valuable water. Remember that the heroes must have enough water skins for this.

At the center of the patch are the remains of two dwarves who were taken by the spider cacti. They have some treasure remaining.

This treasure is tiered, because part of it is money. Since the money has value only in the next encounter, it is not certified.

In a large sack, the heroes find gold pieces.

Gold = 120 – total party level.

Make the following adjustments: For each shaman in the party capable of creating water, subtract 10 gold. If there are no shamans in the party capable of *create water*, add 10. For each high water race, add 10.

The total range thus should come out to something between 54 (for a 6th level party with three shamans), to 124 (for a 1st level party with no shamans). If the first level party consisted of all lizardmen, plantmen, and river tam'hi, they would find 184 gold.

The heroes may have seen gold before, any oscray or lacerial knows what it is. They also know it has no practical value in the jungle, but a few heroes are carrying around a necklace which is a gold piece on a thong. In general, the heroes recognize the gold as having some intrinsic value, if not what the concept of money is.

Other treasure (certed).

One of the dwaves was wearing a kank-carapace breastplate. This offers armor protection +6, with a check penalty of -4. It does have one hole in it, but not enough to damage the armor protection. Wearing it does add one gallon to the water requirement for a hero.

The other dwarf had a masterwork *keen* scimitar, made of obsidian.

Once the heroes have dealt with the spider cacti, they can march for another two hours before they must rest. After one more day's marching, they reach the oasis, which is controlled by some escaped gladiators.

Possible salvage: If the heroes think of it, and can make Wilderness Lore rolls of 20 (15 – low tier), they can use the needles to make barbed blow gun darts. (+1 to damage) This only applies to the needles they have cut off. The needles that were burned off are useless for this.

Encounter Eight: Oasis

Slowly the mountains draw near. You are still enjoying the bounty of the spider cactus. Imagine, a plant that seeks to draw the very moisture from your body. No wonder the elemental nobles fled this world!

Now you come to a sight you have not seen before, at least not on this world. Something green and growing is visible in the distance. It must be the oasis that Ka'cha spoke of.

As you draw closer you can see it is not unoccupied. A wall made of trees and sticks stands around the oasis. Several large huts of unusual construction are inside the wall, with a gate on one side. People who look like broad light-skinned nubari are standing upon the wall. They have strange weapons pointed in your direction. No one seems very friendly on this world.

The heroes have time to prepare. The muls are not going to come out after them.

Muls: Muls (pronounced mules) are a half-dwarf/half human crossbreed. They have exceptional strength and stamina. They are the preferred race for gladiators and can go up to a week without sleeping. They can even fight for up to 24 hours straight without rest. A number of them escaped the arena, and fled here. They have set up a stockade around the oasis, and make their living bartering and selling their water.

Since every oasis is rare, they have a profitable business with trading caravans and others passing through the desert on their way to one of the towns near the mountains, to the large city on the other side of the desert (where the heroes were going to be taken to be sold), and with those headed for the pass to the Plateau Forest.

The leader of the Muls is Miralte the Wolf. He was a famous gladiator, so famous he was given his freedom. He loved a human female, but she was not freed. So he managed to secure her escape, along with a number of others, including muls, dwaves, humans, and even two elves. Now his community has grown to about 50 people, all that the oasis can support. They call their community 'The Last Oasis', and are pretty decent bargainers.

Miralte introduces himself from the safety of the stockade.

"I am Miralte, once called the Wolf. What is your business at the Last Oasis? If you serve the Dragon-Kings, continue your journey.

(Wait for them to deny it).

Who then do you serve?

Again, wait for a reply.

You are a small party to be alone in the desert. Ill equipped, I might say, if it does not offend. Have you gold or steel to trade? Or other goods of value?

Of course now the gold makes sense to the heroes. Once they show that they have gold, Miralte has them invited in, provided their other answers are satisfactory. Their first sight of the oasis is liable to be shocking; the two who open the gates are elves. These elves have nothing to do with slaving.

The oasis is indeed a pleasant place, at least for this world. Small plots of growing

vegetables surround two large huts. There is a cool clear pond almost six nubari across. There is a weapon maker at work, a korobokuru with absolutely no hair upon him anywhere. Near him is a pen with a number of large birds. Another of those broad nubari, as well as several normal looking nubari tends them. Well, normal except for the rather sickly paleness of their skin. Several other small huts, apparently constructed of earth (adobe) are within the wall.

Miralte steps down from the platform he was standing on. "Welcome to the Last Oasis." We have goods for sale, as well as water. What do you seek?"

By now, the heroes should be convinced to get as much water as they can. They can purchase normal (for Athas, and the Jungle) items as well. That is, leather and hide armor, bone weapons, water and water skins, food.

The heroes do have some gold, but they probably also have other things of value. The shiny stones (gems) that many a hero carries have intrinsic value. A lot of the things that the heroes carry as souvenirs or trophies will not have value. A ceramic spoon of the ancients, for instance, is worth little or nothing. But if they have gems, allow 10-20 gp for a small gem, 30-50 gp for a medium gem or particularly nice sounding gem (ruby or diamond, for instance), and 100 gp for a large gem (eye of the tiger, large emerald, good sized diamond).

Price List: (Subject to 25% fluctuation either way for barter).

Water w/skin: 11 gp (one gallon).

Water w/o skin: 10 gp

One day's food: 1 gp

Normal bone weapon – 2 gp for small weapon or a dozen stone tipped arrows, 5 gp for medium weapon, 10 gp for large weapon.

Certed Items: (all fruits count as normal potions).

Pear of restoration – (2) (does lesser restoration) – 30 gp each.

Cherries of bull's strength – (2) - 25 gp each.

Persimmon of levitation – (1) 50 gp

Be sure to barter with the heroes. Remember that they should have no idea what this 'gold piece' term means. That does not bother Miralte. He quickly switches to 'How about 10 water skins full, a week's food for everyone in your party, two

quivers of arrows, and a pair of *cherries of strength* for that sack of gold pieces, that ruby, the emerald, and that diamond?" Miralte is used to bartering. Since he occasionally deals with thri-kreen, he is used to people who have no concept of money.

Allow the heroes to make opposed bartering rolls, if they wish. It should actually just be role played out, but if they win the bartering role, Miralte is willing to give them a slightly better deal. "Okay, how about I make it 12 skins of water and throw in the *persimmon of levitation* for good measure. If not, he stands fast.

Miralte, Athasian Mul Chieftain: medium humanoid; Fighter 13; Hit Dice: 13d10+91 (206 hp); Initiative: +8 (dex, improved init.); Speed: 60 ft; AC: 18 (+4 hide armor, +4 dex); Attacks: +23/+18/+13 melee, +17/+12/+7 ranged; Damage: 1d8+11 (Crit 15-20/*keen bone long sword* +1) or ranged 1d6+1 (short bow); Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft; Special Qualities: Psionics; Saves: Fort +15, Ref +8, Will +7; Abilities: Str 26, Dex 18, Con 25, Int 15, Wis 14, Cha 17; AL N(G); Languages: Trade tongue (common), Elvish (oscray), sign language.

Skills & Feats: Barter +8, Bluff +4, Diplomacy +4, Hide +4, Intimidate +16, Knowledge – Arena fighting +5, Perform +10, Sense Motive +7; Survival – Desert +6, Spot +5, Listen +5: Alertness, Improved Critical – Longsword, short sword, battle axe, Weapon Focus – longsword, short sword, battle axe, Weapon Specialization – Long Sword, short sword, battle axe.

Psionics: Miralte has the psionic power of *dimensional anchor*, which should not come into play in this encounter.

Miralte used to be a very hard man. His living was to kill or be killed in the arena. Since he has come to Last Oasis, he has begun to take on some good qualities. He still must look out for his people, but he won't rob the heroes and turn them out into the desert with nothing, as he might have in the old days.

He'll insist on a fair deal, and he won't give anything away. Actually, he might spare some water if the party was broke and dying of thirst. Since they're not, he won't.

Once the party has traded, they can look about the oasis a bit. For 10 gp or one shiny stone, they can rest here for the day and recover their senses and lost con points.

Significant actions the heroes may take.

Two things can get the party ejected, one can get them respect.

Respect: The only Shapechangers on Athas are druids. If one of the heroes shows this ability, they are immediately accorded respect as a powerful druid. If more than one does so, they are held in near awe, this much power for good is seldom seen on Athas.

Ejected:

1. Defiling magic. ANY arcane magic a witch doctor casts here will cause a large section of vegetables or other plant growth to die. The community does not welcome defilers. If this is cast before bargaining, all prices are immediately doubled. In addition, the offending witch doctor is told to leave. Now. Miralte has to physically restrain several of the stockade residents from killing the defiler outright. The party is questioned intently as to any other defilers in the party.

If they attempt to explain, and do it VERY politely, the offending hero may be invited back in. That is if he takes a solemn oath, under pain of death, to cast no spells while here. Miralte is very serious about this; he warns the offender repeatedly that repeating the offense will mean his/her death. He's serious, if the hero does it again, he'll do his best to kill the hero. Given Miralte's stats, and the fact that he can call on at least 10 more fighters in the compound with similar stats, the hero will die. Make sure to warn them about this repeatedly.

2. Jumping in the pool. They are used to this. When the party first enters, someone (like a river tam'hi or lizardman, for instance), may head straight for the pool to dive in. Since everyone here is faster than the heroes (most twice as fast), several humans head them off and grapple them (with a base +15 attack roll for grappling). And since the worst strength among the gladiators is 20, while the best is a 30, the hero does not get to the pool. They aren't hostile; they explain that the pool is their livelihood. Dirt and grime mustn't foul it. If the hero wants to purchase water to wash with or soak in, they think she's crazy, but they're willing to deal. It would take at least 10 gallons of water before a hero could soak in it. Miralte can provide a barrel if they want to do this and can afford it. The water is then put back into skins and will be resold. Wasting water is not an option. If the heroes do this, assume that one gallon is lost to spillage and evaporation, but the other nine

gallons can be put back into skins and used by the party. (If they turn up their noses, remind them that two days ago, bath water would have tasted pretty good.)

Unless there is a lot of time left in the round, move this encounter along. The heroes need to barter for supplies and water, but don't take too long. If you have time, the inhabitants are very curious about the heroes. Remember that even the nubari are different than any the natives have seen.

Possible questions:

To nubari: Does that dark skin help protect you from the sun?

Also: How did you tame that tiger (or lizardman, or monkey, or snake, or carnivorous ape, or whatever strange creatures the heroes have with them).

To korobokuru: where did you get all that hair? Dwarves have no hair.

To shu: Why are you so far from your home?

To others in the party with a shu: So, how many of you has the little one eaten so far? If questioned about this question, they reply that it's common knowledge that 'halflings' only see other 'halflings' as people, everyone else is food.

To tam'hi: Have you been sick? When this is denied, the questioner just shrugs and says that he's never seen such a small spindly elf.

To oscray, butu, and aarakocra: What kind of monster are you? Which of the horrid dragon kings did this foul thing to you? The questioner is very sympathetic, feeling sure that some horrid defiler changed them from their true shape – human in the case of oscray and Aarakocra, shu in the case of butu.

In every case, claims that they came from another world are laughed off. "If you don't want to tell us where your home is, we can understand that. But if you must lie, come up with something believable."

Exception: If they have shown a number of shape-changers (powerful druids by their standards), they might accept that they came from

the planes of the elements, which is actually pretty close to the truth.

Miralte does inquire where they are going, and can give them directions to a pass in the Ringing Mountains. He estimates a normal party could reach it in one day, (meaning two days for the heroes).

Encounter Nine: Even the Clouds want to eat us!

It has been two days since you left the Last Oasis. True to his word, Miralte gave you good directions. You have reached the mountains, and are climbing up a difficult path. But it is a path, obviously used by other travelers. Occasionally you come to a campsite, with evidence of people camping in defensible locations. Even the sky shows some signs of friendliness. For the first time, you can see a cloud in the sky. It doesn't look like a rain cloud, but it's still something you hadn't seen before on this inhospitable world.

With luck, you'll reach the top of the mountain pass tomorrow, and maybe, just maybe, find your way home. The air is cooler here, although still as dry as a bone. The winds have picked up, and at times, threaten to blow you off the mountain.

This is the time to give any flying heroes a break. Warn them that flying is difficult. If they persist, have them make flying rolls (Dex or balance – DC 25). Failure means they smash into the mountain, and take 2d6 points of subdual damage (4d6 for high tier). If they succeed, raise the difficulty by 5. Keep at it until they decide they had better walk. This is called being nice to the heroes. The monster they are about to face would give them no chance to survive. This is hardly fair to the heroes, making their survival depend on the DM rolling a 1 on the D20. So get them out of the air, even if you have to smash them into unconsciousness to do it. They should thank you for it later.

As you trudge up a rather steep incline, there is a roar from up ahead. It sounds familiar, something like the saber tooth tiger you once heard in Malatra.

Standing on an overhanging ledge about 20 nubari lengths away is a huge panther. In size it is easily a match for a saber tooth tiger.

It leaps from the ledge. It must not be too

smart, as no beast could leap that distance. But it is not landing on the trail. Instead, it soars up high into the air and begins to glide down towards your party.

Pause for reactions. The panther is a psionic cat, and has good maneuverability in its flight. It can follow and track the heroes, no matter what they do.

The beast reaches the apex of its glide, and now (pick a hero) can see it is focused in on him/her. As it reaches out with claws the length of a dagger, it hangs in the air. And hangs. And hangs. A look of surprise comes across its face, and then panic as a shadow passes over you. Something large and white moves swiftly across your vision, and then it and the panther are gone! As you look about in confusion, you see that the cloud, or what you thought was a cloud, has just about finished swallowing the huge panther. More to the point, it seems to be circling about, ready to come in for another bite!

Cloud Ray: gargantuan magical beast; Hit Dice: 30d10+120 (285 hp); Initiative: +5 (+5 dex); Speed: 10, Fl 150 (good); AC: 15 (+9 natural, -4 size); Attacks: +25 melee; Damage: 5d10+15 (tale whip or bite); Face/Reach: 25 ft. by 25 ft./25 ft; Special Qualities: Improved Grab, Swallow, Psionics, *polymorph self*. Saves: Fort +18, Ref +10, Will +15; Abilities: Str 40, Dex 21, Con 19, Int 11, Wis 11, Cha 12.

Skills & Feats: Spot +15; Flyby Attack.

Psionics: an Inertial Barrier continually protects The Cloud Ray. It also has the powers of *telekinesis*, and *improved levitation*, and *control winds*. *Control winds & improved levitation* are also innate powers, and costs no power points. Only *telekinesis* costs points, and it has 120 per day. It used 80 of them to hold the panther in midair, leaving only 40 to use on heroes.

Inertial Barrier: Grants damage reduction 10/+5 to a total of 150 points absorbed. When the 150 are used up, it has no DR for the remainder of the day.

Telekinesis: Cost 40, save – Will, DC 16; allows it to hold creatures in the air. The cost is based on the weight. With the 40 points it has left, it can support no more than 400 lbs.

Improved levitation: Uses to support itself in the air:

Control Winds: Allows it (in conjunction with improved levitation), to effectively fly and maneuver at great speed without worrying about the winds.

Tail attack: The cloud ray can make a whipping attack with its tail. This is so fast it actually makes a sound like thunder. On the next round it can turn and attempt to bite the creature struck.

Polymorph self: The cloud ray can polymorph itself into one shape, that of a very large rock. It uses this for camouflage and to lure prey in when it is extremely hungry. It will not use this power in this combat. Note that this does mean that if by chance it falls victim to a *polymorph other* spell, it lasts only one round. Then it polymorphs back to its original shape and resumes its hunt.

The cloud ray is a monster that prefers flying creatures, but this one is hungry and will take what it can get. It does not actually swallow creatures so much as it absorbs them. But for the heroes' purposes, it amounts to the same thing. If the heroes get under cover, it takes one shot with *telekinesis* to pull someone into the air, and then moves off in search of easier prey.

It takes the cloud ray at least three rounds to circle and come in for another dive. If the heroes try to fire missiles at it, emphasize how little damage they are doing. The *inertial barrier* and the large amount of hit points mean that the heroes have little chance to slay this beast. A better option is to get under cover.

Getting under cover: As was mentioned in the read aloud text, there is an overhanging ledge which the heroes (even the slow ones) can reach by running for two rounds. The ledge extends for 20' along the trail, and is a good five to eight feet deep. The lowest point is 10' above the trail, not exactly secure, but enough to keep out a gargantuan creature like the cloud ray.

Other options include crouching boulders on the side of the trail, or simply making a good hide roll. The cloud ray cannot reach them under the ledge. It will try to use *telekinesis* to pull one of the heroes out. Even if the save is failed, other heroes grabbing on can keep the hero secure. *Telekinesis* is not an instant power, the other heroes will have time to react before a victim is

pulled out to be eaten. With the power points it has left, it can only lift a total of 400 pounds, as long as enough heroes grab on to exceed that limit, the *telekinesis* fails.

If the party chooses to stand and fight: Give them one more break, and only one. Pick out someone with plenty of hit points, and have the beast come in and take a shot at them. Remember that with the flyby attack and its reach, it doesn't have to get closer than 15'. Only weapons longer than that allow them to even try a melee attack. Otherwise, they must use missiles. Make sure that the damage does not result in an instant kill, the first time. After that, if they really want to die fighting this creature, let them.

The one chance the party may think they have is to hit it with repeated *polymorph other* spells until it fails. Due to its innate polymorph ability, this lasts only a round. Also, the *inertial barrier* power applies to any falling damage. It also remains effective in whatever form the cloud ray may be in for the round the polymorph is effective.

If they keep out of the way, the cloud ray circles for a few minutes. It then floats off to hunt for easier prey. The heroes can continue whenever they feel comfortable.

Encounter Ten: Trees and Shu!

It was like crossing into a different world. One minute you were in the hot dry mountains, now you are in hot, humid, lush forest. The trees are different from what you see in Malatra, but they are trees. There is grass, and even streams! According to Roshink's instructions, you were to find an oak tree big enough that a saru could not get his arms around it, and he could bring you home.

There are many oak trees, but none of large enough size. You'll have to do some looking around.

The heroes search the rest of the day. Other than a giant sloth capturing and eating a carnivorous ape, they don't see anything interesting. The next day they can make Wilderness Lore rolls (DC 20 for high tier, 15 for low), to locate an oak tree of the proper size. They may try again if they fail, or they may take 20.

When they locate the tree, they also locate a tribe of halflings. Halflings in Athas have certain similarities to the shu in Malatra. For instance,

they will never kill another halfling. But there are certain differences. For instance, they do not recognize anyone other than halflings as people. Instead, they recognize them as food. Thus, technically, they are not cannibals, but the heroes may feel that they are.

If there are any shu in the party, use the first read-to text. If not, use the second.

If shu are present:

As you finally locate the oak tree you need, a pair of faces pop out of the underbrush near the tree. It is a pair of shu, tattooed even more heavily than the shu of your home world. They smile at (insert names of shu here), and come forward to greet them. "I am Trenik, and this is Botila. We thank you for this offering you have brought us."

Wait for the shu to ask what offering. Also, allow heroes to make spot and listen rolls (DC 15 for low tier, 20 for high tier), to recognize that there are many halflings in the underbrush around them. At least 30.

"Why, all this food, of course. The tribe will feast for many days on these creatures. Have them lay down their weapons and their deaths will be painless. Food always tastes better when it is calm before it dies." As he says this, you are aware that many shu are emerging from the underbrush. Most have blowguns, but some have shortspears and others have bows.

The shu in the party may attempt to convince the halflings that these are their friends, not food. It won't do any good. If a very convincing argument is made, it just convinces the halflings that the heroes have been brainwashed, or magically controlled. They are not halflings, so they are not people. When it is clear that the heroes are not going to surrender, the shu attack with poisoned blowgun darts and arrows. Others close with spears (also poisoned).

If no shu are present:

As you finally reach the tree you need, the underbrush is suddenly alive with shu. Dozens of them, all heavily tattooed, appear. An elder shu speaks. "Welcome to the Ringing Forest. This is our land. We welcome you to it, and thank you for bringing such a feast as yourselves to us. Please lay down your weapons and come along quietly. We find that

our food tastes better when it is calm before it dies.

Again, there are upwards of 30 shu, with most having poisoned blowguns and arrows, some having poisoned spears.

Elves-Athasian: NA (30+), small humanoid; Fighter 3; Hit Dice: 3d10+12 (25 hp); Initiative: +7 (dex); Speed: 40 ft; AC: 19 (+2 leather armor, +7 dex); Attacks: +4 melee, +11 ranged; Damage: 1d6+1+poison (halfspear) or ranged 1d2+1+poison (blowgun darts) or 1d6+1+poison (arrow); Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft; Special Qualities: Low-light vision, Psionics; Saves: Fort +8, Ref +7, Will +3; Abilities: Str 12, Dex 25, Con 18, Int 12, Wis 14, Cha 10; AL N;

Skills & Feats: Hide +10, Survival – Ringing Forest +5, Spot +8, Listen +7, Move Silently +13; Alertness, Point blank shot, Precise shot.

Poison: The halflings use a powerful sleep poison. Save = Fort DC 15 (17 for high tier). In 1d4 rounds after failing the save, the hero falls asleep for 1d4 hours.

Psionics: All of the halflings have a wild psionic talent. Each halfling has one of the following (50% chance for each one)

Burst: 0 level talent, cost – free for the first 3 uses, 1 point thereafter. Adds 10 to speed for one round.

Daze: 0 level talent, cost – free for the first 3 uses, 1 point thereafter. DC 13 (15 for high tier) or affected as by a *daze* spell.

The Combat: The halflings have at least one spear wielder move to melee with each hero (two if high tier). The rest use arrows and blowgun darts. Their attacks are well coordinated, each hero is targeted by one arrow and three darts each round. The intent of the encounter, if not of the halflings, is to keep the heroes close to the tree. As long as they stay with the tree at their backs, they cannot be flanked by the halflings. If they move away, they are immediately flanked by half of the halflings attacking them.

The halflings can get replacements for those that are killed, up to double the number of those attacking.

Going home: This may seem like a losing battle for the heroes, since the halflings have plenty of replacements. However, it is also the key to their getting home. Roshink said he had to bring them

back through the Dreamlands. To some, this may suggest sleeping. And indeed, when anyone falls asleep touching the oak, or under its branches, Roshink can bring them home through the Dreamlands. There are three options for this:

1. The heroes figure it out. This is superior deduction with minimal clues. Roshink will commend them.
2. The heroes make an appeal to Roshink to take them home. He responds, with difficulty. In the mind of those making the appeal, they hear only the word 'Sleep.'
3. They fight it out, figuring to get home later. Make sure that the first hero to go down from sleep poison (or unconscious at negative hit points), falls against the tree, or is touching one of the protruding roots. On the next round, their unconscious body disappears. Be sure to have the halflings rushing forward to gather up the body act surprised. They are.

Thus, the way to win is to lose, a lesson Roshink was hoping they would learn. Not every battle can be won with brute force. Sometimes to go down fighting is the best way. Once they have figured it out, the heroes can voluntarily fail their saving throws, and all can return home.

Potential Problems:

Shu in the party. They are not likely to want to attack the halflings, at least they shouldn't. The halflings will not attack them, at first. If they attempt to defend the other party members, the halflings hit them with sleep darts. They hope to be able to remove the evil (to them) controls the other heroes have over the shu.

If the shu just stay out of it, and the others in the party succumb to the sleep poison and are transported home, the shu could be stuck here. The halflings want to know what happened to the food (the other heroes), but will not force the shu to leave the tree. Eventually, they should be able to just lay down and go to sleep, and be transported home.

Flying heroes, and others who may not be in range of the oak tree.

When the flying heroes see what is happening to the others, they should figure out what they need to do. Worst case, if an Aarakocra flies up and out of the battle, she can wait until the halflings leave the area and join her companions.

A tiger katanga who pounces on someone who takes the fight to the halflings can possibly be trapped outside of the area of the tree.

Solutions – If it's just one, have them fall down next to a buried tree root, with just a tiny piece of it touching their skin. Or, the halflings bind them up in nets to carry them back for the feasts, and happen to brush up against the tree on their way. In other words, don't leave someone stranded here to be eaten unless they really ask for it.

Encounter Eleven: What have you learned?

The trip back is different than the journey there. You feel yourselves floating through misty clouds, traveling vast distances in the blink of an eye. When you awaken, you are back on the banks of the River of Laughing Idols. Roshink sits with the patience of the earth. "Welcome back, travelers. I trust that your journey taught you much?"

Wait for responses.

"So, what exactly have you learned?"

What Roshink is looking for:

1. That magic run rampant can destroy a world. (defiling magic, weakness of divine spells)
2. That we must care for the jungle and not take it for granted. (Stories from the escaped slaves and Ka'cha).
3. That sometimes the only way to win is to run away (lessons from the elves and the cloud ray).
4. That losing can sometimes become winning (the halflings)
5. That if you only fight for survival, you forget what else is important. (the entire round).

As long as he gets answers somewhere in this range, he is satisfied. If not, he is disappointed.

If they do not come up with answers close to this.

"I had expected you to learn more. Perhaps you have not spent a long enough time on Athas. Perhaps... you should go back."

The heroes should generally protest, and might have a few more ideas about what the lessons were.

If they come up with some good answers:

I am pleased that you have come back wiser than when you left. This knowledge will be important in the coming days. Go, tell your peoples of the world of the Dark Sun, and what it will be like if the Tamara win here." With that, Roshink slides back down into the earth, gone.

Epilogue:

So you have concluded a visit to a strange and terrible land. It is one that Malatra could come to resemble if the tamara have their way with it. While you did not come back loaded down with treasure, you did come back with something even more valuable, experience. The experience of seeing an entirely new world. The knowledge of just how precious this land you call Malatra is. The determination to fight for this land, against the evils that assail it.

Here ends "Dark Suns".

Experience Point Summary

Story Award:	1,900 XP
Optional Role Playing Award	100 XP
Total possible experience	2,000 xp

The story award is if the heroes completed the entire adventure. If they did not complete it, award 75=90%, depending on how close they came.

Treasure Summary:

Note: As stated in the epilogue, there is little treasure in this module. No rewards at the end, for instance. Instead, the module has a high experience point award, to reflect the learning that the heroes accomplished.

Encounter Six: *2 apples of healing (cure moderate wounds – 2d8+3).*

.Encounter Seven: Kank hide breastplate

Obsidian *keen* scimitar.

Encounter Eight:

Pear of restoration – (2) (does lesser restoration)

Cherries of bull's strength – (2)

Persimmon of levitation – (1)

DM Aid #1 – Athas, the World of Dark Sun

Magic and Changes on Athas:

Following are a list of changes that the heroes will encounter while on Athas.

Divine Magic: Since the connection is thin, and the elementals are weakened on Athas, ALL divine spells function at $\frac{1}{2}$ effect. If the spell does damage, it does half damage. If healing, it does only $\frac{1}{2}$ of the normal healing (round down, minimum of 1). Otherwise, duration and range are halved. Summoned monsters are restricted to elementals (no nature spirits in Athas), and have normal stats, but half the usual hit points.

The most important spell change on Athas is of course the *Create Water* spell. It creates only $\frac{1}{4}$ of the water that it would in Malatra.

Note: This does not apply to any fetishes that act as scrolls, as the power for the spell is bound into the fetish. These work at full effect (with the exception of *Create Water*, which still creates $\frac{1}{2}$ of the water specified).

Arcane Magic: Arcane magic on Athas is divided into two types, defiler and preserver. Those who seek to preserve the life on Athas learn a special way to cast their spells, to avoid damaging the environment. This takes years of training. While the heroes would probably like to be able to be preservers, they have had no such training. Any arcane spells cast by the heroes are defiler spells.

Defiler spells suck the life out of the world to power the magic. This is the normal way magic works on Athas. Every time an arcane spell is cast, plant life dies! The effect is a 10' radius per spell level. (0 level spells cause a 5' circle to die). Nothing will grow there again until at least 10 years have passed.

If the terrain contains no living plant life at all (specified in the encounter description), the life is drawn from the heroes surrounding the arcane spellcaster. This is equal to 1 point of damage per spell level, each. Zero level spells drain 1 point from every other hero in the area. If no heroes are in the area of draining, the hit point drain comes from the caster herself.

A special case here includes any plantmen present. Even if other plant life is present, the plantmen always suffer 1 point of damage per spell level cast, as long as they are in the area of effect (10' radius per spell level).

Note: This does not apply to the use of fetishes as scrolls; the power for those comes from the fetishes.

Water: Each normal character requires one gallon of water per day to survive on Athas. However, several character races are in a lot more trouble. Plantmen, lizardmen, and river tam'hi need three times the water to survive, that is three gallons per day. Small races (shu, pangolin katanga, etc.) need $\frac{1}{2}$ gallon of water per day.

Failure to get enough water results in loss of 1 point of constitution per day. Failure to get ANY water results in the loss of 1d4 points of constitution per day. If a hero's constitution reaches zero due to water loss, he dies. All constitution lost is recovered 24 hours after receiving enough water.

This water use rate assumes that heroes travel at dusk and dawn. If they attempt travel through the heat of the day, add 50% to the water requirements.

If a hero is wearing heavy armor (like the brass chain mail that many oscray start with), he adds 1 gallon to his daily needs.

Language: Roshink has arranged through the travel spell that the Athasian trade tongue is understood by all as Malatran common, and vice versa. Sign language works the same way. He wants the heroes to learn, and they won't do that if they can't talk to or understand anyone. Of the other languages, the only one that can be understood is elvish, which comes across as a heavily accented Oscray. Their history does not reflect it, but what the oscray are currently speaking is actually ancient elvish. Since reading and writing is based off the oscray language, those with the read/write feat can understand written elvish.

DM Aid #1 – Athas, the World of Dark Sun (continued)

Psionics: Almost all creatures on Athas have one or two psionic powers, these are granted at birth, although most don't manifest until puberty.

The psionic handbook is not necessary to run this adventure. All powers are listed with a cost, and a DC for the saving throw, if allowed. Using psionics is usually a move equivalent action, although most 0 level talents (like *skate* and *burst*), can be used as a free action.

Other differences: The inhabitants of Athas are the product of generations of a fight for survival that no one from Malatra can imagine. Thus, the elves have a speed of 60', and an average strength of 22. These are not misprints; this is the way most of the races on Athas have evolved. Almost all of them will be stronger or faster than the heroes; most will be both. In the case of the elves, they are a particularly speedy race, disdaining mounts as slow and weak.

Money: Money is used on Athas, a concept that is foreign to the heroes. Fortunately, money is rare, so barter is an accepted form of trade. Here the heroes may have an advantage. Since barter is all they know, they will be the equals or better of most they might barter with.

The Arena: A lot of talk about the arena is bandied about. If they can find someone to answer them (Ka'cha or the muls), the heroes can learn a few things. The arena is part of the Dragon Kings entertainment for the masses. It is a way of punishing wrongdoers, testing fighting prowess, and amusing those under the heel of the Dragon Kings. There are whole mercenary companies and houses that do nothing but train gladiators. Unusual monsters and fighters (like sarus, lacerials, lizardmen, and shapechanging tigers) would be featured in highly publicized matches, meaning they are worth a good price.