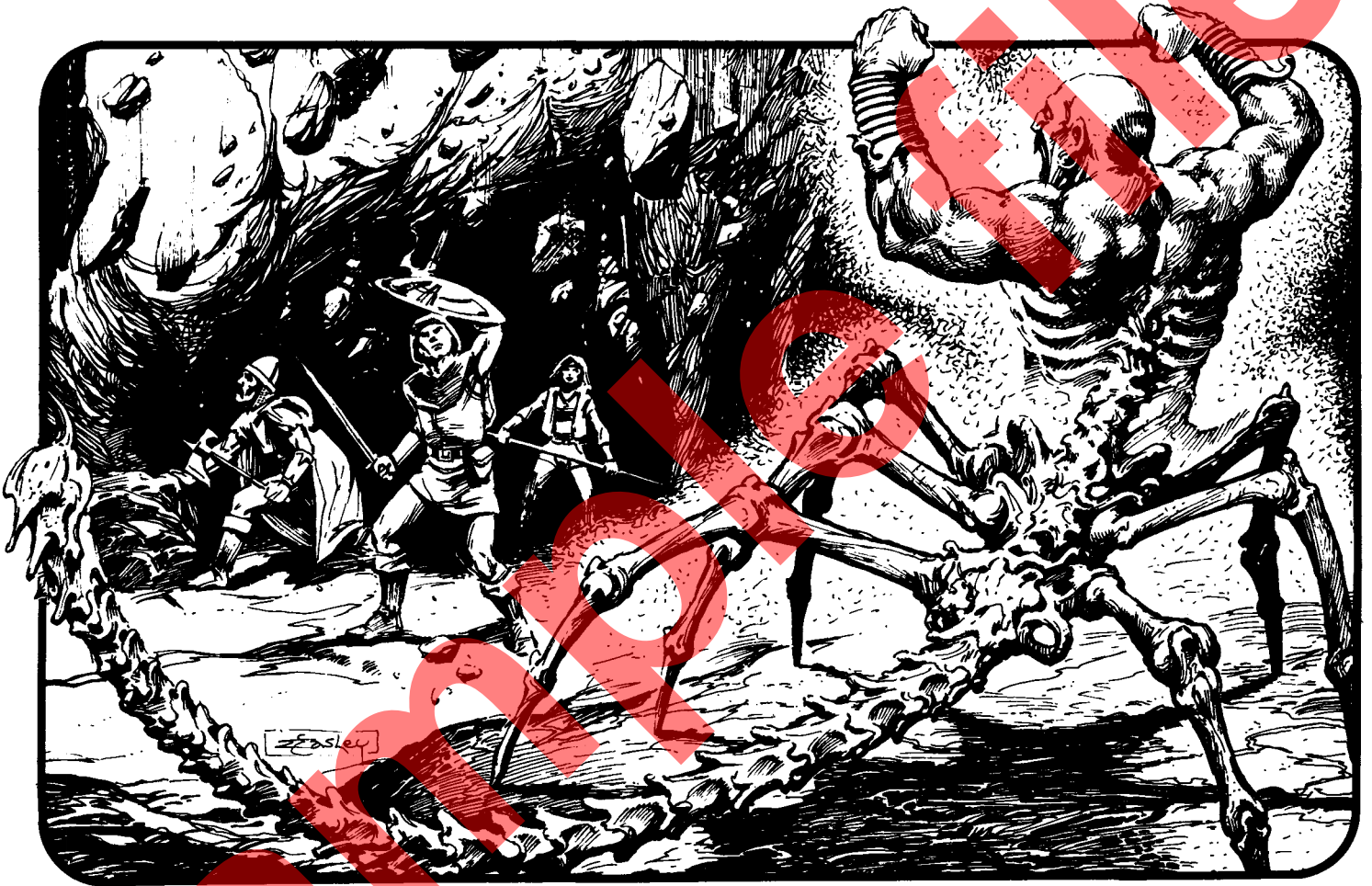


DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® Expert Set  
Wilderness Module X4

# Master of the Desert Nomads

by David Cook

An Adventure for Character Levels 6-9

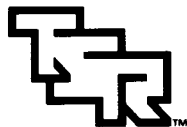


Who is the one who sends unknown terrors into the heart of an army's camp? Is he a man — or something else? What power of his inspires fear into the horrendous legions now marching on the civilized lands? What can you do to stop the one known only as The Master?

**Editor: Michael Williams**

©1983 TSR Hobbies, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS is a registered trademark owned by TSR Hobbies, Inc.  
Distributed to the book trade in the United States by Random House, Inc., and in Canada by Random House of Canada Ltd.  
Distributed to the toy and hobby trade by regional distributors  
Distributed in the United Kingdom by TSR Hobbies (UK) Ltd.



TSR Hobbies, Inc.

TSR Hobbies, Inc.  
POB 756  
Lake Geneva,  
WI 53147

TSR Hobbies (UK) Ltd.  
The Mill, Rathmore Road  
Cambridge CB14AD  
United Kingdom

PRINTED IN USA  
ISBN 0-88038-016-0

9068

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® Expert Set  
Wilderness Module X4

# MASTER OF THE DESERT NOMADS

## PART 1: INTRODUCTION

**Master of the Desert Nomads** is intended for use with the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® Expert Set. This set expands on the rules given in the D&D® Basic Set. This module cannot be used without the D&D® Basic and Expert rules.

If you intend to play in this module, **stop reading now**. The following information is for the **Dungeon Master only**, who will use this information to guide the players through the adventure. Knowing what will happen will ruin the excitement and surprise for the players as they face new and unknown situations.

### Background:

For years, the Great Waste to the west of the Republic has been the home of nomad raiders. Petty little tribes, both human and otherwise, have roamed this trackless waste, raiding each other and the surrounding settlements. For a while, the local lords easily controlled this banditry. Then the tribes became dangerous: the raiders apparently set aside their feuds and prepared for war. Spies reported massive armies gathering. Shortly, some of the farthest-flung towns were no longer heard from. Heeding their spies and the stories of refugees from the west, the lords and the governor of the Republic sent out a call for arms. Throughout the settled lands, they asked for mercenaries and experienced men to fight the nomad foes. All manner of men answered — peasants, mercenaries, veterans, elves, and adventurers. Among these many came your group.

You were late in arriving, for the main army had already marched. Your party joined the rag-tag lot of reserves going to meet them: the undesirables and unusables of those who came to fight. Along the way there were many quarrels and disputes. Peasants fought for a dead man's boots; drunken mercenaries ransacked a village; men were knifed as old blood feuds broke out.

Finally, the reserves reached a village only recently taken by the main army. Still among the smoking ruins were the signs of nomad enemies — humans, orcs, and other unknown creatures. The commanders halted at this place. Now you have been camped here for several days.

### Notes for the Dungeon Master:

**Master of the Desert Nomads** is the first part of a two-part adventure. The second part is **Wilderness Module X5, The Temple of Death**. The same characters are used in both modules, although they may advance in levels as play progresses.

Before playing this module, the DM should read and become familiar with the details and events that appear. This will make playing more enjoyable and faster for everyone. There are eight sections of this module: the introduction, five encounters, one section of new monsters at the end of the module, and a section of pre-rolled characters that may be used with this adventure.

This module gives information in two different ways — boxed and unboxed. The information in the box should be read to the players as soon as they have an encounter or enter a room. The unboxed information is for the DM's use. It may contain facts the players can learn through questioning or actions, but the players must do something to get this information.

This module is designed for 6-8 characters from 6th to 9th level in experience, with about 50 levels total for the party. The party should have a range of all classes. It is suggested that the party have a cleric of 8th or 9th level. All characters should have from two to three magic items including magical swords and armor. All the members of the party should be outfitted for a wilderness adventure.

This adventure combines wilderness and dungeon encounters. The mission the characters will be given requires them to travel cross country and gather information. While on the way, they will have many encounters, some relating to their mission and others that simply add excitement to the adventure. With the exception of the first few encounters and the last one, none of these encounters are set. Instead, they are organized by the type of terrain in which they occur. When the player characters enter that type of terrain, the DM decides when and where on the map each encounter should occur. For example, when the characters are rafting up the river, the DM may have them meet the **Monsters From Below** after a day of travel. In this encounter, if several of the player characters are severely hurt, the DM should wait until the characters are almost to the end of the river before having the next encounter, **The Watchers on the River**. The DM controls the timing of all the encounters. He does not have to worry about the characters missing an important encounter by not going in the right direction.

This module leads the player characters through the first half of a mission that may be completed by continuing play in the second module of this series, **The Temple of Death**. However, if the DM wants to use only this module, it may stand on its own. When the players are given their mission, the DM should not have them try to find the Master, but should instruct them to find the Great Pass and report back its location. Appearances by the Master should be left in to confuse the players and give the DM a starting point for further adventures.

To complete their mission in this module (and the next in the series), the player characters must use stealth. They will travel through large areas of an enemy territory where armies are on the march, preparing for a major war. Obviously, characters who announce their mission or alignment are going to find themselves in serious trouble. When giving the players their mission, the DM should stress the need for secrecy.

The DM should also stress that the mission the player characters are undertaking is an important one. They will discover that their

mission has even attracted the attention of higher beings. Appearing at one point in the module is an "Unknown Benefactor." There is no explanation of who or what this being is, and the player characters are not able to observe it closely. The being only appears in the most absolute of need, but it should not be used to bail the characters out of situations into which they have stumbled through their own stupidity or foolishness! The Unknown Benefactor appears in the module for atmosphere and feeling, not as a cure-all to the characters' problems.

This module contains maps of the Evil Abbey (on the inside cover), a wilderness map of the Great Waste, the Bandit Attack, the

Village of Pramayama, and the Buried Temple. The wilderness map is designed to be joined to the upper left edge of the wilderness map that appears in **Module X1, The Isle of Dread**, but it is not necessary to use these maps in this way. The wilderness map has many locations named on it that are not described in the module so that the DM may incorporate the map into his campaign, filling out these place names with whatever information or details are desired. This way, the wilderness map may be used for later adventures.

To begin play in the module, start with the first encounter of the following section.

## PART 2: KEY TO THE SETTLED AREAS

**General Information:** The settled lands form the Western outpost of the Republic. This is a very poor region and is normally not well-defended. The land along the Asanda River is dry and stony. It cannot support many crops and is only thinly settled by humans. Those who live here survive by raising cattle, fishing, and irrigating fields to grow crops — a constant job since both annual floods and the desert destroy fields.

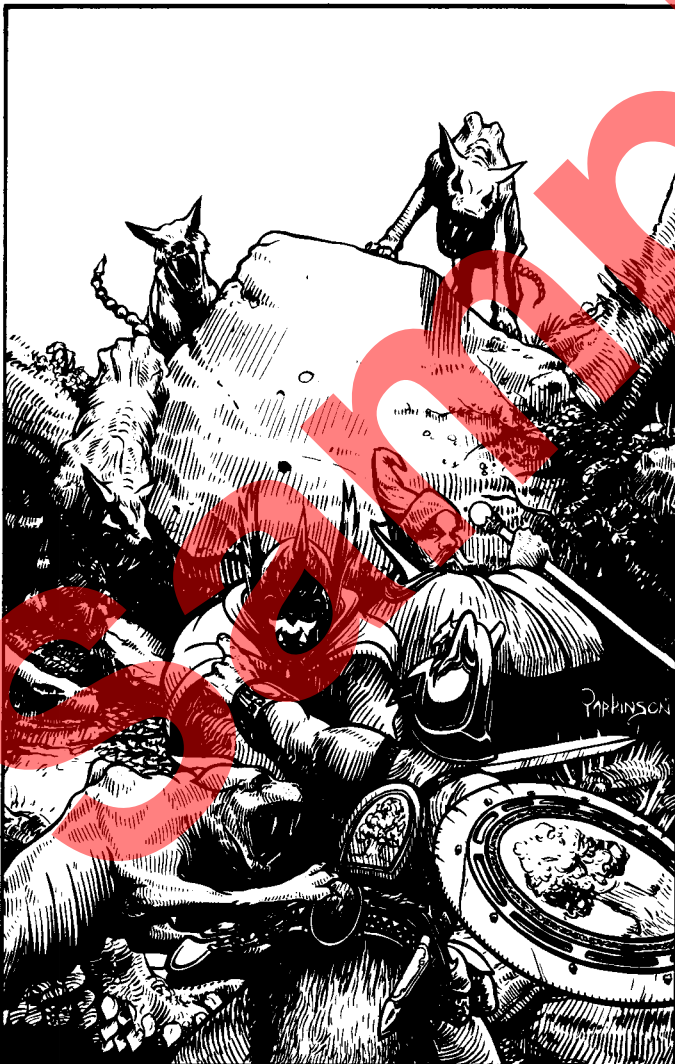
When the player characters arrive with the reserve forces, nearly all of the settlers will be gone from this area. They have either left, going back to the safer lands, or have been killed. There are signs

everywhere of the passage of a large army — burned buildings, broken weapons, stragglers, graves, bones, and scavenging animals. If the players tell the DM they want to do something heroic or adventurous on the journey, the DM can inform them that they are too late. There is really nothing in this area to do.

On each day that the characters travel in the settled lands, the chance for an encounter is 1-2 on 1d6. The DM should then roll 1d20 and consult the following table to determine what has been encountered. Beside each number is the time of the encounter, either daytime (D), night (N), or anytime (Any).

### Settled Lands Encounter Table

Die Roll	Time	Encounter
1-2	Any	3-30 Brigands (AC 6; HD 1; hp 4 each; #AT 1; D 1-8 [sword] or 1-6 [shortbow]; MV 120'; Save F1; ML 8; AL C)
3	N	2-12 Bugbears (AC 5; HD 3+1; hp 14 each; #AT 1; D 2-8; MV 90'; Save F3; ML 9; AL C; surprise on 1-3)
4	Any	1-4 Gargoyles* (AC 5; HD 4; hp 18 each; #AT 4; D 1-3/1-3/1-6/1-4; MV 90'/150'; Save F8; ML 11; AL C; immune to <b>sleep</b> and <b>charm</b> )
5	N	3-18 Gnolls (AC 5; HD 2; hp 10 each; #AT 1; D 2-8; MV 90'; Save F2; ML 8; AL C)
6	N	2-8 Hellhounds (AC 4; HD 5; hp 30 each; #AT 1; D 1-6 or breath; MV 120'; Save F5; ML 9; AL C)
7	D	2-4 Lions (AC 6; HD 5; hp 28 each; #AT 3; D 2-5/2-5/1-10; MV 150'; Save F3; ML 9; AL N)
8	D	2-8 NPC's (all variable)
9	Any	1-6 Ogres (AC 5; HD 4+1; hp 20 each; #AT 1; D 1-10; MV 90'; Save F4; ML 10; AL C)
10-14	D	2-20 Peasants (AC 9; HD ½; hp 2 each; #AT 1; D 1-4 (dagger); MV 120'; Save Normal Human; ML 5; AL N or L; will have 1-4 rumors per group)
15	D	1-8 Robber Flies (AC 6; HD 2; hp 8 each; #AT 1; D 1-8; MV 90'/180'; Save F1; ML 8; AL N; surprise on a 1-4)
16	D	1 Tarantella (AC 5; HD 4; hp 24; #AT 1; D 1-8 + poison; MV 120'; Save F2; ML 8; AL N, causes dancing)
17-19	D	2-20 Veterans (AC 2; HD 2; hp 14 each; #AT D 1-8 [sword] or 1-6 [bow]; MV 120'; ML 6; AL L or N; will know 1-6 rumors per group)
20	N	3-30 Zombies (AC 8; HD 2; hp 12 each; #AT 1; D 1-8; MV 120'; Save F1; ML 12; AL C; immune to <b>sleep</b> and <b>charm</b> ; always strike last)



## The Village of Pramayama

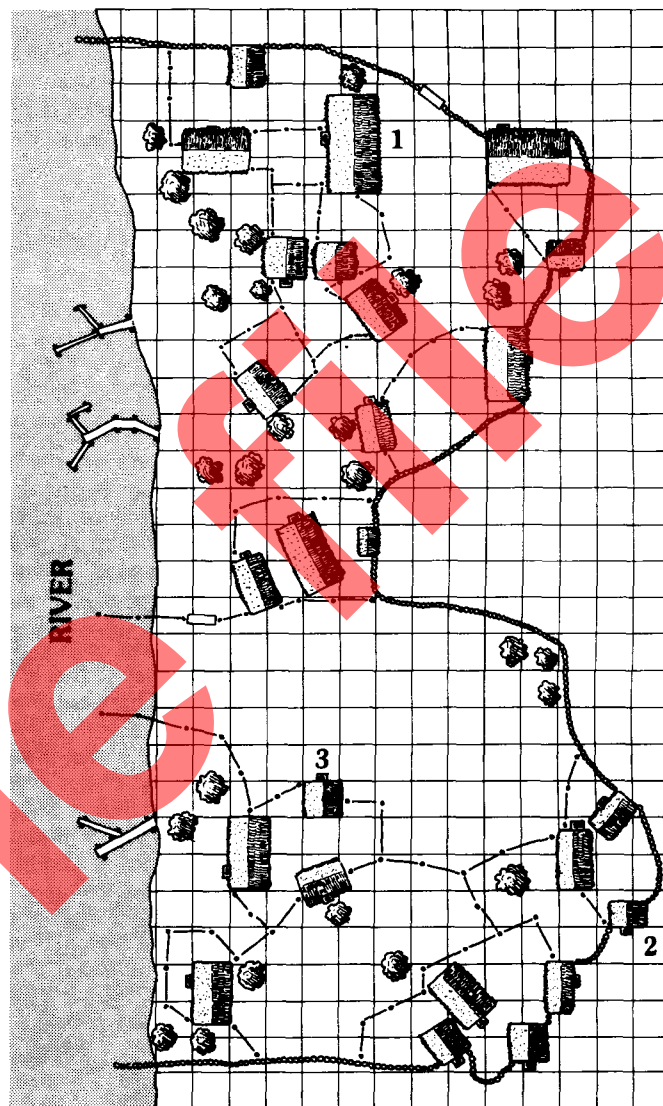
The brigands, bugbears, gargoyles, gnolls, and hellhounds will all be under the command of the Master, although only indirectly (i.e. through his army, spies, or other agents). Any who survive an encounter with the player characters will report the events to their leaders. This is yet another means the Master has of keeping track of the party.

### Rumors

If the player characters are able to talk with any friendly humans, they may learn some of the current rumors, true or false. The DM should not just give the rumors to the players; they must ask for information from the NPC's. To determine what rumors the characters learn, roll 1d20 and consult the following list.

### Die Roll Rumor

- |    |   |
|----|---|
| 1  | The desert raiders took no slaves. They killed my brother, a strong worker! (True)  |
| 2  | Dragged at the head of the attacking army was a monstrous horrible idol too hideous to describe. (False)  |
| 3  | Flying things darkened the sky when the attackers came to my village. (True)  |
| 4  | The Republic Field Army has been destroyed. (True)  |
| 5  | A survivor told me he heard two soldiers talking about the "things from the Black Mountains." He said they were afraid of them and what they would do. (True) |
| 6  | The army of the desert raiders has scattered and fallen apart! (False)  |
| 7  | We saw a small band of men fleeing across the desert, pursued by a black, flying shape. (True)  |
| 8  | The raiders must be guided by some ungodly force! (True)  |
| 9  | I tell you, I saw it with my own eyes! The raiders are all zombies! (False)   |
| 10 | They cannot be killed! Dead men rise up and fight again in their ranks! (False)   |
| 11 | Some caravans, carrying rare chemicals and unknown goods, are able to cross the desert unharmed. A scout told me so. (True)                                   |
| 12 | A foul stench precedes the coming of the raiders. It terrified all the men. (Partially true)  |
| 13 | Scouts sent against the might of the evil army have never returned. We find their skulls on stakes. (True)  |
| 14 | Their leaders are able to raise great sandstorms from calm weather. (False)   |
| 15 | The source of their power is a great chariot beyond the snowy peaks. This I saw in a vision. (True)   |
| 16 | I was offered the chance to convert or be killed. Luck was with me and I escaped. (False)   |
| 17 | They attacked us on the night of a full moon. Their army was nothing but accursed monsters. (False)   |
| 18 | I used to adventure, and I saw their army. It wasn't much — only a mangy lot of desert men with some orcs and foul beast men. (Partially true)                |
| 19 | They are ruled by the Master. Beware for his eyes are everywhere! Trust no one! Trust nothing! (True)   |
| 20 | Destroy that being called the Master and you destroy them all. (Partially true)   |



leaves, and thorn bushes. A small battle was recently fought here, and the village shows the effects. When the player characters arrived, the palisade was broken in many places and the insides of some of the buildings were burned, but by now the palisade has been repaired and the soldiers have tried to fix up the remaining buildings. There are only two villagers remaining in the town. All their food (grain and cattle) has been taken or driven away.

### 1. Commander's House

This is the largest house in the village, although it does not look any better than the others. The commander of the reserve force and his followers have taken it over to use as their headquarters. The commander (a 14th level fighter) will never meet with the player characters. If they wish to talk to the commander or have information they want to give him, they will meet with the fighter Sarras (AC 0; F10; hp 65; #AT 1; D by weapon; MV 40'; Save F10; ML 10; AL L) armed with a sword +2. Also present in the house are 4 bodyguards (AC 1; F6; hp 35; #AT 1; D by weapon; MV 40'; Save F6; ML 9; AL L) armed with crossbows and swords.

Sarras is a very busy man, handling most of the daily work the reserve force demands. Therefore, he will only have a little time to

**THE VILLAGE OF PRAMAYAMA:** The adventure for the characters begins in the small village of Pramayama, a human farming village located on a bank of the Asanda River. The buildings are made of dried mud brick with thick walls and high, narrow slit windows. The many fences inside the village are made from palm tree logs and woven reed rope. Surrounding the village is a crude palisade (log wall) made from palm tree logs, woven palm

spend with the players. He will listen and deal with matters that relate to the reserve force (for example when the characters report incidents at their guard post), but will have no patience with wild claims or demands on his time. The first time the player characters come to him (if they do), he will be half-interested. If the characters return again, Sarras will be rude and ignore them. If they persist after this, he will order their confinement. The DM should try to make it clear before this that the player characters will be expected to adventure without anyone else's help. Everyone else is just "too busy" or "too important."

## 2. House of the Mad Hermit

In this dirty, small hut lives one of the two remaining villagers, a mad hermit (AC 9; HD 1/2; hp 2; #AT 1; D by weapon; MV 40'; Save NM; ML special; AL N). He hides inside his hut all day and only appears at night. Everyone (including the PCs) knows of his presence, and most think he is a powerful holy man, touched by a vision from the gods. If the player characters try to talk to the hermit, his behavior will be completely unpredictable. The DM should roll a monster reaction every turn (see D&D © Expert Rulebook, p. 23) to determine how the hermit will behave. If he attacks, he will whip a dirty dagger from under his shirt and leap on the nearest character. At the same time, he will scream at the top of his lungs. This will not attract any attention, though, for the villagers often hear the hermit screaming for no apparent reason.

The hermit does have some valuable information that he may give the player characters if he reacts well to them and if they ask the right questions. He will tell them to "beware the Malakaz of the swamp" and that "the eyes of those not near can see." He will also tell the characters to "seek the lost gate that scorpions guard." He claims not to know what lies beyond the swamp. As the DM runs this encounter, he should mix in incoherent babbling and insane giggles. The hermit has nothing of value.

## 3. The Guide

Staying in this house is the other remaining villager, Pormas Theocrat (AC 7; HD 1/2; hp 4; #AT 1; D by weapon type; MV 120'(40'); Save NM; ML 8; AL N). Pormas is a river guide. If asked by the player characters, he will be willing to guide them up the river to the Sind Desert; however, he must be paid at least 500 gp to take the job. He will not let himself be hired for any less, and will try to get as much money as possible. In bargaining, he will point out the great risks involved — the dangers of the river and the fact that an enemy army is somewhere out there. If the player characters do not hire him, he will give them no information about the desert or the location of the Great Pass. Pormas has only leather armor and no weapons other than a dagger. If the party hires him, he will insist that they provide him with proper equipment, including a camel.

Pormas does have other information: if asked what he knows of the enemy, he will tell how he hid in the mud of the riverbank when the attackers came. The enemy troops were mostly men or creatures very like men. Most of the men rode camels. More importantly, there were a number of other beasts — "monsters of the desert" and unknown flying things. Unlike in previous raids, the attackers did not take slaves. All who were captured by them were eventually killed. Several times he heard mention of "the Master's orders" or "by the command of the Black Master." From the little information he has, he believes the Republic main army has followed the desert raiders into a trap somewhere in the desert. He has no other information.

## Settled Land Encounters

The following two encounters must be played in the order listed. The DM should follow the instructions given, changing or adding as he sees fit. Both encounters should take place while the player characters are in the settled lands.

## 1. The Mysterious Man

To prepare the players for this encounter, the DM should read the following to them:

You have been staying at the village of Pramayama for several days. Very little has happened and certainly nothing exciting. There have been no reports from the main army. Because your group has more experience than the normal soldier, you have been made special scouts and have been given the title "Guides." This has managed to keep you from having to do most of the dull and demeaning work of the ordinary soldier.

Tonight is your night for guard duty. Almost all the villagers are gone and the rest of the army is out searching for food. Only yourselves, the commanders, and a few others remain in the village.

Slowly, the night passes. All seems quiet and normal. Suddenly, well past midnight, you hear a scream from the darkness! Just at the edge of your lantern light, you can make out the forms of several creatures struggling. Human cries mingle with an unnatural hissing.

Fighting just at the edge of lantern range are a soul eater\* (AC 0; HD 10; hp 50; #AT 2; D 1-10/1-10; MV 180'(60'); Save C10; ML 12; AL C; see end of module for more information) and Bishop Guillaume (AC 1; C7; hp 32; #AT 1; D 2-7 [1d6+1]; MV 120' (40'); Save C7; ML 6; AL L). Guillaume has the following spells memorized:

**First level: none**  
**Second level: speak with animal**  
**Third level: striking**  
**Fourth level: none**  
**Fifth level: quest**

All his other spells have been cast. Guillaume also has a **ring of protection**, +1 and a **mace** +1. If the party investigates, both the soul eater and Guillaume will see the group. Guillaume will scream for aid, saying that he carries a valuable message. The soul eater will say, in hate-filled tones, "Stay back, helpless beings! This one is pledged to me." If the party attacks the soul eater, it will still concentrate its attacks on Guillaume, but will attack those who get in its way.

If on any round, Guillaume has 10 or fewer hit points, he will try to cast his **quest** spell on a human character wearing plate mail armor. He will throw a tube at the character and say, "Go there and do what should be done in the name of Law and righteousness!"

If the soul eater is defeated, it will dissolve and Guillaume will collapse to the ground. It will be obvious to all that he is exhausted. He appears to have been in the desert for many days. His clothes are caked in dust, and sand has worked down into his armor, rubbing sores and cuts into his skin. His face is dry and sunburnt and his lips are cracked. He has no equipment except his plate mail armor and his magical items. The soul eater, on the other hand, will return to attack the Master, who will suspect that the creature failed its mission. The Master will defeat the soul eater, and this will not affect his statistics as given in the next module.

If alive after the fight, Guillaume will explain that he has a mission of great importance. With or without the party's consent, he will cast his **quest** spell on a player character who wears plate mail armor. If necessary, he will explain that great dangers demand this action, and though it troubles him to cast the spell, it must be done. He will give the tube to the character, with the same instructions as above. He is almost incoherent and will not be able to give more details about what must be done.

The tube contains a crude map to the Highlands beyond the Great Pass. Next to a large red blot on the Highlands is scrawled: "O Gods, guide me to destroy this temple of death..." The rest of the map shows some of the terrain, though not in any detail.

Since their job is to guard the camp and report all unusual incidents to Sarras, characters will be expected to bring Guillaume (alive or dead) to the leader and make a report, after which they will be sent back to their post. Nothing more will happen that night. The next day they will be ordered to the commander's house. Sarras will tell them that they are needed for a mission of grave importance and great risk. He will order the player characters to travel beyond the Great Pass and find the Temple of Death. He does not know what they should do once they get there, and will tell them that they must use their own judgement. Somehow, he thinks, the temple is connected with the outcome of the war. He will give the characters Guillaume's map. The map is very crude, he points out, and does not show how to reach the Great Pass. Therefore, the first part of the mission is to reach the Republic main army and learn more from their scouts. The army is somewhere in the desert, chasing the enemy. He will tell the player characters that scouts have reported a caravan west of the town, beyond the Salt Swamp. They are to join this caravan and travel with it into the Sind Desert. The caravan leaves soon, and to reach it in time, the characters must take a boat up the river and across the swamp. Finally, because of the importance of their task, Sarras stresses the need for secrecy. Agents of the enemy might be anywhere. The player characters should be very careful.

The instructions that Sarras gives the players should assure that they will follow whatever character (if any) Guillaume has **quested** in the section above.

## 2. The Evil Patrol

After the players have received their mission from Sarras, the DM should allow them time to prepare. If the players ask about the guide, Sarras will vouch for the man's loyalty and suggest that he be hired. Sarras will not be able to give the characters money, magic or any other assistance except a boat, nor will he be able to spend any more time with the characters. The reserves are setting out from the village today and he must work on other details of the campaign. If Guillaume is still alive, he will not be able to add any more information except that his scouting party was attacked by horrible beasts and only he escaped alive. He will be able to use his spells to heal any wounded party members. From this point on, the players will be on their own.

By the time the boat is ready to leave, it will be late in the day. The DM should read the following to the players.

You are at one of the small docks, preparing to leave. The sun hangs low over the river, making it shine like red glass. The commander and the remaining troops have already left the village and marched into the desert. Except for the remaining villagers, the place is deserted. As you are loading the boat, you hear a low throbbing sound, like a distant drumbeat. The crickets and the frogs stop their singing. Everything is suddenly still.

If the characters scan the horizon, they will see nothing unusual. However, if a character looks toward the setting sun, there is a possibility equal to his chance to find secret doors that he will see something. About a mile away, a large, winged creature flies in a slow circle above the river. The sound seems to be the beat of its wings. It will circle for about 10 minutes and then fly away. The player characters will not be able to see the creature clearly, but half an hour later (before the loading is finished), the party will hear the beating sound again. Again, if the party looks to the sky in the west, they will have the same chance as before to see the flying creature. This time it is flying down the river towards the



characters. As it gets closer, the characters will be able to see a figure riding on its back. The creature is a wyvern (AC 3; HD 7; hp 44; #AT 2; D 2-16/1-6 + poison; MV 90°(30°)/240°(80°); Save F4; ML special; AL C) and the figure riding on its back is a magic-user (AC 9; M 6; hp 19; #AT 1; D 1-4 + spells; MV 120°(40°); Save M6; ML 10; AL C). He has the following spells memorized:

**First level: magic missile, shield**

**Second level: levitate, mirror image**

**Third level: haste, lightning bolt**

He also has a ring of spell storing that contains the following spells: **haste** and **lightning bolt** (D 6-36).

The wyvern does not need to make morale checks if the magic-user is alive. If the magic-user is slain, the wyvern will have a morale of 7.

As soon as the wyvern is within 240 yards, the magic-user will cast his **haste** spell from the ring on three trolls (AC 4; HD 6+3; hp 40, 32, 28; #AT 3; D 1-6/1-6/1-10; MV 120°; Save F6; ML 10(8); AL C) hiding along the riverbank 240 yards from the boat. On the next round, the trolls will charge to the boat (moving double speed) and attack (six attacks each). Meanwhile, the wyvern will close to 180 yards and the magic-user will cast his **lightning bolt** from the ring at the party. After this, the magic-user will dismount, cast his **shield** spell to improve his armor class, and let the wyvern attack the party. Then the magic user will cast his other spells as best he can. If he has five or fewer hit points left, he will mount the wyvern and flee.

The magic-user is also carrying 500 gp, a dagger, and an amulet carved in the shape of a skull. This is an **amulet of finding**. Any person with one of these amulets may see everything the wearer sees through the eyes of other amulets of this kind. The Master has one of these items and will know the success of the attack and who the player characters are. The Master keeps his amulet in a cloth bag around his neck, so the player characters will only see blackness at the other end, if they discover the power of the amulet (which they must guess). If a player character wears this amulet, the Master will be able to keep track of the group's progress, and the party will not be able to surprise any of his followers.