

## IN SEARCH OF OBSCURE

What lurks in caves that are hidden even from the gods? What happens if you go off a centuries-old trail, towards the unknown? What happens if you imagine, for a moment, that familiar places can still hide the ancient secrets? The cycle "In Search of Obscure" will test the character of your heroes, as they will face the things they haven't seen before, the things that will seem like a bad dream the next morning. And sometimes the heroes themselves will be their main foe.

## NEUTRAL MECHANICS

The adventure is created without binding to any specific RPG system. You can easily transfer both gameplay features and numerical values to your preferred system. Use the aspects of characters and locations at your discretion, while disclosing or hiding what you want from the characters. Make the heroes pass checks or be guided by common sense - now it's your adventure!

## SANDS OF THE PAST

There is an old and almost forgotten fairy tale about the castle DARAMUT - an impregnable fortress on a mountain surrounded by sand, located far in the South, beyond the VAST DESERT. Many famous travelers tried to get to it, but none of them came back. Even the people who live nearby say that there is nothing behind the Vast desert. Only death.

Only strange incidents every now and then, whispers in the night, and secrets passed from father to son give hope that somewhere far away there is an ancient castle Daramut, which hides a real treasure - an artifact that can break the time space.

## STUCK OUT OF TIME

On their way to the Daramut, the heroes will meet many people from different places and even times. Some of them came to Daramut in search of the artifact but were trapped here forever. It seems that people who stuck out of time have lost their minds and have no idea where they are, but do not question what is happening. They want to get to the castle, to the Artifact of time, but something or someone constantly disrupts their intentions, forcing them to chase the ghosts of their past again and again.

## HOOKS

The heroes will learn about a powerful artifact that can change the cloth of time. The ancient scriptures and knowledge of the wisest tell them that far to the South, on the edge of the world, there is a castle called Daramut. If there is something in the universe that can create time anomalies, it is hidden there. Your heroes have to go a tough way in their travels, have a significant experience and an infinite desire to get this artifact. If you're just beginning - make the players carefully study the past of they characters, and come up with a situation in which they just cannot miss this journey.

## LEGEND OF THE CASTLE DARAMUT

The heroes learn about a legend that says that thousands of human lives ago, far in the South, beyond miles of sandstorms, there was a kingdom of KING ARDASHIR.

Ardashir went the hard way from soldier to king. He took part in dangerous campaigns against barbarians, risked his life for the sake of his commanders, and when he became one of them, he cherished the life of every person under his command, knowing the name of absolutely every one of them.

In battle, he and his army were invincible. Many were amazed by his mind - he detected a gap in the enemy's defense in seconds, in a fair duel, he could behead his opponent instantly, and in a personal conversation, after having met the person he needed - knew everything about them.

Having dealt with the conspirators who brassily and meanly poisoned the king, he put on the crown, which made happy every citizen of the kingdom. He set out to make new conquests, conquering more and more lands. Years later, people learned that the Great Southern lands had long perished without their new King Ardashir. DESERT CREATURES, like ghosts of barbaric tribes, attacked the kingdom.

The creatures knew no pity or mercy. Driven by desert storms, they buried settlements and the dead bodies of their inhabitants in the sand. The kingdom was quickly diminishing, despite all the efforts of Ardashir. He restrained the enemy heroically, but the creatures grew stronger every year.

The monsters managed to reach Ardashir's castle Daramut. All other lands were buried in the sand. The last line of defense was broken. The glorious kingdom that used to flourish was in the final battle, which had to determine its fate.

This is where the story ends. Many events in it raise questions. What does the Time Artifact have to do with this story? What was really going on in the kingdom? Does the kingdom even exist today?

There are still no answers to these questions. One can only guess what could have happened by collecting the pieces of information here and there, like the written words of a dying ruler that “Ardashir has to answer for what he did”, or a painting by an artist who has suddenly depicted a castle among the vast sandy open spaces and gave his work a strange name Daramut, or the dream of the last known thinker, where the shining, which he would then call the Time Artifact, imprisoned thousands of people in space, preventing them from getting out. Having listened to the stories of the mad elders of the southern villages, having found ancient maps in the caves, having read a long forgotten book in the buried library, the heroes will learn about the way to Daramut lying across the Vast desert.

This legend and the rumors associated with it can be told gradually over the course of other adventures, so that players remember the details better.

## KING ARDASHIR

During their trip, the heroes gradually learn the truth about Ardashir and what’s going on in Daramut. The better they know the original legend, the more interesting it will be for them to discover the real history of the southern kingdom, described below.

Ardashir was indeed a simple soldier. He followed orders, and he did it well. His army was clearing the lands from barbarians, who worshiped other gods and regularly attacked the neighboring settlements.

Everything changed, when Ardashir’s best friend Bahadur led his group for reconnaissance and was ambushed. The barbarians wanted to bring the message to the kingdom, by severely mutilating corpses of the scouts, including their commander Bahadur.

When he saw this scene, Ardashir changed forever. He swore to take revenge on every pagan barbarian. He was ruthless to his enemies, giving no mercy to anyone.

A few months later, being a commander, he found strange records in one of the enemy villages. They were telling about a dangerous cursed object, a gift from the evil gods to mortals, for their amusement. A thing that could change time. For a fee.

Like a madman, Ardashir started looking for any information about the existence of this divine mockery of all the living. A long search, numerous and ruthless tortures led him to it, to the Artifact of Time. And he took it, in spite of prayers and curses from the barbarians. They warned him of the dark forces in the blood of their people and of the consequences that awaited the Southern lands if he took advantage of the Artifact.

It didn’t scare the future king.

He got his friend back. But the temptation to correct his mistakes, to live without fear, the opportunity to return the people he loved took over.

Thanks to the artifact, he knew all the moves of his enemies, all the weaknesses of his foes.

Believing in his own omnipotence, he began to build his own empire, and only the Evil gods that are laughing somewhere know how many thousands of times over these years he has used their gift. He set up a conspiracy to poison the king - Ardashir considered him weak and stupid. Having eliminated his enemies, he became the king - «the most worthy and imperturbable.»

The vengeance was close. As the elders of the already dead nations said, the fallen rose from the sands to take revenge. Now these creatures have to clear the Southern lands from the influence of otherworldly forces that have disturbed the balance of the universe.

And even the Time Artifact became useless in the face of a looming threat.

No matter how many times Ardashir tried to change the situation, no matter how many options he tried by breaking the cloth of space and time - the Desert Army found its way to the last stronghold of the kingdom - Daramut.

## THE VAST DESERT

To get to Daramut, the heroes have to overcome the Vast desert. Many brave men have tried to cross it, but no one has come back.

People say that the way may take several days and the heroes will have to experience all the hardships of unbearably hot climate and sandstorms, but they have no other choice.

Journey through the boundless desert is like a dream, showing the owner related, but sometimes lacking in logic and consistency, events.

1. At first, the heroes are cheerful and fully trust their guide - a bright star in the sky. They find that the desert is not so ruthless - there are oases where they can take a break, while small storms pass by.

2. A few days later, the heroes will find half-buried carts with provisions. In addition to things that may be useful to them in the future, they will find a diary. There are few entries in it. The beginning says about the campaign of the famous traveler TABIT for «the thing that will return him his son». In the first days, his caravan did not meet any obstacles on its way, but then he began to notice strange things - people from his group disappeared during the rest halts and supplies ran out too quickly.

The heroes must know the stories of the merry wanderer Tabit - every child knows them. Such a talented storyteller with a great voice really existed, but it was more than a hundred years ago. Despite this, it looks like the carts with the provisions were abandoned a few days ago.

The heroes will not find any remains around the carts.

3. After a long and tiresome journey, the terrified heroes will stop and realize that they've been going forward for days without any rest. Moreover, the guiding star has long disappeared from the sky.

Looking around, the heroes will notice a soft light ahead. The lamp of another caravan burns down, and there is still not a single person around.

The appearance of its carts and their content will not tell the heroes anything - they have never seen such antiques in their lives before. They will think it might have been the caravan of one of the oldest kings, who was forgotten even by the history itself.

Here, they'll find a couple of pages torn out of the diary. The splendid handwriting will reveal its owner, a queen of an ancient empire named LUCIA. In her old age, she traveled here secretly, with a circle of warriors close to her, to «correct the mistakes she made every minute of her life.»

4. The players will find their heroes in total weakness. They haven't eaten anything for several days. If they were accompanied by fellow travelers, they have gone. If they were riding horses, the horses will be gone too. But their group is not the only one they see near them.

Hundreds of sand figures walk on their side. Each of them, whether an ordinary old man, or a wounded warrior in tribal clothes, or a savage from the Northern peaks lagging behind, goes forward, fascinated by something ahead. And looking ahead again, the heroes will see a mountain with a silhouette of Daramut castle on it far ahead.

You can adjust the descriptions to your lore.

The heroes are not disturbed by the sand figures until each of them recognizes someone they know in this silhouettes. Someone who isn't looking at the road ahead, but right at them.

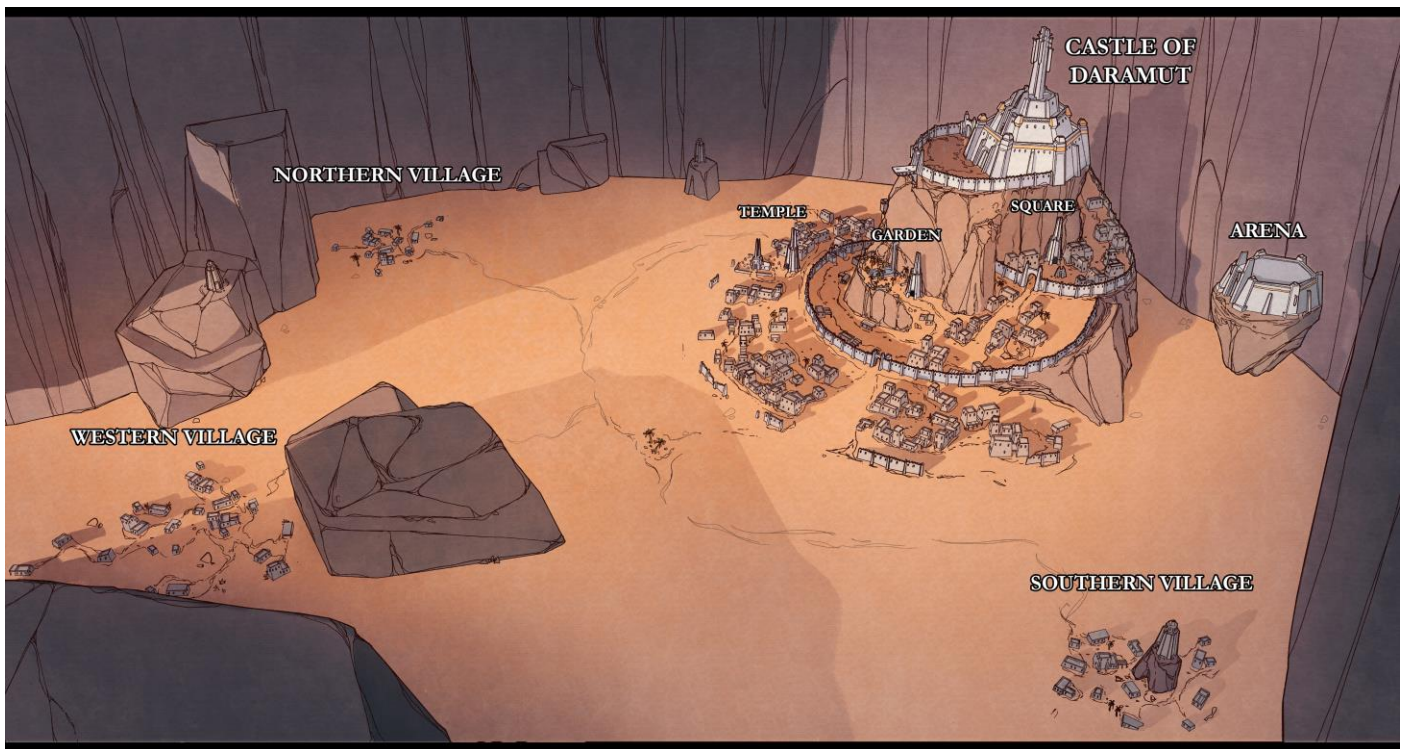
## SHADOWS OF THE PAST

The silent SAND SILHOUETTES will find their human form, barely heroes will realize who they are. During the adventure, they will appear in different places of Daramut, reminding the heroes that not only people around them want to return the past, but the heroes themselves have a similar temptation too.

The past of your heroes will come in handy here. Before the game, ask each player who or what may bother their characters. The silhouettes can be a reminder of tragedies in the lives of the heroes, of betrayals and unfulfilled promises that turned misfortune, of secret fears and death. The heroes will recognize these faces from thousands of others.

Everyone the heroes have met on their way to Daramut, from Tabit to hundreds of sand figures - every one of them would like to get the Artifact of Time to bring back the past. Behind each of them, there is a story they want to change even if it costs them their lives. The heroes will hear some of them, while the other will remain secret.

DMs task is to use the silhouettes to make the heroes at least think about taking advantage of the artifact for personal purposes. After all, it is the only thing that can correct mistakes of the past and bring the long-awaited peace to their lives.



## WESTERN VILLAGE

The heroes come to their senses in a small village, in a dilapidated house on a hill. They don't find their belongings or equipment near them.

The windows look out onto most of the village.

The village looks like it's been looted. The doors are broken down, things are thrown out, and the streets are full of sandy frozen bodies. THE SAND WARRIORS are walking along the main streets and lanes - half-dead silhouettes wrapped in shawls and fabrics, with weapons in their hands. They are scrabbling around, looking for someone, searching houses over and over again.

The heroes will notice their personal belongings on some warriors.

As soon as the heroes want to go outside, a silhouette like the ones patrolling the streets will run into the room and will immediately take off his shawl.

This is the famous wanderer Tabit, familiar to the heroes both from the fairy tales in childhood and from the cart they met.

## TABIT

\* A famous wanderer who lived over a hundred years ago

\* [Hidden] Looking for the Artifact to bring back the time when he decided to go on a new journey, abandoning the upbringing of his son forever.

Tabit will tell that the Desert creatures thought the heroes were dead and took some of their equipment. The wanderer dragged the heroes to his shelter in the village.

It will take some time before the heroes reach the Temple in Daramut. You can leave the heroes without everything, forcing them to improvise, act carefully, and look for equipment on their own. Alternatively, you can leave the most essential things to speed up the adventure.

Tabit, like many «stuck» Daramut residents, doesn't understand exactly where they are. The heroes will find that he cannot give a clear answer to direct questions, being confused in words and memories.

The wanderer will tell the heroes that the city is shrouded in a Sandstorm called by the guards of Daramut for protection. The desert army is gathering forces to cross it soon. If the heroes want to get to the palace, they need to hurry.

Tabit can lead the heroes through the storm, but only in exchange for their help. There are people in the Northern and Southern villages who need help. By freeing them, the heroes will do a good deed. The wanderer will say that these people looked unusual and strange, just like the heroes themselves.

Tabit will not help the heroes to cope with their problems - he needs to solve his own ones. He wants to get to the Palace - that's where the Artifact lies, which will relieve him of the inner pain. He constantly seems to hear a voice calling him somewhere, but he cannot understand where exactly. He looks for it all over Daramut, but can't find it. He believes that's his son's voice.

Back in his youth, when Tabit was careless and went with the flow of traveller's life, he left his child and beloved for the sake of adventures. Years later, he tried to find his family, but unsuccessfully. Then Tabit did realize what he had lost and that he had been happy only with them. That's why he went to Daramut, wanting to take back that time and fix his mistake.

Tabit will be waiting for the heroes in the Western village and will guide them through the Sandstorm as soon as they accomplish his quest.

This is where the heroes can meet the Silhouettes from their past again. They can lead the heroes out of the way, making the heroes follow them, deceiving their sight and hearing. Use them here and in the future to both break the perfect plan and maintain the atmosphere and sense of time tearing that surrounds Daramut and its inhabitants.

#### NORTHERN VILLAGE

The Desert army has gathered all the inhabitants on the main street and is about to start the execution. Some of these residents are frozen figures from the sand, whose life is long over (which does not worry the invaders).

But among them there are a couple of living «stuck» people, waiting for their plight in fear.

The stuck are two people dressed in animal skins embroidered with fur, brothers Carr and Cuyler. After rescue, they will tell of their lands far north, of which the heroes have never heard of as if they existed in another world.

Their lands were torn apart by a catastrophe that only the two of them managed to get out of. The northern gods came to them in a dream and said that if they wanted to bring back the lives of their people, they had to go to the edge of the world and fearlessly enter the desert lands. And that's how they found themselves here, in the sand trap of the Southern lands.

#### CARR & CUYLER

\* Brothers from the harsh northern lands

\* Looking for the Artifact to bring back the lives of the perished people

The brothers will not go to the Castle with the heroes - they can swear they saw some of their men in the desert. They need to help and save them, and then think about the Artifact.

#### SOUTHERN VILLAGE

Despite the scorched houses and the sandy frozen bodies that flooded the streets, not a sound can be heard around the settlement.

The Desert Assassins will ambush the heroes, wanting to take them prisoner and bring them to the other captives.

The heroes can find the hidden captives independently, being guided by quiet singing that comes from a passage hidden in the rock. The song is sung by AZAR, the warrior of Daramut. He sits next to the sand figures to which he dedicates this song - to his «brothers in arms».

#### AZAR

\* The Guardian of Daramut

\* Went on campaigns against barbarians with the king

#### THE TRUTH ABOUT ARDASHIR #1

Azar served at the same time as King Ardashir when he used to be an ordinary soldier. He will tell the story of how they defeated the barbarians and cleared their native lands together with the future king. Some of his friends were lost in battles. But that's what a soldier's burden is about.

Months later, Ardashir became his commander, but he has changed a lot while they were apart. The king's warriors forcibly oppressed other nations to the king's will, taken more and more new lands. Ardashir was ruthless, but he had his own goals. He was constantly looking for something, trying to get the information he needed from the elders of the captured tribes. They cursed him, which made his actions tougher. It wasn't the brave warrior he once knew. It was a completely different man, which he once told the future king.

Ardashir only said that Azar had no idea what he was talking about.

Years after the campaigns, Azar was one of the first witnesses to the invasion of the Desert creatures. One day, he and his men were cut off from the others in one of the royal forts. They fought to the last soldier. This is his last memory. He doesn't remember how he got here and he doesn't care at all.

Azar will remain among the bodies of his dead friends.

## PASSAGE THROUGH THE SANDSTORM

Having coped with the quest, the heroes will find Tabit in the Western village. Without further ado, he will understand that the work has been done and will be ready to lead the heroes through the storm. He will warn that the Desert Army is also about to pass through the barrier and follow its scouts to besiege the city.

Upon reaching the crossing point, the heroes will find hundreds of the Desert warriors, impeccably holding the line and waiting for orders. Tabit knows how to sneak past them if the heroes act quickly and carefully. If the heroes do not manage to be unnoticeable enough; some of the Warriors will go out of the formation and start chasing them, but will quickly lose sight of the heroes in the sandstorm.

Do not forget the usefulness of Silhouettes in the story. In the sandstorm, the heroes can see the scenes from their past, which can be seen by others too. This can encourage both players and the characters to have an interesting conversation during the break.

Once on the other side, the heroes will see Daramut in all its glory. The city consists of several levels, the highest of which is the Castle itself, where the Artifact of Time is stored.

## DARAMUT CITY

### CITY, LEVEL 1

Once there was a large farmers' market in this part of the city where goods from all over the kingdom were sold. Now there are only ruined houses, burned merchants' shops, and sand-covered corpses that fall into pieces after being touched.

Tabit will guide the heroes past the kingdom's forward-deployed guard units, ready to fend off the first attack from the enemy that will cross the Sandstorm. The heroes will pass by the walls with the archers on them. Their dark, frowned faces are turned towards the storm - they look out for Desert army spies and assassins, some of whom have already slipped into the city.

Barely the heroes are safe Tabit will have to leave them. He has heard the voice again, and can't help going in search of it. Before he leaves, he will tell the heroes they need to find a man named FARZIN if they want to get to the castle. He'll be on one of the city's towers. They need to hurry - the Sandstorm is about to end and the Desert Army will assault the city.

In the depths of the lower level, there is almost no one - the defenders are either on the front line or have retreated towards the second, more reliable line of defense, taking up the positions for shooting. However, here the heroes can still meet as a small patrol group of the guards, ready to fight any strangers, including the heroes, as well as the Desert scouts and assassins, gathering information and looking for weaknesses in the defense.

### TEMPLE

When approaching the once beautiful Daramut temple, visible from afar, the heroes can notice the movement of unknown figures in the neighboring streets.

The desert scouts try to get inside the temple - someone has barricaded themselves in it. They are about to break the dark windows and get inside. On some of them, the heroes can see their stolen things.

The heroes need to hurry if they want to help the people who escaped from the besieging enemy. If they do it too well - a small group of scouts will surely break inside. They are about to attack a woman praying on her knees, paying no attention to them.

### LUCIA

\* Queen of the forgotten empire

\* [Hidden] Wants to correct the mistakes she made in her reign

Lucia is constantly praying with her eyes shut, in a temple unknown to her to the gods she doesn't know. She cannot get rid of the thousands of voices in her head that she's asking for forgiveness. These are the voices of

people she killed in her lands. Only by the end of her life, she did realize the mistakes she had made, and despite she had aroused in her people. She wanted to make things right, so she went to the unknown southern lands, looking for an artifact she did not even believe existed.

After viewing the temple, the heroes will notice bizarre figures, having similar shapes with the castle. But they will also see strange, rough silhouettes made of clay. They look like the warriors of the Desert army. Taking one of them in their hands, they will hear the voices of those who brought these statuettes to the temple. These people pray that the curses of the Evil gods do not come true. One of the voices, the man who was once considered a barbarian, will tell the story in more detail.

## THE TRUTH ABOUT ARDASHIR #2

The man will ask his gods, to whom he is forbidden to pray, for mercy for the king. Ardashir not only destroyed all settlements and peoples, which he considered wild, without paying attention to whether they were peaceful or violent, but took over "the thing that was sent by the Evil Gods as a mockery of the southern peoples, so that they would destroy their own families" - the Artifact of Time. The temptation to turn back time is enormous, and the vengeance for it is even greater.

The king searched for the artifact for a long time, fishing out pieces of information from the elders of the wild peoples. He had mercy on no one, as if he was a madman wanting only one thing - to find the Artifact and use it for his own purposes.

## TOWER BY THE TEMPLE

The tower was used by the king's soldiers as a reconnaissance tower, but recently it was attacked by the Desert army. The corpses of the defeated guards still lie on its top, being gradually covered with sand.

Although Farzin is not here, the heroes can find the supplies and equipment they need and learn about the way to the second level of the city.

## CITY, LEVEL 2

This part of the city was home to craftsmen and traders selling their goods throughout the kingdom.

The walls here are protected by warriors of the kingdom. The heroes can climb over them using a rope they will find nearby or they can make a small diversion to distract the guards at the gates or at the partially collapsed walls.

As soon as the heroes reach the 2nd level of the city, the dull sounds of the horns behind will draw attention of the guards at the walls. Thousands of soldiers of the Desert army will start leaving the weakened sandstorm. The royal guards on the front line will fight the marching enemy confused by the storm, but its army is too large. The Desert warriors will crush the first line of defense and flood the city streets.

Control the Desert Army offensive by yourself. You can let it immediately reach the 2nd level of the city, making the heroes watch the battle scenes between the Desert warriors and Daramut guards and sneak between the enemies from both sides, or control the group's pace, making it act faster when you need it.

## ROYAL GARDEN

A small oasis among the empty streets. The trees are still growing here, and the purl of water will tempt the heroes to stop here and take a rest.

There is an old man dressed in light southern clothing sitting under the trees. He is surrounded by piles of books and is writing something down in one of them.

The old man is quietly reading his own notes on the history of the kingdom.

## THE TRUTH ABOUT ARDASHIR #3

After returning from his last conquest and walking the streets of the triumphant city, Ardashir took the King's place several months later.

He won over all the people who used to be loyal to the king by finding the weaknesses of each of them.

Ardashir arranged a dinner, the day after which the king died. Then he immediately ordered the execution of the noblemen who were already loyal to him, accusing them of organizing the murder and betrayal. He could tolerate their weaknesses and vulnerabilities as a commander.

But now he's king.

As soon as Ardashir ascended the throne, a new threat hung over the kingdom. Sand creatures rising from the depths, sent as a trial, began oppressing the royal territories, leaving nothing behind but sand.

And no matter how firm and unmistakable King Ardashir was in the past, a new challenge from gods made him lose what he had conquered throughout his life.

The sand creatures came to take back what was taken from them. Now they want to clear the Southern lands from the savages that have been so wasteful and cruel to it in recent years. To clear them from the Southern kingdom.

Here, in a quiet and secluded place, the Silhouettes of the past will give heroes a rest, stopping to mislead them. With the sand, they can draw pictures of their past for the characters, giving the heroes a hope of ending their persecution - if they understand themselves and admit their own delusions.

#### TOWER BY THE GARDEN

As the heroes approach the tower, a stone from its top will fall at their feet. There's definitely someone there. Going upstairs, the heroes will find a middle-aged man named Farzin, sadly looking at the city swallowed up by the sand.

#### FARZIN

\* Inventor of the kingdom

\* [Hidden] He was the first to discover the gap between time and space

Farzin was once an inventor during the reign of the King. He invented various tricky devices that temporarily held back the progress of the Desert army, like that Sandstorm through which the heroes have passed.

#### THE TRUTH ABOUT ARDASHIR #4

Farzin was sensitive to the matter that makes up the visible and invisible world. He was the first to notice how the familiar begins to change, and no one else sees it. It was as if the events were repeating, but the outcomes were changing; people saw something, but after a while they forgot about it; his inventions worked well, but then they failed. All this drove the inventor crazy, for what reason he locked himself in his own house for a long time until he went to the king with a question that tortured him.

He saw that no matter how the world changed around him, no matter how it fell in time and created chaos around him, one thing remained unchanged - the king of this world.

Afraid to say a word, he returned home. Or the king asked him to say what he was thinking about, and he didn't. Or he didn't come home, but was caught, tortured, and forced to say everything he was really thinking and seeing.

Or all at once.

Anyway, he can't remember what happened next.

Farzin has heard of a secret passage in "different times", but does not know where it is. The only one who can know about its existence is an old friend of the king - BAHADUR. Now he's in the Air arena. He broke the mechanism of movement so that no one would bother him, but if the heroes want to get to the Castle and try to put an end to all this - the tower at the Main square has a working part of the mechanism, which "muffles the magical threads that permeate the existence." From the Main square, the heroes can move to the Arena.

#### CITY, LEVEL 3

Created for the king's best and most loyal people, this part of the city has remained untouched by besiegers. The road from here leads directly to the Castle but is guarded by the best squad of the king, capable of standing up to the advancing army.

#### SQUARE

A wide space full of wounded soldiers of the king's army and the bodies of locals, many of whom have turned into sand and slowly decay in the wind.

It will not be easy to slip past the king's soldiers, so the heroes should act carefully, improvising on the move.

#### TOWER BY THE SQUARE

Near the tower, there is a part of the equipment left by the king's army, and inside it there are archers of the king looking for the enemy.



At the top of the tower, the heroes will find a bizarre and unknown device that muffles the magical threads. By taking out the mechanism Farzin was talking about, they can use it on the Gates at the other end of the square.

## ARENA

Walking through the gate, the heroes will find themselves in the hovering Arena. The city noise suddenly gives way to silence and only somewhere far below, the heroes can hear the sounds of a battle.

A large and strong warrior named BAHADUR sits in the center of the arena and sharpens a huge axe. As soon as anyone tries to get closer, Bahadur will stand up and turn around facing the strangers.

The warrior doesn't know who came to him or what they'll say. All he knows is that the enemy can be disguised as anyone. That's why he'll start the fight first.

By immobilizing Bahadur or inflicting him enough damage, he will bow down to the enemy and demand to take his life. He can no longer "live knowing where it all began and how it might end."

## BAHADUR

\* Friend and brother-in-arms of Ardashir

\* [Hidden] Knows the truth about what's going on

## BAHADUR (difficulty 9/10)

\* Taking a leap forward, knocking down enemies around, then immediately attacks with an axe

\* As soon as anyone gets too close to Bahadur, he makes a wide swing with the axe to scare away his enemies.

## THE TRUTH ABOUT ARDASHIR #5

Ardashir and Bahadur have been through a lot of things together, becoming not only brothers in arms, but also close friends.

Once there was a strange incident, after which he stopped recognizing a familiar person in Ardashir.

Bahadur and his group went on a reconnaissance mission, but were caught in an ambush that had been prepared for them. The barbarians didn't just want to kill one of the best soldiers in the kingdom - they wanted to catch, mutilate, and disfigure him. Using him as an example, they wanted to leave a message to anyone who dared to continue invading their lands.

And then Ardashir appeared, saving him from imminent death. He was glad to see his friend safe and sound, but his eyes painted another picture, still incomprehensible for Bahadur - there was both joy and horror and anger in them at the same time.

For the rest of his life, Bahadur had dreams about what could have happened if Ardashir had not appeared; the horror and pain he could have experienced. It made him restless and no one could explain to him what it was.

Until one day, when Ardashir explained it.

He confessed to his friend what he really saw.

Bahadur didn't survive that ambush. Ardashir was at the scene of his death and saw what he had turned into; what the savages had done to him.

After Bahadur's death, Ardashir couldn't continue living in peace, couldn't leave it alone. He began to believe in barbarian tales about the thing that could change time. For months he had been searching for it, seeking information from savage elders.

The tales were true. He found the Artifact of Time, which took the form of a spear he'd never left.

He changed the past as much as he could then, despite prophecies and curses. Ardashir said he saw Bahadur dying dozens, hundreds of times. And every time, something changed in him.

Then he just couldn't stop. He saw weaknesses, mistakes, untapped opportunities. He longed for divinity until the curses of the wild gods began to come true, and the Desert army rose from the sands, taking away everything that King Ardashir had worked so hard on "for hundreds of years". There's no turning back for him anymore.

Ardashir was depressed and full of contradictory, confusing feelings. Bahadur couldn't believe his words for a long time and when he did, years had passed and he could only wait for it to be over.

Ardashir told Bahadur about the hidden passage through which he sometimes leaves the Castle. The King will be glad if his old friend ever comes to visit him.

Bahadur wishes to go with the heroes to the Castle. If anything started because of him, it is he who should end it.

## SECRET PASSAGE

On the 2nd level of the city, at the other end of the gate, there is a secret royal passage.

By this time, there is a battle between the guards of the kingdom and the Desert army in every street. The heroes can take advantage of the chaos to pass unnoticed to the right place, but they will not manage to leave the streets without clashes.

Do not forget about Silhouettes of the past, which still can distract and mislead the heroes.

## CASTLE

After passing through the secret path, the heroes will go out to the castle square, where the main entrance is located.

The road to the castle, which was guarded by the king's best men, is already being stormed by the Desert army forces. The heroes have not so much time left.

## ARDASHIR

In a wide hall surrounded by book racks, a hunched man sits on the throne, writing something down in a book with a trembling hand. In the other hand, he holds his spear, which he has carried for most of his life.

He is surrounded by the best warriors in the kingdom. Bahadur knows some of them, but the king's strict order prevents them from showing weakness and allowing strangers to harm Ardashir.

Bahadur will address to Ardashir, calling him to be wise. It's long over. The kingdom has fallen. And the only thing that can be done about it is to take away the source of the troubles - the Artifact of Time. This is the last chance to stop the chaos that's going on around.

Ardashir recognizes an old friend, but can't accept his offer. The king looks tired and depressed, mostly from himself and his own actions. He doesn't want to give up so easily.

The noise outside the palace rises and the Sand warriors rush in to get the artifact. A battle on three sides begins.

On four, if you actively use the Silhouettes of the past. Here, they are stronger than ever and can even get a physical form.

Ardashir remains in place, sadly and impassively crossing something out, writing it down, and crossing it out again.

The heroes need to get to the king and the artifact. Make sure it doesn't happen too easily and quickly - the heroes have enough problems around that you can use for your own purposes.

As the heroes get closer to Ardashir, they will hear him constantly mumbling that "everything can be fixed", "there must be a way."

Bahadur tries to calm down his old friend by saying that "nothing can be returned and nothing should be returned. It's over."

Ardashir will slowly drop his manuscript. He will say he wanted things to be better. He couldn't see his people suffering. He couldn't let them be used. He couldn't accept what was happening.

Closing his eyes, he'll release his hold of the spear that lay firmly in his hands. A bright flash will light up the premise and time will stop its movement. Having opened their eyes, the heroes will find frozen sand figures in the place of other people that slowly fade away from the gusts of wind. The castle and the whole Daramut will turn into quiet and long abandoned ruins, in which nothing has happened for thousands of years. And only a spear-shaped Artifact of time lying at their feet and a manuscript will prove that everything that happened had really existed.

The lying book tells the story of the Kingdom of Daramut that the heroes learned during this mission. No fairy tales, only the harsh truth about the king that was ready to do anything to bring back what he had lost. Having received what he wanted, he could not cope with the temptation to correct the past, which saved some people, but ruined others.

The Artifact of time not only takes the form that its owner expects to see, but also imposes a curse the owner is afraid of. It allows its owner to travel in a moment of a powerful emotional shock, so after a while the king simply could not rewind the time. The Artifact couldn't do anything else for him.

Ardashir did not want to lose important and useful people, but finally lost everything that he had been living for. The sand and time storms that surrounded Daramut fell.

Now heroes can go home.

If you feel confident in yourself and in the group, you can bring them to the necessity of acceptance of their past. Confront each of the heroes with their demons which made them who they are. You can do it before the final scene, and then the end of the adventure will be naturally interlaced with stories of the characters and all the way they came will be not to find out what happened to Daramut, but to understand the inner world and heroes' nature.

## ENCOUNTERS

### CROSSING THE DESERT

Performing Tabit's request and moving from village to village, the heroes will find themselves close to a huge stone east of the Western village. Gusts of wind lift sand into the air, preventing the heroes from seeing anything far ahead.

This is what the Desert riders squad will take advantage of, which picked up the group's trail.

The riders can be heard from far away. They will be quickly approaching the heroes, trying to attack them on horseback in a single rush.

Having made one attack, the group of riders will disappear in the rising sand dust, going for the second one. Losing brothers in arms will not stop them until the heroes reduce their squad at least in half - then, going for the next attack, they will get off their horses and try to approach the heroes at a distance of a bow shot.

If the heroes reach the stone and find shelter there, the squad will disappear from the view of the heroes, rushing and trying to get closer to shot at the heroes with bows.

### DESERT RIDERS (difficulty 7/10)

\*Attack an enemy in small groups

### STREETS OF DARAMUT - AMBUSH

Sneaking through the city, the heroes will hear a familiar voice on one of the streets. It's a Tabit and, according to the shouts, he's fighting with someone.

When they reach the street, the heroes will find him standing over the bodies of two Desert scouts. Tabit pays no attention to the heroes and looks the other way.

An experienced warrior or an attentive pathfinder may have a gut feeling that something is wrong there.

Barely the heroes approach Tabit as he turns his face towards them. With monochrome sand-color eyes and a grin on his face, the silhouette of the wanderer familiar to the heroes will scatter into sand grains, raising a column of sand from which the Desert assassin comes out, who took the appearance of Tabit, and two scouts. The Desert warriors come out slowly from different sides and approach the heroes.

It's an ambush.

### STREETS OF DARAMUT - BATTLE

The heroes will hear the sounds of battle - the Desert army warriors surrounded the Guardians of the kingdom that cover up the wounded with their last ounce of strength.

The heroes can pass by - then one of the scouts will notice them, forcing them to fight or hide from the approaching reinforcements.

If the heroes help the Guardians of the kingdom, the latter will treat such an action from strangers with disbelief, but will not attack and pursue them. Perhaps they will nod to thank the heroes and return to their tasks of helping their comrades-in-arms.

# ENEMIES OF DARAMUT

## DESERT SCOUT (difficulty 4/10)

Soldier of the Desert army

\* Once out of sight of the enemy, can move instantly to a short distance from the enemy.

## DESERT WARRIOR WITH A SPEAR AND A SHIELD (difficulty 5/10)

### DESERT ARCHER (difficulty 6/10)

Soldier of the Desert army

\* Once out of sight of the enemy, can move instantly to a short distance from the enemy.

## DESERT ASSASSIN (difficulty 7/10)

Elite soldier of the Desert army

\* Can mimic any sound to get the victim's attention

\* Once out of sight of the enemy, can move instantly to a short distance in any direction.

## DESERT RIDERS (difficulty 7/10)

\* Attack an enemy in small groups

## DESERT WARRIOR WITH A HAMMER (difficulty 8/10)

\* Strong but clumsy

\* With a hammer blow from below, sends a wave of sand towards the enemy, temporarily dazzling them

## KINGDOM GUARD WITH A BOW (difficulty 5/10)

\* Has a set of different arrows (fire, poison, smoke, etc.) to support other guards

## KINGDOM GUARD WITH A SHIELD (difficulty 6/10)

\* Direct 1vs1 attacks come with disadvantage

## KINGDOM CASTLE GUARD (difficulty 8/10)

\* Direct 1vs1 attacks come with disadvantage

## BAHADUR (difficulty 9/10)

\* Taking a leap forward, knocking down enemies around, then immediately attacks with an axe

\* As soon as anyone gets too close to Bahadur, he makes a wide swing with the axe to scare away his enemies.