

# Elven Tower Cartography



## Snacks for the GM's Mind

Adventure Resources and Ideas  
One-shot Suggestions  
Game Design Tips





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## February 2019

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The intent with this material is to create ideas and extra material for the illustrations I create. You're free to use this information or change it in any way to adapt it to your own game and players.

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## 247 Dust Hole - Desert Encampment



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# THE DUST HOLE

*I tell you, if you do not stop at the Dust Hole, you won't come out alive.*

## *-A Desert Guide*

### About this Resource

This resource features the general description of an adventure location for RPG adventures or general inspiration. Not all releases are the same; some may include rules material for Dungeons and Dragons 5e but mechanics are left to a minimum.

These adventure ideas that are appropriate for low to mid-level (Levels 1 to 10) adventuring parties. As the DM, you are free to change or modify any or all the information found here. NPC names and settlement names are the first you should consider changing to accommodate any homebrew-world lore. When monsters are referenced, the creature's name is noted in bold. Only creatures from the *D&D5e Monster Manual* are cited.

### BACKGROUND LORE



iving in the great desert is truly a challenge only the bravest and most adaptive peoples can achieve. Most people would consider a life by the desert a self-defeating way of life, having so many places where it is a simple chore to settle and thrive. Despite this, many colonies exist in the boundaries of the deserts and even deep inside them. How they survive tends to be a mystery to outsiders until they study their ways. Living in the desert is harsh on the body on the mind, but it can be done.

Desert dwellers know how to live from the desert. Where people see a barren wasteland, the desert people see edible plants, evasive fauna, and ways they can make the best of what they have.

The great desert is a grand spot on the map of the land. Merchants and travelers often go the long way around the desert to avoid its harsh environment. But that option is not feasible for most.

Merchants and workers must make a living and they only have enough time to do so. Merchants, in particular, know that crossing the dangerous desert gives them an advantage against other merchants that choose to go the long way. And thus there are many paths and trails through the desert.

The way is hard and dangerous, many do not make it across. They become victims of exposure, wild animals, and even desert brigands. Some improve their odds of success by hiring expert guides

### General Features

These are the general features of the Dust Hole. It is located in the middle of the desert, roughly where three desert trails intersect. It provides protection and solace from the elements but it is still a dangerous place.

**Terrain.** The soil is in places a mixture of hardened rock and fine sand. Parts where the floor is mostly sand are considered difficult terrain for the purposes of tactical combat.

**Weather.** The desert is a dangerous place. Traveling during the day exposes the body to extreme heat conditions. On the other hand, the nights are cold. Some nights are too cold to endure without protective clothes. The shade and shelters in the Dust Hole provide protection during day and night. However, the threat of a sand storm is something no one can fully protect against.

**Light.** Lighting conditions depend on the weather and time of day. A sand storm impedes vision beyond 5 ft.

**Smells and Sounds.** The lack of humidity in the air impedes the sense of smell, a constant sterile smell is all people can perceive. The sound of wind against in the sand is a common occurrence.





who know the way of the desert people and the paths through the inhospitable place. Still, there is a risk because the desert is a beast which cannot be tamed.

There is a ray of hope in the depths of the desert, however. Weary travelers, lost companions, and experienced guides always try to make their way to the place they call the Dust Hole to find a moment of respite. The Dust Hole is a permanent camp built collectively by merchants and travelers

who take one of the many main roads through the desert. It is located under the shade of a U-shaped ridge formation. It offers a place to rest from the wind, the heat, and exhaustion.

The first thing a person sees when approaching the Dust Hole is a group of wagons and camel-drawn carts arranged to form a loose barrier against the wind. Common travelers know they should place their carts in such way as to improve the protection from the elements in the camp. In-



side, there are four permanent tents, a place to stop camels or other beasts of burden, a central circle of stones for a bonfire, and a multitude of crates, barrels, and other things that belong to merchants or are donated to the camp to serve weary travelers.

It is customary for any visitor in the Dust Hole to gift something to the community currently there on arrival. The gift can take many forms: rations, water, building materials, and other useful goods. This non-spoken rule is what keeps the Dust Hole growing with each passing season.

There are only a handful of permanent residents in the Dust Hole. A stable-boy who takes care of the camels for a silver coin has been there for three years. Madam Faggena takes care of the two permanent sleeping tents (the two largest), she also expects compensation for her services. A fat hobbit with a permanent grin on his face set up a general store in the smallest tent. He sells a variety of useful supplies for desert-traveling.

## Non Permanent Population

Apart from the few permanent residents, there are usually 25-40 travelers in the camp. These people stay only for a few days before returning to the road. Recurrent travelers only visit the camp twice a year, others usually do it once a year or once in their lives. Because of this, any group of adventurers may encounter all kinds of people in the Dust Hole. The ever-changing nature of the encampment residents assures that the party will never meet the same person twice if they visit the place more than once.

Here is a list of interesting NPCs which the party can meet at the Dust Hole. It is unlikely that all of these characters are in the camp at the same time. This list is not exhaustive and is meant to provide inspiration for desert-quests and interesting interactions with uncommon characters. Some of the entries below include adventure ideas or follow-up quests.

### Madam Faggena

This woman cleans and manages the two sleeping tents in the camp. She is a middle-aged woman of brown skin. She explains that for years, the locals procure water from a nearby oasis. However, this has not been possible as of late because a strange entity appears and causes a local sandstorm to

prevent visitors. Madam Faggena implores the party for help before their supplies run dry. The entity is a desert elemental creature which is fed up with people exploiting the oasis for water.

### The Dark Soldiers

Three soldiers from a faraway shady empire are resting in camp. They are looking for two construct fugitives. They say the constructs are dangerous and offer a bounty for them. In truth, one of the constructs has a map to the location of a phylactery of the emperor-lich. The soldiers are trying to prevent the construct from delivering the map to their empire's enemies.

### The Poisoned One

A person in camp lays on a carpet unmoving. He poisoned himself by eating something in the desert. A traveling healer has tried to use some common antivenoms with no success. No one knows what he ate, the healer claims he can cure the man if he knows what it was.

### Unlikely Insects

A group of four thri-keen (human-sized insectoids) live in the desert as nomadic merchants. They trade in delicacies for goods from non-desert lands. The telepathic insects explain that they will pay in gold if the party gets rid of a rival merchant party of their kind who will arrive in two days to camp.

### The Unbeaten

A humanoid form rises from the ground; suddenly, a sandstorm appears and hits the encampment, disturbing the peace of whoever is in it. Everybody seems terrified, trying to get themselves to a safe place. Everybody except a kid. A kid that once read a book about the one that was there, but is no more. And he knows what it was. And he knows that to stop this, the strong ones in this desert will have to face the entity and stand victorious after a battle with it. The creature is the ghost of a warrior who died in the desert unbeaten in battle. He now looks for the pleasure of defeat so that he can rest.

### The Halfling and the Camels

The fat hobbit with a permanent grin on his face in the general store tent is known as Gullible Jack. He has been in the camp for over thirty years, almost from the moment the camp first came to be. He appears to be a normal halfling but years ago he received a gift from a creature of the desert. Jack



can use a spell to turn people into camels. Jack is a reasonable person and he only does this to thieves and criminals in camp. The party may gain insight into his ability after an orphan boy goes missing in camp. The boy tried to steal something from Jack's store and he turned him into a camel. The party may notice a new young camel with the other camels, something in the way it looks and the hair on its head reminds them of the orphan boy.

## **The Dispossessed Merchants**

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A group of four well-dressed merchants claims to have crashed their flying vessel two hours away from the camp. They offer a hefty reward to the party if they go to the crash site to retrieve a wooden chest and a bundle of documents from a desk. They cannot pay upfront because their gold is in the crash site.

## **Coming Home**

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The locals are being attacked in the night by a strange sandy entity in the dark but no one has been able to see it for real. It always gets away as soon as a light is turned on. It turns out it is a sand golem who claims the Dust Hole as its home. The golem was away from the desert for hundreds of years after coming into service of a wizard. It now returns to its home to find it full of humanoids.

## **The Apothecary**

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An herbalist and researcher of desert plants has been living in the camp for a few months. He wishes to get a sample of a strange plant that only flowers once a century. He wishes to hire the party to escort him to the location and guide him back to camp alive.

## **The Defeated**

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A lonely old mercenary eats alone by the fire. Recent scars of a terrible battle on his arms and face. He is missing his left arm. He is on his way back home from a foreign land where he was defeated in battle. In secret, he wishes to die in the desert as he makes his way back home.

## **A Different Kind of Gnom**

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A gnom merchant known as Hildred hired for his desert expertise, and that he's not a particularly picky eater. Not a particularly pleasant person, but he seems knowledgeable in survival skills and the paths in the desert. He has fallen out of favor with his old group and asks the party if they are willing

to help him kill them.

## **The Faith Defeated**

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An injured warrior of the faith, a paladin, is currently under the care of a healer in camp. He lost a battle against a mummy in the desert and got infected with mummy rot. The healer says he might not make it through the night. The paladin charges the party with defeating this mummy or else the creature will escape its burial place.

## **The Perfect Grain**

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A lonely man is crying and moaning by the bonfire at night. If asked, he explains that he has lived in the Dust Hole for over four years, trying to find the perfect grain of sand. He eventually found it last week, but as he was getting ready to leave for the desert boundary, he lost it. He is now looking in camp. The search should not take long, he claims, because he knows it must be within the camp.

## **The Perfect Guide**

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Zenta, a desert guide, is camping in the Dust Hole overnight. Her desert tribe heritage and facility with many of the region's languages can make her a strong ally to the party. To make things better, she is currently looking for work. Unfortunately, she is a runaway bride being hunted by her jilted fiancé, the Sultan Kaseem.

## **Lizard Hunt**

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Kaleed is a desert druid. He is thin and quiet with dark, leathery skin from walking in the sun. His traveling gear includes a large metal cage with at least 40 different kinds of lizards inside. He collects them. Kaleed claims he is currently looking for the rare golden salamander. Will the adventurers help?

## **A Murderer Among Us**

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A different type of travelers is currently in town. A group of sentient animated rugs is in camp for a night or two. They are hiding a *rug of smothering* responsible for a local death because they're family. The victim was a spices merchant who died two days ago.

## **Not During Dinner**

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After nightfall, a pair of unsavory individuals are engaged in a terrible activity while other people try to rest and cook their food by the fire. One of the men is a desert ranger and is showing his companion the correct way to skin animals.



## **The Insightful Monkey**

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The local stable boy owns a cute monkey named Scrubb. The monkey hangs out with everyone in camp except a man named Hort, who claims to be the “Master of Camp”. Hort spews orders and everyone in the Dust Hole follow them and respect his authority. Additionally, Grubb seems to dislike Hort. The small monkey throws small stuff at him from time to time.

If magic is used to speak with the monkey, Grubb explains that Hort was not there yesterday. He arrived this morning and suddenly everyone treats him with respect. In truth, Hort is Rakshasa Enchanter. His charm spells do not work on the monkey.

## **Who Ate It?**

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If a member of the party spends enough time among the camp’s camels, one of the camels steps forwards and greets the adventurer. The talking camel cannot explain how, why, or for how long he has had this ability. The camel does not know if it has a name either. On the other side of the camp, a group of three children is having an argument over candy. Each one of them claims that the other two ate their candy. In truth, it was the talking camel who ate all the candy.

## **Trapped in the Heat**

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There is a hole on the side of the northern ridge where a trickle of water springs. It is an ice devil. The evil creature can come out of the hole but not for long because the hot weather will kill it after a short time. The locals know what hides in the hole but still make the best of it by collecting the water from the hole. If asked, the devil explains that his master, a powerful wizard tried to teleport him to a distant place but he botched the spell. Now the devil cannot escape the Dust Hole and is a prisoner in the camp. Despite his evil nature, the devil has not attacked any of the camp residents because he sees no usefulness in it.



# THANK YOU

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I have two adventures, linked below, and a compilation of maps for the Forgotten Realms.

