

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.

SANDS OF TIME

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 their 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 this 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 Sandy 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.



ENEMIES

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.

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!