

THE SANDS OF ETERNAL DREAD



CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW

Theme/Genre: High Fantasy with Horror and Mystery Elements

Tone: Dark and Tense with moments of Heroic Triumph

Target Player Level: Level 5

Expected Duration: 2 hours

Player Focus Preferences:

- **Combat:** High
- **Roleplay:** Medium
- **Exploration:** High

BACKSTORY AND SETTING

WORLD OVERVIEW

The adventure unfolds within the Shifting Expanse, a formidable desert that conceals as much as it reveals. Its sprawling sands are known to bury entire cities, erasing them from history. By night, eerie whispers ride the cool winds, persuading the unwary to chase illusory ruins. Legends speak of Ammu-Ket, a tyrannical pharaoh sealed beneath these sands, his malevolence tethered to an ancient obelisk.

LOCAL AREA

The epicenter of the campaign, **Dunefall**, is a beleaguered outpost on the edge of habitable land. It serves as a refuge for nomads and adventurers, clinging to life atop ruins of predecessors who vanished. At its heart rises the black obelisk, presumed to imprison Ammu-Ket's soul. Its ominous red glyphs pulse faintly but intensely, igniting whispers of dread among the townsfolk.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Ammu-Ket's reign was one of terror until his binding heralded peace. His soul was magically sealed in an obelisk by desperate priests to thwart his influence. After centuries, however, whispers of his malice rattle the peace—seeping through the cracks, manipulating minds, and resurrecting the fallen as undead thralls.

IMPORTANT NPCs

- **Keeper Rashim:** A custodian of the obelisk's secrets who dreads its power but understands the ritual to contain it.
- **Zahid Al-Ras:** A charismatic treasure hunter whose witty demeanor masks a relentless ambition for wealth.
- **Lady Elythra Nimar:** The stern high priestess with intrinsic ties to Ammu-Ket's empire, her knowledge is invaluable yet closely guarded.
- **Dread Wraith Yireth:** Ammu-Ket's devoted specter lieutenant, yearning to fulfill her master's release.

PLOT HOOK

OPENING SCENE

A dense, mystical sandstorm envelops Dunefall, casting the village into chaos. At its core, panicked townsfolk encircle Maidha—a young researcher, delirious and chilled amidst scorching heat, clutching a crescent-shaped artifact. Her words are fragmented prophecies of doom just before she collapses, clutching the ground in fevered exhaustion.

A sinister howl breaches the storm's symphony, followed by skeletal jackals attacking indiscriminately. The town's defenses buckle, and Keeper Rashim implores anyone capable to defend the obelisk from the mounting threat.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

1. **Defend the obelisk** from undead attackers.
2. Investigate Maidha's artifact to delineate its link to Ammu-Ket.
3. Enter the desert's depths to thwart Ammu-Ket's impending awakening.

KEY LOCATIONS

LOCATION 1: THE STARTING AREA – DUNEFALL VILLAGE

Atmosphere: The village is beset by a brutal sandstorm, its air heavy with tension and the cries of terrorized villagers. Shadows dart within the swirling sands, and the obelisk stands as a dark monument against the sky.

Notable NPCs:

- **Keeper Rashim:** Provides insights and urges action.
- **Zahid Al-Ras:** Offers his guidance to uncover the roots of the artifact's origin.

Encounters:

- **Combat:** Engage 3-4 undead skeletal jackals—desert-dwelling undead with **pack tactics** (Stat Block: Jackal Skeletons, MM pg. 310).
- **Roleplay:** Interrogate Maidha with a DC 15 Persuasion or Medicine check to calm her distress. Engage Rashim for historical clues.
- **Clues:** The crescent artifact glows and is identified by Rashim as a relic from Ammu-Ket's era.

LOCATION 2: THE GRAVE OF BONES

Atmosphere: This formidable canyon stretches like the skeletal maw of a long-dead beast, bleached bones crunch beneath footfalls; fissures expel ethereal blue luminescence into the gloom.

Puzzle/Challenge: An arcane door awaits with shifting runes. Solving its riddle reveals passage but failing this DC 17 Insight/Arcana check awakens a **Bone Naga** for combat.

Encounter: Confront desert bandits scavenging for remnants, they can be parleyed, intimidated, or fought.

LOCATION 3: AMMU-KET'S TOMB

Atmosphere: Buried deep within dunes, this high temple echoes with faint ritualistic chants. Dying braziers cast twisted shadows upon menacing runes whispering of demise.

Challenges:

- An **anti-magic aura** encompasses segments of the tomb, intensifying threats.
- Navigate precarious, crumbling sands, and deadly bladed traps toward the ritual chamber.

Climactic Encounter: At the ritual epicenter, **Dread Wraith Yireth** leads legions of spectral constructs in an attempt to unleash Ammu-Ket's soul.

ENCOUNTERS AND CHALLENGES

COMBAT ENCOUNTERS

- **Skeletal Jackals:** Expose players to relentless enemies utilizing **pack tactics** (MM pg. 310).
- **Bone Naga Trap:** Failures in solving the door's puzzle prompt a Bone Naga, escalating suspense.
- **Dread Wraith Yireth (Custom Stats):**
 - HP: 120 | AC: 17 | Capable of flight
 - **Energy Drain** attack: 2d8 necrotic damage
 - Summons **2 Shadow Constructs (AC 15, HP 50 each)** each turn unless halted via obelisk rituals.

PUZZLE/TRAP

- **Shifting Runes Puzzle:** Players align symbols to the artifact's crescent mark. Missteps cause sand geysers to erupt (DC 15 Dex Save or sustain 2d6 piercing damage).

CLIMAX AND RESOLUTION

THE FINAL CHALLENGE

At the narrative's crescendo, the obelisk glows incendiary with Ammu-Ket's essence surfacing. Players must conquer **Dread Wraith Yireth** in an intense showdown while countering the ritual with a DC 18 Arcana/Religion check using the crescent artifact for suppression bonuses, disorienting Yireth.

STAKES

- **Success:** Ammu-Ket's soul is fragmented, the obelisk's menacing glow diminishes, and desert whispers cease.
- **Failure:** Ammu-Ket awakes, empowering the desert in devastation, turning Dunefall into the nexus of his dread resurgence.

REWARDS

LOOT

- **Cloak of the Dunes:** Resists fire damage.
- **Crescent of Binding:** Banishes a fiend or undead permanently—single use.
- **Gold:** 200 pieces per adventurer.

STORY REWARDS

- **Heroic Recognition:** Earn the unwavering gratitude of Dunefall, Rashim proclaims your legendary deeds.
- **Future Paths:** Lady Elythra unveils ancient magics for those seeking further ventures.

SUPPORTING DETAILS

- **Custom Monsters:** Detailed Dread Wraith Yireth stat block available upon request.
- **Maps:** Incorporate a desert outpost, bone-canyon, and complex temple layout for dynamic engagement.
- **Player Handouts:** Feature riddle inscriptions, crescent artifact cipher, imprisonment texts of Ammu-Ket.
- **Atmospheric Music Suggestions:**
 - “Rise of the Sands” by Peter Crowley for the desert theme.
 - “Echoes of the Past” by Adrian von Ziegler for tomb exploration.
 - “The Fallen Pharaoh” by BrunuhVille for climactic battle scenes.

FLEXIBLE OUTCOMES

- **Failure or Retreat:** Consequences impact the region, offering plot threads for sequels, with the cursed desert rising in prominence.
- **Success:** Extend exploration possibilities to unlock secrets of Ammu-Ket’s empire, rewarding continued engagement with untapped treasures.

POST-GAME WRAP-UP

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

1. What moment from the game stood out most to you?
2. Did the balance between combat, exploration, and roleplay satisfy your expectations?
3. Are you interested in delving further into this world and its myriad mysteries?

This structured adventure brings your party into the thrill of high stakes, layered with mystery and palpable dread. Dive into the sands—your story awaits.