

SECRET OF THE SHIFTING SANDS

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A Dragonstar Adventure for four 3rd-level characters

“Secret of the Shifting Sands” is a Dragonstar adventure suitable for a party of 3rd-level player characters (PCs). Consult the “Scaling the Adventure” section if you want to run the adventure with a larger, smaller, higher-level or lower-level party of adventurers.

PREPARATION

“Secret of the Shifting Sands” is written for the *Dragonstar* campaign setting by Fantasy Flight Games. Text that appears in italics is player information, which you can read aloud or paraphrase where appropriate. Normal text contains information important to you when running the adventure. Maps are included at the end of the adventure in their own appendix.

The party will find it beneficial to have at least one rogue or mechanist. Although it is possible to complete the adventure without one, the presence of a rogue or mechanist greatly enhances the party’s chance of success.

The adventure takes place on Primogen II, found in Chapter 4 of the *Dragonstar: Guide to the Galaxy*, although any sparsely populated planet with a large desert will suffice. Although the Secret of the Shifting Sands assumes that the opposition consists of sand rats (see new monsters section) any low-level humanoid race can be substituted to better fit the DM’s campaign.

BACKGROUND

Ten years ago, an Imperial craft suffered a navigational failure and went down amid the Burning Dunes. Although precisely what the craft carried is unknown, Imperial forces descended on the desert in unprecedented numbers to retrieve the craft and her pilot. After months of scouring the desert, the Imperial forces gave up the search. The cargo and pilot were never recovered.

Some few days ago, after a brutal sandstorm, the sand rats came across the exposed remains of an Imperial pilot. Among his possessions, the rats discovered the black box from his craft. Ragash, the leader of the sand rats, surmised that the box and pilot could well have come from the Imperial craft lost to the sands all those years

ago. Although the rats did not have the facilities to unlock the secrets of the box, Ragash reasoned that, at the very least, he could sell the box back to the Imperials for a princely sum. To make certain that none of his followers attempted to steal the box, he kept his suspicions to himself.

Unfortunately for Ragash, one of his less competent tribesmen was not aware of the box’s value or his leader’s plans for it and traded the box to a caravan for some wine and a few other luxuries. When Ragash discovered what had happened, he was furious. He immediately put the fellow responsible to death and set off in search of the caravan.

Ragash and his tribe caught up to the caravan at the trading post known as the Shifting Sands and politely asked the merchant for the return of his property. The merchant, alerted by Ragash’s urgency, refused to sell it back and began to formulate his own suspicions as to the importance of the box. Ragash relented, but returned in the dead of the night with his warriors, killing everyone inside the trading post and reclaiming his treasure.

In taking the box back, Ragash discovered that the merchant had used his computer equipment to unravel the secrets of the black box. Overjoyed with his new discovery, Ragash immediately sent most of his warriors back into the desert, took a trusted few with him to plunder the treasure, and left the rest to clean up the mess.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The PCs arrive at the trading post and come under attack by the sand rats. They then defeat the sand rat rear-guard while preventing the destruction of the trading post and investigating what the sand rats are trying to accomplish. Over the course of their investigation, they learn of the existence of the black box and its significance. Finally, the characters pursue Ragash and his band into the wastes to stop him from claiming the prize.

SCALING THE ADVENTURE

If the DM feels that the rats are too dangerous for his party, the simplest solution is to use basic sand rats instead of the specialists listed above and replacing the blaster carbines with lasers or con-

ventional slug throwers. For a party of 4th-level characters, use the adventure as written. The players may have an easier time of completing the mission, but their rewards will be lessened as well. To make the adventure more dangerous, add additional class levels to the sand rats and upgrade their equipment appropriately.

FOR THE PLAYERS

Getting the PCs to the trading post should be simple. The Shifting Sands is the only such establishment for miles in any direction and has a local monopoly on fuel and other essential supplies. If the players need a more urgent reason to visit the post, the area is prone to violent sandstorms and the post would make a convenient safe haven in which to ride out the storm.

Likewise, the Burning Dunes are known to harbor the ruins of lost civilizations, so the PCs can be in the area searching for forgotten wealth or lost items of power. Alternately, one of the heroes could have a relationship with the proprietor of the Shifting Sands, be it relative, lover, or old friend, and wants to stop by and say hello while he happens to be in the area.

DUNGEON FEATURES

The Shifting Sands is constructed of industrial brick. All interior doors are made of two-inch thick steel (Hardness 12, 60 hp., Break DC 30) and slide into the ceiling when activated. Doors are activated through a touch pad on either side of the portal. All doors have an electronic locking mechanism, but this is not engaged on most of the portals. On those doors marked with a key symbol, the door is locked and requires electronic lockpicks and an Open Locks check (DC 25) or a keycard to open. Exterior doors are six-inches thick and recess into the walls when opened (Hardness 12, 180 hp., Break DC 36). They are also activated with a touch pad on either side of the door.

Exterior walls are five-foot thick composite bricks (Hardness 18, 2100 hp.). The interior walls are composed of concrete blocks six inches thick (Hardness 10, 120 hp.). Rooms and hallways have ten feet of ceiling clearance unless otherwise

noted. The map is printed to a five foot per square scale.

The Shifting Sands is well lit. Light from the outside comes in through windows and skylights. These windows are shuttered with sliding metal plates to protect against sandstorms. Glowing panels in the ceiling augment the natural lighting. These panels continue to glow as long as the reactor (Area 14) is functioning.

Note that all of the NPCs in the Shifting Sands are in radio communication with each other. If they think the PCs are more than they can handle, they will regroup and attempt to make an exit. If the PCs capture a communicator and the rats detect them listening in, they will switch to a backup frequency.

OUTSIDE (AREA 1)

Outside the Shifting Sands is the beginning of the Burning Dunes. Sparse vegetation and rocky sand leaves the characters little cover for approaching the Shifting Sands unseen. Impose a -4 circumstance modifier for the bright light and lack of cover unless the PCs employ unusual measures (such as sending the rogue in first under cover of an *invisibility* spell).

1. SAND RAT SENTRY (EL 2)

A square, gray building squats amid the desert ahead. Sunlight reflects off the many windows, a dancing cascade of light in contrast to the oppressive heat of the desert landscape. A small fueling station sits beside the building, and an overturned dune runner lies nearby, resting partially atop a small mountain of tires. Two figures lay sprawled in front of the metal door of the structure, their limbs spread awkwardly amid a pool of discolored sand.

Slithburn, a member of the sand rats, stands watch from the roof. A Spot check (DC 15) reveals his position by the light glinting from his rifle. The roof is easily accessible by climbing over the overturned dune runner. Characters wishing to climb onto the roof may make a Climb Check (DC 5) to

determine success. Characters searching the roof area will notice that the communications antenna is down. The antenna was purposely sabotaged and cannot be repaired; it will need to be replaced instead.

Slithburn is loyal, but he is not willing to lay down his life for Ragash. If he is losing the battle and the PCs order him to surrender, he does so if it appears it will give him a reasonable chance of survival.

One of the sprawled bodies belongs to Ray, a male dwarf mechanic. His name is proudly engraved on a patch over the left breast pocket on his jumpsuit. The second body belongs to the female elf that owned the overturned dune runner. The keys are still in the pocket of her jumpsuit. PCs searching the bodies of the fallen will discover the keys on a successful Search Check (DC 5).

NPC: Slithburn: 15 hp.

Tactics: Slithburn is on the roof of the Shifting Sands and alert for danger. His prone position gives him one-half cover against targets attacking from the ground. If he comes under attack, Slithburn contacts the rest of his squad with his personal communicator and puts them on alert. He also uses his *dermpatch of endurance* to increase his chances of surviving the encounter. The only way to either action is to sneak past the vigilant rat (opposed Hide check) or take him out on the first round of combat (with *sleep*, *color spray*, or a similar incapacitating spell, or by taking him down outright).

Treasure: The dune runner (see appendix) is still operational, just a bit scuffed and dented. A successful Strength check (DC 20) or some time with a lever or other special tools will get it back on its feet. The keys are in the pocket of the elf corpse (Search DC 5). If the PCs find the keys, it becomes much simpler for them to catch up with Ragash later in the adventure. Besides his listed possessions, Slithburn has no treasure.

Developments: If the PCs fight Slithburn, he uses his personal communicator to alert the rest of the sand rats. If the PCs stealthily dispose of Slithburn, but take time to right the dune runner before continuing, there is a chance (Listen check

DC 15) that one of the sand rats inside the Garage (area 5) will hear the commotion and come to investigate.

GROUND FLOOR (AREAS 7-8)

The ground floor is for services, resting, and general amenities when folks stop at the trading post. The walls are painted white, but are dingy enough to suggest that a new coat of paint or at least a good washing is in order.

2. LOUNGE

Two tables stand overturned in the failing light, their attendant stools scattered like fallen leaves. A booth in the corner of the room remains upright, patronized by a slumped figure lying in a sticky pool of spilled blood. A long counter dominates the northern half of the room; a body rests among the toppled stools at its feet, his chest half buried in noodles and sauce. A break in the wall above the counter leads to the kitchen beyond. Above the counter, a video screen flickers with static, bathing the scene in a ghostly light. A solid steel door on the eastern wall leads to the outside while three lighter doors exit the room to the north and west.

On closer inspection, one of the doors on the north wall leads to the kitchen area while the other is marked with the symbol of a unisex bathroom. The door to the western wall leads to the concessions area and is clearly marked with a plaque beside the portal. Both corpses were patrons of the Shifting Sands that happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. The pasta covering the second corpse is spaghetti and sauce. If the PCs investigate the bodies, their pockets appear rifled, all valuables and identification are missing. The video screen is operational, but not receiving at the moment due to damage to the communications antenna outside.

3. CONCESSIONS & SUPPLY

Rows of broken shelves line the walls of this room. Banners proclaiming brand superiority dot the walls, gaudy posters at odds with the drab bricks. Discarded packaging litters the floor, broken merchandise and tattered paper forming a chaotic tapestry of debris. A broken robot stands behind a small counter in the northern part of the room, its metal body rent and broken. Three doors exit the room, one on the eastern wall and two to the north.

This room serves as the store and supply depot for the Shifting Sands. As a repository of useful and portable goods, the sand rats hit it hard. The robot is irreparable, but a character clever with electronics and a datapad can recover some of its recent memory with a successful Use Device check (DC 17). Characters who succeed in this check can replay the last few moments of the robot's life including the sand rat attack.

Searching the room will uncover some informative pamphlets about the Burning Dunes and their history. In the recent history section of these pamphlets, the characters find mention of the events outlined in the Background section of the adventure. The sand rats already looted this room for anything of value.

4. STORAGE ROOM

Stout metal shelves fill this room, forming aisles running north to south. A broken skylight supplements the light thrown from the ceiling panels, casting the room in a sunny glow. Broken glass litters the floor amid oil stains and a fine dusting of sand. Stacks of boxes clutter the northern corner of the room beside a huge set of double doors. A row of large canisters stretches from the door itself nearly to the southern end of the room. The central container bears a mechanical device with a blinking light and an ominous, red display.

This room serves as storage for spare parts for the garage and the trading post. The sand rats left nothing of any value when they looted the place. Of real interest to the PCs is the device on the canisters. The canisters all carry vehicle fuel; this is obvious from their labeling. The device is a small, powerful explosive, set to detonate the fuel. The bomb is not set to explode any time soon, the PCs have hours to disarm the device (Disable Device DC 10) or clear the area. Loud noises in this area will alert the scavenging sand rats in area 5, prompting them to investigate.

5. GARAGE (EL 3)

Two large lizards stand silhouetted before an enormous metal door. A hovering cart trails behind the scaly beasts laden with a veritable mountain of goods and gear. The reptiles stand nearly motionless in their blinders and harness, only occasionally stamping a foot or swinging an enormous tail. A lift ponderously rises from the oil-stained floor, pulling free from the debris like some strange mushroom thriving in the dark. On the western wall, a long workbench lies half-buried in tools and broken vehicle parts. A row of orange canisters lines the eastern wall of the room, bracketing a pair of double sliding doors. A smaller door on the south wall is clearly marked with the word "restroom" in the common tongue.

The garage is full of vehicle parts and empty canisters of vehicle fuel. If the PCs need to perform any repairs on their vehicles, most any minor repair short of a full rebuild can be accomplished here.

NPCs: Shakara: 19 hp, Nesrek: 17 hp.

Creatures: Giant sand lizards (2): 22 hp each.

Tactics: The sand lizards are pack animals and non-combatants. Loud noises like explosions or gunfire will spook the creatures, causing them to run away into the desert.

Shakara and Nesrek will be largely oblivious to the characters unless one of the other rats sounds the alarm and will require a Listen check

(DC 15) to avoid surprise. If the rats are alert, then Nesrek covers the loading dock with his rifle while Shakara covers the southern exits with her crossbow.

Treasure: Most of the loot heaped onto the hovering cart consists of supplies and spare parts of no interest to PCs. However, among the debris are a masterwork toolkit, a medkit, and two *dermpatches of cure light wounds*. The hovering cart is also valuable, but less likely to be of interest to PCs. More information regarding the hovering cart can be found in the new items section at the end of the adventure.

6. KITCHEN

The mighty stoves lie dead and cold in the kitchen, the grills and fryers silent and empty. Half-prepared food lies out on the countertops, already buzzing with flies and vermin. Pots and pans lie overturned on the greasy floor amid the remains of half-cooked meals. A break in the southern wall provides a clear view of the lounge area over a simple counter. Beneath the counter, a portly corpse lies broken, his hand still clutching a stained cooking knife. Racks for dishes and supplies hang on the northern wall, while an enormous dishwasher dominates the eastern portion of the room.

This room serves as the kitchen for the trading post. The food on the countertops is spoiled and inedible, but there is enough food in the local refrigerators for the PCs to make a meal if they are so inclined. The stairs in the alcove in the northwestern part of the room leads to a larger food storage area and the personal apartments of the owner and his family.

Treasure: The proprietor's corpse has a magnetic keycard that will open all locks within the Shifting Sands. The knife is simply a good-quality cooking knife, roughly equivalent to a dagger if used in combat.

7. LOCKED BATHROOM (EL 1)

A toilet rests against the eastern wall, flanked by a small cabinet mounted with a sink. A mirror hangs over the sink, spotted with crusty droplets of dried fluid. The cabinet doors are open and empty bottles lay strewn across the white tile floor. The room is otherwise clean and smells faintly of lemons.

This room contains Klezac, a bucket, and some cleaning supplies, which Klezac has rigged into a crude, caustic trap.

NPCs: Klezac: 7 hp.

Tactics: Klezac waits behind the door with a full bucket of cleaning chemicals. When the door opens, he will throw the bucket in the face of the first PC. To hit, he needs to make a successful ranged touch attack. Failure means that he doused a PC's lower half, but nothing serious or incapacitating. If successful, the PC takes 1d4 damage (save vs. Fortitude DC 12 for half). PCs who fail their saves are also blinded for 1d3 rounds. If he blinds a PC, Klezac attempts to flee. Otherwise he curls up in a ball screaming, "I surrender! I surrender!"

Development: If Klezac manages to flee past the PCs, he has a 50% chance of running towards the garage (area 5). If the sand rats in area 5 are still alive, this will alert them to intruders if they were not already alerted. Also, if they were on the alert, they will open fire on Klezac when he enters their room.

8. UNISEX BATHROOM

A toilet peeks from behind a wooden cabinet in the northern part of this room. The cabinet is topped with a marble countertop and pierced with a steel sink. A plain mirror hangs over the sink beside a fluid dispenser filled with a thick, pink gel. Beside the door, a metal container holds paper towels, over an overflowing trash bin.

This is a simple unisex bathroom. It is unusually clean for a public restroom, but it is otherwise unremarkable.

UNDERGROUND (AREAS 9-12)

The underground areas include showers, storage, and living space. All doors marked with a key cannot be opened without a keycard or electronic lock-picks and an Open Locks check (DC 25). This level has a thin, gray carpet to cover the floors. The northern portion of the underground is off limits to guests and contains maintenance equipment and the generators to run the building.

9. SUITE ONE

A simple bed, neatly made, rests against the southern wall. A small nightstand with a single lamp stands vigil beside the bed, its surface clean and buffed. A single video monitor hangs from the eastern wall, its screen dark and empty.

This room serves as one of the two suites that travelers can rent for a refreshing nap or a night in an actual bed. It was not in service when the sand rats attacked and still stands ready for visitors.

10. SUITE TWO

A bloody figure lies sprawled atop the thick green carpet of this room. A rumpled bed lies against the northern wall, its covers slithering to the floor in a heap. Beside the bed, a nightstand sits beneath an overturned lamp, its drawer open and empty. A blank video screen on the eastern wall stands dark and silent like the great, disapproving eye of some long forgotten god. Sticky papers lie like fallen leaves about the room, slowly seeping up the blood from the broken corpse below. Two doors exit this room, one on the northern wall leads back to the hallway, and another door to the south.

The bloody figure belongs to the merchant who purchased the black box from the sand rats. Although he did not give in to Ragash, the information was on his datapad. The papers are merely hardcopy of records and receipts for the merchant's business. Although the datapad itself is missing, a

Search check (DC 10) finds a standard data crystal under the bed. This contains a backup of all the merchant's records. A Use Device check (DC 15) defeats the relatively simple encryption and reveals the merchant's notes on the black box including the GPS coordinates of the crash and his suspicions that the black box is related to the lost Imperial cargo. The PCs need a datapad to display the information.

11. SUITE TWO BATH

A long tub dominates the western half of this room opposite a small toilet and sink. A razor and a few small bottles lay atop the sink with an open tube of toothpaste. The floor is scuffed, white tile and half-covered with a damp, white towel. A few towels lie scattered across the room, one hanging over the edge of the tub. A simple mirror hangs over the sink.

This private bath serves the second overnight suite. The toiletries belong to the dead merchant in area 10. There is nothing of value in this room.

12. SUITE ONE BATH

A long tub dominates the western half of this room opposite a small toilet and sink. The floor is scuffed, white tile and half-covered with a shaggy, white towel. More towels hang above the toilet and a simple mirror hangs over the sink.

This private bath serves the first overnight suite. Many spacers and travelers greatly appreciate the opportunity to soak their travels away and pay a premium for use of the tubs. There is nothing of value in this room.

13. LAUNDRY ROOM

A bank of washing machines dominates the eastern part of this room. A pressing board rests in the southern portion, toppled over a still, female form. Small piles of clothing sits atop the fallen woman, stained red from the spreading pool beneath.

Designed to take care of the guest's laundry needs, the equipment in this room is capable of washing and pressing most clothing in record time. The corpse belongs to the proprietor's wife. Her pockets have been searched and turned inside out. Close inspection of the body will determine that she was about six months pregnant when she died. There is nothing of value here.

14. UTILITIES (EL 3)

Large hoses and cables throb around the edges of this chamber. A reactor dominates the southern portion of the room while less identifiable devices cluster around to the north. The din of machinery permeates the air, in a cacophony of industrial noise. A device is affixed to the reactor; its blinking light and red display at odds with the otherwise drab exterior of the device.

The device is a bomb, set to send the reactor into critical overload and blow the Shifting Sands to tiny bits. A Disable Device (DC 20) check disarms the bomb. A Spot check (DC 15) reveals that the reactor has been damaged and is building to an overload. A Repair check (DC 20) is necessary to stabilize the reactor. Alternately, a Use Device check (DC 5) will shut the reactor down. This will kill power for the entire building, plunging it into darkness and alerting all the sand rats to the presence of intruders.

NPCs: Siltasha: 11 hp and Rekburt: 13 hp.

Tactics: If the rats have not been alerted at this point, both Siltasha and Rekburt are hard at work on setting the charges and making certain the reactor builds to overload. Due to the noise in the room, they do not hear the PCs approach, allowing the PCs a surprise action on both the saboteurs.

If alerted, Rekburt watches the door with his blaster at the ready. He shoots the first PC he sees.

Treasure: In addition to their personal gear, Siltasha has a master key for all the doors in the building.

15. FOOD STORAGE

Shelves and boxes clutter this small room. A bewildering variety of brand names, and cans assaults the senses each label proudly proclaiming its superiority to the next. The stacks are uneven and some spots on the shelves are bare. A clipboard hangs from a peg next to the door.

This room harbors the basic necessities and dried goods for the restraint upstairs as well as dining for the shopkeeper and his wife. The clipboard is merely a list of goods with check marks next to what needs to be reordered.

16. FREEZER

A blast of cold air emanates from this room. Inside, rows of frosty shelves hold preserved meats and beverages. Broken bottles litter the floor, their contents already frozen into pools of golden ice.

This large, walk-in freezer keeps supplies for the restaurant fresh until they can be used. The broken bottles once held some of the high-quality chilled wines that the proprietor kept for special occasions. There is nothing of value here.

17. APARTMENTS (EL 1)

Thick, red carpeting covers the floor of this large room. The room is divided into two halves. The northern half holds a small kitchen and dining area while the south bears some comfortable chairs, a low table and a dark video screen.

These apartments house the main living area for the proprietor and his wife. The northern half of the room has a small kitchen and dining area while the southern part of the room is for watching video programs, reading, and general recreation.

NPCs: Selness: 13 hp.

Tactics: If the rats are not on alert, Selness is looking for more loot to add to her bag. She will require a Listen check to notice the arrival of the PCs. Otherwise, she will be listening for activity in

the hallway beyond, if she hears movement she will open the door and commence firing.

Treasure: Selness' bag contains 170 credits, a silver chain inset with lapis stones (130 cr), a pair of nightvision goggles, a *dermpatch of cure moderate wounds*, and a *dermpatch of cure light wounds*.

18. APARTMENT BATH

A long tub dominates the northern half of this room opposite a small toilet and sink. The floor is scuffed, white tile and half-covered with a shaggy, white towel. More towels hang above the toilet and a simple mirror hangs over the sink.

This is the private room for the proprietor and his family. It is quite clean and well kept. Toiletries are in a cabinet under the sink or in the cabinet behind the bathroom mirror. There is nothing of value here.

19. BEDROOM

Pink, floral wallpaper covers the walls of this room. Sky blue carpeting covers the floor in a thick layer of comforting shag. A crib rests against the western wall with a simple mobile twirling above. The crib's coverlets are neatly folded back before a small but plush pillow. A box sits against the north wall beside a tiny replica of a simple home.

This room was to house the couple's coming daughter. The box contains simple baby toys and the house is a hand-carved replica of a frontier homestead. There is nothing of value to the PCs in this room.

20. MASTER BEDROOM

A plush double bed dominates the southern part of the room flanked by matching nightstands and lamps. Twin dressing cabinets nest against the northern wall. The cabinet to the east is stuffed to overflowing with garments and additional clothing rests atop the cabinet or hangs from its knobs.

Both dressers contain simple working clothes. The western dresser belongs to the proprietor; the other belongs to his wife. There is nothing of value here.

21. SHOWERS

Three curtained stalls line the eastern portion of this room, the curtains drawn back to reveal a single showerhead and drain beyond. Small lockers stand before each stall, their doors slack and open. Clean, white towels sit atop each of the lockers. A hamper in the western wall allows for disposal and a shelf above the hamper holds fresh towels, ready for use.

A simple shower facility, this room exists so travelers can wash some of the road from their bodies. There is nothing of value here.

OBSERVATION DECK (AREA 22)

The observation deck is simply a lounge area without food. This floor is carpeted and the furniture is quite plush. Unlike the ground level, the windows in the observation deck are only shuttered during inclement weather. The windows in the observation deck provide a clear view of the roof.

22. OBSERVATION LOUNGE

Shuttered windows and ample skylights brightly illuminate this room. Comfortable couches line the walls before low tables. A few stools stand at attention around a scattering of tables in the center of the area. Dingy white carpet covers the floor, giving way to the simple gray furniture and pale, whitewashed walls. A door pierces the wall to the north, leading onto the roof beyond.

The observation lounge allowed travelers to sip drinks and relax away from the busy restaurant and lounge below. The door leads out onto the roof. If the PCs have not disposed of Slithburn already, he has a good chance to notice the characters snooping around this area. There is nothing of value here.

23. SHOWDOWN WITH RAGASH (EL 5)

The desert sands part to reveal a fallen starship. A simple Imperial cargo shuttle lies half-buried in the choking desert sands. Three riding beasts stand tethered before the ship, eagerly awaiting the return of their masters. The cargo bay lies open, its contents exposed to the outside air for the first time in many years.

Ragash and his minions reached the downed Imperial shuttle and penetrated the hull before the PCs arrived. One of the rats on guard (opposed Spot check to notice) is watching from the hold. If he sees the PCs, he alerts his comrades who will attack from behind cover of the other cargo aboard the ship.

NPCs: Ragash: 33 hp, Astithak: 17 hp, and Bereek: 17 hp.

Tactics: Astithak and Bereek will be closest to the entrance, fighting from behind the crates and boxes in the cargo bay for as long as possible. This gives them the benefit of half cover. Meanwhile, Ragash spends the first few rounds of combat protecting himself from errant energy weapons with his *endure elements* spell before attacking with spells and blaster attacks augmented with his *true strike* spell.

CONCLUSION

Secret of the Shifting Sands has several possible outcomes. If the party finds and defeats Ragash, they now have possession of the Imperial cargo. Once they have the cargo, they need to decide what they are going to do with it. The DM is left to decide on the exact contents of the shuttle, so he can tailor it to his campaign. It could be a new weapon, a strange alien artifact, a canister of frozen spores, a captive demon, or even a clutch of dragon eggs.

If the characters return the cargo to the proper authorities, they win points with the Imperial government and should be rewarded. Their bank balances should grow by 1,000 credits. The DM should adjust this amount to fit his campaign.

If the characters choose to keep the cargo, the DM can make it something more ominous.

Something valuable or dangerous without being immediately useful would be most appropriate. Again, the DM is encouraged to fit the cargo to his campaign and the style of his players.

If the party opts not to proceed to the final confrontation with Ragash, or doesn't manage to discover the whereabouts of the crashed ship, then the cargo should definitely be a weapon or something else that the PCs would rather not fall into Ragash's hands. If the DM wishes to use Ragash and the sand rats again, the PCs can learn of a powerful warlord among the Burning Dunes.

If Ragash escapes, he can bedevil the party at a later date. The canny sand rat has a small army of humanoids at his disposal and is vengeful enough to make certain that the PCs suffer for thwarting his plans.

NEW MONSTERS

Sand Rat

Medium-Size Monstrous Humanoid

Hit Dice: 1d8+1 (6 hp)
Initiative: +1 (Dex)
Speed: 30 ft.
AC: 16 (+1 Dex, +5 armor vest)
Attacks: Scimitar +1 melee
Damage: Scimitar 1d6
Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.
Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft., scent
Saves: Fort +3, Ref +1, Will -1
Abilities: Str 11, Dex 12, Con 13, Wis 8, Int 11, Cha 8.
Skills: Listen +3, Spot +3, Wilderness Lore +2
Feats: Alertness, Technical Proficiency

Climate/Terrain: Any arid
Organization: Solitary, Band (2-10), Pack (12-24) or Tribe (50+)
Challenge Rating: ½
Treasure: Standard
Alignment: Usually Lawful
Advancement: By character class

Sand rats are a variation on the several rat-like humanoids common throughout the Empire. A

highly adaptable species, creatures similar to sand rats are found on hundreds of worlds. A sand rat is easily mistaken for a wererat, standing between four and a half and five feet tall and rising on two legs. Their claws are atrophied and useless. Although they sport large gnawing teeth, they never use these natural weapons in combat.

Sand rats are social and highly intelligent, easily capable of learning Imperial technology. Generally shunned by other races, sand rats form colonies in out of the way areas on the planets they inhabit where their extremely hardy natures allow them to thrive.

CREATURES

Giant sand lizards are merely a variety of giant lizard that has adapted for desert survival. The creatures have pebbly scales in shades of dull yellow and gray, allowing them to blend more thoroughly with their sandy surroundings.

Giant Sand Lizards (2): CR 2; Medium-size Animal; HD: 3d8+9; hp: 22 each; Init: +2 (Dex); Spd: 30 ft., swim 30 ft.; AC: 15 (+2 Dex, +3 natural); Atk: +5 melee (1d8+4, bite); AL N; SV: Fort. +6, Ref. +5, Will +2; Str 17, 15, Con 17, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 2.

Skills: Climb +9, Hide +7*, Listen +4, Move Silently +6, Spot +4.

*In their natural sandy surroundings, this Hide bonus improves to +8.

NPCs

SLITHBURN

Slithburn is a sand rat loyal to Ragash. Although he would not betray his leader under most circumstances, he is a self-serving rat at heart. Given a combat gone badly, he will barter information for his escape. Slithburn knows that Ragash tore the place apart to regain an item mistakenly sold to the merchant in area 10. He also knows that his tribe looted most of the Shifting Sands already. His

group is to dissuade passers-by and to erase the evidence of their presence. He does not know what item Ragash ordered the raid to reclaim.

Slithburn, male sand rat War2: CR 1; Medium-size Monstrous Humanoid (5 ft. tall); HD: 2d8+6; hp: 15; Init: +2 (Dex); Spd: 30 ft; AC: 18 (+2 Dex, +6 combat fatigues); Atk: +4 melee (1d6+1, keenblade scimitar) or +5 ranged (1d12, masterwork assault rifle) or +4 ranged (6d6, concussion grenade); SQ darkvision 60 ft, scent; AL LE; SV: Fort. +6, Ref. +2 Will -1; Str 12, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 11, Wis 8, Cha 8.

Languages Spoken: Common.

Skills: Intimidate +3, Listen +3, Spot +3, Wilderness Lore +2. *Feats:* Alertness, Technical Proficiency.

Possessions: Keenblade scimitar, combat fatigues, concussion grenades (x2), masterwork assault rifle, assault rifle magazines (x2), *dermpatch of cure light wounds* (x2), *dermpatch of endurance*, personal communicator, 25 credits.

SHAKARA AND NASREK

Shakara and Nasrek work as a team. Shakara is somewhat vain and quite proud of her spellware enhancements and looks for excuses to use them on her victims. Both of the sand rats are loyal to Ragash, but will trade their knowledge for their own safety. These rats know that the tribe attacked the Shifting Sands to get at a merchant staying here. They also know that the merchant had a kobold manservant, but don't remember his name. They are tasked with sorting and loading any useful goods their scavenger Selness finds.

Shakara, female sand rat Rog1/War2: CR 2; Medium-size Monstrous Humanoid (4 ft. 11 in. tall); HD: 2d8+1d6+4; hp: 19; Init: +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd: 30 ft; AC: 18 (+3 Dex, +5 armor vest); Atk: +3 melee (1d6, retractable claws) or +5 ranged (2d6, automatic crossbow); SQ darkvision 60 ft, scent; AL NE; SV: Fort. +5,

Ref. +5, Will -1; Str 11, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 8, Cha 9.

Languages Spoken: Common.

Skills: Appraise +2, Climb +5, Disable Device +4, Hide +4, Intimidate +4, Listen +2, Move Silently +4, Open Lock +4, Ride +4, Search +2, Spot +2, Tumble +4. *Feats:* Alertness, Improved Initiative, Technical Proficiency.

SA: Sneak attack +1d6.

Possessions: Retractable claws, automatic crossbow, bolts (x50), armor vest, *dermpach of cure light wounds* (x2), personal communicator.

Nesrek, male sand rat Thug1/War1: CR 1; Medium-size Monstrous Humanoid (5 ft. 2 in. tall); HD: 1d8+1d6+9; hp: 17; Init: +2 (Dex); Spd: 20 ft; AC: 20 (+2 Dex, +8 battle armor); Atk: +4 melee (1d8+2, heavy mace) or +4 ranged (1d12, hunting rifle); SQ darkvision 60 ft, scent; AL LE; SV: Fort. +4, Ref. +4, Will -1; Str 14, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 9, Wis 9, Cha 8.

Languages Spoken: Common.

Skills: Intimidation +4, Listen +3, Spot +3. *Feats:* Technical Proficiency, Toughness.

SA: Backstab +1d4.

Possessions: Masterwork hunting rifle w/ laser sight, magazine (30 shots), masterwork heavy mace, smoke grenade, battle armor, *dermpach of cure light wounds* (x3), personal communicator, 38 credits.

KLEZAC

Klezac worked as a personal assistant for the merchant in area 10. He is terrified, but will be very cooperative if the PCs act like they might give him a chance to escape alive. He will do his best to earn the PCs goodwill volunteering information and helping out with food preparation and equipment

maintenance if allowed. Klezac knows that his former employer purchased a black box from the sand rats a few days ago. His boss was pretty excited by the find, and became even happier when he had a chance to take a crack at decoding the data. Klezac knows that his boss refused to sell the black box when Ragash, the leader of the sand rats, came looking for it. He also knows that the sand rats came that night and killed everyone in the Shifting Sands. Klezac doesn't know for certain what was on the black box, but he suspects it has something to do with the Imperial shuttle that crashed in the Burning Sands ten years ago.

Klezac, male kobold Exp2: CR 1; Small Humanoid (Reptilian); HD: 2d6; hp: 7; Init: +2 (Dex); Spd: 30 ft.; AC 13 (+1 size, +1 Dex, +1 natural); Atk: +2 ranged (1d4 + blindness, bucket of cleaning supplies) or -1 melee (1d2-2, unarmed); SQ Darkvision 60 ft., light sensitivity; AL N; SV: Fort. +0, Ref. +1, Will +3; Str 6, Dex 13, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10.

Languages Spoken: Common, Draconic.

Skills: Appraisal +5, Hide +10, Listen +7, Profession (personal assistant) +5, Search +5, Spot +7. *Feats:* Alertness, Technical Proficiency.

Possessions: Work clothes, 25 credits.

SILTASHA AND REKBURT

Siltasha and **Rekburt** are the demolition team for the rats. More accurately, Siltasha is the demolition team and Rekburt is her bodyguard. Although both are reluctant to betray their fellow rats, either will offer information for their freedom. Siltasha even offers to repair the reactor and disarm the bombs if it means that she and Rekburt will go free. The rats know that they came to massacre the Shifting Sands to recapture an item from the merchant in area 10. They know that Ragash retrieved the item and left with some trusted assistants to an undisclosed location in the desert. They also know that the rest of the tribe returned to their encampment. They will not disclose the location of the camp.

Dragonstar

Siltasha, female sand rat Mech2: CR 2; Medium-size Monstrous Humanoid (4 ft. 6 in. tall); HD: 2d6+2; hp: 11; Init: +3 (Dex); Spd: 30 ft; AC: 18 (+3 Dex, +5 armor vest); Atk: +1 melee (1d3, unarmed) or +5 ranged (3d8, blaster pistol*); SA sabotage; SQ darkvision 60 ft, scent; AL LE; SV: Fort. +1, Ref. +3, Will +3; Str 10, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 9.

Languages Spoken: Common.

Skills: Craft (explosives) +6, Demolitions +6, Disable Device +6, Knowledge (chemistry) +6, Open Lock +8, Profession (engineer) +5, Repair +8, Search +6, Use Device +10. *Feats:* Gearhead, Hacker, Technical Proficiency.

SA: Sabotage (can make a touch attack that disables a device on a successful Disable Device check [DC 20] or deals 1d8+2 damage to a soul-mech or robot. A sabotage attack prompts an attack of opportunity.)

Possessions: Blaster pistol w/ minor upgrade, minicell, armor vest, masterwork demolitions kit, masterwork electronic lockpicks, masterwork tool kit, 10 cr.

*Because of the minor upgrade ability, Siltasha's blaster pistol ceases to function if she rolls a 1 to attack. Her blaster has been modified for accuracy and receives a +1 bonus to attack rolls.

Rekburt, male sand rat Thug2: CR 1; Medium-size Monstrous Humanoid (5 ft. 6 in. tall); HD: 2d6+6; hp: 13; Init: +1 (Dex); Spd: 30 ft; AC: 17 (+1 Dex, +6 combat fatigues); Atk: +2 ranged (4d8, blaster carbine) or +6 melee (1d6+3, masterwork keenblade shortsword); SA Backstab + 1d4; SQ darkvision 60 ft, scent; AL LE; SV: Fort. +6, Ref. +2, Will -1; Str 16, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 9, Wis 8, Cha 7.

Languages Spoken: Common.

Skills: Intimidate +3, Listen +6, Spot +6. *Feats:*

Alertness, Technical Proficiency.

SA: Backstab +1d4.

Possessions: Blaster carbine, minicell (x2), masterwork keenblade shortsword, combat fatigues, *dermpatch of blur*, *dermpatch of cure light wounds (x2)*, personal communicator, 120 cr.

SELNESS

Selness is a fanatical follower of Ragash. She will fight to the death to protect the secrets of her leader and will try to take as many of her enemies with her as possible. If somehow coerced, she knows that her leader went to an undisclosed location with an object that he reclaimed from a merchant within this building. She thinks that the merchant stole the item from Ragash and that the tribe was entirely justified in its slaughter by way of revenge.

Selness, female sand rat Thug2: CR 1; Medium-size Monstrous Humanoid (5 ft. 4 in. tall); HD: 2d6+6; hp: 13; Init: +1 (Dex); Spd: 30 ft; AC: 17 (+1 Dex, +6 combat fatigues); Atk: +2 ranged (4d8, blaster carbine) or +6 melee (1d6+3, masterwork keenblade shortsword); SA Backstab + 1d4; SQ darkvision 60 ft, scent; AL LE; SV: Fort. +6, Ref. +2, Will -1; Str 16, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 9, Wis 8, Cha 7.

Languages Spoken: Common.

Skills: Intimidate +3, Listen +6, Spot +6. *Feats:* Alertness, Technical Proficiency.

SA: Backstab +1d4

Possessions: Blaster carbine, minicell (x2), masterwork keenblade shortsword, combat fatigues, *dermpatch of blur*, *dermpatch of cure light wounds (x2)*, personal communicator, 120 cr.

RAGASH

Ragash is the leader of the sand rats. He is both warrior and sorcerer, giving him considerable prestige among his people. He is a crafty rat and cares

nothing for his followers. He hopes that the cargo will contain something that might boost his personal power. Ragash is not willing to sacrifice himself for his cause. If his minions appear to be losing their fight, he activates his *dermpatch of invisibility* and attempt to escape. Ragash fights with his spells and blaster unless forced into melee. If forced into melee combat, he does his best to disengage and escape.

Ragash, male sand rat Sor3/War2: CR 4; Medium-size Monstrous Humanoid (5 ft. tall); HD: 2d8+3d4+15; hp: 33; Init: +2 (Dex); Spd: 30 ft; AC: 18 (+2 Dex, +6 flight suit); Atk: +4 melee (1d3+1, unarmed) or +6 ranged (2d10, laser pistol); SQ darkvision 60 ft, scent; AL LE; SV: Fort. +8, Ref. +4, Will +5; Str 13, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 11, Wis 13, Cha 16.

Languages Spoken: Common, Draconic.

Skills: Alchemy +7, Climb +3, Concentration +9, Intimidate +5, Ride +3, Spellcraft +7. *Feats:* Combat Casting, Leadership, Technical Proficiency.

Spells Known: (6/6; base DC = 13 + spell level) 0—*daze, detect magic, flare, read magic, resistance*;
1st—*endure elements, magic missile, true strike*.

Possessions: Laser pistol w/ laser sight, +2 *flight suit, cloak of resistance +1, dermpatch of invisibility*, personal communicator.

ASTITHAK AND BEREK

Astithak and **Berek** are simple-minded thugs, fanatically loyal to Ragash. He used the pair as strongmen and leg-breakers among those who oppose his rule of the sand rats. Both rats gladly lay down their lives for their master. They use simple tactics, shooting from cover for as long as possible before moving in to melee.

Astithak, male sand rat Thug1/War1: CR 1; Medium-size Monstrous Humanoid (4 ft. 11 in.

tall); HD: 1d8+1d6+9; hp: 17; Init: +2 (Dex); Spd: 20 ft; AC: 20 (+2 Dex, +8 battle armor); Atk: +4 melee (1d8+2, heavy mace) or +4 ranged (1d12, hunting rifle); SQ darkvision 60 ft, scent; AL LE; SV: Fort. +4, Ref. +4, Will -1; Str 14, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 9, Wis 9, Cha 8.

Languages Spoken: Common.

Skills: Intimidation +4, Listen +3, Spot +3. *Feats:* Technical Proficiency, Toughness.

SA: *Backstab* +1d4.

Possessions: Masterwork hunting rifle w/ laser sight, magazine (30 shots), masterwork heavy mace, smoke grenade, battle armor, *dermpach of cure light wounds* (x3), personal communicator, 38 credits.

Berek, male sand rat Thug1/War1: CR 1; Medium-size Monstrous Humanoid (5 ft. 3 in. tall); HD: 1d8+1d6+9; hp: 17; Init: +2 (Dex); Spd: 20 ft; AC: 20 (+2 Dex, +8 battle armor); Atk: +4 melee (1d8+2, heavy mace) or +4 ranged (1d12, hunting rifle); SQ darkvision 60 ft, scent; AL LE; SV: Fort. +4, Ref. +4, Will -1; Str 14, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 9, Wis 9, Cha 8.

Languages Spoken: Common.

Skills: Intimidation +4, Listen +3, Spot +3. *Feats:* Technical Proficiency, Toughness.

SA: *Backstab* +1d4.

Possessions: Masterwork hunting rifle w/ laser sight, magazine (30 shots), masterwork heavy mace, smoke grenade, battle armor, *dermpach of cure light wounds* (x3), personal communicator, 38 credits.

NEW TECH

Dune Runner (Utility Truck): Huge Vehicle; hp 90; Top Spd 20; Acc 2; Dec 3; Hand -2; Stealth 3; AC 3 (-2 size, -5 Dex); SQ vehicle, hardness 10; Fuel 270.

Stations: Pilot 1, Passenger 6.

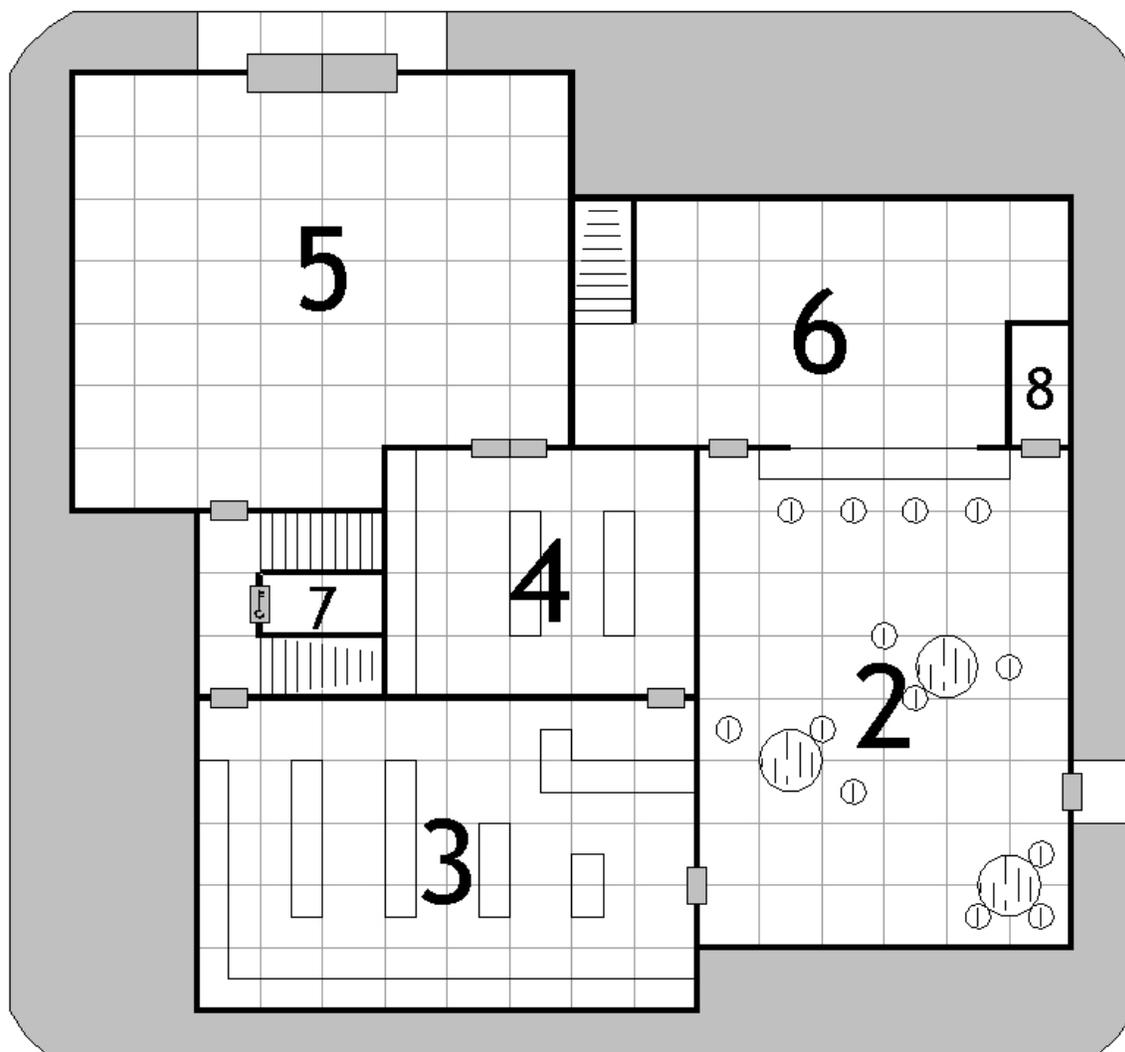
Cargo: 1,000 lb.

Cost: 25,000 cr (20,000 base price + 5,000 for off-road modification).

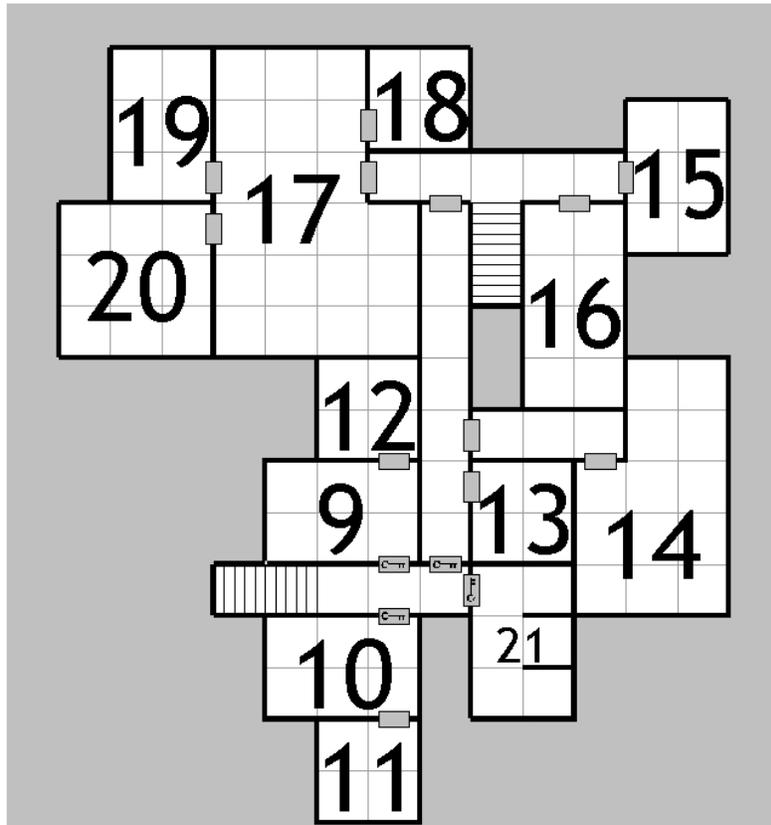
The Dune Runner is a standard utility truck with extra-wide tires and a high off-road suspension that allow it to drive over soft sand.

Hovering Cart: The hovering cart is a cart or even just a large metal disk that rests on a permanent *Tenser's floating disk*. The cart itself is sturdy and suspended by the spell, allowing the owner to pile it high with cargo. This cart can hold a maximum of 1000 pounds, but larger or smaller versions of the hovering cart can be constructed. If overloaded, the cart simply sinks to the floor. Like a mundane cart, the hovering cart can be affixed to beasts of burden or pulled along by the user. Unlike a normal *Tenser's floating disk* the cart has no range limitations (the spell is affixed to the cart) and does not automatically follow the user. *Caster Level:* 10th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *Tenser's floating disk*; *Market Price:* 40,130 cr; *Weight:* —.

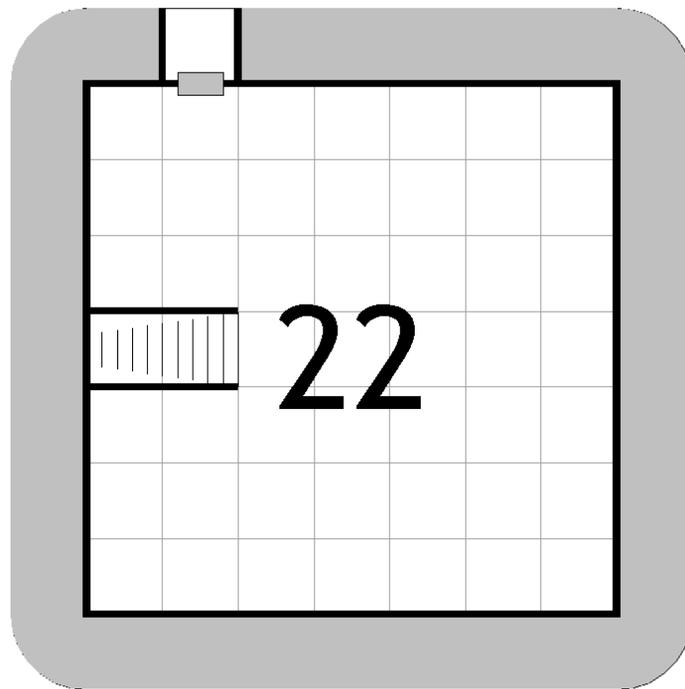
SECRET SANDS: GROUND LEVEL



SECRET SANDS: BASEMENT LEVEL



SECRET SANDS: OBSERVATORY



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