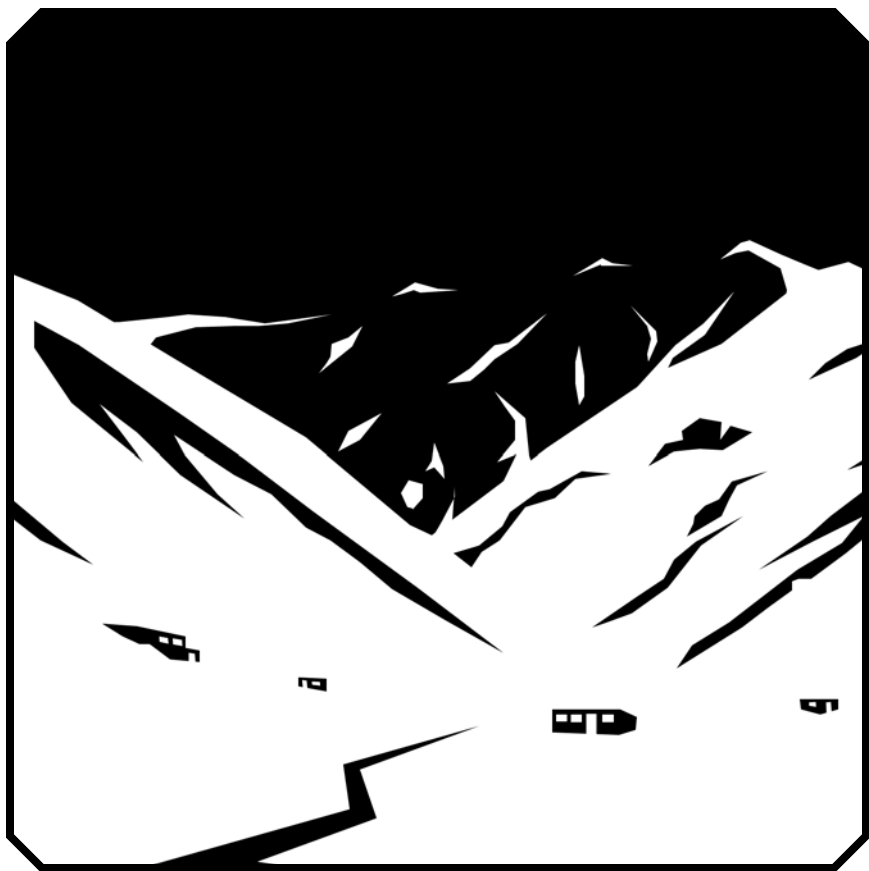


Khas Fara

VILLAGE *of* FEAR



Cannibal witches, magical curses, & furious gnolls. What the fuck, people?

JASON MORNINGSTAR

KHAS FARA, VILLAGE OF FEAR

By Jason Morningstar

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Introduction

Khas Fara is a dusty village situated in a little-visited dry valley. Once a gateway to the mountain passes and lucrative trade with the east, other caravan routes have overtaken it. Now fewer than one hundred souls call Khas Fara home.

And they are afraid, because an evil witch has taken over their town.

Overview

This adventure is suitable for any fantasy setting and rules, although guidelines for use with CRN Games' *The Shadow of Yesterday* and *OSRIC* have been provided. Magic is implied but not present. The adventure can be adjusted to suit any low- to mid-power-level player characters. There's a good chance that the situation can be resolved entirely without violence, but if violence occurs, it will come from many directions at once.

Getting Them to Khas Fara

Situated on a long-neglected caravan route, Khas Fara is a great mid-point between two more "interesting" locations. It's the sort of place weary travelers might be compelled to stop for an evening. As a destination, other story hooks present themselves. Perhaps the player characters are hired as agents of the Parceler's Guild, to bring gifts to the wedding of the local water parceler's son. Maybe they are hired on as guards for a low-rent caravan, whose master is desperate or stupid enough to attempt the dangerous old crossing with a budget crew. Perhaps one of them is a relative of Danel, who sent a cryptic message begging for help in "lifting a curse". And there's always the tattered map, with the notes about caches of hidden gold in the crags above Khas Fara...



AROUND THE VILLAGE

The Old Gates

There's only one road – the caravan road – and it is impossible to lose. It rises from the lush lowlands into the arid, wind-swept upper valley. Half a league outside of Khas Fara, the first signs of habitation present themselves – the crumbled stone gate that marks the furthest extent of what was once a great trading post, the boom town of its day. Under the shelter of an arch is a well-used fire pit, still warm, as well as stacks of greasy goat bones and, nearby, a neatly demarcated pile of gnoll excrement.

The Cemetery

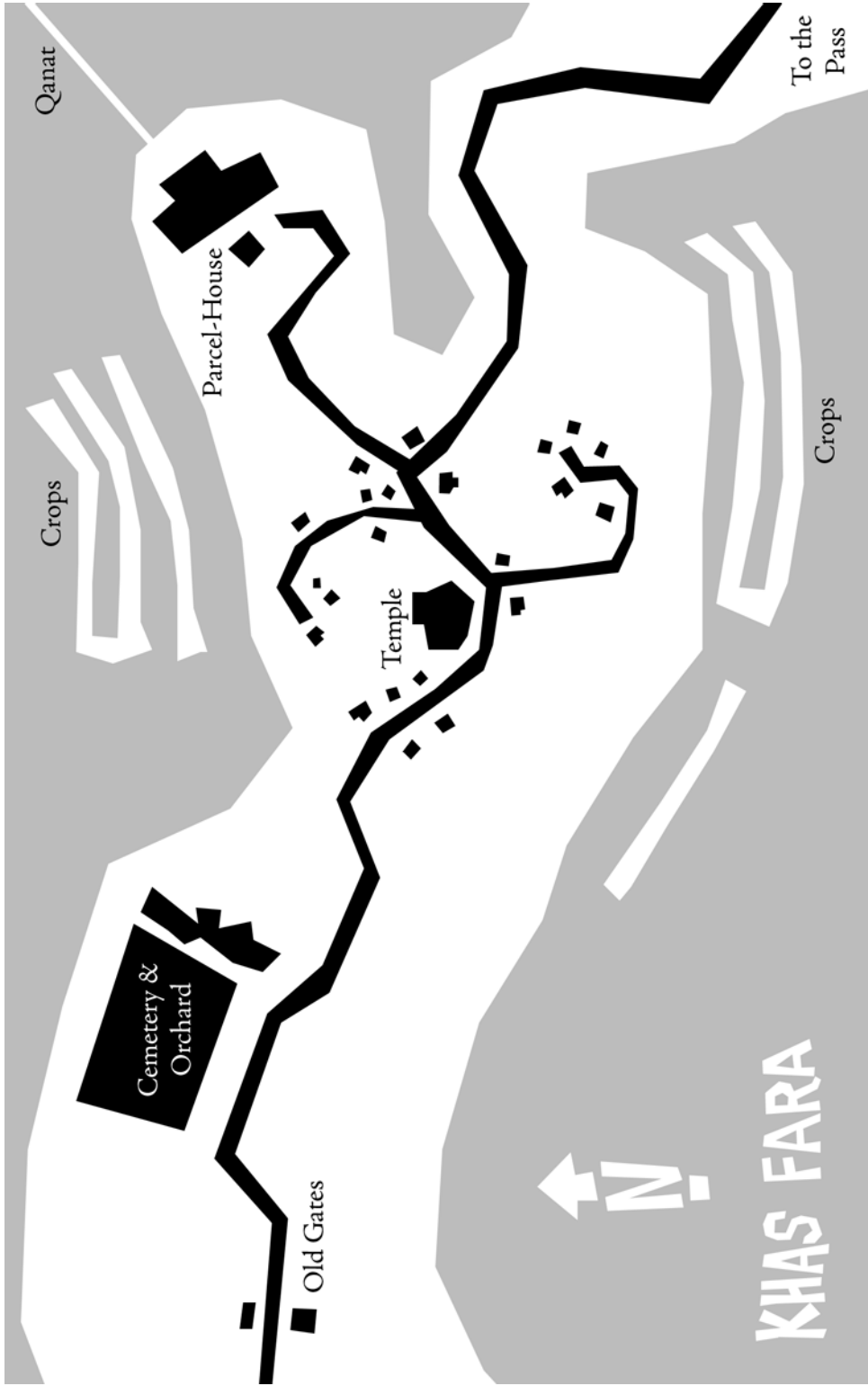
Further up the caravan road, beside an orchard of stunted pistachio trees, is a very old cemetery. Half a dozen of the graves have been recently disturbed and re-filled, their contents tamped down with shovel-blades. Scattered in the orchard, if anyone bothers to look, are a few scattered human bones with desiccated bits of flesh clinging to them.

The Crop Tiers

Closer still, with the village in sight, travelers can see that the slopes surrounding the village have been laboriously tiered over generations to grow crops. Millet and spinach grow in profusion. Above the tiered fields, some villagers tend herds of goats.

The Parcel-House

At the furthest point up-valley stands the most elaborate and well-maintained structure in Khas Fara, the Parcel-House. It is into this imposing whitewashed edifice that the village's qanat empties. The qanat is a hand-dug underground stream that channels meltwater from the mountains into a large, sheltered cistern. The communal cistern is the village's only source of water, and by tradition the Parceler is the most respected person in the village.



Qanat

Crops

Parcel-House

Temple

Cemetery &
Orchard

Old Gates

To the
Pass

Crops



KHAS FARA

The Temple

At the center of the village is a simple but well maintained temple to the mountain Gods. It is tended by Danel, the village redsmith. He lives in an adjoining mud brick hut with his daughter Arbella. Danel does his smithing in an covered courtyard, and has a variety of copper tools and ornaments for sale or barter.

Everywhere Else

The rest of Khas Fara consists of practical mud brick huts with straw roofs, each housing a family. Communal kitchens meet the needs of every five or so families, and extended families tend to group together.

Staying in Khas Fara

There are no public accommodations in Khas Fara. However, her people are bound by the laws of mountain hospitality and will graciously take in travelers, asking nothing in return. They will do this with some anxiety, since they are assuming responsibility for the health and safety of their guests, but they will do their best to keep these concerns to themselves. Villagers will not permit travelers to sleep out of doors, or to go hungry, even though they have little to spare.

The players can choose any group they wish – even Simta – and won't be turned away. The Parcel-House is the only place in town large enough to shelter three or more guests, so they may be split up among various families, which is definitely encouraged.



PART ONE: THE WITCH

What's Going On

A few months ago a witch arrived in Khas Fara. Her name is Simta. With flame-red hair, an owl on her shoulder and a trio of evil-looking hyenas trailing her, everyone could tell in an instant that she was a powerful witch. Simta announced that she was going to live in Khas Fara and would assume the duties of Parceler. When Shirat, the Parceler of record, opposed her, Simta bewitched Shirat's son, Ram, enslaving him with magic. That was enough to cast a pall of fear over the village. Soon, Simta had made herself comfortable in the Parcel-House with her son, a no-account thug named Asor, and her bodyguard, a competent professional soldier named Nardeen. Together with her hyenas, who she claims are her stillborn daughters returned to protect her, and a dirty white owl, she rules Khas Fara now. She controls the water, and she controls the people.

Simta likes the village and plans a long-term stay. Asor has expressed an interest in Arbella, and the witch has announced their engagement. Danel doesn't dare object, even though the girl is promised to the now-bewitched Ram. Arbella is predictably despondent.

Witchcraft and Misery

In the traditions of the mountain people, witches are cannibals who eat human flesh to acquire power, and soon after Simta's arrival several graves – including that of Danel's widow – had been disturbed, their contents uprooted and desecrated. Everyone knows that a witch can trick you into eating a piece of human flesh, and thereby grab hold of your spirit, which is what she's done to poor Ram. Ram does her bidding in silent, humiliated misery.

Witches also scrape the anal glands of their hyena familiars and use the foul paste to fuel torches that light their way during night-time rides. They grind up the bones and teeth of the dead to make evil potions. Their owls see everything and report back to their mistress. They have a secret cabal, the Union of Ten, who will fly to assist one another in the event of a challenge. Once a witch has taken roost, no power on earth can dislodge her. Scary stuff.

Behind the Terror

Simta is no witch – she’s an actress. Whatever power she has is suggestion alone, backed up by Nardeen’s muscle, her hyena pack’s nose for grave-robbing, and her own larcenous nature. She is a truly malicious and unpleasant person, but she has no magical gifts at all. She’s also made a mistake that may prove fatal to her and her little band of thugs.

Simta and the Player Characters

Any outcome is perfectly fine. Perhaps they want to send her packing – they can do so after a fight, and Simta will make sure that prominent townspeople, appropriately “bewitched”, will fight on her side. Perhaps they want to cut a deal with her – also fine. If the player characters overstay their welcome, Simta will have no reservations about poisoning them, slitting their throats, or turning her hyenas loose on them. There’s no fixed outcome necessary, but there should be some dramatic interaction with Simta, her crew, and the residents of Khas Fara. She is completely capable of using the innocent villagers against the player characters. Once things are at a steady boil or perhaps resolved with Simta, bring on the Dog People.



PART TWO: THE DOG PEOPLE

What's Going On

High in the passes and scattered across the upland desert are the Dog People, known among themselves as Gnolls, violent nomads who are generally hated and feared by caravan-master and valley farmer alike. The gnoll packs vary widely in temperament. Some have developed a strong taste for forged steel and spices acquired by force, and others for human flesh and the flames of burning buildings.

Rachagh, the Brindled One

A few packs are more moderate, and until recently, the pack of Rachagh, the Brindled One, could be counted among this number. A matriarch of small means, Rachagh can muster exactly six warrior-mates. She contents herself with the slim pickings among the high peaks, leaving the passes and plains to her more violent and intelligent sisters. Rachagh knows Danel and has even traded with him on one occasion – traded a human baby for a large sack of copper jewelry, true, but by gnoll standards it was remarkably liberal.

Grandmother of Gnolls

On a goat-stealing foray into Khas Fara, one of Rachagh's warrior-mates saw Simta beating a hyena. He dutifully reported this sacrilege to his matriarch. Hyenas are the "grandmother of Gnolls" and are held in high esteem. By ancestral code they cannot be domesticated or owned by meat-skins, and they certainly cannot be whipped. Rachagh and her warrior-mates will descend on Khas Fara to right this wrong in one way or another. While they are not eager for a fight, they are warriors – if one comes, they will use every resource at their disposal to make it a memorable one.

Rachagh and the Player Characters

A thundering pack of Gnolls descending in fury on Khas Faras may look like a set-piece battle. That's fine, if that's how they players want to roll. If it ends up being a big fight, use **DM5 a,b,c, and d from Otherworld Miniatures** for Rachagh and her six warrior-mates. Have Rachagh and four of them storm into the village as a group, with two warrior-mates flanking the meat-skins from another direction. If it becomes plain that it is a punitive raid, they should take care to set fire to huts (or people) using the stinking, smoldering gourds filled with hyena butter that they carry. In the event of a throw-down, Simta and her crew will do nothing to help, naturally.

It's equally likely that the players may choose to parley, and that's a great option. Rachagh is insulted and furious, her pride injured and unable to back down before her mates – she will require the hyenas and some measure of reparations. If any of the hyenas have been injured or killed, she will demand blood for blood from the meat-skins. It will be challenging to negotiate with the Gnolls, who are eye-wateringly foul smelling and have trouble pronouncing vowels.



CAST OF CHARACTERS

SIMTA, *evil witch*

Simta is in her fifties, a fat woman covered in crude tattoos with a shock of henna-dyed red hair. Her skills lie in performance, and her ability to impersonate a dreadful sorceress have served her well. Simta also has a natural gift for training animals – Her three hyenas were raised from cubs as vicious guards and affectionate companions, and her old owl is trained to fly to her wrist on command.

TSOY Notes

As an expert charlatan, Simta is a Master at Sway and Animal Ken and Adept at a variety of interpersonal and manipulative skills. She has two points in each of her pools.

Simta has the Secret of Specialty (Witchery) – she gains a bonus die in any Sway contest with a person who believes she is a witch.

SHIRAT, *midwife and former Parceler*

Shirat is the soul of Khas Fara, an elderly midwife who has held the important title of Parceler for thirty years. Once a resident of the Parcel-House, she now lives in a hastily-built addition to some extended relative's hut. Despite the current troubles, Shirat remains a counselor and advocate for the villagers, as best she can. Like everyone else, she is terrified of Simta, who has cast an evil spell on her son, Ram.

TSOY Notes

As a village elder, Shirat is Adept at Orate, and Competent at all interpersonal skills, as well as First Aid. She has one point each in her Instinct and Reason pools.

DANEL, *priest and redsmith*

Danel's a cave-chested old wreck, a hollow-eyed man with a rumbling cough from breathing vaporized copper for years at the smithy. He loves his village and his daughter and will do anything in his power to save them from the witch. In this he is a bit of a romantic, and his ill health only emboldens him. He has dealt with Rachagh in the past and knows her ways.

TSOY Notes

As the village holy man, Danel is Adept at Pray and Counsel and Competent at abilities related to being a fine craftsman. He has one point each in his Vigor and Reason pools.

Danel wears his badge of office, a copper holy symbol that carries the Secret of Imbuement, granting him +1 to his success level using the Counsel ability. As the village holy man, Danel is Adept at Pray and Counsel and Competent at abilities related to being a fine craftsman. He has one point each in his Vigor and Reason pools.

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RAM, *Shirat's son, village hero and zombie*

Ram is eighteen, good looking, and a competent goat herder. Before Simta's arrival, he was betrothed to Arbella. Now he is Simta's slave, because she tricked him into eating his own father's long-dead flesh. Ram considers himself entirely helpless and trapped in the witches power, although this condition is entirely self-inflicted. He will do whatever she asks, although if he finds it distressing he will probably do it ineptly. Widely revered as the village's best man, some small part of Ram likes being ordered around.

TSOY Notes

Ram is Adept at Woodcraft and Competent at abilities related to village life, including Scrapping. Ram's Adept at Woodcraft and Competent at abilities related to village life, including Scrapping.

ASOR, Simta's son, bully and drunkard

Asor is a swaggering lout in his early thirties, fond of showing off too much muscle gone to fat, more often than not drunk and spoiling for a fight he knows he can win. He likes to push people around and he's quick to call for Nardeen if he gets into trouble. Nardeen is, sadly, never far.

TSOY Notes

As a repellent villain, Asor is Adept at Sense Danger and Competent at Deceit, Streetwise, and Scrapping. He has no points in his pools. Asor should receive a penalty die when he is drunk, which is often.

ARBELLA, Danel's daughter and village beauty

Arbella is a beautiful girl of sixteen who helps her father around the temple and tends a tulip garden. Until recently she was betrothed to her true love, Ram, but is now to marry the witches horrible son Asor instead.

TSOY Notes

As a kind-hearted and attractive maiden, Arbella is Adept at Savoir-Faire and has the Secret of Specialty for it, granting her a bonus die when dealing with male strangers.

OSRIC Villagers

APPEARING: 2d6 able-bodied men

MOVE: 90 feet

ARMOR CLASS: 7 (Nardeen 5)

HIT DICE: 1 (Nardeen 2)

ATTACKS: 1

DAMAGE: 1d6 or weapon type (Nardeen has a +1 two-handed sword)

MAGIC RESISTANCE: Standard

TREASURE: 2d6cp per individual (Nardeen 3d6 gp; +1 sword)

INTELLIGENCE: Average

ALIGNMENT: Neutral

NARDEEN, *laconic bodyguard*

Nardeen stands a head taller than the tallest villager and carries a menacing executioner's sword slung across his back. He comes from a distant land, and he works for coin, but he is deeply enmeshed in Simta's schemes and can't easily escape. Nardeen's primary task is to keep Asor in check, to prevent the fool from harming anyone or himself. He takes his duties quite seriously but has absolutely no love for his employer or her misbegotten man-child. Nardeen likes Shirat and will go out of his way to keep her from harm – to a point.

TSOY Notes

As a professional soldier and bodyguard, Nardeen should be Adept at related skills and Competent at anything related to life on the road. He has two points each in his Vigor and Instinct pools.

Nardeen has the Secret of the Signature Weapon for his executioner's sword.

THE HYENAS, *well-trained beasts*

Simta's three trained hyenas are deadly, man-eating brutes when unleashed. If physically threatened, Simta will absolutely order them to attack. If she decides that someone has overstayed their welcome and she can get them alone, she will likewise set the hyenas on them.

TSOY Notes

Treat them as a collective pack that is Adept at Power and Competent at Prowess, Senses and Brain. The pack has Vigor and Instinct pools of two each. A single hyena would have no pools and Power, Prowess and Senses all lowered by one. They are far more effective as a group.

Secret of Bone Crushing Jaws: The hyena's bite inflicts +1 harm in combat.

OSRIC Hyenas

APPEARING: In this case, 3

MOVE: 90 feet

ARMOR CLASS: 5

HIT DICE: 3

ATTACKS: 1

DAMAGE: 1d8

MAGIC RESISTANCE: Standard

TREASURE: None

INTELLIGENCE: Animal

ALIGNMENT: Neutral

Simta's trained brutes have no special attacks or defenses beyond their extraordinary bite.

RACHAGH, *the Brindled One, gnoll pack matriarch*

Rachagh is imposing and dangerous by human standards, but something of a weak dullard by gnoll standards. She has a small pack and controls an unproductive territory. Despite her diminished circumstances, Rachagh is proud of her pack and her heritage, and doesn't suffer fools (at least fools more foolish than herself) gladly. In a fight she should be genuinely terrifying.

TSOY Notes

As the matriarch of a semi-ferocious war-band, Rachagh is a Master at individual combat and Adept at related military disciplines, like tracking and tactics. She is Competent at abilities related to communicating, negotiating, and intimidating. Rachagh has three points in her Vigor pool and one point each in Instinct and Reason.

Rachagh has the Secret of the Mighty Blow and a vicious, weathered sword that does +1 harm in combat. In addition, she wears tough hide armor that offers +1 protection from harm in battle.

Rachagh's WARRIOR-MATES, *warriors and mates*

The male Gnolls who follow Rachagh are not as fearsome as their pack leader individually, which is why they stick together and fight in groups of two or three.

TSOY Notes

An attack group is Adept at combat-related abilities and has one Vigor pool point. Like their leader, the Gnolls use weapons that offer +1 harm and wear armor that provides +1 protection.

An isolated male gnoll is Competent across the board and has no pool points.

OSRIC Gnolls

APPEARING: In this case, 6 plus a leader

MOVE: 90 feet

ARMOR CLASS: 5

HIT DICE: 2d8

ATTACKS: 1

DAMAGE: By weapon (usually 2d4)

MAGIC RESISTANCE: Standard

TREASURE: 3d6gp per individual

INTELLIGENCE: Low

ALIGNMENT: Chaotic Evil

Rachagh would be a superior specimen with double the hit dice stated for attack purposes. Her warrior-mates are as listed, and fight at +1 on to hit and morale rolls if they are within 60 feet of their leader.

None of them have any special attacks or defenses.



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