

Campaign/Game: Dark Sun - Freedom: D&D 5e
Episode 1: The Feeling Begins

Date: August 4th, 2022

Characters

Sorak of the Silver Hand, Elf Ranger - 3 (Luke D)
Grunk Hamfist, Half-Giant Barbarian - 3 (Adam J)
Nysos Chel, Half-Elf Druid - 3 (Preston J)
Jinx, Halfling Rogue - 3 (Rachel Y)
Krikik, Thri-Kreen Ranger - 3 (Becca)

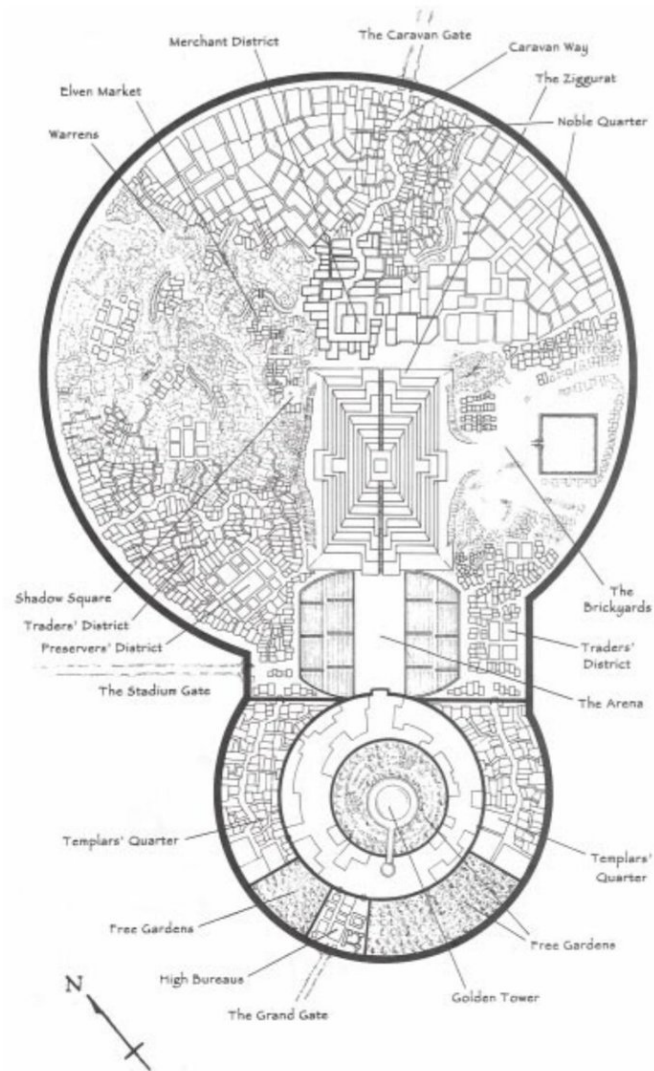
DM: Andrew

Log:

For over a millennium, Tyr has stood.

During the past thousand years, the city has labored beneath the oppressive eye of Kalak, Tyrant of Tyr. Under the fearful shadow of his defiling magic, Tyr has festered from a small oasis settlement to a sprawling and corrupt metropolis. Renowned for wealth, power, and a steady though meager production of iron, Tyr is perhaps the most decadent city state in a decadent land. Here, where mortal life counts less than a drop of water, a person can buy anything and suffer any fate. All but the poorest Tyrians own slaves, and nobles tend vast plantations by the lash. Indeed, slaves outnumber freemen two-to-one within the brutal city of Tyr.

Outside the walls of the city, verdant plantation-lands where crops receive more water than the unnumbered slaves who tend them. These fortress plantations belong to the city's nobles and garner great wealth for them by providing nearly all of Tyr's food. Standing armies fiercely guard each plot of land. Once within the gates of Tyr, the throng of odd caravans, tang of exotic foods, and heady rattle of strange dialects unsettles you: Every Athasian city state follows unique laws and customs. Those unfamiliar with the ways of Tyr may run afoul of its templars or, worse yet, Kalak himself.



King Kalak, Lord Kalak, Tyrant of Tyr—he goes by many names. Defiant Tyrians mock their lord (when shielded from his psionically-enhanced senses) with the title “Kalak the Diminutive,” for Kalak’s ancient body is horribly wizened—gaunt, emaciated, and puny. This dry husk of flesh, though, channels unimaginable power. Kalak holds Tyr in an iron grip. His mind is said to roam the city, dealing death for the slightest offense.



As in most Athasian cities, the sorcerer king leaves day-to-day business to templars—his faithful servants and police force. On the streets, the golden cassocks and imperious manners of templars set them apart from other Tyrians. These men and women wield great power, checked only when their actions might offend Kalak, a superior templar, or a noble. Tyrians generally avoid templars, who, on the slightest whim, can imprison slaves and citizens alike. Of late, the templars of Tyr have been preoccupied, spending their careers upon Kalak’s massive public works. Indeed, for the past twenty years, the templars’ lives have centered on a huge stack of stone—King Kalak’s ziggurat. Dominating the center of the city, the square-stepped tower rises in sharp-edged splendor over the neighboring slums. Only now, after twenty years of construction, does the ziggurat near

completion. For two decades, lash-striped slaves have borne massive blocks into place and mortared them together with their own blood. Now the streets and markets of Tyr ring with rumors that King Kalak has commanded his templars to finish the tower before month’s end. No rumors tell why dread Kalak is building the ziggurat and dark looks dissuade those who may ask.

Beside the ziggurat stands a familiar sight: a gladiatorial arena. Here Kalak holds epics of bloodsport, and on rare occasions comes himself to hear the sanguine roars of the populace. A box seat at one end of the arena allows King Kalak to view the battles, well removed from the filthy rabble. Most of the time, though, Kalak remains hidden deep within his Golden Tower.

This tower lies off the arena’s other side (opposite the Ziggurat), rising from the center of Kalak’s palace. Lush gardens crowd the tower’s base, a green paradise from which Kalak’s defiler magic leeches its power. Beyond the garden lies a clutter of buildings and colonnades where only King Kalak and his six high templars may walk. Few others summoned here ever emerge again.

On the outer periphery of the sorcerer king’s grounds rests the templar quarter. Templars dwell in happy seclusion from the populace, both to signify their privilege and to safeguard their lives. Greatly feared and little loved, if templars lived among the people, murder and riot would become commonplace. For their own protection, the templars draw together in pampered

security. The best foods, goods, and services can be routinely had in the Templar's Quarter, but only a fool-hardy or dazzling thief would dare tread within the compound.

The details of the Golden Tower and the templar quarter, however, come to you only through rumor. Any steps you tread in those high halls may well be your last. Rather, the sights and sounds and smells of Tyr that work upon you come from the massive gates, bustling markets, bawdy streets, vermin-ridden slums, crowded merchant houses, and polished noble quarters.

Most enter Tyr through the caravan quarter, where strange outlanders and plodding merchant caravans clog the streets. The main avenue, called Caravan Way, winds toward Kalak's ziggurat and supports caravansaries, outfitters, beast traders, inns, merchant houses, and wine shops. The assortment of goods and services here is good, though they come at a premium price. The caravan quarter bustles both night and day and is well patrolled; merchants pay the templars dearly for protection.

The caravan quarter butts up against the noble quarter. Here, nobles keep small, walled citadels, complete with slave quarters, gardens, guardhouses, and private apartments. Most of the nobles wisely contribute generous sums to the city coffers: those who do receive preferential protection from the half-giant patrols of the templars. Few nobles actually reside within the city walls, where their private armies are forbidden, preferring to pass their time on estates outside the walls. A few townhouses lie scattered in other areas of Tyr. Some such villas were constructed by rising sons of old families while others have been relocated by Kalak, himself, to chastise particular noble houses. Whatever their origin, these islands of wealth provide prime targets to thieves and thugs.

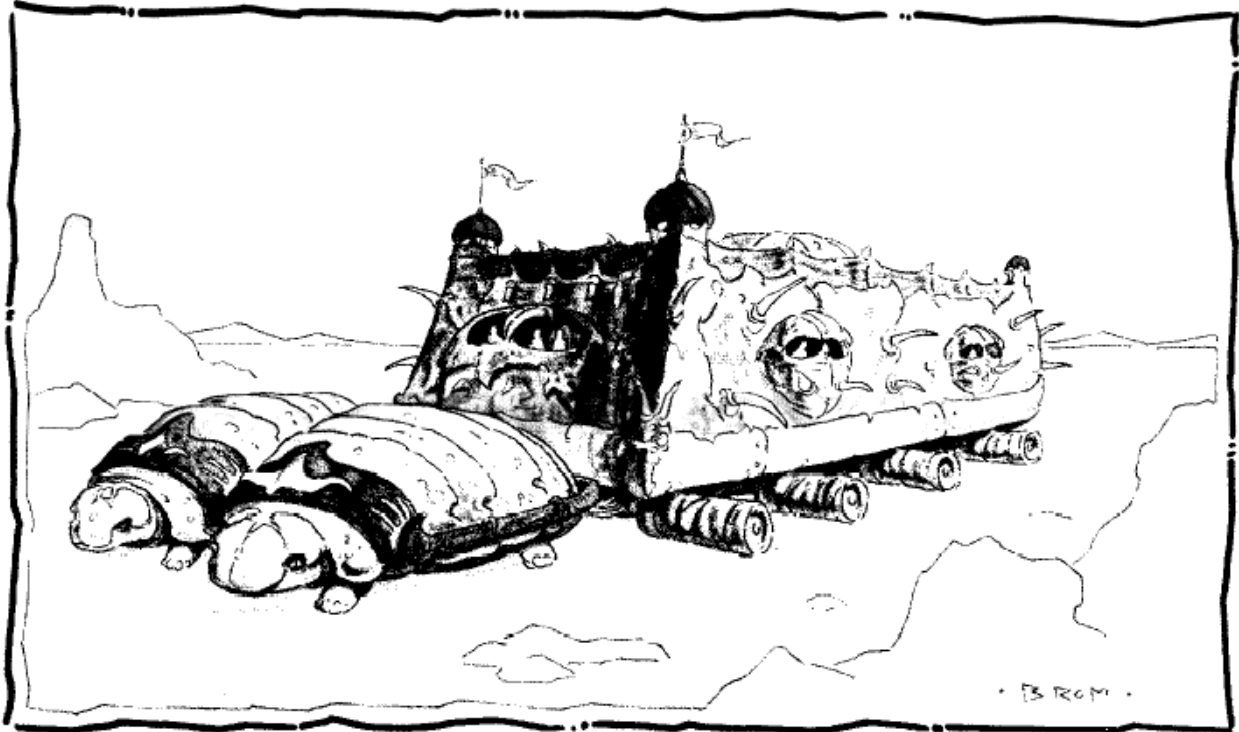


Tradesmen reside in the next lower niche in Tyrian culture. Tradesmen's districts spread across various sections of the city, home to most of the Tyrian citizenry. Tradesmen occupy the uncomfortable cusp between slaves and freemen: though bound to a particular noble house and occupation, they possess minor rights to property and protection. A street in a tradesmen's district will house the practitioners of a single craft or the craftsmen of a particular noble. These districts are Ty's monetary badlands; they hold little to steal and even less to buy or trade.

One can hardly spend a day in Tyr without passing sometime through the warrens of the slum quarter, which gives Tyr much of its infamy. This vast crumbling sprawl houses the impoverished, the desperate, the outcast, and the enslaved. Many residents of the warrens work as day laborers, setting out each morning to seek work on the plantations. More desperate occupants might even sell themselves at the slave market near the dust-choked wadi. Others turn to theft or murder for hire. Those incapable of work, even illegal work, beg door-to-door. One way or another, these oppressed people glean enough food and water to live another day. What little extra they might own comes from hard labor in sweatshop shanties at night. Life in the warrens is brutal and unforgiving.

The darkest section in the warrens is the elven quarter. Treated as near-criminal outcasts by the rest of Tyr, the elves have settled their own portion of the slums, closer to the base of the ziggurat than others would find comfortable. Here they live, little bothered by templars or nobles, who consider them inconsequential vermin. Runaways, rebels, and murderers all find shelter in the narrow streets of the elven quarter. When the templars stage their rare incursions into the elven quarter, they go heavily armed, with a squad of half-giant guards at their heels. The elven quarter gives the slum its true notoriety. Here, you can literally buy or sell anything—if you have the coin or charisma to do so. Elven merchants boast that they will someday sell even the bones of your grandmother on a back street of the elven market. Indeed, they may already have.

This trading acumen both sustains and justifies the elven quarter. The canny elves bring in exotic and sometimes priceless items from the ruins in the wilderness, items prized by Tyrian nobles. Even so, a deal struck in the elven quarter is anything but sure, for thieves, muggers, renegade wizards, and swindlers abound. A 50% markdown little compensates a buyer who loses his life.



As the scene is set, Sorak of the Silver Hand has just arrived in Tyr after traveling the great caravan routes across the deserts of Athas. He has earned an honest amount of Tyrian ceramic coins, less than the last time he successfully led some miserly tradesmen past the horrors of the desert. However to cure his dry, sandy thirst he enters a wine shop in the Merchant's Quarter named the Cranky Kank. Soon after Sorak takes a seat at the back of the shop to enjoy his megar cup of a suspect vintage, a young half-elven woman enters. She moves suspiciously from table to table, as if looking for someone. A commotion comes at the door. The woman abruptly takes the empty seat at Sorak's table. Three templars with eight guards march into the hall and block all exits. The head templar harshly demands, "Where is the renegade Preserver?" No one says a word. As the templars move among the tables, the guards twist patrons around for a better look at them. The half-elven woman introduces herself as Sadria. "It's been so long! How is your family?"

Eventually the templars settle at Sorak's table. They confront him about "the preserver." Sorak says that he does not know who that is, and blames another patron, a tattooed mul named Liurgard. The mul is angered by this accusation, and begins to shout. Eventually the templar tires of the exchange and orders both dragged off to the slave pits. Sadria looks on in guilt and horror as Sorak is hauled away. He mouths to the young half-elf "you owe me."

In another part of the city, in a kitchen located near the colosseum that serves the great games, Grunk Hamfist is finishing a gourmet meal for a nobleman who has come to inspect his stable of gladiators. Grunk's dwarven friend Coubo timidly helps Grunk bring the roasted meat and vegetable dish up to the private box of none other than Verrasi of Minthur, one of the most wealthy and feared of all the nobles. After an argument about what sort of animal the meal

consisted of, Grunk and Coubo are both tied up and sent off to the brick pits as slave labor as well.

After a successful assassination, Jinx is in the narrow streets of the elven market seeking out a delicacy of the halflings - pickled rat brains. She encounters one strange grey-market stall run by a halfling named Rugyo. Just as a transaction is made, and the delicious rodent brains are being slurped down, a squad of the sorcerer king's guards seals off all streets and alleys. Shutters and doors slam, shutting off businesses and homes. The soldiers begin to move down the street, accosting everyone in their path. They order everyone to assemble along one wall. The crowd tries to run, but their paths are stopped. Jinx manages to hide beneath the ruins of Rugyo's stall as the halfling brain-merchant is grabbed by the neck by a half-giant. He begins to call out for help from Jinx, but only makes a gurgled cry as he is hauled away.



Elsewhere, Krikik enters a tavern in search of a way to turn the handful of strange, ceramic bits into food. The ways of the city-folk are strange and new, and the thri-kreen wants to experience everything that is new. As they make themselves comfortable, Krikik sees a rival thri-kreen named Chch'karan enter. A sweaty slave dwarf named Puig bumps into Krikik and spills a whole plate of steaming hot gruel on both of the two enemies. Hot broth sprays everything, soaking both thri-kreen. Chch'karan clacks in irritation. The innkeeper, Timrol, fawns nervously, "Clumsy oaf! I curse the day I bought you! My greatest apologies for this slave's graceless behavior. Name his punishment—whatever amuses you!"

Chch'karan becomes less irritated and more amused as they watch the innkeeper, "Perhaps I should EAT you!" The slave Puig cowers, watching fearfully. Uncomfortable laughter fills the air. Timrol offers fresh drinks, which Puig brings directly. The dwarf slave meaningfully looks at the two mugs of spiced wine, then back to the two kreen. He leaves as the two enemies lock eyes

and slurp down the beverages. Insults are traded, and a brawl is on between the two mantis people. Unfortunately, as they struggle both Krikik and their nemesis Chch'karan realize that they are both poisoned by the special spiced wine served by the proprietor. They too are sent to the pits, sold for a few pieces of silver by the innkeeper, Timrol.

Nysos has found himself in Tyr, perhaps against his will. He walks through a plaza in the elven quarter. The day has reached its hottest corner, when only the most desperate merchants keep their shops open. The streets lie deserted but for a few poor beggars who have no other place to stay. A pair of wealthy looking elves enter the plaza. They are tall and slender, their skin a crinkly brown from the sun. Their somber but finely-cut clothes denote high status within their tribe. They spot a half-elf huddling in the shade of a convenience shop. His clothes are dirty and tattered. Nysos witnesses the half elf beaten by the two elves. The druid refuses to aid the half elf, only to find himself caught up when guards appear from out of nowhere to arrest both him and the poor half-elf wretch, named Orman.

At this point, most of the characters have found themselves taken to the slave pits. Processing occurs with callous efficiency. Ever-present guards quell escape attempts while slaves, with no regard to gender or species, are stripped of all clothes and items. As clothing is heaped onto bonfires, the supervising templar pockets items that interest him and distributes those that do not. Next a team of guards shave beards and heads to eliminate lice, and each slave receives a loincloth (or shift), a blanket, and a small waterskin. Once within the pits proper, a taskmaster assembles the slaves and assigns each to a work crew commanded by an overseer. Work crews perform one menial task, such as hauling water, mixing mud, forming bricks, hauling bricks, setting bricks, cutting wood supports, and so forth.

Daily life in the pens drags by with dreary brutality. Just before dawn, slaves line up to receive water rations: any slave who cannot get to the water station or who arrives late must survive that day without water. The overseers gather their crews, beating and whipping any who are slow to assemble. Meanwhile, clean-up crews scour the pens, removing the bodies of dead slaves and applying savage punishment to stragglers. Slaves too weak to work are killed.

The crews work until sundown, with only two short breaks during the day. Each overseer drives his slaves hard to meet near-impossible quotas. If he fails, the overseer loses his rank and returns to the pens, where he can expect little love from his former crew. The overseers are, thus, merciless in their duties. Any malingering is rewarded with the whip.

Little passes unseen by the eyes of the guards, though they are mainly concerned with staying out of the sun and halting escape. Occasionally guards enter the pens to stop large fights or prevent riots, operating in groups of eight to ten: guards never leave their necks or weapons unprotected when in the company of slaves.

Sometimes even able-bodied slaves must be killed: a man goes mad under the burning sun; a brute attacks an overseer or templar; a laborer soils the ziggurat with his sweat or blood. On other occasions, though, a slave may attract the notice of the Master of the Games and be sent

to the gladiator pits. Improved treatment does little to compensate gladiators for their high mortality rate.

At night, slaves return to the pits and overseers go to special quarters. The daily meal, a worm-infested gruel, is served along with another ration of water. Those who do not reach the kitchen in time are not fed. After the meal, slaves sleep where they can. The strongest and their followers claim the few huts and shelters; all others sleep outside.

Weapons, obviously, are strictly outlawed to slaves. Ingenuity, bribery, and improvisation, however, can provide substitutes for weapons. Every character has material to make one weapon—a sap—by filling a piece of cloth with sand and stones. Stones, sticks, and rope can also be scavenged. With these materials, characters can make slings, garrotes, lassoes, bolas, wooden daggers, crude flails, and clubs. Stolen tools such as mauls, wooden clubs, wooden pitchforks, and possibly even a small obsidian handaxe, might be available to the lucky or clever. Finally, a few slaves have sufficient contacts and influence to acquire “real” weapons. These slaves usually head powerful and wide-spread gangs within the pens.

The first morning after arriving in the pits, an odd din rises over the caterwauling of the overseers. A crowd of slaves quickly clusters around the source of the sound, packed in elbow-to-elbow. A stinging hail of grit assails the clustered slaves, who scramble for safety. At the center of the ring, a slouching half-giant whirls about, swiping massive hands at the nimble gith who are tormenting him. The monsters' taunts are biting sarcasm. They lampoon the giant's ugliness, slowness, witlessness, and imitative personality. The giant cannot match their verbal insults. Frustrated, he lashes out with fists, throws sand, and bellows.

The heroes unite behind the ex-gladiator Kanla to help the poor half-giant. Sorak strangles a Gith with his sling, then sprints out to the crowd. Jinx, hired by the two elves to harm Lissan to keep her from competing in the arena, cuts at the gladiator's legs but is nearly stabbed to death by Rugyo, angry that Jinx did not keep him from the fate of slavery. Krikik's swarm entangles two Gith, while Nysos drags the monsters through a field of stinging rocky slate. Grunk stands toe to toe with two Gith, trading blows with his fists.

Half giant guards arrive. Jinx hides. Rugyo, angry that his lucrative rat brains business has been ruined, tries to murder Jinx. Sorak and Jinx manage to escape into the crowd. Grunk, Preston, and Krikik are all thrown into the punishment pits where they get to know one another. Krikik shares some good berries and Urrgos becomes fast friends with Grunk.

As the episode ends, Jinx is given the job to locate the half-elf Sadria by the two wealthy elves who threatened to kill the half-elf Orman. These two are named Prithen and Nandex.