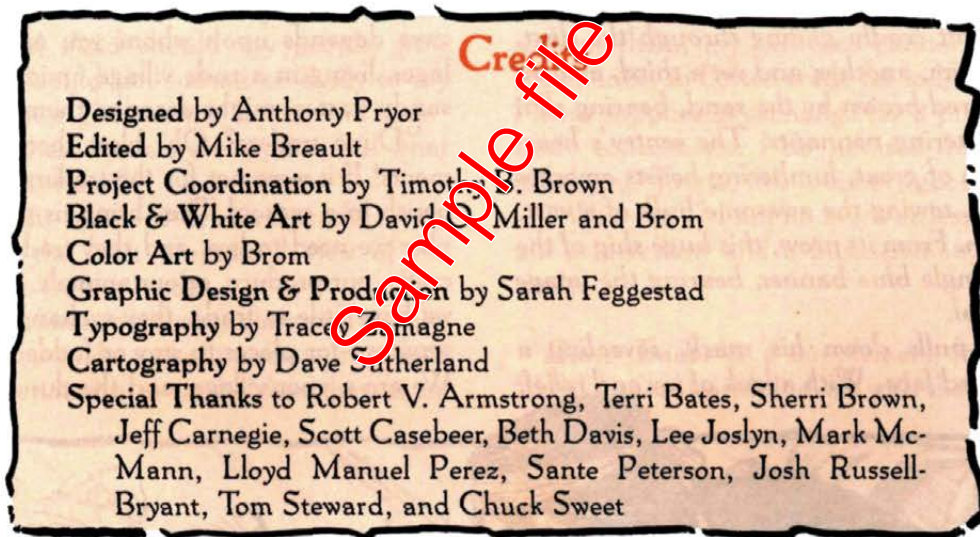


Dune Trader

by Anthony Pryor

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
The Major Merchant Houses of the Tyr Region	5
Small Trading Houses	39
Elven Merchant Houses	44
Other Nonhuman Traders	63
The Trader Campaign	65
A House Inika Caravan	84
A Heavy Caravan	86
An Elven Market	88
Fort Prosper	95
Crodlu	96



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Introduction

A hot wind blows across the Sea of Silt—a wind swift and furious enough to scourge skin and polish bone. A tiny huddle of stone huts clings tenaciously to the shore, like a mekillot hunkered down against a sandstorm. A lone figure stands nearby, swathed in heavy robes, his face muffled save for a narrow eyeslit. He keeps watch, gazing away from the sea, across the endless sands, awaiting those who may never come again. He braces himself against the wicked wind, leaning upon a bone staff as the next blast tears at him.

Abruptly, the sentry stares intently into the gritty maelstrom. Could it be? Yes—there it is—a lone outrider, his swift crodlu gliding through the dust. Then, behind him, another, and yet a third, all clad in silks turned red-brown by the sand, bearing slim lances with fluttering pennants. The sentry's heart leaps as a hitch of great, lumbering beasts emerges from the storm, towing the awesome bulk of a great, armored wagon. From its prow, this huge ship of the sands flies a single blue banner, bearing the image of a silver jozhal.

The sentry pulls down his mask, revealing a tough, weathered face. With a look of joy and relief,

he raises a silver whistle to his lips. He sends forth three sharp, urgent blasts that cut like a bone dagger through the wind's howl. From the huddled stone buildings emerge the men, women, and children of the village, frantically donning their robes while laughing, joking, or crying with relief.

Although the winds are fierce and enemies abound in the blasted wastes along the Sea of Silt, the villagers know that now they have a chance to live through another year.

The dune trader has come.

Exactly who and what are dune traders? The answer depends upon whom you ask. A simple villager, living in a rude village amid the perils of the sandy wastes, might describe them this way:

"Dune traders? Oh, bless them, by all the elements! If it were not for the traders, we would surely perish in a season! They bring us the food and supplies we need to live, and they trade it to us for our crafts, our produce, or our animals. Sometimes, when we have little to trade, they exchange their goods for services—for places to stay or fodder for their beasts. We are a poor village, and the dune traders treat us



Introduction



fairly. Without them, we would perish!”

The sorcerer-kings, on the other hand, maintain somewhat different views:

“Sometimes, I don’t know whether to praise them or curse them. They live in my city, they take up valuable space and resources, and yet they obey me only when it suits them. They say that they wish to maintain the general good, keep things stable so that they may make a profit. Sometimes I wonder whether they plot against me, seeking to destroy my authority. Oh, but these traders are a pain!

“And yet, without them, my people would be unable to raise great monuments to my glory, or perhaps even to eat! And should my people grow dissatisfied, they would not submit so easily to my rule, and would not give me the honor and reverence I deserve. These traders are a pain, but what would I do without them?”

As can be seen, opinions of dune traders vary greatly. Possibly the least prejudiced view of the traders may come from a trader.

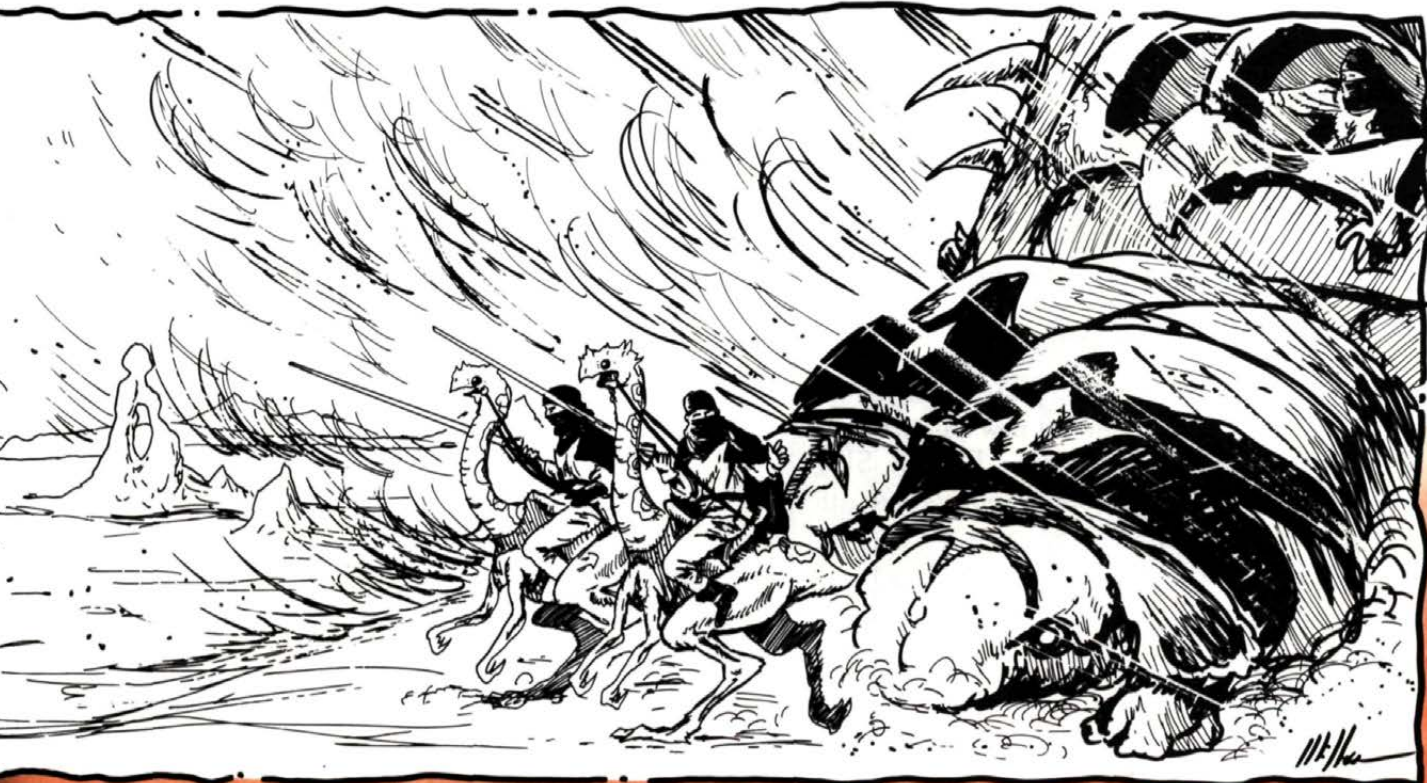
“What am I? I am a merchant, plain and simple. I do what I must to make a profit and to provide a climate that is conducive to trade. And how must

that be done, you ask? By maintaining absolute neutrality, I tell you. By refusing to join any group or order, by trading with all equally. I trade with all and shun no one. All are welcome to trade—elves, dwarves, gith, belgoi—why, I would trade with the dragon itself if it wished!

“And good will is almost as important as profit, for without good will, profit is often impossible. I cooperate with the sorcerer-kings, even though I find many of them personally distasteful. Without their good will, I cannot trade, and thus I cannot make a profit. And the poor villagers of the sands—I know that often they do not have enough to trade, but without them, my caravans cannot rest or receive assistance, so I often trade for lodging or meals, or I leave supplies in exchange for a promise of future trade concessions. I do not see this as kindness, mind you. To me, this is simply good business.

“Who am I? I am no more or less than I seem. I am a merchant and a businessman. I am a dune trader.”

Dune Trader is a supplement for the DARK SUN™ game world. It deals with the inner workings





Introduction

of the powerful trading houses of Athas. The first section describes the leading trading house of each of the major cities of the Tyr region—Wavir (Balic), Tsalaxa (Draj), Inika (Gulg), Shom (Nibenay), M'ke (Raam), Vordon (Tyr), and Stel (Urik). Each entry discusses the house's history, trade practices, assets, and relations with the sorcerer-kings and other trade houses. The characters and various outposts and headquarters of each house are also detailed.

Following this, some of the hundreds of minor merchant houses are described. As most PC-driven merchant houses will start small and work their way up, this section provides valuable information on how to run such a business.

The next chapter describes the elven merchants. Three major types of elven merchants exist on Athas—the “legitimate” trading tribes that do their business mostly in the open, raiding tribes who occasionally trade, and tribes of elves who trade in the shadows, dealing in contraband and engaging in smuggling, intrigue, and darker activities. A typical example of each of these tribes is detailed.

Finally, there is information on trade routes, trade goods, and how PCs can become merchants, including statistics for the new trader class of player characters.

Armed with the information in this book, a DM can learn the secrets of Athasian trade and create a challenging, realistic trading environment for profit-hungry players. Trade is the lifeblood of Athas. This, then, is the world of the dune trader.

A Note on Abbreviations

Characters and monsters are referred to here by a standard short format. Several new character classes have been introduced for the DARK SUN™ game, and the following abbreviations are used:

B: Bard	C: Cleric	D: Defiler
F: Fighter	G: Gladiator	I: Illusionist
Ps: Psionicist	Pr: Preserver	R: Ranger

Te: Templar Th: Thief Tr: Trader

In short character entries, spells and psionic abilities are listed simply by number per level (for spells) and total number of abilities (for psionics). Spells and psionic abilities for these characters can be chosen by the DM or picked randomly. Detailed personality descriptions list specific spells and abilities, but these can be changed by the DM to fit his campaign.

The Merchants' Code

All mercantile houses follow a strict code of behavior, known as the Merchants' Code. Anyone wishing to join a merchant house must accept all aspects of this code and abide by them or face immediate expulsion. The code varies from house to house, but in most cases it conforms to the following principles:

1. Recognition that by joining a merchant house, an agent forsakes citizenship in any city or membership in any tribe.
2. An oath of allegiance to the merchant house.
3. A promise to perform in the best interests of the merchant house in return for a salary.
4. A promise to deal honestly with stranger, friend, and foe alike.
5. A promise not to flaunt any wealth gained through employment with the house.
6. A promise to uphold the laws of the city in which the agent is stationed, and to do nothing to bring down the wrath of the sorcerer-king or his agents upon the house.
7. A promise to cooperate with other merchants to make life very expensive for any person who unjustly imprisons, blackmails, or otherwise harasses any merchant.

The Major Merchant Houses of the Tyr Region

It would be a terrible mistake to assume that all power on Athas rests in the hands of the sorcerer-kings. Power can be held in many ways, and many hands besides those of the cities' rulers may possess it.

The major merchant houses of Athas hold much of the balance of power, often to the dismay of the sorcerer-kings. The merchant houses supply the lifeblood of Athas—foodstuffs that feed isolated city-states, construction materials to build the palaces of sorcerer-kings and decadent nobles, slaves to toil in fields or fight and die in gladiator pits, and many other vital items.

Organized along family lines with a matriarch or patriarch at its head, a major house controls dozens of caravans, maintains estates in several different cities, sponsors trading villages, and employs (or owns) thousands. The largest houses—Wavir, Tsaxa, and their ilk—are influential enough to make even the most powerful sorcerer-kings take heed.

The leading trade houses of each of the Tyr re-

gion's cities are detailed in this chapter. Information given includes their assets, histories, trade practices, headquarters, caravans, leading personalities, and more.

House Inika

Inika operates out of its headquarters in the city of Gulg. It is small compared to some of the other major houses, but this is by choice. Dealing in small, valuable cargoes, such as kola nuts, exotic feathers, spices, and gemstones, Inika sees the benefit in remaining small and efficient. As a result, the house rakes in profits far out of proportion to its size, gaining a reputation for being one of the shrewdest houses in the region.

House Inika's banner shows a plain gold circle on a black field.

History

Over three centuries ago, in the year of the Des-





The Major Merchant Houses of the Tyr Region

ert's Fury, in the city of Gulg, Taro Inika, a trusted agent of House Riben, broke his merchant's oath and left his employers, starting his own house. Only the good will of Biria Riben, the house's matriarch who had once been Inika's lover, prevented the new house from being crushed within a year.

In Gulg, rivalries between trade houses are kept to a minimum to maintain the peace and tranquility of the city. This proved a rich environment for the new concern. Within a few years, the house assumed its current form: a streamlined business dealing in small but valuable cargoes.

House Vordon, ever on the lookout for weak rivals to exploit or destroy, immediately dispatched raiders to disrupt the silk routes between Urik and Raam. Surprisingly, House Inika gave in immediately, abandoning the routes, effectively ceding them to its wealthier competitor. Unfortunately for Vordon, they soon found that the resources that Inika had withdrawn from the silk route had been rerouted into the spice trade between Tyr and Gulg, where Vordon was extremely vulnerable. Within a few months, Vordon was on the ropes, losing money on the spice route and regretting the day that it ever heard of House Inika.

Such incidents underline two of House Inika's major philosophies: that force is to be used only as a last resort, and that strategic withdrawal to a superior position is often the best route.

Assets

Inika's favored trade goods—kola nuts, spices, gems, feathers, and other small but valuable items, help make Inika caravans small and fast. Gulg's relative tranquility and the regularity of its production provides House Inika with a regular income. Wise investment and conservative spending combine to keep Inika on a solid financial footing.

Caravans: Inika's caravans are small and fast. Elven scouts provide advance warning of ambushes or attacks, which are usually avoided rather than confronted. Cargo is carried almost exclusively on

kanks, although inix are sometimes used for larger cargoes. Mekillots and wagons are almost never found in Inika caravans.

Average caravans include about a dozen elven scouts with up to 20 kanks and (rarely) four to six inix. Due to the caravans' small size, House Inika can afford to maintain many more than other merchant houses. At any one time, Inika can have 50 to 75 caravans carrying cargo across the region.

Inika caravans' tactics are, first and foremost, to avoid any enemy forces. Should this fail, they scatter to break up pursuit. The scouts are expected to seek out the dispersed kank riders and bring them back together after the attack has ended.

Facilities: House Inika maintains very few permanent installations, preferring to temporarily rent or lease space in villages, forts, or cities. The house maintains a few trade villages and fortresses, such as Fort Adros. Major facilities and their resources are listed below.

Fort Adros: 75 employees, 150 slaves. Supply point along the gold route between Walis and Altaruk. Often a target of attacks by elves and gith.

Fort Harbeth: 50 employees, 100 slaves. Supply and storage point in the foothills to the southwest of the Mekillot Mountains, equidistant from Gulg, Salt View, and North Ledopolus. A major trading post for the slaves of Salt View and a place to purchase dwarven items from Ledopolus.

Fort Skonz: 50 employees, 75 slaves. Supply point at junction of three roads between Tyr, Altaruk, and Silver Spring. An increasingly important position as trade links between Tyr and other cities begin to be re-established. Fort Skonz was threatened with occupation by Urik forces during the recent conflict between Tyr and Urik, but the threat failed to materialize.

Shazlim: Trade village, 500 citizens. Located along the southern edge of Dragon's Bowl between Raam and Silver Spring, Shazlim represents an important stopover and trade point in the area.

Permanent facilities, such as the house's head-