

# 22 – A Random Encounter

## Dunes of the Ankheg



With Cassie following Random's Shadow Trail, the "Path to Glory" tunnel led through the mountains and emerged into a patch of rocks in a wide desert of dunes. They had to wait a few hours for a violent sandstorm to abate to see another Patch of rocks about 5 miles away that were the only landmark.

Borgak, the leader of the Orcs led the way across, followed by one with zebra-striped war paint, then our heroes and then the rest of the Orcs. Trailing behind was the runt of the group – Trix.



About a mile across the Dunes, the first two orcs slid into a conical depression of soft sand that opened up beneath their feet. At the bottom a huge insect-like creature emerged to try and eat them!



Cassie and Aleyn open up with shots from their pistols. This Shadow clearly has sufficient Tech to support modern weapons. Most of the shots pass through bits of the creature that don't bother it, but Cassie manages to hit something significant and chunk of its chitinous plating falls away.

The others manage to throw ropes down to the two victims and drag them away with only minor damage – these Orcs are tough and seem to heal almost as rapidly as Amberites.

The sounds of the shots seem to draw the attention of another creature that burrows through the sand towards them.

Trix (not as zealous as the others and more at home sneaking and ambushing than in open battle) decides to run for the distant rocks, but the other Orcs bravely face their fate.

Cassie puts a final bullet into the brain pan of the first monster and it dies just as the second one looms from the sand. Aleyn hacks off a big chunk with his Soul Blade, greatly impressing the Orcs and inspiring them to chant his name as they slash at it too. Cassie finishes it off with another bullet to the brain and they move on more cautiously.

"Zebra" takes a trophy – one of the thing's mandibles and Trix slinks back shamefacedly, claiming to have been "trying to get behind it!".

The other Orcs are devoutly seeking death in the service of Rando – convinced they will reach some kind of Warriors' Paradise, but Trix is clearly keen to stay alive and was bullied into joining them – [GM: In game terms, he has +2 Guile and +2 Haste and only +1 Force while all the others have +3 Force and 0 Guile and -1 Haste. They all have +1 with their archaic weapons.]

By breaking-up the rhythm of their steps and carefully prodding the sand ahead of them, they make it to the rocks. There are recent scratches in the rock as though a number of people passed through here a couple of days before. The trail leads across another 10 miles of sand to a further group of rocks.

## War in the Jungle

After a rest, during which the Orcs are all fully recovered, they press on and reach the second patch of rocks before nightfall. Cassie can sense the Shadow Trail leading on from here. It doesn't seem as though the Abyssal Horror reached this far. It seems to have lost Random's trail in the Mountains of Storms.

Aleyn decides it may be worth trying to Trump Random from here. He pulls out the card and concentrates hard. There is some resistance but his recently-improved skills with the Trump let him push for contact. Suddenly there is Random, crouching in a trench in a rain forest under a night sky.



He looks tired and hisses angrily "Radio Silence damn you!" and immediately breaks contact. Beyond him they could see a mixture of Orc and human troops including Captain Furniss (the red haired woman Cassie practices duelling with only a week ago).

Next morning Cassie leads them through the rocks and emerges into a Rainforest. A clear track, recently hacked with machetes, leads onwards. A twin propellered helicopter passes high overhead (similar to a Chinook) and they hear very distant staccato gunfire (sub-machine guns).

They follow the trail and manage to spot a sentry, watching the trail from a camouflaged dug out. Scanning the area with his binoculars, Aleyn spots a couple of claymore-like bombs with a tripwire between them (and an apparent radio-control).

Cassie steps out and calls to the man (hoping he is one of Benedict's troops).

He is – and he recognises Cassie as the young woman who saved him and his fellow troops by pulling them from the Courts of Chaos to Texicanna before the nuclear blast reached their camp.

## A Random Encounter at Last

He takes them to meet Random and Captain Forniss, in a series of dugout trenches a few miles further up the track.



The King is glad to see them and even more glad to hear that his ploy of leading the Abyssal Horror into the Mountains of Storms seemed to have worked. If the thing is no longer nearby, perhaps he's given it the slip and can contact Amber after all.

The thing followed him, ripping through Shadow from Texicanna into the Post-Apocalypse. It spewed out hundreds of Skaven while it was dragging itself through the rip and they lost half the troops before they could get on. Fortunately, Random had picked his Shadows with care and the local cybernetic monsters had joined in the defence, slowing it down enough to let them move on – he'd given his troops strict orders not to attack the scorpions, knowing they would ignore non-hostiles completely. The Skaven weren't so lucky.

In the Mountains of Storm, Random escaped through the tunnels (he seemed almost embarrassed about having collected a bunch of religious fanatics who seemed to worship him) while the Horror had been blasted by the lightning. "All part of my cunning plan!" he grinned.

In desperation, he'd led his little band into the middle of an area of modern jungle warfare in the hopes the Skaven who followed would be handled fairly easily. Nothing had followed them, but there were Skaven here. Apparently a "Dark Circle" has formed somewhere up ahead – about 15 miles North and Skaven are emerging from it. The locals have called a temporary truce in order to handle this new foe. This place seems to have an analogue of the Vietnam War playing out but with technology more like modern day. Random's troops have managed to stay unnoticed for a couple of days as the battlefield is focussed ahead of them as the Skaven have been driven back from here to the Circle. They have managed to gather a few modern tech supplies (the claymores) left as useless by the Skaven who didn't know what they were. They've been able to sneak close enough to overhear that there seems to be a build up of Skaven in the Circle and that they may be about to try an assault. The locals will probably be fine as they have access to everything up to tactical nukes. The Skaven's advantage in other realms had been that Technology faded, but that seems to only happen when the Horror is nearby.

Random has a bit of a go at Cassie for not having found a solution. This is the first time he's directly mentioned the idea that Cassie is "supposed" to provide the solution for some sort of Apocalyptic event. "Don't you have ANY idea what to do about all this?"

She chooses not to reveal what she learned in Tir Na'Nogth and claims that "This isn't the right Apocalypse!".

[GM: Maybe this thing with the Abyssal Horror and Dara's mass sacrifice of Chaos Lords to release it really is pure coincidence that it follows on from the de-stabilisation of the Pattern(s) that's been going on for the last few months – who can say!]

"Oh fantastic!" says Rando "Now we need to know what the plural for Apocalypse is!"

The King decides to Trump Gerard in Amber and send Cassie through, then she (as she has plenty of energy left) can hold the gate open so that the King, Aleyn and the Troops (human and Orc) can pass through. He'll arrange to send the Orcs home to the Mountains later.

The Orcs are devastated by this declaration. Rando seems to have miscalculated their religious zealotry. Returning home from the Path of Glory seems like a disgrace to all of them (apart from Trix).

Aleyn tries to talk them around, get them to focus on preparing for a greater Battle and even tries to encourage Trix to become a "prophet" of Rando. Trix is far too cowardly and despised by his fellow Orcs. There is even a suggestion that Rando might not actually be a God! Maybe Cassie (the Sorceress who can also open the Path to Glory) should overthrow Rando and become their Goddess?

Our Heroes, and the King, are now back in Amber.