

The Rocky Ravine

An Introduction

Parched winds whistle along the canyon, funneled by its crumbling walls. Extrusions of sand blasted rock jut from the ground at every angle, like the decaying teeth of some ancient titan. This territory and its inhabitants are unknown to you. Rumours tell of strange creatures watching travelers from afar, of raids in the dead of night and the strange hoots and whistles that precede them. So far the journey has been quiet, your companions the only living things you've seen in days.

Up amongst the rocks a few pebbles come loose bouncing down the steep canyon sides, common enough in this crumbling landscape but something else catches your attention. From the corner of your eye you see a shadow dart between rocks, too quick to be seen clearly. You get the feeling it's not just some cute little desert rodent, something or someone is watching you.

Up ahead you hear a cry, your wizard companion clasps his hand to his neck and pulls a small dart from his skin. He looks at you wide eyed and opens his mouth to speak but all that comes forth is a ragged croaking sound. Your other companions draw their weapons and form a rough circle as strange cries and high pitched whistles begin to echo around the canyon. Up on a ledge high on the canyon wall a humanoid silhouette appears, flowing robes whipping in the wind, hands raised to the sky it starts to chant in a strange language. The wind picks up driving sand and dust through the canyon at greater and greater speeds. As visibility drops you can make out figures swarming down the canyon walls, your party preparing to meet them head on, all the while the figure calls forth the full fury of the desert winds down upon you.

Notes and Tips

- 30x30 grid map
- The verticality of this map can be used to create some fun dynamic combat. Use rocks for advantages like cover, line of sight and difficult terrain.
- Jumping from rock to rock may help a combatant but acrobatics or Athletics checks should be rolled if the distances are large.
- Shifting sands! Some areas of the map are unstable, have them collapse when someone enters them, sending them tumbling down the canyon walls.
- Rocks fall everyone dies! Rocks can roll down the canyon walls, be thrown by creatures or by magical means.
- Try some humanoid insect monsters, I like the Thri-kreen for this but it really isn't hard to reskin a standard human monster to work as well.
- I imagine some desert wasps would work well here. Have them 'buzz' the party a few times and then attack, a nest is hidden somewhere in the rocks above.
- Earth elementals could inhabit this canyon, have them rise up around the party, reconstituting from the rocks around the party before attacking!
- Or use Stone golems that have somehow gone 'feral'. Maybe the party has been sent to find and destroy them.
- Desert bandits are a great basic encounter, try adding in a twist, maybe some exotic pets like scorpions or hyenas. Or just go with a fun race as desert bandits like Minotaurs or Tabaxi.

Variants

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