

# DARKENED SKIES

## Millennium Episode 1: The Past

*It is springtime in the Fatimid caliphate and in three days Jeddah will be under the path of a total eclipse. The young caliph al-Hakim chafes under the watchful hand of his regent and advisor **Barjawan**. As the eclipse passes over Barjawan will spill the blood of the young king in a blasphemous ritual. After that, the future is darkness...*

*On April 7th, at around 9:22 AM, year 1000, a solar eclipse's path of totality will cross the Arabian peninsula. The last king died three years ago, leaving his young son al-Hakim – now 14 – to rule under the guidance of his regent and advisor, Barjawan the eunuch. Unknown to al-Hakim, Barjawan intends to use a dark ritual to curse the king's line and erase them from memory, installing himself instead as the caliph.*

The vizier must spill the blood of a prince, a priest, and an orphan for the ritual, and needs three further ingredients: a silver sword used to kill a king, the first scriptures of a religion, and white asphodel. Barjawan has these ingredients already, and is simply waiting for the right moment. He knows that he must do everything he can to help the magic work, and so must throw suspicion from himself. He intends to hire some outsiders to 'investigate a threat to the caliph,' knowing that he can dispose of them when the deed is done – or even before.

Barjawan only needs a handful of people that he can press into this service publicly. By luck his lackeys have rounded up the PCs. Barjawan plies them with pay, promises of fame, appeals to their sense of duty, or to their piety as necessary to get them to agree. He tells them they should employ their best means to find and eliminate the threat to the caliph, and that they'll have every authority in the city. They are then dismissed.

A contact of one or more PCs (**Raji**, **Saqid**, or **Yasser** are appropriate) urges them to visit the seer of the oasis, a witch – or spirit – named **Naha** that lives a day's travel from Jeddah and can see the future. She'll be able to tell the PCs what, or who, is threatening the caliph's life. The trek through the desert is interrupted by a band of robbers that rush after the PCs, do not ask for gold or goods, and simply attack. These bandits are actually assassins (five **Aspirants of the Comet** and a **Cult Fanatic**) sent by Barjawan to get rid of his investigators before they can cause trouble or make a mess.

BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

SET-UP

SCENE 1

**Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah** The young caliph.

**Barjawan** The vizier.

**Naha** The witch – or spirit – of the oasis.

**Ahmad** A dealer in herbs.

**Hatem** The scriptorium overseer.

**Nasri** The general's widow.

**Irfan** Knows Barjawan, Nasir, and Raji.

**Medhi** Knows Barjawan, Raji, and Yasser.

**Kareem** Knows Barjawan, Nasir, and Saqid.

**Nasir** An agent of the northern Caliphate.

**Raji** A royal scholar.

**Saqid** The head priest.

**Yasser** The new general.

The spirit of the oasis tells the PCs about the ritual: a powerful spell that requires the blood of an orphan, a prince, and a priest, of which the caliph is all three. The spell's other requirements are a silver sword that has slain a king, the first scripture of a religion, and the flowering plant white asphodel.

Each of the ritual elements can be found in the center of Jeddah. The **asphodel** can be procured from a dealer in herbs and alchemical reagents with ease. The **scripture** must be an antique copy of a gospel on vellum, preserved in the royal mosque. The **sword** is in the home of the widow of the general that rode with al-Hakim's father. Each was collected by a different member of the caliphate's nobility recently: Irfan gathered the asphodel; Medhi borrowed the scroll; Kareem acquired the sword. The common thread tying each together is being in the vizier Barjawan's inner circle. Thus, he must be the villain!

By the time the research is done, it's morning of the 7th. The PCs rush to Barjawan's quarters only to find them locked and abandoned, a magical trap left for anyone who would follow him. A narrow staircase descends to a chamber beneath the palace where light comes down in a single beam. As the eclipse passes overhead the light dims. Barjawan is in the center of the room preparing for the ritual: asphodel and vellum burn in censers and braziers. The sword is raised high! This fight includes two **cackler** demons and Barjawan (an **Illusionist**). The caliph is drugged and lashed to an altar. In the throne-room above a dummy, wrapped in illusion, sits in his place.

### Fire-Breathing Statue

This trap is activated when an intruder steps on a hidden pressure plate, releasing a magical gout of flame from a nearby statue. The statue can be of anything, including a dragon or a wizard casting a spell.

The DC is 15 to spot the pressure plate, as well as faint scorch marks on the floor and walls. A spell or other effect that can sense the presence of magic, such as detect magic, reveals an aura of evocation magic around the statue.

The trap activates when more than 20 pounds of weight is placed on the pressure plate, causing the statue to release a 30-foot cone of fire. Each creature in the fire must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Wedging an iron spike or other object under the pressure plate prevents the trap from activating. A successful dispel magic (DC 13) cast on the statue destroys the trap.

SCENE 1

SCENE 2

SCENE 3