



HAZARDS OF DARK SUN

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ATHAS, THE WORLD OF the DARK SUN® campaign setting, presented DUNGEONS & DRAGONS players with one of the most challenging environments ever conceived of in a roleplaying game. It was a strange and alien world populated by a myriad of terrifying creatures and unusual races. Though metal was a rarity, psionics were everywhere. The beasts that characters encountered beyond the walls of the seven city-states were dangerous, but they were not the only hazards that heroes faced.

Many times, the threat was right in front of you: a cactus bristling with poisoned spines, or the sword-

like fronds of a jungle bush. Predatory plants aren't unheard of in other campaign settings, but Athas is a special exception. When the very sand you walk upon might be home to a score of barbed, hypodermiclike spines, traveling from place to place gains a whole new set of risks.

DEW FROND

Though the Athasian deserts are renowned for their hazardous cacti, the verdant jungles of DARK SUN are literally brimming with dangerous plants. One of the most dangerous of these is the dew frond.

Dew Frond Hazard

Level 4 Obstacle
175 XP

Dew fronds easily blend with the foliage of their tropical surroundings. Young fronds are 3 to 5 feet tall and yellow-tan in color.

Hazard: An individual dew frond plant consists of four separate, barbed fronds growing from a single central stalk, and each frond acts independently of the other three. Dew fronds feed on the blood of passing animals, and when feeding they grow at a frightening rate.

Perception

No check is necessary to notice a dew frond.

Additional Skill: Nature

◆ DC 17: The character identifies the plant as a dew frond.

Trigger

The dew frond attacks when a creature enters or begins its turn in or adjacent to a square of dew fronds.

A dew frond that has restrained a creature cannot make other attacks until the restrained creature has escaped.

Attack

Opportunity Action Melee

Target: Creature in or adjacent to dew frond

Attack: +8 vs. AC

Hit: 2d6 damage, and the target is restrained and takes ongoing 3 damage (until escape).

Effect: Each time a dew frond deals damage, it regains 5 hit points and grows 6 inches tall.

Countermeasures

◆ Restrained characters can use the escape action (DC 19) to free themselves. A failed escape check results in an extra 1d6 damage.

◆ A character can attack a dew frond (AC 12, Fortitude 10, Reflex 10; hp 39).



SAND CACTUS

One of Athas's most notorious predators is nearly invisible to the naked eye. Submerged beneath the surface of the world's sandy wastes, the sand cactus poses a constant threat to heroes and passing creatures.

Sand Cactus Level 6 Obstacle
Hazard 250 XP

The sand cactus is a passive predatory plant. Thankfully rare, a sand cactus lives just beneath the surface of the sandy wastes.

Hazard: A sand cactus lurks below the surface, only exposing a few dozen barbed needles that surround the mawlike orifice through which it feeds. The color of these needles matches the sand in which the cactus is buried, which makes the needles exceptionally difficult to spot. A single sand cactus can spread its needles out to affect a 4-square-by-4-square area. Ongoing damage is cumulative for a creature that has been stuck by multiple needles.

Perception

◆ DC 26: The character notices the sand cactus's needles sticking above the surface of the sand.

Additional Skill: Nature

◆ DC 18: The character identifies the plant as a sand cactus.

Trigger

The sand cactus attacks when a creature enters or begins its turn in a square that contains the sand cactus's needles.

Attack

Opportunity Action Melee

Target: One creature

Attack: +9 vs. Reflex

Hit: 1d10 damage, and the target is restrained and takes ongoing 5 damage (until escape).

Miss: Half damage.

Countermeasures

◆ Restrained characters can use the escape action (DC 17) to free themselves. A successful escape check results in an extra 1d10 damage.

◆ A character can attack an uncovered sand cactus only (AC 14, Fortitude 12, Reflex 14; hp 51). A sand cactus is buried 5 feet below the sand's surface.

SPIDER CACTUS

One of Athas's most active predatory plants is the spider cactus, which is found clustered in groups of two to eight individuals. The sinister nature of the spider cactus is betrayed by the bones of creatures that have fallen victim to it.

Spider Cactus Level 3 Obstacle
Hazard 150 XP

A spider cactus stands between 6 and 7 feet tall. The plant is bright green with white vertical streaks that run the length of its body.

Hazard: A spider cactus hunts by firing barbed purple needles at prey. Skewered prey are then dragged to the base of the cactus, where they can be pierced by large, green feeding needles. A spider cactus grows among others of its kind in patches along roads, paths, or other prey-rich areas.

Perception

No check is necessary to notice the spider cactus.

Additional Skill: Nature

◆ DC 20: The character identifies the plant as a spider cactus.

Initiative +4

Trigger

The cactus attacks any single creature within 3 squares, using its ranged attack against distant enemies and melee attack against those within range.

Attack

Standard Action Ranged 3

Target: One creature

Attack: +8 vs. AC

Hit: 1d8 damage, and the target is immobilized (until escape), and pulled 1 square.

Attack

Standard Action Melee 1

Target: One creature

Attack: +9 vs. AC

Hit: 2d6 + 5 damage, and immobilized until escape.

Countermeasures

◆ Restrained characters can use the escape action (DC 16) to free themselves. A successful escape check results in an extra 1d8 damage.

◆ A character can attack a spider cactus (AC 11, Fortitude 11, Reflex 11; hp 33).

◆ A spider cactus's needle tethers can be cut (AC 15, Fortitude 15, Reflex 15; hp 5), freeing a trapped character.



About the Author

Gary Astleford has been a freelance writer and game designer since 2003. In that time, he has been fortunate enough to write for companies such as Black Industries, Fantasy Flight Games, Green Ronin, and Wizards of the Coast, to name a few. Currently, he lives in Fairfax, Virginia, with his wife and two children.