

The *Dune Trader* supplement for *Dark Sun* gave us a ton of details on running trade caravans on Athas and has been embraced by trader characters in my games since it was released. My players and I have expanded on the material in there considerably – one player built a massive Excel sheet that randomizes trade goods across all the city-states (including a way to determine how many gems and jewels are on the market!), adjusting their value according to the material given in *Dune Trader*. We’re working on making that ready for public release.

In the meantime, however, here’s the system we use to determine cargo price and availability, and to represent the hazards faced by caravans when they head out across the wastes. Our Excel sheet automates all of this but while we get it ready, we figured we might as well share the actual system itself.

If you’re playing a trader and you send goods off to another city-state, sometimes it’s fine to play that expedition out in real time. But sometimes that doesn’t work because the campaign is dealing with other issues, or the DM and other players don’t fancy spending a couple of sessions helping you ferry your latest shipment of Nibenese nose flutes to Balic.

This set of tables allows you to abstract much of what happens, determining cargo availability, and coming up with encounters, weather hazards, customs duties, and other problems your trade caravan may face. The systems used here work alongside the caravan sizes presented in *Dune Trader*, the troop types given in the *Dark Sun Rules Book*, and the encounter calculation method used in the *Journeys* system which I shared back during season one of *To Tame a Land* (look for a repost from Athas.org soon). This means that the hazards system here will interface smoothly with all existing *Dark Sun* rules, making it easy to customize this to your edition of choice.

To use this system, follow these steps:

- Decide on the caravan’s cargo using *Dune Trader* or other sources of trade goods. Higher-level traders may be able to acquire more goods – see **Cargo** below.
- Determine how well-defended the caravan is. Is it defended primarily by irregular, militia, medium, or heavy troops? See **Troops** below.
- Determine the **Caravan Size**: small, medium, or large.

- See **Table 3: Number of Events** to determine how many events the caravan will face, according to how long its journey lasts. Longer journeys bring greater risk.
- Roll on **Table 4: Event Types** to determine each event. Note that it’s possible to roll no hazard – the elements smile on you! Adjust cargo value or troop numbers accordingly or apply any other special conditions.
- **Profit!**

## Cargo

This stage involves buying whatever cargo you wish to send on the caravan. We’re reproducing the tables from *Dune Trader* here, but you can use another source to set the buying price if you prefer – ideally, you’d buy something that will sell for a higher price at the destination. See **Table I: Trade Goods** overleaf.

We’ve added a column to this table that lists Quantity. This allows you to randomly determine how much of a given cargo is available on the market at the start of any given expedition. The roll produces an amount of whatever unit the cargo is given in. So if you’re buying ale, it’s given in gallons and you roll IdI00 to see how many gallons of ale are available on the market. If you’re buying chalk, it’s given in pounds and you roll IdI000 to see how many pounds of chalk are available. For amber, roll IdI0 to see how many ounces are available, and so on.

Roll for random market fluctuation using the table from *Dune Trader*, which may change the letter code given on Table I. Here’s the table, for reference:

**TABLE 2: RANDOM MARKET FLUCTUATION**

DI00 Roll	Result
01-75	No change
76-90	Adjust price code by one letter (50% chance of either up or down)
91-98	Adjust price code by two letters (50% chance of either up or down)
99-00	Adjust price code by three letters (50% chance of either up or down)

Modify the amount and cost of cargo according to the letter code – as *Dune Trader* explains, the letter code affects price and availability:

# TRADING EXPEDITIONS

**TABLE 1: TRADE GOODS**

QUANTITY	ITEM	BASE COST	BALIC	DRAJ	GULG	NIBENAY	RAAM	TYR	URIK
Id100	Ale	2 bits/gal.	C	B	C	C	D	D	C
Id10	Amber	50 sp/oz.	C	B	D	B	C	D	C
*	Armor	*	B	C	C	D	B	D	B
Id100	Beer	5 bits/gal.	C	C	D	C	B	C	C
Id10	Bronze	5 gp/lb.	B	B	C	C	C	D	B
Id100	Candy	1 bit/lb.	C	C	B	B	D	D	C
Id1000	Ceramics	1 sp/100 pcs.	B	C	C	B	D	D	C
Id1000	Chalk	1 bit/lb.	C	B	B	C	D	D	D
Id100	Chitin	4 sp/lb.	C	B	B	D	C	C	B
Id100	Cider	8 cp/tun	B	C	D	C	B	C	C
Id10	Cinnabar	1 sp/oz.	B	C	D	B	C	C	D
Id1000	Cloth - Common (per 10 sq.yds.)	7 cp	C	C	D	C	C	B	B
Id100	Cloth - Fine (per 10 sq.yds.)	50 cp	B	D	B	C	C	C	C
Id100	Cloth - Rich (per 10 sq.yds.)	1 sp	C	D	B	B	D	C	D
*	Clothing	*	B	D	D	B	C	C	C
Id1000	Coal	3 cp/lb.	C	C	D	C	B	B	D
Id100	Copper	2 sp/lb.	B	B	B	D	C	D	B
Id100	Cosmetics	1 sp/oz.	B	C	C	C	D	D	D
Id1000	Cotton	2 cp/lb.	C	B	C	C	D	D	B
Id100	Crodru - Riding	10 sp each	C	B	C	C	C	C	C
Id10	Crodru - War	20 sp each	C	C	D	C	B	D	B
Id100	Dyes/Pigments	1 sp/oz.	C	B	D	C	D	C	B
Id100	Erdlu	10 cp each	C	B	B	D	C	D	C
Id10	Feathers - Rare	5 sp each	B	B	D	C	D	D	D
Id100	Feathers - Common	3 cp/100	C	B	D	C	C	D	D
Id100	Figs	1 bit/lb.	B	C	D	C	B	B	C
Id100	Fruit	2 bits/lb.	C	C	D	C	B	B	C
Id10	Furs	3 sp each	B	C	B	C	D	C	D
*	Gems	*	C	C	C	B	D	D	D
Id100	Glass	1 sp/lb.	B	C	B	C	C	D	C
Id10	Gold	50 gp/lb.	C	D	C	B	D	C	C
Id100	Hardwood	1 gp/lb.	C	B	D	D	C	D	B
Id100	Herbs	3 bits/lb.	D	C	C	C	B	B	D
Id100	Incense	2 sp/oz.	C	B	C	B	D	C	D
Id100	Inix	10 sp each	C	B	B	D	C	C	C
Id100	Ink	8 cp/oz.	C	B	B	C	C	D	D
Id10	Iron	1 gp/lb.	B	C	B	C	B	D	B
Id10	Jade	1 sp/lb.	C	C	B	C	C	D	C
*	Jewelry	*	C	B	C	C	D	D	C
Id100	Kanks - Trained	12 sp each	D	B	D	B	C	C	C

# TRADING EXPEDITIONS

QUANTITY	ITEM	BASE COST	BALIC	DRAJ	GULG	NIBENAY	RAAM	TYR	URIK
Id100	Kanks - Untrained	50 cp each	D	B	B	D	D	C	D
Id100	Kank Nectar	10 cp/lb.	D	D	B	C	B	B	C
Id1000	Leather	5 cp/sq.yd.	D	D	C	C	B	C	B
Id1000	Marble	2 sp/lb.	B	D	D	C	C	B	D
Id10	Medicines	5 sp/oz.	C	B	C	C	B	D	C
Id10	Mekillots	20 sp each	C	B	C	C	C	D	B
Id100	Mirrors	1 sp each	C	C	B	D	C	D	D
Id100	Nuts	3 cp/lb.	B	C	D	C	B	B	D
Id1000	Obsidian	5 cp/lb.	B	B	C	D	B	D	B
Id100	Oil - Flammable	2 sp/gal.	D	B	C	D	D	C	B
Id1000	Oil - Lamp	1 bit/gal.	C	D	C	B	C	C	C
Id1000	Oil - Cooking	8 bits/gal.	C	C	D	D	B	B	C
Id10	Paintings	10 sp each	C	C	C	B	C	D	D
Id100	Paper	2 sp 100 ct	B	B	C	C	D	C	C
Id100	Perfume	5 cp/oz.	B	C	C	B	C	D	D
Id1000	Resins	8 sp/oz.	C	D	C	C	C	B	D
Id1000	Rice	1 bit/lb.	C	B	C	D	B	B	C
Id1000	Rope - Hemp	1 cp/50 ft.	B	D	C	C	C	C	C
Id100	Rope - Silk	1 sp/50 ft.	B	D	D	B	C	D	C
Id100	Rugs	1 gp each	D	B	C	B	C	D	D
Id1000	Salt	2 bits/lb.	D	C	D	C	B	B	D
Id100	Silk, raw	4 sp/oz.	D	C	B	C	D	D	D
Id10	Silver	50 sp/lb.	D	C	B	C	D	C	B
**	Slaves	**	C	B	C	D	B	B	B
Id100	Songbirds	1 cp each	D	C	C	B	C	D	D
**	Spell books	**	C	B	C	D	C	C	B
**	Spell components	**	C	D	B	D	C	C	B
Id100	Spice - Exotic	15 cp/lb.	D	C	D	D	C	D	B
Id100	Spice - Rare	2 cp/lb.	C	C	D	D	B	C	B
Id100	Spice - Uncommon	1 cp/lb.	C	C	D	D	B	C	B
Id10	Statues	1 gp each	C	B	C	B	C	D	D
Id1000	Sugar	4 bits/lb.	C	C	D	C	B	B	D
Id1000	Tools	1 cp each	D	C	C	D	B	C	C
Id1000	Vegetables	2 bits/lb.	C	C	C	D	B	B	C
Id1000	Water	10 cp/tun	B	C	C	D	B	B	C
Id1000	Wax	7 bits/lb.	C	C	B	C	D	C	C
*	Weapons	*	C	D	B	D	B	C	B
Id100	Wine	2 sp/tun	B	C	D	C	B	B	D
Id1000	Wheat	1 cp/lb.	C	D	C	C	B	B	C

\* Cost varies - See PHB.    \*\* Cost varies greatly - DM sets price.

- A: Supply is very low. None of the cargo type is available for purchase.
- B: Supply is low. Half of the rolled amount is available for purchase. Price is twice listed cost.
- C: Supply is normal. The rolled amount is available for purchase. Price is the listed cost.
- D: Supply is high. Twice the rolled amount is available for purchase. Price is half the listed cost.

In our games, we also use a rule that higher-level traders can acquire more cargo than lower-level traders. They have the connections and reputations to source more goods. Multiply the available cargo by one third of the trader's level to determine how much a higher-level trader can acquire.

This allows there to be up to 10,000 pounds of each heavy cargo for the highest-level traders, which matches the maximum capacity of an argosy (15,000 lbs., when fully crewed). So at levels 1-3, there's no multiplier. At levels 4-6, it's double, at levels 7-9, it's triple etc., capping out at 10 times the base amount for a 30th level trader. Non-traders never receive a multiplier.

If you're renting space aboard a caravan owned by someone else (such as another trading house), you may have to pay a fee for this - 5% to 10% of your total cargo value is a normal fee.

## Troops

Caravans need defenders. The more well-defended your caravan is, the better it can deal with any hazards it may encounter. Troops are divided into three categories for the purpose of this system: **irregular** or **militia** troops, **medium** troops, and **heavy** troops.

These categories match the troop types given on page 50 of the *Dark Sun Rules Book* and on page 108 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* for AD&D 2nd Edition. If you're using another edition, determine which types of troops are being used to defend the caravan. When you hire troops to guard your caravan or act as scouts (or assign them from your followers), use this method to determine what category they fall under.

With mixed troop types, the largest number determines the overall category. So if you have 100 irregulars and only 30 medium troops, the overall defenders are categorized as irregular.

This, in turn, helps determine the overall caravan size.

## Caravan Sizes

The size of a caravan affects how vulnerable it is to hazards that may occur during the expedition. Larger caravans present more formidable targets and raiders fare more poorly against them.

Use the following categories to determine the size of your caravan:

### Small Caravan

1-6 cargo mounts  
1-20 guards  
1-12 scouts

### Medium Caravan

1-6 wagons  
21-40 guards  
13-24 scouts

### Large Caravan

1 or more argosies  
41 or more guards  
25 or more scouts  
(Large caravans also often carry additional troops)

A caravan must meet all of these criteria to be considered a certain size. So a caravan that has 80 guards but no argosies is still considered medium, for example.

These categories match the sample caravans given in *Dune Trader*, ensuring that this system supports existing *Dark Sun* material.

**Do not forget to buy enough food and water for all caravan staff and mounts!**

## Expedition Events

This is the heart of this system - a method to determine what actually happens to your caravan once it's out on the road. Determine how long the caravan's journey is by measuring it in miles or hexes on the 2e map of the Tablelands and check for the number of events on **Table 3** overleaf.

Miles are given for the 2e and 4e versions of the map - distances have been rounded off slightly for convenience.

## TRADING EXPEDITIONS

**TABLE 4: EVENT TYPES**

Roll	Category	Specific Hazard	Result
01-30	<b>NO HAZARD</b>	None	None
31-45	<b>RAIDERS</b>		
01-05		Dwarves	Lose 10% of troops and mounts, round down, or pay the raiders 10% of the cargo value
06-25		Elves	Lose 15% of troops and mounts, round down
26-30		Giants	Lose 30% of troops and mounts, round down
31-45		Gith	Lose 10% of troops and mounts, round down, or lose 5% of cargo by amount, determined randomly
46-50		Half-elves	Lose 10% of troops and mounts, round down, or lose 5% of cargo value
51-55		Half-giants	Lose 20% of troops and mounts, round down
56-60		Halflings	Lose 10% of troops and mounts, round down, or lose 10% of cargo by amount, determined randomly
61-75		Humans	Lose 15% of troops and mounts, round down, or lose 10% of cargo value
76-90		Thri-Kreen	Lose 25% of troops and mounts, round down (four balls of ranike sap reduces this by 10%)
91-00		Mixed Group	Lose 20% of troops and mounts, round down, or lose 20% of cargo value
46-75	<b>ADVERSE WEATHER</b>		
01-35		High Temperatures	Caravan forced to buy additional 20% of water rations
36-70		High Winds	Caravan slowed by 1d4+4 days, forced to buy additional 10% of food and water rations
71-00		Sandstorms	Caravan slowed by 2d4+4 days, forced to buy additional 20% of food and water rations
76-90	<b>BUSINESS RIVALS</b>		
01-20		Agreements	A trade agreement costs the caravan 2% of its cargo value
21-40		Threats	Threats from rivals cost the caravan 5% of its cargo value
41-55		Extortion	Blackmail costs the caravan 10% of its cargo value
56-70		Infiltration	Sabotage costs the caravan 10% of its cargo value and delays departure by 1d4+2 days
71-80		Kidnapping	Kidnap costs the caravan 20% of its cargo value
81-90		Murder	A high-ranking member of the caravan is assassinated
91-00		All-Out Assault	The entire caravan is lost due to a sustained attack by a rival house - begun the trade war has
91-00	<b>SORCERER-MONARCHS</b>		
01-35		Bribery	Pay 5% of the caravan's cargo value or be delayed by 3d4 days
36-65		Taxes	Pay 10% of the caravan's cargo or be delayed by 3d6 days
66-80		Smuggling	Lose 10% of the cargo by amount, determined randomly
80-00		Intent to Sell	Lose 20% of the cargo by amount, determined randomly

**TABLE 3: NUMBER OF EVENTS**

Journey Length (2e)	Journey Length (4e)	Journey Length (2e Hexes)	Number of Events
I to 75 miles	I to 170 miles	I to 15 hexes	1d2 events
76 to 200 miles	171 to 450 miles	16 to 40 hexes	1d2+1 events
201+ miles	451+ miles	41+ hexes	1d3+2 events

Once you have determined how many events can occur on the journey, roll on **Table 4: Event Types** to see what they are. You can use these events to spark narrative content for your game - see **Examples** at the end of this blog for ways to accomplish this.

Losses are given for **Medium** caravans. **Small** caravans double these amounts. **Large** caravans halve these amounts.

**Irregular** and **militia** defenders add 10% to losses. **Medium** troops decrease losses by 5%. **Heavy** troops decrease losses by 10%.

## Profit!

Once your caravan reaches its destination, you are ready to sell your goods. Roll again on Table 2: Random Market Fluctuation to see the state of the market in your destination. Apply the following modifiers:

- A: Demand is very high. Increase your sale price by 5 to 10x (1d6+4).
- B: Demand is high. Double your sale price.
- C: Demand is normal. Sale price is the listed value.
- D: Demand is low. Halve your sale price.

If you rented space aboard the caravan of another trader or trade house, they may require you to pay them a cut of your profits. Again, 5% to 10% would be a normal amount, as determined by your DM or through roleplaying.

## Examples

Here are some actual examples of this system being used from season I of *To Tame a Land*:

### Portek's First Caravan

Portek hires space on a fast House Wavir caravan from Tyr to Balic. He pays 10% of his cargo value to cover shipping costs. It's a long journey so there are 1d3+2 event rolls, resulting in 4 possible events.

The event rolls are 10%, 14%, 45%, and 97% - which is two "no hazards", one attack by raiders, and one encounter with the forces of the king.

The "raiders" roll produces an attack by thri-kreen and the "sorcerer-monarch" roll results in taxes, which means increased levies encountered on arrival in Balic.

So...

The caravan is attacked by a large kreen raiding party and 25% of all mounts and personnel are slain and eaten. No cargo is lost. Portek incurs no loss from the attack, however, because they weren't his troops - this is why he pays shipping charges.

On arrival in Balic, the templars of Andropinis levy extra charges on the caravan for all manner of spurious reasons. Bribes are paid alongside taxes and the losses shared - this is not covered under the shipping charges. Portek loses 10% of the value of his cargo from this, but his items can now be sold in Balic. If Portek was in control of the caravan, as opposed to renting space on it, he could refuse to pay the taxes and instead suffer a 3d6 day delay while the templars sit on his shipment.

### Kyrodias and Matthias' Caravan

Kyrodias and Matthias invest in a joint caravan to Nibenay. It's a long journey, with 1d3+2 events. The dice declare 3 events: 86% (infiltration), 57% (high temperatures), and 80% (trade agreement).

So...

While preparing the caravan for departure, Kyrodias and Matthias discover that its staff has been infiltrated by criminals from the Toothcutter Gang, apparently acting on the orders of Shivrin. The criminals attempt to sabotage the caravan, spoiling and stealing goods, costing 10% of the total cargo value. It takes five days to clean up the mess and sort things out, meaning that the caravan departs Tyr on 25th Fifthover. Kyrodias is able to settle the problem by making a trade agreement with Shivrin, but this costs an additional 2% of the overall cargo value.

The journey is uneventful, mainly because of the brutally high temperatures that beset the entire Tablelands. The caravan is forced to take on extra water supplies at Silver Spring, increasing expenditures on water by 20%. Nevertheless, the caravan makes it to Nibenay without any further problems, arriving on 25th Hexameron.

The return journey has 5 hazards, but three of the rolls are low (two rolls of 29% and one of 11%), meaning no events. The other two are 98% (taxes) and 89% (bribery).

Thus...

Turnaround in Nibenay is quick and the caravan is ready to depart on 2nd Morrow. However, the templars of the Shadow King impose hefty taxes (10% of the total cargo value for the return). Knowing that these are somewhat spurious, Kyrodias refuses to pay the taxes and the caravan sits and waits for 3d6 days before being cleared for departure.

The return journey to Tyr is completely without event. Arriving back in Tyr, however, sees the caravan hit with more taxes (5% of total cargo value) or be subject to another delay while Kyrodias deals with paperwork and whatnot. Kyrodias accepts the delay of 3d4 days and the caravan clears customs in Tyr on 16th Octavus.

Try this system out for your own Dark Sun games and let us know how it goes! And keep an eye out for our fully automated version soon!

• B R O M •

