

**DUNGEONS  
& DRAGONS**

**BILL  
SLAVICSEK**

Includes THE ABYSSAL PLAGUE Prelude, Part 2

THE MARK OF  
**NERATH**

# WOLF RUNNERS OF THE TRADE ROAD

AN ENCOUNTER BASED ON  
THE UPCOMING NOVEL  
*THE MARK OF NERATH*

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## SPOILER ALERT

This encounter draws on events and characters presented in the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® novel *The Mark of Nerath*. To that end, it replicates a scene from the novel, and the monster statistics blocks represent certain villains in the story. If you are reading or plan to read *The Mark of Nerath*, come back to this encounter after you have completed the novel so that you don't inadvertently ruin any surprises.

The encounter that follows re-creates a scene from my upcoming DUNGEONS & DRAGONS novel, *The Mark of Nerath*. Although the scene in the novel features the heroes of the story, you can also use it to form the basis of an encounter in your campaign.

In the novel, the wizard Albanon and the paladin Roghar are traveling east out of Fallcrest along the Trade Road when they find the path ahead blocked by nine unsavory figures and a pair of large, gray wolves. These are members of the infamous Wolf Runner bandit gang, including their leader, Sylish Kreed.

The scene, as it takes place in the novel, starts out in the favor of the Wolf Runners, since only two adventurers (who are around 5th level) and a pseudodragon oppose them. By the third round of combat or so, however, five more adventurers come to the aid of Albanon and Roghar. I've changed some details of the encounter to make it more suitable to run in the game, but the tone and the basic structure of the scene remain the same.

How will the encounter play out for your group of adventurers? Give it a try and find out!

## IMPORTANT NPCS

The Wolf Runners bandit gang plagues the eastern portion of the Nentir Vale. Especially vulnerable to the gang are travelers along the Trade Road, including merchants and farmers, who make tempting targets for the bandits. The legend of the Wolf Runners has grown in the time that the gang has been active in the area, and people as far away as Winterhaven and the Dragondown Coast have heard about the bandits and their wolves.

Sylish Kreed leads the Wolf Runners. He's a large man, with long, dark hair that he wears tied back. A wolfish grin brightens his rugged features, and it grows wider as the situation around him intensifies. A chainmail tunic protects him when he rides into battle, its links glowing faintly with the subtle hint of enchantment. Kreed approaches every raid with good humor and a certain politeness; he tries to be civil in his dealings with victims and prefers to leave them alive. He leaves them short of gold and goods, but alive—that way he can rob them again at a future date.

Despite his good-natured approach to his chosen profession, Kreed hates to lose. It happens so rarely that when the bandit leader does wind up on the losing end of a battle, his good mood darkens and he becomes sullen and even depressed. The only way for him to break the gloom is to get revenge on whoever beat him or engage in a new battle and win with style and overwhelming force. He won't forget the loss and continues to harbor a deep hatred for the person who got the better of him, but a victory or two puts him back into his usual calm and cheerful nature.

Two dire wolves serve as companions to the charismatic Kreed. He calls them Gray and Cloud, and they remain protectively nearby in case the large man has need of them. The dire wolves tolerate the rest of the bandit gang, but they treat Kreed as though he were the alpha male of their pack.

In addition to being the leader of the Wolf Runners and an exceptional warrior who handles a greatsword with ease, Kreed hides a dark secret from all but his most-trusted companions (which includes the Wolf Runners). A few years ago, before Kreed formed the bandit gang, he was bitten by a werewolf. Now, Kreed is a lycanthrope, able to shift between wolf, hybrid, and human form. Most of the time, the bandit leader maintains control of the affliction and can shift between forms as he sees fit. But for three days every month as the full moon rises, the curse overcomes him and Kreed gives in completely to the wolf inside him.

If any other lycanthropes serve as members of the Wolf Runners, their existence remains a mystery.

## ENCOUNTER BACKGROUND

Sylish Kreed and his Wolf Runners have plagued the eastern portion of the Nentir Vale for more than a year, and their reputation has become known far and wide. Travelers along the Trade Road from Fallcrest to Hammerfast are the bandit gang's usual prey, but the Wolf Runners have been known to raid settlements from Nenlast to the Harkenwold. They sometimes strike at travelers using the King's Road, as a change of pace, and they have been rumored to have attacked a merchant boat on the Nentir River at least once. Both Fallcrest and Hammerfast have sent out expeditions to drive off the bandits, but neither endeavor was successful.

Stories about the Wolf Runners fill the taverns throughout the Vale, and any adventurers in the area should have no trouble hearing about this dangerous gang and its charismatic leader. Although the Wolf Runners prefer to target merchant caravans, farmer's wagons, and lone travelers, they aren't above taking on a group of adventurers for fun and profit. Kreed enjoys the challenge, and just such an encounter might be what he needs to overcome the gloom of a recent loss.

Adventurers could be hired by the Lord Warden of Fallcrest or the Town Council of Hammerfast to find the Wolf Runners and drive them away. Or, after hearing wild tales about Sylish Kreed and his gang, the adventurers could wind up ambushed as they head out for their next quest. Either way, at some point the adventurers must face down Kreed and his gang on a lonely stretch of the Trade Road.

## ENCOUNTER: ON THE ROAD

**Encounter Level 9 (2,300 XP)**

### SETUP

**4 Wolf Runner archers** (A)

**4 Wolf Runner bandits** (B)

**2 dire wolves** (W)

**Sylish Kreed** (K)

You can use this encounter when your group of adventurers is returning to or leaving a village or town. It is set along the Trade Road, which runs between the settlements of Fallcrest and Hammerfast in the Nentir Vale. You can set it in any similar location in the campaign world of your choice. It works best as a higher-level threat, so consider running it for a group of 5th- or 6th-level adventurers.

The adventures start on the eastern edge of the road.

**As the adventurers crest a hill or round a bend in the road, they spot the bandits up ahead. Read:**

*Nine horses approach the road, pounding across the grassland from the south. Nine men and women, humans, wearing leather or hide armor, leap from the horses and spread out across the road ahead of you. One of the nine is larger than the others, standing almost a head taller than his companions, and possessing better equipment. While the others carry bows and short swords, the larger man wears chainmail armor, and a greatsword rests comfortably across his back. Two extremely large, gray wolves run alongside the larger man.*

**The large man is Sylish Kreed, and he speaks as his group approaches. Read:**

*"I am Sylish Kreed," calls the larger man. "Perhaps you've heard of me? I am the leader of this band." He gestures to each side as his companions nock arrows and draw swords from scabbards.*

*"The Trade Road ahead is temporarily closed," Kreed says, a wolfish smile upon his face. "Bandits, don't you know. I might be inclined to open it just for you . . . provided you can meet the price."*

### NEGOTIATIONS

If the adventurers are willing to pay his price, Sylish Kreed lets them go on their way. Sure, they'll be a little poorer for the experience, but no blood will have been spilled along the way. Kreed is a reasonable bandit—or at least he likes to think that he is. For the paltry sum of 400 gp each (2,000 gp for a party of five adventurers), Kreed wishes the adventurers well and sends them safely on their way.

If the adventurers try to negotiate, a short skill challenge might be in order. Use the notes under "Roleplaying Sylish Kreed" to give the bandit leader personality and to pepper the conversation as the adventurers try to work out a deal for safe passage.

**Level:** 9 (XP 800).

**Complexity:** 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures).

**Primary Skills:** Bluff, Diplomacy, History, Insight, Intimidate, Perception.

**Bluff (DC 25):** A character can attempt to fool Kreed in some manner, trying to fast-talk a way past him or convince him of an outrageous claim or outright lie to gain an advantage. Kreed is wily and observant, so this skill is one of the hardest to employ against him effectively. This skill can be used to gain 1 success in this challenge.

**Diplomacy (DC 17):** A character can attempt to negotiate with the bandit leader in good faith, trying to get him to lower his price for safe passage. Kreed loves to haggle, so this approach plays to his own sense of fun and enjoyment. This skill can be used to gain 2 successes in this challenge.

**History (DC 12):** A character can use his or her knowledge of Kreed and the Wolf Runners to play to the bandit leader's vanity and sense of ego. A success or failure with this skill doesn't count toward the completion of this challenge, but does reward either a +2 bonus or -2 penalty to skill checks made for the rest of the challenge. This skill can be attempted only once during the challenge.

**Insight (DC 17):** A character can use his or her sense of the situation to determine that Kreed would rather take the safe passage price than get into a battle and potentially be forced to kill the adventurers. He prefers not to spill blood if he can avoid it. A success or failure with this skill doesn't count toward the completion of this challenge, but does either decrease (with a success) or increase (with a failure) the final cost of safe passage by 100 gp. This skill can be attempted only once during the challenge.

**Intimidate (DC 25):** Sylish Kreed and the Wolf Runners don't scare easily. It takes a lot to rattle the bandit leader, and he doesn't take kindly to anyone who approaches an honest negotiation with lightly veiled threats and a hint of violence. This skill can be used to gain 1 success in this challenge.

**Perception (DC 17):** A character can attempt to read the tactics of the situation, noticing where the other bandits stand and how alert they are. This could provide the adventurers with a tactical advantage if negotiations fail and the encounter turns into a battle. On the other hand, a failure using this skill leads to a total misreading of the situation, granting the bandits a tactical advantage. A success or failure with this skill doesn't count toward the completion of this challenge, but it does provide the adventurers with either a +2 bonus or -2 penalty to their Initiative checks if and when combat breaks out.

**Success:** If the adventurers achieve 4 successes before 3 failures, Sylish Kreed reluctantly agrees to reduce his asking price for safe passage from 400 gp per character to 300 gp per character (plus or minus anything for the use of Insight in the challenge, above). The adventurers are a little less wealthy, but they can continue on without a fight if they so choose.

**Failure:** If the adventurers amass 3 failures, despite their best efforts at negotiations, Sylish Kreed loses his temper. "That's the thanks I get for being such a nice guy," Kreed complains as he draws his greatsword. "Wolf Runners! Attack!"

## TACTICS

Sylis Kreed and his dire wolves hang back as the battle begins. He issues orders and draws his greatsword, but he doesn't rush into combat without first evaluating the skills and determination of the adventurers.

The archers attack first, launching volleys of arrows at the adventurers. Remember to use *second shot* whenever an archer hits with a ranged attack. The archers attempt to stay at range, peppering the adventurers with arrows. They resort to clubs and daggers if they are engaged in melee.

The bandits attempt to keep the adventurers away from the archers, setting up flanks to use their *wolf runner's bite* bonuses. A bandit uses *dazing strike* at the first opportunity, falling back to *short sword* attacks afterward. If a bandit is at range from an enemy, he or she hurls a dagger before moving into close combat.

The dire wolves wait for Kreed's command, then they work together to protect Kreed from any targets that get too close. Kreed fights along with the dire wolves, working in tandem to set up flanks and take down opponents quickly.

Kreed stays in human form, fighting with his greatsword, until he becomes bloodied. Then he shifts into hybrid form and uses *claw* attacks and *bloodmoon* *fury*.

## ROLEPLAYING SYLISH KREED

Sylis Kreed can be charming, friendly, and likable as he goes about robbing victims blind. When victims fight back or threaten him, he can become angry and ferocious. If he's forced to draw steel, he reluctantly fights to kill.

Sample phrases for Kreed include the following:

"Believe me when I say this, but it would seriously upset this perfectly pleasant day I've been having if you force me to spill your blood all over the road."

"You're outnumbered and, in my humble opinion, outclassed. So pay the gold and we can both go back to whatever it was we were doing before we happened to meet on the road."

"I wish you would have just paid the fee. Ah well. No sense dwelling on things that will not be. Kill them, Wolf Runners. And be quick about it."

"I'm really going to hate killing you. Would you care to surrender and become members of my band?"

"Disperse, Wolf Runners! Meet up back at camp."

## DEVELOPMENT

Sylish Kreed and his band are polite and even kind of friendly—until the battle begins. Then they fight ferociously, attempting to take down the adventurers as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Kreed and the Wolf Runners cut and run if the bandit leader is bloodied and if a dire wolf is killed, or if four or more gang members go down.

If the adventurers do wind up beating or otherwise getting the best of Sylish Kreed, the group makes a formidable enemy for use in future adventures.

<b>4 Wolf Runner Archers (A)</b>	<b>Level 4 Artillery</b>
Medium natural humanoid, human	XP 175 each
<b>HP 44; Bloodied 22</b>	<b>Initiative +6</b>
<b>AC 16, Fortitude 15, Reflex 17, Will 15</b>	<b>Perception +3</b>
<b>Speed 6</b>	
TRAITS	
<b>Second Shot</b>	
The archer can make one extra ranged attack against a target that it hit with a ranged attack in the round.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬆ <b>Club</b> (weapon) ♦ <b>At-Will</b>	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d6 + 5 damage.	
⌘ <b>Dagger</b> (weapon) ♦ <b>At-Will</b>	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +11 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d4 + 5 damage.	
⬇ <b>Longbow</b> (weapon) ♦ <b>At-Will</b>	
Attack: Ranged 30 (one creature); +11 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 7 damage.	
<b>Skills</b> Stealth +11, Streetwise +7, Thievery +11	
<b>Str</b> 12 (+3)	<b>Dex</b> 18 (+6) <b>Wis</b> 12 (+3)
<b>Con</b> 14 (+4)	<b>Int</b> 10 (+2) <b>Cha</b> 11 (+2)
<b>Alignment</b> unaligned <b>Languages</b> Common	
<b>Equipment</b> leather armor, longbow, 12 arrows, club, 2 daggers	

<b>Sylish Kreed, Werewolf (K) Level 6 Elite Skirmisher</b>
Medium natural humanoid (shapechanger), human XP 500
<b>HP 144; Bloodied 72</b> <b>Initiative +8</b>
<b>AC 18, Fortitude 19, Reflex 18, Will 16</b> <b>Perception +10</b>
<b>Speed 6</b> (8 in wolf form) <b>Low-light vision</b>
<b>Saving Throws +2; Action Points 1</b>
TRAITS
<b>Regeneration</b>
The werewolf regains 5 hit points whenever it starts its turn and has at least 1 hit point. When the werewolf takes damage from a silvered weapon, its regeneration does not function on its next turn.
STANDARD ACTIONS
⬆ <b>Claw</b> ♦ <b>At-Will</b>
Requirement: The werewolf must be in wolf or hybrid form.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 3 damage, or 2d8 + 8 against a bloodied target, and the target falls prone.
⬆ <b>Bite</b> (disease) ♦ <b>At-Will</b>
Requirement: The werewolf must be in wolf or hybrid form.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 7 damage. At the end of the encounter, the target makes a saving throw. On a failure, the target contracts werewolf moon frenzy (stage 1).
⬆ <b>Greatsword</b> (weapon) ♦ <b>At-Will</b>
Requirement: The werewolf must be in human or hybrid form.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 4 damage.
⬇ <b>Bloodmoon Fury</b> (weapon) ♦ <b>At-Will</b>
Requirement: The werewolf must be in hybrid form.
Effect: The werewolf makes two claw attacks.
MINOR ACTIONS
<b>Change Shape</b> (polymorph) ♦ <b>At-Will</b>
Effect: The werewolf alters its physical form to appear as a Medium wolf, unique human, or hybrid.
<b>Skills</b> Bluff +10, Diplomacy +10, Intimidate +10
<b>Str</b> 18 (+7) <b>Dex</b> 16 (+6) <b>Wis</b> 14 (+5)
<b>Con</b> 16 (+6) <b>Int</b> 12 (+4) <b>Cha</b> 14 (+5)
<b>Alignment</b> unaligned <b>Languages</b> Common, Elven
<b>Equipment</b> greatsword, chainmail

<b>4 Wolf Runner Bandits (B)</b>	<b>Level 4 Skirmisher</b>
Medium natural humanoid, human	XP 175 each
<b>HP 53; Bloodied 26</b>	<b>Initiative +7</b>
<b>AC 18, Fortitude 16, Reflex 17, Will 15</b>	<b>Perception +2</b>
<b>Speed 6</b>	
TRAITS	
<b>Wolf Runner's Bite</b>	
The bandit deals 1d6 extra damage to any target granting combat advantage to it.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬆ <b>Short Sword</b> (weapon) ♦ <b>At-Will</b>	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 + 5 damage, and the bandit can shift 1 square.	
⌘ <b>Dagger</b> (weapon) ♦ <b>At-Will</b>	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d4 + 5 damage, and the bandit can shift 1 square.	
⬇ <b>Dazing Strike</b> (weapon) ♦ Recharge when the attack misses	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 + 6 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the bandit's next turn.	
Effect: The bandit can shift 1 square.	
<b>Skills</b> Stealth +10, Streetwise +8, Thievery +10	
<b>Str</b> 12 (+3)	<b>Dex</b> 17 (+5) <b>Wis</b> 11 (+2)
<b>Con</b> 13 (+3)	<b>Int</b> 10 (+2) <b>Cha</b> 12 (+3)
<b>Alignment</b> unaligned <b>Languages</b> Common	
<b>Equipment</b> hide armor, short sword, 4 daggers	

<b>2 Dire Wolves (W)</b>	<b>Level 5 Skirmisher</b>
Large natural beast (mount)	XP 200 each
<b>HP 67; Bloodied 33</b>	<b>Initiative +7</b>
<b>AC 19, Fortitude 18, Reflex 17, Will 16</b>	<b>Perception +9</b>
<b>Speed 8</b>	<b>Low-light vision</b>
<b>TRAITS</b>	
<b>Pack Harrier</b>	
The wolf gains combat advantage against any enemy that is adjacent to two or more of the wolf's allies.	
<b>Pack Harrier (mount)</b>	
The wolf's rider gains combat advantage against any enemy that is adjacent to one or more of the rider's allies other than the wolf.	
<b>STANDARD ACTIONS</b>	
⬇ <b>Bite</b> ♦ <b>At-Will</b>	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 4 damage, or 3d8 + 4 against a prone target.	
The target falls prone if the wolf has combat advantage against it.	
<b>Str 19 (+6)</b>	<b>Dex 16 (+5)</b>
<b>Con 19 (+6)</b>	<b>Int 5 (-1)</b>
<b>Wis 14 (+4)</b>	<b>Cha 11 (+2)</b>
<b>Alignment unaligned</b>	<b>Languages —</b>

## Werewolf Moon Frenzy Level 6 Disease

This disease starts with a fever, which soon becomes a violent and unpredictable rage.

Stage 0: The target recovers from the disease.

Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target takes a -2 penalty to Will.

Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, whenever the target becomes bloodied, it makes a melee basic attack as a free action against an ally adjacent to it.

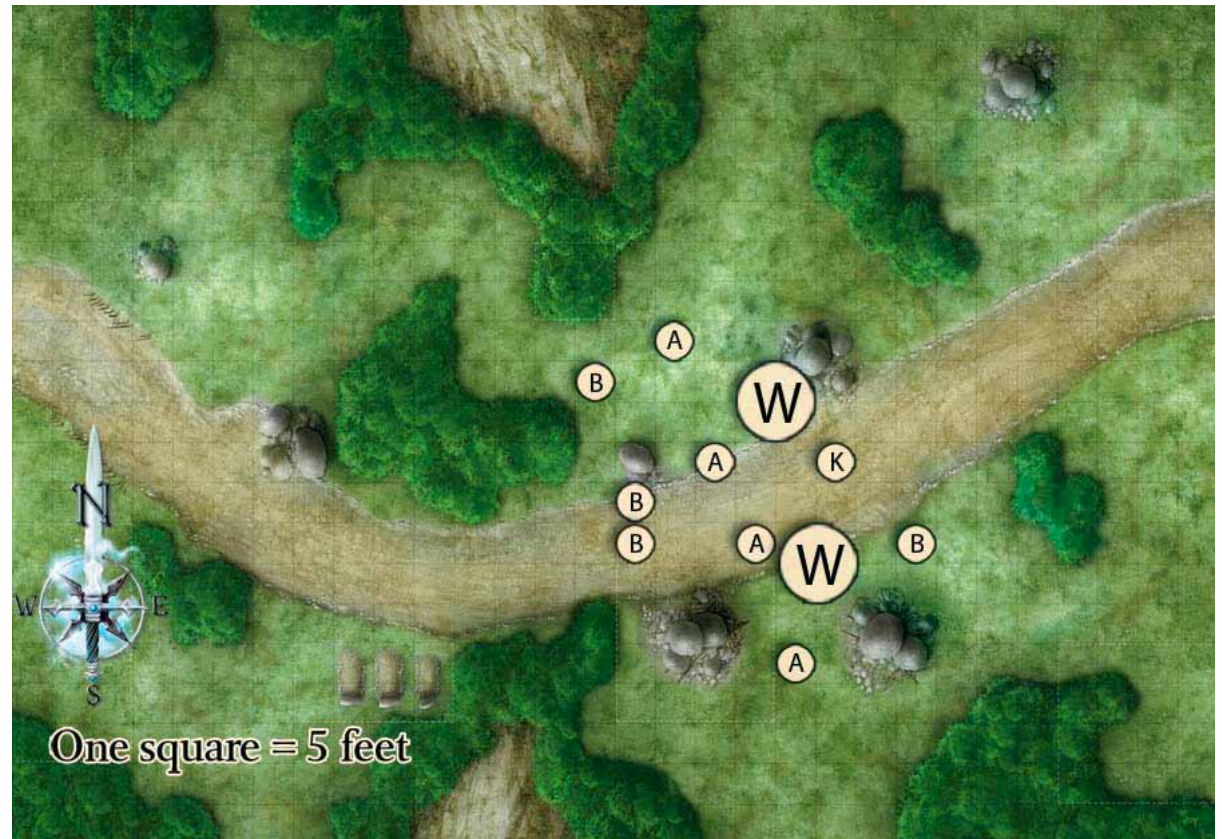
Stage 3: While affected by stage 3, whenever the target is hit by an attack, it makes a melee basic attack as a free action against an ally adjacent to it.

Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes an Endurance check if it is at stage 1 or 2.

10 or lower: The stage of the disease increases by 1.

11-14: No change.

15 or higher: The stage of the disease decreases by 1.



## FEATURES OF THE AREA

**Illumination:** Bright light (daylight).

**Boulders:** Scattered piles of rock sit along the side of the road. They provide concealment and cover for creatures hiding behind them. Otherwise, the boulders are blocking terrain.

**Road:** The road consists of compacted dirt, crushed rock, and loose bits of ancient cobblestone from the time of the Nerath empire.

**Trees and Foliage:** Thick growth surrounds the road in numerous places. These areas of thick growth provide concealment and are difficult terrain.

## About the Author

**Bill Slavicsek** is the R&D Director for DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® Games and Novels at Wizards of the Coast. He is the designer of numerous game products, including the *Castle Ravenloft* boardgame, and the author of the new DUNGEONS & DRAGONS novel, *The Mark of Nerath*.