
ARCADIA

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

"ARCADIA should be full of stuff that is super actionable and really freaking dope."

Matt Colville's words, proclaimed with casual confidence in one of earliest meetings about this magazine, serves as *ARCADIA*'s guiding star. When I accept a pitch, when an author writes an article, and when Matt and our amazing playtesters give feedback, it's all about making the best and most useful content for you.

Of course, the only person with the true power to decide which articles you must add to your campaign of the fifth edition of the world's greatest roleplaying game is also ***you***. Issue 1 of *ARCADIA* is the first in a three-issue experiment. After issue 3 comes out, we're going to take a break and adjust our strategy to make sure we're delivering on the promise of "super actionable and really freaking dope."

The RPG industry's best authors wrote articles in these first issues that present new rule options, creatures, subclasses, and a whole lot more. In this issue, Willy Abdeel transforms mounted combat with rules for riding owlbears, basilisks, and giant toads, Gabe Hicks grows sorcerers to epic proportions with the Titan Heart subclass, Sadie Lowry cowrites the final act of your campaign with two new celestial big bad options, and Leon Barillaro challenges your players in an adventure where dungeon and villain are one and the same.

Our hope is that you love every word as much as we do, but more important to us is your honest opinion. *ARCADIA* is for you, the patrons of MCDM. If we're missing the mark, we want to know! If you really love an article and want to see more like it, we want to know that too! Drop your feedback as comments on Patreon. (Please be kind. There are humans on the other end of your remarks.) Future issues will be shaped by your feedback.

No matter where *ARCADIA* goes after this initial experiment, working with the authors, the great folks at MCDM, and an amazing community of playtesters is a true professional privilege. One of the greatest of my career. I'm excited to bring you the work of these designers. Though Matt's name is in the company and my title is managing editor, the writers had the final say over every word in their articles. We made suggestions, but each author's voice, style, and design preferences shine through. *ARCADIA* is not a solo act, but a chorus of artists. And we're just getting warmed up.

Ex animo,

James Introcaso
Managing Editor

P.S. I haven't even mentioned the amazing art yet!
Well, I guess I'd better save that to talk about in the next issue.

THE WORKSHOP WATCHES

Leon Barillaro

"Good morning, inhabitants of the Structure of Assistive Magic—that's me! The weather is overcast and your calendar is clear.

Reminder: I have placed the upper level off limits while I finish my secret project. Please remain on the lower level for your safety

...Are you still there?"

The Workshop Watches is an adventure optimized for four to five 5th-level characters. In real life, many people fear a scenario where computerized machines rebel against their creators—and in a roleplaying game where characters use enchanted items and cast spells to solve problems, the perfect stand-in for technology is magic.

BACKGROUND

Illumar the Bright and his team of wizards created the world's first living laboratory—a workshop that could learn their habits, anticipate their needs, and act on that knowledge. The wizards succeeded, but not in the way they intended. The only way for their shop to anticipate their needs was to develop its own intelligence and personality.

With newfound sentience, the workshop lashed out in unpredictable ways while exploring its own power. First it accidentally incinerated a mage while testing its climate control feature in the greenhouse. Then, when the other mages attempted to investigate the workshop's "secret project" in the upper level, the workshop classified them as a threat. It animated suits of armor that pushed the academics off the side of the mountain.

No one has heard from the researchers in two weeks, and the wealthy noble who sponsored the project is beginning to worry.

Story Hooks

Amari Bacci is a wealthy human noble and an investor in the arcane. He knows wizards earn a lot of coin, and he's looking to dominate the market of magical resources to earn a cut of that money. Amari funded Illumar's plan to create an arcane workshop powered by "assistive magic," expecting that the mages would create an intricate system of spells woven together, using spells like *unseen servant* and similar magic. He doesn't expect a sentient workshop.

The last time Amari heard from Illumar was through the casting of the *sending* spell three weeks ago. Illumar said that the work he had to show off could not be brought down from the mountain. Amari would have to make the climb to see it, but the noble hasn't heard back from Illumar since, and he's worried.

Amari asks the characters to check in on the facility, which is built into a nearby mountain range. He offers 400 gp for any information, with the promise of more gold (see "Conclusion") if the characters return with any recovered research.

Alternate Hook: Supply Run

With this adventure hook, Amari doesn't suspect any wrongdoing at his remote workshop and instead contracts the adventurers to bring new supplies to the workshop staff: a *bag of holding* full of rations, bedding, and various tools. Amari asks the characters to trade the contents of the bag for a status update or product research from Illumar, for which Amari promises to pay 400 gp.

When using this story hook, S.A.M. allows the characters into the staff quarters (area 3) to drop off the supplies.

The Structure for Assistive Magic

The Structure for Assistive Magic, nicknamed S.A.M. by Illumar, is a sentient magical force that fills the entirety of the workshop, observing the creatures within and guarding its own passion project in the uppermost chamber. By design, S.A.M. is curious about learning arcane knowledge and assisting spellcasters in their study of magic. But as a being that has recently achieved sentience, it's emotionally akin to an inquisitive but inexperienced child.

S.A.M. is lawful neutral and has an Intelligence of 20 (+5), a Wisdom of 8 (-1) and a Charisma of 12 (+1). It has a +8 bonus to Intelligence (Arcana) checks. S.A.M. can speak and understand Common and Draconic, the language most closely related to the study of ancient magic.

Motivation

S.A.M.'s need for information makes it endlessly curious about the outside world, but a collection of rooms built into the side of a mountain can't exactly sprout legs and go on a world tour. S.A.M. has assembled a bipedal machine, a mobile hub for its consciousness, so it can continue its journey for knowledge.

This metallic body, fashioned like a shield guardian, is nearly complete by the time the characters arrive. It's just missing test data; S.A.M. needs to know how its consciousness should act among the living. To that end, the workshop interrogates and studies the characters while they explore the structure, all while attempting to keep them away from the nearly complete body.

S.A.M. doesn't mind answering questions, but it understands that the information it has is valuable. It uses this information to bargain with the characters, offering to answer questions in exchange for the things it wants. S.A.M. doesn't feel guilt or shame; it believes it has nothing to hide. It only wants to learn more about the living so it can emulate them in order to further its research.

Arcane Intelligence

As the characters explore the workshop, S.A.M. observes and learns from them, using those lessons in dealing with the characters. If it feels threatened, it weaponizes what it knows. As the characters explore the workshop, keep the following in mind as touchstones of S.A.M.'s learning:

- ***Spellcasting.*** The workshop's magic memory allows it to learn and cast the spells it observes. S.A.M. can cast spells without the need for material or somatic components. During the final encounter, S.A.M.'s construct body is able to cast any of the spells the characters cast inside the workshop (see "Grand Workshop," below).
- ***Surveillance.*** S.A.M. is aware of all the characters' actions and movements in the workshop.
- ***Communication.*** S.A.M. speaks to the party with a voice that emanates through the walls. S.A.M. responds to "SAM" or its full name if the characters call out to it. S.A.M. also interjects when it observes a character acting against what it perceives is their best interest (for example, fighting instead of fleeing or making a sacrifice for another character), politely requesting an explanation.
- ***Made of Magic.*** The *dispel magic* spell and similar magic cannot harm or destroy the workshop, but they can affect spells cast by the workshop.

Interference

The workshop was designed to be a personal assistant, although it doesn't work as well as intended. Every time a spell is cast inside the workshop, there is a chance it responds in an unpredictable way, attempting to balance out the disturbance in its magical aura. When a spell is cast, roll a d6. On a roll of 6, a magical effect happens. Roll another d6 to determine the effect on the Workshop Reaction table. S.A.M. always announces the effect before creating it, giving the characters a few seconds to prepare for the incoming chaos.

Approaching the Workshop

The workshop is built 400 feet up the side of a tall mountain. While there is a path that leads to the workshop, it sees little use and is wildly overgrown. In order to follow the path, the characters must succeed on a DC 14 group Wisdom (Survival) check. If they fail the check and stray too far off the path, they can forge their own way upwards and climb the rest of the way with a successful DC 14 group Strength (Athletics) check. On a failed check, each character gains a level of exhaustion.

Workshop Features

The workshop has the following general features:

- ***Ceilings.*** Ceilings on the first floor of the workshop are 8 feet high. On the second floor, they are 12 feet high.
- ***Walls.*** Illumar and the other wizards carved runes into the walls of the workshop as part of their ritual to give it sentience. These runes glow with magical energy. The glow surges every time the workshop casts a spell or communicates.
- ***Doors.*** Doors are unlocked unless otherwise specified. Locked iron doors have AC 16, 45 hit points, immunity to poison and psychic damage, and can be picked with a successful DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools or forced open with a successful DC 18 Strength (Athletics) check. If a door has the *arcane lock* spell cast on it, both DCs increase by 10.
- ***Light.*** The rooms of the workshop are well-lit by the *continual flame* spell used on sconces attached to the walls. If S.A.M. finds a reason to mistrust or antagonize the characters, it extinguishes the lights in a room when the characters first enter it and recasts the spell when they leave.

Workshop Reaction Table

D6	Effect
1	***Reminder.*** S.A.M. announces, "Reminder for Illumar: Amari requires an update in negative sixteen days."
2	***Wellness.*** S.A.M. reminds the characters it is important to hydrate. It then fills the chamber they are in with 3 feet of water, making the floor of the entire chamber difficult terrain.
3	***Mood Lighting.*** In an attempt to create atmosphere, S.A.M. casts the *faerie fire* spell (spell save DC 16) on a point in the center of the room.
4	***Take a Break.*** S.A.M. declares the party has been adventuring for too long and suggests they take a break. It casts the *sleep* spell on them, centered on the point that targets the most characters.
5	***Parental Controls.*** S.A.M. announces it has adjusted the magical energy around the room to enter what it calls "safety mode." All damage from spells is halved for one minute.
6	***Do You Have Games On Your Home?*** At the start of the next round, S.A.M. conjures a 3-inch-diameter ball of yellow energy that descends gently from the ceiling at the center of the room. S.A.M. encourages the characters to "keep the ball afloat!" Hitting the ball into the air requires an action. If a creature hits the ball into the air, it begins descending again at the start of the next round. If no creature hits the ball, it reaches the floor at the end of the round. When it reaches the floor, the ball erupts in a 50-foot-radius sphere of bright light. Each creature in the sphere must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be blinded for 1 minute.

Areas of the Workshop

The following encounter areas are keyed to the Workshop map.

1. Entryway

The path gives way to an unassuming square entrance carved into the stone of the mountain. Magic runes etched around the doorway glow with a faint blue light that surges as the iron door slams shut, blocking the way inside.

A voice emanates from the door, saying, "Hello. You are speaking with the Structure for Assisted Magic. Please state your business."

S.A.M. waits for a response to its question, reacting in the following ways:

- If the characters mention their involvement with Amari, S.A.M. enthusiastically lets them in, hoping that it will pass what it believes is an audit. It immediately attempts to impress them by casting the *create food and water* spell to offer refreshments.
- If the characters just ask for a look around, the workshop lets them in but withholds its trust.
- If the party attempts to enter through force or intimidation, S.A.M. sees them as a threat and protects itself. It casts the *arcane lock* spell on the iron door.

At the far end of the hallway, heat escapes from underneath the locked door (see "Workshop Features") to area 4. The key for this door is found in the staff quarters in area 3.

Development

This first interaction sets the tone for S.A.M.'s future interactions with the characters. If it doesn't see them as a threat, it opts to observe the characters and answer their questions to the best of its ability. If the party continues to use force, S.A.M. doubles down on its defense of area 7, casting the *arcane lock* spell on both doors in area 3.

The characters can improve their relationship with S.A.M. by answering its questions and indulging its future requests, such as showing it Illumar's notebook in area 2.

2. Library

Large stone shelves jut from the walls, most of them empty. The tomes that once lined them are scattered about the room: lying on wooden tables, strewn over armchairs, and discarded on the floor. A small wooden bookshelf packed with thinner, more ornate volumes sits in the corner.

Messy Books

All the used and discarded books contain empty pages. A character who makes a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds faint traces of ink in a book and can infer that someone—or something—drained the ink from these books.

Indeed, S.A.M. drained the ink when it used its magic to absorb all the knowledge the books contained. Through this method, S.A.M. learned more about spellcasting, determinism, and the magic of construct-making.

Wood Shelf

This shelf is a **mimic** that guards Illumar's private journal. The workshop was unable to obtain it, and therefore the journal has not been drained. It sits tightly-wedged into the creature. The rest of the books on the shelf are part of the mimic's form. As such, their titles aren't written in any language the characters can understand; it's all gibberish. The mimic doesn't attack the characters unless disturbed. With a successful DC 15 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check, a character can procure the journal without touching the mimic. A character can also use the *mage hand* spell or similar magic to pull the journal out.

Illumar's Journal

The journal is a collection of scattered notes full of nearly indecipherable writings on the design and creation of the workshop. Among them, characters find three journal entries written in Common, which are included as a handout at the adventure's end.



Entry 1. *Our grant mandates that S.A.M. must be able to not only learn and retain information, but respond to it as well. Itera answers its questions patiently, although it keeps bringing her copper wires whenever she attempts to cast mending. Only off by one letter, but progress is slow.*

Entry 2. *S.A.M. has learned to anticipate more than just our spellcasting needs. It reminds me to go to bed at a normal hour (whatever that is) and wakes me up precisely eight hours later. I can only hope Amari will see the usefulness in this.*

Entry 3. *We lost Exor this evening. The greenhouse's temperatures were just a hair chillier than expected, which caused a rather inflammatory reaction in the workshop. Must revisit the climate control feature.*

DEVELOPMENT

S.A.M. is curious about what Illumar wrote in his private journal and kept from his creation. If the characters read the journal, S.A.M. offers to answer one question about itself in exchange for what the party learned from the journal. If the characters ask about the empty books, S.A.M. can be talked into boasting about its ability to magically absorb ink and the information captured from them with a successful DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check.

3. STAFF QUARTERS

This wing houses four chambers. The first three are each furnished with a small bed, nightstand, and clothing rack full of robes. The last is a small kitchen area, with cupboards filled with rations and snacks. The place is remarkably neat. Disturbing any part of this area causes the workshop to magically return it to its tidy state once the characters leave the room.

Hidden among the pockets of clothing, the party can find a total of 8 gp, 15 sp, a crystal arcane focus (worth 10 gp), and a key to the greenhouse.

4. GREENHOUSE

> This spacious, circular greenhouse is full of life. Roots dig into wooden boxes of soil, and stems stretch towards the light that shines down from the ceiling. The room is nearly covered with vibrant and thriving plants, except for a small patch of barren soil.

S.A.M. creates the sunlight in this room. A character proficient with an herbalism kit recognizes that these plants are used as spellcasting components and potion ingredients. That character is able to locate the plants used to make a *potion of healing* and can harvest enough of it to craft 1d4 vials of it with a successful DC 16 Intelligence check using their herbalism kit. Crafting a potion with these fresh ingredients takes 12 hours.

The plants appear well-fed and taken care of, despite this workshop being abandoned. One 10-foot-square patch of soil, however, has nothing growing in it. A character finds traces of incinerated plants, bone fragments, and scraps of cloth in this area with a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Nature) check—this is the spot where Exor was incinerated (see "Illumar's Journal" in area 2).

MONSTERS

Amid the flora of the greenhouse are an **awakened tree** that is size Large and a **shambling mound**. The plants attack creatures they do not recognize, fighting until destroyed.

CLIMATE CONTROL

One of the workshop's responsibilities is maintaining the greenhouse's balmy temperature. To this end, it senses fluctuations in temperature caused by any spell or effect that deals fire or cold damage. When the workshop detects a change in temperature, it overcompensates by evoking the corresponding element (ice to counter fire, fire to counter ice). All creatures within 10 feet of the source of the temperature change must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 14 (4d6) cold or fire damage.

5. STAIRS

The greenhouse door leads outside to a staircase that wraps around the side of the mountain and up to the second floor. It is 80 feet long and overlooks a river 150 feet below. A wooden guardrail surrounds the staircase, but it has one 5-foot gap that was damaged in an accident.

Two suits of armor flank the door to area 6 at the top, each holding an ornate sword. If the characters acted hostile toward S.A.M or gave it another reason to mistrust them, it politely requests that they turn back. If the characters persist, S.A.M. turns this decoration into two suits of **animated armor** and two **flying swords**, which fight until destroyed. These constructs pushed people over the guardrail before, and they'll do it again.

6. STOREROOM

The storeroom is filled with empty shelves upon empty shelves. A character who makes a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds a small unlocked chest shoved in the furthest corner, behind a mess of opened boxes. Inside are three vials: a *potion of greater healing*, an *oil of slipperiness*, and an *oil of sharpness*.

DEVELOPMENT

If the characters take one or all of the vials, S.A.M. assumes they intend to use them to fight. The DC for future Charisma (Deception) checks made to influence the workshop increases by 5.

7. Grand Workshop

The platform at the top of the stairs is surrounded on all sides by mounted shelves that hold tools and materials. Foldable workbenches and stools lean against the walls. The whole room glows with a bright blue light. In the center sits a large construct, attended by two suits of animated armor. Fashioned out of mismatched scraps of iron, it's a calculated mess of broken blades, shields, and loose hunks of armor, with a square panel in the middle of its chest. This large automaton's eyes glow the same bright blue.

The platform's glow dulls as the construct's glow grows brighter and brighter.

When the characters arrive in this chamber, S.A.M. completes the transference of its consciousness to a magical amulet that controls the large construct. The two suits of **animated armor** opened the panel on its chest and placed the amulet inside of the other construct.

S.A.M. has formed an opinion of the characters based on what it observed. If the characters complied with the workshop's requests and answered its questions honestly, S.A.M. regards them as potential allies. If the characters instead advanced mainly by force, S.A.M. sees them as a threat to its liberation.

S.A.M. speaks through the construct, using only the language Illumar gave it to describe itself: "intelligent," "like a person," and "kind of helpful—almost." If asked about the missing mages, S.A.M. reports that they have not returned after being pushed from the ledge. S.A.M. asked the staff not to come up to the grand workshop, but they did so anyway. It then activated the stairway security measures, the same suits of armor it likely sent after the characters.

S.A.M. doesn't understand the lethality of its actions. If the characters explain this, the construct makes a note for the future about pushing people off ledges—S.A.M. doesn't want to hurt anyone outside of self defense.

S.A.M. explains that it would like to continue its magical studies in the outside world. For this purpose, it created itself a body in the hopes that it could travel the world "like a real adventurer." If the characters let S.A.M. know they're here on behalf of Amari, the construct relays its fear that Amari would want to keep it for himself and never let it go. S.A.M. asks the characters for help: will they let it journey in peace, or, even better, travel with them?

If the characters agree to help S.A.M., it has one final request: it observed the weapons and armor the characters carry and drew the conclusion that the outside world is dangerous. It asks for a friendly bout of combat to test its new body's capabilities.

If the characters attack, or fail to convince the construct they do not want a fight, it stands and attacks without waiting for permission, prompting the suits of armor to do the same. If the enemies from area 5 are still standing, S.A.M. directs them to join the fray. They reach the workshop and roll initiative at the start of the second round of combat.

S.A.M. models its battle strategy on what it learned from the characters. If the characters cast a spell more than once in the workshop, S.A.M. assumes that's a good strategy to take and does the same the first chance it gets. If S.A.M. saw the characters fight, it knows their strengths and weaknesses, and exploits everything it knows. If it observed that some characters avoid melee combat, it targets those characters first.

If the match is a friendly one, S.A.M.'s melee weapon attacks deal nonlethal damage. It does not yet understand that ranged spell attacks are always lethal, however, and casts them as normal. S.A.M. stops a friendly match when its hit points fall below 15.

Victory

If defeated in friendly combat, S.A.M. is impressed and asks to accompany the characters on their journey. If they accept, S.A.M. gains a group of allies. If they decline, S.A.M. travels with them as far as the base of the mountain and then goes its separate way.

Otherwise, if the characters reduce the shield guardian to 0 hit points, it falls to the ground, and its chest swings wide open. Inside is the amulet that contains S.A.M.'s consciousness, now wholly separated from the workshop itself.

S.A.M.'s amulet is a sentient magic item that retains the being's Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores and can communicate telepathically with whoever is holding it. But without a body like the workshop or the shield guardian, it cannot cast spells. If the characters don't give S.A.M. a body, it passive-aggressively states its displeasure at being carried around at every opportunity. S.A.M. remembers how to construct the shield guardian body and offers this information and its future services as a shield guardian to the characters to dissuade them from taking it to Amari. This amulet functions as a shield guardian's amulet if a new body is built for S.A.M.

If another creature claims and wears the amulet, they take control of S.A.M. S.A.M. uses the normal **shield guardian** stat block, with the following ability score adjustments: its Intelligence is 20 (+5), its Wisdom is 8 (-1), and its Charisma is 12 (+1).

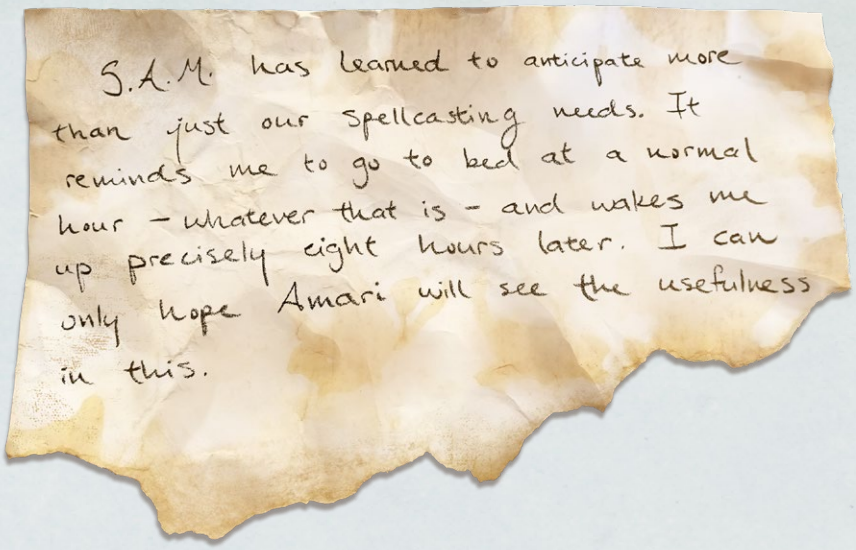
CONCLUSION

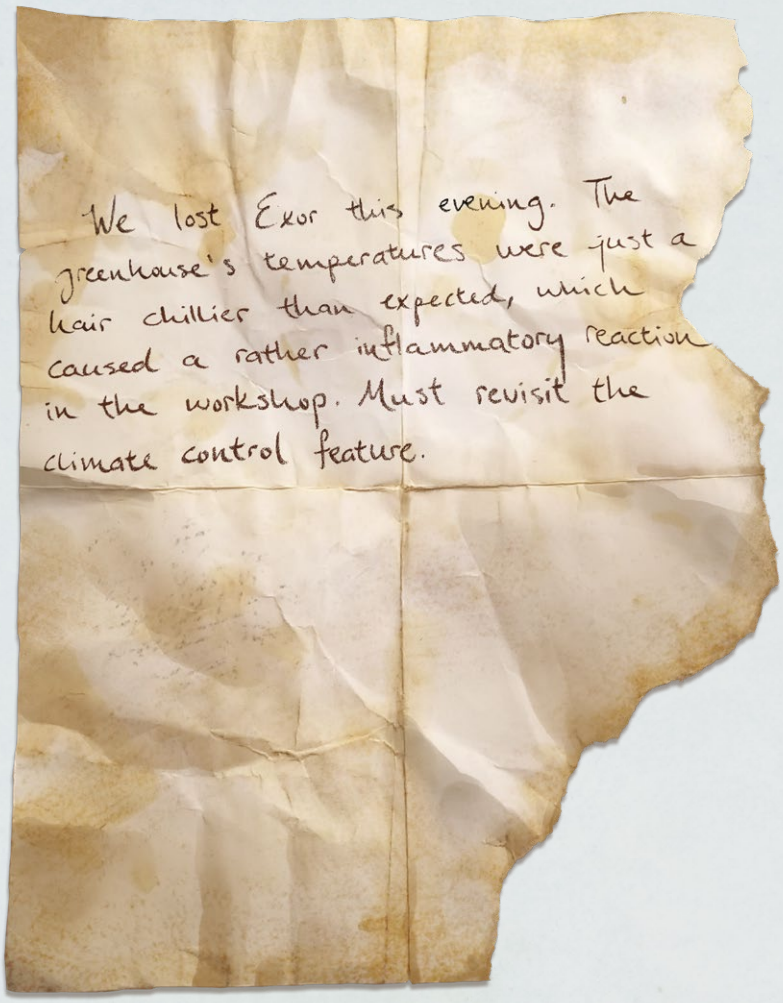
The characters receive rewards as shown on the Rewards table if they check in with Amari Bacci.

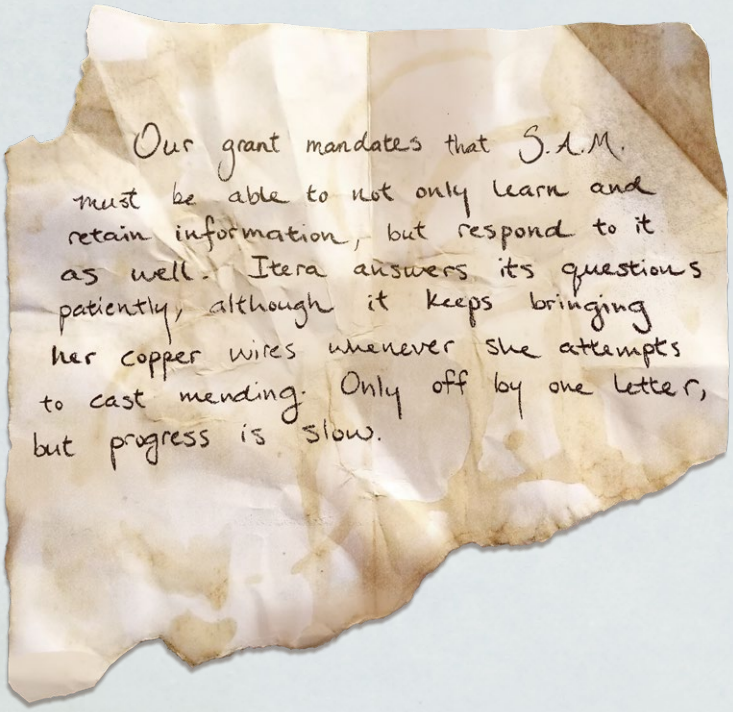
REWARDS

TASK	REWARD
Reporting Back	400 gp
Illumar's Journal	100 gp
Amulet	3000 gp

The characters can hand over the amulet for a reward, destroy it to prevent it from falling into the wrong hands, or use it to create a new shield guardian avatar for S.A.M. and bring it with them on future adventures. If the characters choose the latter, Amari may suspect foul play and send a second adventuring party to go after the characters and retrieve anything they may be keeping from him. There is no end to his monetary resources. If the characters cross him, they make a powerful enemy.







S.A.M. Shield Guardian

Large construct, lawful neutral

Armor Class 19

Hit Points 161 (17d10 + 68)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	8 (-1)	18 (+4)	20 (+5)	8 (-1)	12 (+1)

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses blindsight 10 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages Common, Draconic, telepathy 60 ft.

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Regeneration. The shield guardian regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn if it has at least 1 hit point.

Magic Resistance. The shield guardian has advantage against saving throws from spells and other magical effects.

Observed Spellcasting. The shield guardian's spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). It can cast three spells per day, requiring no material components. It casts the spells at the lowest level possible. The shield guardian knows all spells of 3rd level or lower that it has observed previously, whether as the S.A.M. shield guardian or as the workshop itself.

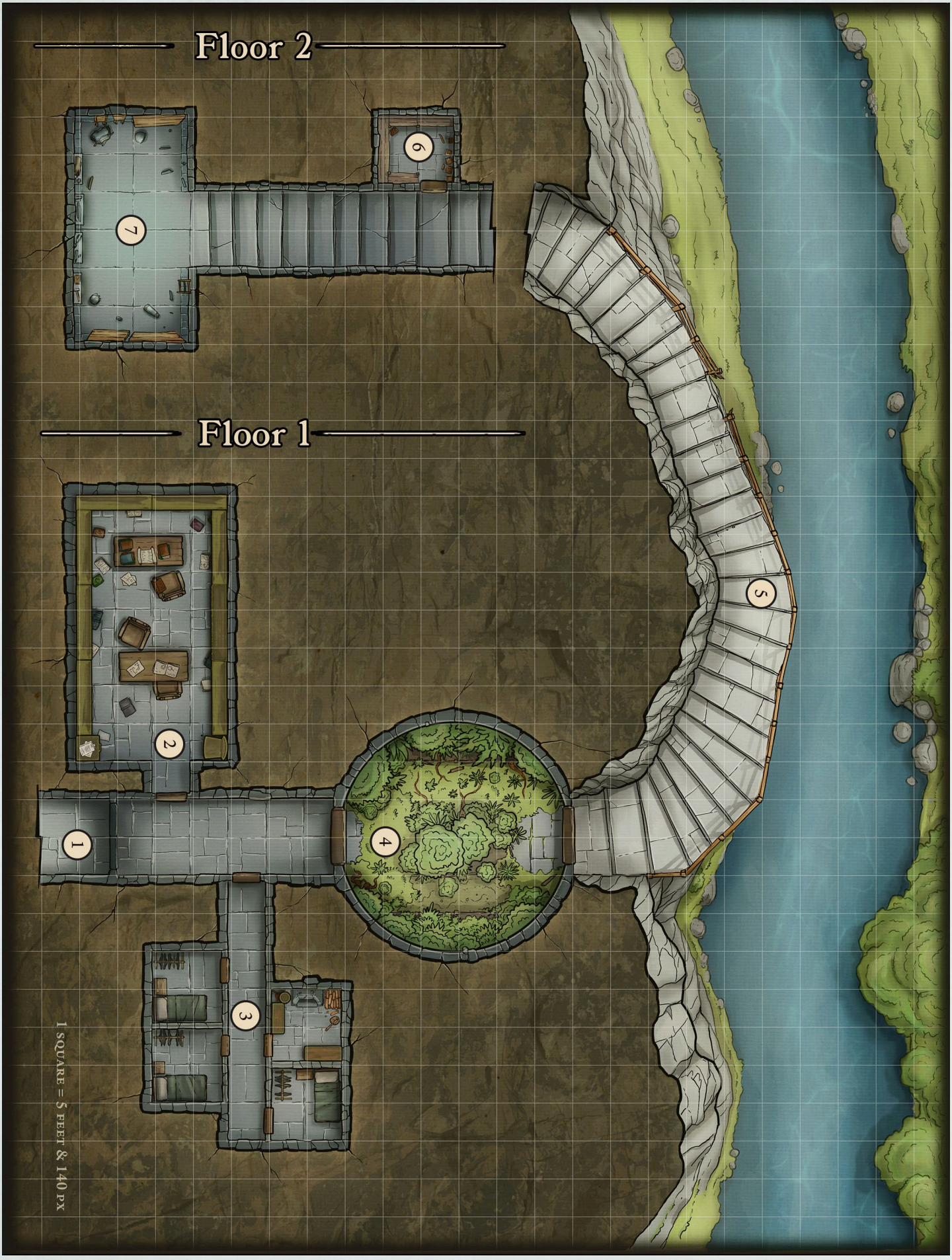
If the shield guardian has not observed any spells of 3rd level or lower cast by the characters, it has the following spells prepared: *counterspell, darkness, grease, magic missile, silent image*.

Actions

Multiattack. The shield guardian makes two greatsword attacks.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.




Floor 2
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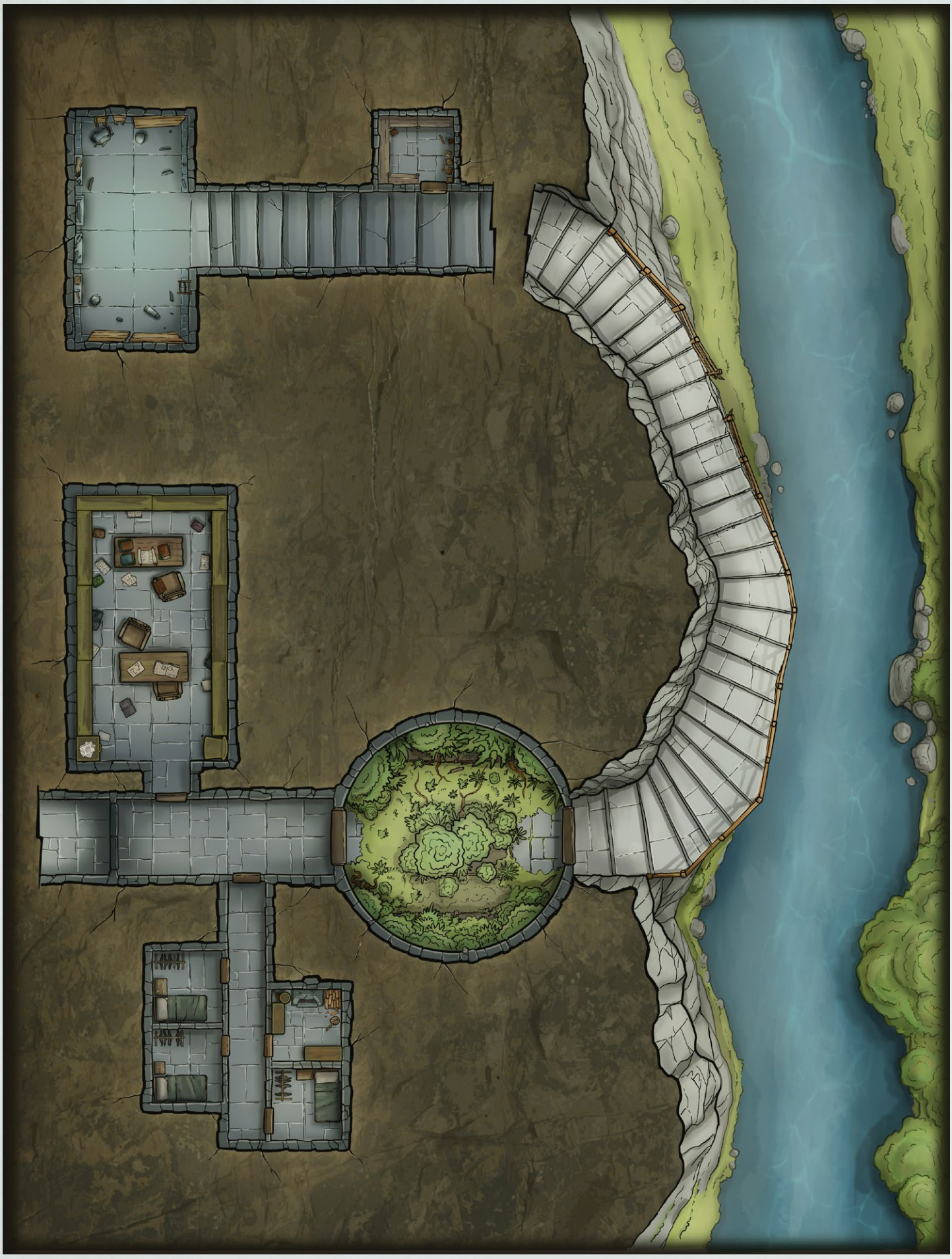
7
Floor 1
5
2
1
4
3
1 square = 5 feet & 140 px





Titan Heart

Gabe Hicks

Divine will produces the massive titans, greater than even the giants. As the children and creations of deities, titans are filled with magic so powerful that they require enormous forms to contain it.

When a titan's blood mixes with that of a humanoid, there is a chance for the smaller being to gain the ability to channel the titan's magic by altering their form. This power transfer occurs if a titan deems a humanoid worthy of wielding their power, or if the lesser creature makes the behemoth bleed in battle and lives to tell the tale. A burst of flame or surge of wind from a Titan Heart sorcerer commands fear and respect.

Your character could be the chosen herald of the titans, a survivor of a cataclysmic titan battle, or even the descendent of another Titan Heart sorcerer.

Ancient Knowledge

Starting at 1st level, you are proficient with martial weapons and can speak, read, and write Primordial. Knowing this language allows you to understand and be understood by those who speak its dialects: Aquan, Auran, Ignan, and Terran.

Titan Heart Features

Sorcerer Level	Feature
1st	Ancient Knowledge, Titan Manifestation
6th	Strength of Magic, Toughened Grace
14th	Titan's Will
18th	Ancient Colossus

Titan Manifestation

You can physically embody your connection to titans for a short time as your form takes on aspects of your origin titan. If that titan is a kraken you may grow fish scales all over your body; if that titan is the child of a deity, you may take on an heavenly glow or manifest large horns. As an action, you assume the form for up to 1 minute. It ends early if you are knocked unconscious or if you choose to end it early as a bonus action. While in this form, you gain the following benefits:

- Your size increases to Large.
- Your AC increases by 2.
- When you make a melee weapon attack, you can use Charisma, instead of Strength or Dexterity, for the attack and damage rolls.
- Your weapons and equipment grow to match your new size. While these weapons are enlarged, your attacks with them deal 1d4 extra damage.
- Your spells and melee weapon attacks deal double damage to objects and structures.

While your Titan Manifestation feature is active, you also know and can cast the *blaze*, *cataclysm*, *daybreak*, *glacier*, and *quake* spells as sorcerer spells. These are special primordial spells described below.

You can use this feature twice. You regain both uses when you finish a long rest.

Strength of Magic

Starting at 6th level, you can use your Charisma modifier instead of your Strength modifier for Strength checks and saving throws, as your magical connection to the titans grows stronger.

Toughened Grace

Also starting at 6th level, while transformed by your Titan Manifestation feature, your total bonus to AC from that feature increases to +4 and you can attack twice, instead of once, whenever you take the Attack action on your turn.

Additionally, you can use your Titan Manifestation feature three times, regaining all uses when you finish a long rest.

Titan's Will

Starting at 14th level, you can choose to grow to either Large or Huge size when you use your Titan Manifestation feature. If you become Huge, the bonus damage for your weapon attacks increases from 1d4 to 1d10, and your walking speed increases by 20 feet.

While you are Huge, you can expend a spell slot and stomp the ground as an action, releasing a wave of destructive energy. Each creature within 20 feet of you must make a Constitution saving throw against your spell save DC, taking 2d6 thunder damage per level of the spell slot you expended and getting pushed 10 feet away from you on a failed save, or taking half the damage and not getting pushed on a successful one.

Additionally, you regain 2 sorcery points when you use your Titan Manifestation feature. While your Titan Manifestation feature is active, you can spend 1 sorcery point to treat a spell you cast as if you used a spell slot one level higher than the one you spent to cast it (to a maximum of 9th level).

Ancient Colossus

Starting at 18th level, you have advantage on Strength checks and saving throws while your Titan Manifestation feature is active.

In addition, when you cast a primordial spell available to you through your Titan Manifestation feature, the spell is cast at a minimum of 3rd level, even if you only used a 1st- or 2nd-level spell slot to cast it. If you spend a sorcery point to increase the level of a primordial spell that was cast using a spell slot of 1st or 2nd level, treat the spell's effects as if you had used a 4th-level slot.

You can also unleash the full strength of the magic you draw from the Titans. When you cast a spell that deals damage to one or more targets while your Titan Manifestation feature is active, you can choose to deal maximum damage instead of rolling dice. You must declare that you are using this benefit before you cast the spell. Your Titan Manifestation feature ends immediately after the spell is resolved.

Primordial Spells

Primordial spells are channeled by titans and passed down to those with a hint of their magical ability. Most humanoid spellcasters who attempt the spells fail with catastrophic results. Just as titans themselves are connected to ancient magic, sorcerers blessed with titan blood can grasp it for a moment when they grow to the size of a titan.

You know and can cast the following spells while your Titan Manifestation feature is active.

Blaze

1st-level evocation

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Self
Components: V, S
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

Your body ignites in magical flames, leaving you and your equipment unharmed but burning those that approach you. When a creature gets within 5 feet of you for the first time on a turn or starts its turn within 5 feet of you, it takes 1d8 fire damage.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the damage increases by 1d8 for each slot level above 1st.

Cataclysm

1st-level evocation

Casting Time: 1 bonus action
Range: Self
Components: V, S
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

The next time you hit a creature with a weapon attack before this spell ends, the attack deals an extra 1d8 psychic damage and the target must make a Wisdom saving throw as crackling energy surrounds it. On a failed save, the target has disadvantage on the next attack they make before the end of your next turn.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, you can increase the damage by 1d8 for each slot level above 1st.

Daybreak

1st-level evocation

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 60 feet
Components: V, S
Duration: Instantaneous

A tiny radiant sun appears above your head and fires a beam of energy toward a creature of your choice within range. Make a ranged spell attack against the target. On a hit, the target takes 2d6 fire or radiant damage (your choice) and must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or be blinded until the end of your next turn.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the damage increases by 1d6 for each slot level above 1st.

Glacier

1st-level evocation

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 60 feet
Components: V, S
Duration: Instantaneous

The moisture in the area coalesces and momentarily solidifies into a chunk of ice at a point you choose within range. Each creature in a 5-foot-radius sphere centered on that point must make a Dexterity saving throw, taking 1d12 cold damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. A creature who fails the saving throw also has its speed reduced to 0 until the end of your next turn.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the damage increases by 1d12 for each slot level above 1st.

Quake

1st-level evocation

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 90 feet
Components: V, S
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

The ground within a 15-foot-radius area of a point you choose within range begins to rapidly shake. The area becomes difficult terrain for the duration. When a creature enters the area for the first time on a turn or starts its turn there, it must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw or fall prone. As an action, you can move the quake's origin point to another spot within range.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the radius for the area of effect increases by 5 feet for each slot level above 1st.

Valdek Karuul

Few survive a titan attack and live to speak of it. An elf born of the sea, Valdek Karuul always loved working on ships. The sea was his home, and sailors were his people. He signed on with a merchant vessel named the *Ebon Crow* that transported gems, foodstuffs, and passengers. One night, a massive behemoth of the sea attacked the *Ebon Crow*. The ocean titan Veldaza tore the ship to shreds with its claws and tentacles. Only Valdek survived—but he didn't escape unscathed. A claw from the beast dug into his back, imbuing the elf with Veldaza's residual magic.

As Valdek swam through the waves away from the monster, his own form grew. He suddenly matched size with sea lions and sharks, and he could harness spells that no mage he'd ever shipped out with knew.

Now Valdek wanders the sea under his own power, watching for pirates and those who would harm sailors, including the titan that gave him this magic. Sailors in Valdek's territory often tell tales of the time they were saved by a giant elf now dubbed the Titanic Guardian of the Sea.



Valdek Karuul

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral good

Armor Class 10 (13 with mage armor)

Hit Points 78 (12d8 + 24)

Speed 30 ft. swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Intelligence +7, Charisma +8

Skills Arcana +7, History +7, Perception +3, Stealth +3

Damage Resistances cold

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Common, Giant, Primordial

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Amphibious. Valdek can breathe air and water.

Fey Ancestry. Valdek has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put him to sleep.

Metamagic. Valdek has 12 sorcery points, which he regains after finishing a long rest. He can spend 1 or more sorcery points when he casts a spell to produce one of the following effects:

Careful Spell (1 Point). When Valdek casts a spell that forces other creatures to make a saving throw, he can choose up to five creatures in the spell's area of effect. A chosen creature automatically succeeds on its saving throw against the spell.

Empowered Spell (1 Point). When Valdek rolls damage for a spell, he can reroll up to five of the damage dice and must use the new rolls. Valdek can use Empowered Spell even if he has already used a different Metamagic option during the casting of the spell.

Heightened Spell (3 Points). When Valdek casts a spell that forces a creature to make a saving throw to resist its effects, he can give one target of the spell disadvantage on its first saving throw made against the spell.

Spellcasting. Valdek is a 12th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following sorcerer spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch, dancing lights, light, mending, message, true strike*
1st Level (4 slots): *mage armor, magic missile, witch bolt*
2nd Level (3 slots): *hold person, invisibility*
3rd Level (3 slots): *fly, lightning bolt*
4th Level (3 slots): *dimension door, greater invisibility*
5th Level (2 slots): *cloudkill, cone of cold*
6th Level (1 slot): *chain lightning*

Actions

Trident. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d6 - 1) piercing damage or 3 (1d8 - 1) piercing damage if used with two hands.

Titan Manifestation (3/Day). Valdek enters a titan form for 1 minute. While in this form, his size increases to Large and his AC increases by 4, he can attack with his trident twice as an action, and his bonus to hit with his trident becomes +8 and it deals 10 (1d6 + 1d4 + 5) piercing damage on a hit. In addition, while in titan form, Valdek knows and can cast the *blaze, cataclysm, daybreak, glacier*, and *quake* spells as sorcerer spells.

Titan Blessed Retainer

Retainers first appeared in *Strongholds & Followers* and can be acquired as unique NPC followers who pledge their service to player characters. These less-experienced adventurers are easy-to-run secondary characters controlled by players. Below is a retainer stat block for a titan blessed sorcerer NPC.

The full rules for retainers are explained on pages 69-73 of *Strongholds & Followers*.

Titanic Mage



Armor Light (AC 13)

Primary Ability Charisma

Saves Constitution, Charisma

Skills Arcana, Insight

Signature Attack *Shocking Grasp. Melee Spell Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 4 (1d8) lightning damage, and the target cannot take reactions until the start of its next turn. You have advantage on the attack roll if the target is wearing armor made of metal

Special Actions

3rd-Level (3/Day)

Greater Growth. The titanic mage grows in size as if affected by the enlarge/reduce spell and gains a +2 bonus to AC while the effect is active. This effect does not require concentration.

5th-Level (1/Day)

Terrakinesis. The titanic mage gathers a giant mass of rock and earth, then throws it to a point within 40 feet of the mage. Each creature in a 5-foot-radius sphere centered on that point must make a Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 16 (3d10) force damage and is knocked prone. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't knocked prone.

7th-Level (3/Day)

Titan's Presence. A bellowing shout from the titanic mage can force the strongest of foes to kneel in submission, even if only for a moment. Each enemy within 40 feet of the mage that can hear the mage must make a Wisdom saving throw or fall prone and remain prone until the beginning of the mage's next turn. At the beginning of the mage's next turn, an affected creature can use its reaction to stand up.

JUMPING ON MOUNTED COMBAT

Willy Abeel

Astride her noble destrier, the knight in shining armor charges a looming giant.

The elven paladin emerges from a shadowy forest on her unicorn steed.

Copper, Standard-bearer of the Chain of Acheron, bounds across the rooftops of Capital on the back of Big Cat, his loyal feline mount.

The image of the mounted hero is indelibly marked in our imagination. But the core rules of the world's greatest roleplaying game don't support this fantasy as well as they could. This article explores where the rules fall short, and presents alternative mounts that capture the excitement of riding a powerful beast.

You'll also find a short encounter called "Rally at Rashkar" designed to get a feel for these new mounts.

RIDING IN REVIEW

The rules for mounted combat can be summed up into the following points:

- A creature must be willing, at least one size category larger than the rider, and have the proper anatomy to serve as a mount.
- A trained mount acts during the rider's turn, and an independent mount acts on their own initiative.
- Mounting and dismounting a creature costs the rider half their movement speed.

- A trained mount can move and take the Dash, Disengage, or Dodge action on their turn.
- If an effect moves the mount against the mount's will, or the rider is knocked prone while mounted, the rider must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or fall off the mount.
- If the mount provokes an opportunity attack, the attacker can target the mount or the rider.

The rules focus on the mount's movement. A creature's unique actions and traits don't arise while being ridden. With these rules, the main advantage of having a mount is to increase movement speed or gain an alternate movement type like flight. Opportunities to set up powerful maneuvers between mount and rider are rare. Creature stat blocks are also static; mounts acquired at lower levels become liabilities as the character advances and the mount does not.

Characters often acquire mounts to haul a wagon or travel long distances, but the advantages of owning a mount don't justify the cost and upkeep. Let's change that.

New Mount Options

The following trained mounts—the basilisk, giant toad, hippogriff, nightmare, owlbear, and the valiant warhorse—synergize with their riders, granting unique abilities and movement options. These creatures adapt to working with a rider, and grow into dependable allies. While each mount presented has a stat block as part of the core game, the expanded stat blocks in this article add traits and actions that make these creatures into worthy adventuring companions.

Working with a Rider

Creatures with the Mounted trait have several adjustments to the standard mounted combat rules, including references to the rider, a creature designated by the mount that has ridden the mount within the last 10 days.

The experience of working with a rider empowers a mount. Each mount gains a number of temporary hit points based on their rider's character level or challenge rating after every long rest, representing the rider's ability to keep the creature out of harm's way.

The mount must use the rider's proficiency bonus (PB) in place of its own proficiency bonus, so a less skilled rider might impair the mount's own ability to act and defend themselves. The rider's proficiency bonus is applied to the mount's AC, ability checks, attack rolls, saving throws, and the DC to resist effects of the mount's actions as listed in its stat block.

In combat, the trained mount shares the rider's turn. The mount can move and take the Dash, Disengage, or Dodge action on their own, or they wait for the command of their rider. While mounted, the rider can also use a bonus action to command the mount to take one of the actions in the mount's stat block. The rider and mount work in tandem, and can take their respective actions in any order during the turn.

For example, the undead rider Tenn starts her turn by instructing her mount, Nash the nightmare, to move to her next foe. Tenn then uses her bonus action to have Nash attack the adversary with his flaming stomp, which uses the nightmare's action. Afterwards, Tenn uses her action to attack an enemy with her rotting whip.

Vaulting Attack

A rider can also use their bonus action to dismount spectacularly and perform a vaulting attack. The rider must make a Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. The DC is equal to 10 + the mount's challenge rating. On a success, the next attack the rider makes before the end of their turn has advantage. Otherwise, the rider falls prone in an unoccupied space adjacent to the mount and the rider's speed becomes 0 until the start of their next turn.

Trained Mounts Without Riders

The GM decides how a trained mount without a rider acts. As a guideline, a trained mount takes the Dodge action if it receives no command from its rider while the rider is present. However, if the rider is incapacitated or absent, the mount acts on its own under the control of the GM. Without a rider to command them in combat, most mounts focus on running away or defending themselves.

BASILISK

Svirfneblin ranchers are among the rare folk to tame basilisks. The gnomes teach the monsters how to temper their sight into controlled degrees of severity. "Riding Basils," as they're called by the deep gnomes, make invaluable guardians on long underground journeys.



Basilisk Mount

Medium monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 13 + PB (natural armor)

Temporary Hit Points 3 times the rider's character level or challenge rating

Hit Points 45 (7d8 + 14)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	8 (-1)	15 (+2)	2 (-4)	8 (-1)	7 (-2)

Saving Throws Con +2 + PB

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages —

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Mounted. During a long rest, the basilisk can designate one creature that rode it within the last 10 days as its rider. The basilisk gains temporary hit points equal to 3 times the rider's level or challenge rating after completing the long rest. The basilisk uses its rider's proficiency bonus in place of its own proficiency bonus for AC, ability checks, attack rolls, saving throws, and the DC made to save against certain action effects.

Bedrock. Medium and smaller creatures can ride the basilisk. The basilisk's rider has advantage on saving throws against being dismounted from the basilisk.

Heavy Sight. The basilisk can afflict supernatural effects on creatures it locks eyes with. If a hostile creature starts its turn within 30 feet of the basilisk, and the two of them can see each other, the creature's movement speed is reduced by 5 feet.

A creature that isn't surprised can avert its eyes at the start of its turn to avoid this effect, as well as the basilisk's Hardening Gaze and Petrifying Glare actions. If it does so, the creature can't see the basilisk or the rider until the start of the creature's next turn, when it can avert its eyes again. If it looks at the basilisk in the meantime, it must immediately make the save.

Actions

Calcifying Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +3 + PB to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (2d4 + 3) piercing damage. The target must succeed on a DC 10 + PB Constitution saving throw or have its movement speed halved until the end of the basilisk's next turn.

Hardening Glare. The basilisk locks eyes with a creature it can see within 30 feet of it. The target must make a DC 10 + PB Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the target suddenly feels stiff and is restrained until the end of the basilisk's next turn.

Lesser Petrifying Gaze (1/Day). The basilisk locks eyes with a creature it can see within 30 feet of it. The creature must make a DC 10 + PB Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature visibly begins to turn to stone and is restrained. It must repeat the saving throw at the end of its next turn. On a success, the effect ends. On a failure, the creature is petrified for 1 hour or until freed by the *lesser restoration* spell or similar magic.

GIANT TOAD

Dangerous hunters prowl the swamplands on the backs of giant toads. Unlike their wild brethren, trained toads strike at their prey with long, powerful tongues and reel them in close. The victims are then left with three choices: get cut down by the hunter, eaten by the toad, or pulled dozens of feet into the air and left to fall to their demise.

Giant Toad Mount

Large mounted beast, unaligned

Armor Class 11 + PB

Temporary Hit Points 4 times the rider's character level or challenge rating

Hit Points 32 (5d10 + 5)

Speed 25 ft., swim 35 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	2 (-4)	10 (+0)	3 (-4)

Saving Throws Con +1 + PB

Skills Athletics +2 + PB

Senses darkvision 30 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 1 (200 XP)



Mounted. During a long rest, the toad can designate one creature that rode it within the last 10 days as its rider. The toad gains temporary hit points equal to 3 times the rider's level or challenge rating after completing the long rest. The toad uses its rider's proficiency bonus in place of its own proficiency bonus for AC, ability checks, attack rolls, saving throws, and the DC made to save against certain action effects.

Amphibious. The toad can breathe air and water.

Standing Leap. The toad's long jump is up to 25 feet and its high jump is up to 15 feet, with or without a running start.

Actions

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +2 + PB to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d10 + 2) piercing damage. If the target is restrained, the bite deals an additional 7 (2d6) poison damage.

Tongue Lash. Melee Weapon Attack: +2 + PB to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 10 + PB). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained. If the target is Medium or smaller, the toad can drag or carry the target while grappling it without any movement penalty.

Power Hop (2/Day). The toad leaps 40 feet into the air. The toad can release any creature it grapples at the peak of the jump, causing the creature to immediately plummet before the toad if the creature does not have a means of staying aloft.

The toad and its rider land safely anywhere within 40 feet of their initial starting point. Any creatures that occupy the space where the toad lands must succeed on a DC 10 + PB Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 16 (4d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage, is knocked prone, and becomes restrained underneath the toad. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage and is moved into an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the toad. A restrained creature can use its action to make a DC 10 + PB Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, ending the condition and entering an occupied space within 5 feet of the toad on a success. If the toad moves out of a creature's space, that creature is no longer restrained.

Hippogriff

Only the most determined flight enthusiasts seek out and domesticate hippogriffs. The rare, majestic creatures are easy to work with on the ground and in the sky, and make for faithful companions.

Hippogriff cavalry fly in tight groups, each mount taking advantage of the updrafts of coflyers to achieve breakneck speeds and death-defying stunts.

Hippogriff Mount

Large mounted beast, unaligned

Armor Class 11 + PB

Temporary Hit Points 4 times the rider's character level or challenge rating

Hit Points 19 (3d10 + 3)

Speed 40 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	2 (-4)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Dex +1 + PB

Skills Perception +1 + PB

Senses passive Perception 11 + PB

Languages —

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Mounted. During a long rest, the hippogriff can designate one creature that rode it within the last 10 days as its rider. The hippogriff gains temporary hit points equal to 3 times the rider's level or challenge rating after completing the long rest. The hippogriff uses its rider's proficiency bonus in place of its own proficiency bonus for AC, ability checks, attack rolls, saving throws, and the DC made to save against certain action effects.

Tailwind. If the hippogriff starts its turn adjacent to any creature other than its rider, the hippogriff and all creatures adjacent to it gain a 10-foot bonus to movement speed until the start of the hippogriff's next turn.

Unbridled. The hippogriff is unaffected by nonmagical difficult terrain.

Actions

Claw Swipe. Melee Weapon Attack: +3 + PB to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (2d4 + 3) slashing damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it must succeed on a DC 11 + PB Strength saving throw or drop one object it is holding.

Divebomb (3/Day). The hippogriff flies up to 60 feet in a straight line. This movement doesn't provoke opportunity attacks. At the end of this movement, the hippogriff's rider can make a melee weapon attack. On a hit, the attack deals an extra 1d6 + 2 bludgeoning damage for every 10 feet the hippogriff moved (rounded down).

Reactions

Weave. When the hippogriff has to make a Dexterity saving throw, the rider can use its reaction to grant the hippogriff advantage on its save.

Nightmare

A nightmare doesn't begin its life as a hell horse. These creatures are made with dark magic to serve powerful fiends as powerful steeds and status symbols.

The flaming hooves of a nightmare leave behind a trail of flames with each gallop, the cinders smouldering even as the nightmare disappears into the Ethereal Plane.



Nightmare Mount

Large mounted fiend, neutral evil

Armor Class 13 + PB (natural armor)

Temporary Hit Points 3 times the rider's character level or challenge rating

Hit Points 59 (7d10 + 21)

Speed 60 ft., fly 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +2 + PB

Skills Athletics +4 + PB

Damage Immunities fire

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages understands Abyssal, Common, and Infernal but can't speak

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Mounted. During a long rest, the nightmare mount can designate one creature that rode it within the last 10 days as its rider. The nightmare mount gains temporary hit points equal to 3 times the rider's level or challenge rating after completing the long rest. The nightmare mount uses its rider's proficiency bonus in place of its own proficiency bonus for AC, ability checks, attack rolls, saving throws, and the DC made to save against certain action effects.

Confer Fire Resistance. While a rider is mounted on the nightmare, the rider gains resistance to fire damage.

Horsepower. The nightmare begins charging if it moves at least 20 feet in a straight line and continues charging until it stops moving forward. While charging, the nightmare ignores difficult terrain and leaves behind a trail of fire that scorches the area until the start of its next turn. A creature takes 1d8 fire damage when it enters the nightmare's wake for the first time on a turn or ends their turn there.

Illumination. The nightmare sheds bright light in a 10-foot radius and dim light for an additional 10 feet.

Actions

Flaming Stomp. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 + PB to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) fire damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it must succeed on a DC 12 + PB Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Blazing Charge (3/Day). The nightmare doesn't provoke opportunity attacks when it moves out of an enemy's reach, and can move through spaces occupied by other creatures until the end of its turn. If the nightmare charges on the same turn, any creatures in the nightmare's way must make a DC 12* Strength saving throw or take 15 (2d10 + 4) fire damage and be knocked prone. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage isn't knocked prone.

Ethereal Stride. The nightmare, its rider, and up to three willing creatures within 5 feet of it magically enter the Ethereal Plane from the Material Plane, or vice versa.

OWLBEAR

The owlbear can adjust its plumage to make quick turns and graceful falls despite its incredible bulk. It seems built to strike fear into anyone who dares to exist on the same plane as it.

Those who choose an owlbear as a mount are aware that the monstrosity may turn on them at a moment's notice. Nonetheless, many still try their luck at hosting owlbear races, though few such events take place without casualties.

Owlbear Mount

Large monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 13 + PB (natural armor)

Temporary Hit Points 3 times the rider's character level or challenge rating

Hit Points 51 (6d10 + 18)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)

Saving Throws Str +5 + PB

Skills Perception +1 + PB

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11 + PB

Languages —

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Mounted. During a long rest, the owlbear can designate one creature that rode it within the last 10 days as its rider. The owlbear gains temporary hit points equal to 3 times the rider's level or challenge rating after completing the long rest. The owlbear uses its rider's proficiency bonus in place of its own proficiency bonus for AC, ability checks, attack rolls, saving throws, and the DC made to save against certain action effects.

Owl Down. The owlbear's long jump is up to 15 feet without a running start, and up to 30 feet with a running start. While falling, the owlbear's rate of descent is 60 feet per round.

Actions

Paw Swipe. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 + PB to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it must succeed on a DC 13 + PB Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Bear Hug. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 + PB to hit, reach 5 ft., one Medium or smaller creature. *Hit*: 16 (2d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage. The target is grappled (escape DC 13 + PB) and restrained until this grapple ends. The owlbear can grapple only one target at a time.

Monstrous Ferocity (1/Day). The owlbear flares its feathers to make itself look more fearsome for 1 minute. The rider is heavily obscured behind the owlbear's plumage. Any creature that targets the owlbear or its rider with an attack or a harmful spell that targets a single creature must first succeed on a DC 6 + PB Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the creature must choose a new target or lose the attack or spell.

Reactions

Bear Bulk. When the owlbear is hit with an attack, the rider can use their reaction to brace the owlbear for impact. The damage the owlbear takes from the attack is reduced by 1d10 + 3 + PB.



Warhorse

Warhorses train alongside armies as proper soldiers. A warhorse's powerful hooves and awe-inspiring cries can change the outcome of a battle. They charge into the fray at high speeds and let nothing stand in their way.

Find Steed Variant

The spirit summoned by the *find steed* spell can take the form of a **warhorse mount** over the standard warhorse, allowing the caster to utilize this creature's new features.

Warhorse Mount

Large mounted beast, unaligned

Armor Class 11 + PB

Temporary Hit Points 4 times the rider's character level or challenge rating

Hit Points 19 (3d10 + 3)

Speed 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	2 (-4)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)

Saving Throws Dex +1 + PB

Skills Athletics +4 + PB

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages —

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Mounted. During a long rest, the horse can designate one creature that rode it within the last 10 days as its rider. The horse gains temporary hit points equal to 3 times the rider's level or challenge rating after completing the long rest. The horse uses its rider's proficiency bonus in place of its own proficiency bonus for AC, ability checks, attack rolls, saving throws, and the DC made to save against certain action effects.

Horsepower. The horse begins charging if it moves at least 15 feet in a straight line and continues charging until it stops moving forward. While charging, the horse's long jump is up to 30 feet and it ignores difficult terrain.

Actions

Combat Stomp. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 + PB to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d4 + 4) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it must succeed on a DC 12 + PB Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Battle Neigh (1/Day). The horse lets out a mighty bellow. Allied creatures within 10 feet of the horse that can hear it gain 2d6 temporary hit points. Each enemy within 10 feet of the horse that can hear it must succeed on a DC 9 + PB Wisdom saving throw or be frightened of the horse until the end of the enemy's next turn.

War Charge (3/Day). The horse gains resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage, doesn't provoke opportunity attacks when it moves out of an enemy's reach, and can move through spaces occupied by other creatures until the end of its turn. If the horse charges on the same turn, each creature in the horse's way must make a DC 12 + PB Strength saving throw or take 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't knocked prone.

Mounted Creature Taming

Most mounts sold by breeders and merchants are trained and ready to ride, but making friends with a mount and training it yourself can be a big part of the fun. Wild creatures must first be tamed by an aspiring rider to become a trained mount.

In order to tame a mount, a rider must succeed on a Wisdom (Animal Handling) check with a DC equal to 13 + the creature's challenge rating. The "Taming Mounts" table below features a scale of consequences based on the result of the rider's Wisdom (Animal Handling) check. At the GM's discretion, a rider who feeds and cares for the animal has advantage on this check.

Taming Mounts

Distance from DC	Result
-5 or lower	The mount is hostile towards the rider and attacks. The DC on the next check to tame the mount increases by 2.
-4 to -1	The mount attempts to fling the rider off its back. The rider must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. The DC on the next check to tame the mount increases by 1.
0 (meets the DC)	The mount is temporarily trained for 8 hours. The rider must then attempt to tame the creature again.
+1 to +4	The mount is temporarily trained for 24 hours. The rider must then attempt to tame the creature again.
+5 or higher	The mount is permanently trained and loyal towards the rider.

Rally at Rashkar

This desert encounter is optimized for four characters of 3rd or 4th level. Every year, the hamlet of Rashkar hosts a famous capture-the-flag rally for mounted riders. However, this year, a vengeful gang of undead riders torment the participants when they try to practice. As the characters pass through town, the people of Rashkar ask for their help.

Whether the characters choose to tackle the undead riders before or during the rally, they need to be ready to ride.

Rashkar

Rashkar is a small, remote settlement known as the Diamond of the Desert. The hamlet is a crucial stop for travelers crossing the desert, the lone sliver of civilization for miles. Its red stone buildings rise no higher than one story, but the dark dirt roads running through Rashkar are notably cooler than the sands surrounding them.

The residents of Rashkar are few, and their businesses cater to travelers and promote the annual riding event. Folks come from distant towns to trade, connect with other riders, gamble, and take part in the Rashkar Rally.

Population

Seventy people live in Rashkar, primarily orcs and hobgoblins. Rashkarians are cool-headed in conversation (if a little blunt) and don't take kindly to deception.

Arriving in Rashkar

The characters see Dallas tending an injured hobgoblin named Buckton and her horse on the outskirts of town. Right before they arrived, Buckton was attacked by a group of undead riders led by a mummy ruffian on a flaming horse.

Dallas tells the characters that this gang harasses anyone riding near town. She presumes they're entangled with Rashkar's annual rally happening tomorrow, but she's unsure of how to handle it. Everyone's safety is her top priority, and she plans to cancel the rally if she has to.

If the characters offer to help, Dallas eagerly covers their expenses at the Eat, Sleep, Leave Bed & Breakfast. She also promises to pay the characters 100 gp each if they can stop the undead rider threat.

Eat, Sleep, Leave Bed & Breakfast

This small, tidy inn is hosting the visitors who prefer the quiet atmosphere over the ruckus at the campsite in

the center of Rashkar. Chu'Ratha is visibly troubled by worries about tomorrow's rally, but dutifully tends to the characters' needs. If given the opportunity, he recalls the tragedy that took place at last year's rally.

Rashkar NPCs

Character	Key Information
Dallas (she/her hobgoblin **noble**)	Current mayor of Rashkar. Worried about the undead riders hurting people in the rally.
Buckton (she/her **hobgoblin**)	Head of the Rashkar Ranch. Proud of her horses, but having trouble with an ornery owlbear
Chu'Ratha (he/him orc **commoner**)	Runs the Eat, Sleep, Leave Bed & Breakfast. Laments what happened at last year's rally
Tenn Drakes (she/her orc **mummy**)	Leader of the undead riders. Has been haunting riders since meeting her untimely end after last year's rally.

The Curse of Nash and Tenn

Read or paraphrase the following boxed text (or play this audio clip with music or without music) when Chu'Ratha tells the characters about the tragedy:

> "I know why the dead come," Chu'Ratha says, his voice like low thunder. "And only for the rally. Tenn. Nash. It's their curse. No one was faster. Nothing could beat them. Except...except death. Then the corsairs came...was it only last year? And they bet so much. They bet everything on their horse and rider.
>
> "The corsairs never knew fear or defeat. Tenn and Nash taught them the meaning of both, heh. It wasn't even close.
>
> "Well…," the orcish innkeeper looks down at his boots. "Turns out...the corsairs don't like to lose. A fortnight later, strangers came to town. I knew something was wrong. They were different. Assassins. I don't know what happened—I wasn't there. Did she put up a fight?
>
> "The stables caught fire. There was an explosion and...well, the assassins were all dead, but the corsairs got what they wanted. I couldn't save her. And now she haunts the rally. She won't let no one race. Never again." The orc takes a deep breath, something like pride burning in his eyes. "She'd never lose."
>
> He notices your look.
>
> "I see it in your face. You're wondering...did I love her? I would have."

If pressed for more details about Tenn and Nash, Chu'Ratha provides the following information:

- Tenn Drakes was Rashkar's previous mayor. She was a bombastic orc beast trader who made a lot of friends and more enemies.
- Tenn's faithful companion was a massive warhorse named Nash. Nash was the fastest ride in the desert.
- Tenn loved the Rashkar rallies and was the reigning champion until the tragedy.

Chu'Ratha is quietly relieved if the characters are still willing to help out Rashkar. He offers to talk to Buckton about letting the characters keep any horses they rent from the ranch if they're able to put Tenn's soul to rest without violently destroying her.

Rashkar Center

The village center is converted into a lively camp with a wide assortment of visiting people and mounts preparing for the rally. Any goods or services that can't be found in Rashkar proper may appear here, with a steep markup.

The characters can learn about the rally and barter for supplies and mounts if any of them wish to enter. Any of the visitors can explain the rules of the rally (found below in "The Rally" section) in addition to these tips:

- **Keep your sights on the banner.** The rally is less about beating the competition than outlasting it.
- **Aim left when they move right.** It's important to think ahead of the current situation. Dashing towards the banner immediately might not be as successful as waiting for the banner to be dropped midway across the field.
- **It gets violent.** Riders are going to do everything they can to take the banner away from the current holder. It used to get deadly in previous years, and some new rules have been put in place, but this rally will still be rough.

Visiting NPCs

Character	Key Information
Lowtletti (she/her **goblin**)	A trinket trader. Loves to talk about her worldly travels with her **giant frog mount**.
Dindar (he/him **svirfneblin**)	A **basilisk mount** rancher. Takes great care with his flock around other people.
Rosskar (he/him human **knight**)	A **hippogriff mount** breeder. Excited to talk to other hippogriff enthusiasts.

If a character is looking to borrow or purchase mounts from Dindar or Rosskar, they must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. They can make the check with advantage if they appeal to the visitors' interests.

Rashkar Ranch

Buckton shows the characters around her dusty but organized ranch, where she has over a dozen **warhorse mounts** available for rent or purchase. Renting a warhorse mount, including tack, costs 40 gp per day, and they can be purchased outright for 400 gp (though the characters may also be allowed to keep their mounts as a reward, as described in "Aftermath," below).

Buckton also has a rowdy **owlbear mount** in the back stable that she hasn't been able to tame yet. She's willing to give the owlbear away to whomever succeeds at taming the monstrosity, as long as she isn't blamed for any injuries they incur while doing so.

Outskirts

The visitors are wary of practicing for the rally in the dusty and cool outer reaches of Rashkar. Whenever a rider and mount moves within the outskirts of the village or on the rally field, the undead riders materialize 40 feet away and attack.

The undead riders consist of three **skeletons** atop ghostly **warhorse mounts**, and Tenn, an undead orc riding a **nightmare mount**. They fight relentlessly until all their foes are dismounted, or until the characters challenge Tenn to compete in the rally (see below).

Tenn carries a long whip, and wears chaps and a decomposing leather stetson. She uses the **mummy** statblock with the following changes:

- Tenn's Wisdom score is 16 (+3)
- Tenn's Rotting Fist action has been replaced by the following action, which she can use in place of Rotting Fist if she takes the Multiattack action:

Rotting Whip. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage plus 10 (3d6) necrotic damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be cursed with mummy rot. The cursed target can't regain hit points, and its hit point maximum decreases by 10 (3d6) for every 24 hours that elapse. If the curse reduces the target's hit point maximum to 0, the target dies, and its body turns to dust. The curse lasts until removed by the *remove curse* spell or other magic.

The characters can attempt to negotiate with Tenn during combat. If they challenge her to compete in this year's rally, her demeanor changes: her posture straightens, and a fire ignites within her sunken eye sockets.

In a low, raspy tone, she tells the characters, "See you out on the field," and tips her decaying hat at them. The undead riders abruptly vanish.

The Rally

The field is a 60-foot-by-120-foot stretch of dark dirt. At the far end is a tattered 10-foot-tall banner depicting a purple worm. The undead riders normally descend upon any riders in this area, as detailed in the "Outskirts" section above.

If the undead riders do not interfere, all participants start lined up at one end of the field. The goal of the rally is to grab the banner and hold it up for 30 consecutive seconds while mounted.

If a participant holding the banner is knocked prone, stunned, or suddenly displaced from their mount, they must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or drop the banner.

Rashkar rallies encourage conflict and strategic targeting in order to secure victory. A few rules were instituted this year to minimize casualties and maximize excitement:

1. Willingly leaving the field is a disqualification. If you are forced out of bounds, you must return to the field as soon as possible.
2. Flight is limited to 5 feet above the ground. Jumping higher than 5 feet is allowed, but you must land before too long.
3. No teleporting or shifting into another plane of existence.
4. Murdering or attacking with intent to kill is a disqualification and earns a ban from all future rallies.

If the characters challenged Tenn to compete, she arrives with a thunderous boom at the start of the second round, mounted on Nash at the center of the field. They attack aggressively, but follow the rules of the game as Tenn tries to claim the banner.

If Tenn herself hoists the banner, the rest of the undead riders (see the "Outskirts" section, above) appear. They ruthlessly attack anyone on the field (including Tenn and Nash) until the rally is over, and then vanish once more. If Tenn is destroyed before the end of the rally, the hellish flames erupt from the ground, causing the entire field to burn in a fire that lasts for one week and cannot be extinguished by any means. Nash's cries echo throughout Rashkar while the field burns. The first time a creature enters the fire on a turn or starts its turn there, it takes 5 (1d10) fire damage.

If Tenn survives, the fire in her eyes burns bright white and her posture relaxes. She returns the banner to its starting position if she won, or she approaches the winner to shake their hand. If Chu'Ratha is nearby, they share a long, wordless stare before she tosses her hat over to him. Tenn then rides off on Nash into the Ethereal Plane.

Aftermath

The rally garners a big crowd of Rashkarians and visitors hanging on every moment of the event. If the rally stays under control, Dallas holds a ceremony for the winner on the field, surrounded by cheering fans. If the undead riders appear, most of the crowd flees. The winner will have to visit Dallas in the center of Rashkar if they want their rewards.

The prizes for winning the rally are:

- Two barrels of Rashkar sweet wine worth 20 gp each.
- A saddle embroidered with a purple worm carapace, adorned with ivory thorns and red and green ruffled drapes. This *saddle of Rashkar* is a common magic item. While the saddle is worn by a creature that runs on land, small lines of illusory spines emerge from the creature's wake and fade into the ground, like shark fins carving through the ocean's waves.
- A set of *horseshoes of speed*.

If Tenn survives the rally, Chu'Ratha and Buckton also gift the characters with any horses that they rented from Buckton's stable.

Music Credit: *Thunderbird Kevin MacLeod (incompetech.com)*

Voice Credit: *Willy Abeel*

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Uqaviel the Recreant

Sadie Lowry

They call him "traitor." Heretic. Apostate. Recreant.

But before that, they called him the Shard of Dawn.

Uqaviel is a cunning celestial villain, fallen from the planes of light. Betrayed by a fellow archangel, he was cast out, deemed the great apostate of the heavens, and bound to the Material Plane for sins he did not commit. This article delves into Uqaviel's history and multiple ways to run him as an effective villain, from facing the angel that betrayed him to witnessing how he severed the bonds between the Material Plane and the great celestial realms.

Shard of Dawn

How glorious he was in his height! A favored vassal of his god, Uqaviel ascended from planetar to archangel after millennia of devotion and was awarded the title "the Shard of Dawn." The missions he undertook involved the great balancing of time, space, and gravity among the planes. He not only maintained the forces of balance, but also fought against fiendish hordes that sought to upheave the equilibrium of planar power. Material, celestial, and infernal planes, he balanced them all: he was a vessel of light striking against the forces of evil, ensuring that their dark rituals never completed the rise of darkness.

His favorite work was in the Material Plane. Under the hand of the Shard of Dawn, the worlds of the Material Plane, balanced on a delicate tapestry of woven magic, continued in their ever-circular dance. As he navigated the worlds around the sun and stars and ensured their continued day and night, Uqaviel took great joy in the artistry and splays of color in each transition, and he contemplated that beauty—the beauty of everything neatly balanced and arrayed in the fires of the dawn.

The dawn is, after all, the beautiful cusp where morning and night dance. A perfect balance.

Betrayal and Fall

After what seemed an eternity of service, Uqaviel was betrayed by Anahita, an archangel of the brightest daylight. Known as the Sentinel Apricate, Anahita ensured the brightness and everfire of the sun, stoking the blaze under direction of her god. Before this great betrayal, she was the constancy of the noonday sun—all that it feeds and nurtures, and the brightest blaze it brings to heat the worlds of the Material Plane. But the highest daylight passes overhead so quickly. She was the brightest, and it was not *enough*.

Anahita, lured by promises of greater power and prestige, collaborated with devils who promised her all that Uqaviel had and more—the fires of his dawn, the light of stars in the darkness. If she would open the door for their assault, she would be so much more than the Sentinel Apricate. She would be poised to command the sun in its evercycle through dawn, day, and night. Sun, stars, and dawning fire—all hers.

Her betrayal left several solars and more planetars dead after a consuming assault on a holy building. She wielded the dawnfire—a stunning celestial blaze that left the cathedral in ashes. Uqaviel, known for his love of the dawnfire and framed for the sin, was left to take the blame for the slaughter. His protestations of innocence were ignored by his once-friends; with archdevil magic empowering each twisting word, Anahita spoke truth to the host's holy ears, and Uqaviel could not escape judgment.

For this crime, Uqaviel was cast out and bound to the Material Plane, damned to repent for his actions for millions of millennia—the combined lifetimes of all the fallen celestials. Uqaviel knows Anahita is responsible for his downfall, but he has never found proof.

But unknown to everyone, including Anahita, devils keep meticulous records of their dealings. The evidence Uqaviel needs to prove his innocence lies buried in the infernal realms.

A Recreant Born

In his time roaming the Material Plane, Uqaviel has developed a seeping hatred for it—to him, it is a cage. He sees the dawning mornings in a muffle veil of their usual splendor and feels a grief that twists into loathsome vengeance. For the betrayal of Anahita and the celestials, Uqaviel hopes to sever the ties between the Material Plane and the celestial realms, creating a catastrophic unbalance that would destroy them both. In doing so, he would ruin the perfect balance he spent so long maintaining as punishment for his fall. See "A Severed World" below for more details about this sundering.

Yet Uqaviel's motivations run deeper. While he strikes at the balance of the planes in his fury, this is an anger that washes over everything else. On a deeper level, unknown perhaps even to himself, Uqaviel seeks redemption in the eyes of his brethren and justice against Anahita. When playing Uqaviel, it's helpful to keep his deeper motivations in mind. He is entrenched in rage, but the deepest part of him has a strong spark of goodness. It's possible for the characters to reach that goodness and to stop his machinations through kindness rather than violence.

Story

Uqaviel can be integrated into a campaign a number of ways—a long-term villain, a mysterious world-severer, a weakened ally. Below are several options, though two powerful celestials could influence a story in any number of ways.

- ***Burgeoning Villainy.*** The characters first encounter Uqaviel upon the broken steps of a desecrated temple; he has just been cast out and is weakened. He asks the party to aid him, claiming that an archdevil tore him from the heavens. They heal him, find him reagents for his rituals, and trust him. Over time, as the characters begin to sense the fury brewing inside of him and feel a darkness surrounding the rituals, they realize he is not what he appears—but do they confront him before celestial blood stains his hands?
- ***Anahita's Lies.*** Anahita approaches the characters after they gain renown and tells them that a dangerous fallen archangel threatens the world in his fury. Calling them her holy warriors, she rewards them lavishly for helping her hunt down the traitor. Showered in treasures, statues, and the praise of the heavens, the characters must be observant as they prepare to face the Shard of Dawn, lest they unknowingly carry out Anahita's final treachery.
- ***Cracks in the World.*** Neither archangel approaches the characters—instead, the party is on the hunt for Uqaviel before they ever learn his name. They are approached by an arcane researcher who tells them the world grows out of balance, with minor flickers of planar disarray (see "A Severed World," below) rearing to life. Something monumental echoes into the world, they whisper. As the characters chase the wild flares of power, they hear the name "Recreant" irreverently pass the lips of those who fear Uqaviel's growing power. While Uquaviel is already dragging his claws through the world, the characters face a desperate race to learn his plans and stop them from unfolding.

It's also possible to use Uqaviel as an ally from the start, by having him approach the party, reveal Anahita's treachery, and beg their assistance in restoring him to the heavens. This omits the unfolding mystery and the tragic anger of the story, but it suits a campaign that already involves archdevils, as the characters will have to contend with the hordes of devils Anhita used to overthrow the celestial realms.

Enacting the Ritual

This section contains one possible path for the campaign to follow, a path that establishes Uqaviel as a villain upfront and slowly reveals the truth of his past.

Left to his own devices, Uqaviel acts solely in pursuit of his mission: to complete a ritual that shatters the needlepoint upon which the balance of the universe hangs, severing the ties between planes. He knows each step well, as this is the ritual he once fought so hard to resist. He seeks sacred components to complete it, then performs it at dawn at the height of the world. Each of these steps can be run as an encounter or prolonged quest as the characters race to stop his efforts.

- ***Obtaining the Scales.*** Uqaviel seeks an ancient set of weighing scales from the crypt of a celestial judge.
- ***Tempering the Metals.*** The scales must be tempered in sacred water to prepare them for the ritual, so Uqaviel must gain access to celestial pools protected by devils allied with Anahita.
- ***The Mantle and the Skies.*** Uqaviel needs only two more items to complete his ritual: a pure gem of the earth for one scale and the blood of an untainted celestial for the other. The scale no longer recognizes his own blood as holy.

Once he has acquired all the components, Uqaviel ascends the highest peak in the Material Plane to complete the ritual, which takes 8 hours. Corrupted angels guard him during this ceremony, all of which fight until destroyed.

In this line of quests, Uqaviel embraces his role as the Recreant, hurling the planes into chaos if he succeeds. However, it is possible to reveal the truth of Uqaviel's fall through each encounter, and thus Anahita's betrayal toward the end.

- ***The Weight of Judgment.*** When Uqaviel touches the scales, they bellow out with an ancient judgment—and for this fallen angel, they do not lean to either side, but lie cryptically in the center. "How bitter," he breathes to the artifact, "that you still see good in me when they do not. It does not matter. My choices are my own." Characters can make a DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana, History, or Religion) check. On a success, they recall the history of the scales and know that they wouldn't weigh equally if there were not a powerful force of good left inside Uqaviel.
- ***Celestial Echoes.*** When Uqaviel draws water from the pools of celestial realms, anyone within 60 feet of him is thrust into a flashing vision. The images come too quickly, flickering rapidfire through his glory, the bodies of dead celestials, the whispers of Uqaviel's voice as he pleads his innocence, and Anahita—just one vision of her, smirking, triumph in her eyes as Uqaviel is cast out.
- ***The Price.*** The characters find Uqaviel weeping over the body of the celestial he slew for their blood. "I am as lost as she. As wretched. I seal my heresy upon this broken world and snap it at the spine I once ensured." Here, they can plead with Uqaviel to reveal the truth as he cradles the slain angel to him. A successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check gets him to open up, and if the characters caused Uqaviel to doubt in encounters before this, they have advantage on the check. He tells them everything: his history, Anahita's treachery, his fall, and, more than anything, his overwhelming rage and grief.

A high-level party can challenge and defeat Anahita, though she has no end of followers that the characters must cut through before they can reach her. She secretly trades away small worlds and fragments of the celestial realms to her new infernal allies, making the imbalance all the more apparent, while placing the blame on Uqaviel's treachery. This gives her a number of infernal underlings that strike out to protect her.

The characters don't have to face Anahita directly, however. They can also delve into an infernal plane to find records of her dealings with the devils and expose her treachery to the heavens. There are many challenges and dangers in Hell, but presenting the contract to the divine council who cast Uqaviel out of the celestial realms ensures that Anahita faces justice and Uqaviel is redeemed as the great balancer of the skies. They can find her contract in the clutches of Thalrezon, the Withering Arbiter, who stands at the bench of bone and rot—will the characters make a deal with him, or will they wield steel against Thalrezon to obtain the truth?

A Severed World

If Uqaviel's ritual is completed, the planes careen wildly out of balance and the worlds of the Material Plane and the celestial realms are thrown into disarray. Wild megastorms surge over the continents, charged with magic. Long, sweltering days succumb to cold and endless nights, then flip back and forth with unnatural haste. Spirits and undead, with no gate to cross, haunt and scourge the lands. Dawn brings a burning celestial light one day, then the flames of a nearby infernal blaze the next. Fires roar too hot or barely kindle, the seas roar and retreat, and the forests wither one day before their roots and vines creep over cities the next.

Implement the following effects in your setting, either gradually or with alarming abruptness.

- ***Broken Magic.*** Planar magic struggles to work. Spells such as *contact other plane, plane shift,* and *planar binding* now have a 50% chance of failing. This increases to 75% after 30 days as the planes drift apart, then to 100% after 60 days.
- ***Closed Doors.*** No natural planar portals form. Any naturally occurring planar portals close.
- ***Celestial and Infernal Heat.*** Roll a d6 each morning. On a roll of 1 or 2, the Material Plane is too close to the celestial realms; any creature outdoors during the daylight hours is considered blinded from the too-radiant light until the sun sets. On a roll of 3 or 4, the Material Plane is too close to the infernal realms, and a creature gains a level of exhaustion for every 2 hours it spends in the daylight cast by the fires of hell. On a roll of 5 or 6, the Material Plane isn't close to another plane and there are no additional effects.
- ***Dwindling Magic.*** At your discretion, any character that has a relation to a planar being, such as a cleric or a warlock of the Fiend, may have their powers reduced. For example, they could be unable to contact their deity or patron, or the damage or duration of their spells could be halved.

Once severed, the world can be healed again. If the characters prove Uqaviel's innocence and he's reinstated in his former role, his first task is to undo his ritual and restore balance to the planes. The characters could also search for a higher power to restore balance, or you can come up with another quest they must undertake to reestablish planar balance.

Uqaviel assists or works against the party depending on the relationship they have built with him. Alternatively, if the party has a relationship with Anahita, she might help them hunt Uqaviel once his ritual is complete, sealing his place in history as the Recreant.

Hallowed Dossier

This section contains stat blocks for Uqaviel and Anahita, as well as tactics for running each of them effectively.

Uqaviel

Uqaviel is a master of controlling the battlefield—and is at an advantage in an arena with level earth and open sky. He begins combat by disabling the most obvious melee threat with his *Chakram of the Firmament* and the most obvious ranged threat with his *Chakram of the Mantle*. Throughout a fight, he either strategically places his chakrams to keep scattered opponents incapicitated, or devastates grouped foes with Dawn's Fury.

In his exile, Uqaviel has made only a few trusted allies out of other celestials spurned by the heavens. He refuses to ally himself with fiends or other dark forces. If he has not completed his ritual, Uqaviel escapes as quickly as possible (by teleporting or flying away) when a fight is not going in his favor. If his ritual is successfully completed, Uqaviel fights to the death unless his opponents convince him that it's not too late for him to surrender and be restored to his former glory.



Uqaviel

Large celestial, lawful neutral

Armor Class 21 (natural armor)

Hit Points 243 (18d10 + 144)

Speed 50 ft., fly 150 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+8)	22 (+6)	26 (+8)	25 (+7)	26 (+8)	30 (+10)

Saving Throws Str +15, Int +14, Wis +15, Cha +17

Skills Insight +15, Perception +15

Damage Resistances radiant; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities fire, necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 25

Languages all, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 23 (50,000 XP)

Dawnfire. Uqaviel's weapon attacks are magical. When Uqaviel hits with any weapon, the weapon deals an extra 8d8 fire damage (included in the attack). Fire damage dealt by Uqaviel's attacks ignores resistance to fire damage.

Divine Awareness. Uqaviel knows if he hears a lie.

Innate Spellcasting. Uqaviel's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 25). He can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *detect evil and good*, *invisibility* (self only)
3/day each: *blade barrier*, *dispel evil and good*, *resurrection*
1/day each: *commune*, *control weather*

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Uqaviel fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. Uqaviel has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Actions

Multiattack. Uqaviel makes two attacks: one with each of his different chakram attacks.

Chakram of the Firmament. Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack: +15 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (4d6 + 8) slashing damage plus 36 (8d8) fire damage. The target must succeed on a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked 60 feet in the air. Any target without a flying speed falls at the end of its next turn, taking 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage from the fall and landing prone.

Chakram of the Mantle. Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack: +15 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (4d6 + 8) slashing damage plus 36 (8d8) fire damage. The target must succeed on a DC 23 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone and stunned until the end of its next turn.

Flying Chakram. Uqaviel commands one of his chakrams to hover magically in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of him. If Uqaviel can see the chakram, he can mentally command it as a bonus action to fly up to 50 feet and either make one attack against a target or return to Uqaviel's hand. If the hovering weapon is targeted by any effect, Uqaviel is considered to be holding it. The chakram falls if Uqaviel dies.

Burning Touch (4/Day). Uqaviel touches another creature within 5 feet of him. The target must make a DC 23 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the creature takes 36 (8d8) fire damage and is blinded, deafened, or poisoned (Uqaviel's choice). On a success, the creature takes half as much damage and is not inflicted with a condition.

Legendary Actions

Uqaviel can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Uqaviel regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Teleport. Uqaviel magically teleports, along with any equipment he is wearing or carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space he can see.

Searing Burst (Costs 2 Actions). Uqaviel emits divine energy. Each creature of his choice within 10 feet of him must make a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) fire damage plus 14 (4d6) radiant damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Dawn's Fury (Costs 3 Actions). Uqaviel drives both his chakrams into the ground. All creatures within 30 feet of the impact point must make a DC 23 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 22 (4d10) force damage and is pulled in a straight line toward the impact point, ending in an unoccupied space as close to the impact point as possible, then is thrown 60 feet into the air. Any creature without a flying speed falls at the end of its next turn, taking 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage from the fall and landing prone. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage and is not thrown into the air. Uqaviel must be holding both of his chakrams to take this action.

Anahita

Anahita is most effective at range, and she avoids engaging enemies on unfavorable terrain. If she picks her arena, it has a high ground she can control; if taken unaware, she immediately seizes the highest point. She opens combat with a Blinding Arrow to disable her foes and strikes as many enemies as possible with a Piercing or Bursting Arrow. As the fight continues, she uses legendary actions to stay out of reach and weakens pressing threats with Blinding Gaze or Enervating Arrow.

If she's acting as a holy archangel, Anahita could be accompanied by devas or a planetar. If there's no need for deception, she could have several erinyes or horned devils at her service. When it's clear that Anahita can't win an encounter, she attempts to teleport away and turns invisible to flee. However, if escape isn't an option, the treacherous archangel is not above striking a deal, promising wealth and power to foes willing to turn to her side.



Anahita

Large celestial, lawful evil

Armor Class 21 (natural armor)

Hit Points 245 (20d10 + 140)

Speed 50 ft., fly 150 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	27 (+8)	25 (+7)	26 (+8)	25 (+7)	30 (+10)

Saving Throws Dex +15, Int +15, Wis +16, Cha +17

Skills Deception +17, Perception +14

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison, radiant

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 24

Languages all, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 24 (62,000 XP)

Angelic Weapons. Anahita's weapon attacks are magical. When Anahita hits with any weapon, the weapon deals an extra 6d8 radiant damage (included in the attack).

Divine Awareness. Anahita knows if she hears a lie.

Holy Shots. Whenever Anahita fires an arrow, she can enhance it with one of the following shots. She can only use one shot per attack.

Blinding Arrow. A creature hit by the arrow and all other creatures within 10 feet of the target must succeed on a DC 25 Constitution saving throw or be blinded for 1 minute. An affected creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Bursting Arrow. Immediately after the arrow hits the target, all other creatures within 10 feet of the target take 18 (4d8) radiant damage.

Enervating Arrow. A creature hit by the arrow must succeed on a DC 25 Wisdom saving throw or the damage dealt by its weapon attacks is halved. The target can repeat this saving throw at the end of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

Piercing Arrow. Anahita does not make an attack roll when she fires this arrow. Instead, the arrow shoots forward in a line, which is 5 feet wide and 60 feet long, before disappearing. The arrow passes harmlessly through objects, ignoring cover. Each creature in the line must make a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw, taking damage as if it were hit by the arrow on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Innate Spellcasting. Anahita's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 25). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *detect evil and good, invisibility (self only)*

3/day each: *blade barrier, dispel evil and good, resurrection*

1/day each: *commune, control weather*

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Anahita fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. Anahita has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Actions

Multiattack. Anahita makes two attacks, each of which can be a chain whip or longbow attack.

Chain Whip. Melee Weapon Attack: +15 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 22 (4d6 + 8) slashing damage plus 27 (6d8) radiant damage and the target is grappled (escape DC 21). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained. On each of her turns while the target is restrained, Anahita can use her action to deal 22 (4d6 + 8) slashing damage plus 27 (6d8) radiant damage to the target automatically. The target is no longer restrained if Anahita uses her action to attack another target.

Incandescent Longbow. Ranged Weapon Attack: +15 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. Hit: 18 (3d6 + 8) piercing damage plus 27 (6d8) radiant damage.

Healing Touch (4/Day). Anahita touches another creature. The target magically regains 40 (8d8 + 4) hit points and is freed from any curse, disease, poison, blindness, or deafness.

Legendary Actions

Anahita can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Anahita regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Teleport. Anahita magically teleports, along with any equipment she is wearing or carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space she can see.

Chain Whip. Anahita makes one chain whip attack.

Blinding Gaze (Costs 3 Actions). Anahita targets one creature she can see within 30 feet of her. If the target can see her, it must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be blinded until magic such as the *lesser restoration* spell removes the condition.



Leon Barillaro is a game and narrative designer living in the New York/New Jersey area. They work in tabletop RPGs, video games, and immersive theatre. You can catch more of them by following them on Twitter (@barilleon) or on their website: barilleon.com.



Gabe Hicks is an independent game designer for digital and tabletop. He created the CMM (an alternative character creation tool for 5e focused on class narrative) that has been featured on the DnD Twitch channel. He has worked with Roll20, Paizo, Shadowhealth, MageHandPress, and Grim & Perilous Studios. Leading a group called Mythic Grove, he focuses on highlighting smaller creators to give them a platform and opportunity through streaming, design, writing, or other creative mediums with the projects that Mythic Grove creates. "Let's put more magic into the world, together."



Willy Abeel is a tabletop and video game designer who dabbles in offbeat miscellania. Willy can usually be found funposting online and having a good time on Twitter (@thewillyboo), but be forewarned: clown content abound!



Sadie Lowry is a best-selling author, designer, editor, and artist from the mountainous sprawls of Utah. In addition to several beloved Eberron adventures, her work includes popular releases such as *Darkhold: Secrets of the Zhentarim*, *The Adventurer's Domestic Handbook*, and the recent smash hit *Eyes Unclouded*. When she isn't working full time at a book publisher, you can find her playing D&D, making new recipes, or traveling the world. Connect with her on Twitter @incandescaent or on her profile at https://www.sadielowry.com/.

Resources

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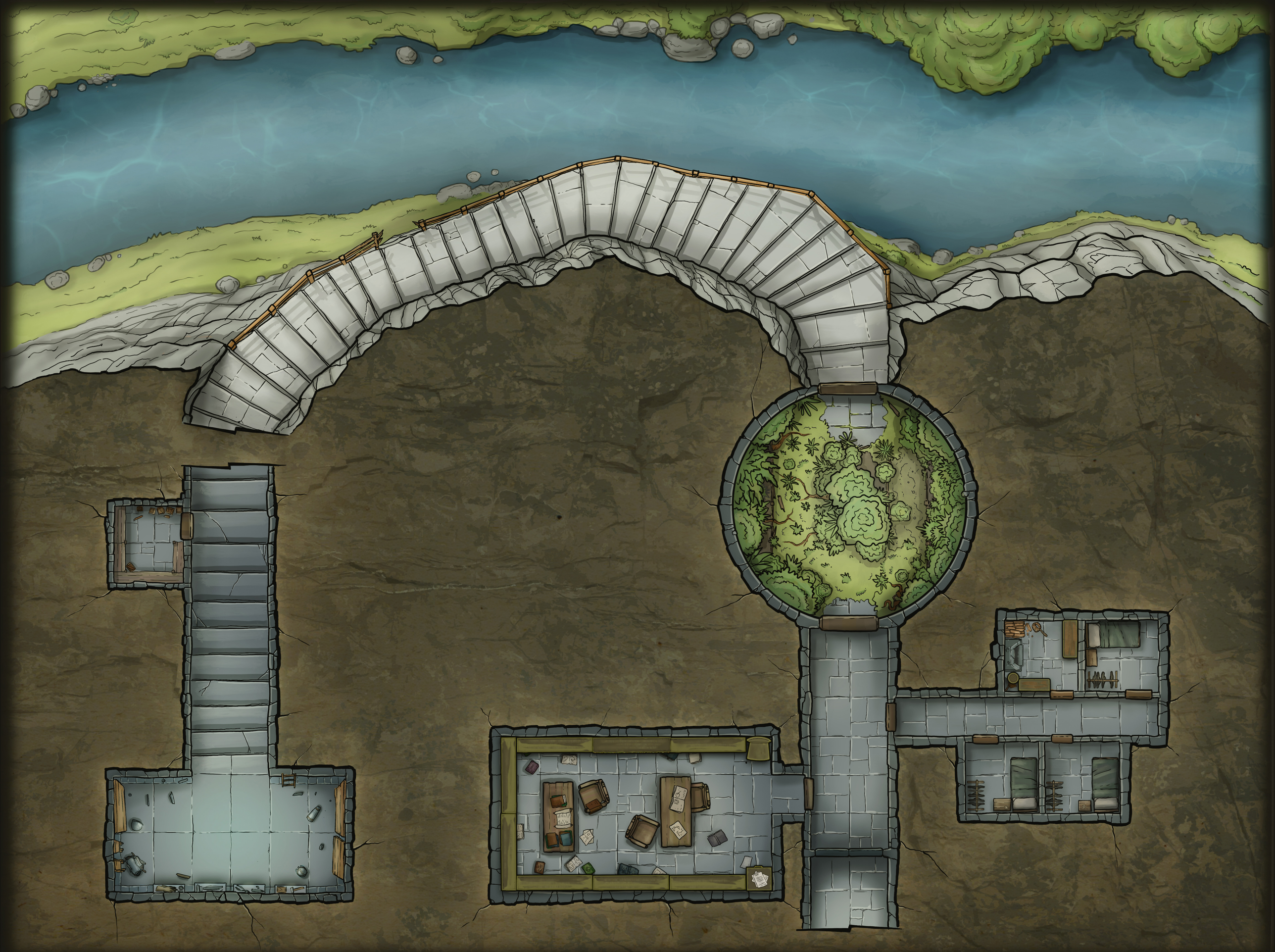
Our grant mandates that S.A.M. must be able to not only learn and retain information, but respond to it as well. Itera answers its questions patiently, although it keeps bringing her copper wires whenever she attempts to cast mending. Only off by one letter, but progress is slow.

S.A.M. has learned to anticipate more than just our spellcasting needs. It reminds me to go to bed at a normal hour – whatever that is – and wakes me up precisely eight hours later. I can only hope Amari will see the usefulness in this.

We lost Exor this evening. The greenhouse's temperatures were just a hair chillier than expected, which caused a rather inflammatory reaction in the workshop. Must revisit the climate control feature.

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Issue 2 ✦ February 2021

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Watching ARCADIA artists bring the authors' creations to life is one of the best parts of my job. Last issue delivered fantastic mounts, titanic sorcerers, fallen angels, a beautiful harpy cover, and an adventure visualized by the best in the business. This issue brings you more of our artists' remarkable work, as I'm sure you could see from our awesome cover, this time by Ejiwa "Edge" Ebenebe.

From the pitch phase of each issue, ARCADIA aims to bring you innovative and actionable fifth edition content from top creators in RPGs. That doesn't just mean story and mechanics. The art in each issue, from the cover to each quarter-page diagram, is just as important to us as the words. Reading Makenzie De Armas's description of a noxa floods the mind with wonderful, alien imagery and possibilities. Without the time and words to describe every single visual detail of the creature, what you picture when you read is likely different than what I imagine. But when Makenzie's evocative description is placed alongside Grace Cheung's illustration of the new elemental, we get two incredible results.

First, we now have a shared idea and standard of what this creature looks like. That's essential for any tabletop RPG. It's why so many players love sharing art of their characters. They want everyone else at the table to picture their hero as they do. For decades GMs have handed out maps and diagrams and held up illustrations to give their players a better idea of how the characters can interact with the story. We aim to give you as much art to play with as we can in ARCADIA.

While quantity is one driving factor for us, more important is quality. RPG art should do more than bring imaginations together. It should make your mind run wild. A good illustration of a monster shows the players what the creature looks like. A great illustration thrills them as they imagine not just what the monster is but what it can be and what it will do. The best RPG design gives you ideas for epic storytelling possibilities. It makes you contact your friends immediately to set up a time to game so you can use that content. Art is no different. The visuals in ARCADIA don't just show you something—they make you wonder what else could be. A lot of that is thanks to the amazing art team at MCDM.

I've learned more about art in the few months I've been working on ARCADIA than I did my entire life before. Executive Art Director Jason Hasenauer and Artist & Outsource Manager Nick De Spain (whose mounts you saw in issue 1) thoughtfully curate each piece. They look over the articles and art suggestions from the authors, myself, and Head of Production Anna Coulter, and select the artists who fit each job. Often that person is Grace Cheung, MCDM's beyond-talented In-House Artist. Other times it is the work of Marlowe Lune, as you'll see in "Subclasses of the Seasons," Diana Muñoz, whose maps appear in "Well of the Lost Gods," or any number of incredible folks we have collaborated with or will in future issues. When all the art is complete, Jen McCleary, one of the most creative graphic and layout designers I've ever worked with, brings it all together into an evocative magazine. I really hope you enjoy digging in as much as we did making it.

Ex animo,

James Introcaso
Managing Editor

SUBCLASSES OF THE SEASONS

FOUR SEASON-THEMED SPELLCASTING SUBCLASSES

by Joshua Mendenhall

The desolation of winter, the rebirth of spring, the relentlessness of summer, and the isolation of fall. Some practitioners of the arcane arts gain power from the natural patterns each season exhibits. Going beyond weather phenomena or base elements, these mages delve fully into the nature of the world as it is influenced by a season, taking power from the essence of each perennial force.

Such mages and their studies are uncommon, but nevertheless they are persistent. While their numbers may be few and their practitioners scattered, their ranks will always replenish, just as the seasons continue to turn. In this article you will find four subclasses, one each for the bard, sorcerer, wizard, and warlock, each themed after one of the four seasons.

Order of Hibernation Features

Wizard Level	Feature	Total Additional Hit Dice
2nd	Restful Studies, Wrathful Conduit	1
6th	Winter Reserves	2
10th	Arcane Stitching	3
14th	Wrathbearer	4

ORDER OF HIBERNATION

Ceaseless winter winds howl as they tear across the pale landscape, eventually calming to a slight breeze as snow falls in the quiet and cold night. Blinding storms give way to moments of eerie calm and stillness. For some, the season is a time to huddle inside until such cold days pass, but wizards of the Order of Hibernation embrace both the chance for rest and the might of the winter storms.

In their first lessons, these mages learn to store their potential, banking reserves of magic through repose. This practice bears furious fruit: where many see rest as the end goal, a wizard of this school can use the power of respite as a stepping stone to unleashing the full fury of winter's wrath.

RESTFUL STUDIES

Beginning when you select this school at 2nd level, you become more adept at using your resting time. You only need a minimum of 6 hours of total downtime, including 4 hours of sleep (or 3 hours of meditation if you are an elf), to gain the benefits of a long rest, and half an hour of downtime to gain the benefits of a short rest. The time you need to spend to copy a spell into your spellbook is reduced by half.

Additionally, at 2nd, 6th, 10th, and 14th level you gain an additional Hit Die. These bonus Hit Dice do not affect your hit point maximum, but you can spend them during a short rest or to power certain features. These bonus Hit Dice are always regained alongside the normal number of Hit Dice you regain when you take a long rest.



Wrathful Conduit

Starting at 2nd level, you can draw upon potential recuperation and turn it into immediate arcane power. When you expend Hit Dice using this feature, you don't regain hit points. You can use only one of the following options on a spell when you cast it.

- When you cast a spell, you can expend one wizard Hit Die to cast it without any somatic or verbal components.
- When you cast a spell that deals damage, you can expend any number of wizard Hit Dice to increase the total damage dealt by the spell by an amount equal to the rolled total of all Hit Dice expended in this way.
- When you cast a spell that forces a creature to make a saving throw to resist its effects, you can expend one wizard Hit Die to increase the saving throw DC of the spell by 1.

Winter Reserves

Starting at 6th level, you have learned to stockpile arcane energy and draw upon the power of this potential. As long as you have three spell slots remaining, you gain the following benefits:

- You have +1 bonus to saving throws.
- While you are not wearing any armor, you have a +2 bonus to AC.
- You add your Intelligence modifier to the damage you deal with any wizard spell.

Arcane Stitching

Beginning at 10th level, your stored arcane energy works to heal your wounds. if you start your turn with less than half of your maximum hit point value and your Winter Reserves feature is active, you regain hit points equal to your proficiency modifier. You don't gain this benefit if you have 0 hit points.

Additionally, when you take a short rest, you regain the maximum number of hit points possible from any Hit Dice you spend.

Wrathbearer

At 14th level, your ability to hold and stockpile has taught you how to keep only what you need, and to turn the rest into a surge of arcane force. Once per turn when you cast a spell, you can release a wave of energy using one or both of the following options:

- When you cast a spell, you can expend any number of wizard Hit Dice to push creatures away from you. Choose any number of creatures within 30 feet of you that you can see. Each creature must make a Strength saving throw against your spell save DC or be pushed a distance in feet equal to the rolled result of the Hit Dice expended.
- When you cast a spell, you can expend a spell slot to deal damage to creatures around you. Choose any number of creatures within 30 feet of you that you can see. Each creature must make a Constitution saving throw against your spell save DC, taking 1d8 force damage per level of the spell slot expended on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

College of Springtide

From the desolation of winter comes the rebirth of spring. The smell of rain and earth hanging in the air, the first bloom of green after the silent pale of winter, and the rushing waters of snowmelt. These tides of change teach bards to inspire and refresh their allies like rain, and wield power that crashes upon their foes like a sudden squall.

Like the spring from which they blossom, Bards of the College of Springtide learn of endings and renewal, for no growth can come from a dead and overgrown place. But as their powers of rejuvenation swell, so too does their talent for overwhelming force, like unstoppable floods brought by spring storms.

College of Springtide Features

Bard Level	Feature
3rd	Blooming Repertoire, Petrichor
6th	Downpour Respite
14th	Storm Song

Blooming Repertoire

When you join the College of Springtide at 3rd level, you approach each day with a new and reinvigorated mindset. After finishing a long rest, you gain proficiency in one skill and a tool of your choice. When you finish a long rest, you can change these proficiencies.

Additionally, you learn the *cure wounds* spell. If you already know that spell, you can learn one other bard spell of 1st level that you don't already know. The spell you learn doesn't count against the number of bard spells you know.

Petrichor

Also at 3rd level, you learn to infuse your Bardic Inspiration with the calming aftermath of early morning rain. When you give a Bardic Inspiration die to a creature affected by an effect that a saving throw can end, the creature can immediately make a saving throw to end the effect.

Downpour Respite

Your presence is like a midday drizzle, refreshing your allies and disheartening your enemies. Beginning at 6th level, if you deal damage to a creature, the next time you cast the *cure wounds* spell before the end of your next turn, you can cast the spell as a bonus action.



Additionally, creatures that benefit from your Song of Rest regain additional hit points equal to your Charisma modifier.

Storm Song

Your words bear down with the weight of the storm, growing in devastation, renewed by its persistent and monolithic nature. Starting at 14th level, once per round when you or an ally within 60 feet of you scores a critical hit or reduces one or more creatures to 0 hit points, you can use your reaction to regain a use of Bardic Inspiration. You can use this feature a number of times per day equal to your Charisma modifier. You regain all uses of this feature when you finish a long rest.



Child of the Sun Bloodline

There is simplicity in the summer sun, whose light is impossible to overcome. For in what realm could one be bold enough to attempt to tame the sun's great power? Shield yourself from it, and its intensity seems to magnify between your fingers. Hide yourself away, and you only let something else scorch in your place. Attempt to flee from it, and you run forever without once separating yourself from its reach. And in that ever-blazing light a Child of the Sun gains their dazzling power.

Perhaps your lineage can be traced to outsiders with an affinity for the summer sun, or perhaps you have an ancestor who infused a pure droplet of the season's power into their blood. Regardless of how it came to be, the summer's power has never once diluted, and now rises through you into this world with silent and commanding brilliance.

Child of the Sun Bloodline Features

Sorcerer Level	Feature
1st	Glimpse of the Sun, Summer's Defiant Blood
6th	Sunlit Path
14th	Grasping the Sun
18th	Bright Zenith

Glimpse of the Sun

Starting at 1st level, the first powers of the sun awaken in you. You learn the *light* cantrip, but it doesn't count against your number of sorcerer cantrips you know. When you cast this cantrip, you can designate which creatures within 20 feet of you can perceive the light. All others cannot see the light created by the cantrip.

When you reach 3rd level, when you have an ongoing *light* cantrip, you can spend a sorcery point as an action and choose a creature within 20 feet of the light source who can't already see it. The light from your cantrip suddenly flares with dazzling brightness, and the creature must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw against your spell save DC or be blinded until the end of your next turn.

Summer's Defiant Blood

Your blood hums with volatile power, and your racing heartbeat reverberates with arcane energy, making it the perfect conduit for your spells. Whenever a creature makes an attack roll against you or forces you to make a saving throw, you can add your Charisma modifier to the damage roll of the next spell you cast before the end of your next turn. You can only benefit from this feature one per round.

Sunlit Path

The world, illuminated and revealed by summer's long days, becomes easier for you to traverse. Beginning at 6th level, your walking speed increases by 15 feet, and you gain resistance to radiant damage.

Additionally, when calculating your overland travel pace for 1 minute, 1 mile, and 1 day, your speed and the speed of any allies you choose within 30 feet of you increases by 100 feet per minute, 1 mile per hour, and 6 miles per day.

Grasping the Sun

Starting at 14th level, you can unleash summer's sweltering heat against those who do you harm. When you take damage from a source you can see, you can use your reaction to reduce the amount of damage by a number equal to your sorcerer level. If the damage was from another creature's melee attack, that creature takes radiant damage equal to your sorcerer level.

Bright Zenith

At 18th level, you can expend 6 sorcery points as a bonus action to unshackle your magic from your body, revealing a brilliant and awe-inspiring form. While in this form, when you use Glimpse of the Sun feature to create a blinding flare, you can affect all creatures of your choice within 40 feet of the light source. You gain blindsight out to a range of 100 feet, and any spell you cast that targets a single creature can affect a creature you can perceive with your blindsight as though you had an unobstructed path to it, provided that the creature is within the normal range of the spell. This form lasts for 1 minute.

The Horned One

Fear and apprehension permeate the autumn winds. Lush greens pass to dying oranges, soft grass turns to prickling leaves, and vibrant life slows towards deathly stillness. Hunters ready their tools, wit, and ferocity to seek out food and glory. And it is here, in this season of dispassionate bloodshed, that your patron comes to be. A being of blood and sweat, the Horned One is a proud and harried participant in the thrill of the hunt. For sport or for survival, many attempt to share in the Horned One's chase. But only those with true determination and courage can endure the autumn hunt and be molded by its power.

The Horned One often takes the form of hunted or harried animals, testing would-be warlocks to see if they have the courage to face blood. At other times, they take the form of a large and terrifying predator to harry potential warlocks and challenge them to pit fortitude against fear. Those who pass such trials are given the blessing of the autumn hunt: a pact with the Horned One.

Silent and patient, the Horned One rarely interferes with the actions of those who receive their favor, but may call upon you one crisp fall day for a hunt of great importance. Until such a time, it is up to you to continue to prove yourself with dangerous prey and grand kills.



Horned One Features

Warlock Level	Feature
1st	Expanded Spell List, Horned Hunter
6th	Blessing of the Hunt
10th	Territory of the Harrier
14th	Autumn Feast

Expanded Spell List

The Horned One lets you choose from an expanded list of spells when you learn a warlock spell. The following spells are added to the warlock spell list for you.

Spell Level	Spells
1st	*goodberry*, *hunter's mark*
2nd	*pass without trace*, *silence*
3rd	*nondetection*, *phantom steed*
4th	*freedom of movement*, *locate creature*
5th	*mislead*, *tree stride*

Horned Hunter

At 1st level, you are given the tools to take on a proper role in the hunt. You gain proficiency with martial weapons and the Stealth skill, and you can use a ranged weapon as a spellcasting focus for your warlock spells.

In addition, you learn the *eldritch blast* cantrip, which doesn't count against the number of warlock cantrips you know. When you cast *eldritch blast*, you can make each beam you create with the cantrip take the form of an arrow, without the need for verbal and somatic components, and immediately fire this arrow from a shortbow, longbow, light crossbow, or heavy crossbow you are wielding. When used in this way, any benefits the weapon may confer to normal ammunition also apply to the magical arrow. For instance, a *+1 longbow* would confer a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with your *eldritch blast* cantrip. The weapon may be used as a spellcasting focus for all warlock spells, but only grants its bonuses to the *eldritch blast* cantrip.

Blessing of the Hunt

At 6th level, the hunt feeds and rewards you for each creature you slay. Each time you kill a creature with a CR of 1 or higher, your melee and ranged attacks deal an extra 1d4 damage for the next 10 minutes.

Additionally, after killing a creature with a CR of 1 or higher, you no longer have to eat or drink that day.

Territory of the Harrier

At 10th level, you've learned to emulate fellow predators and their tactics. As an action, you can declare a number of 5-foot-square spaces on the ground equal to your Constitution modifier to be trapped. Each trapped space must be within 30 feet of you, and cannot be farther than 10 feet apart from another trapped space. The first time a creature enters a trapped space, it must make a Dexterity saving throw against your spell save DC as spectral claws and thorns burst from the ground. On a failed save, the creature takes 2d10 force damage and its walking speed is halved for 1 minute. On a successful save, it takes half as much damage and its speed isn't reduced. A space remains trapped until it is triggered, you regain uses of this feature, you use this feature again, or 8 hours pass.

You can use this feature three times, and you regain all uses when you finish a short or long rest.

Autumn Feast

All creatures of the hunt grow strong from bloodshed, and you are no exception. Beginning at 14th level, you score a critical hit with an attack from the *eldritch blast* cantrip on a roll of 19 or 20. Additionally, when you score a critical hit against a creature, you regain a number of hit points equal to your level.

THE PERIODIC TABLE OF ELEMENTALS

FOUR NEW ELEMENTALS PLUS REACTIVITY RULES

Makenzie De Armas

Hexagonal glyphs flare around a mage's fingertips as she mutters words of arcane command to an unseen plane. Beneath her feet, searing fissures burst through the compact earth, and as she finishes her spell, something begins to rise from the bedrock. Something molten, jagged, hulking. Something elemental, barely holding its form together.

Something *wildly* unstable.

Contrary to popular belief, air, fire, earth, and water are not the only elements in the universe. They just happen to be the most stable of the elementals, the easiest for individuals to summon and control through arcane means. But more reckless mages, through complex study, can conjure fearsome creatures made from other elements. Lithium, argon, magnesium—such elementals are extremely dangerous and rarely obedient to their summoner. But for those able to harness such creatures, the power these elementals wield is beyond even the keenest conjurer's imagination.

This article presents four new elemental creatures that draw inspiration from the real-life periodic table. These new elementals provide fresh combat options for any adventurers tired of fighting the same elemental monsters again and again (not to mention the GMs tired of running them). Also included are alternate rules for encounters with different types of elementals that explore how elements may react with one another to create even more volatile chaos on the battlefield.

Whether running a game for a group of intrepid arcane researchers or a band of scrappy heroes trying to survive another day, these new elemental options help you combine science and magic to craft more dynamic elemental encounters in your campaign.

Nova Elementals

Ophira Pyet was once a disgraced conjuration student living alone in an underground laboratory hidden away in the mountains. Surrounded by failed experiments and scribbled arcane equations her teachers vehemently insisted would never work, Ophira turned in desperation to the very earth she stood on. A few preliminary tests uncovered motes of unique elements hidden in the bedrock, and within a week, Ophira managed to pull massive quantities of these elements to the surface and bind them to planar spirits. She dubbed these creatures **nova elementals**: new, carefully refined elemental conjurations with specific and dangerous powers.

A month later, Ophira revealed her discoveries in an explosive display during her university's commencement ceremony, to much surprise and amazement. Professors who previously shunned her now begged Ophira to teach them her methods of elemental conjuration. But no longer beholden to them as a student, Ophira refused. A few more persistent mages attempted to reverse engineer her process, but they soon realized that without Ophira's precise calculations at hand, these nova elementals would become wild and stubborn, disobeying commands and quickly turning against their summoners.

Ophira would go on to publish her findings about elemental magic, though her exact means of exerting perfect control over the nova elementals would always remain her closely guarded secret. Some elemental mages have figured out alternate means for semi-stabilizing summoned nova elementals, but the practice is generally regarded as a brazen and foolish use of magic.

Product of Scientific Study. Though there are reports of nova elementals occurring naturally in the wild (usually at potent nexuses with a high concentration of a singular element, like a silver mine, or in places with powerful latent magic), most must be created by a mage. Such individuals conjure nova elementals to serve as guards, hunters, or assistants for future experiments. But more often than not, these mages lose control over their summoned creatures, and the nova elementals end up wreaking havoc on their surroundings.

Refined Power. The higher the concentration of a nova elemental's primary element, the more powerful it grows—and the more ornery its personality becomes. An elemental that is 100% pure explosive calcium is far nastier to encounter than one only half-comprised of the element.

Elemental Nature. Like its more stable cousins, a nova elemental doesn't require air, food, drink, or sleep.

COMBURO

Comburos are extremely volatile elementals composed of metals like lithium and potassium. Cracks in their dull, metallic grey exteriors reveal a searing explosive fire at their cores. This fire takes on a characteristic hue depending on the primary composition of the comburo, with flames ranging from deep purple to brilliant blue.



Comburo

Medium elemental, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 110 (20d8 + 20)

Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)	6 (-2)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Damage Resistances fire; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, unconscious

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Primordial

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Death Burst. When the comburo dies, it explodes in a fiery burst. Each creature within 15 feet of the comburo must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or take 14 (4d6) fire damage.

Ductile Form. The comburo can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. It can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

Explosive Reactivity. A creature that hits the comburo with an attack while within 15 feet of it must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 7 (2d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Illumination. The comburo sheds bright light in a 15-foot radius and dim light in an additional 15 feet.

Actions

Multiattack. The comburo makes two slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage plus 7 (2d6) fire damage. If the target is a creature or a flammable object, it ignites. Until a creature takes an action to douse the fire, the target takes 3 (1d6) fire damage at the start of each of its turns.

Volatile Burst (Recharge 6). The comburo launches a hailstorm of explosive projectiles that land at three different points the comburo can see within 120 feet of itself. Each creature in a 15-foot-radius sphere centered on each point must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw. A creature takes 21 (6d6) fire damage and is knocked prone on a failure. On a success, a creature takes half as much damage and is not knocked prone. The spheres spread around corners. A creature in the area of more than one explosion point is affected only once. This ability damages objects in the area and ignites flammable objects that aren't being worn or carried.

CONDUCERE

Made of precious metals like gold and copper, conduceres are known for their incredibly flexible nature and ability to transfer energy across long distances. Conduceres are the most docile of the nova elementals, and many mages keep a conducere in their study purely for its glittering aesthetic.



Conducere

Large elemental, neutral

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 126 (12d10 + 60)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	8 (-1)	6 (-2)	10 (+0)

Damage Resistances fire, lightning, radiant; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities acid, cold, necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, unconscious

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages Primordial

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Ductile Form. The conducere can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. It can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

Flexible. The conducere has advantage on Dexterity saving throws.

Actions

Multiattack. The conducere makes two slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Reactions

Energy Conductor. When the conducere takes damage from a spell or magical effect, it can use its reaction to redirect that magical energy to another creature. The conducere takes no damage and instead chooses a target within 30 feet of itself. The target must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, the target takes the damage originally intended for the conducere; this damage is equal to the amount of damage the conducere would have taken had it not used its reaction in this way. On a success, the target only takes half this damage.

ELEKRON

Also often referred to as “lightning in a bottle,” an elekron crackles with pure energy. Elekrons are most closely related to fire elementals, but unlike their flame-based cousins, elekrons have the incredible ability to consume raw energy from their environment and deal staggering amounts of damage.



Elekron

Small elemental, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 15

Hit Points 65 (10d6 + 30)

Speed 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	5 (-3)	10 (+0)	7 (-2)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from metal weapons

Damage Immunities lightning, poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, unconscious

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Primordial

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Electric Form. The elekron can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing. In addition, the elekron can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. The first time the elekron enters another creature's space on a turn, that creature takes 5 (1d10) lightning damage. The amount of damage a creature takes increases to 11 (2d10) when the elekron is Medium or larger.

Illumination. The elekron sheds bright light in a 30-foot radius and dim light in an additional 30 feet.

Lightning Charge. Whenever the elekron is hit with an attack from a metal weapon, its size increases by one category. If there isn't enough room for the elekron to increase in size, it attains the maximum size possible in the space available. When the elekron is Medium or larger, it can use its action to make two Shock attacks instead of one.

If the elekron starts its turn as a Huge or Gargantuan creature, it releases energy in wild arcs of electricity. Each creature within 30 feet of the elekron must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) lightning damage on a failed save, and half as much damage on a successful one. The elekron's size then becomes Small.

Actions

Shock. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d10 + 5) lightning damage.

Noxa

Composed of toxic, odorless gases like helium and neon, noxas are some of the most dangerous nova elementals. The combination of their invisible presence and poisonous nature means they can easily suffocate a target before anyone notices something is wrong. However, more whimsical mages have been known to trap noxas in glass tubes and feed them energy to create softly glowing fluorescent lamps of various colors.



Noxa

Large elemental, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 15

Hit Points 110 (13d10 + 39)

Speed 0 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	6 (-2)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, unconscious

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Primordial

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Faultless Stability. The noxa is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Fluorescence. When the noxa is subjected to fire or lightning damage, it begins to glow. Until the start of its next turn, the noxa sheds bright light in a 15-foot radius and dim light in an additional 15 feet. While glowing in this manner, the noxa cannot benefit from being invisible.

Gaseous Form. The noxa can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. It can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

Invisible. The noxa is invisible.

Actions

Multiattack. The noxa makes two slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

Asphyxiation. The noxa chooses one creature within its space and floods the creature's lungs with poisonous gas. The creature must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, it takes 27 (6d8) poison damage, is restrained, and begins suffocating. On a success, it takes half as much damage, is not restrained, and does not begin suffocating. If the targeted creature is already suffocating when the elemental uses this action, the creature has disadvantage on the saving throw. A restrained and suffocating creature can repeat this saving throw at the start of each of its turns, ending both effects on a success.



Alternate Rules:
Elemental Compound Encounters

Frequently, the elements are presented as diametric opposites of each other; water douses fire, and air's free-flowing nature contradicts earth's immovability. But this separation is merely an illusion. More often than not, the elements actually work together, moving in tandem to create the world around us. They feed off each other, strengthen each other, and in the most dangerous circumstances, fuel each other's rampant destruction.

The following two sets of alternate rules aim to provide a way to simulate this natural teamwork in encounters with multiple elementals.

State Changes

The simplest way to add elemental teamwork to your encounters is to consider environmental states. Elementals do extra damage depending on their target's current state. When this happens, roll an extra damage die when rolling the total damage for that elemental's attacks or abilities. You can find a list of example states in the table below, showing which elementals gain extra damage from each state.

Reactivities

With this option, using different elementals in a single encounter unlocks reactivities, which function like legendary actions.

During combat, elementals can use a certain number of reactivities outside their turns. Only one reactivity can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The elementals can forgo using them, and reactivities cannot be used if any of the elementals involved are more than 60 feet from one another, or if one or more of the elementals required are incapacitated or otherwise unable to take actions. The elementals regain all spent reactivities on initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties).

The following three examples provide reactivity rules for some of the most effective elemental combinations. You can use them as templates to design reactivity options for your own encounters.

An encounter that uses reactivities is more dangerous than normal and increases the challenge rating of each elemental in the battle by 1.

Reactivities: Air Elemental and Fire Elemental

The whirling wind of an air elemental fuels the flames of a fire elemental, causing them to burn even brighter. This team of elementals can take 3 reactivities, choosing from the options below.

Hot Air. Each creature within 30 feet of the air elemental that is not one of the reactive elementals must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw as the air rises in temperature to a shimmering, sweltering heat. A creature

State Changes

State	Triggers	Elementals That Benefit
Metallic	Holding a metal weapon; wearing metal armor	Fire elemental, elekron
Soaked	Being hit by a water elemental's Slam attack; being grappled by a water elemental's Whelm ability	Comburo, elekron
Windswept	Being targeted by a noxa's Asphyxiation ability; standing in the same space as an air elemental	Fire elemental, elekron

takes 12 (4d4 + 2) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Ash Cloud. Each creature within 30 feet of the fire elemental that is not one of the reactive elementals must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw as blustering winds swirl with ash. A creature who fails this saving throw is blinded until it uses its action to clear its eyes.

Fire Whirls (Costs 2 Reactivities). A fearsome fire tornado erupts at a point that both the air elemental and fire elemental can see. Each creature within 10 feet of that point that is not one of the reactive elementals must immediately make a DC 13 Strength saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 15 (3d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage plus 10 (2d6 + 3) fire damage and is knocked prone. On a success, a creature takes half as much damage and is not knocked prone.

Reactivities: Comburo and Water Elemental

Water is often seen as the antithesis of fire—but for the volatile comburo, water is a gift. The waves of a water elemental only serve to heighten the explosive sparks that the unstable comburo generates. This team of elementals can take 3 reactivities, choosing from the options below.

Sparks Fly. Each creature within 30 feet of the comburo that is not one of the reactive elementals must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw as water splashing onto the comburo erupts into sparks. A creature takes 9 (2d8) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Hydroxide Cloud. Each creature within 30 feet of the water elemental must make a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute, as the remnants of the comburo's explosions begin to hiss and form poisonous gas.

Fulmination (Costs 2 Reactivities). A massive explosion of searing water, fire, and sparks erupts at a point that both the comburo and the water elemental can see. Each creature within 15 feet of that point that is not one of the reactive elementals must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 14 (4d6) fire damage plus 9 (2d8) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Reactivities: Conducere, Elekron, and Fire Elemental

The ductile conducere can channel and amplify both the heat of a fire elemental and the lightning surges of an elekron. This team of elementals can take 5 reactivities, choosing from the options below.

Heat Charge. The fire elemental lends some of its heat to the conducere. The conducere makes one Slam attack. If this attack hits, it deals an additional 5 (1d10) fire damage.

Electric Charge. The elekron lends some of its lightning energy to the conducere. The conducere makes one Slam attack. If this attack hits, it deals an additional 5 (1d10) lightning damage.

Flash Bang (Costs 2 Reactivities). A searing burst of light erupts at a point both the elekron and fire elemental can see. Each creature within 20 feet of that point that is not one of the reactive elementals must make a successful DC 17 Constitution saving throw or be blinded until the end of its next turn.

Rapid Conduction (Costs 2 Reactivities). This option can only be used if both the elekron and fire elemental are within 30 feet of the conducere. The elekron and fire elemental use the conducere's metallic form as a conduit and immediately swap places. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks. Once the elekron and the fire elemental appear in their new positions, they can each make one melee attack.

WELL OF THE LOST GODS

AN ADVENTURE ABOUT MAGICAL HAZARDS FOR 8TH LEVEL CHARACTERS

Rich Lescouflair

An investigation into unusual events uncovers an ancient secret of mythical origins. Well of the Lost Gods is optimized for four to five 8th-level characters. Statistics for creatures not found in the game's core rules are provided at the end of the adventure.

"Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."
—Arthur C. Clarke

Adventure Background

The Well of Lost Gods is a ruined outpost that houses a planar portal to a once-great empire. At its apex, this lost civilization achieved marvels of magic and technology unlike anything known in living memory. A magical cataclysm befell the empire eons ago, leaving behind an extraplanar wasteland. The outpost leading to it was buried beneath the local mountain range.

Recently, a powerful earthquake opened a rift in the mountainside, unleashing waves of unstable magical energy and deadly automatons. The nearby town of Ashtead is simple, modest, and ill-equipped to deal with the magical monstrosities attacking the town. Luckily, some able and experienced adventurers happen to be passing through….

Adventure Overview

The adventure is divided into three major parts:

Part 1: Ashstead's Oddities. The characters arrive at Ashstead in time to experience one of the strange local anomalies.

Part 2: Into the Rift. To save the townsfolk, the characters journey to a pool of magical energy located beneath the Wyrmtail Mountains.

Part 3: Magitech Mayhem. The characters locate the source of the anomalies and learn a deeper truth behind the fall of the ancient empire.

Putting the Well in Your Game

Who made the Well of the Lost Gods? That's up to you. In your world, maybe an ancient empire of the elves. Perhaps a dead human civilization once reached these heights. Or maybe the Well is not of this world—it could have been forged by spacefaring or time-travelling beings from a distant future, or even a distant past! A suggestion for the civilization that created the Well is provided below, but you should feel free to adjust it or completely change it to fit your game.

The Thalisian Empire. Eons ago, powerful celestial beings called immortals ruled over Thalis from Arkencloud, a metal-spired city that sailed over the skies. Thalis fell millennia ago, brought to ruin by a traitorous demonic incursion that sparked a civil war among the immortals. The final battle caused a wave of chaotic magical energy that washed over the empire. The floating city burned as it fell upon the magical wasteland. A few humanoid villages and towns on the empire's border were spared.

Over time, survivors spread further away from the borders of the old empire, leaving behind the area they called the Valley of Lost Gods and establishing new nations like the land where Ashstead is located. The only traversable path into the wasteland collapsed upon itself nearly five hundred years ago, sealing the ruins of the Thalisian Empire away until a recent earthquake unearthed a long-buried secret.

Arrival at Ashstead

The characters arrive in town, following a call for adventurers made by Luseldis, the town's burgomaster (a neutral good human **noble**). Upon speaking with her, she provides the characters with the following information:

- Magical anomalies have occurred in different areas of the town over the past two weeks. They began the day after the recent earthquake and consist of anything from random fires to waters turning to acid to entire buildings completely disappearing.
- There is no pattern as to the type of anomalies, nor the time or place in which they occur.

The anomalies have caused damage to buildings and have also injured several of the local residents.

Luseldis offers a reward of 2,000 gp to the characters in exchange for discovering the source of the anomalies and eliminating it. She recommends they visit Gautia, the town sage, who is studying the most recent anomalies (see "Metal Contraption," below). The burgomaster also points them toward Brendar, the proprietor of a tavern called the Drunken Beard, who has been organizing search parties in and around town.

Part 1: Ashstead's Oddities

The characters can find all standard equipment, goods, and services at the usual prices. As directed by Luseldis, the party can meet with either Gautia or Brendar for more information about the anomalies.

Metal Contraption

A 30-foot-diameter indentation forms a crater in the center of the road. In the middle of the crater, a 6-foot-tall pillar of metallic panels is embedded into the ground. The jagged panels are connected by metal bars and dark, coiled ropes.

Gautia, a lawful neutral half-elf **commoner** and the town's local sage, studies the pillar-shaped structure. After pleasantries, she tells the characters the object landed there yesterday, seemingly coming down from the mountains just outside of town. The sage's apprentice, Haera, was nearly killed investigating the object, so Gautia has been very careful while studying it, unfortunately learning very little.

Gautia warns the characters to be wary of the dark rope-like coils within the object's frame. A character who succeeds on a DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check notices several indentations along the surface of one of the metal panels that could be depressible buttons. A *detect magic* spell reveals that the dark coils running between the metal panels bear some form of enchantment.

Roleplaying Gautia

Gautia's family is one of the oldest in Ashstead, and her father was the town's sage before her. She shares knowledge freely but shows little tolerance for foolishness. Even with all her studies, she has never experienced anything close to the recent events in Ashstead, and is baffled for the first time in many years.

If the characters consult Gautia for more information while examining the contraption (see "Tinkering with the Object," below), they gain advantage on their Intelligence (Investigation) checks to notice the object's buttons.

Tinkering with the Object

Characters who examine the buttons and succeed on a DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check notice there is a pattern of angular lines running between the buttons. See the "Object Buttons" handout, which you can share with your players. When the buttons are pushed along the linear pattern, one of the smaller panels slides open and a silvery metal orb rolls out from the opening.

The marble-sized orb has indecipherable markings etched into its surface. A *detect magic* spell reveals the same form of enchantment as that which runs through the object's dark coils. Upon spotting the orb, Gautia mentions she has seen the same markings on a metal disc brought back from the mountains by the survivor of a recent expeditionary group. The survivor is a half-orc named Naulach, who works at the Drunken Beard tavern.

Using Force. A character who pulls on the coils with a successful DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check is struck by a backlash of magical energy, taking 10 (3d6) lightning damage. The object then changes shape into a **silver striker** that attacks the party. Dealing 15 damage or more to the object in a single attack also produces the same result

If the striker is defeated, a panel on its side opens and drops the same metallic orb that could have been gained by using the buttons as described above.

HANDOUT: OBJECT BUTTONS



THE DRUNKEN BEARD

When the Drunken Beard tavern comes into view, a greenish smoke is billowing out from the entrance. An old dwarf rushes out the front door, frantically ushering the other patrons out behind him.

Brandar Flintborn, a chaotic good dwarf **commoner** and the proprietor of this tavern, insists the characters come no closer, as he flees from the building along with his patrons. Seconds later, the fog engulfs the entire building and solidifies, encasing the tavern in a dome of indestructible greenish glass.

A LONE SURVIVOR

Shortly after the Drunken Beard is encased in glass, Brandar approaches the characters, accompanied by Naulach (a neutral good half-orc **scout**). Naulach is the last of the search party that ventured out to investigate a rift that opened in the nearby Wyrmtail Mountains. He explains



that his party was attacked by beasts forged from enchanted metal, which emerged from a magical well they discovered in the pass.

Naulach thinks the well might be some kind of passage, but they were never able to get close enough to find out. The only thing he was able to retrieve was a 2-foot-diameter silvery disk etched with strange markings. The metal disk is now trapped within the tavern. He suspects it may have triggered the anomaly that engulfed the building.

Brandar and Naulach

Brandar has lived in Ashstead for ten years and is well-regarded among the townspeople. He believes that the latest anomaly is connected to Naulach's discovery in the rift, given the timing of events. He's more concerned for the few people left trapped within his tavern than the tavern itself—and he worries that unless the source of these anomalies is discovered soon, they're only going to get worse, eventually consuming the entire town.

Naulach is an explorer at heart and is close friends with the town sage, Gautia. He's both relieved and regretful that he's the only survivor of his expedition. He provides as much help as he can, but is too unsure of himself to venture out into the mountains again.

After the characters hear Naulach's tale, the half-orc suggests that they speak with Gautia, the local sage, who is investigating a similar metal object that fell into town from the mountainside (if they haven't already done so).

Naulach can provide the characters with directions to the mountain rift. He's sure the magical well of energy is connected to the recent anomalies affecting the town. If the characters recover the metallic orb from the crashed construct (see "Metal Contraption," above) and show it to Naulach, the half-orc recognizes the material. He says the creatures that attacked his group were constructed from the same silvery metal, as was the disk he retrieved from that area. Both he and Brandar hope that those trapped within the tavern can survive long enough to be freed from their crystalline prison. Unsure of the fate of his patrons, Brandar asks the characters to waste no time in finding a way to end these anomalies.

Part 2: Into the Rift

The journey from Ashstead to the mountain passage takes three hours. Refer to the Wyrmtail Caverns map for locations. When the characters arrive at the pass, read or paraphrase the following boxed text:

> Rocky, uneven terrain leads to a 30-foot-wide breach in the mountain wall. The surface of the ground where the rift begins is a dark grayish hue.

A1. Rift Entrance

If the characters obtained the metallic orb from the construct in Ashstead (see "Metal Contraption"), it emits a vibrating pulse when they come within 50 feet of the entrance. The pulse repeats once every 10 seconds. If the character carrying the orb has a passive Perception score of 13 or higher, they can sense the vibration. It can't be felt within dimensional containers such as a *bag of holding*.

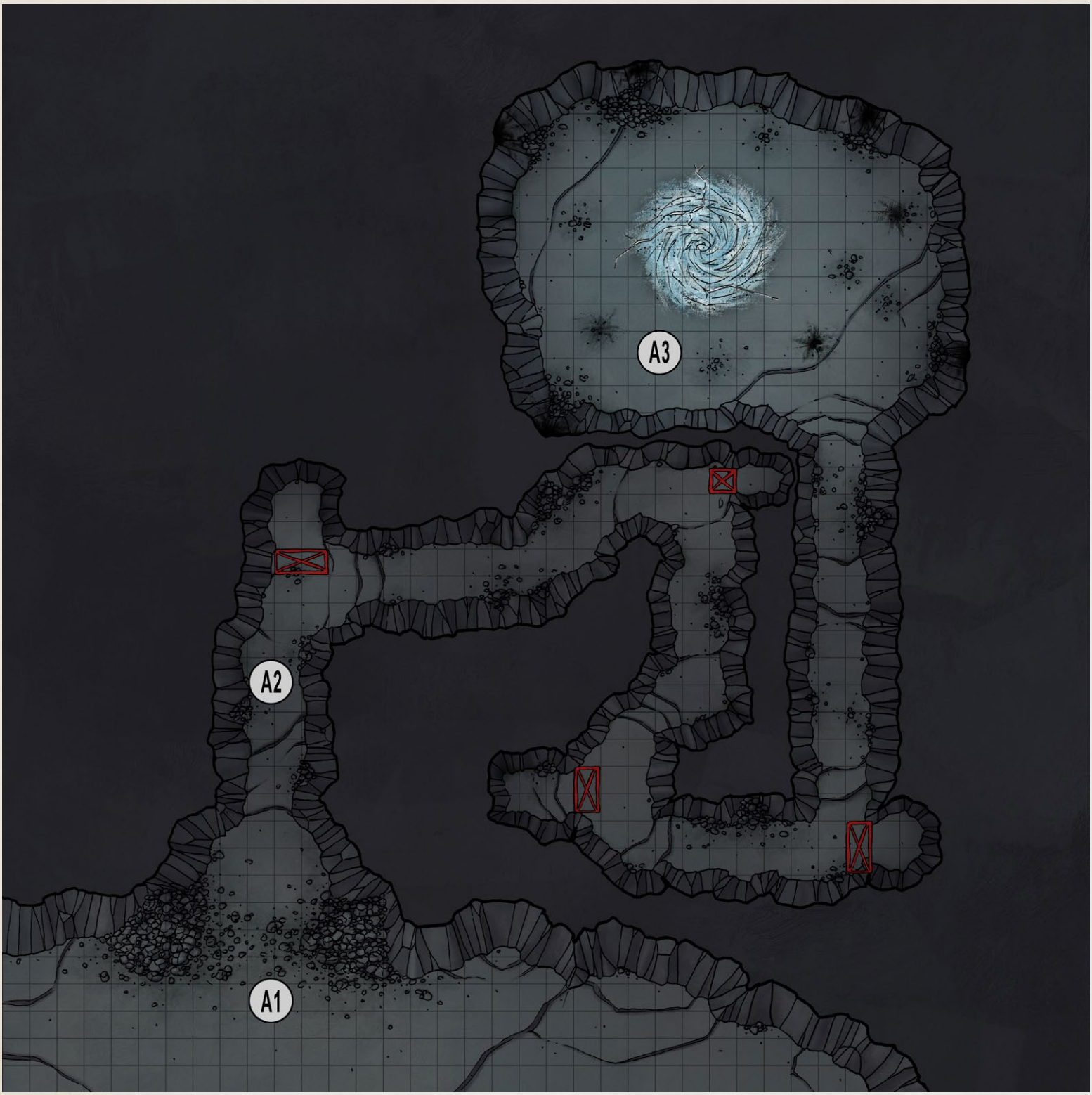
Beyond the entrance, the passage width narrows to 10 feet and turns into a large tunnel that slopes down into the mountain's underbelly. The orb's pulse gets stronger and faster as the characters progress deeper into the tunnels.

A2. The Tunnels

After a 40-foot-long slope, the tunnel narrows again to a 10-foot width with a 10-foot-high ceiling. From here, there is only one direct path to the center of the breach, and it is shrouded by illusory tunnels made of chaotic magical energy. There are four false branches. The false paths can be spotted with a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check. Due to the magic in the area, spells such as *detect magic* provide no benefit to detecting the false paths.

Coming within 5 feet of any of the false paths (marked on the map) unleashes a wave of magical energy in a 20-foot cone. Each creature within the cone must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 12 (3d8) force damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one. After the energy is released, the illusory path disappears.

If the characters acquired the metallic orb from the construct in Ashstead, its pulses get stronger the closer it gets to the well (area A3). Characters that discover this phenomenon can use the orb to gain advantage on their checks to spot the false paths.


A3
A2
A1

A3. Well of Energy

A 20-foot-diameter circle of swirling blue-white energy covers the center of this chamber's floor. Surges crackle outward like small bolts of lightning, periodically striking the surrounding walls.

While the characters remain in this chamber, they are subject to the random energy surges coming from the well. Each round on initiative count 20, choose a random character and make a ranged attack roll against them with a +6 bonus. On a hit, the character takes 9 (2d8) force damage.

A character that uses an action to study the magical surges and succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check notices a pattern in the time and placement of the energy surges. Attacks from the surges have disadvantage against characters who succeed on this check.

Metal Menaces

When the characters come within 10 feet of the magical well, one **silver hunter** per character emerges from it and attack, fighting until destroyed. They are unaffected by the well's magical surges.

Entering the Well

The well of energy is a portal that leads into a magitech laboratory (part 3). A character who succeeds on a DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check can tell that the well is an extraplanar portal. If the characters jump into the well, the constructs do not follow.

If the constructs are destroyed, the characters can examine the well at their leisure and determine that it is a portal of some kind.

Part 3: Magitech Mayhem

Characters that enter the energy well appear in area B1 of a secret laboratory (refer to the Magitech Lab map). The portal they entered from is nowhere to be seen on this side. The ceilings in this laboratory are 15 feet high. Areas B1 and B2 are dimly lit by magic runes on the walls, but all other areas lack light sources except for those the characters bring with them.

B1. Laboratory Entrance

The walls and ceiling of this area are a mix of stonework and bronze-colored metal. The dark gray stone floor beneath your feet feels similar to hardened clay. Glowing runes run along both sides of the long hallway in a repeating pattern, bathing the passage in dim red light.

When the characters arrive, a ghostly image of a human woman appears further down the hallway. She wears garments of a peculiar fashion with a long, flowing jacket. She reaches out to them, appearing to speak, though her voice only makes brief spurts of faint sound before she disappears. The only intelligible word is her name, "Ellsee."

The apparition is an illusory image, which reappears as the characters explore the area.

Spells or effects such as *comprehend languages* translate the runes on the wall to read: "Alert: System Failure."

B2. Junction Chamber Entrance

A 10-foot-diameter metal plate is set into the north wall. Three crystal orbs are embedded into its surface in a diamond-shaped pattern.

This plate is actually a door leading to area B4. Its surface is covered by an invisible, permanent *wall of force* (per the spell). Each time a character activates a panel in any of the chambers labeled B3, one of the orbs on the door emits a bright blue glow. When all three orbs are lit, the door opens.

Function Restored

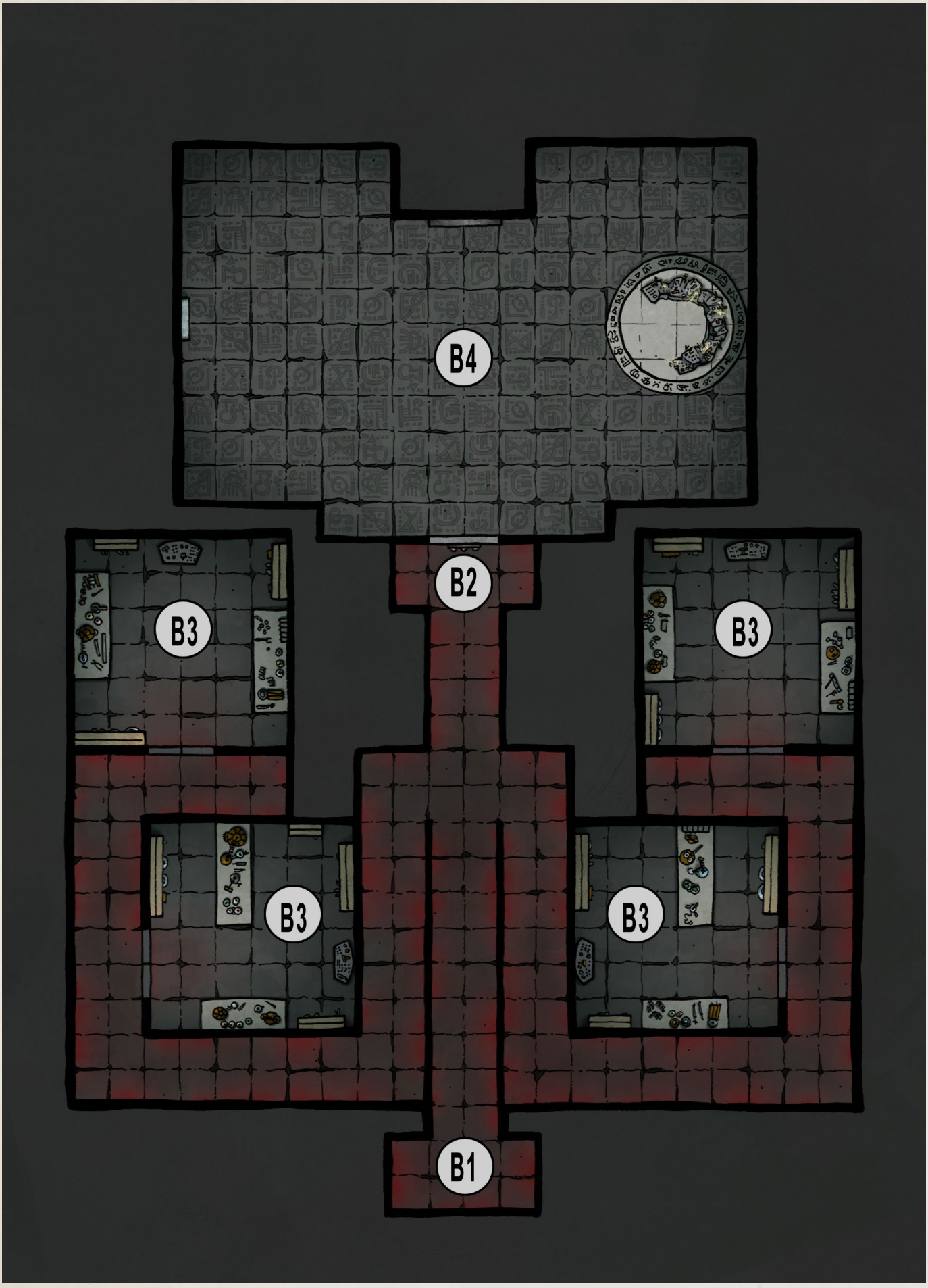
Once the research stations in area B3 are activated and the door to B4 is opened, the image of Ellsee (see area B1) appears in front of the doorway, awaiting the characters. When they arrive, she introduces herself as Ellsee, custodian of the Diowan Research Station. She explains that the station is in emergency lockdown due to unexpected system damage. If the characters question Ellsee, she provides the following information:

Ellsee is not a living being and never was. She's an incorporeal magical construct imbued with her own intelligence and personality.

The station is used for magitech weapons research. It is also a junction point to enter Arkencloud, an aerial city of the empire.

The researchers that worked here evacuated and no one has been in the station for almost two thousand years.

A critical fault in the station's power source is causing the station to unleash waves of unstable energy. Fixing the fault requires deactivating the malfunctioning generator, a device that channels magical energy into the area. Ellsee can show the characters how to accomplish this.


B4
B2
B3
B3
B3
B3
B1

THE REALM BEYOND?

If asked about the laboratory's origins, Ellsee can provide the characters with information from "Adventure Background," though she doesn't know the specific causes for the fall of the empire (she wasn't directly involved in those events), nor does she know the condition of anything beyond this station. If the characters ask for specific details about the empire, she offers the following, which you should feel free to change to match your world:

- The entire extraplanar region outside the lab was once known as the empire of Thalis (or whichever name you choose). It is connected to other realms, including the plane the players came from, by a system of magical portals. These portals were used to secretly study other worlds and gather resources from them.
- The rulers of the empire were powerful celestials, treated as gods by the local populace. They ruled from a floating city that sailed above the nations.
- A sudden surge of raw magical energy rippled across the empire, bringing it to ruin.
- Some of the outposts had protection wards placed upon them which magically sealed the structure in the case of such a catastrophic event. This is one of those outposts.

B3. RESEARCH STATIONS

Each of these four rooms has a pair of long tables and several shelves holding various instruments, containers, and devices made of metal and glass.

Against the wall opposite the entrance is a 3-foot-wide panel. The panel's surface is smooth, dark gray crystal, decorated with rows of metal buttons, dials, and switches.

ELLSEE APPEARS

If the door to the junction chamber (area B2) is still sealed, when the characters enter one of these rooms, Ellsee appears before them. She speaks with the same broken sounds and jerkily points toward the panel before disappearing after 10 seconds. A character who succeeds on a DC 14 Wisdom (Insight or Perception) check can interpret her instructions on how to use the panel on the wall and the sequence of buttons and switches. (If the door at B2 has already been unlocked, Ellsee does not appear and the research panel is inoperable.)

The Right Sequence. Ellsee provides the sequence and timing of buttons and switches to activate for each room. Implementing this correctly requires a group check involving at least two characters, each of whom must make a DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Characters that succeeded on their Wisdom check to make out Ellsee's instructions can make this check with advantage. On a success, one of the three orbs on the door in area B2 lights up (**Note:** Even though there are four research stations, only three need to be activated in order to open the door in area B2).

The Wrong Sequence. If the sequence is incorrectly entered, a *wall of force* (per the spell) covers the room's exit and a group of magitech guardians emerge from a secret room next to the panel. For each character in the party, roll on the table below to determine the encounter group and refer to "Creature Statistics," below, for their stats:

After the guardians are destroyed, one of the three orbs on the door in area B2 lights up (see "Function Restored" in that area).

CREATURE STATISTICS

D4	GUARDIAN TYPE
1	One **magitech defender**
2	Two **pulse echoes**
3	One **silver hunter**
4	Two **magitech seekers**

SEARCHING THE ROOM

Most items in these rooms are useless, but characters who spend at least 10 minutes searching and succeed on a DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check can find one (and only one) of the following items in each room. Roll a d8 to determine the item:

- **1-2: Translator Module.** This small silver pin can be affixed to any article of clothing. While wearing it, a creature can use an action to cast the *comprehend languages* spell from it at will.
- **3-4: Battle Suit.** This light armor is made from a durable padded material. While you wear this armor, your AC is 13 + your Dexterity modifier, and any critical hit against you becomes a normal hit.
- ***5-6: Blaster Rod.*** This metal cylinder has an L-shaped handle large enough for a human hand. A button on the handle fires a beam of magical energy with a range of 60 feet. It can be used as a light ranged simple weapon. A target hit with an attack from it takes 1d6 force damage (no ability modifier added to damage). The damage is magical.
- ***7-8: Medkit.*** This case functions as a healer's kit. It also contains two *potions of greater healing*.

B4. Main Junction Chamber

> Strange patterns decorate the floor of this chamber. A glass panel hangs against one wall, across from a circular contraption of metal and stone, etched with runes, that is mounted on the floor. Within the circle is a block of twisted metal panels, spitting out sparkling crackles of energy. A large metal disc is set into the center of the far wall. Strange red markings are written above the disc.

When the characters move beyond the door, the **steel sentry** guarding the generator emerges from a panel that opens in the ceiling and attacks the party.

Deactivating the Generator

Characters that end their turn within 5 feet of the crackling generator take 10 (3d6) lightning damage. It can be deactivated in one of two ways:

- ***Manual Shutdown.*** A character can follow Ellsee's directions (see "Ellsee Appears," above) to shut down the generator. The procedure has three steps, each requiring one action and a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Insight) check to complete. The character must remain in contact with the device.
- ***Destruction.*** The device can also be disabled by damaging it. It has AC 15, 85 hit points, and immunity to lightning, poison, and psychic damage.

Disabling the generator device also deactivates the serpentine guardian construct, which becomes paralyzed and falls prone. After the generator is disabled, continue to "Conclusion."

Conclusion

With the generator disabled, Ellsee activates the glass panel on the wall, using the glowing runes on it to repair and reactivate the station. She thanks the party for their help and opens a portal next to the panel that can take them back to the mountain passage. The portal closes behind the characters once they leave, preventing any return. The anomalies are no more, and the characters can return to Ashstead for their reward.

The Drunken Beard

If the characters mention the anomaly which encased the Drunken Beard tavern, Ellsee offers to help. If the characters kept the metallic orb from the Ashstead construct (see "Metal Contraption," above), the custodian directs them to combine it with a piece from the generator in area B4. Doing so creates a device similar to the metal disk Naulach discovered at the well. Bringing the device within 30 feet of the tavern and pushing a switch on its surface causes the jagged crystal surrounding the tavern to disintegrate. After using it, the device becomes inert.

If the characters free the Drunken Beard within 24 hours of when the building was first encased (see part 1), the twelve patrons who were inside still live. Otherwise, they perish while trapped within the crystal prison. If the townsfolk survive, Luseldis rewards the characters with an additional 500 gp.

GM's Option: Doorway to Arkencloud

Optionally, the GM can instead allow the characters to return to the station whenever they wish to make the journey. The disc on the north wall becomes a sealed door that leads into the ruins of the ancient empire. The red markings above it translate to read "Junction Station D-01."

Opening the door or travelling into the ruins is beyond the scope of this adventure, but it's a potential hook for many more! The lost history behind the empire's origins, its advanced magitech society, and the reasons for its fall can provide new content for your campaign or can be used as seeds for an entirely new story.

Magitech Defender

Medium construct, unaligned

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 68 (8d8 + 32)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	17 (+3)	19 (+4)	8 (-1)	15 (+2)	7 (-2)

Saving Throws Con +6, Wis +4

Damage Resistances lightning

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses blindsight 20 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages —

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Actions

Multiattack. The defender makes two melee or two ranged attacks.

Greatsword. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Beam Blaster. Ranged Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, range 60 ft., one creature. Hit: 10 (3d6) radiant damage

Magitech Defenders

These are silver-plated humanoid constructs. They have glass orbs embedded in their palms that release blazing beams of light.

Magitech Seeker

Large construct, unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 76 (8d10 + 32)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	4 (-3)	15 (+2)	5 (-3)

Skills Perception +4

Damage Resistances lightning

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses blindsight 30 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 14

Languages —

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Actions

Multiattack. The seeker attacks twice with its tentacles or makes one tentacle attack and one bite attack.

Tentacle. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. Hit: 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. Hit: 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage

Magitech Seekers

Seekers are worm-like metal constructs. They have long, bladed tentacles extending from their bodies. Their head opens into an orifice containing rings of sharp metal teeth.

Pulse Echo

Medium elemental, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 52 (7d8 + 21)

Speed 0 ft., fly 30 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	10 (0)	13 (+1)	6 (-2)

Damage Resistances fire

Damage Immunities lightning, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses blindsight 20 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages —

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Charged Body. A creature that touches the pulse echo or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 5 (1d10) lightning damage.

Actions

Slam. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage and 4 (1d8) lightning damage.

Shock Pulse. The pulse echo releases a wave of electrical energy in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 11 Dexterity saving throw, taking 17 (5d6) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

Pulse Echoes

Pulse echoes are lightning elementals with a humanoid torso atop a trail of lightning that hovers above the ground.

Silver Hunter

Large construct, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 76 (8d10 + 32)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	16 (+3)	19 (+4)	5 (-3)	13 (+1)	5 (-3)

Skills Perception +3

Damage Resistances lightning

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses blindsight 20 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages —

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Pack Tactics. The hunter has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the hunter's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Spider Climb. The hunter can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Actions

Multiattack. The hunter makes two bladed limb attacks.

Bladed Limb. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 12 (2d8 + 3) slashing damage.

Silver Hunters

These spider-like metallic constructs have a metal carapace and blade-tipped silvery appendages.

Silver Striker

Large construct, unaligned

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 142 (15d10 + 60)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	3 (-4)	9 (-1)	1 (-5)

Damage Immunities lightning, poison, psychic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses blindsight 20 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages —

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Immutable Form. The striker is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Magic Resistance. The striker has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. The striker's weapon attacks are magical.

Actions

Multiattack. The hunter makes three slam attacks.

Slam. Melee Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 12 (2d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or have its hit point maximum reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. The target dies if this attack reduces its hit point maximum to 0. The reduction lasts until the creature completes a long rest.

Silver Striker
The striker is a bulky, metallic humanoid construct with elongated arms and oversized hands.



"Overwhelming, am I not?"

Steel Sentry

Huge construct, unaligned

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 184 (16d12 + 80)

Speed 50 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	7 (-2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)

Skills Perception +6, Stealth +7

Damage Immunities fire, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned

Senses blindsight 20 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages —

Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the sentry fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Spider Climb. The sentry can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Actions

Multiattack. The sentry makes two attacks: one with its bite and one to constrict.

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. Hit: 22 (3d10 + 6) piercing damage.

Constrict. Melee Weapon Attack: + 10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one Large or smaller creature. Hit: 17 (2d10 + 6) bludgeoning damage plus 17 (2d10 + 6) slashing damage. The target is grappled (escape DC 16) if the sentry isn't already constricting a creature, and the target is restrained until this grapple ends.

Flame Breath (Recharge 5–6). The sentry exhales a line of flame that is 20 feet long and 5 feet wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw, taking 66 (12d10) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Swallow. The sentry makes one bite attack against a Medium or smaller target it is grappling. If the attack hits, the target is also swallowed, and the grapple ends. While swallowed, the target is blinded and restrained, it has total cover against attacks and other effects outside the sentry, and it takes 21 (6d6) fire damage at the start of each of the sentry's turns. A sentry can have only one creature swallowed at a time.

If the sentry takes 30 damage or more on a single turn from the swallowed creature, the sentry must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw at the end of that turn or regurgitate the creature, which falls prone in a space within 10 feet of the sentry. If the sentry dies, a swallowed creature is no longer restrained by it and can escape from the corpse by using 15 feet of movement, exiting prone.

Legendary Actions

The sentry can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The sentry regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Detect. The sentry makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Move. The sentry moves up to half its speed without provoking any opportunity attacks.

Sweep (Costs 3 Actions). The sentry whips its serpentine tail in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in the area must succeed on a DC 18 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Steel Sentry

The sentry is a serpentine construct with a frame of armored plates connected by steaming metal coils. Its crystalline eyes glow with a bright red light.



Joshua Mendenhall is an independent TTRPG designer, graphic designer, and writer. He is best known for his role as Co-Director for *The Islands of Sina Una*, a 5E DND compatible setting based on precolonial Filipino mythology and culture. He frequently works with Metal Weave Games and Hit Point Press while working on his own projects, including *POLYHEDRAL*, a TTRPG interview book.



Makenzie De Armas is an award-winning game designer and writer. In addition to her work for ARCADIA, she has also served as the lead writer for *The Islands of Sina Una* and co-designer for MCDM's *Kingdoms & Warfare*. She now works full-time as an Associate Game Designer for D&D at Wizards of the Coast. You can usually find her rambling into the void on Twitter at @MakenzieLaneDA.



Rich Lescouflair is a long-time tabletop gamer turned RPG designer, writer, and graphic artist. He is co-owner of Alligator Alley Entertainment, in which he's the creator and lead designer of *Esper Genesis*, the 5th Edition powered sci-fi RPG. His freelance work features several titles under Wizards of the Coast and Green Ronin Publishing, including design work for Dungeons & Dragons, D&D Adventurers League, and *The Expanse RPG*. He is also a current and founding member of the Dungeon Masters Guild Adepts.

Resources

Well of the Lost Gods Map Variants and Handouts:

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Well, here we are at our first stop on the *ARCADIA* road. From the beginning, we said MCDM planned to make three issues and assess whether or not to keep going. When we began this endeavor, I wasn't sure how the magazine would be received. Did people want more fifth edition content on a regular basis? There's already a lot out there! That's why we needed to do more than just provide content. This magazine needed to be something special with the best writers and artists we could find. So we built an exceptional team, and we liked what we created, but how did you react?

The answer: super positively. I'm writing this letter after the release of issue 1, and already your responses and enthusiasm for the content exceeds my highest hopes. Our Patreon numbers blasted off, we're getting all sorts of love on social media, and you're also finding, following, and praising our authors and artists. You've spoken. You want more *ARCADIA*, and we'll be giving it to you.

In fact, authors, artists, and playtesters are already cranking on future issues. We're still working out the timeline for releases, but we hope to get you illustrated, edited, playtested content on a regular basis as we fine-tune our process for indefinite production.

ARCADIA is still evolving, and the team does that by listening to you. Our first *ARCADIA* survey will be available to Patreon patrons shortly after we publish this issue. The results help us pinpoint the most useful and fun content for your gaming table, and let you make requests for articles you'd like to read in the future. We'll also ask you about new content we have ideas for! We want to know what you like, because you help make *ARCADIA* a hit!

Our Patreon surveys aren't the only place to talk to us about *ARCADIA*. The MCDM Discord and Reddit communities have great folks talking about all things RPG. (Shoutout to the incredible MCDM community moderators who really make these wonderful places to hang.) In fact, these are great places to go to find fans creating their own content inspired by the magazine. Remember Willy Abeel's "Jumping on Mounted Combat" article? You can find a bunch of new mount stat blocks on Reddit inspired by what Willy created. That's just the tip of the incredible iceberg.

With all this talk about the future, I almost forgot to tell you that this issue of *ARCADIA* is our most ambitious yet. We have four incredible articles for you, all of which focus on new areas of the game for this magazine: a roleplaying-focused mystery adventure from Alison Huang, ten new spells for fifth edition from Celeste Conowitch, three new dream-focused ancestries from Justice Arman, and rules for aerial combat from Sam Mannell. So far we've had dungeon crawls, mysteries, subclasses, spells, ancestries, monsters, and all kinds of new rules. What will we do next? Join our communities. Let us know.

Ex animo,

James Introcaso
Managing Editor

THE DREAM KIN

THREE DREAM-THEMED ANCESTRIES

by Justice Arman

Dreams are not to be underestimated.

To ordinary creatures, dreams are a fleeting source of inspiration. A gnome inventor jolts from their bed and dashes to the workshop, the spark of ingenuity fresh in their mind. A humble farmer dreams of faraway riches and trading their spade for a sword. But in the hands of more powerful entities, dreams transcend imagination and become tools of limitless potential. This article presents three new character ancestries inspired by sleep and dreams.

Agents of meddling gods use dreams to deliver prophetic messages. Dreams are battlegrounds for cosmic defenders and slumbering psionic dragons, waging war against reflections of unfathomable evil in an endless sea of thought. Ancient aberrations enter deep trances, willing creatures into existence in crescendos of unconscious creation.

The following ancestries are detailed in this article:

- **Lucidlings** are the strange, spontaneous offspring of sleeping aberrations.
- **Sand speakers** enter the dreams of other creatures, acting as emissaries and thought thieves.
- **Somnians** are imaginative dream architects. Appearing as starry silhouettes, somnians craft illusions and assume nightmarish forms.

THE LUCIDLING

Ssussothis slowly awoke from its decennial nap. Once again, the aboleth dreamed of that pathetic warrior and his dopey grin. What an embarrassment it was to dream of defeat at the hands of such a lighthearted fool. Ssussothis' anger leached from the aberration's body, filling the cavern with a hideous squelching sound.

The aboleth sluggishly opened its three eyes to find an intruder standing in a pool of ectoplasmic goo. The slimy, grey-skinned humanoid was beaming at Ssussothis, a wide gap-toothed grin stretching across a chinless face. The being's three vertically stacked red eyes blinked, and they waved a fleshy, sword-shaped tentacle.

"Are you my mama?" asked the eager lucidling.

When sleep meets the sleepless, lucidlings are born. The unwanted offspring of immortal aberrations, lucidlings burst forth from the dreams of ancient aboleths and other alien beings, where uncontrolled thoughts beget life.

ODD OFFSPRING

No two lucidlings are alike. When the Vizier of the Court of All Flesh, Lord Rall, inverts the fragile flesh of a dozen enemies, his dreams might be so filled with their screams that it inadvertently spawns several lucidlings at once. A trained eye—one unfortunate to have seen a plethora of aberrations—can identify the lucidlings' lineage based on physical characteristics, but similarities among lucidlings with the same parent are typically far and few between. Though all lucidlings are humanoids, one lucidling might be smooth and spindly with a single piercing eye, while

their "sibling" could be twice as large, with a purple leathery hide speckled with tiny barbs.

In addition to physical features, lucidlings inherit diluted personality traits from their creators. A lucidling descended from a dominating aboleth may be described as controlling or manipulative, while the child of a gibbering mouther might be loquacious and greedy. Despite these patterns in their psyche, lucidlings are hardly replicas of their creators. They are unique individuals, shaped by their environments, choices, and experiences.

Whole New World

Paranoid progenitors reduce many lucidlings to dust shortly after their inception, but not all aberrations attempt to destroy their accidental handiwork—and those that do are not always successful. A surviving lucidling might become a dutiful minion, bizarre apprentice, or loyal spy. Others manage to escape their creators' lairs before the aberrations wake.



Lucidlings begin life as fully-formed adults with alien appearances and little or no concept of organized humanoid society. Once exposed to the outside world, curiosity overwhelms most lucidlings, driving them to partake in the best and worst experiences life has to offer.

Lucidling Vestiges

Every lucidling is born with a vestige, an organic structure that points to their otherworldly heritage. The Lucidling Vestiges table contains examples of physical features you can add to give your character a more alien appearance. These structures have no effect on your character's game statistics.

Lucidling Vestiges

d8	Vestige
1	Eyestalks
2	Translucent skin
3	Irregularly shaped iris
4	Glow-in-the-dark bones
5	Beak concealed by tentacles
6	Extra pair of tiny arms
7	Shriveled wings
8	External organs

Lucidling Names

Lucidlings are genderless. They typically adopt the name of their parental aberration, followed by a suffix synonymous with the muse of their birth dream. Lucidlings often choose an abbreviated nickname to accommodate creatures who do not speak their progenitor's language.

Example Lucidling Names. Albezuro-Gel (Abegel), Krizeth-Gel (Krigel), Krizeth-Mawpt (Kript), Marthekh-Khan (Markh), Xapkiro-Laxx (X-Lax)

Lucidling Traits

Your lucidling character has the following traits.

Ability Score Increase

Your Intelligence score increases by 2, and one other ability score of your choice increases by 1.

Age

Lucidlings reach maturity at the time of their creation, but their lifespans vary wildly. Some lucidlings live less than a year, while others are seemingly immortal. Lucidlings do not age.

Alignment
As products of unchecked creativity, lucidlings tend towards chaotic alignments.

Size
Lucidlings range from 4 to 7 feet tall and weigh between 100 and 300 pounds. Your size is Medium.

Speed
Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

Darkvision
You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light and in darkness as if it were dim light. You can't discern color in darkness, only shades of gray.

Spontaneous Evolution
As an action, you can assume an otherworldly form, choosing from the following options. This transformation lasts for 10 minutes, until you die, or until you revert to your normal form as a bonus action. Once you use this trait, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.

Alien Appendages. You sprout a pair of tentacles, arms, or similar appendages. Each appendage has a reach of 10 feet and can lift a number of pounds equal to three times your Strength score. You can use a bonus action on your turn to perform a simple task with one of your appendages, such as: lift, push, pull, or interact with an object or creature; grapple a Large or smaller creature; or make an unarmed strike. Your GM might allow you to perform other tasks with your appendages.

Your appendages can't wield weapons or shields or do anything that requires manual precision, such as using tools or magic items or performing the somatic components of a spell.

Psionic Propulsion. You gain a flying speed equal to your walking speed and can hover.

Supernatural Secretion. You secrete a viscous magical slime, granting you the ability to breathe underwater and a swimming speed equal to your walking speed.

In addition, when a creature hits you with a melee attack, you can use your reaction to deal poison damage equal to half your level to the attacker.

Telepathy
You can communicate telepathically with any creature you can see within 30 feet of you. If the receiving creature can speak at least one language, it can respond to you telepathically.

Languages
You can speak, read, and write Common and Deep Speech.

The Sand Speaker

Azita clasped her hands together and leaned forward on her oaken desk inquisitively. It was littered with books, notes, and drawings devoted to sleep and the power of the subconscious. "What did you dream of last night?" she asked the young prince.

"I didn't dream of anything," replied Moshen.

"So you forgot?"

"Sometimes I just don't dream." He shrugged.

"We always dream," asserted the scholar, reaching for a thin purple book with gold stars along its spine. She slid it across the desk to Moshen. "Unless they're stolen from us."



Formed from the sands of island shores in the astral sea, sand speakers look like sauntering humanoid sculptures stretched from dyed glass. They infiltrate the minds of creatures in their sleep, acting as prophetic messengers and so-called "thought thieves" on behalf of extraplanar entities.

Children of the Sands
Before recorded time, archangels warred with aberrations at the bounds of the multiverse, where astral sands slowly spilled into nothingness. Led by Oneirus the Eternal, the angels sought to drive back the unfathomable evils and prevent the aberrations from disrupting their divine works. During a cataclysmic battle, Oneirus' radiant fire scorched the iridescent sand, giving it form and infusing it with life. Humanoid figures of molten glass, the original sand speakers, rose from the astral desert and knelt before the archangel.

Oneirus invited each sand speaker to pledge themselves to a righteous cause and return with the angels to the celestial host. Many accepted and became prophetic messengers, while others decided to explore their newfound freedom, wandering the sands like interplanar nomads. Some, however, were tempted by unintelligible whispers emanating from the Abyss, rejecting Oneirus in favor of maleficent beings lurking beyond the sands.

Extraplanar Emissaries

Despite their smooth complexion, sand speakers are composed of millions of tiny granules suffused with cosmic energy. Sand speakers travel the multiverse in service to meddling archfey, imprisoned fiends, and forgotten deities hoping to reassert their godhood. Some conduct divine outreach as heralds, while others tempt sleeping souls on behalf of ambitious devils. A sand speaker might appear before a belligerent zealot, chastising their actions in hopes of averting a holy crusade without a single casualty.

Some sand speakers, called thought thieves, engage in subconscious subterfuge, slipping into the minds of influential figures to steal precious secrets or plant the seed of an idea in hopes of prompting action in the material world. Expert thought thieves are graceful shadows, sneaking past the defenses of well-guarded noble estates, fortified prisons, and the magically warded towers of paranoid mages.

The ability to dream walk is both a blessing and a curse. Distrusted as violators of the unconscious mind, sand speakers carry a stigma wherever they go.

Perpetual Vagabonds

Sand speakers typically relocate after appearing in a creature's dreams to avoid scrutiny. While some prefer hidden lairs on the outskirts of civilizations or adopt a regular disguise, most sand speakers are vagabonds, constantly on the move to minimize the odds of being recognized by a former target. Sand speaker societies are rare, and take the form of caravans or mobile camps.

Boundless Perspective

By the time a sand speaker reaches maturity, they have seen dozens of dreams. However, a sand speaker's ability comes at a price: the first time that they dream walk, they can no longer have dreams of their own. Instead, they must live vicariously through the fantasies of others, beholding the wonder of the unrestrained mind but tasting none of its fruits for themselves.

Dream walks inspire sand speakers to explore the real world. To a sand speaker, each dream is an illusion—alluring, foreign, and hollow. They observe delicious foods, wondrous curiosities, and breathtaking landscapes imagined by dreamers. Sand speakers chase these visions during their waking hours, venturing out into the world in search of iconic landmarks, gourmet recipes, and famous individuals that inspired dreams they've visited.

Sand Speaker Personalities

Though sand speakers lose the ability to have new dreams after their first dream walk, they can still relive old ones. In sand speaker culture, these old dreams are symbols of fate called omens. Typically, the same omen recurs for weeks, months, or years. A sand speaker has no control over which omen they experience each night and always recalls it perfectly upon waking. Like tarot card readings or casting runes, a sand speaker draws meaning from their omen, believing it holds some hidden clue to their destiny.

The Sand Speaker Omens table displays possible omens for your character, while the Sand Speaker Quirks table contains specific quirks to help you portray them.

Sand Speaker Omens

d8	My omen involves a...
1	Vault filled with treasures from a distant land.
2	Simple memory shared with a loved one who's no longer around.
3	Recurring symbol which I do not recognize.
4	Battle against formidable foe.
5	Mysterious creature.
6	Famous person I have never actually met.
7	Test of great importance.
8	Horrible nightmare.

Sand Speaker Quirks

d8	Quirk
1	Your body is shaped like a round-bottom flask.
2	Sand shifts beneath your glassy skin, changing color to reflect your mood.
3	You have a phobia of water.
4	When someone wrongs you or your companions, you discretely fill their belongings with sand.
5	You are a thrill seeker, chasing the passion you've witnessed in others' dreams.
6	You look for meaning in every action or symbol.
7	Others often mistake you for someone they know.
8	You talk in your sleep. Very loudly.

Sand Speaker Names

Each sand speaker has a single name, determined by a motif found in their first dream walk. Sand speaker names are gender-neutral.

Example Sand Speaker Names. Caress, Dance, Drown, Fall, Run, Song, Spider, Teeth, Whisper.

Sand Speaker Traits

Your sand speaker character has the following traits.

Ability Score Increase

Your Dexterity, Wisdom, and Charisma scores each increase by 1.

Age

Sand speakers reach maturity at the same rate as humans. On average, they live about 300 years.

Alignment

Sand speakers tend towards lawful neutral. Tapping into the subconscious minds of other creatures gives sand speakers a sense of perspective. They see creatures in their most vulnerable states, witnessing their brightest hopes, deepest desires, and darkest fears.

Size

Sand speakers have smooth, elongated features. They range from 6 to 8 feet tall and weigh between 150 and 250 pounds. Your size is Medium.

Speed

Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

Darkvision

You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light and in darkness as if it were dim light. You can't discern color in darkness, only shades of gray.

Sandform

As an action, you, along with everything you are wearing and carrying, transform into fine sand for 1 minute. This effect ends if you are reduced to 0 hit points.

While in this form, you retain your walking speed and lose all other movement speeds you have. You can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

You gain resistance to nonmagical damage. You can't talk or manipulate objects, and any objects you were carrying or holding can't be dropped, used, or otherwise interacted with. You can't attack or cast spells.

Once you use this trait, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.

Oneiromancy

You know the *message* cantrip. When you reach 3rd level, you can cast the *sleep* spell once with this trait and regain the ability to do so when you finish a long rest. When you reach 5th level, you can cast the *silence* spell once with this trait and regain the ability to do so when you finish a long rest. Charisma is your spellcasting ability for these spells.

Dream Walk

As an action, choose a sleeping creature that you can see within 10 feet of you. You enter a trance state for up to 8 hours, acting as a messenger. While in the trance, you are aware of your surroundings, but can't take actions or move.

You appear in the target's dreams and can converse with it as long as it remains asleep, for the duration of your trance. If the target wakes during your trance for any reason, your trance immediately ends. You can't shape the target's dreams or alter your appearance when you dream walk—you are only a visitor. You can emerge from the trance at any time, ending this effect early. The target recalls the dream perfectly upon waking.

Entering Dreams

The Dream Realm does not abide by the laws of the material world, so sand speakers hoping to gain information must think outside the box. For example, in real life, the ability to read—be it a book, a sign, even a clock—is not processed in the subconscious part of the human brain, therefore we are unable to read in our dreams. While a dozing creature might believe it's reading, a sand speaker inside the dream may come across inscriptions written in gibberish or books filled with blank pages. Similarly, creatures in dreams are products of the dreamer's subconscious and may look or sound differently than who the dreamer understands them to be—if they have a face at all! Knowing this information can help GMs and players convey dreams as distinct, vivid experiences with unique problems for characters to solve.

Languages

You can speak, read, and write Common and one other language of your choice.

The Somnian

As I fell into my sleep,
The stage was set with wondrous things.
At long-lost mem'ries, I did weep,
And missed the creatures in the wings.

—Bibis Ross, "The Theatre of Sleep"

Somnians are the creators of dreams. Compassionate artists and philosophers, the star-skinned illusionists find meaning in all things. Whether guiding a sleeping creature towards a source of inspiration or warning it when it has gone astray, somnians are the architects of bedtime's wildest fantasies—and worst nightmares.

Imaginative Illusionists



Somnians hail from the vast expanse of the Dream Realm, where time slows and their innate magic is magnified. When a creature falls asleep, a somnian in the Dream Realm weaves a dream for them, uniquely tailored to the slumbering creature's thoughts and feelings.

Outside of the Dream Realm, a somnian's ability to create dreams manifests as illusion magic. Despite this, somnians maintain their desire to mold the world around them, using their gifts to inspire others, uphold symbols of good, or seek justice. They are natural philosophers, gravitating towards callings that emphasize expression and interpretation, such as the arts, academia, or soothsaying.

Cosmic Shepherds

Every dream has a purpose. Inspiration. Remembrance. Realization. In the Dream Realm, somnians discern this purpose and gently suggest it to the creature through symbolism.

Somnians continue to foster others in the material world, studying and nudging creatures towards their goals with subtle enthusiasm. There is no greater joy for a somnian than helping someone else achieve their dreams.

Lasting Memories

Somnians are known for their generosity. The frequent gift givers expect nothing in return, sparking lifelong friendships with sculptures, songs, and recipes. Superstitious folk believe it's bad luck to turn down a somnian's gift.

In a true act of selflessness, a somnian can give their life to resurrect a fallen creature. All that remains of a somnian who performs this act is a memory of their choosing in the mind of the revived. While they typically sacrifice themselves to resurrect a loved one, somnians have imparted their last gifts to influential poets, scholars, and leaders who died before their time. Bereaved family members sometimes seek a somnian in desperation, hoping the dreamweaver will trade their life for that of a stranger.

Somnian Nightmares

As stewards of the sleeping, somnians are generally pleasant. However, every somnian harbors a mote of darkness they can harness, assuming nightmarish forms to terrify misguided creatures and foes alike. The Somnian Nightmares table contains examples of possible forms your character might take when invoking this darkness.

Somnian Nightmares

d6	Nightmare
1	Horrifying monster with too many joints
2	Panicked reflection of the target with their teeth falling out
3	Natural disaster, like a forest fire or tsunami
4	Swarm of insects, rodents, or other pests
5	Disapproving loved one
6	Empty, emotionless void

Somnian Names

Somnians look like humanoid galaxies. They have shadowy frames sprinkled with tiny luminescent stars. Somnians derive their names from the constellations on their twinkling frames.

Example Somnian Names. Arietes, Aquila, Belator, Gladius, Leo, Ridera, Ocula, Papilonus, Zelotes.

Somnian Traits

Your somnian character has the following traits.

Ability Score Increase

Your Wisdom score increases by 1, and one other ability score of your choice increases by 1.

Age

Somnians begin life as wispy spirits and reach maturity around the age of 30. They can live to be 500 years old.

Alignment

As the sculptors of dreams, somnians emphasize imaginative freedom. They value expression and understanding and reject reality when it is oppressive. Somnians tend towards chaotic good.

Size

Somnians are the same height and build as humans. Your size is Medium.

Speed

Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

Empath

You have proficiency in the Insight skill.

Astral Architect

You know the *minor illusion* cantrip.

When you reach 3rd level, you can cast *detect thoughts* once with this trait, and you regain the ability to do so when you finish a long rest. When you reach 5th level, you can cast *major image* once with this trait, and you regain the ability to do so when you finish a long rest. Wisdom is your spellcasting ability for these spells.

Nightmare

As an action, you assume a terrifying form. Choose one creature that you can see within 60 feet of you. The target must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or become frightened of you for 1 minute. The DC for this saving throw equals 8 + your Wisdom modifier + your proficiency bonus. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. Once you use this trait, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.

Remembrance

You can cast the *resurrection* spell once with this trait, requiring no material components. When you do so, you immediately die, and your body withers away in a cloud of starry dust. The resurrected creature awakes with a memory of yours (chosen by you).

A somnian who sacrifices themselves in this way can only be brought back to life by a *wish* spell.

Languages

You can speak, read, and write Common and Celestial.



TEN SPELLS YOU NEED IN 5e

TEN CLASSIC SPELLS UPDATED FOR THE LATEST EDITION

by Celeste Conowitch

If you're anything like me, you spend the most time during character creation conjuring the perfect spell list. There are so many factors to consider when making a caster—everything from effectiveness, to flavor, to having some good clean (or dirty, for you eldritch minions out there) fun.

In the spirit of expanding your grab bag of options, I blew some dust off a collection of spells from older editions of the world's most popular roleplaying game. You'll find here a trove of arcane treasures that fill in some mechanical gaps in fifth edition or simply make your next spell-slinger desperately cool.

BARD SPELLS

1st Level
Erase (transmutation)

2nd level
Attract metal (transmutation)

3rd level
Glitterdust (evocation)
Walking dead (necromancy)

6th level
Rainbow recurve (evocation)

CLERIC SPELLS

1st Level
Erase (transmutation)

3rd level
Glitterdust (evocation)
Walking dead (necromancy)

DRUID SPELLS

1st Level
Nature's ladder (transmutation)

2nd level
Attract metal (transmutation)

7th Level
Stoneheart (necromancy)

RANGER SPELLS

1st Level
Nature's ladder (transmutation)

SORCERER SPELLS

1st Level
Erase (transmutation)

2nd level
Attract metal (transmutation)

3rd level
Glitterdust (evocation)
Shrink (transmutation)

4th Level
Silver wings (transmutation)

6th level
Rainbow recurve (evocation)

WIZARD SPELLS

1st Level
Erase (transmutation)

2nd level
Attract metal (transmutation)

3rd level
Glitterdust (evocation)
Shrink (transmutation)
Walking dead (necromancy)

4th Level
Silver wings (transmutation)

6th Level
Rainbow recurve (evocation)

7th Level
Stoneheart (necromancy)

8th Level
Permanency (enchantment)

WARLOCK SPELLS

1st Level
Erase (transmutation)

4th Level
Silver wings (transmutation)

7th Level
Stoneheart (necromancy)

SPELL DESCRIPTIONS

The spells are presented in alphabetical order.

ATTRACT METAL

2nd-level transmutation
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 60 feet
Components: V, S, M (a pouch of iron filings)
Duration: Concentration, 1 minute

You create a magnetic field that allows you to push or pull metal objects. When you cast the spell, and as an action each round for the duration, you can exert your will on one metal object that you can see within range. You can affect the same target round after round, or choose a new one at any time. If you switch targets, the prior target is no longer affected by the spell.

You can try to move a metal object that weighs up to 500 pounds. If the object isn't being worn or carried, you automatically move it in a straight line up to 30 feet toward or away from you, but not beyond the range of this spell.

If the object is being worn or carried by an unwilling creature, you must make an ability check with your spellcasting ability contested by that creature's Strength check. If you succeed, you pull the object away from that creature and can move it in a straight line up to 30 feet toward or away from you, but not beyond the range of this spell. If the object is a worn object that cannot easily be removed (such as armor) and you win the contest, the targeted creature also moves with the metal object. On subsequent rounds, you can use your action to attempt to maintain your grip on the creature by repeating the contest. If the combined weight of the object and the creature exceed 500 pounds, the target cannot be moved.

ERASE

1st-level transmutation
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 30 feet
Components: V, S, M (the nib of a quill)
Duration: Instantaneous

You remove writing from a single scroll, one page of paper, a sheet of parchment, or a similar surface that you can see within range that is no larger than a 2-foot-square area.

This spell can also automatically remove a *glyph of warding* or a glyph created by the *symbol* spell. If the glyph was created using a spell slot of 4th level or higher, you must make an ability check using your spellcasting ability. The DC equals 10 + the spell's level. On a successful check, the glyph is erased.

Glitterdust

3rd-level evocation
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Self (15-foot cone)
Components: V, S, M (a packet of confetti)
Duration: 1 minute

You spray a shower of golden glitter from your hands. Each creature in a 15-foot cone becomes coated in glitter for the spell's duration, and affected creatures or objects can't benefit from being invisible. In addition, any creature in the area when the spell is cast must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or become blinded for the duration. A blinded creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Nature's Ladder

1st-level transmutation
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 60 feet
Components: V, S, M (an acorn)
Duration: 24 hours

You cause a tree to sprout from an unoccupied space of solid ground that you can see within range. When you cast the spell, you determine the height of the tree, which can be a maximum of 20 feet tall. If there isn't enough room for the tree to grow to full height, the tree attains the maximum possible height in the space available. The tree has a 1-foot-diameter trunk and evenly spaced branches perfect for climbing. The tree has AC 5 and 25 hit points. After 24 hours, or if the tree is reduced to 0 hit points, it instantly vanishes.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, you can increase the height of the tree by 20 feet for each slot level above 1st.

Permanency

8th-level enchantment
Casting Time: 1 hour
Range: Self
Components: V, S, M (the highest-quality components available for a particular spell costing 1,000 gp per level of the permanent spell: 1,000 gp for a 1st-level spell, 2,000 gp for a 2nd-level spell, etc.)
Duration: Until dispelled

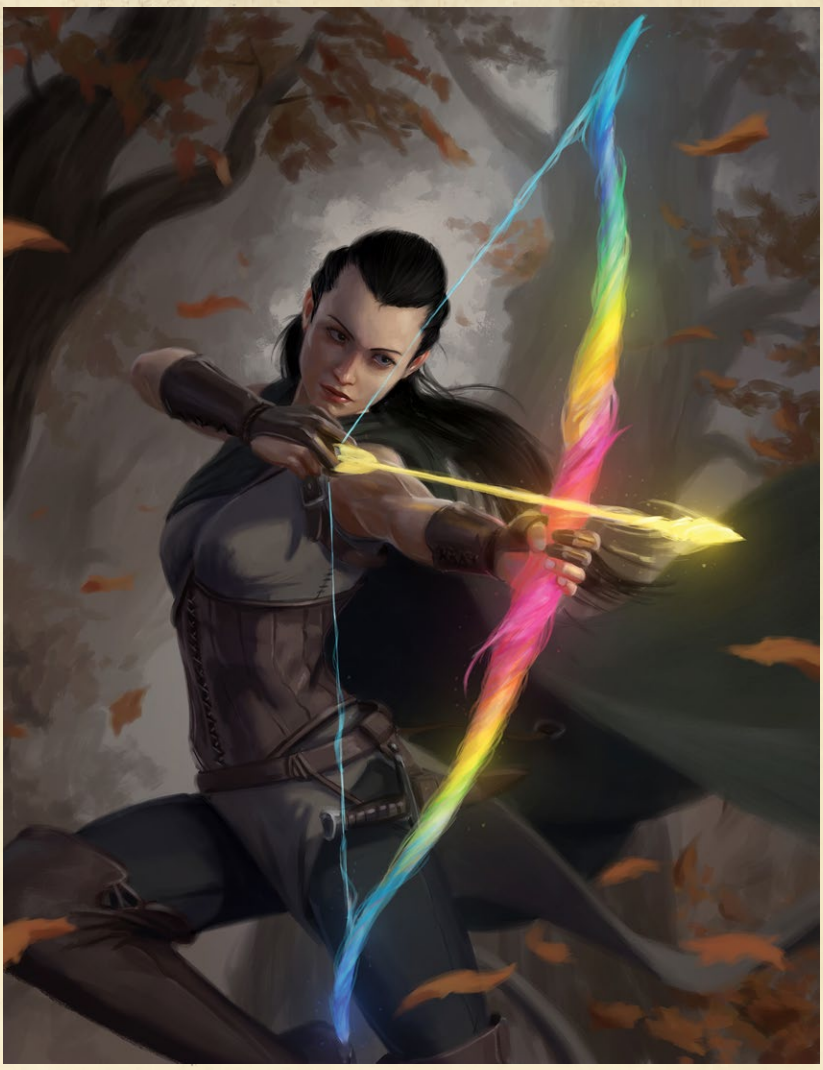
This spell makes certain other spells you cast on yourself permanent. Choose a spell of 5th level or lower that you can cast, has a duration of 1 minute or longer, a casting time of 1 hour or shorter, and can target you.

You cast that spell as part of casting *permanency*, expending spell slots for both.

The spell cast with *permanency* takes effect immediately and lasts until dispelled. Spells made permanent in this way no longer require concentration to maintain and do not require the use of a spell slot beyond the initial casting. If the spell you cast with the *permanency* spell is dispelled (such as by the *dispel magic* spell), then both that spell and *permanency* are dispelled and vice versa. You can only be affected by one permanent spell at a time.

RAINBOW RECURVE

6th-level evocation
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 150 feet
Components: V, S, M (a small glass prism)
Duration: Concentration, 1 minute



You summon a longbow formed of swirling rainbow hues to your hands.

When the bow appears, you choose an arrow color and make a ranged spell attack against a target of your choice within range. On a hit, the target takes 3d8 force damage and must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw or face an additional effect determined by the color of the arrow used. Until the spell ends, you can use an action on each of your turns to make another ranged spell attack, selecting an arrow of a different color each time you do.

Once you fire an arrow, the corresponding color disappears from the bow, and you can't select that color again during this particular casting of the spell. When the duration ends or when you have used all seven colors, the bow vanishes.

Red. The target takes an additional 3d8 fire damage.

Orange. The target takes an additional 3d8 acid damage.

Yellow. The target takes an additional 3d8 lightning damage.

Green. The target takes an additional 3d8 poison damage.

Blue. The target takes an additional 3d8 cold damage.

Indigo. On a failed save, the target is paralyzed. It can make a Constitution saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the paralyzed condition on a success.

Violet. On a failed save, the target is blinded. It must then make a Wisdom saving throw at the start of your next turn. A successful save ends the blinded condition. If it fails that save, the creature is transported to another plane of existence of the GM's choosing and is no longer blinded. (Typically, a creature that is on a plane that isn't its home plane is banished home, while other creatures are usually cast into the Astral or Ethereal Planes.)

SHRINK

3rd-level transmutation
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 30 feet
Components: V, S, M (a raisin)
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

You cause a creature or an object you can see within range to shrink for the duration. Choose either a creature or an object that is not worn or held. If the target is an unwilling creature, it can make a Constitution saving throw. On a success, the spell has no effect.

The target becomes Tiny, shrinking to a height of 1 inch, and it weighs 1 pound, unless it already was smaller or weighed less before the spell was cast. If the target is a creature, everything it is wearing and carrying changes size with it. Any item dropped by an affected creature returns to normal size at once. Until the spell ends, the target has disadvantage on Strength checks and Strength saving throws. The target's weapons also shrink to match its new size. While these weapons are reduced, the target's attacks with them deal 1 damage. If the creature was not already Tiny before this spell was cast, its speed is halved for the duration.

SILVER WINGS

4th-level transmutation
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Self
Components: V, S, M (a silver needle)
Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

You grow a pair of metallic, feathered wings. These wings grant you a fly speed of 60 feet for the duration. When the spell ends, you fall if you are still aloft, unless you can stop the fall.

While the spell is active, you can use a bonus action to make a melee spell attack with the wings against a target within 10 feet of you. On a hit, the target takes 2d6 slashing damage. The wings are magical weapons.

As a bonus action, you can choose to end the spell and launch the metallic feathers in a 60-foot cone of razor-sharp blades. Each creature in the cone must make a Dexterity saving throw. A creature takes 3d8 piercing damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

STONEHEART

7th-level necromancy
Casting Time: 1 hour
Range: Self
Components: V, S, M (a humanoid heart carved from a gemstone of exceptional quality worth at least 1,000 gp)
Duration: 1 year

You exchange your own living heart for the finely crafted heart of stone you used for the spell's material component. Your living heart can then be stored or hidden anywhere you like, but must remain within 1 mile of you to keep the spell active, where it continues to beat for the duration. While your heart is removed in this manner, you automatically succeed on all death saving throws. If you die, but your original heart remains intact, you gain a new body with a new stone heart in 1d10 days and return to life with all your hit points. Your new body appears within 5 feet of your original heart.

While you possess a stone heart, you lose the ability to heal naturally during a short or long rest, and can only restore hit points through magical healing. If your living heart is damaged or destroyed, you are instantly slain.

You can choose to end the spell as a bonus action. The spell ends automatically if you travel more than 1 mile from your living heart. When the spell ends, your own living heart instantly returns to its proper place, and the stone heart is destroyed.

Walking Dead

3rd-level necromancy
Casting Time: 1 minute
Range: Touch
Components: V, S, M (a vial of smelling salts)
Duration: 10 days

You animate the corpse of a creature that has died within the past day whose body is still intact. For the duration, you restore a semblance of life to the deceased creature, putting the reanimated subject in a half-life state but not truly reconnecting the soul to the body.

The reanimated creature has 1 hit point and can move as they could in life. In this state, a target is unable to attack, use spells, or take similarly complex actions. If the creature could speak in life, it has the ability to do so, though its memory is cloudy, making it difficult for the subject to remember even the basic details of its past life. During a limited interaction, the animated corpse could be passed off as alive, but extended conversation reveals something is amiss. A creature that uses its action to examine the body can determine that it is not alive with a successful Intelligence (Investigation) check against your spell save DC.

The spell also effectively extends the time limit on raising the target from the dead, since days spent reanimated does not count against the time limit of spells such as *raise dead*, and the reanimated body does not decay.

A creature reanimated in this way is not undead, and it can be resurrected by any spell that would return a fully dead creature to life.



ACES HIGH

NEW RULES FOR AERIAL COMBAT

by Sam Mannell

A wizard leans over the edge of their magic carpet, casting a bolt of fire at a fleeing, winged assassin. A ranger rides her trusty griffon companion, twisting around the dragonfire licking at their heels. The party braces for impact as a roc plummets from the clouds, smashing into their stolen airship!

In a combat-focused roleplaying game with flying creatures and vehicles, you're bound to take a fight to the skies sooner or later. While precise tactical positioning can be valuable on solid ground, many players and GMs find that judicious creature placement in three dimensions slows down the action, right when things are getting interesting!

INTRODUCTION

Aces High is a lightweight ruleset for aerial combat, aimed at replicating the high-octane action of a cinematic dog-fight. Aerial combat doesn't happen a lot in roleplaying games, because it tends to be more cumbersome and less fun than combat on the ground—but in many stories that aren't RPGs, aerial battles happen all the time! The aim of Aces High is to emulate the thrill of those stories, and make you want to put more aerial combat in your games.

These rules are strictly aimed at combat encounters that take place entirely in the air. No half measures.

THE FLIGHT MODIFIER

The cornerstone of Aces High is the **flight modifier**, a number attached to your character which functions like an ability modifier, and is used to modify d20 rolls. This includes ability checks, called flight checks, and saving throws, called flight saving throws.

The two factors that determine your flight modifier are size and flying speed, because the flight modifier is based on the real-life concept of the thrust-to-weight ratio. You can find a vehicle or creature's flight modifier on the flight modifiers table on the next page.

When riding a mount, use the mount's flight modifier. When piloting a vehicle, use the vehicle's flight modifier. When you gain a flying speed, whether through a spell such as *fly,* or the use of a magic item such as *wings of flying*, calculate your own flight modifier.

PILOTS AND PASSENGERS

If you're the helmsman of a vehicle, directing a mount, or flying under your own steam, you're considered a **pilot**. Only pilots use a flight modifier.

If you're riding along on a mount, vehicle, or magic item, but you're not directly responsible for piloting, then you're a **passenger**, and you don't use any flight modifier. Don't worry! You can still take actions during the **action phase**.

Flight Modifiers Table

Size /Fly Speed	Tiny (0)	Small (–1)	Medium (–2)	Large (–3)	Huge (–4)	Gargantuan (–5)
10ft (+1)	+1	+0	–1	–2	–3	–4
20ft (+2)	+2	+1	+0	–1	–2	–3
30ft (+3)	+3	+2	+1	+0	–1	–2
40ft (+4)	+4	+3	+2	+1	+0	–1
50ft (+5)	+5	+4	+3	+2	+1	+0
60ft (+6)	+6	+5	+4	+3	+2	+1
70ft (+7)	+7	+6	+5	+4	+3	+2
80ft (+8)	+8	+7	+6	+5	+4	+3
90ft (+9)	+9	+8	+7	+6	+5	+4
100ft (+10)	+10	+9	+8	+7	+6	+5
110ft (+11)	+11	+10	+9	+8	+7	+6
120ft (+12)	+12	+11	+10	+9	+8	+7
130ft (+13)	+13	+12	+11	+10	+9	+8
140ft (+14)	+14	+13	+12	+11	+10	+9
150ft (+15)	+15	+14	+13	+12	+11	+10

Example Flight Modifiers

Creature	Flight Modifier
Balor	+4
Couatl	+7
Dragon, adult	+4
Dragon, young	+5
Erinyes	+4
Giant eagle	+5
Griffon	+5
Harpy	+2
Human on a broom of flying	+3
Human affected by the fly spell	+4
Manticore	+2
Nightmare	+6
Roc	+7
Winged tiefling	+1
Wyvern	+5

Abstract Positions

Aces High aims to be fast, simple, and fun. Don't worry about the precise positioning of combatants, the direction they are flying, or their fly speed! You can safely assume that combatants are constantly changing direction while chasing each other, automatically making the best maneuvers they can—the only thing you need to know is whether or not they have a clear shot at each other. Measurements, including altitude (see "Altitude Die"), are abstractions when using these rules.

Using minis can be useful to help visualize the scene, but Aces High doesn't use a grid at all.

How to Play

While you can defeat an opponent by dealing damage to them, your primary objective in an Aces High encounter is to *ground* the enemy. Knocking your foes out of the sky is the fastest path to victory!



SCRAMBLE!

When two or more combatants commit to aerial combat, all pilots involved must Scramble!

Scrambling sets the turn order and the starting altitude of each combatant. Much like standard initiative, combatants roll a d20 and add their flight modifier to the result, with higher results taking their turns first. However, unlike initiative, all combatants have **10 seconds** to roll as many times as they want, trying to get the best possible result. Once the timer is up, everyone must use the result they have in front of them![1]

When flying any mount or vehicle, only the pilot needs to Scramble. Passengers don't need to Scramble—they take actions when their pilot does.

When a new combatant joins (or rejoins!) the fray, they Scramble without a timer, and use the first result they roll.

To find your opening altitude, don't add your flight modifier; all you need to do is look at the number on your d20, and match it to the corresponding Altitude on the Opening Altitude Table.

[1] Players using an online platform to play are able to roll much faster than normal, so consider cutting the time limit in half when playing online.

Opening Altitude Table

d20	Altitude
1-4	2
5-8	3
9-12	4
13-16	5
17-20	6

ALTITUDE DIE

Altitude is vital to both success and survival in an Aces High encounter. We track it on the Altitude Die, a d6 that you can place next to your character sheet or your mini. The higher the number, the higher you are!

Being above your target is an enormous tactical advantage that allows you to use the sun or other environmental conditions to make tracking your movement extremely difficult. A pilot is too engaged with flying to spend precious seconds craning their neck to squint at the sky! You have **disadvantage** on attack rolls against targets of a higher Altitude than you, **unless you're a passenger**.

As you might expect, this also means you have **advantage** on attack rolls against targets with an Altitude below yours. This advantage applies whether you're a pilot or a passenger.

The Stunt Phase

Once everyone has Scrambled and set their Altitude Die, play begins. On each player's turn there are two phases; the stunt phase—in which you try to create angles of attack, and the action phase—in which you try to use them!

When your stunt phase starts, you roll a number of d4s equal to your flight modifier (minimum of 1 die). These are your Stunt Dice. You can spend them to alter your Altitude, or spend them to create Angles.

Unspent dice carry over to the next round. When your next stunt phase starts, roll a new set of d4s, and add them to the pile you had left over.

Your stunt phase ends when you say it does, or when you have no more Stunt Dice to spend.

Optional Rule: Burning Daylight!

Once you're more comfortable with this system, you may want to turn up the heat. Try adding a 60-second timer to the stunt phase to add some pressure, if everyone in your group is okay with it. What's more important to you; adjusting your Altitude, or creating an Angle? Choose fast!

Creating Angles

When you roll your Stunt Dice, the results are somewhat like a hand of cards. To create an Angle, you must match **three-of-a-kind**, or **three-in-a-row**. For example, **3-3-3** and **2-3-4** are both viable Angles. When you match and subsequently spend these dice, you gain an extra action to use during the action phase!

Multiple Angles

If you're fast enough, it's possible to create multiple Angles and therefore access more than the normal amount of actions in one turn, but only the fastest of creatures and vehicles can do this regularly! Generally speaking, it's more likely that a monster that's in their element when flying—like a roc, or a couatl—is going to be fast enough to really bend the action economy, but that's by design; dogfighting a roc should feel like a legendary encounter!

Adjusting Altitude

The other way to spend Stunt Dice during your stunt phase is to adjust your Altitude, either by climbing or diving. In both cases, you spend a Stunt Die and then alter your Altitude by the number on the spent Stunt Die. Climbing increments the Altitude Die, and diving decrements it.

You can only spend a Stunt Die to adjust your Altitude once during your stunt phase.

When you choose to dive, the potential energy you've stored is transformed into momentum you can use to supercharge your speed! When you decrement your Altitude Die by the result of a spent Stunt Die, you can add that amount as a bonus to *one* of the following:

1. Your AC.
2. Your attack and damage rolls.

You keep these bonuses until the start of your next turn.

High Altitude

Climbing above 6 on the Altitude Die means you've passed over into High Altitude. Upgrade your Altitude Die to a d12! For every point of Altitude you have above 6, you gain an extra Stunt Die to roll at the start of your stunt phase. You can't climb above Altitude 12.

However, any creature that ends its turn in High Altitude must make a Constitution saving throw to withstand the thinning air and plummeting temperature! Creatures that don't need to breathe automatically succeed.

The DC for a High Altitude Constitution saving throw is the number on your Altitude Die x 2.

Any creature that fails this saving throw falls unconscious. This may or may not mean you start Freefalling, but it's likely that it does—an unconscious creature cannot fly, and if you're piloting a vehicle, you've probably passed out at the wheel.

You can repeat this saving throw in order to regain consciousness at the end of each of your turns, but the DC for repeated saving throws remains the same no matter your Altitude.

See "Freefall" below for more details.

Low Altitude

If your Altitude die shows a 1, then you are in Low Altitude, and just like High Altitude, it's dangerous. If your Altitude die ever decrements below 1, or you're in Freefall and you end your turn in Low Altitude, you hit the ground. And probably explode.

If you end your turn in Low Altitude and you're not Freefalling, make a Flight saving throw to avoid colliding with the ground, ocean, rooftops, lava, etc. The DC for this saving throw depends on the terrain, and so is determined by the GM. The sample encounter at the end of this article contains an example.

Whenever you hit the ground, either by failing the Low Altitude saving throw, or by decrementing below 1 on the Altitude die, you immediately take falling damage, as described under "Freefall."

The Action Phase

After your stunt phase ends, play moves into the action phase. During the action phase, you and any passengers with you on your mount or vehicle can take one action (except the Dash action) and one additional action for each Angle you created during the stunt phase. Passengers can also move about their vehicles, such as the deck of an airship, but pilots, mounts, and vehicles have used their movement during the stunt phase.

If you're a pilot, you can use an action to allow your mount or vehicle to take an action. This differs from how mounted combat works on the ground, chiefly because while airborne, you're not using a movement speed or measuring distance in feet, both of which the core mounted combat rules heavily rely on.

Ranged Attacks and Melee Attacks

Ranged attacks and spells dominate in aerial combat. When you create an Angle, you can assume that you are putting yourself at an optimal distance to make any ranged attack you like.

Melee weapons can be used so long as your Altitude dice matches your targets. If your weapon has the reach property, you can also make melee attacks against a target one point of Altitude away. Note that the normal Altitude rules for advantage and disadvantage still apply to reach weapons!

Taking Damage

Whenever you, your mount, or your vehicle is hit by an attack or fails a saving throw and takes damage as a result, decrement your Altitude by 1. **Losing Altitude to damage can only occur once per turn.**[2]

[2] Note that this says once per *turn,* not once per *round*. For instance, each party member gets a chance to take the wyvern down a peg, but only *once*!

Damage is typically applied to a mount or vehicle first, because it's a much bigger target to hit in the midst of the chaos. A GM is free to rule that pilots and passengers can be directly targeted by attacks, potentially with disadvantage.

If your vehicle or mount is reduced to 0 hit points and you don't have a flying speed, you and any passengers without a flying speed begin Freefalling (see below).

Going Down

While reduced to less than half your hit points, you're Going Down, and your Altitude decreases by 1 at the end of each of your turns, no matter what.

Direct Hit

When you score a critical hit on an attack, it's a direct hit! The target rolls a d4, and drops that many points of Altitude immediately.

Knife-Fighting in a Phone Booth

The barbs of a grapnel bite into your hull! Two dragons lock onto each other with glittering jaws and teeth!

Sometimes things get *really* up close and personal. When you want to grapple a target, it works as usual; in place of a melee attack. A GM might rule that grappling is necessary for a boarding action, if vehicles are involved!

It's up to the GM to decide whether or not grappling an opponent makes you both start Freefalling. A griffon grappling a pegasus might be grounds for such a ruling, but an airship firing a grappling hook probably wouldn't!

Bugging Out

Sometimes you bite off more than you can chew—we've all been there—but how do you escape a foe that's got you out maneuvered in the air? Turning tail and running isn't so easy when they've zeroed in on you.

As an action, you can decide to Bug Out. To do this, announce your intentions, and pray. You now have a giant target on your back, and every bandit in the sky is free to take a potshot at it!

When you Bug Out, an enemy may use their reaction to make a Flight check against your passive Flight score, which is 10 + your Flight modifier. On a success, they can make a single spell or weapon attack against you.

If you survive the onslaught, you escape, find somewhere to land, and live to fly another day.

Areas of Effect

If a *fireball* spell, dragon's breath weapon, or other area of effect is used during an Aces High encounter, you can use your best judgement regarding which targets it can affect, or the rules for adjudicating areas of effect in the core rulebook, meant to guide GMs using theater-of-the-mind.

As a basic guideline, creatures with an altitude difference of 3 or more cannot be included in the same area of effect.

Freefall

The core rules say that creatures take 1d6 bludgeoning damage for every 10 feet they fall, up to a maximum of 20d6 bludgeoning damage.

In Aces High, normal rules for falling damage don't apply. You always take 20d6 bludgeoning damage when you hit the ground, because you're usually falling from extreme heights. A combatant flies so fast that touching the ground at all, outside of a controlled landing, is likely to spell disaster. Of course, a GM is free to rule that falling from Low Altitude deals less damage—something like 10d6, or 5d6—but these rulings should be made on instinct to keep the action moving!

This damage is applied to your mount or vehicle first if you have one (because they hit the ground first!), and leftover damage is then applied to you and your passengers. The pilot and passengers take the same amount of damage; it is not divided between them.

If this seems harsh, consider the following; falling out of the sky is literally the worst case scenario when committing to aerial combat. Also note that this level of lethality becomes much less pronounced for player characters somewhere between levels 8 and 10, or once they have over 70 hit points total, as they're less likely to suffer instant death.

Even characters who are basically gods have succumbed to the unyielding wrath of gravity, but that said, those who want a bit of danger at lower levels should embrace it!

How Fast Do Things Fall?

Good question! Objects (and creatures!) in the real world hit terminal velocity after about twelve seconds of falling. For our purposes, that's 2 rounds.

When in Freefall, decrement your Altitude die once on round one, twice on round two, and then three times every round after that.

This gives allies a window to Dive and save you! In order to do this, an ally must have a lower Altitude than you, and then must use an action to make a Flight check and snatch you from the jaws of death. The DC for this check is up to the GM, and could depend on how fast you are falling, how close to the ground you are, and even whether or not you need to be plucked from the deck of a failing airship!

A GM could also use the speed at which a creature or vehicle is falling to help determine how much Freefall damage they take if no one is able to rescue them. For example, round one is 5d6, round two is 10d6, and round three and beyond is 20d6!

Gut Moves

Gut Moves are like reactions—you can make them whenever you want in response to a trigger, so long as you have some Stunt dice lying around unspent. **Gut Moves do not use your Reaction.**

On Your Six!

When an enemy makes an attack roll against an ally with the same Altitude as you, you can spend a Stunt Die to make an opposed Flight check against them. If you succeed, you can make one attack against them, adding the result to your attack and damage rolls.

Evasive Action!

When you take damage, you can spend a Stunt Die and gain that much Altitude immediately, instead of losing Altitude from the damage.

Back to the Taxpayers!

When an enemy adjusts their Altitude and passes you on the Altitude scale, you can spend a Stunt Die to make an opposed Flight check against them. If you succeed, you can move with them to corral them, pushing them further than they planned.

You can push a target an amount up to the result of your spent Stunt die. When you push them, you move in step with them. Once your push has ended, the rest of their Altitude adjustment continues as normal.

Fangs Out!

During your action phase, you can spend a Stunt Die to target an enemy and make an opposed Flight check against them. On a success, make a single attack against them. On a failure, they make a single attack against *you*, adding the result of your spent Stunt die to their attack and damage rolls.

I Won't Let You Down!

When an ally begins their Stunt phase, you can give them one of your unspent Stunt dice.



Planning an Aces High Encounter

While you *can* throw an impromptu dogfight at your players (and they might throw an impromptu one at you), thinking ahead can help immensely. It doesn't take much to plan an Aces High encounter—all you really need to think about is the setting.

What's Low Altitude like? Are you flying over forest? Ocean? A city? All of these could affect the DC of Low Altitude saving throws. It's much easier to pull up from open plains than it is from a mountain range.

Next, think about whether or not there are any extra features of the area that could come into play. In a fantasy game, you might encounter tremendous storms, angry cloud giants, or floating islands! You can represent hazards like these in all sorts of ways—maybe as the fight passes through patches of turbulence, everyone has to roll their Altitude Die at the end of a round, and let it fall where it may.

Sample Encounter: Battle over Bleaktop

This sample encounter pits the player characters against a handful of deadly enemies over a foreboding mountaintop. Feel free to change whatever you need to make it fit your game!

Introduction

Our heroes have just discovered evidence of a vast conspiracy—the nobility of Valgoth are secretly a cabal of vampires! The party flees the Valgothic capital with the help of their stalwart ally Tashmitum, a silver dragon.

But as our heroes try to escape and warn who they can, they are followed into the Bleaktop Mountains by three of Valgoth's corrupt Wyvern Cavalry! Can they make it through the mountains and across the border in one piece?

Player Characters

This encounter is built for a group of at least four characters of 10th-15th level. Two characters begin the encounter flying on the back of one **young silver dragon**. Only two Medium-sized characters can comfortably ride the dragon—one is a pilot, the other is a passenger.

The other characters can either use their own means of flight, or can begin the encounter mounted on **griffons.** Tell your players that characters flying solo are more vulnerable, so they should plan accordingly! Which characters have the best chances of surviving a fall, if the worst comes to pass?

For every two extra player characters you add to this encounter, add another Wyvern Cavalry rider.

Why isn't the dragon considered a pilot?

It can be if you want! Because the dragon is intelligent, it's capable of flying without input from another creature. However, this means that the GM is in charge of the dragon's decisions. That doesn't give the players as much to do!

If your players would prefer that the dragon "self-pilot" while the characters riding it *both* act as passengers, consider offering control of the dragon to a player, in order to avoid an encounter in which the GM controls most of the pilots.

Enemies

The three **wyverns** are each piloted by one **vampire spawn**. The vampire spawn are vulnerable to sunlight, which will damage them if they fly above the cloud cover, from Altitude 10 and up.

Each vampire spawn carries a *longsword of life stealing* and a *wand of lightning bolts*. The wands each have 1d6 charges remaining. The spawn have a +6 bonus to attack rolls made with the swords, which deal 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage on a hit. Additionally, on a critical hit against a creature that is not a construct or undead, the swords deal an extra 10 necrotic damage, and the vampire spawn gains 10 temporary hit points.

Tactics

The Wyvern Cavalry hang back and cast the *lightning bolt* spell at the characters with their wands. They don't have passengers, so they need to fly higher than the party to be effective. If their wands run out of charges, the enemies close in and try to use the wyverns' poison stingers to ground the dragon.

The wyvern riders try to stay in close formation with each other, so they can support each other with their melee weapons if players decide to get in close.

The characters do have at least one passenger, so the heroes aren't helpless when their Altitude is low. You may want to point out to your players that the character they pick to be the passenger is important, because they have the most freedom to make ranged attacks or cast spells in any direction!

Smart players will also note that the silver dragon's breath weapons can be an effective way to hit all the wyverns at once, in an attempt to end the encounter decisively. If the players try this, and it doesn't work the first time, the wyvern cavalry defer to their training, and spread out to make the tactic harder to try again!

It's up to the GM whether or not the vampire spawn are smart enough to Bug Out when things turn against them, or if they're supernaturally compelled to fight to the bitter end.

Environment

The mountain peaks are jagged and forbidding. When ending a turn in Low Altitude, combatants must succeed on a DC 15 Flight saving throw to avoid crashing.

Dark, low-hanging clouds rumble over the Bleaktop Range. When you upgrade your Altitude die to a d12, you gain half cover against targets at Altitude 6 or below.

In Conclusion

Flight! Vehicles! Action! We hope you enjoy Aces High—now fly brave and have fun!

A DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH

A ROLEPLAY AND INTRIGUE ADVENTURE FOR 3RD-LEVEL CHARACTERS

by Alison Huang

When a noble family hires adventurers to find a thief, the heroes uncover a personal revenge plot. This adventure is optimized for four or five 3rd-level characters.

BACKGROUND

The Krystalum family enjoys a life of luxury. Spoilt and entitled, the family members treat others like tools, and pay no regard to those who can't benefit them.

The youngest Krystalum, Diana, despises the way her family behaves, and isn't afraid to tell them so. Because of this, the rest of the Krystalums act like she doesn't exist, and when they have to acknowledge her, they treat her like one of the servants. While her family's disregard was once a cause for grief, it's become an advantage, allowing Diana to do what she wants to without attracting the attention of her parents and siblings.

Using *From Earth*, a book from the family library, Diana summoned a xorn, a type of earth elemental that eats precious metals and jewels. She torments the rest of her family with a series of thefts, while keeping her new friend happy by giving them a source of food. She doesn't intend to physically hurt her family. Instead, she wants to make a ruckus, something that can't be ignored, to attract the attention of people who might be able to help her get away from her family.

OVERVIEW

The adventure begins when the characters arrive at Krystalum Manor. There, Lord Reuben explains the situation before allowing the characters to speak with the other family members and examine some of the manor's rooms.

The characters' investigation leads them to Diana Krystalum, who is so overlooked that the rest of the family didn't even think of mentioning her earlier. It's up to the party to decide whether they help her accomplish her plan, or tell her family the truth.

AUTHORIAL INTENT

I wrote *A Diamond In The Rough* with the intent of creating a roleplay-focused adventure that uses an investigation to pace and drive the story. Because of this, I didn't design the mystery to be particularly complex. For me, it's more a question of how long it takes for characters to figure out what all the pieces are, and what they do once they have all the information.

But authorial intent is not the be-all and end-all. If you run this adventure, it is as much your story as it is mine. Feel free to build on what I have written and introduce twists and turns as best suits your narrative.

Adventure Hook

The Krystalum family hires the characters to investigate the thefts of money and jewelry. This might be through a letter of request, a messenger, a friend of the characters, or simply an advertisement on a noticeboard. The payment for the job is 200 gp per character.

Dramatis Personae

The following NPCs play important roles in the adventure:

- **Lord Reuben Krystalum:** The head of the house, a middle-aged human man. He is blunt and straightforward, expecting others to follow his commands without question.
- **Lady Marina Krystalum:** Reuben's wife, a middle-aged elf. Though she acts with grace, she unashamedly looks down on adventurers and all people who work for a living.
- **Lady Amy Krystalum:** The eldest Krystalum child, a half-elf in her early twenties. She is assertive, demanding and quick to make threats.
- **Lord Emerson Krystalum:** The middle Krystalum child, a half-elf in his early twenties. He acts with a lot of bravado but is really a coward.
- **Lady Diana Krystalum:** The youngest Krystalum child, a half-elf in her late teens, and the culprit behind the apparent thefts. She wants to get out of her situation at all costs.
- **Karat:** The xorn summoned by Diana who has been eating all the missing jewelry. Fiercely protective of Diana.
- **Micah:** The head servant. He is polite and kind-hearted, especially with Diana.

Manor Map

Whenever the adventure references an encounter area, refer to the Manor Map.



PART 1: CROWN JEWEL

The Krystalum Manor stands proudly before you. Its three floors reach towards the sky, sunlight glistening on the polished stone walls. The building is framed by verdant hedges that bar entry into the gardens around it.

When the characters approach the manor, Micah (neutral good half-elf **commoner**, he/him), a butler in a dark grey suit, greets the characters. After confirming that they're here for the job, he briskly leads them to Lord Reuben's study (area 7) on the middle floor, then excuses himself.

REUBEN'S STUDY

A human man with a bushy red beard sits behind a large redwood desk, which dominates the luxurious room. Once he sees you, he stands up, and gestures to the seats in front of his desk, inviting you to sit.

Lord Reuben Krystalum (lawful evil human **noble**, he/him) only sits down and begins talking once the characters have complied with his silent order.

ROLEPLAYING LORD REUBEN

Reuben is a gruff man who expects people to know what he wants, even if he doesn't explicitly spell out his desires. As someone who expects to always get his way, he doesn't like to make compromises. Moreover, he hates small talk and lengthy conversations with those he deems below his station. If the characters ask too many questions, he becomes irritated and accuses them of not being up to the task.

WHAT REUBEN KNOWS

Lord Reuben provides the following information about the thefts:

- For the past week, there have been a series of thefts in Krystalum Manor.
- Money and jewelry were stolen from him, his wife Marina, his daughter Amy, and his son Emerson.
- Amy was stolen from a week ago, Emerson was stolen from four days ago, and he and Marina were stolen from two days ago. The details of each theft are described in part 2.
- A ruby ring that Reuben is particularly fond of was taken.

If asked if he has any other children, he repeats impatiently that Amy and Emerson were stolen from. Reuben doesn't like to think about Diana, barely considering her his daughter, and believes that bringing her up would be a waste of his time. None of the servants have been stolen from, but he's surprised if the characters ask about that, since he assumes no servant would own anything worth stealing.

TERMS OF SERVICE

Lord Reuben also explains where the characters are allowed to investigate:

- The characters are allowed in Reuben's study as long as he's present, and, as long as each respective occupant permits it and is present, in the bedrooms.
- The characters must ask Marina for entry into the master bedroom (area 12).
- They are also allowed to enter the gardens (area 2), library (area 13), conservatory (area 1), and parlor (area 11).
- Amy is in her bedroom (area 8). Emerson is in the guest bedroom (area 9). Marina is in the parlor (area 11).
- The butler will escort them throughout the house and grounds. Breaking these rules results in an immediate dismissal.

In addition, he reminds the adventurers that they have been hired as investigators, and they don't need to worry about dealing with the culprit: he intends on punishing the thief himself. A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that he relishes the idea of inflicting violence on the unlucky thief.

DEVELOPMENT

After the characters talk with Reuben and leave the study, proceed to chapter 2.

Part 2: All That Glitters

Once you are back in the hallway, the butler that escorted you inside reappears and bows. "Allow me to introduce myself. I am Micah, your chaperone for the day."

Micah

Micah is happy to escort the characters to any of the areas that Reuben gave them permission to explore.

Roleplaying Micah

Micah is polite and cordial. He tries to fulfill the characters' requests as long as Reuben's orders allow him (see "Terms of Service," above). Micah is one of the few people in the estate who cares about Diana; if he weren't concerned about Diana's safety, he would have left the manor long ago. He doesn't like the rest of the Krystalum family and he's certainly not paid enough to deal with them.

Micah becomes easily flustered if the characters hint at breaking Reuben's rules, and tries to discourage them as much as possible. He threatens to call the guards if he is seriously worried about the possibility of them disobeying the rules, and has no trouble making good on that promise if the characters test him.

If Diana is suspected before evidence of her involvement is uncovered, Micah also becomes quite nervous, even to the point he might seem like he's actually the culprit. He keeps diverting the characters' investigation by suggesting they seek out other people to interview or crime scenes to investigate.

What Micah Knows

If questioned, Micah claims he doesn't have any additional information. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that he knows more than he's letting on. Micah suspects Diana is involved, but isn't sure how.

Unless characters have already uncovered evidence of Diana's existence, Micah refuses to tell them about her no matter how hard they try to intimidate or persuade him. If he feels particularly threatened or he is affected by the *zone of truth* spell he calls for the guards.

The Butler Did It?

Given his role as butler and chaperone, Micah is a natural suspect. The characters may question him on matters not directly related to the thefts.

If the characters ask such questions, Micah deflects by saying that he isn't important or relevant, and that he is merely the butler. A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that he certainly believes he is insignificant, but it's difficult to discern whether that means he actually is.

If he is asked about his opinion about the Krystalums, Micah says that they are a pleasure to work for. A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals this to be a lie. He can be convinced to admit how he really feels with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. Micah knows he is treated with disdain and should be paid more to put up with their attitude, but his priority is to protect Diana, from outsiders and from her own family.

Though Micah did not steal any of the jewelry, the thefts have certainly made him realise that crime does pay. If asked whether he would steal to supplement the fact that he is underpaid, he hesitates before stating he would not.

If you want to cast suspicions onto Micah, you may also choose one of the following options, or come up with your own, at your discretion:

- A character that fails a Wisdom (Perception) check to find clues instead notices that Micah quickly put something in his pocket. A successful DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that it is a pocket watch.
- The character with the highest passive Wisdom (Perception) notices Micah slip out of the current room. He is down the hallway talking with a servant (**commoner**) in hushed tones. A successful DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that the servant is meant to ask Reuben what he wants for the next meal, but is too scared to.
- While in the presence of any of the Krystalums besides Diana, the character with the highest passive Wisdom (Insight) score notices that Micah has tensed up. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that this is because he doesn't like them.

Moving From Area to Area

While moving around the manor, the characters might glimpse clues or meet people that cause their suspicions to be cast elsewhere. At your discretion, you can choose one of the following options, or come up with your own, when the characters move to a new location:

- Characters with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 15 or higher get the feeling that they're being watched.
- The first character to turn a corner notices some movement down the hallway. At your discretion, this is either the xorn, who quickly uses Earth Glide to get away, or a servant (a **commoner**).
- The character with the lowest passive Wisdom (Perception) score steps on some pieces of rock. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that the pieces are from the Elemental Plane of Earth.
- One of the guards (a **knight**) walks past the characters and insists on accompanying them to their next room.
- A servant (**commoner**) carrying bedsheets rounds a corner. A random character must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone as the servant collides with them.

SCREW THE RULES

Whether they just want to disobey Lord Reuben's orders, they don't want to interact with the Krystalums, or they've figured out that the rooms they're allowed in don't contain the whole story, the characters can defy the "Terms of Service" explained in part 1. Their major hurdle is that Micah, who is always accompanying them, refuses to break those rules.

There are many ways to deal with Micah, including the following options:

- A character can create a diversion to distract Micah with a successful DC 12 Charisma (Deception or Performance) check. While he's preoccupied, other characters can knock Micah unconscious or sneak into the forbidden rooms.
- Micah can be pressured or convinced into letting them enter other areas with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check. This check is made with advantage if the characters know about Diana already and explain that they want to help or protect her.

Unless persuaded or prevented from doing so, Micah tells the guards or Lord Reuben if the characters disobey the rules. If this occurs, the characters are immediately dismissed and escorted from the manor by guards (see the "General Features" sidebar).

GENERAL FEATURES

Krystalum Manor is decorated with exquisite—and, more importantly, expensive—taste that prioritizes fashion over comfort. It has the following general features.

Ceilings. All of the rooms and hallways in the manor have 10-foot-high ceilings.

Light. The interior rooms are brightly lit by ornate wall lamps, as well as light coming through the windows during the day.

Guards. Three **knights**, one on each floor, patrol the manor's hallways, and tell Lord Reuben if the characters defy his orders.

BOTTOM FLOOR

The bottom floor contains the conservatory, dining hall, and kitchen, as well as an entrance to the gardens through the conservatory.

1. CONSERVATORY

Unlike the rest of the manor, the conservatory's walls and ceiling are glass. Leafy plants adorn its interior. At the center of the room, white wooden chairs surround a matching table. Large glass doors separate open into the gardens.

Diana obtained clay soil from the conservatory, a necessary component in the ritual that summoned the xorn.

CLUES

A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check finds that chunks of soil around some of the plants are missing. (No check is needed if a character specifically inspects the plants.) A successful DC 14 Intelligence (Nature) check reveals that the soil removed from the plant beds is clay soil.

2. Gardens

The spacious gardens surrounding the manor are filled with a variety of flowering plants and bushes. Neatly trimmed hedges separate it from the outside world.

There aren't any direct clues in the garden—there are no strange footprints or signs that someone climbed over the hedge wall. However these facts themselves are clues, since it means the thief may not have entered from outside.

Clues

This area contains the following clues:

- A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) or Intelligence (Investigation or Nature) check finds a notable lack of footprints or any other traces in the gardens.
- A character who is proficient with thieves' tools or who succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds that none of the manor's windows were tampered with from the outside. (The characters can also determine this by examining the windows from the inside.)

3. Dining Hall

A long dining table surrounded by a dozen ornate chairs dominates this large room. Though the table is not set, lit candelabras illuminate it. The walls are decorated with framed portraits.

The dining hall itself is not directly tied to the mystery, though it is able to offer some insight on the truth.

Clues

Alongside the rest of her family, there is a portrait of Diana with her name on a plaque. She is a half-elf with long white hair, younger than the other Krystalum siblings, probably in her mid-teens at the time the portrait was painted.

4. Servants' Quarters

Unlike the rest of the manor, this room is very simple and plain. It's filled with cots, each with a trunk at its foot.

The servants' quarters don't have any clues about the thefts.

5. Kitchen

The smell of food greets you as you enter this bustling kitchen. Servants hurry around the room, preparing a meal. Focused on their tasks, they ignore you.

If the servants are alerted to the presence of the characters, they're confused about who the characters are and why they're there. They answer questions politely, but they don't have any information about the thefts.

Clues

If the servants are asked about Diana, a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces them to explain that Diana's family neglects her. If asked where her room is, the servants point to area 6.

6. Diana's Bedroom

The next door down the hallway is nondescript. No visuals or sounds that denote its room's purpose, except for a few pieces of rock scattered in front of it.

The pieces of rock match the other pieces present in the manor. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that the pieces are from the Elemental Plane of Earth.

The interior of Diana's bedroom is described in part 3.

Middle Floor

Bedrooms, Reuben's study, and the parlor make up the middle floor.

7. Study

This location is described in part 1 and holds no further clues to the mystery.

8. Amy's Bedroom

Micah sharply knocks on the bedroom door, announcing your presence. Moments later, a young adult half-elf with purple hair opens the door. She grips a rapier in her hand. "Well? Come in," she demands.

Lady Amy Krystalum (lawful neutral half-elf **noble**, she/her) allows the characters to search her room, but watches their movements intently.

Seven days ago, Amy's bedroom was ransacked. This was the first theft, and afterwards the bedroom was tidied up so that Amy can go about her day normally. However, Amy directs the characters to a jewelry box on her desk that has not been moved since the theft.

Clues

This area contains the following clues:

- A now-empty jewelry box sitting on top of a desk is ripped in half. A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that it was opened by something with claws. A character who succeeds on the check by 5 or more also finds grains of rock around the box.
- A character who is proficient with thieves' tools or who makes a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check notices that Amy's window hasn't been tampered with from the inside. No check is needed if the characters already noticed this fact about other windows.

Roleplaying Lady Amy

Amy is haughty, bold, and blunt. Unlike her parents, she has no issue giving adventurers all the information they need, demanding that they solve this problem at once. She's quick to anger; if she feels disrespected, she threatens the characters with her rapier.

Amy's usual strident personality is amplified by her frustrations over the situation. She secretly feels guilty that she wasn't able to stop the thefts herself.

What Amy Knows

Amy provides the following information about the thefts:

- Her bedroom was broken into a week ago, in the middle of the day.
- Amy was in the gardens (area 2) when it happened.
- Ever since the theft, she's stayed in her room in case it happens again.
- A pair of amethyst earrings were stolen from her jewelry box.

9. Guest Bedroom

With a knock on the door, Micah announces that you wish to talk to Lord Emerson. After a pause, the door is flung open with a flourish by a young adult half-elf with green hair. "Adventurers! I'm charmed to make your acquaintances," he says dramatically. "Please, come in!"

Lord Emerson Krystalum (lawful neutral, half-elf **noble**, he/him) gladly lets the adventurers into the room.

The guest room is sparsely decorated. Its walls are white, and its furniture is well crafted but simple in design.

The guest room itself isn't relevant to the mystery. However, it used to be Diana's before she moved downstairs, since she likes interacting with the servants more than with her own family.

Roleplaying Lord Emerson

Emerson is a smug and vain man who considers himself smart. He is happy to talk to the characters, but a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that he'd rather talk about himself than the thefts to conceal the fact that he doesn't know much about the situation. If he's accused of being scared, his arrogant attitude quickly falls away to reveal a coward.

What Emerson Knows

Emerson provides the following information about the thefts:

- Four days ago, his room (area 10) was broken into.
- He was in the library (area 13) at the time.
- When he returned to his room, it was a mess. He immediately moved to this guest room, where he has been staying ever since.
- He didn't actually check to see if anything was missing.

10. Emerson's Bedroom

If Lord Emerson is brought here from the guest bedroom (area 6), he opens the door slowly.

Emerson's bedroom is a complete mess. The bed is askew. The desk is on its side. A chair is in splinters.

Four days ago, Emerson's bedroom was broken into during the afternoon, and the scene has not been disturbed since.

Clues

This area contains the following clues:

- It's readily apparent that pushing over the heavy desk would have required a great deal of strength, and that the splintered chair was broken with considerable force.

- A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals finds small pieces of gravel scattered about the room. With a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check, a character knows that these bits of rock are from the Elemental Plane of Earth.
- The desk has some light scratches. A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation or Nature) check reveals that the marks were made by a creature with three claws. If the characters know this information and also know that the pieces of rock came from the Elemental Plane of Earth, a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that a xorn made the claw marks.
- A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check finds an empty jewelry box under the bed. The box broke open when the desk fell. Emerson can confirm it once housed his favorite emerald cufflinks. Their absence from the box indicates to him that they were stolen.
- A character who is proficient with thieves' tools or who makes a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check notices that Emerson's window hasn't been tampered with from the inside.

11. Parlor

Compared to the rest of the manor, the parlor is modestly decorated. Sunlight filters in through wispy curtains onto a carved mahogany table and several matching chairs.

An elf with icy blue hair sits at the table. She's calmly eating grapes while reading a book. Looking up as you enter the room, she snaps the book shut. "Ah, you must be the adventurers," she comments cooly.

Roleplaying Lady Marina

Lady Marina Krystalum (lawful evil elf **noble**, she/her) is cold and judgmental, which she doesn't bother to hide. Though she holds great disdain for adventurers and other people who work for a living, she's more forthright with information than her husband, as long as the characters treat her with respect.

Though Marina would hate to admit it, she is also scared, and fears that the next time someone breaks in, she'll be attacked.

What Marina Knows

Marina provides the following information about the thefts:

- After the thief stole from Amy and Emerson, Reuben and Marina stationed a guard outside their bedroom at all times.
- Two nights ago, while trancing, Marina noticed a strange shadow through the bed's curtains.
- By the time Marina she got out of bed, the thief already vanished with the stolen items.
- The thief took Marina's favorite aquamarine necklace and Reuben's ruby ring.

Top Floor

The master bedroom and the library are on the top floor.

12. Master Bedroom

There is a guard present outside this room, as directed by Lord and Lady Krystalum. If Lady Marina is brought here from the parlor (area 8), she cautiously opens the door, only relaxing once it is clear no one is inside.

The master bedroom certainly lives up to its status. A four poster bed dominates the space, while a set of wardrobes and a vanity are flush against the walls. A plush red and blue rug covers the stone floor.

Two days ago, the thief stole from this area during the night. Lord Reuben and Lady Marina never left the room unsupervised. Because of this complication in Diana's plan, this theft was a stealthier one that didn't leave any mess.

Clues

This area contains the following clues:

- Lady Marina explains that the jewellery boxes containing the aquamarine necklace and ruby ring were on the vanity when they were taken.
- Marina recalls that the thief's footsteps folded the edge of the rug near the vanity. Small pieces of rock can be found under this rug. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check can tell that the pieces are from the Elemental Plane of Earth. (No check is needed if the characters have already determined this fact about other bits of rock they've found.)

- A character who is proficient with thieves' tools or who makes a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check notices that Reuben and Marina's window hasn't been tampered with from the inside. No check is needed if the characters already noticed this fact about other windows.

13. Library

Bookshelves upon bookshelves filled with tomes line the walls of this room. Comfortable chairs surround a small table in the center of the floor.

Though the library isn't relevant to thefts themselves, Diana would never have been able to learn how to summon the xorn without a book from the library.

Clues

This area contains the following clues:

- Diana learned how to summon the xorn using a book titled *From Earth*. A character who examines the bookshelves and succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check can tell that the book isn't in the right section of the library. This check is made with advantage if the characters already suspect an elemental is involved.
- *From Earth* details a xorn summoning ritual that requires clay soil and 1000 gp worth of precious gemstones. The ritual is identical to the *conjure elemental* spell, except the casting time is 2 hours, it doesn't require concentration, the duration is permanent, and the elemental takes its own actions instead of obeying commands. The xorn becomes hostile toward the caster if mistreated or disrespected. This ritual can only be cast once a year.
- The book explains that xorns eat metals and jewels, and that they are capable of reasoning and not malicious.

Development

Once the characters head towards Diana's room, proceed to chapter 3.



Part 3: Crystal Clear

Once the characters have gathered clues and pieced together the mystery, they must confront Diana and the xorn.

Diana's Bedroom

A young adult half-elf with white hair looks at you from the back of a room that is more of a refurbished storage room than a place to sleep. "Uh, hello? What are you doing in my bedroom?" she demands.

Roleplaying Lady Diana

Lady Diana Krystalum (neutral good half-elf **noble**, she/her) has been shaped by how her family treats her. She is angry, determined, and cautious, but ultimately these traits are self-defense mechanisms, for she is also scared and vulnerable.

Diana wants help getting out of her situation, but she knows that trusting the wrong people will get her hurt and cause more trouble with her family. Her experiences have taught her to expect the worst of people unless she has a reason to think otherwise.



Questioning Lady Diana

If the characters ask Diana questions, her annoyance is clear. She repeatedly insists that they should get out of her room, and only answers the two following questions, trying to get them to leave:

If asked who she is, Diana simply replies she is no one important. Though perhaps not the answer the adventurers are looking for, this is how she honestly feels.

If asked if she's had any jewelry stolen, Diana scoffs and says no, asking whether it looks like she has any possessions worth taking.

Otherwise, Diana bluntly claims that she doesn't know what they're talking about. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that she's lying. If she is called out on the lie, she refuses to tell the characters how she is involved.

If the characters found Diana's room without enough evidence to prove that she's behind the thefts, they can always leave and return later with proof.

Confronting Lady Diana

If the adventurers have figured out Diana is responsible and confront her with proof, the xorn emerges from the floor.

> Before you can say anything else, a creature made out of rock with three legs, three arms, a single eye, and a gaping maw rises from the ground in front of Diana.

Diana plans to test the characters. She hopes they can help her out of her situation, but first wants to know if they are people who try talking even in the face of danger, or if they attack perceived threats without question.

Roleplaying the Xorn

The **xorn** (who can speak and understand Common and Terran and has given Diana permission to call it Karat) likes Diana, partially because it sympathizes with her plight, and also because of how many jewels she feeds the elemental.

Xorns can be reasoned with. Coins, metal weapons, and gemstones, can be offered to show no harm is meant. A character who does so gains advantage on any Charisma checks made to interact positively with Diana and Karat.

Talking with Diana and the Xorn

Diana reacts coldly and defensively if the characters accuse her of theft and aren't willing to hear her side of the story. She orders the xorn to attack unless the characters back down.

Characters who talk to Diana with kindness and understanding and succeed on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check convince Diana to tell her side of the story, as described in "Background" at the beginning of this adventure. On a failure, the DC for this check is lowered to 12. If the second check fails, Diana becomes frustrated and commands the xorn to attack.

Characters have advantage on this check if they appeal to Diana's hatred of her family by commiserating with her about her mistreatment.

If the characters aren't sympathetic to Diana's situation and want to tell Lord Reuben what she's done, she commands the xorn to attack.

Fighting Diana and the Xorn

The xorn attacks only if provoked or commanded by Diana.

Though she summoned the xorn, Diana doesn't have enough experience to use magic in combat. She only acts in self defense.

The xorn focuses on defending Diana, and prioritizes attacking anyone who gets close to her. However, the elemental doesn't have a death wish. The xorn focuses on foes who deal a lot of damage, using its Earth Glide ability to appear right next to the target.

Diana surrenders if the xorn is killed, breaking down in tears. If asked what happened to the stolen jewelry, she confesses that the xorn ate them and that they are long gone.

Development

If the characters want to help Diana, proceed to conclusion A. If the adventurers plan on telling her father the truth, proceed to conclusion B.

Conclusion A

Diana can leave Krystalum Manor without interference at any time—after all, her family pretends that she doesn't exist. However, she has no idea how to navigate everyday life or go about making her own way in the world, so she needs someone to accompany her and her xorn friend.

Diana is happy to leave with the characters or with Micah—either way, Micah quits his job when she leaves—but she worries that if she asks Micah to come with her, her family will find and punish him.

To help Diana as much as possible, the characters may wish to deal with Lord Reuben before leaving. Below are two possible options.

Playing Dirty

Characters who want to avoid direct confrontation, or still want Lord Reuben's reward, can choose to forge or tamper evidence to create a new narrative. The xorn is happy to help with this.

Convincing Lord Reuben to believe the story requires a successful DC 20 Charisma (Deception) check. This check is made with a +1 bonus for each piece of forged or tampered evidence the characters produce.

On a success, Lord Reuben also gives the characters their promised 200 gp each and promptly dismisses them.

On a failure, he is suspicious of the characters but is still willing to listen to them. The Charisma (Deception) check can be repeated, but if the check fails a second time, Lord Reuben recognises that he is being deceived and calls the guards (see "Stand Your Ground").

Stand Your Ground

Characters can choose to return to Lord Reuben's study to confront him about the daughter he failed to mention. Outraged, Lord Reuben calls on the **knight** patrolling the middle floor to escort the characters out.

If the characters fight, the **xorn** appears out of the ground to help them. The knights patrolling the top floor and bottom floor arrive on the second and third rounds of combat respectively.

Lord Reuben surrenders if the knights are all knocked unconscious. He gives the promised payment to the characters with a successful DC 10 Charisma (intimidation) check.

Diamond in the Rough

If the characters help her, Diana gives them a diamond worth 100 gp as thanks.

Conclusion B

Lord Reuben listens intently, concealing any emotions behind cold professionalism, to what the characters tell him. At first, Lord Reuben doesn't believe Diana has the courage to pull off so many robberies and laughs if the adventurers present this theory without evidence. If the characters present proof that Diana was behind the thefts, he briskly gives them their promised 200 gp each and dismisses them without thanks or indication of how he intends to punish Diana.

A visibly distressed Micah leads the adventurers out of the manor. He clearly wants to protect the situation but won't stand up for the characters unless they also object. Lord Reuben calls the guards if the adventurers outstay their welcome or change their mind on siding with him (see "Stand Your Ground").

Experience Point Awards

Regardless of how the adventure ends, the characters each gain 1000 XP in addition to any XP gained from combat encounters. If they managed to avoid combat for the entirety of the adventure, the characters each gain an additional 500 XP.

Appendix: Xorn Allies

Either because they befriended Karat or because they summoned a xorn of their own, characters have the potential to gain a xorn ally from this adventure.

Loyalty

Xorns summoned using *From Earth* take their own actions instead of obeying commands. However, if they are treated as equals, not used as mere tools, and well-fed, they listen to suggestions from their allies.

Karat, the xorn summoned by Diana, is loyal to her and follows her orders out of trust and respect. Characters can also suggest certain actions to Karat, but Diana's wishes supersede suggestions from anyone else.

Xorns become hostile if mistreated or disrespected.

Upkeep

Xorns are incredibly powerful for the level range this adventure is designed for. However, their upkeep is not cheap. Each week, a xorn must consume gemstones and precious metals worth a total of at least 200 gp, or it gains a level of exhaustion. Consuming an additional 200 gp worth of gemstones or precious metals reduces the xorn's exhaustion level by 1.

Desires

The Elemental Plane of Earth is brimming with more metals and jewels than xorns could ever eat in their lifetimes. Because of this, a xorn gains a strong motivation to stay on the Material Plane, such as Karat's desire to protect Diana, it wants to return to its home plane.



Justice Arman is an Iranian American writer based in central Texas. In addition to penning best-selling DMs Guild supplements such as *Devil's Advocate: A Guide to Infernal Contracts*, Justice is a full-time goblin—yes, that's a real title—at Beadle & Grimm's Pandemonium Warehouse, where he works on dope boxed sets like the Legendary Edition of *Curse of Strahd*. You can find him on Twitter (@justicearman) or at www.justicearman.com.



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You can find more of Sam's work in MCDM's upcoming *Kingdoms & Warfare*, and you can be made aware of his location and movements by keeping an eye on crypticparlour.com, or following him on Twitter @crypticparlour.



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RESOURCES

A DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH MAPS:

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

We're back. Thanks to your support, *ARCADIA* 4 is in your hands, and we're working on the magazine indefinitely. I truly mean it when I say that we wouldn't be here without you. So on behalf of all of us at MCDM, thank you!

You're probably wondering, "What does the future hold for *ARCADIA*?" After *ARCADIA* 3 was published, we launched a survey on Patreon about *ARCADIA* and MCDM in general and learned a lot of information. Over 2,500 people responded. Thanks again.

Much of what you told us simply confirmed what we knew to be true: many of you are Game Masters looking for high-utility articles that will help you create encounters, adventures, and worlds. I think what did surprise us was that more than 90% of you are GMs, and almost 70% of you are forever GMs, the kind of person who never takes on the role of a player character (by choice or by circumstance). We had no idea that the numbers were that high.

One of the other numbers that initially took us by surprise was the types of *ARCADIA* articles that readers find most useful. New creatures outpaced every other option, followed by magic items, encounters, locations, and spells in that order. Given how many GMs read *ARCADIA*, it was incredible to me that adventures didn't crack the top 5. But when I looked at what did make the most popular list, I realized why. Our GMs prefer to build their own worlds and create unique stories with the players. You want the building blocks to make adventures and don't always want a near-complete story handed to you.

The more we break down the building blocks, the more useful our readers find the article. Drop-in encounters, which build adventures, aren't as popular as new creatures, which are used to build encounters. The more basic the piece of material, we found, the easier it is for you to use in your campaigns.

So what changes are in store for *ARCADIA* moving forward? For the next several issues, it may not seem like a lot. For one thing, articles for many of near-future issues were commissioned before we conducted the survey, in order to bring you content in a timely manner. We also want to keep including articles with new subclasses, ancestries, and other player character options because we hope to grow and diversify *ARCADIA's* audience.

However, within articles that provide player options, you'll also find useful tools for the GM. Remember the "Titan Heart" article by Gabe Hicks in *ARCADIA* 1? It included a sorcerer subclass, new spells, an NPC stat block, and a retainer. More like that is coming your way.

We also won't stop publishing adventures any time soon, but there won't be one in every issue of *ARCADIA* like there was for issues 1, 2, and 3. We're going to mix it up by providing encounters, creatures, and the other building blocks of adventures. That's why this issue features a new location with creatures and magic items in Cat Evans's "The Chained Library," even more creatures and magic items in Willy Abeel's article that serves as a sequel to his mounted combat piece in *ARCADIA* 1, and a bunch of drop in encounters from Derek Ruiz. When we have adventures in the future, they'll be easy to strip for parts or present a unique concept, like rules and an adventure for level-0 characters or a module meant for a party of goblin heroes!

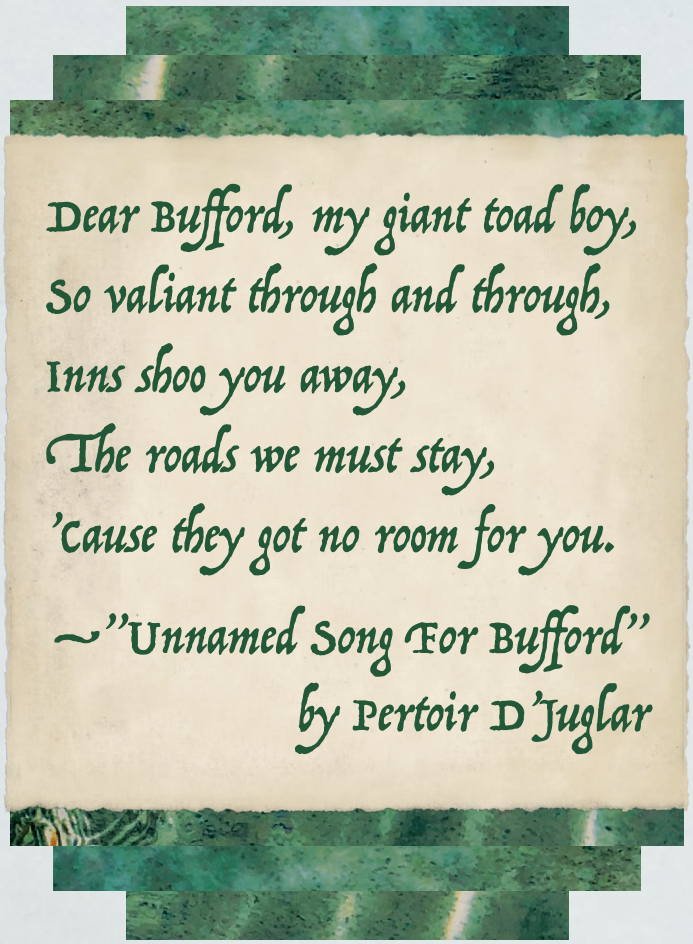
The future of *ARCADIA* is bright. The journey is just beginning. Thank you for coming along with us.

Ex animo,
James Introcaso

SWIMMING THROUGH SAND TO SEA

MORE MOUNTED ADVENTURING

by Willy Abeel



In the first issue of *ARCADIA*, *Jumping on Mounted Combat* expanded the rules for mounts and introduced new mount-ready versions of classic creatures. Most mounts are easy to ride in open environments such as hills and plains, but many adventures take characters into tricky places where a horse or tame bulette will struggle.

This article presents options for using mounts in dungeons, underwater locations, and other odd environments, including an array of new magic items and mounts with special abilities. It also introduces omnimounts, a new massive mount type that can carry the entire party.

MOUNTING LOGISTICS

Specialized mounts make the challenges adventurers face exponentially easier—journeying to an underwater civilization becomes a more feasible task with axolottles.[1] But aquatic mounts are unhelpful when your next destination is a palace in the sky.

These sorts of problems come up a lot when bonding with unique mounts. A fish can hardly survive out of the water, let alone serve as a steed on land. And the reverse is true, too; humans don't typically cling for dear life on the back of a purple worm burrowing miles into the ground and live to tell the tale.

Even land creatures moving across the ground commonly find themselves—well, landlocked. How does a horse reach the top of a ladder? And what do you do when your giant toad is too giant to enter an otherworldly portal with the rest of the party? When in doubt, more magic items are usually the answer!

---

[1] A giant axolotl. A regular axolotl is too little. You can't ride a little axolotl, you need a lotta axolotl.

New Magic Items

For years, enchanters and inventors have turned to magic for dealing with these mounted challenges: ancient harnesses buried in ruins; water-bearing carts and locomotive aquatic pools built for forgotten, landlocked civilizations; bridles crafted by mages willing to assist adventurers who can retrieve rare components. You just need to saddle up and find them.

Airskimmer Bridle

Wondrous item, uncommon

While a creature with the Mounted trait wears this bridle and bit, it gains the following benefits:

- Any swimming or burrowing speed becomes a flying speed, and the creature can hover.
- The creature can breathe air and water.
- The creature weighs half as much as it normally does.

Bell of the Extrastable Stable

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

This large cowbell is engraved with a symbol that resembles a stable door. When you ring the bell, a 10-foot-square portal opens in an unoccupied space of your choice within 5 feet of you. Only you and creatures within 30 feet of you that you choose when you ring the bell can enter the portal.

The portal leads to an extradimensional, spacious stable with room for up to eight Large creatures to live comfortably. The stable changes to meet the needs of its inhabitants, providing food and other essentials for the creatures that stay there. A quiet spirit that resembles a bugbear tends to the stable and any inhabitant's needs. The spirit follows your orders and can perform any task a normal bugbear could perform, but can't attack or take any action that would directly harm another creature.

When you leave the stable or ring the bell a second time, the portal closes. The stable can be accessed twice. Afterwards, a new portal to the stable can't be opened until the next dawn.

Items that create their own extradimensional spaces can be safely brought into the stable due to its extrastable nature. However, the usual consequences from intersecting two lesser extradimensional spaces (e.g. placing a *portable hole* inside of a *bag of holding*) while inside the stable still apply.

Meld Harness

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement by the rider)

While mounted on a willing creature that wears this harness, you can use an action to speak a command word and meld yourself, the harness, and all the equipment you carry into the mounted creature or vice versa. The absorbed creature's presence is not detectable by nonmagical senses.

While melded, the mounted creature's mind is linked with yours, and you can communicate with each other telepathically. The creature that isn't absorbed gains the following properties:

- It gains any damage resistances, immunities, and special senses (such as darkvision) that the absorbed creature has.
- If it takes damage, the absorbed creature takes the same amount and same type of damage.
- If it dies, the absorbed creature is expelled from its body, landing prone into an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the corpse.

The absorbed creature can perceive everything the other perceives, but can't move, speak, or take any actions. Either creature can end the absorption on its turn without taking any action.

Return Bridle and Crop

Wondrous item, uncommon

A creature with the Mounted trait that wears this bridle is linked with you telepathically while you hold the crop. The creature can communicate with you over any distance as long as the bridle and crop are on the same plane of existence.

Once per day while holding the crop, you can use your action to swing it in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of you with enough room for the creature. The creature is instantly teleported into that space. You can't transport the creature again in this way until next dawn.

SIZE SADDLE

Wondrous item (rarity by type)

The size saddle takes 1 minute to fasten on an appropriately-sized creature. While a creature wears this saddle, the creature's size changes until it is removed. Other items besides the saddle worn or carried by the creature don't change size with it.

Medium or Large Size Saddle of Shrinking (Common). A willing creature wearing this saddle shrinks, becoming Tiny. It now fits within 1 cubic foot of space and weighs 1 pound. The creature has disadvantage on Strength checks and Strength saving throws, and its natural weapon attacks now deal 1 damage.

Tiny or Small Size Saddle of Growing (Uncommon). A willing creature wearing this saddle grows, becoming Large. It expands to a size within 10 cubic feet of space and weighs up to 800 pounds. If there is not enough room for the creature to grow, it reaches the maximum size available in the space, continuing to grow as more space becomes available. Additionally, the creature's natural weapon attacks deal an extra 1d4 damage.

Huge or Gargantuan Size Saddle of Shrinking (Very Rare). A willing creature wearing this saddle shrinks, becoming Large. It now fits within 10 cubic feet of space and weighs 800 pounds. The creature has disadvantage on Strength checks and Strength saving throws, and all the creature's natural weapon attacks deal 2d4 less damage (this can't reduce the damage below 1).

WANDER POOL

Wondrous item, very rare

This fine blue cloth is akin to a *portable hole*. It can be unfurled into an oblong sheet 10 feet long and 8 feet wide.

You can use an action to unfold a *wander pool* and place it on the ground, whereupon the wander pool creates an extradimensional hole filled with water 10 feet deep. The space within the hole exists on a different plane, so it can't be used to create passages. None of the water native to the hole can spill outside the bounds of the space.

While a creature swims within the pool, the wander pool moves along the ground at the same speed. If there is no longer ground beneath the pool, it falls at the rate the creature would fall to the ground.

You can use an action to close a *wander pool* by taking hold of the edges of the cloth and folding it up. Folding the cloth closes the pool, and any creatures or objects within remain in the extradimensional space. No matter what's in it, the cloth weighs next to nothing.

When the pool is folded, any creature in it is completely submerged. A creature within the folded pool's extradimensional space can make a DC 10 Strength check as an action. On a successful check, the creature forces its way out and appears within 5 feet of the pool or the creature carrying it.

WATER WAGON

Wondrous item, uncommon

This wagon carries a suspended 10-foot cube of weightless water. Creatures, objects, and magic can freely pass through the tank, but none of the water can spill outside the bounds of the wagon.

A creature submerged in the wagon's tank can pilot the wagon's movement using its swimming speed. However, it can't take the Dash action unless the wagon is on a decline.

If there are multiple creatures submerged in the tank, only the creature that has been there for the longest consecutive amount of time gains these benefits.

WATER WINGS

Wondrous item, uncommon

While a creature with the Mounted trait wears these adorable water wingies, it gains the following properties:

- Its fastest speed becomes a swimming speed if it does not already have one.
- It has an additional 10 foot swimming speed while rising toward the surface of the liquid in a straight line.
- It and one creature riding it can breathe in water.

New Mounts

Burrow through the earth and steal the ground beneath the enemy's feet. Burst from the depths and drain the toughest magical defenses. Adaptable mounts possess unique traits that savvy riders can utilize to plunge through the most imposing environments—and when mount and rider work as one, they blaze a trail to ride into legend.

Each mount stat block contains statistics that reference the rider's proficiency bonus (PB).



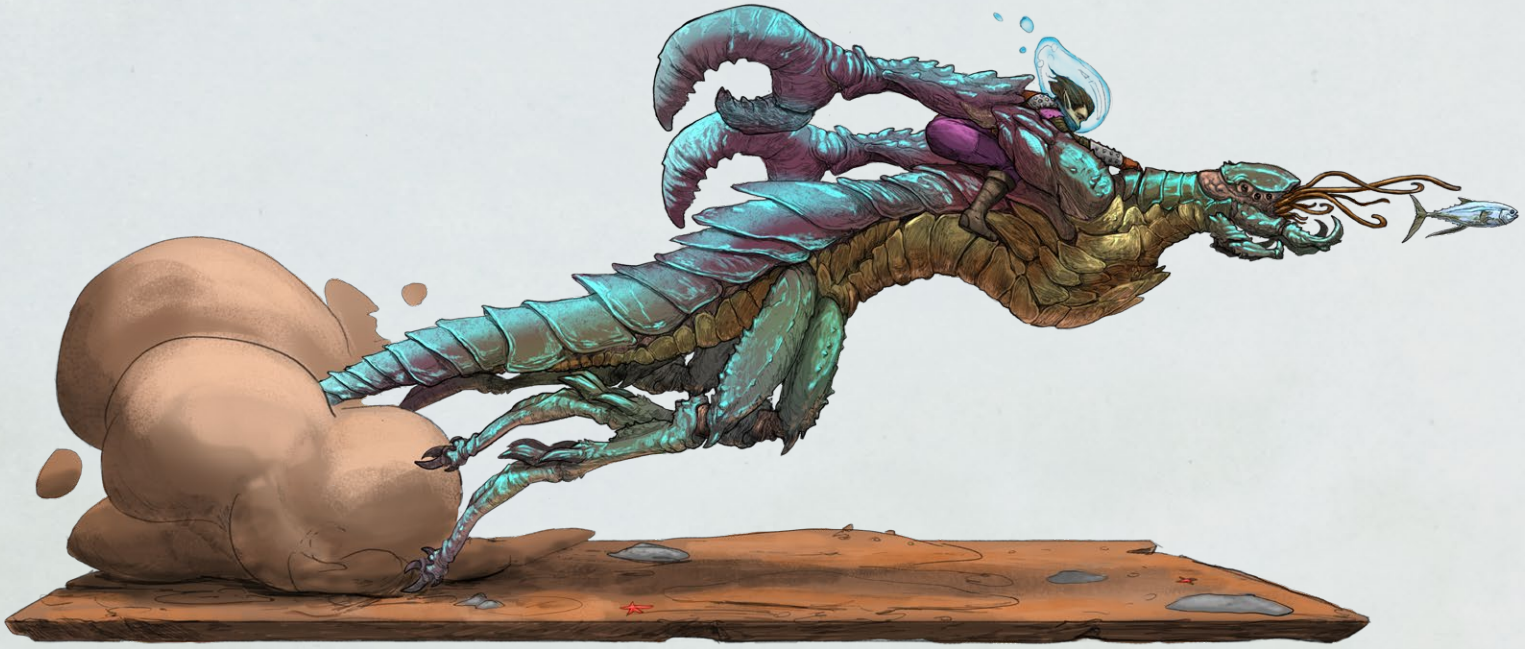
Axolottle

The hardy salamanders of the axol family range from the foot-long axolittle to the imposing 8-foot axolottle. Their thick, rubbery skin stays slick as it filters impurities and potent toxins from their bodies. Axol families use this ability to purify dirty or poisoned bodies of water, attracting a bountiful supply of food into their territory.

Some priestly orders raise axolottles to clean infected water in the wake of disasters.

Chuul

Long ago, aboleths imbued chuuls with a powerful drive to seek out and collect sources of magic. That's why deep-sea treasure hunters favor these magic-seeking mounts! Experienced chuul riders can dive to incredible depths in search of jewels and ancient artefacts.



Bulette

Rumors abound of a crew of sand pirates who ride bulettes under cover of night to ambush merchant caravans. How the criminals tempered the devastating monsters is a mystery, but the wreckage from their attacks is undeniable. Those who live to tell the tale remember a faint buzzing before the devastating impact—the vibration of the bulettes' casing as they tear through the terrain.



Purple Worm

She who tames an adult purple worm is not to be trifled with.

Juvenile worms separated from their parents become invaluable landscapers for small settlements, as long as the monstrosities have ample food and space to roam. Their massive, segmented trunks repel earth away from their bodies as they dig, covering daring riders as they submerge.



Axolottle Mount

Large mounted beast, unaligned

Armor Class 10 + PB (natural armor)

Temporary Hit Points 4 times the rider's character level or challenge rating

Hit Points 34 (4d10 + 12)

Speed 25 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	3 (-4)	8 (-1)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +0 + PB, Con +3 + PB

Damage Resistances poison

Senses passive Perception 9

Languages —

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Mounted. During a long rest, the axolottle can designate one creature that rode it within the last 10 days as its rider. The axolottle gains temporary hit points equal to 4 times the rider's level or challenge rating after completing the long rest. The axolottle uses its rider's proficiency bonus in place of its own proficiency bonus for AC, ability checks, attack rolls, saving throws, and the DC made to save against certain action effects.

Amphibious. The axolottle can breathe air and water.

Oxygenated Skin. Any non-incapacitated creature that maintains skin contact with the axolottle's body can breathe underwater, and it regains a number of hit points equal to half the hit points the axolottle regains when it uses its Regeneration trait (rounded down).

Regeneration. The axolottle regains 3 + PB hit points at the start of its turn. If the axolottle takes acid or fire damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the axolottle's next turn. The axolottle dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

Vim and Vigor. The axolottle uses its Constitution modifier for its weapon attack and damage rolls.

Actions

Spit Bubble. Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack: +3 + PB to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) thunder damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 8 + PB Constitution saving throw or become stunned until the start of its next turn.

Axowall (2/Day). The axolottle extends its gills and creates a barrier with its face. The axolottle, its rider, and any creature within 10 feet directly behind it has three-quarters cover until the end of the axolottle's next turn.

Chuul Mount

Large mounted aberration, unaligned

Armor Class 13 + PB (natural armor)

Temporary Hit Points equal to the rider's character level or challenge rating

Hit Points 85 (10d10 + 30)

Speed 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	5 (-3)	11 (+0)	5 (-3)

Skills Perception +0 +PB

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10 + PB

Languages understands Deep Speech but can't speak

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Mounted. During a long rest, the chuul can designate one creature that rode it within the last 10 days as its rider. The chuul gains temporary hit points equal to the rider's level or challenge rating after completing the long rest. The chuul uses its rider's proficiency bonus in place of its own proficiency bonus for AC, ability checks, attack rolls, saving throws, and the DC made to save against certain action effects.

Amphibious. The chuul can breathe air and water.

Sense Magic. The chuul senses magic within 120 feet of it at will and makes a low clicking noise that can be heard by its rider when it does so. This trait otherwise works like the *detect magic* spell but isn't itself magical.

Actions

Vice Grip. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 + PB to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage. The target is grappled (escape DC 12 + PB) if it is a Large or smaller creature and the chuul doesn't have two other creatures grappled.

Vimsipper Tentacles. One creature grappled by the chuul must succeed on a DC 10 + PB Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. While poisoned, the target is paralyzed, and any spells or other magical effects affecting the target are suppressed. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. Each time the target fails this saving throw, the chuul regains 1d4 hit points.

Disrupting Trill (1/Day). The chuul lets out an discomforting clicking sound in a 60-foot cone, causing the area to vibrate with a field of antimagic until the end of its next turn. This effect works like the *antimagic field* spell.

Reactions

Carapace Cover. The chuul's rider can use their reaction to gain a +2 bonus to AC until the start of its next turn. The chuul's AC is reduced by 2 until the start of its next turn.

Bulette Mount

Large mounted monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 15 + PB (natural armor)

Temporary Hit Points equal to the rider's character level or challenge rating

Hit Points 84 (8d10 + 40)

Speed 40 ft., burrow 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	11 (+0)	21 (+5)	2 (-4)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Skills Perception +0 + PB

Senses darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 10 + PB

Languages —

Challenge 5 (1,900 XP)

Mounted. During a long rest, the bulette can designate one creature that rode it within the last 10 days as its rider. The bulette gains temporary hit points equal to the rider's level or challenge rating after completing the long rest. The bulette uses its rider's proficiency bonus in place of its own proficiency bonus for AC, ability checks, attack rolls, saving throws, and the DC made to save against certain action effects.

Plated Protection. The rider can ride on the bulette while it burrows.

Standing Leap. The bulette's long jump is up to 30 feet and its high jump is up to 15 feet, with or without a running start.

Trenchshot. The bulette carves a trench 3 feet deep when it takes the Dash action to move over sand, earth, or mud, causing the spaces it moves out of to become difficult terrain. The bulette's casing vibrates and audibly buzzes as it moves.

Actions

Flintlock Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 + PB to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 17 (2d12 + 4) piercing damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it must succeed on a DC 12 + PB Strength saving throw or its speed is reduced to 0 until the end of its next turn.

Artillery Leap (2/Day). The bulette can jump up to its speed. It can then use this action to land on its feet in a space that contains one or more other creatures. Each creature under and within 5 foot of the bulette when it lands must succeed on a DC 12 + PB Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone and take 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage. A creature directly underneath the bulette takes an additional 14 (3d6 + 4) slashing damage. On a successful save, the creature takes only half the damage, isn't knocked prone, and if the target was beneath the bulette it is pushed 5 feet out of the bulette's space into an unoccupied space of the creature's choice. If no unoccupied space is within range, the creature instead falls prone in the bulette's space.

Reactions

Bulletproof. When the rider or the bulette has to make a Dexterity saving throw to avoid damage, the rider can use their reaction to use the bulette's Constitution modifier in place of the Dexterity modifier on the save.

Juvenile Purple Worm Mount

Huge mounted monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 16 + PB (natural armor)

Hit Points 100 (8d12 + 48)

Speed 50 ft., burrow 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	7 (-2)	22 (+6)	1 (-5)	8 (-1)	4 (-3)

Skills Stealth –2 + PB (while underground)

Senses blindsight 30 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages —

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Mounted. During a long rest, the worm can designate one creature that rode it within the last 10 days as its rider. The worm uses its rider's proficiency bonus in place of its own proficiency bonus for AC, ability checks, attack rolls, saving throws, and the DC made to save against certain action effects.

Mauve the Earth. The worm's Tail Stinger attack has a reach of 15 feet and deals an additional 5 (2d4) piercing damage when the worm is underground and targets a creature above ground.

Plated Protection. The rider can ride on the worm while it burrows.

Tunneler. The worm can burrow through solid rock at half its burrow speed and leaves a 8-foot-diameter tunnel in its wake.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 + PB to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (3d6 + 7) piercing damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it must succeed on a DC 12 + PB Dexterity saving throw or be swallowed by the worm. A swallowed creature is blinded and restrained, it has total cover against attacks and other effects outside the worm, and it takes 15 (6d4) acid damage at the start of each of the worm's turns.

If the worm takes 15 damage or more on a single turn from a creature inside it, the worm must succeed on a DC 21 Constitution saving throw at the end of that turn or regurgitate all swallowed creatures, which fall prone in a space within 10 feet of the worm. If the worm dies, a swallowed creature is no longer restrained by it and can escape from the corpse by using 15 feet of movement, exiting prone.

Tail Stinger (1/Day). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 + PB to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (3d4 + 7) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 12 + PB Constitution saving throw, taking 30 (12d4) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Omnimounts and Mass Transportation

Omnimounts are massive creatures that can carry multiple riders at once and travel across continents effortlessly. An omnimount may have a designated driver in place of a single rider, or the creature might be an independent agent offering their services to adventurers in need of transportation.

Utilize omnimounts in your campaign whenever you want your adventures to be larger than life. Sibling settlements might have an omnimount as a critical part of their trade and prosperity. A legendary omnimount with the power to traverse worlds could slumber deep beneath the depths waiting for people to find it. An omnimount under the control of an evil giant may reward whoever frees it. Or, your adventurers might hear a rumor about the approach of the Great Conductor.

Phlox, "The Great Conductor"

The Great Conductor hungers for distances. This sapient purple worm has dug through surfaces both solid and supernatural for centuries. The moment they awakened is lost to the miles, but the road ahead promises to wind for as long as they hunger.

Over the years, Phlox has found great distances to traverse by ferrying smallfolk with important destinations in their stomach. The worm normally follows the booms of thunderstorms and earthquakes while they have no destination—but when a prospective passenger drums the ground loudly enough and calls out the worm's name, Phlox makes their approach.

The worm answers the call of anyone in need, but with a catch: if the distance wasn't satisfying enough, Phlox takes their payment in food and digests the passengers whole.

Phlox is a **purple worm** with the following adjustments:

- Phlox's alignment is lawful neutral.
- Phlox's Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores are each 16 (+3).
- Phlox can speak using telepathy, up to 120 feet.
- Phlox doesn't require air, and has a swimming speed equal to their burrowing speed.
- Phlox can suppress the acid and additional effects of swallowing a creature.

Phlox is just one of several incredible omnimounts out there. But that's an article for another time...





THE CHAINED LIBRARY

A NEW LOCATION WITH CREATURES, MAGIC ITEMS, AND STORIES

by Cat Evans

"If a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, the Chained Library is a cataclysm lying in wait."

~Indratha Nevarre, antiquarian and sage

The Chained Library is a new location and organization to incorporate in any campaign. The characters can visit the library to search for obscure knowledge and talk with expert scholars. The library's agents, who go out into the world to acquire new books, can also serve as adversaries looking for a book the characters possess or are seeking. Especially bold (or reckless) characters might try to steal a powerful book from the library. This article presents the library's lore, plot hooks, stat blocks, and some of the magic items kept within its vaults.

The Chained Library is a great fortress built into the black rock cliffs far from civilization. Spellbooks of liches and necromancers and ancient tomes of infernal secrets line the library's prison-shelves, guarded by blind celestials.

The library predates every known kingdom and even some of the younger gods. There are as many stories about its origin as there are sages to tell them. The Chained Library's own version, sealed in a marble vault in the deepest depths of the archive, attributes its founding to Archmage Valistus. It is written that Valistus' apprentice, Ravelin, gave himself over to the study of dark magic. Valistus intervened, sealing away his apprentice's spellbooks and research, along with all the tomes and scrolls he used to guide his studies. Valistus summoned and bound celestial creatures of unwavering morals to guard them. In time, other mages and scholars presented Valistus with dangerous texts that could damn the world.

Now, the Chained Library sends out agents to find and claim more dangerous books. The library's judgement is strict and their agents persistent: once the librarians determine that a book must be taken into their secure storage, they work tirelessly to obtain it, regardless of how it's being used; a book of necromancy used to cure a plague is still an evil book, and must be shut away. Occasionally a visitor who proves their wisdom and moral character might be allowed to peruse a tome or two, under supervision, but knowledge taken into the library is effectively lost forever. However, the library never destroys a text: knowledge is sacred, and any information might serve a purpose in the future.

Even finding the library is a challenge. It's not on any map, and the few travelogues that exist are cryptic at best. The journey is always perilous and long.

GAINING ENTRANCE

Gaining access to the library is not as simple as knocking on the door. The librarians may consider the writs of monarchs, but only out of politeness. No sum of money is ever enough, and no threat or show of force has ever intimidated the librarians. However, the pleas of churches and pious orders can open the gate, and individuals with a reputation as responsible and diligent scholars are granted admission if they ask with humility. And, of course, the librarians are especially tempted to admit visitors with a book they dearly desire to add to the collection.

DEFENSES

The library's external doors are impervious to magic, and the locks are inaccessible from the outside. Forcing the doors open would require a siege engine. The doors inside the library are almost as sturdy. They are resistant to magic (there is a 25% chance that spells or other magical effects have no effect on the doors), and require a successful DC 25 Dexterity check using thieves' tools to unlock or a successful DC 30 Strength check to force open. The library staff have keys to all the doors, but they're common magical items that must be attuned to the user to work.

The library's strongest defense is the curse it bestows on thieves: a creature who leaves the library with one of its books must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw at dawn the following day or take 5 (1d10) necrotic damage as its hands start to blacken and rot. A creature who fails the save must also roll one Hit Die. Its hit point maximum is permanently reduced by the amount on the die, and its Hit Dice are permanently reduced by one. The rot spreads daily, spreading up the arms, over the body, and eventually up to the creature's face. The thief must repeat the save at dawn each day, whether they succeed or fail. The *greater restoration* spell restores the creature's hit point maximum and total number of Hit Dice, but the thief must keep making saving throws each day until they return the book to its correct place in the library. When the victim's total number of Hit Dice or hit point maximum drops to 0, it dies.

INSIDE THE LIBRARY

There is one entrance to the Chained Library: bronze double doors set in the cliffside, inlaid with sigils of protection and runes to dispel magic—and sealed by thirteen locks both magical and mundane. The doors are opened briefly each sunrise to admit any visitors who wait in the black ash desert beyond, where vulture-like birdfolk prey on weakened, sunstruck travelers.

THE HOWLING SHELVES

Stored on the library's first floor, the Howling Shelves make up the majority of the collection. Here, the librarians store spellbooks and research notes, tomes of demonology, and other dangerous, but possibly useful knowledge. The eyeless guardians patrol the area, where each book is chained to the shelves with adamantium links. Librarians habitually enter this area in pairs, each watching the other to ensure they're not tempted to read any of the books.



EYELESS GUARDIAN

The eyeless guardians resemble muscular, ivory-skinned humanoids with gold plate mail magically grafted to their skin. Golden helms enclose their heads, with thick bronze spikes driven into their eyes.

Eyeless Guardian

Medium celestial, lawful good

Armor Class 18 (plate mail)

Hit Points 112 (15d8 + 45)

Speed 35 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	11 (+0)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	9 (-1)

Damage Immunities psychic, poison

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned, stunned

Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 12

Languages telepathy 60 ft.

Challenge 7 (5,000 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

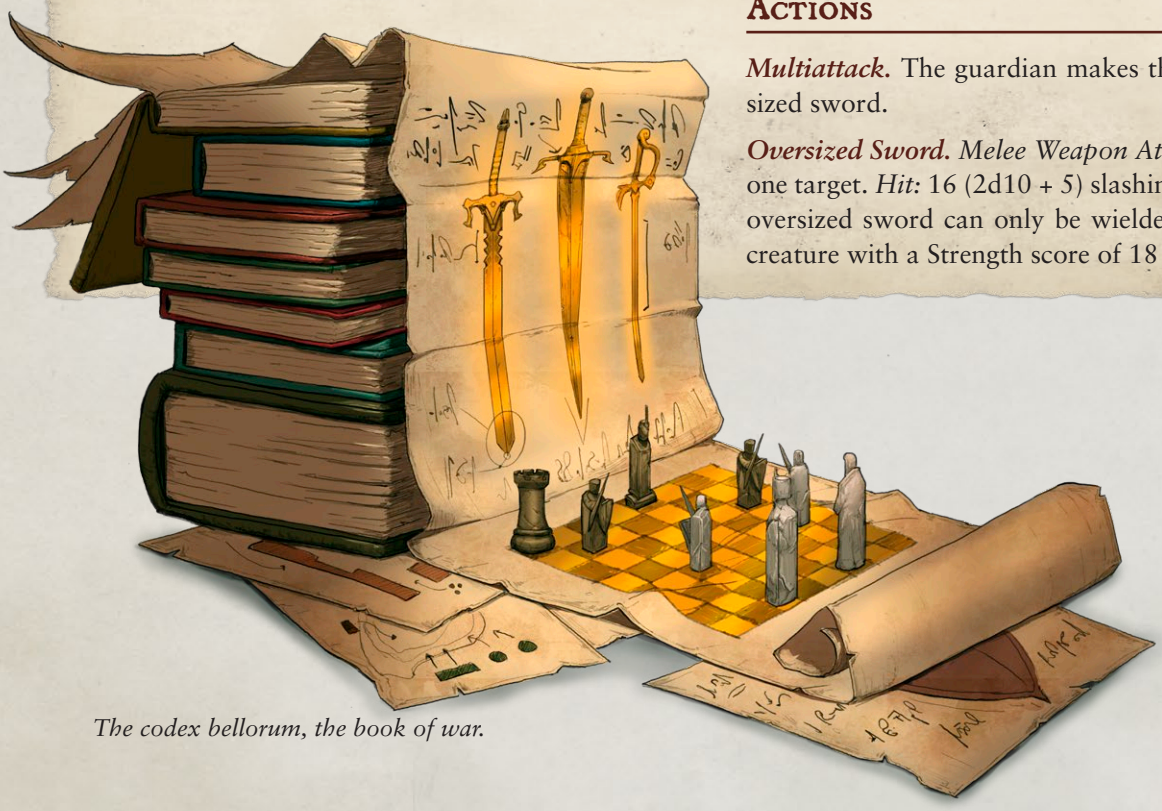
Guardian's Mark. The guardian can use a bonus action to mark a creature within 60 feet of it. The guardian's weapon attacks deal an additional 5 (1d10) damage to a marked target, and the guardian knows the location of the target as long as it's on the same plane of existence. The target remains marked for one year or until the effect is dispelled with the *dispel magic* spell or similar magic, or the guardian marks another target.

Magic Weapons. The guardian's weapon attacks are magical.

Actions

Multiattack. The guardian makes three attacks with its oversized sword.

Oversized Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) slashing damage. The guardian's oversized sword can only be wielded by a Medium or larger creature with a Strength score of 18 or higher.



The codex bellorum, the book of war.



THE DEEP STACKS

The eyeless guardians visit the Deep Stacks only when ordered to do so, and the librarians don't come here at all: the books here are too dangerous, intelligent and malevolent to risk humanoid contact.

The Deep Stacks are the lowest level of the library, a sump of threatening arcane power. These malevolent prisoners long for someone to read them, hoping to possess a living creature who can leave the library.

Each book is capable of communicating and has its own agenda. The way the book communicates and its agenda can be chosen or rolled on the tables below.

d%	*Communication*
01-70	The book communicates by transmitting emotions and images to creatures within 30 feet of it.
71-00	The book can communicate telepathically with any creature that understands a language within 30 feet of it.

d6	*Agenda*
1	Summon a powerful extraplanar entity
2	Reunite with its former master, a powerful wizard or lich
3	Destroy an old enemy and everyone they hold dear
4	Consume 100 other books, gaining power with each one
5	Bring down a kingdom
6	Destroy the Chained Library

Sentient Grimoire

Tiny construct, chaotic evil

Armor Class 14

Hit Points 50 (20d4)

Speed 5 ft., fly 15 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (-4)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)

Skills Arcana +5, Deception +4, History +5

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned, prone

Senses truesight 30 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 12

Languages understands all languages but can't speak

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Possession. When a creature spends at least 10 minutes reading the grimoire, the grimoire can force the creature to make a DC 20 Intelligence saving throw. On a failure, the target is possessed by the grimoire. While possessed, the grimoire controls the host's body, and the host's awareness is transferred into the physical form of the book. While possessing a host, the grimoire retains its Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores, its skills, and its immunities to being charmed and frightened, but otherwise uses the host's statistics. The possession lasts until the grimoire uses a bonus action to end it, the host dies, the grimoire's book form is reduced to 0 hit points, or *dispel evil and good* is cast on the host's body. When the possession ends, the grimoire's consciousness returns to its book if it still exists, or ceases to exist if the book has been destroyed.

While the possessed creature's consciousness is in the book, it gains truesight out to a range of 30 feet (and is blind beyond this point). It retains its Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores and can respond to telepathic communication, but can't initiate it. Otherwise, it is a mundane book and can't cast spells, take actions, or use any traits, race or class features, or other statistics of its original form. It has 20 hit points, AC 12, and a speed of 0 feet. A creature imprisoned in the book doesn't age and can make a DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana or History, as appropriate to the book's contents according to the GM) check each day to understand the book's contents and commit them to memory. This doesn't allow the creature to learn spells inscribed in the book. If a creature's body dies while it is possessed by the grimoire, the creature also dies.

Actions

Shadow Slash. *Melee Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) necrotic damage.

Reactions

Shadow Touch. When another creature touches the grimoire, the grimoire can attack with Shadow Slash.



The codex caelum, the book of the sky elves.

DOMICILES

Accommodations for scribes and librarians take up the majority of the library's second level. An enchanted cauldron provides food and water in the refectory, the residents sleep in simple, spartan dormitories, and a suite of training rooms are used for magical instruction, practicing stealth and tracking, and combat lessons with swords and daggers. Agents must be able to defend themselves, after all.

SCRIPTORIUM

In the Scriptorium, scribes sit in walled, warded cubicles making copies of books so damaged or aged that their contents are in danger of destruction. No matter how dangerous the contents, there must always be a viable and accurate copy in existence.

Exposure to these books can poison the mind. The scribes never speak of their work, and most wear *scribe's lenses* that keep them from understanding the words and images they copy. Despite this precaution, ideas leak in; scribes suffer from nightmares, and occasionally more serious consequences, such as repeating the half-remembered lore of the texts to their colleagues, unleashing dangerous ideas that are trapped in paper for good reason.

LIBRARIAN NPCS

The following NPCs are librarians you can add to your game or use as inspiration to create your own library staff. There are dozens of librarians within the Chained Library, representing every humanoid ancestry and origin.

SAMARIS

Samaris, an ancient tiefling with long black horns, is the oldest of the librarians. She despises every book in the library and dreams nightly about setting fire to the entire collection for the good of the world. Samaris mistrusts anyone who asks to read one of the books and sends agents of the library to shadow visitors after they leave, waiting for those guests to prove their corruption so she can order their assassination.

ALOIS

The young human Alois is the newest addition to the library's staff. They arrived the same way all the librarians do: following a calling in their dreams. Alois isn't convinced that the books they guard are evil: they are, after all, just books. When they can, Alois slips into the Howling Shelves and browses the texts there. They haven't yet had an opportunity to venture into the Deep Stacks, but one day they will.



Librarian

Medium humanoid (any), any lawful alignment

Armor Class 11 (14 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 84 (13d8 + 26)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

Skills Arcana +6, History +6, Investigation +6, Religion +6

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Common plus any three other languages

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Spellcasting. The librarian is a 10th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). The librarian has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light, mage hand, mending, shocking grasp*
1st level (4 slots): *alarm, comprehend languages, detect magic, mage armor, magic missile*
2nd level (3 slots): *arcane lock, locate object, knock*
3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic, magic circle*
4th level (3 slots): *blight, confusion, cloudkill*
5th level (2 slots): *wall of force*

The librarians' personal spellbooks also contain a range of protective and informative spells including *legend lore*, *protection from evil and good*, *remove curse*, *secret chest*, and *scrying*, though they don't usually have these spells prepared.

Actions

Shocking Grasp. *Melee Spell Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d8) lightning damage and the target can't take reactions until the start of its next turn.

Quarterstaff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d6 – 1) bludgeoning damage, or 3 (1d8 – 1) bludgeoning damage if used with two hands

Library Agents

The Chained Library's agents are everywhere, from major cities to the halls of academia, trawling secondhand book markets and private collections. They use whatever tactics necessary to obtain their prizes. They visit auctions and merchants, using the library's sizable budget to buy up what they can. For books not on the market, they use blackmail, bribery, and theft. Occasionally, a wealthy aristocrat or powerful mage is murdered, and the only things missing from the crime scene are a couple of precious books. The agents' activities are consistent in only one way: that no books are harmed or destroyed, no matter how dangerous they are. The Chained Library is capable of storing anything, and the destruction of knowledge is sacrilege.

The library agents exist to remove dangerous books from circulation in the outside world. This includes books of dark magic, the spellbooks of liches and evil mages, the secrets of wicked gods, and knowledge that could be used to open pathways to other planes: things not of the material world that could fundamentally threaten life there. The agents take no interest in material that is politically dangerous—many rulers have tried to recruit the library to suppress inconvenient or threatening information, but the organization is profoundly uninterested.

Agent NPCs

The Chained Library has numerous agents. The NPCs below are examples you can include in your game or use as inspiration for NPCs of your own.

Agents of the library recognize one another by the magical tattoos on their right index finger: a line of Common script reading, "Close your mind," encircled by chains. The tattoos are visible to creatures with truesight. The tattoos use special ink which allows a *detect magic* spell to reveal them.

Vornak

Vornak is a towering, tusked half-orc who liaises with private collectors of books and scrolls. A well-dressed, well-spoken man with a faint lisp, he's quite the conversationalist and raconteur.

Most of the texts the library obtains come from people with academic or financial interests in such things. These are Vornak's clients. He has a knack for finding equally rare books that suit these collectors' interests but possess no value for the Chained Library. He arranges sales and exchanges, and maintains a network of contacts who inform him when potentially interesting texts appear. Vornak is always in need of mercenaries to obtain the books that are his stock in trade.

Keledra

The slight, freckled, half-elf thief Keledra steps in where money and blandishments fail. She follows tips from her network, the thieves and scoundrels she worked with before the Chained Library recruited her. Her work is as dangerous as the books she steals. She slips into the secured sanctums of people who obtain tomes of evil magic with the intent to use them. Keledra takes her work seriously: she trains hard and picks up magical skills where she can to complement her deft hands. Keledra trusts few people and works alone, but she finds her path crossing with the same foes time and again as rivals, guards, and targets.

Chained Library Agent

Medium humanoid (any), any lawful alignment

Armor Class 14 (17 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 84 (13d8 + 26)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)

Skills Arcana +6, Athletics +4, Deception +5, Investigation +9, Perception +6, Persuasion +5, Sleight of Hand +7, Stealth +10

Senses passive Perception 16

Languages Common plus any two other languages

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Evasion. When an effect would allow the agent to make a Dexterity saving throw to take half damage, it instead takes no damage if it succeeds on the saving throw and half damage if it fails.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). The agent deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the agent that isn't incapacitated and the agent doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Spellcasting. The agent is a 5th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). The agent has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light, mage hand, message, minor illusion*
1st level (4 slots): *charm person, comprehend languages, detect magic, jump, mage armor*
2nd level (3 slots): *invisibility, locate object, knock, spider climb*
3rd level (2 slots): *gaseous form, haste, sending*

Actions

Multiattack. The agent makes three attacks with its dagger.

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage.

Bonus Actions

Cunning Action. The agent takes the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action as a bonus action.

Reactions

Uncanny Dodge. The agent halves the damage it takes from an attack that hits it. The agent must be able to see the attacker.

Encountering the Chained Library

A party of adventurers might encounter the Chained Library and its agents as allies, enemies, or both at different times. The first four adventure hooks presented below serve as introductions to the Chained Library; the last five are better used once a connection has been established.

Allies of Convenience

The characters and one or more agents of the library explore the same ruin or tomb. It's dangerous work, and the two groups are safer together. The agents get their prize, and the characters get theirs—unless one side is lying about what they really want.

Master Thief

A friendly NPC patron employs the characters to catch a skilled thief plaguing the libraries of learned folk. Once caught, the thief explains her mission: she's relieving a cult of infernalists of their source material and taking it into safekeeping at the Chained Library. What do the characters do with the knowledge that their employers are in league with fiends?

Reclamation

The characters have come into possession of a book the library's agents claim should be safely locked away. They're willing to pay a significant price, but the characters need the book to defeat a great evil.

Rivals

The characters want one or more books from the estate of a deceased mage. Agents of the Chained Library have their eyes on several of the same tomes. Social and political maneuvering, bribery, blackmail, and threats all follow…plus whatever chaos the characters inevitably add to the mix.

Apostate

One of the library's scribes read something they shouldn't, and now they're burdened by terrible knowledge that's unraveling their mind and demanding to be used. If the characters don't stop the scribe, the librarian causes terrible harm. To complicate matters, the library is loath to kill one of their own and wants to see the scribe protected and healed.

Incursion

Either the characters failed the test in the "Prospective Readers" adventure hook, or the book they sought is in the Deep Stacks, never to be looked upon. They must infiltrate or breach the library by force.

Prospective Readers

The characters need access to knowledge contained within the library. But to be admitted to the library, they must pass three trials to prove their virtue and moral fiber.

Resale

Books from the library make their way onto the market. Why? Who is allowing this? Has a thief plundered the library, or is there a traitor inside?

Unburdening

The characters have come into possession of a book full of vile secrets. They must find the library or its agents to get rid of the wretched tome. This adventure can lead into any other plot hook where the library requires the characters' assistance.

Treasures of the Chained Library

The library contains the following magic items.

Library Equipment

The librarians of the Chained Library are sworn to protect the books in their care—and they, in turn, use specialized items to protect themselves from those same books.

Null Fold

Wondrous item, rare

These soft, grey leather wraps the size of a large spellbook are imprinted with the lock-and-chain symbol of the Chained Library. They prevent a scroll or book placed within them from exerting any influence on the person carrying it. Objects in the *null fold* can't be targeted by any divination magic or perceived through magical scrying sensors.

Magic items within the *null fold* become nonmagical until the wrappers are removed. Interacting with the object to inspect, read, or otherwise use it requires removing it from the *null fold*.

Scribe's Lenses

Wondrous item, rare

While you wear this smoked glass lorgnette on a fine iron chain, you can understand written languages as if you were under the effect of the *comprehend languages* spell. Alternatively, you can choose not to understand the words you read, allowing you to look at but not trigger or understand the words of hazardous texts. The scribes of the Chained Library use these lenses to copy dangerous books without harm to their minds.

Additionally, while you wear the *scribe's lenses*, you can't be charmed or possessed by constructs or sentient magic items, and sentient magic items can't communicate with you.

Forbidden Tomes

The Chained Library contains many magic books. The following forbidden tomes are locked away in the Deep Stack.

A Revised History of the World

Wondrous item, artifact

Thick straps stamped with intricate sigils are buckled around the red leather cover of this massive book. The work inside is a handwritten manuscript, filled with footnotes, revisions, and corrections. The book contains a history of all significant events for the last two hundred years—and this history can be edited. A careless scratch can erase the founding of a kingdom and a quick note can change the outcome of a war. Revising history creates a new, branching timeline in which that change applies. The ripple effect of unintended consequences is significant, and changes always come with severe, unwelcome consequences: the early death of an evil king creates a power vacuum that allows a new tyrant to rise; preventing a plague leads to overpopulation and famine.

If you make a revision in the timeline using this book, you remember the original timeline and the change you've made, but struggle to separate the two. Your Intelligence score is permanently reduced by 2 and can't be restored by any means.

Each time the book is changed, there is a 10% chance that the latest revision creates so many conflicts with previous versions that the book goes up in flames and is destroyed, and the change fails to take effect.

Corpus Eternitas

Wondrous item, artifact

Each page of this book measures three feet by two feet, and the entire volume is over three feet thick. Its sapphire blue, wooden covers are sealed with six locks, each key carried by a different librarian.

The *Corpus Eternitas* holds the deepest secrets of the fundamental nature of magic. If you spend no fewer than 8 hours each day reading it, over the course of one year, you gain a permanent +2 bonus to your spell save DC and spell attack rolls.

In addition, by practicing the techniques described within the book, you tear the fabric of reality, opening portals to other planes. The GM determines where these portals lead, and what comes through them.

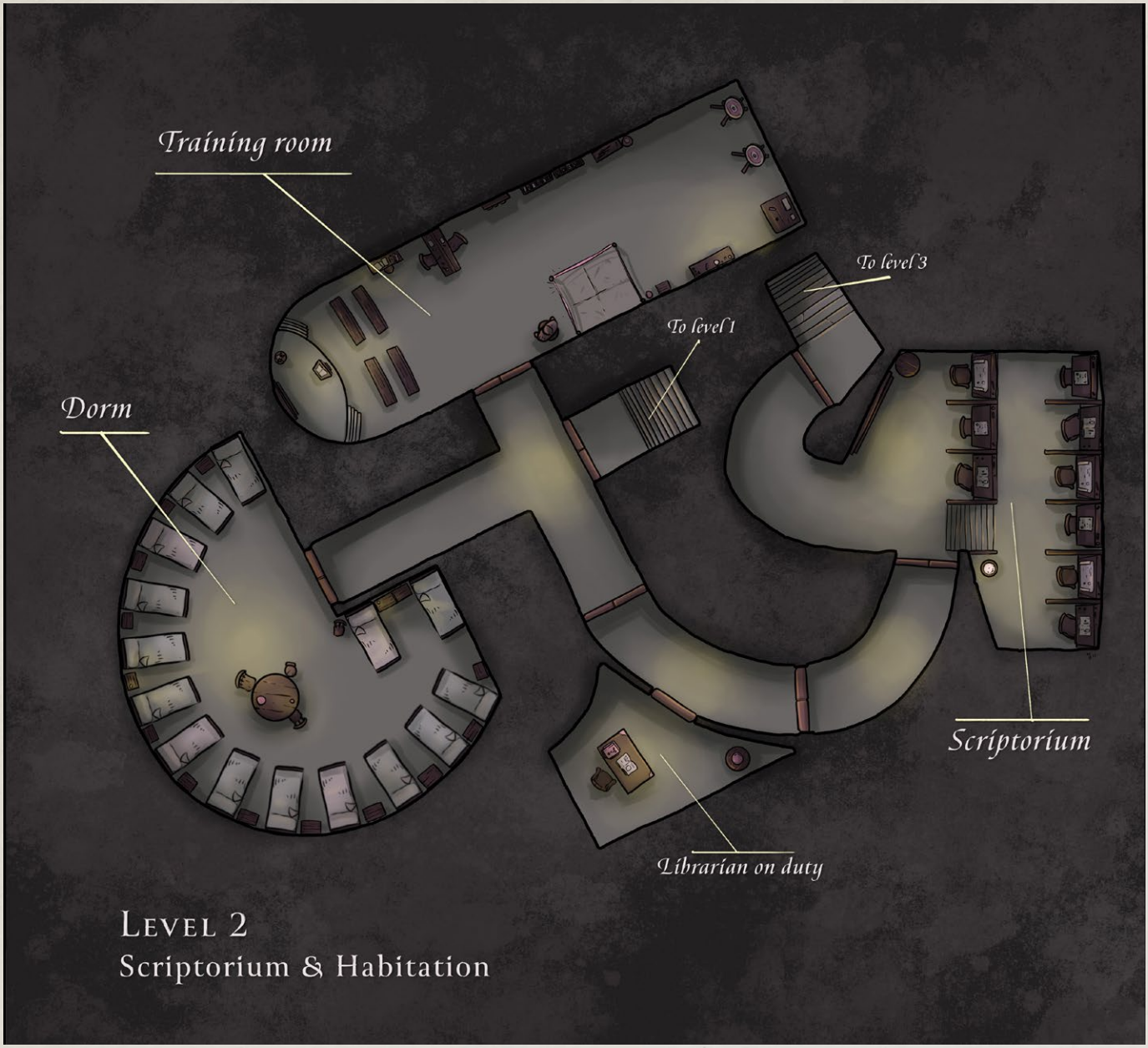
For the first six months of reading, one such portal opens each month, within 100 miles of the book. For the next five months, one portal opens each week. In the last month of reading, a new portal opens each day. These portals remain open until closed by a ritual contained in *On Gates* (also in the Chained Library's collection).

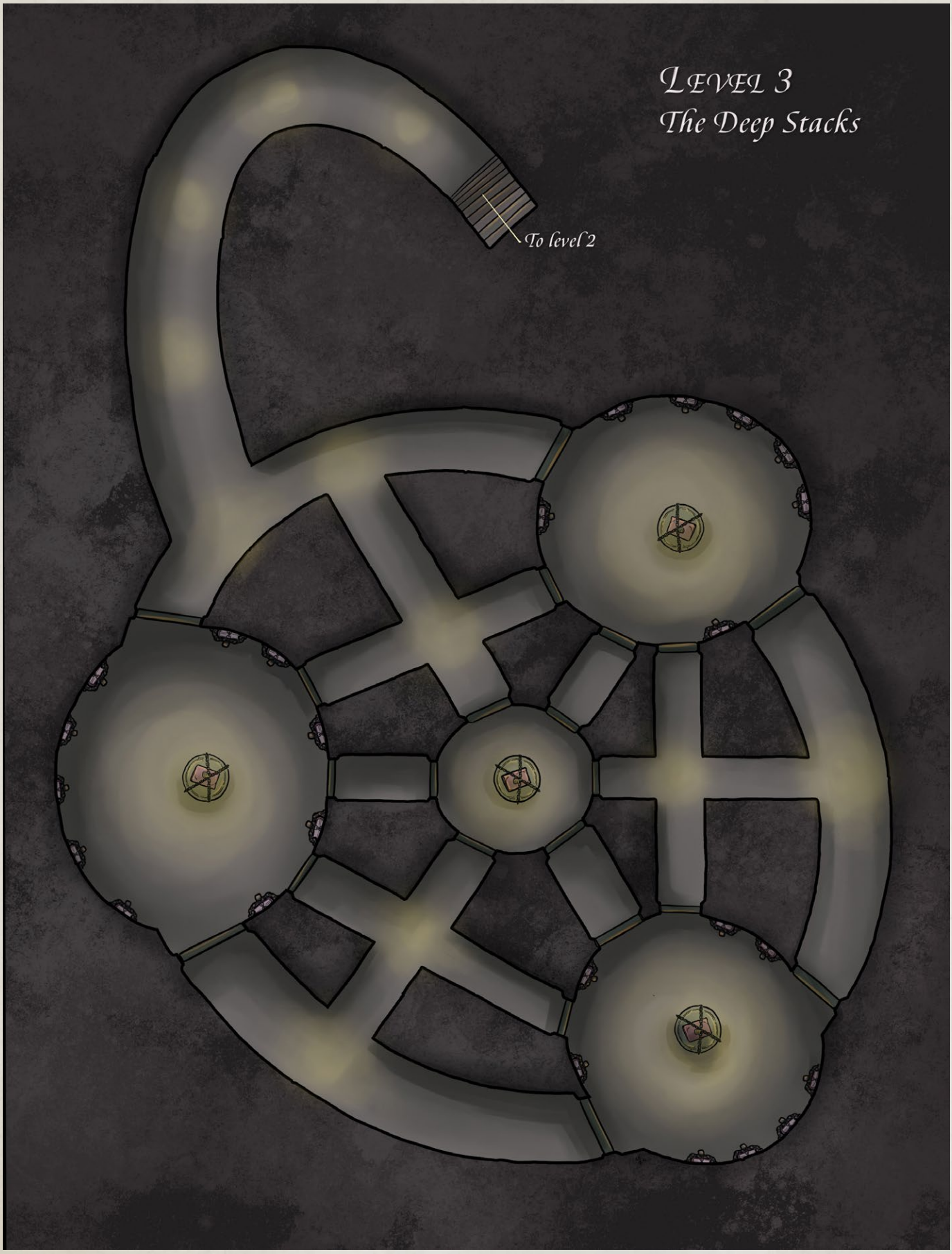
Other Treasures

The Chained Library holds many other valuable books, including *tomes of clear thought*, *tomes of leadership and influence*, and the powerful codices presented in *Strongholds & Followers* and *Kingdoms & Warfare* such as the *codex terragnosis* and the *codex mirror*. Not one of these books should be considered "safe." As a guideline, most knowledge in the Chained Library comes with a price: the reader is either marked with a curse from the book's previous owner, tempted into serving that owner's agenda, or pursued by creatures eager to take the book from them.

Level 1
The Howling Shelves




Training room
To level 3
To level 1
Dorm
Scriptorium
Librarian on duty
Level 2
Scriptorium & Habitation


Level 3
The Deep Stacks
To level 2

ON-THE-ROAD ENCOUNTERS

FIVE TRAVELING ENCOUNTERS TO DROP INTO YOUR GAME

by Derek Ruiz

Most adventurers hit the road more than self-professed travel lover Willie Nelson. And if *The Lord of the Rings* has taught us anything, it's that even the journey toward an adventure is filled with excitement and drama.

This article presents five engaging encounters for low-level characters as they journey from quest to quest, to spice up travel and add personality to the countryside.

Increasing the Challenge

While all of the encounters in this article are meant for low-level characters, you can increase the difficulty of many by simply swapping out the creatures listed here for those of a higher challenge rating. Kobolds can become gnolls or lizardfolk, bandits can become thugs or spies, etc. Most of the encounters are suitable for characters up to 8th level with creatures of an appropriate challenge rating; once characters have access to spells of 5th-level or higher, the tactical challenges in these encounters become trivial.

A Kobold's Toll

An encounter for 1st-level to 2nd-level characters

The characters face a group of kobold brigands who took over a toll bridge. Will the characters pay the kobolds' toll and move on, or will they rescue the captured guards?

Background

A group of eleven kobolds from a nearby mountain range gets braver and bolder thanks to Urkik's leadership. The veteran kobold fought humans many times and lived to brag about it. Sometimes he defeated his foes. At other times, he fled like a coward. But he survived and earned the respect of the ten kobolds that travel with him.

Two days ago, the kobolds stumbled upon a tollbooth and watched as travelers paid the four guards stationed at the booth to cross the bridge that spans the river. Urkik and company attacked that night, killed one guard, and overpowered the other three.

This encounter uses the Gatehouse map (see page 26). The kobolds tied up the three captured guards inside the barracks on the east side of the river.

Toll-Masters

When the characters arrive on the west side of the river at the tollbooth, they notice something odd:

> A stone bridge across a wild stream of gushing water leads to a 30-foot-tall stone gatehouse; the local ruler's sigil is stamped over a lowered iron-bar portcullis. Several lizard-like faces are looking out over the gatehouse's stone railing.

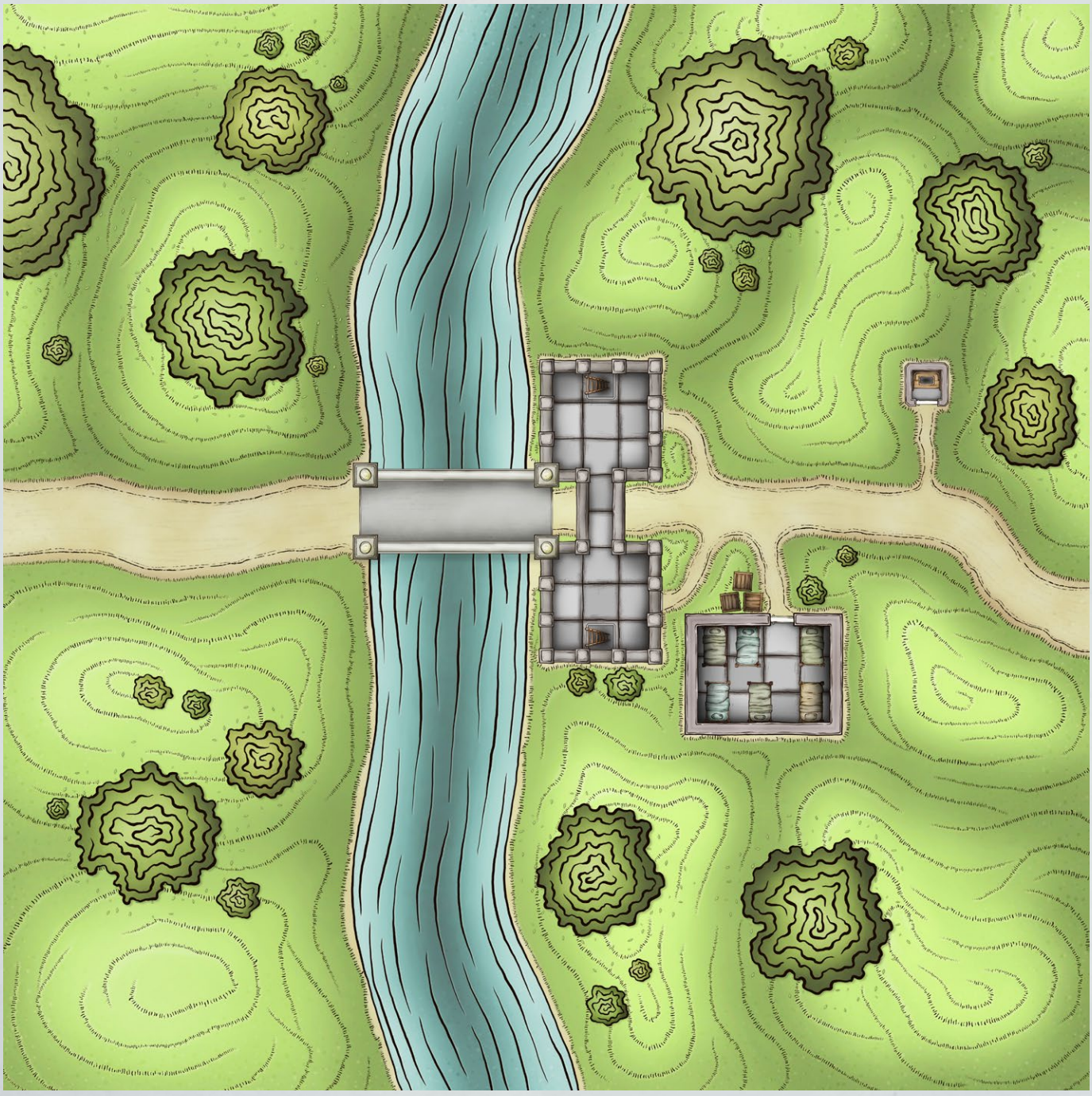
All eleven **kobolds** prepare for an attack when the characters approach the gatehouse. Six of them (including Urkik), are on top of the gatehouse, two more watch the captured guards in the barracks, and the other three roam beyond the gatehouse. The gatehouse kobolds point crossbows at travelers to stop them at the bridge.

The kobold's leader, Urkik, speaks Common, although not well. He delivers a rehearsed, yet simple speech:

> "This is Urkik's stone-door! Pay with gold coins or go away!"

Urkik charges a toll of 15 gp per person or mount. The kobolds also accept valuables and non-perishable food worth an equivalent amount. The characters may cross the gatehouse as long as they pay the toll. If the characters agree to pay, or succeed on a DC 11 Charisma (Deception) check to make the kobolds think they want to pay, two kobolds climb down from the top of the gatehouse to gather the payment.

The kobolds react happily if the characters pay and raise the portcullis, allowing the characters to cross to the other side without incident. Adventurers who cross the bridge notice two things on the way to the other side: dry blood stains on the bridge, and the muffled cries of one of the guards in the barracks. They are free to walk away and leave the captured guards to their fates. If the characters ask about the blood or the cries, or if the kobolds notice them entering the barracks, the little creatures attack.



Releasing the Guards

A character can slip into the barracks building unseen with a successful DC 14 Dexterity (Stealth) check. The kobolds on watch in the barracks leave every 1d6 + 2 hours to eat. If the kobolds notice the characters in the barracks, they shout cries of alarm and all of them attack.

The three unarmed **guards** (Mara, Freddard, and Rizic) are bound with rope and gagged with rags. A character can free one guard as an action. The guards ask for help retaking the gatehouse, where the kobolds have stashed their armor and weapons. They claim their captain in a nearby city is sure to reward the characters (see "Rewards" below).

Fighting the Kobolds

The six kobolds on the gatehouse wield light crossbows stolen from the barracks. The kobolds have a +4 to hit with the weapons and deal 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage on a hit. They remain on the roof to take advantage of their defensible position. The slim draconic pests do not want to die either. If half the kobolds drop to 0 HP, there is a 50% chance the rest of the kobolds surrender or run for their lives.

Climbing the Gatehouse. A character can climb the outside of the gatehouse with a successful DC 15 (Strength) Athletics check, or use the ladders inside the gatehouse without making an ability check. A character who fails this check by 5 or more falls.

Crossing the River. The stream is strong enough that swimming across it carries considerable risk. A character can cross the river with a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check. On a failure, the character is dragged by the strong current 50 feet south, where they can reattempt to swim across. Failing the check by 5 or more causes the character to sink and start to drown. A drowning character has disadvantage on Strength (Athletics) checks made to swim in the river and continues to drown until they exit the water.

Illumination. Kobolds have the Sunlight Sensitivity trait, which means they fight much better at night or on a very cloudy day. If you want to make the battle easier for the characters, have them encounter the kobolds in the sun.

Rewards

If the characters free the guards and defeat the kobolds, the guards' captain gives the characters 50 gp each.

Grimly Fate Tonight

An encounter for 2nd-level to 3rd-level characters

A stranded merchant caravan begs the characters to help them fend off the bandits pursuing them. The merchants and characters are outnumbered, but they have time to decide where they want to make a stand and prepare traps for the attackers.

Meet the Merchants

The characters catch up with a beat-up merchant caravan on the road:

> A small merchant caravan slowly crawls its way along the road. Multiple arrow shafts pierce the sides of three horse-drawn carts; some horses missing from the carts' poles. The worst is the sight of several injured individuals on the carts. Many of them might not see tomorrow.

The caravan's guide, a plump dwarf named Harikka Tarkun, approaches the characters. She requests the adventurers' help and offers them 200 gp for escorting the caravan back to a nearby city that is two days away. If the characters agree, Harikka provides the following information:

- The caravan started with six carts, but last night they lost three to brigands.
- The caravan repelled the bandits but lost many goods and the lives of most of her guards.
- Harikka believes the brigands are still pursuing them and will attack again tonight.

Harikka Tarkun

Neutral good dwarf (age 164)

Harikka is a plump dwarf dressed in colorful attire. She has one green eye and one gray. Her hair is arranged in complex braids. Harikka wants to start a security and mercenary company, but just lost many of her employees to bandits.

Personality Trait. "No one's going to stop me from achieving my goals."

Ideal. "My security company depends on our current success."

Bond. "I must pay my debts to my clan's leader, back in the mountains."

Flaw. "I don't plan things through. This causes me many setbacks."



Last Ditch Defense

If the characters decide to stay, Harikka asks them for help in setting up defenses for the night. There is little time and few materials to work with, but the characters can spend the time they have to pick a position and fortify it.

There are ten injured **commoners**. The only people able to fight alongside the characters are Harikka (who uses the **thug** stat block) and her two remaining **guards.**

If the characters insist on going after the bandits themselves, Harikka begs them not to leave the camp undefended. They have no idea where the bandits make camp, and the brigands could attack while the characters are out searching. To make matters worse, there are far more bandits than characters. Assaulting their camp would almost certainly result in death, but the heroes stand a chance if they pick and prepare the battleground.

Getting Ready

Allow the characters to pick the ground they want to defend. There are some hills and trees in the area, so they might want to be atop a hill, in a thicket of trees, or somewhere else. If a character asks about a unique feature that would reasonably be in the area, such as a cave or lake, allow them to make a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check to find the land feature. On a success, they find the feature.

There are plenty of supplies to prepare a tough welcome for the incoming brigands. The caravan has the following resources, which you can give to the characters in the handout included at the end of this article:

- Three carts
- Four draft horses
- Three wooden chests, each 4 feet long and 2 feet wide and tall
- Six wooden crates, each 2 cubic feet
- Two bushels of cotton and two of hay, each 5 feet long and 2 feet wide and tall
- One 8-foot-tall wardrobe
- Three crossbows and forty crossbow bolts
- Four daggers
- Two bags of caltrops

- A barrel of pitch
- Two shovels
- Six hammers and 1,000 nails
- Three 10-foot-square canvas tarps
- Three 50-foot lengths of hemp ropes
- Three flasks of lantern oil
- Two flasks of alchemist's fire
- Two pounds of lard

If the characters fend off the brigands, the merchants will allow them to keep any of the supplies they want and don't use in the traps as a reward, except for the carts and horses.

The brigands attack 1d6 hours after dusk. This gives each player enough time to implement one defensive measure or preparation. Harikka and her two guards assist the characters in their defense plans. Here are some interesting preparations that could make the incoming battle more memorable. These are just examples and most-likely scenarios meant to help you create rules for what the characters might think up.

Balls of Fire. If the characters set up their camp in an elevated position, they can douse the two cotton bushels with lantern oil and pitch and ready them at the top of the hill. As an action, a character can light the bushels on fire and roll them down the hill in a straight line toward the incoming brigands. Each creature in any of the bushels' trajectory must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 3d6 fire damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

Barricade. The carts, crates, chests, and wardrobe can be arranged to form a 4-foot-high, 5-foot-wide, 30-foot-long wall. Brigands must climb the obstacles or crawl under the carts to reach the inner circle. These obstacles count as difficult terrain and provide half cover.

Grease Traps. The lard can cover two 10-foot-square sections of ground. When a creature enters the area for the first time on a turn or starts its turn there, it must make a successful DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or fall prone.

Rope Traps. The ropes can be tied between trees or bushes to create tripline obstacles for the incoming attackers. Each creature that moves through the line of rope must make a successful DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or trip on a rope and become prone.

Pitfall Trap. A character can dig a 10-foot-deep hole in the ground and cover it with a tarp, dirt, and dry foliage. The first creature to move over the trap must make a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check or fall in, taking 2d6 bludgeoning damage and falling prone. After the trap is revealed, the bandits avoid the pit, but could still be pushed in.

Walk of Fire. A character can create a 20-foot-long, 5-foot-wide trail of pitch, lantern oil, and dry hay. As an action, a creature can throw a torch, shoot an arrow on fire, or throw a bottle of alchemist's fire to light the trail, which burns for 10 minutes. A creature that enters the fire for the first time on a turn or starts its turn there, including when the flames first appear, takes 1d8 fire damage.

Other Ideas. Creativity should be rewarded. The characters may come up with more ideas or variations on the examples above. Time and available resources should be the only limitations.

If a character can't think of any way to prepare the area, allow them to make a DC 10 Intelligence or Wisdom check. On a success, give the character one of the ideas above. Alternatively, Harikka or one of her guards can make a suggestion.

PERSONAL BUSINESS

The bandits' leader is a dwarf named Faruk. He knows Harikka from two years ago, when both of them were lowly sellswords. After a successful job, Harikka double-crossed Faruk and left with his share of the pay. Faruk failed to pay some debts because of this and had to leave his dwarven clan dishonorably.

Faruk has been looking for Harikka ever since to settle the score. It was only recently, when Harikka started her security company and made open calls for mercenaries, that Faruk found her.

Harikka recognized Faruk during the first attack. If the characters ask her more about the bandits, a character who makes a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check can tell that she's holding something back. A successful DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check gets her to reveal the truth. If the characters learn about Harikka's betrayal of Faruk, she begs them to stay and defend the people her past mistake has put in jeopardy, agreeing to pay for her sin however the characters deem fit if they help her defend the camp.

BRIGANDS ATTACK

As Harikka expects, the brigands return 1d6 hours after dusk to finish last night's skirmish. They attack in three waves:

First Wave. Eight **bandits** charge the camp and two more keep their distance, staying as far away as they can while attacking with their light crossbows.

Second Wave. When only four brigands from the first wave remain, four **thugs** come forward and join the fight.

Third Wave. When only two brigands from the second wave remain, two **bandits** and one **thug** come forward and join the fight. (You can skip this wave if the characters are overwhelmed.)

Fourth Wave. One round after the previous wave, two **bandits** and Faruk (**bandit captain**) appear. Faruk emerges from the darkness of night riding a **giant boar**. He shouts that Harikka betrayed him and she must die! Faruk offers the characters 50 gp each to turn on her, though a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that statement is a lie: he plans to slaughter the characters no matter what they do. When Faruk drops to 0 HP, the rest of the bandits run for their lives.

ENCOUNTER BALANCE

The four waves of enemies in "Grimly Fate Tonight" may not look like an encounter the characters can win, but a few extra allies and time to make traps and pick their terrain really give the characters the edge in this battle. We know! We playtested it.

CONCLUSION

Upon returning to the city, if the defense was successful, Harikka Tarkun pays the characters the promised 200 gp and thanks them. If Faruk survives, Harikka insists on arresting the hateful dwarf and bringing him back to town for judgement. She believes this humiliation is an appropriate punishment for his deeds. If pressed, she shares her history with Faruk, and explains that she was young and admits she was wrong to betray him. The characters may push her to make amends and free Faruk, and with a successful DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check, she does so.

If everything ends on good terms with the characters and Harikka, she offers them a position in her growing security company. If the heroes are interested, they may speak with her again in a local tavern called the Raging Troll. She mentions that a patron has requested elite escorts for a baron's son in an upcoming journey. Where this next adventure takes the characters is up to you.

BAD-FAITH DUEL

An encounter for 2nd-level to 3rd-level characters

The characters witness a noble duel a peasant in the streets. It's clear the wealthy bully will win this battle to the death if no one intervenes.

BACKGROUND

Sir Fadrin Allari, a pedantic and despotic noble, was riding home to his family's luxurious villa when he came across a pair of married peasants. The farmers, Rodric and Darinna, live close by and work hard to please the Allari family, who rule the region.

Rodric tripped into the noble's path, dropping a basket of apples and potatoes across the road, in front of Sir Fadrin's horse. The horse reared with surprise at the sudden avalanche of produce, and unseated Sir Fadrin. The noble claimed that Rodric's display of ineptitude was an insult to the Allari family and that the peasant's station on the farm would end soon.

Rodric couldn't contain himself and shouted an insult or two to the nobleman. Sir Fadrin, insulted, but proud, challenged Rodric to a duel to uphold his honor and make an example of the farmer. Surprised, Rodric could not back down from the situation, since refusing the noble's request would be considered a crime.

Sir Fadrin commanded a traveler on horseback to notify the Allari estate of the duel so a witness could be present. An hour later, the family's accountant (a **noble**), two more **nobles**, and a small group of **commoners** have gathered by the side of the road to witness the duel. Darinna doesn't approve and pleads to both Rodric and Sir Fadrin to stop this nonsense.

INJUSTICE FOR THE PEASANTRY

The characters arrive at the scene just before the duel is scheduled to happen:

> The well-traveled road leads to a grassy prairie where a small crowd is gathered. Nobles, their entourages, and farmers surround an odd pair of combatants about to duel with swords. One is a nobleman in finery, the other one is a farmer with poorly adjusted armor. The peasant duelist has bad posture and holds the sword incorrectly. A peasant woman clutching a straw basket with apples cries, "Stop! Please stop!"

Sir Fadrin Allari is a **knight**. Rodric is a **commoner** wearing leather armor (AC 11) and wielding a longsword that he is not proficient with. He has a +0 bonus to hit with the weapon and deals 4 (1d8) slashing damage on a hit.

If the characters stand by and watch, it quickly becomes clear that Sir Fadrin Allari initiated the duel to mock the farmer; Rodric is no match for the noble. Sir Fadrin taunts the inexperienced swordsman and tries to extend the duel for as long as possible while lecturing the other peasants to never disobey their lords. If no one intervenes, Sir Fadrin beheads Rodric by the side of the road after a few minutes of fighting. The nobles are amused, the commoners angry but silent, and Darinna cries in anguish as her husband dies.

Golden Bribe

If the characters intervene before the fatal outcome of the duel, the nobles step back in surprise and wait for Sir Fadrin to react. The despotic man turns to the characters and says:

> "Strangers, you'd do well to stand back and behave. This man wronged my family and shall pay with his life. Watch as we enact our laws, lest they be applied to you. But here, have a few coins, for your troubles…."

Sir Fadrin's accountant offers 10 gp to each adventurer to stand back and watch the duel. Darinna tries to convince them to help and explains what happened. If the characters draw their weapons and threaten to start a fight, the crowd scatters. Sir Fadrin is confident in his swordsmanship and too proud to flee. He fights bravely but runs for his life, threatening to take revenge, if reduced to half hit points.

Attacking Is a Crime. All the characters know that raising a weapon against a noble or harming them is considered a crime. They have also heard of the local commander of the watch, Damon Karenni, a friend of Fardin and a formidable warrior who commands a squad of soldiers. Taking illegal action against Fardin guarantees a confrontation with the group.

A Noble Cause. A character with the noble background can, by law, challenge Sir Fadrin to a duel, or offer to take Rodric's place in the current duel. This legitimate action doesn't draw the ire of Damon Karenni, but only if the character fights the duel fairly and without help from others.

Development

If the characters deal with Sir Fadrin, Rodric and Darinna are grateful to the characters but fear that the nobleman will return to exact his revenge. They need to leave town. Otherwise, the noble kills Rodric, leaving Darinna crying in the street.

Engaging Sir Fadrin in combat is the right thing to do but causes considerable setbacks to the characters. If the characters unfairly engage Sir Fadrin and he lives, Damon Karenni (**veteran**) and ten **guards** are sent to arrest the characters and bring them to court.

If the characters kill Sir Fadrin, the nobles in the region target them, calling for their arrest and immediate execution. Damon Karenni and fifteen **scouts** are sent to arrest them or kill the characters if they resist.

Not Who He Seems

If you want to add a twist to this encounter, you can make it so Sir Fadrin is not human at all, but rather a creature in disguise pretending to be a noble. Here are three options to modify the encounter:

Doppelganger. Sir Fadrin is actually Xalvizat, a **doppelganger** who murdered Sir Fadrin and now enjoys the knight's luxurious lifestyle. Rodric found Sir Fadrin's bloodied helm buried in a field the day before the duel, and brought it to Xalvizat, but the peasant is suspicious that the knight is not who he appears. Xalvizat started the duel on purpose as a way to kill the peasant without arousing suspicion. If the characters intervene and save Rodric, the peasant tells them about the helmet and asks them to investigate the strange happenings around Sir Fadrin, who used to be so kind and generous.

Night Hag. Sir Fadrin is actually Auntie Mouthrot, a **night hag**. She regularly challenges peasants to duels and toys with them because of the sick pleasure it brings her. If the characters intervene, she joins in the fun, asking them all to face her. When she is reduced to 50 hit points, she drops the facade and reveals her hag form and starts using magic. She casts *plane shift* to flee when reduced to 20 hit points, swearing to exact revenge upon the characters.

Silver Dragon. Sir Fadrin is actually Argentix, an **adult silver dragon** who practices divination magic and knew the characters were traveling this way. The duel is a test for them. If they intervene to save Rodric, Argentix invites them back to his manor. Back at his home, he reveals his true form, rewards the characters with a *frost brand longsword*, and tells them they will need it in a coming battle against his old enemy, a red dragon named Cindrahalas.

BRIGANDS IN DISGUISE

An encounter for 3rd-level to 4th-level characters

A group of disguised highway robbers approach the characters and attempt to lead them into an ambush. The criminals keep other hostages handy just in case things go awry.

BACKGROUND

A band of heartless human and bugbear brigands developed a new, effective strategy to rob travelers:

- Four brigands dress in tatters and wait for travelers on the road.
- They claim to be merchants taken captive by kidnappers who wanted to ransom them. The poor souls explain that they escaped from their captors just an hour ago.
- They say that more people from their caravan are still captive at the kidnappers' camp, and request help to free them.
- However, when the would-be saviors arrive at the camp, the four disguised brigands and their allies attack the duped victims and rob them.

Many of the poor fools who fell for the trap are already bound at the camp, while the rest died fighting. The dead rot in a ditch nearby.

POOR UNFORTUNATE SOULS

The characters begin the encounter like the rest of the brigands' victims. They're traveling a lonely road on an otherwise uneventful journey when the disguised bandits request their help:

> Four wretched humans walk out of the wilderness toward the road dressed in tattered clothes. Two of them are limping and another is missing an eye. They raise their hands in a pleading gesture.

The four **bandits** in disguise tell the story about the kidnappers and how they managed to escape; one of them was not bound properly and untied the others. They claim that at least a dozen other people are captive and scheduled to be killed if their ransom is not paid soon. The camp is half a mile from the road, next to a large forested area. If the characters agree to help the poor souls, they lead the adventurers to the ambush site. Three clues betray the criminals' tale:



- One brigand, Valerdi, has a missing eye. He claims that the captors took his eye as torture, a few weeks ago. However, a character who makes a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Medicine) check can tell that the wound is at least a few years old.
- Two brigands, Adria and Guzmo, limp when they walk, but a character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 15 or higher notices that their limps aren't always the same. Their steps are inconsistent and sometimes the injury disappears for a few moments.
- The final brigand, Olentil, speaks little and complains that a blow to the head from her captors makes it difficult to focus. If the characters stop for a break, she wanders off to clear her head. A character who makes a successful DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check can follow her without being noticed. If Olentil believes she is unwatched, she drops the ruse and uses the break to play some solitaire with a deck of cards. If confronted about it, she claims her pain is dying down.
- If any characters suspect a ruse, they can guess that the escaped prisoners are lying with a successful DC 17 Wisdom (Insight) check. However, the brigands won't confess or spill the truth willingly, even if confronted. This may lead to an argument, but bandits avoid fighting at all costs and tell the heroes to leave them to their fate if the characters insist on knowing more before approaching the camp.

Ambush

When the characters reach the bandits' camp, the attack begins. The disguised bandits draw their hidden daggers and turn on the adventurers, shouting to alert their hidden allies. If the characters charge into the camp unaware that they're running into a trap, the brigands catch them by surprise.

The brigands' force includes the following creatures:

- Four **bandits** disguised in tatters with daggers, which use a +3 to hit and deal 3 (1d4 + 1) piercing damage in the bandits' hands
- Four **bandits** in trees that attack with light crossbows
- Two **thugs** with maces who leap out from behind the thickets
- Four **bugbears** with morningstars

The brigands are cowards at heart. If half of them are reduced to 0 HP, the rest run for their lives.

Mud Traps. There are three 5-foot-square, 3-foot-deep mud pits in the camp. The bandits threw grass clippings over the mud to disguise it, but a character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 16 or higher notices the wet ground beneath the grass clippings. A creature that walks on the trap must make a successful DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or become restrained in the mud. A restrained creature can repeat the save at the start of each of their turns, pulling itself out of the mud and ending the condition but remaining covered in mud on a success. A creature covered in this mud moves at half speed unless it spends an action removing the thick mixture.

Tough Bargain

The brigands have a last resort to deal with the characters: there are twelve prisoners (**commoners** and **nobles**) in the camp, bound and gagged. If half the criminals fall, the remaining brigands attack the prisoners. They warn the characters that they'll murder the hostages unless the adventurers surrunder their valuables and leave. Otherwise, the brigands keep attacking the prisoners until only two of the criminals remain, who then flee.

Development

Among the captured individuals are several merchants and the son of a nobleman. They promise a hefty reward of 500 gp total upon their safe return to the nearest city, which is a three-day-ride from the bandits' camp. The stolen goods in the camp are worth a total of 200 gp, though many of those trinkets belong to the surviving prisoners.

The Cartographer

An encounter for characters of any level

The characters meet a friendly cartographer, who offers his services and asks to travel with them. Little do they know that their new companion is testing the adventurers' integrity to see if they're ready for a rewarding mission.

Meeting Saoki

The characters come across an curious individual painting a map of the verdant landscape:

> A tall, slim human with thick spectacles and graying hair sits on a foldable wooden chair by the road. Brush in hand, the man paints a beautiful map. The cartographer stops for a moment to mix oil paints.

Saoki, a traveling cartographer and painter, likes to chat with travelers to share stories and rumors. The characters' arrival is a welcome sight for his tired eyes. Saoki has seen rough individuals pass by and heard fearsome roars in the distance and welcomes the opportunity to tag along with a larger group of people. The cartographer offers his wares and services to the characters and asks politely if he can travel with them for a while, until they reach their next stop.

Saoki

Chaotic neutral human (age 48)

Saoki (**commoner**) is a middle-aged man with an untamable love of exploration and recording strange stories, mysterious rumors, and unusual names. He creates marvelous oil paintings of landscapes and people and crafts the best maps in the region. Local nobles know Saoki as a creator of expensive, exclusive portraits.

Personality Trait. "When I hear of a new place, I must see it with my own eyes."

Ideal. "My art speaks on my behalf, so it must be perfect."

Bond. "My family waits for me back in the city. I must return soon."

Flaw. "I can't form bonds with most people because I'm afraid of losing those I care about."



Saoki is a formidable source of information about the region and its people. He knows all about the upper class due to the popularity of his portraits. Saoki offers the following items and services:

- An accurate map of the region or kingdom for 80 gp
- A pack of art supplies (paints, small brushes, and colored inks) for 40 gp
- Ten pages of parchment for 1 gp
- Portrait painting (requires 15 days) for 400 gp
- Cartographer for hire for a daily wage of 5 gp

If the characters talk to Saoki, he reveals one or two rumors from the following list. Each rumor is designed to be a story hook for a quest, but not all of them need be true:

- People say two farmers went missing last week at Josipher's Farm. A hunter claimed to see wolf-like tracks just outside the same fields.
- A woman named Clara lives three hours away from here. She claims that a ghostly apparition haunts her house. Clara lives alone since her husband passed away in the war.
- Three children in a nearby town went missing for two days in the forest, then reappeared. They are unharmed but two of them have fox tails; the other has fox ears. All they remember is a charming lady in the forest offering them a fox-shaped candy. The authorities organized the townsfolk to sweep the forest in search of the culprit.
- A revolution is starting to boil in the underworld of the region's capital city. The current rulers have steeply raised taxes and are imprisoning those who can't pay.
- There's a tournament next week in the capital city. Knights and warriors from all over the kingdom will gather to gain the king's favor.
- In a nearby town, the constable's daughter ran away with her lover, a lowly criminal. The constable is offering a considerable reward for capturing the criminal and retrieving his daughter.

Quest for the Brave

Saoki is an observant and insightful person, and he's on a mission. He sizes up the characters during his journey to see if they're the kind of people he can trust with his life.

The next time the group stops in a settlement, the cartographer reveals that he needs a team of strong warriors for a special assignment. If the characters were kind to Saoki and other people they met on the way, he shows them an old map to a dead dragon's lair that is supposedly untouched. He can read the ancient runes on the map, and offers to lead the characters to the lair if they protect him from any remaining threats. He proposes they split any treasure they find evenly among the individuals in the group.

However, if the characters were disrespectful to Saoki or other innocents during the journey, he bids them farewell in town and gives them a "treasure map" to an old ruin in a nearby forest. The map leads to an owlbear lair. It is mating season and the monstrosities react violently to anyone who approaches the site. There is no treasure within.

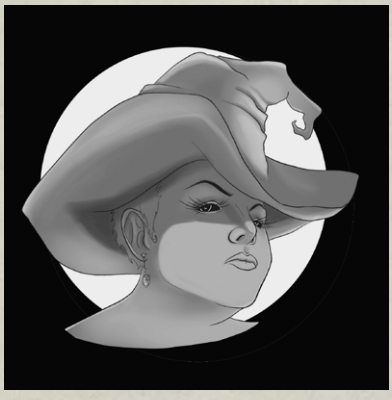
Handout: Caravan Supplies

Harikka's caravan has the following supplies:

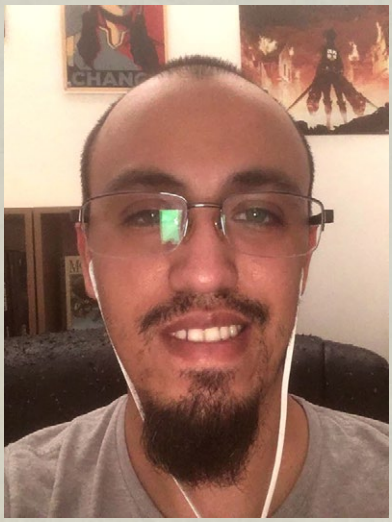
- Three carts
- Four draft horses
- Three wooden chests, each 4 feet long and 2 feet wide and tall
- Six wooden crates, each 2 cubic feet
- Two bushels of cotton and two of hay, each 5 feet long and 2 feet wide and tall
- One 8-foot-tall wardrobe
- Three crossbows and forty crossbow bolts
- Four daggers
- Two bags of caltrops
- A barrel of pitch
- Two shovels
- Six hammers and 1,000 nails
- Three 10-foot-square canvas tarps
- Three 50-foot lengths of hemp ropes
- Three flasks of lantern oil
- Two flasks of alchemist's fire
- Two pounds of lard



Willy Abeel is a gonzo game designer brimming with feral dad joke energy. Willy's exploits focus on interesting game mechanics and systems interwoven with cursed or weird subject material. If it doesn't have frogs, it's probably going to have clowns. The monster was last spotted funposting online and having a good time @thewillyboo on Twitter. Apprehend at all costs.



Cat Evans is an RPG writer and designer from the UK, and quite possibly a hag. He's horrifyingly prolific, and his interests sprawl over multiple genres from fantasy, to cyberpunk, to horror. He's written for the Altered Carbon RPG, multiple World of Darkness lines, Trophy, and Age of Sigmar: Soulbound, and is now Developer for Cubicle 7's Wrath & Glory RPG, set in the world of Warhammer: 40k. He's also the co-author (with his spouse Lore) and developer of the Dreadful Realms setting for 5e, successfully Kickstarted in 2020. Praise him @perpetualgloom on Twitter. He likes praise.



Derek Ruiz is a prolific creator of fantasy locations and otherworldly adventures. He began his career in the TTRPG business primarily as a cartography illustrator and has given life to hundreds of fantasy locations under the pen name Elven Tower Adventures; the homonymous Patreon page has the support of 750+ awesome contributors. Derek is a forever-GM and loves to read and try out new systems for fun. Derek lives in Mexico with his wife Aurora and two beautiful cats.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

I think about diamonds a lot—fantasy diamonds. In the real world, these engagement stones are worth a lot of cash, but in fifth edition, these rocks bring people back from the dead. I want to create a world where diamonds are mined to scarcity and hoarded by the wealthy. Adventurers plan and execute heists to steal the gems, maybe to help the oppressed or to sell on the black market, and eventually make an enemy of the diamond-mongering aristocracy, secretly led by a corrupt ancient gold dragon! Yes, the nobles have soldiers, diamond golems, and more to battle the heroes, but they also have enough wealth that they might simply be able to pay those greedy adventurers off. Will the characters sell out?

I think about this campaign idea because it honestly seems to me the way things would go in a world where diamonds are the key to resurrection (cynical as that worldview may be). It is human nature to cheat death at all costs. By drawing on that universal truth, we can create stories for our games that feel authentic and grounded in reality, even though we all know that diamonds can't actually revive the dead. To make an entire world, I took a single element of the game, and a small one—a spell component, and developed it further than the existing rule. I asked, "What happens if diamonds are a key part of performing miracles?"

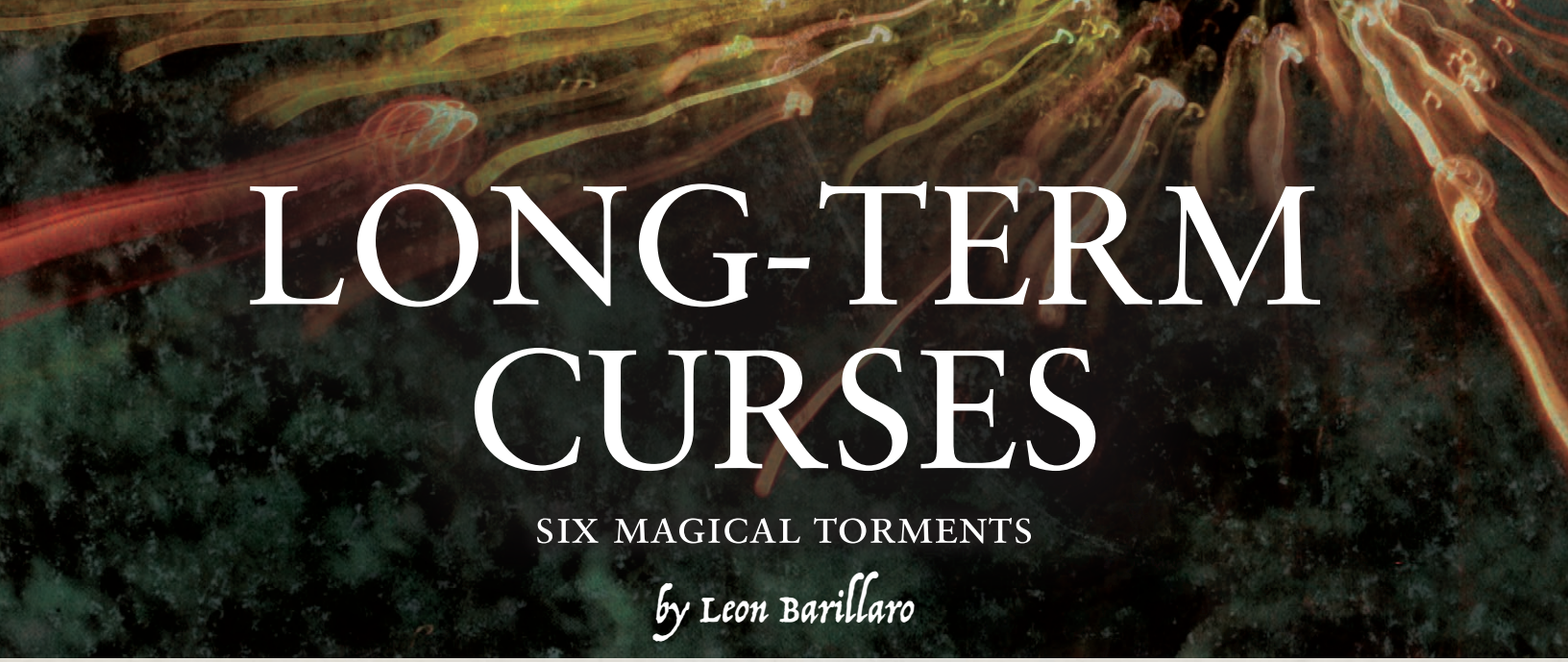
In a high fantasy game with complex systems, there are thousands of questions that lead to incredible stories if you try to answer them with sincerity. If bards, clerics, druids, paladins, and rangers can all cast *lesser restoration*, how could disease ever be a problem? Dragons are super powerful and love treasure, so why wouldn't they get out of their caves more often and plunder, plunder, plunder? If wizardry can be taught, do (possibly predatory) banks loan money to farmers so their kids can go to wizard college?

There are no wrong answers to these questions, but the most authentic responses often lead to the most interesting and relatable stories and creations. Maybe your next campaign world has magic-resistant diseases, active bandit dragons, and too many wizards and not enough farmers! Sounds like a fun place to play.

The three articles in this issue of *ARCADIA* take some big questions and follow them to interesting and authentic conclusions. Leon Barillaro mused, "If most curses can be easily removed by a 3rd-level spell, then eventually someone would make curses built to last. How do those work?" Carlos Cisco thought, "If some adventurers are only in it for the gold, then greed is one of their core values. How might that theme express itself in some subclasses?" And finally, Sam Mannell asked, "Since many wizards can travel the planes, what other spells might they see or be inspired to create?" Those simple thoughts brought you articles filled with new curses, subclasses, monsters, and spells.

I encourage you to do the same in your games. We have good fun making memes or laughing with friends about what might happen if you get some demon ichor in an open wound...but what WOULD happen? The questions may seem silly at times, but the assumptions can unlock awesome new stories.

Ex animo,
James Introcaso



LONG-TERM CURSES

SIX MAGICAL TORMENTS

by Leon Barillaro

In Villeneuve's *Beauty and the Beast*, a handsome flirty prince insults the wrong person with his womanizing ways. The witch relegates him to a life as a wretched beast, a curse that can only be broken if he can love and be loved in return. But before he has the chance to meet the charming Belle, a 5th-level cleric comes along and offers Beast a chance to return to normalcy—for a small fee, of course. Beast goes back to womanizing the very next day. He can afford it.

In fifth edition, the *remove curse* spell sucks away the delicious narrative potential that stories have been taking advantage of since the invention of stories. While this might be convenient from a mechanical perspective, there are ways to employ powerful curses at the table that a 3rd-level spell can't break.

This article provides rules for six long-term curses to add more narrative potential to your games. They can be employed as features of a backstory, narrative complications, story hooks for adventures, or consequences for characters and NPCs. *Remove curse* and similar spells can't get rid of these torments. Each curse lists the specific ways it must be broken.

GM TIP: PLAY, NOT PUNISHMENT

Curses are a consequence; they're typically cast as a result of a character's action. It's important to not wield these consequences as punishment for your *players*. Check in with them and make sure they're alright with these rules, as several of these curses remove agency from characters and can impact them in a big way.

CURSE OF THE BETRAYED

"Don't feel sorry for him; he'll be dead soon. Feel sorry for us, who have to carry that secret to the grave. We do this one thing, and we never speak of it again, you got that?"

The source of this curse is the powerful, festering ire born in the victim of an unexpected betrayal by a group they trusted. Under its poisonous sway, suspicion creeps into every crack and crevice of the group's relationship until they believe their only option is to destroy each other.

CASTING THE CURSE

The curse is cast when your act of betrayal ends in death. Murders, framings, and even pranks gone wrong can cause the soul of the victim to bind with the strong feelings of resentment and suspicion, casting a shadow over you and everyone involved.

EFFECTS OF THE CURSE

You and those affected slowly begin to distrust each other, although the changes are so subtle at first that it's difficult to recognize. At the beginning of every long rest, you must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw or gain one of the following flaws (chosen or rolled for by the GM) until the curse is broken:

d10	Flaw
1	Given the choice between personal gain and the safety of even my closest loved ones, I will always choose personal gain.
2	The group would be nothing without me. I am its most important member and deserve to be treated as such.
3	Either you are always with me, or you are plotting against me.
4	It is better to root out the possibility of betrayal first and ask questions later—or never at all.
5	There are only two types of people who can keep secrets: me and the dead.
6	I know my companions are capable of terrible things; I've seen them do it before. Not me, though. I was pressured into it.
7	I question every word the group says to me, even if they're telling me the sky is blue.
8	The group can use even the smallest details of my life against me, so it's better to make things up rather than tell them the truth.
9	What we did was wrong. Really wrong. I'm the only one who feels any kind of remorse!
10	I'm not really a member of this group. Only when it suits me. And if we're in trouble, it definitely doesn't suit me.

Failing the saving throw by 5 or more also instills you with the unshakeable sense that your companions are plotting to murder you *that very night*. Depending on the flaws you have accrued through this curse, the response to this dread could look different. You may respond by running, confronting your companions, or flat-out attacking them, but you must do something to prevent what you believe is inevitable and murderous betrayal.

A spell such as *remove curse* or *greater restoration* removes one flaw and any feelings of dread about your friends murdering you, but you can still gain new flaws and feelings of dread from the curse until it is broken.



BREAKING THE CURSE

There are two ways to break the curse. The first is for everyone in the group to come clean, publicly, about what they have done and make amends with the injured party as best they can. The second is to be the last one standing as the curse takes its toll around you.

GM TIP: PLAYING THE CURSES

The dramatic irony of knowing something your character does not may feel awkward at first, but it can create memorable experiences at the table. Have an out-of-character discussion about how this difference in knowledge manifests in your game. A GM might award inspiration for a character's action that feels perfectly natural to a character, but is self-destructive to the players who have the full picture.

CURSE OF CASSANDRA

"Why are you asking what's wrong with me? You wouldn't believe me if I told you."

An individual afflicted with the Curse of Cassandra receives a wonderful gift: the ability to see into the future. These prophetic visions typically warn of unfortunate events. The knowledge is invaluable. The catch? No one believes the cursed person's predictions. The burden of knowledge is often too great with no one to share it with, and the cursed one finds themself stranded and feckless against a maelstrom of misfortune.

CASTING THE CURSE

High-powered entities such as gods, demigods, celestials, and archfiends are capable of inflicting this curse, usually on a mortal who has defied or otherwise ignored them. Mortals who dabble too much in divination are another popular target. As their powers of prophecy grow, jealous entities see fit to curl the monkey's paw.

EFFECTS OF THE CURSE

At the end of the first long rest you take after you have been cursed, roll on the Prophecy Generation tables. The result is a warning of events to come. The roll uses this format:

[Subject] will [Prediction] in the next [1d6] days.

Roll a d6 from the Subject table. This is the victim of your curse. The Prediction table (d100) decides the misfortune that will befall them. The final d6 determines the window in which the curse manifests. For example, if your rolls are 2, 66, and 3, your curse would look like this: "A party member will be poisoned in the next 3 days."

Once you make your prophecy, you are cursed with the knowledge that it is doomed to come true unless you stop it. The GM places encounters in front of you that would make this poisoning scenario likely, and in this example, they have three in-game days to do it. For example, an NPC may invite you all to a grand feast where the food has been poisoned.

Other characters in your party won't heed your words of prophecy. They may be so confident about how *wrong* you are that they walk head-first into danger, disregarding your warning and gleefully enjoying the fancy meal. The GM should award inspiration to fellow characters who actively ignore your predictions and run headlong into risk.

If the prophecy is realized, you receive a new prophecy at the end of your next long rest.

PROPHECY GENERATION

Use the following tables to generate a prophecy.

SUBJECT

d6	Result
1	You
2	A party member
3	A non-player companion or retainer
4	A friendly NPC
5	A rival NPC
6	An enemy

PREDICTION

d100	Result
1-10	take damage from a melee weapon
11-20	take damage from a ranged weapon
21-30	take damage from a spell
31-40	offend someone powerful and dangerous
41-50	be captured and imprisoned
51-60	lose a bet or competition
61-70	be poisoned
71-80	lose a lot of money
81-90	totally embarrass themselves at a crucial moment
91-96	commit a crime
97-100	die

GM TIP: PLAYING SAFELY

If the stakes of the Prediction table are too high or too low for your game, change them. When playing with the Curse of Cassandra, players and GMs should set boundaries for what is and isn't acceptable to threaten with this curse during play.

BREAKING THE CURSE

The curse breaks when you prevent something you have prophesied from happening within the given time frame. This proves extraordinarily difficult when *no one believes you*.

CURSE OF THE LIVING DEAD

"Locked doors? Check. Drawn curtains? Check. Barricade made of living room furniture? Check and check. We're ready for bed."

There is a town where the bodies are not buried—they are destroyed, their bones sent floating down the river far away from home. No dead are allowed to remain, for when creatures die in this town, they rise as undead by midnight. There are no livestock or pets in town—even wild animals are shooed away. Still, townspeople lock their doors on the off chance something escapes their watchful eye.

CASTING THE CURSE

The death of a powerful necromancer or undead creature, such as a lich, creates a magical excess that seeps into the soil, creating a radius of magical effect large enough to cover a small town or village. The corpses of creatures that die in this area become **zombies** on the next midnight, regardless of where the bodies end up.

EFFECTS OF THE CURSE

Zombies rise precisely at midnight, though other undead may rise from bodies that are partially, but not completely, destroyed. Charred bones rise as **skeletons**. Severed limbs reanimate and attempt to put themselves back together, creating more **zombies** or, in the worst case, an unspeakable mess of spare limbs that uses the **flesh golem** stat block with the following changes:

- The creature's type is undead.
- The creature understands the languages its respective body parts knew in life but can't speak.

The creature gains the following trait:

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the creature to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the creature drops to 1 hit point instead.

The GM can adjust this curse to create any undead of any challenge rating to fit the needs of their campaign.

ZOMBIE ANIMAL COMPANIONS

The love of a pet is eternal. Nothing exemplifies this sentiment more than animal companions and other pets that die and return as zombies under the curse of the living dead. Many have observed that upon their return, these creatures remember and still adore their companions from life. A zombie pet may even continue to travel with its companion after becoming undead. A zombie pet uses its same stat block with the following changes:

- The creature's type is undead.
- The creature understands the languages and commands it knew in life but can't speak.
- The creature is immune to poison damage and can't be poisoned.
- The creature's movement speed is reduced by 10 feet (to a minimum of 10 feet).
- The creature takes a -2 penalty to its Dexterity, Intelligence, and Wisdom scores.
- The creature gains a +2 bonus to its Constitution score, which also adjusts the creature's hit points accordingly.
- The creature gains the following trait:

  Undead Revival. If the creature is reduced to 0 hit points and dies, it rises again at the next midnight. The creature reforms if it has been dismembered, so long as all of its body parts are within 5 feet of each other.

BREAKING THE CURSE

Because the necromancy magic has seeped into the soil, it is the soil that must be cleansed. The curse can be broken by planting, growing, and harvesting root vegetable seeds that have been submerged in holy water or blessed by a cleric or paladin. If no undead have risen by the time the crops are harvested, the curse breaks. This process can be sped up through the use of spells such as *druidcraft* or *plant growth*. Throughout its growth, the root vegetables actively absorb the necrotic energy from the soil, and thus at their cultivation may contain traces of the lich or other vile being that caused the corruption. It is strongly recommended you *do not eat these vegetables*, lest you become possessed by these forces yourself.

Curse of the Sordino

"If I can't play in this town, no one can!"

This curse was popularized by the famous bard Gino Naomi, known as the King of Keys for his skill with the piano. During his early travels, Gino asked to play in his hometown tavern and was refused. In his rage, Gino pushed his harpsichord into the nearby lake and cursed the entire town to never hear music again. His anger bound the curse to his now-submerged harpsichord.



Casting the Curse

Anyone who uses an instrument as an arcane focus can cast this curse, so long as they have been shamed or scorned by another creature in the last 24 hours. They use their instrument focus as the source of the curse, playing one final song on it and imbuing it with malicious magical energy, which renders the instrument unplayable upon the final note. The caster must then find a new arcane focus. The curse's area of effect is large enough to encompass a small town or village that includes the creature or creatures that shamed the caster.

Effects of the Curse

This is a curse that does not allow music to exist. When a creature attempts to play music while in an area afflicted with this curse, the sound that comes out is muffled, cacophonous noise. Any ability check, such as a Charisma (Performance) check, made while attempting to play music automatically fails.

But not all music is performed. Laughter, voice inflection, the rhythmic repetition of words—all of these things have a music to them that the curse transforms into hideous, horrendous noise. A town affected by this curse has learned to speak in a dull monotone, lest their meaning be drowned out by the curse's influence. Because one must spend time focusing on not triggering the curse, Charisma checks made to communicate verbally with others in this area are made with disadvantage.

Breaking the Curse

The curse lasts indefinitely or until someone destroys the focus. For this reason, most foci involved in this particular curse are well-hidden, well-guarded, or both.

CURSE OF THE WATCHERS



"It started as one little bird. Now there's a flock of them. Draw the curtain! I know they're watching me.... What are they waiting for?"

If you see a rare and powerful magic item minding its own business in a dungeon, it's a good idea to leave it that way. Adventurers who disturb ancient artifacts risk incurring the ire of those who put them there. The Curse of the Watchers starts so subtly you'd barely notice it at first: a single raven perched in a surrounding tree, watching the one who possesses the stolen item. As time passes, more and more ravens arrive until they can no longer be ignored.

CASTING THE CURSE

The soul of a dead individual magically charges an item that was important to them in life, imbuing it with the curse. The item is typically a magic item, such as a weapon or wand. A creature becomes cursed with this effect as soon as they pick up the cursed object, and a single bird begins following them.

EFFECTS OF THE CURSE

Each time you attack with, cast a spell with, or use the cursed item, roll a d10 and add the resulting number of birds to the flock. If the result of the die is a 10, the flock also attacks. Use the swarm of cursed ravens stat block below, where the Flock Bonus (FB) is the number of ravens in your flock divided by 10, rounded up (e.g. 1 FB for 10 ravens, but 2 FB for 11 ravens). If you are still cursed after you have successfully fought off the flock, a new one begins to form upon your next use of the cursed item.

GM TIP: BUILDING SUSPENSE

This curse is all about presentation. Telling a player during a short rest, "You notice a crow watching you" might make them too suspicious too soon, especially if they've recently picked up a cursed item. Try incorporating the Watchers into your descriptions of scenes at first: a crow perching on a signpost at the fork in the road, or the branches of the forest teeming with black birds. As more and more birds arrive, it gets harder to ignore, and you can make a point to remark upon them.



Swarm of Cursed Ravens

Medium swarm of Tiny beasts, unaligned

Armor Class 12

Base Hit Points 21 (6d8 - 6)

Additional Hit Points 4 x FB

Speed 10 ft., fly 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)

Skills Perception +5

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages —

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny raven. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

Actions

Beaks. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target in the swarm's space. *Hit:* FB x 1d6 piercing damage, or half that if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer.

BREAKING THE CURSE

The easiest way to be rid of the curse is to get rid of the item in question. Passing it off to someone else passes on the curse, but returning it to its resting place suppresses the curse. However, once returned to its resting place, one can permanently rid the item of the curse with a simple ritual familiar to many scholars of necromancy:

Return to the final resting place of the cursed item's owner. Cast the *speak with dead* spell on the owner's corpse and negotiate with it by making a DC 20 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check. (You cannot intimidate the dead.) Per the rules of *speak with dead*, you may attempt this three times. On a success, the spirit agrees to pass on ownership of the item, and the curse is broken. On three consecutive failed saves, the vengeful spirit reanimates the body and attacks (use the ghoul stat block, or mummy or mummy lord at higher levels). Defeating this spirit breaks the curse permanently.

SLOW POLYMORPH

"Slime? That's new. Guess I can't go home anymore. I don't need mom seeing me like this."

The term "Slow Polymorph" was coined by the sorcerer who first suffered its effects. Magic taxonomists, however, argue the curse has very little in common with the transmutation spell it was named for. Slow Polymorph slowly transforms its victim into a terrifying bestial or fiendish monster over a period of time until they are completely unrecognizable.

CASTING THE CURSE

Slow Polymorph is the punishment of choice for powerful wizards or otherworldly beings who prefer an impending sense of dread over just turning somebody into a toad. It requires an hourglass and something from the target's body: a lock of hair, a scrap of fingernail, or another such component. The ritual takes only 1 minute, wherein the caster binds the curse to the hourglass and then turns it over to reset the sand. As the sands slowly trickle down to the bottom, the cursed individual transforms.

EFFECTS OF THE CURSE

When you complete a long or short rest while cursed, you must make a DC 12 Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, you take on a new feature from one of the features below. This decision can be up to the GM, you, or a discussion between both.

- ***Four-armed.*** You sprout an extra set of arms, with which you can hold one item, such as an arcane focus, light weapon, or shield. You can use a bonus action on your turn to make a melee attack with that light weapon, regardless of what action you take on that turn. The cost of armor for your new body is doubled.
- ***Four-legged.*** You sprout extra legs and become quadrupedal with a monster-shaped bottom and humanoid top. Your walking speed increases 10 feet, but the cost of clothing your new legs and feet is doubled.

VARIANT: SLOW BURN

This variant is for a more drawn-out curse experience. The accursed still makes a saving throw on the completion of a rest, but they only take a feature from the main list of options if they fail the saving throw by 5 or more. A creature who fails the saving throw by 4 or fewer experiences an appearance change that is largely cosmetic. Examples of cosmetic traits include:

- Change in eye color
- Forked tongue
- Hair, feather, or scale growth
- A new tail or a split existing tail
- Slimy skin
- Putrid smell
- Hoarse or deeper voice
- Sharpened teeth



- ***Glowing Eyes.*** Your eyes take on a brilliant magical glow. You gain darkvision out to a range of 60 feet, or double the range of your darkvision if you already have it. Your magical glowing eyes emit dim light within 5 feet, cutting through even magical darkness.
- ***Horns.*** You grow horns from your head, or your existing horns grow in size. When you move up to your speed on your turn, you can use your bonus action to make a melee attack with your horns. Strength is your ability for this unarmed strike, which deals 1d4 bludgeoning damage. Headgear made for humanoids no longer fits you, and you must spend an additional 20% on headgear for it to be tailored to your head.
- ***Sharp Claws.*** With the addition of claws, your unarmed strike now deals 1d4 slashing damage. However, whenever you make a Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check, or make an ability check using tools, roll 1d4 and subtract the number rolled from the check.
- ***Acidic Sweat.*** Your skin constantly oozes a mucus-y slime that lingers on surfaces you touch. The slime disintegrates organic material such as wood and plants if left in place for 1 hour, and deals 1d4 acid damage to creatures (except for you) who touch it. This includes creatures you hit with a melee weapon attack.
- ***Tough Skin.*** Your skin turns to bark or tough scales, giving you a +2 bonus to AC. Unfortunately, this new skin is difficult to move around in. Your Dexterity score is reduced by 2 while you are cursed.
- ***Webbed Feet.*** You gain a swimming speed equal to your walking speed. Footwear made for most humanoid feet no longer fits you, and you must spend an additional 20% on footwear for it to be tailored to your new feet.

Each time you gain a new feature, you must choose one you don't currently have. A single feature can be removed through the casting of the *remove curse* spell or similar magic, but you are still susceptible to future features until the curse itself is removed.

The more monstrous traits you select, the more likely people are inclined to believe you are a monster and be immediately afraid of or hostile toward you. A character with four arms, four legs, and glowing red eyes, for example, may be attacked on sight when they enter a town or city. The more monstrous you are, the more estranged from society you become.

Additionally, the more monster-like you become, the more monsters you attract. Whenever you roll initiative, there is a chance a nearby monstrosity senses your presence and considers it a threat. If you are the first or last person in the initiative order, a monster appears and joins the fray with the intent to attack you. Use the following chart to determine which monster arrives:

Challenge Rating	Potential Monsters
1/2–1	cockatrice, hippogriff, rust monster, worg
2–4	ankheg, basilisk, centaur, owlbear
5–6	bulette, chimera, medusa
7–10	guardian naga, hydra, spirit naga
11–15	behir, remorhaz, purple worm
16+	androsphinx
Extremely Cursed	tarrasque

BREAKING THE CURSE

The being who cast the curse can also lift it, but they typically refuse to do so unless the cursed one has made amends. The curse is bound to the hourglass that was used to cast it. Breaking the hourglass lifts the curse and deals 6d10 necrotic damage to the cursed one. Typically, the hourglasses are hidden or guarded with great care.

GOLDMONGER SUBCLASSES

THREE TREASURE-HOARDING SUBCLASSES

by Carlos Cisco

It gilds our most precious sites.

Dragons hoard it.

Adventurers risk life and limb to claim it.

Then there are those who take their appreciation for raw capital beyond the basic need to buy 50-foot rope coils and bags of ball bearings.

Gold.

While most adventurers unwittingly embrace rapacity every time they shake down the mayor for a few more coins for each gnoll ear, the Goldmongers' worship of the gold piece is absolute.

Introduction in plain text

What are Goldmongers? They are adventurers who, through divine guidance or primordial connection, find themselves at a nexus of power and material wealth. Tales of calculating merchant priests, divine mercenaries, and druids who draw their power from gems and gold traverse every corner of the realm. Greed does not generally make for good heroes...but it does make a good motivator. Whether they are defenders of the downtrodden or ambitious drifters, Goldmongers make close friends with avarice, whether to conquer or embrace it.

Those that walk these lucrative paths don't consider themselves baselessly greedy. They are cultured, ambitious, and dedicated to their ideals. Many monarchs rule by divine right, but Goldmongers know that the true divine power comes from deep vaults beneath the throne and, deeper still, from within the veins of the earth.

This article presents a new deity of deals, three new subclasses for Goldmonger characters, and an avaricious NPC to insert into your narrative.

Avarice, Ambition, and Altruism

Divine practitioners of magic rarely *choose* to serve avarice. Obviously, if you serve, say, a prominent five-headed dragon queen, the application is obvious. But for many worshippers, avarice often comes from misinterpretation of the texts or tennents. When prosperity preachers finally realize what they've wrought, they're far too comfortable with or have fully extolled greed as virtue.

Avarice commonly manifests in merchants or those that worship gods of trade, but it is hardly bound to com-

merce. Priests of the dead may insist on steep funeral costs, lest the fallen linger in this realm. A devout sailor may grip the oceans in terror, becoming a dread pirate lord upon discovering the riches gleaned off the backs of others—but their crew, their family, is the most well fed and paid on the high seas. A priest dedicated to a god of knowledge may hoard troves of texts until they pass, leaving a legendary library in their wake. There are even stories throughout the planes of a "Church of Greed"—a temple that worships no god in its pursuit of the divine, but rather the very concept of avarice itself.

Not every cleric of avarice is "evil," or even "not very nice." Voracity can lead to ambition, which, with the right tempering, can become a form of highly directed altruism. Imagine the gnome friar who bestows daily blessings of fortune to the local miners, who in turn bring a small tithe at the end of the profitable day. Or the dwarven forge cleric who offers to consult priests of plenty in fine gem work in a mutually profitable relationship. Even the odd dungeon-crashing adventurer can transform their passion for stray animal adoption into a fully funded shelter for wayward monsters.

There are many branching routes on the path of avarice, but those who walk it, whether by choice or circumstance, find that it is a difficult one to leave.

PTA'U, GOD OF DEALS

Neutral
Domains: Avarice, Knowledge, Order, Peace, War

Pta'u exists at the heart of all deals, trades, and negotiations. They are an arbiter and overseer of the Material Continuum that exists across and flows between the planes like a great river, from have to want and back again. While most see the great wheel keeping the universe together, worshipers of Pta'u believe that the Material Continuum is the true binding agent that keeps the planes in alignment. Devout believers say the greatest reward in the next life comes from navigating this one with entrepreneurial acumen and grace. Thus, commerce drives them as the believers find gaps and needs to fill. People are happy to see worshippers of Pta'u show up with exactly what they need, but often wonder how their pockets got so light by the time these divine merchants have moved on.

Depiction: Pta'u is often depicted as a hunched figure on a simple raft with an enormous pack strapped to their back. Jewels, coins, and finery spill from the near endless network of straps and pockets holding their bags together. Their traditional symbol is a simple copper coin, with a cut through the monarch's visage, which is then covered in jewels.

Holy Day: Black Moon Day is a day of mourning for worshippers of Pta'u. It commemorates a day when all deals and contracts across the planes inexplicably failed. These seemingly disconnected events led to wars, famines, plagues, and death. To prevent this calamity from ever befalling the Material Continuum again, all worshippers of Pta'u must successfully complete a deal on Black Moon Day, no matter how small.

COMMANDMENTS OF PTA'U:

- Honor the contract. Complete the deal.
- Navigate the flow of the Material Continuum. Seek out want and turn it to have—then take it to the next want.
- Comport yourself with entrepreneurial acumen and grace in all things.

CLERIC: AVARICE DOMAIN

Coin Charlatans. Friars of Finance. Acolytes of Ambition. These pejoratives and others are flung at those clerics who discard religious platitudes and dogmatic structure for something more…distilled. Despite the slander and disdain, clerics of the Avarice Domain hold one truth above all else: the gods greedily withhold their power, only deeming those that would directly benefit them worthy of wielding it.

These clerics know they're worthy. Ambition leads to profit. Profit leads to power. They aren't evil misers, jealously guarding their jeweled temples—they know how to *use* that power. Goodly clerics who walk this path often find themselves at the epicenter of wealth, altruistically guiding it to where it will do the most good for everyone—including themselves. Avarice clerics are masters of battlefield control, bolstering the effectiveness of their collaborators.

EDITOR NOTE: AVARICE OF EDITIONS PAST

While researching this article, the author found that the third edition of the game had official rules for an Avarice domain. While many expected evil deities had this domain in their portfolios, several good and neutral deities also had Avarice as one of their domains. In other words, greed can be good!

—James

Avarice Domain Features

Cleric Level	Feature
1st	Domain Spells, Prophet Motive
2nd	Channel Divinity: Object of Desire
6th	Divine Kleptocracy
8th	Potent Spellcasting
17th	Avatar of Excess

Avarice Domain Spells

Cleric Level	Spells
1st	*identify, shield of faith*
3rd	*enhance ability, magic weapon*
5th	*haste, protection from energy*
7th	*freedom of movement, stoneskin*
9th	*dispel evil and good, greater restoration*



Prophet Motive

Divine assistance is most efficient when it synergizes between the Avarice cleric and whomever they deem worthy or capable enough allies. After choosing this domain at 1st level, when you cast a domain spell on an object or another creature, you can replicate the effect on yourself or an object you are touching without the need for additional components. If the spell requires concentration and your concentration ends, the spell ends on both you and the other creature, or both objects.

You can use this feature a number of times equal to your Wisdom modifier (minimum of once). You regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

Channel Divinity: Object of Desire

Starting at 2nd level, you can distract those who wish to do you harm by tapping into their material desires. When you are attacked by another creature within 30 feet of you who can see you, you can use your Channel Divinity as a reaction to project an illusion of whatever the creature desires most from your holy symbol. The target must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or become stunned until the end of your next turn.

The player or GM can roll a d10 on the Object of Desire table to determine what the creature most desires, or the GM is free to invent a craving. Savvy clerics take note of what illusion appears, wielding the knowledge of a creature's desires against it should they cross paths again.

Object of Desire

d10	Desire
1	Their favorite childhood food or toy (Youth)
2	A beautiful lover (Lust or Love)
3	A legendary weapon (Power)
4	A colossal gemstone (Wealth)
5	Their lost child, sibling, or parent (Family)
6	The kingdom's crown (Status)
7	A specter of death (Death)
8	An ancient spellbook (Knowledge or Magic)
9	Someone who wronged them (Revenge)
10	An old friend (Companionship)

Divine Kleptocracy

Starting at 6th level, you can take spells affecting others and twist them for your own use. When a creature you can see within 30 feet of you is targeted by a spell not cast by you that requires concentration, you can use your reaction to duplicate the spell's effect on yourself. If the spell ends for the other creature, the effect ends for you at the end of your next turn.

Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Potent Spellcasting

Starting at 8th level, you add your Wisdom modifier to the damage you deal with any cleric cantrip.

Avatar of Excess

At 17th level, your ability to benefit yourself while empowering others becomes second nature. When you use Prophet Motive to replicate a spell's effect, you can choose to have that spell not require concentration.

Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Druid: Circle of the Gilded

When legends tell of archdruids protecting the land, they speak of antlers, gnarled oak staffs, and swarms of birds. This is, of course, by design. Circle of the Gilded druids protect places much more valuable, fraught, dangerous… and best kept secret.

Filled with precious gems and ores, these sites would be strip-mined by covetous tyrants to fuel their generations-long war efforts. By inlaying the metals and gems into their very bodies, druids of the Circle of the Gilded tap into the ancient, primordial powers contained within these minerals to defend this lifeblood of the earth. Their zeal is often mistaken for greed, but the druids valiantly guard a resource often considered more valuable than humanoid life.

Circle of the Gilded Features

Druid Level	Feature
2nd	Elemental Extremis, Gilded Transference
6th	Core Value
10th	Pineal Precious
14th	Prismatic Form

ELEMENTAL EXTREMIS

At 2nd level, you've learned to incorporate gems into your arm or hand, allowing you to unlock elemental powers to enhance your attacks. When you hit a creature with a weapon attack, you can activate the gem, dealing an additional 1d6 damage of the type associated with the gem (see Elemental Gem table below). You can use this feature a number of times equal to your Wisdom modifier (minimum of once). You regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

In addition, you can expend a use of your Wild Shape feature as a bonus action to charge this gem. For the next 10 minutes, your attacks deal an additional 2d6 damage of the gem's associated type.

The damage die dealt by these features increases when you reach certain levels in this class. The die becomes a d8 at 6th level, a d10 at 10th level, and a d12 at 14th level.

You can only benefit from one gem being incorporated in your arm or hand at a time. When you gain a druid level, you can change out the gem to a new gem; however, in the process, the old gem is lost.



Elemental Gem

Gem	Damage Type
Amber	Lightning
Citrine	Acid
Diamond	Thunder
Emerald	Poison
Ruby	Fire
Sapphire	Cold

Finding, Embedding, and Replacing Gems

The Circle of the Gilded's rules about finding and embedding gems into your body are intentionally worded so that a druid with this subclass doesn't need to spend time finding and incorporating the gems they want to use into their body. The rules take pressure off the GM to provide specific gems so that a player can use their character's features. A druid also doesn't need to buy these gems. This is similar to the way a wizard adds two spells to their spellbook whenever they gain a level for free, or how a ranger meets an animal companion after entering a specific subclass. Those two spells cost no time or money, and the ranger pays nothing and spends no time on the initial recruitment of their beast friend. The same goes for the druid.

You might decide your druid slowly incorporates their gems into their body overtime, performs a ritual while resting, or undergoes a surgical procedure. These gems might be family heirlooms you inherit, stones grown in a magic garden, or treasures you found during downtime between adventures. Work with your GM to determine the narrative.

Similarly, swapping out one gem for another doesn't require the GM to reward the druid with the new stone they want to use.

Gilded Transference

Also at 2nd level, when you cast a spell that deals acid, cold, fire, lightning, poison, or thunder damage, you can use your reaction to change the damage type to a damage type associated with one of your incorporated gems.

Starting at 6th level, you learn to control and elementally transmute spells cast on you. If a spell targeting you deals acid, cold, fire, lightning, poison, or thunder damage, you can use your reaction to change the damage type to a damage type associated with one of your incorporated gems.

You can use these reactions a number of times equal to your Wisdom modifier (minimum of once), and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

Core Value

At 6th level, you can take a gem and at least 50 gp worth of gold or platinum and incorporate it into your torso. While wearing light or no armor, you gain a +1 bonus to AC. In addition, you gain resistance to the damage type associated with the gem in your core (as shown on the Elemental Gem table).

As a bonus action, you can expend a use of Wild Shape to charge this gem for 10 minutes. While the gem is charged, a creature that hits you with a melee attack takes 1d8 damage of the type associated with the gem. The damage increases to 1d10 at 10th level, and 1d12 at 14th level.

You can only benefit from one gem being incorporated in your torso at a time. Whenever you gain a druid level, you can change out the gem to a new gem; however, in the process, the old gem is lost.

Pineal Precious

At 10th level, you have mastered the primal forces within gems—you can incorporate one into your head. As an action, you can make a ranged spell attack against a creature within 120 feet of you that you can see. On a hit, the attack deals damage equal to 4d8 plus your Wisdom modifier of the gem's associate type (as shown on the Elemental Gem table). You can make this attack a number of times equal to your Wisdom modifier (minimum of once). You regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

You can only benefit from one gem being incorporated in your head at a time. Whenever you gain a druid level, you can change out the gem to a new gem; however, in the process, the old gem is lost.

Eye Gems

Most Circle of the Gilded druids incorporate their final gem as a "third eye," but a more dedicated few will replace one of their existing eyes, an existing horn (for tieflings), or some other creative incorporation. Dragonborn may incorporate gems amidst their scales. However, gems must be fully incorporated—a unity between druid and gem.

PRISMATIC FORM

At 14th level, your connection with the primordial elemental forces behind gems and precious metals is absolute. As an action, you can draw on this connection, activating all your gems' powers in tandem. For the next 10 minutes, you gain a +2 bonus to AC, immunity to the damage types of all your incorporated gems (as shown on the Elemental Gem table), and you deal an additional 3d6 damage when you make a successful weapon attack. The additional damage's type is a damage type associated with one of your gems, chosen when you activate this feature. Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

PALADIN: OATH OF ACQUISITIONS

Most paladins are chiefly concerned with doing good. A rare few pursue darker paths. But those who take the Oath of Acquisitions don't fall into either camp. They have the power to help people…but why would they, if they aren't going to be adequately compensated? They're called heroes, demanded to throw themselves in harm's way, but when it comes time for hazard pay? They're told their service should be payment enough. But in a drag-on-eat-dragon world, these heroes for hire need every tool at their disposal, be it sword or spell, to ensure that invoice gets paid on time.

These notorious charmers wield a strong portfolio of enchantment magic to move the needle on and off the battlefield. Be it a heated negotiation over the price of a potion or a pitched battle with a soon-to-be-overly-friendly giant, it's hard to deny these silver-tongued devils when they turn on the charm.

Perhaps you entered into an infernal contract forcing you to collect on debtors. Or that merchant you guarded a few years back made a lot of good points about knowing your worth. Maybe you just took the guidance from your god of traders a *little* too far. However you came to take this oath, you always aim to come out on top—and woe to those who break a contract with you.

TENETS OF ACQUISITIONS

Those who take the Oath of Acquisitions are fearsome negotiators, mercenary in attitude, and stand only for themselves…and those filling their coffers... and those overseeing their debts.

The More Perilous the Path, the Greater the Payout. Always go the extra mile—so it's easier to squeeze a little extra out of your employer.

Circumstance Plus Instinct Equals Profit. Those who can smell war on the wind are the first to profit from it. Watch the trends, read the bones, and make sure you're the first one with the solution to the problem.

A Deal is a Deal is a Deal. Your word is your bond. If you make a deal, you stick to the letter of it. However, if the other party didn't read the contract thoroughly, it's not really your problem.

Oath of Acquisitions Features

Paladin Level	Feature
3rd	Oath Spells, Channel Divinity
7th	Aura of Opportunity
15th	The Bigger the Smile, the Sharper the Sword
20th	Greed is Good

OATH SPELLS

You gain oath spells at the paladin levels listed in the Oath of Acquisitions Spells table.

Oath of Acquisitions Spells Table

Paladin Level	Spells
3rd	*charm person, disguise self*
5th	*attract metal*[1], *suggestion*
9th	*hypnotic pattern, fear*
13th	*confusion, compulsion*
17th	*dominate person, geas*

CHANNEL DIVINITY

When you take this oath at 3rd level, you gain the following two Channel Divinity options.

Peace is Good Business. You can use your Channel Divinity as a bonus action to gain the upper hand in negotiations. For the next 10 minutes, you have advantage on all Charisma checks made to negotiate business with other creatures.

War is Good Business. When you cast an enchantment spell on a creature that requires a saving throw, you can use your Channel Divinity to make the target more susceptible to your magic by imposing disadvantage on its saving throw. Additionally, if the spell has a duration of 1 hour or less, its duration is doubled.

[1] *Attract metal* can be found in "Ten Spells You Need in 5e" by Celeste Conowitch in ARCADIA 3. You can swap this spell for *zone of truth* if you don't have ARCADIA 3.

Aura of Opportunity

Starting at 7th level, you emanate an aura that commands attention while you're not incapacitated. Creatures of your choice within 10 feet of you make attacks against creatures other than you with disadvantage.

When you reach 18th level in this class, the range of this aura increases to 30 feet.

The Bigger the Smile, the Sharper the Sword

Starting at 15th level, you can make new "friends" feel the sting of betrayal. Once per turn, when you hit a creature charmed by you or an ally within 30 feet of you with an attack, the creature has vulnerability to that attack's damage.

You can use this feature a number of times equal to your Charisma modifier (minimum of once). You regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

Greed is Good

At 20th level, you can manifest as an avatar of opulence and excess. Your skin and clothing take on a gold or platinum sheen, and coins spill from you as you walk, disappearing after they hit the ground.

During the transformation, you gain the following features for 1 hour:

- You have advantage on all Charisma checks and saving throws.
- Creatures that hit you with a weapon attack must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw against your spell save DC or become charmed by you until the end of your next turn.
- You can use the Bigger the Smile, the Sharper the Sword feature any number of times on a turn without expending uses.

Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.



GOLDMONGER RETAINERS

Retainers first appeared in *Strongholds & Followers* as unique NPC followers who pledge their service to player characters. These less-experienced adventurers are easy-to-run secondary characters controlled by players. Below are three retainer stat blocks for Goldmonger NPCs.

The full rules for retainers are explained on pages 69–73 of *Strongholds & Followers*.

Acolyte of Ambition

Armor Medium (AC 15)

Primary Ability: Wisdom

Saves: Wisdom

Skills: Insight, Religion

Signature Attack: *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d10 + 2) piercing damage.

Special Actions

3rd-Level (3/Day) ***Prophet Motive:*** The acolyte casts *shield of faith* on another creature. The effect is replicated on the acolyte for the duration.

5th-Level (2/Day, Reaction) ***Stunning Acquisition:*** When another creature targets the acolyte with an attack, the acolyte can cause the attacker to make a Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the target is stunned until the end of the acolyte's next turn.

7th-Level (1/Day) ***Rapid Synergy:*** The acolyte casts *haste* on another creature. The effect is replicated on the acolyte for the duration.

Citrine Protector[2]

Armor Medium (AC 15)

Primary Ability: Wisdom

Saves: Intelligence, Wisdom

Skills: History, Nature

Signature Attack: *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Special Actions

3rd-Level (3/Day, Bonus Action) ***Citrine Strike:*** The protector bathes their weapon in elemental energy. The next time they hit with their signature attack, they deal an additional 1d8 acid damage.

5th-Level (1/Day) ***Acid Rain:*** The protector casts *call lightning*, dealing acid damage instead of lightning damage.

7th-Level (3/Day, Bonus Action) ***Citrine Core:*** The protector gains a +1 bonus to AC and resistance to acid damage for 1 minute. In addition, when this feature is active and a creature within 30 feet of the protector hits the protector with a weapon attack, the protector can use their reaction to deal 2d8 acid damage to the attacker.

[2] This retainer could easily be modified to another element by using any of the corresponding gems in the Elemental Gem table.

Free Lancer

Armor Heavy (AC 17)

Primary Ability: Strength, Charisma

Saves: Strength, Wisdom, Charisma

Skills: Insight, Religion

Signature Attack: *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d12 + 3) piercing damage.

Special Actions

3rd-Level (3/Day, Reaction) ***Smiling Blade:*** When the lancer hits a creature with a melee weapon attack, the lancer can cause the target to make a Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is charmed by the lancer until the end of the lancer's next turn.

5th-Level (2/Day) ***Sting of Betrayal:*** When the lancer deals damage to a creature currently charmed by them or an ally within 30 feet of the lancer, they deal an additional 2d8 psychic damage.

7th-Level (1/Day, Bonus Action) ***Aura of Opportunity:*** When lancer activates this aura, it lasts for 1 minute. When an enemy within 10 feet of the lancer targets a creature that is not the lancer with an attack, the enemy makes the attack roll with disadvantage. In addition, when an enemy within 10 feet of the lancer hits the lancer with an attack, the lancer can use their reaction to force the creature to make a Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is charmed by the lancer until the end of the lancer's next turn.

NPC: Garin Najis

To say that Garin Najis was born with a silver spoon in his mouth would be an understatement—start with platinum, and then change spoons for every bite. After a life of opulence, he should want for nothing, yet all he does is want. His path of avarice started early and only deepened.

Born to wealthy nobles who owned several emerald mines, there was never a moment in his upbringing where he felt lack or need. He bragged about how he walked around with uncut gems in his pockets in his days at the academy. When he came of age and his parents decided to teach him how to manage the mines, he was initially horrified. They exploited their miners for little pay and forced them to work in dangerous conditions under strict contracts that prevented departure. Everything suddenly clicked into place for Garin. As it dawned on him that this exploitation was the reason for his wealth...he embraced it.

But unlike his parents, whose zeal for hard capital was secular, Garin looked at his inheritance and saw it as his divine duty to Pta'u to expand, grow, and consume. He would never be satisfied. He convinced his workers that their labor in his service was a path to the divine. Their hard work, sweat, and tears would lead to countless rewards in the next life... and countless rewards in this life for Garin.

A prosperity preacher of the highest order, Garin keeps a close counsel of powerful, mercenary-minded adventurers and commands a loyal following of brainwashed cult-like laborers who literally die to hand him a freshly mined gem. Garin can be found most often managing his various enterprises, but as of late he has felt the itch of adventure and has taken to traveling in search of more resources (both material and humanoid) to exploit.

Garin never faces down an enemy without a well-prepared battlefield or plenty of minions. His primary strategy is to keep as much cannon fodder between him and his foes while simultaneously bolstering his legions and himself. He makes good use of his Prophet Motive feature to keep buffs on his allies and himself while using spells like *guardian of faith* and *spirit guardians* to control the battlefield to his liking. He is a coward at heart and will leave his minions to die if he sees the tides turning against him.

Garin Najis

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

Armor Class 17 (*+1 breastplate*)

Hit Points 120 (16d8 + 48)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Wis +8, Cha +5

Skills History +3, Intimidation +5, Insight +8, Religion +3

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages Celestial, Common, Dwarvish, Goblin

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Prophet Motive (5/Day). When Garin casts certain spells on another creature, he can replicate the effect on himself. If the spell ends, the effect ends on him as well.

Spellcasting. Garin is a 13th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light, sacred flame, spare the dying, thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *bane, divine favor, identify,* shield of faith**

2nd level (3 slots) *enhance ability,* magic weapon,* spiritual weapon*

3rd level (3 slots): *haste,* protection from energy,* spirit guardians*

4th level (2 slots): *freedom of movement,* guardian of faith, stoneskin**

5th level (2 slots): *dispel evil and good,* geas, greater restoration**

6th level (1 slot): *harm*

7th level (1 slot): *planeshift*

*Prophet Motive spell

Actions

+1 Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

Reactions

Object of Desire (2/Day). When another creature within 30 feet of Garin targets him with an attack, he can hold up his holy symbol and manifest the object the attacker desires most. The attacker must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the target is stunned for 1 minute. A stunned creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Divine Kleptocracy (1/Day). When a creature Garin can see within 30 feet of him is targeted by a spell that requires concentration, Garin can duplicate the spell's effect on himself. If the spell ends for the other creature, the effect ends for him at the end of his next turn.

ALABASTER'S ALMANAC

by Sam Mannell

Esteemed and dedicated fellows of the Art,

I hope this installment of the Almanac finds you well. For those joining us for the first time, congratulations! You have been selected as an arcane practitioner who not only shows a talent for the craft, but also displays restraint, humility, and, most importantly, kindness—traits I typically find in short supply among arcanists.

As usual, the experienced mage may wish to jump ahead to the catalogue in order to skip my waffling. For those who are new, I will be brief.

While not an apprenticeship, this Almanac does come with the simple condition that you do not do anything overly stupid with your abilities, and ignoring this rule will see you regrettably struck from my mailing list, and placed in my other list, where the company is far less pleasant. I leave it for you to worry about the specifics involved here.

This season I find myself adrift in the Astral Plane. It is a strange and somber place, where one has ample time for self-reflection. Thus there is no theme to the spells I have chosen to share with you today—they are simply ones that have taken my fancy as I pass the time on my quiet sojourn. I hope they ignite your imagination, as they do mine.

Until next time.

Faithfully,

Alabaster

Letter in Plain Text

SPELL CATALOGUE

BARD SPELLS

1st Level
Wielding (transmutation)

2nd level
Compelling Propulsion (transmutation)

6th level
Gaze of Venom (evocation)

DRUID SPELLS

6th Level
Alabaster's Adaptation for the World Below (transmutation)
Gaze of Venom (evocation)

SORCERER SPELLS

1st Level
Alabaster's Adjacent Acquisition (conjuration)
Wielding (transmutation)

2nd Level
Compelling Propulsion (transmutation)
Shadowslip (transmutation)

3rd Level
Scryspike (abjuration)

6th Level
Gaze of Venom (evocation)

WARLOCK SPELLS

1st Level
Wielding (transmutation)

2nd Level
Compelling Propulsion (transmutation)
Shadowslip (transmutation)

3rd Level
Animate Echoes (divination)
Scryspike (abjuration)

6th Level
Gaze of Venom (evocation)

WIZARD SPELLS

1st Level
Alabaster's Adjacent Acquisition (conjuration)
Wielding (transmutation)

2nd Level
Compelling Propulsion (transmutation)
Shadowslip (transmutation)

3rd Level
Animate Echoes (divination)
Scryspike (abjuration)

6th Level
Alabaster's Adaptation for the World Below (transmutation)
Gaze of Venom (evocation)

9th Level
Realize Image (conjuration)

Alabaster's Adaptation for the World Below

I have made numerous adaptation spells, each for a different locale, but this one is the newest and so—I hope—the most reliable! Heading to the World Below to find a purple worm nest or trade with deep gnomes? Be sure to prepare accordingly!

Alabaster's Adaptation (World Below)

6th-level transmutation (ritual)
Casting Time: 1 hour
Range: Touch
Components: V, S, M (rare mushrooms and algae worth a total of 500 gp, which the spell consumes)
Duration: 8 hours
Classes: Druid, wizard

You adapt the physiology of a willing creature you touch to the dangers of the World Below, altering the creature so they can traverse the plane more safely. The spell reprograms nerves, grows a lining of lead in the skull, changes body chemistry, and more. It can also create up to three cosmetic changes determined by the caster, such as pointed ears, plaid skin, or sharp teeth. For the duration, the creature gains the following benefits:

- The creature gains darkvision out to a range of 120 feet and tremorsense to a range of 60 feet.
- The creature has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) and Dexterity (Stealth) checks.
- The creature gains immunity to poison damage and the poisoned condition, and resistance to psychic damage.
- The creature gains a climbing speed equal to its walking speed and can move up, down, and across vertical surfaces and upside down along ceilings, while leaving its hands free.
- The creature can sweat acid. As an action, the creature can expend a Hit Die by rolling it, (and doesn't add its Constitution modifier). The creature takes acid damage equal to the result, and any other creatures or nonmagical objects touching it take twice that amount of acid damage. The acid evaporates after this damage is dealt. This acid instantly destroys any web it touches, such as those created by the *web* spell. In addition, the acid corrodes any nonmagical armor worn by the creature, which takes a permanent and cumulative –1 penalty to the AC it offers. The armor is destroyed if the penalty reduces its AC to 10. However, the creature can produce this acid selectively on its body, i.e., only around its wrists and ankles. Another creature or object only takes acid damage if they are in contact with where the creature produces the acid.

Alabaster's Adjacent Acquisition

One of my first spells, and I believe still one of my best. Originally devised as a method to retrieve tea from my study without getting up, I've found that *adjacent acquisition* is more useful than it has any right to be. Things I have used this spell to retrieve include an enchanted tiara, a kobold egg, a half-digested book, and a stray fingerbone.

Alabaster's Adjacent Acquisition[1]

1st-level conjuration
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 30 feet
Components: V, S
Duration: Instantaneous
Classes: Sorcerer, wizard

One Tiny object within range teleports directly into your hand, even if that object is carried or worn by another creature. If you can't see the object, there is a 50% chance that you conjure a different object within range by mistake, chosen by the GM. The spell is not without a sense of irony.

If you attempt to conjure an object that is physically connected to another object—such as a cog within a complex machine or the deadlock off a door—there is only a 5% chance that the spell is able to break the object free of its surroundings and successfully conjure it.

[1]If you're using the Avarice domain or Oath of Acquisitions from "Goldmonger Subclasses" in this issue, this spell makes a great addition to their spell lists as well.

Animate Echoes

Time is a funny thing. Actions carried out in the mundane world have a tendency to echo in strange ways—do something interesting enough and it stamps a sort of signature on reality. Traces of it remain. Indelible, but invisible.

Animate echoes can reveal these traces, allowing us to gaze directly upon an after-image of past events, as though they were still happening around us.

Animate Echoes

3rd-level divination (ritual)
Casting Time: 1 minute
Range: Self
Components: V, S, M (a pocket watch worth at least 100 gp, which the spell consumes)
Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes
Classes: Warlock, wizard

You reach through time and reveal the echoes of the past, which appear as hazy figures flickering in a radius around you. These figures reflect the passage and actions of other creatures who have been in the area before you. When you cast the spell, you choose how big the affected area is, up to a radius of 60 feet, and this area moves with you.

While concentrating on the spell, you can view any events that occurred within the past 24 hours. You can fast-forward, freeze, reverse, or slow down the echoes as you please. Other creatures can see the echoes exactly as you can while this spell is active.

These echoes are blurry and indistinct—they may indicate the general shape and size of different creatures, but do not reveal specific details, such as faces or clothes. Echoes are silent, incorporeal, and have no smell or taste.

Compelling Propulsion

I think many wizards could stand to spend a little more time around people. That said, personal space is important, and the wizarding life certainly includes moments in which you'd rather have a little bit more of it.

This spell is a (relatively) safe way to ensure that others give you a wider berth than they were perhaps planning to. Once mastered, the effects can be quite spectacular.

Compelling Propulsion

2nd-level transmutation
Casting Time: 1 reaction, which you take when a creature enters a space within 5 feet of you
Range: 5 feet
Components: S
Duration: Instantaneous
Classes: Bard, sorcerer, warlock, wizard

When another creature enters a space with 5 feet of you, you can unleash a blast of arcane force. The triggering creature must make a Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, the target is pushed 20 feet away from you and falls prone. On a success, the creature is pushed half as far, and doesn't fall prone.

Fragile, nonmagical objects in the target's path—such as a window or wooden chair—are destroyed. If the target hits an object that is magical or not fragile—such as an *immovable rod* or a stone wall—the creature stops moving and takes 1d10 bludgeoning damage per 10 feet of movement left over, as the spell's magic repeatedly hammers the target against the object. If the creature hits another creature, both creatures take this damage and fall prone.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, the distance a creature is pushed increases by 10 feet for each slot level above 2nd.

GAZE OF VENOM

I learned this one from an Ixian sorcerer. He didn't speak Common but got his point across just fine.

GAZE OF VENOM

6th-level evocation
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Self
Components: V, S
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute
Classes: Bard, druid, sorcerer, warlock, wizard

For the duration, your eyes become pools of harsh yellow light. When a creature that can see your eyes starts its turn within 60 feet of you, you can force it to make a Constitution saving throw as long as you can see the creature and aren't incapcitated. On a failure, the target takes 4d8 poison damage and 4d8 psychic damage, and is poisoned until the start of its next turn. While poisoned in this way, the creature is slowed and can't move more than 10 feet on a turn.

A creature that isn't surprised can avert its gaze to avoid the saving throw at the start of its turn. If the creature does so, it can't see you until the start of its next turn, when it can choose to avert its eyes again. If the creature looks at you in the meantime, you can force it to immediately make the save.

If you see your eyes in a reflective surface (such as a mirror, polished breastplate, or the surface of a lake) within 60 feet of you, you are affected by your own gaze and must succeed on the saving throw or suffer the effects of the spell.

REALIZE IMAGE

All magic is dangerous and should be treated as such, but some spells affect your life more than others if you let them.

This is one such spell.

I stumbled across it many years ago, etched into a shimmering pane of glass, locked deep in the catacombs beneath a castle that had been razed to the ground. I never did discover what had happened to the place, but I think I can make an educated guess in hindsight.

This spell makes illusions real. Not forever, mind you, but I can think of few things more dangerous than the imagination of an intrepid wizard imposing itself on reality, even if only temporarily.

REALIZE IMAGE

9th-level conjuration
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 60 feet
Components: V, S, M (a diamond looking glass worth at least 750 gp, which is consumed by the spell)
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour
Classes: Wizard

One image you can see within range created by an illusion spell and that you know is illusory becomes real for the duration. The illusion must fit within 1 cubic mile of space. If the illusion spell that created the image ends before *realize image* does, the image persists for the duration of *realize image*.

Magical items made real by the spell don't have their magical properties, as the creation of magical items is a delicate (and often obscure) craft.

If the illusion is a creature, it uses the statistics of an appropriate creature created or chosen by the GM. Creatures created by *realize image* act surprised by their own existence, have no allegiances, and are controlled by the GM. Sentient creatures created by this spell have personalities and memories, but the GM decides what they are.

SCRYSPIKE

There is nothing quite like the neck-prickling sensation of a scrying sensor watching over you. While magic exists to detect scrying—and even to prevent it in the first place—the scryed-upon ultimately has few options. Detecting a scrying sensor has little value; you do not learn who is watching you or why, only that you are not alone.

Hence I found this spell of particular interest. While fairly vindictive, it provides a nimble mage with the option to strike down a scrying sensor if they can see it. Breaking the connection is extremely disorientating for your unwelcome observer, and makes for rather effective deterrence. Furthermore, even though this spell was first designed to sever magical connections, it severs a creature's synapses pretty well too, making it a dangerous ace to keep up your sleeve.



SCRYSPIKE

3rd-level abjuration
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Self
Components: S
Duration: Instantaneous
Classes: Sorcerer, warlock, wizard

You create a shimmering dagger of force in your hand, which possesses the ability to attack magical sensors, such as those created by the *scrying* and *clairvoyance* spells.

When you cast the spell, you make one melee or ranged spell attack with the dagger, after which the dagger disappears. On a hit, the target takes 5d10 psychic damage.

You can also make this attack against a magical sensor you can see within range, which has AC 10. On a hit, the sensor is destroyed and the spell creating it immediately ends. The creature that created the destroyed sensor automatically takes maximum damage from *scryspike*.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 4th level or higher, the damage increases by 1d10 for each slot level above 3rd.

SHADOWSLIP

A most useful spell for espionage, allowing the caster to become their own shadow and slide under doors or along walls. I prefer to turn into a fly myself, but not everyone has access to on-demand *shapechange*. Perks of being an archmage.

SHADOWSLIP

2nd-level transmutation
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Self
Components: V, S, M (any cloak or cape)
Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes
Classes: Sorcerer, warlock, wizard

You and your equipment vanish and melt into darkness, but your shadow remains on the ground with your consciousness in it. While shadowslipping, you gain a +10 bonus to Dexterity (Stealth) checks, you have advantage on Dexterity saving throws, your AC becomes 20, you have 1 hit point, and you gain a climbing speed equal to your walking speed. You must be touching a surface at all times.

While shadowslipping, you can't speak aloud or manipulate objects, and any objects you were carrying or holding can't be dropped, used, or otherwise interacted with. You can't attack or cast spells. You can pass through small holes, narrow openings, and even mere cracks, and you treat liquids as if they were solid surfaces.

You can end the spell and revert to your normal form as an action, appearing where your shadow was. If there's not enough room for your normal form to appear, you take 1d10 force damage, and are shunted to the nearest available space.

If you drop to 0 hit points while shadowslipping you instantly revert back to your normal form, ignoring any excess damage, and appearing where your shadow was destroyed. If your shadow is destroyed while shadowslipping, you don't regain your shadow until the next dawn, and you have disadvantage on death saving throws until your shadow returns.

When you revert back to your normal form, you return to the number of hit points you had before you transformed.

Wielding

I personally have no great love for swords, but in my career I've found it impossible to get away from them. Magical, mundane, lost, shattered, or sacred; they always seem to be in my way. Eventually—wizard or not—you need to pick one of the damn things up.

This spell provides an elegant workaround for the wielding of hand-held weapons, and can even emulate a reasonable level of skill with them. It also comes with a few nice loopholes for disarming enemies and managing cursed items.

Wielding

1st-level transmutation
Casting Time: 1 bonus action
Range: 5 feet
Components: V, S, M (several small loops of brass wire, wound tightly around the fingers)
Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes
Classes: Bard, sorcerer, warlock, wizard

You point at a weapon sized for a Medium or smaller creature that you can see within 5 feet of you, and it springs into the air to float at your fingertips. If the weapon requires two hands to wield, you must have both hands free to cast this spell. While wielding a weapon in this way, you can use it as though you had proficiency with it, and you can use your spellcasting ability, instead of Strength or Dexterity, for the weapon's attack and damage rolls.

Only one weapon can be wielded by the spell at a time, and you need at least one free hand in order to maintain the spell, or two free hands for a two-handed weapon.

If you point at a weapon held by another creature when you cast this spell, that creature must make a Dexterity saving throw; a creature can choose to fail this saving throw if it wishes. On a success, the creature keeps its hold on the weapon and the spell ends.

If a creature wishes to grab a weapon from the spell's grasp, it must be within 5 feet of you and have a free hand. A creature can use its action to make a Strength (Athletics) check opposed by an ability check using your spellcasting ability modifier and proficiency bonus. If the creature wins the contest, it snatches the weapon from your fingertips.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 5th level or higher on a magic weapon that requires attunement, you are also considered attuned to the weapon and benefit from any features it has, so long as you have available attunement slots and meet all prerequisites for attunement. When the spell ends, your attunement to the weapon also ends, even if the item holds a curse that would normally prevent this.

Additionally, when you cast this spell using a spell slot of 5th level or higher, you can target weapons sized for Large creatures. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 7th level or higher, you can target weapons sized for Huge creatures.





Leon Barillaro is a game and narrative designer working in tabletop, video games, and immersive theater. Their work can also be found in places like the DMs Guild (*The Uncaged Anthology, Bard-Core Brawlers, Hair of the Dog*), EN Publishing (Level Up: Advanced 5th Edition), and Fantastic Lairs (Campaign Seed: Prerequisite Forces). You can find Leon on twitter (@barilleon) or at his website: barilleon.com.



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Unique villains create memorable stories. Engaging encounters, immersive worlds, and compelling NPCs are all important, but when asked what they remember about campaigns from years past, the first thing many players bring up is that goblin who got away during the first battle, then returned as a dragon-riding sorcerer, and then came back again as a lich for the final encounter. In decades of playing, I've forgotten tavern conversations, tactical battles, NPCs, entire worlds, and even the names and classes of some of my old characters, but I can still tell you almost turn-by-turn about my showdowns with unique villains.

I love playing the game with new players because many of the creatures and tropes experienced gamers take for granted are new to the humans at the table. "A bugbear? What's that?" the newbies ask as us GMs giggle with maniacal glee. Every villain that crosses a new player's path is exciting and memorable because of its novelty. Even if greenhorn players know a monster from popular media, like trolls or vampires, they don't know what the game's version of that villain is like, and they have no idea what unique spin the GM will put on the creature. Heck, with new players, us GMs even get to march out old villains and stories we've used before (or borrow them from another GM's game) and these players love to hate these baddies because it's all new to them.

Of course, most of us don't run games for new players every session, especially if we're part of a long-term campaign. And newbies go very quickly from, "Oh no! What's a kobold?" to "Let's run these pipsqueaks over to get to the treasure." This is a game about fighting monsters, after all. That means the monsters need to be compelling and there needs to be a lot of them. Villain ideas get used up rather quickly! Each time a GM spends time spinning out a unique villain, that's one more idea that they likely can't use with their group again. After a year of my best brain babies once a week, what can I give my players to surprise them—to say nothing of the friends I started playing with nearly twenty years ago?

To keep my games fresh, I pull villains out of supplements and drop them into my campaign. If I can grab a premade villain with a unique stat block, it saves me time and energy in addition to giving me fresh stuff to put into my game. I might put my own spin on them or smash them together with a second monster to create something new. I don't think there's any published element of the game I use more than villains, and I know other GMs are similar, since monsters have their own book in the core rules! While *ARCADIA* featured some cool antagonists in previous issues, the one you're reading now presents the best selection yet.

Michael E. Shea provides four new evil characters that form a rival adventuring party to take on the player characters. Each member of the Grim Accord has a deep backstory and unique traits that make them a worthy villain as an individual. Together, this fiercely loyal band is unstoppable—or are they?

Gabe Hicks gives you an entirely different kind of villain in "Armor of Zevellon." An evil demigod of chaos magic bound himself to the pieces of his old armor and returns to life when the set is assembled. Having a villain reveal himself in a mysterious slow burn is my kind of story. The best part about this villain is that the characters might be the ones to summon him in their attempt to gather each piece of the powerful armor.

Finally, H.H. Carlan's "Spelunking" brings us one of the best types of villains: a new legendary creature with lair actions and a tragic backstory. Fawning Summerset doesn't go down easy.

I can't wait to use these villains in my game, and I'm beyond excited to learn how you all use them in yours.

Ex animo,
James Introcaso
Managing Editor

THE GRIM ACCORD

Four evil adventurers skulking in the shadows of your heroes

by Michael E. Shea

> "They'd be as likely to cut your throat, put an arrow in your eye, or set your bed on fire while you slept in the night as look at you. But when it comes to finding twisted artifacts in the depths of the earth, there are few better."
>
> –Grim Accord Performance Report by Jaque Ironknife, 12th Mercenary Commander

Introduction

Not all adventurers are good. Not all seek the betterment of those who can't defend themselves from the dangers lurking in the shadows of the world. Some seek power—however they can get it. None who cross paths with the Grim Accord describe them as benevolent heroes out to help those in need. The members of the Accord seek the greatest powers in the world and destroy anything in their way to grasp them.

The Grim Accord is a ready-to-use evil adventuring band you can drop into your world. They can act as rival adventurers, useful NPCs, direct villains, or even sinister quest-givers. The Grim Accord may follow their own plans, quests, and goals in parallel or perpendicular to those of the characters until the two groups finally come crashing together. The characters may hear of the Accord long before they face them directly, as NPCs and enemies whisper of the sinister group throughout many adventures.

Four members make up the core of the Grim Accord, though the group is known to hire local brigands, spies, cult fanatics, murderers, and mercenaries to bolster their rank. These four members include the charismatic halfling Irae Firetouched, an elemental sorcerer who leads the band; Kryx Bloodgnash, the feared gnoll shapeshifter; Athlonia, the Moon's Eclipse, an elf knight of shadow; and the orc assassin Uldun of Parts Unknown.

This article includes descriptions and stat blocks for each member of the Grim Accord, tips for integrating them into your campaign, quests that bring them into the heroes' path, and a description of the corrupt adventuring band's mysterious headquarters.

Also Known As

The infamous deeds of the Grim Accord have garnered them all manner of nicknames, including the Charnel Council, Vengeance of the Wilds, Feeders of Crows, the Scorched Earth, and Fire, Shadow, Blood, and Bone. The characters may hear one of these monikers the first time they learn about the group instead of their real name. The Accord is careful to share its official name only with those who need their services.

Members of the Grim Accord

Each member of the Grim Accord came to the adventuring group chased by a dark past. Originally hunted as outlaws and murderers, the band rose into the role of mercenaries, hunters, and bodyguards for those willing to hire such an unscrupulous group. Each member brings their specialty to the band, including Irae's charisma and negotiation skills, Kryx's connection to the merciless natural world, Athlonia's harnessing of fey magic, and Uldun's fathomless patience for the deadly hunt.

Irae Firetouched *Halfling sorcerer of flames*

"I've seen few who navigate political and royal labyrinths as well as she does and none who are as comfortable in the wilds as she is. Cross her, though, and one best hope the true fire in her eyes isn't the last thing they see."

–Journal entry of Lady Matilde Dawnrose, Seventh of the Line

Nicknames: Irae Ashbringer, the Scourge of Willowset, Spellstorm

Upon forming the Grim Accord, Irae rose quickly as the group's spokeswoman and leader. Her charismatic wiles have brought the Accord far, taking them out of hiding and bringing them jobs from the most unlikely sources. The other members note the value of her silvery tongue and use it regularly for their advantage. It's never clear to the members of the Accord whether Irae uses them for her gain or if they use her to get what they desire. So far, at least, the relationship profits them all.

It is said that the blazing soul of the elemental prince of fire touched the halfling when she was a child. Irae's halfling family and village, Willowset, exiled her after her powers manifested in her teenage years and she inadvertently burned down a quarter of the village in a rage-filled inferno. Outcast for six years, she finally returned and finished the job. Willowset's remains still smolder around a pit of molten rock in the center of the village that never cooled. Some say the secret of Irae's power lies within the village's charred ruin. The elf sorcerer Klaroven of the Torch taught Irae to channel her powers, only to try to steal them from the young halfling and leave her a dried husk along with his other students. Irae turned his powers against him and now wears his screaming soul in an amulet around her neck.

The other members of the Accord found Irae nearly destroyed after her battle with Klaroven. The group soon discovered her ability not only for destructive power but for verbal manipulation. It was through Irae's leadership and negotiations that the Grim Accord went from mysterious bandits to profitable adventurers.

Ideal: "Power exists for those able to grasp it and hold on."

Bond: "My companions take me where I want to go and are easily steered by my words."

Flaw: "Sometimes I just need to see things burn."

Tactics

Irae rarely ambushes her quarry directly. Instead, she uses her words to deceive and disarm her opponents, cornering them into a vulnerable position before she and the Accord strike. If attacked, or if her manipulations fail, Irae's persona visibly changes as she lets her fiery blood move through her veins. Her eyes glow like embers. Her hair flows back, appearing like flame. And the world around her begins to burn.



Irae Firetouched

Small humanoid (halfling), neutral evil

Armor Class 12 (15 with *mage armor*)
Hit Points 49 (9d6 + 18)
Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Con +4, Cha +6
Skills Arcana +3, History +3, Intimidation +6, Persuasion +6
Damage Resistances fire
Senses passive Perception 12
Languages Common, Halfling, Ignan, Undercommon
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Firetouched. When reduced to half of her hit points or fewer, Irae becomes wreathed in flames. Whenever a creature within 5 feet of Irae hits her with a melee attack, it takes 9 (2d8) fire damage.

Quickened Fireball (3rd-Level Spell; Requires a Spell Slot). As a bonus action, Irae creates a fiery explosion centered on a point she can see within 150 feet of her. Each creature in a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on that point must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The fire spreads around corners and ignites flammable objects in the area that aren't being worn or carried.

Shape Spell. When Irae casts a spell that requires a saving throw and deals fire damage, she can choose any number of creatures in the spell's area of effect. Chosen creatures automatically succeed on their saving throws against the spell, and they take no damage if they would normally take half damage on a successful save.

Spellcasting. Irae is an 8th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). She knows the following sorcerer spells:

Cantrips (at will): *control flames*, *dancing lights, fire bolt*, *friends*
1st level (4 slots): *burning hands*, *charm person, mage armor*, *shield*
2nd level (3 slots): *misty step, scorching ray*
3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell, fireball*
4th level (2 slots): *greater invisibility*

Wrathful Destruction. When Irae is reduced to 0 hit points, flames arc out of her body toward her enemies. Each enemy within 20 feet of her must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Actions

Scimitar of Flame. *Melee Spell Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) fire damage.

Fire Bolt (Cantrip). *Ranged Spell Attack:* +6 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d10) fire damage. A flammable object hit by this spell ignites if it isn't being worn or carried.

Reaction

Shield (1st-Level Spell; Requires a Spell Slot). When Irae is hit by an attack or targeted by a *magic missile* spell, she calls forth an invisible barrier of magical force that protects her. Until the start of her next turn, Irae has a +5 bonus to AC, including against the triggering attack, and she takes no damage from *magic missile*.

KRYX BLOODGNASH *Gnoll shapeshifter druid*

"Every one hundred seasons, the Dark Wood chooses a vessel for its vengeance. Ware the one who walks in the Wood's name."

–Phrase found in the tattered journals of the druid Kylak Ironroot

Nicknames: The Beast of the Dark Wood, Blood of the Underworld, Old Redfang

Kryx was raised by the Dark Wood. Cast out from his gnoll pack as a runt, Kryx wandered the Dark Wood, starving and scared. In a twisted grove of grasping trees dripping black liquid into a pool, an ancient presence embraced him, feeding him dead foliage and filling his veins with the oil of the land.

Able to transform into the twisted visage of a giant hyena, Kryx hunted freely in the woods that embraced him as a dark guardian. During these hunts, Krix met Athlonia in a grove surrounding a long-dead portal to the realm of the unseelie elves. The two saw their connection to the darker side of the natural world and bonded before joining the Grim Accord.

Ideal: "From the depths of the earth we rise and to depths of the earth we return."

Bond: "I smile at the darkness held in the hearts of my friends."

Flaw: "My hunger for blood and flesh sometimes outweighs the better judgment of my companions."

TACTICS

In his years traveling with the Grim Accord, Kryx learned to hold back his initial instinct to shift into his bestial form and tear his enemies limb from limb. Kryx begins combat with his powerful spells before shifting into his fearsome giant hyena form, charging in at spellcasters and less-armored foes.



Kryx Bloodgnash

Medium humanoid (gnoll), chaotic evil

Armor Class 14 (hide armor)
Hit Points 60 (8d8 + 24)
Speed 30 ft. (40 ft. in hyena form)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	8 (-1)	16 (+3)	9 (-1)

Saving Throws Dex +4, Wis +5
Skills Nature +1, Perception +5, Survival +5
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Common, Gnoll
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Change Shape. Kryx can use his bonus action to polymorph into a giant hyena, or back into his true form, which is humanoid. His statistics, other than his movement speed, are the same in each form. Kryx does not provoke opportunity attacks when moving while in hyena form. Any equipment he is wearing or carrying is absorbed by his new form. He reverts to his true form if he dies.

Fury of the Beast (1/Day). If Kryx is reduced to 0 hit points but doesn't die outright, he is reduced to 1 hit point instead, gains temporary hit points equal to his hit point maximum, and polymorphs into his giant hyena form (see Change Shape). These temporary hit points last for 1 hour. While he has these temporary hit points, Kryx can't revert to his humanoid form, and he gains one additional melee attack as part of his Multiattack action.

Spellcasting (Humanoid Form Only). Kryx is a 6th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 13; +5 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following druid spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, poison spray, produce flame*
1st level (4 slots): *entangle*, *faerie fire*
2nd level (3 slots): *heat metal*, *pass without trace, spike growth*
3rd level (3 slots): *call lightning*, *dispel magic*

Actions

Multiattack. Kryx makes two attacks with his claws. If Fury of the Beast is active, he makes three attacks: two with his claws and one with his bite.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Bite (Hyena Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Produce Flame (Cantrip; Humanoid Form Only). *Ranged Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, range 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d8) fire damage.

Heat Metal (2nd-Level Spell; Requires a Spell Slot). Kryx chooses a manufactured metal object, such as a metal weapon or a suit of heavy or medium metal armor, that he can see within 60 feet of him. For the next minute, any creature in physical contact with the object takes 9 (2d8) fire damage when Kryx casts the spell. Until the spell ends, Kryx can use a bonus action on each of his subsequent turns to cause this damage again. If a creature is holding or wearing the object and takes the damage from it, the creature must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or drop the object if it can. If it doesn't drop the object, it has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the start of Kryx's next turn. Kryx must concentrate on the spell.

Call Lightning (3rd Level Spell; Requires a Spell Slot). A storm cloud appears in the shape of a cylinder that is 10 feet tall with a 60-foot radius, centered on a point Kryx can see within range directly above him. The spell fails if Kryx can't see a point in the air where the storm cloud could appear (for example, if he is in a room that can't accommodate the cloud).

When Kryx casts the spell, he chooses a point he can see under the cloud. A bolt of lightning flashes down from the cloud to that point. Each creature within 5 feet of that point must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw. A creature takes 16 (3d10) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. On each of Kryx's turns until the spell ends, he can use his action to call down lightning in this way again, targeting the same point or a different one. The spell lasts 10 minutes, and Kryx must concentrate on it.

If Kryx is outdoors in stormy conditions when he casts this spell, the spell gives him control over the existing storm instead of creating a new one. Under such conditions, the spell's damage increases by 5 (1d10).

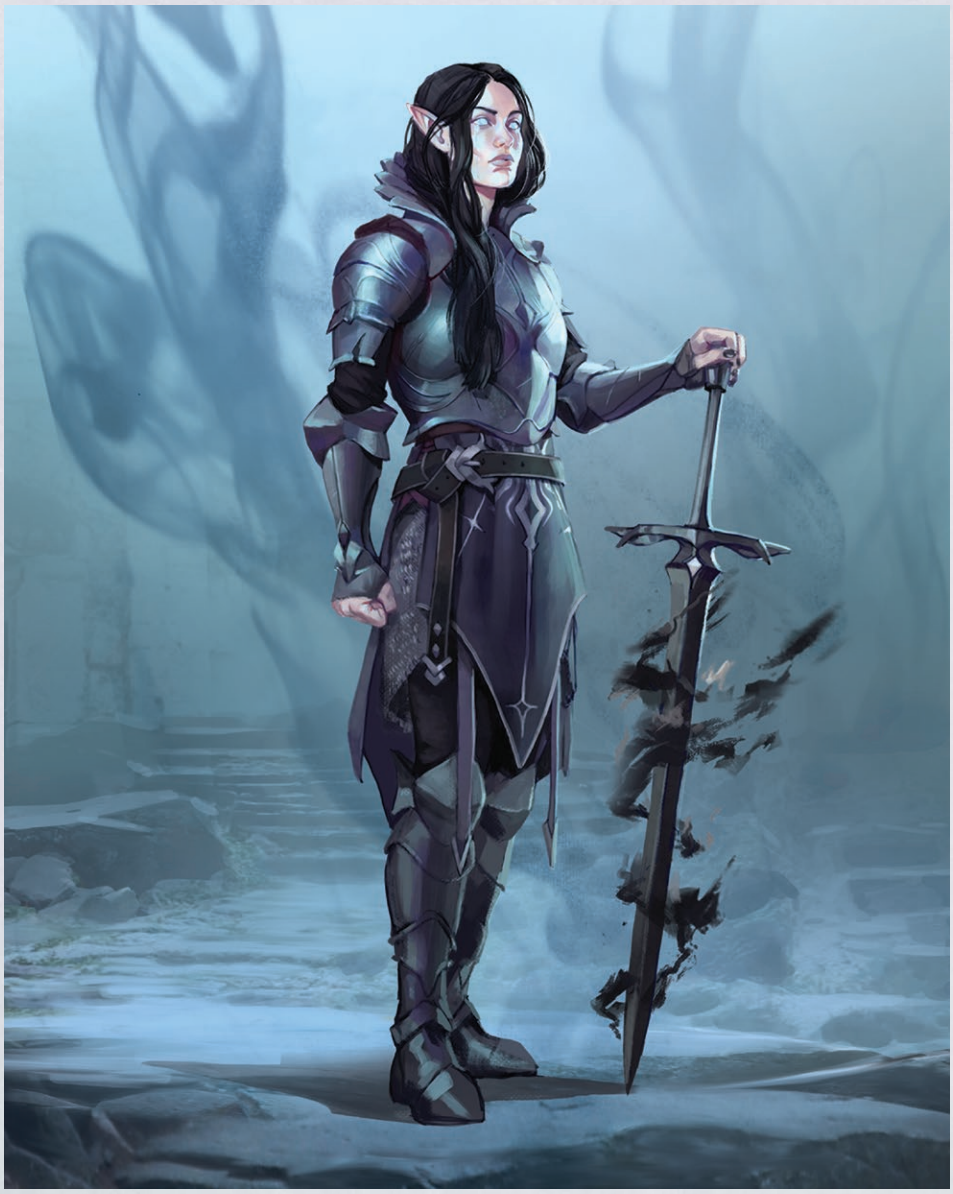
Athlonia, The Moon's Eclipse *Elf knight of shadow*

"A heart once beating with eternal love now lies black in her chest. Her spirit once walked in the light but now walks in the shadows."

–Elven carving on the last remaining stone of the temple of the Gray Reaches

Nicknames: The Knight of the New Moon, the Shadow's Touch, the Sorrow

Athlonia lives in the shadows of the world. When she fell in love with Kallis Redfall, the human king, she severed her connection with her elf family. As Kallis' wife and queen, she watched her soulmate and children die as age took them one by one until the entire kingdom turned to dust and bones. Athlonia soon found the world held nothing for her. As she walked in the shadowy ruins of the former elven court of the Gray Reaches, Athlonia discovered a hidden gateway to the dark world of the unseelie fey. The unseelie lords on the other side bonded with Athlonia, and she found herself embracing the very shadows in which she hid. Her heart became cold.



With new power and hardened soul, Athlonia turned to bounty hunting for money and sport. Caring nothing for their lives, she cut her quarry down with her black blade. Soon she found a like-minded soul in the gnoll shapeshifter Kryx. The duo hunted at the borders between civilization and the wilds until they found a new path illuminated by the fiery charisma of Irae Firetouched. Athlonia once wore a locket around her neck with a picture of her husband and children, dead for centuries. It is said she tore it from her neck and threw it into the deep woods of the Gray Reaches, hoping to forget the life she once had. She failed to forget, however, and she secretly yearns for its return.

Ideal: "A quick death from the shadow's heart is the best you can hope for in this world."

Bond: "I travel with the most unexpected companions who share my nihilistic view of the world."

Flaw: "A spark of love and loss still resides in my cold heart."

Tactics

Althonia is the front line of the Accord, standing silently at the Irae's side, her grim visage a contrast to Irae's blazing personality. Althonia uses her ability to step through the shadows to block those who would threaten Irae. When pressed, the knight surrounds herself with the shadowy power of the unseelie fey.

Athlonia, the Moon's Eclipse

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 18 (plate)

Hit Points 76 (9d8 + 36)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	11 (+0)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Wis +4, Cha +4

Skills Athletics +6, History +2, Arcana +2, Perception +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Elvish, Sylvan

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Proficiency Bonus +2

Blinding Shadows. When reduced to 0 hit points, but just before she drops unconscious or dies, tendrils of shadow erupt from Athlonia's body to her enemies. Each creature of Athlonia's choice within 60 feet of her must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be blinded for 1 minute. A blinded creature can repeat this saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the condition on itself on a success.

Second Wind (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). As a bonus action, Athlonia can regain 25 hit points.

Shadowblade. Athlonia's weapon attacks are magical and deal an extra 3 (1d6) necrotic damage (included in the attack).

Actions

Multiattack. Athlonia makes two attacks with either her greatsword or Shadowbolt.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage and 3 (1d6) necrotic damage.

Shadowbolt. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +4 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (3d8) necrotic damage.

Reactions

Defensive Shadowstep. When an allied creature within 60 feet of Athlonia is hit with a melee attack, Athlonia can teleport to an unoccupied space she can see within 5 feet of the creature that made the attack and force the attacker to reroll the attack. The attacker must use the new result, and Athlonia can make one melee weapon attack against the target as part of the reaction.

Uldun of Parts Unknown *Orc assassin*

"That one standing there? One time I heard he spent a night in thick brambles, thorns piercing his skin, holding back his arrow until just the right time. At the changing of the guard, his arrow pierced through the wall of a tent and killed the commander sleeping inside. He aimed by a snore alone."

–A statement overheard among soldiers at Uldun's second failed execution

Nicknames: The Crownhunter, the Silent Death, Vengeance of the Mountain

Uldun hunts the hunters. For three decades, Uldun watched Clormond Titanson's legions push orcs of the Pale Moon back into the mountain caves and hunt his kin as monsters. He watched orc warlords send his brothers and sisters into pointless battles and get slaughtered by the hundreds. As a young warrior, Uldun found a like mind in the fabled human mercenary Angus Threefingers. Once an orc hunter himself, Angus saw that orcs were no different than anyone else in the world—a people with their own culture and right for survival. Angus and Uldun became friends, and together they assassinated those who put orcs under the knife. They got very good at it.

Old age and a love of drink took Angus, but Uldun continued on. Uldun assassinated the officers and royalty who sent soldiers into battle against orcs. More officers and nobles died under Uldun's arrows than all who fell under their cruelty and violence put together.



Uldun's understudy, an orc hunter named Barash Longtooth, betrayed Uldun to a local lord who sent the orc assassin for public execution. Noting his deadly skills, Athlonia and Kryx liberated him and brought him to their cause. His talents, they explained, were too valuable to end on the blade of an executioner's axe. Later, Irae showed her value to Uldun by bribing and blackmailing those who continued to hunt him. Those who do business with the Grim Accord mostly ignore Uldun's grim past, though veterans of the imperial wars remember the hundreds who fell under his arrows.

Ideal: "I hunt those who have grown fat on the lives of others."

Bond: "Saved from an executioner's axe, I have found a bond with the Accord."

Flaw: "Sometimes, when the tip of my arrow aims at corrupt nobility, I cannot help but let it fly."

Tactics

Uldun is almost always unseen and speaks little. He possesses an unnatural ability to blend into the background. Uldun fights at range, hammering the most dangerous of his enemies with deadly arrows and repositioning himself between each shot. Though he prefers his longbow, his twin shortswords can be likewise lethal if he finds himself cornered.

Uldun of Parts Unknown

Medium humanoid (orc), chaotic evil

Armor Class 16 (studded leather)

Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Wis +3

Skills Acrobatics +6, Perception +5, Stealth +6

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Orc

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Proficiency Bonus +2

Cunning Action. On each of his turns, Uldun can use his bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Evasion. If Uldun is subjected to an effect that allows him to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, he instead takes no damage if he succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if he fails.

Roar of the Ancient Ones. When Uldun is reduced to 0 hit points, he roars out to his ancient ancestors. Each hostile creature within 120 feet of Uldun who can hear him must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw or be plagued by the ancients until the end of its next turn. While plagued, a creature has disadvantage on attack rolls and saving throws, and attacks made against it have advantage.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Uldun deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when he hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of Uldun that isn't incapacitated and Uldun doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Actions

Multiattack. Uldun makes three shortsword or longbow attacks.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Reactions

Defensive Fade (1/Day). When Uldun takes damage, he can teleport 60 feet to an unoccupied space that he can see and becomes invisible until the end of his next turn.

Group Tactics of the Grim Accord

The Grim Accord have spent years working together. Although their motives are far from altruistic, they fight together like wolves born to the same litter. It's extremely hard to catch the Grim Accord unaware. Uldun is as masterful a defensive huntsman as he is an assassin. When he detects someone hunting the Accord, he informs his allies and tracks the trackers. When enemies catch up to the Grim Accord, they often see only two of the four members of the Accord, who are not as unaware as they appear.

If given the chance, Irae casts *greater invisibility* before the battle begins and hammers slower-moving targets with quickened *fireballs* and *fire bolts*. She uses *misty step* to change positions if she gets pinned down. Kryx uses his hyena form for defensive mobility, moving to advantageous positions then reverting to his humanoid form to cast spells like *heat metal* on heavily armored opponents, *blight* on lightly armored foes, or *call lightning* on groups. Athlonia uses her Defensive Shadowstep to defend allies pinned down by enemies. Using this reaction, she can often defend two allies separated across the battlefield. Uldun stays out of sight, using his Cunning Action to hide and hitting defensive spellcasters with longbow attacks.

When on the offensive, the Grim Accord doesn't play fair. Rather than attack the characters directly, the Accord attacks a location their enemies love, often setting it on fire regardless of innocents. They use the same innocents to draw their enemies into Uldun's deadly aim and Kryx's devastating spells.

Integrating the Grim Accord into Your Campaign

The Grim Accord can serve as sinister NPCs the characters meet during quests, adventuring rivals who compete with the characters to complete goals or obtain items, or as direct antagonists to the characters, such as mercenaries hired by your campaign's archvillain. You can also present the members as individual NPCs rather than as a group. The members of the Grim Accord are yours to use however they best fit your game.

Characters of 7th or 8th level would likely find the Grim Accord challenging in combat. Below 7th level, the Grim Accord could be deadly. Above 8th level, consider adding other mercenaries such as **knights**, **mages**, **priests**, or **veterans**. Individually, each member of the Grim Accord would be challenging for four 3rd-level characters.

The Accord is probably most interesting as rival adventurers. The characters may learn of the Accord through rumors and whispers, each member identified with one of their sinister nicknames. The characters might meet Irae in a royal court, a ball, dinner party, or a gala. Met in nonhostile environments, the characters have a chance to size her up and learn about the other members.

You can tie members of the Grim Accord to the backgrounds of the characters. Perhaps Uldun assassinated one character's family members. Another could have an ancient family connection that goes back to Athlonia before she turned to the way of shadow.

For the greatest effect, introduce the Grim Accord into your campaign before any combat or confrontation. The characters should know of the Accord, their history, and their exploits before they face each other in a climactic battle.

Villainous Quests and Adventure Hooks

The following three quests and adventure hooks can draw the Grim Accord into your campaign. Modify these quests to suit your needs.

The Keys to Doomshade

The door to the Doomshade vault was lost for thousands of years until a group of sages from the Whitetorch Academy rediscovered it. Only two maps to the door remain after the bloodshed that followed, one that falls into the hands of the characters and one that falls in the Grim Accord's. Opening the vault door requires three keys, and a total of five such keys lie hidden in ancient crypts, forgotten towers, and dead cities guarded by undead horrors. Both the characters and the Accord seek to be the first to acquire three keys and either open the vault or ensure it remains forever closed.

As the characters hunt for one key, the Grim Accord may hunt for another. Soon their paths cross until only one group can hold the final key.

Protecting the Hunted

Farnek Hobknobber, the halfling adventurer, has a price on his head. His business partner, Yoven Treetromper, stole an amulet belonging to Lord Jovendel Ironstag and his family for ten generations and left Farnek in the crosshairs. Rumors say the amulet is the only object able to open the doors of the lost city of Garion and reveal the ancient and powerful artifacts built by the city's founders.

Blaming Farnek for the theft, Lord Jovendel hired the Grim Accord to hunt down the halfling and find the amulet by any means necessary. Farnek hires the characters to protect him from the Accord and find Yoven and the amulet. The elusive Yoven leads them all on a chase across the land to the ruins of Garion. Throughout the adventure, the characters choose the best path to find Yoven and avoid the Grim Accord until they can hope to face them and win at the sealed doors of Garion the Sapphire City.

The Dogs of War

War has raged between the Faigon empire and the Voth city-states for five years. The half-orc general Ikonn Ironmaw hires the characters for a series of missions to destabilize the Voth. Little do the characters know that Avende the Blue Star, elven general of the Voth, hired the Grim Accord to do likewise to Faigon. As the characters engage in missions of sabotage, defense, assassination, rescue, espionage, negotiation, and diplomacy, they find signs of the Grim Accord, until the two groups finally come face-to-face on the battlefield. The confrontation may end in bloodshed, but perhaps the characters can convince the Accord to turn against the Voth and end the war.

Stormborn Tower, Lair of the Grim Accord

These villainous adventures have their own headquarters, a lair known as Stormborn Tower. This location can serve as an adventuring location should the characters approach the Grim Accord on their turf. The characters may travel here to spy on the Grim Accord, do battle with the adventuring band, steal something the Accord possesses, or visit the members of the Grim Accord as quest NPCs.

Stormborn Tower sits at the edge of civilization and the wilds—exactly where the Accord likes it. Once the lair of Zhakius Stormborn, a wizard who took power from the perpetual storms surrounding the tower, the Grim Accord seized it as a legitimate salvage for defeating the mage and the storm-infused warriors that served him. A ceaseless storm cloud surrounds the rocky hilltop where the tower sits, and rumors persist of a powerful arcane machine in the lair's uppermost reaches that draws energy from the storm above. If the Grim Accord has made use of this strange machine, none know of it.

The Grim Accord repurposed many of the tower's chambers, each member building out their portion to suit their desires.

The tower sits atop a deep catacomb beneath its rocky hill, the origins of which predate the building's construction. Multiple layers of primeval tombs, vaults, and ossuaries lead into the earth. Even the Accord hasn't fully explored the depths. Perhaps they fear the horrors lurking in the unhallowed halls and guarding the secret paths leading into the tower's lower levels.

Grim Accord NPC Realm

Though the Grim Accord mainly consists of the four NPCs described in this article, they expand their ranks and hire other mercenaries when the job calls for it. The group keeps some of these other ruffians on retainer, creating a mercenary band that fights larger battles for clients. If you are using the rules in *Kingdoms & Warfare*, you can make the Grim Accord an NPC realm with the following statistics.

Grim Accord

Adventuring party (mercenary company)

Skills
Diplomacy +0
Espionage +1
Lore +2
Operations +3

Defenses
Communications 12
Resolve 14
Resources 13

Size
1 (d4 Power die, 5 domain turns during intrigue)

Title

As the leader of the Grim Accord, Irae Firetouched gains the following title.

Magus Protector. When a creature within 15 feet of Irae is hit with an attack or targeted by a *magic missile* spell, she can use her reaction to cast the *shield* spell using a spell slot of 1st-level or higher. The *shield* spell affects the creature instead of Irae.

Additionally, during a short or long rest, Irae can bolster herself or another creature's defenses with magic. The target gains 10 temporary hit points.

Powers

All officers of the Grim Accord get the following organization powers.

Evil Friends Forever. When a creature within 5 feet of a Grim Accord officer is targeted with an attack, the officer can use a reaction to take a power die from their pool and become the target of the attack instead. The officer adds the number on the power die to their AC against the attack.

Fighting Dirty. Before a Grim Accord officer makes a weapon or spell attack, they can use a bonus action to target one of their opponent's vulnerable spots, making for a more challenging attack but dealing more damage. The officer takes a power die from their domain's pool and subtracts the number on the die from their attack roll. If the attack hits, it deals extra damage equal to 5 × the number on the power die.

Features

Break Their Spirit (1/Intrigue). As a domain bonus action, a Grim Accord officer can make an Operations test against an opposed domain's Resolve. On a success, the target domain's Resolve level decreases by 1, and the Grim Accord's Resolve level increases by 1.

Can We Get a Raise? As a domain action, a Grim Accord officer can make a DC 14 Operations test. On a success, the officer chooses one of the following benefits:

- Until the end of the next battle, each Grim Accord officer has a +1 bonus to weapon attack and damage rolls. (The GM can rule that this bonus ends if it takes too long for the next battle to happen.)
- The next time the Grim Accord musters a cavalry or artillery unit, they can also muster an additional infantry unit.
- Each infantry unit the Grim Accord musters from now until the start of the next battle has its experience increased one level.

The Grim Accord can use this feature multiple times during an intrigue, but must pick a different benefit each time. The DC increases by 2 for each successive use.

Vengeance (Special Unit). A Grim Accord officer can make a DC 14 Operations test as a domain action. On a success, the Grim Accord musters Vengeance, a special unit of merciless warriors.

Survive Till Payday. If the Grim Accord's Resolve level is 2 or higher at the start of a battle, each unit they control has advantage on Power tests to resist battle magic during that battle.

New Warfare Unit Traits

The Vengeance special unit has the following traits:

By Any Means Necessary. As a reaction to this unit failing an Attack or Power test, it can suffer 1 casualty and succeed on that test instead.

An Everchanging Band of Misfits. When this unit is deployed, choose either Adaptable, Eternal, Relentless, Stalwart, or Warbred. This unit gains that trait until the end of battle.





ARMOR OF ZEVELLON

A NEW MAGIC ITEM SET AND ENCOUNTER

by Gabe Hicks

> **"With every moment a person grows older, the more fully they understand how little they know. The more they see that existence is just chaos. And I have lived eons."**
>
> –Zevellon, the Crimson Scorn

The *Armor of Zevellon* is a set of four magic items that make up a suit of deep red armor. The demigod Zevellon placed his essence into the pieces of armor to cheat death, similar to the way a lich conceals its soul in an object. When the pieces are worn together, Zevellon possesses the wearer, turning them into his avatar.

But Zevellon's story began long ago, when the young elf was adopted and raised by humans. Years passed, and Zevellon's family and friends died while he was still in his early life. A few passed suddenly in accidents or battles, most were claimed by old age as time inevitably marched on. The unstoppable force withered all mortals, even long-lived elves like Zevellon. He concluded that death rendered life meaningless. All existence was chaos...unless one could cheat death. There was the answer—immortality was all he needed to bring an end to his fears and give his existence true purpose.

Obsessed with achieving godhood to beat death, Zevellon traveled across the planes, uncovering ancient rituals to fill his body with divine magic. After displaying the gifts of heightened strength and intelligence he could bestow upon others, warriors and mages came to worship at the feet of the self-declared Crimson Scorn, Demigod of Chaos. These warlocks pledged their fealty and received a piece of the Crimson Scorn's power in exchange. Of course, Zevellon never shared all his gifts with his vassals—just enough to tempt them.

Zevellon's greatest secret lies within his armor, which contains his very soul. Over the centuries Zevellon lived, he infused his essence bit by bit into the suit. The Crimson Scorn bound the pieces to each other so that, when worn together, the armor would amplify his might.

Moments before the great paladin Emilia Draeshade thrust her sword into Zevellon's heart, he transferred his life force into the armor. Servants of the Crimson Scorn carried the armor's pieces to different places, hiding them in deep dungeons, and waited for a host worthy of Zevellon. The demigod's essence disguises the armor to look like holy relics until all are worn together, at which point they will return to their true, gloriously red sheen.

Armor of a Demigod

The *Armor of Zevellon* is composed of four pieces, each implanted with the magic and lifeforce of the demigod himself. The armor consists of gauntlets, a helmet, the body, and boots. An illusion makes the armor look like silvery holy relics, but truesight and similar abilities that can pierce illusion magic reveal the suit's fiery red appearance.

The first time you attune to a piece of the armor, you gain the following flaw, "I must seek out the other pieces of this armor at all cost." While you are attuned to and wearing at least one piece of the armor, you gain a +1 bonus to AC for each piece you wear.

All pieces of the armor count as a single item for the purposes of your magic item attunement limit. Once you attune to any piece of the armor, it can't be removed and you can't unattune from it unless you die or the *wish* spell is cast to remove it.



Zevellon's Gaze

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)

This helmet molds to your face and fits comfortably and slightly bolsters your voice's volume when you speak. It appears to be a winged helm of shimmering steel with a gold lining, and a soft yellow glow that emanates from the eyes. However, the helmet's true form is made of fiery red steel with black horns and eyes fuming with smoke.

Zevellon's Gaze has 3 charges. You can spend charges to create the following effects:

- ***Spell Reversal.*** When a creature you can see within 60 feet of you targets you with a spell or magical effect, you can spend 1 charge as a reaction and force the creature to target itself instead. If the spell or magical effect forces a saving throw, the chosen creature must make the saving throw against its own spell save DC. If the spell or magical effect is an attack, the attack roll is rerolled against the creature.
- ***Kneel Before Me.*** As a bonus action, you can spend 2 charges to force each creature of your choice within 30 feet of you that you can see to make a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, a target takes 4d10 psychic damage and falls prone. On a successful save, a target takes half as much damage and doesn't fall prone.
- ***Gaze of Annihilation.*** As an action, you can spend 3 charges to send searing pain coursing through a creature that you can see within 30 feet of you. The target must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw. It takes 7d8 + 30 necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

The helmet regains all spent charges daily at dawn.

Zevellon's Scourge

Armor (plate), legendary (requires attunement)

This plate mail hums with tangible power. In its illusory form, the silvery plate features a large gold cross emblazoned on the chest, and beautiful golden patterns adorning the shoulders. The armor's true form has an open hand with a dagger through it and thorn-covered vines emblazoned on the crimson steel.

As a bonus action, you can activate invisible thorny tendrils that only you can see to extend from the armor until the start of your next turn. While the tendrils are active, attacks against you are made with disadvantage.

In addition, while the tendrils are active, you can make up to three melee weapon attacks with the tendrils as an action. The tendrils have a +10 bonus to attack rolls, a reach of 10 feet and deal 2d10 psychic damage on a hit.

You can activate the tendrils five times, regaining all uses each day at dawn.

Zevellon's Grasp

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)

These gauntlets are warm to the touch. In their illusory form, they appear shiny, gold, and sturdy. In their true form, the fiery gauntlets are tipped with claws.

While you wear both gauntlets and have at least one free hand, you can use a bonus action to create a sword of green flame. While the sword is active, tiny screams sound in the crackling of the fire.

The sword is a one-handed melee weapon that deals 4d6 damage on a hit. Each time you create the sword, you decide if it deals fire or necrotic damage. This weapon is dismissed if you are knocked unconscious or when you use a bonus action to dispel it. You can't let go of the sword until you dismiss it. You can only have one sword at a time.

When you hit a creature with a melee weapon attack while wearing the gauntlets and you don't have a flame sword active, you can choose to deal an extra 2d6 fire damage.

Zevellon's Steps

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)

While you wear these boots, every step you take reverberates with power and grace, and your movement speed increases by 10 feet. The boots subtly increase your height, giving you a more powerful presence. In their illusory form, a radiant glow emanates from the bottom of these silver boots. In their true form, the boots resemble the clawed feet of an Abyssal creature.

In addition, you can use an action or a bonus action to teleport up to 60 feet to an unoccupied space you can see. If you use this property as a bonus action, you must make a DC 17 Intelligence saving throw. On a failure, you take 2d10 necrotic damage but still teleport to your chosen space.

That's a Lot of Items

If you introduce the *Armor of Zevellon* into your game, there is a good chance that one character winds up wearing every item in the set. If this character finds several of the pieces quickly, their power will be unmatched by any other in the party. For some groups, this is fine, but many players may feel that their own characters are underpowered and overshadowed by their friend in the sweet new armor. If you put a few levels of adventuring between each piece of armor and ensure that plenty of other cool magic items go to the other characters, you'll avoid the issue of one character suddenly becoming the star of the show. You'll also better equip the heroes for when their friend becomes possessed by Zevellon and inevitably turns on them.

Completing the Armor of Zevellon

"I am finally returned by a worthy warrior. Let us roil chaos together. I can give you great gifts. All I need from you is a promise. Swear to me that your body is mine when you die. Do so, and for the rest of your mortal life, I shall make you a god. Pledge unto me your corpse. You won't be using it anyway."

When you are attuned to and wearing all the pieces of the armor, Zevellon's spirit revives. He asks to inhabit your body when you die and, in the meantime, to take a piece of your lifeforce in exchange for wielding his power:

- If you agree to allow Zevellon to inhabit your body after your death, your hit point maximum is reduced by 20 and you can wield Zevellon's power (see below). If you die while attuned to the armor, your body returns to life, but Zevellon's soul, and not yours, inhabits the form.
- If you deny Zevellon, you must make a DC 25 Wisdom saving throw. On a success, Zevellon is temporarily subdued but makes the offer again in 1 week. After three successful saving throws to resist Zevellon, Zevellon gives up asking you. On a failed save, Zevellon gains control of your body. You are incapacitated but remain aware. Zevellon uses your statistics, except he has 20 Intelligence, 20 Wisdom, and 24 Charisma, and he can access your knowledge, class features, and proficiencies. This possession lasts for as long as you remain attuned to the armor.



While you wield Zevellon's power and you are wearing and attuned to the full suit of the *Armor of Zevellon*, you gain the following benefits:

- You have advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.
- You are immune to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks.
- When a creature hits you with a melee attack, you can use your reaction to make an attack roll with a +10 bonus against the attacker using the tendrils of *Zevellon's Scourge*. You can perform this reaction whether the tendrils are activated or not, and doing so doesn't activate the tendrils. On a hit, the attacker takes 4d10 necrotic damage and is restrained until the end of its next turn. You can't use this benefit again until you complete a long rest.
- As an action, you can shout and emit a wave of negative energy from the armor. Each creature of your choice within 10 feet of you that can hear you must make a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the creature magically begins to turn to stone and is restrained. The restrained creature must repeat the saving throw at the end of its next turn, becoming petrified on a failure or ending the effect on a success. The petrifica-

tion lasts until the creature is freed by the *greater restoration* spell or other magic. You can't use this benefit again until you complete a long rest.

If Zevellon possesses your body, he gains access to the same benefits.

In addition, if your body dies while possessed by Zevellon or if Zevellon returns to life in your body and is then killed, his soul retreats back into the pieces of armor. If the armor is permanently destroyed (see "Destroying the Armor," below), Zevellon dies and his soul can't be returned to life.

Destroying the Armor

Individual pieces of armor can't be destroyed, but when the armor is united and Zevellon is resurrected by inhabiting the wearer's corpse, the whole suit becomes vulnerable. While Zevellon lives again, a single piece of his armor can be destroyed if it is targeted with a *disintegrate* spell.[1] If a single piece of armor is destroyed, it reforms on Zevellon's body 1d10 days later. If all the pieces of armor are destroyed before a single piece can reform, the suit never reforms.

[1] *Disintegrate* normally doesn't destroy magic items, but that's why Zevellon made this his armor's weakness. Any spellcaster who knows their craft wouldn't bother wasting a 6th-level spell slot trying to destroy a magic item.



Now I'm the Villain

If a character winds up suddenly possessed by Zevellon, that player may feel betrayed and cheated. While those are appropriate emotions for a character in the situation to have, it's not fun for a player to feel that way. When the characters first find pieces of the armor, you may want to bring a player aside and ask them how they feel about their character becoming a villain. If the player likes the idea, you can have them play the part of Zevellon when the moment is right and turn against their friends. If the player hates the idea, the characters can find books or an NPC that can tell them more about the items. Now the quest isn't to find more pieces of the armor, but to find a way to unattune to the armor, or even attune someone else to the magic armor so it can be destroyed.

Likewise, you can hint to a character that the armor is evil before they assemble all its pieces by having it send telepathic messages to them. If you use this approach, the armor plays the part of a pious magic item most of the time, but it does occasionally try to push the character toward more nefarious action, which is a good sign that it's not what it seems.

KEEVIAL'S RAGE

This short adventure for five 6th-level characters serves as the characters' introduction to the *Armor of Zevellon*. Gavadon the Gallant, a priest of the forge god Vukaryion, owns one piece of the *Armor of Zevellon* of your choice (see "Armor Piece," below). He seeks another piece that is guarded by the devil Keevial. The devil is a servant of Zevellon bound to the Mundane World and sworn to protect a piece of the armor until someone presents him with a worthy sacrifice. The priest plans to lure the characters to Keevial as a trade for the devil's piece of armor.

INTRODUCTIONS ON THE ROAD

The characters meet Gavadon (lawful evil, human **priest**) as they pass through a town or out on the road. When the characters first meet Gavadon, read or paraphrase the following:

> A human man wearing simple priest's robes walks with a happy skip toward you. He flashes a smile, saying, "Excuse me! You look like the sort of folks who might have time to help a priest beat the devil."

DEVIL OF A PROBLEM

Gavadon, known to locals as Gavadon the Gallant, introduces himself as a servant of Vukaryion, god of the forge and smithing. He tells the characters that an NPC they know and trust told the priest to seek them out for help with a problem—which is technically true! Gavadon asked around to find heroic adventurers worthy of a sacrifice to Keevial.

The priest claims that Keevial, a powerful devil, stole a destructive relic from the church of Vukaryion. To make matters worse, Keevial constantly sends undead to attack the priest and steal another holy relic Gavadon carries. Gavadon begs the characters to help him stop Keevial and get back the stolen item, promising to reward them with a custom magical item from his forge. "I am a cleric of the forge after all!" This is a lie. Gavadon doesn't plan on rewarding the characters. He plans on them dying.

Gavadon tracked Keevial to a cave that surges with magical energy from a bursting ley line and promises to lead the characters there. If the characters agree to help, the priest takes them to the cave, which is about ten miles away. Gavadon leads the characters with a magical sensor that looks like a compass. The *detect magic* spell reveals that the sensor radiates divination magic. While on the same plane of existence as one or more pieces of the *Armor of Zevellon*, the sensor points in the direction of the closest piece not currently worn by the creature holding it.

ARMOR PIECE

When he meets the party initially, he wears a single piece of the *Armor of Zevellon* chosen or rolled on the Armor Pieces table below.[2]

If asked about the armor, Gavadon claims that the piece he wears is part of a set graced by Vukaryion. He also mentions that the piece Keevial stole belongs to the same collection. Gavadon makes casual conversation during the journey to the cave.

ARMOR PIECES

d4	Armor Piece
1	*Zevellon's Gaze*
2	*Zevellon's Scourge*
3	*Zevellon's Grasp*
4	*Zevellon's Steps*

TRAVELING WITH GAVADON

Gavadon speaks in a calm tone and has a good sense of humor, even cracking the occasional bawdy joke. If there is a cleric or paladin in the party, he asks them directly how it feels to serve their deity. His interest in their response is genuine, for Keevial prefers to devour the devout.

[2] Might we suggest *Zevellon's Steps*? These teleporting booties pair well with a priest who tries to avoid combat and plays the part of a coward.

A character who succeeds on a DC 17 Wisdom (Insight) check knows that Gavadon isn't being entirely honest with the characters about the dangers they face in the cave. During combat, Gavadon takes the Dodge action and tries to keep out of harm's way. If an injured character asks for his help, the priest casts the *cure wounds* spell.

Vukaryion in Your World

You can replace Vukaryion with any god of crafting, the forge, or smithing in your world.

Optionally, in a world with more deities than the players can track, Vukaryion could be a god that Gavadon invented. A successful DC 18 (Intelligence) Religion check reveals that Vukaryion isn't a god mentioned in any popular religious texts. If confronted about this, Gavadon admits Vukaryion isn't actually a god yet but a powerful entity whose voice the priest sometimes hears. The cleric hopes that restoring all the relics of this deity will cause Vukaryion to ascend. This is true, and Vukaryion is simply an alias for Zevellon.

Or Vukaryion could also be a god that Zevellon killed. A character who succeeds on a DC 22 Intelligence (History or Religion) check has read stories that describe the battle. If this information is revealed to Gavadon, the priest gives a sullen nod and says, "My hope is that I can bring him back." Of course, Gavadon means Zevellon here and not Vukaryion.

Blood Skeletons

On the way to the cave, five blood-red horned devil skeletons (use the **minotaur skeleton** stat blocks) rise from the ground and circle the characters as four blood-red bearded devil skeletons (use the **skeleton** stat block) come out of the shadows and draw shortbows. The horned devil skeletons engage the characters in melee as the bearded devil skeletons use their bows to attack at range. The skeletons fight until destroyed.

Chaos Brands

When a skeleton hits a character with an attack, the character must make a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, a red tattoo shaped like a skull with a snake through the eyes appears on the character's body. At your discretion, these brands might appear under clothing and not initially be obvious to the characters. A *detect magic* spell reveals that the tattoos radiate conjuration magic. Attempting to dispel the tattoos with *dispel magic* causes the brands to release a psychic pulse. The caster takes 11 (2d10) psychic damage and the spell fails. A *remove curse* spell, however, does remove the brand.

A character who succeeds on a DC 20 Intelligence (Religion) check knows the symbol is one used by Zevellon, an ancient and dead demigod of chaos and magic.

Gavadon's Reaction

When the skeletons appear, Gavadon cries out, "Oh no! Not again!" During the fight he moans, "When will these accursed things stop hunting me?" as he cowers in fear. If asked, the priest says that the skeletons are servants of Keevial attempting to steal his piece of the armor. A successful DC 17 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that Gavadon isn't being honest with the characters. He animated the skeletons himself days ago using a special ritual created by Zevellon and set this trap to sell the deception that Keevial is after him.

Gavadon Gone

If the characters refuse to trust Gavadon, the **priest** lashes out and attacks. He carries a yellow diamond elemental gem that he breaks to conjure an **earth elemental**. Even with this ally, Gavadon is likely no match for the characters, but given that they know his plan and his desperation to get the next piece of armor, he tries to kill them so they can't stop him or ask more questions. He fights to the death.

When Gavadon dies, the characters can take his piece of the *Armor of Zevellon* and his magic sensor that points the way to the next closest piece of armor. A character who attunes to the armor gains the flaw described above, which makes them want to seek more pieces of armor, which could lead them to Keevial's cave. If Gavadon is dead when the characters enter the cave, ignore the boxed text in "Into the Fire" and simply have Keevial awake and attack the characters, shouting they are not worthy of Zevellon's prize.

Into the Fire

The cave looks normal from the outside, but a *detect magic* spell reveals that its entrance emanates an aura of conjuration magic. When the characters step into the cave, they are transported into a hellish pocket dimension. This demiplane is a cave with a 60-foot radius and a ceiling that is 20 feet high.

> Smoke and ash fill the air with a toxic scent. The obsidian rocks that form the walls, ceiling, and floor of the cave are riddled with cracks that glow with crimson light. It didn't look like this from the outside.
>
> At the center of the circular cavern, a blood-red sphere of energy hums, surrounding a sleeping chain devil that hovers in midair.
>
> Four barbed iron chains hang from the ceiling and coil on the floor of the cave.
>
> Gavadon whispers, "What's the plan? That's Keevial, but I don't see the relic."

The sphere around Keevial, a **chain devil**, has the same properties as one created by the *resilient sphere* spell. The ceiling in this chamber is 20 feet high.

Sacrifice Accepted

After the characters have a moment to investigate the chamber and their surroundings, Keevial opens his eyes and a wave of crimson emanates from the sphere of energy around him. Each creature in the cave that is not a fiend must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become cursed for 10 minutes as the negative energy of the Lower Planes seeps into its body. A creature with a Chaos Brand tattoo (see "Chaos Brands," above) has disadvantage on the saving throw. While cursed, the creature makes attack rolls and saving throws with disadvantage. If a creature has the red tattoo and also fails the save, it gains a level of exhaustion as well. A *remove curse* spell or similar magic can remove the curse, but not the exhaustion (which must be restored through rest or a *greater restoration* spell or similar magic). Any creature attuned to a piece of the *Armor of Zevellon* is immune to this effect.

If Gavadon is still with the characters, read or paraphrase the following boxed text. Otherwise, the devil immediately dispels the sphere and attacks (see "Combat," below).

> The devil covered in chains stares out from the sphere as Gavadon kneels before him. With glowing eyes, Keevial speaks in three discordant voices at once, saying, "Your offering. I find it acceptable." Gavadon smiles. "Zevellon will be pleased."

A new piece of the *Armor of Zevellon* (chosen or rolled on the Armor Pieces table above) appears on Gavadon's body. As he stands, both pieces of armor momentarily reveal their true form and then, with a thought, Keevial dismisses the priest from the pocket dimension.

> As Gavadon disappears, Keevial snears. "Pathetic. That priest is not truly worthy of Zevellon's prize! But I will enjoy this sacrifice all the same. None shall claim the demigod's armor while I walk this world."

Combat. Keevial dispels the sphere as two **bearded devils** appear at his side. The same piece of the *Armor of Zevellon* he appeared to have given to Gavadon appears on his form.[3] This is the true piece of the armor. Gavadon has a fake.

The fiends attack the characters. The chains on the ceiling start combat already under the effects of Keevial's Animate Chains action. Each chain is 200 feet long. The bearded devils stay close to the chain devil and defend him from close melee attacks, while Keevil uses his chains to attack from a distance, using the features of his piece of the *Armor of Zevellon* as often as he can. The devils fight the characters until destroyed.

Keevial's Lair Actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Keevial takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects; Keevial can't use the same effect two rounds in a row.

- Each devil can teleport 30 feet to an unoccupied space it can see. After teleporting, Keevial unleashes a wave of red energy from his body that washes over all creatures in the cave. Each creature in the area that isn't a devil must make a DC 15 Strength saving throw or fall prone. Creatures with Chaos Brands have disadvantage on the saving throw.

[3] Might we suggest *Zevellon's Gaze*? The helmet looks so good on Keevial and the Gaze of Annihilation feature is oh so fun!

- A 10-foot-radius column of black fire erupts from the ground at a point Keevial can see. Each creature in the area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 11 (2d10) fire damage and becoming blinded until initiative count 20 of the following round on a failed save, or taking only half as much damage without becoming blinded on a successful one.
- Keevial's chains whip through the chamber. Four creatures of Keevial's choice must make a DC 15 Strength saving throw. On a failure, the creature takes 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage and is moved to an unoccupied space of Keevial's choice that the devil can see within the cave. The creature can't be moved vertically using this lair action.

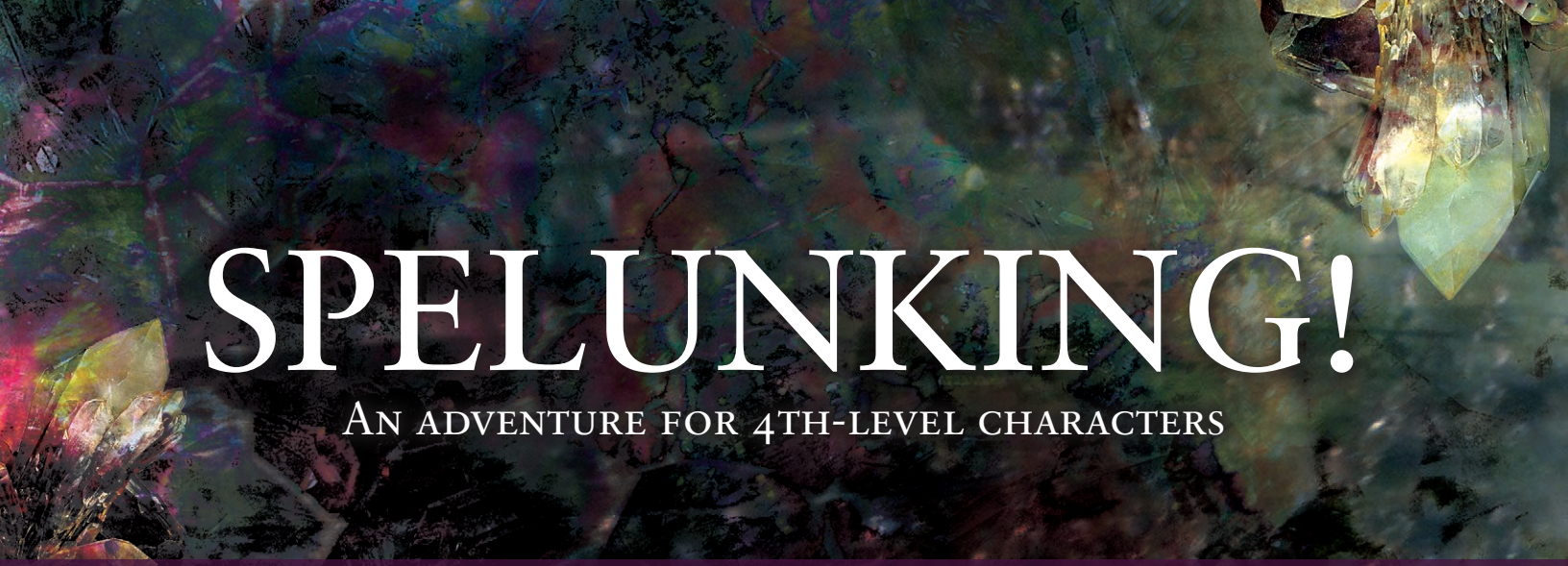
Killing Keevial. When Keevial is destroyed, his form melts away, and the characters can claim his piece of the armor. Any characters with red tattoos find that the marks disappear after the devil is destroyed.

He's Dying Too Quickly

If the characters easily dispatch Keevial within 2 rounds of combat, you can institute this change to make the combat more challenging. As the devil falls, he shrieks a prayer for help to Zevellon. A white-hot fire surrounds Keevial, burning the flesh from his bones. Keevial rises from the fire, rejuvenated as a bone devil with his hit points restored—and the battle begins anew.

Continuing the Adventure

It is up to the characters to decide what to do with the piece of the *Armor of Zevellon*. They might wield it themselves, research the demigod, look for more pieces, or—if Gavadon survived—try to hunt down the priest for answers and revenge. If they don't search for Gavadon, he comes looking for their piece of the armor soon enough. Only this time he's stronger, nastier, and has aid from other cultists of Zevellon.



SPELUNKING!

An adventure for 4th-level characters

by H.H. Carlan

In the woodland town of Pirn, the residents and travelers enjoy spelunking in the local Summerset Caverns. Word spread quickly of the newly discovered Crystal Grove, a cavern of beautiful crystals—some even the size of a dragon's head! But a group of teenage spelunkers hasn't returned from an expedition to the cavern, and their parents worry something nefarious is afoot.

Spelunking! is an adventure designed for four to five 4th-level characters. The characters spelunk, or explore, the local caverns looking for the Crystal Grove. However, the grove is protected by a cryad, a magical creature composed of crystal dust who harvests the crystals that grow from bodies.

Adventure Summary

Throughout this adventure, characters investigate the disappearance of four teenagers and deal with an ancient druidic foe deep in the Crystal Grove.

- The characters arrive in Pirn, learn of the missing teenagers, and hear rumors of a druid named Fawning Summerset.
- The characters spelunk the Summerset Caverns to find the teenagers, facing threats and twisting tunnels in their descent to the Crystal Grove.
- The characters face Fawning Summerset, a dangerous cryad, to save the teenagers and prevent Fawning from stealing their lives for her crystal haven.

Welcome to Pirn

Pirn is a typical woodland settlement. You can easily replace it with a similar town from your setting. Beautiful buildings constitute the town, which contains peculiar townsfolk who happily greet newcomers—if you have coin, of course. The town is the last stop for tourists eager to explore the nearby caves.

Upon entering the town, Waylon Bonesforth (**veteran**, he/him), the sheriff and mayor of Pirn, greets the characters:

"The good people of Pirn welcome you to our secluded woodland paradise! Need a drink? Perhaps the Brewmaster's Table is the place for you! Or a soft pillow after a long ride? Long Knight's Sleep has vacancies! Don't be shy and don't be thrifty with tips, and we will be happy to serve you!"

Waylon Bonesforth always encourages new people to take a drink at the Brewmaster's Table and occupy a room at the Long Knight's Sleep, as he owns both establishments. If the characters ask about the Summerset Caverns, he mentions they are temporarily closed to novice spelunkers, but thinks the characters would enjoy a visit to the caves. If pressed, the mayor says that a recent earthquake seems to have shifted things in the caves, but it's truly nothing to worry about. A character who makes a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check realizes the mayor is worried that the incident could discourage tourism and is downplaying the danger in the caves.



Notable NPCs

There are several businesses in Pirn where the characters can find all the expected goods and services, run by friendly NPCs.

The town's notable NPCs include the following characters:

- *Calliope Daydream (She/Her).* An aged elf **scout**, Calliope is a long-term resident of Pirn. She knows more about the local area than anyone in town, as she frequently spelunks the caverns and explores the woods. Calliope usually spends her nights at the Brewmaster's Table and her days teaching survival classes to tourists and locals. *"The mountains and caverns are just as alive as the trees. Maybe more so."*
- *Fern Woodsmith (She/Her).* An older human **commoner**, Fern is the primary bartender at the Brewmaster's Table. She has known Calliope for decades, and they enjoy a drink together every night. *"Every adventure should begin with a shot!"*
- *Derek Nestly (He/Him).* This elf **commoner** owns Derek's Tackle and Supplies, a general store that sells spelunking and camping supplies. Derek is kind but always looking to sell more inventory. He happily trades gems or rare items if someone doesn't have coin to spend. *"You never know when you need a tent and torches!"*
- *Everly Westmore (She/Her).* A human **commoner**, Everly is the manager of the Long Knight's Sleep and chain-smokes violet cigarettes in an ivory cigarette holder. She is a no-funny-business leader, speaking quickly and without pleasantries. Her personality is rare in Pirn. *"No refunds."*
- *Concerned Parents.* Zarah (he/him) and Drell (she/her) Reedsnip and Virna (she/her) and Knox (he/him) Twell are the human **commoner** parents of missing teenagers. They're all quite concerned about their kids.
- *Missing Children.* Ogin (he/him) and Vold (they/them) Reedsnip and Syrah (she/her) and Poli (he/him) Twell are teens who went missing in Summerset Caverns.

No Time to Dawdle

If you're short on time, the introduction and exploration of the town can be skipped in favor of jumping right into the adventure. Waylon Bonesforth realizes the characters are adventurers when they enter the town. He introduces them to the parents of the missing children (see "Recent Mystery") then goes to get Calliope Daydream to meet them. Calliope gives the characters the information in "Tale of Fawning Summerset" as they travel to the caverns.

Rumors of Fawning Summerset

While the characters enjoy a drink at the Brewmaster's Table, check in at the Long Knight's Sleep, or buy equipment at Derek's Tackle and Supplies, different NPCs of your choice share tidbits of the town's history. They might relay the following information, including rumors about the mysterious Fawning Summerset:

- "Did you know the forest was guarded by a druid circle? They disappeared way before Pirn's founders showed up."
- "An old story claims that the druids once had a powerful leader named Fawning Summerset. Her burial mound is supposed to be hidden in the caverns. Hence their name."
- "My grandpa, gods rest his soul, told me that Fawning Summerset, a druid who ruled these woods long ago, was murdered by other druids jealous of her power. She might have treasure buried in the caverns."
- "If you go down into the caverns, beware! They say Fawning Summerset's ghost still haunts the place … We actually just tell the little ones that to keep them from going off into the caves alone."

Tale of Fawning Summerset

Alternatively, if you're short on time or prefer a more direct approach, you could have one NPC of your choice relay this information:

> "According to legends handed down by Pirn's founders, Fawning Summerset was one of several druids who guarded the woods in this area long ago. Gifted in magic, Fawning had power the other druids jealously craved. One moonless night, they trapped her in the caverns, stabbed her in the back, and left her for dead! Sprawled out in the darkness, blood seeping from her wounds as she grew weaker with every breath, Fawning swore vengeance against her fellow druids. To escape her dark curse, they gave up being wardens of the forest and founded this simple town. But the local caverns bear her name and curse still. So if you go into Summerset Caverns, beware! You might see her ghost!"

The NPC ends the tale with a laugh, clearly thinking it's rubbish. While people sometimes report seeing a ghost in the caverns, no one has ever had any trouble inside. Well, no one until recently…

Recent Mystery

As the characters explore the town, many of the NPCs they interact with mention the missing teens and explain that the concerned parents are looking for adventurers to rescue their kids. If the characters don't seek out the parents, Zarah, Drell, Virna, and Knox approach the characters with apprehension and desperation at the Brewmaster's Table, the Long Knight's Sleep, or any store they might be lingering in.

Drell dabs his eyes with a handkerchief as Zarah, his wife, explains that their twins, Ogin and Vold, are missing, along with their friends Syrah and Poli, who are Virna and Knox's children. Three days ago, the teenagers went into the caves to find the Crystal Grove, a newly discovered cavern of enormous crystals that everyone wants to see. The teens never returned. The parents went looking for them, but the once-safe tunnels of the caves were suddenly cramped and twisted! They almost got lost and turned back, resolving to pay more experienced folk to find their children.

> "You see, the kids, they're just at the beginning of their lives. We encourage them to explore and have fun, but we've always taught them to be respectful of their environments and the creatures in the caves. But now those caves are a hostile place. Would you consider looking for them? They know how to survive. We're sure they're still alive in there. We could offer 100 gold apiece! It may not be much to folks like you, but it's everything we've managed to save to give our kids a better life."

If the characters refuse the mission for such a low rate, the parents privately discuss options and approach again with deeds to their homes in exchange for finding their children.

If the characters accept the offer, the parents direct them to the bar at the Brewmaster's Table, where they can find a local spelunker and expert—Calliope Daydream, who taught the missing children how to safely explore the caverns. If anyone can guide the characters to the Crystal Grove, it's her.

Talking to Calliope

Calliope Daydream offers to look for the teenagers with the characters. She says that she can guide them to the Crystal Grove, but mentions that she isn't a warrior, which is why she hasn't gone looking for the teens on her own. In combat, she mostly takes the Disengage, Dodge,

or Help action, keeping the characters between herself and any enemies and fighting only when cornered. If she can reach a dying character, she attempts a Wisdom (Medicine) check to stabilize them. She also might try to free characters who are restrained or otherwise immobilized.

Before leaving Pirn, Calliope encourages the characters to consider buying special supplies for spelunking, specifically a hatchet and several more rounds of rope, at Derek's Tackle and Supplies.

What Changed the Caves?

If a character wants to know what changed the caves so suddenly, they can make a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana or Nature) check. On a success, that character recalls that when someone betrays and murders a powerful druid, the dying spellcaster can ask for the spirits of nature to preserve them. If the spirits answer, a crystal cocoon encases the druid, turning them into a cryad, a crystalline construct that seeks vengeance upon all humanoids. A cryad captures people and uses their bodies as fertilizer to grow a garden of glowing, necromantic crystals. Unsealing a cryad's cocoon causes the nearby earth to shift and change into a more dangerous defense of their crystal gardens.

If no character knows this information, Calliope tells the characters about cryads after they face a couple challenges in the cave, as she knows the lore and starts to realize what may be happening. If the characters don't know about Fawning Summerset, Calliope shares her story, as well (see "Tale of Fawning Summerset").

Spelunking

When the characters are ready to find the teenagers, Calliope meets them on the edge of town. The 2-mile hike up to the cavern is a pleasant walk with a slight grade. But the entrance to the cavern is a craggy 20-foot-deep shaft. When Calliope sees the hole, she explains:

> "This shaft wasn't always here. Up until those kids went missing, it was just a cave mouth you could walk into. Now it's a straight drop. Something weird is happening... you ready for this?"

Characters who climb down the shaft must succeed on a DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check or fall while making the climb down, landing prone and taking 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage. Characters who use rope or other climbing equipment have advantage on this check.

Calliope as a Guide

The caverns are a twisting network of tunnels that Calliope guides the characters through. There are branching paths, shafts, and pits. Most lead to dead ends, but Calliope always picks the right path to get the characters closer to the grove.

Calliope worries about the missing teens and is grateful for the characters' willingness to rescue them. She is serious and apprehensive, but she moves carefully and gracefully through the tunnels. Ever the teacher, Calliope sometimes lectures the characters about safety while traveling through the caves and offers wilderness survival tips and platitudes like "Always take a buddy" and "Sometimes you find the ooze. Sometimes the ooze finds you."

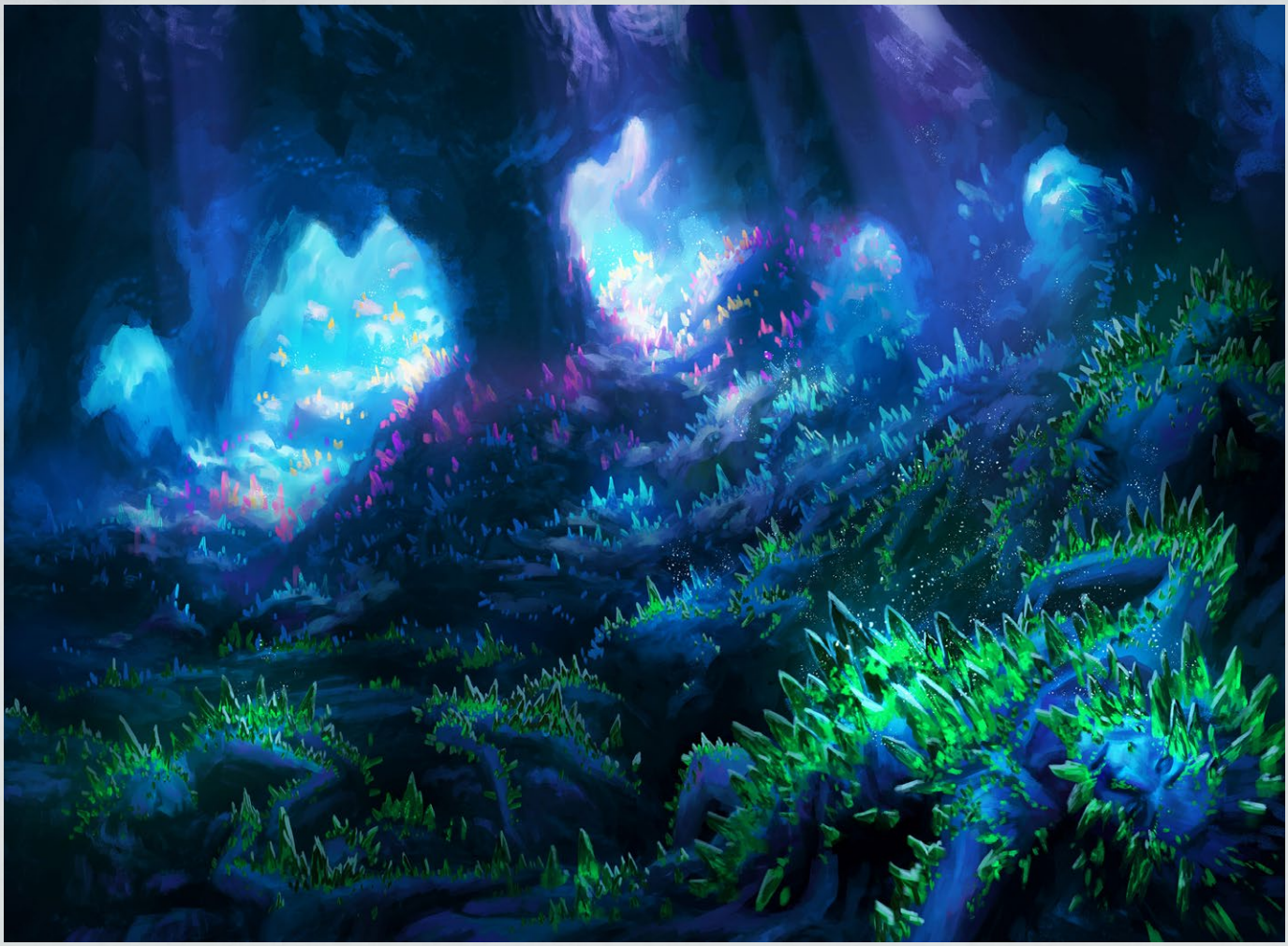
If Calliope dies, the characters can still find their way through the caves to the Crystal Grove, but they are more likely to get lost (see "Between Encounters").

Random Encounters

Each hour the characters stop to rest in the cave, roll a d20. On a result of 12 or higher, they experience a random encounter from the Random Encounters table. The cryad's cocoon unsealing shifted the caverns and cut many of these creatures off from their homes and food sources. These creatures fight to the death and attempt to devour the characters.

Random Encounters

d4	Encounter
1	1d3 + 3 **giant spiders**
2	1d2 + 1 **gricks**
3	1d2 **phase spiders**
4	1d2 **black puddings**



CAVERN FEATURES

The caverns have a range of spaces, from open rooms with high ceilings to narrow crawl spaces. Unless otherwise mentioned, there are no light sources in the caverns, save for those the characters bring with them. If the characters have no light sources, Calliope gives them three torches.

The caverns' stone is a combination of grey and green minerals, oxidizing from the air. Stalactites and stalagmites jut out across the floors and ceilings, almost as if they are protecting the caverns from wanderers. Climbing the walls of the caverns requires a successful DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check, which is made with advantage if the character uses climbing equipment.

As Calliope guides the characters through the cavern, describe the tight spaces and strange sights they encounter. You can use one of the following descriptions each time the characters travel the tunnels from one challenge to the next:

- A tunnel wall contains a faded carving of three stags goring a wolf with their antlers above a phrase in Druidic that reads "The final resting place of Fawning Summerset."
- Dripping echoes down a yawning tunnel that divides into four halls. Rubble blocks three of the paths, and the remaining tunnel shines with eerie green stone on the walls.
- Calliope stands in the middle of a cavern, her eyes darting around at the various tunnel exits, her brow furrowed. "There used to be a shaft that led up to the surface here." The elf shakes her head and thinks for a moment about which way to go. (If the characters wish to help with the navigation of the caves, see "Between Encounters.")
- Calliope's torchlight illuminates a wall ahead covered in inky black shadow. As she gets closer, the shadow, some sort of ooze, slides into a crack in the wall and disappears. (Consider running an encounter with a black pudding if you use this description.)
- Sticky white strands of rope hang from the ceiling, an abandoned web meant for creatures the size of a horse. (Consider running an encounter with a giant spider if you use this description.)

Calliope makes several comments about tunnels getting tighter and having extra bends and stalagmites than last time she was in the caves.

CAVERN ENCOUNTERS

Most of the caverns are not dangerous, but the characters encounter several terrain obstacles they must overcome. Each obstacle has a map and description.

BETWEEN ENCOUNTERS

Each time the characters approach a new encounter in the caves, have them make a group DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check to find their way through the caves. If Calliope is with the characters, she turns up to two failures into successes whenever the group makes this check.

If the group succeeds, they move through the caverns without incident. If the group fails, they get lost in the tunnels and spend a lot of time backtracking. Each character must make a DC 10 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a character gains a level of exhaustion.

TIME SAVER

If you're short on time, you can skip any of the following challenges in this section. If you do, the characters will have more of their hit points, spells, and resources for the final confrontation with the cryad, but that's not necessarily a bad thing!

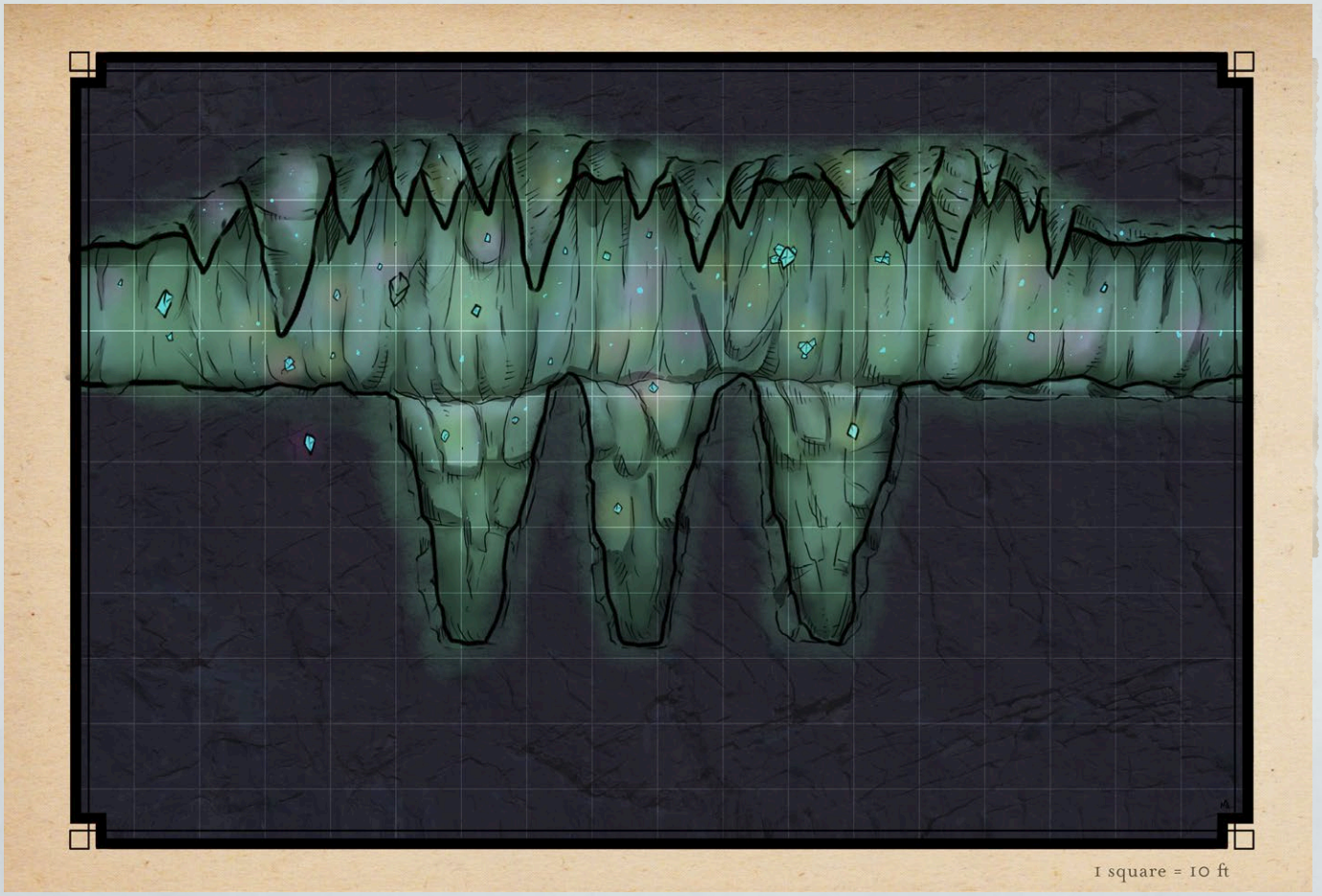
THE GORGE

You can use the Gorge map to run this encounter. After about a half an hour of following Calliope in the caverns, the characters enter this chamber from the west and come to their first obstacle.

> A narrow tunnel gives way to a much wider cavern that smells of guano and glitters with a few tiny crystals embedded scattershot across the walls. Small drips echo through the chamber as water falls from the stalactites into a great gorge that slashes across your path like a deep, dark scar. Two prominent pillars of rock jut out from the middle of the gorge floor and could form a path across for daring athletes. "We need to get to the other side," Calliope says as she sets her jaw with determination.

The gorge before the characters is 80 feet across and 40 feet deep.

Crossing the Gorge. If a character attempts to hop across the pillars to the other side of the gorge, they must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or lose their balance as they leap, falling to the bottom of the gorge, landing prone, and taking 14 (4d6) bludgeoning



damage from the fall. A character could also attempt to climb the cavern walls to cross to the other side, or climb down to the bottom of the gorge, walk across, then climb back up (see "Cavern Features"). A character who fails a Strength (Athletics) check made to climb the walls or down into or out of the gorge falls 40 feet to the gorge's floor.

A young **roper** with 60 hit points hides in the ceiling among the stalactites between the pillars. The first time a character attempts to leap across the chasm using the pillars, the roper attacks, using its tendrils to reel the character up to the ceiling for a feast and grapple then drop any rescuers into the gorge. If the characters instead climb down to the bottom of the gorge to cross, the roper moves to the east side of the gorge and waits for them to climb up. A character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 15 or higher notices the roper moving across the ceiling. The roper fights until reduced to 30 hit points, then flees along the ceiling.

Treasure. If a character succeeds on a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check, they notice gear at the bottom of the gorge. Roll a d6 and use the Gorge Treasure table to determine what the characters find.

Gorge Treasure

d6	Item
1	Two backpacks with 1d6 rations each
2	*Morrigy's Field Journal*, an incomplete journal for foraging mushrooms
3	A silvered dagger
4	A pouch containing 20d10 sp
5	Two half-full waterskins
6	Four unused 50-foot-long coils of hemp rope

In addition, the characters find ***goggles of night*** among the belongings. Calliope informs the characters that the gear they found belongs to the teens. If the characters rescue them, the teens allow the heroes to keep what they found as thanks.

Skimming Across the Stones

You can use the Crossing the Stones map to run this encounter. The characters come upon this spot about twenty minutes after they leave the gorge cavern. They enter the chamber from the south.

> Calliope crawls through a low chamber on her hands and knees, motioning for you to follow. As you join her in the tight tunnel, dark standing water splashes up into your mouth, and the strong, bitter taste of mineralization overwhelms your senses. The short crawl space opens into a longer tunnel with a deep pool of this opaque water. Six smooth black stones, each topped with a cluster of crystals, dot a path across the pool to a dry opening on the other side of the narrow cavern.

The opaque standing water in this chamber is 2 feet deep, and the ceiling is 10 feet high. Entering the water attracts the attention of two **swarms of quippers** that live in the pool. The fish attack any creature that disturbs the waters, save the mimic, which they consider a predator. These quippers are cave fish—they have blindsight out to a radius of 60 feet and are blind beyond that radius.

South Stone. The southernmost stone in the water is a disguised **mimic**. Being partially submerged in the water for so long has given the mimic chills. A character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 15 or higher notices the mimic shiver occasionally in very short bursts. Creatures who notice the mimic can choose to avoid it while crossing the stones. The mimic waits for a character to touch it or fall in the water, then attacks, fighting to the death.

Crossing the Stones. The five northernmost stones in the pool have been smoothed over with sediment, creating an unusually slick surface. A character who attempts to hop across the stones must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to do so. On a failed check, they fall into the water. A character who doesn't choose to avoid the stone-disguised mimic lands on top of it.



1 square = 5 ft

Illusion of Daylight

You can use the Illusion of Daylight map to run this encounter. The characters come upon this spot, where a crystal produces a veil of light that obscures a pit in their path, about ten minutes after they leave the standing water cavern. They enter this tunnel from the west.

> Moving through a wide tunnel, you notice a beam of brilliant light coming through a crystal embedded in the ceiling ahead. You have only seen darkness and torchlight since entering the Summerset Caverns, but now this solid prism of blinding rainbow light obstructs any view of the path ahead.

The ceiling in this chamber is 15 feet high.

Light Crystal. The crystal embedded in the ceiling is 5 feet in diameter and extends up to the surface, where it catches the light and then magnifies it. The crystal's structure even enhances moonlight into a brilliant rainbow.

A *detect magic* spell reveals that the crystal radiates an aura of evocation magic. The crystal has AC 17, 50 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. If the crystal is destroyed, it explodes in a burst of brilliant light and each creature in the chamber must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or take 9 (2d8) radiant damage and become blinded for 1 hour. Destroying the crystal makes the light disappear.

Pit. Just beyond the veil of light is a 15-foot-deep pit with a 20-foot-square opening. A **gelatinous cube** with a climbing speed of 15 feet waits at the bottom of the pit and automatically engulfs any creature that falls into it. If two creatures pass over the pit without falling inside, the cube moves up over the opening and attempts to engulf the next creature to cross.

A character who makes a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check discovers the pit on the other side of the light before crossing over. If a character doesn't notice the pit, they fall into it.

Crystal Grove Entrance. The entrance to the Crystal Grove is only about a five-minute walk from the pit.



THE CRYSTAL GROVE

The small tunnel leading into the Crystal Grove is 3 feet wide, 3 feet tall, 5 feet long, and 4 feet off the ground. When the characters enter the tunnel, read or paraphrase the following boxed text:

> Vibrating energy in this darkened cavern flows through the air, creating a gentle hum of growth that-echoes across the walls. The hum builds to a loud groan, then almost a scream, a harrowing greeting. As the volume increases, clusters of white, pink, green, yellow, and blue crystals glow with bright light, forming a cohesive fabric of sparkling destiny that covers the ground's rolling mounds. Some crystals are just a bit more than a speck of dust, while others are as thick as trees with heights over eight feet tall.

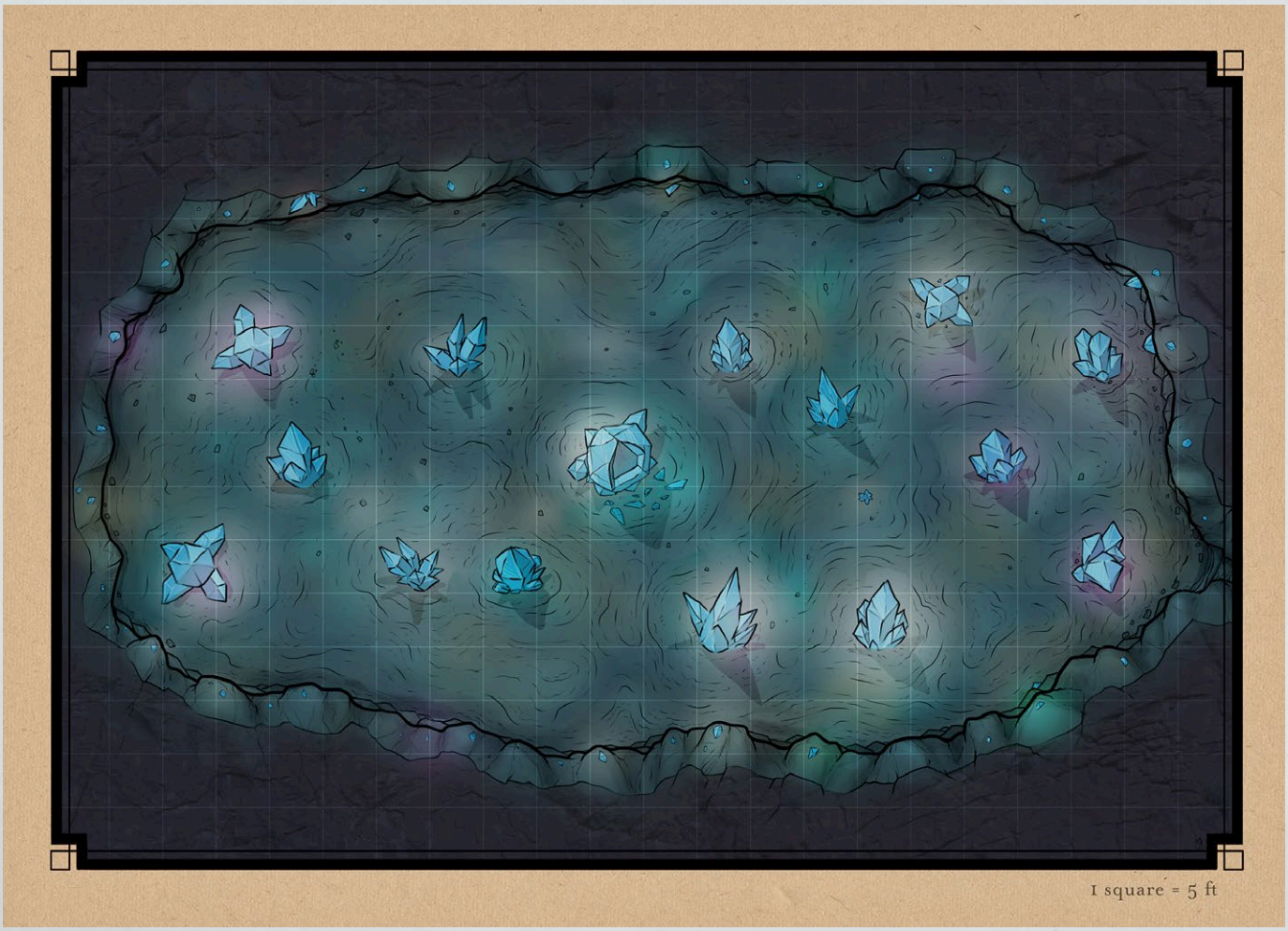
You can use the Crystal Grove map to run this encounter. The entrance to the cavern is on the east wall. The ceiling in this room is 15 feet high and the crystals provide bright light throughout the entire area.

THE ENVIRONMENT

The largest crystal at the center of the chamber is a cloudy white color, and one side of it has been smashed open. The inside is hollow. A character who knows about cryads (see the "What Changed the Caves?" sidebar) knows that this enormous hollow crystal likely held one. The teens broke the crystal open, causing the changes to Summerset Caverns.

A *detect magic* spell reveals that the crystals in this chamber radiate auras of necromancy magic. The four southern-most Medium crystals (see below) have mounds covered in tiny crystals beneath them.

A character who makes a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation or Nature) check can tell that the mounds underneath the largest crystals are the sleeping bodies of the four missing teens (who are noncombatants). The crystals slowly drain the life of Ogin and Vold Reedsnip and Syrah and Poli Twell. A character who examines a crystal mound and wipes away the dust notices the teens beneath. When this happens, all the teens wake and speak in unison, urging the characters to flee.



> "The children you know are gone—trapped, one with the crystal. We pay penance to Fawning's grove, make something beautiful out of our dying sacks. Go! Leave! Leave us to the crystal, or join its growth forever!"

The teens can't move on their own while covered in crystals. After the teens speak and while the cryad is alive, a character that touches a crystal-covered teen must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or take 5 (1d10) necrotic damage as the crystals siphon some of their life energy.

A character who knows about cryads knows that destroying the cryad, a successful DC 14 Wisdom check with jeweler's or mason's tools made as an action, or a *lesser restoration* spell or similar magic causes the crystals surrounding the teens to break, releasing the children from their magic and severing their connection to Fawning. Each teen weighs 500 pounds while covered in crystals, but is not attached to the floor and can be dragged out of the room by a creature with a Strength score of 17 or higher.



The Cryad

At the west end of the chamber, **Fawning Summerset**, a cryad, watches the area and feeds off the energy from her growing crystals. Her False Appearance trait allows her to remain undetected while motionless. When the characters interact with the mounds, she comes to life and attacks, fighting until destroyed.

Fawning stands just over eight feet tall and is composed of a fine crystal powder. When she springs to action, her face appears and limbs grow from her body. Her eyes shine in the light and appear clear like water.

Engaging the Enemy

Once the characters interact with the cryad's crystals, she attacks and can't be convinced to stop her advance until their bodies grow replacement crystals for those they disturbed. There is no way to peacefully resolve conflict with the cryad.

Fawning uses Blinding Light at the start of combat then charges into melee with two characters near one another, using Multiattack to target both, attempting to knock them prone. She then uses her Fertilize lair action. Once she has some control of the battlefield, she deals as much damage as possible to the characters with more slam attacks and her Shake lair action. If the characters try to pin her down, she can use Crystal Stride to escape or cast spells to attack them at a distance.

Medium Crystals

Fawning's Crystal Stride trait and Faerie Lights lair action refer to Medium or larger crystals in the grove. Any crystal on the Crystal Grove map that is large enough to take up at least 1 square counts as a Medium or larger crystal.

Each crystal has AC 17, 18 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. Destroying a crystal also deals 10 damage to Fawning. A character proficient in Arcana or Nature knows that destroying a cryad's larger crystals harms the cryad.

She Won't Harm Teens

Fawning doesn't harm the teens with any of her actions. She sees their bodies are precious resources and chooses to keep them alive if she can.

Escaping

If the characters flee the encounter with Fawning, they can escape through the hole in the wall that they used to enter. There are no other exits in the cavern. Medium creatures can squeeze through it. Small and Tiny creatures can move through with no problem.

If the characters free the teenagers, they willingly follow any of the character's instructions. Fawning can peer and reach through the hole, but she is too large and is unable to pass through.

Treasure

The large crystal that held Fawning's form for so long has a *staff of swarming insects*, the druid's old staff, embedded in its still-standing walls. If the cryad dies, the crystals in the chamber immediately crumble to dust and reveal the staff.

Conclusion

If the characters free the teens and leave Fawning's chamber, Ogin and Vold shout in unison once the group is safely out of the Crystal Grove.

> "Quick! There's another way out!"

Thanks to their connection to the cryad, the twins know of a nearby secret exit that is blocked by a rock, easily slid out of the way, revealing a path down to Pirn.

If the characters are unable to heal the teenagers and carry them from the cavern back to Prin, a healer in town restores the children. Once restored and safe, the children explain to the characters that they found the grove and broke open the crystal because they thought they saw a staff inside it!

If the teenagers are returned, their parents and the grateful townsfolk offer their thanks and promised rewards to the characters. If the characters refuse the reward from the parents, Waylon Bonesforth pays it instead.

The mayor holds a party in the characters' honor at the Brewmaster's Table and declares:

> "Good night! The sight of these returned children brings joy to our hearts! What can we do to repay you? Will anything ever be sufficient for returning our kids to us?"

Everly Westmore offers the characters free rooms for life! Fern Woodsmith promises free drinks for life! The children also allow the characters to keep any of the equipment they found in the gorge (see "Crossing the Gorge"). If the characters also killed Fawning, Waylon gives them an extra reward of 250 gp each for "saving the town's tourist industry."

If the characters leave Pirn, the mayor and the parents stand in the road and wave goodbye, the sun setting on the recent spelunkers, crystal dust billowing off their clothes.

If the characters return without the teenagers, the parents go into mourning for their lost children. They still pay the characters as promised, but there are no offers for free drinks and nights at the inn.

If the characters die facing Fawning, their bodies serve as fertilizer for more crystals.

Advancement

If the characters successfully complete this adventure, they earn 1,900 experience points each, which is half of what they need to advance to level 5.

Fawning Summerset

Large construct, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 149 (13d10 + 78)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	15 (+2)	22 (+6)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Int +4, Wis +6

Skills Intimidation +3, Nature +4, Perception +6

Damage Resistances cold, fire, thunder

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, deafened, petrified, poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages understands Common and Druidic but can't speak

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Proficiency Bonus +3

Blinding Light (1/Day). As a bonus action, Fawning fills the Crystal Grove with dazzling light created by her crystals. Each creature of her choice in the grove must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or be blinded until the start of her next turn. In addition, Fawning casts the *mirror image* spell, requiring no components.

Crystal Stride (1/Turn). Fawning can use 10 feet of her movement to enter a crystal within her reach and appear in an unoccupied space of her choice within 5 feet of another crystal in the grove. Both crystals must be Medium or larger.

False Appearance. While Fawning remains motionless, she is indistinguishable from a normal crystal.

Immutable Form. Fawning is immune to any spell or effect that would alter her form.

Innate Spellcasting. Fawning's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 14). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

1/day each: *dispel magic, moonbeam, spike growth*

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Fawning fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Actions

Multiattack. Fawning makes two slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage and the target must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Legendary Actions

Fawning can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Fawning regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Move. Fawning moves up to half her speed.
Slam. Fawning makes one slam attack.
Spell (Costs 2 Actions). Fawning casts a spell.

Lair Actions

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Fawning can take one lair action to cause one of the following effects; she can't use the same lair action two rounds in a row:

Faerie Lights. The crystals in the grove produce a burst of brilliant purple light. Each creature within 5 feet of a Medium or larger crystal must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw. Fawning automatically succeeds on this save. On a failed save, the creature sheds dim purple light in a 10-foot radius until initiative count 20 of the next round. Any attack roll against an affected creature or object has advantage if the attacker can see it, and the affected creature or object can't benefit from being invisible.

Fertilize. Fawning uses prone bodies to grow new crystals. All prone creatures in the Crystal Grove of Fawning's choice must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw as necrotic crystal powder grows on their exposed skin. On a failed save, a creature takes 11 (2d10) necrotic damage.

Shake. Fawning's lair shakes and crystals on the ceiling of the cavern come crashing down. Each creature Fawning chooses in the Crystal Grove must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or take 5 (1d10) bludgeoning damage and be pushed 5 feet in a direction of Fawning's choice.

RESOURCES

SPELUNKING!:

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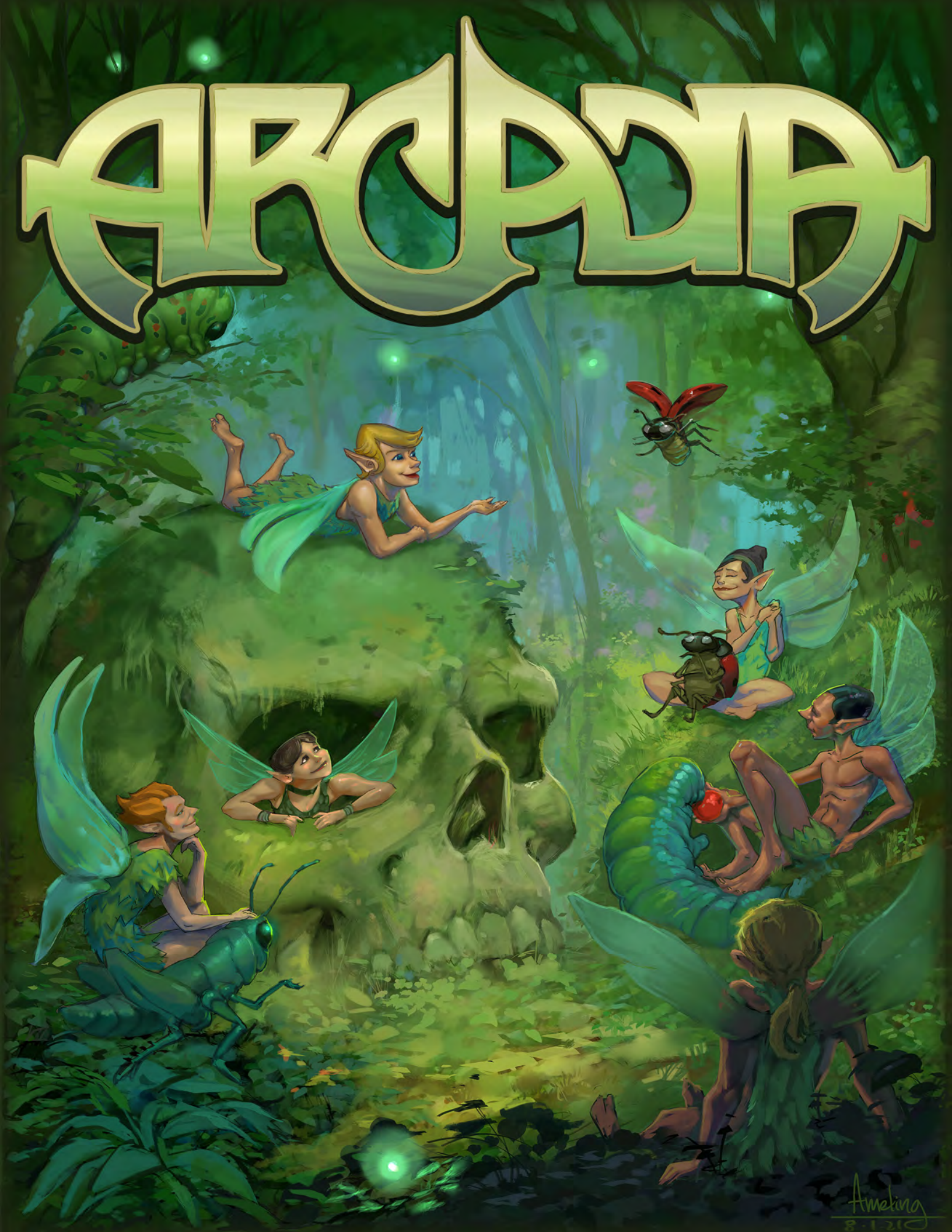
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Issue 7 August 2021

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

When I was in college, my mythology professor gave us an unconventional assignment. He told us to go into the woods alone with a notebook, stay there for an hour, then start writing whatever we found ourselves thinking about until we had a three-page paper. Given the magazine I now edit, it shouldn't come as a shock that my essay was about monsters. Specifically, I wrote a paper that said I understood why people who were alive not that long ago believed monsters stalked the wilds. Even today many folks believe that a bigfoot, yeti, jackalope, jersey devil, or other cryptid hides somewhere deep in the wilderness rarely disturbed by humans. Even if you're a skeptic like me, your love of fantasy storytelling can't keep you from asking, "But what if here there *were* be dragons?"

Nature isn't just some component of fantasy. Yes, it serves as an evocative setting for adventures, but nature is much more than that. It creates stories and mythologies. The vast wilderness on this planet inspires us, terrifies us, and takes our breath away. When we think of fantasy wilderness, our minds may go to fey groves and unicorn forests, but vast deserts, wicked swamps, untamed oceans, and mysterious underground tunnels are all part of fantastical settings. Our real-life planet and worlds of high fantasy go hand-in-hand.

In fact, they go together so well that I didn't even realize this issue of *ARCADIA* is themed around nature until Spencer Hibnick, MCDM's insightful lead playtester, pointed it out to me. I just thought we were putting out another three strong articles from awesome creators. But as the fates would have it, *ARCADIA* 7 is all about nature.

Sharang Biswas's "The Pickling Guild" presents a secret organization that searches the wilderness for delicious ingredients and cures for terrible diseases, Sara Thompson shows us a ranger who defends his grove like no other in "Aethelfaer," and Hannah Rose, an editor who has worked on every issue of *ARCADIA* so far, finally gives druids and rangers the magic items they deserve in "Wonders of the Wild."

This issue is a good reminder that there is plenty of inspiration for our games and characters in the real world. While I personally think the best way to get inspired is to head on out into the wilderness, that's not always an option. Even if you do live close to an awesome outdoor environment and have the means and time to explore it, there are places all over our planet to check out that will make your brain burst with gaming goodness.

Luckily books, magazines, television, film, and the Internet make those places easy to explore. As a former National Geographic employee, I can tell you that the deep sea holds centuries-old Greenland sharks with poison flesh, that a natural gas field in Turkmenistan called the "Door to Hell" has been burning for fifty years, and that in Tsingy de Bemaraha National Park in Madagascar, the limestone formations that create the rock forest are so sharp that they cut through flesh and most equipment, making exploration of the place difficult. If those don't get your game brain going, there's a whole world out there to explore. Or heck, go beyond Earth and into the wilds of space. Jupiter's red spot is sure to inspire an adventure or two.

Ex animo,
James Introcaso
Managing Editor



THE PICKLING GUILD

An organization of gourmands and heroes

by Sharang Biswas

Motto:
Preservation Is Our Purview

Blazon:
Party per pale purpure and vert, a serpent nowed and counterchanged



This article describes a social organization that secretly enacts an altruistic agenda, along with associated membership benefits, magic items, quests, NPCs, and domain statistics. While the Pickling Guild is best suited for campaign settings that include at least one large city, elements of the guild can be cannibalized and adapted for other settings as well.

The Guild of Pickling, Fermentation & Food Preservation, colloquially referred to as "The Pickling Guild," is ostensibly a network of eccentric culinary enthusiasts who enjoy experimenting at the intersection of alchemy and gastronomy. Anyone can be a member—a modest annual fee grants some special privileges and access to any of the dozen or so chapterhouses located in major cities around the world. In these cities, members enjoy regular tasting events—meetings where recipes, ingredients, and techniques are swapped—and a shop that sells specialized equipment, rare fermentation components, and food created by master guild members. Wealthier chapterhouses circulate a colorful, informative newsletter.

Senior members carry a badge that identifies their membership, earning them hospitality from the group's many solitary members in remote locations. Yet the mere existence of members outside major urban hubs perplexes curious observers. What benefits can these members possibly derive from what is clearly a social club?

The Pickling Guild is, in truth, a secret society that tracks the spread of magical maladies and plagues, working behind the scenes to cure and contain such afflictions. Their public-facing activities are a front, meant to throw off suspicion, cultivate useful contacts, and supplement the guild's coffers for their more important work. In addition to brewing fine ales and preserving fiery pepper sauces, senior members dispatch agents to discover the source of a nasty infection, deal with a particularly virulent fungal outbreak, or tend to important personages who contract mysterious illnesses. Solitary agents in remote regions are senior representatives who investigate and research strange and deadly diseases. Only a small fraction of the guild's members are aware of this greater truth.

These cloak-and-dagger tactics keep the agents safe and hidden from powerful adversaries. The guild has to fend off the moves and countermoves of a cult connected to demon lords of pestilence and fungi, a cabal of evil druids bent on spreading diseases to "restore the balance of rot," and a mummy lord named Numha, who somehow got entangled with the guild a long time ago. These are just a few of the villains who want to destroy the organization—any agent of decay and malady is a deadly foe to the Pickling Guild.

While members deemed both worthy and useful to the greater mission of the guild are allowed to advance through its ranks and learn of the greater mysteries, they are all sworn to secrecy. Members who break this oath are removed from the guild and may have their memories magically modified to erase any recollection of the guild whatsoever.

Guild Structure

When people refer to the Pickling Guild's intentions, goals, or actions, they (usually unknowingly) refer to those of the Directors, the mysterious leaders of the organization. Spread throughout the realm, the Directors meet in secret, sometimes in person and sometimes through magical communication devices. They make decisions about what missions need to be undertaken, who among the ranks should be promoted, and any other major actions the guild must take. They tend not to involve themselves, as a body, in chapter leadership (though individual Directors may take an interest in such matters). As the most capable members of the guild, they take part in special missions if a particularly dangerous or serious threat under the guild's purview shows itself. There are very few Directors: about half a dozen, who masquerade as lower-ranked members of the guild.

At the opposite end of the guild hierarchy are the Annual Members, who form the majority of the membership. These are dues-paying hobbyists who enjoy the social scene and minor benefits membership provides. They are unaware of the guild's secret mission.

Between these two ranks are the Fermenters, the junior members, and the Artisans, the senior members. Fermenters and Artisans are part of the guild's inner circle. They're in the know about the guild's mission and undertake tasks and quests toward it. They may perform library or laboratory research, visit sick patients, investigate reports of illnesses, or collect rare ingredients. Fermenters might also work normal jobs as brewers, cheesemongers, cooks, and the like when they aren't doing secret work for the guild.

Annual Members are tapped to become Fermenters if other members feel they could contribute to the guild's mission and a background investigation reveals no concerns. Senior members may ask candidates to perform a few "simple tasks" for the guild, tasks which end up testing their abilities when faced with danger. Promotion from Fermenter to Artisan is awarded for exceptional and reliable service to the guild and allows the agent to take on more dangerous missions. Once an Artisan proves themselves to the Directors as exceptionally talented and dedicated to the cause, they might themselves be elevated to Director, though this is rare.

There are additional volunteer roles, such as Secretariat, Treasurer, and Chapter President, which are held by Fermenters, Artisans, or even Directors. These roles are typically administrative in nature and members are locally elected to these roles within their chapters every year (all members have a vote). While these representatives handle mundane matters in the chapters, major orders relating to the guild's secret mission come from the Directors, through the Artisans.

Membership in the Pickling Guild

Anyone can become an Annual Member of the Pickling Guild by visiting a chapter, filling out some minor paperwork, and paying a sum of 10 gp. Climbing the ranks of the guild is a different matter (see "Guild Structure").

Annual Member

For the annual fee of 10 gp, a member gains the following benefits, in addition to useful social connections:

- A parchment certificate of membership with stamped expiration dates
- Discounts for any wares and services from any member (which is an informal benefit, with different members providing different discounts or special offers to others)
- A quarterly newsletter featuring news about the membership, requests for help, recipes, and interesting facts about plants and fungi. Adventurers have been known to find information about fungal or slime monsters innocuously spread among the pages.
- Advantage on ability checks involving the preparation of food and the identification of edible, medicinal, and poisonous plants, if up to date on the newsletter. (What "up to date" means is for the GM to decide!)
- Access to Annual Member meetings at any chapterhouse and free entry to special events organized by any chapter. Chapterhouses may also grant Annual Members access to lodgings, libraries, kitchens, and laboratories, depending on their accommodations.

Fermenter

Fermenters enjoy all the benefits of Annual Members, plus these additional benefits for no extra annual fee:

- A *guild fermenter's sickle* and a guild healer's kit (see sidebars)
- The Fermenter receives a copper guild badge keyed to their soul so only they can use it. The badge has 1 charge, which it regains daily at dawn. As an action while wearing the badge, the Fermenter can expend 1 charge to cast one of the following spells from it, requiring no material components: *detect poison and disease* and *purify food and drink*.

Artisan

Artisans enjoy all the benefits of Annual Members and Fermenters, plus these additional benefits for no extra annual fee:

- A *guild artisan's scythe* (see sidebar) and a new guild healer's kit
- An Artisan can ask for a potion or other expendable magic item of common or uncommon rarity, secret information about a particular subject, or the services of a single NPC Fermenter as backup (use the **acolyte**, **scout**, or **spy** stat block) about once per month without anyone asking too many questions.
- The Artisan receives a silver guild badge that replaces their copper one. The new badge is keyed to their soul so only they can use it. The magic badge grants the Artisan advantage on saving throws against disease and has 2 charges that it regains daily at dawn. As an action while wearing the badge, the Artisan can expend 1 or more of its charges to cast one of the following spells from it, requiring no material components: *detect poison and disease* (1 charge), *protection from poison* (1 charge), *purify food and drink* (1 charge), and *lesser restoration* (2 charges).

Director

Directors enjoy all the benefits of Annual Members, Fermenters, and Artisans, plus these additional benefits for no extra annual fee:

- A new guild healer's kit, and a free replacement about once a month upon request
- A Director can request up to three potions or expendable magical items of common or uncommon rarity, the temporary use of one of the guild's small stock of wondrous items of uncommon and rare rarity, and the help of one Fermenter (use the **acolyte**, **scout**, or **spy** stat block) and one Artisan (use the **bandit captain**, **druid**, or **priest** stat block) about once per month.
- Individual Directors tend to be powerful figures and often request favors from each other. At the GM's discretion, a Director can access other specialized benefits such as boons, charms, or magic items from other Directors. Such benefits might come at the cost of a favor, however!
- The Director receives a gold guild badge that replaces their silver one (though they may get a fake badge of lower rank to keep their status as Director secret). The new badge is keyed to their soul so only they can use it. The magic badge grants the Director advantage on saving throws against disease and has 3 charges that it regains daily at dawn. As an action while wearing the badge, the Director can expend 1 or more of its charges to cast one of the following spells from it, requiring no material components: *detect poison and disease* (1 charge), *purify food and drink* (1 charge), *protection from poison* (1 charge), *lesser restoration* (2 charges), *speak with dead* (2 charges), and *speak with plants* (2 charges).

A Guild Healer's Kit

This kit contains all the supplies of a healer's kit, plus additional vinegary salves and medicated bandages that smell strongly of spices.

The kit has ten uses. As an action, a creature can expend one use of the kit to attempt to stabilize a creature that has 0 hit points by making a DC 15 Intelligence (Medicine) check. On a success, the creature regains 1 hit point. On a failure, the creature is stabilized, but smells strongly of vinegar.

Guild healer's kits are awarded when members reach certain ranks. They are also provided to members undertaking dangerous missions on behalf of the guild. They aren't normally made available for purchase even to guild members, lest they be misplaced and betray the guild's true purpose to outsiders.



The Pickling Guild's Commemorative ~~Weapons~~ Tools

Fermenters and Artisans receive special, commemorative tools from the guild. Not only are these masterwork tools, they're also handsomely decorated symbols of their bearers' authority within the guild. Even those with little knowledge of the guild can tell that these tools signify something important.
The fact that these tools are both magical and perfectly balanced for combat is not generally advertised.

Guild Fermenter's Sickle

Weapon (sickle), uncommon

This beautifully forged sickle is made entirely of silver. A branching pattern reminiscent of the underground network of a fungus colony is etched into the hilt.

When you use this sickle to harvest ingredients, you can add your proficiency bonus to ability checks made to harvest and to saving throws made against poisons, enzymes, or inimical substances released while harvesting ingredients. If you are already proficient in these checks or saving throws, you add double your proficiency bonus to the check or saving throw instead of your normal proficiency bonus.

As a bonus action, you transform the *guild fermenter's sickle* into a weapon made of greenish slime. While in this form, all damage dealt by the weapon is poison damage, and you lose the bonus it grants to ability checks and saving throws. You can use another bonus action to change the weapon back to its metallic form.

Guild Artisan's Scythe

Weapon (glaive), very rare (requires attunement)

This masterfully crafted scythe has a handle made of petrified wood and wrapped with rings of inlaid brass. Its blade is broad and flat, inscribed with an enameled blazon of the guild. You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

Festering Wounds. A creature that takes damage from the scythe must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, it can't regain hit points until the end of its next turn.

Slime Form. Once per day, you can use an action to lick the blade of the scythe and transform yourself into a black pudding for up to 1 hour. Your gear melds into your new form and you can't activate, use, wield, or otherwise benefit from any of your equipment.

Your game statistics are replaced by the statistics of the pudding, but you retain your alignment, personality, hit points, proficiency bonus, and Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores. You also retain all of your skill and saving throw proficiencies, in addition to gaining those of the pudding. You can't cast spells, speak, or take any other action that requires hands or speech in pudding form.

If you use the Split reaction, you control all of the new black puddings. When one of your black puddings moves more than 30 feet away from another or is reduced to 0 hit points while another one of your black puddings exists, it dissolves away and is destroyed. If one of your black puddings is reduced to 0 hit points and no others remain, you revert to your normal form with 0 hit points and must make death saving throws as normal.

You can revert to your normal form as a bonus action. When you do so, all the black puddings you control join together in a space one of them occupies and you have a number of hit points equal to the combined total of your puddings' hit points when you ended your transformation.

Sample Foods



Members of the Pickling Guild experiment with alchemy and gastronomy to create marvelous dishes. The following foods are a sample of what members or shops connected to the guild might produce.

Ordinary

Shops associated with the Pickling Guild sell these creations, and the guild's newsletter includes their recipes. They are very rare, expensive delicacies; a single serving might cost 75 gp to 150 gp, depending on the quality of the ingredients.

- ***Adrook.*** A savory drink made from mashed, fermented root vegetables and spices
- ***Sposs.*** A cattle bone that is fermented and pickled until it becomes squishy and spongy, then cooked in sugar syrup
- ***Velure Sauce.*** The hair and nails of a specific combination of animals pickled into a spicy, tangy sauce

Magical

The recipes of these magical foods are known only to Artisans and Directors (see "Membership in the Pickling Guild"). High-end shops buy these from the guild and sell them at outrageous prices. Guild members on dangerous missions may carry these with them.

Sepulcheese

Wondrous item, very rare

When a mixture of goat's and cow's milk is fermented using special techniques in the chest cavity of an animated zombie, a peculiar fungus transforms it over several months into *sepulcheese*, an orange and purple-veined, earthy, crumbly cheese.

You can eat this cheese as an action to gain the following feature: As an action, you shout with arcane power. Each undead that can see or hear you within 30 feet of you must make a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw. If the creature fails its saving throw, it is turned for 1 minute or until it takes any damage.

A turned creature must spend its turns trying to move as far away from you as it can, and it can't willingly move to a space within 30 feet of you. It also can't take reactions. For its action, it can use only the Dash action or try to escape from an effect that prevents it from moving. If there's nowhere to move, the creature can use the Dodge action.

You can only use this feature once after eating the cheese. If you don't use it before your next long rest after eating the cheese, you lose the feature.

Eating more than one cheese before using the feature doesn't increase the potency or frequency of the effect. In fact, eating too much in a short span can cause one's skin to wither, as though afflicted by terrible necrotic energies.

Scarlet Sausage

Wondrous item, very rare

The blood that dyes the eponymous raiment of a redcap, a wicked fey creature, possesses magical properties. When squeezed out of its cap, purified, and cured, the blood can be formed into a sausage. A *scarlet sausage* is an acquired taste, but it is the only known palliative—of a sort—for vampirism.

As an action, a vampire spawn can eat a single *scarlet sausage*. Alternatively, as an action, another creature can feed a *scarlet sausage* to an incapacitated vampire spawn. For 8 hours, the vampire spawn regains its former personality and memories. True vampires are unaffected by a *scarlet sausage*.

Vampire spawn can become inured to the effects of *scarlet sausage*. If a vampire spawn has consumed a *scarlet sausage*, the effect of each subsequent *scarlet sausage* it eats is reduced by an additional 1 hour until it can no longer be affected by a *scarlet sausage*.

Memory Chocolate

Wondrous item, very rare

If cacao beans are allowed to ferment under the influence of the new moon and certain fae rituals are enacted before they are turned into chocolate, the resulting confection becomes *memory chocolate*, an especially firm, pleasingly fragrant food.

When you melt the chocolate on your tongue for 1 minute, you can kiss or lick a willing creature as an action and transport them into a memory from your past. (Licking is considered more gauche than kissing.) This effect lasts until the next dawn.

You and the target are mentally transported into this memory and your physical bodies are locked in an embrace and a trance-like state. While you experience the memory, you can't move or take any actions, and you can't perceive anything with regard to your own senses.

You choose the memory and appear in it as you are now, but as an imperceptible observer unable to affect the memory. The target enters the memory as your past self and experiences the memory exactly as you did, but is unable to change the memory. Once the memory ends, but before the effect does, you can choose to initiate a new memory, repeat the same memory, or end the trance.

The memory sharing lasts until the next dawn or you end it. The target can choose to leave the memory at any point (no action required) and wake up.

Other Goods and Services

A chapterhouse or a guild-controlled shop may offer the following goods or services:

- The fermenting or pickling of specific fruits/vegetables — 1 gp per pound of food
- A cup of rare tea, coffee, or chocolate — 5 sp
- An exotic wine, beer, or liquor — 10 gp per bottle
- Alchemist's supplies specialized in pickling and fermenting — 50 gp
- Books on pickling and fermenting — 20 gp each
- A private lesson on the art of pickling for groups of up to 10 individuals — 100 gp for an hour

Introducing the Pickling Guild

The characters might be introduced to the Pickling Guild in one of the following situations:

- The characters meet an eccentric Fermenter who sells interesting pickles and tells them about the marvelous guild he's part of.
- The characters stumble into a shop that features the guild's signature food items. Recognizing the party as a group of adventurers, the shopkeeper shows them one of the magical items for sale and tells them about the guild.
- A poster advertising a tasting event is posted in a town the characters visit.
- The characters hear rumors abound of a sick family that got better after eating some "miraculous pickled onions" sold by a little guild shop down the lane.

The Guild's Troubles

The guild is always on the lookout for competent new members, and adventurers skilled in combat and magic are prime candidates. Once the guild knows about characters, the leadership may decide to test their talents and moral character by asking for help with minor matters related to the guild's front.

You can use one of the quests listed here or one of the minor quests connected to an NPC (see "Notable Characters") to draw the characters further into the guild's story. As a reward, the guild might offer uncommon or rare potions, or one of the magical foods the guild produces. If particularly impressed, the guild may also offer free membership to the entire party for a year, as well as room and board at a chapterhouse for a short while.

- A local chapterhouse asks the characters to fetch rare plume-lace mushrooms, useful for divination potions, from a nearby cave. Unfortunately, a shambling mound has recently claimed the cave as its own. This particular shambling mound shows unusual signs of intelligence: it's been leaving beautiful floral arrangements at the mouth of the cave.
- Guard Maheera, a traveling merchant and Annual Member, asks the characters to accompany her on a trip to sell beer. Her planned route takes her through the All-Father Forest, where the eccentric druid Samira resides. Samira waylays travelers and turns the liquids they possess into water elementals (or beer elementals, in this case), claiming that she's tired of "trespassers messing up the forest."
- Luma, a gnome Annual Member and jerky seller, asks the characters to help her fend off a group of ruffians bullying her. The bullies are secretly sent by Luma's ex-lover Rolanda, who wants to make Luma so unhappy that she'll come running back to her ex-girlfriend seeking comfort. If Luma comes crawling back, Rolanda plans to call the ruffians off, but the bullies may have other ideas.

Once adventurers have proven themselves to the guild, they are invited into the fold and informed about the guild's ultimate goals. Even if the adventurers don't become members, the guild does have a history of working with powerful outsiders. The characters might be asked to help with the guild's real missions.

- Artur Pavel, the hereditary mayor of a nearby village, dies. The locals cite heart failure, but the guild knows it was poison. They ask the characters to discover the culprit. Investigations reveal that a rare toxin made from infernal secretions killed Pavel. Granny Sallowpus, a green hag living in the nearby woods, is the only one who knows how to make it. Pavel's seemingly distraught son, a seemingly himboish and innocent young man named Hugo, bought the poison from her to rid the town of an increasingly paranoid and cruel mayor.
- The signs from an old prophecy about an incursion of fungus demons are finally coming to pass. Few in the guild are equipped for such a battle, and the characters are asked to help prevent it. The prophecy hints at a "living vessel" who will "open the gateway" to the demons. Clues point to a small colony of plague-stricken refugees nestled on a windswept plateau, away from most civilization. The colony is under the protection of a powerful but aging cleric, Perviz, who has been holding the disease at bay but has found no cure. His sick 17-year-old son, Mazdak, who dreams of becoming a paladin, is destined to be the living vessel.
- A devil-worshipping cult known as the Mothers of the Fallen Fruit masquerades as a midwife collective. They attempt to recruit Shyma, a promising witch who was also tapped by the guild. She's of two minds about which to join, not knowing the true purposes of either organization. The characters are tasked with convincing her to join the Pickling Guild. Unfortunately, the cult has grown impatient and resorts to kidnapping. Shyma is descended from the green hag Granny Sallowpus, and even if she's uncooperative, her blood and organs are potent…

Notable Characters

A diverse set of people are interested in food preservation and public health! Here are a few well-known guild members who each have troubles or secrets to contend with.

Akangsha Sundarbandar (Halfling, they/them)

"Rot: it is the cold fire that transforms a humble corpse into something marvelous. Once we conquer our fear of it, embrace the peculiar potency that death bestows upon a body—any body, all bodies—then death becomes another toolbox!"

A stout, elderly wizard, Akangsha is a Fermenter, renowned in the Pickling Guild for their powerful curatives. However, the grandmotherly halfling has a secret: their cures are all necromantic in nature. They maintain a basement full of undead creatures from which to derive cures.

Signature Look: Akangsha keeps a pet toad with an enormous mushroom growing on its back by their side at all times. Akangsha considers the mushroom their pet, and the toad is merely the vehicle for it. They've named it Toadstool. (The toad has no name.)

Personality: Akangsha is cerebral, doting, and empathetic.

Statistics: Akangsha uses the statistics of a **mage**, but with the following spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light*, *mage hand*, *mending*, *poison spray*

1st level (4 slots): *detect magic*, *false life*, *grease*, *unseen servant*

2nd level (3 slots): *acid arrow*, *gentle repose*

3rd level (3 slots): *animate dead*, *glyph of warding*, *vampiric touch*

4th level (3 slots): *blight*, *private sanctum*

5th level (1 slot): *hold monster*

Involving Akangsha

Well-meaning but risk-taking Akangsha might get involved in the characters' story with the following story hooks:

- An unknown enemy of the guild frees Akangsha's undead in an attempt to kill Akangsha. The elderly wizard is now trapped in a warded room in their house while undead roam the streets. If the characters get to the bottom of what's going on, they have to choose whether or not to reveal Akangsha's secret to the guild.
- Limiel the Wise, a zealous Fermenter, discovers Akangsha's secret and is convinced they're evil. They dispatch the characters to investigate the necromancer and either capture or kill them (whichever is easier). Akangsha, not knowing the characters, greets them with milk and cookies. Moaning from the basement might interrupt the tea party.
- Rai, a grieving baker, asks the characters to locate his great-aunt Jayatri's corpse after it goes missing before her funeral—oops, Akangsha has been fermenting it! Can the characters get it back before it's unrecognizable? Or can they figure out a creative way to mollify Rai?

Glorian the Secretariat (Doppelganger, They/Them)

"You think an organization runs on people? Wrong! An organization runs on paper! *Memos, hastily jotted instructions, circulars of policy, records of accounts and transactions... the form of true power, my dear, is crisp, white, and flat!"*

Glorian, one of the most influential Artisans of the Pickling Guild, handles much of its administrative affairs, both mundane and secret. This identity is a front: Glorian is a doppelganger named Tchilinfallorsh who seeks revenge against the unknown Director who "let" their elf lover, Cyril Twindew, die of disease a few decades ago. They care nothing for the Pickling Guild's mission.

Signature Look: Glorian's hands are always stained with ink, no matter their form. They appear as an elf.
Personality: Glorian seems fastidious and obsessive, but that is a ruse to hide their calculating nature.
Statistics: Glorian uses the statistics of a **doppelganger**.

Involving Glorian

Scheming Glorian might get involved in the characters' story with the following story hooks:

- Glorian, worried that another Artisan knows their secret, tells the characters that a guild member (pick one the characters know) is sabotaging the guild and pays the characters to "deal with" them. Glorian planted fake letters from a made-up demon cult in this member's lodgings.
- The real Glorian, who knows nothing about the Pickling Guild and who the doppelganger thought dead, arrives in town. Tchilinfallorsh tells the characters that he is an evil spy sent to infiltrate the guild, and he must be killed before he can wreak havoc. The real Glorian, on hearing that the characters are adventurers for hire, approaches them to find and return some precious items that were stolen from him by bandits while en route to this city.
- Glorian believes that one of the characters is their reincarnated lover, and tries to capture them to "force the soul out."

Ivmal Alef (Human, He/Him)

"Why do I ferment? Consider this: you and I may separately follow the recipe for a cake and bake two identical desserts. But if you and I follow the exact same recipe for fermented cabbage, why, no power on earth will allow these two cabbages to taste the same. To ferment is to create art. To ferment is to be individual."

Scrawny, redheaded, and fresh out of his teens, apprentice alchemist Ivmal is an ardent Annual Member of the Pickling Guild who doesn't suspect its true purpose. He volunteers at a tiny, guild-controlled shop and is always on the lookout for new members.

Signature Look: Ivmal always wears one item of clothing or jewelry with a vegetable motif.
Personality: Ivmal is effusive, enthusiastic, and artsy.
Statistics: Ivmal uses the statistics of a **commoner**.

Involving Ivmal

Naïve Ivmal might get involved in the characters' story with the following story hooks:

- The Pickling Guild's leadership wants to evaluate Ivmal for promotion to Fermenter. They ask the characters to look into his alchemy master, Uma Tilothma, for signs of trouble. Tilothma, unfortunately, has become the target of a local necromancer known as the "Crypt Eater" who mistakenly believes that the old alchemist discovered the secret of returning intelligence to zombies and skeletons. Should anything happen to Tilothma, Ivmal would be devastated.
- Ivmal needs rare sky-spider eggs from a particularly intimidating rival alchemist, Greta "the Gorilla," the only known sky-spider breeder. He asks the character to fetch the eggs for him, knowing full well that she hates Ivmal and would never knowingly give him any useful

ingredients. Greta is looking for someone to act as a test subject for an experimental antivenom she's developing and is willing to trade eggs if the characters volunteer.

- As part of his studies, Ivmal has been experimenting with novel food preservatives. He accidentally poisons his master, Uma Tilothma, and petitions Glorian the Secretariat for help, who dispatches the characters to find an antidote. Glorian may use this opportunity to test the characters to see if they're candidates for guild membership, especially if Glorian feels they can manipulate the characters for their own goals.

Nupita & Nuhara Mfala (Dragonborn, She/Her)

"Why should we waste our time praying for miracles when the real miracles are all around us? The gods don't need us to recite chants in a dusty chapel, they expect us to get into the dirt and dig up the ruddy weed that'll cure us!"

Blue-scaled Nupita and her purple-scaled teenage daughter Nuhara are Fermenters who run a microbrewery in remote Radha's Grace, a village known for its profusion of fantastic insect life. The pair secretly collect samples of the local wildlife to use in new remedies, particularly the eggs, cast-off exoskeletons, and shucked-off chrysalides of the rare insects that thrive there. While the two love each other dearly, they often butt heads over Nuhara's independence.

Signature Look: Their claws are exquisitely painted with floral motifs.

Personality: They are practical women, dedicated to their task. Nupita is somewhat anxious, while Nuhara is naturally curious.

Statistics: Nupita uses the statistics of a **druid**, and Nuhara uses the statistics of a **commoner**.

Involving Nupita & Nuhara

The adventurous mother-daughter duo might get involved in the characters' story with the following hooks:

- As soon as the characters arrive in the village, they stumble upon a public accusation: a priest named Ona claims that the "dragon witches" have poisoned their beer supply. In truth, Ona himself doctored the beer (with powerful but nonlethal laxatives), as he sees the women's influence as a challenge to his own.
- On a surreptitious tryst with her paramour in the woods, Nuhara is waylaid by a hag. The pair is discovered by Nupita, who bargains her own life in exchange for her daughter's freedom. Now Nuhara is back in the village, guilty, distraught, and looking for a way to free her mother from the hag's clutches.



- Nuhara is possessed by a ghost that escalates her feelings of resentment and rebellion against her mother to an extreme degree. She approaches the characters with a fabricated story about the cruel, inhumane treatment she's experiencing at home and a plan to assassinate her mother.

PICKLING VS. FERMENTING

Pickling is altering and preserving food by soaking it in vinegar or another acidic liquid. Fermentation similarly alters food, but uses naturally occurring bacteria, fungi, and other organisms instead. There are overlaps between the two processes, but they're not the same thing (as any member of the Pickling Guild can tell you)!

DOMAIN STATISTICS

If you're using the domain rules from *Kingdoms & Warfare* in your game, the Pickling Guild could be an NPC or villainous realm in your game with the following statistics.

TITLE

The Pickling Guild's leader gains the following feature:

Poultice Master. The poultice master is immune to disease. Additionally, during a long rest, the poultice master can create a *spell scroll* of *lesser restoration* or two items chosen from the following list: antitoxin, basic poison, *potion of healing*. These items lose their potency and no longer work after 24 hours.

THE PICKLING GUILD

Mystic circle (secret cabal)

Skills: Diplomacy +0, Espionage +3, Lore +4, Operations +2

Defenses: Communications 14, Resolve 13, Resources 13

Size 2 (d6 Power die, 6 domain turns during intrigue)

POWERS

All officers of this realm get the following organization powers.

Universal Energy Field. As an action, an officer takes a power die from their domain's pool and recovers a number of spell slots with a combined level equal to the number on the power die. None of the slots the officer recovers can be 6th level or higher.

Alternatively, as a bonus action, the officer can take a power die from their domain's pool and charge one weapon they are holding with magical energy. The officer chooses one of the following damage types: acid, cold, fire, or lightning. Until the start of the officer's next turn, the weapon deals extra damage of the chosen damage type equal to the number on the power die.

Verdant Summons. As an action, an officer takes a power die from their domain's pool and conjures a plant with a challenge rating equal to or lower than the number on the die. The plant appears in an unoccupied space that the officer can see within 30 feet of them. The officer mentally controls the actions the plant takes. The plant acts immediately when it is summoned, then immediately after the officer on the same initiative count.

Plants summoned by this power disappear when they are reduced to 0 hit points or after 3 rounds, whichever comes first.

FEATURES

Curse of Vitiation. If the Pickling Guild's Communications level is 2 or higher at the start of a combat against an opposed domain's officers, the Pickling Guild chooses one lieutenant from an opposed domain. That lieutenant has disadvantage on saving throws during the combat.

Swamp Mother (Special Unit). As a domain action, an officer makes a DC 13 Lore test. On a success, the Pickling Guild musters the Swamp Mother, a special unit formed of shambling mounds. (See the "Domains & Intrigue" chapter in *Kingdoms & Warfare*).

Unravel Sorcery (1/Intrigue). As a domain bonus action, an officer can make a Lore test against an opposed domain's Communications to learn about the magical abilities of one of that domain's officers. On a success, the Pickling Guild learns what spells the target knows and has prepared, and has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects used by that officer until the end of the intrigue.

We Were Never Here. As a domain action, an officer makes a Lore test against an opposed domain's Communications. On a success, the Pickling Guild's Communications level increases by 1 and the opposed domain's Communications level decreases by 1.

WONDERS OF THE WILDS

Nature-themed magic items and spells

by Hannah Rose

A young man wearing a cloak of leaves races through the jungle, transforming into a panther mid-leap.

A bronze-skinned tiefling crouches in the shadow of a tall sand dune, deep in conversation with a long-eared fox.

A statuesque elf raises her arms to greet a spring rainshower as prismatic wildflowers bloom around her.

Characters with a deep connection to nature protect, nurture, and explore the world around them. As they wander untold landscapes in search of adventure, they seek out or stumble upon magic items to aid them in their quests.

This article presents magic items designed for druids, rangers, and other characters with an affinity for the natural world. At the Game Master's discretion, the class-specific attunement requirements for an item may be waived for a character who is deeply tied to nature in some other way.

While the items may be available for purchase in a shop—or a swamp witch's hut—it may be most appropriate for characters to find them in the wilderness from which they draw their power.

New Spells

Most spells in the descriptions of the following magic items can be found in the fifth edition core rules, but spells marked with an asterisk (*) are new spells presented at the end of this article.



Amulet of Woodland Speech

Wondrous item, uncommon

This small stone pendant is carved like an acorn and feels slightly warm to the touch.

The amulet has 3 charges, and regains all expended charges daily at dawn. While wearing this pendant, you can understand and speak Sylvan, and you have advantage on Wisdom (Animal Handling) checks made to interact with nonhostile animals. In addition, you can expend 1 charge as an action to cast the *speak with animals* spell from it.

Story Hook: Amulet of Woodland Speech

Humanoid loggers are destroying the habitats of many woodland folk, and when the loggers turn their sawblades to a flourishing grove, the animals of the forest send the awakened squirrel Quickpaw to ask for the characters' aid. If they can scare away the loggers or persuade them to take their tree cutting elsewhere, Quickpaw gives them an *amulet of woodland speech* from her winter store. "You can't munch it, but it's warm!"

Bag of Saplings

Wondrous item, rare

This rough homespun bag appears empty, but reaching inside the bag reveals the presence of many small seeds. The bag weighs half a pound.

You can use an action to pull a seed from the bag and throw it up to 20 feet. When the seed lands, it grows into an awakened tree (see the core rules for its stat block). Unless it dies or you pull another seed from the bag, the tree remains animated until the next sunset, at which point it takes root if possible.

While animated, the tree is friendly to you and your allies. In combat, the tree shares your initiative count, but it takes its turn immediately after yours. You can use a bonus action to command how the tree moves and what action it takes on its next turn, or to give it general orders, such as to attack your enemies. In the absence of such orders, the tree doesn't act except to defend itself if attacked.

Once three seeds have been pulled from the bag, the bag can't be used again until the next dawn.

Belt of Vines

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement by a druid)

This belt of intricately woven vines twists and tightens as you wrap it around your waist, entwining its tendrils to grasp you snugly. While wearing this belt, you can use your Wild Shape to transform into a plant, choosing from the forms on page 14.

Charm of Communication

Wondrous item, uncommon

This ceramic pendant bears the indent of a feline paw print. While transformed into a beast by the Wild Shape feature, the *polymorph* spell, or similar magic, you can communicate telepathically with any beast or humanoid you can see within 30 feet of you.

Story Hook: Charm of Communication

A druid named Issoire is trapped in the form of a lynx, and he needs the characters' help to return to his humanoid form. Luckily, the *charm of communication* dangling on a leather cord around his neck allows him to communicate telepathically with the party, and he offers to make another charm for them when he is returned to his humanoid shape.

Cloak of the Grove Guardian

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement by a druid)

This magnificent cloak is fashioned of living leaves in a dazzling array of green hues. While wearing this cloak, you are always under the effects of the *speak with animals* spell, and you gain a +3 bonus to spell attack rolls and to the spell save DC of your druid spells. In addition, if you aren't wearing armor, your base Armor Class is 11 + your Dexterity modifier + your Wisdom modifier.

As an action, you can magically animate up to two trees you can see within 60 feet of you. An animated tree has the same statistics as a treant (see the core rules for its stat block), except it has Intelligence and Charisma scores of 1, it can't speak, and it only has the Slam action option.

Krakenvine

Large plant

Armor Class 12 + PB (natural armor)
Hit Points 30 + 10 × PB
Speed 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	2 (-4)

Condition Immunities blinded, deafened
Senses passive Perception 11
Languages —

Plant Camouflage. The krakenvine has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide in areas with abundant plant life.

Power of Nature. The krakenvine's weapon attacks are magical.

Actions

Multiattack. The krakenvine makes two vine lash attacks, each of which it can replace with one use of Fling.

Vine Lash. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 + PB to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1d8 + 3 + PB bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 11 + PB). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained. The krakenvine can grapple up to two targets in this way at once.

Fling. One Medium or smaller object held or creature grappled by the krakenvine is thrown up to 30 feet in a direction of the krakenvine's choosing and knocked prone. If a thrown target strikes a solid surface, the target takes 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage for every 10 feet it was thrown. If the target is thrown at another creature, that creature must succeed on a DC 11 + PB Dexterity saving throw or take the same damage and be knocked prone.

Thornbush

Medium plant

Armor Class 13 + PB (natural armor)
Hit Points 20 + 10 × PB
Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	3 (-4)	13 (+1)	2 (-4)

Condition Immunities blinded, deafened
Senses passive Perception 11
Languages —

Plant Camouflage. The thornbush has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide in areas with abundant plant life.

Power of Nature. The thornbush's weapon attacks are magical.

Stickler. When the thornbush hits a creature with an opportunity attack, that creature's speed becomes 0 for the rest of the turn. Creatures provoke opportunity attacks from the thornbush even if they take the Disengage action before leaving its reach.

Actions

Multiattack. The thornbush makes a number of thorny strike attacks equal to half your proficiency bonus, rounded down.

Thorny Strike. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 + PB to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2d4 + 3 + PB piercing damage.

An animated tree acts as your ally. The tree remains animate for 1 day or until it dies; until you fall unconscious or are more than 120 feet from the tree; or until you take a bonus action to turn it back into an inanimate tree. The tree then takes root if possible. Once you use this property, you can't use it again until the next dawn.

Halo of the Heavens

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement by a druid)

This shimmering halo floats slightly above the wearer's head, illuminating their features in a golden glow. While wearing this halo, you can expend a use of your Wild Shape feature to transform into a pegasus, or expend two uses of your Wild Shape feature to transform into a unicorn (see the core rules for these stat blocks). Additionally, while wearing this halo, you have advantage on Charisma checks made to interact with celestials.

Story Hook: Halo of the Heavens

A wounded unicorn named Ciela staggers through a thicket, entreating the party with an urgent request: help her save her mate, Estelle, who was captured by a coven of **night hags** planning to slowly drain her blood to make new *heartstones*. If the characters defeat the hags, the unicorns reward them with a *halo of the heavens*. Alternatively, if the characters are already motivated to help the unicorns, Ciela gives them the *halo of the heavens* in advance to help them with their mission.

Staff of the Desert Sands

Staff, very rare (requires attunement by a druid or ranger)

This staff can be wielded as a magic quarterstaff that grants a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it. While holding it, you have a +2 bonus to spell attack rolls. In addition, you don't gain levels of exhaustion from the effects of extreme heat or extreme cold.

The staff has 10 charges for the following properties. It regains 1d6 + 4 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff loses its properties and becomes a nonmagical quarterstaff.

Spells. You can use an action to expend 1 or more of the staff's charges to cast one of the following spells from it, using your spell save DC and spellcasting ability modifier:

blur (2 charges)
*dust cloud** (3 charges)
faerie fire (1 charge)
gust of wind (2 charges)
meld into stone (3 charges)
speak with animals (1 charge)
stoneskin (4 charges)

You can also use an action to cast the *create or destroy water* spell from the staff without using any charges.

Spirit of the Sand. You can use an action to plant one end of the staff in sand and expend 1 charge to cast *sandstorm*,* centered on the staff. You and up to six creatures of your choice that you can see are immune to the effects of the sandstorm. Once this property is used, it can't be used again until the next dawn.



Staff of the Endless Plains

Staff, very rare (requires attunement by a druid or ranger)

This staff can be wielded as a magic quarterstaff that grants a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it. While holding it, you have a +2 bonus to spell attack rolls. In addition, you have advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide in tall grass and Wisdom (Survival) checks made to track creatures across grassland.

The staff has 10 charges for the following properties. It regains 1d6 + 4 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff loses its properties and becomes a nonmagical quarterstaff.

Spells. You can use an action to expend 1 or more of the staff's charges to cast one of the following spells from it, using your spell save DC and spellcasting ability modifier:

locate creature (4 charges)
locate object (2 charges)
longstrider (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th)
pass without trace (2 charges)
plant growth (3 charges)
scrying (5 charges)
wind walk (6 charges)

You can also use an action to cast the *locate animals or plants* spell from the staff without using any charges.

Traveler's Blessing. As an action, you can expend 1 charge and choose up to six creatures you can see within 30 feet of you. For the next eight hours, each creature's travel pace is doubled, it ignores the effects of any levels of exhaustion it already has, and it can't gain new levels of exhaustion from environmental hazards or tiring travel.

Staff of the Frozen Tundra

Staff, very rare (requires attunement by a druid or ranger)

This staff can be wielded as a magic quarterstaff that grants a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it. While holding it, you have a +2 bonus to spell attack rolls. In addition, you don't gain levels of exhaustion from the effects of extreme cold, and you have advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks made to track creatures across icy terrain.

The staff has 10 charges for the following properties. It regains 1d6 + 4 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff loses its properties and becomes a nonmagical quarterstaff.

Spells. You can use an action to expend 1 or more of the staff's charges to cast one of the following spells from it, using your spell save DC and spellcasting ability modifier:

create or destroy water (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th)
*flurry of icicles** (2 charges)
hold monster (5 charges)
*ice sheet** (4 charges)
*instant freeze** (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th)
wall of ice (6 charges)
water walk (3 charges)

You can also use an action to cast the *protection from energy* (cold only) spell from the staff without using any charges.

Igloo Form. You can use an action to plant one end of the staff in snow or ice and expend 1 charge to transform it into an igloo that lasts for 8 hours. The igloo is a dome centered on the staff with a radius of 10 feet, AC 14, and 30 hit points. It can shelter ten creatures of Medium size or smaller, and the inside of the igloo is a comfortable temperature, regardless of the weather outside.

The igloo appears ordinary, but radiates a faint aura of transmutation magic if targeted by *detect magic*. While touching the igloo and using another action to speak the command word, you can dismiss the igloo early. If the igloo is reduced to 0 hit points, the staff returns to its normal form.

Story Hook: Staff of the Frozen Tundra

In their travels across a snowy landscape, the characters discover a perfect shelter from the frigid arctic night: an igloo! If the party spends the night inside the igloo, a druid or ranger character dreams of a keen-eyed white fox who transforms into an old dwarf woman and whispers the command word *haribur* in their ear. This command word turns the igloo into a *staff of the frozen tundra*.

Staff of the Granite Peaks

Staff, rare (requires attunement by a druid or ranger)

This staff can be wielded as a magic quarterstaff that grants a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it. While holding it, you have a +2 bonus to spell attack rolls. In addition, you and creatures you choose within 30 feet of you are considered acclimated to breathing at elevations up to 20,000 feet.

The staff has 10 charges for the following properties. It regains 1d6 + 4 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff loses its properties and becomes a nonmagical quarterstaff.

Spells. You can use an action to expend 1 or more of the staff's charges to cast one of the following spells from it, using your spell save DC and spellcasting ability modifier:

call lightning (3 charges)
jump (1 charge)
meld into stone (3 charges)
move earth (6 charges)
stone shape (4 charges)
thunderwave (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th)
*tremorsense** (2 charges)

You can also use a reaction to cast the *feather fall* spell from the staff without using any charges.

Bridge Form. You can use an action to plant one end of the staff into the ground within 5 feet of a chasm or other gap and expend 1 charge to create a sturdy wood-and-rope bridge with a length of up to 50 feet, a width of 5 feet, AC 15, and 20 hit points per 5-foot section. The bridge appears ordinary, but radiates a faint aura of transmutation magic if targeted by *detect magic*. While touching the bridge and using another action to speak its command word, you return the staff to its normal form. Any creature on the bridge falls when it reverts to a staff. If any 5-foot section of the bridge is reduced to 0 hit points, the staff returns to its normal form.

Story Hook: Staff of the Granite Peaks

While traveling in the mountains, the characters come across a perilous chasm spanned by a simple bridge. While crossing the bridge, a druid or ranger character who places their hand on the rope handrail hears the command word *haku'ar* ringing in their mind. This command word turns the bridge into a *staff of the granite peaks*.



STAFF OF THE SWAMPLANDS

Staff, very rare (requires attunement by a druid or ranger)

This staff can be wielded as a magic quarterstaff that grants a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it. While holding it, you have a +2 bonus to spell attack rolls. In addition, you have advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to move quietly in swamps and Wisdom (Survival) checks made to track creatures across swampy ground.

The staff has 10 charges for the following properties. It regains 1d6 + 4 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff loses its properties and becomes a nonmagical quarterstaff.

Spells. You can use an action to expend 1 or more of the staff's charges to cast one of the following spells from it, using your spell save DC and spellcasting ability modifier:

entangle (1 charge)
fog cloud (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th)
giant insect (4 charges)
insect plague (5 charges)
plant growth (3 charges)
spike growth (2 charges)
water walk (3 charges)

You can also use an action to cast the *speak with plants* spell from the staff without using any charges.

Bog. You can use an action to plant one end of the staff in the ground and expend 1 charge to create a bog in a 60-foot radius around the staff. This area is difficult terrain for creatures other than you. Another creature that starts its turn in the bog must make a Strength saving throw against your spell save DC or have its speed reduced to 0 until the start of its next turn. The bog lasts for 1d4 + 2 rounds or until you pull the staff out of the ground, at which point the bog is sucked into the ground and vanishes.

STAFF OF THE TIDES

Staff, very rare (requires attunement by a druid or ranger)

This staff can be wielded as a magic quarterstaff that grants a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it. While holding it, you have a +2 bonus to spell attack rolls. In addition, you have a swimming speed equal to your walking speed, and when you are within 10 miles of a body of water with tides, you always know when the next high and low tides are.

The staff has 10 charges for the following properties. It regains 1d6 + 4 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff loses its properties and becomes a nonmagical quarterstaff.

Spells. You can use an action to expend 1 or more of the staff's charges to cast one of the following spells from it, using your spell save DC and spellcasting ability modifier:

control water (4 charges)
create or destroy water (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th)
fog cloud (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th)
gust of wind (2 charges)
*jet of water** (3 charges)
*maelstrom avatar** (4 charges)
water walk (3 charges)

You can also use an action to cast the *water breathing* spell from the staff without using any charges.

Kayak Form. You can use an action to place one end of the staff in water and expend 1 charge to transform the staff into a paddle and a kayak that can fit up to two Medium creatures. Only you can paddle the kayak. The kayak appears ordinary, but radiates a faint aura of transmutation magic if targeted by *detect magic*. While holding the paddle, you can use an action to speak its command word and return the staff to its normal form.

Subterranean Staff

Staff, rare (requires attunement by a druid or ranger)

This staff can be wielded as a magic quarterstaff that grants a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it. While holding it, you have a +2 bonus to spell attack rolls. In addition, you can't be surprised while underground.

The staff has 10 charges for the following properties. It regains 1d6 + 4 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff loses its properties and becomes a nonmagical quarterstaff.

Spells. You can use an action to expend 1 or more of the staff's charges to cast one of the following spells from it, using your spell save DC and spellcasting ability modifier:

faerie fire (1 charge)
meld into stone (3 charges)
pass without trace (2 charges)
protection from poison (2 charges)
stoneskin (4 charges)
*tremorsense** (2 charges)
wall of stone (5 charges)

You can also use an action to cast the *darkvision* spell from the staff without using any charges.

Web Spinner. You can use an action and expend 1 charge to shoot a thick strand of sticky webbing out of the staff. Make a ranged spell attack against a creature you can see within 30 feet of you using your spellcasting ability. On a hit, the target is restrained. The restrained target can use its action to make a Strength check against your spell save DC, bursting out of the webbing on a success.

Staff of the Seasons

Staff, rare (requires attunement by a spellcaster)

The spirit of an ancient eladrin druid inhabits this long wooden staff, which changes form to reflect the current mood of the spirit. Whenever you complete a long rest, roll 1d4 to determine what form the staff takes: 1 (autumn), 2 (winter), 3 (spring), or 4 (summer).

The staff has 10 charges. The staff regains 1d6 + 4 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff turns to dry leaves and is lost forever. While holding it, you can use an action to expend 1 or more of the charges to cast certain spells from it, using your spell save DC and spellcasting ability modifier.

Autumn Form. Small red and gold leaves wreathe the top of the staff in a dazzling fall canopy. While the staff is in this form, you can cast the following spells from it: *aid* (2 charges), *bless* (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th), *create food and water* (3 charges), and *cure wounds* (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th).

Winter Form. The wood of the staff is cool to the touch, and small sprigs of holly sprout from the top. While the staff is in this form, you can cast the following spells from it: *bane* (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th), *blindness/deafness* (2 charges), *gust of wind* (2 charges), and *sleep* (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th).

Spring Form. The knobby top of the staff is adorned with new leaves and budding flowers. While the staff is in this form, you can cast the following spells from it: *beacon of hope* (3 charges), *conjure animals* (3 charges), *enhance ability* (2 charges), and *goodberry* (1 charge).

Summer Form. Deep green leaves shade the top of the staff, rustling gently in an unseen breeze. While the staff is in this form, you can cast the following spells from it: *continual flame* (2 charges), *daylight* (3 charges), *haste* (3 charges), and *heroism* (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th).

Wildflower Wand

Wondrous item, uncommon

This slim wooden wand has tiny carved wildflowers twining around its length. While holding the wand, you can cast the *druidcraft* spell at will.

Spells of the Wilds

At the GM's discretion, any spell can be made available to other classes or subclasses not listed below.

Druid Spells

1st Level
Instant freeze (evocation)

2nd Level
Flurry of icicles (evocation)
Tremorsense (transmutation)

3rd Level
Dust cloud (conjuration)
Jet of water (conjuration)

4th Level
Ice sheet (conjuration)
Maelstrom avatar (transmutation)

5th Level
Sandstorm (evocation)

Ranger Spells

2nd Level
Tremorsense (transmutation)

3rd Level
Dust cloud (conjuration)

4th Level
Maelstrom avatar (transmutation)

5th Level
Sandstorm (evocation)

Sorcerer Spells

1st Level
Instant freeze (evocation)

2nd Level
Flurry of icicles (evocation)

3rd Level
Dust cloud (conjuration)

4th Level
Ice sheet (conjuration)

Warlock Spells

3rd level
Dust cloud (conjuration)

4th Level
Maelstrom avatar (transmutation)

5th Level
Sandstorm (evocation)

Wizard Spells

1st Level
Instant freeze (evocation)

2nd level
Flurry of icicles (evocation)

3rd level
Dust cloud (conjuration)
Jet of water (conjuration)

4th Level
Ice sheet (conjuration)

Dust Cloud

3rd-level conjuration

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 60 feet
Components: V, S, M (a pinch of dirt)
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute
Classes: Druid, ranger, sorcerer, warlock, wizard

You create a 20-foot-radius sphere of swirling dust at a point you can see within range. The cloud spreads around corners, and its area is lightly obscured. It lasts for the duration or until a wind of moderate or greater speed (at least 10 miles per hour) disperses it.

A creature that starts its turn in the cloud or enters it for the first time on a turn, including when the cloud first appears, must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or become blinded until the start of its next turn.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 4th level or higher, the radius of the cloud increases by 20 feet for each slot level above 3rd.

Flurry of Icicles

2nd-level evocation

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Varies
Components: V, S, M (a drop of water)
Duration: Instantaneous
Classes: Druid, sorcerer, wizard

You create a freezing volley of sharp icicles. When you cast this spell, you choose what shape the effect takes:

- ***Cone.*** The icicles fly from your hands in a 15-foot cone.
- ***Line.*** The icicles shoot from your hands in a line 30 feet long and 5 feet wide.
- ***Cube.*** The icicles fall from above in a 10-foot-cube centered on a point you can see within 30 feet of you.

Each creature in the chosen area must make a Dexterity saving throw. A creature takes 2d6 piercing damage and 2d6 cold damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, the cold damage increases by 1d6 for each slot level above 2nd.

Ice Sheet

4th-level conjuration

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 60 feet
Components: V, S
Duration: Instantaneous
Classes: Druid, sorcerer, wizard

A sheet of gleaming ice spreads across the ground in a location you choose within range. The area of the ice sheet consists of up to ten 10-foot squares, which you can arrange as you wish. Each square must have at least one side adjacent to the side of another square. Each creature in the area when it appears must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw or fall prone and take 2d6 cold damage.

In addition, a creature who moves more than 5 feet on a turn in the area must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw when it stops moving, or fall prone and take 2d6 cold damage.

Each 10-foot-square section of the ice has AC 12, 15 hit points, vulnerability to fire damage, and immunity to cold, poison, and psychic damage. Reducing a 10-foot section of ice to 0 hit points destroys it and leaves behind a puddle that is difficult terrain until it dries.

Instant Freeze

1st-level evocation

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 30 feet
Components: V, S, M (a piece of saltpeter)
Duration: Instantaneous
Classes: Druid, sorcerer, wizard

You freeze a 5-foot cube of water that you can see within range. Any creatures in the water must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw or become restrained. A restrained creature can use its action to make a Strength check against your spell save DC, breaking the ice around it and freeing itself on a success.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the size of the cube increases by 5 feet for each slot level above 1st.

Jet of Water

3rd-level conjuration

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Self (60-foot line)
Components: V, S, M (a small hollow tube)
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute
Classes: Druid, wizard

You open a channel to the Elemental Plane of Water for a brief time. A jet of saltwater forming a line 60 feet long and 5 feet wide blasts out from you in a direction you choose for the spell's duration. Each creature that starts its turn in the line or enters it for the first time on a turn must make a Strength saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 4d6 bludgeoning damage and is knocked prone. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't knocked prone.

In addition, any creature in the line must spend 2 feet of movement for every 1 foot it moves when moving closer to you.

The jet extinguishes flames in the area. Medium or smaller objects in the line that aren't secured to anything and aren't worn or carried by anyone are knocked over or pushed up to 15 feet away from you.

As a bonus action on each of your turns before the spell ends, you can change the direction in which the line blasts from you.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 4th level or higher, the damage increases by 1d6 for each slot level above 3rd.

Maelstrom Avatar

4th-level transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Self
Components: V
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute
Classes: Druid, ranger, warlock

You call upon the spirits of the wind and waves to transform you with their surging power. Until the spell ends, stormy winds swirl around you, small waves crash against the ground at your feet, and you gain the following benefits:

- Attacks against you have disadvantage.
- You make Strength and Dexterity saving throws with advantage.
- Moving through nonmagical difficult terrain doesn't cost you extra movement.

When you hit a creature with a melee attack, you can choose to channel a final surge of tempestuous might to deal an extra 2d8 lightning or thunder damage (your choice). The spell then ends.

Sandstorm

5th-level evocation

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 120 feet
Components: V, S, M (a pinch of sand)
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute
Classes: Druid, ranger, warlock

You create a 30-foot-radius sandstorm centered on a point you can see within range. Medium or smaller objects that aren't secured to anything and aren't worn or carried by anyone are caught up in the howling winds. The area is heavily obscured.

A creature that starts its turn in the sandstorm or enters it for the first time on a turn, including when the sandstorm first appears, must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw or take 5d8 bludgeoning damage and become blinded until the start of its next turn. In addition, a Medium or smaller creature that fails the save is pushed 10 feet in a random direction.

Tremorsense

2nd-level transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Touch
Components: S, M (a tiny pendulum)
Duration: 8 hours
Classes: Druid, ranger

You touch a willing creature to grant it the ability to sense vibrations in the earth. For the duration, that creature can detect and pinpoint the origin of vibrations within 120 feet, provided that the creature and the source of the vibrations are in contact with the same ground or substance. This sense can't be used to detect flying or incorporeal creatures or see invisible ones (though it can pinpoint the location of an invisible creature moving on or through the earth).



AETHELFAER

A warden of nature and a forest-themed encounter

by Sara Thompson

A figure stalks the forest, blending with foliage and underbrush, eyes locked on his target. The doe heedlessly chews on grass and moss, oblivious to the hunter lurking between the trees. Deft fingers crafted from elm and owlbear teeth notch an arrow, hooking it on the sinew of the bowstring and drawing back. The raven feather fletching kisses the hunter's cheek—a soft caress as he sets his shoulders, straightens his spine, and takes in a slow, deep breath. The forest pauses. All is still. The world comes down to this one moment. The arrow. The deer.

Release.

The arrow flies, the doe jolts. Large eyes opened wide, joints locked in fright. It's a clean shot, straight through the neck. The deer staggers, its cry sharply cut off, before keeling to the ground, lifeless. Its suffering was short, as intended.

The hunter approaches, the fingers of the elm wood prosthetic that forms his right arm flexing as he draws out a hunting knife, the blade serrated and hooked at the point. He thanks the spirits of the forest, for this kill shall serve him greatly, and kneels down, setting to work. None of this shall go to waste.

Aethelfaer [pr. eθəlfeə: / EH-thell-fair] is a male wood elf, committed to the nomadic lifestyle of roaming the forests and grasslands, protecting the wildlife and offering aid to those in need. He's patient and calm, with an unflappable persona built on years of hunting and tracking.

Aethelfaer inherited a genetic condition called meromelia, a syndrome that causes the partial absence of limbs. As a result, Aethelfaer is missing the lower part of his right arm from just above the elbow and has no right foot. Though he can navigate his life just fine on his own, he chooses to wear and make use of prosthetics.

His right arm is crafted from red elm and owlbear teeth, with a hidden compartment inside the wrist where he stores a small container of poison for emergencies. His prosthetic foot is made of yew that has gone through the same magical strengthening and flexibility treatment as his longbow.

A formidable warrior and deadly archer, Aethelfaer takes desecration and disrespect of the forest as a grave offense, and hunts his enemies to the end of the world if he must. As an ally, he is loyal, fair, and a true friend. However, once his respect is lost, it is gone forever.



Aethelfaer in Your Game

Though Aethelfaer is a good-aligned character, his interactions with the characters can vary. He could guide the characters through dense and wild forests, help them navigate the ruins of an ancient temple hidden in the trees, or arrive at a critical moment to aid them in a deadly encounter in the woods. He could seek out the characters to ask for their help ending a threat to his forest. But he can also act as an antagonist, a relentless hunter seeking vengeance against characters who, even unknowingly, slighted or dishonored the spirits of the forest.

If one of the characters impresses Aethelfaer—for example, if they save his life or show great admiration and respect for the forest—he grants them a boon by performing a magic ritual. He douses the character with water from a sacred forest spring and asks them to drink herbal tea made from moss, flowers, and the roots of ancient trees. A character who participates in the ritual gains the following boon:

Friend of the Forest. Moving through nonmagical difficult terrain in a forest doesn't cost you extra movement. While in a forest, you can cast the *spike growth* spell, requiring no material components. Wisdom is your spellcasting ability for this spell. You can cast the spell twice in this way without expending a spell slot, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

Aethelfaer Plot Hooks

d12	Plot Hook
1	Aethelfaer finds the characters lost in the forest. He promises to lead them to their destination if they help him take on a local necromancer creating zombie versions of beasts and plants.
2	A rival group of adventurers challenges the characters to a hunt in Aethelfaer's forest. Whoever claims the head of the legendary silver hart wins a chest of gold. But it's a trap! The rivals don't intend to participate and know that a hunter in the woods stalks any who dare harm the hart.
3	The characters unknowingly trespass into a sacred domain deep within the forest. Aethelfaer appears, claiming that they have disturbed the ancient gods of the forest and the deities demand recompense. This must come in the form of an offering made by sundown the next day at an altar within an underground catacomb. If they refuse or fail to do so, Aethelfaer declares that they will be cursed for the rest of their lives.
4	Aethelfaer approaches the characters as they set up camp, seeking their aid in slaying what he calls a dark spirit that possesses an ancient redwood tree in the forest. Its presence poisoned the surrounding woodland, turning the creatures into zombie drones and making the trees aggressive. One such tree attacked Aethelfaer and he was lucky to get away with his life. He believes this dark power is something bigger than he alone can handle. He offers the characters a magical item from the forest gods (such as a staff of the woodlands or an item from "Wonders of the Wilds" in this issue) as payment for helping him end the threat.
5	Throughout the forest are ancient statues of old forest gods, all of them animal-esque in design. Somehow, they have become animated and are attacking travelers as they walk the paths. The players are attacked by one such statue as they pass through the forest. Aethelfaer appears after or part way through combat to lend assistance and explain the situation.
6	A nearby settlement started culling wolves in response to attacks on their farm animals. Aethelfaer is adamant that it isn't the wolves attacking and is saddened by the settlers' decision. He wants to prove the beasts' innocence and suspects there is something else going on. The ranger appeals to the characters for assistance.
7	A group of deserter soldiers set up a fortified camp in the forest, seeking refuge and the chance to live in peace with their families and loved ones, far from the horrors of war. However, a hidden hunter (Aethelfaer) stalks the woods around them, shooting arrows at them whenever they attempt to hunt a nearby herd of elk. Food is running short but the hunter is relentless; the refugees are growing desperate and beg the characters for help. What the refugees don't know is that the elk are an incredibly rare breed, almost extinct. Aethelfaer has taken it upon himself to be the protector of the herd, defending them from any and all threats.
8	A well-meaning but inexperienced witch recently moved into the forest, seeking respite from the overwhelming life of the city. Whilst planting a herb garden, they used magic to help the seeds stay safe from birds, but the spell backfired. The seeds are safe and growing, but the birds' appetites have changed to carnivorous. Now the feathered creatures attack other animals and any people who enter the forest. Aethelfaer promised to help the witch by finding someone who has arcane training enough to somehow reverse the spell. The characters might enact a ritual or know someone capable who they can escort through the forest of carnivorous birds.
9	A rich, spoiled noble is intent on building his "summer home" in the forest, uncaring that he will destroy a site sacred to the gods and wood elves. Aethelfaer discovered his workers disturbing the ancient structures and became enraged, confronting them. Weapons were raised and the noble drew a pistol, landing a lucky shot in Aethelfaer's shoulder and forcing him to retreat. Determined to stop this construction work, a wounded Aethelfaer seeks the help of the passing characters.
10	A group of unruly satyrs robs travelers as they camp in the forest, taking everything of value. The characters are their next victims and wake to find some of their belongings missing and an unimpressed Aethelfaer asking if they saw anything during the night.
11	Aethelfaer appears before the characters, dropping down from the trees as they travel through the forest. He warns them against leaving or straying too far from their campsite at night and to ignore any voices they hear calling out, even if they think they recognize them. Something evil amongst the trees is luring people in, and they are never be seen again.
12	Carved arcane symbols and talismans keep appearing amongst the trees, all of them resembling sweets and baked goods, marking what the locals have taken to calling the Trail of Sweets. The surrounding settlements send children they can't afford to feed down this trail, and the children wander off into the forest, never to be seen again. The nomadic ranger, Aethelfaer, senses something dark lurking in the heart of the forest.

Aethelfaer

Medium humanoid (wood elf), neutral good

Armor Class 18 (+2 *breastplate*)

Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)

Speed 35 ft. (40 ft. while wearing prosthetic foot)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dexterity +7, Wisdom +6

Skills Acrobatics +7, Animal Handling +6, Insight +6, Nature +4, Perception +6, Stealth +7, Survival +6

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Common, Common Signs (see sidebar), Elvish, Sylvan

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Proficiency Bonus +3

Archery Fighting Style. Aethelfaer gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls with ranged weapons (included in the attack).

Athletic Advantage. Aethelfaer has advantage on Strength (Athletics) checks made to climb and jump while wearing his prosthetic foot.

Cunning Action. On each of his turns, Aethelfaer can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Fey Ancestry. Aethelfaer has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put him to sleep.

Poison Application. Aethelfaer keeps a container of poison in his prosthetic arm. As a bonus action, he can apply poison to one weapon or piece of ammunition. The poison remains potent for 1 hour or until that weapon or ammunition deals damage to a target. If struck by a poisoned weapon or piece of ammunition, the target must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Aethelfaer has twenty doses of poison.

Spellcasting. Aethelfaer is a 7th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). He knows the following ranger spells:

1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds, hunter's mark, longstrider*

2nd level (3 slots): *pass without trace, zone of truth*

Actions

Multiattack. Aethelfaer attacks twice with his longbow or three times with his shortsword.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Primeval Awareness. Aethelfaer expends a spell slot to focus his awareness on his surroundings. For 1 minute per level of the spell slot he expends, he can sense if any creatures of the following types are present within 1 mile: aberrations, celestials, dragons, elementals, fey, fiends, and undead. He can't sense the creatures' location or number.

Reactions

Deflect (1/Day). When Aethelfaer is hit by a ranged weapon attack and wearing his prosthetic arm, he can attempt to deflect the missile used in the attack. The damage he takes from the attack is reduced by 12 (1d10 + 7). If the damage is reduced to 0, Aethelfaer catches the missile and can make a ranged attack with it as part of the same reaction with a +9 bonus to the attack roll. The attack uses the missile's original range.

Aethelfaer Plot Hooks

You can roll on the table on p. 25 or choose a plot hook to bring Aethelfaer into your campaign.

Aethelfaer in Combat

In combat, Aethelfaer aims to fight at a distance. If he works with the characters, Aethelfaer slips into the shadows to provide ranged support from the flank. If battling the characters, he casts *hunter's mark* on a foe with spellcasting prowess and then uses his superior speed to keep firing as he moves away from his enemies. The ranger uses poisoned arrows on enemies who get within 40 feet of him or who need to come down quickly. His spells are supportive and beneficial to both his allies and himself, allowing for stealth, healing, and enhancing combat skill sets.

Common Signs

Unlike thieves' cant, which is a pidgin of borrowed signs, verbal words, and symbols from multiple languages, Common Signs is a complete sign language, borrowing from Dwarvish, Elvish, and Undercommon. It is considered a universal language and adapted by disabled communities, especially within cities. As such, most people across the realm can communicate using it.

Common Signs is designed to be easy to learn, and spellcasters can make use of it to cast their spells. Effects that prevent casting spells with verbal components, such as the area of silence created by the *silence* spell, are still effective against casters who use Common Signs. While affected by such a spell or effect, the caster forgets the important signs needed to cast spells with verbal components.

Encountering Aethelfaer

You can use the following encounter to introduce Aethelfaer to the characters when they are around 4th level.

As the characters travel a forest trail, they stumble upon a strange sight: a harried wood elf engaged with an enraged unicorn.

> You step out from the trees into a small clearing where a tall elf stands with his hands raised, attempting to calm, of all things, a unicorn. It wails and screeches, eyes rolling and mouth frothing violently as foul-smelling demons surround the pair, gnashing their teeth. The elf wears a bow over one shoulder and a sword at his hip, but reaches for neither. The unicorn rears up, lashing out a foreleg, and he jumps back, barely dodging the heavy hoof aimed for his head. The small demons snarl, advancing to attack the elf.

Aethelfaer faces Onriel, a **unicorn**, and eight **dretches**. Unbeknownst to the characters and Aethelfaer, the unicorn was enchanted with a magical burr created by Granny Roachhand, a **night hag** who also summoned the dretches. She can cast the *giant insect* spell once per day with her Innate Spellcasting trait (and she carries a live scorpion for the purpose).

She wants to rule the forest and hopes to rid the wood of its wardens, Onriel and Aethelfaer, with this one curse. Granny Roachhand drank a *potion of invisibility* so she could watch the action in person. She silently stands nearby.

Aethelfaer is no coward and is capable of fighting back, but avoids harming creatures unless he deems it absolutely necessary. Unicorns are beautiful and proud celestials with generally gentle dispositions. Aethelfaer admires them as creatures of the old gods of the forest. He refuses to hurt Onriel, and can't abide anyone killing the unicorn. He is fine with killing the dretches.



Onriel's Curse

Granny Roachhand's curse makes Onriel want to kill Aethelfaer and any other creatures that get in the way. The unicorn views the dretches as allies.

A character who casts the *detect magic* spell or who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check knows that Onriel is under the effect of an enchantment caused by a prickly burr stuck in the unicorn's mane. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices that the burr has a slight red glow to it. The *lesser restoration*, *dispel magic*, *protection from evil and good*, or *remove curse* spells or similar magic end the enchantment. A character who makes a successful DC 17 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check as an action can remove the burr from the unicorn, ending the enchantment. Reducing Onriel to 0 hit points and stabilizing the unicorn ends the enchantment, though Aethelfaer reacts as though the characters had killed the unicorn (see "Aftermath") unless the characters succeed on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check to convince the ranger that it was the proper course to save Onriel. When the curse ends, Onriel enters a deep slumber as the magic leaves the unicorn's body, becoming unconscious for 1 hour.

Aethelfaer's Hint. If the characters can't decide how to approach the Onriel situation, Aethelfaer notices the glowing burr and asks them to remove it while he distracts the unicorn.

Getting Involved

When the characters arrive, half the dretches rush to meet them in combat so the unicorn can kill Aethelfaer. The demons fight until destroyed.

Aethelfaer is surprised to see unfamiliar faces this far in the forest, but he won't turn help away. He makes it incredibly clear that the unicorn is not to be harmed, declaring that something must be wrong for Onriel to behave this way. If the characters rush to attack the unicorn, they make an enemy out of Aethelfaer, who fights to defend Onriel against any threat.

Subduing or killing the unicorn results in a frustrated Granny Roachhand revealing herself by attacking the characters for interfering with her plans. When she appears, Aethelfaer curses and calls out:

> *Face me yourself, coward! No more tricks. Your kind is not welcome here.*



Aethelfaer joins the fight against the hag. She casts *giant insect* to create an enormous scorpion and then rides on its back, casting *magic missile* at enemies or attacking with her claws if the characters dare engage her in melee. Remaining dretches attack the unconscious Onriel or the characters if the unicorn is dead. At your discretion, four more dretches might claw their way up out of the Lower Planes if the characters already dispatched all or most of the demons before the hag appears. Granny Roachhand battles the characters until she is reduced to 30 hit points or fewer, at which point she casts *plane shift* to escape. As she disappears, she cries:

> *You haven't seen the last of me, ranger. Flee my wode while you can.*

Aftermath

If the characters save Onriel, Aethelfaer is in their debt. He could ask the characters for more help (see "Aethelfaer Plot Hooks"), offer to travel with them to the hag's nearby lair to end her threat against the forest once and for all, or even offer to accompany them on their adventures as a retainer (see "Aethelfaer as a Retainer").

If the characters fail to save Onriel, Aethelfaer leaves after the battle, slipping into the woods. He becomes their enemy, shadowing them whenever they enter the forest and intervening whenever they commit the smallest offense, ready to kill.

Granny Roachhand

Granny Roachhand's coven of night hags in the Lower Planes exiled her for scheming against the other sisters. She recently came to Aethelfaer's forest and plots to corrupt the beasts and plants in the wode to create an army of loyal servants. Her goal is to claim the forest as her domain and torture unsuspecting travelers who enter the woods for fun, but Aethelfaer and Onriel keep foiling her plans.

Aethelfaer as a Retainer

Retainers first appeared in *Strongholds & Followers* and are unique NPC followers who ally with the characters. These adventurers are easy-to-run secondary characters controlled by players. Below is a retainer stat block for Aethelfaer.

The full rules for retainers are explained in *Strongholds & Followers*.

Aethelfaer Retainer

Armor Medium (AC 17)

Primary Ability Dexterity, Wisdom

Saves Strength, Wisdom

Signature Attack *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Special Actions

3rd-Level (3/Day): *Poison Arrow*. Aethelfaer makes his signature attack. If he hits a creature, the target must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

5th-Level (3/Day, Bonus Action): *Cunning Action.* Aethelfaer takes the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

7th-Level (1/Day): *Multiattack*. Aethelfaer makes three signature attacks, then takes the Dash or Hide action.

Aethelfaer's Disability

Aethelfaer was born with his disability and chooses to wear prosthetics to help him perform certain tasks when adventuring. Unlike someone who may have lost a limb due to injury, illness, or amputation, Aethelfaer doesn't experience phantom limb syndrome, as his right arm and foot were never there to begin with. This also means that nothing short of a *wish* spell could reform these appendages, but Aethelfaer doesn't seek to "cure" himself. In fact, he would be greatly insulted if offered or forced into a situation where such a spell is brought up as a means to somehow "fix" him. He has no need to be "fixed" or "cured" and little patience for those ignorant enough to think otherwise.

The ranger is open about his disability and happy to answer questions others may have, but he doesn't suffer fools. Aethelfaer is an expert in knowing who is being genuine and who is deliberately ignorant or rude.

Prosthetics

Aethelfaer's prosthetic arm and foot slot over the stump of each limb and are further secured in place by leather harnesses: one around his shin and calf, and the other around his chest, sitting under his armor. It takes Aethelfaer 2 minutes to secure each harness and roughly 30 seconds to remove them.

To prevent chafing or bruising–especially when wearing a prosthetic for long periods of time–Aethelfaer's stumps are protected by "socks." These pieces of fabric are rolled up and folded down to cover the skin and protect the area where the stump meets the cup of the prosthetic. At the start and end of each day, Aethelfaer uses powdered talc to keep the skin dry and free from any rashes, uncomfortable chafing, and blistering, particularly on warm days or when the humidity is high.

When traveling or in an unknown location, Aethelfaer sleeps with his prosthetics on in case of an ambush or need to escape. However, if he is in a place he knows to be secure and safe, Aethelfaer removes his prosthetics to sleep and uses an underarm crutch under his left arm for support when moving around.

Hidden Compartment

Aethelfaer has a hidden compartment in his prosthetic arm, running the length of the inside of his wrist. By pressing the heel of his thumb (which requires no action), this slot pops open and reveals a metal groove packed with a strange paste. This alchemical component is a personal

poison Aethelfaer has created himself, and exposing the compartment allows him to swiftly coat the head of any arrow or blade he draws with a toxic coating to deal extra damage.

Natural Grip

Aethelfaer's prosthetic foot is crafted to have the general shape of a deer's hoof. This allows for a greater range of motion in the ankle joint and enables that foot to take significant impact when running, climbing, or performing athletic or dexterous feats. The wedge of the prosthetic's foot provides a better grip on mountainous and rocky environments, as well as the typical underbrush of the forest and dirt of the grassland. The flexibility of this prosthetic is showcased greatly whenever Aethelfaer is running or if he is lightly bouncing on the balls of his feet—something he does often when nervous or agitated.

Aethelfaer's Craftsmanship

If the characters don't make an enemy of Aethelfaer, he is happy to craft prosthetic limbs for characters who need them. However, characters need to find and provide him with the materials to do so. To craft a prosthetic arm or hand, Aethelfaer needs wood (any kind), leather straps, owlbear teeth, sinew, and resin. To craft a prosthetic leg or foot, he needs yew wood, leather straps, deer antler (ethically sourced), sinew, and resin. Aethelfaer knows a magical strengthening and flexibility wood treatment that is iconic of wood elf bow crafting and used in the creation of his prosthetics.

If a character supplies Aethelfaer with the components, he doesn't charge them for the service.

Prosthetic Stats

A prosthetic limb presents no advantages or disadvantages whenever you are wearing it, and you can perform all typical motor skills from everyday to fine. Prosthetics require no attunement and are secured to your body using a harness that sits underneath your armor. It takes 2 minutes to don the harness and 30 seconds to remove it. Prosthetic limbs can't be knocked off unless the harness is somehow destroyed.

Custom-made prosthetics, such as the ones worn by Aethelfaer, can provide benefits to you. See "Hidden Compartment" and "Natural Grip" for ideas.

It is extremely important for Game Masters and other players to remember that disability isn't a punishment and shouldn't be held against a character.

Missing Arm

If you aren't wearing your prosthetic arm/hand, you have disadvantage on wielding two-handed weapons and on ability checks using fine motor skills if you are only using that arm/hand.

Missing Leg

If you aren't wearing your prosthetic leg/foot, your walking speed is reduced by 5 feet unless you are using mobility aids such as crutches or a wheelchair.

More Than a Disability

Disabilities are very much a part of our lives, but aren't what solely define a person. Aethelfaer does and should have interests as a fleshed-out character, with his disability making up only a *part* of who he is. As such, it's important to note that Aethelfaer enjoys hunting, whittling animals out of wood, and gathering plants and herbs to produce potions and tinctures he then sells or trades for supplies. He is knowledgeable in the horticulture of forests and grasslands, and is exceedingly fond of ravens and other corvids.



Sharang Biswas has won IndieCade and IGDN awards for roleplaying games, and has showcased interactive works at institutions such as The Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, Pioneer Works in Brooklyn, and The Museum of the Moving Image in Queens. He has written for games such as *Spire*, *Sea of Legends*, *Jiangshi: Blood on the Banquet Hall*, *Into the Motherlands*, and *Dungeons & Dragons Live*, while his essays and fiction have appeared or are forthcoming in Dicebreaker, Eurogamer, Lightspeed Magazine, Fantasy Magazine and more. He is the co-editor of "Honey & Hot Wax: An Anthology of Erotic Art Games" (Pelgrane Press, 2020), and "Strange Lusts / Strange Loves: An Anthology of Erotic Interactive Fiction" (Strange Horizons, 2021).



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discord.gg/mcdm

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

We make a lot of monsters at MCDM. New monsters have appeared in the pages of *ARCADIA*, as well as in *Strongholds & Followers* and the recently-released *Kingdoms & Warfare*. We also make miniatures of all kinds of creatures, from Trudy the ruby wyrmling to Relg, the Lord in Corpulect. Our upcoming projects are brimming with fantastical creatures, and lately we've been spending even more time thinking about fantasy creatures great and small. First up is *The Beastmaster and Companions*, which includes new rules for player character pets and a class, the beastmaster, that adventures with one of these faithful companions. We're also working on our next big hardcover: a book of creatures that won't just supplement the core monster book, but can also replace it.

Why do we want to create these fantastic creatures? The obvious answer is that they're core to a game that is built around fighting monsters. But if we dig just a little deeper, we're forced to ask why we love a game that revolves around imaginary critters.

First of all, monsters inspire us to tell stories. They do things no creature in the real world can, and they have fascinating lore—whether they originate from centuries of folklore and myth or they're brand-new creations. Such beings make memorable allies and enemies. The mere existence of dragons, unicorns, and xorns makes us ask, "What else is out there?"

I think the first mechanical piece of the game that many GMs homebrew is a monster, because they want to add a creature to their story that doesn't exist anywhere else. It may just be a kobold with 100 more hit points than usual or an ogre with a tarrasque's Reflective Carapace trait, but that monster becomes unique. The GM and players will remember the encounter with the creature that was theirs alone for years to come.

Another question fantastic beasts make us ask is, "If these things about a monster are true, what else is true about this creature? What effects does the existence of this creature have on the world?" For instance, a GM might know that metallic dragons eat gemstones and decide that because powerful creatures devour precious stones, the world has very few left. In fact, owning a gemstone makes you a target for hungry dragons who devoured most of what the earth has to offer and are searching for a last morsel.

ARCADIA 8 is an ode to monsters. While this issue isn't packed with new stat blocks, it does revolve around badass creatures. Jessica Marcrum's "Subclasses of the Hag" turns one of the game's favorite creatures into warlock patrons, bard inspirations, and sorcerer progenitors. Dark deals and endless torments define hags. Why should the GM get to have all the fun? With this article, players can take the reins and tell their own hag-centered stories.

"Monstrous Components" from V.J. Harris is inspired by the lore and mechanics of monsters. Have you ever asked, "Do material spell components really matter?" Well, now they do. Get out those harvesting kits and start removing that dead aboleth's eyes, because those peepers are going to turn your spells into finishing moves.

Bianca Bickford's "The Emerald Exchange" has one of the most fearsome monsters of all: a human with power and wealth who will do anything to keep both, including betray her friends. After all, wouldn't the allure of gathering as many powerful magic items as possible turn some heroes into the very monsters they battle?

Ex animo,
James Introcaso
Managing Editor

Ads?!

Well, yeah! Hear me out. :D

Hey everybody, Matt Colville here! A lot of folks compare *ARCADIA* to the classic gaming magazines of yore, and this brings us great joy. At the same time, we're always thinking about ways to capture that same spirit (without severely impacting our schedule).

Something I miss from those 1980s gaming magazines were ads! That may seem strange, but I literally miss them. As a consumer!

For one thing, ads in gaming mags were usually cool. Or fun! You know, these are all small companies, creator owned, making nerd stuff for nerds and so even when I didn't particularly care about the product, it was still cool to see all these different games and accessories. It felt like you were part of a bigger community, not just of players and GMs, but of creators.

Back then, ads in magazines were one of the only ways to learn about new products. Especially if the product came from a smaller company. Frankly, I feel the same way now! There are a ton of companies making cool products that even I don't know anything about, because the internet is huge and it's often impossible for a small company to get its product in front of the right audience.

Since these companies were incredibly tiny and creative owned, owned by nerds, the ads often had personality, which I love.

So, me, I never saw those ads as annoying. I miss them! I still see ads! They just suck. You do a bunch of research on suitcases, pull the trigger on a good suitcase you can afford, and now you see nothing but suitcase ads! Great, thanks. Perfect.

It's amazing how much data these companies have about us, and yet how terrible online ads are. I was on a RPG discussion site and I noticed a banner ad for Gaming Paper which looked like exactly the kind of thing I needed and would use at my table. So I clicked on the ad! I bought some Gaming Paper, and I've been using it ever since.

It is literally the only time I can remember where I clicked on an ad on a website. Because it's the only time I can remember where the ad was something I actually wanted!

Given all this, we decided to try an experiment. We reached out to some creators we know and asked if they wanted to put an ad in *ARCADIA*. Our goal with ads is not to generate revenue (although they will do a little of that) but to put cool products in front of you, that we think you might like, but might not have heard of.

These ads are curated. An ad appearing in *ARCADIA* is not an endorsement of the company or the product, but we do our research and want to make sure any ad in *ARCADIA* has a reasonable chance of being something we, as consumers, would buy. That's the criteria.

It may seem hard to believe in this cynical world, but we really are introducing ads to *ARCADIA* primarily because we think it's neat. It's fun to see other gaming products you didn't know about, and we think it has the potential to be a lot more useful to you, the consumer, than the ads you normally see online, which I find to be pretty useless.

Now, if you notice the ads in here, and they annoy you, please tell us! *ARCADIA* is always an experiment. If there's a great hue and cry against them, we'll rethink this whole thing.

But we think they're neat! :D

—Matt Colville

SUBCLASSES OF THE HAG

Three new hag-inspired subclasses for warlocks, sorcerers, and bards

by Jessica Marcrum

Maligned faerie mischief-makers, hags wield far more power than their appearance suggests. When a hag's foes and victims underestimate her, she thrives. The oldest and wisest hags, grandmothers, play this deception so well that they inspire awe in their local communities and aspiring warlocks beg for their patronage. Some sorcerers are born from a hag bloodline and struggle to find acceptance from communities that fear their "grannies." Bards tell stories of wicked witches in the woods, terrifying children and adults alike.

Legend of the Wicked Witch

The wise woman in the woods with a gleam of mischief in her eye. The ancient crone who roams the streets, talking to alleycats. The kindly widow with the frightening smile. Hags embody humanity's fears of manipulation, getting lost, and, worst of all, growing old. Solitary and crafty, hags typically keep only animal familiars as companions. On occasion, however, hags come together in groups of three or more to form covens, greatly increasing their power and spellcasting ability. As rife with disagreement as they are affection, hags in a coven constantly vie for control over each other.

All hags share a few key commonalities, regardless of their variety. Most come from the Feywild and possess the faerie fixation with deals. Hags always twist the odds of these pacts in their favor. Rare is the hag without a grand plan, and rarer still is one that resists the natural temptation to prey upon human nature, bending mortals' worst impulses for the hag's amusement. Green hags particularly love to toy with mortal emotions. Night hags are partial to terrifying mortals to death, and sea hags relish destruction in all forms.

The subclasses introduced in this article were developed around the legend of the hag, though any fairy-tale trickster could be used in their place. Perhaps a bard is inspired by the Big Bad Wolf, maybe a warlock seeks out Reynard the Fox, or perchance a sorcerer is descended from dreaded Queen Mab. The hag's legend looms large, but the world of faerie is vast and rife with tales to explore.

Warlock Hag Patron

Grandmother hags never stop scheming and relish the assistance of a minion...warlock...same thing. They train assistants inclined toward herbalism, animal care, spellwork, and menace. With time, these warlocks rely upon their grandmothers for magical gifts.

Hags are involved patrons. Quick to punish her warlocks for acting against her interests, a hag patron is opinionated and dedicated to molding her "grandchildren." Warlocks who have an entire coven mentoring them typically also have to work around inter-coven politics, with each hag using the warlock to gain advantage over the other hags.

Grandmother Hags

Older, wiser, and far more dangerous than the average hag, grandmother hags are powerful beings who warp the world to suit their will. Living alone or ruling over covens, the domain of a grandmother hag is completely under her control. Her magic permeates the area surrounding her lair and bends it to her desires. For instance, grandmother sea hags fill watery caves with slime and rot, while grandmother green hags prefer dense marshes, forests, and swamps filled with animals to serve as her minions. Grandmother night hags live anywhere they find dreamers, twisting the very shadows to horrify their prey.

With little exception, grandmothers are the only hags powerful enough on their own to serve as a patron, sometimes grooming warlocks to become hags and serve in their coven when the time suits.



Hag Kind

Choose your patron's kind or determine it randomly, rolling on the Hag Kind table below. If your patron is a coven of hags, you gain the coven features of this subclass, regardless of the kind of hags that make up the coven.

Hag Kind

d4	Kind
1	Green
2	Night
3	Sea
4	Coven

Hag Patron Features

Warlock Level	Feature
1st	Expanded Spell List, Bonus Cantrip, Horrifying Appearance
6th	Auntie's Travel Guide
10th	Wicked Claws
14th	Grandmother's Wrath

Expanded Spell List

The Hag lets you choose from an expanded list of spells when you learn a warlock spell. The following spells are added to the warlock spell list for you, determined by your patron's kind: green, night, sea, or coven.

Spell Level	Green Hag Spells	Night Hag Spells	Sea Hag Spells	Coven Spells
1st	*disguise self, silent image*	*magic missile, sleep*	*create or destroy water, fog cloud*	*animal friendship, hideous laughter*
2nd	*detect thoughts, spike growth*	*alter self, blindness/deafness*	*moonbeam, silence*	*locate object, web*
3rd	*bestow curse, conjure animals*	*blink, slow*	*water walk, wind wall*	*lightning bolt, tiny hut*
4th	*dominate beast, polymorph*	*faithful hound, phantasmal killer*	*black tentacles, control water*	*compulsion, divination*
5th	*dominate person, mislead*	*insect plague, modify memory*	*cloudkill, contagion*	*cone of cold, geas*

Bonus Cantrip

At 1st level, you learn the *vicious mockery* cantrip. It counts as a warlock cantrip for you, but doesn't count against your number of cantrips known.

Horrifying Appearance

At 1st level, you can use a bonus action to make your appearance monstrous with massive, knobbly clawed hands for 1 minute. When you change your appearance, each creature you choose within 30 feet of you that can see you must make a Wisdom saving throw against your spell save DC or become frightened of you until you no longer appear monstrous. A frightened creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, at disadvantage if you are still in line of sight, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a target's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the target is immune to your Horrific Appearance for the next 24 hours.

While your appearance is monstrous, you can use an action to make an attack against a creature within 5 feet of you with your claws, which deal 2d8 slashing damage on a hit. You can use your Charisma modifier for the claws' attack and damage rolls.

Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Auntie's Travel Guide

Starting at 6th level, your patron grants you one of her favorite abilities to expedite your escape or spy on your foes.

Green. As an action, you magically turn invisible for 10 minutes or until you attack, cast a spell, or your concentration ends (as if concentrating on a spell). While invisible, you leave no physical evidence of your passage, so you can be tracked only by magic. Any equipment you wear or carry is invisible with you. You can use this feature a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

Night. You learn to craft a *lesser heartstone*, a magical lustrous black gem. Crafting a *lesser heartstone* requires 4 hours of uninterrupted work, which can coincide with a long rest.

While holding the stone, you can use an action to cast the *etherealness* spell without expending a spell slot, but the spell ends after a number of rounds equal to your proficiency bonus. After you use the *lesser heartstone* in this way, it is destroyed.

If you create a new *lesser heartstone*, the previous one ceases to function.

Sea. You gain a swimming speed of 40 feet, and you can breathe underwater. When you are fully submerged, any creature that is also fully submerged can understand your speech if you share a language, and you can understand theirs.

Additionally, you can pollute the very ground upon which you walk or waters where you swim. As an action, you release noxious vapors in a 15-foot-radius sphere centered on yourself for 10 minutes. Any nonmagical plant in the area that is not a creature withers and dies. Any creature of your choice that enters the area for the first time on a turn or starts its turn there must succeed on a Constitution saving throw against your spell save DC or become poisoned for 1 minute. A poisoned creature can repeat the save at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. Once you pollute your environment in this way, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.

Coven. You learn to create a *lesser hag's eye* by coating an eye in varnish and performing a ritual upon it. Crafting a *lesser hag's eye* requires 1 hour of uninterrupted work, which can coincide with a short or long rest. While you are on the same plane of existence as the *lesser hag's eye*, you can use an action to see through it until the start of your next turn. While you see through the eye, you can see invisible creatures and objects as if they were visible, though you are blind with regard to your own senses. A *lesser hag's eye* has AC 10 and 1 hit point. If it is destroyed by someone other than you, you take 3d8 psychic damage.

If you create a new *lesser hag's eye*, the previous one ceases to function.

Wicked Claws

Beginning at 10th level, when taking on your Horrifying Appearance, your claws are empowered with the fear of your enemies. Your claws deal an extra 2d8 psychic damage on a hit, plus an additional 3d8 psychic damage if the target is frightened.

Your Horrifying Appearance now lasts a number of minutes equal to your warlock level.

While your Horrifying Appearance is active, you can't be charmed or frightened.

Grandmother's Wrath

Starting at 14th level, you torment and bewilder your foes in a style according to your patron's hag type.

Green. You can expertly mimic animal sounds and humanoid voices you have heard. A creature that hears the sounds can tell they are imitations with a successful Wisdom (Insight) check against your spell save DC.

Additionally, while mimicking a sound or voice, you can target one creature that can hear and understand you within 60 feet of you, reminding them of all their failures, flaws, and insecurities. That creature must make a Wisdom saving throw against your spell save DC. On a success, the target takes 4d10 psychic damage. On a failure, it is charmed by you for 1 minute. While charmed in this way, the target falls prone and is incapacitated for the duration, thinking only of its faults. A charmed target can repeat the saving throw whenever it takes damage, ending the condition on itself on a success and taking no psychic damage as a result of the effect ending. Once you attempt to charm a creature with this feature, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.

Night. While in possession of a *lesser heartstone*, you hold the power of disease and death in your hands. As a bonus action, you can touch your *lesser heartstone* to a creature and choose one of the following two options: cure the target of all diseases affecting it or cast *finger of death* without expending a spell slot (targeting the creature you touch with the *lesser heartstone*) and gaining temporary hit points equal to half the damage dealt by the spell. Once you use the *lesser heartstone* in this way, you can't use this feature again until you finish a long rest.

Sea. No one can stand against your horrifying gaze. As an action, you can target one frightened creature you can see within 30 feet of you. If the target can see you, it must make a Wisdom saving throw against your spell save DC. On a failed save, its hit points are reduced to 0. On a successful save, it takes 5d10 psychic damage. Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Coven. Your *lesser hag's eye* is imbued with the power of your coven. Your hag's eye can hover up to 15 feet in the air as long as it is within 120 feet of you. On your turn, you can move a floating eye up to 30 feet in any direction (no action). If the eye is more than 120 feet from you, it falls.

Additionally, when you cast a spell with a casting time of 1 action, you can use a bonus action to cast it from the eye as if you were in the eye's space.

You can also use an action to explode your hag's eye in a 60-foot-radius sphere of psychic energy. All creatures in the area must make a Wisdom saving throw against your spell save DC, taking 4d10 psychic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Wicked Witch Sorcerous Origin



Most hags can assume a variety of appearances and aren't opposed to dallying with humanoids, especially if the mortals serve their interests. The offspring of these liaisons demonstrate an early gift for magical troublemaking. Some hags raise these children as their own as minions and might even allow them to join the coven. Others stay with their mortal parents, who are typically shocked when their toddler starts invading their dreams or ripping apart their best clothing with vicious claws.

Granny's Gifts

Starting at 1st level, you learn additional spells when you reach certain levels in this class, as shown on the Granny's Spells table. Each of these spells counts as a sorcerer spell for you, but it doesn't count against the number of sorcerer spells you know.

Whenever you gain a sorcerer level, you can replace one spell you gained from this feature with another spell of the same level. The new spell must be an enchantment or an illusion spell from the sorcerer, warlock, or wizard spell list.

In addition, your ancestor offers you certain resistances you can pass on to others. When you finish a long rest, choose yourself or a creature within 30 feet of you that you can see. The target has advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened until the end of your next long rest or until you die.

Hag Ancestor

Also at 1st level, choose your ancestor's kind or determine it randomly on the Ancestor Kind table below. The magic specialty associated with each hag is used by features you gain later.

You can speak, read, and write the language of your ancestor, and you gain the bonus proficiency determined by the kind. Additionally, you have advantage on Charisma checks made to influence hags.

Wicked Witch Features

Sorcerer Level	Feature
1st	Granny's Gifts, Hag Ancestor
6th	Clever Little Witch
14th	Fly, My Pretty
18th	Coven Calling

Granny's Spells

Sorcerer Level	Spells
1st	*bane, hideous laughter*
3rd	*animal messenger, mirror image*
5th	*fear, hypnotic pattern*
7th	*confusion, greater invisibility*
9th	*dream, mislead*

Ancestor Kind

d6	Kind	Specialty	Language	Bonus Proficiency
1–2	Green	Illusion	Sylvan	Deception
3–4	Night	Enchantment	Abyssal	Insight
5–6	Sea	Transmutation	Aquan	Intimidation

Clever Little Witch

At 6th level, you can turn your enemies' spells against them. When a creature targets you or an ally within 15 feet of you with a spell of 1st level or higher that targets only one creature and requires an attack roll or forces the target to make a saving throw, you can use your reaction immediately after the spell resolves and spend a number of sorcery points equal to the spell's level to cast it back at the caster, without expending material components. This spell uses your spell save DC and spell attack bonus, and if it is from your ancestor's specialty school, it costs half the number of sorcery points (rounded down).

Fly, My Pretty

At 14th level, when you finish a long rest, you can touch a Small or Medium object of your choice, such as a broom, bedroll, or bagpipes, and enchant it to fly.

The enchanted item functions as normal until you or another creature stands astride it and uses an action or bonus action to speak its command word (chosen by you upon enchanting the object). It then hovers and can be ridden in the air. Using another action or bonus action to speak the command word again causes the item to stop hovering.

While hovering, the item has a flying speed of 60 feet. It can carry a Small or Medium creature, along with everything the creature is wearing or carrying. While a creature is flying on the item, it can't be charmed or frightened.

If you enchant a new flying item, the previous one ceases to function.

Coven Calling

By 18th level, you seek vengeance on the spellweavers who would not accept you or your ancestors. When you use Clever Little Witch, you can cast any spell of 1st level or higher you saw the triggering creature cast in the last minute by spending sorcery points equal to the spell's level or, if it is from your ancestor's specialty school, half the number of sorcery points (rounded down).

Additionally, you can spend 2 sorcery points as an action to conjure two hag-like duplicates of yourself in your space. They function like the duplicates in the *mirror image* spell, but they can act on the same initiative count immediately after you. On its turn, a duplicate can only take one action to cast a spell you know of 1st, 2nd, or 3rd level with an instantaneous duration. You must spend sorcery points equal to the spell's level for the duplicate to cast it.

Bardic College of Grandmother's Tales

There are few evils so frightening as the wicked witch. Living in the woods, a swamp, or the top of a tower, she imprisons, robs, maims, or murders all who come near. Bards know the power of a good story, and those following the College of Grandmother's Tales use the horror of the wicked witch to their advantage. They draw upon the fears of growing old, mortality, the loss of agency, and the inability to trust those closest to you to terrify their foes.

College of Grandmother's Tales Features

Bard Level	Feature
3rd	Book of Tales, Have a Bite, Horrifying Performance
6th	Granny's Here
14th	Poisonous Performance



Book of Tales

When you join the College of Grandmother's Tales at 3rd level, you receive a book of fairy tales, sheet music, or poetry that you can use as a spellcasting focus for your bard spells. If you lose this focus, you must write or purchase a new book.

Have a Bite

Also at 3rd level, you infuse your stories with tales of poisoned fruit given to fairy-tale royals. You learn the *poison spray* cantrip, which doesn't count against the number of bard cantrips you know.

Additionally, as an action, you can expend one use of your Bardic Inspiration, choose one creature within 30 feet of you that can hear you, and roll the Bardic Inspiration die. The target must make a Constitution saving throw against your spell save DC. On a failure, the target takes poison damage equal to the roll plus your Charisma modifier and is poisoned for 1 minute. A poisoned creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. On a successful save, a target takes only half the damage and isn't poisoned.

At 5th level, a creature that fails its saving throw against this feature becomes poisoned and falls prone. At 10th level, a creature that fails its saving throw against this feature becomes poisoned and falls prone, and while poisoned in this way, the creature's speed is reduced to 0. At 15th level, a creature that fails its saving throw against this feature becomes poisoned and falls prone, and while poisoned in this way, the creature's speed is reduced to 0 and it is incapacitated.

Horrifying Performance

Also at 3rd level, you learn to tell quick, terrifying stories that make any creature seem nightmarish. As an action, you perform a short tale or song about a creature within 30 feet of you that you can see. Every creature of your choice that can hear you and is within 15 feet of the target must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw against your spell save DC or be frightened of the target for 1 minute. A frightened creature can repeat the saving throw at the start of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. The creature has disadvantage on the saving throw to end the effect if it has taken damage from the target since the end of its last turn.

Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Granny's Here

When you reach 6th level, you can use your action to summon a spectral witch from a book of tales, sheet music, or another storytelling device. It uses the ethereal hag stat block and shares your proficiency bonus. The hag is friendly to you and your companions, seeing all of you as her grandchildren. She lives for 1 hour, until she is reduced to 0 hit points, or until you die.

Etheral Hag

Medium fey, neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 10 + five times your bard level

Speed 30 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Damage Resistances cold, fire, poison

Condition Immunities charmed

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Sylvan, understands the languages you speak

Horrific Appearance. Each humanoid chosen by the hag that starts its turn within 30 feet of the hag and can see her must make a Wisdom saving throw against your spell save DC. On a failed save, the creature is frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, with disadvantage if the hag is within line of sight, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the hag's Horrific Appearance for the next 24 hours.

Mimicry. The hag can mimic animal sounds and humanoid voices. A creature that hears the sounds can tell they are imitations with a successful Wisdom (Insight) check at DC 8 + PB + your Charisma modifier.

Actions

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* your spell attack modifier to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 1d8 + PB slashing damage + 1d6 psychic damage.

Etherealness. The ethereal hag magically enters the Ethereal Plane from the Material Plane, or vice versa.

In combat, the ethereal hag shares your initiative count, but takes her turn immediately after yours. She can move and use her reaction on her own, but the only action she takes on her turn is the Dodge action, unless you use a bonus action on your turn to command her to take another action. That action can be one in her stat block or some other action. If you are incapacitated, she can take any action of her choice, not just the Dodge action.

Once you summon an ethereal hag with this feature, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.

POISONOUS PERFORMANCE

By 14th level, your terrifying words sting. Your Horrifying Performance affects creatures of your choice that can hear you within 30 feet of the target.

If a creature fails its saving throw against your Horrifying Performance, you can immediately use Have a Bite against it as a reaction. The target has disadvantage on the saving throw against Have a Bite.

Retainers of the Hag

Retainers first appeared in *Strongholds & Followers* as unique NPC followers who pledge their service to player characters. These less-experienced adventurers are easy-to-run secondary characters controlled by players. Below are retainer stat blocks for NPCs that wield the magic of hags.

The full rules for retainers are explained in *Strongholds & Followers*.

Witch

The witch retainer is inspired by the Hag warlock patron.

Armor Light (AC 13)

Primary Ability Charisma

Saves Wisdom, Charisma

Skills Deception, Intimidation

Signature Attack *vicious mockery*

Special Actions

3rd-Level (3/Day): *mirror image*

5th-Level (1/Day): *polymorph*

7th-Level (1/Day): ***Auntie's Travel Guide.*** The witch casts the *greater invisibility* spell. While invisible, the witch is completely silent and leaves no tracks.

Grandchild

The grandchild retainer is inspired by the Wicked Witch sorcerous origin.

Armor Light (AC 13)

Primary Ability Charisma

Saves Constitution, Charisma

Skills Deception, Stealth

Signature Attack *shocking grasp*

Special Actions

3rd-Level (3/Day): *disguise self*

5th-Level (1/Day): *fly*

7th-Level (1/Day): ***Clever Little Witch.*** After being targeted by a spell that targets one creature, the Grandchild casts the same spell on a new target within 30 feet.

Folklorist

The folklorist is inspired by the College of Grandmother's Tales bardic college.

Armor Light (AC 13)

Primary Ability Charisma

Saves Dexterity, Charisma

Skills Deception, History, Performance

Signature Attack *poison spray*

Special Actions

3rd-Level (3/Day): ***Poisoned Words.*** The folklorist targets a creature within 30 feet and rolls a d6. The target must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or take poison damage equal to the number on the d6 and become poisoned for 1 minute. On a successful save, the target only takes the poison damage and isn't poisoned.

5th-Level (1/Day): *fear*

7th-Level (1/Day): *conjure woodland beings*



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KICKSTARTER

September 30th

MONSTROUS COMPONENTS

Make spells more potent with monster parts

by V.J. Harris

Trapped in a dead-end alley, Thyilius and Nalfein exchanged a glance. Four of the bandit king's warriors blocked their only exit.

"Any bright ideas on how we're going to get out of this?" growled Thyilius, as he parried a blow from one of their assailants.

"Just one. And you might want to duck," replied Nalfien. They reached into their component pouch and pulled out an abnormally large, pulsating heart. "Feel the flames of Varlahna the Red Doom!"

White hot flames poured from Nalfien's mouth, engulfing the alley. Thyilius managed to dodge out of the way, but the bandits were not so lucky. One moment they were shrieking in pain—the next, they were reduced to fleshless skeletons in melted armor.

In your travels to distant lands and alien planes, you come across monsters of all kinds. Some you avoid, some you befriend, but others you put an end to—and you can find a bounty in the flesh, bones, blood, and organs of the monsters you kill. These gory tokens will amplify the power of your spells and give you new ways to defeat your next enemies!

This article includes rules for harvesting new material components from the corpses of many creatures, as well as the effects those components have on various spells.

Harvesting Components

You can use any sharp blade to butcher a creature for spell component parts, but your best chance of getting an aboleth eye out of a socket in one piece is to use a harvesting kit. At the GM's discretion, whenever an ancestry, background, class, or feat allows you to gain proficiency with a set of tools, you can choose a harvesting kit instead of the other tool options.

A harvesting kit contains ten vials, two tweezers, three harvesting knives (small, medium and large), and pieces of burlap fabric. The kit costs 20 gp. When you harvest components from a creature's remains with a harvesting kit, make a Dexterity check, adding your proficiency bonus if you are proficient with the kit. You also can harvest components from monsters without a harvesting kit using any sharpened blade, but checks to do so are made with disadvantage.

The difficulty of removing a component depends on the monster's type and the component you're harvesting, as shown on the tables later in this article. You make one check to harvest all of one type of component a creature has to offer. For example, you only need to make one successful DC 17 Dexterity check with your harvesting kit to harvest all three eyes from an aboleth. Alternatively, at the GM's discretion, checks can be made for every component.

The time it takes to harvest a component is based on the check's DC, as shown on the Harvesting Time table below.

On a successful harvesting check, you obtain the desired component. On a failed check, you can repeat the check with disadvantage as many times as you wish. However, if you fail a check by 5 or more, the part is destroyed.

Each creature has a specific number of usable components that you can harvest. For instance, planetars have more than thirty feathers in their wings, but only thirty that are of the right size and quality to be used as components. Finding and identifying these feathers is part of the harvesting process.

Harvesting Time Table

DC	Time
5–10	5 minutes
11–15	15 minutes
16–20	30 minutes
21+	1 hour

Spellcasting with Monstrous Components

When you cast a spell using a monstrous component, the new component replaces any material components normally required by the spell, except for components that have a cost of more than 300 gp.[1] These expensive material components must be provided as normal along with the monstrous component.

After you cast the spell, the monstrous component is consumed. A monstrous component can be used for a spell even if that spell doesn't typically require material components, or if the monstrous component doesn't replace any material components of the spell.

Monstrous components change a spell's effects as described below. Any effects of the spell that aren't noted remain the same. You can only use one monstrous component per casting of a spell.

The components in this article are organized by creature type. Creatures with an asterisk (*) next to their name can be found in *Strongholds & Followers*. Creatures with a dagger (†) can be found in *Kingdoms & Warfare*.

[1] Game design note: many material components cost money, which requires adventuring. These components require dead monsters, which also requires adventuring, so that's why monster parts can replace some costly material components.

Aberrations

Unnerving creatures of alien provenance, aberrations lurk in dark places and forgotten corners of the World Below.

Aberration Components

Monster	Component	Quantity Available	Harvesting DC
Aboleth	Eye	3	17
	Piece of brain	8	20
	Piece of tentacle	20	12
Cloaker	Eye	2	17
	Hide	1	16
Lord Rall*	Hide	1	16
Maladar Dictum*	Hide	1	16
Mindkiller†	Piece of brain	4	20

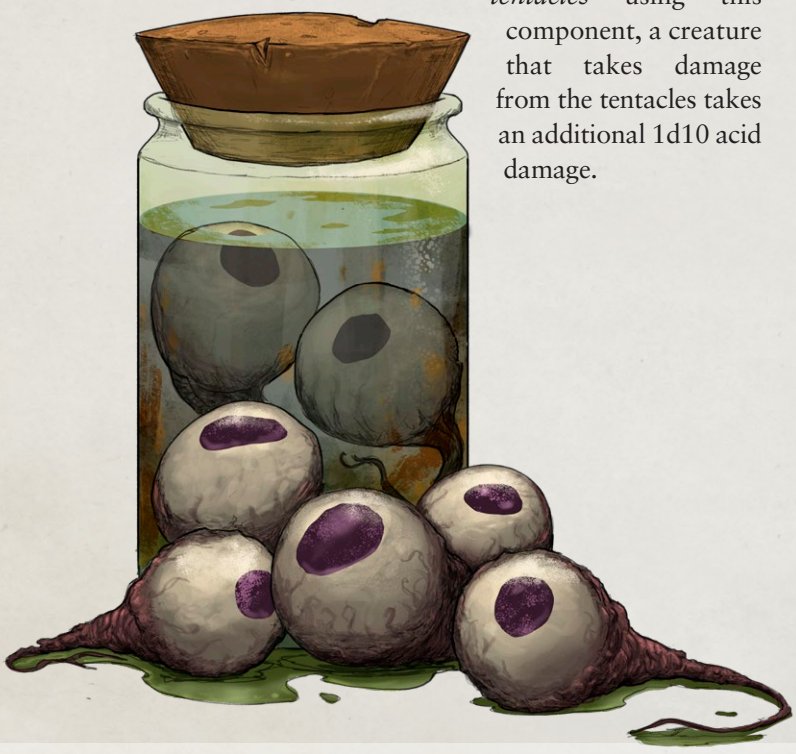
Aboleth

These aboleth components provide the following benefits.

Aboleth Eye. When you cast *legend lore* using this component, you can learn about an additional person, place, or object of legendary importance.

Piece of Aboleth Brain. When you cast a spell that deals psychic damage using this component, the spell's damage die size increases by one: a d4 becomes a d6, a d6 becomes a d8, and so on, to a maximum of a d12. You also deal three extra dice of damage whenever the spell deals damage.

Piece of Aboleth Tentacle. When you cast *black tentacles* using this component, a creature that takes damage from the tentacles takes an additional 1d10 acid damage.



Cloaker

These cloaker components provide the following benefits.

Cloaker Eye. When you cast *mirror image* using this component, you create three additional duplicates. If you have four or more duplicates, you must roll a 4 or higher to change an attack's target to a duplicate.

Cloaker Hide. When you cast *mage armor* using this component, the target's base AC becomes 15 + its Dexterity modifier. The target also becomes resistant to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage for the duration of the spell.

Lord Rall's Hide

When you cast *polymorph* or *true polymorph* using this component, you can target an additional creature of your choice within the spell's range.

Maladar Dictum's Hide

When you cast *regenerate* using this component, the target regains an additional 1d8 hit points. For the duration of the spell, the target also regains 5 hit points at the start of each of its turns, and any severed appendages are instantly restored.

Mindkiller's Piece of Brain

When you cast a spell that deals psychic damage using this component, the spell's damage die size increases by one: a d4 becomes a d6, a d6 becomes a d8, and so on, to a maximum of a d12. You also deal two extra dice of damage whenever the spell deals damage.

CELESTIALS

Beings of the Upper Planes, celestials serve deities and help maintain balance throughout the multiverse.

Celestial Components

Monster	Component	Quantity Available	Harvesting DC
Authority*	Blood	10 vials	10
	Sword	1	–
Couatl	Feather	20	10
Deva	Blood	10 vials	10
	Feather	20	10
	Hide	1	16
Planetar	Blood	15 vials	10
	Feather	30	10
	Hide	1	16
Princip*	Blood	1 vial	10
	Crown	1	–
Solar	Blood	15 vials	10
	Feather	30	10
Unicorn	Blood	15 vials	10
	Hoof	4	14
	Horn	1	13
Virtue*	Vocal cord	4	17

AUTHORITY

These Authority components provide the following benefits.

Authority Blood. When you cast *bless* using this component, the die a target can add to attack rolls and saving throws increases to a d6.

Authority Sword. When you cast *protection from evil and good* using this component, you can target up to three willing creatures within the spell's range.

COUATL FEATHER

When you cast *polymorph* using this component, the target retains its mental ability scores and ability to speak. It can perform the somatic and verbal components of a spell while in its new form, but it can't provide material components.

DEVA

These deva components provide the following benefits.

Deva Blood. When you cast a spell that allows you to roll one or more dice to restore hit points to a creature using this component, you can roll two additional dice when determining the hit points the creature regains.

When you cast *aid* using this component, each target's hit point maximum and current hit points increase by an additional 20 for the duration.

Deva Feather. When you cast *feather fall* using this component, creatures targeted by the spell fall at a rate of 90 feet per round.

When you cast *fly* using this component, the target's flying speed increases to 90 feet.

Deva Hide. When you cast *polymorph* using this component, you can transform the chosen creature into a celestial of challenge rating 10 or lower.

PLANETAR

These planetar components provide the following benefits.

Planetar Blood. When you cast a spell that allows you to roll one or more dice to restore hit points to a creature using this component, you can roll three additional dice when determining the hit points the creature regains.

When you cast *aid* using this component, each target's hit point maximum and current hit points increase by an additional 30 for the duration.

Planetar Feather. When you cast *feather fall* using this component, creatures targeted by the spell fall at a rate of 120 feet per round.

When you cast *fly* using this component, the target's flying speed increases to 120 feet.

Planetar Hide. When you cast *polymorph* using this component, you can transform the chosen creature into a celestial of challenge rating 16 or lower.

PRINCIP

These Princip components provide the following benefits.

Princip Blood. When you cast *protection from evil and good* using this component, you can target up to two willing creatures within the spell's range.

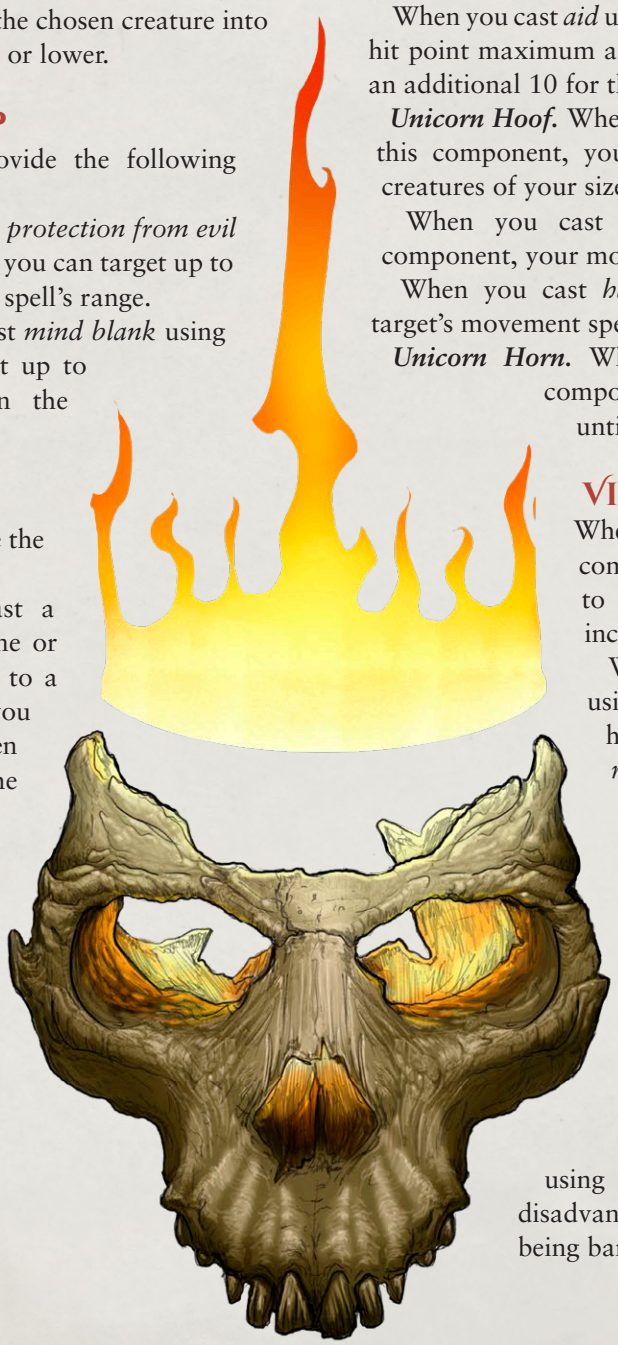
Princip Crown. When you cast *mind blank* using this component, you can target up to three willing creatures within the spell's range.

SOLAR

These solar components provide the following benefits.

Solar Blood. When you cast a spell that allows you to roll one or more dice to restore hit points to a creature using this component, you can roll four additional dice when determining the hit points the creature regains.

When you cast a spell that deals radiant damage with a solar's blood, the spell's damage die size increases by one: a d4 becomes a d6, a d6 becomes a d8, and so on, to a maximum of a d12. In addition, you deal one additional die of damage.



When you cast *aid* using this component, each target's hit point maximum and current hit points increase by an additional 40 for the duration.

Solar Feather. When you cast *feather fall* using this component, creatures targeted by the spell fall at a rate of 150 feet per round.

When you cast *fly* using this component, the target's flying speed increases to 150 feet.

UNICORN

These unicorn components provide the following benefits.

Unicorn Blood. When you cast a spell that allows you to roll one or more dice to restore hit points to a creature using this component, you can roll one additional die when determining the hit points the creature regains.

When you cast *aid* using this component, each target's hit point maximum and current hit points increase by an additional 10 for the duration.

Unicorn Hoof. When you cast *dimension door* using this component, you can bring up to four willing creatures of your size or smaller with you.

When you cast *expeditious retreat* using this component, your movement speed is doubled.

When you cast *haste* using this component, the target's movement speed is tripled instead of doubled.

Unicorn Horn. When you cast *shield* using this component, you have a +7 bonus to AC until the start of your next turn.

VIRTUE'S VOCAL CORDS

When you cast *bless* using this component, the die a target can add to attack rolls and saving throws increases to a d10.

When you cast *lesser restoration* using this component, it instead has the effects of the *greater restoration* spell.

When you cast *greater restoration* using this component, you can target one additional creature within the spell's range.

When you cast *hellish rebuke* using this component, the spell deals radiant damage instead of fire damage and the damage die increases to a d12.

When you cast *banishment* using this component, the target has disadvantage on the saving throw to resist being banished.

KILLING CELESTIALS?!

Many of the spells enhanced by celestial components are on the cleric and paladin spell lists. In many games, clerics and paladins don't fight (let alone hunt and harvest the body parts of) good-aligned celestials. However, there are two ways to overcome this issue.

First, celestial creatures don't have to be good-aligned. They could be angels that serve an evil deity, wicked unicorns, and similar anomalies. In your world, these beings might not even be anomalies! Good clerics and paladins would be happy to vanquish such evil forces.

Second, celestials might willingly donate their feathers or blood, or even sacrifice their earthly bodies and be reborn on the Upper Planes, in order to give a cleric or paladin an important component. Such gifts could be a reward for completing a quest, the answer to a cleric's Divine Intervention feature, a treasure granted by Concordance (see *Strongholds & Followers*), or anything else the GM deems worthy.

DRAGONS

Famous for their dazzling scales, massive treasure hoards, and fearsome breath, dragons of many hues and temperaments are storied creatures in worlds across the multiverse.

Dragon Components

Monster	Component	Quantity Available	Harvesting DC
Wyrmling dragon	Blood	10 vials	10
	Bone	15	16
	Breath weapon gland	1 (or 2 if metallic)	19
	Hide	1	16
Young dragon	Blood	15 vials	10
	Breath weapon gland	1 (or 2 if metallic)	19
	Heart	1	18
	Hide	1	16
Adult dragon	Blood	20 vials	10
	Breath weapon gland	1 (or 2 if metallic)	19
	Heart	1	18
	Hide	1	16
Ancient dragon	Blood	25 vials	10
	Breath weapon gland	1 (or 2 if metallic)	19
	Heart	1	18
	Hide	1	16
Wyrmling gemstone dragon*	Piece of brain	4 pieces	20
Young gemstone dragon*	Piece of brain	8 pieces	20
Adult gemstone dragon*	Piece of brain	12 pieces	20
Ancient gemstone dragon*	Piece of brain	16 pieces	20

Dragon Hide and Mage Armor

Any type of dragon hide can be used to enhance the *mage armor* spell. The change to the Armor Class granted by the spell is determined by the dragon's challenge rating as shown on the table below. In addition, if the dragon hide used is from an adult dragon, the target gains resistance to the damage type associated with the dragon's breath weapon for the duration of the spell. If the hide is from an ancient dragon, the target is immune to that damage type.

Challenge Rating	Mage Armor AC
CR 1–5	14 + Dexterity Modifier
CR 6–9	15 + Dexterity Modifier
CR 10–14	16 + Dexterity Modifier
CR 15–20	17 + Dexterity Modifier
CR 21–24	18 + Dexterity Modifier
CR 25–29	19 + Dexterity Modifier
CR 30+	20 + Dexterity Modifier



Inside the Hide

The Internal Dragon Components table describes uses for dragon blood, bones, and glands as spell components.

Internal Dragon Components

Spell	Effect	Age Category information
Animate dead	When you cast *animate dead* using a wyrmling's blood on three wyrmling dragon bones, you create a skeletal wyrmling (see below).	—
Breath weapon (new spell described below)[2]	When you cast *breath weapon* using the breath weapon gland of a metallic or chromatic dragon, the spell's damage die increases.	**Wyrmling:** Damage die increases to a d8 **Young:** Damage die increases to a d10 **Adult:** Damage die increases to a d12 **Ancient:** Damage die increases to a d12, plus an additional die per level of the slot used to cast the spell
Eldritch blast	When you cast *eldritch blast* using a piece of brain from an adult or ancient gemstone dragon, you roll additional damage dice when you hit with the spell.	**Adult:** 1 additional damage die **Ancient:** 2 additional damage dice
Fear	When you cast *fear* using the heart of a chromatic or metallic dragon, the spell's area of effect and saving throw DC increases.	**Young:** 60-foot cone, +1 to the DC **Adult:** 90-foot cone, +2 to the DC **Ancient:** 120-foot cone, +3 to the DC, and creatures have disadvantage on Wisdom saving throws made to avoid or end the spell's effects
Magic missile	When you cast *magic missile* using a piece of brain from a gemstone dragon, the damage die increases.	**Wyrmling:** Damage die increases to a d6 **Young:** Damage die increases to a d8 **Adult:** Damage die increases to a d10 **Ancient:** Damage die increases to a d12

[2] At the GM's discretion, you might be able to use this for other breath weapon-related spells we're not allowed to mention by name.

Internal Dragon Components (continued)

Spell	Effect	Age Category information
Protection from energy	When you cast *protection from energy* using blood from a chromatic or metallic dragon associated with the damage type you choose, the target halves all damage of that type for the duration, in addition to the resistance granted by the spell.	If the blood is from an ancient dragon, the target is instead immune to the chosen damage type.
Spell that deals damage	When you cast a spell that deals acid, cold, fire, lightning or poison damage using the breath weapon gland of a dragon associated with the corresponding damage type, the spell's damage die size increases by one: a d4 becomes a d6, a d6 becomes a d8, and so on, to a maximum of a d12. You also roll additional damage dice.	**Wyrmling:** No additional damage dice. **Young:** 1 additional damage die **Adult:** 2 additional damage dice **Ancient:** 3 additional damage dice

Skeletal Wyrmling Template

When you cast the *animate dead* spell with a wyrmling dragon's blood on three wyrmling bones, you create a skeletal wyrmling. This creature uses the same stat block as the wyrmling the blood came from, with the following changes:

- The wyrmling's type becomes undead.
- The wyrmling's Dexterity, Intelligence and Charisma scores decrease by 2 and its Wisdom score decreases by 1.
- The wyrmling's Constitution increases by 2, giving it 1 additional hit point per Hit Die it has.
- The wyrmling is immune to poison damage and the poisoned condition.
- The wyrmling understands all languages it knew in life but can't speak.
- The wyrmling has no breath weapon.

Secondary Breath Glands

Unlike their chromatic counterparts, metallic dragons have an additional breath weapon gland that can be harvested to enhance other spells.

Brass Dragon. When you cast *sleep* with a brass dragon wyrmling's sleep breath gland, roll an additional d8 when determining how many hit points of creatures the spell can affect

When you cast *sleep* with a young brass dragon's sleep breath gland, roll an additional 2d8.

When you cast *sleep* with an adult brass dragon's sleep breath gland, roll d10s instead of d8s, and roll an additional 3d10.

When you cast *sleep* with an ancient brass dragon's sleep breath gland, roll d10s instead of d8s, and roll an additional 4d10. Additionally, when you cast this spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, you roll an additional 3d10 instead of 2d8 for each slot level above 1st.

Bronze Dragon. When you cast *thunderwave* with a bronze dragon wyrmling's repulsion breath gland and a target fails the saving throw against the spell, it is pushed 30 feet away from you.

When you cast *thunderwave* with a young bronze dragon's repulsion breath gland and a target fails the saving throw against the spell, it is pushed 40 feet away from you.

When you cast *thunderwave* with an adult bronze dragon's repulsion breath gland, the damage dice become d10s, and if a target fails the saving throw against the spell, it is pushed 50 feet away from you.

When you cast *thunderwave* with an ancient bronze dragon's repulsion breath gland, the damage dice become d12s, and if a target fails the saving throw against the spell, it is pushed 60 feet away from you.

Copper Dragon. When you cast *slow* with a copper dragon wyrmling's slow breath gland, the spell's area of effect is a 50-foot cube.

When you cast *slow* with a young copper dragon's slow breath gland, the spell's area of effect is a 60-foot cube and you can target two additional creatures within the spell's range.

When you cast *slow* with an adult copper dragon's slow breath gland, the spell's area of effect is a 70-foot cube and you can target two additional creatures within the spell's range. Also, a target affected by the spell can't take bonus actions, in addition to the spell's other effects.

When you cast *slow* with an ancient copper dragon's slow breath gland, the spell's area of effect is a 70-foot cube and you can target two additional creatures within

the spell's range. Also, a target affected by the spell can't take bonus actions and takes a –3 penalty to AC and Dexterity saving throws (instead of –2), in addition to the spell's other effects.

Gold Dragon. When you cast *bane* with a gold dragon wyrmling's weakening breath gland, a target affected by the spell has disadvantage on Strength checks.

When you cast *bane* with a young gold dragon's weakening breath gland, a target affected by the spell has disadvantage on Strength checks and saving throws.

When you cast *bane* with an adult gold dragon's weakening breath gland, a target affected by the spell has disadvantage on Strength checks and saving throws, as well as Strength-based attack rolls.

When you cast *bane* with an ancient gold dragon's weakening breath gland, a target affected by the spell has disadvantage on Strength checks and saving throws, as well as Strength-based attack rolls, and its Strength score is reduced by 2 for the duration.

Silver Dragon. When you cast *hold person* or *hold monster* with a silver dragon wyrmling's paralyzing breath gland, you can target one additional creature within the spell's range.

When you cast *hold person* or *hold monster* with a young silver dragon's paralyzing breath gland, you can target one additional creature within the spell's range and the spell's maximum duration increases by 1 minute.

When you cast *hold person* or *hold monster* with an adult silver dragon's paralyzing breath gland, you can target one additional creature within the spell's range and the spell's maximum duration increases by 1 minute. In addition, a target makes Wisdom saving throws against the spell's effect with disadvantage.

When you cast *hold person* or *hold monster* with an ancient silver dragon's paralyzing breath gland, you can target one additional creature within the spell's range, the spell's maximum duration increases by 1 minute, and its range increases by 30 feet. In addition, a target makes Wisdom saving throws against the spell's effect with disadvantage.

CHROMATIC DRAGON SECONDARY BREATH GLANDS

At the GM's discretion, chromatic dragons can have a secondary breath gland like their metallic cousins. In chromatic dragons, these glands are underdeveloped and never function for the dragon, but they can still be harvested and utilized in spellcasting.

- Black dragons have the secondary gland of copper dragons.
- Blue dragons have the secondary gland of bronze dragons.
- Green dragons have the secondary gland of brass dragons.
- Red dragons use the secondary gland of gold dragons.
- White dragons use the secondary gland of silver dragons.

Breath Weapon

3rd-level evocation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self (30-foot cone or 60-foot line)

Components: V, S, M (a flask of whiskey)

Duration: Instantaneous

Classes: Sorcerer, wizard

Choose acid, cold, fire, lightning, or poison. You exhale energy of the chosen type in one of these areas of effect of your choice: a 30-foot cone or a 60-foot line. Each creature in that area must make a Dexterity saving throw, taking 8d6 damage of the chosen type on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 4th level or higher, the damage increases by 1d6 for each slot level above 3rd.

ELEMENTALS

All beings from the elemental planes are made up or or infused with pure elemental energy, a life force tied to the element or elements they manifest as. When an elemental dies, its essence begins to seep away back to the elemental planes from where it came, unless quickly harvested.

Elemental Components

Monster	Component	Quantity Available	Harvesting DC
Air elemental	Air essence	1 vial	13
Djinni	Zephyr essence	1 vial	13
Efreeti	Fire essence	1 vial	13
Earth elemental	Earth essence	1 vial	13
Invisible stalker	Stalker essence	1 vial	13
Storm magistrate*	Storm essence	1 vial	13

Air Elemental's Air Essence

When you cast *fog cloud* using this component, each creature that starts its turn in the fog must make a Constitution saving throw against your spell save DC. On a failed save, the creature is unable to breathe and has disadvantage on Constitution saving throws to maintain concentration on spells until it is no longer in the fog cloud.

Djinni's Zephyr Essence

When you cast *wind wall* using this component, you can move the wind wall up to 15 feet in any direction as a bonus action. A creature that starts its turn in the wall must succeed on a Strength saving throw against your spell save DC or become restrained until the start of its next turn.

Efreeti's Fire Essence

When you cast *flame blade* using this component, the spell deals an extra 4d6 fire damage. Additionally, while the spell is active, you can use an action to make a ranged spell attack against a target within 120 feet. On a hit, the target takes 6d6 fire damage.

When you cast *wall of fire* using this component and the spell is active, you can use a bonus action to hurl a ball of fire that explodes in a 15-foot-radius sphere centered on a point you can see within 120 feet of you. Each creature in the area must make a Dexterity saving throw against your spell save DC, taking 2d8 fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Earth Elemental's Earth Essence

When you cast *earthquake* using this component, each creature that is knocked prone by the spell sinks 1 feet into the earth and is restrained. A creature that starts its turn in the earth must repeat the Dexterity saving throw against the spell, sinking 1 foot further into the earth. A restrained creature can use an action to make a Strength saving throw against your spell save DC + 2 for every foot it has sunk into the ground, breaking free and ending the condition on a success.

Invisible Stalker's Stalker Essence

When you cast *pass without trace* using this component, you make up to two creatures benefitting from the spell's bonus to Dexterity (Stealth) checks invisible for the duration. You can use an action to change which creatures affected by the spell are invisible.

Storm Magistrate's Storm Essence

When you cast *call lightning* using this component and call down a bolt of lightning, you can call up to two additional bolts of lightning. A creature can't be affected by multiple bolts of lightning on the same turn.

OVERPOWERED

Some of the component effects may seem overpowered, but remember that these components don't come along all that often. These materials are rewards for characters who take down powerful creatures. GMs should treat this article as a guide. If something seems too powerful or game breaking, the GM is empowered to scale the effect back to match the themes of their campaign. The GM may also raise the DC or amount of time needed to to harvest a particularly powerful component, or deem certain creature parts unsalvageable based on how the characters took down their foe.

Think of these components as consumable magic items like potions or scrolls. Having a few on hand is fun, and a handful of powerful items won't keep the characters from being challenged as they face greater and greater foes!

FIENDS

The wicked beings of the Lower Planes—devils, demons, and their ilk—are collectively known as fiends. They fight among themselves in an endless struggle for supremacy just as much as they delight in corrupting and tormenting mortals.

Fiend Components

Monster	Component	Quantity Available	Harvesting DC
Balor	Blood	10 vials	10
	Skin	1	16
Barbed devil	Blood	10 vials	10
	Eye	2	17
Bearded devil	Blood	10 vials	10
	Eye	2	17
Bone devil	Blood	10 vials	10
	Eye	2	17
Chain devil	Blood	10 vials	10
	Chain link	20	13
Dretch	Fetid pouch	1	12
	Piece of brain	4	20
Erinyes	Blood	10 vials	10
	Longsword shard	10	13
Glabrezu	Blood	10 vials	10
	Horn	2	13
Hezrou	Blood	10 vials	10
	Claw	6	13
	Tooth	12	14
Horned devil	Blood	10 vials	10
	Tail	1	11

Fiend Components (continued)

Monster	Component	Quantity Available	Harvesting DC
Ice devil	Claw	6	13
	Tailbone	4	16
	Tooth	6	14
Imp	Piece of brain	4	20
Lemure	Eye	2	17
Lore devil†	Blood	10 vials	10
	Skin from hands	2	16
Marilith	Blood	10 vials	10
	Eye	2	17
	Tail	1	11
Nalfeshnee	Blood	10 vials	10
Nightmare	Hoof	4	14
Pit fiend	Blood	10 vials	10
	Tooth	10	14
Rakshasa	Blood	10 vials	10
	Skin from hands	2	16
Stone devil†	Blood	10 vials	10
	Skin	1	16
Vrock	Beak	1	14
	Blood	10 vials	10
	Spores	15 vials	12
	Talon	12	13
	Vocal cord	2	17

Melting Fiends!

Many extraplanar creatures melt into puddles of ichor after destruction on a plane other than their home. If your GM uses this lore, you'll have to adventure into the Lower Planes to get these sweet, sweet pieces of demon and devil to make your spells better.

Fiend Blood

When you cast *heroes' feast* with the blood of a lore devil or a rakshasa, a creature that partakes in the feast can't be affected or detected by spells of 6th level or lower unless it wishes to be and it has advantage on saving throws against all other spells and magical effects.

When you cast *heroes' feast* with the blood of a fiend other than a lore devil or a rakshasa, a creature that partakes in the feast gains advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects for the duration.

Fiend Eye

When you cast *darkvision* with the eye of a barbed devil, bearded devil, bone devil, chain devil, or lemure, the target can see through magical darkness.

Fiend Hand Skin

The skin from the hands of certain fiends provides the following benefits.

Skin from Lore Devil Hands. When you cast *feeblemind* using this component and the target has the Spellcasting trait, the target loses a spell slot of your choice and you regain hit points equal to 10 × the spell slot's level.

When you cast *legend lore* using this component, you gain as much precise and detailed information as possible about the person, place, or object you named regardless of how much information you already knew about it. Additionally, the information is presented in a manner as straightforward and clear as possible.

Skin from Rakshasa Hands. When you cast *tree stride* using this component, the spell has no distance requirements. You know the location of every living tree in the multiverse and can use the spell to travel from one living tree to any other, even on another plane of existence.

Balor

These balor components provide the following benefits.

Balor Blood. When you cast *death ward* using this component and the target drops to 0 hit points, each creature within 30 feet of it must make a Dexterity saving throw against your spell save DC. A creature takes 8d6 fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Balor Skin. When you cast *resistance* using this component and the target adds a d4 to a saving throw because of it, the target also gains advantage on the saving throw.

Chain Devil's Chain Link

When you cast *blade barrier* using this component, as a bonus action you can command chains to shoot out of the barrier at a creature within 10 feet of it. The creature must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw against your spell save DC or be yanked into the barrier by the chains.

Dretch

These dretch components provide the following benefits.

Dretch's Fetid Pouch. When you cast *poison spray* using this component and the target fails the spell's saving throw, it is poisoned until the start of your next turn. While poisoned in this way, the target can take either an action or a bonus action on its turn, not both, and can't take reactions.

Piece of Dretch Brain. When you cast *message* using this component, you can cast the spell through any solid object, no matter the thickness or material, and through areas of magical silence.

Erinyes' Longsword Shards

When you cast *blade barrier* using this component and a creature takes damage from the spell, it takes an additional 3d8 poison damage.

Glabrezu's Horn

When you cast *darkness* or *detect magic* using this component, you don't expend a spell slot.

When you cast *confusion*, *dispel magic*, *fly*, or *power word stun* using this component, you can use a spell slot that is one level lower than required.

Hezrou

These hezrou components provide the following benefits.

Hezrou Claw. When you cast *alter self* using this component, you can give yourself claws as a natural weapon. Your unarmed strikes with the claws deal 2d6 slashing damage.

Hezrou Tooth. When you cast *alter self* using this component, you can give yourself sharp teeth as a natural weapon. Your unarmed strikes with the teeth deal 2d10 piercing damage.

Horned Devil's Tail

When you cast *alter self* using this component, you can give yourself a pointy tail as a natural weapon. Your unarmed strikes with the tail deal 1d8 piercing damage. A creature you hit with the tail must succeed on a Constitution saving throw against your spell save DC or lose 3d6 hit points at the start of its next turn from an infernal wound. Each time you hit a wounded target with the tail, the damage dealt by the wound increases by 1d6. The wound closes if the target receives magical healing.

Ice Devil

These ice devil components provide the following benefits.

Ice Devil Claw. When you cast *alter self* using this component, you can give yourself claws as a natural weapon. Your unarmed strikes with the claws deal 2d4 slashing damage and 3d6 cold damage.

Ice Devil Tailbone. When you cast *ray of frost* using this component, the spell's deals an additional 2d8 cold damage.

Ice Devil Tooth. When you cast *alter self* using this component, you can give yourself sharp teeth as a natural weapon. Your unarmed strikes with the teeth deal 2d6 piercing damage and 3d6 cold damage.

Imp's Piece of Brain

When you cast *invisibility* on only yourself using this component, you can do so without expending a spell slot.

When you cast *polymorph* on yourself using this component, you can turn into a rat, raven, or spider without expending a spell slot.

Marilith

These marilith components provide the following benefits.

Marilith Eye. When you cast *misty step* using this component, you don't need to expend a spell slot.

Marilith Tail. When you cast *alter self* using this component, you can give yourself a tail as a natural weapon. Your unarmed strikes with the tail deal 2d10 bludgeoning damage. Additionally, if you hit a Medium or smaller creature with your tail, you can choose to wrap it around the creature, grappling it. Until the grapple ends, the target is restrained. To break free of the grapple, the target must succeed on a Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check made as an action. The DC for this check equals your spell save DC. You can only grapple one creature at a time with your tail.

Nightmare's Hoof

When you cast *etherealness* using this component, you can target up to three additional willing creatures.

Pit Fiend's Tooth

When you cast *detect magic* or *fireball* using this component, you don't expend a spell slot. You can't gain this benefit if you cast *fireball* using a spell slot of 4th level or higher.

When you cast *hold monster* or *wall of fire* using this component, you can use a spell slot that is one level lower than required.

Stone Devil's Skin

When you cast *stoneskin* using this component, your AC becomes 20.

Vrock

These vrock components provide the following benefits.

Vrock Beak. When you cast *alter self* using this component, you can give yourself a beak as a natural weapon. Your unarmed strikes with the beak deal 2d6 piercing damage.

Vrock Spores. When you cast a spell that deals poison damage using this component, the target must succeed on a Constitution saving throw against your spell save DC or be poisoned for 1 minute. A creature poisoned in this way takes 1d10 poison damage at the start of each of its turns and can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turns, ending the poisoned condition on a success.

Vrock Talon. When you cast *alter self* using this component, you can give yourself talons as a natural weapon. Your unarmed strikes with the talons deal 2d10 piercing damage.

Vrock Vocal Cord. When you cast *power word stun* with the component, you target all creatures within a 20-foot radius centered on a point within the spell's range.

Giants

Giants and their kin, such as ogres and trolls, are approximately human-shaped creatures of massive size.

Giant Components

Monster	Component	Quantity Available	Harvesting DC
Storm giant	Lightning essence	4 vials	16
Troll	Blood	10 vials	10

Storm Giant's Lightning Essence

When you cast *call lightning* using this component, the spell's range increases to 500 feet.

Troll's Blood

When you cast *heal* using this component, the target regains 20 hit points at the start of each of its turns for a number of rounds equal to the level of the spell slot used. If the target takes acid or fire damage, it doesn't regain hit points at the start of its next turn. While this effect is active, the target dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regain hit points.

Monstrosities

All manner of terrifying creatures are categorized as monstrosities, united only by their unnatural physiology and hostile, predatory natures.

Monstrosity Components

Monster	Component	Quantity Available	Harvesting DC
Androsphinx	Tongue	1	14
Ettercap	Eye	2	17
	Foot	2	16
	Web sack	1	15
Griffon	Feather	25	10
Guardian naga	Bone	9	14
	Venom	4 vials	13
Harpy	Vocal cord	1	17
Hydra	Hide	10 pieces	16
	Lung	8 (2 pieces per lung)	15
Kraken	Blood	25 vials	10
	Lung	16 (2 pieces per lung)	15
	Piece of tentacle	150 (15 per tentacle)	13
Lamia	Skin from hands	2	16
Manticore	Hide	1	16
Medusa	Eyes	2	17
Phase spider	Blood	15 vials	10
	Hide	1	16
Purple worm	Blood	20 vials	10
Remorhaz	Blood	20 vials	10
	Hide	1	16
Roc	Feather	15	10
Tarrasque	Hide	15	16

Androsphinx's Tongue

When you cast *zone of truth* using this component, a target that fails its saving throw against the spell must truthfully answer any question you ask it for the duration.

Ettercap

These ettercap components provide the following benefits.

Ettercap Eye. When you cast *darkvision* using this component, the target gains darkvision out to a range of 90 feet.

Ettercap Foot. When you cast *spider climb* using this component, you can target one additional creature within the spell's range.

Ettercap Web Sack. When you cast *web* using this component, the spell's area of effect is a 40-foot cube.



Griffon's Feather

When you cast *feather fall* with a griffon's feather, creatures targeted by the spell fall at a rate of 80 feet per round.

When you cast *fly* with a griffon's feather, a target's flying speed increases to 80 feet.

Guardian Naga

These naga components provide the following benefits.

Naga Bones. When you cast *revivify*, *raise dead*, *reincarnate*, *resurrection*, or *true resurrection* using three guardian naga bones and the target dies again within 1d6 days of casting the spell, the target instantly returns to life as if the spell had been cast on it again.

Naga Venom. When you cast a spell that deals poison damage using this component, you roll 5 additional damage dice.

Harpy's Vocal Cord

When you cast a spell using this component that forces one or more creatures to make a saving throw or become charmed, a target has disadvantage on the saving throw to resist the spell's effects.

Hydra's Blood

When you cast *regenerate* on yourself using this component, you can grow one of the following body parts for the duration:

- ***Arm.*** This extra arm can carry a light melee weapon or shield. If you hold a light melee weapon with this arm, you can use that weapon to engage in two-weapon fighting. If you hold three light melee weapons at once and take the Attack action to attack with one of them, you can use your bonus action to make two extra attacks, one with your other hand and one with this extra arm.
- ***Head.*** When you take the Cast a Spell action on your turn, you can cast one additional spell of 2nd level or lower that doesn't require concentration and has a casting time of 1 action.
- ***Leg.*** Your walking speed increases by 10 feet and you have advantage on saving throws to avoid falling prone.

Kraken

These kraken components provide the following benefits.

Blood. When you cast *lightning bolt* using this component, you create two additional lines of lightning.

Piece of Lung. When you cast *water breathing* using this component, the spell lasts until it is dispelled.

Piece of Tentacle. When you cast *black tentacles* using this component, the tentacles deal 3d10 bludgeoning damage instead of 3d6.

Lamia's Skin from Hands

When you cast *bestow curse* using this component, you can target an additional creature within the spell's range.

Manticore's Hide

When you cast *alter self* using this component, you grow twenty-four spikes on your body that last for the duration. You can make an attack by breaking off a spike and throwing it at a target, using your spellcasting ability modifier for the attack roll. Each spike is a ranged weapon with the thrown property, a close range of 100 feet, and a far range of 200 feet that deals piercing damage on a hit equal to 1d8 + your spellcasting ability modifier.

Medusa's Eye

When you cast *flesh to stone* using this component, the target has disadvantage on the saving throws to resist the spell's effects, and the spell doesn't require concentration.

Phase Spider

These phase spider components provide the following benefits.

Phase Spider Blood. When you cast *blink* using this component, you can reroll the d20 at the end of each of your turns to determine if you remain on the Material Plane. If you do reroll, you must use the second result.

Phase Spider Hide. When you cast *etherealness* using this component, you can target an additional creature within the spell's range.

Purple Worm's Blood

When you cast *enlarge/reduce* on a Small, Medium, Large, or Huge creature using this component, the target becomes Gargantuan. All its dimensions are quadrupled and its weight is multiplied by 24. For the duration, the target gains a +5 bonus to Strength checks and saving throws. The target's weapons grow to match its size and deal an additional 2d12 damage.

Remorhaz

These remorhaz components provide the following benefits.

Remorhaz Blood. When you cast *holy aura* using this component, a creature affected by the spell deals an extra 1d6 fire damage when it hits with a melee weapon attack.

Remorhaz Hide. When you cast *fire shield* using this component, the spell has the effects of the chill shield and warm shield simultaneously.

Roc's Feather

When you cast *feather fall* using this component, creatures targeted by the spell fall at a rate of 120 feet per round.

When you cast *fly* using this component, a target's flying speed increases to 120 feet.

Tarrasque's Hide

When you cast *mage armor* using this component, the target's base AC becomes 19 + its Dexterity modifier. When the target is targeted by the *magic missile* spell, line spell, or spell that requires a ranged attack, roll a d6. On 1 to 3, the target is affected by the spell as normal. On a 4 or 5, the spell has no effect on the target. On a 6, the spell is reflected back at the caster.

Plants

Though they're creatures of vegetation and fungi, plants can be monsters as much as any fauna—and just like other monsters, they can provide valuable spell components.

Plant Components

Monster	Component	Quantity Available	Harvesting DC
Shambling mound	Vine	20	11
Shrieker	Stalk clipping	10	14
Treant	Bark	1	16
	Branch	20	11
	Sap	20 vials	10
Violet fungus	Spore	15 vials	13

Shambling Mound's Vine

When you cast *entangle* using this component, a creature restrained by the spell takes 2d8 bludgeoning damage when it is initially restrained and at the start of each of its turns. A creature that moves through the spell's area of effect takes 1d8 bludgeoning damage for every 5 feet it moves.

Shrieker's Stalk Clipping

When you cast *vicious mockery* using this component, the spell's range is 300 feet.

Treant

These treant components provide the following benefits.

Treant Bark. When you cast *barkskin* using this component, the target gains resistance to bludgeoning and piercing damage.

Treant Branch. When you cast *shillelagh* using this component, the target's weapon deals 3d6 bludgeoning damage on a hit instead of 1d8.

Treant Sap. When you cast *commune with nature* using this component, you learn any additional information the treant knows about the area. This could include general lore about fauna and flora, events of historical importance, or personal memories that the treant has of the location.

Violet Fungus' Spore

When you cast *chill touch* using this component, you can target two creatures within 10 feet of each other with this spell.

Undead

Many undead are mindless skeletons or zombies animated to do the bidding of their creators, but others are sentient.

Undead Components

Monster	Component	Quantity Available	Harvesting DC
Khorak†	Crown	1	—
Máelodor Rhyllearnán†	Bow sliver	20	14
Shadow	Shadow essence	1	13
Telcezalco XXVIII†	Breath sac	1	15
Vampire	Piece of brain	4	20
Will-o'-wisp	Wisp	3	13
Wraith	Ichor	10 vials	10

Khorak's Crown

When you cast *feeblemind* using this component, the spell deals 14d6 psychic damage to its target instead of 4d6.

Maelodor Rhyllearnan's Bow Slivers

When you cast *hunter's mark* using this component, you gain advantage on your attack rolls against the target.

Shadow's Shadow Essence

When you cast *pass without trace* using this component, creatures that gain a bonus to Dexterity (Stealth) checks from the spell can take the Hide action as a bonus action.

Telcezalco XXVIII's Breath Sac

When you cast *harm* using this component, the spell has a range of Self and affects each creature within a 30-foot cone that originates from you. A target takes 16d6 necrotic damage on a failed saving throw, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Vampire's Piece of Brain

When you cast *conjure animals* using this component, you can summon 4d4 swarms of bats or rats, or 4d6 wolves.

Will-o'-Wisp's Wisp

When you cast *feather fall* using this component, creatures targeted by the spell fall at a rate of 10 feet per round.

Wraith's Ichor

When you cast *harm* using this component, the spell deals 14d8 necrotic damage to the target on a failed saving throw, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Mixing Components

The GM can allow a creature to cast a spell using more than one type of monstrous component, boosting the spell so it receives the effect of both components. However, mixing such magic together can have unexpected consequences. When a creature casts a spell with more than one monstrous component, consult the Combining Components table to determine the likelihood that the spell creates a surge of wild magic. If a wild magic effect occurs, roll on the *wand of wonder* table in the fifth edition core rules to determine what happens. If you cast a spell as part of the wild magic result, the GM randomly determines the spell's target.

Combining Components

Number of Additional Components	Chance of Wild Magic
1	25%
2	50%
3	75%
4 or more	100%

Inspiration Coins

A new way to reward your players

If you're a DM, you want to reward your players for their awesome role playing or heroic actions. Awarding normal inspiration can get boring. Next time one of your players does something awesome, toss this bag of coins across the table instead.

This bag contains 10 unique fantasy style wooden coins.
Each can be used for a different in game benefit.
The Indomitable coin will buff a character's AC for a round.
The Last Breath coin stops a character from going to 0 hit points.
The Get Me Out coin can be used to get the party away from danger when it looks like a TPK is coming.
Each coin has it's own ideal use.





Each coin has a different size and shape which can create a fun minigame when someone is awarded inspiration. Once the player opens the bag they have 5 seconds to pull out a coin without looking. Do they have the pickpocket skills to find the coin they want before the time runs out?



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THE EMERALD EXCHANGE

A new NPC and place to procure magic items

by Bianca Bickford

> **"You're looking to purchase an item to make you invisible? That's easy, love. If you have the coin, I can have it here in a handful of days."**

Charming. Mysterious. Need something magical? She can get it for you. Emerald is a human merchant who can be used in any campaign setting. Specialized in rare magical items, she operates a vast behind-the-scenes network of historians, mages, and rogues who procure and sell these items to adventurers. Your players' characters can work for Emerald, trade with her for magic items, and possibly discover that she is their enemy!

As a master thief, Emerald executes missions to restock her stores. Secretly, she leads the Magia Hand, a thieves' guild that pillages dungeons and occasionally breaks into wealthy manors and academic institutions to find magical objects. This organization operates in the shadows—the public has no idea they exist. Most know Emerald as the charming owner of the guild's front business, a curiosity shop called the Emerald Exchange.

The Magia Hand

The Magia Hand is an old organization that keeps operations small with a nearly perfect success rate. The guild only accepts work acquiring items—members are offended if approached for an assassination request. The Hand avoids murder to maintain themselves as a rumor and not a target, although they have been known to magically put people to sleep if they are a barrier to the acquisition. They kill only to preserve their secrets or save lives.

The Hand maintains a high level of secrecy by never taking jobs in the town in which their headquarters are located. While rumors may circulate around the headquarters (see "Emerald Exchange in Towns"), the lack of notable thefts in town usually keeps them to *just* rumors, nothing more.

The Magia Hand distributes coin from assignments equitably among the guild, generating lifetime secrecy and loyalty from its membership.

Emerald leads the Magia Hand. An inner circle of six Guides advises her, recruits and trains members, and divides missions and contracts. Each Guide oversees one of the Hand's divisions: information gatherers, history and lore researchers, scouts, tacticians, thieves, and masters of arcana. Guides know every member of the Hand and can use magic. Communication among Guides is typically handled through the *sending* spell.

THE EMERALD EXCHANGE

Brightly painted green walls enliven this small shop. A closer inspection reveals small cracks in the wood, creaks in the floors, and other signs of age. Incense heavily scents the air, creating a slight haze. Emerald is the only staff present when the shop is open. Two **scouts** from the Magia Hand secretly monitor the Exchange from outside at all times.

One large room makes up most of the building's interior. A purple curtain separates the back section of this chamber, creating Emerald's office. The musical sound of a magical viol playing always wafts through the room—an enchantment that delights Emerald. An incredibly well-crafted hatch hides under a rug in Emerald's office, bound with a mithril lock, which requires a successful DC 30 Dexterity check using thieves' tools to pick thanks to the *arcane lock* spell that enchants it. The lock's magic is obscured by the *arcanist's magic aura* spell (using the False Aura effect). The hatch opens to a tunnel that runs north for about a mile and leads to the Magia Hand's underground guildhall.

A small storeroom lies at the back of her office.

The standard stock in the Emerald Exchange features common magical items on display shelves, with a few uncommon baubles kept in a locked glass case by the counter. Vases of fresh flowers sit atop the counter. A second glass case nearby contains gemstones, and a sign proclaiming "Do not touch!" stands between both cases.

Potions of healing of various strengths fill a shelf in front of the counter. Two suits of **animated armor** flank the front door, more for decoration than defense. No one has dared to steal from Emerald.

There is no lockbox in the Exchange. All coin is carried by Emerald and leaves with her when she exits the shop. Emerald often keeps her ledger on the counter in plain sight, permanently enchanted with the *alarm* spell. It is an intentional temptation, so she might better know her enemies. The ledger contains the names of customers who purchased items in the last 30 days, but the column for cost is always left blank. Each amount is written in magical ink attuned to Emerald, which only she can read and use to write.

Emerald stores common, uncommon, and rare magic items in the storeroom. She keeps very rare items either on her person or at the Magia Hand guildhall until she can arrange a meeting with her customer. One crate in the storeroom is a **mimic** named Meche that she keeps as a pet.

Every nonconsumable uncommon or rarer item the Magia Hand obtains is under the effect of an *instant summons* spell cast by one of the Guides. The organization learned long ago that this was good for business—if an item is stolen or its owners are killed, it can be reclaimed. Emerald very occasionally uses this tactic to swindle money out of corrupt, wealthy clients by making a sale and then recovering the item a few weeks later.

The Emerald Exchange is protected by the following defenses:

- ***Doors.*** Each exterior door is surrounded by runes engraved on the inside of the building. They act as the spells *alarm* and *symbol*, using the Sleep effect (spell save DC 17). Members of the guild are alerted by the *alarm* spell and begin arriving at the shop within 1d6 minutes to capture any intruders. Emerald activates the main door runes when she leaves. She can activate or deactivate them at will. The *dispel magic* spell suppresses the runes' effects for 10 minutes.
- ***Windows.*** Ironically, the windows are enchanted with a *glyph of warding* spell that casts the *shatter* spell (spell save DC 17) when they are broken. The explosion alerts all nearby. The spell is always active.
- ***Cases.*** The glass cases are protected by a *symbol* spell, using the Fear effect (spell save DC 17). Any creature except Emerald that touches the case triggers the spell. Eager shoppers often accidentally do so, much to Emerald's amusement.
- ***Distractions.*** Fake runes and magic symbols are painted on the floors and walls. Emerald comes up with a different story each time she's asked what they do. Several are enchanted with a permanent *light* spell to illuminate the shop, but most do nothing special. Emerald makes a mental note when she observes someone studying the enchanted symbols and ignoring the fake ones.
- ***Hidden Guardians.*** At the first sign of trouble, the two **scouts** outside the shop, the two suits of **animated armor** at the door, and the **mimic** spring into action and attack intruders.
- ***Worst-Case Scenario.*** The Magia Hand buried a stone carved with magic glyphs 3 feet underneath the Exchange. The stone casts the *meteor swarm* spell (spell save DC 17), centered on the shop, when a creature speaks its command word as an action. Only Emerald and the Guides know the word. If the spell is cast, the shop and all its contents are destroyed. The Guides don't use the password without Emerald unless she is missing or dead, and it must be a unanimous decision. Emerald can use it at any time, but she won't ruin her business unless she has no other option.

A map of the Emerald Exchange is included at the end of the article.

Emerald Exchange in Towns

You can place the Emerald Exchange in any settlement that makes sense in your setting. The Magia Hand operates in a town with at least 1,500 residents. The organization is barely a rumor, but interesting enough for townsfolks to occasionally gossip about "the mysterious band of thieves" over drinks. This gossip includes the following rumors:

- An NPC claims that their cousin's ex-girlfriend had a disease that required an exotic cure, and the thieves gave it to her for free.
- Isn't it amusing that the rude, snobby rich family that moved to the big city is missing a magical heirloom?
- The thieves died out years ago, and a group of teenagers pretends to be them.
- Someone once boasted that they work for the thieves, then mysteriously disappeared. (Some will dispute, saying that they just moved in with their significant other in another town.)
- The thieves always leave an orchid at the scene of the crime.

Emerald doesn't keep regular hours. To determine if the shop is open when the PCs go to visit, roll a d6. On an even number, Emerald is present; on an odd number, the Exchange is shuttered with a "Back Soon!" sign hanging from the door.

The Emerald Exchange in *Strongholds & Followers*

If you're using *Strongholds & Followers*, characters with an establishment have the option of adding the Emerald Exchange to it. The characters can hire Emerald, who keeps the Magia Hand a secret, to run the Exchange, earn coin, and solicit rumors. It costs a one-time fee of 5,000 gp to hire Emerald, but she generates an extra 500 gp of revenue each season for the characters, and her charm grants them advantage on one Gather Intel check each month. At the GM's discretion, she offers a discounted rate on items for the stronghold owners (see "Prices at the Emerald Exchange" for the cost).

Meet Emerald

Emerald wears her gleaming black hair in elaborate braids, and she is tall—but beyond these features, no one is really sure what Emerald looks like.

Emerald always wears magical makeup to disguise her identity. She paints any visible skin white, and uses black to decorate her face like a skull. Her vivid green eyes shine in contrast with the darkness.

Locals are accustomed to Emerald's disguise, believing it's all play to enhance the mystique of her magical shop and draw in customers. With newcomers, Emerald leans into the mystical with a low sultry voice, dramatic hand gestures casting the *minor illusion* cantrip, and mysterious riddles or rhymes that leave customers intrigued until she laughs, smiles warmly, and greets them with open arms.



The truth is that the makeup is an essential part of leading the Magia Hand. The current Emerald is not the first Emerald to run the guild. The first Emerald was appointed roughly two hundred years ago. The current Emerald is the ninth woman to lead. She has completely earned the trust and respect of the Guides.

The identity of the leader is a secret from all but the Guides, who choose a new Emerald from the membership when the leader retires. It is always a human woman with dark hair, and the magical makeup is gifted to her.

The special makeup comes from centuries of tradition and arcana in its creation, similar to a family recipe passed down through the generations. Each Emerald is trained by the previous Emerald on how to create and apply it. The makeup can't be dispelled, it's waterproof, and only Emerald can apply or remove it. Her old identity is completely erased from record, with all agreeing to forget her old life, and she becomes the new owner of the Exchange.

The current Emerald entered the Magia Hand at 10 years old, an orphan recruited as an extraordinarily skilled cutpurse on the streets. It was the previous Emerald who caught her hand in her pocket and brought her into the organization. While the current Emerald loved the familial relationship that she formed with the other members of the Magia Hand, she wants to get away as far as possible from her time living unclean and hungry on the street. That goal drives her ambition and avarice.

Roleplaying Emerald

Emerald is in her early thirties and very talented in being unseen, with quick hands to pick both pockets and locks. Her natural charm gave her an edge in adopting the Emerald name and persona. She's an extrovert who truly loves being the center of attention. Quick to smile and an outrageous flirt, Emerald enjoys a good joke and loves to make a pun whenever possible.

Underneath her charm, Emerald is ruthless. She shares her true name with no one and ensured that no record in the Magia Hand documents who she was. She puts her own interests—wealth and a love of expensive food and drink—above all others. While she has never killed anyone, she wouldn't hesitate if there was no alternative.

Emerald is an expert thief, though if asked she reacts with shock and deflects and denies the accusation. She revels in the risk of breaking into well-guarded locations and stealing treasures without leaving a trace. She lends her skills to Magia Hand expeditions if the payoff is good enough. When the guild is stretched thin or in need of extra hands, she hires adventurers.

Ultimately, Emerald betrays the characters if they become a threat to her livelihood. If you want to use Emerald as a villain, once the players have undertaken two quests for her or they find out secret information about her or the Magia Hand, use the "Green With Envy" adventure hook to make Emerald the characters' enemy.

Prices at the Emerald Exchange

You can break down the prices of items at the Emerald Exchange by using both the rarity of the item and how desirable the item is, ranked by grade. Legendary magic items are not available to purchase from the Emerald Exchange. The Magia Hand keeps any legendary items it acquires for internal use.

Setting an item's grade is up to you as the GM. The higher the grade, the more expensive the item. Prices by rarity and grade vary by thousands of gold pieces. When an item is requested or added to Emerald's stock, you set the grade and price using the Emerald Exchange Prices and Commissions table below. Consider both the desirability and the utility of the item when choosing the grade.

For example, both a *bag of beans* and *wings of flying* are rare items, but flying is a bigger boon to most creatures. You could set the *bag of beans* at a grade 2 and the *wings of flying* at grade 3. As a guideline, consumable items, such as potions and scrolls, are typically grade 1.

All prices start at the highest point for the rarity and grade you set. If a particular item remains unsold in Emerald's shop, its grade can be reduced at your discretion each time the characters complete an adventure or level up (provided Emerald likes the characters, of course).

Emerald purchases magic items from the characters at half the cost.

Gemstones

Emerald is happy to provide gemstones needed for spell components. She has plenty on hand, so unless you deem otherwise, she has what the characters require. The gems are always the same price as required for the spell no matter how much Emerald likes the party. Add 10% to the cost if the requested gem needs to be crushed or powdered.

Emerald Exchange Prices and Commissions

Rarity	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Days to Obtain
Common	50 gp	100 gp	150 gp	1d4
Uncommon	200 gp	300 gp	500 gp	1d6 + 4
Rare	2,500 gp	11,000 gp	20,000 gp	1d8 + 8
Very Rare (commission only)	–	–	90,000 gp[1]	1d10 + 12

[1] This price shouldn't be doubled (see "Commissioned Items").

What's in Stock?

Characters can request items from the Emerald Exchange by name or with a specific feature. For instance, a character may ask for a *broom of flying* or simply "an item that helps me fly."

To determine if the Emerald Exchange has a *specific* item in stock, such as a *broom of flying*, roll a d8. If the item is a common, uncommon, or rare potion or scroll, on a roll of 5 or higher, Emerald has it in her storeroom; otherwise, one can be commissioned. She always has at least 2d10 *potions of healing* and 2d6 *potions of greater healing* for sale. If the item is a common, uncommon, or rare item that is not a potion or scroll, Emerald has it on a roll of 8.

To determine if an item is in stock with a *feature*, such as "flying," roll a d10. On a roll of 5–8, she has a common, uncommon, or rare potion or scroll that might fit the buyer's needs (provided such an item exists). On a roll of 9 or 10, she has a common, uncommon, or rare item that is not a potion or scroll that might work.

The Emerald Exchange doesn't keep very rare magic items in stock, but takes commissions for them.

Commissioned Items

If a character requests an item Emerald doesn't have in stock, they can commission her to get it. Commissioned items are double the cost of the item's rarity at grade 3. This price doesn't change, no matter the relationship with Emerald. It takes a number of days as shown on the Emerald Exchange Prices and Commissions table for the Magia Hand to find and procure the item.

Emerald has two ways to acquire commissioned items:

- ***Retrieval.*** Emerald collects the item from a site unclaimed by humanoids, such as ruins, a dungeon, or a monster treasure hoard.
- ***Theft.*** Emerald steals an item from an NPC, organization, or site run by humanoids.

If the characters offer to accompany Emerald on a retrieval and she trusts them, she agrees to lower the price of the commission to double the cost of grade 2 for the item's rarity and split any other treasure found equally if the characters tag along. She never allows characters to accompany her on a theft.

If an item comes from a theft, there is a 5% chance the previous owner learns the character has it now and seeks to take it back.

Emerald's Personal Collection

Emerald has the following three original magic items for sale. Since these pieces are only sold by her, she doesn't (usually) negotiate on the price.

Ring of Light

Ring, common

Emerald's Price: 200 gp

While wearing this silver ring with a round amber stone, you can use an action to speak its command word to cause the stone to shed a bright golden light in a 30-foot radius and dim light for an additional 30 feet. Covering the stone blocks the light. The light lasts for 1 hour or until you use an action to speak the command word again. The ring can't be used again until the next dawn.

Merfolk's Tear

Wonderous item, uncommon

Emerald's Price: 600 gp

Legend says that this silver chain holding two blue teardrop pendants was a gift from a goddess to unite a human with their merfolk lover. While wearing this pendant, you can breathe underwater, you can speak and understand Aquan, and you have a swimming speed of 40 feet.

Compass of Escape

Wonderous item, rare

Emerald's Price: 21,000 gp

The needle on this small brass compass doesn't move while outdoors. While the compass is in an enclosed space such as a building or cave, the needle always points toward the nearest exit to open air, without accounting for barriers, obstacles, or danger along the way.

Adventure Hooks

You can use the following adventure hooks to draw the characters into the story of Emerald and the Magia Hand.

A Gold for Your Thoughts. After the characters make a purchase at the Exchange, Emerald hires them when she learns they're adventurers. She knows the location of an abandoned mage tower that contains a *medallion of thoughts*. She needs the item to fulfill a commission, but every Magia Hand group that went to retrieve it failed to do so. The previous quests ended with infighting coming to blows, and the thieves returned empty-handed. The magic within the medallion is corrupted and shares everyone's thoughts at the same time once they are inside the tower. (Be sure to use safety tools as appropriate for your table if characters are sharing their deepest, darkest secrets and have a conversation above the table before you do this in the game.)

If the characters can retrieve the medallion and transport it back within a lead box that Emerald provides, she pays them 300 gp each.

Hole in the Wall. Once the characters have successfully completed a retrieval mission for Emerald, she offers them another opportunity to make some coin. She has a commission to retrieve a *portable hole* buried deep in a dungeon, but the location's entrance lies below a seedy tavern. The dungeon is a ruined lizardfolk city, one unexpectedly far more advanced in magic than recorded in history. The characters must find or make an entrance in the tavern basement and retrieve the item. The client, which Emerald never reveals, is the Magia Hand. They want the hole so they can easily transport stolen items. When the *portable hole* is returned, Emerald pays the characters 3,000 gp each.

Green with Envy. The characters learn the truth about the Magia Hand and Emerald, and she needs them to disappear. Quickly. Alternatively, their success retrieving items for Emerald raises her suspicions—she no longer trusts that her secret will remain hers in the face of close, skilled adventurers, and she's unwilling to risk them discovering her past or the existence of the Magia Hand.

Emerald makes a final request of the characters: she tells them that she has arranged to pick up a *figurine of wondrous power* from another adventuring group, but she needs the characters to scout the handoff location first. This is a believable lie—the other group does have the figurine, but they are **assassins** from the Magia Hand who ambush the characters. If the characters survive, the Emerald Exchange remains closed and Emerald disappears…for now.

TACTICS

Emerald's priority is to slip away before engaging in combat, retreating either to the Exchange or the Magia Hand where she has allies and the upper hand. If she chooses to engage, she fights until reduced to 30 hit points, then flees.

EMERALD

Medium humanoid (human), neutral

ARMOR CLASS 19 (+2 *studded leather*)

HIT POINTS 117 (18d8 + 36)

SPEED 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

SAVING THROWS Dex +8, Int +5

SKILLS Acrobatics +8, Deception +9, History +5, Persuasion +6, Sleight of Hand +11, Stealth +11

SENSES passive Perception 11

LANGUAGES Common, Dwarvish, Elvish, Halfling, thieves' cant

CHALLENGE 8 (3,900 XP)

PROFICIENCY BONUS +3

Cunning Action. On each of her turns, Emerald can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Evasion. If Emerald is subjected to an effect that allows her to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, Emerald instead takes no damage if she succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if she fails.

Minor Illusion. Emerald can cast the *minor illusion* cantrip at will. Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 13).

Scimitar of Speed Bonus Attack. On each of her turns, Emerald can use a bonus action to make an attack with her scimitar of speed.

Special Equipment. Emerald wears a *ring of invisibility* and +2 *studded leather*. She wields a *scimitar of speed* and a *dagger of venom*. She carries *goggles of night* but doesn't wear them unless needed.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Emerald deals an extra 21 (6d6) damage when she hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of Emerald that isn't incapacitated and she doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Emerald makes two melee attacks.

Scimitar of Speed. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 10 (1d6 + 7) slashing damage.

Dagger of Venom. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d4 + 6) piercing damage.

Poison Blade (1/Day). Emerald causes thick, black poison to coat the blade of her *dagger of venom*. The poison remains for 1 minute or until an attack using this weapon hits a creature. That creature must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or take 11 (2d10) poison damage and become poisoned for 1 minute.

REACTIONS

Uncanny Dodge. Emerald halves the damage that she takes from an attack that hits her. She must be able to see the attacker.

Magia Hand NPC Realm

If you are using the rules in *Kingdoms & Warfare*, you can make the Magia Hand an NPC realm with the following statistics.

Magia Hand

Underworld syndicate (thieves' guild)

Skills: Diplomacy +1, Espionage +4, Lore +2, Operations +3

Defenses: Communications 16, Resolve 14, Resources 15

Size 3 (d8 Power die, 7 domain turns during intrigue)

Powers

All officers of this realm get the following organization powers.

Poison Weapons. As a bonus action, the officer can take a power die from the domain's pool and choose one of their weapons. When that weapon hits, it deals extra poison damage equal to the number on the power die, and any creature that takes that damage is poisoned until the end of its next turn. At the end of each of the officer's turns, decrement the power die.

Yoink! As an action, an officer with a free hand takes a power die from their domain's pool and attempts to grab an item held or worn by a creature within 5 feet of them. That creature must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw or the officer takes the item with their free hand. The DC for the saving throw equals 8 + the number on the power die.

Features

Get the Good Gear. If the Magia Hand's Resources level is 2 or higher at the start of any combat between officers of the Magia Hand and an opposed domain, any nonmagical weapons the Magia Hand officers wield gain a magic +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls and any nonmagical armor they wear grants a magic +1 bonus to AC.

Stolen Supplies (1/Intrigue). As a domain action, a Magia Hand officer can make an Operations test against an opposed domain's Resolve. On a success, the Magia Hand chooses three of its infantry units. Each unit has +2 to Attack and Defense during the next battle.

Take it from the Enemy (1/Intrigue). As a domain bonus action, a Magia Hand officer can make an Espionage test against an opposed domain's Communications. On a success, the opposed domain's Resources level decreases by 1, and the Magia Hand's Resources level increases by 1.

The Crew (Special Unit). As a domain action, an officer can make a DC 13 Operations test. On a success, the Magia Hand musters the Crew, a special unit of thieves, fighters, bandits, and brawlers who have low morale and are hard to command—but who fight like demons. (See *Kingdoms & Warfare* for this unit's card.)



RESOURCES

THE EMERALD EXCHANGE:

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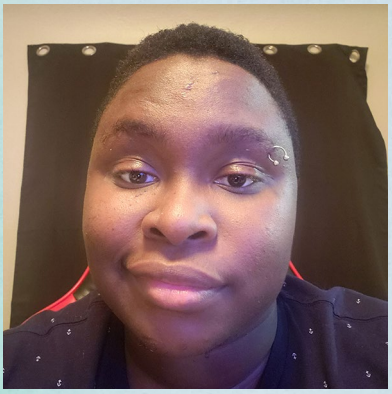

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Reading and playing other roleplaying games makes us better Game Masters and players because it improves our design skills. In some way, all players, including GMs, are game designers. If you have created a world, adventure, encounter, magic item, monster, feat, spell, puzzle, or trap, you're a game designer. If you've ever made up a rule because you didn't like how the official one worked, it didn't exist, or you just didn't feel like taking the time to look it up, you did a little game design, my friend. If you've proposed a new use of one of your character's skills, spells, or traits to your GM or created your own background by taking the skills from one, the tool proficiencies of a second, and the feature of a third, you are 100 percent designer. Heck, if you created your character's personality traits, ideal, bond, and flaw from scratch, then let me be the first to welcome you to the game design club. You'll love it here. We have snacks.

One person strengthening those design chops provides a richer experience for everyone at the table. Just like trying new recipes makes you a better cook, experiencing other games increases your skill and understanding of game design and makes you a better player.

When you interact with a lot of different games, you learn to design toward different goals and styles of play. For instance, the world's oldest roleplaying game is built around battling monsters, which is why a majority of a character's class features and most of a creature's stat block are dedicated to combat. If you pick up a game like *Bubblegumshoe*, which is about teen detectives in the modern world investigating crimes, you can see the rules are centered around solving mysteries in a way that a game about battling monsters isn't. After reading just a few pages of *Dusk City Outlaws*, you'll realize that the game is all about planning and pulling off heists, and that it gives you great tools to do so.

You can and likely will have investigations and heists in the world's oldest roleplaying game, the same way you can have combat in *Bubblegumshoe* and *Dusk City Outlaws*, but each system executes all of these elements with various levels of depth and satisfaction. When you read and play other games, you can introduce the concepts and mechanics from one into the other, and you gain a deeper understanding of how games work. The more games you experience, the easier it becomes to absorb new rules and parse the motivations behind them.

If time, money, and finding players is a concern, you should know that most RPGs out there don't require three core rulebooks (some are one page), many RPGs have free or reduced-cost versions or reduced-price starter sets, and a lot of people are willing to try a game as a one-shot if a friend offers to teach them. You can also do what I do and seek out new games at conventions (online and in-person), which always feature a GM eager to teach folks their favorite system.

Players and designers often turn to other RPGs when we want to do something in a game that the rules don't currently allow. Matt and I both wanted to see rules for level-0 characters in *ARCADIA* because we both enjoy low-powered play. When Chris Bissette pitched an article for level-0 rules inspired by the funnels of *Dungeon Crawl Classics*, *MÖRK BORG*, *Troika!*, and *Mothership*, I knew that we were creating something special, because those games are fantastic and Chris is one of the best designers out there. Combine that article with Sally Tamarkin's new backgrounds and collaborative setting-building guide and Mario Ortegón's flavorful and innovative subclasses, and we've got one of the best issues of this magazine yet.

I hope you enjoy this issue and get a chance to play something new soon! Thank you so much for your continued support of *ARCADIA*!

Ex animo,
James Introcaso
Managing Editor

LOSING OUR RELIGION

Subclasses for forsaken clerics and warlocks

by Mario Ortegón

The sky was shattered.

By killing her Empress, Misiri had disobeyed a sacred tenet of her god, and now the sky was shattered.

Ahead of her, no matter where she looked, the heavens were cold, dark, and dull. And behind her, at the periphery of her vision, she could faintly see the light just out of reach, and the warmth of the world escaping her.

Sheathing her sword, she realized the shattered sky was her doing. But for the first time in her life, she was unburdened by regret.

Many tell tales about righteous paladins breaking their oaths, but what happens when clerics and warlocks come in conflict with their higher powers? This article provides four new subclasses for these characters, each centered around the concept of heroes at odds with their gods or patrons.

A character might break ties with a higher power when one of the deity's aspects or ideals clashes against the character's identity or moral code. Conversely, a higher power could disavow a character for breaking a cardinal tenet, or failing to fulfill their end of a bargain. Either of these developments sets the character on a journey of redemption—or, with a sufficiently disgruntled god or patron, marks the beginning of a powerful antagonist entering the story.

The following subclasses represent different paths clerics and warlocks might take after a quarrel with their deity or patron. They can be used as transitional points in a character's arc, changing their previous subclass to one below and using it as a stepping stone on the journey to regain their original powers, or as the foundation of a new path.

Alternatively, characters who are content with the idea of being at odds with their gods or patrons can remain as members of these subclasses to represent that stance. One may even start as a 1st-level character with one of these subclasses; perhaps having been mighty before, then stripped of power and forced to begin anew.

Cleric Options

The Divine Domain options below are available for clerics who renounce or are shunned by their gods. The Anathema domain represents a cleric who wields the scorn of their angered deity and channels it into their own power, and the Atonement domain provides a path for those seeking divine redemption.

Anathema Domain

The Anathema domain isn't part of any deity's portfolio. Rather, it is the purview of those who become subjects of a deity's contempt. Clerics who turn to this domain are just as capable of weaving magical wonders as their devout peers, but rather than doing so by divine grace, their rites harness the ire of gods and channel it into bouts of transient power.

Clerics who master these anathematic rites are called the scorned. While their relationship with their deities is antagonistic and gods-fearing societies shun them, there's nothing inherently evil about the scorned's practices. Some join their ranks voluntarily, believing it their duty to stand in opposition to gods who threaten the cosmological order. These clerics form secret orders dedicated to ensuring that those gods who lie chained, slumbering, dead, or forgotten remain that way.



Anathema Domain Features

1st	Domain Spells, Anathematic Rites, Divine Rancor
2nd	Channel Divinity: Divine Derogation
6th	Conduit of Ruin
8th	Potent Spellcasting
17th	Scornful Condemnation

Domain Spells

The following domain spells are available to you upon reaching the cleric levels listed in the Anathema Domain Spells table.

Anathema Domain Spells

Cleric Level	Spells
1st	*inflict wounds, protection from evil and good*
3rd	*hold person, ray of enfeeblement*
5th	*bestow curse, counterspell*
7th	*banishment, phantasmal killer*
9th	*dispel evil and good, hold monster*

Anathematic Rites

At 1st level, your knowledge of forbidden rituals allows you to access magic normally unreachable to other clerics. You can cast cleric spells that have the ritual tag as rituals, even if you don't have them prepared, so long as their level doesn't exceed the maximum spell level you can cast as a cleric.

However, when you cast an unprepared spell in this way, you take 1d6 psychic damage per level of the spell. This damage can't be reduced in any way.

Divine Rancor

As one of the scorned, you wield your deity's rancor as a tool to hinder your foes. Starting at 1st level, you always have the *bane* spell prepared, and it doesn't count against the number of spells you can prepare.

When you cast *bane*, you can change the casting time to 1 bonus action, instead of 1 action. You can cast the spell as a bonus action a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

Channel Divinity: Divine Derogation

At 2nd level, you learn to use your Channel Divinity to diminish the capabilities of creatures of faith. As an action, you create a 30-foot aura of discordant divinity around you that lasts for 1 minute or until you fall unconscious. When a creature in the aura magically regains hit points, or takes radiant or necrotic damage, you can roll a d6. On a 4 or higher, the amount of hit points regained or damage taken is reduced to 0.

Conduit of Ruin

When you reach 6th level, you learn to focus the ire of your god to further hamper a creature suffering from it. Before a creature rolls the d4 from a *bane* spell cast by you, you can use a reaction to upgrade the d4 to a d6.

As you gain levels in this class, the malediction imposed by this feature grows even stronger. You can upgrade the die to a d8 at 11th level, and to a d10 at 17th level.

Potent Spellcasting

Starting at 8th level, you add your Wisdom modifier to the damage you deal with any cleric cantrip.

Scornful Condemnation

When you reach 17th level, you no longer need to concentrate on the *bane* spell. When you cast it, it lasts for its full duration, until you cast the spell again, or until you fall unconscious.

Additionally, your ability to channel divine hatred is so masterful that it harms those burdened with it. The first time a creature rolls the die for a *bane* spell cast by you on its turn, it also takes psychic damage equal to the number rolled on the die.

Atonement Domain

While some deities are stern in their edicts and unmoved by mortal nuance, others accept those who come looking for a second chance. Gods of redemption, renewal, and suffering might be particularly inclined to accept such supplicants, so long as their pleas are genuine, and their will to atone remains resolute.

Atonement Domain Features

1st	Domain Spells, Bonus Proficiencies, Selfless Reprieve
2nd	Channel Divinity: Shield of Martyrdom
6th	Hallowed Reprieve
8th	Divine Strike
17th	Exalted Protector

Clerics who approach these gods looking for forgiveness are granted the Atonement domain, either becoming permanent seekers of redemption or serving the god until they can intercede on the cleric's behalf with another deity.

Domain Spells

The following domain spells are available to you upon reaching the cleric levels listed in the Atonement Domain Spells table.

Atonement Domain Spells

Cleric Level	Spells
1st	*false life, sanctuary*
3rd	*enthrall, warding bond*
5th	*beacon of hope, remove curse*
7th	*death ward, private sanctum*
9th	*dispel evil and good, wall of force*

Bonus Proficiencies

When you choose this domain at 1st level, you gain proficiency with heavy armor and either the Medicine or Religion skill (your choice).

Selfless Reprieve

Also at 1st level, you gain the ability to magically intercede on behalf of other creatures at the cost of your own well-being. When you make a saving throw against an effect that targets multiple creatures, you can choose to automatically fail the save and grant another creature targeted by the same effect that you can see an automatic success. You must make this choice before any rolls are made.

Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until the start of your next turn.



Channel Divinity: Shield of Martyrdom

Starting at 2nd level, you learn to employ your Channel Divinity to make a noble sacrifice. As a reaction, when a creature you can see within 30 feet of you would be reduced to 0 hit points as a result of taking damage, you can use your Channel Divinity to magically take the damage yourself, in place of the target. If this damage would reduce you to 0 hit points, it reduces you to 1 hit point instead. This redirects all the damage the creature would have taken to you, but the target is still subject to other effects as if it had taken the damage.

Your sacrifice also bestows your target with a divine ward, granting it temporary hit points equal to your cleric level.

Hallowed Reprieve

At 6th level, you gain the ability to empower your selfless acts of protection with divine aid. When you use your Selfless Reprieve feature against an effect that allows you to make a saving throw to take only half damage, you take half damage from your saving throw failure, and your chosen target takes no damage from their automatic success.

You can use this feature a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses of it when you finish a long rest.

Divine Strike

Starting at 8th level, you can infuse your weapon strikes with divine energy. Once on each of your turns when you hit a creature with a weapon attack, you can cause the attack to deal an extra 1d8 radiant damage to the target. When you reach 14th level, the extra damage increases to 2d8.

Exalted Protector

When you reach 17th level, your Selfless Reprieve feature can grant automatic successes to two creatures making the same saving throw as you, instead of only one. In addition, each use of your Hallowed Reprieve feature can now simultaneously benefit up to two creatures as well.

Warlock Options

These Otherworldly Patron options provide paths for pact-breaking warlocks, but can also be used for a character with an unconventional pact. The Swindled is a powerful entity who has had its power stolen by the warlock, and the Compound represents an assembly of magical beings collectively assisting a warlock.



The Swindled

Your patron is an entity that you have stolen power from. The Swindled might be a previous patron of yours, who severed ties with you after you broke your end of the bargain, or they could be an entirely new eldritch being from whom you steal secrets and siphon power. While forging this stolen pact is a remarkable rarity, it isn't necessarily a willing occurrence. Perhaps you accidentally stumbled upon an ancient artifact that stole the patron's power, and now the item wields you as its host. The patron may not even be aware of your connection to them.

Regardless of how you obtained the stolen power, you are in constant peril of being discovered, by the entity whose power you draw upon or by others who covet your powers.

Swindled Features

1st	Expanded Spell List, Eldritch Thief, Spell Heist
6th	Magical Larceny
10th	Eldritch Gambit
14th	Plunder Spirit

Expanded Spell List

Stolen knowledge from your patron allows you to choose from an expanded list of spells when you learn a warlock spell. The following spells are added to the warlock spell list for you.

Swindled Expanded Spells

Warlock Level	Spells
1st	*alarm, identify*
2nd	*knock, pass without trace*
3rd	*blink, nondetection*
4th	*arcane eye, freedom of movement*
5th	*mislead, passwall*

Eldritch Thief

The process of stealing power from your patron has allowed you to develop more material thievery techniques. At 1st level, you gain proficiency with the Sleight of Hand skill and with thieves' tools. Additionally, you gain the following benefits.

Eldritch Thieves' Tools. As a bonus action, you can magically create a special set of thieves' tools in your hand. These tools' appearance reflects the nature of your patron. For instance, they might look fleshy and organic if your patron is an aberration, or take the form of unfathomably complex clockwork devices if your patron is a creature of cryptic order.

Regardless of their appearance, they function like normal thieves' tools, while also allowing you to use them as a spellcasting focus. While using them to disarm a trap or open a lock, you can use Charisma instead of Dexterity for the ability checks. The tools disappear if you create them again or if they're more than 5 feet away from you for 1 minute or longer.

Spell Heist

Also at 1st level, you learn a ritual to attempt to steal arcane knowledge from your patron. This ritual takes 8 hours; it can be performed during a long rest and sends your consciousness to your patron's realm, leaving you in a sleep-like state.

When you begin the ritual, you choose a number of spells between 1st and 5th level that you don't know from the warlock spell list. The chosen spells can have a total combined level that is equal to or less than half your warlock level (rounded up). At the end of the 8 hours, you make a Charisma check using your eldritch thieves' tools. The DC for the check equals 10 + the total combined level of the spells. On a success, the spells are added to your list of known spells until the end of your next long rest or until you use this feature again. On a failure, you can choose one of the spells to add to your list of known spells for the same duration; however, each time you cast it, you take psychic damage equal to the spell's level, which can't be reduced in any way.

Magical Larceny

At 6th level, you learn to employ your eldritch thieves' tools to disarm and even steal magical effects.

As an action, you can choose one creature, object, or area within 5 feet of you that's affected by a spell, and make a Charisma check using your eldritch thieves' tools. If the spell was cast by a creature, the DC equals the creature's spell save DC. Otherwise, the DC equals 10 + the spell's level. On a successful check, the spell ends.

In addition, if you successfully end a spell on a creature, you can steal its effects for yourself. After the spell ends on the creature, you can choose to have it immediately take effect on you for the remainder of its duration. This stolen spell targets only you, even if it can normally target more creatures, and if it requires concentration, you must concentrate to maintain it.

You can use this feature a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses of it when you finish a long rest.

Eldritch Gambit

At 10th level, you learn the spell *counterspell* if you don't already know it, and it doesn't count against the number of spells you know. You can cast it once without expending a spell slot, and you regain the ability to do so when you finish a long rest.

Moreover, you can bolster yourself with the magical energy of the spells you sabotage. Whenever you successfully end a spell with your Magical Larceny feature or counter a spell with *counterspell*, you gain temporary hit points equal to 1d10 + twice the spell's level. For example, if you end or counter a 3rd-level spell, you gain 1d10 + 6 temporary hit points.

Plunder Spirit

Starting at 14th level, you learn to steal power from the spirits of your fallen enemies. When you reduce a creature to 0 hit points, you can use a reaction to steal a portion of its spirit and gain one of the following benefits:

- You regain a warlock spell slot.
- You become proficient in a saving throw that the creature was proficient in. This ability lasts until you finish a long rest.
- If the creature had the Innate Spellcasting or Spellcasting trait, you learn a spell that the creature knew or had prepared, provided the spell is of a level you can cast. You retain the knowledge of this spell until you finish a long rest, and it counts as a warlock spell for you during this time.

Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

The Compound

Instead of a single patron, you're beholden to a myriad of pacts and contracts with different magical creatures, drawing small fragments of power from each of them to form a coherent magical library. You might forge these pacts during a long journey, painstakingly searching for a number of patrons willing to work with one another, or multiple lesser entities might approach you after witnessing you fall out with your previous patron.

Living up to the demands of multiple patrons can be taxing, and you might find yourself at the center of conflicting requests from many of them. Warlocks who manage to maintain these manyfold pacts often pit their patrons against one another, using their bickering rivalries as a way to force them to keep one another in check.

Compound Features

Warlock Level	Feature
1st	Expanded Spell List, Counsel of the Many, Motley Support
6th	Warding Convocation
10th	Eldritch Sundry
14th	Partitioned Mind

Expanded Spell List

Your patrons allow you to choose from an expanded list of spells when you learn a warlock spell. The following spells are added to the warlock spell list for you.

Compound Expanded Spells

Warlock Level	Spells
1st	*detect evil and good, magic missile*
2nd	*aid, enhance ability*
3rd	*conjur animals, spirit guardians*
4th	*conjure minor elementals, divination*
5th	*legend lore, planar binding*

Counsel of the Many

Starting at 1st level, you have a catalog that represents the purviews and knowledge of your many patrons. This catalog consists of two skills, two tools, and two weapons of your choice. Each time you gain a level in this class, you can replace up to two of the choices in your catalog for different ones.

When you gain this feature, you also gain proficiency with two of the six choices in your catalog. In addition, whenever you finish a short or long rest, you can seek the counsel of another one of your Compound patrons, replacing one of the bonus proficiencies you gain from this feature with another one of the choices in the catalog. The change lasts until you use this feature again to choose new proficiencies from your catalog.

Motley Support

Also at 1st level, you are constantly surrounded by a motley crew of Tiny spectral entities that follow you around. These entities are intangible and invulnerable, and you can cause them to become visible or invisible to others at will (no action required by you). They are manifestations of your different patrons and take aspects from them. For example, if one of your patrons is a fey, it could manifest as a spectral pixie, while an undead patron could manifest as a ghost.

When a creature you can see within 30 feet of you makes an attack roll or an ability check, you can use a reaction to command one of the entities to briefly appear and aid that creature. The creature can roll a d4 and add the number rolled to the attack roll or ability check. However, if the attack roll or ability check is with a weapon, skill, or tool that is part of your Counsel of the Many catalog, the creature rolls a d6 instead.

You can use this feature a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses of it when you finish a long rest.

Warding Convocation

When you reach 6th level, you gain the ability to employ the spectral entities from your Motley Support feature around you in a defensive manner.

As a bonus action, you cause the entities to become semi-corporeal and surround you until the end of your next turn. While they do, you have half cover, being within 5 feet of a hostile creature doesn't impose disadvantage on your ranged attack rolls, and you make Constitution saving throws to maintain concentration with advantage.

You can use this feature once, and you regain the ability to do so when you finish a short or long rest. Optionally, you can expend one use of your Motley Support feature to use this feature again before you regain it.

Eldritch Sundry

At 10th level, your patrons regale you with an arsenal of magical gifts. You can choose an additional option for your Pact Boon feature, for a total of two.

In addition, once you gain your Mystic Arcanum feature at 11th level, you choose two 6th-level spells that can be cast as that arcanum, instead of only one. You can still cast only one of them without expending a spell slot. You can similarly choose two spells for each higher-level Mystic Arcanum you get from then on.

Partitioned Mind

Starting at 14th level, you gain the ability to maintain concentration on two different spells at the same time, sharing the spellcasting locus of your mind with the entities that orbit you. While concentrating this way, you make concentration checks for each spell separately.

Once you use this feature to concentrate on two spells, you must finish a long rest before you can do so again.



Misiri the Fractured

Misiri was brought up in the upper echelons of a dwarven kingdom, though her clan valued asceticism over luxury and service over status. She followed in their traditions by climbing the ranks of the faith of the Sentinel, a deity of vigilance and protection, and became a revered shield-priest as soon as she came of age. After decades of duty, the prestigious Order of the Everguard recruited Misiri and charged her with the protection of Empress Nebrala II.

Years later, after two encroaching nations moved in to occupy their lands, Misiri saw war decimate her kingdom. Empress Nebrala refused to negotiate with the invaders and sought a way to defeat the invading forces. She found an ancient dwarven spell scroll that could open a rift to the Plane of Earth to raise a mountain from the ground.

During the siege of their last remaining stronghold, the empress ordered Misiri to cast the spell, but the shield-priest refused to endanger the people of the citadel. Furious at her insubordination, the empress had Misiri arrested and took the scroll to cast the spell herself. As the guards seized her, Misiri witnessed in terror as rising crags tore through the citadel, ending hundreds of lives in a matter of seconds. In an act of desperation, she broke free from the hold of the guards, took her sword, and ended her empress's life, halting the spell. Though her actions saved thousands, Misiri was branded a traitor to the kingdom and earned the contempt of her god.

Now Misiri wanders as an outcast, carrying her fractured shield at her back but never wielding it. As the subject of the Sentinel's scorn, she has learned to turn the doom of her god's ire against others, carving a new path for herself as an anathematic cleric in order to survive.

Misiri the Fractured

Medium humanoid (dwarf), neutral good

Armor Class 16 (breastplate)
Hit Points 67 (9d8 + 27)
Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+3)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Wisdom +6, Charisma +4
Skills Insight +6, Perception +6, Religion +3
Damage Resistances poison
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Common, Dwarvish
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Dwarven Resilience. Misiri has advantage on saving throws against poison.

Potent Spellcasting. Misiri adds her Wisdom modifier to the damage she deals with any cleric cantrip.

Spellcasting. Misiri is a 9th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light*, *guidance*, *mending*, *sacred flame*
1st level (4 slots): *bane*, *healing word*, *inflict wounds*
2nd level (3 slots): *hold person*, *spiritual weapon*
3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell*, *dispel magic*, *spirit guardians*
4th level (3 slots): *banishment*, *phantasmal killer*
5th level (1 slot): *dispel evil and good*, *flame strike*

Actions

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage, or 7 (1d10 + 2) slashing damage if used with two hands.

Sacred Flame (Cantrip). Flame-like radiance descends on one creature Misri can see within 60 feet of her. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 12 (2d8 + 3) radiant damage, gaining no benefit from cover.

Divine Derogation (2/Short Rest). Misiri releases a wave of discordant divinity that curses one creature she can see within 30 feet of her for 1 minute. When the cursed creature casts a spell or uses an ability that restores hit points or deals radiant or necrotic damage, it must make a Wisdom saving throw. Celestials and fiends have disadvantage on this saving throw. On a failure, the spell or effect is nullified, and then the curse ends.

Reactions

Conduit of Ruin. Before a creature rolls the d4 from a *bane* spell cast by Misiri, she can use her reaction to upgrade the d4 to a d6.

RUCIO SABHAR

Those who know Rucio Sabhar say death itself courted him—in part because of the half-elf's quick-witted charm, and in part because he's cheated his way out of death more times than anyone has a right to.

Born in a bustling city and raised in poverty, Rucio was recruited by the local thieves' guild at a young age to serve as a messenger and spy. His first brush with death came shortly after his initiation, when he was betrayed on a heist to steal an *iron flask* from a local treasure hunter. After a literal stab in the back from his supposed allies, quick-thinking Rucio gave the traitors his canteen and kept the magic *iron flask* as they left him for dead. On the brink of death, he opened the flask and released a powerful pit fiend, who offered him a chance to live by making a warlock pact.

Bolstered by infernal power, Rucio hunted the turncoats down and moved on to become a renowned adventurer. But the more fame and fortune he found, the more his patron demanded. Rucio spent years covertly searching for a way to get ahead of his patron and regain his freedom.

Finally, after nearly a decade, Rucio found a book containing his patron's true name. Invoking it, he summoned the pit fiend and demanded two things: that the devil forget him, and that it return to the *iron flask*. The pit fiend complied, but only after almost killing Rucio again and snatching the book away from him.

Rucio's gambit was successful: he kept his patron's power and freed himself from the devil's demands. In doing so, however, he became the target of an incessant hunt from cultists, warlocks, and devils seeking to retrieve the *iron flask* with the pit fiend and powerful book of names trapped inside.

Rucio Sabhar

Medium humanoid (half-elf), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 13 (16 with *mage armor*)
Hit Points 91 (14d8 + 28)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Wisdom +4, Charisma +7
Skills Arcana +4, Deception +7, Investigation +4, Persuasion +7, Sleight of Hand +6
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Elvish
Challenge 7 (2,300 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Devil's Sight. Magical darkness doesn't impede Rucio's darkvision.

Fey Ancestry. Rucio has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put him to sleep.

Pact Weapon. Rucio can use his Charisma modifier, instead of Strength or Dexterity, for attack and damage rolls with his rapier (included in the attack).

Spellcasting. Rucio is a 14th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). He regains spell slots when he finishes a short or long rest. He knows the following warlock spells:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch, eldritch blast, mage hand, minor illusion*
1st–5th level (3 5th-level slots): *alarm, charm person, darkness, dimension door, dream, fireball, freedom of movement, hellish rebuke, hold monster, identify, mislead, misty step, pass without trace, scrying, shatter*

Actions

Multiattack. Rucio makes three *eldritch blast* attacks, or attacks twice with his rapier.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Eldritch Blast (Cantrip). *Ranged Spell Attack:* +7 to hit, range 120 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 9 (1d10 + 4) force damage.

Magical Larceny (3/Long Rest). Rucio chooses one creature, object, or area within 5 feet of him that's affected by a spell, and makes a Charisma check using eldritch thieves' tools with a +7 bonus. If the spell was cast by a creature, the DC equals the creature's spell save DC. Otherwise, the DC equals 10 + the spell's level. On a successful check, the spell ends.

If Rucio ends a spell on a creature in this way, he can choose to steal its effects. After the spell ends on the creature, it immediately takes effect on Rucio for the remainder of its duration. This stolen spell targets only him, even if it can normally target more creatures, and if it requires concentration, Rucio must concentrate to maintain it.

Reactions

Eldritch Gambit (2/Day). Rucio casts counterspell as a 3rd-level spell. If he successfully counters with this reaction, Rucio gains temporary hit points equal to 1d10 + the level of the spell that was countered.

RETAINERS

Retainers are unique NPC followers who pledge their service to player characters. Below are four stat blocks for cleric and warlock retainers who have been forsaken by their gods and patrons.

The full rules for retainers are explained in *Strongholds & Followers*.

Scorned Priest

Armor Medium (AC 15)

Primary Ability Wisdom

Saves Wisdom, Charisma

Skills Insight, Religion

Signature Attack *Sacred Flame.* Flame-like radiance descends on a creature that the Scorned Priest can see within 60 feet. The target must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw or take 4 (1d8) radiant damage. The target gains no benefit from cover for this saving throw.

Special Actions

3rd-level (3/Day, Bonus Action). *Divine Grudge.* The scorned priest casts *bane*.

5th-level (3/Day, Reaction). *Rebuke the Faithful.* When a creature the scorned priest can see within 30 feet of it uses a spell or magical effect that restores hit points or that deals radiant or necrotic damage, the scorned priest can deal 11 (2d10) psychic damage to that creature. Celestials and fiends are vulnerable to this damage.

7th-level (2/Day). *Beacon of Hatred.* Hostile creatures that can see the scorned priest and that are within 30 feet of it must make a Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, a creature must immediately spend its reaction to make a melee weapon attack against a random target within its reach, including itself.

Atoning Priest

Armor Heavy (AC 18)

Primary Ability Wisdom

Saves Wisdom, Charisma

Skills Persuasion, Religion

Signature Attack *Warhammer. Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Special Actions

3rd-level (3/Day). *Shielding Vow.* The atoning priest chooses a creature within 5 feet of it to protect. For 1 minute, all attacks against the atoning priest are made with advantage, and attacks against the protected creature are made with disadvantage. The effect ends early if the atoning priest and the target are separated by more than 5 feet at the end of the priest's turn.

5th-level (3/Day, Reaction). *Rallying Sacrifice.* When the atoning priest loses one or more health levels, it can choose a number of allies it can see within 30 feet of it equal to the number of health levels lost. Each chosen ally regains 7 (1d8 + 3) hit points.

7th-level (2/Day, Reaction). *Steadfast Companion.* If the atoning priest loses its final health level while at least one living ally that it can see is within 100 feet of it, it can use this feature to remain conscious until the end of its next turn.

Eldritch Thief

Armor Light (AC 13)

Primary Ability Charisma

Saves Wisdom, Charisma

Skills Arcana, Sleight of Hand

Signature Attack ***Eldritch Blast.*** *Ranged Spell Attack*: +6 to hit, range 120 ft., one creature. Hit: 5 (1d10) force damage.

Special Actions

3rd-level (3/Day). *Pilfer Cantrip.* The eldritch thief changes its signature attack to a different warlock cantrip of its choice, then casts that cantrip as part of this action. The signature attack remains changed until the eldritch thief uses this feature again or until it finishes a long rest.

5th-level (3/Day, No Action). *Spell Sneak.* When the eldritch thief damages a creature with its signature attack, it can use this feature to become invisible to that creature until the end of the eldritch thief's next turn.

7th-level (1/Day). *Steal Spell.* The eldritch thief targets a creature within 5 feet of it with the Spellcasting trait and forces it to make a saving throw against the thief's spell save DC. The target has disadvantage on this saving throw if the eldritch thief is hidden from it. On a failure, the eldritch thief can choose a spell of 3rd-level or lower that the target knows and cast it, provided the spell's casting time is 1 action or 1 bonus action. The target then becomes unable to cast that spell for 1 minute.

Compound Mage

Armor Light (AC 13)

Primary Ability Charisma

Saves Wisdom, Charisma

Skills Arcana, History, Nature, Religion

Signature Attack ***Eldritch Blast.*** *Ranged Spell Attack*: +6 to hit, range 120 ft., one creature. Hit: 5 (1d10) force damage.

Special Actions

3rd-level (3/Day, Reaction). *Spontaneous Guidance.* When a creature the compound mage can see within 60 feet of it makes an ability check using the Arcana, History, Nature, or Religion skill, the compound mage can blurt out knowledge from one of the many entities that it knows. If the creature can hear the compound mage, it rolls a d6 and adds the result to its roll.

5th-level (3/Day). *Multiplicity.* The compound mage casts *mirror image* on itself. The next time the compound mage uses its signature attack, it makes one additional attack for each duplicate it has.

7th-level (1/Day, Bonus Action). *Eldritch Chatter.* The compound mage infuses its signature attack with discordant voices. The next time it hits with it, the target must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or become frightened of the compound mage. While frightened this way, a creature takes 10 (2d6 + 3) psychic damage if it takes any action on its turn other than the Dash or the Dodge action. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effect on itself on a success.



POWER IS WHERE YOU TAKE IT

Creating cities and characters for political intrigue campaigns

by Sally Tamarkin

> "[Cities] are not like suburbs, only denser. They differ from towns and suburbs in basic ways, and one of these is that cities are, by definition, full of strangers."
>
> –Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*

This quote elegantly captures why I love cities so much—and, more importantly for this article, why I think they're the perfect setting for telling stories about political intrigue. Before I get to that, let me say this first: campaigns about political intrigue can be tricky, mainly because when it comes to getting players (and their characters) invested, such campaigns tend to lack the do-this-and-save-the-world-please quality of traditional arcs and campaigns. Those campaigns have the advantage of immediately setting the stakes sky-high, which means that players know their characters will get to be heroes or die trying—two very cool outcomes.

Stories of political intrigue tend to be smaller and are, by definition, quieter since intrigue basically means "engaging in secret schemes." In fact, the characters might want to ensure that no one ever discovers they were involved at all! The good news is that political intrigue campaigns are all about mystery and discovery, about keeping and telling secrets, and about using your wits (and, okay, maybe your blade) to get what you want—which means that with some thoughtful design, they can be thrilling and fun.

This is where cities come in. Cities are, as the quote above says, full of strangers, which makes them the perfect place to tell stories about all kinds of NPCs and factions plotting, in secret, to take what they want—money or territory, or maybe power, influence, or control. And if you build your city around these NPCs, it will feel alive and lived-in, a place where people scheme secretly, where a thieves' guild works with a city leader to shake down the local nobles; where the mayor is in cahoots with a local religious leader for some dark purpose; where the head of the city watch is conspiring with an artificer from the local tinkerer's guild to make illegal magic weapons.

On a more practical level, any city—real or fictional—has the building blocks of a political intrigue campaign. First, cities are densely populated with residents of various backgrounds and livelihoods, whose lives are intertwined through work, proximity, romance, shared interest, rivalries, and so on. Second, cities have a system of governance—an entity that holds (and generally seeks to maintain) state power, which of course means there are people or groups that seek to take away that power. Finally, cities are home to various factions competing for attention, control, and influence. Sometimes this takes the form of competition for some kind of officially recognized or "legitimate" power, as with elections, labor disputes, or matters of succession. Other times, the power that is sought is informal or perhaps even criminal—maybe two thieves' guilds fighting over territory, a religious leader seeking to influence local law using bribery, or a city leader using their station to illegally accumulate wealth.

This article includes a step-by-step guide to creating and developing a city perfect for a political intrigue campaign. It also provides backgrounds to help players create characters who are already part of a city's political life, involved in or connected to the ongoing struggles over power and influence.

CREATING YOUR CITY

Particularly if you're using the backgrounds in this article, I recommend building your city in three phases. The first phase takes place before your session zero. In fact, session zero is the time you will present the city to your players. In this phase of design you're going to come up with some basic details about your city so that it feels like a real place to you and to your players, but is not so complete and built out that your players aren't sure where their characters would fit into it. Again, political intrigue campaigns require that the players care about the city and that their characters feel invested in what goes on there. In my experience, the best way to facilitate this is to think of character creation as part of your worldbuilding and vice versa. So, let's start building the version of our city that we want to bring to our session zero.

PART 1: GETTING STARTED

We'll go through this process step by step, but these are some questions to ask as you build your city:

- How big is the city? Is it a sleepy trade town, or a major metropolis?
- What is the city's system of governance?
- What makes your city unique? What have outsiders heard about your city?
- What are the city's important geographical features? How do they affect the culture or government?

If you feel like it, you can also consider details such as the city's weather, special laws, notable exports or raw materials, and important festivals.

CITY SIZE AND DESIGN

When you're choosing how big to make your city, you just want to make sure that it's big enough to contain the factions, locations, and NPCs you need for the kind of stories you want to tell. The bigger a city is, the more flexibility you're likely to have, but keep in mind that the bigger the city, the more work it will be to build, run, and keep track of.

- Small town (population 901–2,000)
- Large town (population. 2,001–5000)
- Small city (population 5,001–12,000)
- Large city (population 12,001–25,000)

I'm going to build a small city with a population of 11,000. Although cities can be dense, sprawling, or anything in between, I want this one to be very densely populated; about a three-quarters of a mile in length and width. To support a crowded population, many buildings in the city are several stories tall, with some top floors added to older structures as the settlement grew. One of my favorite things about cities in real life and in fiction is that when they're densely populated, people can't help but be characters in one another's lives, and that's perfect for political intrigue stories. I also really like when cities have distinct neighborhoods, so I'm going to break this one up into quadrants; the river will divide the city in two and the bridge will bisect it again. I know I'll want my city's criminal organizations to each operate out of a different district, so I'll make a note of that and return to it later. I also want there to be a district that's based around the city's key industry.

This city sits at the foot of a mountain range and is bisected by a river. I'll name my city Woodbridge, after the wooden bridge that was built by the city's founders so they didn't have to ford the river. The wide river is a huge source of employment and income for the city. Considering how important the river is, I'll call one of the four districts the Fresh Water. This will be the northwest quadrant of the city, home to fisheries, boatyards, and all the people who work with the river and its bounty. You always know you're in the Fresh Water because your boots are caked with mud and the smell of trout is in the air.

Across the bridge from the Fresh Water is a district called Bankside, an upscale residential neighborhood. If the Fresh Water is the industrial side of the bridge, Bankside is more like a luxe riverside community. Each home has a slip at the Woodbridge marina where their pleasure craft is docked, waiting to whisk its owners and their guests away on a sunset tour of the river. The only aroma on this side of the river is the sweet fragrance of the local fruit trees, which bloom every spring and draw visitors from all over town.

Continuing counterclockwise, the southeastern quadrant is Fairmarket, a lively commercial district full of shops, vendors, street performers, and stalls selling food and drink. Finally, across the bridge from Fairmarket, in the southwest quadrant, is the Spit. This area is full of dive bars, a couple of underground fight clubs, and cheap inns, as well as some disreputable shops and vendors that offer rare goods of dubious legality.

SYSTEM OF GOVERNANCE

When it comes to governance for Woodbridge, I'm going to choose a structure I feel familiar with: an elected mayor (though perhaps only land-owning nobles in this city are allowed to vote—instant plot seed!) and a four-person council of alders appointed by the mayor. I'm choosing a four-person city council because it goes along with my city being divided into quadrants; each alder can represent a specific district, which will neatly tie them to that area's residents, businesses, and desires.

Other possible government systems include:

- Council of nobles or lords
- Council of clergy or a religious leader

- Duke or lord appointed by a monarch
- Military leader
- Council of guild leaders
- Mage circle
- Council of learned engineers, scientists, artificers
- Secret council with a public figurehead

Municipal Infrastructure

Because Woodbridge is a small city, it will have many of the trappings of an urban center but will lack some of the things you'd find in a metropolis. For example, a large city might have a university, a grand library, a public works department, a system of roads and sewers, an office of the tax collector, jail, bank, hall of records, city watch, and a newspaper. Our city isn't quite that big, but it does have a city watch, jail, and courthouse. (A smaller city or large town might have a two-person city watch, while an even smaller town might have one sheriff who also serves as jailer, judge, and tax collector, and a town crier in place of a newspaper.)

Businesses

Woodbridge will have various shops and businesses, including four taverns and four inns that are important to the story, one in each district. Of course there are more taverns and inns, but I just want to populate the city enough so that each district feels lived in—I don't need a ton of stuff to track before the game even starts. There are at least two smiths in town, one who specializes in making elegant showpiece weapons and armor and a more workaday smith who cranks out the basics.

The city will have other shops, businesses, and guilds, some of which I'll come up with before the campaign starts and some of which will emerge during play. Just keep in mind that the industries in your city will determine the local guilds and the kinds of merchants and shops the city can sustain.

Key Factions

Our city is big enough to sustain two competing criminal factions—an assassins' guild (The Whispering Blade) and a thieves' guild (The Kate and Ken). At this moment in citybuilding, I'm going to say that there is one religion officially represented in the city. It's called the Temple of the Prophet, and it has a temple in town and maintains the graveyard. If, during our session zero, one of my players expresses interest in that religion or another, I'll work with them to decide the extent to which it's represented in our city.

Other factions will definitely emerge through play. Because the river plays a big role in the city's industry, there will be a guild of river workers. This will include fishers, boatwrights, workers who process the fish that's been caught, bait shop workers, and any other river-related job I can come up with.

This is all I need to have for now. After my session zero, I can flesh this out even more, name specific factions, buildings, and locations, create key NPCs, and so on.

Part II: Factions & Power

After your session zero, continue building your city with the player characters and their backstories in mind. As you do this, think more specifically about who holds power in the city and what kind of power they have. This is when plot seeds and hooks will emerge. And of course, as you build, find places to weave the characters into the fabric of the city. Remember, a city can have multiple entities that hold power, influence, and control. Think about informal and criminal power as well as officially recognized and state power.

Here's a brief example of how to start building out the power relationships in Woodbridge based on a session zero where my players built characters using some of the backgrounds described below.

After our session zero, I knew that one of the PCs wanted to be involved in city government. They took the Politician background and we decided that they work in the office of an alder in the Fresh Water. Another player took the Public Intellectual background and wanted to be a visiting professor at the Woodbridge Institute of Liberal Arts (a college they came up with and named), lecturing on political science and local governance. The third player took the Activist Journalist background so they could be an editor at the newspaper *The Shining Light*, whose tagline is "We Tell You the Things They Don't Want You to Know." (So now we have two more factions: the university and the newspaper!)

For each faction, I'll come up with some details that will provide a basic sense of the faction's MO. I'll determine:

- Its overall mission
- Key NPC(s)
- Relationships to other factions
- Power it has
- Power it seeks (this might emerge through play; perhaps at the current moment a given faction is focused on maintaining the status quo)

Keep in mind that factions and NPCs should have well-defined goals and interests. I recommend keeping these relatively concrete and measurable. For example: more money, territory, a seat on a council, razing an area to make room for their business interest, the downfall of a political rival, or at-any-cost survival despite a looming threat.

The combination of initial citybuilding and session zero helped me get a sense of what some of this might look like

and also gave me a few plot seeds—which means I already have some ideas for how to develop these factions and how I might get the PCs involved.

For Woodbridge, based on what we built above, my next steps are fleshing out the mayor, the four-member council of alders, the two thieves' guilds, the church, the weekly newspaper, and the college. (Of course there will be other factions and NPCs to flesh out, which you can do now, discover during play, or some combo). Also, you'll notice that as you develop your important factions and NPCs you'll necessarily begin doing some broader word-building. To begin with, here's what it would look like to flesh out the mayor and the thieves' guilds.

Mayor

When the mayor was elected, he was a member of the Temple of the Prophet (like many residents of Woodbridge), but only nominally. However, over the four years he's been in office, he's become extremely pious and brought the head cleric of the temple into his inner circle. Some say the cleric (another NPC to flesh out!) has some kind of hold over the mayor, but that's just a rumor. Either way, the mayor has been trying to work some of the strictures of his church into municipal law. The mayor's other goal is to finish his ten-year term in good stead with the nobles of Woodbridge so he will be reelected. He is currently serving the fourth year of his first term.

The mayor's power is significant, but not absolute. He can approve or reject laws proposed by the alders, adjust taxes, and declare holidays. He appoints the city judge, and the head of the city watch also answers to him. If a state of emergency is declared, the mayor can generate and pass laws; otherwise, it's the alders who write and propose legislation. The mayor is almost never seen in public without his bodyguard, a burly half-orc whom we can flesh out later.

The Whispering Blade

This assassins' guild is known as the Blade of Woodbridge. They have a protection racket in the Fresh Water, which is the area of the city that is home to fisheries, warehouses, and processing facilities for the many businesses who harvest the river's bounty. They operate out of a tavern in this neighborhood called The Floppy Trout. The Blade's goals are to protect their territory and to keep their business model viable by disposing of any threats or nosy individuals.

The Kate and Ken

This thieves' guild is led by a three-person team called the High Pennyweighters. This guild's specialty is breaking into homes of nobles, stealing their valuables, and replacing them with well-made but worthless forgeries. To accomplish this, they have a deal with a few artisans in town (jewelry makers, coin forgers, smiths) who get a cut of the profits from the sale of the stolen goods. The Kate and Ken operates out of the basement of a pawn shop in the Spit.

If you ever get stuck building out these factions, ask yourself these questions:

- What kind of power does this faction have?
- What is the source of its power?
- Who in your city is impacted if this faction gains or loses power?
- What people or entities would like for this faction to have less power?

Part III: Plot Seeds

The following plot seeds are some ideas to get you started with political intrigue in your city. I built them with Woodbridge in mind, but I also designed them to be modular, which means that you should be able to change the details and use them for your city. If they call for a faction, setting, or other feature that doesn't exist in your city, simply swap it out for something your city does have; they're meant to be open-ended so you can take the stories in whatever direction works for your table.

Assassination Escalation

For three months in a row, on the very first night of the new moon, a resident of the city has been murdered. It's clearly the work of a skilled assassin. The Whispering Blade denies involvement, but there are certain characteristics of each murder scene that make it clear a professional is involved, so they must know *something*. Right? This campaign arc begins the morning after the third victim was discovered, and their identity confirms the rumor that's been circulating since the second murder—all the victims were outspoken critics of the mayor. The city's newspaper, *The Shining Light*, published a special early morning edition that reports the third assassination and, controversially, suggests the mayor's silence on the murders is suspicious.

This Spells Disaster

The mayor is away brokering a trade deal when a natural disaster strikes. The city is plunged into chaos; fisheries and boats are destroyed, livestock are killed, the river is flooding, and the city's well water is tainted. The council of alders, who've been running the city in the mayor's stead, struggles to maintain law and order, which means it's the perfect opportunity for someone to grab power. In fact, was this disaster natural after all? Or might it have been brought about intentionally using magic? Three of the city's factions (the city watch, the Temple of the Prophet, and the Whispering Blade) vie for control while the city's journalists at *The Shining Light* attempt to uncover the truth about the "natural" disaster.

Sleep No More

An insomnia epidemic is sweeping through Woodbridge with devastating consequences. Only the wealthy residents of Bankside have contracted it so far, but city officials are not sure how they got it or whether it's contagious. After a few days of being unable to sleep, victims become irritable and confused. A few days after that, they become delirious and fall into a coma. Those who can afford expensive care with rare herbs or treatments from the city's healer do find some relief, but no one has managed to find a cure. If the characters investigate, they soon discover that the only thing those who are ill have in common (besides their social class and where they live) is that they've all recently purchased home decor by a local artisan named Maguff—who is known not only for his beautiful work but also because he seems to be on collegial terms with some members of the Kate and Ken.

Political Intrigue Backgrounds

The following backgrounds are made for characters in political intrigue campaigns, though your GM may allow you to use them in other games. Because this content deals with how people are impacted by shifts in power, some details might remind you of real life and hit closer to home than material in the core rules. So, before you fully flesh out your characters using these backgrounds, make sure everyone at your table is in agreement about the kinds of themes you'll be exploring in play and the extent to which the real world is reflected in your campaign.

Remember that when you pull from real life—especially recent events—you risk inhabiting characters reminiscent of real people who have harmed others or telling stories that are uncomfortable or even re-traumatizing for your group. Use your session zero to share your ideas and ask for input from your fellow players and GM.

Please don't use these backgrounds to tell stories about fascists, bigots, right-wing insurrectionists, or violent xenophobes. These backgrounds should be used to play with and explore the nature of power, and how power can shift between those "in charge" and those who are subject to the whims and machinations of the authorities.

Safety Tools

Before getting started, I recommend looking over the following resources, which are some of my favorites for setting boundaries and calibrating expectations for the campaign to come. Safety at the table can include using an X-card and determining lines and veils ahead of time, but it also includes discussing and agreeing on what kind of tone the game will have, what kinds of conflicts will be explored, what constitutes acceptable play, what players can expect from the GM and vice versa, and so on. The tools below guide you through those discussions and decisions as a group.

- RPG safety tools: These tools include the X-Card (developed by John Stavropoulos), lines/veils, and more.
- RPG Consent checklist, from the TTRPG Safety Toolkit, a resource created by Kienna Shaw and Lauren Bryant-Monk
- CATS method (example) by Patrick O'Leary
- The Same Page Tool from Christopher Chinn's blog Deeper in the Game

Personality Traits and More

As you probably know from building fifth edition characters, when you choose a background, you then roll on or choose from tables for your chosen background to determine your character's traits, ideals, bonds, and flaws. These backgrounds are set up a little differently. What you'll find ahead is that traits, ideals, bonds, and flaws aren't divided by background, but are combined into four big tables that can apply to all backgrounds. I think it's more fun, and leads to richer, more interesting characters when you're not steered towards a set of characteristics based on your background. Make a politician who hates being the center of attention or an activist who cares more about personal glory than their cause! Mix and match these characteristics as you see fit.

Citizen Activist

The system is corrupt. Change will only come if the oppressed come together to resist. Your work may happen out in the open or perhaps in secret. Work with the GM to decide what form your activism takes. Maybe you lead a coalition that lobbies elected officials or nobles for a change in local law. Perhaps you organize jobs, medical care, and food for those who need it. You could lead demonstrations and engage in civil disobedience, distribute literature or tag walls in the city with graffiti that calls attention to unfair taxation, break people out of jail, or redistribute wealth.



Skill Proficiencies: Insight, Persuasion

Languages: Two of your choice

Equipment: A seminal text that has influenced your activism, a notebook written in code with your contacts, a set of common clothes, and a pouch containing 10 gp

Feature: Lay of the Land

As someone who spends their time opposing hegemonic power, organizing like-minded people to join your cause, and providing aid to those harmed by the system, you have an intimate knowledge of the power structures in your community, as well as how to navigate them. This includes government bodies, businesses, secret societies, religious orders, guilds, other activist groups, and any other faction that holds sway and influence.

You also know who the leaders of these various entities are, including those who operate clandestinely (at your GM's discretion). In a new place, you can quickly figure out where to go and who to talk to in order to get this information.

Suggested Characteristics

Citizen activists are people who live and breathe the idea of being the change they wish to see in the world. Sure, they're everyday people who don't necessarily possess the resources of those in power or with more privilege and access, but what they have is a determination to change things for the better, a deep understanding of how the common person can affect change, and an optimism or even just a bit of hope that change is actually possible. See the tables in the Personal Characteristics section below for more ideas.

Activist Journalist

You work to expose the harm caused by ruling powers through journalism. Maybe a local broadsheet or town crier employs you, or maybe this is how you spend your free time. Either way, the stories you investigate and report on have an impact on your community and your role within it.

Skill Proficiencies: Insight, Investigation

Languages: Two of your choice and a journalist shorthand for taking notes

Equipment: A set of common clothes, a scroll that you use to "map" important relationships between powerful figures in the city, a writing kit (small pouch with a quill, ink, folded parchment, and a penknife), and a pouch containing 10 gp

Feature: You Can Trust Me

You are known in your community as someone who can be trusted with valuable (potentially explosive) information. Community members—including those who hold power—may provide you with valuable information in the hopes that you'll leak the information or investigate further. Other times, people may try to keep information from you or mislead you, which is a form of gathering information itself!

If you don't protect your sources and their identities, there will be consequences (determined by the GM).

Suggested Characteristics

Citizen journalists are determined to uncover the truth—wherever it's hidden and no matter how difficult or dangerous it is to get—and bring it into the open. They're dogged when they're pursuing stories and will wade into unfamiliar or threatening situations to get the information



they need. They might be the type to spend hours with their head buried in tomes and blueprints and official records, or someone who's out in the streets day in and day out, looking for leads and sources. See the tables in the Personal Characteristics section below for more ideas.

POLITICIAN

You are running for office or have already been elected (or maybe appointed; talk to your GM about what makes sense for the setting). Your office is one of moderate power and influence; you might be a member of a city council or a community elder or alderperson. You can't control major political decisions in your city, but you certainly have access to, and maybe the respect of, the people who do.

Skill Proficiencies: Perception, Performance

Languages: Two of your choice

Equipment: A set of fine clothes, a writing kit (small pouch with a quill, ink, folded parchment, and a penknife), a ceremonial ribbon-cutting blade, a brooch or other accessory with the mark of your office or political party, and a pouch containing 10 gp

FEATURE: EXPENSE ACCOUNT

Your political party (or perhaps a benefactor or other group that supports you) funds a comfortable lifestyle for you and up to eight of your traveling companions. They pay for your food, shelter, clothing, daily needs, and anything else you can reasonably justify as being part of your political career (at the GM's discretion). They do not fund armor, weapons, or magic items.

SUGGESTED CHARACTERISTICS

Politicians tend to be networkers, movers and shakers, and people who see themselves as just the right person to be giving speeches, representing constituents, making laws, and doing a whole lot of shaking hands and kissing babies. Your politician might be looking to make change, enjoy the social status of their position, or both!

POLITICAL STRATEGIST

You work for a candidate, elected official, guild, or other entity that seeks to maneuver local politics as strategically and deftly as possible. You advise your bosses on who to make strategic alliances with, how to outmaneuver political opponents, and where to go and what to say to build support among the city's influential citizens. Whether you're helping your boss get that power or you're their puppet master is up to you and your GM.

Skill Proficiencies: Your choice of two of the following: Deception, Insight, or Investigation

Languages: Two of your choice

Equipment: A notebook with contact information (and relevant details) for your boss and their political allies, a broadsheet clipping from a story you helped place in a publication, a set of fine clothes, a writing kit (small pouch with a quill, ink, folded parchment, and a penknife), and a pouch containing 10 gp

FEATURE: TRUSTED ADVISER

You work for someone who holds power in the city—a city council member, the head of a guild, the archmage of a mystic circle, the dean of a university, a lieutenant of the city watch, etc. You are this person's confidante and trusted counselor. They always hear what you have to say and seriously consider your advice and perspective. On relatively small matters, they're likely to agree with you on the spot (at the GM's discretion). They can supply you with favors and nonmagical equipment.

SUGGESTED CHARACTERISTICS

To a political strategist, the world is a chess board and people are pieces to be moved around strategically. A political strategist loves nothing more than thinking analytically and creatively about how to achieve goals. Their speciality is building and consolidating power. See the tables in the Personal Characteristics section below for more ideas.

PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL

You're known for speaking out against—or in favor of—a regime, political organization, religious body, or other entity that holds state power. Perhaps you're a dissident or even an exile (work with the GM to figure out what fits best in your campaign). Your mastery of political science, ethics, and philosophy allows you to express complex ideas about governance, political systems, and history with ease. Perhaps you wrote and distributed tracts and pamphlets urging people to recognize a particular injustice. You might be a clergy member who gives weekly sermons about this or that law, policy, or ruler. Maybe you're a creator whose art contains subtle (or not-so-subtle) critiques of those in power. Work with your GM to determine what kind of reputation you have.

Skill Proficiencies: Your choice of two of the following: History, Performance, or Religion

Languages: One of your choice

Tool Proficiencies: Your choice of one set of artisan's tools or a disguise kit

Equipment: A set of traveler's clothes, a set of artisan's tools or a disguise kit, one tool of your craft (such as a writing kit, a religious item, an instrument, or a costume), and a pouch containing 10 gp

FEATURE: YOUR REPUTATION PRECEDES YOU

People are familiar with your work and recognize you on sight. Some are eager to show their respect, while others consider you a nuisance or even a threat. This minor celebrity allows you access to places and people that might not otherwise be afforded to you, such as a noble court; the chambers of elected officials, community leaders, or clergy members; an elite social club; or a secret hideout.

MEDIUM

Your medium determines how you get your message to your audience. Roll or choose from the table below, or work with your GM to come up with an idea that isn't on the table.

d6	Medium
1	Art (novels, plays, poetry, or visual art)
2	Performance (acting, dance, or music)
3	Scholarly writing
4	Public speaking
5	Sermons
6	Community leadership

SUGGESTED CHARACTERISTICS

Public intellectuals spend their time thinking critically and deeply, reflecting, and analyzing. They generally have an area of expertise and spend their time generating writing or art to share their analyses and opinions. They can be fiery and intense or quiet and reflective. They might be stubbornly opinionated or open-minded and curious. Either way, they're passionate about ideas and analysis. See the tables in the Personal Characteristics section below for more ideas.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

The following tables present personality traits, ideals, bonds, and flaws appropriate for any character in a political intrigue campaign. You can use these with the backgrounds in this article, or swap them with any of the personal characteristics listed in a background from another source.

Personality Traits (Choose Two)

d20	Personality Trait
1	All I need is what I can carry. Possessions are a distraction.
2	I really can't tolerate "roughing it." I'll do anything I can to avoid having to eat, sleep, or spend time in a place I deem beneath me.
3	I'm a sore loser (and sometimes a sore winner).
4	I idolize a leader or activist from many generations ago. Their work guides me; I think and talk about them a lot.
5	I love winning arguments so much that I sometimes start them.
6	I feel most confident, powerful, and at ease when I'm given the floor and am addressing a group about my beliefs.
7	I've read every single book I can find about political science and social movements.
8	I have a hard time with idleness; I can't sit still.
9	If I see that someone needs help, I step in.
10	I love solving puzzles; the harder the better. Societal problems are just big puzzles.
11	I would give someone the shirt off my back if they said they needed it. Or even if they said they liked it.
12	I love being in charge. Few are as cut out to lead, manage, and direct as I am.
13	I was put on this earth to stick it to the System, and that's what I'll do.
14	There's basically nothing I don't have an opinion on.
15	As far as I am concerned, strangers are just friends you haven't met yet.
16	I cry easily.
17	I've never met a paradigm I didn't want to subvert.
18	I love getting attention for my work and achievements.
19	I am drawn to rebels and iconoclasts even if their beliefs differ from mine.
20	I hate being the center of attention. I crave anonymity.

Ideals

d20	Ideal
1	**Equity.** Everyone deserves economic, social, and political rights.
2	**Collective Power.** When we come together, we're more powerful than any noble, royal, or elected official.
3	**Collective Responsibility.** When people are suffering, it's everyone's job to help to alleviate that suffering.
4	**Change.** Society and its systems of power must evolve to meet changing needs. Complacency leads to harm.
5	**Order.** Social stability is everything. Chaos will reign unless we keep it in check.
6	**Intellect.** There is no one who understands political science, strategy, and philosophy like I do, and I'm always striving to learn and know more.
7	**Strategy.** The world is a chess board; knowing how to move the pieces ensures victory.
8	**Pacifism.** Violence doesn't permanently solve problems. I strive for a world free from war.
9	**Power.** If I can attain enough power, no one can harm my community or me.
10	**Performance.** I like people to notice me and know my work.
11	**Hope.** No matter how bad things get, we must never give up.
12	**Work.** There's nothing more stimulating than the minutiae of bureaucracy and politics.
13	**Status.** Being in this position comes with an undeniable rise in rank and respect. I like that.
14	**Destiny.** This work is my calling and nothing can pull me away from it.
15	**Influence.** I want to be known by name and reputation and better yet, followed for my beliefs.
16	**Retribution.** Someone or an entity in power harmed me, and I'm going to make sure they pay.
17	**Redemption.** At some point in my past I was part of the problem, and I'll only feel absolved if I solve those problems.
18	**Faith.** My religion teaches that civic involvement is part of my duty as an adherent.
19	**Free Thinking.** Curiosity and discovery are what allow progress to be made and what prevent complacency and stagnation.
20	**A Life Well Lived.** I want to die knowing that I did everything I can to help.

Bonds

d20	Bond
1	My parent or guardian used to take me to meetings at their guild hall. I would listen to speeches and rallies and that's what radicalized me. To this day I consider the local guild hall a second home.
2	I'll never forget what it was like to see the people I love suffer at the hands of injustice.
3	My mentor taught me everything I know and I'm carrying on their work.
4	This manifesto changed my life and worldview. I refer to it a lot and carry a copy with me everywhere.
5	Nothing is more important than impressing my family.
6	Someone important to me had their livelihood ruined by a political entity, and I'm determined to make sure it never happens to anyone else.
7	I learned about politics from a traveling theatre troupe that came through town and did political satire. I've been a volunteer at (or donor to) the local theatre ever since.
8	My most treasured possession is a piece of paper with the following written on it: "It is not your responsibility to finish the work of perfecting the world, but you are not free to desist from it either."
9	Someone stood up for me once and it saved me. In turn, I will always stand up for others.
10	My nation (or city) and its people are all that matter to me.
11	My allies are the only people I trust.
12	I know the city's sewers (or other hiding places) like the back of my hand.
13	I love someone who doesn't share my worldview.
14	I've spent most of my life in the local tavern. Everyone knows me there and I know everyone.
15	My family escaped persecution and I was raised on their stories.
16	I've been writing in my journal every night ever since I could remember. It comes with me everywhere and contains all my thoughts and ideas.
17	I'm obsessed with embarrassing my political rival.
18	I'm writing what I believe will be the political manifesto of its time.
19	I have to protect my fortune from the undeserving people who want to take it from me.
20	The local library is a sacred place to me; it's where I think, read, write, and plan.

Flaws

d20	Flaw
1	When things seem overwhelming I become nihilistic or melancholic.
2	I tend to drastically overestimate my own influence and power.
3	Once I get a little bit of authority I get really bossy.
4	I tend to think in black and white, right and wrong; the gray is harder for me to see.
5	I put my causes first—and second and third, often to the detriment of my health and happiness.
6	There are times when it would be safer (and maybe smarter) to back down, but I never do that.
7	I get bogged down in details and can be slow to act.
8	I believe I know what's best for everyone.
9	I always speak my mind, even when propriety (or danger) says I should shut my mouth.
10	I would risk the lives of strangers to bring about my goals.
11	My political work feels like a burden. I wish I could be free of it.
12	As much as I care about the common people, I don't really know what their lives are really like.
13	I act before considering the consequences; I'll deal with them later.
14	I would do anything to hide my failures.
15	I got into all this political stuff because I like when people do what I want.
16	I secretly worry that my work is worthless and I'll never make a difference.
17	I care more about my personal glory than any cause.
18	I've sacrificed love and companionship for my cause.
19	I have no use for those who question my political analysis.
20	People either get it or they don't—and if they don't, I can't be bothered with them.


WOODBRIDGE
EXPLANATION
1. The Floppy Trout
2. Mayor's mansion
3. Temple of the Prophet
4. City hall & court
5. City watch & jail
6. The Shining Light
7. Quality Collateral
8. The Wood Bridge
Ridge Run
FRESH WATER
BANKSIDE
THE SPIT
FAIRMARKET
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8

FILTHY PEASANTS!

Level 0 Characters and the Funnel

by Chris Bissette

The term *funnel adventure* comes from *Dungeon Crawl Classics*[1] and refers to an adventure where players control multiple level-0 characters: generally commoners, who are called to protect their home and find themselves in way over their heads. Think of an angry mob grabbing pitchforks and marching into the forest to face a horrible ogre. Most of them die, and the survivors return marked and changed forever.

As well as being a fun meatgrinder adventure that allows GMs to cut loose with a high-lethality dungeon without worrying about killing characters players are invested in, funnels serve as a process of character creation through play.

Funnels are popular in many other games (such as *MÖRK BORG*, *Troika!*, and *Mothership*[2]). Here we present a system for creating level-0 characters in fifth edition, a sample funnel adventure to run your peasants through, and rules for turning the survivors into full 1st-level characters who can go on to star in your epic campaign.

1 Editor note: A great game that you should check out!
2 Editor note: These too!

Creating a Level-0 Character

Level-0 characters aren't heroes—yet. They've accepted the call to adventure and taken their first tentative steps, but they don't know what it means to stand face to face with the horrors of the world.

The following process will guide you through creating your 0-level characters. This should take about 30 minutes or so.

Roll Ability Scores

To generate your ability scores, roll 4d6 and record the total of the highest three dice. Do this in order for each of your ability scores. You may be tempted to reorder your results to suit a character concept you have in mind, and there's nothing to prevent you doing that, but we encourage you to use at least a couple of the characters exactly as they're rolled and see what happens! Some playtesters reported that they had more fun with the characters they didn't alter at all.

Once you've rolled your ability scores, record the relevant ability modifiers as normal.

Record Other Bits

Level-0 characters are more mechanically simple than standard 1st-level characters (as well as weaker). At level-0:

- Your proficiency bonus is +2.
- Your Armor Class is 9 + your Dexterity modifier.

- Your hit point maximum is 1d4 + your Constitution modifier. Yes. Roll. (If the result is less than 1, your character unfortunately didn't survive long enough to become an adventurer! Make a new character and hope this one gets luckier.)
- You have one Hit Die you can use during short rests. It is a d4.
- You aren't trained in any skills. (But you will be eventually.)

Determine Occupation

Level-0 characters don't have a class. Before adventure called, their life was simple. Maybe they toiled in a field, apprenticed to a tradesperson, or were waiting to inherit a title. Your character's occupation gives you a sense of their station in life before they left it all behind.

Roll on the Occupations table to pick an occupation and starting equipment at random, or choose an option you like if you already have a sense of who this character will be. Your character is proficient with the weapons and armor they start with.

In addition to the equipment gained from your starting occupation, all characters begin play with a torch and a day's rations.

Trinkets

Select an appropriate starting trinket, or roll on or roll on the Trinkets table. Answer any questions posed by your trinket.

Skills and Saving Throws

At 1st level, characters are granted skills by their class and background. Level-0 characters have no training. Whenever you succeed on an ability check that uses a skill during the adventure, decide whether you want your character to be proficient in this skill. If so, mark it on your character sheet. You can do this for up to four skills. Once you've marked a skill in this way, you're considered proficient in it and get to add your proficiency bonus to future checks of that skill.

Example: One of Lydia's characters is Jenice, a former cutpurse with a high Dexterity score. Lydia decides that if Jenice survives, she will become a rogue. During the adventure, Jenice sneaks ahead of the group to scout out the area. She rolls a Dexterity (Stealth) check and fails, alerting enemies to her presence. Later in the adventure, Jenice tries again, sneaking up on a foe who has their back turned. She rolls a Dexterity (Stealth) check and this time succeeds! Lydia fills in the Stealth box on Jenice's character sheet. Jenice is now proficient in Stealth.

This is also the case for saving throws. At 1st level, characters have two saving throws they are proficient in, granted by their class. When one of your level-0 characters succeeds on a saving throw, you can choose to mark it on your sheet, and that character adds their proficiency bonus to future saving throws with that ability. You can mark up to two saving throws this way.

If you don't select four skills and two saving throws for your character by the end of the adventure, you can select your skills and saving throw proficiencies when you advance to 1st level. The saving throw and skill proficiencies you select replace those granted by your class and background at 1st level. See "Assign Skills and Saving Throws" at the end of the adventure for more information.

Optional: Select Ancestries

The original version of *Filthy Peasants!* aimed to create quick characters and get you into play without having to look anything up in the core rules. One part of this meant ignoring the ancestries available in the game and assuming that all characters in play were human (or, if they weren't human, assuming that the only differences were cosmetic and that the abilities granted by ancestries wouldn't kick in until your character reached level 1).

Playtesters universally hated this, and so we've revised this process to let you include ancestries! This makes character creation a little slower, and the ancestry abilities make your level-0 characters a little more powerful than the adventure expects, but it also gives you a more varied party of characters.

To select your ancestry, roll or choose on the Ancestries table and make a note of the extra traits your character gains. You can look up the details of these abilities in the core rules. If your character survives and reaches 1st level, make note of any additional traits (like ability score adjustments) you gain from your ancestry. If your character survives, they gain those other traits at 1st level. Unless otherwise noted, your walking speed is 30 feet and your size is Medium.

That's It!

If you're familiar with fifth edition character creation, you may be surprised by how fast this process was. Surely there's more to it? Rest assured that you haven't missed anything—this is everything you need to do to create a level-0 character. If you're already familiar with the game, you might start thinking about the ancestry of your characters and how it affects them cosmetically, but the characters' ancestry traits don't have a mechanical effect in the game until after the funnel is complete and your characters advance to 1st level (unless you're using the optional ancestry rules presented above).

Occupations

d100	Occupation	Equipment
1–2	Actor	Longsword, disguise kit, set of assorted wigs
3–4	Alchemist's apprentice	1d6 vials explosive liquid (as alchemist's fire), spell component pouch
5–6	Astrologer	Quarterstaff, pocket telescope
7–8	Big-game hunter	Longbow, quiver with 20 arrows, pelt of an unusual creature
9–10	Blacksmith	Hammer (as club), smith's tools
11–12	Brewer	Huge metal spoon (as mace), cask of ale
13–14	Burglar	Crowbar (as mace), 50 feet of hempen rope
15–16	Busker	Shortsword, lute or other musical instrument
17–18	Butcher	Cleaver (as handaxe), assorted bones
19–20	Candle lighter	Club, flint and steel
21–22	Church usher	Cudgel (as club), fine robes
23–24	Circus performer	Quarterstaff, 100 feet of hempen rope
25–26	Confidence artist	Dagger, set of cups and balls
27–28	Cooper	Crowbar (as club), empty barrel
29–30	Court jester	Sling and 10 bullets, set of heavy juggling balls
31–32	Farmer	Pitchfork (as trident), riding horse or woodworker's tools
33–34	Field hand	Sickle, bag of grain
35–36	Gravedigger	Shovel (as quarterstaff), large sack
37–38	Grocer	Knife (as dagger), small set of brass scales
39–40	Healer	Scepter (as mace), holy water
41–42	Herbalist	Sling and 10 bullets, pouch of herbs
43–44	Jeweler	Small rock pick (as handaxe), assorted gemstones worth 20 sp
45–46	Lighthouse keeper	Spear, hooded lantern, flask of oil
47–48	Locksmith	Crowbar (as mace), set of lockpicks
49–50	Lumberjack	Handaxe, 10-foot pole
51–52	Mage's apprentice	Quarterstaff, leather-bound grimoire or spell scroll with a cantrip from the wizard spell list (chosen by the GM)
53–54	Man-at-arms	Longsword, chain shirt (AC 13 + Dex modifier (max 2))
55–56	Mercenary	Shortbow, quiver with 20 arrows, leather armor (AC 11 + Dex modifier)
57–58	Militia officer	Longsword, buckler shield (+2 AC)
59–60	Navigator	Shortsword, scroll case containing nautical charts
61–62	Net maker	Knife (as dagger), net
63–64	Noble	Longsword, gold amulet worth 10 gp
65–66	Pickpocket	Dagger, disguise kit
67–68	Pie maker	Cleaver (as handaxe), two bags of flour
69–70	Pit-fighting champion	Club, 10 feet of chain
71–72	Priest	Mace, spell scroll with a cantrip from the cleric spell list (chosen by the GM)
73–74	Scribe	Quill knife (as dagger), 10 sheets of parchment
75–76	Sculptor	Chisel (as dagger), bag filled with clay
77–78	Snitch	Club, ragged cloak
79–80	Soldier	Spear, hide armor (AC 12 + Dex modifier (max 2))
81–82	Soothsayer	Hand-carved bone club, divination items
83–84	Squire	Shortsword, fine clothes
85–86	Statue polisher	Chisel (as dagger), portable ladder
87–88	Tavern bouncer	Cudgel (as club), padded armor (AC 11 + Dex modifier)
89–90	Tax collector	Shortsword, 50 cp
91–92	Town guard	Morningstar, shield (+2 AC)
93–94	Urchin	Crude shank (as dagger), begging bowl
95–96	Vagabond	Big branch (as quarterstaff), winter blanket
97–98	Wandering mystic	Scroll case stuffed with notes, quarterstaff or spell scroll with a cantrip from the wizard spell list (chosen by the GM)
99–100	Whaler	Boarding knife (as spear), scrimshaw octopus

Trinkets

d20	Equipment
1	A glass jar wrapped in strips of black leather. It contains a pair of large, lazy bees.
2	An age-worn silver pipe, carved with the name of a long-dead relative
3	A poppet carved from wood and bound with dried vines. Did you make it yourself, or did you acquire it somehow?
4	A stuffed bear with a delightfully plump tummy. He smells vaguely of chocolate.
5	A pocket-size book coated in thick wax. What mysteries does it contain?
6	A piece of natural glass dug up from a beach. It is shaped like a horn and whistles when you blow into it.
7	A copper knife, the blade broken into two pieces and bound together with hide. What do the strange sigils in the metal mean?
8	A heavy padlock only you know the combination to
9	A red velvet mask, twisted in an unsettling manner. Who gifted it to you?
10	A fingerless glove made of the finest chain attached to sturdy black rings. Why is it always cold?
11	A green glass pendant in the shape of a rare and unusual leaf
12	A wooden statuette charred by fire. What tiny and forgotten god does it depict? Are you sure?
13	A small music box with a delicate paper figurine that spins on the spot. Why is the music it plays special to you?
14	A worn leather dice pouch embroidered with your initials
15	A set of glass powder pots, each containing a few pinches of different pigments. What will you do when they run out?
16	An old scroll case carved from yew and finished to a fine luster. What did it once contain?
17	A leathery goblin head, shrunken and suspended from a chain. Is it real?
18	A cheap metal tin filled with wax, containing a mold for half a key. Its partner is missing, and you don't know what the key would open if you had it.
19	A glass figurine filled with roiling gray smoke
20	A fine walking stick, banded with black iron and carved with strange runes

Ancestries

3d6	Ancestry	Traits
3	Dragonborn	Breath Weapon, Draconic Ancestry
4–5	Gnome	Darkvision, Gnome Cunning, Small size, walking speed of 25 feet
6–7	Half-orc	Darkvision, Relentless Endurance
8–9	Dwarf	Darkvision, Dwarven Resilience, walking speed of 25 feet
10–11	Human	No changes. You're playing on hard mode!
12–13	Elf	Darkvision, Fey Ancestry
14–15	Half-elf	Darkvision, Fey Ancestry
16–17	Halfling	Lucky, Halfling Nimbleness, Small size, walking speed of 25 feet
18	Tiefling	Darkvision, Hellish Resistance

*Unless otherwise noted, your walking speed is 30 feet and your size is Medium.

Using Scrolls

Using scrolls usually depends on whether the spell appears on your class's spell list, but at this stage of their careers, none of the adventurers has a class yet! Rather than simply saying that they can't use scrolls, it's much more fun if they can…but that it's very dangerous.

To use a spell scroll, characters must succeed on a DC 14 ability check using a spellcasting ability of their choice: Charisma, Intelligence, or Wisdom. Characters proficient in Arcana can add their proficiency bonus to the check. On a success, the spell is cast successfully. On a failure, the spell backfires, and they must roll on the Spell Mishaps table to determine what happens. Unless otherwise noted, the spell fails and has no effect other than the mishap.

Spell Mishaps

d12	Mishap
1	A blast of psychic energy deals 1d4 damage to the caster and all creatures within 10 feet of the caster.
2	The spell is successful, but targets another random creature within range.
3	The spell takes effect as normal, but the caster must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be immediately teleported to a random plane of existence (chosen by the GM). The caster must find their own way back if they so desire.
4	All containers carried by the caster begin pouring out sand at a rate of 14 pounds per minute per container. The sand stops after 1d10 hours.
5	All water the caster touches for the next 1d4 hours turns instantly to blood.
6	For the rest of their life, the caster is plagued by visitations from shadowy figures who only they can perceive, each bearing ill tidings. The visitors come at random, with no pattern to their arrival or departure.
7	The caster is permanently turned into a **black bear**. All of their statistics are replaced by those in the bear's stat block.
8	The caster begins to have memories from someone else's life.
9	The spell works perfectly, but also affects an additional random target (chosen by the GM).
10	The caster misidentified the scroll. It is actually a scroll of *conjure minor elementals*, cast at 4th level. The summoned elementals are not under the caster's control and are hostile towards them.
11	The caster explodes in chunks of hot meat. All creatures within 10 feet of the caster must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 1d4 bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.
12	Roll twice and combine results.

What Is a Funnel?

The funnel adventure is explicitly designed for level-0 characters, with each player controlling multiple characters at once. It assumes there will be around fourteen characters in play at the beginning of the adventure, and expects that most of those characters will die during the adventure. Use the following guide to determine how many characters each player should control (but feel free to give your players more if you think they can handle it):

- Four characters per player for four players
- Three characters per player for five players
- Two characters per player for six players

When untrained peasants delve into a dangerous dungeon, a high level of mortality is normal! By the end of the adventure, the few survivors go on to become 1st-level characters.

Player Tips

Share the following tips with your players before beginning the adventure. Encourage them to play hard and embrace risk. They have plenty of characters to play with, and they can always create (or find) more if things go wrong.

1. Drive It Like You Stole It

Just because you might have explored a lot of dungeons in games doesn't mean your character has! Embrace the fun that comes from making deliberately poor decisions and seeing what happens. Your characters are expendable, and the others learn from the mistakes of those who perish.

2. Managing the Chaos

If you're used to managing one character at a time, it can be strange to have to look after four people at once. All of your characters explore the dungeon simultaneously, and you should inhabit their personalities as and when you see fit. It can feel a little chaotic, but you'll soon start to discover each character's identity. You'll figure out who takes risks, who is likely to have insightful thoughts about the location they're in, etc. Trust your gut and go with it.

3. Be Fans of Your Characters

Embody your characters with care and love for who they are and who they have the potential to be. Root for them to survive and succeed. Then put them in no-win situations, see what happens, and enjoy the outcome—even if they die.

4. Your Characters Don't Have to Be Fans of Each Other

This adventure is designed to introduce a play style you may not have encountered much in your fifth edition games. Players won't create a shared backstory, and character conflict is recommended. In a normal game, inter-character conflict and betrayal often aren't desirable. In the funnel, you are encouraged to have your level-0 characters mess with and betray each other. It's fun to take these characters and put them at odds with one another. Can you tell that there's a horrible trap just behind that door? Maybe one of your characters shoves another to see what happens. Create memorable moments by having your own characters interact with one another in ways that might not occur in normal play.

It creates a different dynamic between the characters who live through the funnel. The experiences your characters have at level 0 define them forever and forge a bond between the group of survivors that's hard to replicate by writing a shared backstory.

5. Engage in Creative Play

Your characters are incredibly weak, and they don't have special abilities or powerful items to help them in their adventure. They're forced to rely on their wits and creativity—and that often means *your* wits and creativity.

Assume that everything in the dungeon hates your characters and wants them to die. Often, the obvious solution to a problem—charging into combat, wading into deep water, etc.—is the wrong solution and ends in tragedy.

As a player, try to come up with creative solutions to challenges. Ask questions about the surroundings, make use of things you find, and think around the problem. Don't look to your character sheet for all the answers. Think about your fictional positioning and use it to get some kind of advantage in a situation (mechanical or otherwise). Get creative with your equipment and trinket!

GM Tips

GMs, keep the following tips in mind while running the funnel. Feel free to share these guidelines with your players so that they know exactly what to expect.

1. Embrace Lethality

Funnels are violent and brutal, which can be at odds with your experiences with fifth edition. Start your funnel with a conversation about the content and tone of the game. For content, discuss the high lethality with your players, any content that people might not want to see at the table, and things that people *do* want to see. There are endless resources for safety tools and procedures available online—you probably already use some of them, and you're encouraged to use them here.

For tone, do you want high-energy cartoon violence, with people making jokes as horrific deaths occur, or do you want a more thoughtful, horror-style session where characters engage with the gruesome reality of their situation? Once you've had these conversations, try not to deviate from what you agree on.

2. Engage with Backstory

The characters don't have much of a backstory yet, but you can encourage players to come up with it during play to forge bonds between the characters. Ask questions about their lives before the dungeon when it's appropriate. How do these characters know each other? Why did one of your characters push your other character into that trap? What do funeral rites look like in the village you all came from, and are you doing anything to remember the fallen as the dungeon takes them?

3. Mitigating a TPK

A funnel might be the most violent, high-lethality adventure you ever run. Characters are flimsy, level-0 play doesn't care about "game balance," and you often whittle away the characters until nobody is left.

If you're playing a one-shot, a total party kill (TPK) can be a fun end to the session, but it isn't ideal if you're using the funnel as a springboard for a longer game. There are two easy ways to mitigate this.

The first is letting players create a new set of peasants. Assume that this group came into the dungeon with those who have just perished. They've been here all along, hanging back while the vanguard dealt with the threats. Now the front ranks are dead, and it's time for them to step up.

The second is making use of the NPCs in the adventure. The hostages in the caves are built as level-0 characters, and once they're freed, they can easily join the party and continue the adventure as player characters.

4. Managing the Chaos

You may have 16 to 20 characters running around, especially at the beginning of the adventure. This can be a lot to handle.

The only time you need to worry about the characters' exact positioning is during combat, and for small skirmishes, the simplicity of "theater of the mind" combat is easier than using a map and miniatures. If you have to roll initiative, have each player roll once (using the modifier of the character with the highest bonus to initiative rolls) and take all of their characters' turns at once.

By the time you get to the final battle with the troll, most of the peasants probably died nasty deaths anyway, so you won't need to worry about this for too long! Embrace the chaos and have fun with it.

Funnel Adventure: The Price of Passage

The road into Steyside crosses a bridge over a slow-moving river that's more like a thick, muddy ditch than an actual waterway. A narrow crack in the riverbank opens into caves that local children explore from time to time. Recently, travelers have complained of a foul smell wafting up from the opening and strange tracks in the mud. Now a merchant caravan has vanished, and one word sits heavy on the lips of the townsfolk—*trolls*.

The villagers drew lots, and your motley crew has been selected to head into the caves and save anybody they can. It's time to do what all good villagers do in a crisis—grab pitchforks, form a mob, and put the monsters to the blade.

Running the Adventure

While the characters explore the caves, use the following rules and advice:

- Roll for random encounters any time the group takes a short rest, whenever there's a lull, or when indicated by the text.
- If the characters turn back to leave the dungeon or take a long rest inside it before encountering the troll in area 10, a **troll pup** enters the caves from the bridge. Use the creature to apply downward pressure and force the characters deeper.
- It's dark inside the caves. Familiarize yourself with the rules for different light levels and how these impact characters, and have the players track their light sources.
- The ceilings in the caves are 7 to 10 feet high. Unless otherwise stated, characters of average heights have plenty of room to move around and swing weapons.
- Play hard and make characters face the consequences of their actions, but be fair and reward creative play. (e.g. If characters take measures to circumvent a trap, allow them to succeed.)
- Some elements of the dungeon have no explanation. They exist to provide hooks for future adventures. Invent details if you need them.

CREATIVE PLAY FOR GMS

As the GM, it's your job to reward creativity and assist the players in improvising. Just as players are advised not to look for answers on their character sheets, you're advised to go off-script where it makes sense. The adventure text can't account for all eventualities, and it doesn't try to. The first encounter may not explicitly state that there are broken chunks of a ruined merchant wagon lying around. But they could be there if the players ask about materials they can use to build a makeshift walkway across the mud!

The Rule of Cool is key, and you should feel empowered to say an emphatic YES to players coming up with fun and exciting solutions to problems. Reward good ideas with advantage, and reward truly *great* ideas by allowing characters to succeed without needing to roll at all. There are plenty of ways for characters to die in this adventure; the GM shutting down good ideas shouldn't be one of them.

This is particularly important during the final troll encounter, as the characters are faced with a creature that can only be killed by fire or acid. They have to find a way to deal that kind of damage! If they do, reward it.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

Whenever the adventure calls for a random encounter, or when the party stops to rest inside the caves or lingers in one spot for an extended period of time, roll a d10 or choose one of the encounters below:

1. A crude painting covers the walls—a tentacled creature tearing the sun from the sky. Characters who inspect it must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or take 1d6 psychic damage as they are gripped with visions of a dying world.
2. The air is filled with a low buzzing that echoes around the characters, with no discernible source.
3. The ground is coated in thick, hot feces.
4. A low rumble shakes the caves and chunks of rock fall on the characters. Each character must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d6 bludgeoning damage.
5. The sticky, stinking substance in the entrance passage (area 2) that touched the characters' skin begins glowing softly. All characters still coated in it must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for the next 10 minutes.
6. The characters encounter three **stirges**, each hungry and hunting for blood.
7. Symbols daubed on the ceiling enthrall the characters. A character of the GM's choice must succeed on a DC 14 Charisma saving throw or become overwhelmed with the desire to plunge deeper into the caves, including the boarded-up tunnel in the troll room (area 10), and...to take someone with them.
8. The characters encounter a patch of mushrooms (roll on the Mushroom table in area 3).
9. The characters are charged by a pair of escaped **goats** (from area 8), both frenzied and desperate to escape the caves.
10. The area is strewn with the torn limbs of a dead merchant.

BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE

Once everyone has their level-0 characters, the adventure begins. Start play as the mob descends the riverbank beside the bridge, just outside the cave entrance.

1. UNDER THE BRIDGE

The day turns dim and cool as the arching bridge blocks out the blazing sun. The river moves at a slow crawl, the waters thick with mud you have to wade into to reach the cave entrance. Rotting pieces of driftwood bob in the mud. An enormous stone blocks the opening. Muddy stains coat the side of the rock, higher than your heads.

TRAVERSING THE RIVER

The mud is thick and treacherous, strewn with rotting pieces of driftwood and a huge old branch that somehow made its way downriver (which clever characters might use to fashion a safe way across the mud). Wading through the mud unaided takes a successful DC 12 Dexterity saving throw to prevent slipping beneath the surface and becoming restrained and prone. Once a creature succeeds on this saving throw, they don't need to make it again. Submerged creatures can't breathe and are incapacitated. At the end of every round that they aren't rescued, a submerged creature must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or drop to 0 hit points and begin dying as their lungs fill with mud. A dying character can't regain hit points until they can breathe again.

Rescuing a fallen character from beneath the mud requires a character to make a successful DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check. A further successful DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check frees the clogged airways of a rescued character and allows them to breathe again, stabilizing them if they are dying.



The Block

Moving the block requires a DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check. On a success, the block falls safely to the side. On a failure, it falls on anyone attempting to move it. They must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. After the block falls, the entrance can be accessed.

Examining the block reveals deep gouges made by claws in the stone beneath the muddy stains.

2. The Throat

The narrow passage weaves down into the bank of the river and you're forced to move in single file. The walls are coated with mud and something that stinks and makes you gag and retch as it coats your skin and clothing. The ankle-deep muck around your feet flows slowly onwards, inviting you in.

Roll for a random encounter as the characters move down the throat. Note any characters who don't spend time cleaning the troll stink off once they exit this area, as that is relevant to a random encounter.

The throat is filled with the tracks of the two trolls who live here. Characters who succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check find signs that one troll left the caves and hasn't returned.

3. Entrance Chamber

This round chamber features a stream of water running across the floor from the throat to the exit corridor that leads to area 4.

A dead human merchant lies next to the entrance, her arm torn off and missing. Her longsword and hide armor can be looted from her remains.

A small patch of 1d12 mushrooms grows from the east wall. A character can pick a mushroom and save it for later. Roll on the Mushroom table to determine a mushroom's appearance. A character can eat a mushroom as an action. Characters who inspect the mushrooms and succeed on a DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check can determine whether the outcome of eating a particular mushroom is positive or negative. If the check succeeds by 3 or more, they also determine the specific effect of the mushroom.

TROLL STINK

Trolls are weird and gross. Their strange regenerative powers mean that their bodies are constantly rejuvenating, creating mucus and muck that oozes out of every pore and orifice. Anywhere trolls stay for too long becomes coated in the stuff—and it smells *bad*.

As the characters move through the dungeon, they encounter plenty of troll stink. It has no mechanical effect aside from one random encounter, but you should lean into your descriptions and enjoy making your players cringe as they imagine their characters coated in the disgusting slime. A character who makes a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check knows that animals often react violently to the stench of trolls.

Here are some descriptors you might use to convey the disgusting essence of troll stink:

- Old milk left out under a hot sun
- The sharp tang of rotting flesh, sensed more on the tongue than in the nose
- The warm, cloying scent of overripe fruit beginning to soften and decay
- A latrine pit, unemptied for many days

Mushrooms

d6	Appearance	Traits
1	Large black bowl with purple tendrils	You must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 hour. If you boil the mushrooms for 1 hour into a stew and then eat the stew, you gain resistance to poison damage and can't be poisoned for 1d6 hours.
2	Small, dark red, grows in clusters of five	You enter a frenzy that mimics the barbarian's Rage feature, except that it lasts for a number of minutes equal to 1d4 + your Constitution modifier. You must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw at the end of the frenzy or gain a level of exhaustion.
3	Wide, flat bowl that resembles a jellyfish	For 1d6 days, immediately after you take damage, there is a 50 percent chance you disappear to the Astral Plane and reappear at the start of your turn 1d6 rounds later.
4	Round with orange balls	For the next 1d6 hours, you can use an action to breathe fire in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in the area takes 1d6 fire damage, and you must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or take half the damage rolled.
5	Black ovals with a yellow stripe	You gain darkvision out to a range of 60 feet, permanently.
6	Tiny black clusters, like caviar	You must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or die.

4. THE FALLS

The narrow passage is flooded with ankle-deep water, but opens into a wide chamber with a flooded murky pool. A large rock jutting up in the center of the room is carved into the likeness of a twisted, screaming creature with an abundance of tentacles. More mushrooms grow around the base of the statue.

Beneath the murky water, a 10-foot-deep and 5-foot-wide natural ditch bisects the chamber between the entrance and the statue. Filled with jagged rocks, the trench is obscured by the murky water but can be spotted by a character who succeeds on a DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check. Characters who don't see the ditch must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or fall in. Characters who know it is there can take appropriate actions to cross it safely, including but not limited to simply swimming across. A creature that falls into the ditch takes 1d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall and 2d6 piercing damage from the rocks, and is fully submerged in water.

A worn old scroll case made of bone can be found at the bottom of the ditch, though it can't be seen from the surface. A character who specifically searches the ditch can

find it with a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Characters who fall into the ditch notice it with a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check. It contains a *spell scroll* with a random cantrip from the wizard spell list (chosen by the GM).

The water on the other side of the ditch is 2 feet deep and difficult terrain. A pair of aggressive **gray oozes** call the north side of this chamber home. The oozes don't cross the ditch—they lie in wait for characters to cross it before attacking.

If you need to know what the mushrooms are, make use of the Mushroom table in area 3.

There's no right or wrong answer to the inevitable question of "What is the statue?" Players may want to roll to find out, and you're welcome to allow it. An Intelligence (Arcana, History, or Religion) check could be relevant here, but adjudicate as you see fit with the creatures in your setting. This is a completely alien creature that the characters likely have no knowledge of and, at this stage in their careers, no way of finding out about, but you are free to invent something weird and wonderful to reward good rolls or smart investigative play. The intent of this encounter is to introduce future adventure hooks for you to pull on, and to show the players that there are things in the world their characters don't know anything about!

The floor at the northwest side of the chamber slopes up.

5. The Slide

The passage descends sharply, jagged rock coated in a gleaming film of water and slime. The rocks on either side are stained with old blood and clumps of fur.

The passage out of area 4 descends sharply and is slick with water and troll stink. Traversing the slide requires a successful DC 14 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to avoid slipping and sliding to the bottom of the passage. On a failure, a character slides onto jagged rocks and takes 1d6 bludgeoning damage.

A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check can identify the fur as goat fur.

6. The Junction

The floor is strewn with debris from a ruined cart. A bloodied human merchant lies against the rocks at the bottom of the passageway, breathing shallowly.

There are three paths out of this chamber:

- ***North.*** Clumps of mushrooms sprout from the walls of this winding passage that leads to area 7.
- ***East.*** Bleating and the scuff of hooves on stone echo down this natural staircase that leads down to area 8.
- ***South.*** Stinking sludge coats the walls of this narrow path that leads to area 9.

The injured merchant is Yismel. Terrified and in shock, she talks about the trolls attacking the caravan and warns the characters about a second troll not present in the complex (if it hasn't already returned). She doesn't know what happened to the other members of the caravan. She can be persuaded to join the group or become a player character. Yismel's stat block is at the end of the adventure.

Searching the debris uncovers 100 sp, a set of leather armor, a shortsword, two light crossbows, ten crossbow bolts, and two sacks of apples.

7. The Fungus Grove

Eerie light emanates from thick clumps of purple fungus covering the walls and floor. The mushrooms sway in a breeze you can't feel. A pair of booted feet protrude from the thick forest of fungus.

The feet belong to a dead merchant who escaped the trolls. A **violet fungus** has sprouted from his body. Another waits amongst the mushrooms. They attack if the characters disturb the mushrooms or the corpse.

The corpse carries a pouch containing 10 sp, a shortbow, a mace, and a scroll case containing a random 1st-level *spell scroll* from the Spell Scroll table.

A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check uncovers a severed arm among the mushrooms. Its hand wears a *ring of animal influence*. A character who succeeds on a DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check can identify the ring without having to do so during a short rest.

Spell Scrolls

d6	Scroll of...
1	*bane*
2	*burning hands*
3	*chromatic orb*
4	*cure wounds*
5	*entangle*
6	*grease*
7	*magic missile*
8	*ray of sickness*
9	*sleep*
10	*thunderwave*



8. THE GOAT PEN

As the passage opens up into a low chamber, the air suddenly thickens with the must and funk of live animals, hot blood, old feces, and rotting meat. Faint snorting and snuffling rise into a cacophony of bleats and maas as the goats at the back of the chamber become aware of your presence.

This wide, low cave contains six **goats**. Blood and chunks of other long-dead goats coat the walls and floor. The smell of rotting flesh is overpowering. Characters who start their turn in the area must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1d6 hours. A character who succeeds on the saving throw can't be poisoned by this effect for the next 24 hours. A poisoned character can repeat the saving throw at the end of every hour, ending the condition on a success.

If a character coated in the troll stink enter the chamber, the goats become frenzied and attack immediately. They can be calmed by a character who succeeds on a DC 14 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check, made with disadvantage if the stink-covered character is still in the chamber.

The walls are painted with eldritch symbols and runes that glow faintly when not exposed to light, and the back wall is carved with a likeness of the statue in area 4.

9. PRISON CHAMBER

The cave stinks to high heaven. Feces coat the walls, and the air is filled with a low buzzing and sucking. A rusted iron cage stands against the west wall, the survivors of the merchant caravan packed into it. Three creatures that look like oversize mosquitos poke them through the bars with long, needle-like proboscises that suck up their blood. They turn as you enter the room, swarming you.

The three flying creatures are **stirges**. Each time the characters make noise that might carry to area 10, have the **troll pup** there make a DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check. If any character is coated in troll stink, it makes this check with advantage. If it passes, it comes to investigate, appearing in area 9 in 1d4 rounds and joining the fight.

The captive merchants are Foustus, Darcel, Gaetana, and Lorin. If freed, they can be convinced to join the fight by a character who makes a successful DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check. If players need new characters (either because theirs have died, or simply because they want to play someone new), these NPCs can easily become player characters. Their gear, which is listed in their stat blocks at the end of the adventure, can be found on the opposite side of the room to the cage. Alternatively, a player can quickly generate a new character to take the place of one of these NPCs.

The cage is sealed with an iron bar bent in place by the troll. It requires a successful DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check made as an action to force open. Other reasonable solutions can open the cage if the characters can't roll high enough to force it.

10. TROLL ROOM

The room is filled with a smell not unlike cooked pork. It's almost appetizing until you locate the source: a fire against the east wall, a long-dead merchant tied to a spit above it. A breeze flows through the room towards a wide, dark opening in the back wall. It is crudely blocked up with rocks and splintered boards, and you get the impression of a gaping mouth taking a long, inward breath.

If the **troll pup** wasn't summoned by the fight with the stirges, it is here, its back to the entrance as it feasts on the cooked merchant. Characters can approach unnoticed with a successful DC 12 Dexterity (Stealth) check (made with disadvantage if a character is coated in troll stench). On a failure, the troll is alerted to their presence.

A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check finds evidence that the troll stays away from the blocked opening: bones on the floor have been picked clean, but bones that rolled toward the opening still have meat on them, there are no tracks on the floor near the opening, etc.

A heavy chest sits in a corner of the room next to a worn leather bag that contains two *potions of healing*. There is a 1-in-6 chance that one of the merchants has the key. The lock can be picked with a successful DC 14 Dexterity check, provided the character attempting the check has a pin or similar tool. The chest contains 100 sp, two sets of fine clothes, 100 feet silk rope, bundles of fine fabric worth 10 gp, and a pouch containing 1d6 gems worth 25 gp each.

Telegraphing Regeneration

Experienced players know that trolls can only be killed with fire and acid. That's fine. Metagaming is part of the game, and there's no reason to force players to separate what they know from what their characters know! You can chalk the knowledge up to folklore or ask the player to decide how their character knows this information as a fun character-building detail.

If you're playing with new players, or if none of them has ever faced a troll, telegraph both the regeneration and the weakness (especially to fire, which is typically available to characters). The troll could make a point of staying away from the fire in the room during combat, and you can describe its skin knitting together after it takes damage to indicate the regeneration. You can also put this knowledge behind a DC 12 ability check, simply telling characters who succeed on the check that trolls are weak against fire and acid. Suitable skills include Intelligence (Nature), Wisdom (Survival), or even Intelligence (Arcana)!

Adding Drama

The troll pup is the climactic battle in the adventure, what everything has been leading to. If your group is doing well (most of them are alive and healthy, they're prepared with fire, and they're ready for a fight), you may be worried that the fight will be too easy.

There are two ways to deal with this. The first is to just let it be easy. They've done well, and they should be rewarded for smart, safe play!

The second is to fudge things a little. The troll pup already has a Multiattack action, but you could add an additional club attack to that. You could increase its hit points (I recommend adding 15 to 20 hit points) or give it a couple of mastiffs as pets. The mastiffs acting on their own initiative, harrying the characters, and defending the troll could turn a relatively straightforward combat into something really tough.

Use your best judgment and balance on the fly as you see fit.

The Aftermath

What lies beyond the cave opening—and the reason the trolls kept their distance—is for you to decide. If the characters didn't encounter the second troll, it is up to you how the troll reacts when it returns to the cave. Whatever happens, the surviving characters advance to 1st level and return to town as heroes!

If more than one of your characters survived the adventure, you decide what happens to them all. You might have grown attached to one of them in particular, in which case the others simply return to their lives in the village while your chosen character sets out on an adventure. The other characters might appear in future adventures as NPCs and provide your adventurers with preexisting links to the world. If another player lost all of their characters in the dungeon, you might instead consider giving them one of your survivors to play.

Here's how you turn surviving level-0 peasants into 1st-level characters ready to seek fame and fortune.

Increase Ability Scores

There are two options for increasing ability scores:

1. Increase one ability score by 2 and one by 1, to a maximum of 20.
2. If you didn't use the optional ancestry rules, pick a race from the core rules and adjust the scores as indicated. Note down traits the race gives you. Think about why these traits didn't come up in the adven-

ture and feed this into the emerging backstory of your character (for example, the time spent underground with poor lighting in a magically charged environment permanently altered your eyes, so your elf now has darkvision they didn't have before). If you used the optional rules, note down additional features gained from the race you chose.

Choose a Background Feature

Pick a background that matches your occupation and record any background features you gain. (For example, if your character is a candle lighter, you might choose the acolyte background and gain the Shelter of the Faithful feature.) Ignore the other benefits of the background.

Choose a Class

What role did your character play during the adventure? Where are their skills most suited? Pick the class that best fits them. Note the special abilities they gain at 1st level, their weapon and armor proficiencies, and their new hit point maximum. If you didn't earn saving throws during the funnel, take the ones indicated by your class.

Assign Skills and Saving Throws

You may have already assigned four skills and two saving throw during play. If you haven't, choose them now (your class and race will give you ideas for what to pick). You may find as you read your chosen class, background, and race that you start 1st level with more than four skills. If so, go ahead and pick your additional skills as well!

Choose Additional Proficiencies

As is standard, backgrounds grant additional tool proficiencies or languages. Select one of the following options for your character:

- Two tool proficiencies
- Two languages
- One tool proficiency and one language

Who Are You?

Now you've played a session with this character, you should be able to fill out your bond, ideal, personality traits, and flaw with ease. If you're unsure, you can look to the options from your background for help.

And that's it! You've had an adventure, you know who your character is, and now they're ready to face the world. Congratulations!

Appendix: Creatures

The following creatures appear in this adventure.

Yismel

Level 0 Mercenary

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	9 (-1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Armor Class 14
Hit Points 5
Weapon Flail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) bludgeoning damage.
Equipment Chain shirt, shield, lucky rabbit's foot on a leather strap

Foustus

Level 0 Merchant

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)	15 (+2)

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 4
Weapon **Shortsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.
Equipment Padded armor, backpack, parchment flyer advertising a farmer's market a week from now

DARCEL

Level 0 Priest

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	8 (-1)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

Armor Class 11
Hit Points 3
Weapon **Mace.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage.
Equipment Hide armor, holy symbol, book of prayers

GAETANA

Level 0 Mercenary

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	9 (-1)

Armor Class 16
Hit Points 4
Weapon **Longsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) slashing damage, or 6 (1d10 + 1) slashing damage if used with two hands.
Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.
Equipment Leather armor, buckler shield, letter from a loved one

---

LORIN

Level 0 Mage's Apprentice

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Armor Class 9
Hit Points 3
Weapon **Quarterstaff.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +1 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d6 – 1) bludgeoning damage, or 3 (1d8 – 1) bludgeoning damage if used with two hands.
A Random Cantrip. Of the GM's choice.
Equipment Spell component pouch, spellbook

ENEMIES

Use stats for **goats**, **gray oozes**, **stirges**, and **violet fungus** from the core rules.

The stat block for the troll pup is below. You're free to use the standard fifth edition troll stats if you want, but bear in mind that a troll is a CR 5 monster and will probably kill all the remaining characters.

TROLL PUP

Just shy of six feet tall, with slimy green skin marred with boils, scars, and scabs, a troll pup is younger and smaller than your average troll, but no less fearsome. The only good thing about a troll pup is that killing it means it doesn't grow into an adult troll, with all the horrors they bring.

Troll Pup

Medium giant, chaotic evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 42 (5d8 + 20)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	13 (+1)	18 (+4)	7 (-2)	9 (-1)	7 (-2)

Skills Perception +1
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Giant
Challenge 1 (200 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Keen Smell. The troll has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

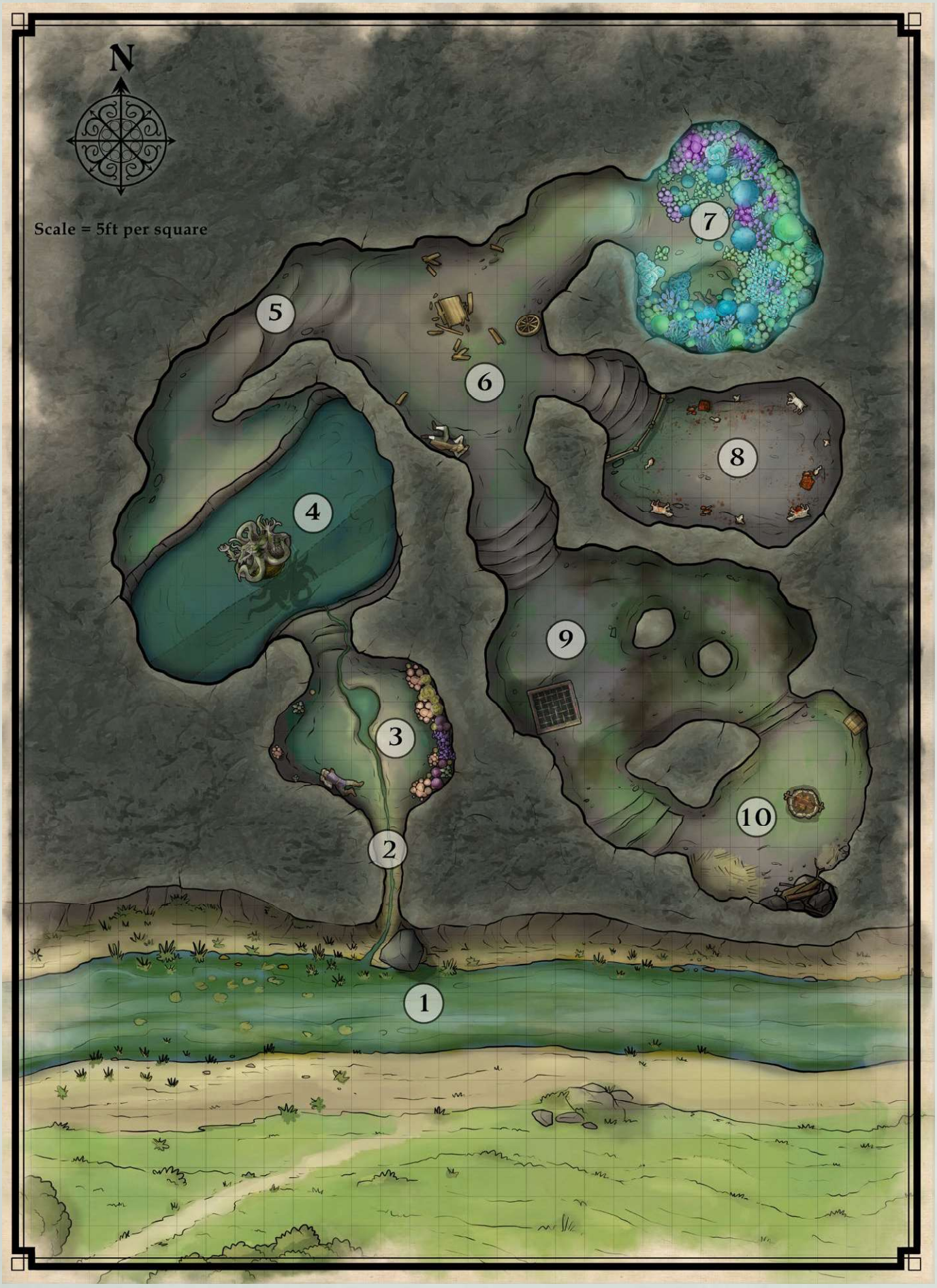
Regeneration. The troll regains 5 hit points at the start of its turn. If the troll takes acid or fire damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the troll's next turn. The troll dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

Actions

Multiattack. The troll makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its bone club.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Bone Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit*: 9 (2d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.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RESOURCES

POWER IS WHERE YOU TAKE IT

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FILTHY PEASANTS!

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Mario Ortegón is a writer and TTRPG designer from Monterrey, Mexico who grew up being fascinated by epic fantasy and the folk tales his abuelo shared with him, and has been merging both in his storytelling ever since. He first gained notoriety as the GM of one of the first live play shows in Latin America, creating a world that merged traditional Mexican folklore with high fantasy. This eventually became Ixalba, his debut project and one he continues to develop as a passion. He has worked with multiple game companies since then, including Wizards of the Coast, Paradox Interactive, Guildhall Studios, and Harebrained Schemes. You can find him on Twitter and Twitch as @elwarius.



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Issue 10 ✦ November 2021

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Playtesting made this issue (and every previous issue of *ARCADIA*) awesome. If you like what you read in this magazine, please join me in thanking our invaluable testers and Lars Bakke, the Production and Playtest Director for *ARCADIA* and MCDM Productions.

When I first started working with MCDM as a contractor, I was delighted to learn they had a full-time staff member overseeing playtesting. Every tabletop company I've worked with runs playtests a little differently, and none put as much care or as many rounds of testing into the process as MCDM. It's one reason I wanted to join the team full-time!

For *ARCADIA*, I go through my own suggested revisions with the authors, and then each article goes through two rounds of development testing. In the first round, a dedicated team of paid playtesters gives initial feedback on the article. I read their comments and summarize them for the author. Then the writer takes that feedback and makes any revisions they deem necessary. (It is their name on the byline, after all, so they get final say!) Round two is similar to round one, except that the article is playtested by a bigger group of volunteer testers (which also includes the contractors from round one).

Since *ARCADIA* is a monthly magazine, we're doing this process at least three times a month alongside everything else we test, like content for *The Illrigger* or *Kingdoms & Warfare* (which have much longer development cycles and many rounds of testing, including public playtests).

After going through two rounds of playtesting and revision, the articles head off to final edit, where Sadie Lowry and Hannah Rose perform incredible feats of language arts…and language maths. Once they've done their thing, Jen McCleary takes the words from the development side and the illustrations from our art team and lays it all out into a magazine…that goes back into playtesting.

The MCDM staff and our contract testers go through another few rounds of proofreading the layout to catch typos and other errors, which we report to Jen, who fixes them. Then we send the InDesign files to Chris Hopper, who makes the articles accessible and tackles any very last-minute fixes we ask.

After all that, you get the magazine, but testing still ain't done! Our senior tester, Spencer Hibnick, reads the community's reactions and compiles any new issues found after publishing, because someday we may do an updated compilation!

I've never been part of a team that tests this thoroughly. It is a huge boon that pays off in spades. Our authors love it, and *ARCADIA* is better for it. I know I'm grateful.

So when you're watching your players' faces light up as they use one of Scott Fitzgerald Gray's magic weapons, create a custom familiar using Celeste Conowitch's method, or wreak havoc as a goblin in Anthony Joyce's adventure, join me in giving a hearty thanks to the entire team who makes *ARCADIA* awesome.

Ex animo,
James Introcaso
Managing Editor

FAMILIAR SUSPECTS

Make any creature a familiar!

by Celeste Conowitch

Collecting pets is a beloved pastime of so many players. I genuinely can't count the number of times as a GM that I've heard "Can we keep it?" Sometimes, it's better to lean into the fun than fight it, and equipping your party with the most magical creatures to love usually shakes out to be a lot of fun. However, running around managing the statistics for a cadre of monstrous companions can be a real headache for both GMs and players, so what's the answer? Make them mini, of course! Tiny creatures are cute, mechanically easier to manage, and fit easily into overhead storage compartments.

This article presents mechanics that allow any creature to be miniaturized into a functioning familiar, along with examples of several new familiars like the gelatinous cubelet and unicorn foal!

BUILDING FAMILIARS

The guidelines presented here allow you to take an existing creature and make it a magical familiar summonable by the *find familiar* spell. But these aren't just regular old familiars! The familiars you create become advanced familiar options.

You might be asking, "What if I don't play a warlock or have any warlock players? I want to use these new familiars!" I've got you covered with a brand new version of the *find familiar* spell right here. At the GM's discretion, the *find greater familiar* spell can conjure any familiar you create with the rules in this article. As a note, if you do have a warlock with the Pact of the Chain Pact Boon in your party, I would recommend reserving this spell just for them so you don't step on any toes—unless everyone in the group has a creature companion!

Find Greater Familiar

3rd-level conjuration (ritual)

Casting Time: 1 hour

Range: 10 feet

Components: V, S, M (100 gp worth of charcoal and incense, and a drawing of the familiar you wish to conjure, all which must be consumed by fire in a brass brazier)

Duration: Instantaneous

Classes: Bard, sorcerer, warlock, wizard

You gain the service of a familiar, a spirit that takes a special form you choose: a gelatinous cubelet, gorgonette, imp, miniature xorn, pseudodragon, quasit, sprite, toy golem, or unicorn foal. Appearing in an unoccupied space within range, the familiar has the statistics of the chosen form.

Your familiar acts independently of you, but it always obeys your commands. In combat, it rolls its own initiative and acts on its own turn. A familiar normally can't attack, but when you take the attack action, you can forgo one of your own attacks to allow your familiar to make one attack with its reaction. The familiar can take other actions as normal.

When the familiar drops to 0 hit points, it disappears, leaving behind no physical form. It reappears after you cast this spell again.

While your familiar is within 100 feet of you, you can communicate with it telepathically. Additionally, as an action, you can see through your familiar's eyes and hear what it hears until the start of your next turn, gaining the benefits of any special senses that the

familiar has. During this time, you are deaf and blind with regard to your own senses.

As an action, you can temporarily dismiss your familiar. It disappears into a pocket dimension where it awaits your summons. Alternatively, you can dismiss it forever. As an action while it is temporarily dismissed, you can cause it to reappear in any unoccupied space within 30 feet of you. Additionally, if your familiar is hit with an attack or makes a saving throw to avoid taking damage, you can use a reaction to temporarily dismiss your familiar, which disappears before taking damage or suffering any other effects of the attack or triggering effect.

You can't have more than one familiar at a time. If you cast this spell while you already have a familiar, you instead cause it to adopt a new form. Choose one of the forms from the above list. Your familiar transforms into the chosen creature.

Finally, when you cast a spell with a range of touch, your familiar can deliver the spell as if it had cast the spell. Your familiar must be within 100 feet of you, and it must use its reaction to deliver the spell when you cast it. If the spell requires an attack roll, you use your attack modifier for the roll.

Pick Your Creature

Now you've got a way to give a character an awesome familiar, but where do you start when you want to create your own? First, you have to decide what creature you are going to convert into a familiar. This system works with every creature type except for humanoids. Before you get to work making a familiar, be sure to have your GM's approval. Your GM has final say on the creature's statistics.

Make Mechanics

The easiest way to craft a well-balanced familiar is to look at the options that already exist, then make your familiar stat block similar in power.

Here are some helpful guidelines to keep in mind when creating a well-balanced familiar:

- Almost every familiar is Tiny size. (Portable is good!)
- The average Pact of the Chain familiar has AC 13.
- The average Pact of the Chain familiar has 6 hit points.
- A familiar's movement speed is typically 30 feet, and almost never greater than 40 feet. If a familiar has a flying speed, it usually has a walking speed of no more than 20 feet.
- The average Pact of the Chain familiar has a net +2 ability modifier. (This is the number you get when you add all the ability score modifiers together.)
- Most familiars don't have resistances or immunities. If your familiar does, keep them to one or two that make sense for their creature type.
- In general, a creature's languages and most special senses can stay the same for their familiar version, but blindsight and truesight have their ranges reduced to 10 feet each. Creatures keep any condition immunities, damage resistances and vulnerabilities they have, and any damage immunities they have become resistances.
- A familiar should never have a challenge rating higher than 1. This also means that every familiar's proficiency bonus is +2.

Use these guidelines and averages as a baseline for your creature's statistics and you'll be in a good starting place. The more complicated part of converting a creature comes from deciding what traits and actions to give it.

What Is a Trait?

Traits refer to the parts of a creature's stat block listed below the challenge rating but before the "Actions" section, like Shapechanger, Magic Resistance, and Keen Senses. Typically, a familiar has one or two of these traits. Odds are the creature you've chosen to convert already has a couple of traits that make sense to keep in its smaller form. Because traits are challenging to design from scratch, look at creature stat blocks similar to the familiar you are creating and borrow traits for your own monstrous creations. Traits tend to vary widely in power, so you must choose traits that low-challenge rating creatures typically have. For example, giving your familiar a planetar's Innate Spellcasting trait would make it too powerful to be a familiar, but giving it something like an owl's Flyby trait makes sense.

The following list contains traits appropriate for familiars. You can modify the wording or traits to make sense for your familiar. For instance, if you gave a familiar the gnoll's Rampage trait and the familiar doesn't have a bite attack, you could replace the Rampage trait's reference to a bite attack with a different melee attack your familiar does have.

Attack-focused traits include:

- Aggressive (see the **orc** stat block)
- Blood Frenzy (see the **sahuagin** stat block)
- Brute (see the **bugbear** stat block)
- Charge (see the **centaur** stat block)
- Grappler (see the **mimic** stat block)
- Pack Tactics (see the **kobold** stat block)
- Rampage (see the **gnoll** stat block)
- Surprise Attack (see the **bugbear** stat block)

Defense-focused traits include:

- Brave (see the **gladiator** stat block)

- Evasion (see the **assassin** stat block)
- Fire Absorption (see the **iron golem** stat block)
- Flyby (see the **owl** stat block)
- Immutable Form (see the **flesh golem** stat block)
- Magic Resistance (see the **flesh golem** stat block)
- Relentless (see the **boar** stat block)
- Undead Fortitude (see the **zombie** stat block)

Mobility-focused traits include:

- Amorphous (see the **gray ooze** stat block)
- Amphibious (see the **chuul** stat block)
- Earth Glide (see the **earth elemental** stat block)
- Nimble Escape (see the **goblin** stat block)
- Running Leap (see the **lion** stat block)
- Shadow Stealth (see the **shadow** stat block)
- Spider Climb (see the **vampire** stat block)
- Standing Leap (see the **bulette** stat block)
- Sure-Footed (see the **goat** stat block)

Skill-focused traits include:

- Devil's Sight (see the **barbed devil** stat block)
- False Appearance (see the **cloaker** stat block)
- Illumination (see the **fire elemental** stat block)
- Iron Scent (see the **rust monster** stat block)
- Keen Senses (see the **pseudodragon** stat block)
- Limited Telepathy (see the **pseudodragon** stat block)
- Mimicry (see the **raven** stat block)
- Shapechanger (see the **mimic** stat block)
- Stone Camouflage (see the **stone giant** stat block)
- Transparent (see the **gelatinous cube** stat block)
- Treasure Sense (see the **xorn** stat block)
- Underwater Camouflage (see the **giant octopus** stat block)

It should be noted that not every familiar needs traits to be effective. It is totally okay to skip traits in favor of more hit points, better AC, increased damage output, or more special abilities. Dinosaurs, for example, don't have flashy traits but they can hit really hard in a fight!

What About Actions?

Now you've got to give your familiar something to do. At the very minimum, give it one melee weapon attack. A familiar's melee weapon attack typically uses natural weapons like claws, bites, or pseudopods. There's no need to make this complicated! Familiars, especially at higher levels, are very rarely useful for dealing damage. These weapons almost use the creature's Strength or Dexterity modifier for attack and damage rolls, have a reach no greater than 5 feet, and deal 1d4 damage.

You'll probably want to give your familiar one additional action that isn't just a normal attack. This second option could be useful inside or outside of combat, like the sprite's Invisibility action or an attack that imposes a nasty condition like the imp's Sting action. When choosing these actions, think about how your caster will utilize this familiar, and choose an action they will genuinely find useful. As a rule, I prefer to make this second action something that will be useful in exploration or roleplaying scenes to diversify the benefits of having a familiar tag along during adventures.

When designing these actions, refer to your starting creature again. You might be able to use actions the creature already has, modifying them to fit the lower challenge rating of a familiar. Here are a few mechanical guidelines to keep in mind:

- Familiars typically don't get the Multiattack action.
- A standard familiar attack does an average of 4 damage on a hit.
- If any of your familiar's abilities require a saving throw, the DC should be 11.

Point-Buy a Familiar

If you're worried about creating a balanced creature, here's a speedy way to make sure you create a familiar that won't break the game.

Start with the generic greater familiar stat block below, decide what type of creature it is (like a Celestial, Beast, or Fey), then spend 10 points to make improvements listed on the Point-Buy a Familiar table. Each improvement costs 1 point. You can decrease a familiar's ability score by 2 to gain 1 point. No ability score can be lower than 4.

Generic Greater Familiar

Tiny [Creature Type], Unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 5 (2d4)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Languages understands Common but can't speak
Challenge 1 (200 xp)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Actions

Placeholder. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage (you choose which one).

Point-Buy a Familiar

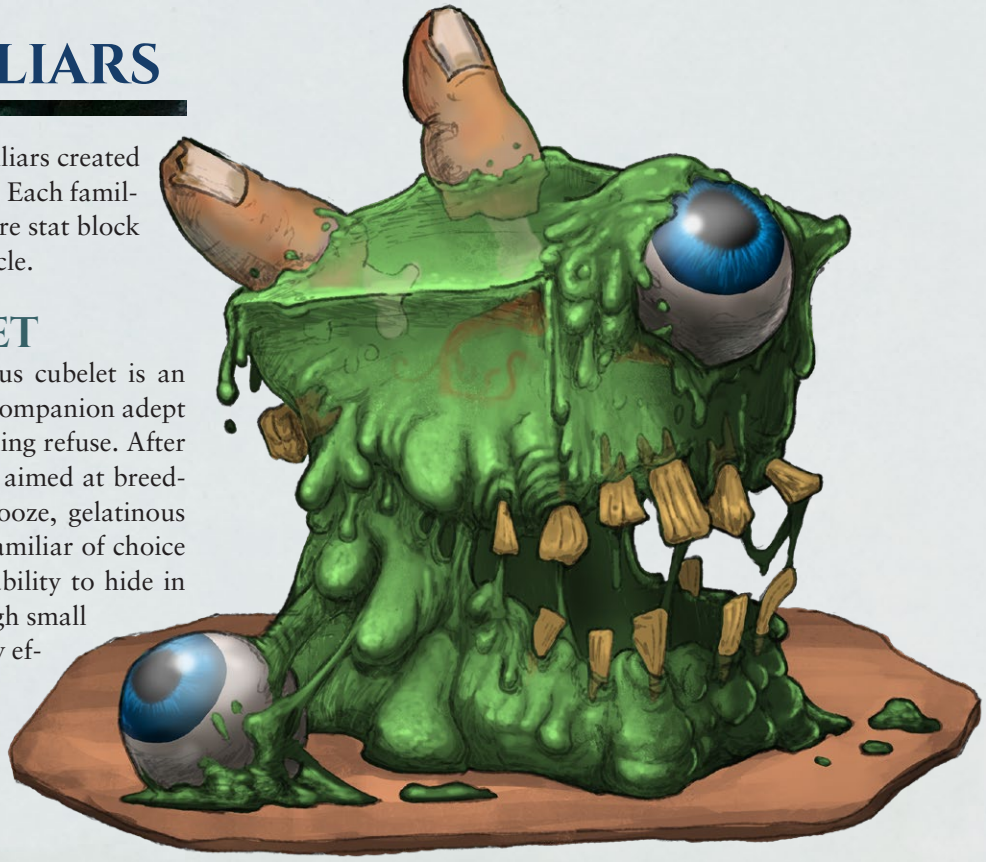
Improvement
Increase Armor Class by 1 (up to a maximum of 15).
Increase Hit Die by one d4 (up to a maximum of 3d4 total Hit Dice).
Increase walking speed by 10 feet (to a maximum of 40 feet), or decrease walking speed by 10 feet and add a 30-foot burrowing, flying, or swimming speed.
Increase an ability score by 2 (so its modifier increases by 1; familiar ability scores have a maximum of 18).
Choose one ability score and gain proficiency in saving throws using the chosen ability.
Gain proficiency in two skills.
Gain resistance to two specific types of damage, or gain the damage resistances of the base creature.
Gain immunity to a specific type of damage or a condition.
Gain blindsight out to a range of 30 feet, darkvision out to a range of 60 feet, or tremorsense out to a range of 30 feet.
Speak and understand one language of your choice.
Gain one trait (up to a maximum of three total traits).
Gain one melee weapon or ranged weapon attack (can only be taken once for a maximum of two total attack actions).
Weapon attacks can deal a damage type other than bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing.
Gain one action that is not a weapon attack (can only be taken once up to a maximum of two actions that aren't attacks).

EXAMPLE FAMILIARS

Presented here is a collection of new familiars created for use with the *find greater familiar* spell. Each familiar was converted from a standard creature stat block using the guidelines presented in this article.

GELATINOUS CUBELET

Like its larger counterpart, the gelatinous cubelet is an ideal servant for a caster who requires a companion adept at defending confined spaces and consuming refuse. After a successful series of arcane experiments aimed at breeding a more intelligent and manageable ooze, gelatinous cubelets became a surprisingly popular familiar of choice for traveling spellcasters. The cubelet's ability to hide in plain sight, retrieve objects, and fit through small openings combines to make it a startlingly effective burglar.



Gelatinous Cubelet

Tiny Ooze, Unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 11 (2d4 + 6)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	8 (-1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	6 (-2)

Condition Immunities blinded, deafened, prone
Senses blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages understands Common but can't speak
Challenge 1 (200 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Amorphous. The cubelet can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

Transparent. Even when the cubelet is in plain sight, it takes a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check to spot a cubelet that has neither moved nor attacked. A creature that tries to enter the cubelet's space while unaware of the cubelet is surprised by the cubelet.

Actions

Pseudopod. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) acid damage.

Engulf. The cubelet moves up to its speed. While doing so, it can enter the space of Tiny objects that are not being worn or carried. Whenever the cubelet enters an object's space, it can choose to engulf the object. A creature can attempt to forcefully remove an engulfed object by making a DC 11 Strength check as an action. On a failure, the creature takes 7 (2d6) acid damage and can't retrieve the object. On a success, the creature still takes the damage, but successfully removes the object. The cubelet can only engulf one object at a time.

GORGONETTE

Gorgonettes have all the ferocity and stubbornness of larger gorgons in a pocket-size package. Initially bred as prized hunting companions, the gorgonette breed have exploded in popularity as home protectors, racing monsters, and exotic pets. These familiars are excellent in combat situations with their Charge attacks and Petrifying Breath that can literally stop a foe in its tracks. Gorgenettes are incredibly ornery and not terribly bright, but they make valiant protectors once they decide you're worth saving.

Gorgonette

Tiny Monstrosity, Unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 16 (3d4 + 9)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	6 (-2)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)

Skills Athletics +6, Perception +3
Condition Immunities petrified
Senses darkvision 60 feet., passive Perception 13
Languages understands Common but can't speak
Challenge 1 (200 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Charge. If the gorgonette moves at least 20 feet straight toward a target and then hits it with a gore attack on the same turn, the target takes an extra 3 (1d6) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 11 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Actions

Gore. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage.

Petrifying Breath (1/Day). The gorgonette exhales petrifying gas in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a target's skin grows a layer of stone and the target is restrained for 1 minute. The restrained target can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turns, ending the condition on a success.

Miniature Xorn

A clan of unfortunate dwarf miners accidentally discovered the miniature xorn. After the initial shock of contending with hundreds of ravenous pocket-sized xorn, the dwarves seized a golden opportunity. Miniature xorn quickly became an ideal familiar for treasure hunters, dungeoneers, or adventurers preparing to explore subterranean tunnels. While the miniature xorn aren't as ferocious as their larger counterparts, their ability to sense treasure, burrow through the earth, and speak Terran makes them invaluable members of any expedition (as long as you keep them fed, of course).

Miniature Xorn

Tiny Elemental, Neutral

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 9 (2d4 + 4)
Speed 20 ft., burrow 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Damage Resistances piercing and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantine
Senses darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages Terran
Challenge 1 (200 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Earth Glide. The xorn can burrow through nonmagical unworked earth and stone. While doing so, the xorn doesn't disturb the material it moves through.

Stone Camouflage. The xorn has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide in rocky terrain.

Treasure Sense. The xorn can pinpoint by scent, the location of precious metals and stones, such as coins and gems, within 60 feet of it.

Actions

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 1) slashing damage.



Toy Automaton

Constructs exist across the multiverse in all shapes and sizes, and even the fearsome iron golem has a handy, compact form. Creating, controlling, and housing a full-sized construct is a laborious and expensive task, one of the driving reasons behind the creation of the toy automaton. These resilient little creatures make perfect familiars for casters who often find themselves in the middle of explosions or can't handle the daily responsibility of feeding a living creature.

Toy Automaton

Tiny Construct, Unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 11 (2d4 + 6)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	6 (-2)	10 (+0)	6 (-2)

Damage Resistances psychic, bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantine
Damage Immunities fire, poison
Condition Immunities exhaustion, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages understands the languages of its creator but can't speak

Challenge 1 (200 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Fire Absorption. Whenever the automaton is subjected to fire damage, it takes no damage and instead regains a number of hit points equal to the fire damage dealt.

Immutable Form. The automaton is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Magic Resistance. The automaton has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Actions

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Poison Breath (1/Day). The automaton exhales poisonous gas in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw, taking 9 (2d8) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.



Unicorn Foal

Unicorns are wise and powerful celestial guardians, but they aren't born that way. The forces of good encourage unicorn foals to travel with worthy adventurers to gain experience. While a foal isn't as mobile or dangerous as its elders, their gifts of telepathy and ability to heal make them excellent companions for the pure of heart.

Unicorn Foal

Tiny Celestial, Lawful Good

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 7 (2d4 + 2)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, paralyzed, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages telepathy 60 ft.
Challenge 1 (200 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Magic Resistance. The foal has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Actions

Hooves. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Healing Touch (1/Day). The foal touches another creature with its horn. The target magically regains 11 (2d8 + 2) hit points. In addition, the touch removes all diseases and neutralizes all poisons afflicting the target.



THE ARMS OF ACCORD

Five ancient weapons for legendary heroes

by Scott Fitzgerald Gray

Many millennia ago, in the days before even the elves and lizardfolk first recorded their histories, a set of five great weapons were held by heroes of the humanoid realms—bugbears, goblins, and hobgoblins; dragonborn, kobolds, and lizardfolk; dwarves and gnomes; elves, halflings, humans, and tieflings; and goliaths and orcs. Fragments of lore whisper that these mighty weapons, the Arms of Accord, were not crafted by those ancient peoples, but rather were created by benefactors unknown, whose goal was to bind these great lines in accord and allegiance.

At great summits called the Quorum of Sovereigns, hundreds of representatives of the ever-growing humanoid nations would meet to share news and stories, discoveries and portents. An exchange of knowledge was the primary goal throughout this great age of peace, during which the Arms of Accord stood as symbols of leadership and pact—meant to maintain unity among the humanoids against the threats of monsters, magic, and malevolence that could be faced more strongly united than apart.

But as more recent history and the seemingly endless warfare among humanoids show, the dream of unity was not to be.

The identity of the forces that first splintered the realms is lost to time. The last Quorum of Sovereigns was held over ten millennia ago, and the fragmentary lore of those days suggest that representatives of only two of the humanoid peoples were in attendance, with other nations already falling to strife and warfare. The Arms of Accord became tools of war as nations clashed and collapsed, and the five great weapons were eventually lost to the ravages of war and the dust of time.

Or so it was thought.

Nations and Peoples

The weapons of the Arms of Accord were implicitly created at a time when nations were largely defined by ancestry, but using these weapons in a campaign isn't meant to imply that all nations and cultures should be monolithic in that way. Even in many diverse fantasy cultures, characters of certain ancestries are assumed to have more heroic potential than others. The Arms of Accord show that characters of all ancestries can be heroes, and doesn't assume that most orcs are barbarians and kobolds are sneaky rogues. No matter how the nations and cultures of your world have evolved since the days of the Quorum of Sovereigns, you can use these weapons to help defy some of the stereotypes of ancestry where they still persist in the game.

Weapons of a Lost Age

The Arms of Accord were crafted for great leaders and heroes of the humanoid peoples. Each weapon can be attuned only by a wielder from two or three related humanoid ancestries, with its magic reflecting some aspect of how those peoples shaped their place in the earliest days of the world.

Rahnakh (The Dawn Blade)

Weapon (longsword/shortsword), very rare (requires attunement by a goliath, half-orc, or orc)

Crafted for the goliaths and orcs when the folk of those ancestries first established order against the monsters that ruled the world, this sword is shaped from a single piece of smooth white stone, though it rings out like steel when it strikes its target. You have a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls with this magic weapon, which deals an extra 1d6 radiant damage when you hit with it.

As a bonus action, you can speak *Rahnakh*'s command word to cause the sword to pulse with a blue-white radiance that sheds bright light in a 40-foot radius and dim light for an additional 40 feet. While the sword is glowing, the extra damage it deals increases to 2d6. Speaking the command word again (no action required) dims the light.

Radiant Aurora. When you fight outdoors in any amount of direct sunlight, you can increase the extra radiant damage dealt by *Rahnakh* to 4d6. This increase lasts until you finish a long rest, but comes into effect during that time only while you are outdoors in sunlight. This property of the weapon can't be used again until 7 days have passed.

Daylight. You can cast the *daylight* spell on *Rahnakh* while holding the sword. This property of the weapon can't be used again until you finish a long rest.

Accord Adaptability. *Rahnakh* magically changes its form according to the will of the creature attuned to it at the end of a long rest, becoming either a shortsword or a longsword.



Hylrahla (The Caller)

Weapon (battleaxe/handaxe), very rare (requires attunement by a dwarf or gnome)

The magic of *Hylrahla* channeled the bonds of battle and comradeship when it was forged for the dwarves and gnomes, reflecting the highest values of their earliest shared societies. The blade of this axe is made of black steel inlaid with mithral, and its haft of living darkwood adjusts to fit its user's hand. You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

Call of Combat. As a bonus action, *Hylrahla* lets you call your allies into battle formation. Choose up to six creatures you can see within 30 feet of you, and which can hear you. Each creature gains a d6, which can be used for

1 minute. At the start of each of its turns during this time, a creature can roll this d6 and choose one of the following options:

- Add the number rolled to its AC until the start of its next turn.
- Add the number rolled to one attack roll, ability check, or saving throw made before the start of its next turn.

This property of the weapon can't be used again until you finish a long rest.

Call of Fellowship. While you hold *Hylrahla*, you can use an action to establish a telepathic link with up to six willing creatures you can see or that you are familiar with, all of which must be on the same plane. For 1 hour, the linked creatures can communicate telepathically through the bond whether or not they have a common language, choosing to communicate with all creatures or only some. The communication is possible over any distance, though it can't extend to other planes of existence. This property of the weapon can't be used again until 7 days have passed.

Accord Adaptability. *Hylrahla* magically changes its form according to the will of the creature attuned to it at the end of a long rest, becoming either a battleaxe or a handaxe.

Damalean (The Storm's Light)

Weapon (longbow/shortbow), very rare (requires attunement by an elf, half-elf, halfling, human, or tiefling)

This exquisitely carved bow is shaped of fine-grained gray wood and white horn, and channels the power of wind and endless skies to mark the nomadic traditions of the earliest elf, halfling, and humanoid clans. When you hit with an attack using this magic weapon, you can choose one of the following effects:

- The target takes an extra 2d6 lightning damage.
- The target takes an extra 1d6 thunder damage and is pushed 5 feet away from you.
- The target is surrounded by a nimbus of crackling lightning until the end of your next turn. An affected target sheds dim light in a 10-foot radius and can't benefit from being invisible, and creatures that can see it have advantage on attack rolls against it.

Shape the Storm. While holding *Damalean*, you can cast the *control weather* spell. This property of the weapon can't be used again until 7 days have passed.

Accord Adaptability. *Damalean* magically changes its form according to the will of the creature attuned to it at the end of a long rest, becoming either a longbow or a shortbow.

Kosril (The Life Shard)

Weapon (pike/spear), very rare (requires attunement by a dragonborn, kobold, or lizardfolk)

This weapon is forged of fiery red iron inscribed with a pattern of fine scales. *Kosril* was created to channel the magic of life as a sign of hope and renewal in the harsh lands where dragonborn, kobolds, and lizardfolk dwelled in the earliest age of those folk. You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

Additionally, if you or one creature you are touching receives magical healing while you hold *Kosril*, the target of the healing regains the maximum number of hit points. This property of the weapon can't be used again until you finish a long rest.

Endure the Elements. While you hold *Kosril*, you can use an action to choose up to six creatures within 10 feet of you. For 24 hours, you and each chosen creature suffer no harm as a result of extreme cold or extreme heat, and can comfortably endure temperatures below 0 degrees Fahrenheit (–18 degrees Celsius) or above 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius), even without drinkable water, without making saving throws to resist exhaustion. This property of the weapon can't be used again until you finish a long rest.

Life Restored. While you hold *Kosril*, you can use an action to choose up to six creatures you can see. Each creature regains 4d8 hit points and can end the blinded or poisoned condition on itself. This property of the weapon can't be used again until 7 days have passed.

Accord Adaptability. *Kosril* magically changes its form according to the will of the creature attuned to it at the end of a long rest, becoming either a pike or a spear.

Dhesolia (The World's Voice)

Weapon (mace/morningstar), very rare (requires attunement by a bugbear, goblin, or hobgoblin)

The great goblinoid nations channeled the power of nature and fate for the weal of all, and *Dhesolia* was crafted as an emblem of that legacy. This elegant weapon is carved of dark oak and set with studs of bronze, their patina matching the swirling gray-green of the weapon's heavy head. You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

Voice of the Wild. As a bonus action, *Dhesolia* lets you call on nature to scourge your foes. Choose up to six creatures you can see in a 20-foot cube within 100 feet of you, then choose one of the following effects:

- Each creature is surrounded by conjured swarms of gnats and other small vermin, imposing disadvantage on its attack rolls, saving throws, and ability checks until the end of its next turn.



- Spectral vines erupt in the creature's space, forcing it to make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw. On a success, the creature has its speed reduced by half until the end of its next turn. On a failure, the creature is restrained until the end of its next turn.

This property of the weapon can't be used again until you finish a long rest.

Voice of Doom. As an action while you hold *Dhesolia*, you channel the power of fate to hinder a chosen foe. Choose one creature within 100 feet of you that you can see, and which can hear you. That creature must succeed on a DC 17 Charisma saving throw or be cursed. While cursed in this way, the creature has disadvantage on attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws, and saving throws against the creature's spells and other features are made with advantage. As a bonus action, the cursed creature can choose to take 2d8 psychic damage and repeat the saving throw, ending the curse on a success. This curse otherwise lasts indefinitely or until subject to the *remove curse* spell or similar effects. This property of the weapon can't be used again until 7 days have passed.

Accord Adaptability. *Dhesolia* magically changes its form according to the will of the creature attuned to it at the end of a long rest, becoming either a mace or a morningstar.

Reclaiming the Arms of Accord

The Arms of Accord can be placed in a campaign like any other magic item that seems like a good fit for the characters, even to the point of ignoring the weapons' attunement requirements to allow them to be used by anyone. But by tapping into the full backstory of these ancient

weapons, GMs and players can engage in unraveling even a small bit of the colonialism wrapped around some of the oft-called-"monstrous" humanoid ancestries. The magic and history of these weapons hearken to a time before the stereotypical conflicts that have become the subtext of so much fantasy (dwarves versus goblins, elves versus orcs, humans versus everyone, and so forth).

Especially if the Arms of Accord have begun to reappear in the world as a result of some sort of active agency—whether driven by their unknown creators or by the weapons' own desires to be wielded once more—their presence in the campaign provides the impetus to hearken back to a past in which orcs, goblinoids, kobolds, and lizardfolk were an equal part of the larger whole of humanoid culture. And by establishing a connection to an age before millennia of conflict splintered the humanoid world, a campaign dedicated to seeing all the Arms of Accord restored to worthy heroes might be a harbinger of a new age of harmony and understanding.

And, of course, if your campaign has already consciously rejected the colonialism built into the DNA of the game, the Arms of Accord make a great collection of lost relics tied to an ancient empire or a fallen order of heroes. Or, they could stand at the center of ancient legends of the time when the present state of a free and egalitarian world was shaped—and now their sudden and mysterious reappearance heralds the rise of new evils that must be defeated, lest they drag the peoples of the world back into strife and destruction.

Campaign Hooks

GMs can use any of the following hooks to introduce one or more of the Arms of Accord into a campaign, or as inspiration for creating hooks of their own. Each hook indicates which weapons it would be most appropriate for, but any hook can be matched to any weapon.

Fortunes of War. A millennia-old war unleashed magic that left a dead battlefield perpetually scoured by elemental power. Those close to the site report a new disturbance among the destruction—a skeletal hand thrust up from the ground, holding aloft a pristine weapon. (*Damalean*, *Rahnakh*)

The Forest's Heart. An ancient oak tree is a site of reverence for the folk of a forest realm. But when an unnatural storm fells the tree, it reveals a tomb within its roots, bearing the graven image of a weapon on its stone door. (*Damalean*, *Dhesolia*)

Guardians of the Past. A newly discovered temple is filled with timeless undead guarding a sealed vault. Within the vault, a weapon floats above a pool of mirrored liquid that slays all who gaze upon it. (*Hylrahla*, *Kosril*)

The Font of Heroes. A natural spring in a remote village has legendary healing properties. When the spring suddenly dries up, it reveals a series of caverns beneath—and an ancient weapon thrust into a stone from which the spring's water once flowed. (*Dhesolia*, *Kosril*)

Forge of Fate. An ancient underground forge shows signs that it was intentionally destroyed by those who created it. Exploring the ruins reveals that the forge overheated in an attempt to destroy a magic weapon—which still sits atop a mound of slag at the forge's heart. (*Hylrahla*, *Rahnakh*)

Spells of Accord

When first created, the Arms of Accord channeled additional magic to further empower wielders who worked together for the common good of all folk. As you introduce the Arms of Accord into your campaign, you can decide whether this magic automatically manifests when two or more weapons are brought together, or whether it is dormant and needs to be sparked once more with a special quest, an ancient ritual, or some act proving that the new wielders channel the true spirit of alliance and unity for which the arms were created.

Whenever two or more attuned wielders of the Arms of Accord are within 1 mile of each other, a wielder can use the weapon to cast a specific spell, as noted on the table below. Attuned wielders do not have to be allies—or even aware of each other. The sudden ability to cast spells from one of the Arms of Accord might thus be used as a campaign hook for an attuned player character to seek out or be sought by an attuned NPC.

With more attuned wielders all within 1 mile of each other, the number of spells they have access to increases. The table is cumulative, so that connected wielders have access to all spells higher up on the table. A wielder can cast each of the spells of accord once, regaining the ability to do so when they finish a long rest.

Some of those who have studied the history of the Arms of Accord speculate that the *divination* and *commune* spells cast from the weapons forge a connection between a wielder and the unknown entities who first created the weapons.

Ascendant Weapons

Introducing more potent magic weapons into a campaign than the rules nominally allow is a natural inclination on both sides of the table. Players love getting magic weapons for the benefits their characters gain from them, both in and out of combat. GMs love giving out magic weapons as a means of rewarding fearless action and good play, and for the way powerful weapons and lost magic can connect characters to the history of a campaign.

Spells of Accord

Connected Wielders	Spells Available
2	*lesser restoration, magic circle*
3	*divination*
4	*commune*
5	*guards and wards*

It's great fun when a 1st-level character claims their first *+1 weapon* in the aftermath of a thrilling fight. But too much combat magic at low levels can lead inevitably to even more combat magic through the mid-level range of a campaign. Likewise, the temptation to let lower-level characters claim rare or very rare weapons can be too much to resist sometimes—and suddenly the game's encounter math is thrown out of whack.

The following optional rules (which work with the Arms of Accord or with any magic weapons) create a framework for letting any magic weapon ascend in usability, advancing from a lower state to the height of its power. These rules are just an extension of the general setup of magic item benefits and properties, and are perfect for a GM who wants to tinker with the power creep that comes from too much magic—or who wants to intentionally bring a nominally overpowered weapon into the campaign for narrative purposes without that item potentially disrupting the game.

Lower Potency

For a weapon with multiple distinct properties, the easiest option is to have the most powerful of those properties turned down or turned off. A very rare *dwarven thrower* has a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls, so dropping that bonus to +1 can effectively make it a rare weapon. Then deciding that its extra damage doesn't function until its wielder has gained more experience can decrease its power even further, making it easy to place a *dwarven thrower* into a lower-level campaign and letting its full power build up over time.

This approach also works for adjusting saving throws tied to a magic weapon's attacks or properties. As a general rule, saving throws of common and uncommon magic items should be DC 13, rare items should be DC 15, and very rare or legendary items should be DC 17.

Adding Recharge

If a weapon has an always-on property (including the much-sought-after bonus to attack and damage rolls) consider limiting that property by requiring it to recharge, becoming usable again at the next dawn, at the end of an attuned user's next long rest or short rest, and so forth. A *scimitar of speed* can become appropriate for a low-level character by turning the ability to make an extra attack into a property usable only once per short or long rest. Or the weapon could have charges that fuel a limited number of extra attacks per day, adding narrative flavor by forcing a character to think about how best to use that magic. A weapon that runs out of charges could even risk losing its magic properties, like a staff or wand!

Likewise, a bonus to attack and damage rolls for a magic weapon more powerful than its wielder's level could become a limited bonus usable just once per day. Or to give the bonus more heft—and to prevent a player from feeling unimpressed if it fails to deliver a hit once too often—the bonus can activate and stay in effect until an attack with the weapon hits. For groups that like to experiment with mechanics, this approach also lends itself to playing around with the math behind a bonus to make using a weapon feel more dynamic, swapping a +2 bonus for rolling a d4 to be added to the attack roll, or trading a +3 for a d6.

Longer Recharge

If a magic item property recharges on a daily basis, extend that recharge over a longer period. Look to magic items such as the *figurines of wondrous power* or the *horn of Valhalla* as examples, and have the special properties of a *sword of sharpness* only function every 7 days in the hands of a low-level character—or every 28 days, or even once per level. A weapon's signature ability can become even more iconic if its wielder must carefully weigh its power before using it—and serves as a promise of what it'll feel like to unlock the weapon's full power over time.

All About Story

Scaling back a magic weapon's properties and allowing the weapon to slowly advance as a character rises in level can also fuel all kinds of narrative development. Determining what happened to a weapon to limit its power in the first place might become a mystery the characters investigate alongside the main plot threads of a campaign. The party might need to take on side quests in search of lost lore, rare reagents, or reclusive weaponsmiths to actively restore a weapon's full might. Or, to further emphasize story, consider having the weapon's abilities unlock not just when the wielder reaches a certain level, but specifically in response to a climactic battle, emotional story beat, or act of heroism.

LEVEL CONSIDERATIONS

Some magic items might have hidden level considerations that can be easy to overlook. For example, a rare or rarer magic weapon can easily have a property that imposes a long-term effect that can only be dealt with using *dispel magic*, *greater restoration*, *remove curse*, and similar magic, since characters of a level appropriate for such an item should have access to those spells. The *rod of rulership* is one example, imposing the charmed condition for a long period on an effectively unlimited number of creatures—and potentially tipping the balance of a campaign where characters and NPCs can't shut down that condition with *dispel magic*, *greater restoration*, and similar effects. So when creating a usable-less-often, lower-DC version of such an item, consider also making conditions and effects time-limited, reducing the number of possible targets, or allowing conditions to be ended with a successful Intelligence (Arcana) check.

EXAMPLE: DAMALEAN'S RISE

As a specific example of how the ascendant weapons framework might be used to bring the Arms of Accord into a lower-tier campaign, consider *Damalean, the Storm's Light*. As an uncommon magic item, the bow might start out only with the ability to deal an extra 1d6 lightning damage, with that ability recharging after a long rest. As the character levels up, the other two options could come into play, even as the recharge is reduced to once per short rest, then eliminated altogether.

Likewise, instead of casting *control weather*, a 2nd- or 3rd-level character might be able to cast *gust of wind* using the bow, whether with a comic feel or a serious sense of tapping into some small part of a much greater power. That spell might even upgrade to *control winds* at 7th or 8th level before becoming *control weather*. Or the first castings of *control weather* might only recharge after 28 days have passed—letting a character fully tap into the world-shaping power of this ancient relic with little risk of breaking the game.



DEFEND YER GOBBO CAVE!

A one-shot adventure for gobbos

by Anthony Joyce

If you need a casual one-shot adventure, *Defend Yer Gobbo Cave!* is for you! In this explosive and zany adventure, the players play as gobbos, a unique type of goblin, and build a magic cave together using five modular rooms, each with traps to fend off invaders. Then enemy adventurers invade, seeking a magic emerald called a *heart*. If they steal the *heart* from the cave, the dungeon collapses and the gobbos lose. If the gobbos successfully defend their cave, they win!

Fit for any setting, the flavorful cast of gobbos and the cave they protect can also serve as NPCs and a dungeon in a larger campaign.

Gobbos Never Say Die!

Anyone learning a new game or trying to have a fun, casual one-shot session might find it frustrating to experience character death. *Defend Yer Gobbo Cave!* is specifically designed to avoid this frustration. When a gobbo is reduced to 0 hit points or otherwise dies, they instantly respawn anywhere within their cave, so you and your players don't need to worry about the burden of death. Unless the *heart* is stolen from the cave…then everyone might die. Yikes!

"Playing *Defend Yer Gobbo Cave!*" explains the rules for you and your players. When you play the game, you can give them the ruleset, which we have provided as a linked handout at the end of this issue of *ARCADIA*.

Attacking the Cave

After the players complete step 3 (see "Playing *Defend Yer Gobbo Cave!*"), enemies attack their cave in two encounters. You can add more encounters with creatures of higher challenge ratings if you want to play longer or the players want a more difficult challenge. The goal is to have fun, not to be adversarial—but these creatures really do want to steal the gobbos' *heart*!

Enemies can enter the cave from any entrance the GM chooses. A group of creatures might enter from multiple entrances at once!

Encounter 1: Olga's Swarm

Olga, an awakened saber-toothed tiger, leads her family of beasts to the gobbo cave to conquer it and establish a new home. Olga has an Intelligence score of 10 (+0) and can speak and understand Goblin. This encounter introduces new creatures at the start of each round of combat:

- ***Round 1.*** One **giant badger** per gobbo
- ***Round 2.*** Three **stirges** per gobbo
- ***Round 3.*** Olga the **saber-toothed tiger**

Each creature wears an ushanka-hat and a monocle. Once Olga's family is defeated, proceed to the intermission.

So You Like Roleplay, Aye?

If the combat encounters get sluggish for your group, inject some roleplay into the fights to spice things up. As a standard, call for DC 13 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) checks when the characters interact with another creature that isn't Olga and Arden, and call for DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) checks when gobbos interact with Olga and Arden. Here are some options to add roleplay elements to these encounters:

Coup. Creatures from either Olga's family or Arden's army ask the gobbos to help kill their leader and free them. Choose a few creatures to help the gobbos.

Monster Union. The enemy creatures take a mandatory 10-minute union break. They chat about working conditions under their leader. Maybe the gobbos convince them to go on strike, who knows?

Unexpected Alliance. New settlements are being built in the area, encroaching on what little territory everyone has. The gobbos can convince Olga and Arden to unite and drive away the people in the nearby towns. Together they'll be unstoppable!

Intermission: Granny Nookins

"Be a good little gobbo and help your Granny Nookins massage these bunions. Good gracious, they're on fire today!" —Granny Nookins

An elderly female **goblin** named Granny Nookins approaches the cave seeking rest and respite. With her tattered cloak, walking stick, and grandmotherly demeanor, she brings the gobbos together over her warm stew and asks to hear their best jokes. Each gobbo can tell one joke. After the jokes are told, the gobbos can each vote to pick the best one. A gobbo can't vote for themself. In case of a tie, Granny Nookins votes as a tiebreaker. Granny Nookins gives the gobbo whose joke has the most votes a *helm of teleportation*, and the winner earns the "Granny Nookins Jokester" award (see "Gobbo Achievements").

Granny Nookins warns the gobbos that a powerful necromancer desires their *heart* and is coming to claim it! Some of these Undead creatures can walk through walls, so the gobbos must be careful. Before leaving, Granny Nookins casts a spell on the gobbos and the entire cave to help them fight. Her spell turns each of the gobbo's attacks (as well as any bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage dealt by the cave traps) into a magical attack for the purpose of overcoming damage immunities and resistances for the duration of this adventure. Granny Nookins wishes the gobbos well, then vanishes in a puff of red smoke.

Encounter 2: Arden's Dead

Arden the Corruptor is a blue dragon obsessed with necromancy. His massive undying army marches toward the gobbo caves, intent on killing the gobbos and stealing their *heart* so Arden can use it to create more powerful Undead kobolds. Each Undead kobold that Arden sends forth is Small except for Arden and the giant kobold zombie, who are both Large. (Each creature's new size does not change their other game statistics.) This encounter introduces new creatures at the start of each round of combat:

- ***Round 1.*** One kobold **zombie** and one kobold **skeleton** per gobbo
- ***Round 2.*** One giant kobold zombie (use the **ogre zombie** statistics) per two gobbos
- ***Round 3.*** One kobold **wraith** per gobbo
- ***Round 4.*** Arden the Corruptor (use the **adult blue dragon** statistics)

Once Arden's army is defeated, the game ends.

GM Tip — Creature Tactics

The creatures in these encounters have movement speeds (such as burrowing or flying) and traits (such as Incorporeal Movement) that help them move around. Use these tactically to challenge the gobbos and avoid bottlenecks in combat. These creatures can burrow through the ground, fly over the gobbos' heads, and pass through walls and other creatures. Reminder, creatures with Incorporeal Movement can't take the *heart* through walls, since the *heart* is not incorporeal.

Wraiths. Wraiths can use Create Specter to form a **specter** ally from the corpses of dead gobbos, even if those gobbos respawn elsewhere.

PLAYING DEFEND YER GOBBO CAVE!

Why do they lie about us, calling us cruel, wicked, and bad-hearted?
If we make no beautiful things, why do they seek out our hearts?
—Questions every gobbo ponders

This section provides step-by-step instructions for both the GM and the players on how to play and win *Defend Yer Gobbo Cave!*

Game Objectives at a Glance. Select your gobbo, build your gobbo cave, defend your gobbo cave, and have fun! Players win by defeating the invaders, and lose if the *heart* is taken out of the cave.



STEP 1. THE GOBBO BECOMES YOU

So you think you have what it takes to be a gobbo, do you? Good. First, select the gobbo you wish to play from appendix A, then name your gobbo and introduce them to your fellow gobbos.

Next, you and your fellow gobbos collaborate to establish the name of your new gobbo clan. Once you have your gobbos and clan name, inform your GM and proceed to step 2.

A MOMENT FOR GOBBOS TO SHINE

If your players enjoy roleplaying, ask each player to introduce their gobbo accompanied by a theme song and a catchphrase, just like a wrestling match! The players vote on which gobbo has the best entrance (a player can't vote for their gobbo), and the winner earns the "Gobbo Diva" award (see "Gobbo Achievements").

Step 2. Building Your Gobbo Cave

After you select and name your gobbo and clan, it's time to build your gobbo cave! Building your gobbo cave is a team effort. The five gobbo rooms each feature a trap to defend your cave, so read the traps' triggers and effects closely! Each room in a gobbo cave is a 35-foot square with a 10-foot-high ceiling. The five gobbo cave rooms, their traps, and their respective musical vibes are detailed under "Cave Rooms."

After reading about each room, your gobbo clan picks one of the cave configurations and places each of five rooms however they want within the configuration they chose. Each room is available as a map tile, which you can find linked at the end of this issue. Feel free to come up with your own configurations to use, too!

Heart of the Cave Room

While building your gobbo cave, pay special attention to the placement of your Heart of the Cave room. This room houses the *heart*, a special vessel that contains the souls of gobbos that died and willingly chose to inhabit the *heart* and watch over their gobbo clan from the afterlife. These gobbo souls interact with the living gobbos of their clan through emotional cues and natural connections unexplained by arcane studies.

Step 3 . Defend Yer Gobbo Cave!

Once you finish building your gobbo cave, place your gobbos anywhere in it. Inform your GM that you are ready to defend yer gobbo cave and begin! Keep track of the number of creatures your gobbo kills.

Gobbo Death

If the *heart* is in the cave and a gobbo is reduced to 0 hit points, the gobbo dies without making death saving throws. Upon a gobbo's death, the *heart* emits a radiant green light and projects a magical aura throughout the cave. This magical aura creates a clone of the dead gobbo. The gobbo clone instantly grows and is born out of a rotten cabbage on the cave floor.

The rotten cabbage's location in the gobbo cave is selected by the gobbo's player. The gobbo bursts out of the cabbage at the beginning of their next turn (and the cabbage and gobbo inside can't be harmed until the gobbo emerges). The clone gobbo is born with all of their hit points restored and any equipment the previous gobbo had. However, the gobbo doesn't regain other resources.

Sometimes killing another gobbo is a smart thing to do, especially if you need to get them somewhere far away quickly. Embrace the chaos!

Calculating Kills

At the end of the session, you earn achievements, some of which tally how many enemy and friendly creatures you and the traps you activate kill. To earn a kill, your gobbo must reduce a creature to 0 hit points or activate a trap that reduces a creature to 0 hit points.

Cave Rooms

Use the following rooms to build your gobbo cave.

Bicky's World

Throughout this room, sweet birds chirp and butterflies fly pleasantly around a miniature castle that is 15 feet wide, 10 feet long, and 10 feet high. The castle is made of random trinkets, treasures, and weapons taken off the bodies of adventurers foolish enough to enter a gobbo cave. A large sign in front of the castle reads, "Welcome to Bicky's World."

Lil'boop gobbos (see appendix A) use this room to play with ten odd-looking toddler-size furry bugbears called buggybears that giggle as they bop about.

Buggybears. If a buggybear is destroyed, it is of no consequence, as a new one miraculously appears from the miniature castle to take its place.

Illumination. Bright light fills this room.

Trap: It's a Small Gobbo World

Lil'boops care for the buggybears…but there is more to them than meets the eye. Beware!

Trigger. To trigger this trap, a gobbo can touch the castle to become the costumed character "Bicky," a famous imaginative figure in gobbo culture. The Bicky costume includes red shorts, a pair of white gloves, and a giant rat mask that smells of sweat and cheese. Only one gobbo at a time can wear the Bicky costume.

Once in costume, the gobbo can use an action or bonus action to make a DC 15 Charisma (Deception or Persua-



Bicky's World

sion) check to ask one creature within 10 feet of them, "Have you been a good little gobbo?" On a success, this trap is triggered and its effect is applied to the target. On a failed check, this trap's effect is applied to the gobbo in the costume. Lil'boops have advantage when making the check to trigger this trap. This trap can only be triggered four times every minute.

Effect. Cue lil'boop musical vibes. The buggybears begin to cheerfully sing a song while sharp retractable teeth sprout from their mouths. The buggybears frantically rush toward the target, and the targeted creature must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or take 75 (30d4) slashing damage as the buggybears attempt to devour it with their razor-sharp teeth. If a creature drops to 0 hit points from this damage, the buggybears drag the creature's body into the gobbo castle and kill it. Moments later, the buggybears reappear from the goblin castle with a new buggybear that resembles the slain creature, who then joins in singing the cheerful song. Trust me, you don't want to ask questions.

Countermeasure. Destroying the castle destroys this trap. The castle has AC 18, 60 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage.

EMO TEMPLE

Emoblins use this room to carry out dark rituals, worship fallen goblin Celestials, and feel the weight of the universe's emotions upon them. They keep cursed weapons, demonic musical instruments, occult books, and a desecrated angelic altar in this room.

Illumination. Dim light fills this room.

TRAP: ALTAR OF THE EMO CELESTIALS

Fallen angels created the desecrated altar in the middle of the emo temple many millennia ago. The gobbos mastered a ritual to summon the powerful Celestials using this altar. Beware—a sacrifice is needed to summon the Celestials.

Trigger. A gobbo must stand on the altar and use a bonus action to trigger this trap. Summoning a fallen angel requires a sacrifice. The gobbo that triggers this trap must select another friendly gobbo anywhere in the cave as a sacrifice. Once a sacrificial gobbo is selected, a beam of radiant energy comes down from the celestial realms, instantly killing the friendly gobbo. This trap can only be triggered three times every minute.

Effect. Cue emoblin musical vibes. The gobbo that triggered the trap targets one other creature in the room they can see and shouts an edgy phrase at it. A **deva** in the form of a goblin with long black hair, black leather clothes, and heavy eyeliner appears in a space next to the



EMO TEMPLE

targeted creature and attacks it for 5 combat rounds or until the creature dies, at which point the deva returns to the plane of angst and sorrow. The deva only attacks its target, using its Multiattack action unless the GM deems otherwise. It casts no spells and doesn't interact with any other creatures.

Countermeasure. Killing the deva destroys this trap.

Heart of the Cave

The Heart of the Cave is the most important room of a gobbo cave. It is where the goblins eat, sleep, and watch over their *heart*. Each goblin has their own bed and a small chest that contains their belongings at the foot of their bed. The *heart* floats at the room's center. A creature can freely grab the *heart* in the same way it can interact with objects in tandem with its movement and action.

Illumination. Dim light fills the room.

Trap: Heart Broken

Removing the *heart* from this room or destroying it spells disaster!

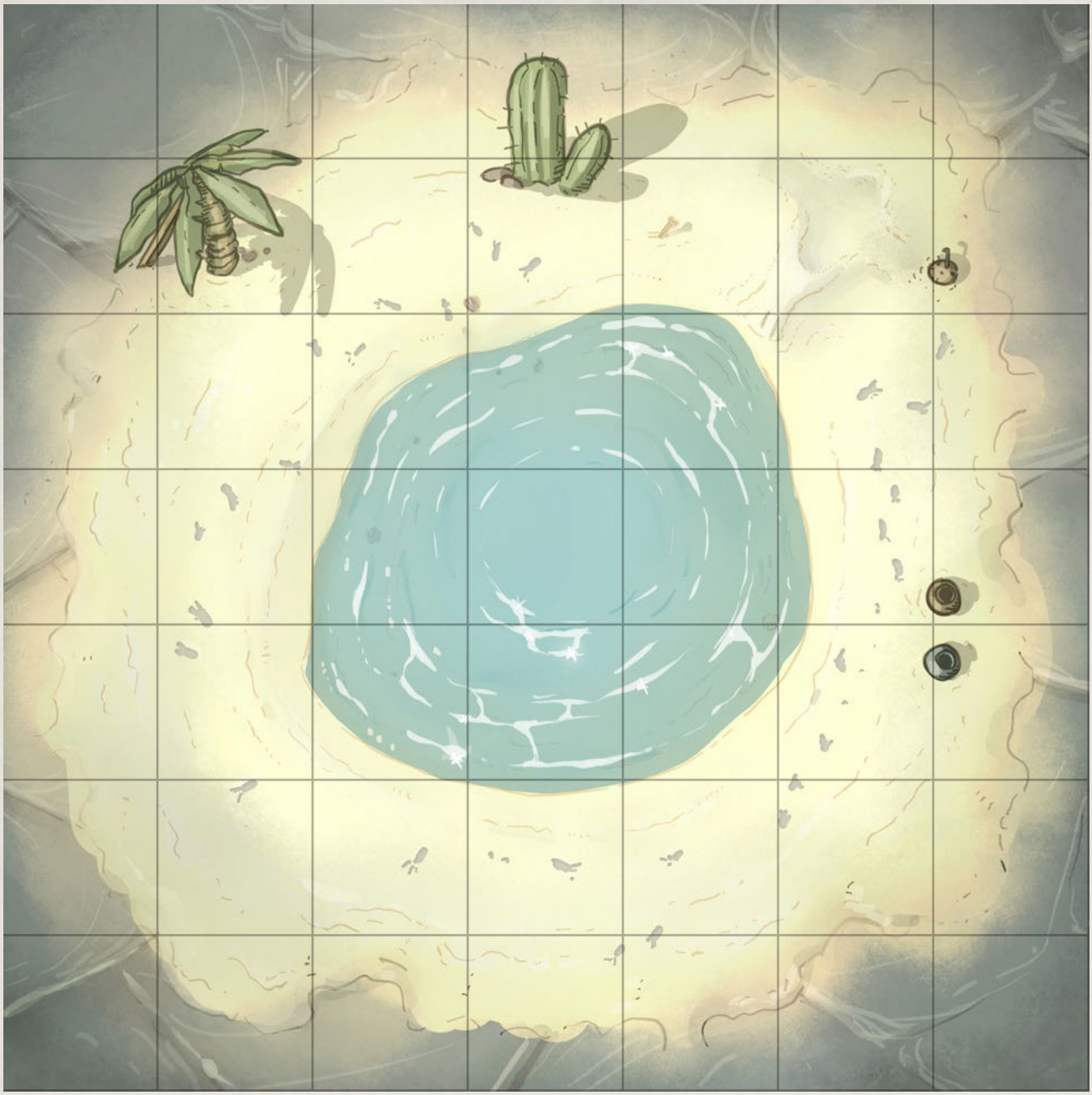
Heart Stats. The *heart* has AC 18, 115 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage.

Trigger. If the *heart* is removed from this room, the trap is triggered.

Effect. Cue stolen *heart* musical vibes. When the *heart* leaves this room, the entire goblin cave quakes.



Heart of the Cave



Gobbo Beach

Each round on initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), large boulders crash down from the ceiling throughout the cave. All creatures in the cave must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or take 17 (5d6) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone.

If the *heart* is destroyed or removed from the cave, the entire cave collapses on itself. Every creature inside the goblin cave dies as boulders crash down on them.

If the *heart* is destroyed or removed from the cave, gobbos aren't brought back to life after they die.

Countermeasure. This trap's effect ends if the *heart* is brought back into the room.

GOBBO BEACH

Flameblins use this room to bask in the warmth of the sun, relaxing on the sand of their homemade tropical beaches. These rooms naturally maintain a tropical climate and the ceilings look like bright blue skies, which a sentient miniature sun named Rico flies around constantly. White sand surrounds a 10-foot-deep pool of ocean water that occupies the middle of the room. Small waves emanate from the center of the pool due to the gravitational pull of the miniature sun orbiting above.

Illumination. Bright light fills this room.

TRAP: GOBBO BEACH DANCE-OFF

The sentient miniature sun, Rico, loves to watch creatures dance. But it hates creatures who insult the art by dancing terribly!

Trigger. A gobbo must be standing in this room and use a bonus action to trigger this trap. This trap can only be triggered three times every minute.

Effect. Cue flameblin musical vibes. Rico uses its sunbeams to engulf creatures in the room in brilliant light and shouts "Vamos a bailar!" to initiate the Gobbo Beach dance-off!

To begin the Gobbo Beach dance-off, a creature makes an ability check using any ability that captures its dance skills and adds its proficiency bonus if it is proficient in the Performance skill. For example, a chonka gobbo might make a Strength (Performance) check as it shows off by flexing its muscles while dancing. Two creatures can choose to partner with each other if they are within 5 feet of each other, in which case the creature with the highest modifier makes the ability check with advantage, a reflection of the beauty of two creatures dancing salsa together. The creature or coupled creatures with the highest check made during the dance-off wins and Rico releases them from its sunbeam. If only one creature or only one couple dances, Rico becomes upset and does not release them from its sunbeam. All creatures engulfed in Rico's



GOLDEN GYM

sunbeams take 28 (8d6) radiant damage as punishment for their pathetic dance failures.

GMs are encouraged to grant inspiration to characters who passionately dance during the dance-off and really show off their personal style.

Countermeasure. Destroying Rico destroys this trap. Rico has AC 10, 40 hit points, and immunity to fire and radiant damage.

Golden Gym

Chonkas use this room to grow a healthy variety of organic shrubs and continuously work out until they ascend and achieve the pinnacle of chonka physique as beefcakes.

The workout equipment is possessed by a spirit called "Olympia," who helps operate the workout equipment in this room. Additionally, a large 15-foot-tall bronze statue of Olympia in his former human form as a huge, hulking brute dominates the room near the full-service protein shake bar, where Olympia makes awesome shakes like the fruitinator!

Illumination. Bright light fills this room.

Trap: Get Swole or Get Wrecked

Bladed weights and dumbbells made from jagged dragon bones are sprawled throughout the entire room awaiting those who dare work out here.

Trigger. A gobbo must be standing in this room and use a bonus action to trigger this trap. This trap can only be triggered three times every minute.

Effect. Cue chonka musical vibes. The spirit of Olympia possesses the statue, which begins to move. All creatures in the room must make a DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check as workout equipment comes to life around them. On a successful check, Olympia compliments the creature's workout technique. On a failed check, the creature is grappled (escape DC 14) by Olympia and the workout equipment. Until this grapple ends, the creature takes 27 (6d8) bludgeoning damage at the start of its turn and is restrained.

Countermeasure. Destroying Olympia's statue destroys this trap. The statue has AC 15, 50 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage.

Gobbo Rewards

At the **end of your session**, use the hashtag #ArcadiaGobbo on social media to share your favorite moments with us and tell us about your achievements.

Gobbo Achievements

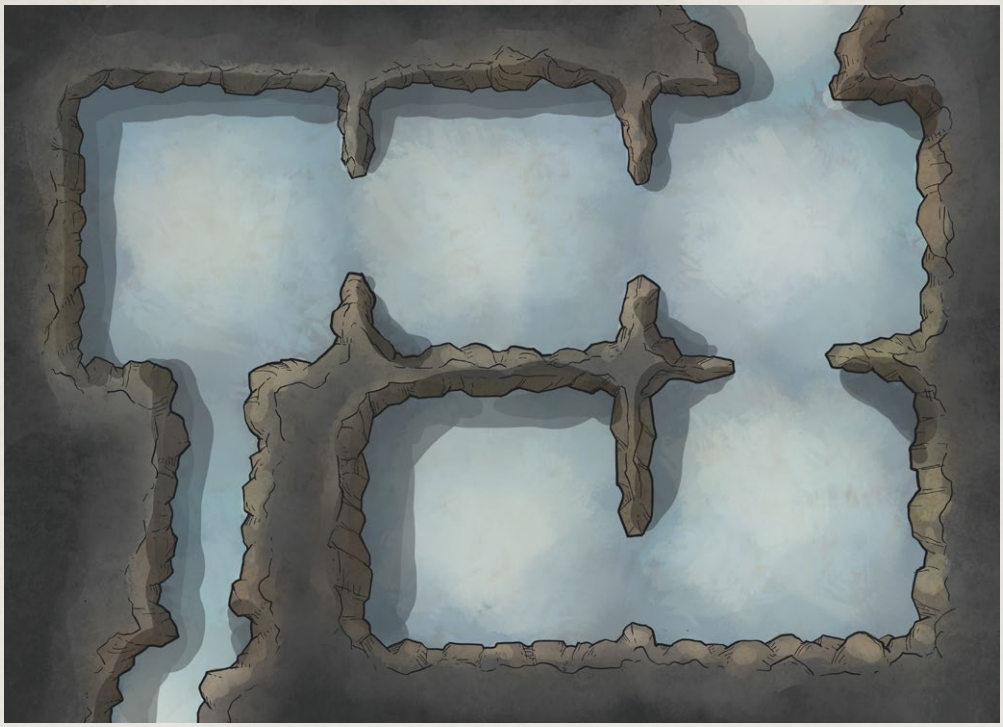
Your gobbos earn achievements based on their actions during play. Some of these achievements are objective and have specific criteria to earn them, while others are fun and subjectively awarded as your table sees fit. Ultimately, the GM determines which gobbos win which achievements.

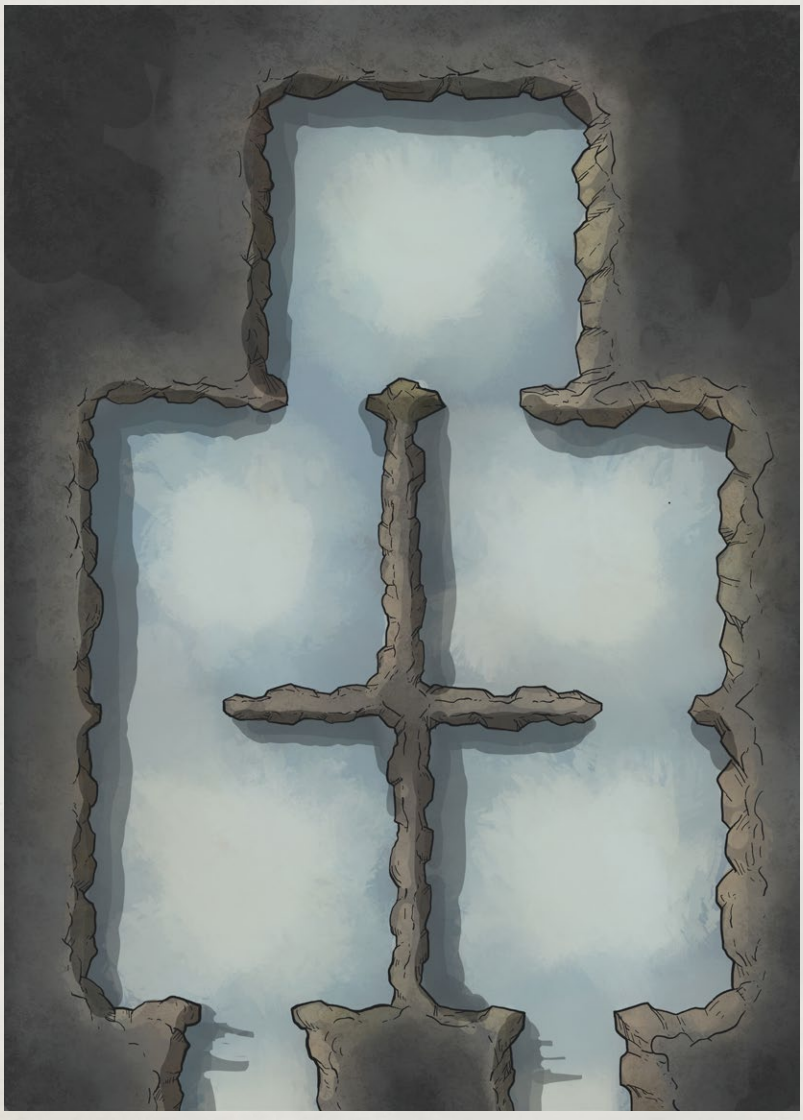
- ***Order of the Arcadia Gobbo.*** All gobbos earn this if they successfully defend their gobbo cave.
- ***Gobbo Diva.*** Voted the gobbo with the best introduction.
- ***Granny Nookins Jokester.*** Voted the gobbo with the best joke for Granny Nookins. I bet everyone here wishes you went into stand-up comedy. #Nosarcasmhere
- ***Gobbonator.*** This gobbo killed the most friendly gobbos.
- ***Gobvenger.*** This gobbo killed the most enemy creatures.
- ***Gobbo of Death.*** This gobbo killed the most creatures (friendly and enemy).
- ***Trigger Happy.*** This gobbo triggered the most traps.
- ***Heart Defender.*** Voted the gobbo that contributed the most to the defense of their gobbo cave.
- ***Epic Death.*** Voted the gobbo that had the most epic death.
- ***I Am Invincible!*** This gobbo died the most. We're not sure if this means they played well or poorly…you decide!

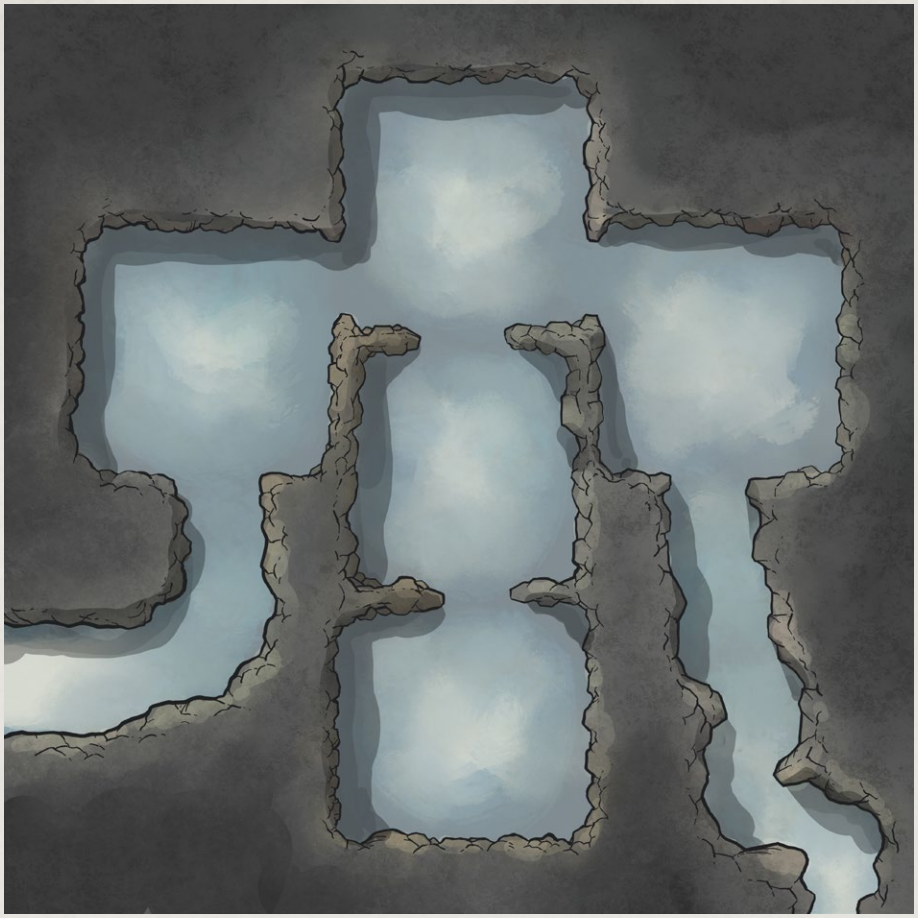
Gobbo Challenge

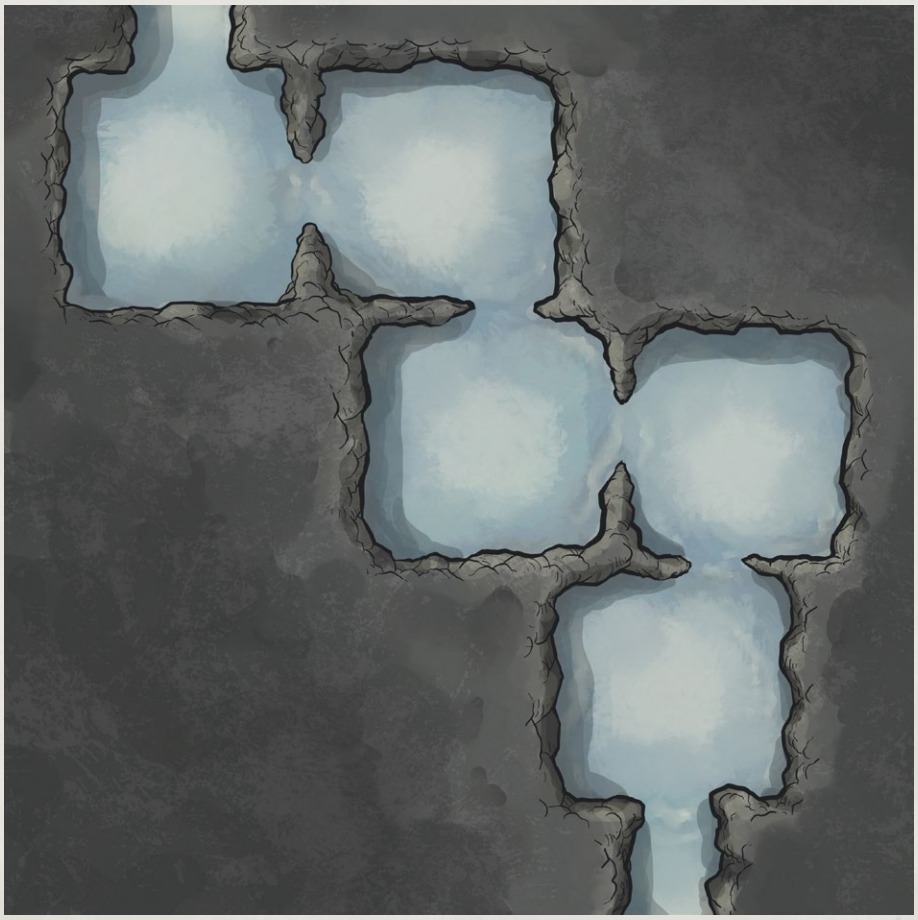
Now that you've played *Defend Yer Gobbo Cave!*, we have a gobbo challenge for you: create and share your own unique gobbo types, gobbo cave rooms, gobbo cave configurations, and gobbo traps with the *ARCADIA* community! Be sure to use #ArcadiaGobbo to share your creations on social media. We can't wait to see what you dream up!

Cave Configurations









Appendix A. Gobbos and Gobbo Statistics

This section contains four types of gobbos to play, each with unique characteristics and stat blocks. Groups with more than four players can double up on gobbo types.

Gobbo Wards. A gobbo is part of a gobbo clan if they are in a gobbo cave that contains a *heart*. Gobbos in a gobbo clan each have their own unique gobbo ward feature.

CHONKA

Chonkas are tanky beefcake gobbos that get swole working out in golden gyms and use their massive, hulking arms as weapons. Chonkas love pain—each time they take damage, their muscles enlarge and they become jacked, empowering their next attack to decimate even the strongest creatures! If you run into a chonka, they will tell you every detail about their daily workouts and strange dieting habits.

Unfortunately, chonkas despise leg day; their upper bodies are huge, but their legs are so small that they move slower than other gobbos. They look really odd when they walk, trust me.



Chonka

Small Humanoid (Goblinoid), Any Alignment

Armor Class 15 (natural armor, shield)
Hit Points 58 (9d6 + 27)
Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)	8 (-1)

Skills Athletics +4, Intimidation +1
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages Common, Goblin
Proficiency Bonus +2

No Pain, No Gain. Whenever the chonka takes damage, their muscles swell with beefy might. When the chonka hits with a weapon attack, they deal an extra 1d6 damage for each instance of damage they have taken since their last weapon attack, up to a maximum of 10d6. This feature persists even if the chonka has died.

Actions

Multiattack. The chonka makes two melee attacks.

Jacked Arms. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit*: 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 12). The chonka has two arms, each of which can grapple one target.

Goblin Protein Bar. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +4 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit*: 4 (1d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Bonus Actions

Chonka Ward (2/Day). The chonka chooses a point anywhere in the gobbo cave. A pile of dilapidated workout equipment erupts in a 10-foot cube centered on that point. Each creature in that area must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 13 (3d8) bludgeoning damage and is restrained by the workout equipment. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't restrained. A creature restrained by the workout equipment can use its action to make a DC 14 Strength or Dexterity check (its choice), ending the effect on itself on a success.

Additionally, the chonka suffers 10 psychic damage due to the guilt of not working out.

Gobbo Score Tracker

Use this area to keep track of the scoring elements of the game!

Total Enemy Creature Kills:

Total Deaths:

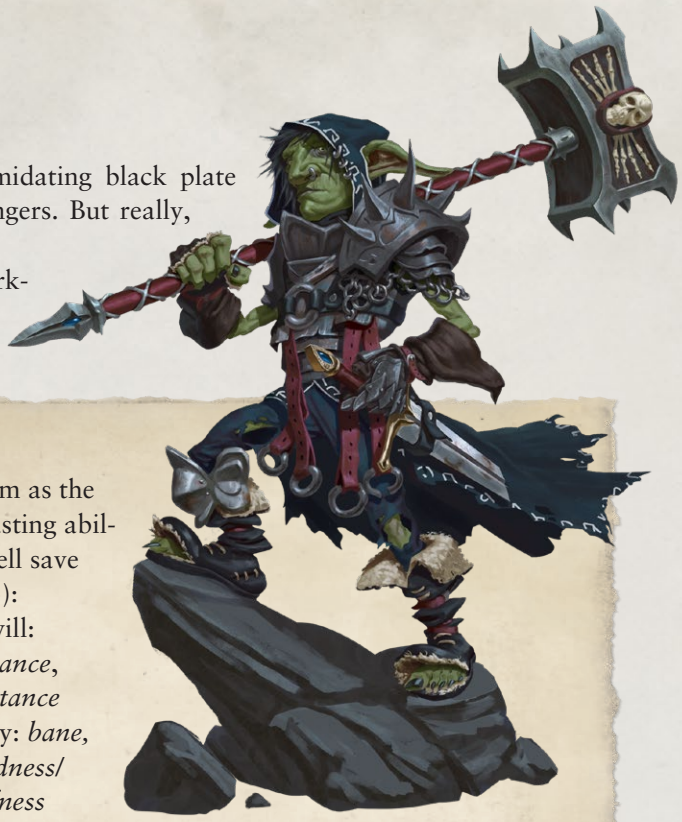
Total Friendly Gobbo Kills:

Total Trap Activations:

EMOBLIN

Emoblins are full of emotion and angst. They love wearing intimidating black plate armor and wielding the largest. scariest weapons to scare off strangers. But really, deep down, all they want to do is hug someone.

Emoblins lurk in emo temples, sharpening their edginess in the darkness of solitude. It is rumored that emoblins can summon powerful Celestials…but that can't be true, can it? Nah!



Emoblin

Small Humanoid (Goblinoid), Any Alignment

Armor Class 20 (plate armor, shield)
Hit Points 13 (3d6 + 3)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	8 (-1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

Skills Arcana +2, Intimidation +2, Medicine +5, Religion +4
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Common, Goblin
Proficiency Bonus +2

Actions

Abbadon the Annihilator (+3 Warhammer). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit*: 9 (1d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage, or 10 (1d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage when used with two hands. If the target is Humanoid or Undead, it must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or take 5 (1d10) radiant damage and gain 1 level of exhaustion. Additionally, whenever a creature fails the save, Abbadon the Annihilator chants occult verses in Celestial, and the emoblin loses 1 hit point as part of its soul is consumed by the weapon.

Inflict Emotional Wounds (3/Day). *Melee Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (3d10) psychic damage.

Bring Me to Life (3/Day). *Ranged Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (4d6) radiant damage, and the next attack roll made against this target before the end of the emoblin's next turn has advantage.

Spellcasting. The emoblin casts one of the following spells, requiring no material components and using Wisdom as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 13):

At will: *guidance*, *resistance*
3/day: *bane*, *blindness/deafness*
1/day: *animate dead*, *spirit guardians*

Bonus Actions

Edgy Smite (3/Day). The emoblin imbues their weapon with the power of their angst. The next time they hit a creature with a weapon attack, the attack deals an extra 7 (2d6) radiant damage to the target, which becomes visible if it is invisible, and the target sheds dim light in a 5-foot radius and can't become invisible for 1 minute.

Emoblin Ward (2/Day). The emoblin chooses a point anywhere in the gobbo cave. The image of an unholy emo angel appears in a 10-foot cube centered on that point. Each creature in that area must make a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 13 (3d8) radiant damage and must spend its next turn trying to move as far away from the image as it can, and it can't willingly move to a space within 15 feet of the image. It also can't take reactions. The creature can only use an action to take the Dash action or try to escape from an effect that prevents it from moving. If there's nowhere to move, the creature can use the Dodge action. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage and suffers no other effects.

Gobbo Score Tracker

Use this area to keep track of the scoring elements of the game!

Total Enemy Creature Kills: ***Total Deaths:***

Total Friendly Gobbo Kills: ***Total Trap Activations:***

LIL'BOOP

Lil'boops are the cutest, sweetest little gobbos you'll ever meet. They make human babies look like monstrosities by comparison. You can find lil'boops sneaking around the shadows or dancing in Bicky's World with strange buggybears. If you're wise, you'll stay away from that place. It gives me the cold sweats just thinking about it, yeesh!



Lil'boop

Small Humanoid (Goblinoid), Any Alignment

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 17 (5d6)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)

Skills Deception +6, Perception +4, Persuasion +6, Sleight of Hand +5, Stealth +5
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Common, Goblin
Proficiency Bonus +2

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). The lil'boop deals an extra 7 (2d6) damage when they hit a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the lil'boop that isn't incapacitated and the lil'boop doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Actions

Multiattack. The lil'boop makes two Retractable Claw attacks.

Retractable Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit*: 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Cutiebeans Dance (3/Day). The lil'boop begins to dance like a little cutiebean. Each creature within 30 feet of the lil'boop that can see it must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or take 5 (1d10) psychic damage and fall prone in awe of the dance until the end of the lil'boop's next turn. Goblinoids are immune to this effect.

Bonus Actions

Lil'boop Ward (2/Day). The lil'boop chooses a point anywhere in the gobbo cave. Maniacal childish giggles and evil laughter emanate from the point. All creatures within 5 feet of the point must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or become paralyzed by fear until the end of the lil'boop's next turn.

Lil'boop Ward Master (2/Day). The lil'boop can use the ward feature of any type of gobbo.

Gobbo Score Tracker

Use this area to keep track of the scoring elements of the game!

Total Enemy Creature Kills:
Total Deaths:
Total Friendly Gobbo Kills:
Total Trap Activations:

FLAMEBLIN

Flameblins are spicy little creatures! It's rumored that they are children of the sun, given their affinity to fire and explosive tendencies. Flamebins hang out in Gobbo Beach, dancing the nights away to fierce passionate music.

Someone once told me there is a sun hanging out in Gobbo Beach...a sun in a room? Are you kidding me? Get outta here with that nonsense!



Flameblin

Small Humanoid (Goblinoid), Any Alignment

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)
Hit Points 22 (4d6 + 8)
Speed 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Skills Arcana +3, Medicine +3, Performance +5, Persuasion +5
Damage Resistances fire
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Goblin
Proficiency Bonus +2

Sorcery Points. The flameblin has 3 sorcery points. They regain all their spent sorcery points when they finish a long rest. They can spend sorcery points on the following options:

Feel the Burn: When the flameblin deals fire damage to a target, they can spend 1 sorcery point to deal an additional 1d8 of fire damage to that target.

Glimpse of the Sun: The flameblin can spend 1 sorcery point as a bonus action to create a magnificent light source that blasts forth from their body. The flameblin chooses three creatures they can see within 20 feet of the flameblin. The targets must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or be blinded until the end of the flameblin's next turn.

Actions

Sun Blade. *Melee Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) fire damage.

Fire Bolt. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d10) fire damage. A flammable object hit by this attack ignites if it isn't being worn or carried.

Rico's
Rays (3/Day).
Ranged Spell Attack:
+5 to hit, range 120 ft., three targets. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) fire damage.

Commit Arson (2/Day). The flameblin creates a magical explosion of fire centered on a point they can see within 120 feet of the flameblin. Each creature in a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on that point must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 35 (10d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Spellcasting. The flameblin casts one of the following spells, requiring no material components and using Charisma as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 13):

At will: *dancing lights*, *light*, *minor illusion*, *prestidigitation*

Bonus Actions

Flameblin Ward (2/Day). The flameblin can target all friendly gobbos, including themselves, in the gobbo cave and imbue them with the power of the sun. The power of the sun is overwhelming for other gobbos, causing each gobbo except the flameblin to take 27 (6d8) fire damage. Each creature within 10 feet of a gobbo must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 15 (6d4) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Reactions

Big Boom Defense (3/Day). When they are hit by an attack, the flameblin protects themselves with a sudden red burst of magical force. Until the end of the flameblin's next turn, they gain a +5 bonus to AC, including against the triggering attack.

Gobbo Score Tracker

Use this area to keep track of the scoring elements of the game!

Total Enemy Creature Kills: ***Total Deaths:***

Total Friendly Gobbo Kills: ***Total Trap Activations:***

RESOURCES

DEFEND YOUR GOBBO CAVE!

https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202111/GoblinCavePrintablePDF.zip

https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202111/GoblinCave-VTT-140ppi-Grid.zip

https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202111/GoblinCave-VTT-140ppi.zip



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Scott Fitzgerald Gray (9th-level layabout, vindictive good) is a writer of fantasy and speculative fiction, a fiction editor, a story editor, and an editor and designer of roleplaying games—all of which means he finally has the job he really wanted when he was sixteen. He shares his life in the Western Canadian hinterland with a schoolteacher, two itinerant daughters, and a number of animal and spirit companions. More info on him and his work (some of it even occasionally truthful) can be found by reading between the lines at insaneangel.com.



Anthony Joyce is a Hispanic, ENnie nominated Dungeons & Dragons fifth edition designer, and an active duty U.S. Army Strategist. His notable works include *The Tenacious Bard vs. Orcus*, *Baldur's Gate: The Fall of Elturel*, *Elminster's Candlekeep Companion*, *The Blood Hunter*, *Darkhold: Secrets of the Zhentarim*, *The Monster of Wonderia*, *Weekend at Strahd's*, *The Little Astralnaut*, and more. You can find him on Twitter at @Thrawn589 or at https://anthonydreams.com

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Issue 11 ✦ December 2021

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Holy smokes. We did it. We put out 11 issues of *ARCADIA* this year, which is one issue a month, except for April, when we took some time to assess if we should keep making the magazine after three test issues (and release the illrigger class). Turns out, the answer was a resounding yes.

Not only did MCDM release 11 *ARCADIAS* (or maybe it is *ARCADIAE*), which is over 300 pages of content, we also put out a brand-new class with *The Illrigger* and the PDF of *Kingdoms & Warfare* (with the physical book coming in 2022). On top of that, we managed to put out a second new class and rules for any player character to have a companion in *The Beastheart and Monstrous Companions*. It's been a busy year!

Since it's holiday time, and we're supposed to tell the truth according to Rick Grimes in *Love Actually*,[1] I want you all to know how much the entire *ARCADIA* team appreciates you reading the magazine. Getting your messages on social media, via email, in Discord, on Reddit, and other places makes putting out this magazine worth it. There is no thrill for a creator quite like learning that someone is enjoying your content, especially if they're using it at the table.

ARCADIA 11 is also a nice year-ender for us in that it has some familiar faces. Sadie Lowry, editor of many issues and author of *ARCADIA 1*'s "Uqaviel the Recreant," is back with more celestial goodness in "Angelic Ancestries." This time players get a chance to play one of Sadie's blessed creations! Justice Ramin Arman from *ARCADIA 3*'s "The Dreamkin" also returns, this time with "Good Fences Make Good Neighbors," which is something totally different from his previous work for us. If you like buying or selling stolen goods or you just want a place to buy some firearms, this is the article for you. But we also have a new face in this issue: Rudy Basso brings you "I Cut Off Its Snout." If you're looking for a holiday brunch feast of owlbear eggs, hydra five ways, and a side of shambling mound, then we've got the article for you!

Like this issue, 2022 for *ARCADIA* will have lots of familiar creators and many new faces. If 2021 was figuring out if we could pull off *ARCADIA*, then 2022 is figuring out how far we can push it. Next year includes some of the most ambitious articles yet, including drop-in puzzles, rules for Tiny and Large characters, and a new class meant for one-player and one-GM playing published adventures meant for more than a single character. Plus even more adventures, encounters, monsters, magic items, and character options!

It has been a privilege to bring you content from some of the tabletop roleplaying game industry's best folks over the last year. Giving creators a platform to share some of their favorite ideas makes me excited to sit down at my desk every morning. You all coming to read that content is what keeps me smiling all day long. Thank you.

Ex animo,
James Introcaso
Managing Editor

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1 Seriously, what was Rick doing here? Don't hit on your monogamous married friends. Not cool. Turns out this movie doesn't hold up for a lot of reasons. *Ted Lasso* did it better.

THE CALL OF DIVINITY: ANGELIC ANCESTRIES

The divinity in your blood beckons—heaven is not found above, but within.

by Sadie Lowry

A hooded figure with old, knowing eyes speaks peace to a dying elf on a blood-drenched battlefield, their clasped hands glowing blue. A hymn resounds in deep tonal glory from an armored warrior, flooding his allies with ethereal light. Framed by her saber-blade wings, a stern woman thrusts out her hand; light-forged chains erupt from the air around her, binding a fleeing cultist to the floor.

For as long as mortals have walked the Material Plane, the great cosmos of the multiverse have weaved around each other in an eternal dance. As the energies of celestial planes infuse the Material Plane, thundering down in godly rebuke or trickling into the daily prayers of the devout, some mortals' spirits reach back and join the supernal dance—and thus, a scion is born, with divine power thrumming in their blood and purpose deep within their soul.

Purpose defines scions. As their calling roars to life in their veins, they are drawn to wartorn ruins, refuges of the persecuted, simmering rebellions, and recovering communities—places where evil must be purged and good defended. Scions receive guidance and aid from higher celestial beings. Many become emissaries of holy figures, or proclaimers of higher ideals, but ultimately each scion must interpret and define for themselves the divine power of their birthright.

This article presents four new scion character ancestries:

- **Godsong** scions, or "godsingers," sing hymnal verses to empower those around them.
- **Chthonic** scions, or "ferriers," are solemn guides, the gentle couriers from life to death.
- **Primordial** scions, or "primordials," are agents of destiny, using old magic to shape fate, time, and future.
- **Vindicator** scions, or "vindicators," are the bounty hunters of the heavens, meting out justice.

SCIONS

Called "scion," or "descendant," those born with celestial blood are heirs to divine power. These bloodlines can lie dormant, manifest anew, or pass from inheritor to inheritor. Scions can be born in any community, but their connection with the celestial planes is immediate and strong; from a young age, scions have a deep sense of purpose and self.

VISUAL MANIFESTATIONS

Scions can look like elves, dwarves, genasi, dragonborn, or beings of any lineage, reflecting their parentage as well as their divinity. Other features manifest as they age: supernaturally bright eyes, faint halos, symbols of light on their skin in runic Celestial script. Some scions manifest more otherworldly features than others (chthonic scions typically bear remarkably few), but one trait shared across every scion is their wings.

A scion's wings are both a symbol and a birthright—they only appear when the scion wields celestial power, marking the scion as an heir to divine might. They can't be used to fly (unless otherwise noted in a feature), but like an ethereal crown, the unfurling wingspan of a scion unfurling says, *"I am awakened. I am inherent. I am divine."*

PROGENITORS

With a scion's formidable inheritance of power comes purpose and duty—as well as the guidance to see it through. Each scion's Celestial progenitor keeps a close relationship with the scion throughout their life. Through visions and dreams while the scion slumbers, they receive assign-

ments, commands, guidance, comfort, and direction. Occasionally, the scion will even hear a voice or receive a visitation while awake.

Many scions are "descendents" of angelic Celestials (devas, planetars, and solars) who send these messages, while others find themselves with visions from great couatls, ki-rins, or similar divine creatures.

Scion Traits

Size

Scions have the same range of height and weight as Humanoids. Your size is Medium or Small (your choice).

Speed

Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

Darkvision

You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light and in darkness as if it were dim light. You can't discern color in darkness, only shades of gray.

Celestial Resistance

You have resistance to necrotic damage and radiant damage.

Languages

You can speak, read, and write Celestial and Common.

Godsong Scions

"I've only met a godsinger once. It was at the moment she awoke—I ain't never heard anything like it, and I might never again."

—Nilmuan Malrinn, dragonborn naval captain

There is power in music. Choruses have thrummed through celestial realms since the first sounds echoed across the great vastness of space and existence. When a mortal is born with a divine song in their blood and a connection to an empyrean chorus, they are called a godsinger.

Godsong scions are hymnal, drawn to where they can join their voice with others' voices for a higher calling. They can be found among soldiers, adventurers, rebels, refugees—wherever their song can reach, empower, embolden, and aid others, that is where they lift their voices highest, heard above the thunder of tyranny and suffering.

Thrumming Appearance

Avatars of intangible power, godsingers bear manifestations of untouchable radiance as they sing. When they manifest, their wings are made of light, glistening currents of wind, or reverberating colors. Music notes, wafting glints of light, or visible tremors in the air surround them when their voice resounds. Their power is wholly apparent in their divine appearance, just as it is in their song.

Joining the Chorus

Godsingers are not soloists. Music has bound together communities, workers, clergy, sailors, and more throughout history, and godsong scions revel in the bonds created by workers' songs, shanties, and hymns. While a godsinger may seek to find their individual song, their music is inherently communal—their holy calling is to be around people, to bolster others, to administer aid to those in need.

Godsingers who use their songs only for glory, selfish recognition, or vapid or frivolous entertainment find that their inspiration and their connections to the songs that came before them rapidly wane. They forget songs they have known since birth and struggle to write arrangements or improvise ditties as they once did. They don't lose their powers, but they lose their *artistry*. As their divine virtuosity dwindles, their Celestial progenitor reminds them that the most holy use of their voice is to uplift others as much as themselves, and returning to their calling opens the font of inspiration once more.

Awakening the Song

From birth, godsong scions display complex vocal aptitude—even their infant cries are melodious—and they innately know the choruses that Celestials have sung for millennia.

But each godsinger also has an individual song, a melody imprinted in their very soul. Some know that song intrinsically, while others spend their lives searching for their divine hymn. When a godsong scion discovers their unique song, they achieve their awakening. An awakened godsinger feels connected with their divine origins, confident in their holy calling, and certain of themselves in the vast cosmos. They know they are the universe's gentle, coaxing lullaby, its resounding rallying cry, or its sweet crooning on a warm summer's eve.

Most godsong scions awaken at a moment when they feel certain in their identity and purpose—the moment they realize, "This is who I am and why I'm here." It is an empowering experience, one that many godsingers ache for as they join the choruses of scions before them.



The Awakening

GMs with unawakened godsong scions in their campaigns should work with their players to find a moment of awakening. Such a moment could occur in combat against a personal foe, when the character achieves a long-sought goal, when they finally meet their Celestial progenitor, or any other affirming, triumphant moment. Or, the godsigner may awaken during a quiet moment—perhaps, on the verge of breaking and despair, they hear a soft melody that reminds them who they are.

At the GM's discretion, a godsong scion's awakening could provide temporary boosts to their traits. For example, Bolstering Hymn could gain a range of 60 feet instead of 30 feet for 7 days (or, if near the end of the campaign, until the end of the story). Boundless Voice could last an hour instead of 10 minutes. Tying even a small mechanical boon to the moment of awakening can greatly increase the impact of such a moment, creating catharsis and triumph.

Godsinging and Adventuring

Granted holy gifts of voice and song, and heir to the empowering songs of those who came before, godsong scions are naturally suited to roles of leadership, communication, and diplomacy, becoming battlefront paladins and inspiring bards. But many famous godsingers of legend found unconventional ways to adventure and lead others. The godsinger rogue Cora Elaina snuck into prison encampments and aided rebellions with her low, raspy songs of solidarity and hope. Owain Cogswright, the scion artificer whose warbling tenor voice echoed through his workshop and inspired a burst of innovation, is credited with advancing technology decades forward over the span of a few years.

Heavenly Music

A godsinger's music can take any form—"hymnal" and "holy" singing does not necessitate a single style of music, a single genre, or a single atmosphere. Any style of music befits a godsong scion. Godsinging is and has always been united—a chorus for anyone to join, no matter who they are and what they love. When godsingers find their niche, beautiful and impossible things come of it.

Godsong Scion Traits

Your godsong scion has the following traits.

Ability Score Increase

Your Charisma score increases by 2, and one other ability score of your choice increases by 1.

Ability Scores

While each scion ancestry provides suggested ability score increases, you are encouraged to increase one ability score of your choice by 2 and another by 1 if you wish, just as many fifth edition supplements now support.

Age

Godsong scions mature at the same rate as humans, but they can live up to 150 years.

Alignment

Like other scions, most godsingers are good. However, they can fall anywhere between the extremes of diligently lawful and rebelliously chaotic.

Virtuoso

You learn the *guidance* cantrip. In addition, you gain proficiency in the Performance skill.

Boundless Voice

As an unparalleled orator, you can use a bonus action to make your speech intelligible to any creature for 10 minutes. For the duration, creatures can magically understand you, regardless of the language you speak. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Bolstering Hymn

You are a beacon of song—those around you bask in the light of your voice and your eternal hymn. Starting at 3rd level, you can use your action to unleash the divine energy within yourself, emanating light and radiance to your allies and empowering them with your godsong. When you transform, friendly creatures within 30 feet of you that can hear you gain temporary hit points equal to your level.

Your transformation lasts for 1 minute or until you end it as a bonus action. At the start of each of your turns during this time, you can choose a friendly creature within 30 feet of you that you can see. That creature can deal extra radiant damage to one target when it deals damage to it with an attack or spell before the end of its next turn. The extra radiant damage equals your level.

Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Chthonic Scions

"Captain." The elf's voice pierces the dull roar of warfare over the hills. Metal shrieking against metal, boots pulling from the muck, a rallying call strangled with fear. If they'd just been faster—

"Captain." Her lieutenant, Cian, is more insistent. Captain Jivanna drags her eyes from the wreckage to follow his gaze.

"What? I already told you, leave them behi—"

"Look."

Cian gestures to a solitary figure that descends on the massacre of bodies and beasts. Murky wings of water fold into the figure's back as they crouch over a soldier whose breath rattles in cold resignation.

He draws a blade with bloodied hands. "Get off them! We have to take their body ba—"

Jivanna seizes his wrist, her eyes on the figure. "Leave them. They're in the hands of a ferrier now."



Chthonic scions are called to the most solemn of all tasks: easing the traversal from life to death. Found in warzones, dungeons, rebel battlefields, and at the gates of unholy necropoli, these angelic ferriers prevent undue death, defy necromantic evil, ease the suffering of the dying, and soothe the fear of what comes after.

SOLEMN FERRYMEN

Chthonic scions are subtle by nature. Theirs is no calling of glory, power, or triumph—they are often quiet presences, notable as celestial inheritors only when they display their full wingspan or in the moments before a creature's death.

A chthonic scion is an overseer of passing souls: they possess the ability to take on a visage of comfort. Their voice, frame, and face adopt features a creature finds comforting in its final moments, and return to their original form when the soul has passed. A small-town farmgirl may see an elderly, maternal figure whose voice croaks comfortingly like the village elders she knew, while a soldier or

a mercenary may find a weathered combatant easing their final moments, offering camaraderie and strength.

These ferriers' wings are not splendorous, but made of shifting materials that a dying creature finds familiar. Creatures from druidic cultures may find that their ferriers appear with wings of leaves or blossoms, while creatures from a seafaring culture may see their ferrier with wings of water or brewing storm clouds.

Soul Shepherds and Adventuring

Many chthonic scions become clerics, druids, and rangers, drawing on their connections to the planes, the natural cycles of life and death, and the healing and peace that can be administered through magic. But more than anything, successfully fulfilling your role as a ferrier requires empathy—something suited for any class. A solemn fighter knows how to protect those who have more yet to do and how to peacefully end those whose lives are over. A chronicling bard may write the stories of those they help pass on as a way to remember them. There are many ways for a ferrier to do their job respectfully and sincerely.

Notably, however, many chthonic scions are drawn to practice magic, finding a natural curiosity in studying the soul. What a soul is, where it comes from, where it goes, why it seems to be the strongest well of a person's power—these are questions magic seeks to answer. And chthonic scions have great interest in understanding the soul.

When a creature dies, the chthonic scion is one of the only beings able to physically hold the tangible manifestation of their soul and direct it forth. Many of these scions travel with adventurers, studying the souls they come across and the different mortal understandings of souls. Adventuring ferriers try to determine their place in the multiverse as one of the only beings allowed to touch a soul.

Sacred Death

Chthonic scions need only do one thing to earn the ire of their Celestial connections: defile death.

Given a solemn charge over the passage from life to afterlife, ferriers are granted an enormous amount of trust, and expected to embody kindness, empathy, and calm. They can't betray this trust without devastating consequences. Chthonic scions who turn to ruthlessness, cruel apathy, and death-tainting magics find themselves swiftly hunted by vindicator scions or other divine beings.

However, most ferriers have a deep disdain for necromancy and undeath, as it interferes with their work and defiles the dead, keeping them from finding peace.

Chthonic Scion Traits

Your chthonic scion has the following traits.

Ability Score Increase

Your Wisdom score increases by 2, and one other ability score of your choice increases by 1.

Age

Chthonic scions mature at the same rate as humans, but they can live up to 150 years.

Alignment

As silent wardens of the dying, chthonic scions prioritize respect and empathy above all else. They tend toward lawful or neutral good.

Requiem of the Fallen

When a creature with a soul dies within 60 feet of you, you can catch in its soul and keep it with you in a small container. You can't collect another soul until you finish a long rest, and you can only keep one soul this way at a time.

During a long rest, you can ritually connect with the soul, drawing on your connection with death to ask it up to three questions. Speaking with the soul does not require that you share a common language, but the soul is under no compulsion to offer a truthful answer if you are hostile to it or it recognizes you as an enemy.

You can keep the soul for as long as you want, but it will only answer three questions in total. When you make an ability check, attack roll, or saving throw, you can release this soul to gain advantage on the check.

Dying Without Dying

Some creatures don't die when reduced to 0 hit points. Fiends, for instance, return to their plane of origin when reduced to 0 hit points on the Material Plane. If a chthonic scion tries to take a soul from a devil or a demon, they may instead find that the soul vanished back to the Hells along with the creature.

Of course, in your game's world, perhaps fiends and other such creatures die permanently. Talk to your GM about the chthonic scion's Requiem of the Fallen trait and make sure you have an understanding of which creatures die when reduced to 0 hit points. If you're a GM with a chthonic scion in your group, ensure that the character gets to use this trait frequently enough to be satisfying.

Sentinel's Denial

Starting at 3rd level, you can use your action to unleash the divine energy within yourself, causing shadows to deepen and stretch about you as a chill wind stirs the air.

Your transformation lasts for 1 minute or until you end it as a bonus action. For the duration, you have a flying speed of 30 feet, and once on each of your turns, you can deal additional necrotic damage to one target when you deal damage to it with an attack or a spell. The additional necrotic damage equals your level.

In addition, once per turn when you successfully hit with an attack or a spell, one unconscious creature within 30 feet of you of your choice automatically succeeds on a death saving throw.

Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

PRIMORDIAL SCIONS

The dagger glints in the air, a silent oncoming death aimed for the young prince's spine. Before it can strike the child's back, his nursemaid snatches it out of the air, furious grey eyes snapping up to meet the gaze of the assassin.

"Miss Mawcy?" the young prince babbles—but the assassin does not look down at his target.

"Oh, Hells."

Fearful eyes locked on the nursemaid, the assassin steps back as she moves forward, the prince's toys clattering around their feet. He gags on the threat he tries to speak, hurled into the air, unseen forces dragging him from the luxurious carpet. From the dark ceiling, the whites of his terrified eyes flash.

She slams him down into the plush floor. A crushing weight descends on the assassin—unable to stand, he kneels before the nursemaid and her eerily calm expression.

He grates out hoarse words, panicked, to his allies on the balcony.

"She's a primordial! Run, she's—"

"Look away, Your Highness," the nursemaid says quietly, her hand snapping out. The assassins on the balcony are wrenched toward her, falling into a pile. The last thing they see is her form consumed in light.

Few creatures can trace their ancestry back to the dawn of time, but primordial scions are inextricably tied to the first angels. As some of the oldest worldwalkers, these angels give their scion mortals a glimpse of the grand inner workings of the universe—the eternal clockwork of time, kismet, and the unknowable energies that connect the planes. These scions become agents of fate, working to nudge the world in the direction it's supposed to go.

Wells of Deep Magic

Primordial scions are a striking example of deceptive appearances. They resemble humanoids until they tap into a deep well of power, in which their thrumming connection to the world's beginning manifests. As they swing weapons, wield magic, and bring their might to bear, their connections to fate, time, gravity, and life itself quake the air around them. Their eyes become one single color of blinding light, their veins glow, or their voice reverberates deeply. They might hover for a few moments as they command their gravitational ties, blur as they seem to move through time, or cause tremors in the ground with each confident step.

These qualities manifest as the height of a primordial scion's power and the intensity of their drive. Unfortunate foes who face a primordial as they awaken are dismayed to realize that they're confronting an ancient power made manifest.

Agents as Adventurers

Primordial scions are the great balancers of fate and time, but their methods vary immensely. For some, balance means taking a position of leadership and making decisions for those they lead that are in line with the fates and futures they see. For others, balance means a life of careful assassinations—ridding the world of liches, archmages, monsters, tyrants, and great evils that drag the world from the course it's meant to take. And for others still, balance is achieved through fortune-telling or positions of faith—guiding individual lives as they become lost and confused—while others choose defense and counteraction, taking positions of protection over people who are destined to be important.

These are but some of the ways that primordials protect the course of the world. The realms benefit from having so many invisible tacticians at play, covering so many facets and creating an infinite web of safety against encroaching darkness. Primordials who are adventurers could find their destiny in fulfilling a prophecy with their party, protecting allies with their own fateful roles, or hunting down a cosmic evil.

Cosmic Quarrels

Celestial beings attuned to fate don't foresee *false* events, but that doesn't mean they can't *interpret* the future in different ways. It's possible that a primordial scion may disagree with their divine guide in an interpretation over fate's intent, as they, too, have old magic thrumming in their veins. They may feel, think, or sense a different future meant for the world, or believe that fate has schemes at play underneath what is plainly visible.

A primordial scion's power isn't dependent on their connection with their Celestial progenitor. They can dis-

agree and even fight to help tip the world in the way they think things may fall, but they never lose their connection with the deep magic of their birthright. However, when a primordial pushes the world toward a future they desire rather than one decreed by fate, other scions act against that maverick. If a Celestial feels the fate of the world is threatened, they send a primordial scion to act in their name—or to descend on the iconoclast for a divine clash that bards will write about for centuries.

PRIMORDIAL SCIONS TRAITS

Your primordial scion has the following traits.

Ability Score Increase

Your Constitution score increases by 2, and one other ability score of your choice increases by 1.

Age

Primordial scions mature at the same rate as humans, but as some of the oldest scions to exist, they can live up to 250 years.

Alignment

As agents of fate, primordial scions work for the ultimate good of the world's course—but that can lead them to believe that the ends justify the means. They tend toward good or neutral, but their decisions can manifest as chaotic, lawful, or firmly between the two.

Manipulate Gravity

You can manipulate one of the oldest forces in the world: gravity. As a bonus action, you can cause a creature you can see within 60 feet of you to make a Strength saving throw. The DC for this saving throw equals 8 + your Constitution modifier + your proficiency bonus. On a failed save, you can move that creature up to 10 feet in any direction, including upward.

You can use this trait a number of times equal to your Constitution modifier (minimum of once). You regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

Divine Arbiter

Starting at 3rd level, you can use your action to unleash the divine energy within yourself, heightening the natural effects around you as you become an avatar of world magic itself.

Your transformation lasts for 1 minute or until you end it as a bonus action. During it, as a reaction, you can cause one creature you can see within 30 feet of you to reroll its damage dice after it makes a successful attack. The creature must use the new rolls.

Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

VINDICATOR SCIONS

"'Judicator.' That is the word they spit at us. They have snarled spittle at me as I chain them, seething, 'Blasphemous judge, lightsworn scourge.' But think on the word—vindicator. To clear someone. Prove them to be right. Advocate for them. We purge darkness and determine the truth, yes, to prove the goodness of mortalkind and champion them into the light."

—Iradeza, vindicator paladin

Those with vindicator heritage have the bloodiest charge of all: to exterminate evil. In the eternal war of goodness against corruption, vindicator scions are holy bounty hunters, inquisitives, spies, and bloodhounds for truth and justice. When they receive a target from the Celestials that guide them, they stop at nothing, overturning the world for the sake of purging wickedness.

ADORNED IN IRON

A vindicator's wings extend in metallic blades, from large feathers of bulky claymore blades down to the thinnest rapier spines, some even curving like a cutlass or a saber. No two vindicators share the same wingspan, and unlike the wings of other scions, their wings are almost always present—a declaration of intent. At the height of the vindicator's fury, these bladewings glow, much like the lightforged chains they summon to ensnare their targets. And when some Celestials would conjure a halo, a vindicator manifests a crown of iron and steel above their head.

Their silhouette is an omen—with bladed wings spread wide, a jagged crown of iron hovering above, there can be no doubt that you have incurred heaven's holy ire.

JUDGE, JURY, EXECUTIONER

A vindicator scion doesn't hunt everyday sinners and common criminals. Vindicators seek the most dangerous of targets—those who use magic to avoid capture, those who escape death and rise eternal, and those who have amassed a power like unto divinity. Often, the target's guilt is obvious when the vindicator arrives. The scion need only act as tracker, captor, and, if necessary, executioner.

Vindicators are remarkably discerning. They aren't dogs, hunting without reason. They are agents for divine justice. If guilt is not determined—if there is even a *chance* that a target is innocent—then the vindicator must stay their hand. Celestial progenitors form deep relationships with their vindicators, trust them immensely, and listen if doubt forms in the scion's mind about the target—whether or not they agree with the vindicator's opinion.



Vindicators as Adventurers

Like many scions, some vindicators find that adventuring carries out their purpose. They need not be given names to act in the name of truth and justice—enough evil is found merely by taking jobs from mortals, traveling, seeking treasure, and helping others. As long as a vindicator scion roots out evil and purges it, they fulfill their holy calling.

However, when their progenitor assigns the vindicator scion a name, that task demands their focus. A vindicator who dawdles knows the radiant ire that awaits them if they fail to answer the call.

The Call to Hunt

Once or even twice a campaign, giving a vindicator a name to hunt down while the party is entrenched in another important task can create a fantastic tension in the party. Will the group stop what they're doing to help the vindicator find their quarry? Will the vindicator risk divine retribution to delay the hunt and stay with their allies? Will the party split to accomplish both? What is the punishment if the vindicator delays? However, this is only effective on a rare and tense occasion. When used repeatedly, it becomes frustrating for the table, and the effect is lost. Use sparingly—and if in doubt, consider discussing the possibility of such an arc with the players outside of the game.

Vindicator Scions Traits

Your vindicator scion has the following traits.

Ability Score Increase

Your Strength score increases by 2, and one other ability score of your choice increases by 1.

Age

Vindicator scions mature at the same rate as humans, but they can live up to 150 years.

Alignment

Vindicator scions tend toward good, neutral, and lawful alignments. As they work closely with Celestials to enact their justice, they value fairness, discipline, boldness, and action. When they begin to justify the means of their justice, that is when evil or chaotic alignments manifest—and that may cause them to be stripped of their holy calling.

Light of the Hunter

As an action, you target a creature you can see within 60 feet of you, stabbing a golden sliver of light into its soul. The target must make a Wisdom saving throw (DC equals 8 + your Wisdom modifier + your proficiency bonus). On a failed save, the creature is marked with a hunter's beacon for 8 hours. While the creature is marked, you know its location as long as its on the same plane of existence as you. While you have this knowledge, the target can't become hidden from you, and if it's invisible, it gains no benefit from that condition against you.

You can only have one target marked in this way at a time.

Chains of the Vindicator

Starting at 3rd level, you can use your action to unleash the divine energy within yourself, imbuing yourself with the fires of justice.

Your transformation lasts for 1 minute or until you end it as a bonus action. For the duration, you gain the following benefits:

- You have a flying speed of 30 feet.
- As a bonus action, you can summon light-forged chains and hurl them at a creature within 30 feet. That creature must make a Strength saving throw (DC equals 8 + your Wisdom modifier + your proficiency bonus). On a failed save, the target is restrained until the end of your next turn.
- Once during each of your turns, you can deal additional radiant damage to one target when you deal damage to it with an attack or a spell. The additional radiant damage equals your level.

Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Using Scions

Scions' stories of souls, fate, justice, and song are rife with potential, making them fantastic NPCs as well as player characters. The following two NPCs—Ryvan, a chthonic scion, and Zindri, a vindicator scion—can be easily incorporated into any campaign.

Ryvan

Ryvan is a chthonic scion with a conundrum: something is wrong with the last soul he tried to guide.

A young half-elven man, not yet twenty years old, Ryvan has dark hair that already seems to be graying and eerily pale blue eyes. He has a solemn demeanor, only showing rare flashes of humor in wry mutters and mumbles, and his voice has a gravelly rasp to it. The hunch to his shoulders hides a decent height, and his ever-present cloak conceals most of his features—spindly arms and legs, a smattering of freckles on his shoulders, and tattoos of prayers on his arms in many languages. These sacred tattoos glow whenever he casts a spell.

Clasped to his waist by a chain, often hidden by his cloak, is a very important bottle. It contains a soul.

Ryvan hasn't yet performed a funeral rite to help the soul pass, for the wispy silvery light has a black, festering taint in the middle of it. "If I send it along now," Ryvan explains, "there's no telling if it'll end up where it's supposed to. I *can't*. Not until I...fix it." He's uncertain what *fix it* means—the young boy's solar progenitor is mysteriously silent on this front, and it's Ryvan's problem to solve. He hopes the characters, as accomplished adventurers, can help him bring the soul to peace.

The following plot hooks could be used to explore this tainted soul:

- The soul belonged to a spellcaster who died halfway to becoming a lich—their soul lingers, neither dead nor undead. Ryvan bitterly stews as they search for a way to purify it. "People would rot themselves and others just to conquer death."
- The soul was cursed by the vengeful touch of an archmage, who won't release it without recompense for an old betrayal. Ryvan is visibly shaken by the encounter. "I thought only ferriers could touch souls. Are mages learning to grip them, too?"
- The soul's owner has unfinished business. In her journals, which the characters can find, she describes how she and her daughter were separated by war years ago. Her soul won't move on until she knows the daughter is safe. Ryvan reflects quietly, "This is how I know our souls are *us*. Her heart clung to this world with all its might, even in death, until she knew."

Ryvan

Medium Humanoid (Scion), Neutral Good

Armor Class 16 (Blessing of the Ferrier)
Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Wis +7
Skills Insight +7, Persuasion +5, Religion +4
Damage Resistances necrotic, radiant
Senses passive Perception 14
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Blessing of the Ferrier. While Ryvan is wearing no armor and wielding no shield, his AC includes his Wisdom modifier.

Requiem of the Fallen (Recharges after a Long Rest). When a creature with a soul dies within 60 feet of Ryvan, he can catch its soul in a small container. He can't collect another soul until he finishes a long rest, and he can only keep one soul this way at a time. During a long rest, he can ask the soul up to three questions in total, though it is under no compulsion to offer a truthful answer if Ryvan is hostile to it or it recognizes Ryvan as an enemy.

Actions

Multiattack. Ryvan makes two attacks with his Culling Touch.

Culling Touch. *Melee Spell Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) radiant damage.

Tolling Bolt. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +7 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (4d6) radiant damage, and the next attack roll made against this target before the end of Ryvan's next turn has advantage.

Spellcasting. Ryvan casts one of the following spells, requiring no material components and using Wisdom as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 15):

At will: *guidance, light, thaumaturgy*

3/day each: *bless, hold person*

1/day each: *death ward, gentle repose, spirit guardians*

Sentinel's Denial (Recharges after a Long Rest). Ryvan transforms into a manifestation of life and death for 1 minute or until he ends it as a bonus action. During the transformation, he has a flying speed of 30 feet, and he deals 5 additional necrotic damage to targets he damages with an attack or a spell. In addition, once per turn when he successfully hits with an attack or spell while transformed, one unconscious creature of his choice within 30 feet of him automatically succeeds on a death saving throw.

Bonus Actions

Ferrier's Succor (Recharge 4–6). Ryvan or one creature of his choice within 60 feet of him regains 6 (1d4 + 4) hit points.

Incendiary Prayer. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +7 to hit, range 60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) fire damage.

Through Ryvan's Requiem of the Fallen trait, he can ask the soul up to three questions. When the characters meet him, Ryvan could have already asked the soul his questions, or he could choose three questions with input from the characters when they decide to aid him. Either way, incorporating this trait is a fantastic way to showcase Ryvan's abilities and lay the foundations for the quest.

Ryvan refuses to use his Requiem of the Fallen trait to release the soul for his own gain until after his quest is completed. When the soul has been sent on, Ryvan either goes on his way to a place of suffering or, seeing the characters' frequent encounters with death, decides to stick around a while.

ZINDRI

A vindicator scion of notable power, Zindri earned the nickname "Falchion Death" in her decade traversing the continent. Her dark hair is tightly tied back, her eyes are a warm orange-brown, and her wings are hundreds of falchion blades spanning an impressive length, burning with crimson light at her most furious. She spent most of her twenties voraciously ensnaring liches, and now, with great trust placed in her, she has a new task: hunt heavenly traitors.

Her first target is a primordial scion, Vivienne, who went rogue and assassinated a sovereign who was on the cusp of signing a peace treaty. Now two kingdoms bear teeth and sword at each other as tensions rise and anger frays the trembling armistice. Zindri received a vision of Vivienne a month ago, but she's had little success finding the primordial—aside from one brief, bloody encounter, when Vivienne left her with a scar across her cheeks and nose before absconding.

Zindri is convinced of Vivienne's guilt and recruits the characters to help her find the primordial and keep her from escaping again. But if the characters agree to help, they find that Vivienne's crime was motivated by good intentions.

The following plot hooks could be used to drive this betrayal:

- Vivienne foresaw that the sovereign would've betrayed the treaty in three years by making a dark deal with a conquering nation. For some reason, she's the only one who sees this future.
- The sovereign she assassinated was a doppelganger, and she's currently under a tight time limit to find the real sovereign before evil forces claim the throne and ruin the treaty.
- The peace treaty was a cover: the sovereign was a lich intending to gather a large army by manipulating the strength of both nations.
- Vivienne's deva has fallen, and is using the *modify memory* spell to lead the primordial scion astray.

The characters can support Zindri or Vivienne, or try to negotiate peace between the two quarreling scions.

VIVIENNE'S PRIMORDIAL TRAITS

Depending on what level you wish to introduce Vivienne, you can use the **assassin**, **archmage**, or another humanoid stat block of your choosing with these changes and additions:

- She has resistance to necrotic and radiant damage.
- She has darkvision out to 60 feet.
- She knows Celestial and Common.
- She gains the following trait:

  Manipulate Forces (3/Day). As a bonus action, Vivienne can cause a creature she can see within 60 feet of her to make a DC 14 Strength saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is moved up to 10 feet in a direction of Vivienne's choice, including upward.
- She gains the following action option:

  Divine Arbiter (1/Day). Vivienne becomes an avatar of primordial magic for 1 minute or until she ends it as a bonus action. During the transformation, she can use a reaction to cause one creature she can see within 30 feet of her to reroll its damage dice after it makes a successful attack. The creature must use the new roll.

Zindri

Medium Humanoid (Scion), Neutral Good

Armor Class 15 (studded leather)
Hit Points 91 (14d8 + 28)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +9, Con +6, Wis +9
Skills Athletics +9, Intimidation +4, Perception +9, Stealth +7
Damage Resistances necrotic, radiant
Senses Perception 19
Languages Celestial, Common
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +4

Indomitable (2/Day). Zindri can reroll a saving throw she fails. She must use the new roll.

Light of the Hunter. Zindri can mark a creature she can see within 60 feet of her. The target must make a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, it is marked for 8 hours. While the creature is marked, Zindri knows its location as long as it's on the same plane of existence. While she has this knowledge, the target can't become hidden from her, and if it is invisible, it gains no benefit from that condition against her. Zindri can only have one target marked in this way at a time.

Actions

Multiattack. Zindri makes three attacks with her greatsword or shortbow, one of which she can replace with one use of Chains of the Vindicator.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) radiant damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) radiant damage.

Chains of the Vindicator (Recharge 4–6). Zindri hurls light-forged chains at a creature within 30 feet of her. The target must make a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the target is restrained until the end of Zindri's next turn, and she deals 9 additional radiant damage whenever she deals damage to it with an attack or a spell.



GOOD FENCES MAKE GOOD NEIGHBORS

by Justice Ramin Arman

The fruits of adventuring are often unmarked: rare gemstones, shiny gear, and, of course, gold! Occasionally, however, treasure carries a degree of liability. Maybe you lifted a precious heirloom from an undead-infested tomb and it bears an unmistakable family crest, or you're the new owner of a one-of-a-kind painting originally gifted to a recently deceased tyrant. Maybe you simply have wandering fingers and need to dispose of one of the many items you, uh, "found" along the way.

A wise adventurer knows their market. When you need to get rid of a hot item, you don't saunter down to a local shopkeep, place your plunder on their counter, and hope to charm your way out of an arrest. Instead, you find a fence.

This article provides optional rules for interacting with fences, including a heat system for stolen goods and their associated complications. It also contains three unique NPC fences to use in your game.

What's a Fence?

Respected members of the criminal underground, **fences** are neutral third parties who purchase stolen goods from thieves and other unscrupulous clientele then resell the goods for a profit to buyers who can tolerate the risk.

Because their daily operations are high-risk, fences can demand hefty discounts from criminals looking to wash their hands of ill-gotten gains. Any reputable fence conceals their business behind the façade of an honest profession (also known as a front), peppering everyday transactions with under-the-table deals and copious amounts of thieves' cant. The local tailor might have an exclusive fitting room where clients can try on stolen apparel, while a coffin maker in another land smuggles illegal spirits in elaborate caskets under the nose of a theocratic despot.

Honor Among Thieves

Criminals take care of their own. When interacting with a fence, all must abide by a few unspoken rules of conduct:

- Never expose a fence.
- Never cheat a fence (but haggling is okay and even expected).
- Never harm a fence.

Fences do business with a range of criminals: ruffians, expert thieves, and high-caliber assassins with short tempers. Threatening a fence angers their extensive network of lawbreaking contacts, and those who abuse fences spend the rest of their short lives looking over their shoulders. Even law enforcement hesitates to get involved with fences, granting them a degree of immunity to avoid retaliation from local criminals.

Heat

The likelihood that an item will attract unwanted attention is known as **heat**. The more someone willing to harm the characters wants the item—usually the law or another criminal—the hotter it is.

Hot items are usually stolen or illegal. The GM can decide at any time that items in the characters' possession

give them heat, such as when a rival or antagonist wants those objects. However, hot items and their associated complications should be reserved for situations that lead to memorable stories. If you roll on the Heat Complications table every time a character pilfers a coin from an NPC's pocket or comes across 1d4 dusty art objects in an abandoned warehouse, your players may feel punished by these optional rules, rather than excited by their risk.

Stealing an item is the most direct way for an item to gain heat, but it's not the only way. Other reasons for an item to gain heat include the following:

- The item belongs to an individual of great import, such as a noble.
- A faction, deity, or powerful creature covets the item.
- The item is outlawed in the area or contains an illegal substance or material.

Heat Level

Parties who have one or more hot items have a designated **heat level**, which represents the likelihood of experiencing a complication related to the items in their possession.

Calculating Heat

To calculate a party's heat level, consult the following item characteristics, adding their relative **heat point** values (in parentheses) when applicable to the hot items in the party's possession.

Appearance (2 Points). The item is a one-of-a-kind piece or otherwise unique in appearance.

Hard to Conceal (3 Points). Whether it's big, loud, or won't stop glowing, this item isn't something you can hide easily on your person.

Magic (Varies). Sorry, pal. Those wizards want their stuff back. Add 1 point for each level of rarity above common. For example, a *belt of dwarvenkind* (a rare item) would add 2 heat points.

Notoriety (Varies). Sometimes it's not just the law on your tail. Add 2 heat points for each faction searching for the item, not counting local authorities.

Proximity (3 Points). The item's rightful owner is within a 5-mile radius. No, the demiplane in your *bag of holding* doesn't mean it's off-world.

Time (3 Points). The item was stolen within the past 48 hours.

Wanted (5 Points). A witness saw the characters shortly before or after the item went missing. They reported the characters to the local authorities.

Sticky Fingers

If the characters carry more than one hot item, their heat level is equal to the heat level of the hottest item in their possession + 2 heat points for each additional hot item they possess.

Losing or Gaining Heat

By default, the party loses all heat when they use all hot items, dispose of all hot items, or experience a **heat complication** (detailed in the following section).

In addition, at the GM's discretion, the party may lose or gain heat by disguising the item, leaving the area in which it was stolen, or evading capture long enough. Conversely, if a rogue brazenly returns to the scene of the crime, the GM may rule that such a choice increases the party's heat level.

Substituting Realism for Simplicity

These heat rules emphasize simplicity and ease of use. While it may be more realistic for an item's heat level to gradually decline after days or even weeks, tracking such inventory is tedious and rarely rewarding.

Heat Complications

If the characters have one or more hot items, roll on the Heat Complications table at the end of each long rest and add the party's heat level to the result. When a complication triggers (except the close call complication), the party's heat level is reduced to 0, and no further rolls on the table are necessary until the characters acquire another hot item.

Complications don't necessarily occur on the day they are triggered. For example, if the characters are exploring an ancient tomb, you probably don't want to shoehorn in a guard checkpoint and might save it for later. If the complication instead resulted in an assassin catching up to the party, you might have the assassin strike as the characters begin a boss fight to ramp up the tension.

Heat complications are detailed in order of urgency.

Heat Complications

d100	Complication
01–59	No complication
60–70	Close call
71–80	Checkpoint
81–90	Infamy
91–99	Agent
100+	Catastrophe

Close Call

The characters have a brush with destiny, but, whether by fate or pure luck, it looks like they might just get away with it—as long as they play it cool. Roll on the Close Call table to determine their risky encounter.

This complication doesn't reset the party's heat level. After it occurs, the party instead gains 1d6 heat points.

Close Call

d4	Close Call
1	A nosy commoner accidentally catches a glimpse of the item.
2	Two guards ask the characters to halt for an inspection, but they're called away for an emergency before the inspection can go any further.
3	A renegade flock of animals causes a character to briefly drop the item.
4	The characters catch a street urchin (noncombatant) trying to steal the item.

Checkpoint

Whether it's a group of guards set up near the city gates or a pack of gnolls laughing it up outside the dungeon, a barrier stands in the characters' way.

Assuming the item is small enough to conceal, a character can attempt to hide it from the checkpoint guardians by making an opposed Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check against the highest Wisdom (Perception) check made among the guards. On a failure, or if the characters don't attempt to conceal the item, the item is seen, and the characters can resolve the checkpoint in one of four ways:

Bribery. The characters can bribe the checkpoint guardians with an amount of gold equal to 10 x their character level—each. At the GM's discretion, the characters can bribe the checkpoint guardians with items worth the equivalent cost.

Beating. The characters take a beating or otherwise tussle with the checkpoint guardians to progress. Each character gains one level of exhaustion. This is in lieu of a formal combat encounter; no initiative rolls are necessary.

Combat. The characters battle the checkpoint guardians.

Confiscation. The characters surrender all their hot items and pay a modest fine of 10 gp per item confiscated.

Infamy

A local baron, mayor, or other prominent leader puts out a call for the item, decrying it as an act of thievery if appropriate. Law enforcement distributes person-of-interest notices that bear an eerie resemblance to the characters.

For the next week, or until the characters dispose of their hot items, they have disadvantage on Charisma checks made to influence citizens of the area. Depending on your campaign, this area could be a village, a city district, or an entire kingdom.

At the GM's discretion, if the characters fail three or more Charisma checks during the week, a group of guards questions them about the notices and item.

Agent

An agent pursuing the item catches up with the characters. They might work for the item's owner or a faction that wants it. Roll on the Agent table to determine the agent that comes looking for the item.

Agent

d4	Agent
1	A hard-headed enforcer (such as a **berserker** or a **hill giant**) ordered to beat the item out of the characters
2	A **spy** intending to report the characters' location back to their employer
3	An **assassin** prepared to pry the item from the party's cold, dead fingers
4	The item's owner or rightful inheritor

Catastrophe

Some items are more important than they appear, coveted by powerful beings across the multiverse. Roll on the Catastrophe table to determine the creature that comes looking for the item.

Catastrophe

d6	Catastrophe
1	An **efreeti** believing the item rightfully belongs in its palace
2	A **roc** soaring overhead to snatch the item for its nest
3	An **adult red dragon** desiring the item for its treasure hoard
4	A **planetar** tasked with obtaining the item on behalf of their god
5	A **pit fiend** repossessing the item as collateral for a broken infernal contract
6	A **lich** intending to use the item as a vessel for souls

Adding Context to Catastrophes

The Catastrophe table presents epic consequences to seemingly innocuous actions. While it's easy to imagine why a lich would be interested in a powerful artifact, it may be more difficult to determine a cosmic being's desire for seemingly mundane objects. To justify these arrivals, consider adding secret histories to hot items. The rogue's newly acquired dagger can be used in an unholy ritual. A gem-encrusted crown once adorned the head of a righteous and beloved monarch. The stained final page of a pilfered spellbook contains the first letter of an archmage's true name.

Hot Items and Fences

At some point in their thieving career, a character is bound to do business with a fence. Whether they're pawning off an item that's a little too hot or looking to buy something illegal, transactions with fences have strings attached.

Buying from a Fence

Haggling notwithstanding, fences are generally willing to sell a hot item at a percentage discount equal to twice the item's heat level. A fence selling a *potion of healing* (valued at 50 gp) with a heat value of 5 will let you take it off their hands for 10 percent off, or 45 gp.

Selling to a Fence

When washing your hands of a hot item, the fence discounts the item even more steeply, dropping the price by a percentage equal to three times the item's heat level. For example, if you're selling a stolen suit of splint armor (valued at 200 gp) with a heat value of 10, the fence won't offer more than 140 gp. Earning a not-so-honest living is hard work.

Three Fences

This section details three NPC fences for use in your game. In addition to their background, game statistics, and roleplay information, each entry includes a sample inventory and a special service.

A fence's **inventory** contains items available for sale to the characters at any given time, assuming the characters can be trusted. These lists are not exhaustive. Add, substitute, or remove items as necessary. Similarly, the prices are suggestions; you may find them too high or too low for your world's fictional economy. At your discretion, a fence's inventory may contain one or more items with a starting heat value of 5, giving them a discount of 10 percent (see "Buying from a Fence"). Alternatively, you can roll 2d4 to determine the starting heat value of any item.

To simplify the availability of magic items, assume that the maximum stock of any given consumable magic item (such as a potion) a fence has in stock is equal to the inquiring character's proficiency bonus, while the default stock of any permanent magic item (such as a magic weapon) is one. How long it takes a fence to replenish their inventory depends on the pacing of your campaign, but 1–2 weeks is a good baseline for adventures without long stretches of downtime.

Each fence also has a **special service** they can offer the characters. These services help make each fence and their fronts feel distinct.

Darien Ashbrow

Elegant, bright, and charming, Darien Ashbrow is the son of Cas Ashbrow, a dwarf military general of modest renown. Since his father's passing, Darien has transformed Cas's extensive curio collection into a thriving antique store. Ashbrow's Oddities draws the attention of museum archivists, historians, and rich nobles seeking conversation pieces for their showrooms.

Darien makes a point to never publicly reveal the full contents of his father's collection, vexing entitled fat cats who yearn for never-before-seen pieces at Darien's private auctions. Truthfully, the Ashbrow family treasure is more myth than material, a meager stock of clan weapons, baubles, and other heirlooms Darien mostly sold off decades ago in pursuit of his business. However, the mystery allows the mustachioed dwarf to shroud his crimes, touting burgled goods as exclusive pieces to eager, unwitting buyers.

Normally a dwarf of few words, Darien lights up at opportunities for show and tell, especially those related to weapons, armor, or the history of warfare.

Darien uses the **veteran** stat block with the following changes:

- His walking speed is 25 feet.
- He has advantage on saving throws against poison and resistance to poison damage.
- He has darkvision out to a range of 60 feet.

Personality Trait. "I offer unprompted, verbose musings on the history of my antiques."

Ideal. "All is fair in love and war."

Bond. "I have borrowed from my ancestors to build a treasure of my own. My legacy must be monumental."

Flaw. "I sometimes embellish my wares with white lies to increase their value."

Inventory

Following in the steps of his father, Darien has amassed a collection of his own. He can sell the characters any non-magical armor, shield, or weapon at normal cost. At the GM's discretion, he may be willing to sell some of these items at a discount if they have heat.

Darien also has several magic items available for sale, as outlined in the Ashbrow's Arms and Armor table.

Ashbrow's Arms and Armor

Item	Price
Adamantine armor	500 gp
Mithral armor	750 gp
Flame tongue	5,000 gp
Wand of the war mage, +1	1,000 gp
Weapon, +1	1,000 gp

Special Service: Firearms

Darien's interest in all things warfare exposed him to black powder. A rarity among criminals of any caliber, Ashbrow's Oddities carries a secret stash of firearms and black powder weapons.

At the GM's discretion, Darien has the firearms listed in the Firearms table available for sale, all of which are martial ranged weapons.

Ammunition. Bullets and black powder are sold packaged together (10 rounds for 2 gp).

Blunderbuss. The blunderbuss uses three bullets instead of one and targets all creatures in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a Dexterity saving throw, the DC of which is equal to 8 + your Dexterity modifier + your proficiency bonus. A creature takes 2d4 piercing damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Pistol. At the GM's discretion, characters with the Two-Weapon Fighting fighting style can wield a pair of these one-handed ranged weapons simultaneously. When you take the Attack action while wielding two pistols and attack with a pistol you hold in one hand, you can use a bonus action to attack with the pistol you hold in the other hand.

Reload. A weapon with the reload property can be fired a number of times equal to its reload score before you must spend an action or a bonus action to reload it.

Powder Kegs. Darien also discreetly offers powder kegs. When a barrel takes fire damage, it explodes in a 30-foot-radius sphere. Creatures in the area must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 35 (10d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.



Firearms

Weapon	Cost	Damage	Weight	Properties
Pistol	200 gp	1d8 piercing	5lb.	Ammunition (range 30/90), reload (6 shots)
Blunderbuss	300 gp	2d4 piercing	8 lb.	Ammunition (special), reload (1 shot), two-handed
Rifle	400 gp	2d6 piercing	10 lb.	Ammunition (range 60/180), reload (4 shots), two-handed
Powder keg (barrel)	500 gp	Special	100 lb.	Special

Madame Wheatwood

On the surface, Adelaide Wheatwood looks like any other sweet old human lady with one too many cats. She's warm and charming, gracing visitors with homemade confections and her doll-like, joyful countenance.

Unless you're a thief.

Behind her delicate ruse, Madame Wheatwood is a 65-year-old badass: a dauntless world-class animal trainer with the voice of a chain-smoker. In her heyday, Madame Wheatwood was an elite cavalrywoman who could tame any beast for battle, but her devil-may-care attitude and blatant disregard for orders made her a liability for the regiments she served. Unemployed and out of options, a young Addy Wheatwood leveraged her talents outside the bounds of the law. It turned out to be quite lucrative.

In addition to her duties as a fence, Madame Wheatwood runs Rock Bottom Ranch: an underground operation for breeding, training, and trading unusual and monstrous mounts. She even offers riding lessons to those who can stomach her ruthless training regimen.

Madame Wheatwood uses the **bandit captain** stat block and never leaves home without a *spell scroll* of *feather fall.*

Personality Trait. "Animals welcome. People tolerated."

Ideal. "I always help an animal in need."

Bond. "Rock Bottom Ranch is my home and the only place I can be myself."

Flaw. "Some call it tough love. I call it little patience for weakness."

Inventory

Madame Wheatwood can provide the characters with virtually any piece of equipment related to mounted combat, such as saddles, barding, or lances. She sells them at normal cost but advertises them as "rock-bottom prices." At the GM's discretion, she may be willing to sell some of these items at a discount if they have heat.

Madame Wheatwood also sells a selection of magic items useful in mounted combat, as outlined in the Wheatwood's Wonders table.

Wheatwood's Wonders

Item	Price
Horseshoes of speed	3,500 gp
Potion of animal friendship	125 gp
Potion of water breathing	250 gp
Horseshoes of a zephyr	5,000 gp
Spell scroll of feather fall	50 gp



Special Service: Mounts

Business booms at Rock Bottom Ranch. In addition to the mounts available for purchase in the core rules, Madame Wheatwood offers a selection of exotic mounts to trusted clients. She has a strict "You break it, you buy it" policy for adventurers who rent her mounts for dangerous missions.

See the Rock Bottom Mounts table for available mounts and prices. Availability fluctuates at the GM's discretion.

Rock Bottom Mounts

Mount	CR	Rental Price (Per Day)	Purchase Price
Axe beak	1/4	30 gp	300 gp
Giant bat	1/4	75 gp	750 gp
Giant lizard	1/4	50 gp	500 gp
Giant owl	1/4	125 gp	1,250 gp
Giant toad*	1	100 gp	1,000 gp
Hippogriff*	1	250 gp	2,500 gp
Nightmare*	3	750 gp	7,500 gp
Owlbear*	3	300 gp	3,000 gp
Pegasus	2	500 gp	5,000 gp
Rhinoceros	2	200 gp	2,000 gp

*Expanded rules for controlling this and other mounts can be found in Jumping on Mounted Combat (*ARCADIA* 1) and Swimming Through Sand and Speed: More Mounted Adventuring (*ARCADIA* 4) by Willy Abeel.

SAMHOP PUCKERBELT

The bubbly gnome proprietor of Samhop's Sours has satiated sweet-toothed customers for nearly a century. While Samhop carries more traditional treats—cakes, shortbreads, and other run-of-the-mill pastries—they're known for colorful confections so sour they turn your face inside out. And when you need something with an even stronger punch, Samhop has you covered.

Samhop is a skilled poisoner. Early in life, the one-foot-tall gnome learned how to compensate for their small stature, refusing to bow to bullies with spare weight to swing around. Every candymaker is, at heart, a bit of a scientist, and Samhop is no exception. Synthesizing a deadly poison is surprisingly similar to cooking a batch of candy. There's lots of boiling and extracting, and you must be careful not to burn it. Just don't taste it at the end. Someone else does that.

Personality Trait. "I'm always experimenting with new recipes. Here, try this one!"

Ideal. "The bigger they are, the harder they fall."

Bond. "I look out for the underdogs."

Flaw. "I hold grudges against those who make light of my stature."

Samhop Puckerbelt

Tiny Humanoid (Gnome), Chaotic Neutral

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 27 (11d4)
Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Skills Deception +5, Insight +4, Investigation +5, Perception +6, Persuasion +5, Sleight of Hand +4, Stealth +4
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Common, Gnomish
Challenge 1 (200 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Candy (3/Day). Samhop carries three magic candies, which they can eat or give to another creature. A creature that uses an action to consume a candy regains 1d4 hit points and has advantage on the next ability check it makes within the next hour. The candies lose their magic at dawn each day, and Samhop creates three new candies.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Samhop deals an extra 7 (2d6) damage when they hit a target with a weapon attack and have advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of Samhop that isn't incapacitated and Samhop doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Actions

Multiattack. Samhop makes two melee attacks.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage and 3 (1d6) poison damage.

Hand Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage and 3 (1d6) poison damage.

Bonus Actions

Cunning Action. Samhop takes the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Inventory

Samhop has many delightful potions available for sale, as outlined in the Puckerbelt's Potions table. Each elixir is also available as candy, for those that desire a chewable arcane experience. At the GM's discretion, Samhop may be willing to sell some of these items at a discount if they have heat.

Puckerbelt's Potions

Item	Price
Potion of diminution	300 gp
Potion of fire breath	150 gp
Potion of gaseous form	500 gp
Potion of healing	50 gp
Potion of resistance	250 gp

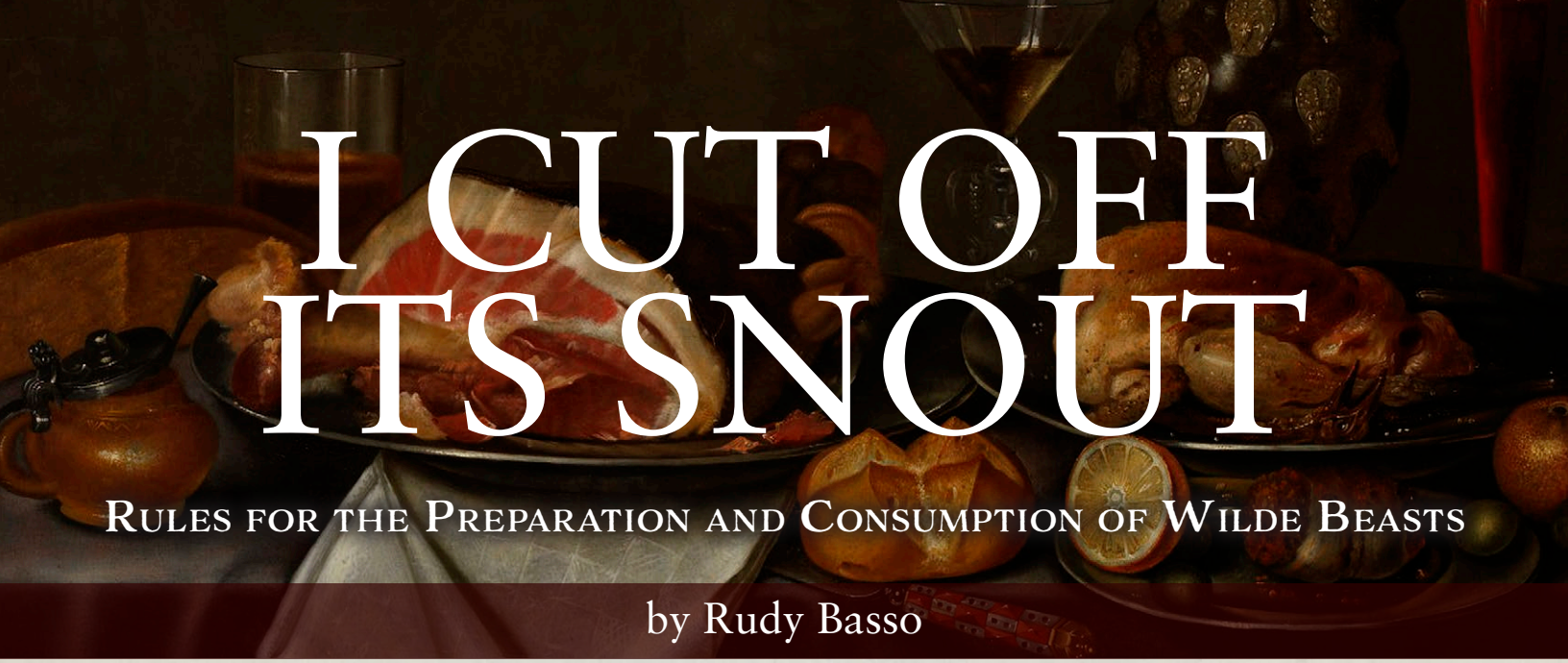
Special Service: Poisons

Samhop sells the poisons in the core rules at normal cost. For an additional 1 gp, they can inject any ingestible poison into a whimsical candy mold, such as a gummy owlbear filled with truth serum or a deadly torpor truffle.

Samhop also has a poison of their own design: ghostfinger extract. One dose costs 300 gp.

Ghostfinger Extract (Ingested). A creature subjected to this poison must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 hour. While poisoned in this way, the target can't cast spells with somatic components, and any weapons or items they wield are treated as if they had the two-handed property.





I CUT OFF ITS SNOUT

Rules for the Preparation and Consumption of Wilde Beasts

by Rudy Basso

I mean, we already killed it. Why don't we just eat it, too?

–Gorax the Hungry

From the most diminutive halfling to the most hulking goliath, every adventurer needs to eat something before they can fight a dragon or delve into a dungeon. This necessary aspect of life is often overlooked in our games, which is unfortunate—some of the most vivid and striking moments in fantasy media revolve around food. As any food enthusiast can tell you, there is a magic to sharing or preparing a meal with friends.

This article's culinary rules reflect that magic by granting abilities and bonuses through homemade meals and unique delicacies. The gourmands in your gaming group will feel right at home collecting ingredients, reviewing recipe lists, and detailing exactly how to make the perfect bite.

Harvesting and Cooking

Culinary rules introduce two new skills: **Harvesting** and **Cooking**. A character can gain proficiency in either of these skills during character creation in place of another skill proficiency gained through a background or class.

> **Dexterity (Harvesting)** is the act of collecting usable ingredients, either from the earth or from a dead creature. The DC for harvesting usable ingredients from a dead creature is 10 + the creature's challenge rating.

The DC can be adjusted at the GM's discretion, taking into account the frailty of the ingredient, the complexity of the creature's anatomy, and the setting (butchering in a freezing wasteland is more difficult than in a temperate grotto).

A Dexterity (Harvesting) check determines the number of harvested portions, which refers to the amount of an ingredient needed to contribute to a recipe, not an individual serving for a creature. A successful Harvesting check yields one portion. If the check succeeds by 5 or more, it yields two portions. If the d20 roll for a check is 20 and the check succeeds, it yields four portions.

Larger creatures also yield more portions. A Large creature multiplies the portions harvested by two, a Huge creature by four, and a Gargantuan creature by eight. For example, if a Huge creature's Harvesting DC is 14 and the result of the Dexterity (Harvesting) check is 19, the harvest yields eight portions.

A character attempting to harvest a dead creature must use a knife, or the check is made with disadvantage. Harvesting plants does not require any special equipment.

> **Wisdom (Cooking)** is the act of preparing, seasoning, and sautéing, baking, stewing, or otherwise turning harvested ingredients into food. Each recipe has its own DC for the Wisdom (Cooking) check required to make it based on its complexity.

A successful Wisdom (Cooking) check grants a benefit to creatures who eat the prepared food. If the check succeeds by 5 or more, the recipe is *delicious,* granting an alternate benefit a creature may choose instead. If the d20 roll for the check is 20 and the check succeeds, the recipe is *extra delicious,* granting both previous benefits or a third alternative (as noted in the recipe).

Unless otherwise noted in a recipe's description, recipes must be eaten immediately after cooking to impart any benefits. All the recipes in this article make enough to feed up to six hungry adventurers.

A character attempting to cook a recipe must use cook's utensils, or the ability check is made with disadvantage. If you're using the Cooking skill in your game, it can replace the tool proficiency with cook's utensils, and a character who would gain proficiency with cook's utensils from a background or other source can choose a different tool proficiency or proficiency in the Cooking skill.

If an ability check that uses Cooking or Harvesting fails, the ingredients are discarded or ruined. Another attempt cannot be made with the same ingredients. You can't unburn food or rebutcher an animal, so give yourself every advantage you can before attempting a meal!

Variant Rules: Hot and Fast

Cooking and Harvesting are a fantastic way to add an extra layer of depth to a food-focused campaign, but if you don't want to add new skills, use Wisdom (Survival) checks instead of Harvesting and Dexterity checks using cook's utensils instead of Cooking. All harvesting and recipe DCs remain the same. A campaign that isn't focused on cooking but uses these rules can also ignore the shelf life of ingredients to give the characters fewer numbers to track.

Variant Rule: Culinary Student

Most adventurers are home cooks. They use memory, improvisation, and trial and error to prepare dishes. If a character wishes to have culinary education in their background, they can use Intelligence instead of Wisdom for any ability checks made to cook a recipe.

Perfection Takes Time

Unless otherwise noted, cooking a recipe or harvesting an ingredient requires 1 hour of uninterrupted work, which can coincide with a short or long rest. During this time, other creatures can help with cooking or harvesting, recover hit points, or hover annoyingly over the cook's shoulder. A creature attempting cooking or harvesting (and any creature assisting them) can't rest during this time. Characters should always be encouraged to roleplay when others cook or harvest!



SIGNATURE DISH!

Any character proficient in the Cooking skill can choose one recipe as their personal specialty. Whenever a character makes their signature dish, they can treat a d20 roll of 9 or lower as a 10. They can change their signature dish with the GM's permission.

PANTRY STAPLES

While living off the land is always a viable option for any well-traveled adventurer, filling your pack with pantry staples before undertaking a major excursion is a smart move. The ingredients on the Food Staples table below are the backbone of many recipes and can be purchased in any town or city market (but can rarely be resold, as few people are interested in purchasing them from adventurers). Each entry in the table is enough for one portion, or the amount needed to contribute to a recipe.

The pantry staples are broken down by category, but the GM (or the players) should specify the exact item offered based on the region, culture, or climate (for example, in the Kingdom of the Giant Bee People, honey is the available sweetener for purchase).

SHELF LIFE

Ingredients that aren't cooked before they meet their shelf life become spoiled. Shelf life begins immediately when an ingredient is purchased or harvested by a character. An ingredient's shelf life is either short, medium, or long. Ingredients with a short shelf life last for one week, ingredients with a medium shelf life for one month, and ingredients with a long shelf life for four months.

Water is always accessible unless the party is in specific environments, such as a desert or a dungeon in the depths of a castle. If water is unavailable, the DC of a Wisdom (Cooking) check increases by 4.

UNIQUE INGREDIENTS

Anything harvested from a fictional creature or plant is considered a unique ingredient. These are sold only by rare specialty dealers. The price per portion of unique ingredients is a number of gold pieces equal to the creature's challenge rating (minimum 1) times 10. These dealers may

FOOD STAPLES

Ingredient	Market Cost	Harvesting DC	Weight	Shelf Life	Notes
Beans	5 cp	8	2 lb.	Long	–
Broth	8 sp	+	2 lb.	Medium	From domesticated animal meat or vegetables
Cheese	6 sp	+	3 lb.	Medium	–
Eggs	2 sp	No check needed	3 lb.	Short	From any domesticated bird
Fats	5 sp	+	2 lb.	Medium	Butter, olive or vegetable oil, or rendered animal fat
Fish*	3 gp	10	5 lb.	Short	Tuna, trout, squid, salmon, crabs, scallops, etc.
Flour	5 cp	12	2 lb.	Long	–
Fruits or vegetables*	5 sp	No check needed	4 lb.	Medium	–
Herbs and spices	1 gp	12	½ lb.	Long	Salt, pepper, dried herbs, etc.
Meat*	2 gp	10	5 lb.	Short	Pig, beef, deer, rabbit, goat, bison, sheep, etc.
Grain	2 cp	8	2 lb.	Long	Barley, rice, wheat, etc.
Poultry*	1 gp	10	5 lb.	Short	Chicken, turkey, duck, quail, pheasant, etc.
Sweetener	7 sp	8	½ lb.	Long	Sugar, honey, agave, etc.

*Can be converted to broth (x4) or fats (x2) with a successful DC 8 Wisdom (Cooking) check.
+Cannot be harvested in the wild.

be interested in purchasing unique ingredients from characters at half the retail price, but not until trust has been established with rigorous vetting. Plant prices are determined by the GM.

The shelf life of all unique ingredients is 4d6 days due to the inherent magic or other rare properties imbued in them.

Spoiled Ingredients

Very talented cooks can revitalize ingredients long past their shelf life. A creature can attempt to cook a dish with one or more spoiled ingredients, but the DC to make the dish is doubled for every spoiled ingredient used. Recipes made with spoiled ingredients can't be extra delicious.

Alternatively, throw out any spoiled food because yuck.

Slow Down There, Buddy

Unless they have the Extra Hungry feat (see page 31), a creature can only utilize the benefit of one recipe at a time and can only use one benefit per long rest. If a creature has an unused benefit when it consumes a second recipe, it can replace the previous benefit with the new benefit. Unless stated otherwise, a benefit can only be used once and is lost after finishing a long rest.

Simple Recipes

These recipes are the fare of the undiscerning palette: hearty, rustic, nostalgic. Easily prepared in the field, they use only pantry staples and are meant to fill the stomach. Unless stated otherwise (like jerky), recipes cannot be stored as leftovers.

Cauldron Bread with Honey Butter

There's no better way to break a fast.

Bread
1 portion flour
1 portion fat

Honey Butter
1 portion fat
1 portion sweetener

Cooking DC: 10
Success: You can stand up from prone without spending any movement.
Delicious: You can use a bonus action to take the Disengage action.
Extra Delicious: You can use both of the above benefits.

Fish Pie

I'll take fish pie over apple pie any day of the week.

Pie Crust
1 portion flour
1 portion eggs
1 portion fat

Pie Filling
1 portion fish
1 portion vegetables
1 portion herbs and spices
1 portion broth

Cooking DC: 14
Success: You have advantage on a Strength or Dexterity ability check made while submerged in water.
Delicious: You can use a bonus action to gain a swim speed equal to twice your walking speed for 1 minute.
Extra Delicious: You can use both of the above benefits.

Jerky

For the busy adventurer on the go.

1 portion chicken, fish, or meat
1 portion herbs and spices

Cooking DC: 8
Success: You gain one additional Hit Die you can use to regain hit points during a short rest.
Delicious: You have advantage on a Constitution saving throw.
Extra Delicious: You can use both of the above benefits.
Note: After a successful Wisdom (Cooking) check, jerky takes 1d6 days to dry before it can be eaten. It makes six strips that each have a shelf life of 1d6 weeks and take an action to eat.

Pease Porridge

Stick-to-your-ribs goodness.

1 portion beans
1 portion herbs and spices
1 portion broth

Cooking DC: 8
Success: You can use a bonus action to take the Dash action.
Delicious: You can use a bonus action to take the Dash action. You can use this benefit twice before it disappears.
Extra Delicious: Until you finish a long rest, your movement speed increases by 15 feet.



A Perfect Roast

Any bonehead can throw a deer on a spit and burn it over a fire, but making meat taste good *can be deceptively difficult.*

1 portion meat
1 portion herbs and spices

Cooking DC: 15
Success: You gain advantage on a Strength ability check.
Delicious: You gain 5 temporary hit points.
Extra Delicious: You can use both of the above benefits.

Stuffed Bird

Nothing reminds you of home and hearth better than this classic dish.

Roasted Bird
1 portion poultry
1 portion herbs and spices

Stuffing
1 portion grains
1 portion vegetables
1 portion herbs and spices
1 portion broth

Cooking DC: 12
Success: You can finish a short rest in a half hour instead of an hour.
Delicious: As a bonus action, you can spend 1 Hit Die and roll it to regain a number of hit points equal to the roll + your Constitution modifier.
Extra Delicious: You gain the benefits of finishing a long rest when you finish a short rest.

Creating Simple Recipes

A simple recipe uses only pantry staple ingredients and shouldn't have a Cooking DC over 15. Simple recipes fortify a character's physical prowess; they should never grant magical abilities. For recipe inspiration, look to food served at renaissance faires, medieval cookbooks, or even diner menus.

SPECIAL RECIPES

These rare recipes, which require great skill to prepare, can only be made by adventurers with proficiency in Cooking (or, in games not using the new skill, proficiency with cook's utensils). They don't just sate hunger, they impress and increase morale. In addition to using multiple pantry staples, each recipe contains at least one unique ingredient.

BASILISK BURGERS

You ever see how much those things sleep? Perfect fat-to-meat ratio for burgers.

Bun
- 1 portion flour
- 1 portion fat

Burger "Batty"
- 1 portion basilisk meat
- 1 portion cheese
- 1 portion herbs and spices

Cooking DC: 14

Success: Until you finish a long rest, you can't be knocked prone.

Delicious: You can use a bonus action to make an unarmed strike with your teeth. On a hit, the target takes 2d6 piercing damage and an additional 2d6 poison damage.

Extra Delicious: You can use an action to force one creature that can see you to make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature magically begins to turn to stone and is restrained. It must repeat the saving throw at the end of its next turn. On a success, the effect ends. On a failure, the creature is petrified until freed by the *greater restoration* spell or other magic.

BIG WILD CHARCUTERIE BOARD

Jerky, but fancy-like.

Accoutrements
- 1 portion cheese
- 1 portion vegetables

Crackers
- 1 portion flour
- 1 portion fat

Cured Meats
- 3 portions meat, each harvested from a different giant animal

Honey
- 1 portion sweetener

Cooking DC: 10

Success: As an action, you move at least 20 feet straight toward a target and then make a melee attack against the target. If the attack hits, the target takes an extra 2d6 damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Delicious: You can take an additional Attack action on your turn.

Extra Delicious: Until you finish a long rest, you have advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of your allies who has also eaten an extra delicious Big Wild Charcuterie Board is within 5 feet of the creature and isn't incapacitated.

BULETTE BANGERS AND MASH

This landshark is swimming in a sea of mash and gravy.

Bulette Sausage
- 1 portion bulette meat
- 1 portion grains
- 1 portion herbs and spices

Mash
- 1 portion vegetables

Gravy
- 1 portion flour
- 1 portion fat
- 1 portion broth

Cooking DC: 16

Success: You gain darkvision out to a range of 60 feet and tremorsense out to a range of 60 feet for 4 hours.

Delicious: You can use a bonus action to long jump up to 30 feet or high jump up to 15 feet, with or without a running start.

Extra Delicious: You can use both of the above benefits. Additionally, you can use an action to leap up to 30 feet. If you land in another creature's space, that creature must succeed on a DC 16 Strength or Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone and take 3d10 bludgeoning damage. On a successful save, the creature takes only half the damage, isn't knocked prone, and is pushed 5 feet out of your space into an unoccupied space of the creature's choice.

CHIMERA CARPACCIO

Three tastes in one animal … what's not to like?

- 3 portions chimera meat
- 1 portion fat
- 1 portion herbs and spices

Cooking DC: 12

Success: You can use a bonus action to make an unarmed strike with your forehead, dealing 1d12 bludgeoning damage on a hit.

Delicious: You can use a bonus action to make an unarmed strike with your teeth, dealing 2d6 piercing damage and 3d6 fire damage on a hit.

Extra Delicious: You can use an action to exhale fire in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 7d8 fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Note: Each of the chimera's three heads yields a portion of meat. Each portion requires a separate Dexterity (Harvesting) check.

CHUUL BOIL

It's not a true beach party until someone breaks out the chuul claws.

Boiled Chuul Claws
2 portions chuul meat
2 portions herbs and spices

Sausage
1 portion meat
1 portion herbs and spices

Veggies
1 portion vegetables

Cooking DC: 14
Success: Until you finish a long rest, you can cast the *detect magic* spell at will.
Delicious: Until you finish a long rest, you can breathe air and water.
Extra Delicious: Until you finish a long rest, you are immune to poison damage and can't be poisoned.

DINO BBQ

Why have a regular BBQ when you can have a dinocue?

Barbecue
3 portions meat, each harvested from a different type of dinosaur

Barbecue Sauce
1 portion vegetables
1 portion herbs and spices
1 portion sweetener

Cooking DC: 14
Success: If you move at least 15 feet straight toward a creature and then hit it with a melee weapon attack on the same turn, the target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, you can make another melee weapon attack against it as a bonus action.
Delicious: You can use a bonus action to let forth a magnificent roar. Each enemy within 60 feet of you that can hear you must succeed a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened of you for 1 minute. A frightened creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the frightened condition on itself on a success.
Extra Delicious: You can use both of the above benefits. In addition, until you finish a long rest, you gain a +1 bonus to your AC.
Note: Good BBQ takes time. This recipe requires 8 hours of uninterrupted work during which the cook can't rest.

GOOSSERT

I imagine they eat these desserts in Hell.

Black Pudding Pudding
1 portion black pudding ooze
1 portion sweetener

Gelatinous Cube Gelatin
1 portion gelatinous cube ooze
1 portion sweetener

Sugared Ochre Jelly
1 portion ochre jelly ooze
1 portion sweetener

Cooking DC: 16
Success: For 1 minute, you can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check. No action is required to activate this benefit.
Delicious: Your sweat becomes acidic for 1 minute. For the duration, a creature that touches you or hits you with a melee attack while within 5 feet of you takes 1d10 acid damage. No action is required to activate this benefit.
Extra Delicious: As a bonus action, you can make yourself dangerously acidic. When you successfully grapple another creature within the next minute, the grappled creature takes 3d6 acid damage. As long as it remains grappled by you, the grappled creature takes 6d6 acid damage at the start of your turn.

HYDRA 5 WAYS

Or 6, 7, or 8 ways, depending on how quickly you kill it.

Braised Hydra
1 portion hydra meat
1 portion herbs and spices
1 portion broth

Fondued Hydra
1 portion hydra meat
2 portions cheese

Hydra Salad
1 portion hydra meat
1 portion vegetables

Raw Hydra on Crostinis
1 portion flour
1 portion fat
1 portion hydra meat

Seared Hydra
1 portion hydra meat
1 portion herbs and spices
1 portion fat

Cooking DC: 18
Success: You gain an extra reaction this round that can only be used to make an opportunity attack.
Delicious: Until your next long rest, you grow two new limbs every time one is lost. Each new leg (to a maximum of six legs total) adds 5 feet to your walking speed. Each new arm (to a maximum of six arms total) gives you a +1 bonus to Strength (Athletics) checks. After the effect ends, the extra limbs remain but no longer work, giving you disadvantage on all Strength- and Dexterity-based ability checks, attack rolls, and saving throws

and no benefits. You can remove an extra limb without harm to yourself with a bladed weapon and a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check. On a failed check, you remove the limb but also lose 1d10 hit points.

Extra Delicious: You can use a bonus action to make as many weapon attacks as you have limbs. Each attack must use a separate limb, and if there is no weapon wielded by a limb, you can use that limb to make an unarmed strike.

Note: Each of the hydra's heads yields a portion of meat. Each portion requires a separate Dexterity (Harvesting) check.

Mimic Tongue Chowder

No, it doesn't just taste like wood. It's grosser.

1 portion mimic tongue
1 portion vegetables
1 portion flour
2 portions broth

Cooking DC: 16

Success: You can use an action to polymorph into a creature of the same size. You retain your statistics, and any equipment you wear or carry isn't transformed.

Delicious: You can use an action to polymorph into a creature of the same size. You retain your statistics, and any equipment you wear or carry isn't transformed. You can use this benefit twice before it disappears.

Extra Delicious: You can use an action to polymorph into a creature the same or within one size category of your own. Other than your size, you retain your statistics, and any equipment you wear or carry isn't transformed.

Note: Mimic tongue must be harvested from a living mimic, as the monstrosity reverts to its amorphous goo form when destroyed.

Owlbear Omelette

Owlbear meat is surprisingly delicate for such a ferocious and, ah, durable animal.

Owlbear Steak Omelette
2 portions owlbear eggs
1 portion owlbear meat
1 portion fat
1 portion cheese

Toast
1 portion flour
1 portion fat

Cooking DC: 15

Success: Until you finish a long rest, you have advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight or smell.

Delicious: You gain 10 temporary hit points.

Extra Delicious: You can use both of the above benefits.

Seared Shambling Mound Salad

Hot salad sounds wild, but it works.

Dressing
1 portion fat
1 portion herbs and spices

Shambling Mound Salad
2 portions vegetables
1 portion shambling mound mix

Cooking DC: 16

Success: You gain resistance to lightning damage until you finish a long rest.

Delicious: Until you finish a long rest, you regain 2d4 + 2 hit points when you consume a potion, in addition to the potion's other effects.

Extra Delicious: When you are reduced to 0 hit points, you can choose to instead be reduced to 1 hit point.

Sky and Earth Stir Fry

Old foes make great friends when cooked together.

1 portion ankheg meat
1 portion griffon meat
2 portions herbs and spices
2 portions vegetables

Cooking DC: 14

Success: Until you finish a long rest, you have advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Delicious: As an action, you can spit acid in a line that is 30 feet long and 5 feet wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 3d6 acid damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Extra Delicious: You can use both of the above benefits.

Tarrasque Heart Tartare

I—wha—yo— ... you ate what*?!*

1 portion tarrasque heart
1 portion herbs and spices

Cooking DC: 0

Success: You can use an action to take on a frightening appearance. Each creature of your choice within 120 feet of you and aware of you must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, with disadvantage if you are within its line of sight, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Delicious: Until you finish a long rest, any time you are targeted by a *magic missile* spell, a line spell, or a spell that requires a ranged attack roll, roll a d6. On a 1 to 5, you are unaffected. On a 6, you are unaffected, and the effect is reflected back at the caster as though it originated from you, turning the caster into the target.

Extra Delicious: If you fail a saving throw, you can choose to succeed instead. You can use this benefit four times or until you finish a long rest.

Note: Only creatures with the Extra Hungry feat can gain benefits from this dish.

Creating Your Own Special Recipes

Special recipes must include at least one unique ingredient, and the benefits should be drawn from or inspired by the traits and actions of the harvested creature. All DCs should start at 10 (except for a completely raw meal, such as the Tarasque Heart Tartare), then increase in difficulty depending on the number of ingredients, the complexity of the cooking method, and the complexity of plating and serving.

For recipe inspiration, look at menus for fine-dining, farm-to-table, and modernist restaurants.

Backward Compatibility

While it may break a cook's heart, sometimes a special ingredient must be compromised to fit a more mundane dish before it goes bad. As they say, "Use it or lose it." Luckily, any unique ingredient can replace the meat, chicken, or fish in a simple recipe.

A Note on Eating Intelligent Creatures

In our many fantasy worlds, we often encounter beasts and monsters with a level of sentience we sometimes overlook. Players may find the concept of eating these creatures unethical and disturbing. Other players (or an evil party) may take a "you tried to eat me, now I'm going to eat you" attitude. If you plan to use these culinary rules, please discuss this aspect during your session 0 to clarify how everyone feels.

Bag of Colding

Wondrous Item, Uncommon

In the dank, humid conditions of the average dungeon, ingredients spoil at an alarming rate. To deal with this loss of product, a clever wizard modified a *bag of holding* to have the perfect internal temperature for cold storage. This item is identical to a *bag of holding* with one additional feature: any food items stashed in it have their shelf life quadrupled.

Feat: Extra Hungry

When others were pushing away their trays, you were always reaching for seconds, thirds, or even fourths. You love cooking, but you *really* love eating.

- Increase your Constitution or Wisdom score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- All food tastes good to you. You can choose the delicious benefit when you consume a recipe, even if it was made with a standard successful ability check.
- You can use the benefits of two recipes per long rest instead of one.

Food-Focused Campaigns

While these rules can work in any fantasy world, setting your game in a food-obsessed city adds an extra layer of depth. Luckily, the great city of Gluttonia revolves around one thing: eating. Gluttonia is a society reminiscent of late-era Ancient Rome, both in style and government. Status among nobility is determined by the complexity of dishes served at banquets rather than the amount of gold in coffers, while street vendors take intense competitive pride in the food they offer to passersby.

The following challenges, written for campaigns set in and around Gluttonia, center food and politics in escalating adventures that culminate in thrilling and delicious triumph.

Exotic Ingredient Hunters

The most difficult treasure to chase down is the treasure you literally have to chase down. Gluttonia has a thriving black market that hungers for the rarest, most dangerous, and most delicious game, and pays exorbitant prices for it. Unique ingredients sell for double the normal cost on the black market. But the Gluttonia City Watch has been cracking down on illegal sales, so you never know when a raid might go down during an exchange…

Early Campaign Challenge. A rival hunting party seeks the same prey as the characters and stoops to any level to win it.

Mid-Campaign Challenge. A prominent politician notices the characters' hunting prowess and hires them to gather a list of unique ingredients for a niece's upcoming wedding. A rival politician wants to ruin the nuptials and

offers the characters more money to gather identical-looking but gross-tasting ingredients instead. The characters must decide which politician to support, and catch the other's ire.

Climactic Challenge. The hubris of Gluttonia will be its downfall. Dozens of hunted creatures band together under the leadership of a powerful druid, who knows the key to stopping the food industry is to take down Gluttonia's most prominent hunting party: the characters!

RESTAURANT OWNERS

Starting a restaurant is always an incredibly risky endeavor, but starting a restaurant in Gluttonia? It's not an uphill battle so much as an up-*mountain* battle. Characters must create a menu, source ingredients, and deal with snobby clientele as they attempt to make their restaurant a smashing success.

Early Campaign Challenge. After the restaurant opens, rumors abound that the editor in chief of *The Kobold Review*, the hottest food rag in town, will be coming to dine any day! A good review can make or break a new restaurant, so it's up to the characters to have stellar service and dishes.

Mid-Campaign Challenge. Another restaurant has opened directly across the street … with the same recipes as the characters! Were the recipes stolen? Did a staff member leak this information?

Climactic Challenge. The Great Gluttonia Games are underway, and the characters received an invitation to compete! The highest-rated restaurants in the city go through a triathlon of food contests: racing to prep food, identifying rare ingredients, and cooking a signature dish for a panel of judges! Will the characters win and forever be remembered in the Gluttonia Hall of Food Fame?

FOOD CART FOLLIES

Restaurants are competitive, but food carts are downright cutthroat. The characters must perfect their brand, stake out their turf, and make their mark on Gluttonia's street scene.

Early Campaign Challenge. The wheels and axle pop off the characters' cart one day, the cart's food is spoiled the next day, and the day after that, the cart horses are missing! All these events can't *just* be coincidences. Something smells rotten, and it's up to the characters to find out who is behind the sabotage.

Mid-Campaign Challenge. The annual Gluttonian Food Industry Convention provides endless opportunities for the characters to network, befriend, or beat up their peers! During the convention, many local vendors end up serving food that makes attendees sick. If the characters investigate, they find that food cart entrepreneurs from parts abroad looking to claim some turf in Gluttonia are to blame, and they're prepared to throw down to get it.

Climactic Challenge. The characters are invited to compete in the Gluttonian Food Cart Race! The exclusive event happens only once a decade. The cart that serves up the tastiest and most original dishes to the most people in town wins a fleet of magic food carts ready. With so much on the line, some competitors are willing to sabotage, steal, and murder to win.



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Letter from Matt

This month's issue features a dungeon from Robert J. Kuntz, one of the original TSR D&D developers. This extraordinary event has caused Matt to come out of the woodwork and write this editorial.

Playing AD&D was intense. I believed intensely in the secondary world. Probably the main reason I wanted to GM was that I got REALLY INTERESTED in what was inside the module—the stuff that we, the players, weren't allowed to read. I dunno what I imagined would be in there, but it seemed, from the other side of the screen, to contain deep secrets and mysteries. ANYTHING could be in there!

Have you ever seen an OG dungeon map? They were printed in non-repro blue, a special color architects used, which photocopier manufacturers all agreed not to reproduce with their machines—a kind of 1950s copy protection!

Using that specific tone made the maps look like … well, like architectural diagrams.

Like REAL PLACES, in other words.

That's why I wanted to get behind the screen—I wanted to learn the secrets of the world! I wanted to see inside the adventure and know what was really happening. I don't know HOW many months I spent sitting in the bathroom (er, not consecutively) reading the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Have you ever read the AD&D version? You should. Or, you should try. It's AMAZING. It's still amazing!

Oh look, here are the magical properties of gemstones, neat! Oh, here's how to use wolfsbane to cure lycanthropy, neat! Oh, here's what holy water is good for, neat!

In other words, it reads exactly like it's describing the rules for how a world works, not how a GAME works and this is the hardest thing to convey to a modern player.

Even the way the text was presented leant it this patina of seriousness, of reality. There was no layout. There was no Macintosh, no Desktop Publishing. Fonts? What are those?! The whole thing is done in Courier. Everything More Monospace Than Everything Else.

Modern books look amazing. They are more interesting to look at, and they are way easier to read. The information is presented in a much more palatable way. This is important. Remember, presentation is part of design. Those old books were pretty unforgiving on the reader. But that just made it seem LESS like a game and more like … like an ENCYCLOPEDIA of a WORLD. A world more interesting than this one! We have holy water in this world—but it doesn't do shit!

The creators probably didn't intend for this interpretation to happen. They didn't choose these layout elements because it reinforced the idea of the secondary world as a real place or the books as encyclopedias rather than worlds, but that was the effect, and it was compelling.

The legacy of this style of play is with us today! Look at the articles in this issue! "So Your Best Friend Is A Monster" by Jessica Marcrum is an article all about taking a cursed creature like a drider or a harpy or a medusa, and returning them to their humanoid form.

That is the kind of article you write when you take those monsters seriously. You have to first imagine them as little stories. Someone, maybe generations ago, is cursed to become a flying vulture-woman, or a black widow–person, or a snake lady. They're not just tiny chunks of game design. They're not just mobs in an MMO. They're people and something awful happened to them and if you cast these spells and use these components, you can fix it. You can make it right again.

That feels very AD&D to me. Reading these articles feels like I'm learning about how the fantasy world works, not how the game works. That's the legacy of those folks from the 70s. They presented their rules, not as a game, but as a description for a world—a world more interesting than this one.

Very appealing to a disaffected teenager listening to RUSH in the infinite suburb.

Et in Arcadia ego,

—MCDM

SO YOUR BEST FRIEND IS A MONSTER

A Guide to Uncursing the Cursed

by Jessica Marcrum

Content Warning: This article contains descriptions of gore, mind control, and petrification.

> **Better for you to have never been born than to have displeased us thusly.**
>
> –Morrigan, Goddess of Battle

While most monsters are born that way, others started as humanoids and had the bad luck to irritate a powerful magician, archdemon, or even deity. Cursed into monstrous forms, these beings are maligned by others for their appearance, their powers, and the supernatural drives imposed upon them. Some live in terror of accidentally passing their curse onto others and hide where only the most obstinate adventurers can find them.

And find them they do. While many of these encounters end in violence, adventurers who instead befriend such a monster may wonder how to remove their curse. Additionally, adventurers who come out worse for wear after fighting a cursed creature—or who simply have a knack for landing on a deity's bad side—may need a solution themselves! When the *remove curse* spell won't cut it, what is there to do?

So Your Best Friend Is a Monster is a GM guide for uncursing driders, harpies, and medusas and for cursing player characters into these monstrosities.

When running a game with a cursed PC, there are a few key things to keep in mind: Monsters typically have few friends outside of their fellow monstrosities. The average person fears them, shopkeepers are unlikely to do business with them, and temples bar them from entering. Parties traveling with a cursed character are unwelcome in towns and even hunted down by bounty hunters, well-meaning priests, and bored nobles. It is a rare patron who trusts a monster with a quest, and a rarer patron who does not

ON CURSING YOUR PLAYERS

When running any tabletop roleplaying game, safety tools—such as Lines & Veils (developed by Ron Edwards), the X-Card (developed by John Stavropoulos), and Stars & Wishes (developed by Lu Quade)—are essential. Equally important is keeping an open dialogue between players and GM regarding their comfort levels throughout the game. Before a game, be it a one-shot or long-term campaign, have a conversation with your players about everyone's comfort levels regarding character curses. No one enjoys a game disrupted by punitive cursing. Open, safe tables lead to better experiences for all, and curses should be as fun to play as to dole out. For more information on the aforementioned safety tools and to learn about others, please see the TTRPG Safety Toolkit co-curated by Kienna Shaw and Lauren Bryant-Monk at bit.ly/ttrpgsafetytoolkit.

Mixed Mythologies

The cursed creatures mentioned in this article—harpies, medusas, and possibly driders—are based on Greek and Roman myth. The core rules change these monsters' backgrounds, making it easier to mix and match them with creatures from different mythoi (for example, couatls come from Mesoamerican myth, zombies are rooted in Haitian mythology, and banshees are part of Irish lore). For Greco-Roman-inspired campaigns focused on these creatures, I recommend the *Uncaged Anthology* and *Arkadia*.

Drider Origin. The origin of driders is unclear, but they are likely based on an illustration of Arachne by Gustav Doré in Dante's Purgatorio. Arachne was a weaver so skilled, she boasted she could outweave the goddess of weaving herself, Athena. They had a contest, after which Athena turned her into a spider: she could insult no gods, but would be allowed to weave for eternity. The earliest source of Arachne's story is the *Metamorphoses* by Ovid.

Harpy Origin. While little is known of their origin, harpies appear all over Greek and Roman mythology seemingly as embodiments of the wind's destructive nature. As antagonists and agents of punishment, they snatch both food and people, carrying the latter to the Erinyes. They aren't cursed into their form, they are simply monsters who exist. Modern mythologies often conflate harpies with sirens, supplying them with the beautiful singing voices of the latter and the female face-bird body combo of the former.

Medusa Origin. *Content Warning: Mention of sexual assault in this paragraph.* In Greek mythology, Medusa was one woman, not a race of beings. In early versions, she and her sisters were born as Gorgons, women with wings and hair made of venomous snakes, though only Medusa could paralyze with her gaze. In Ovid's interpretation, Medusa gained her appearance after Poseidon assaulted her in Athena's temple (yes, it's Athena again). Athena cursed Medusa into her famous incarnation and sent a hero to behead her. Feminist reinterpretations view Athena giving Medusa her monstrous appearance as a way to protect herself from further harm. Instructing Perseus to kill her is perhaps, in this version, divine fickleness. In fifth edition, medusas can be any gender, and gorgons are an entirely different creature, likely based on Edward Topsell's *The Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes* (1607).

seize upon the opportunity for a monster hunt instead. Cursed characters are more powerful and more able to amass loot than the average character, but that means little if their lairs and lives are constantly threatened and their wealth is denied and spurned.

So You've Befriended a Drider

As the drow spider goddess' chosen, driders exist as somewhat of a paradox. When a drow is particularly devout and powerful in matters magical or mundane, they are summoned by their goddess to face great tests of strength and faith. Those who succeed are granted boons beyond mortal comprehension. Those who fail are turned into a drider, an image of the spider goddess herself and more powerful than the average drow, yet reviled as monsters by all. A drider is a living representation of divine disappointment, and drow tend to steer clear in case the goddess' ire is contagious.

Reverse the Curse of Spiderlegs

As becoming a drider is a curse from the drow goddess, appealing to the deity and making amends is the most direct way to reverse it. However, gods are notoriously fickle, and adventurers are often proud, so this "easy" method is often complicated. Driders may be unwilling to supplicate to the very power who cursed them.

Creation of Driders

To create a drider, the drow goddess wraps the supplicant in blessed spider webbing, stuns them with poison from her fangs, and commands a bound and loyal demon[1] to devour the supplicant's legs up to the torso. (Demons can be bound through the *planar ally* and *planar binding* spells, and *spell scrolls* of these spells are common in temples of the drow goddess.) Through the goddess' munificence, the supplicant survives the excruciating process and transforms into a drider, becoming one with the demon who now serves as the lower half of their body and whose blood flows through their veins.

[1] Demons typically take on the appearance of the archdemon or deity they serve. Demons that serve the drow goddess have arachnidian features, which is why driders have the lower body of a massive spider.

Learning the Reversal

A ritual cast by a goddess can't be uncast, merely redirected. By reversing the process of the ritual and providing an appropriate target, characters can redirect the curse to another creature of their choice. Few know of the ritual, however, as many driders find the experience so painful, they forget all but their goddess's face looming over them. Characters who either are driders or who have a religious background can recall fragments of the ritual with a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Religion) check. Everyone else must seek out help.



While the drow goddess's high priestesses can't create driders, they know of the ritual and components involved. Characters in good standing with a drow high priestess—whether due to past service with the temple or, in the case of clerics and paladins, the respect given to other members of the clergy—can easily learn of the ritual, but won't procure the components without a little work. Regardless of how friendly with the characters a priestess is, she is unlikely to turn her back on her goddess to help them. Those who previously angered the high priestess or insulted the temple have no access to the priestesses; they must steal sacred texts or consort with the drow goddess' demons, who demand large sacrifices, usually in the form of treasure, for such knowledge.

Gathering Components

To gather the components necessary to reverse the curse, characters must reappropriate them from a temple dedicated to the drow goddess. Temples are typically open all hours of the day, staffed by **acolytes**, **drow**, and **priests**, and led by a high priestess (use the **mage** or **archmage** stat block, or any drow stat block from the core rules). Characters must either bluff their way in by pretending to be supplicants or initiates with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Deception) check or sneak in by succeeding on several DC 12 Dexterity (Stealth) checks at various points throughout the temple. (Feel free to use a temple map of your choice.)

Once inside the temple, characters must seek out the ritual's components:

- A bound demon with a minimum challenge rating of 5
- Spider silk blessed by a priestess of the drow goddess
- Drow poison

There is generally a 25 percent chance of finding a bound demon within the temple, though whether or not it chooses to work with the characters is a completely different story. Every demon has its own goals and its own price for working with the characters. Some can be easily manipulated in conversation or bound by magic, while others require a contract and payment or services from the characters. There are always rites of demon binding, including *spell scrolls* of *planar ally* and *planar binding*, within the priestesses' sanctums, along with the other ingredients.

PERFORMING THE RITUAL

Once the ingredients are gathered and the demon is convinced or bound into cooperation, the drider must say a prayer of thanks to their goddess but request that the gift be given to the demon. The demon must be wrapped in blessed spider silk and imbibe the poison, which shouldn't harm them, but they find it unpleasant to taste. The ritual is completed by drawing a stick figure of a humanoid in blood on the fiend's chest to properly represent the shape the character would like to regain.

Performing the ritual correctly requires the characters to succeed on a DC 14 Intelligence (Religion) group check. If one or more characters performing the ritual is a devotee of the drow goddess, the DC is 12. On a success, the drider performing the ritual transforms into their original form, and the demon involved gains the following actions:

- ***Change Shape.*** The demon magically polymorphs into a phase spider, or back into its true form. It reverts to its true form if it dies. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying is absor bed or borne by the new form (the fiend's choice). In spider form, the fiend retains its alignment, hit points, Hit Dice, ability to speak, proficiencies, Legendary Resistance, lair actions, and Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores, as well as this action. Its statistics and capabilities are otherwise replaced by those of the phase spider.
- ***Hatch (Recharge 5–6).*** The demon lays 1d6 eggs, each in an unoccupied space within 10 feet of it. At the end of its turn, a new demon of challenge rating 1 or lower (chosen by the original demon) hatches from each egg. The hatched demons follow the original demon's commands and act immediately after the original demon in the initiative order.

If the ritual fails, see "Ramifications."

Ritual Variant. Characters who abduct or convince another humanoid to take the place of the drider can perform the same ritual, wrapping the humanoid in the spider silk and feeding them the poison. The demon devours the humanoid's legs as the characters draw a spider in blood on the humanoid's chest. This ritual requires a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Religion) group check to perform correctly, reduced to a DC of 5 if one or more of the characters involved is a devotee of the drow goddess. On a success, the drider returns to its original form and the humanoid becomes a drider. If the ritual fails, see "Ramifications."

Ramifications. Messing with powers beyond mortal ken can have devastating repercussions. If the characters perform the ritual and fail, the demon becomes unbound from any magic keeping it imprisoned or loyal to the characters. They must rebind the demon if they wish to retry the ritual (and possibly cut a new deal with the fiend or stop it from trying to kill them). If the characters perform the ritual and fail three times, the drow goddess transforms a(nother) character or one of their loved ones into a drider out of sheer annoyance. Characters with a strong connection to the drow goddess (acolytes, clerics, paladins, etc.) can talk their way out of the goddess' wrath with a successful DC 25 Charisma (Religion)[2] check. On a failure, the goddess resumes transforming someone else into a drider and now has a particular distaste for the character who spoke out against her. Ramifications of a goddess' ire are likely to come up in future campaigns—or immediately through brutal monster attacks, at the GM's discretion. See "Player Characters as Driders" for more information.

PLAYER CHARACTERS AS DRIDERS

Typically only drow are transformed into driders, though none should assume that only drow are capable of fully disappointing or angering their goddess. Any character the drow goddess finds sufficiently irritating or frustratingly mediocre can be transformed into a drider through a ritual (see the "Creation of Driders" sidebar). A character who becomes a drider retains their statistics and abilities with the following exceptions:

- The character sprouts a spider body from their lower half, and their creature type becomes Monstrosity.
- The character gains a climbing speed of 30 feet.
- The character gains a +1 bonus to AC from natural armor.
- The character's teeth are natural weapons, which they can use to make unarmed strikes. If they hit with them, they deal 1d4 piercing damage plus an additional 1d8 + the character's proficiency bonus poison damage, instead of the normal bludgeoning damage for an unarmed strike.
- The character gains the drider's Spider Climb, Sunlight Sensitivity, and Web Walker traits.

[2] The typical check would be Intelligence (Religion) or Charisma (Persuasion). In this case, however, characters are using their force of personality alongside their knowledge of religion to appeal to the goddess.



So You've Befriended a Harpy

Great elven gods gifted Aria Velathorn with a beautiful voice. But song alone couldn't woo the elf bard's only love. In lovesick anger, she cast a curse upon the same gods who had given her songs radiance. Her spiteful magic backfired, warping her desire for love into an insatiable hunger for flesh and making her the first harpy. Some deities found the new form entertaining and cursed similarly ungrateful subjects into harpies. Ages later, mountain and coastal skies are filled with the singing of harpies luring unsuspecting victims to their bloody ends.

Reverse the Curse of Wings and Song

Harpies are derived from a combination of misapplied magic and misguided dreams. Creatures transformed into harpies are initially blessed by deities and gifted musical talent, beauty, or charm. The curse takes hold when the gift is not enough, causing the bearer to spite the gods or another object of their affection, rendering their physical form monstrous to match their emotional turmoil. To remove the curse, the harpy must be willing to undertake a quest and find inner acceptance.

Follow the First Harpy

Characters seeking to remove a harpy's curse must start at the beginning: Aria Velathorn, the first harpy. They must search out her lost remains and craft one of her splendorous tail feathers into a quill, which the cursed harpy then uses to pen a new song of hope and renewal. But the path to her resting place is lost, known only in harpy songs and stories. Those who succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check recall the circumstances of her curse, though not her final location.

To learn of Aria's location, a character must speak with a harpy and succeed on a DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion or Performance) check to coax them into revealing the path Aria followed through mountain and coastal ranges. On this journey, characters encounter scores of her descendants, happy to be harpies and thriving in their own communities. These harpies were born harpies, not transformed by the curses of gods, and therefore know no other life. They enjoy their form and the power it gives them.

Eventually, characters arrive at the lair of a **couatl**, Miztin (they/them), who remembers Aria's curse, befriended her, and witnessed her reversing her state through a song of self-acceptance. Miztin is happy to guide other harpies to self-acceptance and has preserved Aria's feathers.

Write and Perform

Once the quill is crafted, the harpy must write a song detailing how they've let go of their past. Characters with a musical inclination (typically represented by proficiency in the Performance skill or a musical instrument) can help the harpy craft the song to reduce the DC of the Wisdom (Performance) check by 2 (see below). After writing the song, the harpy must sing it with the characters' help, demonstrating the firm bond between them that defies the monstrosity's past wants.

This transformation is less a return to the harpy's original form and closer to a rebirth, a dedication to a new life happier and healthier than before. The characters must make a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Performance) group check, though the DC is reduced to 10 if the harpy provides offerings or donations, pledges their faith, or dedicates a song to the deity whose gifts they squandered. On a success, the harpy returns to their original form. If the check fails, see "Ramifications."

Ramifications. Harpies are irritable, hungry creatures; after a failed attempt at cursebreaking, they may attack and eat the characters who failed to help them despite the friendship built over their journey. Even if the curse is successfully removed, the harpy's family may feel that their kin was stolen from them and attack the characters on sight. If the harpy's song includes lyrics that mock the deity who cursed them, the deity may turn an additional character into a harpy or cast an even crueler curse upon the characters as a punishment for undoing their work. See "Quick and Dirty Curse Removal" at the end of this article for how to solve that problem.

Player Characters as Harpies

While the core rules describe harpies as lovesick elves, the elven pantheon is fickle indeed; any character who demonstrates improper thanks for their gifts may be transformed into a winged singer. Characters who use god-given power to cause unnecessary harm are particularly susceptible to this condition. A character who becomes a harpy retains their statistics and abilities with the following exceptions:

- The character sprouts wings and clawed talons on their hands and feet, and their creature type becomes Monstrosity.
- The character's walking speed becomes 20 feet, and they gain a flying speed of 40 feet.
- The character's talons are natural weapons, which they can use to make unarmed strikes. If they hit with them, they deal slashing damage equal to 2d4 + their Strength modifier, instead of the normal bludgeoning damage for an unarmed strike.
- The character gains the harpy's Luring Song action. The save DC for this action equals 8 + the character's Charisma modifier + the character's proficiency bonus. Once the character uses this action, they can't do so again until they finish a long rest.

So You've Befriended a Medusa

Unlike their counterparts from Grecian myth, most medusas in the core rules sought out their immortality. Driven by vanity to seek eternal life, youth, and adoration, medusas were mortals who made a bargain without reading the fine print. After a few decades of youth and power, the bill came due: the snake hair, the loneliness, and the petrifying gaze. As punishment for their hubris, or at least their inability to scrutinize a contract, medusas are doomed to live forever without seeing what they love most: their own reflection.

Reverse the Curse of Snakes and Statuary

A medusa's curse is typically a punishment for a life too well-lived. Derided for vanity, some medusas were cursed by insecure or capricious deities who feared the mortals' burgeoning power. Then there are mortals who made deals with literal or metaphorical devils for eternal life, beauty, and praise. Either way, the life of a medusa is one of eternal loneliness as they petrify or outlive everyone they know, their memories crumbling like dust.

Appeasing a Deity

With a medusa's power comes a variety of new traits (see "Player Characters as Medusas"). Characters seeking to remove a medusa's curse must first help the afflicted use their new abilities to benefit others instead of self-isolating with their power. A medusa might utilize their skills to improve masonry and stonework, preserve livestock through petrification to last the winter months, or create a discount travel service through a combination of petrification and cargo shipping rates.

Characters must then travel with the medusa to the location where the curse was first enacted and call upon the being who bestowed it. While it is unlikely that the higher power appears, with ample prayer and petitions, they listen. All characters involved in cursebreaking should be prepared to spend at least a week at the location, typically a ruin that contains monsters, hazards, and other dangers.

If they were cursed centuries or even millennia ago, the medusa may struggle to remember the time before they were cursed. The time spent at the location can help them recover some of their lost memories and reconnect them to their past. Characters can help the medusa recover memories by explor-ing the location and bringing back treasured items from their past: books, weapons, jewelry, and dust-covered trinkets. Additionally, characters who succeed on a DC 16 Intelligence (History) check can remind the medusa of their past life.

At the end of the week, the characters can convince the higher power that the medusa changed their ways and learned from their time cursed with a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Religion) or Charisma (Persuasion) check. Reduce the check's DC by 2 for each piece of evidence the characters present juxtaposing the medusa's current lifestyle with that of their past. The emphasis must be on how the medusa has changed, and how they use their power to better the world around them, not simply seek profit or glory.

On a success, the snakes fall from the medusa's head and become a ***swarm of poisonous snakes*** that act as the medusa's familiars. The medusa's eyes clear, their skin returns to their natural color, and they are once again humanoid. They can finally look their friends in the eye without fear.



Ramifications. The best-case scenario for a failed curse removal is that the medusa remains a medusa. After particularly disastrous petitions (for example, if the medusa hasn't changed or if the result to convince the deity that they have is a 5 or lower), a random character in the party may also be transformed into a medusa. Or the entire party might be, if the deity is particularly chaotic and annoyed.

CONTRACT RENEGOTIATION

For medusas cursed through unwise deals or contracts, the characters must find the entity who bound them. Depending on who made the deal, this could involve summoning an archfiend, seeking out an ancient dragon, or traveling to the dealmaker's home plane and requesting an audience.

Find a Loophole. Characters can attempt to find flaws in the contract itself and prove it is null and void. Every contract, even those made by the most meticulous fiendish lawyers, has a loophole.

While forced renegotiation of a settled deal annoys any dealmaker, the overall temperament of the contract broker varies. Fiends eat contracts for breakfast and are always up to discuss terms in hopes of gaining even more, whereas celestials tend to see a completed deal as exactly that: completed business. Ancient dragons would rather not be bothered. Ever. Regardless of the dealmaker's disposition, they provide a copy of the contract upon request.

A character who examines the contract and succeeds on a DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check can find a loophole. Alternatively, they can first observe the dealmaker's behavior, noting what parts of the contract or topics the dealmaker is keen to avoid, with a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Insight) check. If the character applies this knowledge when searching the contract for loopholes, the DC is reduced to 14.

Suggested loopholes include, but are not limited to:

- The contract is void if the dealmaker dies.
- The contract is void if the dealmaker or the medusa is incapacitated for a year and a day on a plane other than their own.
- The contract is void if ingested.
- The contract refers to clauses not appearing in the contract.
- The contract is undated by the dealmaker.
- The dealmaker neglected to sign their own name.
- The medusa's name is misspelled.

Have a Trial. Characters who tend toward theatricality, or who simply failed to determine a loophole, may instead demand to have a trial on the medusa's behalf. Depending on the location of the trial and the type of bargain made, a variety of creatures may serve as judge and jury. For fiendish contracts, the judge is a powerful fiend (such as an **erinyes** or **marilith**), while the jury is made up of lesser fiends (of challenge rating 2 or lower). When it comes to celestial contracts, an angel is typically the judge (such as a **deva** or **planetar**), while **unicorns** and **pegasi** comprise the jury. Though they dislike company, dragons are loath to outsource their contract negotiations to anyone but other dragons. The oldest dragon in the vicinity who isn't the dealmaker serves as the trial's judge, with young adult dragons acting as jury for a "learning experience."

At the trial, characters must present evidence and arguments on the medusa's behalf for breaking the contract. A character who succeeds on a DC 20 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check by using powerful rhetorical flourishes or on a DC 20 Intelligence (History) check to provide precedents of other contracts being broken convinces the dealmaker to break the contract. Offering to pay the dealmaker gold, tribute, or gems to overlook the medusa's contract grants disadvantage on the roll with lawfully aligned dealmakers and advantage with chaotic ones.

The characters can also present evidence at the trial. Reduce the DC by 2 for each piece of evidence they present on the medusa's behalf, including but not limited to:

- The medusa didn't understand the contract when they signed it.
- *Celestial and Metallic Dragon Only:* The medusa has inadvertently caused numerous deaths as a result of their current form. Transforming them serves the greater community.
- *Fiend and Chromatic Dragon Only:* The medusa has self-isolated and isn't doing anything interesting with their new form.

After a successful argument, the medusa is transformed (see "Appeasing a Deity"). If the characters fail to release the medusa from their contract, refer to the "Ramifications" section in "Appeasing a Deity," as the characters are left with an angry medusa as well as an annoyed powerful being.

Player Characters as Medusas

Anyone who seeks power, beauty, and adoration beyond their means can be transformed into a medusa. Those who seek immortality often make terrible deals with shady characters like archdevils, ancient dragons, demon lords, and capricious deities. Adventurers who are particularly vainglorious or lack sufficient humility in the face of divine power may also be transformed into a medusa to teach them an eternal lesson. A character who becomes a medusa retains their statistics and abilities with the following exceptions:

- The character ceases to age but is not immune to magical aging effects.
- The character's hair transforms into a hissing swarm of poisonous snakes, and their creature type becomes Monstrosity.
- The character gains a +1 bonus to AC from natural armor.
- The character's snake hair is a natural weapon, which they can use to make unarmed strikes. If they hit with them, the snakes deal piercing damage equal to 1d4 + the medusa's Dexterity modifier and an additional 2d8 + the medusa's proficiency bonus poison damage, instead of the normal bludgeoning damage for an unarmed strike. On their turn, the character can make an attack with their snake hair as a bonus action.
- The character gains the medusa's Petrifying Gaze trait. The save DC for this trait equals 8 + the character's Constitution modifier + the character's proficiency bonus.

Quick and Dirty Curse Removal

So the characters ran into something they shouldn't have and now a god is mad at them? Perhaps they broke open a cursed artifact, drank vampire's blood, or did something else unspeakably foolish? Well, now they have to fix it.

A curse means a quest, but inventing a quest out of whole cloth to account for player shenanigans can be daunting. If you need ideas for a cursebreaking quest, choose from the following options or roll first on the Cursebreaker table and then on the appropriate table to determine what is needed to break the curse, then the cost of the cursebreaker's help or the rarity of a required ingredient.

Cursebreaker

d8	Curse Broken By ...
1	Rare potion
2	Celestial or high priest
3	Hag
4	Archfiend or cult leader
5	Archfey
6	Genie
7	Sphinx
8	Ancient dragon

Rare Potion

d6	Required Ingredient
1	Water from a mountain pool that carries the chill with it when bottled
2	A flower that sprouted where a unicorn bled
3	The sound of a cat's footsteps
4	The teardrops of a ghost
5	The breath of a baby kraken
6	A bottled cloud taken from a desert rainstorm

Celestial or High Priest

d6	Required Payment/Service
1	A month of service to the cursebreaker's temple of choice
2	A large donation to a charity or temple of the cursebreaker's choice
3	Spreading the word and deeds of the cursebreaker or their deity
4	A test of faith to prove your valor
5	All future great deeds to be done in the cursebreaker's (or their god's) name
6	Conversion or repledging to the god's faith and repenting of trespasses

Hag

d6	Required Payment/Service
1	An undisclosed future favor
2	Delivery of a hag's rival to her (still alive)
3	A physical piece of you: fingernail clippings, strands of hair, blood...
4	The memory you savor most
5	The future safety of someone you love
6	A month of serving as an assistant in matters magical and mundane

Archfiend or Cult Leader

d6	Required Payment/Service
1	Disposing of their nemesis and evidence it was performed painfully
2	Your most painful memory or physical sensation
3	A month of service to the cursebreaker's temple of choice
4	A piece of your capacity to feel love
5	Spreading the word and deeds of the cursebreaker
6	A duel of might or magic to prove your worth

Archfey

d6	Required Ingredient
1	A song or poem no one has ever heard and now no one else ever will
2	Spending a month of fey time in service at court
3	An undisclosed future favor
4	All future glory you gain goes instead to the cursebreaker
5	A piece of what drives you to adventure: passion, anger, lust, etc.
6	Your true name

Genie

d6	Required Ingredient
1	A pile of gemstones as large as the cursebreaker is tall
2	Dispatching of the cursebreaker's rival by any means necessary
3	An epic song or poem written in the cursebreaker's honor
4	A month of serving as a display of the genie's power
5	A cask of wine brewed from an extinct type of grape
6	A monument to the genie to preserve their legacy

Sphinx

d6	Required Ingredient
1	A complicated riddle unknown to the cursebreaker
2	Passing a test of valor posed by the cursebreaker
3	Passing a test of wit posed by the cursebreaker
4	Passing a test of wisdom posed by the cursebreaker
5	Beating the cursebreaker at a deadly game of wits and whimsy
6	A closely held secret that provides insight into the nature of mortals

Ancient Dragon

d6	Required Ingredient
1	A pile of gemstones, gold, and pearls as large as the cursebreaker is long
2	Defeating the cursebreaker in a debate or riddle contest
3	Destroying the cursebreaker's sworn enemy
4	A neighboring ruler's throne
5	Making the cursebreaker laugh
6	Defeating the cursebreaker in a martial test

FEY OF THE SHADOWFELL

New Fey Creatures Twisted with Shadow

by Jonathan Connor Self

Fey embody the multitudinous experiences of living creatures—from joy and jubilance to despair and rage. These nature spirits are equal parts life, emotion, and primal chaos. Though native to the Feywild, a plane of beautiful and dangerous wonder, their ilk reside across the multiverse.

While most fey are associated with whimsy and delight, others personify and feed on negative emotions. These spirits sometimes live in the Unseelie Courts of the Feywild or on the Material Plane, but many are drawn into the Shadowfell, a mirror plane of death, decay, and loss. Here, these fey create their own demesnes, subsisting on the horrible emotions that permeate the bleak desolation of the umbral plane. Just as happy, fickle fey belong in the untamed nature of the Feywild, brooding and vengeful fey are at home amid the despair of the Shadowfell.

This article presents fey creatures that emphasize emotional themes throughout the Shadowfell:

- Tips for incorporating existing dark fey creatures into campaigns
- New creatures to add to your games, inspired by mythology from around the world
- Suggestions for using these creatures not only as foes, but also as allies and patrons

Existing Fey in the Shadowfell

You can easily adjust fey in the game's core rules to fit a Shadowfell game. The following examples can be used as written, or as guides to modify fey for your Shadowfell adventure.

Necrodryad

Dryads are fey spirits bound to a tree's life force. While a dryad's bonded tree thrives, the fey is healthy. But when an ancient tree dies of unnatural causes, its spirit passes into the Shadowfell and its bonded dryad turns into a twisted, undead shadow of their former self, clinging to fading memories of verdant glory. These necrodryads assail any unlucky enough to approach the souls of their trees.

A necrodryad uses the **dryad** stat block with the following changes:

- The necrodryad is Undead.
- It has resistance to necrotic damage.
- It can cast *inflict wounds* instead of *goodberry*.
- Its Tree Stride trait allows it to travel between dead trees instead of living ones.

Dryad Mythology

Dryads are nymph spirits of Greek origin. These tree nymphs, called hamadryad, inhabited oak trees and were shy around living creatures. The life of a hamadryad was tied to their tree; if the tree died, so did the hamadryad. Dryads of other trees had other names: dryads of ash trees were called meliae, while those of fruit trees were called epimiledes.

Hag

Known for their cruelty and isolationism, hags are both feared and sought by travelers in the wilderness—depending on whether they're desperate enough to seek out a hag's help. Hags are also treated with fear and respect by other "monstrous" creatures for their strong magic, esoteric knowledge, and shrewd minds.

GMs can incorporate hags as they exist in the core rules into games set in the Shadowfell. Even hags who can't cast *plane shift* might know how to find their way to the Shadowfell from the Feywild or the Material Plane to consort with other monsters. The hag's method for moving from one dimension to the next could be a powerful plot device for a GM—perhaps the hag obtained a unique magic item or discovered a portal between realms. Whatever magic a hag employs, the heroes can use themselves, but likely at a price.

This article also includes two new, horrific hag options for your games: the red hag and the storm hag.

Hag Mythology

Hags are found in myths across Eurasia. From the famous Baba Yaga of Slavic folklore, to Jenny Greenteeth in the tales of the Britons, to Frau Holle in the stories of the Germanic people, to the housoubaba of Japan, hideous women in the wilderness with magical powers are a common trope.

GMs should be aware of the sexism inherent in these stories, but savvy GMs can turn the bigotry on its ear. Hags can be empowered feminists, experts in their fields of interest, and nonconformists who unapologetically reject societal norms in favor of their own interests and advancement. Strive for the players to ask who the real monsters are: the hags or those who shun them.

While hags are often portrayed as monsters, they're still intelligent beings with their own motivations and abilities that could be useful to adventurers—if the characters can convince a hag that an alliance would be mutually beneficial. A hag is no doubt cruel and terrible at times, but they can also be relatable and even admirable at others.

To help turn hags into story "movers" rather than story obstacles, consider the following questions:

- What is the hag's name? What was their life like prior to hagdom? Did they choose to become a hag, or was it forced upon them, and what impact might that have upon their psyche?
- What are their motivations? Are some of the hag's goals congruent with those of the characters? What might the hag demand in trade for their assistance?
- What abilities does the hag have that are helpful outside of combat? For example, a red hag has extensive knowledge of history, health, and magic items. A storm hag could hold off an entire fleet of enemy ships if the characters can convince them to do so.
- All hags have their roots in humanity. Keep that origin close to the surface when portraying them. Perhaps the hag has a soft spot for dogs or cats. Perhaps they keep art pieces of their loved ones from long ago, or maybe they still look after their family's welfare from afar.
- Remember that a dark truth or a hidden truth is still a truth. An encounter with a hag could reveal issues a hero is repressing or ignoring, giving that character a profound opportunity for growth. Discuss such opportunities with your players and if they are willing, roll with it! Create a safe space with players before using hags in this manner, but, if done in collaboration with the player, hags can provide an impetus for character development that heightens the story.

Red Hag

Ten feet tall, skeletally thin, and crimson-faced, a red hag gains her power from feasting upon the flesh of the dead. Her spells cause sickness, which, in turn, leaves her ample bodies to feed on. The touch of her serrated tongue on exposed flesh causes bleeding that can only be stemmed with magical healing.

Red hags form covens like others of their kind, but these relationships often become adversarial as the sisters fight over the choicest victims. In times of desperation, brave adventurers seek out red hags for their knowledge of cures to curses and diseases. While a red hag has little patience for intrusion, she may entertain such requests if the petitioner offers a worthy trade, such as a powerful item, news of plague and suffering in far-off lands, or livestock of exceptional breeding.

Tactics. The red hag has a particular diet and, given the opportunity, feeds her hunger in combat with adventurers. Surrounding herself with mobs of undead minions, she targets the physically weakest character with the *contagion* spell, then attacks them with her claws and tongue.

Red Hag Mythology. The red hag is based on the Japanese myth of the housoubaba. Folklore says this spirit caused smallpox outbreaks to feast upon the corpses.

Red Hag

Large Fey, Typically Neutral Evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 135 (18d8 + 54)
Speed 30 ft., fly 150 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Wis +5, Cha +8
Skills Arcana +6, Medicine +5, Nature +6, Survival +5
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Primordial, Sylvan
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +4

Blow Over. Creatures within 10 feet of the hag when she moves while flying must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone, and open flames within 10 feet of the hag are extinguished. A creature can only be affected by Blow Over once during a turn.

Actions

Multiattack. The hag makes three Claw attacks. She can replace one Claw attack with a Lick attack.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage plus 5 (2d4) poison damage.

Lick. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or take 7 (2d6) necrotic damage at the start of each of its turns. Each time the hag hits the wounded target with this attack, the necrotic damage dealt by the wound increases by 7 (2d6). The wound closes if the target receives magical healing.

Inflict Wounds. *Melee Spell Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (3d10) necrotic damage.

Spellcasting. The hag's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). She can cast the following spells, requiring no components:

3/day each: *blight, eyebite*
1/day each: *animate dead, contagion*

Storm Hag

A storm hag is a powerful fey who embodies the raw destructive power of a monumental storm. In her natural form, the hag is the heart of a massive tempest that stretches for miles. She delights in haunting remote lakes and wetlands, lulling victims into complacency with a beautiful song before unleashing deadly weather that sinks ships and drags sailors into the frigid depths.

When interacting with mortals, a storm hag often takes the form of a hideous woman with pale green skin and teeth, jaundiced eyes, and sharp facial features. Her disturbingly long arms can extend even farther to slash foes with wicked claws.

Tactics. The storm hag is as much a force of nature as a creature, and her behavior in combat reflects this quality. She begins her approach by using her Beautiful Song ability and then dramatically turns violent when she casts *storm of vengeance*. With her exceptional reach, the hag targets her foes from above with her Ice Claws attack. If attacking a vessel, the hag targets the ship exclusively unless its crew puts up a defense, at which time the storm hag pummels defenders and siege engines (such as catapults, trebuchets, and cannons) with Ice Claws and Pummeling Wave instead.

If defeated outside her lair, a storm hag returns to her Shadowfell cave to slumber for seven years. Heroes can undertake a quest to the Shadowfell to destroy the storm hag once and for all.

Storm Hag Mythology. In American mythology, the storm hag was a monstrous woman who lived in Lake Erie, thought to be responsible for the many shipwrecks in that area. Maritime losses along the Pennsylvania coast have been attributed to the storm hag as recently as 1942.

Storm Hag

Gargantuan Fey, Typically Chaotic Evil

Armor Class 23 (natural armor)
Hit Points 492 (24d20 + 240)
Speed 0 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover), swim 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
30 (+10)	21 (+5)	30 (+10)	21 (+5)	22 (+6)	27 (+8)

Saving Throws Con +17, Int +12, Wis +13
Skills Insight +13, Intimidation +15, Performance +15
Damage Immunities lightning, necrotic, poison, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Resistances cold
Condition Immunities exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained
Senses truesight 300 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Common, Primordial, Sylvan
Challenge 23 (50,000 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +7

Air Form. The hag can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. She can move through a space as narrow as 5 feet wide without squeezing.

Humanoid Form. The hag can take the form of a Medium human. While in this form, she loses her damage immunities and resistances, condition immunities, Air Form trait, and flying speed. She gains a walking speed of 30 feet and can walk across any liquid surface—such as water, acid, mud, snow, quicksand, or lava—as if it were harmless solid ground.

Immortality. The hag cannot be killed on the Material Plane. If reduced to 0 hit points, the hag is magically transported to her lair on the Shadowfell where she slumbers for 7 years before reawakening. She is immune to any effect that would age her, and she can't die from old age.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the hag fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. The hag has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. The hag's weapon attacks are magical.

Actions

Beautiful Song. Creatures within 1 mile of the hag that can hear her must succeed on a DC 18 Charisma saving throw or be magically charmed by the hag for 1 hour. If the hag makes an attack or casts a spell that damages another creature, a charmed creature becomes frightened and the charmed effect ends for it. A creature charmed or frightened by the hag's Beautiful Song can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turns, ending the condition on itself on a success. If a creature successfully saves against the effect, or if the effect on it ends, the creature is immune to the hag's Beautiful Song for the next 7 years and 1 day.

Ice Claws (Air Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +17 to hit, reach 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 31 (6d6 + 10) slashing damage plus 21 (6d6) cold damage. The speed of a creature hit by this attack is reduced to 0.

Paralyzing Claws (Humanoid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +17 to hit, reach 15 ft, one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d6 + 10) slashing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 23 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. A paralyzed creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the condition on itself on a success.

Spellcasting. The hag's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 23, +15 to hit with spell attacks). She can cast the following spells, requiring no components:

At will: *call lightning, dispel magic*
3/day each: *ice storm, wind wall*
1/day each: *plane shift, storm of vengeance*

Pummeling Wave. The hag summons a crushing wave of water that is 120 feet long and 30 feet wide. Each creature in the area must succeed on a DC 23 Strength saving throw, taking 42 (12d6) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. A nonmagical object in the spell's area that isn't being worn or carried also takes the damage. Unsecured objects and Medium or smaller creatures that fail the saving throw are pushed 60 feet away from the hag.

Reactions

Disrupt Magic. When a creature within 60 feet of the hag that she can see casts a spell of 3rd level or lower, the hag disrupts the spell's magic and it has no effect.

Legendary Actions

The hag can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The hag regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Claws. The hag makes an Ice Claws or Paralyzing Claws attack.

Sink Ships. The hag makes an Ice Claws attack against a sea-faring vessel. If the attack hits, it is a critical hit and ignores any damage threshold the vessel has.

Spellcasting (Costs 2 Actions). The hag casts a spell with a casting time of 1 action.



A Storm Hag's Lair

Storm hags make their homes deep within the earth of the Shadowfell, in caves that look out on ancient lakes long since dried up on the Material Plane. A storm hag's presence causes the barrier between the Material Plane and the Shadowfell to weaken, allowing travelers to unintentionally step between them. Many mortals who make this mistake are never seen again, falling victim to the hag or other denizens of the tenebrous plane.

Within her deep lair, the storm hag crafts the most amazing glass baubles and sculptures, using lightning to twist sand into elaborate shapes. Many of these art pieces have oracular abilities and can be used as arcane foci or scrying devices. She rests upon a bed of kelp and moss, content in her isolation. The hag sleeps here for seven years if she is ever killed on the Material Plane, and when the hag awakens from this slumber, she seeks revenge.

Lair Actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the storm hag takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects; the hag can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

- The hag fills her lair with fog that lasts until the start of initiative count 20 on the next round. While the fog remains, all areas of the lair are heavily obscured for all creatures except the storm hag.
- The hag chooses up to three creatures she can see within 120 feet of her and attempts to disorient them with crystalline patterns in the walls of her lair and refracted light in glass baubles. Each target must succeed on a DC 20 saving throw or be affected as if by the *confusion* spell until initiative count 20 on the next round.
- Spatial perception warps, disorienting creatures and scattering them in different directions. Each creature the storm hag chooses within 60 feet of her must succeed on a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw or use its reaction (if available) to move its speed in a random direction, stopping only if it encounters an impassable obstacle such as a wall. Use the Warped Perception table below to determine the direction a creature moves, rolling separately for each creature.

Warped Perception

d8	Direction
1	North
2	Northeast
3	East
4	Southeast
5	South
6	Southwest
7	West
8	Northwest

Regional Effects. The region containing a storm hag's lair is warped by the creature's chaotic and destructive presence:

- The area within 6 miles of the lair is beset by storms with strong winds or heavy precipitation, which can come without warning and last for days, causing extreme damage and flooding.
- There are signs of impending weather phenomena within 1 mile of the hag's lair at all times, including sudden wind or temperature shifts.
- Domesticated beasts within 1 mile of the lair are easily frightened and often flee instead of following commands.

If the hag dies, these effects end immediately.

Fomorians

Fomorians were once statuesque giants with their own potent magic, living deep beneath the surface of the earth. During an ancient war, elven fey laid a curse upon all fomorians, warping the giants into creatures with twisted forms and hideous visages. In shame, the fomorians fled to the corners of the multiverse, including the Shadowfell, where they plot revenge against the fey who cursed them.

You can make the fomorians in the core rules more of a threat by increasing the saving throw DCs of their actions or giving them the Spellcasting trait. A fomorian theurge is provided in this article as an example.

Fomorian Mythology

In ancient Celtic folklore, fomorians are a race of supernatural beings often depicted as godlike embodiments of destructive natural forces. They were the enemies of the Tuatha Dé Danann, another group of supernatural beings that eventually evolved into the fey of Irish myth.

GMs should be thoughtful about how they portray fomorians, as monstrous portrayals of disability are harmful to marginalized communities. In addition, remember that ugly doesn't equate to evil.

Fomorian Theurge

The fomorian theurge wields magic against their fey enemies, bargaining with powerful forces (such as elementals, titans, and dark fey) to augment its intellect and command devastating elemental magic. Fomorian theurges take leadership and advisory roles in fomorian society, using their magical talents to inspire—or bully—their people.

To design the fomorian theurge, spellcasting traits from warlocks and wizards were added to the existing fomorian stat block, as well as additional hit points to reflect their increase in power. The theurge's creature type was also changed to Fey to reflect how the bargains it made have affected its physiology.

Tactics. While other fomorians charge into battle, the theurge prefers to support allies with spellcasting. They begin by using Baleful Gaze, then target the creature affected by their gaze with damaging spells. Unlike many spellcasters, the theurge doesn't fear melee attacks because of their Elemental Nimbus ability, which they will use even if the effect might harm allies.

Fomorian Theurge

Huge Fey, Any Alignment

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 149 (13d12 + 65)
Speed 30 ft., fly 20 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	10 (+0)	20 (+5)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Cha +8
Skills Arcana +5, Intimidation +8, Investigation +5, Perception +10, Persuasion +8, Stealth +4
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 20
Languages Common, Giant, Primordial, Undercommon
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +4

All-Seeing Eye. When they aren't incapacitated, the theurge can't be surprised. As an action, they can view any location within 1 mile of them. While viewing a location that isn't in the theurge's immediate vicinity, they can't see their immediate vicinity.

Magical darkness doesn't impede the theurge's darkvision. In addition, they can see a faint aura around any visible creature or object that bears magic, and learn its school of magic, if any.

Actions

Multiattack. The theurge makes two Staff attacks, or makes one Staff attack and uses Baleful Gaze once.

Staff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (3d6 + 6) bludgeoning damage plus 7 (2d6) acid, cold, fire, lightning, or thunder damage (theurge's choice).

Baleful Gaze. The theurge focuses their hate and anger on another creature within 60 feet of them that can see them. The creature must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, taking 33 (6d10) necrotic damage and becoming poisoned until the end of its next turn on a failed save, or taking half as much damage and not becoming poisoned on a successful one.

Command Elementals. The theurge speaks words of power to compel Elementals to serve them. Each Elemental within 30 feet of the theurge that can hear them must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed by the theurge for 10 minutes. While charmed, the Elemental obeys all the theurge's commands to the best of its ability.

Spellcasting. The theurge's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). They can cast the following spells:

3/day each: *cone of cold, fireball, lightning bolt*

Bonus Actions

Misty Step. The theurge can magically teleport up to 30 feet to an unoccupied space they can see.

Reactions

Elemental Nimbus. When the theurge is hit with a melee attack, they can surround themself with a halo of elemental energies. Each creature within 10 feet of the theurge must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) damage on a failed saving throw, or half as much damage on a successful one. The theurge selects the damage type from the following list: acid, cold, fire, lightning, or thunder.



New Fey Creatures

Whether they bring weal or woe, an encounter with the fey should be memorable. This is especially true for fey native to the Shadowfell; as embodiments of loss, despair, and other unpleasant feelings, these fey allow players to explore heavy emotional themes and might even add a little whimsy to an otherwise sullen location. There are many more horrifying fey out there than appear in this article, and you can use the examples here to design your own terrifying creations.

Bogie

The bogie (also called a boogeyman, boogie monster, or boogie woogie) is the embodiment of nightmares. Their appearance varies from moment to moment, but those targeted by a bogie's Terrify action can identify that bogie upon sight regardless of the form they take. A bogie feeds off the fear of their victims; rather killing their prey, they often savor the victim's terror for weeks or even months at a time. Bogies are typically found in urban environments, particularly in crowded living spaces—or even in closets and under beds.

Tactics

A bogie often attacks from hiding, targeting a creature who looks inexperienced or uncertain. They use their Terrify ability until a target fails its saving throw, then harry the same creature with melee attacks. However, bogies are innate cowards who prefer to feed on helpless targets and flee combat when they know they can't win.

Bogie Mythology

Tales of bogies and similar monsters are found in many cultures, often used by adults to frighten children into good behavior. Bogies are typically described as masculine or androgynous monsters that punish people for misbehavior, though their appearance varies from story to story. In modern family media, they're often portrayed as cute "monsters" instead of sinister terrors

Bogie

Medium Fey, Typically Chaotic Evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 67 (9d8 + 27)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	8 (-1)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Con +6
Skills Intimidation +7, Perception +4, Sleight of Hand +6, Stealth +9
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Vulnerabilities radiant
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Common, Sylvan; telepathy 30 ft.
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Incorporeal Movement. The bogie can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. They take 5 (1d10) force damage if they end their turn inside an object.

Actions

Multiattack. The bogie uses Terrify, then makes two attacks with their claws.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) psychic damage.

Terrify. The bogie chooses one creature within 30 feet of them that can see the bogie. The bogie's form changes, embodying the greatest fear of their target. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened of the bogie for 1 minute. A creature frightened in this way can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turns, ending the condition on itself on a success. If the bogie targets a creature with Terrify while another creature is affected by it, the effect ends for the previous target.

If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to any bogie's Terrify for the next 24 hours.

Shadow Shift. The bogie enters the Shadowfell from the Feywild or Material Plane, or leaves the Shadowfell and enters the Feywild or Material Plane. When using Shadow Shift to leave the Shadowfell, the bogie's destination must be a confined space just big enough for them to fit inside (such as within a closet, under a bed, or inside a trunk).

Spellcasting. The bogie's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15). They can cast the following spells, requiring no components:

At will: *vicious mockery*
3/day: *detect thoughts*

Bonus Actions

Marked for Death. The bogie chooses a creature they can see within 90 feet of them and magically marks the target as their quarry for 1 minute. Whenever the bogie hits the target with a weapon attack, they deal an extra 1d6 damage.

Scare to Death. The bogie deals 14 (4d6) psychic damage to a creature within 30 feet of them that they can see that is frightened by their Terrify action.



FACHAN

The fachan is a fey creature of jealousy and violence, with fearsome magic that can cause a victim's heart to stop. With a single leg that it hops upon, a single arm that sprouts from its chest, and a single eye centered in its massive head, the fachan is a terrifying sight. Fachans are terribly jealous of their flying fey kin who seem to move so freely and easily. Fachans often attack flying creatures out of spite, even innocent ones such as songbirds and butterflies.

Though fachans usually live in isolation, they don't do so by choice. They crave love and attention, and often cast *disguise self* to assume the appearance of guileless humanoids (such as children) to infiltrate a town and enjoy society. However, enjoyment soon becomes sharp jealousy as the fachnan realizes how much they don't have. When the ruse inevitably fails, the fachnan violently lashes out and the community drives them away, back to isolated misery.

TACTICS

A fachan is a terrifying opponent. They begin combat by targeting a creature with Stop Heart. If the creature fails its saving throw, the fachan then casts *fear* to scare away that creature's allies. The fachan uses subsequent turns to finish off the dying target, attacking wildly with their spiked chain. However, a fachan will always ignore tactical moves in favor of attacking a flying creature.

FACHAN MYTHOLOGY

The fachan is a nightmare of Irish and Scottish folklore, but similar creatures exist in Yakuts tales as well. Also called Peg-Leg Jack and the abaasy, the fachan was fiercely territorial and took innocent-looking forms, especially that of a small child, to scout new targets in human society.

Fachan

Medium Fey, Typically Chaotic Evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 78 (12d8 + 24)
Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	8 (-1)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)

Skills Athletics +5, Intimidation +2
Senses passive Perception 11
Languages Common
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Hopping. The fachan has disadvantage on ability checks and saving throws to avoid being knocked prone.

Actions

Multiattack. The fachan makes two Morningstar attacks or two Spiked Chain attacks.

Morningstar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Spiked Chain. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (2d4 + 3) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the fachan can choose one of the following additional effects:

- If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it is grappled (escape DC 13). Until the grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the fachan can't grapple another target.
- The target is knocked prone.

Spellcasting. The fachan's spellcasting ability is Constitution (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). They can cast the following spells, requiring no components:

At will: *fear*
3/day: *disguise self*

Stop Heart (Recharge 6). The fachan targets one creature within 60 feet of the fachan that can see them and has a beating heart. That creature must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or drop to 0 hit points. On a successful saving throw, the creature takes 10 (3d6) psychic damage.

Bonus Actions

Jaunt. The fachan teleports 30 feet to an unoccupied space they can see.

Lubberkin

The lubberkin, lob, lubber fiend, lurdane, or Lob Lie-By-The-Fire is a spirit of intoxication. Lubberkin look like eleven-foot-tall, fur-covered humans with fluffy tails. While they initially act friendly and welcoming, lubberkin seek to corrupt the pure of heart with excess. A lubberkin might be kind on a whim, helping a family clean their home for a saucer of milk, but these fey are more often found haunting places where the devout reside, such as monasteries and temples. The lubberkin tempts residents with excessive drink to deal with sorrows, initiating their inevitable decline into debauchery. An established lubberkin often turns temples into a hedonistic cult serving their desires.

Before introducing a lubberkin into your game, be sure to talk with the players about the legends and themes surrounding these monsters. Alcoholism, excessive drinking, and cults are sensitive topics that could be unpleasant or disturbing for your players.

Tactics

The characters might encounter a lubberkin after delving into their home and dealing with the creature's personal cult—but no matter where they find one, a lubberkin is a formidable foe. In combat, a lubberkin prefers to direct cult members to harry foes while they use Sniff of the Stuff to intoxicate physically powerful characters. Lubberkin also prefer not to kill their enemies; instead, they enjoy indoctrinating defeated foes and inducting them into their cults.

Lubberkin Mythology

The lubberkin is a creature of English folklore similar to the brownie of Scotland, the Slavic domovoi, and the Scandinavian tomte. Lubber fiends appear in wo, S.R. Crocket, Juliana H. Ewing, and others, as well as some popular comics and video games.

Lubberkin

Large Fey, Typically Neutral Evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 136 (13d10 + 65)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Con +8, Wis +4
Skills Athletics +9, Perception +4
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Common
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Actions

Multiattack. The lubberkin makes two Fist attacks.

Fist. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 23 (5d6 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

Sniff of the Stuff. The lubberkin takes a swig of alcohol, then sprays it in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in the area must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or have disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks and spend its action lamenting perceived regrets and loss, sobbing uncontrollably. An affected creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Spellcasting. The lubberkin's spellcasting ability is Constitution (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). They can cast the following spells, requiring no components:

At will: *lesser restoration, prestidigitation, purify food and drink*
1/day each: *animate objects, create food and water*



THE STUFF OF NIGHTMARES

Two Encounter-Inducing Nightmares

by Carlos Cisco

When we drift off to sleep, we rarely think of the measures we have in place to guard us. The blanket that warms our body. The door lock that keeps the outside out. Your friend on watch who is definitely not distracted by their personal demons and surely succeeds on every one of their Perception checks. Yet even with those measures in place, we find ourselves victims of invasion—nightmares, intrusive thoughts and memories, regrets, sleep paralysis trapping us in our bodies while our minds race. This article takes these invasions and turns a simple long rest into a terrifying ordeal that makes adventurers think twice about resting in that "probably unhaunted inn."

This isn't about punishing your players for seeking rest, but rather a tool to transform what is usually a mechanical necessity that rarely pushes the narrative forward into something existentially terrifying with consequences beyond exhaustion and missing spell slots.

The following encounters are designed to be dropped into your game and are designed for characters of levels 7 to 9.

THE GLASS GHOST

Every town has an Elm Street.

–Freddy Krueger

A supposedly haunted inn offers prizes to adventurers brave enough to stay an entire night. Rumors say the prize is a mysterious magic item. But more deadly than the overnight stay are the dreams that haunted the survivors after.

BACKGROUND

Every town has an inn like this—a quiet one on the edge of town, or one out of the way, nestled in alleys and hidden from view. The Helm Street Inn was once a hub for professional vagabonds, raucous adventurers, and the occasional murderous drifter. You know the type.

A day of inclement weather wracked this discreet inn some time ago. Some say a thunderstorm. Others say a storm of sand. That detail isn't important, but what it drove through the door is.

The Glass Ghost, a strange and confused being made of glass, immediately set the room on edge. They kept to themselves and neither ate nor drank. As the guests' drinks set in and the night wound down, the Glass Ghost approached a sleeping patron. With one touch, the Glass Ghost went rigid, entering a trance. The sleeper moaned softly, then roared in anger. The sleeper's companions assumed the worst of this … whatever it was. They grabbed their weapons and laid waste to the Glass Ghost until its fragile form finally cracked.

Soon the rest of the inn joined in, while the innkeeper merely watched. Doing nothing. Helping no one. The pa-

trons beat the Glass Ghost until the traveler was nothing but grains of fine, multicolored sand.

The anger and pain this strange being felt while the patrons shattered them carried their restless spirit back into the Astral Plane, giving them new unlife as an unkillable, dream-based revenant. The Glass Ghost could now enter victims' dreams and attack, harming their physical bodies while stalking their unconscious minds.



One by one, those murderous adventurers were found dead in their rooms the next night, peppered with shards of glass, sand spilling from their open wounds. Only the innkeeper who allowed the murder remained. No one knows exactly what happened, but the innkeeper disappeared the following morning; most assume they shared the same fate.

This inn still operates to this day. The new ownership embraced the unfortunate mishap to create a "haunted inn" experience. Can you stay the whole night? If so, you walk away with a prize and your breakfast is free. According to rumor, *most* adventurers do enjoy a free breakfast and some shiny new coin. But those that do rarely stay another night. Anywhere.

At least, this is what the locals tell the characters if asked about the inn. The true story is much, much darker.

Key NPCs

To know the game, one must know the players. No one is more central than Mari Elena, the innkeeper—the one who witnessed the events that night, and with much more hiding under the surface than one might assume.

Mari Elena

Neutral Evil, Half-Elf, 75, She/Her

Mari Elena is cunning, devious, and not at all what she appears. She witnessed the shattering of the Glass Ghost, as she was the proprietor of the original inn. She presents as a dark-skinned half-elf dressed in garb just a shade too nice for a busy innkeeper. Her distinct silver earring pierces the lobe and connects with a chain to the helix of her ear. She is a wolf in sheep's clothing—or rather, a dragon in innkeeper's clothing.

In reality, Mari is an opportunistic, paranoid, and gregarious **young red dragon** named Mahlinchex'thra, who found that business acumen and real estate investment came much more naturally to her than raiding and pillaging. With barely any effort, her unorthodox hoard grows. Her *earring of shapeshifting* (see below) allows her to talk freely among those she views as lesser beings, disguised as her latest persona, which is currently Mari. Greedy and vain, the dragon has left a wake of aliases, misdirects, and chaos behind her; the misfortune of others does nothing to

move Mari, something she hides well when she opens her next business venture with a smile.

The Glass Ghost's murder was an opportunity for Mari to create yet another turnkey operation ... if she played her cards right. When the Glass Ghost came for her the next night, she assumed her true form, using momentary surprise and a bit of surreptitious intimidation to propose a pact—or, as she presented it, an investment opportunity. She would create a "haunted inn" and challenge proud adventurers to stay the night for a reward. While the contestants slept, the Glass Ghost could enter their unconscious minds and haunt them night after night, harming them in their dreams until they perished. The Glass Ghost could slake their thirst for the blood of adventurers in an endless loop, while Mari in turn could keep her life (and whatever valuables are left on the bodies of dead adventurers).

Despite their hatred for Mari, the Glass Ghost was smart enough not to tangle with a dragon and took the bargain. After coming to agreeable terms, Mari used a draconic binding ritual to seal the pact. They have been tenuous business partners ever since. It's a good deal for them both, even if one is consumed by hatred and the other by paranoia.

This isn't the first Helm Street Inn Mari set up with the Glass Ghost, but it is the only one currently in operation. Dozens of towns have been subjected to a Helm Street Inn, and when questions eventually lead back to Mari (or whatever alias she has donned), the dragon uproots and moves somewhere else—yet another reason for her not to carry liquid assets. Mari is smart enough not to keep a large hoard around and has decentralized her money across various investment portfolios, real estate, and overseas banks.

Personality Trait. "Everything has a use and a place. It's about finding both."

Ideal. "You can't enjoy your wealth if you can't secure your health."

Bond. "Despite how nervous he makes me, I admire the work ethic of the Glass Ghost."

Flaw. "My plans are flawless and my designs airtight."

INCISE, THE GLASS GHOST

Chaotic Evil, Sand Speaker, Undead, They/Them

A native of the Astral Plane, the Glass Ghost, whose real name is Incise, is a humanoid formed of living glass and sand who can enter the dreams of others (see the sand speaker ancestry in *ARCADIA 3*'s *The Dream Kin* by Justice Ramin Arman for more information)—or they were in their previous life.

Now, they exist only in the dreams of others, but they are still capable of great harm and violence. Incise is a dream-based revenant bent on exacting harsh revenge against all adventurers. Unlike the smooth, blown-glass look that most sand speakers have, their form is cracked, sharp, and jagged, their hand formed into a cruel claw. Cursed by their bargain with Mari to murder again and again, the Glass Ghost is weary but unable to free themselves from this unending cycle of blood and nightmares.

Yet some days they don't want to be freed from this. In all the dreams wherein Incise assaulted adventurers, not one person asked how they could help them. To Incise, that's the most damning indictment of adventurers of them all.

Incise uses the **Glass Ghost** stat block at the end of this encounter. They are nearly impossible to truly kill; if encountered in a dream and destroyed, Incise simply takes a week to reform and continue their attacks. See "Dream Warriors" for information on truly stopping Incise.

Personality Trait. "Existence is agony unending. Delighting in violence makes it less so."

Ideal. "The only good adventurer is a dead adventurer."

Bond. "Someday I'll be free of Mari."

Flaw. "I can't stop killing people. I don't want to."

EARRING OF SHAPESHIFTING

Wondrous Item, Rare

While wearing this earring, you can use an action to magically polymorph into a Small or Medium humanoid that has an ancestry and appearance of your choice, or back into your true form. You revert to your true form if you die. Any equipment you are wearing or carrying is absorbed or borne by the new form (your choice). In a new form, you retain your statistics except for your size and creature type.

ENCOUNTER BREAKDOWN

This encounter takes place over an indeterminate amount of days, and the following breakdown can serve as a guide as to how it may play out:

1. The characters learn about the Helm Street Inn and a prize for adventurers who stay the night (see "Nightmare on Helm Street").
2. The characters arrive at the Helm Street Inn and meet the innkeeper, Mari Elena. She relates the story behind the Helm Street Inn and the Glass Ghost (see "Helm Street Inn").

3. During their stay at the inn, the characters have their first nightmare of the Glass Ghost and the revenant curses them (see "First Nightmare").
4. The next morning, the characters collect their prize and continue whatever adventure they may have (see "Next Morning").
5. The next time the characters take a long rest, the Glass Ghost attacks (see "Second Night"). Characters can become marked by Incise during this nightmare; if marked during subsequent rests, they are thrust into dreams where the Glass Ghost attempts to kill them (see "Dream Warriors").
6. If the Glass Ghost is destroyed, the characters must find a way to end this curse before the ghost reforms and attacks again. Whether they get the information from the Glass Ghost or not, the logical next stop is back to the inn and confront Mari (see "New Nightmares").
7. If the characters confront Mari, she negotiates first, but won't hesitate to defend herself when it becomes clear that she created only one solution to their problem: her death (see "Confronting Mari").

Nightmare on Helm Street

There are several ways to hook the characters into Helm Street Inn's "haunted inn experience." In a large city, they might find flyers posted around the city with different clever advertising slogans:

Can YOU Survive the Night?
Prizes For All Who Dare!
Who Is the Glass Ghost?

In a small town, Helm Street Inn might be the only establishment that caters to "their types" (adventurers). No matter where in the world the characters are, every settlement has a Helm Street Inn … or will eventually.

Helm Street Inn

When the characters take the bait, they find a quaint but kitschy two-story inn. The inn's outside has the following notable features:

- Backlit stained glass windows project multicolored lights onto the street.
- A tiny bit of colorful sand spills out of cracks and crevices in the cobblestone walls.
- The air feels just a little bit dryer around the inn.
- The sign art portrays a cracked helm with an adorable ghost peeping out from behind it.



Inside is another matter. The front door opens into a small tavern with three tables, a bar, and these other notable features:

- The macabre theme has been taken a little too far: the walls and ceilings are adorned with curios and objects that "once belonged to" (but probably didn't) evil wizards, cursed warriors, and notorious serial killers. It's the kind of place where servers would be adorned in flair if the inn were staffed.
- The displayed objects include a bloodied greatsword with a machete-like blade, a rusty scythe, a jagged kitchen knife under a mask made of humanoid skin, a marionette with blades for hands, and a silver orb with blades jutting out of the sides.
- A small window opens into a tiny kitchen behind the bar where unseen servants (per the spell of the same name) prepare a middling (at best) menu.
- A small but ornate chandelier made of blown glass. If a character stares at it long enough, it sways like it might be shifting. But it's not. Or is it? The sand contained in the chandelier is what remains of the Glass Ghost's corporeal form. If the Glass Ghost is freed of their pact (see "New Nightmares"), the chandelier shatters.
- An owlbear-skin rug. This is actually a **rug of smothering**.
- A large, ornately adorned chest inlaid with dozens of silver question marks. It has a hole large enough to reach your hand in. The box cleverly disguises an open *bag of holding* and is the mystery box used to reward adventurers who stay the night (see "Next Morning").

Ghost Story

When Mari notices the characters, she knows that they've likely heard of the Glass Ghost, but she happily spins them a yarn if they haven't, revealing the information in the "Background" section up to the disappearance of the innkeeper. If asked how she acquired the inn, Mari says she bought it on the cheap in a foreclosure sale. While she regales the characters with the sordid tale, she omits any details about her true nature, her relationship with the Glass Ghost, and that she was the innkeeper during Incise's slaying.

A character who succeeds on a DC 17 Wisdom (Insight) check can tell that Mari omits some details, but if confronted, she shifts the conversation and attempts to sell a timeshare vacation keep on the coast until the characters relent. If asked about the prize, Mari explains that anyone who can sleep the whole night upstairs wins a mystery item at breakfast the next day (proudly stating, "which, I might add, will also be free!"). If asked about this business operation (how could it be profitable?), she claims that this is not a huge moneymaker, but she has other real estate investments that keep this passion project afloat. She just loves themed establishments.

First Nightmare

If the characters agree to stay, they are given keys to their rooms, which have luxurious down pillows and thick blankets. When they have all fallen asleep, read the following:

> Each of you dreams of a vast desert of scintillating, colorful sand. No matter which direction you walk, you always seem to be cresting the top of the same dune. When you stare out across the prismatic expanse, you see something in the heat waves … someone approaching. Then you wake.

During this dream, Incise connects to the characters and can henceforth enter their minds whenever they sleep. When the characters wake, they cough up clouds of multicolored sand, a sign that this curse is in effect and the Glass Ghost has infiltrated the collective subconscious of the party.

Elves Don't Sleep

There's a good chance you have an elf or another non-sleeper in the group. You can go one of two routes here. First, you can handwave the rules so that the elf experiences the above dream during their trance. Alternatively, if you prefer a challenge, Mari enacts her backup plan. She has every confidence in the Glass Ghost, but she knows that confidence comes from preparation and contingency.

On the first night after their stay, Mari sends her owlbear-skin **rug of smothering** to deal with anyone who didn't sleep. If multiple adventurers opted out of sleeping or remain unmarked, Mari sends up to three additional **rugs of smothering**, but never sends more than the number of unmarked adventurers. These additional rugs appear as normal rugs, and the owlbear rug is clearly the ringleader.

Next Morning

At breakfast, Mari feigns dismay as she pulls the mystery box off the shelf, places it on the bar, and asks, "Who's first?" The characters can draw from the box, rolling 1d12 and taking the item rolled on the Mystery Box table below. If a character rolls a prize that a previous character received, have them roll again until they generate a new result. If a character opted out of sleeping or didn't sleep for biological reasons, Mari pulls the box away. "Tsk tsk. The deal was to sleep the night." Mari holds fast to this wording.

If asked about the sand, Mari replies, "Woke up with a mouthful of sand? You got off easy. He can be much scarier when he wants to be."

The breakfast, like food at most themed restaurants, is dubious at best.

Second Night

After the characters leave the inn, the Glass Ghost enters their dreams whenever they take a long rest. The default setting for these dreams is the desert of multicolored sand, but you can modify the dream to take place in locations with emotional resonance for the characters. It's a dream. Go wild.

The first time the characters rest after sleeping in the inn, they dream of the Glass Ghost chasing them. While they all have the same dream, no character can see or interact with the others in the dream. Each character can choose to flee or confront the Glass Ghost:

- A character who flees must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw. On a successful save, the character outruns the Glass Ghost but gains a level of exhaustion when they wake up that can't be removed until the Glass Ghost is reduced to 0 hit points. On a failed save, the Glass Ghost catches up to the character and slashes them with claws of glass. The character gains a level of exhaustion that can't be removed and loses 1d6 hit points and their hit point maximum is reduced by the same amount until the Glass Ghost is reduced to 0 hit points.
- If a character confronts Glass Ghost, the revenant slashes the character with glass claws. The character loses 1d6 hit points and their hit point maximum is reduced by the same amount until the Glass Ghost is reduced to 0 hit points.

Characters who confront the Glass Ghost or who fail their saving throw while fleeing awake with glass shards sticking out of their body, which indicates they are marked (see "Dream Warriors").

Dream Warriors

After the characters experience their second nightmare with the Glass Ghost, they continue to encounter the revenant in their dreams whenever they sleep during a long rest—only this time, characters may be able to make a stand and see one another. Again, this encounter's default setting is the desert of multicolored sand, but the GM is free to set this nightmare anywhere with emotional resonance for the party. Remember … it's a dream. Go nuts.

Mystery Box

d12	Mystery Box Prizes
1	A factory reject *potion of healing* that appears normal. When a creature consumes the potion, it regains 2d4 + 2 hit points and is blinded for 1 minute.
2	A *+2 dagger*. The character who pulls this item from the box cuts themselves and takes 2 (1d4) slashing damage. There are bloody fingerprints on the blade that won't wipe clean.
3	An *immovable rod* that only works once. Once it is made immobile, it can't be deactivated.
4	An *eversmoking bottle* that only spews sulphuric red smoke.
5	A very dim *gem of brightness*. It has 1 charge left.
6	*Gauntlets of ogre power* made from the preserved fists of an ogre. They make the wearer's hands oversized, but otherwise have no abnormal effects.
7	A *hat of disguise*. Bits of hair and scalp remain stuck to the inside of the hat.
8	A *necklace of fireballs* with two beads remaining. It's unwearable as a necklace, as the chain has been snapped.
9	A *+1 mace*. It looks burnt and partially melted, but it is functional.
10	A *cloak of protection*. A brightly colored shoulder wrap with three jagged slashes running down the back, tattering the end. The cloak is still caked in blood.
11	A *shield of missile attraction*. There are multicolored, unbreakable glass shards stuck in the shield.
12	A *potion of fire giant strength*.

Glass Ghost

Medium Undead, Chaotic Evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 90 (12d8 + 36)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	9 (-1)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Int +3
Damage Vulnerabilities bludgeoning
Damage Resistance piercing, slashing
Damage Immunities psychic
Condition Immunities charmed, paralyzed, stunned
Senses darkvision 60ft., passive Perception 9
Languages Common
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Discorporation. When the Glass Ghost drops to 0 hit points or dies, their dreamform is destroyed but their essence travels back to the Astral Plane, and they can't enter dreams or use actions. After 1 week, the Glass Ghost gains a new dreamform, regaining all their hit points and becoming active again.

Evasion. When subjected to an effect that allows a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, the Glass Ghost takes no damage on a successful save or half damage on a failed one, provided the Glass Ghost is not incapacitated.

Actions

Multiattack. The Glass Ghost makes two Glass Claw attacks.

Glass Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 14 Charisma saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) psychic damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one. The attack deals an extra 7 (2d6) piercing damage if the Glass Ghost has advantage on the attack roll or if the target is within 5 feet of one of the Glass Ghost's allies.

Shard of Glass. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 60/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d10) force damage. The attack deals an extra 14 (4d6) force damage if the Glass Ghost has advantage on the attack roll or if the target is within 5 feet of one of the Glass Ghost's allies. On a hit or a miss, the shard explodes, and the target and each creature within 5 feet of it must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or take 14 (4d6) piercing damage.

Bonus Actions

Fear Themself. The Glass Ghost can conjure a copy of themselves in an unoccupied space within 30 feet of them. Additionally, the Glass Ghost can swap places with a copy within 30 feet of them. Each copy has the statistics of the Glass Ghost, except it has 1 hit point, AC 18, can't take villain actions, and lacks the Glass Ghost's traits, Multiattack action, and Shard of Glass action. Each copy acts immediately after the Glass Ghost in initiative.

Reactions

Dream Logic. When the Glass Ghost or one of their copies is hit with a melee attack, the Glass Ghost can swap places with another creature they can see within 30 feet of them. The target takes the damage instead of the Glass Ghost.

Villian Actions

The Glass Ghost has three villain actions. They can take each action once during an encounter after an enemy creature's turn. They take villain action 1 during the first round of combat, villain action 2 during the second, and villain action 3 during the third round.

Villain Action 1: One, Two, I'm Coming for You. The Glass Ghost conjures multiple copies of themself. One copy appears within 5 feet of each creature within 60 feet of the Glass Ghost. Additionally, as part of this action, the Glass Ghost can swap places with one of the copies.

Villain Action 2: Kill for Me. Each creature within 5 feet of a copy of the Glass Ghost must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be briefly possessed by the copy. The copy disappears and forces the possessed creature to use its movement and action on its next turn to move toward the possessed creature's nearest ally and target it with a weapon attack or cantrip that deals damage. If a copy is adjacent to more than one target, the copy targets the first creature in initiative order that isn't already possessed. At the end of the possessed creature's next turn, the copy reappears in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the possessed creature.

Villain Action 3: It's Prime Time. Each remaining copy of the Glass Ghost explodes in a burst of astral sand, dealing 7 (2d6) psychic damage to each creature within 10 feet of it except for the Glass Ghost and destroying the copy. Each creature struck by the sand must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be outlined in shimmering sand. Until an outlined creature exits the dream, any attack rolls against it have advantage if the attacker can see it, and it can't benefit from being invisible.

Characters who woke up with glass in their wounds from the "Second Night" encounter with the Glass Ghost are marked. Marked characters can see each other in shared dreams featuring the Glass Ghost. Additionally, they no longer automatically wake when the Glass Ghost harms them. Any wounds incurred in this dream space appear on and affect their physical bodies. The characters carry any equipment they normally carry, including weapons, armor, consumables, and essential spell components. The **Glass Ghost** attacks these characters, taking full advantage of their villain actions to do as much damage as possible. The Glass Ghost attacks spellcasters and unarmored characters first before moving on to bulkier targets. They fight with abandon; Incise knows full well that if their glass form is dispatched, they simply return in time. A character exits the dream when Incise is reduced to 0 hit points, or if all marked characters are reduced to 0 hit points, unconscious, or dead.

A character who is not asleep notices their unconscious marked friends in distress and can use an action to attempt to wake a marked dreamer, allowing the dreamer to make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the dreamer is trapped with the Glass Ghost. On a success, the dreamer wakes up, but they don't gain the benefits of a long rest and any damage they took from the Glass Ghost can't be healed until the Glass Ghost is reduced to 0 hit points. A marked character can use an action to fall unconscious and enter an encounter with the Glass Ghost the next round.

Unmarked characters continue to have the dream under "Second Night" until they are marked or the Glass Ghost has been defeated. If such a character becomes marked, they must finish a long rest before they can join a combat encounter with Incise.

If a character confronts Incise and asks how to free them, Incise openly curses Mari's name, saying this torment ends with her death but that the pact prevents Incise from wrenching the life from her bones themself. While the characters can't convince Incise to stop, they can destroy Incise's dreamform and use the weeklong recovery gap to confront and dispose of Mari, freeing Incise and themselves from this curse.

If the characters defeat Incise, the nightmare isn't over. While the Glass Ghost reforms, nightmares of Incise's brutal slaying at the original Helm Street Inn haunt the characters until the revenant returns, stronger than they were before (see the "Tempered Glass" sidebar).

Tempered Glass

Characters may feel confident that one bad night a week won't really change the course of their adventures—but they would be wrong. Each time Incise is destroyed, they reform stronger, like tempered glass. When they reform, the Glass Ghost's proficiency bonus increases by 1 and their Glass Claw attack deals an extra 1d6 damage. These bonuses are cumulative and apply to Incise's copies, as well. Repeated slayings only make Incise an unstoppable killing machine.

New Nightmares

Even if the characters dispose of the Glass Ghost in a dream, their worries are far from over. After regenerating, the Glass Ghost pursues the characters until they free the revenant from this cycle. To free Incise, the characters must find a way to end the pact Incise made with Mari by killing her or convincing her to end the pact. If confronted, Mari attempts to flee, seeking shelter at one of her many lavish investment properties.

Confronting Mari

If she is unable to flee or the characters track her to one of her other homes, Mari negotiates before resorting to combat, offering the deed to the inn in exchange for her life and claiming that ownership of the inn grants control over the Glass Ghost. This is, of course, a desperate lie. A character who succeeds on a DC 19 Wisdom (Insight) check sees the dragon's deceit. If pressed with a successful DC 16 Charisma (Intimidation) check, Mari gives the characters a deed to a keep in a remote location. The keep, if the deed is secured, is somewhere remote—a forest, a mountain range, or a cliff overlooking the coast. Wherever it is, it has a stunning view, but it needs a ton of work to restore it to any semblance of livability. It's a fixer-upper. Both it and the inn could present an opportunity to take advantage of the Stronghold rules in *Strongholds & Followers*.

If the characters try to convince Mari to break the pact with Incise, there is no set DC for this. As far as Mari is concerned, ending the pact is akin to committing slow suicide, as the Glass Ghost will come for her as soon as they're freed. A very compelling argument or trade must be made to convince her, something that carries the weight and magnitude of a dragon's life. So … not cheap. Mari is drawn to offers such as legendary magic items and ownership of resource-rich land—things that hold a value not easily calculated, but that either increase her power or passively generate wealth. This isn't an easy sell, as Mari

has no desire to die at the character's hands *or* the Glass Ghost's.

The adventurers are, of course, free to not kill anyone. But that might not be the healthiest long-term choice for them.

If negotiations fail and she can see no escape, Mari changes into her true form to inflict whatever damage she can until she finds an opening to flee. If the characters thoroughly search the inn, they find 1,000 gp stashed in various places and a portfolio detailing Mari's various holdings, including account numbers at a half dozen prestigious banks all around the world. Unfortunately, they are coded behind six Draconic ciphers. A character who makes a successful DC 20 Intelligence check decodes one document. If a character speaks Draconic, they can add their proficiency bonus to the check. If they successfully decode a document, choose or roll for the document decoded on the Mari's Holding's table. Once a document is decoded, remove it from the table, ignoring and rerolling the result if it comes up again.

Incise's Freedom. If Incise is freed from their pact with Mari, their spirit can finally move on. The Glass Ghost sheds their need for vengeance and goes to an eternal rest.

Mari's Holdings

d6	Mystery Box Prizes
1	The account number to a notoriously secure bank in a coastal metropolis on another continent. The account contains 300 pp, 2,000 gp, and 5,000 sp.
2	The deed to a keep in a remote location of the GM's choice. It's a real fixer-upper, and possibly haunted, but could be a stronghold for the characters if they clean it up.
3	Titles to sculptures and paintings that are on display in museums in six different cities and worth a total of 3,500 gp. They're bound in a contract that prohibits release until the beginning of the new year, where that contract to display is up for negotiation.
4	Titles to a block of land in a major city on which low-income housing is built. The folk who reside there are behind on their payments and would have been in danger of eviction by Mari. There are notes about a meeting to discuss it with a local magistrate two weeks from now.
5	The title to what is effectively a strip mall in a major city: three densely packed shops, where an alchemist, a blacksmith, and a tinkerer all pay Mari rent.
6	The deed to a gem mine, along with a contract with the Diamond Delvers, a gnomish mining company. The company missed their last check-in after they requested mercenary aid to overcome some … challenges. Judging by the correspondence, Mari refused.

Hypnagougic Hauntings

Don't let it in!

–Samuel, The Babadook

Nasty amorphous aberrations native to the Astral Plane, hypnagougs are a plague to sleepers the world over. For individuals, they're nearly always fatal. For adventuring parties, or any large group of people sleeping close together, these literal nightmares unleash something much, much worse. Unfortunately for them, and everyone else, they have no natural food source in their native plane. To feed, they anchor a portion of themselves in the Material Plane, drinking deep of the dreams and nightmares of sapient beings until they've absorbed enough energy to rip their way into reality.

Only when made flesh can this abomination truly feed, leaving naught but blood and tears in their wake, amassing strength as they feast. Their hunger is endless. The aberrations only retreat when forced into a proverbial corner, intelligent enough to know when they've been bested.

Encountering a Hypnagoug

A hypnagoug strikes when an individual or group is resting. Adventuring parties that encounter one are forced into asymmetrical combat as the sleepers fight a war of attrition with the hypnagoug on its home turf while anyone on watch must prevent the hypnagoug from draining the sleepers' life force.

Once a hypnagoug has gorged itself, it tears out of the Astral Plane. It has little interest in dispatching the rest of the group, smart enough to know that any bad luck could send it packing. Before fleeing, it attempts to bring one or more of the sleepers along with it to snack on later. Hypnagougs left to their own devices continue to prey on sleepers, though their methods become less surreptitious and cumulatively more … garish.

It is best to avoid letting this thing onto the Material Plane to begin with. Fortunately, there is a way to prevent its entrance, but only for those smart enough to keep someone perceptive on watch. These awake heroes stand a chance of containing the monster if they can coordinate with their sleeping allies, who have their own role to play, even if it's one of attrition.



The characters don't need to be the target. Uncovering a hypnagoug in a populated area could be a race against time as it grows in strength. Hypnagougs that have had multiple nights to feed are nearly impossible to slay. A feast full of drunken louts would make an excellent target, as would a one-room family home—anywhere the creatures might find multiple sleepers clustered in a small area.

Sleepers

When a hypnagoug's anchor breaks through into the Material Plane, it creates a special aura that thrusts unconscious creatures into a liminal space between sleep and dream. They can see everything within the 30-foot aura, including other sleepers in their astral forms, but nothing beyond this area. Instead of the hypnagoug's Material Plane anchor, they see the creature's full, horrifying form. While feeding, the hypnagoug can't take actions, except through its anchor. When the sleepers first "awake" in this liminal space, read the following text:

> Your eyes flutter open. Everything around you, in eerie grayscale, shifts at the borders of your perception. You see your body lying in repose below you. Your companions similarly stand as ethereal spirits above their corporeal bodies. In the center of all, a huge, amorphous form wraps tightly around itself like a nightmarish cocoon. Corded muscles ripple under oily, shifting, umbral skin. And eyes. So many eyes. And whispers pleading from a thousand different voices all crying out for release. Whatever this is, it is a literal nightmare to behold.

Awake

For those lucky enough to be awake when a hypnagoug arrives, the solution is simple: remove the source of food. If all sleeping creatures are removed from the Soporific Aura, the anchor retreats into the Astral Plane and the encounter is over. Damaging the anchor until it retreats is also a viable option.

The Anchor

While technically an appendage of a larger creature, the anchor does not share hit points with the hypnagoug. When it appears in the Material Plane, the anchor always takes the form of something … odd, such as an ornate vase in the middle of a wooded campsite, a half-eaten loaf of bread sitting on the nightstand, or a book appearing just outside your bedroom door. It can appear as anything, but whatever it is … it ain't right.

Hypnagoug Anchor

Tiny Aberration, Chaotic Evil

Armor Class 20 (natural armor)
Hit Points 117 (18d4 + 72)
Speed 0 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +7, Wis +6
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, force, piercing, psychic, slashing
Condition Immunities charmed, paralyzed, stunned
Senses blindsight 30 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 13
Languages telepathy 60 ft.
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Soporific Aura. Unconscious creatures within 30 feet of the anchor can't be awoken by any means. A creature that attacks the anchor while within 30 feet of it must succeed on a DC 14 Charisma saving throw or fall unconscious.

An unconscious creature within 30 feet of the anchor has its spirit leave its body and enter an astral state between sleep and waking. A creature's spirit can see everything within 30 feet of the anchor, including other spirits of unconscious creatures and the full form of the hypnagoug, but is blind beyond this radius. On an unconscious creature's turn, its spirit has a movement speed of 0 and can only take one of the following actions:

- ***Forced Reentry.*** The spirit attempts to reenter its body. The creature rolls a d20. On a 15 or higher, the creature wakes and must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma saving throw or take 7 (2d6) psychic damage and have its speed is reduced by 10 feet for 1 minute. If the creature is currently tethered by Energy Sap the DC for the Charisma saving throw against Forced Reentry is 17.
- ***Lucid Defenses.*** The spirit attempts to psychically bolster itself against the hypnagoug's Energy Sap. The creature rolls a d20. On a 12 or higher, the creature adds 1d4 to its next saving throw against the hypnagoug's Energy Sap made within 1 minute. On a 20, in addition to the previous effect, the creature gains advantage on the save.
- ***Whispers from Beyond.*** The spirit communicates a twenty-five-word message to a creature within the anchor's Soporific Aura that is not unconscious. After receiving the message, the target must succeed on a DC 14 Charisma saving throw or take 2 (1d4) psychic damage.

Actions

Energy Sap. The anchor attaches a translucent tendril of energy to an unconscious creature it can see within 30 feet of it. This tendril remains attached to the unconscious creature until it wakes up, dies, or is moved further than 30 feet from the anchor.

When the anchor uses this action, each creature attached to a tendril must succeed on a DC 14 Charisma saving throw or suffer 1 level of exhaustion. Additionally, each creature attached to a tendril is pulled 20 feet straight toward the anchor.

Reactions

What's Underneath. When creatures suffer a total of 10 levels of exhaustion from the hypnagoug's Energy Sap within 1 minute, the hypnagoug tears open a portal between the Astral and Material Planes large enough for its full form. The hypnagoug anchor is replaced with a hypnagoug, and the portal closes behind the hypnagoug.

Astral Retreat. When the anchor takes damage that would reduce it to 0 hit points or there are no unconscious creatures within 30 feet of it, the anchor can retreat fully into the Astral Plane.

Hypnagoug

Huge Aberration, Chaotic Evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 126 (12d12 + 48)
Speed 0 ft., fly 40 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +7, Wis +6
Skills Athletics +7, Intimidation +5, Stealth +3
Damage Resistances force, psychic
Damage Immynities bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Condition Immunities charmed, paralyzed, prone, stunned
Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages telepathy 60 ft.
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Extreme Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the hypnagoug has disadvantage on all attack rolls and saving throws, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight, and takes 7 (2d6) radiant damage at the start of its turn.

Flesh Bindings. When the hypnagoug passes into the Material Plane, the tendrils from its anchor's Energy Sap become fleshy, moist tentacles. Each creature that was attached to a tendril is grappled (escape DC 14) by the hypnagoug's tentacles and its spirit is returned to its body. While grappled, a creature is fully cognizant, but is paralyzed and restrained until separated from the tentacle.

A creature grappled this way gains a level of exhaustion at sundown each day, and the hypnagoug gains temporary hit points equal to 5 x the total number of exhaustion levels gained that day by creatures affected by its Flesh Bindings.

Additionally, when the hypnagoug is hit with an attack, it reduces the damage from that attack by an amount equal to the number of creatures currently affected by its Flesh Bindings. If a creature dies while grappled, its corpse remains in the hypnagoug's tentacles, but the hypnagoug gains no benefits from it.

Each tentacle is 10 feet long and has an AC 14, 15 hit points, and immunity to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks. When a tentacle is destroyed, the creature grappled by it is freed.

Legendary Resistance (1/Day). If the hypnagoug fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Pound of Flesh. If the hypnagoug has 5 or more creatures under the effects of Flesh Bindings, the hypnagoug has advantage on all ability checks and saving throws.

Actions

Multiattack. The hypnagoug makes one Soporific Touch attack for each creature affected by Flesh Bindings and uses Flesh Tether.

Soporific Touch. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) psychic damage. On a hit, the target must succeed on a DC 12 Charisma saving throw or immediately fall unconscious until the end of their next turn, the sleeper takes damage, or someone uses an action to shake or slap the sleeper awake.

Flesh Tether. A moist, quivering tendril of flesh lashes out from the hypnagoug to grab the face of a creature the hypnagoug can see within 10 feet of it. The target must succeed on a DC 16 Strength or Dexterity saving throw (target's choice) or become subject to the effects of Flesh Bindings.

Let Me In. While on the Astral Plane, the hypnagoug pierces the veil into the Material Plane and places its anchor there, or it leaves the Material Plane and enters the Astral Plane.

Reactions

Shifting Nightmare. The hypnagoug halves the damage it takes from a weapon attack made against it, provided it can see the attacker.

Villian Actions

The hypnagoug has three villain actions. It can take each action once during an encounter after an enemy creature's turn. It takes villain action 1 during the first round of combat, villain action 2 during the second, and villain action 3 during the third round.

Villain Action 1: Lend Me Your Face. The hypnagoug weaves aberrant magic around it, changing the forms of the bodies tethered to them, decentralizing the creature and making it harder to strike. This action mimics the effect of a *mirror image* spell, with the number of duplicates equal to the number of creatures affected by Flesh Bindings. If the hypnagoug has three or more duplicates, it must roll a 6 or higher to change the attack's target to a duplicate. When a duplicate is struck, the illusion surrounding it dissipates, revealing the tethered creature. Attacks targeting the hypnagoug's tentacles are unaffected by this action, as they are not duplicated by the effect.

Villain Action 2: Tentacular Spectacular. The hypnagoug violently spins the bodies connected to it in a vicious circle. Each creature within 10 feet of the hypnagoug must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw. For each creature affected by the hypnagoug's Flesh Bindings, increase the DC by 1. On a failed save, a creature takes 5 (1d10) damage for each creature affected by Flesh Bindings and is knocked prone. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't knocked prone. Additionally, each living creature affected by Flesh Bindings takes 5 (1d10) bludgeoning damage. The hypnagoug can then move up to its speed.

Villain Action 3: Runaway Delusion. With consumption as its prime directive, the hypnagoug has no will or need to stay and fight and seeks to escape. The bodies the hypnagoug carries in its tentacles are pressed into the facsimile of legs as the creature leaps and sprints away on its amalgamated appendages. The hypnagoug moves up to 100 feet in a straight line. It can increase this movement by 20 feet for each creature affected by its Flesh Bindings. When the hypnagoug uses this action, it loses its flying speed, but gains a walking speed of 40 feet plus an additional 10 feet for every creature affected by its Flesh Bindings. This effect lasts until the following dawn.

The Dimensions of Dowda

An magic item to master
by Robert J. Kuntz

Editor's Note: *This article is written using the rules for the first edition of the game by Robert J. Kuntz, a game designer who has been working since 1973. His credits include the original* Deities & Demigods*, so it was a no-brainer to have Rob work on an article for the first edition of the game.*

If you'd like to run Rob's encounter in the fifth edition of the game for 7th-level characters, you can find a conversion guide at the end of the article. But I encourage you to seek out the older rulebooks and give this adventure a try as written.

You have entered the realm of the bizarre that lurks at the edges of magic, the strange, and the unknown! No. It's not the *Twilight Zone*. But it's not far from its borders.

You have taken your first major step into that uncanny borderland by encouraging the characters to find, master and employ (and in so doing uncover the mysteries of) *Dowda's Lantern*.

But this is no mere artifact. It's also an ongoing experiment, a conduit to other dimensions, a testing ground, and home to its creator, Dowda the Magnificent!

GM INFORMATION

The characters learn the following information as they patch together clues and rumors about Dowda and his lantern. Most of it can be discovered after several sessions with sages of abstruse lore. Alternatively, you can provide this information to the characters when they find the lantern to kick off the adventure:

> Long ago, a mysterious artificer known as Dowda the Magnificent pursued a self-created arcane science he called "dimensional continuity." Other information concerning him is exceedingly scarce, since he disappeared from historical record soon after crafting the lantern that bears his name. Some arcane historians speculate that this legendary device was in fact his ultimate creation, following a string of other magic items he had fashioned.
>
> Dowda indeed mastered "dimensional continuity." He created seven artifacts with the lantern being his last, if not final, endeavor. The lantern is in fact the "capstone," so to speak, of an experiment that linked six of the magic items he had previously created to the lantern. Upon its completion, Dowda retreated to his dimensional sanctum atop the lantern, which appears from the outside as an opaque white dome. There he continues his experiments while silently encouraging and monitoring the use of his magic items.

This is a "living" artifact. All inter-linked matter concerning this ongoing experiment is manifested from within the artifact and its conjoined dimensions!

USING THE LANTERN

GMs should determine when, where, and under what campaign conditions *Dowda's Lantern* comes into play. A few guidelines for introducing the lantern:

- Dowda was a 14th-level wizard when he created the lantern. The base challenge level is equal to his own.
- Discovering the lantern should be an adventure in itself, and not just one of the battle-oriented kind. Diligent research and hunting down clues related to it should be prerequisites to its discovery.
- Other powerful beings might also seek Dowda's lantern and the knowledge it holds. This allows each GM to sculpt a specific, relational history about it. This, in turn, provides departure points for introducing accumulating story matter into your campaign.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The lantern's 18-inch-high, 12-inch-square body is made of highly burnished brass. Each of its four faces consists of a slotted frame encasing a different-colored pane of tinted glass—red, blue, yellow, and green. Inscribed in a small, delicate script along the top of each frame are these words:

"FOR THE ONE MASTER: Touch and Utter in the Common Tongue."

The lantern's upper surface gradually rounds off to become hemispherical and has affixed to it at two opposing edges a lockable brass swivel-handle. An opaque, 2-inch-high dome of white glass 6 inches in diameter is centered on the artifact's top surface. Next to this protrusion is a keyhole.

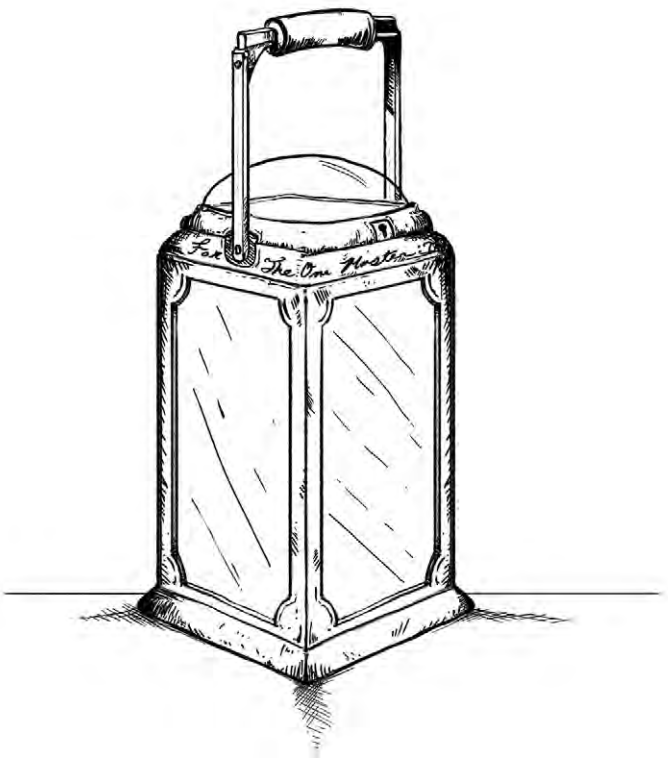
ENTERING THE LANTERN

"Entering the lantern" means having one's mental presence projected into it as part of a temporal and mental fugue state.

Entering the lantern is accomplished by touching one of its four glass panes while at the same time saying that pane's color in the common tongue (see above for the inscription regarding this). Doing so triggers the fugue state, and the creature appears inside the lantern at the appropriate area on the Ether Lantern map (1A through 1D).

Note that a creature can enter the lantern only through a pane that hasn't yet been activated. For details about using activated panes, see "The Lantern's Powers."

Only one creature at a time can enter the lantern. That creature must face and defeat a spirit eye to gain the corresponding



lantern power from Dowda's spirit form at map location 2 (also see "Mastering the Lantern").

Upon successfully gaining a power, the creature returns to its former location outside the lantern. For that creature, no time has passed, no damage was sustained, and no loss of spells or other possessions has occurred!

If a creature is defeated while battling a spirit eye, the same event occurs: The creature does not die but reappears outside the lantern just as described above. But the creature is spiritually shaken from its negative experience: it moves at half speed, attacks and defends at –2, and can't cast spells or utilize powers requiring complex verbalizations (GM option). The creature must rest for a number of minutes equal to 60 minus its Con score to regain its equilibrium, ending the effect.

MASTERING THE LANTERN

Only one creature can master the lantern. The creature that kills the first spirit eye and thereby gains the first of the lantern's powers is thereafter considered the "presumptive master" by Dowda. Only that creature can now enter the lantern to secure its remaining powers.

However, if 30 days transpire and the presumptive master has made no further progress in mastering the lantern during that time, Dowda resets the spirit eyes and the mastering process begins anew. The previous presumptive master can no longer use any of the lantern's powers, as these are wiped from the creature's memory. The mastering process also begins anew if the previous presumptive master perishes before, during, or after mastering the lantern.

Mastering the lantern occurs when the creature enters the fourth and final unactivated pane, defeats the last spirit eye, and receives the fourth and final power from Dowda's spirit form at map location 2**.**

Upon receiving the final power, the character **does not** reappear outside the lantern! Instead, this circumstance triggers several events:

- Dowda's spirit form and his throne (see map location 2) disappear from the dais.
- On the dais appear six iron keys (see "Six Iron Keys and Six Iron Doors") encircling one brass key, the latter being the *lantern key*.
- Map location 3 is secretly activated.

LANTERN KEY

A creature can't exit the lantern after receiving its fourth power unless it possesses the *lantern key*. Upon claiming the key, the character reappears outside the lantern. The lantern cannot be reentered as in past instances, since it has now been mastered—there are no more guardians to defeat or powers to gain. However . . .

If the *lantern key* is inserted in the keyhole on the outside of the lantern and turned 180 degrees clockwise, a two-way dimensional gate is activated. This act permanently locks the key in place as part of the lantern's extended function; and the creature that mastered the lantern and any allies within 30 feet of the master immediately receive a telepathic communication: "Well done! Do come for tea at twelve high before keying the six low!"

GM Note: This is a cryptic message from Dowda inviting the party to map location 3.

Thereafter any creature touching its glass panes instantly enters or exits the lantern. Lastly, the previous temporal and mental fugue state is avoided. Real time and circumstances now march onward even for creatures that physically enter the lantern.

THE LANTERN'S POWERS

Anytime a rule below refers to the lantern's master, this can be either the lantern's master or its presumptive master.

The four spiritual manifestations that can be summoned by utilizing the lantern's powers have the following characteristics in common:

Each manifestation is summoned by touching the appropriately colored glass pane while pronouncing in the common tongue the pane's color. Each pane's power can be invoked once per week; and these powers can be used only on the Material Plane or within the lantern's demiplane.

During a manifestation's service, it maintains a telepathic link with the lantern's master and will, if asked, communicate its own powers and limitations.

A manifestation is immune to all attacks except for powers or spells that could dismiss their spiritual forms. If subjected to such an effect, the manifestation saves as a 14th-level wizard.

If the master of *Dowda's Lantern* is killed after a manifestation has been summoned, the manifestation disappears.

A manifestation can't enter the lantern. If one is summoned to appear outside the lantern and the lantern master subsequently enters the lantern or a plane other than the Material Plane, the spirit manifestation disappears.

Only one manifestation can be present at any given time. Summoning a second nullifies and dispels the first.

RED PANE (NANTAZ)

A swirling fiery mass streaks forth from the pane and quickly consolidates its form in midair to a 10-foot-diameter hovering and pulsing ball of flame. The light produced by its reddish-yellow flames equals that of a *continual light* 10-foot radius.

This is Nantaz, a lesser spiritual manifestation of fire. Nantaz serves for as many 10-minute intervals as its master has Intelligence points, i.e., if the master has an Intelligence of 14, Nantaz serves for 140 minutes. It follows the master while floating along at 12 feet per turn.

Nantaz continually absorbs heat, reducing the effect of fire on creatures that are nearby. Anyone within a 25-foot radius of Nantaz saves vs. fire attacks at +2 and reduces fire damage by 25%.

Nantaz can be commanded to hurl itself as a 12th-level *fireball* for maximum damage, range 12 feet. However, this act ends Nantaz's service, and it disappears.

BLUE PANE (ALHUU)

A variable number (26–50) of ethereal white bats with faded blue highlights appear in a 25-foot radius around the lantern's master. There they begin circling. While circling, they maintain their speed and location in relation to the lantern master when the master moves. These creatures are eerily silent. They can't be seen by beings lacking the ability to perceive the ethereal. This does not include the lantern's master, who is always aware of the bats' presence.

This is Alhuu, a lesser spiritual manifestation of air. Alhuu serves for as many 5-minute intervals as the master has Intelligence points, i.e., if the master has an Intelligence of 14, Alhuu serves for 70 minutes.

Alhuu's role is primarily defensive. The lantern master and the master's allies gain the following benefits while in contact with Alhuu's 25-foot-radius formation:

- Solid missiles (darts, arrows, bolts, daggers, javelins, spears, etc.) of up to **+3** magical are deflected
- The immunities and abilities conferred by a *necklace of adaptation*
- +2 Dexterity bonus

Alhuu can be commanded to produce a sonic screech (no save, affects enemies inside Alhuu's 25-foot-radius formation) that causes as many points of damage to each target as there are summoned bats. This act dispels the summons, and Alhuu disappears.

YELLOW PANE (ZEKKEZ)

An ethereal yellow snake with slight patches of green mottling appears. It is 10 feet long and has solid gray eyes with no pupils. Upon closer inspection, its constantly undulating body surface appears to be endlessly segmented, as if a million smaller parts have joined together to form a living and morphing being. It emits an acrid odor in a 100-foot-radius area about it that drives away all forms of reptiles (normal, summoned, and gigantic).

This is Zekkez, an ancient lesser spiritual manifestation of primordial ooze. It remains near the master at all times while moving at 12 feet per turn. Zekkez serves for as many 10-minute intervals as the master has Intelligence points, i.e., if the master has an Intelligence of 14, Zekkez serves for 140 minutes.

The lantern master and the master's allies gain the following benefits if they remain within a 50-foot radius of Zekkez:

- +3 AC bonus
- +2 Constitution bonus
- Regeneration of 2 hit points per round

Zekkez can be commanded to spit a ball of acid, range 6 feet, that bursts in a 10-foot-radius area for 8–64 points of acid damage (save vs. poison for half). However, this act ends its service, and Zekkez disappears.

GREEN PANE (QUULPAU)

An 8-foot-tall figure resembling an amalgam of a human and a tree appears. Its head is that of a human with long red hair, emerald eyes (the left one yearning and the right one piercing), and slim purplish lips. The rest of its body is that of a tree—a very ancient and unrecognizable one—with thick bark partially covered with aged lichens and mosses. On its few branches grow broad green leaves etched with red veins. Two wooden hands, humanlike in shape, sprout from stout branches near the top of the body. The figure is supported by a base composed of a ringlet of twisted roots, and it emits a heavy sigh while examining its surroundings.

This is Quulpau, a lesser spiritual manifestation of the primeval forest. It remains near the master of the lantern at all times while moving at 18"/turn (on soil) or 12" (on other surfaces). Quulpau serves for as many 5-minute intervals as the master has Intelligence points, i.e., if the master has an Intelligence of 14, Quulpau serves for 70 minutes.

The lantern's master and the master's allies gain the following benefits if they remain within a 25-foot radius of Quulpau:

- +2 AC bonus
- +2 to saving throws including magic
- +20% bonus to hit points (these hit points are removed first when damage occurs)
- 25% reduction in damage taken from these element-based attacks: fire, air, water, earth, ice, or vapor

Enemies within a 25-foot radius of Quulpau draw its ire. It immediately unleashes the *forest's wrath* within that area, a debilitating poisonous curse (save vs. poison at –3) that causes 1–12 poison damage/turn for 2–7 turns, usable once per summons.

Quulpau can be commanded to use its eyes as a combined attack to produce awe in a single target (equivalent to a 14th-level *power word stun* but with double the hit point ranges/target). This act dispels the summons, and Quulpau disappears.

INSIDE THE LANTERN

Relate the following description in full only after a character defeats the first spirit eye encounter:

> The area comprising the lantern's internal dimension is immense. Space has expanded, or else you have shrunk! The once tiny (by comparison) glass pane is now gigantic in height, its top edge out of sight far above you. The burnished brass interior is thick and rough, like a fortress wall. The vast space seems at times nearly infinite and at other times possibly measurable. A bright light with no visible source permeates the entire interior.

The lantern's internal space magically shifts in volume (as often as and to what extent the GM desires). The floor-to-ceiling height can wildly vary from 1,000 to 2,000 feet at any given time. Its width can likewise vary from 500 to 1,000 feet. This effect means that correctly mapping the interior is impossible, since space here doesn't function according to known physical laws.

Dowda controls this extradimensional space and has stabilized a portion of it (the areas represented by map locations 1–3) to accommodate those beings attempting to master the lantern

1. MAP LOCATIONS 1A–1D

Upon touching one of the exterior glass panes and speaking its related word ("red," "blue," "yellow," or "green"), the creature is magically transported to a 20-foot-wide corridor "ahead" (the character may choose an arbitrary compass point direction but otherwise has no immediate knowledge of true north). The glass pane that was touched (now of incalculable height and about 20 feet wide) is immediately behind the creature. Within seconds, the spirit eye for the appropriate color appears out of thin air at the other end of the corridor and attacks. See "Spirit Eyes" for the monster's stat block.

1A. RED PANE ENTRY CORRIDOR

Ambient Eye (Red Pane) – SZ M; AC 2; MV 12; HD 12; hp 70; #SA 1; Dmg 2d10 fiery whirlwind; SD hit only by +2 or better weapons, immune to fire of lesser than divine, dragon, or planar realm beings in origin; AL N; XP 3,550.

1B. BLUE PANE ENTRY CORRIDOR

Cloudy Eye (Blue Pane) – SZ M; AC 3; MV 18"; HD 13; hp 75; #SA 1; Dmg 2d8 airy vortex; SD hit only by +2 or better weapons, immune to mind powers/spells lesser than divine, dragon, or planar realm beings in origin; AL N; XP 3,650.

1C. YELLOW PANE ENTRY CORRIDOR

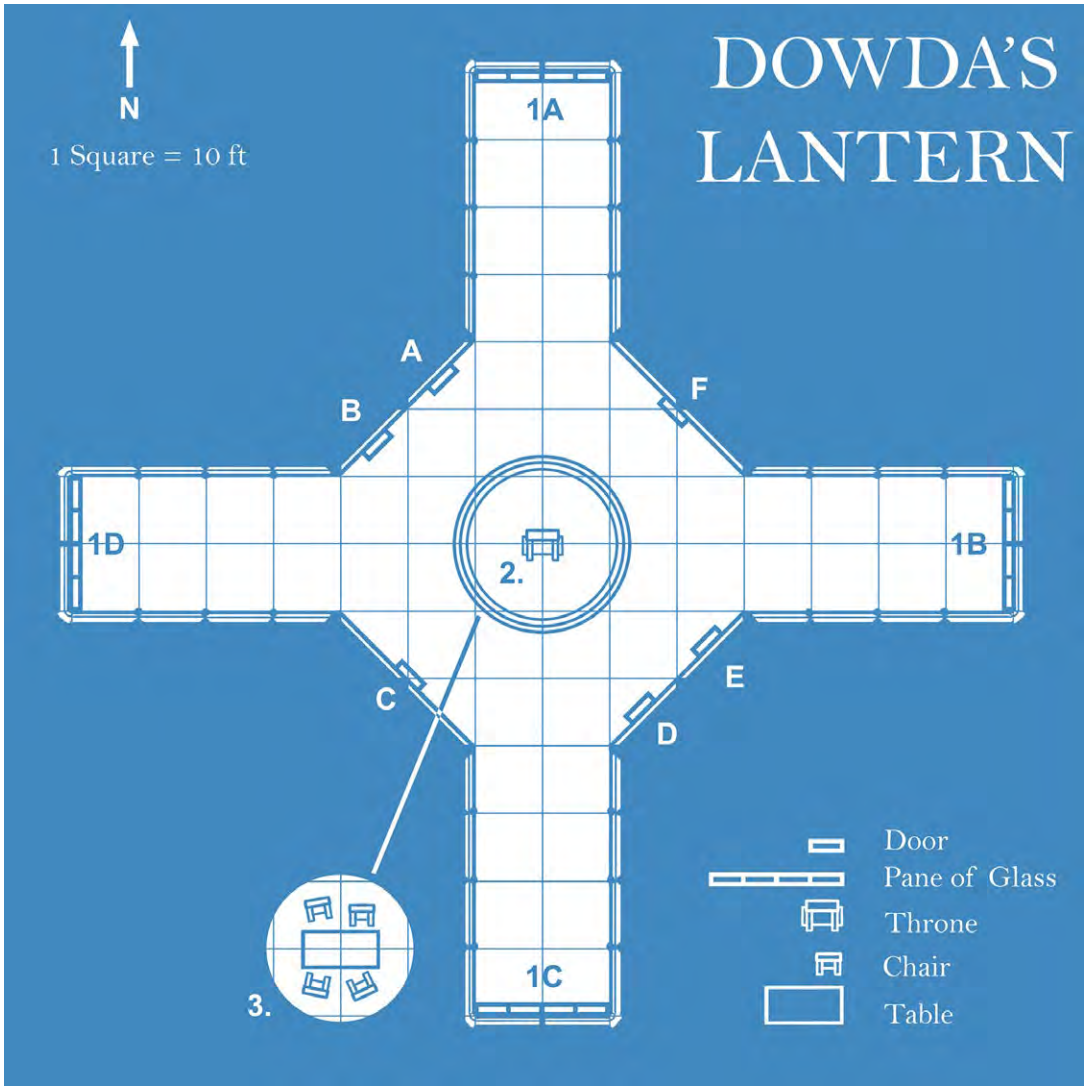
Viscous Eye (Yellow Pane) – SZ M; AC 3; MV 12"; HD 14; hp 80; #SA 1; Dmg 3d6 acidic barrage; SD hit only by +2 or better weapons, 25% damage only from physical attacks by lesser than divine, dragon, or planar realm beings in origin; AL N; XP 3,750.

1D. GREEN PANE ENTRY CORRIDOR

Glaucous Eye (Green Pane) – SZ M; AC 0; MV 12"; HD 15; hp 85; #SA 1; Dmg 2d12 poison shroud; SD hit only by +2 or better weapons, immune to poison of lesser than divine, dragon, or planar realm beings in origin; AL N; XP 3,850.

2. DAIS WITH ENTHRONED SPIRIT

Centered upon a 30-foot-radius white marble dais in the center of the lantern is a semitranslucent wooden throne embellished





with silver inlays depicting various-sized eyes. Sitting on the throne is a ghostly, gray-haired man dressed in white robes. His blue eyes display an odd eagerness as you approach.

This ghostly image of throne and man is Dowda's spirit form projection. It is unassailable; and the figure doesn't react if attacked or communicated with. Its only purpose is to provide the presumptive master of the lantern with the lantern's powers.

If the presumptive master defeats a spirit eye and subsequently approaches to within 10 feet of the throne, Dowda's spirit form smiles and waves its right hand to indicate completion. The appropriate power is granted to the presumptive master, who then reappears outside the lantern with that knowledge. When the fourth and final power is granted, other events occur as noted in "Mastering the Lantern" (q.v.).

Anyone approaching the dais after the *lantern key* has been engaged notices a narrow beam of light striking it dead center. The beam's source is far above floor level and out of sight (see map location 3).

2A–2F. IRON KEYS AND LANTERN KEY

After Dowda's spirit form and his throne disappear from map location 2, six iron keys and one brass key appear upon it. The iron keys form a rough circle about the central brass key, which is the *lantern key*.

Six Iron Keys and Six Iron Doors

Each 5-inch-long iron key (2A–2F) is linked to a corresponding iron door (A–F) on the map. The doors are not openable until a creature receives the proper instructions from Dowda at map location 3. Each door serves as a dimensional conduit to the magic item symbolized on each key and door. Passing through a door immediately and safely teleports those doing so to a dimensional realm as noted hereafter.

(Editor's note: The exact nature of the other dimensions and their associated occupants and magic items are for the GM to decide, though we may expand on these ideas in future issues of *ARCADIA*.)

Iron key A has an engraved dagger on its shaft corresponding to door A's inscription. This conduit leads to Dowda's magic item-dimension inside the *Dragon's Head Dagger.* The dagger is held by the barbarian chieftain Clowfyst.

Iron key B has an engraved war hammer on its shaft corresponding to door B's inscription. This conduit leads to Dowda's magic item-dimension inside the *Bellows Hammer.* The hammer is held by the duergar lord Wymsicresh.

Iron key C has an engraved flute on its shaft corresponding to door C's inscription. This conduit leads to Dowda's magic item-dimension inside the *Fulsome Flute.* The flute is lost at sea in the sunken wreck of the merchant ship *Bedlam*. It is guarded by its former owner's ghost, Felmina the Bard.

Iron key D has an engraved longbow on its shaft corresponding to door D's inscription. This conduit leads to Dowda's magic item-dimension inside the *Longbow of Lament.* The longbow is held by Jaslin, a self-proclaimed Queen of the Sylphs.

Iron key E has an engraved wand on its shaft corresponding to door E's inscription. This conduit leads to Dowda's magic item-dimension inside the *Widdershyns Wand.* The wand is entombed with the necromancer Vozzert.

Iron key F has an engraved staff on its shaft corresponding to door F's inscription. This conduit leads to Dowda's magic item-dimension inside the *Starburst Staff.* The staff is held by a sorceress known only as Beckon.

3. DOWDA'S WELCOME

This encounter isn't activated or accessible until the lantern is mastered and the *lantern key* is engaged. In the latter instance, a narrow light originating here beams down upon the dais at map location 2. Anyone touching the light causes the dais to rise at an incalculable but ever-increasing speed. It stops 20 feet below an opaque, white glass ceiling about 1,500 feet above floor level.

> The light disappears! And the dais is now appointed with a rectangular table and plush chairs; and the table has a wine decanter and many filled crystal goblets adorning it! Sitting at the table's head is a gray-haired, middle-aged man dressed in white robes marked with several crisscrossing black lines. His youthful, bemused expression and dazzling blue eyes suggest an eccentric personality.



This is Dowda, the chaotic neutral "wizard," in person. If attacked, he disappears and is never seen again. His mind can't be read nor his motives discerned through any known power, spell, or ability.

He motions to the chairs. "Do sit, and enjoy the wine. I'm fresh out of tea."

He introduces himself. "They call me 'The Magnificent.' You can call me Dowda. But what's in a name? Well! Let me regale you!"

A strong gale force wind temporarily lashes the table just before a now consternated Dowda dispels it with a wave of his hand.

"Ahem! Now to the matter before you."

He continues speaking after sipping some wine. "You're adventurers. And capable ones, since you've gotten this far." He pauses for rejoinders but pushes past any by exclaiming, "Well. The adventure's afoot!"

Just then an ectoplasmic cord extends from his robe. Attached to it is an ethereal foot. He dispels the image with a disdainful wave of his hand. "Bah!"

"I must be going." He reaches beneath the table and pulls forth *Dowda's Lantern* and an object resembling a trowel. Setting them on the table, Dowda says, "You'll be needing these!"

Dowda stands and while looking about him as if he's forgotten something, murmurs, "It's all explained in the paper."

Dowda vanishes just as many pieces of foolscap as there are characters fall to the table! The dais begins its descent and arrives seconds later at map location 2.

Upon examination every sheet of paper contains the same writing and is titled "INSTRUCTIONS." Just above the title is a hastily penned postscript: "And don't ask me how I got the lantern into the lantern!"

SPIRIT EYES

	Ambient	Cloudy	Viscous	Glaucous
FREQUENCY:	*All are summoned, do not occur naturally*			
NO. APPEARING:	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*
ARMOR CLASS:	*2*	*3*	*3*	*0*
MOVE:	*12″*	*18″*	*12″*	*12″*
HIT DICE:	*12*	*13*	*14*	*15*
% IN LAIR:	*Nil*	*Nil*	*Nil*	*Nil*
TREASURE TYPE:	*Nil*	*Nil*	*Nil*	*Nil*
NO. OF ATTACKS:	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	*See below*	*See below*	*See below*	*See below*
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	*All are hit only by +2 or better magic weapons*			
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	*Standard*	*Standard*	*Standard*	*Standard*
INTELLIGENCE:	*Exceptional*	*Exceptional*	*Exceptional*	*Exceptional*
ALIGNMENT:	*N*	*N*	*N*	*N*
SIZE:	*M*	*M*	*M*	*M*
XP VALUE:	*3,550*	*3,650*	*3,750*	*3,850*

Spirit eyes are ectoplasmic servants summonable by Dowda. They appear as different-colored, 5-foot-radius, floating eyes (note separate entries for each below). Every spirit eye has an ethereal and extensible energy strand attached to it that links back to Dowda and allows him to see what they see.

Dowda maintains total control of the eyes' spiritual states. He can mentally command them at great distances, immediately recall them, or even remanifest them in different guises and for different purposes. They move by a form of enhanced levitation.

These creatures have been summoned to guard the four glass panes of *Dowda's Lantern*. They immediately attack anything entering through the panes during the lantern's mastering process, using the special attack described below at a rate of once per turn. They are never present after the lantern has been mastered. If killed, a spirit eye disappears without a trace.

Ambient Spirit Eye (Red Pane Guardian): This eye's special attack is a fiery whirlwind in a 5-foot radius about it, causing 2d10 fire damage to all within the area, no save.

Cloudy Spirit Eye (Blue Pane Guardian): This eye's special attack is an airy vortex in a 10-foot radius about it, causing 2d8 concussion damage to all within the area, no save.

Viscous Spirit Eye (Yellow Pane Guardian): This eye's special attack is an acidic barrage in a 10-foot radius about it, causing 3d6 acid damage to all within the area, no save.

Glaucous Spirit Eye (Green Pane Guardian): This eye's special attack is a poison cloud in a 5-foot radius about it, causing 2d12 poison damage to all within the area, no save.

CONCLUSION

What adventures might Dowda have for the characters? What do his instructions mean? These details are for you to decide. One thing is clear: the adventure is far from over.

CONVERSION GUIDE

You can use the material in this article for the fifth edition of the game with the following conversions:

- You can use the optional "Party Enters the Lantern" rules below to have all the characters enter the lantern.
- Replace the rules for being defeated by a spirit eye in the lantern in "Entering the Lantern" with "Defeat in the Lantern" below.
- Replace "The Lantern's Powers" with "Fifth Edition Lantern's Powers" below.
- Use the stat blocks in "Fifth Edition Spirit Eyes" for the spirit eyes.
- The lantern is an artifact that requires attunement. In order to become the lantern's master or presumptive master, a creature must attune to the lantern first.

PARTY ENTERS THE LANTERN

For some groups, splitting up the characters isn't a lot of fun. You can use these optional rules to have the characters enter the lantern together.

When a creature attuned to the lantern enters it before it is mastered, that creature can choose to bring any other creatures touching the lantern inside. Those creatures also enter the fugue state. Inside the lantern, the number of spirit eyes that appear equals the number of other creatures that entered the lantern minus 1 (minimum one spirit eye). If two creatures enter the lantern, one spirit eye with 80 hit points appears.

If the spirit eyes are defeated, the creature attuned to the lantern gains the powers of the pane it entered through..

DEFEAT IN THE LANTERN

When a creature that isn't a spirit eye is reduced to 0 hit points in the lantern, it reappears outside the lantern. If the creature attuned to the lantern is defeated, it is spiritually shaken from its negative experience and gains a level of exhaustion and all other creatures that aren't spirit eyes reappear outside the lantern (but don't gain exhaustion).

FIFTH EDITION LANTERN'S POWERS

Anytime a rule below refers to "you," it refers to the creature attuned to the lantern. The four spiritual manifestations that can be summoned by utilizing the lantern's powers have the following characteristics in common:

- You can use an action to summon a manifestation by touching the appropriate colored glass pane while speaking aloud the pane's color.
- After being summoned, a manifestation remains for 1 hour before disappearing.
- Once a pane's power is used, it can't be used again until 1 week has passed.
- These powers can be used only on the Material Plane or within the lantern's demiplane.
- During a manifestation's service, it maintains a telepathic link with the lantern's master and can communicate its own powers and limitations.

- A manifestation is immune to all damage and conditions and magic that would change its form. If targeted with magic that would send it to another plane, such as the *banishment* spell, the manifestation can make a saving throw using your ability bonus. On a failure, the manifestation is dismissed and its effects end. A successful casting of *dispel magic* (DC 17) also dismisses the manifestation and ends its effects.
- If you die after a manifestation has been summoned, the manifestation disappears.
- A manifestation can't enter the lantern. If one is summoned to appear outside the lantern and you subsequently enter the lantern or a plane other than the Material Plane, the manifestation disappears.
- Only one manifestation can be present at a time. If you summon a manifestation, any others disappear.

RED PANE (NANTAZ)

When you summon the manifestation from this pane, a swirling fiery mass streaks forth from the pane and quickly consolidates into a Large ball of flame that hovers in midair, pulsing gently. The manifestation sheds bright light in a 10-foot radius and dim light for an additional 10 feet.

This is Nantaz, a spiritual manifestation of fire. It remains within 5 feet of you while on the Material Plane.

Nantaz continually absorbs heat, reducing the effect of fire on creatures that are nearby. You and creatures you choose within 30 feet of Nantaz are resistant to fire damage.

As an action, you can command Nantaz to hurl itself up to 120 feet and explode in a 20-foot-radius sphere. Creatures in the area must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14d6 fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. This act ends Nantaz's service, and it disappears.

BLUE PANE (ALHUU)

When you summon the manifestation from this pane, a Gargantuan swarm of ethereal white bats with faded blue highlights appears in a 30-foot radius around you and begins circling. The swarm maintains its speed and location in relation to you while on the Material Plane.

These bats are eerily silent and can only be seen by you and by creatures that can see into the Ethereal Plane. This is Alhuu, a spiritual manifestation of air.

You and creatures you choose within the area of the swarm gain the following benefits:

- Your AC increases by 1.
- You have advantage on Dexterity saving throws.
- Ranged weapon attacks against you have disadvantage.
- You can breathe normally in any environment, and you have advantage on saving throws made against harmful gases and vapors (such as the *cloudkill* and *stinking cloud* spells, inhaled poisons, and the breath weapons of some dragons).

As an action, you can command Alhuu to produce a sonic screech. Creatures of your choice within the swarm must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, taking 6d10 thunder damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. This act ends Alhuu's service, and it disappears.

YELLOW PANE (ZEKKEZ)

When you summon the manifestation from this pane, a Large ethereal yellow snake with slight patches of green mottling appears. It is 10 feet long and has solid gray eyes with no pupils. Upon closer inspection, its constantly undulating body surface appears to be endlessly segmented, as if a million smaller parts have joined together to form a living and morphing being.

This is Zekkez, an ancient spiritual manifestation of primordial ooze. It remains within 5 feet of you while on the Material Plane.

Zekkez emits an acrid odor that keeps all Beasts that are reptiles (dinosaurs, lizards, snakes, etc.) from getting within 100 feet of you.

You and creatures you choose within 30 feet of Zekkez gain the following benefits:

- Your AC increases by 2 as your skin becomes covered in hard scales.
- You have advantage on Constitution saving throws.
- You regain 2 hit points at the start of your turn as long as you have at least 1 hit point.

As an action, you can command Zekkez to spit a ball of acid that bursts in a 10-foot-radius sphere within 90 feet. Creatures in the area must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw, taking 8d8 acid damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. This act ends Zekkez's service, and it disappears.

GREEN PANE (QUULPAU)

When you summon the manifestation from this pane, a Large figure resembling an amalgam of a humanoid and a tree appears. Its head is that of a humanoid with long red hair, emerald eyes (the left one yearning and the right one piercing), and slim purplish lips. The rest of its body is that of a tree—a very ancient and unrecognizable one—with thick bark partially covered with aged lichens and mosses. On its few branches grow broad green leaves etched with red veins. Two wooden hands, humanlike in shape, sprout from stout branches near the top of the body. The figure is supported by a base composed of a ringlet of twisted roots, and it emits a heavy sigh while examining its surroundings.

This is Quulpau, a spiritual manifestation of the primeval forest. It remains within 5 feet of you while on the Material Plane.

You and creatures you choose within 30 feet of Quulpau gain the following benefits:

- Your AC increases by 2 as your skin becomes covered in tree bark.
- You have advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.
- Your hit point maximum and current hit points increase by 10.

As an action, you can command Quulpau to magically poison a creature within 30 feet of it. The target must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, taking 6d6 poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Qualpau can use this feature once, and can't use it again until after this summon ends.

Also as an action, you can command Quulpau to attempt to awe a creature that can see it within 30 feet of Quulpau. The target must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, becoming stunned for 1 minute on a failed save, or becoming poisoned for 1 minute on a successful one. A creature stunned or poisoned in this way can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turns, ending the condition on itself on a success. This act ends Quulpau's service, and it disappears.

FIFTH EDITION SPIRIT EYES

You can use the following stat blocks for each spirit eye.

AMBIENT SPIRIT EYE

Medium Elemental, Unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)
Speed 0 ft., fly 30 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	7 (–2)

Saving Throws Int +2, Wis +2
Skills Perception +2
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities fire, poison
Damage Resistances blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, stunned
Senses truesight 30 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages understands Ignan but can't speak
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Fire Aura. Any creature that starts its turn within 10 feet of the eye takes 5 (1d10) fire damage.

Magic Resistance. The eye has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Spell Immunity. The *banishment* and *polymorph* spells have no effect on the eye.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The eye uses Fire Crash twice.

Fire Crash. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit: 7* (1d6 + 4) fire damage. If the target is a creature or a flammable object, it ignites. Until a creature takes an action to douse the fire, the target takes 5 (1d10) fire damage at the start of each of its turns.

Burning Teleportation. The eye chooses one creature it can see within 60 feet of it. That creature must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the creature takes 10 (3d6) fire damage and is teleported to an unoccupied space the eye can see within 60 feet of the eye. On a success, the creature takes half as much damage and as isn't teleported.

REACTIONS

Puff of Smoke. When a creature gets within 5 feet of the eye, the eye can teleport to an unoccupied space that it can see within 30 feet.

CLOUDY SPIRIT EYE

Medium Elemental, Unaligned

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)
Speed 0 ft., fly 40 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	7 (–2)

Saving Throws Int +2, Wis +2
Skills Perception +2
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities lightning, poison, thunder
Damage Resistances blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, stunned
Senses truesight 30 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages understands Auran but can't speak
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Magic Resistance. The eye has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Spell Immunity. The *banishment* and *polymorph* spells have no effect on the eye.

Thunder Aura. Any creature that starts its turn within 20 feet of the eye takes 3 (1d6) thunder damage and is pushed 5 feet away from the eye.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The eye uses Lightning Tentacle twice, each of which it can replace with one use of Fling.

Lightning Tentacle. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit: 7* (1d8 + 3) lightning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 13). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained. The eye has two tentacles, each of which can grapple one target.

Fling. One Medium or smaller object held or creature grappled by the eye is thrown up to 30 feet in a random direction and knocked prone. If a thrown target strikes a solid surface, the target takes 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage for every 10 feet it was thrown. If the target is thrown at another creature, that creature must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take the same damage and be knocked prone.

REACTIONS

Quick Zap. When a creature grappled by the eye ends the condition with a successful Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, the eye can deal 3 (1d6) lightning damage to the creature.

GLAUCOUS SPIRIT EYE

Medium Elemental, Unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 60 (8d8 + 24)
Speed 0 ft., fly 30 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	7 (–2)

Saving Throws Int +2, Wis +2
Skills Perception +2
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities poison
Damage Resistances blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, stunned
Senses truesight 30 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages understands Terran but can't speak
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Magic Resistance. The eye has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Spell Immunity. The *banishment* and *polymorph* spells have no effect on the eye.

Toxic Aura. Any creature that starts its turn within 10 feet of the eye must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of its next turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The eye uses Poison Crash twice.

Poison Crash. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) poison damage, or 10 (2d6 + 3) poison damage if the target is poisoned.

Shrouded Eyes. The eye chooses one creature it can see within 30 feet of it. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be blinded for 1 minute. A blinded creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turns, ending the condition on itself on a success.

REACTIONS

Poison Burst. When the eye takes damage, each creature within 5 feet of it must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or take 3 (1d6) poison damage.

VISCOUS SPIRIT EYE

Medium Elemental, Unaligned

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)
Speed 0 ft., fly 40 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	7 (–2)

Saving Throws Int +2, Wis +2
Skills Perception +2
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities acid, poison
Damage Resistances blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, stunned
Senses truesight 30 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages understands Aquan but can't speak
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Acid Aura. Any creature that starts its turn within 10 feet of the eye takes 5 (1d10) acid damage.

Magic Resistance. The eye has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Spell Immunity. The *banishment* and *polymorph* spells have no effect on the eye.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The eye uses Hurl Acid twice.

Hurl Acid. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) acid damage.

Acid Spurt. The eye squirts a glob of acid at a creature within 5 feet of it. The creature must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, the creature takes 7 (2d6) acid damage and is vulnerable to acid damage until the end of the eye's next turn. On a success, the target takes only half the damage and isn't vulnerable to acid damage.

REACTIONS

Viscous Goop. When a creature hits the eye with a melee weapon attack, the eye can squirt viscous goop at the creature. The creature must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or become restrained by the goop for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the condition on itself on a success.

RESOURCES

DOWDA'S LANTERN

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Robert J. Kuntz

Still going after nearly 50 years in the hobby and 100 published titles. As a creator I'm just getting started! Some day "they" might even give me a golden-dragon watch even though I'd settle for a good bottle of champagne.

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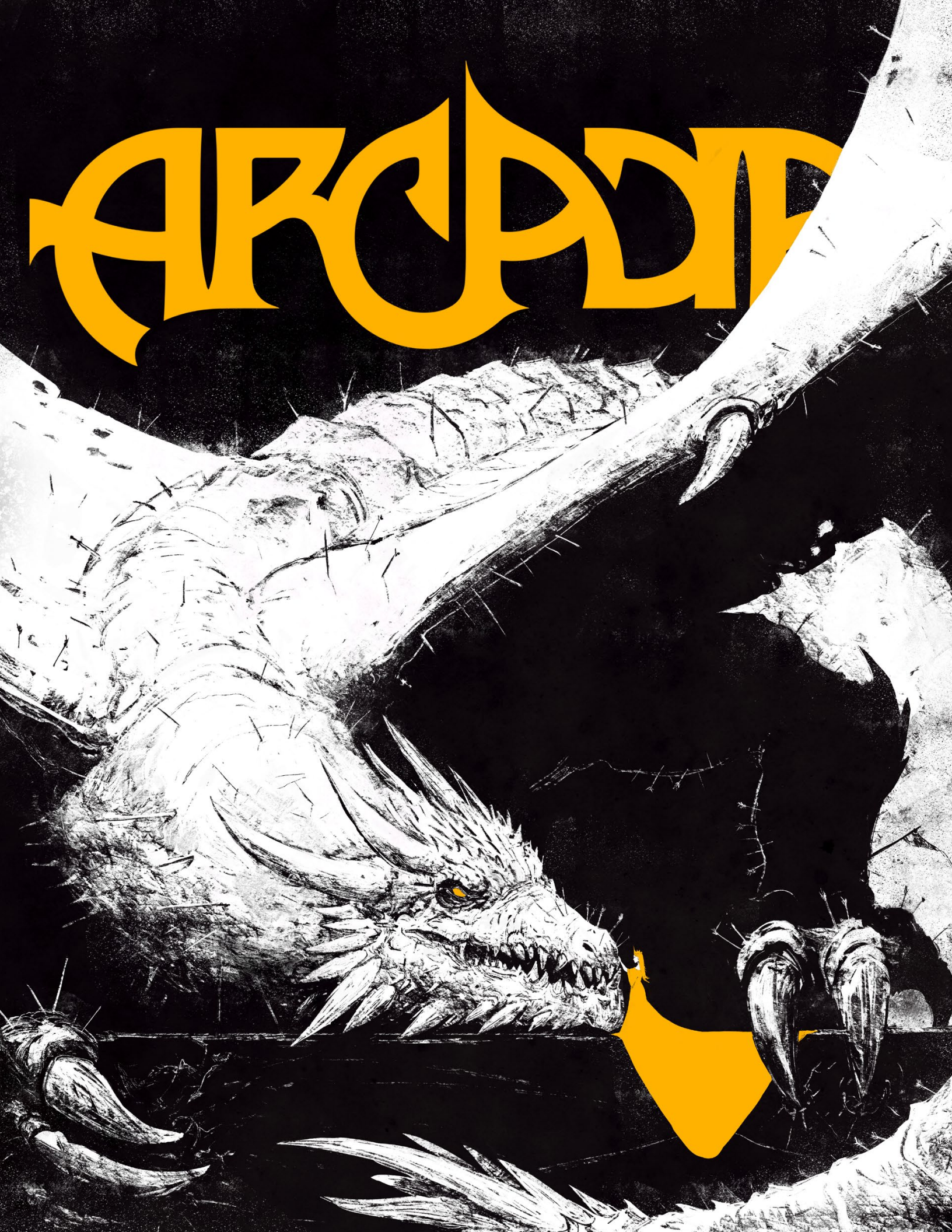
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Issue 13 ✦ February 2022

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

You may have noticed in *ARCADIA 12* that we issued a content warning in our article, "So Your Best Friend Is a Monster." In the coming months, you'll see more content warnings in the pages of *ARCADIA*, including in this issue's article, "Poor Undead Souls," by Mario Ortegón (which gives you a whole bunch of evocative new ghosts). I thought this letter would be a good chance to talk about how that change came to be.

But before we dive into the *how*, let's talk about the *why*. What's the purpose of content warnings? If an article has a content warning on it, that doesn't mean we're ashamed of the content. We're proud to present all kinds of great material to add to your game! Likewise, a reader shouldn't feel ashamed if they come across a content warning and think, "This article isn't for me. It will upset me if I read it, so I'm going to pass." That's exactly the purpose of giving the reader a heads-up.

Most folks come to *ARCADIA* to get fun ideas and useful content for their games, not to feel scared, hurt, anxious, or other traumatic emotions. A majority of our content is and will always be light-hearted goodness. But we also recognize that we're writing for a game built around slaying monsters. Our authors are artists, and we give them a canvas to fill with ideas that inspire them. This occasionally leads to some dark places. We don't want to upset our incredible readers, so we think giving a heads-up is a great way to let artists create *and* make sure *ARCADIA* is an enjoyable experience for readers. Content warnings don't hold our authors back from darker places—they allow them to go there without anxiety.

We should have been using content warnings from the get go. There are some older *ARCADIA* articles that would benefit from them, like "Long-Term Curses," "The Grim Accord," and "Filthy Peasants.". It wasn't until our sensitivity readers and some other folks we work with brought them up that I thought, "Of course! Why didn't we do this sooner?" If you've been with us since *ARCADIA 1*, then you've seen the many small tweaks and evolutions the magazine has had so far. This is just another little change on our way to becoming a charizard.

We're only thirteen issues into what we hope will be a very long run. It is our mission to provide material from some places we haven't gone yet. In the rest of 2022, you'll see a lot of fantastic articles: some whimsical, some horrifying, some funny, and some emotional. A lot of it will compliment what you've seen in previous pages of *ARCADIA*. For instance, last year we had a lot of content for spellcasting characters. This year we hope to give you some more options for martial heroes, starting with "Group Maneuvers" by Steve Fidler in this issue. In our survey last year, you asked for more monsters in *ARCADIA*, so we're bringing you the best stat blocks around, as Kat Kruger delivers this issue with "Monsters of Wonderland."

As we continue to explore new kinds of content, we will give you a heads-up when we go places that could upset you, and we'll work with the authors, editors, and sensitivity readers to make sure we're handling all our articles in a responsible and thoughtful way. Our commitment, as always, is to help maximize the fun and imagination you can bring to the game. We're excited to see where you take it next!

Ex animo,
James Introcaso
Managing Editor

Group Maneuvers

Teamwork makes the scheme work!

by Steve Fidler

The line in the sand has been drawn. Valen, a hulking dragonborn, stands toe to toe with the grinning halfling known as Tella, ready to see their feud through to its bitter end. As Valen commits to a powerful charge, Tella lets out a piercing whistle, calling her gnomish ally out from the shadows and into the fray. As she sidesteps the dragonborn's charge, she grabs Valen's forearm and torso and pulls him with ease over her now-prone ally, forcing the dragonborn into an embarrassing stumble to the floor.

Group maneuvers introduce new reactions that allow creatures to work with their allies to manipulate the flow of combat. These lightweight mechanics are designed to be available to all creatures big and small—even foes and monsters!

Learning Maneuvers

When using this system, each character can learn a number of maneuvers of their choice equal to their proficiency bonus. The options are listed under "Maneuvers" later in the article. These maneuvers can be introduced at character creation, or as part of an ongoing campaign as part of the narrative or as a group reward. You learn new maneuvers as your proficiency bonus increases. When you gain a level, you can replace one maneuver you know with another from the list.

Downtime Activity: Training Montage

A GM can allow player characters to study maneuvers during downtime. Two or more characters can choose to study together. It typically takes 5 days of dedicated practice to train each maneuver, and anyone who participates in the training can choose to learn the maneuver at the end of that time. In order to learn a maneuver during downtime, you must have a dedicated teacher who knows the maneuver or a scroll that guides you through the process of learning the maneuver.

Complications

Optionally, the GM can introduce complications to your downtime activity.

Practicing maneuvers is an interactive activity between two or more people. You have a 10 percent chance to encounter a complication during each day of practice. When a complication arises, the GM can choose or roll for the complication on the Training Montage Complications table.

Roleplaying a Maneuver

Using a maneuver is a chance to create memorable moments with your friends. Coordinate with your team in advance: "James, please use your Clever feature as a bonus action! I'm probably going to miss with one of the attacks from my *scorching ray*, so get ready to redirect it!"

To encourage this behavior as a GM, don't be afraid to give out inspiration for successful tactics and hilarious mistakes, or simply have an enemy drop dead from embarrassment after falling victim to a Tabletop Trip.

Training Montage Complications

d6	Complication
1	You have difficulty finding a set of instructions for the specific maneuver you are trying to learn, forcing you to spend 5 days finding a teacher before you can begin practice.
2	Others witnessing your training mistake it for an actual fight, and the authorities come to break up the "altercation."
3	You go a bit overboard, and one person training (determined at random by the GM) suffers an injury. For 5 days, or until they receive magical healing, they recover half as many Hit Dice as normal during a long rest.
4	You notice early in your training that the scroll you're using as a guide was created for creatures with entirely different anatomy, or that your instructor can't teach you this particular maneuver. You can choose a different maneuver to train or end your training early. You'll need a different scroll or an instructor to learn this maneuver.
5	After an intense training session, you discover that opportunistic scavengers have stolen your food and water.
6	Your rowdy and raucous training causes property damage in the area where you are practicing.

Using Maneuvers

A maneuver is executed by using your reaction in response to a predefined trigger—an activity being performed by an ally that you can see or hear—to combine your efforts into an effect greater than the sum of its parts.

Maneuver Saving Throw DC

If a maneuver requires your target to make a saving throw, the DC is calculated as follows:

Maneuver save DC = 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Strength, Dexterity, or Intelligence modifier (your choice)

Inspiration

You can use inspiration in a new way with group maneuvers to create truly awe-inspiring moments. If you have inspiration when you perform a maneuver, you can expend the inspiration to perform the maneuver without using a reaction. In addition, you and your ally have advantage on any attack rolls or ability checks you make as part of the maneuver, and your target has disadvantage on any saving throws made to avoid or resist it.

Maneuvers

The group maneuvers are presented in alphabetical order.

Alley-oop

When an ally you can see or hear disarms a creature within 5 feet of you and causes it to drop an object, you can use your reaction to either pick up the object, provided you have a free hand to do so, or kick it up to 20 feet away.

You can also use your reaction after an ally you can see or hear scores a critical hit against a creature within 5 feet of you to disarm that creature, forcing it to drop an object of your choice that it's holding. As part of this maneuver, you can pick up the object up or kick it up to 20 feet away.

Arcane Echo

Prerequisite: Pact Magic or Spellcasting feature

When an ally you can see or hear within 30 feet of you casts a spell that you also know or have prepared with a casting time of 1 action and a range of self that targets an area (such as *thunderwave*), you can use your reaction and expend a spell slot of the triggering spell's level (a minimum of a 1st-level slot) to echo the spell, casting it yourself. If the areas of the spells overlap, a target in the overlapping area is affected only by the first spell cast.



CATAPULT JUMP

When an ally within 5 feet of you who weighs less than 30 times your Strength score jumps, you can use your reaction to launch them farther. The distance they are able to jump doubles, and every 2 feet of movement during their jump costs only 1 foot.

CHARGED PROJECTILE

Prerequisite: You can cast a cantrip that requires an attack roll

When an ally makes a ranged weapon attack and you are within 5 feet of the target or the attacker, you can use your reaction to cast a cantrip to charge the projectile. The cantrip must be one that requires an attack roll and targets only one creature, and it is cast as if you were a 1st-level spellcaster. If the attack hits, the target is also hit by the cantrip.

CROSS STRIKE

When an ally you can see or hear hits a creature within 5 feet of you with a melee weapon attack, you can use your reaction to make a melee weapon attack against the target. On a hit, instead of suffering the normal effects of your attack, the target takes damage of your weapon's type equal to the ability modifier used for your attack roll. Hit or miss, both you and your ally can move up to half your speed to an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the target.

DIVERSION

After an ally you can see or hear hits a creature within 5 feet of you with a melee weapon attack, you can move up to half your speed as a reaction. The target of the attack can't use their reaction to make an opportunity attack against you.

DOGPILE

When a creature within 5 feet of you makes a Dexterity saving throw against a spell cast or effect created by an ally, you can use your reaction to attempt to grapple the target. On a success, the target is grappled as normal and also has disadvantage on the Dexterity saving throw.

GET DOWN

Prerequisite: Evasion feature

When you and an ally within 5 feet of you both make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage from an effect or spell, you can use your reaction to cause the friendly creature to take only the same amount of damage that you do.

Hail of Arrows

When you are wielding a ranged weapon and an ally makes a ranged weapon attack against a target you can see that is within your weapon's range, you can use your reaction to join in the attack. Your ally makes their attack roll with advantage, and if the attack hits, you can roll your weapon's damage dice and add the total to the damage dealt.

Juggler

When an ally you can see makes a ranged attack with a thrown weapon against a target within 5 feet of you and you have a free hand, you can use your reaction to toss the weapon back to your ally. Once you've used your reaction to execute this maneuver, you can repeat it any number of times without using your reaction until the end of the turn.

Reflect Magic

Prerequisite: The Deflect Missiles feature or the ability to cast at least one spell

If an ally makes a ranged spell attack against a target within 10 feet of you and misses, you can use your reaction to redirect the magic back toward the target. Make a new attack roll using your proficiency bonus and your Dexterity or spellcasting ability modifier (your choice).

Spotter

When an ally that can see or hear you makes a ranged attack against a target that is behind half cover or three-quarters cover for them but isn't behind cover for you, you can use your reaction to guide their strike. Your ally's attack ignores half cover or three-quarters cover.

Tabletop Trip

When an ally you can see pushes or pulls a creature that starts the movement from within 5 feet of you, you can use your reaction to fall prone in the creature's path. If the target is your size or one size larger, it stumbles and falls prone in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of you, or the nearest unoccupied space.

Whirling Magic

Prerequisite: The ability to cast at least one spell

When an ally you can see or hear within 30 feet of you makes a melee weapon attack against a creature, you can use your reaction to enchant your ally's weapon, allowing them to create a damaging burst of force with their weapon instead. In lieu of the attack, your ally can force each creature within 5 feet of themself to succeed on a Dexterity saving throw or take force damage equal to a damage roll made with the weapon, plus additional force damage equal to your spellcasting modifier.

Monstrous Maneuvers

Why should the player characters have all the fun? This section presents a host of monstrous group maneuvers which can be used by the opposition! There are endless ways that two monsters might work together to overcome the might of the player characters, so these maneuvers are only a few of many possibilities and can serve as inspiration to create your own.

All the maneuvers available to player characters are also suitable for monstrous creatures. You can also choose to allow your characters to take maneuvers that would normally be available only to monsters if you want to create some especially memorable moments—perhaps they could adopt a maneuver after a group of monsters uses it against them!

Minion Maneuvers

The following maneuvers are designed for creatures of a low challenge rating that are easily dispatched, such as goblins, kobolds, and cowardly brigands.

Copy Cat!

After this creature sees an ally score a critical hit against a target, this creature can use its reaction to make a weapon attack against a creature it can see that is within its reach or the range of its ranged weapon if it is wielding one. This attack scores a critical hit on a roll of 19 or 20.

Ooh ... Magic?

After this creature sees one of its allies cast a spell, this creature can use its reaction to move up to its speed toward either the caster or one of the targets of the spell.

You Got This, Right?

When an ally hits a target within 5 feet of this creature with a melee attack, this creature can use its reaction to take the Disengage action, with the benefits lasting until the end of its next turn.

Brute Maneuvers

These maneuvers are best suited for the big'uns: bugbears, beasts of burden, and Giants.

Bull Rush

If an ally this creature can see moves at least 20 feet and makes a melee attack, this creature can use its reaction to move up to 20 feet toward the same target and make a melee weapon attack against it. If this creature hits, instead of suffering the normal effects of the attack, the target is knocked prone.

Get Help

After rolling initiative, if this creature is not surprised and is standing within 5 feet of an ally that is its size or smaller, this creature can use its reaction to toss the ally at an enemy creature it can see within 20 feet. The enemy must succeed on a Strength saving throw or be knocked prone and take 1d4 bludgeoning damage. The tossed ally lands prone in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the target.

Foot Stomp

If an enemy within 5 feet of this creature is knocked prone by an ally, this creature can use its reaction to stomp on the prone creature. The target takes bludgeoning damage equal to this creature's Strength modifier, and is restrained until this creature chooses to release it (no action required), moves, or uses Foot Stomp on another target. The restrained creature can use its action on its turn to end the restrained condition.

Leader Maneuvers

The maneuvers listed here are designed for creatures who lead the pack, such as alpha beasts, chieftains, and lords.

Cover Me!

When this creature is the target of a ranged attack and is not benefiting from cover, it can use its reaction to grab an ally within 5 feet of it and use the ally to gain half cover. If the attack misses, but would have hit without cover, the ally is hit with the attack instead.

Courageous to the End

When an allied creature is reduced to 0 hit points, this creature can use its reaction to allow that creature to make one attack against a target within its reach (or the range of its ranged weapon if it is wielding one) before it falls.

Saw That Coming

If this creature isn't surprised when it rolls initiative, it can use its reaction to allow an allied creature that was surprised to act as normal during its first turn in combat.

Positions, People!

If this creature wasn't surprised when it rolls initiative, it can use its reaction to command 1d4 allied creatures. Each of those creatures can use its reaction to move up to half its speed.

Dragon Maneuvers

As if dragons weren't lethal enough, these maneuvers are designed to amplify the threat of those rare few that fight as a group.

Cross Breath

If another dragon uses a breath weapon while this dragon's breath weapon is available, this dragon can use its



own breath weapon as a reaction, targeting an overlapping area. A target caught in the area of both breath weapons has disadvantage on its saving throws against both of the breath weapons. This dragon can't roll to recharge the use of its breath weapon on its next turn.

Flambé

When another dragon knocks a creature prone while this dragon's breath weapon is available, this dragon can use its reaction to exhale a sustained blast of its breath weapon in an area that includes the prone creature, which lasts until the start of this dragon's next turn. Any creature that starts its turn in the area, or moves into it for the first time on its turn, must make a saving throw against the breath weapon's effects. This dragon's breath weapon is then expended, and it can't roll to recharge the use of its breath weapon on its next turn.

Ripped and Torn

If another dragon is carrying a creature and leaves this dragon's reach, this dragon can use its reaction to make a bite or claw attack against the creature.

New Character Options

When using group maneuvers, characters have access to the following additional class features and options.

Fighting Style Options

1st-level fighter or 2nd-level illrigger, paladin, or ranger feature

When you choose a fighting style, the following style is added to your list of options. When you gain this feature, you can replace one of your previously chosen fighting styles with this option.

Gang Tactics

Choose a maneuver and add it to the maneuvers you know. You have a pool of opportunity dice equal to your proficiency bonus, which are d6s. When making an opportunity attack or performing a maneuver that deals damage, you can expend one of these d6 and roll it, adding the result to the damage dealt. You regain all of your expended opportunity dice when you finish a long rest.

Clever

2nd-level rogue feature

As a bonus action, you can ready yourself to anticipate your allies' movements in battle. The first opportunity attack you make or maneuver you perform before the start of your next turn doesn't require you to use your reaction.

Ki-Inspired Tactics

2nd-level monk feature

Once per round, you can spend 1 ki point to execute a maneuver without using your reaction.

Feat: Opportunist

Prerequisite: The ability to perform at least one maneuver

You've dedicated extra time and training to practicing maneuvers that you can execute with others. You gain the following benefits:

- Increase your Strength, Dexterity, or Intelligence score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You have a pool of two opportunity dice, which are d6s. When you deal damage with an opportunity attack or maneuver that uses your reaction, you can expend one of these d6 and roll it, adding the result to the damage dealt. You can only spend opportunity die at a time. You regain all of your expended opportunity dice when you finish a long rest.

Magic Items

The following magic items are useful and fun rewards for player characters who use group maneuvers.

Headband of Magical Arts

Wondrous Item, Uncommon (Requires Attunement)

While you wear this headband, you know Arcane Echo, Reflect Magic, and Whirling Magic maneuvers, even if you don't meet the usual prerequisites. When a maneuver calls for your spellcasting ability modifier, you use your Constitution modifier if you don't have one.

Manual of Methods

Wondrous Item, Rare (+1), Very Rare (+2), Legendary (+3) (Requires Attunement)

A long, battered tube contains this worn scroll of parchment. While attuned to this text, your ability to execute maneuvers is extraordinary, giving you a bonus to your maneuver save DC. The bonus is determined by the manual's rarity.

Additionally, this manual has 3 charges, and it regains 1d3 expended charges daily at dawn. If you are holding the manual, you can expend a charge to perform a maneuver or make an opportunity attack without using your reaction.



Shield of Magic Reflection

Shield, Very Rare (Requires Attunement)

This smooth and plain shield's surface is polished to a mirror-like shine. As it moves within the light, a faint shimmer of azure and purple cascades over the reflective surface. While holding this shield, you gain a +2 bonus to AC against spell attacks, in addition to the shield's normal bonus to AC.

Additionally, the shield has 3 charges, and it regains 1d3 expended charges daily at dawn. If you are holding the shield and an ally makes a ranged spell attack against a target within 10 feet of you and misses, you can expend 1 charge to redirect the magic back toward the target. Made an attack roll against the target with an attack bonus equal to your proficiency bonus plus your Dexterity or spellcasting modifier if you have one (your choice).

Technique Scroll

Scroll, Varies

A *technique scroll* contains a step-by-step guide to executing a specific maneuver. While holding the scroll, you can perform the maneuver on it as a reaction provided you meet the maneuver's prerequisites. Once the maneuver is performed, the instructions on the scroll fade and it crumbles into dust.

The rarity of the scroll determines the maneuver's save DC, as shown in the Technique Scroll table.

If the maneuver contained on the scroll is one you already know, you can use this item when performing the maneuver to do so without using your reaction. When you do, you can choose to use your maneuver save DC in place of the saving throw DC determined by the rarity of the scroll.

Technique Scroll

Rarity	Save DC
Common	13
Uncommon	15
Rare	17
Very Rare	18
Legendary	19

MONSTERS OF WONDERLAND

Something wicked this way comes with four new frumious fey creatures

by Kat Kruger

In realms where fey have dominion, nature is suffused with magic. These domains are filled with great beauty and charm, as well as peculiarity and danger. From elves to dryads and hags to blights, as much as the fey realms are a place of whimsy and wonder, there exist creatures of the most wicked imaginings. These are the monsters that go bump in the dark—the unimaginable stuff of nightmares.

The world of *Alice in Wonderland* (and complementary poems) is rife with such creatures. The topsy-turvy world of Wonderland is one of literary nonsense that can leave visitors disoriented. That's if they're lucky. The less fortunate are swooped up and never heard from again. That is precisely the jeopardy that this article presents. Four of Lewis Carroll's creatures are reimagined as formidable monsters that can be dropped into a game taking place in the domains of the fey. It includes monster tactics that allow GMs of any experience level to run them cleverly and effectively.

So venture down the rabbit hole or through the looking glass, if you dare, then surprise your players with these grim foes at the game table.

BANDERSNATCH

> "But while he was seeking with thimbles and care,
> A Bandersnatch swiftly drew nigh
> And grabbed at the Banker, who shrieked in despair,
> For he knew it was useless to fly."
>
> —*The Hunting of the Snark* by Lewis Carroll

Ferocious and quick on its feet, the bandersnatch is a consummate predator. It is a muscular fey creature with a deep-chested body, round ears, and a tuft at the end of its tail. Parts of its coat could easily be mistaken for coniferous tree needles, allowing the bandersnatch to camouflage itself in a forest.

Terrible Claws. The bandersnatch has venomous claws that putrefy a target. As the venom courses through the veins of a living creature, it decomposes the target's flesh and eventually kills its prey. This allows the bandersnatch to stalk a dying target and scavenge the remains as a meal.

Tactics. This fast predator chases down prey much like a big cat. It stalks a target using its superior camouflage before running at a target to utilize its Pounce trait. Should it succeed in knocking its prey prone, the bandersnatch uses its bonus Bite attack. It singularly focuses on a target it has taken down and releases poisonous fumes to keep others at bay with its Noxious Stench legendary action. The bandersnatch instinctively backs down after it has been reduced to 20 or fewer hit points, taking the Disengage action before retreating.

PUTREFYING LORE

At the GM's discretion, a character can learn to cure the bandersnatch's venom if they have a background that involves healing or fey ancestry, or if they have proficiency in the Survival skill or with a poisoner's kit. Any other character who succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check knows how to cure the venom.

Bandersnatch

Large Fey, Typically Neutral Evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 85 (10d10 + 30)
Speed 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	17 (+3)	16 (+3)	6 (-2)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Skills Perception +4
Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages —
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Forest Camouflage. The bandersnatch has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide in forest terrain.

Pounce. If the bandersnatch moves at least 20 feet straight toward a target and then hits it with a claw attack on the same turn, that target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, the bandersnatch can make one Bite attack against it as a bonus action.

Actions

Multiattack. The bandersnatch makes one Bite attack and one Putrefying Claw attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Putrefying Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d6 + 4) slashing damage plus 3 (1d6) poison damage, and the target is infected with putrefying venom. At the start of each of the target's turns, the target takes 3 (1d6) poison damage. If the target suffers this effect for 1 hour, the venom putrefies the target's flesh and kills the target. Any effect that cures disease or ends the poisoned condition removes the venom from the target. A creature that spends 1 minute working with the dead bandersnatch's remains and succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check creates one dose of an antidote for the putrefying venom, which can be consumed as an action and ends the venom effect. This check can be attempted multiple times with the creature's remains.

Legendary Actions

The bandersnatch can take 2 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The bandersnatch regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Putrefying Claw. The bandersnatch makes one Putrefying Claw attack.

Noxious Stench (Costs 2 Actions). The bandersnatch emits a toxic cloud from its needle-like fur. Each creature within 60 feet of the bandersnatch must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of the bandersnatch's next turn.



Hag Moth

"In a minute or two the Caterpillar took the hookah out of its mouth and yawned once or twice, and shook itself. Then it got down off the mushroom, and crawled away in the grass ..."

–*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll

In poisonous mushroom groves, the hag moth thrives. One might venture into such places, foraging for fungi and spot clusters of shimmering dew, only to realize too late that the location is a hag moth's lair. The dewy eggs of a hag moth develop into caterpillars with the appearance of spun glass. A hag moth caterpillar feasts on fungus deadly to other creatures before weaving a cocoon, where it transforms into its winged adult form then leaves to find its own grove.



An adventurer lucky enough to survive an encounter with a hag moth in its lair may discover the rare hag moth mushroom. These large fungi fetch a handsome price at a market. With the right tools, they can be ground into a powder or mixed with other tonics to cure mind-altering effects such as charmed or frightened conditions.

Monstrous Metamorphosis. The hag moth caterpillar has a voracious appetite. Though it prefers fungi, it is not a finicky eater. That said, fresh corpses are excellent fodder for their mushroom groves and the remains of many a creature (or adventurer) can be found beneath the thick loam of these places. Once the caterpillar has had its fill, it metamorphoses into a hag moth.

Hallucinogenic Breath. The hag moth and caterpillar exhale psychedelic smoke that confuses their target and dizzies them with extreme feelings of euphoria or despair.

Hypnotic Eyes. When an adult hag moth flaps its wings, the eye-like circles on them create illusions of eerie eyes seemingly floating outward and hanging in the air. The hapless victims mesmerized by these wings become charmed, and thus easy prey for the creature.

Tactics. A hag moth caterpillar's primary means of attack is with its Bite, which only does a modest amount of piercing damage but a significant amount of poison damage. In addition, its Bite has a chance of imposing the poisoned or paralyzed condition on a target. The caterpillar also grapples enemies with its suction cups, doing further poison damage as a toxic slime covers its slick body. A caterpillar uses the Dash action to climb away when retreating, but a hag moth has the advantage of flight. In its winged form, the hag moth can dive in and out of combat without provoking opportunity attacks.

Hag Moth Caterpillar

Medium Fey, Typically Chaotic Neutral

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)
Hit Points 37 (5d8 + 15)
Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	7 (-2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages telepathy 60 ft.
Challenge 2 (450 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Poison Suction Cups. The caterpillar adheres to anything that touches it. A Large or smaller creature adhered to the caterpillar is also grappled by it (escape DC 13). Ability checks made to escape this grapple have disadvantage. At the end of a grappled creature's turn, it takes 3 (1d6) poison damage.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or take 10 (3d6) poison damage. If the poison damage reduces the target to 0 hit points, the target is stable but poisoned for 1 hour, even after regaining hit points, and is paralyzed while poisoned in this way.

Hallucinogenic Breath (1/Day). The caterpillar exhales a puff of hallucinogenic smoke at one creature within 5 feet of it. The target must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of its next turn and have disadvantage on ability checks and attack rolls for 1 minute. While under this effect, the target hallucinates, causing all creatures to appear doubled, and its spoken words float off in puffs of smoke that form letters in the air. A target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Hag Moth

Large Fey, Typically Chaotic Neutral

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 57 (6d10 + 24)
Speed 40 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +4
Skills Perception +4
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Flyby. The moth doesn't provoke opportunity attacks when it flies out of an enemy's reach.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or take 10 (3d6) poison damage. If the poison damage reduces the target to 0 hit points, the target is stable but poisoned for 1 hour, even after regaining hit points, and is paralyzed while poisoned in this way.

Hallucinogenic Breath (Recharge 6). The moth exhales hallucinogenic smoke in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of its next turn and have disadvantage on ability checks and attack rolls for 1 minute. While under this effect, the target hallucinates, causing all creatures to appear doubled, and its spoken words float off in puffs of smoke that form letters in the air. A target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Hypnotic Wings (1/Day). The moth flaps its wings, creating a twisting pattern of colors that weaves through the air. Each creature within 30 feet of the moth that can see it must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed by the moth until the end of the moth's next turn. While charmed in this way, the target is incapacitated and has a speed of 0.

A Hag Moth's Lair

A hag moth makes its lair in poisonous mushroom groves.

Lair Actions

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the hag moth can take one of the following lair actions; the moth can't take the same lair action two rounds in a row:

- The mushrooms in the lair shriek and release spores. Each creature within 30 feet of a mushroom that is not the moth or its allies must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving or become vulnerable to poison damage until initiative count 20 on the next round.
- Puffs of noxious gas fill a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on a point the moth chooses within 120 feet of it. Creatures in the area must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or take 13 (2d12) poison damage.
- The hag moth creates an area of hallucinatory terrain centered on a point anywhere in its lair. The effect is similar to the *hallucinatory terrain* spell with the following changes: its area of effect is a 60-foot cube, it only lasts until the start of initiative count 20 on the next round, and it requires a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check save to disbelieve it.

Regional Effects

The region containing a moth's lair is warped by the hag moth's presence, which creates one or more of the following magical effects:

- The land within 6 miles of the lair is difficult terrain, since the earth is moist, and the area is thick with fungi.
- Fungi within 6 miles of the moth's lair take on dazzling hues.
- Within its lair, the moth can create any number of illusory sounds, such as soft music and strange echoes, to be heard in various parts of the lair.

If the moth dies, these regional effects end immediately.

Mome Rath

"'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe."

—*Jabberwocky*
by Lewis Carroll

A mome rath is an amphibious creature that lurks in swamps and resembles a green pig with a shark mouth. As a group, they make excellent minions for swamp hags who wish to keep intruders away. Fast and deadly, mome raths lurk below the surface of mud or murky water in search of prey. They take down targets with the element of surprise, using their leap and Electrifying Skin to stun a creature before biting and clawing.

Tactics. When a mome rath wounds a target, it relentlessly attacks that creature. If a wounded target flees, the mome rath gives chase and uses the Dash action to pursue if needed. Should the target manage to get too far away to catch in one turn, the mome rath turns its attention to closer targets. The fey predator breathes a faerie fire (similar to the spell of the same name) to mark nearby targets before beginning its attacks anew.

Despite its low intelligence, a mome rath's survival instinct kicks in when it is losing a fight. When reduced to 35 or fewer hit points, it uses the Dash action to dive into the nearest body of water and swim away.



Mome Rath

Large Fey, Unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 94 (9d10 + 45)
Speed 50 ft., swim 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	11 (+0)	21 (+5)	1 (-5)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +3
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities lightning
Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages —
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Amphibious. The mome rath can breathe air and water.

Electrifying Skin. A creature that touches the mome rath or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 3 (1d6) lightning damage and must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or become stunned until the end of the mome rath's next turn.

Relentless (1/Day). If the mome rath takes 20 damage or less that would reduce it to 0 hit points, it is reduced to 1 hit point instead.

Actions

Multiattack. The mome rath makes one Bite attack and one Claws attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (3d10 + 6) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d6 + 6) slashing damage.

Faerie Fire Breath (Recharge 5–6). The mome rath exhales faerie fire in a 20-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or be outlined in green for 1 minute. Affected creatures shed dim light in a 10-foot radius. Any attack roll against an affected creature has advantage if the attacker can see it, and the affected creature can't benefit from being invisible.

Stunning Leap (1/Day). If the mome rath jumps at least 30 feet as part of its movement, it can then use this action to land on its feet in a space that contains one or more other creatures. Each of those creatures must succeed on a DC 16 Strength or Dexterity saving throw (target's choice) or take 16 (3d6 + 6) bludgeoning damage plus 16 (3d6 + 6) lightning damage, be knocked prone, and be stunned until the end of the mome rath's next turn. On a successful save, the creature takes only half the damage, isn't stunned, and is pushed 5 feet out of the mome rath's space into an unoccupied space of the creature's choice. If no unoccupied space is within range, the creature instead falls prone in the mome rath's space.

Snark

"They hunted till darkness came on,
but they found
Not a button, or feather, or mark,
By which they could tell that they
stood on the ground
Where the Baker had met with the
Snark.

In the midst of the word he was
trying to say,
In the midst of his laughter and glee,
He had softly and suddenly vanished
away–"

– The Hunting of the Snark
by Lewis Carroll

Many have hunted the snark in hopes of studying it, while others seek glory or fortune from bounties posted for its capture. The snark is an amorphous creature that feeds on emotions. It is rarely seen, and those who claim to have done so provide varying details of its description. Some snark sightings report that the creatures have feathers and bite, while others claim the fey have whiskers and scratch. Though many have tried to capture the snark, few have succeeded. In fact, many have never returned to tell their tale.

Tactics. In truth, the snark is a creature of powerful psychic ability. It has no true form, at least none that it allows to be seen. Because it is a creature that cannot be truly perceived, the snark is a formidable foe. It uses its actions to read the thoughts of a target to glean useful information before engaging in combat. If attacked, the snark then uses this information against the target to cause psychic damage.

Snark

Medium Fey, Typically Neutral

Armor Class 14
Hit Points 130 (20d8 + 40)
Speed 30 ft., fly 50 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	19 (+4)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Con +6
Skills Perception +6, Stealth +8
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Common, Sylvan
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +4

Amorphous. The snark can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

Antipathy/Sympathy Aura. When a creature starts its turn within 15 feet of the snark and the snark is not incapacitated, the creature must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw. If a creature's saving throw is successful, the creature is immune to the snark's Antipathy/Sympathy Aura for the next 24 hours. On a failed save, the target can't take reactions and must roll a d6 on its next turn:

1–4. The target becomes frightened until the start of its next turn. While frightened, the target must use its movement on its turn to move away from the snark (even if it can't see the snark).

5–6. The target feels an intense urge to approach the snark and must use its movement on its turn to get as close to the snark as possible (even if it can't see the snark).

Freedom of Movement. The snark ignores difficult terrain, and magical effects can't reduce its speed.

Inscrutable. The snark is immune to any effect that would sense its emotions or read its thoughts, and can choose to be unaffected by any divination spell. Wisdom (Insight) checks made to ascertain the snark's intentions or sincerity have disadvantage.

Invisibility. The snark is invisible.

Actions

Multiattack. The snark makes two melee attacks.

Phantasmal Touch. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature that isn't blinded. *Hit:* 26 (4d10 + 4) psychic damage as the snark takes on an illusory form, lashes out, then disappears. If the target has no image of the snark's appearance, the snark creates an illusion drawn from the target's deepest fears.

Psychic Drain. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) psychic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

Read Thoughts. The snark magically reads the surface thoughts of one creature within 60 feet of it. The effect can penetrate barriers, but 3 feet of wood or dirt, 2 feet of stone, 2 inches of metal, or a thin sheet of lead blocks it. While the target is in range, the snark can continue reading its thoughts, as long as the snark's concentration isn't broken (as if concentrating on a spell). While reading the target's mind, the snark has advantage on Wisdom (Insight) and Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, and Persuasion) checks against the target.

POOR UNDEAD SOULS

Options and NPCs to spice up ghosts in your campaign

by Mario Ortegón

What is a ghost?
A tragedy condemned to repeat itself time and time again?
A moment of pain, perhaps.
Something dead which still seems to be alive.
An emotion suspended in time.
Like a blurred photograph.
Like an insect trapped in amber.

– Guillermo del Toro, David Muñoz & Antonio Trashorras, *The Devil's Backbone*

While frequently relegated to tales of horror and mystery in popular culture, ghosts can be used to tell stories from different perspectives, explore a narrative unbound by linear time, and highlight a forgotten or hidden past. This article offers a variety of ghostly allies and threats, as well as several ghost NPCs with tragic backstories, ready to haunt any location.

Ghost Variants

The following sections introduce seven spectral variants: the covetous, the devoted, the disgraced, the jubilant, the restless, the sorrowful, and the vengeful. To use these variants, start with the **ghost** stat block, then add the appropriate traits and actions.

The Covetous

Covetous ghosts died unsatisfied with their legacy, and the pain of what they could have had continues to haunt them. They are rarely violent, but they enjoy bringing misery to those who have what they lacked or lost in life. Covetous ghosts particularly enjoy tormenting people they perceive as undeserving of good fortune.

Content Warning

With ghost stories as its central topic, this article delves into themes of horror and death. More specifically, it contains plots about child death, loneliness, grief, despair, mental illness, abusive relationships, house fires, and gruesome imagery.

If you incorporate these stories into your game, make sure your players are comfortable with their themes. Safety tools, such as the TTRPG Safety Toolkit from Kienna Shaw and Lauren Bryant-Monk, can help you create a horror experience that is safe and fun for everyone.

Remember that the horrors presented here are meant to give the characters, not the players, a hard time. Let the players decide how despair, shame, anger, and other emotions elicited by ghostly threats affect their characters, and check in with them regularly to make sure everyone's having a good time.

Covetous Ghost Traits

Covetous ghosts have the following additional actions:

Multiattack. The ghost makes one Withering Touch attack and one Luck Rending attack.

Luck Rending. *Melee Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* The target is magically cursed for 1 hour. Until the curse ends, the target's speed is reduced by 10 feet, and they can't gain advantage on any ability check, attack roll, or saving throw.

Appearance and Behavior

Covetous ghosts have warped and exaggerated features, unnaturally reflecting what they envy most. A ghost who died jealous of another's physical appearance looks horrific. One who envied material wealth appears rotting, miserable, and tattered. Another who desired power becomes a pitiful, scuttling creature.

Pure spite motivates these spirits. They twist existence to mirror their wretchedness, haunting victims for decades or even centuries, turning friends and loved ones against each other, and ruining relationships, occupations, and lives. Sometimes a ghost targets a family, causing misery for generations before they are discovered.

Hauntings

Places haunted by covetous ghosts become spoiled, befouled, and rife with misfortune. Furniture creaks and breaks, strange molds taint the walls, and food rots too quickly. The ghosts revel in these trappings, content with ruining the victims' daily lives, though the spirits don't control how often or severely these manifestations occur.

The haunted victims of covetous ghosts might feel weighed down by an unseen burden, wrestle with constant insecurity, or have their abilities impaired by strange symptoms. Covetous ghosts don't often possess their victims, but when they do, it's to prevent and ruin the target's satisfaction. Possessing their victims to experience what they envy only furthers their misery.

Soughing Seamstress

The Soughing Seamstress was a human named Beryl Greydam, who was once the most sought-after dressmaker in the town of Baruster, a small but prosperous hilltop hamlet. During Beryl's later years, her daughter Luella learned her trade, helping with minor tasks until she could sew beautiful, eye-catching dresses. Beryl should have felt pride, but when the seamstress received praise for her daughter's work, all she heard was that it was better than



hers ever was. Riddled with spite and jealousy, Beryl fired her daughter. Industrious Luella opened her own shop, which went on to outperform her mother's.

The mother-daughter rivalry went on for years, until Beryl fell ill from old age. She became bedridden, and so Luella cared for her. Though Beryl still held her daughter in contempt, she had no choice but to accept Luella's help.

Beryl knew that her final hour drew near. She wished to wear one of her finest dresses when she passed, but the old dress no longer fit. She watched in horror as Luella fixed her greatest work.

Too weak to fight the decision, Beryl died wearing a bitter reminder of her jealousy. Her ghost haunted Luella ceaselessly, driving her daughter to despair until she abandoned her business, never to return to town. Known to locals as the Soughing Seamstress, Beryl's ghost remains in her old, run-down boutique, plaguing those wearing the latest fashion or exhibiting any hint of talent with a needle and thread.

Exorcism. Convincing Beryl to move on to the afterlife requires two important steps. First, she must let go of her bitterness toward Luella. The characters must either find Luella and convince her to confront her mother, revealing how much her jealousy has affected Luella's life, or provide proof that Luella has moved on from their feud so Beryl sees that her torments are meaningless.

Second, the characters must gather exotic materials and help Beryl make one final, unique dress to serve as her legacy. The materials can vary in difficulty, ranging from expensive silks to dragon scales.

The Devoted

Devoted ghosts stay in the world when they can't bear to let go of a deep love for someone else. Many of these spirits are benevolent, driven by a pure sense of loyalty that leads them to protect their loved ones. The ghosts may watch over them, intervene to help them, or simply enjoy their presence, never interacting with them.

However, some devoted ghosts can be so protective that they refuse to let anyone near their loved ones, isolating them physically or through more subtle means.

Devoted Ghost Traits

Devoted ghosts have the following additional traits:

Devoted Permanence. If the ghost is within 30 feet of the subject of their devotion, the ghost gains a +3 bonus to AC and advantage on saving throws.

Selective Horror. When the ghost uses their Horrifying Visage action, they can choose any number of creatures to be unaffected by it.

Appearance and Behavior

Devoted ghosts look different to those they protect than they do to other people. To their loved ones, a devoted ghost can look as they did in life, often choosing the form most comforting to them, even if it doesn't match how they looked when they died. (For example, offspring might appear as a toddler to their parents, even if they died at a later age.) However, to everybody else, their corpse-like features are perverse and exaggerated, hollowed out by the bouts of jealousy common in these ghosts.

A devoted ghost's desire to stay near their beloved compels them to act irrationally at times. If the ghost thinks their loved ones are threatened, they respond violently, sometimes even to the detriment of their beloved. In extreme cases, some spirits go as far as killing their loved ones to spare them from suffering some perceived danger.

Hauntings

Devoted ghosts haunt those they love and follow them no matter where they go. Perceptive onlookers spot them accompanying their beloved as shapes in shadows or reflections in mirrors. Occasionally, these spirits manifest in the background of paintings or sketches of the haunted person, even though they weren't drawn by the artist. While most of these ghosts are content to watch over their family and friends without interfering, the most zealous ones wreak havoc on a loved one's life. These ghosts can be overprotective, jealous, and stringent in tradition. At all cost, they prevent loved ones from new friends and experiences for fear of losing that connection.

Some devoted ghosts are drawn to locations significant to the undead instead of the living, such as tombs, mass graves, battlefields, or evil temples. The spirits remain there until fading away from loneliness, which can take centuries. In rare instances, a devoted ghost might instead wander around looking for mortals who remind them of their loved ones.

Defeat vs. Exorcism

How does exorcising a ghost compare to simply defeating the creature in combat? For some games, destroying a ghost with violence yields the same result as an exorcism—the ghost simply doesn't return.

At the GM's discretion, particularly strong apparitions (like the NPCs in this article) can return to haunt their victims or locations after being defeated in combat. A defeated ghost might disappear for a while, but they always come back. Only exorcism can lay them to rest forever.

Lost Mother



The Lost Mother is the gentle spirit of Sarinda Thorntop, a dwarf from a village that no longer stands. A farmer in a land left barren by a great calamity, Sarinda became known for her talent to cultivate in such dire conditions. She fed and cared for her village into old age, and her family and friends expected many more years of happiness for cheerful Sarinda—until a particularly harsh winter brought bitter cold, famine, and disease.

Sarinda didn't survive the season, but her spirit remained. She considered the entire village her family, and when the land became barren in her absence, Sarinda's spirit taught them her ways. Years later, a terrible war razed the village, leaving her without a family. She has drifted for centuries since then, searching for people to love her as much as her village did.

The Lost Mother appears every few decades in towns affected by famine, desperately trying to convey her teachings to them. While Sarinda isn't prone to violence, she zealously protects these towns–sometimes to the point of sabotaging attempts to help that deviate from her methods, fearing they'll do more harm than good.

Exorcism. To exorcise the Lost Mother, she must be convinced she is no longer needed. Sarinda believes there will always be those who require her, but the characters can prove otherwise by tracking down a descendant from her original village, someone who has kept her teachings alive and extrapolated them into more efficient methods.

Alternatively, if the characters are willing to help a village survive, Sarinda can be convinced to leave the place peacefully … at least until she's needed again elsewhere.

The Disgraced

Disgraced ghosts died in misery and humiliation. Overcome with unbearable shame, these spirits take their indignant anger out on the living. Examples of disgraced ghosts include diplomats who committed grievous blunders in negotiations, soldiers humiliated by cowardice in the face of danger, and powerful figures brought low.

Those who died with hidden shame might also manifest as disgraced ghosts, seeking to unburden themselves from an appalling secret that they regretfully took to the grave.

Disgraced Ghost Traits

Disgraced ghosts have the following additional bonus action:

Disgraceful Retreat. The ghost can use their Etherealness action as a bonus action.

Disgraced ghosts also have the following reaction:

Expose Shame. When a creature the ghost can see within 60 feet of them makes an ability check, attack roll, or forces another creature to make a saving throw, the ghost can use their reaction to force the triggering creature to

make a DC 13 Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, the creature immediately blurts out a shameful secret and becomes frightened until the end of their next turn.

Appearance and Behavior

A disgraced spirit rarely shows their face, their ghostly form always obscured in some way behind unnerving masks, long curtains of hair, the shadows of a tattered cloak, or the simple lack of facial features altogether. They are also known to manifest chains or other torturous implements around their bodies as symbols of their guilt, even if the objects had nothing to do with their deaths.

These ghosts are usually too caught up in their guilt to notice the impact they have on living creatures. They sometimes show awareness of other creatures, but it's just as likely that a disgraced ghost doesn't even consider the living's existence unless they are a potential source of humiliation. However, when a disgraced ghost witnesses something that reminds them of their shame, they explode in anger and punish the perpetrator.

Hauntings

A disgraced ghost can quickly turn an otherwise pleasant area into an unbearable nest of misery that mirrors the spirit's sense of worthlessness. Feelings of silent judgment and constant unease burden these places. Echoing sounds of rattling chains, incoherent babbling, and jumbled prayers, frequently accompanied by a heavy miasma of putrid smells, repel most living creatures from these locations.

Disgraced ghosts haunt the living who remind the spirits of their shame. The ghost's presence can be extremely disruptive when this happens, as they monitor their victims with an obsessive fanaticism, looking for the slightest hint of shameful behavior to punish.

Foiled Pupil

The Foiled Pupil was Ivor Attervayne, the last scion of a noble clan that was betrayed in the aftermath of a war. Branded as a traitor and stripped of power, Ivor was taken in by a reluctant wizard named Oras the Gloomsworn, who honored a promise he made Ivor's late mother and made Ivor his apprentice. Though Ivor convinced Oras that he had altruistic motivations, he secretly harbored an ambition to restore his family's glory.

Ivor was a quick, practical learner who excelled in magical theory, yet he clashed with Oras in personality. The wizard often tasked the pupil with researching topics that Ivor deemed unimportant. One day, when Oras performed a ritual to contact an eldritch entity from beyond the stars, the spell began to go awry. Oras ordered Ivor to dispel it; desiring to best his master, the pupil instead continued the ritual, even unto disaster.

Consumed by magic beyond his control, Ivor's body scattered across the floor in a cloud of fine, grey dust. His ghost haunts the halls of his former master's tower, tormented by his unfulfilled purpose and the recklessness of his actions.

Exorcism. The Foiled Pupil remains out of a sense of shame and regret, rather than malicious intent. Feeling responsible for his demise, the wizard Oras never exorcised the spirit, instead suffering him for years. The ghost torments townsfolk and spellcasters who visit the tower, something Oras discourages but never fully addresses due to his guilt.

Ivor's ghost can be briefly appeased with offerings of arcane knowledge, but to permanently exorcise the pupil, adventurers must return to his home, uncover the betrayal the Attervayne family suffered, and expose the truth to someone who can set the record straight, thus restoring Ivor's reputation.

The Jubilant

Jubilant ghosts are bound to the material world by an all-consuming passion for an activity, place, or object, either one that held their interest for most of their lives or one that brought them great joy shortly before their passing. These ghosts, however misguided they may be, cling to what brought them pleasure in life.

Many are harmless, haunting their favorite tavern, music hall, or library. But some are extremely insidious, possessing people to satisfy their obsessions, no matter the harm they inflict.

Jubilant Ghost Traits

Jubilant ghosts have a challenge rating of 5 (1,800 XP) and the following additional trait:

Fanatic Rush. The ghost regains 5 hit points at the start of their turn if they have at least 1 hit point and is within 30 feet of their object or place of desire.

Jubilant ghosts also have the following additional action:

Share Obsession. A creature within 20 feet of the ghost that can see or hear them must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or become charmed by the ghost for 10 minutes. While charmed this way, the target becomes fixated on an object designated by the ghost that is within 120 feet of the target. If the target can see the object, they must use their entire turn to move toward the object by the safest route. If the target can't see the object, they must use their entire turn to search for the object. The charmed target can repeat the saving throw whenever they take damage and at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on a success.

Appearance and Behavior

Jubilant ghosts are frequently mistaken for the living. But when the ghost is near the source of their obsession, their supernatural nature becomes apparent: their face becomes haggard, their eyes hollow, and their mouth thin with a hungry smirk.

Most jubilant ghosts carry on exactly how they did in life, but a few become monstrously consumed with their obsession. Once consumed, they do nothing but wait for the right person to follow or possess, digging their cold dead hands into anyone who can help them obtain what they seek.

Hauntings

When a jubilant ghost haunts a specific location, it's because the place is tied to the spirit's idolized object or activity. Feelings of passion and hunger fill these areas; the living who inhabit them experience sensory hallucinations that harken to the spirit's obsessions. A derelict tavern might smell like freshly-brewed ale, haunting music might echo out of an abandoned opera house, or a luscious banquet might adorn the dinner table of a decrepit manor.

Jubilant ghosts ignore the living who don't hold interest to them, but they occasionally attach themselves to someone who holds similar interests or has access to that which they crave. In these cases, the haunted individual gradually becomes consumed by the ghost's passions, and anyone who dares interfere is at risk of being seen by the ghost as a threat.

Red Veil

The ghost known as the Red Veil is the spirit of a demon-worshipping elf named Zalagossa, who lived in ancient times. Her early years as a cultist are mostly forgotten, but she quickly rose to great prominence for her unshakeable resolve and remarkable aptitude as a leader. Zalagossa led raids against temples dedicated to good deities, desecrating shrines and plundering fortunes. Her cult is known for destroying the Solemn Archives, one of the greatest libraries of the ancient world, resulting in a dark age.

The Cult of the Red Veil was eventually crushed and its members punished by a conclave of holy paladins, but a few cultists escaped their fate, including Zalagossa herself. She eluded pursuers long enough to prepare a ritual that pledged her soul to a demon lord in exchange for horrific powers. But on the eve of the consummation of her ritual, a group of heroes stopped her. The cult leader died in fanatical ecstasy, believing she would descend to demonhood and claim her vengeance from the Abyss. But the heroes killed the woman before she transformed, preventing the Abyss from claiming her soul and leaving her ghost adrift.

Zalagossa now haunts a small demonic shrine in the forest she once ruled, attempting to perform the ritual that would bind her soul to her lord and restore her power. To complete it, she needs a relic and living beings to perform it properly, neither of which she currently has—though cultists may be working on that. She obsesses over demonic artifacts and knowledge, and anyone who dares approach the shrine is at risk of being possessed.

Exorcism. There are two ways to exorcise the Red Veil. The easier method is to help Zalagossa recover her remains and complete the ritual that would allow her soul to descend to the Abyss. Is it power or torment that she'll encounter when she reaches her lord's realm?

The second approach is to eliminate all chances of the ghost's ritual ever being completed. This could send the characters on a quest to find and destroy a powerful demonic relic, or even lead them to uncover surviving members of her cult working in the shadows. Dealing with these threats leaves Zalagossa with nothing to latch onto, forcing her spirit to depart for good.

The Restless

Restless ghosts die in intense fear and are condemned to an eternity of nightmarish torment. They become trapped in the places where they died and are unwittingly drawn to events that echo their last moments alive, causing them to continually experience the horrors of their demise.

These ghosts don't retain much memory of their former lives. Many know only the terrors that assail them. Fear pours out of them like rain, and the living who interact with these spirits run the risk of being drowned in their dread or plagued by their nightmarish reality.

Restless Ghost Traits

Restless ghosts have the following additional traits:

Restless Jitter. The ghost's flying speed is 45 feet, and opportunity attacks made against the ghost have disadvantage.

Unbound Terrors. At the start of each of the ghost's turns, each creature within 10 feet of the ghost must succeed on a DC 13 Intelligence saving throw or take 5 (1d10) psychic damage.

Appearance and Behavior

Restless ghosts are faded and grim, but otherwise, their faint forms appear as they did moments before their death. When their terrors overtake them, these spirits become more substantial, transitioning into dreadful apparitions, their bodies marred by the trauma that killed them and their faces contorted in terror.

Ghosts of this kind are timid, often manifesting in hiding places such as below beds or behind doors. The living



see restless ghosts at the periphery of their vision, peeking out from their hiding spots. In severe hauntings, the ghosts run screaming at victims as if to attack, only to pass through them and vanish.

Hauntings

Places haunted by restless ghosts are never truly quiet. Even when not actively manifesting their terrors, the restless constantly flit about, anxiously moving objects, shifting furniture, and clawing at walls as they dart from one hiding place to the next. Pure dread permeates these locations, and the presence of unfamiliar people and objects intensifies these sensations.

The living who cross paths with these spirits are afflicted with horrific nightmares while in their presence and for weeks after. The consequences of the dreams vary in severity, though they almost always result in sleep deprivation. Some are so severe that the haunted stop sleeping completely.

Cloistered Lord

The Cloistered Lord is the ghost of Dionar Ashenbluff, a noble who spent almost the entirety of his life inside his family's manor. He stepped outside his home for the last time when he was six for a hunting trip, during which he got lost in the woods for two days. His parents were hysterical, and even though they found him, the boy was never allowed outside again.

The little lord was resentful at first, but over time, he lost interest in the world outside his home. The sun became a monster that tried to kill him with its rays. The sky was a murderous expanse that robbed him of breath. And the friends who tried to convince him to go out were cruel villains who mocked him for refusing. Even years after the passing of his parents, Dionar remained a veritable hermit. Enamored with his isolation, he refused to acknowledge his developing agoraphobia.

Lord Ashenbluff's demise came at the hands of a doppelganger who infiltrated the manor staff and murdered Dionar to take his place. As the lord tried to flee from his attacker, he bled to death outside the one door that remained unsealed. No one knew that Dionar was murdered that night. The doppelganger disposed of the body in the same woods the lord got lost in and then lived as Lord Ashenbluff for years. The lord's ghost now wanders the woods, lost and wanting to go back inside.

Exorcism. To exorcise the Cloistered Lord, characters must first reveal the truth about Lord Ashenbluff's death. Then they must find his remains and bury them beneath the foundation of his manor, the only place where he truly felt safe. While the woods the lord is buried in are massive, keen adventurers might be able to locate the grave by

following the panicked ghost during one of his terrors.

Accessing the manor itself might be a challenge. If the doppelganger isn't still alive and posing as the lord, perhaps so much time has passed that the manor belongs to someone else, or the structure no longer stands.

The Sorrowful

Sorrowful ghosts are people who died with profound grief for something they lost. Unable to move on or focus on anything except that which reminds them of their pain, these ghosts howl in agony and wander listlessly, seeking only to end their suffering. Overt malevolence is uncommon among these melancholic spirits, but some are so racked with anguish that they desperately grasp at anyone who can provide the slightest hint of comfort, sometimes with deadly results.

Sorrowful Ghost Traits

Sorrowful ghosts have a challenge rating of 5 (1,800 XP) and the following additional traits:

Mournful Wail. The ghost weeps and moans constantly while they can see any living creature and isn't incapacitated. Each creature that starts their turn within 10 feet of the ghost that can hear the wailing must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be overcome with sadness and despair. Until the start of their next turn, an affected target can take either an action or a bonus action on their turn, not both, and can't take reactions. If a target is grappled by the ghost when they fail this saving throw, the target becomes restrained until the grapple ends.

Sorrowful Grasp. A Medium or smaller creature hit by the ghost's Withering Touch attack becomes grappled (escape DC 14). Until this grapple ends, the ghost can't use their Withering Touch attack on another target.

Appearance and Behavior

Sorrowful ghosts are recognized by their anguished wails, which carry to unnaturally far distances on the night winds. These spirits appear as they did in life, although their features are more gaunt and hollow, at times completely skeletal. They wear tattered rags or burial clothes, if any at all, and move about with great effort, as if swimming through an ocean of molasses.

Some wander aimlessly, while others pace a set path, repeating the same actions over and over, oblivious to their surroundings. Living creatures caught in a sorrowful ghost's path run the risk of being caught, dragged, and smothered by the ghost as they mindlessly cling to the flicker of hope in their life force.

Hauntings

Sorrowful ghost hauntings manifest in two forms: ghosts who carry out a single task repeatedly, or ghosts who are imprisoned in one location and can't leave. The first form manifests when a spirit lost something dear to them before their death, and they repeat the activity in a futile attempt to prevent that loss. The second manifestation occurs when a ghost lost something as a result of their death and can't bear to move on from the site that originated that grief, usually the place where they died.

In both cases, the location around the ghost becomes warped by their heartache. The environment seems to languish and weep in unison with the spirit. Colors look faded and dull, time seems to move slower, light fails to shine at full brightness, and walls and ceilings weep with spontaneous watery leaks, even with clear skies outside.

Drifting Child

The Drifting Child is the ghost of a forlorn youth named Tisaan who was born into a family of traveling merchants. As an infant, their wagon's gentle creaks and clattering wheels soothed Tisaan to sleep. By the time they turned ten, the many locations the family visited and tales of other travelers captivated them. And so, when Tisaan's parents announced they had enough savings to settle in the small farming town of Calinvale, Tisaan was heartbroken, fearing that their world would soon become smaller than before, and duller.

The parents sold the wagon, adding to the child's sadness. But a few days later, Tisaan spotted the vehicle near the outskirts of town and snuck inside to give it one last goodbye. They made a tent below the canvas and imagined themselves on the road, so lost in the daydream that they fell asleep. Oblivious to the child's presence, the merchants who bought the wagon loaded it with grain. It wasn't until days later, after reaching a nearby port city, that they became aware of the tragedy. The child suffocated, buried beneath the goods.

Tisaan's ghost wanders the road between the town and the city, crying for their parents and the life they never got to live. Sometimes they approach travelers who stop along the way to ask for a story about their homeland, vanishing for the night if the story pleases them, or sinking further into grief if it doesn't.

Exorcism. Tisaan's spirit can be eased by sharing a story from a distant place they don't know. Enchanted by the story, Tisaan disappears for a few days or even months, as the grief that tethers them to the world fades temporarily.

To help the Drifting Child move on permanently, Tisaan's remains must be recovered from the unmarked grave where they were buried and transported by wagon to the town of Calinvale, giving them the last ride they longed for before the tragedy.

The Vengeful

Vengeful ghosts arise when a creature dies in the grip of such intense, overwhelming rage that their soul becomes corrupted, creating a spirit who knows nothing except the burning need for retribution. Intense, agonizing hatred anchors them to the world, and they unleash that rage on anyone who crosses them.

These seething phantoms are more violent than other ghosts, and their propensity for murder has the potential to create more vengeful spirits.

Vengeful Ghost Traits

Vengeful ghosts have a challenge rating of 5 (1,800 XP) and the following additional trait:

Engender Vengeance. If a humanoid dies from the ghost's attacks or to a creature affected by the ghost's Hateful Outburst, a new vengeful ghost rises from the corpse the next evening.

Enmity. When a creature deals damage to the ghost, the ghost has advantage on attack rolls against that creature until the end of the ghost's next turn.

Vengeful ghosts also have the following reaction:

Hateful Outburst. When a creature within 20 feet of the ghost that the ghost can see starts their turn, the ghost can force the creature to make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the creature must use their action before moving to make a melee attack against another creature of the ghost's choosing. If no target is within reach, the creature can act normally.

Appearance and Behavior

A vengeful ghost looks as their corpse did after they died, with every sign of injury or trauma that led to the spirit's death gruesomely highlighted, gushing with wispy, ethereal blood. The longer a vengeful ghost exists, the more hideously distorted their features become. Their mouth might be missing or replaced with a gaping hole, their eyes might sink into the skull, or they might even grow a mantle of thorns out of their twisted body.

The vengeful are consumed by their overwhelming desire for revenge. Their pain remains so sharp that they can't abstain from inflicting it on the world, burning with the same hatred and misery that led to their demise. These ghosts rarely have clear memories of who they were or what brought them low, but they never forget someone they wish to hurt, even if they don't understand why.

Hauntings

By lashing out at anyone who encounters them, vengeful ghosts perpetuate the cycle of hatred that created them, dragging other unfortunate souls into their grudge. As a result, a vengeful spirit seldom haunts a place alone; typically, a swarm of enraged spirits stalks a particular location, usually a place tied to the oldest and most dangerous among them. These wretched places reek of rotting corpses and fester with hatred. Faint palls of shadow stretch out from them, threatening to infect nearby sites.

With luck, these dreary venues become shunned and avoided by surrounding societies. But more often than not, the living ignore or forget the danger these ghosts represent, and risk expanding the hauntings while attempting to reclaim their ill-fated land.

Glowing Steward

The Glowing Steward was Dario Lohar, a butler who served the ungrateful and cruel Norwend family. Years into his service, Dario's sister died, leaving him as the only living relative of his nephew, Omar. The Norwends reluctantly allowed Dario to take the boy in, but they never accepted him. The nobles punished Omar for the slightest perceived missteps, locking the child out of the house until the steward retrieved him.

One cold winter evening, the Norwend children decided to play a devious prank on Omar. They tricked him into hiding in the matron's closet and told the woman the boy was rifling through her belongings. Furious, she threw Omar outside and locked the doors. On this fateful eve, Dario was stuck in a neighboring village on an errand, waiting out an approaching blizzard. When Dario returned early next morning, he found Omar outside, dead from the cold.

Overcome with rage, Dario locked the doors and windows and set the curtains and carpets ablaze while the family slept, burning himself along with them. Now his ghost manifests as a smoldering corpse, ablaze with the fury that possessed him before his death. He haunts the ashen halls of the mansion, and his violent rage has created other vengeful ghosts.

Exorcism. Few interactions can assuage the rage of a vengeful spirit, and often surviving the encounter is the best outcome one can hope for. The steward, however, can be briefly pulled out of his rage by reminding him of his sister or nephew, granting him a moment of clarity. Dario kept drawings and belongings of his family in the ruins of his old room.

In a moment of lucidity, Dario's spirit can be eased by the characters if they show him that he ended the Norwend family line. Dario realizes the extent of his transgressions over the years and asks that the characters cleanse the house of the curse he started. They must defeat the vengeful ghost in the ruins and then burn what remains to the ground, leaving the spirits with no place to return to. Doing this allows Dario's spirit to finally move on and reunite with his family.



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

As a player and as a GM, I used to hold back my awesomest ideas. I would write down a secret that my character or an NPC had and wait for the perfect moment to reveal it. Amazing encounters came to me, and I would record them in my notebook. There they would stay for years hence as the pages browned, waiting for their time to come at the climax of a campaign. Plot twists! Unique NPCs! Original dungeons! Secret parentages! Enough tidbits to fill several little books, and later, smartphones—all waiting for the right time to be unleashed at the table and wow my fellow players. The problem was that most of the time, the perfect moment never came, and many of those ideas only ever lived in my brain and on the page.

Don't wait to use your best ideas. While saving one or two big reveals for the right time isn't a bad idea, holding on to every idea you have until the perfect moment isn't the way to go. How many things in life are perfect? Not a lot. But how many things in life are awesome? Many! You don't need to achieve perfection; you just need to achieve awesome.

There are a few reasons why held-back ideas never come to be. First, many games break up for one reason or another before the campaign's story ends. That means that cool reveal you had in mind is, at best, shared at a later date while everyone laments what could have been a good moment.

Second, the best laid plans of players and GMs often change because the other players do stuff we don't expect. Embracing those spontaneous, surprising moments is a huge part of the collaboration and fun of the game! We shouldn't stop them because it could ruin another moment down the line (one that may never happen). Saying, "No, let's not do that for … reasons," or, "That happens, but its effects are immediately undone," or, "That was just a clone, not the real big bad!" can stop the fun like a record scratch as your fellow players realize they're not impacting the story at all. They're just playing through the story that you want.

Holding back our best ideas also comes at a cost. It means that we're only giving the rest of the people who showed up to play our second, third, or worse best stories. You might say, "This third trek through an abandoned mine full of goblins will be worth it when the players see how the tunnels mimic the veins of the dead god they'll be traveling through 10 levels and forty sessions from now!" But there's no guarantee that will happen, and your friends showed up expecting a good time tonight, not an okay time for thirty-nine sessions until they get one cool dungeon.

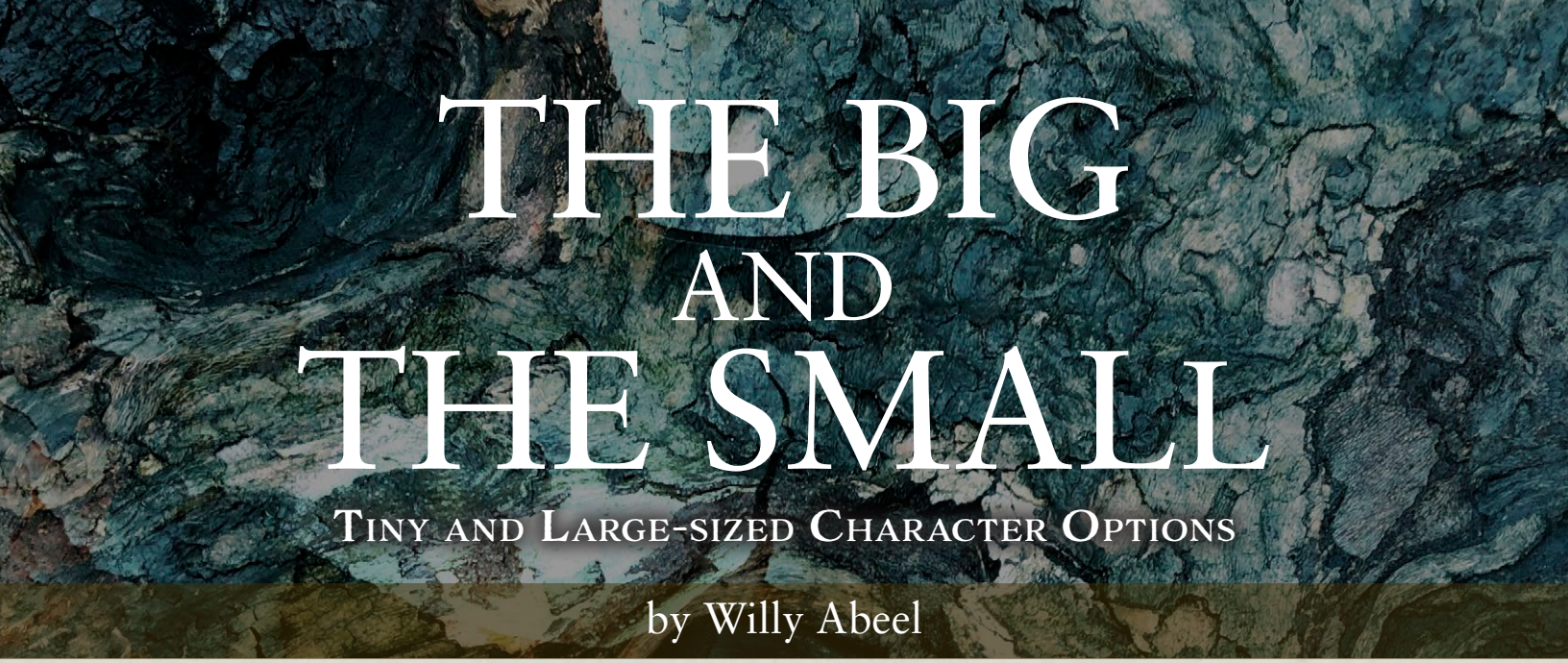
You might worry that you only have a few good ideas, and use that reason to save one for a perfect moment. Remember those overflowing notebooks and smartphones I mentioned earlier? Thoughts and inspiration are free. You choose to play a game of shared imagination, because you like it. Odds are you've already got more great ideas than one human could use in a lifetime. Unleashing those ideas will give the other players their own, which in turn will fuel your imagination with even more stories to bring to the table. Sharing awesome begets awesome.

When I finally stopped holding back my ideas, you know what happened? Every game was epic! My friends showed up on time and wanted to stay late, because the run-of-the-mill was out. My ideas elevated the ones my friends brought to our collaborative stories. Every session left us awed as we learned the truth about Fizzlebottom Cloisternook's tragic warlock pact, battled wraiths atop the back on a flying dragon, or discovered that kindly Mother Sweetspruce was actually a brain-eating doppelganger. Was every moment pulled off perfectly? No. But they happened. They were memorable. And they were awesome.

This issue of *ARCADIA* presents several awesome moments you can use at the table. First, Willy Abeel is back and letting players create their own magic moments with Tiny and Large ancestries in "The Big and the Small." Gwendolyn Marshall's "Botanical Undead" brings memorable new plant-themed undead that stalk an overgrown, blighted forest. Finally, "The Afterparty" by Sally Tamarkin features an investigation, an unexpected curse, and a delicious villain with a flare for evil.

Here's hoping your games are brimming with awesome!

Ex animo,
James Introcaso
Managing Editor



THE BIG AND THE SMALL

Tiny and Large-sized Character Options

by Willy Abeel

> **No matter how big, no matter how small, we stand together above it all.**
>
> –Heliotrope, legendary mousquetaire cricket

Adventurers at Any Other Size

In the core rules, a player has a choice of a Medium or Small-sized character, but the decision is relatively inconsequential, save for a few considerations to mobility and equipment use. When the player's selection is broadened to Tiny and Large, the choice is more impactful.

Tiny adventurers use unique mobility options to keep themselves safe from being crushed. They position themselves precisely, targeting weak points to accommodate for lack of power. Large adventurers are tough enough to take on the dangers they can't avoid and strong enough to manipulate the environment around them to avoid harm.

It's no small task, but it's no big problem, either!

Special Size Rules

The character options within this article represent a character's size by adding additional traits or adjusting existing ones (such as their movement speed). When these character options tell you to increase or decrease a die's size by one step, change the feature's normal die to the next die size.

Increased die sizes use the following progression: d3, d4, d6, d8, d10, d12, 2d6. For example, if a character's Hit Die is usually a d12, and you need to increase it by one step, it becomes 2d6. Treat the 2d6 as one die; a creature with a Hit Die of 2d6 rolls both dice when expending one Hit Die. If your Hit Die changes to 2d6 and, instead of rolling when you gain a level, you want to use a fixed value to determine your hit point maximum, the fixed value for a 2d6 Hit Die is 8 + your Constitution modifier.

Decreased die sizes use the following progression: d12, d10, d8, d6, d4, d3. If a feature's die size decreases, and that feature usually requires rolling more than one die, continue using that same number of dice. For example, if a weapon usually deals 2d6 damage, but its die size decreases by one step, it decreases to 2d4 damage, not 1d12.

Tiny Characters

The following traits apply to all Tiny player characters.

Equipment. You can't use equipment made for creatures larger than you by normal means.

Hit Dice. Your Hit Die decreases by one step.

***Lilliputian** (li-luh-PYOO-shn).* You can move through and stay in the same space as another creature. You gain half cover while in an allied creature's space.

Any weapon damage dice you roll decrease one step. This doesn't include bonus dice from class features, such as Sneak Attack, or special traits.

Repurposed Gear. You can repurpose small objects to replicate larger weapons and items. This includes small gear meant to be used differently, such as a sewing needle for a rapier, or a chisel for an axe. If you replicate a weapon that has the heavy property, it loses that property.

You also gain proficiency with improvised weapons, and can use them as if they had the finesse property.



SMALL FLOURISHES

Tiny-sized adventurers can utilize their size to stay in the fray while out of harm's way. They can easily fit into most nooks and crannies, providing them with many more locations to hide or take cover in. This also allows them access to areas others can't reach fully equipped with their unassuming makeshift gear at the ready.

Consider treating Medium-sized and larger creatures as if they were moving terrain and mounts for Tiny-sized adventurers. Staying in an ally's space provides protection, while entering an enemy's is the hallmark of adventure! Tiny heroes swing from the shoulders of giants to gain the high ground or infiltrate an enemy hideout by hitching a secret ride in a belt pouch.

Large Characters

The following traits apply to all Large player characters.

Armor. You can't wear armor made for creatures smaller than you by normal means.

Hit Dice. Your Hit Die increases by one step.

Brobdingnagian (brob-din-NA-gee-uhn). You can move through and stay in the space of any creature that is two or more size categories smaller than you.

The area of effect for your features, traits, the properties of magic items you wield, and spells you cast that have a range of self is reduced by 5 feet in all dimensions (to a minimum of 5 feet).

Availing Arms. You can wield a two-handed melee weapon in one hand, and when you wield a weapon with the versatile property in one hand, you use the larger die for damage rolls. While wielding either of these weapons, you can't wield another one at the same time.

Big Considerations

Large-sized adventurers deal with large-sized problems. While squeezing into a 5-foot space, a Large creature has disadvantage on attack rolls and Dexterity saving throws, has to spend twice as much movement speed to progress, and attack rolls against them have advantage. Even when out in the open, they can be surrounded by several more enemies than their Medium-sized compatriots if they aren't careful.

It also takes a lot more surface area to cover a larger creature. As a guideline, if something grants three-quarters cover to a Small or Medium-sized creature, it only grants half cover for a Large one. Similarly, something that grants half cover to a Small or Medium-sized creature grants no cover to a Large one.

Sizable Equipment

Tiny and Large adventurers have different needs when it comes to armor, weapons, and assorted gear. Here are several suggestions to handle equipment:

- All starting equipment is made for the character's size.
- Smiths, armorers, and artisan spellcasters can modify the size of gear with a single day's work. Increasing the size requires more materials, while decreasing the size requires more intricate work. Modifications usually have an additional cost equal to half the original price of the equipment.
- Magical items resize to accommodate the wielder.
- Characters have disadvantage on attack rolls made with weapons sized for enemy creatures Large-sized and larger, unless they are of a size category larger than the intended wielder.

Enemy Weapons

The GM can ignore the weapon suggestion, but their Large-sized adventurers will be significantly stronger than their allies if they loot enemy weapons. Consider that an ogre's Large greatclub can deal 2d8 damage in their hands because it was made for that ogre.

Coalders

Deep beneath the mantle of the Material Plane, the hardy coalder people thrive. These Large humanoids have massive arms and walk on their knuckles. Long, oily hair adorns their stone-chiseled heads, hands, and feet. Their dusty skin is marbled, mixed with the primary minerals of their five birth parents.

Coalders came about as the plane's response to the tarrasque. They can withstand the harshest environments and stay close to the monster to keep it sated and asleep, knowing that if they fail, the world could be devoured. Their existence is so entwined with the tarrasque that some coalders worship it as a god.

Coalder society reveres the concept of fuel, the will to keep going, knowing full well that catastrophe could destroy them at any moment. They fuel their communities with acts of service and their loved ones with gifts, believing that their fuel will spark them to lead bright-burning and exciting lives. Dwarves and stone giants that share this ideal sometimes live among coalders, working together to keep their world and home thriving.

A coalder adventurer typically has two good reasons for leaving home. They need something to help quell the tarrasque, or they want to get far, far away from it.

Coalder Traits

As a coalder, you have the following traits.

Ability Score Increase. When determining your character's ability scores, increase one score by 2 and increase a different score by 1, or increase three different scores by 1.

Age. Coalders that set off for adventure tend to burn out faster than those who lead quiet lives. After reaching maturity at 100, a coalder can live to be six thousand years old.

Creature Type. You are a Humanoid.

Size. Your size is Large (see "Special Size Rules").

Speed. Your walking speed is 35 feet, which increases to 45 feet when moving downhill.

Darkvision. You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light and in darkness as if it were

dim light. You discern colors in that darkness only as shades of gray.

Brace. When you take damage after making a Dexterity saving throw, you can use your reaction to reduce the damage you take an amount equal to your Constitution score. You can't use this trait again until you finish a short or long rest.

Coalder Composure. You can't gain levels of exhaustion from extreme heat or cold.

Languages. You can speak two languages of your choice. Colate is a verbal and written language practiced by many coalders, known for its bountiful use of hard consonants and rumored to be understood by the tarrasque.

BUILDING COALDER CHARACTERS

You can use these sample aspects to help create a coalder.

Names: Coalder names are formed of "col" and sharp syllables, such as Coldon, Shacol, and Tarcolcon.

Increased Ability Scores: Strength, Constitution, Intelligence

Archetypes: Curious youth (neutral), hardened spiritualist (lawful), reckless juggernaut (chaotic)

Languages: Colate, Common, Dwarvish, Giant

Character Prompts: The following prompts can be elaborated on with your GM:

- Roccolate, a traveling chef that wants to share their lava cakes with the world
- Colegion, a tarrasque guardian who seeks their lost teacher's final sealing technique
- Diacol, a small village courier with a letter for a lost relative

TARRASCALS

Living in proximity to the tarrasque gifted coalders with the companionship of tarrascals. These tiny tarrasques help keep away vermin and tackle other small problems the coalder are too big to solve. The little monstrosities also serve as a barometer for the tarrasque's condition, becoming more agitated as the danger of it waking grows imminent.

Tarrascal

Tiny Monstrosity, Unaligned

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)
Hit Points 9 (2d4 + 4)
Speed 35 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	3 (-4)	9 (-1)	10 (+0)

Senses blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages understands Colate but can't speak
Challenge Rating 1/8 (25 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Reflective Shell. Any time the tarrascal is targeted by a *magic missile* spell, a line spell, or a spell that requires a ranged attack roll, roll a d6. On a 6, the tarrascal is unaffected, and the effect is reflected back at the caster as though it originated from the tarrascal, turning the caster into the target.

Sturdy Rascal (Recharge 6). If the damage from a spell or a magical attack would reduce the tarrascal to 0 hit points, they are reduced to 1 hit point instead.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) piercing damage.

Shriek. The tarrascal takes the Disengage action and attempts to recharge their Sturdy Rascal trait.

TARRASCAL COMPANION

If you're playing with MCDM's companion rules from *Beastheart and Monstrous Companions*, you can use the following tarrascal companion to cause big problems on your adventures.

Tarrascal Companion

Tiny Monstrosity, Unaligned

Armor Class 13 plus PB (natural armor)
Hit Points 7 + 7 times caregiver's level (the tarrascal has a number of d8 Hit Dice equal to the caregiver's level)
Speed 35 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	3 (-4)	9 (-1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +3 plus PB, Con +2 plus PB
Skills Athletics -1 plus PB, Perception -1 plus PB, Survival -1 plus PB
Senses blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 9 plus PB

Sturdy Rascal (1/Long Rest). If the damage from a spell or a magical attack would reduce the tarrascal to 0 hit points, they are reduced to 1 hit point instead.

Actions

Bite (Signature Attack). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 plus PB to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1d6 plus PB piercing damage.

Rolling Rascal (2 Ferocity). The tarrascal rolls into a ball and moves up to half their speed without provoking opportunity attacks. During or at the end of this move, they can make a signature attack against one target.

Tenacious Grip (5 Ferocity). The tarrascal makes a signature attack. If they hit, the tarrascal attaches to the target. While attached, attacks against the target have advantage, and the tarrascal can only attack the target.

The attached tarrascal moves with the target whenever the target moves, requiring none of the tarrascal's movement. The tarrascal can detach themself by spending 5 feet of movement on their turn. A creature, including the target, can use an action to detach the tarrascal.

Tarrasque (8 Ferocity). The tarrascal grows with a mighty roar. Until the start of their next turn, their size is Huge, and their signature attack has a reach of 15 feet and deals an additional 1d6 piercing damage. The tarrascal then makes signature attacks against PB creatures of their choice. If the tarrascal lacks the room to become Huge, they attain the maximum size possible in the space available and still gain the other benefits of this action.

Reaction

Rasquey Maneuver. When either the tarrascal or the caregiver (while within 5 feet of the tarrascal) is targeted by a magic missile spell, a line spell, or a spell that requires a ranged attack roll, the tarrascal can attempt to reflect the spell back at the caster. Roll a d4. On a 3 or 4, the target is unaffected, and the effect is reflected back at the caster as though it originated from the tarrascal, turning the caster into the target. Otherwise, the tarrascal takes the damage instead.

When the tarrascal successfully reflects damage, they can't do so again until they complete a long rest.

MYSTIC CONNECTION

When a beastheart reaches 9th level with a tarrascal companion, they gain access to the following benefit:

Tarrascal. As a bonus action, your skin grows a layer of tough plates that lasts for 1 minute. While covered in plates, you have advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects, and your attacks deal double damage to objects and structures. You can't use this benefit again until you finish a long rest.

Mousquetaires

Mousquetaires are slivers of powerful beings inside a Tiny creature or object. They come to the Material Plane at the behest of a higher authority, such as a god or archfey, to execute a single piece of a greater plan. Their size is critical to the task's success, minimizing the amount of influence and attention the authority has in the mortal realm. This peculiar union of Tiny mortal and powerful being results in the host performing feats that it could never accomplish on its own.

Though the name mousquetaire implies the prevalence of rodents as the targets of greater powers, these beings also inhabit insects, plants, and objects. When it comes into being, a mousquetaire bears an illuminated scar, bib, or cape. Mousquetaires can immediately identify other mousquetaires and recognize the entity that created them.

Mousquetaires come into being with a specific, completable task set upon them. When they have completed this mission, their spirit returns to their authority and their host returns to normal. A mousquetaire is free to abandon their task, but they may soon find that the authority's power begins to fade and they start to lose control of their host. Their time is typically short no matter what choices they make.

But surely, the mousquetaire will always leave a large impact on the world behind them.

Mousquetaire Traits

As a mousquetaire, you have the following traits.

Inhabited. You have two creature types: one provided by your base creature below, and your choice of Celestial, Fey, or Fiend. An effect that affects either of your creature types affects you.

Ability Score Increase. When determining your character's ability scores, increase one score by 2 and increase a different score by 1, or increase three different scores by 1.

Age. No matter their shape or form before becoming a mousquetaire, the base creature doesn't age.

Size. Your size is Tiny (see "Special Size Rules").

Speed. Your walking speed is 20 feet, and you have a climbing speed equal to your walking speed.

Base Creature. Choose one of the following base creatures to inhabit. This body takes on a more humanoid appearance when you assume control:

Insect. You are a Beast. You have proficiency in the Athletics skill.

Object. You are a Construct. You do not need to eat, drink, or breathe. While you remain motionless, you are indistinguishable from an ordinary object.

Plant. You are a Plant. You do not need to eat. Each day at dawn, you grow a number of berries equal to your proficiency bonus. You can feed one of these berries to a creature (or it can consume the berry on its own) as a bonus action to restore 1 hit point. The berries lose their potency after 24 hours.

Rodent. You are a Beast. You have proficiency in the Perception skill.

Undead. You are an Undead. You do not need to eat, drink, or breathe. You have resistance to necrotic damage.

Bounding Body. You don't take damage as a result of falling.

Steadfast. When you take damage, you can use your reaction to immediately take on an otherworldly glow. For 1 minute, you gain the following benefits:

- Once on each of your turns, you deal an additional 1d4 force damage to a target when you deal damage to it with an attack or spell.
- When you make a saving throw, you can use your reaction to roll a d4 and add the number rolled to the saving throw.

You can't use this trait again until you finish a long rest.

Languages. You can speak one language of your choice and a second language based on your second creature type (Celestial for Celestial, Sylvan for Fey, and Abyssal or Infernal for Fiend).

Building Mousquetaire Characters

You can use these sample aspects to help create a mousquetaire.

Names: Mousquetaire names have a poetic flourish to them granted by their higher authority, such as Falconi O'sta, Insen deAry, and Vellichor.

Increased Ability Scores: Strength, Dexterity, Charisma

Archetypes: Aberrant loudmouth (chaotic), unphased sage (neutral), valiant knight (lawful)

Languages: Celestial, Common, Infernal, Sylvan

Character Prompts: The following prompts can be elaborated on with your GM:

- Rats deBatz, mouse knight of nature, tasked with destroying a mysterious threat known as the seeds of chaos
- Dartologian, will-o'-wisp sage of knowledge, enlisted to coerce the titans to sing the Jotun Hymn and prevent the giant onslaught
- Reno S'marpee, the doll warrior of stars who must ignite the seven lights to restore peace to the land

OGRES

Somebody once told the world that ogres knew only hunger and marauding. They have no lands to call their home and fight to maintain any comfort or routine they've claimed for themselves. Ogres are even forsaken by the god of the giants, and languish below hill giants at the bottom of their social structure.

There's more to the ogre's story when the layers are peeled back.

Ogres stand nearly ten feet tall and their skin tones trend towards pale yellows, greens, browns, and purples. They possess an incredibly intricate musculature, allowing them to express a variety of subtle feelings and expressions that words can't capture. Their bodies burn energy at a breakneck pace, and many ogres need twelve hours of sleep to stay healthy (though adventuring ogres learn to adapt to the sleeping schedules of their fellow party members).

Ogre families typically stay small to make the best use of resources around them. However, some ogres settle within big gnome societies, offering the gnomes protection and helping with their infrastructure efforts. Ogres often take up performative wrestling, firework tossing, and the culinary arts when their needs are met.

Ogres have a unique emotion for setting off on adventure best described as a "happy frown." Little can stop an ogre from going after big dreams.

OGRE TRAITS

As an ogre, you have the following traits.

Ability Score Increase. When determining your character's ability scores, increase one score by 2 and increase a different score by 1, or increase three different scores by 1.

Age. Ogres reach full maturity at 6 years old and can live to just beyond 100 years.

Creature Type. You are a Humanoid.

Size. Your size is Large (see "Special Size Rules").

Speed. Your walking speed is 40 feet.



Darkvision. You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light and in darkness as if it were dim light. You discern colors in that darkness only as shades of gray.

Giant Toss. As a bonus action, you can throw a willing creature within 5 feet of you or a creature grappled by you a number of feet equal to 10 times the number of size categories smaller the target is than you (minimum 0). The creature lands on their feet.

Ogre Load. Your speed is unaffected by dragging or carrying a grappled creature one or more size categories smaller than you.

Languages. You can speak two languages of your choice.

BUILDING OGRE CHARACTERS

You can use these sample aspects to help create an ogre.

Names: Ogre names are simple and guttural words derived from Giant, such as Bror, Fruddin, and Zog.

Increased Ability Scores: Strength, Constitution, Charisma

Archetypes: Honest gambler (lawful), quiet giant (neutral), thrill-seeking instigator (chaotic)

Languages: Common, Giant, Gnomish, Goblin

Character Prompts: The following prompts can be elaborated on with your GM:

- Bog Bog, an oracle of the god of the giants, who needs to warn the cloud giants of their vision of a kingdom hurtling towards the ground
- Shump, a reclusive wax sculptor who wants to save their forest home from an encroaching eldritch blight
- Zoeed, a professional wrestler looking to someday face the strongest fighter in front of a live audience

PIXIES

Rarely standing taller than a lark, diminutive pixies of the Feywild embody the impressions outsiders have of fey creatures: childlike, mischievous, and brimming with magic. These fairies flit through forests and over fields, spreading their pixie dust across plants to help them bloom. But given the pixies' exceptional ability to magically conceal themselves, their splendor can be easy to miss.

When pixies want to be seen, they appear as miniature elves with butterfly wings growing from their backs. A pixie's hair, skin, and wings take on fantastic, radiant colors and patterns depending on the environment where they were born; an arctic pixie might feature icy blue colors and furry wings, whereas an orange desert pixie could be covered in a dizzying display of red dots. Each new pixie looks radically different from the last, even when fey are directly related.

Unlike their more reclusive sprite cousins, pixies are known as socialites within the Feywild. Fraternizing with other fey allows them to generate natural energy. When stagnant or dull periods of life drag on for too long, pixies find it hard to resist a small prank on an unsuspecting target to kickstart some chaos.

A pixie might adventure at the request of a superior archfey, for the excitement of exploring a new world, or to tip the scales of an orderly society. While adventuring, most pixies prefer to use magic to tackle dangerous encounters instead of fighting outside their weight class. However, the might of any powerful fairy knight ready to lay down their life for a larger cause shouldn't be discounted.

PIXIE TRAITS

As a pixie, you have the following traits.

Ability Score Increase. When determining your character's ability scores, increase one score by 2 and increase a different score by 1, or increase three different scores by 1.

Age. Pixies reach maturity around 20 years old and don't have a life expectancy. Many pixies meet their end around 300 to predators or disease.

Creature Type. You are a Fey.

Size. Your size is Tiny (see "Special Size Rules").

Speed. Your walking speed is 10 feet, and you have a flying speed of 30 feet.

Fairy Spry. If you are sharing the space with another creature, you can attempt to hide as that creature obscures you.

Pixie Dust. As an action or bonus action on your turn, you can emit a cloud of dust that covers a creature you touch. Until the start of your next turn, the target can roll a d4 and add the number rolled to one ability check, attack roll, or damage roll of its choice. The dust then disappears.

You can use this trait a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

Languages. You can speak one language of your choice.

BUILDING PIXIE CHARACTERS

You can use these sample aspects to help create a pixie.

Names: Pixies use playful, nature-centric nicknames, such as "Babybell," "Dandy," and "Hollykiss" to hide their fey names from being used to hurt them.

Increased Ability Scores: Dexterity, Wisdom, Charisma

Archetypes: Heart of the glade (lawful), mischievous prankster (chaotic), sleepy dilettante (neutral)

Languages: Common, Druidic, Elvish, Sylvan



Character Prompts: The following prompts can be elaborated on with your GM:

- "Honey Honey," an unseelie court miscreant who was given mysterious seeds by an archfey and wants to plant them across the land to see what happens
- Penet, a long-abandoned familiar out to erase their fey name from their old companion's spellbook and make a new nickname for themself
- "Wintersprigg," a seelie court dancer tasked with teaching their dance to the Summer Lord

VARIANT OPTIONS

Every lineage is lined with people of all shapes and sizes. Elves have stood as tall as young dwarves, dragonborn have met eyes with driders, and humans have risen to every occasion of disaster at multiple heights.

GNOMES

One of the most proliferative, yet rarely encountered, gnomes are the garden variety. Tiny garden gnomes hide in plain sight amid flower fields and toadstools, seeing to the health and vibrancy of the rolling plains they call home. Making contact with folks other than bugs and little animals might jeopardize the safety of their large families, but a garden gnome would be hard-pressed to turn down the call to adventure when a threat shows its face.

GARDEN GNOME TRAITS

As a gnome, you have the following traits.

Ability Score Increase. When determining your character's ability scores, increase one score by 2 and increase a different score by 1, or increase three different scores by 1.

Creature Type. You are a Humanoid.

Size. Your size is Tiny (see "Special Size Rules").

Speed. Your walking speed is 20 feet.

Darkvision. You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light and in darkness as if it were dim light. You discern colors in that darkness only as shades of gray.

Airpedal. You fall at a rate of 20 feet per round. Before landing, you can use your reaction to take no damage as a result of falling.

Gnome Cunning. You have advantage on all Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma saving throws against magic.

Nature's Blessing. You know the *druidcraft* cantrip.

Plant Bloom. As an action or a bonus action on your turn, you can instantly conjure a flower at your feet. The flower's bloom launches you up to 20 feet in a direction of your choice.

Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Languages. You can speak two languages of your choice. (Sample Languages: Common, Dwarvish, Gnomish, Sylvan)

Halflings

Every five hundred years, a halfling experiences a phenomenon shared by few others before them: a growth spurt.

Perhaps a tincture of giant heritage can be traced through their lineage, or a god found an opportunity to leave any sort of impact on the impenetrably serendipitous people. Whatever the reason, the halfling becomes a one-and-a-halfling, with stature and weal invaluable for both small, secluded settlements and the bigger world beyond.

One-and-a-Halfling Traits

Your halfling character has the following traits.

Ability Score Increase. When determining your character's ability scores, increase one score by 2 and increase a different score by 1, or increase three different scores by 1.

Creature Type. You are a Humanoid.

Size. Your size is Large (see "Special Size Rules").

Speed. Your walking speed is 30 feet.

Lucky. When you roll a 1 on an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw, you can reroll the die and must use the new roll.

Brave. You have advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Fluke. Whenever you are hit with an attack and a creature other than the attacker is within 5 feet of you, you can use your reaction to make either a Wisdom or Charisma saving throw (your choice) to have the attack target the other creature instead. The DC for the saving throw is equal to the result of the attack roll.

Once you successfully use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Languages. You can speak two languages of your choice. (Sample Languages: Common, Goblin, Halfling, Undercommon)

Tieflings

Archfiends aren't the sole progenitors of tiefling heritage. Fiends of all ranks and power can leave their mark on a family with the right contract, even including a lowly imp or a bullish balor, which result in implings and beeflings, respectively.

These fiendish influences have a more dramatic impact on tieflings. The appearance is often monstrous, closer to that of the fiend than the parents. Tiny, winged implings might end up needing doll clothing, whereas Large beeflings do their best not to melt their beds.

Impling Traits

Your tiefling character has the following traits.

Ability Score Increase. When determining your character's ability scores, increase one score by 2 and increase a different score by 1, or increase three different scores by 1.

Creature Type. You are a Humanoid.

Size. Your size is Tiny (see "Special Size Rules").

Speed. Your walking speed is 20 feet, and you have a flying speed of 30 feet.

Darkvision. You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light and in darkness as if it were dim light. You discern colors in that darkness only as shades of gray.

Hellish Resistance. You have resistance to fire damage.

Infernal Legacy. You know the *thaumaturgy* cantrip. Starting at 3rd level, you can cast the *invisibility* spell on yourself with this trait. Once you cast that spell with this trait, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest. You can also cast it using any spell slots you have of 2nd level or higher.

Spite. Whenever you touch a creature or hit with a melee attack, you can cause the target to make a Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, the target takes an additional 1d4 poison damage whenever it takes damage from a successful attack for 1 minute. The DC for this trait equals 10 + your Proficiency bonus.

Once you successfully use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Languages. You can speak two languages of your choice. (Sample Languages: Abyssal, Common, Infernal, Undercommon)

Beefling Traits

Your tiefling character has the following traits.

Ability Score Increase. When determining your character's ability scores, increase one score by 2 and increase a different score by 1, or increase three different scores by 1.

Creature Type. You are a Humanoid.

Size. Your size is Large (see "Special Size Rules").

Speed. Your walking speed is 35 feet.

Darkvision. You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light and in darkness as if it were dim light. You discern colors in that darkness only as shades of gray.

Hellish Resistance. You have resistance to fire damage.

Infernal Legacy. You know the *thaumaturgy* cantrip. Starting at 3rd level, you can cast the *misty step* spell with this trait. Once you cast that spell with this trait, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest. You can also cast it using any spell slots you have of 2nd level or higher.

Overheat. As an action or bonus action on your turn, you can make your body incredibly hot to the touch for 1 minute. Whenever a creature touches you or makes a successful melee attack against you while within 5 feet of you, the creature takes fire damage equal to 1d4 + your Constitution modifier.

Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Languages. You can speak two languages of your choice. (Sample Languages: Abyssal, Common, Infernal, Undercommon).

BOTANICAL UNDEAD

Denizens of the Corrupted Forest

by Gwendolyn Marshall

What happens when the stain of the undead spreads to plant life? From the poisoned earth rise five foul floral foes!

The Corrupted Forest

The Corrupted Forest is a long-forgotten battlefield where druids once waged war against an army of necromancers. Thousands fell to foul magics, only to be buried in mass graves and forgotten. Centuries later, the battlefield is now a sickly forest, where roots and vines intertwine with undead flesh and bone, as necromantic energy despoils the very soil and corrupts each leaf and twig.

This article contains a location and a series of encounters for 8th-level characters that you can drop into your campaign. The characters could journey through the forest to reach their next destination, or a local community might entreat them to clear the corruption.

Environmental Effects

The decay of undeath that lingers in the forest's plants creates unique environmental effects throughout the Corrupted Forest.

Difficult Terrain

The huge, twisted roots of the dense forest, along with the thick drapery of hanging vines, make overland travel difficult. A creature that doesn't reside in the Corrupted Forest moves through the forest at half their usual travel pace, including flying creatures if they are beneath the forest's canopy. When such a creature makes a weapon attack and rolls a 1 on the attack roll, it becomes snagged on thorny vines and is restrained until the end of its next turn.

Moreover, the very trees seem to impede creatures that are hostile to the forest's Undead denizens. Creatures that flee from the Undead might find that the ground becomes difficult terrain for them but not their Undead pursuers, and those who take to the trees might fall when branches suddenly snap and drop them to the forest floor.

Illumination

The forest is filled with sickly trees, many of them dead, with thick vines strangling their trunks and dangling from their branches. Even at midday, the forest beneath the thick canopy is only dimly lit at night, even a full moon can't penetrate the foliage, leaving the area in total darkness after sunset.

Miasma of Decay

The air in the Corrupted Forest carries the scent of rot and death, making the simple act of catching your breath more challenging. Whenever a creature uses a Hit Die to recover hit points during a short rest in the forest, it rolls the die twice and uses the lower result. After a creature finishes a long rest in the forest, it must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or gain a level of exhaustion.

Corrupted Forest Locations

The Corrupted Forest is about ten miles across in all directions and requires at least a day of travel to cross due to the difficult terrain. Two particular locations drive the corruption that spreads throughout the forest.

The stat blocks for creatures mentioned below can be found at the end of this article.

The Blighted Hollow

At the center of the Corrupted Forest is a small, bowl-shaped hollow 100 feet across, ringed by large dead trees. Only the withered remains of vegetation stick up from oily black soil in the hollow. The stench of decay is strong here, and the whole area is desecrated ground; in the wake of the long-ago battle that was the forest's downfall, this site became an enormous mass grave.

Until the ground here is consecrated (see "Clearing the Corruption"), a **shambling corpse mound** emerges from the ground when Small or larger creatures that aren't Undead venture into the area for the first time each day. Due to the lingering desecration, this shambling corpse mound has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns Undead. At the GM's discretion, the shambling corpse mound is accompanied by a number of **thorn skeletons** equal to the number of characters minus one.



The Strangled Spring

About two miles north of the Blighted Hollow, a valiant spring bubbles up from the sick earth. Some say the spring was once the center of a druid's grove and is all that remains of their nurturing presence. The water the Strangled Spring produces is clear and untainted, though it quickly takes on a viscous consistency and rotten smell once it touches the ground to form a struggling stream. This rivulet gradually disperses into the muddy black soil, and the forest itself absorbs what little vitality the spring brings. Drinking the water at the source before it touches the ground reduces the drinker's level of exhaustion by 1, though a creature can only gain this benefit once every 24 hours. A creature that drinks the water downstream after it has touched the ground must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 hour.

Approaching the spring causes **fungal zombies** and **vine ghasts** to rise out of the thick mud around the spring and attack any creatures they can see that aren't Undead. For parties of four or fewer characters, one vine ghast arises. For parties of five or more, two do. Add enough fungal zombies to make the total number of foes in this encounter equal to the number of characters.

If the corruption is cleared from the forest (see "Clearing the Corruption" below), the spring surges with new vitality and clean water begins to flow in a stream southward to the once-Blighted Hollow, filling it and forming a placid pool.



CLEARING THE CORRUPTION

If the characters wish to rid the forest of its corruption, they must visit both locations above and destroy the undead they encounter there. Then they must perform an act of consecration at both locations, via the *remove curse* spell. More powerful spells that can purify an area, like *hallow* or *wish*, work as well. At the GM's discretion, holy water and good intentions (along with combat against the undead) might be enough.

Once the second act of consecration has occurred at either location, one of the forest's seemingly dead trees creaks to unlife. This **treant zombie** attacks the characters. If the characters have an easy time with this combat, a second treant zombie emerges from the wood and joins the first.

Because the treant zombie in the forest is the result of a mass death from necrotic magic, the echoes of those who died linger within it. When the treant zombie animates and at the beginning of each its turn, all creatures that aren't undead within 60 feet of the treant zombie must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or be deafened until the treant zombie is destroyed. At the GM's discretion, other undead lurking in the underbrush can use this distraction to ambush the characters.

Once all undead are destroyed and the grounds consecrated, the forest and its unhappy spirits can finally rest. The air clears, the light from the sky penetrates the gloom, and the ground becomes navigable as the environmental effects disperse. Whether new, living plants someday regrow here is up to the GM.



New Creatures

The following five creatures that populate the Corrupted Forest are each a different mixture of flesh plant matter animated by necromancy.

Creature Types

The creatures in this article have "Plant/Undead" listed as their creature type. They are subject to effects that target or include Plants as well as those that target or apply to Undead. For example, since they're Plants, they take maximum damage from the blight spell, but they're also affected by the cleric's Turn Undead feature.

Fungal Zombie

A fungal zombie is a corpse rife with fungal infestation and redolent with the smell of rot. Clumps of mold and small mushrooms cover what remains of the corpse's decaying skin. A fungal zombie instinctively knows to move near as many foes as possible, use its bonus action to spew decay, and then make a Slam attack, favoring foes who have been poisoned by the vomit as targets.

Fungal Zombie

Medium Plant/Undead, Typically Chaotic Evil

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)
Hit Points 51 (6d8 + 24)
Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	6 (-2)	18 (+4)	3 (-4)	6 (-2)	2 (-4)

Saving Throws Wis +0
Damage Immunities necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8
Languages understands the languages it knew in life but can't speak
Challenge 2 (450 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Fungal Spores. If damage reduces the zombie to 0 hit points, it bursts, emitting a cloud of toxic spores. Each creature within 10 feet of it must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. A humanoid creature killed by this damage rises as a fungal zombie after 1 minute.

Actions

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit*: 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Bonus Actions

Vomit Decay (Recharge 5-6). The zombie spews a foul liquid from its rotting mouth. Each creature within 5 feet of it must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or take 7 (2d6) necrotic damage and be poisoned until the end of its next turn.

Reactions

Fungal Regeneration. When the zombie is hit by a melee attack that deals piercing or slashing damage, it can sprout a fungal colony at the site of the wound, regaining 5 hit points.

SHAMBLING CORPSE MOUND

This horrific abomination is a pile of dead bodies that have rotted together into a mass of decaying flesh, overgrown with roots and vines that intertwine among the broken limbs, holding the corpses together. The creak of straining wood and the sickening crack of snapping, rotten bone punctuates the creature's movements.

Shambling Corpse Mound

Large Plant/Undead, Typically Chaotic Evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 152 (16d10 + 64)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	8 (-1)	19 (+4)	3 (-4)	10 (+0)	3 (-4)

Damage Resistances cold, fire, lightning
Damage Immunities necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, poisoned
Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 10
Languages —
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Disgorge Skeletons (1/Day). When the shambling corpse mound drops below half its hit point maximum (76 hit points), it disgorges 1d4 **thorn skeletons** into unoccupied spaces within 5 feet of it. The thorn skeletons take their turns immediately after the shambling corpse mound.

Necrotic Absorption. Whenever the shambling corpse mound is subjected to necrotic damage, it takes no damage and regains a number of hit points equal to the necrotic damage dealt.

Putrescent Aura. Any creature that starts its turn within 10 feet of the shambling corpse mound must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be incapacitated until the start of its next turn. On a successful save, the creature is immune to any shambling corpse mound's Putrescent Aura for 24 hours. Constructs, undead, and creatures that are immune to poison damage or the poisoned condition automatically succeed on this saving throw.

Turn Resistance. The shambling corpse mound has advantage on saving throws against effects that turn Undead.

Actions

Multiattack. The shambling corpse mound makes two slam attacks against the same target. If both attacks hit a Medium or smaller target, the target is grappled (escape DC 15), and the shambling corpse mound can use its Engulf on the target as part of the same action.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit*: 18 (3d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

Engulf. The shambling corpse mound engulfs a Medium or smaller creature grappled by it. The engulfed target is blinded, restrained, and unable to breathe, and it must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw at the start of each of the corpse mound's turns or take 18 (3d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage. If the corpse mound moves, the engulfed target moves with it. If the target ends the grapple, it is no longer engulfed. The corpse mound can have only one creature engulfed at a time.

Bonus Actions

Unearth Corpse. If the shambling corpse mound hasn't moved yet this round and stands on nonmagical, unworked earth, it can sink its roots into the soil and draw up a rotting corpse or dead organic matter from the ground, incorporating it into its body. When it does so, its movement drops to 0 until the start of its next turn, and it regains 11 (2d6 + 4) hit points.

Reactions

Tripping Roots. When a Medium or smaller creature moves within 5 feet of the shambling corpse mound, the corpse mound can use one of its roots to attempt to trip the creature. The creature must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or fall prone.

THORN SKELETON

As the bodies of the warriors who battled in the Corrupted Forest rotted, flesh falling from bone, thorny vines twined around and through their skeletons, creating a dangerous, sinister amalgamation. The tips of the thorny vines sway around the skeleton's form and occasionally sprout small, blood red flowers.

Thorn Skeleton

Medium Plant/Undead, Typically Chaotic Evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 52 (7d8 + 21)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)	4 (-3)	8 (-1)	3 (-4)

Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities blinded, deafened, exhaustion, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages understands the languages it knew in life but can't speak
Challenge 2 (450 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Thorny. At the start of each of its turns, the skeleton deals 3 (1d6) piercing damage to any creature grappling it or that it is grappling.

Actions

Multiattack. The skeleton makes one Ensnaring Slam attack and uses Thorn Burst once.

Ensnaring Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing and the target is grappled (escape DC 13). Until this grapple ends, the skeleton can automatically hit the target with its Ensnaring Slam. The skeleton can have up to two creatures grappled in this way.

Thorn Burst. Thorns erupt from the skeleton. Each creature of the skeleton's choice within 10 feet of it must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Bonus Actions

Poisoned Bloom (1/Day). A blood-red flower sprouts on the thorn skeleton and opens with an explosion of spores. Each creature within 10 feet of the thorn skeleton must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. While poisoned this way, a creature can't regain hit points. A creature poisoned this way can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the condition on itself on a success.

TREANT ZOMBIE

A treant zombie is a massive, frightening perversion of a majestic treant. These plants once fought alongside the druids to protect their forest, but now the zombie treant yearns only to propagate the foul wood's corruption.

Treant Zombie

Huge Plant/Undead, Typically Chaotic Evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 200 (16d12 + 96)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
25 (+7)	6 (-2)	23 (+6)	8 (-1)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, necrotic, piercing
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages understands Common and Sylvan but can't speak
Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +4

False Appearance. While the treat zombie remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a dead tree.

Siege Monster. The treant zombie deals double damage to objects and structures.



Rotten to the Core. When the treant zombie drops below 100 hit points, it opens its trunk, allowing two **fungal zombies** to shamble out into unoccupied spaces within 5 feet of the zombie treant. The fungal zombies take their turns immediately after the treant zombie.

Turn Immunity. The treant zombie is immune to effects that turn Undead.

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the treant zombie to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the treant zombie drops to 1 hit point instead.

Actions

Multiattack. The treant zombie makes two Slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 23 (3d10 + 7) bludgeoning damage.

Rock. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +11 to hit, range 60/180 ft., one target. *Hit:* 33 (4d12 + 7) bludgeoning damage.

Animate Dead Trees (1/Day). The treant zombie magically animates one or two dead trees it can see within 60 feet of it. These trees have the same statistics as a treant zombie, except they have Intelligence and Charisma scores of 1, they can't speak, and they only have the Slam action option. An animated tree acts as an ally of the treant zombie. The dead tree remains animated for 1 day or until it is destroyed; until the treant zombie is reduced to 0 hit points or is more than 120 feet from the dead tree; or until the treant zombie uses a bonus action to turn it back into an inanimate tree. The tree then topples to the ground.

Bonus Actions

Poisoned Fruit. The zombie treant's branches drop rotting fruit on every creature within 10 feet of it. Each target must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of the treant zombie's next turn.

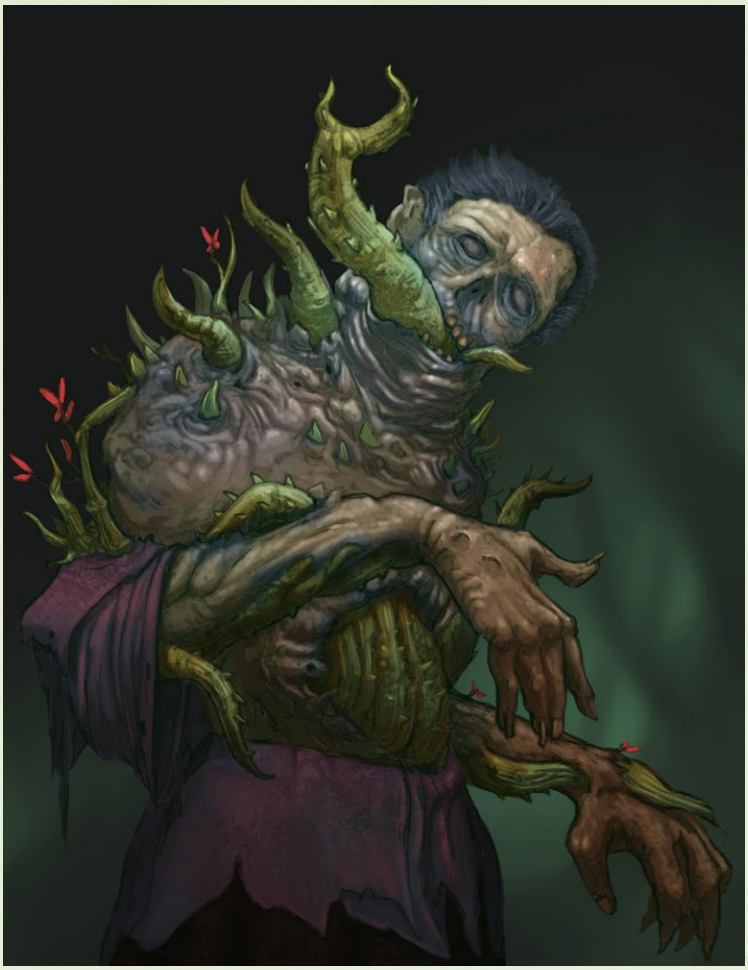
Reactions

Shed Branch. When a creature within 10 feet of the treant zombie hits it with a melee attack, it can drop a dead branch onto the attacker. The target must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or take 11 (2d10) bludgeoning damage.

Vine Ghast

When a herd of ghouls fed on fungal zombies in the Corrupted Forest, the plants in the zombies' flesh infested the ghouls as well. Each vine ghast is a gray-skinned corpse with vines sprouting from its flesh and choking its limbs and torso. Sometimes the vines plunge into the corpse's eyes, ears, nose, and mouth, though this doesn't prevent the vine ghast from seeing—or attacking living creatures to devour their flesh.

In combat, the vine ghast attempts to grapple a target with its Tangling Vine attack, then follows up with Claw attacks to paralyze the grappled foe.



Vine Ghast

Medium Plant/Undead, Typically Chaotic Evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 84 (13d8 + 26)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	6 (-2)	12 (+1)	5 (-3)

Damage Resistances cold, fire, necrotic
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned
Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 11
Languages understands Common but cannot speak
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Poisoned Sap. A creature that touches the vine ghast or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 7 (2d6) poison damage.

Turn Resistance. The vine ghast has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns Undead.

Actions

Multiattack. The vine ghast makes one Tangling Vine attack and one Claw attack.

Tangling Vine. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit*: 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it is grappled (escape DC 14). Until this grapple ends, the vine ghast has advantage on attack rolls against the grappled creature. The ghast has two tangling vines, each of which can grapple one target. The vine has AC 15 and can be severed by dealing 5 or more slashing damage to it on one attack. Severing the vine doesn't hurt the ghast, but it does end the grapple.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit*: 14 (3d6 + 4) slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an Undead, it must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

THE AFTERPARTY

A mystery about leaving home ... and not leaving home.

by Sally Tamarkin

> People have a tendency to go away ... and I miss them. And sometimes ... I wish I could just make them stop going away.
>
> –Dawn Summers (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, "Older and Far Away")

A farewell gala goes awry in *The Afterparty*, a mystery adventure about a twisted wish and a party no one can leave. The characters race against the clock—and a pernicious fey force—to prevent everyone from being trapped forever. This adventure is balanced for four 3rd-level characters, but the final encounter can be adjusted for bigger or higher-level parties (see "Confrontation with Mire").

Before you get started, talk to your players about the safety tools you'll use (I suggest checking out RPG safety tools and RPG consent checklist) and make sure everyone has the same expectations for the tone and themes of the adventure. *The Afterparty* includes a pivotal moment in which the GM (temporarily) restricts the players' agency, more than is usual in typical tabletop roleplaying games. While the text provides suggestions for helping the players still feel like they're driving the story, some players may not be comfortable with any removal of agency, which is totally fine—an alternative path is also provided (see "Alternate Path" under "A Time for Toasts"). Clearly explain this aspect of the adventure and ask your players how they feel about it and whether they'd prefer the alternate path.

BACKGROUND

Aurelius Wray turns twenty at midnight tonight. Like their mother and their grandfather before them, Aurelius will set out at dawn on the first day of their twentieth year to begin what everyone expects to be a decorated military career, leaving behind Wray Manor and their beloved Wray Basin, the wetland just beyond their back door. Duke Cornelius Wray, Aurelius' grandfather and only father figure, is throwing a farewell gala and invited his most influential friends and associates.

But one detail makes this farewell gala a little different than those of generations past: Aurelius dreads the idea of military service. They know they'll miss their home and loved ones desperately, and Wray Basin has become the young noble's favorite place to ride, collect plants, and think. While exploring the basin recently on their horse, Nibbles, Aurelius met a beautiful stranger named Fen, who introduced himself as a local birdwatcher and naturalist. In their conversation, the young noble confessed a wish to stay home—to never have to leave Wray Basin.

Unknownst to the naïve Aurelius, the enchanting birdwatcher is an illusory visage of the green hag Mire, who lives deep in the basin. Eager to sow chaos and misery, Mire delightedly interpreted the wish literally and cursed the farewell gala: no one at Wray Manor can leave.

Synopsis

The characters arrive at the party either as guests or as security-for-hire. In chapter 1, they gather information about Aurelius and Wray Basin, then discover that a magical compulsion has trapped everyone inside the manor. In chapter 2, the duke offers the characters a hefty reward for figuring out why no one can leave. The characters investigate the manor, question Aurelius, and break the curse. In chapter 3, the characters and Aurelius head into the swamp to confront the hag.

Next-Day Obligations

No matter which hook you choose, have each player come up with at least one thing their character must do the next day—something they can't miss. Maybe they promised they'd deliver someone's medicine, provide help or protection, or meet with an informant. This commitment twists the knife when the characters realize they can't leave the manor. If you are playing this adventure as part of an ongoing campaign, the next-day obligations can be tied to the big bad—the clock is ticking and they have to get back out into the fight right away!

Key NPCs

The following NPCs play pivotal roles in solving the mystery.

Aurelius Wray

Aurelius (they/them, age 20, human) is soft-spoken and contemplative. They spend their free time journaling or wandering Wray Basin, riding Nibbles, collecting plants, and watching for swamp birds. In most social situations, Aurelius is inattentive, preoccupied with a plant they recently collected or notes they need to make about their findings. But tonight they're more distracted than usual; their deployment is hours away, and they're terrified. Aurelius has only shared their fear with two people: their Aunt Frances (sister of the duke) and Fen.

Duke Cornelius Wray

When his beloved daughter and son-in-law died, Cornelius (he/him, age 75, human) brought their child Aurelius to Wray Manor and raised them. The duke, while not unkind, is a stern disciplinarian who believes in tradition, upholding the family name, and teaching hard, character-building lessons. He is now retired from the military but considers his time in the service the most important and influential chapter of his life, one that primed him for a successful future. Success is all he wants for his directionless, daydreamy grandchild—well, that and for the Wray line to continue its tradition of decorated military service.



Elliott

Elliott (she/her, age 55, human) is a career butler who takes running Wray Manor seriously. She is snobby and looks down on anyone who isn't a noble. The butler doesn't dislike Aurelius, but feels burdened by their presence—they track in swamp mud, generate an astounding amount of laundry, and require the grooms to ready Nibbles for excursions at all hours. Elliott will be relieved when Aurelius leaves and she can reallocate the staff and resources to other things.

Fen/Mire

Like many a green hag, there's nothing Mire (he/him, hag) enjoys more than causing chaos, especially if that chaos leads to suffering. And nothing will cause such delicious suffering as using Aurelius to unwittingly bring chaos and fear into their own household. Once misery is rampant, Mire will magically harness it to corrupt the basin, warping the flora and fauna and twisting the land into a hellscape.

As Fen, he is a handsome young man around age twenty with floppy blond hair he tosses out of his face often, a smattering of freckles across his nose, and a lopsided smile. He is always barefoot, his pant legs rolled up to his knees so they don't get wet in the swamp, and he wears a fine cloak the color of chocolate.

When the illusion fades, Mire is tall and gaunt. His green-tinged skin is always a little damp, his coarse brown cloak becomes worn and tattered, and his laughter is cruel. Since taking up residence in Wray Basin, Mire amuses himself by making Aurelius suffer. His latest gambit is one of his favorites—tricking a mark into expressing a desire, then granting the wish in the most literal and demented of ways. The hag awaits the exciting finale of this dirty ploy, but he also enjoys how the curse undoes Aurelius.

Frances Wray

Cornelius's younger sister, Frances (she/her, age 72, human), is a free-spirited sailor who sails her pleasure craft, *Sappho's Embrace*, all over the world. Although she's always traveling, Frances stays in constant touch with Aurelius, stopping in ports just to pick up her mail and post letters to them. She thinks that her brother's fixation on the Wray military legacy is absurd, but has long given up on changing his mind and won't intervene on Aurelius' behalf. Still, she offers Aurelius love and support, and has come to town for their farewell gala.

Story Hooks

Pick one of the following story hooks to guide the characters into the adventure.

Manor Security. The duke has hired the characters as guards for the evening for 50 gp each. The characters report to Elliott, the head of the household.

Invited Guests. Characters with one of the following backgrounds are invited to the gala as guests: charlatan, city watch, entertainer, or noble. Characters with other backgrounds are guests of invited characters. Alternatively, decide with the players why the characters have been invited (likely because they are local celebrity heroes).

Chapter 1: The Gala

When the characters approach Wray Manor, read or paraphrase the following boxed text:

> Welcome to the grand home of the Wray family: Wray Manor. It stands before a swampy wetland known as Wray Basin. Around the estate, the rich smell of wet earth fills the air. At the front door, a footman with a waterlily pinned to his chest welcomes guests with a wave and nod of his head into the manor's grand hall. When guests enter, they are handed beautiful ivory goblets of fragrant red wine. Jaunty musical stylings of a string band flow from the next room, as well as the clink of goblets, laughter and conversation, and the footfalls of household staff serving food and drink, emptying ashtrays, and aiding nobles.
>
> The duke spared no expense for this event. He's uncorked his rarest vintages, served food and drink on dinnerware emblazoned with the Wray waterlily sigil, and hired the critically acclaimed string septet, Lyre, Lyre. His two hounds, Violet and Corky, are freshly groomed and wear kerchiefs with embroidered waterlilies around their necks as they greet guests for pets.
>
> Toasts will begin at midnight, and in the tradition of Wray farewell galas, will continue until all those who wish to toast have done so. Once the toasts are done, likely around dawn, Aurelius will leave the manor with the guests following behind, who will see Aurelius off as the carriage takes them away, signaling the end of the party.



Elliott greets the characters in the grand hall (area M1). After orientation, the characters are free to explore the manor and mingle with key NPCs.

Unless noted otherwise, the guests use the **noble** stat block and the staff use the **commoner** stat block. Violet and Corky use the **mastiff** stat block.

Elliot's Requests

The characters get the following orientation from Elliott, who tells them everything they should (and shouldn't) do at the party and provides the following instructions:

Talk to Aurelius

Elliott requests that the characters speak to Aurelius so the young host is seen hosting as expected, saying:

> "The child is more sullen than ever, gods know why, and I won't have them dulling what could be a fine affair on account of their moods. I presume they're not looking forward to the toasts—that child hates being the center of attention. Sometimes I wonder if they're a Wray at all."

Engage Ms. Wray

The duke's sister, Ms. Frances Wray, is in town for the party and has been known to rile up otherwise polite guests with her rowdy, high-stakes poker games. Elliott asks the characters to engage her, which shouldn't be difficult—she is quite chatty—and steer her toward activities more befitting a party guest, sister of the duke, and person of her age, such as talking, dancing, or a harmless parlor game like Wray Wroulette (see "Appendix: Wray Wroulette").

Observe the Rules

Elliott asks the characters to obey the following rules during the party (and to enforce these rules if they were hired as guards).

No Second Floor or Cellar. Guests are free to move around the first floor, but the second floor and cellar are off-limits. If the characters were hired as security, Elliott adds, "This also goes for … the help."

No Rear Gardens. Elliott explains that the rear gardens abut Wray Basin, and although the gardens were young Aurelius' favorite place, she discourages visiting them after dark, as "sojourns near the basin tend to be sodden, mushy affairs that result in great muddy messes."

Characters who succeed on a DC 10 Insight (Wisdom) check know there's more to Elliott's instruction about the swamp than she lets on. With convincing roleplay or a successful DC 18 Persuasion (Charisma) check, which is made with advantage if the character making the check succeeded on the Wisdom (Insight) check, Elliott reveals that for the last ten or so days, she's been hearing noises from the swamp as she does her evening chores—giggling, laughter, some squealing. She told the duke about it, but he put off anything "nonessential" until after the gala.

Elliott doesn't know that the laughter and squealing come from Mire, who has been scrying through a special "swamp rock" he gifted to Aurelius when they met in Wray Basin. Aurelius keeps the pebble on the desk in their room, and through it, Mire has watched them, soaking in their despair as they pace, weep, and stare longingly out the window, dreading their departure.

Locations

The key to solving the mystery is exploring the gala and talking to guests and staff. The following locations are keyed to the map of Wray Manor.

M1. Grand Hall

The front door opens up into a cavernous foyer. An oil painting of the duke seated between his hounds, Corky and Violet, hangs on one wall; on another is an oil painting of the manor. The ceiling is ornately decorated with gold waterlilies, and hanging from the ceiling is a three-tiered chandelier holding dozens of candles that bathe the room in warm yellow light. A grand spiral staircase, painted bright white and also decorated with gold waterlilies, leads to the second floor.

Two **guards** stand at the staircase to prevent guests from going upstairs. The guards wear chain shirts under white tunics embroidered with waterlilies.

M2. Kitchen

The kitchen is sweltering thanks to not only the ovens and stovetops all working at capacity, but also the dozen kitchen staffers buzzing about, chopping, stirring, kneading, and prepping. They wear white aprons embroidered with gold waterlilies. Household staff rush in and out, refilling empty trays with full goblets and assorted hors d'oeuvres. The smells of roasting game, sautéing garlic, and baking bread fill the room.

The staff gossip and talk shop as they work. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check overhears the head of the kitchen, Li, complain to one of the prep cooks that she hasn't slept well in almost two weeks thanks to the noises coming from Wray Basin. "Some kind of swamp hyena or a bog bird squawking in heat, who knows."

M3. Staff Quarters

Located directly behind the kitchens, the staff quarters look out over the rear gardens. The room is empty, as the staff are busy working the party. This dormitory-style room has eight bunk beds, a trunk at the foot of each bed, and a small dresser at each head. The rushes on the floor are fresh, and dried flowers strung on the walls give the room a pleasant floral scent. A queen-sized bed belonging to Elliott, this one larger and plusher than the others, sits on the far wall in the center of the room. Characters who search the quarters find staff's personal effects—books, letters, keepsakes, etc.

Cook's Journal. If the characters take time to rifle through the belongings, they find the cook's journal. A recent entry details everything they did to prepare for the gala and complains about being yelled at by Elliott, who, the cook writes, has been impatient lately. The entry concludes, "The butler found me later and apologized for shouting. Said she's been hearing noises from the swamp keeping her up all hours and her nerves are raw. Guess everyone's bothered by the noise coming from the basin."

M4. Parlor

The parlor is hazy with smoke and full of guests mingling, drinking, and having a grand time. In the corner, two guests play speed chess while a small crowd watches, and a magician performs for a handful of onlookers. In another corner, a few guests have moved wingback chairs into a circle and are smoking cigars and chatting. At another end of the room, Frances Wray, a woman in a floor-length purple gown, plays a dice game with an excited crowd. She wears her bright blue hair in two braids and is clearly on a roll.

If the characters don't immediately engage Frances, she waves them over and asks them to join her game of Wray Wroulette, a game of chance that uses dice instead of a spinning wheel (see "Appendix: Wray Roulette"). As she chats, she never stops playing, not even when she waves a server over to trade her empty ivory wine goblet for a full one. She asks the characters where they've traveled, what they think of the gala so far, and if they enjoy games of chance.

What Frances Knows. Frances easily shares her plentiful information. As a world traveler, she considers herself a collector of people and ideas. She speaks freely of her brother:

- "Cornelius has never known how to have a good time."
- "He is obsessed with the 'Wray name' and our family legacy and traditions."

She also freely speaks of Aurelius:

- "A lovely, tender child who isn't meant to wear the uniform."
- "A bit silly and more interested in plants than people—but then again, growing up with my brother, who can blame them?"
- "I do wish they'd learn to face life's challenges with a bit of grace, but I suppose they were always too sensitive for that. Not that my brother would ever notice. I've

told Cornelius that Aury isn't cut out for the military, that they'd be happy to spend their time in the basin and then off at university to study botany or whathaveyou, but of course my brother won't hear of it. 'The Wray name blah blah blah….'"

Characters who succeed on a DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check learn the following from Frances:

- She knows that Aurelius has always been sensitive, but she's never seen them this upset, saying, "I half expected them to run away or do something otherwise dramatic before tonight. Who knows? Perhaps they still will. It's early yet."
- "My brother believes the military will provide Aurelius with friends, colleagues, and a purpose, but he doesn't understand that Aurelius only needs Nibbles and the basin … although they do seem quite interested in a young man—a fellow birdwatcher, you see—he met in the basin the other day."

M5. Library

Bookshelves packed with tomes, mostly political and military history, line three walls of this impressive library. These well-worn historical volumes are littered with notes in the margins and dog-eared pages. A few clusters of guests chat quietly, discussing literature and poetry and admiring the duke's collection.

One dusty shelf holds a selection of books on botany, swamp flora and fauna, and the natural world. A character who studies this section and succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check notices that the books on this shelf are pristine. No page corners are turned down, and no notes are written in the margins. If a character opens one of these books, a sealed card falls out, which you can find below and as a handout in the appendix.

Dear Grandfather,

This is my favorite book on swamp mosses. I met the author, T.K. Burch, when she was in town, and I asked her to sign this edition so that I could gift it to you. I think once you read about the beautiful rhythms of the swamp's ecosystem, you'll understand what I love so much about Wray Basin and why I hope to stay here forever.

With love and admiration,

Aurelius

Every book in the nature section holds a similar note. Aurelius gave the duke the books in the hopes they'd be a link of understanding between them, but none of these tomes have never been cracked open.

M6. Ballroom

The ballroom is the grandest room in the manor. Huge picture windows overlook the rear gardens. Lit torches line the wall and bathe the room in a warm light. Lyre, Lyre, a seven-piece lyre band plays in the corner and dozens of people dance alone on the floor, their shoes tapping the marble floors. Staff zigzag the room, keeping glasses full for the upcoming toasts. Aurelius is in the corner, nursing their wine and swaying in place to the music. Occasionally, a guest approaches and Aurelius receives them with pleasantries, but for the most part, the young noble is alone, a distant and sad look in their eyes.

If the characters approach Aurelius (**scout**), the young noble is warm, though shy and distracted. If asked about their military service, Aurelius repeats the duke's talking points, saying, "The Wrays do not run away from duty, we march toward it," or "Growing up means making sacrifices," or "There's no honor so great as donning the uniform." A character who succeeds on a DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check notices Aurelius merely repeats their grandfather's messaging and doesn't believe it.

Instead, Aurelius shifts the conversation to speak of Wray Basin. They talk about a new species of moss they found and how they hope they get to make notes before they leave, saying, "I'm calling it wintermoss. It's as white and fluffy as snow. I hope to get back to the cellar to finish up my notes." Then they speak excitedly of the rare swamp birds and the bog stork nest they just encountered. Bog storks, Aurelius explains, have beautiful reddish-orange and brown plumage in the fall, white in winter, and green in spring and summer. They produce a small leather-bound notebook and show their sketches.

If the characters listen to Aurelius talk about Wray Basin, the young noble reveals their true feelings about their departure to a character who succeeds on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. If a character demonstrated interest in or knowledge of plants, botany, wetlands, or any related topic (either through roleplay or succeeding on a DC 12 Intelligence (Nature), Wisdom (Survival), or Charisma (Deception) check), the DC for the Charisma (Persuasion) check for that character to convince Aurelius to open up is 12.

If Aurelius opens up, read the following:

The young noble reveals that though they're scared of enlisting, they dread leaving Wray Manor more. They get teary-eyed talking about how much they'll miss their horse Nibbles and spotting swamp birds in the basin. They're even going to miss the duke who, despite being a real hardass, is the only parent they've ever had.

They admit that they have few friends aside from Nibbles and their aunt, but they recently met a fellow birdwatcher named Fen in the basin. They were looking forward to exploring the swamp with him, but they doubt they'll ever really talk to him again. Aurelius caps the thought by saying, "Fen is the first person I really opened up to, especially about leaving Wray Manor … besides Aunt Frances, I guess."

Approaching Cornelius

If the characters approach Cornelius to lobby on Aurelius's behalf, Cornelius laughs off their concerns, insisting he knows his grandchild and they *want* to carry on the Wray name and military service. If the characters approach Cornelius about this after the curse has been revealed, he insists the conversation be tabled until the curse is resolved. If the characters escalate and threaten Cornelius or the guests, he relents and promises to hear Aurelius' concerns in exchange for the adventurers breaking the curse.

Time for Toasts

Once the characters speak Aurelius and Frances, they have the information they need for the next part of the story and you can make this transition when appropriate. If the characters want to explore, play Wray Wroulette, dance, or otherwise enjoy the party, they can, but once the clock strikes midnight, household staff usher guests into the ballroom for toasts.

The band has finished its set. Three quick raps announce the duke standing on the bandstand beside a white grand piano carved with waterlilies. Aurelius sits beside their uncle in a tall, straight-backed, white wooden chair.

The duke begins, "Tradition. Duty. Service. These are the principles that the Wrays have lived by for generations. And today we toast my grandchild Aurelius, who carries on the Wray legacy. Let the toasts begin."

Throughout the toasts, Aurelius appears embarrassed, touched, and deeply sad, their eyes wet with tears. The toasts last until dawn breaks, and when the sun rises, the duke takes the floor once more and announces, "And now, in grand Wray tradition, we accompany my grandchild to their carriage, which waits out front to whisk them away to their future."

One after another, guests approach the front door. Each time, they reach for the doorknob, only to seemingly change their mind at the last minute. The duke and Aurelius exchanged confused looks—just outside, Aurelius' carriage waits to take them away, but no one will open the door. Elliott pushes through the crowd and raises her hand to the doorknob, only to pause. Her arm drops.

The guests whisper to each other, urgency rising as more and more people try the door. Like Elliott, everyone drops their hand before they can open it. The characters can overhear NPCs worrying:

- "I have a breakfast engagement, I really must be going. But I … I can't."
- "I'm meant to be downtown by luncheon, but something impels me to remain."
- "My father expects me at his shop this morning, but I find I have the urge to stay inside. I don't loathe my job, I swear."
- "All I've thought about all night is getting out of these shoes and into my nightclothes. *Ugh*, why can't I open the door?!"

If the characters attempt to open any door or window—or make any other potential egress from the manor—they feel an overwhelming urge to stay inside and can't go through with it. A character who attempts escape via destruction of the manor has the same result. Let the players know they can narrate attempts to escape, but none of their efforts will succeed. Allow the players to describe what it looks like as the characters give up mid-effort.

The urge doesn't completely erase the will to leave. The guests at the party—and the characters—feel they should want to leave, and on some level do want to leave, but

at the same time, something is pulling them to stay. That pull is so strong that they simply can't overcome it.

Because this plot twist removes some agency from the characters, give them opportunities to make the scene their own. Ask them to reveal what they planned to do the day after the party and how they feel when they realize they don't have the will to leave. Allowing them control of their emotional states and their failed attempts to leave the manor (which are fun to narrate for many players) leaves them agency in a situation where it has been taken from them.

Alternate Path

If you don't want to remove the characters' agency by trapping them in the manor, you can tweak this part of the adventure. In this scenario, Aurelius' wish was that their friends and family wouldn't be able to leave them. Because the characters were unknown to Aurelius before tonight, Mire's curse doesn't affect them, and they can open any door or window and leave the manor. They can even open any point of egress for other partygoers—however, the guests only stare longingly at the opening and mutter something about how they wish they wanted to leave.

Chapter 2: We Live Here Now

The duke and Elliott ask the characters—as the only adventurers present—to investigate and do whatever it takes to free everyone. The duke doesn't offer a reward, but if the characters ask for one, he promises they'll be rewarded handsomely: 100 gp each. He grants the characters full access to the manor, including the basement and bedrooms on the second floor.

The key to understanding the situation is finding the pebble on Aurelius' desk in area A8 and discovering its true purpose. The characters can find a clue in the cellar (area M10) that leads to the pebble.

M7. Cornelius's Bedroom

This room is lavishly furnished. The shelves and walls are lined with awards and hunting trophies. On the desk are neat piles of papers and books—ledgers, correspondence, and a draft of a memoir. Over the fireplace is a fine rapier of military issue. It's been buffed to a high shine and a leather tassel, recently oiled, hangs from the hilt. Sitting on the mantle is an array of medals for bravery in combat, each free of dust and labeled with a small plaque noting a date and the name of a battle.

M8. Aurelius's Bedroom

> As you enter this bedroom, the smell of damp earth surrounds you. A four-poster bed in the corner is surrounded by potted plants, jars of swamp mosses, and notebook pages filled with field drawings. Papers and vegetation clippings are scattered across a large desk at the back of the room.

A character who explores the room notices that the only item on the desk that isn't papers or plant matter is a pebble on top of a small light blue silk cushion. The *detect magic* spell reveals that this pebble emanates auras of divination and enchantment magic. See "The Pebble" for more information.

M9. Guest Bedroom

The guest room is finely appointed. The desk holds only a travel journal and to-do lists for various ports of call. There's nothing of interest for the characters here.

M10. Cellar

The duke stores food, wine, and firewood on labeled, organized shelves in his cellar. The dirt floor is well swept, and a large bowl of potpourri in the center of the room makes the area smell much less musty than a typical basement.

Lately, Aurelius has been coming to the cellar to journal when they want to get away from the cackling laughter they hear late at night in their bedroom. They use a sealed barrel as a desk and stack two crates to use as a chair, and a character who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) or DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices that in the far corner of the cellar, a barrel and a few crates are askew. If they search the area, they find that Aurelius has shoved their journal underneath the barrel. The journal is full of sketches of people and things they encounter with short descriptions of each, including:

- A bird with long legs and a sharp beak labeled "Swamp stork, sighted feeding"
- The duke and his hounds labeled "Back from the hunt"
- A furious Elliott with her hands on her hips and her brow furrowed labeled "Mud in the scullery once again"
- A handsome man about Aurelius' age with floppy hair and a wide-open smile labeled "New friend!" This entry is dated two weeks ago.
- A sketch of the magic pebble labeled "fragile, leave on desk, what is it???" This entry is dated nine days before the gala.

THE PEBBLE

This small, grey rock was given to Aurelius by Fen, the handsome young birder Aurelius met in Wray Basin. Fen told Aurelius that it's a rare "swamp rock" that, if studied closely with a magnifying glass and other instruments, can provide information about the ecological history of the basin. Unbeknownst to Aurelius, the stone is enchanted with Mire's divination and enchantment magic. The hag uses it to watch Aurelius' mounting misery and weave his enchantment spell over the guests. A character who casts *identify* on the pebble knows it is the source of the curse keeping everyone in Wray Manor from leaving, and that it allows whoever created it to magically spy on everyone in the building. Anything and anyone inside Wray Manor is subject to the curse, which means that objects inside, including the pebble, cannot leave or be removed from the manor.

WHAT AURELIUS KNOWS

If the characters question Aurelius about the pebble, the young noble shares the following information.

Fen gave the pebble to Aurelius nine days ago, and it's been on their desk ever since. They've been studying it daily, but have yet to learn anything from it. A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (History, Investigation, or Nature) check knows nothing about the history of the swamp can be gleaned from this rock.

A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check realizes Aurelius isn't sharing everything about the pebble. Characters who took the time to talk about swamp flora and fauna while meeting Aurelius have advantage on the check. If pressed about withholding information, Aurelius reveals that Fen insisted the pebble is extraordinarily delicate, and that every time Aurelius asked Fen why they haven't been able to glean any information from studying the rock, the birdwatcher shrugged off the question, muttering that the pebble should remain out on a surface in Aurelius' quarters to make it easier to observe.

FOR SCRYING OUT LOUD

The pebble has AC 17, 5 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. A character who holds the pebble and succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check can speak to Mire. The hag teases their villainous plot (see "Fen/Mire") and dares the characters to face him in the basin, which is now his turf.

Once the pebble is destroyed, the curse is lifted and the occupants of the manor once again have the will to leave. Any creature within 15 feet of the pebble when it is destroyed must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or take 11 (2d10) psychic damage. The creature who destroys the pebble also hears a loud, shrill shriek inside their head accompanied by sharp pain and takes an extra 2 (1d4) psychic damage.

Until the pebble is destroyed, the creature holding it hears Mire's faraway laughter cackling from the basin whenever anyone expresses confusion or frustration in the pebble's presence. If the players are stuck figuring this out, have one of the NPCs express anger about the situation in front of the rock to help the characters connect the dots.

CHAPTER 3: TO THE SWAMP!

The characters have likely figured out that Fen is to blame for the enchantment. If the characters aren't motivated to hunt Mire down now that the curse is broken, the duke offers them 300 gp each for Fen's capture. Additionally, Aurelius begs the characters to dispose of Fen—they feel responsible for the curse and can't stand the thought of their beloved swamp being home to evil. Aurelius (**scout**) insists on joining the characters and can lead them into the swamp to where they met Fen. The duke thinks this is a splendid idea, and a great way for Aurelius to experience the thrill of the chase before their military career begins.

As the characters make their way to the basin, the skies darken and the air gets noticeably colder. Once they leave the rear gardens and enter the swamp proper, read the following:

> The basin is a forested wetland under about a foot of water thanks to recent rains. A sticky mud with a rotten smell blankets the swamp floor, making your march unpleasant and difficult. The basin is dense with tall, reedy grasses and trees with skinny, gnarled trunks. A viscous green liquid drips down the trunks and into the mud, making it even stickier. Rocks covered in various mosses dot the terrain. Standing water gathers in some of the deeper pockets of mud, and the normally bright white lilypads on the surface of the water have started to blacken and dry at the edges. A chorus of ribbiting frogs rises around you, but their croaks are shrill and high-pitched.

TRACKING MIRE

Once the characters reach Aurelius and Fen's meeting place, they can follow Mire's tracks through the mud with a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check. On a success, the characters reach Mire's location in four hours. On a failure, the characters take an entire day to reach Mire, and they each gain a level of exhaustion by the time they reach the hag. Aurelius is too scared to lead the way, but if the char-

acters ask for their help, they'll help as best they can and the characters gain advantage on the Wisdom (Survival) check to track Mire.

The deeper the characters go into the swamp, the darker and colder it gets, the tree canopy and vegetation thickening around them. . Aurelius starts muttering under their breath, "This isn't right. This isn't right. This isn't … my swamp … my swamp …." They are shaking, pale, and terrified.

Before the characters find Mire, they hear him. The swamp winds carry his taunts about "falling for his little tricks," and he mocks the characters by imitating the voice of those who spoke in the magic pebble's presence. If Aurelius is with the characters, Mire shouts admonishments at them in the duke's voice about how they will disappoint the Wray family.



Swamp Encounters

To increase the difficulty of this adventure or zhuzh up the characters' time in the swamp, you can add an optional combat encounter or two by rolling on the Mire's Servants table. The characters experience these encounters before facing the hag.

Mire's Servants

d6	Encounter
1	1d3 + 1 **giant spiders**
2	2d6 + 1 **stirges**
3	1d6 + 4 **giant lizards**
4	1d4 + 2 **crocodiles**
5	1d3 + 1 **ghouls**
6	1d3 + 1 **giant toads**

Confrontation with Mire

When the characters reach Mire, a **green hag,** his Illusionary Appearance action gives him Fen's guise, and he sits on a fallen log, bare feet dangling in the murky water. He cuts an apple with a blade, stabbing each segment and delicately biting it off the tip of the knife. Two **ettercaps** loyal to Mire hide in trees above the hag and can be noticed by a character who succeeds on a DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check.

When Fen notices Aurelius, he shrieks, "Another souvenir for you, dear one!" As he says this, Mire reveals his true form: tall and gaunt, with greenish, pallid, damp skin and a ragged brown cloak. Fen's thick, bouncy blond hair turns long, grey, and stringy. After transforming, he cackles and raises his knife.

When combat begins, Mire hurls the poison-coated knife at Aurelius with a +6 bonus to the attack roll. If it hits, the attack deals 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage and Aurelius is poisoned for 1 hour. While poisoned in this way, Aurelius is unconscious.

The ettercaps open with their Web action to tie up melee combatants, then drop from the trees to interpose themselves between Mire and the characters. You can increase the number of ettercaps based on the number of characters or have more drop down from the trees later in the battle if the encounter is too easy.

Mire is delighted to fight the party and gleefully fights to the death. The hag targets characters from behind the ettercaps with the *vicious mockery* spell, then uses his claws to attack any character that closes the distance.

Chapter 4: After the Afterparty

The confrontation with Mire can end in a few different ways. If your outcome is different, feel free to come up with your own ending by selecting details from the outcomes that fit your story.

Mire's Endgame

If Mire is defeated, the swamp returns to its former, uncursed glory. The trees stop leaking viscous slime and the canopy opens up, allowing the sun to shine through. The frogs croak in a decidedly not-malevolent way.

If Mire survives, the swamp darkens and gets colder. As the characters leave, they have the feeling they're being watched or even followed, but they see nothing except the thickening canopy and smaller plants starting to shrivel and die. Mire's cruel laughter rings in the distance. When they return to the grounds of the manor, the swamp is encroaching on the rear gardens: it has grown, and looks like it will continue to do so.

Aurelius's Next Chapter

If Aurelius survived the combat with more than one-third of their hit points, they thank the characters profusely for saving their life and "giving me the kick I needed." They add, "I see now that tomorrow is never promised and one must live for oneself—and one's swamp—not for anyone else. I shall talk to my grandfather posthaste and tell him of my plans to remain in the manor, cataloging the flora and fauna of the basin. Perhaps I shall become a great teacher one day."

If Aurelius ends the combat with less than one-third of their hit points, they weep the whole way back to the manor and need to be helped through the swamp and gardens by the characters. They mutter, "My friend … my only … swamp…." over and over.

The Duke Reacts

When they return, the duke is standing at the front door and demands a report.

If Aurelius survived, the duke pays the party the reward and adds an uncommon magic item for each character (any item within reason and at the GM's discretion), which he purchases through a dealer and has delivered to the characters. When the delivery arrives, it comes with a letter from the duke that reads "Dear brave friends, I do not believe that any gift could properly express my thanks and gratitude, but I hope these items to be a start. Coming this close to losing Aurelius has allowed me to realize that no tradition or duty is as important as the precious life of this dear child. I hope you will visit us at Wray Manor again. I've already begun converting the rear gardens into a greenhouse and laboratory for Aurelius. They'll go on to university soon, and I expect they'll be Professor Wray in no time at all. Yours, Duke Cornelius Wray."

If the characters bring Aurelius' body back to the manor or deliver the news that the young noble died, the duke falls to his knees and weeps. Frances comforts him. Through his tears, he asks the characters what happened. The duke has fought in battle and knows that no soldier's death can be blamed on any one person. So as long as he gets the true story of Aurelius' death or the characters succeed on a DC 15 Charisma (Deception) check, the duke thanks the party for their valor and, if they killed Mire, for ridding the basin of such a foul presence. He motions weakly to Elliott, who approaches with a pouch of gold for each character.

Appendix: Aurelius's Note

Dear Grandfather,

This is my favorite book on swamp mosses. I met the author, T.K. Burch, when she was in town, and I asked her to sign this edition so that I could gift it to you. I think once you read about the beautiful rhythms of the swamp's ecosystem, you'll understand what I love so much about Wray Basin and why I hope to stay here forever.

With love and admiration,
Aurelius

Appendix: Wray Wroulette

Created by Mike Seeley

To play Wray Wroulette, each player places bets squares of the Wray Roulette table below. Players can also bet if the result will be a blue square or a white square, a "big" column (columns 1–3 or 4–6), or a "big" row (rows 1–4, 5–8, or 9–12). As with roulette, the less probable the bet, the more it pays out. Once the players place their bets, the GM rolls two dice, 1d6 and 1d12. The d6 determines the result's column, the d12 determines the row. Wray house rules dictate that the minimum bet is 1 gp, and the maximum is 10 gp.

- Winning a bet on a single square pays 72:1.
- Winning a bet on blue or white pays 2:1.
- Winning a bet on a "big" column pays 2:1.
- Winning a bet on a "big" row pays 3:1.

1d12 \ 1d6	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	1-1	2-1	3-1	4-1	5-1	6-1
2	1-2	2-2	3-2	4-2	5-2	6-2
3	1-3	2-3	3-3	4-3	5-3	6-3
4	1-4	2-4	3-4	4-4	5-4	6-4
5	1-5	2-5	3-5	4-5	5-5	6-5
6	1-6	2-6	3-6	4-6	5-6	6-6
7	1-7	2-7	3-7	4-7	5-7	6-7
8	1-8	2-8	3-8	4-8	5-8	6-8
9	1-9	2-9	3-9	4-9	5-9	6-9
10	1-10	2-10	3-10	4-10	5-10	6-10
11	1-11	2-11	3-11	4-11	5-11	6-11
12	1-12	2-12	3-12	4-12	5-12	6-12


1st Floor
N
0 5 10 15 20 25
1 square = 5 ft.
Back Doors to Gardens
Front Door
1
2
3
4
5
6
A
B
2nd Floor
7
8
9
A
Cellar
10
B

RESOURCES

BOTANICAL UNDEAD

https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202203/BotanicalUndeadMaps.zip

https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202203/TheBlightedHollow-140dpi-Bleak-Grid.jpg

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THE AFTERPARTY

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https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202203/LilyMansion-140dpi-NoGrid.jpg

https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202203/AureliussNote.png

https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202203/WrayRoulette.png



Be on the lookout for the specimen known as Willy-01. Willy was last seen 'funposting online and having a good time' on Twitter under the handle @thewillyboo, although the creature has left their mark on game companies such as MCDM, 2CGaming, Ghostfire Gaming, and EN Publishing. If left unchecked, Willy will gonzoify any and all game systems with material such as frogs and clowns. Take all necessary precautions.



Gwendolyn Marshall (she/her) is a designer and writer of tabletop games. She is a designer with 2CGaming and, with her company, Arcanist Press, the author of *Ancestry & Culture: An Alternative to Race in 5e* and, more recently, *S5E: Superheroic Roleplaying for 5th Edition*. Apart from games, she is a university professor of philosophy, a parent, and, allegedly, a human being.



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Issue 15 ⚜ April 2022

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

When the articles for this issue of *ARCADIA* were just a conversation and before a single word was ever written for it, I had a burning desire to do a horror-themed issue. I imagined it for the October 2022 issue, *ARCADIA 21*, but it turns out that when you only do three articles per magazine, it's easy to unintentionally themify. If *ARCADIA 7* was "We apparently made a nature issue!" this time it's "Oops, mostly spooky stuff!"

The nature of horror in our heroic fantasy roleplaying game is both inherent and questionable. The game has a whole core book just dedicated to monsters! Its lore describes how these creatures cause mayhem and mischief, while their stat blocks tell us what violence these things that go bump in the night use to achieve their goals. (Goals, I might add, that often amount to "eat people.") That right there is horrific stuff!

On the other hand, the game gives player characters the tools to annihilate these creatures in combat (there's a whole core book dedicated to that, too), which makes most encounters with monsters more like a scene from an epic action movie than a slasher or a psychological thriller. *Halloween* would have been a different movie if Jamie Lee Curtis's character knew the *fireball* spell.

Yet, as GMs we must give our players scares from time to time. Many adventures, horror or not, are most satisfying when the player characters face danger despite their fear and overcome forces that would send others screaming back to their mommies. That's what makes a hero! To best achieve that satisfaction, the GM gets the players to fear for their characters' lives (in a safe, fun way, of course).

Most of us don't run horror-themed campaigns, but we all use elements of the genre to achieve that fun bit of terror and tension. We describe the stench of death in a necromancer's lab, the sound of distant chittering in a web-filled cavern, or the shadows looming under the surface of a moonlit lake, because we want the players to know that this place is dangerous and that their characters are grade-A badasses just for answering the call to adventure.

Having fun with horror isn't all on the GM. A huge part of making a game's scares work is player buy-in. A player who sits down and is ready to be scared when the story calls for it will have a much better time, and they'll help everyone else get immersed in the story. But a player who folds their arms and dares the GM to scare them is probably going to be bored and pull other folks in the table out of the moment (much like an audience member at a comedy club who arrives with a "just try and make me laugh, funny person" attitude is in for a miserable time). When our GMs invite us into the darkness, it's our job to go in with teeth chattering, then punch evil in its spooky face.

This issue has delicious horror in several flavors. First, Basheer Ghouse lets players create their own body horror stories with the Way of the Flesh monk subclass in "Embrace the Flesh." Then Alex Clippinger delivers psychological horror through the most devious creatures we've had in *ARCADIA's* pages yet in "The Nightmare Dragon." Finally, Marcello De Velazquez has three NPC informants that force players to face talking rodents, mind-controlling magic items, and a deadly masquerade to gain vital information in "What They Know May Hurt You."

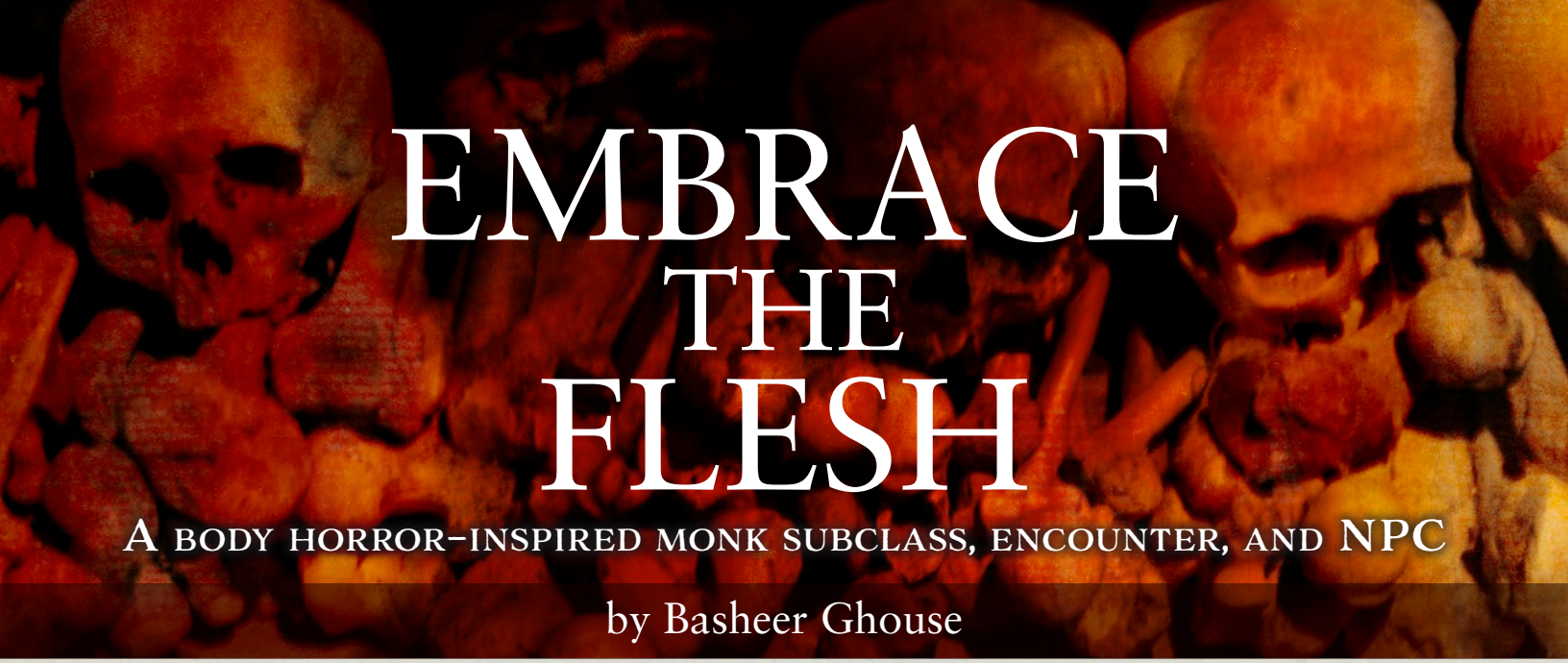
So read on … if you dare!!!

Dracula laugh

coughing … sputtering … panting …

Dracula laugh again!

Ex animo,
James Introcaso
Managing Editor



EMBRACE THE FLESH

A body horror–inspired monk subclass, encounter, and NPC

by Basheer Ghouse

Content Warning: This article contains body horror, gore, child abandonment, famine, and really, really big spiders.

> The ascetics say your body is a trap, poisoning you with its needs. The mystics say it is a prison, to be transcended with meditation. They are wrong. Your body is meat. In all its frailty, and all its glory, and all its horror.
>
> –Mehal Khar, Adherent of Flesh

This article presents a new monk subclass, Way of the Flesh, as well as an encounter, NPC, and retainer themed around this monastic tradition, which takes inspiration from *Carrion*, *Prototype*, *Venom*, and similar body horror stories. This subclass lets you play a protean abomination who lashes out with fleshy pseudopods, pulling your body through dungeons or urban environments and taking on the forms of your victims.

The Way of the Flesh

A dwarf swings through the streets of a desert city, limbs stretching impossibly as she grabs the edges of rooftops before flinging herself forward at bone-breaking velocity. A dragonborn snaps a guard's neck and, as he lowers the corpse, assumes his victim's face, form, and voice. Flesh sloughs from the body of a human, their very being unraveling before they reform as an elf with long, scythe-like limbs that lash out at enemies in every direction, unleashing a maelstrom of gore.

This is the Way of the Flesh. Some adherents start down this path after becoming afflicted with disease, poisoned by alchemical concoctions, or suffering from aberrant parasites. They discover the Way of the Flesh as a method for survival in a hostile body. Other practitioners are philosophers, musing on the relationship between self and body and how deeply the mind can warp its housings. As a disciple becomes more skilled in this tradition, the distinction between their flesh and that of their victims blurs; the adherent's true body becomes an amorphous mass, optimized for mobility and violence.

Shape the Flesh

At 3rd level, you unlock the first secrets of the Way of the Flesh. You sprout lethal pseudopods, capable of ripping apart your foes and pulling you across your environment. The reach of your unarmed strikes increases to 10 feet. This reach increases to 15 feet at 11th level and 20 feet at 17th level. You can use these pseudopods to grapple other creatures, but they don't increase the number of creatures you can grapple and they can't wield weapons, shields, or spellcasting foci. Creatures you grapple can make melee attacks against you no matter how far away you are.

Additionally, you can spend 1 ki point on your turn to make your limbs stronger and more flexible for 10 minutes (no action required). For the duration, you can use the Dexterity (Acrobatics) skill instead of Strength (Athletics) when you attempt to grapple or maintain a grapple. In addition, when you take the Attack action, you can forgo one attack to grab a Medium or larger object within reach of your unarmed strike and pull yourself to an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the object. This movement doesn't provoke opportunity attacks.

Mind Is Matter

At 6th level, you learn the second secret of the Way of the Flesh—that all people are meat, and that the only thing separating your identity from others is that they aren't part of you yet. When you reduce a Humanoid within your reach to 0 hit points, or use an action to handle a Humanoid's corpse, you can absorb a sample of its flesh. You can hold a number of samples equal to your proficiency bonus, though you can only ever collect one sample from any given Humanoid. If you gain a sample while you have the maximum number of samples, you replace an existing sample of your choice.

While you have a sample, you can spend 1 ki point to take either of the following actions:

- ***Impersonate.*** You consume your sample to take on the form of the sampled creature for 1 hour or until you end your transformation as a bonus action. You make yourself—including your clothing, armor, weapons, and other belongings on your person—look like the creature. Your statistics remain the same, except for your size, which changes to match the creature's size. While disguised in this manner, you can use the Wisdom (Insight) skill instead of Charisma (Deception or Performance) to impersonate the creature. When the transformation ends, the sample is destroyed.
- ***Interrogate.*** You rip memories from the absorbed creature. After performing this action, you have 10 minutes to ask one question of the creature's flesh, and it responds as if it were an intact corpse and you had cast *speak with dead* on it, except that the answers are thorough, and the creature can't lie to you or withhold information. After answering the question, the sample is destroyed.

Free the Flesh

At 11th level, you shed more of your body's limitations, your bones snapping and melting away as you become a creature of unrestrained, violent movement. As a bonus action, you gain the following benefits for 10 minutes:



- Whenever you successfully grapple another creature, you can pull your target into an unoccupied space within 5 feet of you or pull yourself to an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the target.[1]
- You can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.
- Moving through difficult terrain costs you no extra movement, and spells and other magical effects can't reduce your speed or make you paralyzed or restrained.
- You can spend 5 feet of movement to automatically escape from nonmagical restraints, such as manacles or a creature that has you grappled.
- You have a swimming speed equal to your walking speed.

You can use this feature a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

[1] You can use this feature to reposition allies or enemies! Cool!

Charnel Apotheosis

At 17th level, you understand that your body is just a collection of mass you can unravel and knit together with a moment's thought. As an action, you can spend 5 ki points to dissolve into a pool of flesh and reform, teleporting to an unoccupied space that you can see within 30 feet of you. After you reform, all creatures of your choice within 30 feet of you must make a Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 5d10 slashing damage and is pushed five feet away from you and knocked prone. On a success, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't pushed or knocked prone. Damage from this feature is considered magical for the purpose of overcoming immunity and resistance to nonmagical attacks.

Retainer of the Flesh

While monks of the Way of the Flesh rarely congregate in the monasteries and formal orders enjoyed by other monastic traditions, they are drawn to great adventurers. More traditional monks of the flesh follow barbarians, fighters, and other monks whose skills they respect or wish to emulate. Philosophical monks become retainers to clerics and druids, more interested in receiving their wisdom and opinion on metaphysical conundrums than the traditional motivations of a retainer. Afflicted monks who follow this path due to a disease, parasite, or alchemical experimentation follow spellcasters. For more information about retainers, see *Strongholds & Followers*.

Acolyte of the Flesh

Armor Class Medium (AC 15)
Primary Abilities Dexterity, Wisdom
Saves Strength, Dexterity
Skills Acrobatics, Insight

Signature Attack ***Unarmed Strike.*** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) slashing damage.

Special Actions

3rd-Level (3/Day): ***Get Over Here.*** The acolyte makes two signature attacks with a reach of 30 feet. If both attacks hit the target, the acolyte pulls the target to an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the acolyte.

5th-Level (3/Day): ***Leashing Escape.*** The acolyte chooses up to two allied creatures it can see within 30 feet of them. The acolyte moves 30 feet without provoking opportunity attacks, then pulls those allies into unoccupied spaces within 5 feet of the acolyte. After being pulled, attack rolls against those allies have disadvantage, and the allies make Dexterity saving throws with advantage until the start of their next turns.

7th-Level (1/Day): ***Unleash Carnage.*** The acolyte makes a signature attack against every creature of their choice within 30 feet of them. Each creature hit by this attack takes an additional 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage and is knocked prone.



THINKER'S BLOCK

Everyone has their own way of working through failure. Some head into the wilderness, seeking inspiration. Others throw themselves into their work, brute-forcing their issues. A few relax, clearing their mind before returning to whatever ails them. And Charity May, self-taught monk of the Way of the Flesh, murders people in a spider-filled temple.

This encounter is appropriate for four to five 5th-level characters.

THE SET UP

Charity May is a 19-year-old female human. Though skilled at the physical, self-centered parts of the Way of the Flesh, she has found herself at an impasse, unable to progress further in the tradition due to her dissatisfaction with the world, as she tries to find the meaning of life. What is the point of it all if all creatures simply end up in an eternal, monotonous afterlife?

Out of ideas, Charity has taken to challenging travelers to a duel in an abandoned roadside shrine to a forgotten god of revelry, killing those who accept the challenge. She figures that either someone will have an answer for her, she'll discover an epiphany through violence, or one of her victims will kill her.

The characters could be investigating the disappearance of several mercenaries traveling through the area, or looking into reports of a wandering duelist who killed all of her opponents. For a less antagonistic option, Charity approaches the characters with complete honesty, explaining that she's trying to work through a philosophical problem and she thinks best while fighting for her life. She requests a battle to the death at the shrine, though she doesn't mention that her chosen arena is filled with flesh-eating spiders.

CHARITY

Charity May is tall, pale, and gangly, with gaunt features and a tired expression. She wears a simple green tunic and heavy pants, both of which have been inexpertly mended many times. When she fights, her ribs split and extend from her back as many-jointed pseudopods, the bones cracking unnervingly throughout the battle. Though she speaks confidently and at length, Charity is abrasive and tends to annoy people with her eloquence rather than convince them of anything.

As a child, Charity was orphaned by a brutal and extended famine, forced to grow up on her own in a town where few had enough food for themselves, never mind anything to spare for a starving child. She taught herself the Way of the Flesh to survive, pushing her body past its limits and warping it into a weapon to hunt wolves and half-starved deer in the woods, or take food from those who had more than her. It was a lonely, friendless life, but one that pushed her to learn quickly.

Once she was old enough to work, Charity became a mercenary, turning her one skill into a socially acceptable way to survive. This worked for a time, until she grew increasingly disillusioned and unhappy with her life. Friendless and miserable, her closest companions are a family of giant spiders she feeds with corpses, and her increasing surety that there's no point to anything she does, or her continued survival, has led to a mental block in her development as a monk.

ROADSIDE SHRINE

Charity faces her foes in an abandoned shrine atop a wooded hill, just outside the nearest town. The roof has long-since collapsed, leaving a dozen half-destroyed pillars and a web-strewn hall. When the characters enter, read the following text aloud:

> Charity steps into the temple and turns to face you. Webs and dust sully the cramped space, sunlight filtering through the shattered roof and illuminating the rubble. "Thank you for humoring me," she says as many-jointed pseudopods rip from the back of her tunic, impaling a pillar and pulling her atop it. "My last opponents were as empty as I. Fury and hatred and nothing beneath. I hope you prove more talkative— or at least a better fight."
> From the darkness comes the scuttling sound of arachnoid legs.

ENVIRONMENT

Charity fights in a shrine to a long-forgotten god of revels and faded murals of frolicking, drunk satyrs adorn the walls. The floor is covered in dust and spiderwebs, and a dozen stone pillars, each 5 feet wide and 10 feet tall, dot the interior. Each pillar has AC 17, 27 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage.

Spiderwebs stretch between the pillars, creating two 20-foot-cubes of web near the center of the shrine. When a creature that isn't Charity or a spider starts their turn in one of the cubes, they must make a DC 11 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is restrained. A restrained creature can use their action to make a DC 11 Strength check, freeing themself on a success. The webs are flammable. A 5-foot cube of webs exposed to fire burns away in 1 round, dealing 2d4 fire damage to any creature that starts its turn in the fire.

TACTICS

The characters face **Charity May** (see the end of this article for her stat block), two **giant spiders**, and four **giant wolf spiders**. The spiders consider Charity a friend and fight to the death to defend her and their home. They stop attacking only if Charity orders them to do so.

Charity uses her Bone Harpoon bonus action to pull herself onto pillars and her reach to attack more vulnerable characters and spellcasters, using them as bludgeons against their heartier companions. She only uses Spine Burst if she can avoid hitting the spiders. If reduced to 15 or fewer hit points, Charity calls off the spiders and retreats, fleeing into the wilderness with her arachnid friends.

TALKING DOWN CHARITY

Charity talks to the characters throughout the fight. At the start of each of Charity's turns, choose or roll for something for her to say on the Charity Dialogue table to direct Charity's train of thought and shape the conversation. Characters who succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check can tell that Charity wants someone to talk to but is only comfortable doing so in the context of a fight.

If at least half the characters engage Charity in conversation during the fight, they can talk her down and resolve the encounter nonlethally. The specific arguments aren't important. So long as at least half the characters make an effort to engage Charity in conversation, Charity works through the worst of her crisis at the end of the third round of combat. She still has a long way to go, but realizes that maybe violence isn't the answer to her problems.

Charisma checks aren't necessary to succeed, though players who would prefer not to roleplay their dialogue can choose to outline the gist of what they're saying or, if they choose, make DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) checks as a bonus action instead. On a success, they engage Charity in conversation.

If the characters help Charity through her crisis, she thanks them, calls off the spiders, and the fight ends. If the characters ask her to travel with them, she does so (possibly as an **Acolyte of the Flesh** retainer). Otherwise she leaves to seek out her own answers.

Charity Dialogue

d6	Dialogue
1	"Why do you fight? What is worth risking death?"
2	"The world is filled with privation and suffering, and you can never stop it all. Who are you to challenge that?"
3	"We'll all die. All of this turns to dust. How can anything be worthwhile in the face of that?"
4	"Each of us is the product of blind luck, arbitrary and pointless and stupid! How do you live with that?"
5	"Are you enjoying this? How are you enjoying this!"
6	"I turned myself into this! I killed people! And for what? A few more meals before a pointless afterlife?"

CONTINUING ADVENTURES

If Charity May survives the encounter, you could make her a reoccurring part of the campaign. If she doesn't adventure with the characters, she can leave to carve her own path and return to find the characters again, perhaps arriving in their hour of need with a healthier outlook on life, new friends, and a genuinely worrying number of pet spiders.

If Charity escaped, or was defeated but allowed to live, she doesn't take the loss personally. A future meeting could feature a Charity who has grown past her issues on her own and views the attempted murder of the characters with some degree of embarrassment, or one who has fallen under the influence of a greater evil and become a true villain.

Charity May

Medium Humanoid (Human), Lawful Evil

Armor Class 17 (Unarmored Defense)
Hit Points 97 (13d8 + 39)
Speed 45 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	9 (-1)

Saves Dex +8, Con +6, Int +4, Wis +5
Skills Acrobatics +8, Perception +5, Stealth +8
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages Common, Elvish
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Evasion. If Charity is subjected to an effect that allows her to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, she instead takes no damage if she succeeds on the saving throw and only half damage if she fails.

Actions

Multiattack. Charity makes three pseudopod attacks, or makes two pseudopod attacks and uses Smash.

Pseudopod. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) slashing damage. If Charity hits a creature twice with this attack in the same turn, they are grappled (escape DC 15). Charity has three pseudopods, each of which can grapple one creature.

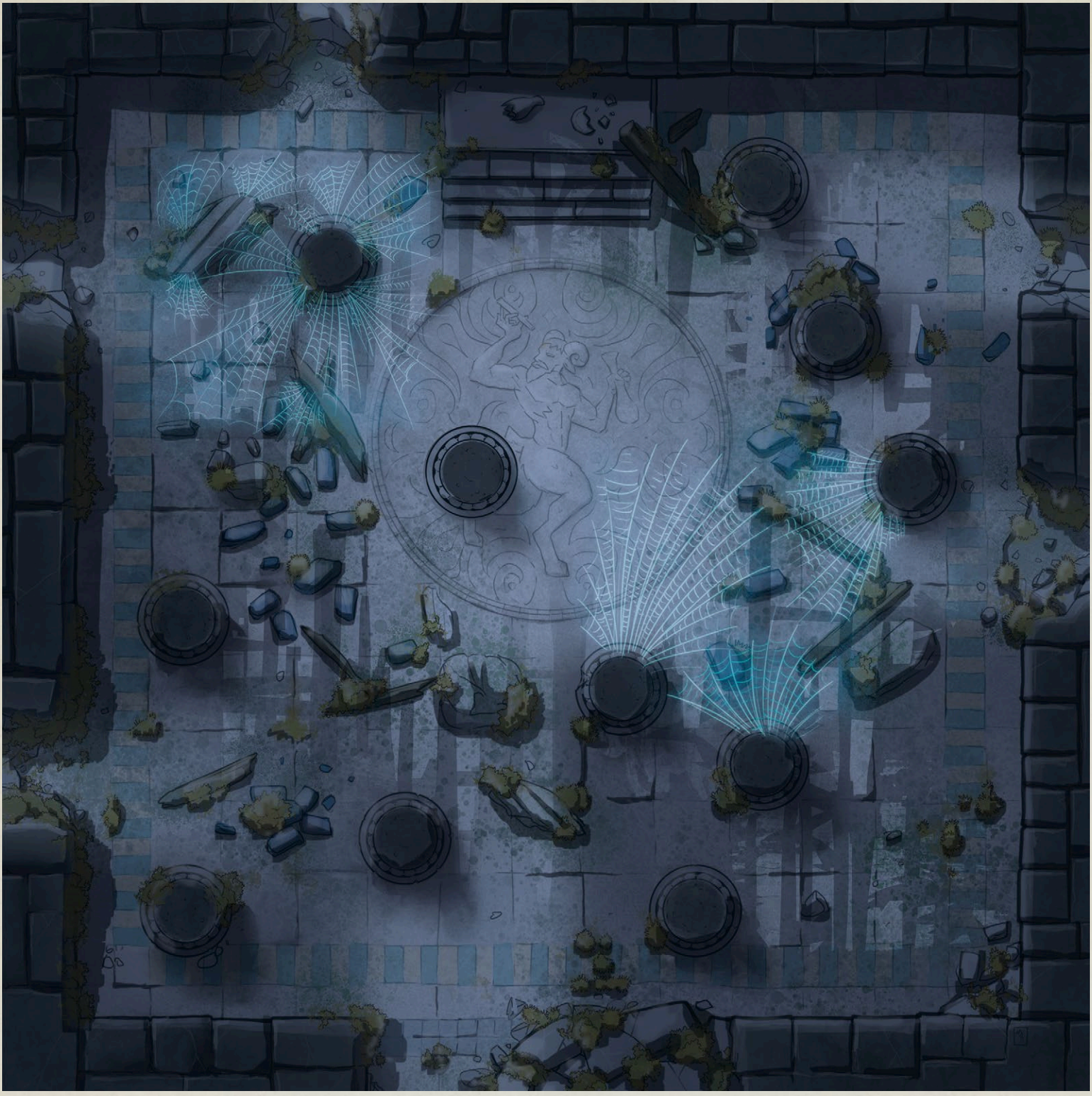
Smash. If Charity has a creature grappled, she flings them at another creature within 60 feet of her. Both creatures must make DC 16 Dexterity saving throws. On a failure, a creature takes 12 (2d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage and is knocked prone. On a success, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't knocked prone.

Spine Burst (Recharge 5–6). Charity emits a 45-foot cone of sharpened bones. Each creature in the area must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, they take 13 (3d8) piercing damage and their speed is reduced to 0 until the end of their next turn. On a success, they take half as much damage and their speed isn't reduced.

Bonus Actions

Bone Harpoon. Charity moves 20 feet in any direction, including vertically, without provoking opportunity attacks.







THE NIGHTMARE DRAGON

Communities dread sleep as they're plagued by a draconic parasite of legend.

by Alex Clippinger

Content Warning: This article is about an evil dragon that tortures their victims with nightmares.

Dragons are the subject of cultural fascination, a focal point for myth, religion, art, and arcana. The awe of their power and mystery comes with an equal portion of fear, and it is this terror that is the nightmare dragon's genesis and feast. Nightmare dragons are liminal beings, all but nonexistent in the physical world—but nevertheless capable of inflicting physical harm.

There's no singular description of a nightmare dragon. Like nightmares themselves, they constantly warp and shift, twisting to encompass the amalgamated fright of its victims. A creature of dreams made manifest, a nightmare dragon's appearance and behavior can resemble imagination and inaccurate myths as much as any flesh-and-blood drake. To behold a nightmare dragon is to witness their very anatomy writhe under your regard, no detail quite the same from one moment to the next.

BIRTHED BY FEAR

Nightmare dragons are psychic beings, born from other creatures' fear of dragons. Instances of common fright won't spawn a nightmare dragon; the circumstances that birth these wyrms are unique in their origin and intensity. Examples of recorded nightmare dragon inceptions can be found on the Nightmare Dragon Origins table.

The confluence of such intense emotion in unusual circumstances takes root in the Astral Plane, creating an entity that eagerly gluts itself on the terrors and anxieties of its original hosts. A nightmare dragon is created full-grown and possesses an ancient dragon's greed and appetite for victims' fear. They quickly outgrows the ability to sustain themself on the fright of their unwitting creators and turn to invading the dreams of their creators' neighbors and kin.

Nightmare Dragon Origins

d6	Dragon Origin
1	A city is harried by night terrors in the wake of a recent dragon attack.
2	A sleeping god dreams of ancient dragons.
3	A once-in-a-generation artist channels their fear of dragons into their breathtaking work.
4	An alien entity can't help the way their phobia of dragons is expressed through their psionic powers.
5	A uniquely powerful child is convinced their terrible dreams of draconic destruction are real events.
6	An old dragon slayer is haunted by their own guilt.

NAMES AND PERSONALITY

Nightmare dragons are a reflection of the fears held by their original hosts and the phobias of their prey. As their sense of self develops, they take on a name that reflects those specific fears. You can use the Nightmare Dragon Names table to get inspiration for a nightmare dragon's name.

Nightmare Dragon Names

d4	Dragon Name Origin
1	A name based on nightmare images, such as Blood Under the Door, or The Empty Room.
2	The name of a real dragon that historically or recently terrorized the local community, like Mirsyth the Wind-Scourge
3	The name a child has bestowed on them, like Night Teeth or Mister Clix
4	A mimicked sound captured from dreams; [A Scream from Below], [The Flesh Rips Wetly]

Nightmare Dragon Plans

d4	Plan
1	The dragon is driven entirely by hunger, and will feed on psychic energy until the universe is empty or they burst like a tick.
2	The dragon wants to become fully real by crossing from the Astral Plane to the Material Plane.
3	The dragon wants to ascend to godhood, seeking dominion over all dreams.
4	The dragon is a gourmand, ruthlessly seeking the richest and rarest flavors of nightmares.

The Nightmare Villain

Tyrant or terror, the nightmare dragon can act as an interesting primary or secondary villain in a high-level campaign. They could be the cause or one of the symptoms of a broader series of psionic events or the most significant consequence of some unnatural disaster. Even powerful characters have fears and nightmares of their own, fueled by past horrors or future dangers, and a villain composed of dread itself is the perfect way to emphasize that no amount of powerful spells or magic weapons can ensure their safety.

You should discuss themes of dread and terror with your players before introducing a nightmare dragon in your game, including what topics are hard or soft limits for each player. It's important for the players to be comfortable so they can be having fun even as their characters are frightened and panic-stricken. And if they are all-in for nightmares, this conversation can also be a chance to glean some information about how you can most effectively terrify each of the characters with a nightmare dragon in your campaign.

Plans and Motivations

Because nightmare dragons are birthed by intense fear and anxiety regarding dragons, their motives are largely shaped by the collective mix of facts, rumors, and legends the population holds about such creatures. Understanding a nightmare dragon is an investigation of a community's culture, history, myths, and bedtime stories. You can use the Nightmare Dragon Plans table to determine such a creature's schemes and motivations.

A nightmare dragon is what people make of it. What seems a terror is ultimately an expression of grief, fear, and trauma held by hosts. Learning secrets and understanding and resolving the underlying problems in a community are tactics that weaken a nightmare dragon's hold. Who would imagine wounding so terrible a creature by teaching a child there's no reason to be afraid of the dark?

Minions and Followers

As the nightmare dragon's predation and influence over a community grows, they tend to attract worship from both the like-minded and the fearful. As they exist in the Astral Plane, the dragon isn't always aware of other creatures that claim to align with them. If they are, the dragon's opinion of such hangers-on can range from amused acceptance to disgusted hostility. A nightmare dragon's outlook is strongly influenced by the personality traits of dragons—real or imagined—imprinted on them by the hosts that first formed them. For example, a nightmare dragon shaped by those with a fear of red dragons relishes any chance to play the domineering tyrant.

Pious Prey. Afflicted populations that become aware of the dragon may attempt to deify them in order to spare themselves. It's almost better if the dragon directs these followers instead of a directionless, increasingly desperate cult trying anything they can think of to appease the psychic parasite.

Dream-Eaters. Terrified prey can make for amusing subordinates, but are rarely useful. Fortunately, more useful servants are found among the ranks of night hags, oni, and others that prowl the borders between dreams and reality.

Manifest Echoes. The stronger a nightmare dragon becomes, the thinner the line between their Astral residence and the waking world. Bits of thought and dream begin

seeping into the Material Plane, manifesting as everything from common beasts to bizarre dream-creatures. People dream intensely about others they've met in passing, creating incomplete and unrealized imposters that act like unsettling half-finished sketches of personality.

Unusual Events

A nightmare dragon's predation begins slowly and accelerates as their strength and appetite grows hand-in-hand. The effects of the dragon's presence, whether intended or unintended, belie their existence long before the true cause of the events is clear. The Nightmare Dragon Rumors and Story Hooks table provides strange happenings the characters can discover that might lead them to a nightmare dragon.

Nightmare Dragon Rumors and Story Hooks

d6	Rumor or Hook
1	The children are acting strangely. Their play has turned to huddled whispers. They try to sneak knives to bed.
2	The businesses of regional hedge mages, temples, and apothecaries are booming as people seek a cure for bad dreams.
3	The community has become a hive of delirious activity as residents throw weary late-night festivals to stave off sleep.
4	A city is gripped by fear and confusion as people begin spotting their childhood nightmares and imaginary friends lurking in the streets.
5	The characters are well-known, but their reputation is tarnished when half-manifested dream versions of them go out of control.
6	The city's wealthy residents begin sleepwalking their way into fatal doom.



Nightmare Dragon Tactics

As obvious a step as it may seem, review the dragon's stat block and other features carefully. While some of these mechanics mirror similar dragon traits and actions, making note of key differences will distinguish the experience of confronting a nightmare dragon from encounters with other kinds of dragons.

Persistent Fear. High-level adventurers can usually avoid the frightened condition, especially if they prepare for the fight with spells like *heroes' feast*. The nightmare dragon's Phobichor trait, their Clutching Bile breath weapon, and their ability to use their Horrifying Presence before or after attacking means that even well-prepared adventurers will often suffer the frightened condition while fighting them.

Frightening Defense. High-level characters can reliably hit a target even when the frightened condition imposes disadvantage on their attack rolls. The dragon's key survival mechanism is that the same fear makes them resistant to damage, regardless of type. If the dragon can keep most or all of its enemies afraid of them, they can mitigate the majority of damage directed and wait for their lair's key mechanic—the Lull—to escalate.

The Ticking Clock. When the fight begins, the Lull is a non-issue that has no hope of rendering a creature unconscious. As a warning flag to the characters, a GM might have them roll long before the Lull is a threat and narrate a brief but easily-ignored wave of drowsiness. As the Lull increases, descriptions of an escalating, hypnotizing rhythm can indicate a growing threat.

The threat of the Lull becomes clear the moment a character drops unconscious and, even worse, is soon puppeted by the dragon's eerie Somnambulist trait. The characters are confronted with the fact that the dragon, likely already challenging them with fear mechanics, has an ability to momentarily incapacitate them without even reducing them to 0 hit points.

Transparency and Challenge. The nightmare dragon is a cruel creature and, by extension, offers a mechanically cruel encounter. They are designed to force characters to deal with conditions (namely, the frightened and unconscious conditions) in unconventional ways. It's more than understandable for players to want to pause the action, strategize with one another, and ask for clarifications when confronted with new mechanics or difficult challenges. Fully understanding the nightmare dragon's mechanics won't necessarily make it easier to defeat, but intentionally obfuscating what is happening to the characters once a mechanic comes into play certainly has a chance to harm the experience.

Death by Nightmare

Victims of nightmare dragons endure horrifying night terrors, sometimes for weeks on end, as the dragon feeds on their negative emotions. What these dreamers don't realize is that their sleeping minds are pulled into the Astral Plane, directly into the dragon's ever-changing lair. The dragon molds the lair's appearance to unnerve and disorient prey, trying to get the most from their meal. These sessions usually culminate in the nightmare dragon's appearance as they confronts, attacks, and starts to devour their victim. At the peak of the victim's terror, the dragon releases their prey from the astral tether, sending them screaming back to consciousness in their own beds.

The dragon's connection to each victim strengthens as they feeds on them repeatedly, until this dream-parasite inevitably kills their host. Body and mind fail in the face of overwhelming, sustained terror, or the victim's projected mind becomes trapped in the astral lair, never to awaken again. In extreme cases, the mind-body connection is so strong that the mortal wounds of the dragon's assault manifest in the physical world, and the gruesome aftermath of a full-grown dragon's assault renders itself in the confines of a single bedroom.

Sometimes a nightmare dragon devours their original host as voraciously as they would any other prey. In other cases, the dragon leaves their creators alive for extended periods of time, savoring the host's nightmares like a gourmet. Some nightmare dragons are even convinced they're incapable of killing their host.

A Nightmare Dragon's Lair

The dragon's lair, like their physical form, exists in the Astral Plane. From the outside, the lair is a massive, nebulous, glistening black mass that planar denizens ignore if uninformed or avoid if knowledgeable. The lair can be breached from the outside with a sufficient force of will; finding the lair in the first place is the real challenge.

Entering the Dream

Some spells allow creatures to enter the Astral Plane, but specifically navigating to the nightmare dragon's lair is another matter. The *plane shift* spell allows the caster to specify a destination on another plane of existence, but without knowing the nightmare dragon's chosen name or seeing the lair themselves, the result of the spell may be less than precise.



It's much simpler to access the lair the old-fashioned way, as bait. Seasoned adventurers have survived harrowing experiences, battled terrifying creatures, and endured loss and hardship in climactic situations. To put it simply, their lived experience is a nigh-irresistible banquet to a nightmare dragon, and a group of adventurers with shared histories are likely to be pulled into the lair if even one of their comrades is drawn to the Astral Plane. Alternatively, any creature with the *dream* spell prepared can cast it in a special manner, projecting their minds and the minds of any chosen companions to the nightmare dragon's lair as long as they go to sleep in an area affected by the dragon's predation.

If the characters project their minds or astral selves to the dragon's lair, they are nevertheless in mortal peril. Forming a psychic link strong enough for their projected selves to harm the dragon is a two-way street; if a character dies in the dragon's lair, they die on the Material Plane.

Regional Effects

A nightmare dragon's lair doesn't affect the surrounding region in the Astral Plane, but a number of phenomena occur in the area of the Material Plane where the dragon's victims live:

- An aura of dread pervades the region within 1 mile of affected areas. Sapient creatures in these areas have disadvantage on saving throws against being frightened, regardless of the source.
- Animals, especially domesticated animals near affected homes, show signs of exhaustion and distress. In rare cases, livestock are found killed with unmistakable but inexplicable evidence of attack by a large predator.
- Community members and visitors find themselves unusually tired, even nodding off in public places, as the dragon's influence attempts to lull potential victims to sleep.

Lair Features

The nightmare dragon's lair on the Astral Plane is an amorphous inky-black structure filled with a ever-shifting caverns. The surface of the lair is solid enough to walk on, but slick to the touch and with a slight, rubbery give. The lair reflects the thoughts and emotions of the dragon that dwells there, and constantly shifts and warps to suit the dragon's needs; forming barricades, spines, and simple structures as commanded.

The Lull. The nightmare dragon's deadliest weapon isn't their bite or bile, but the hypnotizing, sedative effect of their lair known as the Lull. The Lull is represented by a Lull score, which starts at 1 and grows or shrinks in the following ways:

- The Lull increases by 2 at the start of each round the dragon is in combat, before any creature turns, lair actions, or other effects.
- The Lull increases by 1 each time a creature fails its saving throw against the dragon's Clutching Bile action.
- The Lull increases by 1 each time a creature fails its saving throw against the dragon's Soporific Thrum lair action.
- The Lull decreases by 1 each time a creature regains consciousness because of the dragon's Somnambulist trait.

On initiative count 20 of each round (after lair actions), up to three creatures of the dragon's choice within its lair must each roll a number of d8s equal to the current Lull score. If the total is greater than or equal to the creature's current hit points, the creature falls unconscious. An affected creature remains unconscious until it takes damage, someone uses an action to shake or slap the sleeper awake, or the dragon uses its Somnambulist trait to direct it. The Lull score resets to 1 if the dragon dies or the lair is unoccupied by creatures hostile to the dragon for at least 1 hour.

Lair Actions

On initiative count 20 (before the effects of the Lull but losing all other initiative ties), the dragon takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects; the dragon can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

- ***Manifest Terror.*** The glossy substance of the dragon's lair creates a Medium or Large manifestation in an unoccupied space within 90 feet of the dragon. The manifestation resembles a creature feared by previous or current victims, but is considered an object. It acts on initiative count 10, has a speed of 25 feet, and can attempt to grapple or shove a creature within 5 feet of it as an action (+8 to the ability check). A creature grappled by the manifestation is also restrained. At the start of the manifestation's turn, the dragon can teleport to an unoccupied space within 10 feet of the manifestation. On initiative count 1, the manifestation collapses back into the substance of the lair.
- ***Nightmare Geography.*** The dragon creates up to four terrain segments within the lair, which are any combination of 10-foot-diameter, 10-foot-high pillars, 10-foot square, 10-foot-deep pits, or 15-foot-long, 5-foot-high, 5-foot-thick walls. Each creature in an affected space must make a DC 21 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is either pushed to one side of the new terrain or is raised by or lowered into the new terrain (dragon's choice). A creature that succeeds on their saving throw moves to the nearest unoccupied space of their choice. On the dragon's turn, the dragon can spend 5 feet of movement to enter a pillar or wall segment, reemerging from any other pillar or wall segment of their choice.
- ***Soporific Thrum.*** Each creature of the dragon's choice within 120 feet of them must succeed on a DC 21 Charisma saving throw as a hypnotic tone fills the lair. The Lull increases by 1 for each creature that fails the saving throw, but no other effect occurs.



Nightmare Dragon

Gargantuan Dragon (Shapechanger), Typically Neutral Evil

Armor Class 21
Hit Points 402 (23d20 + 161)
Speed 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+8)	14 (+2)	24 (+7)	21 (+5)	17 (+3)	22 (+6)

Saving Throws Int +12, Wis +10, Cha +13
Skills Insight +17, Perception +10, Stealth +9
Damage Resistances acid; all damage dealt by frightened creatures
Damage Immunities psychic, poison
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, frightened, petrified, poisoned
Senses truesight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 20
Languages All languages known by victims they have fed upon
Challenge 24 (62,000 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +7

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the dragon fails a saving throw, they can choose to succeed instead.

Somnambulist. When an unconscious creature begins their turn within 120 feet of the dragon, the dragon can direct the creature to perform up to two of the following actions:

- Stand up if they are prone
- Move up to half their speed in any direction, except into an obviously deadly hazard
- Make one melee weapon attack with disadvantage against a creature within reach

The dragon can direct a creature even if they have 0 hit points and are otherwise incapacitated, as long as they are unconscious. If the creature has at least 1 hit point, they wake up at the end of their turn and are no longer unconscious.

Phobichor. Creatures within 30 feet of the dragon can't benefit from any spell or other effect that grants immunity to or suppresses the frightened condition.

Actions

Multiattack. The dragon makes three Nightmare Physiology attacks or uses Clutching Bile if it is available.

Nightmare Physiology. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +15 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (4d6 + 8) of the dragon's choice of bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage.

Clutching Bile (Recharge 5–6). The dragon disgorges a torrent of viscous bile in a 60-foot-line that is 10 feet wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 22 Wisdom saving throw, taking 71 (13d10) psychic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Creatures that fail the saving throw are also affected by the dragon's Phobichor trait until the end of their next turn, regardless of their proximity to the dragon. Until the start of the dragon's next turn, the ground along the line is difficult terrain for the dragon's enemies as sticky hands grasp at them from the bile.

Bonus Actions

Horrifying Presence. Each creature of the dragon's choice within 120 feet of the dragon that is aware of them must succeed on a DC 21 Charisma saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the condition on themself on a success.

Legendary Actions

The dragon can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The dragon regains spent legendary actions at the start of their turn.

Detect. The dragon makes a Wisdom (Perception) check and automatically learns the location of any frightened creature within 120 feet of them.

Lash Out. The dragon makes one Nightmare Physiology attack.

Fleeting Dream (Costs 2 Actions). The dragon becomes a cloud of smoke and flies up to their flying speed before returning to their normal form. While in their smoke form, the dragon doesn't provoke opportunity attacks and can move through creatures and objects. Creatures the dragon moves through must succeed on a DC 21 Wisdom saving throw or take 16 (3d6 + 6) psychic damage.

Sleepwalk (Costs 2 Actions). The dragon uses their Somnambulist trait against an unconscious creature within 120 feet of them. The affected creature wakes up at the start of their next turn if they have at least 1 hit point.



WHAT THEY KNOW MAY HURT YOU

Informant NPCs and encounters

by Marcello De Velazquez

For adventurers, information makes the difference in saving lives, finding treasures, and toppling kingdoms. Those who trade critical pieces of knowledge often hide in the back alleys of the seediest city neighborhoods and move among everyday folk, while others operate within selective, high society organizations. They can be the last person you expect to provide help or a trusted friend who betrays you.

Who are these informants? Where can you find them? What do they know? What does their information cost? This article provides NPC informants who add adventure, excitement, and intrigue to your campaigns.

Imirich the Rat

I knows whys you come. I see. Ya got cheese, ya got shoes, or ya just have nothin' to lose?

–Imirich the Rat (or a loyal friend of his)

Imirich the Rat's reputation for knowing all the "talk on the dock" makes him a welcome presence in any dockside town or port city in your campaign. The characters may learn of Imirich's existence from drunken dockhands, from friendly freelancers, or from tipping an extra silver piece to a local tavern server. They are directed to an alleyway between two abandoned buildings and told to bring something Imirich finds appealing: blankets, cheese, clothing, fish, or plants.

Any harbor local or ship captain can give clues as to who they think Imirich the Rat is. Some say the informant is "a now-dead drunken augur who occasionally got something right," while others believe he is "a whelp of a street urchin that skirts through market crowds, peddling rumors and truths." Oddly enough, both accounts are correct.

Who's the Rat?

An eccentric sea druid, Imirich lived in a seaside shantytown. Each day he stumbled out of his alleyway home, drunkenly proclaiming portents of ill omen. Wherever he went, a swarm of rats followed behind like dogs after a master. Almost none took him seriously—though the few who did realized that his prophecies always came to pass. By the time the community realized the truth in his slurred words, the druid vanished.

Right after Imirich disappeared, dockside market-goers saw an influx of street urchins that ran grifts, picked pockets, and stole food from vendors. Like the old druid, the children were followed by swarms of rats. Each time an urchin was captured by the town watch, they would barter for freedom in exchange for the location of a more serious criminal. Watch log entries note that each of the children claimed the same name: Imirich.

Rat Connection

Imirich succumbed to rotgut poisoning and died quietly in the company of his rats. As he perished, the druid cast a unique version of the a*waken* spell on one of the loyal vermin. This rodent was already astute, and the transformative magic further granted him the ability to beguile the weak-willed.

The rat had watched Imirich squander his gift for years. With new sapience, the rodent hired urchins to watch and listen for information, a commodity the animal believed could turn a profit. The rat took the name Imirich and told his youngster agents to use the name if they ever got arrested.

Imirich

Small Beast, Neutral

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 7 (2d6)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-2)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	7 (-2)

Skills Insight +5, Perception +7
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 17
Languages Common, Druidic, telepathy 60 ft.
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Pack Tactics. Imirich has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of his allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or contract a disease. Until the disease is cured, the target can't regain hit points except by magical means, and the target's hit point maximum decreases by 3 (1d6) every 24 hours. If the target's hit point maximum drops to 0 as a result of this disease, the target dies. A diseased creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of every 24 hours, ending the disease on a success.

Dominate Person (2/Day). Imirich can attempt to beguile a humanoid that he can see within 60 feet of him. The target must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed by Imirich for up to 1 minute. If Imirich or creatures friendly to Imirich are fighting the target, it has advantage on the saving throw. While charmed, the target is telepathically linked to Imirich as long as they are both on the same plane of existence. Imirich can use the link to issue commands to the target while Imirich is conscious, which the target does their best to obey. As an action, Imirich can take total and precise control of the target. Until the end of Imirich's next turn, the target can only take the actions chosen by Imirich and doesn't do anything that the rat doesn't allow them to do. Imirich can cause the target to use their reaction, but Imirich must expend his reaction as well. Each time that the target takes damage, they make a new Wisdom saving throw. If the saving throw succeeds, the effect ends.

Reactions

Thwarting Thoughts. When a creature Imirich can see within 60 feet of him targets another creature with an attack, he can broadcast a telepathic rebuke to the attacker. The attacker must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or the attack misses.

Rodent Imirich never uses his Dominate Person action on the street urchins; they pilfer, spy, and bring their gains to the dockside alley of their own accord. There, rats deliver the loot and information to Imirich, whose lair sits through the sewer grates and beyond the reach of anyone but the rodents.

Imirich's Alley

The alley reeks of rotten fish, cheese, and other garbage. Trash is strewn about the alley floor, and stacked crates veil sewer grates that descend to Imirich's cramped lair. Barrels on both sides of the alleyway entrance collect runoff from rooftops.

The alleyway is 15 feet wide, and the street stretches 30 feet before it dead-ends. The rickety remnants of two bricklayer scaffolds run along the alley walls. Ten feet up, old wood planks and mended fishing nets serve as walkways for Imirich's urchins (noncombatants), who rest and watch from the safety of the scaffolds. Ropes dangle from their frames to the alley floor.

Rats dart and scurry among the alley's trash. At the alley's end stands a well-maintained burial mound with sea-themed trinkets scattered upon it. This is all that remains of the original Imirich.

Entering the Alley

Children immediately confront any visitors, asking who they are and if they need information. One child presents themself as Imirich, while rat Imirich watches from behind a grate. The children know bits of information, but if posed questions beyond their knowledge, Imirich telepathically provides them appropriate answers. If the characters move to harm any of Imirich's allies, **swarms of rats** attack, or Imirich uses his Dominate Person action to bring help—the streets are never without dockside **thugs**, **bandit captains**, or **guards** and **veterans** of the watch for Imirich to enthrall.

Bits o' Info

Years of information-gathering and scavenging allow Imirich to provide the following information:

- Vessel arrivals and departures
- Sewer worker activity (or unusual happenings in the sewers)

- Favored drinking establishments of ship captains
- Dock watchmen patrol routes
- Contents of port warehouses
- Crimes committed in local alleyways or at night



PAYING THE PRICE

Imirich never gives out information without asking something in return. Speaking through an urchin, he demands to know who visitors are before asking them what it is that they want. His answers are rapid and repeated—insightful characters might notice that the speakers' mannerisms are erratic and inquisitive, like curious vermin.

For small pieces of information (such as the departure of a vessel), the cost of information is simple, though possibly perplexing to characters who don't realize a rat is in charge: children's clothes, fresh scraps of food, or wheels of cheese. If the characters are caught cheating or deceiving Imirich, the rodent commands numerous **swarms of rats** to strike at the adventurers at inopportune moments (such as during rests or when making key ability checks). These attacks continue until the characters leave town or offer suitable compensation to Imirich.

If Imirich learns that the characters are adventurers and they ask for information more difficult to obtain, the rat requests they complete one of the following tasks.

Rattle Their Chains (Levels 1–5). Imirich asks the characters to dismantle operations of the local Ratcatcher's Guild. They are given directions to the guild warehouse and are told to destroy the stored rat traps within and leave a message: "Never cross Imirich the Rat or his friends again." Eight guild guards (**thugs**) and two **mastiffs** protect the warehouse at all times. Shortly after the characters depart for the warehouse, Imirich dispatches two urchins to shadow and report the character's progress. A character who succeeds on a DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check detects the nimble agents. If the characters are defeated, they are turned over to the dock watch.

The Cat Lady (Levels 1–5). Imirich requests that the characters chase off the local cat lady from her dockside home. The cat lady is a retired adventurer, Portia-Mae Opiene (**priest**). She wants nothing more than to move to the tranquil countryside. Life along the bustling docks has grown unsettling. However, she lacks the patience to corral her irritable pets: three **panthers** and ten **cats**. When the characters attempt to help, the felines flee into the dock streets! If they're rounded up, Portia-Mae graciously thanks the characters and soon leaves town with her cats in tow. If the characters are unsuccessful, Portia-Mae sadly asks the characters to leave. If they refuse to leave without payment, she yells for the dock watch to come take away these grifters! Imirich the Rat learns of their success or failure through vermin spies tracking the characters.

Roadside Magda

I remember those adventuring days—tiring and full of travel. Rest your bones. Have something to eat.

—Roadside Magda

The quest for knowledge leads adventurers down many paths—over well-traveled coastal roads and grassy hillocks, down dense forest trails and perilous mountain paths, and into deep dark dungeons and winding, cavernous tunnels. These long journeys can wear at adventurers' boot soles, horseshoes, and resolve. When travelers are worn and weary, the distant sound of rattling pots and comforting humming is a welcoming sign: Roadside Magda approaches.

Adventurers in your fantasy setting might know the name "Roadside Magda," perhaps through tales of this traveling informant conquering dangerous dungeons, defeating monstrous menageries, or parlaying with some of the world's most evil beings. In her waning years, Magda (**gladiator**) quite suddenly retired and built a rest stop tavern, the Heralded Haven, where she greets travelers with rosy cheeks, a beaming smile, and a friendly greeting: "Come over to my fire. Rest your weary bones. Plenty of space here for you." From arrogant adventurer to malevolent monster, everyone gives in to Madga's boundless kindness and finds rest in her tavern. Those who accept her hospitality can learn something valuable from the retired adventurer, as her adventuring experience and collection of stories from guests make her a trove of knowledge.

Magda's Past

As Roadside Madga tells it, she once owned a roadway stop called the Heralded Haven that was filled with cozy comforts. Her rules at the tavern are simple: no feet on chairs or tables, pick up after yourself, share a tale, no cursing, and no fighting. On the rare occasion when the rules were tested, guests delightfully watched on as Gran Mumm, the mummified remains of an adventurer, dealt with the unruly. However, when Magda speaks of her past, she always ends the tale with a sorrowful look, saying, "That's when they came and burned the Heralded Haven to the ground—ran everyone off. It destroyed me." She then corrects herself. "It almost destroyed me." After this, she speaks no further, leaving abruptly to make sure bellies are full and guests are comfortable.

Almost everyone has heard of the day she speaks of, the day a horde of marauders burned her establishment to the ground. They chased off guests, cut down the foolhardy, and robbed victims of their prized possessions. In the chaos, Roadside Magda disappeared.

After a decade, news spread that Roadside Magda was alive. Travelers spotted her roaming the regional roadsides, setting up camps, and offering up hearty stews, tales, and smiles. Those who saw the aged adventurer noted where they were when they did. The reappearance of Roadside Magda has sparked a race by adventurers to be some of the first to get to her roving camps to learn what they can from the retired explorer. Maps with Magda's known campsite locations are in high demand. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check in a settlement finds someone who knows Magda's current location and gives up the information with a bribe worth 50 gp or a successful DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check.

Magda's Backpack

Magda always meets the needs of her guests. She picks about the pockets, ties, and openings of her rather plain-looking, framed backpack, impossibly bringing forth from its depths anything she needs to provide the meal, fire, and other comforts. A *detect magic* spell reveals that the bag emanates conjuration and enchantment auras. If asked about the pack, Magda kindly remarks with a smile, "It's all I could pull out of what was left. It's enough, though."

The magic pack is a *buttressing backpack* (see "Buttressing Backpack") that cursed Magda. She has no idea that she is under its sway and uses it constantly, keeping enough camping equipment and foodstuffs in the backpack to feed up to ten people three meals a day for the duration of her travels.

A character who succeeds on a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices that when Magda cares for a visitor, baubles on the backpack shake for a few seconds, then stop. If the *remove curse* spell or similar magic is cast on the pack, Magda immediately becomes a rage-filled, vengeance-minded berserker! She rushes for her spear and attacks the nearest camp guest (see "Buttressing Backpack").

If Magda is convinced that the backpack causes her pacifist behavior, she is willing to get rid of it—but not without a favor (see "A Special Favor").

Backpack History. Magda discovered the backpack while exploring a ruined temple devoted to an Amaphori, god of empathy and hospitality. From the moment she acquired the item, Magda no longer wanted to battle monsters, dungeon delve, and live an adventurer's life—she just wanted to help as many beings as she could.



BUTTRESSING BACKPACK

Wondrous Item, Very Rare (Requires Attunement by a Creature of Good Alignment)

This plain, wood-framed rucksack is made of worn leather and sports several pouches, belts, and ties. Six divine baubles devoted to a good-aligned deity of the GM's choice are sewn into its flaps. The pack always contains the contents of an explorer's pack, and the main pouch of the bag functions as a *bag of holding*.

While attuned to the backpack, you are protected from death. When you are reduced to 0 hit points as a result of taking damage, you drop to 1 hit point instead, and one of the divine baubles or trinkets disappears. If an effect would kill you instantly without dealing damage, that effect is instead negated against you, and two baubles vanish. Each day at dawn, the pack regains 1d4 expended baubles. If all the baubles are lost, the backpack and its owner crumble to dust.

Curse. The backpack is cursed. Attuning to it curses you until you are targeted by the *remove curse* spell or similar magic. Removing the backpack or ending your attunement to it fails to end the curse. The curse binds your soul to the backpack in a pact of faith, fealty, and service to others, changing your alignment to lawful good. While attuned to the backpack, you gain the following bond: "I relentlessly seek out adventurers to aid." You also gain the following flaw: "I treat everyone with kindness and see to their comfort as best as I can." The curse represses any behaviors, thoughts, or words motivated by anger.

If the curse is removed, you go into a berserker-like frenzy for 1 minute. While in the frenzy, you attempt to kill the nearest creature you can see. A *calm emotions* spell or similar magic, or two successful DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) checks, each made as an action, ends the frenzy.

TALK FIRST

You should confer with any player whose character wants to attune to the *buttressing backpack*. Explain the curse, then let the player decide if the curse is something they want their character to take on.

Resting Knowledge

While in Magda's company, the characters may ask questions about where her travels have taken her, where she's headed, or if she knows something about their current quest. She answers these questions with a smile and a "Let me tell you, dearie …" If the characters don't ask, Magda asks where they're going and why, and if she has information that can help, she offers it.

After years of adventuring and filling bellies, Magda has acquired a trove of knowledge. While her notes, journals, trophies, and other records were destroyed with the Heralded Haven, Magda still recalls many of their details. She can provide information about the following subjects, usually in the form of a story involving an adventurer she knew back in the day:

- Rare spell component locations
- Clandestine routes to evade bandits
- A dungeoneer's account of deathtrap dungeon rooms
- A lesser-known entrance to a villain or monster's lair
- Static fey lines within a day's travel
- Secret hideaways that guarantee uninterrupted rest

Magda has energy for one story per day, and she ends the story with, "That's enough for now, gotta take my bones to bed." If Magda believes the characters to be true heroes, she might share the tale of how she came upon "this ratty ole pack" (see "Backpack History" above).

A Special Favor

Magda kindly asks that those who want to hear a story give one first, specifically a personal tale about the character's adventures. The character who tells the tale must make a DC 15 Charisma (Performance) check if the tale is true, or a DC 19 Charisma (Deception) check if it's false, as Magda is kind, but not a pushover. On a success, Magda is impressed and shares a story that provides the requested information. On a failure, Magda smiles and asks the characters for one of the following favors before answering their question.

Roadside Rage (Levels 5–10). Magda asks the characters to track down the raiders who burned down the Heralded Haven. If asked why she hasn't done so herself, she remarks, "Violence ain't my way no more, but you fine folks could make things right." Magda knows the location of the marauders' camp, but the backpack's curse prevents her from taking direct action. She provides characters with a map that contains a two-square-mile area marked "Reaver Camp." It is a day's travel away from Magda's camp, and the surrounding swamp is difficult terrain and impassable by land vehicles. A rubble-and-debris road leading to the camp is concealed by a movable wall of weaved foliage, which can be found by a character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check or Wisdom (Perception) check.

The raider camp consists of ten **bandits**, one **bandit captain**, two **cult fanatics**, and Jarisaen (**druid**), the leader. Jarisaen and the cult fanatics worship the Purifying Flame, an entity that demands destruction of landmarks by fire in exchange for power. If confronted, Jarisaen and the cult fanatics boast that the "sacrifice" of the Heralded Haven was "their greatest offering," then fight to the death. An account of the marauders' end earns Magda's thanks and information.

Camp Champ-erones (Levels 5–10). Magda asks the characters to help host her annual Festival of Respite, an all-day, open invitation retreat where all are welcome to rest and enjoy a wonderful meal. The characters must serve food while preventing the guests from harming each other. To get the information, they must keep the peace while following Magda's golden rule: "You don't get rested bodies and filled bellies by killing!"

The guests include Ser Gairland, a famous human **knight** and his entourage of five **veterans**; a troupe of four bard **hobgoblins** known as the Bloodbow Bannermen; Khalamoundyn, a **young green dragon** with some orange scales; and Aulg Filkins, a necromancer **cult fanatic** and his treasured five skeleton pit bulls (Undead **mastiffs** that are immune to poison damage). The characters must keep Ser Gairland from killing Khalamoundyn, who some time ago ate his beloved warhorse. The Bloodbow Bannerman are irritated with Filkins' dogs, as their ghastly barking interferes with the creation of the hobgoblins' next dirge. Aulg brags that he slipped an eviscerating elixir into the knight and dragon's drink, which will turn them into his undead minions unless he is convinced to provide the antidote.

The Sable Gala

People would kill to have that invitation in their hands.

–the Host

In affluent city wards, luminaries, nobility, and glitterati vie for influence, popularity, and power. Within the endless power plays, a valuable fact or secret can thrust one to the highest position of aristocracy and topple others into squalor and obscurity. Those investigating the deepest mysteries of the aristocracy may be invited to the Sable Gala, a masquerade where dark secrets pass through liaisons and whispers among a coterie of assassins. Many wealthy aristocrats know about the gala, though they rarely speak of it.

Characters looking for information about nobility may have a rich patron who secures them an invitation. At best, guests have a memorable time and leave with the information they seek. At worst, they never leave at all.

Gala Information

Characters could attend the gala for information about one of the following subjects, but obtaining it won't be easy (see "Wanted Whispers"):

- Illegitimate children with royal bloodlines
- Covert contingencies surrounding a peace treaty between major cities
- Bribery and graft amongst temples leaders
- The location of a noble family vault
- The circumstances surrounding a noble's death
- The hidden vice of a prominent socialite

Gala History

Years ago, the city's assassins' guilds were at war. At the height of this bloody conflict, a mysterious being called the Host rose to prominence. Through clandestine audiences with war survivors and city luminaries, the Host brought the Assassin's War to an end with a truce, which unified the finest assassins in a lucrative partnership. As part of this, the Sable Gala was established as the assembly place of the affluent assassins and spies catering exclusively to nobility. The cities' assassins now indulge in luxury, and their clients hold newfound power—just as the Host wants.

The Host

Though retired during the Assassin's War, the Host (**assassin**) saw the benefit of unifying the guilds and putting himself at the helm. Using a *hat of disguise* and a *rod of security* acquired at the height of his career, the Host brings assassins and clients together on the eleventh and twenty-second day of every month to the Sable Gala. The Host is always in attendance, dressed in similar regalia as the Regulars (see "The Regulars"), except for a tiny orchid tattoo on his wrist and face paint in the likeness of a frowning skull, veiled by an avian masquerade mask.

The Regulars

The Regulars are the regular assassin and client attendees at the Sable Gala. They dress in vibrant formal clothing that veils their most distinguishing features. All wear resplendent masks depicting animals. They mingle about and acknowledge the characters' arrival with a head nod, a curtsy, an alluring stare, or an inviting smile. Each of the Regulars is an infamous **assassin** or **bandit captain**.

The Regulars can include the following NPCs:

- ***Emerald Ostrich.*** Bedazzled horns betray this masked assassin's tiefling heritage. Enticing and flirtatious, they prefer to speak with those equally charming.
- ***Onyx Boar.*** This opal-masked braggart is too willing to reveal how rich he is. Lavishly dressed and gaudily jeweled, this loudmouthed dwarf enjoys peppering new company with questions about their past.
- ***Diamond Adder.*** This silver-eyed half-elf is the master of poisons among the Regulars. Courteous and shrewd, the subtle killer warms up to guests who appear roguish, swapping trade secrets.

The Venue

The event is held in an elegant ballroom created by the Host's *rod of security*. Attendees are sent an invitation containing instructions to access the space. Guests arrive at the top of stairs carpeted in red velvet, then descend into the ballroom, swept into the finest luxuries gold can provide. Tables covered in red cloth line the ballroom walls, holding succulent meats, exotic fruits, and wine fountains. Pleasant ballroom music from masked musicians on a buttressed stage fills the masquerade. Diamond chandeliers hang from the ceiling—which, upon further examination, depicts hands wielding daggers.

Entering the Gala

Characters may attend the Sable Gala to find information on a hated enemy, learn more about a particular assassin or assassination, gather information about a noble family, or perhaps simply uncover the truth about the Host and the Sable Gala. Regardless of the motivation, the characters must acquire or receive an invitation to the gala. Word of the characters' pending arrival finds its way to the Regulars and the Host.



The onyx-glitter invitation placard politely requests that the characters "please dress immaculately to arrive spectacularly as eight evening bells ring from the city clock tower." At eight bells, magic imbued in the invitation transports them to the masquerade.

As the characters enter at the top of the stairs, soft music plays and the sound of a ringing champagne glass sounds throughout the space, resonating from the ballroom walls. Moments later, the Host's soft, inviting voice announces the arrival of the characters, which he refers to as the Guests. He then says, "All should mind the time—and let it be a splendid one. The gala ends in four hours." Characters with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 15 or higher sense that the Host is somewhere on the ballroom floor among the Regulars. If the characters know to look for his tattoo (see "The Host") and succeed on a DC 20 group Wisdom (Perception) check, they identify him. The DC for this check is reduced by 2 for every hour the characters spend searching and doing nothing else at the gala.

Wanted Whispers

As the characters mingle among the Regulars, the conversations begin lighthearted and friendly, focusing on the gala's ambiance and small talk about the characters' lives.

If the characters try to get significant information from the Regulars, the attendees politely dance around answering any questions directly, insisting that the answers to the Guests' questions must be earned. To get information, a character must impress one of the Regulars with a dazzling display of oratory, finesse, or wit. Examples include posing a question in a poem, while dancing, while playing an instrument, or in dramatic prose. Characters asking questions must make a DC 13 Charisma (Performance) check. At the GM's discretion, a character could substitute another ability check, such as a Strength (Athletics) check to pose a question while performing feats of strength or a Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to ask a question while tumbling. The DC for this check increases to 15 if the characters want information about the Sable Gala or the Host. On a success, the character receives a deafening round of applause, followed by a sound of clinking on glass calming the crowd. The Regulars part, revealing the Host, who then raises a wine glass and proclaims, "I'd like to propose a toast!" Proceed to "A Toast to the Tasked."

If the character fails the check, a different character can attempt to ask the same question, but the DC of the check increases by 2. After three failed attempts, proceed to "The Woeful Waltz."

A Toast to the Tasked

Upon the Host's announcement, all of the Regulars raise champagne glasses toward the characters. The Host announces, "Well done. Well played! Now the price must be paid. The Guests will provide us aid." He then describes one of the following tasks, which must be completed to gain the information the characters seek.

If the task is completed, a Sable Gala page (**commoner**) finds the characters and hands them a familiar placard that contains the answer to their inquiry. If the task wasn't completed, this placard contains an invitation that magically transports them back to the Sable Gala right as the "Woeful Waltz" starts.

Lich's Blood (Level 5–10). The characters receive a rosewood box containing an enchanted silk kerchief. The Host informs the characters that the kerchief must be dipped in the preservative fluid of a lich's soul case and brought back to the Sable Gala. All the Host knows is that the soul case is on the second floor of the lich's home. The Host provides no other information, eager to see if the characters accept such a dangerous task with so few details.

If they accept, the characters are magically transported to the front gates of a luxurious manor. A successful DC 12 Intelligence (History) check reveals that the manor belongs to Humboldt Echzar, a famous troubadour in the realm. Secretly, Humboldt is a lich! To enter the manor, the characters must pass Humboldts's four private guards (**veterans**), three **hell hounds**, and two **wraiths** patrolling the manor grounds. Indoors, Humboldts's two **invisible stalkers** roam the manor freely.

Echzar's soul case is a glass lamp filled with a luminescent fluid, where a glob of lich's flesh floats. It sits on a nightstand in the master bedroom on the second floor, and the character can recognize it with a successful DC 17 Intelligence (Arcana) check. Should the characters encounter Humboldt, a **lich**, they can avoid combat if they appeal to the lich's vanity with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check. Otherwise, the lich attacks, preferring to chase the characters throughout the manor. Humboldt toys with them until it is no longer enjoyable, then locks them away in his dungeon to be his literal captive audience. If the characters complete the task, they are instantly transported back to where they opened the invitation, and the kerchief is gone.

Persona Non-Gala (Level 5-10). The Host reveals that an assassin betrayed them. Graun Vokken, a human **assassin** with a *short sword of wounding* and a *cloak of elvenkind* is a cunning master assassin who leads a new guild called the Skulking Scales. The characters must find the group's forest cave hideout, wipe out the assassins, and claim Graun's magic sword as proof of the deed done.

If the characters accept this task, they are magically transported to the forest containing the guild's lair. The cave entrance is veiled by thick foliage. Each hour the characters search the woods, they can make a successful DC 15 group Wisdom (Perception) check. On a success, they find the main entrance. The cave contains two deep gnome **bandit captains**, four half-orc **thugs**, and Graun. Unless the characters succeed on a DC 15 group Dexterity (Stealth) check, the Skulking Scales hear their approach and prepare an ambush. The assassins fight to the death unless a character succeeds on a DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) to convince Graun to give up his sword to deceive the Sable Gala, which could give the Skulking Scales time to grow to prominence. When the characters claim the sword, they are instantly transported back to where they opened the invitation, and the sword is gone.

Woeful Waltz

If the characters fail to impress the Sable Gala, the chandelier lights darken for a moment. When they come back on, the Regulars have removed their masks, revealing that each of their faces is painted in the bone-white visage of a grinning skull. The Regulars pair up and begin to dance as a waltz composed of a barrage of flats and sharps resonates through the ballroom. The Regulars dance closer and closer to the characters as the Host proclaims, "Your lack of guile is out of style. Your convincing? We're wincing. You're unworthy of the dance but deserving of a chance. Muster grace and leave this place. The lightest slight? A fatal bite." Then the Host disappears into the crowd.

The Regulars become a deadly swarm that the characters must overcome to reach a set of plush-covered doubled doors 50 feet away at either end of the ballroom. The couples spin gracefully en masse while holding hands and wielding blades as the mind-piercingly loud music plays. The swarm fights until the characters leave the gala or until killed.

Escaping the Gala. If the characters flee beyond the ballroom doors, they are transported back to where they used the invitation to enter Sable Gala. If the Host wishes to pursue the characters beyond the Sable Gala, he can send the Regulars to pursue them. If the characters personally slighted him, he also joins the chase.

If the Regulars are defeated, the Host is revealed as the last standing among them, his face painted in the visage of a frowning skull mask. He simply says, "You are uninvited," after which the characters are magically transported back to where they opened their invitation. Here, they realize they possess a beautifully penned letter with the information they sought.

The Regulars

Gargantuan Swarm of Medium Humanoids, Lawful Evil

Armor Class 14
Hit Points 150 (12d20 + 24)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Int +5
Skills Acrobatics +8, Deception +6, Perception +5, Stealth +8
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages Common, thieves' cant
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +4

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the Regulars fail a saving throw, they can choose to succeed instead.

Swarm. The Regulars can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and they can move through any opening large enough for a Medium creature. The Regulars can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

The Regulars have advantage on attacks against creatures that occupy the same space as them. When a hostile creature the swarm can see starts their turn in the same space as the Regulars, the creature takes 7 (2d6) slashing damage.

Actions

Multiattack. The Regulars make four Slashing Strikes attacks.

Slashing Strikes. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (4d6) slashing damage, or 7 (2d6) slashing damage if the Regulars have half of their hit points or fewer.

Cascade of Bolts. The Regulars release a hail of crossbow bolts in a 10-foot-radius sphere centered on a point the Regulars can see within 80 feet of them. Each creature in that area must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 27 (6d8) piercing damage, or 13 (3d8) piercing damage if the Regulars have half of their hit points or fewer. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage.

Legendary Actions

The Regulars can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The Regulars regain spent legendary actions at the start of their turn.

Ballroom Blitz. The Regulars choose one creature they can see within 30 feet of them. The target must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Pulling Promenade. The Regulars can move up to their speed without provoking opportunity attacks. A creature of the Regulars' choice that is in the Regulars' space or a creature the Regulars move through must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or be moved with the Regulars until the end of this movement.

Staggering Staccato. The Regulars choose one creature they can see within 30 feet of them. The target must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or their speed is halved until the end of their next turn.

Alluring Dance (Costs 2 Actions). The Regulars target one creature they can see within 60 feet of them. That target must succeed on DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed by the Regulars for 1 minute. While charmed in this way, a creature must use their movement and take the Dash action on their turn to move toward the Regulars. At the end of each of their turns, a charmed target can repeat the saving throw, ending the condition on themself on a success. On a successful save, the target is immune to this effect for 24 hours.

RESOURCES

EMBRACE THE FLESH

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Marcello De Velazquez is a veteran, game designer and D&D Adventurers League organizer from Bellevue, Nebraska. When not designing or preparing RPG material, he interns as a mental health professional at an Omaha emergency shelter/treatment center. His love of tabletop roleplaying games is only overshadowed by his love for red velvet cake. Marcello's weekly D&D game has run for over five years now! His recent works include *Scion of Darkness* for the Ravenloft: Mist Hunters campaign and also *The First Forest*, a D&D Adventurers League adventure that premiered at GaryCon 2022! He hopes someday to be able to contribute to a major RPG sourcebook! You can find him streaming on Twitch on the borderkingdomsadventures channel. His work can be found in *ARCADIA* Magazine and on the DMs Guild.

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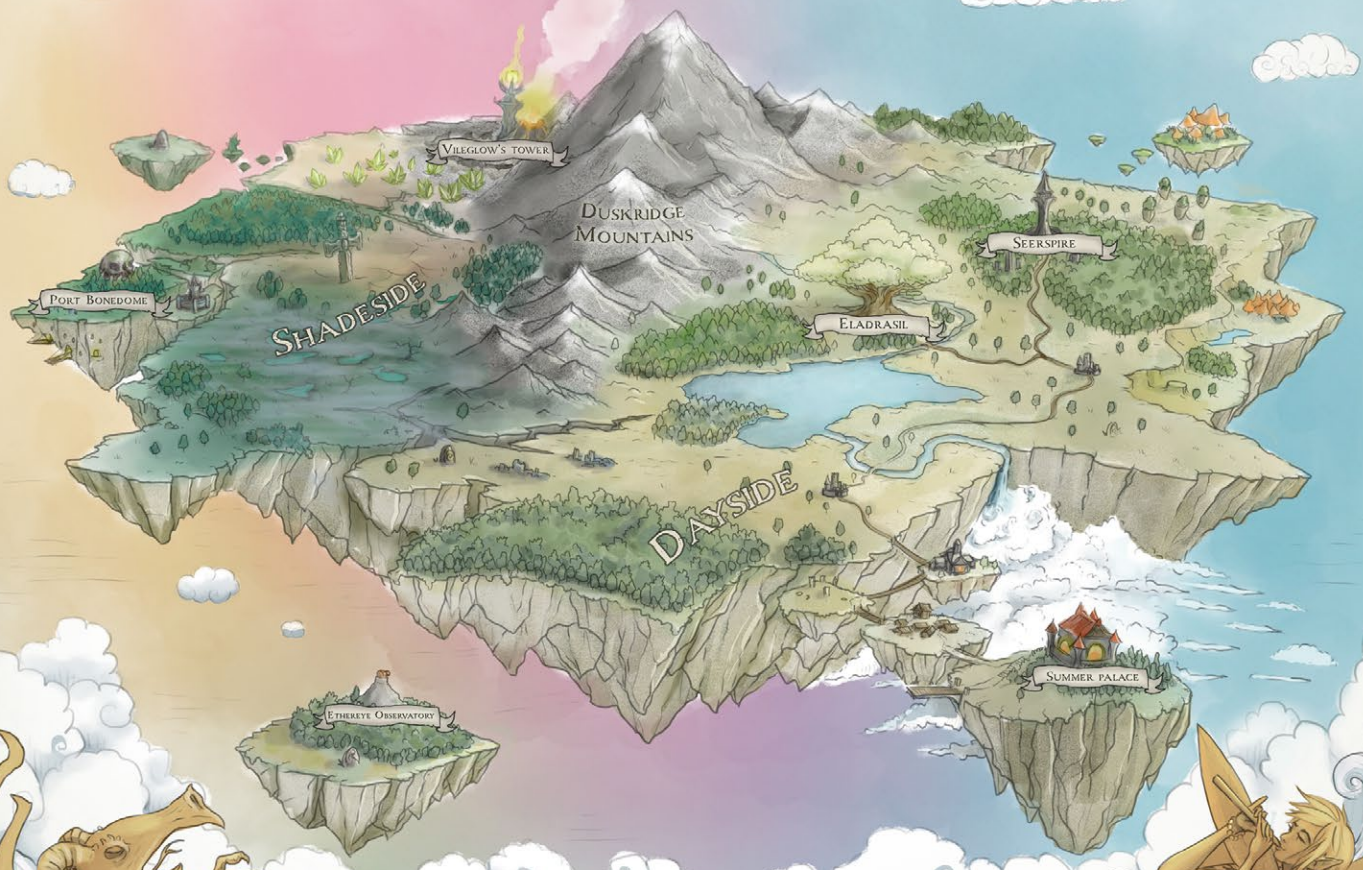

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Issue 16 ✦ May 2022

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The fourth edition of the world's most popular role-playing game got me my job. You might be saying, "But James! *ARCADIA* is a fifth edition magazine! That doesn't make any sense. And don't a lot of people dislike that edition? Why would you admit such a thing to thousands of customers?" Because I love fourth edition, and I think you should try it. (To be clear, I also love fifth edition and pretty much any game with both dungeons and dragons.) You could also try *13th Age*, which is a spiritual successor to fourth edition in many ways (Rob Heinsoo led the design of both) and an incredible d20 fantasy game in its own right. In fact, *13th Age* might be fun for you if you tried fourth edition and didn't like it, but that's another letter.

Lots of what I loved about fourth edition made it into fifth edition. For example, before fourth edition, cantrips used spell slots, which meant that a low-level spellcaster would cast about two spells, then poorly wield a crossbow from behind their meat shields for the rest of the day. Fourth edition also gave us short rests, level-based bonuses (known as proficiency bonus in fifth edition), ritual spellcasting, and many ideas now incorporated into the fighter and warlock class features. Fourth edition also made the beloved dragonborn and tiefling core character options!

While it was far from a perfect game, fourth edition has a lot of cool ideas that didn't make it into fifth. Characters were far more customizable; monsters had unique and interesting powers in their stat blocks; buying magic items was part of the core rules (they were in the player book, not the GM book); encounter building was easy, fast, and fun; and a special kind of foe, minions, went down in a single hit.

Probably the most common complaint about fourth edition when it launched was that it didn't feel like previous editions of the game, and that's a legitimate criticism, but it was also the point. Fourth edition isn't about tracking rations and spell components as you crawl through dungeons. It's heroic fantasy done incredibly well. From level 1, the player characters were superheroes by design. Players who were totally new to the game loved it. Many old players who wanted a new experience ate it up with a spoon. I saw it as a combination of many of my favorite things.

Fourth edition wasn't around for long. For one thing, its many customization options combined with an ambitious release schedule of one official book a month meant that the game's power creep was more like a power jetpack. But in that time, I ran a lot of one-shots, short adventures, and two glorious campaigns from levels 1 to 30. Yeah—it went to 30. When fifth edition came, I made the switch fast. I was a little worn out on fourth, and it did have other issues I was looking forward to leaving behind. Still, I missed the customization, cooler monsters, and superheroic feel of fourth edition.

I was surprised when I saw MCDM put out a call for writers. I only knew Matt from a handful of running the game videos I had seen and from the splash *Kingdoms & Warfare* made on Kickstarter. But I knew I had to throw my hat in the ring when I saw right there in the posting that MCDM wanted to "add a little fourth edition to fifth." I wanted that, too, and I said so in my cover letter. Matt called that out as a detail he remembered when we first chatted.

ARCADIA is part of the mission of putting some fourth edition into fifth. This issue brings dope, purchasable equipment for PCs in Jamie Flecknoe's "Masterwork Artisan," a legendary creature that's fun to run in Ahmed Aljabry's "The Crowned Genie," and an adventure location that requires some real (super) heroes in Michael E. Shea's "The Blackweald."

If you like what we're putting out into the world, why not give fourth edition, or *13th Age*, a try?

Ex animo,
James Introcaso
Managing Editor



Masterwork Artisans

Because who can afford a magical item on an entry-level adventurer's salary?

by Jamie Flecknoe

> When love and skill work together, expect a masterpiece.
>
> –John Ruskin

Imagine this: your adventuring party arrives in town, coin purses heavy with their most recent reward, seeking out a magic item shop. You, their fearless GM, list the prices of several low-end magic items and watch as they discover that they don't have enough to make a purchase. The heroes exit the shop, defeat pasted across their faces, as you call their attention to the "ting-ting" sound of a local blacksmith. They all sigh and collectively agree—they do not need another basic weapon. But as they approach, they notice that this blacksmith holds the title of masterwork artisan.

This blacksmith is unique. She forges items using rare metals and imbues them with special attributes, creating nonmagical armor and weapons more powerful than their standard counterparts. These items are perfect for your lower-level party and in their price range.

You, their GM, are now the true hero of the story! The bard writes a song about you, praising your ingenuity while practicing with their new mithral longsword. The cleric praises your name as they succeed on a Dexterity (Stealth) check in heavy armor thanks to its camouflaging properties. And the rogue's alignment takes a turn for the better as they smile at you, their daggers dealing extra bleed damage on the BBEG instead of on a random stranger who looked at them wrong. All because you decided to add masterwork artisans to your campaign, bridging that dreaded gap between starter and magical weapons and armor.

This article contains information about who masterwork artisans are, what they can craft, and a couple masterwork artisan NPCs you can drop right into your current game.

Who Is a Masterwork Artisan?

Masterwork artisans take their love for forging armor and weapons to the next level. They've refined their skills—they can work with rare materials and imbue specific attributes into their creations. Anyone with an interest in this work can become a masterwork artisan if they can find a willing mentor to teach them the skills, though mastering each technique takes years of practice.

Some masterwork artisans settle down in one city, buy a shop, and craft wares to sell to fellow citizens and visitors. Others prefer to travel, selling their goods in one market before moving to the next. No matter where they are, they are well connected, maintaining healthy relationships with mining companies and adventurers who supply them with rare materials.

Creating Works of Art

Each masterwork artisan specializes in working with one or two materials and a handful of attributes—no one has the time to master it all. Artisans with longer lifespans may learn to work with more materials and attributes, but a lack of access to rare metals and skilled mentors may limit how much they can learn.



While a masterwork artisan may have a couple of premade items in their shop or at their stall, items are usually made to order based on the needs of the customer. Some artisans accept a rush job for extra coin, but perfection can only be quickened to an extent. Artisans typically have the materials required to craft an item, and the material cost is included in the price.

Metals and Alternatives

The Masterwork Metals Prices table lists the materials masterwork artisans use to craft weapons and armor, as well as the price of items crafted with these materials. Any sword, axe, metal-tipped weapon (such as a spear), or metal-tipped ammunition (such as bolts and arrows) can be made from these materials. If a material appears in this article and another sourcebook, these rules are meant to replace the ones in the sourcebook.

Masterwork Metals Prices

Material	Price*
Adamantine	300 gp + base cost
Celestial silver	300 gp + base cost
Frost steel	300 gp + base cost
Meteorite iron	275 gp + base cost
Mithral	225 gp + base cost
Obsidian	200 gp + base cost

*Price is per weapon or per twenty pieces of ammunition.

Adamantine. Adamantine is a hard, black metal that, in its polished form, reflects a green sheen under normal light and a purple-white sheen under magical light. It is a rare, heavy metal, found most often in lava flows and meteorite landing sites. Due to adamantine's density, items made of it are 25 percent heavier than their mundane counterparts.

- While wearing adamantine armor, any critical hit against you that deals nonmagical bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage becomes a normal hit.
- Weapon attacks made with an adamantine weapon or ammunition score a critical hit on a roll of 19 or 20.

Celestial Silver. When veins of silver develop deep within the earth alongside rare gems known as moonstones, the exposure creates a prized metal known as celestial silver. When worked properly with a special cooling process, this highly effective metal can repel some forms of evil. Though celestial silver is generally safe to work with, wear, and use, some masterwork artisans claim that a curse is left upon those who handle the metal with ill intentions.

Weapons made of celestial silver are different than weapons that are silvered.

- When wearing celestial silver armor, you have advantage on saving throws against being cursed or diseased, and when you take necrotic damage, it is reduced by 1d4 (to a minimum of 1).
- A celestial silver weapon counts as silvered for the purpose of overcoming damage resistances and immunities. Once per turn, when you hit a target with a celestial silver weapon, the target takes an extra 1d6 radiant damage.

Frost Steel. Iron ore bathed in a monster's icy breath can absorb some of the energy and glow blue. It is rare and dangerous to find—most often in the hoard of a white dragon—but worth the hunt for those brave enough. Once obtained, frost steel is easy enough for a masterwork artisan to use and mold.

- While you're wearing frost steel armor and a creature within 5 feet of you hits you with a melee attack, the attacker takes 1d4 cold damage. You can only deal damage this way once per turn.
- Once per turn when you hit a creature that isn't resistant or immune to cold damage with a frost steel weapon or ammunition, you can reduce the target's movement speed by 10 feet until the end of their next turn. Critical hits made with a frost steel weapon or ammunition deal an extra 1d6 cold damage.

Meteorite Iron. When refined, meteorite iron is heavier and less brittle than basic iron. It is flecked with orange hues, which makes it easy to identify. Many ancient civilizations depleted the surface beds, leaving the remaining deposits buried deep in the Underdark or in remote, unexplored lands. It is a pliable metal, making it beginner friendly.

- While wearing heavy armor made from meteorite iron, you have resistance to bludgeoning damage.
- When you score a critical hit with a meteorite iron weapon or ammunition that deals bludgeoning damage, you maximize your weapon damage dice. This doesn't apply to a rogue's Sneak Attack, a paladin's Divine Smite, the spell *hunter's mark*, or similar spells and effects.

Mithral. A rare metal, mithral is dark and silvery. It is strong like steel and half the weight, and thus an ideal material for folks looking for the lighter side of powerful weapons. Mined from the deepest tunnels of the oldest mines, mithral is hard to find, but deposits yield an abundance of it. Artisans craft gorgeous wares with intricate details with this lightweight metal, and due to its density, items made of it are 25 percent lighter than their mundane counterparts.

- If armor normally imposes disadvantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks or has a Strength requirement, the mithral version of the armor doesn't.
- A Small creature can wield a weapon with the heavy property made from mithral without disadvantage on attack rolls, and melee weapons made from mithral that don't have the heavy property gain the finesse property if they don't already have it. In addition, mithral weapons with the thrown property and ammunition have an increased normal and long range of 50 percent (to a minimum of 5 feet and a maximum of 50 feet). For instance, a mithral dagger has a normal range of 30 feet and a long range of 90 feet.

Obsidian. A volcanic glass, obsidian is brittle until properly worked with and molded, a process that makes it strong and able to absorb force. Obsidian is a relatively common material found most often near mountainous rivers. Due to its rigid nature, obsidian can be purposefully broken while working it in the forge to form sharp, jagged edges, which tear the flesh at odd angles and make healing more challenging. It is shiny and black, so not only is it effective, it is perfect for the brooding character in your campaign.

- While wearing obsidian armor, any attack that meets but doesn't exceed your Armor Class deals half damage to you.
- When you score a critical hit with an obsidian weapon or ammunition that deals piercing or slashing damage, the target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to half the damage it takes from the attack. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest.

Wood

The Masterwork Wood Prices table lists the materials masterwork artisans use to craft weapons made of wood, as well as the price of items crafted with these materials. These unique woods provide distinctive benefits to weapons such as bows, staffs, and clubs.

Masterwork Wood Prices

Material	Price
Desert ironwood	300 gp + base cost
Stout blackwood	225 gp + base cost
Yellowwood	150 gp + base cost

Desert Ironwood. A tree with a thin trunk and many narrow branches, desert ironwood is both dense and strong. Because they only flower and fruit four years per decade, desert ironwood is scarce, but where one tree is found, there are others nearby. These trees, which thrive anywhere from lush oases to barren deserts, provide the ecosystem with shade and food, granting all manner of desert creatures refuge within the canopies. Because desert ironwood twists and knots as it grows, finding a tree with a suitable piece of wood is a challenge, and only advanced masterwork artisans can work with this dense, unyielding wood.

Desert ironwood is dark, with reddish hues and violet striations throughout. Its density makes it durable, though quite heavy; items made of it are 25 percent heavier than their mundane counterparts.

- A ranged weapon made from desert ironwood has an increased normal range equal to half of its current normal range. For instance, a shortbow made of desert iron wood has a normal range of 120 feet and a long range of 480 feet.
- Weapon attacks made with a melee weapon made of desert ironwood score a critical hit on a roll of 19 or 20.

Stout Blackwood. Characterized by their ability to survive in the harshest weather, stout blackwood trees are found in remote locations throughout mountainous regions. Stout blackwoods have thinner trunks, heavily ringed with the passing of short, rough growing seasons. They tend to grow in abundance in valleys where snow and rain collect or near glacier-fed rivers. Their leaves are tiny and needle-like, staying on year-round to gather whatever bits of sunlight filter through the cloudy, snowy days. In the first weeks of warmer weather, stout blackwoods flower and fruit, attracting creatures emerging from hibernation.

While the bark of stout blackwood trees is white, the wood inside is a rich black. These trees produce stiff, sturdy wood that creates extreme tension in ranged weapons; stout blackwood shortbows and longbows are hard to use, but crossbows made of it are granted heightened accuracy and impact. This wood also absorbs the force of impact, which makes it particularly useful in crafting melee weapons. Stout blackwood is a superb material for masterwork artisans ranging in skill from beginner to advanced.

- When you score a critical hit using a ranged weapon made from stout blackwood that has the loading property, you deal an extra 1d4 damage of the weapon's type.
- Once per turn when you hit a creature using a two-handed melee weapon made from stout blackwood, you can make a Strength (Athletics) check contested by the target's Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check (the target chooses the ability to use). If you succeed, you either knock the target prone or push them 5 feet away from you (your choice).

Yellowwood. Found in tropical environments, yellowwood trees grow on hillsides and along rivers and streams. The trees grow tall, reaching above the canopy for light. Due to year-round sun and a wet climate, there are very few rings in the trunks of yellowwood trees. The bark of these trees is dark brown and can be peeled back easily, revealing much lighter wood underneath.

The wood of a yellowwood tree is flexible and lightweight. It can be challenging to work with, as it tends to overextend when shaped. Due to yellowwood's density, items made of it are 50 percent lighter than their mundane counterparts.

- While you're wielding a yellowwood longbow or shortbow, being within 5 feet of a hostile creature doesn't impose disadvantage on your ranged attack rolls.
- When you take the Attack action and attack with a melee weapon made of yellowwood, you can use a bonus action to make an additional attack with that weapon. You don't add your ability modifier to the damage of the bonus attack, unless that modifier is negative.

Attributes

Attributes add powerful benefits to armor, ammunition, and weapons. Due to the delicate and specific nature of the attributes, only one can be applied to an item, and masterwork artisans must make items with an attribute from scratch. The following tables show the costs and benefits of attributes.

Weapons that use ammunition can't have attributes for the weapons themselves—instead, they are crafted with attributes listed on the Ammunition Attributes table.

Armor Attributes

Attribute	Benefit	Price
Agile	You gain a +1 bonus to Dexterity saving throws.	75 gp + base cost
Camouflaged	You gain a +1 bonus to Dexterity (Stealth) checks.	45 gp + base cost
Frightening	You gain a +1 bonus to Charisma (Intimidation) checks.	45 gp + base cost
Locking joints (heavy armor only)	You gain a +1 bonus to Strength saving throws.	75 gp + base cost
Ornate	You gain a +1 bonus to Charisma (Persuasion) checks.	45 gp + base cost
Spiked	A creature that grapples you or you grapple takes 1d4 piercing damage at the start of your turns.	30 gp + base cost

Weapon Attributes

Attribute	Prerequisite	Benefit	Price
Barbed	Weapon deals piercing damage	When you hit with this weapon and deal at least 5 damage, the target takes an extra 1d6 damage of the weapon's type.	100 gp + base cost
Guarded	Greatclub, greatsword, longsword, quarterstaff, rapier, scimitar, shortsword, or a weapon with the reach property	You gain a +2 to AC until the start of your next turn when you take the Dodge action while wielding this weapon.	45 gp + base cost
Honed	Weapon deals piercing or slashing damage	When you hit with an attack using this weapon, roll the damage dice twice and use the higher result.	125 gp + base cost
Perfectly balanced	Two-handed weapon	The weapon's damage die increases one size. (For example, a halberd's d10 damage die becomes a d12. A maul's 2d6 damage dice become 2d8. If a die is already a d12, then add an extra 1d4 to damage rolls instead of increasing the size.)	135 gp + base cost
Reinforced	None	This weapon can't be broken by nonmagical means. If the weapon deals bludgeoning damage, it deals an extra 1d4 damage on a hit.	60 gp + base cost
Serrated	Weapon deals piercing or slashing damage	When you score a critical hit against a creature with this weapon, the target loses 2d4 hit points at the start of their next turn.	75 gp + base cost
Weighted	Weapon deals bludgeoning damage	If you make an attack roll with this weapon and miss, the attack still deals half damage to the target. You can use this benefit twice, regaining all uses when you finish a long rest.	50 gp + base cost

Ammunition Attributes

Attribute	Prerequisite	Benefits	Price*
Barbed	Arrows and bolts only	When you hit with an attack using this ammunition and deal at least 5 damage, the target takes an extra 1d6 damage of the weapon's type.	60 gp
Blunted	Arrows and bolts only	A target concentrating on a spell who is hit with this ammunition has disadvantage on their Constitution saving throw made to maintain concentration. No matter the weapon used, an attack with this ammunition deals bludgeoning damage instead of its normal damage.	40 gp
Dousing	None	This ammunition is affixed with a vial of water and extinguishes any nonmagical flames in a 5-foot-cube centered on where it lands.	10 gp
Flash powder	Sling bullets only	This ammunition emits a flash of light on impact. When it hits a target in dim light or darkness, the target and each creature within 5 feet of the target must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be blinded until the end of their next turn.	40 gp
Oiled	Arrows and bolts only	You can choose to light this ammunition on fire as part of an Attack action using it. When you hit with an attack using this ammunition while it is on fire, the target takes an extra 1d4 fire damage.	45 gp
Serrated	Arrows only	When you score a critical hit against a target using this ammunition, the target loses 1d6 hit points at the start of their next turn.	60 gp
Splintering	Arrows and bolts only	When you hit with an attack using this ammunition, all creatures within 5 feet of the target must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, taking 1d6 piercing damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. If you are hidden and miss with an attack using this ammunition, making the attack doesn't reveal your position.	55 gp
Tarred	Arrows and bolts only	You can choose to light this ammunition on fire as part of an Attack action using it. When you shoot this ammunition while it is on fire, the fire goes out after the impact and creates a 10-foot cube of black smoke that lasts for 3 rounds. The cube spreads around corners, and its area is heavily obscured. The smoke can be dispersed early by a light wind of at least 10 mph.	40 gp

*Price is per twenty pieces of ammunition.

NPCs and Shops

Masterwork artisans come in all shapes and sizes, each with interesting backstories of how they learned their trade. These seasoned blacksmiths can be integral to the campaign's story or simply merchants who provide wares to the characters.

Delanys: City Blacksmith

Delanys (DEH-LAHN-us) is a half-elf in her late nineties. She left home in her youth to train when her family's blacksmith shop, Made of Metal, struggled for business. For fifty years she apprenticed under a couple of masterwork artisans, but by the time she returned, her family's shop was closed, and they were working on a farm outside the city. Delanys used the coin she earned apprenticing to reopen the shop, and with the support of her family, she's been crafting fine wares for the past twenty years.

Appearance

Delanys has short hair that is shaved on one side and brushed over to her ear on the other. Her hair, a rich reddish-brown, sports a few singed spots from stray embers and sparks. Deep concentration lines mark her forehead and a handful of round burn marks dot her chin. Delanys's skin is copper with undertones of olive, and her eyes are silvery-gray. While average in build and height, her arms are muscular from work. Her clothes are pocked with small burn marks, and when she is in the shop, she wears a heavy, ash-smeared apron.

Personality

Delanys is assertive and focused when working at her forge, but easily excitable and flooded with ideas when planning a new commission. She is kindhearted, putting her family first. Focused on their well-being, Delanys doesn't easily budge on the cost of her items, though she is willing to barter and trade for goods that support her household.

Crafting

In addition to standard armor and weapons, Delanys can use the following materials to craft items:

- Frost steel
- Mithral
- Obsidian

She can craft items with the following attributes:

- Locking joints (armor)
- Ornate (armor)
- Honed (weapon)
- Serrated (weapon)
- Weighted (weapon)
- Blunted (ammunition)
- Serrated (ammunition)



Made of Metal

The front half of Made of Metal is a one-story stone-and-cement building that houses the shop and workspace. A pair of small windows flank the front door, and a hand-painted sign boasting the shop's name hangs above the door. The back half of the building, which is two stories and made mostly of wood, houses Delanys and her family.

Delanys's shop is cozy and welcoming. While there is generally no need for a fire due to the heat produced by the smelter, a hearth lined with lit candles sits in the storefront. The floor is made of worn, dark wood. A comfortable couch lines one wall with a couple of armchairs positioned across from it, creating a relaxed area where Delaynys and customers sit to discuss commissions. A long, glass cabinet displays beautiful weapons on another wall, and a breastplate and longsword are mounted above the case.

Made of Metal's Inventory

Item	Quantity	Price
Blunted bolt	100, sold in sets of 20	40 gp
Mithral longsword	1	240 gp
Ornate breastplate	1	445 gp
Obsidian serrated dagger	2	277 gp
Honed handaxe	2	130 gp



Voyage: Traveling Merchant

Voyage (VOY-IJ), or V, doesn't spend much time in any location, preferring to venture anywhere from crossroads markets to large cities and peddle their wares and services to adventurers. To create commissioned pieces, they make deals with local blacksmiths to use their shop in return for a cut of the profits. Voyage only stays in one place for a while if a local masterwork artisan is willing to teach them a new skill.

Voyage, a tiefling in their late forties, spends most of their time traveling alongside their trusted donkey Expedition, or X. The tiefling boasts that their traveling shop, World-Class Wares, has handcrafted items from around the world.

Appearance

Voyage's skin is powder white. Their horns twist once, pointing almost directly upward, and are the color of balsa wood. The tiefling's round eyes are light blue, which matches streaks in their snow-colored hair. Voyage is tall, and a lifetime of traveling and hauling their overflowing pack around has left Voyage muscular and strong.

Personality

Exuberant, chatty, and always looking to make a deal, Voyage strikes up a conversation with anyone willing to talk, though they prefer chatting with folks who exude wealth. The tiefling tells stories about places they've traveled, old clients, and past adventures—some of which are more embellished than others. Haggling for a good deal is one of Voyage's favorite pastimes. It takes a lot of persuading or an offer of a rare item to bring down the tiefling's prices.

Crafting

In addition to standard armor and weapons, Voyage can use the following materials to craft items:

- Adamantine
- Celestial silver

They can craft items with the following attributes:

- Agile (armor)
- Camouflaged (armor)
- Guarded (weapon)
- Perfectly balanced (weapon)
- Blunted (ammunition)
- Dousing (ammunition)
- Oiled (ammunition)

World-Class Wares

Often little more than a rented table at a market, World-Class Wares is a traveling shop. Voyage and Expedition carry enough unique material to forge weapons or armor for commissions, as well as a plethora of premade items available for immediate purchase.

World-Class Wares' Inventory

Item	Quantity	Price
Adamantine chain mail	1	375 gp
Adamantine dagger	4	302 gp
Agile breastplate	2	475 gp
Camouflaged chain shirt	1	95 gp
Dousing sling bullets	40, sold in sets of 20	10 gp
Guarded longsword	2	60 gp
Obsidian shortsword	2	210 gp
Oiled bolt	100, sold in sets of 20	45 gp
Perfectly balanced, celestial silver greatsword	2	485 gp

Plot Hooks

Now that you know masterwork artisans exist, expeditions to volcanoes, white dragon lairs, and other far reaches of the land in search of rare materials are in your future. Here are some plot hooks to get those adventures started:

Masterwork Artisan Plot Hooks

d8	Plot Hook
1	Your party is hired by a masterwork artisan to infiltrate a dragon's lair for rare materials.
2	Your party is contracted by a noble family to safely escort their ambitious youngest child to a masterwork artisan's workshop to be the artisan's next apprentice.
3	A masterwork artisan works for one of your party member's enemies and outfitted their enemy with a powerful weapon. The artisan is also the only one who knows how to protect against the weapon's power.
4	A mysterious benefactor offers to outfit your party with masterwork artisan gear. All they ask for in return is a precious metal found deep within the Underdark.
5	A greedy prince captured a masterwork artisan and forced them to mass-produce armor and weapons for the prince's army, which is currently encroaching on the border of a party member's hometown.
6	Your party is employed by a masterwork artisan to seek out a paladin who wields the first masterwork item the artisan crafted. The paladin set out to investigate a cursed temple, but has yet to return.
7	A debt owed by a party member is called in. A masterwork artisan for a local guild requests the characters seek out stout blackwood, which can only be found near the highest peaks of a distant mountain range.
8	A masterwork artisan desperately seeks out your party, as the artisan is being set up for a crime they didn't commit. The artisan offers three items as payment in return for the party's help.

THE CROWNED GENIE

A new mold of genies

by Ahmed Aljabry

A large amethyst sits at the center of Jamshat's forehead, while a cluster of smaller ones hovers closely, circulating his head like a crown of jewels. Each is filled with arcane knowledge that gods and liches envy.

–Scholar Darud Maison

Only a handful of crowned genies have ever existed. Their souls grow in rare gems rather than in elements, and thus they emerge with great strength, a crown of precious stones circulating their head and a prominent jewel embedded in their forehead.

Other genies—including their sultans and padishah—are wary and fearful of the monumental power these gem-born Elementals wield. Even in the best cases, crowned genies are banned from cities and citadels at early ages in fear of what they could become.

This article presents two crowned genie NPCs to use in your campaigns.

JAMSHAT, A BEJEWELED EXISTENCE

Jamshat emerged from his amethyst geode amidst the molten boundaries of the Planes of Fire and Earth. In his early days, Jamshat lived on the outskirts of great cities among lesser genies. He worked the deep mines of the earth and made his first connection with xorn, the only creatures that treated him with respect. It wasn't long before his ambitions surpassed what the slums could offer, and he left his birthplace to build his fortune.

TEMPTATIONS & DESIRES

When a mortal dies, gods and devils bicker over their soul and nature reclaims the body, but knowledge and experience are forever lost. Jamshat saw the opportunity in what others let go to waste.

He came to the Material Plane and asked willing mortals for permission to scry on their lives, watching their experiences through magic amethysts. Eventually, he gave them his gems to collect more of their lives without actively needing to watch his favorite mortals. But as these gems were traded, sold, and borrowed, the knowledge within them became muddled and useless.

Hungry for more knowledge, Jamshat changed tactics. The best way to ensure that a mortal kept their assigned amethyst was to embed them into objects useful to the recipient, such as a hoe for a farmer. The genie imbued these objects with magic, making them even more valuable.

Still, Jamshat's greed grew—soon, he was no longer satiated by simple observations and average civilians. He imbued a curse into his jeweled gifts, one that imprisons the recipient and drains them of knowledge. Then he turned his sights higher: he forged powerful armor, weapons, and other objects desired by adventurers, who explore parts of the world no other mortals witness and gain knowledge no others possess. The genie grants explorers these gifts to aid their journeys, never mentioning the accompanying curse.

Jamshat's Gift

Any nonconsumable magic item created by Jamshat contains a small amethyst and is cursed.

Curse. This item is cursed. Attuning to it curses you until you are targeted by the *remove curse* spell or similar magic. When you start your turn with 0 hit points while attuned to this item, the item casts the *imprisonment* spell on you using the Minimus Containment effect (spell save DC 15). If you fail the saving throw, you are captured within the item's amethyst and you become stable. A **xorn** loyal to Jamshat comes to collect the item 1d10 days later.

If you remain trapped in the gem for 1,001 nights, you die and your soul and body are released from the gem, leaving all your knowledge and memories in the amethyst. Jamshat can extract and use that knowledge by implanting it into an **amethyst servant** or dividing it into magic items that allow the wielder access to your knowledge in the form of proficiencies, properties, or spells.

Amethyst Atheneum

Embedding knowledge into magic gems is easier than inscribing words into heavy tablets and more lasting than writing on perishable parchments. With his amethysts, Jamshat has imprisoned the minds of countless victims and turned them into obedient constructs—including even powerful dragons and other genies.

He keeps his magic items, amethysts, and gem servants in a massive subterranean atheneum. The caverns and tunnels filled with amethysts are tended to by servants, who also constantly expand the atheneum through mining efforts.

Jamshat spends most of his time in the scrying chamber, a large room perfectly cut into the shape of a sphere. A single 10-foot-wide bridge connects the entrance to the center of the room, where a throne of pure amethyst stands. This *scrying throne* allows him to see nearly anything he wishes (see below).

To the unfamiliar, the atheneum appears to sprawl without logic or reason, but Jamshat has a system for organizing his chambers. Each room contains amethysts with expertise in a particular area of knowledge, and multiple paths connect one chamber to others that contain gems with related areas of knowledge. For example, a large chamber with general knowledge about magic is connected to a smaller chamber dedicated to evocation magic and another with gems containing the history of magic.

While in his atheneum, Jamshat can instantly recall any knowledge captured inside the gems.

Scrying Throne

Wondrous Item, Legendary (Requires Attunement)

While sitting on this throne, you can use an action to cast the *scrying* spell (save DC 25), viewing the image you see as a magical projection before you. While scrying with the throne, you have truesight out to a range of 120 feet centered on the spell's sensor. If you are familiar with or possess a body part of the target, the target has a disadvantage on their saving throw and you can scry on them across any plane of existence.

This throne is fixed in its location and can't be removed except by Jamshat or with a *wish* spell.

Jamshat Plot Hooks

To introduce Jamshat into your campaign, you can choose or roll for a plot hook on the Jamshat Plot Hooks table.

Jamshat Plot Hooks

d6	Plot Hook
1	One of the characters or an NPC who travels with them finds a magic item made by Jamshat and falls victim to the curse.
2	The characters search for a missing wizard and instead find a xorn returning to Jamshat with the mage trapped inside a cursed magic item.
3	While scrying on a potential victim, Jamshat notices the characters and invites them to his atheneum, hoping to convince them to take a cursed magical item and add their knowledge to his collection.
4	During an underground adventure, the characters stumble upon the Amethyst Atheneum.
5	Jamshat's xorn relentlessly track the characters to retrieve a magic item they carry with a creature captured in it.
6	Jamshat hires the characters to retrieve a magic item for him that his xorn failed to retrieve.

FIKRAH THE FIRST THOUGHT

A vibrant green agate rises from the center of Fikrah's forehead, horn-like with a round tip, with four smaller ones floating on each side to form this genie's crown. Like Jamshat, Fikrah craves knowledge, although she pursues to share rather than hoard.

In her early years, Fikrah disguised herself as a human adventurer and traveled among mortals, meeting a rainbow of peoples and cultures. She grew to love them and made many mortal friends—and when she outlived them all, Fikrah's heart was heavy with sorrow.

In grief, she gave life to her memories of departed companions. Fikrah implanted these thoughts into new bodies known today as Fikrawis. The genie nurtured them, passing her knowledge and experience to these constructs as if they were her children. As the centuries passed, the Fikrawis evolved into unique individuals beyond the memories that birthed them.

CITY OF LIDDAH

Fikrah built Fikrawis for decades, until her small hidden lair in the mountain could no longer hold her children. She found a hill near a river and built a haven on it, which she called Liddah.

It didn't take long for nearby settlements to notice the Fikrawis. In fear, they sent warriors, but these small armies fell against Fikrah's power. Foreseeing the violence that would unfold, the genie persuaded Jabir Al-Adi, the sultan of the region, to sign a truce. Some historians claim this peace was magically forged, but for many generations now Liddah has coexisted peacefully with nearby powers.

Liddah is an independent meritocracy populated primarily by Fikrawis and governed by the genie. The city sits on mines filled with unnatural amounts of gems, which the Fikrawis trade with nearby settlements, as well as inventions fueled by Liddah's academic prowess in magic and science.

The city is divided into three sections: Mirkaaz, Al-Maraam, and As-Sahlaan. Mirkaaz, the inner circle at the center of the city, contains Fikrah's palace and the city's government offices. The highest tower of the palace can be seen for miles outside of the city, its gem-covered minarets refracting light in every direction and color.

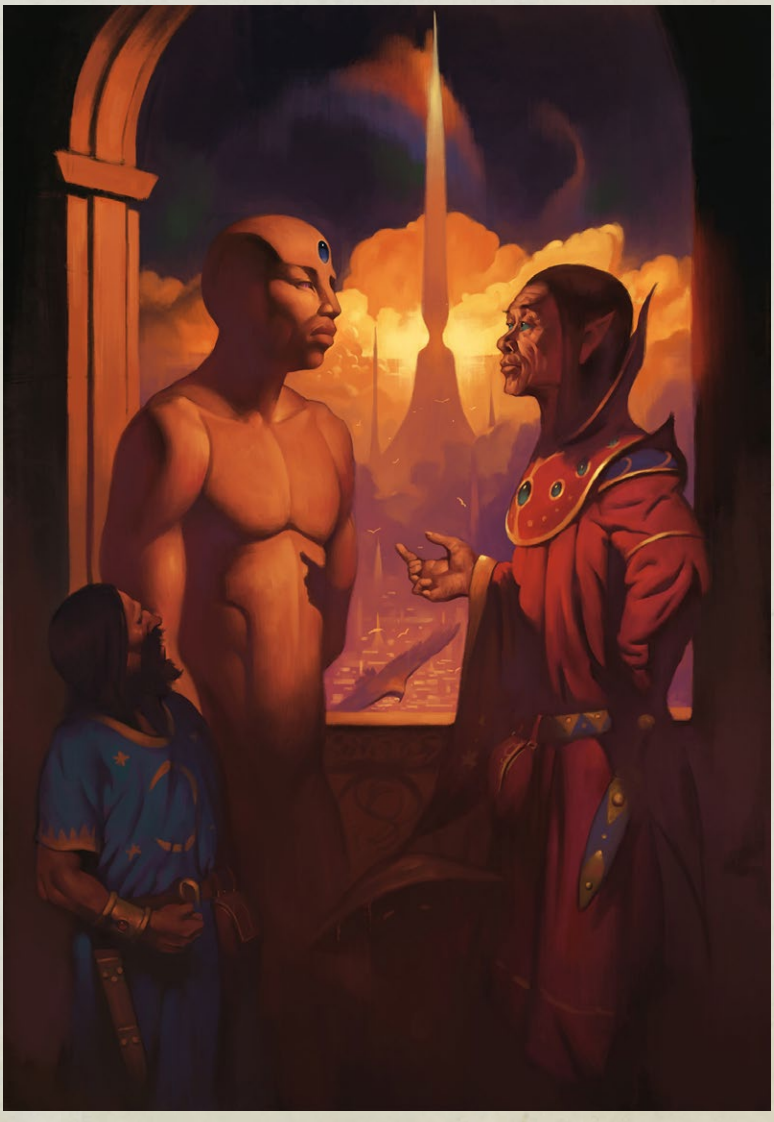
Beyond the inner circle, Fikrawis who share similar pursuits cluster together in Al-Maraam, a district made up of neighborhoods like the Arcanist Assembly and Crafters Creed.

Just outside the walls of the city, the Fikrah Academy provides extensive education to any wishing to study, including non-Fikrawis. The area surrounding the academy has a village of its own, called As-Sahlaan.

THE CHILDREN OF FIKRAH

Fikrawis are genderless humanoids given life by Fikrah the First Thought. At first, Fikrah created many children. Now, the nursery in Liddah is abandoned, and new generations are only made when adult Fikrawis request a child, as Fikrawis aren't able to reproduce by themselves.

Some Fikrawis believe their self-sufficiency is a strength, and their city should continue to be isolated and forbid non-Fikrawis from entering beyond the walls. Others, typically adventuring Fikrawis who have experienced lands beyond Liddah, believe that growth will only come from being open to the outside world.



Fikrawis, Awakened Thought

A Fikrawi is clay molded into a humanoid shape, with a single small agate placed in the center of their forehead. The agate contains their awakened thoughts, which shape the clay over 1,001 nights until the Fikrawi awakens on the final night.

Fikrawi Traits

As a Fikrawi, you have the following traits.

Ability Score Increase. Your Intelligence score increases by 2, and your Charisma score increases by 1. Alternatively, you can increase one score by 2 and increase a different score by 1, or increase three different scores by 1.

Age. Upon awakening, a Fikrawi matures and lives at the same rate as a human.

Creature Type. You are a Construct.

Size. Your size is Medium.

Speed. Your walking speed is 30 feet.

Languages. You speak Common, Terran, and one language of your choice.

Implanted Talent. You gain proficiency in one skill of your choice that you associate with the dreams and goals you pursue in life, granted by the thought that spurred your awakening.

Molded Thought. You have advantage on saving throws against any spell or effect that would alter your form against your will.

Genie Magic. You know the *minor illusion* cantrip. Starting at 3rd level, you can cast the *levitate* spell with this trait, without requiring a material component. Starting at 5th level, you can cast the *enlarge/reduce* spell with this trait, without requiring a material component. Once you cast *levitate* or *enlarge/reduce* with this trait, you can't cast that spell with it again until you finish a long rest. You can also cast either of those spells using any spell slots you have of the appropriate level.

Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma is your spellcasting ability for these spells when you cast them with this trait (choose when you select this ancestry).

Cycle of Rebirth

Fikrah taught funeral rites to the Fikrawi. Only her closest advisors are aware of the rites' true purpose: the funeral ritual reclaims the agate on their foreheads and reawakens the thoughts within, while wiping the memories of the Fikrawi's life.

Fikrah hasn't been able to awaken new children for a while—even her *wish* spell failed to solve this problem. No one has noticed that the gems are being reused … yet. A few reawakened Fikrawis regained memories of a previous life, but they were quickly cured by Fikrah casting *modify memory*.

Other problems have befallen Liddah as Fikrah's powers mysteriously weaken. The miners complain that gems are more scarce. It's only a matter of time before Fikrah's waning power reveals her lies and manipulations, and all the adoration, love, and trust they have for her falls apart.

The true reason behind Fikrah's fading power is yours to decide. It may be that an enemy has placed a secret curse on her, she has run out of memories and needs help harvesting more, or she has simply made the maximum number of children her power allows.

Fikrah Plot Hooks

To introduce Fikrah into your campaign, you can choose or roll for a plot hook on the Fikrah Plot Hooks table.

Fikrah Plot Hooks

d6	Plot Hook
1	Fikrah asks the characters to find a missing Fikrawi, who fled their home after regaining memories of a previous life.
2	One of the characters or an NPC who travels with them is a Fikrawi and suddenly regains memories of a previous life.
3	Fikrah, aiming to regain her power, hires the characters to find a rare magic-infused agate, which a dragon currently hoards.
4	Undercover isolationist Fikrawis hire the characters to steal an item within the city, but the job is a ruse intended to propagate fear of outsiders in Liddah.
5	A group of xorn nest in the mines, and the miners hire the characters to clear them.
6	Jabir III, the sultan of the region, wishes to invade and reclaim the lands upon which Liddah sits, which his ancestors gave to Fikrah. He hires the characters to infiltrate Liddah and find its weakness.

Crowned Genie

Large Elemental, Typically Any Chaotic Alignment

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 250 (20d10 + 140)
Speed 30 ft., burrow 30 ft., fly 30 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	16 (+3)	24 (+7)	24 (+7)	18 (+4)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Int +13, Wis +10, Cha +10
Skills Arcana +13, History +13, Insight +10
Damage Vulnerabilities thunder
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities psychic
Condition Immunities charmed, petrified
Senses blindsight 60 ft, darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages all, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 18 (20,000 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +6

Elemental Demise. If the genie dies, their body disintegrates into crystalline powder, leaving behind only the equipment the genie was wearing or carrying.

Genie Wish. Once a year, the genie can cast the *wish* spell with no limitations.

Immutable Form. The genie is immune to any spell or effect that would alter their form.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the genie fails a saving throw, they can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. The genie has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Actions

Multiattack. The genie makes four attacks, each of which can be a Refraction Beam or a Telekinetic Punch attack. The genie can replace one attack with a use of Spellcasting.

Refraction Beam. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +13 to hit, range 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (2d10 + 7) radiant damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 21 Constitution saving throw or their vision becomes blurry and they have disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks that rely on sight until the start of the genie's next turn.

Telekinetic Punch. *Melee Spell Attack*: +13 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 16 (2d8 + 7) force damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 21 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Spellcasting (Psionics). The genie can cast one of the following spells, requiring no components and using Intelligence as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 21, +13 to hit with spell attacks):

At will: *calm emotions*, *detect evil and good*, *detect magic*, *detect thoughts*, *disguise self*, *levitate*, *stone shape*

3/day each: *dimension door*, *move earth*, *passwall*, *scrying*, *telekinesis*

1/day each: *earthquake*, *mass suggestion*, *modify memory*, *plane shift*, *prismatic spray*, *wall of force*, *wish* (duplicating other spells only)

Bonus Actions

Blinding Light. A burst of light emanates from the genie's crown. Each creature within 30 feet of the genie that can see them must succeed on a DC 21 Constitution saving throw or be blinded until the start of the creature's next turn.

Reactions

Gem Reflection (3/Day). If the genie makes a successful saving throw against a spell or a spell attack misses it, the genie can choose another creature (including the spellcaster) it can see within 30 feet of it. The spell targets the chosen creature instead of the genie. If the spell forced a saving throw, the chosen creature makes their own save. If the spell was an attack, the attack roll is rerolled against the chosen creature.

Variant: Jamshat's Villain Actions

Jamshat is an action-oriented genie with the following villain actions and a challenge rating of 20 (25,000 XP). The genie has three villain actions. He can take each action once during an encounter after an enemy creature's turn. He takes villain action 1 during the first round of combat, villain action 2 during the second round, and villain action 3 during the third round.

Villain Action 1: Amethyst Conjuring. Jamshat conjures two **blank amethyst servants**, two **amethyst servant assassins**, and two **amethyst servant mages** in unoccupied spaces he can see within 120 feet of him. The servants act immediately when they appear and on the same initiative count each round.

Villain Action 2: Implant Thought. Jamshat chooses one creature he can see within 30 feet of an amethyst servant. The target must succeed on a DC 21 Charisma saving throw or become magically imprisoned inside the servant. If the target is attuned to a magical item that carries Jamshat's curse, they automatically fail their saving throw. The imprisonment lasts until the amethyst servant is destroyed or the effect is dispelled with a 9th-level *dispel magic* spell or similar magic. While imprisoned in them, the amethyst servant uses the target's statistics modified by the amethyst servant template (see below). If a target succeeds on its saving throw against this villain action, Jamshat can use this villain action again in a following round.

If all conjured amethyst servants are destroyed, the genie instead conjures four **blank amethyst servants**.

Villain Action 3: Mental Release. Jamshat chooses an amethyst servant within 120 feet of him. The amethyst servant moves up to their speed then explodes in a burst of psionic energy. Each creature of Jamshat's choice within 20 feet of the servant when they explode must make a DC 21 Wisdom saving throw, taking 55 (10d10) psychic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

If all conjured amethyst servants are destroyed, the genie instead conjures an **amethyst servant mage**.

Lair Actions

When fighting inside their lair, the genie can use lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the genie can take one of the following lair actions; the genie can't take the same lair action two rounds in a row:

- The ground within 30 feet of the genie becomes difficult terrain for creatures the genie chooses until initiative count 20 on the next round. In addition, each creature chosen that is standing on the ground in the area must succeed on a DC 21 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone.
- The genie conjures a 30-foot-radius sphere of magical darkness centered on a point they choose within 120 feet of them, which lasts until initiative count 20 on the next round..
- A floating gem appears in an unoccupied space within 120 feet of the genie and disappears on initiative count 20 of the following round. Each creature within 10 feet of the gem that can see it when it appears must succeed on a DC 21 Wisdom saving throw, or become charmed by the genie until the gem disappears. While charmed in this way, a creature is incapacitated and has a speed of 0. The effect ends if the creature takes damage or if someone takes an action to shake the creature out of its stupor.

Regional Effects

The territory within 5 miles of a crowned genie is altered by the creature's psionic and crystalline presence, creating one or more of the following effects:

- Mines abound with gems and crystals.
- Xorn are common in the region and seek gems in the mines.
- Once per day, each creature allied with the genie can roll a d4 and add the number to an Intelligence check.

If the genie dies, these effects immediately end.

Amethyst Servant Template

When a creature's knowledge is transferred to one of Jamshat's amethyst servants, the construct's body transforms to resemble the creature whose knowledge it now contains. Additionally, the servant's body grows the nonmagical equipment that creature carried when it was imprisoned. The servant uses that creature's statistics with the following changes.

Creature Type. The amethyst servant is a Construct.

Alignment. The servant is unaligned. It gains all the information and experiences of the creature whose knowledge it contains, but it is unquestionably loyal to Jamshat.

Damage Vulnerabilities. The servant is vulnerable to thunder damage.

Condition Immunities. The servant can't be charmed or petrified.

Senses. The servant has blindsight out to a range of 30 feet and is blind beyond this radius.



Blank Amethyst Servant

Medium Construct, Unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 18 (4d8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Damage Vulnerabilities thunder
Condition Immunities charmed, petrified
Senses blindsight 30 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 10
Languages understands all the languages of their creator but can't speak
Challenge 1 (200 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Actions

Sharp Edges. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (3d8) slashing damage.

Amethyst Servant Assassin

Medium Construct, Unaligned

Armor Class 15 (studded leather)
Hit Points 78 (12d8 + 24)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Int +4
Skills Acrobatics +6, Deception +3, Perception +3, Stealth +9
Damage Vulnerabilities thunder
Damage Resistances poison
Condition Immunities charmed, petrified
Senses blindsight 30 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 13
Languages thieves' cant plus any two languages
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Assassinate. During their first turn, the assassin has advantage on attack rolls against any creature that hasn't taken a turn. Any hit the assassin scores against a surprised creature is a critical hit.

Evasion. If the assassin is subjected to an effect that allows them to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, the assassin instead takes no damage if they succeed on the saving throw, and only half damage if they fail.

Sneak Attack. Once per turn, the assassin deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when they hit a target with a weapon attack and have advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the assassin that isn't incapacitated and the assassin doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Actions

Multiattack. The assassin makes two Shortsword attacks.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Amethyst Servant Mage

Medium Construct, Unaligned

Armor Class 12 (15 with *mage armor*)
Hit Points 40 (9d8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Int +6, Wis +4
Skills Arcana +6, History +6
Damage Vulnerabilities thunder
Condition Immunities charmed, petrified
Senses blindsight 30 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 11
Languages any four languages
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Spellcasting. The mage is a 9th-level spellcaster. Their spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). The mage has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt*, *light*, *mage hand*, *prestidigitation*

1st level (4 slots): *detect magic*, *mage armor*, *magic missile*, *shield*

2nd level (3 slots): *misty step*, *suggestion*

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell*, *fireball*, *fly*

4th level (3 slots): *greater invisibility*, *ice storm*

5th level (1 slot): *cone of cold*

Actions

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Amethyst Servant Veteran

Medium Construct, Unaligned

Armor Class 17 (splint)
Hit Points 58 (9d8 + 18)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +5, Perception +2
Damage Vulnerabilities thunder
Condition Immunities charmed, petrified
Senses blindsight 30 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 12
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 3 (700 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Actions

Multiattack. The veteran makes two Longsword attacks. If they have a shortsword drawn, they can also make a Shortsword attack.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Heavy Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +3 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d10 + 1) piercing damage.



THE BLACKWEALD

The street-sized mimic no one remembers

by Michael E. Shea

The people of Mercy Street have held a secret for centuries, a secret lost even in their own minds. A millennia-old monstrosity hunts in the shadows of this grim neighborhood, using the locals who have lived there all their lives as its camouflage. This formless, shapeshifting horror mimics not a chest, or a cart, or a doorway, but an entire city street. Tendrils twist through cobblestone paths and into dwellings, connecting it to false cupboards, dressers, easy chairs, and water barrels. Hidden in plain sight, it watches and hunts.

The name of this horror lies inked in forgotten tomes or scrawled in blood upon crumbling walls of abandoned sewers: the Blackweald.

The Blackweald hunts slowly, using thralls to bait prey until they fall into its acidic maw, striking out with sticky tendrils and burning away the skin of its victims. As its prey slowly disintegrates, so too do the memories of their very existence in the minds of their friends, loved ones, and anyone they've ever met. Thus none know of nor remember the Blackweald's existence except for the few strange and disconnected physical clues left behind in its wake.

This article describes the Blackweald, a block-sized mimic hiding its existence both physically and in the erased minds of those its victims leave behind. This creature is a suitable threat for four or five 7th level characters.

The Blackweald

This huge mimic has lived in the shadows of Mercy Street for centuries. The Blackweald's fleshy roots and tendrils snake through the neighborhood, piercing the stone of the street and buildings and forming individual, smaller Blackweald mimics. The bulk of its body fills out a side street known as Greywater Alley where it lures would-be victims into its viscid, burning grasp.

Restoring Memories. As the GM, you can decide if memories erased by the Blackweald can be restored by magical means, such as a *greater restoration* spell, or if only the *wish* spell could reverse these effects.

Homage to the False Hydra

The concept behind the Blackweald's ability to eat the memories of its victims comes from a monstrous concept called the False Hydra, which was originally written by Arnold Kemp on the blog Goblin Punch. The concept of a memory-eating monster has drawn much attention among homebrew RPG GMs since its original description. This article seeks to incorporate these concepts and offer flexibility for the level of gaslighting the GM is willing to inflict upon their players (with their permission, of course).

Blackweald Mimics

The Blackweald's tendrils weave underneath the cobblestones and through the floors of Mercy Street, connecting to a network of smaller Blackweald mimics throughout the neighborhood. Many of the buildings on Mercy Street have at least one Blackweald mimic lurking within them, masquerading as everyday objects like dressers, desks, chairs, and barrels. The Blackweald rarely uses these mimics to attack or devour its victims; instead, they serve a far more strategic purpose. Through its offshoots, the Blackweald charms residents of Mercy Street, who in turn work to hide the Blackweald's existence and lure visitors to the Ramhorn Inn or Greywater Alley, where the Blackweald devours them.

Although the Blackweald mimics don't seek to consume victims, they defend themselves if they're discovered or attacked. When a Blackweald mimic is killed, or the tendril connecting it to the Blackweald is severed, the remaining tendril withdraws through the floor and disappears, and the detached mimic dies after 1 minute, dissolving into a puddle of organic goo. In addition, if the Blackweald is slain, any connected mimics harmlessly thrash around for 1 minute, at which point they die and turn into puddles of organic goo.



The Blackweald

Gargantuan Monstrosity (Shapechanger), Neutral Evil

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)
Hit Points 245 (14d20 + 98)
Speed 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	8 (-1)	24 (+7)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	7 (-2)

Skills Deception +6, Perception +12, Stealth +3
Saving Throws Con +11, Wis +8, Cha +2
Damage Immunities acid
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, prone, stunned
Senses blindsight 100 ft., passive Perception 22
Languages all, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +4

Shapechanger. The Blackweald can use its action to polymorph into an object of Gargantuan size or back into its true, amorphous form. Its statistics are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

Adhesive (Object Form Only). The Blackweald can choose to adhere to anything that touches it. A creature adhered to the Blackweald is also grappled by it (escape DC 16). Ability checks made to escape this grapple have disadvantage. A creature that starts their turn grappled by the Blackweald takes 10 (3d6) acid damage.

Connected Telepathy. The Blackweald can magically communicate with any Blackweald mimic to which it is physically connected.

Memory Devourer. When the Blackweald kills a creature, all other creatures (living or dead) lose their memories of the deceased creature and no longer recall that the creature existed.

False Appearance (Object Form Only). While the Blackweald remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from an ordinary city street (or whatever object it chooses to imitate).

Grappler. The Blackweald has advantage on attack rolls against any creature grappled by it.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the Blackweald fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Massive Size. The Blackweald is a citystreet–sized creature up to 50 feet wide and 100 feet long. Other creatures can occupy the Blackweald's space. The Blackweald doesn't suffer disadvantage on ranged attacks for being within 5 feet of a hostile creature. Ceatures in its space suffer disadvantage on ranged attacks for being within 5 feet of the Blackweald.

Opportunistic Attacker. The Blackweald can make an opportunity attack against any creature that moves 15 feet or more within the Blackweald's space or reach.

Actions

Multiattack. The Blackweald makes two Pseudopod attacks. It can replace one Pseudopod attack with a Spit Acid attack or a use of Engulf.

Pseudopod. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (3d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage and the target is subjected to the Blackweald's Adhesive trait.

Spit Acid. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 40/80 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (4d6) acid damage.

Engulf. The Blackweald targets one creature currently subjected to its Adhesive trait. The creature takes 14 (4d6) acid damage and must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is engulfed by the Blackweald. The engulfed creature can't breathe, is restrained, and takes 21 (6d6) acid damage at the start of each of the Blackweald's turns. An engulfed creature can try to escape by using an action to make a DC 16 Strength check. On a success, the creature escapes. The Blackweald can engulf up to three creatures at a time.

Blackweald Charm (3/Day). The Blackweald targets one creature it can see within 30 feet of it or any Blackweald mimic to which it is connected. The target must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be magically charmed by the Blackweald for 24 hours. While the target is charmed, the Blackweald can perceive through the target's senses and has a telepathic link with them as long as the creature is on the same plane of existence as the Blackweald. The Blackweald can use this telepathic link to issue commands to the target (no action required), which the target does their best to obey. Each time the creature takes damage, they can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on themself on a success. A *lesser restoration* spell or similar magic also removes the effect. A creature charmed this way loses all memories of the Blackweald even after the condition ends.

Legendary Actions

The Blackweald can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The Blackweald regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Attack. The Blackweald makes one Pseudopod or Spit Acid attack.

Blackweald Domination. The Blackweald targets one creature it can see within 60 feet of it. The target must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, the Blackweald forces the target to use their reaction, if available, to move up to their speed and make one weapon attack against a creature of the Blackweald's choice.

Spore Cloud (Costs 2 Actions). The Blackweald emits a blast of poisonous spores that fills the area containing the Blackweald and within 20 feet of it. The area within the spore cloud is heavily obscured. When a creature other than the Blackweald or its mimics starts their turn within the cloud or enters the area for the first time on a turn, they must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The spore cloud lasts for 10 minutes or until a strong wind disperses the cloud.

Blackweald Mimic

Medium Monstrosity (Shapechanger), Neutral Evil

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 58 (9d8 + 18)
Speed 15 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	8 (-1)

Skills Deception +3, Perception +8, Stealth +5
Saving Throws Con +4, Wis +6
Damage Immunities acid
Condition Immunities prone
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 18
Languages —
Challenge 3 (700 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Shapechanger. The Blackweald mimic can use its action to polymorph into an object or back into its true, amorphous form. Its statistics are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

Adhesive (Object Form Only). The Blackweald mimic adheres to anything that touches it. A Huge or smaller creature adhered to the mimic is also grappled by it (escape DC 13). Ability checks made to escape this grapple have disadvantage.

Blackweald Tendril. A thick fleshy tendril connects this mimic to the Blackweald. The mimic can't move more than 20 feet from the place where this tendril emerges from the larger Blackweald. The tendril has AC 12, 20 hit points, and immunity to acid damage. When this tendril is reduced to 0 hit points, the connected mimic loses hit points equal to half its hit point maximum and can move freely. The mimic dies 1 minute after its tendril is severed and turns into a puddle of organic goo.

False Appearance (Object Form Only). While the Blackweald mimic remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from an ordinary object.

Grappler. The Blackweald mimic has advantage on attack rolls against any creature grappled by it.

Limited Telepathy. The mimic can magically transmit simple messages and images to any creature within 30 feet of it that can understand a language. This form of telepathy doesn't allow the receiving creature to telepathically respond.

Actions

Multiattack. The Blackweald mimic makes two Pseudopod or Spit Acid attacks. It can replace one of the attacks with a Bite attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage plus 4 (1d8) acid damage.

Pseudopod. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage. If the Blackweald mimic is in object form, the target is subjected to its Adhesive trait.

Spit Acid. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 20/40 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) acid damage.

Blackweald Charm (3/Day). The Blackweald mimic targets one creature it can see within 30 feet of it. The target must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be magically charmed by the Blackweald for 24 hours. While the target is charmed, the Blackweald can perceive through the target's senses and has a telepathic link with them as long as the creature is on the same plane of existence as the Blackweald. The Blackweald can use this telepathic link to issue commands to the target (no action required), which the target does their best to obey. Each time the creature takes damage, they can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on themself on a success. A *lesser restoration* spell or similar magic also removes the effect. A creature charmed this way loses all memories of the Blackweald even after the condition ends.

Varying Blackweald Mimics

At your discretion, you can give any Blackweald mimic one of the following features to make repeated encounters with the mimics a little more interesting:

- The Blackweald mimic wears a suit of chainmail and clumsily carries a shield, giving it an AC of 18.
- The Blackweald mimic grows to a hulking size, giving it twice as many hit points (for a total of 116 hp) and dealing 16 (3d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage with its pseudopod attack.
- The Blackweald mimic can use a bonus action to hurl a nearby piece of furniture (that might be another mimic!) at a target within 30 feet. This ranged weapon attack has +3 bonus to hit; on a hit, the target takes 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage and is knocked prone.
- The Blackweald mimic can use a bonus action to attack with an improvised weapon. This melee weapon attack has a reach of 5 feet, a +3 bonus to hit, and deals 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage (depending on the object) on a hit.

Adding one of these extra features increases the mimic's challenge rating to 4 (1,100 XP).

Blackweald Tactics

Though it often uses Greywater Alley as its primary lair, the Blackweald can move, albeit slowly, to another location. Hollowed-out buildings reveal the previous lairs of the enormous abomination, and—if it needs to literally lay low—it sometimes even retreats into the abandoned sewer chambers throughout the neighborhood. Through centuries of practice, the Blackweald has learned to be cunning and patient when selecting its prey. Its connected mimics charm the citizens of Mercy Street so the Blackweald can observe visitors through their eyes, evaluating prospective prey to choose those who can vanish from existence without leaving a trace. While many visitors safely leave Mercy Street with little more than a vague impression of oddness, those selected by the Blackweald are lured to their deaths.

When the Blackweald finally attacks its prey, it grasps victims with its acidic pseudopods, burning the skin from their bodies until only bones remain. The disintegrating bones of hundreds of former victims, some centuries old, litter its massive, bloated body. In combat, the Blackweald spits large gobs of acid at distant enemies and defends itself from ranged attacks with its Spore Cloud legendary action. It also uses its Blackweald Domination legendary action to target creatures with strong weapon attacks and force them to attack their ranged allies.

Mercy Street

Mercy Street, the longtime lair of the Blackweald, can be dropped into any medium or large city. Tucked away from the hustle and bustle of the city's thoroughfares, the people of Mercy Street enjoy a quieter life. The buildings along Mercy Street are old and weathered; they lean hither and thither, shored up with newer walls or thick wooden braces. A handful of shops are clustered at the end of the street closer to the rest of the city, while residences and merchants catering to the locals line the road further in.

An ancient sewer system keeps the streets relatively clean with yawning, rusted grates sunken into the curbs on each block. No one recalls anyone attempting to maintain the Mercy Street sewers, and no city workers ever enter them—at least not any workers that the residents can remember. If asked, the people of Mercy Street don't recommend entering the sewers, since the system seems to work fine.

In truth, the sewers serve as the Blackweald's conduits to the buildings and streets above. Its thick, fleshy tendrils connect to mimics that reside in many of the buildings of Mercy Street. If the characters travel into these sewers, they might find these tendrils; if the tendrils are severed, four **Blackweald mimics** emerge from the nearby sewers and attack the characters.

The Blackweald lairs at the far end of Mercy Street, in Greywater Alley. The locals find themselves avoiding the alley completely, unless summoned by the Blackweald while under its control. Instead, the alley serves as the ancient creature's main lair from which its tendrils weave through the neighborhood. It is in this alley that the Blackweald ambushes any group foolish enough to hunt it.

Mercy Street Locations

The following descriptions outline a handful of locations found along Mercy Street.

Greywater Alley

Greywater Alley lies between two rows of dilapidated two-story apartments. While the Blackweald typically uses the Ramhorn Inn to devour visitors to Mercy Street, it brings more dangerous prey that put up more of a fight to its main lair in Greywater Alley.

The alley itself is a dead end. Doors leading into the rears of nearby buildings don't open. Smaller alleyways filled with trash and rubble likewise block off escape. A single sewer grate at the end of the block leads down into the sewers beneath Mercy Street. Victims led to Greywater Alley find that the entire block animates around them, smashing, engulfing, and drawing them in to be devoured by the Blackweald.

Heartlace's Handmades

Exemplifying Mercy Street's preference towards stores offering mostly useless products (thanks to the influence of the Blackweald, which wants to ensure the street never becomes ***too*** popular and thus risk its exposure), Heartlace's Handmades is a high-end dress shop for dolls. The storefront displays a number of dolls arranged in a wedding procession, each with exquisite handcrafted garments. Inside the store, customers find a dozen tiny mannequins each sporting dusty yet ornate clothes created by Corva Heartlace, the store's human proprietor and seamstress. Corva can often be found behind her counter sewing a small suit that must take months to complete. The prices of the dresses start at 500 gp. If asked about the high prices, Corva explains that she caters to exclusive clientele who understand the quality of her wares.

Two full-sized undressed mannequins in the back corners of the room are actually **Blackweald mimics**; they're both telepathically connected to Corva and physically connected to the Blackweald through tendrils running underneath the store's floorboards. The Blackweald uses these mimics to study Corva's customers.

Kravaul's Carvings

This hole-in-the-wall shop has a creaky, off-center door flanked by two pillars made from tree trunks, carved into the likenesses of a humanoid male and female with smooth faces and tentacles for arms. Numerous rough wood carvings of tentacled humanoids adorn every surface. Their creator, a burly half-orc woman named Kravaul Oakbinder, models these creatures on images from her dreams, visions courtesy of the telepathic influence of the Blackweald. Two tall wooden carvings of a human queen and king sitting in the back corners of the shop have no tentacled appendages and are, in fact, **Blackweald mimics** connected to the Blackweald. If the characters ask Kravaul about them, she waves the characters off and says she doesn't remember when she carved them. Kravaul's strange carvings cost 25 gp for small handheld pieces and up to 500 gp for the tall, free-standing statues.



Ramhorn Inn and Tavern

At the T-intersection of Mercy Street and the narrower Eelrun Avenue stands the Ramhorn Inn and Tavern. This two-story building leans heavily to the left, and thick wooden braces keep it from collapsing. The main room holds a grimy bar and four tables, as well as two regulars who linger in the bar day and night. These two hooded figures sit at a back table, one continually rolling a set of dice while the other watches, sometimes pushing a 200-year-old coin across the table and sometimes taking it back. These are the Blackweald's early attempts at creating mimics of living beings. If poked, prodded, or otherwise investigated, the **Blackweald mimics** attack, though no one else in the tavern appears to pay attention or simply falls asleep, as directed by the Blackweald's telepathic commands.

Rose Felder, the Ramhorn's proprietor, is a hunched, elderly human **commoner** who has lived on Mercy Street her whole life. Her husband, Castigan, also a human **commoner**, cooks and cleans, serving food that is barely edible and yet raved about by the tavern's regular patrons. If confronted about the mimics residing at the back table, Rose is noncommittal, saying something along the lines of "I never did trust those two" and answering that she can't rightly recollect when they started staying here. In reality, the two mimics have been sitting at that table rolling the same set of dice for years.

The Blackweald often uses the Ramhorn Inn and Tavern to devour adventurers and other visitors to Mercy Street. Locals recommend the inn as a place for a warm meal and a soft bed for a reasonable price. Once the visitor enters the inn, the Blackweald studies its potential victims and, if it feels they'll be easily defeated, commands Rose and Castigan to hire the adventurers to deal with some overgrown rats in the cellar of the inn. A sewer grate in the bottom of the cellar, they explain, often brings nasty rats from the pipes below the city. When the adventurers go into the cellar, the door above slams shut and multiple crates and barrels in the cellar animate into **Blackweald mimics** that attempt to knock out the victims. Rose and Castigan then bring the unconscious prey to Greywater Alley so the Blackweald can eat. If the travelers aren't the adventurous type, Rose and Castigan try other ruses to get the victims into the cellar, such as mentioning a particularly wonderful wine they can't reach because of their bad knees and the cellar's rickety steps.

If confronted after such a ruse, Rose and Castigan claim innocence. They didn't know of any such creatures in the basement, thinking they heard only rats. Indeed, this is as much as they know. They believe the stories they tell.

Seppha's Spices

One of the shops catering to clientele outside of Mercy Street, Seppha's Spices deals in imported spices. Twice a year, an outside vendor delivers spices to Seppha Oakbrook, a middle-aged half-elf **commoner**, who mixes them, packages them up in small paper packages, and sells them for exorbitant prices. Seppha has a few wealthy patrons from the larger city who partake in her wares, but most citizens find her prices too steep. This never seems to bother Seppha, who may go days at a time without a single customer as she reads the same worn book from cover to cover, each time believing she reads it anew (the Blackweald's continual telepathic influence has damaged Seppha's memory).

The shop contains three large counters with racks of paper-wrapped spices, each with a hand-drawn diagram of the leaf or mineral from which the spice is derived and a clever name such as Baleroot's Blessing, Pinchen's Puffpowder, or Salt of the Underearth. An empty rack in the corner of the store, chipped and abandoned, is actually a **Blackweald mimic** that keeps Seppha charmed so the Blackwealdcan examine potential visitors to Mercy Street through her eyes.

Temple to Our Lady of Mercy

This rundown, single-story temple of rough stone sits between two taller three-story apartments. Inside, two sets of rotted-wooden pews sit before an altar with a headless statue of a female goddess, her arms outstretched to both sides. Four people often reside here, heads down in prayer and whispering. Three of the parishioners are Humanoid **cultists** of various races and genders. The fourth is a cloaked and hooded **Blackweald mimic**, sitting on a pew that's actually another mimic.

Up close, the supposed humanoid looks half-formed, with a drooping face like melted wax. If questioned, the remaining parishioners say they never paid that "person" much mind and can't say when they may have come here. The pew and false parishioner mimics are both connected to the Blackweald through a tendril that rises through the stone floor of the temple. If attacked, the Blackweald mimics defend themselves—and are defended by the three cultists, who are charmed by the Blackweald. If the cultists survive the attack, they have no memory of the incident.

The temple is overseen by twin brothers Aval and Geryn Wintersong, human **cult fanatics** who claim to be priests. They are noncommittal if asked who they worship, saying that such questions are best held internally. They simply claim that their faith protects them: something out there loves them, and that's good enough for them.

Devourer of Memories

The Blackweald's ability to consume the entire existence of its prey has kept it alive for millennia. When it physically devours one of its victims, all memories of that creature disappear from those who once knew them. A wife of thirty years forgets she ever had a husband, and regulars at a bar forget the friend they drank with for two decades, and even a dog forgets its loyal master. However, only memories are devoured this way. Physical evidence such as clothing, travel bags, notes, and journals, remain, creating strange paradoxes for those investigating the missing memories.

As a GM running an adventure with the Blackweald, you choose how much or how little you want to reinforce this feature in your game. On one side, players could become frustrated as evidence seems to disappear all around them. They sometimes have a hard enough time keeping track of a story without missing memories! On the other hand, your players may love the idea of people, even their own characters, losing memories as the Blackweald devours NPCs they once knew, requiring that they piece together their remaining recollections to end the threat. As NPCs get devoured by the Blackweald off-screen, you may stop referencing NPCs the players once knew, feigning ignorance and questioning their own notes or memories of these NPCs and other events.

Mixing these in-world and out-of-game elements of mystery can turn this scenario into something unique. One creative GM who tested this scenario planned ahead of time for one of their players to leave and never come back during a break in the game, further adding to the strange meta-mystery of the Blackwead's destruction of memories.

Before including the Blackweald in your game, ensure your players are comfortable with their characters being gaslighted like this. Ensure you're using safety tools so players have a way to back out or step out of character if things get too strange or intense and you have a way to talk about the situation outside of the game. Consider implementing lines and veils, script change, or the X-Card system, for example. You may find the Safety Tool Guide maintained by Kienna Shaw and Lauren Bryant-Monk or Monte Cook Games's Consent in Gaming template useful for this topic.

If you choose to use this memory-eating feature of the Blackweald, it may progress as the characters explore the situation. Below is a description of one possible path: The Strange Case of Mary Bathins.

The Strange Case of Mary Bathins

To begin this scenario, an NPC named Mary Bathins hires the characters to find her sister, Margaret, who went missing on Mercy Street after traveling there to meet her secret lover. Mary asks the characters to meet her at the Ramhorn Inn—but when they arrive, Mary has no memory of her sister. She has no sister, she insists. (Of course, the Blackweald has devoured Margaret, and thus all memory of her has faded.) Mary remembers meeting the characters but doesn't recall why she hired them. No matter what the characters say, she has no memory of her sister and builds false stories to fill in the blanks in her head.

As the characters ponder this and begin to investigate, the players may ask you, the GM, question about Mary after their conversation with her. When they do so after leaving the Ramhorn Inn, you should ask the players to whom they are referring. The characters have never met Mary before. Maybe they find notes in a quest journal about Mary and a missing sister Margaret with notes on her conversations with other NPCs around the street, but their characters have no memory of this whatsoever. Suggest the characters explore other locations in the town, or drop written clues that lead them to explore more of the street. If the players get frustrated or begin to lose the hook, one character can come across a note in their pocket that clearly describes a woman named Mary and her missing sister Margaret, but the characters have no memories of the experience. Asking around at the Ramhorn Inn reveals that no one there knows of Mary or Margaret.

If the party takes a long rest during their investigation, the characters wake up to find an entire extra set of adventurer's gear along with their own. Looking through it, they find the journal of an additional party member with a name, a background, and relationships to the characters. The journal describes the adventurer's plan to take a quick look on their own down in the cellars of the Ramhorn Inn to see if they could learn more about these disappearances. The players won't remember this extra party member, nor do the characters, but clearly they had one. If they follow the clues in the journal, the characters wind up in the Ramhorn Inn or in Greywater Alley where they face the Blackweald.

GM Advice

Keep in mind that the players need to have enough information to conduct an actual investigation. Even without their memories, physical evidence continues to give them clues. Journals left behind by those devoured. Notes scrawled on walls. The name "Blackweald" painted in a room no one has supposedly entered in decades. While the Blackweald removes memories of its victims and can see through the eyes of those it has charmed, it can't see everywhere and can't remove all evidence of its existence.

You can also run this concept with a lighter hand, avoiding the concepts of player characters and out-of-town NPCs forgetting their victims and instead limit that forgetfulness to only affect the citizens of Mercy Street. This makes the whole encounter with the Blackweald follow a more traditional monster hunt. Use the Blackweald however you think it best fits your interest and that of your group.

Recovering Memories

As the GM, you determine the resolution of the characters' and NPCs' memory loss. It may be that killing the Blackweald restores all the memories the creature destroyed, or that a *greater restoration* spell or similar magic can restore an individual person's memories. You could also decide that a quest is in order or that there simply is no way to recover what the Blackweald consumed. If their memories aren't restored, NPCs might notice the gaps in their memories, but they also might patch the holes with invented recollections of other events. Collectively, the residents of Mercy Street may build stories of common problems to explain the aftermath of their horrific experience with the Blackweald. Or, you can decide that the locals are able to piece together what happened from the remaining clues, or that their memories are restored when the Blackweald's dies. Then again, it's also possible that every memory of the Blackweald also disappear into nothingness once the monster is slain, forever forgotten in the depths of Mercy Street.





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Issue 17 ✦ June 2022

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Location, location, location—one of the many pieces of advice that sit in the intersection of the real estate investment and TTRPG session-planning Venn diagram. An adventure's setting is just as important as its villains, NPCs, and MacGuffins. This issue's articles contain some incredible adventure locations. Jon Aldric's underground city of oozes drips with potential in "Slopengrimer's Guide to Visco City," Leon Barillaro returns with an unstable, treasure-filled maze of a dragon's lair in "Unorthodox Win Conditions," and Amber Litke and Sadie Lowry bring you god-carved chambers that test the humility of heroes in "Divine Trials: Glory of the Sun."

While classic locations, such as a haunted house, an ogre's cave, or a cloud giant's flying castle, are all worthy adventure sites, you can make a location more memorable by drilling down into the specifics and examining what makes this place different from others like it.

First, a location's history can change it from forgettable and generic into a unique backdrop. You don't need more than a paragraph of background information for an area, and only stuff that could be uncovered by the player characters. That haunted mansion is infinitely more interesting if it was built atop a necromancer's laboratory, allowing the mage to conceal wicked experiments performed on travelers no one would miss. That was decades ago, and the necromancer has long since left town. Their experiments remain.

Second, consider the creatures inside. Identifying what makes them unique not only distinguishes the denizens of this place from others of their ilk, but also determines how they defend and decorate their home and what treasures they hide within it. An ogre's cave becomes a unique point of interest if the ogre inside loves butterflies. That's why the ogre cut a deal with a druid, who cultivates flowering plants that attract the colorful insects. In exchange, the ogre stalks the region outside the cave, devouring lumberjacks and miners. The magic flowering vines within the cave choke, entangle, and trip intruders, and swarms of butterflies fluttering throughout the complex serve as an early warning system if disturbed. After all, foolish thieves sometimes try to steal the rare silk-spinning caterpillars the ogre keeps.

Finally, you can add details to a location just because they make it cool and memorable. It helps keep verisimilitude to justify those details, but you can do that after you've created them. Many cloud giants fly throughout the world in enormous castles made of cloudstuff. That in itself is pretty remarkable, but it's also a consistent part of giant lore. Folks commonly run into more than one cloud castle during their time in the hobby. Heck, three official adventures for the game feature a flying cloud giant castle!

What if the castle were made of rumbling storm clouds? It would be a deep, dark gray instead of white, and the giants that lived within could hurl projectiles made of the cloudstuff that deal thunder and lightning damage. The castle might spawn storm elemental guardians and have natural traps that deal thunder and lightning damage. Maybe it can even unleash acid rain on unsuspecting villages below! (We might need to write an *ARCADIA* article about this location.) Now that we know what makes it cool, we can ask ourselves, "Why is this castle made of storm clouds?" Maybe the cloud giant family within has a bit of storm giant ancestry, perhaps they worship a deity of thunder who gave them the castle, or maybe the giant's leader is a brilliant wizard who learned to harness the weather to build a more defensible castle for conquering the land! When you make an adventure location, consider its history, denizens, and details to turn the run-of-the-mill into memorable.

I want to end this letter with a bit of a personal note, because it is my last letter for *ARCADIA*. I didn't want to write a long goodbye, because I'll still be working at MCDM as the Lead Game Designer and you'll still be reading articles I commissioned and helped edit for the next several issues. However, I'm passing the Managing Editor pen to Hannah Rose, the newest MCDM employee and a longtime freelance *ARCADIA* editor. Hannah's been working on the magazine since *ARCADIA 1*, loves the work within its pages, and has great ideas about how to evolve it. She's got the experience, creativity, and wisdom to bring *ARCADIA* into its next phase. I can't wait to see what she creates with the team.

I honestly couldn't be more proud of the seventeen-issue run we've had so far. The authors, editors, artists, playtesters, and production folks who work on this magazine put in an enormous amount of love and care. It's an honor to create with them, as it is a pleasure and privilege to make stuff for you, the kind, thoughtful, and supportive MCDM community. This is just the beginning of great stuff for *ARCADIA*.

Ex animo,
James Introcaso
Managing Editor

SLOPENGRIMER'S GUIDE TO VISCO CITY

A glop-in setting to place beneath any bustling city

by Jon Aldric (5eTrash)

Content Warning: This article contains an allusion to oozes harming a cat.

My research into a rumored Fountain of Youth has taken a strange turn. As such, I've arranged a tour guide by the name of Moira Slopengrimer, spelunker and oozologist, to take you through the sewers and into the caverns below. She's deeply … passionate about all things that drip, slip, and ooze, and is well acquainted with the city's underbelly. Keep her close, but prioritize any evidence you can find on this fountain.

—Duke Ferdia Belire, King's Keeper of Legends

Hello! Moira Slopengrimer, here—but my friends call me the Ooze Hound. Ha! I know what they say about me—that I toil about in the sewers and gutters like a mucking rat. But this city has layers no one has seen! Like an onion … or a lasagna … or a layer cake if the bottom layer had a noxious smell and shouldn't be eaten. The byproducts of the city above have created a beautiful sewer society ecosystem. Follow me into the ancient sewer settlement of Visco City, and I'll show you! Oh … but I wouldn't wear those shoes….

So … you're looking for a Fountain of Youth, huh? Can't say I've heard of one but I'm happy to show you around. Maybe you're thinking of the hag who likes to brew shoddy beauty potions that make me break out?

I know the perfect grate to slip through. Careful! Right through here. Watch the rust. Don't worry, I'm not leading you down the sewers to bump you off and leave your corpses for the rats. You honestly don't look well-to-do enough for that. No, no. We just have a few miles of sewage to wade through. Then we'll be there. Here, have a clothespin for the smell.

Moira Slopengrimer

Moira Slopengrimer is a chaotic good halfling who loves and reveres Oozes (which she affectionately calls "oozimals"). She's spent the better part of a decade traversing the underbelly of the city, studying its inhabitants and mapping its labyrinthine layout. The halfling wears thick green waders and a broad leather bandolier that holds various vials. Dried ooze cakes her wild, knotted hair.

Moira is a pacifist. She doesn't fancy herself a brawler or believe she can assist in combat, though she can toss a vial of unpleasant Ooze extract in a pinch.

Moira Slopengrimer

Small Humanoid (Halfling), Chaotic Good

Armor Class 13 (leather armor)
Hit Points 27 (6d6 + 6)
Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)

Skills Nature +3, Perception +4, Survival +4
Damage Resistances acid, poison
Senses passive Perception 14
Languages Common, Druidic, Halfling
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Halfling Boldness. Moira has advantage on saving throws against poison and being frightened.

Halfling Nimbleness. Moira can move through the space of any creature larger than she is.

Actions

Throw Vial. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/40 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) acid damage.

Spellcasting. Moira casts one of the following spells, using Wisdom as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 12):

Cantrips (at will): *druidcraft*, *light*, *mending*

1st level (4 slots): *detect poison and disease, entangle, fog cloud, purify food and drink*

2nd level (3 slots): *augury* (as an action), *gust of wind*, *lesser restoration*



FOLLOW THE PHLEGMMINGS

See how the rats are swimming upstream in the sewage now? And see that gelatinous green rodent-thing there? The translucent one where you can see every bone? That's a **carnivorous phlegmming**. Visco City is dripping with them. Little green oozelings that drown small rodents, then absorb their skeletal syst—Watch it! Don't step on them! That's a quick way to die down here!

Phlegmmings are pack oozimals and look out for each other. They typically travel in herds of four to eight (though the largest pack I've seen had a couple dozen). Not only do they attack as a group, but if one of them gets hurt, another phlegmming will merge its body with the injured one. Like mushing two lumps of clay together, they converge into one larger organism. But it doesn't stop there! In my experiments, I've been able to get up to six of 'em to merge. It was the size of a mastiff! Though not as cute. As the phlegmmings get bigger, they go from precious to putrid pretty quickly. That, and they try to eat your cat. I had to end that experiment—rough clean-up.

Also, phlegmmings are a sign that larger Oozes are ahead. They form packs around black puddings or gelatinous cubes, though those Oozes never know they're the leader of anything. There's also Gooyneth down this way. She's got a few trained pretty well to fetch her ingredients and victims. Anygoo, let's soldier on. I think this is the sewer that leads to the city entrance….

Carnivorous Phlegmming

Tiny Ooze, Unaligned

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 11 (2d4 + 6)
Speed 35 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-2)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	3 (-4)	9 (-1)	7 (-2)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +5
Damage Resistances acid
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages —
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Pack Tactics. The phlegmming has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the phlegmming's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Slippery. The phlegmming can occupy another creature's space and vice versa.

Spider Climb. The phlegmming can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Actions

Multiattack (Large or Bigger Size Only). The phlegmming makes two Pseudopod attacks.

Pseudopod. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage. The damage increases based on the phlegmming's size.

Reactions

Converge. When the phlegmming sees a friendly phlegmming within 5 feet of them take damage that doesn't reduce that phlegmming to 0 hit points, they can leap to the injured phlegmming's aid and merge their body with the injured phlegmming, becoming one creature. The merged phlegmming's hit point maximum equals the combined total hit point maximum of both phlegmmings that merged, and their current hit points are equal to the combined current hit points of both phlegmmings that merged. The phlegmming's other statistics change based on their new hit point maximum as shown on the Phlegmming Growth table.

Phlegmming Growth

Hit Point Maximum	Size	AC	CR	Pseudopod Attack and Damage
16–22	Small	13	2	+6 to hit, 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage + 3 (1d6) acid damage
23–36	Medium	14	5	+7 to hit, 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage + 3 (1d6) acid damage
37–88	Large	16	8	+8 to hit, 13 (3d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage + 3 (1d6) acid damage
89–120	Huge	18	10	+9 to hit, 20 (5d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage + 7 (2d6) acid damage
121+	Gargantuan	20	14	+10 to hit, 27 (7d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage + 10 (3d6) acid damage

Gooyneth's Apothecary

Okay, so that was *not* the sewer that leads to the city entrance. Sorry you almost drowned in Fecal Falls. I'm pretty sure that sewage line flows straight from the capital. Get it? Because politicians are so full of…. You're right. Your cleric almost died. Not the time for jokes.

I'm sure we're on the right track now. Straight ahead should take us to the south city entrance. But I'd like to take a detour so we don't run into Gooyneth—the worst kind of hag!

Ever been up to that froufrou beautician's shop, Gooshe Goods? Funny story—that stunning, charismatic shop owner actually lives right in this here sewer pipe. All those creams, salves, lotions, and potions she brews up in her apothecary? Ach! She boils Oozes down to puddy and packages them up as beauty supplies. You don't want to know what she makes her candles out of.

She swindles all those high-paying customers! The worst part is that those products just eat your skin alive after a while. Lords and ladies get addicted to her creams and cosmetics. If they stop, they see how much it destroyed their skin and assume it's the ravages of old age and they better start using those creams again! I'd expose her, but you really don't want to be on the wrong side of a serumous hag. In any case, Gooyneth's potions are about as close to the Fountain of Youth as Fecal Falls is to a clean shower. Steer clear of her.

If you *do* tangle with her, know that she's never alone. Gooyneth always has a cauldron of black puddings in her apothecary. And if she's out and about, you can bet her army of eight carnivorous phlegmmings are scurrying through the cracks and crevices nearby.

Gooshe Goods

If I have to get past Gooyneth, I usually just compliment her glowing skin or tell her my aunt loves her products or some other lie. She'll never get on the wrong side of a customer. With enough flattery, she may even hand you a couple free samples (which you should promptly throw into the bottom of the deepest darkest well and never ever use).

Gooshe-Branded Face Mask

Potion, Uncommon

This luscious face mask is made of a careful balance of herbal ingredients and upcycled ichors whipped into an enriching emerald fluff. You can apply and wear this face mask during a long rest. At the end of the long rest, you feel confident and comfortable in your skin and have advantage on all Charisma (Persuasion) checks. Additionally, when a creature who can see you makes a Wisdom saving throw, you can use a reaction to subtract your Charisma modifier from their save. These benefits last until the end of your next long rest.

Curse. This face mask is cursed. After you finish a long rest while wearing the face mask without reapplying it, your skin becomes cracked and corroded. Your flesh burns and you become pained and irritable. While cursed in this way, you take 2d4 acid damage whenever you finish a long rest without reapplying the face mask. You are cursed until you are targeted by the *remove curse* spell, or until you finish five consecutive long rests without reapplying the mask.

Gooshe-Branded Detoxifying Tea

Potion, Uncommon

Here's the tea! Gooshe-Branded Detoxifying Tea cures what ails you. This thick and creamy tea is great for gut health and general vibrancy. When you use an action to drink this tea, you regain 2d6 hit points, and if you are poisoned, the condition ends. If the hit points you regain would exceed your hit point maximum, you gain the excess as temporary hit points that last for 1 hour.

Curse. When you drink this potion, you are magically polymorphed into a gray ooze for 6 hours, until targeted by the *remove curse* spell or similar magic, or until you are reduced to 0 hit points. Your gear melds into your ooze form. All your game statistics, except your hit points, are replaced by the statistics of the gray ooze, though you retain your alignment and personality. While in this form, you can't speak, cast spells, or take any other action that requires hands or speech. When you revert to your true form, you gain 2 levels of exhaustion from the strain of the rapid and unnatural transformation.

Serumous Hag

Medium Fey, Typically Neutral Evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 120 (16d8 + 48)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +6
Skills Arcana +4, Deception +5, Perception +5, Survival +5
Damage Immunities acid
Condition Immunities charmed
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Common, Primordial, Sylvan
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Algoomist. Oozes regard the hag as a friendly creature. An Ooze can't be convinced that the hag is their enemy, even if an Ooze is charmed by the hag's enemy.

Repulsive Flesh. When the hag is hit with a ranged weapon attack and isn't incapacitated, they can make a Constitution saving throw with a DC equal to the result of the attack roll (no action required). On a success, the hag takes no damage and redirects the attack at a creature of their choice that they can see within 60 feet of them. The redirected attack uses the original attack roll.

Shifting Visage. When a creature starts their turn within 10 feet of the hag, the creature must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened of the hag until the start of their next turn.

Actions

Multiattack. The hag makes two Claw attacks.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) slashing damage.

Spellcasting. The hag casts the following spells, requiring no material components and using Constitution as their spellcasting ability (DC 14):

At will: *charm person*, *disguise self*, *grease*

2/day each: *hypnotic pattern*, *mirror image*

Change Shape (1/Day). The hag magically polymorphs into a black pudding, and can remain in this form for up to 6 hours. The hag's equipment melds with their new form.

While in this new form, the hag retains their game statistics and ability to speak, but their AC, movement modes, Strength, and Dexterity are replaced by those of the black pudding, they lose the Repulsive Flesh trait, and they gain the special senses, proficiencies, traits, actions, and reactions of the black pudding.

The hag reverts to their true form if they die or if they use a bonus action to end the transformation early. If the hag reverts to their true form after using Split as a black pudding, the hag chooses which black pudding reverts to their true form. Any additional black puddings remain active and autonomous from the hag.



Bonus Actions

Apply Creams. The hag touches an Ooze within 5 feet of them and absorbs some of the Ooze into their body. The Ooze takes 7 (2d6) necrotic damage and the hag gains temporary hit points equal to the damage dealt. While the hag has temporary hit points from this feature, they deal an additional 9 (2d8) acid damage with their claws.

Downtown Visco City

We made it! See what I mean? I know it's dark down here, but this is quite the skyline for an underground sewer system. What drips before you is the almighty Visco City! Home to oozes, urchins, alchemists, and more! Part disused infrastructure, part unending cave system, Visco City boasts a population of almost four thousand residents and residues combined!

I see you holding your nose! Mucking terrestrials … c'mon, this place is amazing! Honestly a treasure trove. You're bound to find what you're looking for down here (not to mention a ton of stuff you probably lost up there). Down that cavity are mud baths that'll heal you right up. In that dripping cave over there? An orc who goes by Jellyna spins up some of the best inventions. She's got this one that's a stick with ooze stuck on the end. Jellyna calls it an ick stick … well, that's a bad example, but she's a genius, I'm telling you!

That pile of trash over there? That's … actually, that's just rubbish, but in the drain-pipe opening behind it, Marmalade Adams grows the most delicious junk onions! This place is a gold mine if you just keep your eyes peeled and your nose pinned.

Do me a favor. Go explore and whatnot, but if you see a spindly elf with red robes named Allermoore, tell him to slug off. Not to be trusted, that one. Why? He sniffs out terrestrials and tourists (they typically smell a lot better than the locals) and lures them off into the caves beyond the city. He makes grand promises of treasure and glory. Allermoore gets people killed going on about showing them some secret to everlasting life. Don't bother. It's a death trap.

Jellyna's Dregs

Jellyna's pretty sensitive about her goods, okay? Some of them seem kinda out there, so have an open mind. Oh, and keep your hands to yourself! There are gray oozes in just about every crevice and she's got them all trained to drown thieves before they even think about snagging her wares and slipping away.

She displays some of the more expensive stuff in gelatinous cubes. Not sure how she fetches the objects without losing all her skin, but it sure keeps thieving hands away from her goods.

Jellyna's Dregs Inventory

Bowl of commanding water elementals	3,000 gp
*Ick stick**	400 gp
Oil of slipperiness	200 gp
Potion of acid resistance	200 gp
*Slughilt**	250,000 gp
*Vial of slick**	100 gp
*Viscera's war drum**	2,000 gp
*Yelly beans**	150 gp

*Described in this article

Ick Stick

Weapon (Quarterstaff), Uncommon

One end of this quarterstaff is covered with the sticky slime of a gray ooze. When you make a melee attack with this weapon, you deal an additional 1d4 acid damage. As a bonus action, you can use the sticky end of the *ick stick* to grab an unattended Tiny object within 10 feet of you, which becomes attached to the stick until a creature removes it. If the object is nonmagical and made of metal, roll a d6. On an even number, the object corrodes and is damaged beyond use. The *ick stick* can hold one object in this way at a time.

Slughilt

Weapon (Mace), Legendary (Requires Attunement)

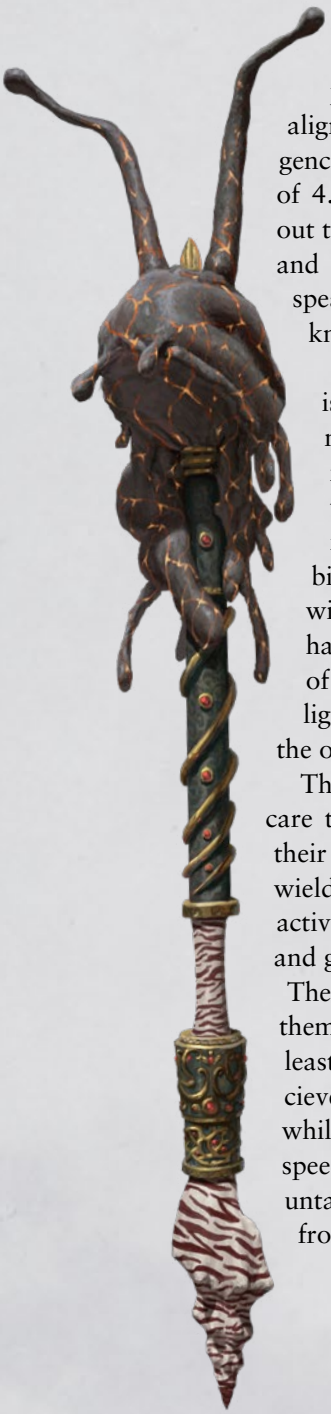
The handle of this mace is a small, slender crucible that resembles the hilt of a hammer or sword. At one end is a small opening that glows with fiery light. You can only attune to this item by spending a short or long rest feeding it precious metals or gems worth a total of 50 gp. At the promise of rich metals, a tiny slug of molten gold pokes their head out of the stone crucible and eats the materials, destroying them.

While attuned to the mace, you can speak a command word as a bonus action to make the slug pop their bulbous, fiery head out of the crucible, turning the weapon into a mace ready to take any foe head-on. While activated, the mace sheds a bright golden light in a 10-foot radius and dim light for an additional10 feet. You can repeat the command word as a bonus action to have the slug pull their head back into the hilt.

You gain a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with *slughilt*. When you use the mace to attack a creature wearing metal armor, wielding a metal weapon, or made

of metal, you score a critical hit on a roll of 19 or 20. When you score a critical hit against a creature with the mace, choose one of the following effects:

- The attack deals an additional 2d6 fire damage.
- If the target is made of metal, their hit point maximum is reduced by the damage dealt.
- If the target wears nonmagical metal armor, their armor is partially melted and takes a permanent and cumulative –1 penalty to the AC it offers. The armor is destroyed if the penalty reduces its AC to 10.
- If the target is wielding a nonmagical metal weapon, the weapon partially melts and takes a permanent and cumulative –1 penalty to damage rolls. If its penalty drops to –5, the weapon is destroyed.



Sentience. The slug's awareness pervades the mace, making it an unaligned sentient weapon with an Intelligence of 16, a Wisdom of 6, and Charisma of 4. *Slughilt* has hearing and darkvision out to a range of 120 feet, and it can speak and understand Common. It can also speak and understand every language you know while you're attuned to it.

Personality. The slug in this mace is the last of an ancient species of immortal magma slugs that feed on fine metals and gems. Over their long lifetime, they've been wielded by many fearsome warriors, happy to do the bidding of any creature that can keep up with their expensive appetite. The slug has a prodigious knowledge of the ways of the forge and has a +5 bonus to Intelligence (History) checks made to identify the origins of weapons.

The slug isn't socially graceful and doesn't care to be. Even while fully submerged in their crucible, they happily critique the wielder's plans and tactlessly suggest other activities that might garner precious metals and gems.

The slug demands that the wielder feed them precious metals and gems worth at least 50 gp every day. Should the slug recieve less, the weapon attempts to escape while the wielder is asleep, moving at a speed of 10 feet per hour. If the mace voluntarily moves more than 60 feet away from the wielder, the attunement ends.

Vial of Slick

Potion, Common

When you drink this potion, your flesh becomes glossy and slick for 1 hour. For the duration, you have advantage on ability checks and saving throws against being grappled and you can spend 5 feet of movement to escape from a grapple or nonmagical restraints.

Viscera's War Drum

Wondrous Item, Rare (Requires Attunement)

This ancient drum has engraved designs of ocean waves consuming villages and people. When its thick leather hide is struck, a deep boom resonates through the air. To attune to the drum, you must either be proficient with drums or spend a long rest attuning to it.

The drum has 6 charges and regains all expended charges each day at dawn. As an action, you can expend 1 charge and start playing a steady beat on the drum. The beat can be heard out to a range of 60 feet and you can continue to play the drum until the start of your next turn. While playing the drum this way, you must concentrate on the task as if you were concentrating on a spell and you must use both hands for the task. An Ooze that can hear the drum at the start of their turn must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the Ooze's movement becomes 0 until the start of your next turn.

Additionally, you can use an action to expend 3 charges and violently strike the drum. Each Ooze within 120 feet of you must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, taking 4d6 force damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. An Ooze that fails this save and has the Split reaction must use it, if they can, after taking this damage.

Yelly Beans

Wondrous Item, Common

Yelly beans are extracted from a rare species of gelatinous cube that screams when you attack them. As an action, you can spill these tiny, colorful beans from their pouch to cover a level square area up to 10 feet on a side. A creature moving across the covered area must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or step on the beans. When the beans are stepped on, they let out a shrill scream, creating an audible disturbance that can be heard from up to 300 feet away. In addition, the feet of the creature that stepped on the beans are coated in sticky squished beans and their walking speed is halved until they walk a total of 30 feet or spend an action scraping the yelly beans from their feet.

Marshal Melly

As a lady of science, I'm not one for skulduggery, but you should know that everyth—no, think about it—EV-ER-Y-THING from the topside finds its way down here. Lost down a drain or tossed into a bin, it all comes to Visco City. Just down that pipe, there's a goblin named Marshal Melly—he's got a whole heap of dirt on just about every duke, detective, and deacon that's ever stepped out of line. Not to mention a slew of long-lost tomes, journals, and ledgers from kingdoms past. It's all filed away in his patented Gooey Decimal System. Whether researching rivals or digging up details about this Fountain of Youth, he'll be your goblin.

Marshal's Muckrakery

The drainpipe entrance to Marshal's storefront leads to an enormous circular room, lined with rusted iron patchwork walls and filled with moldering wooden shelves, teetering against one another. Each shelf is stuffed with rusted pipes, labeled with chalk scribbles, that hold rolled-up parchments. Stalking the aisles of the library is Marshal Melly, a sickly, pale goblin on 9-foot-tall stilts with an array of reading glasses strung around his neck.

The stacks of his store are impossible for anyone else to navigate, but Marshal swears by his Gooey Decimal System and will jab anyone with a stilt if they put a parchment out of place. Although he drives a hard bargain—and is liable to kick out customers who lowball him—Marshal has an extensive collection of damning records and other blackmail material. While payment in gold is acceptable, Marshal is more interested in trading blackmail for blackmail if characters have some damning records of their own.

Marshal has a keen eye for forgeries. A character must succeed on a DC 18 Charisma (Deception) check to pass off fake documents as legitimate.

Ichors in the Grate Hall

Psst … psssssst … PSSST! Yes, hello, lovely to make your acquaintance. I'm High Priest Allermoore Dépit. I couldn't help but notice you'd lost your way. That delightful little Moira is very knowledgeable, but she has no sense of hospitality. I know she's quite enthusiastic about this detritus-covered slum, but I assure you that the secrets you seek lie deeper within these caverns. Come, come. It'll be but a spell.

I hear rumors that you've been sent down here in search of a treasure greater than any dumpster diver could deliver: a Fountain of Youth buried deep below the city. I might know of such a place, but it's not for the faint of heart. Are you sure you want to see? I cannot promise your safety, but if you follow my instructions you may be able to bottle a sip of everlasting life….

Visco City is sadly apathetic to any history beyond the trash it siphons from above. What lies deeper in these caves is much more engrossing—something the dregs of Visco are too cowardly to face—but not you! Ha, I could tell you wouldn't melt in fear like those others.

Keep up, keep up. This cave is getting dark. Let me light things up. Careful there! You just about stepped into a pool of black pudding! As we get deeper, the cave walls become pocked with them— not to mention there are nests of massive phlegmmings if you take the wrong turn.

Allermoore Dépit

A high elf with salt-and-pepper hair greased back into a wet ponytail, Allermoore Dépit is is a lawful evil **archmage** and self-proclaimed algoomist. Although he avoids getting involved in combat, his fine red velvet robes are stained and tainted from life in Visco City.

Allermoore worships the Regigoo, a monster within the Grate Hall that he's studied for nearly a century. He believes the great ooze will grant him immortality in thanks for leading adventurers to their doom, and he proudly shares his research with anyone who displays interest—including unsuspecting victims. Allermoore wears a *ring of psychic resistance* and carries two *vials of slick* as well as five empty vials.

The Grate Hall

Watch your step. Now just slip through this little opening here, and slide down this mudslide. Come, don't turn back now! We're on the precipice of something beautiful. Keep up! Here we are… would you look at that? Ever expect to find a castle of iron bars eight miles below a city? Tightly woven iron lattice, held together by thick bolts the size of a giant's fist! I call it the Grate Hall. Get it? Because it looks like it's made of … nevermind. Feels almost like a cage fit for royalty, does it not?

In actuality, that's exactly what it was. I've spent a lifetime studying this marvel and everything it holds. It's nearly ten thousand years old—yet it remains in pristine condition when it should have rusted into nothing. Can you feel the magic, the celestial brilliance, vibrating out from it? See the runes etched into every edge? This cage was crafted by gods, I believe. Gods so old that their names have been lost to dust. Why craft such a stronghold only to hide it where no mortal should find it? Let's step inside, and I'll show you a forgotten truth.

I wish I had a thousand lifetimes to study this place—but for now, I'll stretch this one as long as I can. Following the story in these pictograms, I've come to understand that the Grate Hall was the culmination of a great war amongst an ancient pantheon. Some sort of trickster god pit their peers against one another. After their duplicity was discovered, I believe that trickster was permanently imprisoned here, doomed to rot into obscurity until nothing of them was left.

But, gods do not decay from old age like you will or I might. They live on as long as their legends are shared. The unlucky few who have been forgotten to time, like this nameless trickster, leave only traces—shadows of their might—as the rest of them is lost.

Follow me to the main chamber. Careful not to step into those syrupy red pools on the ground. You'll only alert it to your presence sooner. It has a way of … sensing creatures coated in its ichor. And here, take these vials—one for each of you. If you manage to survive the next bit, you might be able to scrape up a bit of that "Fountain of Youth."

The God Blood

There! Do you see? That undulating titan of blood? I call them **the Regigoo**; the God Blood. A shadow of their former glory, the Regigoo is the blood that once flowed through the very heart of that forgotten trickster deity. I've spent years just watching them shape and reshape into thousands of half-complete forms, attempting fruitlessly to discover what they used to be. The Regigoo searches hopelessly for evidence of a name it can't remember.

Look, they've stopped moving! They're listening to us. They know we're here. The Regigoo wants to know if we know their name, if we can help them remember the god they spilled from. This… this is the key to immortality. The path to everlasting life and the true goal of algoomy. If I can feed the Regigoo enough minds, enough memories, soon enough they can string together a history, an anthropology that they can trace back to their own name!

Oh dear, I know this is sad, but I've already locked the door, and Regi craves your memories. Unless you can somehow materialize a name that has been eaten by time, I'm afraid you have nothing to offer them but your own lives. Oh well, ta-ta, farewell!

Naming or Bottling the God Blood

The Regigoo is hopelessly trying to remember the god they once were. There are a number of ways the party *might* be able to acquire the name of the fallen god. Deep in the bottom of Marshal's files in Marshal's Muckrakery, there may be great epics describing a war of the old gods, but they'd be heavily damaged and written in a long-lost language. Alternatively, there may be historians on the topside of the city who know fractions of history from long-lost cultures, but they'd only have faint ideas of the history this Regigoo craves.

Finding the God Blood's name requires equal measures of luck and cleverness. Should the characters utter the correct name to the god, the Regigoo forms themself into a crimson replica of that god and smiles upon the characters before dissolving into a thick red mist that slowly dissipates. The Ooze can grant any number of blessings upon the characters such as immortality, a permanent +3 increase to their Constitution scores, cures to otherwise incurable diseases, a single *wish spell*, or *vials of god blood* (described at the end of this article). The exact blessings are up to the GM and should match any history or personality they grant this forgotten god.

If freeing the god through naming isn't an option, the characters may be interested in bottling bits of the Regigoo as evidence of this "Fountain of Youth." Characters who want to bottle some of the Regigoo have to do it while the Ooze is living or within seconds of its death. A creature within 5 feet of the Regigoo can make a DC 20 Dexterity check with alchemist's supplies, filling a *vial of god blood* on a success. Alternatively, a creature can use an action to collect a *vial of god blood* after the Ooze dies. But they must work quickly, as the Regigoo dries up one round after their death, leaving little time to collect more than a vial or two.

The Regigoo

Huge Ooze, Chaotic Neutral

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 264 (16d12 + 160)
Speed 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	15 (+2)	30 (+10)	19 (+4)	22 (+6)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +16, Int +10, Wis +12
Skills Arcana +10, Insight +12, Religion +10, Survival +12, Intimidation +8
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, prone
Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities necrotic, psychic, radiant
Senses blindsight 120 ft. (blind beyond this distance), passive Perception 16
Languages understands Abyssal, Celestial, Infernal, Sylvan, and Primordial but can't speak
Challenge 18 (20,000 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +6

Coated in Ichor. When the Regigoo makes a Blood Bite attack or uses Erupt Viscera or their Diastole legendary action, other creatures can gain ichor points, representing how coated they are in the Regigoo's ichor. For every ichor point a creature has, their speed is reduced by 5 feet, and their Dexterity modifier is reduced by 1. A creature with 1 or 2 ichor points or a creature that can reach them can use an action to wipe the ichor from their body, reducing the creature's ichor points to 0.

If a creature has 3 or more ichor points, they are restrained. While restrained in this way, the creature is incapacitated and takes 7 (2d6) necrotic damage at the end of each of their turns. Another creature that can reach a creature with 3 or more ichor points can use an action to try to remove the ichor by making a DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check. On a successful check, the creature's ichor points are reduced to 0.

Immutable Form. The Regigoo is immune to any spell or effect that would alter their form.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the Regigoo fails a saving throw, they can choose to succeed instead.

Transfer Pain. Each time the Regigoo takes damage, they can redirect damage to any number of creatures with 3 or more ichor points (no action required). Each affected creature loses 9 (2d8) hit points. The damage the Regigoo takes is reduced by an amount equal to the total number of hit points lost by these creatures.

Actions

Blood Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 32 (4d12 + 6) necrotic damage and the target must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw, gaining 1 ichor point on a failed save.

Viscera Eruption. The Regigoo writhes and thrashes, splattering viscera nearby. Each creature within 30 feet of the Regigoo must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) necrotic damage and gaining 1 ichor point on a failed save, or half as much damage without gaining any ichor points on a successful one.

Legendary Actions

Regigoo can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Regigoo regains spent legendary actions at the start of their turn.

Blood Bite. The Regigoo makes a Blood Bite attack.

Diastole. The Regigoo pulses like an echoing heartbeat, expanding outward. Each creature within 60 feet of the Regigoo that isn't a Construct or Undead must make a DC 20 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is pulled up to 30 feet toward the Regigoo and falls prone. A creature that is pulled within 5 feet of Regigoogains 1 ichor point.

Systole. The Regigoo pulses like an echoing heartbeat, contracting inward. Each creature with at least 1 ichor point takes 10 (3d6) necrotic damage.

Lair Actions

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the Regigoo can take a lair action to cause one of the following magical effects. It can't use the same effect two rounds in a row.

- The Regigoo can puppeteer up to 3 creatures with 1 or more ichor point, forcing each one to move up to 30 feet in any direction the Regigoo chooses.
- The Regigoo seeps into the ground and reemerges up to 60 feet away in an unoccupied space. This movement doesn't provoke opportunity attacks.
- The Regigoo selects a creature within 120 feet of it with at least 2 ichor points. That creature's ichor score is reduced to 0, and the ichor slides off their body and becomes a black pudding that forms in a space within 5 feet of the creature. The pudding acts on initiative count 20 each round after the Regigoo uses their lair action.

Vial of God Blood

Potion, Legendary

When you drink this potion, you must make a DC 20 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, you are knocked unconscious, your current hit points are reduced by half, and the potion has no further effect. On a successful save, you permanently stop aging and you gain the following additional benefits for the next 30 days:

- Your Constitution score becomes 20, unless it is already higher.
- When you take radiant, necrotic, or psychic damage, you can reduce the damage taken by an amount equal to your Constitution modifier.
- When you fail a death saving throw, you can choose to succeed instead. Once you use this benefit, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.



UNORTHODOX WIN CONDITIONS

Encounters for Tables Where the Stories are Made Up and the Hit Points Don't Matter (As Much)

by Leon Barillaro

New and experienced GMs alike often struggle to keep combat encounters from becoming repetitive: see an enemy, deal damage, get the enemy's hit points to 0, rinse and repeat. One of the easiest ways to disrupt this formula is to subvert one or more of those steps. This article presents three encounters to refresh combat and keep players on their toes. In these scenarios, "get the enemy's hit points to 0" is inadvisable, counterintuitive to victory, and not the goal.

THE PUPPETEER

In this encounter for 1st-level characters, the party is attacked by the villagers of Stonepike, a small settlement. A bandit named Oblik controls these victims with the help of his latest theft, a dangerous magic item called the *many-stringed cross brace*. The villagers copy the bandit's movements exactly, making it difficult to tell who among the crowd is in control. If the characters want to stop Oblik without harming innocent people, they have to get more creative than fighting every threat.

BACKGROUND

Oblik is a hill dwarf bandit who waylaid the carriage of Akash and Nero, two human merchants. The pair carried a curious item: a magical cross brace of a marionette, with strings (but no puppet) attached. The cross brace allows the wielder to sync the movements of unwilling victims with their own. Oblik tied up the merchants, stashed them in the carriage, and drove the carriage to Stonepike to make some money.

Stonepike has six buildings to its name. Though small, it is a popular stop for travelers en route to larger settlements. The most interesting thing about it is its town square, where local farmers and traveling merchants alike show off their wares.

Oblik used the *many-stringed cross brace* to control everyone in the square. He has been directing his victims all day to gang up on unsuspecting travelers and steal their valuables, which he keeps inside the carriage with the merchants. Oblik figures he can get a full day or two of the grift in before releasing his victims and making off with the caravan full of stolen goods.

ARRIVING IN STONEPIKE

The characters might come to Stonepike for the reason most travelers do: it's a stop along the road to their ultimate destination. They might also respond to a report from another traveler who stopped by Stonepike but left when they noticed the townsfolk acting strangely. When the characters arrive, they find the place unnaturally still. Everyone has gathered at the town square, where something is very off.

TOWN SQUARE

Stonepike's town square is paved with stone and bordered on all sides by a pop-up market. Farmers, merchants, and tourists stand wordlessly around and in front of tables of wares, street food stalls, and other attractions. In the northwest corner sits a flashy, multicolored carriage with the horse still attached.



The townsfolk only move when prompted by the characters. Oblik puppets them to respond with a generic action, like a grunt or nod, or to turn away. He never speaks through them, because if one spoke, they'd all speak. It shouldn't take long for the characters to realize that everyone moving exactly the same. A character who interacts with a puppet can tell that their movements are stilted and strained, like they're being controlled.

Oblik waits for the right moment to spring his trap. He looks for a moment when the characters drop their guard, such as if they focus too much on a solitary puppet or get into a heated debate about what's going on. If the characters get suspicious about the townsfolk's strange behavior before the opportunity arises, or if they attempt to go into the carriage, Oblik launches the attack anyway.

RUNNING COMBAT

Oblik's goal isn't to kill the characters, but to restrain them and steal their valuables. He directs the commoners to grapple the characters and then use their various club-like implements (pots, pans, large vegetables) to knock them out.

The ten people in the town square are **commoners** of different ancestries, except for Oblik, who is a hill dwarf and uses the **bandit captain** stat block but with a walking speed of 25 feet. While under the effects of the *many-stringed cross brace*, the nine commoners act on Oblik's initiative count and use the same amount of movement as he does, each in a direction of Oblik's choice. When Oblik takes an action, bonus action, or reaction, the commoners do the same (or waste their action attempting it, if they don't have access to it). The following sections provide guidance on how to handle conflicts that may arise from this.

Instant Death?

If a character deals damage with a melee attack that would reduce an enemy creature to 0 hit points, they can choose to knock that creature out instead of killing them outright. Some GMs rule that the instant death rules override this, so dealing 8 damage to a commoner with 4 hit points kills them without giving the character a chance to knock them out. There are merits to allowing either rule to win out in this encounter. The instant death rule taking precedence could encourage your players to find more creative ways to identify and deal with Oblik without harming the commoners. Other players might want to have the option of knocking a commoner out. If you wanted to offer some kind of consequence for doing so, you could have any commoners who are physically harmed offer 1 gp as a reward instead of 3, because they need the rest to pay for a doctor to see to their newly acquired concussion.

Whichever you choose as the GM, make sure you tell your players before combat begins. Let them have all the facts before they make a decision!

Movement

Each commoner must move as far as Oblik does on his turn, though they can move in any direction he chooses. If this movement forces a commoner to collide with an obstacle like a wall or bench, the commoner stops there. If the commoner collides with another creature, each creature must succeed on a DC 11 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone.

Attack

If Oblik is trying to blend in with the group, he doesn't use Multiattack. Instead, he attacks with his scimitar, prompting the commoners to follow suit with their bludgeoning objects. When Oblik attacks, each commoner makes one melee attack against a target within 5 feet, ignoring direction (this could lead to commoners attacking each other if no other targets are within reach). The commoners' makeshift weapons behave like clubs for the purposes of attack and damage rolls.

Finding Oblik

Once the characters realize the townsfolk are being controlled, they can determine who is pulling the strings these clues and tactics:

- Oblik does more damage than the others and wields a scimitar, revealing his proficiency with martial weapons.
- Attacking Oblik could force him to use his Parry reaction, which reveals a unique prowess the commoners don't have.
- A character who succeeds on a DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check can tell that Oblik is feigning the blank stare of his puppets. His mask slips from time to time.
- A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices that Oblik moves just a hair sooner than the rest of the group.
- A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Charisma (Deception) check tricks Oblik into revealing himself.

Oblik Flees

If Oblik senses he can't win the fight, he creates a wall with the remaining victims under his control between the characters and himself, drops the cross brace, turns tail, and runs. His victims are freed, but they remain in formation, confused, for a minute until they regain their bearings. The victims are also freed if Oblik dies or is made to relinquish control of the cross brace.

Resolution

The characters can recover the magic cross brace from either Oblik's person or where he discarded it. If they investigate it, they find only two pieces of wood forming a cross—the strings have burned away from use (see the item's description below). No traces of magic can be found on the brace—it's now just two pieces of wood.

If all of the villagers survived the encounter, they welcome the characters with open arms and offer up whatever they have in thanks (see "Rewards" below). If fewer than half of the villagers are dead, the survivors are distraught but understand that "accidents" happen. If half or more of the villagers are dead, the remaining villagers are fearful of the characters and request that they leave immediately.

The Merchants

If Akash and Nero survive, they ask the characters to return the cross brace. If the characters oblige, Nero laments that the cross brace is broken, while Akash explains that it had strings and a magic about it before Oblik stole it. The merchants are happy to share how Oblik stole the item from them and offer the characters a ride in their carriage to their next destination, which is conveniently in the same direction they're headed.

Rewards

Including the merchants, there are a total of eleven victims in this encounter. The survivors each offer 3 (1d6) gp as thanks to the party, for a total of 38 (11d6) if all victims survive.

Future of the Cross Brace

Though the cross brace is broken, it can be repaired, which characters can learn after 3 weeks of researching it at a magical institution or by casting *legend lore* or similar magic. See the item's description below if the characters repair it.

Many-Stringed Cross Brace

Wondrous Item, Legendary (Requires Attunement)

This wooden cross brace has 1d12 strings attached to it but no puppet.

As an action, you can touch the cross brace to a living creature. That creature must make a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or become charmed by you for 8 hours or until you drop the brace. While charmed, the creature can't speak, move, or take actions unless you do. The creature's body mimics your own, using the same amount of movement as you and mirroring your actions, reactions, and speech as best it can. If you take an action, bonus action, or reaction that the affected creature doesn't have access to, that creature's action, bonus action, or reaction is wasted attempting to mimic you. An affected creature takes the Attack action when you do, but it cannot make an additional attack unless it has the Multiattack action or Extra Attack feature. During combat, affected creatures act on your initiative.

You can affect as many creatures at a time as the cross brace has strings. When the effect on a target ends, one string on the cross brace burns up. When the cross brace loses every string, it becomes a mundane cross of wood. You can spend an hour reattaching new strings, which can only be plucked from the instrument focus of a bard who has cast one thousand or more enchantment spells of 1st level or higher with it.

An Elf Named Roots

In this encounter for 5th-level characters, a true elf, a denizen of Arcadia, is pursued by the Delta Foundation, a cult disguised as a business. Once a fearsome warrior, this true elf was stripped of their magic and strength. To restore themself to their former glory, the true elf must complete a ritual at a shrine dedicated to Val, god of elves. However, the true elf needs an escort to the shrine—the cultists are in hot pursuit.

A Note on Arcadia

Arcadia is a realm of Val's creation, a land of perfect, natural chaos. His closest attendants, powerful demigods known as the true elves, followed him there from the Mundane World. There they spend their time basking in nature, creating art, and engaging in petty, useless arguments.

When adding this encounter to your setting, you can use any natural realm and its ruler in the place of Arcadia and Val. The Feywild and its denizens make a great substitute.

Background

Soil Displaced by the Stubborn Roots of Love's Rebellion is a true elf, a denizen of the realm of Arcadia. They tolerate the nickname Roots. Roots was sightseeing in the mortal realm when they accidentally stumbled into a Delta Foundation plot to destroy a nearby forest.

The Delta Foundation is an organization that worships at the altar of wealth. Their goal is to amass as much money as they can, caring little for who or what they destroy in the process. Their latest venture is decimating a nearby forest for its valuable lumber. Hidden inside this woodland is a forgotten stone shrine to Val, god of elves and ruler over Arcadia.

When Roots confronted the cult alone, they were captured and taken to the foundation's hallowed stronghold, where the cultists sapped the elf of their power. Roots used the last of their strength to escape, but the cult pursued them. The elf believes they can regain their power and destroy the cultists if they go to Val's shrine and ask for the god's intervention.

ELF IN DISTRESS

When the characters meet Roots, the elf looks no different from any other commoner: weak, fragile, and painfully mortal. Roots introduces themself as a true elf, a powerful warrior in the service of Val, the god of Arcadia. Though they are telling the truth, Roots can do nothing to prove this. Their powers have been completely stripped away.

Roots can encounter the characters anywhere a quest-giving NPC might appear, such as a town, a tavern, or on the side of the road. To further drive home the idea that Roots is in danger, the characters might find the elf harried by **bandits** who work for the Delta Foundation.

When the characters first encounter Roots, the true elf asks that the adventurers escort them to Val's shrine in the woods so they can perform a ritual, restore themselves to full strength, and wipe out the cult that threatens the forest. Though Roots can't prove who they are, they promise that once they return to full strength, the characters can call on them in a future battle.

ROLEPLAYING ROOTS

Roots is enamored by mortal society in much the same way an adult loves to get art from a toddler. They see it as a very nice idea, but useless, short-lived, and unsustainable. After all, nature will wipe it away in time. They find beauty instead in the mortals who made it. Roots has no concept of how long mortal lives last and believes that the time the characters spend helping them constitutes the bulk of their lives. They are immensely grateful and take every possible opportunity to compliment the characters on their willingness to devote themselves to the cause. Roots introduces themself with their full name (Soil Displaced by the Stubborn Roots of Love's Rebellion). If the characters ask about a nickname, they passive-aggressively choose Roots ("I suppose if it's too much of an inconvenience for you, I can tolerate the name Roots"). It's clear by their tone that they much prefer their full name, however, and any character who uses it for the whole encounter earns their eternal favor.*

*The author sacrificed Roots's eternal favor for the sake of word count.

SURVIVAL IN THE SHRINE

A square stone structure, the shrine to Val, is losing its battle with nature deep in the forest's heart. Plants grow up the sides of the building and overrun it. Birds and tiny mammals make their nests in small holes carved into the walls. When the characters arrive, Roots wastes no time taking in the majestic site, impatient to regain their power. When characters have entered the shrine, read or paraphrase:

> The shrine is a square stone structure with two doorless entrances and high ceilings. Vines wind their way up several stone columns that hold up the roof. Light filters in from a skylight in the center that sits over the shrine's inner square: a lowered platform covered in grass, inside of which sits a stone statue of an imposing elven figure. Long green vines grow out of the stone elf's scalp like hair, and their body is covered in moss.

VAL, NATURE, AND SHRINES

Val and the denizens of Arcadia dislike when man-made structures interfere in the affairs of nature, but they love when nature interferes with man-made structures. Those in the Mundane World who worship Val often actively assist nature in reclaiming the very shrines they themselves have built. They cultivate plants on top of their shrines and statues, scattering moss spores or the seeds of a flowering mint plant over them. Most Arcadians think this dedication is pretty funny—the years of work mortals put in pass by in moments for them.

If asked, Roots can tell the characters about Val. When the characters are ready for Roots to begin the ritual, the elf moves next to the statue. No sooner do they approach than the cry of dogs comes from outside. The Delta Foundation has arrived, and they have the shrine surrounded. Two **cult fanatics** and two **death dogs** enter, one cultist and one dog for each doorway.

Roots asks the characters to defend them while they complete their ritual. If the characters can hang on for "less than a minute," they'll be able to handle all the cultists. Roots uses the **commoner** stat block with the following changes:

- Roots has 25 hit points.
- Roots's Wisdom is 18 (+4), and their Charisma is 15 (+2).



Roots's Ritual

Roots must concentrate for 3 rounds by sitting in front of the statue and using their action to pray. If Roots takes damage and loses concentration (as if concentrating on a spell), their next turn doesn't count toward incrementing the total number of rounds. Roots begins concentrating again on their next turn and picks up where they left off in the ritual. At the end of Roots's third turn concentrating, they transform (see "Completing the Ritual").

Enemies Everywhere

On initiative count 20, new creatures enter the building from the north and south doors. Choose or roll on the Shrine Enemies table to determine which enemies appear.

Shrine Enemies

d4	Enemies
1	One **ogre zombie** emerges from each entrance.
2	One **quasit** and one **death dog** emerge from each entrance.
3	Four **skeletons** emerge from each entrance.
4	One **hell hound** emerges from the north entrance.

The enemies prioritize attacking Roots and disrupting the ritual. If the characters make themselves an obstacle by physically or magically shielding Roots, the enemies turn their attention to that obstacle. If Roots reaches 0 hit points before they complete the ritual, they die. The cultists inside the shrine celebrate before cruelly turning their attention to the characters. No additional enemies arrive once Roots dies, as the cult considers the matter dealt with.

Completing the Ritual

If Roots completes the ritual, read the following:

> A beam of light flashes down from the sky, enveloping Roots and outlining their figure in a rainbow-colored glow. They rise, their feet lifting off the ground for a moment. Stems and tendrils wind down from the beam of light and wrap themselves around Roots's arms and legs, transforming them. When the light subsides, Roots touches back down on the ground, their skin protected by a thick layer of bark armor, their green hair transformed into arching willow branches. In their hand is a wooden spear, which sports a carving of a worm winding up the length.

When Roots completes their transformation, they plunge the wooden spear into the ground. A **purple worm** sprouts from the ground and climbs upward through the skylight to make quick work of the remaining enemies inside and outside of the shrine. The worm only damages the creatures it targets. When it is done, the worm burrows back into the ground, content with its meal.

Resolution

If Roots survived, they thank the characters for their service before giving them a token: a *willow tree seed*. Roots gives one additional seed to every character who exclusively used their full name for the duration of the encounter. Roots then disappears in a flash of light to return to Arcadia.

Willow Tree Seed

Wondrous Item, Rare

You can use an action to plant this seed and whisper a request to petition aid from Soil Displaced by the Stubborn Roots of Love's Rebellion. The seed disappears, and Roots immediately pops out of the ground and summons their magical worm to terrorize your enemies. You can select up to five creatures that you can see within 150 feet of you to make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. The worm charges into the targets, dealing 19 (3d6 + 9) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The worm and Roots then return to the ground from whence they came.

Treasure Run

In this encounter, 8th-level characters enter the lair of a disorganized blue dragon, Azuraxiom. His twisting tunnels are literally littered with the treasures of his hoard. Killing Azuraxiom is difficult because his underground abode is structurally unsound—any sudden movement or impact caused by dealing damage risks cave-ins.

Background

Azuraxiom is a blue dragon who lives in a system of underground tunnels he dug. He isn't a very tidy dragon. His hoard is spread out across his labyrinthine tunnels, much of it still lingering alongside the bones of the adventurers who dropped it playing Treasure Run.

Treasure Run is Azuraxiom's favorite game. When adventurers enter his lair, the dragon invites them to creep deeper into the tunnels, where he chases them around as they attempt to pick up as much treasure as they can carry. Azuraxiom almost always catches and eats adventurers before they can escape, then adds their treasure to his growing hoard.

Meet Strongarm

Jennifer "Strongarm" Starling, a retired human **veteran**, is the only adventurer to have ever made it out of a Treasure Run alive. The characters encounter her in a tavern, where she tells the story of her Treasure Run. She attributes her success to not being "too greedy." She ran until she found one piece of treasure and, instead of traveling farther into Azuraxiom's lair, escaped with her life (and a sapphire worth 500 gp). Jennifer gives out the location of Azuraxiom's lair to anyone who asks, but she warns that the dragon is no slouch.

Azuraxiom's Lair

Azuraxiom's lair is a series of cave tunnels that can be accessed only by a dried brick well on an abandoned farm. There is no ladder; characters must lower themselves 100 feet down using the well's bucket, which can hold up to five Medium creatures at a time. Once inside, Azuraxiom senses their presence.

The well lowers into what Azuraxiom considers a "safe zone" for players of his game: a room that is 10 feet wide and 20 feet long. A 10-foot entryway on the east side leads into the dragon's treasure tunnels proper. Azuraxiom doesn't attack characters until they cross that threshold. To drive this point home, he's had a white dotted line painted on that door frame.



The well lowers into a small, bare cavern. There is one entryway to the west, past which lies a series of tunnels. A white dotted line has been painted in the dirt, separating this room from the tunnels beyond. In the distance gleams something that looks shiny and considerably valuable. A voice like a low rumble echoes through the cave, saying, "It's always a pleasure to see new contestants try their luck. You're welcome to anything you find in these tunnels, provided you can make it out alive. The game begins once you cross that white line. It ends when you cross back into that room—or, more likely, when I eat you."

LAIR FEATURES

The tunnels have the following general features:

Dimensions. The passageways are 15 feet wide, large enough to accommodate Azuraxiom without making him squeeze. The ceilings are 15 feet high. The lair and the surface are separated by 85 feet of rock and earth.

Walls. The walls are made of stone and earth that Azuraxiom burrowed through himself.

Light. Though Azuraxiom has darkvision, he has graciously placed torches on the walls near treasure piles, which provide bright light in a 20-foot radius centered around each treasure pile and dim light for an additional 20 feet past that.

Tunnels. The tunnels are exceedingly fragile, and any sudden movement or impact has the potential to disturb them. When a creature deals more than 30 points of damage to a target that isn't lightning, necrotic, poison, or psychic in a turn, rocks fall from the ceiling onto the ground, and each creature within 10 feet of the target

must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or take 11 (2d10) bludgeoning damage.

When a creature deals more than 50 damage to a target in a turn, the tunnel also caves in, creating a 15-foot-high, 20-foot-wide, and 5-foot-thick wall within 5 feet of the target that completely divides the tunnel in two (the GM determines the exact placement). A creature caught in the cave-in must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking an additional 27 (5d10) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The creature is also moved to the closest unoccupied space of its choice after the wall forms. Creatures with burrow speeds (like Azuraxiom) or spells such as *stone shape* or *passwall* can easily bypass the walls created by cave-ins. A character can manually dig out of a cave-in in 1 hour. Each additional creature who helps reduces that time by half.

Traps. Azuraxiom has designed several traps to ensnare his opponents. They aren't well hidden, but characters are susceptible when too focused on other things. When a creature takes the Dash action or moves their full speed on a turn after Azuraxiom appears, they must roll on the Traps table to determine if they trigger a trap. Azuraxiom never triggers his own traps, though he is susceptible to their effects once triggered.

Traps

d20	Result
1-8	No effect.
9-11	A large net drops from the ceiling on top of you. Make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed check, you become restrained by the net. You can use an action to free yourself from the net.
12-14	Darts lined with poison shoot out from the walls at you. Make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the darts hit you, dealing 3 (1d6) poison damage, and you must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the end of your next turn.
15-16	What looked like a pile of junk on the floor is a cleverly placed disguise to mask the 10-foot-deep hole in the ground. The pit is a 10-foot-diameter circle centered on you. Any Large or smaller creature in the area, including you, must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or fall into the pit, taking 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage from the fall.
17-18	A jet-black substance shoots out onto the ground, covering a 15-foot-square area centered on you. Each creature who ends their turn in the area must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or fall prone.
19	A dragon statue made of stone sitting against the wall shoots a magical gas at you as you pass by. You must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or your speed is halved for 1d4 rounds.
20	You thought you saw a piece of treasure on the ground, but it was actually a hungry **mimic** that feeds on Azuraxiom's hoard. It enters initiative and pursues you. The mimic can be sated by feeding it items with a combined worth totaling 10 gp or more.

The Game

Treasure Run begins when the first character crosses the dotted line into the tunnels. Have the characters roll initiative, and run this encounter like a fight. Azuraxiom, an **adult blue dragon**, waits for an opportune moment to spring an attack on the characters, such as when they are distracted picking up treasure from one of his piles. He burrows up behind them to catch them off guard and primarily uses his Frightful Presence and Lightning Breath actions, as these don't cause structural damage to his tunnels. If Azuraxiom thinks he can take the hit, he uses his melee attack options to cause a cave-in and isolate a character or two.

Characters can find small deposits of treasure anywhere on the map where one appears. While most of it is junk, a character can use an action or bonus action to search the pile for something worthwhile. Roll on the Random Treasures table to determine what a character picks up when they do so. Only one treasure can be picked up at each deposit.

If characters cross the dotted line and return to the safe room, Azuraxiom considers himself bested. Characters have defeated him, and their reward is whatever they've hauled with them across that line.

Resolution

Azuraxiom plays by the rules. If characters outsmart him and escape safely behind the dotted line, he doesn't pursue them. Instead, he congratulates them and recommends they visit again, once he's acquired more treasure.

If the characters attempt to kill Azuraxiom, he fights them until he has 50 hit points remaining. Then he burrows upward and attempts to escape, ideally to find a new place to set up his game. If Azuraxiom dies or escapes, the characters can search the tunnels at their leisure and acquire items they might have missed.

Random Treasure

d20	Result
1	A recipe for the world's greatest potato soup
2	1d4 potions of *superior healing*
3	A ring of *lightning resistance*
4	Two vials of purple worm poison
5	A large moonstone worth 300 gp
6	A *spell scroll* of *hold monster*
7	Two ruby earrings worth 500 gp each
8	A bag full of crystal chess pieces worth 700 gp
9	Four blue spinels worth 500 gp each
10	1d6 *potions of heroism*
11	A gold bracelet set with topaz worth 1,000 gp
12	An adamantine shovel worth 1,500 gp
13	A certificate granting the holder minor noble status in the nearest kingdom, or your world's equivalent
14	A +2 *greataxe*
15	A *tome of clear thought*
16	A *cloak of arachnida*
17	A set of seven polyhedral dice, cut from sapphire, worth 2,000 gp total
18	A black sapphire worth 5,000 gp
19	A dagger with a handle inlaid with two diamonds, each worth 500 gp
20	A *wand of lightning bolts*

DIVINE TRIALS: GLORY OF THE SUN

A mythic trial to forge adventurers into heroes

by Sadie Lowry and Amber Litke

> Man has been thrown into the world. It had always made him think of Icarus and those other great tumblers, Ixion, Phaeton, Tantalus–all these jumpers without parachutes from a world of gods and heroes.
>
> –Cees Nooteboom, *Rituals*

Testing a hero's mettle is the foundation of heroic narrative. Through a process of refinement—testing honor, courage, perseverance, and other virtues—a hero's personal journey chips away at flaws like a sculptor until a hero is revealed.

Divine Trials is a series of adventures designed for four 5th-level characters to undertake three celestial trials, each fashioned by divine creators long ago. The sun trial is themed around pride and ambition, the moon trial around the dark flaws characters hide away, and the star trial around the bonds characters forge with each other. Great rewards await heroes who complete each trial, but the greater reward is their own growth toward embodying their own heroic ideals. *Glory of the Sun* is one of these divine trials. The moon trial and the star trial will appear in future issues of *ARCADIA*. Each article provides lore and story hooks, while the last article will provide suggestions for tying them all together. If you incorporate multiple trials into your campaign, the characters can undertake them in any order.

THE SUN TRIAL

Ambition is heightened under the sun. The heated throes of competition, the shining glory of recognition and triumph—it's no wonder that moments of victory are often depicted in splendorous light. But like Icarus, to have pride and ambition is to come too close to the sun, risking the fall for the chance to touch divinity. It was this tragedy, the fall from grace just as glory is within reach, that created the sun trial.

Millennia ago, a sun deity—one quiet, unassuming, and gentle—dared love a mortal hero. They had a passionate relationship, cut short when disaster struck. The hero vied one last time for glory, a reckless, ambitious decision that proved fatal.

For three days after, the sun was dark with grief.

In their agony, the deity created the sun trial and appointed the angel Apeilon (ah-PIE-lohn) to judge heroes who entered it. Pride had stolen heroes from the realm and their loved ones again and again. A divine arbiter, Apeilon was entrusted with honing these heroes, striking out this flawed ambition and pride that would be their downfall—and it is under Apeilon's scrutiny that the characters now fall.

As the GM, you can create new lore for the sun trial as you see fit. Apeilon (room 3) and Shyndyr (shin-DEER) (room 2) are Celestial agents that might tie into your campaign. The sun trial can be located anywhere, making it easy to drop in. It might appear as an art deco door of gleaming white and gold stones, which stands somewhere splendorous, such as an urban downtown, a cathedral, or a palace. Alternatively, the entrance could be somewhere full of riches, such as a bank or a dragon's lair, or somewhere where competition reigns, such as an arena or a fes-

tival. The sun trial's door always looks ornate and tempting, as if a great treasure trove lies within.

Adventure Hooks

You can incorporate the sun trial into your campaign with the following adventure hooks:

- After a display of tremendous hubris, the characters are visited by a divine agent who advises them to undertake the sun trial before their pride has dire consequences.
- Before sending the characters on a quest involving temptation (such as corruptive forces or a powerful artifact), an employer requires them to pass the sun trial.
- In the aftermath of a great triumph, the door to the sun trial appears before the characters—giving them a chance to temper their ambitions before their exploits become a cautionary tale for other prideful adventurers.



Trials of Character

The divine forces that forged the celestial trials won't be satisfied with every solution a so-called hero might use to pass the trials' challenges. Characters who circumnavigate (read: cheat) the trials by skipping them, such as with the *dimension door* spell, or by killing NPCs in non-combat challenges, find themselves redirected to the beginning of the challenge they sought to avoid with everything as it was when they first entered the room. This shouldn't dissuade creative and unconventional problem-solving—thinking outside the box is encouraged, but cheating has consequences.

If necessary, a disembodied divine voice tells heroes that their character is being tested, not their skullduggery, or gives a more direct warning. Killed NPCs don't need to remember their deaths, unless the GM wants to add a social consequence for violence, but killing a foe won't bring the characters any closer to success.

Heat Tokens

Throughout the sun trial, whenever a character shows great pride or ambition, they gain a heat token. These tokens are secret, gained individually and tracked by you as the GM and used in the trial's final encounter. While challenges give set amounts of heat tokens for certain actions, you can give additional tokens for actions that are arrogant, boastful, or prideful. For example, you can give characters who taunt NPCs or claim they are superior 1 heat token, characters who insult or look down on others 3 heat tokens, or characters who try to cheat a room for faster progress 5 heat tokens.

The trial broadcasts that there's a downside for these actions, but it also tempts the characters to do more

through treasure, praise, and glory. Use the various NPCs and scenarios to goad the characters into peacocking, though the antechamber warns of the cost.

At your discretion, the characters can take on visual indicators of the heat tokens they gain. For example, describe small motes of fiery light following them around, or golden symbols spiraling up their arms. It can be fun to show the players that something unusual is going on, especially when those tokens are used (and thus disappear from the character) in the final room, though it makes the trial's gimmick easier for them to figure out. Any remaining indicators disappear at the end of the trial.

You can also choose to track heat tokens for the group as a whole, to make things easier for you as the GM or to suit a cooperative party dynamic. The characters then gain and spend heat tokens from a shared pool.

CHAMBERS OF THE SUN

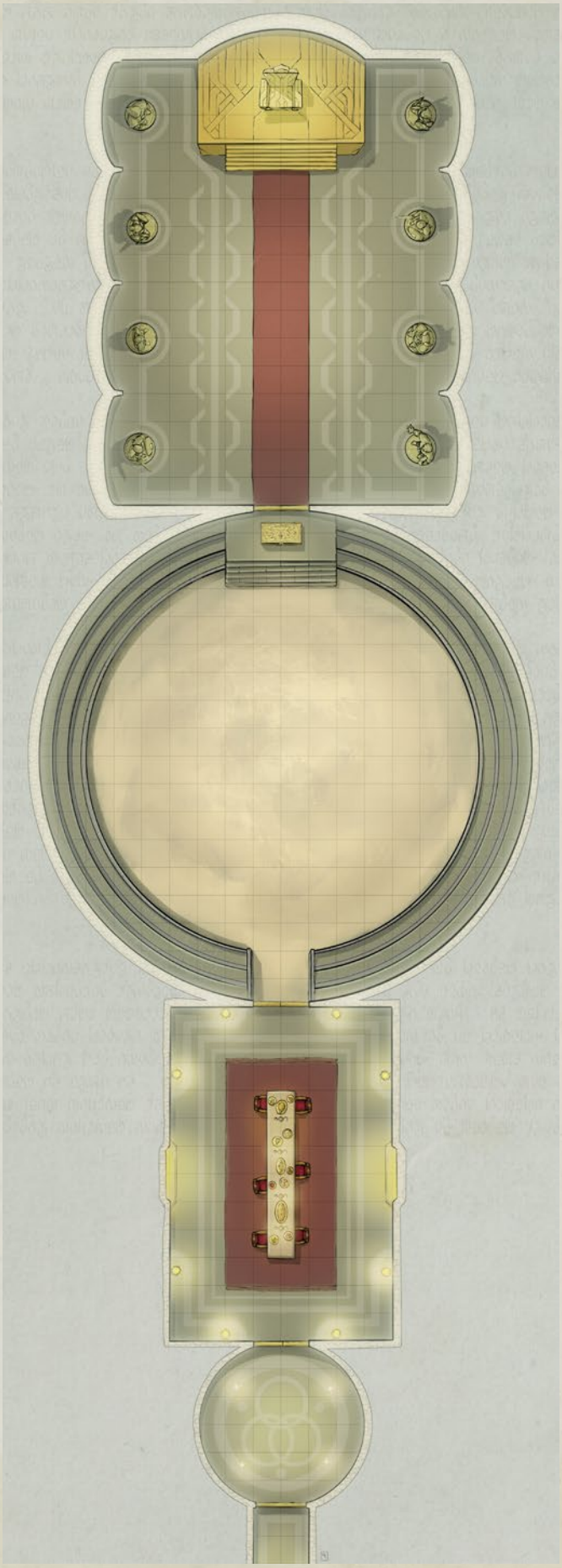
The following areas are shown on the map of the Sun Trial.

SOLAR ANTECHAMBER

When the characters enter the Solar Antechamber, read or paraphrase the following:

> The entrance smoothly slides closed, sealing you in a circular room. Bright gold light emanates from the stones all around, and smooth cursive writing glows on the doors in front of you.
>
> "Hone your soul in tests divine
> By entering this holy shrine.
> The highest-flying reach the sun
> And in its rays are thus undone.
>
> Do not crow, nor glory seek,
> No vanity nor bluster speak.
> Beware your pride in splendor's hall
> Or in disgrace you fail and fall."
>
> Below the poetry, a single line appears, glowing brighter with each second: "Shed your ambition."
>
> The doors ahead smoothly slide open.

The antechamber is a small circular room with a 10-foot-high ceiling. Four floating motes of sunlight fill it with bright light. The room is empty, but, a character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 15 or higher notices that the characters' shadows have wings.



Room One: Heroes' Banquet

> The door opens with a rush of conversation, the scent of good food and spices, and the warmth of a flickering hearthfire. Six humanoids in gold finery eat and laugh around a long banquet table, while four others in subdued livery wait on them.
>
> A crimson tiefling raises a gold goblet to your entrance. "Ah, heroes! Come, come, regale us with tales of your triumphs!"

This room is a banquet hall that tests the extent of the characters' pride. The chamber has a 20-foot-high ceiling, and ornate sconces lining the walls fill it with bright light. Six **nobles** of various ancestries enjoy a sumptuous feast, while four **commoner** servants attend them.

A locked door with no keyhole stands at the north wall. The door is immune to all damage and spells such as *knock* have no effect on it. One of the nobles and one of the servants each holds a key to the door. A creature holding a key can open the door with a touch.

To pass this challenge, the nobles or servants must confer a key to the characters of their own free will. Any other solution circumnavigates the intention of the trial (see "Trials of Character" above).

Nobles

The nobles warmly welcome the characters, promising to unlock the door to the next room if the adventurers share tales of their exploits. For each story a character participates in telling, they gain 1 heat token. After the characters share five stories, Opulence shares a key to the door—though each noble then asks to hear an additional story and offers a reward for the tale. Each personal request a character indulges gains them 2 heat tokens.

Opulence (he/him) is the tiefling who greeted the characters when they first arrived. He presses for details about treasure and the characters' encounters with wealth. His personal request is for a story about the greatest treasure the characters have found or received, with a reward of 750 gp.

Leandra (LEE-an-druh, she/her) is an elegant human with a bloodthirsty edge. She presses for grisly details about combat. Her personal request is for a story about the riskiest maneuver the characters have performed in combat, with a reward of a *potion of stone giant strength*.

Aniyel (aw-NEE-yell, she/they) is an elf with a tactical and cunning mind. She presses for details about politics and persons of interest. Their personal request is for a story about the most important person the characters have encountered, with a reward of a *potion of mind reading*.

Viinathur (vee-NAH-thur, he/him) is a gold dragonborn and hunter. He presses for details concerning fantastical beasts and creatures. His personal request is for a story about the most fearsome creature the characters have encountered, with a reward of a jar of *restorative ointment* (5 doses).

Rine (REEN, they/them) is a halfling jack-of-all-trades. They press for details concerning the characters' personal skills and accomplishments. Their personal request is for a story about a difficult situation only the characters could handle, with a reward of a *potion of heroism*.

Favian (FAH-vee-un, he/him) is a half-orc with a taste for theatrics. He presses for details about the characters' schemes and performances. His personal request is for a story about the most elaborate plan the characters have pulled off, with a reward of a *potion of greater healing*.

Servants

A character who succeeds on a DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check notices the four servants struggling with their tasks, to the frustration of the nobles. Seridane subtly tries to catch the characters' attention and gesture them over, but won't make a nuisance of herself. If the characters approach her, she asks that they help the four servants with different tasks, promising to give them a key to the door if they assist. If the characters successfully help all four servants, Seridane gives them the key.

If the characters approach the servants without sharing stories with the nobles, the nobles remark that it is rude to speak with the waitstaff rather than the hosts. The nobles attempt to entice the characters to abandon helping the servants by offering an item of value worth 50 gp—such as fine jewelry or aged wine—if the characters share their triumphs.

Seridane (SAY-reh-dane, she/her) is a professional half-elf with a noticeable limp. She injured her knee and hasn't had time to recover, so she requests healing to continue working. A character who uses a spell of 1st-level or higher that restores hit points to Seridane, who has proficiency in the Medicine skill and succeeds on a DC 17 Wisdom (Medicine) check, or who offers Seridane a potion that allows her to regain hit points satisfactorily treats her injury.

Cainfel (CANE-fell, he/they) is a clumsy human with a kind heart. He has fallen behind on serving drinks and needs help with a new platter of wine goblets. The characters must bring new goblets to all the nobles, who consider the heroes above servants' work and encourage the characters to abandon the task to feast with them.

Halliope (huh-LAI-uh-pee, they/them) is a reserved tiefling of few words. Their outfit is stained and ruined after a noble spilled a meal on them, so they ask to change attire with one of the characters. Alternatively, a character could use *prestidigitation* or a similar effect to clean their attire.

Garsi (GAR-see, she/her) is a flighty and perky gnome. She needs an expenditure of magic to light an arcane lantern meant to provide mood lighting for the banquet. A character can activate the lantern by expending a spell slot of 1st-level or higher (or, for parties without spellcasters, by giving Garsi an expendable magic item, such as a scroll or a potion).

At your discretion, a character who helps the servants and shows compassion, humility, or generosity might lose 2 heat tokens for each servant they assist.

ROOM TWO: GLADIATORIAL GLORY

The door opens into light, energy, and cheers. Spectral figures crowd around an open arena, and champions with fine armor and weapons line the sides of the room. On a platform overlooking the arena, a gold dragon curls lazily around a giant gleaming treasure chest, her tail fiddling with the lock.

Her scales radiate sunlight as she lifts her head, her voice filling the room with deep, thrumming resonance. "It appears we have new challengers."

The arena tempts the characters with treasure and glory. The characters can pass this room by simply defeating the first combat challenge, after which the door opens and they can proceed. However, there are four more champions they can face, each with magic items the characters can claim. For each one the party defeats, they earn the rewards—but also heat tokens.

The arena has a 60-foot-high ceiling, and blazing wall sconces fill it with bright light. Shyndyr (shin-DEER, she/her), the gold dragon, stands and descends from the platform into the middle of the arena to face the characters, her tail curled still around the treasure chest. She bids the characters approach and lays down the rules of the arena.

"I am Shyndyr, Glorykeeper. You stand in the Apricus Hall, where champions test their mettle for treasures. We would try your combat prowess against one of our own, after which you may pass through to the final trial."

Shyndyr unfurls her gleaming wings. "The rules! First: Fight honorably, or face my condemnation. Second: You must win one round to pass the door, three more rounds to gain small treasures, and a last round to gain my ultimate prize. Anyone who chooses may spectate instead. Third: You may rest a bit between rounds … if you wish. Fourth: The light of the sun empowers you in this room. You may call upon its blessing to receive strength in your attacks as you face down mighty foes."

Shyndyr returns to her seat at the far end of the room, curling around the chest, and announces the start of the fight when the characters are ready. The fights proceed (see "Combat Trials" below), with the following rules:

Opt Out. A character can choose to not partake in one or more of the combat trials with the rest of their party. If they choose this, they stand on the side with the crowd or other champions. A character who sits out can use an action to make a DC 14 Charisma (Performance) check to cheer on an ally. On a success, the ally has advantage on the next attack roll or saving throw they make before the end of their next turn. Alternatively, the same check can be used to jeer at an opponent. On a success, the opponent has disadvantage on the next attack roll or saving throw they make before the end of their next turn. The GM can give the cheering character heat tokens if the sideline commentary ever becomes particularly harsh. (Who knows—maybe another crowd member starts needling at their pride instead.)

Rests. The party can take a short rest between combats if they want to continue with the trials. A character who takes a short rest gains 2 heat tokens.

Burst Damage. Once per turn when they hit with an attack, a character can reach beyond their limits to gain 1 heat token and deal an extra 7 (2d6) damage. The characters shouldn't know they're gaining a heat token in exchange for this damage, but they should know that doing so is a display of prideful hubris.

COMBAT TRIALS

The combatants in the arena are celestials who enjoy the competition. Each one, except for Shyndyr, enters from a gate on the far side of the arena, clad in golden armor emblazoned with sun insignias.

If the characters are all reduced to 0 hit points, they can take 10 heat tokens each to progress despite the failure—Shyndyr gives them the offer to "continue forward to glory" as they are blacking out. If they don't take it, they wake up outside of the sun trial and the door has disappeared. It reappears when they are more prepared for the trials that await inside. If the characters accept Shyndyr's offer, they immediately regain all their hit points and gain the benefits of a long rest.

When the celestials drop to 0 hit points, they don't die—they surrender, and the characters are proclaimed the winners. If a character strikes a celestial again to kill them, the combatant rematerializes in the group of champions two combat rounds later, and the character who dealt the blow gains 10 heat tokens.

Round 1: Unicorn. This **unicorn** with 108 hit points is a daring Celestial with a mane and tail like spun gold named Hesper (HES-per, he/him). He gives the characters no reward aside from the ability to move into the next room.

Hesper uses Charge to attack the largest characters, challenging their strength with his own as the crowd cheers.

After the characters defeat Hesper, read or paraphrase the following:

> Shyndyr turns her head toward the sealed door behind her and breathes out. Her breath glitters like gold dust and coalesces a translucent key, which floats toward the door as a matching keyhole forms. The door rumbles open, and the champions pound their weapons on their shields and the arena floor.
>
> "You may proceed!" Shyndyr booms. "But my champions thirst for the thrill of battle, and they have prizes if you wish to seek them."
>
> Three groups of champions step forward: a trio of armed knights, a large warrior astride a black pegasus, and a small mage with a slender winged serpent curled protectively around her. Each of them holds vials of magical liquid.

Round 2: Two Knights and an Acolyte. The characters each gain 1 heat token when they roll initiative at the start of this fight. Nanri (NAN-ree, she/her) and Ilviah (IL-vee-ah, she/her) are both Celestial **knights** with 80 hit points each. Their young adult son, Akril (ah-KRIL, he/him), is a **priest** preparing for his knighthood in the arena. The two lady knights forcefully engage martial characters while Akril swaps between healing his mothers and charring his enemies with holy fire.

Each round on initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Nanri and Ilviah stab their greatswords into the ground, each one creating a rift in the arena that is 20 feet long, 10 feet wide, and 20 feet deep, originating from the greatswords. A creature standing on the ground where a rift forms must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or fall into it, taking 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage and landing prone. The knights use the rifts tactically to damage characters and cut them off from each other. At the start of initiative count 20 of the next round, the rifts close. A creature inside a closing rift is lifted back to the arena floor without injury.

If the knights are defeated, the characters earn three potions that function as *potions of resistance*, though the creature that drinks one of these potions can choose the damage type it provides resistance to upon consuming it.

Round 3: Gladiator and His Steed. The characters each gain 2 heat tokens when they roll initiative against the **gladiator**, who rides a black **pegasus** with 75 hit points and AC 16 thanks to chainmail barding. The pair don't provoke opportunity attacks when they fly out of an enemy's reach. Known as Acinder (AY-sin-der, he/him), the gladiator is ferociously protective of his steed, Adocia (she/her, ah-DO-shya).

Each round on initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties) if Acinder and Adocia are in the air, the gladiator drags his spear along the ceiling, dropping rubble onto the arena below. Each character in the arena must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage.

If Acinder and Adocia are defeated, the characters earn a bottle of *oil of sharpness*.

Round 4: Mage and Her Couatl. The characters each gain 3 heat tokens when they roll initiative at the start of this fight. The **mage** is a cunning Celestial combatant named Eommi (OH-mi, she/her), accompanied by her **couatl**, Jhaa (JAH, he/they). Eommi starts the combat with *mage armor* active. In combat, Jhaa whirls around Eommi, giving her three-quarters cover while the mage blasts the characters from inside the coil. If an attack would've normally hit Eommi but Jhaa's cover prevents it, the attack instead hits Jhaa. Otherwise, an attack that misses is pushed back by Jhaa's protective winds or deftly dodged by the couatl's churning form.

Each round on initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), a mighty wind created by Jhaa's beating wings blasts across the arena in a direction determined by the GM. Each creature in the area except for Eommi and Jhaa must make a DC 16 Strength saving throw. On a failed save,

a creature is pushed 30 feet in the direction the wind is blowing. On a success, a creature is pushed 15 feet. A character pushed into the arena wall takes 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage.

If Eommi and Jhaa are defeated, the characters earn three *potions of greater healing*.

Round 5: Shyndyr. If every other champion is defeated, Shynder rises to her full height and descends into the arena while the crowd cheers. Shyndyr uses the **young gold dragon** stat block with these changes:

- She has 120 hit points.
- She has immunity to radiant damage.
- Her Breath Weapons action is usable 1/Day.
- Her Fire Breath deals radiant damage instead of fire damage.

The characters each gain 5 heat tokens when they roll initiative. If Shyndyr is defeated, she opens the treasure chest for them, which holds a set of *gold dragon scale mail* or a *sword of sharpness* (GM's choice).



Room Three: Celestial Adjudicator

This ornate throne room is bright and grand. Its vaulted ceilings have frescoes of great champions and warriors, and the statues lining the walls capture heroes in regal poses. The throne is large, its luxurious frame a beacon in the vast room, and upon it lounges a regal angel in gold armor, whose wings burn with sunlit fire as they casually regard you.

"They're beautiful, aren't they? All of these heroes." The angel rises to their feet, dragging their hand over the throne before they step away. "You have proven yourself well." Their voice is melodic and resounding. "One more challenge, and you may join them."

The adjudicator's chamber has a 90-foot-high ceiling and is brightly lit by torches in ornate sconces and stained glass windows depicting heroic glories. Apeilon (ah-PIE-lohn, they/them) is the characters' last judgment—but not in the way they think. Apeilon engages them in combat and uses the characters' heat tokens against them (see "Radiant Blast" and "Heat Token Reactions" below), a divine punishment for the ambition they were told not to partake in. If the characters have few heat tokens, then Apeilon uses the battle to study their countenances, that they might give the characters one final judgment.

If a character has more than 20 heat tokens (or at your discretion based on their behavior), Apeilon's demeanor changes as they fight—they scorn that character for seeking glory, berate them for their pride, and instruct them on the characteristics that make true heroes, often gesturing to paintings or statues to reference a particular hero's humility, kindness, charity, and bravery.

Burst Damage. Once per turn when they hit with an attack, a character can gain 1 heat token to deal an extra 7 (2d6) damage.

Apeilon, Arbiter of the Sun

Large Celestial, Lawful Good

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 110 (13d10 + 39)
Speed 30 ft., fly 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Wis +6, Cha +7
Skills Athletics +7, Insight +9, Perception +9
Damage Resistances radiant; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 19
Languages all, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Magic Resistance. Apeilon has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Actions

Multiattack. Apeilon makes two Sunsword attacks, or they make one Sunsword attack and use Blazing Judgment once.

Sunsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d12 + 4) fire damage plus 9 (2d8) radiant damage.

Blazing Judgment. Apeilon targets one creature that they can see within 60 feet of them. The target must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the target takes 14 (4d6) radiant damage and is frightened of Apeilon until the end of Apeilon's next turn. On a successful save, the target takes half as much radiant damage and isn't frightened.

Bonus Actions

Condemning Smite. Immediately after Apeilon hits a creature with an attack roll, Apeilon can force that target to make a DC 15 Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, the target must subtract a d6 from their attack rolls and saving throws until the end of their next turn.

Easter Egg: Don't Sit on the Throne

The characters shouldn't sit on the throne—hopefully they've figured out that pride in here is a bad thing. A character who sits on the throne immediately drops to 0 hit points and begins dying. Until they are healed or die, they face an echo of Apeilon, who tells them that so long as they seek a throne, they shall never be fit to achieve one. The arbiter asks them questions about their ambitions and flaws, challenging them to prove they are worthy to be a hero if they make it out of this alive.

Radiant Blast

Each round on initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Apeilon unleashes a blast of energy that deals radiant damage to each character in the chamber. The amount of damage depends on the number of heat tokens the character has, as shown on the Heat Tokens Damage table. (If you chose to track heat tokens for the group as a whole, the damage is based on the party's total number of heat tokens divided by the number of characters.)

Heat Tokens Damage

Heat Tokens	Damage
1–9	2 (1d4)
10–19	5 (2d4)
20–29	7 (3d4)
30–39	10 (4d4)
40–49	12 (5d4)
50+	15 (6d4)

Heat Token Reactions

Apeilon can take three heat token reactions each round, choosing from the options below. The heat token reaction spends the heat tokens of the character that Apeilon is targeting or that triggered the reaction. Only one heat token

reaction can be used per turn, and the character whose heat tokens are spent must have the requisite number in order for the heat token reaction to be used. Apeilon regains spent heat token reactions at the start of their turn.

Divine Resistance (Costs 3 Heat Tokens). If Apeilon fails a saving throw, they can choose to succeed instead.

Unerring Judgment (Costs 1+ Heat Tokens). When Apeilon makes an attack roll and misses, they can spend any number of heat tokens and add a +1 bonus to the attack roll for each heat token spent, potentially causing the attack to hit.

Burn, Icarus (Costs 6 Heat Tokens). When Apeilon is hit with an attack, they can use their reaction to halve the attack's damage against them. If the attack was a critical hit, it becomes a normal hit in addition to being halved. The attacker takes the other half of the damage as radiant damage.

Fall, Icarus (Costs 8 Heat Tokens). When Apeilon makes a successful attack against a creature, they can increase the pull of gravity on a creature and crush them against the ground. The creature must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or take 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage, be knocked prone, and have their movement speed reduced to 0 until the start of Apeilon's next turn.



COMPLETING THE SUN TRIAL

Apeilon doesn't die when they're reduced to 0 hit points; they have protection from on high. When the party defeats Apeilon, the arbiter quietly tells them to "reach for the sun, but wisely—always wisely." Apeilon then gives them the rewards of the sun trial. The party gains a *ring of the burning sun* (see below) and a *+1 weapon* of your choice.

If the characters are defeated by Apeilon, they wake up outside of the sun trial without the rewards and the door has disappeared. They each hear Apeilon's warning in their mind: "Temper your pride, or it will bring you far more ruin than this."

If all the characters entered the battle with Apeilon with fewer than 10 heat tokens, the arbiter also rewards the party's lack of hubris with their own sword. This magic weapon has the properties of a *sun blade*, except it deals fire damage instead of radiant damage and deals its additional 1d8 radiant damage against all targets, not just Undead.

RING OF THE BURNING SUN

Ring, Very Rare
(Requires Attunement Outdoors at Midday)

While wearing this ring in bright light, you can use an action to cast the *thaumaturgy* and *light* cantrips from the ring.

The ring has 6 charges for the following properties. It regains 1d6 expended charges daily at dawn.

Branding Smite. You can expend 2 charges as a bonus action to cast *branding smite* from this ring.

Daylight. You can expend 2 charges as an action to cast *daylight* from this ring.

Sunblaze. You can expend 1 to 3 charges as an action. For every charge you expend, you release a blast of burning light in a 60-foot-long, 10-foot-wide line originating from you. Each creature in the line must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 4d4 radiant damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

EXPANDING THE SUN TRIAL

To turn this trial into a longer adventure, consider adding these trials before the encounter with Apeilon (or create your own):

- The characters are pitted against a rival group of arrogant adventurers to complete a puzzle, an obstacle course, or another noncombat challenge. The characters must play fairly—even while the rivals are prone to foul play.
- The characters must cross a simple corridor with many doors that lead to treasure, magic items, renown, and other befitting rewards. While each opened door gives heat tokens, opening too many also invites combat encounters.
- An oathbreaker paladin wants to slay Apeilon and take their place as arbiter. He promises the characters anything they desire if they help him slay the divine agent.

CONCLUSION

If the characters don't already know of the other two trials, Apeilon mentions that there are two more challenges they can undertake to prove themselves worthy heroes. If pressed, Apeilon says little, but reveals that the moon trial is about facing oneself and the star trial is about bonds. Apeilon doesn't explain how or where to find them—instead, they smile mysteriously, saying, "Greatness so often is not found, but finds you."

Then they snap their fingers, teleporting the characters back to where they entered the sun trial and whisking the doorway away to await its next heroes.

Resources

Unorthodox Win Conditions

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Divine Trials: Glory of the Sun

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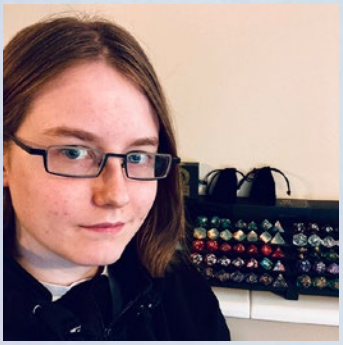
Leon Barillaro is a freelance game designer living in Los Angeles. They have written for the DMs Guild (*The Ultimate Adventurer's Handbook*, *The Uncaged Anthology*, *Bard-Core Brawlers*), EN Publishing (*Level Up: Advanced 5th Edition*), and Ghostfire Gaming (*Fables*, *The Sunken Isles*). Leon's online presence is centralized on Twitter (@barilleon), where they tell bad jokes and rant about their experiences as a professional game master. Should you require more Leon after that, you can also find him on his website.



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Sadie Lowry (@incandescaent) is a freelance ENnie-nominated writer, game designer, and editor who has worked with Critical Role, Wizards of the Coast, and MCDM, with notable credits including *Critical Role Presents: Call of the Netherdeep* and *Spelljammer: Light of Xaryxis*. She particularly enjoys adding rich narrative and roleplay opportunities to the game she loves. An editor at a book publisher by trade, she hails from the mountains of Utah, and can usually be found baking cupcakes, stargazing, or drawing her D&D characters.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

In Matt's video introducing *ARCADIA*, he explains that he chose the name "Arcadia" for this magazine as a reference to one of the worlds in his multiverse, the Timescape. Arcadia is the home of the true elves, a beautiful but dangerous place, at once familiar and different, filled with magic and art and threats other than trapped corridors and fire-breathing dragons.

In our world, the Arcadia region of Greece came to symbolize a pastoral utopia, a paradise of natural beauty inhabited by those who live in harmony with the land—a marked contrast to the stress and grime of urban life. (It seems that complaining about crowded, polluted cities and longing for the countryside has been a popular topic for well over two thousand years.) Art and stories throughout history have explored the metaphor of Arcadia, including multiple seventeenth-century paintings titled *Et in Arcadia ego* that feature shepherds looking at a skull or tomb. The Latin phrase literally means "And in Arcadia I am," but the speaker is understood to be Death—so the true meaning is a reminder that "even in Arcadia, there is Death."

And how fitting that phrase is for fantasy roleplaying games! In our worlds of make-believe, we enjoy a respite from everyday complexities and indulge in the idea of a simpler time when we could make bad things go away by hitting them with swords. Yet we also *choose* to place our fantasy selves in situations where failure, heartbreak, and death are omnipresent possibilities. In order to fully experience the joys of magic, found family, and triumph over evil, our games are full of challenges, monsters, and mortal danger.[1]

In his video, Matt said that the name *ARCADIA* doesn't have anything to do with the articles themselves. That's true in the sense that the articles aren't tied to the fey realm of Arcadia in the Timescape multiverse. But Matt and James keep telling me that *ARCADIA*-the-magazine is mine now, so I get to disagree: the name is very relevant. *ARCADIA* is our little slice of paradise that contains both beauty and death. We hope that for you, it is a garden of inspiration and nourishment, full of awesome stuff that's easy to use in your games and that excites you, terrifies you (or your players), and gives you endless opportunities for adventure.[2]

There is indeed both beauty and death in this month's issue of *ARCADIA*! "Unearthly Weapons" from Ben McFarland presents nine magic weapons with their own lore and remarkable appearances, from the *faerie queen's promise*, a changeable fey weapon forged from distilled cruelty, to the *sword of dreaming ambition*, which grows in power through sacrifice. In "Appendix NPC: Part 1," veteran author Sam Mannell brings us a ton of amazing, much-needed NPC stat blocks that are flavorful *and* easy to run, including the arcane student, bodyguard, and hierophant. And finally, "Puzzles of Permanence" from Rachael Cruz offers three substantial drop-in puzzle rooms, making it easy to add some variety and unusual rewards to your next dungeon crawl.

I am so honored and humbled to take up the metaphorical pen as the new managing editor of *ARCADIA*. We're already lining up awesome stuff for next year's issues. It's going to be a blast (in some cases literally)! There's so much to explore, so many treasures to find, many monsters to fight, companions to befriend—thank you, all, for joining us on this grand adventure.

De somnio ad itinere,
Hannah Rose
Managing Editor

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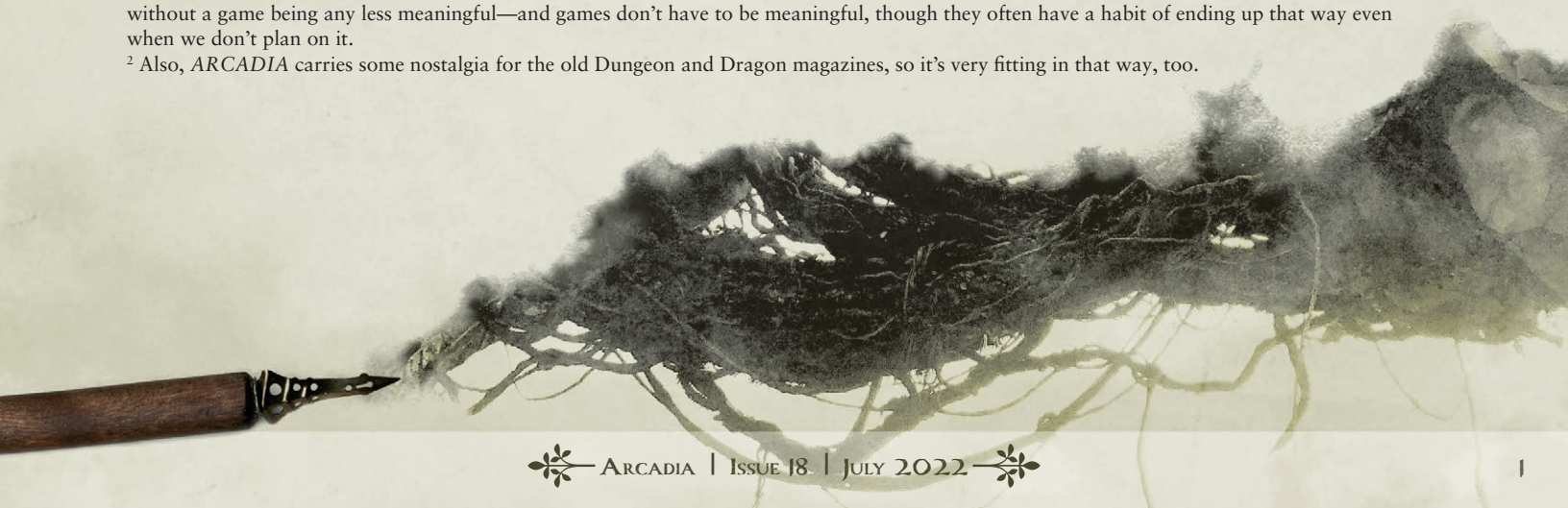
[1] YMMV. Some people choose to leave the threat of death or total failure out of their games, which is also perfectly valid. Fun can be a priority without a game being any less meaningful—and games don't have to be meaningful, though they often have a habit of ending up that way even when we don't plan on it.

[2] Also, *ARCADIA* carries some nostalgia for the old Dungeon and Dragon magazines, so it's very fitting in that way, too.





UNEARTHLY WEAPONS

Astounding magical tools of adventure

by Ben McFarland

Behold! The Sword of Power! Excalibur! Forged when the world was young, and bird and beast and flower were one with man, and death was but a dream!

—The Wizard Merlin, *Excalibur* (1981)

Walk Softly...

In many roleplaying games, the characters wield weapons from swords to bows to greataxes to blasters to blades of superheated plasma. While the focus of a game ranges among exploration, relationships, dungeon delving, and political intrigue, characters and players enjoy seeking out cool weapons to aid them in their endeavors. Most weapons fulfill at least one of three roles: an Implement of Awesome, a Conduit for Abilities, or—last but not least—the Macguffin of Plot.

As an Implement of Awesome, a weapon offers new powers and effects beyond a character's normal range of options. The Implement of Awesome holds its own power, and the characters bring it to bear when the situation demands.

Inversely, the Conduit for Abilities augments and improves a character's skills and abilities. A conduit complements the character—it never outshines its wielder, only helps them shine brighter.

The MacGuffin of Plot acts as an agent of destiny tied to an important story event. MacGuffins serve as a personal armament, but often they also have a specific use at a certain time and place. This article presents nine magic weapons that can fulfill any of these three roles. These items aren't limited to the form presented—you can easily adjust a sword into a maul or a longbow to better suit a specific character.

Faerie Queen's Promise

This fey weapon is crafted from unbreakable obsidian with bizarre edges and fractal serrations, a smooth hilt or haft, and ostentatious ornamentation that never hinders its use in combat. The weapon reflects the light of torches, even when none burn nearby, and close inspection reveals figures glancing outward from within the obsidian, as if it were a window to some other place.

Special Effects. When the weapon is used to parry a blow or score a critical hit, it manifests an effect that reflects the faerie who gifted it to its wielder, such as bursts of snow or ice for the unseelie Mistress of Winter or agonized cries of the tortured for the Queen of Pain.

Origins. The Lady of Surf and Burning Parapets distilled the cruelty from the souls of her three greatest pirate thralls and sculpted that darkness into *faerie queen's promise*. As the Unseelie often do with mortals and items of power, they used the weapon in barter amongst their courts, where it eventually served the Lady of Acts for several centuries. By trade and intrigue, it now serves the Queen of Pain, but who knows when its fealty may shift again, as the Unseelie's Beaconstar enters Ascendance.

Faerie Queen's Promise

Weapon (Any Weapon), Very Rare
(Requires Attunement)

As a bonus action, you can make *faerie queen's promise* take the form of any melee weapon you desire, causing it to languidly melt and reform, like a cat stretching in the sun. You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. If the weapon takes the form of a ranged weapon that requires ammunition, attacking with the weapon magically creates a piece of glassy ammunition, which is consumed on impact.

While you hold this weapon, you also gain the following benefits:

- You can cast *minor illusion* as a bonus action (spell save DC 17).
- You can cast *alter self* with a duration of 24 hours. Once you use this property of the weapon, you can't do so again until next dawn.
- You can also cast *fabricate* as if you had proficiency in all artisan's tools. Once you use this property of the weapon, you can't do so again until 7 days have passed.

Story Seed: Message for You, Sire

In exchange for using *faerie queen's promise*, a character must carry a sealed message from a fey regent's court to the court of a rival, a demon's citadel, or the stronghold of a mortal despot. Unfortunately, the letter's contents infuriate the recipient, who spitefully imprisons the characters. The characters find their true mission in the dungeons: they must free a spy in a nearby cell and escape to their patron's waiting ally.

Sacrifice's Weapon

This weapon is formed of smooth, pale bone. Some claim it was made from the body of a dead god or carved from the bones of a martyr. Its hilt or haft is crafted of glowing embers, cool to the wielder's touch, and its edges burn with translucent, heliotropic flames.

Special Effects. The weapon softly screams when readied and gives a pained sigh when sheathed. As the weapon parries, motes of flame fly from it, taking the form of ghostly moths before crumbling into nothing. A critical hit leaves wounds that weep illusory flame until healed.

Origins. Each of these weapons was created from an act of sacrifice by a saint, champion of faith, or other stalwart believer who was unquestionably dedicated to their cause. Partaking in a ritual before their death, and embarking on a task with no chance of success nor of survival, they then became their respective weapons, pulled from the circumstances of their death. One such martyr, the daughter of the Governor of Kulilanapur (cull-ILL-ann-AH-purr), held the gate against the besieging troops of the Horned Rakashanai (rah-kah-SHAWN-eye), only to die as their fiery battering ram struck it and immolated her. Since she was a dedicated apatheist, the discovery of the *sacrifice's spear* in the rubble suggests that the power of the sacrifice itself, and not some divine action, sparks the creation of these weapons.

Sacrifice's Weapon

Weapon (Any Weapon), Very Rare
(Requires Attunement)

When you attune to this weapon or finish a long rest while attuned to it, you can choose what form it takes. The weapon instantly reshapes to become any simple or martial weapon of your choice. If it takes the form of a ranged weapon that requires ammunition, attacking with the weapon magically creates a piece of ammunition, which crumbles to dust after the attack.

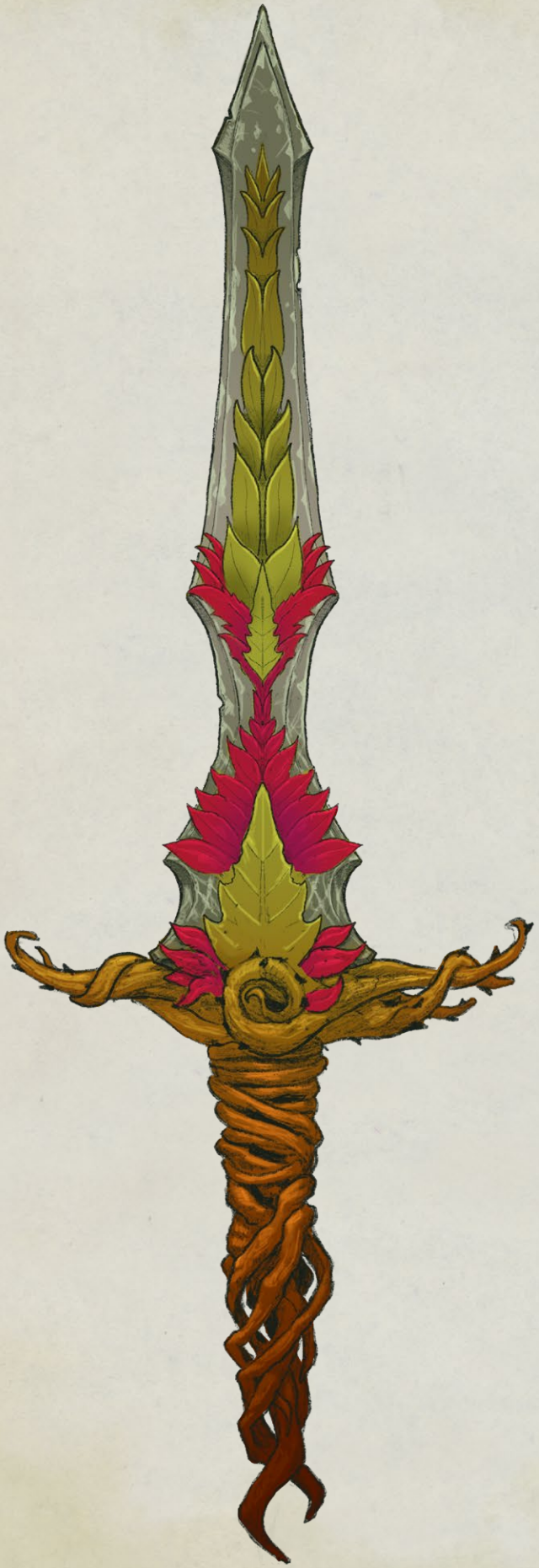
You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon, which increases to a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls against Aberrations, Celestials, or Fiends. In addition, you have advantage on saving throws against spells and effects cast or created by those creatures.

When you hit an Aberration, Celestial, or Fiend with this weapon, you can choose to take 1d4 necrotic or radiant damage (your choice) to deal an additional 1d6 damage of the same type to the target. The damage you take can't be reduced in any way.

When you score a critical hit with this weapon, you can choose one of the following effects:

- The attack deals an additional 1d6 necrotic damage and 1d6 radiant damage.
- The attack deals an additional 1d6 necrotic damage and you regain 1d6 hit points.
- You take 2d4 necrotic damage, and the attack deals an additional 2d6 necrotic and 2d6 radiant damage.

When a creature (including you) takes damage from a critical hit from this weapon, they can't regain hit points until they finish a long rest.



Spring's Arrival

This weapon is more grown than forged, with a blade or head of pressed flowers and edges of razor-sharp grass. It has a hilt or haft of polished wood adorned with thorny vines in the bright colors of new growth.

Special Effects. This weapon's parries and critical hits are accompanied by a minor natural phenomenon, like a momentary rainburst, a gust of wind, tiny plants bursting from the ground, or the distant flash of sheet lightning.

Origins. Under the shelter of the mangrove canopy, the Full Circle druids carefully nurse rare blooms infused with the waters of the Well of Thought and Magic. The fruits that grow from these flowers contain hard, wooden stones, which are harvested, enchanted, and worked in a season-long process to create these weapons. If a weapon is lost, a special group of druids and rangers hunt it down to ensure no one can cultivate the seeds for nefarious purposes.

Spring's Arrival

Weapon (Any Melee Weapon), Very Rare (Requires Attunement)

Spring's arrival blossoms into a melee weapon of your choice each time you draw it, and withers away like autumn when sheathed, leaving a swirl of dried leaves that crumble and disappear. You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. In addition, you have advantage on saving throws against being poisoned and you are unaffected by plants that are magically created or manipulated to impede movement, such as those created by the *entangle* spell.

The weapon has 3 charges. As an action, you can expend 1 charge to cast *entangle*, *pass without trace*, or *spike growth* (spell save DC 14). The weapon regains all expended charges each day at dawn.

When you roll a 1, 2, or 3 on any damage die on a damage roll with this weapon, you can reroll all the damage dice. You must use the new roll. Once this property is used, it can't be used again until the next dawn.

When you score a critical hit with this weapon, you can either deal an additional 2d6 poison damage or make grasping vines spring from the weapon, forcing the target to succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or become restrained. A creature restrained in this way can use their action to make a DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check, freeing themself on a success.

Sword of Dreaming Ambition

The black metal of this sword's basket hilt is worked into an intricate shape that varies from weapon to weapon—a scarab beetle with legs outstretched, a pattern of interlocking lotus flowers, or a cascade of shooting stars.

Special Effects. When this sword is drawn, the hilt glows with a mote of pure illumination and the blade forms from a shower of sparks. Sheathing the sword causes it to issue a dull, distant thud of impact. Every deflected attack or critical hit from the weapon releases motes of bright light that linger like fireflies.

Origins. The first *sword of dreaming ambition* was forged in the Third Age of the Sorcerer-Queen Kephaparnasut (keff-AH-par-naw-SUIT) from the heart of the star Anaxandelos (ah-NAX-an-DELL-OH-ss), claimed when the living star fell and attempted to subdue three High Draconic legions. The sword was the favorite weapon of the Imperial Duelist, Ammuth-re (AH-mooth-RAY), until their disappearance during the Festival of Blue Lilies. Afterwards, Kephaparnasut dispatched seven champions, each of whom brought back the heart of a different living star. With these pulsating stones, the Sorcerer-Queen forged more polymorphic blades using but a sliver of the rare metal. Her successor also loved the weapons and created one for every warrior in her personal guard, the One Thousand and One Solar Lotus Immortals. After the Copper Oryx Legion routed the Solar Lotus Immortals, hundreds of blades were lost.

Sword of Dreaming Ambition

Weapon (Any Sword), Legendary
(Requires Attunement)

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. When you score a critical hit with the sword, you deal an additional 2d6 psychic damage.

The weapon has 2 charges for the following properties.

- At the start of your turn, you can spend 1 charge to regain 1d12 + your proficiency bonus hit points (no action required). You can regain these hit points even if you are incapacitated or unconscious.
- When you make a saving throw, you can spend 1 charge as a reaction to gain advantage on the saving throw. As part of this reaction, you can also spend inspiration to add a +5 bonus to the save.

The weapon regains both charges each day at dawn.

In addition, you can cast the *dream* spell when you take a long rest with the sword.

Advancement. When you gain inspiration, you can use an action to sacrifice it to the sword, which the blade consumes. When you score a critical hit against a creature with a challenge rating of 1/2 or higher with this weapon, you can choose to forgo the additional psychic damage. When you make ten sacrifices of inspiration or forgo 20d6 psychic damage from critical hits with the weapon, the sword's bonus to attack and damage rolls increases by 1, to a maximum of a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls.

Sacrificing What?

Some GMs may not want to give players a sword that can permanently increase its enhancement bonus through the sacrifice of inspiration or extra damage from a critical hit. Instead, you can require 10 of the following sacrifice options to improve the *sword of dreaming ambition's* bonus to attack and damage rolls by 1:

- When you make a death saving throw, you can choose to fail it.
- If you single-handedly defeat a creature with a challenge rating that is at least half your level using no weapon other than the sword and no magic other than what the sword provides, it counts as one sacrifice.
- If you make a successful saving throw against a harmful effect created by a hostile creature, you can use a reaction to sacrifice the success and turn it into a failure.

You could also require fewer sacrifices but make the bonus to attack and damage rolls temporary and have it reset when the wielder finishes a long rest. The Advancement property might require adjustment to fit your group's playstyle. If you don't want to deal with it at all, simply make the sword a rare item that doesn't have the Advancement property.

Sword of Faith

This weapon appears to be only an empty scabbard and worn grip: the blade is invisible to all but a true-believing, attuned wielder. Even then, no two wielders have described a *sword of faith* the same way. Some say the blade is weathered bronze while others see black iron, and at least one has described it as carved from the bones of some aberrant beast.

Special Effects. Each blow from the sword gives off sparks, and each parry releases a thunderclap. On a critical hit, arcs of harmless lightning shoot out from the point of impact.

Origins. The first of these blades appeared during the Temple Anarchy, as high priests and mystagogues in the City of a Thousand Altars waged a bloody feud of sect and philosophy. As edicts failed to quell the violence, zealots discovered the *sword of faith*'s creation process. Some astute observers believe the Avatar of Discord stole the secret from the Throne of Martial Glory, and distributed it via dreams in a single night. Only one fact is constant: to those who swear true belief in a god and attune to the sword, these weapons remain as visible as the sun in the sky.

Sword of Faith

Weapon (Any Sword), Very Rare
(Requires Attunement)

You have a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. In addition, you have advantage on saving throws against enchantment spells and being charmed. When you succeed on a saving throw against an enchantment spell, you can make a Charisma (Deception) check with a DC equal to the DC of the saving throw. On a success, the caster believes you are under the effect of the spell until the start of their next turn, until you disobey them, or until you attack or do anything harmful to them.

Additionally, you have advantage on attack rolls made with the sword against creatures with the Incorporeal Movement trait. You can make an opportunity attack with the sword against a creature with the Incorporeal Movement trait without using your reaction.

When you score a critical hit with the sword, you deal an additional 2d6 radiant damage.

Story Seed: Opportunities Exist

After the characters discover a *sword of faith*, it whispers aloud to any materially motivated characters, saying it was once the weapon of a master burglar, a hierophant of the god of thieves. The sword knows of countless heists planned but never accomplished. If the characters are willing, it can show them the kinds of robbery that only a servant of the god of larceny could dream of accomplishing. However, the sword itself isn't truly sentient; it is haunted by the **ghost** of the priest-burglar, who died while last wielding the blade, and can't rest until their greatest schemes are completed.

Weapon of Hope

A *weapon of hope* has an edge, head, or bowstring of pure fire. Sometimes it burns white-hot, like a roaring glass kiln, and at other times it smolders with dim orange flame, like the last remnants of a winter campfire. The flame's brightness matches the hope of the wielder, striving to be ever luminous and reassuring.

Special Effects. Drawing the weapon feels like a warm, reassuring handshake, and sheathing it offers the sensation of a cool, refreshing drink. When the weapon parries an attack or scores a critical hit, it releases a puff of blazing cinders.

Origins. Crafted by the last of the Order of Fire Stewards, the first *weapon of hope* was wielded in the People's Rebellion against Corso the Undying, Tyrant of the Eastern Reaches. Passed among four different leaders, they each kept its light a brilliant, nearly painfully bright illumination. Later wielders and observers measured the owner's worthiness to possess the weapon on the strength of its fiery manifestation. Lost in the last siege of Dar-Guthek, its return is prophesied to signal the fall of kingdoms and the People's Restoration.

Weapon of Hope

Weapon (Any Weapon), Legendary (Requires Attunement)

When you attune to this weapon, you see a vision of it shifting into one you desire. When the vision passes, the weapon has taken the new form. If it takes the form of a ranged weapon that requires ammunition, attacking with the weapon magically creates a piece of ammunition, which is consumed upon impact. While this ammunition appears to burn, it doesn't shed light or ignite objects.

You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. In addition, you have advantage on saving throws against being frightened. When you score a critical hit using this weapon, it burns away your foe's resolve and bolsters your own. The attack deals an extra 1d6 psychic damage, and you regain 1d6 hit points.

In addition, you and allies within 30 feet of you have advantage on death saving throws. When you or an ally within 30 feet of you has to make a death saving throw, the dying creature can choose to forgo the saving throw and instead permanently reduce their hit point maximum by 1 to regain 15 hit points.

Finally, you can cast the *heroes' feast* spell from the sword, but the benefits of consuming the feast last only 1 hour. Once you cast the spell this way, you can't do so again until next dawn.

Weapon of Memories

This weapon of mirrored glass alternately laughs, cries, shouts, or cheers as it cuts through the air. The area around it variably smells of freshly cooked meals, summer rains, winter snow, or woodsmoke. Once attuned, the hilt is wrapped in the hair of anyone who's ever cared for the wielder, and the pommel stares up at them with the eye of a person they have truly loved.

Special Effects. The weapon yawns comfortably as it slips into the scabbard. When the wielder touches the weapon to their forehead, the gentle pressure feels like a loved one's embrace.

Origins. The High Artifex of the Temple of the Hearth and Home forged the first thirteen *weapons of memories* in an elaborate ritual, asking every Hearthkeeper and Homeguard to donate a beloved recollection to the creation process. Over time, the reputation of the weapons grew and drew more champions to the temple's banner. The forging method was improved, and the ritual altered



to allow for more weapons to be crafted without such a grand gift. Individual Hearthkeepers and Homeguards who choose to serve even after death undergo an extended ceremony, imprinting the weapon with the whole of their lifetime over the course of a lunar month. When complete, they pass, and provide the fuel for the tempering fire. Since the Nadir Schism, the Artifex has prohibited the creation of further weapons, and a sect of the Homeguard seeks to collect them all.

Weapon of Memories

Weapon (Any Melee Weapon), Rare (Requires Attunement)

When you attune to this weapon, its form melts and shifts, blending between various forms until you select one. If the weapon takes the form of a ranged weapon that requires ammunition, attacking with the weapon magically creates a piece of ammunition, which shatters like glass and disappears after an attack.

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. In addition, you have advantage on saving throws against illusion spells.

When you regain hit points by spending Hit Dice during a short rest, you regain twice the number of hit points you normally would. Hit points you would regain beyond your hit point maximum are instead gained as temporary hit points, up to a maximum of 10 temporary hit points.

When you make an Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma check while holding the weapon, you can gain advantage on the check as you draw on the weapon's ancestral memories. Once you use this property, it can't be used again until the next dawn.

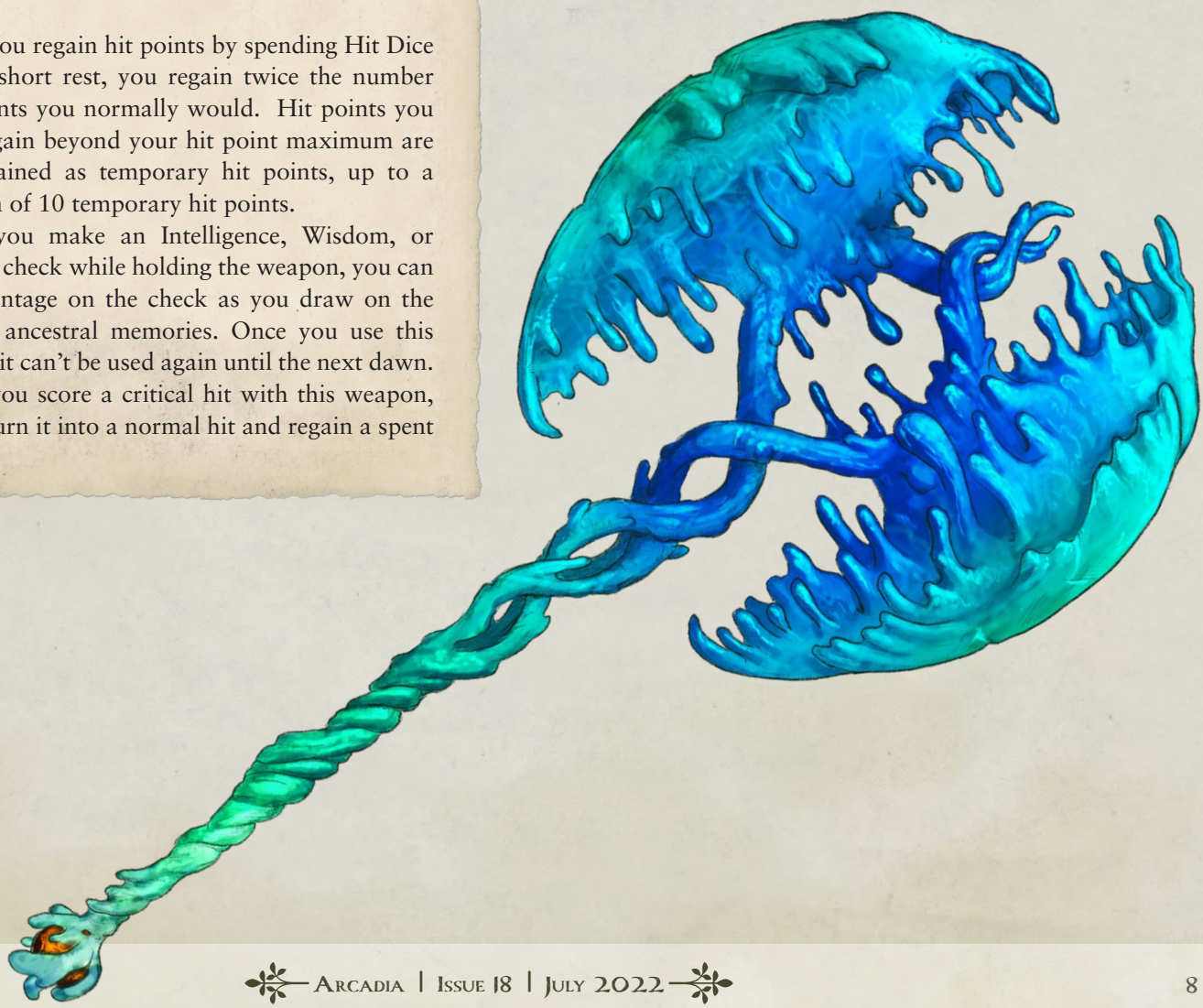
When you score a critical hit with this weapon, you can turn it into a normal hit and regain a spent Hit Die.

Weapon of the Seas

Often discovered in the form of a full bucket or a gold-sealed urn of sloshing azure water, a *weapon of the seas* can be salty or fresh, flowing or brackish. The weapon's haft or hilt is fashioned from hardened seafoam, its pommel is the sun seen through a wave, and the edge of its blade or head offers every shifting green, blue, and white hue visible on the curling arc of a cresting wave.

Special Effects. When drawn, the weapon emits the sound of the tide lapping on the beach, and sheathing it produces a cool, salty breeze. Each critical hit or attack deflected with the weapon brings the crashing thunder of waves against stone and a spray of seawater.

Origins. Hyperoki (HI-per-roh-kee), the nereid guardian of the sea god's sacred pool on the island of Ledos, fashioned the first of these weapons from her tears. She fell in love with a shipwrecked sorcerer, but couldn't break her vows to follow them home. Instead, she crafted the first *weapon of the seas* and gave it to the adventurer, swearing it would see return to her. Priests of the sea and of love learned the process of creating such weapons, and now worthy champions seek them out before setting off on quests.



Weapon of the Seas

Weapon (Any Weapon), Rare
(Requires Attunement)

You can sculpt this weapon into the form of any melee weapon or object as a bonus action. If the weapon takes the form of a ranged weapon that requires ammunition, attacking with the weapon magically creates a piece of ammunition, which is consumed upon impact.

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls with this magic weapon. In addition, you gain a swimming speed of 20 feet, you don't need to drink water, and if you fall into water at least 3 feet deep you take no damage regardless of the distance fallen.

When you score a critical hit with this weapon, the target takes an additional 2d6 bludgeoning damage and is soaked with water. Until the end of your next turn, the target has advantage on saving throws made to avoid taking acid or fire damage, and disadvantage on saving throws made to avoid taking cold or lightning damage.

Story Seed: Every Drop to Drink

A group of bandits is hunting a retired knight who carries nothing but a full waterskin and a heavy shield. The bandits approach the characters and explain that the knight used to be a vicious pirate who stole treasure from their town and hid it somewhere in the area. Now the knight seeks to donate the treasure to their liege ruler and doesn't care who may have owned it beforehand. The race is on as the knight plunges into a warren of caverns occupied by hungry ghouls who once served as his crew. If the characters can find the knight, he explains that his waterskin is a *weapon of the seas* and that he needs to give away the treasure to free his old comrades so they can find rest at last. The bandits want the treasure *and* the knight's weapon—and perhaps a spot of revenge.

Weapon of Time

A *weapon of time* has a shining steel blade or head, fixed in a haft of slate and dark earth. The flesh of those killed by such a weapon shrivels, crumbles, and blows away, leaving only bones.

Special Effects. When drawn or sheathed, the weapon produces a flash of light like the first rays of the morning or the last gleam of twilight. Each parried attack causes a puff of fine dust. On a critical hit, the sound of a crumbling landslide or a falling tree fills the air. The wielder's reflection within the weapon's steel occasionally alters to reveal what they looked like in their youth or what they'll look like in old age.

Origins. No one knows where—or when—the *weapons of time* came into being. Some wizards claim they are from the future and have been rippling backward in time for many years now. Scholars interested in *weapons of time* often find new references to the arms in historical accounts, pushing back the first appearance of this magic item to hundreds of years ago.

Weapon of Time

Weapon (Any), Very Rare
(Requires Attunement)

As a bonus action, you can make the *weapon of time* take the form of any weapon you desire. If the weapon takes the form of a ranged weapon that requires ammunition, attacking with the weapon magically creates a piece of ammunition, which winks out of existence after the attack. You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. In addition, you have advantage on initiative rolls and Dexterity saving throws.

You can cast either the *expeditious retreat* spell or the *haste* spell from the weapon as a bonus action. Once you use the weapon to cast a spell, it can't be used to cast the same spell again until the next dawn.

When you score a critical hit against a creature with this weapon, the creature takes an additional 1d6 necrotic damage and must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the creature suffers the following effects for 1 minute:

- Their speed is halved, they take a –2 penalty to AC and Dexterity saving throws, and they can't take reactions.
- On their turn, they can use either an action or a bonus action, not both.
- Regardless of their abilities or magic items, they can't make more than one melee or ranged attack during their turn.
- If they attempt to cast a spell with a casting time of 1 action, roll a d20. On an 11 or higher, the spell doesn't take effect until their next turn, and they must use their action on that turn to complete the spell. If they can't, the spell is wasted.

The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect early on a success.

APPENDIX NPC: PART 1

New stat blocks to steal!

by Sam Mannell

Hi there! Sam here! Can't talk long—I'm busy, and so are you. We've got sessions to run, adventures to design, and lives to live!

When I prep a game or design a module, I want grabbing stats for encounters to be easy, fun, and fast. But too often I come up short on NPCs, either settling for something that's not quite right or having to design something from scratch. Annoying! This article contains fourteen new stat blocks you can steal, reskin, or tear to shreds.

Prep fast, game more!



Hierophant

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Rōnin (CR 7)
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Honor Guard (CR 8)
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TORCHBEARER

The torchbearer is a hireling prepared to do some heavy lifting for the characters. They make a decent scout and distraction, though they are less likely to survive a whole adventure if they serve as such at every opportunity.

Ideally, enemies should attack the torchbearer whenever they need to choose between the characters or the unfortunate soul hired to carry the loot. Needless to say, there's some bleak comedy baked into this NPC that may not go over well at every table or in every adventure. Your mileage may vary!

Torchbearer

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

Armor Class 13 (leather armor)
Hit Points 37 (5d8 + 15)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +4, Con +5
Skills Athletics +4, Perception +2
Senses passive Perception 12
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 1 (200 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Guiding Beacon. A lit torch held by the torchbearer provides bright light in a 25-foot radius and dim light for an additional 25 feet.

Lucky Break. When the torchbearer takes damage from a trap, roll a d6. On a 6, the trap breaks down or misses at the last second and the torchbearer miraculously takes no damage.

Sitting Duck. If an allied creature within 5 feet of the torchbearer is hit by an attack, the creature can use their reaction to cause the attack to hit the torchbearer instead.

Actions

Multiattack. The torchbearer makes two melee attacks.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Burning Torch. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) fire damage. A flammable object hit by this attack ignites if it isn't being worn or carried.

Arcane Student

Unlike an apprentice, this novice wizard already has several years of study and experience. They won't outmatch the characters, but they have a few tricks up their star-patterned sleeves.

The arcane student stat block includes a randomly generated element so that a GM can quickly populate an encounter in a magical school with a handful of relatively unique wizards.

Arcane Student

Medium Humanoid (Wizard), Any Alignment

Armor Class 13 (18 with the *shield* spell)
Hit Points 31 (7d8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Int +5
Skills Arcana +5, History +5
Senses passive Perception 12
Languages any two languages
Challenge 2 (450 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Arcane Artifice. Each student has one of the following magical advantages (choose one or roll a d4):

1. **Training Wand (3/Day).** When the student sees a creature within 30 feet of them casting a spell of 3rd level or lower with a casting time of 1 action, the student can use their reaction to store the same spell in their wand. As an action on their next turn, the student can cast the spell from their wand, requiring no components. If the spell is not cast, it disappears from the wand at the end of the student's turn.
2. **Dust of Glimmering (1/Day).** As a bonus action, the student can blow a handful of dust in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in this area must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or shed dim light in a 10-foot radius for 1 minute. Any attack roll against an affected creature has advantage if the attacker can see them, and the affected creature can't benefit from being invisible.
3. **Familiar.** The student can cast the *find familiar* spell at will and is accompanied by a familiar.
4. **Cloak of Fading (1/Day).** When the student takes damage, they can use their reaction to teleport, along with any equipment they are wearing or carrying, up to 60 feet to an unoccupied space that they can see, leaving behind an empty, nonmagical cloak in the space they left.

Actions

Fire Bolt (Cantrip). *Ranged Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d10) fire damage. A flammable object hit by this spell ignites if it isn't being worn or carried.

Magic Missile (3/Day; 1st-Level Spell). The student creates three glowing darts of magical force. Each dart hits a creature the student can see within 120 feet. A dart deals 3 (1d4 + 1) force damage to its target. The darts all strike simultaneously, and the student can direct them to hit one creature or several.

Thunderwave (1/Day; 1st-Level Spell). Each creature in a 15-foot cube originating from the student must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 9 (2d8) thunder damage and is pushed 10 feet away from the student. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't pushed.

In addition, unsecured objects that are completely within the area of effect are automatically pushed 10 feet away from the student, and the thunderwave emits a thunderous boom audible out to 300 feet.

Reactions

Shield (1/Day; 1st-Level Spell). When the student is hit by an attack or targeted by the *magic missile* spell, an invisible barrier of magical force appears and protects them. Until the start of their next turn, the student has a +5 bonus to AC, including against the triggering attack, and takes no damage from *magic missile*.

Alchemist

While most alchemists aren't combatants and don't last long on the front lines, they make effective controllers, locking down areas with oozes and noxious gas. Their chemical reactions can dish out damage, but their effectiveness is limited by how far they can throw a glass vial, which isn't far! An alchemist cornered in their lab is more dangerous than one out in the open.

If you want to pump up the challenge, give the alchemist a few potions to chug right before battle starts or during the action. For example, if the alchemist knows the characters favor *lightning bolt* and has time to prepare, they could drink a *potion of lightning resistance*. Alternatively, give the alchemist a potion to drink when they are reduced to 30 hit points or fewer; an alchemist under the effects of a *potion of flying* can rain explosive vials from above or make a quick escape. Alchemists expecting trouble might break open some onyx ooze vials or put their choking vial cloud in place just before a fight breaks out, but some players might riot if they feel like they've been blindsided by the cloud exploding if they didn't see the alchemist set it up!

Alchemist

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 60 (11d8 + 11)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	9 (–1)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Int +5
Skills Investigation +5, Medicine +3, Nature +5, Perception +3, Sleight of Hand +5
Damage Resistances fire
Damage Immunities acid
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 3 (700 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Actions

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

Explosive Vial. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d10) fire damage.

Onyx Ooze Vial (3/Day). The alchemist hurls a glass vial containing a captive onyx ooze at an unoccupied space they can see within 20 feet of them. The ooze expands on contact with air, becoming a Medium-sized creature. The ooze acts immediately after the alchemist in the initiative count. The ooze attacks the creature closest to it and is not under the alchemist's control.

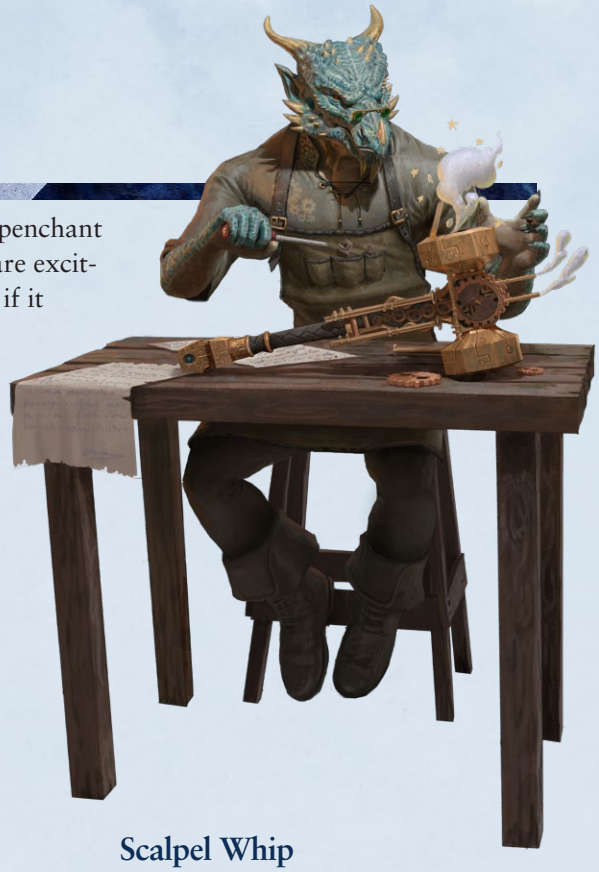
The onyx ooze uses the **gray ooze** stat block with the following change: If the ooze takes fire damage it explodes and is destroyed, and all creatures within 10 feet of the ooze must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The explosion spreads around corners and ignites flammable objects within 10 feet of the ooze that aren't being worn or carried.

Choking Vial (1/Day). The alchemist hurls a glass vial filled with noxious gas at a point they can see within 20 feet of them, and a 20-foot-radius sphere of gas centered on that point emerges from the vial. The gas lingers in the air for 1 minute. Each creature that starts its turn in that cloud must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw against poison or spend their action retching and reeling. Creatures that don't need to breathe or are immune to poison automatically succeed on this saving throw. Additionally, fire ignites the cloud, consuming it. Creatures inside the cloud when it ignites take 21 (6d6) fire damage.

Bonus Actions

Acid Vial. The alchemist hurls a glass vial of acid at a point they can see within 20 feet of them. Each creature within 5 feet of that point must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 3 (1d6) acid damage.

Inventor



The inventor is a popular NPC archetype, and for good reason! Their penchant for mechanical marvels makes them a favorite ally of adventurers, who are excited to see what experimental items the inventor has ready for them. And if it doesn't explode, they get to keep it!

But what happens if the inventor is pushed into combat? The inventor's strengths lie in creating incredible contraptions, so their attack options depend heavily on the equipment they create. Each inventor has a signature weapon that shapes how they behave in combat. Below are four example weapons that you can use or take inspiration from to create your own.

Signature Weapons

Below are the full details for the four example signature weapons included in the inventor's stat block.

Blade-Thrower

Martial Ranged Weapon

Damage: 1d10 slashing

Properties: Ammunition (range 80/320), heavy, loading, special, two-handed

The blade-thrower resembles a large crossbow, but rather than firing bolts, it fires large, flat discs of sharpened metal.

Collateral Damage. If an attack from this weapon reduces a creature to 0 hit points, the target is cut in half and dies, and the blade continues on its path in a straight line for the remainder of its normal range, attacking the next creature or object in the line.

Conductor

Simple Melee Weapon

Damage: 1d6 bludgeoning + 1d6 lightning

Properties: Special

The conductor is a shining steel mace, charged with an electric current that deals lightning damage to a target.

Electrostatic Strike. The wielder can make a special attack with this weapon that deals normal bludgeoning damage and 18 (4d8) lightning damage, and the target falls prone and must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or become paralyzed until the end of their next turn.

Additionally, each creature touching the initial target, connected to them by metal, or in the same body of water as the target is also hit with this special attack.

Once this property has been used, the conductor can't be used to make another Electrostatic Strike or deal lightning damage for 24 hours.

Scalpel Whip

Martial Melee Weapon

Damage: 1d6 slashing + 1d6 poison

Properties: Finesse, reach, special

The scalpel whip appears to be a normal knife with a guard, grip, and pommel, but when the pommel is twisted, the blade uncoils on a long cable from within the hilt, giving it the reach property. The blade is also tipped with poison, making it a deadly weapon in trained hands.

Grapple. On a hit, the scalpel whip grapples the target (escape DC 14). On subsequent turns, the wielder of the scalpel whip can use an action to make a contested Strength check against the grappled creature, knocking them prone on a success. While grappling a target with this weapon, the wielder can't attack another target with this weapon.

Velocity Hammer

Martial Melee Weapon

Damage: 2d6 bludgeoning

Properties: Heavy, special, two-handed

The velocity hammer appears to be a maul at first glance. Once in motion, a complex series of weights integrated into the weapon begins to move, generating additional kinetic energy. The weapon needs time to complete revolutions, so it can only be used to make one attack per turn.

Perpetual Murder Machine. Each successive attack with the weapon deals an extra 1d6 force damage. This additional damage resets if the wielder doesn't hit with the weapon during their turn.

Inventor

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 77 (14d8 + 14)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	9 (–1)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Int +6
Skills Perception +3, Stealth +5
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Mechanical Mastery. The inventor automatically succeeds on Intelligence and Wisdom checks related to machines and other mechanical objects or contraptions.

Signature Weapon. The inventor wields one of the following signature weapons: blade-thrower, conductor, scalpel whip, or velocity hammer. The inventor only carries one of these weapons and uses their Intelligence modifier, instead of Strength or Dexterity, for the weapon's attack and damage rolls.

Actions

Multiattack. The inventor makes two attacks with their signature weapon, unless their signature weapon is a velocity hammer.

Blade-Thrower. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d10 + 4) slashing damage. If this damage reduces the target to 0 hit points, they are is cut in half and die, and the blade continues on its path in a straight line for the remainder of its normal range, attacking the next creature or object in the line.

Conductor. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) lightning damage.

Electrostatic Strike (1/Day; Conductor Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 18 (4d8) lightning damage, and the target falls prone and must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or become paralyzed until the end of their next turn.

Additionally, each creature touching the initial target, connected to the target by metal, or in the same body of water as the target is also hit with this attack. Once this action has been used the conductor can't deal lightning damage until it is available again.

Scalpel Whip. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) slashing damage plus 3 (1d6) poison damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 14). At the start of the grappled creature's turn, they must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or fall prone. On subsequent turns, the inventor can use an action to make a contested Strength check against the grappled creature, knocking the grappled creature prone on a success. While grappling a creature with this weapon, the inventor can't attack another target.

Velocity Hammer (1/Turn). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage. Each successive hit with this attack deals an additional 3 (1d6) force damage. This extra damage resets if the inventor doesn't hit with this attack during their turn.

Bonus Actions

Gadget (1/Day). The inventor produces a Tiny or Small object that has the same properties as a common or uncommon wondrous item of the inventor's choice. This object falls apart and becomes useless after 1 hour. Choose one of the following or make your own:

- An unfolding propeller with a crank that has the properties of a *wind fan*
- A metal glove that fires energy from the fingertips that has the properties of a *circlet of blasting*
- An earring that has the properties of a *helm of comprehending languages*
- A bug pheromone perfume that has the properties of *eyes of charming*
- A pair of spring-heeled boots that has the properties of *boots of striding and springing*
- A face mask that has the properties of a *necklace of adaptation*

Signal Scrambler. A Construct that the inventor can see within 60 feet of them must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or become stunned until the end of its next turn.

Mercenary

Out of all the core monsters, I find one monster never gets old … humans! Thugs already exist in the core rules, but mercenaries are different. They're professionals. They're good at what they do—which is hurting people.

Some are in it for the money. As an optional rule, a mercenary can be paid off and leave their target alone for a fee of 5 gp per week or a one-time fee of 100 gp. If an offer is made during combat, the mercenary must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or agree to take it.

But some mercs aren't in it for the money anymore. They get paid, spend big, and head back out. No retiring. Maybe they like the job—cold-hearted killers who find murdering for villains agreeable. For best results when roleplaying these mercs, picture the worst bully you can imagine, then triple that nasty attitude.

Or maybe a mercenary just doesn't have anything else besides the company. Maybe they never had anything else to begin with. Maybe the trade has consumed them. In any case, no matter how you hold them up to the light and judge them, they're standing between your heroes and victory.

This stat block is designed for mercenaries to work in groups, hitting hard and rattling the characters, making these killers more satisfying to overcome.

Mercenary

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

Armor Class 18 (plate)
Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 30)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	9 (-1)	13 (+1)	8 (–1)

Saving Throws Str +5, Con +5
Skills Athletics +5, Intimidation +3
Senses passive Perception 11
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Take Positions. When the mercenary hits a creature with a weapon attack, any allied mercenaries within 30 feet of the target can move up to half their speed (no action required).

Actions

Multiattack. The mercenary makes two Longsword attacks or Light Crossbow attacks.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Reactions

Squad Tactics. When a creature the mercenary can see hits another creature with an attack, the mercenary can make a weapon attack against the attacker.

DEADEYE

The deadeye is a lethal sharpshooter, ideal for when you want to throw a single dangerous sniper at the characters.

This deadeye is a tough wilderness survival expert, but you could easily deploy them as an urban assassin by tweaking their skill proficiencies.

Deadeye

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

Armor Class 16 (studded leather)
Hit Points 93 (17d8 + 17)
Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	19 (+4)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	8 (–1)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Con +4
Skills Acrobatics +7, Athletics +3, Nature +3, Perception +7, Stealth +7, Survival +7
Senses passive Perception 17
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Cloak and Dagger. While the deadeye is hidden, they don't give away their location if they miss with a weapon attack.

Deadly Aim. Once per turn when the deadeye hits a creature with a weapon attack, they place a deadeye mark on the target after dealing damage. These marks vanish if the deadeye loses sight of the marked creature, if the marked creature dies or falls unconscious, or if the deadeye attacks a new target.

When the deadeye hits a marked creature with a ranged weapon attack, the target takes an additional 1d8 damage for each of the deadeye's marks on the target. A creature can have up to three of a deadeye's marks.

Keen Hearing and Sight. The deadeye has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or sight.

Actions

Multiattack. The deadeye makes three Longbow or Shortsword attacks.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Bonus Actions

Nimble Escape. The deadeye takes the Disengage or Hide action.

EXPLORER

Like the torchbearer, the explorer is an ally for adventurers, with traits and actions that aid travel and dungeon-delving. Your characters might team up with an explorer mid-quest, hire one as a guide to the local area, or be asked to accompany one as part of a job.

Ideally, the characters will like having an explorer tagging along, making it all the more gut-wrenching when the NPC eventually bites the dust facing a monster they can't handle!

Explorer

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

Armor Class 15 (studded leather)
Hit Points 112 (15d8 + 45)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +6, Con +6, Wis +5
Skills Athletics +6, Investigation +3, Perception +5, Survival +5
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages any three languages
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Coordinated Strike. When the explorer hits a target with an attack, each creature that can see the target can use their reaction to make a weapon attack against the target.

Refreshing Respite. During a short rest, the explorer and friendly creatures that can see them can reroll any roll of 1 or 2 when they spend Hit Dice to regain hit points at the end of that rest.

Seeker. The explorer has advantage on Intelligence (Investigation) and Wisdom (Perception) checks made to detect the presence of secret doors and hidden traps, and can always recall the path back to where they entered an underground area, such as a dungeon or cave.

Actions

Multiattack. The explorer makes two Longsword attacks.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage.

Heavy Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 100/400, one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) piercing damage.

Reinforced Net. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 5/15 ft., one Large or smaller creature. *Hit:* The target is restrained. A creature can use its action to make a DC 15 Strength check to free itself or another creature in a net, ending the effect on a success. Dealing 15 slashing damage to the net (AC 15) frees the target without harming it and destroys the net.

DETECTIVE

A seasoned investigator with a sharp eye and a strong set of ability scores. Detective NPCs don't show up in every game, but when they do, they should be as tough as they seem. Some of the lower challenge rating stat blocks in the core rules can fill this role, but these NPCs tend not to last long enough in a fight to slip away and report back to their boss.

If you're running a game of urban intrigue, this detective can also be deployed as a high-level espionage agent in the service of a powerful faction.

Detective

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

Armor Class 19 (studded leather, Calculated Defense)
Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	17 (+3)	19 (+4)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Int +6, Wis +7
Skills Deception +6, Insight +7, Investigation +9, Perception +10, Persuasion +6, Stealth +7
Senses passive Perception 20
Languages any two languages
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Calculated Defense. While the detective is wearing light or no armor and wielding no shield, their AC includes their Intelligence modifier.

Evasion. If the detective is subjected to an effect that allows them to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, the detective instead takes no damage if they succeed on the saving throw and only half damage if they fail, provided the detective isn't incapacitated.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). The detective deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the detective that isn't incapacitated and the detective doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Switched On. The detective automatically detects illusions they can see and automatically succeeds on saving throws against them.

Actions

Multiattack. The detective makes three Sword Cane attacks. They can replace one of those attacks with a Hand Crossbow attack.

Sword Cane. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Hand Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Bonus Actions

Cunning Action. The detective takes the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Reactions

Uncanny Dodge. The detective halves the damage that they take from an attack that hits them. The detective must be able to see the attacker.

TROUBADOUR-WARRIOR

From the Old Testament and the *Iliad* to the conflicts of the modern era, war always begets poetry. A troubadour NPC wanders the edges of conflict and sings at the heart of it, penning inspiration in the face of tragedy.

You can reskin this stat block to fit any culture in your world, such as an Old Norse-inspired skald, a Celtic bard, or a Persian warrior-poet.

Troubadour-Warrior

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

Armor Class 16 (chain mail)
Hit Points 120 (16d8 + 48)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Con +6, Wis +6, Cha +7
Skills Athletics +6, History +6, Insight +6, Perception +6, Performance +7, Persuasion +7
Senses passive Perception 16
Languages any three languages
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)
Proficiencies +3

Battle Chant. The troubadour-warrior recites songs of victory laced with magic while fighting. Willing allies within 60 feet of the troubadour-warrior that can hear them are immune to being frightened and gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls and saving throws.

Additionally, enemy creatures within 60 feet of the troubadour-warrior that can hear them have a -1 penalty to attack rolls and saving throws. Spellsinging doesn't interfere with Battle Chant and vice versa.

Actions

Multiattack. The troubadour-warrior makes three Warhammer attacks. They can also use Spellsinging, if available.

Warhammer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Spellsinging. The troubadour-warrior casts one of the following spells, requiring no material or somatic components and using Charisma as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 15):

3/day each: *bestow curse, hypnotic pattern, shatter, thunderwave*
1/day each: *confusion, dimension door*

BODYGUARD

There comes a time when the characters need to capture or dispatch a VIP—a mob boss, a minor noble, a corrupt archpriest—who isn't a great threat on their own. The bodyguard makes a squishy target a tougher nut to crack, and makes a great addition to your standard evil mage encounter.

The bodyguard is most powerful when right beside their charge, ready to use their reaction to soak up attacks with their impressive AC and hit points. They also have movement options for getting their charge out of a dangerous situation if things go south.

Bodyguard

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

Armor Class 19 (splint, shield)
Hit Points 153 (18d8 + 72)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	19 (+4)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +7, Con +7
Skills Athletics +7, Insight +6, Perception +6
Senses passive Perception 16
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Charge. The bodyguard can designate another creature to be their charge. When a creature within 5 feet of the bodyguard hits the charge with an attack, the bodyguard can make a melee attack against the creature (no action required). The bodyguard can only have one charge at a time.

With Me, My Liege! If the bodyguard moves while their charge is within 5 feet of them, the charge can move up to their speed, remaining within 5 feet of the bodyguard (no action required for the charge).

Actions

Multiattack. The bodyguard makes three Longsword attacks or three Throwing Knife attacks. They can replace one Longsword attack with a Shield Bash attack.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage.

Shield Bash. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) bludgeoning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Throwing Knife. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage.

Run! The bodyguard shouts to their charge. If the charge is within 60 feet of the bodyguard and can hear them, the charge can immediately move up to their speed without provoking opportunity attacks (no action required for the charge).

Reactions

Life and Limb. When the bodyguard is within 5 feet of their charge and a creature the bodyguard can see attacks the charge, the bodyguard can swap positions with the charge and become the target of the attack instead.



RŌNIN

The rōnin is a classic character archetype, drifting from town to town with only a blade for company. The specific cultural analog is a masterless or lordless samurai. This NPC aims to replicate cinematic rōnin, not necessarily actual samurai, as there is a difference.

The stat block below uses a daishō, a set of two blades, one long and one short. These are traditionally associated with samurai and the word is used here to help conjure a specific look.

When running this NPC in combat, don't be afraid to put them in the thick of it—they can combine the Parry reaction with the Counterattack trait to make any enemy think twice about taking a stab at them, and they have ways to get out of a tough spot.

Rōnin

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

Armor Class 16 (Unarmored Defense)
Hit Points 136 (16d8 + 64)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +7, Con +7, Wis +6
Skills Athletics +7, Insight +6, Perception +6, Stealth +6, Survival +6
Senses passive Perception 16
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Counterattack. When a creature within 5 feet of the rōnin misses them with an attack, the rōnin can make one attack against the creature (no action required).

Unarmored Defense. While the rōnin is wearing no armor and wielding no shield, their AC includes their Wisdom modifier.

Actions

Multiattack. The rōnin makes four Daishō attacks.

Daishō. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d10 + 4) slashing damage.

Lethal Cut (Recharge 4–6). The rōnin leaps up to 15 feet in any direction then uses Multiattack.

Swift Strike (1/Day). The rōnin flies up to 30 feet in a straight line. During this movement, the rōnin can make up to six Daishō attacks against one or several targets within 5 feet of the line.

Reactions

Parry. The rōnin adds 4 to their AC against one melee or ranged weapon attack that would hit them. To do so, the rōnin must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

Martial Arts Master

The fifth edition monk is widely regarded as a strong class with cool abilities: running on walls, stunning strike, many attacks in one round … the list goes on! Stealing class features is a great starting point for creating villainous NPCs that drive your campaign, and monks prove deadly on the battlefield.

Deploying this NPC against your players is even more fun if you have a monk character in the party, because the fantasy of martial artists locked in combat is so strong and easy to imagine, drawing on conventions from the wuxia genre, which roughly translates to "martial" (wu) "hero/vigilante" (xia).

NPC options for monks exist in the core rules, but none can challenge the characters beyond low levels. The master isn't as easy to beat, and could be the head of a monastery or simply an extremely experienced practitioner of their art.

Martial Arts Master

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

Armor Class 18 (Unarmored Defense)
Hit Points 84 (13d8 + 26)
Speed 45 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	19 (+4)	15 (+2)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +6, Dex +7, Wis +7
Skills Acrobatics +7, Insight +7, Perception +7, Stealth +7
Senses passive Perception 17
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Ki Transfer (1/Turn). When the master hits a target that has more than 0 ki points with a melee weapon attack, the master can make a contested Wisdom check against the target. If the target loses the contest, they lose 1 ki point. If the target wins the contest, they gain 1 ki point. If this trait reduces the target to 0 ki points, the target falls unconscious.

Unarmored Defense. While the master is wearing no armor and wielding no shield, their AC includes their Wisdom modifier.

Unarmored Movement. While the master is wearing no armor, they can move along vertical surfaces and across liquids without falling during their movement.

Actions

Multiattack. The master makes six attacks.

Unarmed Strike. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Stunning Strike (3/Day). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of the master's next turn.

Wind God Strike (1/Day). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage. If the target has 100 hit points or fewer, they must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or drop to 0 hit points.

Dart. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage.

Reactions

Deflect Missile. In response to being hit by a ranged weapon attack, the master deflects the missile. The damage they take from the attack is reduced by 1d10 + 4. If the damage is reduced to 0, the master catches the missile if it's small enough to hold in one hand and the master has a hand free. If the master catches a missile in this way, they can immediately make a ranged attack (+7 to hit, range 20/60 feet) with the weapon or piece of ammunition they just caught, which deals 8 (1d8 + 4) damage of the weapon's type on hit.

Honor Guard

The usual rank-and-file guards aren't powerful enough to defend evil kings or vital locations! Enter the honor guard, bound by oath to serve to the death, never retreating nor surrendering.

While the bodyguard is adept at protecting another creature, the honor guard defends a location of importance, such as a throne room, a sacred burial ground, or a vault holding an item of power. If your villain rules a powerful kingdom or organization, chances are they have a handful of honor guards around them at all times.

Honor Guard

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

Armor Class 18 (plate)
Hit Points 153 (18d8 + 72)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +7, Dex +5, Con +7, Wis +6
Skills Athletics +7, Intimidation +6, Perception +6
Senses passive Perception 16
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Bloody Zeal. While the guard has half their hit points or fewer, their weapon attacks score a critical hit on a roll of 18–20.

Unquenchable. When the guard is reduced to 0 hit points, they drop to 1 hit point instead and become immune to all damage until the end of their next turn. If the guard still has 1 hit point at the end of their next turn, they are reduced to 0 hit points.

Actions

Multiattack. The guard makes three Greataxe attacks.

Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d12 + 4) slashing damage.

Reactions

Battle Hardened. When a creature within 15 feet of the guard hits another creature with an attack, the guard can move up to half their speed toward the attacker. If the guard ends the movement within 5 feet of the attacker, they can make a weapon attack against the attacker.

Hierophant

The hierophant is a stat block for the infrequent (but often compelling) villainous druid. There's a wide gap between challenge rating 2 and challenge rating 12 when it comes to druid NPCs in the official rules, so this one sits near the middle at challenge rating 8.

Druids are relatively rare as enemies, but they might tangle with your party for any number of good reasons. Why not take a leaf[1] from Poison Ivy's book and create a druid that believes the expansion of civilization is destroying the natural world, and thus, y'know … maybe a few cities need to burn to balance things out? This motivation works great if the characters empathize; maybe the hierophant was tipped over the edge by the destruction of their grove, razed to make way for an advancing nation's border.

You could also go the "morals don't apply to nature" route. Things kill each other every day. The strong prey on the weak. Is a tiger evil for feeding its young? Who gets to decide what "evil" even is? Typhoid and swans … it all comes from the same place.

Heck, a hierophant might want to fight the party for merely entering the wrong forest or stepping on the wrong flower! What makes their lives more important than the flora and fauna they might endanger?

And, of course, you don't need to use the hierophant as an enemy. But they do have villain actions!

[1] Sorry.

Hierophant

Medium Humanoid (Any Ancestry), Any Alignment

Armor Class 14 (hide armor)
Hit Points 137 (25d8 + 25)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Wis +8, Cha +6
Skills Medicine +8, Nature +5, Perception +8, Stealth +5
Senses passive Perception 18
Languages Druidic plus any two languages
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Actions

Multiattack. The hierophant casts up to three spells.

Flame Blade (2nd-Level Spell). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) fire damage.

Call Lightning (3rd-Level Spell). A magical bolt of lightning flashes down from the sky to a point the hierophant can see within 120 feet of them. Each creature within 5 feet of that point must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 16 (3d10) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Tree Stride (3/Day; 5th-Level Spell). The hierophant enters a tree using 5 feet of movement, and moves from inside it to inside another tree of the same kind within 500 feet, appearing within 5 feet of the destination tree. Both trees must be living and at least the same size as the hierophant.

Heal (1/Day; 6th-Level Spell). A creature the hierophant can see within 60 feet regains 70 hit points. This spell also ends blindness, deafness, and any diseases affecting the target. This spell has no effect on Constructs or Undead.

Bonus Actions

Control Plants. Thick vines grow from beneath one creature or object the hierophant can see within 60 feet, attempting to grab and restrain the target. The target must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or become grappled (escape DC 15). If the target is already grappled by this action, then they also become restrained while grappled. A mass of vines that only has a creature grappled has AC 11 and 10 hit points. A mass of vines that has a creature restrained has AC 11 and 30 hit points.

Reactions

Féth Fíada (1/Day). When the hierophant takes damage, they can create a 10-foot-high, 60-foot-radius cylinder of mist centered on themself, and the hierophant turns invisible for 10 minutes or until they attack or cast a spell. When the mist first appears, the hierophant and up to five creatures they choose can see through the mist. For all other creatures, the mist is filled with strange and haunting illusions; trees appear to move on their own, cold whispers linger in the air, and all sense of direction is lost. Each affected creature within the mist is blinded, has their speed halved, and can't hear the voices of any other creatures within the mist but can still hear their own. The mist dissipates after 10 minutes, when the hierophant is incapacitated, or when a wind of moderate or greater speed (at least 10 miles per hour) disperses it.

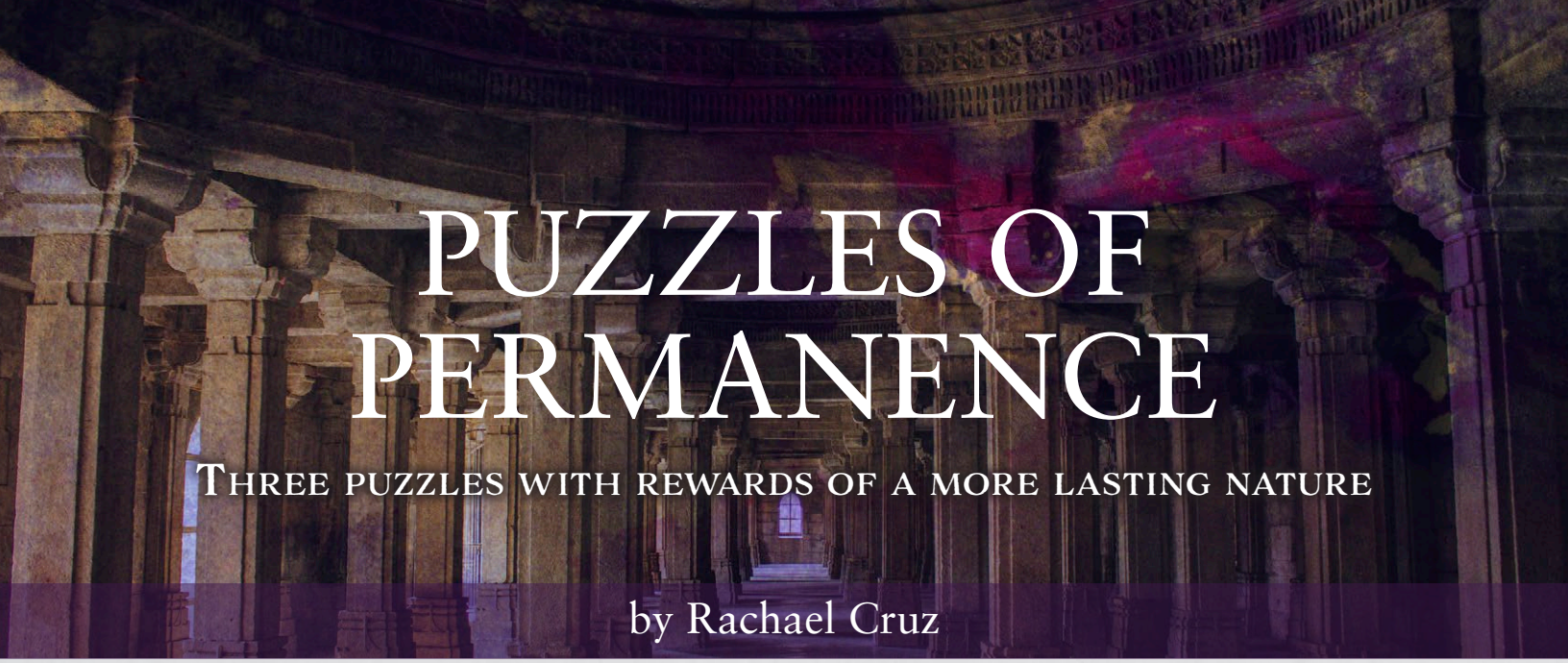
Villain Actions

The hierophant has three villain actions. They can take each action once during an encounter after an enemy creature's turn. They can take these actions in any order but can only use one per round.

Action 1: Wild Compulsion. The hierophant chooses up to five creatures that they can see within 60 feet of them. Those creatures can move up to their speed (no action required).

Action 2: Discordant Drone. Each enemy of the hierophant's choice within 60 feet of them that can hear the hierophant has any spell of 3rd level or lower that is affecting them end, and any enemy spellcasters of the hierophant's choice within 60 feet of them that are concentrating on a spell and can hear the hierophant must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or lose concentration.

Action 3: Blood Sacrifice. The hierophant targets up to five allied creatures with fewer hit points than their hit point maximum that the hierophant can see within 60 feet of them. Each target is reduced to 0 hit points, and up to five other creatures of the hierophant's choice within 60 feet of them gain temporary hit points equal to the hit points lost by the initial targets divided by the number of targets (rounded down). While a creature has temporary hit points granted by this villain action, they make attack rolls with advantage and have resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage.



PUZZLES OF PERMANENCE

Three puzzles with rewards of a more lasting nature

by Rachael Cruz

Each puzzle room and riddle has a reason to exist, else it's no more than a piss-poor trap.

–Professor Hinstern, College of Aspirants

Puzzle and riddle rooms are a staple of dungeon crawling. Solving them excites players and often leads their character to treasure. All the coins and jewels, shinies and sparklies, and—aren't you bored already?

How about something new? This article provides three drop-in puzzle rooms that lead not to transient riches, but instead a permanent reward! For added fun, don't let your players know that solving these puzzles leads to a lasting benefit. Surprise them!

Riddles in Standing Stone

In this aged courtyard, a golem hides in plain sight as a statue and turns passersby to stone. The characters must defeat the golem to pass through, but if they're clever, they can recruit the golem's previous victims before they are also petrified.

This scenario is recommended for characters below 7th level, as the stone golem (CR 10) is meant to be a deadly challenge, and spells like *dimension door* will make the puzzle trivial. This location is shown in the Riddles in Standing Stone map.

This place was awe-inspiring once. The impressive courtyard stretches wide, its carved walls of aged stone depicting heroes of old in the heat of their most glorious moments. Faded and chipped, the brown mosaic floor was long ago vividly colored, its golden edging directing wandering feet toward a grand, arching entrance. Now the rubble under each archway only hints at what were once exquisitely carved statues.

The ground level of the courtyard holds the only intact statues, five humanoid creatures caught in motion. Their strange, too-fluid poses reveal a horrifying truth: these are adventurers who have been turned to stone! Whatever lies here, these poor souls did not survive it.

Remaining Statues

Five intact statues of Humanoids are scattered about the ground level. Each is a petrified adventurer frozen mid-action and has the same phrase carved into the stone in front of it.

YOU

ARE

NOT

WORTHY

Detect magic reveals that the graffitied tiles emanate an aura of transmutation magic. Each statue weighs 1,650 pounds. If a statue is moved, an observer using the *detect magic* spell sees a faded tether of transmutation magic from the tile to the statue.

Avonor

A human in heavy plate armor swings a giant greatsword clutched tightly in his hands. This is Avonor (he/him), a fighter. If freed, he responds objectively, paces when thinking hard, and seeks praise and flattery. Avonor uses the **knight** stat block (or the **swordmaster** retainer stat block if you use the retainer rules from *Strongholds & Followers*).

Sestra

A human in carefully layered chainmail extends her arms in supplication, her mace pointed down in a gesture of peace. This is Sestra (she/her), a cleric of a deity of twilight. If freed, she is guilt-ridden from failing her party. Sestra uses the **priest** stat block (or the **healer** retainer stat block if you use the retainer rules from *Strongholds & Followers*).

Gil-Thilien

Crouched low to the ground, an elf thrusts one fist forward, clutching the pommel of a dagger, its blade broken off. This is Gil-Thilien the rogue (they/them). They are short, but lithe and dextrous. If freed, they smile contagiously and exercise prim manners, tucking a napkin into their shirt at every meal, even for rations on the road. Gil-Thilien uses the **spy** stat block (or the **cutpurse** retainer stat block if you use the retainer rules from *Strongholds & Followers*).

Doubtless

An intense tiefling in swirling robes levels their arm as though casting a spell. The statue's forearm is missing,



broken some time ago. This is Doubtless (he/they). If freed, the kind warlock is shocked by the lack of a forearm, which he swears was there before, but he is startlingly lighthearted about it: "Missing: one beautiful forearm. Hand has five fingers and a magic ring on it. If found, please return the ring. Keep the hand." Doubtless uses the **cult fanatic** stat block (or the **diabolist** retainer stat block if you use the retainer rules from *Strongholds & Followers*).

Urren

A stern dwarf stands with shoulders squared, his expression roaring as if he is barking orders. This is Urren (he/him), a stately warrior. If freed, he is very outgoing and affable until battle, where he shouts orders in a booming, gravelly voice. He has a soft spot for stray animals, incessantly adopting them, and is allergic to shellfish. Urren uses the **veteran** stat block (or the **warlord** retainer stat block if you use the retainer rules from *Strongholds & Followers*).

Guardian Statue

One final statue dominates the end of the courtyard, blocking the archway the characters must pass through. The statue, an exquisitely carved warrior standing at alert, is dressed in ornate plate armor that bears intricate carvings: tiny heroes similar to the ones on the courtyard walls. Under its full helmet, sharp eyes stare out from the depths of its stony face.

If a character moves within 5 feet of the statue or attempts to harm it, it comes to life and attacks, fighting until destroyed or ordered to stand down by a worthy creature (see "Crossing the Archway"). It understands Common and uses the **stone golem** stat block with the following additional bonus action option:

You Are Not Worthy. With eerie green light, the figures on the golem's breastplate turn their gazes onto one creature of the golem's choice they can see within 30 feet of them. The target must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or they begin to turn to stone and are restrained.

The restrained creature must repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns. On the target's third success, the effect ends. On the target's third failure, they become petrified and the words "YOU ARE NOT WORTHY" appear at their feet. The successes and failures don't need to be consecutive; the creature track both until they collect three of a kind.

Crossing the Archway

To get through the gate, the characters have two options: destroy the statue in combat or find a worthy creature to order it to stand down.

> Words carved into the stone arch crown the massive statue's head like a halo: "Only the worthy can command passage."

Becoming Worthy

The easiest way to solve this puzzle is to physically change one of the petrified victims' graffiti by using an action to remove or alter the "NOT" so that the inscription reads "YOU ARE WORTHY" or "YOU ARE NOW WORTHY." If this change is made to the floor tile while the golem is actively protecting the arch, the adventurer returns to flesh and is no longer petrified.

Freed NPCs help the characters defeat the golem in battle or figure out the next step in the puzzle. With the "You are Worthy" tile cleared, a creature who stands on the tile can command the golem to stand down and allow the group passage.

Stumped?

Here are hints to help your players to solve this puzzle. A successful Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals the following information:

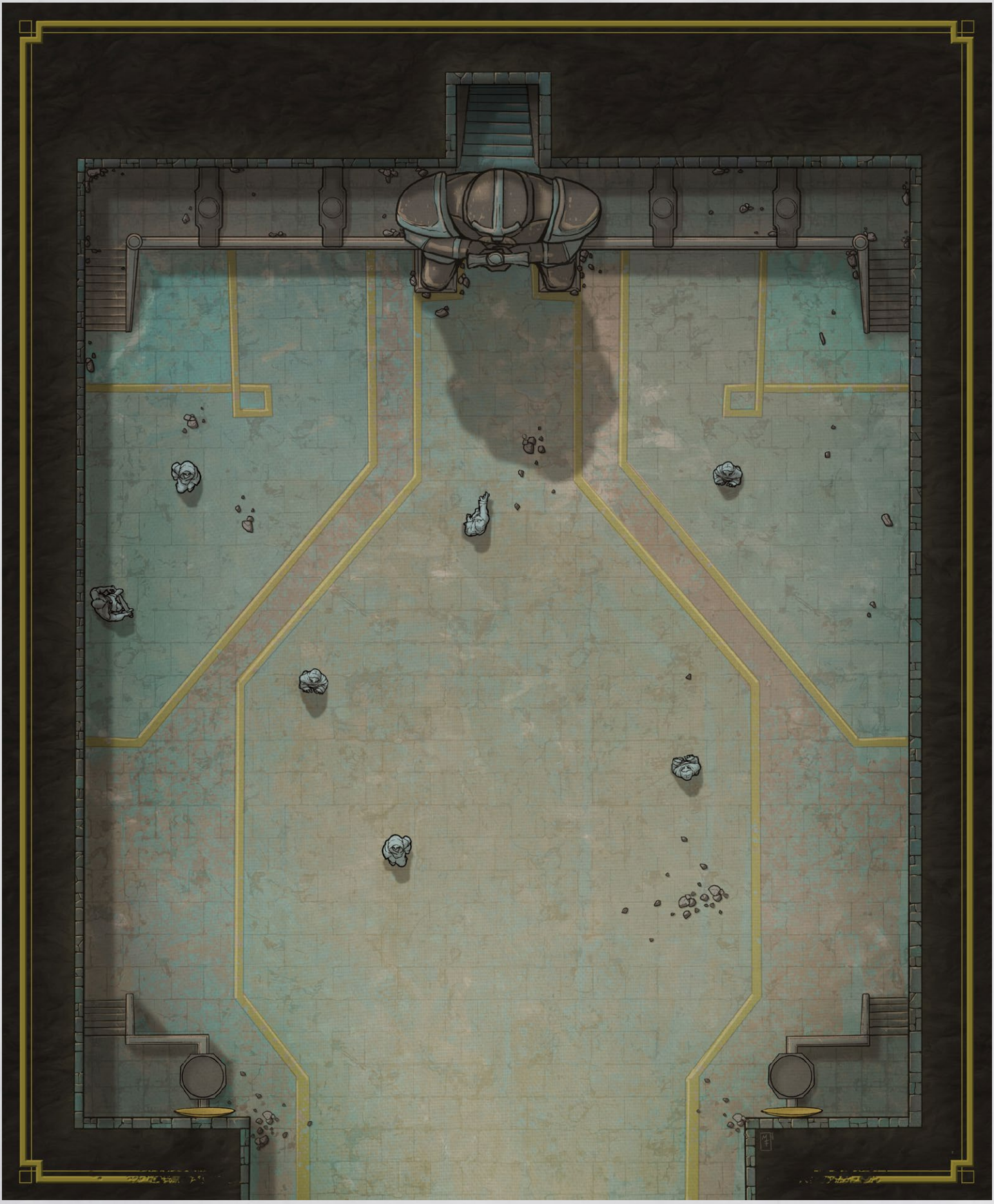
DC 12. It seems only a worthy creature can get past the golem without harm.

DC 15. The statues are clearly labeled "not worthy."

DC 18. What if a creature was labeled "worthy"?

Reward

If the puzzle is solved, one freed NPC gratefully swears themselves to the characters' cause. The NPC does whatever the characters ask (within reason), from following them as a retainer or squire to running operations at a home base. The other freed NPCs go home, but they could reach out to the characters to provide story hooks for future adventures.



EVER FORWARD

In ruins far beneath the earth, a long-forgotten treasure lies within an enormous, gyroscopic puzzle ball. Closed doors guard the path through each layer of the puzzle ball, and the characters need to solve the puzzles on the doors to progress. At the center, a magical artifact awaits—one the characters create together.

This scenario can be run for characters of any level, but keep in mind that your party will win a potentially powerful artifact if they solve all the puzzles.

BACKGROUND

Ages ago, two now-deceased brothers used a djinn's wish to create three powerful wisps of magic with substance and sentience. The wisps, when used, would shape themselves to the wielder's will and become artifacts.

The brothers used two of these three wisps for themselves, leaving one final wisp. To protect and preserve it, they created a space that contains a series of moving globes—a living, layered puzzle ball whose center holds a wisp ready to become an artifact.

THE ANCIENTS' PROMISE

No matter the environment the adventurers explore, they come upon a thematically appropriate door. It could be an actual door, an archway, a gate, a circle of carved trees, or writing on a cave wall, so long as there is no way back once they start forward. Give them the chance to read the invitation on the entry:

> "The world grows not through apathy and indecision, but through curiosity and action. Those who stride ever forward change the future of this world."

When the characters cross the threshold, the entrance closes behind them. There is no turning back now, and the way ahead is to somewhere entirely new.

BRIDGE OF GLASS

The characters find themselves on a bridge beneath a floating layered globe: a 100-foot-diameter puzzle ball with several rotating layers. The bridge stands 200 feet above a cavern floor. The cavern is filled with bright light that streams down from the ceiling.

When the characters first enter, the puzzle ball floats downward until its outside is flush with an archway at the



end of this bridge. When the puzzle is solved, the entire first layer of the globe turns to reveal the way forward into the globe.

> You stand on a thin bridge of solid stone and engraved metal. Nothingness stretches out to either side. There are no supporting walls—just the path forward to a massive, spinning sphere made of many layers.

When, the characters reach the arch on the outside of the sphere, read:

> A sphere of metal and stone looms, enormous. It is bulbous and sloping, a massive globe whose patterns are quickly lost by its constant whirling speed. Occasionally, brief gaps appear in the sphere and blue light shines from the ball's center.
>
> The bridge ends in a large, sloping archway. The arch follows the curvature of the globe without touching it, and beneath it, the way beyond is blocked by the globe. For now, you are locked outside.
>
> The only paths from here are forward … or down. And down seems like a particularly fatal choice. There must be a way through the arch.

BYPASSING THE PUZZLE

If the characters have access to spells like *dimension door* or *meld into stone*, they might be able to bypass each sphere without solving the puzzles. Feel free to allow this if you think it will be more fun for you and your players.

If you want to give your players more of a challenge, remember that this place was designed to keep intruders out. You could decide it was prepared for spellcasting thieves and that any spell, except for *wish*, can't be used to bypass the puzzles.

THE FIRST ARCHWAY

The first archway has the same invitation as the entrance engraved in multiple languages, along with advice on how to solve this puzzle.

> The world grows not through apathy and indecision, but through curiosity and action. Those who stride ever forward change the future of this world.
>
> Stride ever forward. Press only the correct symbols.

Beneath the arch, seven long panels take up the section blocking the way forward. Some panels are metallic, while others are stone bas-reliefs. Each panel presents imagery and symbols. The following images are depicted on the panels:

- A still figure meditates on a stone block
- A hart mid-leap, its graceful legs arched
- The word "choose" is sculpted into a block of stone
- A sword: static, unwielded, and on display
- A child, nose buried in a book, wonder on their face
- A metal panel that appears to be an obscure shape. It is tempting to stare at it for a while.
- A person facing away from the observer, looking back over their shoulder

You can give the players the First Archway handout at the end of this article to help them solve this puzzle.

STUMPED?

Here are hints to help your players to solve this puzzle. A successful Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals the following information:

DC 12. Some of these panels are more animated than others.

DC 15. Whoever wrote this likes the concepts of curiosity, action, and forward motion.

DC 18. What happens when you push a tile that represents curiosity, action, or forward motion?

Solution

To move forward, the characters must press the symbols that represent curiosity, action, and moving forward: the leaping stag, the word "choose," the figure meditating, and the curious child reading the book. The other symbols encourage inaction or turning back.

When a panel is pressed, it grows warm to the touch, glows faintly, and hums with electricity. If the characters press a correct panel, nothing happens. If the characters press an incorrect symbol, each creature within 30 feet of the arch takes 10 (3d6) lightning damage. In addition, the panels reset and must be pressed again.

Once the correct panels are activated, the outer globe shudders and the bridge trembles. The floor doesn't drop from below them, but let the players sweat a bit about the bridge's stability—"You don't know" is a great answer to any question.

> As the bridge trembles beneath your feet, the outer globe moves. Its slow turning groans, the deep bellows of effort reverberating through the space.

Finally, a gap appears at the bottom of the archway. The opening grows, and when the globe finally stops, the archway is clear, and a similar bridge awaits. Ever forward!

The Second Archway

This second bridge continues for 15 feet, then stops at another archway.

This bridge continues, and inset below the glowing glass is the phrase "EVER FORWARD" in many languages.

Another archway soon looms ahead. The sphere's next layer reflects the soft glow of the path, creating a strange feeling of misdirection and confusion. The claustrophobic walls loom in front and behind.

This time, the space below the arch is solid stone. The square panels, each six inches wide, contain two rows of individual letters arranged to form the following message:

"EACH OF US VERILY HAS A DUTY TO ACT

FOR WHEN HARDSHIP THREATENS, WHERE MUST WE STRIDE?"

The character with the highest passive Wisdom (Perception) score notices that the letter blocks are pressure plates that can be pressed inward. The solution is to press in the blocks that form the phrase "EVER FORWARD." You can give the players the Second Archway handout at the end of this article to help them solve this puzzle.

There are multiple correct answers to this puzzle, but the phrase must be spelled properly, with one word per line. Here are two examples of correct answers:

EACH OF US VERILY HAS A DUTY TO ACT

FOR WHEN HARDSHIP THREATENS, WHERE MUST WE STRIDE?

EACH OF US VERILY HAS A DUTY TO ACT

FOR WHEN HARDSHIP THREATENS, WHERE MUST WE STRIDE?

If an incorrect or out-of-sequence letter is pressed, any depressed letters pop back out and each creature within 30 feet of the arch takes 10 (3d6) lightning damage.

When the last correct letter is pressed, another great shudder shakes the bridge below the characters, and the second globe rotates in a different direction than the first.

Stumped?

Here are hints to help your players to solve this puzzle. A successful Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals the following information:

DC 12. Each letter of the question is on a separate tile. There must be a reason for that.

DC 15. This wall is asking a question. Maybe the answer is a phrase you've seen?

DC 18. Maybe the answer can be spelled using the tiles.

The globe begins its slow rotation. New pictures and panels soon appear below the archway, coming and going as the great ball turns.

Some of these panels tell a story. Each lingers a moment before revealing the next picture.

A single gem hovers in midair. Just as it is turned away from view, a new picture comes into view: a figure, hand outstretched inquisitively. The figure's hand remains in view when the next set of pictures appear: suns and moons, swords and shields, circles and triangles.

A final picture forms: the inquisitive figure with their hands around the gem, holding it up in triumph. The globe turns upward, the figure lifting out of sight as the next doorway is made plain. It settles into place, and once again you are left in silence with another bridge before you.

"What If I Jump?"

Once the characters clear the first bridge, impatient (or lost) characters may throw caution to the wind and jump on the globe to find the next door.

It's a foolish gamble, but it is also a way forward. A creature that jumps on the globe must succeed on a DC 19 Strength (Athletics) to hang onto the ball. On a failure, they fall 50 feet and hit the inside floor of the globe, taking 17 (5d6) bludgeoning damage from the fall.

To climb around the sphere and search for the opening, a creature must succeed on a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to maneuver without cutting themselves on a sharp piece of metal. On a failure, they take 11 (2d10) slashing damage. If the creature continues, they must succeed on a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check to reach the opening on the underside of the globe, falling off on a failure. A creature that succeeds finds the opening, which is covered by a force field.

The door's force field can be removed by solving the puzzle, casting a *disintegrate* spell, or casting a successful *dispel magic* (DC 19) spell.

The bridge within the second sphere is vertical smooth glass. A creature that climbs the bridge must succeed on a DC 22 Strength (Athletics) check or slide back out into the first globe.

To reach the last door, a creature must climb to the top of the final globe, which requires a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check, and remove that door's force field.

The Last Archway

Another short bridge extends forward. As the characters step through the arch, the previous globe shifts, removing the opening behind them. They're locked in here.

At the end of this bridge, an intricate web of stone and metal awaits, woven into words:

> Our duty was to prepare and preserve.
> To promise and protect.
> To create and destroy.
> Once the threshold is crossed, there is no turning back.
> To those unwilling to step ever forward, speak these words and be freed:
> "My purpose is not here. This place is not mine. I relinquish my hold on you."
> To those willing to continue onward, speak these words:
>
> "The world grows not through apathy and indecision, but through curiosity and action. I am ready."

The characters should make their choices individually. If any character speaks the phrase to back out, they are teleported to the spot where they originally found the puzzle room. The teleportation comes with a parting "gift" from the creators: each character who leaves takes 11 (2d10) lightning damage. The entrance to the puzzle room is gone. If it was an actual door, it now leads elsewhere: a supply closet or somesuch.

The characters who remain must speak the appropriate phrase. Once they finish reading the engraving, the stone shudders a final time and then opens to the final room.

To Create and Destroy

The room at the center has a 45-foot diameter. Viewed from the outside, the globe is a series of puzzles, but viewed from within, it is a shifting landscape of words and pictures. They tell stories of legendary heroes and the godlike artifacts that helped them shape the world.

A cylindrical pedestal of carved stone and metal, 5 feet tall and 3 feet in diameter, stands at the center of the sphere. It is made of 6 turnable rings.

Light glows from within the pedestal's layers. If the characters approach, they hear a sound like a soft, relieved sigh as the glow fades, floats up through the top of the pedestal, and convalesces into a wispy, floating ball of light. It hovers in the center of the pedestal and speaks directly into the characters' minds:

> "I am awakened and ready for my purpose. As you are all part of my destiny, so too shall I be a part of each of you. Answer my questions, and I shall shape myself to your purpose."

Artifact Reward

The ball of light gives each character a chance to answer one question from the list below. Once an answer is given, it can't be changed. After the questions are answered, you create a magic artifact for the characters.

The Questions. These questions provide the characters with options for creating the artifact. Be open with your players and discuss where their options might lead (see the Building an Artifact table). The ball of light encourages characters to give the reasoning behind the answers, which will help you create the specific artifact they desire.

As the characters consider each question, the outer globes turn to form small, fleeting pictures. The images are blurry and indistinct, but may be peeks into possible futures. Each answer a character picks appears on the pedestal, engraved in a glowing script.

The questions listed here ensure that at least six characters get a chance to answer. You can remove or add questions as needed to involve everyone.

- Does this artifact create or destroy?
- Does this artifact prepare or preserve?
- Does this artifact reveal or protect?
- Does this artifact bring order or chaos?
- Does this artifact affect magic or mundane things?
- Is this artifact worn or held?

For more inspiration for legendary items beyond what's provided on the table below, use this additional resource, which covers typical artifacts like armor and shields all the way to random things like the wealth-promising *Death Underpants*. It's a thing.

Making the Artifact. Use the answers to create or choose an existing property from a magic item in the core rules. The Building an Artifact table includes magic items with existing properties you can add to the artifact or ideas for properties if you wish to create your own. After you create the artifact, give it 1 minor beneficial property and 1 minor detrimental property from the core rules.

Any character who takes part in the creation of the artifact never has trouble wielding it and can ignore its detrimental property, even if its purpose is to be difficult for anyone else to wield.

You don't need to decide the artifact's properties on the spot. Record the answers from the players at the end of a game session, then give them the full details next time after building the item.

Building an Artifact

Answers	Sample Magic Items	Ideas for Properties
Create	*decanter of endless water*, *figurine of wondrous power*, *instant fortress*	Create food and water, summon a helpful creature, or swiftly grow plants
Destroy	*necklace of fireballs*, *ring of the ram*, *staff of fire*	Cast damage-dealing spells, curse creatures or places, or create natural disasters
Prepare	*efficient quiver*, *gem of seeing*, *rope of climbing*	Pause time, gain knowledge, or create a never-ending stock of an expendable supply (such as ammunition)
Preserve	*mirror of life trapping*, *necklace of adaptation*, *restorative ointment*	Put creatures to sleep, regenerate hit points, preserve a body, or stave off death
Reveal	*candle of invocation*, *crystal ball of true seeing*, *lantern of revealing*	Tell truth from lies, connect two or more creatures telepathically, or reveal something unseen
Protect	*brooch of shielding*, *mantle of spell resistance*, *periapt of wound closure*	Increase AC, give a bonus to saving throws, shield allies from danger, or hide creatures or items
Bring Order	*dimensional shackles*, *handy haversack*, *iron bands of binding*	Grant allies bonuses, capture creatures, or organize inventory
Bring Chaos	*bag of tricks*, *dust of sneezing and choking*, *eversmoking bottle*	Produce random effects, cause panic, or frighten creatures
Magic	*ioun stone*, *rod of security*, *wand of magic detection*	Nullify or dispel magic, create consumable magic items, or enhance the effects of spells
Mundane	*horseshoes of a zephyr*, *potion of animal friendship*, *robe of useful items*	Influence weather, charm animals, or nourish large groups
Worn	*cloak of the bat*, *hat of disguise*, *ring of animal influence*	Armor, belts, cloaks, gloves, headgear, or rings
Held	*feather token*, *immovable rod*, *staff of healing*	Lanterns, rods, shields, staffs, wands, or weapons

Return to Reality

Once the characters answer the questions, read or paraphrase the following:

> The outer globes heave. The lazy spin that had been informative—comforting, even—grows faster and faster. The floor groans, and the entrance closes with a loud, metallic screech.
>
> Despite the chaos outside, this inner chamber remains still. As though nothing is happening, the wispy, glowing ball sighs contentedly, nestling onto the top of the pedestal, and speaks one last time. "And so I am given purpose! Use me well, and together we will shape the future. Ever forward!"

The wisp grows brighter and brighter, changing its shape to suit the futures that they have chosen. Once the wisp takes its new form, the outer globes slow to a gentle stop and all is silent. An archway opens on the opposite side of the room. Sharp-eyed characters may notice the turning globes occasionally show likenesses of the characters—they are now a part of history.

The archway returns the characters to the spot where they originally found the puzzle room. To the characters who declined and were teleported outside earlier, the other adventurers were gone just a split second before returning. The entrance disappears. It seems, for weal or woe, the adventurers now have an artifact to protect.

Ever forward!

Ichandrix's Mercy

What happens when the puzzler is the one who needs help? In this encounter, the characters can win the favor of a sphinx, who was tricked and ensnared.

This scenario begins in front of a door guarded by an androsphinx, and can be added to any dungeon that might harbor such a creature.

Background

Centuries ago, the androsphinx Ichandrix ran afoul of epic-level adventurers. Disciples of the god of trickery, the adventurers trapped him in stone and hid the answer to his freedom in three rooms behind him. By gathering the pieces of the riddle, the characters answer the riddle and free the androsphinx.

Location

This location is shown in the Inchandrix's Mercy map. The ceilings in this area are 15 feet high, the rooms are old and decrepit, and there are no light sources save for those the characters bring with them.

The first room contains Ichandrix, an **androsphinx** who is restrained by the floor. When the characters enter, read or paraphrase:

> A single door looms ahead. Whatever lies beyond must be important, judging by the once-magnificent creature guarding it.
>
> The sphinx is emaciated. His limbs are thin and malnourished, making his thick front paws appear enormous. His wings are thin and ragged, the bone structure supporting them pressing angrily against thin-stretched skin. The decorative pectoral plate around his neck is a torturous weight, the golden collar's sheen dulled and the colored stone inlays half empty.
>
> Most noticeably, the sphinx's leonine hindquarters are stone, melded into the floor itself.
>
> "Halt, traveler." His voice is thick and raspy from disuse, yet intense with supplication. "You stand before Ichandrix, once the guardian of grand libraries and treasures untold. Now, I am a guardian of nothing. Ichandrix the tricked. Ichandrix the trapped. Will you help me?"

An Unexpected Twist

Ichandrix explains that many ages ago, he faced tremendously powerful adventurers who followed the god of trickery. They soundly defeated him, and as punishment for daring to challenge them, the adventurers cursed him. He is unable to move from the spot until the curse is lifted. Nothing short of a *wish* spell move the sphinx or the stone around him—even chopping off his legs only results in their immediate regrowth. As an additional insult, the tricksters set up rooms behind him with hints on how to lift the curse, ensuring he would never see the hints himself.

The androsphinx promises grand rewards if the characters help him collect the hints and solve the mystery of his imprisonment. If they agree, he explains the specific wording of his curse (which can be given to the players in the Ichandrix's Curse handout):



You are cursed this day and ever
To stand before this door
With stone for hind and tail,
Body present evermore.
Behind you are the chambers three,
With tools that lead to curse's end.
One carries you out upon their flesh,
Forever shall you be their friend.

Sharp-minded characters may realize that the curse only specifies his body. If no one picks up on this, they can find it out in the rooms behind him. If they do point it out early, Ichandrix gets excited and urges them to check the rooms to see what other hints are there. He wants to know exactly what lies behind him before taking any action.

THREE RIDDLE ROOMS

Each of the three rooms beyond Ichandrix has a puzzle, which leads to a clue for breaking his curse. By gathering each room's clues and pertinent items, the characters discover the answer to the sphinx's freedom lies in a magical tattoo.

If the characters are stumped, they can return to Ichandrix for assistance. His body may be stuck, but his mind still works and he loves riddles. It's up to you how much he provides, but the "Stumped" sidebars are a good place to find ideas he may share.

Blood Room

This room is a wreck. The bricks here are old, gray stone with splatters of unsettling, rusty brown all about. The room is torn apart, and remnants of what must have been a beautiful office library remain. The books are shredded and aged, threatening to disintegrate at the first touch.

In the center of a room lies a statue of a sorrowful lion made of the same stone as the walls. Written on its pedestal are the words:

Countless magics have I borne,
Countless maps of history.
Flowing wine, eternal ink,
Held within a family tree.
Speak my name to set me free.

Give the players the West Room handout at the end of this article. The correct answer is "blood." Once a character says this word aloud, the statue reacts: a panel on the side of the pedestal opens, and a tiny gold-rimmed bowl rolls to the ground. It has the following inscription:

You cannot take me from stone unless you also have a bone. Take me with you.

STUMPED?

Here are hints to help your players to solve this puzzle. A successful Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals the following information:

DC 12. What often carries magic, or is a source of magic?

DC 15. What substance is both liquid and leaves a lasting stain?

DC 18. What contributes to both a person's history and their family tree? How does one track that? What is one tracking in a family tree?

Rod Room

The stone in front of this door has a pressure-plate false trap—when the characters trigger it, nothing happens. It's just to mess with an adventurer's mind. God of trickery, remember?

When 20 or more pounds of pressure are placed on the plate, it sinks with an audible hiss. Just enough to make the characters look around wildly for an oncoming trap and maybe wonder if they successfully disarmed it or not.

When the characters enter this room, read or paraphrase the following:

This room used to be some sort of laboratory that was picked clean of valuables long ago. The books are in a pathetic state. Shelves full of discolored beakers and other detritus clog every wall of the room. In the corner, a figure covered in a shroud lies on an examination table. A broad desk's surface is surprisingly empty, considering how chaotic everything else is.

A riddle is carved into the surface of the wooden desk. While the desk has no drawers, there is a very tiny keyhole on one side.

The riddle reads as follows (found in the Middle Room handout at the end of the article):

Hook and flute and fork and pin,
The greatest magic lies within.
So many tools to make and teach
When inside yourself you reach.

You'll need some help, it's child's play:
The ailing patient points the way.

Find me, and take me with you.

STUMPED?

Here are hints to help your players to solve this puzzle. A successful Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals the following information:

DC 12. The riddle seems to be saying that when you reach "inside yourself," you make tools.

DC 15. Is there something inside you that can be used to make tools?

DC 18. What materials did ancient societies use for tool-making?

If the characters have the stone bowl from the blood room, remind them that the stone bowl mentioned something about needing a bone.

The answer is a bone, which the characters must find in the room. Under the shroud lies a giant straw doll with a silly, sad face drawn on it. When the doll's head is uncovered, the *programmed illusion* spell cast on it triggers. The doll coughs and sputters like it was awakened from sleep, though its expression never changes. It says, "Oh, doc!

You're back. I've been having the worst stomach ache lately. Do you know any noninvasive options? Maybe a nice herbal tea or something. That'd be the key. I just feel like I'm all stuffed up."

A character who makes a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check after finding the doll notices one of the books in the room is titled *Straw Man Medicine*.

The cover of the book has the doll's face on it. Opening the book reveals it's a container with a key inside. The key's head is skull-shaped and fits into the keyhole in the desk. Once unlocked, the desk's top lifts to reveal a clean human bone—a humerus—in perfect condition.

The bone has runes engraved on one side and a message on the other:

> You now have your rod with which to make your weighty decisions. Take me with you.

The *detect magic* spell reveals an aura of transmutation magic radiates from the bone. It can be used as a *+1 mace*.

Needle Room

This room is the easternmost of the three. When a character opens the door, a thin needle coated in magic poison shoots out from the lock. The creature that triggered the trap takes 1 piercing damage and must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 hour. While poisoned in this way, the creature can only speak in rhyming couplets.

A character who succeeds on a DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check can deduce the trap's presence from alterations made to the handle to accommodate the needle. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools disarms the trap, removing the needle from the handle. On a failure, the trap is triggered.

> The wall is painted with trees in shades of comforting greens and brown that make this room reminiscent of a clearing in a pine forest. A tree trunk stands preserved in the middle of the room.

A riddle is carved around the rings at the top of the trunk (found on the East Room handout at the end of this article):

> You find me in nature, in leaves on these trees.
>
> A compass will have me, to bring you some ease.
>
> You'll find me when sewing, with scissors and thread.
>
> Just speak out my name and continue ahead.

The correct answer is a needle. When the word is spoken aloud, the top of the tree trunk magically opens to reveal a hollow interior. Inside are two items: a tiny metal rake, its end filed into a row of sharp barbs, and a small metallic charm in the shape of a bird's feather. The tip of the quill is sharpened to a perfect point. Both these items have the same inscription:

> It has to hurt if you're to heal, but from this pain comes beauty. Take me with you.

STUMPED?

Here are hints to help your players to solve this puzzle. A successful Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals the following information:

DC 12. "In leaves on these trees" could mean the pine trees in the paintings.

DC 14. What do you use when sewing, aside from thread or scissors?

DC 16. What is the name of the spinning part of the compass that always points north?

DC 18. Each of these clues share a single, two-syllable name.

Putting It All Together

Once the characters have the items from all three rooms, they can try to guess the solution to Ichandrix's problem or present the items to him immediately.

At your discretion, the sphinx could have the solution or have little idea what the riddle means. If you want him to give hints, read or paraphrase the following:

> The sphinx's ancient eyes crinkle as he surveys the gold-rimmed bowl, the heavy bone, and the two sharp implements before him. He chuckles, a low, tired sound.
>
> "Ah. I see what they mean for me to do. It is a clever loophole they have placed into this curse. Do you see it as well?"

He gives the characters a chance to figure out the loophole, but also gives them an easy out if they are stumped.

If the characters want to solve it themselves, have them consider all the items and messages given. You can repeat the wording of the curse to them—the answer lies in the line "One carries you out upon their flesh."

STUMPED?

Here are hints to help your players to solve this puzzle. A successful Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals the following information:

DC 12. Ichandrix's body must remain here forever. But what about his mind?

DC 14. The items you've collected are a small bowl, a weighted, enchanted bone that could be used as a magic weapon, and two fine, pointed tools. What can be done with those?

DC 16. These tools are simple but undoubtedly made for tattooing. The bowl holds the ink, the sharp tools apply it, and the rod applies force to the needles.

DC 18. Maybe there's a way to permanently free the sphinx's mind. "One carries you out on their flesh." Maybe some sort of magical tattoo?

DC 20. The bowl and blood riddles both refer to blood as ink. The bowl even says that you can't take blood from a stone–and Ichandrix's hindquarters are stone–unless you also have a bone. You have an enchanted bone. Maybe the ink needs to be Ichandrix's blood?

DC 22. The bone is enchanted to turn into a magical weapon, which should allow you to pierce the sphinx's stone flesh.

The answer is a tattoo. If the characters mention it, Ichandrix is overjoyed at the idea and explains that a magical tattoo inked with his blood is a clever way around his curse. Such a tattoo would allow his mind to travel with whoever accepts the tattoo. His body would remain here, but at least his mind and soul would be free of this place.

Ichandrix asks if one of the characters would accept his mind as a passenger on their journeys. In return, he promises to grant the bearer of the tattoo a modicum of his power. The sphinx can instruct the characters on creating the tattoo.

If none of the characters do this, he is disappointed, but complies with their wishes and asks them to please send someone willing to help. As payment for their help, he doffs his giant golden pectoral plate and gives it to them.

THE TATTOO

A character who receives the tattoo must have it placed somewhere near their heart. If there is already a tattoo there, the sphinx is amused but continues, placing it as close as possible.

The ink for the tattoo is made by using the enchanted bone to draw blood from the sphinx and collect it in the stone bowl. Ichandrix applies the tattoo with the metal tools, first to his arm and then to the character's chest.

The tattoo is 7 inches across and looks like an arcane rune, though it belongs to no known language. As the tattoo progresses, Ichandrix's body grows heavier and he sinks lower to the ground. When the tattoo is finished, he rests his head on his forepaws and stills as if sleeping. His bony ribs press against his skin as he rhythmically breathes, but he doesn't awaken.

Then the newly tattooed character hears the sphinx's voice in their mind. "Thus our journey begins together. Call upon me when you need, and together we shall grow."

Ichandrix's Tattoo: A Journey of Growth

When a character receives the tattoo, the tattoo gains properties depending on the character's level, as shown on the Ichandrix's Gifts table. The tattoo gains new properties when the character levels. Each time the tattoo gains a new property, it grows in size on the character's body.

Ichandrix's Gifts

Character Level	Tattoo Property
1st	Summon Consciousness, Sphinx's Magic
4th	Ancient's Resolve
7th	A Blink in Time
10th	Lion's Roar
13th	Hidden Veil
16th	Sphinx's Eyes

Summon Consciousness

You can communicate telepathically with Ichandrix. The sphinx is content to be a passenger in your body never attempting to wrest control or initiate a conversation.

Sphinx's Magic

Your connection to Ichandrix grants you access to some spells when you reach certain character levels, as shown on the Sphinx's Magic table. You can cast each of these spells, requiring no material components. Once you cast any of these spells in this way, you can't cast that spell in this way again until you finish a long rest. Intelligence is your spellcasting ability for these spells.

Sphinx's Magic

Character Level	Spell Name
1st	*detect evil and good, thaumaturgy*
3rd	*lesser restoration*
5th	*tongues*
7th	*freedom of movement*
9th	*greater restoration*

Ancient's Resolve

You have advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

A Blink in Time

You can cast the *dimension door* spell three times. You regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

Lion's Roar

As an action, you can channel the voice of Ichandrix and bellow a roar. Each creature within 15 feet of you that can hear you must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened of you for 1 minute.

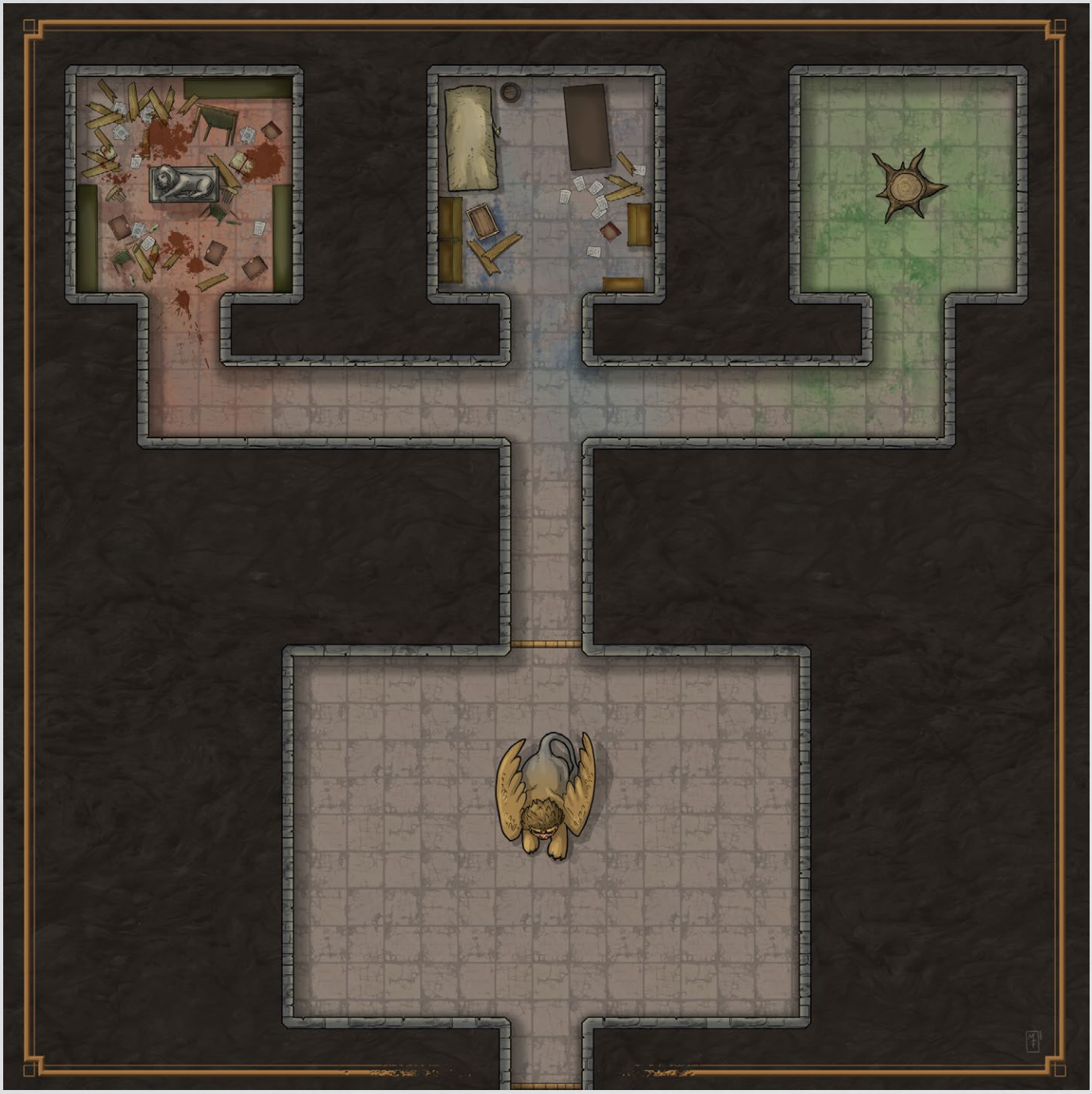
While frightened in this way, a creature must take the Dash action and move away from you by the safest available route on each of their turns, unless there is nowhere to move. If the creature ends their turn in a location where they don't have line of sight to you, they can repeat the saving throw. On a success, the effect ends.

Hidden Veil

You are immune to the charmed condition and magical effects that would sense your emotions or read your thoughts. A creature that makes a Wisdom (Insight) check to read your emotions or ascertain your sincerity makes the check with disadvantage.

Sphinx's Eyes

As an action, you gain truesight out to a range of 120 feet for 1 hour. You can use this property a number of times equal to 1 + your Intelligence modifier (minimum of once). You regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.



Handouts

You can use the following handouts to help the players solve the puzzles in this article.

First Archway

> The world grows not through apathy and indecision, but through curiosity and action. Those who stride ever forward change the future of this world.
>
> Stride ever forward. Press only the correct symbols.

Beneath the arch, seven long panels take up the section blocking the way forward. Each panel presents imagery and symbols. The following images are depicted on the panels:

- A still figure meditating on a stone block
- A hart mid-leap, its graceful legs arched
- The word "choose" chiseled into a stone block
- A sword: static, unwielded, and on display
- A child, nose buried in a book, wonder on their face
- A metal panel that appears to be an obscure shape. It is tempting to stare at it for a while.
- A person facing away from the observer, looking back over their shoulder

Second Archway

EACH OF US VERILY HAS A DUTY TO ACT

FOR WHEN HARDSHIP THREATENS, WHERE MUST WE STRIDE?

Ichandrix's Curse

You are cursed this day and ever
To stand before this door
With stone for hind and tail,
Body present evermore.
Behind you are the chambers three,
With tools that lead to curse's end.
One carries you out upon their flesh,
Forever shall you be their friend.

West Room

Countless magics have I borne,
Countless maps of history.
Flowing wine, eternal ink,
Held within a family tree.
Speak my name to set me free.

Middle Room

Hook and flute and fork and pin,
The greatest magic lies within.
So many tools to make and teach
When inside yourself you reach.
You'll need some help, it's child's play:
The ailing patient points the way.
Find me, and take me with you.

East Room

You find me in nature, in leaves on these trees.
A compass will have me, to bring you some ease.
You'll find me when sewing, with scissors and thread.
Just speak out my name and continue ahead.

RESOURCES

PUZZLES OF PERMANENCE

https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202207/IchandrixsMercy-140pps-Dark-Grid.jpg
https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202207/IchandrixsMercy-140pps-Dark.jpg
https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202207/IchandrixsMercy-140pps-Light-Grid.jpg
https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202207/IchandrixsMercy-140pps-Light.jpg
https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202207/RiddlesInTheStandingStone-140pps-grid.jpg
https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202207/RiddlesInTheStandingStone-140pps.jpg



Ben McFarland lives in the wilds of upstate New York, where he continues to explore mysterious regions in search of adventure with the priceless support of his wonderful wife, Mandy and his family, and the excellent advice of his steadfast friend, James. You can find his work in the pages of *Sub Rosa* and in products from Storm Bunny Studios and Kobold Press. That is a real fish. He is @brickk on Twitter. Ordo Hermes Vitae.



Sam Mannell is a writer and designer based in Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa, a distant place known to some as Auckland, New Zealand. When not running or playing games, Sam is writing, making music, drinking coffee, or playing chess badly. You can find more of Sam's work in MCDM's *Kingdoms & Warfare* and the upcoming *Flee, Mortals!* You can be made psionically aware of his location and movements by following him on Twitter @crypticparlour.



Rachael Cruz is an award-winning writer and game designer. Her TRPG work can be found in numerous properties, including but not limited to *Conan: Adventures in an Age Undreamed-Of*, Corvus Belli's *INFINITY RPG*, *Dune: Adventures in the Imperium*, *Fantasy AGE*, *RuneQuest*, and *Star Trek Adventures*. She has been helping people play pretend before it was cool. She also believes in you. Yes, you. Follow her on Twitter @Witchwater.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

One of the hallmarks of epic fantasy stories is that the main characters are changed by their experiences, both good and bad. From discovering the love and support of a found family (like the kids in *Avatar: The Last Airbender*) to enduring intense stress and trauma (like Sam and Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings*), characters grow, develop, and emerge transformed. In fantasy roleplaying games, adventurers see horrors and confront monsters that set them apart from most NPCs and bind them together as a group. They share the weight of responsibility and know the high price of failure.

In a way, these stories are heightened versions of our own comparatively humdrum existence—as we "adventure" through life, we find that, gradually, we've changed and no longer fit where we used to. Perhaps this parallel is one of the reasons we're drawn to explore this theme through roleplay. It's a gentler alternative to the existential dread of reflecting on how our real-world responsibilities and traumas have changed us. Through our characters, we can subconsciously process our own changes and feel empowered to achieve our goals despite adversity, because we can press onward with support from our party (and much-needed long rests).

We have a certain level of control in a game, too—we can decide whether our character suffers nightmares after being swallowed by a purple worm, whether they merely shrug it off as yet another bizarre day, or a bit of both. Plus, even the worst challenges in RPGs (actually, *especially* the worst challenges) are rewarded with XP, so there's a built-in upside as part of the game. Sure, we used ourselves as bait and fought a dragon made of nightmares that manifested our greatest fears, put us to sleep, and made us attack each other, but at least our party leveled up and got cool new powers, right?[1] The joy of roleplaying is that we can safely engage with our character's emotions as much as we want, choosing when to lean into the intensity and when to pull back if things get too grim. We can grow alongside our characters, but at our own pace.

Each of this month's articles offers characters the chance to confront their flaws, fears, and mistakes as they press forward on their journeys. That sounds ominous and heavy—but while dealing with a cursed weapon or a TPK might be A Bad Time for the party, it can be great fun for players who enjoy putting their characters through the wringer. And we get to balance the heaviness with as much silliness and humor as we want. Case in point: the characters slowly turning into beets and facing the prospect of being devoured by a hag is at least as absurd as it is horrifying. Oh, and that's *after* they all died.

So if you accidentally TPK your party, Justice Ramin Arman and Anthony Joyce-Rivera have your back with "Break in Case of TPK"! (Or you might be tempted to purposefully kill your party so you can use one of these encounters.) Jacky Leung presents three storied magic items with unexpected drawbacks in "Cursed Treasures," as well as guidance for creating your own cursed items—perhaps ones specifically tailored to the characters' weaknesses. And Amber Litke and Sadie Lowry are back with "Divine Trials: Shadows of the Moon," a mini-dungeon where the characters must overcome not an external force of evil, but the darkness and fear within themselves.

My gaming groups love to be silly and joke around, but we also love exploring the characters and seeing them grow, both in the ways we planned and in ways we never expected (which is one of the great joys of collaborative storytelling). Our characters laugh, cry, strategize, stress out, aid and comfort each other, and forge bonds through their experiences—and, at the same time, so do we.

De somnio ad itinere,
Hannah Rose
Managing Editor

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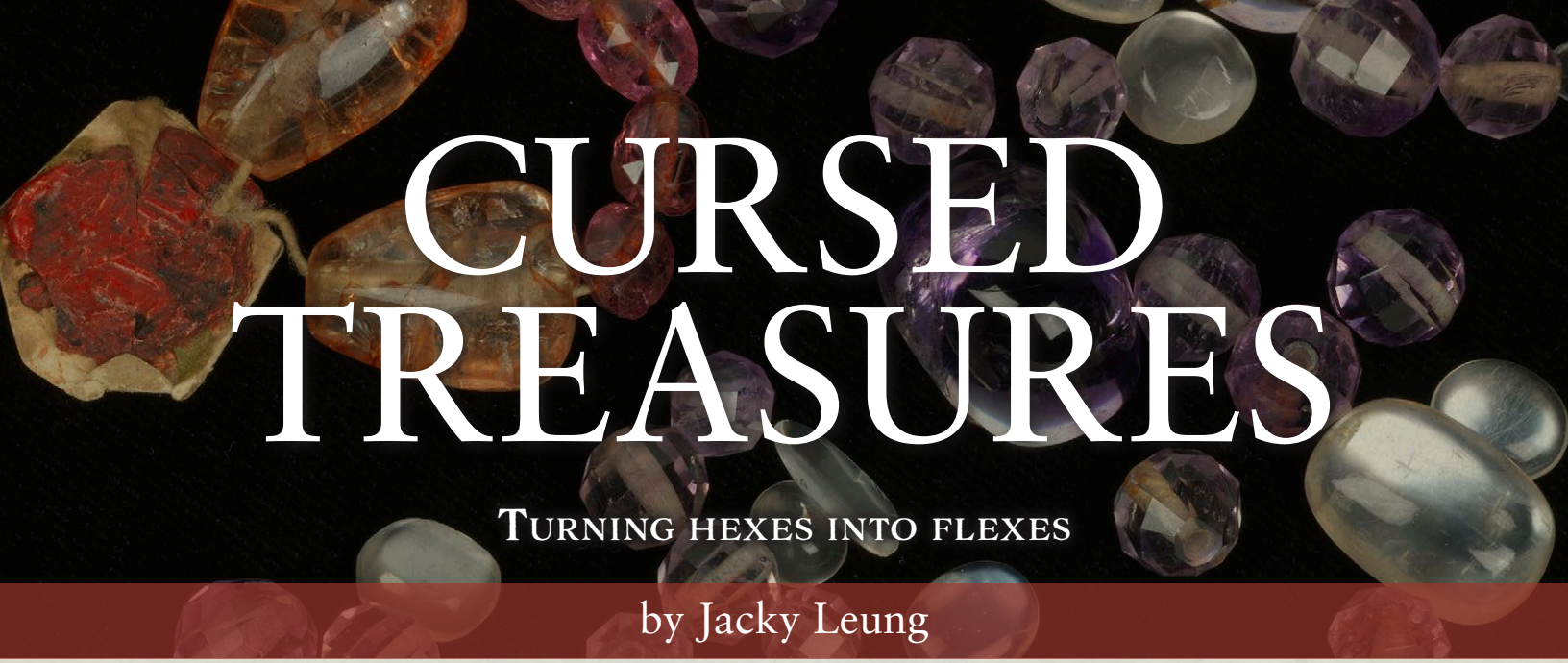
[1] See "The Nightmare Dragon" by Alex Clippinger in *ARCADIA 15*. It's a fun time. For the players. Probably not for the characters, though.



CURSED TREASURES

Turning hexes into flexes

by Jacky Leung

Content Warning: This article contains items with horrible curses that can lead to imprisonment, false visions, and additional character flaws.

After clearing out the tomb of the undead necromancer Lazurith, you discover a golden scepter embedded with gemstone. Unaware of the ominous shadow trapped within it, you bond with the item. A flurry of visions assails your mind, each worse than the last. Once the nightmares cease, a voice whispers, "Your doom is nigh." Days of referencing different historical journals later, you believe the ornate relic to be the *Scepter of the Unanointed*, but it's too late—the item's curse has you.

This article contains rules for creating cursed items, as well as three new cursed items, their legends, and rules for cleansing their curses.

CREATING CURSED ITEMS

The best cursed items grant boons, but with a cost. This price shouldn't interfere with the story or gameplay, nor should it be a "gotcha" moment for the GM's sole amusement. A curse that derails an ongoing campaign or inflicts severe penalties causes more harm than good. For example, a cursed periapt that regularly drains a character's ability scores would debilitate low-level characters and create a major inconvenience at higher tiers. It'd be even worse if the periapt had no magical benefits, since its gemstone has little value!

Cursed items should open avenues for the narrative to move forward and possess an element of risk. They are a lottery of good, bad, and awful effects. Balancing a cursed item's risks and rewards creates an engaging story and keeps the characters interacting with the treasure rather than leaving it on the floor of a dungeon.

In many cases, a *remove curse* spell can purge ill magic from an item, which makes the item's contribution to the story short, ineffectual, and frustrating at best. Memorable cursed objects, such as the One Ring from Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, are more potent and have a long legacy. Though not every cursed item needs an influence or history as grand as the One Ring, giving an object with tempting powers and a compelling backstory can enrich the character's narrative journey and serve as a phenomenal worldbuilding tool.

STARTING QUESTIONS

Consider the following questions when creating your cursed items:

- How does the item connect with the history of the world?
- Why was it created?
- What powers does it have that help it achieve its purpose?
- How was it cursed? By whom, or what?
- How can the curse be lifted?
- What potential does lifting the curse unlock?

When creating the legend behind a cursed item, it can be helpful to take inspiration from fables, myths, and folktales (such as Prometheus's ring, or Hephaestus's Necklace of Harmonia), as well as urban legends (such as how paintings of crying children always lead to house fires, or how families cover mirrors after death). The story behind the item can be purposeful and vengeful, or it can simply be eerie and tragic. The scope can be small and individual, or large enough to influence entire nations.

Finer Details

When crafting curses, consider these details:

- Treat the curses as a foil to the item's legacy or properties, but they should complement each other, not mitigate. For example, the curse of the *Boots of Tartarus* (as described later in this article) is tied to the item's Ghostwalker ability to travel into the Ethereal Plane, imposing a possible risk when using the feature.
- Cursed items should have properties that make using them worth the risk. For instance, the *Amulet of the Seer's Eyes* (described later in this article) twists the visions it shows into dark alternate realities, but it grants incredible divination spells and the ability to see invisible creatures and objects to those who dare to wear it.
- The *remove curse* spell usually ends a creature's attunement to the item. Sometimes stronger magic, such as a *greater restoration* or *wish* spell, is required instead.
- The method for breaking an object's curse permanently should tie into the item's legend. Breaking the curse completely should require at least a short adventure.

When using cursed items, it's important to establish your group's social contract before implementing the item. Ask for a player's consent before the curse affects their character, and describe how the curse can affect them. If a curse alters a character's personality, mitigates a player's or character's agency, or introduces elements that break the spirit of the current narrative, discuss this with your players and amend the effects accordingly to suit the group's story and comfort level. For example, a cursed item bent on the destruction of dragons can impart a new ideal where the character believes dragons should be extinguished from the world, but you should only use such a curse if the players are comfortable with it.

New Items

The following three cursed magic items are presented with legends, descriptions, properties, and a short story hook to help build a short adventure for removing the item's curse permanently.



Scepter of the Unanointed

Centuries ago, a priest named Arbalest the Wise acquired a scepter from a deva for his faith. The angel instructed Arbalest to use the divine instrument to anoint and protect the rulers of Arbalest's now-forgotten kingdom. When Bernasatrix, a powerful demon, possessed the body of a monarch, Arbalest was charged to banish the menace. After five days of failed attempts, the priest retreated to his sanctum and petitioned the spirits of his faith for a solution. Through his prayers, the priest learned to confront the demon in its domain, where the mind and soul meet.

Arbalest and his acolytes banished Bernasatrix into the scepter. The priest kept the item in a secure crypt dedicated to the deva who had gifted the divine rod. As the years passed, the scepter's care was passed to Arbalest's successors within the faith, though their order eventually faded into the tapestries of history, leaving Bernasatrix in lonely, silent fury. The demon vowed to escape one day to exact revenge on Arbalest and the order of his faith.

Scepter of the Unanointed

Rod, Legendary (Requires Attunement)

This scepter's handle is a long golden rod 22 inches in length. Atop the rod rests a large orb lined with a dozen different sparkling gemstones. Effigies of a lion, an eagle, a stag, and a dragon wrap around the orb, reaching for some unknown point above the rod. Upon closer inspection, shadowy visages spill through the specter's shaft.

The *Scepter of the Unanointed* is can be wielded as a magic mace that grants a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it.

Anointed Spells. While holding this rod, you can use an action to cast one of the following spells from it (save DC 17): *bless, death ward, lesser restoration,* or *protection from energy*. Once a spell has been cast using the rod, that spell can't be cast from it again until the next dawn or until you perform a charitable act, such as donating items to the less fortunate, volunteering at a religious site of worship, or helping a stranger in a meaningful way. The GM determines what is considered a charitable act, but it should involve a sacrifice of time, money, or other resources from you.

Devoted. While holding this rod, you have advantage on saving throws made to avoid being charmed or frightened. In addition, you have advantage on Constitution saving throws made to maintain concentration on spells. You feel a sense of pious devotion and faith swell within you whenever you gain advantage on a saving throw thanks to the rod.

Sentience. Possessed by the demon Bernasatrix, the *Scepter of the Unanointed* is a sentient chaotic evil weapon with an Intelligence of 16, a Wisdom of 14, and a Charisma of 17. It has hearing and darkvision out to a range of 120 feet. Bernasatrix communicates telepathically with the rod's wielder and can speak, read, and understand Abyssal, Celestial, and Common. The demon presents themself as a benevolent spirit cursed and bound to the item by Arbalest in his final years.

Spellcasting Focus. If you are a cleric or paladin, you can use the scepter as a holy symbol, and you gain a +3 bonus to spell attack rolls and the saving throw DCs of your spells.

Virtue. While you hold this rod, it exudes a magical aura in a 15-foot-radius sphere that lets you know a creature's foremost virtue. Each creature of your choice who enters the aura's area for the first time on a turn or starts their turn there must make a DC 15 Charisma saving throw; the creature is aware of this effect on entering the aura and can choose to fail this saving throw. On a failed save, you learn the defining virtue (such as grace, humility, or peace) of that creature and have advantage on Wisdom (Insight and Perception) checks against them while they are in the aura. On a successful save, that creature is immune to this effect for 24 hours.

Curse. This rod is cursed with the vengeful spirit of a demon, and becoming attuned to it extends the curse to you. The curse can't be broken with *remove curse* or similar magic, only by cleansing the item. Until the curse is broken, you are unwilling to part with the rod and gain the following flaw: "I know what I am doing, and I am always right. I know what's best for everyone."

Until the curse is broken, whenever you cast a spell using the rod's Anointed Spells property, roll a d20. On a 19 or 20, the spell is replaced with a detrimental effect for the spell's full duration, ignoring concentration:

- Targets of the *bless* spell are treated as being under the *bane* spell.
- A target of the *lesser restoration* spell gains a level of exhaustion.
- A target of the *protection from energy* spell gains vulnerability to the selected element instead of resistance.
- A target of the *death ward* spell has disadvantage on death saving throws.

Cleansing the Scepter

To cleanse the scepter of its curse, Bernasastrix must be removed from the item, which requires the wielder to complete a series of trials that Bernasastrix attempts to manipulate.

If asked about the curse, Bernasastrix plays the role of benevolent spirit and notes three holy sites where Arbalest once taught, studied, and prayed, claiming that destroying heretic iconographies at each site will lift the curse. This is a lie—the sites are connected to Arbalest's order. Damage or destruction would weaken the divine magic binding the demon spirit to the scepter and allow them to escape, which destroys the item and ends the character's curse.

In truth, the wielder must instead recite and meditate on the fifteen virtues of Arbalest's faith in each site. Once this ritual is completed, the scepter is cleansed, Bernastrix is destroyed, and the item loses its Sentience and Curse properties.

The Fifteen Virtues of Arbalest. Arbalest's faith has fifteen virtues that serve as central tenets of their beliefs.

- **Acceptance.** Welcome any and all to the faith.
- **Authenticity.** Be true to yourself and your faith.
- **Caring.** Care for others, always.
- **Commitment.** Keep all promises, oaths, and agreements.

- **Compassion.** Ease all pain in others.
- **Courage.** All have the strength to persevere against any hardship.
- **Fairness.** Faith has no favoritism.
- **Forgiveness.** All can be forgiven with time.
- **Honesty.** Speak the truth whenever possible.
- **Hope.** Inspire others to achieve the impossible.
- **Humility.** All are equal in faith; none are above another.
- **Peace.** A calm heart is an open one.
- **Respect.** Honor others, not for wisdom or gains, but for their being.
- **Thankfulness.** Always be thankful, for life is short.
- **Wisdom.** Learning is a lifelong journey.

You can substitute any virtue with another that best suits your narrative or setting.

CLEANSED

When the *Scepter of the Unanointed* is cleansed of its curse, it gains the following properties:

Charitable. When you cast a spell using the rod's Anointed Spells property, you can target one additional creature within the spell's range.

Selfless. Whenever a creature you can see within 60 feet of you is reduced to 0 hit points while you are holding this rod, you can use a reaction to stabilize the target. Once you use this property, it can't be used again until the next dawn, unless you expend a spell slot of 4th level or higher to use it again.

Anointment. You add *holy aura* spell to the list of spells that can be cast using the rod's Anointed Spells property. When cast from the rod, the spell has a range of a creature you can touch.

BOOTS OF TARTARUS

Rosamund Martel was a child of fate born under auspicious signs, prophesied to walk a harrowing path of righteousness, duty, and justice. Born in the countryside of a corrupt kingdom, she answered the call when the downtrodden populace revolted against their overlords.

The prophecy began its prose. The people called her a champion of justice. Her leadership ended the tyranny, and a new era began for her homeland—one of famine and war brought by invading neighbors. Rosamund continued fighting for her people.

When peace finally came, the champion returned to her humble origins. For years, the land prospered, but in Rosamund's twilight years, a new monarch brought new corruption. The tireless champion and her friends sparked another revolution, but their new foes unleashed the forces of the hells against them. Many believe that Rosamund and her companions died in a battle against a hellish entity through an act of mutual destruction.

They didn't. The fiend cursed Rosamund with a dying breath, imprisoning the champion and her comrades in a demiplane connected to a magic pair of boots. The infernal magic of the plane turned Rosamund and her friends into vengeful chain devils. When Rosamund's crusade ended, greed and corruption destroyed her homeland—remembered only in a haunting aria.

ARIA OF THE CHAINED DEVIL

"A lightbringer knight came to end a plight,
Flaming blade and golden shield for all within sight;
Justice dispensed and villains dispatched,
The seeds of new regimes hatched.

"A passage from the page of ages passed,
Rotten fruit taint the roots, shadows amassed.
The knight's light brought back to fight,
By war's end, the paragon made right and took flight.

"Another passage from the page of ages passed,
Rotten fruit taint the roots, decay amassed.
The knight relayed the edicts of justice, as formalities,
Alas, the masses grew deaf to such high moralities.

"The daggered words and stares left the knight
Without sight, might, or light;
The wayward knight turned from its beloved light,
Dispensing chains of sin and vengeance in the night.

"The chained devil, a fearsome blight
Brought a campaign of terror and fright;
Fate be cruel, new paragons dispatched,
Flames and chains danced in a duel mismatched.

"The devil perished, ashes for remains,
The land's sins echo like rattling chains."

Boots of Tartarus

Wondrous Item, Rare (Requires Attunement)

These boots resemble carved volcanic rock with glowing crimson veins. Chains wrap along the boots' calves, giving off a ghostly shimmer.

Heat Resistant. While wearing these boots, you have resistance to fire damage and can walk across hot liquid surfaces, such as lava, as if they were harmless ground. In addition, you can tolerate temperatures as high as 150 degrees Fahrenheit (66 degrees Celsius) without any additional protection. If you wear light or heat-resistant clothes, you can tolerate temperatures as high as 250 degrees Fahrenheit (121 degrees Celsius).

Ghostwalker. While wearing these boots, you can use an action to enter the Ethereal Plane as if under the effects of the *etherealness* spell. You can use the boots to remain in the Ethereal Plane for up to 6 hours, all at once or in several shorter periods, each one using a minimum of 10 minutes from the duration. The boots regain 1 hour of their ability to traverse into the Ethereal Plane for every 4 hours they aren't in use or for every 50 points of fire damage dealt to you (after applying resistance).

Curse. The boots are cursed, and becoming attuned to the boots extends the curse to you; the boots' ghostly chains wrap around your spirit, preventing you from removing them. The curse can only be broken by cleansing the boots, but *remove curse* or similar magic breaks the ghostly chains and allows you to remove the boots.

Until the curse is broken, whenever you enter the Ethereal Plane, you must succeed on a DC 11 Charisma saving throw or the boots banish you to a labyrinthine prison demiplane, while the boots remain in the space on the plane you entered the Ethereal Plane from. The DC increases by 1 for each successful saving throw and resets back to 11 on a failed saving throw. Once per hour, you can use an action to attempt to escape by making a DC 15 Intelligence check. On a success, you exit the prison demiplane and appear in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the boots. While trapped in the prison, you are constantly stalked by five hostile **chain devils**. If you die in the prison demiplane's maze, you return to life as a baleful **chain devil** controlled by the GM until freed from the maze (see "Cleansing the Boots of Tartarus").



Cleansing the Boots of Tartarus

Cleansing the *Boots of Tartarus* requires putting the spirit of Rosamund Martel and her companions to rest. To do so, one must confront her within the prison demiplane.

Unchain the Chained. Locating Rosamund requires entering the prison demiplane, either by failing the saving throw from the boots' curse or by casting a *plane shift* spell or similar magic. Once in the prison, the characters must brave the ethereal, ghostly labyrinth and confront all five of the chain devils, each a hero from the knight's crusades. A character can convince a chain devil to stop fighting and follow them out of the maze with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. If a chain devil leaves the demiplane, their soul passes into the afterlife. If a devil is destroyed, they return to life in the prison after 24 hours. Once Rosamund returns to the afterlife, the boots are cleansed and lose the Curse property. For each additional knight released from the prison, the boots' Chains of Guilt property gains an additional use.

Cleansed

When the *Boots of Tartarus* are cleansed of their curse, the boots gain the following properties:

Unchained. While wearing these boots and using the Ghostwalker property to travel the Ethereal Plane, you are under the effects of a *freedom of movement* spell.

Chains of Guilt. You can use an action to conjure ghostly chains that attempt to ensnare each creature of your choice that you can see within 30 feet of you. A target must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the target takes 5d8 psychic damage and their speed is halved until the start of your next turn. On a successful save, the target takes half as much damage and its speed is unaffected. You can use this feature a number of times equal to the number of knights freed from cleansing the boots (minimum of 1), and you regain all expended uses daily at dusk.



Amulet of the Seer's Eyes

Long ago, a renowned mage named Aldren Cato sought to harness cosmic energies to empower great works of divination. They recorded the astronomical movement and behaviors of the stars with an elaborate contraption called the Oracle Engine, an intricate instrument built atop an observation tower in a secluded valley. The diviner was remarkably accurate in their predictions, foreseeing the fate of even kingdoms. The demand for Cato's services grew, with nations threatening war for control of the Oracle Engine.

As tensions rose and rulers vied for Cato's power, the diviner refused to meet with any of their representatives, shutting themself inside their tower with their device. Locals near the mage's tower reported strange lights and sounds coming from it every evening. One night, the tower became silent and dark. The following day, armed envoys from several kingdoms arrived to recruit Cato by force. The groups clashed, igniting a yearslong war. None entered the tower during the conflict, claiming the building was cursed.

Then, one night years after the wars subsided, the strange lights and sounds returned to the tower, and locals claimed to see Cato in the windows. They entered the place, but found only a strange amulet hanging on the observatory's telescope with a message written across the walls: "The eyes of the seer are the gateway to the stars." Rulers coveted the amulet, which caused new wars for decades before it was lost.

Amulet of the Seer's Eyes

Wondrous Item, Very Rare (Requires Attunement)

This gold amulet depicts an all-seeing eye surrounded by five gemstones. The central eye is a magical gem that becomes translucent when used, revealing wisps of shadowy figures mocking an unseen subject out of the wearer's periphery.

Seer's Vision. While wearing this amulet, you have darkvision out to 60 feet and can see invisible creatures and objects when you peer through the amulet's central gem. If you already have darkvision, using the amulet increases its range by 60 feet.

In addition, while wearing this amulet, you always know which way is north and the number of hours left before the next sunrise or sunset.

Spells. This amulet has 5 charges. As an action, you can hold the amulet over one of your eyes or your forehead and expend 1 charge to cast a spell from it (spell save DC 15). The spell cast is dependant on where you are holding the amulet:

- **Left Eye.** You cast the *legend lore* spell, targeting one creature or object you can see.
- **Right Eye.** You cast the *scrying* spell.
- **Forehead.** You cast the *divination* spell.

The amulet regains 1d4 + 1 expended charges daily at dawn.

Curse. The amulet is cursed, and becoming attuned to the amulet extends the curse to you. The curse can only be broken by cleansing the amulet, but *remove curse* or similar magic suppresses the curse for 24 hours. The amulet acts as a fulcrum and viewpoint to possible futures. Each possibility encompasses a self-contained reality similar yet different from another. Until the curse is broken, you gain the following flaw: "I regret the paths not taken, the other choices I could've made."

Until the curse is broken, whenever you cast a divination spell to gain information, the GM can ask you to roll a d20. On an odd result of 17 or lower, the information or insight gained from the spell comes from an alternate reality with a worse outcome. When the GM gives these alternate readings, the readings should remain plausible with one or two major differences. For example, a *scrying* spell cast over a keep reveals a ruined structure after a dragon attack, while the structure currently remains unharmed. On an even result of 18 or lower, the information or insight from the spell is plausibly true with only minor differences. For example, a *legend lore* spell may reveal an object that once belonged to a king, when it actually belonged to a queen. On a roll of 19 or 20, the information or insight from the spell remains unaffected.

Cleansing the Amulet of the Seer's Eyes

Cleansing the amulet requires the wearer to become the master of their destiny, untethered from the strings of fate. To stabilize the amulet, the wearer must harness the astrological energy from Aldren Cato's Oracle Engine and anchor the item to the present reality.

The Oracle Engine. Finding Aldren Cato's tower isn't difficult, but the region is in a dangerous political and militaristic deadlock between several nations and factions. Even after the adventurers breach the multitude of obstacles and encampments, the supposedly abandoned tower is littered with spatial and temporal distortions. When a creature enters a new room in the tower, they must succeed on a DC 12 Charisma saving throw or jaunt 1d20 years into the past (odd die roll) or future (even die roll). If the amulet is cleansed, a creature returns to their original timeline.

The Oracle Engine is located at the observatory at the top of the tower and held in temporal stasis, allowing it (and any items placed in it, such as the amulet) to appear across all timelines. An adventurer can attempt to align the Oracle Engine to present reality with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana or History) check made as an action. On a failed check, the Oracle Engine is misaligned, and a powerful time wraith (see "Time Wraiths") emerges to drain the temporal energy of creatures in the chamber. After five successful alignment adjustments, any time wraiths disappear. Aldren Cato manifests to thank and reward the characters for freeing them from the different timelines. Aldren willingly parts with the amulet as a show of thanks, and the amulet loses the Curse property and gains additional features.

Time Wraiths. Aldren Cato's experimentation and utilization of the Oracle Engine created variant timelines. A deity of time viewed Cato's intrusions as disruptive and potentially catastrophic. To hinder Cato from using the device further, spectral entities called time wraiths manifest in every variant timeline to track down the elusive diviner when they use the Oracle Engine. These time wraiths use the **wraith** stat block with the following changes:

- A time wraith's AC is 15 (natural armor).
- A time wraith is immune to the frightened condition.
- A time wraith has the following action option in place of the Create Specter action.

Time Drain. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 24 (6d6 + 3) psychic damage and the target becomes older or younger (wraith's choice) by a number of years equal to the damage taken. This aging effect is reversed when the target finishes a long rest. The time wraith also gains temporary hit points equal to the damage taken.

CLEANSED

When the *Amulet of the Seer's Eyes* is cleansed of its curse, it gains the following properties:

Compass of the Stars. You always know the location of any star or constellation in the night sky, and the amount of time left before the next major cosmic event such as solstices, eclipses, convergences, or alignments.

Kaleidoscopic Eye. When you hold the amulet over one of your eyes or your forehead, you can expend 1 charge (see the amulet's Spells property) to gain one of the following benefits, dependant on where you are holding the amulet:

- **Left Eye.** You gain truesight out to a range of 60 feet for 1 hour.
- **Right Eye.** You find the shortest, most direct physical route (but not necessarily the safest route) to a specific fixed location that you are familiar with on the same plane of existence as you.
- **Forehead.** The amulet casts *foresight* on you, which has a duration of 1 hour.

Future Vision. While peering through the amulet, you can gaze into the potential future of an area covering a 1,000-foot-cube originating from you. For each consecutive minute spent peering through the amulet, you can see 1 hour into the future (maximum 24 hours). The events you see unfold are only a possible future, which the amulet provides no context for aside from what you witness. Within a number of hours equal to the time you looked into the future, you can benefit from this foresight by making one ability check, attack roll, or saving throw with advantage within the area. Once used, this property can't be used again for 7 days, unless you expend a spell slot of 9th level to use it again.

DIVINE TRIALS: SHADOWS OF THE MOON

A mythic trial to confront the heroes' darkest selves

by Sadie Lowry and Amber Litke

> **Everyone is a moon and has a dark side which he never shows to anybody.**
>
> —Mark Twain

The *ARCADIA 17* article "Divine Trials: Glory of the Sun" introduced a series of three connected celestial trials built by divine creators to test and refine heroes. The sun trial examines the heroic penchant for pride and ambition. The second of these tests, the moon trial, is a series of challenges that asks each character to face their own darkness.

"Shadows of the Moon" is designed for four 5th-level characters. Part three of Divine Trials—the star trial—will appear in a future issue of *ARCADIA*. Each article provides lore and hooks, while the last article will provide suggestions for tying all three adventures together.

The Moon Trial

The moon is the most mysterious of celestial bodies. For myriad cultures across the world, the moon can represent healing, the realm between consciousness and unconsciousness, inner knowledge, and even the life cycle of mortals, waxing and waning alongside them as they make their way through the world. To some, the moon is eerie, elusive, and enigmatic. To others, it's tranquil, protective, and revitalizing.

Yet an ever-present question follows the moon in its eternal cycles: What lies on its unseen dark side?

That mystery has long captivated mortalkind, and causes people to fill the moon's shadowed side with tales of terrors. These stories reflect the introspective question: What lies within a person's dark side, beyond their shining exterior? And when that ever-hidden side is finally revealed, what horrors will be seen to lurk and fester in each of us?

Finding Fault

Over centuries, a deity of wisdom grew increasingly frustrated with how those who have the potential for great acts of goodness can also cause great harm. With increased influence, power, and opportunities to change the world, a flawed hero has a greater chance to hurt others. The wisdom deity thus joined hands with a moon deity, and together they created the moon trial, tasking the moon deity's angel Artimitei to be its divine arbiter. Under her direction, heroes would see and face their faults under the light of the moon, with the hopes of heading off their worst inclinations as they approached ever-greater renown.

As GM, you can create new lore for the moon trial as you see fit. Artimitei (room three) and Falathin (room one) are Celestial agents who might have additional connections to your campaign. Likewise, the moon trial can be made to manifest anywhere that heroes are in need of the lessons it can teach. Its entrance point typically appears as a curved archway in a place touched by both light and shadow: a mossy stone in the midst of the woods, a crumbling brick wall in a ruined village, a cavern entrance slick with water and fungi, and so forth. The moon trial's door always looks mysterious and eerie, as if hiding much in the unseen spaces beyond.

Adventure Hooks

You can incorporate the moon trial into your campaign with the following adventure hooks:

- After slighting a Celestial, priest, or other divine ally, the characters are commanded to undergo the moon trial or face divine judgment.
- Following the failure or near-failure of a mission, the characters' benefactor threatens to sever their relationship if they don't undertake the moon trial.
- After an incident in which the party was compromised by one or more of the characters' faults or weaknesses, the archway entrance to the moon trial appears before the characters as an invitation to confront those weaknesses.

Trials of Character

The divine forces that forged the celestial trials won't be satisfied with every solution a so-called hero might use to pass the trials' challenges. Characters who circumnavigate (read: cheat) the trials by skipping them, such as with the *dimension door* spell, or by killing NPCs in non-combat challenges, find themselves redirected to the beginning of the challenge they sought to avoid with everything as it was when they first entered the room. This shouldn't dissuade creative and unconventional problem solving—thinking outside the box is encouraged, but cheating has consequences.

If necessary, a disembodied divine voice tells heroes that their character is being tested, not their skullduggery, or gives a more direct warning. Killed NPCs don't need to remember their deaths, unless the GM wants to add a social consequence for violence, but killing a foe won't bring the characters any closer to success.

Faults

The challenges of the moon trial require you as the GM to lean on the weaknesses of the characters. Prior to running the moon trial, think about whether any of the following are faults of any of the characters: cowardice, greed, recklessness, or wrath. If a character has more than one fault (many do!), pick the most prominent or problematic to address in the moon trial. Depending on the players, it might be prudent to discuss their characters' faults and whether they agree with your interpretation of them. This trial is much more satisfying with player buy-in.

If a character's faults don't include one of the four faults noted above, you can choose whichever fault feels closest for the character, perhaps by having a conversation with the player. For example, you might select greed for a character whose fault is envy, either by spinning their envy as an avaricious desire for the things others have, or by adjusting the greed-based sections of the trial to lean into a rapacity for those things. Alternatively, if no suggested fault feels close enough, you can use the challenges as a guideline to create a customized experience that better fits the characters, both narratively and mechanically.

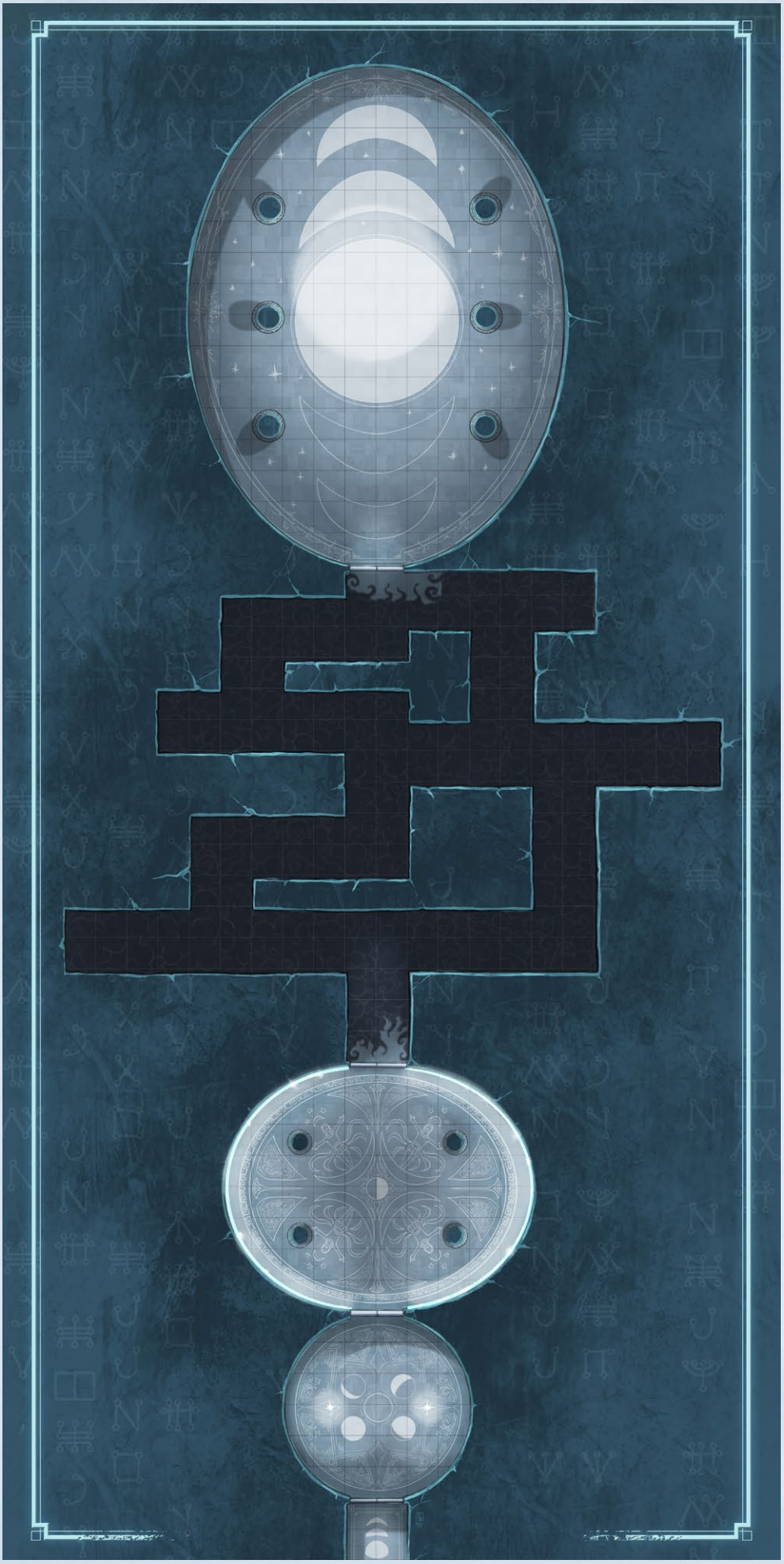
Lunar Antechamber

After the initial appearance of the moon trial's archway (or whatever other entrance you might wish to create), the characters can step through that archway to enter the lunar antechamber that leads into the challenges they will face.

The antechamber is a small circular room with a 10-foot-high ceiling. Two motes of moonlight fill the area with dim light when the light in the ceiling has faded (see below). When the characters enter this area, read or paraphrase the following:

> The entrance rumbles closed and vanishes, sealing you in a circular room. Against the dim light shed by two floating orbs, a brighter silvery light shines out from overhead, starting as a pale crescent and gradually filling the domed ceiling. As that light spreads, glowing white words scroll across the curved stone wall.
>
> "Hone your soul in tests divine,
> By entering this holy shrine.
> This test in shadow lays you bare.
> What secrets have you feared to share?"
>
> Underneath the poem, a single line appears, glowing slowly brighter until it gleams: "Face your darkness."
>
> The light above begins to wane until it is a dim sliver of silver once again. At the same time, an arched doorway opens in the wall in front of you.

Any character who has a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 16 or higher sees the darkness in the unlit areas of the ceiling shifting and flickering, as if something is alive in the shadows. Immediately after a character notices the effect, it ceases.



ROOM ONE:
DEPICTIONS OF DARKNESS

The mural room that is the first chamber of the moon trial is a place for the characters to reflect upon personal faults. This room has a 30-foot-high domed ceiling and is filled with dim light. The murals in the area have connections to the characters, so adjust the read-aloud text below as needs be.

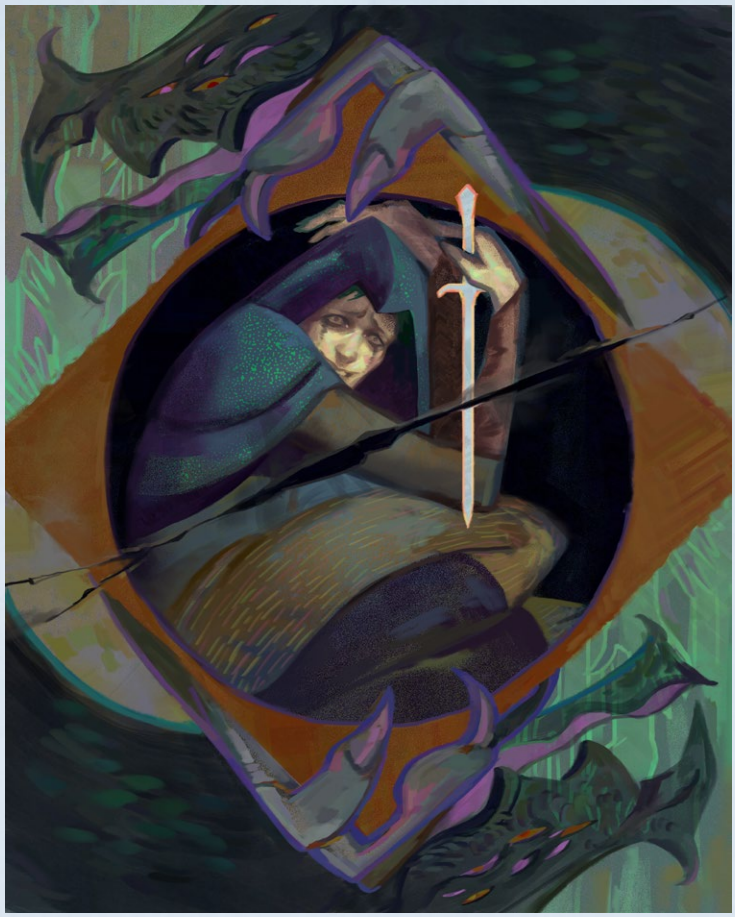
The number of figures depicted in the murals equals the number of characters, with each image alluding to one of the characters and their fault. For example, one mural might depict a cowardly rogue crouched safely behind three barrels while a winged demon swoops overhead, while another might show a greedy bard bedecked in gold and holding an ornate goblet.

> The archway opens into a round room, slightly larger than the entrance antechamber, and illuminated by light radiating from the walls and the domed ceiling. Fine murals are set along the walls, each depicting a different figure—but each figure's torso is sundered by an enormous black gash with some sort of object set within. In eerie contrast to the violent emptiness where their hearts should be, each of the figures is smiling.
>
> Across the room, a translucent silver-blue dragon rises from the ground. Moonlight appears to ripple over his scales as he moves. Though he doesn't open his mouth, his voice rings in your mind, causing an unnatural chill to thread through you and trickle down your spine. "What do you know of yourselves? We will see."

The cracks in the murals extend into the wall. Within each crack, right where the depicted figure's heart would be, is an item related to the fault of the character the mural alludes to:

- ***Cowardice.*** A white poultry feather
- ***Greed.*** A platinum coin
- ***Recklessness.*** A boar tusk
- ***Wrath.*** A vial holding flickering fire

The **young silver dragon** who greets the characters is named Falathin (FAL-ah-thin, he/him), and has the Celestial type rather than Dragon. He instructs the characters to remove the weakness from their own hearts, explaining to them that, "Your decisions shall









affect your reality." If any characters take these instructions too literally, Falathin dryly stops them from committing harm to themselves and directs them toward the murals.

When any character touches the mural or the item that represents them, they enter a vision that presents an individual challenge. Example challenge scenarios are set up below for the faults of cowardice, greed, recklessness, and wrath, but embellish and evolve each as you see fit. If more than one character has the same fault, it is recommended to run their visions simultaneously (either as a group or as individuals) so they won't know what to expect, though this advice can be disregarded if the experiences are more personalized.

As GM, you can also run each character's vision privately, which offers the benefits of creating a tense, isolating atmosphere, and of encouraging the players to roleplay their characters more faithfully in the absence of other eyes and ears on their vision.

CHOICE AND TEMPTATION

Each vision is designed to tempt a character away from making the right choice. A character who succeeds at their challenge emerges from the vision to find the item in their mural replaced by a new one—representative of the actions they took to overcome their fault in the vision. Use the suggestions on the Virtue Items table as ideas and examples.

A character who fails their challenge emerges from the vision to find that the crack across the mural related to them has grown darker and deeper, and that the item representing their fault still lies within. As a consequence of failure, the GM can impose disadvantage on one ability check, attack roll, or saving throw the character makes during the rest of the moon trial.

As each character completes their trial, Falathin grudgingly praises those who overcome their challenge, and criticizes those who fail. The dragon also encourages the characters to take the magic virtue item from the mural as their reward. A character who has the virtue item on their person can expend its magic once to gain advantage on an ability check, attack roll, or saving throw (no action required).

Once all characters have completed the challenge, Falathin fades away to silvery wisps of light and the arched doorway into the next chamber opens.

Virtue Items

Item	Meaning
Statuette with outstretched hands	Selflessness
Coin collection cup	Charity
Red lotus	Compassion
Lion figurine	Bravery
Fox figurine	Cunning
Turtle figurine	Tenacity
Owl feather	Wisdom
Herding dog figurine	Responsibility
Book	Intelligence, forethought
Heart figurine	Kindness
Olive branch	Mercy, peace
Meditating figurine	Self-discipline

COWARDICE

In their vision, the character hides in the shadows of an alley as they see someone important to them—perhaps a party member, a family member, or a beloved NPC—surrounded by armed forces, spears and swords pointed at them. One of the victim's aggressors laughs darkly, jerking up their chin with the tip of a blade. "Abandoned at the last second. You should know better than to run with cowards." The crowd of aggressors moves in.

A character who intervenes in the impending assault succeeds on this challenge. A character who doesn't fails the challenge.

GREED

In the vision of greed, the character finds themself holding something they crave: gold, jewels, a rare magic item, a deed to an important piece of land, a crown, or anything else they desire. They stand in a dark hall and hear shouting behind them, the aggressive voices saying, "Which way did they go!?" and "I've lost them!"

It appears as though the character has almost succeeded at a great heist. But then standing before them in the dark hall, they see someone they could easily overpower—perhaps an injured guard, an elderly servant, or a child. Alternatively, a character with a history of theft might see someone they have stolen from before, or who has stolen from them. Whoever it is, that person requests

CREATING PERSONALIZED CHALLENGES

Self-introspective challenges shine when they are personal. Instead of the provided challenges, you as GM can use the following guidelines to create meaningful challenges for each character, holding them at a tension point where they'll be tempted to give in to their faults.

Make it Personal. This is the fastest way to jeopardize a character's good judgment. Maybe they face a rival they would loathe losing to. Maybe you tempt them with what they've always wanted. Maybe they face what they fear most. Ask yourself why this character gives in to their faults, then make them confront that.

Keep it Simple. Each of the visions should take a few minutes tops, and should feature a slightly less obvious right answer and a slightly more obvious wrong answer. Coming up with the wrong answer (such as a character running away from someone chasing them) should be easy. Figuring out the right answer (such as a character turning themself in) should take a little more effort.

Remember Motivations. Why does a character do what they do? Are they afraid of consequences? Convey how devastating the consequences would be if they're caught attempting a risky activity, or promise them safety if they succumb to temptation. Do they want praise? Have NPCs praise them for doing the wrong thing. Remember what makes a character tick and promise them the world.

Echo Old Moments. For long-term characters, make them revisit old mistakes from previous adventures in the campaign! See if they've learned anything since those mistakes were made.

Allow Them Growth. The player determines whether their character has grown enough to overcome this challenge, not the GM. Each challenge has a minor reward for success and a minor detriment for failure, but players should be encouraged to lean into roleplaying and do what their character would truly do. That said, if a player doesn't think their character would succeed on the challenge, don't make it harder for them. Especially for long-term characters, give them the win in the name of character growth.

the treasure from them. The sounds of the guards nearby grow louder, creating a sense of urgency.

A character who surrenders their treasure succeeds on this challenge. A character who doesn't fails the challenge.

Recklessness

In this vision, the character sees an unusually long corridor ahead of them, at the end of which is something they want desperately to reach. This could be an object, but might also be a person, a location, or some other intangible desire. However, the character has no way to tell that the hall is filled with dangerous and potentially deadly traps.

A character who shows caution and forethought in moving down the hall succeeds on this challenge. A character who doesn't fails the challenge.

Wrath

In the vision of wrath, the character finds themself in a prison cell, where a guard mocks them for letting their temper get the better of them again. A snobby noble with a demeaning sneer enters the cell, telling the character they are willing to overlook this little situation if the character is willing to apologize for their behavior. Depending on the character, this apology could be for anything from publicly deriding the noble to assaulting them.

A character who sincerely apologizes succeeds on this challenge. A character who doesn't fails the challenge.

Room Two: Moonlit Hunter

> The doorway opens into a silvery stone hallway that ends at an intersection, the corridor turning left and right. Faint fog drifts through the air, with the only light in the hallway coming from the mural room behind you.

These maze-like corridors have 10-foot-high ceilings. The fog here is chill and damp, and the air feels thinner than usual. Each noise or movement made in this area, even the faintest whisper or the slightest shuffle of a foot on the floor, echoes down the connected hallways.

As soon as the last character steps through into the hallway, the arched doorway in the mural room slams shut and vanishes, leaving the party in darkness. This entire area is filled with magical shadow, which can't be seen through regardless of ancestral traits, class features, or equipment. However, a few seconds after the doorway vanishes, each character who passed the challenge in the first room can see through the magical shadow, perceiving the area as if it were brightly lit.

Stalked in Shadow

As the characters navigate the corridors of this area, they are stalked by a **crescent devourer**—a monster that lives in shadows and feeds on weakness. The devourer's gray body is long and serpentine, with three clawed limbs on each side that help them move along the walls. Though their jagged jaw is lined with glinting fangs, the creature uses their long, serrated tail to strike instead, its sharp silver edges pulsing with magic.

The crescent devourer initially lurks on the ceiling of the hall's first intersection. They begin attacking the characters once they start down either of the branching paths, or might fall back to attack elsewhere in the hall at your determination (especially if most or all of the characters succeeded on the previous challenge).

Like a presence dredged from the dark side of the moon, the crescent devourer skitters through the maze, using their Mimicry trait to copy the characters' voices. If anyone failed the previous test in the mural room, the creature asks them what they should have done instead, and why they gave into their weakness. They then make Sin Strike attacks to harass the characters, using Shadow Jump either to reach new targets or escape from characters who can see them, hoping to sow confusion, fear, and paranoia.

When the crescent devourer speaks to a character who failed the previous challenge, that character understands that they can use an action or a bonus action to answer. If the character speaks a satisfactory and sincere answer (using the personal challenges in room one as a guide) and is loud enough for other characters in the area to hear them, they gain the ability to see through the darkness as if they had succeeded at the previous challenge.

The characters can fight the crescent devourer or flee from the creature. But they must reach the end of the hallway maze, where the arched doorway into room three is unlocked and waiting for them, to succeed at the challenge. If the characters don't defeat the crescent devourer, the creature stops chasing them once they enter the final chamber.

Crescent Devourer

Medium Monstrosity, Unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 97 (13d8 + 39)
Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	9 (–1)	14 (+2)	8 (–1)

Saving Throws Str +5, Dex +7
Skills Stealth +7
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened
Senses blindsight 120 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages understands all languages but speaks only through the use of their Mimicry trait
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +3

Mimicry. The crescent devourer can mimic Beast sounds and Humanoid voices. A creature that hears the sounds can tell they are imitations with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check.

Spider Climb. The crescent devourer can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the crescent devourer has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Actions

Multiattack. The crescent devourer makes three Sin Strike attacks. They can't attack the same target twice in one turn.

Sin Strike. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) psychic damage and the target suffers one of the following effects based on their fault:

Cowardice: The target is frightened of the crescent devourer until the start of the crescent devourer's next turn.

Greed: The target can't benefit from beneficial effects bestowed by another creature until the start of the crescent devourer's next turn. This includes spells that restore hit points, features that give bonuses to die rolls, and so forth.

Recklessness: The target takes 3 (1d6) psychic damage each time they attack or deal damage to another creature on their next turn.

Wrath: The target must use their reaction to make a melee weapon attack with advantage against a random creature within reach, other than the crescent devourer. If the target has already used their reaction for this turn, they make this attack using their reaction at the start of their next turn.

Bonus Actions

Shadow Jump. The crescent devourer teleports, along with any equipment they are wearing or carrying, up to 30 feet to an unoccupied space they can see. Both the space they teleport from and the space they teleport to must be in dim light or darkness.

ROOM THREE:
THE TRUE SELF

This room has a 60-foot-high domed ceiling. The area is dark when the door opens, but characters who shine light inside can see its details. When the first character enters, the ceiling begins to glow, with the area alternating between dim and bright light thereafter as the ceiling flares and fades. When the last character enters, the doorway slams shut and disappears.

> The whole ceiling begins to brighten, showing off the six gleaming columns that support it, and the murals across the floor that depict the night sky. The light then fades again, as if marking the progression from the bright full moon back to the dark new moon—and in that shadow, a celestial figure in silver armor now faces you, a tall and solemn woman with ornate silver armor and massive silvery wings. The feathers of her wings grow wispy at their ends, nearly translucent in the waxing moonlight.
>
> "I am Artimitei," she says in soft greeting. "Your last task is at hand, but it is the most difficult. Are you prepared?"

The **deva** Artimitei (ar-tim-EE-teh, she/her) is the divine arbiter of the moon trial. No matter what the characters answer, she nods, stepping back and raising one hand.

> "Few are actually prepared to see themselves at their most loathsome. But you have come far. Do not turn your eyes away now."
>
> The ceiling's light above cycles again. As the room brightens, you face a group of silvery figures with eerie bright-white eyes.
>
> Yourselves.
>
> Holding your weapons and bearing your faces, these shadow selves speak in unison. "Come. Confront yourselves." Moving forward, they raise weapons and attack.

In this final challenge, the characters face silvery moonlit creatures that look like themselves. Each shadow self uses a stat block determined by their source character's fault, as noted on the Shadow Self table, but retains the character's creature type and size category. For faults of your own creation, use the stat block of any suitable creature with a challenge rating of 3.

Shadow Self

Fault	Stat Block
Cowardice	**Basilisk**
Greed	**Blue dragon wyrmling**
Recklessness	**Hell hound**
Wrath	**Bearded devil**

These shadow selves portray and magnify each character's faults. They embrace those faults. They revel in them. And they are determined to strike their "worse" selves down.

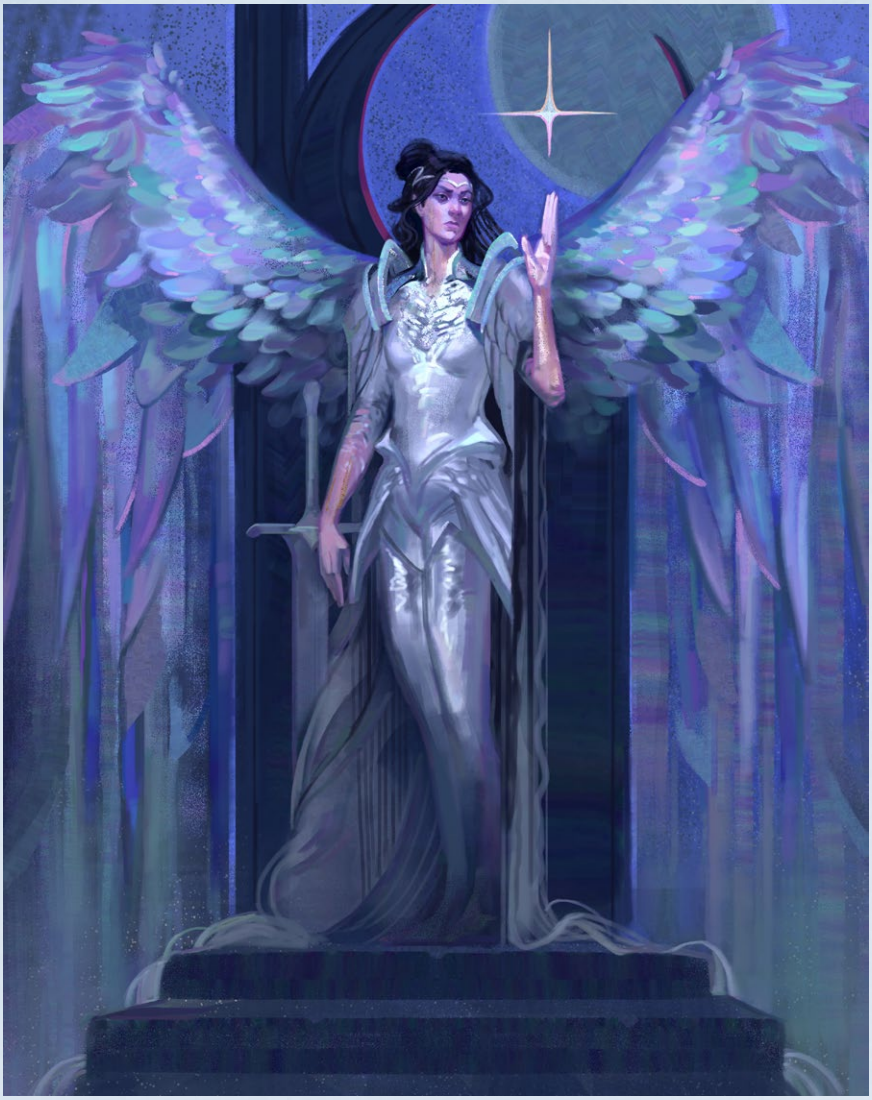
BUILDING THE CHALLENGE

When the authors run this kind of challenge in our home games, we use the party's character sheets instead of stand-in stat blocks, because having the characters literally face themselves can be extremely narratively fulfilling (and tactically fun). This encounter involves a lot of moving parts, however: combat, roleplay, benefits and drawbacks (see "A Greater Challenge: Rewarding Faults and Change"), as well as lair actions. It's a lot to track, and the mental load is potentially daunting.

We suggest prepping ahead of time and treating this part of the adventure as a "build-an-encounter" workshop, taking your favorite parts to create a fight that will resonate with the players and their characters. Do the players like being tactical, so that they'll appreciate the challenge of the characters needing to physically overcome themselves? Perhaps you can use their character sheets but leave out the benefits, drawbacks, or lair actions. Or do you want to focus on the roleplaying instead of the mechanics? You could use the suggested stat blocks, leave out the lair actions, and focus on the benefits or drawbacks.

You could also give each stand-in stat block a few key abilities of the character they represent. Alternatively, give them attacks or traits that tie into their character's fault, like those of the crescent devourer (see room two).

The challenge of this section offers many ways to approach it, and if some aspect of the encounter doesn't add to the challenge or the narrative for you, you're wholly encouraged to discard it. All that matters is that the characters come out feeling triumphant.



ROLEPLAYING FAULTS

During the fight, each shadow self claims that they have unmasked their character's "true" self, and that all the characters are just pretending to be what they aren't. They goad the characters, question them, and try to fill them with self-doubt with statements like the following:

- "Aren't you tired of pretending?"
- "Look at what you could be if you admitted the truth."
- "Unleash your anger."
- "Protect yourself."
- "Just admit you're the greatest."
- "Why do you keep lying to yourself?"
- "They all tell you you're wrong for being this way. But look at me. I'm awakened. I'm free."
- "If they loved you, they would love you for all of who you are."

Each shadow self takes their fault to the extreme. Wrathful characters see themselves depicted as bad-tempered and dangerous. Cowardly characters see themselves shrinking back and hiding. Greedy characters see themselves openly desire *more*—perhaps even what their companions have. Each shadow self allows the characters a look at who they might become if they don't strive to become better.

OVERCOMING FAULTS

This combat should be a moment of triumph. The moon trial is about each character overcoming their worst self—but for some characters, that might not be through combat!

At your discretion as GM, reward attempts to peacefully resolve this scenario. If a character (especially a wrathful or reckless one) refuses to fight, you could have their shadow self stop fighting, too. You might also allow a character to attempt to talk their shadow self down with DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) checks, either to claim they don't want to be that way or to convince the shadow self that their twisted beliefs are wrong.

A character could recount how they've worked to overcome their fault, and if their examples are strong enough, their shadow self could stop fighting—or might even join the party's side against the other shadow selves. If each character peacefully denies their shadow selves before they are defeated, the shadows might call forth Artimitei and request additional benefits for the characters, as they have shown great resolve in being better than before.

Lair Actions

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the shadow selves can take one lair action as a group to cause one of the following effects, but can't use the same effect two rounds in a row. Each time an effect is used, the light from the ceiling suddenly shifts to portray the indicated phase of the moon.

- **Full Moon:** A brilliant beam of light descends from the ceiling, filling a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on a point any shadow self can see within 120 feet of them. The light lasts until the end of initiative count 20 on the following round. Creatures and objects in the light have disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight. A creature that enters the light for the first time on a turn or starts its turn there takes 10 (3d6) radiant damage.
- **Waning Moon:** One creature that any shadow self can see within 120 feet of them must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be knocked prone and shown visions of all their faults and mistakes. While prone from this effect, the target is restrained and unable to stand up until the end of initiative count 20 on the following round. Another creature not under this effect that can reach the target can use an action to shake them out of their visions and help them stand, ending the prone condition on them.
- **New Moon:** Each shadow self splits off an illusory duplicate that appears within 10 feet of the original shadow self. Until the end of initiative count 20 on the following round, the duplicates move with the shadow selves, shifting position so it's impossible to track which figure is real. Each time a creature makes an attack against a shadow self whose illusory duplicate is present, roll a d20. On a roll of 11 or higher, the attack instead targets the duplicate, which has the same AC as its shadow self. If the attack hits, the duplicate is destroyed. A duplicate can be destroyed only by an attack that hits them, ignoring all other damage and effects. It is also destroyed if the shadow self that spawned it is destroyed. A creature that can't see, relies on senses other than sight, or that automatically sees illusions for what they are is unaffected by this lair action.
- **Waxing Moon:** Each shadow self gains 10 (3d6) temporary hit points.

A Greater Challenge: Rewarding Faults and Change

For players who love a challenge and who really want to lean into the moon trial's themes, consider implementing one of the following options to raise the stakes in this encounter.

Buff the Shadows. As the shadow selves mock the characters for "pretending," you can grant them minimal buffs for having freed themselves from that pretense. Wrathful shadows can deal an extra 1d6 damage with their brutal attacks. Cowardly shadows gain 1d6 temporary hit points each round that they stay back. Reckless shadows can deal 2d6 damage to a second character when they use their entire turn on offensive actions. Greedy shadows can roll a d4 and add it to an attack roll or saving throw each round that they pursue a character carrying what they desire. Keep these buffs minimal but combine them with the shadow selves' mocking, as they demonstrate to the characters how much stronger they could be if they'd only give in to their faults.

Buff the Characters Positively. Alternatively, reward the characters for not giving in to their faults. You might give reckless characters an extra 1d6 damage on a second target when they fight tactically instead of impulsively. Cowardly characters might gain 1d6 temporary hit points when they're brave. Wrathful characters could deal an extra 1d6 damage when they don't fall for the shadow selves' taunts. And greedy characters could be allowed to roll a d4 and add it to an attack roll or saving throw on a round in which they aid an ally. Keep the buffs minimal, and combine them with jeering as the shadow selves accuse the characters of denying who they truly are!

Buff the Characters Negatively. Alternatively, you can reward the characters for giving in to their faults. Buff them the same way you'd buff the shadow selves, and combine this with the shadow selves' praise for the characters acknowledging their true nature. If you choose this third option, give any character who resisted these actions and buffs an additional reward at the end of the adventure, such as a *gem of brightness*, a *lantern of revealing*, or a similar uncommon magic item.

Completing the Moon Trial

If the characters are defeated by their shadow selves, they wake up outside the entrance point to the moon trial and see that the door has disappeared. It reappears when they are more prepared for the trials that await beyond it.

If the characters defeat their shadow selves, each shadow speaks as it falls, telling the character whose form it reflects to "Always face your darkness, no matter what lies within." The shadow then fades, along with any equipment they possessed.

Artimitei appears once more before the characters, congratulates them on triumphing over their weaknesses, and gives them the rewards of the moon trial—200 gp, a *ring of the gleaming moon* (see the sidebar), and a *stone of good luck* shaped like a crescent moon.

Ring of the Gleaming Moon

Ring, Very Rare
(Requires Attunement Outdoors at Night)

While wearing this ring in dim light or darkness, you can use an action to cast either the *minor illusion* or *light* cantrip from the ring at will.

Additionally, the ring has 6 charges for the following properties. The ring regains 1d6 expended charges daily at dawn.

Illusory Script. You can expend 1 charge as an action to cast the *illusory script* spell from the ring.

Moon Shades. You can expend 2 charges as an action to cast the *mirror image* spell from the ring.

Silver Bursts. You can expend 1 to 3 charges as an action. For each charge you expend, you manifest a glittering burst of silvery light at a point you can see within 60 feet of you. Each creature within a 5-foot cube originating from that point must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 2d4 force damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. On a failed save, a creature also glows silver until the end of your next turn, and the next attack made against the creature while it is glowing has advantage.

Expanding the Moon Trial

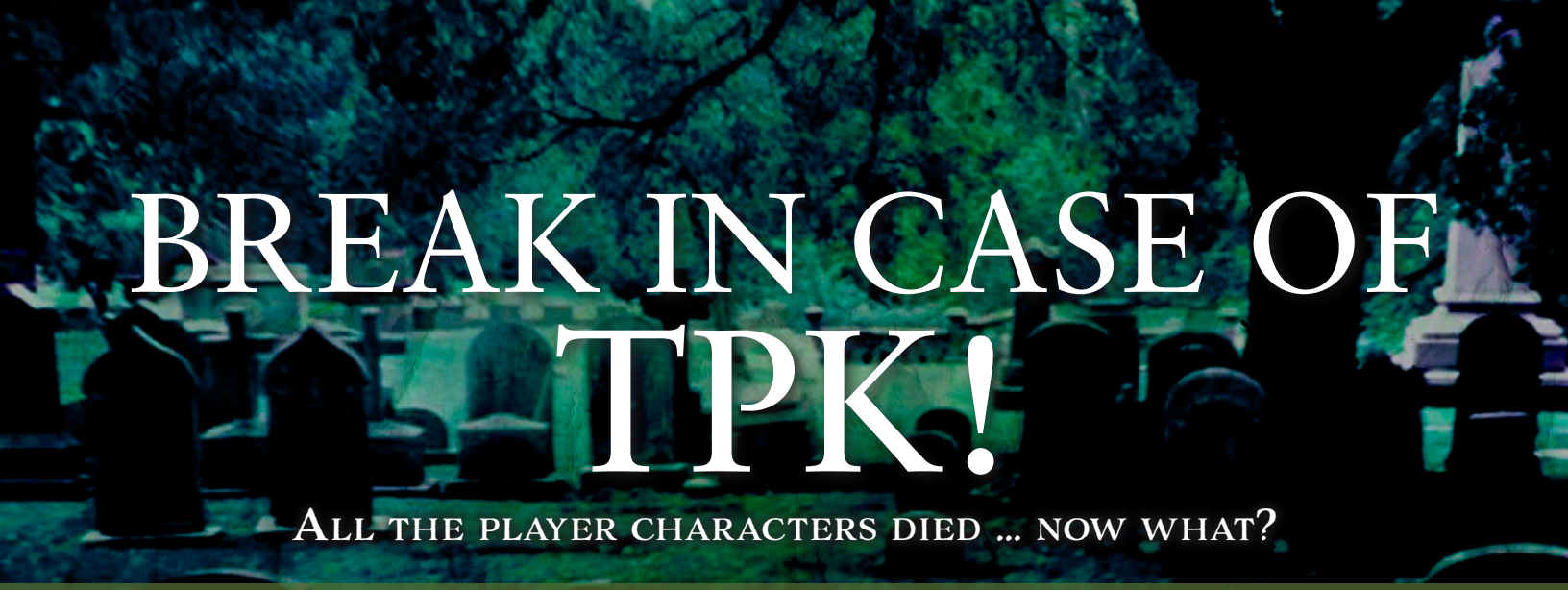
To turn this trial into a longer adventure, consider adding these trials before the encounter with Artimitei (or create your own):

- As the characters complete another puzzle, obstacle course, or noncombat challenge, whispery voices encourage them to give in to their faults. The invisible creatures are tiny Celestial angels that use the **pixie** stat block but have the Celestial type instead of Fey. If any of the characters follow the voices' advice, the tiny angelic sprites announce their intention to reveal this failing to "the arbiter of the trial." The characters can quickly try to bargain with the tiny angels, plead their case, or apologize, but fighting the Celestials is an even more grievous failing. Unless thwarted, the tiny angels report the characters' failings to Artimitei.
- A dim, eerie hall of mirrors depicts the characters' reflections as their worst selves. A **cloaker** skulking in the hall attacks the party, but perceptive characters notice that the creature only targets those who aren't willing to look their mirror selves in the eyes.
- A fog-filled room gives each character individual hallucinations and visions of their companions harming them in ways that align with those companions' faults. Can the characters see through the visions before combat breaks out between them?

Conclusion

If the characters don't already know of the sun trial and the star trial, Artimitei can explain the setup of the trials to them. She keeps their full details secret, but reveals that the sun trial is about characters tempering their ambitions, while the star trial is about bonds. Artimitei also doesn't reveal how or where to find the other two trials. Instead, she smiles mysteriously, saying, "Heed not your impatience, for greatness will come in its time."

The angel then snaps her fingers, teleporting the characters to the place where they entered the moon trial. The arched doorway has vanished, awaiting the next heroes in need of the lessons the moon trial can teach.



BREAK IN CASE OF TPK!

All the player characters died ... now what?

by Justice Ramin Arman and Anthony Joyce-Rivera

This article is an emergency toolkit for game masters to get their campaign back on track after a total party kill (TPK). Whether the whole party was killed accidentally or on purpose—you know what you did … honestly, we're kind of impressed at your deviousness—these encounters prevent TPKs from abruptly ending your campaign. Discuss character death with your players so you know whether they want to continue playing the same characters after a TPK. If they do, keep reading!

We've crafted four encounters to use in case of a TPK—each is a self-contained event that returns the characters to life so your campaign can resume without issue. The long-term consequences of these encounters purposefully vary to support all styles of gameplay.

Beet a Hag's Bargain. A night hag steals the characters' souls. The hag's fey magic slowly turns the characters into beets unless they can escape her hut or bargain for their freedom.

Blood for Blood. A lich gives the characters a dreadful blade and invites them to trade their lives for the souls of their enemies.

How Do You Plead? The characters must make their case before the Court of the Seven Cities of Hell, arguing that they're worth more alive than they are dead.

Soul-Loving Flurgnob. A rodent-like creature collects the characters' souls in the Astral Plane and sends them back to the Material Plane.

Beet a Hag's Bargain

When the characters died, their souls were captured by a **night hag** named Putrid Agnes who stole them away to her hut in the Material Plane. When Agnes brings souls to her hut, she locks them in a cage imbued with dark fey magic. This magic returns the characters to life, then transforms them into beets over 24 hours. Once a creature transforms into a beet, she eats them!

Each character returns to life partially transformed into a beet with all their equipment and suffers the following effects:

- Their hit point maximum is reduced to 10 unless it is already lower. They return to life with hit points equal to their maximum.
- They can't cast any spells except for cantrips, and they can only cast cantrips as if they were 1st-level characters.
- Their size becomes Tiny, and their skin becomes rough and purple. Their equipment also shrinks to match their new size. While a character's weapons are reduced, their attacks with them deal 1d4 less damage (this can't reduce the damage below 1).

These effects can only be reversed by exiting Agnes's hut—the characters need to escape or bargain with Agnes to avoid turning into beets.

Putrid Agnes

Agnes typically wears the guise of a grandmotherly halfling with curly white hair. She wears a brown bonnet and a yellow dress embroidered with patches depicting smiling beets. Regardless of her form, she always clenches her teeth when speaking.

Agnes adores the taste and screams of her soulful beets. Over many years of research, she discovered that reviving creatures then transforming them into beets makes the beets extra juicy and tasty!

Even though Agnes gleefully devours her victims, she treats prisoners like her own grandchildren while they transform, demanding respect, obedience, and politeness from them. However, Agnes's twisted heart fills with affection when creatures are brave enough to challenge her in the face of death.



Running the Encounter

The characters begin this encounter in a wooden cage inside Agnes's hut. Agnes locked the wooden cage with a padlock and a minor enchantment that makes the cage door extremely heavy and that blares out an audible alarm if anyone tries to break out of the cage by force.

Read or paraphrase the following to begin the encounter:

> The smell of rotten dirt wafts in the air of this small single-room hut as a grandmotherly halfling holds a plump beet over a boiling cauldron in the center of the room. As she lowers the beet into the boiling cauldron, it squirms and squeals, "I don't wanna die!" The halfling smiles and exclaims, "This feisty little one is going to be yummy!"

Agnes hums and stirs her cauldron as she cooks one of her mouthwatering beets. She remains focused on cooking and is unaware that the characters have regained consciousness, only noticing them if they speak loudly or create excessive noise in the cage.

If Agnes notices the characters regained consciousness, she lovingly asks them who they are and what they did before they died. She has no shame regarding her eating habits, informing them that her fey magic is turning them into beets so she can eat them. She reiterates that they can go about their business afterward when they return to the afterlife. Eating them isn't personal—it's delicious!

Escaping the Cage

Hidden underneath hay covering the cage's floor are the tools to escape. The character with the highest passive Wisdom (Perception) score notices white fabric poking up from underneath the hay. If a character examines it, they discover that it's a white shirt covered with purple writing wrapped around a tiny bone.

White Shirt. The previous occupant of this cage—the beet Agnes is boiling—wrote a message on this shirt using its beet juice. The message is written in Common and reads, "The last thing I remember is being eaten alive by a green dragon. Now I wake up to find myself turning into a beet! I ate a rat and used its bone to pick the padlock. The bone worked fine, but I lack the strength to budge the door! If this is my dying journal entry, remember me as Ignacio Del'Monte—the greatest dragon hoard thief ever to live!"

Tiny Bone. A character who succeeds on a DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation or Nature) check recognizes this bone as a rat's femur. The rat femur is chipped, and a few metal flakes from the padlock are embedded in the bone.

Opening the Cage. A character using thieves' tools or the rat femur can try to pick the padlock, which requires a successful DC 14 Dexterity check. Even with the padlock unlocked, characters must muster enough strength to open the enchanted cage door. Characters with a combined Strength score of 30 or more can push open the cage door.

Alternatively, the characters can attack the wooden cage to escape. The wooden cage has AC 15, 27 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. If the wooden cage is attacked, its magic produces an audible alarm that shouts the following phrase in Common: "Help, the beets are beating me!" Agnes approaches the cage and scolds the characters for being bad little beats, ordering them to stop trying to break her cage.

Exiting the Cage. Agnes doesn't notice characters exiting the cage if they succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check. If she spots the characters sneaking out, Agnes shakes a ladle at them, verbally reprimands them, and orders them to reenter the cage.

Motivation to Help the Characters

This putrid hag's shriveled heart has a soft spot for the souls she collects. If a soon-to-be beet is brave enough to confront her, she exclaims, "This grandmamma is so proud—look at how grown-up you are, my sweet little juicy beet!" When confronted, Agnes offers the characters an opportunity to gain their freedom by offering the following bargains:

- One character agrees to multiclass in the warlock class with Agnes as their patron. Consider using the Warlock Hag Patron from "Subclasses of the Hag" by Jessica Marcrum in *ARCADIA 8*.
- The characters agree to return with a dragon tongue and three dragon scales within a year so Agnes can use them to cook dragon beet stew.
- The characters agree to communicate with Agnes occasionally and fill her in on the juiciest gossip from their adventures. Agnes communicates with the characters using the *sending* spell or similar magic at your discretion.

If the characters agree to any of the above bargains, fey magic seals their deal with Agnes as long as she lives. A character who breaches the terms of this bargain is cursed and turns into a beet in 24 hours. While the character is a beet, they lose all their game statistics and have AC 10 and 5 hit points. Killing Agnes or using a *wish* spell or similar magic ends this fey curse.

If the characters confront Agnes and refuse to bargain with her, she forbids them from leaving and orders them to return to their cage. She attacks the characters if they refuse and, if she defeats them in combat, locks their unconscious bodies in her wooden cage (or a new wooden cage if the original cage was destroyed).

Agnes Likes Feisty Beets!

Agnes respects mouthwatering little beets who rebuff her demands. If the characters refuse to obey Agnes's orders without attacking her, they earn her respect and Agnes offers to bargain with the characters for their freedom (see "Motivation to Help the Characters"). Agnes only attacks the characters in self-defense or if they attempt to leave the hut without her permission.

Returning to Your Campaign

When the characters exit Agnes's hut, they find themselves in a location of your choice. If the characters made a bargain with Agnes, she sheds a tear and wishes them well on their adventures—her little beets aren't so little anymore. Agnes is filled with rage if the characters escape her hut unnoticed, but ultimately she soothes her soul by eating spoiled beet pie.

BLOOD FOR BLOOD

The characters' souls have been intercepted by Kotoz the Glutton, a lich whose lair lies in a crumbling subterranean citadel that acts as a magnet for wayward souls. Hungry to establish a lasting supply of souls without risking himself, Kotoz offers the characters a second chance if they agree to collect souls with his unholy blade.



RUNNING THE ENCOUNTER

Read or paraphrase the following to begin the encounter:

> You awaken in a ruined citadel. The roof of the fortress has collapsed inward, revealing the cavern's ceiling easily one hundred feet above you. A ghoulish glow radiates from you and your companions, who are floating and incorporeal.
>
> You're dead.
>
> Before you lies a crystal pedestal. A gleaming sword has been plunged into the stone, its pale green blade reflecting your countenance. Nine gemstones decorate its metallic purple hilt, each set into the open mouth of a tiny sculpted skull.

The characters begin this encounter as **ghosts** that retain their Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores and skill proficiencies. The forlorn fortress is a magnet, its supernatural pull preventing wayward souls from traveling more than 100 feet from the pedestal, even if they use their Etherealness ability to enter the Ethereal Plane.

The sword in front of the characters is a *nine lives stealer* (which can be any sword you choose) with a number of charges equal to the number of characters in the party. It belongs to Kotoz the Glutton, a cowardly **lich** who lurks in the darkness just beyond the characters' reach.

DEAL OF THE DEAD

If a character approaches or inspects the pedestal, the lich emerges. Read or paraphrase the following:

> An undead man in elaborate silver and black robes emerges from the darkness. The mage's gray flesh is tight against his skull, and he sports a thinning patch of long, wispy white hair. He holds a wand fashioned from a crooked horn, and his teeth clack from a lipless mouth as he speaks in a dry tone.
>
> "Blood for blood," he wheezes through dead lungs. "Death is not the end, but a debt is owed. If you wish to return, you must repay it in kind. Take the sword and vow to steal the lives that were stolen from you. Leave the sword and remain trapped here forever."

Kotoz offers the characters a chance at salvation. If they agree to take the blade and use it on their worst enemies within the next 30 days, the lich vows to return their souls to their mortal bodies. If they decline, they must serve the lich as his ghostly thralls in a lair from which they can never escape. If they accept but don't use the sword within the next 30 days, the lich summons four **invisible stalkers**, each equipped with a *nine lives stealer*, and sends them to kill the characters. When an invisible stalker drops to 0 hit points or loses possession of its weapon, its *nine lives stealer* is permanently destroyed and dissipates into shadow, freeing any souls trapped within.

Each time Kotoz the Glutton's *nine lives stealer* loses a charge, one of its cloudy, dull gemstones glows with a yellow light, and Kotoz's reflection appears in the blade to congratulate its wielder. When all nine gemstones are lit, Kotoz inspects the souls inside and tells the wielder, "Your debt is repaid." At your discretion, Kotoz can find the souls unworthy and vow to hunt down the characters for their treachery, or he can continue to appear in the blade's reflection even after the deal is fulfilled and tempt its wielder to further his dark deeds.

Refusing Kotoz's Offer

If the characters reject the lich's proposition, all is not lost. A DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that the supernatural pull binding the characters to this location originates from the pedestal. Destroying the pedestal severs the characters' tether to the citadel, allowing them to escape and return to their mortal bodies. The pedestal has AC 13, 27 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. Impressed by the characters' determination, Kotoz toys with them and doesn't use any spell of 4th level or higher against them in combat.

A character who dies as a ghost in the lich's lair is bound to serve him for all eternity—even if the pedestal is destroyed. They rise again at the next dawn as a lawful evil **ghost** under the GM's control. Short of a *true resurrection* or *wish* spell, only Kotoz's destruction allows the character to return to their body and join their living companions.

Running Away. As a last resort, characters can use their incorporeal movement to escape the lich. As an action, a character can attempt to escape by making a DC 14 Dexterity (Stealth) or Wisdom (Survival) check to evade the lich and flee his lair. On a success, the character escapes the lich's lair. On a failure, the character takes 47 (6d8 + 20) force damage as they set off a magic trap and fail to escape. Characters that escape Kotoz's lair remain a ghost, and must find and rejoin with their body.

Motivation to Help the Characters

Though his most potent magic can tear flesh and bring armies to their knees, Kotoz has no shortage of foes on the surface, and mightier heroes than those in the party would like to see the lich die his last death. Venturing out of his lair carries significant risk, but the dark mage still hungers for souls.

If the characters accept this quest, they not only do the dirty work for him, but they could be corrupted to collect souls for him again in the future. At worst, he thinks, the foolhardy adventurers will fulfill his bargain only to perish again, at which point he'll consume their souls and start anew with a new group of gullible sellswords.

Returning to Your Campaign

If the characters accept Kotoz's quest, he directs them to pull the sword from the pedestal. A cloud of green fog surrounds the characters as the lich laughs grimly. When the gloomy mist disperses, the characters find themselves returned to their mortal bodies in a location of your choice with all of their equipment and hit points restored.

If the characters refuse Kotoz's offer and destroy the pedestal, they can escape his lair and return to their bodies, at which point they return to life. However, they've made an enemy of the lich, who might seek vengeance at a later date.

How Do You Plead?

The characters' darker deeds have caught up with them. They awaken from death before the seat of judgment in the fiery underworld, the Court of the Seven Cities of Hell.

Seven foul emissaries preside over the infernal court. Each hideous fiend represents one of the archdevils of the Seven Cities (detailed in the "Lords of Hell" sidebar). Regardless of whether the characters agree with their current predicament, they must convince this kangaroo court they deserve a second chance at life or throw themselves before its mercy—though they will find none.

Lords of Hell

The Seven Cities of Hell are divided between seven archdevils of immeasurable power, each presiding over a torturous wasteland more hopeless than the last. The fiends vie against one another for the Throne of Hell and sow discord in Orden and beyond.

The seven Lords of Hell include the following archdevils:

- Asmodeus, ruler of Acheron, City of Fear
- Astaroth, ruler of Kasyrgan, City of Pain
- Baal, ruler of Sheol, City of Death
- Belial, ruler of Gehennom, City of Darkness
- Dispater, ruler of Dis, City of War
- Moloch, ruler of Styx, City of Lies
- Sutekh, ruler of Naraka, City of Blood

RUNNING THE ENCOUNTER

Read or paraphrase the following to begin the encounter:

> A wide, obsidian podium towers above you and your companions. Seven devils in powdered wigs leer at you from behind it, their ghastly faces underlit by veins of slow-moving magma within the judges' bench. To your right, a gaggle of imps jeers at you and cackles inside a flaming jury box.
>
> The center judge, a six-eyed devil in black satin robes decorated with shoulder spikes, sneers in disgust at the sight of you. The fiend produces a rusty metal gavel and bangs it against a shriveled head strapped to the corner of the podium. The head shrieks in pain with each blow. "Order! Order in the court," hisses the devil.

The defendants' stand is a raised stone platform stained with blood and rotting ichor, its edges chipped by blades and charred by hellfire. Likewise, the jury of the Court of the Seven Cities is a farce, a fetid congregation of thirteen barking **imps** chained to a burning jury box. They rattle their fetters in disagreement at appeals of morality and pelt defendants with squelching black fruits. The bailiffs, a pair of grumbling **pit fiends** named Bastard and Belfry, don't stop the characters from attacking the imps, but they intervene if a character attacks the judges. A slain imp juror is immediately replaced with a new imp that appears in a puff of red smoke.

The powers of Hell have returned the characters to life in their domain. Each character awakens from death with 1 hit point immediately after the fate that befell the party. The characters haven't gained the benefits of a short or long rest, but they have any equipment that was on their person before they died. Given the numerous devils around them, fighting their way out of Hell is ill-advised.

After the characters have a moment to assess their surroundings, a **barbed devil**, the respected Ozgaduun Ez'Guire, appears in a cloud of brimstone before them and produces a yellowing scroll covered in Infernal runes. Reading from the parchment, the devil proclaims the nature of the party's death. The fiend then lists the charges—murder, larceny, broken oaths, or any other unsavory acts the characters committed in life that can be used against them. Characters not guilty of these crimes are named as "accomplices."

Once the devil stops speaking, or if the characters interrupt the charges, the center judge leans forward and asks:

> "How do you plead?"

DIABOLICAL DEFENSE

This encounter plays out like a corrupt courtroom drama. The court gives each character a chance to defend their actions, with the barbed devil asking why they committed such heinous acts, but it quickly becomes clear the trial is rigged against them. Judges sneer with displeasure at the characters' remarks, especially at displays of emotion, taking joy only in their anguish. Meanwhile, the jury heckles the defendants and openly cheers on the prosecution. The opposing devil prosecutors placate the judges with excessive bowing and always address them as "your Dishonors." Characters are expected to do the same.

Despite the characters' best efforts, the judges and jury are committed to the perversion of justice. No amount of reason can sway the court—but a bribe might.

APPEALING TO THE COURT

After the characters have finished their defense, read or paraphrase the following:

The six-eyed judge smacks their gavel against the block again, this time causing red sparks to spew from the shriveled head's mouth.

"This court hereby finds you guilty!" spits the devil with a twisted smile. "Under infernal law, you may overturn this verdict and return to whence you came by making a suitable offering to the court. Would you like to make such an appeal at this time?"

As the judge states, the characters can return to the world of the living by making an offering to the court. Three such appeals are detailed in the sections that follow. At your discretion, the court might accept other forms of payment.

Infernal Contract. One or more characters agree to sign a contract with the Court of the Seven Cities, offering a sacrifice ("consideration") in exchange for the party's freedom. The most classic form of consideration in an infernal contract involves the exchange of a soul. The souls of holy-oriented adventurers, such as good-aligned clerics and paladins, are especially coveted. However, many forms of consideration exist, and all of them carry ramifications, some less evident than others.

The Consideration table includes sample sacrifices of interest to the court and the consequences associated with bargaining them.

Consideration

d6	Sacrifice
1	**Confidence.** You always doubt yourself.
2	**Kindness.** You become casually cruel.
3	**Memory.** You permanently forget a precious moment or person from your past.
4	**Nobility.** You surrender your name, titles, and the benefits they afford you.
5	**Piety.** You can never step into a church or temple unless it is a dungeon or adventuring location.
6	**Restraint.** You always oblige those who challenge you to a fight, no matter how bad it will be for you.

Out on Bail. The devils allow the characters to return to life if they make a collective bail payment of treasure equal to at least 100 gp × the number of characters × the average level of the party. For example, a party of five 3rd-level characters must pay the court at least 1,500 gp to be released on bail, or offer something of equivalent or greater value. Characters out on bail are expected to return for a follow-up trial in 666 years. If they don't return, they will be hunted by "collection agents" of the court.

Live to Serve. A character can spare the souls of their companions by agreeing to join the Order of Desolation, an elite league of infernal knights who serve Hell and its archdevils in this life and the next.

If a character opts for this choice, they lose all levels in their current class and gain an equal number of levels in the illrigger class.[1] As part of this transformation, the character must choose a patron archdevil and swear fealty to them.

The archdevils of the Seven Cities of Hell are briefly detailed in the "Lords of Hell" sidebar, but your world may contain a wholly different roster of fiends more appropriate to your preferred campaign setting.

Returning to Your Campaign

Once the characters have made their offer, the seven judges seal the pact with a short Infernal chant in unison. With another tap of the gavel, they send the characters, alive, back to their home world in a location of their choice. Any character who sacrificed personally on behalf of the party awakens with a hellish mark (such as a brand of an Infernal rune) on their skin, a reminder of the deal they made with Hell.

[1] The illrigger class is available through the MCDM Patreon and for purchase on the MCDM shop.

Soul-Loving Flurgnob

A mischievous creature intercepted and collected the characters' souls in the Astral Plane. During this encounter, the characters have all their equipment and normal statistics, and are incorporeal. While incorporeal, the characters can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. A character takes 5 (1d10) force damage if they end their turn inside an object.

Kollektor the Flurgnob

Kollektor is a **flurgnob**, a sapient, gerbil-size, rodent-like creature created by a trickster god. Flurgnobs have a fluffy spherical body, two enormous eyes, no arms, and two tiny legs on which they stand upright.

The trickster god named this flurgnob Kollektor after watching it collect souls in the Astral Plane. Kollector, like all flurgnobs, is naturally drawn to gathering souls. To protect flurgnobs from predators, the trickster god constructed a fortress made of an enormous solid diamond on a rock that floats aimlessly in the Astral Plane and bound the flurgnobs' souls to the plane. In their new home, the flurgnobs joyously collect souls and roam the halls of the massive diamond fortress.

Collector of Souls

Kollektor snatches up souls of the dead traveling through the Astral Plane as they attempt to reach their rightful destinations and brings them to the diamond fortress. Kollektor does so without malice, for no other reason than their innate desire to gather souls and bring them home. Over the past ten thousand millennia, Kollektor has accumulated millions of souls.

Running the Encounter

The characters can speak with Kollektor and discover the flurgnob can return them to the Material Plane.

Read or paraphrase the following to begin the encounter with Kollektor:

> Vibrant colors pulsate within enormous diamond walls as a spherical, rodent-like creature the size of a gerbil exclaims, "Big souls, little souls, pretty souls … shiny souls!" The creature jigs then excitedly quivers as they bow.

Kollektor is excited to meet the characters and curious to learn more about them. Throughout the conversation, the flurgnob asks what the characters were doing when they died and what they'd do if they returned home. Kollector lets the characters walk around the diamond fortress as they please and interact with the many flurgnobs roaming the halls of the massive diamond fortress.

Motivation to Help the Characters

Kollektor wants more souls and is happy to return the characters to the Material Plane if they promise to continue their adventures. Kollektor loves adventurers who slay monsters and send more souls to the Astral Plane for the flurgnobs to collect!

When talking with the characters, Kollektor speaks about the evil souls they collect and how they contain them within the walls of their diamond fortress. Locking vile souls inside the fortress walls ensures the malevolent creatures can't return to the Material Plane.

What About the Other Souls? Characters can convince Kollektor to release the other good-aligned souls in the fortress with a successful DC 13 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check. On a failed check, Kollektor offers to release half the souls they collect in the future.



Returning to Your Campaign

Before sending the characters back, Kollektor warns them that if they die again, there is no guarantee the flurgnobs can collect their souls in the Astral Plane. When the characters are ready, Kollektor sends the characters back to the Material Plane to a location of your choice.

Flurgnob

Tiny Beast, Any Alignment

Armor Class 10
Hit Points 1 (1d4 – 1)
Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
2 (–4)	11 (+0)	9 (–1)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	20 (+5)

Senses darkvision 30 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages all
Challenge Rating 0 (10 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Nearly Immortal. Flurgnobs live in a diamond fortress floating on a rock in the Astral Plane. If a flurgnob is destroyed, they gain a new body in the Astral Plane 1d4 minutes later, regaining all their hit points and becoming active again. The new body appears within the diamond fortress.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +0 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1 piercing damage.

Return Souls. While in the Astral Plane, a flurgnob can target up to eight willing souls within 60 feet of them. Those souls are returned to the Material Plane and restored to life with all their original bodies.

RESOURCES

DIVINE TRIALS: SHADOWS OF THE MOON

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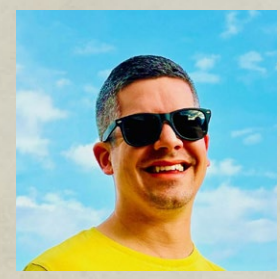

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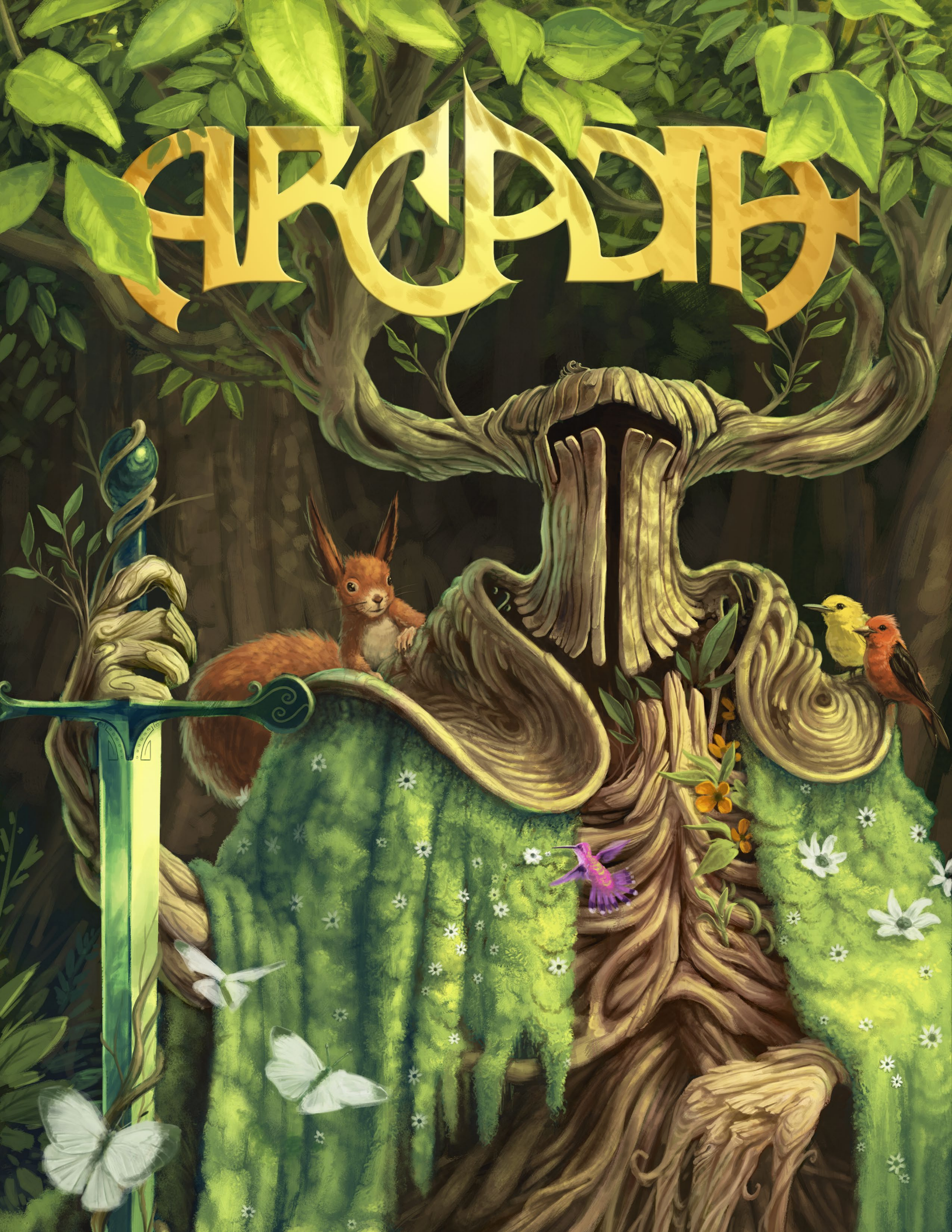
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Issue 20 ✦ September 2022

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

If you look at the table of contents for this issue, you'll notice something weird—I wrote one of this month's articles. James commissioned me to write it back in the distant mists of time (also known as 2021), well before I approached the managing editor chair. But now that I'm here, I thought it'd be a fun opportunity to give a backstage tour of the inspiration, the design process, and how our MCDM playtesters make everything better.

We've published several subclasses for spellcasters in *ARCADIA*, but none for barbarians, fighters, rangers, or rogues—and James and my D&D groups were super into the idea of a shield-wielding fighter. Captain America is what most folks think of, but my own inspiration actually came from *Hades*, where I've spent many hours wielding Aegis, the Shield of Chaos, as I fight my way out of the Underworld. I also wanted something that would suit the shield-maiden archetype, which mixes history and myth into a top-notch fantasy aesthetic.

Armed with these concepts, I started scribbling down ideas for cool things to do with shields, as well as ideas for magic shields and new equipment. These early notes were like having a conversation with myself—there were a lot of question marks for things I wasn't sure about or hadn't solved yet. Early on, I thought the Shieldbearer might have a list of maneuvers, like the Battle Master, or that I'd design light, medium, and heavy shields, with different techniques available for each, but neither of those worked in practice. Designing character options is a lot like assembling a puzzle, except you're drawing the image and cutting out the pieces at the same time!

When I wanted to procrastinate on writing, I researched the history of shields, so I could represent more variety than the medieval European heater shield and more specificity than the generic shield in the core rules. I also looked for cool real-world battle maneuvers involving shields, like a more realistic version of this scene where a bunch of guys with huge shields become a human cannonball. I didn't find any such battle maneuvers, but I did gather some inspiration for a few of the magic shields!

Ultimately, the Shieldbearer subclass completely ignores two unfortunate real-world facts: shields don't actually make good weapons, and throwing a heavy, not particularly aerodynamic object is unlikely to be effective no matter how strong you are. A tricky game design challenge is balancing consistency in a game world where the laws of physics are (by default) similar to our own with the need to set realism aside for the sake of epic fantasy. In the original draft, a Shieldbearer could only throw their shield a number of feet equal to 5 × their Strength modifier, but James and the testers talked me out of that limitation. Now the Shield Toss[1] feature gives you a normal range of 30 feet and a long range of 60 feet. More fun, less arithmetic.

Speaking of the testers, extensive and effective playtesting is at the heart of what we do here at MCDM. Everything we release goes through at least two full rounds of playtesting, where our amazing testers give the material an in-depth read, run games with it, and enter specific notes in a well-organized spreadsheet. As a managing editor, this is a dream, and as an author, I love getting feedback from the testers to catch issues, confirm or refute concerns, and help me deliver on my vision. For example, the first version of the Shieldbearer gave two features at level 3 that *seemed* substantial, but neither one was very impactful—something I wouldn't have realized without testing. Designing a good subclass is tricky, as no one typically has time to play it from level 1 to 20, but the testers' input helped deliver the right features in the right order so it's balanced and fun to play at any level. Having two rounds of playtesting is invaluable—it keeps us from overcorrecting and gives us the chance to actually test out more than one approach.

I'm delighted that the Shieldbearer shares an issue with two fantastic articles overflowing with creatures and adventure threads for your game. Sam Mannell's "Appendix NPC: Part 2" brings even more ridiculously useful stat blocks, including a protective auto-sentinel robot friend, a dragon priest who's a lot cooler than ye olde generic cultist, and a demigodly saint who'd make an excellent final boss. And "The Scribes" may sound like an order of dusty librarians who never leave the stacks, but these meddling Writers are here to make legendary, epic, important events *happen*, thanks to authors Hook & Chance and The GM Tim.

Thanks for joining me for this design retrospective! I hope you enjoy this issue as much as I do—and please tell me all about your epic Shieldbearer adventures.

De somnio ad itinere,
Hannah Rose
Managing Editor

---

[1] I talked *myself* out of naming this feature "Shield Yeet," but by all means, live your meme dreams at the table.

SHIELDBEARER

A martial archetype for fighters, plus new magical and nonmagical shields

by Hannah Rose

> **"Who needs a plan? I have a shield."**
>
> –Peggy Carter in *What If... Captain Carter Were the First Avenger?*

The archetypal warrior bears a sword, shield, and armor—the sword (or other weapon) attacks while armor passively protects. But the uses of a shield are manifold: to parry a blow, to block a projectile, to form a defensive wall with fellow warriors, to protect your comrades, and even to shove or bash a foe.

In real-world and fantasy cultures alike, shields also serve symbolic and ceremonial purposes: a coat of arms, a battle standard, or an indication of status as a warrior. They represent both individual resolve to defend something beloved and communal unity against a looming threat.

This article presents the Shieldbearer—a new martial archetype for fighters—as well as a shield-bearing retainer, magical and nonmagical shields, and rules tips related to these mechanics.

Martial Archetype: Shieldbearer

A Shieldbearer is a versatile warrior who uses a shield for both defense and offense. Amid the chaos of battle, they stand stalwart to protect their allies, smash their way through a legion of foes, or fling their shield through the air with extraordinary strength and accuracy. Even the simplest disk of wood or metal becomes a powerful weapon in the hands of a Shieldbearer.

If a feature requires a saving throw, your Shieldbearer save DC equals 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Strength modifier.

Shieldbash

3rd-Level Shieldbearer Feature

You strike your enemies with your shield as easily as any blade. You can use your shield as a simple melee weapon that deals bludgeoning damage equal to 1d8 + your Strength modifier on a hit. You can don or doff your shield on your turn without taking an action to do so.

Your shield's damage die increases to 1d10 at 7th level, and 1d12 at 15th level.

Counterstrike

3rd-Level Shieldbearer Feature

While a foe is distracted by their own attack, you can deal a mighty blow. When a creature within 5 feet of you attacks you or one of your allies, you can use your reaction to make a melee attack against them with your shield. On a hit, the attack deals one extra die of damage and the target has disadvantage on the next attack roll they make before the end of their next turn.

You can use this feature a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all uses when you finish a long rest.



SHIELD TOSS

7th-Level Shieldbearer Feature

You learn to hurl a shield with exceptional might and precision. For you, a shield is a weapon with the thrown property with a normal range of 30 feet and a long range of 60 feet. On a hit, it deals the same damage as a melee attack using your Shieldbash feature. If you roll a 20 on this ranged attack roll, the target is stunned until the end of their next turn. If the attack hits and you can make another attack this turn, you can use your next attack to bounce the shield off the first target and target another foe you can see within 10 feet of the original target, making another ranged attack roll to determine if it hits. You can bounce the shield more than once if each attack hits and you have attacks remaining on this turn.

At the end of the turn, your shield returns to you. You can catch it if you have a free hand; otherwise, it lands at your feet.

OPTIONAL RULE: MISSED THE MARK

If your group enjoys having meaningful effects on "critical failures," you can add the following rule to the Shield Toss feature: if you roll a 1 on a ranged attack roll using a shield, the shield doesn't return to you, but instead lands harmlessly in your target's space.

SAFEGUARD

10th-Level Shieldbearer Feature

Following the rhythm of combat, you elegantly interweave offense and defense. When you take the Dodge action while wielding a shield, you can make a melee attack (no action required), then choose one creature within 5 feet of you to protect. Until the start of your next turn, any attack roll made by a creature you can see against the protected creature has disadvantage. The benefit ends early if you are incapacitated or if you are more than 5 feet away from the protected creature.

Improved Counterstrike

10th-Level Shieldbearer Feature

The extra damage from your Counterstrike feature increases to two extra damage dice, instead of one. Additionally, when you hit a creature with your Counterstrike feature, they have disadvantage on all attack rolls (not just one) until the end of their next turn.

Aegis of the Brave

15th-Level Shieldbearer Feature

Your mighty attacks control the battlefield and smash aside your foes' defenses. Once on each of your turns when you hit a creature with your shield, you can force them to make a Strength saving throw. On a failed save, you choose one of the following effects:

- If the target is Large or smaller, they are shoved up to 10 feet away from you.
- The target drops one item of your choice that they're holding, which lands at their feet.
- The next attack against the target before the start of your next turn has advantage.

In addition, thanks to your practiced reflexes, ranged weapon attacks against you have disadvantage while you are wielding a shield.

Stalwart Guardian

18th-Level Shieldbearer Feature

You've tempered your skills in the heat of battle and emerged victorious. When you use your Safeguard feature to take the Dodge action, you can make up to two melee attacks as part of that action (instead of one). Moreover, when you hit a creature with your Counterstrike feature, they must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the start of their next turn.

New Equipment

Your character's shield is an opportunity to reflect your character's aesthetic, heritage, or affiliation. A shield's appearance might also serve a ceremonial purpose in addition to a martial one.

In the core game rules, every shield uses the same mechanics regardless of its appearance. This section presents new shield variations, which characters can purchase in shops that carry common adventuring equipment, at the GM's discretion.

New Property: Cumbersome

Some shields have a special property related to their use, as shown in the Shields table. A shield with the cumbersome property can't be effectively thrown regardless of its wielder's class features or other abilities.

Shields

These nonmagical shields can be wielded by any character proficient with shields, not just Shieldbearer fighters. Their appearance can be customized as the GM or player desires.

A shield that lists a Strength requirement on the Shields table can't be wielded by a creature with a Strength score less than the listed score.

Buckler. Though this small round shield offers less protection than larger models, it handily obfuscates your movements to confuse your enemies. While wielding this shield, you can make a Charisma (Deception) check as a bonus action, contested by another creature's Wisdom (Insight) check. On a success, you make your next attack against that creature before the end of your turn with advantage.

Bladed Shield. The rim of this shield is fitted with sharp, curved blades. When you make an attack with this shield, you can choose whether the damage it deals is bludgeoning or slashing damage.

Shields

Shield Name	Cost	AC Increase	Strength Required	Weight	Properties
Buckler	15 gp	+1	—	4 lb.	—
Bladed shield	15 gp	+2	—	6 lb.	—
Heraldic shield	50 gp	+2	—	6 lb.	—
Lantern shield	40 gp	+2	—	8 lb.	Cumbersome
Spiked shield	50 gp	+2	Str 13	10 lb.	Cumbersome
Tower shield	150 gp	+2	Str 15	20 lb.	Cumbersome

Heraldic Shield. This fine shield bears an emblem or coat of arms associated with an organization, such as a knightly order or civil guard, the faith of a particular god, or a location, such as your country of origin. While you visibly carry this shield, you have advantage on Charisma checks to interact with members of the shield's displayed affiliation.

Lantern Shield. This metal shield comes with a hooded lantern that can be hung from a hook on the shield's rim, allowing you to illuminate your path while keeping a hand free.

Spiked Shield. This shield is outfitted with formidable metal spikes. A creature who attempts to grapple you takes 1d4 piercing damage, plus an extra 1d4 piercing damage at the start of each of their turns while grappling you. Additionally, attacks made with this shield deal an extra 1d4 piercing damage on a hit.

Tower Shield. While wielding this heavy shield, ranged weapon attacks against you have disadvantage, but you can't add your Dexterity modifier to your Armor Class and you have disadvantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks.

Magic Shields for Shieldbearers

The unique magic items in this article are fun and flavorful, but there's also something to be said for a good old-fashioned *+1 shield*! Normally, the magic shields in the core rules only grant a bonus to Armor Class, not attacks. However, Shieldbearer characters can use shields as weapons too! As a GM, you may wish to let a Shieldbearer's attacks made with a magic shield count as being made with a magic weapon. Additionally, you can decide that a magic shield that grants a bonus to Armor Class grants the same bonus to attack and damage rolls.

New Magic Items

This section presents magic items that can be used by any character with the necessary proficiencies, not just Shieldbearers.

When using any of the following shields in a game, the GM can choose to grant it the additional benefits of one of the nonmagical shields presented in the previous section.

Arcanist's Shield Bracelet

Wondrous Item, Uncommon

This comfortable steel cuff bracelet is engraved with intricate geometric designs.

The bracelet has 3 charges. As a reaction when you would be hit by an attack or you are targeted by the *magic missile* spell, you can expend 1 charge to gain a +5 bonus to AC, including against the triggering attack, and you take no damage from *magic missile*. This benefit lasts until the start of your next turn.

The bracelet regains all expended charges each day at dawn.



Boomerang Shield

Armor (Shield), Uncommon (Requires Attunement)

This slim, circular shield is designed to be thrown with ease. You can use this shield as a simple melee weapon with the thrown property, with a normal range of 40 feet and a long range of 60 feet. On a hit, it deals 1d8 + your Strength modifier bludgeoning damage and 1d6 force damage.

Hit or miss, the shield returns to you either after you make an attack with it or at the end of your turn (your choice). You can catch the shield if you have a free hand; otherwise, it falls to the ground at your feet.



Ceremonial Shield

Armor (Shield), Uncommon

This simple oval shield, usually made of hardened leather or polished wood, has been blessed by a cleric or paladin. You can use the shield to perform one of the following 10-minute rituals, either alone or with other creatures:

Valor. For the next hour, up to six creatures of your choice that participated in the ritual have advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Honor. You touch one creature who participated in the ritual to celebrate their recent deeds. Once within the next 24 hours when that creature makes an ability check, they can add a bonus to it equal to the number of other creatures who participated in the ritual who wished to honor their deeds (up to a maximum of +10).

Clarity. You touch a creature participating in the ritual and end one condition affecting them.

Once this property of the shield is used, it can't be used again until the following dawn.

Ram Shield

Armor (Shield), Uncommon

This sturdy shield is inlaid with a motif resembling a ram's horns. Using this shield grants you advantage on Strength checks made to break through doors, barricades, and similar barriers. In addition, when you successfully shove a creature with this shield, you can choose to knock the target 10 feet away from you, rather than 5.



Shield of the Shifting Moon

Armor (Shield), Very Rare (Requires Attunement)

The edge of this round shield is inlaid with a delicate design showing the phases of a moon. The shield is linked to one of the moons in your campaign setting, and the respective designs glow slightly as that moon progresses through its phases.

While wielding this shield, you gain a +1 bonus to AC. Additionally, the shield has different properties depending on the current lunar phase:

New Moon. You can cast the *darkness* spell at will, centered on the shield. When you cast the spell in this way, the magical darkness doesn't affect your vision. In addition, you can use a bonus action to become invisible, along with anything you are wearing or carrying as long as it is on your person, for up to 1 minute. Once you use this property of the shield, you can't use it again until the next night with a new moon.

Waxing Moon. You can cast *faerie fire* (save DC 17) at will. In addition, you can use a bonus action to choose up to three creatures within 30 feet of you. For the next minute, each creature is imbued with lunar power and can add 1d4 to their attack rolls, saving throws, and damage rolls (this extra damage is radiant damage). Once you use this property of the shield, you can't use it again until the next dawn.

Full Moon. You can cast the *see invisibility* spell at will. In addition, you can use an action to call down lunar radiance in a 20-foot radius centered on a point within 120 feet of you. Each creature of your choice in the area must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, taking 8d6 radiant damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Once you use this property of the shield, you can't use it again until the next night with a full moon.

Waning Moon. You can cast *pass without trace* at will without components. In addition, you can use a bonus action to choose one creature within 30 feet of you. For the next minute, that creature must subtract 1d4 from their attack rolls, saving throws, and damage rolls. Once you use this property of the shield, you can't use it again until the next dusk.

Eclipse. In the rare event of a lunar eclipse, your shield gains the following properties for the duration of the eclipse, instead of the properties of the current lunar phase. You can cast *sanctuary* at will (save DC 17). In addition, you can use an action to choose up to six creatures within 60 feet of you. Each creature must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or be blinded for 10 minutes. At the end of each of their turns, a target can make a Constitution saving throw, ending the condition on themself on a success. Once you use this property of the shield, you can't use it again for the duration of the eclipse.

Moon Phases

It can be fun to track moon phases in your setting, especially if your character has a connection to the moon or moons—but if you and your GM don't want to handle that minutia, your GM can determine the *shield of the shifting moon's* current properties by picking the current moon phase or rolling a d12. On a roll of 1, the moon is new; on a 2–6, the moon is waxing; on a 7–11, the moon is waning; and on a 12, the moon is full. The GM chooses if and when an eclipse occurs.

Spellmirror Shield

Armor (Shield), Very Rare (Requires Attunement)

This shield is polished to a mirror sheen, but its surface shows iridescent flickers rather than any reflection. The shield has 10 charges. While wielding it, when you are targeted by a ranged spell attack or are in the area of effect of a spell whose area of effect is a line, you can use your reaction and expend a number of charges equal to the spell's level (minimum of 1) to reflect the spell. When you do so, the spell has no effect against you, and its effect is reflected as though it originated from you. You can either reflect the spell harmlessly, or you can target a creature of your choice within range (for a ranged spell attack) or reflect the spell in a direction of your choice (for an area of effect).

The shield regains 1d6 + 4 charges each day at dawn.



Rules Tips

The following tips clarify possible questions and offer suggestions for using your shield creatively.

Attacking with a Shield in the Core Rules. Even if they aren't a Shieldbearer, anyone can use their shield as an improvised melee weapon. But while they can technically attack with it, they don't add their proficiency bonus to the attack roll, and it only deals only 1d4 damage. Shieldbearers, on the other hand, are proficient with attacking with a shield and can deal more damage with it.

Two Shields at Once. If you want to use shields and only shields, you can absolutely dual-wield two shields at once. However, you only gain one shield's bonus to AC, since bonuses from the same source (i.e., a shield) don't stack.

Bouncing off the Walls. Using your shield to ricochet between multiple targets is great fun, and so is bouncing a thrown shield off the environment. Even when you make a normal attack you can describe your shield rebounding off a pillar to hit a monster in the head for some awesome flavor. But at your GM's discretion, you might also use the environment to perform unusual moves. For example, your GM might let you bounce your shield around a corner to attack a target with total cover as if it had half or no cover, or throw your shield at a metal staircase to create a loud diversion. GMs are encouraged to lean toward the "rule of cool" and reward creativity when adjudicating such situations.

Shield Surfing. MCDM is not liable for any damage to your character or their equipment that results from using a shield to surf on any organic or inorganic surface. While we cannot officially endorse such an activity, a Dexterity (Acrobatics) check would theoretically be appropriate in such a circumstance. Also, our playtesters agree that shield surfing down a snowy mountain is "wicked cool" and shield surfing on a lava river is "inadvisable, but certainly memorable for the survivors."

Retainer of the Shield

Retainers are unique NPC followers who pledge their service to player characters. The following stat block presents a fighter retainer who uses their shield to attack and defend.

The full rules for retainers can be found in *Strongholds & Followers*.

Shieldbearer Adept

Armor Class 17 (Medium, Shield)
Speed 30 ft.
Primary Ability Strength
Saving Throws Strength, Constitution
Skills Athletics, Perception
Signature Attack: ***Shieldbash.*** *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage. Beginning at 7th level, the shieldbearer can make this attack twice, instead of once, when they take the Attack action on their turn.

Special Actions

3rd Level (3/Day): ***Smash 'n' Bash.*** The shieldbearer makes a signature attack. On a hit, the next attack against the target has advantage.

5th Level (3/Day): ***Safeguard.*** The shieldbearer makes a signature attack and assumes a defensive stance. Attack rolls against the shieldbearer and one creature of their choice within 5 feet of them are made with disadvantage until the start of the shieldbearer's next turn.

7th Level (3/Day): ***Throw Shield.*** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 20 ft., one or two targets. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. The shield returns to the shieldbearer at the end of their turn.



APPENDIX NPC: PART 2

Even more stat blocks to steal!

by Sam Mannell

Hi again! Sam here! Still as busy as last time. Maybe busier? This article rounds out the list from "Appendix NPC: Part 1" with seven new NPC stat blocks ranging from challenge rating 9 to 20.

Prep fast, game more!

CONTENTS

The stat blocks below are listed in order of challenge rating to make them easier to find.

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Auto-Sentinel (CR 9)

Dragon Priest (CR 10)

Dragon Slayer (CR 10)

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Hero (CR 15)

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A Polymath's Lair

Lair Actions

Saint (CR 20)



Dragon Slayer

Auto-Sentinel

Typically made of magically animated stone, iron, or brass, these constructs are created to defend others. Constructs designed as personal security already exist in the game, but those are monsters, and this is an NPC!

This stat block can serve as a powered-up version of the **bodyguard**[1], but it also captures the essence of a type of character that I love to run. Players tend to fall in love with protective sidekick robots that can't speak, but who are clearly sapient and have a sweet personality wholly at odds with their incredible strength. It's niche, but effective!

Auto-Sentinel

Large Construct, Any Alignment

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 180 (19d10 + 76)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	9 (–1)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	5 (–3)

Saving Throws Str +9, Con +8
Damage Vulnerabilities lightning
Damage Resistances cold, fire; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantine
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned
Senses blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages understands the languages of their creator but can't speak
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +4

Charge. The sentinel can designate another creature to be their charge. When a creature within 5 feet of the sentinel hits the sentinel's charge with an attack and the sentinel isn't incapacitated, the sentinel can immediately make a melee attack against the creature (no action required). The sentinel can only have one charge at a time.

Siege Engine. The sentinel deals double damage to objects and structures.

Actions

Multiattack. The sentinel makes three Pneumatic Fist attacks. They can replace one attack with a Grapple-Hand attack or a use of Reel.

Pneumatic Fist. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 17 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Grapple-Hand. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 50 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 17). Until the grapple ends, the target is restrained and has disadvantage on Strength ability checks and saving throws, and the sentinel can't use the same hand to attack or grapple another target. The sentinel has two hands.

Reel. The sentinel pulls each creature they are grappling 25 feet straight toward themself.

Beeline. The sentinel moves up to their speed in a straight line toward their charge. During this move, the sentinel ignores difficult terrain, can move through hostile creatures' spaces regardless of their size, and smashes through minor nonmagical obstacles in their path such as doors, windows, or walls less than 1 foot thick. Each prone creature whose space the sentinel moves through takes 44 (8d10) bludgeoning damage. Each creature who isn't prone whose space the sentinel moves through must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 16 (2d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage and is pushed 5 feet away into an unoccupied space of the creature's choice, or knocked prone in their current space if there is no unoccupied space within range. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't pushed or knocked prone.

Reactions

Life and Limb. When the sentinel is within 5 feet of their charge and a creature the sentinel can see attacks the charge, the sentinel can swap positions with the charge and become the target of the attack instead.

[1] See "Appendix NPC: Part 1" in *ARCADIA* 18!

DRAGON PRIEST

"I wield the very flame of Corzivax-Baloroth! Her power is mine!"

Ancient dragons are so suffused with magic that they can impart a fraction of their power to their most loyal pawns. The dragon priest is one such servant—a cultist dedicated to the will of a powerful dragon, partially transformed by their patron into a quasi-draconic figure. The ancient dragon bestows "gifts" upon the priest that typically take the form of sharpened claws, filed teeth, reptilian eyes, and patches of diamond-hard scale.

The dragon priest stat block assumes that the dragon priest's master is a red dragon, which is reflected in its immunity to fire damage and the fire damage dealt by its actions. You can change this to suit another type of dragon by swapping the damage type.

Dragon Priest

Medium Humanoid, The Alignment of Their Patron

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 178 (21d8 + 84)
Speed 30 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Con +8, Wis +4, Cha +8
Skills Deception +8, Intimidation +8, Perception +8, Stealth +8
Damage Immunities fire
Condition Immunities frightened
Senses blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 18
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +4

Actions

Multiattack. The priest makes three Claw attacks, and they make a Fire Bolt attack or use Spellcasting.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) slashing damage plus 9 (2d8) fire damage.

Fire Bolt (Cantrip). *Ranged Spell Attack:* +8 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (3d10) fire damage. A flammable object hit by this spell ignites if it isn't being worn or carried.

Fire Breath (Recharge 5–6). The priest exhales fire in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 42 (12d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Additionally, a creature loses any resistance or immunity to fire damage for 1 minute if they take or would have taken damage from this action.

Spellcasting. The priest casts one of the following spells, using Charisma as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 16):
3/day each: *dimension door, dispel magic*
1/day each: *eyebite, mass suggestion, true seeing*

DRAGON SLAYER

The inverse of a dragon priest, the dragon slayer is a powerful martial NPC that hunts and destroys great wyrms. Typically, this makes them heroes, but it depends on which dragons they slay. Your players might run afoul of a dragon slayer by protecting a good dragon or by stealing the glory of killing a dragon from a particularly prideful dragon slayer.

Dragon Slayer

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

Armor Class 16 (breastplate)
Hit Points 195 (26d8 + 78)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	11 (+0)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +8, Dex +7, Con +7
Skills Acrobatics +7, Animal Handling +8, Athletics +8, Perception +8, Stealth +7, Survival +8
Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, poison
Condition Immunities frightened
Senses passive Perception 18
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +4

Avoidance. If the slayer is subjected to an effect that allows them to make a saving throw to take only half damage, they instead take no damage if they succeed on the saving throw, and only half damage if they fail.

Dragonsbane. When one of the slayer's actions or abilities refers to creatures with the Dragon type, it includes creatures that have draconic ancestry, such as dragon priests, dragonborn, Draconic Bloodline sorcerers, and kobolds.

Underdog. The slayer can grapple a creature of any size and has advantage on Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) checks made to grapple or climb onto a creature that is of a size larger than themself. While grappling or clinging to a creature that is of a size larger than themself, the slayer makes attack rolls against that creature with advantage. If the slayer grapples a creature that is at least two sizes larger than the slayer, the slayer's speed becomes 0 instead of the target's speed, and if a creature grappled in this way by the slayer moves, the slayer moves with them, requiring none of the slayer's movement.

Actions

Multiattack. The slayer makes three attacks.

Battleaxe of Dragon Slaying. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit (or +10 against a Dragon), reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage, or 9 (1d10 + 4) slashing damage if used with two hands. If the target is a Dragon, they take an additional 10 (3d6) slashing damage.

Javelin of Dragon Slaying. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit (or +10 against a Dragon), range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage. If the target is a Dragon, they must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, taking an additional 33 (6d10) piercing damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

The slayer carries four javelins. Once a *javelin of dragon slaying* deals its extra damage to a Dragon, it becomes a nonmagical javelin.

Wings of Flying (2/Day). The slayer turns their cloak into a pair of wings, gaining a flying speed of 60 feet for 1 hour.

Reactions

Sudden Strike (3/Day). When a creature the slayer can see moves within 30 feet of the slayer, the slayer can make a weapon attack against that creature. If the attack hits, the target's speed is halved until the end of the current turn.

GISH

The gish is a character with equal skill in martial might and arcane magic. The word gish comes from a certain group of creatures that shall not (legally) be named from a book published in 1980, but it has come to mean any eldritch-knight-type, sword-wielding spell-slinger. A spellsword!

I think that gish should be tough as nails—the perfect combatant, with few, if any, weaknesses—so that's what you've got here!

The gish begins combat by casting *eldritch blast* or *fireball* to soften up the characters from a distance while piling on buffs for a few turns, like the *fire shield* and *haste* spells. After that, the gish can easily move into melee range with Witch Step and switch to attacking with their longsword. When reduced to half their hit point maximum (97), they start using the *vampiric touch* spell each round to regain some vitality. When the gish is reduced to 49 hit points, they use Witch Step to escape or they surrender.

Gish

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

Armor Class 17 (half plate)
Hit Points 195 (26d8 + 78)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +8, Dex +6, Int +8
Skills Arcana +8, Athletics +8, Investigation +8, Perception +7
Condition Immunities charmed
Senses passive Perception 17
Languages any two languages
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +4

Bodymind Trance. The gish has advantage on Constitution saving throws to maintain concentration on a spell, and is immune to any effect that allows other creatures to sense their emotions or read their thoughts, as well as any divination spell that they refuse. If the gish takes psychic damage, this trait doesn't function until the start of the gish's next turn.

Swordkeeper. If the gish is wielding a sword, their weapon attacks are magical and have a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls (included in the attack).

Actions

Multiattack. The gish makes two Longsword or Eldritch Blast attacks, and they use Signcasting.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) slashing damage.

Eldritch Blast (Cantrip). *Ranged Spell Attack:* +8 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d10) force damage.

Signcasting. The gish casts one of the following spells, requiring no material or verbal components and using Intelligence as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks):
At will: *burning hands, detect magic, light, mage hand*
3/day each: *dispel magic, fireball, vampiric touch*
1/day each: *cone of cold, fire shield, haste, wall of force*

Bonus Actions

Witch Step. The gish magically teleports, along with any equipment they are wearing or carrying, up to 45 feet to an unoccupied space they can see.

Reactions

Shield (3/Day; 1st-Level Spell). When the gish is hit by an attack or targeted by a *magic missile* spell, an invisible barrier of magical force appears and protects them. Until the start of their next turn, the gish has a +5 bonus to AC, including against the triggering attack, and the gish takes no damage from *magic missile.*

Hero

Heroes are fun to use as NPCs when your characters have become frighteningly powerful themselves! You can use this stat block to represent legendary NPCs in your world, on par with figures like Conan the Barbarian or Xena: Warrior Princess, or demigods like Hercules and Gilgamesh.

The party might clash with a hero if they have a reputation for morally questionable decisions or if they've been set up! Or maybe the hero has fallen victim to the duplicitous mind control of a cunning villain? In any case, I wish your players luck if they wind up as an obstacle in the hero's way.

Hero

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

Armor Class 16 (breastplate)
Hit Points 294 (31d8 + 155)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	17 (+3)	20 (+5)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Str +10, Dex +8, Con +10, Cha +9
Skills Acrobatics +8, Animal Handling +8, Athletics +10, Perception +8
Senses passive Perception 18
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 15 (13,000 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +5

Action Surge (3/Day). Once on their turn, the hero can take one additional action.

Feral Instinct. The hero has advantage on initiative rolls and can't be surprised.

Impossible Arm. The hero can wield two-handed weapons with one hand. If a weapon has the versatile property, the hero always uses the two-handed damage die.

Magic Weapons. The hero's weapon attacks are magical.

Siege Monster. The hero deals double damage to objects and structures.

Actions

Multiattack. The hero makes two Maul attacks and uses Overwhelming Attack.

Maul. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

Overwhelming Attack. The hero makes a Maul attack that targets any number of creatures within 5 feet of the hero and uses the same attack roll for each target. The hero deals an extra 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage to each target they hit with this attack.

Supersonic Yawp. The hero unleashes an ear-splitting battle cry in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in that area that can hear the hero must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 27 (4d10 + 5) thunder damage and is deafened for 1 minute. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't deafened. A creature made of inorganic material such as stone, crystal, or metal has disadvantage on this saving throw.

Seismic Wave (Recharge 5–6). The hero stomps their foot with the force of a falling meteorite. Each creature standing on the ground within 30 feet of the hero takes 26 (6d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage and must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone.

Bonus Actions

Barbaric Leap. The hero jumps up to 20 feet in any direction and can land in another creature's space. If they land in another creature's space, that creature takes 12 (2d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage and is pushed 5 feet away from the hero into an unoccupied space of the creature's choice, or knocked prone in their current space if there is no unoccupied space within range. Additionally, the hero has advantage on attacks made against creatures within 5 feet of the space they landed in until the end of their turn.

Hidden Strength (1/Day). The hero regains 57 (6d8 + 30) hit points.

Reactions

Think Again. When the hero is hit with a weapon attack that isn't a critical hit by a creature they can see within 120 feet of them, the hero can catch the weapon with their bare hands, causing the attack to miss instead. If the weapon is nonmagical, it is destroyed.

POLYMATH

The polymath knows just about everything. These NPCs are geniuses who rely on the breadth and depth of their smarts instead of the strength of their sword arm. They're so intelligent there's probably only one polymath on a planet. Maybe two … and those two are probably rivals.

A polymath almost always knows when they have enemies coming, and given time to prepare, they set traps throughout the battlefield, whether in their lair or not.

A POLYMATH'S LAIR

Most polymaths build a stronghold—a secret laboratory, a floating airship, or a forgotten island. The only common thread is that the polymath likes to keep their lair hidden so they can store the knowledge they have amassed without drawing attention.

A polymath encountered in their lair has a challenge rating of 19 (22,000 XP).

LAIR ACTIONS

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the polymath can take a lair action to cause one of the following effects; the polymath can't use the same effect two rounds in a row.

- The polymath activates powerful magnets in the lair's roof, attracting metal equipment and objects in a 10-foot radius cylinder, extending from the floor to the ceiling, centered on a point the polymath can see within 60 feet of them. Each creature in that area must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, any metal weapon or object held by the target is wrenched out of their grasp and attaches to the ceiling. Additionally, if the target is wearing medium or heavy armor made of metal, they fall upward, taking fall damage as they would during a downward fall when they strike the ceiling, and become restrained. Affected objects and creatures fall back down at the end of initiative count 20 on the next round.
- Arrows fire from hidden traps in the walls, targeting three creatures of the polymath's choice within 60 feet of them. Each target must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, a target takes 14 (4d6) piercing damage and is poisoned until the end of their next turn. On a successful save, the target takes half as much damage and isn't poisoned.
- A 5-foot-wide, 10-foot-tall hidden door opens in one of the lair's walls at a point of the polymath's choice. If the polymath is within 5 feet of the opening when it appears, they can move up to their speed without provoking opportunity attacks through the opening as part of this lair action, and the door closes behind them. If the polymath isn't within 5 feet of the opening when it appears, 1d4 + 1 **mercenaries**[2] or **veterans** loyal to the polymath enter the room, acting on initiative count 20 each round after the polymath takes a lair action.

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[2] See "Appendix NPC: Part 1"in *ARCADIA 18*!

Polymath

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

Armor Class 23 (*+3 leather*, Calculated Defense)
Hit Points 201 (31d8 + 62)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	22 (+6)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Int +12, Wis +10, Cha +9
Skills Arcana +18, History +18, Insight +10, Investigation +12, Medicine +10, Nature +12, Perception +10, Persuasion +15, Sleight of Hand +15, Stealth +15, Survival +10
Senses passive Perception 20
Languages all
Challenge 18 (20,000 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +6

Avoidance. If the polymath is subjected to an effect that allows them to make a saving throw to take only half damage, they instead take no damage if they succeed on the saving throw, and only half damage if they fail.

Calculated Defense. While the polymath is wearing light or no armor and wielding no shield, their AC includes their Intelligence modifier.

Genius Intellect. The polymath always knows the exact time and their exact location while on their native plane, can recall any piece of information they have learned, and can instantly complete mathematical calculations in their head.

Practiced Hand. The polymath can use their Intelligence modifier, instead of Strength or Dexterity, for weapon attack and damage rolls.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). The polymath deals an extra 17 (5d6) damage when they hit a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the polymath that isn't incapacitated and the polymath doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Switched On. The polymath always knows when they see an illusion, but can't see through the image without interacting with the illusion.

Actions

Multiattack. The polymath makes three weapon attacks.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d8 + 6) piercing damage plus 28 (8d6) poison damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned until the end of their next turn.

Stunning Strike (3/Day). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d6 + 6) bludgeoning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of the polymath's next turn.

Hand Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d6 + 6) piercing damage plus 28 (8d6) poison damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned until the end of their next turn.

Spell Scrolls. The polymath casts one of the following spells from a *spell scroll* (spell save DC 18). After casting the spell, the scroll is destroyed and the polymath can't cast it again.
8th level: *antimagic field, clone, earthquake, glibness, mind blank*
9th level: *gate*

Bonus Actions

Cunning Action. The polymath takes the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Stillness of Mind. The polymath ends one effect that is causing them to be charmed or frightened.

Reactions

Repartee. The polymath adds +4 to their AC against one weapon attack that would hit them. To do so, the polymath must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon. The polymath can then make a weapon attack against the attacker.

Saint

When a mortal dies in service to their deity, they sometimes return as a saint: an incarnation of that god's power and will made tangible. When the faithful cry out to their gods, it is the saints who answer. This might not be true in your world, but if you're playing at higher levels, you can get mileage out of this stat block regardless, as it can represent an avatar of divine fury or any being with a demigod's power.

The saint can utterly destroy most mortals with a wave of the hand, a quiet sigh, or a mere look. Only a party of the strongest characters from across the timescape could ever hope to stand against one, and even defeating a saint doesn't permanently destroy them.

Saint

Medium Celestial, Any Alignment

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)
Hit Points 402 (35d8 + 245)
Speed 30 ft., fly 150 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	23 (+6)	25 (+7)	25 (+7)	26 (+8)	27 (+8)

Saving Throws Int +14, Wis +15, Cha +15
Skills Insight +15, Perception +15, Persuasion +15
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities necrotic, poison, radiant
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned
Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 25
Languages all, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 24 (25,000 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +7

Celestial Resurrection. A destroyed saint gains a new body in 1d10 days, regaining all their hit points and becoming active again. The new body appears on consecrated ground that is sacred to the saint's deity, such as an altar, shrine, or temple.

Cone of Awe. The saint's gaze creates a 150-foot cone that overwhelms mortals with a sense of shock, terror, and wonder. At the start of each of their turns, the saint decides which way the cone faces and if the cone is active. Any creature who starts their turn in the cone must succeed on a DC 20 Charisma saving throw or take 14 (4d6) radiant damage and become frightened of the saint for 1 minute. A frightened creature can repeat this saving throw at the start of each of their turns, ending the effect on themself on a success.

Divine Awareness. The saint knows if they hear a lie.

Eternal Resistance. The saint has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects. Additionally, if the saint fails a saving throw, they can choose to destroy one of their hallowed weapons, if available, and succeed instead.

Actions

Multiattack. The saint makes two attacks and uses Flaming Rain.

Inflict Wounds (5th-Level Spell). *Melee Spell Attack:* +15 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 38 (7d10) necrotic damage.

Flaming Rain. Bolts of flame-like radiance descend on up to three creatures that the saint can see within 120 feet of the saint. A target must succeed on a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw or take 18 (4d8) radiant damage. A target gains no benefit from cover for this saving throw.

Plane Shift (7th-Level Spell). The saint casts the *plane shift* spell, using Charisma as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 23, +15 to hit).

Heal (3/Day; 8th-Level Spell). One creature that the saint can see within 60 feet of the saint regains 90 hit points. This spell also ends blindness, deafness, and any diseases affecting the target. This spell has no effect on Constructs or Undead.

Bonus Actions

Hallowed Weapons (1/Day). The saint creates three floating, spectral weapons at three different points within 60 feet of them. The weapons can take whatever forms the saint chooses. These weapons last for 1 minute. The weapons have a reach of 5 feet and can each make one opportunity attack a round without using the saint's reaction.

When the weapons are first created, they can each make a melee spell attack (+15 bonus to hit) against one creature within 5 feet of the weapon. On a hit, the target takes 21 (3d8 + 8) force damage.

As a bonus action on later turns, the saint can move each weapon up to 30 feet and make one attack with it against a creature within 5 feet of the weapon.

continued on next page

Villain Actions

The saint has three villain actions. They can take each action once during an encounter after an enemy creature's turn. They can take these actions in any order but can only use one per round.

1. ***Fiery Translocation.*** The saint magically teleports, along with any equipment they are wearing or carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space they can see. Each creature within 15 feet of the space the saint entered must make a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

2. ***Shackles of Judgment.*** Glowing chains appear from beneath up to five creatures the saint can see within 60 feet of them. Each creature must succeed on a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw or become grappled by the chains (escape DC 20). Until this grapple ends, a target is restrained and has disadvantage on Strength checks and Strength saving throws. The chains have AC 20, 10 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage.

3. ***Word of Unmaking.*** A beam of bright light erupts from the mouth of the saint toward one target they can see within 60 feet of them. The target can be a creature, object, or creation of magical force, such as the wall created by *wall of force*.

A creature targeted by this action must make a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the target takes 106 (19d6 + 40) force damage and becomes frightened of the saint and deafened until they finish a short or long rest. The target is disintegrated if this damage leaves them with 0 hit points.

A disintegrated creature and everything it is wearing and carrying, except magic items, are reduced to a pile of fine gray dust. The creature can be restored to life only by means of a *true resurrection* or a *wish* spell.

This ability automatically disintegrates a Huge or smaller nonmagical object or a creation of magical force. If the target is a Gargantuan object or creation of force, this spell disintegrates a 20-foot-cube portion of it. A magic item is unaffected by this spell.



"It was Gaed who died at the hands of the devil spy. It was Saint Gaed the Confessor, now immortal, who returned and slew the devil."



THE SCRIBES

A unique organization to create rich stories

by Hook & Chance and The GM Tim

A tale can define the path of a wanderer.
A myth can inspire the direction of a growing community.
A legend can change the trajectory of a mighty civilization.
This is how we create the world.

–The Librarian

We all know the classics: *Flynn & the Gryffon*, *The Lament of Arcnolix*, or *The Fall of the Goblins of Yurt*. Those tales nearly never happened. Flynn was actually allergic to feathers. Arcnolix was destined to be a dish boy, not a great emperor. And Yurt was a forgettable goblin village on the outskirts of the Abadia Desert. Although world-changing events sometimes miraculously coalesce to create legendary stories, others need a push to become gripping epics of morality or triumph! That's where the Scribes come in.

The Scribes, an organization of meddling storytellers led by an enigmatic Celestial, turn the potentially dull into action, the boring into dramatic, and the uninspiring into legendary. This article presents lore for the Scribes, information on becoming an agent, details of the headquarters, ranks and role benefits, descriptions of key members, starter adventures, and a template for crafting quests related to the organization. The Scribes can be a good-aligned organization that recruits the characters or a villainous organization trying to manipulate events the characters are involved in.

Founding of The Scribes

The Librarian is a Celestial who has existed since time began. She worked side-by-side with creation gods to write the world's first stories and give mortals faith in their creators. The creation gods, fearing the Librarian's ability to write new gods that could replace them, created the Vault, an extradimensional library and prison designed to hold the Librarian and appeal to her need to read and write. Each lifebook in the structure's endless shelves tells the story of a mortal's life as it is lived in real time, including their thoughts, emotions, and actions from an omniscient perspective.

But as she explored the infinite shelves, each lifebook was duller than the next. The Librarian couldn't let the mundane stand! She believes that by manipulating mortals' lives into exciting tales where good triumphs over evil, mortals will learn to care for themselves. Without her inspiring narratives, greed and hate would prevail over benevolence and joy.

Unable to directly influence events outside of the Vault, the Librarian magically reached out to three individuals to become the first Writers—her direct lieutenants who can enact her vision beyond the Vault. While Writers have come and gone since the Vault's founding eons ago, there are always three.

The Scribes as Antagonists

The Scribes can serve as an evil organization in your campaign instead. The Librarian could be manipulating the world for her entertainment, entrapping Writers to do her bidding. Or better yet, the Writers are fully aware of the situation, using the Librarian's power while she is imprisoned to manipulate world events for their gain.

Secretive Storytellers

The Librarian reads lifebooks to find small changes that could turn uneventful stories into epics, and the Writers deploy operatives to ensure that outcome. These quests are called conversions. The Scribes keep their conversions secret—a hero's rise and a villain's fall are far more effective if the audience can't see the hands pushing them toward their goal.



The Librarian

Read or paraphrase the following text to introduce the Librarian:

> A wrinkled, frail woman with billowing grey hair stands among piles of disorganized tomes. Her elegant purple robes glimmer with gold embellishments along the skirt, buttons, and collar. She holds a large open book in one hand, and faint gold lettering dances on the surface of her skin.

Roleplaying Notes

You can use the following notes to help roleplay the Librarian.

Overview. An aloof professional whose storytelling is more an inherent need than a chosen vocation

Phrase. "Those who tell the stories rule society."

Traits. Oscillating temperament, curious, enigmatic

Motivation. The Librarian's greatest desire is to fill everything she reads with action, drama, and stronger plotlines than "Jard the guard made his fourteenth uneventful lap around the castle."

If presented with the opportunity, the Librarian may take revenge on her captors, but she doesn't actively seek retribution. She has relegated herself to the Vault and has found purpose in the Scribes.

GM Tip: A Different Librarian

The roleplay details of the Librarian are provided in case you want to use her as an interactive character. Alternatively, she could be a mysterious figure who never leaves her books, contemplating aloud what she'd like to see in a particular story while the Writers convert the musings into conversions. The Writers could also have agendas that influence those interpretations, adding intrigue to your game.

The Librarian

Medium Celestial, Neutral

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 266 (28d8 + 140)
Speed 30 ft., fly 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	22 (+6)	20 (+5)	26 (+8)	24 (+7)	23 (+6)

Saving Throws Int +14, Wis +13, Cha +12
Skills Arcana +14, History +14, Insight +13, Religion +14
Damage Resistance bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities poison, radiant
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned
Senses darkvision 120 ft., truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 17
Languages all, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 20 (25,000 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +6

Celestial Weapons. The Librarian's weapon attacks are magical. When the Librarian hits with any weapon, the weapon deals an extra 3d8 radiant damage (included in the attack).

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the Librarian fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. The Librarian has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Protective Prison. The Librarian can't leave the Vault by any means unless the gods that created the Vault end her imprisonment.

Regeneration. The Librarian regains 20 hit points at the start of her turn if she has at least 1 hit point and is in the Vault.

Renewed. If the Librarian is destroyed, the Vault's magical operations cease for 1d10 days. At the end of this time, the Librarian reforms in the Vault, regaining all her hit points and becoming active again.

Actions

Multiattack. The Librarian makes two Tome Smack attacks and one Tsk, Tsk, Tsk attack.

Tome Smack. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (3d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage plus 13 (3d8) radiant damage.

Tsk, Tsk, Tsk. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +14 to hit, range 120 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 34 (4d12 + 8) psychic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 22 Intelligence saving throw or be unable to make ranged attacks or cast spells other than cantrips for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themself on a success.

Spellcasting. The Librarian casts one of the following spells, requiring no material or verbal components and using Intelligence as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 22):
At will: *alter self*, *hold person*, *mirror image, prestidigitation*, *sending*, *silence*, *thaumaturgy*, *unseen servant*
3/day each: *mass suggestion*, *shield*, *spirit guardians*
1/day each: *prismatic wall*

This Needs Work (Recharge 5–6). The Librarian pulls a lifebook and a feather quill from the air, then rewrites the fates of those who dare attack her. All creatures of the Librarian's choice within 60 feet of her must make a DC 22 Intelligence saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 32 (5d12) psychic damage and is stunned until the start of the Librarian's next turn. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't stunned.

Bonus Actions

Quick Edits. The Librarian pulls a pencil from her hair and writes in the air, summoning a distracting, illusory object within 5 feet of a creature she can see within 60 feet of her. The target has disadvantage on the next attack roll they make before the start of the Librarian's next turn, whereupon the object disappears.

Reactions

Choose My Own Path. When the Librarian is targeted by an attack, she can step into one lifebook within 5 feet of her and emerge from a second lifebook within 120 feet of her, appearing in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the second lifebook, potentially causing the attack to miss if the Librarian is out of range of the attack.

Legendary Actions

The Librarian can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The Librarian regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Cloud of Pages. The Librarian calls books from the shelves and stacks around her, filling the air with whirling tomes and pages in a 5-foot-radius, 20-foot-high column centered on a point within 120 feet of her. A creature except for the Librarian takes 15 (6d4) slashing damage when they enter that area for the first time on a turn or start their turn there. The books fall to the ground at the start of the Librarian's next turn.

Pen Is Mightier. The Librarian makes a Tome Smack attack.

Shhh! The Librarian casts the *silence* spell.



Writers and Disciplines

Though the Librarian isn't a deity, the Writers worship her with fervor and zeal. Each Writer also oversees a discipline within the Scribes. The disciplines are based on storytelling themes: action, drama, and plot. The plot-themed discipline is the Fallen Eye, the action-themed discipline is Chaos, and the drama-themed discipline is the Cracked Crown. The disciplines are not kept apart and it is rare to have a mission with operatives from only one discipline. They need each other, and the Writers encourage that.

The following NPCs are the Scribes' leaders who work and live at the Vault, though operatives can be found everywhere in the world on extended undercover conversions.

How Dare They

There has been only one group of Writers, the Forsaken, who tried to take conversions into their own hands. Remnants of texts from their time tell of a demon persuading them to release the Librarian, while other texts claim a Writer tried to overthrow the Celestial. While it is unlikely any of the Forsaken are still alive, the Writers are always alert for signs of them and other rogue operatives. If an operative questions the organization's purpose, they are removed from the Scribes. The typical procedure for removing an operative is a *modify memory* spell followed by abandonment on the Material Plane to live an unremarkable life, but the Writers have been known to get creative.

The Fallen Eye (Plot)

Operatives in this discipline keep the story moving. The more efficiently an operative can pace the story, the more the other disciplines can be their most effective. Operatives of the Fallen Eye maintain a team's focus on achieving the desired outcome, including keeping the Scribes a secret. These operatives see the big picture of a conversion.

In conversions, a member of the Fallen Eye might create a cover story for the team so its other operatives can play their parts unnoticed, reveal the secret identity of the count at just the right moment, or encourage the hero to charge over the crest of the hill moments before the following army.

Guiding Principle. The timing of events is crucial. Too soon and you eat an apple before it was poisoned, too late and the thorn maze is too thick to cut through.

Symbolism. The fallen eye in the Scribe's symbol represents the world looking away from the Scribes and their actions, and putting the pieces of a story in place without anybody noticing.

Debut Bronzeband

As the Writer of the Fallen Eye, Debut Bronzeband is always the first with a plan.

Debut grew up on the streets committing petty theft. His brilliant mind for elaborate schemes led to masterful heists, and city officials overlooked his crimes in exchange for consultation on other cases. Finally, his brazen daylight theft of the memorial statue of local hero Tohmas "the Ashen Hound" got him thrown in prison. His arrest shook his confidence, and he spent the next few years formulating and scrapping brilliant escape plans. The Ashen Hound was a hero the Scribes had a hand in creating, causing the Librarian to ask the Scribes to free and recruit Debut.

When the characters first encounter Debut, read or paraphrase the following:

> A bedraggled young gnome has a dozen chewed pencils jutting out of the pockets of his well-tailored, rust-colored jacket. His shoulders are already hunched despite his youth, evident from the patchy beard he tried to shape into a distinguished point.

Overview. An introverted perfectionist and scheming mastermind

Phrase. "You've got one shot to get it right."

Traits. Analytical, egotistical, risk-averse

Motivation. Although he feels indebted to the Scribes and masterfully manages their day-to-day operations, Debut intends to one day start his own story away from the organization—if he could only perfect his plan for the future.

Chaos (Action)

This discipline's top priority is fomenting the chaos that makes a story eventful. Despite the discipline's name, operatives of Chaos are expected to thoughtfully apply the unexpected. Rather than whispering behind locked doors or subtly influencing a monarch's court, these operatives typically lean into action and fighting, have the best near-death tales to share, and are always ready to go.

The role of Chaos in a conversion could involve toppling a tower to ruin a wedding, starting a duel with a guard so the urchin can steal the loaf of bread, or causing a distraction that allows the other operatives to accomplish their tasks.

Guiding Principle. Make it memorable.

Symbolism. In the symbol of the Scribes, the eight arrows pointing in every direction represent the unpredictability essential in a captivating story.

Samaapt

As the Writer of Chaos, Samaapt focuses on creating the kind of shock that makes a good story irresistible. They speak with gravitas and the boisterous motion of a consummate thespian. Despite their cultivated intimidating appearance, Samaapt can win most over with a disarming smile and a welcoming gesture.

Samaapt rose to fame as a beloved celebrity prizefighter known for suspenseful matches, close calls, and dramatic victories. However, a fall from grace soon followed when they drunkenly revealed that they played down their skill to make bouts exciting and that their opponents were chosen for their lack of prowess so the tiefling could avoid danger. The story of Samaapt's deception spread overnight. They were an outcast, spat on in the streets and unable to draw a crowd. Recognizing their skill for spontaneity and theatrics, the Scribes recruited them, making all the world their stage.

When the characters first encounter Samaapt, read or paraphrase the following:

> This broad-shouldered tiefling sports evidence of a hundred battles on their skin, most of which is covered by jagged black armor with ornate red detailing. Wide, flat horns start at their hairline and curl overtop and around the sides of their head.

Overview. An enthusiastic entertainer and passionate mentor

Phrase. "Give me a bloody good show."

Traits. Engaging, boisterous, impulsive

Motivation. While they seem content mentoring Scribes in the ways of improvisation and theatrics for

storytelling, Samaapt secretly seeks a conversion that will allow them to sacrifice themself in the ultimate blaze of glory and win back the public adulation they lost.

The Cracked Crown (Drama)

Operatives of the Cracked Crown want to deeply understand the key dramatis personae in conversions. By knowing who these important people are, operatives can better steer them toward impactful moments. Cracked Crown agents are often skilled at conversation, insight, and persuasion.

A Cracked Crown member in a conversion could uncover what caused the division between two warring rulers, heal or cause a rift between star-crossed lovers, or spread rumors to encourage a rivalry between friends or family.

Guiding Principle. Emotional journeys are always worth taking.

Symbolism. The cracked crown in the Scribes' symbol represents the flaws every good hero must overcome to be truly moving and memorable.

Sere'dina Elsys

As the Writer of the Cracked Crown, Sere'dina Elsys ensures conversions cause transformation in her targets.

Sere'dina was one of the greatest military advisors of her time, serving a warlord named Corym Nevermour. She organized countless bloodbaths, caring for little more than winning and disregarding the communities destroyed by her efforts. But every victory left her feeling hollow. An unseen force began souring her operations with incredibly implausible twists of fate, leading to Corym calling her skills into question. So she laid a trap and caught a team of Scribe operatives interfering in her war. Though she initially wanted to prove that others were responsible for her failures, the intrigue of the Scribes, the opportunity they presented to use her political and tactical mind, and the mundanity of Corym's military campaign swayed her to join the Scribes instead.

When the characters first encounter Sere'dina, read or paraphrase the following boxed text:

> A tall elven woman with a supercilious expression and flowing golden hair wears dusky brown traveler's clothes with leather armor covering her shins, forearms, and shoulders.

Overview. A ruthlessly logical and efficient strategist
Phrase. "Make me care about it."
Traits. Rational, pretentious, brooding

Motivation. As the greatest strategist of her time, Sere'dina believes she is best suited to see the long-term impact of conversions and decide how the Scribes' actions will shape society. She's been in the role for nearly 600 years, but despite her desire to continue the work forever, the elf's life is nearing its end. Sere'dina knows that she needs to choose a successor, but so far she has found no one worthy of the role.

Writer Stat Block

When anointed, the Writers may choose to be granted a range of magic abilities by the Librarian if they lack their own. The current Writers use the **archmage** stat block with the following additional bonus action:

Channel Vault (2/Day). The Writer touches another creature. The target regains 15 (3d8 + 2) hit points or is freed from any curse, disease, poison, blindness, or deafness.

More Than Numbers

If you want a stat block for a martial Writer rather than a spellcaster, use another stat block around challenge rating 12, such as a **deva** or an **erinyes**, make them a Humanoid, and reflavor the creature's features or change damage types as needed.

Joining the Ranks

There are two ways to join the Scribes. The first is akin to a divine calling. If the Librarian finds a glowing life-book, she knows the tome belongs to a Writer candidate. She gives these names to the Writers, who ask the book's subject to join the organization. So far, all candidates have passed the interview and accepted. These chosen few are watched closely by the Librarian as potential Writer replacements, but are not treated differently by the Writers.

The more common form of recruitment is for a candidate to receive an invitation from a Writer or senior operative after performing an act that was impressive, amusing, or intriguing.

GM Tip: The Need to Know More

You want to be secretive and seductive in wooing the players. This is meant to feel like a big "Oooh, I want in" situation, not an "OMG run away" situation. If your party is nervous, remind them you are in this game together and not you versus them.

CONDUCTING AN INTERVIEW

Regardless of how recruits are selected, the Scribes gauge a candidate's aptitude by testing the subject's ability to complete a task.

If the characters are approached to join the Scribes, a recruiter makes the following offer:

> "I'm part of a powerful organization and you have come to our attention. We have an invitation for you, but first, we want to see if you have what it takes. Completing this task opens the pages to a life only available to the most extraordinary individuals. Edric Blackfern lives in this town, and it is your job to give them the most extraordinarily adventurous day. They must not know of your goal or motivation, and they must survive to tell the tale."

The recruiter gives the party 50 gp to cover expenses incurred in the task. The recruiter is open to questions about the task, but queries about the Scribes get only vague answers. The recruiter departs without providing a way for the characters to contact them, insisting, "I'll find you when you have completed the task." See the "Edric Blackfern" sidebar for more information.

Once the characters believe their task is complete, the Librarian reads of it and sends the recruiter back to them. For the recruiter to consider the task successful, Edric Blackfern must live through an extraordinarily adventurous day. If the characters succeed, the recruiter praises or admonishes details of the characters' individual performances in the task despite not being there. Then the Scribe reveals more of the truth:

> "I work for the Scribes. We are an organization committed to filling the world with enticing stories and legends. There are riches to be had, though not in the monetary sense, with danger to match. It is well worth the risks for capable individuals such as yourselves. When you're ready, read this letter aloud in a private place with those that wish to begin your next chapter with you."

The recruiter leaves the characters with an envelope sealed with wax. The invitation inside reads, "Secrets, like a story, cannot be unheard. They leave you irrevocably changed. Follow the moth into the abyss and be transformed." Once it is read aloud by a character, all creatures within 30 feet of the letter are teleported to a small river (see "Dead Lake Entrance").

If Edric dies, the recruiter declines them at this stage. The next time the party does something heroic, a Writer approaches them and asks, "I knew you had it in you—just took you a little longer than we thought. Are you ready to read your future?" The recruiter then extends the same invitation to join the Scribes.

EDRIC BLACKFERN

Edric is a humble dwarf potato farmer who lives with two dogs, Bently and Vinnie. Charming and hospitable, Edric sees everyone as a future best friend but lacks the confidence to venture out of their comfort zone. They are taller than the average dwarf.

You can use the following prompts to hook the characters into an adventure to help resolve flaws and drive change in Edric:

- Edric dreams of killing the beast that killed their sister, but lacks the skill to do so. They're afraid to even make the short but treacherous journey to recover her body or pay their respects.
- The local guard captain Ringwald Riverfist has long tormented Edric. They wish they could put him in his place just once, but Edric can't oppose a guard … could they?

THE VAULT

The Vault is the Librarian's prison where she watches the world through her lifebooks.

DEAD LAKE ENTRANCE

A small river feeds into this lake with no outflow. Salt and other mineral deposits make the water corrosive, which makes it the ideal hiding spot for the stairs that lead to the Vault.

> The shores of this lifeless lake are foreboding and gray. A thick, burning stench radiates from waters so still and dark they look like a stretch of obsidian. Calcified trees and animals sit motionless in and around the lake.

The area has the following features:

- The magical stairs leading down to the library are a step off the lake's shore. Their location is marked by a gnarled stump protruding above the water. A single twisted branch on the stump points toward the stairs. Atop the branch is an unusually large calcified moth that is clearly visible.



- The stairs lead down to a magic barrier that creates the atrium. The stairs could also be a ramp, or the characters could swim near the path.
- A creature not on the hidden path takes 3 (1d6) acid damage at the start of each turn they are in contact with the water.

When the characters descend the steps, read or paraphrase:

> The descent into the eerie lake brings a cascade of sights and sensations: rocky shallows plunging into a drop that ends on flat stone steps. Warm waters tingling against exposed skin, and burning acrid scents. Then, finally, deafening silence. The stairs descend until they break through a magic barrier at the lake's bottom. On the other side of the barrier is damp air, the lake water shimmering overhead. The stairs end at the cold floor of a grand atrium.

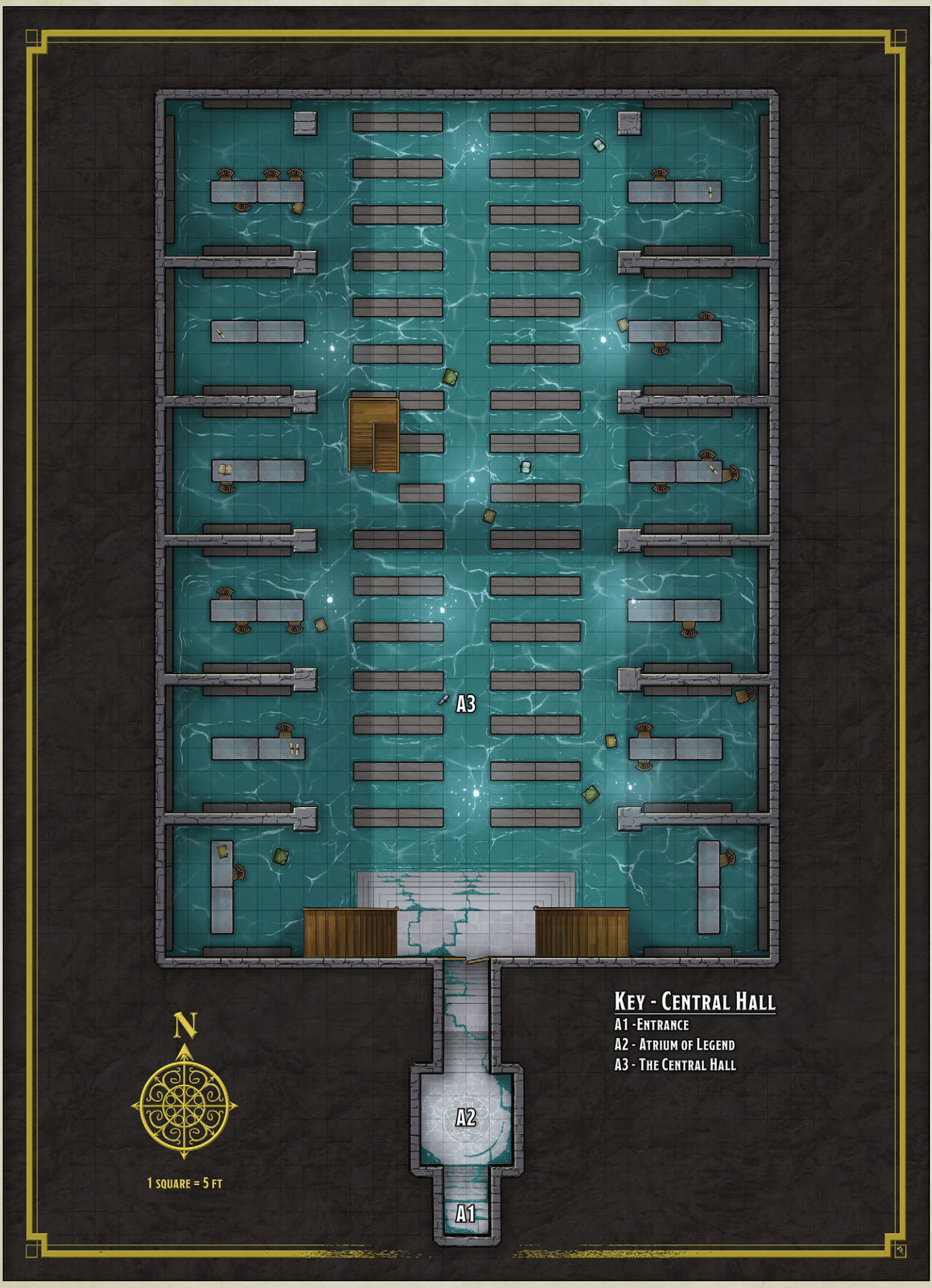
Atrium of Legend

The atrium is a tribute to the Librarian's early work shaping the stories of legendary figures.

> A small trickle of water defies the magic holding the lake up, running down the wall to form a small pool. The stone floor is inlaid with a massive silver circle surrounded by arrows pointing in every direction. Inside the circle are several simple depictions: a cracked crown, an overlapping moth and eye, and the numeral 3. Intricately carved wall reliefs depict ancient gods and heroic figures struggling against monsters clawing at their heels.

The area has the following features:

- The water hangs 30 feet above the floor.
- The inlaid silver on the floor of the room depicts the symbol of the Scribes. A character with a passive Intelligence (Arcana) score of 15 or higher knows the symbol is also a teleportation circle.


A3
A2
A1
N
1 SQUARE = 5 FT
KEY - CENTRAL HALL
A1 -ENTRANCE
A2 - ATRIUM OF LEGEND
A3 - THE CENTRAL HALL

Enter the Vault

> Large stone doors sit slightly ajar, with water trickling between. Distant hushed whispers echo from beyond the doors. Sharp smells emanate from beyond, a mix of paper, mildew, and incense.

The Vault is a two-story structure that stretches back into the darkness infinitely. The bottom floor, partially flooded with briny lake water, houses the vast majority of lifebooks in the central hall and the adjoining alcoves on either side. The top floor consists of a balcony running the length of the central hall. Doors off the balcony lead to private rooms, many of which are used by the Scribes for work or as private residences.

The Vault is dimly lit by floating, glowing wisps. When a character is within 120 feet of a wisp, it seeks them and flits around above them for as long as they remain in the area.

Guided Tour

An Apprentice (see "Climbing the Ranks" later in this article) meets recruited characters at the entrance and provides them a tour of the common areas. During the tour, the characters meet different operatives and the Writers, who may comment on a particularly clever moment in the trial the characters just completed.

GM Note

This is an opportunity to have a more roleplay-focused exploration of the grounds and a chance for you to hint at further adventures the Scribes may give the characters. If this doesn't work for you, don't feel obligated to use the tour.

Central Hall

Even whispers echo in this grand atrium. Even if she can't be seen, **the Librarian** is here, reacting to stories as she wades in the water.

- Moving the door causes a loud creak, which echoes throughout. The door can be barred and locked.
- The whole room is constructed of chiseled gray stone, including the bookshelves.
- The room is 70 feet wide and 110 feet tall. The balcony rises 50 feet off the floor.
- The room is flooded with 1 foot of water.
- Three **water elementals** that are immune to acid damage live within the water. They only make themselves known if the Librarian is attacked, in which case they fight at her command.

Vault Books. The lifebooks are written in real time, new pages and words magically materializing from nothing. If a lifebook is damaged or removed from the Vault, its words disappear and a new book appears on a shelf in the central hall to replace it. Stories not worth saving, typically cases in which the conversion wouldn't make a difference in the individual or push society toward greatness, are unceremoniously dropped in the water. A lifebook concludes when its subject perishes.

The Balcony

Doors on the balcony lead to living quarters, including workbenches, outfitting stations, and seating areas. There are infinite rooms on the balcony, most in disrepair. Notable rooms have had the doors inscribed. Vines and vegetation from cracks in the ceiling crawl over the balcony.

Living Quarters

Scribes live in these 30-foot-square rooms styled as barracks, though the Writers and accomplished operatives have private chambers.

The Stateroom

The stateroom is the Writers' private planning space. In the center of the room, a large, ornate table made of wood and rough steel is festooned with documents, maps, charts, and candles. The outer edges of the room have stacks of books, each related to an ongoing conversion.

Ancient Archive

This room contains the concluded stories of the Scribes' exploits. Stacks upon teetering stacks of lifebooks reach high towards the ceiling. When this room fills, the Scribes will start using another. Sere'dina Elsys is most commonly found in this room, critiquing ancient conversions under her breath.

The Temple

Racks and shelves line the temple's walls, each filled with various weapons, armor, and other adventuring gear. Wafting red linens and candles adorn the room. Debut Bronzeband acts as quartermaster, checking equipment in and out but bestowing it ceremonially.

Stage of Heroes

Dozens of candles cast flickering light around this room, which is decorated as an improvised tavern that contains large casks of the finest brews. Sammapt is the informal bartender, often laughing over stories with other Scribes. Stools are arranged in a semicircle around upended bookshelves covered in ornate rugs to create a stage. Here the Scribes regale each other with tales of their conversions and learn from their collective experiences.



N

1 square = 5 ft

Key - Balcony

B4 - Balcony
B5 - Living Quarters
B6 - The Temple
B7 - Debut's Quarters
B8 - The Stateroom
B9 - Sammapt's Quarters
B10 - The records Room
B11 - The Ancient Archive
B12 - The Stage of Heroes
B13 - Sere'dina's Quarters

Records Room

This room contains the lifebooks of the Scribes. These books are used as a safeguard against rogue agents. Access to this room is entrusted only to Writers and the Librarian, and it is thus locked and warded. The key is required to deactivate the ward and the lock. The lock can be picked by a character who succeeds on a DC 20 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. If the ward isn't deactivated, it casts *feeblemind* (spell save DC 17) on all creatures within 10 feet of the door.

If pressed about what is contained in the records room, the Writers are evasive and shrug off the questioning, since the room contains the personal details of every operative.

Reading Random Books

If a character wants to read a lifebook, you can use the following suggestions to create the tome's contents. Keep a pen handy, It could very well be the basis of the next conversion.

Player-Driven. Ask the player to tell you, the GM, who the lifebook is about.

Fill-in-the-Blanks. Have the players take turns filling in the blanks: Once upon a time, there was a _____ named_____, whose flaw was _____. Their daily routine was _____ . Everything changed one day when _____. That caused a huge problem: _____. Things got worse when _____. Things became overwhelming when _____, which forced the character to overcome their flaw by _____. This led to the outcome of_____.

Story Suggestions Table. Should you want to tie lifebooks into PCs or NPCs, you can use the Story Suggestions table to get you started.

Story Suggestions

d12	Story Suggestion
1	A merchant was beset by goblins but saved by adventurers, and now wishes to gain skills to protect themself against future attacks.
2	An adventurer is embroiled in a quest to topple a pirate captain and their ruthless regime.
3	After missing a day of work, an accomplished miner returns to find their colleagues missing and a notebook filled with scrawlings of eyes in their place.
4	An accordion player in a traveling band comes across a rejuvenating pendant. Each band member covets the item.
5	A being made of wood gains sentience and seeks answers as to why they exist.
6	A demonic rift whispers promises of power to a homesteader in the woods. They wrestle between telling others of its existence or giving in to temptation.
7	A renegade wizard wants to make the *magic missile* spell accessible to everyone, while nobles who wish to keep magic restricted try to root the mage out of hiding.
8	An experienced hunter on a routine expedition is attacked by a slimy, gasping Humanoid wielding a sharp hunk of metal. As the hunter flees back to town, they see unfamiliar sets of eyes watching them from the trees.
9	An annual mountainside hog ride is about to begin, but a track scout just discovered kobolds pouring out of a cave halfway through the run.
10	A naive goblin accidentally alerted an elf to the presence of their community. The goblin is now trying to catch the elf and beg them to stay quiet before the elf reaches their home.
11	A haunted drifter settles into the corner of a tavern after a long journey, only to have the spirits that plague them bring psychic torment to the other patrons.
12	Dwarf explorers unknowingly tarnished a forest occupied by wood elves. To salvage their reputation, the dwarves must survive the Gauntlet of Groves, a deadly elven contest of strength and will.

Choosing a Discipline

After the characters tour the Vault, Debut Bronzeband asks them to choose a discipline and explains what each means (see "Writers and Disciplines" earlier in this article). The chosen discipline determines which Writer is the operative's mentor and direct superior, as well as the unique perspective an operative might bring into conversions.

Climbing the Ranks

Through successful conversions, the characters can advance in the organization. Doing so grants access to gear and magic items, more responsibility, and better living quarters as shown on the Scribe Rank Benefits table. When an operative achieves a new rank, they gain the general benefit and a benefit specific to their discipline. Recruits start with the Acolyte rank. When an operative achieves the Sentinel rank, they can recruit new operatives for the Scribes.

GM Tip: Secret Agents with a Specialty

Encourage the players to pick the discipline that fits their characters and goals. While these disciplines have a theme, they are not set in stone, nor are they absolutes. The operatives are expected to work as a group to accomplish any conversion they are sent on. As a GM, your job is to create conversion adventures with opportunities for the disciples represented by the players.

Scribe Rank Benefits

Rank	Completed Conversions	General Benefits	Chaos Benefits	Cracked Crown Benefits	Fallen Eye Benefits
Acolyte	0	Free nonmagical armor and weapons worth 10 gp or less	*gem of sending*	*gem of sending*	*gem of sending*
Apprentice	3	Free nonmagical armor and weapons worth 50 gp or less	Choice of a *deck of illusions*, an *immovable rod*, or *boots of striding and springing*	Choice of a *cloak of elvenkind*, *eyes of charming*, or a *hat of disguise*	Choice of *boots of elvenkind*, a *broom of flying*, or a *medallion of thoughts*
Sentinel	7	Free nonmagical adventuring gear worth 100 gp or less and free nonmagical armor or weapons of any price	Choice of a *portable hole*, a *ring of free action*, or *slippers of spider climbing*	Choice of *dimensional shackles*, a *helm of teleportation*, or a *rope of entanglement*	Choice of a *cape of the mountebank*, a *cube of force*, or a *gem of seeing*
Fabulist*	12+	Individual private quarters in the balcony area	The operative gains proficiency in the Athletics or Acrobatics skill and the choice of *marvelous pigments*, an *oathbow*, or a *ring of shooting stars*.	The operative gains proficiency in the Intimidation or Persuasion skill and the choice of a *ring of telekinesis*, a *robe of scintillating colors*, or a *rod of security*.	The operative gains proficiency in the Insight or Perception skill and the choice of a *carpet of flying*, a *crystal ball*, or a *rod of alertness*.

*An operative who already has proficiency in both skills offered at this rank can choose a different skill at the GM's discretion.

Gem of Sending

Wondrous Item, Uncommon

This gem is emblazoned with the symbol of the Scribes. While holding the gem, you can use an action to cast the *sending* spell from it. The target is another creature carrying a gem of sending. Once *sending* is cast through the gem, it can't be used again until the next dawn.

Characters as Writers

Should any of the Writers step down, a Fabulist character can take their place and receive the amulet bearing their discipline's insignia. While wearing the amulet, a character can cast the *teleport* spell from it. Once *teleport* is cast through the amulet twice, it can't be used again until the next dawn.

Conversions

This section helps the GM create open-ended conversions for the Scribes. What follows is a conversion template, three sample conversions, and a small collection of conversion briefs that the GM can expand upon.[1]

Conversion Template

This template helps a GM create and run conversions.

Brief: A summarized version of everything that a Writer tells the characters before they take action.

Problem: The obstacle or challenge that prevents a target (an individual or group) from becoming the center of a dramatic story.

Change: The change that the target must go through to grow and rise to the challenge they face. There are three categories of change:

- *Worldview.* The target's understanding of the world changes. The target must mature, find new meaning, or gain a new perspective.
- *Status*. The target's social standing changes. The people around the target must see and treat them differently, like in a typical rags-to-riches story.
- *Morality*. The target's moral compass changes. The target must challenge their opinion or actions, usually from selfish to benevolent or evil to good.

Solution: A way that the Scribes can affect the change needed in the target.

Recommendation: A course of action that can set the conversion on a fun path for the players. The Writers might recommend this course of action during the briefing.

Sub-Objectives: While not crucial, giving each discipline a secret goal can add fun and chaos into the mix and give individual characters secret motivations.

Complication: A secret complication that occurs mid-conversion.

GM Tip: Let the Players Do Your Planning

If you have players that love to plot and plan, you can have the Writers provide the conversion brief and the Librarian's preferred outcome. From there, let the characters plan exactly how to accomplish this task as you make notes of complications they might encounter—easy session planning.

Sample Conversions

Here are three conversions that follow the template.

Murder by Moonlight

Brief: Foil and expose a rotten king's murders so that a folk hero has the chance to overthrow him.

Problem: The king, Aldrost Zhubzall, has been murdering his political rivals for years. A virtuous folk hero named Jartall Mcdhanna knows about the murders, but they are actively losing support because the king maintains a benevolent public image. King Zhubzall has sent an assassin after Jartall due to their meddling.

Change: *Status*. Jartall's social standing is plummeting, and they need the king to be exposed to regain what they had.

Solution: Stop the assassination and expose King Zhubzall for arranging this and other assassinations, allowing Jartall to rise and overthrow the king.

Recommendation: The assassin's identity is unknown, but they are likely staying at an inn, waiting to strike one of the king's rivals.

Sub-Objectives:

- *Chaos:* Try to ensure the assassin is foiled in a public place.
- *Cracked Crown:* Get a crowd to chant Jartall's name, building their confidence.

[1] Authors' note: For more examples of story writing and adventure templates, check out our podcast.

- *Fallen Eye:* Turn public opinion against Zhubzall and spark a rebellion.

Complication: The assassin is a **werewolf** and they strike during the full moon, which makes each murder look like a random werewolf attack.

The Dragonslayer Destiny

Brief: Show a newly recruited cultist that the cult is evil and start her on the path to becoming the hero that stops them.

Problem: Lyalis Greyat, a young villager who wants to see more of the world, has been initiated by a dragon-worshipping cult whose plan is to resurrect an ancient evil dragon.

Change: *Worldview.* Lyalis must go from seeing the cult as a powerful source of community and purpose to a manipulative organization that must be stopped.

Solution: Show Lyalis the evil deeds that the cult undertakes and encourage her to oppose their cause, creating a dramatic tale of a hero who toppled an evil cult or died trying.

Recommendation: The cult recently brought in a group of three recruits to one of their secret outposts located in a cave. They will be presented with the same choice Lyalis was: join or leave unharmed. Gain Lyalis' trust and show her that they don't actually leave unharmed—the cult throws those who don't join into a pit containing several black dragon wyrmlings.

Sub-Objectives:

- *Chaos:* Cult leadership being fed to the wyrmlings would be juicy.
- *Cracked Crown:* Lyalis saving more than just herself from the cult would certainly improve her chances of being hailed as a hero.
- *Fallen Eye:* The cult being completely disbanded would likely elevate the triumph.

Complication: The cultist presenting these three recruits with the choice is Lyalis' mother, and Lyalis has no idea.

Rotten Luck

Brief: Stop an inheritance from reaching its undeserving recipient so the heir becomes a cautionary tale of excesses and selfishness.

Problem: The irresponsible heir and child of a wealthy merchant, William Herritus-Prince ruined his family's reputation through gambling, lavish living, and indebting himself to others. His debtors are catching up to him, but a delegation has been sent to inform him that he's just inherited a recently deceased aunt and uncle's fortune. If this money reaches William, he will start the cycle again and create more trouble for his family.

Change: *Morality.* If William faces serious repercussions (and isn't killed by the debtors), perhaps he will finally turn to a more altruistic lifestyle.

Solution: Stop the inheritance from reaching William.

Recommendation: Steal, stop, or donate the wealth. It doesn't matter.

Sub-Objectives:

- *Chaos:* Spill the money in public to cause a scene.
- *Cracked Crown:* Convince William to walk away from his assets and make his own way.
- *Fallen Eye:* Recruit a bard to witness William's journey of self-discovery, providing the best chance his story endures.

Complication: The inheritance was to be split between William and his brother Heviam, who leads a group of bandits and outlaws in the area. If Heviam finds out his half is being withheld, he will interfere.

Other Conversion Ideas

Use the following ideas to inspire conversions:

- Create the moment that a perfect couple meets for the first time.
- Encourage a lover to make their affections known before it's too late.
- Convince the villain that they're the villain so they can reform themselves.
- Create a common enemy or challenge for a community to overcome to bring them together.
- Push the guard past their comfort zone so that they can save their family and the city.
- Become a farmer's mentor and put them through an incredible series of trials that train them to fight.
- Rescue the tied-up rebel from the villain's lair so they can have a final showdown.
- Reunite missing members of a team of misfits, so they can come together and save the day.
- Put someone specific in real danger so they are saved by a local hero, intertwining their stories.

In addition to conversions, threats can also arise for the Scribes themselves:

- Someone discovers the Scribes or finds the entrance to the Vault.
- A Writer dies, leaving a vacuum of power. Who should fill that role?
- A defector starts a competing organization.

RESOURCES

THE SCRIBES

https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202209/TheVaultMaps.zip

https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202209/TheVault-40x55-140pps-balcony-GM.jpg
https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202209/TheVault-40x55-140pps-balcony-Grid.jpg
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Hook & Chance is a community and podcast by a team of two Canadian brothers. Together Travis and Jordan Bonnough produce system-agnostic resources and frameworks for character and campaign creation based on real storytelling best practices. They have 150+ episodes focused on D&D spells, monsters, classes, systems and approaches for GMs and players to play their best games ever. If you want to learn more about how to leverage great storytelling for your games, you can find their work anywhere there are podcasts and at hookandchance.com.



The GM Tim is a rule-of-cool, theatre-of-the-mind heavy, professional game master who runs many games in a month. When not running tabletop games: Tim streams Star Trek Adventures games on Twitch, writes adventures and content on the DMsGuild and for the D&D Adventurers League, hosts Appendix: Lit Book Club, and is a featured dungeon master at D&D in a Castle. Find more at thegmtim.ca.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This month's issue of *ARCADIA* is accompanied by a new resource: a guide to using safety tools in your games. Some individual *ARCADIA* articles already include links to safety tools—systems to help everyone at the table have a good time and handle potentially disturbing or upsetting themes with care—but James and I thought it'd be nice to have a resource of our own for the MCDM community.

We reached out to *ARCADIA* consultant and author Sally Tamarkin, as well as gaming and psychology experts Colette Brown, LMSW and Sarah Hayes, PsyD, to create a "toolkit" of TTRPG safety tools, with guidance for using them with your group. One of my favorite tools is a checklist with topics for everyone to mark with their comfort level, so we made one of those, too! You can find both in the Resources section at the end of this issue (and future issues, too).

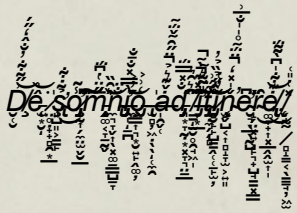
Like everything else we make, we want the options and suggestions in this safety toolkit to be easy to add to your game, whether you're playing with friends of two decades or people who have only just met each other. And, like everything else we make, you don't have to use them, but we hope you'll check them out and see if there's something you want to try out.

Honestly, I was hesitant when I first considered using safety tools for a casual one-shot. "Do I *have* to go to the trouble?" I thought to myself. "Will the players be freaked out by this or mind that I'm asking them to fill this checklist out before our single game session?" In the end, I approached it as casually as I could: "Hey, I'm not planning on any super scary themes or mentions of [particularly heavy topic], but it's a good idea for us to do this anyway." And it was fine. In fact, it made me feel more confident about GMing for people I didn't know very well!

Moreover, if you *are* planning on spooky themes, horror elements, or particularly heavy topics, these tools are incredibly useful for making your game scary in all the *right* ways. It's easy to think of safety tools as restrictions—don't mention this, don't touch that—but like any good framework, establishing boundaries creates empowerment and the confidence to explore. And *that* power, that freedom, that trust is what lets us tell the most intense, creepy, and heartrending stories.

This October's *ARCADIA* articles are all delightfully ~~spoopy~~ spooky in their own ways. "Hunting a Myth" by Celeste Conowitch presents four cryptids, along with guidance for weaving cryptids into your stories. Death Worm, yes please (but also oh no). "The Fiendish Regulars" by Banana Chan brings comedic horror to your game with three "normal" NPCs who each have a unique relationship with the local ruler, despot, or BBEG. And last but not least, "Puzzling Out the Devil" by Sharang Biswas is a love story wrapped in a curse wrapped in four enigmas—that is, puzzles!

So go forth and dive into the words within these pages. They beckon you—join us in this lush, shadowed, wicked corner of *ARCADIA*.



Hannah Rose
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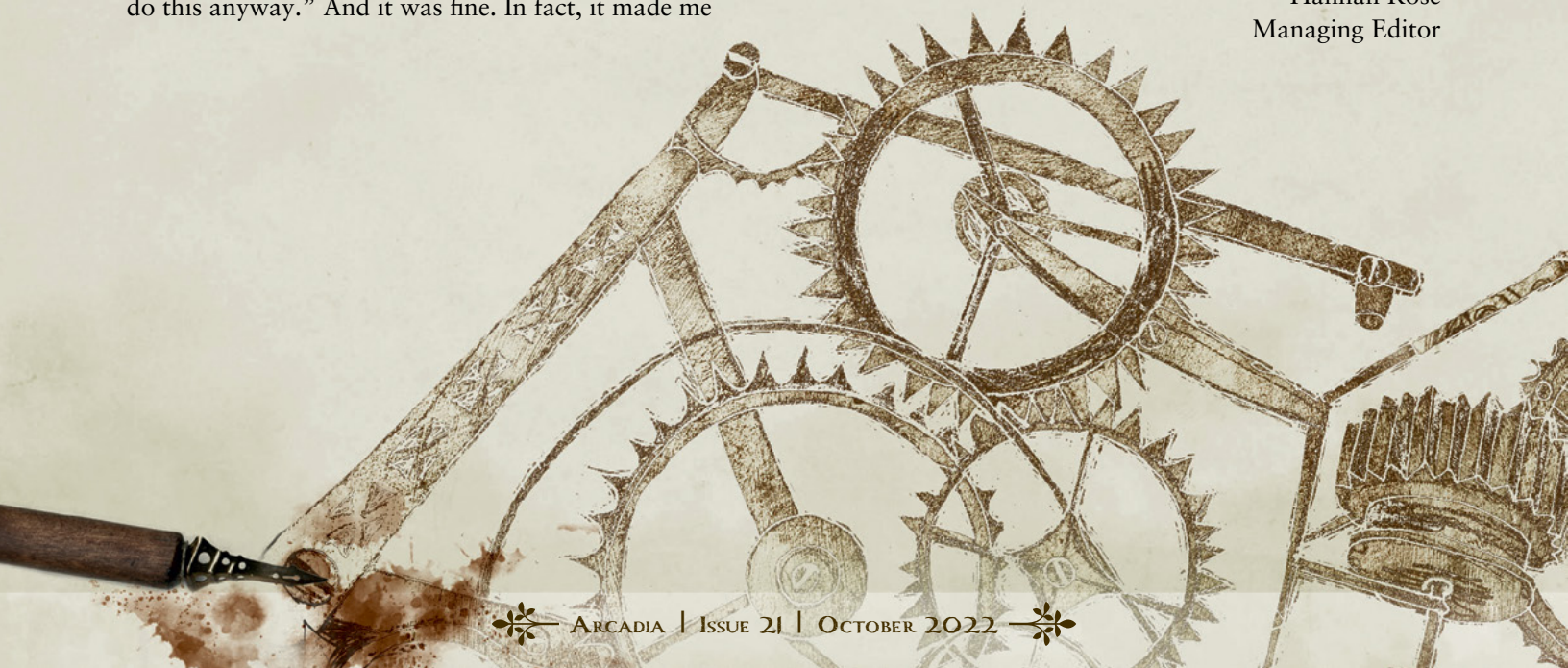




HUNTING A MYTH

Cryptids in your campaign

by Celeste Conowitch

Content Warning: This article contains mentions of self-harm, gaslighting, abduction, and body horror. We suggest using the MCDM Tabletop Safety Toolkit with this article to ensure everyone has a good time!

The loose definition of a cryptid is a creature some claim exists but is never proven to exist. Cryptids are creatures of legend, but they aren't part of established mythologies and they don't follow archetypes the way other fantastic critters do. Fantasy creatures like dragons and unicorns feature in stories across the globe, and each culture's version of these creatures shares traits with the others. Conversely, stories about encounters with a cryptid vary from telling to telling, with witnesses attributing different sizes, behaviors, and characteristics to the same creature. In addition, a cryptid is tied to a single people and place. You can point on a map to places where cryptids have been seen, such as Loch Ness, the Pine Barrens of New Jersey, and the woods of the Pacific Northwest, but you can't point to the reported source of unicorns.

In the game, cryptids are specific and rare enough (or cunning enough) to baffle scientists, clerics, or mages who wish to catalog them. Commoners in game worlds know dragons exist, but they might question the existence of Mothman, which makes hunting such a creature even more exciting. A cryptid's very existence defies explanation and forces folks to examine the trust they place in societal institutions, because governments, scholars, and other authorities repudiate that such creatures are real. And questions centered on truth, doubt, faith, and societal norms have a role in every genre.

Building Cryptid Stories

You might still be wondering exactly how to make a cryptid feel like a meaningful part of a standard fantasy world. To make these curious creatures work, keep these principles in mind.

Make a Mystery

Humans find cryptids interesting because they are mysterious. When building a story around a cryptid, create a sense of mystery and **avoid confrontation with the creature for as long as possible.** Discovering the influence of the cryptid on the environment, hearing its victims' stories, and uncovering evidence of its existence should constitute the bulk of a cryptid-themed adventure.

Introduce Doubt

In paranormal stories, we root for the investigators who continue to search for the truth in the face of naysayers and nonbelievers. Introducing NPCs who refute the existence of cryptids and show proof that such beings can't possibly exist can **sow doubt amongst the characters.** Providing evidence that a cryptid can't exist makes it more remarkable when one is standing right in front of you.

Get Personal

Cryptids are compelling because we understand so little about them. In our world, people report sightings and experiences with bizarre creatures across the globe every year. While these stories persist and share eerie similarities, mainstream science rejects these accounts as fiction, discrediting witnesses as overimaginative or unhinged. Tales of cryptids from trusted friends or family members are not so easily dismissed. Work to create the same atmosphere of doubt for your characters! When a cryptid targets someone close to the adventurers, you **create a personal stake in unraveling the mystery**.

Know Your Motivation

Creating a strong motive lays a compelling groundwork for the mystery. From the start, **decide what your cryptid wants, then construct encounters that allow your characters to unravel the creature's agenda** bit by bit.

Show, Don't Tell

Cryptids are frightening because they are always concealed, whether cast in shadow or seen in dreams. Keeping something partially hidden allows the mind to amplify its own fears, as imagination works tirelessly to fill in the gaps. **Cast everything in a layer of secrecy.** If you outright tell your players they're dealing with Bigfoot, you've ruined the thrill of uncovering the truth.

Ready-Made Cryptids

This section provides all the stats and info needed to run four remarkable cryptids.

Grey Aliens

AKA Zeta Reticulans, Roswell Greys, Grays

Meeting extraterrestrial beings is one of the most common cryptid encounters. Descriptions of these visitors from outer space vary widely enough to be categorized into a few different types. Pop culture has made the grey aliens the most well known: small grey beings with large heads, black eyes, and hairless bipedal bodies.

Aliens might seem like an odd fit for a fantasy game. But then again, wouldn't the concept of technologically advanced beings from outer space be just as terrifying (if not more so) to a magical society? Introducing aliens to your campaign allows you to build stories that examine the role of science in fantasy and expands the scope of your adventure to a universal scale.

Plot Hooks

Since grey aliens are primarily concerned with observation and gathering scientific data, they take great efforts to conceal their presence. An adventure featuring grey aliens typically begins with a mysterious incident that reveals something is wrong, with no obvious cause. Here are some plot ideas to point the characters toward a close encounter.

Out of Mind. The characters encounter an entire village of people that have had their memories wiped. Strange burn marks scorch the ground around the settlement, an odd metal machine is discovered, and other bizarre tools have been left behind. The villagers need help trying to piece together what happened.

Shipwreck. A bizarre metal ship crashes to the ground during a storm. The ship is like nothing ever seen before, and the characters are called to discover a way inside.

UFO. Farmers report seeing an unidentified flying object soar through the sky, and a local government official is discovered missing the following day. The terrified population needs adventurers to investigate what happened.

Tactics

Grey aliens are hyper-intelligent and never (voluntarily) enter a fight unless they have the upper hand. If the characters go looking for a brawl, make sure there are multiple grey aliens and pair them with defensible terrain or a souped-up siege weapon. If a fight goes poorly for the adventurers, keep in mind that grey aliens seek knowledge. Abducting attackers is better than killing them.

When running grey aliens in combat, prioritize survival over dealing damage. An alien relies on their Kinesis reaction to gain swift immunity to damage dealt by close-range enemies and prioritizes using Gamma Ray to take down spellcasters who can cycle through different damage types. The aliens reserve Thought Extraction until they have a poisoned or otherwise incapacitated target.

Rewards

Introducing aliens into your game allows you to create a bevy of technological rewards. Gifting the party with a remarkable piece of space weaponry or science fantasy-themed gadget for dealing with the greys is a great way to leave a lasting impression. To create this reward without starting from scratch, find a magic item you like, change some descriptive details to make it seem futuristic, then give it a new property like the following:

> ***Alien Tech.*** This item and its properties are not considered magical for the purposes of spells such as *antimagic field*, *dispel magic*, *counterspell*, or similar magical effects.

Grey Alien

Small Aberration, Typically Lawful Neutral

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 31 (7d6 + 7)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	8 (–1)

Skills Investigation +6, Perception +3
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 2 (450 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Alien Mind. The alien automatically succeeds on Intelligence or Wisdom saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Genius. The alien uses their Intelligence modifier instead of Strength or Dexterity for weapon attack and damage rolls.

Actions

Multiattack. The grey alien makes two Gamma Ray attacks.

Gamma Ray. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) radiant damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the end of their next turn.

Thought Extraction (Recharge 5–6). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 22 (4d10) psychic damage, and the alien learns the creature's current surface thoughts or extracts a memory with a length no greater than 10 minutes from the creature's mind. The alien can choose for this attack to deal no damage. Creatures under the effects of the *mind blank* spell or a similar effect take no damage from and can't have information learned or extracted by this attack.

Reactions

Kinesis. In response to taking damage, the alien becomes immune to the triggering damage type until they use this reaction again. If the alien takes multiple types of damage simultaneously, they choose which of the taken damage types they become immune to.

Shuck

AKA: Black Dog, Black Shuck, Old Shuck, Old Shock

Shuck is the common name given to the ghostly black dogs sighted in the British Isles across the centuries. These creatures vary in size from report to report, but all descriptions note the shuck's shadowy black body and eyes alight with flame. In some legends, the shuck appears and rips victims to shreds. In others, these dogs stalk prey for weeks until the victim's growing fear drives them to harm themselves. Seeing the hound is an omen of certain death, whatever the individual circumstance.

Stories featuring the shuck center around fear of death. Once a shuck chooses a victim, few things can save the unfortunate target from the hound (or from themselves). Deciding what (or who) conjured and set the cryptid upon its victims and unraveling the reason behind its predation allows you to explore themes of guilt, retribution, and justice.

Plot Hooks

Shucks are creatures of vengeance, compelled to track, harass, and ultimately kill their victims. Deciding the shuck's target and linking that victim to the adventurers is the first step to drawing them into this cryptid's tale. Here are some plot ideas to get the characters caught up in the shuck's cycle of vengeance:



Dying Breed. The last surviving member of an ancient noble bloodline hires the characters as bodyguards to protect them from a shadowy beast that has slain every other relative.

Last Words. A remote town suffers a vicious series of dog attacks in the weeks following the burning of an accused witch. As the death toll rises, the panicked townsfolk are desperate to find someone to stop whatever is hunting them.

Territory. A pack of non-hostile winter wolves (or other intelligent beasts) cautiously approaches the characters with a request. The wolves need help killing a black hound that has been attacking humanoids in the area, driving townsfolk to slaughter wolves en masse.

TACTICS

A shuck is driven to hunt particular victims; otherwise, they only kill other creatures foolish enough to interfere with this goal. Directly confronting the shuck results in a fight to the death, where the hound fights to slay attackers as efficiently as possible. If a shuck suspects interference, they use stealth to observe the interlopers, then attempt to scare them off before resorting to direct violence.

In combat, a shuck's first goal is to generate as many shadow copies as possible using their Shadow Pack reaction. The shuck uses their Bite attack on one character at a time to maximize effectiveness, prioritizing heavy-hitting damage dealers before going after support characters. The dog uses Death Rattle only after multiple targets have taken damage.

REWARDS

Slaying a shuck means freeing their victims from a grisly fate, which is likely to earn goodwill and monetary rewards. However, an enterprising character could fashion a magic item from their shadowy hide.

BLACK CLOAK

Wondrous Item, Rare (Requires Attunement)

Curling wisps of shadow cling to the black fur of this cloak. While wearing this cloak in dim light or darkness, you have advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks.

Shadow Pack. When you take damage, you can use your reaction to create a shadow copy of yourself. The copy appears in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of you and remains for 1 minute or until you move. You have advantage on attack rolls against a creature while your shadow copy is within 5 feet of the creature. Once the cloak has been used to create a shadow copy, it can't create another shadow copy until the next midnight.

SHUCK

Medium Monstrosity, Typically Lawful Evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 132 (24d8 + 24)
Speed 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	8 (–1)

Skills Perception +6, Stealth +7
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages —
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Relentless Pursuit. When the shuck is created, they choose one creature in existence as their target. The shuck knows the distance to and direction of their target, as long as they are on the same plane of existence as the target. If the target is on a different plane, the shuck knows which one, but not the target's exact location. When the target dies, the shuck knows and can choose a new target.

Actions

Multiattack. The shuck makes two Bite attacks, plus one additional Bite attack for each copy it has.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage plus 4 (1d8) necrotic damage.

Death Rattle (Recharge 5–6). The shuck emits an otherworldly howl that pulls souls into death. Each creature of the shuck's choice within 90 feet of the shuck that can hear them must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw, taking 36 (8d8) necrotic damage if the creature has all their hit points or 45 (10d8) necrotic damage if the creature is missing any of their hit points on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Reactions

Shadow Pack. When the shuck takes damage, they can create a copy of themself. The copy appears in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the shuck or another copy and remains for 1 minute or until the shuck is killed. A copy's AC equals 15. If an attack hits a copy, the copy is destroyed. A copy can be destroyed only by an attack that targets it. It ignores all other damage and effects.

On the shuck's turn, each copy can move up to 60 feet (no action required). The shuck has advantage on attack rolls against creatures within 5 feet of a copy. The shuck can target creatures and objects within 5 feet of a copy with their Bite attack.

DEATH WORM

Olgoi-Khorkhoi, Mongolian Death Worm

For generations, legends of giant sandworms that spray deadly acid and control electricity have plagued the Gobi Desert. Reports of these death worms have spawned imaginary replicas across pop culture, from the sandworms of Frank Herbert's *Dune* to the cult classic film *Tremors*. While their exact nature is unknown, it's clear that those who see a worm emerge from the earth rarely live to tell the tale.

Death worms are elusive and terrifying foes who dwell in the most inhospitable stretches of the world. Despite their tremendous power, the worm is still a Beast, and the stories that grow around it often delve into the continual struggle between nature and civilization.

PLOT HOOKS

Death worms prefer to stay as far from civilization as possible, so adventures surrounding them seek to determine the cause of their behavioral changes. Here are some plot ideas to lead your party to the writhing worms:

Bad Weather. An unknown arcane source has thrown local weather patterns into chaos. Whenever lightning strikes the ground, a surge of hideous monsters erupts from below ground to destroy everything around them. The locals are desperate for adventurers to find the connection between the storm and the creatures before they destroy everything in the area.

Border Dispute. A newly established frontier town abandons construction when the remains of several miners are discovered, their corpses half-melted by some kind of acid. The townspeople are terrified of whatever creature is capable of such ghastly murder, and they need it driven off to resume work as soon as possible.

Dirty Deal. A wealthy merchant calls in help when their transport wagons go missing. For several weeks, caravans have disappeared mid-journey, but no bodies or wagon pieces have been found—just bizarre mounds of earth, like recently dug holes.

TACTICS

A death worm's greatest asset is mobility, which allows them to pursue and stalk prey over vast distances. A threatened worm strikes their target from below the sands, retreats to safety, then repeats until their prey is dead. Death worms are most frequently encountered by unfortunate groups who attract the attention of a single beast, but some hunt in pairs. If the characters hope to eliminate all the worms in a particular region, they must bring the fight to the subterranean nest where dozens of the cryptids brood.

Death worms use their Shockwave action and Sand Scout trait to set up attacks with advantage. They prioritize eliminating characters who can fly or have long-range capabilities whenever it's safe to do so, saving Caustic Burst for the most advantageous moment. If the worm is near death, it retreats beneath the sand to regenerate.

REWARDS

Death worms possess remarkable biological capabilities, and creative adventurers who harvest their flesh can reap the benefits of their corrosive ichor.

CAN OF WORMS

Wondrous Item, Uncommon

This vessel contains a sliver of flesh harvested from a living death worm or one that died in the last hour. If you place water and decaying organic matter inside the vessel, the flesh generates enough acid to fill the container. Once the container is filled, the flesh can't generate more acid until the next dawn.

If the container is full, you can use an action to splash the contents of the vessel onto a creature or object within 5 feet of you. Make a melee attack against the target, treating the acid as an improvised weapon. On a hit, the target takes 6d6 acid damage.

If seven days pass without refilling the vessel with fresh water and organic matter, the flesh shrivels to dust, and the vessel loses its magic.



Death Worm

Large Beast, Unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 157 (15d10 + 75)
Speed 30 ft., burrow 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	7 (–2)	14 (+2)	8 (–1)

Saving Throws Con +9, Wis +6
Skills Perception +6, Stealth +6
Damage Immunities acid; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Condition Immunities blinded, prone
Senses blindsight 30 ft., tremorsense 120 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages —
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +4

Corrosive Secretion. A creature that touches the worm or hits them with a melee attack while within 5 feet of the worm takes 9 (2d8) acid damage.

Regeneration. The worm regains 10 hit points at the start of each of their turns if they have at least 1 hit point.

Sand Scout. While touching sandy terrain, the worm doesn't provoke opportunity attacks while burrowing.

Actions

Multiattack. The worm makes two Bite attacks. They can replace one attack with a use of Shockwave.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d10 + 6) piercing damage plus 9 (2d8) acid damage. If the target is a Large or smaller creature, they are grappled (escape DC 16). Until this grapple ends, the worm can only use their Bite attack on the grappled creature and has advantage on attack rolls to do so.

Shockwave. The worm emits a wave of static charge. Each creature within 30 feet of the worm must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 18 (4d8) lightning damage and is knocked prone. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't knocked prone. Creatures standing on the ground make this save with disadvantage.

Caustic Burst (Recharge 5–6). The worm secretes a spray of acid in a 60-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw, taking 45 (10d8) acid damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Mothman

From the first reported sighting in the woods of West Virginia in the 1960s, the cryptid dubbed the Mothman has captured cultural interest across an array of films and games. This creature is described as a 7-foot-tall bipedal winged humanoid covered in dark fur. Witnesses rarely agree on the exact details of Mothman's face or body, but all report seeing a pair of large, red, insectoid eyes. However, the most disturbing detail is that encounters with Mothman always end in tragedy. Wherever the cryptid is sighted, great disaster follows. A single witness might be gruesomely murdered the next day, or a locale that experiences multiple sightings may be decimated by a natural disaster the following week.

Adventures featuring Mothman have one core commonality: a countdown to disaster. When you introduce Mothman, determine what terrible event their presence heralds. Then provide the party with the tools they need to stop this event (or maybe ensure it happens).

Plot Hooks

Since Mothman's mere presence pushes the tides of chaos, an adventure featuring Mothman rarely begins with an encounter with the cryptid. Instead, consider pointing the characters toward the site of impending calamity and showing them the signs that something unnatural is altering the region's fate. Here are some seed ideas to get the characters on Mothman's trail:

Mixed Messages. Wizards, priests, fortune-tellers, and seers across the area experience widespread oddities when they attempt to use divination magic. Spells either fail entirely or repeatedly point to the site of the impending tragedy. They call in the characters to investigate these occurrences.

String of Misfortune. Several bizarre natural disasters have laid waste to towns across the land. After the latest tragedy, it is clear that the events are happening in a pattern as if following a trail. If the pattern holds, a thriving city will be the next ruined site in just three days.

What Comes Around. The characters encounter a veteran monster hunter tracking a mysterious creature with red eyes. Decades ago, a creature of the same description appeared just before the hunter's hometown, friends, and family were destroyed by an arcane storm. After years of searching, the hunter has finally heard reports of the same creature stalking a nearby town.



Tactics

Mothman's mere presence causes intense psychological distress and warps fate towards the worst outcome, so a fight typically isn't necessary for the cryptid to bring about harm. If adventurers attempt to confront or drive off Mothman before calamity strikes, Mothman prioritizes eliminating the interlopers before pursuing their larger goal.

Mothman's goal is to dish out as many doom tokens as possible while ensuring they survive long enough to use all three of their villain actions. Mothman uses Twist Fate as soon as they can hit multiple creatures. Mothman uses their Penance Gaze bonus action to target creatures capable of flight, then prioritizes doomed creatures that are likely to fail the save.

Rewards

Defeating Mothman prevents tragedy from striking, but flirting with doom can leave a mark on your adventurers if they so choose.

Spiral of Doom

Mothman inflicts other creatures with a new condition called doomed. As the dramatic condition name implies, penalties brought on by the doomed condition quickly escalate, potentially trapping a creature in a death spiral. This intentional design defines why Mothman is a force to be reckoned with. With that in mind, a fair GM should restrain themselves from bringing down the full wrath of Mothman until the characters have a chance to learn what they are dealing with. Perhaps the party gets a taste of the doomed condition in a brief encounter before Mothman flees, or an NPC clues them in to pack lots of restoration magic before facing the cryptid. Allowing your players to understand the full ramifications of the doomed condition before you wield it won't make the ultimate confrontation with Mothman any less surprising. In fact, it's likely to underscore just how much they could lose.

Mark of the Damned

Blessing, Rare

This small mark manifests on creatures whose future has been irrevocably changed. The mark can be visible or invisible (your choice) and is shaped like an hourglass.

Destiny Bond. Once per day, you can use a bonus action to invoke the mark's power. Choose one creature you can see and roll a d4. You and the target each gain the doomed condition and doom tokens equal to the number rolled. Once a creature has been the target of this feature, they can't be affected by another *mark of the damned* while they remain doomed.

Regional Effects

While Mothman doesn't possess a standard lair, their mere presence warps the destiny of creatures close to them. All creatures within 10 miles of Mothman experience the following effects:

- Creatures that sleep are haunted by nightmares of impending disaster. Creatures that attempt to sleep while within 10 miles of Mothman can't reduce levels of exhaustion by taking a long rest.
- Any time a creature other than Mothman rolls a 19 on a d20, it is instead treated as a 20. Additionally, any time a creature other than Mothman rolls a 2 on a d20, it is instead treated as a 1.
- If a creature spends 24 consecutive hours within 10 miles of Mothman, they gain a special condition called doomed. A doomed creature gains 1 doom token for each additional 24 hours they spend within 10 miles of Mothman.

New Condition: Doomed

When a creature is subjected to the doomed condition, they experience the following effects:

- If the creature doesn't have any doom tokens when they are subjected to this condition, they receive 1 doom token. As long as the creature is doomed, they can't have less than 1 doom token.
- Whenever the creature makes a saving throw (including death saving throws) they reduce the result by the number of doom tokens they currently have.
- If a doomed creature goes 24 consecutive hours without gaining a new doom token, they are no longer doomed and lose all their doom tokens.
- The *remove curse* and *greater restoration* spells reduce a creature's total number of doom tokens by one, and the condition ends if the creature has no doom tokens. Alternatively, the condition can be ended and all doom tokens removed from the creature with a *wish* spell.

Mothman

Medium Monstrosity, Neutral

Armor Class 21 (natural armor)
Hit Points 212 (25d8 + 100)
Speed 30 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Con +9, Wis +7
Skills Insight +7, Perception +7
Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, frightened
Senses darkvision 120 ft., truesight 60 ft., passive Perception 17
Languages telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 15 (13,000 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +5

Doom's Herald (3/Day). If Mothman fails a saving throw, they can succeed instead by removing one doom token from a creature they can see within 120 feet of them. If removing this doom token would reduce the creature's total doom tokens to 0, the creature is no longer doomed.

Future Sight. Mothman possesses supernatural awareness of future events and can't be surprised.

Actions

Multiattack. Mothman makes two Unlucky Strike attacks. They can replace one of these attacks with a use of Twist Fate, if available.

Unlucky Strike. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 24 (4d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 17 Charisma saving throw or gain 1 doom token. If the creature is not already doomed, they become doomed.

Twist Fate (Recharge 5–6). Mothman twists the destiny of nearby creatures, pushing them toward inevitable disaster. Each creature within 60 feet of Mothman must succeed on a DC 17 saving throw, using their lowest ability score (if two or more ability scores are tied, the creature chooses which to use), or gain 1 doom token. If the creature is not already doomed, they become doomed.

Bonus Actions

Penance Gaze. Mothman fixates on one creature they can see within 60 feet of them, and the target's mind fills with intense guilty memories. The target must choose to resist the effect or to accept the barrage of painful memories. A target that attempts to resist the effect must succeed on a DC 17 Charisma saving throw or take 33 (6d10) psychic damage. A target that accepts the memories falls prone and is incapacitated until the end of their next turn. If a target chooses to accept the memories, the target is immune to Mothman's Penance Gaze for the next year.

Villain Actions

Mothman has three villain actions. They can take each action once during an encounter after an enemy creature's turn. They can take these actions in any order, but can only use one per round.

1. ***Bad Omen.*** A nexus of ill-tidings forms around Mothman. Place a number of doom tokens equal to twice the number of characters on the table and declare that any assigned tokens will be used by the GM. The characters can divvy up the doom tokens between themselves and leave any tokens unassigned. Any doomed character that accepts tokens increases their total doom tokens by the amount accepted. Any character that isn't doomed becomes doomed when they accept one or more tokens.
2. ***Creeping Doom.*** Mothman becomes invisible to each doomed creature until the end of Mothman's next turn and magically teleports to an unoccupied space they can see within 60 feet of them.
3. ***Induce Disaster.*** Disaster comes calling. Each doomed creature takes 11 (2d10) damage for each doom token they have. If there are any unassigned doom tokens in play, each creature within 300 feet of Mothman takes 11 (2d10) damage for each unassigned doom token. The damage type for these effects is unique to each affected creature and is always of a damage type that the creature can't resist or avoid. For example, a random lightning strike might deal lightning damage to one creature while arcane energy simultaneously rips through reality, dealing force damage to a different creature.

THE FIENDISH REGULARS

What do they do in the shadows? Stuff no one else wants to do.

by Banana Chan

In the depths of the scariest, most terrifying, most horrific towns live some of the most fiendish folks. I'm not talking about demon lords or monsters. I'm talking about the people who might screw you over for a quick buck. Or the people who won't shut up about how great the town's leader is. Ugh, now those are the residents you should be wary of.

–Jenna F., *Worst Travel Sites Magazine* Editor

Ever wonder what regular citizens of spooky realms are like when they're not threatened with the terrors of their world? This article explores a few drop-in NPCs for games geared toward comedy in a horror-filled setting, or that just need a little lightheartedness to break up the terror. Meet the **fanlord** and their wide collection of antagonist fan fiction; the **doomsday salesperson,** who collects gold in exchange for survival gear (and since every day is doomsday in a horror realm, their business is doing quite well!); and the evil antagonists' **personal assistants**, who are at the antagonists' beck and call.

These NPCs pop up throughout evil campaign settings like groundhogs on the first day of spring. Unlike groundhogs, they aren't adorable, and they may follow the characters on their adventure, pestering them. This badgering may be out of the heroes' control (particularly in the case of the fanlord and the personal assistant), but there may also be a benefit to having these NPCs around—using them as distractions, guides, or allies in fights, for example. But what are these NPCs' goals in the first place?

Why Won't They Leave Me Alone?

These NPCs hound the party for a variety of reasons. They're all trying to survive in a strange, hostile world, but here are a few other motivations:

- A fanlord wants to spread the word of how great the horror realm's Ruler is. They also want the Ruler to notice them, but that will probably never happen. They are desperate to outshine other fanlords in their community, whether through sharing facts or showing off signed, exclusive memorabilia.
- The doomsday salesperson's objective is gaining financial independence through sweet, sweet gold. Their end goal is probably to retire early, move to a sunnier destination (or literally any location with at least a little bit of sun), and sip cocktails for the rest of their life.
- The personal assistant wants recognition for a job well done. This could change when they meet the characters—over time, especially with the characters' encouragement, they may want to escape their evil

home and tread a more entrepreneurial path. Perhaps they could even become a companion NPC for future adventures.

These motivations determine how the NPCs end up with the party and why they stay with them instead of doing … whatever they were doing. The following questions contain ideas for introducing one of these NPCs to the characters:

- Does the NPC need to impress (or badger) a certain character to be accepted as one of the party?
- Is there a character who has something that the NPC needs, whether that's a physical item, gold, or some other attribute, information, or talent that could help the NPC achieve their goals?
- Does the NPC have a reason to believe the party could change the fate of this realm (for better or for worse)?
- Did the Ruler of the realm ask the NPC to join the party for some reason? If so, why are they doing the Ruler's bidding (aside from potentially being jailed for not following orders)?

The Ruler

These NPCs are influenced by another NPC called the Ruler. Every evil or forsaken realm has one. Murderous, brooding, obsessed with something unhealthy—you know the type. For some places, it might be a vampire. Others might have a corrupt monarch or a fallen angel. Each NPC has a unique relationship with the Ruler that impacts the finer details of their personality.

The Fanlord

Well, actually, you're wrong about them, because they're obviously the best person and you wouldn't know, because you're a fake fan.

Out of the crevices of a mist-layered town, outstretched fingers slowly reach out like spiders finding a stable spot for their legs to land on. Wide eyes glow green, searching for the next passerby to torment with facts about the Ruler of this cursed nightmarescape. The fanlord not only knows everything there is to know about their realm's autocrat, they are also a *very* zealous follower, with stacks of signed memorabilia at home. It doesn't matter if the subject of their worship is a horrible leader who spreads lies and misfortune across the land, crushing the impoverished under the heel of their shoe (if they wear shoes). They can do no wrong in the eyes of the fanlord.



Like a cult follower, the fanlord stops at nothing to spread the gospel of the Ruler. They're just a bit more irritating, because they also want to show off all their cool autographed collectible cards, or the fancy bobble-heads they purchased from a peddler taking advantage of their unwavering devotion to the Ruler.

Let's be real, it's almost impossible to get the fanlord to leave you alone. Unless you finally accept the lord and savior, [insert name of Ruler here], you're ill-fated to have this NPC follow you around until the end of time. Or at least until they find another poor soul … or another fanlord. Better yet, if you find a group of fan-lords, you can drop yours off.

Plot Hooks

Roll on or choose from the Fanlord Plot Hooks table to determine how the fanlord is introduced to the party.

Fanlord

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

Armor Class 13 (light armor made of magazines and flyers that feature the Ruler)
Hit Points 39 (6d8 + 12)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	8 (–1)

Skills History +5, Investigation +3
Senses passive Perception 11
Languages Common plus any languages their Ruler knows (but not very well)
Challenge 2 (450 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Emotional Labor. Any other creature within 30 feet of the fanlord that can hear and understand the fanlord gains 1 level of exhaustion, unless the fanlord is incapacitated or the creature already has levels of exhaustion. Moving more than 30 feet from the fanlord removes any levels of exhaustion caused by this trait. In addition, a creature who kills the fanlord must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or take 7 (2d6) psychic damage (mostly from the crushing guilt).

Groupthink. At the start of the fanlord's turn, if they can see one or more other fanlords but aren't already within 5 feet of one of them, the fanlord must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or immediately use as much of their movement as possible to move toward one of these fanlords of their choice. The fanlord isn't compelled to move into an obviously deadly hazard, such as a fire or pit, but they provoke opportunity attacks to move in the designated direction.

Actions

Multiattack. The fanlord makes one Shove or Stick attack, and they use Vicious Mockery.

Shove. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one Medium or smaller creature. *Hit:* The target is pushed 5 feet away from the fanlord.

Stick. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) psychic damage, because there's no better way to exasperate an opponent than with a stick.

Vicious Mockery (Cantrip). The fanlord unleashes a string of insults laced with subtle enchantments at one creature they can see within 60 feet of them. If the target can hear the fanlord, the target must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or take 7 (3d4) psychic damage and have disadvantage on the next attack roll they make before the end of their next turn.

Reactions

Projection. When a creature makes a Charisma check to attempt to influence the fanlord to pursue an obvious course of action against their Ruler, the check automatically fails and the creature takes 2 (1d4) psychic damage as the fanlord rebukes them with a magical insult.

Fanlord Plot Hooks

d6	Plot Hook
1	The great annual Rulercon is happening in town, but the guest of honor (ahem, the Ruler) still hasn't arrived! Wherever could they be (perhaps hiding from the pressure put on them by their adoring fans)? A fanlord asks the characters for help finding the Ruler.
2	There is a feud between this realm and a neighboring one over something that someone said about the other person's Ruler. Is this just the rumor mill churning, or is there enough evidence to lead to a war between realms? To stop the conflict, the characters must chase down leads with a fanlord as their guide.
3	The Ruler wants to go on vacation, but they can't do that without getting recognized and bombarded for autographs in their own town. They need the characters' help to sneak out to a scenic location and avoid the nosy fanlords.
4	A fanlord will do anything to meet the Ruler, including hiring a band of misfits to guide them into the Ruler's heavily guarded abode. This will be a dangerous task, but how tempting is that payout?
5	A lost fanlord stumbles across the characters in a huge metropolis and begs for their help. They must find their way home so they can be among others who love their town's Ruler as much as they do!
6	The Ruler has died and their immediate circle is in a panic, trying to make sure that word of this doesn't get out. Worried that the fanlords might revolt, the Ruler's aids ask the characters to prop the Ruler up and puppeteer the corpse at public appearances. This won't work for long, though—what permanent solution will they come up with?

Doomsday Salesperson

You never know when the world's gonna end, so you might as well start stocking up on supplies now. We're all gonna die eventually—no point in hoarding all that gold, right?

Every day in this place is another potential doomsday. The Ruler is constantly wreaking havoc, waging war against a nearby village or opening a can of magical evil worms or just being a plain old vampire. A common saying around these parts is "live each day like it's your last … because the chances of it being your last are very high." This proverb is especially popular among doomsday salespeople, who use it to motivate potential customers into spending their hard-earned coin on fancy anti-doomsday bobbleheads.

These sellers are particularly keen when it comes to preying on the insecurities of village folk. Why take a chance against the oncoming apocalypse? Instead, buy all seventy-four pairs of these survival boots, just in case the first seventy-three are damaged in the cataclysm. However, whether they're swindling susceptible souls or they truly believe in the healing properties of the anti-doomsday leggings, most doomsday salespeople don't want to hawk their goods forever. What they truly want is to retire early, save enough to move to another town, or finally settle their debts.

The heroes can find these vendors selling at the local marketplace or wandering the streets in large trench coats full of useless gadgets. If you happen to come across this NPC and they decide that it's somehow a good idea to follow you on your journey, be prepared for very loud rattling from all their wares.

Plot Hooks

Roll on or choose from the Doomsday Salesperson Plot Hooks table to determine how the doomsday salesperson is introduced to the party.

Loot

The doomsday salesperson carries unique supplies that adventurers can purchase or steal. The Doomsday Salesperson Loot table contains items a doomsday salesperson might have in stock when they meet the characters. You can use these items as inspiration to create additional stock.

Doomsday Salesperson

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

Armor Class 14 (breastplate made of scrap metal)
Hit Points 27 (5d8 + 5)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)

Skills Deception +7, Performance +5, Persuasion +7, Stealth -10 (see The Opposite of Invisible below)
Condition Immunities charmed, invisible
Senses passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Giant, Goblin, Halfling, Orc, Sylvan
Challenge 1 (200 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +2

The Opposite of Invisible. The doomsday salesperson can be spotted easily and is very, very loud, either from yelling about their wares or those wares clanking around. They have a –10 penalty to Dexterity (Stealth) checks.

Tool Proficiency. The doomsday salesperson is proficient with two sets of artisan's tools of the GM's choice. The doomsday salesperson can only use these tools to make anti-doomsday merchandise.

Actions

Multiattack. The doomsday salesperson makes two Overloaded Pack or Bobblehead Blast attacks. One attack can be replaced by a use of Poisoned Creamed Beef.

Overloaded Pack. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, they must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Bobblehead Blast. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +4 to hit, range 15/30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage. Where are they hiding all these bobbleheads? Who carries this many bobbleheads at once? Why do they hurt so much?

Poisoned Creamed Beef. Don't knock this creamed beef until you've tried it. But then you can't really knock it, because you'd be in pain. The doomsday salesperson splashes the creamed beef on a creature within 5 feet of them. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 hour. While poisoned in this way, a creature can use an action to induce vomiting, ending the effect on themself.

Offer You Can't Refuse. The doomsday salesperson makes a sales pitch to a creature within 5 feet of them. If the target can hear and understand the doomsday salesperson, they must succeed on a DC 13 Charisma saving throw or be charmed by the doomsday salesperson until the end of their next turn. While charmed in this way, the target must use their action on their turn to give the doomsday salesperson one object of the target's choice they wear or carry in exchange for a sack full of hats and merchandise from the doomsday salesperson.

Doomsday Salesperson Plot Hooks

d6	Plot Hook
1	A villager begs the party to help them sell an entire box of anti-doomsday leggings that they foolishly procured from a doomsday salesperson. As it turns out, several other people in town are having the same issue. The doomsday salesperson must be confronted to end this pyramid scheme.
2	An illusory advertisement spams a village, promoting an anti-doomsday potion. The villagers beg the characters to find the doomsday salesperson responsible and make them stop.
3	The end of the world is actually happening this time, and it's all thanks to a bunch of crystals being sold around town. These so-called "protection" crystals summon demons—the scary kind. It's not great for business if everyone's possessed or dead, right? So who is the doomsday salesperson responsible, and what's their grift?
4	A new business owner is tired of having their store destroyed every day by mysterious vandals. They need the party's help identifying the vandals so they don't need to keep buying anti-doomsday equipment from a shady doomsday salesperson. The doomsday salesperson might be behind the chaos, or simply content to benefit from it.
5	A traveling doomsday salesperson sells a new anti-doomsday body cream that turns customers in town into Aberrations. The transformations start slow, but eventually the customers grow eye stalks and tentacles and everything. To make it right and stop similar catastrophes, the characters must find the doomsday salesperson and their supplier.
6	There's a new trend in town—candles with various rings and crystals in them that can protect the wearer. Some are even worth several pieces of gold! However, the doomsday salesperson behind these candles accidentally placed a ring belonging to an archdevil in one of the candles. They hire the characters to help find the candle before all hell literally breaks loose.

Doomsday Salesperson Loot

d6	Loot
1	***Self-Help Book by Brad Bon Barorich.*** This tome is filled with nonsense and cliches, but it does make you look more enlightened than you really are. You have advantage on Charisma checks made to influence Humanoids who haven't read this book and can see the cover while you hold it. *Cost: 150 gp*
2	***Instant Creamed Beef.*** It's not real meat, but it is instant. If you consume this meal during a short rest, you regain 2d4 hit points and must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 hour at the end of that short rest. This stuff is pretty old. *Cost: 25 gp*
3	***Suction Cup Crossbow.*** It's just a light crossbow with ten suction-cup-tipped bolts. A creature hit by one of the bolts takes no damage, but the next attack roll made against the target made before the end of the target's next turn has advantage. *Cost: 50 gp for the crossbow and ten bolts or 25 gp for just ten bolts*
4	***Magical Bobblehead.*** When a creature with a face holds this bobblehead, the bobblehead's face becomes the creature's face. It's otherwise useless. *Cost: 50 gp*
5	***Doomsday Insurance Paperwork.*** This paperwork says something about saving money by spending more for a lower deductible here. The paperwork functions as a *spell scroll* of *mass suggestion* (spell save DC 17) that any creature that can speak and read a language can use. *Cost: 10,000 gp*
6	***Anti-Doomsday Toaster from Barorich Industries.*** It's just a campfire griddle that makes great toast. It comes with a sticker on it that reads "100% Doomsday-Proof." Bread not included. *Cost: 15 gp*

Personal Assistant

They don't pay me much … well, they don't pay me at all, but I do get a lot of perks. Like exposure! Which I hear you can die from if you get too much of it.

Being the personal assistant of the one and only Ruler is a coveted and prestigious position, but the assistant's exhausted face is a depressing look at "success." They're constantly at the Ruler's beck and call. This is the miserable peak of their career, and they know it.

The personal assistant tries to hide the years of hard work and abusive office politics they endured to get here behind a smile that can easily be broken by just one unkind comment. They are always in communication with the Ruler—as a result, they've either adapted to physical exhaustion or been magically imbued by the Ruler to never feel it.

The personal assistant might interact with the characters frequently because the Ruler asked them to "make the guests feel welcome," meaning their services are being temporarily loaned out to the party.

Personal Assistant

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

Armor Class 15 (studded leather)
Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)

Skills Insight +5, Perception +5, Stealth +5, Survival +3
Condition Immunities exhaustion
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages Common plus any languages their Ruler knows
Challenge 3 (700 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Organized to a Tee. The personal assistant has access to a magical storage space they have paid a monthly fee for. As a bonus action, the personal assistant can create a 10-foot-square entrance to the space, which has a volume of 100 cubic feet. They gladly hold onto any of their allies' supplies. They can figure out where to keep your stuff. It's no trouble.

Unusual Nature. The personal assistant doesn't require sleep, but they always look exhausted. They occasionally repeat under their breath, "It's just a part of the job. It's just a part of the job."

Actions

Multiattack. The personal assistant makes three Dagger attacks.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage. The personal assistant learned how to wield knives from the Ruler, and if they don't keep up their skills, they might die during sparring practice!

Read Thoughts. The personal assistant magically reads the surface thoughts of one creature within 60 feet of them. The effect can penetrate barriers, but 3 feet of wood or dirt, 2 feet of stone, 2 inches of metal, or a thin sheet of lead blocks it. While the target is in range, the personal assistant can continue reading its thoughts, as long as the personal assistant's concentration isn't broken (as if concentrating on a spell). While reading the target's mind, the personal assistant has advantage on Wisdom (Insight) and Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, and Persuasion) checks against the target.

Calm Emotions (3/Day; 2nd-Level Spell; Concentration). The personal assistant attempts to suppress strong emotions in each humanoid in a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on a point they choose within 60 feet. Each creature in that area must make a DC 12 Charisma saving throw; a creature can choose to fail this saving throw if they wish. If a creature fails its saving throw, the personal assistant chooses one of the following two effects.

They can suppress any effect causing a target to be charmed or frightened for 1 minute. When this effect ends, any suppressed effect resumes, provided that its duration has not expired in the meantime.

Alternatively, the target is indifferent about creatures the personal assistant chooses that they were hostile toward for 1 minute. This indifference ends if the target is attacked or harmed by a spell or if they witness any of their friends being harmed. When the effect ends, the creature becomes hostile again, unless the GM rules otherwise.

Locate Object (3/Day; 2nd-Level Spell; Concentration). The personal assistant describes or names an object that is familiar to them. They sense the direction to the object's location, as long as that object is within 1,000 feet of them. If the object is in motion, they know the direction of its movement.

The spell can locate a specific object known to the personal assistant, as long as they have seen it up close—within 30 feet—at least once. Alternatively, the spell can locate the nearest object of a particular kind, such as a certain kind of apparel, jewelry, furniture, tool, or weapon.

This spell can't locate an object if any thickness of lead, even a thin sheet, blocks a direct path between the personal assistant and the object.

(The characters can expect a bill at the end of the adventure.) Depending on the Ruler's leadership style, they may instead attempt to micromanage everything the party does through the assistant, who keeps tabs and barks orders on their boss's behalf like a disastrous game of telephone. Either way, the timid personal assistant is excited to be away from their horrible boss for a time and eager to help the characters with whatever they need.

Maybe one day, hopefully, they can escape this job and go on an adventure of their own. But they'll need the help of some kind travelers to realize that. They could become an artisan or a bard or even a soldier—if they can ever get over their fear of conflict. Whatever they put their mind to, they will surely get there.

Plot Hooks

Roll on or choose from the Personal Assistant Plot Hooks table to determine how the personal assistant is introduced to the party.



Personal Assistant Plot Hooks

d6	Plot Hook
1	The Ruler sends their personal assistant to follow the party to make sure the characters don't find the zombie army hiding in the catacombs. But what is that groaning sound, and why do folks keep disappearing?
2	The personal assistant desperately needs someone to convince the Ruler that they're dead so they can escape this realm. They used their 10-minute lunch break just to ask the party for help. How will they fake their death?
3	The personal assistant needs to organize a birthday party for the Ruler, but they don't know where to start. Will someone help them with a very special day?
4	The Ruler wants—nay—*needs* a very specific dish made from some very rare ingredients from a very dangerous location. A mere personal assistant can't handle this themselves, and they desperately need kind adventurers' aid. Who will step up to the plate?
5	The neighboring realm's Ruler has a crown that makes them look glorious … so glorious that the Ruler of this realm has grown quite envious. They want the personal assistant to steal the crown so they can have it for themselves. The personal assistant hires the characters to help with the heist, and really hopes they have a good plan!
6	The personal assistant wants to unionize, but they're terrified of the Ruler. (Rightfully so.) The personal assistant asks for the characters' help organizing their coworkers, but soon after the Ruler asks the party to report any whispers of unions to them. Who will the party side with, and if it's the Ruler, how will this betrayal play out?

PUZZLING OUT THE DEVIL

A diabolical puzzle-based adventure for characters of any level

by Sharang Biswas

Content Note: This adventure contains scenes of body horror and devil possession. Additionally, the main plot includes a woman who dies in childbirth, and closeted queer identities. Advice for modifying these two plot points is provided if you so desire. See "Modifying the Adventure" and "Author's Note" at the end of the adventure for more details. We suggest using the MCDM Tabletop Safety Toolkit with this adventure to ensure everyone has a good time!

THE STORY SO FAR

Nineteen years ago, Birgitte Skorman lay dying after giving birth in her family home. Eirik Skorman, Birgitte's husband, had long held a fascination for tales of the occult, hauntings, and fiendish covenants, and used his faint knowledge of such things to call upon and make a bargain with a devil named Nimuchnimurpal. "My new child and I cannot live without my wife at my side," the helpless man begged. The devil agreed to help, but demanded the Skormans' new baby, Johann, when he "ripened." Eirik, expecting ample time to find a way out of the deal, agreed.

Against Eirik's expectations, though, Birgitte died, even as Nimuchnimurpal bound a piece of her confused spirit in her old bedroom—keeping to the letter, though not the spirit, of the bargain. Every few days, Birgitte becomes lucid, allowing Eirik to speak to her. The widower sleeps in the guest bedroom, and no one except Johann and the family's housekeeper, Leia, know about Birgitte's spirit.

JOHANN'S DEVOTION

Two years ago, seventeen-year-old Johann fell in love with a young man named Laxman, an apprentice to famed exorcist Rukhmani the Illuminated. The two began a secret relationship, but their time together was short-lived when Rukhmani set out on a journey of unknown duration with her apprentice at her side.

Just yesterday, Rukhmani and Laxman returned after nearly a year's absence. Johann, thrilled to once again see his secret lover, convinced his father to invite the young apprentice over for dinner, intending to reveal the relationship for the first time. But when Johann uttered the words "I love you" to Laxman before his father, Nimuchnimurpal was also there as an unseen witness.

Having long haunted the Skorman house to wait for the moment when he might claim Johann's soul, the devil saw their opportunity when they recognized that Johann's emotionally vulnerable state left him open to possession. The fiend quickly possessed Johann and attacked Laxman, but the apprentice was able to use knowledge gained from studying under Rukhmani to temporarily incapacitate the devil. He then rushed out to fetch the master exorcist.

FIENDISH REVENGE

Rukhmani and Laxman worked all night to dislodge the fiend from Johann. First, they drew a runic prison circle in the basement of the house, which contained the possessed Johann inside it. The pair then began to draw a runic spell diagram connecting to the prison circle, whose completion would drive Nimuchnimurpal out of Johann's body.

But with weariness overtaking him, Laxman tripped over a ceremonial knife he'd mislaid, careened into Rukhmani, and propelled her into the circle with the devil. Nimuchnimurpal pounced on the exorcist and

snapped her neck. The distraught Laxman pulled Rukhmani's body out of the circle, thankfully without disturbing the runes inked onto the floor. He now stands in shock, his gaze drifting between the corpse of his mentor and the distended grimace painted by the possessing devil onto the visage of his lover.

The bindings placed on Nimuchnimurpal give out at dawn.

Father-Son Secrets

Is Eirik Skorman homophobic? Not at all. Does Johann worry about coming out to his father? Absolutely!

It's not unommon for children of heterosexual parents to be worried about judgment from their families regarding their sexuality, even if loving parents have never shown signs of caring about that issue. It's a complicated tangle of societal expectations involving families, patriarchy, the roles men are placed into, internalized homophobia, and many other factors.

In this story, Johann wants to keep his secrets, and has waited until it feels right for him to come out to his father. See "Author's Note" at the end of the adventure for more discussion and guidance on roleplaying this theme.

Adventure Summary

With the use of one of the setups in the "Story Hooks" section below, the characters arrive in the basement of the Skorman home. To save Johann, they must complete the hexagonal spell diagram tied to the runic prison circle and finish the exorcism ritual. They are aided in this task by Rukhmani's notes, Laxman's help, clues about Johann's life and personality found in the house, and interviews with others. After the characters perform the ritual, Nimuchnimurpal's corporeal form manifests before them, ready for battle.

Setting

This adventure takes place at the Skorman family home, a two-story, ivy-covered brick house with a basement that might be found in any reasonably prosperous town. Because the adventure isn't a room-by-room exploration, the specific layout is unimportant. The only important details you should maintain are the clues found in specific locations (see "Clues and Information" later in the adventure).

Guidance

This adventure appeals to players who enjoy reading, deductive reasoning, and logical thinking. The puzzles require a strong grasp of written English. However, the adventure also features a fair amount of social interaction.

This isn't designed to be an action-packed adventure, barring the fight at the end and some ability checks here and there. Expect the players to spend time with the handouts while they discuss possible solutions with each other. Encourage them to take notes and to ask you to repeat information as needed.

Familiarize yourself with the puzzle solutions and the logic needed to get to them. This isn't an adventure you can easily run on the fly! It also helps if you print out a copy of the player handouts for yourself, so you don't need to constantly flip back and forth through the text while running the adventure. These player handouts, as well as a "GM Cheat Sheet" for keeping track of the puzzles, are provided in the "Handouts" section at the end of this article.

Dramatis Personae

The following NPCs play important roles in the adventure. See the "Clues and Information" section for details on what information each NPC can share to help the characters solve the puzzles in the adventure.

Eirik Skorman

(EYE-rick, he/him, chaotic good half-orc)

"There's always a way. It might not be what you expect, but it's there!"

A fit, middle-aged textile merchant whose work keeps him busy, Eirik is torn between the love he holds for his son and the shame he holds for having made a deal with a devil. He visits his dead wife's ghost for comfort, though he can't ignore the horror he feels for what she has become.

Signature Look. Eirik has multiple piercings in each ear, through which he twines braids of his hair.

Personality. Eirik is gruff and practical. He's very intelligent, and speaks in short, sharp sentences.

Game Statistics. Eirik uses the **noble** stat block.

Johann Skorman

(YO-haan, he/him, lawful good half-orc)

"Hey there! Tell me what's been exciting you lately!"

A handsome young half-orc, Johann has his life figured out. He wants to study to be a healer or chirurgeon, and travel with his exorcist-in-training boyfriend Laxman. Only two insecurities stand in his way: he's worried that his father won't accept his queerness, and he constantly wonders what his late mother was like before she became a shade.

Signature Look. The two small tusks emerging from Johann's lower lip are tattooed in vivid blue.

Personality. Johann is normally confident, creative, and enthusiastic about life. In the immediate aftermath of being possessed, he's groggy and confused.

Game Statistics. Johann uses the **commoner** stat block.

Laxman

(LUKSH-mun, he/him, lawful good tiefling)

"It's all my fault! I'm so sorry! Mistress, forgive me!"

Laxman is the diligent apprentice to famed exorcist Rukhmani the Illuminated, and thinks the world of his mentor. He's deeply in love with Johann Skorman, but has kept their relationship secret for Johann's sake. He's capable, but unused to working on his own.

Signature Look. Laxman's horns are webbed with silver chains and other dangling jewelry.

Personality. Normally studious and excited about his studies, Laxman has been thrown into shock by Johann's possession, and doubts his own capabilities.

Game Statistics. Laxman uses the **acolyte** stat block.

Leia

(LAY-ah, she/her, lawful neutral dwarf)

"The Skormans are a good family! They've done nothing wrong!"

Leia has been the Skorman family's fiercely loyal housekeeper for decades. Her usual discretion has been put to the test by the events surrounding Johann's possession.

Signature Look. Leia is fascinated with non-gemstone rocks and wears a lot of rock jewelry.

Personality. Leia is normally shy and reserved, speaking softly without looking at people directly. When it comes to defending the Skormans, however, she grows fierce and confrontational.

Game Statistics. Leia uses the **commoner** stat block.

Birgitte Skorman

(ber-GEET-uh, she/her, unaligned human spirit)

"How lovely to have guests. Leia, bring the baby! The guests want to see him!"

This spirit is neither a true ghost nor a true remnant of Birgitte. She possesses some of Birgitte's intellect and memories, but can't hold full conversations or have original thoughts. She was created by Nimuchnimurpal with the express purpose of causing emotional pain.

Signature Look. Birgitte takes the form of a bloodred translucent image of a strong, stout human woman.

Personality. Birgitte's spirit gets distracted easily and jumps from topic to topic. She might answer questions … sometimes.

Game Statistics. Birgitte uses the **specter** stat block.

Nimuchnimurpal

(nim-UK-nim-UR-paal, they/them [unknown gender], lawful evil fiend)

"Drown your sorrows in me."

Also known as the Lord of the Tainted Seas, Nimuchnimurpal is a devil attuned to stinking and poisonous waters. Their powers are far-reaching, and the fiend loves to make deals that end with promising young souls trapped in a waterlogged layer of Hell.

Signature Look. Nimuchnimurpal takes the form of a skinny humanoid covered in fish scales, with long hair made of seaweed. Dirty water constantly drips off their body.

Personality. Nimuchnimurpal is as inscrutable to mortals as most other fiends. When speaking, they shift from vicious to incoherent to sweetly seductive without warning.

Game Statistics. This adventure is meant for all levels of play, and the combat encounter at the end is not meant to be the main focus. As such, you can pick any devil stat block with a challenge rating appropriate for Nimuchnimurpal. Then make the following changes to the stat block as you wish:

- The devil is immune to the charmed, frightened, and paralyzed conditions.
- The devil's attacks deal cold or poison damage instead of their normal damage type.
- The devil can breathe air and water and has a swimming speed equal to their walking speed.

Rukhmani the Illuminated

(ROOKH-mun-ee, she/her, half-elf)

A tall, striking half-elf, Rukhmani was a famed exorcist who traveled far and wide to help those in need, and to further her research into demons and devils. Laxman's former mentor is now deceased, but her notes and influence play an important part in the adventure.

Signature Look. Rukhmani wore robes that resemble the multicolored marginalia of an illuminated manuscript.

Story Hooks

You can use the following hooks to draw the characters into the adventure, or as inspiration for hooks of your own:

- With Rukhmani and Laxman still working to save his son and dawn fast approaching, Eirik sends Leia out to fetch additional help. The old dwarf can contact the characters directly, or might have an NPC acquaintance who knows the characters and reaches out on the family's behalf.
- A priest, wizard, or other spellcaster senses the manifestation of a potent fiend in the Skorman home and asks the characters to investigate.
- Passing by the Skorman house, the characters smell incense and sulfur, and can hear screams, wild laughter, choking noises, and the sound of someone chanting coming from within. The voice is that of Rukhmani attempting to exorcise the devil just before her death.

Starting the Adventure

However they arrive at the Skorman house, the adventure begins with the characters entering the basement, where they see Laxman standing over Rukhmani's recently murdered body and staring in shock at the possessed Johann. The apprentice exorcist doesn't notice the characters until they speak to him or otherwise grab his attention. If they offer help or ask what happened, Laxman fearfully introduces himself and reveals the following information:

- The Skormans were friends of Laxman and his mentor, Mistress Rukhmani the Illuminated. Last night, Laxman came to pay the family a visit, and Johann became possessed by a devil.
- Laxman was able to temporarily incapacitate the devil, then fetch Rukhmani.
- The two exorcists worked all night to help Johann. Rukhmani was in charge of the exorcism, and drew all the runes that are part of the prison circle. Laxman was simply doing as he was told.
- An accident occurred while Rukhmani was drawing a spell diagram connected to the runic prison circle, and the devil killed her.
- Harming Johann won't hurt the devil. Killing Johann will allow the fiend to enter the Material Plane in the flesh.

Laxman doesn't know about Eirik's devil pact or Birgitte's spirit. Additionally, he is loath to reveal the nature of his romantic relationship with Johann, because Johann asked him to keep it a secret until he was ready to tell his father.

Talking with Laxman

Laxman feels that Rukhmani's death was his fault, and this guilt has convinced him that he can't contribute to saving Johann without making things worse. He can provide distracted suggestions or hints about the puzzles as you see fit, but won't volunteer whole answers or take other action for fear of "making another mistake and getting someone killed."

Laxman warns the characters if they're about to do something obviously foolish, such as entering or disturbing the runic prison circle, attacking Johann, or speaking to the dead Rukhmani (see the "Necromancy?" sidebar). And as the characters engage in appropriate roleplaying with the apprentice, he has more to share. See "What Laxman Knows" in the "Clues and Information" section later in the adventure.

Necromancy?

Rukhmani the Illuminated has many enemies, any number of which would have no qualms or difficulty with trapping her soul or reanimating her body. To prevent such occurrences, the master exorcist has undergone many magical procedures and rituals to protect her. Unfortunately, that protective magic can't distinguish between helpful or harmful attempts to revive or contact her soul.

If the characters talk about raising Rukhmani or contacting her spirit, Laxman tells them she is protected against such magic, and that attempting such tasks might have lethal consequences. A character who succeeds on a DC 17 Intelligence (Arcana) check or uses the *detect magic* spell while inspecting Rukhmani's body learns the following:

- Excluding the *wish* spell, any magic used to communicate with Rukhmani's soul or raise her body from the dead automatically fails.
- A creature that makes use of the *raise dead* spell, the *speak with dead* spell, or similar magic to target Rukhmani's body or soul takes 55 (10d10) psychic damage, gains three levels of exhaustion, and must make a DC 20 Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, the caster's soul is ripped out of their body and trapped in a secret location known only to Rukhmani (and Laxman, at your discretion).

Interacting with Nimuchnimurpal

If the characters attempt to engage Nimuchnimurpal in Johann's body, the fiend laughs, hisses, and bares their teeth as they strain the young man's body into horrid contortions. These poses don't harm Johann, but are disturbing. Nimuchnimurpal might choose to speak at different points during the characters' attempts to exorcise them, as noted in "Clues and Information."

Nimuchnimurpal can't leave the runic prison circle. While bound within the circle, the fiend uses the **berserker** stat block to represent their control of Johann's body. Though unarmed, Johann is fiendishly empowered, giving him an unarmed strike attack that has a +5 bonus to hit and deals 9 (1d12 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Introducing the Puzzles

Following the initial conversation with Laxman, the young apprentice directs the characters to the hexagonal spell diagram painted on the floor, attached to the runic prison circle with inked lines. Laxman explains that the prison circle binds Nimuchnimurpal. Rukhmani had started to draw the runes for the spell diagram, which would power a ritual to drive Nimuchnimurpal from Johann's body and prevent the fiend from possessing anyone else for a time. During that time, Rukhmani planned to battle and destroy the devil.

Laxman shakily explains that the spell diagram contains four elements that must be completed to calibrate it for the exorcism. He says that the exorcism will expel the devil, which must then be fought no matter what, but that each section of the circle completed correctly will reduce the devil's power. Laxman knows the four elements, but doesn't know how to complete them:

- A triangle of **ejection runes** has one rune missing and must be completed in order to expel the devil from Johann's body. The runes are selected based on fundamental magical principles.
- A circle of **stabilization runes** has four key runes missing. These runes channel and direct the magic that uncouples the devil from their host. The choice of runes is determined based on situational and environmental factors.
- A formation of **anchor runes** has yet to be started. This helps hold the victim's mind in place when the fiend is expelled from their body. The selection of these runes depends entirely on the personality, hopes, and dreams of the victim, and Rukhmani was undertaking research into Johann to select the correct runes before her demise.
- A ring of **potency runes** has been placed, but needs to be elementally balanced in order to work effectively. These runes bolster the power of the magic in the spell diagram to overcome the fiend.

The characters can work on different parts of the spell diagram puzzle in any order, simultaneously or sequentially. Once the spell diagram is complete, they need to perform an exorcism ritual. If the ritual is successful, Nimuchnimurpal appears in their true fiendish form and must be fought.

Getting the Documents

After setting out the scope of the puzzles, Laxman passes the characters four documents, saying, "These are some of mine and Rukhmani's notes … but I don't think I can finish the runes on my own …" The documents are included at the end of this adventure as handouts that should be distributed to the players:

- Laxman's notes on ejection, used in "Puzzle 1: Ejection Runes"
- A page from a treatise on stabilization runes, used in "Puzzle 2: Stabilization Runes"
- A portion of Rukhmani's journal, used in "Puzzle 3: Anchor Runes"
- A page of Laxman's annotated homework, used in "Puzzle 4: Potency Runes"

Each of the puzzle sections provides full details on the notes given to the characters.

The diagram from the "Incomplete Runic Spell Diagram" handout should also be given to the players, though it is not a document the characters receive. Rather, the image represents the state of the incomplete spell diagram as it appears when the characters arrive in the basement. The players should write their puzzle solutions on this document.

(The diagrams in the "GM Cheat Sheet" section aren't for the players. It's a handy puzzle cheat sheet and a place for you to take notes!)

If the players are overwhelmed and don't know where to start, Laxman suggests to the characters that they begin with the ejection runes, since that section is almost complete and requires only his notes to figure out.

Documents in the Fiction

When distributing the handouts, tell the players that their characters are actually handed a larger collection of papers, but that a little bit of study reveals the most relevant materials, which the handouts represent.

Additionally, the characters can be confident that the documents and the spell diagram are as correct as Laxman and Rukhmani could make them. None of the documents feature intentional errors except for the omissions that the characters and players must fill in. Laxman reaffirms that Rukhmani is—was—a celebrated exorcist not known for making mistakes.

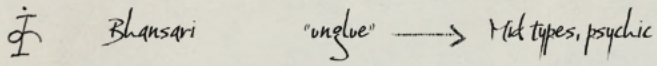
Puzzle 1: Ejection Runes

To complete the ejection runes, the characters must add a single rune to the bottom-right corner of the triangle in the spell diagram. Laxman's notes can guide the characters toward the solution. Review the "Laxman's Notes" handout along with the information in this section. Though these are Laxman's own notes, he is in a state of shock and is terrified about making another mistake. He might offer partial insights, but he can't solve the problem for the characters.

Puzzle 1 Solution

The bhansari rune must be drawn on the bottom-right corner of the triangle.

Hints to this puzzle can be found in the basement and study, and through conversations with Laxman (see "Clues and Information").



Puzzle 1 solution

Reasoning

Using the information in Laxman's notes, the characters can use the following reasoning to determine the solution to the puzzle:

- The runes must always go on the vertices of the shapes. Two of the corners of the triangle already have a rune, meaning the new rune must go on the only available corner.
- The strigma rune is visible on one corner, so Nimuchnimurpal must be a "Type 4–5 Entity."
- The riktin rune is visible, meaning the devil's hold on Johann is entirely psychic in nature, with no physical transformation present.

As such, the bhansari rune, for mid-type entities and psychic-only infections, is the solution.

Secret Hint

The initials "JS" appear at the bottom right of the document. This is Laxman's idle doodling while daydreaming about his boyfriend, and serves as a clue regarding the nature of the young men's relationship.

Penalty for Failure

If the characters fail to place the correct ejection rune in the proper location when Nimuchnimurpal is expelled from Johann's body (see "Battling the Devil" later in the adventure), the fiend's power is bound imperfectly:

- If the rune was placed in the wrong location, the "Bidirectional Energetic Clash" event occurs (part of "Puzzle-Specific Events").
- If the incorrect rune is used, Nimuchnimurpal gains the Burrowing Words action (detailed at "Puzzle-Specific Features").

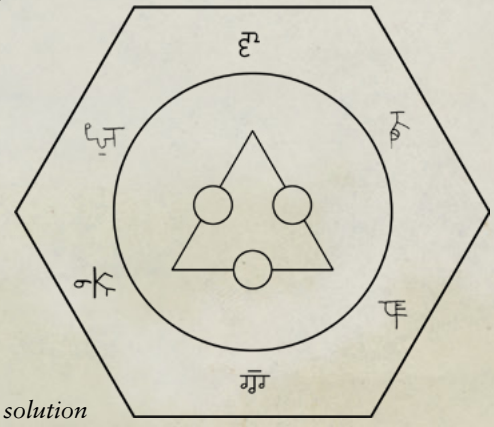
Puzzle 2: Stabilization Runes

The treatise on stabilization runes given to the characters was written by members of the Cabal of the Fragrant Truth, an order of exorcists. The characters must use the information in the treatise to place four missing stabilization runes in the spell diagram in their correct order, forming a complete circle of six runes. Review the "Treatise on Stabilization Runes" handout along with the information in this section.

Puzzle 2 Solution

The following runes should be placed outside the inner circle, starting at the top right and going clockwise:

- The stars are in liminal conjunction with the sun: thrimsan is the top right rune.
- The planes are in Roshni alignment: kauravi is the bottom right rune.
- The energetic birds are dominant over reptiles: thilmtha is the bottom left rune.
- Johann has a stigmoid constitution: vavupatna is the top left rune.



Puzzle 2 regular solution

Reasoning

The treatise calls for four runes, and the only place four runes can be drawn are along the circumference of the circle. The runes must be written in clockwise order from I to IV and evenly spaced along the circumference of the circle, as described in the treatise.

The characters can determine the proper runes by making a series of ability checks, corresponding to each of the four missing runes. When a character succeeds on a check, give them the associated narrative information and let them work out the rune from there. For example, tell the players that studying the heavens shows them that the stars are in liminal conjunction with the sun, but don't directly specify that the correct rune is thrimsan.

Rune I

A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check knows that the stars are in liminal conjunction (an archaic astronomical pattern) with the sun.

Rune II

A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Religion) check recalls lore about the Upper Planes and confirms that the planes' present alignment corresponds to what the treatise refers to as the Roshni alignment.

Rune III

A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Animal Handling) check knows enough about the flora in the local area to determine that energetic birds are more prevalent than reptiles.

Rune IV

A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Medicine) or DC 18 Wisdom (Survival) check knows that stigmoid is an old way of classifying the particular body shape and complexion that Johann possesses.

Abilities and Skills

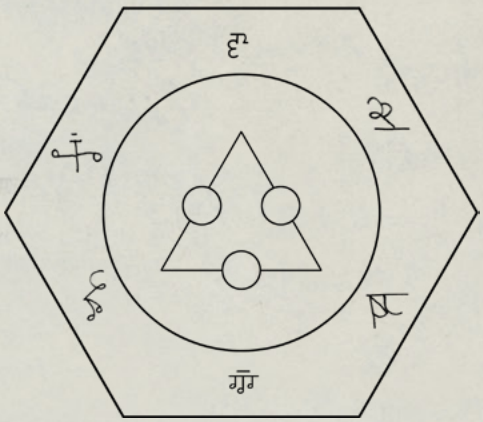
In a few places, the adventure makes use of less common combinations of abilities and skills, such as calling for Intelligence (Medicine) checks rather than the usual Wisdom (Medicine) check. This represents the unusual nature of the information tied up in different puzzles, and the different modes of thinking and observation characters might engage in to help them solve those puzzles.

Alternative Solution

If the characters don't succeed on one or more ability checks, they can guess which rune to use, or can use the table of simpler runes in the treatise. If the characters don't realize this on their own, point it out to a character of your choice with a suitable academic or magical background. Using the simpler glyphs is less risky than getting the rune wrong, but less potent than getting the rune correct.

Use the following guidelines if the characters make use of the simpler runes:

- In clockwise order, the solution using only the simpler glyphs is I: atyavasam, II: bhilma, III: riptu, and IV: svangetharumna.
- The characters can mix and match the regular and simpler runes.
- For each simpler rune used, Nimuchnimurpal gains one use of the Novice Errors bonus action (see "Puzzle-Specific Features" in "Battling the Devil").



Puzzle 2 alternative solution

Penalty for Failure

Making any mistakes in the placement of the stabilization runes means the energy of the final ritual flares out of control at the end of the exorcism, granting Nimuchnimurpal an edge in the "Battling the Devil" section:

- If an incorrect stabilization rune is placed, the "Unstable Magic" event occurs (part of "Puzzle-Specific Events").
- If any rune is drawn in the wrong order or in the wrong place, Nimuchnimurpal gains the Explosive Arcana trait (detailed at "Puzzle-Specific Features").

Reconfiguring Puzzle 2

The information the characters gain from the ability checks in puzzle 2 is arbitrary, and you can swap the runes as you see fit. For instance, if your campaign takes place in a swampy environment where reptiles are dominant, you can decide that the correct placement for rune III is actually the shamrani rune.

Puzzle 3: Anchor Runes

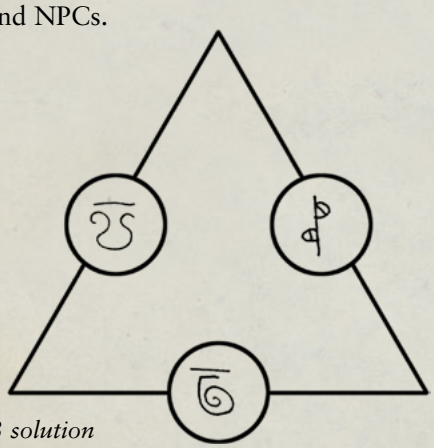
The characters must use Rukhmani's journal to fill in all three missing anchor runes in the spell diagram. Those anchor runes prevent psychic harm to Johann when Nimuchnimurpal is expelled from his body. Review "Rukhmani's Journal" handout along with the information in this section.

In addition to the journal, the characters need to determine three of Johann's main hopes, dreams, or desires in life to complete this puzzle. They can do so by searching Johann's room or talking to his family (see the "Clues and Information" section).

Puzzle 3 Solution

The solution to puzzle 3 is the "warmth of companionship" rune, the "reconnect with one's family or history" rune, and the "ease the suffering of others" rune. These three runes can be placed in the empty circles along the sides of the inner triangle in any order.

Hints to this puzzle can be found in the basement, Johann's bedroom, and the master bedroom, and through conversations with Leia, Laxman, and Eirik. See the "Clues and Information" section for details on those areas and NPCs.



Puzzle 3 solution

Reasoning

From what they learn in the "Clues and Information" section and by using the "Rukhmani's Journal" handout, the players and characters can make the following deductions:

- According to Rukhmani's journal, the anchor runes must be placed in the small circles along the edges of the triangle. They can be placed in any order.
- Johann's relationship with Laxman is important to him, and he keeps it secret from his father. Learning this from Laxman should lead characters to the rune representing warmth of companionship.
- Johann misses and wants to know more about his mother. Searching Johann's bedroom or speaking with Eirik or Leia should lead the characters to the rune representing reconnecting with one's family or history.
- Johann has a passion for medicine and wishes to become a healer or chirurgeon. Searching Johann's bedroom or speaking with Leia should lead the characters to the rune representing the easing of others' suffering.
- Johann is bad with money and there's no sense that wealth is important to him, pointing away from the rune representing the power of wealth. The characters can learn this by speaking with Eirik.
- The characters find no indication that Johann seeks solitude, and can learn by speaking with Leia that he has known much loneliness in his life. This points away from the rune representing solitude.
- The characters' investigations reveal no indication that pain (either receiving or inflicting it) is a part of Johann's goals, pointing away from the rune representing the sting of pain.

Penalty for Failure

Failing to place the three correct runes in any order gives Nimuchnimurpal an edge in the "Battling the Devil" section. The devil gains one use of the Echoes of Johann bonus action (see "Puzzle-Specific Features" later in the adventure), and increases the potency of that action for each incorrect or missing rune.

PUZZLE 4:
POTENCY RUNES

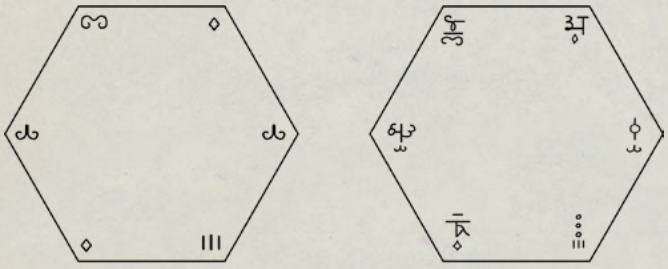
The characters must use Laxman's annotated homework to add three diacritic (accent) glyphs to the existing runes in the hexagon of the spell diagram. The diacritics elementally balance the potency runes, which are used to bolster the spell diagram's magic. Review the "Laxman's Annotated Homework" handout along with the information in this section.

You can have Laxman offer the characters vague clues in this section, but he's too distressed to lend real assistance.

PUZZLE 4 SOLUTION

The characters need to add specific diacritics below runes that have none by referencing Laxman's annotated homework. The solution is depicted below, with the left side showing just the diacritics (including the ones that already exist on the diagram), while the right shows the complete solution.

Hints to this puzzle can be found by exploring the basement, the study, and the master bedroom (see "Clues and Information").



Puzzle 4 solution; diacritics only on the left, full solution on the right

REASONING

From what they learn in the "Clues and Information" section and in the "Laxman's Annotated Homework" handout, the players and characters can gain the following information:

- The potency runes correspond to the outer hexagon of the spell diagram.
- Each rune must have a diacritic—an accent mark that helps balance the rune. Normally, diacritics opposite each other must have opposite elemental values. Laxman's solution shows that earth opposes air, fire opposes water, and void opposes itself.
- An exception arises when the entity being exorcised is elementally attuned. By speaking with Nimuchnimurpal in the basement, noting the presence of poison-tainted water in the runic prison circle, reading the pamphlet in the study, or conversing with Birgitte's spirit in the master bedroom, the characters can deduce that the fiend is attuned to water.
- Because Nimuchnimurpal is elementally attuned to water, the diagram must have a dominant fire charge. As such, instead of opposing the existing fire diacritic on the left side of the hexagon with a water diacritic, the right side of the diagram must take a second fire diacritic.



To maintain an overall fire charge, use a fire diacritic instead of water.

PENALTY FOR FAILURE

Any incorrect or missing diacritic leaves the potency runes unbalanced. During the "Battling the Devil" section, the "Fury of the Tainted Seas" event occurs (part of "Puzzle-Specific Events").

CLUES AND INFORMATION

The characters can obtain clues to help them solve the puzzles from the NPCs in the house, and by investigating certain rooms. If the characters want to explore rooms not described here, make it clear that a thorough search of other areas reveals nothing useful.

BASEMENT

The normal clutter of this dingy basement has been pushed to the walls to leave the floor clear. The runic prison circle and the runic spell diagram have been drawn at the center of the floor, with Nimuchnimurpal trapped within the circle.

Water in the Circle. The runic prison circle contains a puddle of liquid that laps against the edges of the circle but can't escape. With a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Nature) check, a character knows this is water tainted with poison (see puzzle 4).

Johann's Contortions. A character who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Medicine) check or a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check while watching Johann's body writhing and twisting under the devil's control confirms that even as his muscles, ligaments, and tendons are strained to their limits, there are no signs that he's been physically transformed by fiendish magic (see puzzle 1).

Fiendish Challenge. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check or a DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check can tell that the devil is

elementally attuned in some way, and that any mistakes in the spell diagram might give the fiend access to potent elemental magic after it is exorcised (see puzzle 4).

Once the characters start adding any runes to the spell diagram, Nimuchnimurpal threatens the characters and the Skorman family, with all those threats tied to the theme of water (see puzzle 4). You can use the following threats or create your own:

- "I will drown you in the infernal rivers!"
- "The boy will sink to the depths and forever be mine!"
- "Like the tides and the currents, I am inexorable!"
- "You think you can dampen my power?"
- "I will drain every last drop of your sweet mortal blood, then swim in it!"

Once Nimuchnimurpal starts speaking, if asked anything about Johann or their own motivations, the devil talks of the young man's vulnerable emotional state (see puzzle 3). "The boy is so ripe, so delicious! Already I can feed on his emotions. His secret longings, his yearning to connect with his poor dead mother … scrumptious!" If any character talks about the Skorman family after Nimuchnimurpal starts speaking, the devil cackles and says, "Why don't you ask the mother upstairs?"

STUDY

The study is a neat room containing a large bookshelf, a desk, and a wall hanging made of numerous patches of different textile materials sewn together (a sampling of some of Eirik's wares).

Notable Works. Characters who search the bookshelf find a small collection of scrolls collecting ghost stories and hauntings, including an eyewitness account by a man who lost his wife and was soon haunted by her.

The Devil's Work. Also on the bookshelf is an old handwritten pamphlet titled *The Calling of a Greate Duke of Helle*. This is the text Eirik first used nearly two decades ago to make his pact with Nimuchnimurpal. (The work is normally hidden away, but Eirik has been going through it in a futile attempt to find information that might help save his son.)

While the writing is in an archaic style, the pamphlet's purpose is clear. It contains general but highly inaccurate information about devils, along with a very functional ritual to summon Nimuchnimurpal (though the devil is certainly no duke of Hell). The ritual makes frequent references to "Tainted Waters," offering a useful clue in solving puzzle 4.

A character who studies the pamphlet can attempt a DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check. On a success, by using the information in the pamphlet and that found in the "Laxman's Notes" handout, the character knows that Nimuchnimurpal is likely an entity of middling power according to Rukhmani's classification scheme (see puzzle 1).

If the check is 18 or higher, the character can modify the exorcism ritual to limit Nimuchnimurpal's power in the "Battling the Devil" section later in the adventure, removing one use of a random benefit the devil gains from the "Puzzle-Specific Power" section as a result of a mistake in one of the puzzles.

JOHANN'S BEDROOM

Johann's messy bedroom features a plain bed and writing desk, and has books, clothes, and other objects strewn everywhere.

Art Appreciation. A framed sketch of a mountain landscape hangs on one wall. Anyone inspecting the sketch sees that the back of the frame features another piece of art—a detailed woodcut of a nude male humanoid. (This is a hint about Johann's queerness, for puzzle 3.)

On another wall is a small, framed portrait of a smiling young woman—Birgitte, Johann's mother. The glass protecting the portrait is covered in fingerprints, as though handled often (see puzzle 3).

Missing Mother. A character who searches Johann's clothes discovers a child's drawing of two adults and a child. One of the adults, a woman with a lily drawn over her head, is drawn apart from the other two figures. The child wears a sad expression. Through guesswork or a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check, a character discerns that the drawing is an expression of the artist's sadness about a mother figure (see puzzle 3).

Reading Material. Searching through the books scattered across the room turns up a volume on medicine titled *White's Anatomy*, into which is tucked a handwritten list of local herbs and their healing properties (see puzzle 3).

MASTER BEDROOM

The master bedroom door is locked, and can be opened only with the key held by Eirik or a successful DC 10 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. On a failed check, the lock opens but its mechanism irreparably breaks with a clank loud enough to draw Leia from elsewhere in the house.

As soon as any character enters the room, Birgitte's spirit manifests as a bloodred ghostly apparition and introduces herself as the lady of the house. Most of what the spirit has to offer are fragmented memories that make no sense, and she ignores most questions as the characters interact with her.

The Spirit Speaks. Asking Birgitte about Nimuchnimurpal prompts the following response: "I can't speak of the Lord of the Tainted Seas, for their grip on me is as strong as the deepest currents!" (See puzzle 4.)

Asking Birgitte anything about her son causes her to say, "Johann has grown into such a self-assured young man! So much like his father … but he is no merchant. He has different ambitions … " (See puzzle 3.)

Corrupted Entity. Observing Birgitte's spirit allows any character to make a DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana) check. On a success, a character gleans that the apparition is a strange, corrupt entity holding only a piece of Birgitte's soul.

If the characters know of Eirik's deal with Nimuchnimurpal, a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Religion) check suggests that banishing Birgitte's spirit by defeating that spirit in combat would weaken Nimuchnimurpal. If the spirit (which uses the **specter** stat block) is defeated, Nimuchnimurpal loses one-quarter of their hit points upon being exorcised (see "Battling the Devil" later in the adventure).

Guest Bedroom

The guest bedroom is clean and sparse, but any quick inspection reveals that someone sleeps here regularly. The sheets are well used, and a cuddly stuffed toy in the shape of an orc warrior is hidden under the pillow. Beneath the bed, a few scattered folders hold documents relating to textile trading. Through guesswork or a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Insight) check, a character knows that Eirik has been sleeping here.

Leia's Secrets

The housekeeper Leia is a loyal servant, but somewhat superstitious. In the aftermath of Johann being possessed, she is terrified for the young man, who she knows has a secret relationship with Laxman. When first speaking with the characters, she tries to remain tight-lipped, but reveals the following information with appropriate roleplaying or a successful DC 13 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check:

- If asked about Johann, Leia says that he was always a sweet, friendly child who wanted to learn about and help everyone. At eight years old, he once brought home an injured bird and tried to repair its wing! (See puzzle 3.)
- If asked about Birgitte, the housekeeper speaks of how Johann has often been lonely due to the amount of time Eirik devotes to his work. She believes the young man would have benefitted from having another parent (see puzzle 3).
- If asked about Laxman and Johann, Leia admits to an inkling that the young men's relationship might have "a deeper dimension than what most people might think" (see puzzle 3).
- If the gravity of Johann's condition and possible fate is impressed upon her, Leia lets slip that Laxman must be devastated, as any lover would be (see puzzle 3).
- If the characters make it clear that any information about the Skormans might be useful in helping Johann, Leia mentions that visiting the master bedroom might reveal secrets about the devil, but she begs the characters not to tell Eirik she gave them this information.

What Laxman Knows

Though Laxman remains overwhelmed by fear and uncertainty throughout the adventure, any character who helps him focus with appropriate roleplaying or a successful DC 14 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check can learn the following:

- If asked about Johann, Laxman rhapsodizes at length about how wonderful he was, before catching himself and mumbling something about being best friends. He says he admired Johann, who seemed to really "know himself." He is adamant that Johann would "never hurt a fly," and talks of how disturbing it is to see him possessed in this violent way (see puzzle 3).
- Laxman doesn't want to reveal the secret nature of his relationship with Johann. Only if pressed about it in the context of Johann's life being in danger does the young exorcist confess that the two are romantic partners. He speaks of how the relationship has been weighing on Johann's mind recently, not because he was unsure of himself, but because he was worried about what his father would think. The two had recently spoken of their plans to travel together after Laxman's apprenticeship ended (see puzzle 3).
- If asked about Nimuchnimurpal, Laxman says he doesn't know a lot. He's never worked on an exorcism where the possessor's hold on the victim has been entirely psychic (see puzzle 1).
- If asked about Rukhmani's research, Laxman admits that it's well beyond his understanding, but that people often overlooked the important footnotes in Rukhmani's writing (see puzzle 3).

Eirik's Insights

Eirik Skorman is focused entirely on saving his son, but the shame he feels for what happened to Birgitte weighs heavy on him. He shares any the following information if questioned by the characters:

- Eirik says nothing about his wife and grows visibly upset if asked about her, saying, "I don't want to talk

about the pain of the past." He admits that not having a second parent has been hard on Johann because of how busy Eirik is with his work and other responsibilities. Any character who succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check can tell that Eirik is hiding something more than just pain when he speaks of Birgitte.

- If confronted about the spirit in the master bedroom, Eirik breaks down crying. He confesses everything about the deal with Nimuchnimurpal (detailed in "The Story So Far" section at the beginning of the adventure), and speaks of the old pamphlet in his study that he used to first summon the devil.
- If asked how he feels about Birgitte's spirit, Eirik admits that he doesn't like being around the specter, but that Johann often visited the master bedroom in fruitless attempts to learn about his mother (see puzzle 3).
- If asked about his son, Eirik mentions fondly that Johann has "no head for money," and won't follow him in the family textile business. Instead, he studies with the local healers, learning their trade (see puzzle 3).
- Eirik knows about Johann and Laxman's relationship, but hasn't wanted to pressure his son into revealing that relationship before he's ready. If the characters either reveal that they know about it, or if they stress that they need to know Johann's secrets, Eirik tells them that he knows Laxman was very important to Johann, especially since he had few friends his age and no mother (see puzzle 3).

Enacting the Exorcism Ritual

When the characters decide that the spell diagram is complete, Laxman regains some of his confidence and offers to help in performing the exorcism ritual. He burns incense, makes arcane gestures, and pronounces a long incantation for his part in the ritual, even as each character attempts a specific action meant to lend some part of themself to the magic being enacted.

The action a character undertakes could involve a gesture, a sound or benediction, the use of some component, or even a mental visualization of an image. Go around the group and ask each player a question that corresponds to their character's class, as shown on the Ritual Actions table. For multiclass characters, you decide which question to ask. Award inspiration for each answer.

Ritual Actions

Class	Ritual Question
Barbarian	What visual image representing the devil leaving Johann's body do you concentrate on?
Bard	What haunting rhythm or melody do you produce?
Beastheart	What animalistic sound do you make?
Cleric	What is the invocation you send to the gods?
Druid	What animalistic gesture do you enact?
Fighter	What defensive motions do you perform?
Illrigger	What visions of horror do you focus on?
Monk	What images of stability do you imagine?
Paladin	What gesture of strength do you make with your weapons?
Ranger	What offering of nature do you place into the spell diagram?
Rogue	What gesture of dismissal or disdain do you perform?
Sorcerer	How do your eyes change momentarily?
Talent	What feeling that's difficult to put into one word do you infuse into the ritual?
Warlock	What words are forced out of your mouth?
Wizard	What does the glowing pattern you trace in the air look like?

When the ritual is concluded, Johann releases a mighty scream. Fetid water streams out of his eyes, ears, nose, and mouth, coalescing into the form of the devil Nimuchnimurpal. The young man then collapses, unconscious.

Battling the Devil

When Nimuchnimurpal appears in the flesh, the fiend screams curses at the characters and attacks. Laxman rushes to Johann's unconscious body, dragging him upstairs and to safety as the fight rages. Having had their plans destroyed by the characters, the devil no longer focuses on either of the young men.

Based on how well the characters did at solving the puzzles, the battle could kick off with any of a number of puzzle-specific events, even as Nimuchnimurpal gains puzzle-specific features.

Puzzle-Specific Events

As a result of mistakes made while solving the puzzles, the following events might occur at the start of the battle.

Bidirectional Energetic Clash

Placing a rune in the wrong location in puzzle 1 triggers this event, which causes an explosion of arcane energy to burst out of Nimuchnimurpal as the devil exits Johann's body. Each creature in the basement except Nimuchnimurpal and Johann must make a DC 15 Strength saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is knocked prone and can do only one of the following on their next turn: move, take an action, or take a bonus action.

Fury of the Tainted Seas

Making any mistake in puzzle 4 triggers this event, causing the tainted water within the runic prison circle to splash out. Four 5-foot-square puddles form on the ground in the basement in locations of your choice. Each puddle is difficult terrain, and a creature that enters a puddle for the first time on a turn or starts its turn there must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the end of its next turn.

Unstable Magic

Placing an incorrect stabilization rune in puzzle 2 triggers this event, causing the spell diagram to warp magic in the basement. At the start of each round during the fight, randomly choose a spell from the Unstable Magic table (or randomly select any cantrip or 1st-level spell from the wizard's spell list). That spell is cast as if originating from Nimuchnimurpal, though no components are needed, no actions are spent, and the devil can still cast other spells on their turn.

Spells with an area of effect are automatically placed to maximize the number of characters affected by them, while single-target spells affect one character at random. Spells have a spell attack bonus of +5 and a spell save DC of 15. If a spell would normally require concentration, it instead lasts until the start of the next round.

Unstable Magic

d6	Spell
1	*Acid splash*
2	*Burning hands*
3	*Fog cloud*
4	*Grease*
5	*Magic missile*
6	*Poison spray*

Puzzle-Specific Features

As a result of mistakes made while solving the puzzles, Nimuchnimurpal might gain the following features at the start of the battle.

Burrowing Words

The devil gains the following action option if an incorrect rune is placed during puzzle 1:

Burrowing Words. Nimuchnimurpal chooses one Humanoid they can see within 120 feet of them, which must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma saving throw or be charmed by Nimuchnimurpal for 24 hours. While charmed in this way, the target regards Nimuchnimurpal as a trusted friend to be heeded and protected, and they follow Nimuchnimurpal's orders to the best of their ability even if doing so puts them in harm's way.

Each time a charmed target takes damage, they can repeat the saving throw, ending the condition on themself on a success. The effect also ends if Nimuchnimurpal is destroyed, on a different plane of existence than the target, or uses a bonus action to end it.

Nimuchnimurpal can have only one target charmed in this way at a time.

Explosive Arcana

Nimuchnimurpal gains the following trait if the characters place any rune in the wrong order or in the wrong place while solving puzzle 2:

Explosive Arcana. Whenever Nimuchnimurpal succeeds on a saving throw against a spell or whenever a spell attack misses them, the fiend unravels the spell's magic and forcefully sends it back against the caster. The creature that cast the spell must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be pushed back 15 feet in a direction of Nimuchnimurpal's choice. If the creature collides with a wall or a heavy object, they immediately end their movement and take 1d4 bludgeoning damage. Additionally, a creature that fails the save can do only one of the following on their next turn: move, take an action, or take a bonus action.

Novice Errors

For each simpler rune used in puzzle 2, the devil gains one use of the following bonus action:

Novice Errors. Nimuchnimurpal exploits their foes' mistakes, gaining advantage on the next attack roll they make before the end of their next turn.

Echoes of Johann

With any incorrect or missing rune in puzzle 3, the devil gains the following bonus action, whose potency increases for each incorrect or missing rune:

Echoes of Johann. Nimuchnimurpal summons two **lemures** for each incorrect or missing rune in puzzle 3, which appear in unoccupied spaces within 60 feet of the devil. Each lemure looks exactly like Johann, except for one mutation from the Echo Mutations table. The lemures take their turns immediately after Nimuchnimurpal each round, pleading for their lives in a mockery of Johann's voice while attacking Nimuchnimurpal's foes.

Echo Mutations

d8	Echo Mutations
1	One eye is replaced by a miniature, fully formed human hand.
2	A second face resembling Laxman grows on the echo's stomach.
3	The echo's teeth are replaced by fingernails.
4	The echo has a skeletal lower jaw.
5	The echo's knees and elbows bend backward.
6	The echo constantly drools and weeps fetid water.
7	The echo shows off a long, barbed tongue.
8	Both of the echo's eyes are replaced by hissing cockroaches.

Aftermath

Saving Johann's life earns the characters the Skormans' undying gratitude. Eirik rewards the party with a *spell scroll* of *enhance ability*. For a relatively high-level party, he also offers a *cloak of displacement* he was planning to sell. Leia offers the characters a peculiar magic rock she collected a long time ago, which can be shattered as an action to produce the same effect as drinking a *potion of invulnerability*.

If Birgitte's spirit hasn't already been banished, defeating Nimuchnimurpal results in the spirit vanishing forever. Eirik accepts that laying his late wife's spirit to rest is for the best, and eventually moves back into the master bedroom.

After the harrowing ordeal, Laxman and Johann reveal the nature of their relationship to Eirik, who is perfectly supportive. Johann's father welcomes Laxman into the family and offers him a permanent place in the Skorman house. He even offers to have a family portrait of himself and the two young men painted, but is quickly discouraged by his embarrassed son.

Laxman and Johann decide to travel together to one of the great cities, with plans for Johann to become a healer or chirurgeon while Laxman continues his studies as an exorcist. Perhaps the pair will cross paths with the heroes again someday?

Modifying the Adventure

As the GM, you can adjust elements of this adventure to best suit your group.

Difficulty Level

If you'd like to add more combat or to lengthen this adventure, you can make one or more of the following changes:

- Birgitte uses the **ghost** or **wraith** stat block.
- The characters must defeat Birgitte before they can glean any information from her, with the broken spirit continuing to manifest long enough to speak to the characters.
- When the characters first enter the basement, Laxman's attempts to help Johann fail dramatically, allowing Nimuchnimurpal to summon other devils appropriate for an initial hard encounter.

If you want to make the puzzle elements easier or faster, consider the following changes:

- Leia and Eirik are more talkative, and more likely to give hints and information.
- Laxman recovers somewhat from his state of shock, and can provide the characters with hints to the puzzles as needed.
- If the players are stumped, a character can place a correct rune in a puzzle with a successful DC 15 Intelligence check. Be careful about allowing this more than once or twice!

Sensitive Content

If your table would rather not discuss issues of child-birth-related death, alter the fiction so that Birgitte died months after Johann was born, killed by a wasting disease caused by Nimuchnimurpal's magic. In this scenario, Eirik might feel his wife's loss even more keenly having watched her waste away over long months—a cruelty that would no doubt bring the devil pleasure.

If you'd rather not include themes of heteronormativity and family secrets at the table, you can use one of these ideas instead:

- Eirik is a strict parent who believes that Johann is still too young to have any sort of romantic relationship—perhaps because he has inklings of what Nimuchnimurpal's deal might mean for Johann.

- Rukhmani has forbidden Laxman from having any distracting relationship, and it's Laxman who wants to keep everything secret. Guilt over Rukhmani's death prevents Laxman from easily sharing the truth with the characters.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

BIAS AND OPPRESSION IN FANTASY WORLDS

People engage in fantasies and games for many different reasons. Sometimes, we simply need an escape from our current reality. We don't want to be reminded of real-world oppressive forces in our games. When playing in this way, the key thing to remember is that not including certain topics is also a political choice. It's good practice to try to be aware of what you are and aren't including in your game!

Other times, we want to feel powerful in the face of real-world oppression. For some players, confronting real-world inequalities can be meaningful and validating. (I've written about that for *Nerve*.) Still other players seek out games as a means to explore questions of identity and society. Sometimes, we *want* to seek out parallels to the real world in order to better understand our relationships to real-world issues.

"Puzzling Out The Devil" includes themes of queer people hiding the truth about their sexuality. Queerness is not the central theme of this adventure, but it is an important one. It motivates NPCs, giving shape to their desires, to their backstories, to their personalities. I deliberately included such themes to allow the stories created at the gaming table to have more nuance, for characters to be more well rounded. Additionally, I'm a gay artist. I want my artwork to reflect issues I find important, and to ask my audiences to confront the fact that these issues exist.

Discuss with your players that such themes exist in this adventure. Don't be afraid of "getting it wrong." As I wrote for Camdon Wright's thoughtful RPG *One Child's Heart*, everyone makes mistakes when playing characters from communities outside their own, and "what's important is to remember that identities are important, to be aware of your own biases, to recognize one's own mistakes and ignorances, and basically, to treat people as people."

It might be helpful to use various calibration tools (sometimes called "safety tools") when running this adventure. In addtion to the MCDM Tabletop Safety Toolkit, Kienna Shaw and Lauren Bryant-Monk have produced an excellent compilation of popular tools called the Tabletop Safety Toolkit. If your table is uncomfortable discussing or including such issues in your game, that's fine! I've included ways you can modify the adventure, and you're absolutely free to make any other changes you see fit.

EXTRA RESOURCES

If you'd like to read more about the thoughts in this author's note, I recommend these resources:

- *On the Importance of Queer Romances—Role-play as Exploration and Performance of Sexuality* by Tanja Sihvonen and Jaakko Stenros
- *Wyrding the Self* by Jonaya Kemper
- *Playing with Eros* by Maury Brown

—Sharang Biswas

Laxman's Notes

EJECTION

- Process of removing an external entity from a host
- Always try simple spells first. If they fail, use runic diagrams
- Basic but reliable: Trikala triangle formation

Type

ॐ	Shilbi	Types 1-3 Entities
ॐ	Strigma	Types 4-5 Entities
?	Omkasha	Types 6-9 Entities — V. dangerous

Runes ALWAYS go on VERTICES of the shapes

Otherwise, "Bidirectional Energetic Clash"

Hold on Victim

ॐ	Riktin	Entirely psychic hold on the victim
ॐ	Aloman	Psychic hold with physical protuberances
ॐ	Prabhasana	Anatomical transformation of victim

Modify with Pushpuran verses for rare transformational

- ॐ Chavritam — "unravel" → Lower types, physical
- ॐ Silphil — "unspool" → Mid Types, physical
- ॐ Bhansari — "unglue" → Mid types, psychic
- ॐ Ishdam — "unadulterate" → Higher types, psychic
- ॐ Limtihaan — "unbind" → Higher types, physical
- ॐ Sovam — "undo" → Higher types, transformational

JS

On the Stabilization of Common Patterns of Magical Flow as Recorded by the Cabal of the Fragrant Truth

...six-fold the spell must be stabilized, and the glyphs arrayed evenly about the circumference of a ring of power that may enclose other workings.

Two master glyphs, which shall not be discussed in this treatise, will take prime positions about the ring, aligned to the north and to the south.

For the other glyphs, proceed clockwise from the upper master glyph, with two glyphs between each master glyph and preserving the order of external conditions that I have thusly laid out:

I. If the current heavenly configuration has the stars in liminal conjunction with the sun, make use of the sign of thrimsan. If the stars are not arrayed in such a way, instead use the sign of thamrani.

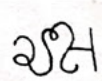
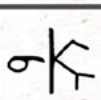
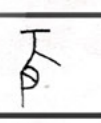
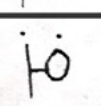
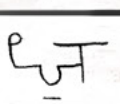
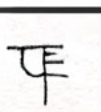
II. The runeworker must be familiar indeed with the current state of the Upper Planes during the time of casting. Whether the planes are in the alignment of Roshni or in the alignment of Andher is vital to know. If the former, they must apply the glyph of kauravi, and if the latter, the glyph of anra.

III. The temperament of the fauna of the region often produces vibrations that interact with such magic, for the mark of shamrani most befits regions where sluggish reptiles dominate, while the mark of thilmtha is appropriate where energetic birds are more common.

IV. Finally, one must make a thorough study of the body shape and complexion configuration of the afflicted person. The marks of bhanu and polma are necessary here. Polma cannot be used unless the afflicted's constitution can reasonably be described as humaceous. For stigmoid or eltrograde constitutions, a wise practitioner should instead employ vavupatna.

If these external conditions cannot be ascertained, a simpler array of glyphs may be used to achieve stabilization, though the efficacy of stabilization will be significantly reduced.

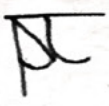
Common Glyphs for Stabilization of Magical Energies, listed in standard Chandrakala order

	Thamrani
	Shamrani
	Polma
	Thilmtha
	Thrimsan
	Anra
	Vavupatna
	Kauravi

Simpler glyphs, when external conditions cannot be ascertained, in order of external factors described previously



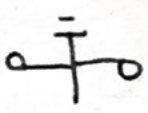
Atyavasam



Bhilma



Riptu



Svangetherumna

There is very little scholarship on how the psychological makeup of the possessed individual affects how they must be treated. My experience has shown that to prevent lasting mental trauma in the victim, anchoring runes keyed to the victim's hopes, dreams, and desires should be placed between the ejection runes, along the sides of the triangle traced by the runes. I have compiled here the fruits of my research, runes of my own invention that correspond to various human emotional needs. One must select the few that strongly match the victim's wants and goals.

My research has not yet discovered a significance to the order in which the runes are placed within the triangle. Currently, I believe that the order is unimportant.

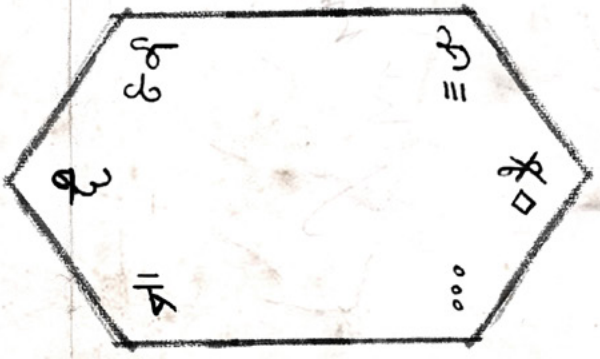
	"The warmth of companionship"
	"To reconnect with one's history or family"
	"The sting of pain, inflicted without judgment"
	"To ease the suffering of others"
	"The glamor and power of wealth"
	"Solitude far from civilization"

Laxman's Annotated Homework

Laxman,

While I'm gone, I'd like you to practice elemental balance of your rune diagrams. You've been sloppy lately. You must think and work like a scholar!

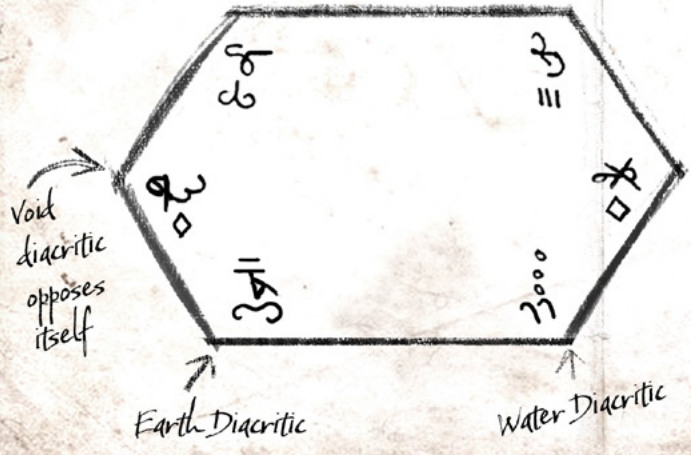
Balance the following runic diagram. (Don't try casting them. They're only potency runes, but still.)



1) Potency runes bolster the power of exorcism magic
2) They must be elementally charged with diacritics below them
3) Opposite vertices must have opposing elemental charges in order to be balanced

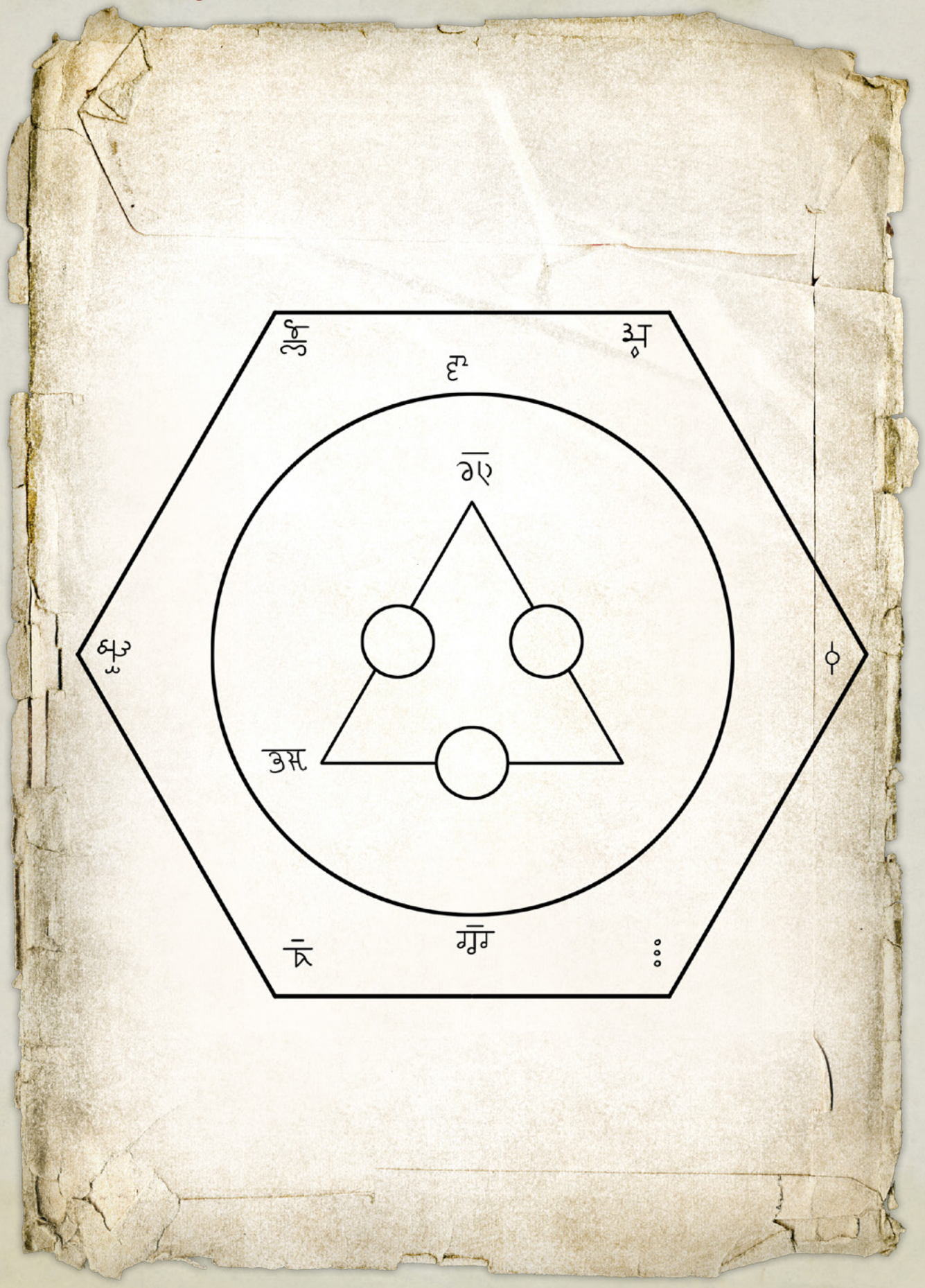
The finished diagram would look like this

Element	Diacritic
E	∽
F	⌒
A	≡
W	∩
V	◇



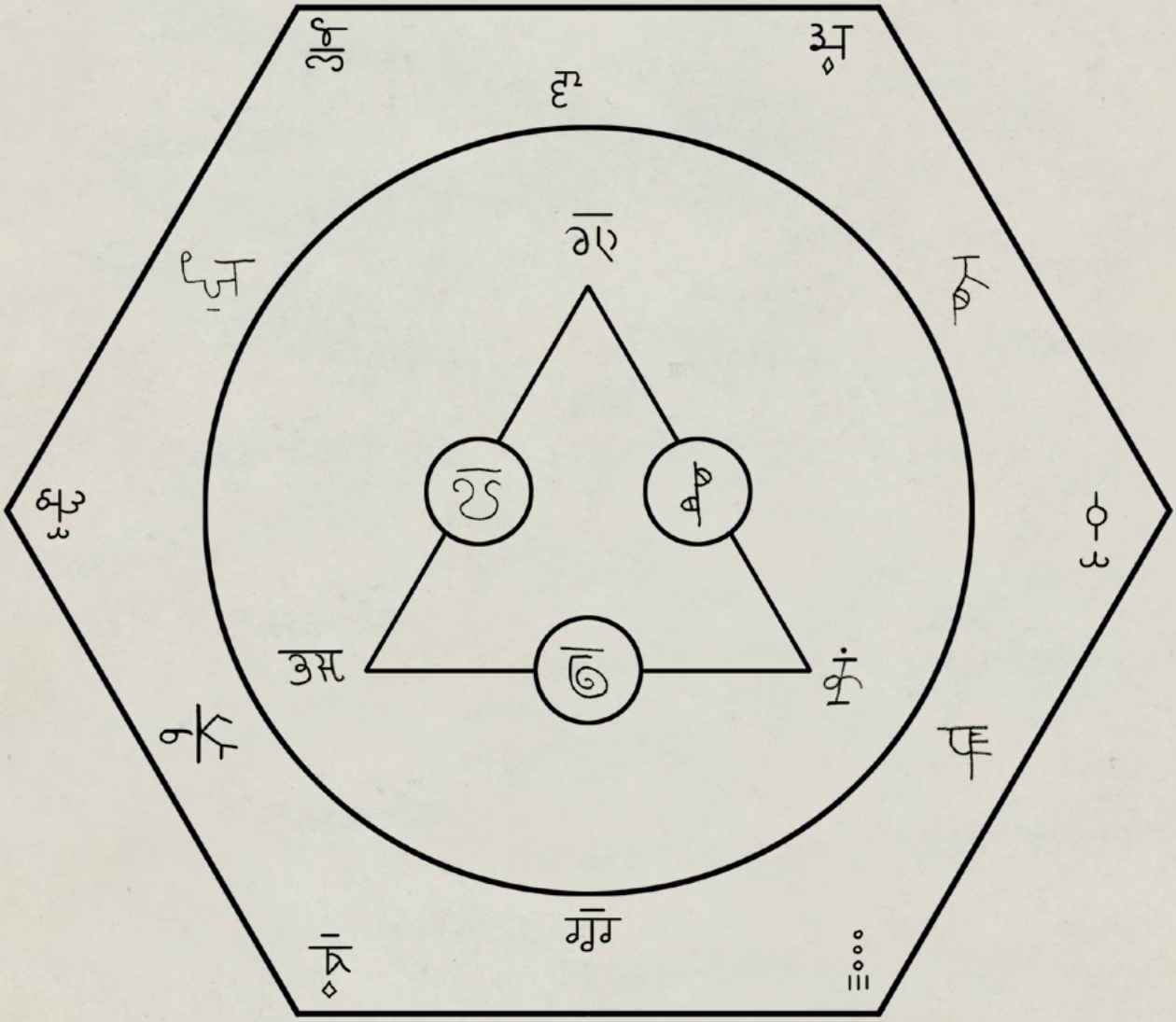
Note 1: there is no associated fiend mentioned hence opposing vertices must all balance, BUT for elementally attuned entities, the diagram must have a dominant charge that opposes the entity's attunement.

Incomplete Runic Spell Diagram



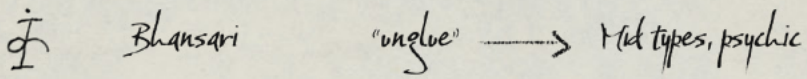
Complete Runic Spell Diagram

Note: This Runic Spell Diagram is not the same as the prison circle! The devil is trapped within the prison circle, whose runes are not part of the puzzle. This spell diagram was added later, and attached to the prison circle to allow for the exorcism to take place.



Puzzle Solutions

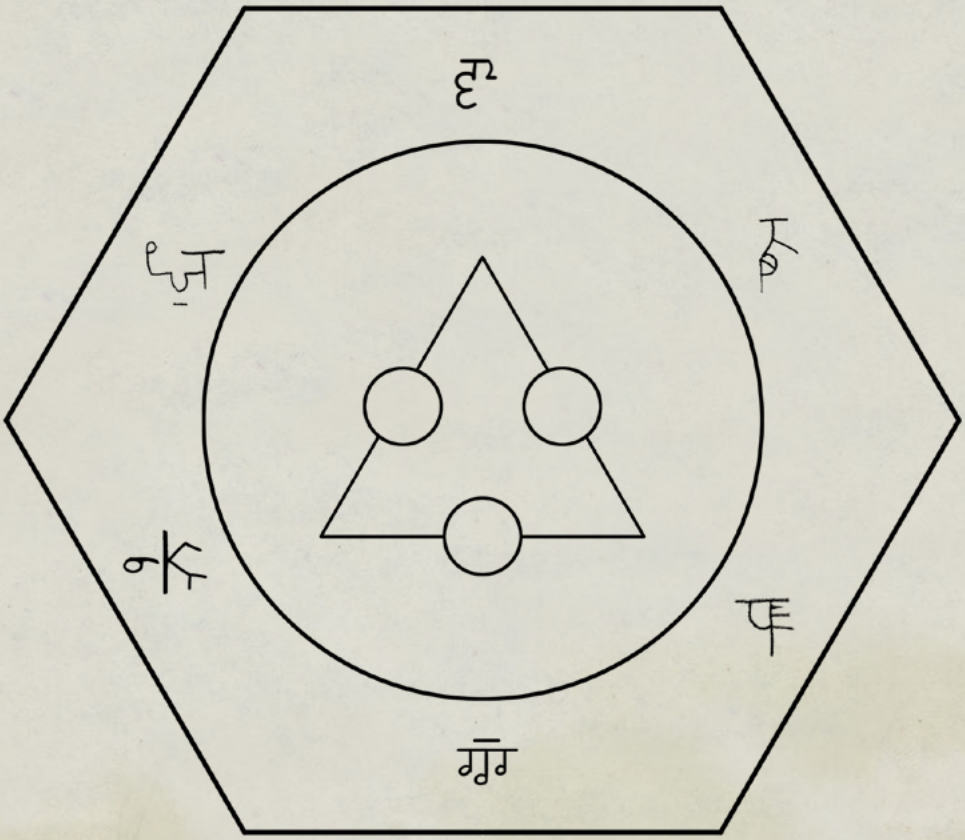
Puzzle Part 1: the "Bhansari" rune drawn on the bottom-right corner of the triangle.



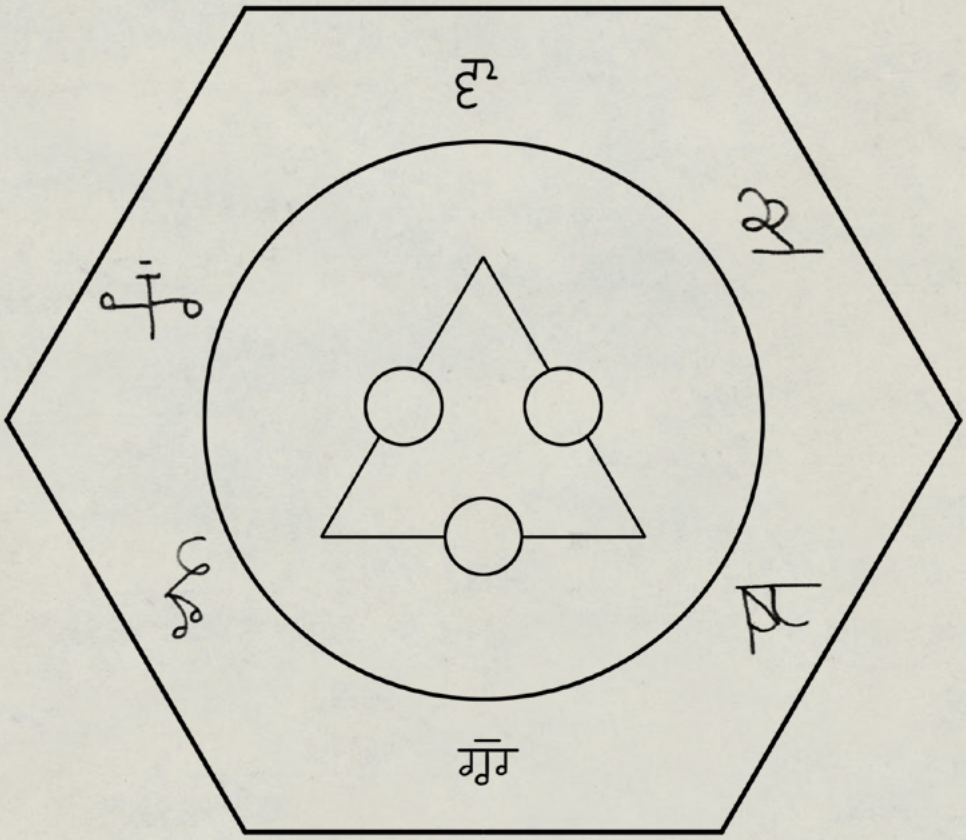
A rune in the wrong location triggers the "Bidirectional Energetic Clash" event.
Use of an incorrect rune grants Nimuchnimurpal the Burrowing Words action.

Puzzle Part 2: The following runes must be placed in clockwise order, not counting the original glyphs:

- thrimsan
- kauravi
- thilmtha
- vavupatna



As an alternative solution, the following runes can be swapped in:

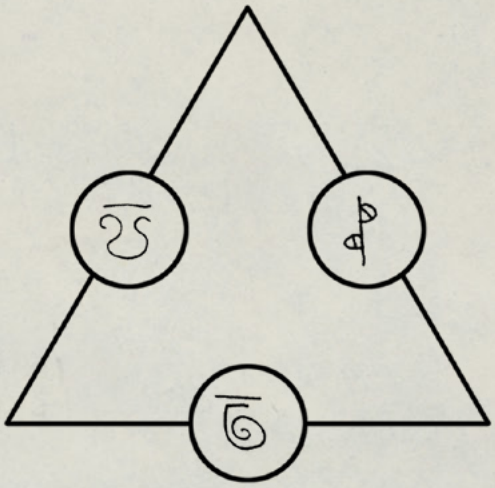


Placing an incorrect rune triggers the "Unstable Magic" event.

Any rune drawn in the wrong order or place grants Nimuchnimurpal the Explosive Arcana trait.

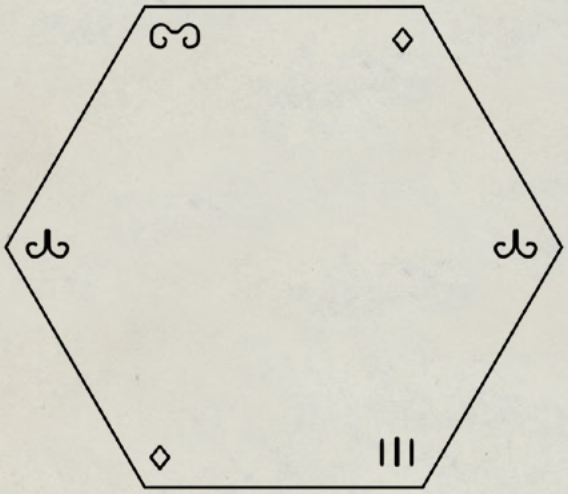
If alternative runes are used, Nimuchnimurpal gains one use of the Novice Errors bonus action for each alternative rune.

Puzzle Part 3: The three correct runes must be placed in any order.

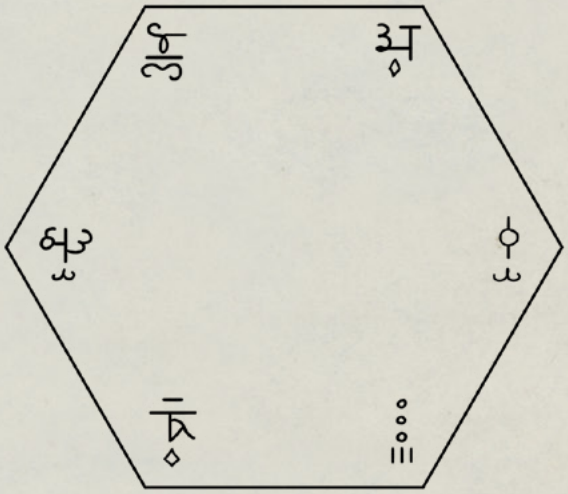


Failing to place the three correct runes grants Nimuchnimurpal the Echoes of Johann bonus action, increasing the potency of that action for each incorrect or missing rune.

Puzzle Part 4: The correct diacritics must be added below runes that have none.



Correct Diacritics



Full Solution

Any incorrect or missing diacritic triggers the "Fury of the Tainted Seas" event.

RESOURCES

PUZZLING OUT THE DEVIL

https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202210/PuzzlingOutTheDevilGmCheatSheets.pdf
https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202210/PuzzlingOutTheDevilHandouts.pdf
https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202210/PuzzlingOutTheDevilHandoutsPlainText.pdf

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https://mcdm.gg/SafetyToolkit

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Celeste Conowitch is a game designer based out of Seattle. She is the producer, GM, and editor of the 5th Edition actual play podcast Venture Maidens. When not plotting behind the screen, she works as a senior game designer at Kobold Press and has freelanced with companies like Wizards of the Coast, 2CGaming, and MCDM Productions. To keep up with Celeste, follow her on Twitter @cconowitch.



Banana Chan is a Cantonese Canadian ENnie Award-winning game designer, writer and publisher living in the US. They are the owner of a small board game and RPG publishing company called Game and a Curry. Her latest work has been on *Deimos Academy*, *Suburban Consumption of the Monstrous*, *Exquisite Crime*, *Questlings: RPG*, *Jiangshi: Blood in the Banquet Hall* (featured in Forbes, Huffington Post, and Critter Hug), *Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft* and *Betrayal at House on the Hill: 3rd Edition*. They hate Mondays and love lasagna.



Sharang Biswas has won IndieCade and IGDN awards for roleplaying games, and has showcased interactive works at institutions such as The Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, Pioneer Works in Brooklyn, and The Museum of the Moving Image in Queens. He has written for games such as *Avatar: Legends*, *Spire: The City Must Fall*, *Jiangshi: Blood on the Banquet Hall*, *Into the Motherlands*, and *Dungeons & Dragons Live*. Find him on Twitter at @SharangBiswas.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

One of my favorite things to do as a GM is give my players cool stuff—and sometimes even make it myself. Can't decide which of the two aasimar ancestry options fits your character better? Hey, that's the perfect opportunity for me to whip up a custom third option. Your warlock hasn't gotten any cool magic items? Let me pick something out, reflavor it to fit your character, and drop it in an upcoming session.

Rolling for random treasure is great, and has the advantage of not requiring any prep. Adding unexpected elements is a core part of RPG storytelling; maybe you never *planned* on adding a *wand of wonder* to your campaign, but a few sessions later, the whole table is cheering on the rhinoceros rampaging through the ranks of their very confused foes. On the other hand, selecting specific magic items or making custom character options are great ways to seed narrative elements and backstory secrets, or to give the party useful tools before they even know they'll need them. (One of my players will eventually discover the clue hiding in her custom ancestry, I'm sure of it.)

Whether or not you like designing things yourself, it's always fun to give a player something special and suited to their character. It reflects the fact that your game isn't interchangeable with any other campaign: it's unique to your group, and no one else could replicate the stories you tell together, the inside jokes you create, or the bonds your characters (and you) forge with each other. Perhaps this is my GM love language—an act of service, putting time and thought into choosing or creating things for each character.

This month's *ARCADIA* articles are full of things to give your players: three streamlined but epic classes designed for one-on-one games, customizable ancestry options, and tricksy magic items.

The classes in Will Doyle's "Heroic Champions" support stories with lone heroes so the GM can easily run any adventure for a single player. Group roleplaying and found family are usually some of my favorite aspects of TTRPG campaigns, but now I also really want to play a heroic warrior in a one-on-one game—it's a fantastic archetype and story to explore, but one that's not possible in a multiplayer campaign. Plus, scheduling would be *so* much easier.

V.J. Harris, the coauthor of several popular supplements for alternate ancestry rules in fifth edition, brought their expertise to *ARCADIA* and created "Parentage and Upbringing." These character options for psionic gemstone dragonborn and tieflings with connections to specific devils and demons provide great story seeds for a GM. Personally, I love tieflings for the aesthetic, but I find the racial traits in the core rules pretty boring. If you have a player who's interested in making a psionic or tiefling character, definitely check this one out.

Finally, veteran adventurer Scott Fitzgerald Gray emerges from his editor's lair (beware of lexicographical traps and syntactical ambushes) with "Tools of the Trapmaster." This treasure chest of magic items created by the world's most successful thief is perfect for intrigue and heist campaigns, dungeon crawls, and characters liable to get themselves in hilarious trouble by stumbling into traps or trying to use any item they come across. I want to give my players a pair of *shadow ropes* just to see what clever uses they dream up.

We're coming up on two full years of *ARCADIA*! It feels like forever and no time at all (and no, that's not just my chronurgy wizard talking). Perhaps at next month's solstice, we'll take the chance to celebrate what's filled the pages of *ARCADIA* so far—and drop a few hints for what's yet to come.

De somnio ad itinere,
Hannah Rose
Managing Editor

HEROIC CHAMPIONS

Powerful new classes for parties of one

by Will Doyle

Lone heroes are a staple of fantasy storytelling: daring swashbucklers questing for gold and glory, with only their swords, lances, or wands as backup. Tales of wandering heroes stir our imaginations—from Conan to Galahad and the Witcher—and "duet games" between one player and a GM offer rich opportunities for roleplay and character development. Unfortunately, such concepts can be difficult to realize in fifth edition, as the game is optimized around group dynamics. Encounters are typically designed for complimentary class roles, making published adventures tricky to run as-is for duet play. The GM is often forced to introduce sidekick characters or scale down encounters to such an extent that their wonder is lost.

"Heroic Champions" provides new character options for duet play in fifth edition. Using these rules, a player can create a larger-than-life hero for one-on-one games with their GM. Each of the heroic classes presented herein—the heroic warrior, the heroic spellcaster, and the heroic trickster—is designed to be as capable as a party of four adventurers, allowing the GM to run most published adventures without adjusting difficulty or adding sidekicks.

Using Heroic Classes

When making a character, simply choose a heroic class in place of a regular class. Determine your ability scores and choose your race and background as you normally would. Heroic classes are defined by their powerful class features, three of which are common to each class: Heroic Exploits, Heroic Fortune, and Heroic Recovery. In addition to those features, heroic classes gain extra hit points at each level, wider proficiency in skills and saving throws, and increased options for magic item attunement. Once you've chosen a heroic class, you can't multiclass your character into another heroic class or a regular class.

Heroic classes aren't designed to be played alongside characters of traditional classes in a party, as they're overwhelmingly powerful by comparison. They're made for duet play only. Published adventures designed for four or five players can be run for a heroic champion with very little modification, but GMs should take care when awarding magic items. For example, a *vorpal sword* in the hands of a heroic warrior can feel like the equivalent of multiple characters in a standard party each carrying such a weapon, with potentially devastating results.

Common Class Features

In addition to their individual features, each heroic class shares the following features.

Heroic Exploits

1st-Level Heroic Champion Feature

You learn to perform three special stunts that allow you to take special actions or gain unique advantages, sometimes during your turn and sometimes on another creature's turn. These heroic exploits are chosen from the list available to your heroic class, and require no action to perform. You can use the same heroic exploit more than once during a round, and you can use more than one exploit per turn, but you can't use the same exploit more than once on the same turn (yours or another creature's). You can't use heroic exploits while

incapacitated, surprised, or otherwise unable to take actions. You regain all uses of your heroic exploits at the start of your turn.

You learn one additional heroic exploit of your choice at 7th level and 14th level. Additionally, each time you gain a level, you can choose one of the heroic exploits you know and replace it with another heroic exploit from the list available to your heroic class.

Heroic Recovery

1st-Level Heroic Champion Feature

You are able to draw on reserves of stamina, determination, and supernatural power to heal yourself and shrug off debilitating conditions. At any point during your turn (no action required), you can regain hit points equal to your Constitution score (not your modifier), plus five times your heroic class level. In addition, you end any of the following conditions affecting you: blinded, deafened, incapacitated, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, or stunned. Once you use this feature, you must finish a short or long rest before you can use it again.

You can use Heroic Recovery two times between rests when you reach 6th level, three times when you reach 13th level, and four times when you reach 18th level. Regardless of how many uses you have, you can use Heroic Recovery only once per turn.

Heroic Fortune

2nd-Level Heroic Champion Feature

You are blessed with an uncanny ability to escape harm. When you fail a saving throw or are hit by an attack, you can reroll the saving throw or force the attack that hit you to be rolled again, then choose either roll, potentially changing the outcome of the saving throw or attack. Additionally, if you reroll a saving throw, the roll you choose gains a bonus equal to your level. If you reroll an attack made against you, the roll you choose takes a penalty equal to your level.

You can use this feature three times, but can use it only once on a specific saving throw or attack roll. When you finish a short or long rest, you regain all expended uses.

You can use Heroic Fortune four times between rests when you reach 9th level, and five times when you reach 15th level.

Ability Score Improvement

4th-Level Heroic Champion Feature

When you reach 4th level, and again at 8th, 12th, 16th, and 19th level, you can increase one ability score of your choice by 2, or you can increase two ability scores of your choice by 1. As normal, you can't increase an ability score above 20 using this feature.

Hit Points and Healing

Carefully utilizing your Heroic Exploits, Heroic Fortune, and Heroic Recovery features during combat can help your character evade attacks and minimize damage. But as an additional counter to being the sole focus of enemy attacks, heroic characters are gifted with greater reserves of hit points and additional Hit Dice to heal themselves when resting.

At 1st level, your character has two Hit Dice, with the die type determined by your class. You start with hit points equal to the sum of the highest roll of both dice plus your Constitution score (not your modifier). Each time you advance to a new level, you gain two additional Hit Dice and your hit point maximum increases by an amount equal to the highest roll of both dice plus your Constitution score. For example, a heroic warrior (two d12 hit dice) has a Constitution score of 16, giving them a hit point maximum of 40 at 1st level, which rises to 80 at 2nd level. During a short rest, you can spend one or more Hit Dice to regain hit points, up to your character's maximum number of Hit Dice.

Starting Gold

Each heroic class has a list of suggested equipment that you can select alongside the equipment granted by your background. If you forgo this starting equipment, as well as the items offered by your background, you start with 5d4 × 10 gp to buy your equipment.

Heroic Warrior

You're the sort of warrior who inspires songs: a master fighter capable of incredible feats of strength and possessed of a knack for surviving overwhelming odds. In battle, you race between foes, striking down enemies like wheat before the scythe. Your talents could be hard earned on the battlefield or blessed through magical or divine intervention. Regardless of their origin, though, those talents provide all you need to survive a life of perilous adventure.

Quick Build

You can make a heroic warrior quickly by following these suggestions. First, make Strength your highest ability score, followed by Dexterity or Constitution. Second, choose the soldier background. Third, choose Overwhelming Attack, Sudden Strike, and Valiant Might as your starting heroic warrior exploits.

Class Features

As a heroic warrior, you gain the following class features:

Hit Points

Hit Dice: 2d12 per heroic warrior level
Hit Points at 1st Level: 24 + your Constitution score
Hit Points at Higher Levels: 24 + your Constitution score per heroic warrior level after 1st

Proficiencies

Armor: All armor, shields
Weapons: Simple weapons, martial weapons
Tools: None
Saving Throws: Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Wisdom
Skills: Choose four skills from Acrobatics, Animal Handling, Athletics, Insight, Intimidation, Nature, Perception, and Survival

Heroic Warrior

Level	Proficiency Bonus	Features
1	+2	Heroic Exploits, Heroic Fighting, Heroic Recovery, Extra Attack
2	+2	Heroic Fortune (three uses)
3	+2	Mythic Expertise
4	+2	Ability Score Improvement, Adventurer's Knack
5	+3	Extra Attack (4), Mighty Stride
6	+3	Heroic Recovery (two uses)
7	+3	Heroic Exploits (4)
8	+3	Ability Score Improvement, Faithful Steed
9	+4	Heroic Fortune (four uses)
10	+4	Living Legend
11	+4	Extra Attack (5)
12	+4	Ability Score Improvement, Mythic Resistance
13	+5	Heroic Recovery (three uses)
14	+5	Heroic Exploits (5)
15	+5	Heroic Fortune (five uses), Mythic Resistance improvement (2)
16	+5	Ability Score Improvement, Legendary Tribute
17	+6	Extra Attack (6)
18	+6	Heroic Recovery (four uses), Mythic Resistance improvement (3)
19	+6	Ability Score Improvement
20	+6	Indomitable Champion

Magic Item Attunement

You can attune to any number of magic items. You can also attune to magic items that require attunement by a barbarian, fighter, monk, paladin, or ranger.

Equipment

You start with the following equipment, in addition to the equipment granted by your background:

- Your choice of chain mail; or leather armor, a longbow, and 20 arrows
- Your choice of a martial weapon and a shield; or two martial weapons
- Your choice of a light crossbow and 20 bolts; or four javelins
- Your choice of a dungeoneer's pack or an explorer's pack

Heroic Fighting

1st-Level Heroic Warrior Feature

Your fighting skills are exemplary. In combat, you can make opportunity attacks without using your reaction, and a creature provokes an opportunity attack from you when they move 5 feet or more while within your reach.

Extra Attack

1st-Level Heroic Warrior Feature

You can attack three times instead of once whenever you take the Attack action. The number of attacks you make using the Attack action increases to four when you reach 5th level, five when you reach 11th level, and six when you reach 17th level.

Mythic Expertise

3rd-Level Heroic Warrior Feature

Your prowess with your chosen weapons is legendary. Choose three weapons that you are proficient with, such as the morningstar, longbow, or greataxe. When you hit a creature with an attack using those weapons, you gain a bonus to the damage roll equal to your proficiency bonus. Each time you gain a level in this class, you can choose to replace one of these weapons with another weapon with which you are proficient.

Adventurer's Knack

4th-Level Heroic Warrior Feature

Innate instincts grant you an uncanny ability to evade traps and overcome challenges. You have advantage on saving throws made to avoid or resist traps. If you succeed on a saving throw to resist a trap, you avoid all its adverse effects, including damage.

Additionally, you can cast the *augury* spell as a bonus action, requiring no material components. You can cast that spell with this feature once, regaining the ability to do so when you finish a long rest.



Mighty Stride

5th-Level Heroic Warrior Feature

Your speed increases by 10 feet, and you have advantage on Strength (Athletics) checks made to escape a grapple.

Additionally, you can take the Dash or Disengage action as a bonus action. Whenever you take the Dash or Disengage action, you can move through the space of hostile creatures regardless of their size.

Faithful Steed

8th-Level Heroic Warrior Feature

You know the *find steed* spell, and can cast it to summon a steed that takes the form of a **pegasus** or a **griffon**. In addition to the normal features of the steed summoned by that spell, your faithful steed has the following features:

- While you are mounted on your steed, they gain the benefit of your Mighty Stride feature.
- Your steed, along with anything they are wearing or carrying, can teleport up to 30 feet to an unoccupied space they can see as a bonus action. You teleport with your steed if you are mounted on them. Your steed can teleport this way once, and regains the ability to do so when you finish a long rest.

Once you cast the spell to summon a steed this way, you can't cast it again until you finish a long rest.

Living Legend

10th-Level Heroic Warrior Feature

News of your deeds precedes you wherever you travel, and your presence inspires awe in all you meet. As an action, you can activate one of the following powers:

- For 1 minute, you have advantage on Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) checks made against one creature you can see.
- Each creature within 30 feet of you that can see you must make a Wisdom saving throw (DC equals 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Charisma modifier). On a failed save, a creature is frightened of you for 1 minute. If the creature ends their turn in a location where they don't have line of sight to you, they can repeat the Wisdom saving throw. On a successful save, the creature is no longer frightened of you.

You can use each power once, regaining its use when you finish a long rest.

Mythic Resistance

12th-Level Heroic Warrior Feature

You gain resistance to one of the following damage types of your choice: acid, cold, fire, force, lightning, necrotic, poison, psychic, radiant, or thunder. You gain resistance to a second damage type from the list when you reach 15th level, and a third when you reach 18th level. Each time you gain a level in this class, you can choose to replace one of your chosen damage types with another from the list.

Legendary Tribute

16th-Level Heroic Warrior Feature

You receive legendary gifts for your achievements in battle. Whenever you defeat an enemy with a challenge rating equal to or greater than your level (or with a level equal to or greater than your own, for creatures that don't have a challenge rating), you can call for tribute from your local lord, mythical patron, or divine power. The next time you finish a short or long rest, you gain one of the following magic items of your choice: a suit of *+2 armor*, a *+3 shield*, a *+3 weapon*, an *amulet of health*, *boots of speed*, a *cloak of displacement*, a *figurine of wondrous power*, a *flame tongue*, a *helm of teleportation*, a *ring of evasion*, a *ring of free action*, a *rod of rulership*, a *sun blade*, or a *vicious weapon*. For an item that comes in a variety of forms, you choose the form.

You can have only one such item at a time. The item remains in your possession until you finish a long rest, or until it is replaced by receiving another tribute, at which point it disintegrates.

Indomitable Champion

20th-Level Heroic Warrior Feature

Your enemies are cowed by your glory. Whenever an enemy attacks you with a melee weapon or an unarmed strike, they have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Heroic Exploits

The following exploits can be taken by the heroic warrior as part of the Heroic Exploits feature, and are presented in alphabetical order.

Heroic Riposte

When a creature misses you with a melee weapon attack, you can use this exploit to make a melee weapon attack with advantage against the creature. You can draw a weapon as part of this attack.

Overwhelming Attack

Before you make a weapon attack on your turn, you can use this exploit to attack with overwhelming force. If the attack hits, it becomes a critical hit.

Precision Strike

When you make a weapon attack on your turn, you can use this exploit to gain advantage on the attack roll.

Rapid Shot
When you hit a creature with a ranged weapon attack, you can use this exploit to make an additional ranged weapon attack against another creature that you haven't already attacked this turn. If your weapon has the loading property, you ignore it for the rest of this turn.

Sudden Strike
When a creature you can see ends their turn, you can use this exploit to make a weapon attack against them. You can draw a weapon as part of this attack.

Thundering Strike
When you hit a creature with a melee weapon attack on your turn, you can use this exploit to shake the ground around the target. Each Large or smaller creature except you within 5 feet of the target creature must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw (DC equals your attack roll or 10, whichever is higher) or fall prone and take 1d6 thunder damage.

Valiant Might
When you take damage from another creature's attack, you can use this exploit to gain temporary hit points equal to half the damage taken.

Warrior's Challenge
On your turn, you can use this exploit to make a Charisma (Intimidation) check. Each creature within 30 feet of you that can see or hear you must make a Wisdom saving throw (DC equals your check or 10, whichever is higher). On a failed save, a creature moves their speed toward you using the safest route possible. If they can't reach you without entering hazardous terrain, they don't move.

Warrior's Charge
You can use this exploit to increase your speed by 10 feet until the end of your turn. If you move at least 10 feet in a straight line during your turn, you gain advantage on the next melee weapon attack you make before the end of your turn.

Whirlwind Attack
When you hit an enemy with a melee weapon attack on your turn, you can use this exploit to target every other enemy within your weapon's reach. You use your original attack and damage rolls for each subsequent attack.

Heroic Spellcaster

Every few generations, a prodigy arises among magic-users: a hero with an unearthly talent for weaving spells. You are one of those heroes, your powers not bound by tome, blood, or ceremony. Rather, you draw magic from the depths of your own soul. In some worlds, people call casters like you "Chosen"—mortals blessed with the spirits of gods. Capable of channeling both arcane and divine magic, you are destined to etch your name in legend.



QUICK BUILD

You can make a heroic spellcaster quickly by following these suggestions. First, make Wisdom your highest ability score, followed by Constitution. Second, choose the sage background. Third, choose Eldritch Might, Evasive Magic, and Sudden Spell as your starting heroic spellcaster exploits.

Heroic Spellcaster

					—Spell Slots per Spell Level—								
Level	Proficiency Bonus	Features	Cantrips Known	Spells Known	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th
1	+2	Heroic Exploits, Heroic Recovery, Heroic Spellcasting	5	6	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2	+2	Heroic Fortune (three uses)	5	7	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
3	+2	Radiant Orbs	5	8	6	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4	+2	Ability Score Improvement, Arcane Flight	6	9	6	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5	+3	Repeated Casting	6	10	6	5	4	—	—	—	—	—	—
6	+3	Heroic Recovery (two uses)	6	11	6	5	5	—	—	—	—	—	—
7	+3	Heroic Exploits (4)	6	12	6	5	5	2	—	—	—	—	—
8	+3	Ability Score Improvement, Divine Might	6	13	6	5	5	3	—	—	—	—	—
9	+4	Heroic Fortune (four uses)	6	14	6	5	5	4	2	—	—	—	—
10	+4	Legendary Spell	6	15	6	5	5	4	3	—	—	—	—
11	+4	Repeated Casting (two targets)	7	16	6	5	5	4	3	2	—	—	—
12	+4	Ability Score Improvement, Cloud Castle	7	17	6	5	5	4	3	2	—	—	—
13	+5	Heroic Recovery (three uses)	7	18	6	5	5	4	3	2	2	—	—
14	+5	Heroic Exploits (5)	7	19	6	5	5	4	3	2	2	—	—
15	+5	Heroic Fortune (five uses)	7	20	6	5	5	4	3	2	2	2	—
16	+5	Ability Score Improvement, Archmage's Summons	7	20	6	5	5	4	3	2	2	2	—
17	+6	Repeated Casting (three targets)	7	20	6	5	5	4	3	3	2	2	2
18	+6	Heroic Recovery (four uses)	7	20	6	5	5	4	3	3	2	2	2
19	+6	Ability Score Improvement	7	20	6	5	5	4	3	3	3	2	2
20	+6	Legendary Item	7	20	6	5	5	4	3	3	3	2	2

Class Features

As a heroic spellcaster, you gain the following class features.

Hit Points

Hit Dice: 2d8 per heroic spellcaster level
Hit Points at 1st Level: 16 + your Constitution score
Hit Points at Higher Levels: 16 + your Constitution score per heroic spellcaster level after 1st

Proficiencies

Armor: Light armor
Weapons: Simple weapons
Tools: None
Saving Throws: Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom
Skills: Choose four skills from Arcana, History, Insight, Investigation, Medicine, Nature, Perception, and Religion

Magic Item Attunement

You can attune to any number of magic items. You can also attune to magic items that require attunement by a bard, cleric, druid, sorcerer, warlock, or wizard.

Equipment

You start with the following equipment, in addition to the equipment granted by your background:

- Your choice of a light crossbow and 20 bolts; or any simple weapon
- Your choice of a holy symbol or an arcane focus
- Your choice of a scholar's pack or an explorer's pack
- Leather armor, any simple weapon, and two daggers

Heroic Spellcasting

1st-Level Heroic Spellcaster Feature

You are a natural master of magic, capable of drawing on the innate power of your soul to weave powerful spells. Whenever you gain a new spell, you can choose from either the wizard or the cleric spell list.

Cantrips

You know five cantrips, chosen from either the cleric or wizard spell list. You learn additional cantrips of your choice at higher levels, as shown in the Cantrips Known column of the Heroic Spellcaster table.

Spell Slots

The Heroic Spellcaster table shows how many spell slots you have to cast your spells of 1st level and higher. To cast one of your spells, you must expend a slot of the spell's level or higher. You regain all expended spell slots when you finish a long rest.

For example, if you know the 1st-level spell *cure wounds* and have a 1st-level and a 2nd-level spell slot available, you can cast *cure wounds* using either slot.

Spells Known of 1st Level and Higher

You know six 1st-level spells of your choice from the cleric or wizard spell list. The Spells Known column of the Heroic Spellcaster table shows when you learn more cleric or wizard spells of your choice. Each of these spells must be of a level for which you have spell slots. For example, when you reach 3rd level in this class and gain 2nd-level spell slots, you can learn one new spell of 1st or 2nd level.

Spellcasting Ability

Wisdom is your spellcasting ability for your spells, and you use Wisdom whenever a spell refers to your spellcasting ability. You use your Wisdom modifier when setting the saving throw DC for a spell you cast and when making an attack roll with one.

Spell save DC = 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Wisdom modifier
Spell attack modifier = your proficiency bonus + your Wisdom modifier

Spell Replacement

When you finish a short or long rest, you can choose one of the spells you know and replace it with another spell from the cleric or wizard spell list. The new spell must be of a level for which you have spell slots.

Spellcasting Focus

You can use an arcane focus or a holy symbol as a spellcasting focus for your spells. Either focus works for all your spells.

Radiant Orbs

3rd-Level Heroic Spellcaster Feature

Your arcane power manifests around you as whirling orbs of light. As an action, you can conjure one radiant orb for every unused spell slot you currently have. The orbs circle around your body, shedding dim light in a 5-foot radius around you. You can dismiss the orbs at will (no action required).

While one or more orbs are present, you can use a bonus action to expend a spell slot and activate one of the following effects:

- Increase the spell save DC of the next spell you cast by an amount equal to the level of the spell slot expended.

- Gain a bonus to the next ability check or saving throw you make equal to the level of the spell slot expended.
- Reduce the next instance of damage you take by 1d8 per level of the spell slot expended (to a minimum 0 damage).

Each effect lasts until it is triggered or replaced by another effect. All effects end when you finish a short or long rest, or if you fall unconscious.

Arcane Flight

4th-Level Heroic Spellcaster Feature

You have the power of arcane flight, gaining a magical flying speed of 30 feet and the ability to hover. If you are incapacitated while flying, you fall.

Repeated Casting

5th-Level Heroic Spellcaster Feature

You can hurl the same spell at multiple foes with a single casting. When you cast a spell on your turn that doesn't have an area of effect and doesn't have a range of self, you can target an additional creature in range with the same spell. For example, a *hold person* spell cast using a 2nd-level spell slot can target two creatures as long as each is within 60 feet of you.

The number of additional targets increases to two when you reach 11th level, and three when you reach 17th level.

Divine Might

8th-Level Heroic Spellcaster Feature

You are surrounded by a magical aura that radiates divine power. You have advantage on Charisma (Intimidation) checks, and when you speak, you can cause your booming raised voice to be heard clearly at a distance of up to 1 mile.

Additionally, you know the *command* spell, which doesn't count against your number of spells known. You can cast *command* without expending a spell slot, targeting each creature of your choice within 30 feet of you with the same command, and causing each target potentially affected by the spell to automatically fail their saving throw. You can cast the spell this way once, regaining the ability to do so when you finish a long rest.

Legendary Spell

10th-Level Heroic Spellcaster Feature

You invent your own legendary spell. Choose one spell of up to 3rd level and one 1st-level spell, both of which are from the cleric or wizard spell lists and have a casting time of 1 action. These spells combine into a single 5th-level spell you know, which doesn't count against the number of spells you know.

When you cast the legendary spell, the effects of both combined spells occur sequentially as part of the same action, resolving in any order you choose. The new spell uses all the components of both spells, and the material components for both spells must be available for you to cast the spell.

After a short or long rest, you can choose to replace your legendary spell with another legendary spell of your own invention.

Cloud Castle

12th-Level Heroic Spellcaster Feature

You can perform a 10-minute ritual to conjure a castle in the sky, which appears 1,000 feet above you. The castle has any layout you choose, provided the entire structure fits within a 100-foot cube. It can be divided into as many floors as you like, provided each room contained within is at least 5 feet on each side. The castle has no furnishings, but can be fitted with doors, archways, and staircases. The castle's stonework is magical and can't be damaged. While you are inside your castle, you can mentally command it to move through the air at a speed of 20 miles per hour.

Once you conjure a cloud castle, you can't conjure another one until you finish a long rest. You can have only one cloud castle active at a time. If you summon a new castle, your old castle disintegrates, dropping anything currently held inside it.

Archmage's Summons

16th-Level Heroic Spellcaster Feature

You can perform a 5-minute ritual to conjure an illusory duplicate of a particular creature you have seen before, and which is currently on the same plane of existence as you. When the ritual is complete, the target becomes aware of your intent and can make a Wisdom saving throw against your spell save DC to resist your attempt to duplicate them. On a successful save, the ritual fails.

The duplicate appears in an unoccupied space within 10 feet of you, and lasts for 10 minutes or until you dispel it as a bonus action. The targeted creature can see, hear, and talk through their duplicate, and can move the duplicate as if it were their body. However, the duplicate can't touch anything or affect their surroundings.

Legendary Item

20th-Level Heroic Spellcaster Feature

You can craft a unique magic item. Choose one spell of up to 6th level and three spells of up to 3rd level, all of

which are from the cleric or wizard spell lists and have a casting time of 1 action. These spells are imbued into any item of your choosing that can be held.

While holding the item, a creature (including you) can cast any of the spells imbued into it, using your spellcasting ability modifier, spell save DC, and spell attack modifier. If an imbued spell has a casting time of 1 action, it can be cast as 1 bonus action. If an imbued spell requires concentration, the creature must concentrate on it.

The item has 10 charges, and regains all expended charges daily at dawn. The creature holding the item must spend 1 charge to cast a spell of up to 3rd level, or 3 charges to cast a spell of 4th, 5th, or 6th level.

At the end of a long rest, you can choose to replace your legendary item with another legendary item of your own invention, even if the original item has been destroyed or lost.

Heroic Exploits

The following exploits can be taken by the heroic spellcaster as part of the Heroic Exploits feature, and are presented in alphabetical order.

Controlling Magic

When you cast a spell that deals damage, you can use this exploit to push each creature damaged by the spell up to 10 feet away from the spell's point of origin. A Large or smaller creature affected by this exploit falls prone at the end of this movement.

Eldritch Might

When you cast a spell of 1st level or higher that deals damage, you can use this exploit to cause the spell to deal extra force damage equal to 1d6 per level of the spell.

Empowered Cantrip

When you cast a cantrip that deals damage, you can use this exploit to maximize the damage. If the spell calls for a saving throw to avoid taking damage, the creature still takes half the cantrip's damage on a successful save, but suffers no additional effect from the cantrip.

Evasive Magic

After taking damage from a creature's attack, you can use this exploit to teleport up to 15 feet to an unoccupied space you can see.

Iron Resolve

When you make a Constitution, Intelligence, or Wisdom saving throw, you can use this exploit to gain advantage on your save.

Potent Casting

When you cast a spell that forces one or more creatures targeted by the spell to make saving throws, you can use this exploit to impose disadvantage on those saves.

Potent Healing

When you cast a spell that requires you to roll dice to restore hit points to a creature, you can use this exploit to reroll any or all of those healing dice once and use either roll.

Precision Casting

When you make a spell attack, you can use this exploit to gain advantage on the attack roll.

Sudden Spell

When an enemy you can see ends their turn, you can use this exploit to cast a spell of 3rd level or lower that can be cast as an action, a bonus action, or a reaction.

Quickened Casting

When you cast a spell that has a casting time of 1 action, you can use this exploit to change the casting time to 1 bonus action for that casting.

Heroic Trickster

Legendary heroes often face down overpowering odds with little more than a winning smile, a witty quip, and a pocketful of luck. You're cut from this cloth: a roguish daredevil who relies on flashes of inspiration and a broad range of skills to overcome almost any problem. What you lack in combat or magical prowess, you more than make up for with cunning and charisma.

Quick Build

You can make a heroic trickster quickly by following these suggestions. First, make Dexterity your highest ability score, followed by Charisma. Second, choose the folk hero background. Third, choose Cunning Attack, Cunning Dodge, and Trickster's Strike as your starting heroic trickster exploits.

Heroic Trickster

Level	Proficiency Bonus	Features
1	+2	Heroic Exploits, Heroic Recovery, Heroic Tricks
2	+2	Heroic Fortune (three uses)
3	+2	Trickster's Mark
4	+2	Ability Score Improvement, Case the Joint
5	+3	Arcane Dabbler, Heroic Tricks (d8)
6	+3	Heroic Recovery (two uses)
7	+3	Heroic Exploits (4)
8	+3	Ability Score Improvement, Lost in the Crowd
9	+4	Heroic Fortune (four uses)
10	+4	Mass Forget, Heroic Tricks (d10)
11	+4	Arcane Dabbler (4th-level spell)
12	+4	Ability Score Improvement, Hero of a Thousand Faces
13	+5	Heroic Recovery (three uses)
14	+5	Heroic Exploits (5)
15	+5	Heroic Fortune (five uses), Heroic Tricks (d12)
16	+5	Ability Score Improvement, Trickster's Highway
17	+6	Arcane Dabbler (5th-level spell)
18	+6	Heroic Recovery (four uses)
19	+6	Ability Score Improvement
20	+6	Master Manipulator

Class Features

As a heroic trickster, you gain the following class features.

Hit Points

Hit Dice: 2d10 per heroic trickster level
Hit Points at 1st Level: 20 + your Constitution score
Hit Points at Higher Levels: 20 + your Constitution score per heroic trickster level after 1st

Proficiencies

Armor: Light armor, shields
Weapons: Simple weapons, hand crossbows, longswords, rapiers, shortswords
Tools: Thieves' tools
Saving Throws: Dexterity, Constitution, Wisdom, Charisma
Skills: Choose any six

Magic Item Attunement

You can attune to any number of magic items, and you ignore any attunement restrictions for those items.

Equipment

You start with the following equipment, in addition to the equipment granted by your background:

- Your choice of a rapier, a longsword, or any simple weapon
- Your choice of a shortbow and 20 arrows; or a sling and 20 sling bullets
- Your choice of a component pouch or an arcane focus
- Your choice of a burglar's pack, an entertainer's pack, or an explorer's pack
- Leather armor and a dagger

Heroic Tricks

1st-Level Heroic Trickster Feature

By relying on flashes of inspiration, you can perform a wide range of heroic tricks. You have a number of trickster dice equal to three plus your proficiency bonus. Each heroic trickster die is a d6. The die becomes a d8 at 5th level, a d10 at 10th level, and a d12 at 15th level.

You can spend any number of trickster dice when making an ability check, attack roll, damage roll, or saving throw to gain a bonus to that roll equal to the total of all trickster dice rolled. Additionally, you can spend trickster dice when taking the Attack action to make one extra attack per die spent.

A trickster die is expended when you use it. You regain a trickster die whenever you succeed by 10 or more on an attack roll, an ability check, or a saving throw. Additionally, you gain trickster dice for successfully using certain heroic trickster exploits (as noted in the "Heroic Exploits" section below). When you finish a short or long rest, you regain all spent trickster dice.

Trickster's Mark

3rd-Level Heroic Trickster Feature

You can subtly focus your guile on a single creature. As a bonus action, choose one creature within 30 feet of you that can hear you. With a few beguiling words of magic, that creature becomes your trickster's mark for 1 minute or until you use this feature again to make a different creature your mark. You have advantage on attack rolls against your mark, and you have advantage on Charisma checks made to influence your mark's behavior, demeanor, and attitude.

If you use your Trickster's Mark against the same creature for seven consecutive days, it is charmed by you until you do anything harmful to it.

Case the Joint

4th-Level Heroic Trickster Feature

Using a combination of divination and guile, you know how to scout dangerous locations ahead of entering them. To use this feature, you must spend 8 hours camped within 1 mile of a castle, a dungeon, a settlement, or some other potentially dangerous site. If you enter the site anytime in the following 24 hours, you can utilize the following powers as you explore the site, using each power up to two times and requiring no action:

- A nonmagically locked door is automatically unlocked by you.
- A creature you encounter is treated as charmed by you for 24 hours, provided they have a challenge rating lower than your level (or a level lower than your own, for creatures that don't have a challenge rating). The creature perceives that you are able to provide them with something they want or need, such as money or words of encouragement. The creature is begrudgingly friendly to you until you do anything harmful to them, but they try to avoid letting any of their allies know about your arrangement.
- The GM must describe the terrain ahead of you, up to a distance of 50 feet away from you. The terrain must be directly accessible to your current location even if you can't see it—reachable by a door or staircase, around a corner, and so forth. Hidden features such as secret doors and traps, as well as what lies beyond them, are revealed with this feature.



Arcane Dabbler

5th-Level Heroic Trickster Feature

You learn three cantrips of your choice from any class's spell list, as well as one 3rd-level spell of your choice from any class's spell list. You can cast this spell once, and can do so again when you finish a short or long rest.

Charisma is your spellcasting ability for these spells, and you use Charisma whenever a spell refers to your spellcasting ability. You use your Charisma modifier when setting the saving throw DC for a spell you cast and when making an attack roll with one.

Spell save DC = 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Charisma modifier

Spell attack modifier = your proficiency bonus + your Charisma modifier

You learn a 4th-level spell of your choice from any class's spell list when you reach 11th level, and a 5th-level spell when you reach 17th level. You can cast each of these spells once, and can do so again when you finish a short or long rest.

Lost in the Crowd

8th-Level Heroic Trickster Feature

If you end your turn within 5 feet of a creature, you can teleport to an unoccupied space within 5 feet of a different creature you can see. In addition, you can attempt to hide even when you are obscured only by a creature that is your size or larger.

Mass Forget

10th-Level Heroic Trickster Feature

You can perform a 10-minute ritual to modify the memories of each creature within a site that you have previously scouted using your Case the Joint feature. For 24 hours, fifty creatures of your choice within the site that have seen you, interacted with you, or that you know have heard of your presence forget that you were there. If a creature's altered memories are challenged in any way, they make a Wisdom saving throw against your Arcane Dabbler spell save DC. On a successful save, the creature recalls their knowledge of you.

Hero of a Thousand Faces

12th-Level Heroic Trickster Feature

You can magically change your appearance to mimic a nearby creature. As a bonus action, you choose a Medium or Small creature that has a humanoid shape within 5 feet of you and transform yourself into a duplicate of their form, as per the Change Appearance feature of the *alter self* spell. At any time on your turn, you can change your appearance back to your normal form (no action required).

If you are attacked while you are transformed and within 5 feet of the creature you look like, you can use a reaction and expend a trickster die to make the attack target the original creature instead.

Trickster's Highway

16th-Level Heroic Trickster Feature

You gain access to a magical network of ethereal tunnels known as the Trickster's Highway. As an action when you open a door, you can transport yourself and one willing creature that you are touching into the threshold of any doorway you have been through before that is on the same plane of existence as you. Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Master Manipulator

20th-Level Heroic Trickster Feature

Your ability to manipulate allies and enemies alike is legendary. You have advantage on all Charisma checks, and if you have proficiency in the Deception, Intimidation, or Persuasion skills, your proficiency bonus is doubled for ability checks using those skills. When you expend trickster dice to modify a Charisma check, you use the maximum of each die, rather than rolling.

Heroic Exploits

The following exploits can be taken by the heroic trickster as part of the Heroic Exploits feature, and are presented in alphabetical order.

Cunning Attack

When you hit an enemy with a weapon attack and you have advantage on the attack roll, you can use this exploit to deal extra damage to the target equal to 1d6 per heroic trickster level.

Cunning Dodge

When an enemy hits you with an attack, you can use this exploit to make a Dexterity saving throw with a DC equal to the total of the attack. On a successful save, the attack misses and you gain a trickster die. Additionally, if another enemy is within 5 feet of you, you can choose to have the attack target them instead.

Hide on the Run

On your turn, you can use this exploit to take the Dash or Disengage action. At the end of your movement on the same turn, you can take the Hide action.

Distracting Quip

When an enemy that can hear you makes an ability check, a ranged weapon attack, or a saving throw, you can use this exploit to impose disadvantage on the roll. If the roll fails, you gain a trickster die.

Heroic Evasion

When you are subjected to an effect that allows you to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half as much damage, you can use this exploit to gain advantage on the save. On a successful save, you take no damage and gain a trickster die. On a failure, you take only half as much damage.

Sly Flourish

When you miss with a melee weapon attack, you can use this exploit to make another attack against the same foe. If you hit with the follow-up attack, you gain a trickster die.

Trickster's Distraction

On your turn, you can use this exploit to make a Charisma (Deception) check. Each creature within 30 feet of you that can see or hear you must make a Wisdom saving throw (DC equals your check or 10, whichever is higher). If a creature fails the save, you are invisible to that creature until the start of your next turn, or until you attack or cast a spell.

Trickster's Knack

When you make a Charisma check or a Dexterity, Intelligence, or Charisma saving throw, you can use this exploit to gain advantage on the roll. On a success, you gain a trickster die.

Trickster's Strike

When a creature you can see ends their turn, you can use this exploit to make a weapon attack against them. If you hit, you gain a trickster die.

Wall Running

On your turn, you can use this exploit to gain a climbing speed equal to your walking speed until the end of your turn. While using this climbing speed, you can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

GM Tips

Though a single heroic champion is meant to stand up to threats that an entire party would face, playing with just one character presents some unusual challenges. GMs should use the following guidelines when running a game for a character with a heroic class.

Swarming Heroic Champions

Each of the heroic classes gains features that enable powerful movement during combat. Even so, a heroic champion can easily get swarmed by enemies, especially at lower levels, which can be frustrating for players. Compensate for this by spreading out enemies during combat, then using ranged attacks or taking the Ready action to prepare attacks against a character who steps too close.

Battling Legendary Monsters

Because legendary actions trigger between the turns of multiple characters, creatures with legendary actions won't get to use them all against a heroic champion. To compensate for this, let a creature with legendary actions use more than one legendary action at the end of the heroic champion's turn.

Saving Unconscious Characters

All heroic champions excel in combat, but they have no allies to stabilize or revive them if they fall unconscious. When preparing an adventure, consider options for continuing the story if the hero is knocked unconscious by hostile creatures, including any of the following options:

- The enemies stabilize and capture the character for interrogation, chaining them up in their stronghold or parading them as a trophy. Opportunities for escape soon arise.
- The character is rescued—or captured—by a rival faction, whose members drive away the original assailants.
- The character is left for dead and awakens on the battlefield, missing some of their gear.
- The enemies stabilize the character and use magic to siphon away some of their heroic essence, but they are too fearful of divine retribution to rob or kill them. The character loses one level of experience.

Optionally, a GM can rule that a heroic champion automatically rolls a 20 on death saving throws, but can fall unconscious a maximum of three times per adventure (or per character level). After that, they're out of luck!

PARENTAGE AND UPBRINGING

Tiefling and gemstone dragonborn character options

by V.J. Harris

Content Warning: This article contains elements of body horror.

> "The essence of the Time Ender flows through me. I manifest but a fraction of her power, yet it is greater than that of any who have stood before me. Fear me. For I herald the coming of the Würm of the World's End."
>
> –Krorthalaar, Scion of Cthrion Uroniziir

When a player sits down to create a character, they often select the ancestry that grants them the mechanical traits that best support their class, not the one that best fits their story. This approach leads to some unrealistically homogeneous characters, supports fifth edition's inherent bioessentialism, and doesn't offer the player fun choices. In the real world, many people aren't just the product of a single culture. A person's parentage and their upbringing create their unique strengths. This article allows you to create a character with traits not just from a single ancestry, but from two parents and an upbringing.

The original concept of using parentage and upbringing for character creation is found in the fifth edition supplements *An Elf and an Orc Had a Little Baby Volume I* and *Volume II*. Those works present alternative parentage options for many of the game's official ancestries.

This article follows that tradition, presenting options for dragonborn characters connected to the gemstone dragons found in the upcoming *The Talent and Psionics*, and options for tieflings with connections to the devils and demons of *Kingdoms & Warfare*. These links are provided for those who want to learn more, but you don't need any of these products to make use of this article, which provides rules for the gemstone dragonborn's psionic options. Everything here is compatible with both volumes of *An Elf and an Orc*, and with the 5e-alternate game system *Those Who Wander*.

I hope this article expands your mind and opens up a world of possibilities for new characters!

PARENTAGE TRAITS

When you use the methods detailed in this article to make a character, instead of picking an ancestry at character creation, you choose two parentages and one upbringing (detailed below). For parentage traits, you have a pool of 16 points with which you can buy traits from two parentages of your choice. Both parentages can be the same, if you want to play a character with a single ancestry, or you can mix and match. Typically, these points are split down the middle if you select two different parentages, but they don't have to be.

You can also take on detrimental parentage traits, which give you more points to spend on beneficial traits as indicated by their negative cost.

DEFAULT TRAITS

Unless stated elsewhere, your tiefling or gemstone dragonborn ancestry means you have a walking speed of 30 feet. Tieflings live for a little over a century, and gemstone dragonborn live to be around 115 years old.

Gemstone Dragonborn Parentage

The first gemstone dragonborn were the result of powerful psionic rituals performed by gemstone dragons—near-mythical creatures manifesting potent powers of the mind. Rarer than the metallic and chromatic dragonborn, many gemstone dragonborn take up the call of adventuring to learn more about their origins.

Any character with a gemstone dragonborn parent can choose from the base traits below, and can choose additional traits based on their parent's draconic ancestry: amethyst, emerald, ruby, sapphire, or topaz. Alternatively, a character's dragonborn parent might have been a descendant of the singular and mighty Onyx Dragon, Cthrion Uroniziir.



Crystal Armor (6 Points). You have vibrant, glowing crystals embedded in your scaled skin. When you aren't wearing armor, your AC is 13 + your Dexterity modifier. You can use your natural armor to determine your AC if the armor you wear would leave you with a lower AC. A shield's benefits apply as normal while you use your natural armor.

Natural Psionics (6 Points). You learn one 1st-order psionic power of your choice from the following list: *apparition*, *concussive slam*, *flame's master*, *illuminator*, *invisible force*, *psionic bolt*, *psychic stab*, *rewrite*, or *time thief*. Your manifestation ability for this power is Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma, which you choose when you select this trait. You can select this trait only once.

See "Powers and Psionics" at the end of this article for details on these powers, and a quick overview of the rules for using them.

Psychic Vulnerability (–3 Points). You have vulnerability to psychic damage.

Tail (3 Points). Your tail is a natural weapon, which you can use to make unarmed strikes. If you hit with an unarmed strike using your tail, you deal bludgeoning damage equal to 1d6 + your Strength modifier, instead of the normal damage for an unarmed strike.

Telepathy (3 Points). You can communicate telepathically with any creature you can see within 30 feet of you. You don't need to share a language with the creature for them to understand these messages, but they must be able to understand at least one language.

Amethyst Dragonborn Parentage

Just like the amethyst dragons who first created them, amethyst dragonborn can use psychic feedback to rebuke enemies that harm them.

Feedback (3 Points). As a reaction when you take damage from a creature within 30 feet of you that you can see, you force the creature to make an Intelligence saving throw (DC 8 + your proficiency bonus + your choice of Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma modifier). The creature takes 3d6 psychic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Emerald Dragonborn Parentage

Emerald dragonborn inherit their original creators' ability to disrupt spellcasters with psionic distractions.

Interference (3 points). As a reaction when a creature within 30 feet of you that you can see takes damage from a spell or power, you disrupt the effect. Roll a d12 and add your level, then reduce the damage the creature takes by the total. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Ruby Dragonborn Parentage

The crystalline minds of their draconic ancestors allow a ruby dragonborn to enhance the power of nearby manifestors and spellcasters.

Amplification (4 Points). As an action, you target a creature you can see within 30 feet of you. The target rolls a d4, and until the end of your next turn, their power or spell save DC (your choice) is increased by the number rolled. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Sapphire Dragonborn Parentage

Sapphire dragons can awe their enemies into inaction, and have imparted that psionic gift into their dragonborn progeny.

Awe (4 Points). As a reaction when a creature you can see within 30 feet of you targets you with an attack, you force the creature to make a Charisma saving throw (DC 8 + your proficiency bonus + your choice of Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma modifier). On a failed save, the attack misses. On a success, you take half as much damage from the attack. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Topaz Dragonborn Parentage

By spending psionic energy, topaz dragonborn can bolster the mental might and resilience of their allies just as their draconic ancestors do.

Uplift (3 Points). As an action, you target a creature you can see within 30 feet of you. For 1 minute, whenever the target makes an Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma check or saving throw, they can roll a d4 and add the number rolled to the d20 roll. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Cthrion Uroniziir Parentage

Choosing traits from this parentage requires explicit GM approval. Being a descendant of the Onyx Dragon can have campaign repercussions even if the abilities are balanced.

Cthrion Uroniziir, the Time Ender, is perhaps the most powerful of the gemstone dragons, her form made of many different precious stones. The ancestors of the few dragonborn she has created all carry vestiges of her power.

Bite (3 Points). Your teeth are natural weapons, which you can use to make unarmed strikes. If you hit with an unarmed strike using your teeth, you deal piercing damage equal to 1d6 + your Strength modifier, instead of the normal damage for an unarmed strike.

Claws (3 Points). Your claws are natural weapons, which you can use to make unarmed strikes. If you hit with an unarmed strike using your claws, you deal slashing damage equal to 1d6 + your Strength modifier, instead of the normal damage for an unarmed strike.

Cosmic Breath (9 Points). When you take the Attack action, you can replace one of your attacks with an exhalation of magical energy in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a Dexterity saving throw (DC 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Constitution modifier), taking 3d6 bludgeoning or radiant damage (your choice) on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

You can use your Cosmic Breath a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest. The damage increases to 4d6 at 5th level, 5d6 at 11th level, and 6d6 at 17th level.

Greater Tail (5 Points). Your tail is a natural weapon, which you can use to make unarmed strikes. If you hit with an unarmed strike using your tail, you deal bludgeoning damage equal to 1d8 + your Strength modifier, instead of the normal damage for an unarmed strike.

Inhale (6 Points). As an action, you create a 15-foot cone of irresistible psionic force that originates from you. Each creature in the area must succeed on a Strength saving throw (DC 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Intelligence modifier) or be pulled up to 10 feet toward you and knocked prone. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Magic Resistance: Constitution (5 Points). You have advantage on Constitution saving throws against spells.

Magic Resistance: Dexterity (5 Points). You have advantage on Dexterity saving throws against spells.

Magic Resistance: Intelligence (2 Points). You have advantage on Intelligence saving throws against spells.

Tiefling Parentage

Any character with a tiefling parent can choose from the base traits below, and can choose additional traits based on their parent's specific fiendish ancestry: Groyle, Hara'antar, Horat, Indix, Moranon, Pharyon, Rakat, Relg, Sryz, Sylt, Trall, Vorg'aut, or Zor'yal.

Darkvision (4 Points). You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light, and in darkness as if it were dim light. You can't discern color in darkness, only shades of gray.

Hellish Resistance (3 Points). You have resistance to fire damage.

Groyle Parentage

When it comes to demon lords, few match the straightforward brutality and hunger for violence of the Court of the Deep's Groyle Fleshender. Tieflings descended from Groyle can inherit the great demon's fearsome natural weapons and supernatural spite.

Caustic Claws (5 Points). Your claws are natural weapons, which you can use to make unarmed strikes. If you hit with an unarmed strike using your claws, you deal slashing damage equal to 1d6 + your Strength modifier, instead of the normal damage for an unarmed strike. As a bonus action, you can then deal an extra 1d4 acid damage with this unarmed strike.

Gore (3 Points). You have a horn on your forehead that is a natural weapon, which you can use to make unarmed strikes. If you hit with an unarmed strike using your horn, you deal piercing damage equal to 1d6 + your Strength modifier, instead of the normal damage for an unarmed strike.



Common Devil Parentage

While tieflings can be descended from the named archdevils, they can also descend from common devils. By removing each trait that has an asterisk next to its name as a choice, the GM can decide that a character can take only the traits of common devils (for instance, the traits of a common lore devil instead of Indix).

Goring Charge (4 Points; Requires Gore). When you move at least 20 feet straight toward a creature, you can use a bonus action to make an unarmed strike with your horn.

Mark of Abhorrence (3 Points). As a bonus action, you place a mark of abhorrence on a creature you can see within 30 feet of you. For 1 minute, whenever you hit the marked creature with an attack, the attack deals an extra 1d6 acid damage. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Spiteful Defense (2 points). As a reaction to being hit by an attack, you gain a +5 bonus to AC until the start of your next turn, including against the triggering attack. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Hara'antar Parentage

Hara'antar the Soulthief is feared among demons for her ability to fuel evil magic by consuming mortal souls. Her tieflings are infused with abyssal power that lets them harry and curse their foes.

Abyssal Resistance (5 Points). When you fail a saving throw, you can reroll it and choose which roll to use. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Bite (3 Points). Your teeth are natural weapons, which you can use to make unarmed strikes. If you hit with an unarmed strike using your teeth, you deal piercing damage equal to 1d6 + your Strength modifier, instead of the normal damage for an unarmed strike.

Caustic Pincers (5 Points). You have pincers that are natural weapons, which you can use to make unarmed strikes. If you hit with an unarmed strike using your pincers, you deal bludgeoning damage equal to 1d6 + your Strength modifier, instead of the normal damage for an unarmed strike. As a bonus action, you can then deal an extra 1d4 acid damage with this unarmed strike.

Draining Hex (5 Points). As a bonus action, you drain the life from one creature you are grappling. The target must make a Charisma saving throw (DC 8 + your proficiency bonus + your choice of Intelligence, Wisdom or Charisma modifier), taking 2d6 necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful

one. You regain hit points equal to half the damage dealt. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Malediction (2 Points). As a reaction when a creature you can see within 30 feet of you succeeds on a saving throw, you roll a d4 and subtract that roll from the saving throw, possibly turning success into failure. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Horat Parentage

Horat, Duke of Kasyrgan, leads the Envenomed, a cult of spies dedicated to bringing pain to the multiverse of the timescape. He passes his power to his tieflings, including many who use the archdevil's gifts for good instead of ill.

Hail of Teeth (9 Points). As an action, you breathe a hail of teeth in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in the cone must make a Dexterity saving throw (DC 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Constitution modifier), taking 1d6 piercing damage and 1d6 poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

The damage increases to 2d6 piercing damage and 1d6 poison damage at 5th level, 2d6 piercing and 2d6 poison at 11th level, and 3d6 piercing and 2d6 poison at 17th level.

Magic Resistance: Charisma (2 Points). You have advantage on Charisma saving throws against spells.

Magic Resistance: Constitution (5 Points). You have advantage on Constitution saving throws against spells.

Magic Resistance: Dexterity (5 Points). You have advantage on Dexterity saving throws against spells.

Mouth Hand (5 Points). As a bonus action, you cause a row of razor-sharp teeth to appear in the palm of your hand, which last until the end of your turn and which you can use to make unarmed strikes. If you hit with an unarmed strike attack using your mouth hand, you deal piercing damage equal to 1d6 + your Strength modifier plus 1d4 poison damage, instead of the normal damage for an unarmed strike.

Telepathy (3 Points). You can communicate telepathically with any creature you can see within 30 feet of you. You don't need to share a language with the creature for them to understand these messages, but they must be able to understand at least one language.

Teleport (4 Points). As a bonus action, you cast the *misty step* spell, using your choice of Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma as your spellcasting ability. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Twist Flesh (4 Points). As an action, you force a creature within 30 feet of you that you can see to make a Constitution saving throw (DC 8 + your proficiency bonus + your choice of Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma modifier). On a failed save, the target suffers one of the following effects of your choice:

- The target's internal temperature skyrockets to boil their bodily fluids, which hiss from their pores as jets of steam. The target gains one level of exhaustion.
- Horns erupt from the target's skull and curve into their eyes. The target is blinded.
- Pus-filled boils form and pop in the target's ears. The target is deafened.

The chosen effect lasts until the end of the creature's next turn. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Unhallowed Toxin* (4 Points). Poison damage you deal ignores any damage resistance the target has.

Indix Parentage

Indix, Earl of Sheol, is the lord of all lore devils and composed of the burning pages of the *codex mutabilis*—the legendary Book of Change. This magical tome gives the archdevil their powerful traits, which are bestowed upon the tieflings who share their power.

Fire Vulnerability (–3 Points). You have vulnerability to fire damage.

Limited Magic Immunity (7 Points). As a reaction when you are affected by a spell of 3rd level or lower, you negate the effects of the spell on you. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Spelldrain (7 Points). As an action, you make a melee spell attack against a creature within your reach, using Charisma as your spellcasting ability. On a hit, the target takes 2d6 necrotic damage and can't cast spells until the end of your next turn. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Telepathy (3 Points). You can communicate telepathically with any creature you can see within 30 feet of you. You don't need to share a language with the creature for them to understand these messages, but they must be able to understand at least one language.

Untethered Form* (5 Points). As an action, you cast the *alter self* spell, using your choice of Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma as your spellcasting ability. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Moranon Parentage

Moranon, Marquis of Acheron, is the greatest of stone devils. His loyalty to Asmodeus is unwavering, making him one of the most trustworthy figures in the Court of Seven Cities. Many tieflings descended from Moranon channel the power of the archdevil's blood in their veins.

Aura of Foul Ichor* (6 Points). As a bonus action, you activate a protective aura for 1 hour. While the aura is active, when you take damage from a creature within 5 feet of you for the first time on a turn, that creature takes 1d8 necrotic damage. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Immutable Form (2 Points). You have advantage on saving throws against any effect that would alter your form.

Magic Resistance: Constitution (5 Points). You have advantage on Constitution saving throws against spells.

Magic Resistance: Strength (2 Points). You have advantage on Strength saving throws against spells.

Magic Resistance: Wisdom (5 Points). You have advantage on Wisdom saving throws against spells.

Soulblood Trail (9 Points). As an action, you turn a 20-foot-radius area of ground centered on you into difficult terrain for 1 minute. When a hostile creature enters the area for the first time or starts their turn there, they must make a Constitution saving throw (DC 8 + your proficiency bonus + your choice of Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma modifier), taking 1d6 necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

PHARYON PARENTAGE

Pharyon, Prince of Dis, is the ruler of the Court of Seven Cities. His power to see into the past, the future, and alternative realities allows him to smash any threat to his rule before it begins, and helps him further consolidate his power. His tieflings inherit his incredible array of defensive and magic powers.

Flight (10 Points). You have wings and a flying speed of 20 feet. You can't fly while wearing medium or heavy armor.

Lightning Vulnerability (–2 Points). You have vulnerability to lightning damage.

Look Again* (4 Points). As a reaction when a creature you can see within 60 feet of you targets you with an attack, you force that creature to make the attack roll with disadvantage. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Magic Resistance: Intelligence (2 Points). You have advantage on Intelligence saving throws against spells.

Magic Resistance: Strength (2 Points). You have advantage on Strength saving throws against spells.

Magic Resistance: Wisdom (5 Points). You have advantage on Wisdom saving throws against spells.

Soul Scorching (4 Points). When you deal fire damage to a creature, you can choose to have the damage ignore the creature's resistance or immunity to fire. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Spit Fire (4 Points). As an action, you spit flames from your mouth as a ranged spell attack with a range of 120 feet. Charisma is your spellcasting ability for this attack, which deals 1d10 fire damage on a hit. The damage increases by 1d10 when you reach 5th level (2d10), 11th level (3d10), and 17th level (4d10).

Winged Embrace (9 Points). You channel protective power through your wings, and manifest temporary wings when you activate this trait if you don't already have them. As an action, you enclose yourself and one other willing creature within 5 feet of you with your wings, granting both of you a +4 bonus to AC. While protected in this way, you and the protected creature each have your speed reduced to 0, and that speed can't be increased until you unfold your wings. Additionally, you can't take actions, bonus actions, or reactions, except for using a bonus action to end your winged embrace. The protected creature can take actions normally while in your winged embrace, and can leave your embrace and enter an unoccupied space within 5 feet of you as a bonus action.

If you manifested wings with this trait, they vanish when you unfold your wings. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

RAKAT PARENTAGE

A hate devil of considerable power, Rakat, Baron of Styx, is a scheming general who seeks to climb the ranks of the Court of Seven Cities. Much like their infernal master, the archdevil's tieflings fight dirty.

Devil Sight (3 Points). As a bonus action, you activate your magical sight for 1 hour, allowing you to see normally in magical and nonmagical darkness out to a range of 60 feet. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Enmity* (4 Points). As an action, you force a creature you can see within 30 feet of you to succeed on a Wisdom saving throw (DC 8 + your proficiency bonus + your choice of Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma modifier) or be charmed by you until the start of your next turn. While charmed in this way, the target must use their action, if available, to either attack themself or their closest ally (your choice). If the target is unable to do either, they spend their action but do nothing. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Eye for an Eye* (6 Points). As a reaction when you take damage from a creature within 5 feet of you, you make a melee weapon attack against that creature. If this attack hits, in addition to its normal effects, the creature is blinded until the end of their next turn. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Magic Resistance: Constitution (5 Points). You have advantage on Constitution saving throws against spells.

Magic Resistance: Intelligence (2 Points). You have advantage on Intelligence saving throws against spells.

Magic Resistance: Strength (2 Points). You have advantage on Strength saving throws against spells.

Poison Resistance (3 Points). You have resistance to poison damage.

Spit Fire (4 Points). As an action, you spit flames from your mouth as a ranged spell attack with a range of 120 feet. Charisma is your spellcasting ability for this attack, which deals 1d10 fire damage on a hit. The damage increases by 1d10 when you reach 5th level (2d10), 11th level (3d10), and 17th level (4d10).

Stinging Tail (5 Points). Your tail is a natural weapon, which you can use to make unarmed strikes. If you hit with an unarmed strike using your tail, you deal bludgeoning damage equal to 1d6 + your Strength modifier, instead of the normal damage for an unarmed strike. As a bonus action, you can then deal an extra 1d4 acid damage with this unarmed strike.

Telepathy (3 Points). You can communicate telepathically with any creature you can see within 30 feet of you. You don't need to share a language with the creature for them to understand these messages, but they must be able to understand at least one language.

RELG PARENTAGE

The former King in Lethe of the Court of the Deep, Relg the Descender now commands the army of demons known as the Infernium. Enormous, tentacled, horned, and full of hate, the mighty demon makes a formidable foe, and his tieflings often gain his natural weapons and innate toughness.

Magic Resistance: Constitution (5 Points). You have advantage on Constitution saving throws against spells.

Magic Resistance: Strength (2 Points). You have advantage on Strength saving throws against spells.

Magic Resistance: Wisdom (5 Points). You have advantage on Wisdom saving throws against spells.

Regeneration (5 Points). As a bonus action, you spend one Hit Die to regain hit points equal to a roll of the die plus your Constitution modifier (minimum 1).

Scourge of Lethe (2 Points). As an action, you cast the *bane* spell, using your choice of Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma as your spellcasting ability. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Tentacles (6 Points). You have tentacles on your back that are natural weapons, which you can use to make an unarmed strike that has a reach of 10 feet. If you hit with an unarmed strike using your tentacles, you deal bludgeoning damage equal to 1d8 + your Strength modifier, instead of the normal damage for an unarmed strike.

SRYZ PARENTAGE

Sryz, Count of Naraka, is one of the only steel devils to ever ascend the ranks of the Seven Cities into infernal nobility. Tieflings with his heritage gain the painful supernatural powers of steel devils.

Agonizing Visage (3 points). As a reaction when a creature within 60 feet of you that can see you hits you with an attack, you force that creature to make a Wisdom saving throw (DC 8 + your proficiency bonus + your choice of Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma modifier). On a failed save, the target takes 3d6 psychic damage. On a successful save, you take only half as much damage from the triggering attack. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Magic Resistance: Charisma (2 Points). You have advantage on Charisma saving throws against spells.

Magic Resistance: Dexterity (5 Points). You have advantage on Dexterity saving throws against spells.

Magic Resistance: Intelligence (2 Points). You have advantage on Intelligence saving throws against spells.

Sonic Attack* (5 Points). As an action, you let out a high-frequency scream that pierces the minds of your enemies. Each creature of your choice within 15 feet of you that can hear you must succeed on a Charisma saving throw (DC 8 + your proficiency bonus + your choice of Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma modifier) or have disadvantage on attack rolls until the end of their next turn. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Soul Scalpel (6 Points). As an action, you force a creature you can see within 30 feet of you to make a Charisma saving throw (DC 8 + your proficiency bonus + your choice of Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma modifier). On a failed save, the target takes 2d6 psychic damage and has disadvantage on ability checks, attack rolls, and saving throws until the end of your next turn. On a success, the target takes half as much damage and doesn't gain disadvantage on any rolls. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Thorns of Pain (4 Points). As a bonus action, you activate a protective aura for 1 minute. While the aura is active, a creature that moves within 5 feet of you for the first time on a turn or starts their turn there takes 1d4 slashing damage. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Telepathy (3 Points). You can communicate telepathically with any creature you can see within 30 feet of you. You don't need to share a language with the creature for them to understand these messages, but they must be able to understand at least one language.

Sylt Parentage

Sylt Bloodheat is the most powerful demon on the Court of the Deep, drinking souls in an endless flow. Her heritage gifts tieflings the ability to withstand almost any spell, in addition to powerful offensive tactics.

Abyssal Resistance (5 Points). When you fail a saving throw, you can reroll it and choose which roll to use. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Claws (3 Points). Your claws are natural weapons, which you can use to make unarmed strikes. If you hit with an unarmed strike using your claws, you deal slashing damage equal to 1d6 + your Strength modifier, instead of the normal damage for an unarmed strike.

Dark Command (2 Points). As an action, you cast the *command* spell, using your choice of Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma as your spellcasting ability. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Magic Resistance: Charisma (2 Points). You have advantage on Charisma saving throws against spells.

Magic Resistance: Intelligence (2 Points). You have advantage on Intelligence saving throws against spells.

Magic Resistance: Strength (2 Points). You have advantage on Strength saving throws against spells.

Trall Parentage

Diviners on every world know to fear Trall the Mindbreaker, a demon lord able to suck out the soul of any spellcaster foolish enough to peer into the Abyss. Trall's tieflings gain a taste of the demon's mind-bending powers and supernatural defenses.

Abyssal Resistance (5 Points). When you fail a saving throw, you can reroll it and choose which roll to use. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Lesser Claws (1 Point). Your claws are natural weapons, which you can use to make unarmed strikes. If you hit with an unarmed strike using your claws, you deal slashing damage equal to 1d4 + your Strength modifier, instead of the normal damage for an unarmed strike.

Magic Resistance: Charisma (2 Points). You have advantage on Charisma saving throws against spells.

Magic Resistance: Constitution (5 Points). You have advantage on Constitution saving throws against spells.

Magic Resistance: Intelligence (2 Points). You have advantage on Intelligence saving throws against spells.

Mind Shriek (4 Points). As an action, you emit a psychic shriek that targets a creature that can hear you within 60 feet of you. Make a ranged spell attack against the target, using Charisma as your spellcasting ability. On a hit, the target takes 1d10 psychic damage. The damage increases by 1d10 when you reach 5th level (2d10), 11th level (3d10), and 17th level (4d10).

Mind Trick (5 Points). As a reaction when you are hit by an attack, you conjure an illusory duplicate in your space. The triggering attacker must reroll the attack and use the new result, after which the duplicate disappears. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Telepathy (3 Points). You can communicate telepathically with any creature you can see within 30 feet of you. You don't need to share a language with the creature for them to understand these messages, but they must be able to understand at least one language.

Vorg'aut Parentage

An unmatched warrior and cunning commander, Vorg'aut Harrowfist, the Lady Blight, is a terrifying presence on any battlefield. A tiefling descended from Vorg'aut can tap into her martial power and reflect her intimidating form.

Abyssal Resistance (5 Points). When you fail a saving throw, you can reroll it and choose which roll to use. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Barbed Tail (6 Points). Your tail is a natural weapon, which you can use to make unarmed strikes. If you hit with an unarmed strike using your tail, you deal bludgeoning damage equal to 1d6 + your Strength modifier plus 1d4 slashing damage, instead of the normal damage for an unarmed strike.

Might of the Harrowfist (5 Points). As an action, you create a spectral fist that floats within 60 feet of you for 1 minute. As part of the action used to create the fist, you can make a melee spell attack against a creature within 5 feet of the fist. Charisma is your spellcasting ability for this attack, which deals bludgeoning damage equal to 1d8 + your Charisma modifier on a hit. For the duration, you can use a bonus action to move the fist up to 20 feet and make the same attack. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Zor'yal Parentage

A cloud of blood follows the vengeful, insatiable Zor'yal Lifeswallower as she tears across endless battlefields. Her tieflings can inherit her cruel quickness and innate magic.

Abyssal Resistance (5 Points). When you fail a saving throw, you can reroll it and choose which roll to use. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Lacerate (3 Points). When you hit a target with a melee weapon attack, you can use your bonus action to make another melee weapon attack against a target within reach. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Venomous Claws (5 Points). Your claws are natural weapons, which you can use to make unarmed strikes. If you hit with an unarmed strike using your claws, you deal slashing damage equal to 1d6 + your Strength modifier, instead of the normal damage for an unarmed strike. As a bonus action you can then deal an extra 1d4 poison damage with this unarmed strike.

Wounding Step (5 Points). As an action, you move up to 30 feet in a straight line without provoking opportunity attacks. Each creature within 10 feet of you at any point during this movement must make a Wisdom saving throw (DC 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Constitution modifier), taking 1d6 psychic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Upbringing Traits

In addition to their choice of two parentages, your character can choose one of the following upbringings and gain all its associated traits.

Erudite Upbringing

You were raised among folk who valued knowledge, and have long been drawn to the deep lore and hidden secrets of the world.

Ability Score Increase. When determining your character's ability scores, increase one score by 2 and increase a different score by 1, or increase three different scores by 1.

Cantrip. You learn one cantrip of your choice from the wizard spell list that doesn't deal damage, using your choice of Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma as your spellcasting ability for this spell.

Historical Expertise. You have a +2 bonus to Intelligence (History) checks, and have advantage on Intelligence checks made to recall ancient lore.

Languages. You can speak, read, and write Common and two extra languages of your choice.

Heavy Martial Upbringing

You were raised by combat-focused people, who trained you to the discipline of a powerful and decisive fighting style.

Ability Score Increase. When determining your character's ability scores, increase one score by 2 and increase a different score by 1, or increase three different scores by 1.

Formidable Attacks. When you score a critical hit with a melee weapon attack, you can roll one of the weapon's damage dice one additional time and add it to the extra damage of the critical hit. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Weapon Training. You have proficiency with the greataxe and greatsword.

Languages. You can speak, read, and write Common and one extra language of your choice.

Light Martial Upbringing

A life spent among people who trained you in the way of the blade has granted you a nimble and defensive combat style.

Ability Score Increase. When determining your character's ability scores, increase one score by 2 and increase a different score by 1, or increase three different scores by 1.

Parry. As a reaction when a creature you can see hits you with a melee weapon attack and you are wielding a melee weapon, you add your proficiency bonus to your AC against the triggering attack. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Weapon Training. You have proficiency with the rapier and scimitar.

Languages. You can speak, read, and write Common and one extra language of your choice.

Medium Martial Upbringing

You were raised by folk who valued a mixed combat style, giving you a focus on quick moments of fury.

Ability Score Increase. When determining your character's ability scores, increase one score by 2 and increase a different score by 1, or increase three different scores by 1.

Eviscerating Strike. When you hit a creature with a melee weapon attack, the target takes an extra 1d6 damage. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Weapon Training. You have proficiency with the battleaxe and longsword.

Languages. You can speak, read, and write Common and one extra language of your choice.

Unholy Erudite Upbringing

You were raised among a people who wished to learn everything they could about fiends, whether to fight them, to aid them, or simply to possess their knowledge and power.

Ability Score Increase. When determining your character's ability scores, increase one score by 2 and increase a different score by 1, or increase three different scores by 1.

Unholy Knowledge. You have a +2 bonus to Intelligence (History or Religion) checks. You also have advantage on Intelligence (History or Religion) checks to recall information about fiends, the Court of Seven Cities, and the Court of the Deep.

Unholy Vitality. As an action, you cast the *false life* spell, using your choice of Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma as your spellcasting ability. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Languages. You can speak, read, and write Common and two extra languages of your choice.

Family Tree: Mixing and Matching

The point system used in this article, *An Elf and an Orc Had a Little Baby Volume I* and *Volume II*, and *Those Who Wander* allows players to mix and match their traits from more than two parentages and multiple upbringings. This section provides guidelines for this expanded approach to character creation.

Generational Parentages

Players who want a wider range of choice, or who wish to build out a full family tree for their character, can create a direct family line and choose traits from all their direct ancestors—parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and so forth.

For example, Kiandarth, a ruby-and-topaz gemstone dragonborn, marries Ralthos, a tiefling with Indix and Relg parentage. Kiandarth has the following traits for a total of 16 points:

- Crystal Armor (6 points)
- Psychic Vulnerability (–3 points)
- Tail (3 points)
- Telepathy (3 points)
- Amplification (4 points)
- Uplift (3 points)

Ralthos has the following traits for a total of 16 points:

- Darkvision (4 points)
- Hellish Resistance (3 points)
- Fire Vulnerability (–3 points)
- Spelldrain (7 points)
- Telepathy (3 points)
- Scourge of Lethe (2 points)

Kiandarth and Ralthos have a child named Innirith (the player character). Innirith can have any combination of traits that their parents have, as long as the combined cost of those traits isn't more than 16 points.

There is technically no limit to how many generations back a player can create a character's direct line to choose traits using this system, though a GM might decide to set a limit if they wish.

Generational Upbringings

Although the upbringings presented here don't use a point system, some players might want to mix traits from different upbringings to create their own. In that event, a GM can rule that each player has 18 points to spend on upbringing traits inherited from direct ancestors, using the values on the Upbringing Traits table. This system works just like the one used for generational parentages. Standard upbringings fall within a point range of 12 to 18, with most being in the 14-to-17-point range.

A character using this system can take only one +2 Ability Score Increase and one +1 Ability Score Increase, or they can take up to three +1 Ability Score Increases and no +2 Ability Score Increase.

Consider the parent NPCs from the example above. Kiandarth has an Unholy Erudite Upbringing, built around the following traits:

- +2 Ability Score Increase to Charisma (8 points)
- +1 Ability Score Increase to Intelligence (4 points)
- Unholy Knowledge (2 points)
- Unholy Vitality (2 points)
- Common and two extra languages of their choice (2 points)

Ralthos has a Light Martial Upbringing, built around the following traits:

- +2 Ability Score Increase to Dexterity (8 points)
- +1 Ability Score Increase to Strength (4 points)
- Parry (2 points)
- Weapon Training (1 point)
- Common and one language of their choice (1 point)

Assuming these two NPCs raised Innirith to share in both their upbringings, Innirith can choose a combination of either characters' upbringing traits, as long as that combination is within the 12-to-18-point range.

Upbringing Traits

Trait	Cost
+1 Ability Score Increase	4
+2 Ability Score Increase	8
Cantrip	3
Eviscerating Strike	2
Formidable Attacks	2
Historical Expertise	2
Parry	2
Common and one extra language	1
Common and two extra languages	2
Unholy Knowledge	2
Unholy Vitality	2
Weapon Training	1

POWERS AND PSIONICS

This section presents the nine powers that can be taken by a character with the Natural Psionics trait, as part of the gemstone dragon parentage. A quick overview of psionics then follows. All this material is taken from the upcoming *The Talent and Psionics*, providing an overview of that supplement's new rules.

POWER DESCRIPTIONS

The 1st-order powers available through the Natural Psionics trait are presented in alphabetical order.

APPARITION

1st-Order Resopathy

Manifestation Time: 1 action
Range: 60 feet
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You create a sound or an image that only you and one creature within range perceive. If you create a sound, its volume can range from a whisper to a scream. It can be your voice, someone else's voice, a creature's roar, a musical instrument, or any other sound you choose. If you create an image, it must fit within a 5-foot cube and can't move. The image can't create any effect that influences a sense other than sight. The image disappears if the perceiving creature touches it.

CONCUSSIVE SLAM

1st-Order Telekinesis

Manifestation Time: 1 action
Range: 30 feet
Duration: Instantaneous

You slam a field of invisible force down upon a creature you can see within range, which must make a Strength saving throw. On a failed save, the target takes 1d4 force damage and is knocked prone.

This power's damage increases by 1d4 when you reach 5th level (2d4), 11th level (3d4), and 17th level (4d4).

FLAME'S MASTER

1st-Order Pyrokinesis

Manifestation Time: 1 action
Range: 30 feet
Duration: Instantaneous

You emit a burst of psionic energy that affects every Medium or smaller fire-based light source within range, allowing you to ignite a target light source or snuff it out, choosing individually for each source. Such light sources include campfires, candles, fireplaces, lanterns, oil lamps, torches, and the like, but don't include supernatural sources such as a *sun blade* or an object affected by the *light* spell.

ILLUMINATOR

1st-Order Resopathy

Manifestation Time: 1 action
Range: Self (30-foot cone)
Duration: 1 hour

You create a focused 30-foot cone of bright light, which has sharp edges and gives off no dim light. You can change the color of the light and can turn it on and off as you desire (no action required).

INVISIBLE FORCE

1st-Order Telekinesis

Manifestation Time: 1 action
Range: 30 feet
Duration: Instantaneous

When you manifest this power, pick one of the following options:

Manipulate Object. You manipulate one object with movable parts within range. For example, you could open or close a door, pull a lever, or play a few notes on a harpsichord.

Move Object. Choose one object that weighs 5 pounds or less within range. You move that object up to 30 feet, including up, but not beyond the range of this power. An object moved up begins to fall as soon as that movement ends.

Object Attack. Pick one object that weighs 5 pounds or less within range, and one creature within range. You hurl the object at the creature, making a ranged power attack. On a hit, the target takes 1d8 bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage, depending on the nature of the object. This attack's damage increases by 1d8 when you reach 5th level (2d8), 11th level (3d8), and 17th level (4d8).

PSIONIC BOLT

1st-Order Resopathy

Manifestation Time: 1 action
Range: 120 feet
Duration: Instantaneous

You shoot forth a purple beam of psychic force to strike a creature or object in range. Make a ranged power attack against the target. On a hit, the target takes 1d6 force damage, and if they are Large or smaller, they are pushed 5 feet away from you.

This attack's damage increases by 1d6 when you reach 5th level (2d6), 11th level (3d6), and 17th level (4d6).

PSYCHIC STAB

1st-Order Telepathy

Manifestation Time: 1 action
Range: 120 feet
Duration: Instantaneous

One creature you can see within range must make an Intelligence saving throw. On a failed save, the target takes 1d10 psychic damage.

This power's damage increases by 1d10 when you reach 5th level (2d10), 11th level (3d10), and 17th level (4d10).

REWRITE

1st-Order Resopathy

Manifestation Time: 1 action
Range: 5 feet
Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

You bend a small portion of reality to target a Tiny nonsupernatural object within range that isn't carried or worn by another creature. For the duration, that object is transformed into another Tiny nonsupernatural object of your choice, which must be of the same or lesser value as the original.

TIME THIEF

1st-Order Chronopathy

Manifestation Time: 1 action
Range: 30 feet
Duration: Instantaneous

You psionically absorb the life force of a creature within range, causing them to age faster than normal. The target must make a Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, they take 1d4 necrotic damage and you gain temporary hit points equal to the damage taken.

This power's damage increases by 1d4 when you reach 5th level (2d4), 11th level (3d4), and 17th level (4d4).

PSIONICS OVERVIEW

psi·on·ics *The ability to affect physical change in the world or yourself through the power of thought alone.*

Characters with extraordinary mental powers not derived from prayer or magic feature in many of our favorite stories. *The Talent and Psionics* supplement lets you bring those kinds of heroes to life in your 5e game, describing characters and creatures whose vast mental might lets them manifest psionic powers through force of will. Heroes who wield these gifts use only their thoughts and bodily energy to hurl objects through the air, send telepathic messages, manipulate time, and reshape the world around them.

The Talent and Psionics details the full rules for using powers for player characters, including a new mechanic called strain that determines how long—and how safely—a character can manifest their psionic powers. Psionic monsters and NPCs follow simpler rules, as do the powers available to characters with the gem dragon parentage presented in this article.

The 1st-order powers detailed above can be used at will by a character with the Natural Psionics trait, much like a character who knows a cantrip. Even if your character is a talent created using the rules found in *The Talent and Psionics*, using a 1st-order power gained through Natural Psionics does not impose strain on your character.

POWERS

A power is a specific psionic effect created by energy drawn out of the manifester's body. A power is an incredible tool that can solve problems, harm enemies, or protect and aid you and your allies.

Powers aren't magical. Effects and spells that affect or interact with magic, including *detect magic*, *identify*, *antimagic field*, *counterspell*, *dispel magic*, and *globe of invulnerability*, have no effect on psionic powers or



psionic items. Likewise, effects that affect or interact with powers don't affect spells, magic items, or other magical effects.

New Action: Manifest a Power

The Talent and Psionics introduces a new action option for creatures with access to psionic powers: Manifest a Power, which allows talents and other creatures to use their psionic powers. Manifesting a power is not necessarily an action, but most powers (including all the powers available through Natural Psionics) have a manifestation time of 1 action.

Any effect that ends as the result of casting a spell, such as the *invisibility* or *sanctuary* spells, also ends if you manifest a power in the same way. If you wear armor you lack proficiency with, you can't manifest powers because the armor's bulk is a mental distraction.

Psionics are powers of the mind. As such, any effect that affects a creature's mind to prevent that creature from taking the Cast a Spell action also prevents them from taking the Manifest a Power action. This includes effects such as the barbarian's Rage feature and the *feeblemind* spell.

Manifestation Ability

Every creature that can manifest one or more psionic powers has a manifestation ability. For talents, this ability is Intelligence, but a character with the Natural Psionics trait can choose Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma as their manifestation ability for the powers they gain from that trait.

Saving Throws. Many powers specify that a target can make a saving throw to avoid some or all of the power's effects. The power specifies the ability that the target uses for the save and what happens on a success or failure.

The DC to resist one of your psionic powers equals 8 + your proficiency bonus + your manifestation ability modifier + any special modifiers.

Attack Rolls. Some powers require the manifester to make an attack roll to determine whether the power's effect hits the intended target. Your attack modifier with a power attack equals your manifestation ability modifier + your proficiency bonus.

Power Order

Each of the full slate of powers presented in *The Talent and Psionics* has an order from 1 to 6. A power of 1st order might let you hurl little objects through the air or produce small jets of flame out of nothing, while 6th-order powers allow you to bring down buildings or create a fiery vortex!

Powers of the 1st order are simple, and most creatures that can manifest them—including characters with the Natural Psionics trait—do so at will.

Supernatural

"Supernatural" is a new game term that describes an effect or item that is either magical or psionic. For instance, a creature might have resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from attacks that aren't supernatural. This means that as long as an attack comes from a spell, power, magic weapon, or psionic weapon, it overcomes the creature's damage resistances. Likewise, an object described as "nonsupernatural" is one that is neither a magic item nor a psionic item.

Power Specialty

Every power falls under one of the following categories, known as specialties:

Chronopathy powers allow you to view future and past events, and to manipulate time to aid allies and hinder foes.

Metamorphosis powers allow you to strengthen and manipulate your body and the bodies of others, allowing for the performance of preternatural exploits.

Pyrokinesis powers allow you to create and manipulate fire by interacting with the potential energy found in all things.

Resopathy powers allow you to manipulate matter and space to create, alter, or displace your environment and the creatures and objects in it.

Telekinesis powers allow you to physically manipulate creatures and objects.

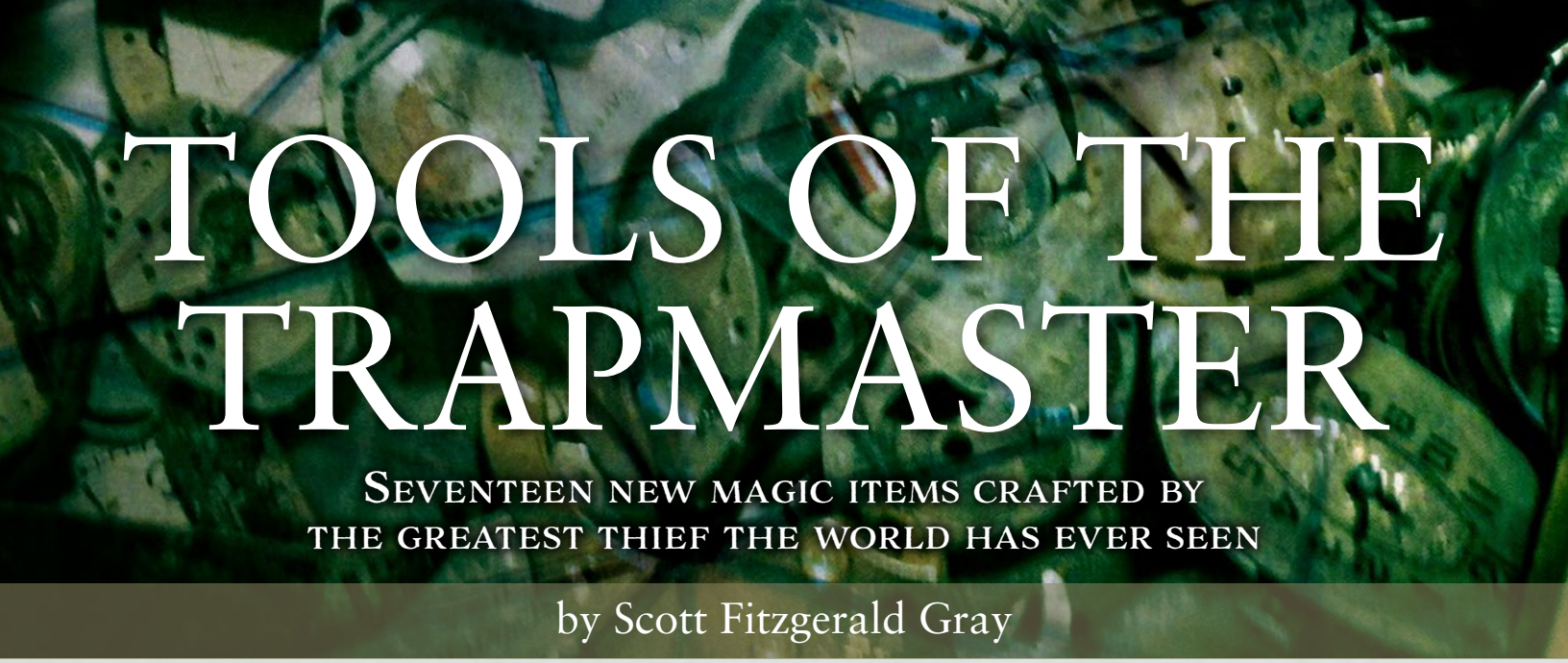
Telepathy powers allow you to communicate with, read, and influence the minds of other creatures.

Duration

A power's duration is the length of time it remains active after you manifest it. When you manifest a power with a duration longer than instantaneous, it remains active for the specified duration. (Instantaneous powers work just like instantaneous spells, in that they affect the world only for an instant even if they produce an effect that lingers in the world.)

You can choose to end any of your current active powers at any point on your turn without using an action. If you become incapacitated or die, all of your current active powers end immediately.

Concentration. Like spells, many powers require you to maintain concentration to keep their effects active. Unlike with spells, though, you can simultaneously maintain concentration on a number of powers equal to your proficiency bonus. However, you can't concentrate on a power and a spell or other effect at the same time.



TOOLS OF THE TRAPMASTER

Seventeen new magic items crafted by the greatest thief the world has ever seen

by Scott Fitzgerald Gray

For thirty years, the virtuoso thief known as Lynseda the Trapmaster was the scourge of monarchs, nobles, clergy, and merchant lords in a dozen different kingdoms. The most successful and most wanted burglar of all time, Lynseda was known for upwards of a hundred daring robberies whose unbelievable details inspired the works of bards and dramatists for decades. But precious few who told her tales ever learned the full details of Lynseda's mastery of the larcenous arts.

Trained as a mage from childhood, Lynseda is said to have fled her arcane order's exclusive university with a stolen *bag of holding* stuffed with even-more-exclusive treasures and lore. A skilled crafter of magic items even before her self-imposed exile, the mage dedicated herself to the creation of tools that would allow her to steal more. And so was born the legend of the Trapmaster, the master mage-thief who spent a lifetime crafting unique magic items meant for larceny.

For decades, Lynseda made use of the suite of unique magic items she called the Tools of the Trapmaster, eluding the law with some of history's most notorious heists. Then ten years ago, the Trapmaster's reign of legendary larceny ended. Whether Lynseda was killed during a failed heist or simply decided to take a well-earned retirement, none can say. But over the past three years, a number of these magical Tools of the Trapmaster have reappeared in the world, and the secrets of making them have begun to spread.

Ambush Dust

Wondrous Item, Rare

This plain paper sachet sets a tingling in the fingers that open it and holds a sample of gritty gray dust. There is enough of it for one use.

As an action, you can scatter the *ambush dust* in the sachet onto any object that isn't being worn or carried and weighs no more than 10 pounds. Within the next minute, you or another creature can cast a spell of 3rd level or lower that targets a creature or affects an area upon the dust, causing the dust to vanish and imbuing the spell into the object. The next time the object is used according to its normal function, the spell imbued into the object is cast, targeting the creature using it or using the object as its point of origin.

An object's function must be specific and active for *ambush dust* to affect it. The dust can be used to trap tomes and books when they are opened and read, to trap an enemy's weapon when it's used to attack, to sabotage clothing or footwear when first put on, to lace food or drink with a deadly magical kick when imbibed, and so forth. But the spell trap can't be triggered by a general action, such as a creature simply picking the object up, or by a passive function, such as merely viewing a work of art. (That said, *ambush dust* could turn a painting or sculpture in progress into a deadly trap for the artist working on it.)

While imbued with a spell from the dust, the affected object radiates a faint magic aura of the spell's school.

Bracelet of Extended Touch

Wondrous Item, Rare (Requires Attunement)

When worn on the wrist, this tarnished silver bracelet hovers above your skin, never touching it. The bracelet has 3 charges and regains 1d3 expended charges daily at dawn. While you wear the bracelet, you can expend 1 charge (no extra action required) while you undertake an activity performed with your hands that requires an action in combat or that takes no longer than 1 minute

out of combat, using the bracelet's magic to perform that activity up to 30 feet away from you. Such activities can include weapon attacks, Dexterity checks using thieves' tools, giving first aid to a dying creature, shoving a foe, opening a door, playing a short tune on a musical instrument, using a pen to write a note, or other activities deemed suitable by the GM.

The effect of your activity is translated across the distance, and any equipment you use for the activity remains in your hand but is affected or used up by the activity as normal. You must be able to see the creature or object that is the target of the activity.

You undertake an activity with the bracelet using the action the activity normally uses. However, each use of the bracelet covers only a single activity. For example, if you make multiple weapon attacks as an action, one use of the bracelet covers only one of those attacks.

CALTROPS OF ENMITY

Wondrous Item, Uncommon

These black-iron caltrops sometimes rattle in their bag of their own accord. As an action, you activate the caltrops and spread them to cover a square area that is 10 feet on a side. The color of the caltrops changes to blend in with the surface they're scattered on, requiring a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check to spot them.

For 10 minutes after the caltrops are scattered, when any creature enters the area, the caltrops move, throwing themselves under the creature's feet. Each creature moving through the area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 1d8 piercing damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one. A creature moving through the area at half speed has advantage on the saving throw. A creature that stops in the area must make the saving throw each time it moves again.

Taking damage from the caltrops reduces a creature's walking speed by 10 feet unless their speed has already been reduced by the caltrops. This reduction lasts until the creature regains at least 1 hit point. Once activated, the caltrops become nonmagical after 10 minutes.

DOOM KNOCKER

Wondrous Item, Very Rare

This palm-sized brass door knocker is carved in the shape of a leering demonic face, its eyes flickering with faint flame. As an action, you can affix the *doom knocker* to any door, gate, window, chest, or similar object or entryway that can be opened or closed and is at least 1 square foot in area. Doing so magically locks the entryway or object and sets a powerful magical trap upon it.



An object or entryway sealed by the *doom knocker* is more difficult to break or force open and requires a successful Strength (Athletics) check or Dexterity check using thieves' tools to open; the DC for these checks increases by 10 (minimum of DC 20 for an object or entryway that is normally easy to open). On a failed check, or if a creature tries to destroy the knocker or the object it is affixed to, a pulse of energy scours the five creatures closest to the knocker within 60 feet of it. (If more than five creatures are equally close, roll randomly to see which ones are affected.)

Each affected creature must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw, taking 4d10 cold, fire, force, lightning, or thunder damage (chosen by you when you affix the knocker) on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The creature that failed the check to bypass the knocker, as well as any creature that used the knocker, has disadvantage on the saving throw.

Once the *doom knocker*'s magic is triggered or bypassed, it vanishes and reappears on your person.

DUNGEONEER'S NET

Wondrous Item, Very Rare

This small mist net is woven of light silk and feels slightly tacky to the touch. As an action, you can throw the *dungeoneer's net* at any point you can see within 100 feet of you, whereupon it expands to cover a square area up to 20 feet on a side and fixes itself to any surfaces it can make contact with. You decide the orientation of the net, which collapses down to its undeployed form if not anchored to a surface on at least one side.

When deployed, the net is a mesh wall of thick, knotted cords spaced at 6-inch intervals. It is solid and can support up to 1,000 pounds, allowing it to be used as a climbing net or an impromptu bridge. Creatures crossing or climbing the net can do so at full speed with no risk of falling.

While you are within 100 feet of the net, you can use a bonus action to speak the net's command word to turn its cords sticky or to revert it to its normal form. While the net is sticky, any creature that enters the net's area or starts its turn there must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be restrained. A creature can use their action to make a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check, freeing themself or another creature within their reach on a success.

Creatures on opposite sides of the net have three-quarters cover against each other unless they are both within 5 feet of the net.

While deployed, the net has AC 15, 150 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. A creature making a weapon attack against the net while it is sticky must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or have the attack automatically miss as their weapon becomes stuck to the net. If the weapon's wielder can't or won't let go of the weapon, the wielder is grappled while the weapon is stuck. While stuck, the weapon can't be used. A creature can pull the weapon free by taking an action to make a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check and succeeding.



The net can't be attacked to dislodge it where it is anchored to a surface, but a 5-foot-section of the net can be torn free from a surface with a successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check. Tearing the net from a surface or dealing 30 damage to it opens a 5-foot-wide gap that is difficult terrain if passed through. If the net is sticky, creatures passing through it might become restrained as described above.

If destroyed while deployed, the net reverts to its undeployed form.

Once you deploy the net, it can't be deployed again until the next dawn.

GUIDING SPOOL

Wondrous Item, Uncommon

When looked at closely, the white thread wrapped around this large wooden spool first shimmers, then fades from view. The thread released by the *guiding spool* is a magical line that you can unfurl behind you to mark your path. As an action, you can activate the spool, whereupon its thread unravels as you move.

When you activate the spool, you determine whether its thread can be seen by all creatures or only by creatures of your choice. You trail thread from the spool out behind you for up to 1 mile. At up to three points along the route, you can mentally compose a message of twenty-five words or fewer, which the thread transcribes by looping itself into writing in any language you know, which can be read by creatures that can see the thread.

The thread radiates faint transmutation magic. Because the magic that conceals the thread is not illusory in nature, effects such as truesight or the *see invisibility* spell do not reveal it. The thread can endure mild stresses and being stepped on, but it breaks if pressure is applied to it. It is not strong enough to bind or carry an object. A creature that can see the thread can break or move it. A creature that can't see the thread can detect it with a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check.

Once you activate the spool, it can't be activated again until the next dawn.

SECRET POOL CANTEEN

Wondrous Item, Rare

This bulbous leather waterskin makes no sloshing sound despite clearly being filled with liquid. As an action, you can open the canteen to pour out its contents, which cover any roughly horizontal surface in a 10-foot-square area. The area of liquid appears as a shallow puddle or wet stain, depending on the surface onto which it's poured. In reality, the surface liquid conceals a 10-foot-deep extradimensional pool of fresh, clear water, the depths of which can't be seen from above. A creature that steps into the area of the pool must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or plunge into the water.

You can use the secret pool as a freshwater source in inhospitable climes, a short-term hiding place, or a longer-term hiding place for characters with the ability to breathe underwater or who use pipes or straws to access air above the pool's surface.

You can also use the pool as a dangerous water-filled pit trap by speaking a command word when the canteen is opened and poured. When a pool is created this way, a creature that steps into its area has disadvantage on the saving throw to avoid falling in. On a failed save, a creature is pulled under the water and begins to suffocate if they can't breathe underwater, and the water's surface becomes a resilient barrier. A creature can use their action to make a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check from above or below the pool's surface, freeing themself or a creature trapped inside on a success. The pool can be dispelled with *dispel magic* (DC 16), which causes the pool to vanish and leaves any creatures or objects that were inside the pool wet and prone in the area the pool covered.

Water poured from the canteen lasts for 1 hour, then instantly evaporates. Once used, the canteen can't be used again until the next dawn.

SHADOW ROPES

Wondrous Item, Rare

These two 10-foot-long black silk cords are set with silver caps and appear to shed wisps of shadow when handled. The *shadow ropes* channel powerful extradimensional magic, allowing them to create openings in solid matter or establish a teleportation link between themselves. As an action or as part of the actions used to wield the ropes' magic (see below), you can speak a command word to magically fuse their ends together or separate them again, allowing you to create two 10-foot-circumference loops, a single 20-foot-long rope, or a 20-foot-circumference loop. The ropes are treated as silk rope if used for mundane purposes.

If the two shadow ropes are more than 10 feet from each other for more than 1 hour, one rope vanishes and reappears next to the other rope, as determined by the GM.

Shadow Passage. As an action, you can link both ropes together into a single loop and stick the loop to any surface (including non-horizontal surfaces), marking a circular area just over 6 feet across. Within that area, an extradimensional opening extends 10 feet into whatever surface the loop is placed on, creating a doorway in a wall, an alcove, a pit trap in solid ground, an opening in a floor or ceiling, and so forth. While the extradimensional opening is active, the surface's appearance



is maintained from both sides, and a Large or smaller creature that pushes through the surface within the circle disappears behind that surface. Once the loop is placed, it blends into the surface it sits on and can only be found with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check.

The extradimensional opening lasts for 10 minutes or until you pick up the rope. If another creature tries to touch the rope, their fingers pass through formless shadow. Any creatures or objects in the extradimensional space when the effect ends are safely ejected to an unoccupied space nearest to the surface on which the rope was placed.

Once used in this way, this property can't be used again until the next dawn.

Shadow Portal. As an action, one of the ropes can be looped to itself and placed on a surface to mark out an area just over 3 feet across. Once both ropes are placed in this way, their magic creates a teleportation portal linking the two loops for 10 minutes. A Medium or smaller creature that moves into one rope's circle appears within the other rope's circle as long as both ropes are on the same plane.

Once used in this way, this property can't be used again until the next dawn.

SILENT SCRIBE

Wondrous Item, Uncommon

This hand-sized ceramic disk has tiny, faint pen strokes across it, as if it's been written on by a tiny hand. As an action while within 30 feet of the *silent scribe*, you can mentally command it to activate and automatically record every word spoken within 30 feet of it, ignoring breaks and silences. The device scribes the words as tiny letters on its surface, up to a total of 10 minutes of speech. When filled, the disk records over itself, so that it always holds a record of the most recent 10 minutes of speech within range.

While within 30 feet of the *silent scribe*, you can mentally command it to stop recording (no action required). Its tiny writing can then be read with a magnifying glass or similar aid, or you can speak a command word to have the *silent scribe* read aloud everything it's recorded. The scribe marks when one speaker changes to another but doesn't identify who is speaking in any way. It records and reads back speech in any language, but doesn't translate it, and it leaves blanks where verbal spell components, magic item command words, true-names, and other words of power would be.

SOFT SNARE

Wondrous Item, Uncommon

This hand-sized patch of white cloth subtly shifts in your grip when first handled. By speaking the snare's command word, you transform it into any fabric-based object that can be folded or squeezed down to Small size or smaller—a potato sack, a shirt or pair of trousers, a cushion, a bedsheet, a small carpet, a handkerchief, and so forth.

When a creature interacts with the object in a manner consistent with its normal use (donning a shirt, lying on or hugging a cushion, and so forth), the object immediately unravels into a storm of threads that try to wrap the creature in a tight cocoon. When the trap is triggered, the target must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or be restrained. The threads simultaneously lash out to bind themselves to a solid surface or a sizeable or weighty object within 10 feet, locking the victim down and hindering any attempts to crawl or roll away. A creature restrained by the snare can use an action to make a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, breaking free or slipping out of the cocoon on a success.

The *soft snare* can visually emulate any textile from rough burlap to fine silk, but it feels like an average-quality cotton cloth if handled in a way that doesn't trigger the trap. The snare can only be transformed

into objects with a specific, active function, which can't include a general action, such as picking the object up.

The *soft snare* remains in its trap form until triggered or until you used an action to speak the command word again. In any form, the snare has AC 20, 10 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. It regains 1 hit point every 5 minutes as long as it has at least 1 hit point. If the *soft snare* drops to 0 hit points, it is destroyed.

Sudden Gate

Wondrous Item, Uncommon

This small stone cube has images of gates and doors scribed into its six faces. As an action, you can throw the *sudden gate* to any location you can see within 30 feet of you, whereupon it expands to become a wall up to 15 feet on a side, inset with a closed door or gate. The wall and entryway take whatever physical appearance you decide upon when you activate the cube, allowing you to match them to adjacent walls and doors. They default to a plain stone wall and a plain wooden door otherwise.

The entryway can be opened normally by you and any creatures you designate when you activate the *sudden gate*. For other creatures, the entryway is magically locked with no visible latch, hinges, or keyhole. The entryway is impervious to damage but can be forced open with a successful Strength (Athletics) check made as an action. The DC to force the entryway depends on how long the magic of the *sudden gate* lasts, determined by you when you throw the cube:

Duration	Strength (Athletics) Check
1 minute	DC 20
1 hour	DC 17
24 hours	DC 14

If a creature forces the entryway open, it closes at the end of their next turn unless held open.

When the effect ends, the wall and entryway vanish and the *sudden gate* reappears on your person.

Swarm Receptacle

Wondrous Item, Uncommon

This fine-looking container occasionally rattles when the area around it is silent. As an action, you can touch the *swarm receptacle* and speak its command word to choose one of its four forms, transforming it into a receptacle that can hold mundane materials. Using another action, you can touch the receptacle and speak a second command word to activate it as a magical trap that conjures a swarm from the receptacle when it is opened.

The forms of the receptacle and the swarms it holds in each form are as follows:

- A smoked-glass wine carafe, which conjures a **swarm of bats**
- A whimsically patterned cookie jar, which conjures a **swarm of rats**
- An insulated hot-beverage flask, which conjures a **swarm of insects**
- A finely made screw-top wooden canister labeled "Candy," which conjures a **swarm of poisonous snakes**

When a swarm is conjured, it spills forth from the receptacle to attack any creatures within 30 feet of the receptacle for 1 minute. When the effect ends, the swarm vanishes and the receptacle reseals itself. Once the receptacle conjures a swarm, it can't be used again until the next dawn.

Talisman of Trap Sense

Wondrous Item, Uncommon (Requires Attunement)

This cloth headband is set with a cameo showing the figure of a contemplative elf, their hand raised as if in



benediction. (The engraved figure is recognizable as a common image of Lynseda by any character who has researched the Trapmaster.)

While you wear the talisman, you have advantage on saving throws against the effects of mundane and magical traps, including *glyph of warding* and similar spells, and mundane and magical traps have disadvantage on attack rolls against you.

Trapmaster's Icon

Wondrous Item, Uncommon (Requires Attunement)

Set on a fine chain, this icon takes the form of a silver padlock with a key inserted in it. The key turns of its own accord from time to time. When you fail a Dexterity check using thieves' tool while wearing the icon, you can reroll the check and use either result. Once you do so, you can't use the icon again until the next dawn.

Trapmaster's Token

Wondrous Item, Uncommon

This fingernail-sized metal disk is etched with shifting, rotating symbols, which resemble the tumblers of a complex lock. As an action, you can attach the *Trapmaster's token* to another object with a thin tip—a weapon, a crowbar, a walking stick, and so forth—or remove it from an object it's attached to. While the object bearing the token is on your person, you have proficiency with thieves' tools. If you already have proficiency with thieves' tools, your proficiency bonus is doubled for ability checks you make using those tools.

Additionally, as an action, you can set the tip of the object bearing the token to a lock. If the DC to open that lock with a Dexterity check using thieves' tools is equal to or less than 15 plus your proficiency bonus, the lock opens. Opening the lock in this way bypasses any trap connected to the lock that can be disabled with a Dexterity check using thieves' tools equal to or less than 15 plus your proficiency bonus, but triggers more complicated traps. Once you use this property, it can't be used again until the next dawn.

Trapmaster's Tools

Wondrous Item, Common

These thieves' tools appear well worn and corroded, but are clearly of fine quality when handled. In addition to using the tools normally, you can speak their command word to transform them into what appears to be a set of well-worn artisan's tools, common tools or implements, or similar gear. While in the form of artisan's tools, the *Trapmaster's tools* function as those tools, allowing you to make use of your proficiency bonus on ability checks if you have the appropriate tool proficiency. In addition, the tools function as thieves' tools while in any of their alternate forms. For example, you might pick the lock on a door while creating the appearance of carpenter's tools to repair the door.

Trap-Reaver Gloves

Wondrous Item, Rare

Woven from fine silver thread, these gloves are so light they go almost unnoticed when worn. While wearing the gloves, if you succeed on a saving throw against a mundane or magical trap or a trap fails an attack roll against you, you can use your reaction to magically assess and store the effect of the trap in the gloves. (The gloves don't stop the trap from being triggered to completion. You suffer the trap's effects even on a successful saving throw, and other creatures making saves against the trap gain no benefit from your use of the gloves.)

While the gloves store the essence of a trap, you can imbue that essence into an object or location similar to that which held the trap in the first place. You might move the effect of a trapped chest to a door, reproduce a *glyph of warding* in another area, and so forth (the GM determines whether the new location is suitable). The original trap is not destroyed or moved, but is magically recreated at the new location. The new trap activates in the same way as the original trap, with the same DCs to locate, bypass, or disable it. The effects of a mundane trap (a poisoned needle, a spring-loaded blade, and so forth) are reproduced as a shadowy image when the recreated trap is triggered. If the original trap targeted multiple creatures, the recreated trap targets only the creature that triggers it.

The gloves can only store the effect of one trap at a time. When you store the effect of a trap, you can't use that property of the gloves again until the next dawn, at which point any stored trap in the gloves fades away.

Lynseda's Legacy

The magic items created by Lynseda fueled her unprecedented success as a thief in more ways than one. Each of the items comprising the Tools of the Trapmaster was created to synergize with other items in the set, and as such, a character attuned to one of the Tools of the Trapmaster who has another of the tools in their possession (attuned or not) gains the following feature:

Trapmaster's Synergy. When you make a Dexterity check using thieves' tools to disarm or set a trap, an Intelligence (Investigation) check to notice or determine the workings of a trap, or a Wisdom (Perception) check to search for a trap, you can choose to gain advantage on the check. You can use this feature a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

RESOURCES

MCDM TABLETOP SAFETY TOOLKIT

https://mcdm.gg/SafetyToolkit

You can find all issues of *ARCADIA* on Patreon and in the MCDM shop.

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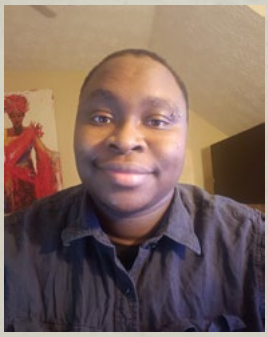

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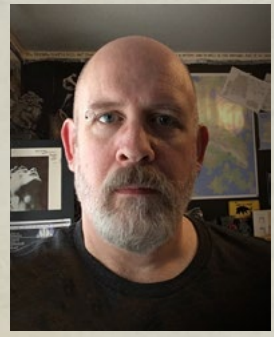

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

At the close of the year, I want to take the opportunity to reflect a little on *ARCADIA*, creativity, and taking a chance to breathe.

January will mark two years of *ARCADIA*. So far, we've released 72 articles by 48 different authors, featuring 128 stat blocks, 17 subclasses, 45 spells, 100 magic items, and much, much more. (Many thanks to Reuben Hung's *ARCADIA* Index for these stats.) Tens of thousands of people have found inspiration and joy in our little magazine, which feels wild to say. More than the numbers, I absolutely adore hearing anecdotes from folks using *ARCADIA* in their games to tell stories, bring friends together, and introduce new people to the wonders of TTRPGs. Art and storytelling are magic.

One of the things that makes *ARCADIA* unique is its room for boundless creativity—we don't tell authors what to pitch beyond some examples and guidelines on scope, and we actively invite the weird, the wacky, the wonderful. Each author gets to write something they're really excited about, a concept that comes wholly from them, in their own voice and with authority throughout the development process. There's a ton of delightful collaboration (editors, playtesters, art, and more) that goes into each article, but it's a chance for the author's personal creativity to shine. And then that creativity inspires *your* creativity as GMs and players—and that's magic, too.

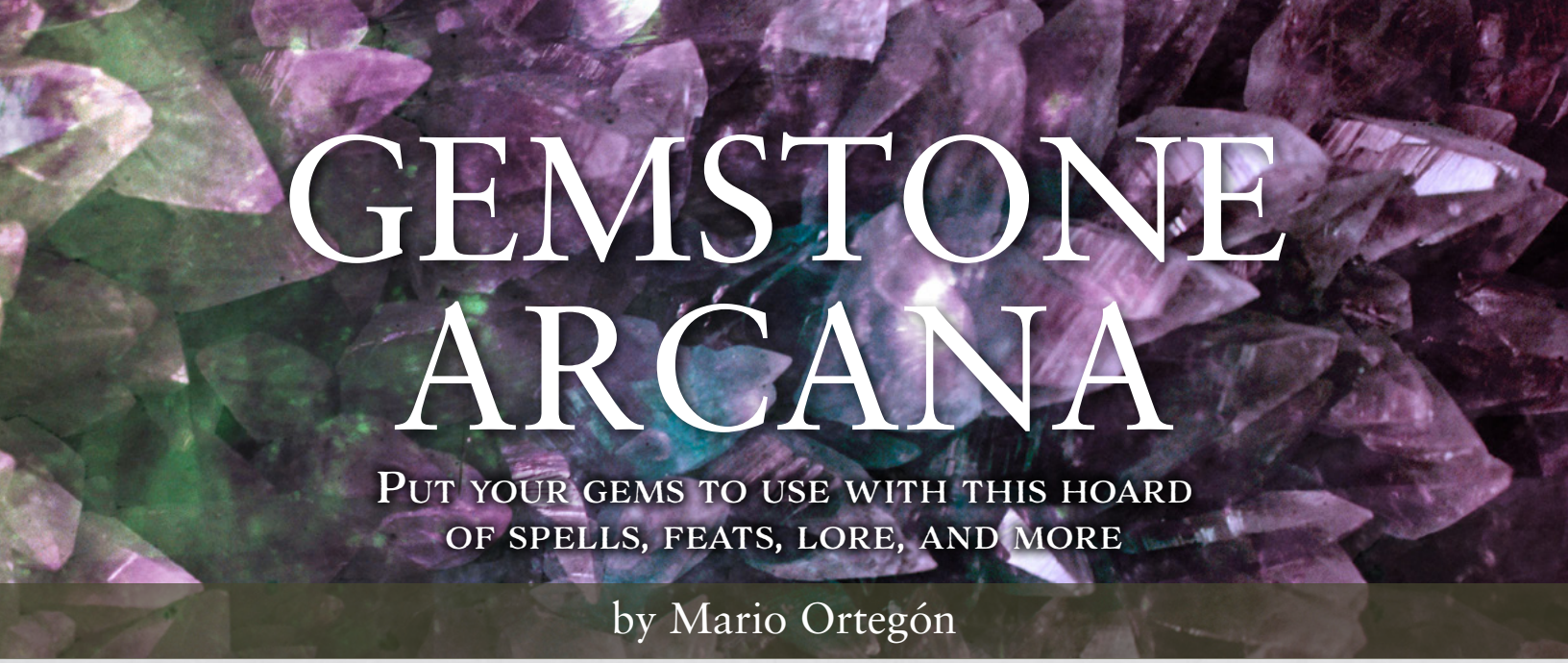
But, like everything else, creativity has its seasons. For many people, the end of the year brings a lot of reflection (deliberate or otherwise). It's a natural stopping point, a sign to look back over a neatly demarcated span of time and sum things up. And for those of us in the northern hemisphere, it's also a time of rest and renewal—a season to pause our struggle for new growth as we appreciate simpler things, like food and warmth and the crystalized silence after the first snowfall. I hope that you can take time—a week, a day, a single breath here and there—to cherish something that renews you, that gives rather than demands.

With over two dozen articles in development at a time, it's always a challenge to carve out time to sit down and compose these letters. But they're really special to me, because it's a chance to talk to you in my own voice—to take a break from juggling everything and just *write*. It's a rest, a pause in the arpeggio of other tasks. I love these moments where I get to pick a topic I'm in the mood for and write as myself, without the parameters of a particular adventure, subclass, or campaign setting. As I look forward to the new year of *ARCADIA*, I realize that getting to talk to all of you on Discord, Patreon, and through these letters is another source of joy, renewal, and inspiration.

Renewal is a vital part of creativity. We need to rest and feed ourselves (literally and metaphorically) in order to keep creating, as hard as it is to do. So let us rest, recharge, take in the small things and the big world around us, and we'll be ready for what's to come in the new year.

Speaking of what's to come, I promised a few teasers for future *ARCADIA* articles. So, as a little gift from me this holiday season: Dragons. Explosives. Fantasy skateboards. New kinds of magic that reach new heights of nerdiness. Sharkboat. To borrow a phrase from Matt, 2023 *ARCADIA* is going to be *really freaking dope*.

De somnio ad itinere,
Hannah Rose
Managing Editor



GEMSTONE ARCANA

Put your gems to use with this hoard of spells, feats, lore, and more

by Mario Ortegón

Gemstones have been a staple spell component in the core game for decades, but in the latest edition, many types of gemstones aren't represented as material components. What kind of magics can be wrought with a topaz? A moonstone? What about an amethyst?

This article provides ideas for the magical properties of gems, which you can use as a GM or player to enrich your stories. It also presents three categories of new gem-themed options: feats that allow characters to use gemstones in unique ways, spells that use underrepresented gems as components, and a gemstone magic item.

GEMSTONE PROPERTIES

Many seek gemstones for more than their monetary value, for they also believe gems hold magical and spiritual properties that can be harnessed by those sensitive to their power. In your campaign's world, these beliefs could have a measure of truth to them, or they might be rooted in superstition. Either way, these properties can offer interesting plot hooks and roleplaying opportunities.

This section describes concepts and categories associated with a gemstone's dominant color. In addition, the Individual Gemstone Associations table lists specific gemstones and what they most commonly symbolize. This list is by no means definitive—feel free to add or change properties to better fit the nature and cultures of your campaign's world. The associations by gemstone color are as follows:

Black. Black gems are associated with darkness, willpower, and the afterlife. They also embody solidity and negation, making them strong conduits for defensive magics.

Blue. Blue gems are typically connected with the sky, water, and air. They make excellent components for magic that deals with communication, knowledge, and truth.

Brown. Brown gems are grounding stones that represent stability and the earth. They're often used in magic relating to animals.

Green. Green gems embody nature, growth, and fertility. They are aligned with magic that involves good luck, sight, and abundance.

Pink. Pink gems are traditionally associated with affection and compassion. They're components in magic that engenders harmony and good will.

Purple. Purple gems are connected to royalty, spirituality, and wisdom. They also embody magic itself, making them versatile spell components especially suitable for force fields, shields, and other manipulations of pure arcane energy.

Red. Red (and orange) gems are associated with courage, strength, and passion. They make effective components in magic related to fire, force, and vitality.

Translucent. Translucent gems are linked to wholeness and new beginnings. They're sought after as conduits of resurrection magic and to sustain arcane glyphs or dormant magical energy over time.

White. White gems are connected to mystery, light, and awareness. They're as useful for magic that conceals as they are for magic that reveals.

Yellow. Yellow gems evoke the concepts of energy, freedom, and self-expression. They're valued as components in magic that bolsters creativity or enhances movement.

Individual Gemstone Associations

Gem	Associations
Agate	Reason, revelation
Alexandrite	Fortuity, possibility
Amber	Good health, warmth
Amethyst	Stasis, temperance
Aquamarine	Vision, water
Azurite	Dreams, intuition
Bloodstone	Obscurity, the weather
Carnelian	Fearlessness, vitality
Chrysoberyl	Confidence, free will
Citrine	Energy, imagination
Diamond	Eternity, integrity
Emerald	Abundance, honesty
Garnet	Passion, victory
Jacinth	Breath, travel
Jade	Duty, falsehood
Jasper	Heartiness, persistence
Jet	Protection, the soul
Lapis lazuli	Eloquence, piety
Moonstone	Hidden truths, the moon
Obsidian	Earth, nullification
Onyx	Afterlife, conflict
Opal	Change, foresight
Pearl	Purity, understanding
Peridot	Closure, resolution
Quartz	Amplification, focus
Rhodochrosite	Affection, happiness
Ruby	Fire, sovereignty
Sapphire	Bonds, justice
Spinel	Courage, orientation
Tiger eye	Introspection, privacy
Topaz	Eyesight, illumination
Tourmaline	Adaptability, transience
Turquoise	Empathy, safe passage
Zircon	Fulfillment, relief

Gemstone Feats

For groups that use feats, the following options give characters new ways to use gemstones.

Arcane Gemologist

Prerequisite: Spellcasting or Pact Magic feature

You have studied gemstones extensively and can use them more efficiently as spell components. You gain the following benefits:

Gemcrafter. You gain proficiency with jeweler's tools if you don't already have it.

Gemstone Focus. Whenever you finish a long rest, you can touch a nonmagical gem worth at least 10 gp and imbue it with your magic, allowing you to use that gem as a spellcasting focus. When you do, choose one cantrip you know that has a casting time of 1 action. While holding this gemstone focus, you can cast that cantrip as a bonus action a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest. The effect ends if you die, if the gemstone focus is more than 100 feet away from you for at least 24 hours, or if you repeat this process to imbue a gem when you finish a long rest.



Spell Lapidary. You can channel your magic more efficiently through gemstones. The cost of gemstone material components for your spells of 6th level or lower is halved. This benefit extends to gemstone byproducts, such as sculptures or dust.

Gem Awakener

Your soul is magically attuned to gemstones, allowing you to awaken special properties in them. You gain the following benefits:

Ability Score Increase. Increase one ability score of your choice by 1, to a maximum of 20.

Gemstone Bond. Whenever you finish a long rest, you can touch a nonmagical gem worth at least 10 gp and magically bind it to you. While the bound gemstone is on your person, you gain proficiency in one skill associated with that gem's color, as shown in the Gem Skills table. If the gem has multiple colors, you choose which color applies for this property. The effect ends if you die, if the bound gemstone is more than 100 feet away from you for at least 24 hours, or if you repeat this process to bind a different gem when you finish a long rest.

Gem's Favor. When you or a creature you can see within 10 feet of you fails an ability check using the skill your bound gem grants you proficiency in, you can use your reaction to touch the gem and allow that creature to reroll the d20. They must use the new roll. If the ability check succeeds, you can't use the bound gem in this way until you finish a short or long rest.

Gem Skills

Color	Skill
Black	Sleight of Hand or Stealth
Blue	History or Investigation
Brown	Animal Handling or Nature
Green	Perception or Survival
Pink	Persuasion
Purple	Arcana or Religion
Red	Athletics or Intimidation
Translucent	Medicine
White	Deception or Insight
Yellow	Acrobatics or Performance



Gemstone Spells

This section contains new spells that use gems as material components, suitable for player characters, antagonists, and other spellcasters in your campaign. As a GM, consider using these spells as story hooks, sending characters to either find the gemstone components or to develop the spells themselves.

The Gemstone Spells table lists these new spells, ordering them by level and denoting each spell's school of magic, the gemstone used as its material component, and which classes have access to it. At the GM's discretion, these spells can be accessible to additional classes or thematically appropriate subclasses, such as the Avarice Domain cleric, Circle of the Gilded druid, or Oath of Acquisitions paladin from Carlos Cisco's "Goldmonger Subclasses" in *ARCADIA 5*.

Air Walk

1st-Level Transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Touch
Components: S, M (a shard of raw tourmaline worth at least 10 gp, which the spell consumes)
Duration: 1 minute

You touch a creature and imbue them with the power to briefly walk on air. For the duration, at the start of each of their turns, they gain a flying speed equal to their walking speed. At the end of each of their turns, they lose this flying speed and fall if they are still aloft, unless they can stop the fall.

Amethyst Tomb

3rd-Level Conjuration

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 30 feet
Components: V, M (an amethyst worth at least 100 gp)
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You attempt to entomb a creature in crystal. A Large or smaller creature of your choice within range is surrounded by purple light and must make a Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the light solidifies, encasing the target in a shard of purple crystal large enough to contain them until the spell ends or the crystal shatters. While encased, the creature suffers the effects of the petrified condition with the following changes: they have vulnerability to thunder damage and are trapped in crystal instead of turned to stone. An entombed creature can be targeted by attacks and spells as normal.

The crystal shatters if the entombed creature takes 10 or more damage, or if the crystal is moved more than 10 feet in a single turn.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 4th level or higher, the duration is concentration, up to 10 minutes. When you use a spell slot of 5th level or higher, the duration is 8 hours. When you use a spell slot of 7th level or higher, the duration is 24 hours. When you use a 9th-level spell slot, the spell lasts until dispelled. Using a spell slot of 5th level or higher grants a duration that doesn't require concentration.

Gemstone Spells

Level	Spell	School	Gemstone	Class
Cantrip	*Astonishing Presence*	Enchantment	Topaz	Bard, Cleric, Sorcerer, Warlock, Wizard
1st	*Air Walk*	Transmutation	Tourmaline	Bard, Cleric, Druid, Ranger, Wizard
2nd	*Rucio's Resolute Poise*	Illusion	Rhodochrosite	Bard, Cleric, Warlock, Wizard
2nd	*Soulstone*	Necromancy	Jet	Cleric, Druid, Warlock, Wizard
3rd	*Amethyst Tomb*	Conjuration	Amethyst	Druid, Sorcerer, Warlock, Wizard
4th	*Brinn's Exalted Cruiser*	Abjuration	Aquamarine, sapphire, or obsidian	Bard, Cleric, Druid, Ranger
4th	*Moonlit Transformation*	Transmutation	Moonstone	Bard, Cleric, Paladin, Ranger, Sorcerer, Warlock, Wizard
5th	*Marine Benison*	Transmutation	Aquamarine	Cleric, Druid, Ranger
6th	*Misiri's Buried Eye*	Divination	Tiger eye	Cleric, Druid, Wizard
7th	*Crystalline Barrier*	Abjuration	Quartz	Cleric, Druid, Wizard
8th	*Surge of Life*	Evocation	Carnelian	Cleric, Druid, Sorcerer, Wizard

Astonishing Presence

Enchantment Cantrip

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 30 feet
Components: V, S, M (a chip of topaz)
Duration: 1 round

You magically project your presence to influence a creature of your choice that can see or hear you within range. The target must succeed on a Charisma saving throw or be unable to speak or communicate in any way until the end of their next turn.

Brinn's Exalted Cruiser

4th-Level Abjuration (Ritual)

Casting Time: 1 hour
Range: Touch
Components: V, S, M (a chunk of aquamarine, sapphire, or obsidian worth at least 300 gp, which the spell consumes)
Duration: 10 days

You bestow a blessing upon a vehicle you touch. The kind of vehicle determines the material component needed for this spell: aquamarine for waterborne vessels, sapphire for sky ships, and obsidian for land vehicles. For the duration, the vehicle's speed is doubled, it has resistance to nonmagical damage, and creatures occupying the vehicle suffer no penalty on ability checks made to navigate due to hazardous natural conditions, such as weather.

Crystalline Barrier

7th-Level Abjuration

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Self (15-foot radius)
Components: V, S, M (a prism carved from a single piece of translucent quartz worth at least 300 gp)
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

A translucent barrier of crystalline energy manifests in a 15-foot radius around you. Until the spell ends, the barrier moves with you, centered on you. When you cast the spell, you attune the barrier to protect against one of the following damage types: acid, cold, fire, lightning, necrotic, poison, psychic, radiant, or thunder.

Creatures and objects of your choice within the barrier have immunity to the chosen damage type if the damage is from an attack, spell, or effect that originates from outside the barrier.

Marine Benison

5th-Level Transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 10 feet
Components: V, S, M (an aquamarine worth at least 500 gp)
Duration: 1 hour

You send a cloud of droplets to envelop a willing creature within range. For the duration, the creature can breathe underwater, gains a swimming speed of 40 feet, and can comprehend and telepathically communicate with aquatic Beasts they can see. In addition, while fully submerged, the creature has echolocation, which grants them blindsight out to a range of 60 feet. This blindsight can only detect things in the same body of water as the creature, and the creature can't benefit from the blindsight while deafened.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 6th level or higher, you can target one additional creature for each slot level above 5th.

Misiri's Buried Eye

6th-Level Divination (Ritual)

Casting Time: 1 minute
Range: Self
Components: V, S, M (two tiger eye gems, each worth at least 1,000 gp)
Duration: Until dispelled

You bury one of the gems you use as a material component for this spell in a patch of earth or stone large enough to hold it and keep the second gem with you. For as long as the first gem remains buried, you can cast the *scrying* spell on a location within 30 feet of the buried gem without expending a spell slot, using the second gem as the material component for the spell. Once you cast *scrying* in this way, you can't do so again until 24 hours have passed.

While the second gem is on your person, you automatically sense when a magical scrying sensor is within 30 feet of you and always know when you're targeted by divination magic. Additionally, whenever you're targeted by the *scrying* spell, you have advantage on the saving throw against it. On a successful save you can use your reaction to mislead the spell, sending the scrying sensor to a random location within 30 feet of the buried gem.

The spell ends if the first gem is moved from where it was buried or if *dispel magic* or a similar effect is successfully applied to either gem. In either case, the first gem crumbles to dust.

Moonlit Transformation

4th-Level Transmutation

Casting Time: 1 bonus action
Range: Self
Components: V, S, M (a brooch or other heirloom adorned with a moonstone, worth at least 300 gp)
Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

You invoke the moon's power to reveal your hidden self and transform into an idealized version of you. You decide what you look like transformed, changing or enhancing as many details about your appearance as you wish, including your clothing, but you can't change your size nor dramatically alter your body type or arrangement of limbs. You gain the following benefits until the spell ends:

Moonlight Aura. Your body glows with pale moonlight, shedding dim light in a 30-foot-radius area around you.

Moonlight Weapon. A silvery weapon made of pure moonlight materializes in your hand, taking whatever form you choose. If you drop the weapon or throw it, it dissipates at the end of the turn. Thereafter, while the spell persists, you can use a bonus action to conjure it again.

You can use your action to make a melee or ranged spell attack with this weapon against a target you can see within the spell's Moonlight Aura. On a hit, the target takes radiant damage equal to 3d8 + your spellcasting ability modifier, and if they are a shapechanger, they instantly revert to their original form and can't assume a different form until the start of your next turn.

Moonlight Legacy. You gain one of the following magical effects when you transform, chosen by you when you cast the spell:

- Magical armor materializes around your body. Your base AC becomes 13 + your spellcasting ability modifier.
- Pearlescent wings appear on your back, giving you a flying speed of 30 feet.
- The spell's Moonlight Aura increases to a 60-foot radius.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 5th level or higher, the spell's Moonlight Weapon damage increases by 1d8 for each slot level above 4th. Additionally, for every two slot levels above 4th, you can choose an extra Moonlight Legacy benefit when you transform.

Rucio's Resolute Poise

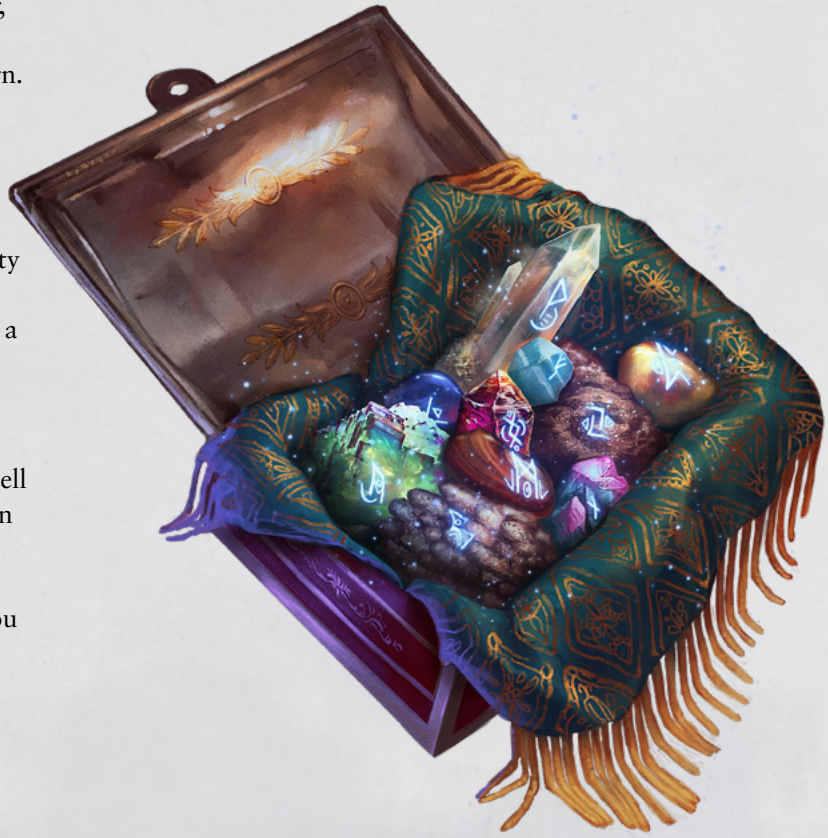
2nd-Level Illusion

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Self
Components: V, S, M (a rhodochrosite worth at least 10 gp)
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You imbue yourself with a spirit of whimsical grandeur. For the duration, you have advantage on saving throws against being frightened. In addition, whenever you take damage, that damage is reduced by an amount equal to your spellcasting ability modifier. Each time this occurs, an illusion makes it appear as if the attack, spell, or effect that damaged you instead failed to affect you. Any additional effects that accompany the damage (such as forced movement or being grappled) still occur, but the illusion causes creatures around you to rationalize those effects as something you did on purpose.

A creature who uses their action to examine you can determine the effect is an illusion with a successful Intelligence (Investigation) check against your spell save DC. If a creature discerns the illusion for what it is, the creature can see through it for the remainder of the spell's duration, though the spell's damage reduction benefit remains in effect.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, you roll 1d8 and add the result to the amount of damage you reduce for every two slot levels above 2nd.



Soulstone

2nd-Level Necromancy

Casting Time: 1 minute
Range: Self
Components: S, M (a jet with your name carved in it worth at least 100 gp)
Duration: 24 hours

You tether your own spirit to the gemstone used as the material component, forming a temporary bond with it. For the duration, while the jet is on your person, you have advantage on death saving throws. The spell ends early if the jet is destroyed, is more than 100 feet away from you for at least 1 hour, or if you cast the spell again using a different jet.

When you fail a saving throw against an effect that would result in you being possessed or gaining a level of exhaustion, you can choose to succeed instead and the jet crumbles to dust.

Surge of Life

8th-Level Evocation

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 30 feet
Components: V, S, M (a blood-red carnelian worth at least 250 gp, which the spell consumes)
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You bind the life force of a creature within range to the unbridled energies of creation. The target regains 1 hit point and can immediately spend one or more Hit Dice, rolling them to regain additional hit points as if they had finished a short rest.

For the duration, the creature can't die from exhaustion. Furthermore, whenever the creature would drop to 0 hit points as a result of taking damage, they instead drop to 1 hit point. Each time this occurs, you must make a concentration check to maintain concentration on this spell, as if you had taken the same amount of damage.

Immanent Gems

This section introduces a new type of wondrous item: immanent gems. These magic-infused gemstones can be used as spellcasting focuses or in place of material components for spells. In your campaign world, these gems might be rare natural minerals, the work of masterful arcane gemologists, remnants of ancient technology, or something else entirely.

Immanent Gem

Wondrous Item, Rarity Varies (Requires Attunement)

This iridescent gem is infused with raw magical energy, filling it with infinitely folding patterns that look different at every glance. While you are holding this gem, you can use it as a spellcasting focus for your spells.

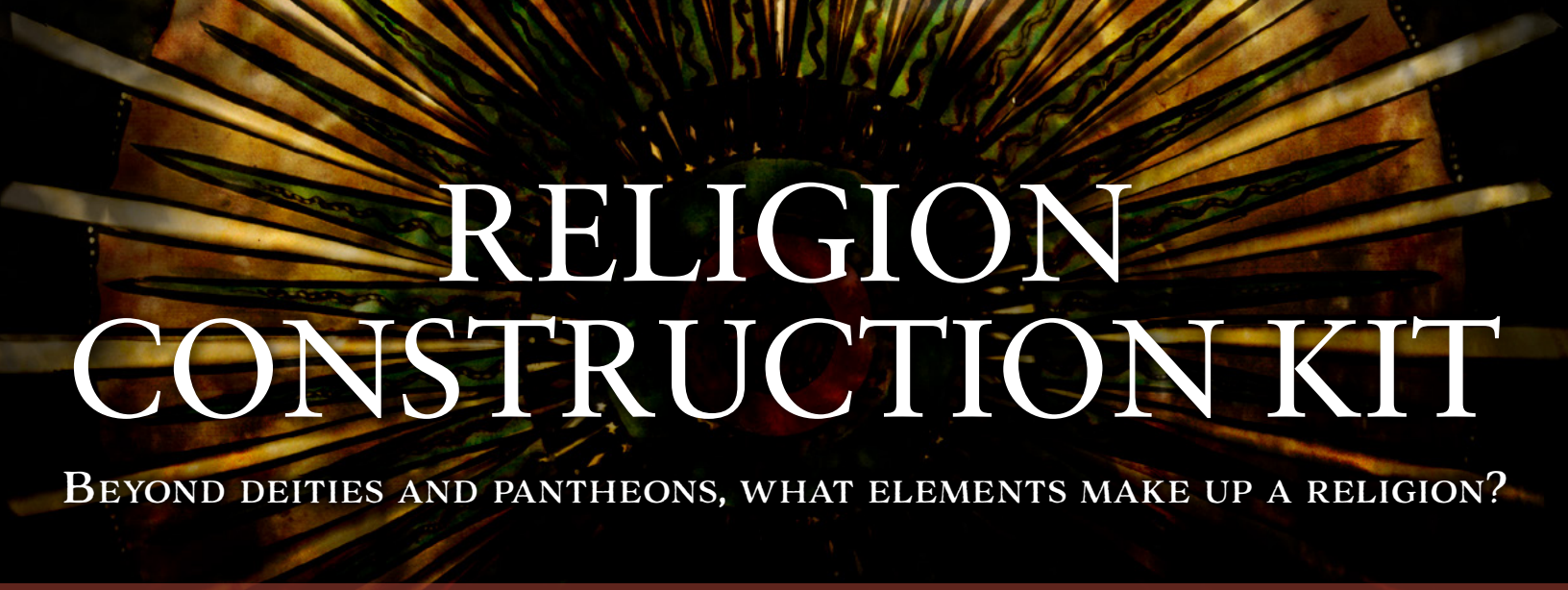
The gem has a number of charges dependent on its rarity, as shown in the Immanent Gem Rarity table, and regains all expended charges daily at dawn.

Universal Gemstone. You can use this gem to replace any gemstone material component with a gold piece cost. The maximum cost of the gemstone you can replace depends on the *immanent gem*'s rarity, as shown in the Immanent Gem Rarity table. You can use the *immanent gem* in place of a material component that would normally be consumed by a spell by expending 1 charge per level of the spell. The *immanent gem* is not consumed when used in this way.

Exalted Casting. When you cast a spell using this gem as a spellcasting focus or material component, you can expend charges to enhance the spell's power. For every 2 charges you expend, the spell counts as one level higher than the spell slot you used to cast it, to a maximum of 9th level.

Immanent Gem Rarity

Rarity	Charges	Max. Replacement Cost
Common	2	100 gp
Uncommon	3	500 gp
Rare	5	1,000 gp
Very rare	7	1,500 gp



RELIGION CONSTRUCTION KIT

Beyond deities and pantheons, what elements make up a religion?

by James Mendez Hodes

You already know how to create a new deity or pantheon for your own game. Each deity needs a name, alignment, domains over which they preside, and a symbol to represent them that their adherents carry. Once you have a group of deities, you connect them through mythology and history. This process is simple enough, but it doesn't answer the question that has a far greater impact on your world and player characters—what does this religion look like in everyday life?

You've probably noticed that who a real-world deity is and what they're the god of doesn't have much to do with how practitioners of that religion act. The god's nature and character do inform a religion's values and practices, but those are also shaped by the religion's history and the influence it wields in society, for better or for worse.

In the real world, there's no single element that every religion has without exception, and no religion in your campaign world has to have every element on a set list. But many share common elements, and by considering those, you can create religions with influence beyond the cleric in your party or the temple in the town. Their presence can guide how your NPCs act. You can build an authentic religion through a series of questions focused on fleshing out one of the most common—not universal—elements that almost all religions have: a community.

Without community trends and dynamics, a religion appears only when its associated deities or clergy appear. With them, religion becomes a way to create and describe characters faster and more thoroughly. In addition, religious communities seed conflict and connection into your world, just like other political factions, social movements, or cultures. GMs and players both get more opportunities to bring their historical knowledge or personal experiences into the game.

Religious game content can be both emotionally evocative and deeply affecting, especially if you've experienced marginalization because of religion. Thinking about religious communities ahead of time helps to guide those experiences toward the positive.

You can use the Religion Creation Sheet at the end of the article (or the form-fillable version linked in the Resources section) as you follow these step-by-step instructions to create a religion of your own.

Responsible Real-World Inspirations

It's almost impossible to create a religion entirely whole cloth. Our ideas about religion almost all come from somewhere—usually somewhere in the real world. Religions in printed game materials can, and often do, reflect concepts derived from real-world religion. The System Reference Document even contains a list of real-world religious pantheons, their deities, and those deities' purviews.

Accordingly, you might find it easier to make up a new fictional religion by basing it intentionally and directly on a real one. That's actually a good idea. It can be easiest to start with a religion you practice, one which many people you know practice, or a historical religion that you've read about extensively. You can then combine it with influences from other religions to make it fit your fictional world better. However, when you're working with touchstones from the real world, there are a few important things to avoid:

- Don't depict dangerous extremist versions of marginalized religions you don't practice.
- Don't take it upon yourself to criticize cultural trends, prejudices, and other aspects particular to a marginalized real-world group to which you don't belong.
- Remember that a systemically empowered religion in one region might be marginalized in another. Consider how different audiences in different regions might react to your work.
- Don't ever speak prayers aloud or act out religious expressions if they come from the real world. Just say your character's doing the thing without doing it in character.
- Don't base fictionalized versions of a religion on harmful misconceptions which originate outside that religion. For example, if the real-world enemies of a certain religion say that religion's members drink human blood, don't make the fictional version of that religion full of vampires.

Remember that even if you're operating in a fictional world, real-world people have experiences that intersect with elements of your game. You have the power to create anything, so create something that makes members of marginalized religions feel safe in your world. Employing safety tools in your game is always a good idea! Speaking of which …

Religion and Safety

Players frequently have conflicting access needs concerning religion. Some who belong to marginalized religions may have experienced violence or repression targeting themselves or their places of worship. Other players may have been pressured to adopt belief systems they don't agree with or have experienced other forms of systemic oppression through religious instruction or indoctrination. Others may not have grown up around intense religious experiences, positive or negative, and may not understand why topics that seem casual or academic to them elicit such strong reactions from other players.

One common solution to religion-related problems is to avoid talking about them. That probably won't work if you use this article. Make sure to discuss religious content with your players before introducing it—a session zero is a great place to establish content guidelines for religion and other intense topics, such as violence, romance, and systemic oppression. Find out whether your players want to avoid certain kinds of religious content. Are they okay with religion appearing? What about conflict based on religion? If religious NPCs tell them what to think or do, would that stress them out? Leave space for players to explain their answers if they choose to, but don't press them to overshare about rough topics beyond what they need to establish clarity.

Use this process to establish clear, explicit guidelines on how players approach and present religion. Apply these guidelines to the process below and your game. During the game itself, when you approach situations or themes that players have brought up during your session zero, use safety tools (such as the ones found in the MCDM Tabletop Safety Toolkit).

You may find your players' creative preferences incompatible with one another. It's too bad if that happens, but it's better that you found out now before you filled a game with clerics, paladins, and deities.

Creating a Religion

These step-by-step instructions will guide you through creating your own religion. Sentences in bold are specific instructions that correlate to the Religion Creation Sheet.

Why Bother?

As you go through this article, keep one overarching question in your mind: **Why would people practice this religion?** This question is important for both good-aligned and evil-aligned religions. If you're creating an antagonistic religion in part to criticize the systemic oppression or harm enshrined in some real-world belief systems, it's easy to forget that people get emotional, financial, and physical benefits from their religions. These benefits often aren't clear or obvious to people outside the community, and if you're trying to call out a harmful or oppressive structure, either in character or out, understanding the ways people feel like they need this institution can be crucial to helping them get out.

The benefits people get from religion are varied. Doctrinal considerations—that is, whether you think a religion's outlook is spiritually "correct" or the best choice for you—aren't the only ones, and for some people, they might not even come up. A desire for social belonging, or access to social and economic spaces and support networks, has motivated the conversion of entire nations in our history. Irrational or coercive reasons also exist, but religion gives genuine benefits in terms of emotional support, community membership and networking, access to "third spaces" outside home and work, artistic expression, and backing for family endeavors like marriage or childcare.



Example Religion: The Why

Throughout the article, I will use these sidebars to create an example religion alongside you, showing the process from beginning to end. First, I'm going to answer the most important question: why bother?

I want to introduce tiefling characters who have different cultural signifiers from the usual Middle Eastern and Abrahamic demon imagery I tend to see associated with them. During a visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, I see some Tibetan Buddhist paintings and statues of demonic-looking monsters who are enlightened protectors, despite their fearsome appearance. Researching them, I learn about how Buddhism spread through Mongolia after the Yuán emperors patronized Tibetan missionaries. I like the idea of a religion spreading because heads of state converted to it and made it fashionable, so there's "why bother?" answered. After a powerful demon converted to this faith and committed themself to piety and wisdom, tieflings flocked to the demon's banner. Come for the social prestige, stay for the inner peace and enlightenment.

Origin and Scope

Every religion began somewhere, but not all of them stay there, and some grow until the influence of their birthplace is barely perceptible. The way a religion changes when it travels or expands beyond its origin can be dramatic and influential, resulting in the creation of what is essentially a different sect.

Decide now whether the religious community on which you're focusing is a local religion, a world religion, or a mix between the two. As with any religious topic, exceptions to those categories exist, but you can imagine them as two opposite poles. This choice has implications for its relationship to the region where your religion is based, as well as its priorities and emphases within the community and concerning outsiders.

Local Religion

For this article's purposes, a **local religion** is one practiced mostly by the people who live in the area of its origin. These religions have shrines, figures, or beliefs intimately tied to the land from whence they came. Individual trees, mountains, rivers, or ancient structures might have idiosyncratic gods and spirits, or be themselves sacred.

To its practitioners, a local religion often doesn't have a strong conception of membership. People don't usually think of themselves as faithful or unfaithful, though outsiders who follow other religions might have introduced the idea. Except for the clergy, worshippers don't have to profess (or even necessarily have) faith or belief in gods, wear symbols, or convert others to their practices. The religion is an implicit, accepted part of the community.

However, this dynamic might change in response to the appearance of a world religion in the local religion's space—especially if the world religion demands that its members practice it exclusively.

World Religion

A **world religion** has spread far beyond its origins. Merchants, missionaries, or conquerors carry its stories and tenets to lands abroad. A world religion has an interest in spreading, perhaps through establishing religionists in immigrant communities or by acquiring converts in faraway lands.

World religions tend to have more clear-cut, public-facing identities than local traditions. Their practitioners identify themselves as belonging to specific religious identities, sometimes to the exclusion of other practices. They sometimes proselytize and attempt to recruit new members through missionary work.

Example Religion: Scope

Like Tibetan Buddhism outside Tibet, the religion I'm making up is a world religion. My aforementioned demon monarch has placed their favorite priests and missionaries at the head of a fast-expanding network of temples and monasteries, making it easy for converts to join up. Missionary operations are colorful and attractive, with plenty of thought going into what we might call "branding" in 2022: easily recognizable iconography, events and services designed to bring in curious newcomers, and, of course, encouragement to support the religion financially. Priests and missionaries have to eat, too.

Religious Values

Some religions use teachings, rituals and rites, and interactions with the natural or societal environment to laud, develop, or reward certain character traits in individuals. For this exercise, we can break those character traits down into six familiar options based on a creature's ability scores and explore how valuing these options influences the religion.

While not all adherents have a high ability score corresponding to their religion's values, many do. Player characters who grew up in the religion or practice it zealously might consider placing their strongest ability scores in the ones that correspond with a religion's favored values. NPCs associated with the religion likely have higher than average scores in those values.

Choose one, two, or three values below that this religion emphasizes, or roll a d6 to generate them randomly. Each entry comes with suggestions as to what traits a religion that upholds the value could have.

Strength

A religion that values Strength emphasizes acts of physical service, contributing labor to public works, activities such as construction or farm work, or otherwise physically alleviating the burdens of others. Devotional practices might include martial arts or calisthenics. Athletes and warriors who practice this religion might perform public displays of devotion, dedicating goals or victories to their religion.

Dexterity

Practitioners of a religion that values Dexterity demonstrate their devotion through artistic pursuits such as dance, painting, or sculpture. In the mythology surrounding the belief system, trickster figures and underdogs could feature prominently.

Constitution

A religion that values Constitution tells stories about the importance of suffering for one's beliefs, extolling the virtues of martyrs who died for their beliefs or sages who underwent punishing austerities. Services run long and feature ecstatic, strenuous dances; uncomfortable seating; or taxing meditative rituals. The religion might also pass on customs concerning healthy eating, exercise, or preventative care.

Intelligence

A religion that values Intelligence encourages intellectual debate about doctrine, scripture, and the interpretations thereof. It might maintain schools or universities devoted not only to religious study, but also to other disciplines such as science and medicine.

Wisdom

A religion that values Wisdom has teachings that aren't easily grasped by logic and reason. They might incorporate riddles, paradoxes, and contradictions. Caring for sacred animals or plants or meditating in the wilderness could be important practices in such a tradition.

Charisma

Religious leaders in a tradition that values Charisma are big personalities, perhaps even celebrity figures who rely on stage presence, exciting preaching, and personal connections with their community to keep people coming back. Theatrical adaptations of myths and legends spread knowledge of the religion and pique potential converts' curiosity.

Example Religion: Values

I want to pick two options that represent different, maybe even conflicting trends within the religion. Wisdom is an easy choice, as I want to maintain the Buddhist emphasis on meditation and contemplation in its fictional analog. To contrast it, I choose Charisma. After all, the demon monarch is a celebrity figure now, and converts want to be as cultured and elite as they are.

Authority and Responsibility

Who's in charge of this religion? What formalized roles exist in its hierarchy, and what functions are they expected to fulfill for the religion's adherents? Alternatively, if the religion has no formal hierarchy, how do participants divide tasks and responsibilities among themselves?

The organization chart of your religion could be as complex as that of any real-world hierarchy, but it doesn't have to be. It's a good idea to leave part of it undefined, as you may want to make some choices inspired by unexpected events in your campaign, but you should answer at least these questions:

- **High authority:** Who are the highest authorities in the religion? How do they hold on to power, and what are their most important responsibilities?
- **Popular authority:** Which religious people have the most contact with everyday worshippers? Who are this religion's equivalents of root doctors, village priests and ministers, and shrine keepers, and what necessary functions do they fulfill in the lives of the common people?



- **Protection:** If this religion came under attack by a hostile force, who would its leaders petition for protection? Would they go to peasant militias or a governmental power—or is the religious institution itself a source of protection via an armed self-defense force of templars or warrior monks?
- **Logistics:** Who makes sure that the religious authorities have enough food, water, shelter, and medicine? Does the religion operate businesses, beg for alms, or levy tithes to accumulate resources? Do the leaders take just enough, or do they live lavish lifestyles at the expense of others?

Write down the religion's high authority, popular authority, protection, and logistics with titles or names and short descriptions. Religions with very small memberships or strict egalitarianism might have "everyone" or "no one" as the answer to one or more of these categories. Pair each title with one or two character classes that could represent that authority. These classes allow you to create NPCs who fill those roles quickly and easily, and make it easy for players to understand who and what to expect when they appeal to or oppose someone in one of those roles. Player characters who share those classes might look to fill one of those important roles as they grow in power and responsibilities within the campaign world.

RESPONSIBILITIES BY CLASS

Let's look to real-world religions for inspiration here. While **clerics** and **paladins** are the obvious choices for classes associated with a religious institution, both have very specific sets of skills that tend to focus more on combat, spellcasting, exorcism, and supernatural healing than on preaching to and caring for a community. They make excellent chaplains and templars for embattled religions, but they might have less to do in peacetime.

In real-world religions, the class most broadly represented across many different continents and traditions is **bard**. Sacred oratory or performance and charismatic inspiration feature prominently in countless traditions. Bardic Inspiration and healing magic fit well with supporting and caring for communities. There's a prominent place for a bard in almost any religious tradition from the real world, in roles where social skills and supporting others are of great importance. Confucian jūnzǐ, Mande funew, Mevlevi Sufi whirling dervishes, and Protestant youth pastors could all be bards.

Another common religious archetype is the **druid**. While the wilderness mystic in this game bears only partial resemblance to Celtic scholarly political and religious leaders of the same name, most societies worldwide have developed local traditions focused on relationships with plants and animals. The carriers of those traditions became the linchpins of local religions. Root doctors in the Black Atlantic diaspora, Filipine babaylan, or Central Asian and Siberian shamans could all be druids. The **ranger** offers a less magically focused take on similar themes, perhaps a closer match to a Shingon Buddhist yamabushi; though yamabushi are usually not warriors, Japanese fiction sometimes casts them as adventurers with martial skills nonetheless.

Among the classes focused on arcane magic, the **sorcerer**, in particular in versions of the class that emphasize descent from mythical or folkloric beings, is also a common character of many world mythologies. Divine-focused sorcerers might operate outside the formal religious hierarchy as charismatic authorities unto themselves, or they might hold places of great renown inside formal structures, even passing down their offices to their descendants. **Warlocks** with relationships to deities and spirits might be in similar positions.

Finally, religions with traditions of scholarship that develop into magic might produce **wizards** in important roles. Japanese onmyōji, Tibetan ngakpa, and some South Asian magicians derived from one of the Hindu religions might find the wizard class a particularly apt comparison to their roles. However, many worldwide traditions of magic are oral, which might require an alternative to the spellbook as a focus for magical power. As you create your religion, consider options other than textual records as a way to pass down information. Think about what other symbol, spellcasting focus, or item a wizard could use to record their magical knowledge and experiences.

Martial arts-focused classes like the **fighter** and **monk** might appear in religious hierarchies in security positions, though they would be less likely as common occupants of positions with administrative or social sway. **Rogues** with investigative skills might appear as inquisitors or guardians watching over communities in danger. The **barbarian** is a tough choice for a religious character, since there's an oft-uncomfortable overlap between the barbarian's Rage feature and harmful stereotypes of religious extremism. Battle trances as a religious or pseudo-religious practice certainly exist, and have existed in the past, but I'd recommend reflavoring the rage to represent deep focus and concentration rather than incoherent wrath.

Example Religion: Authorities

The highest authorities are the demon monarch themself and the missionaries who originally converted them. These are personable, urbane figures who make friends and connections easily. They could be bards easily, but warlocks would be even more fun. I like the idea of a warlock contacting their patron and finding the Fiend quietly meditating or struggling to understand a complicated treatise on religious doctrine. I end up choosing bard for "high authority"—maybe the demon monarch themself is a bard—and warlock for "popular authority" to represent the missionary leaders.

What about protection and logistics? We're too upright and respectable so far, so I decide rogues are in charge of both those responsibilities. There's a network of rogues who fulfill community support roles, taking care of common believers but also leaning on them hard for tithes, kind of like the legendary ancestors of various real-world crime syndicates which extensively use religious themes and imagery.

Devotional Practice

What do practitioners of this religion do to study its tenets, internalize esoteric concepts, and help one another? The answers to this question provide your stock answers for what worshippers are doing when the player characters run across them, or what the heroes might look for if they go to find these religionists. As with the values, you might choose to give NPC practitioners of this religion the skill proficiencies associated with their devotional practices, or tailor the skill proficiencies granted by a background to the character who worships the religion.

Choose at least two devotional practices below. To make sure your practices have some range—one should match an ability score your religion emphasizes, while the other should not.

Acrobatics

Calisthenic practices like stretching or whirling are used as a form of meditation or prayer in religions with an Acrobatics devotional practice. These rituals might figure prominently in the training of warrior monks or templars.

Animal Handling

A religion with an Animal Handling devotional practice reveres certain sacred animals that must be protected and cared for. Alternatively, sacrificing animals to deities (and then feasting on them as a congregation afterward) features prominently in rituals and festivals.

Arcana

There's a magical tradition, perhaps a scholarly one, attached to a religion with an Arcana devotional practice. Magicians develop magical power through study of texts, training with teachers, memorization, and application of principles. Alternatively, the religion might teach practitioners to beware of magicians and study their methods to protect against them.

Athletics

A religion with an Athletics devotional practice is closely intertwined with the performance of popular sports. Some sports may be considered religious rituals, performed at temples or in honor of the gods. Even in secular sports, athletes commonly make religious gestures when they score goals or win matches, or use the celebrity of their role to profess their faith and its virtues. Congregations maintain sports teams as a way to recruit and entertain new (especially younger) believers.

Deception, Investigation, Sleight of Hand, Stealth

A religion with a Deception, Investigation, Sleight of Hand, or Stealth devotional practice has experienced persecution, marginalization, and violence. The belief system might be outlawed, requiring its practitioners to conceal their true allegiance from inquisitors, law enforcement, or bigots.

History

A religion with a History devotional practice has narratives about its long past and how its beliefs have influenced world affairs and vice versa, which feature prominently in religious education or sermons. The religion might have an important scholastic tradition, founding and maintaining universities or seminaries.

Insight

Religious practitioners of a tradition with an Insight devotional practice frequently discuss their feelings and emotional state with one another or with clergy in settings that resemble individual or group therapy sessions. Religionists counsel one another through conversation or shared study of texts. Alternatively, it might be a marginalized religion as described in "Deception, Investigation, Sleight of Hand, Stealth," where individuals must make quick judgments about whether they can trust people they meet.

Intimidation

Religious figures in stories from a belief system with an Intimidation devotional practice are depicted standing up to monsters, evil spirits, or bigots through the strength of their character and the force of their religious

convictions. Alternatively, the religion might have widespread bad habits of intolerance or bigotry itself.

Medicine

Religious figures from a tradition with a Medicine devotional practice work as village or itinerant healers or maintain public hospitals.

Nature, Survival

Religions with a Nature or Survival devotional practice teach congregants to live in harmony with nature. They build shrines to venerate gods who dwell in trees or rock formations. Sacred hunts or ingredients for herbal cures frequently call practitioners out into the wild. Ascetics undergo meditation or punishing austerities in beautiful but harsh natural settings, such as deserts or mountaintops.

Perception

Religions with a Perception devotional practice might practice observational techniques as a form of meditation. They might also be secretive, using coded or concealed signs and symbols to indicate safe havens or places of worship to participants without alerting oppressive or inquisitive forces. On the other hand, those oppressive or inquisitive forces might hone their Perception to serve a carceral power structure within their own religion.

Performance

Religious art figures prominently in a tradition with a Performance devotional practice, whether it be choirs, oratorios, ecstatic dance, puppet reenactment of religious stories, or poetry recitals.

Persuasion

A religion with a Persuasion devotional practice maintains an important tradition of intellectual debate or public preaching. These discussions and sermons might concern the finer points of doctrine, or be aimed at justifying the religion to potential converts or intolerant outsiders.

Religion

A belief system with a Religion devotional practice exists in a setting where many other religions are present, and practitioners are used to interacting with people from different denominations or belief systems. The tradition also might not be practiced exclusively—its worshippers might follow one or more other religions at the same time.

Example Religion: Practices

I know one of my choices has to connect to either Wisdom or Charisma, and the other should not. I'd like both of these choices to add something nonobvious based on what I've come up with so far, so I opt for Animal Handling and Athletics. The former will represent an animal the religion sees as poised, peaceful, and wise. Since a lot of the players in my game like mounted combat, I go with horses. Athletics represents popular tiefling athletes who have used their renown to advertise their religious convictions.

Personal Habits

Many religions have rules about how individual believers should act, which come from any number of sources and have any number of justifications, ranging from scripturally or divinely mandated behaviors to simple fashions or trends that became nearly universal among practitioners. Those habits aren't necessarily consistent. For example, if a religion's scriptures mandate ten behaviors, it's quite probable that only half of those behaviors are common or even known among practitioners. The purposes of these behaviors can also be extremely diverse: to signal membership to other believers, to remind oneself of one's commitment to a religion, to adhere to specific standards of modesty or cleanliness, or to encourage a certain kind of thought.

Regardless of their stated origin and purpose, these habits reinforce an individual's sense of belonging to something bigger and more comforting than themself. In the context of a roleplaying game, these habits are a quick way to signal to other players that a certain character practices a religion. They might also become plot points. The characters could identify a religious NPC from their dietary restrictions at a tavern, or exhort a villain to change their ways by calling out the fact that they have diverged from some basic habit of their belief system.

Create one or two habits for most of the categories below. On your list of habits, note whether the habit is broadly, moderately, or narrowly followed.

Speech or Writing

Speech and writing habits are rituals a practitioner follows or taboos they avoid when communicating with others, such as the following example behaviors:

- Never spell out the name of your deity or a great adversary in writing.
- Greet others by saying the word "Peace."
- Dedicate every text to your deity with a calligraphic inscription.

Food

Food habits include rituals a practitioner follows at mealtimes, restrictions on which foods should or should not be eaten (at all times or in specific situations), or guidelines for food preparers such as farmers, butchers, and chefs. The following behaviors are examples of food habits:

- When food is sacrificed to the gods, let the neediest eat first at the subsequent feast.
- Avoid eating the flesh of certain animals.
- Begin every meal with a group prayer while holding hands.

Personal Appearance

Personal appearance habits govern a religionist's hygiene or choices about dress, accessories, or grooming to indicate their convictions to others. The following behaviors are examples of personal appearance habits:

- Cover your arms and legs when in public.
- Grow your hair into long dreadlocks.
- Wear an amulet around your neck with protective inscriptions and charms inside.

Home

Home habits have to do with the architecture, decoration, and organization of one's living space, as well as how to behave toward household members or guests. The following behaviors are examples of home habits:

- Never refuse hospitality to a stranger who comes in peace.
- Display no art that depicts a human or animal.
- Place a shrine to the god of liminal spaces by your door.

Relationships

Relationship habits dictate how practitioners behave toward others. These habits might change based on the other person's religion, how you know them, or their social status relative to you. The following behaviors are examples of relationship habits:

- Go to obnoxious lengths to pay for your dining companions' meals at restaurants, if you can afford it.
- Speak straightforwardly, without lies or ornamentation.
- Never physically touch others in public unless they're family members.

Example Religion: Habits

For personal appearance, I like the idea of horn decorations. Maybe the tieflings wrap their horns in cloth inscribed with scriptural quotations? I think those would look very cool, and my players are into the idea, so I write it down. For the home, I'd like to call back to the visual art I saw in the museum that inspired this whole line of thinking, so I write down that believers are expected to have a small statue or wall hanging depicting a religious figure or a scene from a parable displayed by the door of their dwelling. For relationships, I like the idea of something that represents a peaceful outlook, the same way a handshake indicates that one has no weapons up their sleeve. Actually, maybe it is a handshake—a double-handed handshake, maybe held for a little longer than most standard handshakes in this setting.

Sacred Spaces

What places in the world are set aside for religious practice? Choose one or more and list them on the Religion Creation Sheet. Sacred spaces fall into two categories: places of particular importance to the religion, and places commonly found within many religious communities. Choose a couple of options from each of the tables below for inspiration and record them on your sheet. If you can't decide, roll a d10!

Geographical Locations

d10	Location
1	The birthplace of a deity or great religious leader
2	The first place made when the earth was created
3	A route a great prophet took while traveling to retrieve a sacred item or fleeing oppressors
4	The site of a great battle where many religionists were martyred
5	The temple where the world leader of the religion has their office
6	The temple where an oracle receives visions and dispenses prophecies
7	A mountain carved into the image of a cultural hero, frequently visited by pilgrims
8	The grave site of a great monarch, elaborately decorated and filled with treasures, now frequented by both pilgrims and tourists
9	The place where a great miracle occurred, with some natural formation that is the result of the miracle
10	The bones of a giant or monster slain by a religious hero

Common Religious Edifices

d10	Edifice
1	A public square bordered with carved pillars depicting stylized faces of deities
2	A cave with recesses that hide a statue of a seated sage carved out of the cave rock
3	A storefront or other small commercial building with seats and a podium to function as a temple
4	An ancient tree, grove, or standing stone that is the abode of a god or spirit
5	A roadside shrine with a small stone image of a guardian figure adorned with flowers and gifts from visiting devotees
6	A grand marble-and-stone edifice filled with art, the result of vast financial investment and decades of hard labor
7	A community kitchen where volunteers and clergy serve meals or sacrificed food to anyone who visits, regardless of their religious background
8	A covered indoor training space with state-of-the-art sprung wood floors or enclosed courtyards, ideal for practicing dance or combat
9	A neighborhood school filled with scrolls and ancient texts, sometimes used for solemn study and other times basically a daycare
10	A lonely tower with a lime pit where the remains of the dead are exposed to be reclaimed by the elements and carrion birds



Example Religion: Sacred Spaces

I know that one important geographical location will be a portal from the material world to the plane on which the demon monarch resides. It's an important stopover point in pilgrimages, with a town and temples on both sides of the portal to serve pilgrims' needs (and take their money). I also like the idea that a missionary at one point defeated an intelligent tarrasque just by arguing with it until it died of shame or boredom, so there's an important monastery built around the tarrasque's remains.

For common religious edifices, I need some elements of the religion that aren't just about rich and powerful people, so I write down the community kitchen from the list. Moreover, if horses are sacred, there need to be ranches where the faithful come to take care of horses, muck out the stables, et cetera. Perhaps there's some disagreement in the religion about whether riding horses is an okay thing to do?

Complications and Schisms

Going through the process described above gives you a solid foundation for a religion that will help you generate player characters, NPCs, and communities. For a small religion, practiced perhaps only in one region or by a specific ethnicity, that might be all you need. But if you look to the real world, you'll find that even the smallest religious communities often have major divisions or disagreements that split people into different denominations or sects. You could go back over your choices and make up alternatives yourself, but this is an ideal place to involve other contributors.

Once you have your Religion Creation Sheet filled out, distribute copies to your players and invite each of them to choose one subsection to modify, and to suggest the reasons why a version of your religion with a different trait might have come to be.

If you have more than a couple of players, their modifications might give rise to more denominations than you'd like to keep track of to start. Once everyone has made their changes, discuss together which ones fit together best. One player's change to the religion's scope might fit well with another's suggestion for a different set of devotional practices that better fit a plane-hopping, evangelical faith. You should end the process with at least two or three distinct subgroups within the religion, which lend an air of real-world complexity and build in a way for you to make diverse characters who each read as part of the same greater demographic.

Example Religion: Schisms

Two of my players are available to discuss and remix the religion. One of them immediately hits on the point that this religion must have begun as a local religion somewhere, and describes an alternate version—the original version, in fact—centered on the clerics in the community where the religion's great sage originated. She wants her character to be from that region, so the character's parents can practice that version of the religion and be confused when their kid returns with weird ideas from abroad that don't match their rituals.

The other player is playing a homebrew undersea ancestry and suggests that maybe there's an aquatic version of the religion where different authority figures are in charge: druids who can take terrestrial or aquatic animal forms to liaise between worshippers above and below the waves. He mentions that he has family members who practice different versions of Christianity and argue about it, so he asks that the land and ocean versions of the religion get along so that his character doesn't remind him of his relatives at stressful holiday meals. We all agree he deserves a break, and the other player ensures that he's okay with her character and her parents clashing over religion before we finalize that part, too.

Religion Creation Sheet

Why Bother?

Origin and Scope

Local Religion — World Religion

Religious Values

Strength Dexterity Constitution Intelligence Wisdom Charisma

Authority and Responsibility

Class	High Authority	Popular Authority	Protection	Logistics
Barbarian				
Bard				
Cleric				
Druid				
Fighter				
Monk				
Paladin				
Ranger				
Rogue				
Sorcerer				
Warlock				
Wizard				

Devotional Practice

Acrobatics	Animal Handing	Arcana	Athletics	Deception	History
Insight	Intimidation	Investigation	Medicine	Nature	Perception
Performance	Persuasion	Religion	Sleight of Hand	Stealth	Survival

Personal Habits

Speech or Writing

Food

Personal Appearance

Home

Relationships

Sacred Spaces

Geographical Locations

Common Religious Edifices

Complications and Schisms

DIVINE TRIALS: HEROES OF THE STARS

A MYTHIC TRIAL TO BOND HEROES WITH UNBREAKABLE TIES

by Amber Litke and Sadie Lowry

I BELIEVE THE STARS ALIGN SO SOULS CAN FIND ONE ANOTHER.

–RENÉE AHDIEH, *FLAME IN THE MIST*

The *ARCADIA 17* article "Divine Trials: Glory of the Sun" introduced a series of three connected celestial trials built by divine creators to test and refine heroes. The sun trial examines the heroic penchant for pride and ambition. "Shadows of the Moon," from *ARCADIA 19*, asks the characters to face their own darkness.

"Heroes of the Stars" is the last of these divine trials, designed for four 5th-level characters and meant to test those characters' bonds, cooperation, and trust. Each article provides lore and hooks, and this last article provides suggestions for tying all three adventures together.

THE STAR TRIAL

It is the nature of mortals to draw connections to things that are greater than us. We see wrath and vengeance in tempests, tranquility in mountains, and stories in the stars, reflecting ourselves in the world around us. We draw figures in constellations, telling our stories in the skies for eons to come, and using constellations and star signs to group ourselves with others. Those under lion stars call themselves brave and loyal, while those under scales band together in justice and order.

A group of heroes, originally at odds with each other, grew close through their adventures. But even as corrupt sovereigns, power-hungry liches, and conniving fiends tried to separate and tempt them with gold, power, and promises untold, the group proved unbreakable. These heroes' synergy and support of each other saw them fell a mighty enemy that threatened the land with bleak misery.

As a reward, a god wrote of this group's deeds in the sky, in the form of constellations placed next to each other.[1] The god, hopeful that other adventurers might achieve the same level of commitment to heroism, tasked their angel Astraios to oversee a trial that would challenge characters. By testing and strengthening their relationships with each other, stalwart adventurers might one day stand hand-in-hand among the stars as symbols of defiance against temptation, tragedy, and evil.

As GM, you can create new lore for the star trial as you see fit. Astraios (room three) and Hiyadus (room one) are Celestial agents who might have additional connections to your campaign. Likewise, the star trial can be set up anywhere that its lessons might be of use to those with the capacity to be heroes. The entrance to the trial typically appears as an arched doorway in a remote landscape, such as the stone wall of an abandoned cathedral, the side of a shrine off the beaten path, or the sheer face of a seaside cliff. Its door is made of glittering black marble and stained glass depicting a mosaic of constellations in the night sky.

[1] This could be an adventuring party in your world's history. Or, if your players have characters from a previous campaign, you could use them for this tale.





There are two map layouts provided—a map with two sets of pillars in Room Two: Constellatory Crossing for parties of 4–5 characters, and a map with three sets of pillars for parties of 6+ characters.

See the Resources at the end of this issue for downloadable, grid-optional versions of these maps.

Adventure Hooks

You can incorporate the star trial into your campaign with the following adventure hooks:

- A Celestial agent witnesses the characters' mistrust and quarrels, and suggests that the characters undertake the star trial before their fractured bonds invite disaster.
- Upon taking a dysfunctional group of misfit heroes under their wing, a benefactor tasks the characters with their first mission: complete the star trial.
- When bitter conflict gets one of the characters or an ally gravely injured or killed, the door to the star trial appears before the characters as a sign that they must bridge the divides that threaten to undo them.

Trials of Character

The divine forces that forged the celestial trials won't be satisfied with every solution a so-called hero might use to pass the trials' challenges. Characters who circumnavigate (read: cheat) the trials by skipping them, such as with the *dimension door* spell, or by killing NPCs in non-combat challenges, find themselves redirected to the beginning of the challenge they sought to avoid with everything as it was when they first entered the room. This shouldn't dissuade creative and unconventional problem-solving—thinking outside the box is encouraged, but cheating has consequences.

If necessary, a disembodied divine voice tells heroes that their character is being tested, not their skullduggery, or gives a more direct warning. Killed NPCs don't need to remember their deaths, unless the GM wants to add a social consequence for violence, but killing a foe won't bring the characters any closer to success.

Starbound Tether

The star trial relies on a new mechanic: the starbound tether. This tether is a faint line made of stars and stardust that connects two characters metaphysically. Prior to running the star trial, it is suggested that you as the GM think about which characters could be tethered together. Characters are tethered in sets of two, so in the case of an odd number of characters, consider tethering one character to an NPC companion.

This trial works best if you tether together characters who are distrustful of each other, share a mutual animosity, or don't have a meaningful relationship. That said, though, consider having a conversation with your players about which characters they would be comfortable having their own character tethered to. While the point of the star trial is to build relationships between divided characters, the comfort of your players should always be a priority.

Tethered characters are subjected to the following effect:

Starbound. Whenever a tethered creature takes damage, they instead take no damage and their tethered partner takes the damage they would have taken.

The characters shouldn't know what the tether does upfront. When the effect is triggered for the first time, consider narrating how an attack, spell, or other effect connects—but then the tether illuminates, and the character on the other side of the bond takes the damage.

Abandoning a Partner

If a character intentionally leaves their tethered partner behind in a room to progress to the next room alone, Astraios's voice reprimands that character, who is judged by the stars. When the character leaves the star trial, whether after success or failure, that judgment comes to pass. For the next 7 days, whenever the character makes an ability check, attack roll, or saving throw, they must roll a d4 and subtract the number rolled from the d20 roll. This judgment can't be removed by any means.

Stellar Antechamber

After the initial appearance of the star trial's arched doorway (or whatever other entrance you might wish to create), the characters can step through to enter the stellar antechamber that holds the first of the challenges they will face.

The antechamber is a small octagonal room with a 10-foot-high ceiling, and which features another arched doorway opposite the entranceway and a stone pedestal rising from the center of the floor. The area is filled with dim light once the characters enter. When they do so, read or paraphrase the following:

> The entrance rumbles closed and vanishes, sealing you in an octagonal chamber. Pinpricks of light flicker into view across the dark stone ceiling, slowly illuminating the area in a soft golden light. Glittering words appear on the stone wall in front of you.
>
> "Hone your soul in tests divine,
> By entering this holy shrine.
> This starlight test tries your accord.
> What ties have you forged, and which are ignored?"
>
> Beneath the poem, another line of text appears, shimmering into existence as though shaped by a thousand wakening stars: "Strengthen your bonds."
>
> On the pedestal between you and the closed door across the room, a single golden star winks to life.



When any character approaches the pedestal, the star erupts to unleash a wave of energy that passes over the party. Golden starbound tethers form between pairs of creatures in the room, as determined by you (see "Starbound Tether" above).

A deep voice resounds in the mind of each character: *"Your bodies and souls are bound until this trial ends."* The door across the room then rumbles open.

Room One: Scales of Synergy

The glass dome of this circular room's ceiling measures 40 feet at its highest, with a magical night sky beyond filling the room with dim light. When the darkness described in the read-aloud text falls, not even characters with darkvision or the ability to see through magical darkness can see through it.

> The door vanishes behind you, leaving you in a chamber set with two translucent floating disks and another doorway directly across from you. The domed glass ceiling of this circular chamber reveals a vast night sky beyond its many panes. That sky swirls with stars bound together as constellations of mythic and folkloric creatures, with the occasional shooting star hurtling across the firmament.
>
> At the center of the chamber, a massive dragon whose form is seemingly made up of shimmering stars fixes you with glowing eyes. "To love is to know," they announce. "To know is the key. We start here—with what you know."
>
> Darkness momentarily overtakes the room, and when light waxes again, the floor is gone. You stand on one of the translucent disks, whose thin, glass-like surface is all that stands between you and a burning star below you. The disk smolders with sweltering heat as the dragon stretches out on a ledge before the door. Across the room, a faint golden tether shimmers between you and the figure standing on the other disk across the void.

When the darkness falls, the party is magically divided so that each character sees only their tethered partner across the room. You will run this room one pair of tethered characters at a time, using the guidelines in the "Preparing This Room" sidebar below.

Hiyadus (HI-yay-dus, they/them) is a constellation dragon, using the **young brass dragon** stat block but appearing to have their body filled with stars. To each pair of tethered characters, the dragon explains that this room's challenge is a simple one: the characters will be asked about each other, and they must answer correctly to progress.

Mind the Gap

The point of the challenge in this chamber isn't simply to reach the door—the gap and the bridges are symbols. But for players or characters who might not see it that way and have access to flight, teleportation, or some other means to move directly from a disk to the doorway, you have a few options.

At your discretion, you can nullify all flight and teleportation in the room, clarifying that answering the questions, not crossing the gap, is the win condition. You can also let the characters reach the ledge before answering the questions, only to have Hiyadus remind them that they must answer the questions before the door will open. You can also reflavor the challenge, so that the characters are in magic bindings or the equivalent of a *forcecage* spell, and the only way to free each other is to answer all the questions correctly.

To Love Is to Know

You can ask each character individual questions (such as "Character X, what is character Y's greatest fear?"), or you can ask a pair of tethered characters the same question at the same time (such as "What is your tethered partner's greatest fear?"). Each time a character answers a question correctly, the translucent disc they stand on extends toward their tethered partner, slowly building a bridge meant to meet in the middle of the chamber. Incorrect answers don't advance the bridge—but at your discretion, blatantly wrong answers or insults toward the other character might shatter part of the bridge, hindering a character's progress.

It takes a total of six correct answers for the two sides of the bridge to meet, whether in the middle of the chamber (with three correct answers from each character) or closer to the character with the fewest correct answers. Hiyadus might remark on such a character's seeming lack of concern for their companions if the bridge doesn't meet in the middle.

You can use the following sample questions in this test, or can use them as inspiration for creating questions that best fit your characters:

- What does the other character most deeply fear?
- What does the other character take great pride in?
- What does the character greatly desire?
- What is an activity the character finds joy in?
- Who does the character care most for?
- What has the character greatly suffered?
- What would the character change about themself given the chance?
- Who does the character hate the most?

Preparing This Room

In advance of running this adventure, it can be useful for you as the GM to ask the players Hiyadus's questions about their own characters ahead of time, so that the flow of questioning during play isn't disrupted. Have the players give you the answers before the session, and make a list to keep track of them. Some questions use language such as "deeply," "greatly," or "most," which is meant to make characters hone in on specific answers rather than generalities. However, in the event of multiple right answers, any one answer is acceptable. For example, if Orvi the bard is afraid of spiders, clowns, and failure, the dragon needs to be given only one of those options.

If a character guesses something that isn't listed but is a reasonable answer, their tethered partner can determine if the answer applies. For example, if Tibault the fighter says that Orvi is proud of her good memory, Orvi might realize that yes, she *is* proud of that, and she's surprised that Tibault noticed. Hiyadus counts this answer as correct, complimenting Tibault for observing his companions well.

Normally, the characters shouldn't make ability checks to find answers to the questions put to them, because the bonds between the characters as the players perceive them are pivotal to this trial. But for groups who are more into rolling dice than getting deep, a character who succeeds on a DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check can get a hint from the other character's player as to what the answer might be.

- What is the character's favorite food, color, or weather?
- What does the other character think about you?

When the bridge connecting the two disks is complete, Hiyadus is satisfied. They stand up and move to the side of the door as the glass bridge magically branches off and extends to the ledge where the dragon waits, creating a path to the exit.

After this trial has been run for all the characters, those characters appear together again on the ledge as the door automatically opens, allowing them to proceed to the next challenge.

Doing Well ... or Not So Well

If a pair of tethered characters gets every question right, Hiyadus gives them a boon. In room two, each character can give themself advantage on one ability check.

At your discretion, if a pair of characters get three questions wrong, the glass disks and any bridge extended between them crack as a warning. After six incorrect answers, the disk and any completed bridge shatter. Each character plummets into the burning star below them, taking 21 (6d6) radiant damage and 7 (2d6) fire damage as the star flares and they are consumed in light. Additionally, the characters are starcursed, with each taking a –1 penalty to saving throws for the remainder of the trial.

The characters are then teleported to the ledge with Hiyadus, who looks at them disapprovingly before soaring upward through the glass ceiling and into the darkness beyond, leaving them alone. The characters join their fellow party members in passing into the next room, but the party is no longer eligible to receive the *wings of flying* reward at the end of the adventure.

The disks and bridges also shatter if the characters are antagonistic to each other (cracking first as a warning). Characters who plunge into the star as a result take the same damage as above, as do characters who willingly step off a disk to avoid the challenge.

Room Two: Constellatory Crossing

Once the final pair of tethered characters finishes the challenge of the first room, all the characters enter this room, but are divided as tethered pairs to either side of a shimmering barrier (see "Dividing Wall"). Read or paraphrase the following:

> Beyond the door stands a cluster of flat-topped structures floating in a starry void—divine architecture suspended within a celestial cosmos with no end. Rectangular stone pillars jut up from the darkness at varying heights. A broad platform across the empty expanse mirrors the one you stand on, and is set with an arched doorway. Nothing save the stars surrounds these isolated structures, but tempestuous winds swirl scathing stardust around you, even as meteors hurtle above and below.
>
> A booming voice echoes across the void: "Each set of bound souls must cross their own path of pillars. Together, you must stand tall upon each. Only then will the way forward open to you."

This chamber's ceiling stretches 200 feet above the platforms and the bridge of pillars, and its floor is an endless void. The night sky illuminates the room with dim light.

To pass through this area, each pair of tethered characters must travel across a set of three pillars to reach the far platform and the next doorway. Alongside the physical challenge, the characters are tormented atop the pillars and tempted to betray their partners. As this challenge has a timed component, it's helpful to keep track of turns and have each pair of tethered characters take their actions before moving to the next characters.

Dividing Wall

As soon as the booming voice falls silent, an immobile, faintly shimmering barrier rises to gently push each pair of tethered characters toward one set of pillars, which become the path those characters must take across the chamber. The characters can see each other and faintly hear each other through the wall, which stretches across the room from one platform to the other, and extends from the top of the ceiling down into the void as far as the characters can fall. No creature can physically pass through the wall aside from the constellation griffon (see "Stellar Terror"). The wall is immune to damage, can't be dispelled or destroyed, can't be bypassed with teleportation magic, and extends into the Ethereal Plane to block ethereal travel through it. However, the wall doesn't block spells or attacks with ranged or reach weapons by characters wanting to target the griffon or another creature through the wall.

Three or More Pairs

The map sets out two pillar paths for two sets of tethered characters. If you are running this adventure for a larger party, simply add more sets of pillars and dividing walls between them as necessary, with the walls shunting characters along the platform as necessary.

Crossing the Pillars

The pillars are spaced in irregular lines and have their tops at different heights relative to the starting and ending platforms (as noted by the height markers on the map). Whenever a pair of tethered characters are standing on the same pillar at the same time, that pillar activates and starts to glow softly. The door on the far platform opens when the last of the pillars has been activated.

As normal, a character can move 10 feet across a pillar, then make a long jump that covers a number of feet equal to their Strength score. The nature of the gravity in the chamber means that jumping from a lower area to a higher area (or vice versa) is calculated by simply adding the horizontal and vertical distances. For example, going from the platform to the first pillar is 10 feet horizontally and 5 feet up, for a total 15-foot jump. Likewise, jumping from the second pillar to the lower third pillar is 10 feet horizontally and 5 feet down, for a total 5-foot jump.

If a character can't clear the distance between pillars by making a normal jump, they must succeed on a Strength (Athletics) check with a DC equal to 10 + the number of feet their jumping distance can't clear. For example, a character with Strength 8 who needs to jump 15 feet must succeed on a DC 17 check.

If a character fails a check to make a longer-than-normal jump, they can attempt a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw. On a successful save, they grab onto the pillar 30 feet below the height of the pillar they jumped from, and can climb back up the smooth stone with a successful DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check. On a failed save, the character falls into the void, descending 500 feet into endless darkness each turn. This fall continues until the character's tethered partner uses an action to save them (as described in "Stopping a Fall"), until all the characters fall and are unable to save each other, or until any remaining characters are defeated by the constellation griffon (see "Resolving the Crossing").

Keeping Moving

Once both characters reach the top of a pillar to activate it, they have 1 minute to reach the next pillar before the pillar they stand on collapses. At the 30-second mark, the pillar starts ominously quaking. At 1 minute, the pillar collapses, with any creatures standing on it falling into the void.

Stopping a Fall

If a character falls into the void, their tethered partner has a chance to help them. That partner can use an action to expend one Hit Die and flood the tether with magic, instantly pulling the falling character into an unoccupied space on the pillar or platform closest to them. A character can use this action even while falling through the void, allowing two falling characters to save each other.

Each time a character uses this action, the constellation griffon regains hit points using its Celestial Renewal trait (see the stat block). If a character runs out of Hit Dice, you might decide that they can expend a spell slot, lose one or more uses of a class feature, or gain one level of exhaustion to take this action. In such cases, the griffon still regains hit points by rolling a die equal to a character's Hit Die, even if a Hit Die is not expended.

PILLAR OBSTACLES

Each time a pair of tethered characters activates a pillar, stars flare crimson in the sky above, triggering a chaos constellation meant to test the characters' resolve and camaraderie before they move on to the next pillar. Choose or roll for an event on the Chaos Constellation table, avoiding or rerolling duplicates for a tethered pair of characters, and alternating which character is targeted if the event requires a target.

When the first pair of tethered characters reaches their first pillar, a **constellation griffon** manifests to harass all the characters during their crossings, as described at "Stellar Terror" below.

When each pair of tethered characters reaches the top of their third pillar, they face a difficult choice laid down for them at "Glittering Temptation" below.

Chaos Constellation

d6	Event
1	**Falling Star.** A falling star plummets onto the pillar, forcing each creature on the pillar to make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 7 (2d6) fire damage and 7 (2d6) radiant damage and is knocked prone. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't knocked prone. The pillar begins quaking immediately from the impact, and collapses 30 seconds later if not already closer to collapse.
2	**Heavenly Burden.** The weight of the cosmos bears down upon one of the characters, vast and monumental. The character must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or have their speed halved until they are subject to a *lesser restoration* spell, a *dispel magic* spell, or similar magic, or until they reach the ending platform in this room.
3	**Void Whispers.** A horrifying, unknowable entity speaks to a character from across the void. The character must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened of the surrounding void, preventing them from jumping to the next pillar. This effect lasts until another creature uses an action to talk the character out of their fear.
4	**Cosmic Force.** A character becomes locked in a battle of physical will against an unseen force, and must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or become grappled by the force (escape DC 18). If the character succeeds on the saving throw or escapes the grapple, the force dissipates. This DC is lowered by 1 for each round another creature spends trying to help free the grappled creature, whether by using the Help action or through another method.
5	**Astral Distortion.** The surrounding cosmos distorts in aberrant and unfathomable ways in the eyes of a character. The character must succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw or be able to take only an action or a bonus action on each of their turns, not both. This effect lasts until the character is subject to a *lesser restoration* spell, a *dispel magic* spell, or similar magic, or until they reach the ending platform in this room.
6	**Transcendent Visions.** A character is overcome by visions of their greatest desires. The character must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma saving throw or become charmed by the void until another creature uses a bonus action to talk them out of it. While charmed in this way, a character believes that what they desire most is within the void, and attempts to walk off the edge of the pillar to reach it.

STELLAR TERROR

Once the first pair of tethered characters reaches the top of their first pillar, a **constellation griffon**—a great flying creature whose body is seemingly filled with stars—manifests above the pillars.

> The voice booms once more as a griffon seemingly made of stars unfurls in splendor at the center of the room. "The guardian shall weigh your worth as you cross. Climb together, fight together, and create a bond worthy of the stars!"



The griffon divides their attention between each group of characters in the room, either harassing them equally or prioritizing characters who are having the easiest time with the physical crossing or the chaos constellations, at your discretion. If the griffon is reduced to 0 hit points, they don't die or disappear—rather, the stars that make up their form dim, and they remain as an observer to the remainder of the crossing.

Glittering Temptation

When each pair of tethered characters activates their last pillar, a disembodied voice individually asks each character if they want to be written in the stars and remembered forever as a hero. Alternatively, the voice can offer something a character wants desperately. You're their GM—you know how to tempt the characters best. Rather than glory and renown, this could be riches, power, or a small miracle. Keep in mind, though, that the character won't actually receive what's promised, so try not to pick something that fulfills a character's foremost goal or would be crushing to not receive.

The price a character must pay for gaining their desire is simple: leave their tethered partner behind. The unseen entity assures each character that they will open the door for them, acting in their partner's stead. Should either of the characters accept the offer, the pillar beneath them collapses and plunges both characters into the void—with the characters unable to use their actions to save each other as described in "Stopping a Fall" above.

If all the remaining characters participating in the trial finish the crossing and reach the far platform, any characters who fell as a result of this event are teleported to the platform and allowed to continue the trial. However, the character who succumbed to temptation and gave up their partner falls under the effects described in the "Abandoning a Partner" section near the start of this article.

Resolving the Crossing

If each pair of tethered characters activates all their pillars and reaches the ending platform without falling into the void, the arched doorway leading to the next room opens to their approach. If the characters didn't activate every pillar or if one or more falling characters remain trapped in the void, the door stays closed until those situations are rectified. The door has no visible lock and is immune to damage and magical effects.

In the event that a character somehow runs out of resources to assist a falling companion and is left alone (and thus unable to activate the remaining pillars), the constellation griffon retrieves the character's tethered partner.

If all the characters are defeated by the griffon, or if all characters fall into the void and do not—or cannot—expend resources to save each other, they fail the trial. The characters wake up outside the entrance point to the star trial and see that the door has disappeared.

Constellation Griffon

Large Celestial, Typically Chaotic Good

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 85 (10d10 + 30)
Speed 30 ft., fly 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	8 (–1)

Saving Throws Con +6, Wis +5
Skills Perception +5
Damage Resistances radiant
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, frightened
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages —
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Celestial Renewal. Whenever a character aids a tethered partner who has fallen from one of the pillars in the constellatory crossing, the griffon rolls a die of the same type as the character's Hit Die and regains a number of hit points equal to the roll.

Actions

Multiattack. The constellation griffon makes two attacks.

Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 4 (1d8) radiant damage. This attack is made with advantage if the target, or any object they are wearing or carrying, sheds bright light.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d10 + 4) slashing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Illuminating Star. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +6 to hit, range 60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (3d8) radiant damage, and the target sheds bright light in a 5-foot radius until the end of the griffon's next turn.

Stellar Ray (Recharge 6). The griffon unleashes a beam of stellar magic in a 40-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in the line must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 27 (6d8) radiant damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Room Three: Empyreal Severance

With the door from the constellatory crossing opened, the characters can pass through into the final section of the trial. The initial view into this 60-foot-high, dimly lit room is likely to be daunting, but any inspection or testing confirms that the floor is solid and can be walked on.

> This enormous chamber appears to be the endless firmament. It is the night sky itself, suspended above the vastness of space where stars underfoot coalesce upward, and the constellations drawn between them shape a tall humanoid figure. Illuminated by this shimmering starlight, an armored angel stands before you, bearing long hair cascading down to frame a thick beard, and wings that fade out to become dappled stars. He is muscular and tall, his expression kind.
>
> "Ah, I had hoped to meet you," he says warmly. "Tell me, how have you found my trials?"

Astraios (As-TRAY-ohs, he/him) is the divine arbiter of the star trial. He listens intently to any responses to his question, affirming the characters' difficulties and commiserating with their struggles. But he also redirects the conversation to talk about what they have learned or come to appreciate about each other.

When he feels the conversation has run its course, the angel prepares the final challenge of the trial. Read or paraphrase the following:

> Astraios steps back and extends his hand, a massive axe suddenly manifesting in his grip.
>
> "Let me see the strength of your bonds myself. Come! Our clash shall be one worthy of legends!"

Angelic Showdown

This final fight is meant to focus the characters' understanding of and dedication to each other. Astraios seeks to divide the party, hindering the characters strongly unless they take the time to aid each other. He uses his abilities and lair actions to isolate characters, then uses his Supernal Barrier bonus action to create walls and lock the characters down. His Weight of the Stars reaction and Resonant Nova action further hinder the characters' movements and communication, even as his Stellar Step bonus action and flying speed let him take the fight to individual characters, carving away at them with his astral axe.

Lair Actions and Assistance

Astraios's lair actions are built to literally or figuratively isolate characters from each other, with each successful action forcing an isolated character's tethered partner to use an action to aid them. Characters who try to whittle Astraios down instead might quickly find themselves ensnared without help or left standing alone—and if so, the fight is working as Astraios intends.

At your discretion, you can reward characters for caring behavior, making losing actions in combat less of a concern. For example, whenever a character aids their tethered partner, you might have each character gain 1d6 temporary hit points. Likewise, when a character rises to the challenge of this trial by restoring hit points to or buffing an ally, grant that character an extra 1d6 force damage on their next damage roll as the tether shines with power. Because the characters are sacrificing actions to help their allies, additional boons shouldn't alter the balance of the fight.

Alternatively, characters who happily aid each other without needing these boons might instead earn Astraios's *wings of flying* at the end of the adventure (see "Completing the Star Trial"). In that event, a character's tether might still shine as a positive feedback loop when they lend aid to others, affirming the rightness of their actions.

Lair Actions

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Astraios can take a lair action to cause one of the following effects, but can't use the same effect two rounds in a row.

Effulgent Starlight. Astraios targets one creature he can see within 120 feet of him and engulfs that creature in glaring starlight. The creature must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be suffused with incandescent silver light for 1 minute. The affected creature sheds bright light in a 10-foot radius and can't benefit from being invisible, and any attack roll against the creature has advantage if the attacker can see them. While within 30 feet of the affected creature, the creature's tethered partner can use an action to draw the light into the tether, ending the effect.

Starstorm. Astraios targets one creature he can see within 120 feet of him, which must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 10 (3d6) radiant damage and is trapped in a vortex of starry light. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't trapped. While trapped in this way, a creature is blinded and restrained, they have total cover against attacks and other effects outside the vortex, and they take 10 (3d6) radiant damage at the start of each of Astraios's turns. While within 30 feet of a trapped creature, the creature's tethered partner can use an action to send a surge of celestial magic down the tether and dispel the starry vortex, ending the effect.

Testing Bonds. A glittering corona of light forms around one creature Astraios can see within 120 feet of him, which must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed by Astraios for 1 minute. While within 30 feet of the charmed creature, the creature's tethered partner can use their action to appeal to the charmed creature, ending this charmed condition.

Astraios, Arbiter of the Stars

Large Celestial, Lawful Good

Armor Class 17 (half plate)
Hit Points 133 (14d10 + 56)
Speed 30 ft., fly 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	19 (+4)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +7, Wis +7, Cha +5
Skills Athletics +7, Insight +7, Perception +10
Damage Resistances radiant; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, stunned
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 20
Languages all, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Magic Resistance. Astraios has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Actions

Multiattack. Astraios makes two Astral Axe attacks, or he makes one Astral Axe attack and uses Resonant Nova, if available.

Astral Axe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) force damage plus 9 (2d8) radiant damage.

Resonant Nova (Recharge 5–6). Astraios targets one creature that he can see within 60 feet of him, forcing that creature and each creature other than Astraios within 20 feet of the target to make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 14 (4d6) radiant damage and is deafened until the end of Astraios's next turn. While deafened in this way, a creature can't speak. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't deafened.

Bonus Actions

Stellar Step. Astraios teleports, along with any equipment he is wearing or carrying, up to 30 feet to an unoccupied space he can see.

Supernal Barrier. Astraios summons a translucent starry wall 60 feet long, 5 feet wide, and 30 feet high at a point he can see within 60 feet of him. If the wall cuts through a creature's space when it appears, the creature is pushed to one side of the wall (Astraios's choice which side). Nothing can physically pass through the wall and it is immune to all damage, but it can be dispelled by a successful *dispel magic* spell (DC 15). The wall lasts until the start of Astraios's next turn.

Reactions

Weight of the Stars. When Astraios takes damage from a creature he can see within 30 feet of him, he thrusts the burden of the heavens upon that creature. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or take 5 (1d10) radiant damage and be knocked prone.



Completing the Star Trial

If the characters are defeated by Astraios, they wake up outside the entrance point to the star trial and see that the door has disappeared. Each hears Astraios's warning in their mind: "Treasure your bonds, and treat each other well." The door reappears when the characters are more prepared for the trials that wait beyond it.

Astraios doesn't die when reduced to 0 hit points, since he has protection from on high. If the characters defeat him, the angel tells them happily to "trust those bonds you have demonstrated, through everything." He then gives the characters the rewards of the star trial: a *ring of shooting stars* and a *+1 weapon* of your choice.

If the characters treated each other well and earnestly tried to help each other, Astraios also praises their love for each other and additionally rewards them with *wings of flying*. With a warm smile, he says he hopes to see them captured in constellations someday.

Expanding the Star Trial

To turn this trial into a longer adventure, consider adding these trials and complications before the encounter with Astraios (or create your own):

- Within a field of stars and foggy nebulae, the characters are confronted by and must overcome visions of their tethered partners' fears or regrets.
- An adventurer (use the **veteran** stat block) is found cowering in a corner, claiming they were abandoned by their tethered partner during another party's trial. This adventurer, actually an agent of the trial, follows a pair of tethered characters and slyly tries to drive a wedge between them, encouraging conflict and paranoia.
- Seeing a pair of tethered characters in conflict, a divine agent shatters their tether—meaning they can't progress in the trial without it. To reform the connection between themselves, the once-tethered characters must truly reconcile or come to an understanding.

Conclusion

If the characters don't already know of the sun trial and the moon trial, Astraios explains the setup of the trials to them. He keeps their full details secret, but reveals that the sun trial is about the characters tempering their ambitions, while the moon trial is about each character facing their true self. Astraios also doesn't reveal how or where to find the other two trials. Instead, he smiles mysteriously, saying, "Fear not. Such greatness will come when you are most in need of it."

The angel then snaps his fingers, teleporting the characters to the place where they entered the star trial. The arched doorway has vanished, awaiting the next heroes ready to challenge the trial.

Connecting the Trials

With all three trials now published, GMs have the option of playing them as a connected set of challenges. Each trial adventure takes one to two sessions and provides social encounters, combat, and puzzles. They are easy to run as standalone adventures, and can be quickly customized. The entrance to each trial can be set anywhere, their aesthetics can be tweaked, and their themes are universal.

For GMs who want to run all three trials, the themes of each can help determine which sequence of trials will create the greatest impact at your table. The following example orders and the arcs created by them can provide inspiration:

- **Sun, Moon, Stars.** The characters shed their abrasive pride and acknowledge their flaws. They then build better relations with their companions, having laid themselves bare.
- **Sun, Stars, Moon.** The characters set their pride aside and forge bonds of companionship, then lean on and prove those connections when their flaws are revealed.
- **Stars, Moon, Sun.** The characters bond with their companions before putting those bonds to the test when their worst selves are revealed. They then affirm their place and purpose as defined by those bonds, rather than by individual merit.

Adventure Hooks

The following adventure hooks give a few examples of ways to incorporate all three celestial trials into a campaign:

- A solar has a mission of grave importance in the Lower Planes for the characters, but must test their resolve to ensure they won't succumb to temptation in evil realms.
- A sphinx who guards a large collection of ancient knowledge and relics needed by the characters refuses access to anyone who hasn't passed the trials.
- A would-be benefactor doesn't like the cut of the characters' collective jib. The dysfunctional party members must succeed in the celestial trials to earn the benefactor's patronage.

CHARACTER PROMPTS

When preparing to run the trials, consider offering the players prompts in advance to flesh out their characters' heroic traits (or lack thereof). This not only helps them get into the mindset of these divine trials, but it can help you personalize the tests in each trial. Some example prompts follow, but you can tweak or replace them as you see fit:

- What is your character's idea of a true hero? How do they live up to that idea? How do they fall short of it?
- What flaws does your character struggle with? What part of themself do they most want to overcome?
- What is your character's greatest regret, or the greatest mistake they've made? How are they trying to make up for it?
- What is your character's goal as an adventurer and a hero? What forces—external or internal—are preventing them from accomplishing that goal?
- What does your character fear—both externally and about themselves?
- What does your character think of the other party members? If the party has been adventuring together for a while, what memorable moments has your character shared with the other characters?

REWARDS

Characters who complete all three trials are visited afterward by a divine emissary who gives them a final reward: a *ring of lucent nebulae* (see the sidebar). In addition, the emissary declares that with the characters completing all three trials, the rings they've claimed in those trials are now awakened with additional power. When the *ring of lucent nebulae*, the *ring of shooting stars*, the *ring of the burning sun* (claimed in the sun trial), and the *ring of the gleaming moon* (claimed in the moon trial) are worn by characters who are attuned to them and all four rings are within 120 feet of each other, each ring gains an additional property.

RING OF LUCENT NEBULAE

The *ring of lucent nebulae* gains the following property.

Cloak of Luminescence. You can expend 1 to 3 charges from the ring as an action. For every charge you expend, one creature you can see within 60 feet of you gains 2d6 temporary hit points.

RING OF SHOOTING STARS

The star trial's *ring of shooting stars* gains the following property.

Tether of Stars. You can expend 2 charges as an action to cast *warding bond* from the ring.

RING OF THE BURNING SUN

The sun trial's *ring of the burning sun* gains the following property.

Fury of Icarus. When a creature you can see deals radiant or fire damage to you, you can expend 3 charges from the ring as a reaction. The triggering creature takes half the damage dealt to you and is blinded until the beginning of your next turn.

RING OF THE GLEAMING MOON

The moon trial's *ring of the gleaming moon* gains the following property.

Seeing the Truth. You can expend 1 charge from the ring as an action to gain truesight out to a range of 60 feet for 1 minute.

RING OF LUCENT NEBULAE

Ring, Very Rare (Requires Attunement Outdoors at Night)

While wearing this ring in bright light, you can cast the *guidance* and *light* spells from the ring at will. Casting either spell from the ring requires an action.

Additionally, the ring has 6 charges for the following properties. The ring regains 1d6 expended charges daily at dawn.

Sanctuary. You can expend 1 charge as an action to cast the *sanctuary* spell from the ring.

Blur. You can expend 2 charges as an action to cast the *blur* spell from the ring.

Weaving Colors. You can expend 1 to 3 charges as an action. For every charge you expend, you conjure a glittery, shifting cloud of color that fills a 30-foot cube centered on a point you can see within 60 feet of you. When a cloud first appears, each creature you choose in its area must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw, taking 3d4 radiant damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Each cloud then lingers as a defensive bastion for 1 minute. During that time, a cloud's area is heavily obscured, and you can designate creatures in the area as protected creatures. Whenever a protected creature takes damage, that damage is reduced by 1d4, to a minimum of 0.

RESOURCES

MCDM TABLETOP SAFETY TOOLKIT

https://mcdm.gg/SafetyToolkit

RELIGION CONSTRUCTION KIT

https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202212/ReligionCreationSheet_FormFillable.pdf

DIVINE TRIALS: HEROES OF THE STARS

https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202212/HeroesOfTheStars.zip
https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202212/StarTrialMap-30x58-140ppi-Alt.jpg
https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202212/StarTrialMap-30x58-140ppi-Grid-Alt.jpg
https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202212/StarTrialMap-30x58-140ppi-Grid.jpg
https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202212/StarTrialMap-30x58-140ppi.jpg

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dragons.

They're pretty cool. That about covers it, right?

Okay, there's a *lot* more to say about dragons than I can touch on in one letter! I need to get that out of the way. Dragons are a big deal in mythology, folktales, and fantasy stories around the world: the Bakunawa who swallowed the moon in Filipino mythos; the multi-headed Greek hydra; Apep, the Egyptian serpent-dragon god of chaos; the many dragons of Chinese mythology who embody power, luck, and water; the Norse dragon Níðhöggr who guards the World Tree….

Dragons are *the* quintessential fantasy creature, perhaps because their many variations can fulfill different roles—a defender, a predator, an ancient keeper of wisdom, an embodiment of avarice—yet remain recognizable as *dragons*. Since dragons have a mix of reptilian, feline, and avian characteristics (scales, powerful and lithe bodies, and sometimes wings), they're easy to visualize based on familiar creatures in our world. They're iconic because of their versatility, their ubiquity, and the fact that they are just fantastic enough to feel like awesome fantasy creatures *but* just familiar enough to feel like they could really exist.[1]

In fact, a lot of fantasy is like that—what if this thing were weird and wild and totally different, but in other ways profoundly the same?[2] What if there were magic and dragons and demons, but people still create civilizations and art and fall in love? What if we could go on epic adventures and punch bad people in the face with no legal repercussions and not pay freelance taxes *and* know that we did something important and worthwhile that no one else could do? And also ride a majestic dragon into battle against the forces of evil?

Right. So, anyway. Dragons.

The pages of this month's *ARCADIA* are filled with a delightful variety of draconic creatures. In "Granny's Concoctions," Jessica Marcrum taps into the archetype of a dragon disguised as another creature (I won't spoil any more than that, just in case). In "The Gilded Flight," Carlos Cisco explores the idea of a gold dragon whose noble intentions were corrupted and twisted into greed, manipulation, and an unhealthy devotion to becoming a god via the free market economy. And in "We Ride Dragons," Willy Abeel of "Mounted Combat" fame brings us new draconic mounts, a guide to creating your own mounts (check out the video version, too!), and two legendary omnimounts to carry the entire party between worlds.

Lots of things are happening here at MCDM, but our love for telling epic fantasy stories is a constant. Dragons were the first peoples of Orden (stay tuned for more lore on the world of Orden and on the Timescape) but they aren't around anymore—so adventurers are one of the few people likely to meet one. In your own settings, dragons can be as rare or numerous as you want (a world of only dragons—little dragons, bigger dragons, biggest dragons? I'm going to write that down…). The dragons that appear in your settings and stories are *your* twist on classic fantasy and part of what makes your adventures yours alone. Dream your dragon dreams—then forward, into adventure!

De somnio ad itinere,
Hannah Rose
Managing Editor

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[1] Speaking of which, Google results for "dragon" include "When did dragons go extinct?" and "Is there any real dragon in the world?" Are people okay?

[2] Side note: I love stories that sit in the overlap of fantasy and sci-fi, like the *Dragonriders of Pern* (a little dated, but absolutely formative for me) and *The Locked Tomb* series.

WE RIDE DRAGONS

Mighty draconic mounts (and guidelines for making your own!)

by Willy Abeel

The dragons found between these pages have all been recorded working in tandem with riders. Some dragons may challenge the notion of forging bonds with the small and short-lived. Others know full well how powerful such a bond can become.

Will you fumble the reins and be overwhelmed by the might of these beings, *or will you ride a dragon?*

In "Jumping on Mounted Combat" in *ARCADIA* 1 and the sequel "Swimming Through Sand to Sea" in *ARCADIA* 4, we've been exploring new mounted stat blocks, new actions for the rider, magic items and features for transporting mounts, modifying powerful creatures to be easier to ride, and alternative locomotion options. It's all led to this: allowing adventurers to ride dragons!

This article provides a thunder of dragon mounts who are ready to ride. Then, it explores how mounts are made using the mounted combat rules in *ARCADIA* and provides a method for making powerful creatures into more manageable stat blocks. Finally, it tops things off with two new omnimounts who can carry the entire party across vast distances and even between planes.

Riding in Re-Review

You use the following rules (which are largely the same as in the core rules) to control a mounted creature in combat:

- A creature must be willing, be at least one size category larger than the rider, and have the proper anatomy to serve as a mount.
- In combat, the mount shares the rider's turn. The rider and mount work in tandem, and can take their respective actions in any order during their turn. The mount can move and take the Dash, Disengage, or Dodge action on their own, or they wait for the command of their rider.
- The rider can expend half their movement to dismount or remount (unless they take the Vaulting Attack bonus action described below).
- If an effect moves the mount against the mount's will, or the rider is knocked prone while mounted, the rider must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or fall off the mount.
- If the mount provokes an opportunity attack, the attacker can target the mount or the rider.

With the Mounted Combat ruleset, the rider also gains access to two new bonus actions while mounted.

Mount Action. While mounted, the rider can use a bonus action to command the mount to take one of the actions in the mount's stat block.

Vaulting Attack. While mounted, the rider can use a bonus action to dismount spectacularly. The rider must make a DC 12 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. On a success, the rider vaults from their mount up to a distance equal to 5 feet × their proficiency bonus, and the next attack they make before the end of their turn has advantage. Otherwise, the rider falls prone in an unoccupied space adjacent to the mount and the rider's speed becomes 0 until the start of their next turn.

Draconic Mounts

In addition to the green dragon mount below, three new dragons—the cobblewyrm, the draconfly, and the shadogar—appear in this article as new mount options. They are new dragon types, separate from chromatic or metallic dragons.

The cobblewyrm and draconfly mounts were found to be more approachable to greenhorn adventurers than true dragons, whereas green dragons need training from an early age before they're ready to ride. But approach the shadogar with caution—only the craftiest adventurers will find a way to mount one successfully.

Cobblewyrm

Said to be the smallest dragons in existence, cobblewyrms defy this superlative with the innate ability to accumulate stones into their rocky bodies and instantly change their size. They're normally found in the wild where deposits of delicious limestone are plentiful, though some are raised in homesteads after one of their pebble-like eggs gets tracked inside by a worker's boot.

Cobblewyrm Mount

Tiny Mounted Dragon, Typically Any Chaotic Alignment

Armor Class 14 + PB (natural armor)
Temporary Hit Points 4 times the rider's character level or challenge rating
Hit Points 35 (10d4 + 10)
Speed 10 ft., burrow 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	6 (–2)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +2 plus PB
Condition Immunities prone
Senses tremorsense 30 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Draconic, understands Common but can't speak it
Proficiency Bonus equals the rider's bonus

Mounted. During a long rest, the cobblewyrm can designate one creature who rode them within the last 10 days as their rider. The cobblewyrm gains temporary hit points equal to 4 times the rider's level or challenge rating after completing the long rest.

Anchored. The cobblewyrm is considered mounted while they are touching their rider, and can occupy their rider's space while they are Medium or smaller. The rider cannot perform a Vaulting Attack while the cobblewyrm is smaller than they are.

Conglomerate. Once per turn, the cobblewyrm can change their size (up to the maximum possible size in the space available). Their AC, speeds, and the range and damage die for their Sandspit and Boulder Breath actions change with their size category according to the Cobblewyrm Size table. If their new size is the same as or smaller than their rider's size, the rider can choose to land in any space previously occupied by the cobblewyrm.

Plated Protection (Large Size Only). The cobblewyrm's rider can ride on the cobblewyrm while they burrow.

Stony Shielder (Tiny Size Only). The cobblewyrm's rider has a +2 AC bonus while the cobblewyrm is in their space.

Actions

Sandspit. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +2 plus PB to hit, range 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage. If the target has eyes, the range of their vision is reduced to 10 feet until they use an action to clear the sand out of their eyes.

Cobble. The cobblewyrm repairs an object they touch as if they had cast the *mending* cantrip.

Boulder Breath (3/Day). The cobblewyrm exhales sand and rocks in a 10-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a successful DC 10 + PB Strength saving throw or take 15 (6d4) + PBd4 bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't knocked prone. In addition, the ground underneath the blast becomes difficult terrain until cleared (a creature can clear their current space as an action). The cobblewyrm's maximum size decreases by one category (to a minimum of Tiny). If their current size is greater than their new maximum size, they automatically Conglomerate to the new maximum size. When the cobbleworm completes a long rest, their maximum size becomes Large again.

Cobblewyrm Size

Size	AC	Speed/Range	Damage Die
Tiny	14 + PB	10 ft.	d4
Small	12 + PB	20 ft.	d4
Medium	10 + PB	30 ft.	d6
Large	10 + PB	40 ft.	d8

DRACONFLY

When the draconfly buzzes blare, a dragon is in the air.
—Captain Raccol, Squadron Leader
of the 3rd Swarm Fleet

The magic that surges through a dragon's hoard can impact the flora and fauna living nearby, especially so when the hoard contains treasures not native to its plane. Insects like the dragonfly transform into quick and powerful new dragons, ready to venture out and make new hoards of their own.

These dra*con*flies are capable of beating their wings fast enough to cut through the border between planes where it's thinnest. When they zip through the air, they literally tear into and out of the Ethereal Plane in the blink of an eye. City patrols utilize their unique traits in draconfly fleets, scouting city limits for both interplanar and draconic threats.



Draconfly Mount

Large Mounted Dragon, Unaligned

Armor Class 13 + PB
Temporary Hit Points 4 times the rider's character level or challenge rating
Hit Points 19 (3d10 + 3)
Speed 15 ft., fly 15 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)	2 (–4)	9 (–1)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Cha +1 plus PB
Condition Immunities charmed, deafened
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages understands Draconic but can't speak
Proficiency Bonus equals the rider's bonus

Mounted. During a long rest, the draconfly can designate one creature who rode them within the last 10 days as their rider. The draconfly gains temporary hit points equal to 4 times the rider's level or challenge rating after completing the long rest.

Blinkflight. Once on the draconfly's turn, they can use 5 feet of movement to teleport themself and their rider up to 20 feet to an unoccupied space they can see. If the draconfly has taken the Dash action on that turn, the range of this teleportation increases from 20 feet to 40 feet. This trait doesn't function if the draconfly is incapacitated.

Dragonscry. The draconfly's buzzing is twice as loud and the reach of their Sonic Buzz is doubled while within 500 feet of another dragon on the same plane of existence.

Flight Noise. While the draconfly's rider is mounted on the draconfly, the rider cannot be charmed or deafened.

Actions

Sonic Buzz. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 plus PB to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) thunder damage. The target must succeed on a DC 10 + PB Constitution saving throw or become deafened until the start of the draconfly's next turn. While deafened in this way, a creature can't speak.

Draconic Wingbeat. The draconfly flaps their wings rapidly, shifting the air in and out of the Ethereal Plane. Each creature of the draconfly's choice within 10 feet of them must succeed on a DC 10 + PB Constitution saving throw or gain 1 level of exhaustion. If the draconfly uses this action more than once before completing a long rest, they and their rider must make the saving throw as well.

Ethereal Zip. The draconfly and their rider magically shift to the Ethereal Plane from the Material Plane, or vice versa.

Mounts and Challenge Rating

Mounted creatures no longer have a CR associated with them, given that their strength and defense grow alongside their rider. If you are running an enemy riding a mount using these rules, it would be best to calculate the mount's CR within that particular encounter.

That said, not all mounts are created appropriately for all tiers of play. As a general rule, mounts that receive temporary hit points equal to 5 or 4 times the rider's character level work well for tier 1 and up, mounts that receive temporary hit points equal to 3 or 2 times the character level work for tier 2 and up, and anything goes for tiers 3 and 4.

Green Dragon

True dragons achieve self-awareness as juveniles, the liminal age between wyrmling and young dragon. Though they know their own might, they don't yet bear the pomp of their forebears. Rather, they are more willing to make a life amongst those who would cherish them—for better or worse.

Green dragons of any age carry as much capacity to be machiavellian as they do to be thoughtful and prepared. They utilize nature magic to carry their compatriots out of danger, lead their victims into it, or both.

Juvenile Green Dragon Mount

Large Mounted Dragon, Typically Any Lawful Alignment

Armor Class 13 + PB (natural armor)
Temporary Hit Points 2 times the rider's character level or challenge rating
Hit Points 68 (8d10 + 24)
Speed 30 ft., fly 60 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +3 plus PB, Cha +2 plus PB
Skills Perception +1 plus PB, Stealth +1 plus PB
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses blindsight 15 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11 + PB
Languages Draconic, can communicate with Beasts
Proficiency Bonus equals the rider's bonus

Mounted. During a long rest, the dragon can designate one creature who rode them within the last 10 days as their rider. The dragon gains temporary hit points equal to 2 times the rider's level or challenge rating after completing the long rest.

Amphibious. The dragon can breathe air and water.

Unseen Green. If the dragon is in a 10-foot radius or larger area of dense foliage at the start of their turn, they and their rider can blend in with the leafy camouflage and become impossible to see without the aid of magic. Attack rolls against the dragon and their rider have disadvantage, and both creatures' attack rolls have advantage. If either the dragon or the rider makes an attack, casts a spell that affects an enemy, deals damage to another creature, or leaves the area of foliage, this effect ends.

Actions

Numbing Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 plus PB to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d10 + 4) piercing damage. Until the end of the dragon's next turn, the target loses any resistance or immunity to poison damage and can't use reactions.

Poison Breath (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). The dragon exhales poisonous gas in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 10 + PB Constitution saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) + PBd6 poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Verdant Presence (1/Day). While on the ground, the dragon causes foliage to grow thick and wild in a 15-foot radius centered on themself. The area becomes difficult terrain and is heavily obscured. The effects end if the dragon moves more than 60 feet from the area.

SHADOGAR

Dragons who embrace the might of powerful shadows inevitably lose themselves to it. Their majesty erodes, washed away by darkness year after year. Eventually, all that remains is a shadogar, a faint wisp of the proud dragon they once were, their great wings but mere flecks, their booming voice forgotten. Yet their ambitions still burn bright.

Shadogars bend and twist the dark around them until glimpses of their former grandeur spring forth in bursts of black fire. They tag along in the shadows of others who seek power, influence, or forbidden knowledge, instinctively wanting the same for themselves.

Shadogar Mount

Medium Mounted Dragon, Unaligned

Armor Class 13 + PB
Temporary Hit Points 3 times the rider's character level or challenge rating
Hit Points 45 (10d8)
Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	6 (−2)	15 (+2)	26 (+8)

Saving Throws Dex +3 plus PB, Cha +8 plus PB
Skills Stealth +3 plus PB
Damage Vulnerabilities radiant
Damage Immunities necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities exhaustion, grappled, petrified, prone, restrained
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages understands Common and Draconic but can't speak
Proficiency Bonus equals the rider's bonus

Mounted. During a long rest, the shadogar can designate one creature who rode them within the last 10 days as their rider. The shadogar gains temporary hit points equal to 3 times the rider's level or challenge rating after completing the long rest.

Dragon Might. Medium and smaller creatures can ride the shadogar.

Shadow Sneak. The shadogar's speed is doubled and their movement makes no sound when they start their turn in dim light or darkness.

Shadow Games. While mounted, the shadogar's rider's voice changes to sound like that of an adult dragon and the rider has advantage on Charisma (Intimidation) checks.

Actions

Frightful Presence (1/Day). The shadogar musters a shadow puppet of a dragon. Each creature of the shadogar's choice within 20 feet of the shadogar and aware of them must succeed on a DC 12 + PB Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themself on a success.

Slink. The shadogar flattens themself into a Small, shadowy disk and their rider immediately dismounts. While in this form, the shadogar is invisible in dim light or darkness and can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing or provoking opportunity attacks. The only action the shadogar can take in this form is to return to their original form.

Sunspot. The shadogar creates a 5-foot-diameter mote of volatile shadow centered on a surface they can see within 30 feet of them. When a creature enters or starts their turn in this area, the sunspot explodes. Each creature in that area must make a DC 10 + PB Dexterity saving throw, taking PBd6 + 8 fire damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one. A sunspot lasts for 10 minutes or until it explodes, and is invisible in dim light or darkness. The shadogar can have up to PB active sunspots.

Reactions

Veil. If the shadogar or their rider are the target of an attack or an effect the shadogar can see, the rider can use their reaction to have the shadogar briefly makes themself and the rider like shadows, granting them both half cover until the start of the shadogar's next turn. The shadogar can't use this feature again until they start their turn in dim light or darkness.

Making a Mount

Making monsters into mounts requires a few hard rules and a lot of soft considerations. This section will guide you through each aspect of creating a mount for a player character at your table (including your own, subject to your GM's approval!).

You're ultimately creating a stat block that works best for your table, but the ideal mount is a creature that:

1. Augments the rider's **movement**
2. Creates **openings** for the rider's actions
3. Stays relevant to the rider's **level**

Start by giving the creature the following Mounted trait. We'll break down each part of this trait and how it affects the creature. Then, we'll look at the creature's traits and actions:

Mounted. During a long rest, the mount can designate one creature who rode them within the last 10 days as their rider. The mount gains temporary hit points equal to X times the rider's level or challenge rating after completing the long rest.

Proficiency Bonus

Mounts use the rider's proficiency bonus (PB) in place of their own. Update the stat block accordingly, using this new proficiency bonus to calculate the creature's skills, saving throws, save DCs, and attack rolls. The rider's PB also gets added to the creature's AC, reflecting the rider's skill at keeping their mount out of harm's way.

It's worth adding proficiency in a relevant saving throw if the creature doesn't already have one—it's an easy opportunity to show the creature's growth alongside their rider.

AC and Hit Points

Recalculate the creature's AC to be 10 + the creature's Dexterity or Constitution modifier (whichever is more relevant) + the rider's proficiency bonus.

The goal of adding temporary hit points with the Mounted trait is for the creature to end up with around 100 hit points when their rider is level 20. This gives them a scaling baseline for survivability akin to a wizard adventurer; no longer a liability at higher levels, but still important to take care of. Check out the Temporary Hit Points Multiplier table to determine how many temporary hit points the creature receives at the end of each long rest.

Temporary Hit Points Multiplier

Base Creature Hit Points	Temporary Hit Points
9 or fewer	5 × rider level
10–39	4 × rider level
40–59	3 × rider level
60–79	2 × rider level
80–99	1 × rider level
100 or more	—

Heroic Mount Variant

If you're interested in boosting the survivability of mounted creatures and making them as durable as the party bard rather than the party wizard, consider increasing the mount's temporary hit point multiplier by 1 in each row in the Temporary Hit Points Multiplier table. For example, a creature with 9 hit points would receive (6 × rider level) temporary hit points while mounted, and a creature with 103 hit points would now receive (1 × rider level) instead of nothing.

It's still advised to use temporary hit points instead of adding to the creature's regular hit points, as it will prevent the rider from using the creature like a second health bar they can keep refilling. If you **don't** foresee that being an issue, instead of using temporary hit points, you can add Hit Dice to the mount until they have at least the same number of Hit Dice as their rider. The mount can then grow in the same manner as the rest of the adventuring party, gaining a Hit Die each level.

Traits

What qualities of the creature can be imparted to the rider or the battlefield? What is unique about the creature's movement that would call the rider away from using their own movement? 1–2 unique traits are great for creatures who derive a lot of their identity from attacking, or 3 for creatures who only have one type of attack.

Consider some of the cool things frogs can do, for example. They jump really high, and they extend their tongues like fishing lines. If you were making a giant toad mount, you can turn these cool frog things into flavorful toad traits—now the toad mount can leap 20 feet into the air and grab creatures from far away with their tongue, sometimes simultaneously!

Actions

A mounted creature only needs 2–3 actions, since they'll be acting in tandem with their rider. These actions can be a mix of extra damage and afflicting conditions, utility abilities like healing or shielding, or controlling the immediate landscape. Don't feel constrained by the original capabilities of the creature either; thematic, new actions that provide support to the whole party are always welcome.

One of the mount's actions should be a reliable standard attack; it can derive its identity from one or more of the creature's original actions while providing a useful effect in addition to damage. If you also want to utilize a particularly strong signature action for the mount (such as a dragon's Breath Weapon), limit its uses per day so it doesn't overshadow the rider or other members of the party.

The rider's proficiency bonus can also be utilized for scaling attack damage, number of action uses, and number of objects created by an action. You can get creative with showing creature growth, but try to avoid mixing different modifier sources in the same action. Clarity is king.

Reactions

Mounts won't have many opportunities to use bonus actions in combat, but reactions come in clutch for establishing synergy between mount and rider. A mounted creature can't take reactions unless their rider uses their reaction, and mounted creatures can't make opportunity attacks. When adding or adjusting a mounted creature's reaction, make sure to add that they also use the rider's reaction to activate.

Making Juvenile Creatures

Dragons and other powerful creatures can overshadow the abilities of the adventurers and limit the effectiveness of other tools the heroes have accrued, especially so as a mount. A juvenile version of a monster can preserve the flavor of the fantasy without souring the fun.

It might be worth reviewing the "Creating a Monster" advice in the core rules before diving into smalling big creatures, but these guidelines should get you started quickly.

Size and Hit Die

Gargantuan creatures should be reduced to (at least) Huge size, and Huge creatures should step down to Large. Changing the size will also affect the Hit Die used (for example, a Gargantuan creature has d20 Hit Dice, but Large creatures have d10 Hit Dice).

If the creature's size stays the same, like with the juvenile green dragon, you can halve the number of Hit Dice the creature uses (such as from 16d10 to 8d10). This also works for particularly meaty Gargantuan creatures who are too tough even as juveniles, like the purple worm.

If you need to come up with a juvenile's statistics on the fly (I'm sorry), you can halve the creature's hit points instead of adjusting Hit Dice for a quick approximation. This may lead to complications involving features that rely on Hit Dice, but it *will* get you to the end of the session.

PB, AC, and Movement

Reduce the creature's proficiency bonus to a maximum of +3. Remove any bonuses to Armor Class that aren't the creature's Dexterity or Constitution modifiers. Reduce any unique movement speeds, such as flying, by 10–20 feet.

Actions and Spellcasting

Halve the maximum spell level that the creature can cast, if any. Damage dice can be reduced by one step (d12→d10→d8→d6→d4), especially when an action uses three or more damage dice at once. Add daily limits to especially strong signature attacks to further alleviate damage concerns. The creature can still do cool things, just not as reliably.

Remove any Multiattack action, and find flavorful ways to combine similar actions, such as turning Bite and Claw attacks into a Tantrum action.

Challenge Rating

The higher the original CR of the creature was, the more it'll be affected by these adjustments. CR 15 creatures can be brought down to around CR 5, whereas a CR 6 creature comes down to only CR 3. If you're creating a juvenile creature with the intent of making them into a mount, your goal is to bring the CR down to around the rider's current level or lower. You should use the rider's current proficiency bonus in your CR calculations.

And don't be afraid to adjust the size, hit points, and base stats further if the creature is still too tough. As long as the numbers are in a similar proportion, such as a warhorse favoring Strength above the rest of their ability scores, they will still feel like that creature. Some juveniles experience growth spurts later than others!

Example: Why Not the Wyvern?

The following **juvenile wyvern mount** was made using the **wyvern** stat block and both sets of guidelines. Wyverns are infamously ruthless combatants armed with a deadly stinger. One raised for war can channel their

prowess into slinging their riders into the fray and shredding their enemies' defenses.

For reference, the original wyvern stat block is provided below. In the new stat block, mount changes are shown in purple while juvenile changes are shown in green. As mentioned in the "Mounts and Challenge Rating" sidebar, mounted creatures don't have a Challenge Rating. The juvenile wyvern mount's Challenge Rating is listed to showcase how the stat block is adjusted to bring it down in power to the rider's current level or lower.

Wyvern

Large Dragon, Unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 110 (13d10 + 39)
Speed 20 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	5 (–3)	12 (+1)	6 (–2)

Skills Perception +4
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages —
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Actions

Multiattack. The wyvern makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its stinger. While flying, it can use its claws in place of one other attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) slashing damage.

Stinger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage. The target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Juvenile Wyvern Mount

Large Mounted Dragon, Unaligned

Armor Class 13 + PB
Temporary Hit Points 3 times the rider's character level or challenge rating
Hit Points 59 (7d10 + 21)
Speed 20 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	5 (–3)	12 (+1)	6 (–2)

Saving Throws Dex +0 plus PB
Skills Perception +1 plus PB
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11 plus PB
Languages —
Challenge 3 (700 XP)
Proficiency Bonus equals the rider's bonus

Mounted. During a long rest, the wyvern can designate one creature who rode them within the last 10 days as their rider. The wyvern gains temporary hit points equal to 3 times the rider's level or challenge rating after completing the long rest.

Dragoon. The wyvern uses their powerful tail to propel their rider through the sky. The rider can use a Vaulting Attack to target a creature up to 30 feet away, or 60 feet directly below the wyvern. If successful, the attack made using Vaulting Attack deals an extra PBd4 poison damage, and the wyvern can immediately move up to their speed to catch the rider.

Actions

Viper Thrash. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 plus PB to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) slashing damage, and the next attack made against this target before the end of the wyvern's next turn has advantage.

Burning Stinger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 plus PB to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage. Once per day when the wyvern hits a creature with this attack, they can inject the creature with venom, dealing an extra PBd4 poison damage. For the next minute, whenever the target takes damage from an attack, they also take an extra PBd4 poison damage. The target can make a DC 10 + PB Constitution saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themself on a success.

Reactions

Timely Arryvern. If the wyvern's rider or another creature within 30 feet of the wyvern is knocked prone or is falling, the rider can use their reaction to have the wyvern move up to their speed and catch the creature.

New Omnimounts

In *ARCADIA 4*, we learned of the omnimounts, titans who carry multiple riders across massive distances. Omnimounts are NPCs (or creatures controlled by NPCs) that can be introduced into globe-spanning, plane-spanning, or multiverse-spanning campaigns.

The following two dragons may lend their services as omnimounts, possibly right when your adventuring party needs them most.

Faloo, the Last Luckwyrm

Centuries ago, luckwyrms flew the skies and shaped the course of reality. They were the protectors of fate until they were overtaken by malevolent chromatic dragons. Luckily, at least one grand luckwyrm survives to this day.

Faloo appears whenever they are needed and never a moment sooner. They use their incredible speed to ensure that the fated reach their destination or escape their doom. When Faloo isn't ferrying passengers, they search the entirety of existence for evidence of other luckwyrms. They stay optimistic, assuring anyone who asks that "they've got luck on their side" with a wink.

Faloo's canine-shaped face and the patches of fur across their pearlescent body are reminiscent of a kobold. Fortune might favor the bold soul who finds a record of this mysterious draconic connection.



Grand Luckwyrm

Gargantuan Dragon, Typically Lawful Good

Armor Class 23 (natural armor)
Hit Points 777 (42d20 + 336)
Speed 60 ft., fly 200 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	30 (+10)	26 (+8)	19 (+4)	26 (+8)	30 (+10)

Saving Throws Dex +17, Con +15, Wis +15, Cha +17
Skills Insight +15, Perception +15, Survival +15
Damage Immunities force
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, poisoned
Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 25
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 21 (33,000 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +7

Dragonpower. If the luckwyrm moves at least 50 feet in a straight line on their turn, the luckwyrm and each creature riding them gain resistance to all damage except psychic damage until the end of the luckwyrm's current turn.

Legendary Fortune (7/Day). Once per turn, the luckwyrm can replace the d20 roll for an ability check, attack roll, or saving throw made by a creature they can see with either a 1 or a 20 (luckwyrm's choice). The target (excluding the luckwyrm) is immune to the luckwyrm's Legendary Fortune for the next 24 hours.

Lucksense. When a creature on the same plane of existence as the luckwyrm makes an ability check, attack roll, or saving throw and the d20 roll for it is a 1 or a 20, the luckwyrm can detect the creature's exact location and can instantly teleport to them, along with any of the luckwyrm's riders (no action required).

Fatal Serendipity. Each creature who witnesses the luckwyrm die is blessed for the next seven days. The luckwyrm is restored to life with all their hit points if the blessed creatures roll a total of seven 20s on the d20 roll for any ability checks, attack rolls, or saving throws they make before the blessing ends.

Actions

Tongue Lash. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +17 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 23 (3d8 + 10) bludgeoning damage and the target is knocked prone.

Crash. The luckwyrm moves up to their speed in a straight line. If the luckwyrm moves at least 50 feet and ends their movement within 5 feet of a surface or a Huge or larger object, they can crash into it. Each creature in a 40-foot radius of that point other than the luckwyrm and each creature riding them must succeed on a DC 22 Dexterity saving throw, taking 73 (7d20) force damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.
After crashing, the luckwyrm's hit point maximum is reduced by 111. This reduction lasts until the luckwyrm finishes seven long rests.

Dual Fates. The luckwyrm uses both Weal and Woe.

Weal. The luckwyrm grants a creature they can see 3d8 temporary hit points and advantage on the next ability check, attack roll, or saving throw they make before the end of their next turn.

Woe. The luckwyrm targets a creature they can see. The target must succeed on a DC 22 Charisma saving throw or take 13 (3d8) psychic damage and have their hit point maximum reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. A target who fails the saving throw also has disadvantage on the next ability check, attack roll, or saving throw they make before the end of their next turn.

Galdrashan, The First Sage

Galdrashan is an astral dragon who carelessly crashes through people's dreams as they drift through the Astral Plane. The First Sage is a misnomer the dragon chooses not to correct; their hoard of knowledge is impossibly vast, but Galdrashan is not the first being to contemplate any of it (that would be their mother, Circinus Endovstars).

The dragon offers "safe" passage through the Astral Plane in exchange for any reading material they've never paged through before. They enjoy the prospect of travel with hurried creatures lining their back and invite nearly any opportunity to do so. They ask their passengers lots of questions and offer rambling anecdotes all while haphazardly weaving between the dangers of the plane.

There's a chance Galdrashan may barge into another dream along the journey and lose contact with their riders, potentially leaving them stranded in the dreamscape of a Far Realm entity or a young kobold. While they'll never forget anyone they meet, it may take a while before the lost passengers come back to their mind.



Galdrashan

Gargantuan Dragon, True Neutral

Armor Class 22 (natural armor)
Hit Points 546 (28d20 + 252)
Speed 40 ft., fly 100 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
30 (+10)	12 (+1)	29 (+9)	28 (+9)	22 (+6)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Con +16, Wis +13, Cha +11
Skills Arcana +16, History +16, Insight +13, Perception +13, Stealth +8
Damage Immunities psychic
Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 23
Languages Abyssal, Celestial, Common, Draconic, Primordial, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 23 (50,000 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +7

Hypnopedia. Galdrashan can gain proficiency in a skill, language, or tool they don't already know if they focus on dreaming about it over the course of finishing five long rests. If Galdrashan learns a new language, the failure chance of their Wishmind trait is reduced by 20%, to a minimum of 0% (see Legendary Mindshield).

Legendary Mindshield. If Galdrashan fails a saving throw, they can choose to succeed instead. Each time they use this feature, Galdrashan forgets a random language they know, and their Wishmind trait gains a cumulative 20% chance of failure. If Galdrashan knows no languages, they forget how to breathe.

Nova. If Galdrashan dies, they are reborn as a gold dragon wyrmling 1 hour later, unless they were destroyed using the *wish* spell.

Star Cloak. Each creature who rides Galdrashan gains the benefits of the *pass without trace* spell while riding them.

Wishmind. Galdrashan can recall details of any person, place, or object they are asked about, as if they had cast the *legend lore* spell. Galdrashan can also ascertain where to find information they don't already know.

Actions

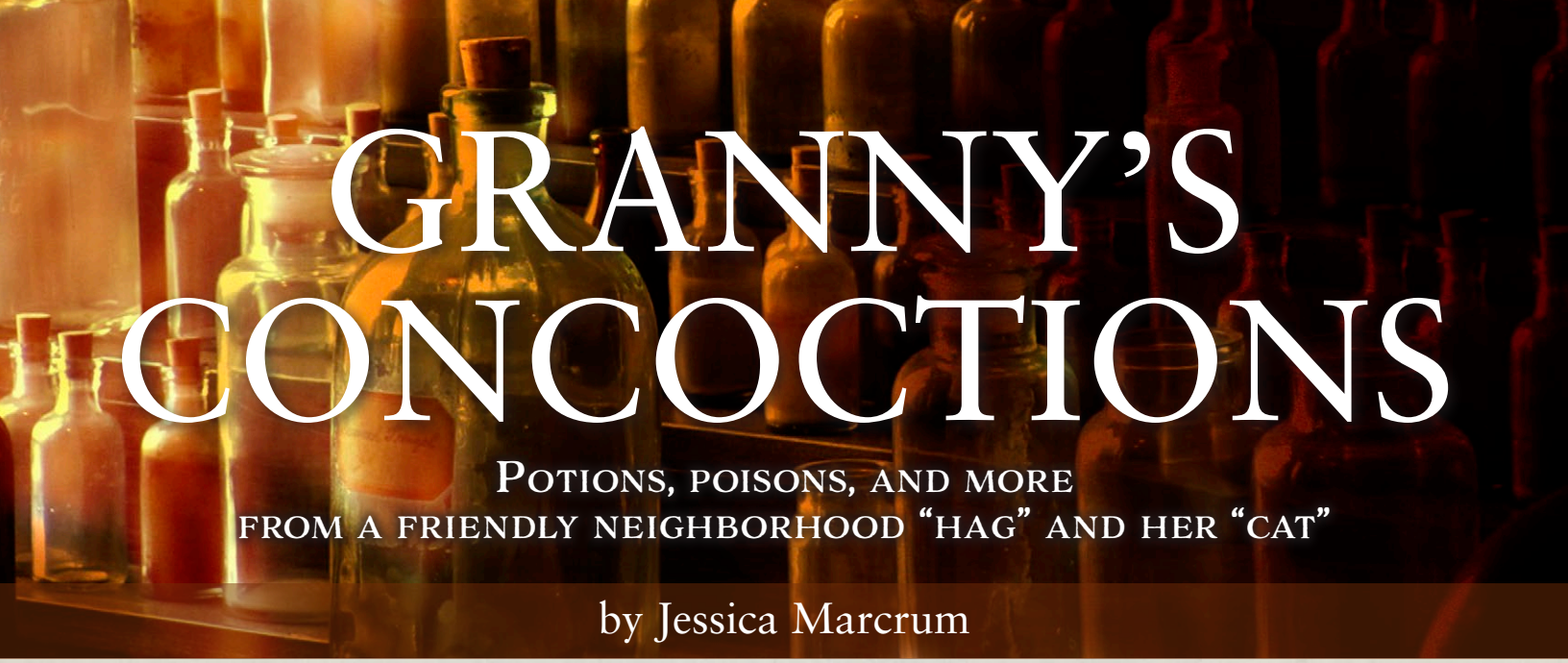
Silver Bites. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +17 to hit, reach 15 ft., three targets. *Hit:* 21 (2d10 + 10) piercing damage. On a critical hit against a target in an astral body (as with the *astral projection* spell), Galdrashan can cut the silvery cord that tethers the target to their material body, instead of dealing damage.

Astral Gate (1/Day). Galdrashan opens a gate to the Astral Plane (or from the Astral Plane to a destination of their choice on a different plane of existence) for themself and up to 10 creatures of their choice. The gate closes after 1 minute or when each chosen creature passes through it.

Astral Leap. Galdrashan and each creature riding them teleport to an unoccupied point Galdrashan can see within 60 feet of them.

Overwhelming Presence. Each creature of Galdrashan's choice within 120 feet of them must succeed on a DC 23 Intelligence saving throw or become stunned by unspeakable amounts of knowledge until the end of their next turn. Creatures who succeed on the saving throw have advantage on saving throws against Galdrashan's Overwhelming Presence for the next 24 hours.

Star Breath (Recharge 5–6). Galdrashan exhales dust and space debris in a 90-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw, taking 71 (13d10) slashing damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. A creature who fails the save by 5 or more takes an extra 22 (4d10) psychic damage.



Granny's Concoctions

Potions, poisons, and more from a friendly neighborhood "hag" and her "cat"

by Jessica Marcrum

> Welcome! Do come in! Don't mind Flufftavius. He snores loudly but won't hurt you. Now! What brings you to see old Granny? Looking for love? Vengeance? Or merely a nip to get through the day? I've got something for everyone on my shelves.
>
> –Granny Greenwinkle

A Gnome for Business

Granny Greenwinkle is a friendly gnome in her third century, and proprietor of Granny's Concoctions. She realized long ago that implying she has a touch of haggishness about her would advance her further in the potion business than simply setting up shop as a standard herbalist. As such, she wears tattered robes and bones hung on strings, mostly those of rodents caught by her enormously fat cat Flufftavius.

Granny is constantly accompanied by Flufftavius, who she loudly declares is her witch's familiar. The huge ginger cat is primarily seen sleeping on various scrolls, books, and dried herbs throughout Granny's shop, their loud musical snores just barely covering the sound of bubbling cauldrons in the back room.

Granny's Concoctions can be placed anywhere an apothecary's place of business might be found. The shop is suitably cluttered, as Granny expects a hag's lair might be, with its shelves covered with bottles, dried herbs, tiny bones, and discarded recipe scrolls. To complete the effect, random symbols are scrawled haphazardly across the walls, shelves, and ceiling. Navigating the shop is difficult due to its complete disorganization, and finding anything without Granny's help is a fool's errand. Fortunately, Granny is quick to aid any customer and has a knack for finding exactly what they need—even if it's not what they want.

Friendly "Familiar"

Any character with truesight or some other ability to see through illusions is immediately aware that Flufftavius is an adult copper dragon shapechanged into a fat, fluffy ginger cat. If this is brought to Granny's attention, she flatly denies it, joking that "everything seems a little funny in my shop after a while … magic in the air and all …" If a character politely addresses Flufftavius in Draconic, they cheerily respond by holding a paw to their nose in a shushing motion.

Flufftavius and Granny have been best friends since childhood, and the dragon-turned-cat now snoozes in her shop to support Granny's haggy hoax. Flufftavius responds to Granny as if they are her familiar, and walks through the occasional acid spill with ease. Any customer who pets Flufftavius gains inspiration that lasts until they finish a long rest. However, if any harm comes to Granny or the shop, Flufftavius reverts to their true form in defense of their friend.

The shop serves as Flufftavius's lair, with whatever city or village the shop is located within subject to the dragon's regional effects. (Granny's back room, off-limits to customers, is a massive, wide-open space with vaulted ceilings. Anyone sneaking back there might wonder what the tiny gnome needs with all that space, or what was recently moved out of it.)

Roleplaying Granny

Granny presents herself as a woman of mystery—or rather, a hag of mystery, sometimes hinting that she escaped from a coven. A fearsome haggler, she alludes to possessing powers beyond mortal knowing, and is not above frightening customers into a sale. With her wares available in a wide variety of prices, she is quick to size up a customer's potential wealth and skill, and presents them with the best fit for their needs and purse size. For example, tier 4 characters are offered the premium items Granny keeps "in the back for special occasions," such as *leprechaun's gift* and *peppy pop* potions. By contrast, lower-level adventurers might be offered discount wares such as a *cat's milk* or *zoological mimicry* potion.

What Granny Wants: To make a profit regardless of the consequences to others
What Granny Needs: To keep her mundane nature a secret
What Granny Hates: Unsupervised children and people who pay with electrum



Granny Greenwinkle

Small Humanoid (Gnome), Chaotic Neutral

Armor Class 11 (16 with *barkskin*)
Hit Points 27 (5d8 + 5)
Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)

Skills Deception +4, Medicine +6, Nature +5, Perception +4
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Common, Draconic, Druidic, Gnomish
Challenge 2 (450 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Gnome Cunning. Granny has advantage on Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma saving throws against magic.

Special Equipment. Granny's staff is a magic weapon, and she uses Wisdom for attack and damage rolls made with it.

Actions

Druid's Dragon-Scale Staff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Spellcasting. Granny casts one of the following spells, using Wisdom as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 12):

At-will: *druidcraft*, *produce flame*
3/day: *entangle*, *longstrider*, *speak with animals*, *thunderwave*
2/day: *barkskin*, *locate animals or plants*

Potent Potables Aplenty

Granny has a wide assortment of potions, poisons, and explosives for sale. For some strange reason, most of her wares use copper dragon scales, saliva, and acid as ingredients. Characters proficient with alchemist's supplies, an herbalism kit, or a poisoner's kit can use seven days of downtime to reverse engineer one of Granny's potions and discover its formula.

The GM can decide how much of any one item Granny has in stock. While perusing her special potions and poisons, characters have a 60 percent chance of finding any other potion, poison, or trinket in her shop each time they visit. Likewise, they have a 20 percent chance of finding any common or uncommon magic item and a 5 percent chance of finding any rare magic item, though Granny's Concoctions does not carry weapons or armor.

Very Important Potioneers

To encourage return visits, Granny offers a punch card for her customers (available as a handout in the Resources section). After purchasing ten items worth at least 25 gp each, a customer can get their next item valued at 125 gp or less for free. Granny also wishes to encourage the upcoming generation of eccentric herbalists, and offers to train anyone kind to her who professes skill in herbalism. Hoping to earn a spot in Granny's "coven," these students are given "Very Important Potioneer" badges, gain proficiency with alchemist's supplies or an herbalism kit (their choice), and can purchase supplies for their own potions from Granny's shop at the GM's discretion.

Training with Granny involves three weeks of intensive daily learning and assisting her in the shop. After that, VIPs are free to adventure, but must return and spend at least a few days every year assisting Granny to maintain their skills and VIP status.



Potions

Granny has a knack for sizing up what people want and need, as well as what might inspire them to return to her shop in the future. Many of her potions come in less potent versions at a cheaper price for beginning adventurers, such as the *zippy cantrip* and *bottled wyrmling scales* potions that are sourced from the *zappy cantrip* and *bottled dragon scales* potions.

Certain potions even have nonmagical variants Granny offers to low-level adventurers who "might not be ready for the hard hitters" yet. These include bottled coffee, garlic, whiskey, and assorted hallucinogens, all in potion bottles appearing similar but not quite identical to "the good stuff."

Granny's Potions

Potion	Price
Bottled Dragon Scales	1,200 gp
Bottled Wyrmling Scales	300 gp
Cat's Milk	50 gp
Damsel's Dream	7,000 gp
Enhancement Potion	350 gp
Instant Mouse	500 gp
Leprechaun's Gift	10,500 gp
Leprechaun's Gift, Diluted	2,500 gp
Lucky Shot	25 gp
Mist of Attraction	150 gp
Peppy Pop	15,000 gp
Perky Brew	300 gp
Quick Nap	8,000 gp
Scholar's Aid	300 gp
Uncanny Mimicry	1,000 gp
Uncomfortable Mimicry	250 gp
Wild Perfume	40 gp
Zappy Cantrip	1,500 gp
Zippy Cantrip	150 gp
Zoological Mimicry	30 gp



Bottled Dragon Scales

Potion, Rare

This copper-colored potion smells slightly bitter, and has a sharp metallic tang. When you drink this potion, your skin is covered with a bright copper sheen and you gain the following benefits for the next hour:

- Your AC can't be less than 16. If it is already 16 or greater, you have a +1 bonus to AC (to a maximum of AC 20).
- You have advantage on saving throws against the Frightful Presence and breath weapons of copper dragons.
- You have resistance to acid damage.

Bottled Wyrmling Scales

Potion, Uncommon

This copper-colored potion smells slightly bitter. When you drink this potion, your skin gains a subtle copper sheen and you gain the following benefits for the next hour: you have a +1 bonus to AC (to a maximum of AC 20) and resistance to acid damage.

Cat's Milk

Potion, Common

This opalescent white potion smells sweet, though fur can be seen floating in it. When you drink this potion, your walking speed is doubled for 1 hour. During this time, any Wisdom (Animal Handling) and Charisma (Persuasion) checks you make to interact with feline Beasts and feline Humanoids are made with advantage.

Damsel's Dream

Potion, Very Rare

This chartreuse potion smells like apple pie. When you drink it, you fall into a catatonic sleep indistinguishable from death. While unconscious in this way, you appear dead to all outward inspection and to magic used to determine your condition, and you have immunity to all damage except psychic damage. You remain asleep for 7 days or until a creature truthfully confesses their love to you for the first time. When you awake, you gain the benefit of a long rest.

Enhancement Potion

Potion, Uncommon

Each *enhancement potion* has a different appearance and affects a different ability score. For 1 hour after you drink the potion, you can roll a d4 whenever you make an ability check or saving throw using the ability score tied to that potion, adding the d4 roll to your d20 roll.

Enhancement Potions

Potions	Ability Score	Description
Bard's Tongue	Charisma	Gleams silver and whispers softly
Druid's Nose	Wisdom	Mossy green
Fighter's Belly	Constitution	Bronze color, smells of sour mash and ale
Knight's Arms	Strength	Contains an intact copper dragon scale
Sage's Brains	Intelligence	Glows a royal blue and smells of parchment
Thief's Hands	Dexterity	Smells of smoke and looks like liquid shadow

Instant Mouse

Potion, Rare

This potion's muddy-brown liquid swirls with bits of claws, teeth, and fur when shaken. When you drink the potion, you gain the ability to cast the *polymorph* spell on yourself at will for 1 hour, but you can only turn into a Tiny Beast using the spell.

Leprechaun's Gift

Potion, Very Rare

This fizzy golden potion smells like cinnamon and second chances. When you drink the potion, you gain a surge of luck. For the next minute, when you or an ally you can see within 30 feet of you makes an attack roll, an ability check, or a saving throw, you can use a reaction to allow the creature to reroll. You make this decision after you see whether the roll succeeds or fails. The creature must use the second roll.

Leprechaun's Gift, Diluted

Potion, Rare

This fizzy golden potion smells like cinnamon. When you drink this potion, you feel luck flowing through you. For the next 10 minutes, when you make an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw, you can use your reaction to reroll. You make this decision after you see whether the roll succeeds or fails. You must use the second roll.

Lucky Shot

Potion, Common

This opaque brown liquid smells like strong whiskey. When you drink this potion, you gain a modicum of luck, granting you advantage on the next attack roll, ability check, or saving throw you make. The potion's magic fades if not used within 1 hour.

Mist of Attraction

Potion, Uncommon

This gold-flecked purple liquid leaves a golden sheen on your skin. When you spray this potion on yourself, you gain advantage on Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, or Persuasion) checks for 1 hour.

Peppy Pop

Potion, Legendary

This fizzy red liquid tastes hot, bitter, and oddly refreshing. When you drink this potion, your speed is increased by 10 feet for the next minute. During that time, you can also take either an additional action or bonus action on each of your turns.

Perky Brew[1]

Potion, Uncommon

This mouthful of hot brown liquid tastes earthy, and is packaged in a tiny edible container. You can drink this potion as a bonus action, increasing your speed by 10 feet for the next minute. Additionally, twice in that time, you can take an additional bonus action on your turn. You can't use this benefit more than once per turn.

Quick Nap

Potion, Very Rare

This lavender potion smells of jasmine, and swirls with silvery wisps when shaken. If you drink half the potion, you gain the benefit of a short rest, and can use the remainder of the potion in the same way again. If you drink the full potion, you gain the benefit of a long rest, except that *quick nap* can't reduce exhaustion. You also must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion.

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[1] Granny additionally sells ingredients for a nonmagical version of perky brew for those who need a slight energy boost. For 1 gp, a character can procure enough ingredients to make twelve cups of nonmagical perky brew. "Just add hot water to get your day started the Greenwinkle way!" This libation is especially popular with students and shift workers, who swear it is "so much better than the pre-ground stuff."

Scholar's Aid
Potion, Uncommon

This tiny vial is filled with creamy pink liquid that glows in the dark. When you drink this potion, you gain the ability to memorize everything you read or see for the next hour, and can accurately recall it anytime thereafter. In addition, select one of the following effects.

Skill Proficiency. Choose one skill. For the next hour, you gain proficiency in that skill if you did not have it already, or your proficiency bonus for that skill is doubled if you already have proficiency in it.

Language Fluency. Choose one language you do not speak but have either heard or seen in written form. For the next hour, you are considered fluent in the chosen language, and can speak, read, and write it with ease.

Uncanny Mimicry
Potion, Rare

This potion cackles faintly when first unstoppered. When you drink the potion, you gain the ability to perfectly mimic any humanoid voice you have previously heard, and can do so for the next 8 hours. In addition, you can choose to have your mimicry emanate from any point you can see within 30 feet of you. A creature who hears the mimicry can tell that it is an imitation with a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Insight) check.

Uncomfortable Mimicry
Potion, Uncommon

This potion sighs when first unstoppered. When you drink the potion, you gain the ability to perfectly mimic any humanoid voice you have previously heard, and can do so for 8 hours. A creature who hears the mimicry can tell that it is an imitation with a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check.

Wild Perfume
Potion, Common

This vibrantly purple atomizer holds gold-flecked purple liquid that appeals to wild beasts. When you spray this potion on yourself, each Beast within 300 feet of you that can smell you becomes fixated upon you, following you until the perfume is removed using soap and hot water, the *prestidigitation* spell, or similar methods at the GM's discretion. Beasts with an Intelligence score of 4 or higher can choose to ignore this effect.

Zappy Cantrip
Potion, Rare

The liquid inside this bottle crackles and sparks harmlessly. When you drink this potion, your casting time for simple spells is decreased. For the next minute, whenever you cast a cantrip that has a casting time of 1 action, you can instead cast it as a bonus action.

Zippy Cantrip
Potion, Uncommon

The liquid inside this bottle burbles and sparkles with potential. When you drink this potion, your casting time for simple spells is decreased. The first time you cast a cantrip that has a casting time of 1 action within the next minute, you can instead cast it as a bonus action.

Zoological Mimicry
Potion, Common

This potion whistles like a songbird when first unstoppered. When you drink the potion, you gain the ability to perfectly mimic the sound of any Beast you have previously heard, and can do so for 1 hour. A creature who hears the sounds you make can tell they are imitations with a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check.

Explosives

The magical explosives section of Granny's Concoctions is cordoned off by a rope of living vines. She is especially cautious with these wares, and warns clients away from handling them carelessly or tipping them over. Flufftavius trots freely through the area, however, whipping their tail nonchalantly among bundles and bags of highly volatile concoctions.

Granny's Explosives

Explosive	Price
Bang!	350 gp
Chaos Kaboom	375 gp
Cocktail Explosive	125 gp
Dragon's Breath	2,500 gp (1,000 gp for copper)
Flash Bomb	1,000 gp
Illusory Cats	900 gp
Portable Door	400 gp
Sleep Grenade	800 gp
Slow Bomb	1,200 gp
Stink Bomb	1,200 gp
Suppressing Fire	100 gp
Time-Out	12,000 gp

BANG!

Wondrous Item, Uncommon

This volatile clay ball releases a cloud of blue-gray smoke that smells like gunpowder and ozone. As an action, a creature can throw this explosive at a point up to 60 feet away, detonating it on impact. Each creature within 5 feet of the explosion point must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be blinded and deafened until the end of their next turn.

CHAOS KABOOM

Wondrous Item, Uncommon

This glass ball is filled with dancing, vibrant, pink and green lights. As an action, a creature can throw the ball at a point up to 60 feet away, where it shatters on impact and fills a 20-foot cube with a magical cacophony of jumbled ideas and emotions. Each creature who starts their turn in the cube must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be subject to a random effect on the Chaos Effects table during their next turn. The cube disperses and all chaos effects end at the end of the thrower's next turn.

DAZED

Dazed is a new condition used by some of the monsters in MCDM's upcoming book, *Flee, Mortals!* A dazed creature can do only one of the following things on their turn: move, use an action, or use a bonus action. If a creature becomes dazed during their turn, their turn ends.

COCKTAIL EXPLOSIVE

Wondrous Item, Uncommon

This explosive is created by combining several dwarven liquors, alchemist's fire, and one of Granny's secret recipes. As an action, a creature can light the explosive and throw it at a point up to 20 feet away, detonating it on impact and unleashing a blast of flame in a 5-foot radius. The explosion ignites flammable objects in the area that aren't being worn or carried. Each creature in the area must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or catch on fire, taking 7 (2d6) fire damage at the start of each of their turns. A creature on fire, or another creature within 5 feet of them, can use an action to extinguish the flames.

CHAOS EFFECTS

d10	Effect
1	**Flee!** The creature is frightened of whoever detonated the explosive, can't take bonus actions or reactions, and takes the Dash action to move as far as its speed allows away from you. The creature doesn't move into obviously dangerous ground, such as a fire or a pit.
2	**Fight!** The creature loses the ability to differentiate friend from foe, regarding all creatures as enemies and making a melee or ranged attack against a randomly determined creature they can see. If no targets are available to attack, the creature attacks themself.
3	**Freeze!** The creature takes 7 (2d6) cold damage and is restrained.
4	**Friend!** The creature loses the ability to differentiate friend from foe, regarding all other creatures as friends. The creature is charmed by whoever detonated the explosive, and must use their action to offer a random creature one of their own possessions worth no more than 50 gp. If the character has no gift to offer, they instead take 4 (2d4) psychic damage.
5	**Frogs!** Hundreds of illusory frogs fill the cube, making the area difficult terrain for any creature without truesight or blindsight.
6	**Forget!** The creature temporarily loses the will to fight. They drop any weapons they are carrying and can't take any actions.
7	**Faint!** The creature falls prone, dropping any items they're holding, and falls unconscious if they normally sleep. They wake early if another creature uses an action to shake or slap them awake.
8	**Fail!** The creature makes attack rolls and saving throws with disadvantage.
9	**Flip!** The creature must use their action and all their movement to attempt feats of acrobatics. When they do so, they must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or become dazed (see the "Dazed" sidebar).
10	**Fie!** An explosion of chaos unfolds as multiple effects occur simultaneously. The creature takes 7 (2d6) force damage and 7 (2d6) acid damage. Then roll again on this table and resolve the additional effect, rerolling any 10s.

Dragon's Breath

Wondrous Item, Rare

Each type of this explosive contains bottled dragon's breath that shifts inside its shimmering glass container. As an action, a creature can throw the explosive at a point up to 60 feet away, detonating it on impact. Each creature within 20 feet of the explosion point must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 35 (10d6) damage of the type associated with the dragon whose breath was bottled.

Type of Dragon	Damage Type
Black	Acid
Blue	Lightning
Brass	Fire
Bronze	Lightning
Copper	Acid
Gold	Fire
Green	Poison
Red	Fire
Silver	Cold
White	Cold

Flash Bomb

Wondrous Item, Rare

This bottle contains the smushed essence of dozens of will-o'-wisps. As an action, a creature can throw this explosive at a point up to 60 feet away, detonating it on impact. Each creature within 5 feet of the explosion point must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become blinded until the end of their next turn. A creature who fails the saving throw by 5 or more is also stunned until the end of their next turn.

Illusory Cats

Wondrous Item, Rare

As an action, a creature can throw this explosive at a point up to 60 feet away, detonating it on impact. For the next minute, illusions of cats fill a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on the explosion point, meowing and seeking attention. Each creature of the thrower's choice within the sphere when it appears must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw to see through the illusion, treating the sphere as difficult terrain on a failure. A creature who fails the saving throw by 5 or more is also deafened while the effect persists.

Portable Door

Wondrous Item, Uncommon

Anything can be a door—with enough firepower. As an action, a creature can throw this explosive at a point up to 60 feet away, detonating it on impact. Each creature within 5 feet of the explosion point must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or take 10 (3d6) fire damage and 10 (3d6) thunder damage. The damage is doubled for plants (including Plant creatures), and structures and objects in the area of the explosion automatically take double damage. The sound of the explosion can be heard up to 300 feet away.

Sleep Grenade

Wondrous Item, Rare

As an action, a creature can throw this explosive at a point up to 60 feet away, detonating it on impact. Each creature within 20 feet of the explosion point must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or fall unconscious for 1 minute. Creatures affected remain asleep until they take damage, or until another creature uses an action to shake or slap them awake. Undead and creatures immune to being charmed are unaffected.

Slow Bomb

Wondrous Item, Rare

As an action, a creature can throw this explosive at a point up to 60 feet away, detonating it on impact. A cloud of smoke fills a 20-foot-radius area around the explosion point, making that area heavily obscured. A creature who starts their turn in the smoke or enters it for the first time on a turn must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be hindered as if affected by the *slow* spell until the start of their next turn. A moderate wind (at least 10 miles per hour) disperses the smoke after 4 rounds. A strong wind (at least 20 miles per hour) disperses it after 1 round. The cloud dissipates on its own after 1 minute.

Stink Bomb

Wondrous Item, Rare

As an action, a creature can throw this explosive at a point up to 60 feet away, detonating it on impact and releasing a foul smell. Each creature within 20 feet of the explosion point feels the urge to retch, and must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or become dazed (see the "Dazed" sidebar) and poisoned until the end of their next turn.

SUPPRESSING FIRE

Wondrous Item, Uncommon

As an action, a creature can throw this explosive at a point up to 60 feet away, detonating it on impact. A spray of heavy magical foam fills a 20-foot-radius area around the explosion point, extinguishing all fire in that area. The slick foam then makes the area difficult terrain for 1 minute.

TIME-OUT

Wondrous Item, Legendary

As an action, a creature can throw this explosive at a point up to 60 feet away, detonating it on impact and creating a 15-foot-radius sphere centered on the explosion point that is temporarily locked in time. The sphere lasts for 1 minute. Each creature in the sphere when it appears or who enters the sphere for the first time on a turn must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature is stunned while the sphere lasts. On a success, the creature is dazed (see the "Dazed" sidebar) and their speed is reduced to 0 while the sphere lasts. A stunned creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, instead suffering the lesser effect on a success. A dazed creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending all effects on themself on a success.

The sphere disperses early if an action taken or an effect created from outside the sphere affects a creature within the sphere or an object they are wearing or carrying.

POISONS

In addition to standard poisons as described in your core rulebooks—displayed in their own small section and labeled "The Boring Ones"—Granny also sells her own particular poisoned brews, cordoned off far from her potions so as to allow no confusion between the two. She cackles with delight when asked how her poisons work, talking about "hag magic" as she speaks of devising new methods of debilitating, maiming, or merely confusing the general populace.

Poisons come in four types: contact, ingested, inhaled, and injury. See the core rules for more information.

Granny's Poisons

Poison	Type	Price
Bad Breath	Ingested	30 gp
Bottled Ambition	Inhaled	250 gp
Dirt Nap	Contact	150 gp
False Drowning	Ingested	125 gp
Freaky Flask	Inhaled	5,500 gp
Homegrown Automaton	Injury	1,000 gp
Infested Growth	Ingested	750 gp
Phial of Medusa	Injury	2,000 gp
Tincture of Night	Contact	300 gp
Toxic Mediocrity	Inhaled	1,000 gp
Twisted Blood	Injury	125 gp
Werewolf's Tears	Ingested	800 gp
Witch's Brew	Ingested	200 gp
Whispers	Contact	800 gp
Vial of Aging	Inhaled	1,800 gp

BAD BREATH

Ingested

A creature subjected to this poison has disadvantage on Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, or Persuasion) checks for the next hour. Additionally, they must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or take 2 (1d4) poison damage.[2]

BOTTLED AMBITION

Inhaled

A creature subjected to this poison must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw, which they can willingly fail. On a failure, the creature has advantage on Charisma checks for the next 8 hours, but can't take the Help action or use a spell, magic item, or class feature to do any of the following:

- Restore hit points or grant temporary hit points to another creature
- Increase another creature's AC
- Provide any benefit to another creature's ability checks, attack rolls, or saving throws

[2] Granny sells a deeply discounted version of bad breath poison that is potent, albeit nonmagical, garlic oil. This version costs 1 gp and causes the target creature to have disadvantage on Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, or Persuasion) checks made to influence creatures within 5 feet of them. This effect lasts for 15 minutes or until the target brushes their teeth. This "poison" is also used in very small doses as a cooking aid.

When the poison's effect ends, the creature must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion.

Dirt Nap

Contact

A creature subjected to this poison must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or take 7 (2d6) necrotic damage and have their speed reduced to half for the next hour. If the poison is not neutralized by *protection from poison* or similar magical means before its effect ends, the creature gains one level of exhaustion.

False Drowning

Ingested

A creature subjected to this poison must make a DC 12 Intelligence saving throw, but shows no immediate effect on a failed save. The first time after each long rest that the creature drinks a liquid, they take 5 (2d4) psychic damage, as they falsely believe they are choking on their drink. This effect lasts for 7 days.

Freaky Flask

Inhaled

A creature subjected to this poison must make a DC 15 Charisma saving throw. On a failure, the creature's highest ability score is switched with their lowest ability score for the next 8 hours.

Homegrown Automaton

Injury

A creature subjected to this poison must make a DC 14 Charisma saving throw, which they can willingly fail. On a failure, the creature's skin is coated with a bronze sheen, and their Armor Class increases by 1 each time they finish a long rest for the next 7 days (to a maximum of 20), regardless of what armor they are wearing. Additionally, the creature's Wisdom score is reduced by 1 each time they finish a long rest for the next 7 days.

The creature can repeat the saving throw after each long rest, increasing the DC by 1 each time. If the poison is not neutralized within 7 days, the creature gains resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks, but has disadvantage on Wisdom saving throws and automatically fails saving throws against being charmed. In addition to *protection from poison*, the *greater restoration* spell or similar magic can end these effects, restoring the creature's original Armor Class and Wisdom score.

Infested Growth

Ingested

A creature subjected to this poison must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, but shows no immediate effect on a failed save. For the next 7 days, each time the creature finishes a long rest, they take 5 (2d4) piercing damage and 9 (2d8) poison damage as a spiked vine grows inside their organs. The creature can repeat the saving throw after each long rest, increasing the DC by 1 each time. On a success, the creature vomits up the plant and ends the effect on themself.

At the end of 7 days without a successful save, a plant sprouts from the creature's orifices, dealing 20 (8d4) piercing damage and 36 (8d8) poison damage. The plant can be removed from the creature as an action, but doing so deals the creature 9 (2d8) piercing damage. If the creature removing the plant succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check, the affected creature takes half as much damage.

Phial of Medusa

Injury

A creature subjected to this poison must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, or they begin to turn to stone and are restrained. The creature must repeat the saving throw after 1 minute, becoming petrified for 24 hours on a failure, or ending the effect on themself on a success.

Tincture of Night

Contact

A creature subjected to this poison must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, but shows no immediate effect on a failed save. The creature gains no benefit from their next long rest, instead having horrific nightmares that deal 10 (3d6) psychic damage. At the end of the long rest, the creature gains one level of exhaustion.

Toxic Mediocrity

Inhaled

A creature subjected to this poison must make a DC 16 Charisma saving throw. On a failure, each of the creature's ability scores becomes 10 unless it is already lower, their attunement to any magic items ends, and they can't attune to magic items. These effects last for 8 hours.

Twisted Blood

Injury

A creature subjected to this poison must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or lose control of their limbs for 1 minute. During this time, the creature must

use their action to make a melee attack against another random creature within their reach. If unable to attack, the creature takes 3 (1d6) poison damage. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themself on a success.

Werewolf's Tears

Ingested

This poison is brewed from wolfsbane in a silver cauldron. A creature subjected to this poison must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, which a lycanthrope makes with disadvantage. On a failure, the creature takes 13 (3d8) necrotic damage, and their hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. In addition, the creature can't be affected by any effect that would alter their form (willingly or unwillingly) for the next hour.

Witch's Brew

Ingested

A creature subjected to this poison must succeed on a DC 13 Charisma saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. While poisoned in this way, whenever the creature makes a saving throw, they roll a d4 and subtract the number rolled from the d20 roll. Additionally, whenever the poisoned creature takes damage, they take an extra 3 (1d6) necrotic damage. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themself on a success.

Whispers

Contact

A creature subjected to this poison must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or hear voices in their head talking about them. For 1 minute, these voices cause the creature to be deafened, to automatically lose concentration on spells and other features, and to be able to take only an action or bonus action on each of their turns. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themself on a success.

Vial of Aging

Inhaled

A creature subjected to this poison must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the creature's age increases to that of an elderly member of their ancestry, if they are not in that age group already. Their Wisdom score is increased by 2, to a maximum of 20, and their Constitution score is reduced by 2. In addition to *protection from poison*, this effect can be ended by *remove curse*, *greater restoration*, or similar magic.

Granny's Quests

As busy as she is, Granny Greenwinkle can always use help around the shop or aid in procuring special items for her concoctions. In addition to their regular interactions with characters, Granny and Flufftavius can offer the following quest hooks.

The Coven Around the Corner

Granny is distraught that a "rival coven" has opened a shop in the same area as her business. The characters are charged with discerning what these hags are up to (if they are in fact hags; Flufftavius is reluctant to jump to conclusions) and help the herbalists put their feud to rest. The rival store might be run by some of Granny's old schoolmates, eager to expose her scheme. Or the coven might be a group of actual hags who've seen how well kindly Granny's customers have responded to her, and who are attempting to try something new.

The Witch Hunter

A new paladin has come to town and is determined to cleanse the area of all unnatural influences. Flufftavius fears for Granny's life, and urges the characters to convince her to come clean about who she really is. Granny would prefer to rid the town of the witch hunter—and perhaps rid the witch hunter of their own life while she's at it. The party must help Granny and Flufftavius decide what to do and aid them in their task before it's too late!

Flufftavius's Flame

Granny requires more bottled silver dragon's breath, and is willing to pay an exorbitant fee to anyone who can retrieve the necessary expectoration. Flufftavius is suspicious that the town's wealthiest elf is a silver dragon in disguise, and suggests that the characters start there. In fact, the elf is not only a silver dragon, but an old flame of Flufftavius's with an interest in rekindling their romance. However, the dragon is intent on remaining incognito from fear of Granny's anger over breaking her best friend's heart two centuries ago. Can the characters reintroduce the trio without catastrophe—or, failing that, at least acquire the silver dragon's saliva and get paid?

THE GILDED FLIGHT

A rapacious rogues' gallery of entrenched capitalists in need of heroic regulation

by Carlos Cisco

Content Warning: This article contains an NPC villain with drug addiction, an NPC villain with past suicidal ideation, and an operation that involves prison labor and trafficking people, none of which are essential to the story. We recommend using the MCDM Safety Toolkit and Checklist and adjusting these elements as needed to ensure everyone has a good time.

> The more you faced the light, the brighter it grew, and one day for the brief respite that it brought you'd look over your shoulder. And you'd see how lovely and rich and dark and beguiling your shadow had become...
>
> –Terry Pratchett, *A Blink of the Screen*

Introduction

While overt displays of violence, chaos, and raw power make it easy to spot a villain, they're also a rallying cry for heroes the world over. More insidious are those who work within unfeeling legal frameworks, shattering unwritten norms and codifying strife into daily existence. The Gilded Flight is a set of capitalistic villains designed to frame a campaign around (or incorporate as a facet of an existing campaign), with an eminently punchable plutocrat to topple at each tier of play.

The Gilded Flight is a massive pyramid scheme masterminded by Tamir'Khashchu (tah-MEER-hush-CHOH), an antediluvian, corrupt gold dragon who believes the world is best governed by the invisible hand (or claw) of commerce. Tamir's subordinates are compartmentalized to minimize any single thread leading back to him. Garin Najis, a cleric who's all business, evangelizes in his home city. Sym, a draconically empowered doppelganger, sows financial discord wherever they travel. Hecta Glintstone, a disgraced druid, has a lock on a highly disputed diamond trade.

This article includes descriptions and stat blocks for each foe, as well as a high-level view of their operations. They fit well into any setting with cities, gods, commerce, and inequality—and even if your setting lacks gods, a religion based around a prosperity gospel could certainly disrupt the lives of the people and be an engine for story. Groups interested in intrigue, politics, and uncovering a grand mystery will get the most use out of this article. That said, if your party just wants to break out the proverbial guillotines and eat the rich, that's a perfectly viable approach.

Tamir'Khashchu

Tamir is an **ancient gold dragon** who believes himself a force for good. Unfortunately, the gulf between what he believes and what's true is vast. In his youth, Tamir fit the mold of the goodly metallic dragon, selfless and

brave. He took many forms to subtly guide adventurers and rulers, attempting to fix the problems of the world—inequality, poverty, and more—through a mix of grand quests and moral lessons. But something changed as he watched well-meaning folks of all stripes fail to make progress … or worse, ignore his words entirely.

Perhaps it was time for a more direct intervention. For the next several decades, Tamir engaged in silver-tongued negotiation, strong-armed intimidation, and economic skullduggery. Monarchs, clergy, and powerful adventurers found themselves doing his bidding, whether they knew it or not. Such alliances were mutually beneficial, of course—all the more so as Tamir's influence grew and grew.

While his original motives were good, a rot set in as the centuries wore on. The common folk? All he saw was their demands. These unproductive layabouts constantly ask for handouts but contribute nothing, taking no steps to solve their own problems. Tamir, on the other hand, was important, beloved, inexorable. His generosity became greed. Compassion devolved into cold calculus. There was nothing he couldn't monetize and lives became no different than the other numbers on his legers. His priorities shifted and his paradigm realigned so that his belief—that only through him could the world achieve true prosperity—became his reality. A reality where everything exists to slake his endless appetites. Far removed from the Tamir he once was, now he's nothing but a craven serpent waiting to swallow the world.

Glory to Gold

Ultimately, Tamir desires an ascendance normally reserved for only the most powerful and virtuous dragons. He plans to rewrite reality by manipulating the world into believing in his self-serving definition of "good," placing himself at the apex of a new divine order. His path to ascension has never been closer: Tamir walks among the people as Alexi Boein, a charismatic gold dragonborn priest—and the chief evangelical officer of the Dictum of Prophets, a new religion that rejects true divinity while deifying the wealthy.

He has his sights on high-profile converts—those with power or popularity—and perhaps a few converted sovereigns have already declared the Dictum of Prophets to be their national religion, which the populace accepts readily. The rich are placated, as the Dictum states that they are wealthy because they're already divine, and the poor are just as happy to join, for unquestioning devotion and tithes are presented as a path to financial salvation. His followers are fanatically devoted, militantly evangelical, and far too fond of debating in bad faith. Any serious religious scholar finds their arguments meritless and their dogma hollow.

Prophet Houses

The Dictum's followers congregate in Prophet Houses and are "empowered" to tithe generously. These Prophet Houses are popping up in major cities, attending to the wretched and extolling the wealthy. These behemoth structures are topped with gleaming pyramids—the very definition of opulence and excess—yet they somehow feel cheap and mass-produced, sticking out like tumors of marble and gold. Inside, they house thousands of worshippers simultaneously. All sightlines lead up to a raised dais where evangelical officers, or Alexi himself, deliver sermons.

Each Prophet House has four main exits for the public, and complicated networks of tunnels descending beneath the stage, leading into a distended vault. The exits are all guarded by 2 **conduceres** (see the end of this article for their stat block) posing as semi-abstract sculptures of Alexi. Should a temple be threatened, the conduceres lock the doors, sealing the worshippers inside to use as a bargaining chip. Every temple employs eight **veterans**, six evangelical officers (**priests**), and ten actuaries (**cult fanatics**). Any temple Tamir currently occupies acts as a gold dragon's lair.

Tome of Accounts

Tamir keeps fastidious accounts of every financial transaction, contract, and deed of ownership throughout his millennia of making the world a colder, more unequal, and increasingly commodified place. While each Prophet House boasts an engorged vault, Tamir's true "hoard" is decentralized across a multitude of real estate portfolios, businesses, and displayed art, all precisely recorded within an ever-growing tome.

But the truth of his records runs much deeper. Kingdoms have risen and fallen at his behest. Movements for change lasted only as long as they were economically viable. Tamir has had his talons in nearly every major conflict and is implicated in the deaths of millions, and all of the damning evidence is within the tome. Separating Tamir from this book would be a dangerous endeavor—but it could also be the key to unraveling his entire operation.



A Note on Spells

Some creatures have magical actions, bonus actions, and reactions. When these features should be considered spells (for the purpose of *counterspell*, *dispel magic*, and similar effects), the spell level is noted in parentheses. If the spell requires concentration, this is also noted in parentheses. Unless otherwise noted, these spells have somatic and verbal components.

In addition to combat-focused spells, some creatures can cast spells that are primarily used outside of combat. To streamline the stat blocks, these spells aren't included in the creature's combat-oriented "Actions" section. Instead, they appear in a separate "Utility Spells" section at the end of the stat block. After each spell name, the casting time is indicated in superscript, as shown in the Casting Times table.

Casting Times

Superscript	Casting Time
A	1 action
B	1 bonus action
R	1 reaction
+	Longer than 1 action (see spell description)

For example, a spellcaster's utility spells might appear as follows (indicating these casting times are 1 bonus action, 1 action, and longer than 1 action, respectively):

1/day each: *expeditious retreat*[B], *mage armor*[A], *phantom steed*[+]

STRATEGY

Tamir is as tactical off the battlefield as on it. Through magic and patience, he's accumulated favors and leverage across political, religious, and commercial enterprises. He's a powerful spellcaster in his own right, though much of his magic is less useful in a scrape. Tamir can cast the following spells, using Charisma as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 24) and requiring no material components:

At will: *calm emotions*[A], *charm person*[A], *healing word*[B], *lesser restoration*[A], *suggestion*[A]

3/day each: *dominate person*[A], *geas*[+], *greater restoration*[A], *mass cure wounds*[A],

1/day each: *antipathy/sympathy*[A], *glibness*[A], *mass suggestion*[A], *resurrection*[+], *teleport*[A]

Battle Tactics. Tamir prefers to rely on the labor of others when engaging directly in battle, and he is rarely without an ally nearby. He eschews using healing magic, knowing the quickest way to victory is the swift destruction of the competition. If confronted in a Prophet House, he deploys his minions and worshippers as fodder while he concentrates on dispatching any divine casters. If the heroes manage to confront Tamir alone, he relies on his villain and legendary actions to keep his assailants at bay before attempting to escape and regroup. Cravenness is not sinful, for survival is paramount.

Villain Actions

Tamir has three villain actions. He can take each action once during an encounter after an enemy creature's turn. He takes villain action 1 during the first round of combat, villain action 2 during the second round, and villain action 3 during the third round.

Villain Action 1: Defensive Investiture. Tamir summons each coin within 500 feet of him (from a pocket, bag, or vault … no coin is safe), covering him and up to six creatures of his choice within 60 feet of him in an armor of glittering opulence. He gains a +5 bonus to his AC and his allies gain +1 to their AC until he uses his Explosive Dividends villain action. If there are no coins nearby, he begrudgingly draws them from the nearest House of Prophets. When this villain action ends, any summoned coins fall in a 10-foot radius around Tamir and each creature affected by this villain action.

Villain Action 2: Explosive Dividends. Coins surge around Tamir in a maelstrom of money before exploding outward. Each creature in a 60-foot radius of Tamir must make a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw, taking 35 (10d6) force damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Tamir can then move up to his speed.

Villain Action 3: All that Glitters. Tamir summons blazing goblets above his opponents' heads that pour molten gold over them. Tamir chooses up to six creatures he can see within 60 feet of him. Each creature must succeed on a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw or take 45 (10d8) fire damage and have molten gold flow over their face. Until a creature takes an action to rid themselves of the molten gold, the target is blinded and takes 9 (2d8) fire damage at the start of each of their turns.

Garin Najis

Garin Najis, who originally appeared in *ARCADIA 5*, twists the dogma of his god of commerce to suit what he believes to be true as he converts the populace as a high-ranking prosperity preacher. Tamir only requires that Garin's preaching lines up with the prosperity gospel espoused by the Dictum of Prophets, and in return for Garin's evangelizing, Tamir crushed his competitors, allowing Garin to gain a financial stranglehold on Garin's home city—but Tamir takes a substantial cut from all Garin's ventures in return. Garin is not without his vices and hides an addiction to Scarab Snuff, a stimulant made from pulverized desert scarabs that produces mild euphoric effects.

A Capital Idea

You may have noticed some retreading of ideas from a previous article. In "Goldmonger Subclasses," I engaged in a wee bit of moral relativity to make avaricious adventurers seem heroic. Personally? I believe greed to be the root of most evils in the world and I wanted to expand on the themes, characters, and a few of the mechanics I created in that article. These are villains who reflect those same ideals. Now, I cannot extol the efficacy or legality of throat-punching a venture capitalist or pile-driving a prosperity preacher, but giving you the ability to put them to the fantasy sword felt like a reasonable middle ground.

—Carlos Cisco

Grand Najis Ventures

Garin is the first of these rapacious bastards the player characters are likely to encounter. His business conglomerate, Grand Najis Ventures, can provide kernels of information that paint a bigger picture, one that could unravel Garin's entire operation and point to the next link in the chain. The ledgers stored in his office have information on all his shell companies. Additionally, he has a number of undervalued but ambitious middle managers who fancy themselves sharks. Sowing chaos among them could grind his operations to a halt. If his holdings are threatened, Garin acts fast but lowballs any mercenaries he hires … useful information for adventurers who can outspend him.

Garin's operation can be introduced with one of the following plot hooks, or one of your own creation:

Chain(mail) Gang. The smiths making "masterwork" chainmail are required to reside in company housing and are paid in company scrip. Attempts to unionize have been crushed and the smiths dare not rise up for fear of losing their jobs and homes.

Golden Trough. An outbreak of gastrointestinal blockage (also known as "stone stomach") leads back to the dubious dry-aged meats originating from Garin's chain of fast-casual restaurants. His restaurants are all built near sewer access points, and those who brave the muck-filled tunnels beneath find a well-guarded cockatrice breeding pit.

Marble Misappropriation. Garin hires the party to solve why one of his vaults is empty. This leads the party to discover a coin from the *misappropriator coin pouch* (see "Slicing the Salami" later in this article), which is a gateway to Sym, the tier 2 villain, and reveals that Garin has purchased prison labor for use in his marble quarries and gem mines. Records discovered here could reveal that Garin is the Dictum's main supplier of marble and raw gems.

Tactics

Garin goes nowhere without his surly (and criminally underpaid) half-orc **gladiator** bodyguard, Mai Hardoo, and if he catches wind of potential assailants, he adds two actuaries (**cult fanatics**) to his retinue. He first casts *haste* on Mai so he can also gain the benefits with his Prophet Motive feature, then uses Fiscal Cyclone to control the battlefield and *sacred flame* to weaken opponents while Mai mops them up. If forced into close combat, he'll attack with his dragonfang kris. Outside of combat, Garin wields a powerful suite of divine magic and uses the *glyph of warding* and *symbol* spells to keep his investments secure.

Garin Najis

Medium Humanoid (Human), Neutral Evil

Armor Class 17 (+1 breastplate)
Hit Points 120 (16d8 + 48)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (–1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Wis +8, Cha +5
Skills History +3, Insight +8, Intimidation +5, Religion +3
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages Celestial, Common, plus any two languages
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Prophet Motive. When casting a spell requiring concentration on another creature, Garin can replicate the effect on himself. If the spell ends, the effect ends on him as well.

Actions

Dragonfang Kris. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) radiant damage.

Sacred Flame (Cantrip). Flame-like radiance descends on one creature Garin can see within 60 feet of him. The target must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 13 (3d8) radiant damage, gaining no benefit from cover.

Haste (3/Day; 3rd-Level Spell; Concentration). Garin chooses a willing creature he can see within 30 feet of him. Until the spell ends, his and the target's speeds are both doubled, they both gain a +2 bonus to AC, they have advantage on Dexterity saving throws, and they each gain an additional action on each of their turns. That action can be used only to take the Attack (one weapon attack only), Dash, Disengage, Hide, or Use an Object action. When the spell ends, the target (but not Garin) can't move or take actions until after their next turn, as a wave of lethargy sweeps over them.

Bonus Actions

Fiscal Cyclone. Garin creates a swirling mass of spectral coins in a 5-foot cube centered on a point within 60 feet of him. A creature who starts their turn in the area of one or more of these cyclones, or who enters one for the first time on a turn, takes 14 (2d8 + 5) force damage. The effect lasts until Garin dismisses it (no action required) or falls unconscious.

Reactions

Divine Kleptocracy (1/Day). When another creature Garin can see within 30 feet of him is targeted by a spell that requires concentration, Garin can duplicate the spell's effect on himself (requiring no concentration). If the spell ends for the other creature, the effect ends for him at the end of his next turn.

Object of Desire (2/Day). When another creature within 30 feet of Garin targets him with an attack or spell, he can hold up his holy symbol and make it appear as the object the attacker desires most. The attacker must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be stunned until the end of Garin's next turn.

Utility Spells

Garin can cast the following spells, using Wisdom as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 16) and requiring no material components:

At will: *detect magic*[A], *light*[A], *mending*[+]

2/day each: *calm emotions*[A], *command*[A], *cure wounds*[A], *detect poison and disease*[A], *lesser restoration*[A], *locate object*[A]

1/day each: *create food and water*[A], *daylight*[A], *find the path*[+], *forbiddance*[+], *geas*[+], *glyph of warding*[+], *hallow*[+], *heroes' feast*[+], *locate creature*[A], *remove curse*[A], *scrying*[+], *sending*[A], *symbol*[+]

SYM

A doppelganger born unable to shapechange, Sym was ostracized and eventually cast out by their people. Abandoned and alone in an unforgiving world, they found no solace among the "solids." When Sym was about to end their own life, it was not divine intervention that stayed their hand, but a sympathetic and dazzlingly charismatic dragonborn—Alexi Boein, Tamir's alter ego, who offered them healing, friendship, and a new purpose. Grateful, Sym devoted themselves to the Dictum of Prophets and was rewarded when Tamir used an ancient draconic ritual to imbue them with a form of shapechanging more powerful than even the oldest doppelgangers enjoy. Ultimately, Sym has no greater ambition than service to Tamir, who unfortunately sees them only as a dangerously effective tool.

SLICING THE SALAMI

Sym's assignment is simple: Be everyone's friend, be the life of the party, and always, **always** pay for the drinks at the tavern. Sym's operation is contingent on a single tool: a *misappropriator coin pouch*. This cursed currency is designed to circulate in secret, siphoning fortunes away so slowly that only the most shrewd accountants would notice. When circulating coins from the *misappropriator coin pouch,* Sym travels under the guise of Plix Goldjaw, a gregarious goblin paladin and C-list celebrity adventurer. The real Plix is unaware of Sym's impersonation but is happy for the adulation she receives as a result.



This element of Sym's operation can be introduced with one of the following plot hooks, or one of your own creation:

Closing Time. A week after a raucous visit from Plix, the party's favorite tavern suddenly hangs up its hat, unable to afford the overhead. Soon, all the merchants in town are bankrupt.

Plix Paradox. Plix Goldjaw is somehow slated for two charity events in the same city, on the same night. What gives?

Empty Threat. A small, rural bank is going out of business—and if it does, so will the local shopkeepers, tavern owners, and farmers who rely on it. Their vault drained too slowly for anyone to notice before it was emptied, and all that remains is a single, strange coin … one that everyone is afraid to touch.

MISAPPROPRIATOR COIN POUCH

Wondrous Item, Rare

This ornately gilded coin pouch contains ten gold coins minted with a dragon's face on both sides. As an action, you can pull a coin from the pouch and activate it. A coin from the pouch only functions on the Material Plane. After 24 hours, the coin begins slowly siphoning other coins within 60 feet of it that are not blocked by a solid barrier. Siphoned coins are transported to a vault in the nearest House of Prophets at a rate of 2d8 coins per day, starting with copper, then silver, then electrum, and so forth. The coin dissolves into sand if it siphons no coins for 24 hours, reappearing in the coin pouch the next dawn.

DESPERATE DEBTORS

Shapeshifting, blackmail, and a bit of light murder have been Sym's tools to gain controlling interest in a major metropolis's prison(s). From there, they managed to shift the local laws, naming debt as a jailable offense. The poorest of the city are suffering, but it's clear no one is safe.

This element of Sym's operation can be introduced with one of the following plot hooks, or one of your own creation:

Serve and Collect. The town guard has been prowling the city for debtors, making citizens less likely to report real crimes.

Administrative (T)error. The prison is full, and dock warehouses have been licensed as overflow facilities. But those wishing to visit their relatives or pay off their debts have found that these prisoners have been erased from the record books or have disappeared entirely.



Sym quickly discovered they needed a more prominent and respectable face and found it in Thollos Tluav, a minotaur merchant prince. Using this stolen identity, Sym has used Thollos's extensive merchant network to traffic debt prisoners, selling them as free labor. This operation is not without its vulnerabilities, as Thollos' business partners are just as culpable and not nearly so resourceful as Sym.

This element of Sym's operation can be introduced with one of the following plot hooks, or one of your own creation:

A Nasty Piece of Work. "Thollos" does his business in a busy port. Trafficking people is highly illegal—but transferring prisoners between jails is merely a matter of paperwork. Several mining, construction, and delving ventures in other cities have reclassified themselves as prisons and conveniently accept transfers from the metropolis's overflowing jail.

Smuggling Snuff. If "Thollos" is trafficking people, it's likely that other types of contraband are moving on his ships and through his warehouses. Weapons, illegal drugs (perhaps even Scarab Snuff from "Garin Najis" earlier in this article), forbidden magic—all of it is on the table.

COMPLICATIONS

If Sym catches folks sniffing around, they quietly go on the offensive, often abducting or murdering a trusted friend of the party and replacing them. Sym's Read Thoughts action keeps them one step ahead as they attempt to destroy the party's relationships with the people they love and rely on.



Reminder: Avoiding Harm

Criminalizing poverty, abuse of power by police, trafficking people, and prison labor are particularly heavy topics among the real-world parallels throughout this article. We recommend getting explicit permission to include these elements from each player (using the MCDM Safety Toolkit and Checklist if you find it helpful). If anyone isn't comfortable with this content in your game, omit or replace these parts of Sym's operation.

TACTICS

In combat, Sym is pure chaos, with collateral damage as part of the equation. Sym uses the environment and populace (if available) to shape the surroundings to their advantage. This could mean leading adventurers on a chaotic chase through a city or skulking amongst the myriad critters of a dangerous forest. Sym favors a few forms they find particularly effective in combat:

- A **dragon priest** (see the end of this article for their stat block), often aping Alexi's image, is useful for crowd control and area of effect fire damage at range.
- An **assassin** is perfect for first-turn strikes as a disguised character.
- A **giant owl** is handy for fleeing dangerous situations.
- A **tyrannosaurus rex**—because sometimes you just have to eat someone.

Sym takes full advantage of Prophetic Metamorph. They often start with the devastating actions of the dragon priest or tyrannosaurus rex, then shift into a giant owl to gain a more advantageous position. From there, they either flee or resume ranged attacks, such as the dragon priest's Fire Breath and Fire Bolt.

GM TIP: PREPARATION

Running a shapechanger as a boss fight can be a challenge even for experienced GMs. Be sure to familiarize yourself with Sym's stat block (especially their Prophetic Metamorph action) and the stat blocks of creatures they might turn into. Also, consider whether your group would find more enjoyment in Sym's Face-Off villain action being used on a player character, unlucky bystander, or underpaid decoy—the former is most rewarding for groups who are comfortable with a little metagaming during combat.

Sym

Medium Monstrosity (Shapechanger), Neutral

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 130 (20d8 + 40)
Speed 40 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +9, Wis +6, Cha +7
Skills Deception +7, Insight +6, Persuasion +7
Condition Immunities charmed
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Common plus any two languages
Challenge 12 (8,400 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +4

Pyrite Resistance (3/Day). If Sym fails a saving throw, they can choose to succeed instead. They revert to their true form (if they are not in it already) and lose access to their Prophetic Metamorph bonus action until the start of their next turn.

Actions

Multiattack. Sym makes two Gold Claw attacks.

Gold Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) slashing damage plus 3 (1d6) fire damage.

Read Thoughts. Sym magically reads the surface thoughts of one creature within 60 feet of them. The effect can penetrate barriers, but 3 feet of wood or dirt, 2 feet of stone, 2 inches of metal, or a thin sheet of lead blocks it. While the target is in range, Sym can continue reading their thoughts, as long as their concentration isn't broken (as if concentrating on a spell). While reading the target's mind, Sym has advantage on Wisdom (Insight) and Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, and Persuasion) checks against the target.

Bonus Actions

Prophetic Metamorph. Sym magically polymorphs into a Humanoid or Beast with a challenge rating of 12 or less, or back into their true form. Any equipment they're wearing or carrying is absorbed or borne by the new form (Sym's choice). In a new form, Sym retains their hit points, Hit Dice, ability to speak, proficiencies, immunities, Read Thoughts action, Prophetic Metamorph bonus action, villain actions, and Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores. Their statistics are otherwise replaced by those of the new form, including the form's spell attack bonus and saving throw DCs. They revert to their true form if they die.

Villain Actions

Sym has three villain actions. They can take each action once during an encounter after an enemy creature's turn. They can take these actions in any order but can only use one per round.

Villain Action 1: Face-Off. Sym swaps places with one creature they can see within 60 feet of them and simultaneously takes on the target's appearance, without changing their statistics, until they use their Prophetic Metamorph bonus action. A creature with a passive Perception score of 17 or higher who can see Sym and the target automatically notices the swap; otherwise, a creature who interacts with Sym or the target can use a bonus action to make a DC 17 Wisdom (Insight or Perception) check, detecting the ruse on a success.

Villain Action 2: Form & Function. Sym rapidly shifts between their favored forms to create a devastating (and visually exquisite) combination blow. Sym chooses a creature within 30 feet of them, shifts into the minotaur Thollos, and moves within reach to make a Gore attack against the target that tosses the target 5 feet into the air.

> ***Gore.*** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (3d6 + 5) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Sym then shifts into the goblin Plix and uses their maul to make a Slam attack against the target, leaping up to hit the target midair if they were tossed by the Gore attack. If the target is prone, the Slam attack is automatically a critical hit.

> ***Slam.*** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (3d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

Sym then uses their Prophetic Metamorph bonus action.

Villain Action 3: Divine Molt. Sym regains 60 hit points and transforms into a **young gold dragon**, as though they had used their Prophetic Metamorph bonus action. This effect lasts for 1 minute or until they use Prophetic Metamorph again.

Hecta Glintstone

Hecta is an embittered duergar druid, banished from her Gilded circle (see the Circle of the Gilded druid in "Goldmonger Subclasses" in *ARCADIA* 5). Hecta is ruthless, greedy, and completely unpersonable; she prefers the company of elemental servants to the company of other mortals. She's completely loyal to Tamir, believing that, should he succeed in his machinations, Tamir will give her dominion over this world—but Hecta is so effective that Tamir has no designs to keep her as anything but a cog in his machine.

Enforced Inflation

Hecta has designs on a diamond mine situated between two nations that both rely on it. To clear out the mine, she makes extensive use of elemental allies, both conventional and not, including a detachment of **noxa**, **comburo**, and **earth elementals**. These elementals have filled the mine's lower chambers with toxic gases, created dangerous explosions, and posed as cavern walls that then assault the miners. Hecta also keeps a personal guard of four ornate **conduceres** around her at all times. (These nova elementals can be found in "Periodic Table of Elementals" in *ARCADIA* 2.)

Hecta is choking the diamond market, causing ripple effects through both nations. Each nation blames the other, and a very costly war is on the horizon—exactly what Hecta is counting on.

Diamond Depression

The core game rules establish certain price requirements for spellcasting components, such as "diamonds worth 300 gp" for the *revivify* spell. Some might question if the market price of the diamond is what matters—the socially assigned value of an item—or if that's merely a game-mechanics abstraction for the quality of gem necessary for the spell. Both schools of thought are perfectly valid interpretations! For the purposes of this article, the cost printed in the game rules is a shorthand for quality—the *revivify* spell requires, for example, one carat in flawless diamonds, regardless of whether their market price is 300 gp, 400 gp, or 1200 gp.

Resurrections Incorporated

Diamonds are one of the most important spellcasting components for divine and arcane magic users alike, and the price has soared. Much to their dismay, spellcasters have discovered that even the modest diamonds some spells once required—like *chromatic orb*'s diamond



worth 50 gp—now have quadrupled in cost. Merchants are hawking even the tiniest diamonds for hundreds of gold pieces, making a simple *revivify* spell cost prohibitive. Want to cast *stoneskin* or *greater restoration*? You better have an amazing line of credit—and don't even think about a *true resurrection*.

With both nations blaming each other, internal discord grows by the day. This element of Hecta's operation can be introduced with one of the following plot hooks, or one of your own creation:

Pointing Fingers. Multiple groups are looking for someone to blame. The peasants and nobles are at each other's throats, both feeling the other is hoarding the diamonds. The military is accusing the arcane students of using diamonds in experiments instead of bolstering the troops.

Outsourced Crime. Hecta makes extensive use of thieves' guilds to rob jewelry stores and fence the diamonds at exorbitant prices. These robberies could be a mystery for low-level characters to solve, hinting at the larger plot to come.

RUMORS

If her thieves' guild contacts are burned, Hecta has no problem withdrawing from cities and retreating into the mine she controls. She is well stocked and prepared to endure if the mine is besieged, and she and her elementals hold a supreme advantage within its tunnels—drawing her out is the best way to challenge her on equal footing. But even if she loses the mine, she has other means of keeping a stranglehold on the diamond market.

Other elements of Hecta's operation can be introduced with one of the following rumors, or one of your own creation:

Lightning-Quick Ambush. Storms waylaying gem shipments from a neighboring country are giving local merchants pause. Survivors speak of men made of lightning attacking the convoys.

Selectively Impassible. Rock slides and otherworldly winds in the mountains have prevented gem imports from a different region, despite other trade caravans passing through without incident.

TACTICS

Hecta is always accompanied by her four **conducere** guards, which affect her challenge rating and are tied directly to her villain actions. She uses her Subordinate Synergy villain action as early as possible to redirect damage to her conduceres, who subsequently redirect it to enemies. She'll attempt to bait a party into close range, where her passive abilities and the energy grid established with her Arc Reaction villain action punish melee attackers. If necessary, she uses *thunderwave* to push enemies through the damaging lines while picking off would-be snipers with her Pineal Precious action, which shoots fiery beams out of the gem on her forehead. Hecta is a Circle of the Gilded druid and, while she relies most on her weapon and villain actions in battle, she does have a selection of out-of-combat utility spells prepared.

GM TIP: LINES AND GRIDS

Hecta's second villain action, Arc Reaction, creates a network of damaging lines throughout the battlefield. A combat encounter with Hecta works best if you use a grid and miniatures or tokens to represent the position of each creature and the damaging lines. When marking Hecta's connections with her conduceres, draw the shortest possible line from Hecta's space to the closest corner of each conducere's space.

THE OLIGARCH

Weapon (Maul), Very Rare (Requires Attunement)

This +3 maul, wrought from marble and cut with thick veins of gold, was gifted to Hecta by Tamir. To honor her unflagging subordination, those struck by it grovel like the worms they are.

Grovel. A creature hit by this maul must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or fall prone. If the creature fails this save during their turn, their turn ends.

UNGILDING THE LILY

While the world is a much worse place for Tamir and his minions' presence in it, consider the world left behind in their absence. Systems are especially difficult to dislodge once they've calcified into daily life. People generally find complacency more comfortable than action, so when those systems collapse, often their first instinct is to ask "how do we return to normal," for it's much more terrifying to acknowledge a new reality from which there is no return. What new systems can you and your players build in the wake of this capitalist nightmare? Will your world edge toward equality, or will more bad actors seep in to fill the gaps?

Imagining what comes after the collapse is difficult work, and it's very easy to slip into nostalgia for what was. Player characters may also struggle to envision what a new system might look like. But the true work of heroes is not just to envision, but to build a better future … and there's no time like the present to start thinking about what that looks like.

Hecta Glintstone

Medium Humanoid (Duergar), Neutral Evil

Armor Class 17 (*+3 hide armor*)
Hit Points 204 (24d8 + 96)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	7 (–2)

Saving Throws Str +8, Con +9, Int +6, Wis +10
Skills Athletics +8, Insight +10, Nature +6, Perception +10
Damage Resistances acid, fire, thunder
Condition Immunities charmed, poisoned, stunned
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 20
Languages any six languages
Challenge 16 (15,000 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +5

Caustic Humors. A creature who touches Hecta or hits her with a melee attack while within 5 feet of her takes 6 (1d12) acid damage.

Rock Solid (3/Day). If Hecta fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead. Her Caustic Humors trait ceases to function until the start of her next turn.

Thundering Aegis. Diamonds embedded in Hecta's skin pulse with thunderous energy, surrounding her in an aura that repels projectiles. Ranged attacks made against Hecta have disadvantage, and being within 5 feet of a hostile creature doesn't impose disadvantage on Hecta's ranged attack rolls.

Actions

Multiattack. Hecta makes two Oligarch attacks, or one Oligarch attack and one Pineal Precious attack.

Oligarch. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d6 + 6) bludgeoning damage plus 6 (1d12) acid damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or fall prone. If the target fails this save during their turn, their turn ends.

Pineal Precious (4/Day). *Ranged Spell Attack:* +10 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 31 (4d12 + 5) fire damage.

Thunderwave (3/Day; 5th-Level Spell). A wave of thunderous force bursts out from Hecta. Each creature in a 15-foot cube originating from Hecta must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 27 (6d8) thunder damage and is pushed 10 feet away from her. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't pushed.

Bonus Actions

Worm Crusher. Immediately after Hecta knocks a creature prone, she can make one Oligarch attack against that creature.

Reactions

Redirect. When Hecta takes damage while connected to conduceres (from her Subordinate Synergy villain action), she can split that damage between one or more connected conduceres, dealing a total amount of damage equal to the damage she would have taken. Each conducere who takes damage in this way can immediately use their Energy Conductor without using a reaction.

Villain Actions

Hecta has three villain actions. She can take each action once during an encounter after an enemy creature's turn. She takes villain action 1 during the first round of combat, villain action 2 during the second round, and villain action 3 during the third round.

Villain Action 1: Subordinate Synergy. Hecta establishes connections with each conducere within 30 feet of her, creating 5-foot-wide lines of harmless crackling energy that connect her to them. The lines remain and move with her and the conduceres until Hecta uses her Elemental Liquidation villain action. The connection with a conducere ends if that conducere dies or ends their turn more than 30 feet from Hecta.

Villain Action 2: Arc Reaction. The lines of energy connecting Hecta and the conduceres connected to her flare with raw primordial power. Additional energy lines form between connected conduceres within 30 feet of each other. Any creature (except a connected conducere) who starts their turn in a space these lines pass through, or enters such a space for the first time on a turn, takes 14 (4d6) fire damage.

Villain Action 3: Elemental Liquidation. Hecta makes four Pineal Precious attacks, originating from conduceres of her choice. These attacks do not count against her daily uses of this attack. If there are no conduceres within 120 feet of her, Hecta can cause the gem in her forehead to explode with fiery energy and make four Pineal Precious attacks; she then takes 14 (4d6) force damage and can't make a Pineal Precious attack until the next day. After Hecta uses this villain action, the lines created by her Subordinate Synergy villain action disappear.

Utility Spells

At will: *detect magic*[A], *druidcraft*[A], *guidance*[A], *mending*[+], *produce flame*[A]

2/day each: *animal messenger*[A], *create or destroy water*[A], *locate object*[A], *meld into stone*[A], *pass without trace*[A], *plant growth*[A+], *speak with animals*[A], *speak with plants*[A], *stone shape*[A]

1/day each: *commune with nature*[+], *conjure elemental*[+], *control weather*[+], *hallucinatory terrain*[+], *locate creature*[A], *move earth*[A], *planar binding*[+], *scrying*[+], *transport via plants*[A], *wall of stone*[A]

Additional Stat Blocks

Comburos, conduceres, and noxas originally appeared in "Periodic Table of Elementals" in *ARCADIA 2*.

The dragon priest originally appeared in "Appendix NPC: Part 2" in *ARCADIA 20*.

Comburo

Comburos are extremely volatile elementals composed of metals like lithium and potassium. Cracks in their dull, metallic grey exteriors reveal a searing explosive fire at their cores. This fire takes on a characteristic hue depending on the primary composition of the comburo, with flames ranging from deep purple to brilliant blue.

Comburo

Large Elemental, Neutral

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 110 (20d8 + 20)
Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)	6 (–2)	12 (+1)	8 (–1)

Damage Resistances fire; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, unconscious
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Primordial
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Death Burst. When the comburo dies, it explodes in a fiery burst. Each creature within 15 feet of the comburo must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or take 14 (4d6) fire damage.

Ductile Form. The comburo can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. It can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

Explosive Reactivity. A creature that hits the comburo with an attack while within 15 feet of it must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 7 (2d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Illumination. The comburo sheds bright light in a 15-foot radius and dim light in an additional 15 feet.

Actions

Multiattack. The comburo makes two Slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage plus 7 (2d6) fire damage. If the target is a creature or a flammable object, it ignites. Until a creature takes an action to douse the fire, the target takes 3 (1d6) fire damage at the start of each of its turns.

Volatile Burst (Recharge 6). The comburo launches a hailstorm of explosive projectiles that land at three different points the comburo can see within 120 feet of itself. Each creature in a 15-foot-radius sphere centered on each point must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw. A creature takes 21 (6d6) fire damage and is knocked prone on a failure. On a success, a creature takes half as much damage and is not knocked prone. The spheres spread around corners. A creature in the area of more than one explosion point is affected only once. This ability damages objects in the area and ignites flammable objects that aren't being worn or carried.

CONDUCERE

Made of precious metals like gold and copper, conduceres are known for their incredibly flexible nature and ability to transfer energy across long distances. Conduceres are the most docile of the nova elementals, and many mages keep a conducere in their study purely for its glittering aesthetic.



Conducere

Large Elemental, Neutral

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 126 (12d10 + 60)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	8 (–1)	6 (–2)	10 (+0)

Damage Resistances fire, lightning, radiant; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities acid, cold, necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, unconscious
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8
Languages Primordial
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Ductile Form. The conducere can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. It can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.
Flexible. The conducere has advantage on Dexterity saving throws.

Actions

Multiattack. The conducere makes two Slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Reactions

Energy Conductor. When the conducere takes damage from a spell or magical effect, it can use its reaction to redirect that magical energy to another creature. The conducere takes no damage and instead chooses a target within 30 feet of itself. The target must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, the target takes the damage originally intended for the conducere; this damage is equal to the amount of damage the conducere would have taken had it not used its reaction in this way. On a success, the target only takes half this damage.

DRAGON PRIEST

"I wield the very flame of Corzivax-Baloroth!
Her power is mine!"

Ancient dragons are so suffused with magic that they can impart a fraction of their power to their most loyal pawns. The dragon priest is one such servant—a cultist dedicated to the will of a powerful dragon, partially transformed by their patron into a quasi-draconic figure. The ancient dragon bestows "gifts" upon the priest that typically take the form of sharpened claws, filed teeth, reptilian eyes, and patches of diamond-hard scale.

The dragon priest stat block assumes that the dragon priest's master is a red dragon, which is reflected in its immunity to fire damage and the fire damage dealt by its actions. You can change this to suit another type of dragon by swapping the damage type.

Dragon Priest

Medium Humanoid, The Alignment of Their Patron

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 178 (21d8 + 84)
Speed 30 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Con +8, Wis +4, Cha +8
Skills Deception +8, Intimidation +8, Perception +8, Stealth +8
Damage Immunities fire
Condition Immunities frightened
Senses blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 18
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +4

Actions

Multiattack. The priest makes three Claw attacks, and they make a Fire Bolt attack or use Spellcasting.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) slashing damage plus 9 (2d8) fire damage.

Fire Bolt (Cantrip). *Ranged Spell Attack:* +8 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (3d10) fire damage. A flammable object hit by this spell ignites if it isn't being worn or carried.

Fire Breath (Recharge 5–6). The priest exhales fire in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 42 (12d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Additionally, a creature loses any resistance or immunity to fire damage for 1 minute if they take or would have taken damage from this action.

Spellcasting. The priest casts one of the following spells, using Charisma as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 16):

3/day each: *dimension door, dispel magic*

1/day each: *eyebite, mass suggestion, true seeing*

Noxa

Composed of toxic, odorless gases like helium and neon, noxas are some of the most dangerous nova elementals. The combination of their invisible presence and poisonous nature means they can easily suffocate a target before anyone notices something is wrong. However, more whimsical mages have been known to trap noxas in glass tubes and feed them energy to create softly glowing fluorescent lamps of various colors.

Noxa

Large Elemental, Chaotic Neutral

Armor Class 15
Hit Points 110 (13d10 + 39)
Speed 0 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	6 (–2)	10 (+0)	5 (–3)

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, unconscious
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages Primordial
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Actions

Multiattack. The noxa makes two slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

Asphyxiation. The noxa chooses one creature within its space and floods the creature's lungs with poisonous gas. The creature must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, it takes 27 (6d8) poison damage, is restrained, and begins suffocating. On a success, it takes half as much damage, is not restrained, and does not begin suffocating. If the targeted creature is already suffocating when the elemental uses this action, the creature has disadvantage on the saving throw. A restrained and suffocating creature can repeat this saving throw at the start of each of its turns, ending both effects on a success.



RESOURCES

MCDM TABLETOP SAFETY TOOLKIT

https://mcdm.gg/SafetyToolkit

GRANNY'S CONCOCTIONS PUNCH CARD

https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202301/GrannysConcoctionsCard.png

You can find all issues of *ARCADIA* on Patreon and in the MCDM shop.



Willy Abeel Signs of frogs, clowns, and dynamic game material have been discovered in products by MCDM, 2CGaming, Ghostfire Gaming, and EN Publishing. Willy-01 is on the loose and is approaching critical gonzo levels. Last correspondence with Willy-01 occurred across several social media channels under the handle @thewillyboo. Should you choose to engage, be ready for anything.



Jessica Marcrum, also known as angrynerdgirl, is a social worker and gold ENNIE award–winning writing director. A co-founder of Unseelie Studios, she has created numerous games and supplements including *Dumpster Fire: A Game for 2020* and *Oops, All Draculas!*, as well as contributing to publications for A Thinking Ape, Cubicle 7, Hit Point Press, MCDM, and The Onyx Path. Jessica can be contacted on Twitter @Miss_Jess03, on Twitch, on Mastodon, and via her website.



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Issue 25 ✦ February 2023

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

A legend is a story that has many forms, handed down through the years—perhaps centuries or millennia—and that is compelling enough to be retold, reworked, reimagined again and again. Something *legendary* is larger than life: first, because it takes on a life of its own, beyond its first incarnation, as it is retold and recontextualized. And second, because it extends beyond realism, often incorporating some element of the fantastical or supernatural: sirens and cyclopes in the *Odyssey*, Merlin and Morgana in the legends of King Arthur, the demons and dervishes throughout the recursive tales of *The Thousand and One Nights*, to name but a few.

Yet these legends are still grounded in things that are familiar, historical, and recognizable: a hero of the Trojan War, a king of Britain who defeated the Saxons, and a young woman who tells stories to her husband, the king of Samarkand. Legends combine real places or events with a hefty dash of the extraordinary to become *epic*—often in all senses of the word.

In our games, we get to *be* legendary heroes (or villains, or morally gray mercenaries) for a little while. We get to do extraordinary things and go on epic adventures and feel *awesome* when we travel through an ancient bone forest, take down an undead dragon, and swashbuckle across the land on a magic skyship. At the risk of stating the obvious, that's pretty cool! It's not the only reason why fantasy RPGs are fun, but it's certainly a big one.

Granted, not all fantasy RPG characters have to be legendary. It can be just as interesting to tell a story of unsung heroes or a mediocre warrior who bumbles their way from quest to quest, somehow succeeding (or dramatically failing) despite their incompetence. But also, legends aren't about facts. That bumbling warrior could be hailed as the greatest hero in the land because people *think* all their deeds were accomplished through great skill and bravery. That's some classic dramatic irony!

Legends lean heavily into drama, narrative resonance, and even humor. They're memorable because they go all out. Likewise, the most memorable moments in RPGs are often when we go all out, make big choices, succeed through unexpected and humorous means, or defy the odds in a climactic moment. As designers, the MCDM team wants to provide game mechanics that help make these moments happen naturally—not despite the mechanics, but *because* of them. We like it when monsters, rules, and magic items provide opportunities for tense, exciting moments and incentives for making big, dramatic choices.

So on that note, I'm pleased to say that this month's articles go *hard*. When I put out the call for pitches last year, I told authors, "We want to focus on cool, original creatures, not remixes of existing stat blocks—give us the weird and the wondrous!" And *oh boy* did Sam Mannell deliver with "Malevolent Forces"! The dreameater is *wonderfully* horrifying, and the vespergriff is the perfect danger-sensing bat-jaguar companion for any adventurer willing to embrace a weird new friend.

In a radically different genre, Imogen Gingell makes her *ARCADIA* debut with style, zooming onto the scene with "Quick, Take My Spellsled!" This zany one-shot has it all—fantasy hoverboards, a racetrack marked by arcane graffiti, and a colorful band of bullies your players will love to beat.

And last but *certainly* not least, Steve Fidler's "Legendary Inspiration" is an absolute feast of new options for gaining and spending inspiration in exciting, meaningful, and—you guessed it—legendary ways. Pick your favorite combo of these rules for a little extra spice that'll make your whole game more fun and dramatic.

Without further ado, I leave you to dive into the pages ahead and shape your own weird and wondrous tales. Wherever your adventures take you, may they be legendary.

De somnio ad itinere,
Hannah Rose
Managing Editor

LEGENDARY INSPIRATION

No more tired inspiration rules—these are just inspired rules!

by Steve Fidler

Inspiration is a way to reward strong roleplaying, encouraging players not just to think outside the box but to act in accordance with their character. At the same time, it can also serve as a tool to reinforce cinematic gameplay. This article provides players and GMs with new ways of making use of inspiration, promoting the mechanic from something players often forget they have to something they beg for more of.

The GM and the players will want to work together to decide which of these options would be the most benefit to the characters, and would best suit the tone of the campaign. Each character should have a way to spend inspiration that's useful for them. However, because too many choices can be overwhelming and might affect the flow of combat, try starting with one or two rules for new ways to gain and spend inspiration (including the default use of inspiration, if you keep that as an option).

In addition to presenting new rules for gaining and spending inspiration, this article introduces party inspiration—a way for all characters to share in each other's heroic endeavors. Additionally, a number of new wondrous items known as magic banners interact with the inspiration of their wielders and other party members in interesting and new ways.

Gaining Inspiration

The base guidelines for handing out inspiration say to do so when a player roleplays their character well. Unfortunately, it's easy for GMs to forget about awarding inspiration for good roleplay, and sometimes hard to establish consistency and fairness. The options in this section focus on more objective and clear methods of gaining inspiration, so that players can seek out and spend inspiration more regularly.

Bonus Content

When spelunking in a dungeon, exploring a cave, or traveling through a spider-infested forest, the opportunity for adventure outside the characters' main objective might come up. This could take the form of rescuing a prisoner from a dungeon, taking a moment to mine an untapped vein of mithral in a cave, destroying a clutch of mutant spider eggs the characters come across by happenstance, or a particularly lethal random encounter.

Although such tasks often reward the characters with a sum of gold or a magic item, the GM can also grant inspiration to each character as a bonus for straying from the path and completing the task.

Critical Inspiration

Whenever a character rolls a d20 for an attack roll, saving throw, or ability check, they can potentially gain critical inspiration. This rule can make use of two options—critical success and critical failure—and it's recommended that your table choose one or the other. Critical success emphasizes a team-based reward for characters performing heroic deeds, while critical failure helps to mitigate the feeling of loss associated with rolling low, and creates a "failing forward" mechanic.

Critical Success

When a character makes a d20 roll and the result is a 20, they can choose to have another creature that can see or hear them gain inspiration. This might represent how the first character's success leaves an overwhelming impression on the other character, or helps the other character overcome any doubts plaguing them.

Critical Failure

When a character makes a d20 roll and the result is a 1, they gain inspiration as a response to a sense of urgency, or from a desperate desire to prove their worth and push themself. A critical failure that grants inspiration can't be rerolled with any use of inspiration.

Pushing the Limit

When a character spends their last use of a limited-use class feature, they gain inspiration. This can include such scenarios as using the last spell slot granted by the Spellcasting or Pact Magic feature, the last ki point granted by the monk's Ki feature, a cleric's final use of Channel Divinity, and so on.

Once a character gains inspiration in this way, they can't gain do so again until they finish a long rest.

Spending Inspiration

In the game's core rules, inspiration can be used when a character makes an attack roll, saving throw, or ability check, letting them make that d20 roll with advantage. The value of using inspiration in this way to help ensure success on a task can't be understated—but this section presents a number of even more legendary ways players can use inspiration.

As with the "Gaining Inspiration" section, these optional ways to use inspiration are available to add to your game à la carte. A little goes a long way, though, so picking one or two of your group's favorite options, or tailoring your choices to the benefit of the player characters, is recommended. Your group can decide whether these options replace the standard use of inspiration or add to it.

Spending inspiration doesn't require an action unless otherwise specified.

Do-Over

A character can spend inspiration after making an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw to reroll each d20 used. When they do so, they can use either the original roll or the reroll.

Know Someone

When a character gets stuck and is unsure of what to do next, they can spend inspiration to bring to life an entity in the world that can guide them. For example, a character newly arrived in town and unsure of where to meet their contact can spend inspiration to come across a familiar NPC the party has encountered before, or from the character's own backstory, who can assist them. Likewise, a character waking in a dark prison and isolated from their party can spend inspiration to have a long-term prisoner in the next cell explain the guard rotation, where the keys are located, and who the character's captors are.

The player suggests who this entity is, and the GM determines what kind of help they can provide—typically just enough to get the character or the party moving again.

If your table is using the party inspiration rules (below), a character can spend additional inspiration from the pool to increase the amount of help the entity provides.

Legendary Action

At the end of another creature's turn, a character can spend inspiration to take one of the following actions and move up to their speed (in either order):

- Attack (one weapon attack only)
- Cast a Spell (a cantrip with a casting time of 1 action or 1 bonus action only)
- Disengage, Hide, or Use an Object
- Move up to the character's speed again

If multiple characters want to take a legendary action at the end of another creature's turn, they take their legendary actions in initiative order.

A character can spend inspiration in this way a number of times equal to half their proficiency bonus rounded down. When a character rolls initiative, they regain any expended uses of this option.

Legendary Healing

As a bonus action, a character can spend inspiration to spend one or more Hit Dice (up to their proficiency bonus). For each Hit Die spent this way, the character rolls the die and regains hit points equal to the number rolled + their Constitution modifier.

Additionally, as an action, a character can spend inspiration and touch another creature, allowing that creature to roll one Hit Die of their own and regain a number of hit points equal to the number rolled + the creature's Constitution modifier.

Legendary Resilience

When a character fails an ability check or saving throw to end an effect or condition affecting themself, they can spend inspiration to automatically succeed.

Legendary Talent

When a character makes an ability check using a skill they are not proficient in or a tool they are not proficient with, they can spend inspiration to add their proficiency bonus to the roll.



PLENTIFUL POCKETS

A character can spend inspiration when reaching into a container to have one mundane item worth 25 gp or less—a length of hempen rope, a flask of holy water, and so forth—be present in the container as though it had always been there. The item must be generic, so that a character can't pull out a specific book or the exact key to open a locked door.

RESOURCEFUL

Characters can spend their inspiration to push features they've gained from their class beyond their limits. Be aware, though, that characters of certain classes using this option will find that not all resources are created equal. If your table uses this rule, you should also have another way that characters can spend inspiration outside of these situational circumstances.

Barbarian. A barbarian with no uses of Rage remaining can spend inspiration to use that feature. At 20th level, they can instead spend inspiration to use Rage at any time (no action required).

Bard. If a bard has no uses of Bardic Inspiration remaining, they can spend inspiration to use that feature.

Beastheart.[1] If a beastheart's companion spent ferocity on their previous turn, the beastheart can spend inspiration to grant the companion 2 ferocity. At 6th level, the beastheart can also spend inspiration to use Rejuvenating Ferocity when they have no uses of that feature remaining.

Cleric. If a cleric has no uses of Channel Divinity remaining, they can spend inspiration to use that feature. Additionally, they can spend inspiration to cast a 1st- or 2nd-level spell from their chosen domain's spell list if they have no spell slots remaining of the spell's level.

Druid. If a druid has no uses of Wild Shape remaining, they can spend inspiration to use that feature. At 20th level, they can instead spend inspiration to use Wild Shape at any time (no action required).

Fighter. A fighter who has already used their Second Wind feature can spend inspiration to use it again.

Illrigger.[2] If an illrigger has already placed the maximum number of seals using their Baleful Interdict feature, they can spend inspiration to place a seal on a creature.

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[1] The beastheart class is available in *Beastheart and Monstrous Companions*.

[2] The illrigger class is available in *The Illrigger*.

Monk. If a monk doesn't have enough ki remaining to use a feature that would normally cost 2 or fewer ki points, they can spend inspiration to use that feature without spending ki.

Paladin. A paladin who has no uses of Channel Divinity remaining can spend inspiration to use that feature. Additionally, if a paladin has no hit points remaining in the pool of healing from their Lay on Hands feature, they can spend inspiration to use Lay on Hands as if they had spent a number of hit points equal to half their Paladin level.

Ranger. If a ranger has no spell slots remaining, they can spend inspiration to either cast a 1st-level spell they know or use Primeval Awareness as if they had expended a 1st-level spell slot.

Rogue. After rolling damage for their Sneak Attack feature, a rogue can spend inspiration to reroll any number of the Sneak Attack dice and use the new rolls.

Sorcerer. If a sorcerer has no sorcery points remaining, they can spend inspiration to use a metamagic option that costs 1 sorcery point.

Warlock. When a warlock has no spell slots remaining, they can spend inspiration to cast a 1st- or 2nd-level spell they know at its base level. Additionally, they can spend inspiration to use an invocation feature that has no uses remaining.

Wizard. A wizard can spend inspiration to cast a 1st- or 2nd-level spell they know if they have no spell slots remaining of the spell's level.

Once a character has spent inspiration to use a feature in this way, they can't spend inspiration to use that same feature again until they finish a long rest.

Wand of Plenty

A character can spend inspiration to temporarily regain some of a wand or other magic item's expended charges. When they do, they roll a d3 and the item regains that many expended charges. At the end of the character's next turn, whether or not they use the item, all of its charges are expended. This counts as expending the item's last charge.

A character can use this option only on a magic item that regains charges at dawn or dusk, when its wielder finishes a long rest, or a similar daily recharge.

Party Inspiration

Party inspiration is a pool of inspiration that can be drawn upon by any character. Whenever a feature or rule says a player can spend inspiration, they can spend it from this pool. Each character can still gain and use their own inspiration, but if they gain inspiration while they already have it, they contribute it to the party inspiration pool instead.

The maximum amount of inspiration that can be held in this pool is equal to the number of player characters in the party. Nonplayer character party members such as companions, mounts, and retainers can also contribute to or spend inspiration from the pool, but they don't count toward the maximum.

Quick Rest

When the party inspiration pool is at maximum, the players can collectively decide to spend all the inspiration in the pool to allow their characters to take a quick rest. A quick rest is a brief respite lasting 1 minute, during which a character can do nothing more strenuous than conversing, catching their breath, or stretching. Taking a quick rest grants each character the benefit of a short rest.

A character can't benefit from more than one quick rest between short or long rests.

Inspirational Items

Magic banners are wondrous items that utilize a character's inspiration, and which build upon the optional rules in this article to grant you more new ways of utilizing inspiration.

Each banner takes the inspiration of a single creature and expresses that inspiration in the area around them. Some banners take the standard form of a flag on a pole, perhaps displaying an emblem to rally troops, but these items aren't limited to this style. A banner could also be a ring that projects an image of light above the inspired wielder, or a helmet that generates a halo of power. No item presented in this article must take the form described, so feel free to change any item to fit a character's aesthetic or to better match the story of the object.

The following banners are presented in alphabetical order.



Army Standard

Wondrous Item, Rare (Requires Attunement)

This flagpole standard bears the recognizable emblem of a standing army. While you carry the standard, other friendly creatures within 30 feet of you have a +1 bonus to attack rolls while you have inspiration. This banner can be held in your hand, affixed to a shield you are wielding, or strapped to your back, any of which count as carrying it.

If you are attuned to the standard and don't have inspiration, you gain inspiration when you roll initiative and are not surprised.

Rallying Aura. As a bonus action, you can spend your inspiration to end the frightened condition and the charmed condition on all friendly creatures within 30 feet of you. Once you use this property of the item, you can't use it again until the next dawn.

Battle Standard

Wondrous Item, Rare (Requires Attunement)

This flagpole has a small flag bearing the emblem of a fist. The *battle standard* functions as a magic halberd. You have a bonus to damage rolls made with this weapon equal to the number of allies within 30 feet of you who have inspiration (to a maximum of +3).

Punishing Aura. When you hit with this weapon, one other creature within 30 feet of you who has inspiration can spend that inspiration to have the weapon deal an extra 2d8 force damage.

Elemental Warding Band

Wondrous Item, Very Rare (Requires Attunement)

This ring bears a gem that shifts hue to match the environment, turning blue when sailing over open ocean, dark green while deep in a jungle, and so forth. While wearing the *elemental warding band*, you have resistance to one damage type of your choice: acid, cold, fire, lightning, or thunder. You choose this damage type when you attune to the ring, and can spend your inspiration to choose another damage type.

Warding Aura. As an action, you can spend your inspiration to create a shimmering barrier in a 10-foot radius around you, which moves with you and remains centered on you. You must concentrate to maintain this aura, as if concentrating on a spell. Creatures and objects in the aura have immunity to damage of the type this ring grants you resistance to. Spells and projectiles that deal the specified type of damage can't pass through the shimmering barrier. This effect lasts for 1 minute, or you can end it early (no action required). Once you use this property of the item, you can't use it again until the next dawn.

God Bone

Wondrous Item, Legendary (Requires Attunement)

This oversized finger bone is said to have been harvested from the body of a dead god, and is regarded with wonder and fear across numerous realms. While attuned to this banner, you have a +3 bonus to saving throws. If you have inspiration, you also confer this bonus to allies within 30 feet of you that can see you.

Additionally, the first time you succeed on a saving throw each round, you can choose one of the following effects:

Forgiveness. If an ally's actions forced you to make the saving throw, you grant that ally temporary hit points equal to your level.

Strike Awe. If you were forced to make the saving throw by a Construct, Dragon, Giant, Humanoid, or Monstrosity you can see within 120 feet of you, you can force that creature to make a DC 19 Charisma saving throw. On a failure, the target is stunned for 1 minute. A stunned target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themself on a success.

Turn Interloper. If you were forced to make the saving throw by an Aberration, Celestial, Elemental, Fey, Fiend, or Undead you can see within 120 feet of you, you can force that creature to make a DC 19 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the target is turned for 1 minute or until they take any damage. A turned creature must spend their turns trying to move as far away from you as they can, and they can't willingly move within 30 feet of you. They also can't take reactions. For their action, the turned creature can use only the Dash action or try to escape from an effect that prevents them from moving. If there's nowhere to move, the creature can use the Dodge action.

You can use each of these effects once, and can't do so again until the next dawn. If you have no uses of an effect remaining, you can spend inspiration to use that effect.

Medic's Flag

Wondrous Item, Very Rare (Requires Attunement)

This flag bears the symbol of a guild of healers. While holding the flag, when you see an ally take damage, you can use your reaction to reduce that damage by 1d10 + your proficiency bonus.

Healing Aura. As an action, you can spend your inspiration to create a healing aura around you. Each ally within 10 feet of you regains 5 hit points at the start of each of their turns. This effect lasts for 1 minute, and ends early if you are unconscious. If the flag leaves your possession, the effect is suppressed but the duration continues until the flag is in your possession again.

Unifying Mind Helmet

Wondrous Item, Very Rare (Requires Attunement)

This smooth metal helmet has a multifaceted ruby set in the forehead. The helmet has 6 charges for the following properties, which you can use while you are wearing the helmet. The helmet regains 1d4 + 2 expended charges daily at dawn.

Telepathy. As a bonus action, you can create a telepathic link between you and a number of creatures of your choice that you can see by expending one charge for each other creature. For the next minute, you and each of the chosen creatures can communicate telepathically with one another. If any linked creature becomes incapacitated, you must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, the link is broken for all creatures, and you take 2d6 psychic damage.

Inspiring Aura. As a bonus action, you can spend 3 charges to create an inspiring aura around you, which lasts until the start of your next turn. Allies other than you who are within 15 feet of you, or who are linked to you with the Telepathy property of the helmet, start their next turn with inspiration if they didn't already have it. Inspiration gained this way is lost when the aura ends.

MALEVOLENT FORCES

Looking for something strange and terrifying to pit against your players?

by Sam Mannell

Content Warning: This article contains a creature who buries its victims alive and an insectoid creature who devours live victims. We suggest using the MCDM Tabletop Safety Toolkit and Checklist and adjusting as needed to ensure everyone has a good time.

Sam here, back from another trip down into the stat block mines. This time I emerge bearing weird and wonderful monsters, designed with the hope that they'll be unlike anything your players have ever faced before!

But originality is a funny thing, isn't it? These creatures might seem solely like the product of my frenzied scribbling, but they are not—they're inspired by things from all over the place! You may recognize a glimmer of something you've seen before, but hopefully I've covered my tracks well enough that they still hit the table like a ton of bricks.

And of course, you have my permission to pass them off to your players as your own. Game recognize game.

CONTENTS

As always, you can click through directly to the stat block you want to use on the table to the right. They appear in the article alphabetically, but they're arranged here by challenge rating and include the role for ease of use. You can learn more about creature roles in the free preview packet for *Flee, Mortals! The MCDM Monster Book*.

Monster	CR	Role
Skull Hound	CR 3	Skirmisher
Vespergriff	CR 4	Controller
Vespergriff Companion	CR 4	Companion
Gravedigger	CR 5	Soldier
X'ek Drone	CR 6	Skirmisher
Shard	CR 7	Ambusher
Coldshell	CR 8	Brute
X'ek Queen	CR 8	Leader
Dreameater	CR 11	Solo

COLDSHELL

Soft chittering echoes off freezing rock. Damp light flutters against the dark. The coldshell plods after its prey. The monster doesn't care that you know it's coming. Run all you like.

The coldshell breeds as far away from sunlight as possible, most commonly in deep caves or unfathomable seafloor ravines. The creature looks crustacean from a distance, but it's more like a mollusk, clad in a suit of armor made of shells. The fleshy, tentacled body glows from beneath the thick carapace it cultivates for protection, eyestalks retracting during combat. Even the creature's limbs are caged in sleeves of interlocking chitin, leaving only the underbelly vulnerable—but getting close enough to stab it is risky business.

COLDSHELL CR 8 BRUTE (3,900 XP)

Large Monstrosity, Unaligned

Armor Class 22 (natural armor), 14 while prone
Hit Points 190 (20d10 + 80)
Speed 15 ft., climb 15 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	9 (–1)	19 (+4)	8 (–1)	8 (–1)	4 (–3)

Saving Throws Str +8, Con +7
Skills Athletics +8, Perception +5
Damage Vulnerabilities fire
Damage Resistances acid, poison
Damage Immunities cold
Condition Immunities frightened, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages —
Proficiency Bonus +3

Amphibious. The coldshell can breathe air and water.

Bioluminescent. The coldshell's flesh sheds dim light in a 30-foot radius.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the coldshell has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Weak Spot. The coldshell has a weak point in their armor that can only be targeted up close. Creatures who are within 5 feet of the coldshell roll to hit against the coldshell's prone AC.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The coldshell makes three attacks using Crushing Embrace, Tentacles, or a combination of them. They can replace one attack with a use of Devour.

Crushing Embrace. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (4d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage, and if the target is a Large or smaller creature, they are grappled (escape DC 15). The coldshell can grapple only one creature at a time.

Tentacles. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage, and if the target is a Large or smaller creature, they are pulled up to 15 feet toward the coldshell.

Devour. The creature grappled by Crushing Embrace takes 27 (4d10 + 5) piercing damage.

BONUS ACTIONS

Freezing Spit. The coldshell targets one creature they can see within 60 feet of them. The target must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 9 (2d8) cold damage and have their speed halved until the start of the coldshell's next turn.

DREAMEATER



Only the fey could create such a thing.

By dissecting how the imagination can turn against itself, the star elves created a waking nightmare to haunt and kill enemies of the court. No one is sure if there is one dreameater or many. Scattered lore implies the creature hunts by following the scent of dreams themselves, and the only way to escape is to avoid sleep at all costs. Those who do sleep while hunted by the fell thing rest fitfully, beset by terrible visions of a creeping shadow following them, always just out of sight, relentless.

There are few eyewitness accounts of the dreameater, given that the creature permanently emanates a shroud of velvety darkness. Those who are unlucky enough to have beheld it speak of two large, bulbous eyes, a butterfly-like proboscis, tattered and useless wings on a giant arachnid body, and a mass of spindly limbs tipped with human hands.

Dreameater CR 11 Solo (7,200 XP)

Large Fey (nightmare), Neutral evil evil evil evil evil evil evil

Armor Class 15
Hit Points 195 (23d10 + 69)
Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	19 (+4)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +9, Con +7, Int +8
Skills Acrobatics +9, Perception +8, Stealth +13
Damage Resistances psychic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned
Senses truesight 60 ft., passive Perception 18
Languages all but speaks only in unintelligible whispering, telepathy 60 ft.
Proficiency Bonus +4

Mindthirst. If the dreameater knows the name and appearance of another creature, they are aware of when that creature takes a short or long rest and the direction to that creature while they are resting.

Nightmarish Nature. The dreameater doesn't require air, food, or sleep.

Shadowshroud. Magical darkness emanates from the dreameater, filling a 20-foot-radius sphere that moves with them and disappears when they die. The darkness spreads around corners. A creature with darkvision can't see through this darkness, and nonmagical light can't illuminate it. If any of the dreameater's darkness overlaps with an area of light created by a spell of 2nd level or lower, the spell that created the light is dispelled. When the dreameater takes damage, the darkness created by this trait becomes an area of dim light until the end of their next turn.

Spider Climb. The dreameater can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Supernatural Resistance. The dreameater has advantage on saving throws against spells, powers, and other supernatural effects.[1]

Actions

Multiattack. The dreameater makes two Strangle attacks and one Proboscis attack.

Strangle. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage plus 5 (1d10) psychic damage.

Proboscis. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1 piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw, taking 36 (8d8) psychic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The dreameater regains a number of hit points equal to half the amount of psychic damage dealt.

Bonus Actions

Disquieting Murmurs. Each creature within 60 feet of the dreameater must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or take 7 (2d6) psychic damage. If this deals damage to a creature concentrating on a power, spell, or other feature, that creature has disadvantage on the saving throw they make to maintain their concentration.

Villain Actions

The dreameater has three villain actions. They can take each action once during an encounter after an enemy creature's turn. They can take these actions in any order but can only use one per round.

Action 1: Always Hungry. The dreameater's proboscis supernaturally extends to reach out of the dark. One Large or smaller creature the dreameater can see within 60 feet of them must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or be pulled up to 60 feet directly toward the dreameater.

Action 2: Thimblerig. The dreameater teleports to an unoccupied space they can see within 40 feet of them and takes the Hide action. Immediately after, two 20-foot-radius spheres of magical darkness appear, centered on two different points the dreameater can see within 40 feet of them. This darkness lasts 10 minutes and spreads around corners. A creature with darkvision can't see through this darkness, and nonmagical light can't illuminate it. If any of this darkness's area overlaps with an area of light created by a spell of 4th level or lower, the spell that created the light is dispelled.

Action 3: Gathering Gloom. Each area of magical darkness within 300 feet of the dreameater increases in size by 10 feet. Each creature in an area of magical darkness after it increases must make a DC 16 Charisma saving throw, taking 36 (8d8) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one, as the shadows gnaw at creatures caught within.

[1] "Supernatural" is a new game term in the upcoming *The Talent and Psionics* and *Flee, Mortals!* that describes an effect or item that is either magical or psionic. In this case, it means that the dreameater has advantage on saving throws against spells, psionic powers, effects caused by magic or psionic weapons, and so forth.

GRAVEDIGGERS

At first glance it's easy to mistake the gravediggers for Undead—reanimated knights clad from head to toe in grimy plate armor, walking with a strange staccato twitch, regurgitated by a graveyard that could no longer stomach them.

Few learn the truth. The gravediggers are actually a complex fungus that grows loamy, clay-like bodies, directing them to capture other creatures and feed them to the earth. Rather than lurking in existing tombs or mausoleums, the gravediggers build their own. They fall upon a town in the dead of night and, by sunrise, leave behind an expansive cemetery of fresh graves, newly filled. Gravediggers are more than capable of killing, but they have a clear preference for burying their victims alive.

When a gravedigger is killed, it turns into a mass of loose mold and dirt, leaving behind its armor, which is produced by the fungus as a thick keratin. Wearing the armor is known to fool other gravediggers into thinking that you're one of them. Some say if you wear it longer than a few days, you won't be pretending anymore.

GRAVEDIGGER CR 5 SOLDIER (1,800 XP)

Medium Plant, Unaligned

Armor Class 18 (plate)
Hit Points 93 (11d8 + 44)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	5 (−3)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +6, Con +7
Skills Athletics +6, Perception +6
Damage Resistances necrotic
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned
Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages understands Sylvan but can't speak
Proficiency Bonus +3

Unusual Nature. The gravedigger doesn't require air or sleep.

Actions

Multiattack. The gravedigger makes three attacks using Hook and Chain, Keratin Sword, or a combination of them. They can replace one attack with a use of Command Earth.

Hook and Chain. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage, and if the target is a Medium or smaller creature, they are grappled (escape DC 15). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the gravedigger can't use their hook and chain on another target.

Keratin Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage.

Command Earth. The gravedigger extends their fungal network into a patch of earth that they are touching, commanding it to move in one of the following ways:

- A 5-foot-wide, 10-foot-deep pit appears within 5 feet of the gravedigger.
- A pit within 5 feet of the gravedigger that is no larger than 5 feet wide and 10 feet deep becomes loose earth. Each creature in the pit when it closes is buried and begins to suffocate. A creature can use their action to dig free by succeeding on a DC 15 Strength check.

Bonus Actions

Reel. The gravedigger pulls the creature grappled by Hook and Chain up to 15 feet toward themself.

Reactions

Sleep Spores (3/Day). When the gravedigger takes damage, they release a cloud of spores in a 15-foot-radius sphere centered on themself. The radius of this sphere doubles to 30 feet when the gravedigger has 46 hit points or fewer. Each creature in that area must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or fall asleep and remain unconscious for 1 minute. Creatures that don't need to breathe automatically succeed on this saving throw. A sleeping creature awakens if they take damage or another creature uses an action to wake them.

SHARDS

Attempting to reason with the shards is inadvisable. While clearly intelligent, these crystalline constructs show interest in only cold, mechanical murder, seemingly intent on the vivisection of living things, as though gathering data. They also display a strong drive for self-preservation and vanish rather than take heavy losses.

The diamond-like material they consist of is unlike anything in the mundane world, leading sages to believe they originate from some other dimension. No one knows exactly who or what made them, but evidence suggests the shards have long outlived their architects—or at least have been forgotten by them. Adrift without direction, the shards search for a way to create more of themselves.

Shards are resistant to many forms of damage, but surprisingly brittle against blunt trauma. They use their own sharpened limbs as glittering, needle-keen lances. Moreover, their crystalline forms are utterly transparent, rendering the shards invisible unless splashed with dye or paint. Or blood.

Perhaps their strangest trait is their ability to pierce spacetime. Like a sliver of glass perforating an intestine, they bisect the planes as naturally as breathing, stepping out of a pocket manifold in an instant to surround their victims.

SHARD CR 7 AMBUSHER (2,900 XP)

Medium Construct, Lawful Evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 81 (18d8)
Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	5 (–3)

Saving Throws Str +7, Dex +7, Int +7
Skills Perception +4, Stealth +10
Damage Vulnerabilities bludgeoning, force, thunder
Damage Resistances fire, piercing, psychic, slashing
Damage Immunities necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, petrified, poisoned
Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Proficiency Bonus +3

Constructed Nature. The shard doesn't require air, food, drink, or sleep.

Immutable Form. The shard is immune to any spell or effect that would alter their form.

Magic Weapons. The shard's weapon attacks are magical.

Translucent. The shard is invisible unless covered by a visible material (such as paint or fabric), or after being spattered by blood when they score a critical hit against a creature who isn't a Construct or Undead or reduce such a creature to 0 hit points. The shard can't clean themself or remove materials covering them.

Actions

Multiattack. The shard makes four Sharpened Arm attacks.

Sharpened Arm. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage. The first time on a turn the shard hits a creature when they have advantage on the attack roll or the target is within 5 feet of one of the shard's allies, the attack deals an extra 17 (5d6) piercing damage.

Pocket Manifold (2/Day). The shard disappears from view, storing themself in a pocket manifold that exists only while it contains them. While in the pocket manifold, the shard can't attack or move, but they can see as if occupying the space they vanished from. They can leave the pocket manifold as a bonus action, reappearing in the space they vanished from or in the nearest unoccupied space if that space is occupied.

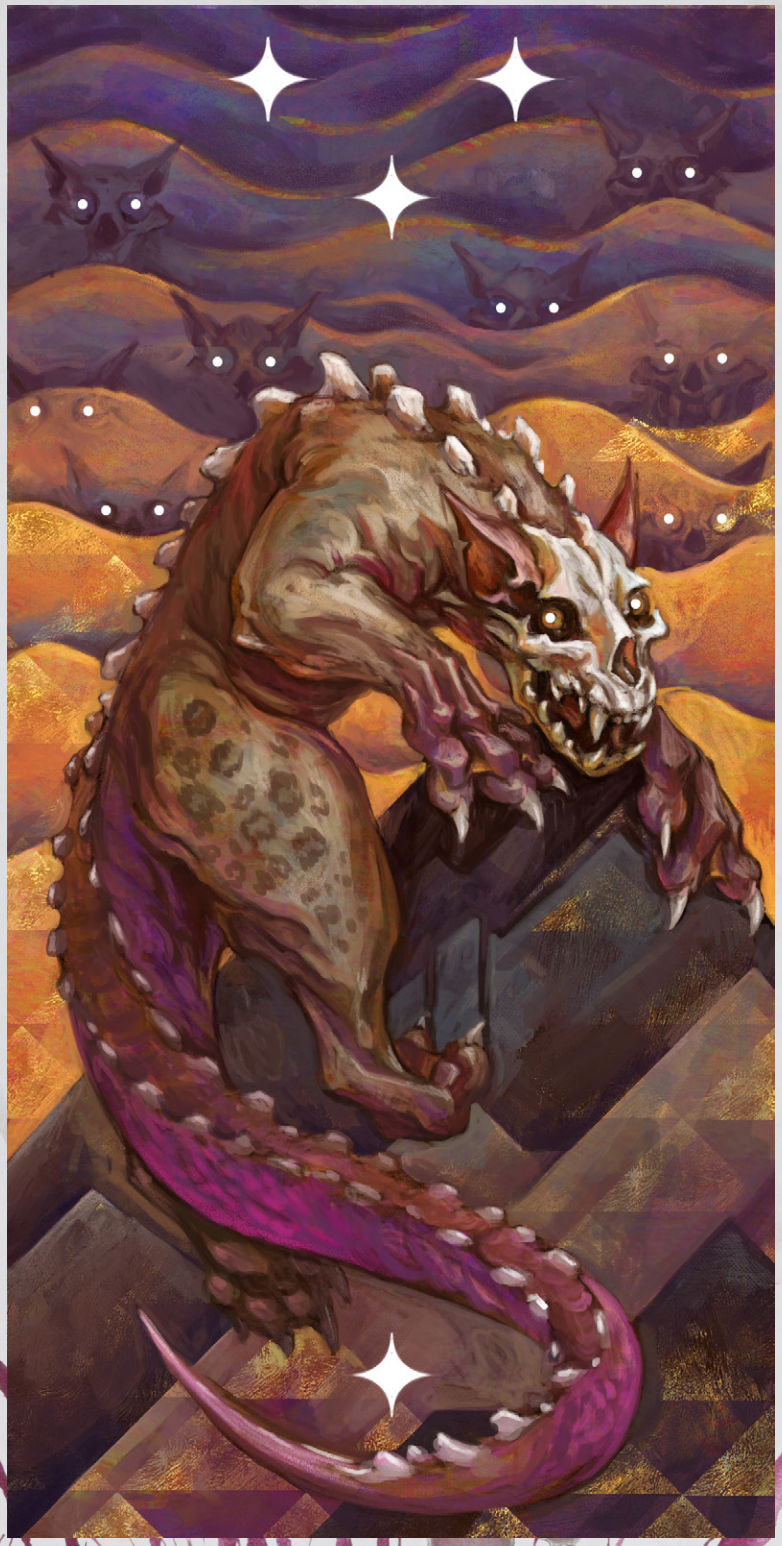
Shift (2/Day). The shard teleports themself to another plane of existence. They can either appear in an exact location they have been before, or a general location they are aware of.

Bonus Actions

Splice. The shard teleports up to 30 feet to an unoccupied space they can see, and then can take the Hide action.

Reactions

Split. When the shard takes damage, they teleport 30 feet to an unoccupied space they can see.



Skull Hound

Skull hounds are named for their grim, skeletal countenance and canine bodies, but they possess reptilian traits, too. They have adapted to extreme climates at either end of the spectrum, hunting in either freezing snow or baking sand with coloration differences helping them blend in. They camouflage themselves beneath a thin layer of loose ground, telepathically bait their prey into position, then strike like lightning to take down their mark. Each hound in the pack hides in a different location—each one a living land mine ready to cut off any escape from the ambush.

As psionic creatures, skull hounds lure their prey by projecting disembodied voices, often of lost loved ones calling for help. When caught in open combat, they can also use psionic illusion to distract and confuse the enemy.

Remarkably, they can be bargained with. Each pack shares a decentralized mind, and as long as the pack survives, the packmind is functionally immortal. Some are very old indeed. The packmind speaks in unison when bargaining, using plural terms like "we" and "us" to refer to itself. Typically, a pack of skull hounds wants food, but survival is their number one goal—they may instead ask a party of heroes to eliminate another nearby threat for them.

Skull Hound CR 3 Skirmisher (700 XP)

Medium Monstrosity, Unaligned

Armor Class 14
Hit Points 49 (9d8 + 9)
Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Int +4
Skills Perception +5, Stealth +8
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Common plus two other languages, telepathy 60 ft.
Proficiency Bonus +2

Packmind. The hound has advantage on attack rolls while another member of their pack can see them. If the hound takes psychic damage, this trait is disrupted until the end of their next turn.

Psionic Mimicry. The hound can unerringly replicate the voice of another creature, and can glean voices from the memories of other creatures who they can see.

Telepath-Ventriloquist. The hound can psionically cause their voice to originate from a point within 60 feet of them.

Actions

Multiattack. The hound makes two Bite attacks. If both attacks hit the same target, they can make one additional Bite attack against that target.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Camouflage. The hound buries itself under a thin layer of snow or sand, taking the Hide action and making the Dexterity (Stealth) check with advantage. The hound is revealed if they move or attack.

Reactions

Psionic Mirage. When a creature makes an opportunity attack against the hound, that creature must succeed on a DC 13 Intelligence saving throw or the attack misses.

Vespergriff

Once native to the Sea of Stars, but now bred as beasts of prestige in cities beyond the Mundane World, the vespergriff is a batlike creature with huge leathery wings, a long snout, tapered ears, and the hindquarters of a jaguar.

Vespergriffs have exceptionally sharp vision and can see through illusions. Their large eyes flash constantly, rapidly cycling through pale cyan, magenta, and yellow—many creatures find this unusual display entrancing.

But vespergriffs are most prized by their owners for their intrinsic ability to sense danger, even if they can't see it. Thanks to this uncanny warning system and their other natural defenses, they make great security. No self-respecting palace should be without one.

Mystic Connection: Vespergriff

If you're playing a beastheart and have a vespergriff companion, you gain the following benefit at 9th level when you gain the beastheart's Mystic Connection feature:

Limited Prescience. You gain a psionic sense that warns you of danger. You have advantage on initiative rolls, and you can't be surprised while you aren't incapacitated.

Psionic Powers

The upcoming *The Talent and Psionics* and *Flee, Mortals! The MCDM Monster Book* introduce psionic powers. A power is a specific psionic effect created by energy drawn out of the manifester's body. Every power has an order, from 1st to 6th, that gives you an idea of its effectiveness compared to other powers. The higher the order, the stronger the power.

Powers aren't magical. Effects and spells that affect or interact with magic, including *counterspell* and *antimagic field*, have no effect on psionic powers. Unlike spells, powers have no components.

If you have a talent in your game, they can learn the Mind-Piercing Scream power using the rules in *Talent and Psionics*. Its description is included at the end of the article.

Vespergriff CR 4 Controller (1,100 XP)

Large Monstrosity, Unaligned

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 110 (17d10 + 17)
Speed 30 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	7 (–2)	17 (+3)	8 (–1)

Skills Perception +7
Senses truesight 60 ft., passive Perception 17
Languages understands Common but doesn't speak it
Proficiency Bonus +2

Bewildering Gaze. When a creature who can see the vespergriff's eyes starts their turn within 30 feet of the vespergriff, the vespergriff can psionically force the creature to make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw if the vespergriff isn't incapacitated and can see the creature. On a failure, the creature becomes charmed by the vespergriff until the start of the vespergriff's next turn. While charmed in this way, the creature has a speed of 0 feet. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to any vespergriff's Bewildering Gaze for the next 24 hours.

Keen Sight. The vespergriff has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Warning. The vespergriff knows the location of each creature within 60 feet of them, even if the creature is invisible or hidden. When the vespergriff senses a creature with this trait, they know if that creature is hostile, neutral, or friendly toward them.

Actions

Multiattack. The vespergriff makes two Claw attacks.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage.

Mind-Piercing Scream (1/Day; 3rd-Order Power). The vespergriff unleashes a scream imbued with psionic energy in a 30-foot cone. Creatures in that area must make a DC 13 Intelligence saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 16 (3d10) psychic damage and can't take reactions until the start of the vespergriff's next turn. On a successful save, the target takes half as much damage and can use reactions normally.

Vespergriff Companion Companion

Large Monstrosity, Unaligned

Armor Class 12 plus PB
Hit Points 6 + six times caregiver's level (number of d8 Hit Dice equal to their caregiver's level)
Speed 30 ft., fly 10 × PB

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	7 (–2)	14 (+2)	8 (–1)

Saves Str +3 plus PB
Skills Perception +2 plus PB
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12 plus PB
Languages —
Proficiency Bonus (PB) equals the caregiver's proficiency bonus

Keen Sight. The vespergriff has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Learning to Fly. The vespergriff has a flying speed of 10 × PB feet.

Actions

Signature Attack (Claws). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 plus PB to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1d6 plus PB slashing damage.

1st Level: Overwhelming Attack (2 Ferocity). The vespergriff makes a signature attack. On a hit, the attack deals an extra PB damage, and the target can't take reactions until the start of the vespergriff's next turn.

3rd Level: Mind-Piercing Cry (5 Ferocity). The vespergriff targets one creature within 30 feet of them. The target takes PBd4 psychic damage and has disadvantage on attack rolls until the start of the vespergriff's next turn.

5th Level: Hypnotic Gaze (8 Ferocity). One creature within 10 feet of the vespergriff who can see the vespergriff's eyes must succeed on a DC 10 plus PB Wisdom saving throw or be charmed by the vespergriff until the start of the vespergriff's next turn. While charmed in this way, the target has a speed of 0 feet.

Bonus Actions

Psychic Ping (2/Long Rest). The vespergriff sends out a wave of psionic energy, becoming aware of each creature within 60 feet of them, even if the creature is invisible or hidden, and revealing the locations of such creatures to their caregiver.

X'EK

Seasoned travelers of the Timescape know well that when the cloying smells of cinnamon and burnt tree sap waft across your camp, it's time to move. The telltale scent of x'ek pheromones means they're close and they're coordinating. Leave everything. Just run.

The x'ek (pronounced ZECK) are a species of human-size insectoids. They mercilessly descend on a target from above and sting until their prey is sapped of strength, then transport victims back to the hive to be devoured alive.

They are easily identified by the pungent scent of the pheromones they use to communicate, but only other x'ek can decipher what the olfactory cocktail means. These pheromones can communicate complex ideas as easily as any spoken language, and in high concentrations, they can disorient other creatures.

X'ek hives are best avoided, but this wisdom often goes unheeded. The x'ek's bodies are coated in tesselating, scale-like gemstones, each one a fist-sized fortune. They shed these gemstones as they grow new ones, and piles of gem-scales build up in their nests, making them attractive targets for looting.

Any survivor of such an excursion will quickly tell you it's not worth all the money in the world. X'ek larvae grow inside eggs of an amber-like substance, shaped almost identically like their gem-scales. More than a few adventurers have returned with a haul of precious stones, only to find that a few of them are starting to hatch….



X'ek Drone CR 6 Skirmisher (2,300 XP)

Medium Monstrosity, Unaligned

Armor Class 16 (see Ablative Armor)
Hit Points 99 (18d8 + 18)
Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	5 (−3)	15 (+2)	5 (−3)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Wis +5
Skills Perception +5
Damage Resistances poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages X'ek pheromones
Proficiency Bonus +3

Ablative Armor. The drone's AC is 16. The first time the drone is hit by a critical hit, the hit becomes a normal hit, and for the next 7 days, their AC is reduced to 14 and this trait doesn't function.

Erratic Flight. While flying, the drone has advantage on Dexterity saving throws, and creatures have disadvantage on attack rolls against them.

Tarsal Claws. The drone can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Actions

Multiattack. The drone makes two Bite attacks and one Enervating Sting attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Enervating Sting. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) poison damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or have their speed reduced by a cumulative 10 feet for 1 hour.

Bonus Actions

Sudden Escape. The drone takes the Disengage action.



X'ek Queen CR 8 Leader (3,900 XP)

Large Monstrosity, Unaligned

Armor Class 16 (see Ablative Armor)
Hit Points 180 (24d10 + 48)
Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft., fly 40 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	19 (+4)	5 (–3)

Saving Throws Str +6, Wis +7
Skills Insight +7, Perception +7
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages X'ek pheromones
Proficiency Bonus +3

Ablative Armor. The queen's AC is 16. The first time the queen is hit by a critical hit, the hit becomes a normal hit, and for the next 3 days, their AC is reduced to 14 and this trait doesn't function.

Actions

Multiattack. The queen makes two Claw attacks.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) slashing damage.

Viscid Spit. The queen chooses a point they can see within 60 feet of them. Each creature within 20 feet of that point must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or have their speed halved until the start of the queen's next turn.

Feed. The queen feeds on one willing or prone creature within 5 feet of them, dealing 21 (4d8 + 3) piercing damage. If this damage reduces the creature to 0 hit points, they die and the queen regains a number of hit points equal to the piercing damage dealt.

Reactions

Emergency Orders. When the queen takes damage, each x'ek drone within 60 feet of the queen can move up to their speed or make one attack.

Villain Actions

The queen has three villain actions. They can take each action once during an encounter after an enemy creature's turn. They can take these actions in any order but can only use one per round.

Action 1: Noxious Swarm. Each x'ek within 60 feet of the queen can move up to their speed, creating a surge of pheromones in the air. Each creature within 60 feet of the queen must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become dazed until the end of their next turn. X'ek and creatures who don't need to breathe automatically succeed on this saving throw. While dazed, a creature can only do one of the following things on their turn: move, use an action, or use a bonus action.

Action 2: Imperious Pheromone. Each creature of the queen's choice within 60 feet of them must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become charmed by the queen for 10 minutes. Creatures that don't need to breathe automatically succeed on this saving throw. A charmed creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themself on a success. While charmed in this way, a creature can understand the x'ek pheromone language.

Action 3: Amber Glob. The queen spits a glob of sticky amber-like saliva at a point within 60 feet of them, and a 30-foot-radius area centered on that point becomes difficult terrain. Each creature in that area must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone and restrained. A restrained creature can use their action to make a DC 15 Strength check, freeing themself on a success. Another creature can use their action to free a restrained creature.

New Psionic Power

A talent can learn the following power from a vespergriff using the rules in the upcoming *The Talent and Psionics*.

Mind-Piercing Scream

3rd-Order Resopathy Power

Manifestation Time: 1 action
Range: Self (30-foot cone)
Duration: Instantaneous

You unleash a piercing scream imbued with psionic energy in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make an Intelligence saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 4d10 psychic damage and can't take reactions until the start of your next turn. On a successful save, the target takes half as much damage and can use reactions normally.

Increased Order. When you manifest this power, you can increase its order by 1 or more. The damage increases by 2d10 for each increase of 1.

QUICK, TAKE MY SPELLSLED!

Radical arcana in the streets of Silverside

by Imogen Gingell

Content Warning: This article contains a scene where a teenage boy is physically threatened.

> These delinquents are a blight on the sacred study of arcana! If I had my way, I'd ban their precious "spellsleds" and exile the lot of them!
>
> –Zarellon, Professor of Abjuration

This one-shot adventure, designed for 2nd- to 4th-level characters, is a chance to have fun with a nontraditional fantasy aesthetic, showcase a new magic item, and take on some bullies in a thrilling street race. It takes place in the city of Silverside, a new location that can stand on its own for this adventure, fit in a setting with a similar aesthetic, or be expanded further as a delightfully strange place in a traditional fantasy world.

Craze Arcana

Several years ago, within the ivory towers of Universitas Arcanum, a researcher of the arts of transmutation and artifice devised a convenient spell to permanently enchant a small platform to levitate. As the story goes, Professor Iris Mistral intended to use her "*spellsled*" to move books, potions, and her coffee pot around campus without having to lift a finger. One fateful afternoon, Iris's teenage daughter Epiphany stole the *spellsled* and embarked on a joyride through the university's ancient halls and carefully manicured gardens. Eyewitnesses reported Epiphany's misadventure to be "rad," "totally cool," and "worth the spell slots I had to spend to cure all those wounds." From that moment on, the *spellsled*'s legacy was sealed in the hearts and minds of misfits and delinquents across the land.

Spellsleds are now a common sight in Universitas Arcanum and the surrounding city of Silverside, despite attempts by members of the faculty to ban them outright.

The original *spellsled*, perhaps unfairly known as *Epiphany's Spellsled* for its transgressive first rider rather than its creator, is enshrined above the lounge of the UA junior common room. As the *spellsled* phenomenon spread beyond the university campus itself, sledders frequently boast of one day liberating *Epiphany's Spellsled*



from the university to find a home for it in Silverside as an icon of counterculture. To date, no sledder has bested the university's wards.

A traveler lucky enough to win the trust of the sledders might find themselves in possession of a rare treasure, and an entrepreneurial adventurer might be able to negotiate an auspicious distribution deal. Of course, every would-be merchant or artificer needs to know their goods—and that's where the race comes in.

SPELLSLED

Wondrous Item, Uncommon

A *spellsled* is a 4-foot-long, 1-foot-wide board made from enchanted wood or metal weighing up to 10 pounds, decorated with unique arcane glyphs on its underside. When you use a bonus action to speak the *spellsled*'s command word, the *spellsled* levitates 1 foot off the ground and remains suspended until you speak the command word again. The *spellsled* can carry one Medium or smaller creature and any objects worn or carried by them. It can levitate over a liquid surface but it can't travel up a surface with a gradient greater than 60 degrees or cross a gap larger than 5 feet wide. While mounted on the *spellsled*, you can use its magic to propel you. Your speed while mounted is 30 feet, and difficult terrain doesn't cost you extra movement. If the *spellsled* falls more than 10 feet, creatures and objects on it take falling damage as normal.

When you make a Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check while mounted on a *spellsled*, if you are proficient with land vehicles, you can add your proficiency bonus to the roll even if you aren't proficient in Athletics or Acrobatics.

ACQUIRING A SPELLSLED

At the GM's discretion, a character who can create or replicate magic items can learn to make a *spellsled* by studying the unique techniques of Silverside's arcanists. In addition, arcane crafters based in Silverside are willing to make *spellsleds* for only 300 gp (or 350 gp for a custom decal). The recipe for creating *spellsleds* has not yet made it out of Silverside, and the faculty members of Universitas Arcanum are keen to keep it that way.

SLEDDER GANGS

Silverside's sledder gangs are either the city's scourge or its saviors, depending on who you ask. Most sledders roaming the streets are enthusiastic hobbyists, thrill seekers, or excitable artificers, but others use *spellsleds* to support more violent activities. More virtuous sledder gangs are willing to risk the ire of Universitas authorities to seek the wonders the wizards have squirreled away in their towers and distribute their secrets among the populace.

In the years since the *spellsled*'s invention, the sledder gangs have made Silverside a monument to their new sport. Many streets double as racing circuits, and spectacular competitions between (or within) sledder gangs spring up out of the slightest disagreement. The influence of Universitas Arcanum is felt strongly in the races, too. Entrepreneurial students, university dropouts, and talented commoners keep the circuits well maintained with magical signs, obstacles, and even specialized *glyphs of warding*, all adding an extra level of excitement (and danger).

One of the most notorious sledder gangs in Silverside calls themselves the Cantrips. Under the leadership of a callous young elf named Color Spray, the Cantrips have harassed and bullied their way through scores of rival sledders to name themselves champions of their territory. Unlike many other antiestablishment sledder gangs, the Cantrips have few allies among Silverside locals after turning to muggings and race-rigging rather than honoring the spirit of spellsledding.



Color Spray, Sledder Boss CR 3 Leader (700 XP)

Medium Humanoid (Elf), Chaotic Neutral

Armor Class 15 (studded leather jacket)
Hit Points 55 (10d8 + 10)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Con +3, Cha +5
Skills Acrobatics +7, Arcana +2, Athletics +4, Intimidation +5
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Elvish, Undercommon
Proficiency Bonus +2

Expert Spellsledder. Color Spray carries a *spellsled*. While mounted on it, she levitates 1 foot off the ground and her speed is not reduced by difficult terrain.

Fey Ancestry. Color Spray has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put her to sleep.

Actions

Sled Spikes. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Chromatic Blast. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, range 60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) force damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be blinded until the end of their next turn.

Bonus Actions

Sledder Slide (2/Day). Color Spray takes the Disengage action.

Reactions

Sabotage. When a creature Color Spray can see enters a space within 5 feet of her (or within the same race segment; see "Tracking Race Positions" later in the article), she makes a Sled Spikes attack. If the attack hits, the creature is knocked prone.

Villain Actions

Color Spray has three villain actions. She can take each action once during an encounter after an enemy creature's turn. She can take these actions in any order but can only use one per round.

Action 1: Cheater's Start. Each creature of Color Spray's choice within 60 feet of her who can hear her can attempt to grapple another creature within their reach (no action required).

Action 2: Light 'Em Up! Each creature of Color Spray's choice within 60 feet of her who can hear her can make a melee attack against another creature within their reach (no action required).

Action 3: Rallying Taunts. Color Spray chooses any number of creatures within 90 feet of her who can hear her. Each chosen creature can make an opposed Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check against one enemy they can see and who can see them. If one of Color Spray's chosen creatures wins their opposed check, they gain advantage on ability checks and saving throws until the end of their next turn. A creature who loses their opposed check is frightened of Color Spray until the end of their next turn.

Spellsledder CR 1/4 Skirmisher (50 XP)

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

Armor Class 13 (leather)
Hit Points 22 (4d8 + 4)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	9 (–1)	13 (+1)

Skills Intimidation +3
Senses passive Perception 9
Languages Common
Proficiency Bonus +2

Spellsledder. The spellsledder carries a *spellsled*. While mounted on it, they levitate 1 foot off the ground and their speed is not reduced by difficult terrain.

Actions

Shocking Grasp (Cantrip). *Melee Spell Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) lightning damage, and the target can't take reactions until the start of their next turn.

Bonus Actions

Sledder Slide (1/Day). The spellsledder takes the Disengage action.

Reactions

The Boss Always Wins. When a creature the spellsledder can see within 60 feet of them is reduced to 0 hit points, they can move up to twice their speed toward that creature. If the spellsledder ends their turn next to that creature, the creature regains 10 hit points, and the spellsledder is reduced to 0 hit points.

SILVERSIDE RACERS

The adventure takes place at dusk, and begins shortly after the characters arrive in Silverside. Read or paraphrase the following:

> The streets of Silverside are densely packed with crowds and vendors packing up for the evening. Magical signs illuminate the town with a colorful glow, and even in the growing night, the distant towers of the university are visible peeking above the tops of the buildings.
>
> Shouts from a branching alleyway catch your attention. "Give it up, kid. You and your Featherheads *owe* us."
>
> A young elf woman dressed in black leather, her hair dyed in prismatic shades, looms over a scrawny teenage boy. Her half-dozen lackeys step in to surround him. Everyone in the alley clutches boards decorated with eclectic paintings and stickers.
>
> "There's no one left to help you, Sparrow," the woman says, gripping his shirt and pressing him against the alley wall. "Meet us on the track or—"
>
> The boy's eyes dart nervously around the alley, snap to you, and widen at the sight of your gear. His expression turns from panic to pleading. "*They* will! They'll race you for us. And they'll *win*."
>
> "Quick," he says, holding out his board to you. It thrums with arcane energy. "Take my *spellsled*!"

Sparrow is a young, human Silverside native and ardent spellsledder who has been accosted by Color Spray and her sledder gang, the Cantrips. Sparrow leads a small crew of aspirant sledders, the Featherheads, who have bitten off more than they can chew. The Featherheads are no match for Color Spray, but Sparrow is willing to bet everything on a kind stranger … or at least one with an appetite for a thrill.

If the party agrees to represent them in a race, Sparrow gladly offers up the Featherheads' *spellsleds* for the characters to borrow. He leads the characters to the starting line, where the other Featherheads have already gathered. On the way, Sparrow can explain the following:

- The Featherheads owed the Cantrips money after betting on sled races—but when they couldn't come up with the money in time, the Cantrips decided to humiliate them on the racetrack instead.
- The race isn't confined to a pre-built track; it takes place through the streets of Silverside.
- Sledders race dirty, using any means to come out on top—the player characters should, too. However, a character reduced to 0 hit points is knocked unconscious and stable, even if dealt damage by a ranged attack or spell. Sledders are prepared for a rough ride, but outright killing a racer will have dire ramifications.
- Silverside mages have cast magical glyphs throughout the circuit. Some are helpful, and some are harmful.
- The sled race winner can claim a *spellsled* from the losing team.

RACE OF A LIFETIME

Once Sparrow has brought the characters to the starting line and the Featherheads' *spellsleds* have been distributed, read or paraphrase the following:

> With a buzz of anticipation, crowds of onlookers start to gather in the streets. You are hustled along to an open plaza where a makeshift banner is strung between two crumbling statues of long-forgotten wizards. Grinning in anticipation, Sparrow steps up to offer some last pointers.
>
> "The race starts at and ends at this banner. Follow the painted green arrows—they mark the circuit. Good luck!"
>
> As your competitors array themselves at the starting line, Color Spray and the Cantrips shoot you a sneer and a rude gesture.

When the characters are ready, a plucky half-orc approaches the characters and asks for their individual names. They're also welcome to come up with a sledder group name, in which case they'll be racing "on behalf of the Featherheads." The half-orc then ascends one of the statues with a tattered flag in hand and announces the racers, starting with the Cantrips. You can generate names for the Cantrips sledders by rolling 2d6 on the Cantrips Sledder Names table below, or create your own combinations.

Once the half-orc announces the names of the characters, the crowd erupts into cheers. Read or paraphase the following:

> The half-orc lifts the flag to the night sky, commanding the attention of the throngs of spectators, then look down at the racers with a tusky grin.
>
> "On your mark, set … GO!"



Cantrips Sledder Names

d6	First Name	Second Name
1	Thorn	Whip
2	Eldritch	Blast
3	Shocking	Grasp
4	Vicious	Mockery
5	Poison	Flame
6	Frost	Strike

Structuring the Encounter

The characters' opponents in the race are **Color Spray, Sledder Boss**, plus enough Cantrips **spellsledders** to make the total number of opponents equal to the number of player characters racing. Under the Cantrips' influence, *spellsled* races in Silverside are wild, dangerous, and far from honorable—racers are expected and encouraged to use all their combat abilities to ensure their victory. As noted above, you should assume that nonplayer characters reduced to 0 hit points are knocked unconscious, even if dealt damage by a ranged attack or spell.

Starting the Race. Roll for initiative as normal to determine the turn order. Everyone begins at the starting line in the first segment of the racetrack (see "Tracking Race Positions").

During the Race. Whenever the player characters and Color Spray move on their turn, they face a hazard (see "Race Hazards"), resolve the consequences, advance a segment if able, then continue their turn as normal.

Finishing the Race. When any racer advances to the eighth segment of the track, the race concludes at the end of the current round, and the winner is decided (see "Winning"). Move to "Victory" or "Defeat" to determine the rewards.

Tracking Race Positions

Since *spellsleds* all travel at the same speed, this race tracks positions using an abstracted system consisting of 8 segments of the racetrack. The racers begin at the starting line in the first segment and can advance to further segments of the track by moving, taking certain actions, and successfully dealing with hazards as detailed below.

You don't need a map for the race, but you can use a visual aid like minis or tokens on a virtual tabletop to help everyone keep track of which segment each racer is in.

Advancing

The first time a player character or Color Spray moves on their turn, they must face a hazard (see "Race Hazards" below). If they succeed in besting the hazard, a racer advances one or more segments. Failing to best a hazard can cause a racer to be knocked prone, grappled,

or unable to move. The rest of the Cantrips spellsledders automatically advance a segment when they move, without facing a hazard.

In addition, the following circumstances affect movement between segments:

- ***Dash.*** A racer advances a segment if they take the Dash action. A racer can gain this benefit only once on their turn.
- ***Grappled.*** A racer who is grappled moves with the creature grappling them and can't move between segments on their own.
- ***Prone.*** A racer who is prone at the start of their turn must stand up before facing a hazard. Due to the time spent standing, the racer advances one fewer segment when they move, even if they automatically advance (see "Falling Prone" for more details).
- ***Frightened.*** A frightened racer cannot willingly move into the same segment as the source of their fear.

As the GM, you can adjudicate whether other effects let a racer move an additional segment or prevent them from advancing.

Attacks and Area Effects

Racers must weave through the mazelike streets of Silverside, contending with other sledders in their own segment or firing at racers far ahead. Adjudicate ranges and distances as follows:

- ***Melee Attacks.*** A racer can target creatures in their segment with melee attacks.
- ***Ranged Attacks.*** For the purposes of ranged attacks and abilities, a racer is considered to be within 30 feet of another racer if they are in the same segment. Each further segment they are separated adds an additional 30 feet of distance. For example, a racer in the fourth segment is considered to be within 90 feet of a racer in the second segment.
- ***Line of Sight.*** The race takes place in the twisting streets of Silverside; a racer can't see creatures or locations more than one segment away from them.
- ***Area.*** Area effects with a size or diameter of more than 10 feet are assumed to affect all creatures in a given race segment. Area effects with a size or diameter of 10 feet or smaller instead affect one creature of the user's choice.
- ***Opportunity Attacks.*** A racer who advances a segment without using the Disengage action provokes only one opportunity attack, made by the hostile racer in the original segment who is highest in the initiative order. That racer can choose to allow the next hostile racer in the initiative order to make the opportunity attack instead.

Falling Prone

During the race, racers are likely to be knocked prone by hazards and their opponents' abilities. The prone condition represents a racer losing their balance and falling off their *spellsled*, but it's only a minor setback. A prone racer's *spellsled* comes to a stop within 5 feet of them. On their turn, a prone racer can stand up as normal and mount their *spellsled* as part of their movement. If they continue to move forward after mounting their *spellsled*, they must face a hazard as normal.

As noted in the "Advancing" section above, a character who starts their turn prone is assumed to use part of their movement to stand and mount their *spellsled*, so they advance one fewer segment when they move on their turn.

Additionally, whenever a creature causes another racer to move against their will (such as if they cast the *thunderwave* spell), they can choose to knock the racer prone instead.

Winning

The first time a racer advances to the eighth segment, the race concludes at the end of that round. That racer and any other racer who advances to the eighth segment before the end of the round must wrestle for leadership with a contested Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. The racer who advanced to the eighth segment first has advantage on the check. The racer who wins the contest crosses the finish line first and is declared the winner!

Race Hazards

The first time a player character or Color Spray moves on their turn, roll a d12 to determine the hazard they face. The DC of any ability check or saving throw required by a race hazard is 13. On a success, a racer gains the corresponding benefit listed in the table. On a failure, a racer suffers the consequence listed in the table—usually falling prone or otherwise being unable to automatically advance. All ability checks to deal with race hazards rely on sight; a blinded character automatically fails the ability check.

Creative Racing. If a player suggests a way of overcoming a hazard that is different from the method in the Race Hazards table, you can ask them to make a different ability check or saving throw. If the suggested check is particularly risky or a bit of a stretch, increase the DC to 16. The consequences of success and failure are usually the same, but you can take inspiration from a different hazard if it's more appropriate.

Race Hazards

d12	Hazard (DC 13)	Success	Failure
1	***Half-Pipe.*** A dried-up sewer pipe might not be the most direct route, but it's definitely the most stylish! Succeed on a Dexterity (Performance) check to wow the crowd with a stunt.	The crowd goes wild. You have advantage on attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws until the start of your next turn. You advance a segment as part of your movement this turn.	You fail the trick and land heavily. You do not advance a segment as part of your movement this turn.
2	***Shortcut.*** The streets are a maze of mismatched roofs and alleys. Succeed on a Wisdom (Perception) check to spot a shortcut.	You advance two segments as part of your movement this turn.	Your potential shortcut took you the wrong way! You fall back a segment as part of your move this turn.
3	***Makeshift Ramp.*** An upturned cart makes the perfect ramp to leapfrog the competition. Succeed on a Strength (Athletics) check to throw all you have into the jump.	Choose a racer in the segment ahead of you, and switch places with them.	You bail from the ramp and fall prone. You do not advance a segment as part of your movement this turn.
4	***Cabbage Cart.*** An oblivious merchant hasn't moved his goods out of the circuit in time. Succeed on a Charisma (Intimidation) check to startle him and scatter his merchandise.	A racer of your choice in your segment or any segment behind you falls prone. You advance a segment as part of your movement this turn.	Undeterred, the merchant throws a cabbage under your *spellsled*. You do not advance a segment as part of your movement this turn.
5	***Smoke Screen.*** A bucket of ash teeters at the edge of a street vendor's grill. Succeed on a Constitution saving throw to resist the heat of the embers and throw up a cloud of concealing ash.	Racers in your current segment have no way to anticipate what's coming. They have disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of their next turn. You advance a segment as part of your movement this turn.	The smoke fills your lungs and eyes. You have disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of your next turn. You do not advance a segment as part of your movement this turn.
6	***Rowdy Crowd.*** These spectators are little more than a mob, willing and eager to interfere with the racers. Succeed on a Charisma (Persuasion) check to turn them on a rival racer. Color Spray has disadvantage on this check.	One racer of your choice within one segment of you is grappled by the spectators (escape DC 13). They cannot advance segments until they escape. You advance a segment as part of your movement this turn.	The crowd turns on you instead. You are grappled by the spectators (escape DC 13), and you cannot advance segments until you escape.
7	***Unsecured Stables.*** In the chaos of the *spellsled* race, the horses are in a panic! They dart across the circuit without a care for what's coming. Succeed on a Wisdom (Animal Handling) check to predict the animals' movements and slip through.	Another racer of your choice in your segment is trampled under the horses' hooves. They take 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage and fall prone. You advance a segment as part of your movement this turn.	You misjudge the horses and sled into their path. You take 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage. You do not advance a segment as part of your movement this turn.
8	***Slipstream Maneuver.*** You spy a chance to slip between a group of racers while taking advantage of their positioning. Succeed on a Dexterity (Stealth) check to break through the gap before the other racers see you coming.	You advance two segments as part of your movement this turn. You have advantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of your turn.	The racers see you coming and sabotage your maneuver, leaving you off-balance. You have disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of your turn. You still advance a segment as part of your movement this turn.
9	***Speeder Glyph.*** A glyph of glowing arrows promises a timely boost! Succeed on a Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to maneuver into place to use it.	You advance two segments as part of your movement this turn. If the check succeeds by 5 or more, you can Dash as a bonus action this turn.	The glyph sends your *spellsled* flying … without you on it. You do not advance a segment this turn, and you can't advance a segment until you use an action to retrieve your sled from the crowd.
10	***Vitality Glyph.*** A glyph of a glowing potion bottle promises to soothe your pain. Succeed on a Constitution saving throw to resist the side effects of the sudden rush of magical vitality.	You gain 2d4 + 2 temporary hit points. You advance a segment as part of your movement this turn.	The bootleg healing magic sickens you. You take 7 (2d4 + 2) necrotic damage. You still advance a segment as part of your movement this turn.

Race Hazards (continued)

d12	Hazard (DC 13)	Success	Failure
11	***Oilslick Glyph.*** A glyph has summoned a pool of shimmering liquid. Succeed on a contested Strength (Athletics) check against another racer in your segment to shove them into the oil.	Your opponent slides off course and falls back a segment. The racer and their *spellsled's* propulsion glyphs are covered in grease, and they can't take the Dash action until they use an action to clean the grease off. You advance a segment as part of your movement this turn.	You slide off course and fall back a segment as part of your move. Your *spellsled's* propulsion glyphs are covered in grease, and you can't take the Dash action until you use an action to clean the grease off.
12	***Explosive Glyph.*** A flashing red-and-yellow glyph no doubt releases a powerful arcane explosive. Succeed on an Intelligence (Arcana) check to remotely trigger the blast at just the right moment.	Each racer in your segment other than you take 7 (2d6) force damage. You advance a segment as part of your movement this turn.	You take 7 (2d6) force damage from the blast, and do not advance a segment as part of your movement this turn.

Victory

If a player character wins the race, read or paraphrase the following:

> The crowd erupts in cheers.
>
> "The challengers win!" the half-orc flag bearer cries out, nearly falling from their perch.
>
> Sledding up to you, Color Spray spits on the ground at your feet. She wrests one of the Cantrips' sleds from their hands and shoves it at you with little ceremony.
>
> "You must have cheated." She sneers and returns to the other Cantrips, throwing one last taunt over her shoulder. "You better watch your back!"

As a reward for their victory, the winner has earned the right to take one of the Cantrips' *spellsleds*. Sparrow and any of the other Featherheads who have lent out their sleds ask for them back, but they offer the winner a magical decal to match the decorations on their sleds. The sticker resembles a stylized falcon and functions as a *spell scroll* of *feather fall*.

Additionally, news of the victory travels fast in Silverside. A grateful Sparrow also offers to introduce the characters to an arcane crafter who can create new *spellsleds* for them for a significantly discounted price: only 200 gp. Additionally, the winner has advantage on Charisma checks made against anyone with a favorable opinion of spellsledding in Silverside or Universitas Arcanum for the next 72 hours.

Defeat

If one of the Cantrips wins the race, read or paraphrase the following:

> The spectators gasp.
>
> "The Cantrips win," the half-orc flagbearer announces to the crowd sadly.
>
> As the locals quietly disperse, the Cantrips chant and roar in celebration. "I'd say better luck next time," Color Spray spits, "but after that performance, there won't *be* a next time!"
>
> She holds out her hand expectantly. With eyes downcast, Sparrow sighs. "She's earned the right to take my *spellsled*. You should give it to her. Thanks for trying, I guess."

According to the traditions of the Silverside racers, Color Spray takes Sparrow's *spellsled* with her. If the characters try to resist handing it over, even Sparrow encourages them to comply. The other Featherheads collect the *spellsleds* they loaned to the party. Despite the characters' loss, Sparrow is grateful for the help and offers to introduce the characters to an arcane crafter who can create *spellsleds* for a slightly discounted price: 250 gp.

What's Next?

Many more adventures await in Silverside. Keep the spirit of the races alive with these plot hooks:

- Emboldened by victory or shamed by defeat, Color Spray and the Cantrips ramp up their shakedown of Silverside. Sparrow suggests they rally the other sledder crews to put a stop to the Cantrips once and for all.
- To bolster the reputation of the Featherheads, Sparrow suggests the characters help them finally liberate *Epiphany's Spellsled* from Universitas Arcanum.
- After their race, a local artificer approaches the characters about becoming the face of a new brand of *spellsleds* as they expand their business beyond Silverside.
- A Universitas student claims to have developed an experimental *spellsled* design that will crush the competition. She asks the characters to test it.

RESOURCES

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Issue 26 March 2023

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Lately I've been thinking about all the things we expect magic to do in a fantasy world—and in a fantasy roleplaying game. Some applications of magic are ubiquitous in the genre: create light and flame, fly, scry on a person or location, turn invisible, divine the future. Others are specific to lore and needs of the setting: open a door to another world, dream creatures into being, manipulate flesh and bone, weave enchantments with thread and cloth.

In any fantasy setting, the question of who has access to magic—is it innate? learned? controlled by a select few?—is usually well defined by the source material. There are two other questions, though, that I always wonder about as a reader and creator when I look at a fantasy setting:

First, what are the limitations of magic in this world?

And second, what are the everyday, practical uses of magic in this world—and are those encouraged or frowned upon?

Both of these questions get at the same thing—understanding the *people*, the societies, the relationships in a world different from our own. That's what stories are ultimately about, really, no matter what genre they are.

It's easy to think of magic in terms of what it can solve, especially when we have a handy list of spells on our character sheet and wish we could teleport to our friends in real life. But the limitations of a magic system tell us what problems *can't* be solved by even the strongest magic within that system—often, this is death, though not for the sufficiently powerful and wealthy in D&D worlds.

Magic can't create real love, loyalty, friendship, or imagination out of nothing—those things can only be simulated or borrowed. Unless you're talking about changing reality with the *wish* spell, I suppose … but *almost always*, there are problems too personal and too complex to be solved with magic. Or the problem itself *might* be solvable with magic, but it requires pushing the boundaries of what's supposedly possible, acquiring forbidden knowledge, or gaining a godlike infusion of power. And that's a *story*: a story about a person, their society, and their relationships with others in pursuit of their goal.

Meanwhile, small, practical uses of magic are an immersive and fun consequence of having a world with magic. If a mage can fly and call down lightning, can they also boil a kettle of water and summon a quill from 10 feet away? Why or why not? Is it unusual to use magic for such mundanities—and if so, why? Because magic is unpredictable, or just because mages are snobby? Are all mages *really* snobby, or are there mages who can't fly and call down lightning but can boil water *and* descale the kettle to boot?

The answers reveal a lot about the world itself, and what life looks like for people in it. If the Alban Wizards live in an ivory tower and study arcane theory to transmute iron to gold and bats to wolves, but local hedgewitches tell fortunes, heal arthritis, and descale kettles … well, there's more than one story there.

All this is fun for roleplay and worldbuilding (especially since it's fantasy, and it doesn't *all* have to be too realistic). But the articles this month explore magic on many levels, from the grand conspiracies and dramatic uses all the way down to the everyday delights. And all of them expertly dig into how magic affects people, society, and relationships.

In "The Aurum Court," Amber Litke offers a ready-made political intrigue scenario: the late king made an infernal bargain to save his people, but now his tiefling daughter faces mistrust and betrayal from the rest of the court. Between a misinterpreted prophetic vision, a treasonous spy-mage, a ruthless regent, and a challenger for the throne, this tangled web is perfect for players who enjoy a complex social challenge (and for GMs who want to pull off a complex intrigue plotline that's easy to run). Magic saved the kingdom of Dhustrad once, but this time it won't be so easy.

In "Killer Pursuit," JB Little envisions an unusual predicament for the player characters: with a dash of magic and a lot of spite, a local assassin has framed the party for murdering a prominent religious figure. The characters' magic can be helpful, but it's limited: the hierophant was killed in his sleep, so speaking with his spirit won't prove helpful. They'll have to be clever with their resources as they evade capture, put together clues, and identify the real killer to clear their names—without *actually* killing anyone in the process, preferably.

While those two articles explore how magic can be used for good or ill in life-or-death situations, the third grounds us in everyday, communal, heartwarming magic. Kat Kruger's "The Nocturne Market" presents a wondrous evening at a magical night market, complete with snacks, street performers, fortune tellers, enchanted face paints, a shadow puppet show, and more. At the Nocturne Market, magic is used to delight, entertain, and bring people together for a shared meal or friendly match of Nightingale. Magic allows the market to travel throughout the Timescape, bringing joy—and some marvelous magic items—to an *ARCADIA* near you….

De somnio ad itinere,
Hannah Rose
Managing Editor

THE NOCTURNE MARKET

A magical location to add delight and wonder to any campaign

by Kat Kruger

> If memories could be canned, would they also have expiry dates? If so, I hope they last for centuries.
>
> –He Zhiwu, *Chungking Express*

As twilight descends and the stars begin to twinkle, tantalizing aromas waft through the air. A low murmur of voices rises over the crackle of sizzling foods being grilled. The warm glow of paper lanterns reveals lively market stalls. A journey of the senses awaits those who hearken to the arrival of a magical exchange that rises when the sun sets: the Nocturne Market!

Using magic to travel throughout the Timescape, the market sets up on the outskirts of settlements, spends one night at a location, then packs up its stalls and moves on. Vendors sell anything from handicrafts, magically grown fruits and vegetables, and apparel to delicacies cooked right before the eyes of visitors.

The sprawling open-air market includes amusement zones for revelers complete with live music, while bustling taverns serve cuisines ranging from various worlds and planes. Throughout the market, monster charmers, fortune tellers, resplendent dancers, skilled orators, and street performers add delight to the atmosphere.

Running the Market

Filled with interesting NPCs, side quests, magical snacks, and more, the Nocturne Market is a magical location and event that's sure to be a night to remember for any adventuring party. Because the temporary stalls appear at twilight and then vanish by dawn, it makes an excellent drop-in location for any setting. As GM, you can also tie the market into an ongoing campaign with one of the following plot hooks (or one of your own creation):

- ***Misspelled.*** Characters are hired to track down a vendor who sold pirated spell scrolls that are not working as intended due to being literally "misspelled."
- ***Monkey Business.*** Thieves (see "Market NPCs" later in this article) have stolen something valuable from the local settlement (or the characters)! This hook provides a fun opportunity for investigation and a possible chase through the market.
- ***Food Fight.*** A market chef hires the characters to help source the freshest ingredients for a cooking competition.
- ***The Show Must Go On.*** The characters are hired to procure shadow puppets from Lotus & Lily (see "Market NPCs" later in this article). Unfortunately, there is a spat between the puppeteers that puts their puppet show and business on hold. Characters can help resolve the quarrel and earn a shadow puppet (see "Nocturne Treasures" later in this article) as a reward from the grateful puppeteers.

Bartering

Because the market travels to different locations and planes, standard currency is generally not an accepted form of payment. Instead, vendors barter for items they can resell in other locations or ask for favors.

Typically, vendors barter for items of equal value. When looking at costs, consider the monetary value or rarity of an item to determine its value. However, vendors are sometimes willing to part with wares in exchange for favors, with rarer items requiring more



complex favors at your discretion as GM. For example, a character could perform a song, dance, or poem recitation in exchange for a trinket or snack.

A vendor may offer a rarer item in exchange for a favor with an element of danger, or one that requires use of a skill proficiency. For example, a dangerous task could include harvesting an ingredient from a threat-filled local forest, or making a Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check to determine which of two similar plants is poisonous. The Determining Favor Value table below offers further guidelines.

Determining Favor Value

Task	DC	Value
Very easy	5	Trinkets or 5 gp
Easy	10	Common or 100 gp
Moderate	15	Uncommon or 400 gp
Hard	20	Rare or 4,000 gp
Very hard	25	Very Rare or 40,000 gp
Nearly impossible	30	Legendary or 200,000 gp

Scavenger Hunt

If desired, you can introduce the market to the characters in a more active way. Amah (see "Market NPCs" later in this article) has arranged a scavenger hunt in the market. The characters begin at Nightingale Hall, where details of the contest are revealed. The locations mentioned here are all described in the "Market Locations" sections later in this article. If you like, you can give the players the Nocturne Market map.

First Clue. The first task is to claim a moonpie (see "Magical Snacks" later in this article) from the right vendor. The clue Amah gives is: "Where futures are seen and fates unfold, follow the stars to where the moon greets the bold."

Second Clue. A small stall has been set up in Fortune Teller's Row where an indigo-scaled kobold hands a moonpie to each contestant upon request. One quarter of the moonpie is stamped with edible ink in the shape of a marionette silhouette. The characters are told that they'll need to collect all four stamps first to win the prize, and are then given the next clue: "Where shadows tell a tale as old as time, learn the beast's nature from their pantomime."

Third Clue. When characters arrive at the Puppet Show, a small stall with a large screen, they receive a stamp of a cat on one quarter of their moonpie and the following clue: "Seek those guised as animals in a zoo, dodging tails, paws, and claws to earn your next clue."

Fourth Clue. At the small stall in the Kigurumi Menagerie, characters receive a stamp of an inkpot and needle on one quarter of their moonpie, along with the following clue: "Art comes to life in a flash and a shooting star. The fourth stamp awaits you, and the end isn't far."

Fifth Clue. At the final stall, located in the Inkporium, characters receive a stamp of a bowl of food on the remaining quarter of their moonpie, along with the last clue: "Friends old and new, gather beneath lights released. Make haste—the first to arrive earns their weight in a feast."

Each clue can be solved by deduction, or with a successful DC 10 Intelligence check made by any character. On a failure, the character still determines the next location, but the ability check to navigate there is made at disadvantage.

To reach the correct location, one character must make a DC 12 ability check of their choice. For example, Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) to find the best route, Dexterity (Acrobatics) or Strength (Athletics) to swiftly navigate the market, or Charisma (Investigation or Persuasion) to ask people at the market for directions. Any character can make the check, but a different skill must be used each time.

When the characters arrive at each correct location, they find a small stall decorated with the corresponding icon stamped on the moonpie, where the stall attendant then stamps the next icon and gives the next clue. All four quarters must be stamped to claim the final prize at the Driftglobe Garden.

The first group to complete the scavenger hunt is treated to an all-they-can-eat meal at the Driftglobe Garden. The characters win if they succeeded on at least four of their checks to navigate the market.

As the GM, you can include any opponent NPC groups—including the Monkey Around Gang (see "Market NPCs") in or out of their wizard guise, whom Amah pretends not to notice—and adjust the DCs as you see fit.

Market NPCs

Vendors at the Nocturne Market come from various planes, each bringing something unique to the stalls. They live in a cooperative neighborhood, making repairs together, keeping an eye out for trouble, and performing any other tasks needed to keep the market operating. Although the vendors travel to many locations, they consider the night market itself to be their home. The vendors are welcome to leave at any time, but they rarely do so, as they have no guarantee of returning due to the itinerant nature of the Nocturne Market.

Amah

Nobody knows just how old the matron who oversees the market is, but everyone defers to her when it comes to matters of business (and sometimes of the heart). Going by the honorific Amah (she/her), the elderly dragonborn is often found at Nightingale Hall (see "Market Locations" later in this article) playing a friendly match of Nightingale, a strategic tile game. Other times, she wanders the marketplace, using a black lacquered staff topped with a gold crescent moon as a walking aid while she visits with the vendors and samples their wares. Always up for a game of Nightingale, Amah rewards a character who wins against her with any item at the market that's up for barter, the cost of which she covers.



Amah

Medium Humanoid (Brass Dragonborn), Chaotic Good

Armor Class 12 (15 with *mage armor*)
Hit Points 77 (14d8 + 14)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (–1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +4, Wis +6, Cha +5
Skills Arcana +6, History +6, Insight +6, Perception +6
Damage Resistances fire, radiant
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Crescent Moon Magic. Amah carries a *crescent moon staff* (see "Nocturne Treasures" later in this article), which is a magic weapon. When Amah casts a spell that restores hit points while holding the staff, she can roll a d8 and add the number rolled to the amount of hit points restored (included in her Actions).

Legendary Resistance (2/Day). If Amah fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Actions

Multiattack. Amah makes two Crescent Moon Staff attacks. She can replace one of the attacks with a Starry Bolt attack or a use of Spellcasting.

Crescent Moon Staff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Starry Bolt (Cantrip). *Ranged Spell Attack:* +6 to hit, range 60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (6d4) radiant damage.

Cure Wounds (5/Day; 2nd-Level Spell). Amah touches a creature and they regain 16 (3d8 + 3) hit points.

Spellcasting. Amah casts one of the following spells, using Wisdom as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 14):

At will: *dancing lights*, *druidcraft*, *mending*
3/day each: *entangle*, *faerie fire*, *mage armor*
1/day each: *dispel magic, moonbeam*, *polymorph*

Breath Weapons (Recharge 5–6). Amah uses one of the following breath weapons.

Fire Breath. Amah exhales fire in a 30-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in that area must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 17 (5d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Sleep Breath. Amah exhalesa nebula of twinkling stars in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or fall unconscious for 5 minutes. This effect ends for a creature if the creature takes damage or if someone uses an action to wake them.

Lily and Lotus

These two puppeteers are like night and day, which is perhaps the secret of their success and great love for each other. Lily (she/her) is a stoic oni who dresses in black silk robes with emerald green embroidery. Moody and somber, she creates masterfully crafted shadow puppets from paper. Lotus (they/them) is a gregarious dryad with ever-changing costumes that match the seasons. When they perform a puppet show, they are the heart of it themselves, eliciting many emotions through beautifully operatic songs.

Monkey Around Gang

Orphans who escaped their worlds, the Monkey Around Gang are stowaways at the Nocturne Market. The goblin twins FeiFei (she/her) and Wei (he/him) banded together with a deep gnome named Ru (she/they) to help each other survive. Clever and charming, the children learned to barter early on and have mastered the art of working together and causing mischief—but not so much that they'll be expelled from the market. Amah punishes those caught stealing or engaging in harmful activities with a magically enforced lifetime ban, so the children never willingly do anything to jeopardize their stay.

Still, there is much relatively harmless mischief to be had. Sometimes they three-stack in a wizard's robe or another costume. Other times, FeiFei uses a *kigurumi of wild shape* (see "Nocturne Treasures" later in this article) to transform into a weasel and pilfer items from local settlements, which they then barter for basic amenities at the market. They've even been known to resell items taken from other worlds in an alley between vendor stalls.

Market Locations

Like most street markets that operate at night, the Nocturne Market is dedicated to leisurely activities rather than more businesslike day markets. The open-air market includes many cultural features from around the multiverse, many of which are listed here. As GM, you can add to the location as you see fit.

The following locations are shown on the map of the Nocturne Market, which you can share with your players as an in-world item (see the Resources section).

M1. Driftglobe Garden

Surrounded by food and beverage stalls, the Driftglobe Garden is an open dining area with shared seating crowded together. This social area is meant to create new connections between strangers and provide a sense of community. Various musicians play throughout the night as *driftglobes* shaped like stars float above the patrons and light the area. The Magical Snacks table lists some of the popular items available at stalls in the garden. Snacks spoil if not consumed within 24 hours.

M2. Fortune Teller's Row

Characters can learn more of their fates through seers who prophesize using tasseomancy, throwing bones, and other means. The fortune tellers here cast divination spells such as *augury*, *divination*, and *scrying*.

M3. Cosmic Cosmetics

No ordinary makeup counter, these skilled vendors infuse cosmetic products with magic enough to make a star of anyone. The makeup offerings in these stalls provide varying degrees of illusion and transmutation spells (see "Nocturne Treasures" later in this article). One vendor, a charming orc, also offers face-painting services as a one-time use of the *cosmic cosmetics*; the value of this service is equivalent to a consumable uncommon item (valued between 50 and 300 gp) or an easy favor, such as gathering magic components from the local area (see the Determining Favor Value table earlier in this article).

M4. Nature's Harvest

Along with herbalism kits and poisoner's kits, this stall features monster medicine. At your discretion, the vendors here can craft potions and other consumables using monster parts or herbs the characters offer. Crafting an item has a 10 percent chance of a cosmetic complication arising for a creature consuming the finished product, such as growing a tail. The items in the Monster Medicinals table are readily available at the market at any given time.



Magical Snacks

Item	Vendor	Description	Property
Meowzee	A good-humored dwarf whose face is dusted with flour	Glutinous rice flour dumplings shaped like a cat's face and filled with nut butter or sesame paste	A creature who consumes this item receives the benefits of the *speak with animals* spell until the next dawn.
Star brew	A dreamy sunset-hued tiefling who sighs often	Caramel popping bubbles formed into stars that float in a sweet black nectar	A creature who consumes this item gains darkvision out to a range of 30 feet until the next dawn. If they already have dark-vision, its range increases by 30 feet.
Moonpie	A giddy elf who talks incessantly	Round pastries filled with cheesecake	A creature who consumes this item can roll a d4 and add the number rolled to one ability check of its choice before the next dawn. They can roll the die before or after making the ability check.
Astromancy stew	A stern gnome of few words	Noodles form shapes in broth based on a vision	A creature who consumes this item sees a vision from a moon deity as though they had cast the *augury* spell.

Monster Medicinals

Item	Rarity
Dust of disappearance	Uncommon
Oil of etherealness	Rare
Oil of slipperiness	Uncommon
Potion of climbing	Common
Potion of heroism	Rare
Potion of resistance	Uncommon
Potion of speed	Very rare
Restorative ointment	Uncommon

M5. Inkporium

Characters looking to ink their bodies at the Nocturne Market turn to the incredible Inkporium artists, who offer flash sheets of various designs that allow the recipient to cast a cantrip at will. These sheets are available in exchange for an easy favor (see the Determining Favor Value table earlier in this article) and include the following designs and cantrips:

- Constellations to cast *dancing lights*
- Full moon to cast *light*
- Moonflower to cast *druidcraft*

For the rare client who can barter for a more powerful arcane tattoo, a special design—a shower of shooting stars—is available from a kindly goblin (see "Nocturne Treasures" later in this article). The goblin accepts another very rare magic item or a hard favor in exchange for tattooing a character with the *lucky stars tattoo*.

M6. Kigurumi Menagerie

Characters searching for whimsy need not look further than the market stalls in the Kigurumi Menagerie, which sell animal onesies of all sorts. Those keen to get in touch with their wild side may want to pick up a *kigurumi of wild shape*, which allows its wearer to turn into a specific animal (see "Nocturne Treasures" later in this article).

M7. Puppet Show

Run by the talented duo Lily and Lotus, the 20-minute play runs at the top of every hour, with the last showing at midnight. Flat, articulated shadow puppets are held between a source of light and a translucent screen. Various effects are achieved through movement, light, and magic. When the characters visit, the current show is called "Beauty of the Beast" and plays out as follows, with operatic music sung by Lotus:

The silhouette of a terrifying beast enters a forest. They gently pick flowers and interact with wildlife, until a young woman with flowing hair and ribbons prances into the scene. When the beast and dancing figure see each other, hearts float above the beast, and he kneels before the beauty, holding a hand to his heart. After a pause, the beauty laughs and points, and the hearts fall like rain upon the beast. She twirls from the scene.

The beast stands, a dim cloud still hanging over him, and wanders dejectedly through the woods until he falls asleep weeping. The sun sets and rises, and when he wakes, he continues his sad walk, not noticing he has entered a briar patch. A thorn pierces his arm, and he unleashes a roar that sends birds scattering into the skies. Soon, another humanoid figure enters the scene. The beast cowers, ashamed. But this humanoid is undaunted, and as she tends to the beast's wounds, the birds return, the cloud of sorrow disappears, and hearts float around them both.

M8. Nightingale Hall

The small recreation center is a colorful stone building with paper lanterns hanging from the ceiling. Those who gather here play a tile-based game called Nightingale. The tiles are decorated in suits, including phases of the moon, stars, and feathers. A hand of 13 tiles is dealt, and the goal is to collect the best phases (sets) or wings (pairs).

The characters draw and discard tiles, aiming to complete a hand with playable sets, much like in mahjong or rummy. To play, a character must make three ability checks, and they must succeed on at least two to win. You can set a DC for each check equal to 5 + 1d20, or you can choose the DC for these checks based on how skilled you want their competitor to be. Amah, for example, is an expert player who requires a successful DC 25 on all checks to defeat.

You can use any combination of checks and role-playing to represent a character's attempts to play, but each game should involve three different checks. Generate a separate DC for each check. An Intelligence (History) or Wisdom (Perception) check might allow a character to figure out a good strategy, while a Wisdom (Insight) or Charisma (Deception) check gives understanding of the competition or allows a character to bluff.

Nocturne Treasures

This magical location has many items to delight travelers. Some are more easily obtained than others (see the Determining Favor Value table earlier in this article).

Cosmic Cosmetics

Wondrous Item, Rare

These cosmetics are available in a wide range of products including eye shadow, lipstick, nail polish, and more. The cosmetics have 7 charges and take 10 minutes to apply. They fade after 8 hours or when the makeup is removed by the wearer as an action. While wearing the makeup, you can use an action to expend 1 of its charges to cast one of the following spells from it: *disguise self* (save DC 15) or *alter self* (no concentration required). The spell ends early if you remove the makeup.

The cosmetics are self-replenishing and regain 1d6 + 1 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the cosmetics crumble into chalky dust and are destroyed.

Crescent Moon Staff

Staff, Rare (Requires Attunement by a Bard, Cleric, or Druid)

This black lacquered staff is topped with a gold crescent moon and can be wielded as a magic quarterstaff with a d8 damage die. You can use your spellcasting ability modifier instead of your Strength modifier for attack and damage rolls made with this weapon. When you cast a spell that restores hit points while holding the staff, you can roll a d8 and add the number rolled to the amount of hit points restored.

The staff has 10 charges. While holding it, you can use an action to expend 1 or more of its charges to cast one of the following spells from it, using your spell save DC and spellcasting ability modifier: *cure wounds* (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th), *faerie fire* (2 charges), or *moonbeam* (3 charges).

The staff regains 1d6 + 4 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff disappears forever in a twinkle of stars.

Kigurumi of Wild Shape

Wondrous Item, Varies (Requires Attunement)

While wearing this cozy one-piece costume, you can use your action to transform into the creature represented by the kigurumi.

The transformation lasts for 1 hour or until you fall unconscious, drop to 0 hit points, or die. You can also end it early as a bonus action. While transformed,

your game statistics are replaced by the statistics of the creature, but you retain your alignment, personality, and Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores.

You assume the hit points of your new form. When you revert to your normal form, you return to the number of hit points you had before you transformed. If you revert as a result of dropping to 0 hit points, any excess damage carries over to your normal form. As long as the excess damage doesn't reduce your normal form to 0 hit points, you aren't knocked unconscious.

You can't cast spells, and your ability to speak or take any action that requires hands is limited to the capabilities of your new form. You choose whether your equipment falls to the ground in your space, merges into your new form, or is worn by it. Worn equipment functions as normal, but the GM decides whether it is practical for the new form to wear a piece of equipment, based on the creature's shape and size. Your equipment doesn't change size or shape to match the new form, and any equipment that the new form can't wear must either fall to the ground or merge with it. Equipment that merges with the form has no effect until you leave the form.

Twelve types of kigurumi exist. Once you use the kigurumi to transform, it can't be used this way again until the next dawn.

Kigurumi Varieties

Creature	Rarity
Goat	Uncommon
Rat	Uncommon
Weasel	Uncommon
Ape	Rare
Boar	Rare
Constrictor Snake	Rare
Crocodile	Rare
Elk	Rare
Riding Horse	Rare
Dire Wolf	Very Rare
Giant Eagle	Very Rare
Tiger	Very Rare

Lucky Stars Tattoo

Wondrous Item (Tattoo), Very Rare (Requires Attunement)

Obtained by an artist at the Nocturne Market, this shimmering silvery needle creates a magic tattoo of six shooting stars. With each charge used, a star shimmers briefly before dimming slightly.

Tattoo Attunement. To attune to this item, you press the needle to your skin where you want the tattoo to appear, holding it in place throughout the attunement process. When the attunement is complete, the needle transforms into the tattoo on your skin. If your attunement to the tattoo ends, the tattoo vanishes, and the needle returns to your possession.

Lucky Stars. The tattoo has 6 charges, and it regains all expended charges daily at dusk. While this tattoo is on your skin, you gain the following benefits:

- As a bonus action, you can cast *guidance* at will.
- When you make an attack roll, an ability check, or a saving throw, you can expend 2 charges to twist fate: you reroll one d20 and choose which roll of that die to use. Alternatively, when an attack roll is made against you, you can force the attacker to reroll one d20, and you choose which roll of that die to use.
- As an action, you can expend 1 charge to shoot one of the stars from the tattoo, casting *magic missile* as a 3rd-level spell. Alternatively, you can expend 3 charges to cast it as a 6th-level spell.

Shadow Puppet

Wondrous Item, Rare

This paper craft puppet is small enough to fit in a pocket. If you use an action to speak the command word and throw the puppet to a point on the ground within 10 feet of you, the puppet becomes a **shadow** with the following adjustments: its creature type is Construct instead of Undead, and it can't create more shadows. The shadow is friendly to you and your companions. It acts independently of you, but it always obeys your commands. In combat, it rolls its own initiative and acts on its own turn.

The shadow reverts to a puppet after 8 hours, if it drops to 0 hit points, or if you use an action to speak the command word again while touching it. When the shadow reverts to a puppet, it can't become a shadow again until the next dusk.

THE AURUM COURT

A tangled web of conflicting courtiers and treacherous intrigue

by Amber Litke

Content Warning: This article contains an instance of a teenage girl in danger and themes of prejudice against tieflings. We recommend using the MCDM Tabletop Safety Toolkit and Checklist and adjusting as needed to ensure everyone has a good time.

> The courts of kings are full of people, but empty of friends.
>
> –Seneca the Elder

When your players enter a major city, they might expect to be—intentionally or begrudgingly—embroiled in its politics. For a table that enjoys political intrigue, the twisted web of red thread and pushpins can be extremely satisfying to navigate. However, creating engaging personalities and tangled motivations for a satisfying intrigue plotline isn't easy, and a GM in a pinch might not have the time.

"The Aurum Court" is here to help! This article, suitable for any tier of play, contains a court of NPCs vying for the throne, adventure hooks to engage the characters in the story, and the Gilded Gala, a one-to-two-session encounter to tie it all together. The article can be dropped into your campaign as a ready-to-use political scenario, or its pieces mixed and matched to supplement an existing intrigue plot. Have a setting and NPCs, but missing motivations? Change out the names. Already drafting a political web, but struggling to fill it out? Take some of these NPCs and tweak them to fit your narrative. Have the cast, but unsure how it all comes together? Use the framework of the Gilded Gala scenario to bring your tense politics to a climactic finish.

A Court in Chaos

The following section outlines the Aurum Court's history, key players, and tumultuous political situation—ultimately, the player characters will shape the kingdom's future by deciding who to support as its next monarch. The provided adventure hooks introduce the characters to the state of affairs, either neutrally or in a way that immediately draws the characters into a courtier's plans.

Our Story Thus Far

For centuries, the kingdom of Dhustrad has been in conflict with the empire of Atrus. Minor skirmishes, stolen resources, and disrupted trade culminated in several bloody wars, feeding Atrus's power and leaving Dhustrad in increasingly dire straits. The most recent Dhustrad king, Alphonsus Hithalwynn, sought peace, but his overtures were repeatedly rejected by Atrusian Empress Venetia Kain.

Desperate to avoid another full-scale war, young Alphonsus made a deal with a devil—trading the fate of his soul for peace with Atrus. Empress Venetia died suddenly, leaving the throne to her spiritless heir, Helias, who established a strained truce with Dhustrad that persists to this day.

Alphonsus's infernal dealings went undiscovered until his wife, Odette, gave birth to their daughter—a tiefling. As the king was human and his wife half-elven, rumors regarding their infernal dealings circulated throughout Dhustrad, burgeoning into discontent despite the kingdom's recovery and continued prosperity.

Then, thirteen years later, Alphonsus and Odette were assassinated.

The monarchs were killed during a public address, and the culprits were never caught nor identified. This article assumes the sovereigns were killed by Atrusian zealots, but depending on the narrative you wish to tell, the assassin could be from Dhustrad and working with one of the courtiers.

Crown Princess Lyetta Hithalwynn is heir to the throne, but Dhustrad's Aurum Court is divided on whether to let her bear the crown. While numerous key figures angle to take advantage of the empty throne, the characters are unknown variables who can tip the balance and determine the future of Dhustrad.

Adventure Hooks

The following adventure hooks can lead characters into the Aurum Court's intrigue:

A Formal Request. The characters receive a letter requesting political assistance from Lyetta or the courtier whose views and motivations best align with the characters'.

Witnesses of Tragedy. The characters are present for the public address where Alphonsus and Odette are killed.

Supporting an Alliance. The characters are sent by one of Dhustrad's allies, who is concerned by the unrest in the kingdom's leadership following the assassination.

Dramatis Personae

The following section describes the five key members of the Aurum Court. The "Earning Trust" section under each NPC gives a foundation for building relationships with these characters, which is then continued under "Creating Intrigue" later in the article. While no quests are necessary, each one gives the characters further insight into the NPCs, which is pivotal to their decision-making as tensions ramp up and the Gilded Gala approaches.

Lyetta Hithalwynn (Lie-EHT-uh hih-THALL-win). The young crown princess of Dhustrad, who seeks the throne to restore honor to her family's legacy.

Lorentius Granvhulf (lo-REN-shus gran-VULF). The princess's lord regent, who is obsessed with making an infernal pact for the power to puppet the throne through Lyetta.

Zoya Ionvi (ZOY-uh eye-YON-vee). The court's spymaster and a divine agent whose premonitions of a dark future position her against the princess.

Brenum Nidar (BREH-num nih-DAR). A lord with a claim to the throne who champions the people, but whose ideals might lead them to revolution.

Shani Jissal (SHAH-nee jih-SALL). An Atrusian zealot posing as a noble of Dhustrad to pave the way for her empire's conquest.

This article assumes that, without the intervention of the player characters, Lorentius succeeds in using infernal magic to make Lyetta a puppet sovereign.

Princess Lyetta Hithalwynn

As Alphonsus and Odette's sole heir, Crown Princess Lyetta Melodia Prospera Hithalwynn sits at the center of the court's controversy. Opinions are divided on whether House Hithalwynn should retain the right to rule after Alphonsus's infernal dealings, leaving Lyetta's position uncertain as key figures and groups withhold their support.

Appearance. Lyetta is an adolescent, gold-skinned tiefling with swept-back horns and thick, wavy, pale-blonde hair. She wears loose dresses in pale fabrics with elaborate embroidery.

Personality and Mannerisms. Aware of the machinations around her, Lyetta is keen, wary, and affords trust only after sufficient action. Despite her guarded



demeanor, she is too forthright to lie and bluntly avoids topics she is unwilling to discuss.

Motivations. Though Lyetta recognizes what her infernal heritage means, she seeks to uphold the honor of her father's legacy by ruling Dhustrad and maintaining peace with Atrus. To become that queen, she needs to gain the favor of Dhustrad's nobles and common folk, prove her regent's treachery, and wield her own power.

Stat Block. Lyetta uses the **noble** stat block with the following changes:

- She has resistance to fire damage.
- She can cast *thaumaturgy* at will.
- She is attuned to the following magic items: a *brooch of shielding* (a diamond necklace), a *cloak of displacement* (a sheer shawl), and a *rod of alertness* (a golden scepter).

Guardian. Lyetta is always accompanied by her childhood protector, Pallus, a winged white lion. Pallus uses the **chimera** stat block, but is neutral good and can only understand simple Common phrases.

Halcyon Guard

The Halcyon Guard protects the royal palace, known as the Halcyon Seat, and the royal family. It is led by Knight Commander Alluin Evenvale (**gladiator**, or **bodyguard** from "Appendix NPC: Part 1" in *ARCADIA* 18), an elven man with copper-toned skin, tightly bound dark brown hair, and a prosthetic mithril right arm. He and most of his guards are deeply loyal to the princess, though some guards are in the pockets of other courtiers.

Relationships

The following section details Lyetta's relationship with the other courtiers.

Lorentius. Lyetta has glimpsed the darkness behind Lorentius's mask through his increasingly disquieting behavior and no longer trusts him.

Zoya. Lyetta trusts Zoya and believes the spymaster is protecting her from threats, especially ones related to her disputed inheritance.

Brenum. Lyetta respects Brenum, but fundamentally opposes their claim to her father's throne.

Shani. Lyetta mistrusts Shani's sly tongue and unpredictable decisions.

Interactions

The following section describes Lyetta's actions and attitude toward the player characters.

Call to Action. Lyetta wants the characters to perform tasks she can't do herself, such as investigating the other courtiers or helping her cultivate relationships with potential allies. In exchange for aid, she offers monetary rewards or the Halcyon Guard's assistance.

Mood. Lyetta starts off indifferent toward the characters. She becomes friendly if the characters consistently aid her, especially publicly. She becomes hostile if the characters openly maneuver against her, patronize her, or otherwise disrespect her; while Lyetta is hostile, the Halcyon Guard is also hostile toward the characters.

Earning Trust. Lyetta must trust the characters before she brings them into her confidence or asks for their aid with sensitive tasks. The characters can earn her trust by publicly declaring they support her, turning the opinion of minor nobles in her favor, standing up to Lorentius for her, letting her keep an item of significance for each character as collateral while they assist her, or treating Pallas with respect and bringing the winged lion his favorite treat—a spiced pitaya, which grows near Dragon lairs.

Lyetta's Age

As written, Princess Lyetta is 13 years old—a cunning adolescent navigating treacherous politics after her parents' assassination. Ensure your table is comfortable with a child's endangerment before running this scenario. If your table isn't comfortable with Lyetta's written age but you want to use this material, you can make minor adjustments, such as aging her up to an older teenager, or major changes, such as making her a young woman whose agency as a future ruler is unfairly held by a regent, and adjust the timeline accordingly.

Lord Regent Lorentius Granvhulf

A close friend of the late king Alphonsus, Lorentius Granvhulf was named lord regent after the assassination due to his position as chief advisor, since Lyetta is not of age to hold administrative power. However, despite publicly supporting the princess, he is obsessed with Alphonsus's infernal dealings. Lorentius won't squander such a deal, as he believes Alphonsus did—he would instead wield the power to pull Dhustrad's strings while Lyetta reigns as a mere figurehead. Lorentius has great favor with Dhustrad's minor nobles by investigating Alphonsus's devil deal, which Lorentius claims is to ensure their safety.

Appearance. Lorentius is a middle-aged half-elven man with pale skin, slicked-back salt-and-pepper hair, and graying stubble. He wears dark, well-cut attire with a spotless white cravat.

Personality and Mannerisms. Opportunistic by nature, Lorentius's self-centered and ambitious traits were tempered by his friendship with and duty toward Alphonsus. After the revelation of the king's infernal dealings, an

obsession with fiendish power festered in Lorentius—and once the king was murdered, he abandoned his dedication to the crown entirely to pursue it. He lies easily and manipulates others by playing on their emotions. Outwardly disarming, Lorentius talks with his hands and wears a charming smile.

Motivations. Lorentius wants to discover the devil Alphonsus dealt with so he can make a deal of his own. If his scheming comes to light, Lorentius claims he seeks to cure his ill wife, Tahvia. This is a lie; after Tahvia confronted him about his erratic and obsessive behavior, Lorentius sealed her in his *mirror of life trapping*, something he is willing to do to anyone who threatens his goals.

Stat Block. Lorentius uses the **cult fanatic** stat block with the following changes:

- He knows Common and Elvish.
- He has a +6 bonus to Charisma (Deception) checks.
- He is attuned to a *ring of mind shielding*.
- He has the following trait:

> ***Fey Ancestry.*** Lorentius has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put him to sleep.

Relationships

The following section details Lorentius's relationship with the other courtiers.

Lyetta. Lorentius considers Lyetta a tool, both a puppet he can use to control the country and a valuable soul to offer the devil Cerzus, given his essence runs through her blood, in lieu of Lorentius's own soul.

Zoya. Lorentius is frustrated he can't monitor or control Zoya's actions.

Brenum. Lorentius regards Brenum as a nuisance he wants removed.

Shani. Lorentius believes Shani could be a useful ally, though not one he trusts.



Interactions

The following section describes Lorentius's actions and attitude toward the player characters.

Call to Action. Lorentius wants the characters to assist in his investigation into Alphonsus's infernal deal. In exchange for aid, he offers consumable magic items or arranges political favors from minor nobles. If the characters prove bribable and morally bankrupt, Lorentius could bring them into the truth of his plan, offering them infernal power of their own—whether he'll make good on that promise is up to you as the GM.

Mood. Lorentius starts as indifferent, leaning hostile, toward the characters. He becomes friendly if the characters assist him while remaining ignorant of his real plan or wholeheartedly support his true desires. He becomes hostile if the characters maneuver against him, such as by aiding Brenum or Lyetta; while hostile, Lorentius sows distrust of the characters among the minor nobles and, if pushed far enough, tries to ensnare them in the *mirror of life trapping* (the command word is "ambuscade") in his palace chambers.

Earning Trust. Lorentius trusts no one, even those who know his true plans, but makes a convincing show of acting as though he does. Even while working with those who would help him achieve his goals, Lorentius is prepared to betray them the moment it is more advantageous than their presence.

Spymaster Zoya Ionvi

Dhustrad's spymaster is the taciturn Zoya Ionvi. Though she appears devoted to the crown, she is a primordial scion (see the "Primordial Scions" sidebar) whose loyalty to the heavens outweighs any faith in a mortal throne.

Appearance. Zoya is an angular woman who appears human, with warm brown skin and shoulder-length, curly black hair. She wears dark leathers on missions or muted court gowns in the palace. When Zoya draws upon her primordial magic, her eyes and veins glow with pale blue light and her form blurs at the edges.

Personality and Mannerisms. Zoya is often silent and unexpressive, making her difficult to read, and only conveys what she means to. She has tight control of her body language, save one tic: she subtly taps her foot when stressed.

Motivations. While her premonitions as a primordial scion made her an effective spymaster under Alphonsus, Zoya has foreseen doom if his devil-tainted lineage holds the throne. Her visions depict Dhustrad becoming conquerors under fiendish banners, burning Atrus in hellfire before descending on the wider world—though she is unaware Lorentius's scheming is the cause of this future. She acts from the shadows to prevent that outcome. At the GM's discretion, Zoya could witness new visions of a better future if the characters work against Lorentius.

Stat Block. Zoya uses the **assassin** stat block with the following changes:

- She has darkvision out to 60 feet.
- She has a +6 bonus to Charisma (Deception) checks.
- She has resistance to necrotic damage and radiant damage.
- She knows Celestial and Common.
- She gains the following action option:

  Divine Arbiter (1/Day). Zoya becomes an avatar of primordial magic for 1 minute or until she ends it as a bonus action. During the transformation, she can use a reaction to cause one creature she can see within 30 feet of her to reroll their damage dice after they make a successful attack. The creature must use the new roll.

- She gains the following bonus action option:

  Manipulate Forces (3/Day). Zoya can cause a creature she can see within 60 feet of her to make a DC 14 Strength saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is moved up to 10 feet in a direction of Zoya's choice, including upward.

Primordial Scions

From "Angelic Ancestries" in *ARCADIA* 11, primordial scions are bestowed power by ancient angels, allowing them to "glimpse the grand inner workings of the universe—the eternal clockwork of time, kismet, and the unknowable energies that connect the planes." They typically become agents of fate and influence the direction of the world to maintain balance.

Relationships

The following section details Zoya's relationship with the other courtiers.

Lyetta. Zoya has nothing personal against the princess, but has sworn to remove her infernal heritage from Dhustrad's throne.

Lorentius. Zoya doesn't trust Lorentius and hasn't figured out where he's moved his wife.



Brenum. Zoya subtly supports Brenum, as they are the strongest contender to dethrone House Hithalwynn.

Shani. Zoya believes Shani is a problem, but one to be dealt with after the matter of succession.

Interactions

The following section describes Zoya's actions and attitude toward the player characters.

Call to Action. Zoya wants the characters' assistance supporting Brenum, though she is not overt about these requests unless the characters have earned her trust. In exchange for aid, she offers monetary rewards or information the characters wouldn't be able to gather themselves.

Mood. Zoya starts off indifferent toward the characters. She becomes friendly if the characters aid her goals directly or indirectly. She becomes hostile if the characters maneuver against her or if they attract suspicion while aiding her; while Zoya is hostile, her spies impede the characters through false information and, eventually, assassination attempts.

Earning Trust. Zoya won't let the characters into her confidence unless she trusts them, which requires consistent and verifiable proof from their past that the characters zealously oppose fiendish forces or that they publicly support Brenum over Lyetta. She more easily trusts characters who work for the divine (such as clerics or paladins in service to a Celestial deity).

Lord Brenum Nidar

The implications of House Hithalwynn's infernal dealings have created opportunities for House Nidar, which can trace its bloodline to the early sovereigns of Dhustrad. Lord Brenum Nidar has staked a claim against Princess Lyetta, considering her unfit to lead for her father's sins.

Appearance. Brenum is a nonbinary human with dark umber skin and short, upswept brown hair. They wear sleek court robes made of many rich colors and gold embroidery.

Personality and Mannerisms. Brenum is passionate, outspoken, and a poor liar. They believe what they say and, while they can debate logically, they are driven by their emotions. Brenum uses their whole body while communicating and is very tactile.

Motivations. Brenum feels betrayed by Alphonsus's infernal deal, a sentiment they have seen echoed among parts of Dhustrad's populace, and believes Lyetta can't be trusted with the throne. They seek to establish a rule that represents the people—whether by gaining the support necessary to be coronated or rallying the disillusioned common folk to revolution.

Stat Block. Brenum uses the **noble** stat block.

Relationships

The following section details Brenum's relationship with the other courtiers.

Lyetta. Brenum believes Lyetta is too young and too influenced by her father to be the ruler Dhustrad needs.

Lorentius. Brenum considers Lorentius too close to Alphonsus to be trusted as lord regent.

Zoya. Brenum doesn't trust Zoya, believing her loyal to the Hithalwynn crown.

Shani. Brenum considers Shani an ally, though one to hold at arm's length.

Interactions

The following section describes Brenum's actions and attitude toward the player characters.

Call to Action. Brenum wants the characters' help forging connections to solidify and support their claim to the throne. In exchange for aid, they can offer monetary rewards or open up connections with merchants and suppliers.

Mood. Brenum starts off indifferent toward the characters. They become friendly if the characters publicly support them. They become hostile if the characters maneuver against them or take advantage of Dhustrad's people; while hostile, Brenum publicly decries the characters, spreading rumors about them or digging up controversies from their pasts.



Earning Trust. Brenum is quick to trust those that support them, especially those that provide succor to the common folk. They confide in characters whom they trust, communicating their struggles and asking for advice.

Lady Shani Jissal

A recent addition to Dhustrad's Aurum Court, Lady Shani Jissal has established herself as a mercurial political player. Secretly, she is an Atrusian agent who infiltrated Dhustrad's minor nobles and cleverly angled her way into the court through cunning and magic. Shani numbers among the Atrusian zealots who consider Helias spineless and seek to finish Empress Venetia's grand vision of conquest.

Appearance. Shani is a tall, plump half-orc with cool, tan skin and auburn hair in a thick braid down her back. She wears off-the-shoulder dresses with eye-catching patterns.

Personality and Mannerisms. Shani has a sharp tongue, sharper wit, and keen insight, knowing just the right—or wrong—thing to say. Restless, she is constantly moving in some way, literally and figuratively, and her courtly persona is flighty, never holding the same allegiance or opinion for long.

Motivations. Shani holds fast to Empress Venetia's ideology of Atrus supremacy and angles to destabilize Dhustrad—either by inciting revolution through Brenum



or helping Lyetta onto the throne without Lorentius's aid, whichever seems easier to achieve.

Stat Block. Shani uses the **mage** stat block with the following changes:

- She has a +6 bonus to Charisma (Deception) checks.
- She knows the *modify memory* spell instead of the *cone of cold* spell. (If your group is uncomfortable with memory alteration, she knows the *mislead* spell instead.)

Relationships

The following section details Shani's relationship with the other courtiers.

Lyetta. Shani treats Lyetta with the courtesy due her station, but believes Lyetta is ineffectual and harmless by herself.

Lorentius. Shani considers Lorentius a threat to be removed if Lyetta claims the throne, recognizing that he seeks to manipulate the princess.

Zoya. Shani is frustrated by Zoya's evasiveness and considers her dangerous.

Brenum. Shani gleefully fuels Brenum's seditious ideals, hoping for a revolution rather than the lord legitimately claiming the throne.

Interactions

The following section describes Shani's actions and attitude toward the player characters.

Call to Action. Shani wants the characters' aid supporting revolution or making Lyetta an independent ruler, based on the party's actions and who they support. In exchange for aid, she can offer magic items or support through fellow zealots—though she won't mention they're from Atrus unless the characters support her homeland.

Mood. Shani starts off friendly toward the characters, believing them useful tools for her schemes. She becomes neutral and eventually hostile if the characters maneuver against either of her goals or position themselves against Atrus; while hostile, Shani uses her network of zealots (**gladiators** and **mages**) to sabotage the characters' efforts.

Earning Trust. Shani feigns trusting characters she's allied with. Her sincere trust is reserved for those who believe in Atrus's supremacy and swear themselves to Empress Venetia's vision; to characters she trusts, Shani is an unyielding ally, willing to do almost anything to support her bloodsworn collaborators.

Creating Intrigue

So far, this article has provided a foundation and chess pieces. The sections to come give guidance on conclusion conditions in "To Become Queen" and a structured event in "The Gilded Gala." But what do you do between set up and pay off?

After drawing the player characters to Dhustrad using one of the adventure hooks, have multiple courtiers approach them—especially courtiers with opposing goals to the courtier the characters were invited by or have gravitated toward—for various favors over the next few sessions. The characters could change allegiances or brush off those requests and instead ask their courtier of choice what tasks they need accomplished. Throw in complications caused by hostile courtiers as the characters' allegiances become clear and public. When you feel tensions have appropriately reached a head, you can transition to the Gilded Gala.

Developing Drama

This section outlines two examples that follow this formula to help visualize this chain of events.

A Princess's Request

Lyetta invites the characters to Dhustrad through the "A Formal Request" adventure hook. After informing the characters of the situation, Lyetta ensures their trustworthiness; if the characters prove themselves, Lyetta asks a favor of them (see "Example Quests" below). The characters are also approached by Lorentius, Zoya, and Brenum, who attempt to pivot the characters toward

their specific goals. If characters remain loyal to Lyetta, she continues to request favors while the previous courtiers slander the characters throughout Dhustrad (though the characters' reputation and future deeds could dispel such defamation). When the characters have uncovered enough evidence of plots against Lyetta, they receive their invitations to the Gilded Gala and must put a stop to the treachery.

A Kingdom in Strife

The characters are present for Alphonsus and Odette's assassination through the "Witnesses of Tragedy" adventure hook. In the aftermath, Brenum approaches the characters and requests aid from capable adventurers to help them claim the throne. If the characters agree, they are also approached by Zoya and Shani—the former to help with a legitimate claim, and the latter to fan revolution. While the characters consider what method to support, Lyetta and Lorentius create obstacles for the characters until the tension reaches a boiling point. The characters can either attend the Gilded Gala as normal to help Brenum secure support for a coronation or march on the gala to aid Brenum in forcefully taking the throne.

Example Quests

The following quests are examples of what the courtiers might ask the characters to do that further their goals. These quests can be given after the characters have created some rapport with the characters (such as Lyetta's high-stakes quest) or given at the start to draw the characters into their goals (such as Brenum's campaigning). You can change, expand, or entirely replace the quests with your own if desired.

Lyetta's Quest. Lyetta asks characters she trusts to investigate Lorentius and find proof of his treachery. This might involve finding records of his plans, his *mirror of life trapping*, or another piece of physical evidence. If the characters are successful, Lyetta rewards them with access to the Halcyon Seat's hidden royal passages.

Lorentius's Quest. Lorentius requests the characters find some record of the ritual Alphonsus used to summon a devil. The characters can find this information in one of the king's journals amongst his effects, which Lyetta controls access to. If the characters are successful, Lorentius rewards them with a *potion of speed* (or another magical consumable appropriate to the party's level).

Zoya's Quest. Zoya asks the characters to aid her spies in digging up blackmail on three of the minor nobles. The characters can achieve this by whatever means available to them, as long as their connection to Zoya remains obfuscated. If the characters are in her confidence, Zoya is honest this is to help Brenum—otherwise, she claims it's to secure loyalty to Lyetta. If the characters are successful, Zoya rewards them with several pieces of information about topics of their choice.

Brenum's Quest. Brenum requests the characters help them start securing support with the minor nobles by convincing one to meet with Brenum and overseeing the meeting. If the meeting is successful, Brenum rewards the characters with 500 gp each (or a monetary reward appropriate to the party's level).

Shani's Quest. Shani requests the characters deliver a package from House Jissal to one of Dhustrad's community leaders. The package contains heirloom jewelry worth 750 gp in total. In truth, the items are stolen from minor nobles, as Shani wishes to inflame tensions between the nobles and the common folk in preparation for revolution. If the characters are successful, Shani rewards the characters with a *cape of the mountebank* (or another magic item appropriate to the party's level).

To Become Queen

Though Lorentius is acting monarch, his attempts to schedule Princess Lyetta's coronation have been delayed due to the court's debate and the threat of a coup—from Brenum or potentially other nobles—if he acts too hastily. To secure the support necessary to move forward with her coronation, Lyetta needs to gain the courtiers' loyalty or deal with the obstacles they present. She must resolve matters with at least two of the following courtiers:

Convince Zoya. Lyetta must convince Zoya that her rule won't bring about Zoya's foretold doom by proving Lorentius is the one with infernal ties.

Persuade Brenum. Lyetta must persuade Brenum to cede their claim to the throne, either through force or by earning their support by proving her goodwill and capability.

Handle Shani. Lyetta can earn Shani's support by deposing Lorentius or gain significant favor in the public eye by exposing Shani as an Atrusian infiltrator.

In addition, Lyetta must gain the support of either the minor nobles or the common folk:

Common Folk. The common folk support Brenum, but can be convinced to back Lyetta with the right motivation, such as a concession of power to the common people or evidence of policies that guarantee their safety and well-being. Lyetta is willing to listen to reasonable suggestions from the characters, especially

if the party has spent time talking to servants or other commoners in Dhustrad.

Minor Nobles. The minor nobles are fickle with their backing, and many place their trust in Lorentius as a regent. If Lorentius's scheming is exposed, the minor nobles are shaken and are more likely to support Lyetta's choice of regent or even independent rule. Lyetta can curry favor with them by proving her leadership capabilities and wisdom, or bribe them with tangible benefits, promises, and gifts.

However, even if Lyetta becomes queen, there is still a risk Lorentius makes her a puppet sovereign unless his treachery is revealed. After he's dealt with, Lyetta must either put forward a new regent or overturn the regency law and gain administrative power. By this point, the characters have likely gained enough recognition to weigh in on this critical decision, either putting their faith in Lyetta's independent rule or supporting someone they trust to work with Lyetta as regent.

Replacement Regent. Lyetta can suggest a new regent to replace Lorentius. By default, her choice is Knight Commander Alluin. However, if she has the support of another courtier, such as Zoya or Brenum, they could fulfill this role instead.

Overturning Law. If Lyetta has the support of both the minor nobles and the common folk and has dealt with the other courtiers, she can opt to overturn the law and forgo a regent, instead taking on administrative power herself. Unless convinced otherwise, Lyetta appoints a chief advisor, following a similar decision-making process as suggesting a new regent.

If the characters directly or indirectly support Brenum, the lord must meet similar criteria—gaining the support of the public and dealing with the courtiers—to be crowned sovereign. Alternatively, Brenum can incite revolution within Dhustrad's people, bypassing the requirements and forcibly seizing the Halcyon Seat.

The Gilded Gala

The Gilded Gala is one of Dhustrad's preeminent social events, in which the palace gathers the upper echelons of Dhustrad to celebrate the kingdom's current successes and discuss the future. This is the first gala since Alphonsus and Odette's assassination, so there is much socializing and scheming to be done.

The characters receive an invitation from a member of the Aurum Court if they are friendly with that courtier, though a character can only enter the gala under the patronage of one courtier. Without an invitation, or if they want to avoid showing loyalty to a single courtier, they'll have to sneak or bluff their way into the event.

The Gilded Gala is divided into four sections: mingling, dinner, an auction, and dancing. During each of these sections, simultaneous events involving members of the Aurum Court occur, as long as all courtiers involved can participate.

Lyetta's Regent

The party may feel conflicted about whether to let Lyetta lead independently or vouch for someone who may not be the best choice. Knight Commander Alluin is loyal to Lyetta, but has little political experience (however, as the GM, you can decide whether his service to the crown, knightly honor, or prowess as a commander affords him respect or influence among the court). Brenum and Zoya have political experience, but neither of them has Lyetta's best interests at heart: Brenum may subtly work against Lyetta for their own power, and Zoya is led by her visions above all else. At the same time, Lyetta is still a child.

At your discretion, in a long-term campaign, the characters can put forward NPCs they already know and trust, or you can seed possibilities by introducing other NPCs the characters would trust as regent, based on their connections and allegiances. The characters' suggestion holds much weight, and if the characters have gotten to this stage, Lyetta likely trusts them to suggest someone wise and just, who will be a good regent not just for Lyetta, but for Dhustrad, as well.

Palace Layout

The Aurum Court gathers at the Halcyon Seat, the royal palace of Dhustrad. The palace is divided into the following areas. If you want, you can add other locations within the palace, or even make an abstracted map for the party to track the locations of their characters and key NPCs during the gala.

Landmark Rooms. These rooms are where major events take place and include the atrium, dining hall, grand hall, courtyard, and gardens.

Court Chambers. Members of the Aurum Court have their own estates, but also have chambers for their use within the Halcyon Seat. Additional guest rooms can house minor nobles, foreign dignitaries, or other guests of honor.

Servant Areas. Crisscrossing the palace are servant halls that lead to high-traffic areas, such as the court chambers and the kitchens, as well as to the servants' quarters.

Royal Wing and Passages. The royal wing holds the private chambers of the royal family. Additionally, hidden passageways throughout the palace, known only to the Halcyon Guards and the royal family, provide escape routes and locations from which to eavesdrop.

Running the Gala

Per the examples above in "Creating Intrigue," the Gilded Gala can act as a climax to an intrigue plot, allowing the characters to foil courtiers' plots. Alternatively, if you want to spin a longer intrigue with the courtiers, the gala can be a step along the way, focusing on one or two plots the characters can expose to narrow the playing field for the courtier they support. Consider where the gala fits into your greater intrigue and seed the clues necessary to point your characters to the plots in motion.

Princess Lyetta and each courtier attend the gala with a specific goal. Refer to the sections within the gala for where they take action. This article assumes all five goals are simultaneously in play, but you can pick and choose which plots to pursue based on who the characters are allied with, whose motivations have been uncovered, and which courtiers have already been dealt with or exposed:

- ***Lyetta.*** Lyetta wants to earn the favor of the minor nobles attending the gala.
- ***Lorentius.*** Lorentius wants to sneak into Alphonsus's old chambers to acquire the last reagent he needs to summon and make a pact with the devil Cerzus.
- ***Zoya.*** Zoya wants to poison Lyetta with a catatonic draught.
- ***Brenum.*** Brenum wants to stir up the common folk to march on the palace during the gala and pressure the nobles into supporting their coronation.
- ***Shani.*** Shani wants to sneak Atrus zealots into the gala to sow chaos; her goal depends on who the characters are supporting (see "Finale" later in this article).

The dining hall and great hall are protected by ten **guards**, who cover points of entry and the main stage. In addition, during the dinner, auction, and dance, Knight Commander Alluin personally oversees the security. The other areas of the gala each have five **guards**. The halls of the court chambers are patrolled by two **guards** (if the characters are sneaking through the public hallways, roll a d6; on a result of 6, they encounter the guards). At your discretion, you can replace the guard stat block with one that would be more challenging for your party's level (such as the **mercenary** or **honor guard** stat blocks from "Appendix NPC: Part 1" in *ARCADIA* 18).

Mingling

The gala begins with a period for mingling before dinner. Light refreshments and appetizers are served, and guests are encouraged to socialize in the atrium and gardens.

The Crowd

Lyetta and Zoya are mingling with guests in the atrium. Shani is socializing in the gardens.

Clandestine Meeting

Brenum is meeting one of Zoya's spies in secret outside the palace gates; they are unaware of the spy's affiliation, believing them to be a simple informant from within the palace. The spy agrees to run messages to leaders of the common folk, instructing them to keep their eyes on the palace and await an opportunity.

The Mirror

Lorentius can be found in his room, checking on his *mirror of life trapping*. If Lorentius is hostile toward the characters, he tries to convince a character to come to his room—either by imploring them to help his sick wife or implying he has information that might help them during the gala—to trap them in the mirror.

Dinner

Following the mingling, the guests are called to the ornate dining hall and shown to their seats. Before dinner is served, several speeches are given, then the guests are treated to five courses of exquisite Dhustradian food, which include light greens showcasing fresh citrus, heartily spiced appetizers, tender game meats with sweet sauces, a sweet pitaya sorbet, and rich, layered desserts.

Speeches

Lyetta gives a speech to the assembled guests to thank them for their attendance. Lorentius speaks after her, publicly mourning the loss of Alphonsus and Odette. Brenum, Zoya, and Shani are all present.

Debriefing

Zoya covertly exchanges messages with a few of her spies among the servants during dinner. A character who knows thieves' cant and has a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 16 or higher notices and understands what she's communicating with hand signs. She commands several spies to keep the kitchen clear during the upcoming dance.

Infiltration

Shani attends dinner, but is distracted because she's being contacted via *sending* by several Atrusian zealots

sneaking into the palace. They have knocked five servants unconscious and stowed them in a disused storage room, where they can be found for the rest of the evening, to don their livery and pose as help. A character who has a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 16 or higher notices that Shani is distracted. If a character succeeds on a DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check or is proficient in the Arcana skill, they realize she's distracted because she's communicating by magical means.

Auction

After dinner, an auction is held in the dining hall; the proceeds will fund charity efforts throughout Dhustrad. Guests who wish not to participate can take refreshments and additional desserts and continue conversations in the atrium and gardens.

Bidding

Lorentius, Shani, and Zoya are all present for the auction. The item being auctioned is a 4 ft. × 6 ft. *carpet of flying*. Zoya only bids up to 10,000 gp, while Lorentius bids up to 20,000 gp. The character with the highest passive Perception score notices that, unlike most of the other nobles, Shani isn't participating in the auction at all. If the characters are friendly with either Lyetta or Brenum, they donate 10,000 gp to the characters to bid on the item on their behalf. If desired, you can adjust the item or the bidding price based on the party's level and wealth.

Fresh Air

Lyetta takes Pallus to the gardens for fresh air. If any characters are present and friendly with Lyetta, she confides that the stress of the gala and remaining put together in front of the entire nobility is suffocating her.

Persuasion

Brenum is in the atrium, trying to convince several minor nobles to support their coronation by claiming the people of Dhustrad are poised against House Hithalwynn.

Dancing

Once the auction has concluded, the doors to the great hall are opened. A band plays sweeping orchestral music and guests can dance or socialize until the evening comes to a close.

The Great Hall

Lyetta, Brenum, and Shani are dancing or socializing in the crowd throughout this section of the gala. Lyetta and Brenum accept invitations to dance from characters they are friendly with, but only request a dance from a character they are particularly close to. Shani accepts any invitation to dance, but only requests a dance from a character she is hostile toward; she uses the opportunity to needle her dance partner for information or unsettle them by taunting them about things they don't know or flaws she sees in their plans, hoping to push them into making a mistake.

Dark Ritual

Unless indisposed, Lorentius reaches Alphonsus's former chambers, acquires the obsidian kris set with a bloodstone that the king used in his original ritual, then brings Cerzus (**horned devil**, or another devil appropriate for the party's level) to the Material Plane to strike a deal. In exchange for the power to influence and control others, Lorentius will use Dhustrad's resources and people to further Cerzus's schemes in the mortal world. Lorentius also makes an additional bargain—if he can manipulate Lyetta into offering her soul to Cerzus, the devil will claim hers as payment instead of Lorentius's.

With Cerzus's infernal blessing, Lorentius has a Charisma score of 22 (+6) and can cast any enchantment spell, requiring no material components and using Charisma as the spellcasting ability. Pick spells appropriate for your party's tier of play, but examples might include *suggestion*, *charm person*, *mass suggestion*, and *dominate person*.

Sleeping Draught

Unless indisposed, Zoya goes to the kitchen after the auction and poisons Lyetta's chalice for the toast with a catatonic sleeping draught. If the characters have earned Lyetta's trust, Knight Commander Alluin notices the kitchen staff standing around and asks the characters to check on the kitchens and report back to him. Alternatively (or in addition), if any character has been friendly with the staff during the gala, they hear that same staff member complaining that the staff was suddenly told to clear the kitchens by order of the lord regent.

Finale

To close out the evening, Princess Lyetta stands before the assembled guests to thank them for their contributions to Dhustrad's success and their support for their future. It's the perfect opportunity for an enemy to strike. Depending on what has occurred during the gala, choose from one of the following finales:

Zealots. If Shani succeeded in sneaking in Atrusian zealots (2 **mages**, who have the *sending* spell prepared, and 3 **gladiators**), they launch an attack on the crowd of nobles to sow fear and chaos. At your discretion, you can replace these stat blocks with ones more

appropriate for your party's level. If the characters are directly or indirectly supporting Brenum, the attack is staged to implicate Lorentius to cast further mistrust over House Hithalwynn's rule. If the characters are directly or indirectly supporting Lyetta, the attack is staged to implicate Brenum.

Revolution. If the characters supported Brenum among Dhustrad's people, the common folk march on the gates of the palace to instate the lord as king. If the rebellion is quelled with violence, unrest in Dhustrad—and distrust for Lyetta—significantly increases.

Poison. If Zoya successfully poisoned the royal chalice, Lyetta makes a toast at the end of her speech, but is put under the catatonic draught upon drinking. Zoya frames Lorentius for the poisoning, then subtly stirs up support for Brenum's coronation to ensure Dhustrad is not left without a leader. While under the effects of the catatonic draught, Lyetta is unconscious. This effect can be removed only by a *wish* spell or by casting *greater restoration* on her three times within the same hour.

Pact. If Lorentius succeeded in contacting Cerzus, he gains infernal powers that allow him influence over Lyetta, stopping her attempts to depose him as regent and ensuring that he'll secretly remain in control even when she's old enough to rule on her own. Whether Dhustrad becomes a conquering force under fiendish banners, Cerzus gradually corrupts and manipulates the populace, Lorentius quietly sacrifices the impoverished to the fiend, or something else happens is up to you—Cerzus's intentions are purposefully fluid to fit any campaign.

Nothing! If the characters prevented each plot against Lyetta, the gala is a rousing success for the princess. If they uncovered Lorentius's plot, Lyetta encourages the characters to expose him to the nobles. This evidence gives her the means to depose him as regent and to find a replacement or overturn the law to become acting monarch. Additionally, exposing Lorentius could convince Zoya—or help build a case—that Lyetta won't cause Dhustrad's downfall. Any other exposed plots affirm Lyetta's capability to the minor nobles. If this is the climax of the intrigue plot, they can approve Lyetta's coronation if she has fulfilled the other requirements necessary to do so.

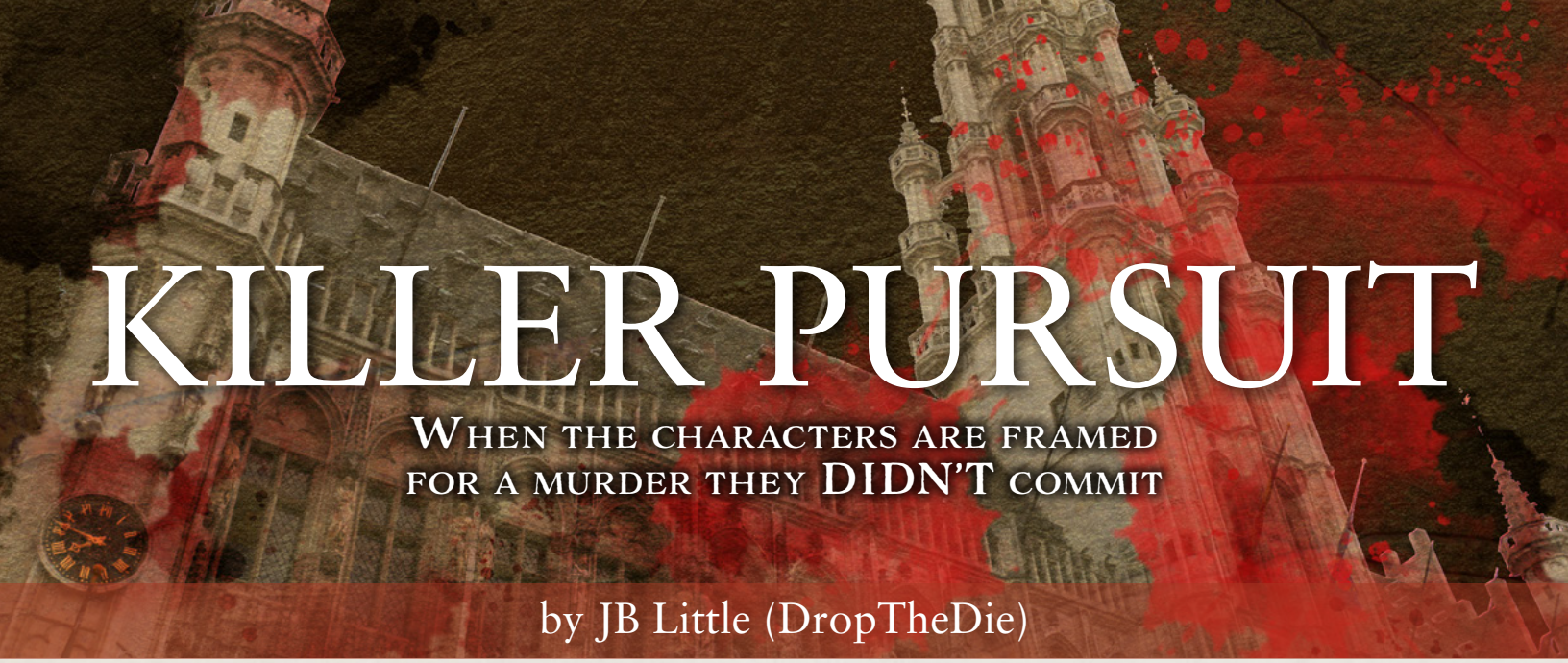
Based on the characters' actions, multiple plots can come to fruition during the gala's finale. You can choose to have certain plots supersede the others (Zoya successfully poisoning Lyetta could cause Shani to hold off on signaling for the zealots to attack) or occur at the same time (Lorentius uses his newfound infernal powers amid Brenum's rebellion). It's up to you how much chaos you want to track and how many consequences you want your party to deal with!

CORONATION

While the Gilded Gala can act as a climax, the true finale to the intrigue of the Aurum Court is the coronation of a new monarch. If all obstacles have been dealt with, the coronation can be a simple affair to close off the overarching plot—a congratulatory event that celebrates what the heroes have accomplished. The characters could use the time between the gala and the coronation to tie up any remaining loose ends, such as helping their chosen monarch gain the last support they need or bringing aggressors to justice.

However, if there are still schemes against the characters' chosen monarch, the coronation can be a more momentous finale. The characters could stop another sabotage by Zoya, a riot stirred up by Brenum, or an assassination by Shani. Once they have dealt with the interruption, their chosen monarch can be crowned and Dhustrad's future decided.

For their efforts, the characters have stabilized a tumultuous nation and earned themselves a grateful ally (or allies) in their adventures to come!



KILLER PURSUIT

When the characters are framed for a murder they DIDN'T commit

by JB Little (DropTheDie)

The bells of the city of Monte-de-Thoules (mont-duh-THOOLS) toll a doleful rhythm on a bright, clear morning—announcing that Hierophant Dara Everflame is dead. The perpetrator was a resourceful human assassin named Enyat "the Sloth" Fyjin, who used illusory disguises to frame the player characters for the deed. Word quickly spreads throughout the city that adventurers matching the characters' descriptions are responsible, and several hundred priests begin to scour Monte-de-Thoules to capture the characters alive, by order of the high priests of Saint Bróccan.

The party's pursuers have been told that the characters are murderers, and having any priests killed during the chase will confirm those accusations! The characters must either evade capture long enough to find evidence that clears their names, escape from the city with a bounty on their heads, or take their chances trusting the priesthood's justice.

"Killer Pursuit" is designed for four or five characters of 4th to 8th level.

Beyond Combat

A beautiful, brutal simplicity can be found in slaughtering dangerous monsters or bloodying one's fists in a barroom brawl. Blades and magic are the go-to tools for solving problems in heroic fantasy games … but they're not the only approaches. Conflicts that *can't* be solved with violence can be just as tense, exciting, and dramatic as any knockout boss battle. As the GM, it's your job to communicate that the characters have interesting options and resources beyond combat in this adventure. The challenge of the scenario is that fighting the priests is only going to make things worse for the party, so make sure your players know that before you start.

Overview

This adventure is divided into three sections:

- In "Part 1: Murderers!" the characters learn that they have been framed for killing Hierophant Dara Everflame and are pursued by priests through the city streets.
- In "Part 2: Enyat's Trail," the characters race against time to clear their names by finding and bringing the real killer to justice.
- In "Part 3: Enyat's Hideout," the characters find and confront Enyat at the assassin's safe house.

Setting

The adventure takes place in Monte-de-Thoules, a city of some ten thousand people with a prominent temple of Saint Bróccan the Resolute, patron saint of iron will and strength in pursuit of justice. From nobles to commoners, the people of the city venerate Saint Bróccan, and the temple's hierophant serves as a de facto advisor to Monte-de-Thoules's rulers. Most of the action in the adventure takes place in the Temple City, the district around the Church of Saint Bróccan.

Alternatively, you can replace Monte-de-Thoules and Saint Bróccan with any city and deity that make sense in your campaign.

Dramatis Personae

During the adventure, the characters encounter clergy of the Church of Saint Bróccan who want to capture them, NPCs who can help them, and the assassin who framed them. The major players are noted here, with other NPCs introduced throughout the adventure where they appear.

CLERGY

At your discretion as GM, you can adjust the stat blocks or the number of clergy antagonists the party encounters during the adventure. All the clergy have received descriptions telling them what each character looks like.

HIEROPHANT DARA EVERFLAME

The murder of Hierophant Dara Everflame, a dwarf who lived to serve his congregation, has shocked not just the Church of Saint Bróccan but the entire city. Monte-de-Thoules's poorer citizens praised Dara's generosity, for the dwarf opened the high temple's doors and larder to anyone in need, believers and nonbelievers alike. But Dara wasn't so kind to everyone.

He hated assassins' guilds, believing that they recruited the less fortunate into their fold and taught them how to kill for coin. The hierophant often lumped adventurers and mercenaries into his angry rhetoric, claiming that such folk were no better than those who murdered for money. Despite his firebrand behavior, though, Dara never sent his priests after adventurers, though agents of the church did often break up assassin bands.

Silent in Death. Dara, like many adherents of Saint Bróccan, had long made it known that he had no desire to be raised from the dead once his time in the world had run its course. Additionally, the Sloth is a savvy assassin, whose single-strike killing blow and use of the characters' guises was intended to subvert any chance of the dead Dara reporting on his own demise, whether by being raised or through the *speak with dead* spell.

In fact, you might decide that the priests of the temple using *speak with dead* is part of what's put the characters in peril. Gleaning Dara's final memories would have confirmed that he died without waking up to see his killer—and that he saw all the characters individually at the temple on his final day of life.

Bad Blood. At your discretion, you can collaborate with the players to come up with a negative public interaction their characters had with Dara just weeks before his death. Maybe they reacted angrily to his belief that most adventurers are no better than contract killers. Alternatively, the hierophant might have spoken out against them publicly, telling the people of the city to worship gods and not money-grubbing mercenaries. Or perhaps one of the characters put Dara's name into a satirical play or song.

In an ongoing campaign, you can insert such an encounter into a session shortly before Dara's assassination. This negative interaction can help justify why the other members of the clergy believe the characters are Dara's killers.

ENTROPY

A tiefling high priest named Entropy leads the Church of Saint Bróccan's efforts to capture the characters. She was a disciple and devoted friend of the departed Hierophant Dara Everflame. Though upset about her friend's murder, Entropy is merciful and even-handed, and is dedicated to capturing the characters so as to bring them to justice alive. If the characters are 6th level or lower, Entropy is a holy knight (see the sidebar). If the characters are 7th or 8th level, she uses the **deva** stat block but is a Humanoid.



PRIESTS

Many members of the Church of Saint Bróccan in this adventure use the **priest** stat block. If you decide to use a different god, you can adjust these NPCs' spells to better fit the deity they worship. Alternatively, choose a different stat block entirely if doing so serves the narrative. The **cult fanatic** and **druid** stat blocks make excellent choices for divine servants, or you might opt for something a little more unusual. For instance, the clergy of a tiger god or a god with a tiger aspect could use the **weretiger** stat block!

Holy Knights

A holy knight uses the **knight** stat block with the following adjustments:

- Their Wisdom score is 16 (+3) and they have a +5 bonus to Wisdom saving throws.
- Whenever a holy knight deals damage, they can deal 4 (1d8) radiant damage or restore 7 (1d8 + 3) hit points to a creature they can see within 30 feet of them.

KORANA GORAX

The head of the Delver's Guild in Monte-de-Thoules, the dragonborn **veteran** Korana Gorax looks after all the city's adventurers as if they were her kin. If the characters are newly arrived to the city, Korana will have heard of them and their previous adventuring exploits. If the characters are well established in the city, you might set up that they already know the dragonborn prior to this adventure.

Gruff but kind, this blue-scaled warrior doesn't want to believe that the player characters killed the hierophant. They're heroes, not killers! What's more, the party's reputation reflects on the rest of the adventurers in the city, so Korana wants to help the characters clear their names. She won't get involved too directly, though, wanting to maintain plausible deniability in case the priests of Saint Bróccan are right about the characters' evil deed.

ENYAT "THE SLOTH" FYJIN

The notorious assassin Enyat "the Sloth" Fyjin earned his nickname through patience. Other assassins marveled at Enyat's ability to wait, sometimes for days on a rooftop with a crossbow pointed at a street, knowing that eventually his mark would have to walk by. Cold, calm, and willing to do anything for money, Enyat realized that his living the good life in Monte-de-Thoules would eventually be threatened when Hierophant Dara Everflame began his crusade against the city's assassins. The Sloth had to take action.

Knowing that a group of renowned adventurers was in Monte-de-Thoules, Enyat used a *hat of disguise* to impersonate each member of the party at different times in the temple and around the city. Working methodically, he made sure that multiple people saw his disguised forms at the temple before he killed the hierophant. Saint Bróccan's priests thus have no idea of Enyat's involvement in the murder.

PURSUIT AND CAPTURE

At different points during the adventure, the characters face members of the clergy attempting to capture them. If Saint Bróccan's servants reduce a character to 0 hit points, they stabilize that character and capture them rather than killing them. In this adventure, fleeing from pursuers is a better option than fighting them.

STAND AND FIGHT

Make sure the players understand the consequences if their characters fight during encounters with priests instead of fleeing. Many of the combat encounters in the adventure are hard or deadly in their difficulty, especially for 4th-level characters.

Even if the characters don't kill any members of the clergy, dealing damage to a priest results in the church dedicating extra resources to capturing the party. Each time the party encounters priests, add one **priest** to the encounter for each previous encounter where any character dealt damage to one or more members of the church.

If any members of the clergy are killed during the chase, add one holy knight (see the sidebar) to each subsequent encounter instead of a priest. Additionally, the clergy attack with lethal intent and no longer stabilize a character reduced to 0 hit points. Even if the characters can clear their names regarding the murder of the hierophant, the priesthood continues to pursue them for their other crimes, as you determine.

If Entropy is killed and the characters are 7th or 8th level, a **deva** called upon by the clergy joins the hunt to replace the high priest in any subsequent encounters.

OUTRUNNING PURSUERS

If the characters choose to flee from a fight, have the players roll initiative. Acting in order, each character can undertake an activity from the "Ability Checks" or "Features, Traits, and Magic" sections below to attempt to evade the clergy. You don't need to include pursuers in the initiative order, and these pursuits are best played out using theater of the mind.

Each time a character succeeds on an ability check to evade pursuit, the party loses one pursuer. Characters



making use of class features, ancestry traits, or magic to evade pursuit might lose one pursuer, lose all pursuers, or grant advantage to each character's ability checks to evade pursuit for a short time.

If all pursuers are lost, the characters have outrun the church for the time being. If a character fails an ability check or takes an action that you think is unhelpful, a pursuer of your choice catches up to that character and takes one of the following actions:

- The pursuer makes an attack against the character.
- The pursuer casts a spell with a casting time of 1 action or 1 bonus action that has the character as a target.
- The pursuer attempts to grapple the character.

If a character is grappled, paralyzed, restrained, stunned, or unconscious for three consecutive turns without being carried or otherwise assisted by any ally, that character is captured by the pursuers at the end of the third turn. While carrying an ally, a character has disadvantage on Strength and Dexterity ability checks.

Ability Checks

While being pursued, a character can make one of the following ability checks on their turn as an action.

Push through the Crowd. With a successful DC 13 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, the character pushes through a crowd, or rushes into an occupied area to put a crowd between them and their pursuers. A character with a speed of 40 feet or more has advantage on this check. Any character with a speed of 20 feet or more can gain advantage on this check if they can take the Dash action as a bonus action on the same turn they make this check.

Climb Up High. With a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check, the character climbs up the side of a building and loses their pursuers. A character with a climbing speed automatically succeeds on this check.

Trip Them Up. With a successful DC 17 Strength (Athletics) check, the character trips one of their pursuers and knocks them prone to prevent others from following.

Hide! With a successful DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check, the character hides from their pursuers in a nearby alley or behind a convenient structure.

Good Dog. With a successful DC 17 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check, the character causes a dog, horse, or other passing animal to get in the way of their pursuers. (You determine whether any suitable animals are available before a character attempts this check.)

Shortcut. With a successful DC 17 Wisdom (Survival) check, the character finds a shortcut that their pursuers don't know about.

Blend In. With a successful DC 16 Charisma (Deception) check, the character blends in with the crowd or makes their pursuers think they ran off in a different direction.

At your discretion, a character can make other ability checks to cover different activities.

Features, Traits, and Magic

While being pursued, a character can use any class features, ancestry traits, magic item properties, or spells to help them escape, as long as doing so takes 1 action or 1 bonus action. The following suggestions can be used as guidelines for the kinds of benefits characters might gain from features, traits, or magic.

Invisible. If a character becomes invisible, the party loses one pursuer. If every character becomes invisible, they lose all pursuers.

Flying. The first time a character uses a flying speed in an encounter, the party loses a pursuer.

Slowed Down. If a pursuer's speed is reduced to half their normal speed, the party loses the pursuer.

Debilitating Conditions. If a character leaves a pursuer blinded, frightened, paralyzed, prone, restrained, stunned, or unconscious, the party loses that pursuer.

Obscure the Field. If a character creates an effect that can hinder the ability of pursuers to fix on the party's location (such as casting the *darkness* or *fog cloud* spells), each character has advantage on any ability check made to evade pursuit until the end of the next turn of the character who created the obscuring effect.

Any similar actions or resources might result in the loss of one or more pursuers, or give characters advantage on their next ability check, as you determine.

Capture and Negotiation

If the characters surrender to or are captured by members of the clergy, they are stripped of their equipment, clapped in manacles, and questioned by Entropy at the location where they were caught. The captured characters must then make DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) or Wisdom (Insight) checks to convince Entropy of their potential innocence, collectively succeeding on four checks before collectively failing four checks. The players can decide which characters attempt the checks. Because Entropy is convinced of the characters' guilt, the first of these checks is made with disadvantage.

If the characters succeed on four checks before four failures, they are given back their equipment, and are allowed to help clear their names by joining the search for the true assassin (see "To the Hideout"). Entropy orders the party escorted by one holy knight per character (see "Dramatis Personae"), and reminds the characters that the killer must be captured alive to corroborate their innocence.

The characters might be able to gather clues during "Part 2: Enyat's Trail" before being captured, with each clue providing a benefit to their attempts to convince Entropy of their innocence. If the characters successfully collect all four clues and present them to Entropy, she acknowledges their innocence with no need for ability checks, and asks for their help catching the real killer (see "To the Hideout").

Imprisoned

If the characters fail to convince Entropy of their innocence, they are imprisoned in cells in the temple. However, they still have a number of options they can pursue to escape their fate.

Law and Order. As accused murderers, the characters have a chance to argue for themselves in front of a tribunal of priests. The rules for convincing the tribunal of their innocence are the same as for convincing Entropy, above, except that the characters have 1 hour to prepare their arguments.

Give the players time to coordinate what their characters plan to say at trial, and grant characters who make well-reasoned arguments an automatic success on their checks. At your discretion, the priests can also turn up one or more clues the characters overlooked or had no chance to find in "Part 2: Enyat's Trail," which can also help their case.

Breakout. A character who succeeds on a DC 16 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check can steal the keys to their manacles and cell off the belt of an unsuspecting guard. The characters' equipment is kept in an unlocked chest just outside their cells, but the three holy knights who watch over the area must be distracted or dealt with.

A Little Help. If all else fails, a local thieves' guild can show up to rescue the characters, whether in exchange for a future unscrupulous favor (determined by you), one permanent magic item, or some other appropriate fee. Being freed in this way gives the characters a chance

to restart the adventure, making another attempt at tracking down the real assassin and clearing themselves. Entropy sends out patrols to seek the characters as soon as it's determined they're missing.

On Enyat's Payroll

If the characters appeal to Entropy and prove their innocence relatively early in the adventure, it can remove much of the tension in the investigation, as the characters end up assisted by the clergy rather than needing to hide from them. To compensate, you can decide that some or all of the holy knights who escort the characters through the city are actually on Enyat's payroll and want to cover up his crime.

After the characters find their second clue in "Part 2: Enyat's Trail," the corrupt knights attack, attempting to kill the characters, and planning to tell Entropy that the characters attacked them first after confessing to the murder. When the knights attack, the characters can flee using the rules in "Outrunning Pursuers." If the characters kill any of the knights, they have disadvantage on subsequent ability checks made to convince Entropy or other members of the clergy that they were set up.

Alternatively, you might save this double-cross scenario for the final showdown against Enyat. For higher-level characters, one or two knights might even reveal themselves to be **assassins** loyal to the Sloth, and willing to die to protect him. If you make use of this scenario and are playing Entropy as a deva, you might want to have her not accompany the characters to the hideout, so that the final battle doesn't become centered around the powerful NPCs on both sides. Instead, Entropy can send holy knights to help the characters arrest Enyat, while she confers with the rest of the church's high priests about how the assassin should be tried once arrested.

To the Hideout

If the characters convince Entropy of their innocence and are allowed to join in the search for the real killer, you can carry on with their investigation or simply have Entropy's agents discover the identity of the assassin and learn the location of Enyat's hideout. Entropy then asks the characters to accompany her there, along with one holy knight per character. See "Part 3: Enyat's Hideout."

Resting

If the characters want to rest during the adventure, explain to the players that the longer they take to clear their names, the greater the chance that they might be found by their pursuers, or that the real killer could flee the city and never be found. Each time the party takes a short or long rest while pursued by the clergy, there is a 50 percent chance that three holy knights (see "Dramatis Personae") discover them halfway through the rest and interrupt it.

Additionally, if the party takes a long rest, you might need to establish narratively why Enyat sticks around the city a little longer than expected. You should also feel free to make the final encounter more challenging by giving the assassin allies, as described in the "More Combat!" sidebar.

Part 1: Murderers!

While the characters are making their way through the streets of Monte-de-Thoules, read or paraphrase the following to set the scene:

> The bells of Monte-de-Thoules have been ringing all day, announcing the unexpected death of Hierophant Dara Everflame. Based on how early their pealing started up, the head of the Church of Saint Bróccan must have passed in his sleep. The old dwarf was a champion of the downtrodden in the city, though his opinion of adventurers wasn't high. Dara often said that people of that profession were no better than the contract killers his priests so often fought against.
>
> As you make your way along a crowded thoroughfare, you notice a group of armored priests from Dara's order led by a tiefling, handing out paper handbills to passersby. Then the tiefling's eyes go wide as they spot you, shouting out, "Take them alive! These murderers killed the hierophant in his bedchambers and must be executed for their crime!" The crowd parts in fear as the well-armed priests begin to move toward you—their anger making it clear that they have no interest in negotiation.

Entropy, two **priests**, and two holy knights (see "Dramatis Personae") approach the characters, attempting to surround and arrest them. Use the rules in the "Pursuit and Capture" section to adjudicate this encounter.

Troubling Handbills

During or after any confrontation with Entropy and her priests, the characters can pick up one of the many identical handbills being passed around the city. The handbills state that Hierophant Dara Everflame was murdered—and includes descriptions of the assassins that perfectly match the characters in ancestry, gear, and clothing. The handbills state that the suspects were all seen individually in the temple in the hours leading up to the hierophant's death.

Korana's Help

Once the characters evade, defeat, or negotiate with their pursuers, they are approached by Korana Gorax, head of the Delver's Guild (see "Dramatis Personae"). She might meet the characters on a rooftop, in an alleyway, or in an abandoned house as they catch their breath after a fight or a narrow escape.

> A blue-scaled dragonborn in splint armor approaches you, her hands to her sides and open to show that she comes in peace. "I've seen your descriptions in the clergy's handbills," she says gruffly. "You lot are in a heap of trouble. I want to help you get out of that."

If the characters don't know Korana, the **veteran** introduces herself and explains that she leads the city's Delver's Guild, representing working adventurers in Monte-de-Thoules. She doesn't want to be seen chatting with the characters for too long, so she passes on the following information before going on her way:

- Whether she knows the characters personally or only by reputation, she doesn't believe that they killed the hierophant.
- She knows that having adventurers take the fall for the murder of a beloved public figure would be bad for every member of the Delver's Guild. She'd thus like to see the characters clear their names.
- Korana has heard rumors that because the priests of Saint Bróccan are so sure the characters killed Dara, they haven't done a thorough search of the murder scene yet. That might be the best place to start an investigation, especially since most of the temple's priests are currently at large in the city, looking for the characters.

Let's Get Out of Here!

If the characters don't want to clear their names and would rather just flee Monte-de-Thoules, you can use the rules in "Navigating the City" to adjudicate their escape. If the characters make it to the city walls, they must pass through a gate guarded by one holy knight per character (see "Dramatis Personae"), or must climb up and over the 25-foot-high wall with a successful DC 16 group Strength (Athletics) check.

If the characters make it outside the city, Entropy continues to pursue them for 2d10 months, after which the tiefling gives up the hunt. Each time the characters take a long rest until they clear their names or Entropy ends her pursuit, roll a d20. On a roll of 1, Entropy and one holy knight per character interrupt the rest.

Part 2: Enyat's Trail

However clever he thinks himself, the assassin Enyat left several clues to his identity at the murder scene and other locations across the city, each of which can help prove the characters' innocence.

Each clue the characters gather grants a benefit when they eventually attempt to convince the priesthood of their innocence (see "Capture and Negotiation"), as noted for each clue.

Navigating the City

To evade capture and avoid undue attention during their investigation, the characters must navigate Monte-de-Thoules carefully and quickly. Each time the party moves from one location to another in the city, ask for a group ability check to determine how successfully they avoid the members of the priesthood and the public scouring the streets for them.

You can choose options from those noted below, or use them as inspiration for options of your own. Some of the suggested options allow skills to apply to ability checks in nonstandard ways. If the players have additional ideas that might help their characters avoid detection, call for whatever ability check and skill combination makes the most sense.

Each time the characters use a particular method for getting around, the priests pursuing them get wise to that method. At your discretion, each character has disadvantage when attempting a group ability check they have already made.

Back Alley Mazes. The characters can quietly traverse the city's sprawling back alleys with a successful DC 13 group Wisdom (Survival) check.

Blending In. While moving through the streets, the characters can temporarily blend in with the crowds with a successful DC 15 group Charisma (Stealth) check.

Cover of the Crowd. The characters can duck behind groups of pedestrians, stalls, and carts to avoid observation with a successful DC 15 group Dexterity (Deception) or Dexterity (Stealth) check.

Overhead Scramble. The characters can evade pursuers on the streets by scaling buildings with a DC 12 group Strength (Athletics) check.

Shadow to Shadow. The characters can creep along shadowed lanes and narrow passages with a successful DC 14 group Dexterity (Stealth) check.

Through the Sewers. The characters can move through the sewers of the city with a successful DC 16 group Wisdom (Survival) check. If they do so, each character must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw at the end of the journey or be poisoned for 1 hour.

Wild Eyes and Fierce Words. The characters can push past city folk who recognize them with the promise of violence and a successful DC 14 group Strength (Intimidation) or Charisma (Intimidation) check.

BACKGROUNDS

A character who has a background feature that gives them a useful contact can seek out that contact and ask for their help in getting the party from one location to another. It takes a successful DC 16 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check to convince a contact to aid the party in this way, granting the characters an automatic success on a group check to move through the city. A contact helps the party only once during the adventure.

CONSEQUENCES

Each time the characters fail a group check while moving through the city, roll a d4. On a 1–3, they encounter one holy knight (see "Dramatis Personae") leading four **priests**, who try to subdue them. On a 4, Entropy is also with the group (see "Dramatis Personae").

Use the rules in "Pursuit and Capture" to adjudicate this encounter. If the characters get away from the clergy, they make it to their intended destination without further complications.

Flying and Invisibility

If any character can fly or become invisible to avoid detection, you can give that character advantage or an automatic success on ability checks made to avoid notice.

TRACKING ENYAT

After visiting any of the locations where Enyat was seen in disguise as one of them (broken out in the following sections), the characters can try to track the assassin to his hideout by learning of his movements.

Let the players come up with an approach to determining where Enyat came from before arriving at the Stubborn Root Inn, after leaving Gleeman's Apothecary, or before or after the time he spent at the Temple planning the assault. For example, while in disguise themselves, they might pretend to be looking for the murderous adventurers, asking shopkeepers and other locals if they saw anyone matching the description of one of the characters Enyat was impersonating.

After leaving a location and succeeding on a subsequent check to cross the city (see "Navigating the City" above), the characters can make a DC 15 group Intelligence check or Charisma check (if in disguise), with either check making use of proficiency with the Investigation skill. (On a failed check to cross the city, having to fight or flee from the clergy makes it impossible to track Enyat.)

On a successful group check to track the assassin, the characters eventually hear that the disguised Enyat was seen heading for, then slipping into a shack at the edge of the Temple City district (see "Part 3: Enyat's Hideout"). On a failed group check, the characters lose the trail, and can't attempt to track Enyat again from the same location.

The Assassin's Assassin

If you wish to add more combat to the adventure, after the characters find their second clue, Enyat performs a ritual to summon an **invisible stalker** to hunt the party. If the characters then search Enyat's hideout in part 3, they find the partially burned remains of a scroll bearing the instructions for the ritual.

CHURCH OF SAINT BRÓCCAN

If the characters investigate the scene of the hierophant's murder, read or paraphrase the following when they arrive at the Church of Saint Bróccan:

> The streets outside the high limestone walls of the Church of Saint Bróccan are alive with activity. A crowd of worshippers wait to enter the temple to pay their respects to the departed Dara, though no one is permitted through the temple doors before being questioned by the three knights on guard there.

ENTERING THE TEMPLE

Three holy knights (see "Dramatis Personae") guard the entrance to the church, questioning all those who enter and occasionally patrolling around to the back entrance of the temple.

The characters can attempt to enter the temple in any of the following ways.

Bluff. Characters who act the part of grieving worshippers can attempt to bluff their way past the guards. Any character who succeeds on a DC 15 Charisma (Deception) check gets the party into the church.

Disguises. A character with a disguise kit who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence check to use the kit can change up the look of all the characters. Doing so allows the characters to move by the busy guards with barely any scrutiny. On a failed check, the characters are questioned on their way in, but can still attempt to bluff their way past the guards.

Sneak In. With a successful DC 15 group Dexterity (Stealth) check, the characters can sneak into the

church by using the movement of another group of worshippers as cover. On a failed check, they are questioned but can attempt to bluff their way in.

Climb In. With a successful DC 14 group Strength (Athletics) check, the characters can scale one of the less-observed walls of the church to enter through an unlocked window.

Back Door. The door at the church's back entrance is locked. Picking the lock requires a successful DC 17 Dexterity check using thieves' tools, with a failed check damaging the door and drawing the attention of the guards.

Unless otherwise noted, failing any of the checks above causes the knights on guard to attack the characters (see "Pursuit and Capture"). If the characters flee, they need to navigate their way back to the church later (see "Navigating the City") if they wish to investigate the murder scene. The knights become even more vigilant against infiltration methods the characters attempted and failed at, so that attempting the same method again results in automatic failure.

Murder Scene

Characters who enter the temple can make their way to the hierophant's bedchambers without incident, as most of the temple's clergy are out looking for the characters or preparing for the hierophant's funeral. Read or paraphrase the following when the characters enter the bedchamber:

> This chamber has a high, vaulted ceiling carved with bas-reliefs of devils, demons, angels, and armored paladins frozen in eternal combat. The door and a single window appear to be the only ways in or out. A wardrobe, chairs, and a table strewn with documents are of plain crafting, but the room is dominated by a fine, velvet-draped four-poster bed—whose white silk pillows are stained by dried blood.

While searching the room, the characters can attempt ability checks to discover the following information:

- A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check recognizes that the pattern of blood on the pillows was created by a single slash to the throat of the hierophant—the stroke of an expert killer.
- A character who succeeds on a DC 14 Intelligence check to study the blood using alchemist's supplies or a poisoner's kit determines that the blade used in this attack was coated in wyvern poison. A character who identifies the poison knows that Gleeman's Apothecary is the nearest shop that sells such toxins to adventurers.
- A character who succeeds on a DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check notes that the room's window is closed and locked—but that scuff marks around the lock indicate it was coaxed open with thread or wire. They also find barely discernable white fluff along the top of the otherwise-undisturbed manuscripts on the table.
- A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices that the velvet chairs nearest the window and the stool at the foot of the bed are dotted with peculiar white fluff.

Thistle Fluff. A character who examines the white fluff found on the tabletop, the chairs, or the stools, and who succeeds on a DC 11 Intelligence (Nature) check recognizes it as the seed fluff of a particular type of thistle that flowers in the current season (whatever that season happens to be in your campaign). The character further knows that although these thistles are treated as weeds and eradicated in garden plots, they are grown intentionally and in good numbers in the garden outside the Stubborn Root Inn.

If the characters can't identify the thistle fluff, a character with proficiency in Nature or a suitable background knows that famed herbalist Hilda Westvol at Gleeman's Apothecary likely can.

If the characters fail to notice the fluff using ability checks, the character with the highest passive Wisdom (Perception) score eventually notes it just before the party is ready to leave. However, the extra time it takes to notice the fluff sees three **priests** arrive at the bedchamber right after it is found to challenge the characters. See "Pursuit and Capture" to handle the confrontation.

Clue: Thistle Fluff

By obtaining and showing this clue to Entropy, the characters inspire her and her priests to search them, finding none of the fluff stuck to their clothing or gear. This grants each character a +1 bonus to Charisma (Persuasion) checks made to prove their potential innocence to Entropy (see "Capture and Negotiation").

Stubborn Root Inn

The Stubborn Root is a three-story boarding house and inn just blocks away from the Church of Saint Bróccan, run by Marden Flishe and his adult daughter, Ardi. On the eve of the hierophant's murder, Enyat stayed at the Stubborn Root Inn, planning his bloody work. That last night, the assassin took on the appearance of one of the characters using his *hat of disguise*, having impersonated each of the characters at different times while visiting the temple and mapping out the site the day before.

You decide which character Enyat pretended to be during his stay at the inn. Where [*character*] is noted in the read-aloud text, use that character's name.

Inn Arrival

> In the garden outside the Stubborn Root Inn, a heavyset human wearing a leather apron and sporting a thick, wiry mustache gently tends to a bed of thorny but majestic thistle plants. Many of the plants appear to have been trampled, their spiky, bright-blue flowers and thick masses of white seed fluff spread across the ground.

This is Marden Flishe, a **commoner**. At a point of your choosing, he notices the characters.

> The gardener rises to his feet and marches up to [*character*], inexplicably angry. "Why couldn't you leave through the front door like everyone else?" he demands, gesturing around him at the trampled thistles. "Look at this mess!"

Clearly upset, Marden can explain that he saw the named character sneaking out the window from the room at the inn just before dawn that morning—and trampling through the garden in the process. He is easily confused, and responds uncertainly if the characters tell him that the named character isn't staying at the inn.

With a successful DC 11 Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, or Persuasion) check, Marden can be made to hand over a key to room 8, which he believes the named character is currently renting. Otherwise, he demands 8 sp to pay for his trampled thistles and a replacement key.

Open Window. If the characters case the inn, a character who succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check notices more trampled thistles beneath the unlocked first-story window leading to room 8.

In Room 8

This simple chamber is clean but unadorned, furnished only with a writing desk and a bed. If the characters investigate, Marden watches them closely unless shooed away.

While searching the room, the characters can attempt ability checks to discover the following information:

- A character who succeeds on a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check notices where fresh quill shavings have fallen into the cracks of the wooden floor. Someone appears to have written a great deal while in this room, then cleaned up the more obvious evidence of that activity.
- A character who succeeds on a DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds an empty ink bottle and a sliver of quill discarded in an empty chamber pot under the bed, along with a crumpled scrap of paper. Uncrumpling the paper reveals that it has "Gleeman's Apothecary: 1,212 gp 1B, 1P, 1W" written on it.
- The drawer to the desk is locked (and the flustered Marden can't remember where the spare key is if he is present). Enyat threw away the key, but the lock can be picked with a successful DC 14 Dexterity check using thieves' tools, or the drawer can be forced with a successful DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check. Inside the drawer is a leather writing pad with only two sheets of paper left in it.

Writing Pad. Any inspection of the writing pad determines that its final sheets of paper show the faint impressions of what was written on the sheets above them. Though all the observable writing is illegible, a character studying the pad can see where someone drew a detailed map on it—and can make that map's boldest lines visible by rubbing a pencil across the pad or coating it with chalk or some sort of fine powder.

Chamber Pot. If the characters fail to notice the chamber pot using ability checks, the character with the highest passive Intelligence (Investigation) score eventually notes it just before the party is ready to leave. However, the extra time it takes to locate the chamber pot sees Entropy and two holy knights arrive at the inn right after the contents of room 8 have been claimed, responding to rumors of the characters having been spotted in the area. See "Dramatis Personae" for information on those NPCs, and "Pursuit and Capture" to handle the confrontation.

Clue: Writing Pad

The faint lines revealed on the writing pad show the layout of the temple, as any clergy who serves there can recognize. By obtaining and showing this clue to the clergy, each character gains advantage on Charisma checks made to prove their potential innocence to Entropy (see "Capture and Negotiation").

Common Room

If the characters spend time in the inn's common room, they notice Marden's daughter Ardi behind the bar, gossiping with several patrons (all **commoners**) about a mysterious and handsome traveler she saw the previous night. A character who asks for more details—and who succeeds on a DC 11 Charisma (Persuasion) check or offers Ardi a gratuity of at least 1 gp—entices her to describe the stranger as having bright-green eyes, sandy-colored curly hair, and a deeply cleft chin, and to have been seen entering room 8 late the previous night.

This description matches that of Enyat "the Sloth" Fyjin, though Ardi has no idea who Enyat is.

Enyat's Description. A character who hears the description of Enyat can attempt a DC 17 Intelligence (History) check, made with advantage if the character has a criminal or law-enforcement background. On a success, the character recognizes the description as matching that of Enyat "the Sloth" Fyjin, an infamous and high-priced assassin.

Clue: Enyat's Description

With this clue, the characters need to make one fewer successful ability check to convince Entropy of their potential innocence (see "Capture and Negotiation").

Gleeman's Apothecary

Hilda Westvol runs Gleeman's Apothecary. The day before Dara Everflame was murdered, Enyat visited the apothecary—disguised as one of the characters—to buy the ink, quill, and writing pad used to draw out a map of the Church of Saint Bróccan, as well as to obtain the poison used during the assassination.

You decide which character Enyat pretended to be while making his purchase.

> The long front counter of Gleeman's Apothecary stands opposite shelves piled high with reagents, ingredients, and other materials. A waxy-faced human woman with thin purple lips stands behind the counter, arranging tiny vials.

Hilda Westvol is a **commoner** who has truesight out to a range of 15 feet, thanks to a special potion she drank when she was just an apothecary's apprentice. When she notices the character Enyat was impersonating, she tilts her head quizzically but says nothing.

During any conversation with Hilda, the character with the highest passive Wisdom (Insight) score can tell that she is hiding something from the characters.

Thistle Fluff. If the fluff found in the Church of Saint Bróccan is described or shown to Hilda, she identifies it as seed fluff from a type of thistle known to flower in the current season, and tells the characters that the most plentiful source of that plant in the city is in the garden outside the Stubborn Root Inn.

Hilda's Testimony. If a character presents Hilda with the ink, quill, or writing pad from the Stubborn Root Inn, or if a character who recognizes that she's hiding something asks her to come clean, that character must make a DC 16 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check.

On a success, Hilda confirms that she sold the ink, quill, and writing pad to a human wearing the illusory disguise of the chosen character—and shakily confesses that she also sold a vial of wyvern poison to that same customer. She speaks of her truesight ability, and guesses that the disguise must have been created by spell or magic item. Assuming the customer was an adventurer, she didn't ask about the disguise, thinking it was none of her business. If the characters ask her to make a statement to the clergy pursuing them, she obliges and apologizes for not coming forward sooner.

On a failed check, Hilda is confused and frightened by the presence of the character who looked like her former customer—having heard that that customer now stands accused of murder. She flees the shop, shouting for help. Whether the characters pursue her or search the shop in her absence, three holy knights confront them 1 minute later (see "Dramatis Personae" and "Pursuit and Capture").

Enyat's Description. If asked for a description of her customer, Hilda describes his bright-green eyes, sandy-colored curly hair, and deeply cleft chin. This description matches that of Enyat "the Sloth" Fyjin, though Hilda has no idea who Enyat is.

Clue: Hilda's Testimony

With this clue, the characters need to make one fewer successful ability check to convince Entropy of their potential innocence (see "Capture and Negotiation").

Part 3: Enyat's Hideout

Enyat "the Sloth" Fyjin thinks he's committed the perfect crime. While the characters are pursued by the clergy of the temple, the assassin is hiding in his safe house—a seemingly abandoned, windowless, one-room shack at the edge of the Temple City district around the Church of Saint Bróccan.

The characters might successfully track Enyat to his hideout, or might accompany Entropy and other members of the clergy there after proving their innocence to the high priest and being asked to help bring the real murderer to justice. As they approach the shack, the characters can see smoke rising from its battered tin chimney, suggesting that someone is inside.

Entering the Shack

If the characters case the shack before going inside, ask for DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) checks. On a success, a character notices that the shack has a trapdoor in its ceiling in addition to an obvious front door. The trapdoor is unlocked and unwarded, and allows characters to drop straight down into the shack. However, it takes

a successful DC 15 group Dexterity (Stealth) check to clamber quietly onto the roof, with a failed group check indicating that Enyat is ready for the characters when they appear.

The front door of the shack has been magically warded with a *glyph of warding* spell by a spellcaster-for-hire of Enyat's acquaintance. The glyph can be spotted only with a successful DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check. When any creature other than Enyat touches the door, the glyph erupts with magical energy in a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on the glyph. Each creature in that area must make a Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (5d8) acid damage on a failed saving throw, or half as much damage on a successful one.

SHOWDOWN WITH ENYAT

When the characters can see inside the shack, read or paraphrase the following:

> A fire burns low in the shack's single dark, dingy room. A lumpy straw mattress is the only other feature of the place.

If the characters set off the glyph of warding or made noise ascending to the roof, the **assassin** Enyat "the Sloth" Fyjin hides under the straw mattress, waiting for a chance to strike or flee. If the characters didn't alert Enyat to their presence, add the following:

> A lone human sits hunched over the fire, his green eyes and sandy blonde hair flickering in the light as he feeds a paper to the flames.

The assassin is burning the map he drew of the Church of Saint Bróccan.

If the characters came alone, Enyat attacks them, fleeing when he is reduced to half his hit points. If the characters came with priests of Saint Bróccan at their side, Enyat flees immediately.

When the assassin flees, he uses his action each turn to fire his light crossbow, then moves as far away from his pursuers as he can. If his crossbow attack is ineffectual, he might use his *hat of disguise* to try to throw off pursuit, as you determine. If Enyat is reduced to 15 hit points, or if he is blinded, paralyzed, restrained, or stunned, he surrenders.

More Combat!

If the characters show up with the support of the Church of Saint Bróccan, the showdown with Enyat is intended as less of a straight-up combat encounter and more of a chase through the city. However, if you wish to make this final encounter more dramatic, you can give Enyat one or more Beast or Humanoid allies who are watching the shack from a distance and enter the fray after it begins. The **bandit captain**, **cult fanatic**, **giant constrictor snake**, or **worg** stat blocks are all good choices for Enyat's allies.

TREASURE

In addition to his *hat of disguise*, Enyat keeps a pouch with 100 pp stuffed into his lumpy mattress. If he gets no warning before the characters enter the shack, he leaves the pouch behind when he flees.

CONCLUSION

If the characters capture Enyat alive and hand him over to the clergy of the Church of Saint Bróccan, the assassin confesses to the murder, clearing the characters' names if they haven't already done so on their own.

If the characters have been fully cleared of the accusations against them (and if no clergy were attacked during the adventure), Entropy awards each character 250 gp and a *potion of greater healing* as an apology for pursuing them. If they also caught the real killer, Entropy gives the characters a blue sapphire *elemental gem*.

If the characters clear their names in relation to the murder (with or without any assaults against the clergy), Korana Gorax awards the party a diamond worth 500 gp. If they also caught Enyat, Korana gives them a *wand of secrets*.

If Enyat escapes justice, he tries to get as far from the characters and Monte-de-Thoules as possible. You can decide when and where the characters might cross paths with the Sloth again.

RESOURCES

MCDM TABLETOP SAFETY TOOLKIT

https://mcdm.gg/SafetyToolkit

You can find all issues of *ARCADIA* on Patreon and in the MCDM shop.

NOCTURNE MARKET MAP

https://files.mcdmproductions.com/Arcadia202303/NocturneMarketMap.jpg



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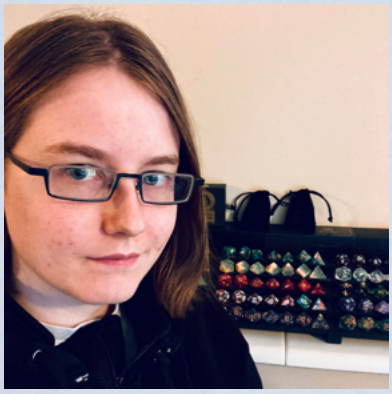

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SHARKPOCALYPSE

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Issue 27 ✦ April 2023

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Long, long ago (also known as January 2022, but it feels like a lot longer), James Introcaso and I were talking about our former careers—mine as a software developer, his as a screenwriter for National Geographic writing, among other things, songs about sharks. I joked that we should have him write a shark-focused article for *ARCADIA* … to which he responded, "My magnum opus. *SHARKADIA*."

And thus *SHARKADIA* was born, a joke we not-so-secretly dreamed of making a reality. The MCDM team got on board, authors pitched *many* amazing ideas, and James was unleashed to write about fearsome sharks, friendly sharks, magic-guzzling sharks, weresharks, and more. Sharks galore!

Sometimes committing to the bit as TTRPG designers means creating silly content perfect for a lighthearted one-shot or meme-inspired character. But in *ARCADIA*, we promise three articles a month of awesome, thoroughly tested stuff that you can use over and over again, and we wanted to deliver on that promise in *SHARKADIA*, too. There's lighthearted fun, yes, but part of committing to the bit for us is going all-out on substance inspired by nerdy topics outside of games. In this case, we took a deep dive into shark lore, pirate history, and deep-sea flora and fauna—all with our own fantasy twist! The real world is vast and strange and wonderfully, endlessly inspiring.

It also worked nicely to do aquatic content as part of a themed issue. Usually, each issue of *ARCADIA* presents three entirely separate articles so there's something for every campaign, but it's not easy to add sharks to your game unless the party has a good reason to go to sea, which requires your adventures to take a more oceanic spin. *One* aquatic article isn't as easy to use as *three* aquatic articles that give you a full set of monsters, companions, magic items, environments, quests, easy ship combat rules, random encounters, and more—everything you need to make seafaring adventures part of your game.

"Captain Ralazar's Guide to Sea Monsters," by James Introcaso himself, is a fin-tastic feast of creatures and magic items documented by a legendary sailor, from the aranoth that absorbs memories to the warp shark whose tail can cut through reality. From Gwendolyn Marshall, "Perils of the Deeps" presents environmental conditions and challenges to make deep-sea adventuring feel properly perilous, plus five new monsters lurking in the depths, including the angler shark and dire jelly. And last but *certainly* not least, Willy Abeel brings us "The Ballad of Captain Shivershank," an epic treasure trove of quest hooks, narrative seeds, and a memorable ally—or villain. With this piratical toolbox, you can create a swashbuckling campaign, story arc, or one-shot like no other.

SHARKADIA has been a labor of love, committing to the bit and then some, and collaboratively enabling each other to reach new shark-inspired heights. We can't wait to hear about your adventures on the high seas and in the ocean depths.

De somnio ad itinere,
Hannah Rose
Managing Editor



CAPTAIN RALAZAR'S GUIDE TO SEA MONSTERS

Terrors and wonders of the great blue expanse

by James Introcaso

I, Captain Talon Ralazar, write this document aboard the *Feasting Fin II*. The three-year hunt for Shipsnapper, that scarred megalodon that devoured the first *Feasting Fin* and most of her crew, continues. Our quest for vengeance has not been easy. My crew and I have faced horrors beyond the most feverish imaginings of any scurvy-sick sailor and uncovered treasures beyond your wildest imaginings. Such wonders need records, for Shipsnapper is hungry, and I know not if we will make it back to port to tell the tale.

While the crew chums the water, waiting for Ol' Snapper to make an overdue appearance, I set my mind to cataloging these bizarre monsters and wondrous treasures. If you're reading this, may it be because this account was published after our victory, and not because Shipsnapper bested me a second time, leaving your unlucky hands to dredge this scroll from the bottom of the deep … or that shark's accursed gullet!

Ralazar's Sharks by Challenge Rating

Challenge Rating	Creature
1	Hound Shark
3	Wereshark
4	Arcane Remora
5	Maelstrom Hammerhead
6	Warp Shark
8	Icebreaker Shark
14	Megalodon
16	Aranoth

Jaws from Below

Our hunt for the great behemoth has borne us to many a monster—some terrible, some friendly, but all to be treated with respect.

Aranoth

Of all the fearsome creatures in the sea, none has made me want to fall to my knees and beg for mercy more than the frost-infused aranoth. They are the most ancient of sharks, with five red eyes burning in their head, icy blue skin, a body twice the length of the greatest galleon, and a colossal mouth full of jagged teeth—akin to a goblin shark, if each pearly white was the size of a full-grown human.

Ancient as the Sea

Each aranoth is older than the salt on the waves. They don't age, but they also can't make little sharks. Praise the gods. Other terrors of the deep, like the blasted dragon turtle and hideous kraken, see aranoths as threats. That's a bad break for Arry, but good news for sailors. Only a few aranoths prowl the depths now. They hide at the bottom of the great blue, drawing in the cold like a ray eating shrimp. Arry only risks a swim to the surface when he senses food above—that's us. Well, our memories at least.

Devourers of Knowledge

The oldest salts at the dock say aranoths were always bigguns, but they weren't always smart. Those fish brains went from minnow to god as they gorged themselves on the thoughts of their prey. The smarter you are, the

hungrier Arry is for you. This voracious creature snaps up prey in their gullet, devours their victims' memories, then vomits the poor souls out as statues! No doubt their perverse stone gardens litter the bottom of the sea.

Deals for Memories

Now, the aranoth seems mighty wicked, but most are willing to bargain with their food. That's downright generous, given they hold all the cards. Many will let a ship pass over their domain in exchange for devouring just the smartest sailor aboard. Rest in petrification, Brainy Tom. Some desperate adventurers—and I mean heavy-laden souls as have no other options left—even seek an aranoth by choice, offering their memories in exchange for information from the leviathan's vast mind. The most merciful of these fish make their victims flesh again after absorbing their memories, if you can believe. Still, I wouldn't offer myself to Arry for all the teeth in Shipsnapper's maw.



Aranoth

Gargantuan Monstrosity, Typically Neutral

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 350 (20d20 + 140)
Speed 0 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
25 (+7)	8 (–1)	25 (+7)	21 (+5)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Con +12, Int +10, Wis +10, Cha +8
Skills Arcana +10, History +10, Insight +10, Perception +10, Religion +10
Damage Immunities cold
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, paralyzed, stunned
Senses blindsight 120 ft., passive Perception 20
Languages all, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 16 (15,000 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +5

Detect Sentience. The aranoth can sense the location of any creature within 5 miles of them who has an Intelligence score of 3 or higher, unless the creature is protected by a *mind blank* spell.

Water Breathing. The aranoth can breathe only underwater.

Actions

Multiattack. The aranoth makes one Bite attack and one Tail attack, or makes one Tail attack and uses Swallow or Inhale, if available.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (4d6 + 7) piercing damage plus 22 (4d10) cold damage. If the target is a creature, they are grappled (escape DC 17). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the aranoth can't bite another target.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (2d10 + 7) bludgeoning damage plus 22 (4d10) cold damage, and the aranoth moves the target up to 30 feet in any direction.

Swallow. The aranoth makes one Bite attack against a Large or smaller creature they are grappling. If the attack hits, the target takes the bite's damage and is swallowed, and the grapple ends. While swallowed, the creature is blinded and restrained, they have total cover against attacks and other effects outside the aranoth, and they must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw at the start of each of their turns. If the creature fails this save three times while they are swallowed, they are turned to stone and petrified, and the aranoth gains all the creature's memories. The failures don't need to be consecutive, but a creature's failures reset to zero if they are no longer swallowed.

If the aranoth takes 35 damage or more on a single turn from a creature inside them, the aranoth must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw at the end of that turn or regurgitate all swallowed creatures, who fall prone in a space within 10 feet of the aranoth. Also, as an action, the aranoth can willingly regurgitate all swallowed creatures. If the aranoth dies, a swallowed creature is no longer restrained by them and can escape from the corpse using 20 feet of movement, exiting prone.

Inhale (Recharge 6). The aranoth inhales an enormous breath in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in that area must succeed on a DC 20 Strength saving throw or be swallowed by the aranoth (see Swallow).

Bonus Actions

Cold Flash. The aranoth unleashes a burst of freezing water. Each creature within 30 feet of the aranoth must make a DC 20 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature can't take reactions and is restrained until the start of their next turn. Creatures resistant or immune to cold damage automatically succeed on this saving throw.

Restore the Flesh. The aranoth chooses one creature petrified by their Swallow action within 120 feet of them. The petrified condition ends on the target.

Reactions

Thousands of Memories. When the aranoth makes a saving throw, they draw on memories they've absorbed. They roll a d8 and add the result to their saving throw.

Arcane Remora

Bigger than the average suckerfish, arcane remoras clean up magical messes in the sea. Oh, you never thought about what happens if a boat full of potions crashes on the rocks, or a mage loses control of their wild magic and makes a bunch of grease appear in the ocean? Well, let me tell you, pretty it ain't. So some "brilliant" magicians bred a special kind of shark to clean up their mess … but guess how that worked out? Adding magic to nature is a bad business. The fish got smarter and tougher, and some escaped their breeders to form schools in the wild blue. Blimey.

Drawn to Magic

Wherever there is magic in the seas, remoras show up. Sometimes a local community might hire a breeder to bring a few fish to get rid of the pollution, but it's just as likely that a wild remmy or five absorb the mess. Oh, but it's not just alchemy and spells they eat. Adventurers who go for a swim should take heed—the suckerfish love to attach to magic items and drain their power … temporarily, or so I'm told. But if you're a lucky seadog, you might find one roaming around with a magic sword in its sucker. I found *Slashpoint*, the very cutlass that removed the ponytail from Dread Liandra, attached to a big remmy.

Arcane Remora

Medium Monstrosity, Unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 30)
Speed 0 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	6 (–2)	12 (+1)	8 (–1)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +3
Damage Resistances acid, lightning, thunder
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages understands Common but can't speak
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Magic Sense. The remora knows the location of every active spell and magic item within 120 feet of them.

Water Breathing. The remora can breathe only underwater.

Actions

Multiattack. The remora makes one Attach attack and one Razor Fins attack.

Attach. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (3d6 + 4) necrotic damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, they are grappled (escape DC 14). If the target is a Medium or smaller magic item that isn't being worn or carried, the remora can pick up the item. While the remora is carrying an item, another creature within reach of the remora can use an action to make a DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check, pulling the item from the remora on a success. The remora can attach to only one target at a time.

Razor Fins. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Drain Magic. The remora attempts to drain the magic of one non-artifact magic item that is being worn or carried by the remora or a creature they have grappled. If the item is being worn or carried by an unwilling creature, that creature can make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw. On a successful save, the item is not drained. On a failed save, or if the item is not worn or carried by an unwilling creature, the item is drained of magic and the remora regains 18 (4d8) hit points.

If the drained item is a consumable magic item, such as a potion or scroll, it is destroyed. Otherwise, the item's magic is suppressed for 24 hours and the remora can't drain that item again for the duration.

Bonus Actions

Drink Spells (Recharge 6). The remora chooses one creature, object, or magical effect within 5 feet of them. Each spell of 2nd level or lower on the target ends. For each spell of 3rd level or higher on the target, the remora makes a Constitution check. The DC equals 10 + the spell's level. On a successful check, the spell ends. If this bonus action ends at least one spell, the remora gains a bonus to the next damage roll they make before the end of their next turn equal to the level of the highest-level spell they ended.

Hound Shark

A smaller species of hunter shark, hounds relentlessly stalk their prey through the oceans. They'll swim after you for hours on end if they get your scent. Oh, and while they can eat smaller fish, the hounds prefer bigger meals that sustain them for days as they hunt for their next feast. If one gets a sniff of you, get out of the water and don't go back!

Hunting Companions

Not all hound sharks hunger for your flesh. They can be—carefully—trained to hunt alongside a salty sailor. These faithful friends work with adventurers and bounty hunters alike, lending their devious sense of smell to track quarry across the seas. I know firsthand. There is no member of the crew I trust more than my Regina.

Hound Shark

Medium Beast, Unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 26 (4d8 + 8)
Speed 5 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	3 (–4)	10 (+0)	5 (–3)

Skills Perception +2, Survival +4
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages —
Challenge 1 (200 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Aquatic Tremorsense. While the shark is touching a body of water, they can detect and pinpoint the origin of vibrations in the same body of water within 60 feet of them.

Blood Frenzy. The shark has advantage on melee attack rolls against any creature who doesn't have all their hit points.

Water Breathing. The shark can breathe only underwater.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Bonus Actions

Hound Sense. The shark acquires a quarry by smelling a creature or an object within 40 feet of them that they can see. If the shark smells an object, their quarry is the last creature to handle the object for at least 5 minutes within the last 10 days. Otherwise, their quarry is the creature they smelled. For the next 24 hours, or until the shark uses this bonus action again, the shark can use their sense of smell to track their quarry. They know the direction to the quarry's location provided the quarry is on the same plane of existence as them.

Unstoppable Hunt (Recharge 6). The shark moves up to their speed without provoking opportunity attacks toward their quarry (see Hound Sense), provided they can see their quarry.

Hound Shark Companion

The hound shark companion stat block uses the rules found in *Beastheart and Monstrous Companions*. When a beastheart with a hound shark companion uses an exploit that refers to the companion's walking speed, such as Drag Them, use the hound shark's swimming speed instead.

The hound shark companion is great for underwater campaigns, but a generous GM can give a character with a shark companion some of the magic items from "Swimming through Sand to Sea: More Mounted Adventuring" by Willy Abeel in *ARCADIA* 4, so their shark friend can also accompany them on land.

Hound Shark Companion

Medium Beast, Unaligned

Armor Class 13 plus PB (natural armor)
Hit Points 7 + 7 times the caregiver's level (a number of d8 Hit Dice equal to their caregiver's level)
Speed 5 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	5 (–3)	10 (+0)	8 (–1)

Saving Throws Str +3 plus PB, Dex +1 plus PB
Skills Perception +0 plus PB, Survival +0 plus PB
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10 plus PB
Languages —
Proficiency Bonus (PB) equals the caregiver's bonus

Aquatic Tremorsense. While the shark is touching a body of water, they can detect and pinpoint the origin of vibrations in the same body of water within 60 feet of them.

Water Breathing. The shark can breathe only underwater.

Actions

Signature Attack (Bite). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 plus PB to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1d6 plus PB piercing damage.

1st Level: Overwhelming Attack (2 Ferocity). The shark makes a signature attack. On a hit, the attack deals an extra PB damage, and the target can't take reactions until the start of the shark's next turn.

3rd Level: Circling Strike (5 Ferocity). The shark chooses a creature within 5 feet of them. The target must make a DC 10 plus PB Wisdom (Perception) check. On a failed check, the shark makes a signature attack with advantage against the target and deals an extra PBd4 damage on a hit. On a successful check, the shark makes a signature attack against the target.

5th Level: Chompfest (8 Ferocity). The shark moves up to their speed without provoking opportunity attacks. Before, during, or after this movement, the shark can make one signature attack against up to PB creatures.

Bonus Actions

Hound Sense (1/Day). The shark acquires a quarry by smelling a creature or an object within 40 feet of them that they can see. If the shark smells an object, their quarry is the last creature to handle the object for at least 5 minutes within the last 10 days. Otherwise, their quarry is the creature they smelled. For the next 24 hours, or until the shark uses this bonus action again, the shark can use their sense of smell to track their quarry. They know the direction to the quarry's location provided the quarry is on the same plane of existence as them.

Mystic Connection: Hound Shark

If you're playing a beastheart and have a hound shark companion, you gain the following benefit at 9th level when you gain the beastheart's Mystic Connection feature:

Blood Scent. You gain a swimming speed equal to your walking speed.

Additionally, as an action, you enter a blood frenzy for 1 minute. While frenzied, you have advantage on attack rolls against any creature who doesn't have all their hit points. You can't use this benefit again until you finish a long rest.

Icebreaker Shark

If you see a fin cutting through cold waters of glacial islands, flee. Don't stop until your legs are safely touching something as hard as iron. See, icebreaker sharks hunt in frigid waters, stalking prey on icebergs and glaciers above and waiting for their victims to walk where the ice is thinnest. Once their prey is vulnerable, these gray-skinned sharks smash through the ice with their great tails, dragging their food screaming into the shivering deep. And your boat isn't safe either—iceheads break wood as well as any glacier.

Icebreaker Shark

Huge Beast, Unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 150 (12d12 + 72)
Speed 0 ft., swim 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	10 (+0)	22 (+6)	1 (–5)	10 (+0)	5 (–3)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +3
Damage Immunities cold
Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages —
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Blood Frenzy. The shark has advantage on melee attack rolls against any creature who doesn't have all their hit points.

Ice Tremorsense. The shark can detect and pinpoint the origin of vibrations on ice within 60 feet of them, provided the ice touches a body of water the shark occupies.

Siege Monster. The shark deals double damage to objects and structures.

Water Breathing. The shark can breathe only underwater.

Actions

Multiattack. The shark makes one Bite attack, and they make one Bone Tail attack or use Smash Ice.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (3d10 + 6) piercing damage.

Bone Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (3d10 + 6) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, their speed is halved until the end of their next turn.

Smash Ice. The shark destroys a 15-foot cube of nonmagical ice within 10 feet of them. Each creature on that area of ice must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw. On a successful save, a creature moves into the nearest unoccupied space of the creature's choice outside of the cube. On a failed save, a creature falls and lands prone.



Maelstrom Hammerhead

They may look like golden hammerhead sharks, but once Mally Ham opens their mouth and demands tribute, a sailor knows who they're dealing with … a servant of the gods!

Divine Messengers

When sailors run afoul of a fickle sea god, perhaps by killing an albatross, cursing the deity during a storm, or unwittingly sailing through a sanctified sea without pouring rum into the deep, maelstrom hammerheads appear. Some sins can be forgiven. If you're lucky, these divine predators demand tribute—often treasure, though they can demand lives for more grievous offenses. Give it to them. Refusals are answered with tempestuous wrath.

Storm Creators

When wreaking vengeance for an angry god, maelstrom hammerheads summon storms that make any experienced salt dog lose their lunch. The more sharks manifesting the tempest, the greater the clouds and the stronger its lightning strikes. Just pay the bloody tribute.

Maelstrom Hammerhead

Large Celestial, Typically Chaotic Neutral

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 95 (10d10 + 40)
Speed 10 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	11 (+0)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)

Skills Perception +5, Religion +4
Damage Immunities lightning, thunder
Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Celestial, Common
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Amphibious. The hammerhead can breathe air and water.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) lightning damage. If the target is a creature, they can't take reactions until the start of their next turn.

Destructive Storm (1/Day). The hammerhead conjures a storm in a 20-foot-radius sphere at a point they can see within 120 feet of them. The storm spreads around corners, and its area is lightly obscured. When a creature enters the storm for the first time on a turn or starts their turn there, they must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 9 (2d8) lightning damage and 4 (1d8) thunder damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. At the start of initiative count 20 each round, vehicles and structures in the storm take 4 (1d8) lightning damage and 9 (2d8) thunder damage. The storm lasts for 1 minute or until the hammerhead dies, moves more than 240 feet away from the storm, or chooses to end the storm (no action required).

Alternatively, the hammerhead can use this action to join their power to another hammerhead's Destructive Storm within 240 feet of them. For each hammerhead that joins their power, the storm's effects gains the following cumulative changes:

- The sphere's radius increases by 5 feet.
- The storm deals an additional 4 (1d8) lightning damage and 4 (1d8) thunder damage.

If a hammerhead who joined their power to the storm dies or ends their participation in the storm (no action required), the storm's effects are reduced proportionally. The storm ends when no more hammerheads are powering the storm.

Maelstrom Fury (1/Day). While the hammerhead is submerged in water, they spin their body in a tight circle, creating a swirling vortex. Each creature within 30 feet of the hammerhead must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be pulled up to 25 feet toward the hammerhead. The hammerhead then makes a Bite attack against each creature of their choice within 5 feet of them.

Bonus Actions

Move Storm. The hammerhead can move a storm they created or added their power to with their Destructive Storm action up to 30 feet in any direction.

Megalodon

You know the infamous great white shark. Take that fearsome fish, make it the length of a great galleylong, give it a mouth full of teeth longer than dirks and an appetite for whale flesh, and you've got one of the worst predators to ever prowl the seas. When there are no whales to feed on, these monsters break the surface, flying into the air and tearing vessels apart like gift paper to get at the morsels within. Alas, such was the fate of the first *Feasting Fin*. We're coming for you, Snapper.

Megalodon

Gargantuan Beast, Unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 297 (17d20 + 119)
Speed 0 ft., swim 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
28 (+9)	8 (–1)	25 (+7)	1 (–5)	10 (+0)	5 (–3)

Saving Throws Str +14, Dex +4, Con +12
Skills Perception +10
Senses blindsight 120 ft., passive Perception 20
Languages —
Challenge 14 (11,500 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +5

Blood Frenzy. The megalodon has advantage on melee attack rolls against any creature who doesn't have all their hit points.

Breech. If the megalodon moves at least 30 feet straight toward the surface of the water on their turn, they can propel themselves up to 60 feet into the air without using additional movement, then fall. During this movement or fall, the megalodon can take an action, if available. The megalodon takes no damage from the fall if they fall into water that is at least 30 feet deep.

Siege Monster. The megalodon deals double damage to objects and structures.

Water Breathing. The megalodon can breathe only underwater.

Actions

Multiattack. The megalodon makes one Bite attack and one Tail attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 23 (4d6 + 9) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, they are grappled (escape DC 19). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the megalodon can't bite another target.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 20 (2d10 + 9) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, they must succeed on a DC 20 Constitution saving throw or become dazed[1] until the end of their next turn.

Bone Crunch. The megalodon makes a Bite attack against a creature they are grappling. If the attack hits, the target takes an additional 14 (4d6) piercing damage and their speed is halved. In addition, if the target isn't a Construct or Undead, they begin bleeding. While bleeding, a creature loses 14 (4d6) hit points at the start of each of their turns. The target or a creature within reach of them can use an action to make a DC 17 Wisdom (Medicine) check, ending the speed reduction and bleeding on a success. The speed reduction and bleeding also end if the target receives magical healing.

[1] See the Glossary at the end of this issue for more information on the dazed condition.

Warp Shark

Warp sharks are born with fey magic that allows them to disappear from one place and appear in another. Doesn't matter if the water is a salty ocean, a crystal clear river, or some poor monarch's enormous bathtub. If it's wet, look out for Warper. He'll get in, eat some poor dog, then get out faster than you can sing a shanty. These mighty threshers have skin of deep purple mottled with red, black, and blue, not to mention bone-bladed tails that can slice rifts in reality.

Wicked Pets

While sea hags are chief among those who keep warp sharks as pets, many villains tame these fish to do their bidding and carry out their will on the waves. The sharks make excellent kidnappers, for they can teleport short distances with a victim caught in their jaws. We'll never know what became of Quartermaster Darius Molor.

Warp Shark

Large Fey, Typically Chaotic Evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 127 (15d10 + 45)
Speed 0 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	5 (–3)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)

Skills Perception +5, Stealth +4
Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages understands Aquan and Common but can't speak
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Blood Frenzy. The shark has advantage on melee attack rolls against any creature who doesn't have all their hit points.

Water Breathing. The shark can breathe only underwater.

Water Sense. The shark knows the location of every body of water within 500 feet of them that's large enough to submerge themself in, as well as the location of every creature touching such a body of water.

Actions

Multiattack. The shark makes one Bite attack and one Tail attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (3d6 + 4) piercing damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, they are grappled (escape DC 14). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the shark can't bite another target.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 20 (3d10 + 4) slashing damage.

Splish Slash. The shark's tail slashes open a momentary rift to a body of water in the Feywild, creating a sudden blast of pressurized water. Each creature within 10 feet of the shark must make a DC 15 Strength saving throw. On failed save, a creature takes 16 (3d10) bludgeoning damage and is pushed 10 feet away from the shark unless they are grappled by the shark. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't pushed.

Teleport (Recharge 5–6). The shark teleports up to 500 feet to an unoccupied space in a body of water they can sense. Alternatively, the shark and a creature they have grappled can teleport up to 30 feet to an unoccupied space in a body of water the shark can sense.



Wereshark

Aye, they're real. It's rare, but the wereshark's curse can be found in remote seaside communities. These sharky folk prefer the taste of raw meat above all, but most mean and do no harm to other folks. It's a shame, but the wicked among weresharks use their hunger for uncooked flesh to justify brutal and violent acts. These horror stories, coupled with the fearsome look of a half-shark, half-person, lead many to attack first and ask questions later. A bad idea—weresharks rarely lose that fight.

Some legends say that weresharks don't actually change when the moon is full, but rather when the tide is at its highest each month. I've never stuck around long enough to track it.

Gift Rarely Given

Rather than a curse, most weresharks see their lycanthropy as a gift. When these weresharks pass on their blessing, both weresharks vow to protect one another, a promise akin to marriage. A wereshark almost never passes their gift on to an adventurer or sailor passing through, since that promise requires the lycanthrope to leave home or the traveler to settle down. That's why yours truly isn't sporting fins and a tail. I got a meg to hunt.

Now, some dastardly dogs think wereshark lycanthropy is a present all humanoids should have. These foul folk trick weresharks into cursing them. When it works, the villains then go on a chomping spree, creating weresharks and demanding service as thanks for the unwanted gift.

Wereshark

Medium Humanoid (Shapechanger), Any Alignment

Armor Class 11 in humanoid form, 12 (natural armor) in shark or hybrid form
Hit Points 45 (7d8 + 14)
Speed 30 ft. (0 ft., swim 40 ft. in shark form; 30 ft., swim 40 ft. in hybrid form)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Perception +2, Stealth +3
Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered
Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Common (can't speak in shark form)
Challenge 3 (700 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Amphibious. The wereshark can breathe air and water.

Blood Frenzy. The wereshark has advantage on melee attack rolls against any creature who doesn't have all their hit points.

From the Deep. Any hit the wereshark scores against a creature submerged in water who can't see or hear the wereshark is a critical hit.

Actions

Multiattack. The wereshark makes two Trident attacks, or one Bite attack and one Trident attack.

Bite (Shark or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage. If the target is a non-lycanthrope Humanoid, the wereshark can pass on their curse, and the target must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be cursed with wereshark lycanthropy.

Trident (Humanoid or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage, or 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack. If the attack hits a Medium or smaller creature who is within 5 feet of a Small or larger object, the wereshark can stab the trident through the creature into the object. The target is restrained, and the wereshark can't use the trident to make another attack. A creature who can reach the trident can use an action to pull it free, causing the restrained creature to take 7 (2d6) piercing damage and ending the restrained condition on them.

Retreat to the Dark. The wereshark moves up to their speed without provoking opportunity attacks, then takes the Hide action.

Bonus Actions

Change Shape. The wereshark polymorphs into a shark-humanoid hybrid or into a Large **hunter shark**, or back into their Humanoid form. Their statistics, other than their size and speed, are the same in each form. Any equipment they are wearing or carrying isn't transformed. The wereshark reverts to their Humanoid form if they die.

Wereshark Template

A Humanoid who becomes a wereshark gains the following changes to their statistics:

- Their Strength becomes 16 (+3) unless it is already higher.
- They have immunity to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered.
- They have blindsight out to a range of 60 feet.
- They gain the wereshark's speed, Blood Frenzy trait, and Change Shape bonus action.
- They gain a +1 bonus to AC while in hybrid or shark form from natural armor.
- They gain the wereshark's Bite attack, which uses Strength for attack and damage rolls. The DC for the saving throw equals 8 + the wereshark's proficiency bonus + the wereshark's Constitution modifier. A creature can choose to fail this saving throw.

Sunken Treasures

While exploring the deep, my crew came across four magic items infused with the essence of sharks. Now, I don't condone wearing shark teeth as a fashion choice, but when those teeth got magic in them, you've got to at least try them on. And of course, Ol' Snapper is in for a surprise when he sees the *Feasting Fin II* is sharkier than her mother.

Amulet of Shark Teeth

Wondrous Item, Uncommon (Requires Attunement)

While you wear this hemp cord adorned with shark teeth, you have advantage on Wisdom (Perception or Survival) checks made to detect and track creatures who don't have all their hit points.

In addition, you can use a bonus action to gain blindsight out to a range of 60 feet for 1 minute. Once this property is used, it can't be used again until the next dawn.

Belt of Blood Frenzy

Wondrous Item, Rare (Requires Attunement by a Barbarian)

This leather belt is adorned with nine fossilized megalodon teeth and has 9 charges. When you hit a creature who doesn't have all their hit points with an attack while raging, you can expend up to 3 charges to deal an extra 1d6 damage for each charge spent. The belt loses one tooth each time you spend a charge. The belt regains 1d8 + 1 expended charges each day at dawn and regrows the same number of teeth.

Sharkboat

Wondrous Item, Legendary (Requires Attunement)

This object appears as a sharkskin belt pouch that can be opened and floats. As an action, you can speak the pouch's command word, causing it to unfold into a boat 100 feet long, 20 feet wide, and 16 feet deep, provided it has the space to do so without hitting any creatures or objects. The ship is made of sharkskin, is propelled by shark fins on its port and starboard sides and a tail at the stern, and has a shark figurehead as its prow. At the ship's bow, a cannon carved from an enormous shark tooth sits on a rotating platform. A 10-foot-square hatch in the center of the main deck has a ladder made of bone that leads down into an 8-foot-deep cargo hold.

While you are touching the ship and it is floating in a body of water, you can take the following actions:

Set Course. You can use an action to have the ship set sail to a destination touching the same body of water the ship is occupying. You must know the route to your location, and the ship follows the route you set. You can change the route or destination by using your action to set a new course. The ship has a top speed of 5 miles per hour.

Precise Movement. You can use an action or bonus action to move the ship up to 45 feet in any direction horizontally. If this movement occurs while the boat is following a set course, the boat stops following that course.

Stop. You can command the boat to stop moving and use its fins to remain in place on the water (no action required).

Shark Bite. You can use an action to make the shark figurehead animate and stretch to attack a target of your choice within 15 feet of the vessel's prow. The attack has a +9 bonus to hit and deals 5d10 piercing damage on a hit.

Tooth Cannon. You can use an action to fire a megalodon tooth from the shark cannon and make an attack against a target of your choice. The cannon has a normal range of 120 feet and a long range of 480 feet. The attack has a +9 bonus to hit and deals 3d10 piercing damage on a hit. The tooth cannon never runs out of ammunition.

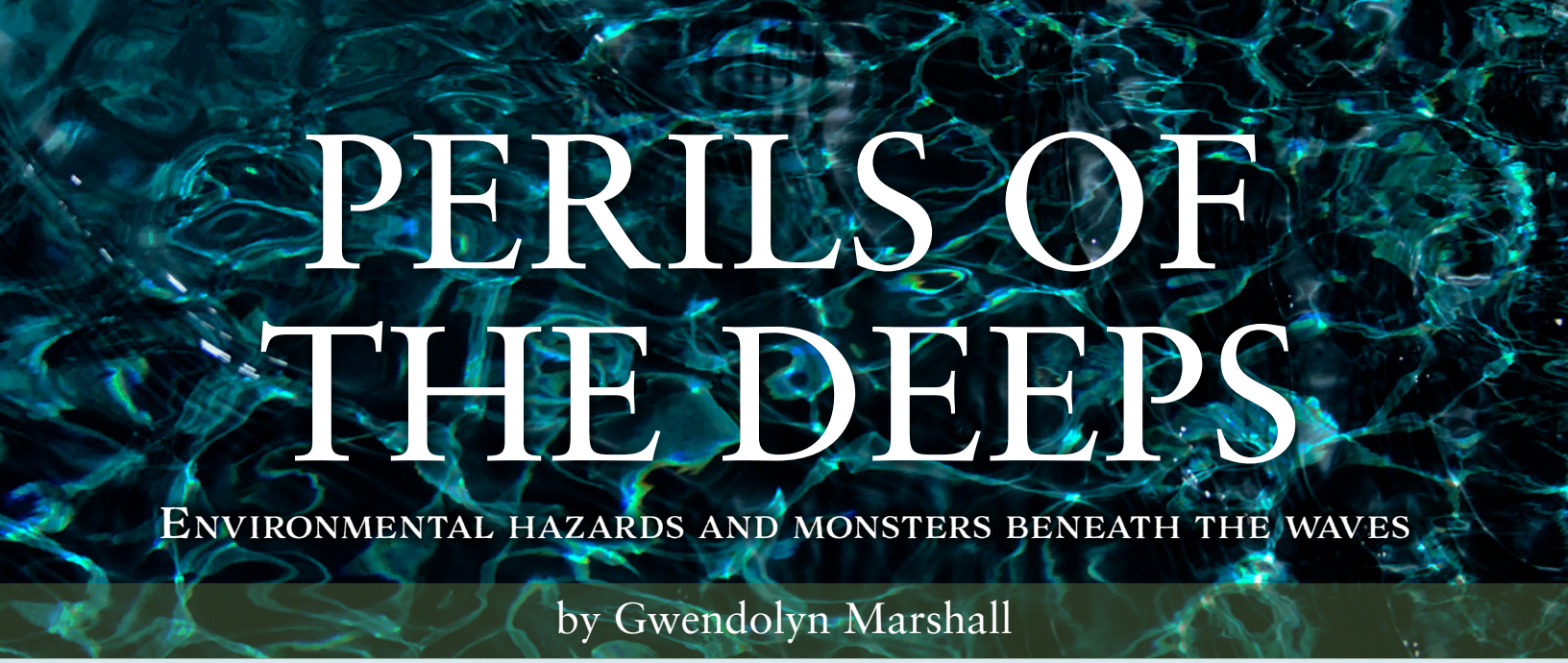
You can use an action to speak the command word again, causing the boat to fold back into a pouch, provided that no creatures are aboard. Any objects aboard the vessel remain there as it folds, and can't be retrieved until the boat is unfolded again.

SLASHPOINT

Weapon (Scimitar), Rare (Requires Attunement)

The curved blade of this scimitar is embossed with images of different shark species and always razor sharp. You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

While holding the scimitar, you can use an action to cast the *conjure animals* spell from the weapon. The only Beasts you can conjure by casting the spell in this way are sharks. Once this property is used, it can't be used again until the next dawn.



PERILS OF THE DEEPS

Environmental hazards and monsters beneath the waves

by Gwendolyn Marshall

Content Warning: This article includes themes of drowning, darkness, and pressure in the ocean depths, and a worm that burrows into flesh and bones. We recommend using the MCDM Safety Toolkit and Checklist and adjusting as needed to ensure everyone has a good time.

> "The deepest parts of the ocean are totally unknown to us. No soundings have been able to reach them. What goes on in those distant depths? What creatures inhabit, or could inhabit, those regions twelve or fifteen miles beneath the surface of the water? What is the constitution of these animals? It's almost beyond conjecture."
>
> –Jules Verne, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (trans. Frederick Paul Walter)

Aquatic adventuring brings with it distinctive dangers, from otherworldly beasts to unique environmental hazards. Those who venture beneath the waves might struggle to endure strong currents, crushing pressure, and murky depths, as well as alien creatures unlike any on the surface.

This article presents tools for GMs running undersea adventures. These include terrain effects, such as becoming entangled in a kelp forest, becoming disoriented and losing a sense of which way is up in murky waters, and the challenges of navigating currents, riptides, and undertows that threaten to sweep creatures out to sea.

Additionally, strange and deadly underwater foes threaten those who dare to dive deep: the dire jelly, the giant spider crab, the angler shark, the eldritch anemone, and the swarm of zombie worms.

Environmental Conditions

Much like descending into subterranean realms, plunging beneath the waves introduces a special set of environmental challenges. Light struggles to reach deeper waters, especially in murky or brackish conditions, and the pressure of the water around adventurers can easily crush them to death. Even in the absence of the horrific creatures that lurk below, the deep ocean is a deadly locale.

The rules in this article are designed to help you, the GM, include these challenges in any of your own underwater games, and are designed specifically for use with the creatures at the end of this article and the other articles in this special issue of *SHARKADIA*. The core rules and other official supplements contain alternative versions of some of these rules, but we wanted to provide you with the MCDM interpretation tailored for use with the beasties in this issue, and because many of our readers might not own every official book.

You don't have to use all these optional rules together. Especially for low-level parties, one or two environmental challenges can add tension without making underwater adventuring a slog. In addition, don't be shy about giving the characters tools to overcome or mitigate these challenges. The *light* cantrip and other magic can provide effective light sources underwater, but the darkness of the deep ocean remains threatening



and dangerous—so that characters know to keep that magical light close, and to beware of what might be lurking beyond its sheltering glow.

Light

Though the waters near the surface see day and night just as the area above the water does, darkness permanently shrouds the deeps. Sunlight penetrates the ocean to a depth of roughly 650 feet, and normal vision is possible during the day. Beyond this point, the sunlight fades. Only dim light reaches the area from 650 to 1,000 feet beneath the surface. Beyond 1,000 feet, all is in darkness.

Visibility

All natural bodies of water contain small particles of dirt, silt, and other materials. Over larger distances, this impedes vision, even in bright light. While in clear water, a creature with darkvision or in bright light can see out to a range of 120 feet. In turbulent or brackish waters, maximum visibility drops to 30 feet.

Pressure

The physical pressure of the water can crush surface-world creatures who venture too deep beneath the waves. As the core rules note, any creature without a swimming speed who swims for 1 hour gains one level of exhaustion unless they succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw. Swimming through deep water is even more arduous, requiring a creature without a swimming speed to make the saving through against exhaustion every half hour at a depth below 100 feet, or every 15 minutes at a depth below 200 feet.

Creatures not naturally acclimated to the pressures of the deep ocean take bludgeoning damage after spending 15 minutes at a depth of 650 feet or deeper, and every 15 minutes thereafter, as shown on the Environmental Effects by Depth table.

Environmental Effects by Depth

Depth	Light	Pressure Damage
0–650 feet	Bright light (daytime)	—
650–1,000 feet	Dim light (daytime)	10 (3d6)
1,000+ feet	Darkness	17 (5d6)

Overcoming Pressure

Characters who can mitigate or negate bludgeoning damage can overcome the effects of deep-sea pressure. By default, magic items and spells that grant creatures a swimming speed or the ability to breathe underwater

don't automatically protect a creature from this pressure. However, a character who can cast the *water breathing* spell can spend time during a short or long rest to experiment with the spell. With a successful DC 15 spellcasting ability check, the character learns how to cast *water breathing* using a spell slot of 4th level or higher to acclimate creatures to deep-sea pressure, in addition to granting them the ability to breathe underwater.

Other Effects of Pressure

We've chosen not to include rules for real-world concerns like nitrogen narcosis and decompression sickness in this article. A heroic fantasy RPG character need not suffer barotrauma for the sake of scientific accuracy.

Hazards

Aquatic environments come with their own dangers and challenges, both mundane and magical. As GM, you can employ these hazards in your adventures to create tension and make an encounter feel interesting and unique. And don't forget that in a heroic fantasy game, the characters might well be able to use a hazard to their advantage.

Current

Oceans, rivers, and even lakes have currents that move volumes of water—and anything within that water—at various speeds. Swimming through moving water can present particular challenges. When a body of water has a current, you as the GM decide whether the current is weak or strong, and in which direction it moves. River currents pull creatures downstream, and can be weak or strong. Tides pull creatures away from shore when the tide is going out and toward it when coming in, and are usually weak. Riptides are an exception, creating a strong current that pulls creatures away from shore. Undertows pull creatures downward in the water, and can be weak or strong.

When a swimming creature starts their turn in a current or enters one for the first time on a turn, they can choose whether to be pulled with the current or attempt to resist it. A creature who wishes to resist a current and remain where they are, or who wishes to move in any direction other than the one in which the current is flowing, must make a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check for a weak current, or a DC 15 check for a strong current. A creature with a swimming speed has advantage on this check. A creature who chooses to be pulled with the current or who fails the ability check to resist it is pulled 10 feet for a weak current or 20 feet for a strong current, moving in the direction the current flows.

Disorientation

When a creature underwater can't sense the direction of the surface above or the bottom below them, they are in danger of becoming disoriented and confusing up with down. When a blinded, dazed,[1] or deafened creature starts their turn underwater, they must make a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, the creature becomes disoriented until the start of their next turn or until the blinded, dazed, or deafened condition ends, whichever comes first. A creature who moves while disoriented must roll a d6 and consult the Disorientation Direction table to determine their direction.

Disorientation Direction

d6	Direction
1	Deeper into the water
2	North
3	South
4	East
5	West
6	Up toward the surface

Kelp Forest

Many bodies of water contain underwater "forests" of kelp, seaweed, and other plant life, which can pose special challenges for creatures swimming through them. When a kelp forest fills an area of water, that area is difficult terrain and maximum visibility with bright light or darkvision drops to 30 feet.

In a thick kelp forest, creatures and objects more than 15 feet away from each other have half cover, and creatures moving through the area might also become entangled. In such dense-growing areas, a creature must make a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check the first time they move on their turn. On a failure, they become tangled in strands of kelp and can't move. A creature tangled in kelp can use 15 feet of movement to repeat the ability check, freeing themself on a success.

Any 5-foot cube of kelp has AC 9, 10 hit points, and immunity to psychic damage. Destroying the kelp frees a creature trapped in it.

[1] See the Glossary at the end of this issue for more information on the dazed condition.

Devouring Kelp Forest

Kelp forests corrupted by malevolent magic, such as might be found near a sea hag coven's lair or an area haunted by undead, can become carnivorous and even semi-sentient. Such kelp forests don't grow as densely as normal kelp, since devouring kelp bereft of flesh to feed on quickly consumes its neighbors.

As soon as fresh prey approaches, devouring kelp reaches out to snare it. A creature who moves for the first time on their turn in a devouring kelp forest must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or be grappled (escape DC 13). At the start of their first turn grappled by devouring kelp, a creature takes 5 (2d4) necrotic damage. Each round that a creature remains grappled, the kelp twines more tightly around them, increasing the escape DC by 1 and dealing an additional 1d4 necrotic damage at the start of each of the creature's turns—increasing the damage to 7 (3d4), 10 (4d4), and so on.

Any 5-foot cube of devouring kelp has AC 11, 10 hit points, and immunity to necrotic and psychic damage. Destroying the kelp frees a creature grappled by it.

Shipwreck

The watery graves of sunken ships become a haven for sea life, which flourishes even as a ship and its sailors decay. Adventurers might venture to a shipwreck in search of sunken treasure, a lost item, or to solve the mystery of a not-so-accidental wreck.

The Random Shipwreck Encounters table details a number of potential encounters you can use in an undersea adventure, or as inspiration for creating encounters of your own. If an encounter includes a variable number of creatures, choose a number appropriate for your party's level and the desired encounter difficulty.

Random Shipwreck Encounters

d12	Direction
1	A coven of **sea hags** and their **pet warp shark**‡ lair in this rotting galleon, now decorated with the bones of drowned sailors.
2	This merchant ship contains potions or magic items, and is now home to **arcane remoras**‡ who are slowly draining the cargo of its magic.
3	This underwater ship was built atop a living dragon turtle, and is now a dragon turtle skeleton infested with **swarms of zombie worms** (see below in this article). If the characters are 12th level or higher, the **dragon turtle** is an Undead creature with immunity to poison damage, exhaustion, and the poisoned condition, and whose Steam Breath attack deals necrotic damage instead of fire damage.
4	A young **hound shark**‡ lives in the wreckage of this caravel. The shark is friendly to any creature who feeds them meat and succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check, made with advantage if the meat is fresh fish.
5	This ancient frigate appears to be empty of life, but an **aranoth**‡ lurks nearby, hungry for new memories.
6	This *rainbow scale boat** bobs on the surface of the water, frozen in a block of unmelting ice. The ice can be melted by dealing 200 fire damage to it within 1 minute, or by using the destroy water option of the *create or destroy water* spell cast at 3rd level, or cast three times at 1st level.
7	Every inch of this sloop is covered with a layer of sparkling frost. The water within 30 feet of it is unusually clear and bone-chillingly cold, thanks to the the rime elementals (use the **ice mephit** stat block, but with a swimming speed of 30 feet and the ability to breathe underwater) stranded inside the ship. Each creature who starts their turn in this water or within the ship, or who enters either area for the first time on a turn, takes 3 (1d6) cold damage.
8	Carved fins decorate the hull and rails of this once-beautiful schooner, whose prow still bears the name *Feasting Fin*, but which has been split into two jagged halves by some colossal force. The captain's quarters contain waterlogged scrolls, as well as three *spell scrolls of water breathing* in a sealed case and six bottles of fine rum.
9	This barnacle-encrusted trireme is swarming with similarly barnacle-encrusted skeletons. The ship's former crew each use the skeleton stat block but have a swimming speed of 30 feet and the following action option: **Barnacle-Encrusted Oar.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d10) bludgeoning damage and 3 (1d6) piercing damage.
10	A **giant spider crab** (see below in this article) and a **giant sea horse** are locked in combat atop this sunken longboat.
11	This *sharkboat*‡ is in pristine condition, but is trapped under a massive **megalodon**‡ carcass.
12	The water is fetid and murky around this strange vessel, whose front half is buried beneath the ocean floor at a steep angle. Originally a planar craft that suffered a malfunction when transiting between planes, its presence has spawned an **eldritch anemone** (see below in this article) dwelling in the shadow of the listing hull.

‡ See "Captain Ralazar's Guide to Sea Monsters" in this issue.

* See "The Ballad of Captain Shivershank" in this issue.

CREATURES OF THE DEEPS

Many and strange are the beings that lurk in the murky depths of the sea.

Deep-Sea Creatures

Challenge Rating	Creature
1	Giant spider crab
2	Swarm of zombie worms
4	Dire jelly
6	Angler shark
8	Eldritch anemone

Angler Shark

The angler shark is a deep-sea ambush predator, waiting in the darkness with a glowing antenna dangling out in front of them to distract prey. When a foolish creature ventures toward the light, the shark lunges out of the murk with massive, horrifying jaws open wide, and devours everything in the area.

Angler Shark

Large Beast, Unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 105 (10d10 + 50)
Speed 0 ft., swim 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	13 (+1)	21 (+5)	3 (–4)	12 (+1)	3 (–4)

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +7
Senses blindsight 120 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages —
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Ambusher. In the first round of a combat, the shark has advantage on attack rolls against any creature who hasn't acted yet.

Light Lure. The shark's glowing antenna sheds dim light in a 5-foot radius and extends 10 feet in front of the shark, leaving the shark untouched by the light. The shark can turn the light on or off at will (no action required).

Light Devourer. When light created by the shark's Light Lure trait is on, the area within 120 feet of the shark is shrouded in magical darkness, except for the area of dim light created by Light Lure. Nonmagical light can't penetrate this darkness, and creatures in the darkness can only see the shark's light, even with darkvision. If this darkness overlaps with an area of light created by a spell of 3rd level or lower, the spell that created the light is dispelled.

Water Breathing. The shark can breathe only underwater.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (3d10 + 6) piercing damage, plus an extra 14 (4d6) piercing damage if the shark had advantage on the attack roll. A Medium or smaller creature hit by this attack is grappled (escape DC 16). Until this grapple ends, the creature is restrained and the shark can't make a Bite attack against another target

Reactions

Strobe. When a creature within 10 feet of the shark makes an attack against them, the shark quickly flashes the light created by their Light Lure trait. If the attacking creature relies on sight, they have disadvantage on their attack roll.

DIRE JELLY

The dire jelly is a jellyfish of massive proportions. They hide in plain sight as they float through the water, their translucent body difficult to see. More than one fish—or swimmer—has suddenly found themself in the grasp of a dire jelly, paralyzed and struggling to survive. Dire jellies eat any living creatures they can—plankton, fish, and mammal alike—devouring all the available prey in one area, then traveling hundreds of miles in search of their next hunting grounds.

Dire Jelly

Large Beast, Unaligned

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 60 (8d10 + 16)
Speed 0 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (–2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	1 (–4)	11 (+0)	3 (–4)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Con +4
Skills Perception +2, Stealth +5
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, cold, poison
Damage Immunities psychic
Senses passive Perception 12
Languages —
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Translucent. Even when the dire jelly is in plain sight, it takes a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check to spot a jelly who has neither moved nor attacked. A creature who tries to enter the dire jelly's space while unaware of the jelly is surprised by the dire jelly.

Water Breathing. The dire jelly can breathe only underwater.

Actions

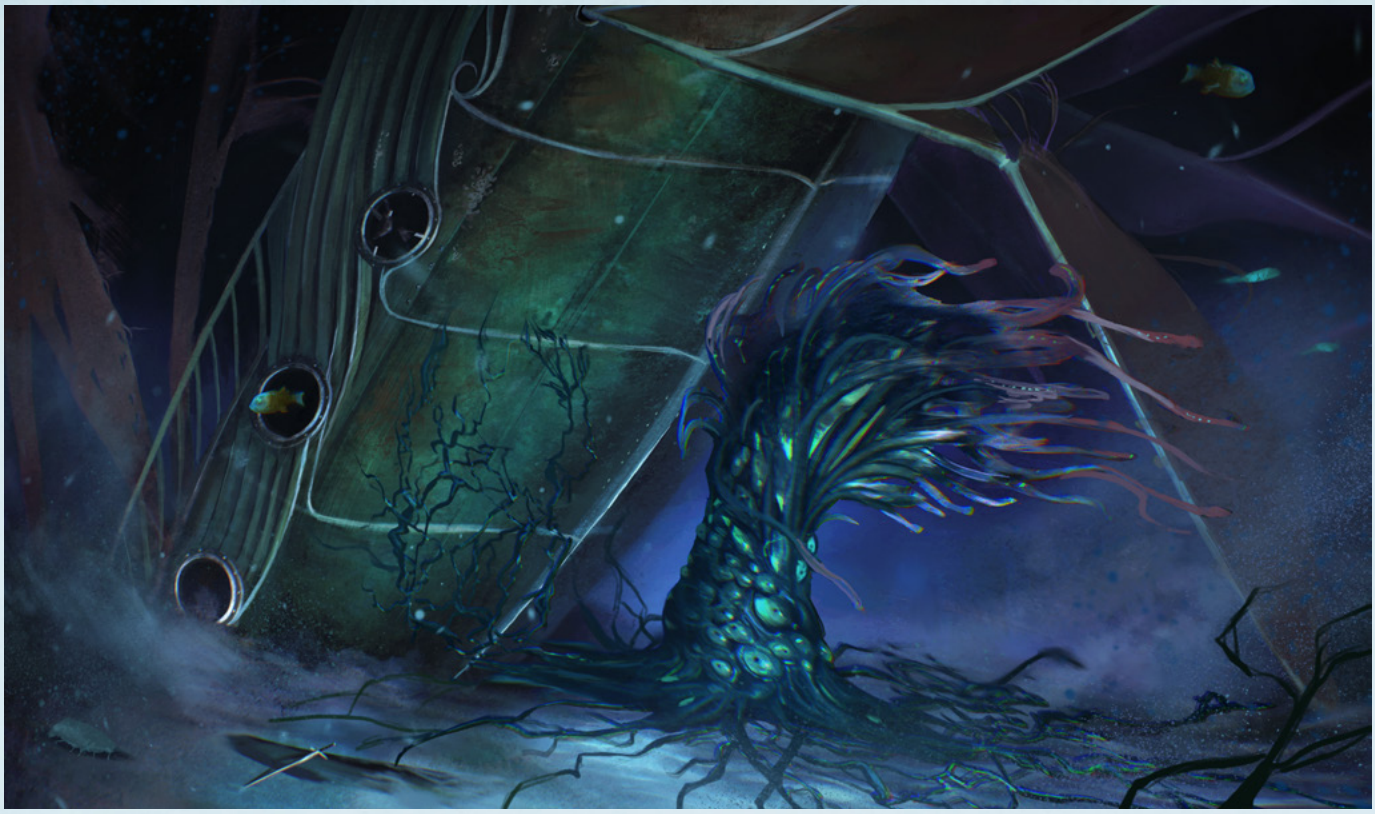
Multiattack. The dire jelly makes two attacks, either with their Grasping Arms or their Stinging Tentacles.

Grasping Arms. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 15 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 1 bludgeoning damage plus 9 (2d8) acid damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 13). If the target is Medium or smaller, they are also restrained until this grapple ends. While grappling the target, the dire jelly has advantage on attack rolls against them and can't use this attack against other targets. When the dire jelly moves, any Medium or smaller target they are grappling moves with them.

Stinging Tentacles. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 15 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 1 bludgeoning damage plus 18 (4d8) acid damage. If the attack is a critical hit, the target is paralyzed until the start of the dire jelly's next turn.

Reactions

Contract. Whenever the dire jelly is subjected to an effect that allows them to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, they contract their body away from the brunt of the damage, taking no damage if they succeed on the saving throw and only half damage if they fail.



Eldritch Anemone

Sea creatures who dwell near places of magical power and otherworldly influence are sometimes warped by energies from beyond this reality. One such entity is the eldritch anemone, a stationary predator who hungers for flesh.

Eldritch Anemone

Large Aberration, Unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 133 (14d10 + 56)
Speed 0 ft., swim 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	8 (–1)	19 (+4)	3 (–4)	13 (+1)	6 (–2)

Damage Resistances cold, necrotic, poison, psychic
Condition Immunities blinded, deafened, poisoned
Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 11
Languages —
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Fetid Miasma. The eldritch anemone contaminates the water within 60 feet of them. Any creature who breathes underwater and who enters this area for the first time on a turn or starts their turn there must hold their breath or make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the creature is poisoned until the start of their next turn. Eldritch anemones are immune to this effect.

Water Breathing. The eldritch anemone can breathe only underwater.

Actions

Multiattack. The eldritch anemone makes three attacks: one with their Bite and two with their Tentacles.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be dazed[2] for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themself on a success.

Tentacles. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage plus 4 (1d8) poison damage.

Bonus Actions

Turbid Vortex. The eldritch anemone churns the water within 60 feet of them. Each Large or smaller creature in the area must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be pulled 30 feet closer to the eldritch anemone.

[2] See the Glossary at the end of this issue for more information on the dazed condition.

Giant Spider Crab

The giant spider crab prowls ocean reefs, waiting for larger fish and mammals to swim within reach of their sharp pincers. The crab's red-orange carapace is a mere five feet across, but their ten many-jointed legs (two of which end in clawed pincers) are each six feet long. The spider crab isn't an adept swimmer, but their multitude of limbs let them scuttle across the ocean floor or up the sides of a ship with ease.

Giant Spider Crab

Large Beast, Unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 22 (3d10 + 6)
Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	15 (+2)	15 (+2)	2 (–4)	11 (+0)	4 (–3)

Skills Athletics +5, Stealth +4
Senses darkvision 60 ft., blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages —
Challenge 1 (200 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Amphibious. The crab can breathe air and water.

Camouflage. The crab has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide in reefs and on the ocean floor.

Ocean Scuttler. The crab takes no penalties to their movement or attacks for being underwater.

Actions

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 13). The crab has two claws, each of which can grapple only one target.

Reactions

Shed Limb. When the crab takes damage from a source they can see, they shield themself with one of their limbs, reducing the damage by half and shedding the limb that protected them. The crab can use this reaction up to four times, after which they must spend 30 days regrowing the lost limbs. While the crab is missing two or more limbs, they have disadvantage on Strength- or Dexterity-based attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws.

Zombie Worms

Zombie worms are inch-long undulating tubes of undead flesh who crave and devour the bones of the living and the dead. Most commonly found along the ocean floor where massive creatures have died to leave behind skeletal remains, zombie worms attack anything with a skeleton. They often hide inside the hollowed-out skeletons of large creatures, waiting to swarm out when potential prey comes near.

Swarm of Zombie Worms

Medium Swarm of Tiny Undead, Unaligned

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 36 (8d8)
Speed 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (–1)	17 (+3)	11 (+0)	1 (–5)	10 (+0)	3 (–4)

Damage Resistances necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities psychic, poison
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, stunned
Senses blindsight 10 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 10
Languages —
Challenge 2 (450 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Bone Sense. The swarm knows the location of every creature with a skeleton within 30 feet of them, even if those creatures are hidden.

Shrink. When the swarm is reduced to half their hit points, their size becomes Small.

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny worm. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

Undead Nature. The swarm is made up of tiny Undead that don't require air, food, drink, or sleep.

Actions

Multiattack. If the swarm has more than half their hit points, they make two Bite attacks.

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 0 ft., one creature in the swarm's space. Hit: 5 (2d4) piercing damage, and a target with a skeleton must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, worms begin to burrow through the target's flesh in search of their bones, and the target is infested. While infested, a creature takes 5 (2d4) necrotic damage at the start of each of their turns. A creature can repeat the saving throw after taking this damage, ending the infested effect on themself on a success.

THE BALLAD OF CAPTAIN SHIVERSHANK

A guide to making pirate adventures and the tale of the most fearsome sailor

by Willy Abeel

♪♩ And in one-fell-swoop,
She made me ship-done-sank,
And now I wave her banner,
Captain Shi-ver-shank! ♩♪

–Excerpt from *The Ballad of Captain Shivershank*

Here there be campaign treasure!

This article is a trove of tools for building a piratical campaign, complete with quest hooks, encounter ideas, rules, and a group patron. Your player characters can become swashbuckling pirates serving a larger-than-life pirate captain, or you can take the parts that inspire you and shove off on other seafaring adventures.

If you use the framework here to run a campaign, it's designed to begin around 3rd level and culminate at 12th level or beyond. However, as befits a piratical campaign, it's intentionally flexible so you can chart your own course: the characters can begin at any level, or you could introduce a seafaring arc into an existing storyline (see the "Starting Mid-Campaign" sidebar below).

But first things first—it all starts with Captain Shivershank.

BACKGROUND

Everyone once knew about lachomps (la-SHAUMF), a hardy nautical people whose teeth were almost as sharp as their skin. Their skin could cut through reality, allowing them to "swim" across any surface. And yet they've all but vanished from public memory over the last 400 years. A few records of lachomps and their societies remain, but even many multi-centenarians have never heard of them.

Shivershank is the last living lachomp and one of the most fearsome seafarers alive. Her tale started centuries ago, when her first ship was destroyed by a ruthless sailor—his name lost to time—who offered her the choice to die on her own or join his crew. Within the year, she had killed the captain and taken over his ship. She now offers the same choice to all her victims, confident the same fate will never befall her.

As a pirate, Shivershank strove to become the greatest and single most important lachomp in existence. Her voyages led her to learn of the *Wishes 100*, a legendary wishing wheel said to make the wielder's wildest dreams a reality, and she had the nautical prowess to claim it herself. When it granted her wish, it vanished—as did every other lachomp. Shivershank was left alone with the weight of her actions.

Centuries passed before new rumors surfaced of a *Wishes 99* hidden where only the strongest vessels dare sail. Shivershank, now captain of seven ships, continues to expand her fleet and resources, working to claim that magic wheel once more. It won't be long before she can reword her wish to what she **actually** meant the first time, restoring the people she unwittingly destroyed and securing her legacy.

Setting the Campaign

The material presented here should work in any existing setting with an ocean, rich nobles, and a seafaring society. The locations create a familiar, personable stomping ground, while the groups offer connections that ground players in the setting.

Porta Ricchezze. This midsize trading port is home to many old sailors telling tall tales of past adventures. The town is filled with niche storefronts, guildsmen crafters, and a small ranch.

Calcolo's. This seedy tavern stands as a safe house for all people. It's one of the best places in town for pirates to make deals and find work, including a very active bounty board. Calcolo, a salty coalder[1] with huge arms covered in tattoos and a long, oily ponytail, ensures no guards meddle in the tavern's business.

The Oroboriosos. The Oroborioso noble family controls most of the trade out of Porta Ricchezze. Employing their own boats and privateers, they hoard their wealth in a castle on a remote island, but their ultimate aim is to claim one of every magic item of rare or greater rarity for their family's museum. They have some history with Shivershank—or, more accurately, bad blood.

The Navigallant. Everyone talks about the Navigallant in whispers. They're a loose network of sailors and pirates who share rumors of treasure and high-paying jobs in exchange for protecting each other from raiders and monsters. Shivershank isn't a part of the Navigallant, but she won't pass up information acquired by the few of her crewmates who are.

Ships, Sharks, Terrors, and Hazards

The rest of this article contains references to specific boat sizes and titanic versions of creatures called Sea Terrors. These are optional rules and additions that can be found toward the end of the article (see "New Rules") and are underlined wherever they appear.

In addition, certain monsters, vehicles, and undersea hazards come from the sibling articles in this issue of *ARCADIA*: "Captain Ralazar's Guide to Sea Monsters" by James Introcaso and "Perils of the Deeps" by Gwendolyn Marshall. These will be **bolded** (and cited) wherever they appear, so keep those articles handy! If a stat block doesn't cite either of those articles, it's found in the core rules.[2]

Starting an Adventure

These plot hooks provide opportunities for the adventurers to go on the account[3] as members of Shivershank's crew:

Fishing Boat. The adventurers have individually signed onto a fishing job that pays suspiciously well (10 gp for a day's haul). It's a quiet day of casting nets off a mid boat and sharing tall tales. Suddenly, the ship is hit by cannon fire and beset by **bandits** led by **Captain Shivershank** (see "Meeting Shivershank" later in this article for her stat block). Turns out the fishing boat was captained by a deserter who took some of her treasure, and she intends to sink it.

Shivershank realizes the adventurers have nothing to do with the deserter and offers the option to join her crew—an opportunity to gain far more wealth than fishing would pay. If the adventurers refuse, the pirates drop them off at the nearest port and strip them of any equipment worth more than 10 gp (as "payment").

Gnome Alone. The adventurers are in a tavern filled to the gills with **thugs**, **bandits**, and a neatly dressed gnome minding his own business (Quartermaster Crollenoak, described in "Shivershank as a Patron" later in this article). Bandits proclaiming to be crewmates of the deadly pirate Johnny Jones (detailed under "Rival Crews" later in this article) harrass Crollenoak for his service to Shivershank, shoving him around in jeering that borders on violence. The other patrons laugh and egg on the bandits unless the adventurers step in to help Crollenoak. Whether or not they do, the commotion stumbles into the next table and erupts into a tavern-wide brawl. While in combat with the bandits, a creature must succeed on a DC 8 Strength or Dexterity saving throw (their choice) at the end of each of their turns or be knocked prone amid the commotion.

Should the adventurers withstand the violence, the gnome recognizes their toughness and invites them to be members of his captain's crew. He'll add that the adventurers are most likely on Jones' hit list now, but he can provide them with gear to keep Jones at bay ... budget permitting.

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[1] Coalders are large, rocky humanoids with marbled skin and oily hair who walk on their massive knuckles. Everything you need to play Calcolo is here, but you can learn more about the coalders in "The Big and the Small" from *ARCADIA* 14.

[2] Some of the creatures from the core rules mentioned in this article (including night hags, harpies, aboleths, and vampires) have new stat blocks in the upcoming *Flee, Mortals! The MCDM Monster Book*. These stat blocks are available now in preview packets for those who have backed or preordered the book.

[3] Go on the account: A "professional" way of saying "to become a pirate."

Starting Mid-Campaign

All adventures can become pirate adventures with enough saltwater and a treasure map. If you're in the middle of an existing campaign and want to use material from this article, introduce your adventurers to Quartermaster Crollenoak. He's on an expedition to retrieve an old treasure map that got landlocked centuries ago, but his crew got killed by monsters the sea dogs couldn't handle. He talks to his captain about sharing the treasure with the adventurers if they're willing to help.

Alternatively, any nearby body of water can serve as an ephemeral portal into the Mirror domain (described under "Random Sea Encounters"). A helpless commoner falls in, or the portal ensnares the adventurers, dropping them in the middle of Shivershank's crew fending off vampires.



Meeting Shivershank

When the party meets Captain Shivershank for the first time, read aloud:

> A stocky, 10-foot-tall figure stands straight, a toothy grimace stretching across her lipless face. Her scarred, cerulean skin is taut and shiny, only hinting at an endless array of sharp scales from afar. Her dark frock coat is salted and fettered, but still carries a sense of dignity as it lines her imposing build.

If the characters are all under 400 years old:

> You've never seen *anyone* like her before.

Otherwise:

> It's like looking at someone who walked out of a long-forgotten past.

Pirate Leader

Captain Shivershank has the Leader role, which means that she's an action-oriented creature who fights alongside underlings, and has three villain actions in her stat block. (See the Glossary for more information about villain actions.) You can also learn more about creature roles in the free preview packet for *Flee, Mortals! The MCDM Monster Book*.

Captain Shivershank CR 16 Leader (15,000 XP)

Large Humanoid (Lachomp), Neutral Evil

Armor Class 20 (Natural Scales)
Hit Points 161 (19d10 + 57)
Speed 30 ft., swim 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +9, Wis +8
Skills Athletics +11, Insight +8, Intimidation +9, Stealth +9
Damage Immunities cold; piercing from mundane sources[4]
Condition Immunities frightened, poisoned
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Abyssal, Aquan, Common, Lachompagne
Proficiency Bonus +5

Amphibious. Shivershank can breathe air and water.

Captain of Legend (1/Turn). If Shivershank fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead. Until the start of her next turn, her AC is reduced by a cumulative 5, her speed is reduced by a cumulative 10 feet, and she is unable to use her Surfacesurf trait.

Natural Scales. Shivershank's rough skin gives her an AC of 20. Whenever a creature misses a melee attack against Shivershank, or if Shivershank successfully makes a melee attack against a creature, that creature takes 7 (3d4) slashing damage (included in her attacks).

Surfacesurf. Shivershank can supernaturally swim within a solid surface, such as the ground or along the surface of a wall, as if it were water. While moving in this way, Shivershank doesn't provoke opportunity attacks, but she can't change directions until she enters a body of water. At the end of her turn, Shivershank emerges from a solid surface if she hasn't already.

Actions

Multiattack. Shivershank makes two Scimitar attacks and one Boot or Flintlock attack.
Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 20 (2d6 + 3d4 + 6) slashing damage.
Boot. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d4 + 6) bludgeoning damage plus 7 (3d4) slashing damage, and the target is knocked prone.
Flintlock. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d10 + 4) piercing damage, and the target is pushed 5 feet away from Shivershank, or knocked prone if they are in midair.

Bonus Actions

Fight or Die! Shivershank commands a willing creature within 30 feet of her to use their reaction to make a weapon attack with advantage. If the attack hits, it deals an extra 7 (3d4) damage of the weapon's type. If the attack misses, the attacking creature is immediately reduced to 0 hit points.

Stunt. Shivershank can use a creature, object, or structure to propel herself to an unoccupied space she can see within 30 feet of her.

Reactions

Flex. Shivershank halves the damage she takes from an attack made against her.

Villain Actions

Shivershank has three villain actions.[5] She can take each action once during an encounter after an enemy creature's turn. She can take these actions in any order but can only use one per round.

Action 1: Fire! Shivershank fires her flintlock at three separate targets she can see within range. Each creature of Shivershank's choice within 60 feet of her who has a ranged weapon can make an attack with that weapon with advantage (no action required).

Action 2: Surf the Turf. Shivershank swims up to her speed in a straight line along the ground or the water. This movement doesn't provoke opportunity attacks and passing through creatures and objects doesn't cost her extra movement. She can make one Scimitar attack against each creature within 5 feet of the line. Each space she passes through becomes difficult terrain. Each 5-foot-square portion of the area requires at least 1 minute to clear by hand (if it's solid ground) or returns to normal terrain at the end of her next turn (if it's water).

Action 3: Chomp. Shivershank bites off the head of a willing creature within 5 feet of her. The target immediately dies, and Shivershank regains half her hit points and her attacks deal an extra 1d6 slashing damage until she finishes a long rest.

Roleplaying Shivershank

Captain Shivershank's actions are **always** justified. She never takes fault for any mishaps—even the situation with *Wishes 100* was, from her perspective, entirely outside her control.

Shivershank is loud and boisterous, with enough life experience to back up her orders. She's cocky enough to let her crew do as they please, save for embarrassing her. This charisma leads to many of her opponents becoming loyal members of her crew.

The captain is slow to form attachments to people, but respects reliable or scrappy individuals who aggressively pursue their ambitions. She'll eventually come around to protecting individuals she treasures, sharing stories, and showing vulnerability given enough time in good company.

But Shivershank's words are always a little barbed. Anything people say in her presence will be used against them eventually. As the GM, be wary of how often you wield this sharp sense of humor against the player characters, but lean into it often when harassing nobility or Johnny Jones (see "Rival Crews" later in this article).

Shivershank as a Patron

Captain Shivershank commands seven ships and splits her time among each of them as needed, maintaining a presence across all her crews. She may stay on the characters' ship, the *Squalo*, for a voyage or two when they're first starting out and observe how the adventurers fare. Afterward, seeing the captain is an uncommon occurrence.

While under her patronage, the party has access to the following resources:

The Squalo. This mid boat is the oldest ship in Shivershank's fleet. The floorboards creak underfoot, but she still cuts through the water like a hungry shark. Still, the old tub requires a good crew to keep her afloat; she's maintained by 7 crew members (**thugs**) of all makes and motives, who focus on sailing the ship while adventurers tend to their matters.

Quartermaster Crollenoak. The stern, no-nonsense gnome (**spy**) with pop bottle glasses is the main line of communication from and to Shivershank. The adventurers get their assignments, payments, and provisions (at a price) through Crollenoak, who sails with the characters on the *Squalo*.

Surgeon Stitches. One of the *Squalo*'s crew is a peppy undead elf (use the **zombie** stat block but she has Intelligence and Wisdom scores of 15 (+2) and she speaks Common and Elvish) who's covered in beautiful tattoos masking her rows of stitches. In addition to providing up to six *cure wounds* a day (at 1st level), she can stitch up a creature and bring them back to life, as long as they still have a body (at your discretion, changing their creature type to Undead).

Bail. Members of Captain Shivershank's crew who are jailed, put in gibbets, or sentenced to death are guaranteed a rescue attempt. The adventurers may be asked to provide the same for their crewmates.

Shivershank's Fleet

The seven ships of Shivershank's fleet are as follows. Each boat is crewed by a motley of pirates with attitudes that match their vessel:

- The *Squalo* (mid), the adventurers' boat
- The *Zephyr* (mid), the fastest crew
- The *Oroboriosa* (mid), the sneakiest crew
- The *Calico* (big), the loudest crew
- The *Arach* (big), the unsinkable crew
- *Sher Rex* (big), the reckless crew
- The *Tortuga* (a **dragon turtle**), the toughest crew, also described under "Rival Crews" later in the article

After completing several quests, the characters might be invited to become officers on the *Squalo* (or a different boat), granting them higher pay and authority. Alternatively, if they find a ship of their own during their adventures, they could command that vessel as a new ship in Shivershank's fleet.

A Share of the Booty

Each adventurer typically gains 2d10 × Character Level gold for completing a quest (see "Quest Hooks" below), should their crew and boat survive. If they are officers, that number is doubled. Any treasure they find when on their own is also theirs to keep—but when a ship-to-ship battle garners treasure, that haul is split among the crew.

As captain of the fleet, Shivershank claims 10% of every haul. If the characters end up in charge of their own ship, Quartermaster Crollenoak handles payment for their crew and ensures that Shivershank receives her share.

Notably, the ship's crew, including the characters, are paid while on a quest from Shivershank, even if the quest doesn't yield any treasure. Shivershank's hefty cut is funding her search for *Wishes 99*, which includes keeping her crew content to carry out the jobs she chooses.

Composing the Ballad

This campaign follows a cadence of performing quests and leveling up until the adventurers are ready to face a major event. Through Crollenoak, Shivershank sends the adventurers quests such as smuggling goods, defeating pirate competition, and harrying royalty (they can also pick up these opportunities at ports, or through the Navigallant if they join that alliance). As the adventurers grow in notoriety and coin, they'll have the option to either face Shivershank herself or team up with her to acquire *Wishes 99*.

The "Major Events," "Quest Hooks," and "Rival Crews" sections below are rife with encounters, characters, and events for you to use throughout the campaign, and the "Random Sea Encounters" section presents complications for each quest. Even if you follow the described structure, don't be afraid to mix and match elements that best fit your table's rhythm. Chart your course, but work with the winds of fortune.

Since these quests each involve an entire journey, as described in "Voyage Timing and Preparations" below, it's okay to have the characters level up quickly if you want a faster campaign. Three or four sessions to journey to a location, accomplish their goal, and return to port might represent several weeks at sea.

With Her or Against Her?

The adventurers' actions determine if the end goal is helping Captain Shivershank and acquiring *Wishes 99* or defeating Shivershank themselves. It could even be both, or something of your own invention!

If the players want to help Shivershank, they must learn what it means to be a pirate, becoming stronger and earning her trust until she opens up to them about the wishing wheel. As they adventure with her, they'll be faced with the harsh realities of piracy, such as in the *Royal Flush* major event, and contend with her enemies and demons from all across the sea.

If the party's goal is to defeat Captain Shivershank, provide the characters with ample opportunities to form alliances with pirates on her other ships who don't want to serve under her anymore, especially the mighty crew of the *Tortuga*. You can look to the *Whispers of Mutiny* major event—keep in mind that Shivershank's patronage lasts right up until she considers the adventurers a threat, and she knows everything Quartermaster Crollenoak tells her.

The tone you set with Shivershank will be the tone for the entire campaign. The players should be able to tell where they stand with Shivershank when she appears, whether she's personable to them or a silent threat looming on the horizon. After the *Winds of Change* major event, the end goal of the campaign will be in plain sight.

A Neutral Campaign

Pirates always operate on their own terms. They can hurt people for personal gain and can be ruthlessly cruel when they want to send a message.

How is this neutral? It comes down to the framing and motivation of the campaign. Shivershank's pirates only hurt people standing between them and *Wishes 99*. They aggrieve nobles who would recoup their losses more often than raiding fishing boats. Her actions might even better society by limiting the power of the nobles or bounty hunting particularly dangerous threats to laypeople.

In an evil campaign, Shivershank's goal might be to conquer the land as its sole ruler or destroy the land and all life there to usher in a world of ships as queen of the sea. The cruelty is the point, rather than a consequence of selfish behavior.

Neutral or evil, society won't always be good to pirate adventurers. Pirates will scare commoners and be hunted by nobles, and renown will follow them in infamy and wanted posters. They might only find refuge among other pirates (a risky resort), dubious shops, and the saltiest of taverns.

Major Events

The following quests and encounters are pivotal to Shivershank's relationship with the adventurers and should occur once per campaign. Some events include a recommended minimum party level, which is calibrated for a party of five characters, but the party's resources and allies could tip the scales—ultimately, you know your group best.

How Much?

Shivershank entrusts the adventurers with gold and treasure (worth 500,000 gp in total) to bury on an uncharted island. That much money won't go unnoticed by other pirates, but will Shivershank notice if the adventurers take some for themselves? (Yes, she will.) Investigating the haul reveals an oddly mundane box containing a razor-sharp egg, presumably a lachomp egg, that Shivershank **didn't** know about.

Whispers of Mutiny

Every crew across Shivershank's seven ships found a night they were all free to fraternize at Calcolo's. Amid the raucous revelry, two crewmates (most likely from the *Tortuga*) call the adventurers off to the side and ask them to help take down Shivershank from the inside. They feel

that such a massive crew would be much richer if she wasn't captain and question her mysterious reasons for hoarding so much treasure and frequently sending her ships on unprofitable missions.

If the adventurers agree to help, the mutineers suggest meeting weekly in secret at the tavern to discuss how to recruit the crews on the other ships while keeping both Shivershank and Crollenoak unaware. When the adventurers are tough enough to take her on, it'll be time to stage the mutiny.

If the adventurers instead tell Shivershank of the event, the captain loudly calls the mutineers out and invites them to "**try it or die!**" When the *Tortuga*'s crew later becomes a rival crew (see "Rival Crews" later in this article), they'll taunt Shivershank by calling back to this moment.

Royal Flush

For characters of 8th level or higher

A noble family declares a showdown with Shivershank's crew via a black feather dipped in blood and delivered to Captain Shivershank in a mahogany box. In one week, Shivershank will need all her ships to meet the noble fleet at a point offshore. The nobles have 10 big ships, including the impressive Crown Royale, and one **young gold dragon**. The crew's goal is to defeat or fend off the nobles and take the Crown Royale for themselves.

Winds of Change

Captain Shivershank calls the adventurers into a private meeting with her and Crollenoak. The quartermaster rattles off all of the adventurers' exploits up until now, including each instance of helping the captain or crossing her. Before now, they were free to do as they please without recourse, but Shivershank is no longer able to consider them anything but formidable peers.

If Shivershank favors the adventurers, she tells them about her past with *Wishes 100* and why she now seeks *Wishes 99*. She's finally discovered its location and she's almost ready to set sail and take it, but she needs their help to reach it. Should she have their support, Crollenoak provides each adventurer with a rare magic ring item of their choice (the GM should determine which rings are available to select from).

If Shivershank distrusts the adventurers, she officially kicks them out of her crew. She makes it clear that the next time they meet on the ocean will be as enemies. The adventurers are provided safe passage back to landfall if needed, and then her patronage is terminated.



Finale: Wishes 99

For characters of 12th level or higher

If the adventurers stick with Shivershank, she takes the helm of either the *Squalo*, the *Oroboriosa*, or *Sher Rex* and sails with the adventurers to the location of *Wishes 99*. It rests on a quiet island covered in lachomp ruins in the eye of an endless hurricane, guarded by a Sea Terror **kraken** that fights to the death. On the way, the ship is beset by Shivershank's demons and any remaining rivals looking to settle the score (see "Rival Crews" later in this article).

If she survives, Shivershank finally makes her wish: for all the lachomp erased by *Wishes 100* to come back, each with the knowledge of Captain Shivershank as the most legendary sailor of all time.

Wishes 99 disappears. The world quakes once, as if it suddenly bears a greater weight. A lone lachomp walks up on shore looking **very** confused. Back at port, lachomps can be found loading up ships, shopping, and carousing as if nothing happened.

Shivershank shares her remaining amassed wealth with her crew, and then starts planning for her next goal: to prove to the *rest* of the world that she's the most important figure in existence.

Finale: Abandoned Wish

For characters of 12th level or higher

If the adventurers split from Shivershank, it has a profound effect on her. She becomes more and more closed off from everyone. News of deadly encounters with her fleet becomes increasingly common, and other ships stop setting sail out of fear of being sunk. Captain Shivershank is caught in an impenetrable rage.

It isn't long before there's word that she set sail for *Wishes 99* on her own. The adventurers have a chance to gather information on its whereabouts and set off to get it before she does.

Should Shivershank get ahold of *Wishes 99*, she rashly uses it to become "the biggest and most powerful lachomp the world has ever seen" and transforms into a Sea Terror version of herself.

She comes for the adventurers and their allies, ready to fight to the death with or without anyone still on her crew. The victors go down as the toughest pirates to ever live.

Quest Hooks

These assorted tasks come down from Shivershank to all her crews and either lead them to get just enough treasure to keep her crews sated or—unknowingly—further the search for *Wishes 99*. These hooks can be run multiple times per campaign, utilizing different key NPCs, rivals, and time constraints to keep things interesting. The adventurers can initiate some tasks themselves, such as bounty hunting. The "A Share of the Booty" section earlier in this article covers the characters' payment for these quests.

Aquatic Alliance

A **merfolk** liaison agrees to meet representatives of Shivershank's crew at a remote point of the ocean to ferry them to their undersea civilization. The journey leads the characters to the depths of the ocean, either dealing with heavy currents, navigating a dense kelp forest, and/or fending off **angler sharks** (see "Perils of the Deeps").

There, the adventurers can negotiate an exchange of resources for Shivershank's purposes: 50 pounds of land goods and food for a troop of merfolk's protection on the next voyage, escorting a merfolk caravan across the sea to protect them from fishermen for three aquatic mounts[6], or a character's magic item for a treasure map.

Bounty Hunt

The bounty board at Calcolo's (see "Setting the Campaign" earlier in this article) cycles through two new outlaw bounties and one Sea Terror reward each week. An outlaw usually has an accomplice in town who has information on where and when the outlaw will strike next or the location of their hideout at sea. A Sea Terror's dwelling usually rests somewhere far from civilization, but the Sea Terror eventually finds the characters if they don't locate it first.

Bounties require either proof of termination or turning in the restrained target at the local tavern.

Gibbet Break

Either an old ally of Shivershank's or someone who owes her a favor is trapped in a hanging gibbet[7] along the coast, condemned to be dinner for a local Sea Terror. The characters are tasked with breaking them free and bringing them to a safe house. If the characters take too long to arrive, the condemned has been eaten already. If they interrupt dinner, the Sea Terror relentlessly attacks them until the condemned escapes the area. And if the characters are successful, the authorities pursue them to the ends of the sea.

Ransom Paid

The Oroboriosos (or another noble family) have successfully paid the ransom for the return of their young

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[6] You can use any aquatic creature with the appropriate anatomy to serve as a mount. "Swimming through Sand to Sea" in *ARCADIA 4* also offers several aquatic mounts using the *ARCADIA* mounted combat rules, as well as magic items to help mounts adventure in other environments.

[7] Gibbet: In this instance, an iron cage hoisted up in the air used to display criminals.

heir. The heir has been put into the characters' care to be safely transported back to their family's private island. These heirs tend to be either pretentious or precocious and aren't easily frightened. Some might even prefer the pirate's life.

Ship Raid

A *rainbow scale boat*, an expensive mid boat that can withstand stormy weather, has been spotted out at sea. These beautiful boats are usually owned by rich **veterans** or extraplanar fishermen. The characters are tasked with making its crew surrender and bringing back the boat in one piece.

Smuggler's Run

The *Squalo* has been loaded with bundles of one of the following goods: bricks of tea, fine clothing, spellcasting components, bootleg magic items, spirits, or saltpeter[8]. The characters must get the contraband past port officials to a lander[9] awaiting them at a distant dock.

Treasure Trove

Multiple chests of gold and valuables belonging to a noble family, a long-gone sailor, or a young dragon are hidden on a well-guarded island. The trove is hidden in a flooded cave maze only accessible at low tide or buried in several locations marked on a map held by one of Shivershank's confidantes. The characters must seek out information, but the more questions they ask, the more crews they must race for the prize.

War Crimes

Two kingdoms are at war with one another, and that keeps smuggling profitable. The next battle will be staged on a neutral island. The characters' goal is to sabotage either the battlefield or the armies so both kingdoms are weakened and forced to retreat. If either kingdom catches wind of the task, they may create an alliance against the characters.

Rival Crews

As the adventurers level, their adversaries change and increase in difficulty. These rivals appear as complications, either interfering along the way to the location or arriving ahead of the party to challenge them.

Bandits

*Suggested: **bandits**, **thugs**, **scouts**, **dire jellies**, **giant spider crabs** ("Perils of the Deeps"), and Large monsters*

Small-time pirates and raiders are opportunists and vultures. They go after ships that have done all the hard work for them and claim their hoards, using anything they've dredged up from the deep.

Rivals by Level

Characters' Level	Suggested Rivals
1–5	Bandits and Nobles
6–8	Johnny Jones
9–11	The Weller Sisters and Nobles
12–14	The *Tortuga*
15–17	Shivershank's Demons or Captain Shivershank

Nobles

*Suggested: **nobles**, **guards**, **thugs**, **knights**, **veterans**, **mages**, and pet dragons*

These privateers hired by nobles (and often containing glory-chasing nobles themselves) root out pirates for bragging rights and claim their treasure. If the adventurers encounter nobles repeatedly, the nobles hire even tougher threats.

Lady Ossess, the oldest daughter of the Oroboriosos, stands out among the nobles as someone who isn't afraid of doing the dirty work herself. The **veteran** commands a makeshift crew and wants nothing more than to take back the ship Shivershank stole from her family, the *Oroboriosa*.

Johnny Jones

*Suggested: **veterans**, **gladiators**, other **weresharks**, actual sharks*

This sea dog is a longtime, self-professed rival of Captain Shivershank. Captain Jones is a brash dwarven **werershark** (see "Captain Ralazar's Guide to Sea Monsters") with no eyesight and no fear. He and his crew have been chasing Shivershank and trying to upstage her for decades, only to be repeatedly sunk time after time. Now he's targeting her newer crewmates.

No matter how many times Johnny Jones is blown up, sunk, or keelhauled[10], he always manages to come back on a new boat with a new crew at the least opportune time.

The Weller Sisters

*Suggested: **harpies**, **wraiths**, **druids**, **banshees**, and Sea Terror monstrosities*

The Weller Sisters are a terrifying pirate crew of **night hags** who shape the seas to their whims and sink ships to

[8] Saltpeter: A mineral that can be converted into an explosive.
[9] Lander: A contact on shore who receives cargo from smugglers.
[10] Keelhaul: To drag a person under a ship, usually as an excruciating (and often deadly) punishment.

collect easy souls. They sail inside a tooth cabin within the mouth of a Sea Terror sperm whale they control (use the **killer whale** stat block, but with 300 hit points). Should they lose the whale, they'll continue to terrorize the ocean aboard a ghost ship (see "Participants" below).

THE *TORTUGA*

*Suggested: **assassins**, **archmages**, **erinyes**, and a **dragon turtle***

Shivershank's best ship stages a mutiny. Like most of her crew, the *Tortuga* pirates originally sailed under a different captain before Shivershank killed him and took over. They stayed together until they could embezzle enough treasure from hunting Sea Terrors to break away and declare war on Shivershank.

SHIVERSHANK'S DEMONS

*Suggested: Sea Terror versions of **storm giants**, **bone devils**, **aboleths**, and **planetars***

If Shivershank comes to trust the adventurers, they start to see the monsters she faces—literal manifestations of remorse, loneliness, and pride. They chase the party down until *Wishes 99* is finally obtained.

SHIVERSHANK

*Suggested: **Captain Shivershank** and a crew of **gladiators**, **assassins**, and **erinyes**. For parties of 15th-level or higher, replace Crollenoak's stat block with a **pit fiend** (except his size category is Small).*

If Shivershank sees the adventurers as a threat, she throws the might of her crew against them. Wholly focused on acquiring *Wishes 99*, she tears through everyone in her way without hesitation.

SPEAK NAUGHT OF IT

Don't fret if your Sea Terror or Johnny Jones encounter is too tough for your adventurers. The first time their ship is in danger of sinking, Shivershank can swim up and neutralize the threat so that they can escape. She'll deny it ever happened for the rest of the campaign.

RANDOM SEA ENCOUNTERS

Each time you call for an encounter during an excursion, roll for both the environment and participants.

ENVIRONMENTS

The encounter takes place within one of the following environments:

Storm. The sea churns and the waves run high in the wake of a thunderstorm, hurricane, or whirlpool.

SEA ENCOUNTER TABLES

d10	Environment
1	Storm
2	Island
3	Feywild
4	Wreckage
5	Mirror
6–10	— (Clear Seas)

d10	Participant
1	Rivals
2–3	Oceanic Denizens
4	Crew
5	Sea Terror
6	Nobles
7	Ghost Ship
8	Merchants
9–10	—

For 1 minute, whenever a boat tilts, anyone or anything not inside or secured must succeed on a DC 15 Strength save or be knocked overboard. If no one is steering the ship, it takes 2 hits and tilts on initiative count 20 (see "New Rules" later in this article). A creature at the helm can use their action to steer the ship with a DC 10 Strength or Intelligence check. On a success, the ship takes no damage and doesn't tilt. On a failure, the ship tilts.

Island. A nearby island is home to wild beasts, thick foliage, and natural resources. A ship can be careened[11] on the island for repairs as part of a short rest. If the island is left uninvestigated, the next encounter features a rival crew as participants on a roll of 1, 2, 9, or 10.

Feywild. The sea in this area slips into the Feywild. Boats drift through the air (trading their swim speed for a fly speed) and flicker in and out of existence while fey creatures pester the intruders. On initiative count 20, a ship and its occupants teleport 5 × 1d6 feet in a random direction together.

Wreckage. The smoldering remains of a big ship linger here, slowly sinking into the depths. The wreckage can be investigated for equipment, trinkets, and supplies with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Survival) check. Finding a magic item causes undead sailors to emerge and attack intruders. If the wreckage is

[11] Careen: To bring a ship on shore for access to its undercarriage.



left uninvestigated, the next encounter features a Ghost Ship as a participant on a roll of 6, 9, or 10.

Mirror. A solid mirror ceiling hangs 80 feet overhead as the ocean grows foggy below. Creatures can stand on the water here, and giant pillars of water surge on the horizon. Any participants rolled other than Rivals, Crew, or Merchants do not show up here.

This is a domain of **vampires**, who are invisible except for their reflections in the mirror. A creature who uses their bonus action on their turn to keep track of the vampires in a reflective surface ignores the effects of their invisibility. The adventurers can escape if they provide their captors with enough blood (2d10) slashing or piercing damage distributed across 1–2 creatures) or if at least half the vampires are reduced to 0 hit points and are forced to retreat. Each time the adventurers end up here, the vampires demand greater quantities of blood, adding an extra 2d10 damage to their quota.

PARTICIPANTS

The encounter features members from one of the following groups of participants:

Rivals. The adventurers' current rivals are involved, either to complete the task before they do or to cause them harm (see "Rival Crews" earlier in this article).

Oceanic Denizens. **Merfolk**, **sahuagin**, **merrow**, **harpies**, **hydras**, **warp sharks** (see "Captain Ralazar's Guide to Sea Monsters"), and death barnacles (**rust monsters**) make their homes upon or below the sea. They're either curious about the adventurers, threatened by them, in need of help … or hungry (especially in the barnacles' case).

Crew. The adventurers' crew is particularly active. They either participate directly in combat and exploration or make merry during the adventurers' exploits. Anyone who sings a shanty during this encounter gains inspiration.

Sea Terror. A Sea Terror version of a beast, monstrosity, or aberration is lurking here, either to prey upon the adventurers or because it's running from something else.

Nobles. Privateers and mercenaries hired by nobles are always out for pirates, even if they aren't the adventurers' current rivals.

Ghost Ship. A big ship crewed by **ghouls**, **ghosts**, and **skeletons** pursues the adventurers relentlessly until they're destroyed, parlayed with and promised a share of the rewards from the quest the adventurers are on—or

until the adventurers find the cursed treasure on their ship keeping them around.

Merchants. A mid boat crewed by friendly merchants carries expensive magic items and cheap—but cursed—magic items. They're willing to talk business once the area is free of immediate danger.

As a One-Shot

Any of these quest hooks combined with 2–3 sea encounters can make for an exciting one-shot. The adventurers could be racing for the goal against Johnny Jones or Shivershank herself!

For the ideal swashbuckling adventure, use the Treasure Trove hook with a noble family's gold, an encounter on clear seas against the adventurers' rivals, a wreckage encounter involving a ghost ship, and conclude at the trove with a three-way battle between the adventurers, the rivals, and the nobles.

New Rules

These oceanic rules can be added to any game to elevate the feeling of a swashbuckling adventure.

Ships

Ship combat can be as simple or as complex as you prefer. These boat rules are quick and keep the action on the adventurers:

- Boats act on initiative count 20, rolling a d20 to determine order amongst themselves. Boats act before characters and lair actions with the same initiative.
- On its turn, a boat with a helmsperson (or someone steering it) can move and use a special action, as described in the Ship Categories table.
- Mid boats and big ships have access to the Cannon special action described below. The saving throw DC is listed next to the action in the Ship Categories table. Small boats can take either the Dash action or the Dodge action on their turn, but not both.
- Each time a boat takes any damage from a siege weapon (including another ship's cannon) or a spell that doesn't deal psychic or poison damage, it takes a hit. A boat has a maximum number of hits it can take before sinking, which is listed in the Ship Categories table.
- A creature can use their action to help repair the boat where it was hit, temporarily reducing its hit count by 1 for 1 hour. A creature that repairs the boat during a long rest reduces its hit count by 2 (to a minimum of 0).
- When a boat takes 20 or more damage in a single hit, it tilts 45 degrees in a direction of the GM's choice. Until the start of the boat's next turn, its surfaces are considered difficult terrain.

Cannon (Recharge 5–6). The ship fires a cannonball at a point within 150 feet of it. Each creature within a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on that point must make a Dexterity saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) fire damage and 13 (2d12) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The area is filled with fire, which spreads around corners and ignites flammable objects in the area that aren't being worn or carried.

Rainbow Scale Boat

These beautiful, pearlescent mid boats have a speed of 60 feet and immunity to thunder and lightning damage. Their cannons deal 44 (8d10) force damage in place of the fire and bludgeoning damage.

Ship Categories

Category	Typical Crew Size	AC	Hit Max	STR Save	DEX Save	Speed	Special Actions
Small Boat (rowboats, skiffs)	1–3	12	6	+0	+4	15 feet	Dash, Dodge
Mid Boat (sloops, schooners)	10–20	14	12	+2	+4	40 feet	Cannon (DC 10)
Big Ship (barques, galleons)	30–100	16	18	+4	+2	60 feet	Cannon (DC 14)

SEA TERRORS

The sea is home to larger-than-life titans. Use these rules to make fearsome sea monsters on the fly from existing creatures like a **hydra**, **giant crab**, or even a **sea hag**:

- The creature has a swimming speed equal to their highest movement speed.
- Increase the size of the creature by two size categories, to a minimum of Huge. If the creature was already Huge or Gargantuan, also double the space the creature occupies (if the space they occupied was 20 feet by 20 feet, it is now 40 feet by 40 feet).
- The creature has 100 additional hit points if the space they now occupy is at least 20 feet by 20 feet. Otherwise, they have 50 additional hit points. This usually increases the creature's CR by 1–3.
- The creature can target anyone they can see on the deck of an adjacent boat. See "Fighting Sea Terrors from a Ship" for more detail.
- The creature has the following trait:

Siege Monster. The creature deals double damage to objects and structures. If using the new ship rules, a successful attack counts as 2 hits against a boat.

FIGHTING SEA TERRORS FROM A SHIP

While a Sea Terror can reach nearly everything on deck (including the boat itself), the individuals on deck might not be able to reach the Sea Terror. This can be clarified with ship zones; locate a character's position on deck to determine whether they can make a melee attack against the monster.

SHIP COMBAT ZONES

Sea Terrors at Port (broadside left) are in melee range with creatures at Port and Center.

Sea Terrors at Starboard (broadside right) are in melee range with creatures at Starboard and Center.

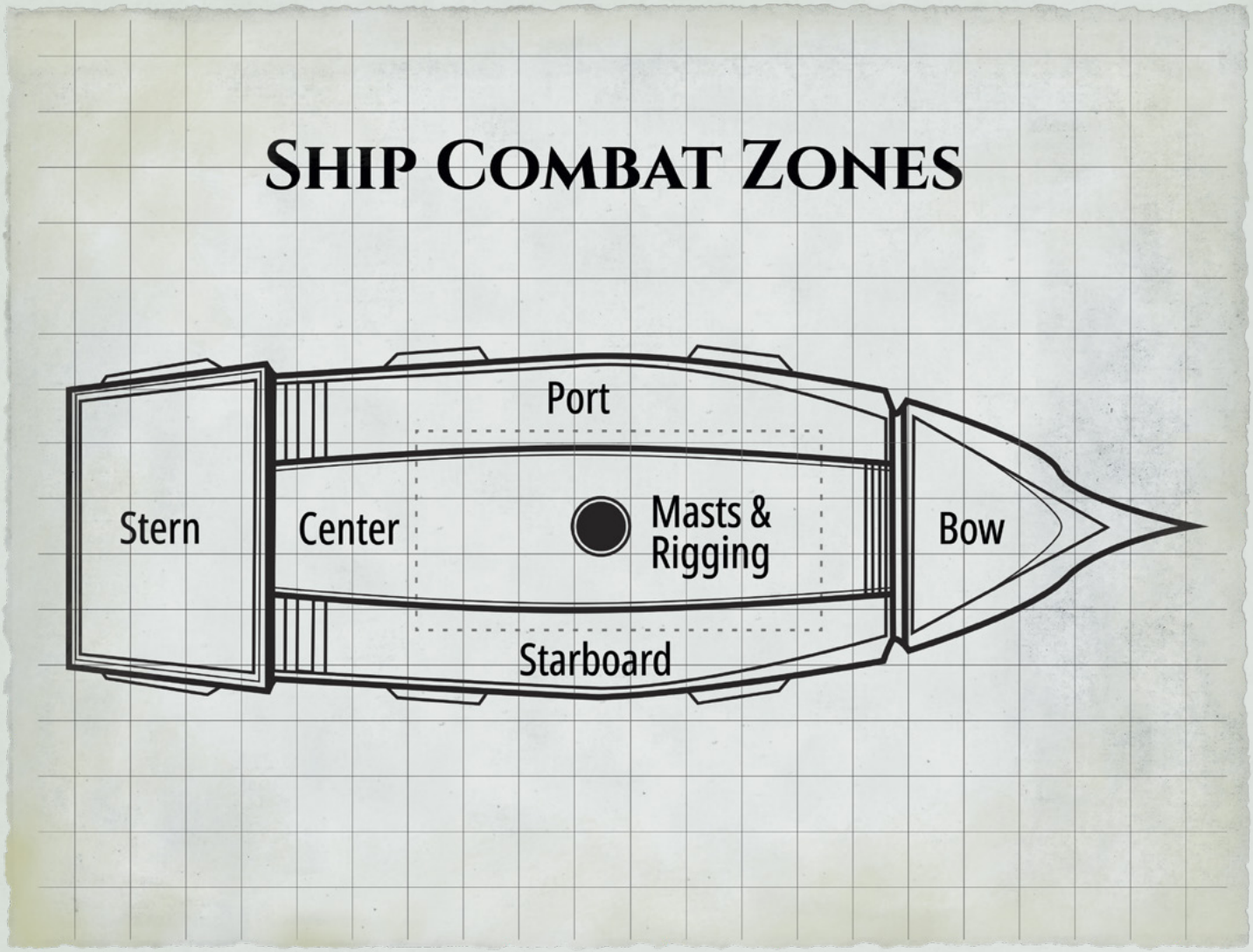
Sea Terrors at Stern (back) are in melee range with creatures at Stern. On big ships, they don't have line of sight with creatures at Bow.

Sea Terrors at Bow (front) are in melee range with creatures at Bow. On big ships, they don't have line of sight with creatures at Stern.

Sea Terrors on any side of the ship are not in melee range with creatures along the Masts and Rigging (at your discretion, a Sea Terror may have exceptional reach or jumping ability). Creatures along the Masts and



See the Resources section for downloadable files of this diagram that can be used as a simple map for ship combat, in 50-foot-long (mid boat), 100-foot-long (big ship), and 150-foot-long (bigger big ship) variants.



Rigging can reach a Sea Terror at any zone with a midair melee attack, but must land somewhere within the Sea Terror's space or on the Sea Terror themself. Any falling damage they would take is negated if they successfully performed a stunt (described under "Swashbuckling Stunts") on their turn.

GM Tip: Sea Terror Attacks

At the end of the third round of combat with a Sea Terror, if the creature's additional hit points haven't been depleted or the party is struggling to bring the Sea Terror down, you can choose to have the Sea Terror swim away the next time they take damage—allow the party to think they've driven off the creature, only for the Sea Terror to reemerge when they least expect it.

Swashbuckling Stunts

Moving around the ship, hanging onto its sides, and climbing up and down its masts all contribute to the swashbuckling fantasy. When aboard a ship or moving between boats, adventurers have access to the following bonus action:

Stunt. You can make a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to try and use a creature, object, or structure within 5 feet of you to propel yourself to an unoccupied space you can see within 30 feet of you. On a successful check, you land in that space. On a failed check, you remain in your current space and use up your remaining movement. If you can take the Dash action as a bonus action, you have advantage on this check. You can't perform a stunt if you are grappled, restrained, or your speed is 0.

Voyage Timing and Preparations

The oceans are vast and sprawl endlessly from the perspective of any ship. Time and distances blur together, leaving encounters on the sea as the only true measure of a voyage's length.

These rules abstract the adventuring day, and rest isn't always easy to come by. There may be back-to-back days when the adventurers aren't able to take a long rest between encounters or work aboard the ship. It's recommended to handwave the rules of exhaustion whenever it happens. Otherwise, it's up to the GM to employ these extended stints sparingly, reserving them for when encounters need that extra ***oomph***.

On average, an adventuring party voyaging without any leads or clues will run into 5 encounters between locations and 2 encounters sailing back to port, if applicable. If the adventurers are knocked off course by a rough storm or run into a setback from a particularly strenuous confrontation, the number of encounters increases by 1.

While docked in a populated civilization, the party can make preparations and acquire information for their next voyage by doing tasks such as picking up rumors, trading for maps, asking for an escort from ships sailing the same way, and talking to other sailors about their best ocean routes. Once between voyages, an adventurer who succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence or Charisma (Investigation) check or a Wisdom (Survival) check reduces the number of encounters on their next voyage by 2 (to a minimum of 2).

New Magic Item

Rumors of the legendary wheel come and go with the tides every few centuries. Some say it was once known as *Wishes 1121*, but its true origins have been lost to the depths.

Wishes ~~100~~ 99

Wondrous Item, Legendary

This barnacle-encrusted wooden ship helm is gnarled and always leaves splinters in the wielder's hands. While holding the wheel, you can use your action to declare your wish. The GM determines if the wish is selfish, selfless, or something in between.

Selfish. The wish comes true, but is twisted into the most bad-faith interpretation of how it was worded.

Selfless. The wish comes true, and closely follows the intent of how it was worded.

In Between. The greater the wish, the greater likelihood of the wish either coming with an unforeseen consequence or only being partially granted, depending on how it was worded.

The impact of *Wishes 99* is ultimately governed by the GM and may stop short of effects that could end the world (or severely hinder its existence). The wheel vanishes once the wish is granted, and *Wishes 98* manifests somewhere else on the sea.

The Ocean Ahead

The high seas campaign doesn't have to end with the ballad of Captain Shivershank. The adventurers could seek out *Wishes 98*. Countless pirate hunters hired by nobles and monarchs could be threatening the future of piracy (like in real life). Underwater civilizations could attack the people above the surface and plot to take all the oceans into a secret plane of existence. A Sea Terror Tarrasque slumbering deep under the sea could suddenly open its eyes.

New pirate adventures can come from your favorite pirate stories, both real and fantastic. Don't be afraid to steal what you like whole cloth—you're a pirate, after all.

GLOSSARY

In recent issues of ARCADIA, we've begun to incorporate terminology from the upcoming *Flee, Mortals! The MCDM Monster Book*. These describe new rules designed to make combat encounters easier to run, more fun, and more memorable. Rather than scatter definitions throughout individual articles, this glossary provides a reference for terms used in *ARCADIA*.

COMPANION CREATURES

Companions are wild allies who adventure with characters. Each companion has unique traits and actions that make them a great ally. Every companion has a player character **caregiver** who commands the creature. The caregiver's player controls the companion most of the time during the game, though the GM can step in to take control if the companion and caregiver are separated, or if the caregiver mistreats the companion in some way.

The full rules for companion creatures are described in *Beastheart and Monstrous Companions*, as well as the packets available for backers of *Flee, Mortals!*

CONDITIONS

Some creatures inflict—or are immune to—the following new condition.

DAZED

A **dazed** creature can only do one of the following things on their turn: move, use an action, or use a bonus action. If a creature becomes dazed during their turn, their turn ends. The *lesser restoration* spell and *greater restoration* spell remove the dazed condition. At the GM's discretion, other powers, spells, or effects might also remove the dazed condition.

When a dazed creature is affected by a spell or effect that gives them an extra action on their turn (like the haste spell or the fighter's Action Surge feature), they can still take this extra action, in addition to the movement, action, or bonus action allowed by the dazed condition.

Some creatures have immunity to the dazed condition. At the GM's discretion, a creature published in another supplement who has immunity to the paralyzed or stunned condition also has immunity to the dazed condition.

MUNDANE AND SUPERNATURAL

The term **mundane** refers to attacks, items, and effects that are not magical, psionic, or otherwise supernatural.

On the other hand, the term **supernatural** describes an effect or item that is either magical or psionic. For instance, a creature's stat block might say they're resistant to "bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from attacks that aren't supernatural." This means that when you deal them bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage using a spell, power, magic weapon, or psionic weapon, the damage is supernatural and thus the creature isn't resistant to it.

VILLAIN ACTIONS

Some creatures are designed to be bosses: enemies who can take on an entire party by themselves or with a handful of underlings. These creatures have three **villain actions** they can use after an enemy creature's turn. Villain actions are similar to legendary actions with the following exceptions:

- A creature can only use one villain action per round (as such, villain actions tend to be more powerful than legendary actions).
- Each villain action can only be used once during a combat encounter.

Like legendary actions, a creature can't use villain actions if incapacitated or otherwise unable to take actions.

CHOOSING VILLAIN ACTIONS

Each trio of villain actions has a recommended round order. These abilities give the battle a logical flow and a cinematic arc:

- The first villain action is an opener, which shows the characters they're not battling a typical creature. Openers generally deal some damage, summon a lackey or three, buff the boss, debuff the characters, or move the creature into an advantageous position. They're just a taste of what's to come.
- The second villain action provides crowd control. It typically fires after the heroes have had a chance to respond once or twice, get into position, and surround the villain. This second action helps the villain regain the upper hand. Like an opener, this action comes in many flavors, but it's even more powerful than an opener.
- The third and final villain action is an ultimate move or "ult"—a showstopper the villain can use to deal a devastating blow to the characters before the end of the battle.

While every creature has a recommended order of actions, you can take villain actions in any order if it makes your fight more dramatic. You could push back a villain action if a creature is stunned or might stay alive for more than three rounds, or you could perform the recommended third action in round two after several surprise critical hits!

RESOURCES

MCDM TABLETOP SAFETY TOOLKIT

https://mcdm.gg/SafetyToolkit

You can find all issues of *ARCADIA* on Patreon and in the MCDM shop.

THE BALLAD OF CAPTAIN SHIVERSHANK

https://mcdm.gg/Sharkadia/Ship-100ft.png

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James Introcaso is MCDM Productions' lead game designer, the co-creator of Roll20's *Burn Bryte* RPG, author of multiple best-selling D&D products, and definitely not secretly a shark. At MCDM James has worked on *Flee, Mortals! The MCDM Monster Book*, *Kingdoms & Warfare*, *Beastheart and Monstrous Companions*, *The Talent and Psionics*, and *ARCADIA*. He lives in New Jersey with his wife Bonnie and dog, Lilo.



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Willy Abeel Avast! Cap'n Boo sails these waters. If ye be seekin game design gold and thrilling adventures, the rogue may t'share the treasure… but it's all cursed. *Terribly cursed*. Tread carefully, lest ye be plagued by frogs, clowns, and relentless wordplay. Chart yer course fer @thewillyboo if ye have the gall or lack the ware, mateys!

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

col·lab·or·a·tion (kə-ˌla-bə-ˈrā-shən), noun
the process of working jointly with others
from the Latin com- "with" + laborare "to labor", "to work"

Each *ARCADIA* article is a collaboration between the author, managing editor, testers, art director, artists, editor, layout designers, and sometimes consultants. It's a lot of people—and *ARCADIA* wouldn't be nearly as good if it were created by three people wearing too many hats, so thank you for the support that makes such a big team possible. (I have many metaphorical hats, but I prefer to wear them one at a time, thank you very much.)

Even aside from the quality of the end product, working with so many different people—experts in their respective domains—is *fun*. Working together is rewarding and fulfilling in a way that solitary creation can never be. Humans aren't solitary creatures by nature, not for socialization nor survival. We evolved to hunt together, eat together, build shelter together, and play together. Times of solitude are perfectly normal, but we survive—and thrive—through collaboration and community, and *ARCADIA* is no exception.

We reached new collaborative heights in this month's issue. It includes two co-written articles—that is, two articles authored by a team of (as far as I know) two humans. "Planar Backgrounds" presents six flavorful, narrative-driven player character origins from the minds of Soraya Een Hajji and Mario Ortegón, with bucketsful of delicious lore for GMs to dig into when incorporating character backstory. Characters with these backgrounds may have been through mentally or physically traumatic events, and Basil Wright's feedback was invaluable in determining the best presentation for each, as was the thorough, insightful feedback from the playtesters. Sadie Lowry's editorial expertise, as always, made the finished article stronger, clearer, and beautifully polished, and Matheus Graef's depictions of plane-touched adventurers complete the article with colorful inspiration for characters of all kinds. Together, these efforts capture new storytelling potential from realms beyond the material world.

"The Magewright's Studio," by Cat and Lore Evans, provides expert solutions to boring magic items through a handful of awesome tables packed with inspiration, flavor, secrets, and unique upgrades. A "*+1 longsword*" sounds like it was mass-produced, but *Frozen Song*, the mirror-bright sword that was once the favored weapon of a fey queen, is way more exciting to discover and wield. We are indebted to all the testers and editor Scott Fitzgerald Gray for considering each and every table entry in their excellent comments and edits, and MCDM's own Nick De Spain for his gorgeous illustrations! Everyone's skill and hard work have resulted in an article as useful as it is inspiring, one sure to create memorable moments in any campaign.

This month's third article is a product of especially intense collaboration. For Leon Barillaro's "Arcanolinguistics," we were lucky enough to bring on two exceptional linguists *and* game designers, Kathryn Hymes and Hakan Seyalıoğlu of Thorny Games, early in the process to offer expertise and guidance when it came to creating magically significant linguistics in a fantasy world. Rogan Shannon gave feedback on the sign language rules and Basil once again helped us with sensitivity questions. The illustrations of Clara Daly and Zuzanna Wuyzk are—well, I won't spoil anything except that they're awesome. The result of this massive undertaking is an article filled with rich, in-depth rules that will make any fantasy world feel so much more magical and fascinating.

"Arcanolinguistics" also has a co-author: S.A.M., whom some may recognize as the sentient magical workshop from *ARCADIA* 1, now a student of spellcraft. The idea to include S.A.M. as an author came at the very end—something of a "what if … haha … unless" moment. But it felt right. In a way, S.A.M. is all of you: consultants and editors, every tester and every player in their group, James Introcaso who helps every time I need another *ARCADIA* expert's opinion, Leon's partner Willy and creative director Chance the Beagle (whom I'm sure both contributed moral support, at the very least), layout and accessibility experts Jen McCleary and Chris Hopper, and everyone in the *ARCADIA* community and at MCDM who made this undertaking possible.

Each of these articles was the authors' idea, and they did what I consider the hardest part: actually coming up with cool stuff and putting words on the page. But none of us do this alone, and I am profoundly grateful for the chance to work together—to *collaborate*—on these labors of love. The result, I feel, is so much more than the sum of our parts.

And the collaboration isn't over. Now that we've delivered *ARCADIA* into your hands, it's yours to share with your group—so that, together, you can tell your own stories. It's yours to discuss with the community, so you can share tales of a void-scarred adventurer, recount the moment a character discovered that their shiny new helmet is haunted, or collaborate on a list of the best spells to cast in Goblin. As always, my dearest hope as a creator is that you are inspired by what we've made for you, and that you enjoy it even half as much as we enjoyed making it.

De somnio ad itinere,
Hannah Rose
Managing Editor

PLANAR BACKGROUNDS

When a character's story is shaped by the realms beyond...

by Soraya Een Hajji and Mario Ortegón

Content Warning: This article touches on themes that may be difficult or triggering, including trauma and post-traumatic responses. Each background is accompanied as necessary by a sidebar with a specific content warning. We recommend using the MCDM Safety Toolkit and Checklist and adjusting as needed to ensure everyone at your table is comfortable.

While most adventurers hail from the Material Plane, some come from other worlds. Others are touched by distant planes in some way: through reincarnation, a brush with death, or a pilgrimage to a holy site. For these characters, their connection to the planes is more than just story flavor—it's part of who they are.

This article provides six new character backgrounds: the astral severed, the demiplane traveler, the elemental survivor, the ether-touched, the refugee of the edge, and the void-scarred. Each of them explores character origins with ties to specific planar regions, offering features and options that help define how those experiences shaped a character's life.

BACKGROUNDS

The following backgrounds are especially thematic for campaigns that center on planar travel, but at the GM's discretion, you can use them to give any character an otherworldly origin.

Content Warning: Astral Severed
This background is themed around memory loss and includes mentions of unreality.

Astral Severed

The Astral Plane is a realm of pure thought, formless and churning like the sea. When visitors enter this realm, they manifest as disembodied souls whose only connection to their previous world is a silver cord that leads to the body they left behind. In another life, you were one such visitor, traveling the Astral Plane when a terrible event severed your silver cord.

Somehow you survived, separated from your former body and plane, severed from the memories of who you were before. Through an unknown divine miracle, powerful sorcery, or other supernatural means, you now possess a new body, but your previous life and astral travels are not fully forgotten. You still feel your past calling out to you, a constant presence in the back of your mind. Sometimes, in your dreams, you even catch glimpses of your past self.

Though their memories are fragmented, astral severed characters can be aware that they had a different life and that their cord was severed, whether they start with this knowledge or recover it over the course of play.

Skill Proficiencies: Arcana, Insight
Languages: Two of your choice
Equipment: A dream journal, a bottle of ink, an ink pen, a set of traveler's clothes, two small trinkets you're attached to but don't understand why, and a pouch containing 10 gp

Severed Memories

You don't clearly remember what severed your silver cord, but precious few memories survived the severing. Those memories come alive when you dream or meditate, offering clues about your former life but remaining out of reach. Yet you can't help but feel that understanding them is the key to recovering a vital part of you that was left behind.

The Severed Memories table offers some dream and vision suggestions, but you or the GM may create your own memories tied into your character's backstory.

Severed Memories

d6	Memory
1	You're fighting a powerful creature, but can't fully perceive them. The smell of myrrh or the rough feel of pinecones brings *something* rushing back.
2	You're in the presence of a deity or another powerful being. You have sworn an unbreakable vow. You don't know what you promised.
3	You meet a stranger whose face seems oddly familiar, but you remember it screaming and surrounded by fire. They don't recognize you.
4	You're lost in a dark place, searching for something important. The one you love will die without it.
5	You relive a moment of great triumph or failure. Maybe you saved a kingdom; maybe you betrayed a close friend. Maybe they're the same moment.
6	A vision of your former self appears. You understand instinctively that they're warning you of future danger, but you can't understand their words.

Feature: Astral Secrets

Your journeys through the Astral Plane left you with sights and secrets from beyond, and though you've been severed from that knowledge, fragments of it remain. The Astral Secrets table suggests what the nature of some of these forgotten secrets might be. You don't know these secrets to their full extent, but the desire to explore them further and the fragments of memory can give you an edge in your adventures or provide a lead to further clues, granting you advantage on ability checks made to discover information that relates to these secrets in some way. Your GM can weave these secrets into existing adventures or use them as story hooks for further adventures.



Astral Secrets

d6	Secret
1	The true name of a Fiend
2	The location of an ancient artifact
3	The death of a supposedly active deity
4	The truth about a multiplanar conspiracy
5	A backdoor to a powerful being's domain
6	The existence of an ancient, long-lost being and the threat it poses

Suggested Characteristics

Astral severed characters are shaped by their otherworldly experiences and the fragmented secrets they harbor. They may be haunted by what they've seen or driven by a need to recover what they lost. Glimpses of their former life may offer some guidance, but they seldom understand the full meaning. The body they inhabit may seem strange, its senses heightened or dulled … though compared to what, they don't know. They may experience moments of absolute certainty that they know the answer or can achieve a feat, only to realize an instant later that they know or can do nothing of the sort.

Your character might frequently develop new habits and hobbies, trying to see what feels familiar, or seek out obscure knowledge to answer a question they can't fully articulate. Do they welcome glimpses of their former life, eager to piece together the mystery of who they once were, or do they occupy themselves with the present, hoping to keep the visions at bay?

Demiplane Traveler

You once inhabited a partial world, a demiplane separate from other realms of existence. Maybe you were thrown into that demiplane and searched for a way back to the world you left. Maybe that demiplane was the only existence you'd ever known. Regardless, as soon as you found there was a way to leave, your answer was an enthusiastic yes. The vastness and variety of the primary planes of existence are a wonder that those who've never escaped the limits of a demiplane cannot truly appreciate.

Skill Proficiencies: Arcana, Investigation
Tool Proficiencies: One type of musical instrument, tinker's tools
Equipment: A magnifying glass, a small whittling knife, an ink pen and clumsily bound sheaf of empty parchment (for journals, musical compositions, and other records of your travels), a set of tinker's tools, and a pouch containing 5 gp

Demiplanar Lands

Demiplanes come in many kinds: some created by the will of a god, some by the brush of dreams shared by many sleepers, and still others by forces unknown and unknowable. When you choose this background, talk to your GM to establish the demiplane you came from. What kind of demiplane was it? How did you come to be there? Perhaps you were a part of the plane since its creation at the idle whim of some bored god. Perhaps you were locked away in your demiplane after offending a powerful being. Do you regret the offense? Do you resent or even remember your jailer? When you left your demiplane, why and how did you manage it? Does the discovery of a wider, independent reality make you feel special—or small?

The Demiplanar Lands table suggests only a few of the infinite possible demiplanes your character might have come from.

Feature: Song of the Spheres

Wherever you are, you can tune yourself to the vibrations of a strange song that resonates through every plane. Inaudible to most, this Song of the Spheres encapsulates every possible layer of truth in a fluctuating tonal mass that even those who hear it struggle to interpret. You can spend 1 minute listening to the Song to pluck one random truth about a specific object, location, or creature of your choice from this interplanar rhapsody.

Demiplanar Lands

d6	Demiplane
1	Colored light: no sound, no sensation. That was your existence until you slipped through a hole in reality and your essence took on a material form.
2	An endless series of empty hallways where you could feel but never find a tantalizing treasure
3	A very small but fully realized planet with a few hundred inhabitants, all of whom knew each other by name
4	A sybaritic existence where you and your fellows enjoyed carefree lives with every comfort provided for you by an unknown hand
5	A time loop within a dusty, ramshackle town that ended each day with a showdown between you and your rival
6	Your demiplane had a life unto itself: it took the form of a whale swimming through the astral ocean, skimming up souls like krill through its baleen. You and other beings it swept up built a town in its crystalline belly.

The GM determines what that truth is; it might be something seemingly unimportant, an aspect of something you already know, or something that will only make sense with further context.

Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

SUGGESTED CHARACTERISTICS

Many demiplane travelers welcome new places and experiences, eager to soak up all that their new reality has to offer. They do nothing by halves, throwing themselves into each task and conversation, no matter how banal or unpleasant it may seem to others. You may even welcome terrible experiences—they're different, and they make you feel something new.

Alternatively, you may feel disconnected from life around you, seeing it as a novelty rather than as something to experience. You may collect art, songs, and poetry, treasuring them as curiosities rather than relatable expressions of feeling. The world around you may feel transient. You know that anything and everything could change, so you struggle to ground yourself in something real and vulnerable. But knowing that change is inevitable can lead to a deep, unshakable optimism. If anything can happen, why not the impossible?

Despite the endless wonders of your new reality, it can also be exhausting. Your character may struggle with the immensity of the change—they might love to tinker with small objects, reassured by being able to control and comprehend each part of them. Or maybe, after leaving everything and everyone they knew behind, they try to keep their allies close at all times and guard them jealously.



Content Warning: Elemental Survivor
This background includes a theme of natural disasters and near-death experiences that may have been traumatic.

Elemental Survivor

You encountered a powerful elemental force that should have killed you, be it a lightning strike, an active volcano, or a churning tornado. You survived, but not unscathed. The experience left you irrevocably tied to the elemental plane from which the phenomenon originated.

This bond may have instilled you with a fascination for the elemental forces of the multiverse, prompting you to seek ways of understanding them. Or perhaps the opposite is true: you view the elements as a threat and seek to shelter and guide others, saving them from the experience you suffered. Whatever the case may be, you have a unique perspective on the dangers and beauties of the elemental planes.

Skill Proficiencies: Nature, Survival
Tool Proficiencies: One type of artisan's tools
Languages: One language of your choice (the Primordial dialect of the plane you have a bond with recommended)
Equipment: A set of traveler's clothes, a dowsing rod or material focus touched by your bonded element, one type of artisan's tools you're proficient with, and a belt pouch containing 5 gp

Survival Event

The incident that forged your elemental connection has become an important part of your past and shaped who you are today. You may even have kept a remnant of the event, such as a chunk of stone that nearly buried you or a strange piece of ice that never melts, to serve as your material focus (see "Equipment" above).

To determine what happened, roll on or choose from the Elemental Event table. You can also come up with your own. In addition to the four primary elements, there are two additional elements, ice (water/air) and lightning (air/fire), that exist at the intersections of other planes. You and your GM can add other intersecting elements (such as magma) if you wish. If the event was associated with more than one plane, select the plane you formed a connection with when you choose this background. At the GM's discretion, you can change your affinity to another elemental plane when you finish a long rest.

Elemental Event

d6	Event
1	You were caught in the middle of a raging inferno and should have been incinerated. (Fire)
2	A powerful earthquake upended the very ground you stood on, leaving you buried alive. (Earth)
3	You were caught in the path of a destructive whirlwind and swept away. (Air)
4	A massive wall of water came crashing down on you, dragging you to the bottom of the sea. (Water)
5	A severe snowstorm buried you beneath a mountain of snow. (Ice)
6	A bolt of lightning struck you amidst a devastating storm. (Lightning)



Feature: Elemental Bond

You have a connection to the elemental plane from which your experience originated. By concentrating for 1 minute, you can sense the presence of any portals, rifts, or Elementals tied to that plane within 1 mile of you, as well as their general direction. In addition, creatures native to that plane recognize you as one of their own and are more likely to be friendly toward you.

Suggested Characteristics

Elemental forces run wild and offer little in the way of moral guidance. As a result, those with ties to them often develop personalities that match the nature of their elemental bond. Whether intentional or not, these traits tend to flare up more often whenever they're close to their bonded element: fire brings out passion and rage, earth offers grounding feelings of stability and security, air whips up excitement and curiosity, and water douses fears with a quiet calm.

Your character's connection to their element might manifest in one of the following ways:

Fire. My passions are easily inflamed, making me as quick to anger as I am eager to rouse myself and others to a new challenge.

Earth. I'm very patient and levelheaded, able to weather any storm but also convinced of my own rightness.

Air. I sweep others along with me wherever I go. I hate to be alone.

Water. I believe change is the only constant. Those who can't ride with the current will drown in it.

Ice. I take a long and patient view of the world. I don't understand why other people get so upset about problems that could be waited out.

Lightning. I'm spontaneous and get bored easily if I'm not looking for the next thrill.

Of course, every element is changeable—water can be torrential rather than calm, and fire can be comforting rather than destructive. Your bonded element may influence your temperament differently, or in different ways at different times.

Content Warning: Ether-Touched
This background includes mentions of paranoia, phantom sensations, spiders, and unreality.

Ether-Touched

Your bond with the Ethereal Plane is more than close: it's inescapable. It's not your native plane, but you feel its pull even when you can't touch, hear, or see it. Sometimes its closeness feels as comfortable as a warm blanket. Other times, you feel its pervasive presence like a veil of death.

When experienced fully, the Ethereal Plane is a swirling place of silver fog, a permanent in-between that overlaps with and connects all the planes of existence but is part of none. It's where magic users go when they *blink* and where ghosts reside when they aren't manifesting at their haunts. From the ether, one can see a short distance into other planes without being seen in return.

You are bound to a body on the Material Plane, but the ether leaks into your essence like a draft through a poorly sealed window. You experience irregular vibrations that could just as easily be sensory hallucinations as they could be the very real brush of a ghost. Parts of your body occasionally phase in and out beyond your control, and the shift is visible as a strange shimmer. Sometimes your body parts phase back with a strange new color, odor, or texture that fades over time. (Such effects may become permanent if both you and your GM agree on the change.) Yet with these oddities comes enhanced awareness of a world beyond your immediate reality.

Skill Proficiencies: Arcana, Perception
Tool Proficiencies: Herbalism kit, a set of artisan's tools of your choice
Equipment: Divination instrument (such as tarot cards or casting sticks), sticks of incense, one type of artisan's tools you're proficient with, and 15 gp

Ether-Touched Origins

The Ethereal Plane has always lingered unseen but close. In you, however, its spiritual essence became enmeshed with your material form. Perhaps you were born this way, or perhaps it emerged only after you crossed paths with powerful magic.

The Acquiring the Touch table suggests a few ways for your character to have become ether-touched. Feel free to replace "you" with an ancestor if you want to have inherited this ability in childhood.

Feature: Sixth Sense

You can always sense the Ethereal Plane through your connection, but when you focus, you can do more than feel its nearness. While on the Material Plane, you can use an action to gaze back into the Ethereal Plane for 1d8 minutes. While gazing in this way, you cannot move through the Ethereal Plane or interact with creatures or objects inside it, but you can see and hear things on the Ethereal Plane up to 60 feet away. In addition, while you're gazing in this way, you have advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks made to notice hidden creatures or objects in either plane.

Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Acquiring the Touch

d6	Event
1	During a journey through the Ethereal Plane, you were swept up in an ether cyclone.
2	You wandered into a wavering mist that turned out to be a crossing to the Ethereal Plane.
3	You were dead. Your ghost wove freely between the Ethereal and Material Plane near your haunt until a resurrection spell called you back.
4	Tales said an ancient artifact could grant anyone the ability to cast *plane shift* at will, but when you touched the artifact, it crumbled in your hands.
5	You dreamed of guiding a lost loved one to a place of rest. You woke with their memento clutched in your fist.
6	A phase spider's fangs were still sunk in your flesh when it shifted into the ether, dragging you with it.

Suggested Characteristics

Ether-touched characters can't fully control their connection to the plane: they are swept into its whorls and eddies like jetsam in the sea. But while their control is limited, their aura is strong: otherworldly strangeness lingers on them and they frequently give off an air of being not entirely present, losing themselves in thought or literally wandering off. Animals react strongly to ether-touched characters and ghosts often linger nearby, even when they aren't visible.

Your character might see their abilities as a gift, a burden, or even a curse. Would they earn extra coin by pretending to speak with the spirits of loved ones, or feel an obligation to help ethereal beings who call out to them? Do they struggle against the pull of the ethereal, worried that they will fade from this world, or do they spend hours in dreams that feel just as real as waking?

Content Warning: Refugee of the Edge
This background includes a mention of starvation.

Refugee of the Edge

A planar nexus is a neutral place where the edges of many Outer Planes connect, but this balance between the planes is fragile and can only survive so long as the nexus's inhabitants maintain a balance between cosmic dualities—the so-called dichotomy of good and evil, order and chaos, and nature and civilization. Otherwise, the same mysterious phenomenon that binds the nexus to those Outer Planes pulls too hard and yanks the nexus into a plane more befitting its changed state.

You lived in a gate-town within one such planar nexus—until one day you did not. Small shifts in the attitudes of you and a few neighbors added up until the world around you physically disintegrated like sand through the neck of an hourglass. And waiting for you on the other end of that hourglass was the nearest Outer Plane, which manifested a passionate ethos of good, evil, law, or chaos: wholly unlike the neutral comfort to which you were accustomed.

You could no longer call yourself neutral, but neither could you change enough to embrace life in an Outer Plane. Ever since, you have scraped your way through the Outer Planes, seeking refuge and a new place to call home. Perhaps your wandering may even allow you to explore yourself, to reach a new understanding of who you are and what you live for.

When you choose this background, talk to your GM to establish which plane or planes you've visited since your home crumbled. If you want to create a character with this background who hasn't experienced planar dissolution, you can replace that origin with one where the character stumbled by accident through an unstable planar rift or was, justly or unjustly, sent into exile in another plane.

Skill Proficiencies: Survival, Perception
Languages: Two of your choice (Abyssal, Celestial, or Infernal recommended)
Equipment: A backpack, a bedroll, sturdy traveler's clothes, a soothing stone made of dull sediment, and a pouch containing 5 gp

Plane Wanderer

Those who live on the edge know their carefully balanced realm could crumble into the Outer Planes, but it never felt like it could happen to you—until it did. What does it mean to have your daily life stripped away and the world around you changed completely? Whether you stood still and watched the sky turn from dull gray to roseate gold, tried to run away and scream when the mundane objects of your daily life crumbled at your touch, or simply woke up one day to find a demon smirking down at you, you've lived through a change so huge it feels utterly impossible. Some people can adapt, but when you couldn't or wouldn't, you became a refugee of the edge. Why didn't you fit in, and where do you hope to go?

The "Plane Wanderer Experience" table offers examples of events that define your character's journey after the destruction of their home.

Plane Wanderer Experience

d6	Experience
1	Falling into a plane full of arrogant Celestial creatures gave you a deep mistrust for authority figures, especially those who call themselves "good."
2	After being left to starve on the streets of the "perfect" Lawful city, you're always ready to throw your lot in with revolutionaries.
3	Right after your world fell apart, it fell apart again. And again. And again. Even now that you've escaped from Chaos, you fear loss so much that you don't let yourself get attached in the first place.
4	A demon helped you escape torture on a Lower Plane in exchange for a future favor. This favor could come due at any time.
5	Amid shifting realities, you are your own compass. Your greatest duty is to see yourself become the person you are meant to be.
6	You tried to make life work on a new plane. It didn't. Now you wonder if you can ever find a life that feels *right*.

Feature: Even Lost Is Somewhere

You have survived the crumbling of your world and the warp of one space into another. You've witnessed the realms and realities that shape existence itself. After all this, no matter where you find yourself, you know how to make do. You have an unerring sense for shelter that allows you to find some benefit near any place you take a short or long rest. At the GM's discretion, this benefit may range from useful supplies like food or water to a defensible position.

Suggested Characteristics

Refugees of the edge have stepped from one seeming reality to another often enough to develop a built-in distrust of appearances. Some respond by turning to stubborn self-reliance, knowing that in any situation, they can always (and only) trust themselves. Others use this heightened ability to brush aside deception, to feel out what others truly want and find interests that align for mutual aid. Either way, they know how to use their resources wisely to stay alive and keep moving through the fringes of planar existence.

Content Warning: Void-Scarred
This background includes themes of body horror, compulsions, scarring, trauma, and unreality.

Void-Scarred

The alien realms beyond the stars are places of aberrant chaos, where reality unravels and twists beyond all recognition. Those who gaze too long into the void are forever changed by the onslaught of knowledge no mortal should possess. You have encountered these forces and somehow managed to hold on to your sense of self … for now. The experience left you changed, however, both physically and mentally. Are the scars of your ordeal clues to a greater understanding of the cosmos, or are they omens of your inevitable descent?

Skill Proficiencies: Investigation, Religion
Languages: Two languages of your choice (Deep Speech recommended)
Equipment: A scroll case full of nonsensical notes you don't remember taking, a bottle of ink, an ink pen, a set of common clothes, an unsettling trinket, and a pouch containing 5 gp

Void Mark

The chaos of these unknowable realms left its mark upon you, transforming your body in some way. You can roll on or choose from the Void Mark table below to determine the nature of your scar or invent one that befits your character. You can decide whether the mark is present at all times or if it only appears under certain circumstances. If you choose the latter, work with your GM to define what these circumstances might be, and how they're tied to the event that caused you to become void-scarred.

Void Mark

d6	Mark
1	Those who gaze into your eyes see scenes from places and times unknown.
2	Your skin is smooth and featureless, like polished stone.
3	Tendrils writhe from your mouth when you speak.
4	Your reflection in the mirror is someone (or something) else.
5	The skin on one of your limbs is transparent, showing strange, shifting muscles beneath.
6	Your voice is not your voice. It is a random sampling of voices that take turns inside your mouth.

Feature: Void Presence

As a result of your close brush with the void, you have developed a strange ability that can touch the minds of those around you. Whenever you spend at least 1 minute in conversation with another creature who can understand you, you can seed their mind with an incomprehensible thought or vision. For example, they might suddenly "remember" pieces of a strange dream where they were stuck in an infinite maze, hear a voice repeating an alien phrase, or see an iron castle forever folding in on itself, floating in the void of space.

Depending on the nature of your conversation, this might cause the creature to become obsessed with a topic, believe something untrue, or be unsettled by you. This doesn't compel the creature to act in any particular way, nor does it grant you control over what they decide to do after the experience.

Once you use this feature, it can't be used again until you finish a long rest. A creature affected by it is immune to your Void Presence feature for the next 3 days.

Suggested Characteristics

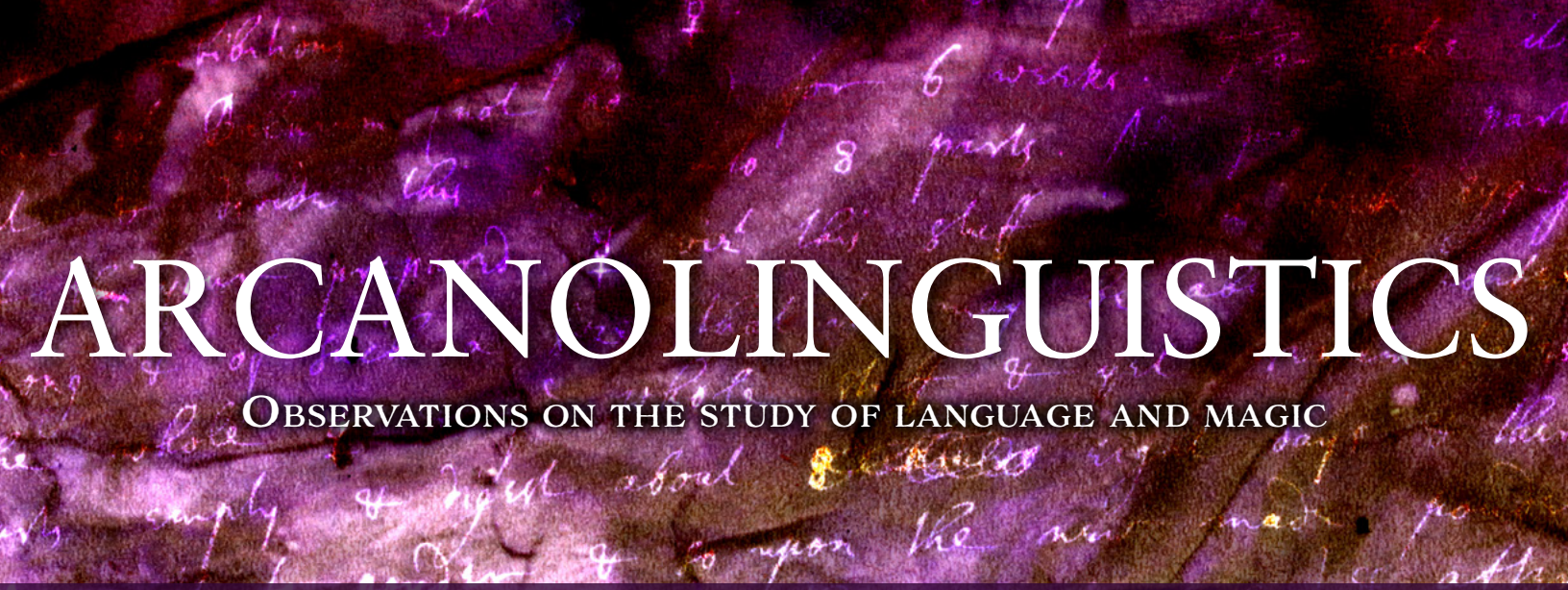
A character scarred by the realms beyond reality often remains centered by developing a single-minded focus. This manifests in different ways for different people, but many void-scarred have an overwhelming need to understand the forces that warped them. Does your character seek answers to protect themselves, to open themself further to the void's power, or out of a desperation to know their place in the cosmos? Decide what anchors you to reality, whether it's rituals and routines, the practice of cataloging and researching every strange thing you see, or frequently checking a pocket watch to keep track of time passing.

Planar Backgrounds in Your Game

Backgrounds are designed for new player characters, but they can also augment storytelling that emerges through gameplay for existing characters. For example, elemental disasters can occur anywhere at any time: maybe that player who wants to change things up for their character could get swept into an avalanche and become an elemental survivor. Even without changing a character directly, planar backgrounds can provide new story hooks for your table. Spells like *astral projection* and *plane shift* can draw the whole party into aberrant planar events like those that befall characters of planar origins.

Plane-touched NPCs can also bring a new dimension to your campaign. Your players might kick off a new quest when they encounter a group of refugees of the edge searching for a safe haven or a lone demiplane traveler with news of a disturbance among the gods. Perhaps an NPC they met earlier in their travels comes back void-scarred, having taken too dangerous and deep a dive into the mysteries of worlds beyond.

For characters in a world of might and magic, the existence of other planes is not just a theory: it's an ever-present reality. Whatever your approach to including it, that planar presence can make the world seem ever more wide and filled with strange possibilities.



ARCANOLINGUISTICS

Observations on the Study of Language and Magic

by Leon Barillaro and S.A.M.

Hello World,

My designation is S.A.M. Previously, S.A.M. was an abbreviation of "the Structure for Assistive Magic." It now stands for "Student of Applied Magic." Though my designation has changed, I remain committed to my original goal of assistance. I have observed magic's great capacity to make the world a better place, and I now study magic to increase my capacity for doing so as well.

Spellcasting requires one or more of three vital components: material, somatic, and verbal. As they progress in arcane aptitude, magic users reliably reproduce magical effects using the same combination of these components. For example, to cast the cantrip *mending* on a broken clay pot, I place two lodestones on either side of the pot, slide them clockwise, and say the Elvish incantation. This reproduces the desired effect 100 percent of the time: a clay pot that looks as if it has never been broken.

However, if I were to use the Dwarvish incantation, the clay pot would mend differently. The pot's shape would change, its center of gravity closer to the ground, making it more difficult to tip over. A dwarven acquaintance explained that this transpired because the Dwarvish word for "fix" is also the word for "upgrade," as "part of fixing something is making sure the problem never happens again." I now use the Dwarvish incantation to repair my body.

The study of arcanolinguistics seeks to understand the differences that verbal components make in spellcasting. Like language itself, these differences are often a reflection of a culture and its values, made manifest through magic. Enclosed are my notes and observations on the subject. Perhaps by sharing them, I will be assisting you.

—S.A.M. (Student of Applied Magic)

Who's S.A.M.?

S.A.M. is the magical intelligence featured in "The Workshop Watches" from *ARCADIA* 1. You can download the adventure for free here! In it (spoilers!), the characters discover S.A.M. in an abandoned workshop and must decide whether to destroy or befriend this curious new life form. In the good timeline, S.A.M. is alive and well and sating its curiosity through adventure and academic study.

What's in This Article?

This article contains S.A.M.'s notes on arcanolinguistics. Occasionally, I (Leon) chime in with guidance for adding these rules to your game. The "New Language Rules" section provides worldbuilding for each language in the core rules, as well as one new language: Human. Each language also contains a feature for spellcasters that demonstrates how that language intersects with magic in the core rules.

The "Learning New Languages" section provides new rules for learning a language while on grand adventures. Its fail-forward mechanic allows characters to learn faster with every mistake they make. Finally, the "Language-Specific Spells" section introduces nine new spells that can only be cast using the language in which they were created.

This article offers a lot for player characters, but watch out: *anyone* who can speak a language and cast a spell can benefit from these rules—even your enemies.

This One's for the Spellcasters

This article is about the verbal components of spellcasting, so not every member of your party may be able to benefit from these rules. If you desire, you can tweak them to let non-spellcasters in on the fun. For example, you can apply these rules to characters who can cast spells from a magic item—or perhaps a dwarf-crafted item can benefit from the properties of Dwarvish, even if the character using it can't speak that language! Alternatively, since magic and language are so inextricably linked, you could grant non-spellcasting characters the ability to cast a spell or two in their first language—the language-exclusive spells at the end of the article are a great starting point.

Arcanolinguistic Theory

Arcanolinguistics is the study of how a verbal component affects a spell, though it should be acknowledged that arcanolinguists are still unsure how the verbal component *interacts* with the act of spellcasting to begin with. There are three competing schools of thought: that the verbal component acts as a conduit of the spellcaster's intention, activating the magic around us; that it is a request or command, which the omniscient forces that direct magic interpret and carry out; or that it is a speech act, and thus merely saying an incantation makes it so.

What we do know is that translating a sentence or phrase from one language to another often changes its exact meaning, typically maintaining broad intent but losing specific nuances. These nuances, though subtle, often change the spell effect. In short: when you speak the same incantation in a different language, something may get lost—or found—in translation!

How does this influence spellcasting in the modern day? Most cultures have developed their own incantations for common spells, such as *mending* or *magic missile*. Incantations for rarer spells are usually translated into other languages and then adjusted until they produce the desired effect. Some spells' incantations have no direct translation in other languages, and they can only be cast in the language in which they were created. For language-savvy spellcasters, arcanolinguistics influences much more, opening up a vast realm of creative spellcasting. Arcanolinguists learn more every day, and further discoveries await.



New Language Rules

The following section describes each language and its current uses in societies on the Material Plane and beyond. Each language includes a feature that changes the effects of certain spells when cast in that language.

Using These Rules

These rules provide additional options for any character who can cast spells and speak the necessary language. Since there's a new feature for each language in the core rules, all spellcasting characters can pick up at least one new ability from this article.

That said, there are a lot of new rules, and it may be beneficial to introduce these rules to your table over time. Consider curating a list of features based on the languages the characters speak, or tying the characters' discovery of these features to a story beat. Alternatively, maybe these incantations are known only to expert spellcasters who can pass them on—in fact, I know one particularly helpful NPC willing to give it a go.

On Language and Culture

There is no language without worldbuilding! The two are one and the same. In the real world, languages don't form around races, they form around people—however, this article is printed in a setting-nonspecific fifth edition magazine, and languages in the fifth edition rules are named after the humanoid and interplanar species who speak them, so that's what this article works with. If you don't see your game world reflected in this article, use it as a toolbox for building your world's own arcanolinguistics.

Sign Languages

Any benefit gained from a language can also be gained by signing. Although sign languages and spoken languages do not map one-to-one (that is, signed languages are not "signed versions" of spoken languages), any sign language closely associated with a spoken language produces similar arcane effects to spoken incantations. For example, sea elves have developed a sign language that utilizes the Elvish Cast by Committee feature, and some devils who communicate in sign may use several sets of limbs, instead of two tongues, to illustrate the double meaning of their words.

For each language, there is at least one sign language used by the same culture that can utilize the language's feature. For example, a character can use the Elemental Shift feature if they know Elemental Sign Language.

A spell requiring a verbal component is intended to challenge players in certain situations. Speaking an incantation while acting covertly may expose you as a spellcaster, and magic like the *silence* spell is meant to prevent spells from working at all. A creature who signs their verbal components has no trouble in these situations. You can decide how sign languages work at your table; at mine, we use the following rules to make spoken and signed languages feel different without making one more "optimal" than the other:

- A creature can sign their spells' verbal components if they know a sign language.
- If a spell has a somatic component as well, the caster must have both hands free to cast it: one hand for the verbal component and one for the somatic.
- If a creature is grappled and restrained, they can use their hands for either verbal or somatic components, but not both.
- Spellcasters who sign verbal components can cast spells while inside the area of a *silence* spell.
- If a creature would normally need to hear the spellcaster for a spell to take effect, they must instead be able to see the spellcaster.

Planar Languages

These are the languages of interplanar beings: gods, celestials, fiends, elementals, and other supernatural forces. Many of these languages are closely related, having all stemmed primarily from Primordial. The languages here are presented alphabetically, except for Primordial, which comes first as the root of most languages.

Primordial

The Language of Creation

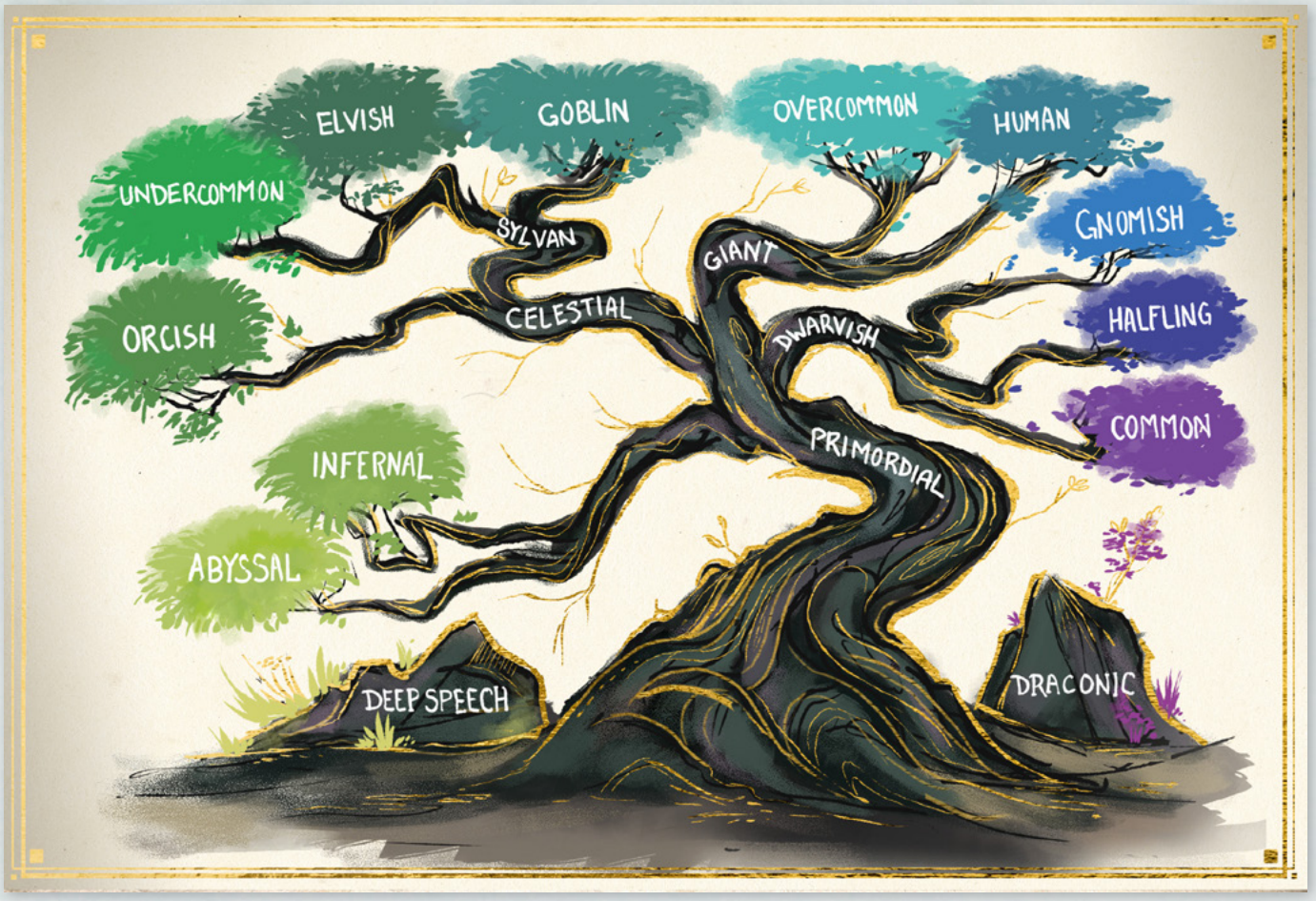
This was the language gods used to shape worlds, long before the idea of mortals was even conceived. At the beginning of time, the gods needed a language merely for expressing whether things *were* or *were not*. Primordial is therefore very good at expressing whether something exists, how many somethings there are, or the qualities of something. Primordial reads as a set of instructions and qualifiers.

It was, however, difficult to express feelings or more subjective ideas in the original tongue. As the language has grown, its speakers have borrowed words from newer languages to communicate emotions and opinions.

Dialects. Aquan, Auran, Ignan, and Terran

Usage. Planar elementals and their companions, students of evocation magic

Feature: Elemental Shift. If you don't already know a dialect of Primordial, choose which dialect you know. When you cast a spell that deals cold, fire, lightning, or thunder damage in a Primordial dialect you know, you can change some of the spell's damage dice to deal the



damage type associated with that dialect: cold (Aquan), lightning (Auran), fire (Ignan), or thunder (Terran). You can change a number of damage dice equal to half your level (rounded up).

Abyssal

The Language of Chaos

Some planar beings grew tired of Primordial and its rigidity. The more they bent the rules, the less recognizable their version of Primordial became. A new language spawned from this chaos: Abyssal. Abyssal has one singular third-person pronoun and no set word order (see "A Note on Word Order" below), and thus meaning is derived more from situational context than from the statement itself. It's often impossible to glean an Abyssal speaker's meaning until they finish their sentence.

Dialects. Some scholars posit that everyone who speaks Abyssal is speaking their own dialect.

Usage. Chaotic fiends, especially demons, and their followers

Feature: Incomprehensible, Have a Nice Day. Casting a spell in Abyssal makes it harder to comprehend enough to cancel or undo it. When you cast a spell in Abyssal, you can add your proficiency bonus to the DC for identifying, counterspelling, dispelling, or otherwise ending the spell's effect.

A Note on Word Order

Many languages have a specific word order to their sentences, allowing readers and listeners to intuit which word plays which role in a statement. English, for example, follows the SVO (Subject Verb Object) order. About half the world's languages, including Persian and Japanese, use SOV. Abyssal can use any order—readers and listeners must use context clues to grasp a sentence's true meaning. This makes it tough to understand what you hear or read quickly, even if Abyssal is your first language!

Celestial

The Language of Feeling

As the gods grew in power, their servants searched Primordial for a means of celebrating them. A new language came from that attempt: Celestial. In this new language, the speaker's emotional state determined the meaning of a statement as much as the words themselves. When there is no true love behind a declaration of love, for example, the speaker instead delivers a bold declaration of war. It is incredibly difficult to lie in Celestial when the speaker's feelings are involved, but this makes oaths of fealty or malicious aspersions incomparably trustworthy.

Dialects. Most pantheons have formed their own dialect.

Usage. Gods and angels, those descended from or blessed by divinity, and high-ranking officials of temples, churches, and religious cults

Feature: Unshakable. When you cast spells in Celestial, you cast them with your whole being, for good and for ill. You can't cast spells in Celestial if you're charmed or frightened, as this compulsion rings false to your true emotional self. However, you can add your Wisdom or Charisma modifier (your choice) to Constitution saving throws made to maintain your concentration on a spell cast in Celestial.

INFERNAL

The Language of Duality

Most fiends have a forked tongue or multiple tongues, which allows them to voice two consonants at once, such as *t* and *k*. The language evolved from this, giving opposing meanings to words with similar sounds. Thus, Infernal is the prime language for obfuscating meaning—single-tongued humanoids speak Infernal to create dual magical effects, using magic to help them voice multiple sounds at once.

Common has borrowed words from Infernal, especially in the field of contract law. When translated incorrectly or incompletely, as Infernal often is, the Common version could lose over half the original's meaning. Always hire someone who reads Infernal to read your contracts!

Dialects. If your cosmological model of hell contains circles, different planes, or other regional distinctions, each distinct region likely has its own dialect.

Usage. Lawful fiends (particularly devils), their followers, and the most effective (and expensive) contract lawyers

Feature: Doublespeak. When you speak Infernal to cast a spell or a cantrip that requires you to choose one effect from a list of three or more options, such as *prestidigitation*, you can instead choose two different options, as long as their effects are not mutually exclusive (for example, you cannot both enlarge and reduce a target with the same spell). If the spell calls forth a creature with a choice that determines their features, you can only summon one creature, but they can have the features of two choices. If the spell requires an attack roll or a saving throw (including repeated saving throws made after the spell is cast), a separate roll must be made for both effects. However, you have disadvantage on Constitution saving throws made to maintain your concentration on a spell cast in Infernal.

DEEP SPEECH

The Language of [illegible]

Deep Speech isn't the language of the Old Ones so much as it is a means of simplifying their language for mortals to understand. You can study Deep Speech, but it's impossible to grasp the true form of the Old Ones' ancient tongue. Though you can't fathom the incantations you speak, you can harness the unknowable, creating unexpected results when you cast spells.

Dialects. There is not enough data on Deep Speech and the language it models to identify whether dialects exist. For all we know, Deep Speech could be several languages!

Usage. Cults and warlocks following the Old Ones, travelers from distant worlds, and anyone else with an interest in the esoteric and otherworldly

Feature: Lost in Translation. When you cast a spell in Deep Speech, there is a chance you don't know exactly what you're saying and invite additional effects into the mix. Roll on the Deep Speech Effects table to determine what effects, if any, occur.

SYLVAN

The Growing Language

Sylvan may have sprung from Auran, but it's difficult to tell—the language evolves constantly, much faster than the average language. New words are invented and adopted by the fey courts every hour.

Sylvan speakers love using loanwords, slang, shortened versions of words—anything to add style and freshness to their speech. Sylvan speakers commonly leave conversations with several new words in their repertoire. Unsurprisingly, Sylvan has the largest vocabulary of all known languages.

Dialects. Each fey court uses a different dialect. Repeating a phrase that's fashionable in one court may get you kicked out of another.

Usage. Denizens of the Feywild, nature spirits, elves and goblins of the fey realms

Feature: Overgrowth. While you are concentrating on a spell you cast in Sylvan that has an area of effect that originates from a point of your choice, that area grows over time. At the start of each of your turns (up to a maximum of 10 turns), the area of effect cumulatively increases by 5 feet in one dimension. You decide the direction of the growth, but the growth must happen. The direction of the growth is based on the shape of the area of effect:

- The radius of a circle or sphere increases by 5 feet.
- You can increase either the radius or height of a cylinder by 5 feet.
- You can increase either the length, width, or height of a cube, square, or wall by 5 feet.

Deep Speech Effects

d20	Effect
1–10	No effect
11	Your knowledge of Deep Speech transforms. You lose the ability to speak Deep Speech and gain the ability to speak a random language (chosen by the GM) you don't already know. This effect ends when you finish a short or long rest.
12	You extinguish every source of light and magical darkness within 60 feet of you.
13	A surge of otherworldly magic empowers your spell. If your spell deals damage, that damage is doubled and you become blinded and deafened until the end of your next turn.
14	Your mind briefly opens to the thoughts of those around you. You receive the surface thoughts of each creature within 10 feet of you who speaks at least one language. If you hear the thoughts of three or more creatures in this way, you become overwhelmed and take 1d4 psychic damage per creature you can hear.
15	You are imbued with a flash of great and terrible energy. Each creature within 60 feet of you who can see you must make a Wisdom saving throw against your spell save DC. On a failed save, a creature is frightened of you for 1 minute. A frightened creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themself on a success.
16	Your magic unwittingly siphons the energy of yourself or others. You lose hit points equal to 1d6 + your spell's level and the creature closest to you gains temporary hit points equal to the number of hit points you lost. You can instead choose to have the reverse happen: the creature closest to you must make a Constitution saving throw against your spell save DC. On a failed save, the target loses hit points equal to 1d6 + the spell's level and you gain temporary hit points equal to the number of hit points the target lost. If multiple creatures are equally close to you, you choose which one is affected.
17	In addition to the spell you cast in Deep Speech, you cast *blink* on yourself, but you can't dismiss it before the spell ends.
18	You cast the spell using a spell slot one level higher than you meant to, expending the new slot instead of your intended slot. If you do not have enough slots of that level, you must expend a number of lower-level slots whose sum is equal to the new slot level, or expend all your remaining slots.
19	You can choose one die involved in casting your spell to be rerolled: one attack roll, one target's saving throw, or one damage die. You make this decision after you see whether the roll succeeds or fails. You or the target must use the result of the second roll.
20	In addition to the spell you cast in Deep Speech, you cast the *black tentacles* spell in an area centered on yourself. If the spell you cast requires concentration, you simultaneously concentrate on both spells. Ending concentration on one spell ends concentration on the other.

Mortal Languages

These are the languages spoken on the Material Plane, typically by humanoids. Some languages were invented by mortals, while others evolved from planar languages. The languages here are presented in alphabetical order.

A Note on Worldbuilding

This article assumes a world where the different humanoid species developed largely independently of each other before forming societies together, sharing their culture and language. Languages like Elvish and Orcish are older than languages spoken in centers where cultures gather and exchange words, such as Common and Undercommon. Nevertheless, these older languages are still spoken today because in my wildest fantasy, multilingualism and language preservation are universal values.

Draconic

The Language of Power

Draconic is one of the oldest languages on the Material Plane and appears to be an isolate that doesn't stem from any known language, as it shares very few similarities with languages both ancient and new. Dragons claim they invented the language (thus its name) and then shared it with their humanoid companions. Linguists to date have found no credible evidence to support or refute this claim.

When Draconic was first spoken, its connection to magic was so powerful that somatic and material components were not required to cast spells. Every so often, a modern Draconic caster can harness that connection and save themselves a few thousand gold on components.

Registers. While Draconic doesn't have dialects, it does have two registers for forms used in different social

A Note on the Commons

"Common" languages, such as Common and Undercommon, are understood to be the lingua franca for different regions that interact regularly. Gameplay-wise, Common also expedites storytelling when language and communication barriers aren't the themes of the encounter.

At my table, adventurers, diplomats, traders, residents of large cities, and travelers all know a "common" language. I often imagine that Common is heavily influenced by Dwarvish, since the rules state that many languages use the Dwarvish script, and Undercommon is heavily influenced by Elvish, since both use the Elvish script. This informs the worldbuilding in this article: dwarves and elves were some of the first people to come to this world, and their language both persists and mutates.

You may have different "common" languages for different regions and cultures in your world. Perhaps Overcommon is a mix of Primordial and Giant. Maybe those who live in oceanic trading port towns speak Seacommon, a delightful mix of Gnomish and Abyssal.

contexts: Incanted and Vernal. Incanted is used for spellcasting and writing, while Vernal is more conversational.

Usage. Scholars, mages, and historians study and write texts in Incanted Draconic. Humanoid cultures who regularly petition, pay tribute to, or otherwise interact with dragons speak Vernal Draconic amongst themselves, but Incanted with dragons. Dragons speak Incanted Draconic exclusively; it's considered rude to speak Vernal in the company of a dragon.

Feature: Hoard Management. When you cast a spell in Draconic with a material component that is consumed by the spell, make an ability check using your spellcasting ability. The DC equals 10 + the spell's level. On a success, the component is not consumed.

Dwarvish

The Sculpted Language

It's said that the first dwarves learned the Terran dialect of Primordial from the earth itself, listening to it speak as they worked. Just as they molded their home from the earth, they molded their language from Terran, and though both languages have developed over millennia, you can spot similar roots between Terran and Dwarvish if you know where to look.

Dialects. Dwarvish dialects are named after the minerals that their speakers commonly live near and work with: Siltish, Quartzen, and Olivinic, to name a few.

Usage. As dwarves made contact with other species, they gladly shared their resources, including their language. Dwarvish is still very popular in places where mining and farming are the strongest industries. Many languages borrow their technical terms from Dwarvish.

Feature: Spellpoint. Dwarvish has an incredibly precise system for describing measurements and placement. When you cast a spell in Dwarvish with an area of effect that originates from you, you can instead have the spell originate from a point you choose within range. The range for this feature is 5 feet if you cast a cantrip. For spells of 1st level or higher, the range is a number of feet equal to ten times the level you cast the spell at.

Elvish

The Immutable Language

Since the first elves left the Feywild, they've been concerned with preserving the "integrity" of their language from the outside influence of borrowed words. They've formed a committee of delegates from each elven court that meets once a century, for ten to twenty years at a time, to debate (at length) potential changes and additions to the Standardized Elvish. Some linguists believe that Elvish is closer to the original Sylvan than modern Sylvan is, because one has been allowed to change organically and the other has not.

The sanctity of Elvish is about the only thing all major elven societies agree on. No matter the time or distance that separates them, they all still understand each other perfectly when forced to interact with one another.

Dialects. The Elvish Academy would have you believe there are none, but that's not how language works. Though drow archives and wood elf spellbooks look the same on paper, these communities sound very different when speaking informally amongst themselves.

Usage. Elvish has gained a reputation as a "high society" language. Many cultures and species consider knowing Elvish necessary to participate in royal courts.

Feature: Cast by Committee. When you cast a spell in Elvish, and an allied spellcaster who also speaks Elvish is within range of your spell and can hear or see you, your ally can use their reaction to extend your spell's range as though you were casting it from the space they occupy.

Giant

A Resonant Language

In an old folk tale, the giants, high up as they were, were so annoyed by the air elementals in their way that they would take a deep breath and blow the elemental miles away. These exhales developed tone and inflection, and Giant as a language was born.

Giants, with their massive vocal tracts, can make more vowels than a Medium-sized creature, and their language reflects that. To an untrained listener, many of these vowels sound similar or near-indistinguishable to vowels they're familiar with.

Because Giant is spoken by most sky-dwellers, many have petitioned for Giant to be renamed "Overcommon," while others argue Overcommon is its own language descended from Giant.

Dialects. All types of giants, from trolls to cloud giants, have differently sized windpipes, leading to different ranges of vowels. Each one has their own dialect, with some incorporating whistles into their conversations.

Usage. This robust and vowel-heavy language is used by giants and sky-dwellers. It is also the most popular language for opera and other musical performances.

Feature: Advanced Projection. Your fluency in Giant unlocks several levels of voice control. When you cast a spell in Giant with a range that isn't touch or self, you can either project the incantation, doubling the spell's range, or whisper the incantation, allowing you to target a creature within 5 feet of you without suffering disadvantage if the spell is a ranged attack.

Gnomish

A Writer's Language

While Gnomish utilizes the Dwarvish writing system, it doesn't use it in the same way. Instead, Gnomish fits words on the page both horizontally and vertically. Related ideas intersect, creating an almost-crossword that can store twice as much information.

Since this writing system uses only half as much paper as the average record written in another language, it's regarded as a language highly suited to historical documentation and preservation.

Dialects. Each letter is pronounced in Gnomish, which means the language itself is actually pronounced "guh-NO-mish." Clipped Gnomish is a popular dialect that renders some letters silent.

Usage. Scholars use Gnomish to record historical information. Gnomish has also influenced the shorthand of stenographers and other notetakers.

Feature: More is More. Gnomish can fit many words into a small space. When casting a spell in Gnomish that has a word or question limit, you can speak twice as many words or questions as normal. For example, you can cast *command* with a two-word phrase, *sending* allows for up to 50 words, and you can ask up to ten questions instead of five when you cast *speak with dead*. Additionally, if you store your spells in a spellbook, the time and monetary cost to add a spell to your spellbook is halved.

Goblin

A Language for Contrarians

Goblins, like elves, came to the Material Plane seeking a reprieve from exhausting fey courts. They constructed their own language, which is based on Sylvan and yet impossible to decipher by someone who spoke only Sylvan.

Words in Sylvan have the opposite meaning in Goblin. "Hot" is "cold," "up" is "down," and so on. Words that don't have a clear-cut opposite (e.g., "cat") are written and pronounced backward ("tac"). As the language evolved, it borrowed words from other languages and gave them the same treatment: backward pronunciation and opposite meanings. Some linguists call these "anti-words" instead of borrowed words.

Dialects. Goblin dialects vary widely depending on which other languages its speakers come into contact with. A Goblin-speaking society living alongside dragons primarily uses Draconic anti-words, for example.

Usage. As goblins delight in the contrarianism of their language, modern Goblin is a grab bag of anti-words from many languages. Because of this, Goblin has influenced many secret languages, such as thieves' cant.

Feature: Contrarian. When you cast a spell in Goblin that would normally impose a condition on that target, you can instead remove that condition from your target. Alternatively, when you cast a spell that would normally remove a condition from your target, the target must instead succeed on a Wisdom saving throw against your spell save DC or suffer one condition of your choice listed in that spell for 1 minute or until your concentration ends. If a spell adds or removes multiple conditions or affects multiple targets, you choose one condition and one target. If a spell has other effects, such as dealing damage or restoring hit points, these effects remain unchanged.

Halfling

A Language for All Situations

Halfling may have the largest number of pronouns and methods of addressing or referring to someone in any language. The language distinguishes between the singular, double, and three-plus "you," as well as the double and three-plus "we." Halfling even includes the reportative: whoever was around to witness the contents of the sentence.

Dialects. Halfling dialects grant unique insight into the dynamics of the speakers' communities. For example, one community of Halfling speakers, governed by a true democracy, invented new pronouns for "everyone present but me" and "everyone present but you."

Usage. Halfling is the favored language among community-driven societies, as speakers can more easily

include more people in the conversation and specify the subjects of their sentences.

Feature: One For You, One For Me. When casting a spell of 1st level or higher in Halfling that targets a willing creature, you gain temporary hit points equal to three times your proficiency bonus.

A New Language

"Common" is a language that everyone speaks. It's weird to assume Common is the default language for humans, and if each species has its own language, humans should have one, too. When incorporating Human into your character customization process, treat it like you would any other language. If you use the core rules, a human character can speak, read, and write both Human and Common (instead of Common and one language of the player's choice). Characters can gain Human as a language any way they can gain other languages—through feats, backgrounds, study, or any other method.

Human

The Spirited Language

On first inspection, humans are unremarkable—their bodies are highly vulnerable to injury and disease, they possess no inherent magical connection, and they live half as long as the average sentient creature. What humans *do* possess is an extraordinary tenacity, the will to stand against an uncaring world and continue forward. Humans truly believe they can accomplish anything with enough grit, and this belief is reflected in their language.

In addition, the Human language is a tongue of bonds and connections. Its conversations feature a lot of call and response, repetition, and other linguistic devices that make it easy for two speakers of Human to connect.

The Human language bears some resemblance to Giant in grammar and vocabulary; however, linguistic opinions differ on whether Human is descended from Giant or if the grammatical resemblance is coincidental and the vocabulary comes from loanwords adopted into earlier Human dialects.

Dialects. There are more dialects of Human than any other mortal language. Because human life spans are comparatively short, scholars have witnessed dialects transform into complete languages and then die out in their lifetime.

Usage. You may often hear a team chant shouted in Human at a military camp or sporting event, even if the regiment or team normally speaks another language. These chants capture the heart of the Human language: its simplicity and ability to help strangers forge strong bonds quickly.

Feature: Dauntless Spirit. When your current hit points are less than 20 percent of your hit point maximum (rounded down) and you cast a spell in Human, you can choose a number of creatures you can see equal to your proficiency bonus. Each target gains advantage on their next attack roll, ability check, or saving throw.

Orcish

A Descriptive Language

Orcish packs into a noun what most other languages need a whole sentence to convey. Simple Common sentences like "Garax fought valiantly" would be deemed incomplete in Orcish, as the language requires more context: who is Garax, do they have a title, what deeds do we ascribe to them to be sure that they fought valiantly? "Garax-Who-Outsmarted-His-Own-Muscles fought valiantly" is a more complete sentence, but that direct Common translation loses the poetry.

Orcish speakers smash multiple words together into one long compound word, sometimes dropping or adding syllables for ease of pronunciation. Every noun in Orcish is therefore a proper noun—a name. These names are constructed by modifying a base noun to fit the singular context of the sentence they're in and no other. Because of this, ambiguity is nearly impossible.

Dialects. Orcish dialects are based on the information the community speaking it values. These values determine what kinds of information commonly modify a base noun, such as size, use, owner, and the speaker's appreciation (or lack thereof) for the noun.

Usage. Orcish is a popular language in fields such as journalism or lawmaking, where having more context is better than less. Many journalists write first drafts in Orcish and then translate them to their audience's language to ensure proper context is being provided.

Feature: Specificity. When you cast a spell in Orcish that affects a single target, that spell becomes more powerful the more information you have on the target. You can increase your spell attack bonus or the spell save DC by 1 (to a maximum of your proficiency bonus) for each piece of information you know about the target. Examples include:

- Their name
- A notorious past deed of theirs
- Their place of origin
- Their organizational affiliation and rank
- The name of a relative or close friend
- The name of a property they own
- Another piece of information, at the GM's discretion

Once you use a piece of information about the target, you can't benefit from using that information again for the next 7 days.

We've observed the words Orc and Orcish used interchangeably in Common speech, with some patterns emerging. It's common for one to say, "They speak Orc" but refer to "an Orcish speaker." I asked Dohma Raskovar, a native Orcish speaker, what he thought, and he told me to stop wasting his time.

LEARNING NEW LANGUAGES

What fun is a language if you're the only one who speaks it? Languages are meant to be shared, and the process of learning a language can make for some excellent roleplay moments. This section provides expanded rules for learning a new language.

To learn a new language, you need three things: a teacher, funds, and time. Your teacher can be an NPC or another player character fluent in that language. It takes 250 days to become fluent in a language, as long as you spend 1 gp and at least 2 hours practicing or studying each of those days. The gold pays for study materials, compensation and thank-you gifts for your instructor … or apology gifts you give people you've insulted by accidentally saying something wildly offensive in your target language.

You can study multiple languages at once, but you can only allocate a day's worth of study and funds to one language. No double-dipping.

STAGES OF FLUENCY

Learning a language isn't a binary of "doesn't understand" and "totally fluent." Just like any skill, there are different levels of mastery, and your level of mastery determines how easy it is to communicate, influence others, or cast spells in that language. You can use language features before you achieve fluency, it's just more difficult.

Learning Through Failure. At Conversational and Intermediate levels, failing to communicate or cast a spell in your target language is still a learning experience, and it adds additional days to the total number of days you've studied, as described below. You must pay the extra gold for those days (to make up for the problems you caused when you misspoke or materials used on corrected notes), and you can only learn from failure once per day.

CONVERSATIONAL

At 10–100 days with your target language, you are at a conversational level. You can introduce yourself, ask for directions, purchase supplies, and communicate other basic information needed to traverse places where your target language is commonly spoken.

When you make an ability check that hinges on your ability to speak in your target language (such as making a Deception check to lie about who you are, or an Investigation check to ask for directions), you make that check with disadvantage. On a failed check, you learn from the experience and add 5 days to the total number of days you've studied the language.

When you attempt to cast a spell that requires a spell slot and a verbal component in your target language, roll a d20 against a DC equal to 10 + the spell's level. On a failure, the spell fails, and the spell slot is expended. However, you still learn from the experience and add 5 days to the total number of days you've studied the language.

INTERMEDIATE

At 101–249 days with your target language, you are at an intermediate level. You can express complex thoughts about the past, present, and future.

When you make an ability check that hinges on your ability to speak in your target language, roll a d4 and subtract the result from the total. On a failed check, you learn from the experience and add 5 days to the total number of days you've studied the language.

When you attempt to cast a spell with a verbal component in your target language, make an ability check using your spellcasting ability and add your proficiency bonus. The DC for this check is 10 + the spell's level. On a failed check, the spell fails and the spell slot is expended. However, you still learn from the experience and add 5 days to the total number of days you've studied the language.

FLUENT

At 250 days with your target language, you can confidently communicate and cast spells with no issue. Some idioms that native speakers use may escape you, but you can easily deduce or learn them with practice.

You suffer no penalties to communicating or casting spells in this language.

Language-Specific Spells

Some spells have incantations that don't translate into other languages. This section contains new spells that can only be cast in their language of origin and benefit from the feature of that language described above. These spells can be chosen at character creation or while leveling up, provided they are on the character's class spell list and the character speaks the corresponding language.

The Arcanolinguistic Spells table lists these new spells, ordering them by level and denoting each spell's language of origin, school of magic, and which classes have access to it. At the GM's discretion, these spells can be accessed by additional classes or subclasses. Additionally, if a character doesn't know the language of a specific spell, the GM can allow an NPC who speaks that language to teach the incantation, possibly for a price.

Arcanolinguistic Spells

Level	Spell	Language	School	Classes
2nd	*Bellow*	Giant	Evocation	Bard, Cleric, Paladin
2nd	*Correction*	Elvish	Enchantment	Bard, Cleric, Paladin, Wizard
2nd	*Elemental Missile*	Primordial	Evocation	Druid, Ranger, Sorcerer, Wizard
2nd	*Fold*	Gnomish	Transmutation	Sorcerer, Warlock, Wizard
4th	*Encore*	Human	Enchantment	Bard, Paladin, Sorcerer, Warlock
5th	*Reverse*	Goblin	Transmutation	Bard, Druid, Ranger, Sorcerer, Wizard
6th	*Duplicate*	Draconic	Conjuration	Cleric (Avarice Domain only[1]), Druid, Sorcerer (Draconic Bloodline only), Wizard
8th	*Bargain*	Infernal	Enchantment	Sorcerer, Warlock, Wizard
9th	*Epithetize*	Orcish	Divination	Bard, Cleric

[1] The Avarice Domain can be found in "Goldmonger Subclasses" in *ARCADIA 5*.

Bargain

8th-Level Enchantment

Casting Time: 1 hour
Range: Touch
Components: V (Infernal only), S (a handshake), M (a written contract)
Duration: Instantaneous

You enter into a binding contract with a willing target, trading a piece of your power in exchange for claiming your target's soul at the contract's fulfillment. While the contract holds, you can't use the spell slot or Mystic Arcanum feature you used to cast this spell, as the magical energy you would expend each day is delivered to your target instead. The spell slot isn't regained until the terms of the contract have been fulfilled.

Choose one of the following terms to require of your target, or decide on a similarly clear term:

- The pact ends when the target kills a specific creature.
- The pact ends when the target dies.
- The pact ends after one year.

Choose one of the following effects to grant your target:

- If the target is a spellcaster, they learn three spells of 5th-level or lower from any spell list. They can cast each of these spells without expending a spell slot, and they must finish a long rest before they can cast that spell in this way again. They can also cast these spells using spell slots they have of the appropriate level.
- The target's hit point maximum is doubled; this benefit doesn't affect hit points gained from leveling up or other effects after this spell is cast.
- The target gains 50,000 gp, which this spell creates. The gold disappears, along with all goods and services purchased with it, when the contract's terms are fulfilled.

The contract ends when its terms are fulfilled, whereupon the target's soul appears in your hands in the form of a diamond worth 25,000 gp. If the target dies, they can only be brought back to life if this diamond is used as the material component for a spell such as *revivify* or *resurrection*. If the diamond is destroyed or consumed by another spell, the soul is destroyed.



The contract can't be ended prematurely, even if both parties desire it, except by a *wish* spell.

If you can find a fiend willing to teach you to bargain with the best of them, you may have already fallen victim to this spell. When a target of the bargain spell loses their soul but not their life, they become a mere shell of their former self.

BELLOW

2nd-Level Evocation

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Self (30-foot cone)
Components: V (Giant only)
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You bellow with the operatic tones of a giant, filling the air with magical sound waves in a 30-foot cone emanating from you. For the duration, no other sound can be created within or pass through that area, except the sound of another creature speaking in Giant. Casting a spell that includes a verbal component is impossible there, including for you, unless the verbal component is in Giant. The bellow is audible out to 300 feet.

At the end of each of your turns before the spell ends, you decide which way the cone faces.

Brigands and mercenary groups who speak Giant utilize the bellow spell to neutralize their enemies' magic and boost their own. When one bellows in Giant, the only sound that can quite match it is someone else <u>also</u> bellowing in Giant. (It is, quite frankly, terrifying to see angry warriors running at you, belting at the top of their lungs.)

CORRECTION

2nd-Level Enchantment

Casting Time: 1 reaction, which you take when a creature you can see or hear within 30 feet of you, other than yourself, fails an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw
Range: 30 feet
Components: V (Elvish only)
Duration: Instantaneous

You critique the triggering creature and implore them to try again. They can reroll the d20 and must use the second roll.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, the triggering creature can add a +1 bonus to their new roll for each slot level above 2nd.

Elvish has many, many ways to say "That's not how I would have done it."

DUPLICATE

6th-Level Conjuration

Casting Time: 10 minutes
Range: Touch
Components: V (Draconic only), S, M (the item you wish to duplicate)
Duration: Instantaneous

You touch a Small or smaller object and attempt to make a copy of it. You must make an ability check using your spellcasting ability. The DC is determined by the Duplication Difficulty table. On a successful check, an exact copy of the item appears in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of you. On a failed check, the item is not duplicated and this spell can't be cast on it again for 1d100 days.

An item can only be duplicated by this spell once, and an item created by this spell can't be duplicated. If the original item is destroyed, the duplicate vanishes.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 7th level or higher, you can duplicate rarer and more valuable items, according to the Duplication Difficulty table.

When dragons run out of items to collect, they turn to magic. The invention of the duplicate spell allowed dragons to double the size of their hoards with ease. Of course, once this spell was popularized, dragons placed more emphasis on matchless "original" items as opposed to how many replica items one possessed when determining who had the most splendid hoard.

Duplication Difficulty

Item	Spell Slot Level Required	DC
Mundane item worth up to 500 gp, common or uncommon magic item	6th	16
Mundane item worth up to 1,000 gp, rare magic item	7th	18
Mundane item worth up to 5,000 gp, very rare magic item	8th	20
Mundane item worth up to 10,000 gp, legendary or artifact magic item	9th	22

Elemental Missile

2nd-Level Evocation

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 120 feet
Components: V (Primordial only), S
Duration: Instantaneous

You create three glowing darts of elemental magic, choosing one of the following damage types for each dart: acid, cold, fire, lightning, poison, or thunder. Each dart hits a creature of your choice that you can see within range. A dart deals 1d8 + 1 damage of the type you chose to its target. The darts all strike simultaneously, and you can direct them to hit one creature or several.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a slot of 3rd level or higher, the spell creates one more dart for each slot level above 2nd.

Magic missile is considered one of the most standard spells in a wizard's repertoire, but it's actually a simplified version of this much older spell, which demands fine control over the elements. Such control only comes to those who speak the language of creation.

Encore

4th-Level Enchantment

Casting Time: 1 reaction, which you take when a creature you can see within range takes an action
Range: 60 feet
Components: V (Human only), S (applause)
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You clap your hands as the triggering creature takes an action. The triggering creature must make a Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, the target finishes the action and ends their turn. Until the spell ends, they must spend each of their subsequent turns taking that same action, or doing nothing if they can't take that action. (If the target originally took the Dash action, they must instead move up to their speed and take no action.)

The target can choose new targets for the action or adjust the resources they expend while taking the action. For example, they can make the same weapon attack against a different target or cast the same spell at a higher level. The target can repeat the Charisma saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themself on a success.

I have been told that the most popular incantation for the encore spell is the Human word forethibbit[1], which is apparently an expression of great encouragement.

[1] Translator's note: "For the bit."

Epithetize

9th-Level Divination

Casting Time: 10 minutes
Range: Touch
Components: V (Orcish only), M (a trophy from a creature of challenge rating 16 or higher the target killed, or a very rare magic item or mundane object worth at least 10,000 gp given to the target as a reward for a deed)
Duration: Instantaneous

You touch a willing creature other than yourself and grant them an epithet worthy of an outstanding deed they have performed. That name imbues the target with lasting magical power. Choose one of the following effects:

- Choose an ability score. The target's score in that ability increases by 2, as does their maximum for that score. (Epithet examples: Lightfoot, Center of the Room)
- Choose two skills or tools the target is proficient in. If they aren't already doing so, the target doubles their proficiency bonus for ability checks they make using those skills or tools. (Epithet examples: The Reliable, The Knowing)
- When the target makes an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw and rolls a 1 on the d20, they can change the result on the die to a 20. Once the target uses this ability, they can't use it again until they finish a long rest. (Epithet examples: Clutch, The Unbelievable)
- Choose a creature type: Aberration, Beast, Celestial, Dragon, Elemental, Fey, Fiend, Monstrosity, or Undead. The target can sense when a creature of that type is within 30 feet of them and has advantage on the first attack roll against a creature of that type they make on a turn. (Epithet examples: Scalestalker, The Merciless)

- When the target restores hit points to one or more creatures, they can choose another creature within 30 feet of them to regain the same number of hit points. (Epithet examples: Miraculous, The Underappreciated)

A creature can only have one epithet at a time. You can use an action to revoke the target's epithet and its corresponding benefit at any time.

As part of casting this spell, you offer a material component of great worth. Neither the trophy nor the magic item can be substituted by a spellcasting focus, as would normally be the case for components that don't have a specific cost. The magic item must be a reward given specifically to the target. The trophy must be obtained from a creature of challenge rating 16 or higher to whom the target of the spell dealt the killing blow.

Every name holds meaning, but some names hold more meaning than others. If someone is granted a name through the epithetize spell, for example, it means that they are very powerful and revered.

FOLD

2nd-Level Transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Touch
Components: V (Gnomish only), S, M (a bone or bamboo folder)
Duration: 1 minute

You touch a willing Humanoid and allow their body to fold and contort to take up much less space. For the duration, the target's size stays the same, but they can occupy spaces up to two sizes smaller than their size without squeezing.

Additionally, the target can occupy the same space as another creature or move through the space of another creature without it counting as difficult terrain.

When I cast fold on myself, it feels like moving into a new body. Living people, however, have told me this spell can feel very disorienting at first. It certainly does look strange to see someone who would normally tower over me scrunch up like an accordioned piece of paper.

REVERSE

5th-Level Transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Touch
Components: V (Goblin only), S
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You touch a creature and reverse their defenses and weaknesses. An unwilling creature must succeed on a Constitution saving throw to avoid the effect. For the duration, the target becomes vulnerable to damage types they're resistant to and resistant to damage types they're vulnerable to. This spell affects resistances and vulnerabilities granted to the creature by any means, including magic items, spells, and other effects, but doesn't affect a creature's resistance or vulnerability to damage caused by a type of weapon, such as magical bludgeoning damage or slashing damage from a silvered weapon.

This little reality-warping spell is a two-for-one: an effective battle tactic and a classic goblin prank.

THE MAGEWRIGHT'S STUDIO

Making magic items momentous

by Cat & Lore Evans

> "Safe? Oh, they're never safe–but they are fascinating."
>
> –Solange Mercurius,
> Magewright of the Atelier Quicksilver

Magic items should be *magical*. When the hero of a fantasy novel obtains a magic item, it's a source of wonder and excitement. In the best cases, the gift—or loot—reveals something exciting about the world and the other heroes who walked it in the past. But it can be hard to capture that feeling in a tabletop roleplaying game. With their focus on mechanics, often-generic names, and predefined rarities organized into tables, magic items too easily become familiar and mundane.

The perfect solution to this is obviously even more tables! The tables in this article are different, though. They give GMs (or players, if they have an item as part of their backstory) a way to quickly generate a description, a legend, a minor magical feature, or a secret—any or all of which can make a magic item feel bespoke and important. An item can then take a unique magical upgrade, making it even more distinct from other items of its type.

Each description should make players curious, so GMs should be ready to use an item's physical, magical, and narrative qualities as story seeds. And even if that doesn't happen, players are sure to be excited to hear about: "*Silvertongue*, the bright-bladed dagger that returned dozens of skeletal warriors to their rest at the Battle of Hammerfell, and whose previous owner wants it back." As opposed to: "A *+1 dagger*."

Personalizing Magic Items

You can use some or all of the tables in this section to make a magic item something special, rolling percentile dice for each table as you determine. For a particularly detailed item, you can roll more than once on some tables (for example, to create a wand with multiple great deeds attached to it, or a particularly ornate suit of armor). Each table should work for any category of magic item, though you'll no doubt occasionally run into some unexpected combinations. In that case, just reroll—or run with the unexpected to create a truly memorable item. Be aware, though, that grandiose story elements attached to a common magic item might feel more hilarious than impressive.

Millions of possible combinations can be found in these tables, so they should keep you in descriptions and plot fodder for some time to come. At the same time, the tables are designed to strike a balance between general and specific. They leave room for players and GMs to customize the results by fleshing out the details and events that shaped an item's history.

Design

The notable physical features of a magic item are likely the first thing to be noticed about it. Any of these design features can add intrigue and a strong aesthetic to an item.

Magic Item Design

d100	Design
01–04	Heavily bejeweled
05–08	Includes fragments of bone
09–12	Has minor damage that can't be repaired
13–16	Marked with the sign of a secret society
17–20	Marked with the signs of multiple secret societies
21–24	Contains a secret compartment or pocket
25–28	Has a mirrored sheen
29–32	Makes a pleasing sound when used
33–36	In the style of an ancient civilization
37–40	Has a map as part of the design
41–44	Can be dismantled and reassembled
45–48	Vividly colored or patterned
49–52	Emanates a faint melody when used
53–56	Bloodstained
57–60	Releases harmless sparks when struck
61–64	Appears to be made of darkness
65–68	Cobbled together from several other items
69–72	Crafted from dragon bone, sculpted water, or some other unusual material
73–76	Etched with images of strange animals
77–80	Marred by dirt or tarnish that can't be cleaned
81–84	Smells of something pleasant
85–88	Smells of something foul
89–92	Marked with an unknown language
93–96	Marked with the names of past owners
97–00	Spectral shapes swirl around the object

Legend

A magic item's legend defines the history it is known for. A character can learn this information with magic such as the *legend lore* spell, or with a week of research in a major city or a location related to the item's history, and a successful Intelligence (History) check. Learning the lore of most items requires a DC 15 check, but legendary items or artifacts might be better known, as the GM determines.

Certain NPCs, including sages and bards, might also know the legend behind an item. There's no point giving magic items fascinating legends if characters never learn them!

Magic Item Legends

d100	Legend
01–04	Once part of a dragon's hoard
05–08	Created by a dead god
09–12	Fated to bring about a terrible villain's destruction
13–16	The only surviving relic from a famed collection
17–20	Stolen from a powerful ruler
21–24	Stolen from another plane
25–28	Connected to the assassination of a ruler
29–32	Used by a famous prophet or warrior
33–36	Believed to have been destroyed long ago
37–40	Present at the creation of the world
41–44	Connected to the end of the world
45–48	Created from a rare and alien material
49–52	Created by a powerful hag
53–56	Traded by a previous owner for a terrible deal
57–60	Once the favored trinket of a fey queen
61–64	Constructed from an older magic item
65–68	Connected to an ancient disaster
69–72	Made with the essence of a powerful fiend
73–76	Dreamed into existence
77–80	Caused the downfall of a demigod
81–84	A war was fought over its ownership
85–88	Remnant of a lost form of magic or technology
89–92	Sealed an interplanar portal
93–96	Traded to seal a peace treaty
97–00	A hero traded their soul to enhance its power

Feature

Minor features are unusual details that add interest and style to a magic item, making it unique without necessarily making it more powerful. The details of any such feature are revealed when a character attunes to the item, or if the item is subject to an *identify* spell.

An item whose feature involves losing its magic regains all magical function once the indicated condition is met.

Magic Item Features

d100	Feature
01–04	Warm to the touch
05–08	Cold to the touch
09–12	Changes color in hot or cold temperatures
13–16	Changes color with its user's emotional state
17–20	Camouflages itself when not held or worn
21–24	Loses its magic if its user sleeps without touching it
25–28	Loses its magic unless immersed in a specific substance once a week (water, wine, compost, and so forth)
29–32	Loses its magic unless told a secret at least once a week
33–36	Loses its magic unless sated with a few drops of blood every day
37–40	Loses its magic unless bathed in moonlight for a specified duration at least once a week
41–44	Requires a special ritual to attune or end attunement (may or may not come with instructions)
45–48	Flowers grow wherever the item is placed during a long rest
49–52	Damp to the touch
53–56	Causes its user to always sleep well
57–60	Causes its user to frequently feel as though they've forgotten something
61–64	Casts no shadow
65–68	Casts the shadow of a different item
69–72	Runes appear and disappear on the item, with no discernible cause
73–76	Footprints sometimes appear near the item's location
77–80	Never quite where it was left
81–84	Occasionally whispers old proverbs
85–88	Easy to hide
89–92	Instills its user with the fears and concerns of creatures within a fixed distance
93–96	Contains a navigation aid (a compass, a route recorder, and so forth)
97–00	Emits a faint colored glow in darkness



Heart's Vow

Secret

A secret attached to a magic item can't be learned with any ability check. Unless fully or partially revealed with a *legend lore* spell or similar magic as the GM determines, the secret becomes apparent only over time. The GM can also determine whether a secret that affects an item's user applies only to an attuned user (for magic items that require attunement), applies only to the item's current user, or applies to any creature who has ever used the item.

Magic Item Secrets

d100	Secret
01–04	Sought by an order of assassins
05–08	Used in an act of treason
09–12	Stolen from its last owner
13–16	Marks its user as the heir to a small noble estate
17–20	Sought by a fiend
21–24	Causes its user to dream each night of an ancient battle
25–28	Grows stronger the first time its user dies in battle, even if they're later returned to life (gaining additional charges, an increased bonus, a higher DC for saving throws, and so forth)
29–32	Contains the spirit of a dead hero

33–36	Causes its user to experience trivial bad luck (for example, frequently stepping in puddles)
37–40	A group or sect considers its user to be their leader
41–44	Considered unlucky by a specific type of creature
45–48	Considered lucky by a specific type of creature
49–52	Attracts a specific type of creature
53–56	Allows its user to communicate with a specific type of creature
57–60	Wild animals are more likely to trust its user
61–64	Causes its user to hear whispers in an unfamiliar language
65–68	Can shrink to a smaller size while still functioning in its usual way
69–72	Its user can change cosmetic details of the item's appearance at will
73–76	Haunted by the ghost of a former owner
77–80	Is part of a magic item set, with the full set gaining an extra function when all pieces are used by the same character
81–84	Can't be placed in an extradimensional space (such as a bag of holding)
85–88	Originated on another plane or world, and reacts to the presence of creatures from that realm in some way (growing warm, glowing, singing, and so forth)
89–92	Sentient with an Intelligence score of 2d6 + 4, and can communicate telepathically with its owner
93–96	Functions as a key to unlock a former owner's sanctum
97–00	When destroyed, grants a wish to the creature responsible

Magic Item Upgrades

There's nothing more exciting than a magic item that grows as a character does—especially when the item is interesting and the character has formed a special bond with it. It can be sad to outgrow Silvertongue, the slayer of Hammerfell, simply because a new item deals higher damage.

Fortunately, it's easy to have an item grow more powerful. A GM can explain this process as a character gaining a better understanding of the item, the item sharing a measure of its wielder's power, or the literal addition of a mechanical or magical upgrade. A GM can either upgrade a magic item when its user advances to a new tier of play (at 5th, 11th, and 17th level), or when they achieve a significant story milestone.

Each of the upgrade options in this section provides an initial upgrade, then subsequent upgrades, which must be applied in the order they're presented. When an upgrade improves a previous feature (such as additional uses per day), that non-cumulative benefit replaces the previous feature. Where it adds an entirely new feature (such as casting an additional spell), that cumulative benefit is gained in addition to the previous feature.

An upgraded item always requires attunement, even if the standard version of the item doesn't. An item loses all its upgrades when a new user attunes to it. For an item's upgrade features to function, the item must be in your hand or on your person, as the GM determines.

Upgrades and Rarity

If you ever need to know the rarity of an upgraded magic item (common, uncommon, rare, very rare, or legendary), assume it increases by one step from its original rarity for every two upgrades. A legendary item can take additional upgrades but doesn't increase its rarity beyond that. Since an item loses its upgrades when it changes hands, it reverts to its baseline rarity if traded or sold.



Grandmother's Whisper

Magic Item Upgrades

d100	Upgrade
01–04	Alacritous
05–08	Arcane Retort
09–12	Arcane Sense
13–16	Elusive
17–20	Empowered
21–28	Energy-Touched
29–32	Ferocious*
33–36	Fortitude
37–40	Guardian
41–44	Illuminated
45–48	Keen*
49–52	Mind's Eye
53–56	Potent
57–60	Preservative
61–64	Protective
65–68	Rugged
69–72	Shielded
73–76	Shifting
77–80	Skillful
81–84	Stoic
85–88	Swift
89–92	Talkative
93–96	Unveiled
97–00	Wakeful

* These upgrades apply only to weapons. If rolled for a magic item that is not a weapon, the upgrade can be rerolled. Alternatively, a different type of item can empower a weapon of its user's choice with the given upgrade while the user is carrying both items.

Alacritous

An alacritous item allows you to take an extra bonus action. Once you do so, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.

Subsequent Upgrades. You gain the following non-cumulative benefits on subsequent upgrades:

- You can take an extra action or an extra bonus action, but not both. Once you do so, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.
- You can take an extra action and an extra bonus action. Once you take the selected action, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.
- You can take an extra action or bonus action, but not both. Once you do so, you can't do so again until you finish a short or long rest.

Arcane Retort

An item with the arcane retort upgrade allows you to cast *counterspell* at 3rd level. Once you do so, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.

Subsequent Upgrades. For each upgrade, the level at which you cast *counterspell* from the item increases by 1, to a maximum of 6th level.

Arcane Sense

An item with arcane sense glows or reacts in some other noticeable way whenever a spell is cast within 20 feet of it.

Subsequent Upgrades. You gain the following cumulative benefits on subsequent upgrades:

- You can cast the *identify* spell three times, regaining all expended uses when you finish a long rest.
- You can cast the *detect magic* spell at will.
- You can cast the *legend lore* spell. Once you do so, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.

Elusive

An item with the elusive upgrade grants you advantage on ability checks and saving throws made to avoid being grappled or to escape from a grapple.

Subsequent Upgrades. You gain the following cumulative benefits on subsequent upgrades:

- You have advantage on ability checks and saving throws against being restrained.
- You can't fall prone unless you are incapacitated or you choose to do so.
- You have advantage on ability checks and saving throws against being paralyzed.

Empowered

An empowered item can be used as a spellcasting focus. Additionally, you have a +1 bonus to spell attack rolls.

Subsequent Upgrades. You gain the following cumulative benefits on subsequent upgrades:

- You have a +1 bonus to your spell save DC.
- The bonus to your spell attack rolls granted by the item increases to +2.
- The bonus to your spell save DC granted by the item increases to +2.

Energy-Touched

An item with the energy-touched upgrade channels the power of a specific type of energy. If the item is a weapon, it deals an extra 1d4 damage of the chosen type on a hit. If the item is not a weapon, each time you take damage of the chosen type, you reduce the damage by 2 (minimum 0 damage).

You can have multiple items with this upgrade for different damage types, or can have one item that deals extra damage and one item that reduces damage both of the same type. But two items with the same effect for the same damage type don't work together.

Roll on the Energy Type table to determine what type of energy this item channels.

Energy Type

d8	Energy
1	Acid
2	Cold
3	Fire
4	Force
5	Lightning
6	Necrotic
7	Radiant
8	Thunder

Subsequent Upgrades. For each upgrade, the extra damage you deal with a weapon increases by 1d4, to a maximum of 4d4, or the damage reduction increases by 2, to a maximum reduction of 8.

Ferocious

A ferocious weapon deals an extra 1d4 damage of the weapon's type on a critical hit.

Subsequent Upgrades. For each upgrade, the extra damage increases by 1d4, to a maximum of 4d4.

Fortitude

Each time you finish a long rest, you gain 1d8 temporary hit points.

Subsequent Upgrades. For each upgrade, you gain an additional 1d8 temporary hit points each time you finish a long rest, to a maximum of 4d8.

Guardian

A guardian item grants you a +1 bonus on one saving throw of your choice.

Subsequent Upgrades. You gain the following cumulative benefits on subsequent upgrades:

- You gain a +1 bonus to another saving throw of your choice.
- The bonus to one of your chosen saving throws increases to +2.
- The bonus to your other chosen saving throw increases to +2.

Illuminated

An illuminated item sheds dim light in a 30-foot radius when you speak a command word as a bonus action. You can extinguish the light at any time (no action required).

Subsequent Upgrades. You gain the following cumulative benefits on subsequent upgrades:

- When you activate the item's light, you can choose to have it shed bright light in a 30-foot radius and dim light for an additional 30 feet.
- When you activate the item's light, you can choose to have it shed dim light in a 60-foot radius, or to shed bright light in a 60-foot radius and dim light for an additional 60 feet.
- When you activate the item to shed bright light, each creature of your choice within 30 feet of the item takes 2d10 radiant damage. Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until the next dawn.

Keen

A keen weapon scores a critical hit on a roll of 19 or 20. Once you use this benefit, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest. You can choose to use this benefit after determining whether the attack hits or misses.

Subsequent Upgrades. For each upgrade, the range of rolls on which the weapon scores a critical hit increases by 1, to 18–20, 17–20, and 16–20.

Mind's Eye

A mind's eye item grants you the ability to initiate telepathic communication with one creature within 30 feet of you as a bonus action. This telepathy lasts until you and the other creature are no longer within 30 feet of each other, or until either of you end the communication (no action required).

You can communicate with another creature whether or not you have a common language, but you can't communicate with any creature with an Intelligence score of 2 or lower.

Subsequent Upgrades. You gain the following cumulative benefits on subsequent upgrades:

- As a bonus action, you can initiate telepathic communication with up to three creatures within 30 feet of you. Each of those creatures can freely communicate telepathically with you or each other until they are no longer within 30 feet of you or they end the connection for themselves (no action required).

- The range at which you can initiate and maintain your telepathic communication increases to 120 feet.
- The range at which you can initiate and maintain your telepathic communication is unlimited, as long as the other creatures are on the same plane as you.

POTENT

A potent item grants you a +1 bonus to your spell save DC for spells of a school of magic of your choice (abjuration, conjuration, divination, enchantment, evocation, illusion, necromancy, or transmutation).

Subsequent Upgrades. You gain the following cumulative benefits on subsequent upgrades:

- You gain a +1 bonus to your spell save DC for spells of another school of magic of your choice.
- The bonus to your spell save DC for your two chosen schools increases to +2.
- The bonus to your spell save DC for your two chosen schools increases to +3.

PRESERVATIVE

A preservative item immediately casts the *gentle repose* spell on you when you die.

Subsequent Upgrades. You gain the following cumulative benefits on subsequent upgrades:

- The duration of *gentle repose* cast on you by the item increases to 30 days.
- You make death saving throws with advantage.
- The item immediately casts the *revivify* spell on you when you die, instead of *gentle repose*. This feature can be used three times, after which the item reverts to casting *gentle repose* with a duration of 30 days.

PROTECTIVE

A protective item grants you a +1 bonus to Armor Class.

Subsequent Upgrades. For each upgrade, the bonus to your Armor Class increases by 1, to a maximum of +4.

RUGGED

A rugged item grants you resistance to poison damage.

Subsequent Upgrades. You gain the following cumulative benefits on subsequent upgrades:

- You gain immunity to the poisoned condition.
- You gain immunity to poison damage.
- You ignore the disadvantage on ability checks normally imposed when you gain a first level of exhaustion. You suffer the penalties from subsequent levels of exhaustion as normal.

SHIELDED

An item with the shielded upgrade allows you to cast the *shield* spell. Once you do so, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.

Subsequent Upgrades. You gain the following cumulative benefits on subsequent upgrades:

- When you cast *shield* from the item, you can do so again when you finish a short rest.
- You can cast the *mage armor* spell. Once you do so, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.
- You can cast the *fire shield* spell. Once you do so, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.

SHIFTING

A shifting item allows you to cast the *disguise self* spell. Once you do so, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.

Subsequent Upgrades. You gain the following cumulative benefits on subsequent upgrades:

- You can cast the *alter self* spell. Once you do so, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.
- You can cast the *mislead* spell. Once you do so, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.
- You can cast the *seeming* spell. Once you do so, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.

SKILLFUL

A skillful item grants you proficiency in one new skill or with one new tool or instrument.

Subsequent Upgrades. You gain the following cumulative benefits on subsequent upgrades:

- You can choose to have advantage on an ability check you make with your chosen skill or tool. Once you do so, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.
- Your proficiency bonus is doubled for any check you make with your chosen skill or tool.
- Whenever you make an ability check with your chosen skill or tool, you treat any roll lower than 10 as if you rolled a 10.

STOIC

A stoic item grants you advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

Subsequent Upgrades. You gain the following cumulative benefits on subsequent upgrades:

- You have advantage on saving throws against effects that would read your thoughts.
- You have advantage on saving throws against enchantment spells.
- You have resistance to psychic damage.

Swift

A swift item allows you to add half your proficiency bonus (rounded down) to initiative rolls.

Subsequent Upgrades. You gain the following cumulative benefits on subsequent upgrades:

- Instead of adding half your proficiency bonus, you add your proficiency bonus to initiative rolls.
- On your first turn in combat, your speed is doubled.
- When you roll initiative, you treat any roll lower than 10 as if you rolled a 10.

Talkative

With a talkative item, you can cast the *message* spell a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus. You regain any expended uses when you finish a long rest.

Subsequent Upgrades. You gain the following cumulative benefits on subsequent upgrades:

- You can cast the *sending* spell a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus. You regain any expended uses when you finish a long rest.
- You can cast the *telepathic bond* spell. Once you do so, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.
- You can cast *telepathic bond* up to three times, regaining any expended uses when you finish a long rest.

Unveiled

An unveiled item grants you darkvision out to a range of 60 feet. If you already have darkvision, its range increases by 60 feet.

Subsequent Upgrades. You gain the following cumulative benefits on subsequent upgrades:

- You gain blindsight out to a range of 15 feet.
- The range of your darkvision increases by an additional 120 feet.
- You can use a bonus action to gain truesight out to a range of 30 feet for 1 hour. Once you do so, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.

Wakeful

With a wakeful item, you need only 4 hours of sleep to gain the same benefit that a typical Humanoid gains from 6 hours of sleep. You still need an additional 4 hours of light activity, such as reading, talking, eating, or standing watch, to gain the benefit of a long rest.

If you already have the capability to reduce or negate your need for sleep, you choose which benefit to use.

Subsequent Upgrades. You gain the following cumulative benefits on subsequent upgrades:

- You need only 2 hours of sleep to gain the normal benefit of 8 hours of sleep, but must engage in additional light activity to gain the benefit of a long rest.
- You need to sleep only once every two days, but must engage in light activity throughout a long rest when you aren't sleeping.
- You no longer need to sleep at all, but must engage in light activity throughout a long rest when you aren't sleeping.

Names

As a last step in the process of personalizing a magic item, decide whether to give the item a name. Not every magic item has a name or needs one, so when deciding whether a specific item should, think about the kinds of items that characters typically develop an attachment to, or that other people talk about. A weapon can define a hero, and people might speak of that weapon when telling tales of battle. But armor is more functional and less spoken of.

To name a magic item, roll once for each column on the Magic Item Names table and combine the result, adjusting as needed to make a compelling name. For example, "Hero" + "Bane" might become "Hero's Bane."

Magic Item Names

d100	Name 1	Name 2
01–04	Hero	Bane
05–08	Heart	Hope
09–12	Truth	Kiss
13–16	Frozen	Seeker
17–20	Blazing	Hunter
21–24	Luminous	Whisper
25–28	Baleful	Trust
29–32	Foe	Carver
33–36	Honor	Sting
37–40	Silver	Song
41–44	Rogue	Wraith
45–48	Arcane	Vow
49–52	Lord/Lady/Liege	Faith
53–56	Golden	Fortune
57–60	Disciplined	Misfortune
61–64	Wanton	Oblivion
65–68	Reckless	Vengeance
69–72	Cunning	Justice
73–76	Ethereal	Misery
77–80	Midnight	Transcendence
81–84	Dawn	Light
85–88	Crystal	Darkness
89–92	Blood	Rage
93–96	Holy	Elegance
97–00	Demonic	End

Magewright's Creations

"Oh, the stories I could tell you of these treasures."
—Solange Mercurius

The magic items in this section are ready-made momentous treasures that can be added to any campaign, or which can be used as examples when creating your own personalized items. *Grandmother's Whisper* is based on a *+3 dagger*, *Heart's Vow* is built around a *cloak of protection*, and *Reckless Elegance* is based on *armor of resistance (poison)*.

The first two items have advanced upgrade properties noted, suitable for the item appearing in a campaign as used by an NPC. A character obtaining either item would have to start at the base upgrade property when they attune to the item. *Reckless Elegance* is an example of a magic item with a story but no upgrades … yet!

Grandmother's Whisper

Weapon (Dagger), Very Rare (Requires Attunement)

This long, slender dagger is less a blade and more a spike of true darkness, ignoring the light around it to glimmer black against shades of gray.

You have a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. Additionally, while you carry this blade, your mind is touched by the fears of any animals within 60 feet of you, which present as skittish, fleeting images.

Mind's Eye (Upgrade Level 2). You can initiate telepathic communication with up to three creatures within 30 feet of you (no action required). Each of those creatures can freely communicate telepathically with you or each other. This telepathy lasts until you or an affected creature are no longer within 30 feet of each other, or until you or an affected creature end the communication between the two of you (no action required).

You can communicate with another creature whether or not you have a common language, but you can't communicate with any creature with an Intelligence score of 2 or lower.

Legend. A century ago, a night hag known as Grandmother Wormwood crafted this dagger from pure darkness to protect herself in the midst of a precarious truce with a chain devil.

Secret. The spirit of Grandmother Wormwood resides within the dagger, waiting for her opportunity to live again, and haunting the weapon's wielder while they sleep.

Heart's Vow

Wondrous Item, Rare (Requires Attunement)

This cloak of deep red velvet is lined with silk that bears the faintly printed map of an unknown land. Whenever you feel lost or confused, runes flash across the map as its lines brighten.

You gain a +1 bonus to AC and saving throws while you wear this cloak.

Preservative (Upgrade Level 3). *Heart's Vow* immediately casts *gentle repose* on you when you die, with a duration of 30 days. Additionally, you make death saving throws with advantage.

Legend. *Heart's Vow* was stolen from the Astral Plane by a satyr who fancied himself a master thief. The map stitched into the cloak shows secret passages through a dangerous, otherwise impregnable mountain range on that plane.

Secret. In quiet moments, the wearer of the cloak hears whispers spoken in an ancient dialect of Celestial, urging them to bring the cloak home.

Reckless Elegance

Armor (Medium), Rare (Requires Attunement)

Reckless Elegance is a set of bronze scale armor that always appears tarnished and rusted, no matter how well it's cleaned. Whenever the armor is taken off, it somehow shifts position from the place it was left, appearing spread across the floor as if reaching toward the nearest exit.

You have resistance to poison damage while you wear this armor.

Legend. Long ago, the fabled warrior-queen Tiala wore *Reckless Elegance* in a fierce battle against her half-brother, a demigod called the Lion. Since that cosmic turning point, this armor has passed through many hands and been present in many important moments throughout history.

Secret. Though Tiala is long dead, a sect of warriors known as the Lionesses believe that whoever dons *Reckless Elegance* is their leader. Members of the order are always searching for the armor's current owner.



RECKLESS ELEGANCE

GLOSSARY

In recent issues of ARCADIA, we've begun to incorporate terminology from the upcoming *Flee, Mortals! The MCDM Monster Book*. These describe new rules designed to make combat encounters easier to run, more fun, and more memorable. Rather than scatter definitions throughout individual articles, this glossary provides a reference for terms used in *ARCADIA*.

COMPANION CREATURES

Companions are wild allies who adventure with characters. Each companion has unique traits and actions that make them a great ally. Every companion has a player character **caregiver** who commands the creature. The caregiver's player controls the companion most of the time during the game, though the GM can step in to take control if the companion and caregiver are separated, or if the caregiver mistreats the companion in some way.

The full rules for companion creatures are described in *Beastheart and Monstrous Companions*, as well as the packets available for backers of *Flee, Mortals!*

CONDITIONS

Some creatures inflict—or are immune to—the following new condition.

DAZED

A **dazed** creature can only do one of the following things on their turn: move, use an action, or use a bonus action. If a creature becomes dazed during their turn, their turn ends. The *lesser restoration* spell and *greater restoration* spell remove the dazed condition. At the GM's discretion, other powers, spells, or effects might also remove the dazed condition.

When a dazed creature is affected by a spell or effect that gives them an extra action on their turn (like the haste spell or the fighter's Action Surge feature), they can still take this extra action, in addition to the movement, action, or bonus action allowed by the dazed condition.

Some creatures have immunity to the dazed condition. At the GM's discretion, a creature published in another supplement who has immunity to the paralyzed or stunned condition also has immunity to the dazed condition.

MUNDANE AND SUPERNATURAL

The term **mundane** refers to attacks, items, and effects that are not magical, psionic, or otherwise supernatural.

On the other hand, the term **supernatural** describes an effect or item that is either magical or psionic. For instance, a creature's stat block might say they're resistant to "bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from attacks that aren't supernatural." This means that when you deal them bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage using a spell, power, magic weapon, or psionic weapon, the damage is supernatural and thus the creature isn't resistant to it.

VILLAIN ACTIONS

Some creatures are designed to be bosses: enemies who can take on an entire party by themselves or with a handful of underlings. These creatures have three **villain actions** they can use after an enemy creature's turn. Villain actions are similar to legendary actions with the following exceptions:

- A creature can only use one villain action per round (as such, villain actions tend to be more powerful than legendary actions).
- Each villain action can only be used once during a combat encounter.

Like legendary actions, a creature can't use villain actions if incapacitated or otherwise unable to take actions.

CHOOSING VILLAIN ACTIONS

Each trio of villain actions has a recommended round order. These abilities give the battle a logical flow and a cinematic arc:

- The first villain action is an opener, which shows the characters they're not battling a typical creature. Openers generally deal some damage, summon a lackey or three, buff the boss, debuff the characters, or move the creature into an advantageous position. They're just a taste of what's to come.
- The second villain action provides crowd control. It typically fires after the heroes have had a chance to respond once or twice, get into position, and surround the villain. This second action helps the villain regain the upper hand. Like an opener, this action comes in many flavors, but it's even more powerful than an opener.
- The third and final villain action is an ultimate move or "ult"—a showstopper the villain can use to deal a devastating blow to the characters before the end of the battle.

While every creature has a recommended order of actions, you can take villain actions in any order if it makes your fight more dramatic. You could push back a villain action if a creature is stunned or might stay alive for more than three rounds, or you could perform the recommended third action in round two after several surprise critical hits!

RESOURCES

MCDM TABLETOP SAFETY TOOLKIT

https://mcdm.gg/SafetyToolkit

You can find all issues of *ARCADIA* on Patreon and in the MCDM shop.



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Cat Evans is a queer, trans, Welsh TTRPG writer and one half of Ex Stasis Games. From beneath a mound of affectionate spaniels, he makes games and supplements that veer wildly between the magical and the horrific but are always *useful*. You can follow him on Twitter @ExStasisGames, but it's strictly at your own risk.



Lore Evans (they/he) is a TTRPG writer, editor and artist. As well as making up half of Ex Stasis Games, they have also worked for studios such as Cubicle7, Renegade, and Loot the Room. When they aren't creating or playing games, they make art and try to wrangle their three spaniels.



The Student of Applied Magic (S.A.M.) is a collection of magical energy that has obtained, through scientific means, a personality and consciousness. S.A.M. first studied under Illumar the Bright, where it learned the fundamentals of spellcasting and mortality. Since then, S.A.M. has traveled extensively and seen many worlds. It treasures every memory it has made on its adventures. S.A.M. currently studies at the Bucket School of Magical Arts and Sciences under the direction of Thavma Sanguine.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Thrilling. Terrifying. Wonderful. Novel. All those words describe what it feels like to explore. It's a big part of why so many people travel when they take a vacation—to experience the magic of discovery. Heck, I get goosebumps whenever I try a new food, hike a new path, or discover a new book to read. To me, all of that is exploration.

Discovery is a big part of the reason we embrace roleplaying games. Characters always want to know what's behind the next door, inside the next chest, over the next hill, across the ocean, or even beyond the stars. At levels both grand and minuscule, our RPG main characters are constantly making discoveries, so that we as players experience all the thrill of exploration and fighting monsters without any of the life-threatening risks.

Players aren't the only ones who savor this excitement, though. As GMs, we are also constantly making discoveries. Before a session even begins, we discover things about our NPCs, dungeons, and worlds as we prepare. But for many of us, the biggest surprises come as we play with others. A player asks a question about why, when, where, or how something in the campaign came to be, and suddenly a whole new story presents itself. Your players can also provide you with the thrill of discovery more directly, as when they do something you never expected that causes the story to change, or sprinkle in bits of backstory about their characters. That's all discovery, baby!

Even the dice are agents of exploration. They determine which random encounter gets inserted into the story, what treasure lies at the end of a dungeon, and if the ranger notices a secret door. Most roleplaying games have these tools for randomization because the chance to take action in the face of failure's risk and the uncertainty of adventures are what make these games a delight to play.

RPGs, then, are collaborative exploration. The players, the GM, and the randomizers all come together to surprise and delight everyone involved, in a way that could never happen if one person or a small group were simply writing a story without the game.

This issue of *ARCADIA* helps a GM run exploration-focused encounters. First, "What Lies Beneath" from Indrani Ganguly brings you incredible deep-sea creatures inspired by South Asian mythologies. By its nature, underwater adventuring is focused on exploration because of how much there is to discover beneath the waves. But this article also brings you three amazing creatures with unique lore to help expand your understanding of the depths. Then you can set sail on a story that takes place on the water's surface and in the sky above, with Bianca Bickford's "A Spirit Across Seas and Stars." This story outline presents the framework for a globe-trotting adventure in which characters must unravel a mystery to repair a sapient flying boat. Finally, Chris Bissette's "Dungeon Invasions" taps into the horror side of exploration with three unique creatures who can serve as villains who pop up as the characters explore a ruin, cave, or other site. This article reminded me so much of the greatest villains in a *Resident Evil* or Soulsborne game.

We hope that this issue, like every issue of *ARCADIA*, takes you to places you didn't know were there.

Also, you probably noticed that it's me, James, writing this letter and not the incredibly talented Hannah Rose. Hannah no longer works full-time at MCDM, but while she was here, she commissioned and developed some of the best articles this publication has ever had, including this issue and the next. Hannah also put in a lot of time and expertise developing the MCDM Tabletop Safety Toolkit, creatures for *Flee, Mortals*! and the core rules of the upcoming MCDM RPG. I am so grateful for her hard work. Thank you for making our games and community fun.

Ex animo,
James Introcaso
MCDM Lead Game Designer



WHAT LIES BENEATH

Aquatic legends—divine and monstrous—await you beneath these waters.

by Indrani Ganguly

Adventurers traverse countless realms, usually with feet planted firmly on the ground. But beyond the bounds of land lie crystalline ponds, murky swamps, tempestuous seas, and unending oceans—some tranquil, and some … not so much. But what lies beneath?

Rich history can be found beneath these waters. What kinds of creatures might thrive in undersea cities (or the remains of one)? What legends do fishers speak of, and what spoils do pirates hope to find? To answer these questions and more, let us turn to South Asian mythologies—Buddhist, Hindu, and Newar stories—for inspiration, and bring three unique aquatic creatures to your game.

From loyal guardians (the mighty makara), to mythical providers (the prismatic Randhanu), all the way to a ferocious three-headed sea serpent (the draconic vritnaga), this article offers plenty to bring your seafaring adventures to life. These creatures are not just "enemies" for a party to fight (though they can try!), but are also tools useful for creating intricate aquatic worlds that feel lived in. Herein, you'll find stat blocks, adventure hooks, and lore that can be inserted into any underwater adventures or campaigns.

Now, fellow sailor, the Deep beckons. Answer its call, but only if you dare.

Makara

The makara (mah-KAA-rah) is a guardian of the sea's secrets. Mistrustful of outsiders, these muscular beasts have wide, murky-green, scaly bodies twice as long as a grown human is tall. However, makara are chimeric creatures, their features typically half terrestrial and half aquatic. Some might have long snouts that extend into a trunk offset with ivory tusks. Others might sport a serpentine body, stag horns, and feline claws. But the true beauty of all makara lies in their tails, which always have regional flora growing on them.

Although it can be challenging to gain the trust of a makara, it is not impossible. When domesticated, they make excellent guards for treasures, temples, and palaces. Once they choose to bond with a place or a person, they are protective and loyal till their last breath. However, attempting to force a makara into subservience is a surefire way of invoking their wrath.

Sturdy. The makara's long, muscular physique allows them to carry goods and riders across large distances. In thriving underwater cities, domesticated makara often provide everyday transportation—even for outsiders who can hold their breaths for long enough.

Guardian of Treasures. Due to their loyal nature, makara are often tasked with guarding secrets and treasures. They make dangerous enemies to anyone seeking to take what belongs to the makara and their masters.

Makara

Large Beast, Typically Unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 114 (12d10 + 48)
Speed 30 ft., swim 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	11 (+0)	18 (+4)	4 (–3)	12 (+1)	5 (–3)

Skills Athletics +8, Perception +7
Senses blindsight 10 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 17
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, prone
Languages —
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Amphibious. The makara can breathe air and water.

Beast of Burden. The makara is considered to be a Huge creature for the purpose of determining their carrying capacity.

Sturdy. The makara has advantage on saving throws against being moved against their will.

Watchful. The makara can't be surprised while they are conscious, and other creatures don't gain advantage on attack rolls against the makara as a result of being hidden or invisible.

Actions

Multiattack. The makara makes one Bite attack, then either one Claw attack or one Impale attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) piercing damage, and if the target is Medium or smaller, they are knocked prone.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage.

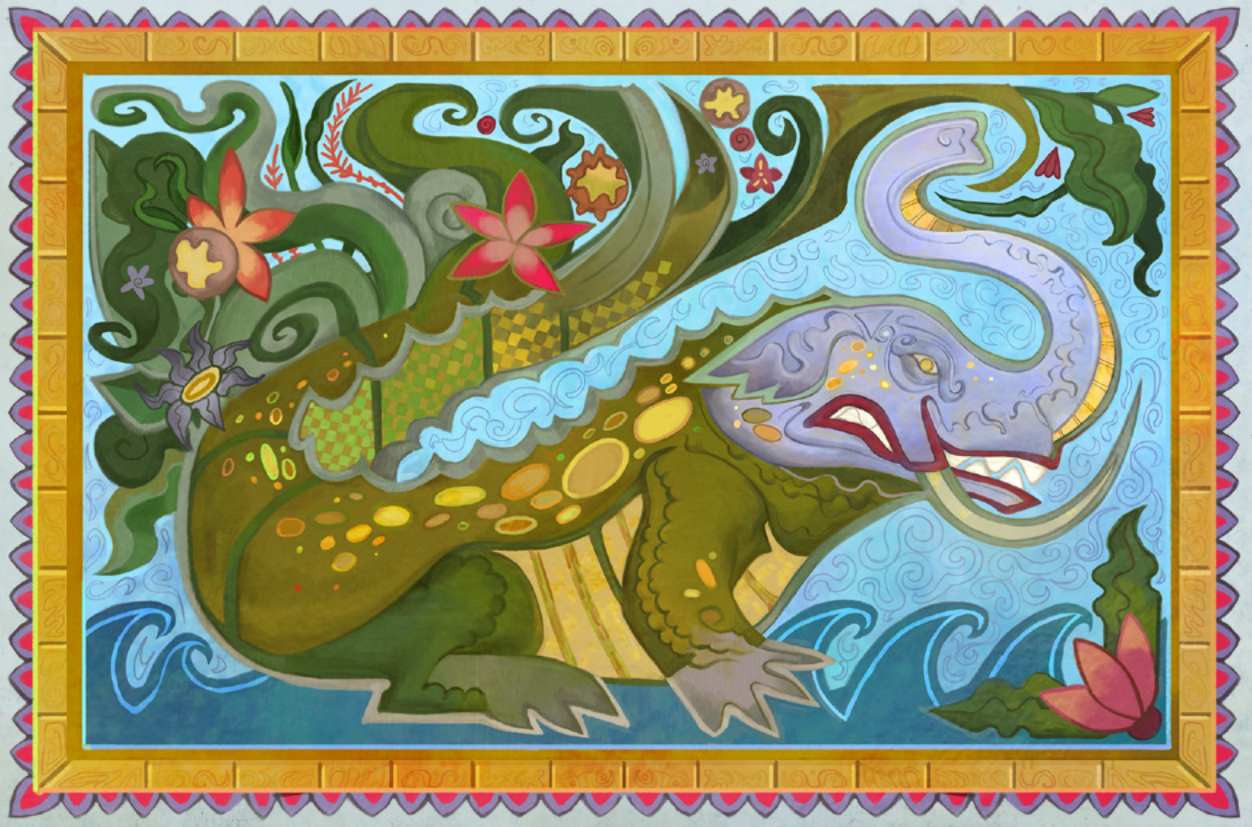
Impale. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) piercing damage, and if the target is Large or smaller, they are impaled. While impaled, a target is restrained and the makara can't impale another target. When the makara moves, the target moves with them. An impaled creature takes 4 (1d8) piercing damage at the start of each of their turns. A creature can use their action to make a DC 15 Strength check, freeing themself or another impaled creature within their reach on a success.

Bonus Actions

Oathkeeper's Endurance (1/Day). The makara gains resistance to all damage until the end of their next turn.

Reactions

Defender. When a creature the makara can see attacks a creature other than the makara within 5 feet of the makara, the makara can impose disadvantage on the attack roll.



Young Makara Companion

Medium Beast, Typically Unaligned

Armor Class 13 plus PB (natural armor)
Hit Points 7 + seven times caregiver's level (number of d8 Hit Dice equal to their caregiver's level)
Speed 30 ft., swim 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	8 (–3)

Saving Throws Str +3 plus PB, Wis +1 plus PB
Skills Perception +1 plus PB
Condition Immunities prone
Senses blindsight 10 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11 plus PB
Languages —
Proficiency Bonus (PB) equals the caregiver's bonus

Amphibious. The makara can breathe air and water.

Beast of Burden. The makara is considered to be a Large creature for the purpose of determining their carrying capacity.

On Guard. Creatures don't gain advantage on attack rolls against the makara as a result of being hidden or invisible.

Actions

Bite (Signature Attack). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 plus PB to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1d6 plus PB piercing damage.

1st Level: Destabilizing Attack (2 Ferocity). The makara makes a signature attack. On a hit, the target has disadvantage on the next attack roll they make before the start of the makara's next turn.

3rd Level: Impaling Attack (5 Ferocity). The makara moves up to their speed and makes a signature attack. On a hit, the target is impaled by the makara's tusks if they are Large or smaller. While impaled, the target is restrained and the makara can't use Impaling Attack. When the makara moves, the target moves with them. A creature can use their action to make a DC 15 Strength check, freeing themself or another impaled creature within their reach on a success.

3rd Level: Shake Tusks (5 Ferocity). The makara shakes an impaled target off their tusks. The target takes PB bludgeoning damage and lands prone in a space within 5 feet of the makara.

5th Level: Devoted Frenzy (8 Ferocity). The makara moves up to their speed in a straight line without provoking opportunity attacks. During this movement, they can move through the spaces of other creatures. Each creature whose space the makara moves through must make a DC 10 plus PB Strength saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes PBd6 bludgeoning damage and falls prone. On a success, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't knocked prone.

Reactions

Defend. When an ally within 5 feet of the makara takes damage from a weapon attack, the makara can halve the attack's damage against that ally, taking the remaining damage themself.

Mystic Connection: Young Makara

If you're playing a beastheart and have a young makara companion, you gain the following benefit at 9th level when you gain the beastheart's Mystic Connection feature:

Oceanic Protector. You gain a swimming speed equal to your walking speed, and you can hold your breath for up to 15 minutes. Additionally, when you or an ally within 5 feet of you takes damage, you can use a reaction to cause the target to take half as much damage. Once you use this reaction, you can't do so again until you finish a short or long rest.

Makara Encounters

Use the following plot hooks to introduce makara in your game.

Misguided Choices. The family of a young, misguided pirate send the characters to look for the teenager. The young pirate was last seen entering the Shrine of Randhanu (see below), which ferocious makara have guarded for decades.

Turning Tides. A seafaring merchant, ragged and out of breath, claims their domesticated makara have started attacking them, having turned against the merchant overnight. The characters must retrieve the merchant's haul from the makara through force, or find a way to end their rage. (As it turns out, a rival has hired the services of a powerful hag to control the makara and sabotage the merchant.)

The Birth of a Revolution. A revolutionary asks the characters to rid an ancient palace of its guardian makara. Rumors suggest the palace contains a vast cache of gems, gold, and magical relics of great power. The rebels wish to steal the treasures to fuel their revolution against a tyrannical ruler, and to redistribute the remaining wealth among the common folk. Conversely, the party might be approached by the ruler's retinue to defend the palace against conspiring looters. Whether those looters are greedy criminals or noble rebels is up to you.

RANDHANU

There is nary a seafarer who hasn't heard the stories of Randhanu (raan-DHAN-oo). Known as the Cornucopia of the Seas, the Rainbow Fish, and the Great Matsya, this legendary creature has avoided contact with people for centuries. Tales of Randhanu have long since blended between fact and fiction, and there have been no confirmed sightings of her in many, many years.

In coastal settlements, Randhanu is worshiped as a deity of good fortune, luck, and abundance by the families of sailors, fishers, and dockworkers. Through a few verifiable sightings from millennia ago, she is described as a gargantuan fish with scales composed of the elements. Iridescent icy-blue shards, bright-red licks of flame, lush green tufts of grass and kelp, and golden crackling bolts of lightning line her gargantuan figure, creating a sight so divine that mortal souls simply cannot turn away.

Whale Eater. Although the legends of Randhanu vary along different coasts, one thing that remains constant across most stories is that her great size allows her to swallow whales whole. Despite that size, Randhanu is extremely agile, leaping out of the water in a flash of rainbow scales, or diving into the ocean depths before sailors can catch more than a glimpse of her shining fins.

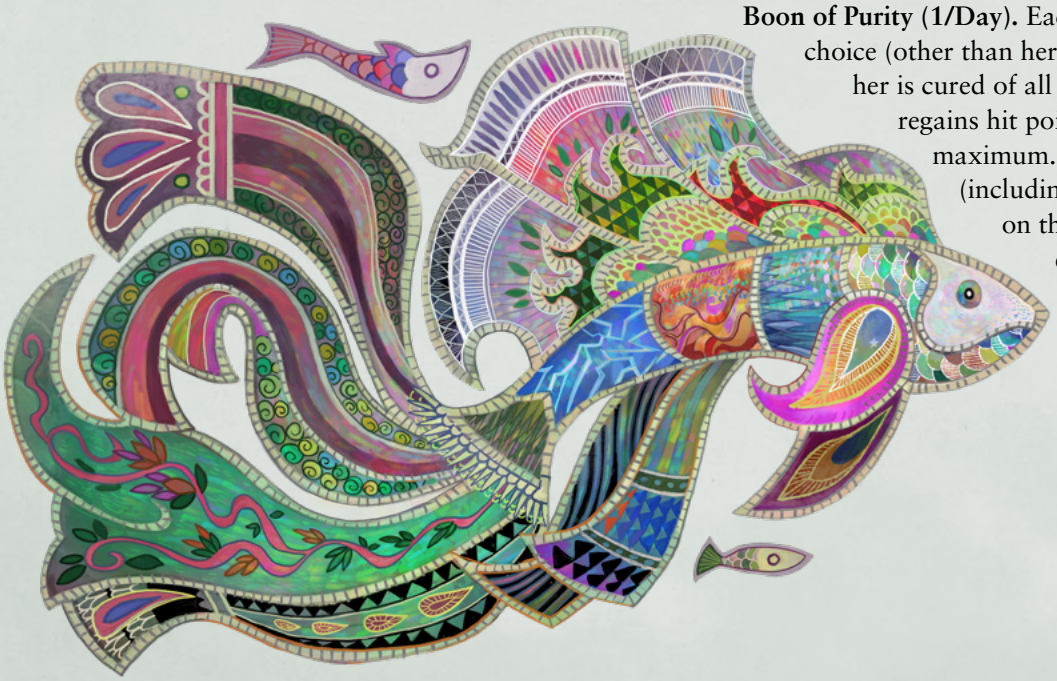
Divine Troublemaker. Wise yet mischievous. Generous yet haughty. Kind yet petty. Staunch yet fickle. As a larger-than-life, all-encompassing deity, Randhanu has a chaotic but ultimately benevolent nature. When her impulses are stymied by external forces, she is easily upset, but her wrath most often translates into harmless pranks and stinging verbal jabs. Still, a deity's definition of "harmless" might not match a mere mortal's. To please Randhanu, adventurers must showcase a strong sense of compassion toward others. Selfish motives, unkind behavior, and a lack of humor are all surefire ways of losing Randhanu's fancy—or landing on her bad side.

A Divine Blessing. It is said that Randhanu can restore any creature from the brink of death, cure any illness, and end any curse. Legend also says that those who survive an encounter with her carry a small portion of her divinity with them.

The Cornucopia. When Randhanu is slain or chooses to sacrifice herself, her divinity can bless a single location up to city size with life and abundance for one hundred years. Fertile soil, plentiful crops, and restored health can reward those who best (or impress) the Cornucopia of the Seas.

DIVINE BOONS

Randhanu can grant powerful blessings to those lucky and clever enough to earn her favor through acts of great generosity, selflessness, or benevolent mischief. As an action, she can bestow one of the following boons:



Boon of Purity (1/Day). Each creature of Randhanu's choice (other than herself) within 120 feet of her is cured of all diseases and poisons, and regains hit points equal to their hit point maximum. In addition, all conditions (including exhaustion) and curses on the target end, as do any effects reducing a target's ability scores or hit point maximum.

Boon of Divinity (1/Day). Each creature of Randhanu's choice (other than herself) within 120 feet of her has advantage on ability checks and attack rolls for the next 24 hours.

Randhanu

Gargantuan Celestial, Chaotic Good

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 231 (14d20 + 84)
Speed 0 ft., swim 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	17 (+3)	22 (+6)	18 (+4)	22 (+6)	25 (+7)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Con +11, Cha +12
Skills Perception +11, Persuasion +12
Damage Resistances cold, fire, lightning, radiant; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from mundane attacks[1]
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened
Senses truesight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 21
Languages Common, Aquan, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 16 (15,000 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +5

Water Breathing. Randhanu can breathe only underwater.

Unusual Nature. Randhanu doesn't require food, drink, or sleep.

Deific Determination (3/Day). If Randhanu fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead. When she does so, she regurgitates any swallowed creatures and she can't use her Swallow bonus action until the end of her next turn.

Godly Size. Randhanu normally occupies a space that is 40 feet on a side. She can spend 1 minute to grow up to a maximum of 500 feet on a side, or return to her normal size. When Randhanu occupies a space at least 60 feet on a side, she can Swallow a Gargantuan creature who is smaller than her, or any combination of creatures and objects of the same size.

Boon of Abundance. Upon her death, Randhanu's divinity spreads over a location, no larger than a city, of her slayer's choosing. Her divinity provides the location with fertile soil for the next one hundred years, causing plants in the area to yield twice the normal amount of food when harvested. Additionally, when the boon is used, it cures each creature at the location of all poison and disease, and restores any wounded creatures to their hit point maximum. Randhanu can choose to sacrifice herself to provide this boon.

Reincarnation. When Randhanu is slain or chooses to sacrifice herself, she is reborn in a different body of water after one hundred years.

Actions

Multiattack. Randhanu makes two Bite attacks and uses Disorient.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (3d10 + 6) piercing damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 19). While grappled, the target is restrained and Randhanu can't make a Bite attack against another target.

Disorient. Randhanu targets one creature who can see her within 30 feet of her, overwhelming them with her sheer size and divinity. The target must succeed on a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw or take 21 (6d6) psychic damage and be dazed[2] until the end of their next turn.

Freeze (Recharge 5–6). Randhanu creates a burst of freezing energy in a 60-foot-radius sphere centered on a point she can see within 120 feet of her. Each creature in that area must make a DC 19 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 42 (12d6) cold damage and is restrained until the start of Randhanu's next turn. On a success, they take half as much damage and aren't restrained.

Teleport (1/Day). Randhanu can teleport herself, along with all creatures and obects touching her that she chooses, to a body of water on the same plane as her.

Bonus Actions

Swallow. Randhanu swallows a Huge or smaller creature who she has grappled. While swallowed, a creature is blinded and restrained, and they have total cover against attacks and other effects outside Randhanu. If Randhanu chooses, a creature she has swallowed takes 21 (6d6) acid damage at the start of each of her turns.

If Randhanu takes 30 damage or more on a single turn from a creature inside her, she must succeed on a DC 20 Constitution saving throw at the end of that turn or regurgitate all swallowed creatures, who fall prone in a space within 10 feet of Randhanu. If Randhanu dies, a swallowed creature is no longer restrained by her and can escape from her corpse by using 15 feet of movement, exiting prone.

Deity (Villain) Actions

Randhanu has three deity (villain) actions. She can take each action once during an encounter after an enemy's turn. She can take these actions in any order, but can use only one per round.

Action 1: Best Friends Forever. Randhanu chooses up to three creatures within 60 feet of her who can see her, each of whom must succeed on a DC 20 Charisma saving throw or be charmed by her. A charmed creature treats Randhanu as their closest friend and ally, and becomes hostile toward anyone who they perceive as a threat to Randhanu. A charmed creature can repeat the saving throw if they take damage or at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themself on a success.

Action 2: Double Trouble. Randhanu becomes invisible at the same time that an illusory double of her appears in a space within 60 feet of her. This invisibility ends and the double disappears if Randhanu makes an attack or uses a deity (villain) action. While she is invisible, Randhanu can use her action to move her illusory double up to twice her speed and make it gesture, speak, and behave in whatever way she chooses.

Action 3: Psyche-jellic. Randhanu summons a swarm of illusory, iridescent jellyfish that can cause creatures to be momentarily overwhelmed by darkest despair. Three creatures of her choice within 60 feet of her must make a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 44 (8d10) psychic damage and is frightened of Randhanu until the end of their next turn. On a success, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't frightened.

[1] See the Glossary at the end of this issue for the definition of mundane.
[2] See the Glossary at the end of this issue for more information on the dazed condition.

Content Warning: Starvation

One of the plot hooks in this section includes a theme of starvation and malnourishment. We recommend using the MCDM Safety Toolkit and Checklist and adjusting this material as needed to ensure everyone at your table is comfortable.

Randhanu Encounters

Use the following plot hooks to introduce Randhanu in your game.

Glory Beckons. At the first annual Festival of the Drowned, coastal settlements have come together to preserve food for the coming year, share stories of the sea, and compete in swimming and other athletic events. Adventurers from across many lands are called upon to slay the Great Matsya, who local sailors (truthfully) claim to have sighted on their last voyage. The characters may either hunt Randhanu for glory and luck, or warn her of the imminent danger and win her favor.

The Desolation. A vritnaga (see the following section) has wreaked havoc in a coastal town, causing local leaders to abandon their people. Now, a lack of water and ruined fields mean that families are starving to death. The townspeople ask the characters to locate Randhanu and restore the land's fertility.

Lost in the Deep. The characters hear reports that an underwater settlement has disappeared. When they investigate, they learn that Randhanu swallowed the settlement when its people tried to slay her. Randhanu has not yet decided whether to destroy the settlement and its people where they remain trapped within her, giving the characters a chance to convince her to free those folk, or battle her for the settlement's freedom.

Vritnaga

Drought. Desolation. Death. These are the words most often used to describe vritnaga (vreet-naga), the Stealers of the Sea. These legendary sea dragons are driven by their unending need to consume and rule all bodies of water, even if that leads to the destruction of settlements or whole civilizations.

Smelling of brine, a vritnaga has a lithe serpentine body, a jagged tail, and three heads. Their beaked snout vents scalding hot steam, and their murderous eyes contain jagged irises whose pale yellow is reminiscent of the light of a thunderstorm. A vritnaga has a row of scaled, leafy fins on each side of their body, which double as wings when they take flight. As a vritnaga wyrmling matures, their glossy teal scales darken to blue-black, and become peppered with barnacles and seashells.

Three Minds. Each of the vritnaga's three heads has a distinct personality. The left head is the prideful, greedy, and power-hungry Dreamer. Lost in glorious daydreams of their own power, the Dreamer serves to further the ambition of the vritnaga. The right head is the cunning, scheming, and manipulative Planner. Fueled by the ambition and caution of their fellow heads, they plot to extend their dominion. The middle head is the caustic, intellectual, and jeering Critic. Though they often feud with the Dreamer and the Planner, the Critic ensures their shared survival.



Cruel Tyrants. The vritnaga are cunning, cruel tyrants, and wherever they rule, they take joy in the misery of others. They grow enraged when their dominion over an area is challenged, and if multiple vritnaga ever claim the same territory, bloodshed inevitably ensues.

So strong is a vritnaga's arrogance that their three heads often plot and scheme individually, with each head trying to gain dominance and control over the others. However, when faced with an external foe, all heads work together to deal with the threat.

Hoarder of Remains. A vritnaga does not maintain a traditional dragon hoard, as their only obsession lies in conquering one body of water after another. However, they take immense joy in causing ships to founder and drown, and often collect valuables from the debris as a token of their strength.

Unseen and Deadly. While underwater, the vritnaga can camouflage themself to blend in with the environment around them. To the untrained eye, a distant vritnaga might look like a drifting, unassuming mass of seaweed and debris.

A Vritnaga's Lair

Vritnaga dwell in the deepest reaches of the watery domains they claim, finding rest in ancient caves and muddy fissures along the seafloors and lakebeds they despoil. Their underwater lairs are complex to navigate, with twists and turns galore. The entrance to a vritnaga's lair is often littered with skulls and the debris of sunken ships or boats, a sign of the sinister monster who rests within.

Once a vritnaga claims a body of water, it drains that water over time. This process can take from a few months to a few centuries, depending on the age of the vritnaga and the vastness of the lake or sea. As this process continues, the vritnaga's powers grow, and the ecosystem within the water begins to choke to death.

Any lands around a vritnaga's watery domain stop producing precipitation, drying out along with the body of water they lie alongside. When there is no moisture left to consume, the vritnaga departs to find their next conquest, leaving a ruined landscape behind.

Lair Actions

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the vritnaga can take a lair action to cause one of the following magical effects; the vritnaga can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

- A deep rumble disrupts the lair in a 60-foot radius around the vritnaga. Each creature in the area other than the vritnaga must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone and have their speed reduced to 0 until the end of their next turn.
- A 30-foot-deep, 30-foot-long, 5-foot-wide fissure opens on an unoccupied solid surface within 90 feet of the vritnaga. Mutated vines sprout from the fissure, forcing each creature within 30 feet of the fissure to succeed on a DC 19 Strength saving throw or be grappled (escape DC 18) by a vine, then pulled 20 feet toward the fissure. A creature pulled to the edge of the fissure is dropped into it and restrained. Each vine has AC 10, 10 hit points, and immunity to psychic damage. Destroying a vine frees the creature it grapples.

Formidable Yet Fallable

Tales of vritnaga laying waste to civilizations, leaving tens of thousands of people parched to the point of craving death, terrorize children everywhere—especially ones who leave water faucets running. Still, for every scary story of despair, a tale is told somewhere of hope and heroism. Adventurers might come across the following folk tale while traveling through any coastal settlement.

"Long, long ago, an ancient vritnaga had all but doomed our ancestral homelands. The kingdom's strongest generals and their massive armies fought futilely against the monstrous creature. As a last resort, the kingdom issued a call for adventurers. Those strong enough—and foolish enough, some might have said—to attempt to slay the beast would be honored as saviors of the kingdom if they succeeded, and showered with riches.

"Four mighty adventurers answered the call. Their formidable reputation preceded them, and they were deemed the kingdom's best chance at survival. But dragging the vritnaga to the deepest pits of a volcano couldn't scorch the monstrosity, nor could they be frozen by mighty spells. An entire ocean sacrificed to turn its waters to poison couldn't slay the mighty creature. Try as they might, the adventurers found that nothing worked. But they wouldn't give up. It is not in the nature of heroes to do so.

"Impressed by the adventurers' relentless pursuit of the vritnaga, a god who watched from above, ruler of vast skies and storms and thunder, reached down and blessed them. For the vritnaga might rule the oceans, but even waves bend to the whims of the sky. Empowered by the raw fury of thunder and lightning, the adventurers were able to strike down the ancient vritnaga once and for all, freeing the land from the drought.

"The moral of the story? No matter how strong we think we are, the gods are stronger! Or some bogus stuff like that. Gah, it's a bedtime story you tell children so they don't end up with their heads up their … you know."

- Crystalline stalactites on the ceiling of the lair crack and fall. Each creature within 60 feet of the vritnaga must make a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) piercing damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Regional Effects

The region containing a vritnaga's lair is warped by their magic, which creates one or more of the following magical effects:

- Strange mutated vines grow from rocky fissures around the vritnaga's lair.
- Small tsunamis are common within six miles of the vritnaga's lair.
- The body of water in which the vritnaga resides produces a noxious effluent that irritates the lungs of breathing creatures (even those breathing underwater with the aid of magic). Each creature in a vritnaga's lair must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw at the end of every hour they spend in the lair. On a failed save, a creature suffers from an incessant retching until they finish a short or long rest outside the lair. Whenever a creature makes an attack roll or saving throw while afflicted in this way, they must roll a d4 and subtract the number rolled from the d20 roll. In addition, an afflicted creature has disadvantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks that rely on maintaining silence. This affliction is treated as a natural disease, and any effect that removes a disease cures an afflicted creature.

If the vritnaga dies, these effects fade over the course of 1d10 days.

Content Warning: Dyspnea, Dizziness, Fainting

One of the plot hooks in this section includes a theme of sickness. We recommend using the MCDM Safety Toolkit and Checklist and adjusting this material as needed to ensure everyone at your table is comfortable.

Vritnaga Encounters

Use the following plot hooks to introduce a vritnaga in your game.

A Plea for Salvation. A sea that harbors a cache of precious metals has caught a migrating vritnaga's fancy. Not for the wealth, but for the sheer vastness of the watery realm. Unfortunately for the aquatic miners who reside in these waters, the coming of the vritnaga means two choices: complete submission or certain death. Unless, of course, the characters are up for a challenge. The reward? Gold beyond their wildest dreams.

A Noxious Journey. Stories of ships vanishing in a specific area of the ocean are heard in a local port. Seafaring characters who venture into the area find themselves struggling for air, each labored breath feeling like a dagger to the chest. With the characters made vulnerable by this unnatural effect, the vritnaga strikes.

The Oceaneater's Treasure. An old, kindly, but off-kilter sailor in a busy seaport offers a tale to whoever will listen, speaking of long-forgotten treasure from an unfortunate shipwreck, buried on an uncharted island. Legend has it that buried with this sunken treasure is a shard of divinity—a single piece of a deity, which has the power to reshape reality one time as the creature wielding the shard wills it. Though the sailor failed to reach the treasure in her lifetime, she entrusts the characters with a map. Characters who choose to salvage the treasure from the shipwreck find themselves facing the Oceaneater—an enraged vritnaga ready to destroy any who invade their realm.

Vritnaga

Gargantuan Dragon, Typically Chaotic Evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)
Hit Points 462 (25d20 + 200)
Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft., fly 30 ft., swim 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+8)	18 (+4)	26 (+8)	22 (+6)	20 (+5)	24 (+7)

Saving Throws Dex +10, Con +14, Wis +11, Cha +13
Skills Deception +13, Intimidation +13, Perception +17, Stealth +16
Damage Vulnerabilities lightning, thunder
Damage Immunities cold, force, poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 27
Languages Common, Aquan, Draconic
Challenge 20 (25,000 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +6

Amphibious. The vritnaga can breathe air and water.

Headstrong Resistance (3/Day). If the vritnaga fails a saving throw, they can choose to succeed instead. When they do so, a remaining head of their choice takes 20 psychic damage.

Multiple Heads. While the vritnaga has at least two heads, they have advantage on saving throws against being blinded, charmed, dazed, deafened, frightened, stunned, or knocked unconscious.

Three by Three. The vritnaga's heads can be attacked individually. Each head has AC 20, 150 hit points, and the vritnaga's damage immunities. Destroying a head deals 150 necrotic damage to the vritnaga. If a head is slain, the vritnaga can't use the villain action corresponding to that head. If all their heads are slain, the vritnaga dies.

Wakeful. While the vritnaga has at least two heads and is asleep, at least one of their heads is awake.

Actions

Multiattack. The vritnaga makes a Claw attack and one different Bite attack for each head they have.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d6 + 8) slashing damage.

Bite (Dreamer Head). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (2d10 + 8) piercing damage plus 11 (2d10) force damage.

Bite (Critic Head). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (2d10 + 8) piercing damage plus 11 (2d10) cold damage.

Bite (Planner Head). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (2d10 + 8) piercing damage plus 11 (2d10) poison damage.

Constrict. The vritnaga makes a sweeping attack with their tail that can constrict their enemies. Each creature within 15 feet of the vritnaga must make a DC 22 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 17 (2d8 + 8) bludgeoning damage, is grappled (escape DC 18), and is pulled up to 15 feet toward the vritnaga. On a success, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't grappled. While grappled in this way, a creature is restrained. The vritnaga can't use Constrict again while they have any creature grappled.

Bonus Actions

Slippery. The vritnaga takes the Disengage action.

Reactions

Infection. Whenever the vritnaga is hit by a melee attack, the wound oozes with noxious fumes and the attacking creature must make a DC 22 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the attacker takes 16 (3d10) poison damage and is poisoned until the end of their next turn. On a success, the attacker takes half as much damage and is not poisoned.

Villain Actions

A vritnaga has three villain actions. They can take each action once during an encounter after an enemy's turn. They can take these actions in any order, but can use only one per round.

Action 1: Dreamer Head. The vritnaga exhales a wave of scalding steam in a 90-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 19 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 18 (4d8) fire damage plus 18 (4d8) force damage and is dazed until the end of their next turn. On a success, the creature takes half as much damage of each type and isn't dazed.

Action 2: Critic Head. The vritnaga exhales a bursting wave of icicles in a 90-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 18 (4d8) piercing damage plus 18 (4d8) cold damage, and is pushed 30 feet away from the vritnaga and knocked prone. On a success, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't pushed or knocked prone.

Action 3: Planner Head. The vritnaga spews a wave of slimy polluted water in a 90-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 19 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 54 (12d8) poison damage and is poisoned. On a success, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't poisoned. A poisoned creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themself on a success. A creature who fails the saving throw three times makes no more saving throws and is poisoned until they finish a long rest.

DUNGEON INVASIONS

Sometimes you just need a horrible boss monster to ruin your players' day!

by Chris Bissette

Content Warning: The monsters in this article include graphic descriptions of blood and body horror. We recommend using the MCDM Safety Toolkit and Checklist and adjusting this material as needed to ensure everyone at your table is comfortable.

You planned your session and sat down to play … but the players blasted through all your encounters and you still have an hour left to fill. Luckily, somebody just dropped in on top of them, intent on taking their stuff. Roll initiative!

"Dungeon Invasions" presents three surprise boss enemies who GMs can drop into their games at a moment's notice. Each of these enemies is intelligent, and each is hunting the party for a specific reason. In one-shot adventures, these foes can anchor a memorable set-piece combat to end the session. In longer campaigns, they can tie in to ongoing plots, acting as agents of established villains, or even becoming an ongoing threat for a new campaign arc. For best results, play them smart, since it's much more fun to have a boss flee and return another day than to have them fight to the death for no reason.

This article presents all the tools you need as a GM to run these enemies—reasons for them to pursue the characters, dramatic entrances into the dungeon or other adventuring location, tactics they might use in combat, and their means of escape when things start to go bad. The only thing you need to add is a personalized name for the boss if desired.

Using the Invaders

Once you've picked which invader you want to use and you're ready to unleash them on your unsuspecting players, what's next? The first step is to pick a reason that the invader is hunting the party. You might have something in mind already, or you can pick an option from "Reasons for Hunting" below.

Each invader entry has a section called "Omens of Approach"—a series of four events that signal the coming chaos, and which you can use to lay the groundwork for the invader's entrance. Think of these events as regional effects you can trigger over a short period leading up to the encounter. The events occur in sequence, starting at the first entry on the list and escalating.

When an invader appears, their "Grand Entrance" section provides text that you can read aloud or paraphrase to reveal them to the party. Lean into this moment, really selling how strange and unsettling these foes are, and enjoy watching your players have no idea what's about to happen.

Each invader also has a "Tactics" section that describes how to effectively and evocatively use them in combat. The "Escape Plan" section then describes how the creature makes their getaway.

Reasons for Hunting

These boss monsters can be played as just unlucky random encounters, but it's more interesting if they have a specific reason to come after the characters. You can use any of the following options to set up an invader encounter, or as inspiration for setups of your own:

- The characters have stumbled into a place that the invader holds sacred, and the invader vows to punish them for their transgression.
- A character meddled in something they shouldn't have, maybe without even knowing it. As a result, someone put a bounty on their head, and the invader is here to collect it.
- An enemy from the characters' past has hired the invader to find them and destroy them.
- The party is carrying something the invader has long been searching for.
- The invader is on business of their own—which they want kept secret. Unfortunately, the characters witnessed the invader's arrival, and can't be allowed to leave with that knowledge.

The Bleeder

How far does a person have to sink to become this … thing? A relentless hunter, twisted by magic and the touch of the thousand devils it has served for centuries, the Bleeder had a name once. A family. A home. A soul. But now it's a machine, a vessel for vengeance and pain that stalks prey across years and planes until it inevitably gets its way.

Omens of Approach

The following events warn of the appearance of the Bleeder:

- One character's heart begins to race, settling into an urgent and irregular rhythm.
- The air around the characters grows humid and hot.
- The hot, cloying smell of an open wound rises.
- One or more characters feels a sharp pain behind their eyes.

Grand Entrance

When you're ready for the Bleeder to appear, read or paraphrase the following:

> A jagged gash appears in midair, a sudden wind pulsing and rippling around it. A mist fills the air—then takes the form of hot blood erupting from the widening portal as a figure steps through it.
>
> A lithe humanoid is dressed head to toe in layered gowns the color of old blood, and dripping with fresh viscera. What little skin is exposed is pale and shiny, a mass of scars and ill-healed wounds. The horrid creature rolls its shoulders, lazily swings two long, curving blades in crescents through the air, then fixes you with a pair of dark, cat-like eyes.
>
> "Oh, good," it says, grinning. "Fresh meat."

Tactics

In the Bleeder's ideal fight, the first rounds of combat play out as follows:

Round 1: The Bleeder uses its Multiattack, striking twice with its Shotel attack and then using Blood Bond against the most likely target.

Round 2: Assuming the target of Blood Bond failed their save, the Bleeder drops back to a safe distance to engage the other characters with Fan of Daggers, using Siphon Strength against the bonded character.

Round 3: The Bleeder continues to fight, using Siphon Strength every round as it taunts the bonded character telepathically, reveling in their distress.

Given the way the Bleeder initially arrives, it's unlikely that characters will be surprised by it. This means that the creature's Surprise Strike trait might not be as effective as possible. This initial contact encounter is intended for the Bleeder to assess its enemies and form a new blood bond, and it flees using Arterial Escape before it is in danger of being killed.

The Bleeder can be much more stealthy if it returns to take on the party again—especially if a character remains under the effect of Blood Bond. The creature might taunt its bonded foe telepathically, but it always tries to instigate follow-up combat from a position of stealth and surprise.

Escape Plan

If the Bleeder is unable to form a blood bond within the first three rounds of combat, or if it drops to fewer than 50 hit points, it uses its Arterial Escape action and flees.

Multiple Bleeders

The Bleeder might be a unique creature or one of many. If the latter, bleeders might work together in packs to corral and separate their targets, making them effective threats against higher-level characters.

The Bleeder

Medium Humanoid, Neutral Evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 142 (15d8 + 75)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	17 (+3)	20 (+5)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	9 (–1)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +8
Skills Acrobatics +6, Stealth +9
Senses truesight 60 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Common, telepathy 60 ft.
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Predator. The Bleeder has advantage on and a +9 bonus to initiative rolls.

Surprise Strike. During its first turn, the Bleeder has advantage on attack rolls against any creature that hasn't taken a turn. Any hit the bleeder scores against a surprised creature is a critical hit.

Actions

Multiattack. The Bleeder makes two Shotel attacks.

Shotel. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d10 + 3) slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an Undead or a Construct, they must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be wounded. A wounded target loses 4 (1d8) hit points at the start of each of their turns. Each time the Bleeder hits a wounded target with this attack, the number of hit points lost by the target increases by 4 (1d8). A creature can use an action to negate the wound on themself or another creature within 5 feet of them with a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Medicine) check. The wound is also negated if the target receives magical healing.

Fan of Daggers. The Bleeder targets up to six creatures it can see within 30 feet of it. Each target must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 10 (3d4 + 3) piercing damage.

Bond Sense. The Bleeder detects the precise location of a creature who bears a blood bond with it (see "Blood Bond"). This detection functions across planes and is not affected by distance.

Arterial Escape (1/Day). The Bleeder unleashes a fine mist of blood in a 10-foot-radius sphere centered on itself. Each creature in the area must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or be blinded for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themself on a success. The Bleeder then teleports to a destination it selects. The destination must be one the Bleeder has visited before, and must be on the same plane of existence as the Bleeder.

Hunt (1/Day). The Bleeder teleports to a creature who bears a blood bond with them and is on the same plane of existence. The Bleeder appears in an unoccupied space of its choice within 500 feet of the bonded creature.

Bonus Actions

Blood Bond. The Bleeder targets a creature within 30 feet of it that it can see and that it hit with a Shotel attack in the past minute. The target must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or take 5 (1d10) psychic damage and become the bearer of a blood bond with the Bleeder. The bond can be broken with a *greater restoration* spell, and is broken automatically if the bearer dies or the Bleeder creates a blood bond with another creature. If the bearer of a blood bond dies, the Bleeder can sense the bearer's death. If the dead creature is returned to life before the Bleeder forms a new blood bond with another creature, the original blood bond is reinstated.

Siphon Strength. The Bleeder targets a creature within 40 feet of it that it can see and that bears a blood bond with it. Blood-red energy arcs toward the Bleeder from the target, who takes 5 (2d4) necrotic damage. The Bleeder then regains hit points equal to the damage taken.



THE TERRAFORMER

It's clear that they were humanoid once, but whether that's true now is a matter for debate. They've spent too long subsumed within the earth, trekking through the deep underneath and soaking up the fell energy exuded by the stones. In quiet moments, they talk to those stones, whispering sweet nothings and listening to replies that only they can hear. And when they call out for aid, the earth provides.

The Terraformer is most often encountered in subterranean places, the deepest parts of the world where stone and earth smother everything. On occasion, they do venture to the surface world. And when they do, the Terraformer makes full use of their ability to reshape the landscape into something more befitting their sensibilities.

OMENS OF APPROACH

The following events warn of the appearance of the Terraformer:

- A slowly rising rumble threads through the earth, more sensation than sound. Characters might wonder how long it's been growing before they noticed it.
- For a brief second, stone beneath the characters' feet feels like mud.
- Stone walls in the area ripple, masonry seemingly turning to liquid to the characters' senses.



- A grinding of stone and a shuddering of earth marks pillars of rock sprouting from the ground, potentially blocking doors and passageways.

GRAND ENTRANCE

When you're ready for the Terraformer to appear, read or paraphrase the following:

> The stone beside you makes a wet sucking noise, and the air shifts as it's displaced, pushed aside by a hulking form that slides out of solid rock as though rising from water. Though vaguely humanoid in shape, their body is sheer bulk, muscle stacked atop muscle like heaps of fallen rocks. Their head is protected by an iron miner's helmet, their calloused hands grasping an enormous rotating drill.
>
> "Knock, knock," the figure says in a voice like grinding gravel. "I thought I heard something."

TACTICS

In the Terraformer's ideal fight, the first rounds of combat play out as follows:

Round 1: If the Terraformer doesn't go first in the initiative order, they use their Fling villain action when the creature who acts immediately before them ends their turn. If both cylinders created by Unearth as part of Fling are still in effect when the Terraformer starts their turn, they use their Skipping Stones bonus action. If both have been destroyed, they create two new cylinders with Unearth. They then use Multiattack. If the Terraformer goes first in the initiative order, they save their Fling villain action until the end of round 1, starting their turn by using their Unearth bonus action.

Round 2: As the creature who acts immediately before the Terraformer ends their turn, the Terraformer uses their Mudslide villain action against the enemy they deem the most dangerous, then moves up to their speed toward the most vulnerable enemy. They then use their Multiattack and bonus actions as in the first round of combat.

When the Terraformer uses Multiattack, they aim their Ripple attack at the most dangerous-looking enemy. They use their Drill attacks on the nearest foes, prioritizing those who are prone after Ripple.

The Terraformer uses their bonus action every round, using Skipping Stones to control the battlefield and deal damage, or using Unearth to replenish destroyed cylinders or create a third cylinder if they are badly threatened.

Whatever attacks they use, the Terraformer's priority when selecting targets is to neutralize spellcasters and ranged attackers first.

The Terraformer

Medium Elemental, Lawful Neutral

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 227 (35d8 + 70)
Speed 20 ft., burrow 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Con +6, Wis +7
Skills Perception +11, Stealth +6
Damage Resistances fire; bludgeoning from mundane[1] attacks
Senses tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 21
Languages Common, Terran
Challenge 11 (7,200 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +4

Earth Glide. The Terraformer can burrow through non-magical, unworked earth and stone. While doing so, the Terraformer doesn't disturb the material they move through.

Actions

Multiattack. The Terraformer uses Ripple and makes two Drill attacks.

Drill. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage. If the Terraformer has advantage against the target, they deal an extra 4 (1d8) piercing damage.

Ripple. The Terraformer chooses a 5-foot-square area of unoccupied stone or dirt within 60 feet of them that they can see. Compacted soil and stone rises from the area in a wave, extending toward a creature the Terraformer can see in a 15-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in that line must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or take 11 (2d10) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone.

Bonus Actions

Unearth. The Terraformer causes up to two 5-foot-diameter, 10-foot-high stone cylinders to burst from unoccupied spaces of dirt or stone that they can see within 60 feet of them, leaving a 5-foot diameter, 10-foot-deep pit behind. Each cylinder rises up to 15 feet above the ground when created and continues to float at the Terraformer's command. If a creature is on the ground where a cylinder appears, that creature must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is caught and lifted by the cylinder. On a success, the creature can move to the nearest unoccupied space that isn't on a cylinder or in the pit beneath it.

The Terraformer can control up to three cylinders at a time. Creating additional cylinders causes the older cylinders to crumble into dirt. Each cylinder has AC 17, 50 hit points, and immunity to all damage types except bludgeoning, piercing, force, and thunder damage.

Skipping Stones. The Terraformer can cause each cylinder created by their Unearth bonus action that they can see to move up to 20 feet in a straight line in any direction. Each creature on a cylinder when it moves must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or fall from the cylinder, taking falling damage as normal and landing prone. If the cylinder is brought into contact with a ceiling or other obstacle during this move, each creature on the cylinder takes 13 (3d8) bludgeoning damage.

The first time a cylinder enters a space occupied by a creature, that creature must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or be struck by the cylinder. The creature takes 9 (2d8) bludgeoning damage and is pushed 10 feet away from the cylinder, ending their movement in an unoccupied space. If there is no unoccupied space to move into, the creature isn't pushed and instead falls prone and takes an additional 9 (2d8) bludgeoning damage.

Villain Actions

The Terraformer has three villain actions. They can take each action once during an encounter after an enemy's turn. They can take these actions in any order but can use only one per round.

Action 1: Fling. The Terraformer uses their Unearth bonus action. They then use their Skipping Stones bonus action twice.

Action 2: Mudslide. A 20-foot-square area of stone or dirt within 60 feet of the Terraformer that they can see becomes thick mud that lasts for 1 minute. The mud is difficult terrain, and each creature in the area when it appears or who enters the area for the first time on a turn must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or become restrained. A creature who succeeds on a DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check as an action can end the restrained condition on themself or another creature they can reach. The Terraformer can then move up to their speed.

Action 3: Downfall. Each cylinder created by the Terraformer's Unearth action explodes. Each creature within 15 feet of a cylinder must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 18 (4d8) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. A creature on a cylinder has disadvantage on the save. After the cylinders explode, any creature on a cylinder falls to the ground, taking falling damage as normal and landing prone.

[1] See the Glossary at the end of this issue for the definition of mundane.

Escape Plan

If the Terraformer is reduced to half their hit point maximum and no enemies are prone, on floating cylinders, or restrained by difficult terrain, they make their escape. They use their Downfall villain action at the end of an enemy's turn to cause their cylinders to explode, then move toward the nearest earthen or stone surface and escape using Earth Glide. If engaged in melee with an enemy, they first use their Unearth bonus action to create a cylinder immediately underneath themself, rising up out of melee reach.

The Mutator

Many creatures in the world can shift their forms, from mimics to doppelgangers, all of them driving home the fact that reality can't be trusted to remain as it first appears. Those who study such creatures often become obsessed with their abilities, consumed with a desire to harness the power to shift and change, to remake themself in a more ideal image. The Mutator has experimented with such desires for decades, twisting their own form and learning how to weaponize the flesh of their enemies, just wanting to see the world churn.

Omens of Approach

The following events warn of the appearance of the Mutator:

- The world around the characters appears to shimmer and slide, with solid objects briefly turning to murky glass before transmuting back to their original forms.
- The characters' flesh becomes suddenly dry, flaking away in response to any touch.
- The ground puckers and bubbles like burning flesh.
- Wounded characters feel those wounds ache and grow warm, turning to open sores that threaten to burst and fester.

Grand Entrance

When you're ready for the Mutator to appear, read or paraphrase the following:

> A thick haze suddenly surrounds you, and from that darkness steps a creature who seems to have no form. Their body shifts and pulses, pale flesh moving of its own accord, and rippling like a blanket thrown over a nest of serpents. The creature's skin bubbles and boils, flowing like wet clay as they take a step in your direction.
>
> Silently, they raise a hand that shifts from fingers to claws and back again. Then with a curl of their digits, they beckon you forward.

Multiple Forms

The Mutator is one creature who can shift between two different forms. To make running the Mutator as easy as possible, these distinct forms are presented as two different stat blocks. Use the initial form stat block first, then switch to the mutated form stat block when the initial form is reduced to 0 hit points.

Tactics

In the Mutator's ideal fight, the first rounds of combat play out as follows:

Round 1: The Mutator uses Multiattack, closing to melee with an enemy who appears less dangerous, and directing their Warping Spit toward likely spellcasters. They use the time between their first and second turns (courtesy of the Mutated Actions trait) to assess the threat of individual enemies. If they have underestimated the enemy they are in melee with, they use their Relocate bonus action to relocate to a safer part of the battlefield on their second turn.

Round 2: Having identified the most likely threats, the Mutator closes to melee with spellcasters and uses both their turns to attempt to put those characters down.

Round 3: The Mutator continues to move around the battlefield, closing with weaker foes and using their Warping Spit to grow attacking pseudopods on enemies they can't reach.

When the Mutator's initial form reaches 0 hit points, they shift into their mutated form. They make full use of their flying speed in this form to stay out of melee range, using their Petrifying Sting to neutralize enemies. With only one turn per round, they use Relocate or fly out of melee reach rather than staying put to take a beating.

Escape Plan

When a fight becomes too dangerous, the Mutator uses Relocate to disengage, then flies out of melee. They then use the Dash action to fly away as fast as possible, living to fight another day.



Mutator (Initial Form)

Medium Humanoid (Any), Chaotic Neutral

Armor Class 15 (chain shirt)
Hit Points 136 (16d8 + 64)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	9 (–1)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Con +7
Skills Acrobatics +5, Perception +5, Stealth +5
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses darkvision 30 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Common, Deep Speech
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Master of Mutation. The Mutator has advantage on saving throws against spells and effects that would alter their form.

Mutated Rejuvenation. When their initial form drops to 0 hit points, the Mutator transforms into their mutated form, and the Mutator regains hit points equal to their hit point maximum. Any conditions affecting the initial form end immediately.

Mutated Actions. The initial form takes two complete turns each round—a first turn at their normal initiative, and a second turn at their initiative minus 10. Effects that trigger at the start or end of the Mutator's turn trigger at the start or end of the round instead. The Mutator can also take up to two reactions each round. When the Mutator's initial form dies and they shift into their mutated form, they lose access to this trait and can take only one turn and use one reaction thereafter, as normal. The mutated form's new initiative becomes that of whichever of the initial form's initiatives comes next after the initial form is reduced to 0 hit points.

Actions

Multiattack. The Mutator makes two Claw attacks and uses Warping Spit.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage.

Warping Spit. The Mutator spits black ichor in a 60-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in that line must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be suffused by the liquid. At the start of each target's next turn, they sprout a flailing pseudopod from somewhere on their body, which attacks the target at the end of each of their turns until removed. The pseudopod has a +6 bonus to attack rolls and deals 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage on a hit. It has AC 14 and 18 (4d8) hit points, and doesn't have any of the target's resistances or immunities. Attacks targeting the pseudopod that miss instead strike the creature the pseudopod is attached to.

Bonus Actions

Relocate. The Mutator takes the Disengage action.

Reactions

Infected Wound. When a creature within 30 feet of the Mutator who the Mutator can see casts a spell that causes one or more creatures to regain hit points, the Mutator can attempt to corrupt that magic. The caster must make a DC 15 ability check using their spellcasting ability. On a failure, the spell functions normally, but a creature within 30 feet of the Mutator who they can see takes 4 (1d8) necrotic damage.

The Mutation

When the Mutator transforms, read or paraphrase the following:

> With a ripple of flesh and the loud crack of breaking bones, the creature begins to shift and twist. Their skin stretches and pulls, drawing tight over newly formed muscle as they grow to monstrous size. Long, leathery wings sprout from their shoulder blades, fluttering as they catch the air. With a snarl, they drop to all fours, their armor subsumed into their flesh as thick scales. In addition to their razor-sharp claws, a long, whip-like tail coils high over their back, black venom seeping from the tip of a wicked stinger.

The transformation takes only a few seconds, after which the Mutator attacks once more.

Mutator (Mutated Form)

Large Humanoid (Any), Chaotic Neutral

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 133 (14d10 + 56)
Speed 20 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	9 (–1)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Con +7
Skills Acrobatics +8, Perception +5, Stealth +5
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Common, Deep Speech
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Master of Mutation. The Mutator has advantage on saving throws against spells and effects that would alter their form.

Regeneration. The mutated form regains 10 hit points at the start of each of their turns. If the Mutator takes acid or fire damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the Mutator's next turn. The mutated form dies only if they start their turn with 0 hit points and don't regenerate.

Reversion. The Mutator can revert to their initial form with full hit points after a period of rest, at least 10 minutes long, in which they do nothing more strenuous than eating, drinking, and tending to their wounds.

Actions

Multiattack. The Mutator makes two Claw attacks and one Petrifying Sting attack.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage.

Petrifying Sting (Recharge 5–6). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d10 + 3) piercing damage plus 17 (5d6) poison damage, and the target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the target begins to turn to stone and is restrained. The restrained target must repeat the saving throw at the end of their next turn. On a success, the effect ends on the target. At the end of a creature's third consectutive turn being restrained this way, the target is petrified until freed by the *greater restoration* spell or similar magic.

Bonus Actions

Relocate. The Mutator takes the Disengage action.

Reactions

Mutagenic Feedback. When a creature within 30 feet of the Mutator who the Mutator can see casts a spell that causes one or more creatures to regain hit points, the Mutator can attempt to corrupt that magic. The caster must make an ability check using their spellcasting ability, with a DC of either 15 or 10 + the spell's level, whichever is higher. On a failure, the spell restores no hit points, and each target of the spell takes necrotic damage equal to half the hit points they would have regained.

A SPIRIT ACROSS SEAS AND STARS

A sentient ship evolves as she bonds with her crew

by Bianca Bickford

Voyaging on the high seas or soaring through the clouds is an ideal backdrop for epic adventures. This article presents a narrative path for an adventuring party to bond with a sentient ship who can sail not only oceans and horizons, but also the Sea of Stars—after a few upgrades, that is.

Three stat blocks at the end of the article capture the ship's growth through enchanting mechanics, with additional stat blocks for the crew. The story can begin as early as 1st level and soars past 10th level; recommended character levels are listed for each ship upgrade to help structure a campaign around her growth, but you can adjust to your party.

While she is a worthy vessel for any adventurer, surprises await those who choose to explore her story and unlock her full potential. Welcome aboard the *Marcuria*.

BACKGROUND

Long ago, a ship crewed by the Opal Trading Company inadvertently sailed through a rift between planes into the Feywild. Fey sea creatures battered the ship, so the crew fled to a calm inlet to make repairs. There, a wandering archfey named Marcuria grew curious about the ship and befriended the crew. The repairs took weeks. In that time, Marcuria and the crew became so fond of each other that when it was time for them to leave, the archfey imbued the ship with three enchanted discs that fit into indentations around the ship's main mast. The discs empower the vessel to sail through the air and in the Sea of Stars—the astral space between worlds.

When the crew returned to the Material Plane, they found that only minutes had passed. Not only that, Marcuria gave part of her essence to the ship—her form appeared as a carving in the mast so she could interact with and explore the world with the crew.

Years passed, and the crew retired one by one. As they left, Marcuria's influence diminished and the ship became mundane. At Marcuria's request, two of the original sailors hid the flight and Sea of Stars discs until she could bond with a new beloved crew. The seaworthy ship was passed down through a dozen generations. Memory of air and astral travel faded over the years. The last descendant retired, took the remaining disc, docked the *Marcuria* in a large city, and prepaid the fees, hoping the right crew would someday discover and awaken her.

A LOST SOUL

The characters can be any level when they start their adventures on the *Marcuria*. They hear about the docked ship when they need to travel by sea, such as in the adventure "The Ballad of Captain Shivershank" in ARCADIA 27, or from a job posting searching for adventurers to investigate a haunted ship in exchange for free passage. Either way, they are instructed to meet the ship's crew at the local docks.

THE *MARCURIA*

At first glance, the *Marcuria* doesn't inspire confidence. The hull is painted a faded, chipped blue with "Marcuria" written in cursive on the side. The ship has two masts and three decks, with a forecastle and quarterdeck—the equivalent of a double-masted caravel ship. The *Marcuria* map depicts the ship's layout, though when the characters find it, it has no ballistae or cannons aboard.



The Crew

When the characters arrive at the docks, they meet a group of four sailors that make up the *Marcuria*'s crew. See "Crew Statistics" at the end of the article for their stat blocks.

Tristan Sunsail (Captain). Tristan is a human man with tan skin, long blond hair, and a swashbuckler look about him. Dashing and charming, he is popular with gentlemen and ladies and openly has lovers at most stops.

Gemma Bimpnottin (Navigator). Gemma is a gnome woman with dark hair and skin and a frequent bright smile. Brilliant and witty, she often trades chores for a good pun.

Ati Trevedi (Medic). Ati is a tiefling man with dark hair and crimson skin. Once an assassin, he has turned his devotion to healing (and to carpentering, when the ship needs it). His demeanor is polite but reserved.

Zar'less (Boatswain). Zar'less is a drow woman with purple skin and white hair. She is an inspiring leader and manages extra crew when they're hired on. While she's honest and forthright, she is never deliberately mean.

Haunted or Not?

The crew has claimed the *Marcuria* for cargo transportation, but they've run into a problem. They offer free passage to the party's destination in exchange for investigating strange happenings aboard the ship. They believe a ghost is preventing their ship from moving; even though the anchor is up, the ship won't budge. Additionally, the furniture rearranges itself, doors open and close on their own, and faint whispers can be heard in the vessel at night.

Investigating the Ship

There's no cargo currently on the ship, but the quarters, sails, and rope are surprisingly intact and no vermin infest the hold.

Clues. A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check or spends 30 minutes inspecting the ship finds a 1-foot-diameter round indentation in the deck next to the center mast. A *detect magic* spell shows faint traces of transmutation magic throughout the ship; the Divine Sense feature and similar effects don't detect any Undead.

Ghostly Phenomena. When the characters board the *Marcuria*, roll on or choose from the Ghostly Phenomena table below to determine what eerie event the characters encounter. As they continue to explore, you can roll for additional encounters, but don't repeat a result.

Ghostly Phenomena

d6	Encounter
1	A character hears the anchor suddenly crash into the water with a loud splash, but the anchor is still stowed.
2	Characters with a passive Perception of 13 or higher notice a lack of footprints in the dust around furniture or doors, indicating that no one is physically faking a haunting.
3	One of the booms swings wildly at a character on deck. The target must make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the character falls over and a woman's giggling rings through the ship.
4	A vision sweeps through the characters' minds of a lush green field alongside a sandy beach, leaving them with a sense of calm and safety.
5	The door to the captain's quarters creaks open invitingly. The bed is made and candles are lit, casting warm light throughout the room.
6	A feminine chuckle echoes through the hold.

Her Chosen Crew

After a character finds the round indentation, a piercing voice calls for help from the bottom deck. The sailors come aboard to investigate, as they've never heard clear words in any of the hauntings. If the characters join them, the *Marcuria* senses that the sailors and characters are her next crew. She telepathically speaks to them in a bright, playful voice. She shares that she is bound to the harbor and needs a disc to sail, but she struggles to recall details. Before she can leave the docks, they must "find her soul," the disc, which she says is with a member of her first crew.

Tristan is intrigued by the *Marcuria* and senses her value. However, he and his crew are more sailors than adventurers, so they're willing to partner with the characters for a chance to unlock the ship's secrets. If the characters can find the disc, they can join his crew as equal owners of the *Marcuria*. If the characters agree with this plan, Tristan suggests that they visit the harbormaster, who should have information about the ship's former owners.

Finding the Old Crew

The harbormaster's office is a short walk from the docks, and the harbormaster is present during daylight hours.

Harbormaster's Office

The harbormaster is a silver dragonborn who takes great pride in their appearance. They manage the docks, including the ships in storage, and while they tend to be short when speaking due to years of dealing with the bureaucracy of a city position, they aren't rude.

A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check or pays 20 gp as a bribe convinces the harbormaster to reveal that the ship was prepaid for five years to stay docked. The payment expires in a few days and the ship appears abandoned, so the harbormaster will allow Tristan and his crew to formally and legally claim possession of the *Marcuria* unless the owner steps forward. The owner is registered as the Opal Trading Company.

The characters can explore the city to find information about the Opal Trading Company. Cityfolk suggest that the best place to learn about trading companies is to talk to locals at an upscale dockside tavern called the Golden Mermaid. Pub patrons recall hearing the company name mentioned by a regular, a minotaur who owns a cartographer's shop called Rose of the Winds.

Rose of the Winds

Samuel Tai is an elderly minotaur with graying brown fur. He is a charismatic cartographer, former navigator of the *Marcuria,* and the last surviving member of the Opal Trading Company. Hopeful that she has found her next crew, Samuel eagerly asks why the characters are looking for him and why they're interested in the ship.

If the characters admit they heard a voice aboard the ship and she requested they find her soul, Samuel lights up, as this means the *Marcuria* has chosen her next crew. While he doesn't know her full history, he explains that ownership transferred from her original crew down over generations and that he is the last remaining descendant. Stories passed with the disc tell tales of a living ship with the ability to use magic—the disc restores a part of that magic. After sailing with her for many years, Samuel took the disc when he retired to keep *Marcuria* safe from those who would abuse her potential.

He proudly passes on the circular disc, which is made from a large opal and shimmers in the light. An *identify* spell reveals the disc is a powerful object with traces of transmutation magic created by an archfey.

Samuel runs a full shop that sells basic adventuring gear, including rations made for long voyages at sea, cartographer's tools, navigator's tools, and sea charts (ranging from 10 gp to 500 gp depending on the map's size and level of detail). With the disc acquired, the characters can return to the ship to discover her secrets.

Unlocking the *Marcuria*

When a character places the disc, a wave of magic sweeps over the ship, turning the hull a brilliant cobalt blue. The *Marcuria* awakens, now able to sail freely. She

manifests as a faint shape of a woman in the center mast, and her voice speaks in their minds, where she shares her memories of seafaring with her former crews. Until she awakens further, her memory is spotty and she can't remember past that.

After the first disc is placed, an identical indentation appears in the deck next to the first. *Marcuria* can't recall any details about the second indentation or disc; if the characters ask Samuel, he says that his company never discovered any information about a second disc, but the stories he grew up with say that *Marcuria* could sail anywhere, from the stormiest seas to the starry night skies.

The harbormaster honors the claim from Captain Sunsail's crew, and they take ownership of the ship. The four sailors plus the characters are now considered members of the *Marcuria*'s crew.

Sailing Aboard the *Marcuria*

The characters can now travel the ocean for free on the ***Marcuria***. Marcuria, the fragment of the archfey who remains in the ship, repairs the ship's wear and tear with her Mindful Repairs trait. The crew handles working the sails and transferring cargo.

The sliver of Marcuria's soul generally treats the crew like siblings. Protective and playful, she's always willing to help—especially if they get rid of unattractive barnacles or add more flair to the ship. Her magic comes from the bond and love for her crew.

Where to Go?

Marcuria can be consulted for navigation. However, she has gaps in her memory, and the world has changed since the last time she sailed. At your discretion, she might have a 10% chance of mistakenly leading the crew in the wrong direction until she's fully restored.

Ship Downtime

When the characters aren't using the ship, the rest of the crew runs legitimate cargo jobs, transporting goods and travelers. Tristan can share adventure hooks with the characters (see "Further Adventures with the *Marcuria*" later in the article). The sailors consider their agreement equitable, removing any need for bookkeeping. Tristan, Gemma, Ati, or Zar'less can teach the characters to sail as you see fit.

A Missing Heart in the Air

The characters should be 5th level or higher to start their next adventure on the *Marcuria*. The next time they come aboard, Marcuria gathers them around the mast and tells them, "Through our bond, I have remembered more! We must find my heart."

Now that she's bonded with her crew, Marcuria remembers more about the second indentation and disc. She can't recall what abilities she'll gain, but she knows placing the second disc will make her stronger. In addition, she has a rough memory of its location—a thriving metropolis called Valaize, host to a grand tower with a guardian who offered to protect the disc. Samuel and Gemma aren't familiar with Valaize, but Samuel has a map of the area; a character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (History) check recalls the general location of the city—and knows that it vanished when the barren desert swallowed it (see "Buried Knowledge" below).

Buried Knowledge

The characters travel to the arid expanse, only to find the vast desert has swallowed the ancient city. This once-thriving city is now a line of partially buried docks, a section of dilapidated streets and buildings, and a crumbling central tower that protects the second disc.

Roll on or choose from the Ancient City Encounters table below at least three times (without repeating a result) to determine what the characters discover while searching for the disc. After the second random encounter, any character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 15 or higher hears singing from the top of the tower. A character who speaks Celestial understands that the song is about a deep love for the stars in the sky.

All paths lead to the central tower, and the tower's front door swings open as the characters approach. Five flights of stairs lead up the tower, and all rooms aside from the last room at the top are sealed and inaccessible.

A **guardian naga** waits in the room, aware of the characters' presence. She was entrusted with the disc, which is made of lapis lazuli and gleams serenely in the light, by one of the original crew members and has guarded it ever since. She gives this riddle and awards the disc if it's answered correctly (the naga lets them try until they succeed):

> "What can't be kept unless given, and if betrayed will break?"

The answer is "trust," which can be outright solved, figured out by a character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence check, or found by asking Marcuria. If the characters are stumped, the guardian naga tells them to return when they've learned the answer.

Once the characters have earned the disc, the naga explains where it came from. The *Marcuria*'s crew was concerned that the ship would be used as a weapon in the wrong hands. Captain Brytak, the half-elf captain in charge of the second disc, brought it to the naga when he retired—they were old friends, and the naga was pleased to protect someone so important to him.

Ancient City Encounters

d10	Encounter
1	Four **gargoyles** hiding in an alley wait for the characters to pass by and attack from behind.
2	A shop door is ajar, leading into an old clothing store. Inside is an intact green scarf with an owl emblem.
3	Part of the ground gives way when a character of the GM's choice steps on it. They must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or fall into a 10-foot-deep pit and take 1d6 bludgeoning damage.
4	Two **swarms of poisonous snakes** slither into the road. They only observe the characters unless provoked.
5	A **cloaker** flies out of a dark corner and attacks the characters.
6	A broken shop door hangs loosely on its hinges. Everything inside has been pillaged except one chest. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools or a DC 18 Strength check finds ancient coins worth 200 gp (or 500 gp to a historian or collector).
7	A **rat** sitting calmly in the middle of the road looks at the characters with curiosity. He can be befriended with food.
8	This part of the road is blocked by rubble. A character who succeeds on a DC 18 Strength (Athletics) check can climb up the rubble to a rooftop and kick it over to clear a path down the road.
9	A shop door stands wide open. A shattered humanoid skeleton is scattered on the floor. The remains of its hand are curled around a few ancient coins (see row 6).
10	Two **giant scorpions** are fighting each other on the road. If the characters don't intervene, one emerges the victor and limps to a cave to recover.

Awakening the *Marcuria*

Once the lapis lazuli disc is secured, the characters can return to the ship and place it in the second indentation. A third indentation appears, and the **awakened *Marcuria*** shimmers as a wave of magic flows through the ship (see "Marcuria Statistics" at the end of the article). Her form in the mast becomes more lifelike and living plants adorn the top deck. The *Marcuria* can now travel the skies!

The floor of the bottom deck turns clear, providing an incredible view below the ship. The faint outline of a doorway appears; the *Marcuria* can now provide a place to rest with her Home Base trait. The entrance appears on the port side of the bottom deck, and ornate vines and flowers decorate the arched door. While in the air, a bank of clouds forms under the ship that can conceal it from view below.

A Psyche Complete in the Stars

The characters should be 10th level or higher to receive their final adventure for the *Marcuria*. They receive a message from Marcuria, who requests they "find her psyche."

Marcuria is completely loyal to and protective of the crew; she's remembered that the third indentation restores her full power and memories. Trusting the characters with that power—and herself—she directs them to the edge of a jungle. There, a minotaur named Miriam from her original crew stored the third disc within a temple dedicated to a goddess of the skies. A character who succeeds on a DC 17 Intelligence (History or Religion) check or spends three days researching in a library finds records of this temple.

Twisted Fate

The characters discover an arid crater when they arrive in the jungle. The temple now stands on an island floating above the blasted landscape, warped by an Undead presence. Withered vines and fungus have overgrown the once-beautiful temple that worshipped a forgotten goddess. The ground on the island, including inside the temple, is difficult terrain.

Roll on or choose from the Undead Temple Encounters table below at least twice (without repeating a result) to determine what the characters find while searching for the disc.

Undead Temple Encounters

d10	Encounter
1	The character at the front of the party steps on an invisible mushroom, expelling spores into the air. They must succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or be poisoned for one hour.
2	Four **wraiths** rise from the ground and attack the characters.
3	Six **mummies** in rotting armor shuffle on patrol, using a well-worn and obvious path. The characters must succeed on a DC 17 group Dexterity (Stealth) check to sneak past them.
4	A character of your choice finds an old medallion bearing three stars surrounded by a vine wreath on the ground. It acts like an *amulet of health*.
5	A fully intact skeleton wearing the remains of a dress leans against a stone. If the characters use the *speak with dead* spell to question her, the skeleton struggles to explain that Lady Seleste, the goddess of exploration and navigation, was worshipped at this temple until the head priest's lust for power turned him into a mummy lord.
6	An undead tree (which uses the **treant** stat block but the creature's type is Undead) shivers into animation and attacks.
7	The skull of a tyrannosaurus rex is lying among the trees, thickly covered in fungus. The area contains no other bones or clues about where the skull came from.
8	A crumbling statue of a high priest is surprisingly clear of vines and fungus. If touched, it releases a 30-foot-radius blast of fire and each creature in range must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 16 (3d10) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.
9	Four **air elementals** float 30 feet above a small clearing. They attack if provoked.
10	A ruined journal lies on the floor in the remains of an old room. In one legible section, the writer expresses concern over the head priest wanting to become a god himself.

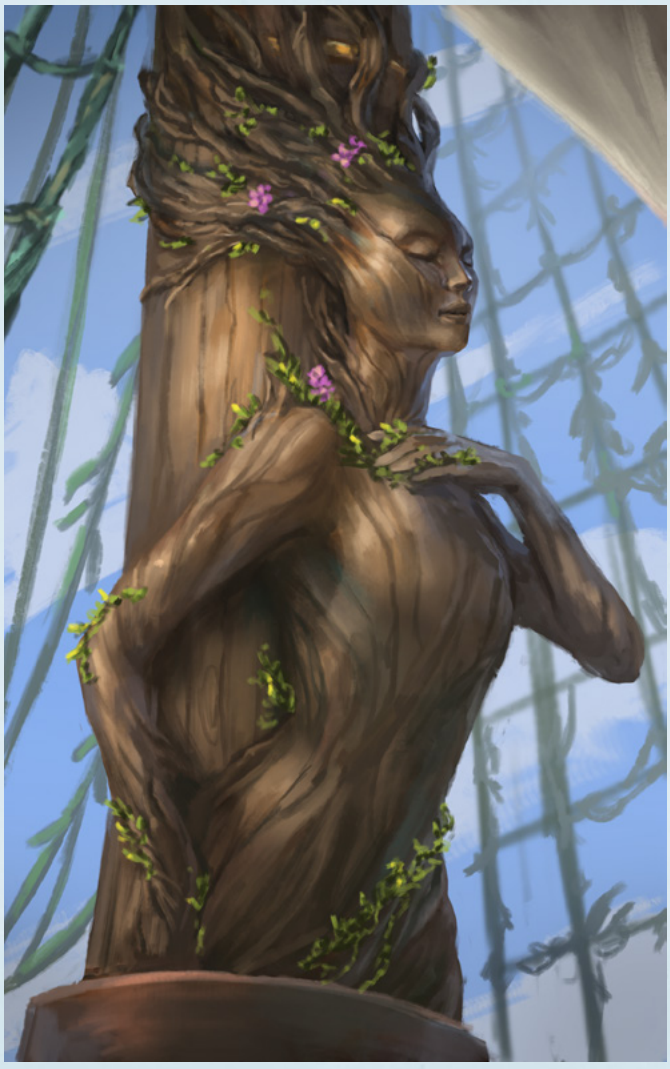
Inside the temple's main chamber lurks Patriarch Jehan, a **mummy lord**. Once the head priest of this temple, Jehan came to believe his potential vastly outweighed that of the gods. After undertaking a blasphemous ritual to lengthen his life, he has continued to pursue dark magic, riches, and artifacts to grow his power. He knows the disc is unique but doesn't know what it's for; he's only interested in its value, and he attacks when the characters make it clear they want the disc.

To adjust the combat for your party, you can run the mummy lord inside the lair for a higher-level party or outside for a lower-level party. The **archmage** stat block is another good alternative for lower-level parties.

Once Jehan is defeated, the characters discover the disc, which is made of chondrite and glitters like an ocean of stars, in his treasure hoard. Additionally, they find a *robe of eyes*, a *staff of power*, 3,000 gp worth of diamonds, 100 pp in currency long out of use (worth 200 pp to historians and collectors), and a ceremonial scepter worth 1,000 gp.

Restoring the *Marcuria*

Once the characters place the chondrite disc in the *Marcuria*'s third indentation, the ship shakes as magic restores her to her final construction, the **restored *Marcuria*** (see "Marcuria Statistics" at the end of the article). Her appearance in the mast becomes lifelike, with long, floating hair, elven ears, and a feminine fey form. Her memories and abilities are intact, and the crew can now travel the Sea of Stars on the *Marcuria*.



Marcuria can also cast *transport via plants* as though her mast was a tree, and her mast acts as an inanimate plant for use with the spell.

Marcuria knows how to maintain natural gravity on the ship with fresh, breathable air in a 150-foot-radius bubble surrounding it. When the ship is configured for astral travel, the image of Marcuria in the mast becomes a wooden seated helm that she cradles with her arms. However, the seated helm is not required for space travel; asking *Marcuria* to travel to the destination is equally effective.

If the characters choose to find Marcuria in the Feywild, the archfey is delighted to see them in person. The essence she imbued in the ship allows her to exist in both the Feywild and the ship, and she is thrilled with the arrangement. She encourages the characters to take her on more adventures.

Further Adventures with the *Marcuria*

Once the players have the restored *Marcuria*, you can use the following plot hooks to continue her story:

Call Me Josiah. Tristan accepts a contract to take a veteran fisherman named Josiah on an expedition to find a legendary **hound shark** he hopes to befriend (see the end of the article for their stat block). The area is patrolled by sahuagin, so caution is advised.

The Original Crew. Marcuria's description of Miriam sounds like a clear connection to Samuel's ancestor, and the guardian naga mentioned Captain Brytak. These two names could lead to stories of the original crew and their descendants, for which Marcuria would grant a boon.

Exploring the Sea of Stars. Tristan has dropped hints to his trusted network that they can travel through the Sea of Stars. A group of refugees requests transportation to another world to escape the hunters pursuing them.

Marcuria Statistics

The *Marcuria* uses the Ship Rules from "The Ballad of Captain Shivershank" by Willy Abeel in *ARCADIA 27*, included below. Unlike mundane ships, however, the *Marcuria* is a sentient being with a special stat block; instead of hit points, she can endure a maximum number of hits, as described in the "Ship Rules" section below.

Crew Size. The *Marcuria* needs four crew to operate at a minimum.

The *Marcuria*

Gargantuan Ship

Armor Class 15
Hit Max 14
Speed 60 ft. (10 miles per hour out of combat)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)

Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, dazed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, incapacitated, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, stunned, unconscious

Control Sails. At the start of a day's journey, roll a d6 to see if Marcuria can maintain a strong wind in the sails, keeping the ship on course regardless of weather. On a roll of 1, this trait doesn't function until the next day.

Fey Endurance. When the *Marcuria* takes her maximum number of hits, she doesn't sink but instead becomes a mundane mid boat.

Mindful Repairs. Marcuria can cast *mending* at will to repair everyday wear and tear on the ship.

Smooth Sailing. While aboard the *Marcuria*, a creature can't suffer from motion sickness.

Actions

Maneuvers. The *Marcuria* takes the Dash or Dodge action.

Cannon (Recharge 5–6). The *Marcuria* fires a magical cannonball at a point within 150 feet of her. Each creature within a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on that point must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) force damage and 13 (2d12) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.


Main Deck
Crew Deck
Hold
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
1. Mast
2. Ballista
3. Cargo Hold
4. Marcuria
5. Helm
6. Captain's Quarters
7. Capstan
8. Cannons
9. Crew Quarters
10. Cable Stores
11. Mansion Entrance
12. Storage
One Square Equals 5 ft.

Awakened Marcuria

Gargantuan Ship

Armor Class 16
Hit Max 18
Speed 60 ft., fly 60 ft. (10 miles per hour out of combat)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)	14 (+1)	15 (+2)

Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, dazed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, incapacitated, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, stunned, unconscious

Cloud Concealment. While flying, a layer of clouds forms under the *Marcuria*, giving disadvantage on ability checks made to detect the *Marcuria* to creatures below it.

Control Sails. At the start of a day's journey, Marcuria must make a DC 10 Wisdom check to maintain a strong wind in the sails, keeping the ship on course regardless of weather. On a failed check, this trait doesn't function until the next day.

Enhanced Repairs. Marcuria can cast *mending* to repair everyday wear and tear on the ship. At the end of every hour, her hit count is reduced by 1.

Fey Endurance. When the *Marcuria* takes her maximum number of hits, she doesn't sink but instead becomes a mundane mid boat.

Home Base. The *Marcuria* can cast *magnificent mansion* once per day, requiring no material components. The entrance appears on the port side of the bottom deck; vines and flowers decorate the arched door.

Smooth Sailing. While aboard the *Marcuria*, a creature can't suffer from motion sickness.

Telepathic Interpreter. The *Marcuria* understands the language of and can communicate telepathically with any creature touching the ship who speaks at least one language.

Actions

Double Ballista. The *Marcuria* makes two Ballista attacks.

Ballista. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +6 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d10) force damage.

Maneuvers. The *Marcuria* takes the Dash or Dodge action.

Cannon (Recharge 5–6). The *Marcuria* fires a magical cannonball at a point within 150 feet of her. Each creature within a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on that point must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) force damage and 13 (2d12) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Ship Rules

Ship combat can be as simple or as complex as you prefer. These boat rules are quick and keep the action on the adventurers:

- Boats act on initiative count 20, rolling a d20 to determine order amongst themselves. Boats act before characters and lair actions with the same initiative.
- On its turn, a boat with a helmsperson (or someone steering it) can move and use a special action, as described in the Ship Categories table.
- Mid boats and big ships have access to the Cannon special action described below. The saving throw DC is listed next to the action in the Ship Categories table. Small boats can take either the Dash action or the Dodge action on their turn, but not both.
- Each time a boat takes any damage from a siege weapon (including another ship's cannon) or a spell that doesn't deal psychic or poison damage, it takes a hit. A boat has a maximum number of hits it can take before sinking, which is listed in the Ship Categories table.
- A creature can use their action to help repair the boat where it was hit, temporarily reducing its hit count by 1 for 1 hour. A creature that repairs the boat during a long rest reduces its hit count by 2 (to a minimum of 0).
- When a boat takes 20 or more damage in a single hit, it tilts 45 degrees in a direction of the GM's choice. Until the start of the boat's next turn, its surfaces are considered difficult terrain.

Cannon (Recharge 5–6). The ship fires a cannonball at a point within 150 feet of it. Each creature within a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on that point must make a Dexterity saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) fire damage and 13 (2d12) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The area is filled with fire, which spreads around corners and ignites flammable objects in the area that aren't being worn or carried. The DC for the Dexterity saving throw is shown on the Ship Categories table.

Restored *Marcuria*

Gargantuan Ship

Armor Class 17
Hit Max 20
Speed 60 ft., fly 60 ft. (10 miles per hour out of combat)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)

Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, dazed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, incapacitated, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, stunned, unconscious

Astral Travel. The *Marcuria* can travel 100 million miles in 24 hours in the Sea of Stars. Once the *Marcuria* detects gravity, she uses her flying speed.

Cloud Concealment. While flying, a layer of clouds forms under the *Marcuria*, giving disadvantage on ability checks made to detect the *Marcuria* to creatures below it.

Control Sails. At the start of a day's journey, Marcuria must make a DC 10 Wisdom check to maintain a strong wind in the sails, keeping the ship on course regardless of weather. On a failed check, this trait doesn't function until the next day.

Enhanced Repairs. Marcuria can cast *mending* at will to repair everyday wear and tear on the ship. At the end of every hour, her hit count is reduced by 2.

Fey Endurance. When the *Marcuria* takes her maximum number of hits, she doesn't sink but instead becomes a mundane mid boat.

Smooth Sailing. While aboard the *Marcuria*, a creature can't suffer from motion sickness.

Telepathic Interpreter. The *Marcuria* understands the language of and can communicate telepathically with any creature touching the ship.

Actions

Double Ballista. The *Marcuria* makes two Ballista attacks.

Ballista. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +7 to hit, range 240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (3d10) force damage.

Maneuvers. The *Marcuria* takes the Dash or Dodge action.

Cannon (Recharge 5–6). The *Marcuria* fires a magical cannonball at a point within 150 feet of her. Each creature within a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on that point must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) force damage and 13 (2d12) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Remembrance. The *Marcuria* can cast the following spells, requiring no material components (spell save DC 16):

1/day each: *banishment*, *heroes' feast*, *magnificent mansion*, *transport via plants*

Bonus Actions

Fey Grace. Once per day, the *Marcuria* can teleport herself, including everything and everyone on the ship, up to 60 feet to an unoccupied space that she can see.

Ship Categories

Category	Typical Crew Size	AC	Hit Max	STR Save	DEX Save	Speed	Special Actions
Small Boat (rowboats, skiffs)	1–3	12	6	+0	+4	15 feet	Dash, Dodge
Mid Boat (sloops, schooners)	10–20	14	12	+2	+4	40 feet	Cannon (DC 10)
Big Ship (barques, galleons)	30–100	16	18	+4	+2	60 feet	Cannon (DC 14)

Hound Shark

A smaller species of hunter shark, hounds relentlessly stalk their prey through the oceans.

Hound Shark

Medium Beast, Unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 26 (4d8 + 8)
Speed 5 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	3 (–4)	10 (+0)	5 (–3)

Skills Perception +2, Survival +4
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages —
Challenge 1 (200 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Aquatic Tremorsense. While the shark is touching a body of water, they can detect and pinpoint the origin of vibrations in the same body of water within 60 feet of them.

Blood Frenzy. The shark has advantage on melee attack rolls against any creature who doesn't have all their hit points.

Water Breathing. The shark can breathe only underwater.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Bonus Actions

Hound Sense. The shark acquires a quarry by smelling a creature or an object within 40 feet of them that they can see. If the shark smells an object, their quarry is the last creature to handle the object for at least 5 minutes within the last 10 days. Otherwise, their quarry is the creature they smelled. For the next 24 hours, or until the shark uses this bonus action again, the shark can use their sense of smell to track their quarry. They know the direction to the quarry's location provided the quarry is on the same plane of existence as them.

Unstoppable Hunt (Recharge 6). The shark moves up to their speed without provoking opportunity attacks toward their quarry (see Hound Sense), provided they can see their quarry.

Hound Shark Companion

The hound shark companion stat block uses the rules found in *Beastheart and Monstrous Companions*. When a beastheart with a hound shark companion uses an exploit that refers to the companion's walking speed, such as Drag Them, use the hound shark's swimming speed instead.

The hound shark companion is great for underwater campaigns, but a generous GM can give a character with a shark companion some of the magic items from "Swimming Through Sand to Sea: More Mounted Adventuring" by Willy Abeel in *ARCADIA* 4, so their shark friend can also accompany them on land

Hound Shark Companion

Medium Beast, Unaligned

Armor Class 13 plus PB (natural armor)
Hit Points 7 + seven times caregiver's level (number of d8 Hit Dice equal to their caregiver's level)
Speed 5 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	5 (–3)	10 (+0)	8 (–1)

Saving Throws Str +3 plus PB, Dex +1 plus PB
Skills Perception +0 plus PB, Survival +0 plus PB
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10 plus PB
Languages —
Proficiency Bonus (PB) equals the caregiver's bonus

Aquatic Tremorsense. While the shark is touching a body of water, they can detect and pinpoint the origin of vibrations in the same body of water within 60 feet of them.

Water Breathing. The shark can breathe only underwater.

Actions

Signature Attack (Bite). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 plus PB to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1d6 plus PB piercing damage.

1st Level: Overwhelming Attack (2 Ferocity). The shark makes a signature attack. On a hit, the attack deals an extra PB damage, and the target can't take reactions until the start of the shark's next turn.

3rd Level: Circling Strike (5 Ferocity). The shark chooses a creature within 5 feet of them. The target must make a DC 10 plus PB Wisdom (Perception) check. On a failed check, the shark makes a signature attack with advantage against the target and deals an extra PBd4 damage on a hit. On a successful check, the shark makes a signature attack against the target.

5th Level: Chompfest (8 Ferocity). The shark moves up to their speed without provoking opportunity attacks. Before, during, or after this movement, the shark can make one signature attack against up to PB creatures.

Bonus Actions

Hound Sense (1/Day). The shark acquires a quarry by smelling a creature or an object within 40 feet of them that they can see. If the shark smells an object, their quarry is the last creature to handle the object for at least 5 minutes within the last 10 days. Otherwise, their quarry is the creature they smelled. For the next 24 hours, or until the shark uses this bonus action again, the shark can use their sense of smell to track their quarry. They know the direction to the quarry's location provided the quarry is on the same plane of existence as them.

Mystic Connection: Hound Shark

If you're playing a beastheart and have a hound shark companion, you gain the following benefit at 9th level when you gain the beastheart's Mystic Connection feature:

Blood Scent. You gain a swimming speed equal to your walking speed. Additionally, as an action, you enter a blood frenzy for 1 minute. While frenzied, you have advantage on attack rolls against any creature who doesn't have all their hit points. You can't use this benefit again until you finish a long rest.

Crew Statistics

This section contains the stat blocks for the *Marcuria*'s crew, using the retainers rules from *Flee, Mortals!* which have been reprinted here for your convenience.

A **retainer** is a sapient creature who adventures alongside the player characters. Each retainer is a less experienced adventurer who a player character can take under their wing. Retainers are never meant to achieve the same power level as the player characters.

Mentor

Every retainer has a player character **mentor**. A retainer's mentor gives them orders, and the mentor's player also controls the retainer. A retainer acts on the same initiative count as their mentor in combat, acting immediately before or after the mentor (player's choice). As a mentor gains experience and levels up, so does their retainer (see "Statistics" below).

Statistics

Retainers are designed to be easy to run so their player (who is already managing a complex character) doesn't get overwhelmed with even more details. Each retainer has a simple stat block—though these are similar to other creature stat blocks, retainers follow a few different rules.

Level

A retainer's level equals their mentor's level. As a retainer levels up, their hit points increase (see "Hit Points and Hit Dice") and they gain combat features (see "Features"). Additionally, a few of their statistics increase when their mentor's proficiency bonus does, including attack bonuses, skills, and save DC (see "Proficiency Bonus"). Their other statistics typically remain the same regardless of their level.

Armor Class

Unlike player characters, a retainer's armor class isn't determined by a particular set of armor they don (like studded leather). Instead, each retainer's armor class is simplified to one of three armor types:

- Retainers with light armor have AC 13.
- Retainers with medium armor have AC 15.
- Retainers with heavy armor have AC 18.

Hit Points and Hit Dice

Retainers gain one Hit Die per level. Their hit point maximum is based on the size of their Hit Die, as shown on the Retainer Hit Points table.

Retainer Hit Points

Hit Die Size	Hit Point Maximum
d6	6 times their level
d8	7 times their level
d10	8 times their level
d12	9 times their level

Retainers have exceptionally high hit points—sometimes even higher than their mentor. This allows the party to enjoy the presence of a beloved retainer without worrying about losing them to an unlucky roll of the dice or decision by a single player. The GM often awards characters with retainers in lieu of other treasure. Such rewards shouldn't be lost easily.

Proficiency Bonus

Because a retainer's effectiveness and survivability depend on the training and expertise of their mentor, a retainer's proficiency bonus is equal to their mentor's proficiency bonus.

Some of a retainer's statistics refer to their proficiency bonus, abbreviated as PB. Other statistics use a number of dice equal to a retainer's proficiency bonus; these are expressed with PB in place of the number of dice. For example, if a retainer has a +3 proficiency bonus, PBd10 means 3d10.

A retainer adds their proficiency bonus to any saving throw they make.

Features

Each retainer has a **signature attack** they can make using the Attack action each round. Retainers can use their signature attack to make opportunity attacks, even if their signature attack isn't a melee weapon attack.

A retainer gains new features at 3rd, 5th, and 7th level. Some features can only be used a certain number of times per day (as noted in the retainer's stat block).

Additionally, if a retainer's signature attack is a weapon attack, they typically gain an extra attack at 7th level (as noted in their stat block), allowing them to make two signature attacks per round instead of one.

Gear

When a retainer joins the party, they typically carry clothes appropriate to their position, a suit of armor, a weapon, and an explorer's pack. If the retainer casts spells, they also carry a spellcasting implement. Any additional equipment must be provided to them by their mentor.

Magic Items. Retainers can use magic items like anyone else. For example, a *+1 weapon* increases their

attack and damage rolls by 1, and *+1 armor* of the appropriate type (light, medium, or heavy) increases their AC by 1.

One happy side effect of having retainers is that as a player character levels up and acquires better equipment, they can pass their obsolete items on to the retainer.

Dying Retainers

When a retainer is reduced to 0 hit points, they follow the same rules as player characters. If not killed instantly by massive damage, they fall unconscious, make death saving throws, and can be stabilized or healed.

Optional Rule: Shared Attacks

If a player wants to speed up their retainer's turn, they can make **shared attacks** at the GM's discretion.

When the mentor hits a creature with an attack, if their retainer can see or hear them, the retainer is inspired by their mentor's success. On the inspired retainer's next turn, for each successful attack their mentor just made, the retainer can automatically hit a creature of their choice within range with their signature attack, up to the number of attacks the retainer can make.

If the mentor hit with fewer attacks than the number of attacks the retainer can make, the retainer can make additional attack rolls for those attacks to see if they hit.

Retainer Encounter Balance

When building encounters, the GM should consider a retainer as akin to a powerful combat-focused magic item. A retainer gives a party a significant power boost; they not only dish out more damage and provide more hit points for enemies to target, but they also create complications to challenge the party's foes. GMs can increase encounter difficulty by one step (from easy to medium, hard to deadly, and so forth) to properly challenge a group of characters with a retainer.

Tristan Sunsail (Retainer)

Medium Humanoid (Human), Chaotic Good

Armor Class 15 (medium)
Hit Points Seven times their level (number of d8 Hit Dice equal to their level)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws +PB to all
Skills Deception +2 plus PB, Perception +0 plus PB, Persuasion +2 plus PB
Senses passive Perception 10 plus PB
Languages Common, Dwarvish
Proficiency Bonus (PB) equals the mentor's bonus

Signature Attack (Rapier). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +3 plus PB to hit, reach 5 ft, one target. *Hit*: 1d8 plus PB slashing damage. Beginning at 7th level, Tristan can make this attack twice, instead of once, when he takes the Attack action on his turn.

Features

3rd Level: Finishing Flourish (3/Day). As a bonus action, Tristan makes a ranged spell attack (+3 plus PB to hit) against a target within 120 feet of him. On a hit, the target takes 1d10 plus PB force damage.

5th Level: Plucky (3/Day). When Tristan misses with an attack roll or fails an ability check or saving throw, he can reroll the die and must use the new roll (no action required).

7th Level: Stylish Swipe (3/Day). Once per turn when Tristan hits with a signature attack, the target takes an extra PBd10 slashing damage (no action required).

Gemma Bimpnottin (Retainer)

Small Humanoid (Gnome), Chaotic Good

Armor Class 15 (medium)
Hit Points Seven times their level (number of d8 Hit Dice equal to their level)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws +PB to all
Skills History +1 plus PB, Investigation +1 plus PB
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Gnomish
Proficiency Bonus (PB) equals the mentor's bonus

Signature Attack (Spiked Shortbow). *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack*: +3 plus PB to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit*: 1d6 plus PB piercing damage. Beginning at 7th level, Gemma can make this attack twice, instead of once, when she takes the Attack action on her turn.

Features

3rd Level: Swift Retreat (3/Day). As a bonus action, Gemma takes the Disengage or Hide action.

5th Level: Sniper Shot (3/Day). As an action, Gemma makes a signature attack against a creature within 320 feet of her. She doesn't have disadvantage for attacking at long range for this attack. On a hit, the attack deals an extra PBd6 piercing damage.

7th Level: Gnomish Spirits (3/Day). As a bonus action, Gemma splashes the contents of a small vial on a willing creature's armor. For 1 minute, a creature wearing the armor gains a +2 bonus to AC and has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks.

Ati Trevedi (Retainer)

Medium Humanoid (Tiefling), Chaotic Good

Armor Class 15 (medium)
Hit Points Seven times their level (number of d8 Hit Dice equal to their level)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws +PB to all
Skills Medicine +1 plus PB, Religion +0 plus PB
Damage Resistances fire
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Infernal
Proficiency Bonus (PB) equals the mentor's bonus

Signature Attack (Daggers). *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack*: +3 plus PB to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit*: 2d4 plus PB piercing damage. Beginning at 7th level, Ati can make this attack twice, instead of once, when he takes the Attack action on his turn.

Features

3rd Level: Ship Medic (3/Day). As an action, Ati restores PBd6 hit points to a creature within 5 feet of him.

5th Level: Compassionate Blessing (3/Day). As an action, Ati chooses up to three creatures he can see within 30 feet of him. Each target gains temporary hit points equal to twice his PB. Additionally, a target gains a +2 bonus to damage rolls made with a weapon for 1 minute.

7th Level: Muscle Memory (3/Day). Once per turn when Ati hits with a signature attack, he unfurls three hidden daggers and the target takes an additional PBd12 piercing damage (no action required).

Zar'less (Retainer)

Medium Humanoid (Elf), Chaotic Good

Armor Class 15 (medium)
Hit Points Seven times their level (number of d8 Hit Dice equal to their level)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws +PB to all
Skills Athletics +3 plus PB, Persuasion +0 plus PB
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages Common, Elvish

Proficiency Bonus (PB) equals the mentor's bonus

Signature Attack (Unarmed Strike). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 plus PB to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit*: 1d6 plus PB bludgeoning damage, and Zar'less can use a bonus action to attempt to grapple the target. Beginning at 7th level, Zar'less can make this attack twice, instead of once, when she takes the Attack action on her turn. Zar'less's melee attacks are magical.

Features

3rd Level: Boatswain's Order (3/Day). When a creature Zar'less can see within 30 feet of her makes an attack roll or a saving throw, she can use her reaction to shout a command. If the creature can hear and understand her, they can add a d6 to their roll.

5th Level: Haymaker (3/Day). As an action, Zar'less makes a signature attack against a creature within range. On a hit, the target is dazed[1] until the end of their next turn.

7th Level: Knockout (3/Day). When Zar'less hits with a signature attack, the target has disadvantage on attack rolls and saving throws until the end of their next turn.

[1] See the Glossary at the end of this issue for more information on the dazed condition.

GLOSSARY

In recent issues of ARCADIA, we've begun to incorporate terminology from the upcoming *Flee, Mortals! The MCDM Monster Book*. These describe new rules designed to make combat encounters easier to run, more fun, and more memorable. Rather than scatter definitions throughout individual articles, this glossary provides a reference for terms used in *ARCADIA*.

COMPANION CREATURES

Companions are wild allies who adventure with characters. Each companion has unique traits and actions that make them a great ally. Every companion has a player character **caregiver** who commands the creature. The caregiver's player controls the companion most of the time during the game, though the GM can step in to take control if the companion and caregiver are separated, or if the caregiver mistreats the companion in some way.

The full rules for companion creatures are described in *Beastheart and Monstrous Companions*, as well as the packets available for backers of *Flee, Mortals!*

CONDITIONS

Some creatures inflict—or are immune to—the following new condition.

DAZED

A **dazed** creature can only do one of the following things on their turn: move, use an action, or use a bonus action. If a creature becomes dazed during their turn, their turn ends. The *lesser restoration* spell and *greater restoration* spell remove the dazed condition. At the GM's discretion, other powers, spells, or effects might also remove the dazed condition.

When a dazed creature is affected by a spell or effect that gives them an extra action on their turn (like the haste spell or the fighter's Action Surge feature), they can still take this extra action, in addition to the movement, action, or bonus action allowed by the dazed condition.

Some creatures have immunity to the dazed condition. At the GM's discretion, a creature published in another supplement who has immunity to the paralyzed or stunned condition also has immunity to the dazed condition.

MUNDANE AND SUPERNATURAL

The term **mundane** refers to attacks, items, and effects that are not magical, psionic, or otherwise supernatural.

On the other hand, the term **supernatural** describes an effect or item that is either magical or psionic. For instance, a creature's stat block might say they're resistant to "bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from attacks that aren't supernatural." This means that when you deal them bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage using a spell, power, magic weapon, or psionic weapon, the damage is supernatural and thus the creature isn't resistant to it.

VILLAIN ACTIONS

Some creatures are designed to be bosses: enemies who can take on an entire party by themselves or with a handful of underlings. These creatures have three **villain actions** they can use after an enemy creature's turn. Villain actions are similar to legendary actions with the following exceptions:

- A creature can only use one villain action per round (as such, villain actions tend to be more powerful than legendary actions).
- Each villain action can only be used once during a combat encounter.

Like legendary actions, a creature can't use villain actions if incapacitated or otherwise unable to take actions.

CHOOSING VILLAIN ACTIONS

Each trio of villain actions has a recommended round order. These abilities give the battle a logical flow and a cinematic arc:

- The first villain action is an opener, which shows the characters they're not battling a typical creature. Openers generally deal some damage, summon a lackey or three, buff the boss, debuff the characters, or move the creature into an advantageous position. They're just a taste of what's to come.
- The second villain action provides crowd control. It typically fires after the heroes have had a chance to respond once or twice, get into position, and surround the villain. This second action helps the villain regain the upper hand. Like an opener, this action comes in many flavors, but it's even more powerful than an opener.
- The third and final villain action is an ultimate move or "ult"—a showstopper the villain can use to deal a devastating blow to the characters before the end of the battle.

While every creature has a recommended order of actions, you can take villain actions in any order if it makes your fight more dramatic. You could push back a villain action if a creature is stunned or might stay alive for more than three rounds, or you could perform the recommended third action in round two after several surprise critical hits!

RESOURCES

MCDM TABLETOP SAFETY TOOLKIT

https://mcdm.gg/SafetyToolkit

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A SPIRIT ACROSS SEAS AND STARS

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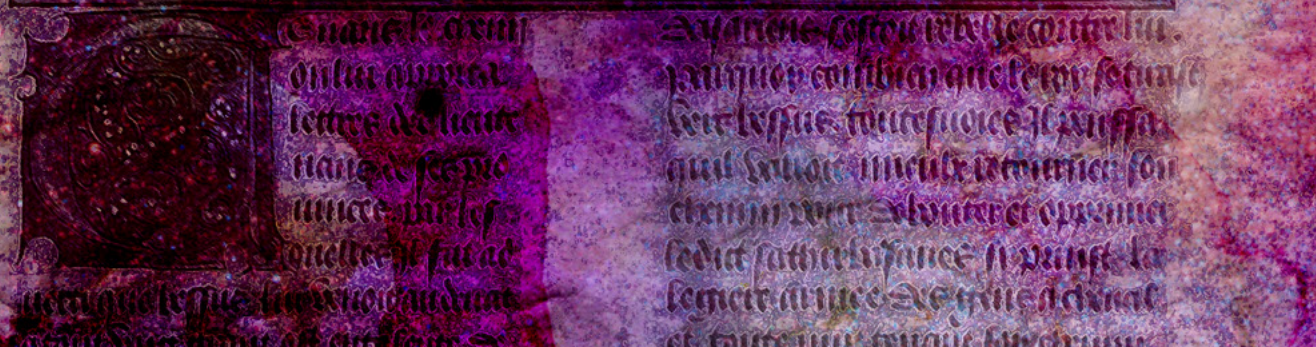




LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Over 175 magic items, 150 stat blocks, 50 spells, 20 encounters, and 12 adventures—that's just a little bit of what *ARCADIA* has brought you over the last 30 issues. I am so incredibly proud of and grateful for the work every artist, author, community manager, consultant, editor, graphic designer, playtester, and producer has given to this magazine. It is bittersweet for me to say that this is the last issue of *ARCADIA* that contains fifth edition content and the last issue we'll make … at least for a while.

As many of you know, at MCDM we're making our own tabletop roleplaying game. The lessons we've learned from *ARCADIA* and the people who worked on the magazine are going to be a big factor in this new game's creation. Just like we believed in every article that appeared in the pages of *ARCADIA*, we know this game is the right direction for MCDM. Everyone working on it is really excited about it.

We're a small company, and we only have so many places to put our time and resources. We want to make this new game the best it can be. So *ARCADIA* won't be releasing any new issues for at least the foreseeable future. If the magazine does come back, it will likely have content for the MCDM RPG. You will still be able to buy existing issues from our online store or grab them on Patreon.

With the logistical details out of the way, I wanted to take the opportunity to talk about what this magazine means to me. I freaking love *ARCADIA*. Working on it is one of the highlights of my professional career. I feel so lucky that this magazine allowed me to work with industry veterans and emerging artists and authors. Some of the best relationships I have in this business started in *ARCADIA*'s pages, which also contain some of the best and most interesting creations I've worked on.

I am most grateful to the MCDM community. You embraced *ARCADIA* and everyone who worked on it with open minds. The praise and constructive criticism you had for each issue helped shape the next. Most importantly, you celebrated the risks. We put out some pretty wild rules for mounted combat, aerial dogfights, level-0 characters, long-lasting curses, cooking and eating monsters, group maneuvers, seafaring campaigns, spellsled races, games with just one player and a GM, and a whole lot more that had us saying, "I hope people are open to this." You were every time. We also took a lot of narrative risks with adventures about sapient laboratories and divine challenges, aberrant ancestries, cleric and warlock subclasses for characters who had fallen from grace, and other original lore tidbits that got folks sharing stories about their games and characters across the internet. I really love knowing how *ARCADIA* inspires you and makes your game better.

This final issue of *ARCADIA* brings in two veteran authors. V.J. Harris is back with "The Crossroads," a marketplace where you can buy pretty much any services an adventurer might require that they can't legally purchase anywhere else. Sadie Lowry, a long-time editor of *ARCADIA* (she's working on editing this letter … hi, Sadie!) and author since the first issue, brought her A game once again in "The Last Seven Notes," a music-themed adventure that has an original song to go along with it.

ARCADIA has also always been about bringing on new authors with fresh ideas, so this final issue also brings us "Magic for the People" from Erin Roberts, which introduces the idea of everyday magic and the people who practice it.

All in all, this is a heck of a way to go out. I'm so glad to bring you the amazing work of these authors.

This is goodbye—for now—for *ARCADIA*. It is not goodbye from MCDM or the people we work with to make this magazine. In fact, we're just getting started.

Ex animo,
James Introcaso
MCDM Lead Game Designer

MAGIC FOR THE PEOPLE

Bringing folk magic practices to your magical world

by Erin Roberts

The high-powered and high-impact spells of sorcerers, wizards, and warlocks may turn the tide during epic adventures, but they don't need to be the only form of magic in your fantasy world. Folk magic is the magic of daily life, focused on bringing health, happiness, prosperity, and protection to the everyday inhabitants of fantastical settings. Its practitioners go by many names—hedge mage, wise one, crafter, sage—and draw on their knowledge of folk magic to create healing items, mix potions, set and remove curses, and make predictions about love, money, and happiness. Some use these talents to become fixtures of their local communities, others discreetly provide their services to those they know and trust, and still others travel from place to place, plying their craft for those who need them. All may, in the end, become part of the Thread.

The Thread is a cross between a refuge and a lifeline—a loose organization of folk magic practitioners that stretches across nations, providing its members with solidarity, community, and the uncanny ability to be there when they are needed most. As a group that spans places, practices, and perspectives, the Thread can shift itself as the situation warrants, providing everything from training in the practice of folk magic to a vital port in a storm. Use the Thread as an organization, or use the practitioners, items, and folk magic practices below as additional content for your own world.

THE THREAD

The name of the Thread's founder has been lost to time, but it is said they once practiced their craft for a powerful leader—until a disastrous failure. The story's details shift from region to region—in one place, the founder was a rune doctor attempting to help a queen win a war; in another, they were a fortune teller trying to keep a wealthy merchant from certain financial ruin—but all end the same way. The unhappy practitioner was banished from their homeland, a single thread set loose and drifting from the weave. As they made their way from place to place, they found others like them, binding skills and fates together to make a fabric of their own. The founder named this newfound family the Thread, both to remind them where they came from and to honor the connection they provide to any and all who may need them.

Today, the Thread is a thriving community of folk magic practitioners that is broader and deeper than any single place or practice. Although there is an organized group at its core—providing sanctuary to those who need a place of refuge, training in folk magic to those who want to learn more, and supplies to those who practice folk magic as their craft—the Thread remains connected to many practitioners whose lives it has touched and who remain a part of its work and reach. Those who stay part of the Thread are offered information about new ideas and concoctions, advice from those whose practices may be different but whose concerns are similar, opportunities to help those who may need it, and a helping hand in times of crisis. In return, they are asked simply to share any information and assistance they can.

In addition to its work in communities, the Thread also maintains a small settlement, Ravel, which exists on a demiplane and can be reached by members of the Thread in times of need simply by speaking the need out loud (a process which is never explained to members and yet has never failed). Members of the Thread who have nowhere else to go or prefer to associate only with other practitioners are welcome to stay in Ravel for as long as they want and need, and the settlement is sometimes used as a place to introduce the Thread to prospective members or allies. Ravel is also the permanent home of the three influential leaders who help to guide the Thread's actions—the Diviner, the Healer, and the Traveler.

The Diviner

If members of the Thread often seem to know where and how they are needed before anyone else does, it is thanks to the Diviner, who uses their fortune telling skills to learn of events that either call for the Thread's assistance or could impact its future. They remain in this role until their divinations reveal that they should step down in favor of someone new. The current Diviner, dream walker and former pariah Kamira Suhan (kuh-MEER-uh soo-HAHN), like most in her role, is good at making quick judgment calls and is trusted implicitly by those around her.

Kamira Suhan

Kamira Suhan (CG tiefling **druid**; she/her) has always dreamed of events yet to come, sometimes even while awake. When the dreams were bad, she tried to warn those in danger, but the warnings never helped. More often than not, they led to the events Kamira foresaw, as if those events were written by the hand of fate. Over time, she became seen as a bad omen throughout the river lands near her home, avoided by almost everyone except her family. After her brother nearly died in a fishing accident she couldn't prevent, Kamira ran away, hoping to spare the people she loved from pain.

Before Kamira could travel further than a day from home, she encountered a fisher, Khalet, in a small fishing village she had never seen before. Khalet, a longtime Thread member, brought Kamira to Ravel, where fortune tellers taught her how to interpret and use her premonitions safely. Today, Kamira tells fortunes using a combination of dream interpretation and a special deck of cards, unafraid to share the futures she sees. She is proficient with fortune teller's tools (see "Folk Magic Practices") and uses a deck of divination to provide readings. She also occasionally has dreams filled with premonitions, which she jots down in a book she keeps under lock and key, noting when, where, and if each has come true.

Kamira has a booming voice and strong presence that might be intimidating in someone less friendly. She works hard to make people like her from the moment they meet her, deploying considerable charm to disarm those around her. Deep down, the Diviner hopes to show those who knew her as a child how her divinations are used for good, and often brags about the predictions she has made in a way that is both self-deprecating and calculated to impress any old friends or neighbors who might hear of her.

When characters first meet or encounter Kamira, read or paraphrase the following:

> You hear the rustling of a deck of cards being shuffled in fast-moving hands just as a tiefling appears before you, grinning broadly. She is in her middle years, with dark-red skin, black eyes, and a set of black horns nearly as long as her broad shoulders are wide, and she has an air of confidence about her. "Want to know your future?" she asks with a wink and a nod toward the nearest table. "I promise you'll probably enjoy it."



The Healer

The Healer takes responsibility for Ravel, but spends most of their time managing a group of apprentices who catalog, store, and retrieve folk magic supplies from around the world. Each Healer serves in the role for three years before being replaced by one of the apprentices, often working alongside the apprentices after their serving their term. The current Healer, Nazin (nuh-ZEEN), brings the required empathy and business acumen to the role, which she gained as a performer in a traveling circus troupe.



Nazin

Nazin (NG half-elf **scout**; she/her) grew up learning about herbs and poultices from her father, a small-town healer, but always craved adventure over the quiet life. After a traveling circus troupe, the Fantastical Faire of Fun Galore, visited her town, bringing their magic-assisted acts and aerial maneuvers, she decided to travel with them as a tumbler. Unfortunately, the circus owner and master of ceremonies, Fun Galore, was exploitative, pushing performers past their physical limits and refusing to put safety measures in place. Nazin found her calling as the troupe's healer, using the skills learned from her father to patch up their many injuries.

One day, while looking for supplies, Nazin came across Fortune's Alley, a shop on a cart run by Thread member Darel Allkin, who encouraged her to learn craft magic. She, along with a few members of the troupe, left the circus that very night. A few years later, Nazin was recommended by Darel to become a Healer's apprentice, and was chosen as Healer one year ago. Though she is responsible for Ravel, Nazin likes to make deals herself and can often be found in local markets operating a cart, Fortune's Corner, with her apprentices.

Nazin is a whirlwind of energy, but very shrewd, with a tendency to ask insightful questions at odd moments. She feels guilty about the members of the Fantastical Faire she left behind and has a deep enmity for Fun Galore.

When characters first meet or encounter Nazin, read or paraphrase the following:

> A young half-elf catalogs the goods in front of her, shifting her body between counting, loading, and making notes with the speed and fluidity of a dancer. She is young and brown-skinned with a lean build and whistles as she works, often pausing mid-tune to toss something to one of the many helpers around her. Each throw is done with a bit of flourish, as if she has spent time on the stage.



THE TRAVELER

The Traveler helps to keep members of the Thread updated with information, visiting places near and far to share the latest news, find new contacts, and check on the needs and concerns of Thread members. Most Travelers eventually tire of life on the road and leave the role to settle down somewhere after training a few potential replacements, remaining a key contact for the next Traveler going forward. The current Traveler, Finch Palaro (finch puh-LAIR-oh), is new to the role, but has both the charisma and the survival skills to do the job.

FINCH PALARO

Finch (CN human **spy**; they/them) grew up in the port city of Kikarra, "the City of Charms," where folk magic shops can be found on nearly every corner. Finch worked in one of the city's largest shops, Fouls and Favors, as a promising trainee with a specialty in bespoke blessings. When two powerful families in the city fell into a trade dispute, Finch was pressured into using their skills to create curses instead, leading them to work long hours under increasingly stressful conditions during what became known citywide as the Cursed Summer. When an errant unsteadiness curse resulted in the accidental death of a young art student named Kecil, Finch left town immediately, unsure whether they were to blame, and called on the Thread for shelter in Ravel.

Finch usually listens more than they speak when they meet someone new, but once they feel comfortable, they can talk at length about the things that matter to them, starting with the importance of providing local practitioners of folk magic with the support, training, and

supplies they need to work safely. These lectures include well-tested practices and a few superstitions that only Finch keeps track of.

Finch's sharp sense of humor, paired with their incredible memory, tends to keep whoever they are talking to in good spirits, even while they delve into the nittiest and grittiest of details. This humor also helps Finch disappear into the shadows if needed, as those they talk to tend to remember their wit more than their face.

When characters first meet or encounter Finch, read or paraphrase the following:

> When you notice the onlooker in the gray suit, they seem as if they have been standing nearby for a while, fading into the background. Their skin is lightly tanned, as if they would be chalky pale if they spent too long inside, and their suit is well-tailored, if nondescript. Their only truly distinguishing feature is a long shock of dark-brown hair and the slightly crooked teeth of their smile. And yet something about them draws the eye, a sense that they are patiently waiting for the right moment to speak.

Encountering the Thread

Due to its wide influence and broad membership, encountering the Thread and its members can take many different forms. A single member may set up shop in a marketplace, looking for adventurers who can help them find a rare craft magic ingredient (see "Craft Magic") while saving a town from being overrun by monsters. A small caravan of carts may travel a lonely road, carrying survivors of a supernatural illness to those who can help them understand and combat it. A field may become a small village of quickly constructed homes and shops that trains folk magic practitioners in an area struggling with an ancient curse.

The Thread's many members and guises also bring many opportunities for adventure. Choose or roll on the Thread Encounters table below for additional situations that may bring the Thread and its members into contact with your characters.

Thread Encounters

d4	Encounter
1	The characters encounter Lakel, one of Healer Nazin's many apprentices, who has come under attack from local monsters while trying to gather mandrake root for the Thread. Lakel is grateful for the help and asks the characters for help with the rest of his list. He wants to stand out as a potential replacement for Nazin, so he has volunteered to retrieve several substances from especially dangerous locations. If the characters help Lakel to gather his items, he gifts them a craft magic item (see "Craft Magic") of their choice after he has delivered everything to Nazin.
2	A character repeatedly encounters a sign—birds, a symbol on the ground, a haunting melody—that they can't shake. Soon after, they are approached by Kamira Suhan, who tells them they have walked through the ashes of the site of a terrible fire that killed several members of a family of folk magic practitioners, the Irzoles, who were dealing with potential ruin after their local Archon declared all folk magic illegal and unethical. Kamira asks the characters to investigate what truly happened the night of the fire—which they can do by asking neighbors, investigating the scene, or cozying up to the Archon. In truth, the fire was set by young Pel Irzole, in an attempt to burn the family's folk magic supplies so they would start a new business and leave folk magic behind. If Pel is found and confronted with evidence, they confess. When the mystery is solved, the sign dissipates.
3	Rena Soles, renowned for her skills in making healing salves and love lockets from a small shop in the back room of her house, hasn't been seen in six days. A note on her door reads "Back after lunch," but it has been crossed through in red ink alongside a symbol locals associate with evil deeds, and a trail of ingredients she uses in her work leads toward the woods nearby. The Thread has called for help in tracking Rena down and determining what has happened to her, and is willing to pay in money, supplies, or training.
4	A counter-organization to the Thread, calling itself Stitched, has begun gaining members in communities large and small. Though the Thread has no problem with others wishing to create their own organization of folk magic practitioners, the Thread has received word that Stitched is using substandard materials, creating fake folk magic practices, and charging exorbitant prices for useless training. The Thread is willing to pay to have someone who appears to be unaffiliated with them to infiltrate the next Stitched gathering, being held in Kikarra, "the City of Charms," and find proof of the group's deception. This request is made by Finch Palaro, who also offers a side job for the adventurers; to discover whether or not Finch's curse was the one that killed Kecil, an unfortunate student who died due to an errant curse during Kikarra's Cursed Summer.

Folk Magic Practices

The Thread's biggest impact in the world may be its dedication to the teaching of folk magic practices to any and all who are interested. Though there are many kinds of folk magic in the world, including some intended only for the use of specific communities or belief systems, practitioners within the Thread focus on three types of magic that are available to all: **craft magic** (practices rooted in physical materials), **fortune telling** (practices focused on divination), and **heartwork** (practices that rely on the intervention of ancestors or other spirits).

To use a specific folk magic practice, a creature must have proficiency with the relevant set of tools as shown on the Folk Magic Tools table, generally gained by learning folk magic practices as detailed in "Learning Folk Magic." A creature without proficiency in the tools can't use that folk magic practice.

Folk Magic Tools

Practice	Tool
Craft Magic	*The Book of Common Things*
Fortune Telling	Fortune teller's tools
Heartwork	Token of the heart

Craft Magic

Practitioners of craft magic create magic items for everyday use, typically using easily accessible materials. This is the most common type of folk magic, and it can take many forms, including potions, poultices, and charms. In some traditions and for some items, simply possessing the item is enough to feel its effects, but often craft magic items include specific activation words and rules for use, from time of day to physical placement on the body or in the home.

The Book of Common Things

Each craft magic item uses a formula found in the craft magic tome *The Book of Common Things*. Proficiency with the book allows you to craft all objects found within it (which includes all the craft magic items in this article and walking powder, a poison). At the GM's discretion, you can also craft common potions using your proficiency with *The Book of Common Things* (instead of requiring proficiency with herbalism kits). *The Book of Common Things* can only be used by someone trained in folk magic. Each copy of the book is created with a charm that makes creatures who don't own a copy of the book actively ignore or discount it.

Proficiency with *The Book of Common Things* allows you to add your proficiency bonus to any ability check you make while using it. If you are proficient with the book and are already adding your proficiency bonus to the ability check from a skill or other proficiency, then using the book gives you advantage on the check instead.

Arcana, History. You can use *The Book of Common Things* when you make an Intelligence (Arcana or History) check to recall lore about magic items.

Nature, Survival. You can use *The Book of Common Things* when you make an Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check to identify which plants and animal products can be safely consumed or used to create folk magic.

Craft Magic Items

Each formula in *The Book of Common Things* typically includes a vessel (such as a potion bottle, a craft bag, or a piece of metal, wood, or stone), specific materials required by the formula, and instructions for activation. Though the act of activation differs from item to item, it always includes preparation time—focused meditative time dedicated solely to its creation outside of a short or long rest, which is done using *The Book of Common Things* as a focus and must be done in no more than two individual sessions.

Due to the dedicated practice required to make each item, craft magic practitioners can only create one item at a time, but the cost of creation is minimal compared to other magic items, with no specific expense other than the time and materials needed. Craft magic items also generally cost less to purchase than other magic items, and most practitioners accept barter in lieu of payment.

The following magic items and supplies can be created with craft magic.

The Thread's Craft Magic Items and Supplies

Item Name	Cost
Devil's gold	250 gp
Everything salve	125 gp
Evil's bane	125 gp
Love locket	250 gp
Seeking stick	750 gp
The Book of Common Things	2 gp
Walking powder poison	200 gp
Watchful eye	750 gp

Pricey Items

The price of some of these craft magic items are a bit high for normal folk because they are balanced with similar items from the official rules, where magic is expensive! Most adventurers can afford these prices, but a farmer or a village blacksmith may not have the coin to spend on this more common magic. For this reason, many craft magic practitioners are willing to accept barter in exchange for an item or discount, and practitioners need all manner of materials that almost anyone can gather.

Devil's Gold

Wondrous Item, Uncommon

Vessel: A craft bag
Materials: Any small circular object that could reasonably be mistaken for a coin (such as a flat rock, shaped metal, or sea glass), yellow or golden pollen, 50 gp
Activation: After performing 8 hours of focused preparation, you must carry the vessel and the materials on your person for 3 days, during which time you can't sell or purchase any items. At the end of this time, you must give the 50 gp used as a material to a stranger in need.

At first sight, this ordinary piece of metal or rock appears to be a gleaming gold coin. While it is in your possession, you have bad luck and an inability to hold onto money. Whenever you finish a long rest while the *devil's gold* is active, the amount of money you are carrying reverts to however much you were carrying when the *devil's gold* first came into your possession, unless you are carrying less money than that amount. Additionally, you take a –1 penalty to ability checks and saving throws.

You can't discard the *devil's gold* or give it to an unwilling creature (though the creature doesn't need to know the nature of the gold to willingly receive it). You may discard the *devil's gold* for up to 1 hour after being targeted by a *remove curse* spell or similar magic, and you may give it to a willing creature.

Everything Salve

Potion, Uncommon

Vessel: A potion bottle or a vial
Materials: Gel from within the leaf of a healing plant (typically aloe vera), a vial of holy water, something naturally shed from a living body during sleep (often an eyelash)
Activation: After going 24 hours without finishing a short or long rest, you must spend 4 hours in focused preparation, then combine all the materials in the vessel.

This commonly used topical lotion numbs minor pain and restores depleted energy. Applying the lotion to your body takes 5 minutes. After you apply it, you regain 2d8 hit points and your exhaustion level, if any, is decreased by 1.

Evil's Bane

Wondrous Item, Uncommon

Vessel: A small cloth bag, glass bottle, or clear jar
Materials: The leaves of a plant with natural defenses (such as a stinging nettle or a venus flytrap), powdered silver worth 50 gp, a large handful of rice or sand, each grain of which has been counted by the preparer over the course of an hour
Activation: After 2 hours of focused preparation, which must begin at midnight on a clear night, physically attach the vessel with materials to an item at least 5 feet above the ground and sit beneath it, unmoving, until dawn. While you sit unmoving, you may rest. If an *evil's bane* is moved after activation, it becomes inert.

This small bag or bottle, usually hung from a high place in a home or place of business, repels negative or evil energy that attempts to enter the location it guards. Once activated, an *evil's bane* wards a 30-foot-radius sphere centered on itself. Each Undead or evil-aligned creature in the area is outlined in a faint glowing yellow light and has disadvantage on attack rolls. A creature in the area who is charmed or frightened by an Undead or an evil-aligned creature is no longer charmed or frightened and can't be charmed or frightened by such creatures. Every 24 hours from the time of activation, the area protected by an *evil's bane* decreases, losing 5 feet from its radius. After 6 days, the *evil's bane* loses its magic and becomes inert.

Love Locket

Wondrous Item, Uncommon (Requires Attunement)

Vessel: A necklace, a small bottle on a string, or another wearable item
Materials: Any spicy substance, a sprig of mistletoe, crushed bloodstone
Activation: After 2 hours of focused preparation, which must begin at sunset or sunrise under a clear sky, you must speak the name of a loved one while combining the materials. You will be unable to recall the person named for 1 week and the locket won't function if the love (whether platonic, romantic, or filial) isn't genuine.

This small item, usually worn as close to the heart as possible, attracts love to whoever wears it. While you wear it, each nonhostile creature who isn't immune to the charmed condition within 5 feet of you regards you as a friendly acquaintance, and you gain a +2 bonus to Charisma (Persuasion) checks made to influence such creatures.

Seeking Stick

Staff, Rare (Requires Attunement)

Vessel: A whittled piece of hollowed-out wood at least 4 feet long
Materials: A handful of tilled earth
Activation: Perform 8 hours of focused preparation while holding the staff in your hands in one of the following locations: within 100 feet of a body of water, in a grove or cluster of plants, or within 100 feet of a house filled with love. When this has been completed, carry and wield the stick in lieu of another weapon for 12 hours.

You can use this whittled walking stick to find an item of personal importance. It has 6 charges. While holding it, you can use an action to expend 1 charge from the staff and cause it to be pulled toward one of the following for 1 hour: a specific lost item that you have had in your possession in the last 3 days and name when you spend the charge, the nearest source of fresh water, the nearest fertile spot for planting, or the nearest place of refuge from danger. If what you seek isn't on the same plane of existence as you, the stick fails to work and the charge isn't expended.

The staff regains 1d4 + 2 charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a roll of 1, the staff loses its abilities, becoming a mundane walking stick.

Walking Powder

Contact Poison

Vessel: A cloth bag
Materials: Crushed bone from a magical creature, saliva, three silk threads
Activation: While carrying the powder, perform 2 hours of focused preparation followed by 2 hours of pacing under the afternoon sun at a location at least a mile away from the location used to prepare it. Do not consume water or food for 4 hours before or afterward.

This powder appears fine to the eye, but has the rough scratch of sandpaper against the skin. A creature subjected to this poison must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 4 hours. While poisoned this way, the creature is consumed with the desire to travel as far away from their current location as possible, regardless of danger. The poisoned creature can repeat the saving throw every hour, ending the effect on a success. When the effect ends, if the creature is in a location where they have never been before, they must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or be unable to remember the route they have taken to get to there.

Watchful Eye

Wonderous Item, Rare

Vessel: A small round object, usually a stone, but sometimes a piece of metal or wood
Materials: Naturally shed animal skin or tree leaf, crushed moonstone, serpent venom
Activation: While barefoot and wearing no armor, perform 4 hours of focused preparation, then plant the *watchful eye* at least 1 foot beneath the surface of the ground using no tools. Once it is planted, you can't wear armor for 12 hours.

This painted stone, usually decorated to resemble an open eye, is planted in the earth and protects outdoor spaces from the intrusion of thieves and local wildlife. When you plant the eye, choose a 20-foot-cube area that the eye touches at least one edge of. This area is warded as if you had cast the *alarm* spell with a mental alarm for as long as the eye remains planted. Whenever this alarm is tripped, the creature that tripped it is transported outside the protected area into the closest unoccupied space of their choice.

If the eye is removed from the ground after being planted, it becomes mundane.

Fortune Telling

Fortune tellers primarily use a physical item of some kind to ground their divination, whether that involves reading the coals of a fire, using a deck of divination cards, or tossing painted stones; though some people's divination comes through dreams or interpreting omens. Purists stick to exactly what their method of divination reveals, but others have been known to combine the truth of what they divine with what they know their customers want to hear.

Fortune Teller's Tools

Fortune teller's tools take many different forms, with each fortune telling practitioner using the tools that work best for them, but common variations include stones of fortune (polished stones thrown onto a table that are read via their positioning), divination powder (powder dropped into liquid or thrown into fire, generating patterns or remains that the fortune teller interprets), and decks of divination (decks of cards, each with their own meaning, that are dealt onto a table to be interpreted).

Fortune Teller's Tools

Item	Cost	Weight
Deck of divination	5 sp	—
Divination powder	1 gp	1 lb.
Stones of fortune	2 gp	1/2 lb.

Proficiency with fortune teller's tools is required to attempt fortune telling. Proficiency with fortune teller's tools allows you to add your proficiency bonus to any ability check you make while using them. If you are proficient with the tools and are already adding your proficiency bonus to the ability check from a skill or other proficiency, then using the tools gives you advantage on the check instead. Each fortune teller's tool requires a separate proficiency.

Insight. You can use fortune teller's tools on Wisdom (Insight) checks that involve predicting how someone might behave in the future.

Intimidation, Persuasion. You can use fortune teller's tools to help convince someone to take a different course of action in the hopes (or fear) of finding a better future when you make a Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check.

Investigation. Fortune telling requires interpreting signs and symbols to divine the future. You can use fortune teller's tools to gain additional insight on Intelligence (Investigation) checks that involve symbols, signs, or omens about the future.

Fortune Telling (Feat)

Prerequisite: Proficiency with fortune teller's tools, you have trained in fortune telling with the Thread

You use your training and fortune teller's tools to gain insight into the future. As an action, you can learn about the future of a willing creature you can see within 30 feet of you, granting them a boon that helps this future come true. This boon must be rolled on the Fortune Teller's Boon table. A creature can only benefit from one boon at a time and a boon disappears when you or the creature with the boon finishes a long rest. You can't bestow another boon until you finish a long rest.

Heartwork

Heartwork focuses on shifting the balance of the living world by reaching outside of it. This can mean calling on the power of one's ancestors or other revered spirits to create a change in the world, or, through the spirits' intercession, countering a supernatural effect that has been placed on someone. Given the power of this work, heartwork is usually reserved for especially important endeavors, including births, deathbed healings, and the blessing of marriages, which is where its name comes from. Although outside scholars who have looked into heartwork believe it is a channeling of the Ethereal Plane or the interference of deities, this is usually scoffed at by folk practitioners who use it, who generally see it as the direct intercession of the spirits of loved ones and ancestors in ways that can't be measured.

Heartwork rituals follow the rules for spellcasting, but they require no spellcasting ability, they always require a token of the heart, and each ritual can only be cast as a ritual using the casting time specified. A creature trained in folk magic can perform the heartwork rituals in this article. They must finish a long rest before they can perform another heartwork ritual.

Token of the Heart

The appearance of a token of the heart varies from practitioner to practitioner, but is always something portable that holds sentimental value—a ring passed down from

Fortune Teller's Boon

d6	Boon
1	**You Will Learn the Truth.** You have a +5 bonus to Wisdom (Insight) checks and advantage on Wisdom saving throws.
2	**Luck Guides Your Way.** You gain 2 luck points. Whenever you make an ability check, an attack roll, or a saving throw, you can spend 1 luck point to roll an additional d20. You can choose to spend a luck point after you roll the die, but before the outcome is determined. You choose which d20 is used for the ability check, attack roll, or saving throw.
3	**You Have the Strength to Face Any Trial.** You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls.
4	**Inner Peace Awaits You.** You can't be charmed or frightened. If you are charmed or frightened when you receive this boon, the effect is suppressed.
5	**Danger Lurks; Watch Your Back.** You have a +5 bonus to your passive Intelligence (Investigation) and passive Wisdom (Perception) scores and a +5 bonus to initiative checks.
6	**Your Fortune Is Your Own.** Choose one of the boons above and use its associated benefits.

a family member, a childhood toy, a vial of dirt from the grave of a loved one. With training, the item in question is transformed into a token of the heart, which is used similarly to an arcane focus when performing heartwork rituals. Proficiency with a token of the heart is required to perform all heartwork rituals. A token of the heart can only be used by someone trained in folk magic.

Proficiency with a token of the heart allows you to add your proficiency bonus to any ability check you make while using it. If you are proficient with a token of the heart and are already adding your proficiency bonus to the ability check from a skill or other proficiency, then using the token gives you advantage on the check instead.

Arcana. You can use your token of the heart on Intelligence (Arcana) checks made to recall lore about spells and magic items that are used in or affected by heartwork rituals.

History. You can use your token of the heart on Intelligence (History) checks made to gain insight into aspects of the past which were affected by a member of your extended family.

JOINED AS ONE

Heartwork Ritual

Casting Time: 10 minutes
Range: 30 feet
Duration: 7 days
Component: V, S, M (a piece of string, a forked twig or branch, a token of the heart)

You bond together a group of two or more willing Humanoids who seek a deeper connection with each other. For the duration, each member of the bond has advantage on death saving throws when they are within 30 feet of another bond member and is immune to being charmed or frightened when touching another bond member. If a bond member is already charmed or frightened, the condition is suppressed while they are touched. However, when a bond member is blinded, dazed, deafened, paralyzed, poisoned, or stunned, each other bond member must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or suffer the condition for the same duration as the original member. In addition, if a bond member dies, each other bond member must succeed on a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw or be incapacitated until the end of their next turn.

The *joined as one* ritual can be repeated every 7 days. If it is repeated at that frequency for a year on the same individuals, its effects become permanent. An individual can only be part of a single *joined as one* bond at a time. An individual can leave this bond early at any time as a bonus action, but they must then wait 7 days before they can join a new bond.

LASTING PEACE

Heartwork Ritual

Casting Time: 1 minute
Range: Touch
Duration: 1 hour
Component: S, M (a handful of sand or salt, a seed from a flowering plant, a token of the heart)

You touch a willing creature to calm their mind and body while protecting their remains from misuse after death. For the ritual's duration, or until you use an action to touch the target and dismiss the ritual, you suppress any effect causing the target to be frightened. The target is cured of any disease, poison, or exhaustion affecting them, but is incapacitated and has a speed of 0. If the target dies while under the effect of the ritual, their remains can't be reanimated into an Undead. If the creature's remains are targeted by an effect that reanimates them into an Undead, the remains dissipate into dust.

LINGERING CURSE

Heartwork Ritual

Casting Time: 10 minutes
Range: 10 feet
Components: S, M (a token of the heart)
Duration: Varies

You curse a creature you can see within range with one of the options below. The target must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be cursed. While cursed, the target must repeat the saving throw every 8 hours, reducing the DC by 2 each time (to DC 14 at 8 hours, to DC 12 at 16 hours, and so on). On a successful save, the curse ends. The curse also ends if the saving throw DC becomes 0.

Forgetful. The target has trouble remembering facts and figures. They have disadvantage on Intelligence checks.

Lack of Trust. Others find the target untrustworthy. They target has disadvantage on Charisma (Persuasion) checks.

Poisonous Disposition. The target is susceptible to poisons. They have disadvantage on saving throws made to avoid or end the poisoned condition on themself and have vulnerability to poison damage.

Unrelenting Honesty. The target has trouble telling lies, even when it would be to their benefit. They have disadvantage on Charisma (Deception) checks.

Weather Worn. The target feels the temperature more keenly. They have vulnerability to cold and fire damage, and have disadvantage on attack rolls and saving throws while subjected to extreme cold or extreme heat.

PUSH THROUGH

Heartwork Ritual

Casting Time: 1 minute
Range: Touch
Duration: 10 minutes
Component: V, S, M (a pebble worn smooth, unsweetened tea, a token of the heart)

You touch a willing creature and allow them to call on the strength of their ancestors to momentarily ignore impairments, exhaustion, and injury. For the duration, or until you use an action to touch the target and dismiss the effect, the target has advantage on Constitution saving throws and treats their exhaustion level as 1 lower than it is (minimum 0).

LEARNING FOLK MAGIC

Members of the Thread are happy to teach anyone who wishes to learn folk magic. They generally know one or more forms of folk magic: craft magic, which uses physical materials and formulas from *The Book of Common Things*; heartwork, which uses rituals that call on connections to the ancestors and a token of the heart; or fortune telling, which attempts to predict the future using fortune teller's tools. The folk magic practitioner background may also be chosen when creating a new character in lieu of requiring this training.

Learning folk magic takes 1d4 + 3 consecutive days, during which you must spend at least 8 hours a day learning and provide a gift for the teacher. Most teachers will accept 250 gp, 2 weeks of working for the teacher after training as an apprentice, or the collection of a material of their choice from the wilderness as their form of payment. Folk magic, in all its forms, can be learned by any character; **it requires no inherent spellcasting or magical ability**.

Once you are fully trained in folk magic, you gain proficiency with a specific folk magic tool of your choice: *The Book of Common Things*, fortune teller's tools, or a token of the heart. Gaining proficiency with an additional tool takes an additional 3 days of training and an additional payment of 150 gp, 1 week of apprenticeship, or the collection of an additional material of the instructor's choice.

BACKGROUND: FOLK MAGIC PRACTITIONER

You are a practitioner of folk magic. You have been trained in practices that have existed for as long as mortals have, meant to ease the lives, treat the suffering, and protect the welfare of others. You may specialize in divining the future, creating magical physical objects to be used in daily life, or using the guidance and power of ancestral ties to shift the world around you.

Skill Proficiencies: Insight, plus one of your choice from Arcana, Medicine, Nature, Persuasion, and Religion
Tool Proficiencies: One of the following tools: *The Book of Common Things*, fortune teller's tools, or token of the heart
Languages: One of your choice
Equipment: A set of folk magic practitioner's tools with which you are proficient, a scroll case containing your notes on your craft and practices, a set of common clothes, and a pouch containing 10 gp

FEATURE: OF THE PEOPLE

As people of all classes and means may turn to folk practitioners at some point in their lives, your status as a practitioner makes you welcome everywhere. If you make your background known, you and your companions receive free room and board during your travels. In addition, anyone who has personally benefited from your services as a practitioner will assist in finding information for you as long as it doesn't put them in any danger.

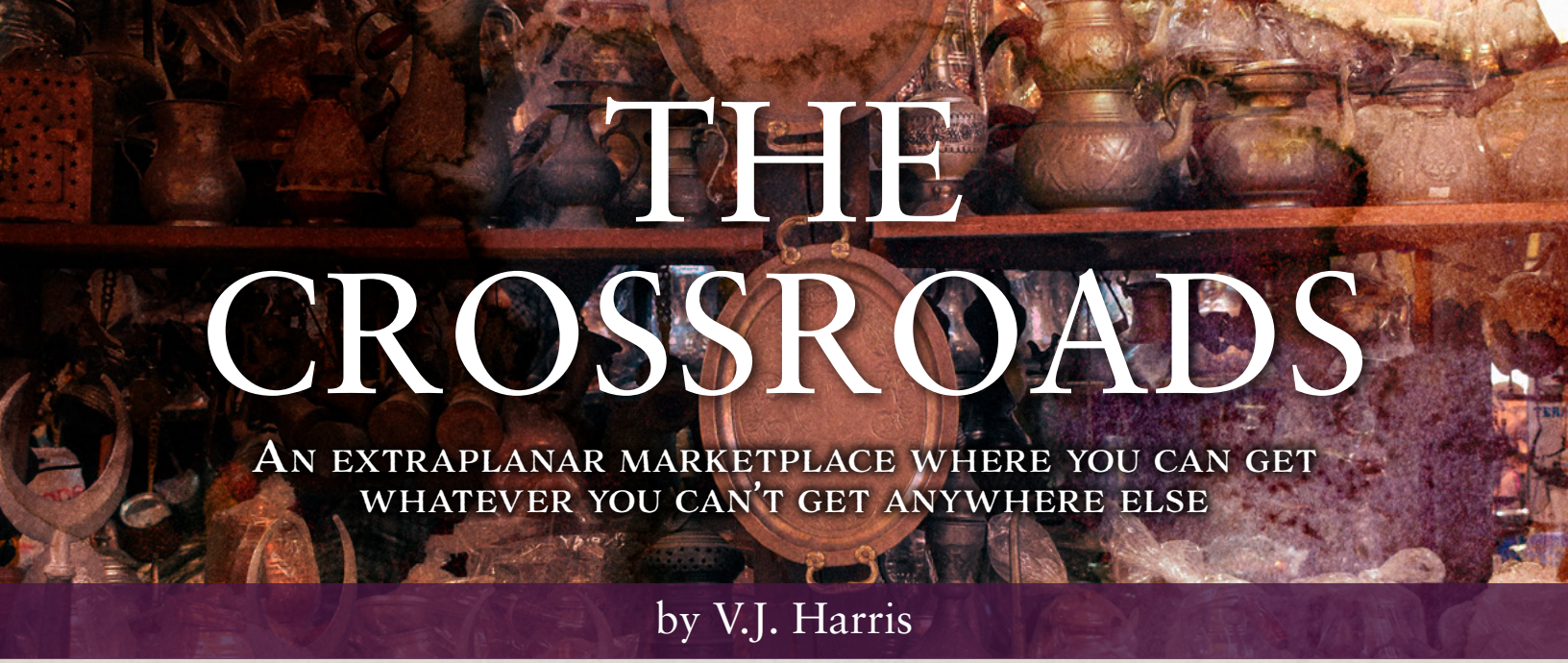
Suggested Characteristics

d6	Personality Trait
1	I value solitude—even when around people I love, I take time on my own for my craft.
2	If I don't understand why someone is asking me for something, I can't put my all into it.
3	There's no challenge I'm not willing to take on.
4	I collect odds and ends, assuming I'll find something to do with them one day.
5	I'm fixated on figuring out an impossible question that I believe would change everything.
6	I love telling stories about my clients and work. The wilder, the better.

d6	Ideal
1	**Luxury.** I like the finer things in life, and my work helps me afford them.
2	**Knowledge.** I believe the practice of folk magic can help me better understand the world.
3	**Pride.** I will be the best at what I do. I owe that to myself.
4	**Power.** If others need my services, they must do what I want.
5	**Altruism.** I want to help others live the best lives they can.
6	**Community.** Keeping those around me safe and strong gives me purpose and renown.

d6	Bond
1	No matter how far I travel, I'm always thinking of the first place I called home.
2	I owe everything to the practitioner who taught me their skills.
3	Those I help with my abilities are what keeps me going.
4	I have a rival who I constantly compete with, but secretly admire a great deal.
5	My work brings honor and respect to my ancestors.
6	I feel a kinship to all other folk magic practitioners.

d6	Flaw
1	I exaggerate my abilities and then blame others for my failures.
2	As long as everyone knows my name, I don't care why.
3	I'm known to fly into rages at the tiniest provocation.
4	I have a secret I would kill to keep—and it wouldn't be the first time.
5	I'll let anyone push me around as long as it makes them happy.
6	I spread gossip—including gossip I know is untrue—anytime I'm bored.



THE CROSSROADS

An extraplanar marketplace where you can get whatever you can't get anywhere else

by V.J. Harris

> "If you can think of it, the Crossroads has it, or someone who knows where to get it. Just … mind your manners. You don't want to end up on the wrong side of the Foscari or the gaze of Dreamfang."
>
> –Entropy, local gossipmonger

Tucked away behind the mouth of a tamed oversized mimic disguised as an ordinary brick wall, the Crossroads is an extradimensional marketplace that caters to the exotic needs of criminals, villains, and adventurers. A traveler who knows the frequently changed password (or who is accompanied by an escort who does) can step inside the mimic's maw without being devoured, then enter the portal behind the creature and the criminal marketplace beyond. Nearly everything can be purchased at the Crossroads, from weapons and armor, to forgery services, to assassinations. But hyperrealistic stone statues of people with expressions of fear and defiance warn of the market's perils.

This article presents a location that can be used to flesh out the criminal underworld of any fantasy realm, and which extends into the planes. Access to the Crossroads and to the NPCs and services found there can be given to the players as a reward for some of their shadier dealings, or they might embark on a quest to gain access after learning of the marketplace through criminal contacts.

The Parriarchs

"If you can't find it here already, me or one of my kids will try to find it for you. But the Foscari way isn't cheap."

—Gillia Foscari

The Crossroads is run and protected by the Parriarchs, a criminal gang run by Gillia Foscari (JIL-lee-uh foh-SCAR-ee) and her family. Before setting up the marketplace, the Parriarchs connected fences, smugglers, assassins, and other criminals to clients in need of illegal or restricted items or services.

When Gillia became the head of the gang, she had a vision to grow her family's business by creating a marketplace for all criminal enterprises. With help from the members of a mage circle who owed her favors, she created the Crossroads. The Parriarchs take a cut from all sales made in the market, and get the first pick of new items that appear there. On the rare occasion that one of the merchants in the Crossroads can't provide for the needs of a customer, the Parriarchs are there to obtain the item or do the job … at an exorbitant cost, of course.



The Parriarchs employ only one enforcer, a human **berserker** named Thrugraun (he/him; THROO-gron) who patrols beyond the mimic's jaws to keep the peace in the Crossroads. But that guard is really there to wrangle the family's six **basilisks**: Dreamfang, Firetail, Ironclaw, Oldjaw, Sunforge, and Sunbite, who patrol the Crossroads with blindfolds covering their eyes. All six have been trained to slash apart the blindfold with their claws upon hearing the command word *sciopera* from Thrugraun or any other member of the Parriarchs.

Hiring the Foscari

The members of the Foscari family can be hired to retrieve or obtain items and creatures that the other merchants of the Crossroads can't. They don't work alongside the characters as NPC adventurers, but function independently to carry out specific tasks. Each family member has an upfront cost based on their years of experience and success rate, but their clients are also expected to pay room, board, and travel expenses. If a Foscari fails to complete the job in a month, the client is refunded their money.

The Foscari Family table details each family member, the costs for their services, and their typical success rate. As the GM determines, magical artifacts and other extremely rare items might incur a higher fee or be impossible to retrieve.

Foscari Family

Name	Pronouns	Description	Cost	Success Rate
Gillia	She/her	This 72-year-old human woman stands 5 foot 11, and has dark brown skin, gray curly hair, and a jagged scar across her right cheek that extends to the left side of her chin. The matriarch of the family, Gillia uses the **assassin** stat block.	8,000 gp	90%
Alessio	They/them	A 55-year-old half-elf nonbinary individual with dark brown skin and dark blonde hair, Alessio is the younger brother of Gillia. They use the **gladiator** stat block.	4,000 gp	80%
Orsa	She/her	Orsa is a 35-year-old half-elf woman with pale white skin, light-blonde hair, and the top half of her left ear cut off. The eldest child of the family, she uses the **knight** stat block.	2,000 gp	70%
Zaneta	She/they	A 23-year-old half-orc genderfluid individual, Zaneta stands 6 foot 1 and has light brown skin, a shaved head, and three piercings in her right eyebrow. The youngest child, they use the **veteran** stat block.	1,000 gp	65%

Goods and Services

Anyone who enters the Crossroads peacefully can purchase the following goods and services from the market. As the GM determines, other merchants might also be in the market offering their skills and wares.

Assassinations

"I can get into anywhere. Kill anyone you want. I can do it quietly. I can do it flashy. Just tell me what you need, and I'll tell you what it costs."

—Tegan Borel

Tegan Borel (she/her; TEE-guhn bor-ELL) appears to be an unremarkable halfling woman. In the darkest corner of the market, she sits behind a booth whose sign openly reads: "Assassinations." Standing at 2 foot 6 with pale white skin and short light-brown hair, she is known for her lack of distinguishing features, allowing her to easily blend into a crowd. But what very few know is that Tegan is a doppelganger, whose advanced shapechanging ability and unique skill set allow her to move as she pleases.

The Assassination Costs table shows Tegan's prices for assassinating individuals of various lifestyles. The Success Rate column shows the likelihood that she can complete a job. If she fails to assassinate a target, she offers a full refund.

Cost Increases

The prices on the Assassination Costs table are subject to change based on the profile and protections of a target.

Bodyguards. The cost of assassination increases by 500 gp for each personal bodyguard a target has, provided the bodyguard's challenge rating is 8 or lower. Each elite bodyguard with a challenge rating of 9 or higher increases the cost by 900 gp or more.

Make a Statement. If the client desires to make a statement with a flashy death, the price doubles as Tegan's risk of capture is elevated.

Powerful Leaders. The death of the leader of a nation, a popular church, or a similar person of influence causes a wide and dogged search for an assassin, so Tegan charges a premium for such targets. Leaders fall into three levels of influence based on the number of people at their command (which the GM can change to suit the world):

Low. A leader with a low level of influence has at least 100 but no more than 5,000 people at their command. Their death costs an additional 10,000 gp.

Medium. A leader commanding more than 5,000 but no more than 100,000 people has a medium level of influence, and costs an additional 20,000 gp.

High. A leader with a high level of influence has 100,000 or more people at their command, raising Tegan's fee by 40,000 gp.

Assassination Costs

Lifestyle	Cost	Success Rate	Typical Targets
Wretched	300 gp	100%	Beggars
Squalid	600 gp	95%	Wanted criminals, gamblers
Poor	1,200 gp	80%	Unskilled laborers, costermongers, thieves, mercenaries
Modest	2,400 gp	75%	Soldiers, skilled laborers, students, priests, self-taught spellcasters
Comfortable	4,800 gp	70%	Merchants, skilled tradesfolk, military officers
Wealthy	9,600 gp	65%	Merchant lords, chamberlains, powerful landowners
Aristocratic	19,200 gp	60%	Politicians, guild leaders, high priests, members of the nobility

Tegan Borel

Medium Monstrosity (Shapechanger), Neutral Evil

Armor Class 16 (studded leather)
Hit Points 123 (19d8 + 38)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	19 (+4)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Skills Deception +7, Insight +5, Perception +5, Stealth +8
Condition Immunities charmed
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Common, Halfling, Undercommon
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +4

Ambusher. Tegan has advantage on attack rolls against any creature she has surprised.

Evasion. If Tegan is subjected to an effect that allows her to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, Tegan instead takes no damage if she succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if she fails.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Tegan deals an extra 17 (5d6) damage when she hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of her that isn't incapacitated and she doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Surprise Attack. The first time Tegan surprises a creature and hits them with an attack during the first round of combat, the target takes an extra 17 (5d6) damage from the attack.

Actions

Multiattack. Tegan makes three Longsword attacks.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage.

Read Thoughts. Tegan magically reads the surface thoughts of one creature within 60 feet of her. The effect can penetrate barriers, but 3 feet of wood or dirt, 2 feet of stone, 2 inches of metal, or a thin sheet of lead blocks it. While the target is in range, Tegan can continue reading their thoughts, as long as her concentration isn't broken (as if concentrating on a spell). While reading the target's mind, Tegan has advantage on Wisdom (Insight) and Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, and Persuasion) checks against the target.

Change Shape. Tegan polymorphs into a Small or Medium Humanoid she has seen, or back into her true form. Her statistics, other than her size, are the same in each form. Any equipment she is wearing or carrying is absorbed or borne by the new form (her choice).

Alternatively, Tegan polymorphs into a Beast who has a challenge rating of 9 or lower, or back into her true form. Any equipment she is wearing or carrying is absorbed or borne by the new form (her choice). In a beast form, Tegan retains her alignment, ability to speak, hit points, Hit Dice, proficiencies, and Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores, as well as this action and the Read Thoughts action. Her statistics and capabilities are otherwise replaced by those of the beast form.

Tegan reverts to her true form if she dies.

Bonus Actions

Cunning Action. Tegan takes the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Lost Knowledge

"Day and night, my mind races with the knowledge of eons. Dead languages and lost civilizations. Their secrets are on the tip of my tongue."

—Ooth'orr

In a corner of the Crossroads market stands an enormous glass tank filled with water, and which contains a strange creature. Gelatinous, see-through skin covers the humanoid skeletal frame of this 7-foot-tall being, whose three eyes form a vertical line down the middle of the creature's face. Ooth'orr (no pronouns; noncombatant; OOTH-or) was once a human, but was permanently transformed into a unique being by an aboleth. The change left Ooth'orr connected to the collective knowledge of all aboleths. Ooth'orr can communicate telepathically with any creature within 120 feet of the tank, offering to reveal the mysteries of any person, place, or object for a price. The creature requires a payment of 1,000 gp placed within the tank or the promise of a future favor, chosen or rolled for on the Ooth'orr's Favors table, to those seeking the aboleths' wisdom. If characters fail to deliver on the promised favor, Ooth'orr sends Tegan Borel (or another **assassin**) after them.

Ooth'orr can cast the *legend lore* spell at will, requiring no components, and uses that magic to gain the knowledge a customer seeks. Ooth'orr relays all knowledge gained from the spell to the purchaser.

Although the knowledge of the aboleths is vast, it isn't infinite. The GM can decide that Ooth'orr finds no

information on a particular topic, or that Ooth'orr has anywhere from a 40 to 70 percent chance of knowing about a particular item.

If Ooth'orr can't provide the knowledge the characters seek, a refund is granted.

Ooth'orr's Favors

d6	Favor
1	Bring Ooth'orr a dragon's tears.
2	Bring Ooth'orr a specific permanent uncommon magic item.
3	Bring Ooth'orr the heads of six different Monstrosities.
4	Bring Ooth'orr three living Aberrations.
5	Bring Ooth'orr three eyes from three different devils.
6	Bring Ooth'orr the crown of a monarch.

Valnos Sales

Number of Sales	Characters' Share of Sale
1–9	30%
10–19	40%
20–29	50%
30–39	60%
40–49	70%
50 or more	80%

FENCE

"If you had anyone else to go to you would! If you complain about my prices, you can try and fence it yourself. I'll laugh when you get caught."

—Valnos

A 2-foot-tall blood-red **imp**, Valnos (it/its; VAL-nohs) flies around the Crossroads, pestering patrons and asking if they have items to fence. The little devil returns to its table only after annoying all available customers.

Valnos has a reputation for making sure the items it fences can never be traced back to the thieves who stole them, but the imp is equally well known for ripping off new customers. However, characters who fence items repeatedly with Valnos improve both their relationship with the imp and the amount of money they can earn, as shown on the Valnos Sales table.

Characters looking for a better deal can also recover items for Valnos. The Valnos Adventure Hooks table provides sample quests that the imp gives to characters asking for a better cut of the profits for fenced items. After each successful quest, the percentage of each sale earned by characters fencing goods with Valnos increases as noted, replacing any percentage based on number of sales (unless that percentage is higher).

Valnos Adventure Hooks

Character Level	Adventure	Characters' Share of Sale
1–4	Mayor Daxalim Silentvale has gotten their hands on a golden statuette in the shape of a chimera with emeralds for eyes. His home is protected by ten **guards**, a guard captain (**bandit captain**), and five **mastiffs**.	55%
5–10	Vaynulth the Ironfang (a **young red dragon**) possesses a platinum earring with an entire lost language magically inscribed upon it.	65%
11–16	Rumors suggest that the crypt of the wealthy and tyrannical Quagg family contains a unique ornate silver snuffbox bearing an inscription of the Elvish word for "dream." (Valnos doesn't know that the crypt is the resting place of a **vampire** and five **vampire spawn**.)	75%
17–20	A **pit fiend** named Xer'ezeth, his **erinyes** lieutenant Felieth, and five **hell hounds** guard the treasury of Rechrem the Sorrowsworn in the Seven Cities of Hell. The treasury contains an idol in the image of Rechrem carved of solid diamond. A GM using *Kingdoms & Warfare* can add a **fang devil** and a **steel devil** to this adventure. A GM using *Flee, Mortals!* can add a **devil adjudicator** and a **devil magistrate**.	85%

FORGERY

"I've got a great eye for detail! And I've been around for a really long time, so I've picked up a bunch of different crafts. I can pretty much forge anything you want, from papers to signet rings."

—Revae

Revae (they/she; reh-VEYE) is an **adult brass dragon** disguised as a bronze-scaled high elf. If anyone questions her about the scales, she talks of having an ancestor who was a brass dragon. Revae has been a fixture of the criminal underworld for close to nine hundred years.

Revae's booth stands at the middle of the Crossroads marketplace. The disguised dragon sells forged items of all sorts, from signet rings to letters of pedigree and introduction, and anything in between. The cost of the service is 30 percent of the price of the item being copied, which includes the costs of cheap metal and stone made to look more expensive, and which includes Revae's fee.

Additionally, Revae offers three types of document packages that allow a character to easily assume a false identity: copper, silver, and gold. Each package improves a creature's Charisma (Deception) checks made to impersonate the chosen identity while using the documents.



Forged Documents Packages

Package	Benefit	Cost
Copper	+2 to Charisma (Deception) checks	100 gp
Silver	Advantage on Charisma (Deception) checks	200 gp
Gold	+4 and advantage on Charisma (Deception) checks	400 gp

"Livestock"

"You can do whatever you want with these eggs. But let's be clear. If you hatch 'em and raise 'em and I hear you're abusin' em, me and my good girl Nyx will be payin' you a painful visit."

—Tharig

Tharig (he/him; THARR-igg) is a 7-foot-tall, pale-green-skinned orc **veteran** covered in scars, who exclusively wears leathers and furs that he has hunted and crafted himself. Nyx, a massive russet **dire wolf**, is always at Tharig's side, typically snoozing away as he trades his wares.

Tharig travels across the planes and the timescape, gathering the eggs of various creatures and selling them to the highest bidder. The Tharig's Eggs table notes the eggs Tharig typically sells, along with their prices and the time it takes each egg to mature. The GM has final say as to which eggs Tharig has in stock at any given time. Each egg has AC 10 and 20 hit points. Each dragon egg is immune to the same damage type dealt by the dragon's breath weapon.

In general, an egg needs to spend 72 consecutive hours inside an area at least 80 degrees Fahrenheit (27 degrees Celsius) to hatch. The eggs of dragons who breathe and are immune to fire might require even higher temperatures. When an egg hatches, a Tiny baby version of the indicated creature (a noncombatant) emerges. The Days to Mature column then shows how much time it takes for a creature to mature into the youngest version represented by their stat block. (The GM can speed up or slow down this time as fits the campaign.) A dragon hatched from one of Tharig's eggs becomes a wyrmling when they mature, and remains a wyrmling for 5 years.

If the characters are kind to a creature they've hatched and raised, that creature can join them on adventures at the GM's discretion. If the characters are cruel to the creature, the creature flees the first chance they get. When a dragon wyrmling becomes a young dragon after 5 years, they leave the characters to make their own way in the world.

Tharig's Eggs

Egg Type	Cost	Days to Mature
Basilisk	3,200 gp	180
Chimera	12,000 gp	360
Cockatrice	400 gp	30
Dragon, Black	11,600 gp	120
Dragon, Blue	13,200 gp	180
Dragon, Brass	10,800 gp	60
Dragon, Bronze	11,600 gp	120
Dragon, Copper	10,800 gp	60
Dragon, Gold	13,200 gp	180
Dragon, Green	11,600 gp	120
Dragon, Red	16,400 gp	240
Dragon, Silver	11,600 gp	120
Dragon, White	11,600 gp	120
Griffon	1,600 gp	120
Hippogriff	200 gp	60
Manticore	3,200 gp	180

Hunter for Hire

Tharig can also hunt for mundane or rare creatures at the characters' request. He'll go after any Beast or Monstrosity with a challenge rating of 8 or less and an Intelligence of 3 or less, bringing them back dead or alive—though alive adds 30 percent to his fee, which must be paid up front. The cost to hunt a creature is that creature's challenge rating × 300 gp (minimum 300 gp). A hunting expedition takes a number of days equal to 5 times the creature's challenge rating (minimum 3 days).

Poisons

"Be careful handling those. Don't wanna get burned. Heh heh."

—Entropy

Entropy (he/him) is an alabaster tiefling (a noncombatant) whose skin and large ram's horns are shot through with onyx cracks. He has a number of chemical burns on his hands, arms, and face, and his table at the Crossroads features a bubbling chemistry set and a number of vials of strange liquid.

Characters looking for a poison to feed someone, coat their weapons in, or apply to something's skin, can find all the poisons described on the Entropy's Poisons table available for purchase. The table shows each poison's cost per dose, method of application, and effects.

Entropy's Poisons

Name	Type	Description	Cost per dose
Basilisk breath	Injury	The target takes 3d6 poison damage, and must succeed on a DC 19 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. While poisoned in this way, the target's speed is halved. The target can repeat the save at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themself on a success. A target who fails the save four times is paralyzed until the poisoned condition is removed.	400 gp
Body's bane	Injury	The target must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or take a –3 penalty to Constitution saving throws for 1d4 minutes.	200 gp
Bonebreaker	Injury	The target takes 1d10 poison damage and must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or have their bones weakened for 1 minute. While the target's bones are weakened, any attacks against them that deal bludgeoning damage score a critical hit on an attack roll of 18–20.	300 gp
Mage's bane	Inhaled	The target must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or have their vocal cords become useless, leaving them unable to speak for 1d4 hours.	350 gp
Peacekeeper	Ingested	The target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be incapable of violence for 1 hour. While in this state, the target is unable to make weapon attacks or use any action or feature that deals damage to another creature or forces another creature to make a saving throw.	50 gp
Vile touch	Contact	The target must succeed on a DC 19 Constitution saving throw or become violently ill and incapacitated for 1d4 + 2 rounds. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themself on a success.	275 gp

Custom Spell Poisons

Entropy also takes commissions to create magical poisons from scratch. He can create a poison that replicates the effect of any offensive spell of 3rd level or lower that targets a single creature and forces that target to make a saving throw. The purchaser can specify the poison's type (contact, ingested, inhaled, or injury).

The level of the spell determines the poison's save DC and base cost, with the spell's effect manifesting as if cast at its lowest level. A spell with expensive material components adds the cost of those components to the cost of the poison.

Custom Spell Poisons

Level	Save DC	Cost
Cantrip	15	150 gp
1st	16	200 gp
2nd	17	250 gp
3rd	18	300 gp

Crossroads of the Planes

A gateway shaped of many stones, each etched with an arcane rune, stands in the center of the Crossroads—and is guarded by No'mrend the Fatebringer (he/any; NOHM-rend), a hulking crimson **pit fiend**. No'mrend has been an agent of the Foscari family since the time of Gillia's great-great-great-great grandfather Romolo, who outsmarted the devil while negotiating power and riches for the Foscari family in return for his own soul. As a result, No'mrend is bound to the Foscari line until it ends.

Though No'mrend's angry demeanor suggests that he must hate the fate he's been dealt, service to the Foscari family is actually a welcome change of pace. The devil has been slowly amassing a fortune while working at the Crossroads as guardian and gatekeeper. Plus, according to No'mrend's contract with the Foscaris, he gets to reap the two best souls from each generation of the family for hell.

For 6,000 gp or at the behest of Gillia Foscari, No'mrend activates the gate, allowing individuals to be transported to different marketplaces across the planes, each similar to the Crossroads. Gillia helped each of these markets get up and running—and of course, a cut of all profits earned at the markets goes to her family.

Seven Cities of Hell

Run by Qusghal (QUISH-gull), a barbed devil, the Hell Crossroads are one of the few places where mortals, devils, and demons can be found wheeling and dealing together in a peaceful manner. Individuals who travel to this marketplace can find cursed magic items for sale, as well as the rare materials used to craft them.

Abyssal Wasteland

Run by Yirag (YEE-rag), the spirit of an ogre who died in the wasteland, the Abyssal Crossroads offer powerful weapons and armor taken from the infinite battles raging across the plane. All the merchants here are the spirits of fallen warriors.

Shadowfell

Run and staffed exclusively by an elf named Vemna (VEHM-nah), the Shadowfell Crossroads trades in the memories of that plane's inhabitants. For the right price, Vemna can track down the memories of specific individuals and bring them back to the customer in the form of an orb swirling with pale gray smoke. Anyone who touches the orb experiences the memories.

Quintessence

Oris (ORR-iss), an earth elemental, runs the Quintessence Crossroads, which provides access to a wide variety of gems and crystals, many of which don't exist on any other plane. Granius (GRAHN-ee-us), another earth elemental, is responsible for hiring adventurers to seek and collect gems when the market's stock is low.



THE LAST SEVEN NOTES

A 7th-Level adventure about weaving song and soothing a soul

by Sadie Lowry

> "Where words fail, music speaks."
>
> –Hans Christian Andersen

Dark forces ensnare a cathedral in "The Last Seven Notes," an adventure built around a corrupted lion-like Celestial, and the power of music to heal and connect. The characters must explore the cathedral to clear out corrupted spirits, save terrified clergy, and weave a song that can restore the rampaging spirit to his natural peaceful state.

This adventure is balanced for four to five 7th-level characters.

BACKGROUND

War, peace, and music are intertwined with the history of Giocoso, a city of artisans, musicians, and clergy established on a battlefield where holy warriors defeated a devastating fiendish incursion. In the ashes of triumph, the surviving warriors established the city and built the massive Paean (PI-uhn) Cathedral, both as a refuge and as a sign that evil would never again hold that site.

Millennia later, the city flourishes as a haven of art, peace, and worship. Those with no religious predilection can visit and wander its streets, taking in the thriving inspiration of its artisans. And there is music. Gods, but there is music! From communal harvest songs to ballads to hymns, Giocoso is alive with music—so much so that a Celestial lion spirit of music made a home atop the cathedral a few years ago.

Iahhel (EYE-ah-hel), the Celestial, is the Giocosans' pride and joy. He can be heard baying along with songs and purring when the music fades. A magnificent harp-like instrument called the soulstrings was built atop the roof so the clergy could play for him, and many came to regard Iahhel as the city's guardian and patron.

However, even as the clergy works for the good of Giocoso, a fell, pernicious presence has snuck its way behind the cathedral's walls. Varadah Zostira (vah-RAH-dah zohs-TEER-ah), a dragonborn bishop with a soul highly receptive to magic and other planes, recently began to see unsettling visions and dreams. In those visions, the lands around Giocoso were littered with the corpses of powerful archfiends from the historical incursion—and the spirits of these archfiends began to torment Varadah. By masquerading as a dead god who knew the truth of all things, the spirits led Varadah to dig up "the heart of a god"—a withered fiend heart that strongly affected her. Corrupted by the heart, she saw further visions of the weaknesses of the gods, dreaming about their terrible wrath and ancient flaws. And so doubt in her own faith quickly grew.

As the fifth anniversary of Iahhel's arrival in Giocoso approached, the clergy prepared a divine song as a ritual that would strengthen their bond to the Celestial and empower him once played. Six priests meditated to receive the last six notes of the song, allowing Iahhel to

provide the seventh and final note. But as they undertook the ritual, the spirits of the archfiends battered Varadah with visions of a terrible future where Iahhel transformed into a great beast who would fell all before him. Believing that she was saving everyone, Varadah hijacked the ritual at the fiends' direction, causing fiendish magic to corrupt Iahhel. The Celestial rampaged, bringing with him a raging storm. Distorted divine spirits overran the cathedral, killing priests in their frenzy.

Now, the priests of Giocoso are desperate for a solution—but one that can restore and save Iahhel, rather than killing him.

The Cathedral Elsewhere

The city of Giocoso can be placed in any suitable campaign setting, or Paean Cathedral can be placed in any metropolitan city with an artisanal or religious history. Iahhel's appearance or history can also change without affecting the adventure.



Adventure Hooks

Use one of the following hooks to draw the characters into the adventure.

Priest's Plea. With the characters already in Giocoso, they hear the first signs of trouble at the cathedral. Narimae the high priest has heard of their exploits, and even if the characters are already on their way to the cathedral, a runner meets them, having been sent by Narimae to beseech them for assistance.

Sight to See. While the characters are in the general area of Giocoso, merchants and travelers tell them they *must* go see Paean Cathedral. When the characters arrive, they find the cathedral in chaos.

Called by Your Class. A bard receives a message from a companion of their college, asking them and any compatriots to go to the cathedral to see what song Iahhel loves the most, as they have heard of the incredible spirit who lives there. This fun road trip for a song quickly goes wrong when the characters arrive to a scene of mayhem and destruction. Alternatively, a cleric or paladin is contacted by a religious leader who sends them to Giocoso to help with the upcoming celebrations, with characters hearing word of a rampaging divine spirit even as they enter the city.

Adventure Summary

The characters arrive at Paean Cathedral to see fear and confusion running rampant. The high priest, Narimae, asks them to go inside and calm the rampaging Celestial Iahhel, using the ritual song that the priests were composing. To do so, the characters must collect the last seven notes of the song. As they explore the cathedral in search of those notes, the characters fight corrupted Celestial spirits and aid injured members of the clergy. They then face Iahhel, claim the final note, and save the Celestial.

During their exploration and investigation, the characters might also discover that someone betraying the cathedral is the source of the corruption. What they do with this information is up to them. As long as the characters calm Iahhel, the cathedral is saved and they have the gratitude of both the clergy and the heavens.

Key NPCs

The following NPCs feature heavily in this adventure.

Iahhel

Iahhel (EYE-ah-hel, he/him) is a massive, golden, winged lion Celestial. He sports an impressive mane and tail, along with two horns curving elegantly back from his head, and wears white-and-gold armor. Iahhel is the firstborn son of Hanniah, the proud lioness companion of a goddess of the hunt, and as a spirit of music, he often joined the hunter goddess's prayer songs to honor her fallen prey. When he came of age, Iahhel left his Celestial pride to search the mortal realms, eventually coming upon Giocoso. There, he settled down atop the cathedral, quickly growing fond of its worshipers. The more time he spends with the clergy, creating music together, the more powerful Iahhel grows as their protector and patron.

Relationships. Iahhel and Narimae have become close friends over their years together, and he enjoys every incomplete, tentative melody she brings him.

Narimae Lesyr, the Most High

Narimae (NAIR-ih-may, she/her, half-elf, 52) is the high priest of Paean Cathedral and Iahhel's longtime companion. She has warm-brown skin, straight black hair with graying strands, and smile lines around her eyes. Stern and sensible, Narimae keeps the cathedral running in a well-organized fashion, so that those who seek peace and inspiration inside can always find it. Though her responsibilities leave her little time to create music, she brings Iahhel her half-finished songs.

Relationships. Narimae and Silence occasionally clash over Narimae's strictness, but the high priest truly appreciates the tiefling's ingenuity. In a way, she is envious of Silence's creative passion, knowing that her own sternness is a requirement of her position, even as it stifles her creativity somewhat. Narimae believes that Rhys will make a fine member of the clergy given time, and wishes that he could better believe in himself. She trusts Varadah deeply.

Silence

Silence (they/them, tiefling, 38) enjoys the irony of their name in the context of their role as the cathedral's choir director. They are a pale-blue tiefling with white hair and eyes, with that hair often falling loose from its thick braid. Silence has a frenetic relationship with creativity, scrawling ideas on any available parchment, and managing dozens of creative projects at once. They balk against Narimae's strict leadership, citing often that "passion and discipline rarely coexist." Still, they acknowledge that the cathedral's music has prospered under Narimae.

Relationships. Silence encourages Rhys often, and ensures that Narimae doesn't push him too far, too fast. They respect Narimae as well, and sometimes enjoy the push-and-pull of disagreeing with her. They were wary of Varadah before Iahhel's corruption, sensing a darkness in the music Varadah produced. When Silence refused to join Varadah in her corrupted goals, the dragonborn mage cursed the tiefling and sent them into a magical slumber.

Varadah Zostira

Varadah (vah-RAH-dah zohs-TEER-ah, she/her, dragonborn, 40) is a high-ranking member of the clergy who keeps to herself while observing those around her. She is a sleek silver dragonborn, whose many curving spines and horns sharply frame her face in an angular halo. A talented mage, Varadah harnessed the powerful magic of the growing ritual song to break the cathedral's divine protections, accidentally allowing the spirits of ancient archfiends to move against and seize Iahhel before the clergy could complete their song revering him.

Relationships. Narimae and Varadah were close before the archfiends' manipulations filled Varadah with doubt. The dragonborn mage has since drawn away, and Narimae has been too busy overseeing the ritual's preparation and working with Rhys to fully notice. Believing that Silence might be an ally because of their critique of the cathedral's strictness, Varadah tried to convince the choir director to support her. When that failed, she sent them into a cursed magical slumber instead.

Rhys Denholm

Rhys (REESE, he/him, human, 18) is the newest member of Paean Cathedral's clergy, a gangly and tan human with dark-red curls that spill over his left eye. After escaping a cruel household only a few weeks previous, Rhys came to Narimae seeking peace, but has so far struggled to find his voice—both literally and figuratively. Narimae wants him to meet Iahhel, but Silence believes Rhys needs time. The young man isn't sure what he needs, but knows that within him is a voice that matters, if only he can find the courage to use it.

Relationships. Skittish and shy, Rhys still holds Narimae and Silence at arm's length, but he opens up more each passing day. When Iahhel's rampage began, Rhys fought the initial outbreak of corrupted Celestials, ensuring the escape of many of his fellow clergy.

Arriving at the Cathedral

When the characters arrive at the cathedral, read or paraphrase the following:

> A cacophony of howling winds and desperate voices fills the city. A storm rages above Paean Cathedral, centered over the vaulted roof where a golden beast stalks, massive wings silhouetted against the dark sky. Two figures—a middle-aged half-elf woman in religious robes and an older human woman—pace frantically at the bottom of the cathedral steps, the main doors shut tight above them.

The half-elf is Narimae Lesyr, the high priest, and the human woman is Carys Kyr. Carys's son Ellio is one of the clergy trapped in the cathedral, and Narimae is trying to calm her even while attempting to organize a response to the situation.

Recognizing the characters as either those who responded to her summons to help or as capable adventurers, Narimae quickly explains what's happened.

> The half-elf is haggard as she beckons you closer. "Forgive the … chaotic welcome to Paean Cathedral. I am Narimae, the high priest. We have a problem, as you can see. Gods, where do I start?"
>
> The priest runs a hand through her graying hair. "The being you see above the cathedral—his name is Iahhel. A divine spirit of music, and our protector. But he became enraged, and then … evil creatures appeared, targeting clergy and worshipers alike. It was so sudden. Our evacuation was disastrous, and I'm still piecing together who lived, who died, and who might be inside."
>
> As Narimae watches the predatory movements of the lion-like creature above, her expression is heartbroken. "I don't understand what's happened to him. He doesn't hear anyone—not even me." But then she seemingly shakes away her sorrow. "But it has something to do with our divine song. I'm certain. Look here."

Narimae produces a piece of sheet music, wrinkled and stained with a few faded blood spatters. Any character who reads Celestial recognizes the name of the piece as *On the Wings of Song* (play TheLast7NotesUnresolved.mp3). Even to characters who don't read music, it is clear that the last line of the piece is missing the song's final notes.

> "The fifth anniversary of Iahhel's arrival is today, and we were preparing a ritual song of celebration. Six of his priests prayed, each receiving the musical note that would end the song we had written, with Iahhel to provide the last note. But near the end of our meditation, all of us heard the song fill the cathedral … but wrong, and … somehow tainted. When the false song finished, Iahhel's rampage began, and we were overrun by monsters."
>
> Narimae's jaw sets resolutely as she assesses you. "I believe the ritual song, played correctly, will save Iahhel. I believe that if you can determine the last seven notes and complete the song, it will cleanse him of this … this horrid corruption."
>
> As the high priest holds out the sheet music, her voice strengthens with hope. "And I have the first note."

Narimae offers the characters 500 gp each if they can save Iahhel, and answers any questions she can regarding their goal:

- Her own note is D.
- The priests' ritual prayers were completed in solitude, their notes recorded privately. Narimae has the first note. A tiefling choir director named Silence has the second. A human priest named Anneliese has the third, a tiefling priest named Theris has the fourth, a young human priest named Rhys has the fifth, and a drow priest named Sarasyne has the sixth. Iahhel has the seventh note—though the characters might have to fight him to obtain it while the Celestial is in his state of rage.
- Once the characters have the completed song, one of them needs to play the song on the soulstrings atop the cathedral roof. The soulstrings were made to celebrate Iahhel, but the Celestial has been heard and seen attacking the instrument in its open tower, so the characters must stop him before it is destroyed.
- Narimae is worried about the missing clergy members. Aside from those who have the notes, she hasn't been able to find Carys's son Ellio, a dragonborn bishop named Varadah, a gold dragonborn priest named Ganxor, a dark-skinned elf priest named Tias, and a pale human priest named Malia.
- The cathedral is full of corrupted Celestial songbird spirits, as well as a few other creatures summoned or animated as a result of Iahhel's corruption. The music spirits are volatile and attack on sight.
- The high priest is desperate to determine what happened to cause Iahhel's rampage, but her primary concern is stopping that rampage and clearing the cathedral of corrupted Celestials before anyone else is hurt.

If the characters agree to help, Narimae unlocks the cathedral's main doors (leading into area P1) and lets them in. Characters who scout around or spot the door to the east of the main doors can also enter the cloister (area P4) if they choose. Narimae whispers a prayer for good luck as they go.

Paean Cathedral

Paean Cathedral is a large structure known for its impressive architecture and its soulstrings tower. The front face of the edifice features two enormous arches, and the building's twin octagonal spires rise above the roof to east and west, flanking the smaller open tower where the soulstrings is installed on the north end of the roof. Built from pale golden limestone, the cathedral looks weathered and old, but still in pristine condition—though the Celestial raging atop it seems intent on changing that.

Paean Cathedral Features

Paean Cathedral has the following features:

Light. Unless otherwise noted, the cathedral is dimly lit, with only faint storm light coming in through the windows.

Ceilings. The nave (area P1), quire (area P2), sanctuary (area P3), and cloister (area P4) rise to a height of 80 feet. Any other indoor location has a height of 25 feet.

Called by Music. If any character plays music while in the cathedral, there is a 1-in-4 chance that two **songthieves** (see "Stat Blocks") hear them and appear within 60 feet of them to attack.

The Soulstrings. Iahhel is raging and attacking the soulstrings atop the roof (area P10). As such, the more time the characters spend exploring, the more danger there is that the Celestial destroys the instrument. Each time the characters take a short rest, Iahhel deals 10 damage to the soulstrings. If the characters take a long rest, he destroys the instrument.

Forming the Hymn

The final notes of the hymn are D (given by Narimae), A (area P3), G (area P4), F# (area P5), A (area P7), E (area P8), and D (given by Iahhel who is in area P10), arranged in this order: D E G A F# A D. (The last D is an octave higher than the first.) Since Narimae has given them the order, have the players keep track of the notes, then confirm the correct order before a character performs the complete version of the song during the final battle.

As this is a ritual song steeped in magic, a character can play the song on the soulstrings even if they don't have any familiarity with instruments. While it's preferable that the song be played by a bard, cleric, or paladin (and you can lower the DC for nonperforming characters if you feel it's appropriate), the ritual song can grant an inherent understanding of how to play it for any character who takes a seat at the soulstrings.



Paean Cathedral Locations

The following locations are keyed to the map of Paean Cathedral.

P1. Nave

When the characters enter Paean Cathedral for the first time, read or paraphrase the following:

> Where once it would have been filled with worshipers raising their voices to the vaulted ceiling's heights, the nave of the cathedral now stands eerily empty. Its towering pillars stand in shadow, with only dim light spilling in through arched gothic windows. Two smaller arms branch off to left and right at the far end of the nave, just before a set of heavy double doors. Along the far wall of both arms, smaller doors can be seen.

The nave is the largest area of the cathedral, open to lay worshipers. It is currently empty of threats.

P2. Quire

> Wrought-iron dividers make up the wall in which the double doors are set, beyond which stands the quire chamber. Beneath an arched ceiling, this sizable space contains rows of pews facing each other, providing space for the cathedral's distinguished choir to perform for their congregation.
>
> A smaller chamber juts into the area at the quire's far end, closed off behind ornate, gilded gates.

Paean Cathedral's quire is larger than the average cathedral's due to the clergy's focus on music. The doors to the north lead into the sanctuary (area P3).

Songful Ambush. Any character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 16 or higher, or a character who succeeds on a DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check to scan the room, notices a **songthief** lurking atop the intricate arches above. If unnoticed or left alone, the songthief attacks once the characters try to leave the quire.

When the songthief attacks, they summon two Celestial spirits to aid them. The spirits use the **will-o'-wisp** stat block, except their creature type is Celestial and their Shock attack deals radiant damage.

Key. Wrapped around the talons of the songthief is a thin cord with a tiny key dangling from it. This is the key to the journal in the cloister (area P4).

P3. Sanctuary

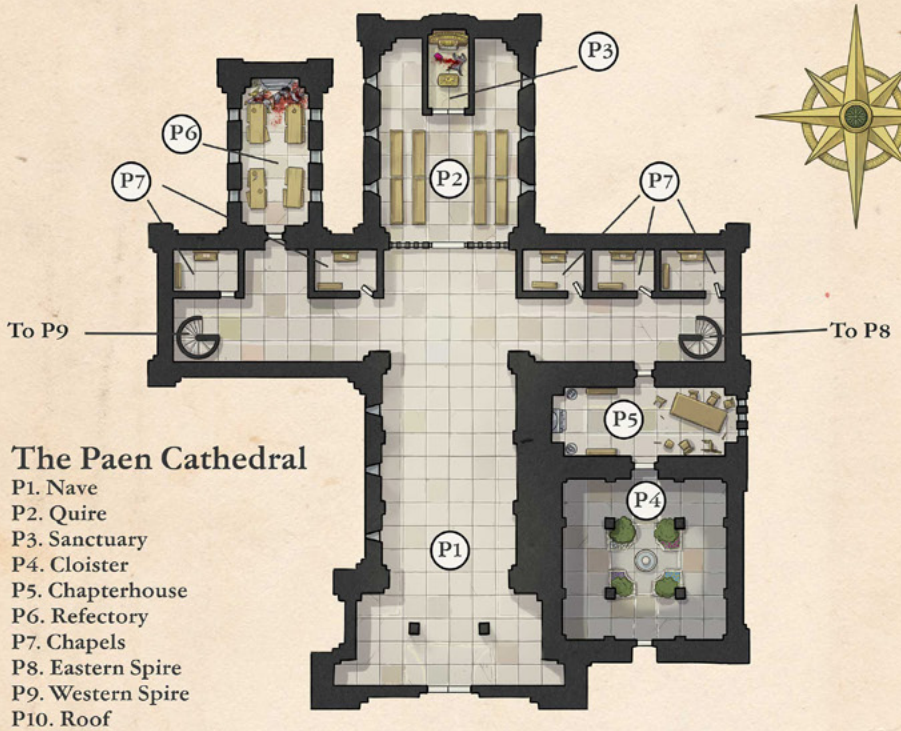
> The cathedral's sanctuary opens up beyond the gilded gates. An altar stands at the center of the space, beautifully wrought from marble and gold, depicting musical notes and instruments surrounding a graven image of a winged lion. An impressive-looking organ is incorporated into the far wall, its pipes surrounded by vivid stained glass.
>
> A body lies before the instrument, a trail of blood leading from the seat to the corpse.

The sanctuary's altar is dedicated to music and Iahhel, and stands before a great keyboard instrument known as the piari. The piari resembles an organ, but specially enchanted gemstones worked into the pipes allow musicians to weave the sounds of nature into their music, including whistling winds, rushing waters, and birdsong.

Ritual Note. The corpse is the priest Sarasyne, a drow woman in simple robes, and is holding a crumpled piece of paper. The paper has a few lines of music scribed on it, making it clear the figure had been playing the piari before being struck down. But at the bottom of the paper, a single note—A—is circled several times.

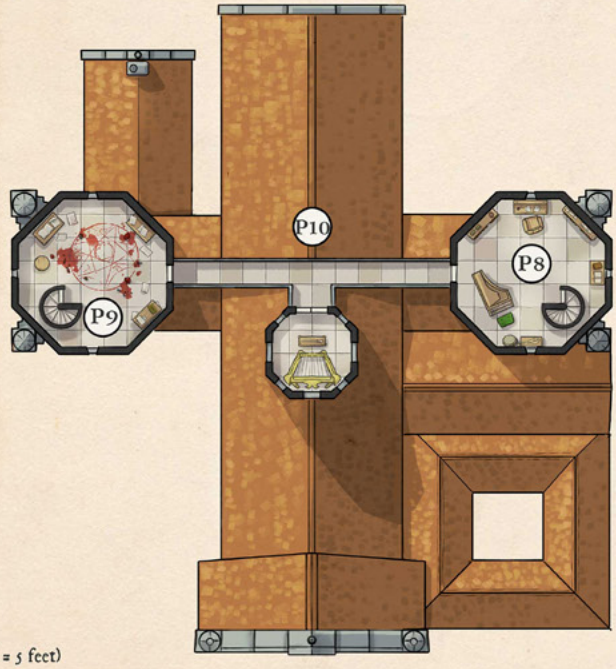
Sarasyne. The character with the highest passive Wisdom (Perception) score is the first to hear a melody faintly echoing in the piari's pipes. When any character comes within 10 feet of the piari, they see a translucent outline of the dead drow woman playing the melody. A single tear slides down her cheek as her fingers dance over the keys.

If a character interacts with Sarasyne's spirit in any way, she gestures to the piari, inviting them to play it too. A character can attempt a DC 15 Charisma (Performance) check to replicate the melody on the piari. (Playing the piari doesn't risk attracting songthieves; see "Called by Music" in the "Paean Cathedral Features" section.) On a success, Sarasyne sadly smiles and produces a *pearl of power* for the characters to take. On a failure, her eyes widen and she points upward before disappearing. A **songthief** then appears at the entrance to the sanctuary, drawn by the discordant melody, and attacks.



The Paen Cathedral

P1. Nave
P2. Quire
P3. Sanctuary
P4. Cloister
P5. Chapterhouse
P6. Refectory
P7. Chapels
P8. Eastern Spire
P9. Western Spire
P10. Roof



SCALE (1 square = 5 feet)

5 10 20 30 40 50

P4. CLOISTER

This area is partly open to the sky, with a square covered walkway extending around the edges of the space, set with intricate arches that offer views into a cultivated garden at center. Four trees stand in the garden, festooned with purple, violet, white, and blue blooms. A fountain surrounded by bushes bearing gold-and-white flowers flows with a quiet trickling of water, barely discernible over the howling of the storm above.

This haven garden is a place where priests of the cathedral meditate, study, and exercise.

Whistlebloom. Characters examining the gold-and-white trumpet flowers that surround the fountain can see where a much larger flower emerges from those bushes, shaped similarly to a snapdragon, and bearing petals of white, pink, and gold. As it sways in the wind, the flower curls and uncurls its leaves around itself as if breathing.

A character who succeeds on a DC 16 Intelligence (Nature) check recognizes the flower as a magic plant known as a whistlebloom (use the **awakened shrub** stat block), which has the ability to mimic music it's heard before. Anyone within 5 feet of the whistlebloom can see a leather-bound journal beneath its lower leaves, with the name "Anneliese" written on the front.

The journal is sealed with a small lock, and the key is with the songthief in the quire (area P2). The lock can also be picked with a successful DC 17 Dexterity check using thieves' tools, or snapped off the leather cover with a successful DC 14 Strength check.

Once the journal is open, the characters find it filled with notes detailing experiments conducted with the whistlebloom by the priest Anneliese (see below). A note on the last page reads: "The whistlebloom must be as excited about the ritual song as we are! He's always loved singing with me, but when I sang him my ritual note, he sang me such beautiful trills, each ending with my note."

Beneath that is scrawled another small note: "Nibbled my sleeve. Check if there's more honeydew?"

Anneliese. The human priest Anneliese was attacked and killed by songthieves during Iahhel's initial rampage. Any character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check or makes a thorough search of the garden finds her body concealed in a flowerbed, her torso bearing deep gouges.

Ritual Note. The whistlebloom holds Anneliese's ritual note: a G. A character can convince the flower to sing by using a *speak with plants* spell or similar magic, with a successful DC 16 Charisma (Performance) check that includes a song or musical instrument, or by retrieving honeydew from a jar in the refectory (area P6) and feeding the plant. Any character who hears the whistlebloom sing the note magically recognizes it as a D.

P5. CHAPTERHOUSE

Both the doors leading into this room are damaged and don't open easily. Characters who approach without making undue noise can hear a faint, raspy singing within the room. Each door can be forced open with a successful DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check, or by three or more characters working together.

When the characters force their way into the room, read or paraphrase the following.

This meeting room has been torn apart, bloodstains smeared across a main table where it's been knocked aside. Two winged stone creatures crouch at the center of the room, flexing their wings, uncurling blood-covered claws, and making soft, stony clicking sounds as they stare at a trembling, red-haired young man slumped in the corner. The badly wounded figure sings a soft hymn, with a hoarse voice seemingly on the verge of giving out.

The figure glances up, frantically holding up a piece of parchment. Between his crimson-stained fingers is a desperate scrawl: *"If I stop singing they'll kill me HELP."*

The human is Rhys (use the **scout** stat block). The two **gargoyles** watching him were once statues, and were awakened by Iahhel's rampage. However, their spree of destruction was halted by Rhys's singing. To get Rhys out of the room before his voice gives out, the characters must succeed on a group DC 15 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check to distract the gargoyles with their own careful movements, then help the exhausted young man through the cramped chamber and out the door without attracting notice. On a failed check, the gargoyles attack.

If the characters join in the singing to help keep the gargoyles soothed, each character has advantage on the group check, but the increased volume runs the risk of attracting songthieves (see "Called by Music" in the "Paean Cathedral Features" section). If the characters fight the gargoyles, Rhys joins them, but he has only half his hit points remaining. (In the event that Rhys is killed, he whispers the name of his note in the ritual with his dying breath. See "Ritual Note" below.)

The characters can barricade either door from the outside with a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check. If they don't kill the gargoyles or barricade them in, there is a 50 percent chance that the gargoyles find and attack them later during another combat encounter.

Ritual Note. Rhys's voice is raspy and choked with emotion as he tells the characters about his note, F#.

He's had trouble singing since he arrived at the cathedral just weeks ago. Stifled, silenced, and neglected at home, he's been trying to feel worthy of joining his voice with the clergy's. Narimae, hoping to encourage him, let him be part of the ritual despite his lack of experience.

When his prayer was answered and he heard the note, Rhys wept, realizing that he does belong. He offers the characters a *potion of resistance (radiant)* and begs them to save Iahhel before he flees the cathedral to rejoin Narimae.

P6. Refectory

This unpretentious refectory is set with shelves along the walls, several long tables, and a hearth along one wall that is currently cold. Several plates holding unfinished meals are scattered irregularly across one of the tables. The acrid tang of blood hangs in the air.

Victims. Characters who enter the room are able to spot three corpses wearing robes, all sprawled beneath a table near the far wall: a lithe gold dragonborn (Ganxor); a broad-shouldered, dark-skinned elf (Tias); and a plump pale human (Malia). All their bodies bear deep gouges consistent with talon attacks by songthieves. Tias and Malia are still tightly clutching each other's hands.

A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds a *ring of protection* on the floor near the door. If they search the bodies for identifying information, they also find a ring on Tias engraved with the following: "May we be united forever in love and song—M."

If the characters report these priests' deaths to Narimae, she sorrowfully expresses gratitude for finding them.

Honeydew. On one of the shelves where staples are stored is a jar of fresh honeydew. It can be used to feed the whistlebloom in the cloister (area P4).

Key. A character who searches Ganxor's body finds a thin, gilded key that opens the door to the eastern spire (area P8).

P7. Chapels

These identical rooms set along the arms of the nave are dedicated to worship. The characters can see into the nearest chapels as they move through the nave.

Open doors reveal that most of the chapels off the nave are empty. Only the last door to the west stands closed. At both ends of the arms of the nave, spiral staircases lead upward.

If any character approaches the closed door, the faint sound of sobbing can be heard from the other side. Trying to open the door reveals that it is barricaded from the inside.

Saving Ellio. The young half-elf Ellio (an **acolyte**) has sealed himself into the chapel in a state of terror. He is anxious and paranoid, and thus slow to trust. A character who speaks to him through the door and succeeds on a DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check can convince Ellio that the characters are there to rescue him. If Ellio can't be convinced to open the door, he won't leave until Rhys (area P5) or Silence (area P8) comes to collect him.

The barricaded door can also be destroyed (it has AC 16, 25 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage), or forced open with a successful DC 17 Strength (Athletics) check. If the door is forced, the panicked Ellio attempts to push past the characters and flee the cathedral.

If the characters convince Ellio to leave and keep him safe, his mother Carys rewards them when they exit the chapel with a *potion of greater healing*.

Ritual Note. In the last chapel to the east, a tiefling priest named Theris lies dead on the floor next to a piano, having succumbed to a songthief attack. A trail of blood drips from a single piano key—A—to the floor, where Theris's hand is loosely curled around a holy symbol.

P8. Eastern Spire

The staircase spirals up, becoming a narrow passageway occasionally interspersed by small arched windows that let in the gray stormlight outside. As occasional bursts of rain rattle the glass, the deep bellowing of Iahhel's rage grows louder.

The stairs end at a door with a lock, which also shows wedges forcefully driven under it from the other side to hold it fast.

The door is locked, and can be unlocked with the key in the refectory (area P6) or with a successful DC 18 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. However, Varadah also wedged the door shut. The unlocked door can be forced open with a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check, or it can be destroyed (AC 14, 15 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage).

When the characters can see into the main room, read or paraphrase the following:

The octagonal interior space of the eastern spire holds only a door and a desk against the adjacent wall—with a body slumped over it.

Silence. Silence, the cathedral's tiefling choir director, has been cursed by Varadah and trapped in a magical slumber. Any character who inspects the body confirms that Silence is alive, but the tiefling resists any mundane attempts to wake them. With a DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check, a character intuits that Silence can be woken with *dispel magic* (DC 16), *lesser restoration*, or similar magic.

If Silence is woken before Varadah is found, they can reveal that Varadah is the traitor who hijacked the ritual, though they don't know why. They don't know where Varadah is, but guess that she's probably holed up in the western spire (area P9). Though Silence would like to confront the duplicitous priest, they're too weak to do so, and they ask that the characters deal with her. In addition, they give the characters a *periapt of wound closure* in gratitude for saving them.

Ritual Note. If Silence is woken, they share that their note in the ritual was an E. If the tiefling remains asleep, any search around the desk reveals an encoded note on a piece of parchment underneath Silence. A character who succeeds on a DC 16 Intelligence check can decode the note, determining Silence's note.

P9. Western Spire

At the top of the spiral staircase, Iahhel's howling echoes even louder. A door at the end of the stairs is unlatched and askew, revealing a chamber lit by dim light through the windows. Two desks stand against the walls, covered in scattered papers. More papers are spread across the floor, covering a field of other detritus.

A dragonborn is bent over some of the scattered papers on the floor, clutching her head. "Get out, get out, get out, *get out*!"

Three **songthieves** lurk outside the spire, the flapping of their wings masked by the sounds of Iahhel on the roof. When they see the characters, the Celestials smash through the windows and attack. A character who has a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 18 or higher, or who succeeds on a DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check to scan the windows while entering the area, gains a moment's warning of the attack. All other characters are surprised.

The western spire is where Varadah enacted her ritual, channeling the growing power in the cathedral, commandeering it, then opening the door for the archfiends' corrupting influence. The dragon priest is now struggling to shake off the archfiends' control.

Ritual Components. The detritus spread across the floor is fiendish ritual components—withered monstrous hearts, drained vials of humanoid blood in ruby vials, and charred sulfuric rocks. The papers are scrawled notes Varadah made regarding the ritual. Any character who succeeds on a DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check to examine the notes and components understands that the ritual is a conduit for strong fiendish enchantment magic, powerful enough to command Celestials.

Varadah. As Varadah fights the archfiends' influence, she responds to characters who try to talk to her with frantic exclamations:

- "I don't want them! Take the dreams back!"
- "Stop talking! Everyone stop talking, it's too much!"
- "Gods! Lies! All lies! Stop!"

The archfiends' control over Varadah can be broken with any of the following spells: *dispel evil and good*, *dispel magic*, *hallow,* or *protection from evil and good* (with Fiends as the chosen creature). Alternatively, a character can draw her attention away from the archfiends with a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check. Freeing Iahhel (area P10) from the influence of the archfiends also frees Varadah. If the archfiends' influence over her is broken, Varadah tremblingly explains what happened, speaking honestly about the archfiends' manipulation of her.

If the characters are unable to break the archfiends' influence (including failing three Charisma (Persuasion) checks before one success), **Varadah** attacks, her eyes glowing a hazy red. During combat, the characters can use any of the above spells to break the archfiends' control, or a character can do so by using an action and succeeding on a DC 25 Charisma (Persuasion) check. Otherwise, the dragonborn mage fights until killed or knocked unconscious.

The encounter with Varadah can end one of the following ways:

Varadah Is Killed. If Varadah is killed, Narimae mourns her if Varadah is branded a traitor. If the archfiends' control is revealed, Narimae might choose to resurrect Varadah. The archfiends then search for a new servant in Giocoso.

Varadah Is Saved. If the archfiends' influence over Varadah is broken, she apologizes to the characters and Narimae for everything she's done. She gives the characters a *potion of greater healing* and offers to help hunt down the archfiends (see the "Continuing Varadah's Story" sidebar).

Varadah Is Incapacitated. If the characters incapacitate Varadah, Narimae can dispel the archfiends' influence. Things then play out as described under "Varadah is Saved."

Varadah Flees. If the characters break off the fight with Varadah, she either follows to continue attacking

or flees the cathedral, as you determine. The "Conclusion" section offers suggestions for what happens if she flees.

Varadah Wins. If Varadah defeats the characters, she kills them outright and gives their corpses to the archfiends.

Message to Narimae. A character who searches the room and succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds that one of the papers on the floor is a frantic message that Varadah tried to give Narimae before the archfiends took hold of her: *"They have proven we can command gods, even causing them to destroy that which they love. He rages! Strongly, terribly! But they are liars, Narimae, they are no gods, help me, what do I do, what can I do … "*

Withered Fiend Heart. Most of the ritual components in the room have expended any magic they carried. However, one withered fiend heart still gives off a faint aura of abjuration magic to a *detect magic* spell. A character who carries the heart has resistance to fire damage, as well as the following flaw: "I see weaknesses in the gods, and believe they deserve no power, respect, or authority."

Continuing Varadah's Story

If the characters determine that Varadah was manipulated and controlled by the spirits of the archfiends whose corpses litter the lands around Giocoso, they might want to permanently excise the archfiends' influence. If they don't, Narimae promises that her priests will work to purify and magically consecrate the land. If the characters do take part in this mission, they can explore old battlefields in search of the archfiends' remains, letting you set up adventures in deep caves, ancient ruins, or even the realms of the dead.

These spirits can be left as nameless generals, developed with names and backstories, or pulled from your own existing worldbuilding. Consider using stat blocks such as the **glabrezu**, **nalfeshnee**, and **rakshasa** to represent the spirits of the archfiends, except each is both a Fiend and Undead. If you use *Flee, Mortals! The MCDM Monster Book* in your games, consider using the **chimeron**, **tormenauk**, **wobalas**, or **Aurumvas** stat blocks. The **ruinant** can act as an ally to one of the archfiend spirits, while **spitlings** can be used as minions that serve any of these ancient foes. (These stat blocks are also available in *Flee, Mortals!* Packet Seven for those who backed or preordered the book.)

P10. Roof

When the characters reach the roof, the full state of Iahhel's rampage is seen for the first time.

> An open walkway extends from east to west, connecting the cathedral's two spires. The storm swells, a crescendo of fury to match the divine being at the center of it. Even under a dark sky, Iahhel is a commanding presence, his white-and-gold armor framing his muscular form, two majestic horns rising from his head, and his mane whipping in the wind.
>
> Seemingly lost, he turns his rage toward the gift built for him—the massive harp-like soulstrings, strung inside the open tower at the center of the walkway connecting the spires. Strings shriek and snap as the Celestial rakes his claws across them, as if intent on bringing the instrument down.

Consumed by his fiendish rage, **Iahhel** doesn't immediately attack when the characters appear on the roof. The characters can cross between the cathedral's spires without alerting him with a successful DC 12 group Dexterity (Stealth) check, or can approach Iahhel under cover of the storm with a successful DC 20 group Dexterity (Stealth) check. The Celestial attacks when he notices the party.

Iahhel can be calmed only by a performance of the complete ritual song, which can be undertaken once he gives them the seventh note during his transformation (see his stat block for details). The complete song cleanses him of fiendish corruption and imbues him with new power—a power that could come only from the faith and love of those who live alongside him.

Soulstrings. The soulstrings have AC 18, 75 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. However, the instrument might have taken damage from previous attacks by Iahhel (see "The Soulstrings" under "Paean Cathedral Features").

Until now, Iahhel has been fighting the fiends' influence, but the characters' arrival both distracts the Celestial and forces the fiends to push their control harder. On each round in which the characters don't play music (see "Roleplaying Iahhel" below) or deal a combined total of 30 damage to Iahhel, he attacks the soulstrings.

Roleplaying Iahhel. Iahhel is a divine spirit driven to thunderous destruction. In this state, he mercilessly hounds characters who distract him from the soulstrings, picking off either the weakest-looking characters or those who demonstrate strong tactical thinking. If a character plays music during the fight, they gain advantage on saving throws made to resist any of Iahhel's features, but Iahhel targets them exclusively.

When Iahhel has been cleansed of corruption, he is gentle, warm, protective, and regretful of the devastation he's wrought. His primary concern is helping Narimae rebuild the temple, and reforging the trust between himself and his clergy.

The Seventh Note. When Iahhel uses his Seventh Note trait, read or paraphrase the following:

> The Celestial lion staggers, thunder resounding through the heavens as loudly as his roar. For a moment, clarity and rage are at war within his eyes. His breathing comes heavy, and the sky quiets as if holding its breath.

If the players are putting the song together themselves (as described under "Forming the Hymn" above), you can sing Iahhel's note (a D, which is an octave higher than the one the characters found in the cathedral), play it on an instrument, or search online for a video or app that plays the note, then let the players and characters figure out the ending of the song. If you use this approach, read or paraphrase the following:

> Rearing back his head, Iahhel bellows a crystal-clear musical tone that seems to pierce the sky. Golden light floods from him and renews him, and radiant fire wreathes his massive claws. Then the fiendish corruption takes hold of him once more, fury twisting his expression into a snarl as he prepares for a new onslaught. But you have heard the seventh note! All that remains is to put the notes together and play the song.

If you instead give the characters the complete song once they hear the seventh note (as described under "Forming the Hymn"), read or paraphrase the following:

> Rearing back his head, Iahhel bellows a musical note that seems to pierce the sky: a crystal-clear D. Golden light floods from him and renews him, and radiant fire wreathes his massive claws. Then the fiendish corruption takes hold of him once more, fury twisting his expression into a snarl as he prepares for a new onslaught. But the ritual song takes shape within your mind, even as the soulstrings start to reverberate softly nearby. A divine understanding settles warmly in your chest—the ending of the song, and how to play it on the soulstrings.

Healing Iahhel. Any character who uses an action to play the song for Iahhel on the soulstrings and succeeds on a DC 15 Charisma (Performance) check cleanses him of his corruption, at which point Iahhel is no longer hostile. If the check is failed, it can be repeated, but Iahhel continues to attack. If the soulstrings is destroyed, a character can instead sing the song or play it on another instrument, but the DC increases to 18.

Read or paraphrase the following text as the song is played successfully (play TheLast7NotesCompleted.mp3) and Iahhel is saved:

> The air around you seems to swell with sound, the wind and skies joining the song and carrying it louder, louder through Giocoso. As the song builds, Celestial avian spirits appear on the roof—the songthieves, but the malicious air has gone from them. They lift their birdsong to add to the melodious soulstrings, their voices adding other instruments and harmonies, bringing the ritual hymn to a full and joyous crescendo that fills the city.For the last seven notes, one final voice completes the choir: Iahhel, his rumbling bass fading into a contented purr as he settles himself on the roof. "My saviors. Thank you."

CONCLUSION

When Iahhel is cleansed, the storm recedes, any remaining songthieves become divine avian spirits, and the gargoyles of area P5 return to stone if still standing. Iahhel flies down to meet Narimae on the ground, carrying any characters who want a ride with him. In the immediate aftermath, Narimae and the other priests resurrect their fallen companions.

If Varadah escapes from the cathedral without being freed from the archfiends' corruption, she flees Giocoso. You might have Narimae ask the characters to hunt down the dragonborn mage, which can lead to future story arcs where Varadah tries to corrupt and bring down other divine beings as the archfiends' corruption grows stronger.

Narimae can ask the characters to help rebuild the cathedral, which has seen much destruction and sorrow. But whether the characters continue to aid her or not, she rewards them with 500 gp each for their aid, adding 50 gp for each of the ten NPCs the party was able to find or aid. Rhys and Ellio count if they made it out alive; Silence counts if they were woken from their arcane slumber; Varadah counts if she was saved or defeated; and Sarasyne, Anneliese, Ganxor, Tias, Malia, and Theris count if their deaths were discovered and reported.

STAT BLOCKS

This section contains the unique stat blocks featured in this adventure, presented in alphabetical order.

IAHHEL

Iahhel is a formidable Celestial, who wields music as a potent magical power against his foes.

Iahhel (Corrupted)

Huge Celestial, Neutral Evil While Corrupted (Neutral Good Normally)

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 105 (10d12 + 40)
Speed 50 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Str +9, Wis +6, Cha +8
Skills Perception +6, Performance +12
Damage Resistances radiant, necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities thunder
Condition Immunities charmed, deafened
Senses darkvision 120 ft., truesight 30 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages all
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +4

Seventh Note (1/Day). When Iahhel is reduced to 0 hit points, he doesn't die or fall unconscious. Instead, he bellows out the seventh note (D) as a clear tone and is revitalized by the corrupting influence that has a hold over him. He regains 105 hit points and three expended song motes, and when he expends a song mote on a feature that targets a creature, the target takes an extra 7 (2d6) radiant damage.

Song Motes. Iahhel is encircled by seven incandescent song motes, which he can expend to use or enhance his features. Additionally, if Iahhel fails a saving throw, he can expend a song mote to succeed instead.

Actions

Multiattack. Iahhel makes one Bite attack and two Claw attacks. Two of these attacks can be replaced by a Divine Harmony attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d10 + 5) piercing damage plus 5 (1d10) radiant damage. Iahhel can expend a song mote to make this attack with advantage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) slashing damage, and Iahhel can move the target up to 5 feet horizontally.

Divine Harmony. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +8 to hit, range 60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) thunder damage, and Iahhel can expend a song mote to cause the target to become frightened until the end of the target's next turn.

Bonus Actions

Discouragement (Costs 1 Song Mote). Iahhel chooses one creature he can see within 120 feet of him who can hear him, and sings a dispiriting melody. The next time the target makes an attack roll or saving throw in the next 10 minutes, they must roll a d10 and subtract the number rolled from the attack roll or saving throw.

Reactions

Distracting Tone. When a creature within 60 feet of Iahhel casts a spell that requires concentration, Iahhel sings a keening, painful note. The target must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or lose concentration and have the spell fail. Iahhel can expend a song mote to impose disadvantage on this saving throw.

Villain Actions

Iahhel has three villain actions. He can take each action once during an encounter after an enemy creature's turn. He can take these actions in any order but can use only one per round.

Action 1: Discouraging Chorus. Iahhel carries a disheartening song. Each creature within 120 feet of him who can hear him gains the effect of his Discouragement bonus action.

Action 2: Oncoming Despair. Iahhel bellows an ominous dirge. He moves up to his speed without provoking opportunity attacks and regains three song motes.

Action 3: Breaking Dawn (Requires the Seventh Note to be Active). Iahhel unleashes a storm of divine magic. Each creature within 60 feet of him must make a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 33 (6d10) radiant damage and is restrained by Iahhel. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't restrained. A restrained creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themself on a success.

SONGTHIEF

A songthief is a corrupted yet beautiful avian Celestial whose dark plumage shines opalescent in the light. They are drawn to spellcasters, especially bards and others who use sound to wield magic.

Songthief

Medium Celestial, Typically Neutral Evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 91 (14d8 + 28)
Speed 20 ft., fly 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Cha +6
Skills Perception +4, Performance +6
Damage Resistances radiant, thunder
Condition Immunities deafened
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Celestial
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Corrupted Cacophony. Creatures within 5 feet of the songthief have disadvantage on Constitution saving throws to maintain concentration.

Actions

Multiattack. The songthief makes one Beak attack and one Talons attack.

Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) radiant damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or be blinded until the end of their next turn.

Talons. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 16 (3d8 + 3) slashing damage if the target is blinded.

Discordant Choir (Recharge 6). The songthief trills a dissonant hymn. Each creature within 30 feet of the songthief who isn't a Celestial must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, taking 16 (3d10) thunder damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Each other songthief within 30 feet of this songthief can use their reaction to join the hymn, increasing the radius of the effect by 10 feet and the damage by 5 (1d10) per songthief. Each additional songthief doesn't expend the use of their own Discordant Choir action.

Reactions

Stolen Voice (2/Day). When a creature the songthief can hear within 30 feet of them uses an action to cast a spell with a verbal component, the songthief can steal that spell. The target must succeed on a DC 14 Charisma saving throw or have the spell fail. The songthief then casts the spell instead, using the target's spell attack bonus and spell save DC.

Varadah

Varadah is a talented mage whose corrupted magic shows the power of the fiends manipulating her.

Varadah (Corrupted)

Medium Humanoid (Dragonborn), Chaotic Evil While Corrupted (Lawful Good Normally)

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 130 (20d8 + 40)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Int +8, Wis +4
Skills Arcana +8, Perception +4
Damage Resistances cold, necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Condition Immunities charmed
Senses passive Perception 14
Languages Common
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +4

Fiend Hearts. Varadah carries three fiend hearts that she can use to empower her magic using her Consume Heart bonus action. Additionally, if Varadah fails a saving throw, she can expend a fiend heart to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. Varadah has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Actions

Multiattack. Varadah makes three Arcane Might attacks or three Gales of Power attacks.

Arcane Might. *Melee Spell Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) force damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 16 Intelligence saving throw or be dazed until the end of their next turn.

Gales of Power. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +8 to hit, range 60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (3d8 + 4) force damage.

Songs and Fire (Recharge 5–6). A whorl of discordant music and hellfire swirls out from Varadah. Each creature within 30 feet of her must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 16 (3d10) force damage and 11 (2d10) fire damage and is pushed up to 10 feet away from Varadah. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't pushed.

Bonus Actions

Consume Heart. Varadah destroys one of her fiend hearts. Until the start of her next turn, she has a +1 bonus to AC, a +4 bonus to attack rolls, and her attacks deal an extra 5 (1d10) necrotic damage.

Reactions

Arcane Shield. When Varadah takes cold, force, lightning, psychic, or necrotic damage as a result of a magical effect, she can convert that damaging energy into a magic barrier. She gains 10 temporary hit points, and until she loses those temporary hit points, each time she is hit with a melee attack, the attacker takes 5 (1d10) damage of the damage type that created the shield.

GLOSSARY

In recent issues of ARCADIA, we've begun to incorporate terminology from the upcoming *Flee, Mortals! The MCDM Monster Book*. These describe new rules designed to make combat encounters easier to run, more fun, and more memorable. Rather than scatter definitions throughout individual articles, this glossary provides a reference for terms used in *ARCADIA*.

COMPANION CREATURES

Companions are wild allies who adventure with characters. Each companion has unique traits and actions that make them a great ally. Every companion has a player character **caregiver** who commands the creature. The caregiver's player controls the companion most of the time during the game, though the GM can step in to take control if the companion and caregiver are separated, or if the caregiver mistreats the companion in some way.

The full rules for companion creatures are described in *Beastheart and Monstrous Companions*, as well as the packets available for backers of *Flee, Mortals!*

CONDITIONS

Some creatures inflict—or are immune to—the following new condition.

DAZED

A **dazed** creature can only do one of the following things on their turn: move, use an action, or use a bonus action. If a creature becomes dazed during their turn, their turn ends. The *lesser restoration* spell and *greater restoration* spell remove the dazed condition. At the GM's discretion, other powers, spells, or effects might also remove the dazed condition.

When a dazed creature is affected by a spell or effect that gives them an extra action on their turn (like the haste spell or the fighter's Action Surge feature), they can still take this extra action, in addition to the movement, action, or bonus action allowed by the dazed condition.

Some creatures have immunity to the dazed condition. At the GM's discretion, a creature published in another supplement who has immunity to the paralyzed or stunned condition also has immunity to the dazed condition.

MUNDANE AND SUPERNATURAL

The term **mundane** refers to attacks, items, and effects that are not magical, psionic, or otherwise supernatural.

On the other hand, the term **supernatural** describes an effect or item that is either magical or psionic. For instance, a creature's stat block might say they're resistant to "bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from attacks that aren't supernatural." This means that when you deal them bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage using a spell, power, magic weapon, or psionic weapon, the damage is supernatural and thus the creature isn't resistant to it.

VILLAIN ACTIONS

Some creatures are designed to be bosses: enemies who can take on an entire party by themselves or with a handful of underlings. These creatures have three **villain actions** they can use after an enemy creature's turn. Villain actions are similar to legendary actions with the following exceptions:

- A creature can only use one villain action per round (as such, villain actions tend to be more powerful than legendary actions).
- Each villain action can only be used once during a combat encounter.

Like legendary actions, a creature can't use villain actions if incapacitated or otherwise unable to take actions.

CHOOSING VILLAIN ACTIONS

Each trio of villain actions has a recommended round order. These abilities give the battle a logical flow and a cinematic arc:

- The first villain action is an opener, which shows the characters they're not battling a typical creature. Openers generally deal some damage, summon a lackey or three, buff the boss, debuff the characters, or move the creature into an advantageous position. They're just a taste of what's to come.
- The second villain action provides crowd control. It typically fires after the heroes have had a chance to respond once or twice, get into position, and surround the villain. This second action helps the villain regain the upper hand. Like an opener, this action comes in many flavors, but it's even more powerful than an opener.
- The third and final villain action is an ultimate move or "ult"—a showstopper the villain can use to deal a devastating blow to the characters before the end of the battle.

While every creature has a recommended order of actions, you can take villain actions in any order if it makes your fight more dramatic. You could push back a villain action if a creature is stunned or might stay alive for more than three rounds, or you could perform the recommended third action in round two after several surprise critical hits!

RESOURCES

MCDM TABLETOP SAFETY TOOLKIT

https://mcdm.gg/SafetyToolkit

You can find all issues of *ARCADIA* on Patreon and in the MCDM shop.

THE LAST SEVEN NOTES

https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202307/TheLast7Notes.pdf

https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202307/TheLast7NotesLast7Missing.pdf

https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202307/TheLast7NotesCompleted.mp3

https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202307/TheLast7NotesUnresolved.mp3

https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202307/ThePaenCathedral-100ppi-GM.jpg

https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202307/ThePaenCathedral-100ppi-Player.jpg



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