

ARCADE



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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 PHLEGMINGS

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 mashing 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 Goyneth 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 Goyneth—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, Goyneth'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. Goyneth 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 Goyneth, 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 mighty 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

<i>Bowl of commanding water elementals</i>	3,000 gp
<i>Ick stick</i> *	400 gp
<i>Oil of slipperiness</i>	200 gp
<i>Potion of acid resistance</i>	200 gp
<i>Slughilt</i> *	250,000 gp
<i>Vial of slick</i> *	100 gp
<i>Viscera's war drum</i> *	2,000 gp
<i>Yelly beans</i> *	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 additional 10 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 receive 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—EVER-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 Goopy 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 Goopy 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.

ITCHORS IN THE GRATE HALL

Psst ... psssssst ... PSSST! Yes, hello, lovely to make your acquaintance. I'm High Priest Allermore 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, Allermore Dépit 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.

Allermore 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. Allermore 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 alchemy. 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 Muckraker, 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 itself 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 Regigoo gains 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 themselves 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 himself 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 himself 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 <i>superior healing</i>
3	A ring of <i>lightning resistance</i>
4	Two vials of purple worm poison
5	A large moonstone worth 300 gp
6	A <i>spell scroll</i> of <i>hold monster</i>
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 <i>potions of heroism</i>
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 <i>greataxe</i>
15	A <i>tome of clear thought</i>
16	A <i>cloak of arachnida</i>
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 <i>wand of lightning bolts</i>

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 splendid 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 splendid, 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.

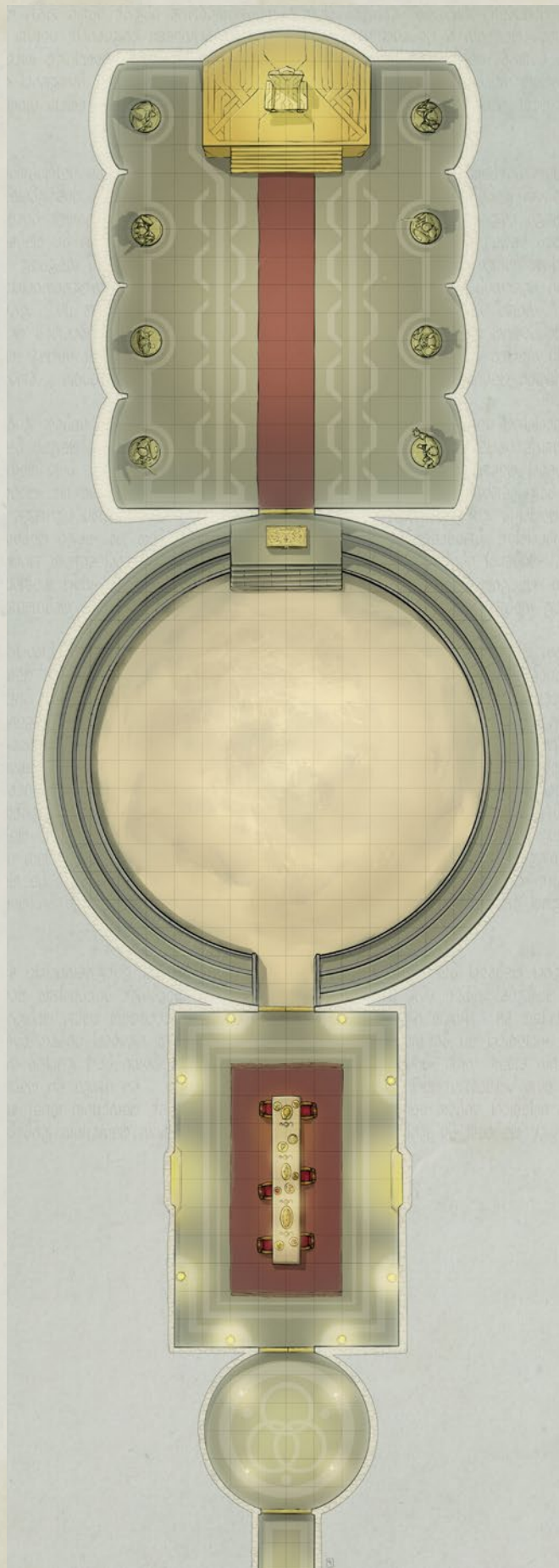
“Hone your soul in tests divine
By entering this holy shrine.
The highest-flying reach the sun
And in its rays are thus undone.

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, Akiril (ah-KRIL, he/him), is a priest preparing for his knighthood in the arena.

The two lady knights forcefully engage martial characters while Akiril swaps between healing his mothers and charging 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, Shyndyr 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 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

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)

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

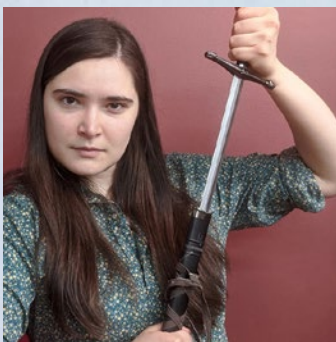
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