

# ARCADE



**MANAGING EDITOR:**  
Hannah Rose

**DEVELOPER:**  
James Introcaso

**PRODUCTION AND  
PLAYTEST DIRECTOR:**  
Lars Bakke

**EDITOR:** Sadie Lowry

**SENSITIVITY READER:**  
Daniel Kwan

**AUTHORS:** Rachael Cruz,  
Sam Mannell, Ben McFarland

**LAYOUT:**  
Jen McCleary

**COVER ART:**  
Gustavo Pelissari

**TITLE LOGO:**  
Tom Schmuck

**ACCESSIBILITY  
CONSULTANT:**  
Chris Hopper

**COMMUNITY  
COORDINATOR:**  
John Champion

**CUSTOMER SUPPORT:**  
Bobby McBride

**MCDM CONTRACT QA**  
**SENIOR TESTER:**

Spencer Hibnick

**TESTERS:** Nathan Clark,  
Cassandra “Dig” Crary,  
Alecson de Lima Junior, James  
Dewar

**INTERIOR  
ILLUSTRATIONS:**

“Unearthly Weapons”:  
Nick De Spain  
Appendix NPC: Patrik Hell  
Puzzles of Permanence:  
Matheus Graef  
(Conceptopolis)

**CARTOGRAPHY:**  
Miska Fredman

**MCDM IS:**  
Lars Bakke: Development &  
Production

Jerod Bennett: Technology  
Grace Cheung: Art  
Matt Colville: Writing &  
Design  
Nick De Spain: Art & Art  
Outsource Management  
Jason Hasenauer: Art & Art  
Direction  
James Introcaso: Lead Game  
Designer  
Hannah Rose: Managing  
Editor

**PLAYTEST  
COORDINATORS:**

AJ Metzger  
Alex Hencinski Anna  
Guimarães Clayton  
Salamon Joel Russ

**PLAYTESTERS:**

Amy Billingham  
Andrew Macdonald  
apollosukulele  
Ashley Ferrum  
Austin Bush  
Ben Doherty  
Bowie Sessions  
Casey Bell  
Casey Williams  
Celeborn Stringham  
Christopher Teale  
Forgotten  
Iris Gorton  
Isaac  
Isaiah Smith  
Jake Lagerstrom  
Luke M.  
Martijn van Meijeren  
Nicholas Renzetti  
Phillip Ada  
Robert Griffin  
Sage1589  
Skye McLaren Walton  
Tim S.  
Zouikri Ahmed Nabil

---

Join us on the MCDM Discord server, where you can chat with others about Arcadia and more!  
[mcdm.gg/discord](https://mcdm.gg/discord)

---

Product Identity: The following items are hereby identified as Product Identity, as defined in the Open Game License version 1.0a, Section 1(e), and are not Open Content: All content which is not included in the Systems Reference Document version 5.1 or has otherwise been specifically designated as Open Game Content, including Unearthly Weapons, Appendix NPC, Puzzles of Permanence, all Trademarks, registered trademarks, proper names (including the names of characters, place names, monsters, organizations, new spells, new abilities, etc.), dialogue, plots, story elements, locations, characters, artwork, graphics, sidebars, and trade dress.

# ARDENT

## 1 LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Hannah Rose

MAGIC ITEMS

## 2 UNEARTHLY WEAPONS

Ben McFarland

*Astounding magical tools of adventure*

NPCs

## 10 APPENDIX NPC: PART I

Sam Mannell

*New stat blocks to steal!*

PUZZLES ENCOUNTERS

## 26 PUZZLES OF PERMANENCE

Rachael Cruz

*Three puzzles with rewards of a more lasting nature*

## 44 RESOURCES

ISSUE 18 JULY 2022

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

In [Matt's video](#) introducing ARCADIA, he explains that he chose the name "Arcadia" for this magazine as a reference to one of the worlds in his multiverse, the Timescape. Arcadia is the home of the [true elves](#), a beautiful but dangerous place, at once familiar and different, filled with magic and art and threats other than trapped corridors and fire-breathing dragons.

In our world, the Arcadia region of Greece came to symbolize a pastoral utopia, a paradise of natural beauty inhabited by those who live in harmony with the land—a marked contrast to the stress and grime of urban life. (It seems that complaining about crowded, polluted cities and longing for the countryside has been [a popular topic for well over two thousand years](#).) Art and stories throughout history have explored the metaphor of Arcadia, including multiple seventeenth-century paintings titled [Et in Arcadia ego](#) that feature shepherds looking at a skull or tomb. The Latin phrase literally means “And in Arcadia I am,” but the speaker is understood to be Death—so the true meaning is a reminder that “even in Arcadia, there is Death.”

And how fitting that phrase is for fantasy roleplaying games! In our worlds of make-believe, we enjoy a respite from everyday complexities and indulge in the idea of a simpler time when we could make bad things go away by hitting them with swords. Yet we also *choose* to place our fantasy selves in situations where failure, heartbreak, and death are omnipresent possibilities. In order to fully experience the joys of magic, found family, and triumph over evil, our games are full of challenges, monsters, and mortal danger.<sup>1</sup>

In his video, Matt said that the name ARCADIA doesn't have anything to do with the articles themselves. That's true in the sense that the articles aren't tied to the fey realm of Arcadia in the Timescape multiverse. But Matt

and James keep telling me that ARCADIA-the-magazine is mine now, so I get to disagree: the name is very relevant. ARCADIA is our little slice of paradise that contains both beauty and death. We hope that for you, it is a garden of inspiration and nourishment, full of awesome stuff that's easy to use in your games and that excites you, terrifies you (or your players), and gives you endless opportunities for adventure.<sup>2</sup>

There is indeed both beauty and death in this month's issue of ARCADIA! “Unearthly Weapons” from [Ben McFarland](#) presents nine magic weapons with their own lore and remarkable appearances, from the *faerie queen's promise*, a changeable fey weapon forged from distilled cruelty, to the *sword of dreaming ambition*, which grows in power through sacrifice. In “Appendix NPC: Part 1,” veteran author [Sam Mannell](#) brings us a ton of amazing, much-needed NPC stat blocks that are flavorful *and* easy to run, including the arcane student, bodyguard, and hierophant. And finally, “Puzzles of Permanence” from [Rachael Cruz](#) offers three substantial drop-in puzzle rooms, making it easy to add some variety and unusual rewards to your next dungeon crawl.

I am so honored and humbled to take up the metaphorical pen as the new managing editor of ARCADIA. We're already lining up awesome stuff for next year's issues. It's going to be a blast (in some cases literally)! There's so much to explore, so many treasures to find, many monsters to fight, companions to befriend—thank you, all, for joining us on this grand adventure.

*De somnio ad itinere,*  
Hannah Rose  
Managing Editor

<sup>1</sup> YMMV. Some people choose to leave the threat of death or total failure out of their games, which is also perfectly valid. Fun can be a priority without a game being any less meaningful—and games don't have to be meaningful, though they often have a habit of ending up that way even when we don't plan on it.

<sup>2</sup> Also, ARCADIA carries some nostalgia for the old Dungeon and Dragon magazines, so it's very fitting in that way, too.



# UNEARTHLY WEAPONS

ASTOUNDING MAGICAL TOOLS OF ADVENTURE

by Ben McFarland

**BEHOLD! THE SWORD OF POWER! EXCALIBUR! FORGED WHEN THE WORLD WAS YOUNG, AND BIRD AND BEAST AND FLOWER WERE ONE WITH MAN, AND DEATH WAS BUT A DREAM!**

—THE WIZARD MERLIN, *EXCALIBUR* (1981)

## WALK SOFTLY...

In many roleplaying games, the characters wield weapons from swords to bows to greataxes to blasters to blades of superheated plasma. While the focus of a game ranges among exploration, relationships, dungeon delving, and political intrigue, characters and players enjoy seeking out cool weapons to aid them in their endeavors. Most weapons fulfill at least one of three roles: an Implement of Awesome, a Conduit for Abilities, or—last but not least—the Macguffin of Plot.

As an Implement of Awesome, a weapon offers new powers and effects beyond a character's normal range of options. The Implement of Awesome holds its own power, and the characters bring it to bear when the situation demands.

Inversely, the Conduit for Abilities augments and improves a character's skills and abilities. A conduit complements the character—it never outshines its wielder, only helps them shine brighter.

The MacGuffin of Plot acts as an agent of destiny tied to an important story event. MacGuffins serve as a personal armament, but often they also have a specific use at a certain time and place. This article presents nine magic weapons that can fulfill any of these three roles. These

items aren't limited to the form presented—you can easily adjust a sword into a maul or a longbow to better suit a specific character.

### FAERIE QUEEN'S PROMISE

This fey weapon is crafted from unbreakable obsidian with bizarre edges and fractal serrations, a smooth hilt or haft, and ostentatious ornamentation that never hinders its use in combat. The weapon reflects the light of torches, even when none burn nearby, and close inspection reveals figures glancing outward from within the obsidian, as if it were a window to some other place.

**Special Effects.** When the weapon is used to parry a blow or score a critical hit, it manifests an effect that reflects the faerie who gifted it to its wielder, such as bursts of snow or ice for the unseelie Mistress of Winter or agonized cries of the tortured for the Queen of Pain.

**Origins.** The Lady of Surf and Burning Parapets distilled the cruelty from the souls of her three greatest pirate thralls and sculpted that darkness into *faerie queen's promise*. As the Unseelie often do with mortals and items of power, they used the weapon in barter amongst their courts, where it eventually served the Lady of Acts for several centuries. By trade and intrigue, it now serves the Queen of Pain, but who knows when its fealty may shift again, as the Unseelie's Beaconstar enters Ascendance.

## FAERIE QUEEN'S PROMISE

Weapon (Any Weapon), Very Rare  
(Requires Attunement)

As a bonus action, you can make *faerie queen's promise* take the form of any melee weapon you desire, causing it to languidly melt and reform, like a cat stretching in the sun. You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. If the weapon takes the form of a ranged weapon that requires ammunition, attacking with the weapon magically creates a piece of glassy ammunition, which is consumed on impact.

While you hold this weapon, you also gain the following benefits:

- You can cast *minor illusion* as a bonus action (spell save DC 17).
- You can cast *alter self* with a duration of 24 hours. Once you use this property of the weapon, you can't do so again until next dawn.
- You can also cast *fabricate* as if you had proficiency in all artisan's tools. Once you use this property of the weapon, you can't do so again until 7 days have passed.

### Story Seed: Message for You, Sire

In exchange for using *faerie queen's promise*, a character must carry a sealed message from a fey regent's court to the court of a rival, a demon's citadel, or the stronghold of a mortal despot. Unfortunately, the letter's contents infuriate the recipient, who spitefully imprisons the characters. The characters find their true mission in the dungeons: they must free a spy in a nearby cell and escape to their patron's waiting ally.

## SACRIFICE'S WEAPON

This weapon is formed of smooth, pale bone. Some claim it was made from the body of a dead god or carved from the bones of a martyr. Its hilt or haft is crafted of glowing embers, cool to the wielder's touch, and its edges burn with translucent, heliotropic flames.

**Special Effects.** The weapon softly screams when readied and gives a pained sigh when sheathed. As the weapon parries, motes of flame fly from it, taking the form of ghostly moths before crumbling into nothing. A critical hit leaves wounds that weep illusory flame until healed.

**Origins.** Each of these weapons was created from an act of sacrifice by a saint, champion of faith, or other stalwart believer who was unquestionably dedicated to their cause. Partaking in a ritual before their death, and embarking

on a task with no chance of success nor of survival, they then became their respective weapons, pulled from the circumstances of their death. One such martyr, the daughter of the Governor of Kulilanapur (cull-ILL-ann-AH-purr), held the gate against the besieging troops of the Horned Rakshanai (rah-kah-SHAWN-eye), only to die as their fiery battering ram struck it and immolated her. Since she was a dedicated apatheist, the discovery of the *sacrifice's spear* in the rubble suggests that the power of the sacrifice itself, and not some divine action, sparks the creation of these weapons.

## SACRIFICE'S WEAPON

Weapon (Any Weapon), Very Rare  
(Requires Attunement)

When you attune to this weapon or finish a long rest while attuned to it, you can choose what form it takes. The weapon instantly reshapes to become any simple or martial weapon of your choice. If it takes the form of a ranged weapon that requires ammunition, attacking with the weapon magically creates a piece of ammunition, which crumbles to dust after the attack.

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon, which increases to a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls against Aberrations, Celestials, or Fiends. In addition, you have advantage on saving throws against spells and effects cast or created by those creatures.

When you hit an Aberration, Celestial, or Fiend with this weapon, you can choose to take 1d4 necrotic or radiant damage (your choice) to deal an additional 1d6 damage of the same type to the target. The damage you take can't be reduced in any way.

When you score a critical hit with this weapon, you can choose one of the following effects:

- The attack deals an additional 1d6 necrotic damage and 1d6 radiant damage.
- The attack deals an additional 1d6 necrotic damage and you regain 1d6 hit points.
- You take 2d4 necrotic damage, and the attack deals an additional 2d6 necrotic and 2d6 radiant damage.

When a creature (including you) takes damage from a critical hit from this weapon, they can't regain hit points until they finish a long rest.



## SPRING'S ARRIVAL

This weapon is more grown than forged, with a blade or head of pressed flowers and edges of razor-sharp grass. It has a hilt or haft of polished wood adorned with thorny vines in the bright colors of new growth.

**Special Effects.** This weapon's parries and critical hits are accompanied by a minor natural phenomenon, like a momentary rainburst, a gust of wind, tiny plants bursting from the ground, or the distant flash of sheet lightning.

**Origins.** Under the shelter of the mangrove canopy, the Full Circle druids carefully nurse rare blooms infused with the waters of the Well of Thought and Magic. The fruits that grow from these flowers contain hard, wooden stones, which are harvested, enchanted, and worked in a season-long process to create these weapons. If a weapon is lost, a special group of druids and rangers hunt it down to ensure no one can cultivate the seeds for nefarious purposes.

### SPRING'S ARRIVAL

Weapon (Any Melee Weapon),  
Very Rare (Requires Attunement)

*Spring's arrival* blossoms into a melee weapon of your choice each time you draw it, and withers away like autumn when sheathed, leaving a swirl of dried leaves that crumble and disappear. You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. In addition, you have advantage on saving throws against being poisoned and you are unaffected by plants that are magically created or manipulated to impede movement, such as those created by the *entangle* spell.

The weapon has 3 charges. As an action, you can expend 1 charge to cast *entangle*, *pass without trace*, or *spike growth* (spell save DC 14). The weapon regains all expended charges each day at dawn.

When you roll a 1, 2, or 3 on any damage die on a damage roll with this weapon, you can reroll all the damage dice. You must use the new roll. Once this property is used, it can't be used again until the next dawn.

When you score a critical hit with this weapon, you can either deal an additional 2d6 poison damage or make grasping vines spring from the weapon, forcing the target to succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or become restrained. A creature restrained in this way can use their action to make a DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check, freeing themselves on a success.

## SWORD OF DREAMING AMBITION

The black metal of this sword's basket hilt is worked into an intricate shape that varies from weapon to weapon—a scarab beetle with legs outstretched, a pattern of interlocking lotus flowers, or a cascade of shooting stars.

**Special Effects.** When this sword is drawn, the hilt glows with a mote of pure illumination and the blade forms from a shower of sparks. Sheathing the sword causes it to issue a dull, distant thud of impact. Every deflected attack or critical hit from the weapon releases motes of bright light that linger like fireflies.

**Origins.** The first *sword of dreaming ambition* was forged in the Third Age of the Sorcerer-Queen Kephaparnasut (keff-AH-par-naw-SUIT) from the heart of the star Anaxandelos (ah-NAX-an-DELL-OH-ss), claimed when the living star fell and attempted to subdue three High Draconic legions. The sword was the favorite weapon of the Imperial Duelist, Ammuth-re (AH-mooth-RAY), until their disappearance during the Festival of Blue Lilies. Afterwards, Kephaparnasut dispatched seven champions, each of whom brought back the heart of a different living star. With these pulsating stones, the Sorcerer-Queen forged more polymorphic blades using but a sliver of the rare metal. Her successor also loved the weapons and created one for every warrior in her personal guard, the One Thousand and One Solar Lotus Immortals. After the Copper Oryx Legion routed the Solar Lotus Immortals, hundreds of blades were lost.

## SWORD OF DREAMING AMBITION

Weapon (*Any Sword*), Legendary  
(Requires Attunement)

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. When you score a critical hit with the sword, you deal an additional 2d6 psychic damage.

The weapon has 2 charges for the following properties.

- At the start of your turn, you can spend 1 charge to regain 1d12 + your proficiency bonus hit points (no action required). You can regain these hit points even if you are incapacitated or unconscious.
- When you make a saving throw, you can spend 1 charge as a reaction to gain advantage on the saving throw. As part of this reaction, you can also spend inspiration to add a +5 bonus to the save.

The weapon regains both charges each day at dawn.

In addition, you can cast the *dream* spell when you take a long rest with the sword.

**Advancement.** When you gain inspiration, you can use an action to sacrifice it to the sword, which the blade consumes. When you score a critical hit against a creature with a challenge rating of 1/2 or higher with this weapon, you can choose to forgo the additional psychic damage. When you make ten sacrifices of inspiration or forgo 20d6 psychic damage from critical hits with the weapon, the sword's bonus to attack and damage rolls increases by 1, to a maximum of a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls.

## SACRIFICING WHAT?

Some GMs may not want to give players a sword that can permanently increase its enhancement bonus through the sacrifice of inspiration or extra damage from a critical hit. Instead, you can require 10 of the following sacrifice options to improve the *sword of dreaming ambition*'s bonus to attack and damage rolls by 1:

- When you make a death saving throw, you can choose to fail it.
- If you single-handedly defeat a creature with a challenge rating that is at least half your level using no weapon other than the sword and no magic other than what the sword provides, it counts as one sacrifice.
- If you make a successful saving throw against a harmful effect created by a hostile creature, you can use a reaction to sacrifice the success and turn it into a failure.

You could also require fewer sacrifices but make the bonus to attack and damage rolls temporary and have it reset when the wielder finishes a long rest. The Advancement property might require adjustment to fit your group's playstyle. If you don't want to deal with it at all, simply make the sword a rare item that doesn't have the Advancement property.

## SWORD OF FAITH

This weapon appears to be only an empty scabbard and worn grip: the blade is invisible to all but a true-believing, attuned wielder. Even then, no two wielders have described a *sword of faith* the same way. Some say the blade is weathered bronze while others see black iron, and at least one has described it as carved from the bones of some aberrant beast.

**Special Effects.** Each blow from the sword gives off sparks, and each parry releases a thunderclap. On a critical hit, arcs of harmless lightning shoot out from the point of impact.

**Origins.** The first of these blades appeared during the Temple Anarchy, as high priests and mystagogues in the City of a Thousand Altars waged a bloody feud of sect and philosophy. As edicts failed to quell the violence, zealots discovered the *sword of faith*'s creation process. Some astute observers believe the Avatar of Discord stole the secret from the Throne of Martial Glory, and distributed it via dreams in a single night. Only one fact is constant: to those who swear true belief in a god and attune to the sword, these weapons remain as visible as the sun in the sky.

### SWORD OF FAITH

Weapon (Any Sword), Very Rare  
(Requires Attunement)

You have a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. In addition, you have advantage on saving throws against enchantment spells and being charmed. When you succeed on a saving throw against an enchantment spell, you can make a Charisma (Deception) check with a DC equal to the DC of the saving throw. On a success, the caster believes you are under the effect of the spell until the start of their next turn, until you disobey them, or until you attack or do anything harmful to them.

Additionally, you have advantage on attack rolls made with the sword against creatures with the Incorporeal Movement trait. You can make an opportunity attack with the sword against a creature with the Incorporeal Movement trait without using your reaction.

When you score a critical hit with the sword, you deal an additional 2d6 radiant damage.

### Story Seed: Opportunities Exist

After the characters discover a *sword of faith*, it whispers aloud to any materially motivated characters, saying it was once the weapon of a master burglar, a hierophant of the god of thieves. The sword knows of countless heists planned but never accomplished. If the characters are willing, it can show them the kinds of robbery that only a servant of the god of larceny could dream of accomplishing. However, the sword itself isn't truly sentient; it is haunted by the ghost of the priest-burglar, who died while last wielding the blade, and can't rest until their greatest schemes are completed.

## WEAPON OF HOPE

A *weapon of hope* has an edge, head, or bowstring of pure fire. Sometimes it burns white-hot, like a roaring glass kiln, and at other times it smolders with dim orange flame, like the last remnants of a winter campfire. The flame's brightness matches the hope of the wielder, striving to be ever luminous and reassuring.

**Special Effects.** Drawing the weapon feels like a warm, reassuring handshake, and sheathing it offers the sensation of a cool, refreshing drink. When the weapon parries an attack or scores a critical hit, it releases a puff of blazing cinders.

**Origins.** Crafted by the last of the Order of Fire Stewards, the first *weapon of hope* was wielded in the People's Rebellion against Corso the Undying, Tyrant of the Eastern Reaches. Passed among four different leaders, they each kept its light a brilliant, nearly painfully bright illumination. Later wielders and observers measured the owner's worthiness to possess the weapon on the strength of its fiery manifestation. Lost in the last siege of Dar-Guthek, its return is prophesied to signal the fall of kingdoms and the People's Restoration.

## WEAPON OF HOPE

Weapon (Any Weapon), Legendary  
(Requires Attunement)

When you attune to this weapon, you see a vision of it shifting into one you desire. When the vision passes, the weapon has taken the new form. If it takes the form of a ranged weapon that requires ammunition, attacking with the weapon magically creates a piece of ammunition, which is consumed upon impact. While this ammunition appears to burn, it doesn't shed light or ignite objects.

You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. In addition, you have advantage on saving throws against being frightened. When you score a critical hit using this weapon, it burns away your foe's resolve and bolsters your own. The attack deals an extra 1d6 psychic damage, and you regain 1d6 hit points.

In addition, you and allies within 30 feet of you have advantage on death saving throws. When you or an ally within 30 feet of you has to make a death saving throw, the dying creature can choose to forgo the saving throw and instead permanently reduce their hit point maximum by 1 to regain 15 hit points.

Finally, you can cast the *heroes' feast* spell from the sword, but the benefits of consuming the feast last only 1 hour. Once you cast the spell this way, you can't do so again until next dawn.

## WEAPON OF MEMORIES

This weapon of mirrored glass alternately laughs, cries, shouts, or cheers as it cuts through the air. The area around it variably smells of freshly cooked meals, summer rains, winter snow, or woodsmoke. Once attuned, the hilt is wrapped in the hair of anyone who's ever cared for the wielder, and the pommel stares up at them with the eye of a person they have truly loved.

**Special Effects.** The weapon yawns comfortably as it slips into the scabbard. When the wielder touches the weapon to their forehead, the gentle pressure feels like a loved one's embrace.

**Origins.** The High Artifex of the Temple of the Hearth and Home forged the first thirteen *weapons of memories* in an elaborate ritual, asking every Hearthkeeper and Homeguard to donate a beloved recollection to the creation process. Over time, the reputation of the weapons grew and drew more champions to the temple's banner. The forging method was improved, and the ritual altered



to allow for more weapons to be crafted without such a grand gift. Individual Hearthkeepers and Homeguards who choose to serve even after death undergo an extended ceremony, imprinting the weapon with the whole of their lifetime over the course of a lunar month. When complete, they pass, and provide the fuel for the tempering fire. Since the Nadir Schism, the Artifex has prohibited the creation of further weapons, and a sect of the Homeguard seeks to collect them all.

## WEAPON OF MEMORIES

Weapon (Any Melee Weapon), Rare  
(Requires Attunement)

When you attune to this weapon, its form melts and shifts, blending between various forms until you select one. If the weapon takes the form of a ranged weapon that requires ammunition, attacking with the weapon magically creates a piece of ammunition, which shatters like glass and disappears after an attack.

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. In addition, you have advantage on saving throws against illusion spells.

When you regain hit points by spending Hit Dice during a short rest, you regain twice the number of hit points you normally would. Hit points you would regain beyond your hit point maximum are instead gained as temporary hit points, up to a maximum of 10 temporary hit points.

When you make an Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma check while holding the weapon, you can gain advantage on the check as you draw on the weapon's ancestral memories. Once you use this property, it can't be used again until the next dawn.

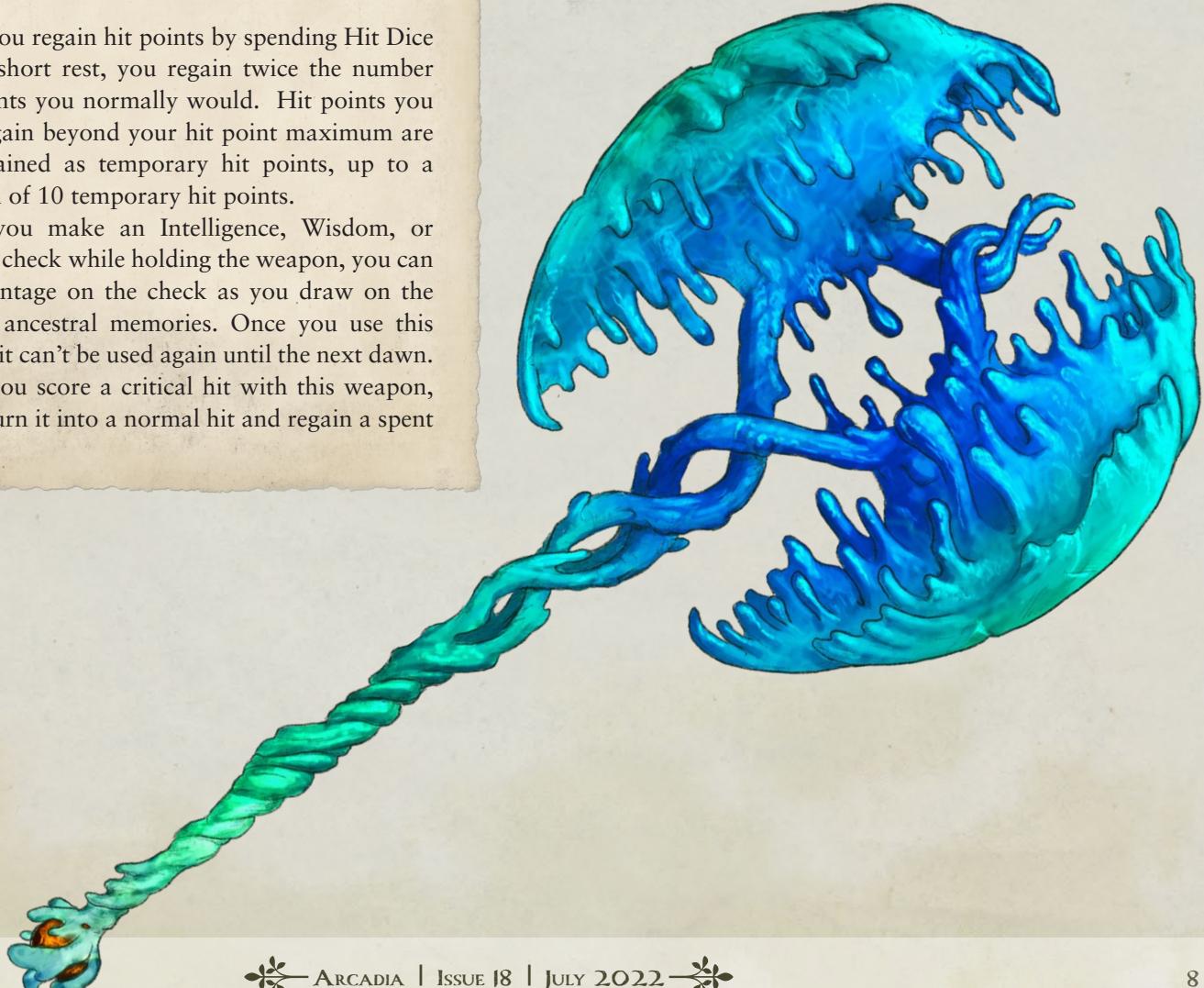
When you score a critical hit with this weapon, you can turn it into a normal hit and regain a spent Hit Die.

## WEAPON OF THE SEAS

Often discovered in the form of a full bucket or a gold-sealed urn of sloshing azure water, a *weapon of the seas* can be salty or fresh, flowing or brackish. The weapon's haft or hilt is fashioned from hardened seafoam, its pommel is the sun seen through a wave, and the edge of its blade or head offers every shifting green, blue, and white hue visible on the curling arc of a cresting wave.

**Special Effects.** When drawn, the weapon emits the sound of the tide lapping on the beach, and sheathing it produces a cool, salty breeze. Each critical hit or attack deflected with the weapon brings the crashing thunder of waves against stone and a spray of seawater.

**Origins.** Hyperoki (HII-per-roh-kee), the nereid guardian of the sea god's sacred pool on the island of Ledos, fashioned the first of these weapons from her tears. She fell in love with a shipwrecked sorcerer, but couldn't break her vows to follow them home. Instead, she crafted the first *weapon of the seas* and gave it to the adventurer, swearing it would see return to her. Priests of the sea and of love learned the process of creating such weapons, and now worthy champions seek them out before setting off on quests.



## WEAPON OF THE SEAS

Weapon (Any Weapon), Rare  
(Requires Attunement)

You can sculpt this weapon into the form of any melee weapon or object as a bonus action. If the weapon takes the form of a ranged weapon that requires ammunition, attacking with the weapon magically creates a piece of ammunition, which is consumed upon impact.

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls with this magic weapon. In addition, you gain a swimming speed of 20 feet, you don't need to drink water, and if you fall into water at least 3 feet deep you take no damage regardless of the distance fallen.

When you score a critical hit with this weapon, the target takes an additional 2d6 bludgeoning damage and is soaked with water. Until the end of your next turn, the target has advantage on saving throws made to avoid taking acid or fire damage, and disadvantage on saving throws made to avoid taking cold or lightning damage.

### Story Seed: Every Drop to Drink

A group of bandits is hunting a retired knight who carries nothing but a full waterskin and a heavy shield. The bandits approach the characters and explain that the knight used to be a vicious pirate who stole treasure from their town and hid it somewhere in the area. Now the knight seeks to donate the treasure to their liege ruler and doesn't care who may have owned it beforehand. The race is on as the knight plunges into a warren of caverns occupied by hungry ghouls who once served as his crew. If the characters can find the knight, he explains that his waterskin is a *weapon of the seas* and that he needs to give away the treasure to free his old comrades so they can find rest at last. The bandits want the treasure *and* the knight's weapon—and perhaps a spot of revenge.

## WEAPON OF TIME

A *weapon of time* has a shining steel blade or head, fixed in a haft of slate and dark earth. The flesh of those killed by such a weapon shrivels, crumbles, and blows away, leaving only bones.

**Special Effects.** When drawn or sheathed, the weapon produces a flash of light like the first rays of the morning or the last gleam of twilight. Each parried attack causes a puff of fine dust. On a critical hit, the sound of a crumbling landslide or a falling tree fills the air. The wielder's

reflection within the weapon's steel occasionally alters to reveal what they looked like in their youth or what they'll look like in old age.

**Origins.** No one knows where—or when—the *weapons of time* came into being. Some wizards claim they are from the future and have been rippling backward in time for many years now. Scholars interested in *weapons of time* often find new references to the arms in historical accounts, pushing back the first appearance of this magic item to hundreds of years ago.

## WEAPON OF TIME

Weapon (Any), Very Rare  
(Requires Attunement)

As a bonus action, you can make the *weapon of time* take the form of any weapon you desire. If the weapon takes the form of a ranged weapon that requires ammunition, attacking with the weapon magically creates a piece of ammunition, which winks out of existence after the attack. You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. In addition, you have advantage on initiative rolls and Dexterity saving throws.

You can cast either the *expeditious retreat* spell or the *haste* spell from the weapon as a bonus action. Once you use the weapon to cast a spell, it can't be used to cast the same spell again until the next dawn.

When you score a critical hit against a creature with this weapon, the creature takes an additional 1d6 necrotic damage and must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the creature suffers the following effects for 1 minute:

- Their speed is halved, they take a -2 penalty to AC and Dexterity saving throws, and they can't take reactions.
- On their turn, they can use either an action or a bonus action, not both.
- Regardless of their abilities or magic items, they can't make more than one melee or ranged attack during their turn.
- If they attempt to cast a spell with a casting time of 1 action, roll a d20. On an 11 or higher, the spell doesn't take effect until their next turn, and they must use their action on that turn to complete the spell. If they can't, the spell is wasted.

The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect early on a success.

# APPENDIX NPC: PART 1

NEW STAT BLOCKS TO STEAL!

by Sam Mannell

**H**i there! Sam here! Can't talk long—I'm busy, and so are you. We've got sessions to run, adventures to design, and lives to live!

When I prep a game or design a module, I want grabbing stats for encounters to be easy, fun, and fast. But too often I come up short on NPCs, either settling for something that's not quite right or having to design something from scratch. Annoying! This article contains fourteen new stat blocks you can steal, reskin, or tear to shreds.

Prep fast, game more!

## CONTENTS

The stat blocks in this article are listed in order of challenge rating to make them easier to find. Click a link to jump straight to the right page:

<a href="#">Torchbearer</a>	(CR 1)
<a href="#">Arcane Student</a>	(CR 2)
<a href="#">Alchemist</a>	(CR 3)
<a href="#">Inventor</a>	(CR 4)
Signature Weapons	
<a href="#">Mercenary</a>	(CR 4)
<a href="#">Deadeye</a>	(CR 5)
<a href="#">Explorer</a>	(CR 5)
<a href="#">Detective</a>	(CR 6)
<a href="#">Troubadour-Warrior</a>	(CR 6)
<a href="#">Bodyguard</a>	(CR 7)
<a href="#">Rōnin</a>	(CR 7)
<a href="#">Martial Arts Master</a>	(CR 7)
<a href="#">Honor Guard</a>	(CR 8)
<a href="#">Hierophant</a>	(CR 8)



HIEROPHANT

# TORCHBEARER

The torchbearer is a hireling prepared to do some heavy lifting for the characters. They make a decent scout and distraction, though they are less likely to survive a whole adventure if they serve as such at every opportunity.

Ideally, enemies should attack the torchbearer whenever they need to choose between the characters or the unfortunate soul hired to carry the loot. Needless to say, there's some bleak comedy baked into this NPC that may not go over well at every table or in every adventure. Your mileage may vary!

## TORCHBEARER

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

**ARMOR CLASS** 13 (leather armor)

**HIT POINTS** 37 (5d8 + 15)

**SPEED** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

**SAVING THROWS** Dex +4, Con +5

**SKILLS** Athletics +4, Perception +2

**SENSES** passive Perception 12

**LANGUAGES** any one language (usually Common)

**CHALLENGE** 1 (200 XP)

**PROFICIENCY BONUS** +2

**Guiding Beacon.** A lit torch held by the torchbearer provides bright light in a 25-foot radius and dim light for an additional 25 feet.

**Lucky Break.** When the torchbearer takes damage from a trap, roll a d6. On a 6, the trap breaks down or misses at the last second and the torchbearer miraculously takes no damage.

**Sitting Duck.** If an allied creature within 5 feet of the torchbearer is hit by an attack, the creature can use their reaction to cause the attack to hit the torchbearer instead.

## ACTIONS

**Multiaction.** The torchbearer makes two melee attacks.

**Shortsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

**Burning Torch.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) fire damage. A flammable object hit by this attack ignites if it isn't being worn or carried.

# ARCANE STUDENT

Unlike an apprentice, this novice wizard already has several years of study and experience. They won't outmatch the characters, but they have a few tricks up their star-patterned sleeves.

The arcane student stat block includes a randomly generated element so that a GM can quickly populate an encounter in a magical school with a handful of relatively unique wizards.

## ARCANE STUDENT

Medium Humanoid (Wizard), Any Alignment

**ARMOR CLASS** 13 (18 with the *shield* spell)

**HIT POINTS** 31 (7d8)

**SPEED** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

**SAVING THROWS** Dex +5, Int +5

**SKILLS** Arcana +5, History +5

**SENSES** passive Perception 12

**LANGUAGES** any two languages

**CHALLENGE** 2 (450 XP)

**PROFICIENCY BONUS** +2

**Arcane Artifice.** Each student has one of the following magical advantages (choose one or roll a d4):

- Training Wand (3/Day).** When the student sees a creature within 30 feet of them casting a spell of 3rd level or lower with a casting time of 1 action, the student can use their reaction to store the same spell in their wand. As an action on their next turn, the student can cast the spell from their wand, requiring no components. If the spell is not cast, it disappears from the wand at the end of the student's turn.
- Dust of Glimmering (1/Day).** As a bonus action, the student can blow a handful of dust in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in this area must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or shed dim light in a 10-foot radius for 1 minute. Any attack roll against an affected creature has advantage if the attacker can see them, and the affected creature can't benefit from being invisible.
- Familiar.** The student can cast the *find familiar* spell at will and is accompanied by a familiar.

- Cloak of Fading (1/Day).** When the student takes damage, they can use their reaction to teleport, along with any equipment they are wearing or carrying, up to 60 feet to an unoccupied space that they can see, leaving behind an empty, nonmagical cloak in the space they left.

### ACTIONS

**Fire Bolt (Cantrip).** *Ranged Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d10) fire damage. A flammable object hit by this spell ignites if it isn't being worn or carried.

**Magic Missile (3/Day; 1st-Level Spell).** The student creates three glowing darts of magical force. Each dart hits a creature the student can see within 120 feet. A dart deals 3 (1d4 + 1) force damage to its target. The darts all strike simultaneously, and the student can direct them to hit one creature or several.

**Thunderwave (1/Day; 1st-Level Spell).** Each creature in a 15-foot cube originating from the student must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 9 (2d8) thunder damage and is pushed 10 feet away from the student. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't pushed.

In addition, unsecured objects that are completely within the area of effect are automatically pushed 10 feet away from the student, and the thunderwave emits a thunderous boom audible out to 300 feet.

### REACTIONS

**Shield (1/Day; 1st-Level Spell).** When the student is hit by an attack or targeted by the *magic missile* spell, an invisible barrier of magical force appears and protects them. Until the start of their next turn, the student has a +5 bonus to AC, including against the triggering attack, and takes no damage from *magic missile*.

# ALCHEMIST

While most alchemists aren't combatants and don't last long on the front lines, they make effective controllers, locking down areas with oozes and noxious gas. Their chemical reactions can dish out damage, but their effectiveness is limited by how far they can throw a glass vial, which isn't far! An alchemist cornered in their lab is more dangerous than one out in the open.

If you want to pump up the challenge, give the alchemist a few potions to chug right before battle starts or during the action. For example, if the alchemist knows the characters favor *lightning bolt* and has time to prepare, they could drink a *potion of lightning resistance*. Alternatively, give the alchemist a potion to drink when they are reduced to 30 hit points or fewer; an alchemist under the effects of a *potion of flying* can rain explosive vials from above or make a quick escape. Alchemists expecting trouble might break open some onyx ooze vials or put their choking vial cloud in place just before a fight breaks out, but some players might riot if they feel like they've been blindsided by the cloud exploding if they didn't see the alchemist set it up!

## ALCHEMIST

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

**ARMOR CLASS** 13

**HIT POINTS** 60 (11d8 + 11)

**SPEED** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	9 (-1)

**SAVING THROWS** Dex +5, Int +5

**SKILLS** Investigation +5, Medicine +3, Nature +5, Perception +3, Sleight of Hand +5

**DAMAGE RESISTANCES** fire

**DAMAGE IMMUNITIES** acid

**SENSES** passive Perception 13

**LANGUAGES** any one language (usually Common)

**CHALLENGE** 3 (700 XP)

**PROFICIENCY BONUS** +2

### ACTIONS

**Dagger.** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

**Explosive Vial.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d10) fire damage.

**Onyx Ooze Vial (3/Day).** The alchemist hurls a glass vial containing a captive onyx ooze at an unoccupied space they can see within 20 feet of them. The ooze expands on contact with air, becoming a Medium-sized creature. The ooze acts immediately after the alchemist in the initiative

count. The ooze attacks the creature closest to it and is not under the alchemist's control.

The onyx ooze uses the gray ooze stat block with the following change: If the ooze takes fire damage it explodes and is destroyed, and all creatures within 10 feet of the ooze must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The explosion spreads around corners and ignites flammable objects within 10 feet of the ooze that aren't being worn or carried.

**Choking Vial (1/Day).** The alchemist hurls a glass vial filled with noxious gas at a point they can see within 20 feet of them, and a 20-foot-radius sphere of gas centered on that point emerges from the vial. The gas lingers in the air for 1 minute. Each creature that starts its turn in that cloud must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw against poison or spend their action retching and reeling. Creatures that don't need to breathe or are immune to poison automatically succeed on this saving throw. Additionally, fire ignites the cloud, consuming it. Creatures inside the cloud when it ignites take 21 (6d6) fire damage.

### BONUS ACTIONS

**Acid Vial.** The alchemist hurls a glass vial of acid at a point they can see within 20 feet of them. Each creature within 5 feet of that point must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 3 (1d6) acid damage.

# INVENTOR

The inventor is a popular NPC archetype, and for good reason! Their penchant for mechanical marvels makes them a favorite ally of adventurers, who are excited to see what experimental items the inventor has ready for them. And if it doesn't explode, they get to keep it!

But what happens if the inventor is pushed into combat? The inventor's strengths lie in creating incredible contraptions, so their attack options depend heavily on the equipment they create. Each inventor has a signature weapon that shapes how they behave in combat. Below are four example weapons that you can use or take inspiration from to create your own.

## SIGNATURE WEAPONS

Below are the full details for the four example signature weapons included in the inventor's stat block.

### Blade-Thrower

*Martial Ranged Weapon*

**Damage:** 1d10 slashing

**Properties:** Ammunition (range 80/320), heavy, loading, special, two-handed

The blade-thrower resembles a large crossbow, but rather than firing bolts, it fires large, flat discs of sharpened metal.

**Collateral Damage.** If an attack from this weapon reduces a creature to 0 hit points, the target is cut in half and dies, and the blade continues on its path in a straight line for the remainder of its normal range, attacking the next creature or object in the line.

### Conductor

*Simple Melee Weapon*

**Damage:** 1d6 bludgeoning + 1d6 lightning

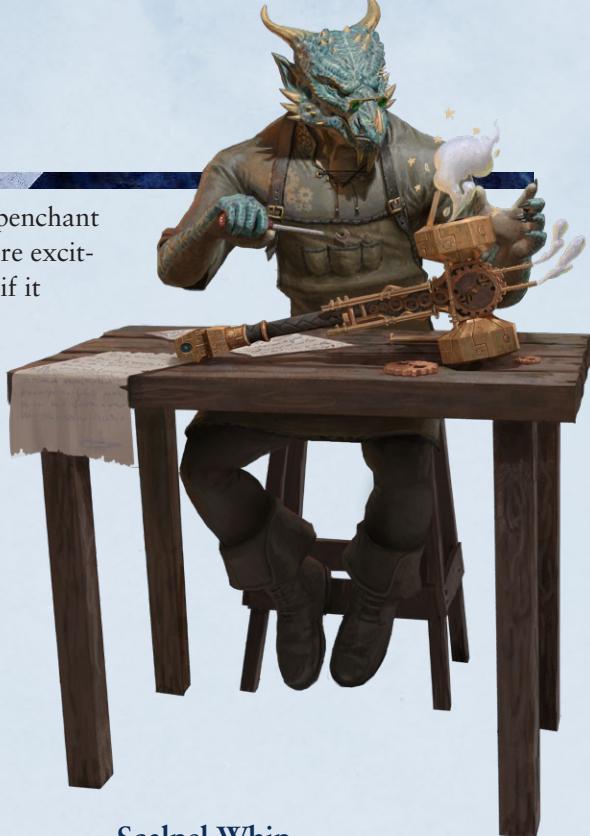
**Properties:** Special

The conductor is a shining steel mace, charged with an electric current that deals lightning damage to a target.

**Electrostatic Strike.** The wielder can make a special attack with this weapon that deals normal bludgeoning damage and 18 (4d8) lightning damage, and the target falls prone and must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or become paralyzed until the end of their next turn.

Additionally, each creature touching the initial target, connected to them by metal, or in the same body of water as the target is also hit with this special attack.

Once this property has been used, the conductor can't be used to make another Electrostatic Strike or deal lightning damage for 24 hours.



### Scalpel Whip

*Martial Melee Weapon*

**Damage:** 1d6 slashing + 1d6 poison

**Properties:** Finesse, reach, special

The scalpel whip appears to be a normal knife with a guard, grip, and pommel, but when the pommel is twisted, the blade uncoils on a long cable from within the hilt, giving it the reach property. The blade is also tipped with poison, making it a deadly weapon in trained hands.

**Grapple.** On a hit, the scalpel whip grapples the target (escape DC 14). On subsequent turns, the wielder of the scalpel whip can use an action to make a contested Strength check against the grappled creature, knocking them prone on a success. While grappling a target with this weapon, the wielder can't attack another target with this weapon.

### Velocity Hammer

*Martial Melee Weapon*

**Damage:** 2d6 bludgeoning

**Properties:** Heavy, special, two-handed

The velocity hammer appears to be a maul at first glance. Once in motion, a complex series of weights integrated into the weapon begins to move, generating additional kinetic energy. The weapon needs time to complete revolutions, so it can only be used to make one attack per turn.

**Perpetual Murder Machine.** Each successive attack with the weapon deals an extra 1d6 force damage. This additional damage resets if the wielder doesn't hit with the weapon during their turn.

# INVENTOR

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

ARMOR CLASS 13

HIT POINTS 77 (14d8 + 14)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	9 (-1)

SAVING THROWS Dex +5, Int +6

SKILLS Perception +3, Stealth +5

SENSES passive Perception 13

LANGUAGES any one language (usually Common)

CHALLENGE 4 (1,100 XP)

PROFICIENCY BONUS +2

**Mechanical Mastery.** The inventor automatically succeeds on Intelligence and Wisdom checks related to machines and other mechanical objects or contraptions.

**Signature Weapon.** The inventor wields one of the following signature weapons: blade-thrower, conductor, scalpel whip, or velocity hammer. The inventor only carries one of these weapons and uses their Intelligence modifier, instead of Strength or Dexterity, for the weapon's attack and damage rolls.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The inventor makes two attacks with their signature weapon, unless their signature weapon is a velocity hammer.

**Blade-Thrower.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d10 + 4) slashing damage. If this damage reduces the target to 0 hit points, they are cut in half and die, and the blade continues on its path in a straight line for the remainder of its normal range, attacking the next creature or object in the line.

**Conductor.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) lightning damage.

**Electrostatic Strike (1/Day; Conductor Only).** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 18 (4d8) lightning damage, and the target falls prone and must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or become paralyzed until the end of their next turn.

Additionally, each creature touching the initial target, connected to the target by metal, or in the same body of water as the target is also hit with this attack. Once this action has been used the conductor can't deal lightning damage until it is available again.

**Scalpel Whip.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) slashing damage plus 3 (1d6) poison damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 14). At the start of the grappled creature's turn, they must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or fall prone. On subsequent turns, the inventor can use an action to make a contested Strength check against the grappled creature, knocking the grappled creature prone on a success. While grappling a creature with this weapon, the inventor can't attack another target.

**Velocity Hammer (1/Turn).** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage. Each successive hit with this attack deals an additional 3 (1d6) force damage. This extra damage resets if the inventor doesn't hit with this attack during their turn.

## BONUS ACTIONS

**Gadget (1/Day).** The inventor produces a Tiny or Small object that has the same properties as a common or uncommon wondrous item of the inventor's choice. This object falls apart and becomes useless after 1 hour. Choose one of the following or make your own:

- An unfolding propeller with a crank that has the properties of a *wind fan*
- A metal glove that fires energy from the fingertips that has the properties of a *circlet of blasting*
- An earring that has the properties of a *helm of comprehending languages*
- A bug pheromone perfume that has the properties of *eyes of charming*
- A pair of spring-heeled boots that has the properties of *boots of striding and springing*
- A face mask that has the properties of a *necklace of adaptation*

**Signal Scrambler.** A Construct that the inventor can see within 60 feet of them must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or become stunned until the end of its next turn.

# MERCENARY

Out of all the core monsters, I find one monster never gets old ... humans! Thugs already exist in the core rules, but mercenaries are different. They're professionals. They're good at what they do—which is hurting people.

Some are in it for the money. As an optional rule, a mercenary can be paid off and leave their target alone for a fee of 5 gp per week or a one-time fee of 100 gp. If an offer is made during combat, the mercenary must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or agree to take it.

But some mercs aren't in it for the money anymore. They get paid, spend big, and head back out. No retiring. Maybe they like the job—cold-hearted killers who find murdering for villains agreeable. For best results when roleplaying these mercs, picture the worst bully you can imagine, then triple that nasty attitude.

Or maybe a mercenary just doesn't have anything else besides the company. Maybe they never had anything else to begin with. Maybe the trade has consumed them. In any case, no matter how you hold them up to the light and judge them, they're standing between your heroes and victory.

This stat block is designed for mercenaries to work in groups, hitting hard and rattling the characters, making these killers more satisfying to overcome.

## MERCENARY

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

**ARMOR CLASS** 18 (plate)

**HIT POINTS** 75 (10d8 + 30)

**SPEED** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	9 (-1)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)

**SAVING THROWS** Str +5, Con +5

**SKILLS** Athletics +5, Intimidation +3

**SENSES** passive Perception 11

**LANGUAGES** any one language (usually Common)

**CHALLENGE** 4 (1,100 XP)

**PROFICIENCY BONUS** +2

**Take Positions.** When the mercenary hits a creature with a weapon attack, any allied mercenaries within 30 feet of the target can move up to half their speed (no action required).

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The mercenary makes two Longsword attacks or Light Crossbow attacks.

**Longsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

**Light Crossbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

### REACTIONS

**Squad Tactics.** When a creature the mercenary can see hits another creature with an attack, the mercenary can make a weapon attack against the attacker.

# DEADEYE

The deadeye is a lethal sharpshooter, ideal for when you want to throw a single dangerous sniper at the characters.

This deadeye is a tough wilderness survival expert, but you could easily deploy them as an urban assassin by tweaking their skill proficiencies.

## DEADEYE

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

**ARMOR CLASS** 16 (studded leather)

**HIT POINTS** 93 (17d8 + 17)

**SPEED** 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	19 (+4)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	8 (-1)

**SAVING THROWS** Dex +7, Con +4

**SKILLS** Acrobatics +7, Athletics +3, Nature +3, Perception +7, Stealth +7, Survival +7

**SENSES** passive Perception 17

**LANGUAGES** any one language (usually Common)

**CHALLENGE** 5 (1,800 XP)

**PROFICIENCY BONUS** +3

**Cloak and Dagger.** While the deadeye is hidden, they don't give away their location if they miss with a weapon attack.

**Deadly Aim.** Once per turn when the deadeye hits a creature with a weapon attack, they place a deadeye mark on the target after dealing damage. These marks vanish if the deadeye loses sight of the marked creature, if the marked

creature dies or falls unconscious, or if the deadeye attacks a new target.

When the deadeye hits a marked creature with a ranged weapon attack, the target takes an additional 1d8 damage for each of the deadeye's marks on the target. A creature can have up to three of a deadeye's marks.

**Keen Hearing and Sight.** The deadeye has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or sight.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The deadeye makes three Longbow or Shortsword attacks.

**Shortsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

**Longbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

### BONUS ACTIONS

**Nimble Escape.** The deadeye takes the Disengage or Hide action.

# EXPLORER

Like the torchbearer, the explorer is an ally for adventurers, with traits and actions that aid travel and dungeon-delving. Your characters might team up with an explorer mid-quest, hire one as a guide to the local area, or be asked to accompany one as part of a job.

Ideally, the characters will like having an explorer tagging along, making it all the more gut-wrenching when the NPC eventually bites the dust facing a monster they can't handle!

## EXPLORER

*Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment*

**ARMOR CLASS** 15 (studded leather)

**HIT POINTS** 112 (15d8 + 45)

**SPEED** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)

**SAVING THROWS** Str +6, Con +6, Wis +5

**SKILLS** Athletics +6, Investigation +3, Perception +5,  
Survival +5

**SENSES** passive Perception 15

**LANGUAGES** any three languages

**CHALLENGE** 5 (1,800 XP)

**PROFICIENCY BONUS** +3

**Coordinated Strike.** When the explorer hits a target with an attack, each creature that can see the target can use their reaction to make a weapon attack against the target.

**Refreshing Respite.** During a short rest, the explorer and friendly creatures that can see them can reroll any roll of 1 or 2 when they spend Hit Dice to regain hit points at the end of that rest.

**Seeker.** The explorer has advantage on Intelligence (Investigation) and Wisdom (Perception) checks made to detect the presence of secret doors and hidden traps, and can always recall the path back to where they entered an underground area, such as a dungeon or cave.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The explorer makes two Longsword attacks.

**Longsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage.

**Heavy Crossbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 100/400, one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) piercing damage.

**Reinforced Net.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 5/15 ft., one Large or smaller creature. *Hit:* The target is restrained. A creature can use its action to make a DC 15 Strength check to free itself or another creature in a net, ending the effect on a success. Dealing 15 slashing damage to the net (AC 15) frees the target without harming it and destroys the net.

# DETECTIVE

A seasoned investigator with a sharp eye and a strong set of ability scores. Detective NPCs don't show up in every game, but when they do, they should be as tough as they seem. Some of the lower challenge rating stat blocks in the core rules can fill this role, but these NPCs tend not to last long enough in a fight to slip away and report back to their boss.

If you're running a game of urban intrigue, this detective can also be deployed as a high-level espionage agent in the service of a powerful faction.

## DETECTIVE

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

**ARMOR CLASS** 19 (studded leather, Calculated Defense)

**HIT POINTS** 65 (10d8 + 20)

**SPEED** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	17 (+3)	19 (+4)	17 (+3)

**SAVING THROWS** Dex +7, Int +6, Wis +7

**SKILLS** Deception +6, Insight +7, Investigation +9, Perception +10, Persuasion +6, Stealth +7

**SENSES** passive Perception 20

**LANGUAGES** any two languages

**CHALLENGE** 6 (2,300 XP)

**PROFICIENCY BONUS** +3

**Calculated Defense.** While the detective is wearing light or no armor and wielding no shield, their AC includes their Intelligence modifier.

**Evasion.** If the detective is subjected to an effect that allows them to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, the detective instead takes no damage if they succeed on the saving throw and only half damage if they fail, provided the detective isn't incapacitated.

**Sneak Attack (1/turn).** The detective deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the detective that isn't incapacitated and the detective doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

**Switched On.** The detective automatically detects illusions they can see and automatically succeeds on saving throws against them.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The detective makes three Sword Cane attacks. They can replace one of those attacks with a Hand Crossbow attack.

**Sword Cane.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

**Hand Crossbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

### BONUS ACTIONS

**Cunning Action.** The detective takes the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

### REACTIONS

**Uncanny Dodge.** The detective halves the damage that they take from an attack that hits them. The detective must be able to see the attacker.

# TROUBADOUR-WARRIOR

From the Old Testament and the *Iliad* to the conflicts of the modern era, war always begets poetry. A troubadour NPC wanders the edges of conflict and sings at the heart of it, penning inspiration in the face of tragedy.

You can reskin this stat block to fit any culture in your world, such as an Old Norse-inspired skald, a Celtic bard, or a Persian warrior-poet.

## TROUBADOUR-WARRIOR

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

**ARMOR CLASS** 16 (chain mail)

**HIT POINTS** 120 (16d8 + 48)

**SPEED** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)

**SAVING THROWS** Con +6, Wis +6, Cha +7

**SKILLS** Athletics +6, History +6, Insight +6, Perception +6, Performance +7, Persuasion +7

**SENSES** passive Perception 16

**LANGUAGES** any three languages

**CHALLENGE** 6 (2,300 XP)

**PROFICIENCIES** +3

**Battle Chant.** The troubadour-warrior recites songs of victory laced with magic while fighting. Willing allies within 60 feet of the troubadour-warrior that can hear them are immune to being frightened and gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls and saving throws.

Additionally, enemy creatures within 60 feet of the troubadour-warrior that can hear them have a -1 penalty to attack rolls and saving throws. Spellsinging doesn't interfere with Battle Chant and vice versa.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The troubadour-warrior makes three Warhammer attacks. They can also use Spellsinging, if available.

**Warhammer. Melee Weapon Attack:** +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

**Spellsinging.** The troubadour-warrior casts one of the following spells, requiring no material or somatic components and using Charisma as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 15):

3/day each: *bestow curse, hypnotic pattern, shatter, thunderwave*

1/day each: *confusion, dimension door*

# BODYGUARD

There comes a time when the characters need to capture or dispatch a VIP—a mob boss, a minor noble, a corrupt archpriest—who isn't a great threat on their own. The bodyguard makes a squishy target a tougher nut to crack, and makes a great addition to your standard evil mage encounter.

The bodyguard is most powerful when right beside their charge, ready to use their reaction to soak up attacks with their impressive AC and hit points. They also have movement options for getting their charge out of a dangerous situation if things go south.

## BODYGUARD

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

**ARMOR CLASS** 19 (splint, shield)

**HIT POINTS** 153 (18d8 + 72)

**SPEED** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	19 (+4)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)

**SAVING THROWS** Str +7, Con +7

**SKILLS** Athletics +7, Insight +6, Perception +6

**SENSES** passive Perception 16

**LANGUAGES** any one language (usually Common)

**CHALLENGE** 7 (2,900 XP)

**PROFICIENCY BONUS** +3

**Charge.** The bodyguard can designate another creature to be their charge. When a creature within 5 feet of the bodyguard hits the charge with an attack, the bodyguard can make a melee attack against the creature (no action required). The bodyguard can only have one charge at a time.

**With Me, My Liege!** If the bodyguard moves while their charge is within 5 feet of them, the charge can move up to their speed, remaining within 5 feet of the bodyguard (no action required for the charge).

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The bodyguard makes three Longsword attacks or three Throwing Knife attacks. They can replace one Longsword attack with a Shield Bash attack.

**Longsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage.

**Shield Bash.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) bludgeoning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

**Throwing Knife.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage.

**Run!** The bodyguard shouts to their charge. If the charge is within 60 feet of the bodyguard and can hear them, the charge can immediately move up to their speed without provoking opportunity attacks (no action required for the charge).

### REACTIONS

**Life and Limb.** When the bodyguard is within 5 feet of their charge and a creature the bodyguard can see attacks the charge, the bodyguard can swap positions with the charge and become the target of the attack instead.



# RŌNIN

The rōnin is a classic character archetype, drifting from town to town with only a blade for company. The specific cultural analog is a masterless or lordless samurai. This NPC aims to replicate [cinematic rōnin](#), not necessarily actual samurai, as there is a difference.

The stat block below uses a daishō, a set of two blades, one long and one short. These are traditionally associated with samurai and the word is used here to help conjure [a specific look](#).

When running this NPC in combat, don't be afraid to put them in the thick of it—they can combine the Parry reaction with the Counterattack trait to make any enemy think twice about taking a stab at them, and they have ways to get out of a tough spot.

## RŌNIN

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

**ARMOR CLASS** 16 (Unarmored Defense)

**HIT POINTS** 136 (16d8 + 64)

**SPEED** 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

**SAVING THROWS** Str +7, Con +7, Wis +6

**SKILLS** Athletics +7, Insight +6, Perception +6,  
Stealth +6, Survival +6

**SENSES** passive Perception 16

**LANGUAGES** any one language (usually Common)

**CHALLENGE** 7 (2,900 XP)

**PROFICIENCY BONUS** +3

**Counterattack.** When a creature within 5 feet of the rōnin misses them with an attack, the rōnin can make one attack against the creature (no action required).

**Unarmored Defense.** While the rōnin is wearing no armor and wielding no shield, their AC includes their Wisdom modifier.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The rōnin makes four Daishō attacks.

**Daishō.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d10 + 4) slashing damage.

**Lethal Cut (Recharge 4–6).** The rōnin leaps up to 15 feet in any direction then uses Multiattack.

**Swift Strike (1/Day).** The rōnin flies up to 30 feet in a straight line. During this movement, the rōnin can make up to six Daishō attacks against one or several targets within 5 feet of the line.

## REACTIONS

**Parry.** The rōnin adds 4 to their AC against one melee or ranged weapon attack that would hit them. To do so, the rōnin must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

# MARTIAL ARTS MASTER

The fifth edition monk is widely regarded as a strong class with cool abilities: running on walls, stunning strike, many attacks in one round ... the list goes on! Stealing class features is a great starting point for creating villainous NPCs that drive your campaign, and [monks prove deadly on the battlefield](#).

Deploying this NPC against your players is even more fun if you have a monk character in the party, because the fantasy of [martial artists locked in combat](#) is so strong and easy to imagine, drawing on conventions from the [wuxia](#) genre, which roughly translates to “martial” (wu) “hero/vigilante” (xia).

NPC options for monks exist in the core rules, but none can challenge the characters beyond low levels. The master isn’t as easy to beat, and could be the head of a monastery or simply an extremely experienced practitioner of their art.

## MARTIAL ARTS MASTER

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

**ARMOR CLASS** 18 (Unarmored Defense)

**HIT POINTS** 84 (13d8 + 26)

**SPEED** 45 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	19 (+4)	15 (+2)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)

**SAVING THROWS** Str +6, Dex +7, Wis +7

**SKILLS** Acrobatics +7, Insight +7, Perception +7, Stealth +7

**SENSES** passive Perception 17

**LANGUAGES** any one language (usually Common)

**CHALLENGE** 7 (2,900 XP)

**PROFICIENCY BONUS** +3

**Ki Transfer (1/turn).** When the master hits a target that has more than 0 ki points with a melee weapon attack, the master can make a contested Wisdom check against the target. If the target loses the contest, they lose 1 ki point. If the target wins the contest, they gain 1 ki point. If this trait reduces the target to 0 ki points, the target falls unconscious.

**Unarmored Defense.** While the master is wearing no armor and wielding no shield, their AC includes their Wisdom modifier.

**Unarmored Movement.** While the master is wearing no armor, they can move along vertical surfaces and across liquids without falling during their movement.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The master makes six attacks.

**Unarmed Strike.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

**Stunning Strike (3/day).** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of the master’s next turn.

**Wind God Strike (1/day).** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage. If the target has 100 hit points or fewer, they must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or drop to 0 hit points.

**Dart.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage.

### REACTIONS

**Deflect Missile.** In response to being hit by a ranged weapon attack, the master deflects the missile. The damage they take from the attack is reduced by 1d10 + 4. If the damage is reduced to 0, the master catches the missile if it’s small enough to hold in one hand and the master has a hand free. If the master catches a missile in this way, they can immediately make a ranged attack (+7 to hit, range 20/60 feet) with the weapon or piece of ammunition they just caught, which deals 8 (1d8 + 4) damage of the weapon’s type on hit.

# HONOR GUARD

The usual rank-and-file guards aren't powerful enough to defend evil kings or vital locations! Enter the honor guard, bound by oath to serve to the death, never retreating nor surrendering.

While the bodyguard is adept at protecting another creature, the honor guard defends a location of importance, such as a throne room, a sacred burial ground, or a vault holding an item of power. If your villain rules a powerful kingdom or organization, chances are they have a handful of honor guards around them at all times.

## HONOR GUARD

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

**ARMOR CLASS** 18 (plate)

**HIT POINTS** 153 (18d8 + 72)

**SPEED** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

**SAVING THROWS** Str +7, Dex +5, Con +7, Wis +6

**SKILLS** Athletics +7, Intimidation +6, Perception +6

**SENSES** passive Perception 16

**LANGUAGES** any one language (usually Common)

**CHALLENGE** 8 (3,900 XP)

**PROFICIENCY BONUS** +3

**Bloody Zeal.** While the guard has half their hit points or fewer, their weapon attacks score a critical hit on a roll of 18–20.

**Unquenchable.** When the guard is reduced to 0 hit points, they drop to 1 hit point instead and become immune to all damage until the end of their next turn. If the guard still has 1 hit point at the end of their next turn, they are reduced to 0 hit points.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The guard makes three Greataxe attacks.

**Greataxe.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d12 + 4) slashing damage.

### REACTIONS

**Battle Hardened.** When a creature within 15 feet of the guard hits another creature with an attack, the guard can move up to half their speed toward the attacker. If the guard ends the movement within 5 feet of the attacker, they can make a weapon attack against the attacker.

# HIEROPHANT

The hierophant is a stat block for the infrequent (but often compelling) villainous [druid](#). There's a wide gap between challenge rating 2 and challenge rating 12 when it comes to druid NPCs in the official rules, so this one sits near the middle at challenge rating 8.

Druuids are relatively rare as enemies, but they might tangle with your party for any number of good reasons. Why not take a leaf<sup>1</sup> from Poison Ivy's book and create a druid that believes the expansion of civilization is destroying the natural world, and thus, y'know ... maybe a few cities need to burn to balance things out? This motivation works great if the characters empathize; maybe the hierophant was tipped over the edge by the destruction of

their grove, razed to make way for an advancing nation's border.

You could also go the "morals don't apply to nature" route. Things kill each other every day. The strong prey on the weak. Is a tiger evil for feeding its young? Who gets to decide what "evil" even is? Typhoid and swans ... it all comes from the same place.

Heck, a hierophant might want to fight the party for merely entering the wrong forest or stepping on the wrong flower! What makes their lives more important than the flora and fauna they might endanger?

And, of course, you don't need to use the hierophant as an enemy. But they do have villain actions!

<sup>1</sup> Sorry.

# HIEROPHANT

Medium Humanoid (Any Ancestry), Any Alignment

**ARMOR CLASS** 14 (hide armor)

**HIT POINTS** 137 (25d8 + 25)

**SPEED** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)	17 (+3)

**SAVING THROWS** Dex +5, Wis +8, Cha +6

**SKILLS** Medicine +8, Nature +5, Perception +8, Stealth +5

**SENSES** passive Perception 18

**LANGUAGES** Druidic plus any two languages

**CHALLENGE** 8 (3,900 XP)

**PROFICIENCY BONUS** +3

## ACTIONS

**Multiaction.** The hierophant casts up to three spells.

**Flame Blade** (2nd-Level Spell). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) fire damage.

**Call Lightning** (3rd-Level Spell). A magical bolt of lightning flashes down from the sky to a point the hierophant can see within 120 feet of them. Each creature within 5 feet of that point must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 16 (3d10) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

**Tree Stride** (3/Day; 5th-Level Spell). The hierophant enters a tree using 5 feet of movement, and moves from inside it to inside another tree of the same kind within 500 feet, appearing within 5 feet of the destination tree. Both trees must be living and at least the same size as the hierophant.

**Heal** (1/Day; 6th-Level Spell). A creature the hierophant can see within 60 feet regains 70 hit points. This spell also ends blindness, deafness, and any diseases affecting the target. This spell has no effect on Constructs or Undead.

## BONUS ACTIONS

**Control Plants.** Thick vines grow from beneath one creature or object the hierophant can see within 60 feet, attempting to grab and restrain the target. The target must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or become grappled (escape DC 15). If the target is already grappled by this action, then they also become restrained while grappled. A mass of vines that only has a creature grappled has AC 11 and 10 hit points. A mass of vines that has a creature restrained has AC 11 and 30 hit points.

## REACTIONS

**Féth Fiada** (1/Day). When the hierophant takes damage, they can create a 10-foot-high, 60-foot-radius cylinder of mist centered on themselves, and the hierophant turns invisible for 10 minutes or until they attack or cast a spell. When the mist first appears, the hierophant and up to five creatures they choose can see through the mist. For all other creatures, the mist is filled with strange and haunting illusions; trees appear to move on their own, cold whispers linger in the air, and all sense of direction is lost. Each affected creature within the mist is blinded, has their speed halved, and can't hear the voices of any other creatures within the mist but can still hear their own. The mist dissipates after 10 minutes, when the hierophant is incapacitated, or when a wind of moderate or greater speed (at least 10 miles per hour) disperses it.

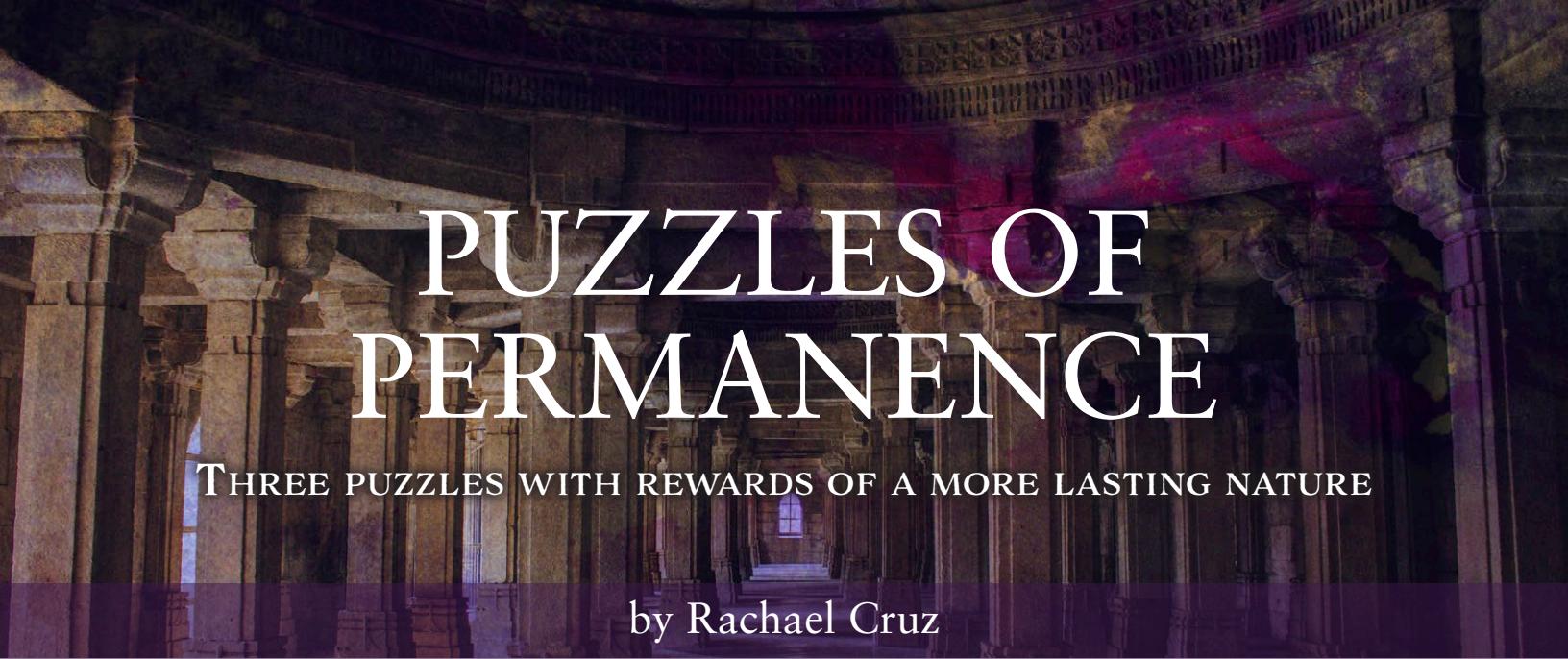
## VILLAIN ACTIONS

The hierophant has three villain actions. They can take each action once during an encounter after an enemy creature's turn. They can take these actions in any order but can only use one per round.

**Action 1: Wild Compulsion.** The hierophant chooses up to five creatures that they can see within 60 feet of them. Those creatures can move up to their speed (no action required).

**Action 2: Discordant Drone.** Each enemy of the hierophant's choice within 60 feet of them that can hear the hierophant has any spell of 3rd level or lower that is affecting them end, and any enemy spellcasters of the hierophant's choice within 60 feet of them that are concentrating on a spell and can hear the hierophant must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or lose concentration.

**Action 3: Blood Sacrifice.** The hierophant targets up to five allied creatures with fewer hit points than their hit point maximum that the hierophant can see within 60 feet of them. Each target is reduced to 0 hit points, and up to five other creatures of the hierophant's choice within 60 feet of them gain temporary hit points equal to the hit points lost by the initial targets divided by the number of targets (rounded down). While a creature has temporary hit points granted by this villain action, they make attack rolls with advantage and have resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage.



# PUZZLES OF PERMANENCE

THREE PUZZLES WITH REWARDS OF A MORE LASTING NATURE

by Rachael Cruz

EACH PUZZLE ROOM AND RIDDLE HAS A REASON TO EXIST, ELSE IT'S NO MORE THAN A PISS-POOR TRAP.

—PROFESSOR HINSTERN, COLLEGE OF ASPIRANTS

Puzzle and riddle rooms are a staple of dungeon crawling. Solving them excites players and often leads their character to treasure. All the coins and jewels, shinies and sparklies, and—aren't you bored already?

How about something new? This article provides three drop-in puzzle rooms that lead not to transient riches, but instead a permanent reward! For added fun, don't let your players know that solving these puzzles leads to a lasting benefit. Surprise them!

## RIDDLES IN STANDING STONE

In this aged courtyard, a golem hides in plain sight as a statue and turns passersby to stone. The characters must defeat the golem to pass through, but if they're clever, they can recruit the golem's previous victims before they are also petrified.

This scenario is recommended for characters below 7th level, as the stone golem (CR 10) is meant to be a deadly challenge, and spells like *dimension door* will make the puzzle trivial. This location is shown in the Riddles in Standing Stone map.

This place was awe-inspiring once. The impressive courtyard stretches wide, its carved walls of aged stone depicting heroes of old in the heat of their most glorious moments. Faded and chipped, the brown mosaic floor was long ago vividly colored, its golden edging directing wandering feet toward a grand, arching entrance. Now the rubble under each archway only hints at what were once exquisitely carved statues.

The ground level of the courtyard holds the only intact statues, five humanoid creatures caught in motion. Their strange, too-fluid poses reveal a horrifying truth: these are adventurers who have been turned to stone! Whatever lies here, these poor souls did not survive it.

## REMAINING STATUES

Five intact statues of Humanoids are scattered about the ground level. Each is a petrified adventurer frozen mid-action and has the same phrase carved into the stone in front of it.

YOU  
ARE  
NOT  
WORTHY

*Detect magic* reveals that the graffitied tiles emanate an aura of transmutation magic. Each statue weighs 1,650 pounds. If a statue is moved, an observer using the *detect magic* spell sees a faded tether of transmutation magic from the tile to the statue.

### AVONOR

A human in heavy plate armor swings a giant greatsword clutched tightly in his hands. This is Avonor (he/him), a fighter. If freed, he responds objectively, paces when thinking hard, and seeks praise and flattery. Avonor uses the **knight** stat block (or the **swordmaster** retainer stat block if you use the retainer rules from *Strongholds & Followers*).

### SESTRA

A human in carefully layered chainmail extends her arms in supplication, her mace pointed down in a gesture of peace. This is Sestra (she/her), a cleric of a deity of twilight. If freed, she is guilt-ridden from failing her party. Sestra uses the **priest** stat block (or the **healer** retainer stat block if you use the retainer rules from *Strongholds & Followers*).

### GIL-THILIEEN

Crouched low to the ground, an elf thrusts one fist forward, clutching the pommel of a dagger, its blade broken off. This is Gil-Thilien the rogue (they/them). They are short, but lithe and dextrous. If freed, they smile contagiously and exercise prim manners, tucking a napkin into their shirt at every meal, even for rations on the road. Gil-Thilien uses the **spy** stat block (or the **cutpurse** retainer stat block if you use the retainer rules from *Strongholds & Followers*).

### DOUBTLESS

An intense tiefling in swirling robes levels their arm as though casting a spell. The statue's forearm is missing,



broken some time ago. This is Doubtless (he/they). If freed, the kind warlock is shocked by the lack of a forearm, which he swears was there before, but he is startlingly lighthearted about it: “Missing: one beautiful forearm. Hand has five fingers and a magic ring on it. If found, please return the ring. Keep the hand.” Doubtless uses the **cult fanatic** stat block (or the **diabolist** retainer stat block if you use the retainer rules from *Strongholds & Followers*).

## URREN

A stern dwarf stands with shoulders squared, his expression roaring as if he is barking orders. This is Urren (he/him), a stately warrior. If freed, he is very outgoing and affable until battle, where he shouts orders in a booming, gravelly voice. He has a soft spot for stray animals, incessantly adopting them, and is allergic to shellfish. Urren uses the **veteran** stat block (or the **warlord** retainer stat block if you use the retainer rules from *Strongholds & Followers*).

## GUARDIAN STATUE

One final statue dominates the end of the courtyard, blocking the archway the characters must pass through. The statue, an exquisitely carved warrior standing at alert, is dressed in ornate plate armor that bears intricate carvings: tiny heroes similar to the ones on the courtyard walls. Under its full helmet, sharp eyes stare out from the depths of its stony face.

If a character moves within 5 feet of the statue or attempts to harm it, it comes to life and attacks, fighting until destroyed or ordered to stand down by a worthy creature (see “Crossing the Archway”). It understands Common and uses the **stone golem** stat block with the following additional bonus action option:

**You Are Not Worthy.** With eerie green light, the figures on the golem’s breastplate turn their gazes onto one creature of the golem’s choice they can see within 30 feet of them. The target must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or they begin to turn to stone and are restrained.

The restrained creature must repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns. On the target’s third success, the effect ends. On the target’s third failure, they become Petrified and the words “YOU ARE NOT WORTHY” appear at their feet. The successes and failures don’t need to be consecutive; the creature track both until they collect three of a kind.

## CROSSING THE ARCHWAY

To get through the gate, the characters have two options: destroy the statue in combat or find a worthy creature to order it to stand down.

Words carved into the stone arch crown the massive statue’s head like a halo: “Only the worthy can command passage.”

## BECOMING WORTHY

The easiest way to solve this puzzle is to physically change one of the petrified victims’ graffiti by using an action to remove or alter the “NOT” so that the inscription reads “YOU ARE WORTHY” or “YOU ARE NOW WORTHY.” If this change is made to the floor tile while the golem is actively protecting the arch, the adventurer returns to flesh and is no longer petrified.

Freed NPCs help the characters defeat the golem in battle or figure out the next step in the puzzle. With the “You are Worthy” tile cleared, a creature who stands on the tile can command the golem to stand down and allow the group passage.

## STUMPED?

Here are hints to help your players to solve this puzzle. A successful Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals the following information:

**DC 12.** It seems only a worthy creature can get past the golem without harm.

**DC 15.** The statues are clearly labeled “not worthy.”

**DC 18.** What if a creature was labeled “worthy”?

## REWARD

If the puzzle is solved, one freed NPC gratefully swears themselves to the characters’ cause. The NPC does whatever the characters ask (within reason), from following them as a retainer or squire to running operations at a home base. The other freed NPCs go home, but they could reach out to the characters to provide story hooks for future adventures.



# EVER FORWARD

In ruins far beneath the earth, a long-forgotten treasure lies within an enormous, gyroscopic puzzle ball. Closed doors guard the path through each layer of the puzzle ball, and the characters need to solve the puzzles on the doors to progress. At the center, a magical artifact awaits—one the characters create together.

This scenario can be run for characters of any level, but keep in mind that your party will win a potentially powerful artifact if they solve all the puzzles.

## BACKGROUND

Ages ago, two now-deceased brothers used a djinn's wish to create three powerful wisps of magic with substance and sentience. The wisps, when used, would shape themselves to the wielder's will and become artifacts.

The brothers used two of these three wisps for themselves, leaving one final wisp. To protect and preserve it, they created a space that contains a series of moving globes—a living, layered puzzle ball whose center holds a wisp ready to become an artifact.

## THE ANCIENTS' PROMISE

No matter the environment the adventurers explore, they come upon a thematically appropriate door. It could be an actual door, an archway, a gate, a circle of carved trees, or writing on a cave wall, so long as there is no way back once they start forward. Give them the chance to read the invitation on the entry:

“The world grows not through apathy and indecision, but through curiosity and action. Those who stride ever forward change the future of this world.”

When the characters cross the threshold, the entrance closes behind them. There is no turning back now, and the way ahead is to [somewhere entirely new](#).

## BRIDGE OF GLASS

The characters find themselves on a bridge beneath a floating layered globe: a 100-foot-diameter puzzle ball with several rotating layers. The bridge stands 200 feet above a cavern floor. The cavern is filled with bright light that streams down from the ceiling.

When the characters first enter, the puzzle ball floats downward until its outside is flush with an archway at the



end of this bridge. When the puzzle is solved, the entire first layer of the globe turns to reveal the way forward into the globe.

You stand on a thin bridge of solid stone and engraved metal. Nothingness stretches out to either side. There are no supporting walls—just the path forward to a massive, spinning sphere made of many layers.

When, the characters reach the arch on the outside of the sphere, read:

A sphere of metal and stone looms, enormous. It is bulbous and sloping, a massive globe whose patterns are quickly lost by its constant whirling speed. Occasionally, brief gaps appear in the sphere and blue light shines from the ball's center.

The bridge ends in a large, sloping archway. The arch follows the curvature of the globe without touching it, and beneath it, the way beyond is blocked by the globe. For now, you are locked outside.

The only paths from here are forward ... or down. And down seems like a particularly fatal choice. There must be a way through the arch.

## BYPASSING THE PUZZLE

If the characters have access to spells like *dimension door* or *meld into stone*, they might be able to bypass each sphere without solving the puzzles. Feel free to allow this if you think it will be more fun for you and your players.

If you want to give your players more of a challenge, remember that this place was designed to keep intruders out. You could decide it was prepared for spellcasting thieves and that any spell, except for *wish*, can't be used to bypass the puzzles.

## THE FIRST ARCHWAY

The first archway has the same invitation as the entrance engraved in multiple languages, along with advice on how to solve this puzzle.

The world grows not through apathy and indecision, but through curiosity and action. Those who stride ever forward change the future of this world.

Stride ever forward. Press only the correct symbols.

Beneath the arch, seven long panels take up the section blocking the way forward. Some panels are metallic, while others are stone bas-reliefs. Each panel presents imagery and symbols. The following images are depicted on the panels:

- A still figure meditates on a stone block
- A hart mid-leap, its graceful legs arched
- The word “choose” is sculpted into a block of stone
- A sword: static, unwielded, and on display
- A child, nose buried in a book, wonder on their face
- A metal panel that appears to be an obscure shape. It is tempting to stare at it for a while.
- A person facing away from the observer, looking back over their shoulder

You can give the players the First Archway handout at the end of this article to help them solve this puzzle.

## STUMPED?

Here are hints to help your players to solve this puzzle. A successful Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals the following information:

**DC 12.** Some of these panels are more animated than others.

**DC 15.** Whoever wrote this likes the concepts of curiosity, action, and forward motion.

**DC 18.** What happens when you push a tile that represents curiosity, action, or forward motion?

## Solution

To move forward, the characters must press the symbols that represent curiosity, action, and moving forward: the leaping stag, the word “choose,” the figure meditating, and the curious child reading the book. The other symbols encourage inaction or turning back.

When a panel is pressed, it grows warm to the touch, glows faintly, and hums with electricity. If the characters press a correct panel, nothing happens. If the characters press an incorrect symbol, each creature within 30 feet of the arch takes 10 (3d6) lightning damage. In addition, the panels reset and must be pressed again.

Once the correct panels are activated, the outer globe shudders and the bridge trembles. The floor doesn’t drop from below them, but let the players sweat a bit about the bridge’s stability—“You don’t know” is a great answer to any question.

As the bridge trembles beneath your feet, the outer globe moves. Its slow turning groans, the deep bellows of effort reverberating through the space.

Finally, a gap appears at the bottom of the archway. The opening grows, and when the globe finally stops, the archway is clear, and a similar bridge awaits. Ever forward!

## THE SECOND ARCHWAY

This second bridge continues for 15 feet, then stops at another archway.

This bridge continues, and inset below the glowing glass is the phrase “EVER FORWARD” in many languages.

Another archway soon looms ahead. The sphere’s next layer reflects the soft glow of the path, creating a strange feeling of misdirection and confusion. The claustrophobic walls loom in front and behind.

This time, the space below the arch is solid stone. The square panels, each six inches wide, contain two rows of individual letters arranged to form the following message:

“EACH OF US VERILY HAS A DUTY TO ACT  
FOR WHEN HARDSHIP THREATENS, WHERE  
MUST WE STRIDE?”

The character with the highest passive Wisdom (Perception) score notices that the letter blocks are pressure plates that can be pressed inward. The solution is to press in the blocks that form the phrase “EVER FORWARD.” You can give the players the Second Archway handout at the end of this article to help them solve this puzzle.

There are multiple correct answers to this puzzle, but the phrase must be spelled properly, with one word per line. Here are two examples of correct answers:

EACH OF US VERILY HAS A DUTY TO ACT  
FOR WHEN HARDSHIP THREATENS, WHERE  
MUST WE STRIDE?

EACH OF US VERILY HAS A DUTY TO ACT  
FOR WHEN HARDSHIP THREATENS, WHERE  
MUST WE STRIDE?

If an incorrect or out-of-sequence letter is pressed, any depressed letters pop back out and each creature within 30 feet of the arch takes **10 (3d6) lightning damage**.

When the last correct letter is pressed, another great shudder shakes the bridge below the characters, and the second globe rotates in a different direction than the first.

## STUMPED?

Here are hints to help your players to solve this puzzle. A successful Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals the following information:

**DC 12.** Each letter of the question is on a separate tile. There must be a reason for that.

**DC 15.** This wall is asking a question. Maybe the answer is a phrase you’ve seen?

**DC 18.** Maybe the answer can be spelled using the tiles.

The globe begins its slow rotation. New pictures and panels soon appear below the archway, coming and going as the great ball turns.

Some of these panels tell a story. Each lingers a moment before revealing the next picture.

A single gem hovers in midair. Just as it is turned away from view, a new picture comes into view: a figure, hand outstretched inquisitively. The figure’s hand remains in view when the next set of pictures appear: suns and moons, swords and shields, circles and triangles.

A final picture forms: the inquisitive figure with their hands around the gem, holding it up in triumph. The globe turns upward, the figure lifting out of sight as the next doorway is made plain. It settles into place, and once again you are left in silence with another bridge before you.

## “WHAT IF I JUMP?”

Once the characters clear the first bridge, impatient (or lost) characters may throw caution to the wind and jump on the globe to find the next door.

It's a foolish gamble, but it is also a way forward. A creature that jumps on the globe must succeed on a DC 19 Strength (Athletics) to hang onto the ball. On a failure, they fall 50 feet and hit the inside floor of the globe, taking 17 (5d6) bludgeoning damage from the fall.

To climb around the sphere and search for the opening, a creature must succeed on a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to maneuver without cutting themselves on a sharp piece of metal. On a failure, they take 11 (2d10) slashing damage. If the creature continues, they must succeed on a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check to reach the opening on the underside of the globe, falling off on a failure. A creature that succeeds finds the opening, which is covered by a force field.

The door's force field can be removed by solving the puzzle, casting a *disintegrate* spell, or casting a successful *dispel magic* (DC 19) spell.

The bridge within the second sphere is vertical smooth glass. A creature that climbs the bridge must succeed on a DC 22 Strength (Athletics) check or slide back out into the first globe.

To reach the last door, a creature must climb to the top of the final globe, which requires a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check, and remove that door's force field.

## THE LAST ARCHWAY

Another short bridge extends forward. As the characters step through the arch, the previous globe shifts, removing the opening behind them. They're locked in here.

At the end of this bridge, an intricate web of stone and metal awaits, woven into words:

Our duty was to prepare and preserve.

To promise and protect.

To create and destroy.

Once the threshold is crossed, there is no turning back.

To those unwilling to step ever forward, speak these words and be freed:

“My purpose is not here. This place is not mine. I relinquish my hold on you.”

To those willing to continue onward, speak these words:

“The world grows not through apathy and indecision, but through curiosity and action. I am ready.”

The characters should make their choices individually. If any character speaks the phrase to back out, they are teleported to the spot where they originally found the puzzle room. The teleportation comes with a parting “gift” from the creators: each character who leaves takes 11 (2d10) lightning damage. The entrance to the puzzle room is gone. If it was an actual door, it now leads elsewhere: a supply closet or somesuch.

The characters who remain must speak the appropriate phrase. Once they finish reading the engraving, the stone shudders a final time and then opens to the final room.

## TO CREATE AND DESTROY

The room at the center has a 45-foot diameter. Viewed from the outside, the globe is a series of puzzles, but viewed from within, it is a shifting landscape of words and pictures. They tell stories of legendary heroes and the godlike artifacts that helped them shape the world.

A cylindrical pedestal of carved stone and metal, 5 feet tall and 3 feet in diameter, stands at the center of the sphere. It is made of 6 turnable rings.

Light glows from within the pedestal's layers. If the characters approach, they hear a sound like a soft, relieved sigh as the glow fades, floats up through the top of the pedestal, and convalesces into a wispy, floating ball of light. It hovers in the center of the pedestal and speaks directly into the characters' minds:

“I am awakened and ready for my purpose. As you are all part of my destiny, so too shall I be a part of each of you. Answer my questions, and I shall shape myself to your purpose.”

### Artifact Reward

The ball of light gives each character a chance to answer one question from the list below. Once an answer is given, it can't be changed. After the questions are answered, you create a magic artifact for the characters.

**The Questions.** These questions provide the characters with options for creating the artifact. Be open with your players and discuss where their options might lead (see the Building an Artifact table). The ball of light encourages characters to give the reasoning behind the answers, which will help you create the specific artifact they desire.

As the characters consider each question, the outer globes turn to form small, fleeting pictures. The images are blurry and indistinct, but may be peeks into possible futures. Each answer a character picks appears on the pedestal, engraved in a glowing script.

The questions listed here ensure that at least six characters get a chance to answer. You can remove or add questions as needed to involve everyone.

- Does this artifact create or destroy?
- Does this artifact prepare or preserve?
- Does this artifact reveal or protect?
- Does this artifact bring order or chaos?
- Does this artifact affect magic or mundane things?
- Is this artifact worn or held?

For more inspiration for legendary items beyond what's provided on the table below, use this [additional resource](#), which covers typical artifacts like armor and shields all the way to random things like the wealth-promising *Death Underpants*. It's a thing.

**Making the Artifact.** Use the answers to create or choose an existing property from a magic item in the core rules. The Building an Artifact table includes magic items with existing properties you can add to the artifact or ideas for properties if you wish to create your own. After you create the artifact, give it 1 minor beneficial property and 1 minor detrimental property from the core rules.

Any character who takes part in the creation of the artifact never has trouble wielding it and can ignore its detrimental property, even if its purpose is to be difficult for anyone else to wield.

You don't need to decide the artifact's properties on the spot. Record the answers from the players at the end of a game session, then give them the full details next time after building the item.

## BUILDING AN ARTIFACT

ANSWERS	SAMPLE MAGIC ITEMS	IDEAS FOR PROPERTIES
Create	<i>decanter of endless water, figurine of wondrous power, instant fortress</i>	Create food and water, summon a helpful creature, or swiftly grow plants
Destroy	<i>necklace of fireballs, ring of the ram, staff of fire</i>	Cast damage-dealing spells, curse creatures or places, or create natural disasters
Prepare	<i>efficient quiver, gem of seeing, rope of climbing</i>	Pause time, gain knowledge, or create a never-ending stock of an expendable supply (such as ammunition)
Preserve	<i>mirror of life trapping, necklace of adaptation, restorative ointment</i>	Put creatures to sleep, regenerate hit points, preserve a body, or stave off death
Reveal	<i>candle of invocation, crystal ball of true seeing, lantern of revealing</i>	Tell truth from lies, connect two or more creatures telepathically, or reveal something unseen
Protect	<i>brooch of shielding, mantle of spell resistance, periapt of wound closure</i>	Increase AC, give a bonus to saving throws, shield allies from danger, or hide creatures or items
Bring Order	<i>dimensional shackles, handy haversack, iron bands of binding</i>	Grant allies bonuses, capture creatures, or organize inventory
Bring Chaos	<i>bag of tricks, dust of sneezing and choking, eversmoking bottle</i>	Produce random effects, cause panic, or frighten creatures
Magic	<i>ioun stone, rod of security, wand of magic detection</i>	Nullify or dispel magic, create consumable magic items, or enhance the effects of spells
Mundane	<i>horseshoes of a zephyr, potion of animal friendship, robe of useful items</i>	Influence weather, charm animals, or nourish large groups
Worn	<i>cloak of the bat, hat of disguise, ring of animal influence</i>	Armor, belts, cloaks, gloves, headgear, or rings
Held	<i>feather token, immovable rod, staff of healing</i>	Lanterns, rods, shields, staffs, wands, or weapons

## Return to Reality

Once the characters answer the questions, read or paraphrase the following:

The outer globes heave. The lazy spin that had been informative—comforting, even—grows faster and faster. The floor groans, and the entrance closes with a loud, metallic screech.

Despite the chaos outside, this inner chamber remains still. As though nothing is happening, the wispy, glowing ball sighs contentedly, nestling onto the top of the pedestal, and speaks one last time. “And so I am given purpose! Use me well, and together we will shape the future. Ever forward!”

The wisp grows brighter and brighter, changing its shape to suit the futures that they have chosen. Once the wisp takes its new form, the outer globes slow to a gentle stop and all is silent. An archway opens on the opposite side of the room. Sharp-eyed characters may notice the turning globes occasionally show likenesses of the characters—they are now a part of history.

The archway returns the characters to the spot where they originally found the puzzle room. To the characters who declined and were teleported outside earlier, the other adventurers were gone just a split second before returning. The entrance disappears. It seems, for weal or woe, the adventurers now have an artifact to protect.

Ever forward!

## ICHANDRIX'S MERCY

What happens when the puzzler is the one who needs help? In this encounter, the characters can win the favor of a sphinx, who was tricked and ensnared.

This scenario begins in front of a door guarded by an androsphinx, and can be added to any dungeon that might harbor such a creature.

## BACKGROUND

Centuries ago, the androsphinx Ichandrix ran afoul of epic-level adventurers. Disciples of the god of trickery, the adventurers trapped him in stone and hid the answer to his freedom in three rooms behind him. By gathering the pieces of the riddle, the characters answer the riddle and free the androsphinx.

## LOCATION

This location is shown in the Inchandrix's Mercy map. The ceilings in this area are 15 feet high, the rooms are old and decrepit, and there are no light sources save for those the characters bring with them.

The first room contains Ichandrix, an **androsphinx** who is restrained by the floor. When the characters enter, read or paraphrase:

A single door looms ahead. Whatever lies beyond must be important, judging by the once-magnificent creature guarding it.

The sphinx is emaciated. His limbs are thin and malnourished, making his thick front paws appear enormous. His wings are thin and ragged, the bone structure supporting them pressing angrily against thin-stretched skin. The decorative pectoral plate around his neck is a torturous weight, the golden collar's sheen dulled and the colored stone inlays half empty.

Most noticeably, the sphinx's leonine hindquarters are stone, melded into the floor itself.

“Halt, traveler.” His voice is thick and raspy from disuse, yet intense with supplication. “You stand before Ichandrix, once the guardian of grand libraries and treasures untold. Now, I am a guardian of nothing. Ichandrix the tricked. Ichandrix the trapped. Will you help me?”

## AN UNEXPECTED TWIST

Ichandrix explains that many ages ago, he faced tremendously powerful adventurers who followed the god of trickery. They soundly defeated him, and as punishment for daring to challenge them, the adventurers cursed him. He is unable to move from the spot until the curse is lifted. Nothing short of a *wish* spell move the sphinx or the stone around him—even chopping off his legs only results in their immediate regrowth. As an additional insult, the tricksters set up rooms behind him with hints on how to lift the curse, ensuring he would never see the hints himself.

The androsphinx promises grand rewards if the characters help him collect the hints and solve the mystery of his imprisonment. If they agree, he explains the specific wording of his curse (which can be given to the players in the Ichandrix's Curse handout):



You are cursed this day and ever  
To stand before this door  
With stone for hind and tail,  
Body present evermore.  
  
Behind you are the chambers three,  
With tools that lead to curse's end.  
One carries you out upon their flesh,  
Forever shall you be their friend.

## THREE RIDDLE ROOMS

Each of the three rooms beyond Ichandrix has a puzzle, which leads to a clue for breaking his curse. By gathering each room's clues and pertinent items, the characters discover the answer to the sphinx's freedom lies in a magical tattoo.

If the characters are stumped, they can return to Ichandrix for assistance. His body may be stuck, but his mind still works and he loves riddles. It's up to you how much he provides, but the "Stumped" sidebars are a good place to find ideas he may share.

Sharp-minded characters may realize that the curse only specifies his body. If no one picks up on this, they can find it out in the rooms behind him. If they do point it out early, Ichandrix gets excited and urges them to check the rooms to see what other hints are there. He wants to know exactly what lies behind him before taking any action.

## Blood Room

This room is a wreck. The bricks here are old, gray stone with splatters of unsettling, rusty brown all about. The room is torn apart, and remnants of what must have been a beautiful office library remain. The books are shredded and aged, threatening to disintegrate at the first touch.

In the center of a room lies a statue of a sorrowful lion made of the same stone as the walls. Written on its pedestal are the words:

Countless magics have I borne,  
Countless maps of history.  
Flowing wine, eternal ink,  
Held within a family tree.  
Speak my name to set me free.

Give the players the West Room handout at the end of this article. The correct answer is “blood.” Once a character says this word aloud, the statue reacts: a panel on the side of the pedestal opens, and a tiny gold-rimmed bowl rolls to the ground. It has the following inscription:

You cannot take me from stone unless you also have a bone. Take me with you.

## STUMPED?

Here are hints to help your players to solve this puzzle. A successful Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals the following information:

**DC 12.** What often carries magic, or is a source of magic?

**DC 15.** What substance is both liquid and leaves a lasting stain?

**DC 18.** What contributes to both a person’s history and their family tree? How does one track that? What is one tracking in a family tree?

## Rod Room

The stone in front of this door has a pressure-plate false trap—when the characters trigger it, nothing happens. It’s just to mess with an adventurer’s mind. God of trickery, remember?

When 20 or more pounds of pressure are placed on the plate, it sinks with an audible hiss. Just enough to make the characters look around wildly for an oncoming trap and maybe wonder if they successfully disarmed it or not.

When the characters enter this room, read or paraphrase the following:

This room used to be some sort of laboratory that was picked clean of valuables long ago. The books are in a pathetic state. Shelves full of discolored beakers and other detritus clog every wall of the room. In the corner, a figure covered in a shroud lies on an examination table. A broad desk’s surface is surprisingly empty, considering how chaotic everything else is.

A riddle is carved into the surface of the wooden desk. While the desk has no drawers, there is a very tiny keyhole on one side.

The riddle reads as follows (found in the Middle Room handout at the end of the article):

Hook and flute and fork and pin,  
The greatest magic lies within.  
So many tools to make and teach  
When inside yourself you reach.

You’ll need some help, it’s child’s play:  
The ailing patient points the way.  
Find me, and take me with you.

## STUMPED?

Here are hints to help your players to solve this puzzle. A successful Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals the following information:

**DC 12.** The riddle seems to be saying that when you reach “inside yourself,” you make tools.

**DC 15.** Is there something inside you that can be used to make tools?

**DC 18.** What materials did ancient societies use for tool-making?

If the characters have the stone bowl from the blood room, remind them that the stone bowl mentioned something about needing a bone.

The answer is a bone, which the characters must find in the room. Under the shroud lies a giant straw doll with a silly, sad face drawn on it. When the doll’s head is uncovered, the *programmed illusion* spell cast on it triggers. The doll coughs and sputters like it was awakened from sleep, though its expression never changes. It says, “Oh, doc!

You're back. I've been having the worst stomach ache lately. Do you know any noninvasive options? Maybe a nice herbal tea or something. That'd be the key. I just feel like I'm all stuffed up."

A character who makes a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check after finding the doll notices one of the books in the room is titled *Straw Man Medicine*.

The cover of the book has the doll's face on it. Opening the book reveals it's a container with a key inside. The key's head is skull-shaped and fits into the keyhole in the desk. Once unlocked, the desk's top lifts to reveal a clean human bone—a humerus—in perfect condition.

The bone has runes engraved on one side and a message on the other:

You now have your rod with which to make your weighty decisions. Take me with you.

The *detect magic* spell reveals an aura of transmutation magic radiates from the bone. It can be used as a +1 mace.

### Needle Room

This room is the easternmost of the three. When a character opens the door, a thin needle coated in magic poison shoots out from the lock. The creature that triggered the trap takes 1 piercing damage and must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 hour. While poisoned in this way, the creature can only speak in rhyming couplets.

A character who succeeds on a DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check can deduce the trap's presence from alterations made to the handle to accommodate the needle. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools disarms the trap, removing the needle from the handle. On a failure, the trap is triggered.

The wall is painted with trees in shades of comforting greens and brown that make this room reminiscent of a clearing in a pine forest. A tree trunk stands preserved in the middle of the room.

A riddle is carved around the rings at the top of the trunk (found on the East Room handout at the end of this article):

You find me in nature, in leaves on these trees.  
A compass will have me, to bring you some ease.  
You'll find me when sewing, with scissors and thread.  
Just speak out my name and continue ahead.

The correct answer is a needle. When the word is spoken aloud, the top of the tree trunk magically opens to reveal a hollow interior. Inside are two items: a tiny metal rake, its end filed into a row of sharp barbs, and a small metallic charm in the shape of a bird's feather. The tip of the quill is sharpened to a perfect point. Both these items have the same inscription:

It has to hurt if you're to heal, but from this pain comes beauty. Take me with you.

### STUMPED?

Here are hints to help your players to solve this puzzle. A successful Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals the following information:

**DC 12.** "In leaves on these trees" could mean the pine trees in the paintings.

**DC 14.** What do you use when sewing, aside from thread or scissors?

**DC 16.** What is the name of the spinning part of the compass that always points north?

**DC 18.** Each of these clues share a single, two-syllable name.

### Putting It All Together

Once the characters have the items from all three rooms, they can try to guess the solution to Ichandrix's problem or present the items to him immediately.

At your discretion, the sphinx could have the solution or have little idea what the riddle means. If you want him to give hints, read or paraphrase the following:

The sphinx's ancient eyes crinkle as he surveys the gold-rimmed bowl, the heavy bone, and the two sharp implements before him. He chuckles, a low, tired sound.

"Ah. I see what they mean for me to do. It is a clever loophole they have placed into this curse. Do you see it as well?"

He gives the characters a chance to figure out the loophole, but also gives them an easy out if they are stumped.

If the characters want to solve it themselves, have them consider all the items and messages given. You can repeat the wording of the curse to them—the answer lies in the line "One carries you out upon their flesh."

## STUMPED?

Here are hints to help your players to solve this puzzle. A successful Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals the following information:

**DC 12.** Ichandrix's body must remain here forever. But what about his mind?

**DC 14.** The items you've collected are a small bowl, a weighted, enchanted bone that could be used as a magic weapon, and two fine, pointed tools. What can be done with those?

**DC 16.** These tools are simple but undoubtedly made for tattooing. The bowl holds the ink, the sharp tools apply it, and the rod applies force to the needles.

**DC 18.** Maybe there's a way to permanently free the sphinx's mind. "One carries you out on their flesh." Maybe some sort of magical tattoo?

**DC 20.** The bowl and blood riddles both refer to blood as ink. The bowl even says that you can't take blood from a stone—and Ichandrix's hindquarters are stone—unless you also have a bone. You have an enchanted bone. Maybe the ink needs to be Ichandrix's blood?

**DC 22.** The bone is enchanted to turn into a magical weapon, which should allow you to pierce the sphinx's stone flesh.

The answer is a tattoo. If the characters mention it, Ichandrix is overjoyed at the idea and explains that a magical tattoo inked with his blood is a clever way around his curse. Such a tattoo would allow his mind to travel with whoever accepts the tattoo. His body would remain here, but at least his mind and soul would be free of this place.

Ichandrix asks if one of the characters would accept his mind as a passenger on their journeys. In return, he promises to grant the bearer of the tattoo a modicum of his power. The sphinx can instruct the characters on creating the tattoo.

If none of the characters do this, he is disappointed, but complies with their wishes and asks them to please send someone willing to help. As payment for their help, he doffs his giant golden pectoral plate and gives it to them.

## THE TATTOO

A character who receives the tattoo must have it placed somewhere near their heart. If there is already a tattoo there, the sphinx is amused but continues, placing it as close as possible.

The ink for the tattoo is made by using the enchanted bone to draw blood from the sphinx and collect it in the stone bowl. Ichandrix applies the tattoo with the metal tools, first to his arm and then to the character's chest.

The tattoo is 7 inches across and looks like an arcane rune, though it belongs to no known language. As the tattoo progresses, Ichandrix's body grows heavier and he sinks lower to the ground. When the tattoo is finished, he rests his head on his forepaws and stills as if sleeping. His bony ribs press against his skin as he rhythmically breathes, but he doesn't awaken.

Then the newly tattooed character hears the sphinx's voice in their mind. "Thus our journey begins together. Call upon me when you need, and together we shall grow."

### ICHANDRIX'S TATTOO: A JOURNEY OF GROWTH

When a character receives the tattoo, the tattoo gains properties depending on the character's level, as shown on the Ichandrix's Gifts table. The tattoo gains new properties when the character levels. Each time the tattoo gains a new property, it grows in size on the character's body.

### ICHANDRIX'S GIFTS

CHARACTER LEVEL	TATTOO PROPERTY
1st	Summon Consciousness, Sphinx's Magic
4th	Ancient's Resolve
7th	A Blink in Time
10th	Lion's Roar
13th	Hidden Veil
16th	Sphinx's Eyes

## Summon Consciousness

You can communicate telepathically with Ichandrix. The sphinx is content to be a passenger in your body never attempting to wrest control or initiate a conversation.

## Sphinx's Magic

Your connection to Ichandrix grants you access to some spells when you reach certain character levels, as shown on the Sphinx's Magic table. You can cast each of these spells, requiring no material components. Once you cast any of these spells in this way, you can't cast that spell in this way again until you finish a long rest. Intelligence is your spellcasting ability for these spells.

### SPHINX'S MAGIC

CHARACTER LEVEL	SPELL NAME
1st	<i>detect evil and good, thaumaturgy</i>
3rd	<i>lesser restoration</i>
5th	<i>tongues</i>
7th	<i>freedom of movement</i>
9th	<i>greater restoration</i>

## Ancient's Resolve

You have advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

## A Blink in Time

You can cast the *dimension door* spell three times. You regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

## Lion's Roar

As an action, you can channel the voice of Ichandrix and bellow a roar. Each creature within 15 feet of you that can hear you must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened of you for 1 minute.

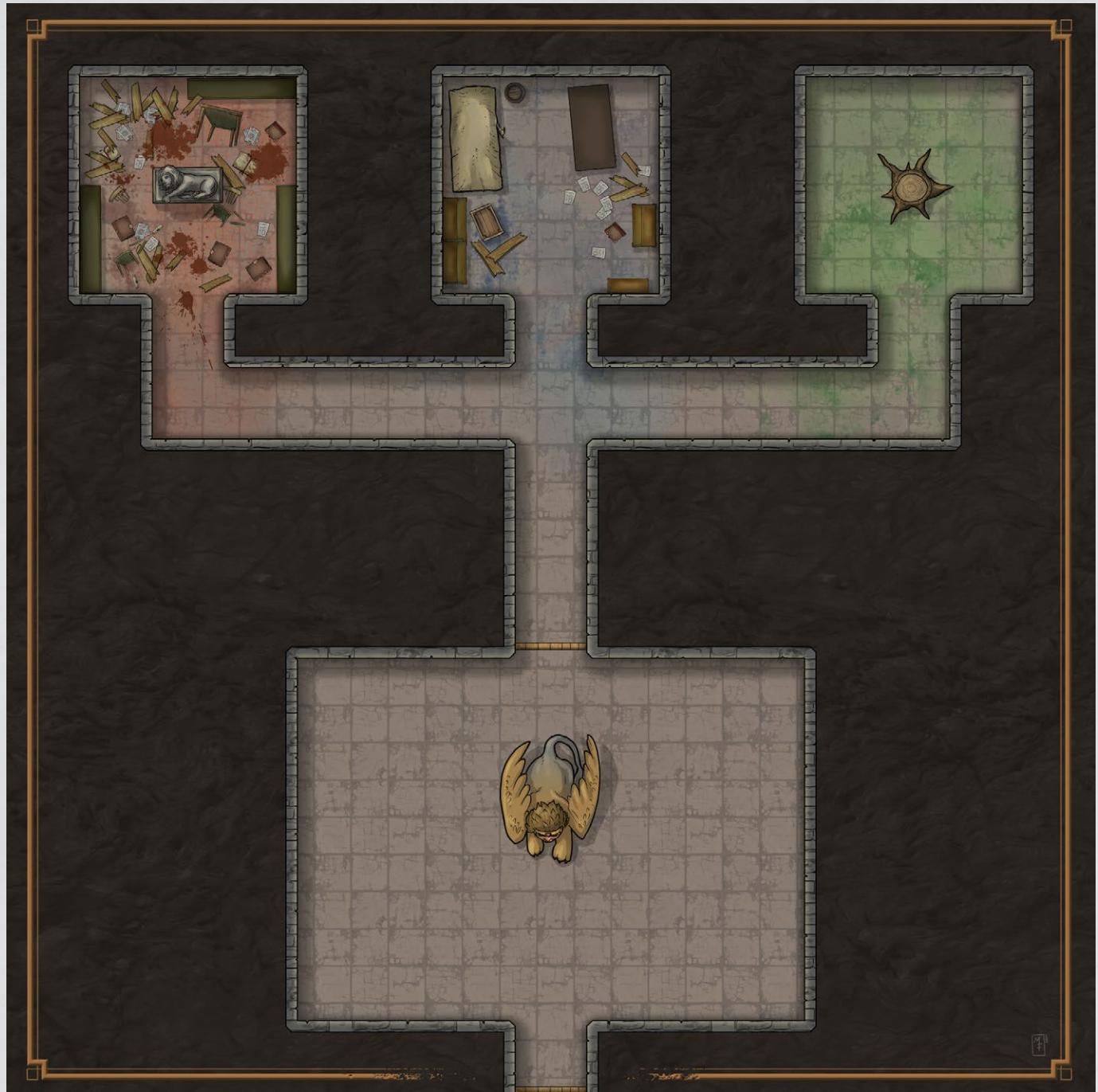
While frightened in this way, a creature must take the Dash action and move away from you by the safest available route on each of their turns, unless there is nowhere to move. If the creature ends their turn in a location where they don't have line of sight to you, they can repeat the saving throw. On a success, the effect ends.

## Hidden Veil

You are immune to the charmed condition and magical effects that would sense your emotions or read your thoughts. A creature that makes a Wisdom (Insight) check to read your emotions or ascertain your sincerity makes the check with disadvantage.

## Sphinx's Eyes

As an action, you gain truesight out to a range of 120 feet for 1 hour. You can use this property a number of times equal to 1 + your Intelligence modifier (minimum of once). You regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.



# HANDOUTS

You can use the following handouts to help the players solve the puzzles in this article.

## FIRST ARCHWAY

The world grows not through apathy and indecision, but through curiosity and action. Those who stride ever forward change the future of this world.

Stride ever forward. Press only the correct symbols.

Beneath the arch, seven long panels take up the section blocking the way forward. Each panel presents imagery and symbols. The following images are depicted on the panels:

- A still figure meditating on a stone block
- A hart mid-leap, its graceful legs arched
- The word “choose” chiseled into a stone block
- A sword: static, unwielded, and on display
- A child, nose buried in a book, wonder on their face
- A metal panel that appears to be an obscure shape. It is tempting to stare at it for a while.
- A person facing away from the observer, looking back over their shoulder

## SECOND ARCHWAY

EACH OF US VERILY HAS A DUTY TO ACT

FOR WHEN HARDSHIP THREATENS, WHERE MUST WE STRIDE?

## ICHANDRIX'S CURSE

You are cursed this day and ever

To stand before this door

With stone for hind and tail,

Body present evermore.

Behind you are the chambers three,

With tools that lead to curse's end.

One carries you out upon their flesh,

Forever shall you be their friend.

## WEST ROOM

Countless magics have I borne,  
Countless maps of history.  
Flowing wine, eternal ink,  
Held within a family tree.  
Speak my name to set me free.

## MIDDLE ROOM

Hook and flute and fork and pin,  
The greatest magic lies within.  
So many tools to make and teach  
When inside yourself you reach.  
You'll need some help, it's child's play:  
The ailing patient points the way.  
Find me, and take me with you.

## EAST ROOM

You find me in nature, in leaves on these trees.  
A compass will have me, to bring you some ease.  
You'll find me when sewing, with scissors and thread.  
Just speak out my name and continue ahead.

# RESOURCES

## PUZZLES OF PERMANENCE

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202207/IchandrixsMercy-140pps-Dark-Grid.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202207/IchandrixsMercy-140pps-Dark.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202207/IchandrixsMercy-140pps-Light-Grid.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202207/IchandrixsMercy-140pps-Light.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202207/RiddlesInTheStandingStone-140pps-grid.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202207/RiddlesInTheStandingStone-140pps.jpg>



**BEN MCFARLAND** lives in the wilds of upstate New York, where he continues to explore mysterious regions in search of adventure with the priceless support of his wonderful wife, Mandy and his family, and the excellent advice of his steadfast friend, James. You can find his work in the pages of *Sub Rosa* and in products from Storm Bunny Studios and Kobold Press. That is a real fish. He is [@brickk](#) on Twitter. *Ordo Hermes Vitae.*



**SAM MANNELL** is a writer and designer based in Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa, a distant place known to some as Auckland, New Zealand. When not running or playing games, Sam is writing, making music, drinking coffee, or playing chess badly. You can find more of Sam's work in MCDM's *Kingdoms & Warfare* and the upcoming *Flee, Mortals!* You can be made psionically aware of his location and movements by following him on Twitter [@crypticparlour](#).



**RACHAEL CRUZ** is an award-winning writer and game designer. Her TRPG work can be found in numerous properties, including but not limited to *Conan: Adventures in an Age Undreamed-Of*, Corvus Belli's *INFINITY RPG*, *Dune: Adventures in the Imperium*, *Fantasy AGE*, *RuneQuest*, and *Star Trek Adventures*. She has been helping people play pretend before it was cool. She also believes in you. Yes, you. Follow her on Twitter [@Witchwater](#).

## OPEN GAME LICENSE VERSION 1.0A

The following text is the property of Wizards of the Coast, LLC. and is Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc ("Wizards"). All Rights Reserved.

1. **Definitions:** (a) "Contributors" means the copyright and/or trademark owners who have contributed Open Game Content; (b) "Derivative Material" means copyrighted material including derivative works and translations (including into other computer languages), notation, modification, correction, addition, extension, upgrade, improvement, compilation, abridgment or other form in which an existing work may be recast, transformed or adapted; (c) "Distribute" means to reproduce, License, rent, lease, sell, broadcast, publicly display, transmit or otherwise distribute; (d) "Open Game Content" means the game mechanic and includes the methods, procedures, processes and routines to the extent such content does not embody the Product Identity and is an enhancement over the prior art and any additional content clearly identified as Open Game Content by the Contributor, and means any work covered by this License, including translations and derivative works under copyright law, but specifically excludes Product Identity. (e) "Product Identity" means product and product line names, logos and identifying marks including trade dress; artifacts; creatures characters; stories, storylines, plots, thematic elements, dialogue, incidents, language, artwork, symbols, designs, depictions, likenesses, formats, poses, concepts, themes and graphic, photographic and other visual or audio representations; names and descriptions of characters, Spells, enchantments, personalities, teams, personas, likenesses and Special abilities; places, locations, environments, creatures, Equipment, magical or supernatural Abilities or Effects, logos, symbols, or graphic designs; and any other trademark or registered trademark clearly identified as Product identity by the owner of the Product Identity, and which specifically excludes the OPEN Game Content; (f) "Trademark" means the logos, names, mark, sign, motto, designs that are used by a Contributor to Identify itself or its products or the associated products contributed to the Open Game License by the Contributor (g) "Use", "Used" or "Using" means to use, Distribute, copy, edit, format, modify, translate and otherwise create Derivative Material of Open Game Content. (h) "You" or "Your" means the licensee in terms of this agreement.

2. **The License:** This License applies to any Open Game Content that contains a notice indicating that the Open Game Content may only be Used under and in terms of this License. You must affix such a notice to any Open Game Content that you Use. No terms may be added to or subtracted from this License except as described by the License itself. No other terms or Conditions may be applied to any Open Game Content distributed using this License.

3. **Offer and Acceptance:** By Using the Open Game Content You indicate Your acceptance of the terms of this License.

4. **Grant and Consideration:** In consideration for agreeing to use this License, the Contributors grant You a perpetual, worldwide, royalty-free, nonexclusive License with the exact terms of this License to Use, the Open Game Content.

5. **Representation of Authority to Contribute:** If You are contributing original material as Open Game Content, You represent that Your Contributions are Your original Creation and/or You have sufficient rights to grant the rights conveyed by this License.

6. **Notice of License Copyright:** You must update the COPYRIGHT NOTICE portion of this License to include the exact text of the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any Open Game Content You are copying, modifying or distributing, and You must add the title,

the copyright date, and the copyright holder's name to the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any original Open Game Content you Distribute.

7. **Use of Product Identity:** You agree not to Use any Product Identity, including as an indication as to compatibility, except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of each element of that Product Identity. You agree not to indicate compatibility or co-adaptability with any Trademark or Registered Trademark in conjunction with a work containing Open Game Content except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of such Trademark or Registered Trademark. The use of any Product Identity in Open Game Content does not constitute a Challenge to the ownership of that Product Identity. The owner of any Product Identity used in Open Game Content shall retain all rights, title and interest in and to that Product Identity.

8. **Identification:** If you distribute Open Game Content You must clearly indicate which portions of the work that you are distributing are Open Game Content.

9. **Updating the License:** Wizards or its designated Agents may publish updated versions of this License. You may use any authorized version of this License to copy, modify and distribute any Open Game Content originally distributed under any version of this License.

10. **Copy of this License:** You MUST include a copy of this License with every copy of the Open Game Content You Distribute.

11. **Use of Contributor Credits:** You may not market or advertise the Open Game Content using the name of any Contributor unless You have written permission from the Contributor to do so.

12. **Inability to Comply:** If it is impossible for You to comply with any of the terms of this License with respect to some or all of the Open Game Content due to statute, judicial order, or governmental regulation then You may not Use any Open Game Material so affected.

13. **Termination:** This License will terminate automatically if You fail to comply with all terms herein and fail to cure such breach within 30 days of becoming aware of the breach. All sublicenses shall survive the termination of this License.

14. **Reformation:** If any provision of this License is held to be unenforceable, such provision shall be reformed only to the extent necessary to make it enforceable.

### 15. COPYRIGHT NOTICE

Open Game License v 1.0a Copyright 2000, Wizards of the Coast, LLC.

System Reference Document 5.1 Copyright 2016, Wizards of the Coast, LLC.; Authors Mike Mearls, Jeremy Crawford, Chris Perkins, Rodney Thompson, Peter Lee, James Wyatt, Robert J. Schwalb, Bruce R. Cordell, Chris Sims, and Steve Townshend, based on original material by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson.

ARCADIA Issue 18, Copyright 2022, MCDM Productions, LLC. Authors: Rachael Cruz, Sam Mannell, Ben McFarland, Matt Colville, James Introcaso, and Hannah Rose.