UNBREAKABLE

VOLUME I



5E

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About the Cover: A robed, grinning salamander welcomes you to the Unbreakable Anthology.

UNBREAKABLE

www.unbreakableanthology.com

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FORWARD

I vividly remember when I first saw *Oriental Adventures for D&D 3rd Edition*. At the time, I was bewildered by the fact that there was an Asian setting for the game. The mechanics and flavor, I felt, were substandard at the time, but offered a way for me to explore my creativity to bring the material closer to an ideal representation.

Fast forward a decade and a half later, and I became wiser to the reality of the misrepresentation found within those sourcebooks and settings. Before working on *Unbreakable*, about a year ago, I thought about reclaiming the *Forgotten Realms* setting of Kara-Tur and modernizing it to reflect the diverse cultures that it tried to represent.

Then I met with Jazz at an *Uncaged Anthology* meet up at GenCon in 2019 and shared this idea with her and a table of other creators. From there, Jazz became the spark that lit this project to life, and ran with the table's initial inspiration of the bamboo forest as our setting. We began to see the reach and reactions of the many lives that would become affected by this project, so it evolved and became something more: a project that exclusively focused on Asian creators telling and illustrating their stories.

From there, Caroline joined as our Lead Graphics & Layout Designer, who captivated us and inspired us to reach even higher creative heights, for which I am eternally grateful. I couldn't have asked for better partners on this journey.

Inside this anthology, you will find the hearts and souls of the writers, artists, and editors who toiled feverishly to make their voices heard. I'm humbled to have worked with such wonderful people and indebted that they wished to go on this journey together. This isn't the end; we are just getting started.

"The bamboo is strong, resilient, unbreakable."

- Morihei Ueshiba

Jacky Leung
Project Organizer for
Unbreakable Anthology Vol. 1

MISSION STATEMENT

The Unbreakable book is the first release in a larger Unbreakable anthology series. The primary goal is to establish a platform for Asian creators (and those who identify as Asian) within the tabletop roleplaying community wherein the opportunity to work and collaborate together to publish as an Own Voices project. The second goal for the Unbreakable series is to produce tabletop roleplaying content that includes and represents the diverse Asian cultures, not just the standard East Asian archetypes. Lastly, the creative leaders of the Unbreakable series hope to inspire and nurture creators to grow and gain their own space and footing within the RPG industry.

INTRODUCTION

In the heyday of roleplaying games, there was a particular draw to Asian settings, but they were mostly, if not, entirely written by non-Asian writers. Understandably, these new publishing companies were the pioneers of our beloved games and hobby. Still, many of these creators did not possess the cultural knowledge or background to adopt these elements and would cause more harm and disrespect than good. Despite those shortcomings, decades later, the desire to have these voices heard and able to tell their stories has grown substantially. Asian creators want their personal stories told. You can see it from the monumental successes of films such as *Crazy Rich Asians* and Boon Jong-ho's recent *Parasite*, telegraphing a growing trend and desire for new perspectives and stories.

Ashley Warren's *Uncaged Anthology* lives as the heart and soul of this project, bringing marginalized voices to the forefront while also telling stories that both respect Asian mythologies and folklore and also have new modern takes on those classics. The confidence of our writers, artists, and editors was born this spark of hope, and we proudly wish to continue to carry this torch and spark the next wave of creators.

To avoid repeating mistakes of the past and under substantial consideration, this project will showcase stories and illustrations from our vibrant Asian community. For some, this is their first major collaborative project; for a few more, their first publication; and for many of the contributors, a chance to tell a story that reflects the diverse Asian heritages and cultures that exist in our shared world. These stories are designed to work agonistically with any campaign or setting you currently have running. However, you are also more than welcome to play an entire campaign set within this unique world of bamboo forests and mists.

We hope to expand beyond just adventures and develop a shared world for the stories written here and beyond.

How to Use this Book

In this book, you will find ten adventures that utilize the 5th Edition (5E) ruleset, accompanied by tables, handouts, and maps placed after every entry. Each written adventure can be played as a standalone or "one-shot" scenario for your playgroup, or you may use these adventures between the beginnings and endings of other story arcs.

The adventures featured in this book are divided into four tiers of play. Tier 1 is for 1st-level to 5th-level characters, Tier 2 is for 6th-level to 10th-level characters, Tier 3 is for 11th-level to 15th-level characters, and Tier 4 is for 17th-level to 20th-level characters. Adventures in Tier 1 and 2 can be adapted for most settings while adventures in Tier 3 and 4 require some narrative adjustments to integrate into any present campaign. It's recommended that a prospective Game Master (GM) read the adventure thoroughly before running it with their playgroup.

Alternatively, you may run an entire campaign using the adventures provided in this book from 1st level to 20th level.

Using this method, the "Drowned Souls of the Hidden Stream" is an adventure designed for 1st-level adventurers, which can serve as a starting off point for your Asian inspired campaign. Additionally, it is recommended that the adventure, "The Last Guest," be reserved for your campaign finale due to the size and scope of its mythology and content length. The setting for this book is best identified as a Pan-Asian fantasy that brings the lush bamboo forests, misty mountains, maritime heritage, and sprawling metropolises of Asia.

Also, pronunciation keys are provided for Asian inspired names of non-player characters (NPCs), locations, customs, and items. It is reasonably understandable if the GM and players mispronounce these names. Still, we hope that in the spirit of good faith, that an earnest effort is attempted before facilitating the need to substitute them. Many of the names carry cultural significance, and substitutions may result in a loss of context.

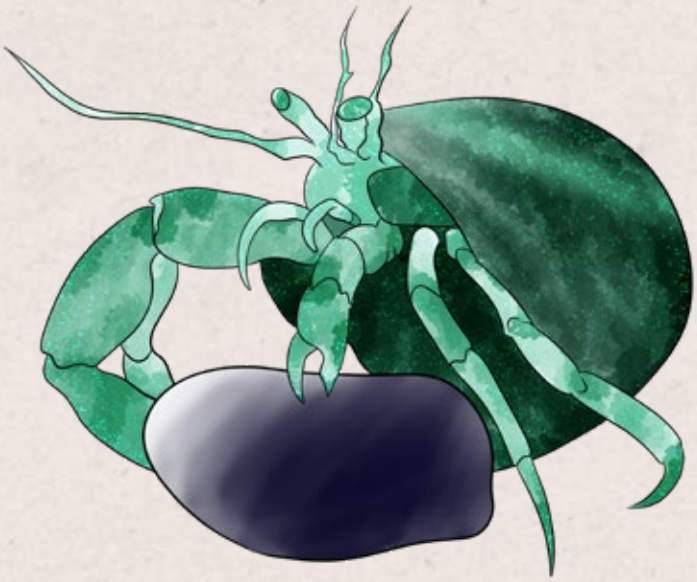
Text that appears in a box like this is meant to be read aloud or paraphrased for the players.

Finally, you will find content warnings at the start of each adventure. GMs expecting to run these adventures should use these warnings to be fit for their respective game groups. The adventures are also accompanied by a short summary by their respective writers as insight should you need to tailor the story to best fit your group. It is recommended that safety tools are implemented so everyone can enjoy the stories in this book with confidence. The TTRPG Safety Toolkit is a compilation of safety tools, created by Kienna Shaw and Lauren Bryant-Monk, that have been designed by members of the tabletop roleplaying games community for use by players and GMs at the table. You can find it at http://bit.ly/ttrpgsafetytoolkit.

About Sidebars

Text in these boxes are extra information. Sidebars help provide the GM further context, helpful hints about NPCs, and advice for adjusting encounters.

Adventures



Through the Dragon's Gate

by Ethan Yen

Content Warnings: Water, Storms

SYNOPSIS

With the recent disappearance of a local magistrate on Luoshang Mountain and the village crops destroyed by a magical storm, villagers have come to believe that they have somehow upset the dragon who resides at the peak of the mountain, creating an atmosphere of fear and anger. Amid this environment, a talking carp arrives in search of heroes willing to resolve the conflict by locating the missing magistrate and brokering peace with the dragon. To do so they will have to ascend the mountain and reach the top of the great Luoshang Falls where the dragon calls home.

An adventure for a party of four 1st-4th level characters running 2 hours.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The adventure begins at the base of the mountain, where a group of fishers are gathered on the river that flows from the mountain. The characters may be travelling nearby when they spot the scene, or perhaps they may be in the area for the following reasons:

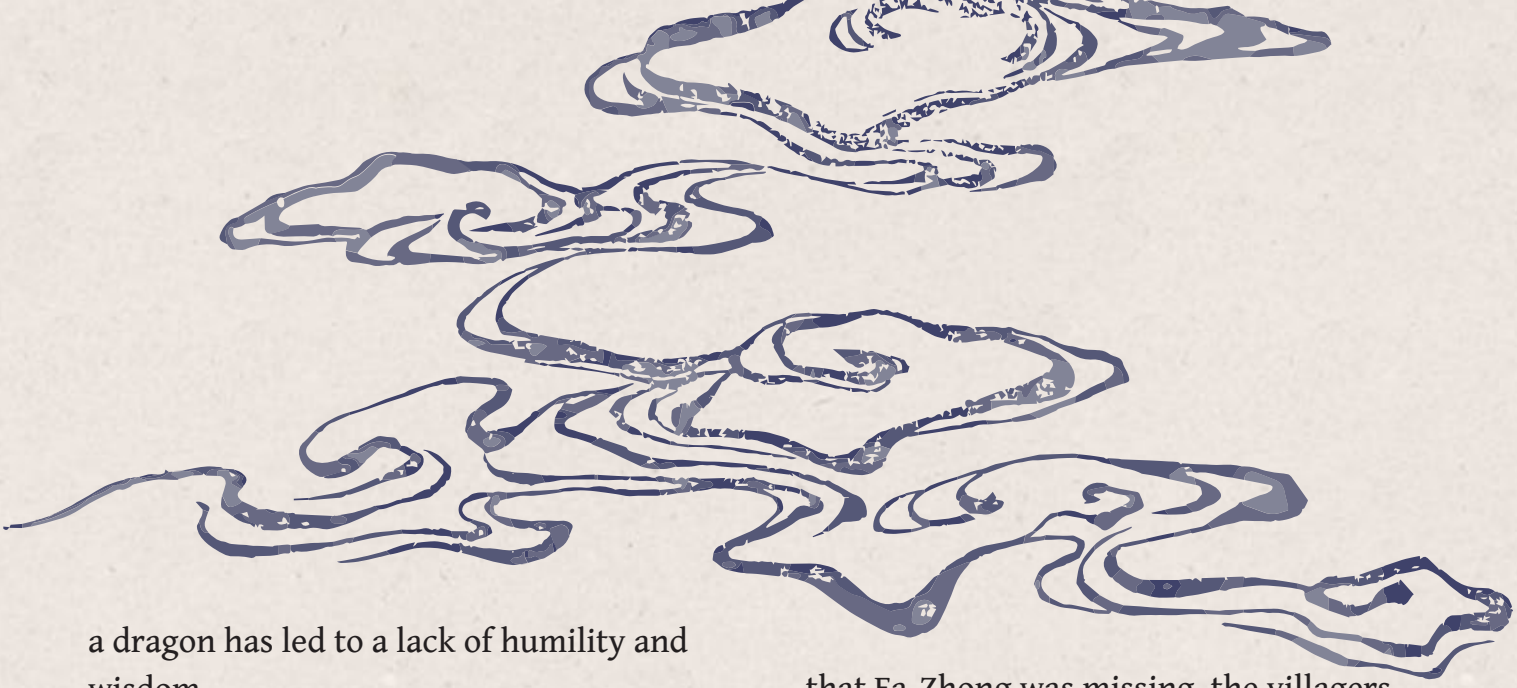
- ***Fishing Friend.*** One of the characters is a friend of Yu-Fu, a fisher who is out early in the morning to catch carp. Yu-Fu has invited the characters on this morning's fishing trip. During this trip, Yu-Fu makes a fortuitous catch.
- ***Missing Magistrate.*** The characters work on behalf of the government, and are sent to Luoshang Village to locate a missing local magistrate.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The peak of **LUOSHANG MOUNTAIN** [*LWOH SHAHNG*] is home to two gold dragons, **JIN-ZHI**, and her young daughter, **JIN-HAO**, whose existence is kept a secret to the outside world because of Jin-Zhi's overprotective nature. Under Jin-Zhi's guidance and protection, the mountain has flourished with wildlife and in turn, has supported the people that live in the village at its base. Eager to become as powerful as her mother, Jin-Hao studied her mother's spell scrolls and quickly mastered the basics. To her daughter's dismay, Jin-Zhi refuses to teach Jin-Hao more advanced magical techniques, sensing that Jin-Hao's rapid advancement and strong sense in pride as



Illustration by Jennifer Peig



a dragon has led to a lack of humility and wisdom.

Eight days ago, Jin-Zhi was considering visiting her ill sibling who lived in a far-off mountain, but was hesitant to leave her daughter alone. Sensing this as an opportunity to prove herself as a responsible dragon, Jin-Hao convinced her mother to make the trip, and let her take care of the lair. During this time, the local magistrate, **FA-ZHONG**, traveled up the mountain to speak to the dragon there, unaware of Jin-Hao's existence. Believing Jin-Hao was the great dragon of the mountain, Fa-Zhong asked Jin-Hao to use her magic to bring about rain for the villager's crops, as no rain had fallen in many days. Rather than wait for her mother to come back, Jin-Hao agreed to Fa-Zhong's request and waited until Fa-Zhong started heading back down the mountain before casting the spell to bring rain. Having never attempted such advanced magic, Jin-Hao instead inadvertently summoned hail upon the village and lightning that struck the mountainside, seriously injuring Fa-Zhong and trapping him on the mountainside.

Jin-Zhi arrived back home to hear word that Fa-Zhong was missing, the villagers believing that he was eaten by the dragon upon the mountain, and now fearing for their own lives. Their fear has quickly become anger as their crops were destroyed from the hailstorm. Jin-Zhi has the power to restore their crops with magic, but doing so would require her to go down to the village, putting her and the villagers in danger as long as their tempers and violent tendencies are present.

As punishment, Jin-Zhi cast a powerful spell on her daughter, stripping her of her magic and turning her into a **CARP** and cast her down **LUOSHANG RIVER** to the base of the mountain. Jin-Hao is to uncover the fate of Fa-Zhong without her pride as a dragon and magical powers, and attempt to convince the villagers to let her mother descend without harm. Only then is Jin-Hao allowed to return home by swimming up a massive waterfall at the peak of the mountain and through the **DRAGON'S GATE**, an archway that marks the entrance to the dragons' lair. Realizing that she will not be able to accomplish this task on her own, Jin-Hao is now on the search for some heroes to aid.

CHAPTER 1
Some Fin in the Boat

With their crops destroyed by a recent hailstorm, the villagers have resorted to overfishing the river for food. One of the fishers catches **JIN-HAO** in her carp form, who asks for aid in her quest.

Fishing on the River

The characters arrive at **LUOSHANG VILLAGE** [*LWOH SHAHNG*] and come across the sight of numerous fishing boats, casting their nets into the river waters below.

> *Next to a small collection of humble houses and barren fields, long wooden boats bob up and down across the nearby river surface, so numerous that many sit bow to stern. Villagers of all shapes and sizes sit in their boats, their nets cast into the waters below, their faces downcast, eyebrows furrowed in anger, and voices grumbling. All around you, you see these nets being raised, full of carp squirming about on the floor of the boats.*

Area Information

The area has the following features.

Dimensions & Terrain. The river is 30 feet wide, and has a meandering, gentle current. Wooden boats are seen from one end of the river to the other, with barely five feet in between each boat. The village is a small collection of mud, brick and wood. Barren fields surround the village. Characters that succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check can ascertain that these fields once held crops, but judging by the imprints in the soil, were destroyed by pebble-sized objects.

Time of Day. It's still early in the day and the sun has just started to rise. A pale mist hangs above the ground, slowly evaporating in the morning light. The mists do not impose any disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks.

Abundance of Carps. A character with a passive Perception of 10 can surmise that the villagers are aggressively fishing the river. Characters that make a successful Wisdom (Survival) or Intelligence (Nature) check of DC 10 know that if the villagers continue to fish at this rate, there will be no carp left in the river, which will cause severe ecological and social consequences.

Village Boats. Each boat is capable of holding five medium humanoids together in a single file. The boat can accommodate more than five medium humanoids, but doing so will require all passengers to be packed tightly together, subjecting them to the Restrained condition while sitting. Any sudden or violent movements while on the boat will require all characters to make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or fall into the river; any creatures with the Restrained condition make this saving throw at disadvantage.

Movement across a boat is considered difficult terrain.

Fishing. If the characters wish to assist the villagers in fishing, they can make a Wisdom (Survival) check DC 10. Characters with fishing tackle or a net can make this check at advantage. On a success, the villagers all cheer and all successive Charisma ability checks concerning the villagers are made with advantage for the rest of the adventure.

Creature Information

There are many villagers (use the statistics for **commoner**) about on their boats of all races, ages, sizes, and genders. Characters can choose to talk to any of the villagers, who are all visibly upset. Characters can learn the following:

- A few days ago, the village magistrate, **FA-ZHONG** went up **LUOSHANG MOUNTAIN** to speak to the dragon who lives there, hoping to ask the dragon to bring much needed rain for their crops. Instead, the dragon summoned a hailstorm and lightning to destroy their crops and Fa-Zhong went missing, presumed eaten by the dragon. The villagers are unsure what Fa-Zhong did to deserve this fate and incur the dragon's wrath.
- Without crops, the villagers have resorted to storing up fish for food, hoping to ferment the fish to preserve them for the upcoming winter. The villagers are overcompensating for their fear of not enough food by making frequent trips to the river.
- General sentiment is that the villagers are angry, upset, and there is even talk that some villagers may go up the mountain and seek vengeance against the dragon.

Fa-Zhong

Fa-Zhong [FAH TSOHNG], a senior human ACOLYTE (he/him), is a kind man that rules fairly. He has a long wispy white beard and despite his age, is quite physically fit. He has hiked up Luoshang Mountain alone on numerous occasions.

Jin-Hao

Jin-Hao is a **gold dragon wyrmling** (she/her) who is cursed by her mother to the form of a large golden carp. She does not wish to reveal her identity as a dragon or that her mother is the one who cursed her due to her hubris, as she fears that if the villagers know of her identity and the truth of their circumstances, they will kill her.

A successful DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that the carp is hiding something. This check is made at disadvantage as it is difficult to read the body language of a carp unless a character has had prior experience interacting with aquatic creatures. A successful DC 13 Charisma (Intimidation) or Charisma (Persuasion) check will get Jin-Hao to reveal the true story, although she will explain out of earshot of any of the villagers.

Ideal. *A dragon is the most magnificent creature in the land, embodying wisdom, strength, and power.*
Bond. *I love my mother, even if we don't get along*
Flaw. *My pride in my abilities and my identity as a dragon often get me in trouble.*

- In the past, the dragon has always been willing to grant the requests of the local magistrate when rain was needed. The villagers are unsure what has caused the dragon to change her opinion.

The villagers will not cease their fishing efforts, but a successful Charisma (Intimidation) or Charisma (Persuasion) check DC 13 will convince the villagers to return home and stop fishing for the day.

The Catch of the Day

After the characters have spoken to the villagers, one of the villagers, **YU-FU** [UR FOO], a senior halfling commoner (he/him), makes a bountiful catch which includes a brilliant golden carp.



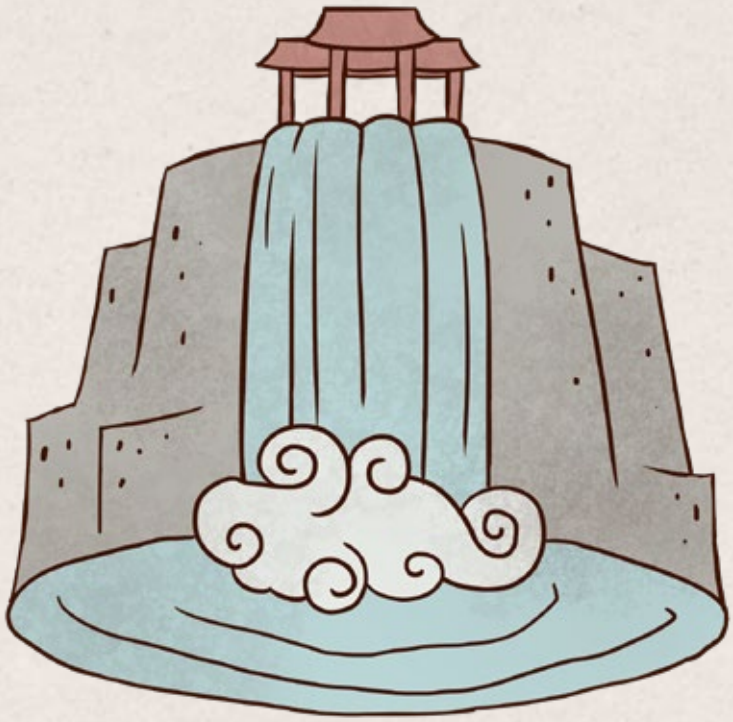
The old man lets out a cry of joy as he pulls a heavy net full of carp onto his boat. His joy quickly turns into fright as a jetstream of water bursts from within the net, sending the man falling and releasing a loud thump as something heavy hits the floor of the boat. A high-pitched voice calls out, "Release me, mortal, or risk my magical might!"

Creature Information

The voice comes from a large scintillating golden carp named **JIN-HAO** [JING HOW] (see sidebar) as she flaps wildly on the floor of the boat in an attempt to return to the water. However, Yu-Fu is quick for his age, and grabs the carp, throwing the carp into a small bucket of water.

Once she calms down, Jin-Hao will explain to anyone willing to listen, the following:

- Jin-Hao will lie to the characters, claiming to be a river spirit who has seen the villager's excessive overfishing and harm to the carp population. She is here to put an end to this practice.
- Although she does not reveal how she knows this, Jin-Hao knows of the villager's predicament, and proposes to look for Fa-Zhong, and return him to the village, or bring back his body back to his family if he is indeed dead. Once Fa-Zhong's fate is known, she asks the villagers to cease their animosity towards the dragon. Then she will parley with the dragon on behalf of



the village, asking the dragon to fix their predicament. She believes the dragon will listen to her, as she is a spirit of the mountain (which is a lie).

- She is looking for help: capable trackers, spell-users, and warriors that can find Fa-Zhong and, though she doesn't admit it, protect her from any dangers in the wild. She will explain that taking a corporeal form is taxing on her magical powers, but is necessary in order to become visible and guide the characters; this is a lie, as Jin-Hao is unable to cast any magic in carp form.
- Jin-Hao will avoid the topic of why the hailstorm was formed, but if pressed, she will give a possible explanation that perhaps the dragon made a magical mishap. The villagers don't believe this, as they know the dragon is a powerful master of magic.
- Once she knows of the characters' existence, she will ask them for aid, promising that they will be rewarded for their efforts within her powers.

The villagers are wary of this carp, and believe this to be some kind of trick from the dragon who resides on the mountaintop to get the villagers to enter the dragon's domain. None of the villagers will join her, refusing to put their fate into the hands of a minor river spirit.

Development

Once released and the characters agree to join her, Jin-Hao explains that they will simply need to escort her as she swims upstream to first talk to an ogre hermit named **JIAN-LIE**, who resides on the mountain along the riverside. He knows all the paths on the mountain and would know where to look for Fa-Zhong. The characters will need to protect her from any predators, as her magic is limited while she maintains this corporeal form (this is a lie). Jin-Hao will swim along the shore within eyesight of the characters as they travel unless the characters have means to travel on the river themselves; she refuses to be kept by the party in a bucket or otherwise. A successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check will convince Yu-Fu to let the characters use his own boat for this journey, as he understands the village's anger will bring about violence, and only a powerful dragon is capable of resolving these problems.

CHAPTER 2

A Journey of Perseverance

Jin-Hao swims upriver to Luoshang Mountain, leading the characters to find Fa-Zhong. Once Fa-Zhong's fate is revealed, the characters must make the journey to the dragon's lair to resolve the simmering conflict.

Cleaning House

The characters arrive at a point upstream where large boulders are scattered about the river. Jin-Hao mentions to the characters that this is the location of the home of Jian-Lie, an ogre hermit, although she is not aware why there are boulders blocking the riverpath. Calling out Jian-Lie's name will alert him to the character's presence, and he will call them up, but will otherwise not acknowledge the character's presence or assist them with finding his home, as he is focused on cleaning out his cave.

Area Information

Dimensions & Terrain. The river is 20 feet wide and runs through a gorge of 60 feet in height. Large, 5-foot boulders are strewn along this stretch of river, creating a dam of boulders blocking the river. The banks of the river are 5 feet wide on either side, flanked by the gorge walls. The banks are covered with a thin layer of water as the river runs around the dam.

Falling Boulders. As the characters traverse this area, large boulders from the top of the gorge fall down. Characters must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 1d10 bludgeoning damage on a failure, and half as much on a success. The rocks are all being pushed into the gorge from a single point up above. A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check or DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check allows a character to ascertain the origin of the rocks is a cave on the side of the gorge.

Stone Stairs. Characters can see that the sides of the gorge can be used as steps to ascend to the top of the gorge. The stone stairs lead up to cave opening halfway up the side of the gorge. This is Jian-Lie's home.

The Hermit's Hideout

Climbing the stone stairs leads to Jian-Lie's home, where he is removing rocks that have collapsed in his home as a result of one of Jin-Hao's accidental lightning strikes.

Area Information

Dimensions & Terrain. The cave is 20-feet wide and appears to go deep into the gorge face. However, 20 feet into the cave, rocks are blocking any further passage. Characters can see that the rocks

were part of the cave walls and ceilings, and fell as a result of great movement.

Lighting. Beyond 10 feet into the cave, there is no natural lighting and the cave is in darkness.

Bone Furniture. To one side of the cave is a chair and table made out of bones lashed together with rope. A successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Survival) check reveals the bones belong to large animals.

Creature Information

The rocks are being pushed into the gorge by **JIAN-LIE** who resides in this cave halfway up the gorge wall, along with his two pet **giant rats**.

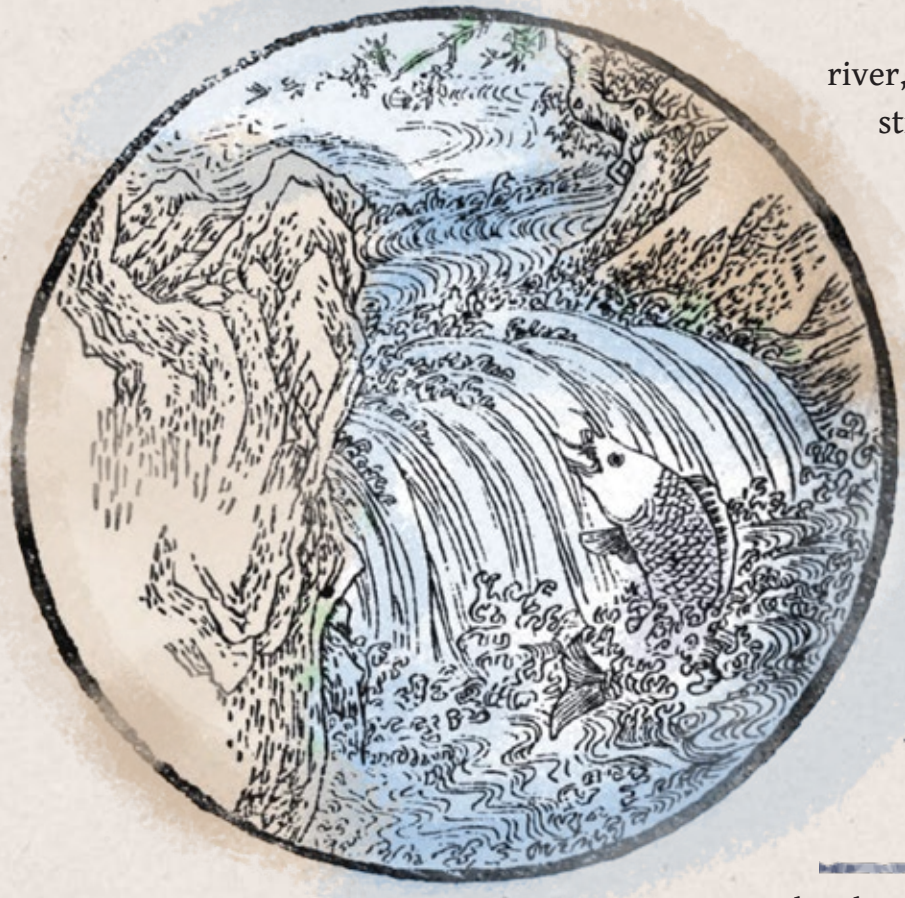
Due to the recent lightning strike that Jin-Hao caused, Jian-Lie's home caved in. Since then, he has been clearing out the rocks by throwing them over the edge down below. Jian-Lie is not hostile, and while not friendly, is willing to answer any questions the characters have, although he is singularly focused on removing the rocks. Jian-Lie knows the following:

- If asked about the possible location of Fa-Zhong, Jian-Lie mentions he saw the magistrate travel up river eight days ago, but has not seen the man since the lightning strike hit.
- Jian-Lie is trying to get to the rest of his cave. He keeps maps of the area that he personally drafted and scrolls that he got off of scared travellers in the back of his cave. He is clearing out the rocks to get to his collection.
- Jian-Lie will agree to help the characters and move the boulders below to open the river if it hasn't already been opened. But first he must get to his maps, as his maps show the possible location that Fa-Zhong may be.
- He is not aware that Jin-Hao is Jin-Zhi's daughter, as Jin-Hao's existence is kept secret, but is willing to listen to the talking carp.

Jian-Lie

JIAN-LIE [JEN LYEH] is an adult OGRE (he/him) with an Intelligence Score of 19. Jian-Lie wears a small metal helmet atop his head and secured with rope around his head. The helmet is considered a *headband of intellect* and gives him superior intelligence. This headband was gifted to him by Jin-Zhi after the ogre was persuaded to spare the life of an endangered species of bird that resides on the mountain instead of eating it. The small metal helmet atop his head gives him a comical image, but one look at his face and teeth reminds any onlooker that the hermit is still very much a dangerous ogre. He spends most of his time cataloguing the mountainside and reading his scrolls. While he speaks in short phrases and few words, the words he chooses are surprisingly descriptive and sophisticated.

Ideal. *Intelligence and Strength are of equal important for a well-lived life.*
Bond. *I treasure my books, for they give me knowledge. I treasure my maps, for they are a product of my knowledge.*
Flaw. *I prefer to keep to myself for fear of society rejecting me and seeing me only as a dangerous ogre*



Helping Out. A character that succeeds on a Strength (Athletics) check DC 20 moves the rest of the large rocks. Characters may help Jian-Lie move these rocks and give him advantage on this check. The large boulders can be broken down (AC 17, HP 30, immune to non-magical slashing and piercing, psychic, and poison damage); if damaged to zero hit points, then only a Strength (Athletics) DC 13 check is required to move the remainder.

Treasure

If the characters successfully help Jian-Lie, the ogre hermit will thank the characters and go to the back of his cave, retrieving a map of the mountain along the river. Jian-Lie explains that the magistrate followed the river up to the peak of the mountain and most likely is somewhere along that route. Jian-Lie circles an area along the route of the river, explaining that he saw a lightning strike in this area. He will also warn the characters that he has seen some damaged magic items flowing in the river, most likely a result of a lighting strike in the dragon's horde.

If the characters assisted Jian-Lie by breaking the large boulders into smaller boulders, he gifts them a *potion of hill giant strength* in thanks.

Suspended from Crossing

The characters continue to follow Jin-Hao up the river in search of any sign of Fa-Zhong. At this point in the river, the water flows over a series of flat rocks, creating small cascades rushing down the gentle slope, making it impossible to paddle a boat upstream. Furthermore, the banks of the river end abruptly as 120-foot gorge walls come up directly against the river, preventing any travel along the riverbank. Jin-Hao suggests the characters pick up their boat and reach the top of the cascades on foot. Carrying the boat requires a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check, and can be performed as a group check if all characters wish to assist. Upon a failure, the characters lose their grip and the boat begins to drift downriver. Jin-Hao can swim up the cascades with a successful DC 8 Strength (Athletics) check.

Adjusting the Encounter

Here are some suggestions for adjusting the scene:

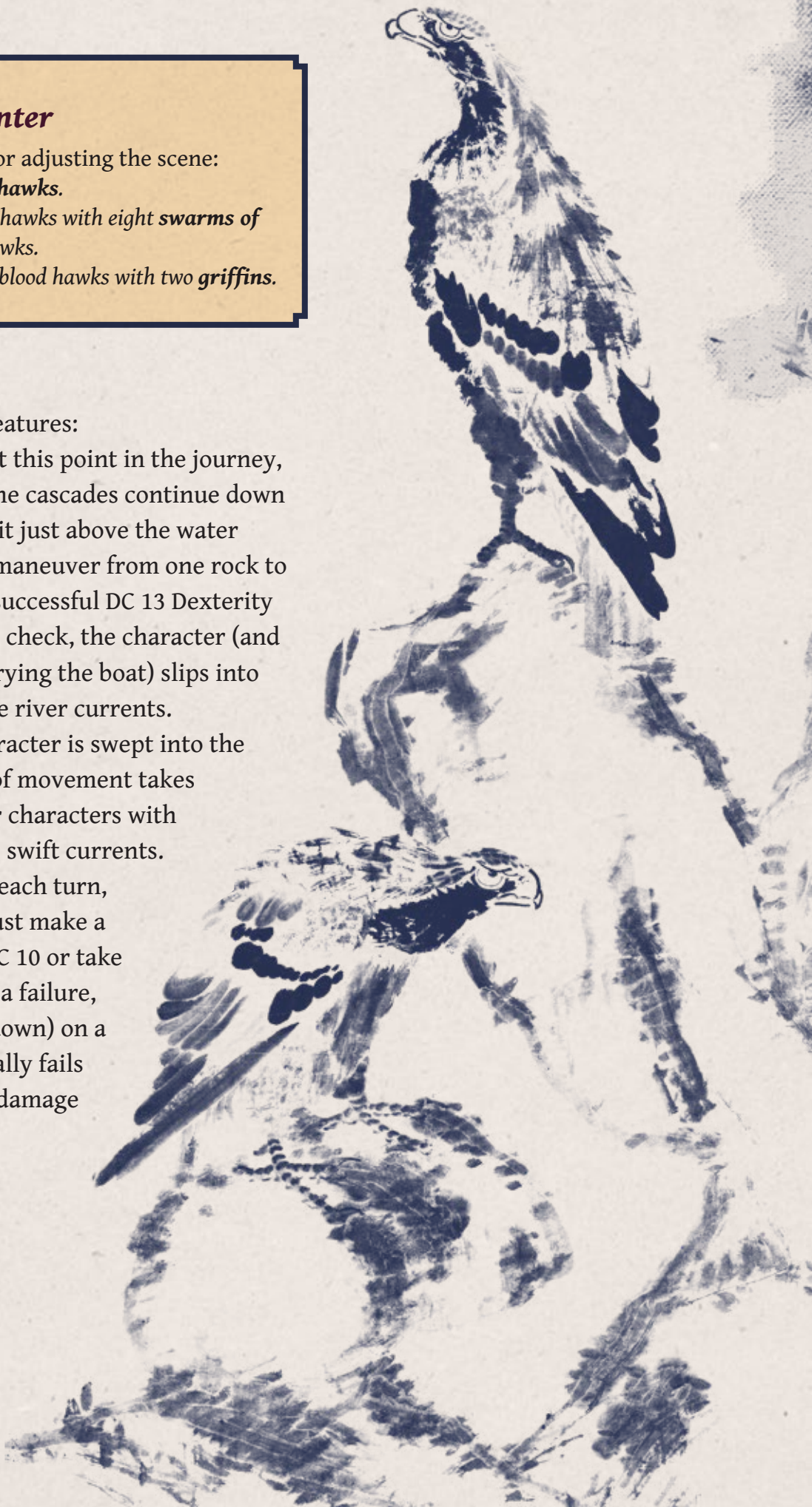
- ***Weak:*** *Remove two* ***blood hawks****.*
- ***Strong:*** *Replace the blood hawks with eight* ***swarms of ravens****, but flavored as hawks.*
- ***Very Strong:*** *Replace the blood hawks with two* ***griffins****.*

Area Information

The area has the following features:

Dimension & Terrain. At this point in the journey, the river spans 10 feet and the cascades continue down for 30 feet. Scattered rocks sit just above the water line, allowing characters to maneuver from one rock to another on the river with a successful DC 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. On failed check, the character (and the boat if a character is carrying the boat) slips into the river and is subject to the river currents.

River Currents. If a character is swept into the river currents, every 1 foot of movement takes 2 feet of movement, even for characters with a swim speed, because of the swift currents. Furthermore, at the start of each turn, characters in the current must make a Strength (Athletics) check DC 10 or take 1d4 bludgeoning damage on a failure, and half as much (rounded down) on a success. The boat automatically fails the check and takes the full damage (AC 15, HP 30).



Damaged Boots of Levitation. A DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check or Wisdom (Perception) check reveals the sole of a leather boot wedged into the rocks halfway up the cascades. An arcane rune is etched into the sole of the boot. Characters may avoid stepping on the sole of boot if they notice the runes. A DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that the arcane rune is damaged and will activate upon contact by any creature. Any character that activates the rune must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the character is subject to the *levitate* spell, rising in the air 20 feet for the next minute. The sole of the boot belongs to one half of a pair of *boots of levitation* that were damaged from the lighting strike in dragons' horde and is unusable as intended.

Blood Hawk Nests. On a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check, characters notice two nests nestled in a tree along the banks at the top of the cascades. A total of eight blood hawks rest in the nests, their eyes focused hungrily on the characters as they arrive.

Creature Information

Inside the nearby nests are eight **blood hawks**, watching the characters intently. The blood hawks know the damaged boots of levitation exist, and have been using it to target helpless prey such as fish or bears. Once the characters pass halfway up the river, they will attack the characters, regardless of whether or not the levitation is activated. The blood hawks will attack as a pack, swooping in to attack and then flying out of range if possible.

An Unlucky Dip

The characters reach the location along the river marked by the ogre hermit. A backpack lies open along the riverside with some of its contents spilled out. This is the site where Fa-Zhong took a stop on his journey to take a bite to eat and dip his feet into the cool water.

Further up along the riverbank, there is an open backpack lying upon a flat rock, some of its contents spilling out and a few articles of clothing nearby. As you approach, you can see a wooden bowl, half-eat rations, and a water damaged scroll.

"That's Fa-Zhong's backpack!" Jin-Hao exclaims, "We must be close!"

Area Information

The area has the following features:

Dimensions & Terrain. The river is 30 feet wide, flanked by rocky ground. On one side of the river, roughly 100 feet away, is the start of a bamboo forest. Characters that makes a DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check looking for signs of a lightning strike will find none, but will conclude that since there are no high points in this area, the lightning strike may have struck the river itself, damaging anyone who was in contact with the river surface.

Lighting. If characters lost their boat in the previous encounter, or have been traveling up river without a boat, the sun begins to set, casting the area in dim light.

Abandoned Backpack. The backpack holds a wooden bowl, rations, and a scroll with water damage. A successful Intelligence (Arcana) check of DC 13 reveals the scroll to be a scroll of water walk, which Fa-Zhong was holding onto in case the dragon requested a tribute for his request. Next to the backpack are boots and socks that belong to the magistrate.

Tracks. A successful Intelligence (Investigation) check or Wisdom (Survival) check DC 13 reveals disturbed rubble that resembles being dragged away from the river bank towards the bamboo forest. Dried blood is found on some of the rocks.

The Bamboo Forest. If the characters are not stealthy while following the tracks into the forest, they hear the sound of a deep growling nearby. A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that the growling is not made by a beast, but of a person. The growling originates from behind a small piles of leaves. Hidden under this make-shift tent made of bamboo and leaves is Fa-Zhong. This shelter can also be found with a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check or Wisdom (Perception) check.

Creature Information

Fa-Zhong is found hiding in his make-shift tent. When revealed, he will cry out for joy, explaining that he thought the approaching sounds belonged to predators and he was trying to scare them away with *thaumaturgy*.

Fa-Zhong explains he was in the water when a flash of lightning struck the river, causing a jolt of pain to shoot up his legs and knocking him unconscious.

Fa-Zhong

Fa-Zhong is a soft-spoken, elderly human with white hair and a wispy beard. Despite his current predicament, he is always chuckling and has a positive outlook on life, willing to accept what comes his way. Fa-Zhong is a capable magic user, but understands that magic does not make someone a good ruler. He has a deep respect for laws and tradition.

Ideal. *Laws represent what society values, and it is the magistrate's duty to enforce those values.*
Bond. *I am willing to sacrifice my well-being for my village.*
Flaw. *I tend to do very little to better my circumstances. When prodded by others to action, I will defer to those more powerful than me.*

When he awoke, he had no feeling in his legs, and dragged himself to the bamboo forest for shelter. With his limited healing magic, he has been unable to regain control of his legs. Jin-Hao will suggest that if they bring Fa-Zhong to the dragon's lair, the dragon can heal his legs. Fa-Zhong does not recognize Jin-Hao's voice as the dragon he spoke to, and does not harbor any ill will towards the dragon, presuming the lightning strike to simply be bad luck. He does wonder aloud why the dragon could not sucessfully bring about rain, as the dragon has done numerous times before.

Development

After the characters discover Fa-Zhong alive, they head towards the peak of the mountain to ask the dragon for assistance. Proceed to the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

The Dragons Emerge

The characters reach the waterfall that marks the entrance of the dragon's lair and find a way to get Jin-Hao and Fa-Zhong up the waterfall and through the Dragon's Gate in order to enter the lair.

Up the Waterfall

The characters arrive at the base of the waterfall, their objective within sight.

Your journey ends at a small lake at the top of the mountain. Surrounding the area are opalescent mists, glistening in the light. In front of you is a wide, 120-foot tall waterfall, cascading down a treacherous rocky cliff face into the lake. As your eyes follow up the waterfall, you see an archway made of ancient timber, standing resolutely at the towering cliff's edge and stradling the crest of the waterfall.

Jin-Hao explains that the only way to enter the dragon's lair is through the Dragon's Gate, as the lair is protected by magical illusions and abjuration wards. Normally, mortals who wish to speak with the dragon do so here at small lake at the bottom of the waterfall. Today, calling out at the bottom of the lake does not elicit any responses. How the characters and Jin-Hao ascend and enter through the Dragon's Gate is up to the characters. One possible option is using the scroll of water walk in Fa-Zhong's backpack, if a character is capable of doing so.

Jin-Hao insists they bring Fa-Zhong up to the lair as proof to the dragon that the magistrate is still alive and needs help. Otherwise, the dragon may attack them, seeing them as warriors from the village. Fa-Zhong provides any healing assistance as he is able. A character that is carrying Fa-Zhong makes Strength and Dexterity ability checks at disadvantage. The characters may leave Fa-Zhong at the lake, but make any Charisma-based skill checks with Jin-Zhi at disadvantage without visible proof of the magistrate's fate.

Additionally, Jin-Hao will ask for some kind of assistance to reach the top of the waterfall, as she is incapable of swimming up a waterfall. Reward creative thinking by the characters.

Area Information

The area has the following features:

Dimensions & Terrain. The lake is approximately a 60-foot radius circle surrounded by rocks and bamboo. The mist generated from the waterfall entering the lake makes the rocky surroundings slippery, requiring a successful DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to remain standing when conducting any feats of athleticism.

Lighting. Light filters through an opalescent mist that surrounds

the area. The mists do not obscure anything, but are beautiful to behold and likened to stars of rainbow light. If the characters have been traveling without a boat, or lost their boat, the area is cast in dim light as the day has passed.

Cliffside. The cliffside consists of jagged and jutting rocks which present a possible, if dangerous, path up to the Dragon's Gate. A successful DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check allows a character to discern which rocks are safe to use as hand and footholds. In order to climb the entire cliffside, a character must make a successful DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check. On a failed check, the character falls from the cliffside, takes 2d6 bludgeoning damage, and must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On a successful saving throw, the character holds onto a jutting rock but is now dangling in the air over the ground below, requiring another DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check to continue climbing to the top. Advantage is at DM discretion if characters make clever use of ropes, climber's kits, or any other tools and abilities at their disposal.

Dragon's Lair. If the characters can see the top of the cliff, it is a bare, rocky, flat mountain peak covered in opalescent mist. The gate stands alone, with water streaming forth over the edge on one side, and nothing on the other side of the gate. Attempting to the dragon's lair at the mountaintop by any other means incurs a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the character takes 4d6 force damage and is pushed 20 feet back, most likely off the edge of the cliff. On a success, the character remains standing and takes no damage, but still cannot pass. Jin-Hao strongly discourages anyone from attempting this option, as this would surely result in death.

Dragon's Gate. Characters who pass through the archway are subject to the effects of a 5th-level dispel magic; this effect does not remove Jin-Hao's transformation. The archway is made of thick timber and painted red. A coiling dragon is engraved on each column of the arch, on one column the dragon appears older and larger, on the other column is a younger dragon of smaller size. Inscribed in gold lettering on a wooden sign on the gate lintel are the words, "The labor required to enter is befitting of a dragon."

Lair Actions

On initiative count 20 (losing on initiative ties), Jin-Zhi can take a lair action and cause one of the following effects.

- *The opalescent mists turn opaque, causing the area to become heavily obscured for the entire round.*
- *Jin-Zhi will use her change shape ability to take on the form of one of the beasts in the table below. In whatever beast form she takes, the beast always has gold scales, feathers, skin, or some other outward appearance to mark it as a gold dragon in a different form.*

Jin-Zhi's Shapes

d6	Beast
1	Giant Crab
2	Crocodile
3	Tiger
4	Giant Eagle
5	Giant octopus
6	Giant toad

The Dragon's Challenge

Passing through the dragon's gate, the characters arrive at Jin-Zhi's lair. Here, she confronts the characters, believing them to be hostile.

> *As you pass through the gate, the air around you shimmers and you are transported to a beautiful grove surrounding an idyllic lake covered in water lillies. Brilliant pearls are strewn about, sparkling with rainbow light. Upon entering, you hear a deep voice reverberate through the ground, "Welcome home, my daughter. What have you brought me?"*

Jin-Hao explains she discovered Fa-Zhong alive, and they seek to heal him and bring him back to the village to calm the villagers down. At this point, Jin-Hao has no choice but to reveal the truth of her circumstances to the characters, explaining that she was responsible for the lightning strikes and hailstorm, and that her mother had banished her from home as punishment until she could make amends.

Jin-Zhi considers her daughter's request to heal Fa-Zhong, but seems indifferent. Instead, Jin-Zhi, proposes a challenge: if Jin-Hao can best Jin-Zhi in combat as animal forms, Jin-Zhi will personally teach Jin-Hao the spell required to restore Fa-Zhong's use of his legs, as well as the spell required to restore the crops in the village. Jin-Hao hesitates, finally openly admitting that she is not ready for such powerful spells, and instead proposes a counter challenge: if the party - her friends without which she would have had no hope to accomplish her task - manage to best Jin-Zhi in her animal forms, then Jin-Zhi will heal Fa-Zhong and restore the village crops. Impressed with her daughter's request and humility, Jin-Zhi accepts these terms if the party also accepts.

Area Information

Dimension & Terrain. Jin-Zhi's lair is a large grove, full of bamboo, boulders, gems and pearls. At the center of her lair is a 60-foot radius deep lake. At the bottom of the lake is a tunnel that leads further inside the mountain, where Jin-Zhi keeps her most valued treasures.

Lake. The lake is covered in water lillies, providing half cover to any creature underneath the water surface. When creatures are within the lake, use underwater combat rules.

Creature Information

Jin-Zhi [JING TZI], an **adult gold dragon** (she/her) emerges from the lake, using her change shape ability to take on an animal form and attacks the characters. During this fight, Jin-Hao will remain in the lake, avoiding combat as she is incapable of dealing appreciable damage.

Objectives & Goals. As part of the challenge, Jin-Zhi does not wish to kill the party, only gauge their strength. She makes full use of her lair actions and the terrain to challenge the characters. She is not above causing multiple characters to fall unconscious.

Adjusting the Encounter

Here are some suggestions for adjusting the scene:

- ***Weak:*** *Jin-Zhi will revert to her true form after suffering 40 points of damage.*
- ***Strong:*** *Jin-Zhi will revert to her true form after suffering 65 points of damage.*
- ***Very Strong:*** *Jin-Zhi will revert to her true form after suffering 80 points of damage.*

Development

Once the characters have dealt a total of 50 damage, in a puff of opalescent mist, Jin-Zhi will revert to her true form and grant Jin-Hao's requests. If the party all falls unconscious, they wake up with 1 hit point after 1d4 hours, with Jin-Hao back in her dragon form. She will offer to take them and Fa-Zhong back to the village and explain the situation to the villagers.

CONCLUSION

After a successful challenge, Jin-Zhi reveals her true form, congratulating the characters on their journey. She thanks them for assisting her daughter as she learned to address challenges without being able to use her own strength and powers, and understanding the importance of support when encountering situations Jin-Hao is not best equipped to deal with. Jin-Zhi transforms her daughter back into her true form.

Jin-Zhi then uses *greater restoration* to restore Fa-Zhong's use of his legs. Jin-Zhi and Jin-Hao fly down to the village below, transporting the characters and Fa-Zhong upon their backs. The villagers, elated to see their magistrate alive, listen intently to the characters' explanations of what transpired. Jin-Zhi restores the crops through the use of multiple plant growth spells, and the villagers agree to cease overfishing the river. Apologies are shared and received by all parties.

Rewards

As a reward for their accomplishments, Jin-Zhi will give the characters a small golden oyster. Every 30 days, the oyster will produce a one-use *pearl of power*. The pearl is a brilliant white pearl that seems to shimmer with a flaming energy inside and is warm to the touch. Jin-Zhi explains this gift is a reminder that power must be cultivated with time and experience in order to be properly wielded. The flaming pearls that are produced by the golden oyster are called Fruits of Time.

Author's Notes & Acknowledgments

This adventure is based on the Chinese Proverb, "The Carp has leaped through the Dragon's Gate." In Chinese mythology, the Dragon's Gate is a waterfall. It is said that if a carp is strong enough to swim up the turbulent river and over waterfall, it will transform into a dragon. This proverb is often used to demonstrate that if one exemplifies perseverance, success will eventually be achieved. The theme of this adventure plays on this proverb by also including a caveat - that one's successes are not only due to personal skill, but also with the help of others.

I would like to thank Jacky Leung (Death by Mage), for inviting me to this project. It has been a great experience working with other Asian Americans and Asian Canadians as we bring our own experiences to this game we all love.

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APPENDIX - MONSTERS & NPCs

Jian-Lie (Ogre)

Large giant, chaotic evil

Armor Class 11 (hide armor)
Hit Points 59 (7d10 + 21)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	8 (-1)	16 (+3)	5 (-3)	7 (-2)	7 (-2)

Senses darkvision 60ft, passive Perception 8
Languages Common, Giant
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Actions

Greatclub. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8+4) bludgeoning damage.

Javelin. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5ft. or range 30/120 ft., one target. Hit: 11 (2d6+4) piercing damage.

Jin-Hao (Carp)

Small beast, lawful good

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 60 (8d8 + 24)
Speed 0 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
2 (-4)	16 (+3)	9 (-1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)

Senses blindsight 10ft., darkvision 60ft, passive Perception 14
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 0 (0 XP)

Water Breathing. Jin-Hao can breathe only underwater as a carp.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1 piercing damage.

Breath Weapon (Recharge 5-6). Jin-Hao uses one of the following breath weapons.

Water Breath. Jin-Hao exhales water in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Jin-Hao (Gold Dragon Wyrmling)

Medium dragon, lawful good

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 60 (8d8 + 24)
Speed 30 ft., fly 60ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +4, Con +5, Wis +2, Cha +5
Skills Perception +4, Stealth +4
Damage Immunities fire
Senses blindsight 10ft., darkvision 60ft, passive Perception 14
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Amphibious. The dragon can breathe air and water.

Innate Spellcasting. The dragon's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14). The dragon can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *druidcraft*

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d10+4) piercing damage.

Breath Weapon (Recharge 5-6). The dragon uses one of the following breath weapons:

Fire Breath. The dragon exhales water in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.
Weakening Breath. The dragon exhales gas in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 13 Strength saving throw, or have disadvantage on Strength-based attack rolls, Strength checks, and Strength saving throws for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving through at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Feeding the River

by Collette Quach

Content Warnings: water, flooding, drowning

SYNOPSIS

The Kr nhaom is a river that feeds and provided transportation for the surrounding area for generations. Now it has become polluted. The water levels have lowered. Even the monsoon waters disappear once they fall. Despite efforts, the river remains polluted. It's up to the adventurers to uncover the mystery and revitalize the river. Who or what is preventing the river to turn back into its natural state?

This adventure is for a party of four 4th level adventurers running about 4 hours.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Adventurers can be called to investigate the river if they are in a nearby town.

- A notice on the town board is looking for mercenaries to investigate the river. For example, fish and river animals have been found dead on the banks of the river. Originally, it is thought to be predators killing them, but they would have been eaten too.
- When shopping from a merchant, prices are wildly more expensive than other towns. Digging deeper, the merchants inform the party that it is tougher to get their supplies since the river has been polluted. They need to raise their prices in order to break even.
- When near the river, a **gray ooze** comes out from the river and attacks the party.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The Kr nhaom [crow-nam] River is the main source of life in the area, providing not only transportation, but also the water to feed the crops and livestock. The sediment is rich with nutrients for flora to grow, especially at the delta. The river has many inlets that branch out into the jungle-like claws that give the river its name.

The Serpent's Coil is a section of the river untouched by civilization. It's said to be the home of many spirits and beings of the river. While mostly keeping to themselves, they occasionally provide good fortune and prosperity to those who they deem worthy.

Prior to the start of this adventure, some of the villages began to pollute the river, specifically Pāk Lěb [pack lehb], a town in the delta of the Kr nhaom. As a gateway into the Kr nhaom blessed with fertile land, the town has immensely prospered, growing rich and expanding. To keep up with expansion and efficiency, the town has polluted the waters with toxic byproducts and spellcasters have tried to unnaturally bend the river to their will. Actions were taken to clean the river, but the damage is already done. A spirit of pollution has manifested in the river, causing havoc. With the water levels lowered and mysterious oozes coming to shore, the river has since been a shadow of itself. The beings of the Serpent's Coil have been too busy defending their homes to help cleanse the river proper.

This adventure requires players to traverse up and down the river. In game, it takes a decent amount of time, however, to avoid unnecessary downtime, it can be fast-forwarded with encounters in between at the DM's discretion.

CHAPTER 1

DOWN THE RIVER DELTA

Players start the adventure at a town nestled on the river, miles north of the delta. The town is a small fishing village on the bank of the Kr nhaom.

Finding A Lead

Fishers and farmers speculate that the river has been polluted since the fish have been sickly and the water occasionally comes up murky. The fishers, in particular, have noticed more polluted waters downstream.

Asking the general townsfolk won't yield as much and they suggest asking the village elder (she/her).

The village elder is keeping track of the pollution. It's unusual to see, considering the village has not changed their living habits that would cause pollution, and also that it's traveling upstream. She suggests traveling downstream to find the source.

Finding a Boat

If the party does not a boat of their own, they can either purchase a boat for 100 gp, or they can do a work exchange. They can help complete various tasks around the village, such as caring for the fields, hauling fish nets, tending to the livestock, etc. for **2 hours in exchange.**

The party is given a map, either by the village elder or a fisher, with these points of interest located: this fishing village, the Serpent's Coil, the delta, Standing Stones, Seaside Temple, and Shoreline Cave.

Traversing the River

Traveling up and down the river takes quite a bit of time. From the town to the delta, it takes about 5 hours travel by boat. To speed up travel, adventurers can express how they are using the downtime. Use the table River Encounters for events that may happen when traversing the river, and select what transpires by rolling a D10. About 3 of these encounters happen prior to Chapter 2.

1. Merchant Boat

While cruising down the river, the party passes a merchant boat heading upstream.

Adventurers can flag down the merchant (they/them), who happily sells mundane items. They do not have much food provisions due to the pollution but do sell adventuring provisions such as minor healing potions.

They have information about the pollution if adventurers ask. They say that one time they traveled down to the river, a rogue tide grounded their boat. They also mention that they were attacked by gray oozes one time. While they are fine, it was definitely something out of the ordinary from their usual trips on the river.

River Encounters

d10	Event
1	A merchant boat calmly sails upstream past the party
2	A group of fishers row past the party
3	An inlet that offshoots from the main river
4	A cave slightly obscured by reeds
5	The party passes by a floating village
6	Silhouettes of serpent-like beings in the river
7	A school of fish pass near the boat
8	The river becomes choppy and violent
9	3 **gray oozes** appear from the river
10	A **crocodile** attacks the boat

2. Fishers

A group of fishers are sailing upstream. Their yield is low and there are clear signs that their morale is down. Talking to them, they reveal they are from a town called Pāk Lĕb [pack lehb]. They are making the trek upstream in hopes of finding more fish.

The fishers can tell the party that Pāk Lĕb is a prospering town on the delta and it's the gate to the rest of the river. They do not know about the pollution that the town caused and the pollution manifested an evil spirit because of it.

3. Inlet

Adventurers pass by an inlet that they can make a detour into, going deep into the jungle thicket. Traveling down the inlet, adventurers encounter a **poisonous snake** hanging down from a vine that attacks the party.

Once defeated, they continue down the inlet until they reach a small cove hidden by trees. A small island sits at the center. The island holds a small, unlocked chest with 3 *potions of healing*.

4. Cave

On the shore, a cave is slightly hidden by reeds and tall grass. Inside the cave, adventurers encounter a **giant bat** that has cornered a human woman. If adventurers fight and defeat the bat, the woman thanks them.

She wears a blue sampot (a traditional Cambodian dress) and adorned with ornate jewelry. She tells the party she needs to get back to the river to help her sisters clean the river. She then disappears into the water.

(This is a good starting point for **Trial 1: Dance of Apsara**.) Before she leaves, she tells the adventurers that she grants them a song to guide them back to her grove. At any time, they can listen to the sound of a Roneat (a xylophone-like musical instrument) to guide them directly to the grove.



Illustration by Kari Kawachi

5. Floating Village

In the center of the river, adventurers see a cluster of homes and buildings. They are held up by long bamboo stilts. Dozens of boats surround the village, some even being used as bridges or makeshift homes.

The village provides a lot of information regarding the trials in the Serpent's Coil.

Prior to the pollution, it was a common occurrence to see the spirits of the Kr nhaom. Now, they never see them. They suggest looking in the Serpent's Coil, a section of the river, untouched by civilization. The village occasionally goes to the Coil to pay respects to the spirits, specifically to the catfish spirits and the apsaras.

Lost Wedding Bangle

A villager approaches the adventurers as they set off. She is a hunter for the village and returning to the village after an unsuccessful hunt. While in the Serpent's Coil, a rogue current caught her boat. She saved her boat, but her bangles were lost within the currents. It holds much sentimental value to them as her partner crafted them for their wedding.

The hunter knows that the currents would most likely bring the bangles towards the inlets there. She can't offer much, but she has a small sum of money for the adventurers should they return with the bangles.

The location of the bangle can be at any of the 4 trials. The DM may choose where it is. Adventurers roll a Wisdom (Investigation) check DC 16 to locate the bangles.

6. The Naga

With a Wisdom (Perception) check or Passive Perception DC 15, adventurers notice silhouettes of snake-like creatures swimming deep underneath the water. They seem to be ignoring anything happening topside, but if adventurers manage to get their attention, they tell the party that they are needed downstream to help their comrades on a hunt.

This encounter may be a good starting point for **Trial 2: Serpent Hunt**. If choosing this path, they accompany the boat to the grove of the naga.

7. School of Fish

Adventurers see a school of fish swimming in the river. They may attempt to catch the fish with a DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) or Intelligence (Nature) check. A closer inspection reveals that these fish look sickly and have a tinge of unnatural gray and green on them.

If consumed, roll a DC 12 Constitution saving throw; on a fail, the character is poisoned for 1 hour.

8. Rapid Rivers

The boat encounters a choppy part of the river. It pushes and pulls the boat, almost as if it is trying to tear the boat apart.

For this encounter, treat it as a group check, with a starting DC of 16. However, adventurers can explain how they are taking precautions to cross the rapids. The DM chooses how much the DC is reduced. Once everyone has had a chance to explain what they are doing, the DM rolls the group check.

If adventurers fail, they take 1d6 bludgeoning damage each from the rapids.

This encounter may be repeated, though with the base DC lowered, assuming the adventurers succeed and understand how to navigate the rapids. If there are multiple failures, the boat eventually capsizes and is overtaken by the currents. **If the boat capsizes, adventurers may get washed ashore to Trial 3: Flooding the Fields.**

9. Gray Oozes

Three **gray oozes** crawl out of the river and onto the boat to attack the party. The oozes do not have a combat strategy other than attacking the closest enemy. This encounter may be repeated.

10. Crocodile Attack

One **crocodile** attacks the boat and the party. The crocodile attacks the closest enemy and also attempts to drag them into the water. This encounter may be repeated.

Development

After an hour or two of travel down the river, the coastline becomes more filled with trees. There are clumps of sickly gray and green sludge floating on the river's surface.

CHAPTER 2

IN THE SERPENT'S COIL

Adventurers eventually arrive at the Serpent's Coil. It's quiet, untouched by civilization. The river body is much larger, almost like a lake, with 4 inlets that sprout out, two on each side of the body. These inlets are the entrances to the groves for the different spirits of the Kr nhaom.

The 4 trials are to help the spirits cleanse their groves from the pollution and provide information on the source of the corruption.

Whichever trial the adventurers go to first, that spirit explains that they and the other spirits cannot banish an evil spirit by themselves, but can help cleanse the river while adventurers find the source.

Trial 1: Dance of Apsara

The southwest inlet leads to the grove of the apsara, female-presenting water spirits and incredible dancers. The grove is serene and calm, almost out of touch with the world around it. The water becomes shallow to the point where adventurers need to get off and cross the waters on foot.

As the party goes deeper into the inlet, there are more streaks of a black-green in the water, clear signs of pollution within the Kr nhaom. A DC 10 Intelligence (Nature or Arcana) check reveals that some part of this pollution is natural, while part of it has some magical influence on it.

At the end of the inlet is the grove. There is a group of apsaras who are preparing themselves to start a dance. They're dressed ornately in sampots with ornate, gold headdresses. If adventurers completed encounter 4, they are greeted by the apsara that they saved and explain the situation. Otherwise, the lead apsara, noted by her white and gold sampot, approaches the party.

Khmer Words

d10	Word
1	Water: tuk
2	Tree: daemchheu *(dom-che)*
3	Leaf: sloek *(sl-ook)*
4	Fruit: phlechheu *(fal-chow)*
5	Current: chr n *(cha-rn)*
6	River: tonle *(tun-le)*
7	Serpent: satv psa *(satv- por)*
8	Sun: preah atit *(pre-ha-te)*
9	Moon: preah chn *(pre-ha-chun)*
10	Rain: phlieng *(ph-leng)*

She has heard of the adventurers approaching from the water. She asks the party to participate in the dance that they in the apsaras are doing to cleanse their grove. Normally, they can do it themselves, but the pollution has weakened their magic on the river.

Mechanics

To simulate the dance, players match images found at the end of this adventure with the DMs words, which are in Khmer. At the start, tell the players what the Khmer word for each word. After, they should try to remember them. The DM may roll between 5-10 words on the Khmer Words Table.

Encourage players to not take notes for this portion if possible.

Once the dance is complete, the streaks of black-green dissipate and the waters return to a clear blue. The lead apsara gives the adventurers a piece of information:

> *Our dances have called pure water to our grove. But the impure waters lie in another hidden grove even we cannot touch.*

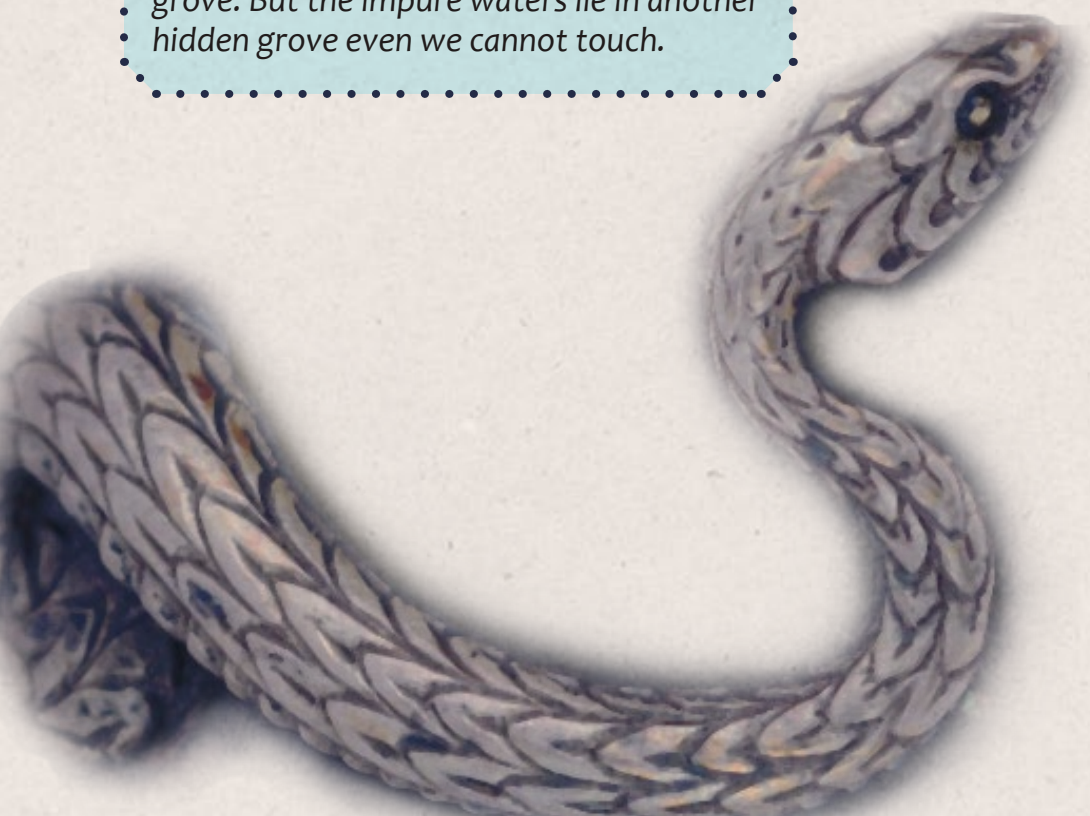
Trial 2: Serpent Hunt

The southeast inlet leads to a cave. Outside the cave is a group of 3 **naga hunters**. If adventurers were accompanied by the naga band from encounter 6, add an additional **3 naga to a total of 6.**

The naga are defenders of the river. While not exactly the spirits, they are the muscle of the river from those who desecrate the land. Their bottom half is a serpent's tail, while their torso and head are a brown-skinned human. The leader is a gender-neutral naga (they/them). They're a friendly individual but cautious on why the adventurers are there. The group of naga have some injuries on them such as various small gashes from weapons.

They open up on their true goal once they learn that the adventurers are trying to save the river. The cave is an entrance to a naga home and a polluted spirit monster is threatening to enter it. The naga are too busy defending their home to help cleanse the river.

Inside the cave, there are 2 **minotaurs**, with patches of moss growing on their bodies. They appear sickly, with pustules growing everywhere, but appear to be moving fine. They are



Difficulty Adjustment

- The naga hunters can be added or taken away as allies during combat.
- To give a sense of urgency, give the defending nagas combined HP of 75.

near a pool of water, the entrance to the naga home, at the end of the cave about 60 ft away.

To succeed in this trial, adventurers venture into the cave and defeat the 2 minotaurs.

Combat

Two naga join the party to attack the minotaurs. The rest move to defend the entrance to the pool. The naga hunter statblock is found at the end of this adventure.

The minotaur attack the closest enemy or an enemy that has done the most damage at them if they are in range.

Once the minotaurs are defeated, they fade away, leaving a small pool of polluted water. Now that the threat is over, the naga can focus on hunting down polluted spirits. They give the adventurers this information on the source of the corruption:

The hunt ends where it all started.

Trial 3: Flooding the Fields

The northwest inlet is short and leads to shore. A small path leads to a rice field; though pristinely kept, there is not a farmer in sight cultivating the fields. While the field is large, only just less than half of it is growing rice. If adventurers take a look closer at the rice, there is rot on some of the plants.

Eventually, a group of small spirits come out of a small farmhouse at the center of the field. They scurry out of their home and surround the adventurers. They are rice spirits: sprite-like, androgynous beings shaped almost like rice pods. In addition to helping cultivate rice plants, they are the spirit of agriculture and farming. They act like hummingbirds or bees, hyperactive and always moving.

They tell the adventurers that there is a "scary monster" in their rice stores and waterway. They are eating their rice, causing the fields to rot, and blocking access to the water. They are pacifists who only want to farm peacefully. The goal of this trial is to defeat the creatures inhabiting the area.

There is 1 **gray ooze** at the rice store and 1 **crocodile** at the waterway.

Once the task is completed, the rice spirits can go help cultivate the fields of other farmers. Before they leave, they give this information to the adventurers:

Our friend will be there. They helped till our fields and now they will help you.

Trial 4: Churning the Claw

The northeast inlet leads to a lake with one stream continuing upstream. A DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that there are catfish swimming towards the lake. With a DC 14, adventurers note that these catfish are larger than normal and show no signs of pollution sickness.

In the lake, a giant catfish, the largest out of all the other catfish in the lake, pops its head out from under the water. It greets the party fondly, identifying themselves as a spirit of fishing and helps create the currents in this river.

Its school has not returned to the lake, thus it cannot clean the waters. It notes that they are lost upstream. Also, they might not recognize the adventurers as allies, so adventurers might need to earn the school's trust.

Attempting to help the catfish, the school try to strike the adventurers. They have a +1 to hit and hits deal 1d4 bludgeoning damage and 1d4 poison damage. To gain their trust by non-magical means, adventurers must pass a DC 13 Intelligence (Nature) check. Feeding them or doing anything that may calm them provides an advantage.

There are 2 locations upstream where small schools of catfish are lost. A DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) easily spots them. One school is tangled in a discarded net left behind by a fisher and the fish got caught in it. Another location is a school of fish that are in a pool of polluted water and can't swim downstream. Some are even beached on the riverside covered in sludge.

Now that the school has been returned to the great catfish, they can begin to clean the waters and churn the river once more. While they can't do it alone, they give the party this information:

> *We cannot churn the waters clean. It is a corruption that has been called natural through unnatural means. Follow the currents to the mouth.*

Development

Once the spirits are able to assist in cleansing the river, adventurers can focus on finding the spirit that is polluting the water.




1 - Fishing Village
2 - Serpent's Coil
-Rice Fields
-Catfish Lake
-Grove of the Aspara
-Naga Cave
3 - Pāk Lĕb (West)
4 - Pāk Lĕb (East)
5 - Shoreline Cave
6 - Standing Stones
7 - Seaside Shrine
N
W
E
S
1
2
3
4
5
6
7

CHAPTER 3

SPIRIT OF POLLUTION

In a hidden grove lies an angry spirit, born out of the misuse and perversion of the river.

Finding The Spirit

The spirit is hidden near the town which was the main source of pollution all those years ago. The spirits that the players help should have given hints on the location.

Riddle Hints

If players need a hint, a successful DC 10 Intelligence check deciphers each riddle:

Our dances have called pure water to our grove. But the impure waters lie in another hidden grove even we cannot touch: The spirit has taken up residence in some sort of grove or alcove. Either the corruption has gotten so terrible for spirits or the area is too unnatural for them.

The hunt ends where it all started: The spirit is in the place of origin for the pollution.

Our friend will be there. They helped till our fields and now they will help you: A shaman, who is also trying to find evil spirits, are near the area who is also trying to find the evil spirit.

We cannot churn the waters clean. It is a corruption that has been called natural through unnatural means. Follow the currents to the mouth: The spirit is in, or near, the mouth of the river.

It takes about 2 hours to reach the delta. Encounters 1-3 and 7-10 from Chapter 1 may be used to indicate the passage of time.

There are a few locations that are marked on the map that can be explored. They all are on, or near, the delta.

Standing Stones

The standing stones are a set of smooth rocks perched out on a sandbar. Standing stones are traditionally used as ritual sites. There are very few tracks and many items are covered in sand, indicating the standing stones have not been used for quite some time.

Shoreline Cave

Along the shore is a cave. It's not a huge cave, but it seems to be a makeshift shelter. Inside, a couple of fishers are taking refuge there. They say that people use this cave to take a break from working.

Seaside Shrine

This tiny seaside shrine stands nestled in an alcove. It's empty, with offerings long left to the elements. The paint on the shrine seems weathered and chips are falling off of it. A statue of a naga sits at the center of the shrine.

Pāk Lěb

As the party reaches the end of the Kr nhaom, it opens up in multiple inlets. The adventurers have reached the Kr nhaom delta. Nestled on the edges of the river is the town of Pāk Lěb [pack lehb]. The town is on both sides of the delta with a long bridge connecting the two. The eastern side of the town is older than the western side, with signs of construction happening.

There are no places to dock on the western side, so adventurers must dock on the eastern side of town and walk over via the bridge.

At the center of the eastern town, there are some villagers fighting against 4 **gray oozes** and 1 **gelatinous cube**. Accompanying them is a shaman. The villagers ask for the adventurers' aid. Once the enemies are defeated, the shaman approaches the party and introduces themselves as Sothy.

Roleplaying Sothy

The human shaman, Sothy [so-tee] (she/her), has an etherealness to her. While kind, she can come off as a bit aloof, having spent her time communing with spirits more than living people. As a speaker for the spirits, she always has the spirits' best interest in mind.

Appearance-wise, Sothy is of medium-height with light brown skin. She wears basic cloth clothing with a blue sash at her waist. She has various bracelets and necklaces and carries a small pack strapped across her body.

Roleplaying the Village Leader

The village leader is a jovial human (he/him) who is very proud of Pāk Lěb's progress. He has the town's best interest in mind, wanting to help everyone progress in his town, both rich and poor.

Finding the Grove

The shaman asks for the adventurers to accompany them to the village leader who is guarding the bridge to the western side of the town. Once there, the village leader is with the town guard, keeping watch for whatever crosses the bridge.

Adventurers are informed that oozes have overtaken the western side of the town and pushed the workers and the people living there across the river. The shaman believes that the spirit is in the center of that side of town. Sothy can try to perform a ritual to summon a spirit familiar to track down the source of the corruption.

The village leader takes the opportunity to try to reclaim the town. He asks the adventure to help clear the western town of oozes while following the spirit. Once the town is cleansed and the spirit is removed, the adventurers are promised a sum of gold from the town's treasury.

Western Town Layout

When Sothy is finished channeling her familiar, an ethereal blue tiger emerges from the ground and heads across the bridge and into the west town.

The town is mostly under construction. The first couple of buildings are residential, with the occasional empty building meant for shops or stalls. The deeper adventurers go into the town, the more under construction it is until it's just foundations.

The spirit familiar follows the main road until it turns north (upstream) at a waterway and heads east, following the waterway away from the main river. Eventually, it opens to a man-made lake.

Along this route, the party encounters gray oozes that attack them. There should be at least 2 combat encounters, but more can be added to increase the difficulty.

The Town's Dilemma

Once everyone rendezvous with the spirit familiar, they stand in front of a small factory. Sludge and dirt pump out from the pipes and into the lake.

This factory was the town's first initiative in trying to accommodate the growing population. With the help of wizards and other magic users, they constructed a man-made inlet and lake. The factory became a smelting plant for iron and clay production. Because of this pollution, the spirit manifested and inhabits the factory, continuing the creation of sludge and polluting the Kr nhaom.

The shaman suggests peacefully banishing it with the party's help.

The mayor suggests bending the spirit to the town's will. The shaman, while against this option, says it's possible and can be used to clean the river up. Adventurers need to convince the shaman with a DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check to agree with the mayor.

Thirdly, adventurers can simply destroy the spirit.

Heart of Corruption

Inside, the building is overgrown with black vines and moss. The foundation and wood even look sickly. The first floor at the entrance is a fairly large area; there is a second floor that leads to other doors, but is blocked with heavy black vines.

The spirit of corruption stands before the adventurers. It is an ethereal-looking being made up of sickly browns, greens, and blacks. Its body is composed of a mud-like sludge. Around it are 4 **gray oozes**.

Banishing or Capturing the Spirit

There are four edifices across the two levels that bind the spirit to the world: A furnace, a shovel, large pipes, and a pile of coal. Adventurers need to destroy these edifices before Sothy can complete her ritual. It takes **1 minute for her to channel it**. During that time, she is defenseless to the spirit, so adventurers need to defend her.

Successfully banishing the spirit:

The edifices crumbled to dust and with the ritual complete, the spirit of corruption loses its hold on this world. It stops where it's standing and kneels to the ground. The sludge body begins to lose its shape and slumps to the ground. A blue-white orb is released from the sludge and disappears from the world.

Enslaving the spirit:

With the old edifices gone, a new one is in place. The spirit of the pollution stops attacking you and instead kneels in front of you, bowing its head in obedience. The spirit is bound to the factory once more, but in servitude to the town.

Destroying the spirit:

At the final blow from the adventurers, the spirit of pollution is destroyed. The sickly sludge is cut before collapsing into an inanimate pile with a faint ethereal blue glowing orb left in the puddle.

Development

Once the spirit of pollution has been dealt with, the adventurers return to the mayor, who rewards the party.

CONCLUSION

Depending on which route adventurers have taken, these are the possible conclusions:

Banishing the Spirit

Back outside, the corruption has receded. The dark vines and sludge have disappeared from the area. The waters in the lake seem to be receding back into the Kr nhaom. The mayor thanks you for dealing with the spirit, but is very concerned about the future of Pāk Lěb now that the water from the lake is receding. Sothy leaves the town after rewarding the players for her home not too far from the town.

Returning to the area after some time, Pāk Lěb has remained relatively the same. Growth has been slow. Instead of multiple buildings being worked on in the western town, now there are only a small handful being completed. The spirits of the Kr nhaom regard the party as friends and often show themselves to greet the adventurers.

A possible plot thread is to assist the town to find an ethical way to efficiently grow the town.

Enslaving the Spirit

While the corruption outside is still there, it quickly gets removed if the adventurers command it. The mayor thanks the adventurers for their help and promises that they always have a place in the town. Sothy, while begrudgingly understanding that things happen, warns that the spirit might break the binds and rebel against the town.

After some time, the spirit has reabsorbed the pollution of the river. The town has

grown exponentially as a place of progress on the Kr nhaom. While the gray oozes are gone, so too the spirits of the river have left the Serpent's Coil. Sothy has also has left the area, possibly with the spirits themselves.

A possible plot thread is that the spirit of pollution has broken its bonds. Now a large and imposing spirit, it terrorizes the town.

Destroying the Spirit

Outside, signs of corruption seem to stay in its place, but it's not growing. The mayor thanks the players for dealing with the spirit. The shaman is upset with the players because, despite the spirit being an evil spirit, destroying it disrupts the balance of life.

After some time, the remnants of the corruption are still there. Though not growing, it is a permanent scar on the Kr nhaom. While it was a hurdle for the town, they eventually adapt to the remnants.

Rewards

Once the spirit is dealt with and the river is cleansed, the party is awarded 400 gp by the town.

There are additional rewards if the party deals with it in a specific way:

- If you peacefully banish the spirit, the shaman Sothy grants the Fishing Cloak.
- If you bend the will of the spirit, the mayor rewards the party an extra 300 gp.
- If the players found the wedding bangle for the hunter of the floating village, they are rewarded an additional 10 gp.
- Upon destroying the spirit, while no additional reward is given, adventurers receive the *Essence of the Spirit of Pollution.* During downtime, a character can infuse the essence into a non-magical piece of armor or weapon. Armor gains +1 AC and resistance to poison; weapons gain 1d6 poison damage.

Fishing Cloak

Wondrous Item, uncommon (requires attunement)

This cloak is imbued with the magic of the river and crafted by Sothy.

The wearer gains +1 AC. In addition, if the wearer removes the cloak, they can use it as net.

When you use an action, Bonus Action, or Reaction to Attack with a net, you can make only one attack, regardless of the number of attacks you can normally make. The range of the net is 15ft. A Large or smaller creature successfully attacked by a net is Restrained until it is freed. A creature can use its action to make a DC 10 Strength check to free itself or another creature within its reach on a success. Dealing 5 slashing damage to the net (AC 10) also frees the creature without taking damage. The net is destroyed, but after 10 minutes it reforms back into the cloak.

Acknowledgments

This adventure draws upon on Southeast Asian folklore and spiritualism. Nature is more than just nature; it has a life force that allows it to exist. When it is tainted, it becomes corrupted and causes an imbalance in the world. I had a lot of fun creating the challenges within the Serpent's Coil that was more than just combat as well as drawing upon Southeast Asian folklore. Thank you to my dad for helping me with the Khmer translation for the mini-game. It means a lot to have reflected on my relationship with Cambodia culture and the effects of that disconnect due to intergenerational trauma.

Author Bio

Collette is a California-based writer and game designer. She has a strong passion for diversity and inclusivity either by creating or inspiring others to get into creating themselves. Her work can be found in Uncaged Volume 3, Book of Seasons: Solstice, and Friends Foes and Other Fine Folks. Follow her on Twitter @collettequach.

HANDOUT





















APPENDIX - MONSTERS & NPCs

Naga Hunter

Medium humanoid (shapechanger), lawful neutral

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 25 (4d8 + 3)
Speed 35 ft., swim 60 ft. in serpent or hybrid form

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (0)	11 (0)	13 (+1)	11 (0)

Skills Athletics +5, Perception +3
Senses Darkvision, passive Perception 14
Languages Common, Draconic, Aquan
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Shapechanger. The naga hunter can use its action to polymorph into one of 3 forms. Its statistics are the same in each form. Any equipment that is being carried or worn isn't transformed. It doesn't revert to any other form if it dies.

Naga Serpent: *A full-bodied serpent with between 1-9 heads depending on seniority.*
Hybrid Form: *A humanoid torso and with a serpent lower body instead of legs.*
Humanoid Form: *A full-bodied humanoid.*

Amphibious. The naga hunter can breathe air and water.

Actions

Longsword (Humanoid or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8+3) slashing damage.

Harpoon (Humanoid or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee or Ranged Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5ft. or range 20/60 ft., *Hit:* 11 (2d6+3) piercing damage. If the target is a Huge or smaller creature, it must succeed on a Strength contest against the naga hunter or be pulled up to 20 feet towards the naga hunter.

Bite (Serpent Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5ft., one creature. *Hit:* 6 (1d6+3) piercing damage.

Poison Spit (Serpent Form Only). *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 15/40 ft. one target. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) poison damage.

Sothy

Medium humanoid, neutral good

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 58 (9d8 + 9)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (0)	12 (+1)	10 (0)	15 (+2)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +3
Skills Acrobatics +3, Perception +3
Senses Darkvision, passive Perception 13
Languages Common, Druidic, Celestial
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Spellcasting. Sothy is a 4th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 13, +6 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following druid spells prepared:

Cantrips: *guidance, mending, produce flame, druidcraft*
1st Level (3 slots): *thunderwave, detect magic*
2nd level (2 Slots): *enhance ability, hold person*

Spiritual Medium (2/long rest). The shaman can communicate with spirits and ask for guidance. The spirits are not omniscient but are generally an expert on the subject they are apart of.

Spirit Familiar (1/long rest). Sothy has a spiritual familiar (**tiger**) that she can call to assist her. Once per long rest, she can call upon her familiar during combat, providing her with a new set of abilities.

Actions

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4+1)

Tiger's Claw (Spirit Familiar Only). The familiar strikes at a target within 30 ft. of Sothy. Make a ranged spell attack against the target. On a hit, the target takes 1d10 2d6 magical slashing damage.

Aspect of the Tiger (Spirit Familiar Only). The familiar grants their power to allies within 30ft. of the shaman. For 1 minute, allies have advantage on stealth rolls and can use the pounce ability found in the **tiger** statblock.

Spirit of Pollution

Medium aberration, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)
Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 9)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	8 (-1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Str +5, Con +6
Skills Acrobatics +3, Perception +2
Immunities Acid, Poison
Resistances Non-magical piercing bludgeoning and slashing damage
Senses passive Perception 12
Languages Understands Common
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. This creature's spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 13. +6 to hit with spell attacks). They have the following Druid spells:

Cantrips: *guidance, mending, produce flame, poison spray*
1st Level (3 slots): *thunderwave, detect magic*
2nd level (2 Slots): *enhance ability, hold person*

Spawn Oozes (1/long rest). The Spirit of the Pollution summons 2 gray oozes. They act on the spirit's initiative.

Actions

Multiattack. The spirit makes two claw attacks.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+3) plus an additional 1d6 poison damage.

Drowned Souls of the Hidden Stream

by Daniel Kwan

Content Warnings: drowning, mild body horror

SYNOPSIS

Drowned Souls of the Hidden Stream is a Chinese-inspired 1st level adventure designed for play by 4-6 characters over the course of a single 3-4-hour session. The Dungeon Master (DM) should read through the adventure carefully and consider how they intend on using the overall plot, encounters, and themes introduced. In Drowned Souls of the Hidden Stream, the players come face to face with the consequences of Imperial growth. The diversion of major rivers to create rice paddy terraces inadvertently caused tremendous flooding, devastating the rural populations that dwell under the bamboo canopy. Notably, the flooding claimed the lives of two temple guardians of the Songxi village (pronunciation: "song she"). This created a location of abundant supernatural activity, and it's up to the players to lay the spirits of the dead to rest.

The content of this adventure is designed to be modular, where players have the freedom to engage with the subject matter in whatever ways they'd like. For instance, the exploration of the setting can be a daring, swashbuckling adventure whereby the characters find themselves jumping across the rooftops of the Songxi village while combating the drowned souls that haunt the flooded grounds. Alternatively, the players can make their way through the adventure and avoid combating the drowned souls, only to find themselves faced with the difficult task of sending the souls of the lovers trapped in the moral realm to heaven. Despite being written as a one-shot adventure, Drowned Souls of the Hidden Stream can serve as a primer for a much longer campaign highlighting the misdeeds of the rich and the human toll exacted when mortals attempt to control nature.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

The players can engage with this adventure in several ways.

1. With their dying wish, the leader of a rural community of refuges who survived the flood pleas with the players to return to the village and put the dead to rest.
2. An aristocrat named Chao Shen seeks a company of adventurers to explore the

ruins of Songxi and recover a lost relic from its temple. They neglect to inform them about the supernatural presence.

3. You return to the village of your ancestors to pay your respects, only to find that it has been destroyed and overrun with supernatural entities.
4. A foreign mercantile guild hires the adventurers to discover why so many of their caravans have disappeared when traveling through the Fangyang Bamboo Sea.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

If you plan on engaging with the content of this adventure as a player, ***stop reading here.***

In *Drowned Souls of the Hidden Stream*, the players come face-to-face with the consequences of Imperial growth. The characters find a small village known as Songxi in the lowlands of the Fanyang Bamboo Sea (pronunciation: “faan yang”). The village was constructed around an ancient stone bridge that was used by the people of the region to cross a body of water known as the Hidden Stream. As people settled on this site to cater to travelers or farm the bountiful landscape, they built homes around the centralized structure, eventually lending it the name Songixi, Village of the Hidden Stream. Surrounded by mountains of the bamboo forest and isolated from the chaos of the cities, Songxi existed for centuries as a village of profound tradition.

This idyllic existence was doomed from the beginning. For his own selfish gain, Emperor Xie (pronunciation: “she-eh”) [he/him] ordered extensive irrigation and flood control



projects in the region. Early attempts to channel and divide the great river that feeds the Hidden Stream failed, resulting in the displacement of the local population to the highlands and the destruction of Songxi. As the waters surged through the village, the residences were destroyed, and the entire population was displaced. Those that died exist between the worlds of the living and dead. Detached from life and forced into a state of undeath – they became less human and more like husks. Now, they roam the village as hollow drowned souls.

During the flood Leping [LEH-ping] and Duan [DWAN], a married couple, met their untimely demise. Leping, a temple steward, drowned while attempting to rescue a relic that has been the heart of Songxi since it was founded – the legendary Sword of Jixia. Attached to his duty, Leping was unable to ascend to heaven without ensuring the safety of the relic. Attached to her love, Duan perished atop the Songxi temple as she watched her husband perish beneath the waters while clutching the ancient blade. She would not ascend to heaven without her husband. Together, they remained in Songxi as spirits. Duan became consumed by grief, her physical body drying out in the sun, resting on the roof of the temple. Leping became consumed by rage as his physical body bloated beneath the waters that flooded the temple. In his new, twisted form, Leping has become a powerful spiritual entity and has subjected countless travelers to fates like his. They now wander the sunken village as drowned souls. It is up to the players to decide whether they will vanquish all the spirits in the village or find a way to give Leping and Duan the proper burial they deserve.

NOTES

The character Emperor Xie can be replaced with any other lordly antagonist that you wish to have in your campaign. Leping and Duan do not have to be a heterosexual couple - their backstory is yours to modify. What must remain is Leping's duty and Duan's love and devotion.

Duan

Appearance. Duan's spirit form appears regal and beautiful, clad in well-kept robes. This contrasts her shriveled corpse. Duan's eyes convey unending sadness.

Roleplaying. Duan is depressed, overwhelmed by her loss. She is inconsolable.

Motivation. She seeks to ascend to heaven, but not without her husband.

Leping

Appearance. Leping's spirit form appears regal and beautiful, clad in well-kept robes. This contrasts with his shriveled corpse.

Roleplaying. Leping acts with blind anger. The helplessness he felt when he drowned in the flood has transformed into pure rage that he directs towards any who enter the temple.

Motivation. Leping won't reunite with Duan until the temple relic is free from the flooded temple.

Funerary Rites

Funerary Rites consist of food offerings, cremation, and burning of incense and joss paper. This should be common knowledge to characters that live in the region in which this adventure is set.

CHAPTER 1

The Fanyang Bamboo Sea

Fanyang is the largest and oldest subtropical bamboo forest in the realm. It's a mysterious landscape full of lakes, stunning waterfalls, and rare flora and fauna. Surrounded by hills and crisscrossing rivers, the ecosystem is home to many dark secrets. The name Bamboo Sea comes from a phenomenon that occurs once every century when all the bamboo trees of Fanyang blossom at once, forming a lush sea of hanging flowers. While forests such as this appear wild and untouched by humanity, they carry the scars of those wronged under its canopy.

Locating the Village

As the players travel through Fanyang, the smell of rotten mulberry serves as a clue to their proximity to the Songxi Village. During this part of the adventure, players may engage in exploration and have their characters get to know each other. As they travel deeper into the forest towards their objective, the Songxi Village, the terrain becomes increasingly difficult and slows their travel pace.

Skill Checks

Characters who pass an DC 14 Intelligence (Religion) check know the smell of rotten mulberries is known to be an omen associated with flooding. (In late historical China, the phrase "mulberry fields" is strongly associated unstoppable changes to the world, the transience of human life, and the understanding that nature isn't always under our control.)

When navigating Fanyang, players roll a DC 15 group Wisdom (Survival) check to see if they can avoid the natural hazards of the forest. If half the group succeeds, it takes three days to navigate the forest. Otherwise, the group unknowingly encounters one of the natural hazards.

Natural Hazards

d6	Natural Hazard
1	**Sink hole** – A random party member falls into a natural sinkhole. A DC 12 Dexterity saving throw will avoid a 20-foot (2d6 bludgeoning damage) drop. Climbing out requires a successful DC 14 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check.
2	**Marsh** – Difficult terrain slows their travel pace (half a day) if they bypass it. Going through the marsh gives players disadvantage on all Athletics and Acrobatics skill checks. Their movement speed is a;sp halved regardless of their ability to move through difficult terrain.
3	**Heavy rain** – visibility is reduced to 15 feet, slowing the players by half a day.
4	**Traps** – a random party member steps in a hunting trap that the hunters that use to live in Songxi set traps to collect game. The player must succeed a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d4 piercing damage. Once ensnared, a DC 13 Strength check is required to free a character from the trap.
5	**Toxic plants** - the players that failed the DC 15 group Wisdom (Survival) check to navigate the forest are exposed to plants that cause an allergic reaction. They must succeed a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or take the poisoned condition for 2 days. A successful DC 13 Medicine check can remove the effects of the toxic plants and remove the poisoned condition.
6	**Dehydration** – the players that failed the DC 15 group Wisdom (Survival) check to navigate the forest suffer from dehydration. They experience level 1 exhaustion until completing a long rest.

Encounters

Save for the sounds made by the characters, the forest is eerily silent and devoid of wildlife. If you wish to challenge players, they may encounter drowned souls (see Chapter 2) as they near the village.

Development

The DM must remember that it is central to this adventure that the players reach Songxi. When the players discover the village, read the text below.

As you travel deeper into the Fanyang Bamboo Sea, the forest visibly thickens. The paths that wind through the forest are shaded even during the day. During the night, it's difficult to sleep. The bamboo shoots provide little cover for the cold winds that cut through the forest, and you huddle close to the campfire for warmth. Years ago, this forest would've been teeming with wildlife. Now, not even the distant howling of wolves or other beasts can be heard. As you near the village and approach from the south, the once-firm ground becomes soggy and difficult to traverse. The earth clings to your boots as the water level begins to rise. Upon reaching the outskirts of the village, wagons remain sunken in the thick mud, abandoned by those who managed to escape. The core of the village is nearly gone, with only the rooftops of houses and a handful of important buildings visible above the waterline.

CHAPTER 2

Songxi, Village of the Hidden Stream

Upon arrival, the party is greeted by the beautiful scenery of the landscape contrasted against the haunting ruins of Songxi. The conditions are hot, humid, and unwelcoming to characters new to this region. From their perspective, the flood entered the village from the east, sweeping westward. The abandoned wagons and supplies through the southern gate indicate the escape route the villagers took. Despite the ceasing of the flood, there are dangers here. While most of the villagers managed to escape the destruction, those who met their unfortunate end in Songxi during the flood, or curious travelers who perished at the hands of Leping, the Gurgling One (Chapter 4) have risen as drowned souls - vengeful lesser spirits bound to the water. The scent of rotten mulberries is strongest here.
As the players enter the village, read the text below.

As you approach the overgrown stone gates that mark the southern entrance to the village, you witness up-close the haunting remains of a once-thriving settlement ravaged by flood and forgotten by the cities beyond the dense bamboo forest. Only the roofs of some houses are visible above the waterline. Those built along the elevated hillside remain partially flooded and are overtaken by the forest as long, strangling vines grow over their walls and roofs. The smell of death lingers in the air and the faint sound of crying echoes through the surviving structures.

Navigating the Village

Nature has completely overtaken what remains of the village which once contained hundreds of thriving households. Some buildings, like the Temple or Watchtower, peak out above the waterline. Players are encouraged to traverse the rooftops and explore the interiors of multi-story housing complexes.

The entrance to the village is the south-facing River Gate comprised of four stone columns and straight inclined gabled roofs adorned with green ceramic tiles mark the southern (and primary) entrance to Songxi. It features three portals (gateways) - two small portals (west and east) for walking entry, and a larger (center) one for carriages and larger processions. A wooden sign hangs ajar above the center portal. It reads “Songxi, Village of the Hidden Stream”. The west and east portals feature a stone statue of a guardian lion - one male to guard the structure, and one female to protect the village occupants. Both stone statues have been worn by time and overtaken by nature. Like the Watchtower, the River Gate was only partially affected by the flood.

Key structures to explore:

Ancestral Hall

A once-charming ancestral hall honoring the Guan, Zhong, Ma, Wang, Liu, Chu, Shao, and Cheng families stand next to the temple complex of Songxi. Wooden sculptures of the progenitors of the surname lineages line the walls of the Hall, which also features a stage that hosted village festivals honoring deified ancestors. Strangely, the scent of incense lingers throughout this space, masking the rotten smell that dominates the village. A pair of water ghosts haunt the ancestral hall, hiding within the cracks of the wooden sculptures, giving them the appearance of waterlogged wood to the inattentive eye. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals a cache of ritual materials such as incense, joss paper, perforated jade discs, and red lacquered boxes.

Dimensions. The Ancestral Hall is a single-story stone-walled building with vaulted ceilings. It is 40 ft. by 30 ft. in dimension with the entrance on the wide side of the structure. The building rests upon a raised stone platform, shielding it from most of the flooding.

Atmosphere. Foreboding, important.

Watchtower

In order to protect Songxi from banditry, the eight families of the village combined their resources to construct a four-story stone observation tower so they'd have enough time to take up arms. During the initial flooding that ravaged the region, some of the village inhabitants managed to survive by climbing to the top of the watchtower. Unfortunately, debris from the flood blocked the door and trapped them inside. They appear to have starved atop the tower. Close inspection of the skeletal remains with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine) check reveals signs of cannibalism - gnaw marks upon the bones - a ghoulish reminder of what mortals are capable of when driven to desperation. Characters who have access to at least two cantrips must succeed a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or hear the scratching of teeth upon bones and fading screams.

Dimensions. The Watchtower is a four-story building with a square base that is 15 ft. by 15 ft. in dimension. The top level is roofed but has open walls.

Atmosphere. Imposing.

Adjusting the Encounter

Here are some suggestions for adjusting the scene:

Weak: *Parties that have four or fewer members should encounter no more than 5 drowned souls as they explore the village. This gives the players more opportunities to slowly explore the village. With fewer creatures, ensure that they do not attack at once, and instead stalk the players through the village.*

Strong: *Parties with five or more members should encounter at least 7 drowned souls as they explore the village. As above, ensure that the creatures stalk players through the village.*

Very Strong: *If you wish to make this encounter challenging, they players may encounter ten or more drowned souls. This number is intended to create a sense of urgency and tension for the players, as they may feel overwhelmed by the sheer number of creatures. This can be used as a means of furthering the plot as they near the temple*

Residential Area

Houses above the waterline have been overtaken by climbing and coiling vines that snake across the interconnected homes with architectural styles and materials that reflect the successive generations that contribute to the village's expansion. Their wooden beams and posts, and colored, glazed tiled roofs have withstood the test of time. Fallen trees can be seen resting upon the structures, providing access to the rooftops and indicating they support the players should they try walking on them. Narrow walkways run between the residential buildings, forming rooftop gaps that any adventurer can jump over.

Dimensions. The dimensions of the Songxi residences are variable, as many are attached to each other in structural blocks.

Atmosphere. If the players enter houses that are only partially flooded, they feel claustrophobic.

Skill Checks

A successful DC 16 Wisdom (Nature) or Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals the absence of fish and waterfowl in the flooded waters is because of the rapid and lush plant growth in the village. Plants growing in locations of intense spiritual energy literally entangle and consume small animals.

On a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, a character sees a shining object near the base of the Watch Tower. It is a Wand of Frost that allows the user to cast ray of frost (+5 spell attack). The wand has 7 charges and regains 1d6 +1 expended charges daily at dawn.

Encounters

Should players succeed a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, they notice the drowned souls that haunt the village. These are immediately hostile to PCs that venture too close and begin combat by using their Drown ability. These creatures are always found hiding within the buildings in the Residential Area, roaming the Ancestral Hall, and circling the base of the Watchtower. While exploring the Ancestral Hall, the players may experience Duan's Aura of Sorrow ability.

Development

The next part of this story begins when the PCs notice the distraught ghost (Duan, the Grieving Ghost) upon the roof of the Songxi Temple and approach the building to investigate. The base of the temple is flooded up to waist height for a medium-sized humanoid.



CHAPTER 3

Duan, the Grieving Ghost

When Songxi was a thriving village, Duan and her spouse Leping were the dutiful stewards of the local temple and the relic housed within it. When the flood ravaged Songxi, Leping urged Duan to seek refuge on the roof while he raced to recover the relic - an ancient sword that seems resistant to tarnish and is inexplicably sharp. Unfortunately, the waves moved too fast, surging through the windows and causing a large iron incense burner to fall on him. Duan watched from the roof's sky well as the waters took her husband. With no help coming and unable to escape, the grief-stricken Duan wasted away.

The Songxi Temple

As the players approach the exterior of the temple, read the text below.

This single-story building enshrines the ancestral gods of the families that inhabited Songxi. Multi-inclined, sweeping roofs adorned with blue roof tiles symbolize the sky, while the wooden support columns and interior stone walls have been painted black to encourage heavenly visits. The black interior walls feature carved decorations of gods overseeing the wellbeing of the village and protecting the wider bamboo forest from fire, demons, and banditry.

The ground-level of the entire temple remains flooded. At the center of the Songxi temple is the sky well, an enclosed courtyard opening to the sky. It contains the body of Leping, the Gurgling One, priest married to Duan, the Grieving One. The doors to the ground level of the temple are blocked by heavy debris. Heavy trees have fallen during the flood, forming ramps that the players can use to access the roof of the temple.

Encounter

As the players approach Duan, read the text below.

A woman of regal beauty floats inches above the roof of the temple. Clad in well-kept robes, she glides back and forth, crying. Her sobs echo through the entire village. She appears human, yet casts no shadow. Nearby rests a shriveled corpse wearing identical yet weather-worn clothing. Time has not treated it well, and it has become tangled in the vines that grow around the structures above the waterline.

The roof of the temple can be accessed by traversing the roofs of the Residences in the Chapter 2, or by traversing the fallen trees resting upon the temple itself. Floating atop the temple is Duan, the Grieving Ghost. She is not immediately hostile towards the party



Art by Kathryne Wilson

and stares sorrowfully through the sky well into the courtyard below. Her incorporeal form floats inches above the rooftop, within view of her dried-out corpse. Duan's corpse has been well preserved by the sun; players notice that it is almost completely devoid of muscle and fat. Her grief was so intense, and the sight of her husband dying so traumatic, that her body literally wasted away.

Her Aura of Sorrow ability is very potent at close range, and those who come within 15 feet of her roll a DC 18 Charisma saving **throw** or experience traumatic visions of the flooding event that ravaged Songxi (Nature of the Vision table) in addition to the effects of her ability. PCs that have experienced the effects of Aura of Sorrow elsewhere in the village must attempt the Charisma save again within 15 feet of Duan.

During combat, Duan makes use of her spirit step and step of sorrow abilities to move between PCs, prioritizing spellcasters. If attacked, Duan retaliates, but pleads with the players to help her husband.

If the PCs decide to speak to her, they learn about the fate of the village: how to raging flood wasn't noticed until it was too late, how the survivors were slain by imperial rangers to cover up the atrocities, and how her husband Leping died trying to save a

local religious relic. Within the temple below, beneath a large, iron incense burner, is the bloated body of Leping dressed in simple temple attire. Their spirits bound to each other in marriage, Duan begs the players to retrieve the body of her husband and perform funeral rites for them - preparing food offerings, burning the bodies, and burn incense and joss paper (common items carried in "priests packs" in a Chinese setting). Performing a funerary rite for the body trapped below restores the mind of Leping, the Gurgling One and allows him to ascend to heaven.

If the players ignore Duan's cries for help and attempt to slay her, an encounter with both her and Leping can occur. If depleted to 5 HP or lower, she cries out that "love is a futile feeling" and uses the dodge action. Leping (Chapter 4) joins the combat and attack the players in a rage.

Adjusting the Scene

Here are some suggestions for adjusting the scene:

Weak: ***For*** *a partiy that has four or fewer members, the DM should emphasize a non-violent approach to interacting with Duan.*

Strong: *A party with five or more members, or those seeking to make this encounter challenging, may either attack her outright or after they experience visions of the flood. For a challenging encounter, Duan may try to separate the party by forcing half of them into the sky well to meet her husband Leping. She's been waiting for a very long time for an opportunity to be free of the material world.*

Skill Checks

On a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception), players can hear her muttering one of these random lines between sobs:

d6	Duan's Muttering
1	*"My love, look what devotion has brought us."*
2	*"Was the sword worth your life?"*
3	*"Would the gods have wanted this?"*
4	*"Even the Empire cares not about Songxi."*
5	*"Just breath... just breath..."*
6	*"I'm waiting for you. I'm waiting. I'm WAITING!!"*

Development

The next part of the story begins when the players attempt to free the spirits of both Duan and Leping. This can happen in two ways. If the players slay Duan, Leping engages them in combat; begin the next chapter. Should the players discover the nature of Duan's fate, the body of her husband below, and agree to perform funeral rites for them, the next section begins.



Nature of the Vision

d6	Nature & Subject
1	[Violent] The perspective of an adult protecting a child from the raging flood. They hoist them upon a horse, and send it galloping into the forest. The vision ends as they turn to witness a wave carrying debris surging towards them.
2	[Scarring] The perspective of a person drowning. The character experiences the feeling of water filling their lungs.
3	[Tragic] Duan's perspective - you witness her husband, clad in the robes of a priest, slowly drown as the waters rise around him. He lies trapped beneath a large iron incense burner, clutching a long object wrapped in silk.
4	[Faint] You hear the faint sounds of the flood as it approaches the village from afar. You hear the approaching flood as the village comes to life as the sun rises.
5	[Uncontrollable] You experience the sensation of drowning and the physical sensation of your body being struck by debris caught in the destructive wave.
6	[Foreshadowing] You see a pair of Imperial rangers inspecting the River Gate in the aftermath of the flood. They speak about the diverted river and how no word of this will reach the cities. A ranger states that they'll ensure that all survivors will be silenced. As they leave, a water ghost rises from the stagnant waters and drags the remaining ranger into the depths.

CHAPTER 4

The Gurgling One

Duan tasks the players with performing funerary rites for her husband Leping. Visible through the temple sky well, he can be seen pacing back and forth, muttering to himself and experiencing fits of rage, in the courtyard below. The players are urged by Duan to free her husband of his rage so that they can move onto the great beyond together. If the players decide to slay her in Chapter 2, Leping attacks.

The corpse of Leping can be seen below the surface of the water, trapped beneath a heavy iron incense burner. It has bloated to grotesque proportions: his eyes bulging and tongue protruding, his skin now shades of green and purple.

Inside the Temple

Leping died in the temple he and Duan devoted their entire lives to maintaining. His bloated corpse remains trapped beneath a heavy iron incense burner, still clutching a long object (a sword) wrapped in fine silk. His spirit, which appears as he did in life - save for his deranged facial expressions - wanders aimlessly around the open courtyard of the temple. If the players take a violent approach and slay Duan, the Grieving One, Leping engages in combat with them atop the temple. If Duan convinces the players to bring both her and Leping to a heavenly rest, then he remains in the courtyard of the temple (visible through the sky well).

Skill Checks

On a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) **check,** a character notes rigor mortis has set in and his bloated right hand still clutches a silk-wrapped object. They also spot the pommel of a fine blade protruding from the silk. If Leping enters his physical body, this skill check cannot be completed.

Encounter

Unless the players can magically pacify his spirit, Leping is a violent encounter. Once the PCs descend into the courtyard, he immediately becomes hostile, mistaking them for bandits seeking the sword he died protecting (unless they have slain Duan) or as the waters that took his life. He attacks the nearest character. After he takes damage for the first time, Leping uses his action to use his corpse like a suit of armor, lifting the incense burner off him like it weighed nothing. If he enters his corpse, Leping doesn't use the sword he clutches in combat.

Funerary Rites

In order to calm the spirit of Leping, the players must conduct funerary rites for both him and Duan. They need to prepare an offering of food, set the corpse ablaze, and burn incense and joss paper. Should that players not have the necessary ritual items, either reskin the contents of a priest's pack (if present) or have the players search through the temple complex for the necessary items, found in the Ancestral Hall.

When the players defeat Leping's spirit and conduct the funerary rites his body and Duan's, read the text below.

As the flames burn and the smell of incense displaces the stench of death, the spirits of Duan and Leping appear before you together. For the first time in years, they look at each other with caring eyes and an understanding that their suffering has come to an end.

His words no longer guttural moans or animalistic cries. "I died protecting this blade. It is the heart of our village, and a piece of heaven."

Duan turns to you. "We dedicated our lives to this place, as did all of the families taken by the water. Seek out the other villages in the bamboo forest and tell them of our fate. Do not seek revenge for us, but rather...justice."

As her final words are heard, and the flames die down, the couple finally ascends into the heavens.



CONCLUSION

While Duan died of grief, Leping perished violently. The encounter with Leping, the Gurgling One serves as both the climax of this adventure, but also a catalyst for a longer campaign. Once the couple have been sent to the great beyond through the application of funerary rites, a calm falls upon Songxi. The water ghosts, whose restlessness was brought upon by the rage of Leping, return to the waters and are still.

The end of this adventure serves as a primer for a political campaign centered upon the misdeeds of the Imperial family. While the couple of the temple have been sent to the great beyond, there are still hundreds of flood survivors displaced throughout the land. Here are a few plot hooks for multi-session campaigns:

1. The armor of the rangers slain by Leping indicate that Emperor Xie is responsible. They carry orders with his seal and failed to cover up his mistakes. He will pay.
2. With a DC 15 Intelligence (History) check, PCs recall that a meteor fell to the land during the Mid-Autumn Festival and King Guo forged it into a sword (the Sky Sword of King Guo) and dagger. Together, legends say that they form a key to heaven. Where is the other blade?



Rewards

XP Rewards: Individual XP rewards are calculated by adding the total XP of the creatures defeated, including Duan and Leping if a non-violent solution was used, and dividing the number between all the players.

Treasure

At the end of the adventure, the players possess a non-magical meteoritic blade of legendary quality known as the Sword of Jixia. The blade is contained within a red lacquered scabbard and features ancient inscriptions upon one side of the blade. A successful DC 14 Intelligence (History) check allows the players to translate the text, "The Sky Sword of King Guo, wielder of the Heavens."

The Sword of Jixia

The *Sword of Jixia*, a blade of unusual sharpness, can be pried from his hands at the end of combat. Treat this blade as one made of a rare, non-magical, metal capable of bypassing slashing resistance. It will garner a lot of gold to an antiquities collector or an adventurer seeking a truly superior blade.

Author's Notes & Acknowledgments

One of the major experiential inspirations for this game's setting was Songxi, a fully restored Tang and Song Dynasty village in Pujiang China. Faithfully restored by the Chinese government, this village is home to a modern rural population that I had the honor of visiting during my time working in China as an archaeologist. Inspiration was also drawn from Houtouwan, a fishing village on the Chinese island of Shengshan. It was made a ghost town after the fishing supply was depleted by trawlers originating from Shanghai.

About the Author

Daniel Kwan is a Toronto-based podcaster, developmental editor, game designer, and educator. He is the co-host and GM of the ENnie Award nominated Asians Represent! Podcast (@aznsrepsent). As a designer, Daniel has published Zany Zoo, Wolf of the South, and Ross Rifles – a game he successfully funded on Kickstarter in 2019. He has also written for games like Haunted West and FlipTales. Daniel is also the co-founder of Level Up Gaming, an organization that provides adults with autism and other disabilities opportunities to develop their social skills through group gaming experiences.

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ADVENTURE APPENDIX - Monsters & NPCs

This appendix details creatures and nonplayer characters that are mentioned in this adventure (*Drowned Souls of the Hidden Stream*) and that don't appear in the SRD.

The creatures are presented in alphabetical order.

Drowned Soul

A water ghost might be mistaken for magical, sentient water, save for the human grimace it and the humanoid form they hold. They are twisted spirits of adventurers who have come before, slain by Leping, the Gurgling One in the Temple. Now, they remain in the material plane, bound to the very water that claimed their lives.

Drowned Soul

Medium undead, any alignment

Armor Class 10
Hit Points 9 (2d8)
Speed swim 50 ft, fly 30 ft (must remain with 30 ft of a water source)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-2)	15 (+2)	10 (0)	10 (0)	11 (0)	12 (+1)

Damage Vulnerabilities cold
Damage Immunities necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, unconscious
Damage Resistances acid, fire, lightning, thunder
Senses Darkvision 60 ft, passive Perception 10
Languages Any it knew in life
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Cold Weakness. When drowned soul takes magical cold damage, its spiritual form freezes, reducing its speed by half and gains vulnerablity to bludgeoning damage until the end of its next turn.

Actions

Spirtual Slam. *Melee weapon attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5ft, one creature. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) force damage.

Drown. The drowned soul occupies the same space as a non-Undead creature and fills the target's lungs with water. The target must succeed a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or take 1d10 bludgeoning damage. Creatures with the ability to breath underwater or don't require air are unaffected by this ability.

Duan, the Grieving Ghost

Unlike the lesser ghosts that haunt the village of the hidden stream, Duan's spirit did not become bonded with the water; for she did not drown. Instead she wasted away, catatonic and trapped upon the roof of the village temple after losing her husband Leping to the raging waters of the flood. Duan appears as she did in life, regal, beautiful, and clad in well-made common clothing. Only now, her eyes convey the unending sadness of a tortured soul.

Duan, the Grieving Ghost

Medium humanoid

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 18 (4d8)
Speed fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-2)	15 (+2)	10 (0)	10 (0)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)

Damage Immunities Necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities Charmed, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, unconcious
Damage Resistances Acid, fire, lightning, cold, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Senses Darkvision 60 ft, passive Perception 11
Languages Any it knew in life
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Spirit Step. Duan can move through creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. She takes 5 (1d10) force damage if she ends her turn inside an object.

Actions

Aura of Sorrow. Each creature within a 60-foot radius must succeed a DC 11 Charisma saving throw or be incapacitated for 1 minute as they feel incomprehensibly sad and begin to uncontrollably weep. A creature within 15 feet of Duan experience additional visions outlined in the Nature of the Vision table. An incapacitated target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the condition on itself on a success. If a target's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the target is immune to the *Aura of Sorrow* for the next 24 hours.

Step of Sorrow. When adjacent to an incapacitated creature affected by the Aura of Sorrow, she can teleport up to 60 feet to an unoccupied space they can see that is also adjacent to an incapacitated creature.

Life Drain. *Melee Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 4 (1d8) necrotic damage. Duan regains hit points equal to half of the damage dealt to target creature.

Leping, The Gurgling One

Clad in the simple robes of a temple steward, he paces back and forth. His incoherent mumbling is punctuated by fits of intense rage as he floats around the sky well.

Leping, the Gurgling One (Corpse)

Medium undead humanoid

Armor Class 10
Hit Points 32 (5d8 + 10)
Speed 30 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	10 (0)	14 (+2)	10 (0)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)

Damage Immunities Necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities Charmed, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, unconcious
Senses Darkvision 60 ft, passive Perception 11
Languages Any it knew in life
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Putrefaction. As Leping's corpse decayed beneath the water, his corporeal body became swollen with gas and fluid. Whenever a creature attacks Leping while he's possessing a corpse, foul smelling fluids and gas bursts from the wound. Each non-Undead creature within 10 feet of Leping must succeed a DC 12 Constitution save or be poisoned for 1 minute.

Actions

Slam. *Melee weapon attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., single target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Leping, the Gurgling One (Ghost)

Medium undead humanoid

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 32 (5d8 + 10)
Speed fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (0)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)

Damage Immunities Necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities Charmed, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, unconcious
Damage Resistances Acid, fire, lightning, cold, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Senses Darkvision 60 ft, passive Perception 11
Languages Any it knew in life
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Spirit Step. Leping can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. He takes 5 (1d10) force damage if he ends their turn inside an object.

Traumatic Tether. Until proper funeral rites can be performed, Leping's spirit will forever be bound to his corpse. He can't move more than 50 feet away from his corpse. If his corpse is destroyed, he will be unable to use his Possess Corpse ability.

Actions

Life Drain. *Melee Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., single target. *Hit:* 4 (1d8) necrotic damage. Leping regains hit points equal to half of the damage dealt to target creature.

Possess Corpse. Leping can possess his corpse so long as both his ghost and body are on the same plane of existance and within 50 feet of each other. Leping controls his body and uses the Leping, the Gurgling Ghost (Corpse) statistics. He can use a bonus action to end the possession and reappear in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the corpse.

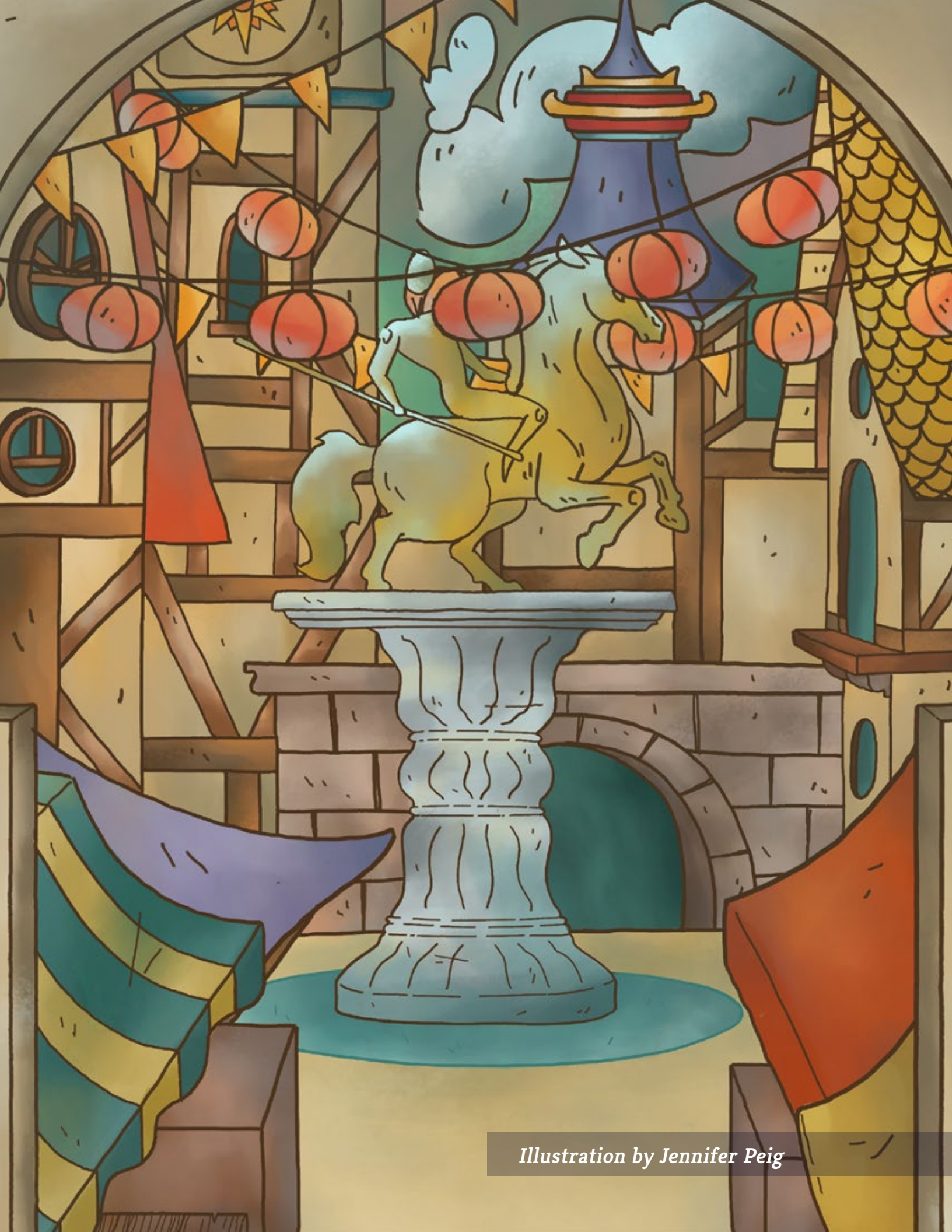


Illustration by Jennifer Peig

Bamboo in the Dark

by Kevin Thien Vu Long Nguyen

Content Warnings: Theft and commodification of cultural artifacts, abuse of authority

SYNOPSIS

Wind carries rumor of a black market auction being held tonight where untold treasures and secrets will be offered and the invited will bring heavy purses. The festival celebrating a legendary Hero of the past has brought folk in from across the province and beyond, making a perfect cover for the smugglers and buyers to conduct their illicit business under the Magistrates' noses. The party need to follow the rumors, find the auction, and make it out with as much as they can carry. Pull this off, and they might become legends.

This adventure is designed for 3-5 player characters between levels 5-10 and can be 1-3 sessions relative to the party's pace.
It is recommended you read the entire adventure at least once before attempting to run it. While each section is distinct, they are interconnected with each directly affecting the next through the Reputation Scale and Adversity Tracks described in Chapter 1 which may result in a more opposition in Chapter 2.

While combat is a component of the adventure, it may be more "combat light" than other adventures. The primary focus skill use, investigative roleplay, and piecing together clues to evoke intrigue where the drama is less "will we die?" and more "can we pull this off?"
Let players know that things like Reputation and Time are being tracked and may affect the adventure via the Adversity Track so as not to blindside them with consequences they were not aware were possible.
The degree to which you describe these mechanisms and consequences is left to DM discretion.

ADVENTURE HOOK

This adventure can be used standalone, as the launch of a longer campaign, or as an interlude to an already ongoing adventure. The party might find themselves in The City simply hoping to take in the festival, following rumor of the auction from without the municipality, or to find the key of another adventure rumored within.

If you are looking for ways to tie the players directly to this adventure here are a few options you might consider:

- A character must recover a stolen family heirloom that is to be offered up on the auction block. Choose one of the following or a bespoke heirloom that better fits your game:
  - A necklace that acts as a key to the family's ancestral mausoleum which has been locked away for generations and weighs on the family's spirit.
  - A statuette of a protective guardian fashioned in the image of an ancestral matriarch; the loss of the statuette has begotten misfortune and tragedy for the family for years.
  - Memoirs of a family member who was said to have gone missing in search of a fundamental truth that would change the world as we know it.
- The party needs to snatch up a quest macguffin known to be in the auction offerings before rival adventurers do or their own efforts might be curtailed.
  - An artifact of Thanh Giong, the great hero being celebrated by the ongoing festival.
  - A map with the location of The Heaven's Gate where mortals can commune with the Gods and parley for a wish to be granted, if judged worthy.
  - An urn crafted by a famous ceramicist centuries ago being offered as a simple art piece; unknown to the smugglers, and likely the buyers, it actually contains a Lich's phylactery.
- The party work with local Magistrates - voluntarily or via coercion - to bust the smugglers and buyers stealing and trading cultural artifacts, and using them and the funds they generate for foul means. If coerced into service, ask the party what the Magistrates would be able to use to effectively leverage against them. Use this as an opportunity as a group to dig up character's dark pasts or to dangle a secret the Magistrates have dug up about a party member that the player might not even know as a carrot at the end of the stick.

Notes on Adventure Hooks

If utilizing the first or second Adventure Hook consider starting in media res with the party fighting the last standing member(s) of a group in a location that is not The City. The enemy as they're defeated reveal the auction as the place where the sought items are, followed by a transition where players can imagine the swell of dramatic music and a color filter shift cutting into a stylish intro credits scene to show the characters as the leads in a movie or show and at the end of these opening credits they've scene transitioned and are crossing a bridge entering The City.

If utilizing the third adventure hook consider having one of the Magistrates reach out to or run into the party with a request for help to take down the smugglers who they suspect might have a mole within the Magistrates. Or start the adventure with the party in a dark interrogation room being questioned by figures in behind a bright spotlight aimed right at seperated party members arrested for some crime and offered the opportunity to take down a smuggling ring or take their chances with the Adjudicator who's reputation for swift and harsh judgement precedes them.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The adventure takes place during an early Spring festival celebrating the legendary hero Thánh Gióng (tan ZEE-ong).

Share the following legend with characters that have Intelligence (History) or Intelligence (Religion) proficiency, or applicable backgrounds like Acolyte or Sage.

If you feel the party might not reasonably know of the legend, set up a storyteller sharing the legend of hero Giong to a crowd, as reflected in one of the options on the Festival Events table.

As the threat of foreign invaders loomed ever closer, Thanh Giong was born of a miracle to a peasant woman. While still a babe, he requested of the King a set of iron armor, iron staff, and an iron horse which the King would of course commission to be crafted by the finest artisans under his rule. During the smithing of his armament, Thanh Giong was fed by the people he swore to defend, and quickly grew into a giant of a man supernaturally quick. Just in time, he would defend his home and people from the approaching invading force. With his commissioned iron armor and staff, Thanh Giong straddled the iron horse which sprung to life and began to gush flames. Riding out to meet the invader, Thanh Giong and his steed valiantly fought until the iron staff shattered in his great sweeping blows. In what lesser heroes might consider an irrecoverable loss, Thanh Giong uprooted bamboo staves from the surrounding groves of the battlefield and used them to beat the enemy back. Forcing a rout, he earned the victory and his kingdom's safety from the invading force.

The festival celebrates this great hero's victory over the invader countless generations after the battle, as well as the beginning of the harvest season portending a bountiful rice crop. Folk from all across the province have come to The City to observe the holiday, tithe the gods, and sell their wares.

The City is built tall on the riverbanks of a major waterway cutting a path through the floodplain, taking advantage of the surrounding fertile soil and river trade. The architecture of The City has adapted to the fickle nature of the area.

Many buildings are built on stilts to keep them above the shifting waterline come monsoon seasons. Some buildings now permanently sit above the water as the area's nature changes and the city grows as each are want to do.

Where other municipalities would have paved streets for carts and beasts of burden, instead canals flow through the city like arteries from the river. Constructed gangways and bridges connect the raised-up buildings for foot traffic.

The verticality of The City has the buildings towering over pedestrians and boats in some areas which cast long dark shadows where anything can be lurking or found.

Within the walled center of The City, construction is much more tightly regulated and thus more reliable and sound. Buildings outside the walls of the City are more... economically constructed.

The bureaucrats of the province have heard reports of smugglers pillaging

historical sites, tombs, museums, and noble's private collections in recent months. Despite establishing a task force to apprehend the thieves and recover the stolen artifacts and goods, there has been no major breakthroughs. Magistrates patrol throughout the city, maintaining the peace and making sure visitors and locals alike are able to enjoy the festivities without issue, all the while keeping eyes and ears sharp for leads that might tip them off toward the auction.

Parties of rival adventurers stalk the streets, the opportunity of gold & treasure and the chance to further their own aims too good to pass up or let any get in their way.

Smugglers have grown bold, and brought their bounty to the seat of provincial power to be auctioned off to the highest bidder, sending invitation to unscrupulous nobles and the highest class of criminal.

The auction is being held at The Deck, a high end supper club in The Commons on the waterfront, and scheduled to begin following a large fireworks display taking place after dark around 9:00pm.

Historial Folk Hero

This one version of many regarding the real world mythical figure Thánh Gióng, one of The Four Immortals from Vietnamese culture.

While the myth, festival, and city are inspired by and resemble some that exist in the real world, creative liberties have been taken by the author with great consideration and utmost respect to their real world counterparts.

For the purposes of this adventure, the hero being celebrated within the fiction shares a name with the real world counterpart. If preferred, DMs may simply refer to them as The Hero.



CHAPTER 1

The Legwork

At the beginning of the adventure, the party arrives to The City on the road leading into The Sticks. A long train of visitors have flocked to The City for the celebrations. The party should know or soon find out that the auction is taking place in The City tonight in addition to their given plot hook(s) either through pre-session table discussion, exposition, or a previous scene. Before the auction, the players need to hunt down the various rumors drifting throughout the city to get a better picture of when and where it is taking place, and what the situation is going to be like when they arrive. This section relies heavily on social-oriented skills, as well as the party's ability to avoid attention.

Paint a picture of the various districts and the festivities of the celebration using the Festival Events Table, making opportunities for your players to interact with the city and its inhabitants. Start placing clues and people of interest in front of the party to observe and engage as they take in the sights and sounds of the festivities, get a feel for the various districts, and spot some of The Competition and The Sources they may encounter later in the adventure. Place the various Sources and Competition that appeal to you or best fit the situation throughout the districts of the city for the players to see and interact, with gaining ground on the investigation but also creating drama in conflict and the avoidance thereof. If the party seem particularly interested in an NPC, feel free to make them a Source, taking one of the clues from another source and giving it to them.

The auction is the same evening, so a ticking clock should keep the party from dallying too long if they wish to hit the auction before the guests head home with their treasures and the smugglers with their coffers. Use of the Time Table included at the end of the adventure might help to track time across the adventure.

Investigating The City

Let the players know that their actions do affect things like their reputation about town and the amount of opposition they may face as the adventure goes on and that time is a factor and you will be tracking these things and adjusting the adventure accordingly. While they are free to act as they please, it's not without consequence.

Encourage the players to engage with the events and people around them. This is not simply to fill time and encourage roleplay but will help them familiarize themselves with The City and its residents and open up opportunities to be taken advantage of throughout the adventure. Persuading the players to engage

with the city and festival without overtly directing them to can be done by simply by describing NPCs and events you would like them to engage with in greater detail than you would for things that would otherwise be set dressing. This is a similar principle to having objects, characters, and scenes that are more highly rendered in a video games, or an item or character of interest in focus and lit with special lighting in a film.

Another way to encourage party engagement is to show NPCs taking interest and engaging with the festival and have NPCs take an interest in the party. Show them that these things are important to other people and they are likely to mirror that sentiment. Show them they are important by having NPCs speak to them and ask them questions, none of which necessarily have to be adventure relevant, and they are likely to reciprocate and engage the NPCs.

Don't feel like you need to overly withhold information from the player characters in this section of the adventure in order to create a sense of mystery or for the clues to feel earned. If the characters don't get enough information to find out when the auction is, then the adventure ends here and the players will feel it was wasted time. That's not to say the characters should be spoon fed information either. Portray the city and NPCs honestly, allowing the players to succeed or fail on their own merit and luck.

Failed Rolls

Speaking of luck, failed skill checks rolled in this chapter of the adventure shouldn't prevent the party from finding the sources, but present other obstacles that cost the party and ratchet up the tension.

Poor Investigation checks might cost the party time leaving them with little to find more clues to get a better picture of the auction.

Poor Persuasion or Intimidation checks might make a scene rousing the attention of other locals affecting the party's Reputation or even gain notice of The Competition.

Poor Stealth attempts might arouse enough suspicion and alarm to directly advance the Adversity Track.

Simply saying "no" in response to a failed roll only serves to deflate the tension and frustrate players; be creative with the consequences of poor rolls.

The City Districts

The City is a bustling sprawl of architecture and culture, full of endless possibility for those who would seize it, or so the Department of Propaganda would have everyone believe. Boots on the gangway, as one more measured might expect, some areas are nicer than others. Some teeming with opportunity, and others where the party is the opportunity.

Within the thick walls the streets are carpeted with solid planks that give nary a squeak creak or moan, and buildings decorated with intricate woodwork. Outside the walls, the walkways are riddled with gaps and holes, whining and groaning at every



Traversing the City

A flowchart-style map is included, detailing which districts are accessible to each other by foot and water taxi, as well as note of travel time for each.

Present players with a copy of this map to help them track their progress through the city, and give them better control of the investigative portion of the adventure, facilitating player agency.

step, and buildings are made with whatever material is available and just enough to provide a roof and maybe a couple walls, if the residents are lucky. While both on paper are places of trade and exchange, the wares and services offered at The Market are far and away different than those at The Scales. Where people live in the Borough, people in The Sticks survive. Where the Temple Ward tends to matters of the spirit and beyond, The Court is more concerned about the body and land. Across each of the districts, canals run like veins. Bisecting avenues allow for quick transport via water taxi or barge.

The Sticks

Circling the walled heart of the city holding near all its other districts, The Sticks holds the most land, the most people, the most poverty, and the least clout. Not as bad as the name would suggest, but not place one would mistake for the highlight of the city. Tall and tight, the buildings of The Sticks do their best to house the common folk of the city, working within the walls for the nobles and better off merchants for piss poor wages/ Without them, The City would crawl to a halt. The tight alleys are chock full of handmade decorations and improvised celebrations mimicking those being held in the City center and temple district, but while lacking the spectacle, performed with more unreserved enthusiasm. The party will likely feel the most welcome here of all the districts in the city. It's a building-code enforcement nightmare and there's a considerable amount of criminal activity, but the residents are sociable and congenial without judgment or having ulterior motives like folk in other districts.

The Scales

On the river side, closer to the slums than the city center, is where the incoming goods from barges are offloaded and weighed, and where those with less legal intent are




THE TEMPLE
THE SCALES
THE STICKS
THE MARKET
THE COMMONS
THE COURT
THE BOROUGH
GANGWAYS ON FOOT (1 HOUR)
CANALS / RIVER TAXI (30 MINS)

like to trade. Celebrations here are limited to an extra ration of rice wine on lunch breaks, if the workers are lucky enough to get one. The festival means high traffic in The Scales as merchants order extra material and stock to prepare for more work on these docks. Everyone else in the city might be enjoying themselves, but the people here are hard at work. The party may feel a bit out of place here; things are for the most part all about business. Cargo is being loaded on and off ships and barges, most communication is done through shouting to cut through the din of the work, and the party may catch some sideways glances and curt dismissals standing out as neither docks labor, sailors, or merchants.

Temple Ward

Shrines to all gods can be found here, but the font dedicated to heroic demigods, including Thanh Giong, is resplendent in offerings and decoration. The festival presence here is much more secular than fun-fair like in the rest of the city. Crowds of parishioners come to the ward with food, drink, and crafts of rice and bamboo to tithe to the Hero and Harvest god's dedications. These gifts are accepted by the priests and monks, and in turn offered to the public as part of a charitable banquet.

Religious services are led by the clergy consist of communal prayer for good fortune and temperate rainfall leading to bountiful harvest, and sermons reciting the legend of hero Giong emphasizing morals of selflessness, service to the community, and bravery in the face of adversity. Party members of a religious bend will feel at home here, seeing shrines to their gods and saints, and being welcomed by the generous residents.

The Market

A nebulous hive of traffic over gangways connecting stilt building outlets and through wide winding canals of river taxis, canoes stacked high with single types of produce and product, and permanently anchored ships converted into shops, here is where one finds the latest fashions and toys. Home to the finest craftsmen in the province, the party might find the most opportunity, at a price. The folk of The Market are extremely friendly and welcoming, but not the same way as the folk of The Sticks. Here you catch "Hello!"s and "How are you?"s only if they're preceding some deal or offer, if you don't look like you have or want to spend money, you might as well be the enemy here.

The Borough

Settled atop a hill, safe from the seasonal flooding that in other districts would surge from the canals and threaten livelihoods, the rich and noble reside here in opulent homes and lounge in private salons, willfully ignorant of the struggles elsewhere. The streets are wide and buildings near palatial with shopping and dining catering to the higher class of clientele. The festival decorations here are minimal and tasteful, and the festivities are reserved. Residents have small private celebrations or attend one of the larger public ones in the city

center. Parties of neither noble or wealthy backgrounds will feel most judged and eschewed here. Without a title or money, or serving at the leisure of a resident, then "you don't belong." The folk here watch like hawks waiting for the smallest faux pas which they'll consider just short of deserving capital punishment but will settle for district Magistrates escorting the offender(s) out.

The Court

Opposite the Market, the Court are where law and order reside. Government and Police based here pass, adjudicate, and enforce the law. Political Bureaus are fully ornamented for the occasion and spirits are high, even an exception made for some vendors to be invited to sell their food stuff to officials and personnel. The Magistrate's precinct is bare of celebratory decoration and disposition, maintaining a professionally-aloof facade even when surrounded by such cheer from their cohorts within the Political Bureaus. Characters of any less then virtuous morality and tactics may feel nervous here.

The Commons/City Center

Built beside, and in some parts atop the river, The Commons is the large central community space of The City. Filled with vendors in pop-up stalls hocking street foods like fried spring rolls, near -bursting banh mi, and grilled meat and vegetables, some sell festive wares like small effigies and dolls of hero Giong, lucky plants and trinkets, party favors, and small fireworks that the Magistrates won't confiscate. Late in the afternoon, a pageantry of parades, music, and dances lead up to the

Festival Events

d8	Event
1	Bathing of the statue of hero Giong and preparation of bamboo floral arrangement offerings.
2	A parade led by an actor playing hero Giong riding a white horse through the city followed by a retinue handing out sweets to children in the crowds.
3	Dancers, acrobats, and or musicians performing on the street for the passing crowds earning tips catch the party's attention and maybe rope one or more into their act.
4	Firecrackers set off by children (or immature adults) too impatient to wait for dark, causing a pleasant shock for some festival patrons, but annoyance from others who reprimand them.
5	An old story teller bombastically reciting of the legend of hero Thanh Giong to a captivated audience. If the players watch, you can recount the legend from the Adventure Background.
6	A speech by a city official welcoming the residents and visitors to the festival, wishing them a good time, and expressing hopes for rain after the festival which signify good luck and a bountiful rice harvest to come.
7	People visiting Temple and small shrines making offerings of money, food, or crafts and performing rituals praying for a bountiful harvest in the coming season.
8	Small, low-production reenactments of The Hero's Myth with flag dancing signifying the battle and the release of paper butterflies signifying the fleeing invaders.

reenactment of Hero Giong's defense of the province from the invaders in a spectacle few want to miss. After dark, strings of brightly-colored lanterns are lit and boats with large firework mortars anchor in The Common's riverbank prepared for a show scheduled in the evening.

The Festival Events

The Festival Events Table lists some of the scenes the party might encounter during the adventure. Consider introducing one each time the party pass from on District to another or within every other hour or so.

Feel free to introduce other random events or urban encounters to best fit your game.

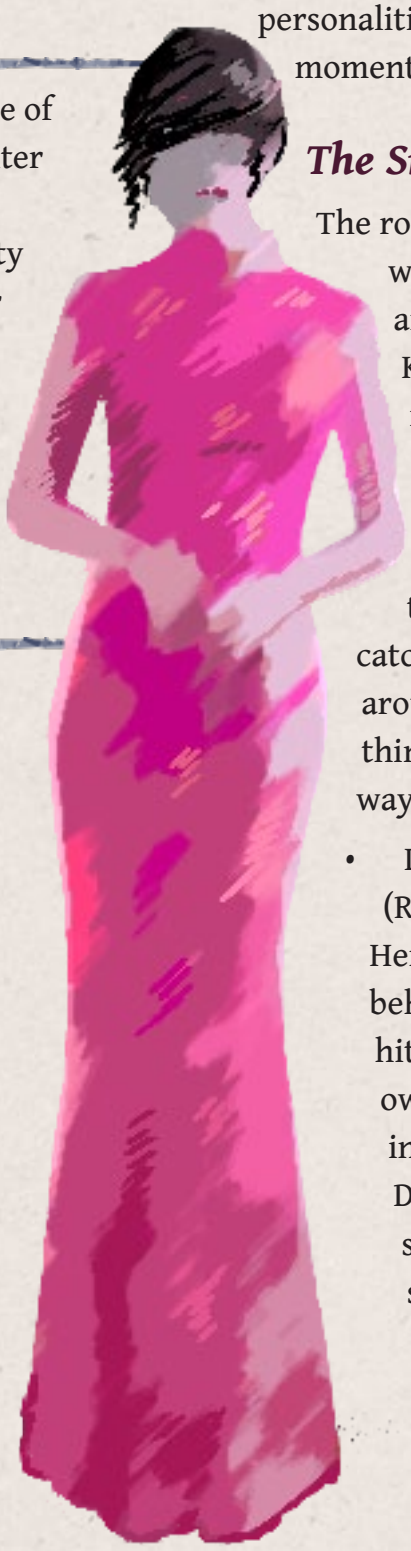
The Powers in Play

The player characters aren't the only ones in the city looking for the auction; others have heard the rumors and have aims to do something about it. They might not be kindly to others that get in their way.

Select a few NPCs from each faction that stand out to you as interesting or fitting the situation, and incorporate them in scenes as the party make their way through the city investigating the auction. If the players seem to latch on to an NPC (like or hating are both valid options), feel free to loop them back in later in the adventure. As for all the other NPCs you don't feature, imagine them acting in the background, have NPCs that are featured mention them, or just forget them all together.

The Party

Collectively describe scenes introducing each of the player characters, showcasing personalities and skills as if the first moments of an action-adventure film.



The Smugglers

The roughnecks and their hirelings who brought in the goods and are running the auction. Known by reputation alone, no one seems to know their true identities. They're going about their business in the city making things ready for tonight's events, but if they catch wind of the party sniffing around their business, they'll make things hard for the party in more ways than one.

- Lien Phan (Lee-EN FAN) (Ruthless, Greedy, Calm) (She/Her). The Boss. **Mage**. Stays behind the scenes until things hit the fan. Wants to live by her own rules and get rich. Dressed in an elegant bright-pink Ao Dai adorned with sparkling sapphires embroidered in the shape of a phoenix and wearing intricate

Roleplaying the Other Groups

Consider having one of An Bui (The Smugglers) or Minh Van (Rival Party) encounter the player characters and interact with them in a friendly manner without the pretext of being members their respective groups working against the Party to create some dramatic tension when reintroduced later on in the adventure possibly at odds with the party.

headdress, today Lien is the best dressed person in the room and revels in the attention. Her signature accessory not to be forgotten, the jade longsword is slung on her hip with which few survive to share that she is able to use it as an arcane focus.

- Trai Vo (TRY VAH) (Calculating, Charming, Open to suggestion) (She/Her). Right-Hand Woman. **Assassin.** Organizing and emceeing the auction. Wants facilitate all Lien's plans even if it means doing things Lien won't understand are for her own good. With a clean shaven head, dark-tinted spectacles, and sporting a cream-colored, traditionally-masculine suit, Trai cuts a handsome figure but knows to never outshine Lien when it comes to special occasions like the festival and auction.
- Mai Ly (MY LEE) (Brutish, Straight forward, Cautious) (She/Her). The Muscle. **Veteran.** Organizing security for the event and paying off dirty magistrates. Wants to make sure the boss is safe by any means. Never to be caught without reading material, she currently carries a bound series of pamphlets on treatises of unique horticultural practices of a remote people far north of this province.
- An Bui (AHN BUH-ee) (Naive, Ambitious, Wanting) (She/Her). The Rookie. **Bandit.** Helping out where she can, she wants to prove herself to her new "friends." Wants to help and be praised. Long, straight, and sleek black hair that flows down to her waist seems to be a point of envy for all that meet An, but is more a hassle in her own opinion. She often fusses over it, but she keeps it in memory of someone. Who exactly, she never says.

The Magistrates

The Law. Technically "the Magistrate's Men," are often colloquially referred to as Magistrates despite lacking the proper governmental station. Looking to crack down on the smuggling ring that operating within the city they are posted on corners and rooftops watching the crowd. Safety of the festivities is the Magistrates' top priority currently, but if they catch word of the auction and anyone that might have information, they'll be sure to crack down. Hard.

*All Magistrates use the **Knight** stat block.*

- Captain Dieu Phan (dee-OO FAN) (Serious, Purposed, Just) (They/Them). The Captain. Wants to maintain order

within the city and keep its citizens safe, even if it costs their happiness. Likely seen, but at a distance, and difficult to interact with, needing to get past many other Magistrates and administrators to reach them. They do not sport the full Magistrates' uniform even in formal settings, opting for long pants and a dress shirt with rolled up sleeves revealing hints of intricate, colorful tattoo work.

- Lieutenant Tu Van (TOO VUHN) (Dedicated, Frustrated, Decisive) (He/Him). The Next-In-Line. Wants to replace Chief Dieu but not overthrow them. The highest authority the party are likely to encounter directly and only if they make a concerted effort. Organizing the hunt for the Smugglers on the ground, likely to be present if a raid on the auction occurs. While not old enough for it to be taken for granted, he seems to have been in better health; Tu walks hunched with an irregular gait compensated with the aid of a plain bamboo cane, but is never found complaining or frustrated about the condition.
- Sergeant Thien Hoang (tea-EN ho-AH-ng) (Power hungry, Corrupt, Protected) (He/Him). The Dirty Cop. Wants people to respect him. Point of authority the party will most likely interact with. Rail thin, his own person is disheveled to the exact point one imagines is the exact degree of unkempt he can get away with without being reprimanded, and is accompanied by a perfectly groomed happy-go-lucky white haired Pekingese-Shih Tzu mix named Tazz who Sgt. Hoang does not seem to mind draws most of the attention.
- Officer Hue Huynh (hw-AY hw-IN) (Brave, Sentimental, Predictable)(She/Her), The Softie. Wants to protect those that can't protect themselves. If the party cause a scene involving someone less fortunate or weak Officer Huynh might show up to defend them and takes "the underdog's side in the situation. Fat and standing about a head taller than most folk Hue seems to cut an imposing figure but will use empathy before force and is not phased by comments on her size.



- Officer Trai Dang (tr-AI d-AH-ng) (Lucky, Funny, In-Debt)(He/Him). The Gambler. Wants to chase the exhilaration of risk. If the party cause a scene while being disingenuous Officer Dang might show up and try to calm the situation down with levity while offering to make the problem go away for the party if they're generous. "Wheels don't squeak when greased." Dressed very smartly, his uniform freshly cleaned and pressed, hair trimmed, and wearing new shoes that seem out of a normal officer's budget along with some very nice gold bracelets and an ornate ring with a stylized character that reads "Nguyen" and is a size too large for his finger.

The Rival Crew

Other adventurers on the trail hoping to beat you there and snatch the goods for themselves. On a quest of their own they've gotten word that an item they require is on the auction block and there's not much they'll let stand in their way.

- Duc Hoang (DUHK ho-AH-ng)(Chipper, Petty, Manipulative) (He/Him). **Priest.** Wants power. A handsome young man with a winning smile and sharp eye for opportunity, Duc dresses as a humble vicar in homespun robes and walks with a staff of gnarled wood. Speaking in humble platitudes to others Duc maintains an air of a simple devotee seeking to help those in need in anyway he can, but in private he is keen to obtain treasures and power to foster his party and religious order to their full potentials.
- Giang Le (z-AH-ng l-EH) (Stubborn, Driven, Merciful)(She/Her). **Gladiator.** Wants to keep Duc in line. Getting on in years but fitter than women half her age, wearing armor that was once resplendent but shows the wear of many battles she carries herself lightly but her eyes always scan around her for threats. Aunt to Duc she tries to reign the boy in but does not hold him under an iron grip, allowing him his full potential but keeping him from overreaching.
- Khanh Ngo (c-AN ng-OH) (Short Tempered, Loyal, Artistic)(He/Him). **Veteran.** Wants to follow orders. With a face wrinkled and tanned he'll tell you he's honestly tell you he's ten years younger than he looks but that's still hard to believe. The newest member of the party he's still acclimating to the group dynamics which often frustrate him but he's least likely to turn on his allies of the bunch.
- Minh Van (m-IN v-UN) (Talented, Lazy, Skilly)(She/Her). **Spy.** Wants to have a good time. Small in stature, her silhouette is defined by the massive pack she carries with her at all times which Minh insists is full of equipment that is essential in every situation refusing to field and protests and literally wearing bells one would think her poor at her typical assignment of sneaking and yet she's more often than not unnoticed when she wants to be.

The Sources

Rumor in The City travels faster than money between politicians. Here are several people that can be placed throughout the city to offer information to the party if they are seeking or being sought out. Feel free to add to the roster as you see fit with folx in the know.

Have the party overhear one sharing the information with someone else. Let them give hints to another Source. The goal here is to see which pieces the party puts together and how they act when investigating rather than keeping these clues from the players. The Sources should be widespread across the city and the clock is ticking so the party should be able to get some information but not all unless they split up, are careless, or particularly effective.

*All sources use the **Commoner** stat block.*

- Mai Van (MY v-UN) (Sweet, Greedy, Gullible) (She/Her) Wants to be known. Knows the auction is going to be held at "The Deck" a fine dining establishment on the waterfront in The Commons. A fashionable young adult entrepreneurial type, her presence is often preceded by humming of some saccharine catchy tune (DM: Think of the most annoying pop song you can. Start humming it when Mai enters a scene). Likely found in The Borough or The Court.
- Hao Ngo (HOW ng-OH) (Paranoid, Mischievous, Resourceful) (They/Them). Wants to have something to leave their family after their gone. Knows when the auction is taking place, after dark just after the fireworks display to be



conducted over the river but before the big reenactment held in The Commons. With more wrinkles than a raisin calling them old would be kind. Hao runs an antique shop that less scrupulous locals might know as a fence for illegal goods, they will play up an act of being hard of sight and hearing to disarm strangers. Hao is likely found in their shop in The Market or dealing with incoming shipments of goods at The Scales.

- Ngoc Phan (n-OH-ck FAN) (Proud, Busy, Desperate)(She/Her). Wants to be comfortable. An elderly woman not much more than skin and bones and dressed in fashions considered old several generations previous. Knows the auction is probably going to be offering art pieces, jewelry, and some supposed relics of hero Giong having received "a gift" from Trai Vo (The Smugglers) to allow a shipment of "coffee" to pass through port inspection without issues. Also knows that The Smugglers have near a dozen local security on retainer, them having joined Trai on her visit to Ngoc just in case the "gift" was not well received, having recognized some as former dock labor. Likely found at work in The Scales or at her home in the Sticks.
- Son Tran (SUN t-RAN) (Honest, Nervous, Strong) (He/Him). Wants to be treated like a person and not an engine. Knows someone who's overheard a fare earlier in the day who he dropped off outside high end traveler's lodging in The Borough talking about an auction and how excited they were to attend even showing off an invitation to her "companion", all the while ignoring Son and tipping very poorly. A strapping young man, Son is typically found on his water taxi throughout the city. Likely found on the water wherever is convenient for the party.
- Anh Le (AN l-EH) (Nosey, Direct, Opportunistic) (She/Her). Wants to get as much as she can about anything and everything to better take advantage. Knows the magistrates are cracking down on the smuggling ring within the city and have formed a task force investigating the auction rumors. The biggest nose the party might have ever seen reinforces Anh Le's rat-like nature and attitude. Anh Le is typically found in The Sticks

Hitting a Dead End

If the party are unable to gain enough information about the auction from the sources in this stage of the adventure due to either not being persuasive enough, being overly intimidating or violent, having been prevented by the other groups at play, or some other reason, it doesn't mean the adventure is over. Have a source approach them with a steeply-priced offer at the last moment. Have them simply stumble onto the information or the location itself sometime after the festivities have begun.

Consider genre fiction where the protagonists have lost the trail and run out of leads, and the ways things happen to fall into their laps to progress the story onward. There is some element serendipity but there also tends to be some cost at their failure as well.



or at The Temple running numbers (a lottery) and egging folk on to press their luck leaning into the uplifted spirits the festival brings.

- Linh Nguyen (l-IN we-IN) (Quiet, Kind, Pragmatic) (She/Her). Wants to give back and help the less fortunate than herself. A beautiful woman in a simple monk's habit but wearing a beautiful and obviously expensive jade brooch on her waist. Daughter to The Deck's proprietors she knows of the Secret Casino and The Safe which would likely house the items being auctioned off. Likely found in The Temple Ward facilitating the charity banquet or walking to/from her parents' home in The Borough.
- Bian Hoang (BEE-an ho-AH-ng) (Coy, Deceptive, Cowardly) (She/Her) Wants to get in good with the Smugglers in hopes to join them. Planted by the smugglers to mislead and spread misinformation. If sussed out will quickly give up the charade and tell the party the time and place of the auction. Painfully average in appearance and dressed in passable festival garb that fits in but struggles to make an impression, Anh Hoang can be found in The Commons actively looking for adventuring types to approach and throw off the trail.

Reputation Scale

In a city as tightly packed as this, rumor and gossip is abound. As the party interact with the local residents and vendors of the city, they might begin to garner a reputation. If they help someone they'll let their friends know these are good folk worth of their time and hospitality. If the party rough up a food hocker to get info on the Auction or just because that's what PCs do, they'll let everyone and their cousin know about these brutes who think they can throw their weight around.

Reputation begins at 0 and increases as notably good deeds or behavior is observed by locals and decreases as notably bad deeds and behavior are observed.

Singular especially dramatic deeds might alter the Reputation Scale multiple degrees, or even modify the Adversity Track.

If things go pear-shaped

If the party aren't careful and make a big scene of getting in a scrap or wrecking a shop and they might get their information but risk get noticed by a perceptive opportunist nearby increasing the Adversity Track.
The combat in this section -if they can't avoid it- should not be especially challenging, the goal is more so to show the effects of their actions rather than defeat them here and now. The threat is not of the party dying but that the people they are confronted or spotted by get away and let others know increasing the opposition they'll find later expecting them.

The enemies in the adventure are not dogmatic or dumb, they're not likely to fight to the death if they can help it, they'll run to find their friends or into situations where they think the party won't fight either threatening civilians or risking too much attention.

Should the party find themselves under arrest by the Magistrates having caused too much trouble, they may feel discouraged and that the adventure is over. Slow things down as the arrest is happening and soon after allowing the players chances to act to either escape or convince the Magistrates to let them go. Or speed up with a quick cut to them locked up in an interrogation room and offered a deal to work with the Magistrates to catch their real targets, The Smugglers. If the party are already working for the Magistrates let their handler come bail them out with a stern talking to and warning to be more careful the whole ordeal costing them time but not cutting the adventure short.

Adversity Track

As the party take in the festivities and track down Sources they might find themselves garnering the attention of The Magistrates, Smugglers, or Rival Crew. Progress the adversity track starting from 0 if the party engage in activity like:

Failure to remain inconspicuous about their intentions while investigating the auction.

Overtly confronting an agent of The Magistrates, Smugglers, or Rival Crew and let them get away to talk about it.

Attacking or excessively harassing locals with witnesses.

Any action that the DM feels is worthy of adjusting the Reputation Scale by 2 or more degrees

For each infraction progress the track and adjust the adventure accordingly.

Development

After the party meets with a few sources and taken in the sights of the city (assuming they haven't been arrested by the Magistrates or irrecoverably defeated by a Rival Party member or Smuggler thugs), the party should be ready to continue onto The Job.

Reputation Scale

+4	Locals cover for the party and mislead the Rival Crew and/or Magistrates if the Party has piqued their attention. Reduce Adversity Track by 1.
+3	Sources will approach the party offering information about the auction at reasonable exchange or money, favors, or persuasive promise of a cut of the haul.
+2	Locals will tip off the party where to find their next Source.
+1	Goods are offered at a disclosed 10% discount, and free samples of festival foods are strongly offered.
0	Per the hospitable atmosphere of the festival the players are welcomed happily, offered food & wares at "good deals" (read normal prices), and invited to. Attention by the Magistrates, Smugglers, and Rival crew is easily avoided.
-1	Goods are offered at an undisclosed 10% markup. Food portions are smaller than everyone else's.
-2	Sources refuse to give up information without some payment or trade. Somewhere along the lines of 100 gp to start.
-3	Sources are less easily persuaded to give up information about the auction, persuasion check DC's increase by 1; but rumor of the party's antics may lend credence to intimidation attempts, intimidation DC's decrease by 1.
-4	Fed up, Locals openly gripe about the trouble being caused with reckless abandon for all to hear, tipping off others in the know to the party's intentions. Increase Adversity track by 1.
-5	Magistrates begin tailing the party ready to intervene in further altercations after world reaches them of the trouble being caused.

Adversity Track

0	The party have avoided any suspicion by the other other groups at play.
1	Negative rumors about the party are fed to locals in an attempt to turn them against the party. -1 to the current Reputation Scale.
2	Magistrates notice the party and a pair on patrol begin to tail them. Will intervene at the next sign of trouble the party cause.
3	One of the Smugglers Rival Crew (DM's pick) confront the party accompanied by 3 Thugs in an effort to dissuade them from further investigation either through intimidation or violence. Killing these enemies in public reduces relevant Reputation Scale by 3 degrees and the Adversity Track by 1.
4	Magistrates to confront the party about the trouble they're causing and ask to come to The Court for questioning. If cooperative the party simply loses time (1-2 hours), if uncooperative the party might find themselves at odds with the Magistrates which in extreme cases might lead to detention.
5	One of the Sources is found missing (presumed dead) and word of their disappearance intimidates other Sources from sharing their information; +2 to all charisma checks against Sources from this point on.
6	The party has garnered enough attention that the Smugglers feel the need to increase security at the Auction triggering High Alert Conditions for "The Job".



CHAPTER 2
The Job

Unless something has gone catastrophically wrong, the party knows the auction is being held after The City's big fireworks display scheduled at 9pm this evening in The Commons at The Deck, the hardest reservation in town.

Upon arrival, they find one of the most beautifully-constructed buildings in the city. Half built-out over the river, with its own dock access and half a story taller than neighboring buildings, patrons on the aptly-named deck see beautiful views and making it perfect place to take in the festivities.

The streets are packed and The Deck is popular, so it's not hard to blend in and get eyes on the place from a distance; getting in is another matter.

About the Magistrate

If using the Magistrates hook, ask the players if they meet with a contact beforehand to inform them of the auction. The Magistrates request the party to go inside and confirm suspicious activity, unable to get a warrant on short notice not willing to risk a false arrest attempt tipping off The Smugglers. A squad of Magistrates will be quartered nearby awaiting a signal from the party to raid the auction.

If the party are unwilling allies of the Magistrates consider having their handler simply show up to demand an update on the situation. Instead of risking their own officers thier handler might order the party to go inside to make the arrest and confiscate the evidence themselves to deliver to the Magistrates post haste.

Adjusting the Encounter

In this chapter of the adventure, any character referred to as a guard under the Normal Conditions conditions uses the Guard stat block. Under High Alert Conditions conditions, the Smugglers hire better security and guards use the Thug stat block.

If you find the party dispatching guards more easily than you'd like to maintain a sense of drama, consider introducing one or two Head Guards using Knight stat blocks.

The Stakeout

Once the Party arrive at the The Deck, allow them time to observe and plan; they might watch from afar or try to infiltrate now. Let them see some suspicious activity for the location, guards on patrols, and staff working. If they've failed to avoid suspicion during the previous phase, they find security tighter and the job more difficult.

The Deck is resplendent with tasteful decoration, featuring strings of dimly-lit cream-colored lanterns, planters of bamboo stalks shaped into intricate patterns, and banners with characters wishing good fortune and plentiful bounties. Guests dressed as if attending a gala arrive to the supper club walking through the crowds gathered celebrating in The Commons, on dazzlingly decorated rickshaws, or by water taxi from the river side onto The Deck's personal dock. Ascending the stairs guests are greeted, offered cocktails, and allowed to lounge along the railed patio overlooking the festivities in The Commons below.

If taking the time to survey The Deck before approaching, a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) spots the Maitre D' checking guest invitations followed by two well-dressed but obviously armed and ready guards at the entrance; a group of guests make a scene when found without an invitation are rudely turned away.

Characters who succeed a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notice on the darker side of the building a set of stairs leading up to a back door where staff bring in crates of food, drink, and sundry to facilitate the event inside and a stack of crates where several staff are loitering on break, smoking.

Characters who succeed a DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check notice a guard posted in a dark corner of the patio near the rear service entrance, drinking from a flask but still keeping watch.

Characters who arrive at the location between 6-8pm and succeed a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check notice Khanh Ngo (Rival Party) on a rooftop of an adjacent building scouting the building.

Characters who observe The Deck from a higher position such as a rooftop of an adjacent building can see a stage and podium constructed in the open air Banquet Hall that makes up the second level of The Deck.

The Inside

Sixteen (16) guards have been hired on as security for the auction.

Try to keep track of how many auction guards the party dispatch, if any, in order to maintain an accurate count should things go south and the party need to fight their way out.

Ngoc Phan (Source) if visited by the party in Chapter 1 told them *near* a dozen. Sources no matter how trustworthy are not infallible.

The following sections are numbered according to the map below.

1. Patio

Encircling the building the patio it's view of the festivities in The Commons below is only second to that of the open air Banquet Hall above. Around and near the front entrance of the club the Maitre D' and 2 guards are checking invitations before allowing guests inside to the event, and staff are making rounds with trays of appetizers and drinks for guests taking in the evening outside. Sneaking in through the front entrance will require a successful DC 20 Dexterity (Stealth) check, which if failed will simply result in some aggressive posturing from the guards and an invitation to leave if not further provoked. If carrying an invitation from the party may use this entrance without issue.

Around the other side of the building is the staff entrance leading into The Kitchen, where staff are entering and exiting with supplies and a singular guard who is much less stringent towards their assignment is posted. Attempts to sneak past the guard requires a successful DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check. If disguised as staff, the party may use this entrance without issue.

An Bui is walking a patrol around the Patio perimeter often stopping to lean along the railing and take in the view of the festival or the river below.

2. Lobby

Designed to be a welcoming invitation to guests the lobby is open and spacious with a bar serving cocktails at one end and a set of stairs leading up to the Banquet Hall at the other. The lobby at the time of the event will be full of guests mingling sharing the

Stealth Combat

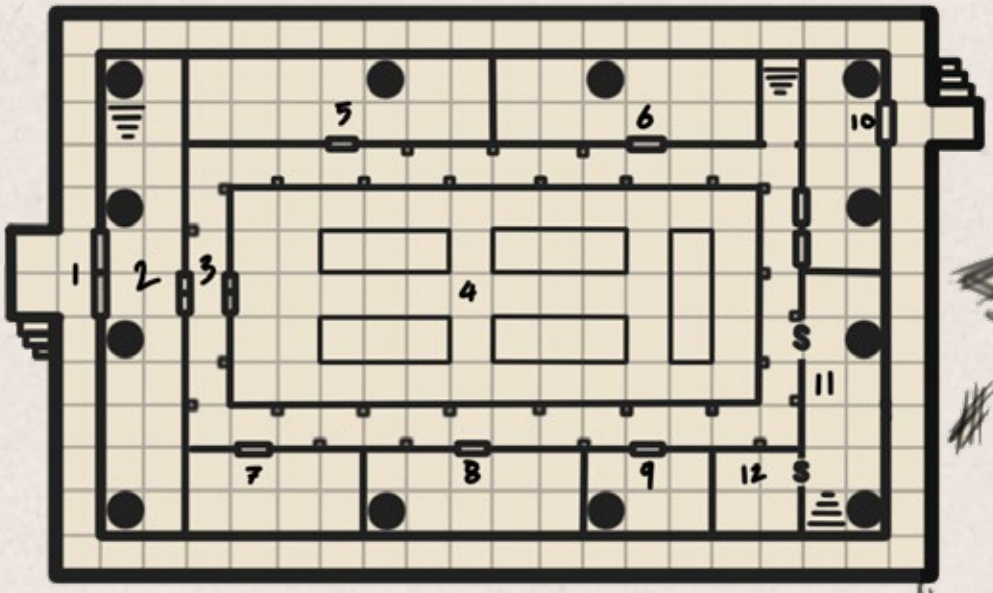
In order to convey the feeling of quick quiet fights thematically in line with heist fiction, consider a rule of thumb that combats are "stealth takedowns" that go unnoticed by other guards or bystanders who are beyond a 30' radius and do not witness the altercation if the following conditions are met:

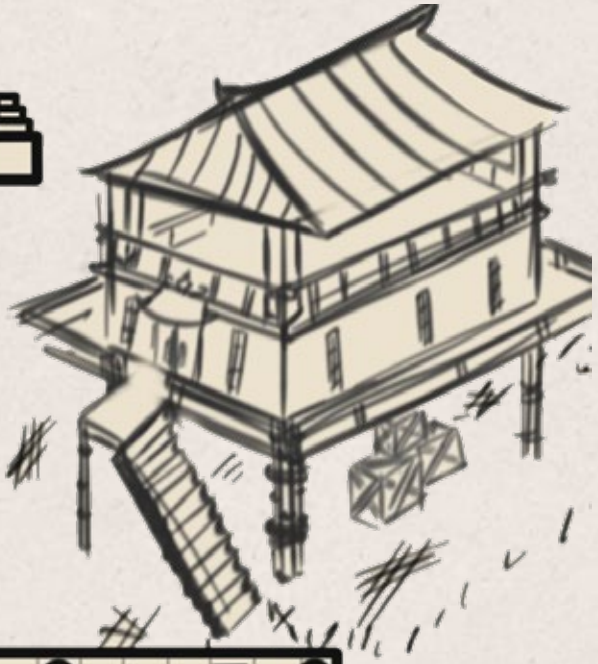
- Player Characters gain Surprise over the enemy
- Combat persists no longer than 2 rounds
- No spells higher than 2nd level (with exception to spells like Thunderwave or Shatter that specifically describe especially loud noticable effects) are cast.

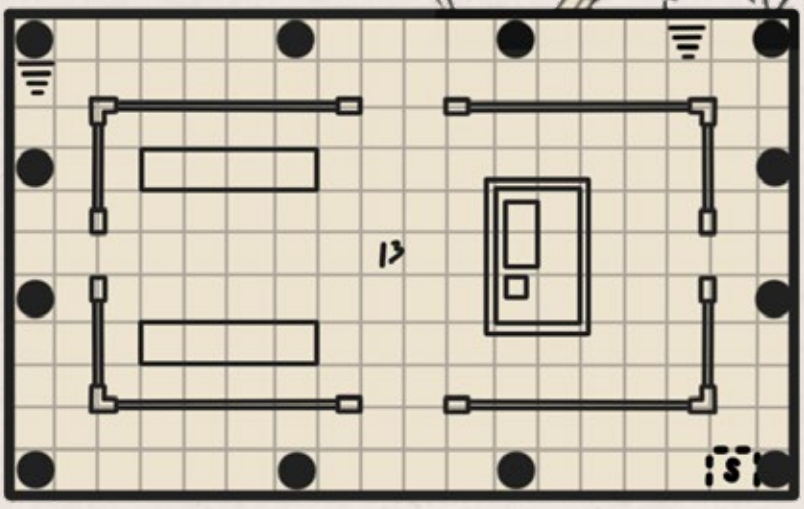
(The spell level limitation suggested is not intended to punish spellcasters for casting any spells while attempting to be stealthy nor give them free license to cast Fireball & Lightning Bolt. Rather, it's offered to give them a hard choice between remaining under notice and being as effective in combat as they can be.)

1 ..... Patio
2 ..... Lobby
3 ..... Hallways
4 ..... Main Dining Room
5-8 ... Private Dining Rooms
9 ..... Old Dining Room / Storage
10 .... The Kitchen
11 .... Secret Casino
12 .... The Safe
13 .... Banquet / Auction Hall

The Deck







latest gossip and news, staff serving small bites and drinks, and guards making sure things remain civil. The guards at the door check all guests who enter for weapons and confiscating them with an assurance they will be returned on their exit. Among the guests will be Lien Phan (The Smuggler), noticeably the only person in the room armed besides the guards, greeting her guests, teasing the offerings to come. The party might even catch a moment where Lien offers assurances to a guest that their funds will be kept secure on site in The Safe which she had the combination of changed especially for the event and that only she knows.

3. Hallways

Long connected passages dimly illuminated by spotlit lanterns showcasing beautiful lacquer and silk paintings, statues, pottery, and similar art pieces creating an enticing ambiance for guests as they're lead through the club. Characters in the Southeast corner of the Halls with a Passive Perception of 15+ may notice the "void" in the building's construction, where a room should be there is not. A hidden door with no handle or mechanism on this side leading to The Secret Casino that fills the "void" can be found with a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Reference The Secret Casino passage for details on surpassing the hidden door. Two pairs of guards patrol the halls, their normal intervals easily mapped if one takes the time to observe. Mai Ly (The Smugglers) can also be found making rounds of the Hallways at a much less predictable schedule and knows the password to have the guards inside the Secret Casino open the door from the other side. If the party are disguised as guests or staff they may travel the halls unimpeded. Sneaking past the guards or Mai Ly will require contested Dexterity (Stealth) checks from the party against the patrol's Wisdom (Perception) checks.

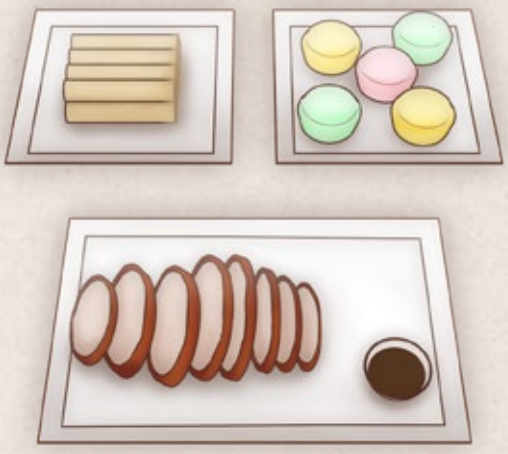
About Mai Ly's Rounds

To Simulate Mai Ly's irregular rounds: Roll 1d6 each time the party enter a Hallway and every few minutes of real time that they are in the halls. On a 6 Mai Ly rounds the corner or exits a room and starts walking in their direction

Among the patrols Minh Van (Rival Party) can also be seen sneaking around ducking behind art displays and skulking into rooms trying to find where the treasure being auctioned off is being kept. Minh presents a threat in that if they notice the party she may alert her allies in The Kitchen and the Auction or even the Security out of spite, but there is a narrow possibility she can be reasoned with to work together for now, which of course will lead to sudden and inevitable betrayal which the party is sure to suspect.

4. Main Dining Room

1st level where guests are dining before the auction. Before the auction starts Trai Vo (The Smugglers) can be found here with the key to The Safe. Before the fireworks display most of the auction attendees can be found here socializing and enjoying the festive banquet. The room is a sea of



aromas at the perfect level where it's still appetizing and not overwhelming with large dishes of family style dishes of roast duck, grilled fish and prawn, beef stew with fresh bread for dipping, bowls of nested noodles, roses of perfectly cured deli meat, and towers of sweet rice cakes just to name a few. Staff enter with trays of bright fresh spring rolls, steaming packets of sticky rice in banana leaves, and sharp crisp pickled bamboo shoots and exit with picked clean dinnerware. During the meal there's little chance of the party drawing notice away from the food and conversation less they grossly act out of turn.

Once the Auction begins only occupied by some of the guests' aides and restaurant staff. If problems occur during the auction guests may be asked to return to the dining room to coral them and keep them from leaving and out of the way while the problems are "addressed" by the smugglers.

5-8. Private Dining Rooms

Less decorated for the holiday than the Lobby, Halls, or Main Dining but still furnished befitting a high end dining establishment. These rooms are most likely unoccupied, the club being closed for the private event taking place in the Main Dining Room and Banquet Hall, but have been left open and available as a courtesy to guests who wish for some moments or privacy but are otherwise. Might catch some guest's aides sneaking off to one of these rooms for a few moments of peace or a bit of fun with some compatriots while their employers are otherwise distracted.

9. Old Private Dining Room / Storage Room

A small room cleared of furniture matching the other Private Dining Rooms, repurposed for storage of the event's guests belongings, confiscated weapons, and "deposits". 1 Guard posted inside with frequent traffic from guest's custodians dropping off their employer's coats, personal belongings, and chests of coin brought to pay for winning bids after the auction. Within the room along one of the walls a hidden door with no handle or mechanism on this side allows access to the Secret Casino can be found by characters who succeed a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check or Intelligence (Investigation) check (reference The Secret Casino passage for details on surpassing the hidden door).

Treasure:

- 12 sets of Fine Clothes in the form of coats, shawls, capelettes, etc.
- An assortment of mundane weapons and ammunition
- 1 Silver Weapon
- 6d6 x 100 gold pieces mixed with smaller denominations in various chests, lock boxes, and purses

10. The Kitchen

Cramped, hot, and loud one would not be judged harshly to think this a torture chamber at first blush but they would not be forgiven for being in the way. Here fire, metal, and food are beaten into submission by the staff to create some of the best cuisine in the province. Staff are constantly on the move jumping between stations, entering with crates of ingredients or dirty dinnerware, and exiting with dishes expertly prepared and plated. From 8pm on Khanh Ngo (Rival Party) can be found here posing as a member of the staff. If entering this area disguised as staff you will be put to work but otherwise unimpeded if seeming to be working; if disguised as guests or guards the party will be politely asked to use the front entrance as the area is not safe for them or the staff for strangers to be coming and going as they please.

11. Secret Casino

Behind hidden doors, known only to staff and select clientele, the Secret Casino is a dim pocket of the city where gambling is otherwise strictly regulated, where players can bet to their heart's content and without concern that the taxfolk will come for their cut of any winnings. Card and dice tables are tightly packed in the small space, on one there's a currently paused game of the local Mahjong variant Mat Chuoc and at another 2 guards are playing Tien Len or "Thirteen." At the far end of the room adjacent the large vault door of The Safe, a set of collapsible stairs leading to a trap door above allowing direct access to the Banquet Hall on the second level, this being the way auction items are to be delivered to their buyers at the auction above after it's conclusion. The 2 guards inside have special instructions only to open the hidden doors which normally only open from the inside upon receipt of the password and make sure no one who aren't The Smugglers is allowed access to The Safe where the high ticket auction items and guests' funds are being stored.

From the outside the hidden doors can be opened by a character with proficiency in Thieves' Tools to succeeding a DC 15 Dexterity check or a DC 15 Strength check.

Under Regular Conditions the guards can be convinced to open the hidden doors from the inside with a successful DC18 Charisma (Deception) check posing as another guard.

Under High Alert Conditions this will require a successful DC22 Charisma (Deception).

Neither guard knows the combination to The Safe.

12. The Safe

Within the Secret Casino, The Safe is usually exclusively securing the casino & its patron's funds, for the purposes of the auction it is also where the goods to be offered on the block are being kept. The combination to the safe was changed especially for the Auction

and the combination is only known by Lien Phan (The Smugglers).

Under Normal Conditions the locked heavy metal door will require a character with proficiency in Thieves' Tools to make a DC 25 Dexterity check to open without the combination.

Under High Alert Conditions a DC 25 Dexterity check by a character with proficiency in Thieves' Tools can unlock the door and an Alarm spell cast within alerting the Smugglers & Security of the breach, DC 20 Passive or Active perception or investigation can spot an Alarm Spell that will silently alert The Smugglers of trespassing before triggering.

If the Alarm is tripped Lien Phan (The Smugglers) and Trai Vo (The Smugglers) enter The Secret Casino outside The Safe in 5 rounds after being notified, An Bui (The Smugglers) shows up 2 rounds after them, and Mai Ly (The Smugglers) one round after An.

Treasure:

- The Hero's Staff. Tre Dang Nga (t-REY d-AH-ng ng-AH).
- The Hero's Iron Plate Armor (Forgery): Crafted to resemble the legendary heroes but not the genuine article. Not magical but still plate armor so really useful to a PC or easily sold for a pretty penny.
- Map: "Leads to a buried treasure deep in the swamps to the West." A successful DC20 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals this map to be a forgery.
- 2d4 gems worth 300gp each
- 1d6 art pieces including paintings, jewelry, statuettes, etc. worth 750gp each
- 10d10 x 100 platinum pieces mixed with smaller denominations in various chests, lock boxes, and purses belonging to The Deck and the auction guests.
- The chosen family heirloom or quest mcguffin of the adventure hook if being used

13. Banquet / Auction Hall

The best view in The City, the open air Banquet Hall is everything a host could want for an extravagant event with a goal of seducing money out of coffers. Shortly before the scheduled Fireworks display scheduled for the evening the guests will fill the space to enjoy the best view in the city of the fanfare preceding the auction security will be posted at the entry & exits; any earlier and this space is likely unoccupied.

Guests likely have some private security auction but their concern is their ward's safety rather than the auction's interests so they'll likely only confront the party if the party makes themselves a threat to their ward or their ward's interests (example: stealing the item they're bidding on in plain view). Among the guests are Duc Hoang (Rival Crew) and Giang Le (Rival Crew) who for the time being are behaving, attempting to avoid standing out.

The small bid items are on display in the around a constructed stage and podium, all under close watch by the guards. The high ticket items are being shown through illusions and are "safe on site" according to Lien Phan & Trai Vo (The Smugglers) who are working the crowd reassuring wary

If Working for the Magistrate

If the party are cooperating with the Magistrates once a large fight breaks out, the quartered squad if not signaled by the party will see the reactions from staff and guests and charge in. 10 rounds after alarms are raised and combat begins 6 Magistrates using the knight stat blocks raid The Deck with the express goal of ending the fight with nonlethal force and arresting the Smugglers.

guests and priming them to bid high. After the auction high ticket items will be brought up via a secret trap door and stairs in the far back of the hall from The Safe on the floor below to the auction hall as they are announced to be presented for bidding. The trap door can be spotted by a character that succeed a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

If some or all of the party are present for the auction feel free to briefly describe some offerings and participate in bidding if they can:

- Several ornate jewelry and art pieces (Bidding starts at 500gp each)
- A number of ancient texts and scrolls (Bidding starts at 800gp each),
- A few Rare magical items (roll or pick 2-3 items). (Bidding starts at 3000gp each).

"The Hero's Armor & Staff" are presented as the piece de resistance with bidding starting at 200,000 gp. If something goes wrong and is brought to the attention of The Smugglers conducting the auction they will call for a brief intermission in an attempt to keep their guests calm while they go investigate and "resolve" the issue.

If Things Go South

Chances that stealth or undercover approaches by the party fail are not inconsiderable. Should the alarms be sounded and the jig is up the party have 2 obvious options, fight or flight.

Should the party choose to hold their ground and fight then they will have a considerable force coming their way. To simulate the spread out nature of The Smugglers and their security, stagger enemies arrivals by a few rounds. Alternate between groups of 2-4 guards arriving together on one round, one of The Smugglers arriving 1-2 rounds later, and so on (with adjustments accounting for any guards or Smugglers the party have dispatched before now) until the party run their way through all of the Smugglers and their guards or the party escape.

Should the party choose to flee forgoing the chance of further looting the auction or arresting any escaped Smugglers, you might begin a chase scene with An Bui & Mai Ly of the Smugglers and 3-4 Guards close behind.

Development

Once the party have retrieved their prize, arrested the smugglers, or simply found their fill of treasure and gold from the auction or have been sufficiently persuaded against this foul business all together they are ready for The Getaway.

CHAPTER 3

The Getaway

Sneaking out

If The Job goes off without a hitch and the party infiltrate and acquire whatever treasure they desire without raising any alarms then they need to sneak out as well. Reference the obstacles & security detailed in Chapter 2 as the players exit the building. Don't simply run the infiltration scenes again but in reverse but acknowledge the situation is dynamic, changing in ways the party can't control and reacting to their previous actions.

During the event the entrance that the party used may no longer be a viable exit forcing them to find another. The front entrance may be locked and guarded once all the guests have arrived to ensure privacy and security. There might have been a grease fire or accident in The Kitchen forcing it to be shut down and cordoned off to guests & staff preventing use of the staff entrance at the rear of the building.

Perhaps the smugglers or their guards find some sign of suspicious activity raising alarms. Make note of each piece of evidence that the party might carelessly left behind such as knocked out guards or discarded disguises and roll 1d6 for each. If any dice roll a 1 the alarms are raised and any remaining guards and the Smugglers began to search the building for the intruders.

If the party entered the event disguised and plan to exit similarly, how do they plan to get their treasure out without notice? Carrying large bags of art, gems, gold, and weapons or with a hogtied Smuggler while dressed as waiters isn't going to go unnoticed.

A Chase

If things went sideways or the party just decided to go in loud they might be exiting the scene with some expediency.

Consider who would be after the party:

- If the party made this into a stick up robbery the smugglers and some of the rougher auction attendants likely wouldn't let the party just walk away.
- If The Job is intercepted by the Rival party there might be a train of adventurer's running after the party through town like wolves chasing down juicy rabbit.
- If the auction's time and location was discovered by The Magistrates they might have conducted a raid while the party were inside filling their bags and the party might need to be on the run from the law.

Lying Low

Once the party are away from the auction house and lose anyone that might be on their tail they might want to consider letting the heat die down some before making anymore plays.

Ask the party where they plan on going:

- Do they have an already ready rendezvous point or safe house?
- Do they have contacts or relations in the city they can use to get out of sight.
- Do they stick together for safety or split up to make them harder to track?

Consider who might be on their trail and canvassing the city looking for them:

- The Smugglers might have put out an underground bounty on the party sending criminals into the streets harassing vendors and sources for leads to the party's whereabouts
- The Rival Party might be using some magics or hire tracking & investigative specialists to find the party.
- The Magistrates might have uniforms setting up checkpoints and going door to door.

A Showdown

In this type of fiction it's typical in the last act, when the party are either celebrating their successful job or huddled in a panic trying to figure out how to avoid getting caught after everything hit the fan that from around the corner or out a dark shadow an antagonist walks out offering an ultimatum or looking for one last showdown to settle things once and for all. This might take place in the middle of the escape as the party is looking over their shoulders running down alleyways and over rooftops, at the rendezvous just when they think they've made it to safety, or on their way out of town a few days later just as they thought the heat had died down.

Emulating this in your game can help reinforce the dramatic irony and themes of heist fiction as well as add a nice "one more thing..." cherry on top of the adventure but may also grind player's gears who are not keen on feeling "railed" into encounters. So, while we might encourage featuring a showdown as an endcap to your adventure, please do so at your discretion to your and your player's tastes.

If there is to be a showdown, the party should be confronted with whichever faction the DM feels will be most dramatic based on how the party played through the adventure up to this point. If they butted heads with the Rival Party along they way they should find them ready and waiting with an ultimatum. If they were careless and left clues or witnesses they might find a regiment of Magistrates on their heels. If they were cavalier during the job they might find the smuggler's

thugs stalking them with aims to hurt. Or some combination thereof if you're feeling particularly saucy.

- Rival party: 1 gladiator, 1 priest, 1 spy , & 1 Veteran.
- Magistrates: 1 knight, 1 veteran, 2 scouts, & 2 guards.
- Smugglers: 1 mage, 1 veteran, 2 thugs.

Development

Once the party have snuck out, escaped, or dust has settled from the showdown the heist is over for better or worse. Whether the heist was successful or if things went sideways should be fairly clear by this point.

CONCLUSION

Success

Rumor of the daring thieves might start spreading in the days following the festival. Some thinking them heroes serving just desserts to the wicked, others dismiss them as the same as the smugglers.

If the party harangue the Magistrates during the adventure, warrants for their arrests may be issued and the party might find wanted posters of varying degrees of flattery around the city.

If the Smugglers are on the loose they may have a vendetta out for the party which may come to fruit later down the line at some inconvenient moment in a later adventure.

If the Rival Party are still around to do anything about it they might try to track down the party with an offer to trade or work together on the Rival Party's current quest for which they need The Hero's Sapling.

Failure

Magistrates might have had the party arrested and awaiting trial. During transfer the party might have an opportunity to escape, or corrupt magistrates might hand the party over to the Smugglers of the Rival Party.

The Smugglers might put a bounty out on the party through underworld networks making them targets for opportune bandits, thugs, and assassins as well as limiting their mobility in clandestine work with less savory characters they might need having leverage over them.

The Rival Party might have taken the loot from them and skipped town to continue their quest, maybe taking a little bit extra off the party for their trouble. Some coin, a few magic items, some personal mementos, the good stuff that would drive the party to give chase.

Magic Items

Tre Dang Nga

Requires attunement by LG warrior

"Light as air, flexes like water, hits like iron."

- +3 Quarterstaff, Versatile, Reach 10'
- When outnumbered by 3+ enemies in adjacent spaces with no adjacent allies you gain Extra Attack (or an additional attack as part of Extra Attack if already benefiting from it)
- Cast Haste a number of times per day equal to your Charisma Modifier (min 1)
- Advantage on all melee attacks when mounted + 30' extra speed on the Iron Horse

  Cast Shield and Fire Shield a number of times per day equal to your Wisdom Modifier (min 1 each) when attuned to matching Armor

With Great Power...

This reward if the party is able to secure it is much higher rating than suggested by 5e's design for the suggested party level of this adventure. This is intentional. In practice, games tend to be shorter than they are long, so in this author's opinions you're better off making it HOT and giving players legendary items as if they were the heroes of their own myth rather than baiting it out for levels 15+, which few games ever reach.

If you would rather not give the party such a powerful weapon at this time, change the quarterstaff to a sapling descended from hero Giong's original bamboo grove simply making it a +3 or +2 quarterstaff.

Author's Notes/Acknowledgments

Much thanks and love to my friends & family who listened to me stress over this project and helped workshop and playtest the many versions of this module. And thanks to the Unbreakable team for the opportunity to share my first written adventure and helping bring Asian stories by Asian people to the tabletop space.

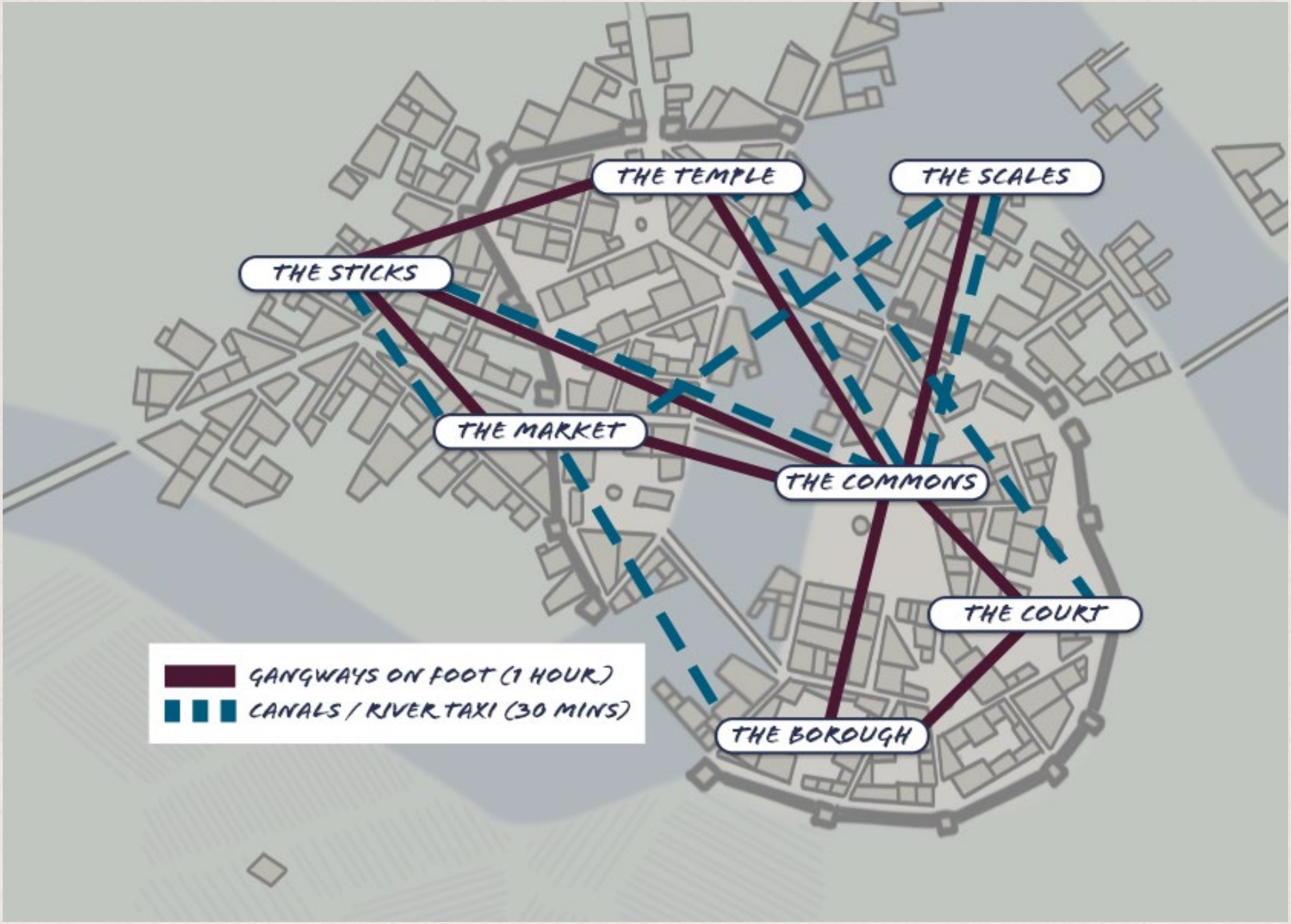
Author Bio

Kevin Nguyen is a 2nd generation Vietnamese-American in Orange County, California quietly running & designing (but rarely finishing) tabletop games, painting miniatures, and trying to reconnect with his roots.

ADVENTURE APPENDIX - Handouts & Aids

Time Table

12pm	Party arrives in The City
1pm	
2pm	
3pm	
4pm	
5pm	
6pm	
7pm	Guests Arrive at The Deck for Dinner, Drinks, and Entertainment before the Auction
8pm	
9pm	Auction Starts
10pm	Auction Ends


THE TEMPLE
THE SCALES
THE STICKS
THE MARKET
THE COMMONS
THE COURT
THE BOROUGH
GANGWAYS ON FOOT (1 HOUR)
CANALS / RIVER TAXI (30 MINS)

Hearts Aflame at Lan Biang

By Steve Huynh

Content Warnings: Fire

SYNOPSIS

Traditionally, the temple atop Lan Biang mountain keeps a flame going all night: a symbol that not even the darkest night can snuff out hope - so long as there are people willing to nurture it. However, three days ago the temple stopped their nightly ritual. Some locals claim to see a small light come up in the twilight - but it is quickly snuffed out. Now, our heroes are tasked with traversing the 1000 stone steps to Lan Biang Temple. Will they be able to save the monks from their ill-gotten fate - or are they too late?

Hearts Aflame at Lan Biang is an adventure for four or five 6th level characters running 3-4 hours.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Lan Biang monks are known for a supernatural power to manipulate fire; as such, some party members may want to take up this opportunity to learn more. It's also possible that the party members know someone from the Lan Biang village and are here to help a friend or family member.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The biggest challenge is not the combat, but trying to save the cursed Lan Biang monks and subsequently keep them alive. As they rescue more and more, combat actually gets harder because they have more people to keep safe; players may find themselves making difficult sacrifices.



Illustration by Anthony Alipio

CHAPTER 1

A Thousand Steps Starts With...

The party finds themselves at the base of Lan Biang mountain. The day is hot and humid but most palpably, there is tension in the air.

The jungles at the base of Lan Biang are humid and hot, and although sweat may be forming on your brow, it's a beautiful day. The jungle smells of wet, warm earth and you can hear the calls of attention-seeking birds. Before you is the first step of a thousand up the lone mountain of Lan Biang. Behind you, a group of worried villagers huddle in a semi-circle to see you off. Fear and worry are on their faces. Will you be able to discover the fate of the monks of Lan Biang Temple? And more importantly, if something ill has befallen them, will you be able to save them?

The Villagers

Should the party choose to gain a bit more context or seek to assuage the worries of the villagers, use the following information to help construct the scene. Two NPCs are listed below but the DM is free to add more if this sort of background helps to motivate the party.

Hoa Nguyen [wah wen], a senior neutral good tiefling (she/her), has lived in the Lan Biang village since she was a little girl. She has memories of being scared at night of the jaguars and wild boars she could hear outside the gates. She also remembers the monks who would sometimes come down the mountain to spend time with them,



teach them, and work with them to ensure they were safe and happy. Although she has gained seventy years of wisdom since then, she can't help but feel dread creep into her heart now that the light on the mountain has been out for three days. She is a hunched-over tiefling with red skin, weathered with age; her gray hair is in a bun though stray wisps tickle her cheeks.

Cam Y Nguyen [cahm ee wen], a young neutral good tiefling (she/her), is a spunky teenager with angular features. Today she is both afraid of the situation and enraged by it. She is one of the very few villagers who has seen the temple personally, and has vowed that as soon as she comes of age (and her little brother **Tao** is old enough to help their parents), she will make the journey up the mountain and become one of the monks. If asked, she remembers the temple smelling heavily of incense, but a unique kind that filled her with energy rather than meditative strength. But the clearest memory she has is of the monks doing "fire training." She says that the monks could literally hold on to hot, burning coals with their hands without so much as flinching. It was terrifying and mesmerizing to watch. She thinks pretty much any monk can do this, but she doesn't know how.

Development

With the villagers placing all of their hopes on the shoulders of the characters, our brave party ascends the steps towards Lan Biang Temple.



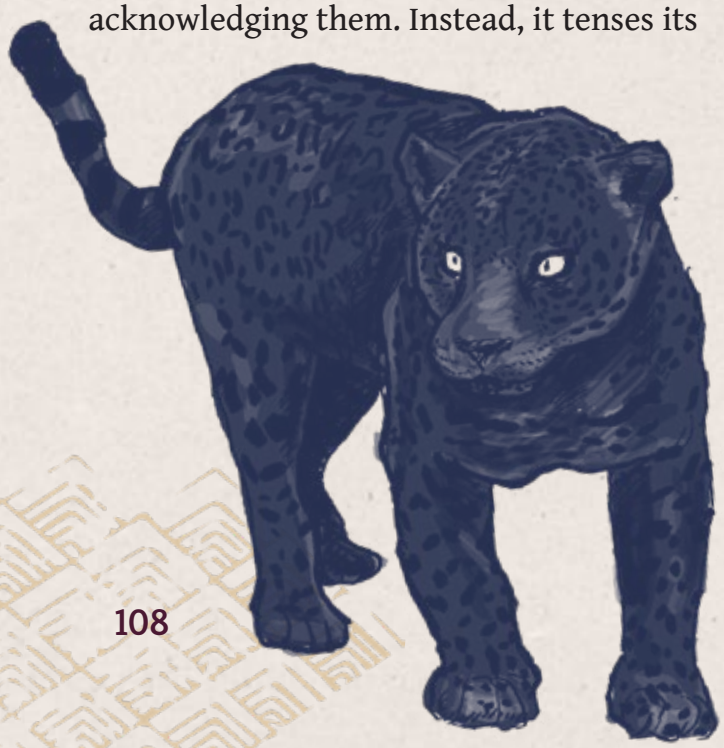
CHAPTER 2

The Cursed Yen Vu

As the party aside the side of the mountain, the air begins to thin and they begin to feel the fatigue of the hike. Every couple of hundred meters, they pass an unlit brazier. Each has a small, unique plaque. They are mantras such as, "The mind leads; the body follows," "A sick spirit drags behind a sick body," and "The fool strikes first; the master strikes last."

Although it's not enough to stop them, the hike clearly shows the journey itself to the temple is both a mental and physical test. As noon crests into the sky, the steps break into a long, narrow strait. At the small break in uphill climbing, a loud roar and crashing from the brush comes overhead

A large, nearly jet-black jaguar bounds from the jungle above. It lands gracefully before the party, but makes no signs to even acknowledging them. Instead, it tenses its muscles and continues bounding down the mountain. However, the crashing above does not stop and just a few seconds later, a large, crystalline boulder collapses right where the jaguar had landed.



With heavy but deliberate movements, the boulder suddenly begins to open. Limbs unfold from it, and the construct stands on two legs. Held in its "arms" seem to be two smaller, crystalline creatures - maybe only 3 feet in height - that take a split second to compose themselves before leaping to the ground, posed to rush forward. The main construct towers at almost 7 feet tall and its body is comprised of translucent, jagged crystals. Two beady eyes glow from its sunken head, though the smaller minions have no eyes. Without a word, all three rush at you simultaneously, limbs poised to crush and claw those that stand in their path.

This is the first encounter with a **hulking crystal construct,** a cursed monk named Yen Vu.

After two rounds of combat, Ai Hoang [eye hong], an adult human **Lai Biang Monk** (she/her) appears; she escaped the temple before the curse took her. She is wielding her staff, but unfortunately cannot enchant her staff with the Flames of Lan Biang during this combat; thus there is no possibility of attacking the crystal construct's Exposed Heart to save Yen.

When Ai first enters combat, read the following:

From the brush above, very light footsteps can be heard. Shortly after the first wave of attacks from the crystal construct, a woman wearing monk robes, tied to fit closer around her body, lands behind the horror. She carries a staff in her hands and, without a word, joins the fray and attacks the creature.

When the hulking crystal construct is defeated, read the following:

With the crystal construct now defeated, Yen Vu's face can be seen through the cracked face. Eventually it crumbles and Yen is able to make out a few last words before their injuries take them.

"Ai, you must go back. You must save our brothers and sisters. The temple is cursed and we must put an end to it lest it spread to the village. You… You may have to fight our loved ones - to the death if need be. But I know you can do it. Remember, so long as our hearts burn with hope, darkness can never take us."

Ai cradles what's left of Yen in her arms for a moment before taking a deep, long breath. She closes her eyes, stands up, and grips her staff so tightly you can see her knuckles whiten. "My name is Ai Hoang… and I need your help at the temple… Please."

If the party wishes to talk to Ai, she willingly shares what happened. Ai is a younger member of the temple who tends to act before contemplating her actions in full. Generally, she has to put effort into being polite to others, but would much rather just speak her mind.

If the party asks about the curse of the recent events in the temple:

- Three nights ago, Lan Biang Temple was visited by monks from another temple, all wearing white. They offered the monks a silver chalice in thanks to the hospitality they received.
- Ai always had a bad feeling about it, but understood that they could not spurn a gift.
- That night, as Ai was returning with fresh water for their guests, she saw the light had gone out at the temple's high altar. As she approached, she first caught a glimpse of the crystal monsters.
- She once tried to attack one of the creatures while it was alone on patrol, but she was sorely outmatched.
- She's been trying to start fires throughout the mountain to attract the attention of the village hoping they send help.
- She recently learned that the creatures don't have her family captive in the temple: they are her family.
- She believes that if she could find the chalice and destroy it, the curse might end.
- She avoids the topic if possible, but she still doesn't understand if there's any other way to save the cursed family members.
- If the party asks about Ai's past, she understands that her mother was very young when

she had her. As such, she asked the monks at Lan Biang to raise Ai.

- Ai loves her temple but often wishes she could explore the world. That said, this is her family and she wants to stick with them until the end.
- At the temple, they focus both on martial prowess and meditation. Just recently she has begun her "fire" training: a technique whereby a monk (usually) douses a hand in an elixir and then place it inside a sacred brazier (the kind the party had passed on their way here) to "pull out flame" for a few seconds. It's painful but with the right training, there is no permanent damage to the body.
- If asked about the spiritual component, she talks about how fire is how they visualize hope. It must be fed and cared for, but sometimes all it takes is a spark and entire realms can be changed. She also talks about how hope often requires sacrifice - something to feed it.
- If the party asked if she thinks this skill could help, she takes on a serious look then say, "Maybe... Maybe."

If the party asks about the temple:

- Lan Biang Temple is actually very small. It's built into a cliff-face and leads to the highest point of the mountain. There, their sacred bonfire is lit each night.
- Ai describes the temple as having a receiving area, a reliquary room, the path to the high altar, and lastly the high altar where the nightly sacred fire is kept burning all night.

Development

By the time the party reaches the top of Lan Biang mountain, they will see the temple. There only seems to be one construct guard on patrol tonight. From here, the party will be able to infiltrate the temple and put an end to this nightmare.



CHAPTER 3

The Curse of Lan Biang Temple

The temple is simple in design, but large and impressive. It is painted red and gold, with stylized flames engraved on all pillars. There is one *hulking crystal construct* patrolling the small steps to the entrance to the temple. As it circles the entire temple, including the remainder of the peak, it would be easy to sneak past.

Temple Entrance

Read or paraphrase the following:

> *This room is large, and was generally meant to receive guests to the temple. However, the halls are quiet save for the rhythmic, heavy footsteps of crystal constructs. In the north east corner, a single hulking construct can be seen, flanked by two smaller minion constructs.*
>
> *In the southwest corner, a single lit brazier - similar to the ones encountered up the mountain - is seen, its fire struggling to remain. The center of the room has one more brazier, but it seems to have died out.*

In this room, a single hulking construct is flanked by two **small crystal constructs**.

The brazier in the center of the room can be lit by someone who can carry the flame from the southwest brazier. Ai will be able to do this.

Once the hulking crystal construct gains the Exposed Heart feature, a second hulking construct will enter one round later. Any constructs that are defeated by the Lan Biang Flames are restored as monks. See **Appendix A** for ideas for monks; all monks share the same Lai Biang Monk stat block.

Lan Biang Brazier

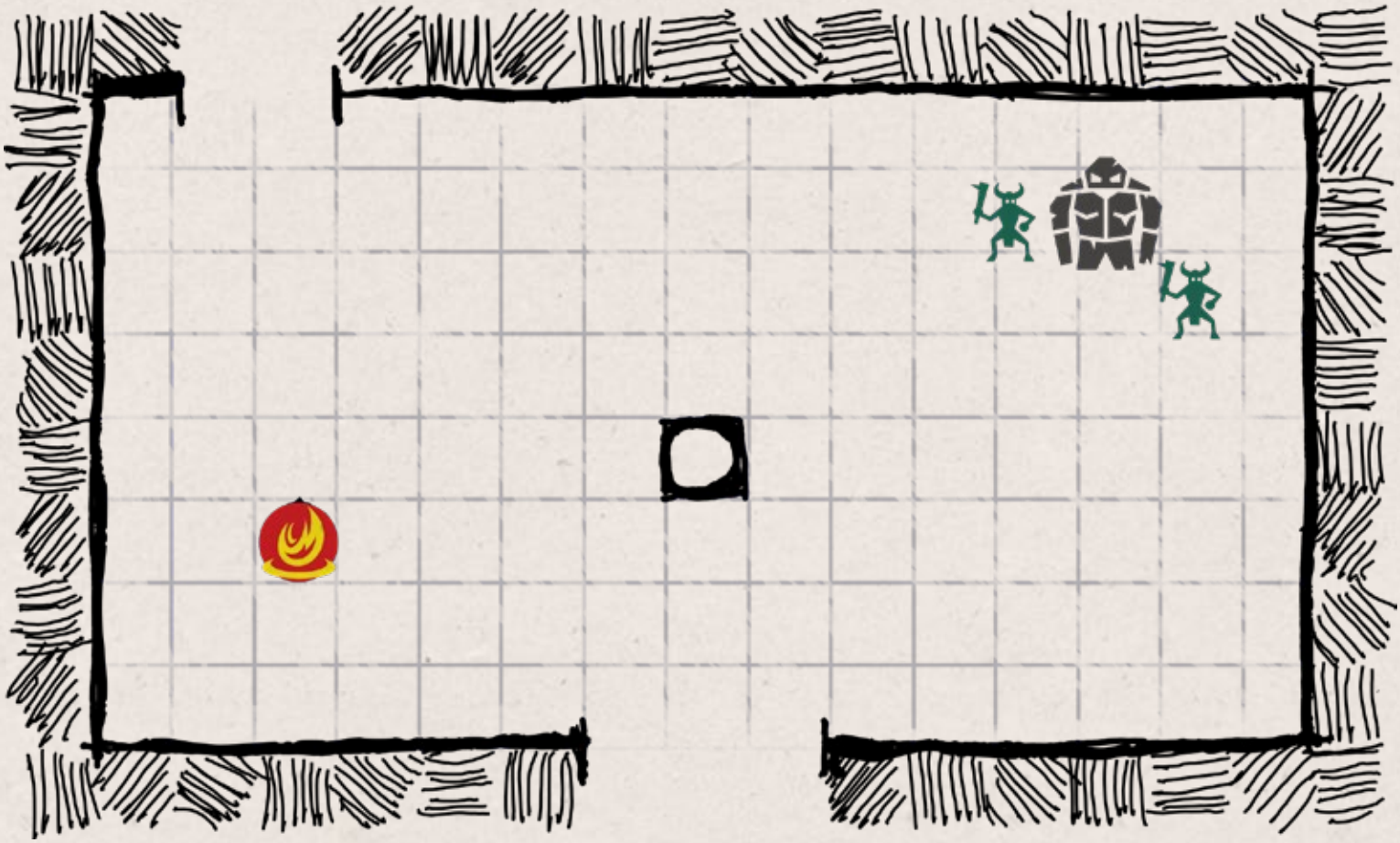
A Lan Biang monk can carry the flame in their hand so long as they are adjacent at any point of their movement and spend an action to retrieve it. The monk can also drop the flame into an empty brazier at any point of their movement so long as they are adjacent to one. At the end of their turn, the monk takes 1d6 fire damage.

Any other person trying to hold the flame takes 2d6 fire damage.

Any creature can hold the flame for one additional turn but the damage doubles each round; for example, a creature that is not a Lan Biang monk takes 2d6 fire damage at the end of their first turn holding a flame then 4d6 fire damage at the end of their next turn.

If a Lan Biang monk holds the flame (and thus starts their turn with it in hand), all of their attacks deal an additional 2d6 Lan Biang Fire damage.

Temple Entrance



1 square = 5 feet

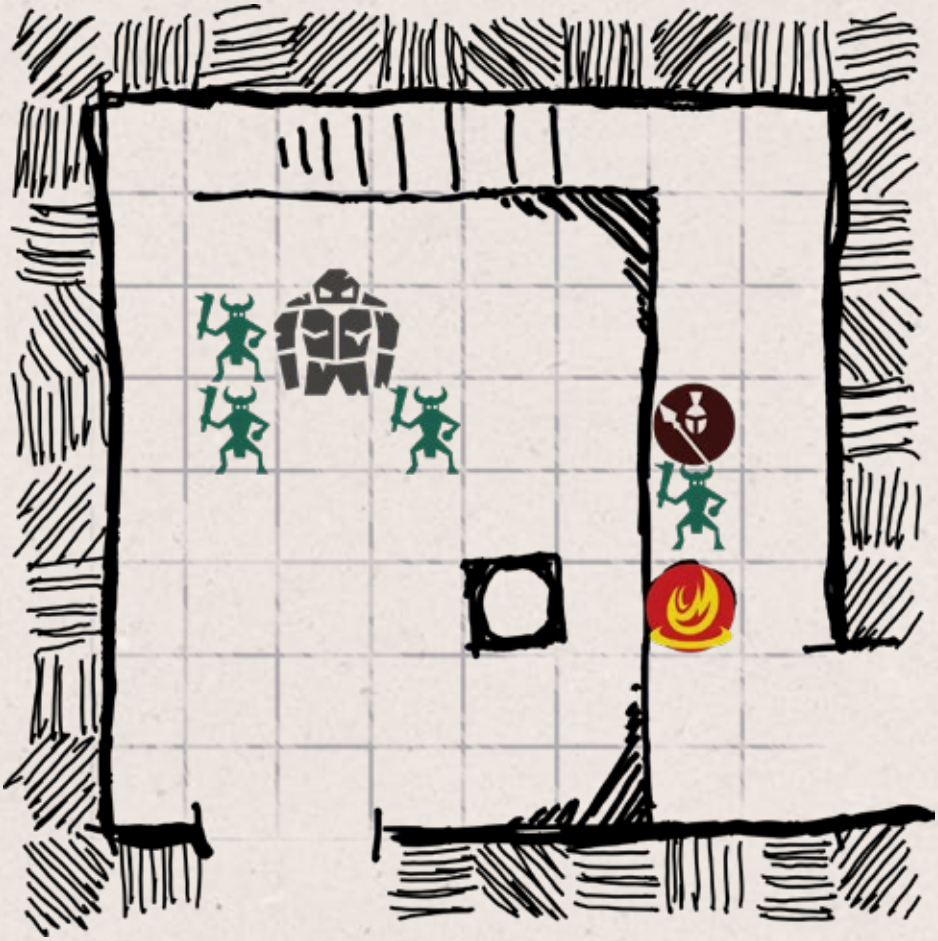
 Hulking Crystal Construct

 Lit Brasier

 Small Construct

 Unlit Brasier

 Spear-throwing Crystal Construct



Temple Reliquary Room

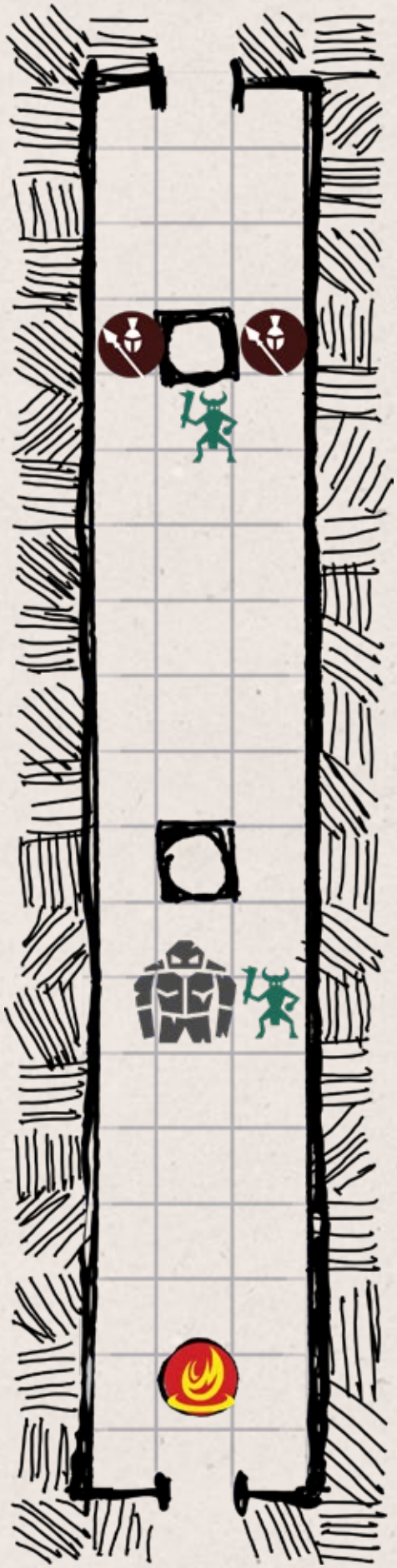
The next room is two levels, continuing the climb up the rest of the mountain. The walls are lined with shelves housing picture frames, incense holders, and relics of many varieties (small statues, golden figures, scrolls, and in a few cases, bones kept in glass containers).

Read or paraphrase:

> *At the top most floor, a brazier burns brightly with another brazier on the lowest floor (where you've entered). Another hulking construct and two minions stand before you, with another construct above. This one seems more lithe with spikes jutting out from its shoulders. As you prepare for combat, you notice it quickly pulls a long, crystalline spear from its body and hurls it with tremendous force.*

A hulking crystal construct is surrounded by three small crystal constructs in the lower level while a **spear-throwing crystal construct** and a small crystal construct guards the lit brazier in the higher level.

Any character that is able to get to the top floor will be able to use their action to turn over the lit brazier and send down coals to the unlit brazier below. This will cause the brazier to also burn with the Lan Biang Flames.

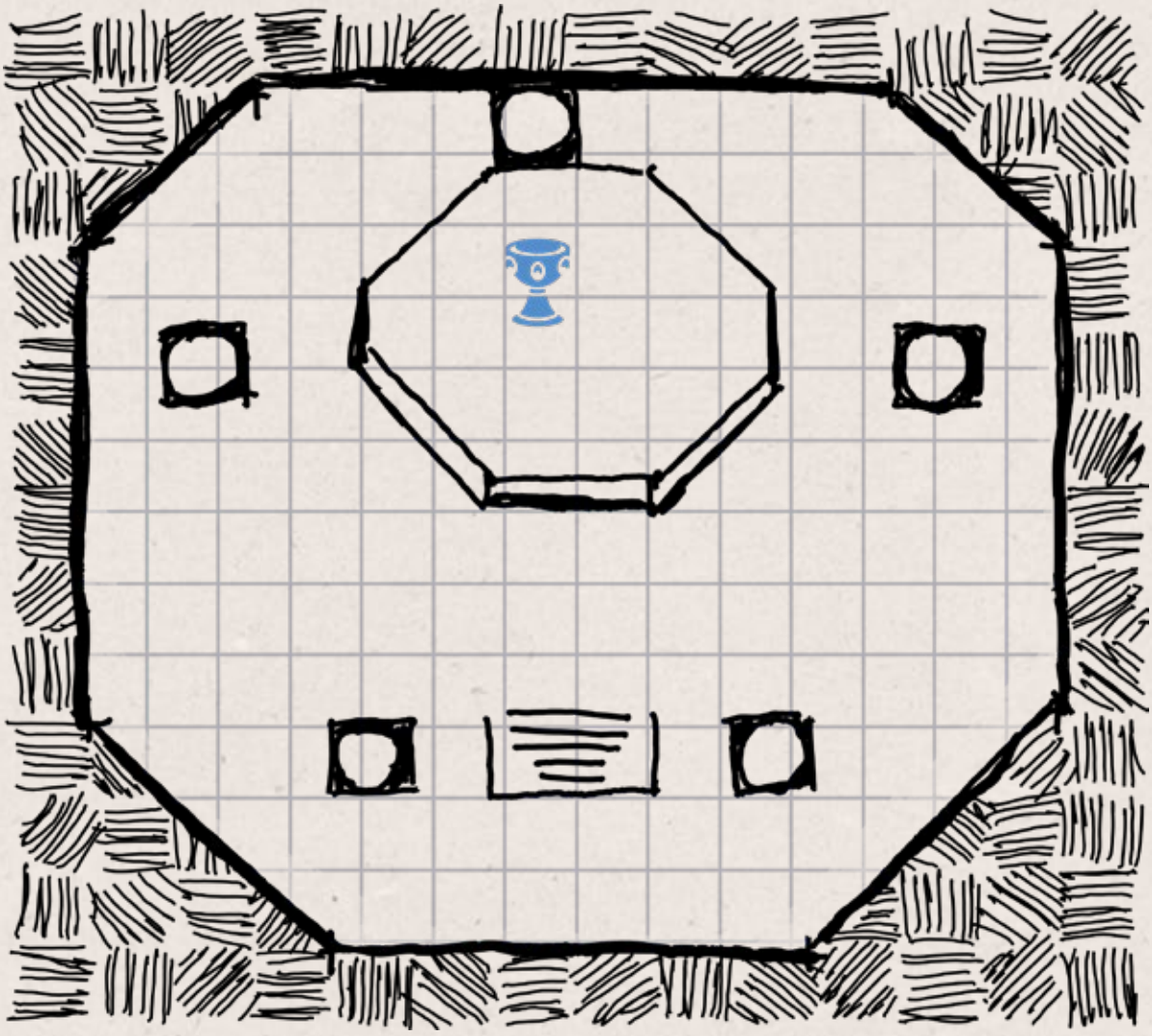


Path to the High Altar

Read or paraphrase the following:

> *Entering this long corridor, you immediately smell incense and coal - much stronger than any other room. Along both sides of this long hallway you can see curtains hiding what you would assume to be small bedchambers. Of course, they are currently all empty.*
>
> *Ahead, you see three braziers though only the one closest to you is lit. The hallway is full of constructs, bent on keeping you from reaching the high altar. The monks you've freed thus far ready themselves and look to you for your signal.*

With the hallway cleared, there remains just one more chamber: the high altar. This last hallway acts as a place where the party can rest with the monks they've saved. See below for provisions the monks will offer them. In this hallway, there are two spear-throwing crystal constructs, two small crystal constructs, and a hulking crystal construct arranged in this room according to the Path to the High Altar map.



High Altar

Read or paraphrase the following:

As you begin to approach the stairwell leading to the peak of the mountain, you begin to hear the voice of the Silver Chalice, the source of the curse.

Words start to ring in your head - quite literally. The words sound as if a bell could talk. It's sweet and tantalizing, and the words ring clearly like music.

"Give in to me and you can have everything. I can take your strength and multiply it ten-fold. I can take your armies and multiply them a hundred times. Your riches - I can grow it by a thousand. All you need to do… is let me in."

Describe to the party that even entertaining thoughts of having more of anything causes small crystals to form on their hands and arms. However, Ai seems to be lost in some kind of trance.

Crystals have begun to form around her body, even creeping up her neck into her face. Her expression is blank.

Let the party deal with this as they see fit. Any concerted effort to bring her back will work. If you do need to set a DC to convince her to resist the urge, set it to DC 14. Allow retries, though failures should increase the DC by 1.

Read or paraphrase the following:

As you crest the top of the stairwell, you find yourselves at the highest point of Lan Biang mountain - and the final "room" of the temple. Surrounded by five unlit braziers is the clearing where the nightly bonfires are lit, full of dry detritus. Above the pit is a beautiful, silver chalice. It floats in the air and although it is merely and object, you feel as if it is looking at you.

"It is not too late," you hear the chalice say in your minds. "You can give in to me and I will make you one of my own - capable of so much more than you could ever dream..."

The chalice begins to well with energy. A hazy ectoplasm body begins to form around it, stirring up wind and dirt. It appears humanoid, though it is covered in silver chains and jewelery. At the end of its arms are two especially long silver chains, covered in barbs and spikes. The chalice itself is suspended in the body's chest.

This last encounter has many different options and it is up to the party to decide which to employ against the Spirit of the Silver Chalice. First, they will be able to bring up fire from the floor below; this allows them to start off with one brazier lit. All other braziers can be lit as expected.

The center area is where the monks start their bonfires each night. The various dry detritus makes it difficult terrain. However, if at least 10 points of Lan Biang fire damage be dealt to "the ground," the entire area sets ablaze and deals Lan Biang fire damage to any creature that starts their turn inside.

Depending on the personalities of the monks who survived and are participating in this combat, one or more may try to pin down the **Spirit of the Silver Chalice** inside the bonfire (dealing damage to both creatures).

Finally, because this is the highest point of the mountain, a creature can be knocked off the edge. Characters and Lan Biang monks are entitled to a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw when pushed off the edge (if appropriate) to catch the ledge. Any other creature pushed off is removed from combat (except for the Spirit of the Silver Chalice; it will cast *misty step* to return to the summit on the next turn).

Development

Once the spirit is defeated, the mountain goes quiet. Before anyone can say anything, the chalice cracks, then loudly shatters. If there are any remaining crystal minions, they likewise crack and then shatter. Another silent moment passes, and then uproarious cheering erupts from the monks. Not only has their home been saved, but the village below remains safe from harm.

CONCLUSION

Depending on which monks survive the encounters, it is up to the DM to determine how to close out this adventure. Below are a few things to keep in mind:

- The monks are forever indebted to the party. If characters have grown particularly close to any of the surviving monks, a closing scene with them is appropriate.
- They do not have much money but are more than willing to part with some of their donations (usually reinvested into repairs of the temple) totaling 2500 gp.
- As long as at least one monk has survived, they are happy to teach any character some of their skills with fire (*Lan Biang Flames*).

Rewards

Lan Biang Flames

With training, each character can learn to meditate over the course of a short rest with an open flame.

At the end of the short rest, a character gains the ability to use and redirect fire. In addition to being able to use the *control flames* cantrip, a character can also control more violent flames to reduce incoming damage. As a bonus action, a character can spend any number of d6 from a pool of 10d6 to reduce incoming fire damage to a minimum of zero; this pool is replenished when a short or long rest is completed within sight of an open flame.



Author's Notes/Acknowledgments

It's never too late to reconnect with a piece of your familial or cultural history.

Author Bio

Steve is a recent addition to the Toronto-based podcast Asians Represent. Specifically he's part of their actual play Dungeons & Da Asians where the crew plays in an unabashedly Asian-inspired setting. He works full-time as a business consultant and spends the rest of his time pursuing cooking, lifting heavy stuff, crossfitting (with relatively few injuries), talking about education, and working on D&D module design - often all on Twitter (@DeeEmSteve). Sometimes he also sleeps. If you asked him what he likes most about TTRPGs, he'd say it's their capacity to help build empathy. If you asked him after a few drinks, he'd make a lot of loud noises and start flexing on you. He means well.

APPENDIX A - LAN BIANG MONKS

All monks that are rescued are described below. Should a DM wish to make up the NPC personalities during the game, all the power to them! These are provided as a reference tool to remove that mental burden.

The names are presented in the order they are encountered at the temple. The crystal constructs look identical to each other and it's not possible to know which monk is cursed until the construct is healed or destroyed.

Except where stated, all monks have the same combat statistics (they all have the same AC, hit points, etc.).

If a construct is destroyed (not healed), any monks that survive will be incredibly distraught but will save grieving for after the temple is saved.

Lan Biang Monks

Name	Description	Notes
Ai Hoang [eye hong] neutral good human (she/her)	Ai is a slight human woman who wields a staff. She's very action-oriented and gets easily confused and frustrated when it comes to too much planning. That said, she understands what is at stake and will work with the characters to save the temple - and her family. Ai was adopted by the temple when she was a baby. She has never met her mother, but the monks say she was a beautiful, intelligent woman, but a victim of circumstance.	Ai attacks with a lacquered quarterstaff which deals 1d6 bludgeoning damage.
Bich Dao [beek zao] neutral half-elf (she/her)	Bich is a half-elf woman who finds decision making very difficult. She will often ask for direction or explicit instructions. When this is given, she finds it easy to focus on the one or two tasks given to her. Bich joined the ranks of the monk after realizing that academia wasn't for her. She had begun studying architecture, but knowing that her mistakes could cost lives was too much to bear. She works with the monks to find peace.	Bich attacks with a spear with a red ribbon that deals 1d6 piercing damage. She can also throw the spear with range 20/60, though she generally avoids this.
Chuot Huynh [CHU-ott hwin] chaotic good tiefling (they/them)	Chuot is a big, bombastic tiefling. They very much believe that laughing is the key to enlightenment - and if they're wrong, at least they'll have a lot of fun along the way. Chuot carries out their tasks with a smile on their face and a song in their heart (and hopefully mostly in their heart for they are an abysmal singer). Chuot joined Lan Biang Temple after dishonorably leaving the military. They were tired of causing suffering and living a dour and serious life.	Chuot attacks with unarmed strikes, but wears thick iron rings on both their forearms. Their blows are heavy and deliberate (though do no additional damage) and ring clearly through combat.

Lan Biang Monks

Name	Description	Notes
Do Phan [zoh fan] lawful neutral human (they/them)	Do is a very serious human. They have deep, calculating eyes and don't say a lot. They struggle to express their emotions but it becomes clear early on by what little they say that they do care deeply for the temple and their family. Do came to the temple from a life of banditry. They have done some very bad things in their life, but are trying to do the right thing now.	Do attacks with a straight sword (1d8 slashing) that has a small red string attached to the hilt.
Em Hoang [em hong] lawful good tiefling (she/her)	Em is the venerable, tiefling matron of Lan Biang Temple. One of her horns cracked and never healed properly. She has a bright, warm smile that is almost framed by her many wrinkles. Em has been with the temple for four decades and became the matron in the last twenty years. In her youth, she was a rambunctious dancer turned bandit turned soldier turned dancer turned monk. She doesn't believe anyone ever makes a "bad" choice; people make the only choice they could given the circumstances. She is here to make sure people grow and learn so that future choices make them as happy as possible.	All monks beg Em not to fight alongside them but Em firmly refuses. She attacks with unarmed strikes - but carries a fan in one of her hands during combat to distract and bewilder her opponents.
Phuc Le [FOOP lei] chaotic neutral human (he/him)	Phuc is by far the youngest person at the temple: an 18 year-old human boy. He's a cocky upstart and honestly doesn't really know why he came to the temple - it just seemed like something to do. Although he doesn't yet realize it, he stays because he never really felt accepted by his family. They just never really paid attention to him.	
Giang Tran [jung chen] neutral aasimar (she/her)	Giang is an aasimar woman who is an ex-circus performer. She has a bubbly attitude but has no patience for rude or mean behavior. Giang's most notable trait is that she rarely walks "normally," preferring to cartwheel or walk on her hands to get around. She finds herself at Lan Biang just so she can "find herself." She has every intention of eventually leaving.	Giang attacks with a chain-and-hammer, giving her 10 foot range and dealing 1d8 damage. After dealing damage to a creature with her chain-and-hammer, Giang can use a bonus action to try to trip them. The creature must attempt a DC 13 Strength or Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone.

Lan Biang Monk

Medium humanoid, neutral (varies)

Armor Class 15
Hit Points 45 (8d8 + 10)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)	10 (0)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Strength +4, Dexterity +6
Skills Acrobatics +6, Perception +5
Languages common
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Martial Arts. A Lan Biang monk deals 1d6 damage with unarmed strikes. When attacking with an unarmed strike or a weapon they are proficient with, the monk may make one unarmed attack as a bonus action.

Ki. A Lan Biang monk has 5 ki points. At the end of a short or long rest, all ki points are restored.

Flurry of Blows. Immediately after taking the Attack action, the Lan Biang monk can spend 1 ki point to attack with two unarmed strikes as a bonus action. If they are attacking with Lan Biang Flames, these unarmed strikes also do this additional damage. If any of these extra attacks hits, the Lan Biang monk can choose to spend an additional ki point to attempt to shove the creature. The creature must make a Strength saving throw (DC 13) or be pushed 15 feet away from the Lan Biang monk.

Stunning Strike. When the Lan Biang monk hits another creature with a melee weapon attack, they can spend 1 ki point to attempt a stunning strike. The target must succeed on a Constitution saving throw (DC 13) or be Stunned until the end of their next turn.

Extra Attack. When the Lan Biang monk attacks, it makes an additional attack.

Actions

Unarmed Strike. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Reactions

Deflect Missiles. A Lan Biang monk can use their reaction to deflect or catch the missile when they are hit by a ranged weapon attack. When they do so, the damage they take from the attack is reduced by 1d10 + 8.

If they reduce the damage to 0, they can catch the missile if it is small enough for them to hold in one hand and they have at least one hand free. If they catch a missile in this way, the monk can spend 1 ki point to make a ranged attack (range 20 feet/60 feet) with the weapon or piece of Ammunition they just caught, as part of the same reaction. They make this attack with proficiency, regardless of their weapon proficiencies.

Hulking Crystal Construct

Medium construct, neutral evil

Armor Class 9
Hit Points 100 (12d10 + 34)
Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	8 (-1)	18(+4)	6 (-2)	10 (0)	5 (-3)

Skills Athletics +8
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned
Senses Darkvision, passive Perception 10
Languages common
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Berserk. The first time a hulking crystal construct starts its turn with 50 hp or less, it goes berserk. Its Slam attack instead does 3d8+4 damage. In addition, it has the condition Exposed Heart.

Exposed Heart. The hulking crystal construct's chest cracks and eventually crumbles, showing a human heart that is encased in magical crystal. A creature that attempts to attack the heart directly does so with disadvantage. If the heart is successfully attacked by a creature that can deal Lan Biang Fire damage and the total damage dealt exceeds 20, the crystal construct dissolves into a mercurial puddle and the original cursed humanoid magically rises up through it, unconscious.

Actions

Multiattack. A hulking crystal construct makes two slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Spear-throwing Crystal Construct

Medium construct, neutral evil

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 80 (12d10 + 14)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	6 (-2)	10 (0)	5 (-3)

Skills Athletics +8
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned
Senses Darkvision, passive Perception 10
Languages common
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Berserk. The first time a spear-throwing crystal construct starts its turn with 50 hp or less, it goes berserk. Its crystal spear attack instead does 3d8+4 damage. In addition, it has the condition Exposed Heart.

Exposed Heart. The spear-throwing crystal construct's chest cracks and eventually crumbles, showing a human heart that is encased in magical crystal. A creature that attempts to attack the heart directly does so with disadvantage. If the heart is successfully attacked by a creature that can deal Lan Biang Fire damage and the total damage dealt exceeds 20, the crystal construct dissolves into a mercurial puddle and the original cursed humanoid magically rises up through it, unconscious.

Actions

Multiattack. A spear-throwing crystal construct makes two Crystal Spear attacks.

Crystal Spear. *Ranged or Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 40/120 ft. or 5ft, one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage.



Small Crystal Construct

Small construct, neutral evil

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 54 (7d8 + 21)
Speed 35 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	6 (-2)	10 (0)	5 (-3)

Skills Perception +2
Senses Darkvision, passive Perception 12
Languages common
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Actions

Multiattack. A small crystal construct makes two claw attacks.

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

Spirit of the Silver Chalice

Medium construct, neutral evil

Armor Class 16
Hit Points 130 (15d8 + 60)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)	10 (0)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Constitution +1, Wisdom +4, Charisma +5
Damage Vulnerabilities Lan Biang Fire
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned
Damage Resistances Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from nonmagical attacks
Senses Darkvision, passive Perception 8
Languages common, telepathy 120 ft
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

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

Actions

Multiattack. The spirit makes two attacks with its chains.

Chain. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* (2d6 + 4) slashing damage. The target is grappled (escape DC 14) if the spirit isn't already grappling a creature. Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained and takes 7 (2d6) piercing damage at the start of each of its turns.

Summon Small Crystal Construct (Recharge 5-6). As a bonus action, the spirit can summon 1d3 small crystal constructs. If there are already at least 6 small crystal constructs in combat, all small crystal constructs heal 3d8 hp and no additional creatures are summoned.

Snuff Out Flames. At the start of every turn, the spirit is able to stir up supernatural winds that can snuff out flames. The spirit rolls 1d4 to see how much flame can be snuffed. The spirit can spend 1 point of the d4 result to snuff out a brazier and can snuff out the entire bonfire with 3.

Misty Step (3/day). As a bonus action, the spirit can momentarily become incorporeal again, teleporting up to 30 feet to an unoccupied space that it can see.

Reactions

False Promises. Once per turn when a creature the spirit can see starts its turn within 30 feet of the spirit, the spirit can reach into its mind. The creature's senses or temporarily dulled and it hears the spirit promise power, riches, or anything else that creature may desire. If the creature is a player character, have the character describe one thing that they greatly desire and how the spirit could most enticingly offer it. The creature must then succeed a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be stunned. This save can be repeated at the end of each of the creature's turns. Crystals begin to form on their face when they are stunned this way. A trusted ally can use their action to help a stunned creature through words and other actions that appeal to their values and spirit, giving the creature advantage on their next saving throw. Once a creature makes a successful saving throw against this ability, they remain immune for 24 hours.

Legendary Actions

A Promise Not Easily Ignored. The first time the spirit starts its turn with 65 hp or less, it reaches into the minds of all Lan Biang monks. It offers a reprieve from its curse, if only they stop fighting it. All monks must make a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be stunned as if affected by False Promises.

The Lost Children

by Kat Kruger

Content Warnings

The mood of this encounter is dark horror. Some players may feel uncomfortable with the descriptions of child neglect and murder at the hands of flesh-eating demons. Should this be the case, do not elaborate on the gory details. Consider the makeup of your players and adjust accordingly.

SYNOPSIS

The adventuring party arrives in a remote village where orphaned children tend to go missing. Only one child was ever able to escape the clutches of evil, but she is now an old woman who is known for weaving tall tales, including that of a yomari (sweet rice dumpling) tree that once grew in her garden from the bones of a nanny goat.

Inspired by a Nepalese folk tale, *The Lost Children* is an adventure designed for three to seven 5th–10th level characters (is optimized for five characters with an average party level of 8) running 3 hours.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The adventuring party is traveling through a secluded area when they save a pet farm goat which leads them to a village where they rest and resupply. During their layover, they are approached by a child with a quest to save her foster brother.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

An old woman named Punthakhu Maincha lives on the outskirts of a remote village in a modest house bequeathed to her by her merchant father. She is known for her charitable nature toward orphan children, whom she feeds both food and stories. In particular, she is fond of telling the tale of her escape from the clutches of demons in her childhood and of the yomari dumpling tree that once grew in her garden from the bones of a nanny goat. She claims that a mouse ultimately saved her life but that her cruel step-sister was not as fortunate.

The villagers pay no mind to the stories, but the local children believe the tales, enough that when an orphan goes missing, a little girl seeks help from outsiders.

CHAPTER 1

TALL TALES

A highland trail allows the adventuring party to cross a mountain range during their journey. While making their way to the other side, they come upon an animal in danger.

A desperate bleating sound cuts through the chilly air. On a rocky incline, a kid goat trembles atop rubble. Its unsteady legs wobble beneath it as the creature continues its plaintive cries.

With a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check, a character notices the snow leopard (panther) beyond the goat, feasting on a fresh kill. It has, in fact, taken down a nanny goat. The kid goat has a hempen rope collar with a tag that reads: "I live in Kankala Lake village. Please lead me home."

From their vantage point, characters can easily spot the rural village below. The mountain pass splits off and leads the adventuring party to Kankala Lake. There are no nearby signs of civilization.

In the bowl of a picturesque valley, surrounded by snow-capped mountains, sits a farming village on a lush green plateau. The community is perched alongside a winding river that feeds into a lake. A single dirt road leads past houses that are made of mud bricks with thatched roofs and raised eaves.

There is no map of the area. The village is situated on a verdant plateau with farmland surrounding a cluster of residential houses. A merchant's house is located on the outskirts, overlooking a river that courses toward the lake.

Although the village is self-sufficient, the residents lead humble lives without any luxuries. Farmers can sell their produce of goat cheese (1 sp per wedge) and flatbread (10 cp per dozen), as well as raksi (a distilled rice alcohol for 3 sp per hand keg). Additionally, there is no inn, but the locals are willing to provide accommodations in their animal sheds.

Talk of the Town

Exploring the area and speaking with locals, characters can easily discover the owner of the goat is a farmer named Kiran. They can also learn that a merchant once lived on the outskirts of the village with his family. During that period, he imported and exported wares. Decades have gone by since he passed away, leaving the estate to his daughter who is now in her twilight years.

Rumors

Spending a little time in the village and chatting with the locals can provide the characters with a number of good leads to explore in and around town. Any character who succeeds on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check finds out one previously unknown piece of information from among those given below:

- Recently, an old couple came through town seeking charity. (See the "Charity Begins at Home" section for more information.)
- An elderly woman lives on the outskirts of town and claims to have survived a demon attack. (See the "The Old Nanny Goat" section for more information.)
- There is a skeleton that hangs in a tree by the river that passes through the valley, laden with jewels and thought to be cursed. (See the "Spirited Away" chapter for more information.)

Charity Begins at Home

Kiran (KEER-an) (human male, **commoner**) tells the adventuring party that an elderly couple came through town looking for alms just days ago. The villagers gave them meager offerings before sending them away. Incidentally, his six-year-old nephew Imay (IM-may), who was orphaned in the winter, disappeared around that time.

Kiran is a farmer of humble means. He is married with five children, including Daxa (DAAK-sha), his ten-year-old daughter. A character who succeeds on a DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check notices that although he would not admit it to strangers, he is relieved that the burden of taking in his sister's boy may no longer his to bear. He is clearly troubled by the death of the nanny goat and the impact its loss will have on his family. Daxa has been tending to the kid goat and is distraught if she learns of the nanny goat's demise.

The couple who came through the village was childless and had expressed a wish that they'd had the good fortune of adopting such a healthy boy. They were last seen heading downriver toward the lake.

The Old Nanny Goat

Characters can easily find the former merchant's house on the outskirts of the village. Its sole occupant is an old woman named Punthakhu Maincha (Poon-TA-coo MEAN-cha) who the villagers have nicknamed "The Old Nanny Goat". Although the house is the only brick and mud mortar building in the village, it is quite modest in appearance.

At the end of an overgrown dirt path rests a simple brick house. Some shingles are missing and a few bricks are crumbling, yet a flourishing fig tree stands in stark contrast to the otherwise deteriorating property.

The adventuring party finds Punthakhu Maincha dozing in a wicker chair with a wide back, wrapped in a long-haired yak hide. She is dressed in simple clothes, no different than the other villagers but wears an iron ring that she rubs when approached by strangers. Any character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check identifies it as a *ring of detect good and evil*.

In her old age, she makes puppets and marionettes which she offers to sell the characters for 5 cp each. Alternatively, she gives away one toy for each tale they are willing to hear. A character must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check to ascertain the woman believes what she is saying is true. The toys include children, demons, mice, and goats.

If the adventuring party encourages the old woman's storytelling, roll a d4 on the Random Tall Tales table below. As she tells the story they may glean the following information to be true on a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check:

- Beasts often see things that humanoids don't; finding a means of speaking with them can reap many benefits
- To receive help, sometimes one must seek the smallest voices to defeat the biggest enemies
- Honesty may at first appear to require sacrifice but ultimately reaps great reward
- A lakhey reverts to its true form if it dies
- Lakheys are flesh-eating demons with a red, ferocious face, protruding fangs, and long black hair



Roleplaying Punthakhu Maincha

The woman is of advanced age and quite senile. Her stories are embellished with details that often seem far-fetched or added for effect. She has a flair for dramatics, although she speaks in an even voice with authority. Her childhood began quite harshly, with a cruel stepmother and stepsister who mistreated her while her father traveled for business. During this time, she was lured away by two lakheys who were disguised as an elderly couple. A mouse warned her of the danger and before they could consume her, she escaped with some treasure. Her stepsister was sent back to steal from them but never returned.

Development



Whether the characters question her or not, Daxa seeks help from the adventuring party before they leave. She believes the elderly couple who came through the village took her cousin and instructs them to take the river path toward the lake as they were last seen on that route. She hands them a felt doll as payment and tells them Imay has the matching doll.

Daxa is unaware that the lakheys killed Imay and, in fact, have lured the couple out of the village with one of them disguised as him. The second lakhey follows the adventuring party out of the village and takes on the disguise of Daxa if discovered.

Random Tall Tales

d4	Tale
1	A sparrow lost a bean and sought help from the highest officials to no avail. When she told an ant of her woes, it helped by intimidating an elephant the king was riding on.
2	Beware of the Gurumāpā (GOO-roo-mah-PAH) (a **hill giant** with a terrifying face and protruding fangs) who was banished to a field for stealing disobedient children.
3	The fig tree in her garden once bore the "fruit" of yomari dumplings. As a young girl, she once fed an elderly couple from the tree, but they turned out to be evil lakheys.
4	She met a woodcutter who lost his ax in the lake, and when a jalpari (**merfolk**) found a silver one and gold one, he was rewarded with them for his honesty when he said they were not his.

CHAPTER 2

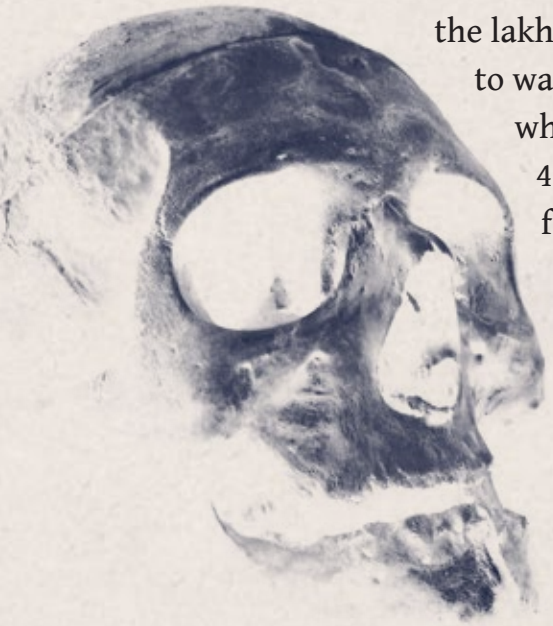
Spirited Away

Following the river, the adventuring party can easily track the couple. With a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check, a character determines they are moving at a leisurely pace and that a small humanoid is with them. There are no signs of struggle.

Any character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check while traveling determines that the party is being followed. In response to being spotted (or at any opportune moment), Daxa reveals herself to the characters.

Unknown to the characters, the girl is, in fact, a **lakhey** who has polymorphed into the likeness of Daxa. She claims to be searching for her cousin. Any character who succeeds on a DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check determines that she is hiding something. She urges the adventuring party to aid her quickly and runs ahead.

If the adventuring party discovers her true identity and fights the lakhey, she will flee to warn her partner when she reaches 45 hit points or fewer.



No Bones About It

After half a day of travel, the path eventually widens to a large riverbank and the adventuring party reaches an eerie site.

In the shallows of the river stands a petrified acacia tree. Its bare, sun-bleached branches stretch toward the sky. Hanging from one bough is a small, humanoid skeleton crowned with a silver circlet that glimmers as the bones sway gently in the breeze. A crow roosts above it. Further along at the edge of the riverbed is a bamboo hut.

When a character enters the area, the crow caws. A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check senses that the crow is trying to warn the party. The area of the riverbank extends 20-feet wide from the water and 30-feet in length. Hidden throughout the sand are ten skeletons (CE male and female humans). Characters entering the area who have a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 15 or higher notice shallow graves in the sand. The buried skeletons rise from their graves and attack if anyone approaches or damages the hanging skeleton, or if they are discovered and attacked.

All the skeletons in this area are the victims of two lakheys who have roamed the region for hundreds of years. Luring vulnerable children away from villages, the demons promise a good home, only to trap them and consume their flesh.

Any character who makes a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check determines that the undead are, in fact, children. As such, the skeletons are restless and can be appeased. Allow the adventuring party to roleplay or use other creative solutions rather than outright destroying the skeletons once they discover they are the bones of children. For example, if the adventuring party acquired puppets from Punthakhu Maincha, they might put on a show for the undead to simply entertain the children or explain the intentions of the characters. Furthermore, although the children cannot speak, they can pantomime scenes explaining their deaths at the hands of the lakheys.

After using one or more puppets to play with the children, the adventuring party may receive one random enchantment on the item for use when dealing with the lakheys. Each puppet is enchanted after the following pantomimed action is performed by the soul of one of the skeletons:

Child. "A boy and girl run hand-in-hand toward you. One trips and vanishes." The character in possession of this puppet can cast *greater invisibility* once.

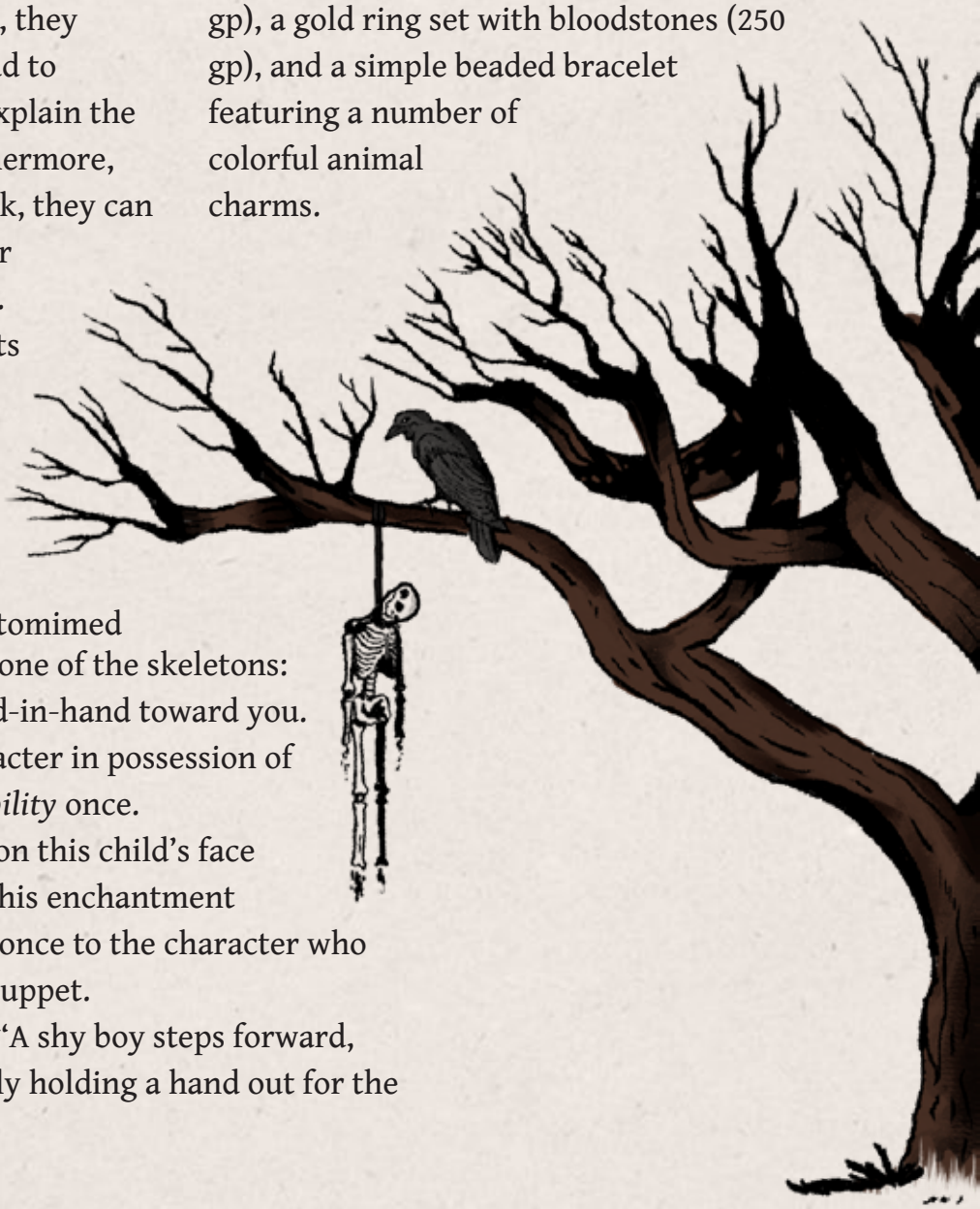
Demon. "The look of mischief on this child's face is almost palpable." This enchantment grants *death ward* once to the character who possesses the puppet.

Mouse. "A shy boy steps forward, plaintively holding a hand out for the toy." Any character in possession of this puppet can cast *arcane eye* once.

Goat. "With arms folded across her chest, a girl stubbornly plants her feet on the ground." Once, while in possession of this puppet, any character can cast *fabricate*.

Randomization is dependent on how many puppets and what types were obtained by the characters. The DM should use their own discretion when rewarding the enchantment.

Although the hanging skeleton also met a gruesome fate, it does not animate with the buried skeletons. On its head rests a silver circlet (750 gp). It is also adorned with other jewelry including a small gold bracelet (25 gp), a gold ring set with bloodstones (250 gp), and a simple beaded bracelet featuring a number of colorful animal charms.



Any character who succeeds on a **DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana)** check determines the bracelet is magical, but it requires attunement to discover its properties as an *animal friendship bracelet* (see "Rewards"). If the adventuring party spares the undead, the crow delivers the bracelet to them. Additionally, sparing the skeleton children earns the adventuring party the *Spirit Guardians* story award (see "Rewards").

Development

When the skeletons are defeated or otherwise appeased, the treasure may be easily removed from the hanging skeleton. The crow caws relentlessly. If a character spends the time required to attune themselves to the bracelet, they will hear the crow's warning, "Three enter; two exit." It is meant as a caution about following the lakheys into their hut. For generations, the crows here have shared the memory of humanoids who steal fledglings, but they have no recollection of their faces. In fact, the lakheys change their appearances regularly so as not to raise suspicion when they return to villages decades later.

The House That Hate Built

Further downriver from the skeletons, a shack stands in disrepair.

A deteriorating bamboo hut shows no sign of recent inhabitants. Its closed door hangs off its hinges and the thatch roof is partially caved in.

What the Mouse Knows

Although it cannot eat, for every piece of food it receives, the mouse reveals one fact about the area:

- The makeshift hut was built by two lakheys.
- The lakheys would lure children into the hut and bar them in until it was time to dine on their flesh.
- Only one girl was kind enough to offer the mouse food in exchange for the above knowledge. As a result, she escaped with treasure.
- A day later, another girl came seeking more treasure at her mother's behest and when the mouse attempted to warn her of the danger, she killed it with a hot fire poker before being killed herself.
- Her ghost haunts the hut.
- Before the lakheys left the area, they buried the bones of their victims in the riverbed near the hanging skeleton.

The building has no windows. Any character who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check notes there are metal brackets on either side of the door frame and a woodblock has been discarded by the entrance. These items were used as an exterior barricade by the lakheys who would trap their victims inside. Furthermore, there are no sounds coming from within, as the building was abandoned long ago.

When any member of the adventuring party approaches within 5-feet of the hut, a ghost mouse (use **rat** statistics) appears and squeaks incessantly. If a character is able to speak with the mouse, it asks for food in exchange for information.

The interior of the hut is a single room measuring 10-feet in circumference. Light comes in through the partially collapsed roof. Other than a rotted straw mat and broken fire poker, there are no furnishings. Scorch marks in the center of the room indicate there was a wood stove used for a period of time.

When the adventuring party enters the hut, Ratna (RET-nah) (**ghost**) appears.

A child sits on the straw mat, cowering with her hands covering her head as she cries. Her fine clothes are slashed and as she turns her hollow gaze toward you with blood streaking her face, she says, "You can't hurt me anymore."

As a ghost, Ratna is blinded with fear and attacks the characters on sight, seeking to drive them out of the hut, which she is bound to in the afterlife. If they attempt to negotiate with Ratna, a character must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion or Deception) check to convince her that they mean no harm. At that point, she stops attacking and agrees to help out the adventuring party if they play a game of Bagh-Chal (BAA-chall) with her. It is an asymmetric and strategic, two-player board game. One player controls four tigers and the other player controls up to twenty goats. The tigers 'hunt' the goats while the goats attempt to block the tigers' movements. As they play, she recalls her last days before she died. (See "What Ratna Knows")

Bagh-Chal Conditions

d10	Condition
1-2	Ratna thinks her opponent is cheating.
3-4	The character playing against Ratna believes she is cheating.
5-6	The game is tied.
7-8	Ratna wins.
9-10	Ratna loses.

Ratna is a sore loser and asks to play again for the best two out of three. If they refuse or she realizes they are purposefully throwing the game, she attacks. A character must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma (Deception) check to fool Ratna. Furthermore, if she loses the second game, she looks accusingly at the character closest to her and says, "Stop pinching me!" before she attacks.

Developments

If the adventuring party defeats or negotiates with Ratna, they discover *chattering coal* (see "Rewards"). Regardless of the outcome, only when the lakheys are defeated can her spirit rest.



What Ratna Knows

Decades have passed since she died, but she can recall the following information from her life:

- The girl was sent by her mother to steal more treasure from an elderly couple after her step-sister, Punthakhu Maincha, escaped from their clutches the night before.
- According to Ratna's mother, Punthakhu Maincha was greedy and jealous of her step-family and deserved to be mistreated.
- Ratna thought her step-sister made up the story of the lakheys to scare them off on account of her selfishness.
- While she was left in the hut to prepare supper, she killed a dirty mouse with a hot fire poker.
- The elderly couple brought her to the hut with offers of a good home, but they revealed themselves to be lakheys at night and killed her.



CHAPTER 3

Devil May Care

As they make their way further downriver toward the lake, they find another encampment.

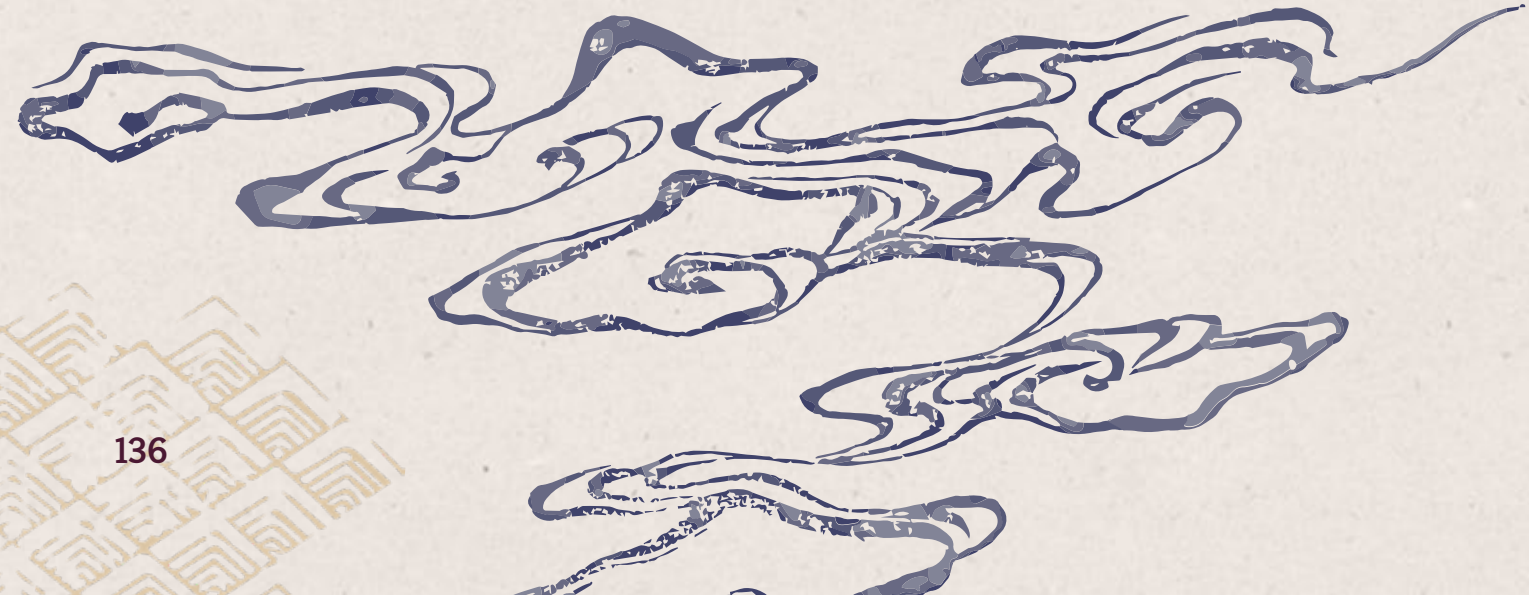
Home Away From Home

The characters come across another bamboo hut, this one freshly built and similar in construction to the one near the hanging skeleton. Inside they find Imay preparing food by a central wood stove.

Daxa pretends to be relieved upon discovering her cousin is safe. Imay also feigns innocence, saying he has been adopted by an elderly couple. Furthermore, he explains that he is preparing chatamari (a very thin round papery bread made of rice) while they are in the river, bathing.

If the adventuring party suggests the boy is in danger, he insists otherwise. Imay attempts to set a plan in motion to retrieve the couple while the characters wait within the hut. There are no other hiding places that would allow the adventuring party a surprise attack. Daxa claims she is small enough to stash herself into a canvas rice sack outside and offers to be on the lookout. Should the characters allow the children to leave, they find themselves barricaded within the hut while the lakheys head to the river to kill the couple. The characters have 1d6 turns to make their escape before the hut burns down, after the lakheys set the roof ablaze. Any character who remains inside the hut at the end of this time period takes 2d6 fire damage.

Alternatively, if the adventuring party realizes Daxa and Imay are the lakheys in disguise, they have the option of tricking or attacking them first before saving the elderly couple. Otherwise, the children follow the characters to the river, prepared to drop their disguise and attack if they are discovered.



Chewing the Fat

The elderly couple is, in fact, bathing in the river after making the long journey from the village. They are human **commoners** who insist they mean no ill will. A character must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check to determine if the couple is telling the truth or a DC 20 Wisdom (Insight) check to realize the children are lying. The lakheys do what they can to encourage the characters to attack the couple in the hopes that the adventuring party will then leave them be.

If their ruse is discovered, the lakheys attack. Include the elderly couple in the initiative order, but when the battle breaks out between the lakheys and adventuring party, they attempt to escape by swimming to the other side of the river and only defend themselves if attacked. This encounter uses underwater combat rules. The river is 500 feet wide. Thirty feet from the riverside, the elderly couple encounters a whirlpool that is 22 feet in diameter. Any character who makes a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) notices the danger and can warn the couple. Otherwise, when a creature starts its turn in the whirlpool, it must make a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check to continue unimpeded. On a failure, the creature is pulled 5 feet toward the vortex's center, and the creature is restrained by the whirlpool until the start of its next turn. If the creature reaches the whirlpool's center, the creature is pulled 5 feet below the surface.

Whenever a lakhey starts its turn with 50 hit points or fewer, it retreats to the water and attempts to dive below the surface. The lakhey resurfaces on its next turn, having disguised itself as one of the elderly couple. It does what it can to obfuscate its intentions beforehand such as pulling the target below the water first. A character must succeed on a **DC 20 Wisdom (Insight) check** to distinguish the lakhey from the human. The couple is unaware of the history of the demons. If the adventuring party shares the details of what they've discovered, they may make a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. On a success, the couple understands the devastation that these creatures have wrought upon the region and offer themselves as a sacrifice. They know a lakhey reverts to its true form if it dies and the adventuring party can destroy the demons, absolved of wrongdoing. Their honesty and altruism should tip off the adventuring party of their true identities. Additionally, the lakheys discourage the idea and attempt to make their way to the other side of the river.

Development

If the adventuring party defeats the lakheys and fled from Ratna, upon returning to the abandoned hut they find her spirit has departed and left behind *chattering coal* (see "Rewards").



CONCLUSION

There are several ways to end the adventure. Should the characters kill the elderly couple, the disguised lakheys return to the village to be reunited with their family. Rumor follows weeks later that the village was beset upon by demons.

If the characters defeat the lakheys, the elderly couple thank the adventuring party for their aid and offers a *bowl of nourishing* as a reward, which they discovered in the hut. The characters also find a shallow grave with the bones of a child picked clean, buried with a felt toy that matches the one Daxa gave the adventuring party. Characters may bring the doll back to the girl and assure her that Imay's soul will be laid to rest. Returning the bones to the family in order to be properly interred results in another rumor years later of a yomari tree growing on the grave of an innocent child.

If the adventuring party showed mercy to Ratna, they may also wish to return to Punthakhu Maincha to reveal the fate of her step-sister.

Rewards

Characters who complete this adventure may earn the following rewards. For all combat experience add up the total for defeated foes and divide by the number of characters present in the combat. The rewards for non-combat experience, are listed per character.

Combat Rewards

Obstacle	XP per Foe
10 skeletons	50 each
1 ghost	1100 each
2 lahkeys	1800 each

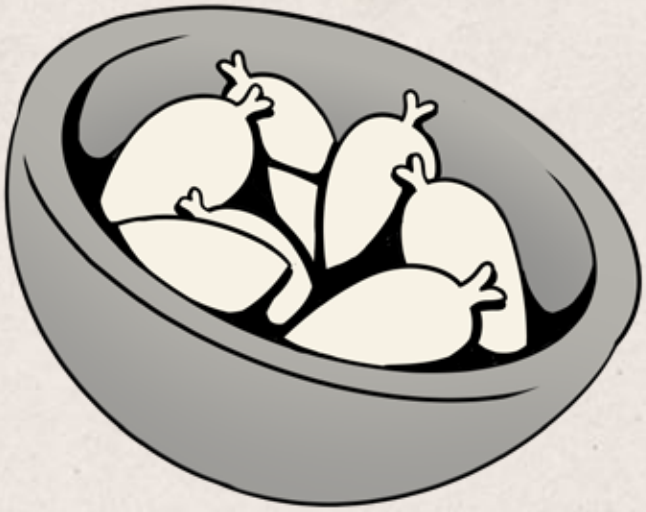
Non-Combat Rewards

Obstacle	XP per Character
Entertain the skeletons	500
Negotiate with Ratna	500

Story Award

Spirit Guardians

When in combat with lakheys, the spirits of angelic children protect the adventuring party. They flit around one chosen character to a distance of 15 feet for the duration. When they appear, the chosen character can designate any number of creatures they can see to be unaffected by the spirits. An affected creature's speed is halved in the area, and when the creature enters the area for the first time on a turn or starts its turn there, it must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 3d8 radiant damage. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage.



Treasure Rewards

Animal Friendship Bracelet

Wondrous Item, uncommon (requires attunement)

While wearing the bracelet, you gain the ability to comprehend and verbally communicate with beasts at will. The knowledge and awareness of many beasts is limited by their intelligence, but at minimum, beasts can give you information about nearby locations and monsters, including whatever they can perceive or have perceived within the past day. You might be able to persuade a beast to perform a small favor for you, at the DM's discretion.

Chattering Coal

Wondrous Item, common (requires attunement)

After you spit on this piece of coal, you can spend a short rest telling it to say up to four words in your voice and set a condition under which the piece of coal speaks. You can also replace old words with new ones. Whatever the condition, it must occur within 5 feet of the piece of coal to make it speak. The coal's words are lost when spat on.

Bowl of Nourishing

Wondrous Item, uncommon

Placing a single grain of rice in the bone bowl produces enough yomari dumplings to feed five humanoids. The food spoils if uneaten after 24 hours.

Author's Notes/Acknowledgments

This adventure was inspired by the Nepalese folktale Dhon Cholechā. It takes place decades after Punthakhu Maincha supposedly escaped from the lakheys.

Author Bio

Kat Kruger is Dungeon Master on the actual play podcast d20 Dames and Chief Wordsmith at Steampunk Unicorn Studio. With over ten years' experience writing in the entertainment and gaming industries she offers a wide gamut of storytelling, workshop, and publishing services. Her D&D adventures from d20 Dames and Adventurer's League can be found on DMs Guild. She is also the Story Architect for Multiverse. Follow her on Twitter/Instagram @katkruger.

Lahkey

Medium fiend (devil), lawful evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 110 (13d8 + 52)
Speed 30 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +6, Con +7, Wis +5, Cha +5
Skills Deception +5, Insight +5, Perception +8
Damage Resistances cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered
Damage Immunities fire, poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive perception 18
Languages common, infernal, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Devil's Sight. Magical darkness doesn't impede the lakhey's darkvision.

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

Shapechanger. The lakhey can use its action to polymorph into a humanoid of its challenge rating or lower. Its statistics are the same in each form, except for the speed changes noted. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

Steadfast. The lakhey can't be frightened while it can see an allied creature within 30 feet of it.

Actions

Multiattack. The lakhey makes three melee attacks with its claws. Alternatively, it can use the Glaive attack once.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Glaive. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an undead or a construct, it must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or lose 5 (1d10) hit points at the start of each of its turns due to an infernal wound. Each time the lakhey hits the wounded target with this attack, the damage dealt by the wound increases by 5 (1d10). Any creature can take an action to stanch the wound with a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check. The wound also closes if the target receives magical healing.



Illustration by Reshma Zachariah

The Lost Rathi

by Russ Wilde

Content Warnings: Storms, Water, Drowning, Poverty, Tyranny, Shapeshifting, Mild Body Horror

SYNOPSIS

Within the Alijahn Forest is a city called Nagajari. The calm of the city is in upheaval, as reports of an approaching war chief have reached the city. However, not all hope is lost. The Raja knows that somewhere within the city is a legendary warrior, one so powerful they have earned the title of Rathi. If you can recruit them, you might be able to stop this threat. Chase this legend while dealing with the approaching threat, and beware the hidden threat that may come.

Can The Rathi be found before the threat arrives? What enemies might lurk in the wings? And what is this warrior doing in Nagajari?

An adventure for a party of four 15th level characters running 4 hours.

ADVENTURE HOOK

As a oneshot, the story begins with the party standing before the crown prince of Nagajari, as he informs them of the plight of the city.

In the case of a campaign, it is possible to have NPCs spread rumors about this problem, until the crown prince reaches out to the party for a meeting.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Nagajari sits on the edge of a river, embedded into a hillside. It is a tiered city, where the rich and powerful quite literally tower over the poor. The crown prince's title and name is Raja Harkesh Divyaali. The players should refer to him as Raja should they be unable to pronounce his name. The people of the city seem desperate to either get out of Nagajari or climb higher within the caste system. As such, most NPCs make a deal for monetary or informational gain unless otherwise stated.

The rumors of a war chief approaching the city are partially true. There is a large band of people coming towards the city, but they are actually a group of holy folx. People who have seen through supernatural means that there is an evil force lingering within the Nagajari and have come to investigate these visions.

The cause of these visions is actually crown prince Raja Harkesh Divyaali, who is actually a Rakshasa that has shapeshifted into the Prince's form. Their goal is to destroy the city, the Rathi, and the holy folx who challenge his power.

While the demonic prince may have plans, there is an

unpredictable element in this adventure: a monsoon. During the adventure, the DM is instructed to roll to see if the monsoon begins. Once the monsoon does begin, flooding begins to destroy the city, starting with the lower levels. The battle for Nagajari then involves the elements and the villain standing before you.

The Raja

Raja Harkesh Divyaali (RAH-juh har-KESH DIV-yah-lee), an adult human **noble** (he/him), is ignorant, arrogant, and stuck up. He wishes to have the first and last words and loves to hear himself speak. He is almost comically dramatic, overemphasizing and playing the inept ruler part to perfection. As he is whimsically ignorant to the strangeness of the situation or his actions, if he is called out by a character, he dismisses it; he never could he have foreseen any of these issues.

CHAPTER 1

The Legendary Warrior

Within the Alijahn Forest, the party comes across a town, Nagajari. Through the wooded hills, the sun shines upon the tiered city, and the party traverses the winding paths of the city for quite some time. Through the town and climbing the streets, the disparity of the caste system is obvious, physically represented by the levels of the city, and the ultimate goal, the palace, high above.

A courier delivered a summons to the party: the Raja Harkesh Divyaali has requested the presence of the party in the palace for an unspecified reason.

Despite the high sun, there is a heavy weight in the air. Occasional glances of fear from the townsfolk who whispers as they watch the party pass by. A DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that the townsfolk are afraid and refuse to talk directly to the party.

After what feels like hours, you arrive at the palace. Whisked into its ivory walls and gaudy presentations, you are brought to the throne room. Standing before you is a dark-skinned human man. He holds himself high, but his stature is not imposing. He wears a golden and red sherwani that seems to float upon his body as if afraid to tarnish the skin of the man underneath. The smell of incense permeates this room, filling your nostrils as Raja Harkesh Divyaali approaches.

Raja Harkesh Divyaali informs the party that the rumors are true and that a war chief is approaching the city, with the intent of toppling Nagajari and subjugating its people. The only hope is to convince The Rathi and ask them to destroy the incoming forces with their incredible powers.

The Rathi

The Rathi is said to be able to face up to 5000 warriors simultaneously and emerge victorious. Most tales of the Rathi seems to be resounding from the slums, but most of the guards seems to have little luck there. The Raja offers 600 gp for each party member, and a single item from his personal vault of treasures.

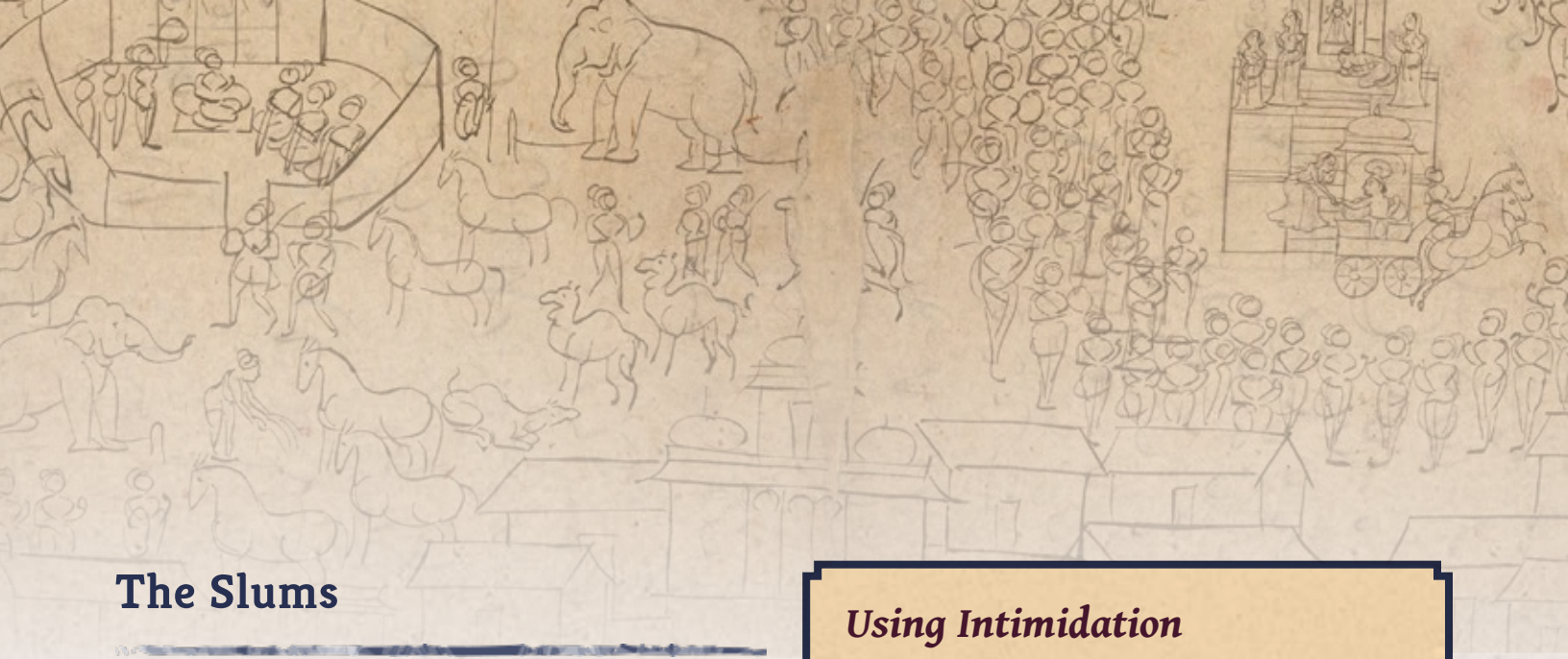
- On a successful DC 18 Wisdom (Insight) check, a character realizes that Raja Divyaali is hiding something.
- On a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) or DC 20 Charisma (Intimidation) check, the Raja confesses that some of the guards have faced off with a figure wearing a red cloak with a black dog before being knocked unconscious. On a failed check, the Raja dismisses the party to go do their job.

Monsoon Rolls

Once the players complete the above section, it is time to begin rolling for the environmental threat: the monsoon and the possible flooding of Nagajari. Several times throughout the rest of this module, a monsoon roll is called for. A monsoon roll consists of rolling a die then determining the outcome and modifier based on the below table. All modifiers are cumulative, and do not disappear once they have been rolled. Make sure to track this modifier, as it is designed to gradually increase until the flood begins. When you begin the monsoon rolls, you start by rolling a d20 this die may decrease as the adventure continues, depending on how your party acts towards people in the adventure. If they act with cruelty or violence, downgrade the Monsoon Roll Die by one (for example, d20 to d12, d12 to d10, and so on).

Monsoon Table

d?	Monsoon State	Modifier	Modifier Effect
≤1	The Flood Begins - This result can only occur during *The Battle For Nagajira*	-2	If the flood begins, check how the players did in *Hunkering Down* and take that result to the end.
2-3	The Monsoon Begins Pick from the below list: • Rain begins to fall • The Wind is moving quickly • Sound is difficult to hear	-1	If you get this result twice, count the third result as the beginning of the flood.
4-12	Small Changes Occur Pick from the below list: • The sky darkens slightly • The wind picks up • The air feels heavy • The temperature drops suddenly	-1	If you get this result three times, count the fourth result as two options from the 2-3 Roll.
13-20	Nothing occurs.	+0	Nothing occurs.



The Slums

Once the players complete their interactions with the Raja, roll a monsoon roll using a d20.

The Community

All signs seem to point towards the slums of Nagajari. As the party enters the slums, it's obvious the sheer poverty that this area suffers from. The way people of all races, both near and far, are packed into this tier is disconcerting considering the earlier opulence of the palace. Despite these conditions, there is still joy.

Houses are built out of scraps of metal, wood, and stone. Streets are packed tight so almost no sunlight reaches the ground and yet the heat is sweltering: trapped with nowhere else to go. This den of poverty has no qualms about race or age; it takes any and all who are pushed into it. Children chase one another, adults chat in the streets, and the sounds of this community reverberate through narrow alleys and labyrinthian roads. The silence is strange as they take notice of a new presence in their midst: your presence.

Using Intimidation

Should the characters use Intimidation to gain information, make sure to increase the difficulty of all future checks against the community by 5. In addition, once that has been done, permanently downgrade the Monsoon Roll Die by one (i.e., d20 to d12, d12 to d10, and so on). Make future monsoon rolls using the new die.

After this, any time the party uses intimidation or violence against innocent people, downgrade the die again, but do not make another roll unless specifically requested in the module.

The community of the slums is wary of the adventurers. Too many times the Raja has sent guards and other groups to their homes to scare them, take their money, or harm their people. As such, the community is apprehensive of such folx. The community does their best to avoid the party, going so far as to shutter themselves away or even staying silent during conversation. Money will not change the minds of the people of the slums. They know that money is a tool for the rich and a poison for the poor.

On a successful DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) or Charisma (Intimidation) check, the people of the slums are more likely to cooperate with the party. Upon

Elder Bhavana

Elder Bhavana (EL-der bah-van-ah) is an older tiefling with purple skin and curved horns (she/her).

She holds herself with respect and power. The people of the community watch her with wide eyes, but none speak or move. She commands more attention and power than first glance would betray. Elder Bhavana has seen the actions of the Raja, and how he has changed over the past year. He has become cruel and unkind. She worries for the community. She feels that something has to change, and that change will be coming soon.

mention of the Rathi, people point them to three possible locations where the Rathi is rumored to hang out: **Dukaan Mayur, The Red Makaan**, and **Kapoor's Kitchen**. Dukaan Mayur is a small store within the slums that sells groceries and other items. The Red Makaan is a building in the slums that houses many people. The rate of tenant turnover means that it is difficult to know any and all people who live there. Once the players have this info, they may head to any of these locations. Kapoor's Kitchen is a restaurant in the slums. The Rathi is always located at Kapoor's Kitchen.

If the check succeeds by 10 or more, an elder of the community steps forward. Elder Bhavana wears an old white saree stained with dust and dirt. Her steps are slow and tremulous as she stands before the party.

Elder Bhavana reluctantly tells the party that she has heard that the Rathi is in **Kapoor's Kitchen**, and warn them that if they try to harm anyone in the slums, the Rathi protects them. If the party is not already aware, she informs them of the red cloak the Rathi wears and the black dog that follows them.

On a failed check, the community scatters from the party, ushering themselves into homes and safe places. All that's left is a single person - a single individual in a red cloak, with a black dog striding beside them. The Rathi has found the players; jump to A Deadly Foe.

Dukaan Mayur

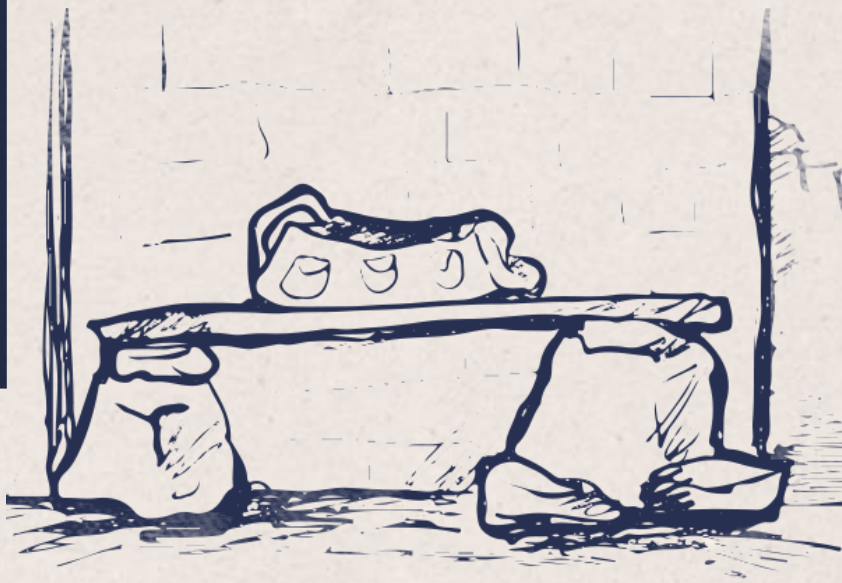
Upon entering this section, make a monsoon roll.

Approaching the location of Dukaan Mayur, it's easy to miss with just how small this store is. It is not inside a building, but is rather propped up in the middle of an alley. There is a line of people waiting to talk to a figure behind a piece of scrap metal balanced on two large stones.

Standing behind the stones is a young firbolg man, wearing a button-up shirt and a lungi. On the piece of scrap metal is a single bag about the size of a traveller's pack. It is made of cloth, and is covered with sewn-on pockets made of various fabrics. You watch as people approach, have a short conversation with the man, and give him some coins. The man then looks at the bag and begins frantically patting the pockets until his hands stop. He removes an elephant-like figurine made of dried banana leaves from the bag and hands it to the young child, who takes it and happily runs away with a bright smile on their face.

Vistal Pavaan

Vistal Pavaan (viss-TAAL PAV-ahn), is a blue firbolg in his late teens (he/him) and owns the Dukaan Mayur shop. Vistal knows where the Rathi is because he just dealt with them, and gave them a new sword for some money. The Rathi told Vistal they would be heading to Kapoor's Kitchen and to meet them there to discuss an upcoming job.



This happens several more times with even more ridiculous types of items this bag has in its tiny pockets. He removes tools, food, trinkets, even a serving platter at one point. Every customer leaves his stall smiling and happy. As the party have been watching, they are moved with the crowd to the front of the line. The young man smiles at the party member in front.

Vistal does not trade information for free. It costs the party, but not in coin. Vistal does deal in coins, but with such adventurers, money comes easily. He wants an emotion: one from each member of the party. Vistal offers the party this: if each of them relives a moment of intense emotion, bringing Vistal along as an outside observer, he gives them the location of the Rathi.

Encourage your players to use this moment as not only a moment of conflict, but also a moment of character development. This moment does not have to be traumatic or horrifying. It can be happy or peaceful. Vistal does not ask for bad emotions; he just asks for emotions. Have your players describe the scene and what happens in it, and throw Vistal's presence into the scene towards the end, to signify that he is there.

Upon completion of this deal, Vistal gives the party the requested information.

Should the players decide to fight Vistal for this information, he creates a 20ft sphere of darkness around himself. Any creature within that sphere must make a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw; on a failed save, gain one level of exhaustion as Vistal feeds on their energy. The shadows last only a moment, but as that moment ends, all creatures may make a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. On a successful check, they see a flash of a memory - not one of theirs but Vistal's.

They see a person wearing a Red Cloak, their face covered. A black dog stands calmly beside them, their tail wagging. They only hear a few words from The Rathi, "Meet me in Kapoor's Kitchen, later today."

Dukaan Mayur is not an actual store, but is the name of Vistal's bag. It is magically enchanted and can be used to acquire almost any non-magical item in the world. He does not offer to trade or give away the bag as it is an essential artifact for his plans.

Vistal's Prescense & Emotion

When throwing Vistal's presence into a scene, it does not have to be violent or aggressive. Here are some ideas:

- Vistal stands in the PCs peripheral vision watching the scene
- Vistal makes a small comment or emotes vocally in reaction to the scene
- An NPC looks towards the PC, but the PC sees Vistal's eyes instead

Should a PC have difficulty coming up with a scene with emotion, try asking them any of the following questions to encourage them to explore their character:

- What was the happiest moment of your life?
- When did you first feel real fear?
- Who was your first love, and when did you realize you loved them?
- What is home to you?
- How do you feel when you see yourself in a mirror?

The Red Makaan

Upon entering this section, make a monsoon roll.

The Red Makaan is a mishmash of materials and colors. Sections of wall jut out in strange angles and thin wooden planks connect various wings which stretch up, creating shadows that hide the burning sun.

Looking more like the machinations of a beholder's dream lair than an actual housing unit, The Red Makaan is the remnants of dozens upon dozens of buildings that have been melded together. In front of you, a large red curtain hangs over the entrance, with a large sign that says "Open."

Upon entering there is a single person standing behind the counter; they look bored with everything.

Meloz Makoz (mell-OHZ MAH-cuz) is a middle-aged dwarf with dark purple hair with black roots (they/them). Meloz works the front desk, and are incredibly bored with this job because nothing fun happens. When the party arrives, Meloz speaks with a monotone voice, asking if they would like to rent a room and for how long they plan on staying. Once they become aware that the party is looking for the Rathi, a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check shows that they seem to perk up a bit.

They allow the party to go up to the Rathi's room with a key, if the party promises to let Meloz follow along. They've been very interested in what's in the "legendary warrior's" room, but they haven't wanted to intrude. Also, this gives them an excuse to blame the party should the Rathi come home early.

The party can also attempt to steal the key, which is kept on a metal board with pins on it behind Meloz. The there are several keys with no details on whose room is which, just numbered. Should the players decided to steal multiple keys without care for which room they are for, feel free to describe other rooms and living situations they enter into.

In order to prevent players from being frustrated, make sure that at least one of the keys opens the Rathi's room; it is unimportant as to the actual number, but it is important to note that if they stole a key, then the Monsoon Roll Die downgrades as described in The Community section.

The Rathi's Room

The room has a wooden door, and the party can easily enter with the key, thereby disabling any traps within the room. Should the party attempt to enter without the key, a glyph of warding goes off, dealing 5d8 thunder damage to anyone within 20 feet of the door. This glyph of warding reactivates in 5 minutes, and affects anyone who attempts to exit the room without the key.

Should the party make it past the door and its trap, they find a messy room with a simple mattress on the ground, a desk, and dog bowls for food and water by the bed. The party may make an Intelligence (Investigation) check within the room.

On a result of 13 or above, the party realizes that there is something wrong with the room. One of the walls is closer than it should be. The party may then roll another Intelligence (Investigation) check with advantage. If the result is 15 or higher, reveal the above information as if they had rolled an 18 or higher originally.

On a result of 18 or above, they find that there is a hidden panel in the metal walls of this room. Opening the panel requires a DC 20 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) or DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check. Within the panel, the party finds dozens of papers. On a successful DC 18 Intelligence check, they are revealed to be plans for a hit on a convoy in a few days. These papers also reveal the details of several different robberies that have already happened in the higher tiers and the amounts stolen. Two symbols are written next to the amounts stolen: K2 (standing for Kapoor's Kitchen).

If Meloz is in the room with the party, they spend the entire time looking around the room, analyzing how everything in the room could be part of a master plan that the Rathi is hatching. This includes everything from the dog bowls, to the mattress, etc. With the K2 clue, the party can move to Kapoor's Kitchen. Without that clue, they may still move to Kapoor's Kitchen, but without the confirmation that the Rathi is there.

Kapoor's Kitchen

Upon entering this section, make a monsoon roll with the current die.

People are wandering in and out, and the restaurant is well lit. Tables are low to the ground and the customers are seated on the ground, eating off banana leaf plates placed on the table.

In the distance is a board with a house special written down: masala dosas with

Sheena Kapoor

Sheena Kapoor (she-nah kah-pour) a mid-twenties half-orc (she/her).

She is not only the hostess for the restaurant, but also the owner. She is aware that the Rathi is here, and wants to stall for long enough to try and help them get out. Sheena and the Rathi have been working together. The Rathi robs the rich and powerful under cover of night and fights off the guards who seek to take money from the poor. They invest the money into Kapoor's Kitchen, which allows them to try to feed all the people in the slums by offering free meals. She is in a romantic relationship with the Rathi.

sambar. There are servers running around carrying plates of this crispy-thin special that has been stuffed with seasoned onion and potatoes, and a side bowl of an orange-colored chutney. Each part of the meal is separated on the leaf with rice as the centerpiece.

You enter into a busy restaurant, tables completely full with people. This place seems completely different from the streets of the slums. Laughter and joy live in this place. Some folx seem to be eating quickly and without hesitation as if they have never seen food in their lives, while others are enjoying their meals and the company they keep.

While you adjust to this change of pace, a hostess approaches you. Her outfit matches the bright atmosphere and the smile on her face is genuine and kind.

Upon seeing the party, the hostess and owner, Sheena Kapoor, greets them immediately and introduce herself to them.

She does anything to try and keep the party away from the kitchen of the building, where the Rathi is hiding out and having a meal with their dog. She even goes so far as to tell elaborate fantastical lies about why the party shouldn't explore the kitchen, lies that are so elaborate and wild that no person would believe them. Should the party choose to doubt that, they may roll a DC 5 Wisdom (Insight) check. On a success, Sheena is revealed to be a horrible liar.

Should the party threaten anyone in the restaurant, Sheena immediately confesses everything that has been going on for their safety. Threats against her own safety have no effect on Sheena; downgrade the party's Monsoon Die if this happens. If the party wishes to get Sheena to open up without intimidation or violence, the players must convince her that they mean no harm to the slums nor the Rathi. They can do that with conversation, offering information, succeeding on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check, or, if received in The Community, informing her of Elder Bhavana's blessing.

In any case, she brings the party to her office, and explain to them that herself and the Rathi have a vigilante funded charity going on. The Rathi robs the rich, without harming anyone, and Kapoor's Kitchen uses that money to pay for food and gives it out for free since the Prince has cruelly stopped helping the slums. She mentions how the Raja brought food to the poor and took care of them, but over the past year he has become withdrawn and sometimes violent, even commanding his guards to attack civilians to maintain his power. Upon the conclusion of this conversation, the Rathi enters.

Standing before you is the legendary warrior you have been hunting for: The Rathi. They stand before you and enter a fighting pose, their small black dog shrinking backwards. Without a single word, they withdraw two gleaming swords. As they do, the world erupts in noise. Bells begin ringing, shouting can be heard in the distance. The Rathi stands up straight, turns away from you all. They say in a voice full of worry, "The War Chief. You are out of time. You are too late. The war chief is here."

Make a monsoon roll.

CHAPTER 2

Ally or Foe?

As the bells ring over the city, the Rathi looks towards the party, their face still covered by their red cloak, and they say in a harsh and commanding voice, "If you want to stop the fall of Nagajira, come with me." They run off without waiting for a response from the party. Should the party try to stop The Rathi, they do their best to avoid a confrontation.

The Rathi uses the Assassin stat block with the following adjustments:

- Increase HP to 98 (15d8+30)
- Increase Multiattack to 4 attacks
- Increase Dex to 18, AC to 16, Attack +7, Damage 7 (1d6+4)

The Chase

Traveling through the streets of Nagajari is no easy task. The slums are far from the entrance to the city, keeping the poor out of sight and out of mind for any visitors. The Rathi moves at a blistering pace, sprinting through alleys, leaping over walls and pushing through impossible spaces.

A DC 18 Wisdom (Survival) check with at least one success in the party allows the party to keep up with The Rathi; if no one succeeds, the party loses sight of them several times, regaining the path by seeing a flash of red cloak in the distance. Throughout the chase, people in the Slums seem to clear out of the way.

You break from the narrow shadows of the slums into the city proper on the lowest tier. The Rathi does not slow down, but in this open area, you are granted a full view of their abilities. They move like lightning, pure energy and instinct. They react to obstacles in an instant, faster than any other person you might have seen before. In these busy streets, you cause more of a disturbance as you push past citizens and run past massive crowds hawking their wares. It seems so strange that mere moments ago you were in the belly of poverty, yet all of these people seem so unaware of the struggles just beyond their field of view.

The run through the streets takes about two hours. When the party reaches the gate, it is in time to see the Rathi speak to a guard quickly and quietly, then they pass through the gates.

No check is necessary to follow The Rathi through the gates, and beyond the city, a group of people, no more than a mile away, trek across a straight and narrow path towards the city. The War Chief has arrived, and only the party and The Rathi stand in their way.

The Rathi's Strategy

The Rathi wishes to blaze into the forces and go wild with attacks, destroying the War Chief's army as quickly as possible. They want the party to distract the War Chief's army, or perhaps assist in the battle. With a successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check, the party can convince The Rathi to wait to attack.

On a successful DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check, it is revealed that the force carries banners of a golden loturn emblazoned upon a white background.

A subsequent successful DC 15 Intelligence (History) or Intelligence (Religion) check reveals that the symbol is known as the center chakrum and is the holy symbol of a god. A result of 20 or higher also reveals that this symbol is a holy symbol of the God of Heavenly Fire, Bravika. He is a known protector of the land, and uses his divine flames to burn away the falsitudes of the world and show them the truth. It seems strange that a War Chief would use the symbol of such a peaceful and righteous god.

Nima's Vision

Should the party try to approach peacefully, **Nima Kolivan** approaches the party. In either case, the group of people do not attack unless attacked first.

Nima has traveled far to arrive in Nagajira due to visions of an impending disaster that threatens the entire nation. An evil lurks in Nagajira, and she has brought the believers of Bravika with her to complete the needed work.

Nima Kolivan

Nima Kolivan (NEE-mah COAL-ih-vaan) is a middle-aged elven woman (she/her). She has dark brown skin and black hair tied in a tight braid that hangs down her back. She wears a gold and white saree that flows beautifully around her, but she also wields a longsword and a shield in her hands.

Nima is kind and has the energy of a friendly older-mother figure. She wants to see the best in people and is constantly encouraging them and supporting them. She is patient, humble, and willing to listen, but she is more than willing to be vicious if the situation calls for it. She wants to keep both her people safe and those who might be in danger.

If the party asks about her visions, she offers to show them what she has seen, but she requires consent first. She also warns that doing this ritual so close to Nagajira could attract some unwanted attention and advises that some party members remain while the rest enter the vision. The party is escorted further into the group of a hundred or so holy people; all races and ages are present. They all watch, interested and confused.

As you get close to the center, Nima looks at her people, and asks a few of them to spread the word: a ritual is about to take place. A few volunteers travel into the vision with Nima; the others remain and protect them. The rest of the holy people nod and begin to scatter into separate groups, seemingly taking on other tasks such as gathering firewood, hunting, or taking watch; it seems to be



practiced to a science. The Rathi takes their stance, watching the grounds with the others and any party members who don't wish to participate in the vision.

Nima looks at the group and kneels upon the ground, asking those who intend to enter the vision to sit with her. As Nima kneels, she removes a jar of ash from her bag and sprinkles a small circle around herself and asks the others to take the jar of ash and follow suit. Once complete, Nima's eyelids begin to droop, as if slumber came quickly, but her eyes flicker open quickly, turning alight with flames that causes the circles of the others to light up, blinding everyone momentarily.

The party may act at their discretion, but if they try to harm the army, the holy people retaliate; there is a burning light that forces everyone to shield or close their eyes. Any party members who didn't enter the vision, or those who didn't attack the at the beginning of the chapter, jump to *Ambushed*.

The Vision

As their eyes readjust after the flash, read the following:

> *You aren't where you were. The ground is muddy and you sink several inches into it. The air is heavy and hot, and within moments, you are sweating as mosquitoes and bugs fly around you. The gates to leave the city are closed behind you. After a moment, a voice seems to call out to you from the slums.*

From here on, the characters are now in Nima's Vision. As this place is not real, the characters cannot use any magic items, spell slots, or harm anything in the vision. They hear a voice calling out from several streets down, towards the slums.

Each character must make a Wisdom (Survival) check or Intelligence (History) check, player choice. Average the results and if the average is 15 or more, they succeed and move towards the voice. On a failure, the party is assaulted by a single ghostly

creature that screams as it sees the party. All party members in the vision must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, characters take 2d10 psychic damage or half as much on a successful one. The creature disappears immediately after screaming, and then the party hears the voice calling again. This time the party need not make a check, as they are now close enough to easily find the source of the voice.

As the party reaches the source of the sound, they find themselves in a familiar part of the slums: at the entrance to the slums. A form, wreathed in golden flames appears, and they know that this is a representation of Nima. She watches quietly, as in the distance a figure colored in bright red enters the clearing. They begin to move, calling in a voice the party can't hear. Gray humanoid shapes appear from the narrow alleys and hidden doorways, walking towards the red figure. The red figure speaks to the gray shapes, and slowly color emerges, lighting the slums.

Nima speaks of the red figure, "A kind face, eyes filled with love and compassion. He brings joy."

A new humanoid figure appears, but something is off: their white light burns bright. They approach the figure in red, and when the formerly-grey shapes turn away, the white figure grabs onto the red man, and pushes him into the shadows. The white figure steps forward, and becomes red, but they are filled with the same white light. The Impostor looks to the gray shapes and strikes downwards, causing them to fall to their knees. Nima continues, "Another hated the joy, and came to crush it. Took his place and began destroying what he had built."

Two Scenes

As these two scenes occur at the same time, if the party approached Nima peacefully, it is advised that the GM read through both scenes, and run all of Nima's Vision before entering combat, as the Vision should be quicker. If it seems that Nima's Vision is taking too long, it is also possible to run through one round of combat then finishing up the Vision, having the characters in the vision join the combat once complete.

Both Nima and the figures vanish, leaving the players in an empty part of the slums. The characters must make a Wisdom (Perception) check. A character who rolls a 15 or higher notices there is still a voice calling for them in the distance. On a roll of 20 or higher, the character also notices that the spot where the Red Figure had stood before they disappeared has two words written in the dirt: "He's Alive." They hear the voice calling in the distance and have advantage on their check to make their way to the voice.

The players must make a collective DC 20 Wisdom (Survival) or Intelligence (History) check to reach the next voice. On a failure, the party is greeted by another screaming spirit; on a failed DC 16 Wisdom Saving throw, it deals 2d10 psychic damage and half as much on a success. The party follows the voice to Nima's form watching a new scene, somehow outside the palace, as the world seems to have magically moved around them.

You find yourselves outside the palace, seemingly having travelled hours in mere minutes. Nima's flaming form watches The Impostor approach the doors of the palace. The doors open slowly and rain falls as The Impostor walks in, standing proudly with their head held high. As the doors to the palace shut, screaming is heard from the rest of Nagajari.

Nima looks directly at the party before speaking, "The city falls if The Impostor remains. He will burn the city to maintain his power. He must be defeated."

As this happens, the screams get louder, the rain gets stronger, and a deep voice begins laughing in the distance.

The entire vision lasts about 30 seconds, which times perfectly to five rounds of the combat in *Ambushed*.

Ambushed

As party members enter a vision with Nima, strange things begin to happen in reality. Read the following aloud:

As your fellow party members enter a vision with Nima, strange things begin to happen. The sky darkens and shadows lengthen, but something seems unnatural about this. Then, after a few more moments, a howl tears through the quiet. Three creatures step out of the shadows and approach the party members and Nima. Their dog-like maws glow with fire as they trod forward on their four legs. They pause for a moment, then descend.

This combat involves six hell hounds who are trying to disrupt Nima's vision. Members of the holy order begin to hide, and the Rathi jumps into protect the innocent civilians. It is up to the conscious party members to fight the enemy.

The hell hounds want to try and disrupt this vision as quickly as possible. They attack anyone protecting Nima, using their fire breath when they can hit more than one person at a time. They don't target unconscious players but don't avoid them when using their fire breath. When any party members hit a hell hound, the creature focus on its attacker until the attacker falls unconscious or until the hell hound hits 0 hit points.

If an unconscious player is hit by a hell hound's fire breath, they take that damage and feel it in the vision, and smell smoke. If a hell hound successfully attacks Nima, the players within the vision must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or take 4d8 psychic damage on a failure. If Nima is hit, all players trapped within the vision must make a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw or take 4d8 psychic damage on a failure, or half on a success. This damage increases each time Nima is attacked up to a maximum of 8d8 psychic damage.

Once the combat is complete, upgrade the Monsoon Roll Die by one (for example, d8 to d10, d10 to d12, and so on).



After the Visions

Once the players leave the vision, no check is needed for participating characters to know that Raja Harkesh Divyaali is an impostor. Nami also brings up the storm in the vision and how it seemed to cause the screaming with the vision. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check reminds the players that it is monsoon season and an incoming monsoon would not only devastate the city, but most of all the slums, too. On a failure, the players know there is some kind of storm which could be coming, but are unsure of how to react.

Either way, The Rathi suggests that they sneak Nima and the rest of her order into the city, while the party focuses on preparing the slums for the coming storm.

Make a monsoon roll.

Development

The next section of the module begins with the party back in the slums. They help prepare for the storm before the final battle against the impostor and his forces. They return to the town and meet with Elder Bhavana and start getting to work, which is where the next section begins.

CHAPTER 3

The Battle for Nagajira

Hunkering Down

The party has been working with the citizens of the slums to prepare for the storm. Begin a skill challenge with your players to determine how they help the citizens.

Going in initiative order, ask your players to describe what they are doing to help the community. Then you as the GM determine what skill they should roll, determining a DC before the roll is made. Certain tasks would be easier than others, for example, "Organizing People using Persuasion" would have a lower DC than "Creating A Waterproof Road Block using Sleight of Hand." Require a number of successes equal to twice the number of characters while keeping the number of failures less than one-and-one-half (150%) the number of characters. Should the party's failures exceed this, the skill challenge ends. Once a player rolls a certain skill, they may not roll the same skill again.

At the end of the skill challenge, inform your players how things look in the slums. Make sure to note if they succeed the skill challenge, as this affects the final result of the story.

Skill Challenge Examples

- Organize The Citizens - DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion)
- Barricade Doors and Windows - DC 18 Strength (Athletics)
- Keep Morale Up - DC 15 Charisma (Performance)

The party may wish to take a short rest prior to returning to the palace, accompanied by The Rathi and Nima.

The Final Battle Begins

The Rathi snuck all of the Holy Order into the city one at a time, and they all remain in the slums, continuing their preparations against the storm. When the party reaches the palace, the gates are strangely closed and standing outside is Raja Harkesh Divyaali surrounded by guards and dogs who are chomping at the bit.

Raja Diyaali speaks up: "So you have brought The Rathi, but I do not remember asking you to bring this outsider." He laughs for a moment. "No, I guess the game is up? I recognize a paladin of Bravika. You must be the 'War Chief'. Oh well. It was a good run while it lasted. But I think it's time that I show my true face."

Raja Divyaali reaches around his neck, tears off an amulet, and crushes it in his hand. As he does, his face shifts and moves as his bones expand and stretch, fur sprouting from every inch of skin. His eyes push further apart, and two ears appear above his head, as sharp fangs appear in his open maw. His hands twist, until his palms face away from his body. Standing before them, in his true form, is a tiger-creature with demonic eyes and a burning hunger. He lifts a single hand and shouts "Attack" as his guards and dogs begin to transform as well.



Make a monsoon roll.

Note: Should the flood begin during this section, either The Rathi or Nima leave to aid the citizens; the party must make the decision quickly, or the next NPC in the initiative leaves first to assist the citizens of the slums. If the party failed the skill challenge, this NPC dies in the disaster. If the party succeeded, this NPC survives.

Gone is the ignorant whimsical Raja. All that is left is sickening confidence. His goal and the goal of his allies is to destroy the party. In order to do this, his demonic allies target any spellcasters that might be able to do area damage, or banish the Raja while the Raja and his hell hounds try to take down any melee fighters. Use Rakshasa statblock for the Raja.

Once the combat is resolved, the module moves into conclusion.



CONCLUSION

Hunkering Down Skill Challenge Success

Nima & The Rathi Live: The party is gathered together by the Rathi and Nima who work together to rebuild the town and figure out what happened to the original Raja. To thank the party, they give them the promised 600 gp per place along with 500 extra gp per player. In addition, they offer the party one of the following: *necklace of fireballs, staff of the woodlands*, or a *flame tongue longsword.*

Nima and/or the Rathi Die: The surviving NPC gathers the party. They inform the party that they are going to work with the citizens to rebuild the city and the government. They thank the party, pay them the promised money 600 gp per party member, and an extra 500 gp per player.

Hunkering Down Skill Challenge Failed

Nima and/or the Rathi Live: The remaining survivor(s) gathers the party. They inform the party that a majority of the citizens ended up passing in the flood, and that they are helping the survivors to evacuate the city. They do not have the energy or numbers to sustain and maintain the entire city. They receive the promised 600 gp per party member.

Nima and the Rathi Die: The remaining citizens ignite chaos. Robbery is widespread. Without a leader, the poor rise up to defeat the rich. A familiar restaurant owner seems to be leading the resistance. The party is given the promised payment 600 gold per party member by Sheena Kapoor.

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Author Bio

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Den of Broken Tiles

by Anthony Alipio

Content Warnings: Gambling

SYNOPSIS

In a winner-takes-all mahjong tournament, the buy-in is a hefty sum of imperial coins, but the reward—and what's more, the prestige—for winning would be very great indeed.

However, this particular gambling households more secrets than just the ones concealed at the tables, and rumors of rodents beneath the establishment are the least of its concerns.

A Tier 3, Asian-inspired take on the classic rats-in-the-cellar motif, **Den of Broken Tiles** brings intrigue, suspense, and a flair of Filipino culture to the tabletop, along with new monsters and an actual-play, **mahjong mini-game option** for an immersive roleplay and resolution mechanic.

An adventure for four 12th level characters running about 6-8 hours.



ADVENTURE HOOK

For gold and glory

A PC who is a gambler has been invited to play in a winner-takes-all mahjong tournament. The Den of Broken Tiles is a prestigious gambler's guild, and to be invited is an honor and an opportunity not to be missed.

Saving the day

A PC who is not a gambler at all has been invited to play in a winner-takes-all mahjong tournament. The invitation might be a case of mistaken identity but for the quickly scrawled note included in the envelope: "Please help, life or death." It is unmistakably addressed to the PC and the entire party.

An intriguing lead

A notorious NPC/mini-boss, whom the party has recently defeated, was carrying an invitation to play in a winner-takes-all mahjong tournament. It included an additional message, hand-written in fine calligraphy: "See to this matter at once." It is pressed with the seal of one of the emperor's highest officials.

In all cases, the invitation outlines the rules and the buy-in/payout amounts described in Chapter 1.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Pilandok, a forest spirit that takes the form of a deer mouse, has been trapped by an ambitious summoner named **Jaan'dik** and is being held in a network of caverns, accessible through the basement/cellar of the **Sinigang House**, a tiny soup shop and mahjong parlor situated on the side of a remote mountain.

The summoner, disguised as the shop's proprietor, is using an invite-only event, hosted by the infamous **Den of Broken Tiles** gamblers' guild, as a front to fence the captured spirit to the highest bidder, promising that Pilandok will grant a wish to whoever frees it from captivity.

Dramatis Personae

(In order of appearance)

Kiza (KEE-zuh) (she/her). A somewhat high-strung rizali dragon (pseudodragon), Kiza's heart is in the right place even if she's skittish when it comes to direct confrontations.

Mama Esca, aka Escalera or Mama E (EH-skuh, eh-skuh-LAIR-uh) (she/her). Esca is the elderly lady who owns the bamboo hut where the mahjong tournament is being held. Unfortunately, she has been imprisoned by Jaan'dik who is now impersonating her via the alter self spell.

Torrenga (tor-EHNG-gah) (he/him). A hired representative of a corrupt high-level official, Torrenga is a highly-skilled mahjong player and renowned gambler. Confident and outspoken, he talks a big game, but it's not mere bluster; he can back his words with actions.

Hintajo (hin-TAH-joh) (he/him). A mouse of a man, Hinjato is quiet and soft-spoken. He never loses composure and has an unreadable gambler's face. Hinjato doesn't value the prize money; he is only interested in seeing if he is the best.

Daiami (dye-YAH-mee) (she/her). The daughter of a gambler who disappeared after attending a similar mahjong tournament, Daiami is looking for answers and won't let anything or anyone stand in her way.

Jaan'dik (jahn-DEEK) (he/him). A powerful summoner who has clawed his way up the ranks within the Den of Broken Tiles organization, Jaan'dik has entrapped a woodland spirit and intends to sell it to the highest bidder.

Pilandok (pi-lahn-DAWK). This diwata (celestial forest spirit) is a tiny deer mouse who loves durian fruit. A prankster at heart, Pilandok rarely intends any real harm.

The Den of Broken Tiles Guild

The Den of Broken Tiles is an urban legend among the populace, purported to be the most exclusive mahjong guild in all the nation. In reality, it is a secret society whose purpose is to control the politics of the land from the shadows. Interestingly, mahjong does play a role within this organization. Often mahjong is simply a cover for agents to infiltrate and broker information, but it can sometimes serve as a gateway for new members to be recruited into the society. A skilled mahjong player has many qualities the Den seeks in its members: strategic thinking, patience, boldness, a cool demeanor under pressure, ambition to be the best, and an understanding that not everything is in one's control.

Illoroco (i-luh-ROH-koh) Province

While the events of this adventure are centered in and around the Sinigang House, players may opt to explore the provincial villages nearby. This province is not much more than several familial tribes living in somewhat sprawling villages. Nestled in the mountains, the province is a popular destination during the warmer months, due to the cooler climate, mountain lakes, and beautiful scenery.

Adventure Outline

Prelude (optional): The Journey In

Travel to the mountains includes an encounter with a rizali dragon.

Chapter 1: Raising The Stakes

The mahjong tournament gets underway, a special prize is announced, and a champion is decided.

Chapter 2: What lies beneath

The captured deer mouse plays dead, then deaf and dumb.

Chapter 3: In the palm of your hand

With his plans thwarted, Jaan'dik attacks.

Conclusion

A two-for-one rescue reveals secrets from the past.

Illoroco Season & Weather

d12	°C/°F	Season	d6	Description
1	21/70	Rainy	1	Torrential rains on and off all day, some flooded paths (difficult terrain), occasional flash flood
2	22/72	Dry	1	Pleasant weather, relatively dry and cool
3	23/73	Rainy	2	Heavy rains and minor flooding here and there
4	24/75	Dry	2	Breezy and temperate for the season
5	25/77	Rainy	3	Thunderstorms and lightning, even late into the night
6	26/79	Dry	3	Partly cloudy and warm
7	27/81	Rainy	4	Light drizzle and mist most of the day
8	28/82	Dry	4	Warm and windy rainstorm in the morning, but sunny and clear in the afternoon
9	29/84	Rainy	5	Foggy (visibility is lightly obscured past 30 feet and heavily obscured beyond 60 feet)
10	30/86	Dry	5	Sticky and hot with light showers
11	31/88	Rainy	6	Hot and humid but surprisingly little rain
12	32/90	Dry	6	Oppressively hot and humid (gain one level of exhaustion after traveling for 6 hours)

PRELUDE - The Journey In

In which the adventurers meet a tiny dragon who warns of trouble to come.

Entering Illoroco

Travel by land from the more urban areas to the more rural mountain provinces can be difficult, as the climate leading up to the foothills is hot, humid and depending on the season, potentially very wet.
Roll a d12 for weather conditions. On an odd number, it is the rainy season; on an even number it is the dry season. Add 20 to the roll for the average temperature in Celsius (evenings are 1d4 degrees cooler; middays are 1d4 degrees warmer), then consult the ***Illoroco Season & Weather*** table.

Anytime thereafter, you can change the weather by rolling a d6 and consulting the chart based on whether it is the rainy or dry season.

The Rizali Dragon

You hear a strange chirping-popping noise in the trees ahead. Abruptly, a small flying creature appears in the air before you accompanied by one last pop. *The creature is chirping in a strange warble, unlike any bird you've heard before. It's then that you realize two things: first, that it is no bird at all, but a winged lizard; and second, that you somehow understand what it is saying.*

"You came! You came! Now you can help!"

This tiny, intelligent flying lizard was, up until recently, enthralled in service to the summoner. If questioned, she introduces herself as **Kiza**, a rizali dragon. Kiza warns of "the mean sorcerer" who has trapped her friend, **Pilandok**. (Kiza is also the one who sent the invitation with the help note if that hook was used). She does not know what the sorcerer looks like since "they took many forms, and I don't know which one, if any, was real." In addition, her memory of her time while enthralled is very fuzzy. She is motivated to help Pilandok, and accompanies the party if asked nicely, but is anxious about being dominated by the sorcerer again.
She may flit off during the tournament and reappear at the end.

A Loyal Friend

Depending on how the party members treat Kiza, and on the outcome of the adventure, she may be open to becoming a more permanent companion.

Development

This optional prelude is an opportunity for the GM to introduce the adventure hook, set the stage for the rest of the adventure, and foreshadow events to come. For the party, it is a chance to discuss why they are traveling to Illoroco and get acclimated to the weather conditions.
Once the party reaches the outskirts of the Illoroco province, proceed to Chapter 1.

CHAPTER 1

RAISING THE STAKES

In which a game of skill and chance reveal a prize greater than money can buy.

House Rules

The aroma of a home-cooked meal greets you as you crest the final rise leading into the Illoroco province. Here the trail branches: the main road heads down into the village, and a small footpath leads upward and inward towards the mountaintop. A small hand-painted sign at the trailhead of the footpath reads: "Sinigang House."

The Sinigang House is designated in the invitation as the location of the tournament. It is owned and operated by a local Illorocan named Mama Esca, but has been privately rented out for the tournament.

There are five tables in the common room and a small adjoining kitchen in the back. A rear exit opens out from the kitchen to a small outdoor area where additional food preparations are made. A wooden door set into the mountainside leads to a small cellar, where Mama keeps dry goods and a variety of homemade rums and wines.

When the party arrives, a burly guard (**gladiator**) collects the buy-in gold and checks the authenticity of their invitation at the door. Weapons (including arcane foci, component pouches, holy symbols, walking staves, etc.) are checked at the door. The bouncer is trained to spot contraband, but on a successful DC 18 Charisma (Deception) or Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check, a PC can smuggle one item in (within reason). A failure means the bouncer finds the item and blocks them from entering unless the item is handed over.

Upon entering, the party is greeted by Mama Esca (**Jaan'dik** in disguise) who warmly invites them to relax and have a meal before the tournament begins. Also in the room are other players and their entourages as well as five representatives from the Den of Broken Tiles (1 **mage**, 4 **cult fanatics**) who serve as referees during the tournament.

Sinigang House

This small bamboo hut, situated a short distance outside Iloroco proper, is known for its wonderful tamarind soup, or sinigang. Its proprietor is a kindly old lady named Mama Esca who prepares the soup herself. In-the-know visitors often make the slight detour to Mama's Sinigang House to enjoy a hearty, delicious meal and a round or two of mahjong afterward. Even the local diwatas (nature spirits) can't resist the enticing aromas when sinigang is cooking on the stove...if the stories are to be believed, that is.



The Players

Four wealthy players (including the party member with the invite) are participating in the tournament, but their entourages pass the time by playing against each other as well.

Torrenga. Torrenga (**bandit captain**) has been authorized to use any means necessary to win the tournament, but on principle will not cheat at the table. He has several hangers-on (2 bandits, 1 thug) who follow his orders.

Hintajo. Hinjato (**noble**) purposely loses the first game just to see how his opponents behave during gameplay. Hintajo has several personal bodyguards (1 **assassin**, 2 **guards**) with him.

Daiami. Daiami (**spy**) seems young to have mastered the game so well. She hired two guides (**scouts**) to travel out here to Illoroco.

Once dinner is over, Jaan'dik enters ("Mama Esca" having already excused herself to the kitchen and back rooms). From his presence, and the deferential way the other Den members respond, it is immediately clear that he is in charge.

Mahjong!

"Welcome, my friends!"

The man before you smiles. While it is not disingenuous, neither is it merely a smile of joy or contentment. It's the smile of one who is quite pleased with themselves, as if he is about to unveil a surprise everyone will enjoy.

"I am Jaan'dik, of the Den of Broken Tiles, and I will be your host for this very special tournament...with a very special grand prize."

Jaan'dik informs the contestants that in addition to the prize money, the lucky winner also gets to meet a diwata face to face, and request any boon they desire (essentially promising a wish spell). While Torrenga crosses his arms and appears somewhat dubious (he has already somehow received advanced notice of this), Hintajo raises an eyebrow with interest, and a gasp of surprise escapes Daiami's lips before she can suppress it.

The rules of winning the tournament are simple. The tournament buy-in purchases a set amount of tournament money tokens; whoever has the most tokens at the end of 3 rounds of play wins the grand prize.

The Tournament Table

Buy-in for the tournament was 500 gp (already collected at the door). In addition to the promised wish spell, the winner takes the pot minus the Den's take of 250 gp.

To simulate gameplay, players roll a skill challenge:

- A PC must roll 5 successful ability checks before rolling 3 failures.
  - A PC may use any skill they are proficient in as long as they can justify how they are applying that skill to win.
  - Their ability check is contested by the NPC player at the table with the highest corresponding ability score.
  - A PC may opt to use a skill to cheat at mahjong. On a success, the cheat goes undetected and counts as 2 successful ability checks towards winning the tournament. However, a failure means they are caught cheating, immediately triggering an encounter with the swarm of tile mimics at their table. Jaan'dik intervenes after 5 combat rounds. The PC is disqualified, forfeiting their buy-in gold and any chance at winning the prize. The tournament continues with the 3 NPCs.

Tournament Rumors

d6	Rumor	Source	Reality
1	The regional chieftain is throwing a week-long wedding festival for his daughter.	Torrenga	**True.** He did his homework before coming, and this rumor is true (possible future adventure hook).
2	Although the tamarind soup is supposedly the best for miles, tonight's serving was nothing to write home about.	One of Daiami's travelling companions	**True.** Though the guide has never eaten at the Sinigang House before, the restaurant is highly regarded among the locals.
3	There once was a gambler named Nine-Fingers, so-named for losing a digit to a tile mimic, who could win this tournament with one hand tied behind her back if she wanted. Fortunately for the players, she has long since passed away.	Hintajo	**True...** A PC recalls such a legendary gambler on a DC 15 Intelligence (History) check. **... and False.** Nine-Fingers still lives (see **Conclusion** for details).
4	Rats raid the cellar so often, they have tummies full of rice and can't walk in a straight line for the amount of rum they consume while they're there.	One of Torrenga's goons	**False.** She has snuck into the cellar and snatched a bottle of rum while no one was looking.
5	Of the diwata protecting this region, the one that has agreed to reward the winner of the tournament is the most powerful.	One of the Den members	**False.** He has not actually been allowed to meet Pilandok, and is basing this only on what Jaan'dik has told him.
6	These types of tournaments used to be held much more frequently, but thieves and robbers became problematic due to the large sums of money changing hands.	Daiami	**False.** She is making this up in an attempt to fish information from others. In actuality, the Den is quite good at keeping the money secure.

Live Play

If the players are agreeable to it (and a mahjong tileset is available), the tournament and the entourage table winners may be determined by playing a real game of mahjong (or baby mahjong). There are several options here:

- A single game: The winner of this game wins at their table. All other PCs lose at their table.
- 5 games: Any PC that wins at least 2 games wins at their table.
- Highest score: The player that earns the most points/money over the course of 5 games wins at their table. (While in general, this is the player with the most wins, as in real mahjong, the value of the wins matters here.)

If a player wants to cheat, you may allow them to roll an appropriate ability check. On a success, you can allow them to see another player's hand, allow them to immediately undo their current discard (e.g. that helped an opponent mahjong/pung/chow), let them view several upcoming tiles in the wall, etc. However, remember that cheating can result in a confrontation with the mimic swarm.

The Entourage Tables

Buy-in at an entourage table is 50 gp (collected by a Den official as play beings). Winner takes the pot minus the Den's take of 25 gp.

To simulate gameplay, players roll a skill challenge:

- A PC must roll 3 successful DC 15 ability checks before rolling 2 failures.
- A PC may use any skill they are proficient in as long as they can justify how they are applying that skill to win.
- The first time a PC at an entourage table gets 2 successes, one of their opponents attempts to cheat. However, doing so invokes the wrath of the **swarm of tile mimics** at their table.
- A person caught cheating at an entourage table must fend off the mimic swarm for 2 combat rounds, at which point Jaan'dik intervenes. Afterward, they are still allowed to play on, but must suffer the ridicule of the other players.

Table Talk

The tournament takes place over the course of 3 rounds, with a short break between rounds. These breaks are opportunities for interactions with the NPCs away from the mahjong tables.

Rumors

Rumors can be gathered by roleplaying a conversation during the tournament. Alternatively, a rumor can be gathered on a successful DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check, made once per round per PC. (Feel free to inform the players, out of character, there is a 50% chance a given rumor is false.)

Development

If a PC does not win the tournament, it is Daiami who ends up victorious. Once the winner of the tournament is decided, proceed to Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

What Lies Beneath

In which the cellar goes deeper than expected.

The Grand Prize Winner

If Daiami won the tournament, read the following. If the PC wins, skip ahead to ***Losing Gracefully***.

> *Daiami, cool and collected for the entirety of the tournament, at last cracks a smile. Or at least a very faint grin.*
>
> *"Mahjong. Seven pair, all up," she announces.*
>
> *Torrenga grimaces, knowing the prize has just slipped through his fingers. Across the table, Hintajo frowns thoughtfully for a moment, then flattens his tiles face down, accepting defeat.*

All Daiami wants is to know what became of her father, and she believes the wish is her ticket to that knowledge. Upon winning, she seems pleased with herself, but a DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals she is still somewhat tense for no apparent reason (she successfully cheated in the last round without alerting the mimic swarm).

Losing Gracefully

Torrenga. While Torrenga accepts being defeated at mahjong, he knows his employer won't settle for second best. However, Torrenga also knows the real game is just beginning. While another has won this first wish for free, Torrenga is confident he has been given sufficient funds to outbid the other buyers looking to secure the captured diwata for themselves.

Hintajo. Something doesn't feel quite right to Hintajo. He can't shake the feeling that someone cheated at the table, but since the tile mimics didn't react, he has no proof.

Daiami. Daiami is slightly disappointed in herself, but still determined to find any leads on what may have happened to her father.

Claiming the Prize

With the final mahjong called, Jaan'dik (who has been in and out periodically) appears in a puff of smoke (misty step). He has been scrying on the last few games from the cellar, where he could also keep a close eye on Pilandok.



"Well done! And well played by all." Jaan'dik smiles his clever, secret-laden smile. "But alas, there can be only one winner. Still, are not all of you curious? Come, the grand prize awaits!"

Jaan'dik beckons all the guests to follow him, walking ceremoniously through the kitchen, out the back exit, and across the small courtyard, stopping only briefly to open the cellar door.

Although the cellar cut into the mountain is not large, Jaan'dik strides confidently in, unconcerned that the group following him is far too large to fit. With a flourish, Jaan'dik reveals a trap door in the floor and descends, floating gently down through the opening and revealing a bamboo ladder by which everyone else can follow.

Through several twists and turns, the underground passage opens into a large cavern that easily holds all the guests. At this point, he makes a big show of revealing a chalk circle drawn with arcane runes. Within the circle's perimeter is a small creature.

This dramatic show is intended to play up the hype of Jaan'dik's power as a summoner and enhance the mystique surrounding the captured spirit. By allowing the tournament winner to make a wish and have it fulfilled right before their eyes, Jaan'dik intends to prove the worth of the prize to all potential bidders. If questioned as to why Jaan'dik doesn't just keep the diwata for himself, he demurs, saying only that he has already made his wish.

Oh, Crap

Unfortunately for Jaan'dik, Pilandok is a trickster and has been playing the summoner for a fool the whole time. He actually can escape the *magic circle* (and has already done so on several accounts) and is not bound at all by the summoner's *planar binding*.

At first, Pilandok feigns death, slouched over and not moving. While Jaan'dik seems confused, Torrenga becomes agitated, fearing the whole thing has been a hoax. Hinjato appears to be amused, but Daiami is distraught, her hopes apparently dashed before her eyes.

Jaan'dik commands Pilandok to rise, growing louder as his frustration and embarrassment builds. He is on the verge of attacking the creature with a spell when suddenly it stirs to life, squeaking a bit and looking around. Regaining some of his composure, Jaan'dik calls the tournament winner forward to make a *wish*.

If it is Daiami, her wish is almost a reverent prayer, whispered barely loud enough to hear: "I wish my father was alive." If it is a PC, allow them to make a *wish*.

In response, the little deer mouse skitters around in the circle for a bit, almost as if it's looking for some way to escape. It stops, sniffs the air, then the ground. When it moves again, it reveals fresh animal droppings. Then, completely ignoring the markings on the ground, it scampers out of the circle, breaking the mute silence at last:

"I'm truly sorry, but I don't think I can do that."

Development

Once Pilandok refuses to grant the winner's wish, proceed to Chapter 3.



CHAPTER 3

In the Palm of Your Hand

In which a very small creature reveals a pretty big secret.

You Dirty Rat

"But...but that's impossible! You must do what I ask!" Jaan'dik stammers angrily.

Pilandok sighs. "You wished for me to stay and do your bidding. And I did so -- not because I was bound by your magic or your words -- but because it was entertaining for me to do so."

Flustered by the turn of events, Jaan'dik lashes out, humiliation fueling his anger, which he, in turn, converts into a surge of magical energy.

With his words, Pilandok casts *vicious mockery*; Jaan'dik must roll a saving throw to avoid its effects.

Jaan'dik's strategy is to quickly incapacitate as many enemies as possible and assess whether he is strong enough to kill them all. If so, he'll definitely attempt to do so. He is banking on the fact that most everyone else is weaponless. Otherwise, he'll flee (*teleport*) after inflicting an initial burst of heavy damage and summoning an earth elemental to cover his escape. If Jaan'dik is defeated in battle (killed or incapacitated), he has a spellbook on his person that contains the spells *magic circle*, *planar binding*, and *summon celestial*.

The other Den members are confused by the turn of events but will defend Jaan'dik and attack any who oppose him. However, if Jaan'dik flees, they will stand down.

Development

Once Jaan'dik flees, is killed, or is subdued, and the remainder of the Den members stand down, proceed to the Conclusion.

CONCLUSION

Finding the Stairs

As the fighting ceases, and things begin to settle down, Pilandok takes the time to properly introduce himself, even polymorphing into humanoid form to make things more convenient. He also knows the real Esca was left for dead in a nearby cavern. At every opportunity he has been helping her recover, recognizing however that she could not resurface until the threat of Jaan'dik was eliminated.



Revelations

Esca is a former member of the Den of Broken Tiles who faked her death, intending to live the rest of her life in anonymity. When Jaan'dik chose the Sinigang House as the ideal spot for his tournament, Esca wanted no part in it. But Jaan'dik summarily subdued her and took her form, never realizing she was Escalera, aka Nine-Fingers, from mahjong legends of old.

Esca also has some information on Daiami's father. In fact, the Den's mishandling of his case was the impetus for her leaving the organization. As he was a skilled and accomplished mahjong player, the Den attempted to recruit him. However, he refused, preferring a life free from the political machinations in which the Den was entrenched. Rather than release him back into the wild, the ranking Den operative decided to "remove" him. Esca helped him escape, faking both their deaths to avoid any unwanted pursuit. Unfortunately, she doesn't know his current whereabouts, or if he still lives, but knows he would be hunted down if he showed his face. She is, however, able to give Daiami a starting point: a location (Nilangas City) and the name of a contact (Dyapni) who might know more.

Rewards

In addition to experience points granted by their various encounters (see below table), the party may receive a small boon from Pilandok (if he feels they have earned it). While it's no *wish* spell, a **ring of steady nerves**, is both a reminder of the party's recent experiences and thematic to Pilandok's trickster nature.

Ring of Steady Nerves

Ring, rare (requires attunement)

While wearing this ring made of entwined deer mouse hair, you maintain a calm disposition, despite any inner turmoil. You gain advantage on any Dexterity checks requiring a steady hand or Charisma skill checks intended to deceive, cheat, bluff, or otherwise conceal information, as well as on saving throws against any effects that deal psychic damage.

However, if you fail your check or saving throw despite having advantage, you are immediately polymorphed into a **deer mouse** for 1d4 rounds.

Chapter	Encounter	XP
Prelude	Speaking to Kiza	1000
	Convincing Kiza to join the party	4,325
Chapter 1	Smuggling a weapon	1,000 per success
	Playing mahjong	2,100
	Cheating	1,000 per success
	Gathering rumors	1,000 per rumor
	Winning at the entourage table	1,000 per win
	Winning the tournament	5,325
Chapter 3	Jaan'dik and the Den members	12,500
Conclusion	Rescuing Pilandok and Esca	5,325
	Helping Daiami find answers	5,325

Author's Notes

When my dad first told me about a deer in the Philippines the size of a mouse that he held in his hand when he was younger, I thought he was joking or just making stuff up or maybe even just talking nonsense, like he was remembering a dream and confusing it with a memory of something real. And although I have traveled there on several occasions, so much of the Philippines is still a mystery to me, and the line between fantasy and reality is easily blurred. The plants and wildlife especially can seem far-fetched in concept but often stranger than fiction in reality. The flying lizard and the mouse-deer are just two such examples.

Mahjong was such a big part of my childhood, I'm happy to bring it into the ttrpg realm. Just thinking and writing about it brings back fond memories of my grandmother who unfortunately suffered from Alzheimer's later in life. But mahjong was one of those things she never forgot and which always seemed to smooth over those rough moments of confusion brought on by the disease. Esca, the inn's proprietor, is loosely based on, and my tribute to, Mama Z, may she rest in peace.

Author's Acknowledgments

A very special thanks to my wife and family who are my whole reason for being and without whose love and support none of this would be possible.

Shoutout as well to all the mentors and role models I've had along the way including Ashley Warren, 1d6 Adventurers, Mike Myler, and Travis Legge.

Author Bio

Anthony Alipio has recently stumbled into a nexus of TTRPG creativity and hopes never to escape. He is the author of Seven Grains of Rice for Mike Myler's Mists of Akuma setting, Dreams and Nightmares for Onyx Path's Slarecian Vault, along with several collaborations with the creators of the Uncaged Anthology (including A Riddle in Time found in Volume IV of the series). You can find him on twitter @dm_fromscratch and support his caffeine addiction via http://ko-fi.com/insomna.

APPENDIX - MONSTERS & NPCs

Jaan'dik

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 12 (15 with mage armor)
Hit Points 99 (18d8 + 18)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Int +9, Wis +6
Skills Arcana +13, History +13
Damage Resistance damage from spells; nonmagical bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing (from stoneskin)
Senses passive Perception 12
Languages Common, Draconic, Elvish, Goblin, Primordial, Sylvan
Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

Magic Resistance. Jaan'dik has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Spellcasting. Jaan'dik is an 18th-level spellcaster. His Spellcasting Ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). Jaan'dik can cast disguise self and invisibility at will and has the following Wizard Spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt, light, mage hand, prestidigitation, shocking grasp*
1st Level (4 slots): *detect magic, identify, mage armor*, magic missile*
2nd Level (3 slots): *alter self, mirror image, misty step**
3rd Level (3 slots): *counterspell, fly, lightning bolt*
4th Level (3 slots): *banishment, fire shield, stoneskin**
5th Level (3 slots): *conjure elemental, planar binding, scrying*, wall of force*
6th level (1 slot): *globe of invulnerability*
7th level (1 slot): *teleport*
8th level (1 slot): *mind blank**
9th level (1 slot): *time stop*

** Jaan'dik casts these spells on himself just before appearing and announcing the tournament winner.*

Actions

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Dagger. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 20/60 ft., one target. Hit: 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Swarm of Tile Mimics

Small swarm of tiny monstrosities (shapechanger), unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 77 (14d6 + 28)
Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)	8 (-1)

Skills Insight +5, Perception +5, Stealth +7
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing
Damage Immunities acid
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages —
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Shapechanger. The swarm can use its action to polymorph into a group of like objects or back into its true form: a grouping of amorphous creatures. Its statistics are the same in each form. Any Equipment it is wearing or carrying isn 't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

The swarm inflicts half damage when reduced to half its hit points or fewer.

Fair Play. Any creature within 5 feet of the swarm that attempts to cheat at a game of chance must make a DC 16 Charisma (Deception) check or be identified by the swarm as a cheater. This check is made with disadvantage if the cheater is in physical contact with the swarm.

Discerning Adhesion (Object Form Only). The swarm adheres to any cheater it has detected that touches it. A Huge or smaller creature adhered to the mimic is also Grappled by it (escape DC 13). Ability Checks made to escape this grapple have disadvantage.

False Appearance (Object Form Only). While the swarm remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from an ordinary object.

Grappler. The swarm has advantage on attack rolls against any creature grappled by it.

Actions

Multiattack. The swarm makes three melee attacks against a single target.

Pseudopod. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage. If the swarm is in object form, the target is subjected to its Discerning Adhesion trait.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage plus 4 (1d8) acid damage.



Mouse Deer

Tiny beast, unaligned

Armor Class 11
Hit Points 1 (1d4 - 1)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
2 (-4)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)	2 (-4)	10 (0)	4 (-3)

Senses darkvision 30 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages —
Challenge 0 (0 XP)

Keen Smell. The mouse deer has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Lucky Aura. Any creature within 15 feet of the mouse deer that can see it gains inspiration. This inspiration is lost if the mouse deer dies, and it backfires (grants disadvantage rather than advantage) if used to attack or otherwise harm the mouse deer. Once a creature has gained inspiration in this way, it is immune to this aura for 1 year.

Actions

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +0 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 1 piercing damage.

Pilandok

Tiny celestial (shapechanger), chaotic good

Armor Class 14
Hit Points 67 (15d4 + 30)
Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	17 (+3)	15 (+2)	10 (0)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +3
Skills Acrobatics +6, Perception +6
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, paralyzed, poisoned
Senses Darkvision 60 Ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Celestial, Elvish, Sylvan, telepathy 60 Ft.
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. Pilandok's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15). Pilandok can innately cast the following spells, requiring no components:

At will: *misty step, vicious mockery*
1/day each: *awaken, calm emotions, invisibility*

Keen Smell. Pilandok has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Lucky Aura. Any creature within 15 feet of Pilandok that can see him gains inspiration. This inspiration is lost if the Pilandok dies, and it backfires (grants disadvantage rather than advantage) if used to attack or otherwise harm Pilandok or his companions.

Once a creature has gained inspiration in this way, it is immune to this aura for 1 year.

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

Magic Weapons. Pilandok's weapon attacks are magical.

Shielded Mind. Pilandok is immune to scrying and to any effect that would sense his emotions, read his thoughts, or detect his location.

Actions

Multiattack. Pilandok makes two attacks: one with his hooves and one bite.

Hooves. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft ., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft ., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Change Shape. Pilandok magically polymorphs into a humanoid or beast that has a challenge rating equal to or less than his own, or back into his true form. He reverts to his true form if he dies. Any equipment he is wearing or carrying is absorbed or borne by the new form (Pilandok's choice).

In a new form, Pilandok retains his game statistics and ability to speak, but his AC, movement modes, Strength, Dexterity, and other actions are replaced by those of the new form, and he gains any statistics and capabilities (except class features, legendary actions, and lair actions) that the new form has but that he lacks. If the new form has a bite attack, Pilandok can use his bite in that form.

Lucky Touch (3/Day). Pilandok rubs against another creature with his fur. The target magically regains 11 (2d8 + 2) Hit Points. In addition, the touch removes all Diseases and neutralizes all Poisons afflicting the target.

Teleport (1/Day). Pilandok magically teleports himself and up to three willing creatures he can see within 5 ft. of him, along with any equipment they are wearing or carrying, to a location Pilandok is familiar with, up to 1 mile away.

Legendary Actions

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

Attack. Pilandok makes one melee attack.

Antagonize (2 actions). Pilandok casts *vicious mockery.*

Slip Away (3 actions). Pilandok casts *misty step.*

A Cargo of Melons for the Courts of the Dead

by KC Shi

Content Warnings: death, torture, family estrangement

SYNOPSIS

A giant salamander demon sits weeping in the great river of the Bamboo Lands, and if not stopped her tears will soon drown crops, flood homes, and destroy entire villages. The reason for her sorrow: she has grown a lovely patch of melons, the best her garden has ever seen, but her only child works far from home and will not be able to taste them before they spoil. The salamander is old, her skin drying and her bones stiff, and she cannot make the long journey to deliver the melons herself — but hale adventurers like you seem perfect for the job. "My son will pay you handsomely for your trouble. He is very rich!" gushes the salamander demon. "Why, he is a functionary of the underworld king himself!"

And that's when you learn that you're delivering these melons straight to hell.

An adventure for a party of four 17th-20th level characters running 3 hours.

ADVENTURE HOOK

This adventure can be played as a one-shot, or integrated as a side mission into a campaign for high level characters. Characters could have many reasons to become involved in this adventure: perhaps they have property on the river, or they have loved ones at risk of the floods. Sympathetic characters might be compelled to help simply once they hear the salamander demon's bawling, while unscrupulous ones might use this as an excuse to conduct business in the underworld.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

This adventure is based off a chapter in Journey to the West, in which Emperor Taizong descends into Diyu, the underworld of Chinese myth, and promises the Yama Kings a gift of pumpkins in gratitude when they release him back into the world of the living. In this module, adventurers will encounter Ox-Head and Horse-Face, the guardians of the underworld, and navigate the capital of Youdu, where the salamander demon's child resides. Even experienced planar travelers will have to take care, because the melons are, well, melons, and will break or burst if not handled carefully during the chaos of high-level combat.

When they arrive, the players learn that the salamander's son has not told his mother the whole truth. He is not a wealthy bureaucrat but an itinerant scribe, and he has not come home in so long because he is ashamed of his professional failures in the courts of the dead. Though he is grateful, he does not have the rich rewards his mother promised. From here the players can choose whether they want to pursue their payment or help repair this broken family, all while trying to escape Diyu.



Illustration by Kari Kawachi

CHAPTER 1

A Mother's Tears

The Huang [hoo-AHNG] River is flooding out of season. The temperamental waterway is dangerous enough when the locals are prepared for its violent moods, but not a drop of rain has fallen for months, and yet reports have reached the party's ears that the Huang has begun to overflow its muddy banks. The characters might have many reasons for investigating the unseasonal flooding – at this level, they are powerful enough that people might have specifically approached them for help – or they might simply be traveling. Whatever their purposes, they arrive to the riverside village of Shangsu [SHAHNG-soo] just as a flash flood begins to spill over the levees.

The moon hangs low and half-lidded the night you arrive at Shangsu, but the end of this road is far from tranquil. Panicked shouts echo through the night as the elderly grab their grandchildren's hands and dash for higher ground, while the adults pile sandbags in a futile effort to hold back the churning yellow waters. Then a dull roar drowns out their voices, as a massive wave spills over the crown of the levees. In seconds the fields are drowned, and soon dozens of villagers might follow.

The characters must act fast if they wish to save the villagers. Spells like *control water* or *wall of stone* are particularly useful here, but even characters without magic can help by pulling villagers out of the water, or piling debris in a way that can divert the flood. Swimming through the torrents of the Huang requires a successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check. Failure means that the character does not move at all, as they use all their strength simply to stay above water, and a failure of 5 or more means the current drags the character underwater and they begin to drown.

The worst of the flood ends after a few minutes, but the waters still run dangerously swift and, unless the characters performed exceptionally well, most of Shangsu has been smashed to pieces by the river. Once the danger has passed and they are in relative safety, the people of Shangsu are free to

Roleplaying Niangniang

The salamander demon is lonely. Her husband barely talks to her and does not approve of her leaving the house, while her only son hasn't been home in years. While she does her best to occupy her time with gardening, cooking, and reading, all of these things are no substitute for meaningful companionship. She puts on a cheery face for company, but a desperate sadness always lingers just beneath the surface.

talk. They are refugees now, for they cannot even contemplate rebuilding until they understand why the river is flooding in the middle of the dry season.

Characters can ask about the river's odd behavior. The most helpful clue comes from Lao Po [lah-ow PUO] (she/her), a fisher who has plied the river longer than most of her neighbors have been alive. She says that she was sailing near the Xin [shihn] River Tributary when she heard a strange burbling. The river swelled, not from rainfall or snow melt, but from below, and the resulting wave swept her downriver.

Lao Po, like most of the others, plans on staying with family at a neighboring village while she gets back on her feet. A few intend to make the long hike to the imperial capital to plead for assistance, although they don't have high hopes for success. The party is welcome to rest with the makeshift camp for the night, before it disperses.

The Yellow River Giant Salamander Demon

The Xin River is small, born from a pair of rugged green mountains about a day's travel from Shangsu. (The party can salvage boats from the debris at Shangsu, if they have no other method of transport.) As the characters approach, it becomes obvious that the source of the flooding is near. The rising water levels have swallowed even the trees, and an eerie quiet hangs over the area, as all the songbirds and insects have been driven away. Only after hours of following the river do the characters hear another living thing: the muffled, burbling sound of someone crying underwater.

The Yellow River Giant Salamander Demon, better known as Niangniang [nee-AHNG-nee-AHNG] (she/her), sits weeping on the riverbed. (See appendix for stats.) Fifteen feet tall if she stood, brown slimy skin mottled with black spots, her tears



have caused the swelling of the Xin and its parent, the Huang. The characters must find a way of drawing her attention before they can talk with her, for she is so bereaved that nothing short of a thunderclap next to her ear (or something equally emphatic) will get her to stop crying. Once she does, the river immediately calms, and the water level begins to sink noticeably.

Once she realizes what she has done, Niangniang is truly sorry. By way of apology, she invites the party to her humble home for lunch. Her eyes start to well up again if the party refuses, and if they leave it's not long before her tears once again swell the river.

Niangniang's Home

The salamander demon lives with her husband in a humble home beneath the mud at the juncture of the two rivers. She seems overjoyed at the chance to entertain guests, and babbles happily as she serves fried fish, steamed buns, lotus with sticky rice, and fragrant rice wine. Her husband, the dragon of the Xin River Tributary, barely speaks. (Use the stats for an **adult bronze dragon**, if necessary.) Most of his reactions consist of grunting and stroking his mustache-like whiskers, and he takes his food to his study rather than eat with the party.

At the end of the meal, she brings out a plate of sliced cantaloupe. If none of the characters have asked her why she was crying yet, she sniffles, and says:

"I feel so silly. You see, melons are my son's favorite. I had just grown a new patch in my garden, the best I'd ever planted – but he works so far from home, and he's not planning on coming back before they spoil…" Niangniang sighs heavily. "I'd deliver them myself but I'm old. No, don't deny it! I'm old, and my skin is dry, and my bones are brittle. Besides, Xiao Wei wouldn't want his Mama fussing about while he tries to live life in the big city anyway."

She pauses. "But you… you all travel for a living, don't you! Why, you're professionals! Important guests that my son would be honored to entertain!" Her eyes brim with tears again. "Oh, would you? My son will pay you handsomely for your trouble. He is very rich!" The salamander demon smiles. "Why, he is a functionary of the underworld king himself!"

Niangniang explains that her only son works as a functionary in the capital of the underworld, Youdu [yo-DOO]. His name is Yiwei [EE-way] (he/him), though she calls him by the affectionate nicknames Xiao Wei [shee-OW way] and Weiwei as well. He is also a giant salamander demon, although he inherited his father's whiskers.

If the party accepts, Niangniang gives each of the characters two cantaloupes. Characters can convince Niangniang to give them more if they impress her with a DC 10 Persuasion (Charisma) check, but the cantaloupes are quite large, weighing 20 lbs. each, and could easily encumber physically weaker characters.



Reaching the Underworld

The most convenient way of entering Diyu [DEE-yoo] is if one of the characters has access to a spell like *plane shift*. Otherwise, Niangniang has a simple solution. She presents each of the characters with a vial of lethal poison, makes sure the melons are packed close, and assures them that they will be resurrected once her son tells the Yama [YAH-mah] Kings that they were doing him a favor.

Understandably, if characters are squeamish about this method of travel, they will have to find a different way. Niangniang hesitantly mentions that her son followed a nearby subterranean stream into Diyu when he first left for the underworld, but it has since become the lair of a **dragon turtle** who does not look kindly upon intruders. Even if they bypass the turtle, the rocky currents will surely pulverize the melons into mush. If the characters take this route, they must each pass a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check to swim with the current or else one of their cantaloupes will be smashed.

Development

The melons secured and the mission given, the characters must now deliver them. How will they enter Diyu? Where in Youdu will they find the salamander's son? And, some characters might be wondering – why hasn't Yiwei come home in so long?

Transporting the Cantaloupes

The cantaloupe melons, while enormous and delicious, are also quite fragile. A cantaloupe bursts every time the carrier takes 25 damage or more in a single attack, or is pushed against a solid surface like a wall or a floor. If the melons are being stored in an extradimensional space, as with a *bag of holding*, they are immune to being smashed.

CHAPTER 2

Descent into Diyu

Diyu is the realm of the dead, a subterranean maze that extends to the ends of the universe, ruled by the Ten Yama Kings. It is divided into levels with such pleasant names as the Hell of Tongue Ripping and the Hell of the Mountain of Knives, where underworld functionaries torture souls to cleanse them of their sins and prepare them for reincarnation. The punishments can be quite graphic, but the fiends in charge of these tortures work with the blasé attitude of government bureaucrats. For a complete list of the hells, see the appendix.

However the characters decided to travel to Diyu, they arrive in the same place.

- If they took Niangniang's poison, then a ghostly wind carries their souls into the underworld. The characters catch frightening glimpses of the Land of Shade – rivers of blood, a city of maimed and headless ghosts, and a fog-shrouded mountain echoing with the howl of demons – before they land at a set of ornate gates, carrying everything that was on their persons when they died.
- If they followed the underground stream, then they tumble down an impossibly large waterfall that ends in a vast subterranean lake. No matter which direction they swim to shore, the characters find themselves standing on a gravelly path, intermittently lit by free-standing torches, which leads them to the gates of Youdu.
- If they used their own method of travel, then the characters arrive in the style they choose. However, due to the lawful nature of the plane, the city gates are their first destination. To begin anywhere else would simply be improper.

Above the gates hangs a large tablet, upon which is written "DEVIL GATE OF THE WORLD OF DARKNESS" in huge letters of gold. Beneath the gates mill the souls of the recently deceased, forming orderly lines in order to be admitted to the city proper. The walls flanking the gates rise and rise until they vanish into shadow, for the light of the torches only reaches so far.



The Underworld Guardians



The two gate guardians, Ox-Head and Horse-Face, watch over the entire procession. They are, fittingly, giant humanoid demons with the head of an ox and a horse respectively. Once, they were simple beasts of burden, but King Yanluo took pity upon them when they died and granted them honorable positions at the gates for their loyalty and service. Use stats for **fire giants** to represent Ox-Head and Horse-Face, except they speak Infernal instead of Giant. Instead of a greatsword, Ox-Head has a halberd which deals piercing damage, and Horse-Face has a club which deals bludgeoning damage.

The two bristle once the characters present themselves for inspection, or if the characters draw attention to themselves some other way.

- If the characters died to reach Diyu, as by drinking Niangniang's poison, then Ox-Head and Horse-Face instruct the characters to see Minister Tsuijue [SWAY-jooeh] at Senluo [sehn-LUOH] Palace, who will assign them punishments for their sins and escort them to the appropriate levels of hell.
- If the characters came to Diyu alive, then Ox-Head and Horse-Face ask what business they have in the underworld. The gate guardians react well if the characters mention that they bring gifts for the courts, but become suspicious if anyone mentions the name Yiwei: they know just about everyone of import in the city, but have never heard of this salamander demon before. If they find the characters untrustworthy, Ox-Head and Horse-Face bar the gates to them and the characters must either fight their way inside, come back in disguises, or find another way.
- If any of the characters have died previously but were resurrected, as with *revivify* or *raise dead*, Ox-Head and Horse-Face immediately become suspicious. As with the previous entry, characters must make their case to enter Youdu, but resurrected characters have disadvantage on all Charisma checks with the gate guardians.

If it comes to combat, the other dead souls in line scatter, and the gate guardians call for reinforcements even as they draw weapons. 1d4 demon guards (**barbed devils**) appear at the end of every round of combat after the first, until the characters flee, negotiate a truce, or defeat all hostiles present. (The Yama Kings might come to deal with the situation personally, though, if anyone lingers over the bodies of their trusted gate guardians.) Ox-Head and Horse-Face chain any characters they defeat, and jail them in the dungeons beneath Senluo Palace until the paperwork is done.

Optional Rule: Cleansing Torture

No one dies in Diyu, at least not for long. While everyone in the underworld has normal bodies and "dies" if they undergo enough punishment, after 8 hours they are restored to full health, no matter if they have been sawed in half, ground into powder, or boiled to a crisp. While most people black out from the pain, some of them (especially those who have undergone the same tortures for thousands of years) remain aware and lucid throughout the whole process.

Youdu, Capital of Death

The characters enter Youdu, the metropolis of the underworld. Youdu is a perfect mirror of the imperial capital, if several orders of magnitude larger and darker. The dead hurry along these bustling streets, alongside animal demons and grotesque devils, all of them in some way involved with great bureaucracy of the afterlife. The center of the city is dominated by Senluo Palace, where the Ten Yama Kings and their retainers reside, but Youdu has just as many back alleys, side streets, and seedy shops as the mortal capital. The lack of sunlight means that the whole city is illuminated by flickering torches.

There is a festive air to the city when the characters arrive. The pious mortal emperor aboveground has declared a day of alms-giving and sacrifice in the coming week, and the citizens of Youdu are already slavering in anticipation of the feast to come.

Encounters with the Dead

Diyu has a habit of bringing the souls of family back together. The characters are likely to meet deceased loved ones while they explore Youdu, and sometimes these meetings are full of bittersweet joy. More often than not, though, long-dead ancestors will berate the characters for not paying them more respects, and demand gold so that they might buy their lives back from the underworld functionaries.

Niangniang did not provide the characters with an address, only vague directions to the river park by the East Market. To actually find Yiwei, the characters will need to do some investigating.

The party must succeed on a total of three DC 15 skill checks in order to track down Yiwei. The following list describes the order of skills they must use (others can be substituted at DM discretion), and the information they learn on a success:

- **Wisdom (Survival):** The characters track down Yiwei's lodgings in the run-down river park by the East Market. The ponds, which are downstream of the River of Punishment, are often clogged with blood, but the souls that reside here cannot afford cleaner accommodations. One local, a water buffalo demon who resignedly cleans the ponds every few hours, says that Yiwei works as a clerk, though she doesn't know where.
- **Charisma (Persuasion):** The characters talk to the functionaries at Senluo Palace, but none of them have heard Yiwei's name or seen anyone matching his description. With a sneer, a minister

of the dead – who at first mistakes the characters for couriers, bringing melons for the feast – mentions that some minor courthouses employ clerks to organize the many thousands of timesheets that the torturers of the eighteen hells submit daily.

- **Intelligence (Investigation):** The characters chase rumors on the street. Word is that the Office of Dismemberment by Vehicles recently received a glut of souls and had a hiring spree to keep up with the workload. They are working on a budget, and the new hires are copying records in a warehouse under the shadow of the Wild Goose Pagoda.

On a failure, the character spends 1d4 hours chasing false leads through the city. On a roll of 1, a mishap occurs and the investigating character loses a melon! Fresh fruit is a rare commodity in the underworld, as the dead must rely on altar offerings for produce, and there are any number of ways a hapless adventurer could run afoul of demons who smell their cargo...

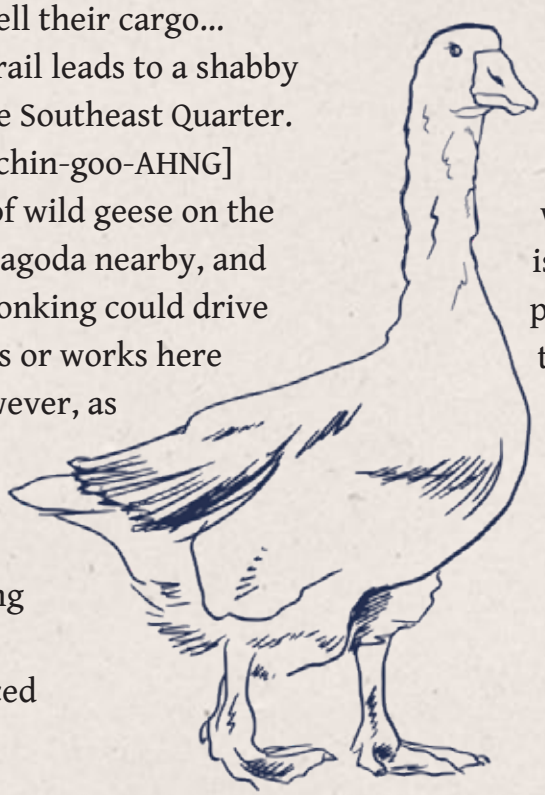
Finally, the trail leads to a shabby warehouse in the Southeast Quarter. King Qinguang [chin-goo-AHNG] keeps a garden of wild geese on the grounds of the pagoda nearby, and their constant honking could drive anyone who lives or works here to madness. However, as the characters approach, they hear the sounds of fighting over the noise.

Four blue-faced mogui [MOH-gwai] (use statblock for **oni**) are in a back alley, mugging a salamander with long whisker-like barbels. They shout how they will collect their debts, and though they cannot kill the incapacitated salamander demon, they seem to be drawing out his suffering on purpose.

After the devils are dealt with, the characters can speak with Yiwei. His wounds are grievous, but he assures them that they'll heal soon enough. Once he realizes the characters are more than just generous bystanders, he invites them to his favorite teahouse, where they might talk more comfortably.

Roleplaying Yiwei

The salamander's son doesn't want trouble. He is both a bad and compulsive liar, reflexively trying to make himself sound more important than he is, although he'll admit to his falsehoods at the drop of a hat. ("Sorry, I don't know why I said that, I really don't...") At heart, he's a hard worker and a good kid, if a little short-sighted.



Development

It is clear now that Yiwei is not the wealthy bureaucrat his mother says he is. Who is he, really? Will the characters press him for their reward? And now that they're all the way in the underworld, how are they getting out?

CHAPTER 3

WHAT STAYS BROKEN

Yiwei's favorite teahouse is cheap, fast, and apparently accustomed to its customers tracking blood on the floor. Yiwei crams himself into a booth in the back and treats the party to tea and snacks, although characters with a passive Insight of 12 or higher notice Yiwei is eating nothing himself in order to save money.

Yiwei explains the following information, if the players ask:

- The mogui were part of a loan shark's gang. Yiwei had borrowed money from them after every other respectable bank in the city had turned him down, and was late on paying back the exorbitant interest on his loans.
- Yiwei has had difficulty holding down a job, because most of the stuffy bureaucrats look down upon a 15-foot, slimy salamander lumbering through their record halls.
- In his infrequent correspondences with them, Yiwei has not told his family about the floundering of his career. In fact, he has insinuated the opposite.
- When pressed, Yiwei admits that he has never felt comfortable speaking with his parents. As their only child, he always felt a great deal of pressure from them. He has not come home in so long because his appearance (and any conversation lasting longer than five minutes) will give away the lie.

Yiwei has questions of his own. He asks how his mother is doing (noticeably, he asks no questions about his father), and if she has made any new friends or gotten out of the house at all. When he sees the cantaloupes, he tears up, making ugly sniffing sounds just like Niangniang. "Ma and I used to fight a lot when I was a kid. What I was doing with my life, the sacrifices she had made for me. She never once apologized for anything she said, but afterward she would always bring a plate of sliced fruit up to my room."

The conversation can go on as long as the characters like. (Without the rhythm of day and night, "life" in Diyu has a monotonic consistency. The teahouse always seems on the verge of closing up shop, but never does.) DMs whose groups enjoy roleplaying are encouraged to use this as an opportunity to make the characters reflect on their own relationships with their family.

The Long Way Out

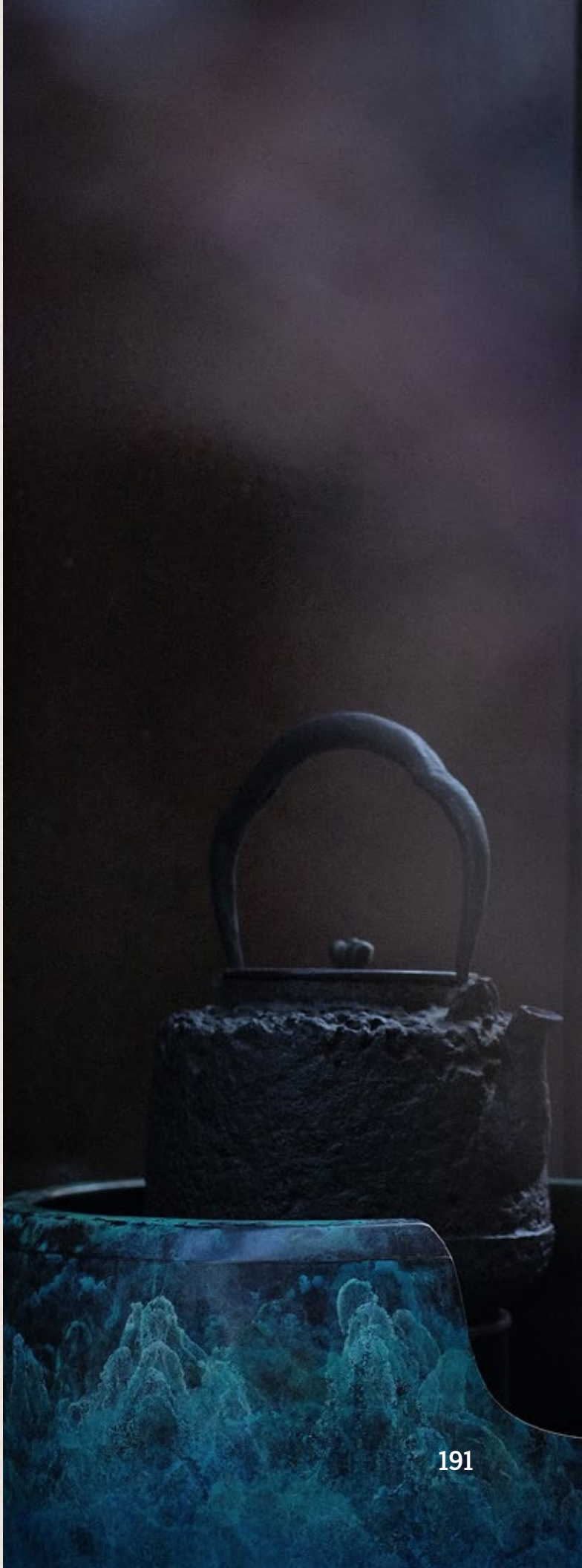
The characters can easily choose not to infiltrate Senluo Palace and take a different way out of the underworld, but a pilgrimage through all the hells is beyond the scope of this adventure. DMs are encouraged to have fun with their research if their parties take this path! The mythology of Diyu is unique, elaborate, and weird in a way that only very old folktales can be.

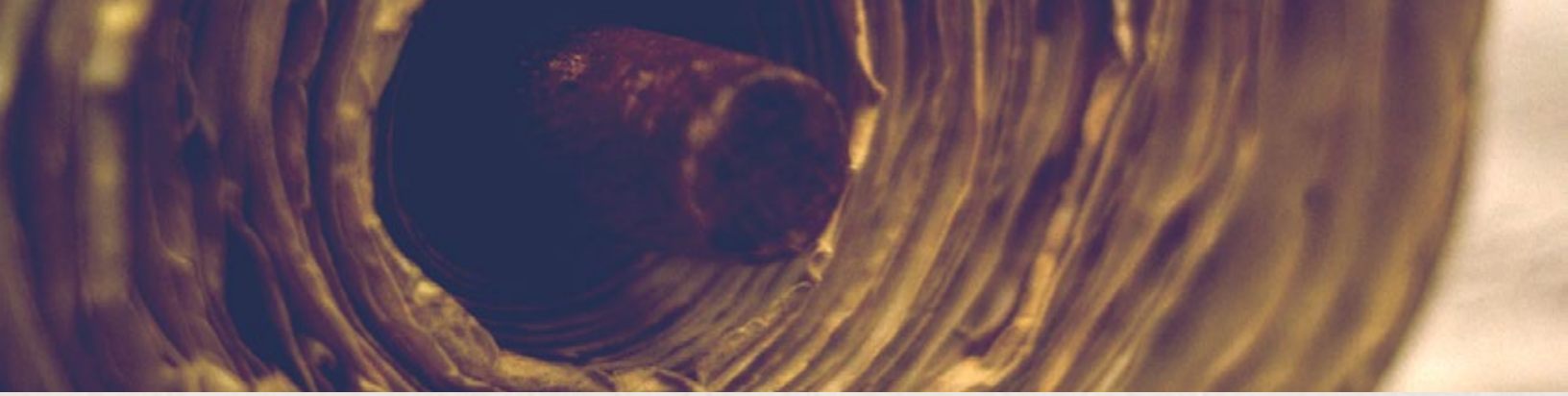
Eventually, though, two thorny questions must be addressed: Will the characters receive a reward? And how are they getting out of hell?

As to the first, Yiwei has literally nothing to give, for the muggers took what little cash he had. He promises to compensate the characters once he's found his feet, but while it is true that clerical work in the underworld can be quite profitable, it doesn't seem like Yiwei is going to make much progress in his career any time soon without a little help.

As to the second, the characters are in a tricky situation. "In the underworld you can only go; you can never come back," says Yiwei, quoting a local saying. Even characters who didn't die to reach Diyu must make the long pilgrimage through all eighteen hells to reach the exit, at which point the bureaucrats will probably insist they pass through the Revolving Prayer-wheel, lose all previous memory of their lives, and become reincarnated anyway. Only demons and immortals can leave the underworld as themselves, and spells like *plane shift* fail without the express permission of a Yama King. "And they only do THAT if you can show them there's an error in their records."

Characters that succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) check know that the records Yiwei is talking about, the Registers of Birth and Death, are kept in the halls beneath Senluo Palace. Yiwei laments their bad luck. Normally he could use his position as a clerk to petition the ministers to inspect the records – a task the functionaries would get to within the century, or the decade if Yiwei really pulled some strings – but with the feast going on, the palace guards won't even let him inside to file the paperwork. The only people who get to go inside Senluo Palace now are those bringing food...





The Banquet of the Kings

The Ten Yama Kings (**pit fiends**) preside over the great banquet, entertaining guests of every size and shape in the great dining hall of Senluo Palace. One hundred and eight unique dishes are to be served from the altar offerings that ghosts and demons are even now collecting from the surface, and flustered servants are running pell-mell across the palace grounds trying to organize the whole affair.

The cost of entry is one melon per character, as well as an extra for Yiwei. If there are not enough melons for the entire party, the remaining characters must find another way inside. If the characters wasted more than 8 hours chasing false leads while searching for Yiwei, they arrive as the final dishes are being served. In this case, a maximum of two characters can gain entrance using the cantaloupes, for the Kings are stuffed and have ordered everything but the choicest morsels to be distributed to the masses.

The characters have many options once inside Senluo Palace. If they wish, they can march straight up to the Yama Kings and demand their release from the underworld – but if the Registers indicate that they should be dead, as described in the next section, then the Kings themselves will subdue the characters and pack them off to the appropriate hell. Characters can also masquerade as guests and partake in the banquet, or else get up to some mischief in the bureaucratic offices that dot the palace grounds. Yiwei, if he came, suggests going to the record halls first. Inspecting the evidence is the best way to know if they have a case.

Yiwei's Career

The adventure as-written assumes that Yiwei came with the party to Senluo Palace, and had a chance to prove himself to a bureaucrat or the Yama Kings. If he didn't, make sure to give the characters plenty of opportunities to give his career a boost! Perhaps they can put in a good word for him with a minister who bemoans the lack of reliable help these days, or perhaps they can slip a forged offer letter into the out-tray at the hiring office.

The Record Halls

Senluo Palace, while magnificent, is large in a way that mortal eyes can still comprehend. The record halls beneath it, however, defy geometry, and stretch on for an impossible distance. The neat rows of scrolls stretch on forever, surprisingly free of dust and sturdy despite their age. Yiwei can help the characters find the correct records in

no time. If he is not present, a character must succeed on a DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check, drawing suspicion from the other clerks with every failure.

If the characters died to reach Diyu, or died before this adventure but were resurrected, the Registers indicate they belong in the underworld. The records must be altered if the characters wish to leave. (While they are free to write whatever they like, including striking their names from the Registers and giving themselves immortality, the more extreme their alterations then the more likely it is their forgeries will be discovered. The consequences of such brazen forgery might not occur until after this adventure, though.) Otherwise, the Registers indicate their deaths occur sometime in the future.

The records in hand, the characters now have enough evidence to approach the Yama Kings about their wrongful imprisonment in the underworld. Once the Kings see that, true to their files, the characters do not belong here, they are immediately ready to send their souls back up to the world of the living. Except, they must know one thing – which clerk caught the error? Whoever was meticulous and thorough enough to catch such a mistake surely has a bright career ahead of them.

Yiwei's Choice

If the characters recommend Yiwei to the Yama Kings, all of his professional ambitions are on the verge of coming true. But there is a melancholy to him, as he gets ready to say goodbye. If any cantaloupes remain for him, after all the party's trials in the underworld, he clutches them close.

"The work never ends down here," he says. "It will probably be a long time until I come home. Ma will probably miss me. And I… I'll…"

Before he can get the words out, he starts to bawl, great thick tears dripping from his cheeks and pooling around his feet. The ponds in the palace gardens seem to swell with sympathy- ah, wait, no, they are actually swelling, and the gardeners start fleeing in panic as the carefully manicured terraces start to flood.

Yiwei is terribly conflicted. If he leaves, then he will lose the opportunity that the Yama Kings have presented to him. Perhaps he will be able to win back their favor when he returns, or perhaps not; it is impossible to say, in the ever-changing tides of the underworld court. But if he stays, then it will be centuries before he has a chance to go back home and see his mother.

Yiwei's choice depends on how the characters advise him now. If they refuse to make the choice for him, reference their conversation in the teahouse for his ultimate decision. Did the party talk more about his mother's sorrow, or about his failing career?

Development

What will the party tell Yiwei to do? What will they tell Niangniang when they return? And how long will it be before their mischief in the underworld catches up with them?

CONCLUSION

The defining variable of the ending depends on whether Yiwei stayed or came home.

If Yiwei stayed: Yiwei requests that the characters pass along a letter when they return to his mother, explaining the full truth. If they do, Niangniang reads it frowning but dry-eyed. She takes a deep, shuddering breath when she is done, and thanks the party for bringing her the truth. She tells the characters that they are always welcome to visit, although she speaks less often of her son now. Should the characters find themselves back in the underworld, they will have a friend in Senluo Palace itself.

If Yiwei came home: The two salamander demons burst into blubbering tears once they see each other, to the point that they have to be interrupted to keep from flooding all the Bamboo Lands again. Yiwei takes a few days to build up the courage to explain the truth to his mother, and while their relationship becomes frostier for the moment, she still lets him help her in the garden. They still argue – but afterwards, they apologize.

Rewards

If Yiwei stayed to advance his career, then a month later the characters receive a letter from the underworld, authorizing them to withdraw 30,000 gp from any bank in the imperial capital. If he came home, then instead of the money, the characters receive more cantaloupes than they know what to do with.

A Tour of the Underworld

The myth of Diyu has undergone many iterations and interpretations, combining the Narakas of Buddhist cosmology with traditional Chinese beliefs about the afterlife. As described in *Journey to the West*, the eighteen levels are:

- The Hell of Hanging-by-the-Sinews
- The Hell of the Wrongful Dead
- The Hell of the Pit of Fire
- Fengdu Hell (also called the Hell of Boiling Faeces)
- The Hell of Tongue Ripping
- The Hell of Flaying
- The Hell of Grinding
- The Hell of Pounding
- The Hell of Dismemberment by Vehicles
- The Hell of Ice
- The Hell of Skin-Shedding
- The Hell of Disembowelment
- The Hell of Oil Cauldrons
- The Hell of Darkness
- The Hell of the Mountain of Knives
- The Hell of the Pool of Blood
- Avīci Hell (also called the Hell of Maggots)
- The Hell of the Steelyard Beam

Author's Notes/Acknowledgments

This is a story based less on Chinese mythology than Chinese-American mythology. It's about leaving home, not understanding your parents, not understanding your children, and the little ways we say "I love you" when we don't know how to say "I love you." My dearest, heartfelt thanks to my mom, who'd bring me peaches when we ran out of cantaloupe.

Author Bio

KC Shi is a freelance writer based in Los Angeles. You can contact her at kcaishi@gmail.com, or find her on Twitter at @kc_shi_. Ask her about bees.

Giant salamander demon

Huge fiend, any alignment

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 230 (20d12 + 100)
Speed 30 ft., swim 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	27 (+8)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Str +10, Con +10, Wis +13, Cha +9
Skills Nature +8, Perception +13, Survival +13
Damage Resistances cold
Damage Immunities acid, poison
Senses tremorsense 120 ft., passive Perception 23
Languages Common, Aquan
Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

Amphibious. The salamander demon can breathe air and water.

Innate Spellcasting. The salamander demon's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 21). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *blindness/deafness, grease, poison spray*
3/day each: *control weather, water breathing*

Actions

Multiattack. The salamander demon makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its tail.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack.* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (3d10 + 5) piercing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack.* +10 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (3d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

Gob (Recharge 5-6). The salamander demon spits a gob of slime at a point it can see within 300 feet of it. Each creature within 10 feet of that point must make a DC 21 Dexterity saving throw, taking 45 (10d8) acid damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one. In addition, on a failed save, the creature's speed is halved for 1 minute. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

The Last Guest

by Jacky Leung

Content Warnings: death (specifically the passing of a loved one), depression, mild body horror

SYNOPSIS

A long-time friend, the Jade Hermit, is approaching the end of his long life. The wise monk has prepared for this moment and has invited you to attend a banquet to celebrate life and the eventual passing. In addition to you, the Jade Hermit seeks your assistance to find his old friends, scattered across the Misty Wilds and Indigo Mountains. You have a limited time to gather the hermit's friends before the banquet.

His friends are animal spirit nobles whom the monk befriended over the course of his life. But past grudges, misfortunes, and ill-feelings separate these once cordial friends. Something stalks in the shadows, hoping to prevent you from achieving your objective. Can you mend the wounds of the animal spirits' hearts before time runs out?

An adventure for a party of four 18th-20th level characters running 6-8 hours.

ADVENTURE HOOK

A long-time friend to the party or one of its members receives an invitation written by the Jade Hermit. The Jade Hermit is a wise, old monk who resides in a monastery in the Indigo Mountains. Nearing the end of his life, the monk wishes for the party to attend a banquet to celebrate life and exchange farewells for the journey of death ahead. The banquet is expected to be held within a week, but the letter suggests that the party arrive early if possible to help organize the event.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Decades ago, the Jade Hermit and his friends held a banquet to celebrate the hermit's ascension into an enlightened master. Twelve of the animal spirits arrived and were immortalized on the murals of the monastery that the hermit made as his home. One of the spirits, the Lord of Cats was tricked by the Prince of Mice and Rats and did not attend the monumental event. The lord of cats has never forgiven the prince of mice and rats or the other animal spirits.

In fact, the Lord of Cats Peydan has been sowing mistrust and misfortune for the other spirits to keep them apart. Their bickering caused them all to depart back to their homes and the years passed. The Jade Hermit was quite sad about the whole affair but hoped that one day the spirits would overcome their differences and forgive each other.

Peydan has heard of the encroaching end of the Jade Hermit and does not want the other spirits to arrive at this last banquet. He is determined to thwart the party's efforts. The party needs to find and meet with each of the twelve animal spirits to convince them to let go of their past grievances to make the pilgrimage for one last goodbye to their good friend, the Jade Hermit.



CHAPTER 1

The Lonely Banquet Hall

Read or paraphrase:

The Jade Hermit operates a monastery located on a mountaintop in the Indigo Mountains. The Indigo Mountains are renown for their coloration, tranquil vistas, and emerald valleys. The journey through the slopes and rocky trails takes roughly several days to reach the summit. The autumn season has reached the Indigo Mountains, many of the trees and flowers have already changed colors and await winter's chill. The monastery was once a thriving complex full of students and instructors generations ago, but the hermit continued to maintain the facilities until recently. Any warmth that would be expected or recalled by any character from the monastery will be greeted with an air of emptiness and forlorn.



The Abandoned Monastery

Read or paraphrase:

Your journey to the monastery through the Indigo Mountains is as treacherous and steep as you remembered. It has been years since you paid a visit to your old friend, the Jade Hermit. Autumn has reached the valleys below, the trees and flowers have changed color and the occasional mountain wind invites winter's caress. It is an auspicious reminder of why you journeyed up the winding slopes and rocky trails: the Jade Hermit's imminent death.

It takes several days but you breathe a sigh of relief at the sight of the arches of the monastery gate. Vines and moss have begun to entwine the stone walls and tiles of the main courtyard. The sight of the dilapidated convent sparks gloom for the monastery; its waned care is evident. You hear the sharp but familiar sound of a wooden staff striking stone. When you turn to find the source, your eyes find the Jade Hermit greeting you with a weary but genuine smile.

The Jade Hermit, an elderly human monk (he/him), wears white robes with blue and yellow trimming. He uses a wooden staff to help him walk and keep balance while standing. A passive Wisdom (Medicine) check DC 15 or higher reveals that the monk's health seems fragile despite his composure. The hermit welcomes the party into one of the monastery's meditation halls, offering tea and small bits of food such as dried fruits and nuts.

Mending Broken Fates

While sitting in the meditation room, the Jade Hermit informs the party of his upcoming end of life. In four days, the monk will pass and begin his journey through death. Before his inevitable fate, the elderly ascetic has one final wish and requests the party to assist him in the matter.

The Jade Hermit shares any of the following information with the characters:

- Decades ago, the monk held a banquet with the animal spirit nobles from the Misty Wilds.
- The banquet was to celebrate the hermit's induction as an Enlightened Master.
- For several years, the animal spirit nobles would journey from their respective homes and celebrate the upcoming new year with the aging monk.
- Within two decades after the first banquet, the attendance dwindled from inflated mistrust, discontent, and bitterness between the animal spirits until none arrived at the banquet.
- The monastery has also lost much of its luster, and many of its students and instructors departed to find their own purpose and meaning in life. As a result, the master was left to attend an empty convent.
- Peydan [pay-DAAN] (he/him), the Lord of Cats, has made infrequent visits to the monastery in recent years to hearten the monk's waning years. A long-time friend, the Lord of Cats,



arrives sometime later to help prepare the banquet while the party goes to persuade the spirit nobles to attend.

- For reasons unknown to the hermit, the animal spirits have become bitter with one another and stayed in their realms to avoid communication with others. The Jade Hermit attempted to reach out to them over the years, but his failing health has recently prevented him from visiting his friends.
- The Misty Wilds is home to many spirits of nature and many different nobles reside within its elusive boundaries. Through the use of ancient magic and help from the nobles, there is a device in the Tranquility Garden that connects to each of the animal nobles' native realms.
- The elderly monk knows he will pass unto death once the sun sets in four days. He is ready to accept his fate, stating that it is a journey all must take.

Once the party believes they have received adequate information from the Jade Hermit, the monk guides the characters to the Tranquility Garden in an adjacent courtyard. Read or paraphrase:

The Jade Hermit escorts you through the monastery to the Tranquility Garden. Beds of withered flowers adorn the enclosed courtyard, the small trees have lost most of their leaves, now draped over the stone tiled floor. The monk walks over to a walled archway and begins to chant for several minutes. The wall fades away to reveal a portal to a grove on the other side as mist pours from it. The elderly hermit extends his hand and gestures toward the threshold.

"Pass through the portal into the grove beyond and do you what you can to reunite my old friends. Use the compass to traverse through the realms of the other nobles. Be careful, there are many dangers in the Misty Wilds. If you happen to see the Lord of Cats, he might be willing to offer assistance. When you have completed your task, tell the dais to send you home, and it will take you back here. I wish you luck."



Fate Clocks

The Jade Hermit has a limited amount of time left before his imminent passage. Time is a precious commodity that instills a sense of urgency and consideration of how characters devote their time and resources to gather the guests for the farewell banquet. In later sections, certain actions consume time. Make the characters constantly aware of the amount of time passing in the mortal realm while they explore the Misty Wilds. Refer to Appendix D for diagrams for the Fate Clocks used in this adventure.

When using the provided clocks, treat each segment in increments of 2 hours. Once a clock is filled, an entire day has passed. If characters take short or long rests, the time passed should be marked off the clocks. Keep this information accessible to the players so they can make informed choices and prioritize their actions accordingly.

Development

Once the party walks through the portal, proceed to Chapter 2.



CHAPTER 2

Guest List



When the characters pass through the portal into the Misty Wilds, they emerge in a tranquil grove with a large tree trunk in the center. At the center of a stone dais rests a dodecagon-shaped compass with twelve animal symbols and a metallic arrow (see zodiac compass in Appendix B). By turning the arrow to an animal symbol, the mists part to reveal a forested path ahead that connects to the realm of the respected animal noble.

Read or paraphrase:

> *You hear a voice from a nearby tree as you pick up the compass. When you turn and look, you see the outline of a cat-like creature materialize from the shadows, resting on the branch.*
>
> *"Greetings, I've never seen you here before. Very curious. Tell me, are you friends of the Jade Hermit? How is my dear friend? What brings you to the grove?"*

The Lord of Cats

One of the animal nobles of the Misty Wilds, Peydan, the Lord of Cats, a chaotic neutral **zodiac noble (cat)** (he/him), has no known realm. The Lord of Cats sowed discourse, seeded misfortune, and sabotaged his fellow nobles for decades. When news of the Jade Hermit's end of life and his desire to reunite the other animal nobles reached the cat noble, Peydan began to conspire against the party to ensure they cannot fulfill the dying monk's wish.

Stalking the Misty Wilds

Peydan is the sower of many of the misfortunes that plague the other nobles, and he wants to keep them miserable and apart. Peydan is an elusive cat spirit, making him hard to detect or see while in the Misty Wilds. A character with a **passive Perception of 18** or higher senses something lurking nearby but cannot pinpoint their location. If a character has any features or items

Roleplaying Peydan, Lord of Cats

Peydan is a mischievous and curious feline noble. Years ago, the Prince of Mice and Rats tricked Peydan when the Jade Hermit invited the animal nobles to celebrate the monk's ascension as an enlightened master. The participants were enshrined and immortalized as a mural in the monastery. Peydan was angered by this betrayal and vowed revenge on all of the other nobles. The Lord of Cats will be cautious but inquisitive when the characters first arrive in the grove, asking questions and probing for the party as they attempt to mend the broken relations and faith within the other nobles.

The feline noble does not want the other animal spirit nobles to reunite with the Jade Hermit and after three nobles become released from their plights, Peydan will take greater steps to intervene against the party. Misinformation and lies (Appendix A) are the preferable methods until physical tampering is required, which might result in a direct confrontation with the cat spirit.

that grant them *truesight*, they see through Peydan's illusions to mask his presence. After introducing Peydan as early as the party's first few steps into the Misty Wilds; it's important that the Lord of Cats remains a stalking presence. Peydan takes drastic actions against the party, sabotaging their efforts when at least 4 or more of the nobles have been helped and plan to attend the banquet. Peydan becomes confrontational against the party when at least 8 of the nobles agree to attend the banquet.

Traversing through the Misty Wilds

When using the Zodiac Compass, the characters can enter into one of the twelve realms of the animal nobles in the Misty Wilds. The Misty Wilds is a parallel dimension where many spirits of nature reside. Scholars are unsure of the size of the Misty Wilds and whether its size is infinite. While in an animal noble's domain, the Misty Wilds Encounters table can be used while the characters explore and search for the respective noble; use the table for combat-oriented groups or if the group wants to be challenged. An encounter from the table does not use up a slot from the Fate Clocks (see **Fate Clocks** section in Chapter 1).

Death in the Misty Wilds is a severe inconvenience as the spirit is bound to the plane; when a creature is the target of a spell that revives or resurrects them, they must succeed a DC 15 Charisma saving throw. On a success, the spell resolves as normal; otherwise, the spell fizzles and the spirit of the creature remains separated. While in spirit form, the character uses only the statblock of a **ghost**.

Choosing a Noble's Realm

The characters need to use the Zodiac Compass (see Appendix) to traverse into the different domains of the animal nobles. There is no particular order that the realms must be visited by the party; leave it to the characters to make the choice. Alternatively, if the characters are indecisive, you may consider allowing the compass to make the determination. You can roll a d12 to determine the next destination, rerolling for any previously visited locations.

Misty Wilds Encounters

d12	Encounter
1	An elemental convergence occurs and two **air elementals**, two **water elementals**, two **fire elementals**, and two **earth elementals** appear. The elementals battle each other and the fight spills over towards the party. The characters have a chance of finding an *elemental gem* among the debris if they defeat the elementals or peacefully resolve the conflict. Roll randomly to determine the *elemental gem* found: 1-5 blue sapphire, 6-10 yellow diamond, 11-15 red corundum, 17-20 emerald.
2	A **rakshasa** and a troupe of **oni** attempt to ambush the party. Allocate an oni for each character in the encounter. If defeated, the rakshasa carries a *dagger of venom* that can be found.
3	A group of **cloakers** ambushes the party. Allocate one cloaker per character.
4	Rai, **a storm giant**, is having an argument with Ten, a **cloud giant**, on a serious matter and turns to the party to help settle the dispute on which of them is the mightiest warrior among them. Once the argument is settled, both giants attempt to rob the party of their valuables.
5	The party finds a wilted garden full of worn statues and a cloaked figure crying in the center. In reality, it's a **medusa** setting an ambush along with her two **stone golem** allies.
6	A trio of **ice devils** blocks the path with walls of ice. The fiends are willing to let a character to pass if they recite the following proverb: "see no good, hear no good, speak no good." By doing so, the characters are recruited for a future military campaign by the fiends. Otherwise, they will attack the party and defend the path.
7	A massive lake separates the path ahead, the characters can use a nearby barge to cross it. A **dragon turtle** lurks in the depths of the lake and will attempt to destroy the barge to devour the characters. The party can attempt to reason with it by giving it something valuable to it.
8	A small girl is found alone on the road and needs help finding her family. The small girl is a **bone devil** in disguise and leads the party to a desecrated graveyard. The fiend ambushes the party with her undead horde of two **minotaur skeletons**, and six **skeletons** on six **warhorse skeletons**. Once defeated, a character may search the graves to find a *nine lives stealer*.
9	The party meets a pack of **werebears**. One of their cubs has been taken by a pair of **rocs** to their mountain-side roost nearby. If the party assists and rescues the cubs, the pack rewards the characters with a *flame tongue battleaxe*.
10	A woodland area is infested with tainted **treants**. Allocate one treant per character.
11	A **purple worm** rampages through a quarry and assaults the party. On a successful DC 15 Wisdom **(Medicine) check**, a character learns the worm is suffering from an ailment deep inside its gullet.
12	Two **mummy lords** guard an ancient shrine. The two undead were former monarchs of the forgotten land. Completing a funeral rite (DC 18 Intelligence (Religion) check) or defeating puts them to rest. The party may find a rod of lordly might if they investigate the remains

Snake Realm: New Skin, Old Regrets



Read or paraphrase:

After passing through the portal, you find yourself in a large bamboo forest that seems to stretch endlessly. The ground is littered with brown and green leaves, the tops of the bamboo clatter together against the odd wind of the realm. The mist clears and you immediately hear the sound of a stringed instrument being plucked. A few chords and melodies can be heard as you search for the source. You find a clearing and your eyes are drawn to a white-haired woman in white robes playing a guzheng. She plays the song in its entirety before she notices your presence.

She gestures to the floor for you to sit as dozens of white snakes slither and pull mats and pour tea into cups cut from the bamboo trunks. The woman smiles and reveals yellow serpentine eyes as you take your seats. "Greetings travelers, I am Bailei, the Snake Sorceress."

Bailei [BYE-lee], the chaotic neutral **zodiac noble (snake)** (she/her), recently shed her skin and reincarnated as a new version of herself. But she still holds the old regrets from the past and needs to be reconciled. When the party meets with her, she invites them to sit down and offer them tea.

Bailei shares any of the following information with the characters:

- Bailei once had an apprentice whom she loved as a sister named Xiaohui [shao-OO-ee] (**mage**, she/her).
- Bailei saved Xiaohui when she was a young green snake.
- The pair explored the world together for many years to gain knowledge and hone their mystical arts.
- As the years passed Xiaohui wanted to separate and journey on her own. Bailei was against it and continued to deter her apprentice from leaving.
- Xiaohui struck Bailei with a powerful toxin that limits the snake sorceress' reincarnations.

A successful DC 18 Wisdom (Insight) or Wisdom (Medicine) check reveals that Bailei is aware of the extent of the poison's effects: that she is indeed dying and she is unable to reincarnate into the next life.

Depending on how involved the party becomes with Bailei's plight, the sorceress admits that she regrets the

Roleplaying Bailei, the Snake Sorceress

Bailei has lived multiple lifetimes, shedding the skin of her previous form to reincarnate into a new version of herself each time. Such a long lifetime, full of lingering regrets, has weighed heavily on her conscience. Bailei is polite and courteous though she may seem distant and her attention can drift elsewhere with an occasional pluck from the guzheng.

Her former apprentice, Xiaohui, struck the snake sorceress with a deadly toxin that limited the noble's rejuvenating traits. As a result, this recent reincarnation is her last one before facing death. She does not mind dying, but she has regrets about her past behaviors and would like to mend those wounds before her passing.

way she treated Xiaohui and would hope to one day make amends with her former apprentice before her final moments. Bailei reveals that Xiaohui has found refuge in a cave on the other side of the realm, a four-hour journey [**Fate Clock: 4 hours**] to traverse through the bamboo forest and hike through the rocky hills. When the party reaches the mouth of the cave, they find a young woman wearing leather armor with a noticeable snake-shaped jade pendant around her neck.

A successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces Xiaohui to forgive her former teacher and friend. Xiaohui also reveals that there is an elixir that may cure Bailei, but it requires gathering special herbs along the mountainside and the neighboring woods. Xiaohui can procure some of the herbs on her own but needs assistance finding the remaining ingredients. A successful group DC 16 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check leads the characters to the essential components and return safely to Xiaohui, who synthesizes the anti-toxin [**Fate Clock: 2 hours**]. On a failed check, the party uses up another 2 hours from the Fate Clock.

On a failed Persuasion check, Xiaohui tells the party to leave her alone and refuse to help them.

Whether the group returns to Bailei with Xiaohui to administer the elixir or not, Bailei thanks the party for trying to help her [Fate Clock: 2 hours].

If informed of Jade Hermit's imminent fate, the snake noble happily agrees to attend the final banquet. If Bailei is still poisoned, she divulges that she is weak and exhausted from her recent reincarnation and needs assistance to reach the entrance of her domain [**Fate Clock: 2 Hours**]. If she is cured by Xiaohui and the party, she informs the party that she can make her way to the monastery and agrees to meet them at the appointed time.

Roleplaying Xiaohui, the Green Snake

Xiaohui was the former apprentice of Bailei, the snake sorceress. She is naturally distrustful of strangers and always on her guard. After leaving her former teacher's side, the young snake spirit has been on her own yet has never left the Misty Wilds or Bailei's domain. Xiaohui is regretful for her actions but felt smothered by Bailei.

Boar Realm: Golden Truffle Hunt

Read or paraphrase:

> *Once you pass through the portal, you arrive in a land filled with fallen red and golden leaves and bare whitebark trees. You see a large, burly figure dressed in dark brown leather feverishly digging the ground. When you approach him, he completely ignores you until you come into view of his boar-like head sniffing the fresh dug earth. He straightens his posture, slightly embarrassed by your arrival.*
>
> *"Hail, friends! I am Chengfu, welcome to my woods. I am on a noble search for a sacred treasure."*



Chengfu (CHEN-foo], the neutral good **boar zodiac noble (boar)** (he/him), is searching for the elusive golden truffle and has been hunting for it for several decades. The legend of the golden truffle is a ruse to distract the noble, which has driven him obsessed and compulsive in his vain search. If the characters ask Chengfu who told him about the golden truffle, he openly states Peydan, the Lord of Cats. If Chengfu is told about the Jade Hermit's imminent passing, he considers the hunt for the golden truffle a worthy cause and urges the party to help him find it.

Chengfu shares any of the following information about the golden truffle:

- The truffle grows in fresh, soft soil.
- The truffle thrives in the darkest, deepest parts of the ground.
- The golden truffle is a magical ingredient said to produce the most heavenly dishes.
- Legends state that the golden truffle can be found beneath an ancient tree.

If the party agrees to assist Chengfu in his search, it prompts a skills challenge.

Skills Challenge

Use these guidelines for running your skills challenge:

Difficulty Class. The base DC for skill checks is set to moderate difficulty (DC 15).

Objective. Assist Chengfu to find the golden truffle.

Making Ability Checks. On their turn, a character can make one ability check using any ability score

Roleplaying Chengfu, the Humble Boar

Chengfu is a determined, straightforward noble. He does not enjoy complex conversations or second-guessing others. The boar noble has a strong faith in others and gives unconditional trust to his friends. Chengfu detests liars and has a hard time grasping the nuances of deception.

The golden truffle has drawn Chengfu's undivided attention, believing it to be some great treasure from the earth and wishes to find it to share with his friends. Many years have passed and Chengfu has not gotten closer to finding it, but he believes he is nearing a breakthrough.

and skill proficiency they like, as long as they can explain how this check could reasonably help Chengfu in his search for the golden truffle. Each successful ability check fills up **1 hour** on the **Fate Clock**. Each failed ability check results in lost time, filling up **2 hours** on the Fate Clock.

Outcomes. If the party accumulates a total number of failures equal to the number of characters in the party over the course of the skills challenge, the search has become fruitless and remains unfilled. Chengfu becomes erratic and anxious, making future discussions with the noble difficult.

If the party instead earns a number of successes equal to the number of players, their search leads them to an ancient tree that fits the legends and conditions for the golden truffle to be found.

A successful DC 16 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check determines there are no golden truffles near the base of the tree. Investigating the tree causes the treant to awaken. The treant informs Chengfu and the party that there was no such thing as the golden truffle and that none has ever grown in the area.

In either outcome, Chengfu develops anxiety, doubts, and insecurities. The party may attempt to console the boar noble. A successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check from either a character or as a group helps convince Chengfu to give up on his search [**Fate Clock: 2 hours**]. The party gains advantage on the check if they performed the skill challenge. The characters can mention any of the following when they console him:

- Chengfu is dedicated and unwavering in his quest.
- The Jade Hermit would be happy to just see the boar noble.
- Chengfu is selfless in his quest, searching for the truffle to share with his friends.
- If the group found the ancient tree, the party can mention that Chengfu was dedicated to his endeavor.
- If the party is suspicious or knows about Peydan's motives, they may reveal any conflicts or obstructions caused by the cat spirit's deception.

If the party successfully calms Chengfu, the boar noble humbly thanks the group and hands them a *luckstone* as a token of their kindness. Whether the party succeeds in consoling Chengfu or not, the boar noble agrees to attend the banquet by the end of the talk.



Dog Realm: Every Dog Has Their Days

Read or paraphrase:

You arrive in a realm of endless plains that stretch the horizon. Small pockets of trees clutter together to form makeshift forests. As you follow the dirt roads, you notice signs written in a variety of languages, which you decipher immediately into 'keep out,' 'go away,' or 'no solicitors.'

At the end of the road, you find a wooden house with a front porch. You notice a figure in a denim overall dress with a dog's head sitting on a chair sifting grain in a basket. The figure looks up at you as you approach. "Did you not read the signs?!" she shouts.

Gin [ghee-INN], the chaotic good **zodiac noble (dog)** (she/her), has locked herself away in her realm for several years after feeling betrayed by Tourou, the rabbit noble. In reality, Peydan, the Lord of Cats, lied about Tourou being the first to reach the moon in the starry heavens. Supposedly, the rabbit noble used plans for a rocket ship shared by Gin.

Gin demands the party to explain the purpose of their visit. If the group mentions the Jade Hermit's last banquet and eventual passing, Gin's demeanor softens and welcomes the characters to her porch with some refreshments.

A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals Gin is deeply distraught, not about the Jade Hermit, but on another



matter. If a character inquires Gin about her distress, she may disclose any of the following information:

- Years ago, Gin and Tourou, the rabbit noble, partnered together to build a rocket ship to travel to the moon together.
- The project made considerable progress before a disagreement erupted between them.
- Both nobles argued about the calculations, the ship designs, and final implementations.
- Tourou grew frustrated and returned to his realm, since then, neither has spoken to each other.
- Gin heard rumors that Tourou successfully launched a rocket ship into the stars and reached the moon using some of the designs Gin developed. If asked where she heard the rumor, she divulges that Peydan, the Lord of Cats, informed her.
- Gin felt betrayed and heartbroken from the news, leaving the project unfinished for several years.
- Gin has lost any motivation to work on the rocket that she and Tourou started together, a bitter reminder of the rabbit noble's duplicity and theft.
- Gin has remained in her realm, tending to some of the plants and trying to forget about her dreams. She has been unwilling to interact with the other spirit nobles for fear of additional betrayals.

Depending on the depth of roleplaying, the party may attempt to persuade Gin to finish the ship and achieve her dream of reaching the moon. A successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check along with promising assistance from the rest of the characters rally Gin to restart the project. If the party knows or suspects of Peydan of manipulation, they may reveal this information, gaining advantage on the Charisma check.

If the party helps Gin to construct the moon ship, this prompts a skills challenge.

Skills Challenge

Use these guidelines for running your skills challenge:

Difficulty Class. The base DC for skill checks is set to hard difficulty (DC 20).

Objective. Assist Gin with finishing the construction of the moon ship and a successful maiden voyage.

Making Ability Checks. On their turn, a character can make one ability check using any ability score and skill proficiency they like, as long as they can explain how this check could reasonably help with the construction of the rocket ship or the preparation for its voyage. Each failed ability check results in damaging an important component that needs to be repaired, costing time and filling up **2 hours** on the Fate clocks.

Outcomes. Attempting to fix and complete the rocket ship takes up **4 hours** on the Fate Clock, not including any mishaps from failed ability checks.

If the party accumulates a total number of failures equal to the number of characters in the party over the course of the skills challenge, the moon vessel remains incomplete and unsafe to fly. Gin is devastated by the outcome and demands the characters to leave the realm. If the characters persist, she may become hostile and attack the party, or banish them back to the Tranquil Garden (DC 23 Charisma saving throw). After the confrontation, Gin refuses to attend the Jade Hermit's banquet.

If the party earns a number of successes equal to the number of players, the rocket ship is complete and ready for its first flight. Gin thanks the group for their efforts before boarding the ship and going through final checks before its maiden launch. She also promises to attend the banquet on her return trip back.

Roleplaying Gin, the Canine Crafter

Gin is a resourceful, usually welcoming spirit noble. Normally, she is optimistic, loyal, thoughtful, and generally trusting to others. The canine noble is a renowned crafter and artisan, responsible for some of the homes of the other zodiac nobles and even the murals at the Jade Hermit's monastery - though the spirit is unaware of the ruined state of the monastery or the disarray of the other nobles' realms. Since the incident with Tourou, the rabbit noble, Gin has become cynical, pessimistic, and distrusting of people.

Ox Realm: Don't Give a Plow

Read or paraphrase:

> *You arrive at a blasted landscape full of broken trees - splintered and uprooted. It is a scene of destruction and ruin that spreads across the horizon. The ground beneath is full of dirt and sand with patches of grass that seemed to have miraculously remained unscathed by the wreckage. The clouds above are dark and thunder rumbles across the land. As you attempt to ascertain the source of the destruction, your ears sense the thunder approaching closer and closer until you realize that the sound is not thunder, but something fierce and gaining speed towards you. Your eyes eventually spot a large dust cloud growing larger towards you, and you soon see the outline of an ox charging at full speed. The noble of this realm has found you - and they seem to be in a bad mood.*

Po [POE], the neutral **zodiac noble (ox)** (he/him), has been on a rampage for several years, manipulated and forced into this native home by the other nobles to avoid harming others. Po is considered to be raging and unintelligible by anyone attempting to reason with him. He attacks the characters at every opportunity while raging.

The characters can attempt to quell Po, who has certain benefits active while raging listed below:

- A character can make a **DC** 15 Charisma-based ability check made with disadvantage against Po. If Po is reduced to less than half of his maximum hit points, he loses this benefit.
- Po has resistance to all damage while raging.
- If a character casts *calm emotions* targeting Po, he has advantage on the saving throw.
- If a character attempts to restrain or grapple him, Po has advantage on saving throws and Strength ability checks. If Po is reduced to less than half of his maximum hit points, he loses this benefit.
- Po under the benefits of the *mind blank* spell with a duration of 2d4 hours remaining.

Regardless of the methods used, it takes **2 hours** on the **Fate Clocks** to adequately calm down Po.



Once Po has calmed down and is no longer raging, he realizes the party is not his enemies and apologizes for his behavior. He attempts to give the characters some display of hospitality among the splintered forest. Depending on the depth of roleplaying, the characters learn that the ox noble hasn't forgiven the other spirit nobles. Furthermore, the ox spirit failed a series of tasks requested by the Jade Hermit decades ago, and the feeling of inadequacy drove the ox noble into a frenzy.

In this new mental state, Po no longer cares about the other nobles or the Jade Hermit, even when informed of the monk's impending death. The players can convince the ox noble to come to the banquet after three successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) checks.

If any of the characters mention any of the points or phrases listed, they make the roll with advantage:

- Po should forgive the other nobles and let go of his grudges.
- Po should forgive himself for being unable to accomplish his tasks.
- Po should accept his failures and try to learn from them.
- The Jade Hermit most likely would forgive Po for his shortcomings and accept him anyway.
- Po would regret not being there to wish the Jade Hermit off to his next journey unto death.

Roleplaying Po, the Noble Ox

Po was always carefree in spirit and form. But he held special accommodations for only certain people, which included the Jade Hermit. Po revered the wise monk and was loyal to a fault. Po always kept to himself and roamed where the grass was greener. Po was always willing to lend aid to long-time friends and allies, especially the Jade Hermit. Failure was not something that often plagued Po, but his dwindling confidence and inadequacy left him bitter and enraged. Po can carry his anger for great lengths of time, but once forgiven, he easily forgets or doesn't care about the issue anymore. Ultimately, Po never wants to disappoint the Jade Hermit and his guilt will linger despite his typical resolution from his outrage.

For each failed attempt to persuade Po, he punches the character. If the characters are unable to convince him, Po asks the characters to leave and threaten to enter into a rage again if they do not heed his request. Regardless of the outcome, 2 hours on the Fate Clocks pass if the party attempts to convince Po.

The Lord of Cats was instrumental in sabotaging Po's early efforts, before instilling doubts in the ox noble's capabilities. If the party knows or suspects of Peydan of manipulation, they may reveal this information, and Po becomes angered at the cat noble.

Rooster Realm: Ruffled Feathers

Read or paraphrase:

As you pass through the portal, you arrive facing the doorway of a large stone fortress with towering red doors. The walls are nearly fifty feet tall and wrap around a tall central building that peeks beyond the perimeter. A pair of armored anthropomorphic birds greet you. One of them presents several strips of cloth to you, and the other offers a short bow.

"Greetings visitors, welcome to the realm of her serene highness Mei Lian. Before you can allow you to enter the realm, we ask that you please put these blindfolds on when addressing her serene highness. They are to protect you from her captivating beauty," one instructs.

The doors open to reveal a vast courtyard of artisans, merchants, warriors, bureaucrats, ministers, and attendants standing in rows, leaving a path to the central building. Their heads are lowered with blindfolds over their eyes. The guards at the gate escort you past the threshold and gesture for you to continue forward.

The Rooster Noble

While a rooster is a gendered noun to indicate a male chicken, in this adventure, the zodiac animals are symbols of their station and do not indicate or suggest a spirit noble's gender. Mei is a female noble who occupies the station for the Rooster on the zodiac, meaning anyone can hold the position. In a later portion of the adventure, you will find additional instances where a spirit noble is not gender-specific to their station.

Mei [MAY], the chaotic neutral **zodiac noble (rooster)**(she/her), is suffering from a curse where her feathers have been falling off frequently. This is a great concern for such a boastful being, which has led to her becoming a recluse in her domain. Mei has denied many visitors from seeing her and has even forbidden anyone from looking at her. The party may make an offering with an item of considerably high rarity or value, such as a very rare or rarer magical item. The staff and guests must wear blindfolds when in the noble's presence.

Once the characters reach the central building, they are instructed by several attendants and staff to adorn their blindfolds to address Mei. The staff are familiar with the layout of the stronghold and promise to assist the characters in reaching their destination.

When addressing Mei, the rooster noble politely inquires about the nature of their visit. If the characters mention the Jade Hermit's inevitable death and his farewell banquet, she is distressed about the matter but ultimately declines to attend. With a successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check, the Rooster Princess reveals that she is under the effects of a curse and does not dare to have the Jade Hermit's last sight of her be some hideously, ugly creature.

If the characters seek to help Mei with her plight, she reveals the following details about the curse:

- Her once radiant red feathers have dulled and turned gray.
- Once the feathers turn gray, they withered and turned black before falling off.



Roleplaying Mei, the Rooster Princess

Mei is a proud and elegant noble. She is known for her beauty and grace, along with providing meaningful insight and resourcefulness. She is always polite and conveys the highest level of etiquette due to guests. Mei is known to be gracious and courteous without anyone foolish enough to betray or mislead her. As the rooster spirit noble, Mei collects various trinkets and artifacts either from her many suitors or from her earlier years adventuring beyond the Misty Wilds.

Mei's Horrific Visage

A character that sees Mei's current form must succeed a DC 21 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened by her appearance for 1 hour. If a character's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, they are immune to Mei's Horrific Visage for the next 24 hours. Alternatively, a character can avert their gaze but makes all ability checks that rely on sight at disadvantage.

- Once a feather has fallen, no new feathers grow in its place.

A successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces Mei to allow the characters to remove their blindfolds to help her. Subsequently, a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Medicine) check reveals the feathers are indeed cursed and determines the best methods to end it.

In order to end the curse, they must follow these particular steps, each related to the way the curse is expressed:

- The red feathers turning gray is a manifestation of withering. If the party was successful with their previous check, this part of the curse can be removed from casting the *death ward* spell.
- The gray feathers turning black is a form of toxin. If the party was successful with their previous check, this part of the curse can be removed from casting the *protection from poison* spell.
- The feathers being unable to regrow is related to Mei's anxieties. If the party is successful with their previous check, this part of the curse can be removed from casting the *calm emotions* spell.

Alternatively, if these spells are not accessible to the characters, they may cast *greater restoration* or *wish* to remove the entire curse. If a character uses the *dispel magic* or *remove curse* spells to remove a part of the curse, they must succeed a DC 19 spellcasting ability check. In the event that none of the characters possess any spellcasting spell slots or the requisite spells to remove the curse, the party may request the aid of some Mei's attendants (**mage**) to cast spells for them.

Another option is for the characters to convince Mei to attend the banquet despite her appearances. Characters attempting this path must succeed on a DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check with disadvantage. If unsuccessful, Mei becomes reluctant to leave her stronghold and refuses to attend the banquet.

If the party is successful in removing the curse or convincing the rooster noble, Mei declares she is going to prepare for her best spectacle for the beloved Jade Hermit. Regardless of which method the party uses to convince Mei to attend the banquet, it takes **2 hours** on the **Fate Clocks** to reach a resolution.

Dragon Realm: Soup for the Dragon Soul

Read or paraphrase:

> *As you breach the threshold of the portal, you emerge through a misty valley where the mountain peaks are lost among the clouds and small forest pockets lay scattered the valley brush. A river snakes through, evenly dividing the region into two halves. There are also several hot springs and pools clustered together near the bottom of the valley. There, you find a tall multicolored-scaled humanoid with a draconic head with antler-like horns wrapped inside a large blanket with a small campfire.*
>
> *The dragon noble greets you. "Greetings, travelers. I apologize for the lack of hospitality, but unfortunately, I am ill and it's been difficult to move about my realm. Please excuse the meager state of the valley; I have not been able to tend to it."*

Fou Long [FOO long], the lawful neutral **zodiac noble (dragon)** (he/him), has been sick for several years from a strange illness. Fou Long has disadvantage on all ability checks while under the effects of the sickness. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check reveals that the spirit noble has been suffering from the Mind Fog Illness. It is a special illness that causes lethargy, occasional spouts of confusion, and nausea. To cure Fou Long, a special potion must be brewed from hard-to-find ingredients. From either a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Nature) check or asking Fou Long about the ingredients, the characters learn there are

Roleplaying Fou Long, the Dragon Guardian

Fou Long is an ancient spirit that protects dragons and dragon-related creatures within the Misty Wilds. The spirit noble is usually a confident creature, possessing an ancient majesty to him. The dragons within the valley revere Fou Long, who in turn, nurtures and cares for them. Patient and insightful, Fou Long enjoys listening to stories and tales beyond the Misty Wilds, the dragon spirit once circled the world and beyond to see many splendors and wonders.

adequate resources to brew an elixir.

Each of the ingredients can be found in a location within Fou Long's realm that also requires an ability check to acquire them. Whenever a character fails their check, the group may have random encounters from either the Misty Wilds Encounter table (see under Traversing through the Wilds) or be attacked by 2d4 young dragons of various colors. The dragons in Fou Long's realm have become feral and attack strangers to the realm.

A successful DC 18 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Medicine) check reveals that the dragons of the realm are acting as antibodies for the dragon noble, keeping potentially hostile invaders from attacking him.

If the characters work on gathering all the ingredients, **8 hours** on the **Fate Clocks** passes. A successful group DC 21 Wisdom (Medicine) check results in a medicinal broth that helps alleviate Fou Long's ailments. The dragon noble consumes the bowl and thanks the characters for their efforts.

If informed about the Jade Hermit's condition and upcoming banquet, the noble happily obliges and promises to attend.

Alternatively, the party can attempt to physically bring Fou Long to the monastery for the banquet. The effort is time-consuming, with some of the resident dragons in the valley becoming hostile to the characters for trying to abscond with their protector. With careful transport, it takes the group **4 hours** on the **Fate Clocks** to bring Fou Long back to the monastery. Though weak and sickly, Fou Long thanks the party for bringing him to the banquet to see the Jade Hermit.



Ingredient Location Table

Ingredients	Location	Ability Check
Golden Ginger Root	Underneath a steel oak tree	DC 17 Wisdom (Survival)
Copper Astragalus Root	Amber orchids at the top of a mountain	DC 17 Strength (Athletics)
Goji Bronze Berries	Berry bush hanging from a cliff face	DC 17 Dexterity (Acrobatics)
Copper Codonopsis Root	Deep inside a cave	DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation)
Crimson Dates	Grove surrounded by poisonous flowers	DC 17 Wisdom (Survival)
Black Draco Chicken	Roaming the valley	DC 17 Wisdom (Perception)
Emerald Spring Water	Water from a crystal waterfall	DC 17 Intelligence (Nature)



Rabbit Realm: Down the Rabbit Hole

Read or paraphrase:

> *As you enter past the portal, you find yourself in a large pasture full of blue-green grass with a purple sky. The moon is large and full, almost too close in some instances. A gentle breeze greets you before you see the makeshift trail appear where the grass was purposefully divided. A flock of butterflies flutter as you disturb the grass, songbirds gently sing a tune, and the weather seems impeccably comfortable. When you reach a small hill, you notice a robed figure with white fur and long ears sitting by a small burrow and staring up at the moon. His ears twitch multiple times as you approach, he turns to you with a weary smile and gives a short wave.*
>
> *When you reach the rabbit-looking figure, he weakly gestures for you to sit on a multipattern blanket where a half-opened basket reveals food and snacks.*
>
> *"Welcome friends, would you like a seat and maybe something to eat? I'm gazing at the moon today and would love the company, if you're willing." The noble says nearly out of breath.*

The chaotic good **zodiac noble (rabbit)** (he/him), Tourou [too-ROW], has been suffering from depression lately and has lost the will to leave his home plane. When the party arrives in the realm, they find Tourou staring at the moon. Tourou is aware of the Jade Hermit's failing health, news brought to him by Peydan.

Tourou and Gin, the dog spirit noble, were once close friends and were working on a project together but he believed Peydan's lies and began to doubt himself. Peydan periodically visits Tourou to reinforce his lies to keep the rabbit's spirits down.

If the party is aware or suspicious of Peydan's actions or motives, a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that the Lord of Cats is indeed spreading lies and misinformation to continue perpetuating Tourou's chronic depression.

If a character attempts to convince Tourou to come to the banquet, they must succeed on a group DC 21 Charisma (Persuasion) check at disadvantage to motivate the rabbit noble out of his realm. On a failed check, Tourou kindly asks the party to leave the realm and let him be alone.

To alleviate Tourou of his depressive symptoms, the party can search a nearby rabbit hole to find relics containing things such as photos, artwork, letters, or trinkets to represent Tourou's accomplishments and symbols of friendship. This prompts a skills challenge.

Skills Challenge

Use these guidelines for running the skills challenge:

Difficulty Class. The base DC for skill checks is set to hard difficulty (DC 20).

Objective. Find symbols of Tourou's bonds to his friends and accomplishments inside his rabbit hole home.

Making Ability Checks. On their turn, a character can make one ability check using any ability score and skill proficiency they like, as long as they can explain how this check

could reasonably help with searching a labyrinthine subterranean tunnel for trinkets or items. Each failed ability check results in damaging an important component that needs to be repaired, costing time and filling up **2 hours** on the Fate clocks.

Outcomes. Attempting to search the rabbit hole takes **4 hours** on the Fate Clocks, not including any mishaps from failed ability checks.

If the party accumulates a total number of failures equal to the number of characters in the party over the course of the skills challenge, the group may have found items but it's not enough to relieve Tourou of his emotional insecurities; it only worsens them. The nostalgia makes the rabbit gazer melancholic and forlorn. The despair and disappointments cause Tourou to feel unworthy and tells the party he can't attend the Jade Hermit's banquet.

If the party instead earns a number of successes equal to the number of players, the group gathers many different items to remind Tourou of his past accomplishments, his better qualities, and his friendships with the other spirit nobles. Each item grants a character a chance to convince Tourou to attend the banquet with a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check.



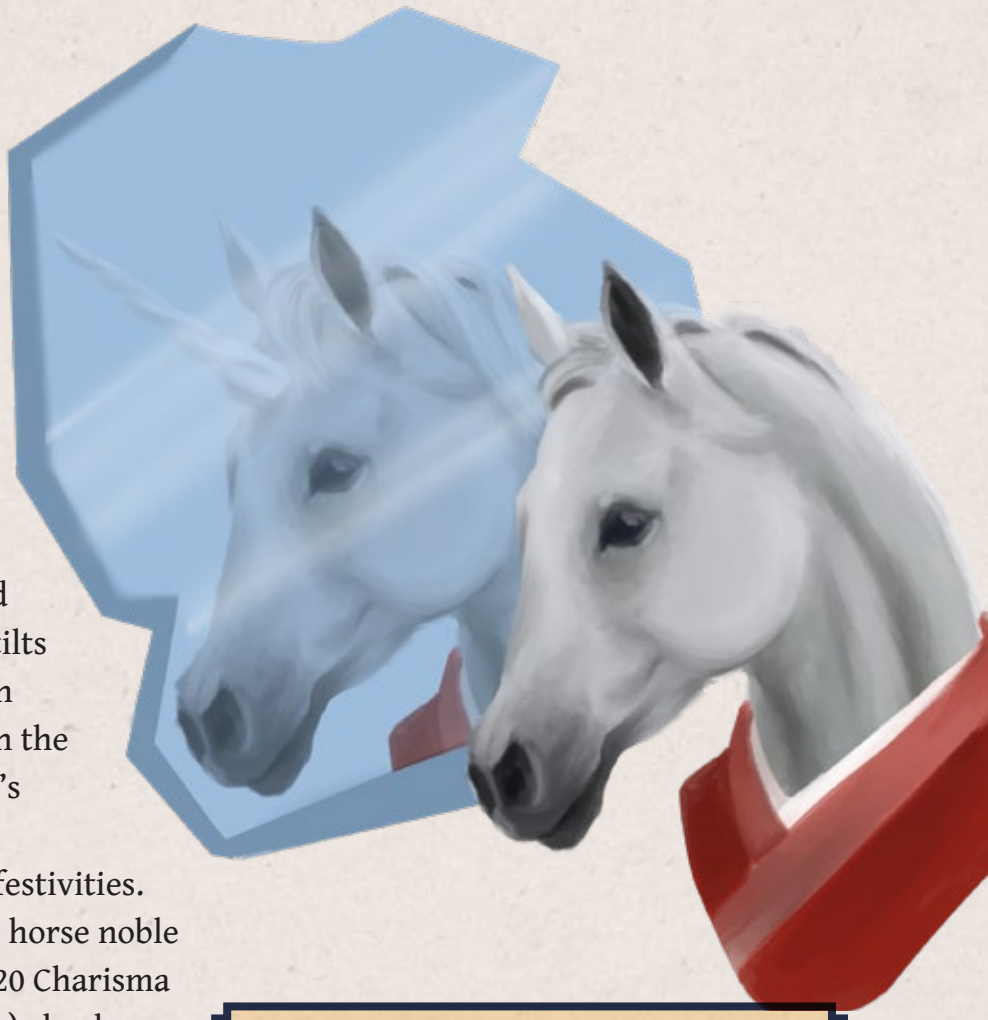
Horse Realm: Island of Majestic Mirrors

Read or paraphrase:

You arrive on the sandy beach of an island. The weather is sunny with some scattered clouds. Beyond the treetops, you notice a cluster of large crystalline structures extending from the ground. The water on the beach has an emerald hue and a haze shrouds the horizon off the coast. When you explore deeper into the forest, you can see your reflection off the crystals, each of them splitting the light into different colors. Unsurprising, you see a humanoid figure wearing a reddish robe with a horse-like head. The figure seems enamored by their reflection and when you approach, the figure turns to face you in shock, transforms into a unicorn, and flees.

Roleplaying Tourou, the Rabbit Gazer

Tourou is a dreamer at heart. He has always had ambitions and goals, but rarely has he achieved any of them. The moon was one of his greatest ambitions and had made plans with Gin, the dog spirit noble, to build a device to allow them both to reach the heavens together. But sometime during the process, Tourou began to develop doubts and ultimately, it lead to an argument with Gin and the ending of their partnership. Tourou is still regretful of his anxieties taking over and hopes to one day make amends, though he doesn't believe he is worthy of forgiveness. Tourou is under the impression that the other spirit nobles detest him and believes that he is a burden for others. As a result, he simply sits in his lonesome staring at the moon, chronically depressed.



Jie [jee-AA], the chaotic neutral **zodiac noble (horse)** (he/him), has been trapped on a remote island surrounded by acid. A creature that starts their turn in the acid takes 4d10 acid damage. The island consists of large crystals that act as mirrors and have entranced Jie for several years with the beauty of his reflection. When the party arrives, Jie is fixated with his reflection but periodically tilts his head to look at the party through their reflections in the mirror. When the characters mention the Jade Hermit's banquet, Jie informs them that he is preoccupied and cannot attend the festivities.

If the party attempts to sway the horse noble from his reflection, a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) or Charisma (Deception) check can lure him from his reflection. He moves 10 feet towards the party with each success, while alternatively moving back to his reflection with each failure. If he moves up to 30 feet or more, he stops admiring his reflection and fully addresses the party. Jie dismisses the party and ask them to leave him alone if he returns back to the mirror from failed checks. If the characters attempt to force Jie to come with them or attack the crystals, Jie becomes upset, transforms into a unicorn (retaining his statistics), and flee.

If the party decides to chase the horse noble, the characters can find Jie and track his location with a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Survival) check. If the characters fail this check, Jie casts *pass without trace* and becomes invisible, making it nearly impossible to track him. Each additional attempt to find Jie's trail or track him costs **2 hours** on the Fate Clocks.

Roleplaying Jie, the Equine Aesthete

Jie possesses a confident spirit, presented as tall and serene. He enjoys being praised and sometimes gets carried away with the compliments which cause a spike in his ego. Once Jie is stuck on a path, he often follows the course until it reaches its logical conclusion, either disastrously or successfully. Jie admires the beauty in all things and will show his appreciation to it, whether it be the arts or even the posture of a creature at rest. His admiration is almost a flaw, as Jie will often stop while in the middle of an action to pause and admire something. Jie has a particular fondness for his beauty and often becomes entranced by his reflection, which can be detrimental in some instances.

Things to consider when running this chase:

- Jie transforms into a unicorn. He can switch between forms as a bonus action.
- Jie consistently uses the Dash action to outmaneuver the party.
- Characters attempting to follow Jie must make a DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check to recognize the real Jie from a reflection while traversing through the crystal forest.
- Difficult terrain does not slow down Jie's base speed.

The characters can attempt to set a trap by luring Jie with something beautiful. Jie considers the following beautiful:

- Himself
- Any gems or jewelry worth 1,000 gp or more
- Any magic item with a rarity of very rare or above
- Anything handmade from an artisan
- A passionate performance

If Jie is restrained by the party, the characters can persuade the horse noble to make an appearance at the banquet with a successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check. On a successful check, Jie swears to be in his best form for the Jade Hermit, promising to attend. Otherwise, Jie resists and escapes by casting the *teleport* spell to appear somewhere on the island. The characters need to restart the chase to locate Jie again.

Tiger Realm: Puzzled Stripes

Read or paraphrase:

> *You arrive in a heavily woodland area. The trees are tall with canopies that block much of the sunlight above. The air is humid but cool, there is an eerie calm over the place as you step deeper. You eventually noticed a series of stone steps and follow them up until you reach a pavilion where a feline humanoid stands looking upward. Their back faces you while a striped tail moves back and forth. You can distinguish some sort of muttering from the figure, then your gaze turns upward to gaze at even more stairs ahead, stretching nearly into the clouds.*

Zhen Yao [GEN yao], the chaotic neutral **zodiac noble (tiger)** (she/her), has been preoccupied with a series of riddles and puzzles for the past few years. After solving one of them, the tiger's arrogance and boasts annoyed the other nobles, forcing many to ignore Zhen Yao since then. The last riddle has left the noble stumped, though stubbornness has prevented her from seeking aid. As a result, she has not left her realm for years, uncaring of the outside realms. If approached by the party, Zhen Yao warmly greets them and gives offerings of hospitality. The tigress is naturally inquisitive and inquires about the nature of the characters' visit to her realm. When the group mentions the Jade Hermit's passing and the final banquet, Zhen Yao expresses her desire to attend but notes that she has been preoccupied by a riddle.



Roleplaying Zhen Yao, the Inquisitive Tigress

Zhen Yao is a curious but objective individual. She loves a challenge, especially ones that tackle her mental capabilities. Zhen Yao believes her success in these mental games are an expression of her superiority and splendor. She detests being doubted by anyone, considering the act itself as a challenge to her character. Zhen Yao is objectively thorough, which grants her an unnerving capability to assess and disseminate ideas, concepts, and even intent. Her challenge-seeking behavior likely stems from her need for praise and approval.

A successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) or Charisma (Intimidation) check means Zhen Yao concedes her arrogance, just this once, and she requests aid from the party. If a character with an Intelligence score of 16 or above is present, make the ability check with advantage. On a failed check, the tigress noble becomes enraged at the party and demand their immediate departure. If the party presses the issue, they must succeed a DC 23 Charisma saving throw or be banished from the realm.

Solving the Riddle

Zhen Yao reveals the riddle and any of the following pieces of information:

- The riddle: "Journey without it and you will never prevail, but if you have too much of it you will surely fail."
- The riddle has a physical component where one must walk up the steps ahead, but there is a trick to them, for Zhen Yao has climbed the steps before but never reached the top.
- The riddle is solved once a person reaches the top to claim whatever prize awaited them.
- Zhen Yao has attempted this riddle for several years with no success.

A successful DC 18 Wisdom (Insight) check or by assessing the context of the situation deduces that the riddle's solution involves confidence. Specifically, that an excess of confidence leads to failure, hence the seemingly endless stairs. A creature needs to have just enough confidence to traverse the steps and reach the top. If Zhen Yao attempts to climb the steps, she is stuck in an infinite loop within the steps and return to the party from behind after several minutes have passed.

If a character attempts to climb the steps, a successful DC 20 Charisma saving throw made with advantage if informed of the context of the riddle allows them to reach the top of the steps and find an *amulet of the planes*. On a failed save, the character becomes cursed and has disadvantage on all saving throws and ability checks until someone reaches the top of the steps. Once the character reaches the top, they may choose to claim the item or not; in either case, the steps and pavilion fades away. Solving the riddle takes **2 hours** on the Fate Clocks.

The group and Zhen Yao find themselves on the forest floor again, a space missing where the steps once stood. Read or paraphrase the following:

> *Zhen Yao looks at you and back at the open crevice where the steps once stood. There is a glint of disappointment on her face before she breathes a sigh of relief. She grins and turns to address you, "I was too presumptuous and never looked at my surroundings. I was trapped by my own desire to prove my worthiness and when I achieved it, I adored the praises I received. I thought to achieve another miracle again, but the foolishness was my own arrogance. Thank you for showing the error of my ways. I look forward to seeing you at the banquet."*

Once the riddle is solved, Zhen Yao promises to arrive at the banquet.

Monkey Realm: The Answers of Evil

Read or paraphrase:

As you exit from the portal, you find yourself in an ancient jungle, tall trees and vines stretch endlessly in either direction. You see a stone statue of a monkey with an arm pointing toward a direction. As you follow the monkey, you find another and continue the path. The distant sounds of monkey howls inform you are getting closer to your desired destination. Eventually you find a large stone temple, part of its ceiling is broken, and vines wrapped along the corners and columns of the structure. The large stone doors require some effort to push open but you manage to give yourselves enough space to enter. A large forum of ethereal monkeys and apes sit on stone benches and ahead you see a large podium with a ape-like figure dressed in white robes at the end.

"Order! Order! The deliberations will continue once we reach a consensus," the figure shouts.

"Ah! Excellent, you must be the new defense counsel, please step forward and approach the podium."

Demao [dee-MAOW], the lawful good **zodiac noble (monkey)** (he/him) has been stumped by a moral conundrum and must pass judgment on a criminal in his realm. The filibuster has lasted for several years, causing delays and prolonged deliberations. Demao is pleased with the party's arrival as an unbiased third party to help advance the judicial process, but the trial is on Demao himself, or more specifically, an aspect of himself. The opposing side is run by another aspect of Demao.



Roleplaying Demao, the Monkey President

Demao strives to uphold a sense of honor, duty, and righteousness while being a beacon of fairness and balance. Intellectual and wise, the monkey noble prefers to have all the facts before passing any sort of judgment. Fueled by a steely resolve to uphold even his judgment that borders on stubbornness, such a decision made by Demao is never taken lightly. Demao is deeply concerned with this particular proceeding, as it's a trial on his own morality. The facet on trial believes they have committed a crime, with another aspect of the monkey noble agreeing with the statement and seeks to prove it.

The Monkeys' Court

If the party accepts Arbiter Demao's request to join the side of the Defense, there is two rounds of statements made for and against the accused. Afterward, there is a chance for cross-examination and closing statements.

The characters learn the following about the Accused Demao's charges and the nature of the crime:

- The Accused believes he has committed an act of evil and therefore deems himself evil.
- The Accused believed that just means could not defeat the evil he faced and therefore resorted to evil acts instead.
- The Litigator argues that the Accused has committed evil and must therefore be punished for their actions.
- The Arbiter must remain neutral in the proceedings, despite any literal personal attachments.
- The Accused's crimes consist of property destruction and the unintentional death of a revered creature to protect those under this rule in the realm.

The overall theme of this court case is based on a paradox of evil: If evil cannot be defeated by just means, does one stain their hands in order to defeat it? Or do they remain true to their convictions even if it means submitting to evil? Ultimately, evil remains.

The characters need to determine whether the Accused is truly guilty or innocent before they advance in giving their statements. The trial is conducted in four phases consisting of two statements, a cross examination, and closing statements. In each statement phase, a character may make a statement on behalf of the Accused. A successful DC 18 Charisma (Deception), Charisma (Persuasion), or Wisdom (Insight) check sways the Arbiter to the character's stance. During the cross examination, each character must succeed a DC 15 Charisma saving throw or have disadvantage on their next ability check during the closing statements phase.

Once closing statements are made, the Arbiter Demao announces the verdict. If the party succeeded in at least three checks during the trial, the Arbiter takes their verdict and issues out no punishments. If the party is not successful, the Arbiter takes the Ligator's verdict and carries out judgment instead.

Once the trial is completed, the Litigator and Accused Demao fade and rejoin Arbiter Demao. He asks the party to approach and thanks them for their assistance in the case. Demao should view that he has committed evil and now face his punishment. If the party informs Demao of the Jade Hermit's impending banquet, the monkey noble gives pause and weighs on the matter. A successful DC 21 Charisma ability check may convince Demao to pause on his self-punishment and attend the banquet first. Otherwise, Demao executes his punishment and the amount of time to pay penance for his actions would take centuries to complete.

Participating in the court trial uses **4 hours** on the **Fate clocks**.

Sheep Realm: Tall Grass, Dark Dreams

Read or paraphrase:

> *You find yourselves in a large meadow full of tall grass, nearly ten-feet tall and the night sky is full of stars. The moon is full and illuminates the otherwise grassy field. A soft breezes dances along the grass blades, an eerie silence has fallen in the realm where you see no trails or paths. While you wait to determine your best and optimal path to start, a sudden wave of fatigue and restlessness takes you, your eyes and limbs grow heavy as the world slowly darkens.*

Bo [BOE], the neutral **zodiac noble (sheep)** (she/her), has been asleep for years, resting in an overgrown meadow with tall grass. Bo has been stuck in a repeating dream of her daily life. When the characters first enter the plane, between fighting off sleep, nightmares manifested from the sleeping Bo stalk the tall grass as well.

Sleepy Meadow

While in Bo's realm, a wave of fatigue and exhaustion overwhelm the characters. When the party first enters the realm and for every hour, spent in it, the characters must succeed a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or fall unconscious. Creatures that normally do not require sleep are still subject to this effect. Creatures that cannot sleep instead gain one level of exhaustion on a failed saving throw. All unconscious creatures enters into Bo's dreamscape where Bo is living a peaceful life without a care in the realm. If the unconscious creature is woken up by another creature (by using an action), the awoken creature takes 3d6 psychic damage from being abruptly pulled from the noble's dreamscape.

In order to wake Bo, the characters need to find her - either physically in her realm or within her dreamscape - and make her realize she is in a dream. A character can spend one hour searching for Bo with a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Survival) or Wisdom (Perception) check. Bo is deep asleep within her realm, which requires significant traveling within her domain, requiring three successful checks to find her sleeping body. Whenever the group fails on their check to search for Bo, the group are turned around in their search efforts, adding **2 hours** to the **Fate Clocks** and encounter a manifested nightmare (**balor**). While in the dreamscape, a character



can attempt to convince Bo that she is in a dream with a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check. A character can use an action to wake up Bo once both conditions are met.

Once Bo is awake, the effects of the realm and the nightmares disappear. The sheep spirit deeply apologizes to the party for any inconveniences she brought to them. She gives the party a *mantle of spell resistance* as a show of thanks and payment for the trouble caused. When informed of the Jade Hermit's impending death and the farewell banquet, she becomes momentarily depressed before agreeing to attend.

The search for Bo and waking her takes up **4 hours** on the **Fate clocks** plus any additional hours from the party's time in the Sleepy Meadow.

Roleplaying Bo, the Woolly Grazer

Bo is tranquil and sometimes shy spirit noble, though Bo is generally good natured and desires to help others, she gets exhausted easily and as a result cannot always lend aid or assistance when asked. Bo has a considerable amount of anxiety when she is awake, which attributes a part of her exhaustion and fatigue. Bo aspires to make others content and happy but often times her attempts go astray or are unsuccessful, which only worsens her mood.

Rat Realm: Caged

Read or paraphrase:

> *You arrive in front of a large ravine with a narrow stone bridge connecting to a set of tall bronze doors on the side of a mountain. You notice motifs of rats and mice on the doors as you approach closer, taking note of the large gears that seem to operate some hidden machinery to control the passage.*

Hao [HOW], the chaotic neutral Prince of Mice and Rats **zodiac noble (rat)** (he/him), has been imprisoned in their realm by the Lord of Cats for several years. Hao's prison is sequestered behind several magical traps and guardians left behind by Peydan. When the characters arrive in Hao's realm, Peydan is present or nearby to keep an eye on the party to ensure Hao is not released from the elaborate prison.

If the party has successfully invited and secured the attendance of at least 8 or more nobles to the Jade Hermit's banquet, Peydan is actively manipulating the traps, making them to be deadlier (increase the DC to 23).

The Mousetrap Prison

Peydan designed this prison by an elaborate trap for anyone brave enough to free Hao, the rat noble. There are three major chambers each containing a puzzle, a trap, and a guardian. Once the last chamber is completed, the party find Hao in his special prison devised by Peydan.

Chamber 1

Puzzle. A large wheel (30ft circumference, over 9ft tall) rests upright in the center of the room; it requires a single creature to run inside of the wheel to lift the large adamantine door on the other side. A creature must run a cumulative total of 200 feet for the door to open.

Trap. When the door opens, the floor of the room, except for the center, surges with electricity. A creature not in the center of the room must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw **and** take 4d6 lightning damage on a failure or half on a success.

Guardians. Once someone begins running inside the wheel, 1d3 **behir** climbs from the ceilings and attacks the party.

Chamber 2

Puzzle. A large, rat-like stuffed figure stands in the center of the room. A sign hanging on it that reads: "Suffering is the path to forgiveness." The characters need to deal 150 points of damage to the figure for the door to open.

Trap. Poison gas fills the room. Each creature must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 4d8 poison damage and is *poisoned* while in the gas. On a success, a creature takes half as much damage and is not poisoned.

Guardians. A pair of **iron golem** awaken and harass the party while they're trying to solve the puzzle. Once the puzzle is solved, the doors open and the golems cease functioning.

Chamber 3

Puzzle. A large prism sits in the center of a room full of tiles with pictograms and symbols on them. If anyone inspects the symbols on the tiles, they notice the tiles represent the different twelve spirit nobles. They can deduce that the order of the animal spirits on the Zodiac Compass is the key. Further investigations reveal prism must be moved in reverse order: boar, dog, rooster, monkey, sheep, horse, snake, dragon, rabbit, tiger, ox, and rat. A character must use an action to move the prism and shine light on a tile.

Trap. Each time the prism is used, elemental energy is emitted and damages the creatures in the room. Each creature makes a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw. For each creature, roll a d6 to determine which element affects it: 1: 4d8 fire damage, 2: 4d8 acid damage, 3: 4d8 lightning damage, 4: 4d8 force damage, 5: 4d8 poison damage, or 6: 4d8 cold damage. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage.

Guardians. A powerful **pit fiend** with various feline features defends this room. It returns to its native plane when the players solve the puzzle.

Once the characters solve the puzzles, they reach a large cavern that descends into the abyss below. There is an adamantine cage where Hao is being held captive.

Roleplaying Hao, the Prince of Mice and Rats

Hao was formerly a mischievous spirit that also enjoyed coveting treasures and trinkets. He always possessed a regal aura to himself, even letting his followers call him a prince. Hao and Peydan were known tricksters and valued the other as a worthy rival. When Hao tricked and betrayed Peydan all those years ago by lying about the date and time of the banquet. When Peydan missed the festivities, the Lord of Cats never forgave Hao and the two constantly warred with one another. The years within his prison has made Hao pensive and regretful for his actions, even ashamed. He hopes to mend the wounds but fears they run too deep to be forgiven, especially after all the things done and said by the two spirit nobles.



Read or paraphrase:

You arrive past the rooms to a large cavern with a large hole that seemingly descends for miles below. High above the hole, suspended by chains, a black metallic cage rests in the center. You vaguely see the outline of a figure inside. You suspect that your quarry lies inside and work to actively retrieve it. The effort does not take you long as you find a pulley and lever to set the cage on solid ground and pry the bars open by whatever means prove prudent for you. Inside, you find a rat-like humanoid figure in tattered rags and various scars on them.

The figure is weak and delirious but manages to speak a few words. "Thank you, strangers. I hoped someone would rescue me one day."

Hao reveals to the party that Peydan, the Lord of Cats sought his revenge on him over his original trickery with the Jade Hermit's first banquet decades ago. The Prince of Mice and Rats warns the characters to not trust Peydan and to be on their guard if are still searching for the remaining nobles. Completing the elaborate traps and puzzles, along with rescuing Hao uses **8 hours** on the **Fate Clocks.**

Development

When the Fate clocks are filled or the party has met with all twelve of the spirit nobles, the banquet is upon them. Proceed to Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

Last Meal

The Jade Hermit's banquet has arrived. Days have passed since characters started the journey to invite the monk's old spirit friends for his celebration of life. The monastery is decorated with the help of the spirit nobles and filled with food and beverages. Refer to the Zodiac Decorations and Gifts Table in Appendix C for each spirit noble that agreed to attend when describing the banquet's decorations. Whether the party was successful in convincing any of the nobles to attend or not, the Jade Hermit thanks the group for their efforts. But Peydan, the Lord of Cats is determined to stop the other guests from arriving at the monastery, including the party.

The Cat is Out of the Bag

Read or paraphrase:

> *Peydan, the Lord of Cats appears before you, blocking your returning portal to the Tranquility Garden to the monastery. The cat spirit seems perturbed at you, agitated even compared to any of your previous encounters with him.*
>
> *"You have meddled in things you do not understand!" he shouts.*

Peydan gives the following demands to the party:

- The party is allowed to return if they choose to not attend the banquet and leave the monastery silently, without notifying the Jade Hermit.
- Peydan demands the party hand over the Zodiac Compass. He lies and tells the party that he knows the secret to immortality to save the Jade Hermit using the compass. He intends to break the device to prevent anyone from interfering with the affairs of the other nobles again.
- Peydan wants the party to destroy the portal in the Tranquility Garden to prevent the other nobles from returning to the monastery.
- Peydan states that failure to comply with these demands incurs his wrath against the party.

If the party agree to Peydan's demands, the Lord of Cats is relieved he did not have to resort to any drastic actions and allows the party to leave peacefully, but warns he is keeping an eye on them to ensure they close the portal to the garden on the other side. A character may use a dispel magic or dispel evil and good spell close the portal or succeed a DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check to perform a ritual

to close the portal between the Tranquility Garden and the Misty Wilds. Proceed to Conclusion A.

Alternatively, the party may attempt to deceive Peydan and lie about fulfilling their end of the deal. A successful DC 22 Charisma (Deception) check convinces Peydan to let the characters back through the garden portal so they can seal it. This buys the characters enough time to inform the Jade Hermit of Peydan's treachery and duplicity. Proceed to Conclusion B.

Depending on their roleplaying, the party may attempt to reconcile with Peydan and help the Lord of Cats move past the actions of the past. Peydan has orchestrated many of the troubles and suffering of his fellow spirit nobles, and he believes it is impossible to be forgiven for his transgressions. If the characters invite Peydan to the banquet, the cat noble is reluctant. There is a considerable amount of doubt, worry, and uncertainty for Peydan, so it requires much convincing from the party. If anyone mentions how the noble has visited the monk over the years and was remembered, they gain advantage on their next Charisma ability check. On a successful DC 22 Charisma (Persuasion) check, Peydan allows the party to pass and fades into the Misty Wilds. Proceed to Conclusion C.

Finally, the players can instead attack Peydan and he retaliates in kind in the following section.



The Thirteenth Hour

Peydan either turned hostile on the party or the party has decided to attack him while they're in the crossroads between portal to the Tranquility Garden and back to the Misty Wilds. This confrontation takes place in the most recent spirit noble's domain. If the characters successfully persuaded the noble, they aid the party against Peydan.

If a spirit noble aids the party, they can perform a special lair action on behalf of the party on initiative count 10 (losing initiative ties). Refer to the Lair Actions table in Appendix C to determine which lair action is accessible based on the spirit noble participating in this encounter. The spirit noble defends themselves against Peydan to the best of their ability by taking the Dodge action on their turns, or providing healing to the characters if possible.

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Peydan takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects; Peydan can't use the same effect two rounds in a row.

- A swarm of ethereal cats swarm at a point Peydan can see. Each hostile creature within a 15-foot radius of the point has disadvantage on their next attack roll or saving throw. These cats last until initiative count 20 in the next round.
- A 20-foot radius cloud of magical darkness envelops a point Peydan can see. A creature with darkvision can't see through this darkness, and nonmagical light can't illuminate it. Each creature inside is blinded. Peydan is unaffected by this darkness and it lasts until initiative count 20 in the next round.
- An aura of rage bellows from Peydan. Each creature within 60 feet of him must succeed a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or take 26 (4d12) psychic damage. Peydan gains temporary hit points equal to half the amount of damage rolled.

Peydan's Tactics

Peydan is outnumbered versus the party, so he employs guerrilla tactics, striking from the shadows before slipping back into the darkness and shadows while employing his lair actions. His initial tactic is to grab the Zodiac Compass from the party to trap them inside the Misty Wilds first. Failing that, Peydan resorts to eliminating the party one at a time.

Upon defeating Peydan, read or paraphrase, then proceed to Conclusion D:

As Peydan falls from his injuries, you notice the former Lord of Cats clutching a pendant with their paw. The lifeless body turns to stardust and drifts across the Misty Wilds. You hear the distant meows and cat cries across the endless expanse of the realms.

Development

The party was confronted by Peydan, the Lord of Cats. Depending on their choices, proceed to the assigned conclusions.

CHAPTER 4

The Ties That Bind

Conclusion A

Read or paraphrase:

You quietly return to the Tranquility Garden; it is night and while your journey felt long, you have reached the deadline for the Jade Hermit's farewell banquet. With a heavy heart, you seal the portal to the Misty Wilds in the garden, barring any of the other nobles from arriving to the monastery. You hear the soft meow of a cat nearby, which you suspect is one of Peydan's emissaries sent to spy on you and make sure you uphold your end of the deal. You all get yourselves ready to depart from the monastery and say your farewells to the dying monk.

If the party visit the Jade Hermit and inform him of Peydan's demands:

Tears of regret and dismay form on the weary monk; he puts the blame on himself and knows that in his dying hour, he will not see his friends ever again. He stumbles over to a chair, the heartache proves draining and the light in his eyes fades as his soul departs to the next journey ahead. The monastery grows colder and you depart past the archways and steps one last time. The place now is a tomb for a broken soul.

If the party visit the Jade Hermit and lie about their outcome:

The Jade Hermit happily receives you and listens to your tale and journey. A look of disappointment hangs on his face though; he states that life will bring them all together one day and perhaps he will meet them again in another life. There is relief in his smile and he invites you to at least stay and enjoys the meal that was prepared. A fitting final night full of revelry and memories before death greets the aged monk the next morning. The monastery is empty and cold, full of memories and lies. Lies for a dying man as flowers for his grave.

Conclusion B

Read or paraphrase:

You return to the Tranquility Garden and see the portal behind you; with your allotted window, you take the chance to find the Jade Hermit. The old monk is weary but happily receives you in the banquet hall. He asks what troubles you. When you inform him of Peydan's treachery and manipulation, a look of disappointment hangs on the monk.

"I hoped he would have forgiven them," he states.

The hermit asks for your assistance to reach the portal. When you all reach the garden, a small cat appears in front of the archway.

"You truly cannot forgive them, Peydan?" The hermit asks. The cat meows in response.

"Then you leave me no choice," the Jade Hermit proclaims and raises his left hand. "I bar you, Peydan, Lord of Cats from ever returning back to the realm of mortals. By the authority of spirits, granted and entrusted to me, you are no longer welcome."

The cat vanishes like smoke. Some of the nobles arrive through the portal, but the hermit collapses from the effort of the magic binding.

"My friends, it is alright. You arrived despite all that has happened, for that I am content. I wish we had more time to share. But the effort spent all of my remaining strength, but I am content. You are all here, I can go in peace."

The Jade Hermit passes.

Conclusion C

Read or paraphrase:

You pass through the portal and arrive back at the Tranquility Garden with Peydan in tow. When you arrive at the banquet hall, you find the other spirit nobles that were able to come, sitting and waiting. They notice the Lord of Cats and pause in their conversations. Peydan nervously bows on all fours, placing his head to the ground.

"I know I have wronged some of you and have done terrible things, but I wish to start over again. I kindly beg for your forgiveness," the cat noble pleads.

The Jade Hermit steps forward and kneels down to lift Peydan's head. There is a look of contentment, kindness, and sincerity.

"You have always been family, and this is time with your family. Welcome home, my friend. Welcome home."

Tears roll off Peydan's cheeks and whiskers before embracing the venerable monk. The other spirits breathe a sigh of relief, their eyes are full of joy and relief. The rest of the evening is met with revelry and nostalgia before the morning, where the hermit is found in his final rest with a smile on his face. Before you leave the monastery, the nobles promise to fix it and improve it, in memory of their longtime friend.

Conclusion D

Read or paraphrase:

After passing through the portal, you find yourselves back in the Tranquility Garden and can hear the distant sounds of conversation from the banquet hall. When you arrive, the Jade Hermit welcomes and sees the weary looks on your faces. When asked, you share the experiences of your journey and the fate of Peydan, the Lord of Cats. There are mixed emotions among the spirit nobles, some remorse and some anger. Despite everything you told, the Jade Hermit has a look of disappointment on his face.

"I hope Peydan finds peace in death and may he find kindness in his next," the hermit wishes aloud.

You join the nobles and the Jade Hermit for a night of silent reflection, mourning the loss of Peydan and the inevitable loss of the monk. The monk passed in the night when you attempt to wake him the next morning. The spirit nobles present swear to the characters that they will honor the memory of the Jade Hermit and restore the monastery. While some may be apprehensive about it, some agree to build a memorial for Peydan, who suffered much in life and hopefully found peace in death.

Rewards

Characters who complete this adventure may earn the following rewards:

XP Rewards

Add the total XP of the creatures defeated by the party, then divide by the number of characters to determine individual rewards.

Encounter	XP
Elemental (Air, earth, fire, or water)	1,800
Rakshasa	10,000
Oni	2,900
Cloaker	3,900
Storm Giant	10,000
Cloud Giant	5,000
Medusa	2,300
Stone Golem	5,900
Ice Devil	11,500
Dragon Turtle	18,000
Bone *Devil*	5,000
Minotaur Skeleton	450

Encounter	XP
Skeleton	50
Warhorse Skeleton	100
Werebear	1,800
Treant	5,000
Purple Worm	13,000
Mummy Lord	13,000
Balor	22,000
Behir	7,200
Iron Golem	15,000
Pit Fiend	25,000
Zodiac Noble Quest	5,000 each
Peydan, Lord of Cats	50,000

Magic Item Rewards

Characters have an opportunity to earn the following items from encounters or completing tasks.

Item	Rarity
Elemental gem	Uncommon
Nine Lives Stealer	Very Rare
Rod of Lordly Might	Legendary
Luckstone	Uncommon
Mantle of Spell Resistance	Very Rare
Amulet of the Planes	Very Rare
Zodiac Compass	Artifact

Author's Notes/Acknowledgments

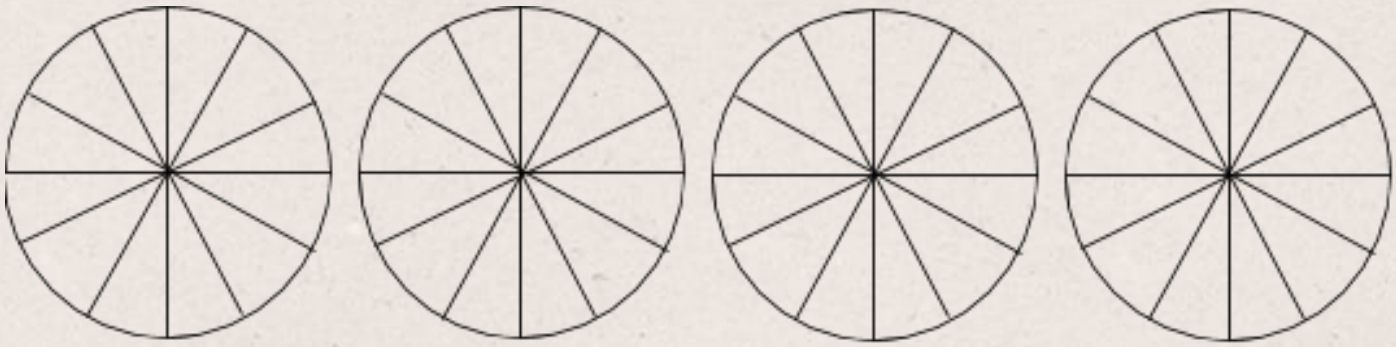
This adventure was written and dedicated to my late great-grandmother. She was a wonderful caretaker and lived a vibrant, full life. She will always be missed. Inspired by the story of the twelve animals of the zodiac, including additional media such as Fruits Basket and Journey to the West, this is a story of forgiveness, redemption, and accepting the death of a loved one. This adventure was also inspired by my great-grandfather, who held a banquet with his friends and family several days prior to his death, making the trip to see them despite his failing health. To quote Gandalf the White, "End? No, the journey doesn't end here. Death is just another path, one that we all must take." Death of a loved one can be especially difficult trauma for many; when running this adventure, please take extra care with the players.

Author Bio

Jacky Leung is a best-selling freelance RPG writer and designer who has contributed to numerous publications, including the Uncaged Anthology, Artifacts of the Guild, and more on the DMsGuild. You can find his indie RPG projects at deathbymage.itch.io. Additionally, Jacky has editorial credentials for several publications on DriveThruRPG, including Godkillers and Power Outage. Jacky also writes articles about D&D and other RPGs on his blog at deathbymage.com.

APPENDIX A - FATE CLOCKS

The characters in this adventure are in a race against time to gather the spirit nobles for the Jade Hermit's final banquet. Each segment presented in this diagram below represents 2 hours of in-game time passed. It's recommended that these clocks are kept within easy reference to the players so they can make informed choices and decisions.



Day 1 Day 2 Day 3 Day 4

APPENDIX B - MAGIC ITEMS

Zodiac Compass

Wondrous Item, artifact (requires attunement)

A dodecagon compass that features twelve animals on it. The top of the lectern can be removed with the arrow intact to serve as a board. They are a rat, an ox, a tiger, a rabbit, a dragon, a snake, a horse, a sheep, a monkey, a rooster, a dog, and a boar. When attuning to the compass, it takes up to **1 hour** on the **Fate Clocks.** While attuned and carrying the compass, you can spend an action to turn the metallic arrow to the desired animal, and speak the command word. A magical portal connecting that respective animal's realm within the Misty Wilds opens within 15 feet of the user and allow up to six creatures to pass through before closing. After using it to open a portal, it cannot be used again until after completing a short rest.

Zodiac Noble

Medium fey, varies

Armor Class 20 (natural armor)
Hit Points 255 (30d8 + 120)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	22 (+6)	22 (+6)	23 (+6)

Saving Throws Dexterity +11, Charisma +12
Skills Arcana +12, Nature +12, Perception +12, **Persuasion** +12, Survival +12
Damage Immunities fire
Damage Resistances Bludgeoning, Piercing, and **Slashing** from Nonmagical Attacks
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, paralyzed, petrified, prone, stunned
Senses Darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 22
Languages Common, Druidic, Sylvan, plus three more
Challenge 23 (50,000 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. The zodiac noble's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 20, +12 to hit spell attacks). The zodiac noble can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At-will: *animal messenger, detect magic, speak with animals*
3/day each: *bestow curse, conjure animals, feather fall, misty step*
1/day each: *control weather, planeshift*

Legendary Resistance (3/day). If a zodiac noble fails a saving throw, they can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. A zodiac noble has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. A zodiac noble's weapon attacks are magical.

Speak with Beasts and Plants. The zodiac noble can communicate with beasts and plants as if they shared a language.

Turn Resistance. The zodiac noble has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns fey.

Spellcasting. A zodiac noble is an 18th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 20, +12 to hit with spell attacks). The zodiac noble has the following druid spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *druidcraft, guidance, mending, produce flame*
1st-level (4 slots): *chromatic orb, healing word, faerie fire, thunderwave*
2nd-level (3 slots): *gust of wind, lesser restoration, pass without trace*
3rd-level (3 slots): *call lightning, protection from energy, wind wall*
4th-level (3 slots): *blight, ice storm, stoneskin, wall of fire*
5th-level (3 slots): *cone of cold, mass cure wounds, tree stride*
6th-level (1 slot): *heal, sunbeam*
7th-level (1 slot): *firestorm, reverse gravity*
8th-level (1 slot): *sunburst*
9th-level (1 slot): *foresight*

Actions

Multiattack. The zodiac noble makes two slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8+5) bludgeoning damage plus 26 (4d8) force damage.

Bolt. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +15 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 24 (7d6) damage of one of the following types (noble's choice): acid, cold, fire, force, lightning, radiant, or thunder.

Legendary Actions

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

Attack. The zodiac noble makes one attack.

Teleport. The zodiac noble magically teleports, along with any equipment it is wearing or carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space it can see.

Noble's Decree (Cost 2 Actions). The zodiac noble expends a spell slot to cast *dispel magic*.

Zodiac Convergence (Costs 3 Actions). The zodiac noble regains a spell-slot of 3rd-level or lower.

Zodiac Prestige

A zodiac noble represents one of the many animals featured on the Zodiac and acts as an emissary for the kin. Depending on which zodiac they are aligned, they gain special benefits and features:

Rat. **Damage Immunity** poison; **Skills** Acrobatics +11, Sleight of Hand +11, Stealth +11; **Senses** Blindsense 30 ft.; Use a bonus action to take the Hide action.

Ox. **Saving Throws** Strength +11, Wisdom +12; **Size** Large; Advantage on Strength saving throws & ability checks.

Tiger. **Speed** 40 ft., Climb 40 ft.; **Skills** Acrobatics +11, Intimidation +12, Stealth +11; **Condition Immunity** frightened

Rabbit. **Saving Throw** Intelligence +12; **Speed** 40 ft., Burrow 40 ft.; **Senses** Tremorsense 60 ft.; **Condition Immunity** grappled, restrained

Dragon. **Damage Resistances** acid, cold, lightning, poison; **Saving Throws** Intelligence +12, Wisdom +12; **Skills** Animal Handling +12, Insight +12; **Speed** Fly 60 ft.; **Senses** Blindsense 60 ft.

Snake. **Damage Immunity** poison; **Skills** Medicine +12, Stealth +11; **Speed** 40 ft., Burrow 40 ft.; **Spellcasting** Charisma spellcasting ability, 18 Sorcery Points, Metamagic: Subtle, Quicken, Heightened, Twinned

Horse. **Saving Throws** Constitution +11; **Skills** Athletics +11, Acrobatics +11; **Speed** 60 ft.

Sheep. **Saving Throw** Wisdom +12; **Skills** Insight +12, Medicine +12; Cannot be affected by magical sleep effects.

Monkey. **Saving Throw** Intelligence +12; **Skills** Insight +12, Investigation +12; **Speed** Climb 30 ft.

Rooster. **Saving Throw** Wisdom +12; **Skills** Acrobatics +11, Performance +12; **Condition Immunity** frightened

Dog. **Saving Throw** Wisdom +12; **Skills** Investigation +12, Stealth +11; Advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

Boar. **Saving Throw** Constitution +12; **Size** Large; **Skills** Investigation +12, Medicine +12; **Speed** 40 ft., Burrow 40 ft.; Knows if it hears a lie.

Cat. **Saving Throw** Intelligence +12, Wisdom +12; **Skills** Acrobatics +11, Athletics +11, Intimidation +12, Stealth +11; Advantage on Dexterity saving throws and ability checks and can innately cast invisibility at will.

APPENDIX D - TABLES

Peydan Lies Table

Peydan sows misinformation to the party and the other spirit nobles. As more spirit nobles agree to attend the Jade Hermit's banquet, the angrier and more malicious the Lord of Cats' lies become.

Noble (Realm)	Peydan Curious (0-3 nobles attend)	Peydan Annoyed (4-8 nobles attend)	Peydan Malicious (9-12 nobles attend)
Bailei	Bailei is told that Xiaohui will return soon and not abandon her.	Bailei is told that Xiaohui has a lover and is much happier alone.	Bailei is told that her current fate is a result of her past mistakes.
Chengfu	Chengfu is told that the golden truffle is near a riverbank.	Chengfu is told if he finds the golden truffle, a special dish will be made for him.	Chengfu is teased of the delectable dishes made with the truffle.
Gin	Gin is told that Tourou held her back from achieving her dreams.	Gin is told that Tourou planned on stealing her designs for the rocket.	Gin is told that Tourou was never their friend and lied during their partnership.
Po	Po is told that he is often airheaded and the other nobles thought so too.	Po is told that none of the other nobles can tolerate his stubbornness.	Po is told that the other nobles mock him when he is not around.
Mei	Mei is told that rubbing ash on her feathers would help remove the curse.	Mei is told that the curse's effects are minimal and that she still looks beautiful.	Mei is told that someone cursed her due to their envy of her grace and beauty.
Fou Long	Fou Long is told that yew bark would help calm his illness. It did not.	Fou Long is told that he basked in the stars, the illness would calm down.	Fou Long is told that he contracted the illness during his last adventure.
Tourou	Tourou is told he held Gin back on completing the rocket.	Tourou is told that he foolishly dreams with no plans to achieve them.	Tourou is told that he is useless and will never amount to anything.
Jie	Jie is told that the other nobles are jealous of his beauty.	Jie is told that he has a blemish on his pristine coat.	Jie is told that no other being compares to his natural beauty.
Zhen Yao	Zhen Yao is told that her intellect places her above the other nobles.	Zhen Yao is told of a reward awaits her upon completion of the puzzle.	Zhen Yao is told that the secret to enlightenment is the reward for the puzzle.
Demao	Peydan informs the party that not everything is what it seems.	Peydan informs the party that the proceedings could take years to resolve.	Peydan tells the party that they could be implicated in the trial and be judged.
Bo	Peydan informs the party to be watchful for movement within the tall grass.	Peydan tells the characters that falling asleep too long in this realm will trap them forever.	Peydan tells the party that falling asleep in this realm can lead to a permanent death-like sleep.
Hao	Peydan tells the party that a sinister creature resides within the mountain.	Peydan tells the party a terrible monster is imprisoned within the mountain.	Peydan tells the party a great evil is imprisoned in the mountain and must not be released.

Lair Actions

When confronting Peydan, the last Zodiac Noble may come to the party's aid. If so, the noble provides a special Lair Action that activates on initiative count 10 (losing on all ties).

Zodiac Noble	Lair Action
Bailei	Bailei makes a ranged spell attack. On a hit, the target takes 6d12 necrotic damage, and a creature within 30 feet heals hit points equal to half the necrotic damage dealt.
Chengfu	Friendly creatures within 60 feet of Chengfu gain the benefits of the see *invisibility* spell and can make a Wisdom (Perception) check as a bonus action.
Gin	Gin creates mechanical marvels that empower weapon attacks. Until the start of the next turn, when a friendly creature within 60 feet of Gin hits with a weapon attack roll, they deal an additional 2d6 force damage.
Po	Friendly creatures within 60 feet of Po gains advantage on Strength saving throws and the Reckless Attack feature until the start of the next turn.
Mei	Until the start of the next turn, friendly creatures within 60 feet of Mei gain resistance to fire damage and whenever a creature is hit by an melee attack, the attacker takes 2d6 fire damage.
Fou Long	Fou Long conjures the visage of an ethereal dragon. Friendly creatures within 60 feet of Fou Long become immune to poison and have advantage on saving throws against being blinded, charmed, frightened, petrified, and poisoned until the start of the next turn.
Tourou	Friendly creatures within 60 feet of Tourou gains advantage on Dexterity saving throws and gains the Uncanny Dodge feature until the start of the next turn.
Jie	Jie casts the haste spell on a friendly creature and the target has advantage on Charisma saving throws until the start of the next turn.
Zhen Yao	Zhen Yao reinforces the mind of one creature within 30 feet of her. Until the start of the next turn, the target is immune to psychic damage, any effect that would sense its emotions or read its thoughts, divination spells, and the charmed condition.
Demao	Demao begins talking incredibly fast about a topic. He casts confusion on the target, making an Intelligence saving throw against the effect instead.
Bo	Bo conjures nightmares to attack a creature. The target must succeed a DC 21 Wisdom saving throw or have disadvantage on attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws until the start of the next turn.
Hao	Hao conjures a cage made of an invisible force around a creature. The target must succeed a DC 21 Charisma saving throw or be trapped. A trapped creature can't leave by nonmagical means. If a creature tries to use teleportation or interplanar travel to escape, it must succeed another Charisma saving throw or waste the action

Zodiac Decorations & Gifts Table

Zodiac Noble	Decoration	Food/Gift
Bailei	White flowers in green jade vases with snake images adorn the monastery halls.	*A platter of dried fruits, vegetables, and dried spices. Some of them are bitter or sweet.*
Chengfu	Red paper lanterns draped along the monastery halls, each with an image of a pig running on them.	*A whole roasted suckling pig. The skin is perfectly crispy and fatty. If asked if Chengfu has any issues eating pigs, he shrugs his shoulders.*
Gin	Various firecrackers rest near the entrance to the banquet hall, ready to be lit during the festivities.	*Several pieces of rock from the moon. They have a silvery glow and glisten in the light.*
Po	Wheelbarrow filled with dirt and brightly colored flowers.	*Ginseng tea. It tastes awful.*
Mei	A large bouquet with red feathers and flowers in a rooster-shaped gold container sits in the center of the banquet table.	*Ivory hair combs, each decorated with flowers and birds made out of pearl.*
Fou Long	A wind-cone flag decorated like a blue dragon, which is plotted in a small dirt mound just outside of the banquet hall.	*A medicinal stew packed with vegetables and herbs in a clay pot. The eater feels invigorated after consuming this hearty stew.*
Tourou	Blue silk napkins with a small white rabbit pattern rests on each plate on the banquet table.	*A picture album filled with paintings of previous banquets, depicting the other nobles and the Jade Hermit together. The blank pages actively paint themselves as the festivities commence.*
Jie	A floating golden pitcher with a horse at the spout. The horse seems to almost erupt from the pitcher while in mid-gallop.	*Magical mirrors. Mortals who peer into them see possibilities of who they could have been: different professions, happier, sadder, etc. The nobles and the Jade Hermit look the same.*
Zhen Yao	Geometric gold plates are placed for each guest with a small porcelain tiger holding all of the eating utensils in its mouth.	*A wooden puzzle box that when completed, reveals a silver ball in the center. There is a pyrographic image of a tiger in a bamboo forest on one side.*
Demao	Three fruit trees on brass monkey-shaped pedestals. Each of the monkeys are either covering its eyes, its mouth, or its ears.	*Large decorative scrolls, each with a single character brushed on with meticulous care. They say things such as "Justice", "Truth", and "Virtue".*
Bo	Soft, downy pillows embroidered with gold depictions of rams and sheep frolicking.	*A large wool blanket with patches depicting a sleeping sheep in different poses.*
Hao	A special dumbwaiter depicting the first twelve zodiac nobles featured together with the word "Unity" painted in the center.	*Platters full of different types of cheeses, fruits, and crackers. Some of them are quite smelly, but Hao remarks at their delectable aroma.*

Artist Bios

Anthony Alipio is not an artist. Well, except for that one harpy for Uncaged Anthology Volume 3. Oh, and that Krampus for 12 Days of Midwinter. He supposes the sphinxes in Uncaged Anthology Volume 4 might count as well. Not to mention the hulking crystal construct in this book. So at some point, Anthony may have to accept the fact that people who do art are generally considered artists. But until then, Anthony is a writer—who occasionally does art.

For news on his latest creative projects you can follow him on Twitter @dm_fromscratch, find more of his work at https://linktr.ee/dm_fromscratch and support his work via https://ko-fi.com/insomna.

Art featured on pages 107, 125, 172.

Caroline Amaba is a Filipino-American creative—artist, writer, game designer—and general internet denizen. She lives her day as a software engineer, and goes into the night playing, talking, and [wanting to] make & play more games. This is Caroline's second major TTRPG publication as Layout Designer (and spot artist), her first being *Cursed Hearts* in the Unbreakable Anthology, Volume 4. When not doing any of the above, she's climbing, flying-trapeze-ing, cooking, or foodie-ing.

Follow her on Twitter/Instagram @clineamb, and more of her work at carolineamaba.com

Art featured on pages 110, 114-117 (maps), 136, 150, 159, 161, 164, 180, 188-9, 191, 205.

Alison Huang is an Australian-based artist who loves to use her skills to bring more diversity and representation into the world. When she's not making illustrations, she's writing, and participating in too many game jams. She can be found on Twitter at @Drazillion.

Art featured on pages 16, 64, 95, 141.

Kari Kawachi is a freelance illustrator who currently lives around Seattle, Washington. Originally hailing from Honolulu, Hawaii, she has been obsessed with art, storytelling, and role-playing for as long as she's been alive. She enjoys painting characters, scenery, and just about anything that sparks the imagination. She has previously worked on other 5E anthology supplements such as Friends, Foes, And Other Fine Folks, Book of Seasons: Solstice, and the lightweight TTRPG Witchpunks.

She can be found on twitter under the handle @yutrio.

Art featured on 34, 39, 40, 183.

Xrystina Marcos is an artist from the Philippines, specializing in dark and creepy pieces. She also designs and plays tabletop role playing games as a hobby.

Art featured on 132, 134, 139.

Joshua Mendenhall is a freelancer who thinks he can trade sleep for work and is slowly proving himself wrong. He is the Co-Director and Lead Designer for the Islands of Sina Una. D&D has been major a part of his life since he was three, so it makes sense that its now become his career.

Art featured on cover.

Tiona Mouton is a freelancing artist who spends most of her time drawing characters and creating stories for them. Recently, she has taken up projects in voice acting and even teaching herself animation through Toon Boom. When she is not working on art, she is enjoying the nerdy things in life, like anime, television, and videogames.

To follow along with what she is doing, you can support her through the links below.
https://twitter.com/michebluedragon
http://instagram.com/michebluedragon
Merch: http://michebluedragon.redbubble.com

Art featured on pages 169, 175.

Jennifer Peig is a freelance illustrator and artist who specialises in fantasy, folklore, and mythology. She resides in Chicago with her ever-exuberant gremlin of a pup. You can often find her scribbling furiously and consuming copious amounts of pastries under piles of blankets.

https://jenniferpeig.com/
https://twitter.com/jennpeig
https://instagram.com/jennpeig

Art featured on pages 11, 70.

Nichole Wilkinson (known as Dendral @tcfdendral on Twitter) is a Thai American illustrator and 3D modeler with a passion for characters and creatures. She's based in Southern California and spends her time eating too much noodle soup. She will one day open a gluten-free Asian pastries bakery. Until then, she'll be drawing.

Art featured on pages 206, 209, 211, 213, 216, 219, 221, 224-25, 227, 229, 231, 234.

Kathryne Wilson (can be found @othermoons_art on Twitter) is a second-year college student working towards her Bachelor's degree in English and an artist who specializes in fantasy, character design, and digital. She's based in Southern California and spends too much time drawing. She hopes to combine both passions of writing and drawing and write books with illustrations.

Art featured on page 59.

Reshma Zachariah is an Indian-American artist and game developer based in California. She specializes in character art and loves experimenting with bright colors and dramatic poses. You can find previews of her work on her instagram, @reshmaszart or on Twitter (@reshmaszart).

Art featured on page 144.

Editors & More

Editors

Jazz Eisinger is a cis demisexual woman writer, game designer, editor, and actual-play podcaster. She is the creator of a local Indiana monthyl meetup group, ABCRPG (Always Be Creating RolePlaying Games). Jazz currently lives with her spouse in Indianapolis, Indiana, and can usually be found at Gen Con in the seminar and panel spaces. You can read more of her musings and find links to her current projects on Twitter at @orangelikejazz.

Lynne M. Meyer is a Bisexual interfaith and diversity educator and activist, holds a Master of Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School, and a Master of Jewish Studies from Spertus Institute. An advocate for inclusive gaming, Lynne brings her professional background to her work as a game designer. Named a 2019 New Voices in Gaming scholar, she is best known as a writer and editor for the acclaimed Uncaged anthology, a collection of myth- and folklore-themed adventures written for Dungeons & Dragons 5th Edition. Lynne is chronic illness warrior, devotee of Hekate, and lover of cats and good coffee. Connect with Lynne on Twitter at @Lynne_M_Meyer.

Echo Roanoke is a writer, editor, gamemaster, and game creator from Indiana. She holds an MA in Literary Studies with a Creative Writing Emphasis from Eastern Illinois University. You can follow her on Twitter at @echoroanoke.

Camielle "Cami" Adams is an assistant editor for Ottercorrect Literature Services and contributing editor to a couple of anthologies under their press. A Political Science honors graduate of Tuskegee University and an upcoming graduate student at the University of Calgary, she spends her time writing and working her way through her enormous book pile. That is when she's not playing *Dungeons & Dragons* as a wayward Dragonborn. Please find her and talk about all things Sailor Moon, werewolves, and Pokémon at @SwirlyTales.

Special Thanks to...

Ashley Warren - Ashley Warren launched the ambitious project of the *Uncaged Anthology* in late 2018 and saw the first volume's release by early 2019. Later that year, it would be nominated for an ENnie award. Her leadership and direction of the project inspired and offered opportunities for many up and coming tabletop RPG writers and artists. This movement would spawn nearly a dozen spin-off anthologies and collaborative endeavors, including *Unbreakable*. We want to give special thanks to Ashley, the head medusa who inspired a vibrant and determined generation of creators dedicated to telling new and diverse stories.

Seersword Dice - *"Violet Incantation" dice set pictured in photo on page 174.*
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