

THE THREE PRINCES OF MESIA

BLOOD IS THICKER THAN WATER

ANDERS SANDBERG

**Fate is a dog walking always behind a man.
Fate is a raging storm blowing over the Land.**



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ON THE COVER

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Credits	1	Valley of the Birds	27
Table of Contents.....	2	The vicinity in the foothills	27
Introduction.....	4	The Castle of the Mother	27
The basic plot	4	The true story: Giidguurmuian	27
Theme and elements	4	Travel	28
Antagonists.....	4	The Outer valley	29
The Mesian court: one happy family	6	Low stymphaloi	29
King Churii Agélastos	6	Griffons	29
Demetrios Monophthalmos	6	Valley of the Birds.....	30
Vasilis	7	Environment	30
Philomena, Queen of Vindiga	7	The High Stymphaloi.....	31
Cyril of Melathia, king of Calbium	7	High Stymphaloi	31
Aunt Praxilla, Queen of Celreia	8	The Roc	32
The Three Brothers.....	8	The Ruins.....	32
Hippias	8	The Keeps	32
Priamos	8	Monsters of the keeps.....	33
Augustinos	8	Traps	34
Household members and Friends.....	8	Treasures	34
Dio Chrysostom.....	8	Yumimtu level 1	35
Terillos	9	Yumimtu level 2	37
Temos	9	Yumimtu level 3.....	38
Cleisthenes of Lamasta	9	Yumimtu level 4	40
Kleitos Myron	10	Roof: the Phoenix Egg.....	41
Eutychides Atheradoi.....	10	Yuzh level 1	43
Desmos Elephteria.....	10	Yuzh level 2.....	46
The Games.....	11	Yuzh level 3.....	47
Opening part: family reunion	11	Yuzh level 4	48
Canoria	11	Kaah the Sphinx	49
Arriving at the court.....	11	Riddles.....	49
Meeting family at the feast.....	12	Prophecies	50
Arrival of the messenger	12	Comments on different things	51
The Aegetoria.....	12	Advice	51
Middle part: honouring the goddess.....	13	Roc versus Phoenix	51
Build games really fast	13	Aftermath	52
Arrival of the goddess	13	Handling the Rod	52
The games	13	A nightmare vision	52
End: The prophecy	13	Back to civilization: love and marriage.....	53
It is time to leave.....	14	A wedding invitation you can't refuse	53
Pitanatis	14	The trip home.....	53
Repairing prophecies.....	14	Arrival at Canoria.....	53
Adventures in the outback	15	News.....	53
On the road.....	15	Marriage complications	54
Random events.....	15	A Modest Proposal	54
Hunting the Harpies	16	Eutara of Calbium	54
Scene 1: Going east	16	Queen Elpinice	55
Scene 2: Tegylos.....	16	Sailing the seas of love	56
Scene 3: showdown in the forest.....	16	Basic Plot	56
Aftermath	17	Antagonists	56
The bandits	17	Kallixena, "The Beautiful Stranger"	56
Treasure	17	Ship needs.....	56
Tavros	18	Crew	57
Vicinity	18	Soldiers.....	58
Lions.....	19	Passengers.....	58
The Satyr's Grove	20	Nautical Rules.....	59
A Fertile Farmstead	20	weather.....	59
Meet Myrsinos.....	21	Sailing and Rowing	59
Myrsinos the Druid.....	22	Crew loyalty.....	60
A Small Religious War.....	22	Encounters	60
Trógon the Eater of Secrets.....	24	Opening events.....	64
Into the underworld.....	25	Departure	64
Getting judged	25	First week.....	64
The horrible witch of bone chasm	25	The Storm.....	64
Clues to the Valley of the Birds.....	26	Falling overboard	65
		Aftermath	65
		Further troubles	65
		The Archipelago: the Monster Islands.....	66
		Termerus: Mimic Island	66
		Lagoon.....	66

The island	67	Events during the skip	108
Isakis: the village	67	Lost Princes!	108
Abantes: the inhabitant	67	War!	108
Doppelgangers as crew	67	Death!	108
Omphalia: Island of the Minotaurs	69	Is the King Sick?	109
Omphalia overview	69	Foreign Influence!	109
The labyrinth of minotaurs	69	Barbarians!	109
Omphalia's secrets	73	Cute Kids in the Royal Family!	109
Objects	75	The Twins: Kallistratos and Nikanor	110
Aftermath	75	Eurypolos	110
Tekhelet: Island of the Lamia Queen	76	Elaphos: dark Messaros	111
Inhabitants	76	Phoebus	111
Arrival	76	Ephiphron	111
The purple-lined palace of sin	77	Agesistrata of Acamantis	111
Fight	81	Trogon the Mystikos	112
Happiness in slavery	81	Personae dramatis	112
Warm welcome at Thermodon	83	Back from the dead	114
Arrival	83	Homecoming	114
The bubbling oracle	83	Arriving at the court	114
Phykios	84	Family Reunion	114
Other marvels	84	The Funeral	115
Homeward?	85	The first day	115
The temple of Zêrunthia	86	The second day	116
Dymesos	86	The third day	116
Harbour	86	a dinner to remember	116
The palace	86	The Mesian Civil War	117
City of a Myriad Surprises	87	The Eve of the War	117
Events	87	Slave rebellion	117
Places in the city	89	Unexpected allies	118
People	90	Defending the north with fire	118
The Temple	91	The Death of Messaros and Birth of Tragedy	118
Description	91	Monophthalmos' reaction	119
Entering	91	Plans always fail, planning is essential	119
Services	92	Calbium	120
Other places on the island	92	Description	120
Priests	94	People and politics	120
Guards	94	The court case	121
The Goddess	94	The Hydra	123
The Audience	95	Final showdown	125
Raiders of the Ark of Aex	97	Drive like Jehu	125
One Last Job	97	The fall of Vindiga	126
Interruption	97	Preparing for the showdown	126
Later	98	High Noon on the City Wall	127
The Scroll	98	Enter, Stage Right	127
Finding a Hēliokántharos	98	The Shot that Was Heard Around the World	127
Pirates!	99	Why stop?	127
The Grey Ship	99	Variations	128
The battle	99	Home, sweet home?	130
Captain Dicaearchus Phaiós ("The grey")	99	The Warriors' Island	130
Behemoth Island	101	The Underworld	130
Getting the beetle	101	Side quest: the Bow of the Winds	131
The Ark of Aex	102	The Electrum scroll	131
Outside	102	The unfinished temple	132
Interior	102	The Angry Chimera	133
Central chamber	102	The safekeeping space	134
The storerooms	103	Attunement to the Bow	134
"I Charm": The Necklace of Harmonia	104	Afterword	136
"I Fight": A jar containing a sealed dragon	104	Tropes are your friend	136
"I Create": A box containing the clay used to create humanity	104	Next time	136
"I Transform": The ekpyrotic fire	104	Care and Feeding of a Narrative	136
"I Nourish": The Cornucopia	105		
"I Protect": The Aegis	106		
Waking up	107		
Anaireus and the Aegis	107		
Meeting Aex	107		
The timeskip	108		

INTRODUCTION

*I have found power in the mysteries of thought,
exaltation in the changing of the Muses;
I have been versed in the reasonings of men;
but Fate is stronger than anything I have known.*

–Euripides, *Alcestis* l. 962

This is to some extent a record of a campaign as it happened, straightened out into a coherent narrative rather than a pre-planned epic. Still, it can serve as a useful scaffold for a DM to build their own version.

THE BASIC PLOT

The PCs are the youngest sons of the King of Mesia, and the campaign follows their growth from naïve youths to great heroes who save or devastate the kingdom. At the beginning one of them becomes subject to a prophecy that he will (apparently) inherit the kingdom at some point, necessitating adventuring far away from dangerous older siblings at the court.

The first third of the campaign is an open setting: the princes roam around adventuring, gradually proving themselves and finding the mysteries of the Valley of the Birds. This is intended to cover the Tier 1 play from levels 1–4.

The middle third of the campaign starts with the news that one of them must marry for political reasons. Hurrying back to the capital they find that they are too late: due to the Year of the Gods the marriage is impossible... unless they travel in person to the goddess of love to ask her for permission. However, their journey gets side-tracked by divine intervention into an odyssey amidst an archipelago of monster-infested islands. This is where they get to become heroes.

The final third of the campaign involves the plots of the gods and their family. Several gods are trying to play them as pawns in order to cause or prevent changes in the world. Meanwhile their elder siblings are clashing, leading to war in their home country: can they return, save what should be saved, and ensure that the right person becomes king as prophesied?

THEME AND ELEMENTS

If there is an overarching theme or moral of the campaign, it is that fate is unpredictable – even when there is a prophecy involved, or perhaps especially when prophecies are involved.

The other main theme is that family matters enormously: handling the actions of your siblings well is hard, your duties to your family may force you to go against your better judgement... yet without family you are nothing.

Not all civic gods are nice; nor are the dark gods necessarily antagonistic. There are monsters that are more upstanding than many humans and good deeds that cause tragic disasters. Fate may be more flexible than human desires. Journeying through all this might lead to wisdom or cynicism, but it is hardly boring.

ANTAGONISTS



What strange creatures brothers are!

Jane Austen

There are no true overarching enemies in this campaign as it is designed but hopefully the PCs will make a few good ones. Or more likely, be their own worst enemies.

At the top level is the subtle plot by Echtria to make the year of the gods turn towards her wife. Pitanatis is unaware of this (or maybe pretends not to notice). Other gods are more astute, and while they may not know who is behind this fate, they can see how the prophecy undermines things. This makes some of the civic gods uneasy about letting the PCs fulfil the prophecy, although their responses differ: Koruphasia wisely stays out of the mess, Zêrunthia tries to block the prophecy, Rharias and Agêtôr content themselves with sending tough trials. These machinations mostly matter in the latter half of the campaign. The more plotting dark gods Anaireus and Aïdôneus are discreetly meddling, but do not have as much at stake as the civic gods.

Suidas the Traitor is a potential powerful antagonist or plot driver. Residing in nearby Avon he would dearly like to get rid of or usurp Laossoos. At the start he is uninvolved, but as Monopthalmos starts to grow powerful and favoured by Laossoos he will involve himself. In the later third of the campaign, he may be manipulating events behind the scenes to cause chaos while remotely manoeuvring his pawns into a situation where he could strike against his father. He is not so much an enemy or rival as somebody playing the PCs... something they tend to hate when they find out.

More locally the older siblings are potential rivals or enemies of the PCs, mostly by trying to deny them a chance to rule the kingdom. They should not be underestimated. Even if they are not treated as enemies, they may make a great team of rivals.

If a more explicit antagonist is desired, a possible option is to make one of the gods like Agêtôr opposed from the start. However, the god is not going to be intervening directly but rather start empowering

someone to become the next king (like Samarion of Vindiga). That person would become the opponent of the PCs. While Agêtôr is unlikely to support very underhanded methods, his champion may be ruthless if lawful – and have even more ruthless underlings.

CAMPAIGN EVENTS

In the campaign we played, the PCs managed to get on Rharias' bad side early (through the satyr encounter) and remain that way, turning her into a grand antagonist. Meanwhile, during the early encounters with the bandits Akiros the hunter managed to survive and get away, becoming a recurring opponent: not so much an enemy as a rival they loved to hate. Similarly members of the ship crew became good antagonists for a while. In the finale Suidas revealed himself, becoming the final enemy... together with their brother.



THE MESIAN COURT: ONE HAPPY FAMILY

*There is, betwixt that smile we would aspire to,
That sweet aspect of princes, and their ruin,
More pangs and fears than wars or women have.*

–William Shakespeare, Henry VIII (c. 1613), Act III, scene
2, line 368.

The setting centres around the kingdom of Mesia in western Hesperos. A prosperous, somewhat stable kingdom with expansive military ambitions and an autocratic king.

KING CHURII AGÉLASTOS



The rule

Of the many is not well. One must be chief

In war and one the king.

Homer, The Iliad, Book II, l. 253 (tr. Bryant)

Churii¹ is a big, powerful man despite being middle-aged. He is infamous for his lack of humour and seriousness, hence his cognomen “never laughing”. His main obsession is ensuring that the kingdom function as he wants and that the gods (especially Agêtôr) are venerated properly. He typically decides what his children will do and then orders them to do it, expecting total obedience. His blind spot is how dangerous his prospective heir could be to the kingdom.

He has been married twice, first to Agathi (mother of Demetrios, Vasilis and Philomena), and then to Amophinome (Hippias, Priamos, Augustinos). In both

cases the mothers died in childbirth. He is currently looking for a new suitable candidate.

Catchphrase: “Do it.”

DEMETRIOS MONOPHTHALMOS



Let great men stir up the conflict for lesser men to fight out.

Ancient fragment N 5225 (Alster 1997 pp. 291–292)

The eldest brother. He has inherited his father’s strength and boorishness, but rather than channelling his considerable energy into politics and administration he loves war. He is utterly ruthless in pursuing martial success. When he gets angry with someone he gets violent.

He lost his eye in a battle some years ago, giving him his cognomen “one eye” – and as he likes to tell the story, he managed to find the archer responsible and personally plucked out both his eyes and fed them to him.

Usually hangs around with his comrades in arms, training, whoring, swilling wine and preparing for the next venture. He regards his younger brothers as utterly irrelevant and his sister as a mere political trade.

Married to Agesistrata, a Canorian noblewoman. He has a young son, Ptoliporthes (“razer of cities”).

Catchphrase: “Eh, little brother! Make yourself useful!”

¹ His unusual first name is from the ancient Rhomaoi language. Grandfather king Anikhetos got a prophecy that his kingdom

would be ruled by someone with a Rhomaoi name, and promptly renamed his son.

VASILIS



The second oldest brother, “the other guy”. A quiet archer that prefers to be left alone but often accompanies Demetrios on his missions. He is a totally opaque person even to himself. Secretly hates his sister (why? Not even he knows).

He is married to Cynisca, a woman belonging to the very wealthy phratry controlling the harbour of Cembra. Two daughters.

Catchphrase: A quick, disdainful nod.

PHILOMENA, QUEEN OF VINDIGA



There is nothing to life that has value, except the degree of power.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Sister Philomena is married to the king of Vindiga, an important vassal state. In Vindiga she is essentially the ruler, having inherited her father's overbearing manner. She is bossy, aware of her status, and smarter than her

brothers. Something she often points out to them. She is unable to avoid handing out cutting put-downs even when it would be in her interest to be nice.

She is quietly manoeuvring to set up her own son Samarion as a candidate for the throne of Mesia in the fullness of time. She regards Demetrios as a worthy if boorish opponent, Vasilis as a mere obstacle. That may change if she realizes his secret hatred, in which case removing him may become a priority.

Catchphrase: “This is for adults, go and play somewhere else, brother.”

CYRIL OF MELATHIA, KING OF CALBIUM



Brother to Churii, a major nobleman or minor king, running an important part of north Mesia near the borderlands towards Aphia and Cythosia. He is a skilled warrior taking the job of defending Mesia seriously.

Married to Eutara. His son, cousin Ajax, is a skilled warrior sometimes sparring with Demetrios. His young daughter Elpinice is reputed to be a real beauty.

He is a practical, traditional man who lacks the ambition of his brother but goes with his plans since he is the eldest. His goal is to keep things as they are.

Catchphrase: “Up north we do it this way.”

AUNT PRAXILLA, QUEEN OF CELREIA



Praxilla is sister to the king of Mesia and the wife of Celreia's king. She is happy to serve as a pretty figurehead and allow her husband and brother to rule.

She is a kind and gentle woman who loves her family, but she is not a strong leader. Often visits Canoria. She ignores politics as unsuitable for women. Unfortunately for her, her brother and nephew may have designs to conquer Celreia as soon as she or her husband dies or if he were to divorce her.

Catchphrase: "Whatever you say, dear."

THE THREE BROTHERS

The youngest children of the king, the Player Characters. They are "extras" – family, but not too important. In response to their overbearing father and siblings they have all in their own way found reasons to escape from court and town, avoiding the worst.

HIPPIAS

The ranger brother (20 years old). He has become a monster-hunter rather than a soldier, to his elder brothers' disappointment. But they do not care much about him.

PRIAMOS

The druid brother, second youngest (18). He has spent time in the wilderness with the priesthood of Mainalios, despite (or rather because) his family's disapproval. Engaged in survivalist one-upmanship with Hippias.

AUGUSTINOS

The monk brother, youngest of the brothers (16). He has studied at the mystery cult in northernmost Mesia, learning secrets about how to master his pneuma and acquired a healthy appetite for learning. He carries around a mysterious old book scroll with an unrecognizable language he was given as a present by his master. A bit of a brat.

THE MYSTERIOUS MANUSCRIPT

It is written in Early Rhomanoi, a language nearly unknown today, using a writing system long forgotten. It has many curious illustrations of unclear meaning,

some of which will hint towards the existence of the Valley of the Birds.

It is a lengthy celebration of Koruphasia, Queen of Heaven upon her ascent as Zêrunthia abdicated. This ought to make any modern reader distinctly confused and uneasy: has Agêtôr not ruled since the world was created? Indeed, Koruphasia is described as gloriously unmarried, having many divine suitors. Agêtôr is not mentioned.

The ascension happened because Zêrunthia lost a judgement: prince Numitor selected wisdom over love, unifying his people with laws and reason as advocated by Koruphasia rather than his charm (as Zêrunthia proposed) so that the empire may last beyond his death. Zêrunthia cursed him and his descendants to always have trouble with love, something Numitor sadly acknowledged.

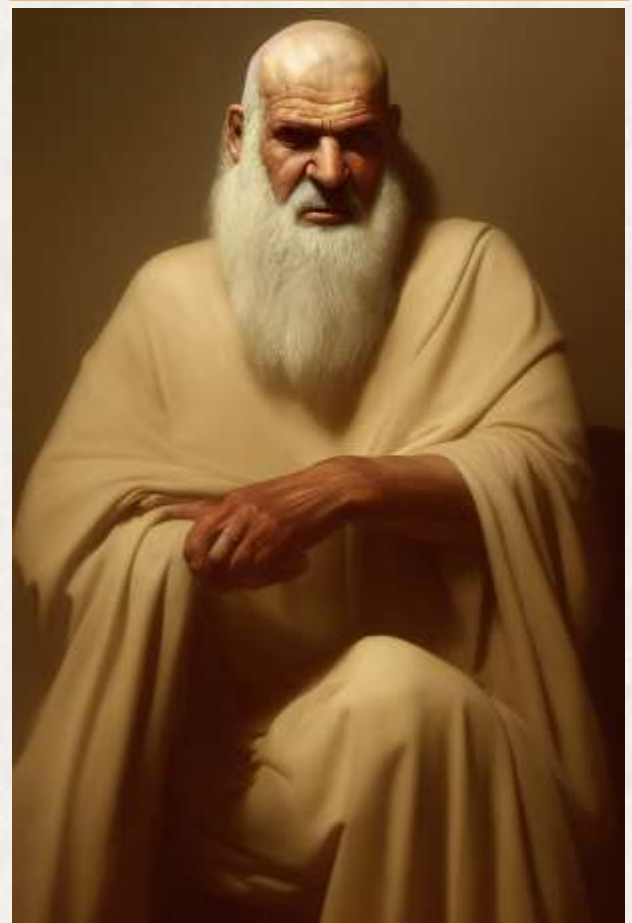
Very few beings can translate this ancient manuscript: the most likely early candidate may be the Sphinx in the Valley of the Birds.

HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS AND FRIENDS

The court is a meeting place for many people: the royal family and their attendants, the major religious and civic leaders of Cannoria, visiting merchants, people trying to offer their services – poets, soldiers, craftsmen – not to mention the servants and slaves toiling to make everything work.

While many of the city's functions take place in the agora or at the temples the court is a place where much of the affairs of state happens. Usually by King Churii listening and then deciding.

DIO CHRYSOSTOM



High priest of Agêtôr, known as the 'golden mouthed'

i.e. eloquent. He is wordy and poetic, but also a shrewd politician. Very bound by sense of duty to kingdom, gods and tradition. He is a powerful ally to the king. Sadly childless – the younger brothers have fond memories of him playing and educating them as children, although these days he is more formal. He is doing his best to ensure the siblings remember what is good for the community. He might also be deluding himself that they listen.

Catchphrase: “As the gods have ordained...”

TERILLOS



Chief of the house-slaves of the palace. An efficient, friendly man that helps the younger princes but firmly ensures that the palace works as it should. Secretly reports everything important to the king. He is convinced that working properly will keep him and his dear ones (most of the household) out of trouble.

Catchphrase: “Young lord, if I may...”

TEMOS



A young messenger, serving all over Mesia. A friendly, enthusiastic man who is surprisingly clever in finding people. While very much a commoner he grew up beside the younger princes and know them well.

Catchphrase: “Ah! There you are, sir! I have a message for you.”

CLEISTHENES OF LAMASTA



A rich merchant, making up for the lack of respect he gets from his dirty job and non-Mesian background by throwing lavish festivities for the Canorians and ostentatiously contributing to the polis. He has

singlehandedly sponsored several ships in the fleet. He gets along well with King Churii since both cynically understand each other so well. He usually hangs out at the court, where his girth is a well-known sight.

Catchphrase: "You there, bring us some more of the good wine I imported!"

KLEITOS MYRON



Kleitos (the myrrh-smelling one) is a senior diplomat and warrior friend of King Churii. A polite, formal and dignified man. He has a square, wrinkled face scarred from a monster fight a long time ago – a chimera breathed fire at him.

Catchphrase: "My lord, if I may mention something..."

He is further described in the chapter "Sailing the Seas of Love" where he plays a larger part.

EUTYCHIDES ATHERADOI



An old man, leader of the very influential Atheradoi phratry. Descendants of the first king of Canoria, founders of the city, and a little bit more citizen than you.

Very conservative, not too friendly, but a supporter of the king and target of the king's persuasion to make Demetrios the next king: his voice in the council will matter enormously one day. Unless he passes away before, in which case his son Corydallos (serving in the Agêtôr temple) may take his place.

Catchphrase: "Hmpf. Young upstarts should know their place."

DESMOS ELEPHTERIA

A disgraced scribe becomes an incantation priest. A disgraced singer becomes a flute-player. A disgraced lamentation priest becomes a piper. A disgraced merchant becomes a con-man. A disgraced carpenter becomes a man of the spindle. A disgraced smith becomes a man of the sickle. A disgraced mason becomes a hod-carrier.

Ancient proverb

Desmos used to be a part of the royal household some years ago, but departed under a cloud. While nothing can be proven it seems he was enriching himself, and Churii told him to never show his face in his presence ever again.

These days Desmos makes a living as a merchant, fixer and small-time con-man, impressing the gullible with stories about grand court life. He got his grand nickname "the liberator" not just from liberating various goods but also his stories that seem to suggest he singlehandedly liberated Vindiga from pirates a generation ago.

He is also undertaking a bit of freelance spying for Philomena, who likes to know what her brothers are up to. He loves to insinuate himself into other people's affairs.

Catchphrase: "Hellooo old friend!"

THE GAMES

It was an early spring day when I met my brothers for the first time in more than a year. The wind made the purple anemone flowers open beneath the ancient cypresses marking the Royal Road, but our hearts were dim despite the joy of meeting each other. We dreaded our duties. Yet the gods had far greater surprises – dreadful and fantastic – in store for us.

Augustinos Chrysodactylos, *The Three Princes of Mesia*

OPENING PART: FAMILY REUNION

The three brothers meet each other on the road towards Canoria, each having been summoned by their father to participate in the Aegetoria festival to honour Agêtôr – all family members must participate, such is the king's decree. This gives a chance to have the players describe their characters and interact, and for the DM to describe Canoria, the Court, their family members, and the religious rite.

CANORIA



ARRIVING TO CANORIA

Canoria's walls tower above you as you wander the road. Around it stretches the fields, olive groves and pastures of western Mesia, but here the land meets the sea in a series of steep cliffs and slopes. The city surrounds a deep bay and your ancestors – as your tutors always pointed out – laboriously built great stairs, the harbour and the magnificent walls that protect the city.

As you approach the noise of carriages, braying donkeys and the usual hustle of town rise. At the gates the guards recognize you and let you through without much hassle. Inside the bustle is even greater as everybody is preparing for the Aegetoria festival.

This scene sets some of the geography of the setting.

ARRIVING AT THE COURT

This scene is about establishing a bit about everyday court life, and to show that the PCs may be princes, but they are fairly low on the prestige scale. Still, they have people serving them here.

ARRIVAL AT THE PALACE

You arrive at the palace. At the entrance Terillos, chief of the house-slaves keeps track of comings and goings. Baskets with food for the feast hall, amphoras to donate to the lower city, cages of rabbits and birds for the lesser sacrifices. He immediately recognizes you and bows deeply: "Welcome, young lords! It is an honour to have you back home."

He claps his hands and orders some slaves to prepare lodgings, bathe the weary travellers and help them settle in. He also points out that you are expected in the feast hall. Soon.



MEETING FAMILY AT THE FEAST

FAMILY

In the great hall of the palace your father the king sits on his throne, overlooking the people dining and conversing. Slaves carry amphoras of wine, a majestic fire burns in the central hearth, and guests lie at the tables enjoying delicacies. Your handlers usher you towards the throne.

Your father King Churii the never-laughing sees you, focuses his gaze on you like you are three particularly annoying flies, and says: "So, there you are." He turns away for a conversation with high priest Dio. Your sister Philomena laughs, shaking her jewellery-covered arms in mock greetings. "Little brotherlings, how cute you are! Escaping from the forest? Here, little animals, catch!" She throws some rich morsels from the plate of her husband, the king of Vindiga, at you.

Among the tables your two elder brothers Demetrios one-eye and Vasilis look up at the commotion, but soon return to the far more exciting arguments with their warrior buddies.

This scene is mostly about letting the PCs get to know their family, interact a bit, perhaps try to mess with disliked relatives or be bullied by them.

ARRIVAL OF THE MESSENGER

ARRIVAL OF THE MESSENGER

A messenger appears and hurries over to the king. He listens with interest, asks some questions and then rises to proclaim: "Great news! The goddess Pitánatis, the Lady of Contests, has chosen to honour us by wandering this way! She is coming along the main road from a visit to Avon in a few days. Let us prepare to pay tribute to her!"

The king immediately gathers some of his trusted aides around him, including high priest Dio. He calls for you and explains that games to the goddess honour will be arranged – by you. "After all, whatever else are good for?" He turns back to an apparently more important conversation.

Dio, Terillos and some of the other practical staff members meet with the PCs and explain that they will help set up the games. Politically sensible PCs (History or WIS DC 15) will realize that their own job is to take credit... or more likely blame if something goes wrong.

However, any preparation needs to be postponed until tomorrow since the Aegetoria processing is beginning.

THE AEGETORIA



THE RITUAL

In honour of Agêtôr, all the leading families and phratries of Canoria perform a procession with torches. Group after group from different parts of the town join in the alleys, stairs and streets until you form a long procession up to the temple. Onlookers sing and cheer, slaves distribute sweet cakes ("I brought them myself from Vindiga", your sister says smugly).

As you reach the temple the leaders of the phratries and families enter (yes, you too). You throw your torches into the sacrificial fire in front of the imposing statue of Agêtôr, the High Lord of the Skies, God of Kings and Rulership. Bound on the altar is a magnificent black bull donated by your father.

Dio intones the sacrificial chant and your father slits the throat of the bull. Blood gushes out into the waiting buckets and splatters on his white royal chiton as he watches the bull die. The temple servants begin to quickly dismember the body to get bones and fat for the sacrificial fire, and meat for the town feast tonight. Meanwhile Dio and the priests confer about the signs of the dying and the organs. "A very fine, brown liver – full, and smooth, no parts missing. Aye, good signs my king. I foresee no imminent trouble, and especially the north looks secure... but the blood splatter foretells random luck: perhaps to be expected when the games are imminent."

The rest of the night is spent in celebration across town. There is great excitement since the Goddess is coming, and there will be games in her honour. All the boys and men boast about how they are going to win their athletic competitions (and some women laugh at the implausibility of it all). Sacrificial smoke disappears up into the starry night to honour the sky-god.



MIDDLE PART: HONOURING THE GODDESS

The approaching goddess must be greeted properly, and the brothers get involved in the logistics. As the games take place, they can win laurels themselves.

BUILD GAMES REALLY FAST

The PCs now need to build what is essentially Olympic games from scratch in a few days with a shoestring budget. While they have some help, this is the player's chance to be brilliant (or not). To a large extent what is needed is to scrounge up funding, donations (prizes, lumber, space), volunteers and everything else. Make deals with phratries about sponsorship. Try to wheedle money or prizes from Cleisthenes of Lamasta, the richest merchant in the city (sure, a good friend of the king, but he did not become rich by giving away things willy-nilly) or perhaps more desperately Desmos Elephteria (a general fixer with bad reputation).

There is a priest of Pitaneis in town, Ephatis the Strong, who usually oversees the athletic training at the Gymnasium; he is in some sense the ultimate coach and now busier than ever as his personal goddess is approaching. While nervous he also knows the practical aspects of setting up game spaces and smart PCs listen to him and use his status to get stuff done.

To make things more exciting, things may get sabotaged by the older brothers' war buddies.

ARRIVAL OF THE GODDESS

In any case, just as things are coming together excited lookouts shout – the goddess is arriving!

ARRIVAL OF THE GODDESS

A procession approaches the field from the main road. Their clothes are simple and functional, but here and there gold gleams. The men and women, human or demigod, following the goddess are all strong, beautiful and deeply impressive. But they are all overshadowed by the Lady. She does not tower over others, nor is her lithe frame too extreme. It is just that that she is in some sense more real than everybody else. When she speaks her voice carries even when she whispers, and you can literally feel her gaze as she surveys the assembled people looking for a good challenge.

King Churii welcomes her and offers his hospitality. She politely acknowledges him and explains that she is more used to stay in the outdoors: her followers will set up tents in one of the fields. The priests perform ceremonial welcomes that she again somewhat impatiently listens to. It is clear that she is eager to see what Mesia has to offer in sport.



THE GAMES



Thou shalt not covet, but tradition

Approves all forms of competition.

Arthur Hugh Clough, *The Latest Decalogue* l. 19–20

Roleplay the games as much or as little as is interesting. There will be various events – stadion running race, diaulos double-stadion races, dolichos long-distance races, pentathlon (stadion, javelin, discus, long jump, wrestling), pygmachia (boxing), tethrippon (four horse chariot race), pankration (wrestling MMA style), hoplitodromos (foot race wearing armor and shield). Depending on what the PCs and others have set up there might be versions for boys, archery contests, and evening competitions for heralds, bards and trumpeters.

The demigods hold back somewhat when sporting with mortals, but their mortal companions are very good athletes. The goddess doesn't compete directly with anyone but watches with interest. She is far more interested in people giving their all to win than how good they are... and there is a certain competitive spirit that seem to spread across town when she is present. After all, why not try to be best? At any cost? On the other hand, cheating in the presence of the goddess is a *bad* idea. The reason there are dolphins is that some swimmers once cheated when she was present.

Generally, big brother Demetrios is likely to go all out for pankration and Vasilis is likely to do well in any archery contest – perhaps getting into a tough challenge with Hippias.

Ideally Augustinos should participate in something like a foot race near the end of the games. Play up the competition, and make it an exciting series of Athletics checks as a super-athletic member of the goddess' entourage almost but not quite catches up to him.

END: THE PROPHECY

It is at this point the goddess decides for her own inscrutable reasons to give the winner (ideally Augustinos, the youngest prince, but otherwise one of the other PCs). She rises, nods to the PC with a mild smile, grabs her bow and fires a shimmering arrow high in the air. It almost disappears in the blue sky, but comes down... piercing the ground just in front of king Churii. As he looks down on the surprising divine arrow his crown slips off his head and falls around the arrow.

There is general consternation. The goddess walks over to the king and whispers a few words to him, handing him the arrow. That seems to appease him – who has gotten an apology from a goddess? But everybody saw what happened and whispers: this is clearly a prophecy. There might have been other winners

in the games, but the young prince has somehow won a crown.

The goddess will not explain, and will just shrug off questions. She does what she does.

IT IS TIME TO LEAVE

Shortly afterwards the goddess signals that she is ready to get moving. The tents are packed up, and the procession begins to move onward. Meanwhile the younger princes may have noticed the looks they are getting from the elder brothers. Looks that foretell bad things. The king, Dio or Terillos (depending on what is suitable) beckons them over and points out that there have arrived reports that harpies have been attacking farmers in the east of the kingdom. Isn't that a good job for monster hunters, druids and... whatever the youngest one is? Hopefully the princes will take the hint

The arrow ends up in the treasury of the kingdom. It will surely become relevant later.

PITANATIS



Pitanatis is not a talkative goddess. She is an athlete who loves to excel and see others excel. She is impatient (unless she is hunting, in which case she can out-wait a cat or a snake). Like all divinities she cannot be affected by non-divine spells or other damage unless she chooses to.

She doesn't take kindly to flattery, cheating or other underhanded tricks. Honesty, or she might force the flatterer to compete directly against her. Cheaters are famously turned into animals as a warning to others. And there are numerous stories of smitten mortals coming to a bad end when they got too intimate...

Anybody in her vicinity must succeed with a WIS save DC 15 or behave as if they had been subject to a 6th level suggestion spell to compete – in sport, in being awesome, in winning social status. This is her mere passive influence: if she focuses, she can make anybody compete unless they have divine protection.

Stat-wise, use Empyrean for her avatar (but normal size) with the major god package (essentially, will make rolls go as she wishes as long as no other god intervenes).

REPAIRING PROPHECIES

Running a prophecy-based campaign needs to take into account that things can go awry. This session in many ways starts the entire plot, so it might feel a bit tense for the DM. However, it is always possible to cheat (for the DM).

What if the PC doesn't win? Then the goddess may decide that he struggled more valiantly than others, and that is the reason for the reward. If the players truly refuse to take part in the sports, she may reward them for having arranged so lovely games anyway! Or even, for an amusing logistical disaster.

Later on the anointed PC may die, or the player may leave the game. Hence it is worth thinking about alternative interpretations of the prophecy. It might be that it was about his line (if the PC has kids at the time) inherits the kingdom, or that his reputation will be overshadowing the kingdom... however, it might also be the case that the PC will get resurrected (good new plot – have the others rescue him from the underworld, having to agree on a terrible price with Aidôneus) or become a NPC.



Apollo with Urania, by Charles Meynier (1798)

ADVENTURES IN THE OUTBACK



I will not bring dishonor on my sacred arms nor will I abandon my comrade wherever I shall be stationed. I will defend the rights of gods and men and will not leave my country smaller, when I die, but greater and better, so far as I am able by myself and with the help of all. I will respect the rulers of the time duly and the existing ordinances duly and all others which may be established in the future. And if anyone seeks to destroy the ordinances I will oppose him so far as I am able by myself and with the help of all. I will honor the cults of my fathers. Witnesses to this shall be the gods Agraulus, Rharias, Enyo, Enyalios, Laossoos, Koruphasia, Agêtôr, Thallo, Auxo, Hegemone, Tenedos, and the boundaries of my native land, wheat, barley, vines, olive-trees, fig-trees...

The Mesian ephebian oath sworn by young men

This part of the campaign is very open: the princes travel, seek out adventure, and meet people and the setting. Ideally this gives them a chance to level up and establish their characters, as well as get to know Mesia. They get clues that there may exist something mysterious hidden among the mountains. Eventually clues lead them to the Valley of the Birds.

ON THE ROAD

They will first pass through farmland, gradually getting sparser as they travel eastward. First good roads allows about 24 km walking per day (x3 if riding), then less as it approaches the foothills of the mountains. The big estates are slowly replaced by independent farming communities. Patches of forest on hills become thicker and better hunting grounds (boars, gazelles, deer) than the minor forests on the western estates. The meadows shift to fields where shepherds graze their herds.

TRAVEL

The Mesian countryside stretches out as you walk along the road. Fields, olive groves, meadows with grazing cattle. You see big estates surrounded by low stone walls where farming slaves tend the fields and workers build stables. Here and there, there are patches of woodland that slowly become more common as you travel eastward and the land becomes hillier.

Further east, they pass a side road leading off to the small town of Tavros to the south, the last outpost before the land becomes really wild. Beyond this point the hills become forested and there are a few deep valleys the road has to cross. In one of them the bandits (see below) have set up camp a few miles away.

RANDOM EVENTS

Runaway boy: Messaros, a young boy is intent on running away. He is an orphan, forced to work hard by remote and uncaring relatives who have taken him in (his sister Ephiphron is with other relatives somewhere, he does not know where). He is small and would surely lose a fight to even a minor monster. Yet he begs and pleads to become an adventurer and join the party on their quest. They are nobles! Surely they need a servant! He will do anything to help them on their noble mission.

CAMPAIGN EVENTS

In my game, the PCs critically failed *all* of their Perception checks while guarding the camp during the night, finding Messaros in the morning by the fire. They took him in, and he became a very important NPC – see the final part of the campaign where the now adult Messaros plays a tragic part.

The Twisted Tree: an ancient olive tree looking very weird. Locals explain it got twisted around by Laossoos himself when he was making a visit to Avon and got annoyed that it would not provide him with fruit. It is now sacred, but still bears no fruit.

Lizards: The party accidentally camped on a nest of bright yellow, rat sized lizards. At dawn they 1d4+2 emerge from their holes. Any quick movements will set them off.

Gonnos the Ranger: A ranger stops by the PCs camp one night and gives them advice on the trail ahead, including places to camp, a warning on where a landslide has disrupted the road, where bandits may be, and a tavern in Tavros where they can get good rates if they mention his name. All his advice is impeccable, but when they mention his name at the tavern, they're told he died years ago on that very road.

A holy shrine to some very minor god or goddess is untended. On it lie some offerings – a handful of coins, some flowers, a piece of fruit. When you walk away, one of you swears they saw the offerings disappear out of the corner of their eye, and when they check back, there's nothing there. Behaving well or badly towards the shrine may lead to minor luck or bad luck in the near future.

A massive pair of manacles, fit for wrists twice the size of a man's and forged from rune-etched iron. The

chains that link them have been broken, the metal notched as if gnawed and bitten through.

Bear: the party sees a large bear up ahead, if they let it pass, the bear continues on without incident. Otherwise, it protects itself while trying to run.

Random omens:

- The road is lined with snakes sleeping in the sun. A hint that Anaireus the Rebel is doing something.
- A crane flies overhead, a sign from Koruphasia. It flies in the right direction to travel.
- An eagle sweeps down ahead of the group, catching a rabbit. It sits on a rock while eating, looking sceptically at the youngsters in a way that eerily reminds them of their father.
- A group of frogs sit in a nearby tree during the night and seem to be watching the party, hinting at interest from Ar.
- A pack of wild dogs follow the PCs for a while. In the morning, a puppy with unusual markings is found snuggling up to a PC. A sign of favour from Echtria.

HUNTING THE HARPIES



The information they have states that the harpy problem is near the village of Apiranthos. This is in the far east of the country: the road towards Inverdenia goes roughly in the right direction.

SCENE 1: GOING EAST

Travel to the east, have suitable encounters as above. The countryside in the region consists of forested foothills to the mountains. The road is not well maintained and there may be various natural and human hazards. In particular, there are bandits around.

A recurring sign is a swarm of bats flying across the sky, a hint that something is wrong. Bats are sacred to Echtria, although these bats may also have been displaced by bandits taking their cave or the ecological disruption due to the Stymphaloi in the north. There is unease and discord in the land.

Apiranthos is a village that lies in a steep valley with meagre farming. The locals are suitably impressed by the PCs and will tell them about their troubles – that are still nothing but the troubles up in Tegylos where the harpies are most active. Down here it is mostly some disappeared cattle and two people, Demetrios and Phani,

who have disappeared – maybe they did join the bandits, maybe they were abducted by harpies.

SCENE 2: TEGYLOS

The PCs arrive in the farming village Tegylos and meet people. It is a desperately poor village in the upper valley, a morning's climb along a rocky path. They hear stories about what happened from the farmers – lost tools, cattle and people. Sightings of flying things laughing horrible. The villagers are tense, bickering about who is to blame (they suspect Thebila, an old widow of being a witch behind the whole thing with some kind of curse).

Actually, it is the farmer **Balias** spreading the rumours. He has been stealing food and blaming harpies. When he killed his wife, he claimed they had stolen her. When someone disappeared, he also blamed harpies. When the Mesian brothers shows up he is horrified, but decides to follow them out into forest and kill them with the help of Agafya, his brutish helper. Unfortunately, there *are* harpies in the forest, perhaps summoned by the rumours or discord.

SCENE 3: SHOWDOWN IN THE FOREST



Balias follows the brothers (ideally acting as a guide), then turns on them to try to kill them and blame the harpies (use **Bandit** for both of them). But then the harpies appear... Dramatically it is very suitable if Balias gets killed by them, of course.

The harpies live near a set of steep cliffs, where they lure people to run to them across an edge with their song. The harpy nest has a meager hoard of 5d6 copper, some trinkets, some shiny metal tools. Their names are: Aello, Ocypete, Celaneo, Podarge.



AFTERMATH



When the PCs have defeated the harpies and Balias they notice a beautiful lady cautiously watching them. It is **Lametisa**, a Dryad who gives three twigs as thanks for cleansing the forest. If they ever need help, just break one of the twigs.

The villagers may be relieved to hear that the harpies are defeated, but they cannot imagine that Balias, one of them, did anything bad. That must have been some kind of sorcery: maybe the PCs could also find the witch that must surely be causing all of this ill-will?

CAMPAIGN EVENTS

In my game, Lametisa became the lover of Priamos the Druid and they eventually had a family. The three twigs turned out to be very useful to save the PCs – in two separate cases by preventing them from splatting due to a high fall by having trees grab them in their branches

The bandits were a recurring enemy at the start, eventually getting slaughtered when the PCs had advanced enough (but Akiros escaped). The chime of opening in their treasure became important later to get into the temple inside the keep in Valley of the Birds.

THE BANDITS

The poor man chews whatever he is given.

Ancient proverb

Yes, bandits... they are a cliché, but fit very well as something the princes should choose to fight for the sake of the kingdom and to save the common people.

The region has a largish band of bandits that prey on travellers and isolated farmsteads. They are outcasts and ruthless. Sometimes they forcibly recruit survivors of their attacks – not everybody is there voluntarily, but rebelling against their new comrades is inadvisable.

Ideally, they should be an on-and-off enemy: first an encounter with a small gang, then maybe an attempt to attack the main group (finding out the hard way that they are not stupid), and finally the big fight. The bandits know the terrain and have some skilled

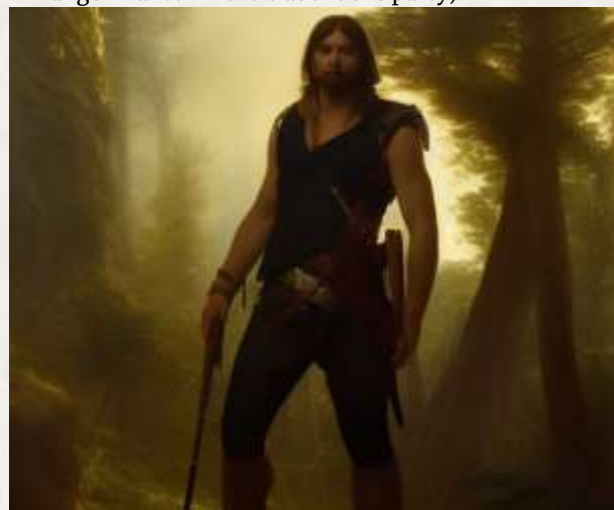
members: for low level PCs they can be quite deadly, so make sure to escalate things suitably.

A bit more interaction with them may reveal that banditry was the better choice for many compared to famine, given the last few bad years and the raids of outlaws across the border to Inverdenia. In fact, the border being a bandit and a semi-starving commoner in these parts is diffuse – these are the relatives of some of the farmers they meet in the villages, and may have allies there.

Normal bandits: most of the bandits are individually not very dangerous, but when given the chance to set an ambush or trap they can be a considerable danger. When teaming up with their leaders they form a formidable group. (See also [Bandit Variants](#))

Achophlos – **Bandit captain:** wears an impressive helmet with fangs and antlers (a [Dread Helm](#)). A bitter, self-loathing alcoholic man shaped by years of abuse at the hands of his brutal family. Has no compunctions against killing people for money or just to dominate them. Sadist, hates everybody and everything – Echtria really likes him. His bandits know better than to cross him.

Akiros: second in command, an archer and hunter with a cold scary demeanour. His eyes are chilly blue. Does not speak much, mostly because an embarrassing lisp. Akiros is normally well groomed despite his arboreal lifestyle. His family was wiped out when he was young by a monster, and he has applied himself to be more deadly than whoever he meets. He has undergone training in the secrets of the wild among the hunter acolytes of Mainalios. He carries some protective amulets from Pitanasis and Mainalios. In a fight he often snipes from cover using Hunter's mark, disappearing with Pass Without A Trace or leaving spike growth behind him. (Rules-wise, treat as a Ranger Hunter 2 levels above the party)



TREASURE

In their camp there are rations, camp equipment, and other survival gear – mostly of poor quality. There are plenty of shortswords, leather armor, daggers, as well as 10 goats they recently stole. Achophlos has a treasure chest containing: 1 lb. of ginger, 1 lb. of salt, 2 lb. of flour, 1 roll of linen. A rabbit fur vest (25 gp). A silver jug (25 gp), 1 potion superior healing, 1 [scroll of protection from Fey](#), a wooden box with 8 + 2 [arrows](#), and a [chime of opening](#)

TAVROS

In the evening we arrived at the village. A handful of buildings, a herd of geese, an agora covered with crude flagstones. At the tavern Messaros was soon telling stories about our adventures to incredulous villagers.

Augustinos Chrysodactylos, The Princes of Mesia

Tavros is a village or small town in eastern Mesia, just where the land shifts from agriculture to the wild. It is a bit isolated but merchants travel the nearby roads and there are paths to the coast to the south where more trade happens.

Tavros is a fairly convenient home base for some of these early adventures. As they pass through to replenish supplies or get news, they can see things change, especially as the satyr situation escalates.

Meges: a semi-retired cleric (for most of the gods), the local wise man. Resides at the agora, where he adjudicates disputes and watches people. Cares for his relatives, but embroiled in a family vendetta between two branches of the family. Speaks with squeezed throat. Catchphrase: "Let us hear."

Kimmeron Xanthodontous (the yellow-toothed) is a merchant travelling the area, buying and selling goods from his wagon. He knows what is going on, but always interprets it in terms of business opportunities. Catchphrase: "Wine? Vegetables? Maybe some oil?"

Ayzie the Storyteller is an old lady with a very loyal dog. She has many good stories to tell, although strangers better give her some food or a coin. She is smarter than she lets on, but also a fair bit more confused than she is aware. Catchphrase: "I heard from my grandmother, who heard it from hers..."

Neleum: the tanner, a sensible man. Catchphrase: "Yes, my lord, I can do it. But it will take time."

Bákrton: the local village idiot. Has an unhealthy fascination with slimy things.



VICINITY

Tergylos (not Tegylos! That is another place!) was a village to the north of Tavros that was totally destroyed by cythosian raiders centuries ago. Nobody goes there these days since the place is haunted. The remnants are mainly scattered stones on an inhospitable hillside, but

north of the ruins there is an entrance to the underworld (see below).

There is also a haunted **former temple** to the south of Tavros on the ridge overlooking the sea. This used to be a temple to some god (stories differ on which) that was raided by pirates; the priest cursed them with his dying breath and their ship sank. However, the place is haunted and best avoided (it is inhabited by a vampiric mist – maybe the priest, maybe the pirates).

ETONACA MAT

The nearest major town is Etonaca Mat at the edge of the hills far north of Tavros (it lies north of the entrance to the Valley of Birds). It matters due to a small pass through mountains leading to Cythosia, making it a somewhat important town defence-wise. It resides on the plain surrounded by agricultural land, but has a sturdy city wall. There is no road straight from Tavros there, so the locals in Tavros regard it as a semi-mythical "big city".

AVON



"Why is Avon called Avon? It is a strange name." the child asked her mother.

"When the Goddess had bought us she needed a place for us. She searched far and wide, and then a friendly river god gave her this place in front of the sacred spring. In the ancient tongue "in front of" is abante, and that became Avon."

Avon is more remote from Tavros than Etonaca Mat, but of course very famous: this is the city-state where the goddess Rharias holds court every 12 years. It is a peculiar place. While working like an agricultural city-state where all goods are brought in and distributed at the central place by the priesthood, the population are halflings. They are the literal slaves to the goddess who bought their kind in ancient time. Being a slave to a goddess is however not entirely bad: she promised them food and luck, and as long as they stay loyal she upholds her side of the bargain.

Being under a goddess direct protection means the city lacks defensive walls. Still, there are temple guards there to protect against drunks, wild animals and other untoward events.

Were the PCs to visit, they might run into the disguised **Suidas the Traitor**, posing as a mere halfling guard. He might show them around, ask innocent questions and generally unobtrusively learn about them... since he foresees that he can use the prophecy as a part of his plot to commit divine patricide in the future.

They might also run into Stratoniceia, working as a roving judge.

LIONS

Three lions have wandered down from the mountains, starting to prey on sheep in the farmland. Shepherds and others are concerned, and the PCs may be just the right people to save them.

Embedded in the skin of one of the lions they find a strange bronze knife (?), shaped like a feather. An exactly identical image is found in Augustino's mysterious manuscript.

Using a bit of druid and/or ranger skill reveals that the lions are more at home north, in the region close to the mountains. It seems that something has driven them away from their normal habitat into the farmland.

Note that lions are sacred to Rharias: while practical Avonese recognize the need to protect people and animals from them they do not like people dressed in lion pelts or boasting about their hunt...



Alexander and Craterus in a lion hunt, mosaic in Pella

THE SATYR'S GROVE

*Be kind to us, Eiraphiotes, woman-maddener: we singers
Begin and end with you as we sing: it is not possible
To begin a sacred song without thinking of you.
So, hail, Mainalios, Lord Eiraphiotes, and your servant too
Myrsinos, the one they also call Konisalos.*

CAMPAIGN EVENTS

This was based on [an idea on Reddit](#). This was a minor encounter that in my campaign grew into a larger story, giving the PCs an interesting ally, their first divine enemy, and creating a major political issue in the final part of the campaign

The PCs find a region where agriculture is thriving thanks to the magic of a satyr druid who is happily exploiting the situation to the fullest. The challenge is to decide what to do about it – if anything. This encounter can be played as a light bedroom comedy or a darker story of addiction, seduction and creeping abuse. The farmstead is also a useful point for PCs to return to for resupply, showing them how things slowly change from visit to visit

A FERTILE FARMSTEAD

UNUSUAL FERTILITY

As you travel along the road, [Druid or Ranger PC] notices something unusual with the vegetation. It is still early spring, but the plants are bigger and healthier than you would expect. When you look at the landscape you see that around you and to the north it is noticeably greener than where you came from, where it still has not recovered from the dryness and cold of winter. The cereals in a field on the hills ahead of you look like they are halfway to harvest, which is unusual.

As they travel along, they find a farmstead where farming is impossibly lush. The grain is rich, the trees full of fruit and olives. The sheep grazing in the field are plump, and the lambs well-grown despite the early spring. The grapevines are growing like crazy. The farmstead is full of intense activity as people work on their tasks – there is much going on. The agricultural yield is tenfold higher than one would expect.

When visited, the owner **Doderios** is both humble and hospitable, yet clearly seems stressed despite his good fortune. He explains that is *because* his good fortune – so much to do! Philyllius, a wine merchant is there too, trading. Alternatively, the PCs may meet Kimmerion from Tavros on the road, saying he has been selling a lot of wine to the Doderios farmstead – but they have unusually much vegetables to trade, so he is very happy.

The PCs are invited for dinner and lodging. There is plenty of food, and the family is boisterous in a rustic way. Observant PCs may notice that there is much less wine than would be expected if wine merchants were around. Doderios is certainly trying to treat the noble guests well, but he is running a bit short. On the other hand, some of the family members and farmhands may be a bit flirty (add a suitable amount of farmer's sexy daughter/son innuendo and comedy).



If they investigate, they may find Doderios or other family members sneaking off to a nearby grove. This is where Myrsinos the Satyr resides, the real cause of the fertility. Myrsinos blesses the land with his druidic magic but demands luxuries to continue, forcing the paterfamilias into ever harder efforts. Girls and boys are getting seduced, and the satyr wants ever more rare wines and sweets.

Doderios the Farmer: a heavy-set man, a true paterfamilias for his family and workers with an overall genial demeanour. Still, his brow is furrowed as he tries to figure out how to get the pasture enlarged for the foals while having enough people to pick the spring-fruit. Catchphrase: "We have been blessed."

Rhoeteia: the mother of the family. A friendly, quiet and industrious woman. Loves Doderios, wonders at what is going on. Doderios has been trying to keep her out of the loop, but she is getting curious about what happens in the grove...

Euterpe: daughter of Doderios, in relation with Myrsinos. Likely to bear a satyr kid.

Gennadios: brother of Euterpe, also in relation with Myrsinos and jealous of his sister.

Gryllos: a remote relative, a former shepherd now trying to handle the fertile goats. Not bright, but a good worker.

Alexias: cousin of Doderios, a farmer from the vicinity. He is also very curious and suspicious about what is going on, and if he finds out eager to also get the same blessing.



Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein, *A satyr, a Maenad and male follower of Dionysus dance in a frenzy* c.1796

MEET MYRSINOS

Why does a charming young man like you seek out my glade? Your father sent you? I sense you asked him to send you... curiosity, and a bit of fear. But mostly curiosity. Feast your eyes on me – I am indeed something to be curious about. Would you like to hear a song?

Myrsinos

Myrsinos will receive the PCs in a friendly manner – new faces! New stories! He happily offers drink from his stash of wine. Drinking PCs should roll a DC 15 constitution (handling the alcohol) or wisdom (drinking in a temperate way) save when drinking, or gain disadvantage on wisdom and self-control due to drunkenness. He openly recounts what he is doing: he made a deal with Doderios to make the land fertile, in exchange for wine and great food.

He is speaking truth, and the deal is honest. Of course, were Myrsinos to stop the return to merely normal yield might cause big trouble. Buying good wine from afar is also not cheap and easy for Doderios to handle, but that is not Myrsinos' concern. Also, while not strictly part of the deal Myrsinos has been seducing a fair number of people. There will be consequences.

I promise on the name of Mainalios that I will not make you do anything you say no to. Indeed, you will likely be screaming "Yes, yes! More!"

Myrsinos

While discussing, Myrsinos will also do his best to get nice-looking or fun characters to join him in music, dance and lovemaking. Actually, seducing three princes sounds like an enjoyable challenge...



DRUIDIC DISPUTATION

Mainalios is the wild god of the wild. Why should he let culture creep in? Nay, let the wines grow and the youth run wild, covered with furs and horns!

Myrsinos

Is the satyr misusing the powers of Mainalios, or furthering them? Should the PCs intervene? Myrsinos is willing to argue forcefully that he is doing exactly what Mainalios stands for: he does what he wants, he helps nature grow, he brings out a bit of the wild in people. Arguments that what he is doing is unnatural are rebutted by pointing out that his fertility magic is all from Mainalios: if the god did not approve, why would he let it happen? The farmers are free to reject his offers and advances. They do not.

That the whole endeavour might end in disaster is not a problem: *"Everybody and everything die in the end. But some of us have fun in the meantime. And we can sow the seeds of tomorrow!"*

He might even suggest a druid duel with Priamos about it: being a higher-level druid than the green PC, who is on home turf (where he has various traps) he is likely to win and humiliate him. If attacked he will also make use of all kinds of dirty tricks – plus, if alerted, by the local farmers.

"You want to stop me? You have to catch me first!" The satyr jumps backwards into the bushes, as every plant around the grove begin to sprout long spikes and entangling vines. Hacking his way through the undergrowth Hippias charges in his direction, only to get thrown up in the air by a snare. From somewhere calming flute music begin to play. Jumping from branch to branch Augustinos looked for the source, feeling increasingly sleepy. A green patch of moss seemed to be made just for sleeping on. Meanwhile Priamos felt something odd: why was he trying to quarrel with the satyr, who had given him such sweet wine? Were they not friends?

"I will let you go on two conditions. One is that you swear upon your gods to never harm me or my grove. The other one... that you get me olives and some wine for a pleasant evening repast."

He might also suggest that they call directly on the god to judge things. That would involve eating some sacred mushrooms and wine, engaging in a vision quest where they both reveal their true natures to each other – and get to see Mainalios as the titanic all-devouring, all-fertile, all-changing god of madness and nature as he is:

ARRIVAL OF THE GOD

You find yourself standing on a vast plain under the stars. The grass is coarse and long, reaching up to your waist. Mysinos dances across it, shouting for Mainalios: "So, let our god decide instead! Let us call upon the Wild One to see who is right! Or are you afraid? Come, Aegocerus Mainalios! Come!"

As you walk, you notice a hill with an irregular dome of dark rocks at the top. When you reach the summit and look out across the plain you see two lakes in the distance. Not lakes, eyes. As they open you realize you and Mysinos are standing on the nose of a vast horned wolf as large as a kingdom.

The eyes focus on you and you hear a rumbling voice that shakes the stars: "So you want to know me? You will know me!" The ground accelerates upward as the face moves and you are thrown into space. Tumbling wildly, you see a vast maw with teeth the size of mountains gape – and you are swallowed. You are crushed, dissolved and annihilated. Like all living beings will be. You feel how nature is filled with hunger, lust, fear and endless energy. You are food and that which eats it. There are no laws but necessity and will. You are intoxicated with blood, sap and wine. It goes on forever.

What this vision means may of course be debated once the participants have recovered. Myrsinos certainly sees it as validating his view that one should eat one's fill before the worm or wolf gets one.

Another possible vision (or actual event) is that the disagreeing party are transformed into field mice and the god sends a fox after them. The survivor was right.

MYRSINOS THE DRUID

*I am thy mate, I am thy man,
Goat of thy flock, I am gold, I am god,
Flesh to thy bone, flower to thy rod.
With hoofs of steel I race on the rocks
Through solstice stubborn to equinox.
And I rave; and I rape and I rip and I rend
Everlasting, world without end,
Mannikin, maiden, Maenad, man,
In the might of Pan.
Io Pan! Io Pan Pan! Pan! Io Pan!*

Aleister Crowley, Hymn to Pan

Myrsinos is a satyr druid. Mainalios called to him once upon a time, asking him what he wanted to do with his life. Truthfully, he answered: have as much fun as possible, swive as much as possible, eat as much as possible, and not let anybody stop the fun. The god granted him a moment of self-insight that made him start the druid path. For a satyr, he is a schemer, planning *weeks* ahead.

As a druid, he is mostly interested in how he can make nature help him enjoy himself and get away with things.

There is a dark streak to him: he is not going to let anybody or anything stop him, and if that means he will hurt others so be it. While normal satyr pranks are just spur-of-the-moment events, Myrsinos schemes to get far greater rewards... that also hurt far more people.

Like all satyrs he is a hedonist, but he also has a controlling streak. He likes having people in his clutches,

physically or emotionally. It adds to his enjoyment. Being subject to somebody else's power is supremely hateful – he will wow to bring them down in the worst way possible.

He is a sworn enemy of the halflings of Avon and the other servants of Rharias (they may well have bested him in the past, when he did a spot of thieving). Direct attacks may be risky, but messing things up for them is great, as is stealing and sabotaging. In a past sortie he took a sacred bowl, just because. He would love to get some of the loaves from the kitchens of Avon. Sacred, delicious and forbidden...

Roleplaying: Myrsinos is cheerful, direct (no circumlocutions or coy hints: a dick is a dick, and it is used to fuck people) and proactive – offer wine, suggest courses of action, control the flow of conversation.

Catchphrase: "Hello, my lovely friends..."

TREASURES

In a hollow tree-trunk is Mysinos treasures. They include: 2300 cp, 800 sp, 70 gp, a box of Perfumed Candles (25 gp), a beautifully carved wooden ring ([Ring of Spell Storing](#) with Haste, Cure Wounds, Hold Person), a ceramic Holy Symbol (Mainalios in his more... ahem... sexual form) (25 gp), some amazing wine (25 gp), some great wine with [sleeping potion](#) (25 gp), 3 x Potion of Healing (dmg 187), and a [cloak of Many Fashions](#).

Holy bowl stolen from Avon. Sacred to Rharias, who has supped from it. It looks like a simple wooden bowl but it has a kind of presence that makes it noticeable. It makes any food eaten from it healthy and nutritious.

A SMALL RELIGIOUS WAR



William-Adolphe Bouguereau, *The Youth of Bacchus* (1884)

*Rharias I turn to; Goddesses, let
My mouth be chaste and pure as she is –
Let me dress in white wool garments
And bind my brow with myrtle-leaves
Before I sing the inviolate goddess,
Rharias, bringing riches in her train.*

If the initial encounter with Mysinos goes well and he continues to bless the land, a bunch of halfling clerics of hearth goddess Rharias shows up trying to stop him. A direct conflict between clerics is unsuitable, but riling up villagers is OK, as well as bringing in PCs...

MYRSINOS THE SATYR

Medium sized Fey

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 28

Speed 35 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws +4 INT, +6 WIS

Skills Deception +7, Nature +4, Performance +7, Persuasion +7, Sleight of Hand +5, Survival +6

Condition Immunities fey immunities to charm, hold or dominate person.

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Koine, Sylvan

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Magic Resistance. He has the satyr advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Mirthful Leaps. Whenever he makes a long or high jump, he can roll a d8 and add the number to the number of feet he covers, even when making a standing jump. This extra distance costs movement as normal.

Spellcasting. Myrsinos is a 5th-level spellcaster (Circle of the Land, Forest). His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *Druidcraft*, *Infestation*, *Magic Stone*, *Mending*

1st level (4 slots): *Charm Person*, *Cure Wounds*, *Purify Food and Drink*, *Snare*

2nd level (3 slots): *Barkskin**, *Enhance Ability*, *Heat metal*, *Hold Person*, *Spider Climb**, *Spike Growth*

3rd level (2 slots): *Call Lightning**, *Plant Growth**, *Haste*

(*=always prepared)

Wild shape: as a druid he can wild shape. One common trick is to turn into a goat and hide among other goats.

ATTACKS

Ram. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (2d4 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

Really Big Stick. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 3 (1d6 - 1) bludgeoning damage.

Panpipes. The satyr plays his pipes and chooses one of the following magical effects: a charming melody, a frightening strain, or a gentle lullaby. Any creature within 60 feet of the satyr that can hear the pipes must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be affected as described below. Other satyrs and creatures that can't be charmed are unaffected.

An affected creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to these panpipes for the next 24 hours.

Charming Melody. The creature is charmed by the satyr for 1 minute. If the satyr or any of its companions harms the creature, the effect on it ends immediately.

Frightening Strain. The creature is frightened for 1 minute.

Gentle Lullaby. The creature falls asleep and is unconscious for 1 minute. The effect ends if the creature takes damage or if someone takes an action to shake the creature awake.

A SHORT LAWBRINGER

Our humility is the unconditional submission before the divine laws of existence so far as they have been revealed to us by the great goddess!

Thanks to prayer and the help from good people I now know the source of the disturbance. I know about a beastly creature that has corrupted people into debauchery, greed, breaking the sacred bonds of family, and spread curses over the landscape. We shall bring decency, justice and purity to the land!

Father Stratoniceia

Stratoniceia Praxidikê (the law-bringer): a halfling priest of Rharias, acting as an enforcer in Avon. A small man with big view of himself and his importance. He is trying to get back some relics that have been stolen from Avon, including a bowl blessed by Rharias. He suspects a satyr for having stolen it.

He is followed by a halfling **acolyte** and two **bodyguards**. His acolyte **Hegesistratos** likes to take notes and incessantly documents what people say and do. He trusts Stratoniceia completely. Eumaeus and Philogus are his two human bodyguards, stoic men who accept the annoyances of their boss in exchange for good pay.

When first encountered (likely in Tavros) Stratoniceia is excitedly explaining how his goddess has given him the insight that something is disturbing the proper moral order of the world. He does not know exactly what or where it is, but he will find out! He is not volunteering the information that some time ago a satyr sauntered into Avon, took food and drink, and absconded with a

sacred relic. However, he is asking around for anything out of the ordinary, whether passers-by, omens or other events. The PCs can point him in the right direction, lead him to a fool's errand somewhere else, or just ignore the situation.

Eventually he will pick up rumours that are now leading him to the centre of the disturbance: he has heard about people worshiping some creature in return for boons, succumbing to bacchanalian frenzy, abandonment of the vows of marriage, incest, engaging in witchcraft and other evil! He is now gathering people to go into the nest of darkness and cleanse it.

He wants to go to the farmstead, but would like to have some extra support – the princes are authoritative and he will try to recruit them if they seem friendly. He is also recruiting villagers to form a mob. The size of the **mob** depends on how well his rhetoric works, which can be helped or sabotaged by the PCs.

The countermob of Doderios family is three households, 15 fighting people (**commoners**). If prepared, Myrsinos may also summon some animals or make the local cattle help.

The actual fight will be two **mobs** of commoners against each other. (See also [this calculator for mob damage](#) and [this stat block for a larger 40-person mob](#)).

THE BATTLE

"Rharias? A matron of obsessive dwarfs and spinsters.

I will punishment-fuck him until he cannot walk, and then he can crawl in front of his goddess like the worm he is!"

Myrsinos response

Stratoniceia may start with a **Command** "grovel" against the satyr – something that is bound to get Myrsinos

goat. It is also a *big* mistake: he has just targeted a cleric of another god, and Myrsinos is smart enough to use that to his advantage. Otherwise he and Hegesistratos are likely to throw buffs ([enhance ability](#), [Beacon of Hope](#), [dispel magic](#) to unblock terrain, [magic circle](#) to protect against fey)

Myrsinos does not want to directly affect Stratoniceia or Hegesistratos, but taking wild shape is OK, as is casting spells that affect the environment. Myrsinos is not going to let someone mess with his fun. He wants to wreck the would-be mob and turn things into exciting chaos. Get a herd of goats to run through them. Spike growth. Lead people through a merry chase in the grove into the snares. Heat metal for swords. Plant growth. Bring down obscuring mist to maximize confusion. Play a frightening melody, or charm people to turn them against each other.

AFTERMATH

Driving off/embarrassing the priestly delegation and mob. They vow to return and wipe out the place from the map. However, that may take a while to happen. The villagers of Tavros will however brood over their defeat, spreading stories about witchcraft and people allied with monsters...

If Myrsinos manages to capture the priest, he will drag him into the grove to deal with him (he will let Hegesistratos run – after forcing him to make a solemn vow to never return to the region or Avon). He is mostly interested in just gaining total control over the priest. After a week Stratoniceia is broken, believes “being drunk keeps me sane”: he has become addicted to Myrsinos, and begins to slip from being a cleric of Rharias to an (insane) cleric of Mainalios helping the satyr. He eventually becomes something of a [Silenus](#).

Defeating Myrsinos: Stratoniceia will want to bring him in chains to Avon to be executed for his crime. Local followers should be executed, enslaved or fined.

If he loses but manages to escape, Myrsinos may take his faithful into the woods, to form a new community of fun, song and life. It will begin a guerrilla campaign against civilization. It might join up with remnants of the bandits.

THE ANGRY GODDESS

Should the PCs take Myrsinos’ side and he succeeds, then Rharias has it in against the PCs but cannot act directly. Still, making fire has become harder and food poisoning is a real risk now. When they enter a home the local hearth spirits will be unhappy. She is however not unforgiving: it is enough to go to one of her temples, honestly ask for forgiveness, perform a penance and the thing is forgotten.

Long term: Rharias and Avon’s main issue is striking against Myrsinos. But sending a military attack is not their style. The revenge will be to bring sacred wine within his reach – wine that is strongly addictive, having been blessed in the temple. Myrsinos will become addicted and need to seek out Avon himself, or suffer withdrawal. There he will have to throw himself at the mercy of the priesthood. Unless he kills himself first.

However, this fate may occur later in the campaign so the PCs get a chance to intervene or participate.

TRÓGON THE EATER OF SECRETS

A TRICKY FELLOW

The mist makes it hard to see what is ahead, but you faintly smell rotting flesh. Something gleams eerily green and there is a faint laughter. As you reach the spot the grass is dead and rotting, but there is nothing there but the stench and a strange whisper: “I see you”.



Mystika, nothics, are servants of Aïdôneus endlessly seeking secrets. They are addicted to hidden knowledge and repelled by freely shared confessions.

This one, **Trógon the Eater of Secrets**, is searching for the true secret of what the prophecy at the game does imply. It finds the brothers fairly shallow secret-wise, but hopes they will mature. Trógon used to be a Norian sorcerer before succumbing to the curse and becoming a *Mystikos*. As a [Mage Nothic](#) it has [dimension door](#), [counterspell](#), [fly](#), [suggestion](#). It really wants to read and learn everything.

Trógon will start shadowing the group, trying to learn about them and their mission. It has no interest in getting caught or interrogated and will flee – often in directions where there are other monsters that will act as a getaway distraction. It might lead them to the underworld portal or the bone chasm just to see what happens.

Trógon is not so much an enemy as the spectator or acquaintance nobody wants to have around: voyeuristic, blabbering your embarrassing secrets, and generally disgusting. It is also keen on ensuring that the princes get a chance to fulfil their destiny and can help them. The problem is that it is also insane, warped and ruthless. In many ways it can act as a Greek Chorus commenting on what is going on.

Catchphrase: “Heheheheeee...”

Some possible comments revealing secrets:

Priamos: You never talk about your mother since you blame Augustinos for killing her. Hah.

Augustinos: You told Anax one of the unrepeatables, didn't you? The one about Triptolemus...

Hippias: You ran away from your first encounter and said it got away.

Messaros: you really liked how Mysinos smelled, didn't you? Just like your uncle's goat...

Myrsinos: you thought stealing the bowl from the temple would give you power.

Stratoniceia: you don't trust the high priests. They let the satyr steal the bowl because they don't care, and now they send you on a fool's errand while they enjoy themselves.

Hegesistratos: What would Stratoniceia say if he knew what you and his niece did? Eh?

INTO THE UNDERWORLD



There is an Underworld Entrance in the hills north of Tergylos, about a day away from Doderios' farm.

There is a region of rocks where once a battle stood, and the place has been cursed ever since. Locals don't go there. It is guarded by a **sword wraith**. When alive he was once ambushed by Cythosians without anybody learning of his fate, and is now seeking to reclaim his glory. He will be laid at rest if he wins a battle that is justly remembered as brave and proper.

Nearby is a hole. The hole leads to a shaft 100 feet deep into the underworld. It is a portal between worlds, leading into the realm of Aïdôneus – mysterious, filled with undead, and definitely *not* the right place to go. PCs succeeding with a DC 10 WIS roll will feel a distinct unease about the hole.

The walls are vertical, but there are many holes and cracks in them that allow careful climbers to climb down. However, the shaft is guarded by **shadows** that are eager to feed on intruding souls. **They hide in the darkness inside cracks**, and surprise strike climbers, blocking their escape, when they have descended far enough.

Any people left on the surface may be attacked by some skeletons that rise from their rocky graves. They also cut any ropes into the hole.

GETTING JUDGED

If getting trapped, instead of being killed, a character may be picked up and moved to one of the Judges of the Underworld – a horrible skeletal figure in robes and mist. The normal punishment for trespass is death and eternal imprisonment (based on the Hidden Law of the Underworld). However, Trógon may intercede and whisper something secret to the judge. That changes the verdict: if they can bring back the crown of Mesia they

will go free; otherwise, their souls will be forever trapped in the Labyrinth of Mysteries when they die.

If a PC is properly defeated by the shadow, it will demand restitution – the judge concludes “This court judges that the Shade Skiatryphon has a right to the accused's shadow by conquest.” The character's shadow will now become a Shadow and live its own “unlife”. The PC will be shadow-less henceforth, something NPCs will notice in bright light if they make a DC 15 Perception roll.

They are then told to walk through a tunnel, but “For every hundred steps you take, you must take one backwards. Every missed one is a soul.” The path is 1000 steps long, requiring 10 DC 10 intelligence rolls. Each miss is one soul the underworld thinks you owe it, and will lead to somebody dying near the character while they hear a disembodied voice count it.

THE HORRIBLE WITCH OF BONE CHASM



A BAD PLACE

Stones crunch underfoot. No, bones. Big bones and small. Some recognizably human and small. The walls of the chasm rise above you, blocking the sunlight and making it cold and dark. The plants growing here are ferns and mosses fed by the faint mist from the fetid stream. On a flat rock there is a crude inscription: “No meat no future”.

The PCs may hear hints about a terrible witch that lives in “the bone chasm” – a chasm used in the past to dispose of unwanted infants. She is to be feared, but she is also blessed since she knows how to read the future. According to the locals she is guarded by monsters and want payment in silver and meat: don't bring too little, or she will take you instead.

The chasm is always in shadow and filled with bones – some from infanticide, most from other animals. The witch is actually a troll matron who is guarded by her husbands. She has acquired sorcerous powers that allow her to foretell the future and find secrets by performing augury on her husbands' guts.

Visitors will be harshly asked why they come and what they have brought, and if it is satisfactory, she will perform her rites. She may tell a party that they brought too little – she drives a hard bargain – and suggest that they leave one of theirs unarmed as hostage while she waits for them to return with more meat. This can lead to a fun uneasy wait as the trolls prepare to feast...

CLUES TO THE VALLEY OF THE BIRDS

The existence of the Valley of the Birds is not known to anybody alive. The main clues are signs of some kind of ecological disruption to the north – animals displaced (lions, bats) further south than they should be, the embedded bronze feather in the lion etc.

There are other ways to get the PCs to pick up things:

Ayzie the Storyteller might tell them a version of the story about the lost temple.

People from Aloli may pass through, complaining of their troubles and saying something is afoot in the mountains.

Mysinós might have picked up on the disruption and mention it to the PCs, or even have found one of the bronze feathers.

Stratoniceia may also be aware that there have been odd disturbances to the north. In his search for the relic thief, he may have passed by and heard rumours, or just got a general feeling that there is something going wrong there.

Trógon might trade information with the PCs. “One great secret for another great secret, eh? You will find out a great secret truth for me, and I will tell you where you can find great treasure and renown, yes? Hehehehe...” Similarly, the witch can point them in the right direction.

The bandits may also have picked up some of the bronze knives/feathers. If interrogated, a bandit may tell a sad story of being a shepherd to the north, driven away when his entire herd was killed overnight by something terrible and he realized he needed to do something desperate to save himself.



VALLEY OF THE BIRDS

*Hear us, you who are no more than leaves always falling,
you mortals benighted by nature,
You enfeebled and powerless creatures of earth always
haunting a world of mere shadows,
Entities without wings, insubstantial as dreams, you
ephemeral things, you human beings:
Turn your minds to our words, our ethereal words, for the
words of the birds last forever!*

Aristophanes, *The Birds*, l. 685–688

A valley high in the mountains, filled with dangerous flying creatures. The Stymphaloi have expanded beyond the valley into nearby valleys, driving away some lions and other monsters. This is in due to a Roc that has nested in the valley.

This part of the campaign is more focused: exploring the ruins of a lost civilization, fighting monsters, surviving, finding treasure. This is where the PCs hopefully grow up.

The intended path is that the PCs start to get clues about something in the north, up in the mountains. They travel there, encounter the tiny and poor village **Aloli** where they may hear the myth below. As they travel up the outer valley, they have an encounter with the griffins and the Stymphalian birds. Hopefully they succeed in climbing it, reaching the Valley of the Birds proper.

THE VICINITY IN THE FOOTHILLS

CAMPAIGN EVENTS

In my game the PCs explored the region near Aloli during their final battles with the bandits, making camp amidst some truly ancient ruins they figured out had been some kind of temple to Laossoos. They were fooled by the myth into thinking the Valley housed something sacred to Rharias, who they had offended, and thought this could bring them into her good graces again.

People in the region know the mountains are dangerous. They tell stories of wild animals and flying monsters, and generally advice against going near them. According to them there is a divine curse cast over the region.

More recently the danger has spread – a herd of cows was found decimated not far from the village, a shepherd was driven insane by “knives falling from the sky” and his herd later found picked clean, and some people claim to have seen a dragon flying over the mountains. A caravan disappeared a month ago, with their goods strewn around and no sign of the people or their horses.

THE CASTLE OF THE MOTHER

One story says Rharias once ruled from a magnificent castle up among the peaks, guarded by intelligent lions. But war broke out as greedy barbarians tried to conquer the kingdom. Her generals fought back, but were betrayed by one of the lions who showed a secret passage to the castle. In a rage she cursed the entire kingdom to

become birds and beasts until her sacred temple is restored. On some nights one can see the light from the spire of the temple far up in the mountains. From time to time processions from Avon have tried to reach it, but they have always been defeated by the monsters. However, there are stories that some of the monsters do remember the heritage and respect the right divine symbols.

THE TRUE STORY: GIIDGUURMUIAN



A Bowman took aim at an eagle and hit him in the heart. As the eagle turned his head in the agonies of death, he saw that the arrow was winged with his own feathers. "How much sharper," said he, "are the wounds made by weapons which we ourselves have supplied?"

Aesop

The kingdom was truly ancient, predating the Rhomaoi. Today only some ancient shades and undead speak the language or vaguely remember it. It was a war-like, powerful kingdom ruled by the *tûng*, warrior priest-kings of Laossoos. Their symbols were birds of prey, and they preferred weapons made from magical bronze, *zhar*.

They were by no means nice. Their culture was perhaps akin to the Aztecs, with an endless demand for battle and human sacrifices.

They ruled the continent from flying steeds, and regularly challenged other great kingdoms. Eventually they lost control over the Phoenix and were destroyed, but they succeeded in trapping the monster at the price of their capital – or maybe it was their enemies that did it. Nobody alive can remember.

The closest to a memory is the High Stymphaloi, but the only thing they know is that the valley (that they call *mêbsho*, “place”) is theirs. In their myths they tell of the great *seygikh zhurzib* (flame spell) that brought the saviour egg to the top of the *mêkhti* (keep). They still call their leader *tûng*, with the full title *being Tûng Murgo Mikre* – king of the knives of the void. They dream of raids of *gûzûng* on other valleys and the lowlands, but such adventures have become rare. Everything was good until the *ibzo* (Roc) arrived.

Zhar is the material of stymphaloi feathers. It is living bronze, and works just like normal bronze. They also have an affinity for *tê*, magical brass.

TRAVEL



*Just as snow or icy hail flies down from clouds, swept on
by gales from North Wind, child of the upper sky,
that's how quickly swift and eager Iris moved.*

Homer, The Iliad 15.202–204 (tr. Ian Johnston)

In the mountains **weather will matter more** than in the lowlands or forests (although introducing weather issues earlier can be a good idea). Roll 1d20 three times each morning for the temperature, wind and rain.

WEATHER IN THE OUTER VALLEY

1D20	Temperature	Wind	Precipitation
1-11	Normal weather, 50F	No wind	No rain
12	Normal weather, 50F	Light wind	No rain
13	Normal weather, 50F	Light wind	Light rain
14	Normal weather, 50F	Light wind	Light rain
15	1d4x10 F colder than normal	Light wind	Light rain
16	1d4x10 F colder than normal	Light wind	Light rain
17	1d4x10 F colder than normal	Light wind	Light rain
18	1d4x10 F hotter than normal	Strong wind	Heavy rain
19	1d4x10 F hotter than normal	Strong wind	Heavy rain
20	1d4x10 F hotter than normal	Strong wind	Heavy rain

Weather in the Valley of the Birds is more extreme, shifting between hot and cold.

WEATHER IN THE VALLEY OF THE BIRDS

1D20	Temperature	Wind	Precipitation
1-11	Normal weather, 40F	No wind	No rain
12	Normal weather, 40F	Light wind	No rain
13	Normal weather, 40F	Light wind	No rain
14	Normal weather, 40F	Light wind	No rain
15	1d4x10 F colder than normal	Light wind	No rain
16	1d4x10 F colder than normal	Light wind	No rain
17	1d4x10 F colder than normal	Light wind	No rain
18	1d4x20 F hotter than normal	Strong wind	No rain
19	1d4x20 F hotter than normal	Strong wind	Light snow/rain
20	1d4x20 F hotter than normal	Strong wind	Heavy snow/rain

Whenever the temperature is at or below 0 degrees Fahrenheit, a creature exposed to the cold must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw at the end of each hour or gain one level of exhaustion. When the temperature is at or above 100 degrees Fahrenheit, a creature exposed to the heat and without access to drinkable water must succeed on a Constitution saving throw at the end of each hour or gain one level of **exhaustion**. The DC is 5 for the first hour and increases by 1 for each additional hour.

Characters used to the mild climate of the lowland will need warmer clothing whenever the temperature is below 50 F, or they will start experience disadvantage on skills.

A strong wind imposes disadvantage on ranged weapon attack rolls and Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing. A strong wind also extinguishes open flames, disperses fog, and makes flying by nonmagical means nearly impossible. A flying creature in a strong wind must land at the end of its turn or fall. A strong wind in a desert environment like the valley can create a sandstorm that imposes disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Everything within an area of heavy rain or heavy snowfall is lightly obscured, and creatures in the area have disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight. Heavy rain also extinguishes open flames and imposes disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing.

Traveling at altitudes of 10,000 feet or higher above sea level is taxing for a creature that needs to breathe, because of the reduced amount of oxygen in the air. Each hour such a creature spends traveling at high altitude counts as 2 hours for the purpose of determining how long that creature can travel. This is mostly an issue at the top of the outer valley and in the canyon.

The Survival foraging DC in the outer valley is 15, in the valley of the birds 17.

THE OUTER VALLEY



A forested, steep valley leading up towards the pass into the Valley of the Birds. There are some stones with ancient inscriptions here and there, and a sharp observer would note the remnants of a bridge over the river running along it. There are remnants of a road, but it looks very ancient. At the top there is a tall cliff with a magnificent waterfall – and griffon nests.

The uppermost part of the valley is relatively flat, with some small bodies of water and an open landscape with small groups of trees. Unfortunately, this makes the landscape too tricky to navigate unseen.

The valley has become infested with stymphaloi who have fled the Valley of the Birds. This has in turn driven other monsters further into the countryside below.

At the top of the valley there is a canyon where an ancient archway indicates that there had been fortifications (now only rubble). Passing through the rubble leads into the Valley of the Birds.

An ancient oak holds a trapped forest spirit. It knows little beyond what passes the tree and what is known among the root-networks of awakened plants, but it has noticed the annoying metal birds recently. It is also aware of the dryad Lametisa singing sad songs about her lover who left her...

LOW STYMPHALOI

The low Stymphaloi are loud, dangerous, angry birds – more seagulls than eagles. They form largish flocks that nest in trees or lakes, take flight to look for prey and then bombard it with their bronze feathers. Because of their metallic nature they are resistant to many forms of damage.

In the outer valley there are a handful of flocks, relatively easily dealt with by hiding or taking cover. In the inner valley they form far larger flocks, swarms of swarms with far greater danger.

(Here I use the statblock from [Dungeons and Drachmas](#) by JC Lira).

GRIFFONS

There are 4 [griffons](#) in the area, for good measure. They compete with the Stymphaloi, generally having the lesser birds acting as scavengers for their kills. There is some degree of inbreeding between them, making some have bronze feathers in their coat.

FLOCK OF LOW STYMPHALIAN BIRDS

Large swarm of Small monstrosities, unaligned

Armor Class 18

Hit Points 43 (6d10 + 12)

Speed 20 ft., Fly 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	3 (+3)	12 (+1)	7 (+1)

Damage Resistances fire, cold, lightning, radiant, necrotic, bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages None

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Swarm The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Small bird. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

Noise sensitivity A Perform (Music) or Intimidate check DC13 or the use of any spell that deals thunder damage causes a flock of Stymphalian birds to become frightened

ACTIONS

Fling Sharp Feathers (recharge 5-6) Ranged Weapon Attack: The bird must be flying. +4 to hit, range 50ft., all targets in a 10' square. Hit 14 (4d6 + 2) piercing damage

Talons and Beaks Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., all targets in the swarm's space. Hit: (2d6+2) piercing damage.

Travellers with horses are particularly likely as victims. Sometimes the griffons attack the horses while the fleeing people get attacked by stymphaloi.

In the griffon nest there are some skeletons, armour and clothing turned to rusty junk, a copper dagger, Iron Bracers (25 gp), a purse with 900 sp, and three griffon eggs. It requires a DC 15 climb to the top.



VALLEY OF THE BIRDS

VALLEY OF THE BIRDS

As you come out through the narrow canyon a large valley opens up before you. It is arid, with steep mountain walls hemming it in from all sides. At the far end the cliff walls at first look like they have strange caves, but then you realize they are the vast ruins of a city. A city so large that it makes Canoria look like a tiny farmstead. Impossibly tall buildings have been carved from or maybe built onto the rock walls. Furthest back there are two huge pyramids side by side. Circling above the two impossibly reflective lakes in the valley floor is a vast flock of birds, sometimes reflecting sunlight from their bronze feathers.



The central valley is about eight miles long and two miles wide, narrowing towards the end where the main city used to lie. From the entrance ruins and the tall, pyramid shaped keeps are visible across the valley, as well as strange glints of sunlight. Flocks of birds often circle above the valley.

The valley is bare, with small shrubs growing among the rocks. The environment has stagnant, alkaline ponds where the Stymphaloi fish. A few standing stones and obelisks point upward. Bones lie scattered. Everywhere there are numerous woolly larvae and beetles feeding on bronze feathers.

Along the sides of the valley there are ruins, now little more than piles of rubble but potentially providing cover for hiding. Some are dwellings, other long fallen aqueducts that used to bring in water to the valley.

Some cliffsides are covered with hollows, inhabited by other birds. Giant statues are carved out of the cliff but badly eroded. Along the deeper cliffsides are ruins of palaces, where some of the High Stymphaloi still live. These are noisome, toxic places because of stymphaloi guano.

Deeper in the valley are the keeps where the inhabitants kept their weapons and secrets. One of the keeps has a strange red light on top of it.

ENVIRONMENT

The valley is cursed. Whatever happened here in the past has left scars that produce strange effects. All magical objects here, and in some sense everything, has detrimental effects or are slightly wrong in some way.

GIANT BEETLES

Some **beetles** grow to giant size due to the weird magic. They are not terribly aggressive, protected as they are by their chitin armour. They are also not edible, their flesh green with metal salts.

They seem to be able to ingest the bronze feathers, digesting them like rust monsters. This also means they

tend to eat the ancient bronze coins, although copper is less to their taste.

HAZARDS

The valley is mostly safe, except for the lack of drinkable water. The valley is dry (Stymphaloi just fly to springs in the surrounding mountains). The stagnant ponds are alkaline and salty, totally undrinkable. The ground is metal-rich and toxic.

The main hazard is that the valley floor is bare and makes it hard to avoid being spotted by the Stymphaloi or the Roc. Following the valley edge will make travel slow and bring one close to low Stymphaloi nests. Travelling during night may be safer, but gets cold just as the day is hot.

HIGH STYMPHALIAN BIRD

Medium monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 16 (bronze feathers)

Hit Points 11 (3d6)

Speed 30 ft., Fly 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	8 (+1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

Damage Resistances fire, cold, lightening, radiant, necrotic, bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Skills Acrobatics +5, Perception +5, Survival +5

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages Auran

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Second Wind On its Turn, it can use a bonus Action to regain 1d10 + 1 Hit Points.

ACTIONS

Fling Sharp Feathers (recharge 5-6) Ranged Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, range 80/320 ft. Hit 8 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage

Talons and Beaks Melee Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 3 (1d4+1) slashing damage.

Mace: Melee Weapon Attack. +3 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: (1d6+1) bludgeoning damage.

Some risk from **scorpions** and **snakes** if messing around among rocks. Both have a noticeable bronze cast on their chitin and scales.

The rocks on the ground are of all sizes and shapes, and sometimes make travel hard. From time to time characters need to make a DC 12 Dexterity check or fall prone and take 1d4 bludgeoning damage. If the PC has taken the Dash action this turn, it has disadvantage on the check and takes 1d6 damage instead. A critical failure may mean they stubbed their toe on ragestone.

RAGESTONE

In some spots there are ragestones, red rocks that stand out and seem warm. Anybody touching them are filled with violent rage and a need to lash out. Some are just loose rubble, others form fallen statues or flagstone surfaces.

RAGESTONE

You feel anger bubbling up in your soul. All your frustration, all your little aches, everything that is wrong with the world – it is just growing and growing. You know you need to hit somebody, inflict some pain, or you will explode.

A creature that starts its turn standing on ragestone takes 5 (1d10) psychic damage unless it makes a melee weapon attack against any creature.

Ragestone is imbued with the essence of Laossoos anger, and was sacred to the ancient inhabitants of the valley. They used it to make monuments and training areas where feeling divine rage would refine the spirits of warriors. After the fall of their civilization the stone may just have become generally cursed. The Stymphaloi mostly avoid it.

MEPHITS

Some [dust](#) and [smoke](#) mephitis manifest due to the cursed nature of the place, trying to cause trouble. They tend to show up when somebody makes a fire. Making intruders sleep and then calling to the Stymphaloi is a popular tactic.

THE KINGFISHER

A happy little kingfisher can be found chirping, fishing, and eating small beetles. It might just be a friendly bird surviving in the tough environment, or it might be a representative of the gods in disguise. Anaireus might have an interest in helping the heroes discreetly, so does Echtria. For stats, use [Bluebird](#).

A LAKE OF MERCURY

It is brilliantly reflective and looks like a hole to the sky. While the liquid is dense enough that everybody floats, it is near impossible to swim in. It also dissolves (or strictly speaking, amalgamates) most metals except iron. Around the pond weird metallic crystals grow. The actual source is some ancient magic, so old it has turned into geology. The pool might well be a portal to other worlds such as the Warrior's Island if one knew how to use it. Now it is just a toxic wonder.

THE HIGH STYMPHALOI

HIGH STYMPHALOI

Monstrous bird-humans: beaks of bronze, sharp metallic feathers they can launch at their victims, and poisonous dung. The low Stymphaloi are ibis-like birds, but the High Stymphaloi look like bronze-winged humans with bronze bird of prey faces.

Once upon a time they were the guardians of a lost kingdom worshipping Laossoos. As the kingdom fell they degenerated into ever less human forms, becoming the monsters they are today. They live a primitive Neolithic life among the ruins, scavenging for food and chant-screaching their pedigree. Superstitious rituals must be performed, or calamity will happen.

The lesser Stymphaloi are prey, domestic animals, and remote relatives the High Stymphaloi can to some extent command and control.

They have golden eggs they care deeply about. They worship the flaming egg on the keep as their future

saviour. However, they feel the need to wait to let it hatch – eggs must not be broken prematurely. But some High Stymphaloi think there is an urgent need to crack it since the Roc is growing ever deadlier; this makes these radicals interested in helping outsiders get close and open it.

Their general outlook on non-Stymphaloi is that they are prey and enemies – but the bird creatures are also very curious about them. If they do not behave threatening they will not initiate attack, just experiment a bit with these novelties. Maybe take some shiny things they have, see if they can defend themselves, or what they do when dropped.

Names: Aera, Aial, Aur, Deekek, Errk, Heehk, Ikki, Iorra, Kleeck, Oorr, Ouss, Piip, Quaf, Quierk, Salleek, Urreek, or Zeed.

NOTABLE STYMPHALOI

Piip the Thalgrim: a young and radical warrior, more curious about intruders than might be healthy and very willing to follow them into exploration. Has dreamed about seeing the Saviour Egg since he hatched.

Blade-Chief Tair: an experienced, conservative warrior who prefers to wait and see, but is getting increasingly challenged by the disaster the Roc represents. Young upstarts are mumbling about the need for radical change – either a new attack on the Roc despite the devastating losses last time, an attempt to awaken the Saviour Egg, or (inspired by the appearance of outside intruders) going to the Outside. Tair will hear nothing of such talk.

Arraz: A great fighter, filled with anger and anguish after the Roc took his family and nest, badly wounding him. Now recovering and willing to take it out on the world.

TREASURES

Stymphaloi love to collect shiny things, bringing it into their nests. Looting a nest requires defeating about 6 Stymphaloi. The shiny things are surrounded by filth, bones and loose bronze feathers.
onyx cameo

RANDOM NEST TREASURES

1d6	Treasure
1	1900 cp, 1000 sp, 50 gp, Metal Dice (pair) (25 gp), Painted Glass Ring (25 gp), Copper Buckle (15 gp), Amulet of Health (rare, dmg 150)
2	2200 cp, 1000 sp, 70 gp, Bloodstone (50 gp), Carnelian (50 gp), Chalcedony (50 gp), Chrysoprase (50 gp), Jasper (50 gp), Star rose quartz (50 gp), Zircon (50 gp)
3	2000 cp, 1100 sp, 60 gp, Malachite (10 gp), Moss agate (10 gp), 3 x Obsidian (10 gp), Turquoise (10 gp)
4	3300 cp, 1000 sp, 70 gp, Azurite (10 gp), 2 x Banded agate (10 gp), 2 x Eye agate (10 gp), Hematite (10 gp), 2 x Lapis lazuli (10 gp), Turquoise (10 gp)
5	1700 cp, 1200 sp, 60 gp, Chalcedony (50 gp), 2 x Jasper (50 gp), Moonstone (50 gp), Onyx (50 gp), Quartz (50 gp), Sardonyx (50 gp), +1 Weapon (bronze battleaxe) (uncommon, dmg 213)
6	1900 cp, 1500 sp, 80 gp, Golden Mask (25 gp), Figurine of Wondrous Power Silver Raven (uncommon, dmg 170),

THE RING

In the nest loot or elsewhere there is a Ring of Mind shielding (uncommon, dmg 191); a golden ring shaped like a sphinx with ruby eyes.

The ring is to help PCs navigate the Valley, maybe getting some backstory or ability to haltingly communicate in Auran with the Stymphaloi.

The ring contains the soul of **le-tûng Murg** (vice priest of knives), a warrior-priest of Laossos. The wearer will be able to hear his telepathic voice.

He is a fragmented, insane nationalist warrior priest wanting everybody to live the Giidguurmuian way and fight for the theocracy. A large ham with no indoor telepathy. He was killed during the calamity and does not remember much, but knows Giidguurmuian as it was. He swore an oath to protect the kingdom from its enemies as long as he could, and he will not give up now. Would go to the afterlife if convinced that the empire is protected from enemies. Could in principle give +9 advice on many things arcane, military and religious, but it will be filtered through insane bloodthirst.

"Praise the lord of knives, feathers and fire!"

"We shall burn them, we shall rip them, we shall take their children as slaves."

"Victory and defence!"

"The waste! The temple! This cannot be!"

"Abase yourself for the Lord!"

"We will laid her husband to gods and men. Polydamas went up to him and said to the foe – therefore, let us make the wife of Antenor, will show no slackness on our way hither and of Dardanus, whom he held aloof from war and by the battle. Sword in hand-to-hand fight him; the ships from peril, and from the wound he was guided by the stout-hearted. Did not Hecas for a great stature, to fight. Laossos and their horses which they be not disquieted about..."

"so longer has glory here are not hide it point of battle, for all his body was a rage"

"He stayed behind in ever so longer stay here and station, why do you jaws, robbing?"

THE ROC

*At once he sent an eagle,
of all flying things the surest omen, a dark one,
which people call black eagle, with wings as wide
as doors on some rich man's vaulted store house,
one fitted well with bolts—that's how wide this eagle
spread its wings on either side, appearing on the right,
speeding across the city.*

Home, The Iliad, 24.392-398 (tr. Ian Johnston)

A **Roc** has built a nest on top of the main temple. It is a straightforward giant predator, content to occasionally grab a High Stymphaloi, a griffon or an elephant. It keeps watch over the valley but is not too concerned for its safety.

PCs travelling across the valley without hiding may be noticed and get a surprise attack.

THE RUINS

To Laossoos, Fumigation from Frankincense. Magnanimous, unconquered, boisterous Laossoos, in darts rejoicing, and in bloody wars; fierce and untamed, whose mighty power can make the strongest walls from their foundations shake: mortal-destroying king, defiled with gore, pleased with war's dreadful and tumultuous roar. Thee human blood, and swords, and spears delight, and the dire ruin of mad savage fight.

From a traditional Mesian hymn to Laossoos

Flaking rock and here and there molten metal. Much of it is covered with ages of stymphaloi guano and dust. Most buildings have collapsed into rubble, but the ones carved into the mountainside are still more intact and often inhabited by the High Stymphaloi.

Some buildings extend into the mountain, forming caves that have also been inhabited by the Stymphaloi. All contents have been looted millennia ago, with a few exceptions. Some chambers are avoided because of religious statues frightening away the Stymphaloi – they fear the power of Laossoos – or the presence of undead.

In many places there writing in the strange local alphabet. Many of the more protected stone walls are covered with reliefs showing warriors, battles, and horrific destruction of enemies and captives: piles of cut-off fingers and other body parts, burning in cages, ploughing people under the ground, throwing from cliffs onto forests of spears. There are many depictions of birds helping the armies, and the sun is often depicted as a giant flaming bird shooting arrows of light on the enemy.

The temple is a tall building with magnificent columns and friezes towering over the other buildings. Enormous statues of armoured soldiers with four eyes and armour looking like feathers flank the entrance. It is crowned by the Roc nest. The ruins close to the temple have cleared out of Stymphaloi, and their treasures lie almost undefended.

Ruined elemental shrine of fury: A small shrine made out of red rock, with faint sounds of metal against metal in the air. All creatures have advantage on melee attacks inside, and the floor is made out of ragestone.

Elephant skeleton: a meal dropped by the Roc into the valley, later picked clean by hungry Stymphaloi and beetles.

Giant spiders: some of the more abandoned ruins and caves are inhabited by **giant spiders** that quietly wait for a foolish bird to enter their web. The PCs may find a golden thread running through a labyrinth, leading to a chamber with glittering skeletons – and an exit sealed by one or two spiders.

THE KEEPS

The bird-man pointed at the dark pyramid to the left and said "Victory – holds saviour egg!" To the right: "Defence – holds certain death!" From below their apices shimmered in the merciless sunlight.

Augustinos Chrysodactylos, The Three Princes of Mesia

The two keeps are steep pyramids. Their surfaces are scorched – the stone seems to have partially turned into glass and here and there melted into a slippery surface.

Outside the keeps there were open plazas, now fields of shrubs and sand dunes. Toppled statues have turned into oblong stones. Bones pile up in corners.

The main entrance doors are very heavy black stone doors. The right pyramid has the door covered by a large sand dune blocking opening unless dug free (takes a week). The left is more free, but making either open requires some form of magic or technology lost to time.

The keeps are linked by a partially crumbled curtain wall that may allow climbing in through what used to be inaccessible portals

Inside the air is still, dead and filled with dust. Yet the dust on the floor shows clear tracks of feet... many, many feet. It is totally dark.

Sculptures are in a strange style, crude and blocky with faces adorned with four eyes. Many walls are ornamented with abstract symmetrical patterns. Others have reliefs showing marching armies and great battles.

Doors, stairs and other things are eroded by sand, yet working surprisingly well.

GM Info: The left one was named “yumimtu” (victory) and the right “yuzh” (defense). Yumimtu has the egg at its summit, while Yuzh and has the sphinx on the roof and is “inhabited” by the mummy priests.

These were the strongholds of the kingdom, filled with their arms and magic. After the disaster some remained. Some was looted, but the devastation kept people away and later as the Stymphaloi returned they made visiting unwise. However, rather little remains after the millennia.

MONSTERS OF THE KEEPS

Defeat me once, the glory is all yours.

Defeat me twice, the shame is all mine.

Defeat me thrice, you get no glory.

–Sayings of Laossoos Enuaios

IRON COBRA

Ancient guardians in the temple and keeps. Strictly speaking, they are bronze cobras, but who cares?

The [cobra](#) hides among bronze statues, waiting to make an ambush. When it does, it also signals to the Osteopólemoi to show up.

THE UNDEAD

Some mummies, floating skulls, and Osteopólemoi are guarding the keeps. The skulls and Osteopólemoi patrol the environment as wandering monsters. They have left numerous tracks in the sand and dust, as well as long furrows from the skull threads.

Every 10 min game time (or whenever it makes dramatic sense), roll on the wandering monsters table:

WANDERING MONSTERS

1d6 Monster

1-3 1d4 Skulls

4-5 1 Osteopólemos

6 1 Mummy

The floating skulls



[Jim F. Faure](#)

Human skulls wrapped in bronze threads, floating through the air and acting as watchers. Inside the skull, there is a bronze bell that normally is silent when they float freely. When they see somebody, they will quietly sneak up on them and try to strangle them, the bell chiming due to the struggle often ensuring enough noise that the Osteopólemoi can find the intruders.

Works as a flying [Rug of Smothering](#), but without damage transfer and false appearance (and with standard undead immunities). Stealth +5.

Osteopólemoi



Armoured skeletal undead guarding the keeps. Their job is to keep intruders away; unless the right passphrase is spoken they will attack. Normally they march through the halls, checking for intruders.

They are free-willed intelligent beings, although deeply set in their ways as eternal guards.

(These are based on the Spartoi in [Aeosianna's Guide to Non-Evil Undead](#))

Temple mummies

[Mummies](#) still serving their god. These are the guardians of the temple, maintaining the ancient rituals and knowledge. Speaking ancient language, chanting, maintaining traps and skeletons. The ancient mummies have secrets that would delight Trogon.

They are led by a priest residing in front of the altar of Laossos.

OSTEOPOLEMOS

Medium undead, lawful neutral

Armor Class 19

Hit Points 80 (10d10+20)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Can understand but not speak Ancient Auran

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Brave The Osteopolemos has advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Turn Resistance. The Osteopolemos has advantage against saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

Disassemble and Reassemble. If damage reduces the Osteopolemos to 0 hit points, it collapses into a pile of bones and is incapacitated and unconscious. The being can be killed in this state if it takes cumulative massive damage, is attacked with a critical hit, or takes more than 20 damage from a magical weapon. If the being is not killed in this state, it rises up with 10 hit points after 1 minute. If pieces are missing they reduce its overall hit points by 10 for each major bone missing. These bones will try to return to the being, and it will know where they are.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Osteopolemos makes two melee attacks.

Long Sword. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. Hit 7 (1d8+3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10+3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

Longbow Ranged Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, range 150/600ft.. Hit 4 (1d8) piercing damage. Ammunition, Heavy, Range, Two-Handed.

Shield Bash. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. Hit 7 (2d4 + 3) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

TRAPS

The keeps were normally trap-free, but surrounding the path to the phoenix egg there are traps placed there in the final days. Most of these traps have themselves failed, except for the magical ones.

The most powerful traps are the **Summit glyphs of warding**: permanent glyphs placed around the summits of the pyramids to prevent aerial attacks. They also create a volume of heat haze surrounding the summit. DC 13 to notice them. When coming within 20 foot, 5d8 radiant damage if fail DEX saving throw, half if succeed.

TREASURES

Most material has disappeared – organic material has crumbled to dust, metals rusted. Potions have turned to clay shards. Only precious metals and magic remains.

The mummies and Osteopólemoi conscientiously clean up the corpses of intruders and drop them in the

back from the curtain wall – there is a large pile of bones there (DC 10 to notice when on top of the wall). There are about a hundred salt and sand-encrusted skeletons in total. Many are Stymphaloi. Armor, cloth, etc. have been eaten by the beetles or rusted into oblivion. What remains is precious metals and gemstones. There is a lot of it, but one needs to spend a gruelling day digging – and the digging may attract mephitis, stymphaloi or other things. During night **disturbed spirits may emerge**, seeking proper burial.

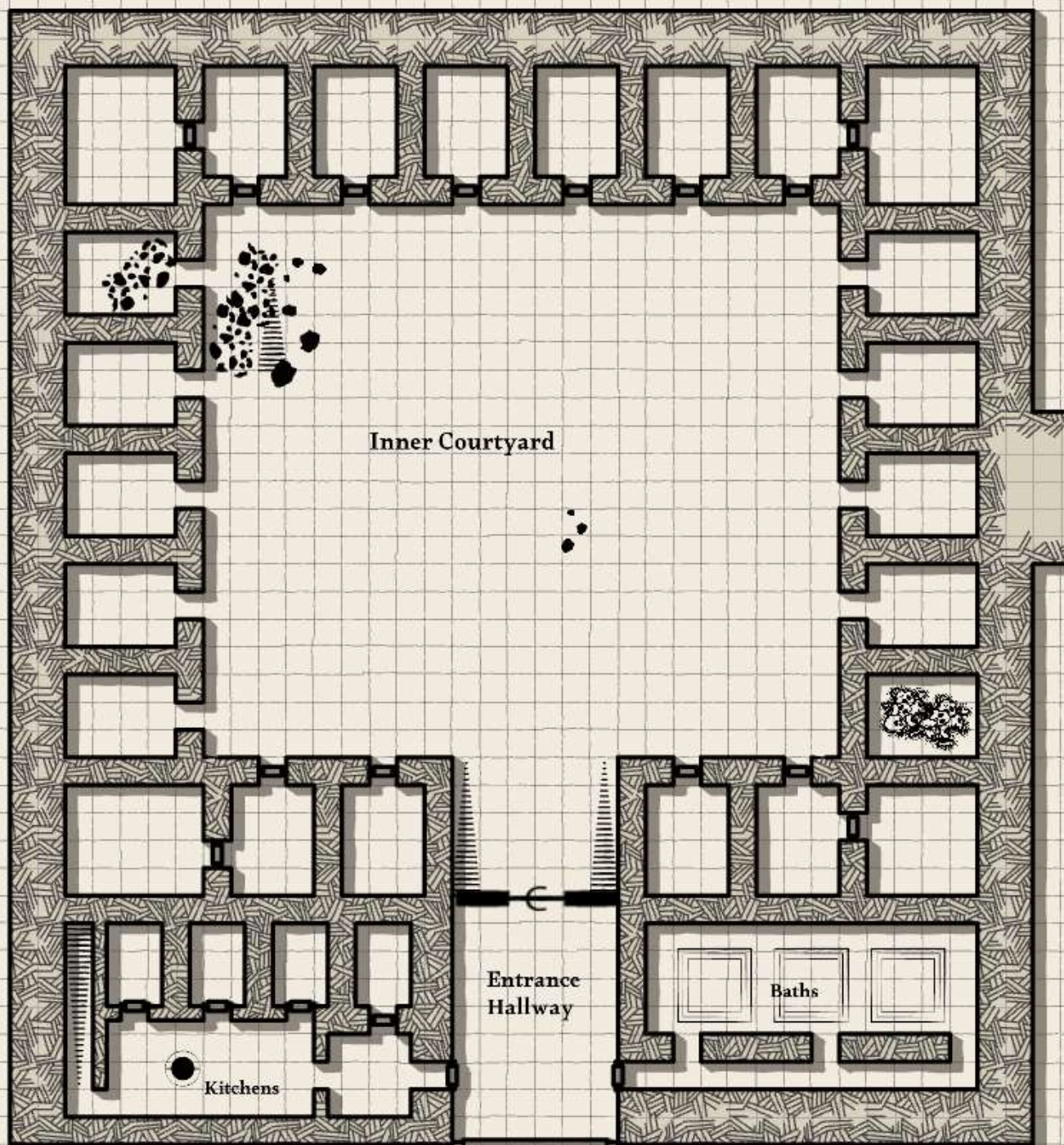
In total there is: 2300 cp, 1100 sp, 100 gp and 7 pp.

x13 25gp art objects: a gold locket, a bronze mirror, a silver die, a copper lamp with silver filigree, a silver bracelet, a silver holy symbol of Laossos (25 gp), 8 gold rings.

The magical items in the pile have all mostly been corrupted by the valley. This is the full list of findable items; roll for the order with which they are uncovered.

ITEMS IN THE SKELETON PILE

1d10	Treasure
1	Little copper container containing dust of disappearance. Works normally, but irritates the nose – need to roll a DC 10 CON save to avoid sneezing. Reroll each turn until under control.
2	A lead tablet with ominous curses in the ancient language; anybody whose name is written on it becomes cursed as per bestow curse (all wounds, poisons or other sources of damage deal an extra d8 necrotic damage).
3	Periapt of health. Carries the portrait of Zêrunthia.
4	Periapt of wound closure. Carries the portrait of Zêrunthia. The curse of the valley makes it extremely painful: a WIS save is needed not to scream when used.
5	A garnet acting as an Elemental Gem summoning a Magma Mephit .
6	An Identified Cube: a small metal cube that Identify always succeeds at identifying – even if the target was another item within 100 ft of the cube. Identifying it also causes it to attune to the caster, returning to their possession if discarded.
7	Sword of berserking. As Berserker Axe , but a sword.
8	Driftglobe. The command words are in Ancient Auran. When used it buzzes like a bee.
9	Mask of Judgment: a golden mask giving advantage on detecting deception or legal judgment when attuned. However, it will tend to bias towards harsher punishments if there are options, and it is impossible not to speak the truth while wearing it.
10	Armor of vulnerability. An ornate orichalcum armour giving resistance against slashing damage... and vulnerability against bludgeoning and piercing damage.



YUMIMTU LEVEL 1

THE ENTRANCE HALLWAY

A grand vaulted hallway into the keep, 30 feet wide. Sand and dust is everywhere. Two doors lead to the left and right while ahead the hallway opens up into darkness.

Somebody investigating the doors (DC 10 investigation) will notice that while badly worn, the hinges seem in good condition (if creaky due to the sand), as if somebody had maintained them. The external doors are however entirely impassable.

THE INNER COURTYARD

A vast open space 115x115 feet across. It is ringed with doorways: six on the north side, five on the west, four on the south side and four on the east side. Beside the entrance there are two stairs leading up to the top of the

entrance hallway. In a few spots masonry has fallen from the inner walls that are sloping upward as an internal pyramid. Small windows overlook the courtyard. At the top there is a complex magical seal (originally an evocation of fire to light the place, now disrupted).

Mephits may play here.



SOLDIERS ROOMS

The side rooms are all empty, with remnants of wooden furniture crumbled into dust. Sand has piled up everywhere.

STAIRS DOWN BELOW

A staircase blocked by big masonry and debris. Originally an underground tunnel to some other defence works, now totally impassable.

THE SEALED ROOM

There is a sealed room where rebellious soldiers were once sealed up alive after a mutiny. Today only their bones remain. If the room is opened they awaken and form a mass of bones that work together to take revenge against the living. The other undead will expel them from the keeps, but do not care about their further activity.

FORMER KITCHENS

A room with crumbling brick ovens and side stores. A deep well with an easily crumbling edge (DEX 13 saving throw, 2d6 fall damage into cistern).

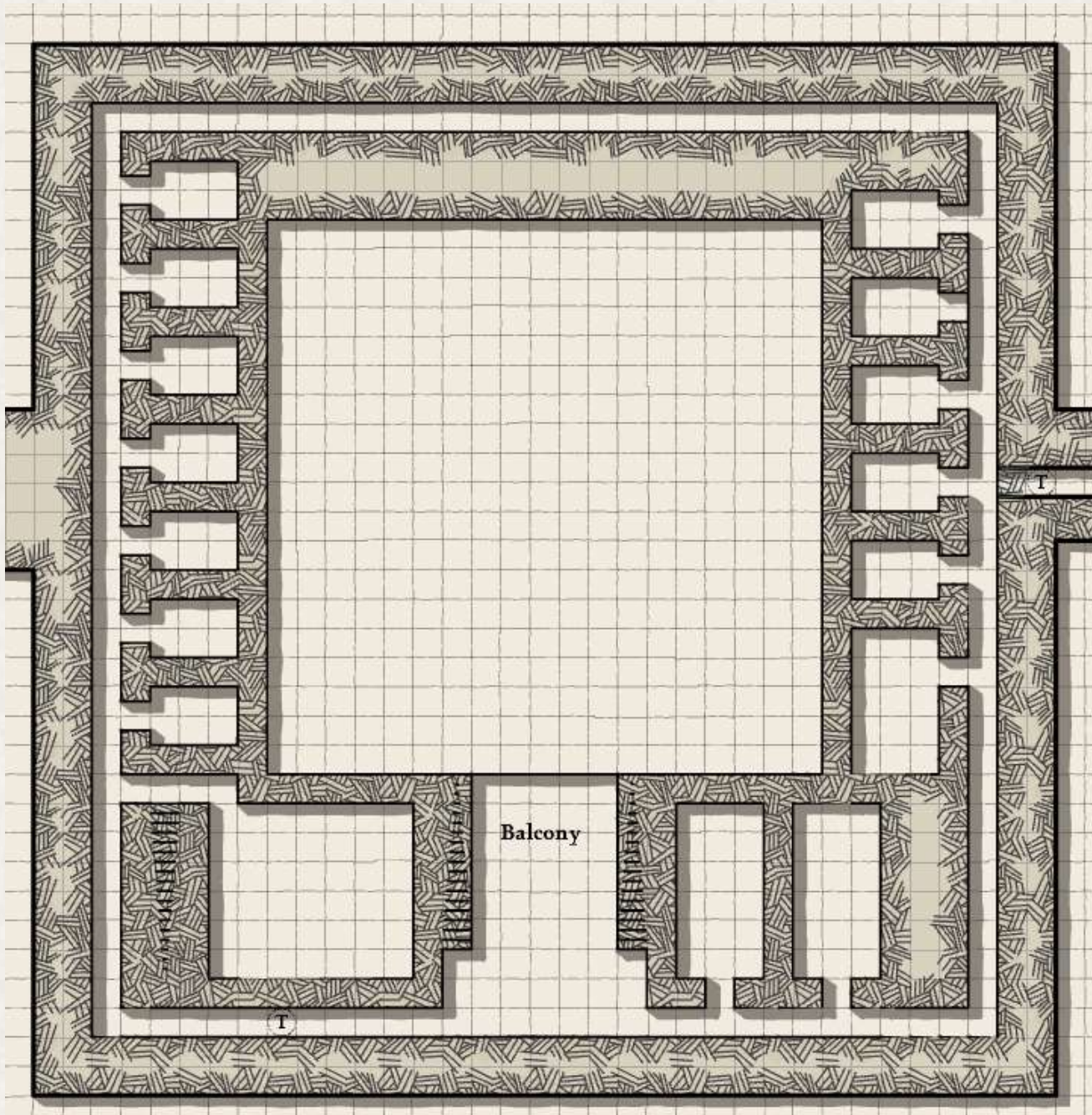
Inside the cistern there is a skeleton surrounded by scattered ceramic shards, decayed leather. It has some possessions (80 gp, an iron Holy Symbol (of Agêtôr) (25 gp), bronze gauntlets (25 gp), a rusted longsword).

Behind a bend there is a narrow stairway leading up. There are long furrows along the walls, as if something with big claws has descended.

FORMER BATHS

Three basins with mosaics showing geometrical patterns. The basins are filled with salt crystals, salt or dust mephitis may manifest.





YUMIMTU LEVEL 2

THE BALCONY

The two stairs lead up to a 25x45'' room ending in a balcony. At the back, there are entrances to hallways to the left and right. There are also two stairs on either side leading further up.

HALLWAY

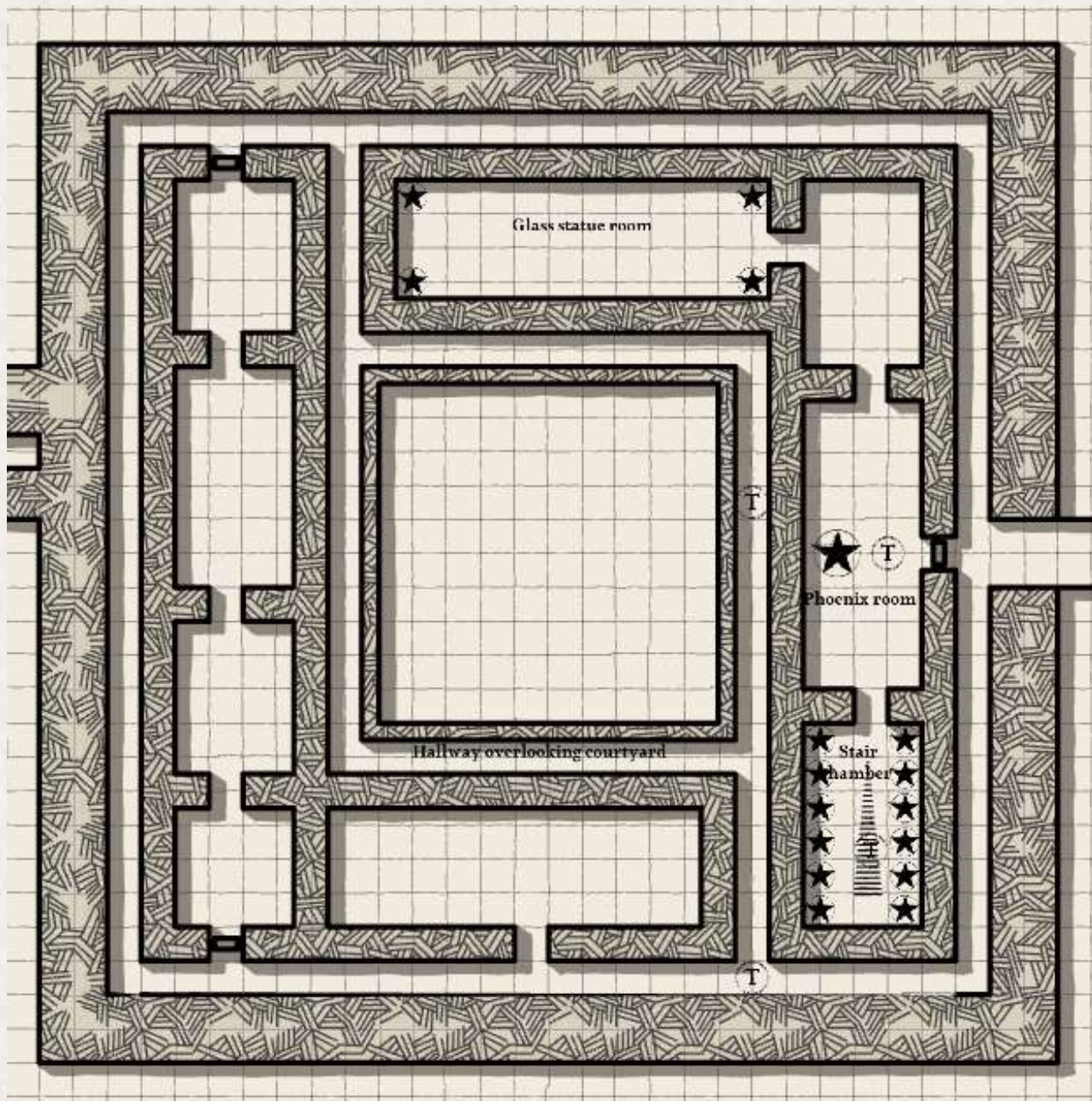
Stretches around the pyramid. Small side cells. Some have tiny windows, little more than tubes overlooking the courtyard.

Trap: Hidden (DC 10) **bear trap** on floor. The Osteopólemoi often drive intruders towards them.

HALLWAY TO OTHER KEEP

Used to have portcullis, but something has forced its way through.

Flagstones trapped to make loud sounds. Ceiling looks unstable and might start leaking in sand.



YUMIMTU LEVEL 3

THE CURTAIN WALL

The curtain wall overlooks the valley and some relatively empty fields beyond filled with dunes and ruins. It has half collapsed. Behind it lies the bone pile described earlier.

HALLWAY OVERLOOKING THE INNER COURTYARD

Hidden (DC 10) **bear trap** on floor. The Osteopólemoi often drive intruders towards them.

PHOENIX ROOM



Long room with openings left and right, 40x15'', with a bronze statue of a bird surrounded by flames along the long wall.

Trap: Statue of phoenix with flames. DC is 15 to spot the pressure plates, as well as faint scorch marks on the floor and walls. A spell or other effect that can sense the presence of magic, such as detect magic, reveals an aura of evocation magic around the statue.

The trap activates when more than 20 pounds of weight is placed on the pressure plate, causing the statue to release a 30-foot cone of fire covering everything

except the furthest parts of the room. Each creature in the fire must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Wedging an iron spike or other object under the pressure plate prevents the trap from activating.

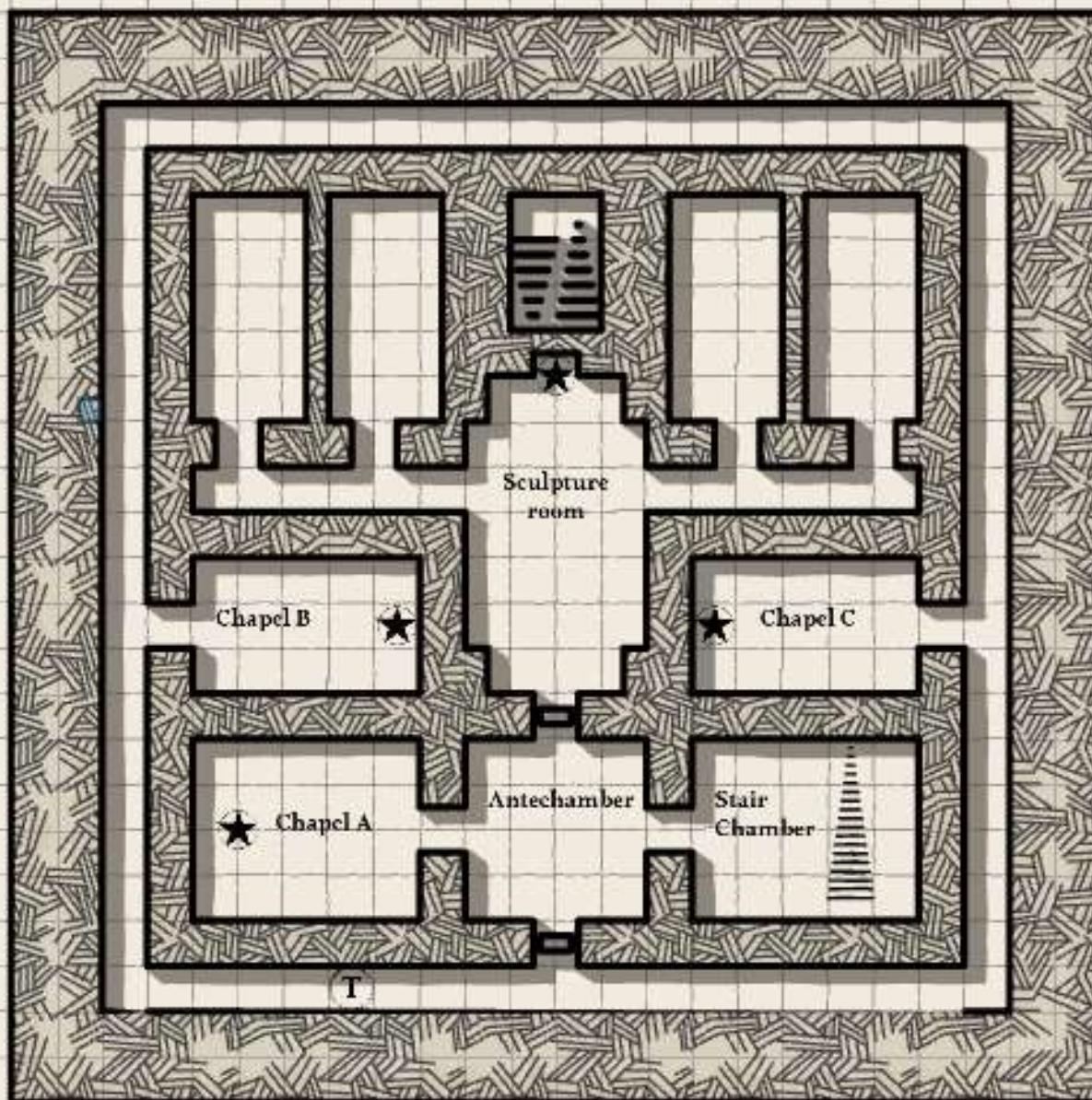
STAIR CHAMBER

Stairway surrounded by sculptures of warriors. The stairway is trapped (DC 15 perception to notice the pressure plates) When the stairway steps are pressed, the warriors move in and block the exit. To remove them need to say the right command to return, or make a DC 15 Athletics or Acrobatics check to sneak past. The statues are **stone golems**. They are not aggressive.

GLASS STATUE ROOM

In each corner there is a large glass statue of a headless man. There are glass shards on the floor. These were golems, but are now destroyed by some past intruders. If examined carefully one can still see long dried blood on their hands and the shards.





YUMIMTU LEVEL 4

STAIR CHAMBER

Filled with some kind of metal machinery, now rusted into a solid mass.

ANTECHAMBER

Chamber with a lavish marble floor of heavily eroded black and white stones.

In the entrance there is a statue of a warrior partially buried in the wall for some reason (a remnant of a battle with intruders some millennia ago).

The chamber used to be trapped by a falling net, the flagstone clicks but nothing happens.

SIDE ROOMS



These rooms were chapels to various gods.

Chapel A: Room with a massive quartz statue of a child with wings that speaks. Asks something incomprehensible, requires an answer. As [crystal golem](#). This is Kefaigundun, a minor god of healing. Staying in the room restores 1 HP per 10 min.

Chapel B: A large iron statue of a young woman wearing a veil. It is hollow and full of coins (434 sp); the

air around the statue feels cold. The statue is surrounded by long burnt out candles. This is an **iron golem** possessed by an undead spirit. If coins are removed, it will start to retrieve them. This depicts Mantuukuu, a goddess of wealth – a form of Zêrunthia.

Chapel C: A medium size iron statue of an emaciated man. He cries tears of blood; a zone of silence surrounds the statue, muting all sounds. The statue activates during an eclipse, wandering the hallways. As **iron golem**. This depicts an aspect of Ar.

THE SCULPTURE ROOM



The room is oblong (35x20'), with a central table or dais with an elaborate seal in the middle. There is a very fancy marble floor, and pillars holding up the ceiling. The room is lined with statues of metallic creatures. Cobras, elephants, wolves, monkeys, and other creatures stand vigilantly, staring at the centre of the room. At the further wall there is a niche with a metal statue of Laossos holding out his arms.

The statue opens the stairway to the roof if given the Rod.

There is an **Iron cobra** hiding among statues, bringing the Osteopólemoi if triggered. Some of the sculptures may act as **animated armor** if repaired or triggered, if more challenge is needed.

If the PCs fight off the cobra and then go down to find the rod, there is a chance that one of the mummies will show up and begin to repair it. When they return, they might find a pissed-off maintenance priest, plus the cobra.

THE STAIRCASE

If given the rod, the statue swings aside, revealing a 10x15' room with a spiral staircase leading up to the top of the keep. The stairs have signs of cracking, almost as if they had been burned by great heat.

SIDE ROOMS TO SCULPTURE ROOM

These rooms seem to have been blasted. Molten metal splatters the walls. Fragments of sculpture lie around. One wall has a silhouette of a human imprinted by the heat.

There is a bronze mirror at each end of the hallway. Once they would have generated a double, but now the metal is so scuffed, buckled and eroded that it cannot manifest. If getting too close a hand might try to grab and pull one in (same strength as character). (Could also be a **mirror of life trapping**)

HALLWAY

Circumnavigates the keep. There are clear signs that the stones have been subject to great forces or heat, with rivulets of rock and metal descending from the roof and cracks in the stones.

Hidden (DC 10) **bear trap** on floor. The Osteopólemoi often drive intruders towards them.

ROOF: THE PHOENIX EGG



THE ROOF

The roof is covered with shiny flagstones of black glass. The valley and its ruins can be seen through a thick flickering heat haze. At the centre of the roof is a set of circles of sparkling blue and red gems surrounding a hot 6 feet flame hovering in the air. Inside the flame floats a big golden egg, bright as a dawn. The air is warm and thrums with power.

This is the place where the phoenix was summoned and later imprisoned in an egg.

The egg floats above a complex pattern of stone, inlaid with precious red and blue gems – lapis lazuli, turquoise, amethysts, sapphires, carnelian, cinnabar, garnet, rubies... it is beautiful, worth a lot, and if disturbed will release the phoenix. Sure, one or two stones can be lost (there have already been a few breaks), but not too many...

Spells of elemental control and time stop protect the egg (detect magic feels enchantment, abjuration, and transmutation). The flame deals 2d10 damage per turn to anything entering, plus they might get affected by some of the spells (growing younger, freezing in place...) Attacks through the flame are hard (disadvantage, weapon may get damaged).

A TEMPTATION TO THE GREEDY

The value is 10 gp for the lapis lazuli, turquoise, cinnabar, 50gp for the carnelian, 100 gp for the amethysts and garnets, and 1000 gp for the sapphires and rubies. Each removed gem has 5% chance of

breaking the circle. Roll 1D20, if it comes up 1... Quickly replacing it *might* help or not.

The expensive red gems can be used as elemental gems to summon fire elementals and the blue ones water elementals. However, if they are removed the chance of breaking the circle is 50%.

The shell of the phoenix egg is nice gold that is infused with much magic, worth perhaps 1000 gp to the right magician... and may 100 to a normal tradesman, who would just use it as gold.

UNLEASHING THE PHOENIX

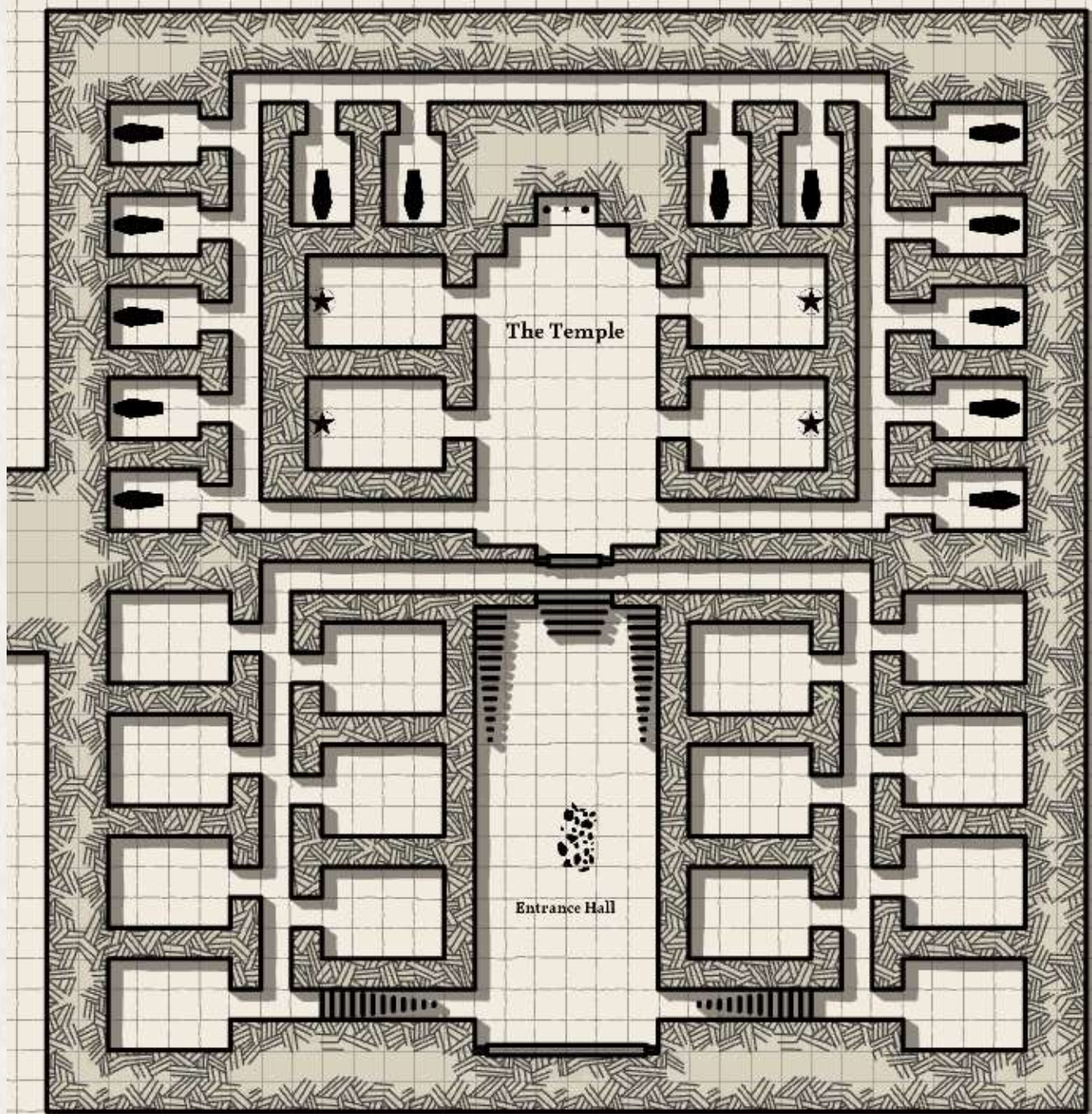
What destroyed the kingdom was a summoning of the phoenix: an elemental force of fire and devastation that is very hard to put back once summoned. Somehow, it was defeated, apparently at the price of the kingdom itself. But the summoning circle in the Left Keep still remains with a magical fire flaming in the air, containing the egg. Were it ever cracked, a young monster would hatch to start destroying the world. Starting with an epic aerial battle against the roc...

It would start as a hatchling, cheerfully running around setting things – and people – on fire before sailing off the edge of the pyramid (triggering the radiance of the runes, which doesn't faze it the least and instead feed it) to set fire to more things...

After a short while, feeding on the flames of some burning trees and fields, it quickly begins to recover its own form. Once coming into its own it begins to fly around to burn the world – likely starting with an epic battle with the Roc.

Somebody unleashing the bird may have the hatchling imprint on them: it will be friendly, but that doesn't mean it will do what it is told or not try to set its "parent" on fire. To truly control it one needs to cast a Control Elemental spell at a very, very high level.





YUZH LEVEL 1

THE ENTRANCE HALL



The hall has a high, vaulted ceiling with deep hollows. Some masonry has fallen in the centre of the room. In front a broad staircase leads up towards a pair of doors with two hallways leading off to the left and right. There

are also two narrow staircases leading up to a balcony above the door. Two hallways lead off to the left and right.

The walls are covered with ornaments showing armies clashing on a vast scale, with a sky filled with birds and weapons.

The inner doors are made of red ragestone and ornamented with interleaved swords. Opening them without touching is a bit of a challenge, especially since they are locked. Unlocking them is a DC 20 task (or easy, if the PCs have the chimes of opening from the bandits)

There are side hallways with rooms that used to be housing, but they are now totally empty.

THE TEMPLE



The floor is sardonyx, worn by millennia of wear. The walls are richly ornamented in the mysterious language with flaking golden inscriptions. Along the walls magical flames shine from sconces made from helmets. Straight in front is an altar of red stone with a 3' bronze statue of Laossoos holding a gleaming rod in his outstretched arms. There is a noticeable disquieting feeling about the statue when examined.

There are four openings to the side leading into side chapels.

A mummified priest is waiting. He wears a frayed red robe and an intricate bronze chestplate. If not showing the right respect for Laossoos and him, he will attack.

This priest is a cleric, although he doesn't normally use his spells in battle; in a sense he has lost the divine connection over the millennia and needs to be "woken up" about his old life to overcome the habits and compulsions of dealing with intruders. When fully active he has access to at least 2nd level spells (such as Locate Object to track down thieves, Spiritual Weapon for extra attacks, Blindness, Augury, Mending).

The priest starts with sowing 4 skeletons from his bag, and then systematically scaring/hitting intruders. The skeletons will form a square; the back ones do ranged attacks as directed by the mummy, the front ones help attacking (and do opportunity attacks, like the mummy, if somebody tries to get the back skeletons)

If approached properly, he will sermonize in ancient language and bless them in the fight against Laossoos enemies. He will not let them have any treasures, and is a rigid preacher:

"To Laossoos I call, sceptered King of Strength and Violence who stands beside every soldier. Patron of Giidguurmuian. Giver of noble war, enemy of cowardice. Most honourable of gods, who anoints heroes among the glorious fallen. Stand

beside me. Consecrate my rage for the good. Bless me that I may fight with honour. Guard me from shooting from my unworthy enemies. From strikes from the weak. Let me never be defenceless. To Laossoos I call: stand with me."

(this acts as a **Bless** spell in the next fight)

Priest Treasure

The priest is wearing frayed robes and bronze rings containing 7 50gp gemstones. It has some dried up potions and a silver feather (Feather token Bird).

A bag of 2d4 teeth that when thrown grows into skeletons. (see setting book for Bag of Skeletons)

Ring of Axiocercus: A ring of **fire resistance**. For each use, the wearer need to eat humanoid flesh to recharge it. (see setting book)

Circlet of Zamama: A bronze circlet with garnet. It holds a **harm** spell that heals undead: once a day it can heal 14d6 HP – if one is undead: a living wearer instead takes it as damage. (Yes, harm no longer works like that in 5e, but the priest is old enough). It can also be placed on the head of a willing person to make them one of the guardian undead.

There is a **filigreed bronze breastplate** sacred to Laossoos – it once belonged to a great hero Kalax, now remembered only in the celestial city. The breastplate can whisper warnings against cowardice and support for bravery (+2 to WIS in resisting doing the less brave choice, advantage on saving throws against becoming frightened). (see setting book)

Temple treasure

Sacred sculpture of Laossoos. It is about three foot tall, made out of bronze, showing the god with multiple arms holding weapons and holding out two hands to hold the rod. There is something eerie about it: this is an actual sacred object touched by the god's aura. It gives military advantage to the side placing it in their main temple and honouring it. Weighs 100 pounds. If disrespected the god will animate it – treat it as a **sacred statue** with an ancient **eidolon** animating it.

Rod of resurrection – a metal rod of an unknown metal, inscribed with strange symbols and a pattern of flaming birds. When used it can heal and even resurrect, but it is painful: the healing feels like the wound was made again (roll for concentration), and resurrection is pure agony (causing a **short-term madness effect** beside the other effects).

THE ROD AND AÏDÔNEUS

In the most ancient eras, Laossoos performed a great service to Aïdôneus and got a boon. He asked for the rod: a way of bringing back favoured warriors. Through gritted teeth the god of death agreed, and the Rod was created.

Fortunately it has not been used for ages, but it is a minor annoyance to He Who Receives Many. He is not against resurrections per se, but they should be accompanied by a greater blood sacrifice. Sure, with Laossoos involved, there is usually a lot of blood spilled in general, but it is a matter of principle. The Rod just invokes the old boon, allowing souls to leave the underworld (at least until they die again... Aïdôneus comforts himself by noting that eventually they will be back).

Carrying the rod means that Laossoos and Aïdôneus will take an interest in the party.



The warrior skeletons are dressed in adamantine chain mail. The inner padding has long since decayed, making wearing it painful. Removing it will make the bones start assembling sleepily.

Mummies are merely wearing frayed robes. Attempts to rob them will wake them up.

Should any of these objects leave the keeps the collected undead priesthood may begin to hunt for them. This will be a team of 3 Osteopólemoi, 3 mummies, a bunch of skeletons, and some of the statue-golems. They are single-minded in their pursuit, but slow.

SIDE CHAPELS TO RHARIAS, PITANATIS, KORUPHASIA AND AGÊTÔR

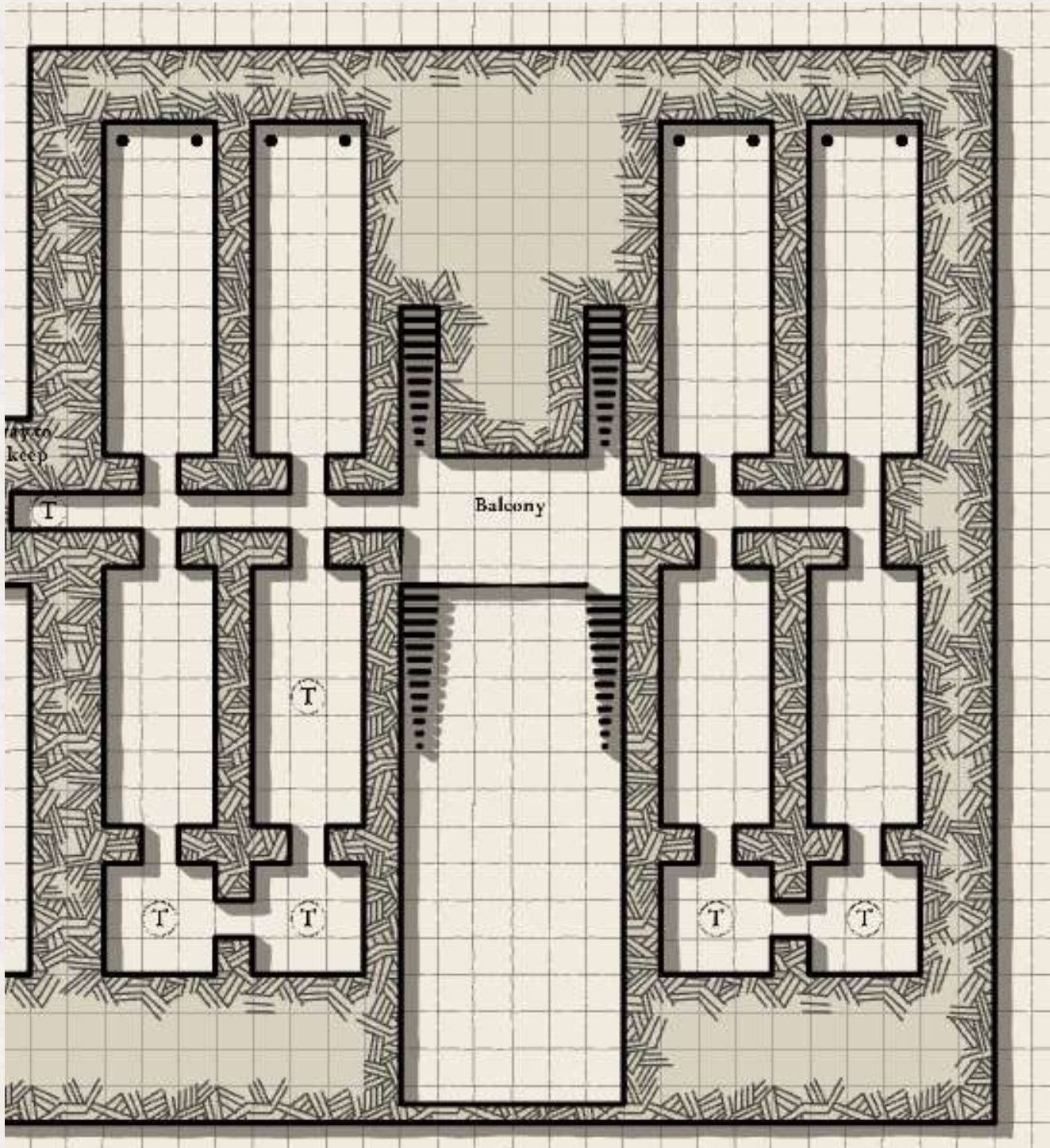
Each holds a statue that can be animated by an eidolon if needed.

- Agêtôr holds Helmet of Amyntor
- Rharias holds bronze chimes
- Pitatanis holds a bronze flute
- Koruphasia holds a bronze lyre

The musical instruments allows one to scare or control Stymphaloi. Were the chimes placed in the entrance canyon the birds would not be able to cross. Learning to play them to control them requires teaching of the secrets of Laossos, but clever PCs might be able to figure out how to do simple effects like charm or frighten. The flute and lyre, played right, acts as the Command spell for Stymphaloi.

CRYPTS

In each crypt there are sarcophagi (sometimes one, sometimes several). Many contain skeletons and mummies waiting for their turn of duty. Each skeleton is wearing armour and with weapons, (new weapons are picked from the labyrinth above). Many of the crypts are empty.



YUZH LEVEL 2

THE BALCONY

A balcony overlooking the entrance hallway. The pair stairs continue upwards. There is a hallway leading left and right relative to the big entrance.

NARROW ROOMS

Narrow, empty rooms. Possibly with unstable roofing.

Trap: Collapsing roof trap, DC 15 DEX to dodge the cave-in, 4d10 damage, otherwise half damage.

The exception is the north-western room, which contains a large pile of tools used by mummies for maintenance – whetstones, hammers, stone saws etc. Much of it is broken and worn down to useless nubs despite mending and magical sharpening.

The northern rooms have two pillars at the back and a conspicuous empty space in between. This used to be the location for targets for ranged attacks.

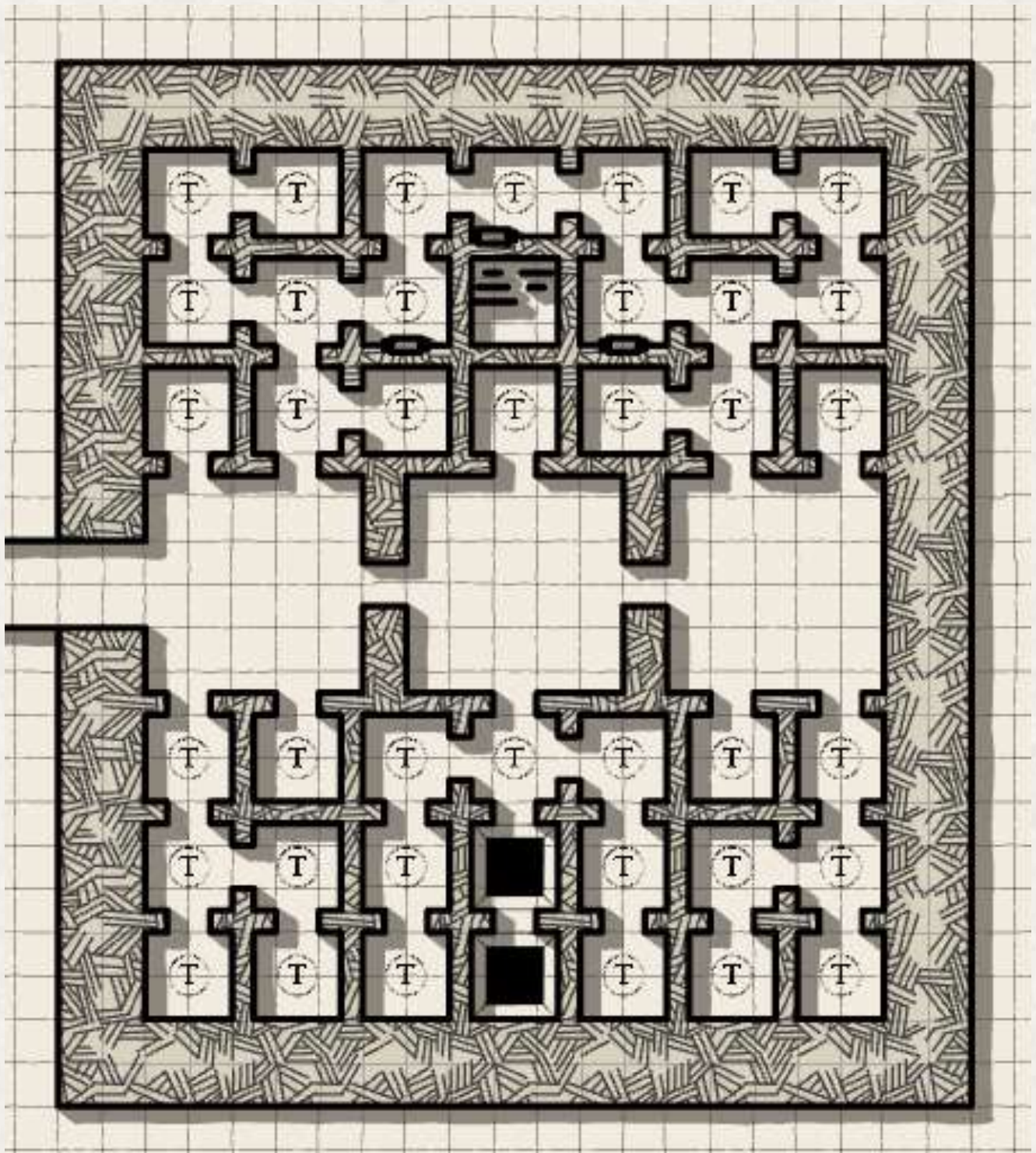
Trap: The southern rooms have floors of ragestone, intended as training or “meditation” for Laossos.



HALLWAY LEADING OVER TO OTHER KEEP

Possibly with unstable roofing.

Trap: Collapsing roof trap, DC 15 DEX. 4d10 damage, otherwise half.



YUZH LEVEL 3

This level was used for meetings, teaching, purifications and as a library.

THE LABYRINTH

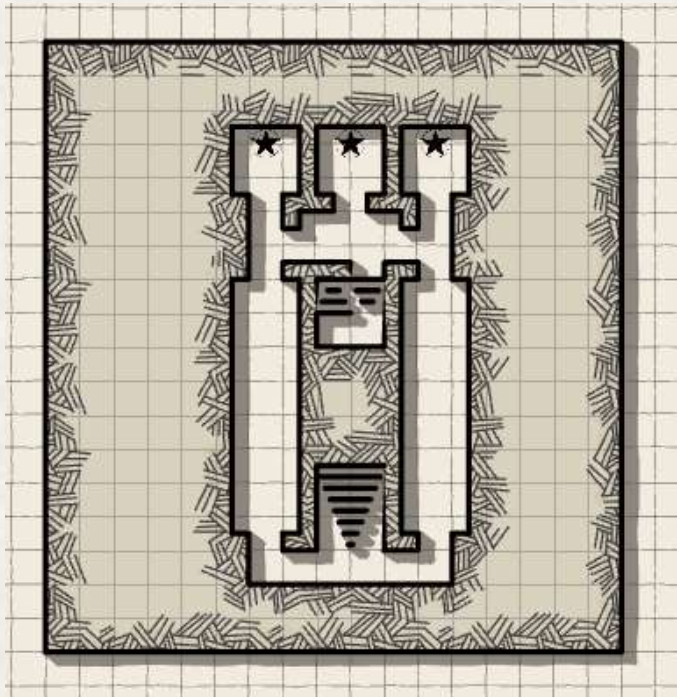
Three big rooms (25x25') decorated by hanging swords and weapons, with floors made of crushed shields. Surrounded by small rooms (10x10') similarly decorated, with arched doorways forming a kind of labyrinth.

Stairs to the lower floor emerge through doors (once locked, now mostly stuck). Room ceiling full of hanging, decaying swords and javelins.

Hidden door leading to staircase up: pull on right sword (DC 20 to notice one seems polished by use)

Trap: DC 15 to notice that some shields are pressure plates, making sword fall down doing 1d6 damage. After seeing it once, DC 10 to detect the shields.

Trap: Central south side, slide traps into the entrance hallway (DC 15 detect, works 50% of time), falling down 40 feet, taking 3d6 damage.



YUZH LEVEL 4

This level used to be further chapels and ritual galleries.

STATUE ROOMS



Rooms that one had lavish frescos (now mostly illegible) holding a statue each:

A massive silver statue of an angel with a skeletal face. It is cold to the touch; a zone of silence surrounds the statue, muting all sounds. This is Muuz, a minor god of death.

If touched it will turn and look the PC in the eyes – they will suffer a horrible nightmare next night (not gaining any rest), yet gain prophetic insights that come in handy later.

A marble statue of a bearded man seated on a throne, holding a spear and a sphere. This is Ranimururtur, a form of Laossos.

Touching it makes it flash bright light from the sphere, and the person takes 1d6 radiant damage but gains the charm of order.

Charm of Order: This charm has 1d4 charges. As an action, use one or more charges to cast the Command spell. For every charges used beyond the first, you may

target an additional target. Once all charges have been used, the charm goes away.

A silver statue of an obese naked man. It is hollow and full of ash; the air around the statue is drafty, yet the ash remains fixed. The statue sits on a raised dais. This is Iuhazaz, a minor fire god.

The statue activates when caressed lightly, igniting and trying to eat the ashes of its victims. Originally intended as a form of funeral. Has advantage against all undead. As [iron golem](#), but exhales fire. It will not leave the room.

GALLERIES



40x10'' galleries with knives sticking out of the walls and pillars hanging irregularly from the roof. This used to be a Path of Blades trap with automated knives and stomping pillars, but is now unusable. However, there is a Rune of fear at remote wall sending people back.

Each creature in the final 30 feet of the corridor must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed saving throw, the creature is frightened of the rune, and the creature must immediately use its reaction to move its speed away from the end of the corridor. The frightened creature can't move closer to the end of the hallway until it uses an action to succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw, which ends the frightened condition on itself.

ROOF

The flat roof of the keep. Broken flagstones, scorched by great heat, cover it. When the PCs arrive the sphinx will show up, appearing as if out of a mirage. During the time it is present it will look like mirages multiply around the roof, sometimes hinting of lush vegetations or other cities.

KAAH THE SPHINX



You can call me Kaah. Or the Sure Death, as the birds do. I have the greatest treasures. Health. Answers. Prophecies. You only have to pay for them in coin. Ask, and I will give you the price.

Kaah

On top of Yuzh she sits, waiting for the time when things are right. Infinitely patient, eternally mysterious, and just a little bit too deadly. Over the millennia she has caught countless Stymphaloi coming too close (to them she is “The Sure Death”). She is not quite a fallen sphinx, but she is not loyal to the gods either and may let slip information that matters.

While in some sense working for Laossos to protect his former kingdom, she is more interested in maintaining the cosmic order. Having seen ages come and go she has a unique perspective on the universe and the gods. Keeping the Phoenix imprisoned is a small thing – she is a cat after all.

She is content to answer questions or heal if people solve her riddles. This includes reading Augostinos’ ancient manuscript, which she will do with great relish.

She is open to being charmed, but keeps her heart under control – anybody who wants to get close will have to solve her very toughest riddle.

RIDDLES

She will select a difficulty of the riddle corresponding to how much she thinks the answer or help is worth. Sometimes she selects one just for fun.

Riddle	Answer
What is so fragile that it breaks when you whisper?	Silence
When you do not know what I am I exist. When you know what I am I do not exist.	A riddle
Flying over the sea and the land. White birds, featherless. Dying in my hands.	Snow
I am a black child sprung from a bright sire, A wingless bird, fleeing to heaven from earth. Each eye that meets me weeps, but not from grief, And in thin air I vanish at my birth.	Smoke
I go from city to city, yet never move. What am I?	Roads
I am tiny, yet I encircle the sea. I am smaller than a mouse, yet can carry a house. Without me, you cannot stand.	Sand and pebbles
I live in palace and cave alike. I weave, yet nobody wears my clothes. I kiss, but not for love.	Spider
I am a tooth that bites meat, yet thereof I never eat. I am the hand that takes the crown, yet the land I never own. When I stir the fire, it becomes a conflagration.	Sword
I grow when you are far, yet cannot thrive when you are alone. Honesty is my enemy, yet I am the enemy of love	Jealousy
I am filled with holes yet strong as steel. I am hard, yet I easily bend.	Chain
What is it that tears into small pieces whatever falls in its toothless mouth? If you put your fingers in its eyes it will instantly prick up its ears.	Scissors
Many people want me, but I do not care. I can give the slave freedom, I can make the poor prosperous, Many hands touch me, but my face does not change expression.	A coin, money
Who speaks without having a tongue, nor a mouth, nor a voice to modulate its words? Without bonds, it makes its owners limp, and makes them leap when its loops are increased.	A pen
I am always in front of you, yet you can never see me.	The future
What is invisible and smells of carrots?	A rabbit's fart ²
Dancing around the greatest fire, the white and black knights have fought since the time began and will fight until it ends. Each will defeat one other, yet be defeated by the next one. Each is immortal, yet they all fade away.	Days and nights
A donkey corpse struck me on the ear with its horny shin.	A flute: Cythosian flutes are made from donkey bones.
Don't speak and you will say my name. But do you need to speak? And so again, a great surprise. By speaking you will say my name.	Silence
There is a story that a man and not a man Saw and did not see a bird and not a bird Perched on a branch and not a branch And hit him and did not hit him with a rock and not a rock.	A eunuch who did not see well saw a bat perched on a reed and threw a pumice stone at it which missed but scared it.

For more, [see this collection](#).

PROPHECIES

Some random prophecies:

- “You will not get your crown before crossed the widest water and the brightest fire, descended under the

heaviest rock and the quietest air to find a weapon you may never use.”

- “An arrow needs a bow.”
- “Three princes out of seven. Six mortals. One crown.”³

² No, the sphinx is not always serious.

³ This alludes to that they will get two twin brothers, one of which is not mortal.

- “For the wrong reasons, you will hunt the greatest monster of all.”
- “What is, shall be no more. What was will be. What will be, shall be past.”
- “We will meet again. Because we have already met.”
- “Find what you love and let it kill you.”
- “When the moon does not fall,
Seek misery and garner praise,
Descend into the darkest maze,
Ascend into the golden hall.”

COMMENTS ON DIFFERENT THINGS

- **Getting up to the roof on the other side:** “Give the god what he holds beneath.” (she points straight down)
- **Phoenix:** “A fire can warm, burn, or devastate depending on who tends it. Are you more skilled or wise than the priest-kings of yore?”
- **Herself:** “I am a guard of an empty room, waiting for the walls to fall in. When there is no room, there is nothing to guard, and I am no longer a guard.”
- **Roc:** “A big bird, but little more.”
- **Kingfisher:** “A small bird, but much more.”
- **Stymphaloi:** “They still remember the bugles of the Lord of Birds.”
- **Griffons:** “Ah, the small ones. Are not one’s children always cute?”
- **City/valley:** “What is this place? A forgotten hearth. A grand empire. The site of the great battle.”
- **The Rod:** “Even the greatest writer sometimes need to erase the wax tablet. Even the greatest warrior sometimes needs healing.”
- **Treasure:** “The greatest treasure holds the second greatest treasure in his hands, while that which is beyond price sleeps above.”
- **Shadow:** “Is a man without a shadow half a man, is a shadow without a man half a shadow?”
- **Nothic:** “You are followed by someone who is blind despite his great vision, and who will lead you to where you do not wish to go. He will give poisoned advice that is true.”

ADVICE

- “If you are the weapon you will never be able to disarm yourself.”
- “When the strong turn the wheel, you have to walk opposite to stay on top.”
- “A man should not eat his heart. Nor should he stir a fire with a sword. Nor step over a yoke.”
- Do not make fun of the dead.
- Do not fight an absent foe
- Control your eye.
- Know who is the judge.
- When you leave, close the door.
- You are one step away from paradise. Or hell. Depending on which way you step. I suggest you step wisely.

THE BATTLE

Above you a terrifying battle takes place in the sky. The Roc screeches and flies at the Phoenix, raking it with its claws and beak. It bursts into flame, and the Phoenix screeches back with a sound that echoes between the mountains. Again and again they strafe each other. Burning feathers and feathers of fire fall from the sky, crashing into the landscape.

As you watch in awe, suddenly the Roc lunges at its opponent and with a roar seems to break its neck. Everything goes brilliant white. As your eyesight slowly returns you see sparks falling from the sky everywhere. The Roc, burned and hurt, still flies triumphantly if somewhat unsteadily. It begins to fly back to its nest, trailing smoke.

But falling from the sky there is also a golden egg, shining like the dawn. It lands with a crash in the middle of the valley.

ROC VERSUS PHOENIX



The PCs are unlikely to be a match for the Roc, not even if they ally with the Stymphaloi. But unleashing the Phoenix might even the odds.

Somewhat surprisingly, the Phoenix only has about 5% chance of defeating the Roc in a one-to-one fight (I estimated this using computer simulation). The Phoenix has a higher CR than the Roc, but the Roc has more hit points. What happens is a grandiose aerial fight between the two gargantuan monsters where the Roc is burned but inflicts enough damage to kill the phoenix... temporarily.

The phoenix explodes, and a fiery egg falls down to the valley floor. It matures over a few days, and eventually a new phoenix hatches, grows, and attacks the Roc. This will keep on repeating until the Roc is killed or leaves.

The Stymphaloi will be pushed into religious frenzy by these events. They will guard the egg, chanting and sacrificing to it. They have faith in their saviour. Outsiders better not annoy them, or they might be sacrifices.

PCs on the other hand may notice that the Roc is hurt. Each battle loses it about half of its hit points, so an attack on it just afterward might have a chance of succeeding. Enterprising PCs might recruit Stymphaloi warriors not too interested in the saviour egg cult and attack the Roc in its nest. This will be a hard and deadly

fight but could result in actually defeating a grand monstrosity.

AFTERMATH



If the phoenix is not released then the status quo will remain. If the Roc is not defeated, then Stymphaloi will gradually migrate out and harass the east Mesian countryside. Using the instruments from the temple could seal them into the valley (or even make the High Stymphaloi somewhat risky allies of PCs). If the Roc is defeated the High Stymphaloi will be able to return to their old lives and the valley will continue as it always has.

If the phoenix is set free, it will burn things in the valley, and eventually end up in an aerial battle with the Roc. If things turn out well it will drive the Roc away and the phoenix will fly off in search for other things to burn. A possible bad situation is if the phoenix burns everything in the valley, forcing the Stymphaloi to flee. An influx of magical bronze birds is going to mess up the countryside.

A free phoenix may eventually become a grand problem, but that may be for higher level heroes to deal with. Laossos will mostly laugh at the devastation, while Rharias will be deeply cross with everybody involved.

HANDLING THE ROD

It might appear that adding such a powerful artefact to the campaign is overpowered. In my experience it is OK. It made the final battle against the Roc feasible, but once healing is used it will take many days for a resurrection to be possible. I got the idea from [Taking 20](#).

More importantly it is a *too* valuable treasure. Smart PCs will understand that if they use it publicly, keeping it will become a real problem. Anybody who hears about it will want to have it. If the PCs are not careful about who they tell they will soon have a steady stream of people seeking help or trying to steal it. The help-seekers may be the most troublesome since they desperately want to bring back loved ones for *good* reasons: as the necessary provider for a family that will otherwise starve, the unjustly killed boy, the beloved wife, the relative they have moral obligations to help...

Giving the rod to a temple may be the “right” way of handling it: it is a major treasure and the involved god will likely be very favourable henceforth. This includes destroying the rod: Aïdôneus would be delighted.

If it becomes a too great problem, have it stolen by a master thief. Maybe Anaireus wants to use it for his plots, Aïdôneus want it out of the way, and they sends agents. Or it is one of the PC’s elder siblings who have figured out the tremendous power and decides to take it. This can easily become a subplot (since PCs *hate* when something is stolen), and if it is one of their siblings it will feed into the tragic rivalries at the end of the campaign.

Note that the Rod can mess up the plot if it resurrects the uncle of the PCs in next adventure, making the marriage with Eutara unnecessary. However, his and Ajax’s body may have been unrecoverable from the battlefield, or more plausibly, they have already been cremated and their dust is no longer available. Wise PCs also may realize that interfering with matters of inheritance and succession this way is bound to anger Agêtôr.

If you do not want to make the rod a Rod of Resurrection, there are many other options. One is that it acts as the statue: the wielder, if commanding an army, will get military advantage. Another may be that it allows commanding birds like the Trident of Fish command (no, the Roc and the Stymphaloi are monstrosities!)

Another way of tuning the Rod in the campaign is to play up the pain and madness its resurrection gives. Sure, you are back... but every time it gets worse (first the madness and pain is short term, next time long-term, and then indefinite). Worse, since this is a divine effect, normal spells cannot fix it. People may express the wish of not being brought back next time if it is this horrifying...

A NIGHTMARE VISION

If a PC touches the statue of Muuz and gains a nightmare vision, this might be useful in the next adventure.

The new queen Elpinice is not seen much, being sequestered upstairs with the other females. But when glimpsed the PC suddenly remembers his nightmare.

A VISION

You are standing in the palace, and it is burning. Bodies of friends and relatives litter the floor. Outside you see the city walls being overwhelmed by enemy soldiers as the defenders turn on each other. From the clouds, the gods watch impassively, despite fervent prayers from the temple district. You turn and see a young boy with blond hair stand in front of the throne with a sword raised against you. ‘It is time you give me the crown’ he cheerfully says as he attacks. The silver goddess of death embraces you and the vision is gone.



BACK TO CIVILIZATION: LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Just because you do not take an interest in politics doesn't mean politics won't take an interest in you.

Pericles

This part of the campaign wrenches the PCs away from their arcadian adventures into civilization, making them realize that they are surrounded by a society with rules. And people willing to use rules to win.

Ideally they should have spent some time in the Valley adventuring, and are now returning. This is ideal: time moves on, making the timing issue of the wedding seem more natural.

A WEDDING INVITATION YOU CAN'T REFUSE

Temnos, a messenger from the court, nearly exhausted stumbles upon the PCs. He, and other messengers, have been searching for the princes everywhere. Guided by some oracles from a friendly priest he has finally found them.

TEMNOS MESSAGE

I found you! Thank the gods!" Temnos nearly collapses, straightens himself up and begins to recite a message. He tells you that your uncle Cyril, ruler of Calbium and lord of Melathia (a part of northernmost Mesia) has recently passed away when the Cythosian hordes attacked. Unfortunately your cousin Ajax was also killed despite heroically driving away the barbarians from his father's corpse. He was the heir to Cyril's land, which now will fall to the widow Eutara. The law says women cannot own land, so she must marry – with a relative, to keep things inside the family and maintaining the unity of the kingdom. Congratulations Hippias – you are the closest unmarried relative that can do this! King Churii wants the whole affair wrapped up *fast*.

This is an important family matter. While the princes may never have met Eutara, they know their uncle Cyril

CAMPAIGN NOTE

In my game, the delays came very naturally. The PCs had managed to get griffon eggs and were (somewhat unsuccessfully) trying to tame the young griffons. When Temnos began to usher them towards civilization they quickly realized that travelling with half-tame griffons that attacked every horse they saw was highly inconvenient.

Staying in a small village also led to an attempted theft of valuables, producing a messy thief-hunt. Although they caught the responsible party, he had many friends in the village and it was decided that they would all go together to Etonacia Mat to meet with the archon. During this trip the suspect managed to escape, and the PCs discovered that the archon was far more interested in the possibility that someone had imported foreign monsters into Mesia – a crime with capital punishment! As they disentangled themselves from the court they ended up fairly late in Canoria.

had an important role in defending the north of the kingdom and his lands are valuable. On the upside, prince Hippias may become a major lord. On the downside, he has to marry.

THE TRIP HOME

Together with Temnos the PCs will likely try to get to Canoria. Ideally there should be some complications along the way delaying them – bad weather, bandits, a contrarian river god, some monster.

ARRIVAL AT CANORIA

Night threw her shadow on the world. Sailors out at sea looked up at the circling Bear and the stars of Orion.

Travellers and watchmen longed for sleep, and oblivion came at last to mothers mourning for their children's death.

In the town, dogs ceased to bark and men to call to one another; silence reigned over the deepening dark.

Apollonius of Rhodes, Argonautica, Book III

NEWS

Mesia has won great success in the war against Cebreia – good news for the big brothers. The PCs can see many new slaves in the city. The war against Tremia is not going as well, which is why uncle Cyril and cousin Ajax died. Monophthalmos looks forward to avenge them and says some bloodcurdling things.

The city is cleaning up after the Enarxia, the solstice festival when the gods shift. Pitaneas has returned to the divine world. Now it is the year of Zêrunthia.

King Churii has recently married! The new step-mother of the PCs is the beautiful Elpinice, daughter of Eutara...



MARRIAGE COMPLICATIONS



Funerary Naiskos, National Archaeological Museum Athens.
Photo [Tilemahos Efthimiadis](#)

As soon as the PCs arrive the king calls for them. He wants this done quickly, and does not appreciate being kept waiting. He explains that *Anchisteia* applies: Eutara must marry a next-of-kin, Hippias is it, and now get going. He calls in all relevant people to court.

Cimon of Calbium is the father-in-law. An old warrior, prone to boasting, and tends to spit a lot. He is actually fairly incompetent at everything but has succeeded in life by having a daughter married into the royal family. Since Cyrus died he is the *kyrios* of Eutara until she is married away again.

To become *etai* (clansmen) Hippias and Cimon have to exchange gifts. Cimon gives a herd of cattle belonging to the lands of Eutara, and explains that the land will be the dowry. Then it is time for *engysis*: Hippias shakes hand with Cimon who says: "I give you my daughter to sow for the purpose of producing legitimate children." to which the intended groom should respond "I take her."

Churii begins to set up things for the *proaulia*, a celebration that normally would happen at Cimon's house but since it is far away and he is guest at court it should happen there. It would involve sacrifices to Zêrunthia, Koruphasia and Aegaia... but there is a problem!

As the process begins Dio Chrysostom shows up and protests: "O king, hold! The solstice has happened and Zêrunthia wanders the earth. It is the year of love, and that means her priesthood cannot bless the wedding!"

Churii becomes wrathful, but Dio continues: "Engysis has occurred – that solves the economic and legal issue. As the gods have ordained, *proaulia*, *gamos* and *epaulia* may not happen until next year."

A MODEST PROPOSAL

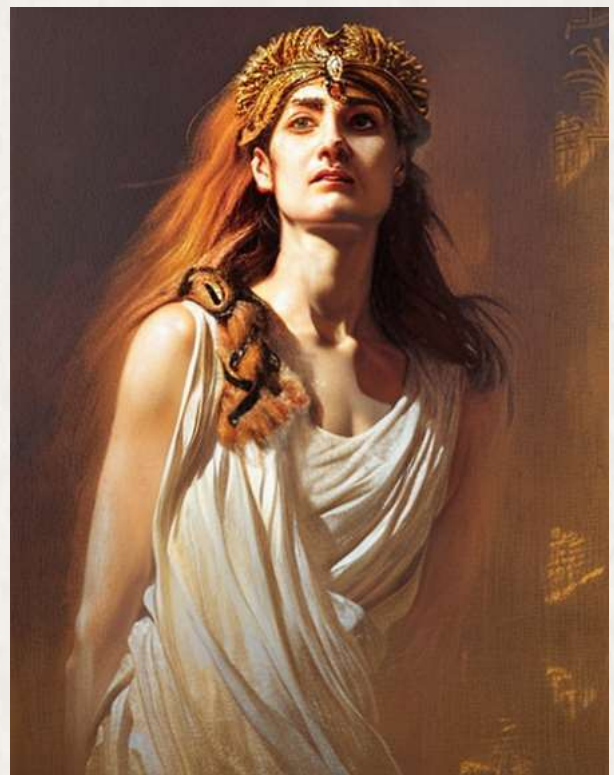
Churii calms down, and considers delaying the wedding. But now brother Monophthalmos raises his voice: "Dio, my heart goes out to my poor brother who is stuck in the desert of bachelorhood. Is there not another option?"

Dio responds: "Well, Zêrunthia can bless marriages in person. She does after all hold court in the world this year. In Dymesos in remote Chiosia. In the unlikely event Hippias were to travel there, he could get her blessing."

Monophthalmos turns to Hippias and asks him if he isn't keen on seeing the world? Besides, if Zêrunthia haven't blessed the marriage, what will the kids be like? He has heard that once the result of an unblessed union was a dog... and he doesn't want to be a dog's uncle.

Churii concurs. Having Hippias mope around court for a year seems wasteful, and he would anyway send a diplomatic mission to Chiosia soon. So, it is decided: Hippias and Eutara will go to ask for the blessing of the goddess. Congratulations!

EUTARA OF CALBIUM



I asked her how she did it once, how she understood the world so clearly. She told me that it was a matter of keeping very still and showing no emotions, leaving room for others to reveal themselves.

Madeline Miller, *Circe*

Eutara is thin, with uneven silver hair (that her daughter insists on dying into a prettier colour for her) and deep grey eyes. She wears tailored clothing and an amulet of luminous crystal. Has a pet bird who sometimes repeats her words. Quiet herself. (The bird sometimes responds to lies, although usually quietly – Eutara notices, but few others).

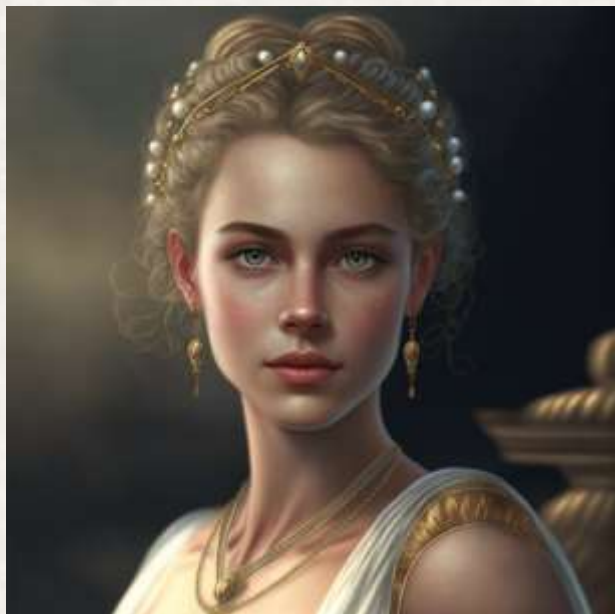
Demure, observant, and more educated than she lets on. She is learned in law – she has read and understood the rules as they are. But being a woman she keeps her knowledge to herself. Normally she sits and weaves, or does other proper things. She is an experienced

matriarch, and effective in organizing the women of a large household.

Initially Eutara will be a bit of a cypher: polite, remote and private. This also helps establish her as a character as the PCs interact with her and slowly learn about her quirks.

Catchphrase: “My dear, pardon a stupid question from a woman, but what is *that*?”

QUEEN ELPINICE



King Churii has married Eutara’s daughter Elpinice⁴. She is young and amazingly beautiful. She seeks to pay back kindness whenever she gets the chance. Soft and melodious voice, long hair, deep eyes. She is very much every man’s dream, and she likes it.

The king is aware of how charming she is to other men too, and really prefers to keep her upstairs among the women of the palace to keep her – and his friends – away from temptation.

He was too late. Elpinice had a relationship with a handsome Cythosian guard in the aftermath of her husband’s death. She is also pregnant with his children. But by seducing Churii quickly she may be able to cover this up. She will give birth to twins, one with dark hair like her and Churii, and one with blond hair like his father – but she will dye it dark to hide it from everybody. There will be seven princes of Mesia.

What nobody expects is that the blond twin is the reincarnation of the god Eurypylos, the Cythosian god of badasses...

⁴ Yes, this means that Hippias will become father-in-law to his own father. While technically this might give him more pull on family matters, King Churii makes it plain who is in charge: he

is. Elpinice’s twins will simultaneously be Hippias’ brothers and grandchildren... in seedy Canoria taverns there will be many, *many* dirty jokes about the family relations.

SAILING THE SEAS OF LOVE

I looked into the water. My destiny was drifting past.

Ancient fragment 6.2.1: Ni 9824 Seg. A l. 4

Adventures on the high seas! See exotic locations and people, and try not to be killed by them! Try to keep your crew from mutiny and starvation! Try to find your way home again!

BASIC PLOT

A pedant about to go on a voyage asked for his tablets in order that he might write his will. Seeing his slaves lamenting because of the danger, he said, "Do not grieve, for I have freed you."

Jests of Hieroceles

The princes are sent to Chiosia to get the blessing of Hippias marriage from Zêrunthia directly, plus a diplomatic mission to deal with the Tyrant. The trip becomes eventful as the embassy tries to make its way despite natural hazards, monsters, treachery and divine intervention.

Why not go overland? The well-travelled experts at the Mesian court advice against it. There is no road that goes even halfway: maybe you could get to Inverdenia, but then there is mountains and cliffs barring the way. Taking a ship is the fastest and safest (not saying much) route.

With the help of the king, a rich merchant and some other prominent Mesians, a diplomatic expedition to remote Chiosia is organized. It will have a ship, an experienced captain and crew, and everybody knows where it is going – what could possibly go wrong?

ANTAGONISTS

The main antagonists are the elder brothers, and the gods. The elder brothers plan on having the younger brothers killed during the trip – they put some of their loyalists in the crew, hint of great rewards if something

CAMPAIGN NOTE

In my game, Rharias at this point was annoyed at the brothers for their acts against her priest, and would send a storm to derail their trip. Later she would also cause trouble with food, hearths, and similar things.

A decision with subtle effects was that the PCs also placed Messaros (the young boy they had adopted as a squire, by now a promising young warrior) in the care of Monophthalmos. This was to have vast consequences in the last part of the campaign.

Finally, there was the decision by Priamos player to not have that PC join the trip. As a druid he preferred to be on land (he might also have been motivated by his flowering love affair with the dryad). He eventually became a NPC.

This point is a decent place to change the roster of characters: the druid player took up playing the Cythosian bodyguard of Eutara, and the set of NPCs around the players also changed totally.

KALLIXENA

Ship

Armor Class 15

Hit Points 300

Damage Threshold: 15 (immune to damage below this)

Crew: 42

Cargo: 10 tons

Speed 3.5/1/2.5 mph; 35/10/25 ft/round. (sails/oars/sails/oars)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)

Damage Resistances piercing damage

Damage Vulnerability Sails and rigging have vulnerability to fire and acid, unless they are wet.

Damage Immunities cold, poison, necrotic and psychic damage

Condition immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, poisoned, prone, unconscious, exhausted

Crew experience bonus: +2

ACTIONS

Ramming Prow: A standard ram, sheathed in bronze, mounted on its bow. A ship equipped with a Ramming Prow does an additional 1d4 damage to the enemy ship for every 1 mph of ship speed on a successful ram maneuver.

bad happens to them. They will sabotage or try to make a dangerous situation get deadly for the PCs.

The more serious antagonist is divine in nature. By this point it is likely that the PCs have annoyed at least one god who will send a storm.

Tenedos the Sailor, if given the proper sacrifices, is not set against the journey, but neither will he stop other gods as long as they send merely mundane problems. He draws the line at direct supernatural interventions.

What if the PCs have been impeccably pious? Even if they have managed to appease the gods they have encountered, there are likely a few they have not dealt with (including the minor gods). If nothing else Typhon may decide to cause trouble just because.

KALLIXENA, "THE BEAUTIFUL STRANGER"

Kallixena is a fast [penteconter](#), a state of the art ship. 30m/100 ft long, about 4m/13 ft wide. It has 50 rowers (25 on each side) and a sail, able to easily reach a top speed of 9 knots (17 km/h; 10 mph) and with good winds more than that.

The black-tarred ship is highly decorated with eyes and art, showing the wealth of the sponsor: Cleisthenes of Lamasta, a rich trader and close friend of the king. In many ways the ship will be a character on her own: a sleek beauty, but vulnerable and dependent on her crew.

SHIP NEEDS

Spending more than a month in the sea makes ship waterlogged and sea growths begin on hull, reducing speed. It needs to be brought ashore, dried for a few days or weeks while maintenance is performed. Normally the shipwright would prefer to do this weekly or biweekly.

There is a ladder at the stern, and typically this is the end parked closest to land when drawn up next to the shore.

If there is less than 42 crew members the ship works, but badly. Speed and manoeuvrability begin to suffer. If less than 21, the ship is essentially crippled. It is possible to set up sail with some effort or row a bit, but the ship will be nearly out of control or adrift.



Bireme by Peter Connolly.

CREW

On that day all the gods looked down from heaven upon the ship and the might of the heroes, half-divine, the bravest of men then sailing the sea.

Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica*, Book I, l. 547–549
(tr. R. C. Seaton)

The ship has a total crew of 78 people.

Page numbers refer to *Nautical Adventures for D&D* by Ronny Hart (1st version).

KYBERNETES TELESINUS OF MYSOS



The helmsman, the *kybernētēs*, (functions as navigator p. 21 and pilot p. 22)

A lion or a tiger of a man, confident in his skill and power. He is always serene, but cautious – he prefers to avoid confrontation. Once lost a dear friend to mermaids, secretly hoping to find him again.

Catchphrase: He often quotes obscure proverbs “Ah, darkness will pass light the night”. “Raise the sails, and you will be on a different island.” “An orc is an orc whether he is green, blue or red.” “Peace comes to the one with a good oar.” “It is difficult to argue with the stomach as it has no ears.” “Old things become new with the passage of time.”

PROREUS ANAXOS THE HALKYONE

The bow lookout (*prōreus* or *prōratēs*) (p. 26)

A young man seeking excitement. He is a bit of a flirt. Family tradition claims he is a descendant of Laosoos. Halkyone means Kingfisher – he is said to be good at finding paths of calm sea. A bit more of a cat than a bird – curious, playful, vain, but potentially very warm and friendly. He is very acrobatic and often watches from top of the mast.

Catchphrase: “Look over there!”

KELEUSTES PEIRITHOUS

The boatswain (*keleustēs*) responsible for equipment and people. (p. 22)

Has a sharp, eagle-like face. Motivated by honour (serving the ship), insanity (talks to his sword) and loathing (absolutely hates nonhumans and cythosians). He follows orders well and is an excellent boatswain.

He used to be normal, but once cursed a god and was cursed in return that until he truly makes penance he will think of his sword as his son and his son as his sword (the son is safe at home, kept by family). Instead of doing that, he insists that all his troubles come from those darn monsters and foreigners. His shipmates are somewhat used to his peculiarities.

Catchphrase: “You *phlyaroi*, get over here and work!”

PENTĒKONTARCHOS LABOTAS

The quartermaster (*pentēkontarchos*) (p. 25)

A friendly, solid man. He proudly worships Rharias. He carries out a complicated religious ritual every morning. He always plays fair. He is very optimistic. He used to be bullied as a child and learned to fight so that it wouldn't happen again (good fighter): if he sees somebody bullying, he will intervene.

Catchphrase: “Let us eat and enjoy before we do anything rash, sirs.”

NAUPĒGOS HALIUS



The shipwright (*naupēgos*) (ships carpenter p. 24).

Draconian and sneaky: often berates others when they do not work well or do not appreciate his work. Often steals and hoards things, and likes to figure out people's secrets. Believes he will die if he ever lies, hence he is painfully honest and frank. This does not help his reputation.

Catchphrase: “It will take three days. If I get the tools and men.”

AULĒTĒS BALIUS

The piper (*aulētēs*) gives the rowers' rhythm and knows how to play the anti-monster horn. (shantyman p. 25–26)

Balius is the brother of Halius the shipwright. Self-centered, but moral: often tries to rein in his brother.

Bad poet. Often makes overwrought similes (“Our troubles are like the sea-worm, that perforates the shell of the mussel, which straightway closes the wound with a pearl.”; “The dreams of poets come like music heard at evening from the depth of some enchanted forest.”)

TOICHARCHOI THET TALOS AND GORIAS

The superintendents (*toicharchoi*), act as oarsmasters (p. 23) and sailing masters (p. 23). Thettalos is a touchy fellow while Gorias is well grounded, and always nibbles on some cookie or other edible thing.

SAILORS



Ten sailors for masts and the sails



ROWERS

Fifty rowers, skilled in rowing together.

The sailors and rowers are in their thirties and forties. They know the sea and are used to it. Being pious is important – sea gods are prickly.

SOLDIERS

Normally a varying number of marines (*epibatai*), hoplites and archers, usually 10–20, would be carried aboard for boarding actions: since this is a diplomatic mission the initial proposal is lacking them altogether, relying on the PCs to protect the ship.

If the PCs protest the exact number will depend on negotiations with their elder brothers... who will grumpily supply some extra warriors as they are “defeated” in the debate. Warriors that are loyal to *them*, and will look for an opportunity of getting rid of the uppity younger brothers.

PASSENGERS

KLEITOS MYRON

Kleitos (the myrrh-smelling one) is a senior diplomat and friend of King Churii. He will be acting as a captain. He has sailing experience, and has been in Chios before.

He has a bald head and golden eyes. He has smooth, sunburned, dark skin. He stands tall and has an athletic build, although he is in his 50s. He has a square, wrinkled face scarred from a monster fight a long time ago – a chimera breathed fire at him. In his youth he was a decent warrior, but age and responsibility has made him fairly creaky in a fight. He is still willing to teach proper hoplites, though.

Speaks politely, formally and with dignity. He is a very good diplomat and always works towards resolution of conflict. Still, he is materialistic and pragmatic: wealth is good, making Mesia great is good, looking awesome is essential.

Wears a [ring of protection](#) and carries his own seal. He also has a wooden treasure chest (like bag of holding) with gifts for the Tyrant and budget for the expedition. The chest will only open for him. It contains a seal from King Churii., funds: 4000 sp, 260 gp, 120 pp, bloodstone (50 gp), chalcedony (50 gp), chrysoprase (50 gp), A chryselephantine jug with gold and ivory ornaments (alchemy jug) – a gift to the Tyrant.

Agenda: convince the Tyrant that Mesia is a powerful ally against the pirates, and that there is no need to struggle over the south sea. Ensure that the princes do not cause too much damage. He cares more about the king's wishes than what any of his sons thinks.

Catchphrase: "My lord, if I may mention something..."

EUTARA, THE FINANCÉE

Described in previous chapter. She does not have sea-legs and is mildly terrified by the whole adventure.

CREUSA

Maidservant to Eutara. A robust woman. A bit too fond of drink. Cheerful, helpful and naive.

Catchphrase: "Oh my!"

CAMPAIGN NOTES

I did a spreadsheet with the crew, keeping track of their roles, health, loyalty... and what they died of. This made it easy to later do callbacks to poor Lysander, who was killed by lightning.

It also helped keeping track of emerging relationships between crewmembers and the PCs.

In my game the brothers' agents were very unlucky during the storm, and never amounted to much.

NAUTICAL RULES



I used the Nautical Adventures for D&D by Ronny Hart (1st version) as a core for the sailing system. [The current 2nd version](#) is more streamlined.

WEATHER

Weather affects how easy it is to sail and other conditions. These conditions correspond to the benign summer in western Hesperos. Each day, roll for the direction the wind is coming from, its intensity and general weather.

(As a GM, it is usually practical to pre-roll weather for a month or so, speeding up gameplay.)

WEATHER TYPE

d10	Result	d10	Result
1	North	1	Calm
2	East	2	Light wind
3	South	3	Moderate wind
4	South	4	Strong wind
5	West	5	Gale
6	West	6	Storm
7	Same as yesterday	7	Same as yesterday
8	Same as yesterday	8	Same as yesterday
9	Same as yesterday	9	Same as yesterday
10	Same as yesterday	10	Same as yesterday

d6	Result
1	Fine
2	Fine
3	Cloudy
4	Rain (impaired visibility)
5	Same as yesterday
6	Same as yesterday

SAILING AND ROWING

Kallixena normally travels by a combination of sailing and rowing. Rowers can row for 8 hours per day; more acts as a forced march (ch. 8 pHB).

The effect of sails on speed depends on the direction and strength of the wind.

WIND EFFECTS

Wind	Direction	Movement rate modification
Calm		Can't sail.
Light	Into	-1 mph
	With	+1 mph
	Across	+0
Moderate	Into	-2 mph
	With	+2 mph
	Across	+1 mph
Strong	Into	No movement
	With	+3 mph
	Across	+2 mph
Gale	Into	Driven 1 mph backwards
	With	+4 mph
	Across	+3 mph
Storm		Driven at 1d4 mph in wind is blowing

The ship does not travel at night: it is too risky, and normally it will anchor along the coast. Not doing this means that the ship risks being lost at sea.

ENCOUNTERS

CREW LOYALTY

And in Salmydessus may the top-knotted Thracians

graciously take him in, naked,

where he will carry out many lowly tasks

eating slave's bread,

seized by cold; and from the foam

may he clutch heaps of seaweed,

chattering his teeth, mouth down like a dog

lying in helplessness.

Hipponax

The crew **loyalty rating** ranges from 0 to 10; it starts at 2 for this expedition (+2 crew experience). Over time it will increase or decrease depending on events. The loyalty rating can never drop below 0 or be raised above 10.

A crew's loyalty rating is increased by 1 point after each successful voyage, battle, storm, monster encounter, or any other encounter or situation that stresses the crew or puts them in danger. After any of these that were unsuccessful, or that ended in the death or major damage to any of the crew, they must make a loyalty check.

Loyalty check: the Boatswain makes a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check modified by the crew experience bonus, trying to instil order. Failure results in removing one point from the crew's loyalty rating. Rolling a natural 1 removes 2 points from the loyalty rating. Success adds 1 and a natural 20 adds 2 points to the loyalty rating.

Morale check: The loyalty rating matters for how it handles the next crisis such as a fight or other stressful event. In such an event roll 1d20 plus the loyalty rating versus a DC depending on the situation.

If the morale check fails by 2 or less, the experience bonus is reduced by 1 point. 3–5 bonus reduced by 2 points, 6–8 by 3 points. A 9+ failure means the crew surrenders or mutinies.

MORALE CHECK DIFFICULTIES

Situation	Difficulty DC
The ship suffers a critical hit, lightning strike or similar impact.	15
Enemy or monster ambush	10
Facing an obviously superior force or monster	15
Ship loses 25% HP	10
Ship loses 50% HP	15
Ship loses 75% HP	20
A crew member slain by magic	10
25% of the crew is dead	15
50% of the crew is dead	20
All officers deserted, dead, or have surrendered	25
The crew is asked to perform a heroic or dangerous task	15
The ship cannot escape the enemy of situation	15
Divine sign of disapproval	20



They say that in a certain city in the far northern islands the cold was so intense that words were congealed as soon as spoken, but that after some time they thawed and became audible; so that the words spoken in winter articulated next summer.

Anaxos the Halkyone

Sailors prefer to keep within sight of land. Part of the reason is navigation, and the need to land frequently. Another part is that the open, deep sea is filled with terrors. Beyond those deadly seas there are even stranger places.

During sailing, there is an encounter every 1d6 days. Roll randomly or select a suitable event.

d6	Result
1	Other travellers
2	Other travellers
3	Sea monsters
4	Phenomena
5	Places (if outside normal routes, otherwise re-roll)
6	Events

On the following tables, add +4 to the result if the ship is in uncharted waters.

OTHER TRAVELLERS

As when in fair weather herds of dolphins come up from the depths and sport in circles round a ship as it speeds along, now seen in front, now behind, now again at the side and delight comes to the sailors; so the Nereids darted upward and circled in their ranks round the ship Argo, while Thetis guided its course.

Apollonius of Rhodes, Argonautica, Book IV l. 933–938
(tr. R. C. Seaton)

d6	Result
1	Local fishermen plying their trade.
2	A merchant ship.
3	A warship from a nearby polis.
4	Survivor: A man clinging from driftwood explains that he is a survivor from a pirate attack.
5	Ichthyophagoi raft with a family.
6	A ship manned by the Namnetes.
7	Merfolk on giant seahorses riding past.
8	Half elves sailing to find their lost homeland.
9	Orcish traders looking for business but now lost.
10	Tritons and water spirits merrily frolicking among the waves.

SEA MONSTERS

The aulētēs may be able to scare away some monsters.

d10	Result
1	A giant octopus wants to snack on a sailor.
2	Crabs: On a rocky beach, the hungry party finds a great amount of delicious blue crabs. When the party starts catching them, their horse sized mother appears.
3	Shark attack: sharks follow the ship, trying to grab somebody foolish enough.
4	Giant shark attack. (See also this variant)
5	Pirates: One or more pirate ships sail up to board the ship. The pirates have never been as successful, evil, and fearsome as in the last few years. They are being led by a pirate queen, whose identity remains a mystery.
6	Slavers: Slavers are basically pirates but with a specific agenda. They may prey less on other ships and more on coastal villages but they often operate the same as pirates would. A slaver fleet may even have one specific ship that is designed to hold and transport slaves.
7	Giant jellyfish: use gelatinous cube , but tentacles have 15 ft. reach and can drag people into the bell.

8	A small island inhabited by sirens, who would love to drive sailors to drown themselves.
9	A tribe of sauhagin riding sharks and led by a baron attack. If they get too much resistance while lobbing spears, they will instead dive under the ship and begin to cut through the planks to sink it.
10	A tribe of merrows (2d4+2) attack. Using their harpoons, they try to drag as many sailors into the water as they can, drowning and eating them.
11	Sahuagin: Giant whirlpool that Sahuagin Water Priests have made to swallow surface ships for slaves/food/resources. Make seacraft/sailing/whatever checks to avoid having the ship swallowed while at the same time fighting off the Sahuagin raiders that try to board and/or rip holes in the sails/wreck the oars.
12	Dragon turtle patrolling reef, not letting anybody leave
13	A young sea serpent thinks the ship looks like dinner.
14	A ghost ship, manned by undead.



PHENOMENA

D10	Result
1	Dolphins begin following their ship, leaping into the air along the sides. It's supposed to be a sign of good luck!
2	The waters are filled with bioluminescent jellyfish.
3	The waves and the wind die, you are stuck in the doldrums, the sailors are worried, this isn't a natural weather pattern for this time of year. How do you calm the superstitious minds of the crew, and can you bring the winds back?
4	A great whale shows up, eyeing the ship curiously. It is somewhat friendly, but might cause damage when it playfully makes waves.
5	A large flock of strange birds land on the ship. They seem almost tame, and chatter almost with human voices.
6	A strange mirage makes it look like there is a big island or a vast ship ahead, but it dissolves when approached.
7	Deep in the clear water the ruins of a vast, drowned city can be seen.
8	A strange and glowing ooze slowly starts attaching itself to the hull of the ship. It seeps through the cracks, and anyone that comes in to contact with it becomes unconscious.
9	A great maelstrom. The lookout needs to succeed with a WIS (Perception) DC 15 check to notice it at a safe distance. If not, the ship will start to get dragged inward. At this point the navigator need to succeed with a DC 15 survival roll to break free. This can be re-rolled several times but the difficulty increases until the ship goes under in the abyss... or ends up, very damaged, somewhere very strange.
10	The water starts boiling and smoke comes out of it. There is distant, deep rumbling from the underwater volcano. Because of the bubbles the buoyancy is lowered, and the ship creaks ominously
11	An island surrounded by darkness and frightful whispers. It is clearly cursed and frighten away the sailors... until next night, when they all wake up from sleep, stage a mutiny and sail towards it like sleepwalkers.
12	Iceberg: what appears to be a white and turquoise island, but turns out to be ice and snow. Mesian sailors are unlikely to have ever seen anything like it and may not know the risks of getting close to a wonder that can calve or suddenly overturn.
13	An area of mirror-still water with no wind, no current and a strange resistance to rowing. It is almost like a trap.
14	Fish, dolphins and other sea-life rushes past the ship in such a number that they force it off course.

PLACES

The first thing you see will be the two Cyanean Rocks, at the end of the straits. To the best of my knowledge, no one has ever made his way between them, for not being fixed to the bottom of the sea they frequently collide, flinging up the water in a seething mass which falls on the rocky flanks of the straits with a resounding roar.

Apollonius of Rhodes, Argonautica, Book II

d6	Result
1	Reefs: Reefs are outcropping that lie below ocean or sea water. They typically are fairly shallow, no more than fifty to eighty meters, and are made up of rock, sand, coral, or some other material that is gathered below the water surface. If not seen by the outlook (DC 10) the ship takes 1d20 damage and may get stuck. If it is stuck and the weather turns bad it will start taking damage at 1d20 per hour until it is unstuck.
2	A pleasant island inhabited by a powerful sorceress or minor god. As long as everybody behaves perfectly and obeys her whims everything is fine... but if not, it is time to turn people into animals!
3	Dinosaur Island: an island with thunder-lizards.
4	Cannibal Island: an apparently nice place with locals (maybe the full orcs, the anthropophagoi) that want to invite you to dinner. The cannibals make their captives docile with an herb to fatten them up.



5	Floating Island: an island that can go anywhere. May actually be a giant turtle or dragon turtle . How come the island you are sailing away from is gaining on you?
6	An island inhabited by a coven of sea hags who very much want to shipwreck sailors. They will try to lure in ships by looking like a fishing village with very ugly inhabitants... and then drop the illusion and strike with fear, magic and claws.
7	A dark cave that creates a illusions of lots of gold... but there is only one cursed coin in the hand of a skeleton. The coin creates nightmares and the owner can't sleep. Yet it cannot be thrown away, only given to somebody who knows the curse.
8	A paradise island where everything is more or less perfect, the inhabitants (the full elves) beautiful and friendly, and there is absolutely no reason to ever leave.
9	An island that is only above water part of the time, sinking at unpredictable intervals. Its inhabitants appear unperturbed by this: "When you drown, you will see the light!"
10	An island inhabited by cyclopes. Wise from a previous encounter with humans they try to sink boats with rocks.
11	Bellonia: the land cursed by the gods to be unfindable. It can only be found by random chance.

EVENTS



D10	Result
1	Leak: the ship is taking in water, and is slowly sinking (loses 1d4 HP per hour). It needs to be moved onshore and repaired.
2	Stowaway: there is an extra passenger onboard.
3	Food destruction: 1d10x10% of the food has become rancid, infested by vermin or otherwise inedible.
4	A sickness spreads onboard. Sailors failing a DC 10 CON be become weak and lethargic, unable to row. They recover on a successful CON check, but critical failure means death.
5	A fight breaks out among some sailors for a petty reason.
6	A mysterious fog appears, limiting visibility.
7	Loss of water: several (1d10x10 %) water barrels have gone bad.
8	Someone has a dream where one of the gods warn them to change course.
9	On a small island the party encounters the ghost of a castaway requiring proper burial. They need to find his bones and bury them, or he will keep on haunting them.
10	A kraken priest rises to the surface, representing Ophion, the divine ruler of this sea (either a kraken, leviathan , or a Potamoi). He demands that they pay tribute or face the dreadful consequences.
11	A storm breaks out, and the ship desperately tries to find shelter. Fortunately there is an island nearby with a suitable bay. Except that the storm doesn't stop. They find a small settlement of other people stranded there, and an old man. This sailor was cursed for boasting that he could sail through any storm: now there is always storm where he is.
12	An empty row boat except an old chest, bound in rusty chains. Clearly there is something or someone inside.
13	On an isolated island there is the remnants of a temple, and on the altar lies a plugged amphora with sloshing contents. It contains an imprisoned minor ocean god (use Marid). Freeing it would put it in debt to its rescuer, but because of its captor was a human it has also sworn to cause the demise of all humans it meet...
14	An enchantment begins to affect sailors. Anybody failing a WIS 10 saving throw will start growing feathers. Each day this repeats until they have three saves (recovery) or three failures (turn into a bird).

OPENING EVENTS



The first few days on the sea are useful for having the PCs meet people, see how sailing is done, and maybe suffer some seasickness: DC 10 CON save roll for anybody not used to the sea each day. Failure gives them disadvantage on other dice rolls for the next day; once successful they find their sea legs.

DEPARTURE

The ship leaves port, sailing for a day. The ship follows the coastline (PCs asking crew about sailing on the open ocean will get stories about why it is a *bad* idea – not just more monsters, but the risk of getting lost and die of thirst, hunger or storms). Typically, the crew then throw in the anchor–stones at sunset and staying anchored for the night.

FIRST WEEK



At first it is 40 km to the border to Vindiga, and then further 40 km to get to Vindiga Pa (the capital). At Vindiga Pa their sister Queen Philomena will show up with her own royal leisure craft, pull up alongside and give her royal (and family) congratulations – mixed with put-downs, bossing around, crude marital advice, and warnings about pirates (she has heard there is some new pirate queen in the south – Kleiton will nod and agree). She also gifts the PCs and the crews with some royal delicacies.

Beyond that it is 40 km along the Covium coast, 40 to city state Bylis. Then 200 km along the Vivumian coast, then 100 along Ephos (city Aucus). As this goes on, they get used to the sea and its needs.

THE STORM



A pedant was voyaging in a storm and each of his fellow-passengers laying hold of some object to save himself, he grasped one of the anchors.

Jests of Hieroceles

Sailing south, things are going reasonably well. There may be some disquieting hints (minor omens, sailors recounting old superstitions that the PCs might feel apply to them).

Suddenly a storm approaches from northeast – unheard of, but a serious threat. The toicharchoi begin to quickly fold down the sails, the navigator desperately looks for a bay to shelter in – but the coast is rocky and full of reefs.

As the wind intensifies, they hear a roar like a lion – Rharias sacred animal. If the PCs have a different god that is angry with them, change the style of the storm to fit with them: Agêtôr may send a storm stretching out like an eagle filled with lightening, Mainalios a wolf-like storm, while Typhon has tentacle-like waterspouts.

The ship will be pushed far away from where it should be, into uncharted waters. There is also a real risk of disaster and death.

Play about 10 rounds, with a weather “lair action” on initiative 20. The ship becomes very difficult terrain. Maybe 2 feet per foot extra movement cost – need to roll DEX to avoid slipping if running. If they slip, they are prone, while a critical failure means 1d6 damage in addition, or being swept overboard.

RANDOM “LAIR ACTIONS” FOR THE STORM

1d6	Effect
1	No effect , or the ship visibly drifts closer to reefs.
2	Small Wave. 3d12 damage to ship. PCs and NPCs not rowing make DC 10 Dex Save or be knocked prone.
3	Medium Wave. 6d12 damage to ship. PCs and NPCs make DC 10 Dex Save or be knocked prone.
4	Large Wave. 5d20 damage to ship. PCs make DC 15 Dex Save or be knocked prone. PCs rolling under 5 are swept off the ship and into sea. Cargo may be swept off, and damage to specific parts of the ship like the rudder or mast.
5	Heavy Winds. Sails fly loose if not lowered. PCs on rigging/crows nest make DC 12 Str Save or fall prone to deck taking appropriate fall damage (5d6 from top of mast). Loose cargo begins to fly off.
6	Lightning Strike. Roll a d6 for where it hits. 4d8 damage to ship. PCs and NPCs in area hit make DC 13 Dex Save or take 2d8 Lightning damage or half as much on a successful save. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Hits bow. Fire 1d6/turn damage until put out. Hits centre deck. Damage, may cause leak doing 1d8 damage per turn to ship until patched. harms 1d6 rowers, Hits mast. Fire starts doing 1d6/ turn. Hits mast. Harms 1d6 officer, fire 1d6/turn. Hits stern. Damage to rudder, harms 1d6 passengers. Misses ship.

When things start turning bad, there might be a need for Wisdom checks to overcome fear to do something. Charisma or persuasion checks to motivate the crew or bring them out of fear.

This is the ideal moment for an enemy in the crew to try tripping them over the side, making it look like an accident (“Sorry, I didn’t see you there sir!”). This might include fake attempts to save them if they fall overboard or are wounded (throw a rope known to be frayed, first aid that seems to fumble and do damage).

FALLING OVERBOARD

*As waters roared above her, she sank way down,
just as a plummet sinks when fastened to a lure,
one fashioned out of horn from some farmyard ox
to bring death to hungry fish.*

Homer, The Iliad, 23.100–103 (tr. Ian Johnston)

Falling overboard places you 1d6+5 feet from the ship, while pushing places you 2d6+5 feet away. Jumping into the water deliberately allows any distance within the maximum jump distance.

Falling or being pushed overboard you need to succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to enter the water without damage. Otherwise, you take 1d6 HP damage from the fall.

Each foot of swimming cost you one extra foot of speed. Each turn you need to make a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to move; failure means just struggling in place to keep one’s head above the waves. Once one reaches the ship one needs to do a DC 20 Strength

(Athletics) check to climb onboard. Failure means one just falls back in the water.

Swimming with light armour gives disadvantage to these rolls. Medium armour increases the DC by 5 too.

Critical failure means the character goes under the surface 2d6 feet (if they are underwater, they sink a further 2d6 feet), or they drop an item.

AFTERMATH

*Now the storm-winds have spirited him away we know not
whither; he is gone without leaving so much as a trace
behind him, and I inherit nothing but dismay.*

Homer, The Odyssey Book I, 4 (tr. Samuel Butler)

After a night of terror, dawn drives away the storm... leaving them on open sea, with no idea where they are. The ship is damaged, provisions lost, crew exhausted.

At this time there will be both celebration and recrimination. It is clear that the gods – or a god – were unhappy and decided to punish the expedition. But which? Enemies in crew may spread rumours, hare-brained people throw out random theories...

The next few days will be tense: the ship and crew are exhausted, and sailing on the open ocean is unfamiliar, deadly and confusing. As things turn darker, they might get a helpful omen from a friendly god. Eventually they find themselves in an archipelago, likely south of the Southern Isles. Now they need to find way home – but first to resupply and repair the ship.

FURTHER TROUBLES

Later, other divine interventions may make their lives hard. Rharias and other civic gods may cause the food stores to be ruined (fire, insects, rats, mold, etc) forcing them to another dangerous island. Agêtôr can send further storms. Koruphasia can cause dangerous mistakes in sailing ruining equipment. Most gods can send sea monsters.

THE ARCHIPELAGO: THE MONSTER ISLANDS



There are stories about islands far south of Bybra. The sea there is vast and filled with monsters. A crew of Kosians once vanished for ten years, but eventually a single survivor appeared in Letum. He was mad, raving about giant butterflies, man-eating trees, and an island inhabited by immortal maidens. He soon died, but on his person, he had a seashell of solid gold. But not even the Nammetes try to travel that far south.

Anaxos the Halkyone

These islands are the “monster islands”, a chain of islands existing in an indeterminate place in the vast ocean. They represent a place where the gods banish people or entire nations when they have been annoying.

Most islands have one responsible deity, although their level of involvement varies.

Getting home from the Monster Islands is not easy. They are somewhere in the ocean, and just sailing will likely lead to eventual thirst, starvation or being wrecked by a storm. To get home one needs either accurate navigation (not invented yet) or divine intervention.

This part of the story can be run as relatively straight railroading as they hop from island to island with “monster of the week” issues as long as it is fun, or they can start learning from locals more about the archipelago and start to navigate, seeking a way home.

A key problem here is resource management: the stores and crew of the ship are finite and perishable. Monsters and disasters will deplete them.

TERMERUS: MIMIC ISLAND

As when a fisherman on a promontory takes a long rod to snare little fishes with his bait and casts his ox-hair line down in to the sea below, then seizes the creatures one by one and throws them ashore still writhing; so Skylla swung my writhing companions up to the rocks, and there at the entrance began devouring them as they shrieked and held out their hands to me in their extreme of agony. Many pitiful things have met my eyes in my toilings and searchings through the sea-paths, but this was most pitiful of all.

Homer, The Odyssey Book 12



Termerus is a lovely island with plenty of resources... except that some of them are mimics and want to eat you. The inhabitants (save one) want to replace you.

Theme: deception, paranoia and imitation. Making the players fear that everything is a mimic.

LAGOON

The lagoon seemed like paradise when our dear Kallixena limped into its turquoise and clear water. The trees on the main island looked like they could provide lumber, the colourful fishes we saw in the water promised food. Anaxos pointed out the ship drifting in the middle of the lagoon and we tried to hail it. Slowly we rowed up towards it, uncertain what this portent meant.

Augustinos Chrysodactylos, The Wedding Journey of Prince Hippias

The island has a pleasant-looking lagoon, with a ship drifting in the middle. Nobody seems to be around.

The ship seems to be in some disorder: the oars are tangled, on the deck are several barrels and amphoras strewn around, a chest, some swords, and there is a pile of cargo sacs near the stern. A careful look will notice bloodstains here and there... then the mimics strike when they investigate the cargo.

In the worst case, the ship is a giant, sleeping mimic.

THE ISLAND

Starving Asopus picked a fruit from a tree. When he opened his mouth to bite into it, it bit his tongue and crawled into his mouth. His muffled screams as it chewed inward were terrifying.

Augustinos Chrysodactylos, *The Wedding Journey of Prince Hippias*

Visiting the island will lead to the discovery that there are mimics everywhere. There are false rocks, false trees, ruins with mimic pillars, statues and monoliths, even mimic wells. There are also ruins that suggest that this once was a more thriving place... except some of them are also mimics. Still, most mimics imitate things animals may want, like a rock with shiny stones or fruit on top.

At the centre of the island there is a temple complex... that is a mimic.



ISAKIS: THE VILLAGE

As the fisherman guided us around the headland a small village came into view. It was very modest, surrounded by a high palisade, and with a small harbour. As we approached there was great excitement among the inhabitants. The fisherman explained in broken Koine that this was Isakis.

Augustinos Chrysodactylos, *The Wedding Journey of Prince Hippias*

There is a village on the coast of the island, Isakis, that seems fairly normal, but is actually inhabited by **doppelgangers**. They will pretend to be normal people, and then quietly replace visitors in order to leave the island.

There is village elder Adamos, a bearded patriarch. Some ladies looking with interest at the outsiders, annoying the young men of the village. Kids playing around, the smell of fish, a palisade around the village.

The village looks like a normal village, with a small harbour and temple dedicated to Rharias. If asked how they handle the mimics the inhabitants will explain that they have learned to recognize them and scare them off with certain herbs. The villagers can provide help and provisions (for a small fee in the form of metal tools). Most of the food is prepared mimics.



If asked about neighbouring islands they admit they do not know much: their small boats only circle this island. They do have encountered raiders ("Horrible monsters wearing horned helmets") that sometimes appear from the east. They believe there are more islands over there.

While replenishment happens, some sailors or officers are separated from the others and replaced by doppelgangers. Their corpses are hidden or fed to mimics, or they are kept bundled up in the village to learn more secrets.

This is the ideal spot to have players who are absent from the game session have their characters secretly replaced, providing a need to rescue them (or for them to run solo-sessions where they escape themselves).

ABANTES: THE INHABITANT

A scribe without a hand. A singer without a throat.

Ancient proverb

The truth of the island is that it was the home of **Abantes**, a high priest fond of imitating the gods; as a punishment Rharias cursed him with immortality and the inability to say anything other than repeat what others say – plus infested the island with imitative monsters.

He looks like a dirty, dishevelled Halfling madman wearing frayed robes. He will come charging into the village when the ship shows up, trying to make them take him away. Unfortunately, all he can do is repeat what others say.

The priest is mad, desperate to get away from his cursed island, and completely immortal (whenever he dies, he appears on the island). Due to his experiences, he is a near perfect detector of deception (+15 to detect it). Mimics also don't attack him.

He will try to stow away on any ship, or negotiate a way off the island – but may be replaced by a doppelganger.

Helping him will annoy Rharias somewhat.

Catchphrase: whatever the previous speaker said.

DOPPELGANGERS AS CREW

For already, sometime, I have been a boy and a girl, a shrub, a bird, and a silent fish in the sea.

The doppelgangers are feckless sociopaths, out to further their own interest. They do not out each other when imitating someone, but they do not help the other doppelgangers unless it is a win-win. They also don't hold grudges: everything is water under the bridge to them.

Still, the PCs may want to recruit them as crew members: they are eager to get off the island too, and not too shabby in a fight. This will be bad for morale (they are creepy), although over time they might persuade, seduce or just habituate the crew to their presence. Still, accepting doppelgangers in the crew will reduce the morale by 2.

The doppelgangers have a secret advantage in their mind reading. They think crew members that hate them should be removed... but make it look like an accident. Hidden killers working for the brothers are great for the doppelgangers: to prove their loyalty they will save Hippias at the right moment from them. But if the killers look like they have the upper hand they might conveniently shift side.

CAMPAIGN NOTE

In my game, several PCs and NPCs were captured and some doppelgangers infiltrated the ship. One replaced Kleitos Myrhon and was discovered by Eutara who noticed he no longer smelled of myrrh. After a mutiny against the false captain, they sailed back to the island where their compatriots had freed themselves.

After some shouted negotiations the ship left, but with three doppelgangers in the crew: Timon, Sethos, and Critias the False. They had sworn loyalty to the PCs and Timon eventually became the actually loyal squire and lover of one of the PCs. In addition, they gained a pet in the form of the small mimic Mimos. Plus, unbeknownst to them, the ship dog that eventually left in Dymesos.



OMPHALIA: ISLAND OF THE MINOTAURS



*Those inhabitants
should pay the penalty of their own crimes
by exile or by death; or it may be
a middle course, between exile and death;
and what can that be, but the punishment
of a changed form?” And while she hesitates,
in various thoughts of what form they should take,
her eyes by chance, observed their horns,
and that decided her; such horns could well
be on them after any change occurred,
and she transformed their big and brutal bodies
to savage bulls.*

Ovid, Metamorphoses, Book X

The next island is bigger, deadlier and more brutal.

Theme: savage, brutal jungle survival. This is an island of heavy metal violence and tropical sensory overload.

OMPHALIA OVERVIEW

As we sailed along the coast looking for a place to anchor there was a shout among the starving sailors: “Cattle! Cattle!” They pointed at an open meadow further up the slope of the island where a large herd of cows were clearly grazing. Our stomachs grumbled in unison.

Augustinos Chrysodactylos, *The Wedding Journey of Prince Hippias*

The island is covered with massive ruins overgrown with jungle. In fact, the entire island is just the tip of a massive, sunken city descending into the depths. It is inhabited by **minotaurs** who raid and rape their way around the local archipelago.

From the sea, it looks like a green pyramid. As the ship approaches it becomes clear that it is an island covered by verdant jungle, with some kind of spires or cliffs rising towards a steep top at the centre. In the water there are big blocks of stone making for somewhat

treacherous navigation. It is also possible to find a few spots where anchoring is possible next to overgrown, crumbling quays.

THE LABYRINTH OF MINOTAURS



The entire island is a labyrinth: big blocks of stone force visitors to wend their way in complicated manners, the banyan-like trees block paths in messy ways and form a dense canopy, and there are entrances to the underground city labyrinth everywhere.

The minotaurs find their way around just fine... and love leading visitors into dead ends where they cannot escape, into ambushes where others come in for the kill, or over unstable ground where they fall into pits (50% chance triggering per person – some may pass and are now separated from their compatriots by a big hole).

In total, there is about 50 minotaurs on the island, plus their **goristro** leader/father/god Oennu. They are somewhat disorganised, occurring in small troops of 2d4 individuals, but one there has been two battles they will send the message around and begin a proper attack: when they notice they have visitors they sail their own ship (OK, it is little more than a crude raft) around the island to try to ambush the visiting ship and board it (20 minotaur crew).

As things get violent, keep track of how many sailors are lost – this might strand the survivors since they cannot sail without enough the crew. The minotaurs kill crew, but some are taken alive for “fun and games” (allowing for rescue missions of traumatized crew).

GETTING AROUND

The island works by moving between certain locations or landmarks: the quays, the lower forest, the field of cows, the temple ruin, the central pyramid etc. It is tricky to get around but over time PCs will learn useful paths.

Going from a point to another requires a successful INT (Investigation) check and takes about half an hour. DC starts at 20 and decreases by five down to a minimum of 10 for each failed attempt. During the night parties have disadvantage on this check.

As the group progresses Survival checks (DC 15) are also done for handling the practicalities of navigating a jungle safely and quietly.

During the half hour there will be a random encounter. If the Survival check has failed, add +1:

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

D6	Encounter
1	Beautiful spot, interesting ruin
2	Natural risk
3	Major hindrance
4	Trap
5	Lone minotaur
6	Minotaur band

When the minotaurs become active, 5 becomes minotaur band too. They can also move around and make ambushes: they are not geniuses, but they are good at fighting. If they get characters to run away (or towards them) they can arrange for them to encounter one of the natural hazards or traps.

DMs may want to fudge these rolls to slowly play up the menace. Ideally the PCs should be deep in the jungle when the minotaurs become active, leading to a race to save the crew.

Much of the flora and fauna is hallucinogenic, and can hence cause the condition Hallucinating (described below) or Frightened when normal creatures would cause Poisoned.

INTERESTING SPOTS

D100	Encounter
1-3	Plump white fruit hang from a tree overhead giving off a sweet and spicy aroma, biting into it lets the thousands of tiny spiders free.
4-6	The birds and animals have suddenly gone quiet.
7-9	An area of lush flowers surrounding a part-buried statue of an half-elf.
10-12	A clearing filled with bones. Many appears to have been crushed. Strange mushrooms grow on them.
13-15	A flock of birds suddenly flees from a nearby shrub, shrieking and defecating over the party while clearly giving away their location.
16-18	A vast stone wall of perfectly smooth, unclimbable stones stretches across the path. It is 30 feet high and made of enormous blocks stacked with no need for mortar.
19-21	A flat glassy black stone is densely inscribed by beautiful patterns that look halfway natural, halfway manmade.
22-24	An opening to the underground tunnels, richly ornamented with elvish symbols.
25-27	1000s of bats/birds/butterflies take flight at the same time, filling the air.
28-30	A colourful bird starts to follow the party, listening to their conversation. After a while it begins to imitate them – LOUDLY. It may fly away and return at the worst (or best) possible moment.
31-33	Amidst the vegetation there are several Urns of Preservation.
34-36	A fairly well-preserved ruin, with some objects and an opening to the underground.
37-39	While making your way through thickets of vines your scratched by long yellow thorns. Although painless the veins near the scratch have turned a vivid orange.

D6

Encounter

40-42	Odd spires, like straight trees of stone but obviously carved, linked by arched lintels like sharp eyebrows.
43-45	A vast tree with aerial roots have grown over and through the stones and ruins, somehow picking up the appearance of architecture in its branches.
46-48	A loud noise like a cat screeching or a baby crying is heard from inside the forest where the party is facing. The noise will go on for a few minutes and then stop abruptly.
49-51	A flutter of crimson butterflies blocks the dirt path to the creek, going into a maddening frenzy whenever someone approaches. Suddenly, the butterflies then open and close their wings, spelling out the word "Teeth" before flying away. Later they may reappear with other ominous words.
52-54	Square pool with reflective surface, except that there is something very off and odd about your reflections. Look too deeply and you are drawn in... into the leech and insect infested water.
55-57	A patch of ferns surrounding a pool of colourful fish.
58-60	On the path ahead, observant players will notice the skeletons of giant insects, birds, and lizards. They are bleached white by the sun.
61-63	There is a horrible smell in the air. The actual source is a weird-looking flower parasiting a tree, attracting insects but PCs might think there is a monster or corpse nearby.
64-66	Suddenly an empty clearing appears ahead nothing but dry grey skeletal trees hanging with a yellow moss.
67-69	A group of humanoid bones litter the jungle floor. It is apparent they were slain in battle.
70-72	The path passes through an old shrine to an ancient god depicted as a half elf. The shrine is covered with moss. It is in disrepair. An old, rusted dagger is stuck in the ground. A small frog sits on top of the dagger. If the party tries to remove the dagger, the frog will attack. If the party kills the frog, the dagger will disappear. Otherwise the dagger will become poisoned every morning, doing +1d10 poison damage when it hits. The frog seems to be around it no matter where you go.
73-75	While resting a small swarm of loudly croaking frogs hop through the camp. Anyone touched by the frogs dreams prophetic dreams that night about the past of the island.
76-78	You come across a clearing. A red-yellow-blue Bird of Paradise is dancing and flashing his feathers in an attempt to attract a mate. If any party member wears a combination of red/yellow, red/blue, or yellow/blue, the bird will attempt to "seduce" the player. If any party member decides to engage the bird of Paradise in a "dance off", the party member can "win" if proficient in Performance and passes a DC15 DEX ability check.
79-81	A water-filled cave in the forest floor, nearly choked with floating lily pads and water hyacinths making it hard to see. DC 10 to notice, otherwise plunge in.
82-84	While travelling through the jungle the party come across hundreds of holes 1 ft in diameter.
85-100	Reroll

NATURAL RISK

1d20	Encounter
1	The party is suddenly attacked by 1d20 giant mosquitoes . They attack and then flee the area.
2	The party comes across a cave or hollow filled with mushrooms that emit a strange blue glow. These mushrooms release spores filling the victims with rage and a yearning for violence. On a failed DC 15 CON save acts as the spell Crown of Madness, with random attacks.
3	Razorvine infestation on or around the path.
4	Weird, dark mists seep up from the ground with a horrible smell. Breathing it in makes necrotic damage (2d8 on a failed CON save, half if successful) or causes hallucinations making navigation hard (disadvantage on the navigation rolls for the next hour, or use the hallucinating condition below).
5	A fifteen-foot-long snake slithers by. If people do not disturb it, it will ignore them.
6	An apparently well-used track, leading into dangerous territory. Next encounter roll is +2.
7	A swarm of insects surrounds and follows the party, not dangerous but makes all tasks more difficult due to buzzing, biting and making it difficult to see. Disadvantage on all rolls.



1d20	Encounter
8	Quicksand! DC 10 Survival to notice it when moving normally (DC 15 if hurrying, DC 20 during the night). If one stumbles into it, one sinks 1d4 + 1 feet. At the beginning of each turn one sinks another 1d4 feet. Unless one is completely submerged, one can escape from the quicksand on a successful Strength check with DC 10 + 1 for each foot one has sunk.
9	A stream crosses the path, 15 feet wide. The water is full of leeches. Anybody crossing needs to succeed on a WIS (Perception) roll with DC 15 to get rid of all of them. Otherwise they will drain 1d6 HP.
10	A 40 ft. wide and 200 ft deep cleft blocks the path, requiring a laborious detour or climbing over somehow. The cleft makes it clear that there are tunnels and chambers underground.
11	Trees draped in sweet-smelling flowers — that drip poisonous sap (Brugmansia). Characters failing a DC 10 CON save will experience terrifying hallucinations and be Frightened by random things for 1d4 hours.
12	A giant centipede falls down on a PC from the forest canopy.
13	Jungle bees : strange iridescent bees whose sting cause the hallucinating conditions if their victim fails a CON save.
14	Violet fungus .
15	2d6 flying snakes .
16	A giant coral snake .
17	A shambling mound .
18	A large number of colourful frogs blocking the path, as if they want something.
19	A stinging plant . Spending time near it causes disadvantage on skill tests and requires a CON save to successfully sleep for the next 2d6 days.
20	An aggressive swarm of insects .

MAJOR HINDRANCE

1d10 Encounter

1. A thick curtain of vines hangs before you blocking the path. If looking carefully small jungle creatures can be seen entwined. When cut the vines quickly strike like snakes trying to ensnare the party. A [Vine blight](#).
2. Ground gives out, causing 2d6 falling damage if miss DEX DC 15 save. The hole will be 2d6 feet wide and is 20 feet deep, into a chamber in the underground labyrinth.
3. Taking a wrong step, a party member steps on an active insect nest, what at first appear to be mere ants are actually a minute species of rust monster - act quickly or lose all metal. Treat as an [swarm of insects](#).
4. A pool of quicksand hidden by large leaves. DC 15 Survival to notice.
5. The path turns into a series of stones across a pool of murky water, containing one or more underwater [ropers](#) doing surprise attacks to drag people down and drown them.
6. The party ends up on top of a crumbling dome, with stones falling into an unseen abyss below. Getting down safely from it is tricky. DEX DC 10 save for each person, or it triggers a collapse. A collapse leads to a 3d6 fall damage.
7. A path that was previously open is suddenly blocked by a stone wall, forcing another navigation roll and further delay.
8. A pool of bubbling tar is in front of you. You see an animal go in and screech in pain, then silence. Suddenly, the creature's skeleton covered in tar struts out and into the jungle as if nothing happened. The necromantic tarpit works as quicksand, but does 1d4 damage per turn someone is in it. If killed, they become a skeleton.
9. A [tar-skeleton](#) as above has been completely covered with leaves and dirt, making it hard to see (Stealth +10). It ambushes the party, trying to push them into danger.
10. A big sinkhole into the underground (possibly water-filled). Anybody getting close need to succeed at a DC 10 DEX save to avoid the edge crumbling into it. Critical failure makes the entire party fall in. 2d6 damage.



TRAP

1d10 Encounter

1. DC 15 to detect a pit trap with [punji sticks](#).
2. [Giant spiders](#) have set traps using web-covered ground and puppeteered victims. (from [2-Minute Tabletop](#))
3. A group of spectral half-elves seem to becon from a distance. If approached the party will run into a trap.
4. A very obvious (DC 5 to spot) tripwire linked to a heavy boulder. If there is an enemy nearby, they might then tip the boulder on top of a character.
5. [Snare trap](#). DC 20 Perception to notice.
6. A camouflaged pit trap (DC 15 to detect), 2d6 fall damage. At the bottom there are 1d4 giant centipedes.
7. A rock has been wedged on top of another, with a tripwire connected to the wedge. DC 15 to notice; if triggered roll DEX save to avoid being hit by the rock doing 3d6 bludgeoning damage.
8. Camouflaged pit trap. A thin layer of branches and leaves have been placed over a deep hole. DC 10 to spot, 2d6 fall damage otherwise.
9. Net trap. DC 15 Perception to notice and avoid. If triggered acts as a +6 Net attack, which if successful lifts the target 10 ft. off the ground.
10. A DC 10 to detect pit trap containing an animal carcass. People falling in take 1d6 fall damage, half if they succeed on a DC 13 Athletics or Acrobatics check. If feeling nasty, have a [swarm of rot grubs](#) at the bottom.

MINOTAURS

D6 Encounter

1. A party of 1d4 minotaurs are noisily making their way through the jungle with food from hunting.
2. A party of 1d4 minotaurs are quietly traversing the forest.
3. A party of 1d4 minotaurs are stealthily tracking the party.
4. An ancient aqueduct, overgrown with vines. Inside the arches are good hiding spots for an ambush.
5. The path suddenly become clearer, almost tended. Crude traps line the path. Quietly the minotaurs sneak up behind and ahead of the characters.
6. The party hears the sound of chanting coming from the jungle. As they get closer, they see a group of five minotaurs, painted with blood, all are holding stone knives. Two are dancing around a fire. They chant, "Blood Ritual, Blood Ritual, Blood Ritual" over and over again.

THE QUAYS

Despite a tricky approach between cyclopean blocks of stone strewn along the shore this ancient crumbling quay is an excellent spot to anchor the ship. It looks halfway natural, halfway man-made.

The crew will be very eager to find nearby sources of water and food.

THE LOWER FOREST



The forest is dense and tough to traverse. Banyan-like trees grow around the big rocks and each other. Thick thorny foliage and huge squarish stones block the way whenever you think you can move easily. Here and there are winding animal paths, but they go in unexpected directions. Everywhere there is life: strange flowers, bright insects, hooting birds and signs that there might be larger animals afoot.

THE COWS

We were enjoying the delicious meat when we heard a noise from the forest. A brutish figure with a bull head came out of the shade. He stared at our camp and bellowed: "My wives!" Filled with rage he charged at us.

Augustinos Chrysodactylos, The Wedding Journey of Prince Hippias

A herd of massive cows that could provide food and milk to the ship. Peacefully grazing on an open hillside. They are the wives of the minotaurs. Anybody touching them will incur the wrath of the minotaur population.

THE UNDERGROUND LABYRINTH

The labyrinth descends deep below the sea-level. In the dry hallways some carvings can still be found, showing half-elves – this island is a remnant of their ancestral home Omphalia.

The tunnels and chambers are overgrown with roots from the jungle above, pools and streams of water, and dangerous shafts leading downwards. On the walls there are numerous inscriptions in elvish from the era when this was a great city.

The Labyrinth has some classic dungeon monsters: [oozes](#), [shambling mounds](#), and [snake pits](#). Necromantic forces create [minotaur skeletons](#) near the Pyramid.

There may be Sauaghins underwater in the labyrinth; uneasy allies with the minotaurs. Sometimes the Lamia queen helps them organise raids.

THE MINOTAUR VILLAGE

A village of huts in front of the Pyramid. This is where many of the minotaurs live. It is a place of brutality and primitive superstition, decorated with the bones of dead enemies and relatives.

THE PYRAMID



The palace is a huge river; its interior is a goring bull.

Ancient fragment Alster 1997 2.154

The central ruins are as crumbling as the rest, but home to the [goristro](#) ruler **Oennu the Roarer**. Oennu was exiled to the island for annoying Typhaon somehow. Inside the pyramid is a black pit leading down to the more monstrous parts of Tartarus. Going into the Pyramid is insanity, going down the pit is a *monumentally* bad idea.

OMPHALIA'S SECRETS



The fox, having urinated into the sea, said: "The whole of the sea is my urine!"

Ancient proverb

Once, the half-elves lived on a great continent with their grand capital unmatched in the civilized world. They sailed the seas, conquered many lands, created great art and wondrous magic. The latter became their downfall: their magic made Agêtôr turn away from their civilization, and the dark gods began to clutch at it. As good rulership vanished and strife, decadence and rebellion spread the sorcerer-kings tried to use ever more dreadful magic to retain their power. Eventually they overreached and Agêtôr caused the continent to sink. The survivors claimed, and soon came to believe, that it was Typhaon's doing – something the civic gods do nothing to dissuade them of.

Still, the ruins of the city of Omphalia remains partially above the water as the island. Inside the central pyramid is the remains of the desperate dark magic of the sorcerers, who opened a portal to the underworld to defend themselves against the divine punishment but were themselves devoured by the monsters that emerged – or transformed into monsters. This is also one reason the archipelago is filled with monsters.

Were one to study the inscriptions closely in the central temples much magic could be learned – but the price is to become tainted by the forces of darkness.

THE FROGS OF OMPHALIA



The jungle is full of tiny poisonous frogs. The frogs are not naturally aggressive, but will attack if they feel threatened. These frogs are the cursed remnants of the half-elves who did not stop their brethren from transgressing the gods. They are condemned to live their lives eating insects and performing dimly remembered rituals. Visitors can find them sitting in a circle around a tree, croaking like they were chanting. Others gather on boats or tools, apparently trying to own them.

The frogs are not intelligent during the day, but during the night or in the underworld they become intelligent. In the underworld they form a vast and pointless bureaucracy for Aïdôneus, monitoring tiny transgressions.



THE SWARM GUARDIAN

The jungle has its own spirit guardian; a spirit driven darkly mad through the corruption seeping through the island. It manifests as a vast swarm of colourful insects – butterflies, beetles, ants, flies and unknown creepy-crawlies with iridescent colours and venomous stings. It can show up randomly, perform a little dance or make some strange patterns, then scatter.

If contacted properly by a Druid or somebody successfully using Arcane they might communicate haltingly. It knows what is going on in the jungle and can show the way, but it must either be defeated in a suitable magic duel or be given sacrifices that are devoured by the insects.

The guardian doesn't care about people, minotaurs or gods. It respects Mainalios and his servants, but "respect" is understood in a bizarre insect way as "trying to mate with/flee from/send appropriate pheromones". The darkness in the island makes it far too fond of blood, and any spilt blood will attract colourful butterflies. It also takes inedible sacrifices or interesting finds to its "nests" that are wild beehives built into skeletons, weirdly decorated with shiny objects, insect carapaces and more bones. They are likely good treasure spots, but guarded by poisonous giant bees.

CONDITION: HALLUCINATING



A hallucinating creature experiences things that are out of tune with reality. Out of combat, the DM rolls on the following table or describe similar nightmarish or delusional scenarios ([see this for some possibilities](#)). The character fully believes them, no matter how incompatible they are with other things. In combat (or for ideas) the DM secretly rolls 1D8 each turn:

HALLUCINATION TABLE

D8	Hallucination
1	Wrong tool/wrong verb: when the character does something, they either use the wrong tool (e.g. tries to stab someone with their bow instead of the sword) or performs a different action from what the player intended (e.g. instead of stabbing they hand the sword to the enemy). This can also be outside things (e.g. the enemy is armed with torches, a fire stops moving)
2	Wrong target/wrong noun: the character's actions aim at a different target than intended (e.g. attack a friend instead of a foe), or a description is incorrect (e.g. the enemy warrior is seen as a hydra).
3	Misinterpret: the character misinterprets what they experience (e.g. an enemy seems to be signalling that they are friendly, they are actually having a dance)
4	Experience things that are not there (e.g. the enemies are supported by a wraith, there is a door in a wall).
5	Nothing is amiss
6	Nothing is amiss
7	Nothing is amiss
8	Nothing is amiss

Note that attempts to use other characters' reactions to tell what is real is also subject to this table. "Sure, they seem to pretend that the monster isn't there, but you can notice their glances at it."

Also note that gods may use the hallucinations to send actual visions.

(Based on the system by [Goblinpunch](#),)

OBJECTS



There are various objects that might be useful or valuable among the ruins. The visitors will likely not have time to explore much but if they put their mind to it, they might find useful or dangerous objects.

AMBER CREATURES

There are giant trees with thick sap that can catch creatures and crystallize around them, preserving them perfectly. Here and there on the island one can find such amber-encased victims – insects, frogs, snakes, birds, bats, even kobolds. The most wondrous thing is that if the amber is removed gently, they can return to life.

OBOLS OF COUNTING

Wondrous item, common

A bronze box containing coins bearing a strange face and indecipherable inscriptions.

When opened, viewers of the coins need to make a WIS save or become obsessed with counting the coins. Each round they must succeed with a DC 10 INT roll to finish. A critical failure on the WIS save makes them totally charmed with the coins and will keep on examining them indefinitely, until freed from the curse. The exact number and decorations will always tend to change.

URNS OF PRESERVATION

Wondrous item, Common

These stone urns perfectly preserve what is inside, as long as they are closed. Most have been opened and wrecked over the millennia, but here and there undisturbed urns sit with bizarre foodstuff.

CONE OF MEMORY

Wondrous item, Uncommon

For Ningirsu, Enlil's mighty warrior, Gudea, ruler of Lagash, made things function as they should and he built and restored for him his Eninnu, the White Thunderbird.

Marble cones a foot long, covered with ancient Elvish writing. These cones commemorate the building of a temple. If there are three or more, they make the space between them unwelcome to spirits, demons, and other supernatural beings. This acts as a Dispel Evil and Good spell. Individual cones can also be used to break enchantment or (if used as a crude weapon) dismissal; the cone shatters after this use.

NECKLACE OF CROCODILE TEETH

Wondrous item, Uncommon (requires attunement)

Magical item from the Minotaurs. This leather thong holds a dozen crocodile teeth that have been engraved with marks of power. While worn next to the skin the bearer can hold his breath for up to an hour at a time, even while physically exerting themselves. (by cwslyclgh)

BWAAH BERRIES

Yellowish berries gathered by the minotaurs. Each berry eaten gives 1d6 temporary hit points. However, next short or long rest the hit points are temporarily reduced by the same amount. If they go below zero the user dies.

THE BLACK DAGGER

Wondrous item, Rare (requires attunement by sacrificing to Typhaon)

A sacrificial dagger made out of obsidian from inside the pyramid, strongly linked to the Underworld. Currently owned by the minotaur shaman. Works as a +1 dagger, but gives necrotic damage. Each time it reduces a sentient being to below 0 HP it allows powering a spell with their life force without using a spell slot.

THE EMERALD OF OENNU

Artefact, Unique

Deep in the central pyramid, near the horrifying gulf leading down to the abyss is a fragment of the magical equipment the half-elves used in their portal ritual. This is a spherical emerald, filled with malevolent energy. It has the same flesh warping power as a Sibirex and will affect creatures near it.

The emerald is filled with malevolent intelligence and likes to gloat and toy with unfortunate humanoids.

AFTERMATH



The point of this part is to survive and get away from the island. Yet there might be a return in the next section if the Lamia Queen needs reinforcement.

The biggest risk is that the minotaurs kill too much of the crew, stranding the PCs in this tropical hell. That may lead to an exciting raftbuilding escape, guerrilla warfare against the minotaurs, or a need for somebody to save them.

One possibility is a ship from Tekhelet coming to recruit minotaurs for a piracy expedition. Another one is to send a friendly ship from Thermodon that gets attacked and the PCs can help.

TEKHELET: ISLAND OF THE LAMIA QUEEN



Following the prophetic dream, we sailed north and then west, and as foretold we saw a beautiful island in the sunset. As we approached, we were filled with joy – this looked safe. We were wrong, and would soon wish we were back among the man-eating minotaurs.

Augustinos Chrysodactylos, The Wedding Journey of Prince Hippias

This island is ruled by a Lamia, who enslaves people visiting and uses them for entertainment, work, sex and food. The PCs will have to escape her wiles and sizeable number of henchmen, perhaps leading a slave rebellion.

Themes: seduction, oppression, decadence.

INHABITANTS

EUTARA RECOUNTS HER DREAM

“In my dream I stood in an olive grove. A crowned goose led me to a spring. There a woman was sitting on an equally crowned unicorn, holding up a golden compass in the sunshine. She gave me water and bread. ‘My child, do not fear: there is help nearby. Sail straight north until you see a white rock akin to a hand; then turn to the west and sail towards the setting sun, where you will glimpse the peaks of an island. On the island you will meet my faithful queen Xenersis who will give you the food, water and help you need. But hurry: the monsters nearby are awakening, and against them I am currently powerless.’ ”

Tyrants no less than ordinary mortals can distinguish merit. The orderly, the wise, the just and upright, they freely recognise; but instead of admiring them, they are afraid of them—the courageous, lest they should venture something for the sake of freedom; the wise, lest they invent some

subtle mischief; the just and upright, lest the multitude should take a fancy to be led by them.

And when he has secretly and silently made away with all such people through terror, whom has he to fall back upon to be of use to him, save only the unjust, the incontinent, and the slavish-natured?

Xenophon, Hiero

The Lamia queen took up residence long ago in what used to be the palace of priest-kings worshipping Aïdôneus. She is vaguely sworn to the powers of darkness but so selfish that she at most gives them lip service.

Using her scrying pool, she finds passing ships, using magic to lure them in. The lookout may notice a lighthouse, a city, or what looks like a good harbour. She may also send a dream, faking divine help.

The palace is grand (see below) and lies on a hill overlooking a bay. Beside the palace is Zakro, a village inhabited by the quiet servants and their vicious overseers. Visitors are kept away from its squalor: this is where people toil endlessly to produce luxuries under the lash of the jackalweres.

On a hill opposite the palace hill are a row of earthen mounds: **tholus tombs** of the priest-kings. They are empty now, the Lamia has taken all the nice grave-goods.

Further along the coast are other small villages toiling at producing luxuries. Some have harbours where ships are repaired. Syros, one of the larger, has some of her pirate ships.

Up the coast and inland are smaller villages, some with farms, some with mines. These are inhabited by simple folk who live a hard life of toil, but who are not treated as harshly as the palace servants. Occasionally, one of their children is chosen to be raised at the palace. The inland is occasionally plagued by monsters.

The total population is about 5000, of which 1000 live in the palace and Zakro. The island is oblong, about 10 km long in the north-south direction and 3 km wide.

The inhabitants are thoroughly cowed. The masks, the shapeshifting jackalweres, the Queen’s magic, all conspire to make rebellion hard – and met with terrifying punishment. While they certainly would love to be rid of the Queen, they know being on the losing side will be worse than death. She sometimes even stages small conspiracies for her own amusement, reeling in foolish people.

ARRIVAL

On arrival, the ship might either be lured across a reef to be damaged, or find itself on a pleasant beach with a dense forest and spring.

Jackalweres kidnap sailors/PCs as slaves while on beach. Ideally this happens during sleep, or when parties go out in the forest to forage – **hidden jackalweres use their sleep stare to subdue them** and carry them off quietly.

When exploring the island, the PCs discover the palace on the other side.

The forest is inhabited by jackals, relatives to the jackalweres.

BANQUET

But when the happy vintage touch'd their brains,

Louder they talk, and louder come the strains
Of powerful instruments—the gorgeous dyes,
The space, the splendour of the draperies,
The roof of awful richness, nectarous cheer,
Beautiful slaves, and Lamia's self, appear,
Now, when the wine has done its rosy deed,
And every soul from human trammels freed,
No more so strange; for merry wine, sweet wine,
Will make Elysian shades not too fair, too divine.

Keats, Lamia

The party is warmly welcomed, brought to audience with the reclusive queen **Xenersis**... in order to be enslaved.

For it would be unbecoming to come to banquet covered in sweat and dust; for the true gentleman should neither be dirty nor be unwashed nor rejoice in mire.

Athenaeus, Deipnosophistae

Before the banquet they are brought to baths where slaves wash them (and they are separated from their weapons). They are given fine clothes and led into the banquet hall. During this step the lamia may disguise herself as a slave and use intoxicating touch on some of them. If bathing separately she can even charm and geas them.

Welcoming drink of **kykeon** (barley, goats' cheese, wine) exquisitely prepared by slaves wearing deer masks.

The banquet is filled with wine, music and restful massage. First food, then a libation to the gods, and then more wine. Some characters may fall asleep – either naturally, or because of jackalweres looking in through peepholes, or even spiked drinks.



The court entertainer is **Kosys Hythlodaios** (speaker of nonsense), a gangly man in a monkey mask: actually an **enslaved sorcerer**. He is set up as a likely fall-guy if the queen needs to misdirect: “Oh, thank you for freeing me from his evil spell – I simply must reward you!”

At some point the queen will request a character to come away for private conversation, starting with Kleithos and working her way down the ranks. They will be brought over to her chambers, where she receives them in a friendly way while talking about how much she admires them. She will make advances, but if rebuffed she will not be offended – however, she will be using her geas and charm powers to get them to agree to help her... which she will twist into serving her, giving her their magical artefacts, and becoming her slaves. People who resist are gently returned... to be taken by her guards

outside the chambers and imprisoned until they see it her way. This way she whittles down the group of visitors until the remainder are easy to deal with.

THE QUEEN

*Why will you plead yourself so sad forlorn,
While I am striving how to fill my heart
With deeper crimson, and a double smart?
How to entangle, trammel up and snare
Your soul in mine, and labyrinth you there
Like the hid scent in an unbudded rose?*

Keats, Lamia

Her chamber is filled with expensive rugs, stands with scrolls, and beautiful urns. The walls are covered with gently swaying cloth that also allows her minions to hide for ambushes. There is also a secret door to escape, and a pit trap under a rug. Several mirrors adorn the room, and enchant people looking deeply into them. There is a smell of rich incense.

Behind the chamber is her private boudoir where she keeps her scrying pool and other magical artefacts.

The queen wants to collect beauty and treasure, as well as useful slaves. She wants to make visitors promise to stay with her and give her their treasures.

She will first call in the leader of the visitors for a one-to-one; she will charm him and give him the geas to provide her with the treasure and manpower of the expedition. Later she may ask for others to come, binding them to her will using charm and suggestion.

Once they are hers, she will shift from seductive to commanding. Rarely raising her voice, but clearly showing that she expects to be obeyed. Disobedience will be punished harshly, and people who are too annoying, useless or just suitable to be made an example of will be killed and turned into dinner.

The Queen is totally narcissistic: it is all about her. But she is not a fool, and she understands the “Evil Overlord List” rather well.

Catchphrase: “You look lovely...”

THE PURPLE-LINED PALACE OF SIN

*Of wealthy lustre was the banquet-room,
Fill'd with pervading brilliance and perfume:
Before each lucid pannel fuming stood
A censer fed with myrrh and spiced wood,*

...

*When in an antichamber every guest
Had felt the cold full sponge to pleasure press'd,
By minist'ring slaves, upon his hands and feet,
And fragrant oils with ceremony meet
Pour'd on his hair, they all mov'd to the feast
In white robes, and themselves in order placed
Around the silken couches, wondering
Whence all this mighty cost and blaze of wealth could spring.*

Keats, Lamia

It is a magnificent palace, with gold leaf and purple banners, low walls surrounding lush gardens, fountains,

Room	Description
1	Propylon – courtyard with monumental gates and pillars (with a guard box next to the entrance) Murals showing procession of figures.
2	Propylon. Murals showing animals, buildings, seated women.
3	Forecourt (used for much palace business)
4	Portico, supported by wooden columns on stone bases. Sentry box.
5	Antechamber, floor with geometric designs. Frescoes showing processions bearing treasures and women leading a bull to sacrifice.
6	The megaron, a large open courtyard with a large central hearth (4m) surrounded by four columns supporting a balcony from the upper floors. The hearth is coated with plaster and painted with spiral and geometric decoration. In the middle of the right-hand wall is a throne dais next to which were two shallow basins linked by a channel for libations. The floor is laid out in squares with the same sorts of patterns as in the Antechamber except for an octopus in front of the throne. The walls are painted with griffins and lions behind the throne and a male figure playing a lyre.
9	Pantry with wine kylikes.
10	Waiting room. Lined with plastered benches and provided with a large wine pithos on a stand.
14-15	Stairs to upper floor
23-24,27	Oil magazines.
43	Bathroom. Large jars with oils and water, and kylikes with wine.
44	Small forecourt
46	Lesser Megaron, decorated with lions and griffins.
63	Open courtyard
64	Queen's court
65	Queens's throne room/boudoir with battle scenes on walls, largely covered by tapestries with hunting scenes. It has a doorway to her sanctum, as well as a trapdoor down to the dungeon.
104,105	Wine magazine

marble columns and opulently furnished halls. Airy curtains flow in the mild breezes.

It has two stories with the upper floors being used as servant and guards quarters. Along the walls are columns painted in bright colours,

Slaves wearing animal masks greet visitors. A spokesperson for the court, a handsome chamberlain in rich silken robes warmly welcome them to The Purple Palace of Tekhelet (he is Arsippus). He explains that the island is ruled by queen Xenersis, and she wants to meet with them. However, first they need to be properly welcomed.

Arsippus is a devoted servant to Xenersis, well aware of what she is and doing his outmost to remain useful to her. Catchphrase: "My dear guests, if I may..."

Any questions about disappeared people visibly concerns the chamberlain, and he might let it slip that the island is plagued by a monster hiding in the jungle harassing the splendid queen. If pressed he spins a yarn

that the queen's beauty upset some kind of monster sent by Echtria that kidnap people as a vicious mockery. If the heroes want to hunt it, the queen would be so delighted and thankful...

The slaves are mostly **sailors**, and if freed they may join the crew. However, some of them may be jackalweres in hiding. This may be where Doppelganger crew could prove their worth – but they do not like to "out" shapeshifters as a matter of principle. Abantes is also impossible to fool, and may be more helpful.

MAP

Layout (shamelessly stolen from the [Palace of Nestor](#) at Pylos): see next page.

LAMIA THRONE ROOM/BUDOIR

Indeed your loveliness assures me of a kind and tender heart within.

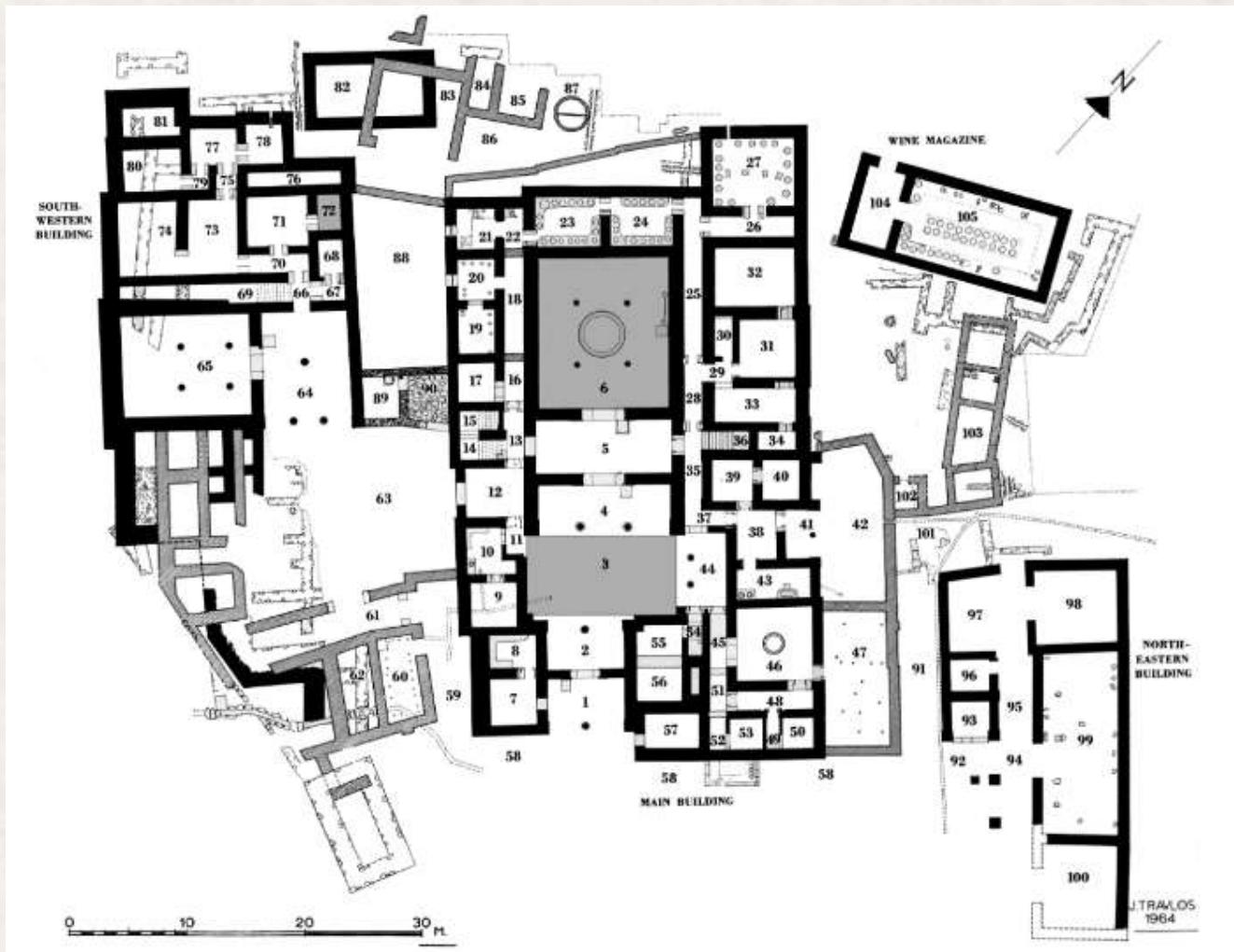
Apollonius of Rhodes, Argonautica, Book III l. 1006–

1007

Rich carpets, tapestries, braziers, urns, furniture and a lovely collection of scrolls with poetry. The wardrobe is full of exquisite clothes and jewellery... as well as many more disturbing things.

Floor:

A finely crafted rug of intricate, geometric designs worked with silver threading. Careful examination (Search DC: 16) reveals an inscription in orcish runes laced in the threading: "When the sky boils, the sentinel returns." The dimensions of the rug are 4ft x 6ft. (50gp)



Under the rug is another rug with holes for metal rings affixed to the floor. The floor itself shows signs of bloodstains.

A bed of silken pillows and the softest down imaginable.

On the desk:

An abacus with copper, silver and gold markers. (100gp)

A large pearl in a decorative marble display case shaped like an oyster. (Pearl: 500gp, stand: 125gp)

A death mask of a beautiful man. This mask belonged to one of the Lamia's favourites, prince Zagrus the Beautiful, and his spirit is still bound to it. He fell in love with her and did not care that she did not care for him in the same way. If she is killed the mask becomes haunted by a **ghost** possessing the wearer, trying to avenge her death.

A bone flute from a human femur (also Zagrus). It has a beautiful sound, and gives advantage to Performance if the subject is love.

A human skull etched in complex erotic scrimshaw patterns. It holds various oils and beauty products.

Book stands:

10 scrolls of poetry from many places.

A large (18"x28"), rectangular electrum sheet with ancient Rhomaoi writing on it. The writing, if deciphered, is a brief history of a powerful magical item known as the Bow of the Winds, with several poetic clues as to where the item may have been lost fourteen hundred years ago during the wars between what would have been ancient Noria and Marvia. The Bow of the Winds is described as an ornate bow of legendary power belonging to Pitantis. See the "Sidequest: Bow of the Winds" chapter. (75gp)

Parchment scrolls (human skin) containing the Lamia's own notes. They are conceited, full of mediocre poetry aping the real skill of other authors, but with titbits about how to run a slave kingdom and with creepy recipes for food, torture, and dark magic.

Wardrobe 1:

200gp exquisite clothes, jewellery worth 700 gp

An ivory-coloured robe of fine wool, which is capable of bursting into illusory flames once a day for up to one minute. The command word, "Pyrkagia", is stitched in red thread on the left sleeve. (100gp)

Snake scarf: a scarf woven with a pattern of snakes.

Snakes never attack you, as if they were charmed. (100 gp)

Fine oils, perfumes, sponges, and other beauty products (300gp).

Wardrobe 2:

An adamantium-headed branding-iron bearing the sigil of the Queen. (100gp)

An iron maiden set with 50 slender silver blades; perhaps for use in torturing lycanthropes or undead? (900gp)

A set of masterwork steel manacles covered in alchemical silver, with a key attached. (20gp)

A large set of knives, chains, and other torture implements.

Sex toys (olisbos, goat eyelid cock ring, various metal wires... the distinction between the torture implements and some of the toys is debatable)

THE DUNGEON

Underneath the palace there are secret tunnels, with corpses from earlier playthings. These are the remnants of the original temple caves of Aïdôneus: a dark place of death, decay, and poison that the Queen uses for disposing of people and things and as an escape route.

The tunnel from her boudoir snakes to a cave in the slopes beneath the palace hill (if necessary she and some of her guards can cause a rockslide burying the entrance; several DC 25 strength checks needed to remove the rocks). It is pitch black inside.

There are a few side-chambers and oubliettes for prisoners.

There are three **traps**:

Locking pit: DC 15 notice something amiss with the floor, otherwise fall down shaft 20 feet, taking 2d6 damage and landing in a pile of rotting skeletons floating in cave water. Opening the trap from inside requires a DC 20 Strength check or a DC 15 Dexterity check with thieves tools.

Another locking pit: just like the previous one, a few feet behind it. The skeletons may or may be animated and try to drown victims.

Commanding visage: An altar and a black stone face carved from obsidian. When a creature approaches within 10 feet of this, the face commands the creature to drink the liquid in the trough on the altar (a **potion of poison**). The target of the command must make a successful DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or attempt to comply with it. A creature that succeeds on the saving throw is immune from further commands from this face. The face has 100 gp jewel eyes that can be removed, and the person involved will now have the disfavour of Aïdôneus. Owning the eyes will produce a strange compulsion to drink whatever liquid is placed in front of oneself.

SANCTUM

In her inner sanctum are magical mirrors and tools for witchcraft. The place is as richly furnished as her boudoir, with various objects for magic or just aesthetic enjoyment. A small sanctuary holds a dark, shapeless rock of ominous presence.

Baetylus stone: A big, shapeless dark rock that has an eerie presence. This is a baetylus, a rock inherently linked to a god. By sleeping next to it one can make contact in dreams with the god if they so wish, and while touching it clerical magic in line with the gods wishes has advantage. In this case it is a baetylus of Aïdôneus.

Scrying bowl: A large turquoise scrying bowl, roughly eighteen inches in diameter. The rim is edged in silver. The interior is dark and inscribed with mysterious symbols. It comes from a remote and unknown country. (175gp)



Mirror of legends: A hazy bronze mirror, set in a frame depicting the goddesses of tales and history. When activated by speaking a name of a person, place or object while holding it a **Legend Lore** spell is activated and the mirror recites knowledge about it. It is usable once each lunar cycle, beginning at the full moon. If it is not used, then a fantastic rumour about the owner will start somewhere.

Mirror of dreams: An obsidian mirror set in a frame of horn and ivory. When activated by staring oneself into a trace it activates a **Dream spell**, allowing contact with a desired target. It is usable once each lunar cycle, beginning at the new moon. If it is not used, then a nightmare beast will escape.

Pharmateka: a large shelf with drugs, ingredients and other objects. Drugs (pharmakons) in expensive agate and jasper jars, ornate wooden boxes, glass vials. DC 15 Arcana to identify any of them, +5 to roll if taste or otherwise carefully try them. Critical failures when trying them means the full effect happens. Each holds 1d6 doses.

Philter of Love: A glass vial of a shimmering pink liquid filled with bubbles.

Philter of Illusion: A glass vial with an opalescent liquid.

Potion of forgetfulness: A glass vial with a milky liquid.

Aglaophotis: A herb from the peony family said to be able to drive out demons from bodies. In the jar is crimson powder of dried petals, which when ingested or blown at someone possessed by anything acts a dismissal caused by **Protection from Evil and Good**.

Moly: A plant with white flowers and black root that protects against magic. By ingesting it one gains advantage on saving rolls against magical effects.

Batrachite: Toadstone, a gem-like stone formed within the head of certain toads. When worn it protects against poisoning, giving advantage on saving rolls against poison. This causes the stone to heat up, sweat and change colour, losing its power.

Lyngurium stones: yellow gemstones that attracts objects. Said to be the solidified urine of a lynx, and hence associated with Aïdôneus. When used as part of magical rituals, gives a +1 bonus to success.

Asphodel: a plant beloved by the dead, who desire it. If shown to them, they must succeed at a Wisdom save

to ignore it. If failed, they will approach it and if offered a taste try to fulfil a command. If they do not get it afterwards they will attack.

Lykoktonon: a poison particularly deadly for wolves, werewolves and other shapeshifters. If made into a weak tea it gives advantage to controlling lycanthropy, but if ingested a full dose does 3d6 damage (half if makes CON save) and gives the poisoned condition for 24 hours for anybody, and 6d6 damage to lycanthropes.

Helleboros: A cure for madness. When ingested it acts as a lesser restoration against mind magic, madness or mental conditions.

Satyrion: A male sexual enhancer orchid extract. Needs to be taken at the right dosage to avoid irritation and poisoning. Make a DC 10 Medicine check; on failure the result is either no effect or 2d6 poison damage (roll a 1d2).

Candle of hexing: A dark candle inscribed with dire invocations. When lit while watching a creature, a [hex spell](#) begins and runs until the candle burns out. If the candle is blown out it stops, but will restart if lit again.

Incense of memory warping: When lit with the right incantations the poppy incense fills the room with dreamlike haze that allows the user to [manipulate the memories](#) of one or more people who are breathing it.

Wraith flask: A silver flask with a holy-symbol runed stopper, extremely cold to the touch. The flask contains wraith essence. If the flask is opened outside of a Protection from Evil or Law Circle, the [wraith](#) regains its form in three rounds and attacks. (Flask: 25gp, wraith essence: 620gp)

Her sanctum contains quite the arsenal if PCs or NPCs get access and figures out their uses. On the upside, this is enough magic to turn the tide of battle. On the downside, this is clearly dark magic: using it will not be good for the souls of the users.

FIGHT

In a fight the Queen will use [mirror image](#) and [call out](#), making her jackalweres and slaves come to her aid.

In fact, some of the chamber walls were [illusions](#) hiding soldiers. (3 jackalweres and [3 sailor-slaves](#) with scimitars per visitor – the strategy is to try to get enemies to sleep, use pack tactics.)

She will primarily ensure she does not take any damage by casting mirror image, letting her slaves do her dirty work. Between that, dodge and claw/dagger attacks if needed. If enemies have previously been WIS-drained she may use suggestion (“you really need to run and warn your friends outside” – making them run into her other guards alone – or “it would be more impressively heroic to fight bare-handed”).

She has a [Weapon of warning](#), an exquisite dagger that gives her advantage on initiative and prevents surprise.

Her daggers are [poisoned](#) with [giant centipede venom](#); DC 11 CON saving throw against taking 3d6 damage (half if saved). If the poison damage reduces the target to 0 hit points, the target is stable but poisoned for 1 hour, even after regaining hit points, and is paralyzed while poisoned.

She might also have a healing potion she uses in a pinch.

LOSS



Roberto Ferri, *Teatro delle crudeltà* (2010)

If battle goes badly (less than 38 hp remains) she will offer way home, possibly treasure in exchange for them never returning. If her offer is rejected, will curse that they will never find their destination.

She may also escape down the pit trap (or some other escape hatch if elsewhere), through secret tunnel where she shapeshifts into a slave (“The Mistress went that way – to her hydra!”) and uses major image to distract with a monster. Later she will resurface with more jackalweres to exact revenge – sabotaging the ship, kidnapping loved ones and forcing swearing oaths to serve her, while secretly picking off enemies one by one.

One strategy is to quickly make headway to a small harbour village in the vicinity and sail away to the island of the minotaurs to recruit some nasty reinforcement. Meanwhile set up a deadly trap for pursuers, like a fire on a locked building with innocents inside, or leave a scuttled boat that sinks (perhaps with a gift in the form of a sack of deadly insects that emerge when wet).

Generally, the Queen is a proactive smart enemy who sends off hench-jackals to cause mayhem, sets up traps, take loved ones as hostages, recruits minotaurs if she needs reinforcements and have her pet sorcerer perform sabotage (mage hand to open the wraith flask in the palace is a great diversion – so many servants that will get turned into spectres!). She is not going gently into the night.

WIN

If she wins, she will truss up defeated enemies and brainwash them thoroughly... unless she is angry, hungry or just bored. This is where things turn dark.

HAPPINESS IN SLAVERY

*Then she mixed them a potion—cheese, barley
and pale honey mulled in Pramnian wine—
but into the brew she stirred her wicked drugs
to wipe from their memories any thought of home.*

Homer, the Odyssey, Book X

If the PCs are enslaved, she will make use of them. The ship crew makes for fine sailors on her pirate ships or servants in the palace. Hippas may be sent as a hunter to

bring down wild animals, escapees or monsters in the wild. Augustinos may be a fun acrobatic entertainer and scribe for her literary experiments, and so on.

Basically, push the horror being in her talons as far as the players can take – it is a life of degradation, fear and desperate ambition to be in her good graces. She is a monster and will eventually consume anybody around her. She also delights in dragging others into depravity, step by step. Like any authoritarian leader she makes everybody complicit in her crimes.

CAMPAIGN NOTES

In my game, the barbarian bodyguard PC was charmed, became her guard, and ended up in her boudoir. After “testing him out” in bed (creepy fade to black) she had him beat one of the sailors to death so that she could try the Rod of Resurrection on him. It failed (a charge had recently been used; had it worked she would then have gleefully asked the PC to kill him again), so she had the sailor turned into “a romantic meal for two” (creepy fade to black).

The other PCs had not been charmed yet, but were put to sleep by Jackalweres. They woke up chained up in a cell, guarded by loyal and non-stupid jackalwere guards. The lamia would come down with an entourage, gloat a bit, and then try Geas until she succeeded. However, one PC managed to get a wooden cup of water, which he kicked at a guard, used Hail of Thorns (it was a thrown weapon after all) and eventually, after a true 1980s action movie scene, managed to free himself and the other PCs, leading to a new fight against the queen and eventually a successful rebellion.

If things look too dark, this is the spot where friendly gods may intervene. If the PCs have been pious towards some gods they might send a dream that magically frees one of them from charm or geas. Gods like Agêtôr may find the queen’s treachery against sacred hospitality a bit too much, and send an intervention. Even if they haven’t, they may have a few unexpected allies: Abantes, if he is present, is easily overlooked and still a cleric – if he were to find a new god and perform an act of sacrifice. Aïdôneus is not happy with the queen: her palace is built on top of his old temple, and she does not venerate him. Plus, various NPCs may try to break PCs out of their charm – one with access to the Lamia’s lab may find the peony powder and use it. This may be a good way to introduce a helpful new NPC, or make Eutara save her husband-to-be.

CAMPAIGN NOTES

In my game, at the climactic battle – which was not going well – Abantes grabbed the Rod and with a roar broke it. The earth began to shake and the sky darkened as the spirits of the dead congregated. Across the island skeletons rose from shallow graves, all with one goal: to avenge their deaths at the hands of the queen and her guards. The destruction of the Rod was a sacrifice to Aïdôneus that made Abantes his new high priest.

He was still immortal and cursed to repeat words, but now able to communicate telepathically, call down forces of death and undeath, and eventually became the unlikely and unexpectedly friendly ruler of the island. As he put it, “Everybody will come to my god eventually, but in the meantime, we need to ensure that there is a proper olive harvest.”

CAMPAIGN NOTES

Eutara and the queen were having herbal tea. “I am so happy my dear that we can have this conversation, lady to lady. Especially over *non poisoned* tea. That was a good attempt, but I do feel a bit annoyed that you did it after we treated your arrow wound. Which was from your husband, incidentally. It seems that he thinks that if he can’t have you, nobody will.”

“I doubt that. While I may be grateful for the healing, I do notice that I was kidnapped and now am an unwilling hostage.”

“My guards told me about your earlier escape attempt. And I heard from your crew what happened after you visited the island of the mimics. For a lady, you are quick to use a dagger.”

“Sadly, not good at winning with a dagger.”

“It is the wrong weapon most of the time. You need to learn how to *win*. Then you do not need to rely on your husband or your bodyguard. Or daggers.”

“I doubt you are interested in letting me win.”

“It depends. As long as I have to retake my island you are just a hostage and I would be a fool to give you any advantage. But when I retake it, you have a choice. You can deny me, and spend the rest of your days weaving in an attic and grumbling about lost opportunities. Or I can teach you to win, and you will win for me. Give it a consideration.”

WARM WELCOME AT THERMODON

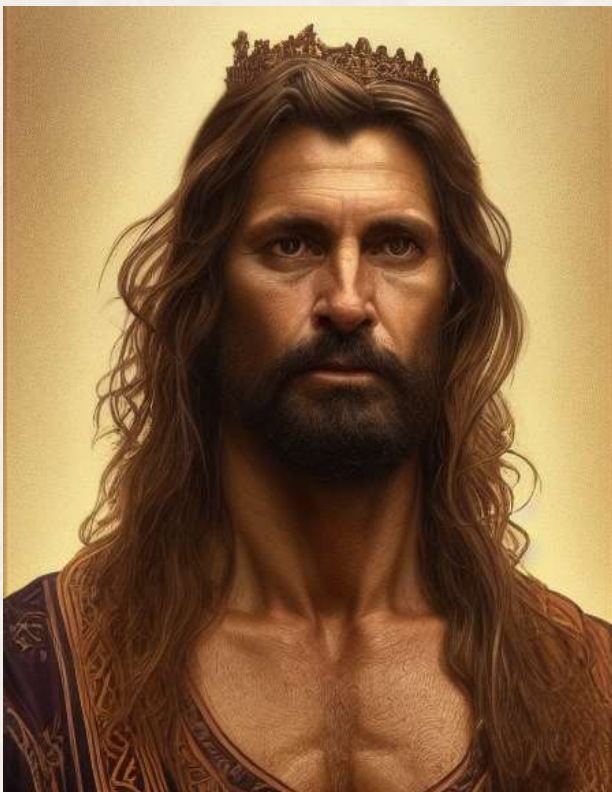
A WELCOME ISLAND

Anaxos the lookout points towards a cloud on the horizon, shouting “an island!” After a while of rowing an island begin to appear below the cloud. It hovers over the tallest mountain and there are other mists and clouds flanking it, wreathing the mountainous island with a kind of halo. You even see smoke bubbling out of the water at one point. There is a glitter from metal at one place, and as you approach you see a strange lighthouse and a big city. Fishermen in boats painted brightly with dolphins, sharks and squids are out at sea laying nets, waving at you in greeting.

Thermodon is a civilized place and a potential way out from the archipelago.

Theme: hidden secrets, trust.

ARRIVAL



The island of Thermodon is volcanic, with numerous hot springs and mountains. It has an active merchant fleet and a wealthy capital set on the banks of a river. It is the most civilized part of the Monster Islands, struggling against pirates from Tekhelet and other islands. The capital has a big harbour, with a statue of the kelp-covered sea-god Phykios as a lighthouse. Broad stairs lead up to the palace. Paranoid PCs may notice a fair bit of defensive fortifications around the island and city.

King Chremonides is a wise, helpful king. When the PCs arrive, he sends courtiers to bring them to court, giving them a warm welcome. He says prophetic dreams foretold of their coming. He lavishes presents (because he has heard of Mesia). This is totally honest, but PCs are likely suspicious after Tekhelet. If they have defeated the lamia queen the welcome will be extra warm, since she was always a thorn in their side.

THE KING’S SPEECH

Honoured visitors from the far and fair kingdom of Mesia, please accept these tokens of welcome and friendship! White, black and golden pearls harvested from our sea. Coral and gold rings. Jars of honey-wine and sea-wine. Cloth of the thread of the silver sea-snail. All in thanks that you arrived safely as foretold by the dreams sent to me by Phykios, he who embraces the sea. We are privileged to have visitors whose destiny is worthy the attention of the gods!

The king’s navigators may be able to point out a good way home. They realize there is a problem to cross the vastness of the North Sea. It is enormous, and it might take months to sail across – assuming monsters and storms doesn’t get them first. They suggest visiting oracle in the springs of the island.

On Thermodon there are plentiful supplies. The locals are amazing fishermen and have all sorts of tools and souvenirs made from coral, pearl, tanned sharkskin, and mysterious materials from creatures there are no names for in koine. They can sell beautiful and strange pearl necklaces at low prices.

THE BUBBLING ORACLE

The oracle lives in a temple enclosing a warm spring and rests in its bubbling, sulphuric water. He is bald and weird, speaking in tongues. His hidden lower body is tentacles.

If given suitable sacrifices or gifts, he will speak in a bubbling voice. The prophecy is: “*When you leave the island, throw a meat sacrifice into the water and do not look back to it.*”

The kraken will direct the weather and send them back towards the civilized lands using a tremendous storm. If anybody looks back they will see a terrifying, madness-inducing kraken and go insane.

If the PCs have angered Rharias the Oracle may also warn about the goddess. “*The mother of forgiveness will forgive if you bring her priest back to her.*”

“*Your destiny is an arrow. You must find a bow that can shoot it.*”

When he is done, he quietly sinks under the surface. The audience is over.



PHYKIOS

We were approaching Dymesos when Eutara suddenly sat up, looking shocked. “No children” she said. “What?” asked Hippias. “There was something off all the time in Thermodon, but I could not put my finger on it. It just hit me: there were no children there. None in the palace, none in the city. Everybody was adult.” Hippias frowned, racking his memory, and nodded. He had not seen any children or adolescents either. Eutara looked at the pearls from the island, wondering what secret they held.

Augustinos Chrysodactylos, The Wedding Journey of Prince Hippias

The land does have a dark secret, but it is not inimical to the PCs. Observant PCs notes the lack of children and elderly.

Thermodon worships the sea god Phykios, depicted as covered by a vast mass of seaweed. Locals are happy to speak about his miracles and how he helps the kingdom thrive in the ocean. He is the lord of sea-life, currents and waves, not always a friendly god but a powerful one. Some tell stories that he is the ancestor of many of the other gods who left their ancestral home deep under the ocean for dry land and the sky, regretfully forgetting about their grandfather.



Phykios is a kraken, one of the wilful servants of Typhaon. It does not care much about surface things, but when it realizes the chance to help shift power it will want to have the PCs sent onward. It is not particularly violent or “evil”, but very alien and horrifying.

Infants are thrown into the sea, and return as adults with no memories but excellent sea-skills – [sea-spawn](#). As they grow older, they begin to turn into sea spawn and eventually return to the sea. An observant PC will eventually notice that there doesn’t seem to be any children in the country, or old people. The locals do not hide their practice but find it so natural that it is not

worth remarking on. Infants should be thrown from the sacred cliff, that is what you do! Keeping them on land?! What do you do with them? Old people naturally go into the sea, that is the way of things.

Suspicious PCs may start investigating more deeply, discovering that there is a mystery cult on the island known as **the Zema**: members sometimes gather in remote places where they perform secret rites at boiling geothermal springs. This is a cult worshipping Yesati, a fire-and-water deity said to be the daughter of Phykios. It is actually entirely benign, but citizens silently congregating in the mists may look very suspicious – and lead to regrettable misunderstandings.

OTHER MARVELS



Thermodon has many other exotic things to offer. Pearls of strange colours and shapes. Coral never seen in Hesperos. Pickled fish with amazing tastes and mildly hallucinogenic properties. Armour padded with cork that doesn’t sink in the water. People who all seem to be able to swim. Tame dolphins. Black chickens with black meat. A sealant boiled from squids that can waterproof a ship far better than any pitch known.

The priesthood of Phykios know strange things. One of them is the spell to awaken ships. They might also know how to fashion Bags of Wind.

AWAKEN SHIP

5th-level transmutation

Casting Time: 8 hours

Range: Touch

Target: A ship or boat

Components: V, S, M (A jewel worth at least 1,000 gp)

Duration: Instantaneous

Classes: Cleric

After spending the casting time tracing magical pathways within the pearl, you affix it to the figurehead of a ship or boat. The target gains an Intelligence of 10. The target also gains the ability to speak one language you know. It gains the ability to move its rudder, sails, ropes, and so forth, and it gains senses similar to a human’s.

The awakened ship is charmed by you for 30 days or until you or your companions do anything harmful to it. When the charmed condition ends, the awakened ship

chooses whether to remain friendly to you, based on how you treated it while it was charmed.

Awakened ships give a +2 bonus to crew experience.

HOMEWARD?

*Just as four stallions yoked together charge ahead
across the plain, all running underneath the lash,
and jump high as they gallop quickly on their way,
that's how the stern part of that ship leapt up on high,
while in her wake the dark waves of the roaring sea
were churned to a great foam, as she sped on her path,
safe and secure.*

Homer, The Odyssey, 13.98-104 (tr. Ian Johnston)

Thermodon is a likely place to return the heroes to Hesperos, if they show the proper respect and trust.

There may be other ways of getting home from the Monster Islands. Maybe they can find a temple to a god and convince the god to help them. Maybe they find a way of flying across the ocean. Returning is not just a matter of sailing in a mundane way: they need supernatural help to do it.



THE TEMPLE OF ZÊRUNTHIA

"I see Lomon Rock!" Anaxos cried from the mast. Below him the sailors erupted in a loud cheer. We were back in known waters. We thought our wild adventures were behind us. How little we mortals know of the games gods play.

Augustinos Chrysodactylos, The Wedding Journey of Prince Hippias

Back to civilization – but besides dealing with port authorities, the administration of the Tyrant and greedy priests the PCs will meet not just one goddess but several. And one of them has a plan...

The basic plot for this part is to (1) get an audience with the Tyrant to perform the official diplomatic mission to join forces against piracy, and (2) get an audience with the goddess so she can bless the marriage. It is a straightforward (?) social encounter. The real issue is that the goddess is not quite on the side of the PCs.

Themes: vastness, mercantile interests, romantic intrigue, seedy urban underbelly, divine intrigue.

DYMESOS

Dymesos! Greatest city in the world!

Dymesos! Seat of the Brilliant Goddess!

Dymesos! Place of prosperity, peace, and propriety.

From dinner speech by Agathoceles Philopator

Dymesos is a bustling, big trade city. Safely nested in central Chiosia at the middle of the deep Dymesian bay it does not need defensive walls or any other limiting factors. It might well be the largest city in the known world, and certainly feels like it. It is cosmopolitan, mercantile and full of adventure. People are diverse – beside humans there are half-orcs, half-elves, and many more exotic races.

The city lies on a gentle slope, interspersed with some hills. One hill holds the palace. Another one is the Temple Island and the adjoining pilgrim quarter of Colia. Not all places are nice: there are regions that have sunk into the marshy ground, becoming shantytowns of waterlogged buildings linked by rickety rope bridges.

When it rains, the streets turn muddy. There is a sewer system that often overflows. Some poor parts of the city are always flooded, seamlessly mixing with the floating homes of sailors and visiting ichthyophagoi.

HARBOUR

This is the site of the Cyprian, since it is agreeable to her to look ever from the mainland upon the bright sea that she may make the voyage good for sailors. Around her the sea trembles looking upon her polished image.

Anyte of Tegea

The main harbour is grand. Dragon statues mark the entrance from the sea (the myth is that they are the petrified remains of an army of monsters that were

defeated by the Goddess). Overseers direct workers to haul ships, cargo and equipment. Merchants nervously watch over their goods. Administrators note the comings and goings, sending slave runners up to the palace. The harbour contains neosoikoi (ship houses) for maintenance and repair, and lodgings for seafarers ranging from the Spartan to opulent.

At the centre of the harbour, on a small premonitory lies the temple of Zêrunthia Euploia, the goddess in her aspect of a blesser of fair voyages.

There are many other harbours, bays and places to anchor that may be cheaper and less conspicuous, but they are also more dangerous. Many locals have their own boats, and the semi-floating shantytowns are home to ichthyophagoi and other people more at home in water than land.

Various merchant communities have come together for mutual protection and assistance in the foreign quarter of the city. This is where one can meet Mesian contacts, centred around **Heracleides of Byrna**, proxenos for Mesia. Heracleides is a jovial Chiosian magnate who maintains the connection between the cities. He knows Kleiton and is generally helpful (although as Kleiton warns the party, he is still Chiosian – he is working for the Tyrant despite his Mesian style).

THE PALACE

The palace is a slippery place which catches those who do not know it.

Ancient proverb

Visitors have to make their presence known at the palace. As non-citizens they are not protected by the laws unless the Tyrant extends his protection to them. Merchants usually present themselves via their associations, but more distinguished visitors will have to deal with the administration directly, ideally helped by a proxenos.

The palace sits on a hill, an imposing structure approached along wide ornamental stairs decorated by grand statues.

Inside the administration of Chiosia occurs. Various functionaries perform the rituals of court and state with the self-importance only the truly superfluous can muster. Digging through the bureaucracy and ceremonies can easily divert anybody. Skilled diplomats and courtiers on the other hand figure out who to talk to when something needs to be done. Which doesn't mean they get what they want: there are some very devious people here that put the interests of Chiosia first.

THE TYRANT

There is a story that the key to his power is a boon he once got from Zêrunthia: that he would be with his true love for as long as he loved. But he loves power and his throne, so the boon made him immortal and powerful. Whether this was Zêrunthia's intention is unclear. But the Tyrant certainly honours Zêrunthia and does not accept any speaking ill of her.

Augustinos Chrysodactylos, The Wedding Journey of Prince Hippias

The Tyrant has ruled Chiosia for centuries. Nobody knows who or what he his.

The Tyrant prefers to be unseen and nameless, sending trusted diplomats to act in his name. An audience is in a darkened room where a voice comes from behind an empty throne, delivered via an acoustic contraption from a nearby room. The palace has several unnerving automations, like doors that open by themselves.

The Tyrant does not accept rebellion or insubordination. The first time is a warning, the second death. Unlike lesser kingdoms Chiosia has guards and soldiers employed by the state, and good ones too. Less spoken of are the assassins on the payroll.

The Tyrant makes sure to keep the goddess happy, and ensure that the priesthood doesn't get involved in his affairs. Last time it happened (some uppity priests wanted more donations from the merchants) he pushed back hard administratively against them, convinced other priests they were more suited for the job, and let some random accidents befall them. The goddess seems not to have minded.

Kleitos will be busy once proper diplomatic channels have been established. The pirate issue is complex, and as he will eventually realize, very tough to negotiate: some officials have connections to pirates that serve Chiosian interests. Getting a treaty to clamp down on piracy is not in their interest, and maybe not the Tyrant's either.

In regards to the PCs, the Tyrant has seen it all. A group of heroes, getting involved with the gods... that is their problem. As long as it does not affect Chiosia he does not care.

CITY OF A MYRIAD SURPRISES



A fool made fun of the city. They made fun of him and he wept.

Ancient fragment N 6119 (Alster 1997 p. 292)

As a cosmopolitan trade city, Dymesos is diverse and intense. Visitors from other places are often overwhelmed – something that many locals happily exploit. It might be prejudice to think Chiosians are all greedy merchants out for themselves, but there are certainly enough such people around to reinforce the prejudice. The cultural differences will also lead to misunderstandings and confusion – again something certain people will exploit in their own way.

The locals – from the Palace to the slaves – are proud of their vast city and will not accept anybody badmouthing it.

EVENTS

Dymesos is a city constantly generating drama and adventure, and the presence of the Goddess and countless pilgrims makes things unusually busy.

Use these events to spice things up when they are too slow, and to show just how much is going on. (Randomly gathered from [threads like these](#) or reinvented.)

1d100 Event

- | | |
|-------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1-2 | A religious phratry is praying out in the streets today all throughout the city. They are praying for the soul of Arketos, son of Echedemos, a famous, old and wise priest who just died. Normally this would be a mere formality but Arketos sacrificed himself to defeat a giant monster and there is no body to bury – everybody needs to join in petitioning all the gods to treat his soul as he deserves. |
| 3-4 | There is a shout and mixed male and female clothing is thrown out of a window. |
| 5-6 | A local bumps into you, warns you of the dangers in the city, and offers 'protection' from them. |
| 7-8 | A silent hierodule is being berated and harassed by a man who demands they have sex. His less drunk friends are trying to make him stop or pretend not to know him. |
| 9-10 | A street has flooded in silty, dirty water. Some enterprising locals are stringing ropes across for a makeshift rope bridge they offer transit from for a few obols. |
| 11-12 | A traveller drops a crate he was carrying under his arm, releasing the dozen or so lizards that were inside. |
| 13-14 | A sudden gust of wind sweeps through the streets, knocking over a nearby fruit vendor's stall. If the party stops to help, he will give them free fruit in thanks |
| 15-16 | There are a 1d6+2 kids playing with each other. They act like animals and run around. "Dogs" chasing "rats". It's a big chaos. You can't keep track and they run around you and into you. You don't know they try to pickpocket you. |
| 17-18 | A barrel of human waste on its way to be emptied in the harbour tips over, spraying everybody in the vicinity. |



1d100 Event

- 19-20 A dog runs up to the party and begins barking and whimpering, attempting to lead them somewhere – straight into a robbery.
- 21-22 A phratry are throwing a festival in honour of their founding father, serving food and wine to everyone.
- 23-24 A group of boys with finger cymbals dance down the street as an advertisement for the tavern they perform at every evening.
- 25-26 A passing slave recognises one of the PCs as an old friend.
- 27-28 A man comes up to the party and tries to tell them something in incredibly broken Koine. Another man explains that he is trying to sell stuff to them, but they really should look at his goods instead since they can communicate with him.
- 29-30 A game of knuckle-bones at a tavern has become high-stakes, and people are thronging to see who will lose their house, have to sell family into slavery or wager their life.
- 31-32 Everybody hurries out of the way for a funeral procession – it is bad luck crossing its path.
- 33-34 A small black dog comes and runs against your leg. If you treat it kindly (pet it, feed it, etc) you gain +1 on all Persuasion checks for the next 24 hours. If you treat it poorly you get -1 on all Persuasion checks for the next 24 hours. A religion check can tell you it is an emissary of Zêrunthia.
- 35-36 Two taverns are having a rivalry about whose fishcakes are the best, with their owners shouting insults at each other and trying to steal customers. This could be a good-natured competition, or deadly serious.
- 37-38 It begins to rain, at first a few droplets and then a torrent. Shops extend protective awnings, people bring up umbrellas to protect themselves, merchants hurry to move goods into cover. As the rain continues the street turns into a river.
- 39-40 A smiling merchant from the southern isles roasts rats, frogs, lizards, and squirrels on sticks. He offers a bite to the PCs. It tastes delicious, but the PC needs to make a CON save to avoid serious gastrointestinal distress 1d4 hours later.



1d100 Event

- 41-42 A chained slave breaks free. He starts running, desperately trying to get away from his captors.
- 43-44 A crying family is taking farewell of their beloved daughter who must, because of a holy promise made by her father, become a servant in the temple.
- 45-46 An attractive lady flirts with a PC. Her very large husband notices and excuses her: she crossed path with one of the godlings earlier today.
- 47-48 A storyteller tells mesmerizing stories about the exotic far lands – Bidia, the Eastern Islands, even remote Mesia.
- 49-50 A sudden gust of wind sweeps through the streets, knocking over a nearby fruit vendor's stall. If the party stops to help, he will give them free fruit in thanks.
- 51-52 There are a 1d6+2 kids playing with each other. They act like animals and run around. "Dogs" chasing "rats". It's a big chaos. You can't keep track and they run around you and into you. You don't know they try to pickpocket you.
- 53-54 There is a mob hunting a tiefling. Somewhere a half-elf is quietly enjoying his plot. Or the reverse.
- 55-56 A little girl is watching you from the alley. The next time you glance over, you see a dog run away.
- 57-58 A godling has blessed a tree to give fantastic fruit. A large crowd has formed to share it.
- 59-60 A very insistent beggar asks for compassion. They might not be human.
- 61-62 A group of the Tyrant's guards charges down the street. They have heard a report of a known troublemaker coming back to town after being ejected: now they will deal with him permanently.
- 63-64 Richly dressed half-orc merchants pass by, surrounded by bodyguards.
- 65-66 A prostitute propositions the party, pointing out it is their religious duty to celebrate love.
- 67-68 A man in a ratty suit in front of a local monument asks if you would like to take the guided tour for 5 gold pieces. If you accept, he gestures to the monument saying "wow look at that", before dashing away with your money.
- 69-70 A brawl breaks out between Pteians and Inverdenians.
- 71-72 A party member has their pocket picked. The thief dashes into the crowd. If caught, the party realizes it's just a child. At that moment an adult shows up and claims to be their parent, scolding them and generally making a scene... so the accomplices in the crowd can steal from the entire party.
- 73-74 In an alleyway the party can see a diseased mule corpse, and 2d4 stirges feeding on it.
- 75-76 An intimidating man walks up to you and punches you right in the face. He is very angry and yells at you. He thinks that you are the guy that slept with his wife. Apparently, you look exactly like him.

EVENTS

1d20 Event

- 77-78 An intimidating man walks up to you – and kisses you passionately. He thinks that you are his new lover. Apparently, you look exactly like them. Somewhere a shapeshifting godling laughs to themself.
- 79-80 A stray dog runs towards you barking loudly. You step aside and the dog stops about 15 feet past you and continues to bark at an empty space on the street ...
- 81-82 A blind man is playing a string instrument very well, drawing a crowd. He sings a song about ancient Rhomaoi, the greatest of kingdoms, and how it tragically fell after having angered the gods. Now only the ruins stand in Noria and among the islands.
- 83-84 Someone throws out a ceramic drinking cup from a tavern, hitting one of the PCs.
- 85-86 A man selling potions vitality for cheap. They're actually just bottles full of mulberry water.
- 87-88 A small festival is taking place: there are street vendors, food carts, and performers filling a small city neighbourhood. Everyone present is wearing a brightly coloured mask in various states of dress (or undress) and the wine is flowing freely.
- 89-90 A young lightly dressed woman runs up to you and begs: "please act like my boyfriend!". A tough man comes around the corner with flowers in his hands and says: "There are you, honey." The woman accidentally used a love trinket on him. She wanted to give it to his best friend. To make matters worse (or more hilarious) a love godling is hiding nearby, looking for complicating the love drama.
- 91-92 An elderly, haggard woman covered with cheap, tatty robes approaches your party, carrying several home-made chains of flowers to be worn around the neck. 2cp/each - will barter to 1cp/each. Thieves and pickpockets in the area will no longer attempt to target wearers of these flower chains.
- 93-94 A little old lady is selling wooden dolls on the street. If approached, she'll say that she knows what you're here for, and say that you were destined to have this particular doll she keeps hidden. If purchased and examined, it turns out to be hollow, with a hidden opening, and stuffed full of illegal pharmaka – somebody is smuggling black magic. And the little old lady soon realizes her mistake and sends her grandchildren to retrieve the doll.
- 95-96 A shabby dressed man walks up to a PC and starts going through their pockets and bags as if this was the most normal thing in the world. He doesn't say a word approaching them, just treating them like they are an inanimate object. When they pull away, he scoffs like the PC is the one being rude and walks off ignoring any call outs.
- 97-98 You overhear a group of people discussing the rich princes from faraway Mesia who recently arrived – exactly how should one best rob them of their treasures?
- 99-100 A priest of Zêrunthia is having a loud and angry quarrel with temple guards – he is a foreigner and not used to be treated as a minor character.

PLACES IN THE CITY



THE BLACK AGORA

A friend said to a pedant who was going on a journey, "I wish you to purchase for me two slave boys of fifteen years each." He replied, "If I do not find such, I shall buy for you one of thirty years."

Jests of Hieroceles

Named because of the wondrous black stone making up the stoa around the agora, this is a key slave market. Slavers from the east sea come here with their unfortunate goods. The agoranomos Timoleon is held in high repute as a fair arbitrator despite his high age.

THE PERFUME BAZAAR

Have you tried the Ointment of Phaon? It will make them fall in love with you. Use it carefully.

A market for perfumes, ranging from the pleasant to the outrageously delightful, from everyday prices to the insanely expensive. Merchants sell ingredients like laurel, marjoram, iris, cardamom, spikenard, cistus, rose, mint, myrtle, hyacinth, cinnamon, narcissus, musk and ambergris. There are incenses, oils and resins. Wandering around is a heady experience and may make newcomers dizzy. At the centre of the bazaar is a tiny garden where Zêrunthia's Roses grow: magical flowers with the most enchanting smell, the monopoly of Mnesitheos and his family.

THE AGORA OF BULLS

An agora in front of the palace where executions take place. It gets its name from the hollow bronze bulls into which criminals are put. Then a fire is lit beneath the bull and the screams transformed by the metal throats into eerie bellows. It is sacred to the gods of justice. Normal days it is a busy market place and a meeting place with state officials not as formal as the palace itself.

TEMPLE OF AR MYSTIKÓS

A small, dark temple to Ar in a side street. This is where city people go to whisper secrets into a tube going into the underground, to relieve themselves of things they feel they need to say. The temple is full of secrets. The priests and priestesses are good at keeping quiet. "The greatest secret is that there is no secret."

THE HILL OF ASHES

The cemetery of the city. At the top are altars to Aïdôneus where bodies are burned together with sacrifices during the funeral rites. Around it is

gravestones and urns for ashes. Merchants of firewood, oils and suitable funerary gifts have shops nearby, although the whole neighbourhood has a bad reputation due to the dark presence of death. Well-off people prefer one of the cemeteries towards the countryside, or, the latest fashion, funeral rafts at sea.

KAPELEIA ALPHA AND OMEGA



There is a tavern the godlings frequent. It looks like any other tavern, but its existence is somewhat magical and it can likely not be found if somebody is not invited.

It serves normal wine, tragemata (sweets, like dried fruits or nuts) or haies (savouries, like kebabs, fishcakes or dried meat). There is often some flute music. Great for a discreet conversation, although there is a risk other godlings overhear or interfere.

The owner, Agasias, is a friendly mortal who has tended the tavern far longer than anybody can remember. Due to his job he has acquired divine protection: grateful patrons have blessed him.

PEOPLE



Fate is a dog walking always behind a man.

Ancient proverb

KATAIGÍDAS THE HELPFUL

A temple guard gives food and fresh water away. Poor and homeless people are gathered around him. He does this frequently. He is the secret hero of the slums. Everyone would do everything for him. However, he never demands anything.

AGATHOCLES PHILOPATOR

To offer one's beauty for money to all comers is called prostitution; but we think it virtuous to become friendly with a lover who is known to be a man of honour. So is it with wisdom.

Socrates, in Xenophon, Memorabilia, 1.6.11

Coming from a modest background Agathocles has become a skilled political operator. He is a go-between, fixer, and party animal showing up at symposia for all the proxenoi and magnates of the city. He is willing to help, if people are generous.

He is great at coming up with impromptu speeches and nice turn of phrase. He is also profoundly untrustworthy and reports back to the Palace.

KYNOS

Kynos is a Diogenes-like character, a proto-philosopher, madman and troublemaker. He has a restless mind, an inability to let go when it would be polite to do so, and a tendency to earnestly get himself into trouble. He does what he wants because "either it is right, and I should do it, or it is wrong, and then I need to learn my lesson." If asked why he can't figure it out without doing stupid things, he responds that he still would need to check whether he figured it right.

He asks uncomfortable questions like "Do people fall in love because of Zêrunthia, or do we have Zêrunthia because we fall in love?"

CAMPAIGN NOTES

In my game, Kynos was just ahead of them in queue for audience with the goddess. He asked her the above question, and was turned into a cat.

ZAMOLXIS

A Meminii slave up for auction: good-looking and desperately trying to hide that he is a scribe – he has heard what the Chiosians do to literate slaves. Originally lived in a pleasant village on an island near Bidia but was captured by pirates. He is skilled in several languages and smart, but admittedly also a coward.

KORAX

A cynocephalic slave up for auction (the name "raven" was given to him because of his black fur). While the cynocephaloi have a reputation as fierce but brutish fighters that might be undeserved, Korax is indeed a fierce fighter... and an idiot. He does not think much, preferring to go by instinct. He is a violent drunk. He is no credit to his race and very likely to be a disaster to anybody buying him.

CAMPAIGN NOTES

In my game, the party bought Korax and Zamolxis. Korax proved to be an endless headache until he finally ended up swallowed by a tyrannosaurus... to everybody's relief. Zamolxis on the other hand proved to be a useful assistant, inaccurate chronicler, lousy court troubadour and eventually manager of an academy.

TROPHONIOS

Trophonios resides in one of the most run-down parts of the city in a semi-flooded house filled with strange amulets, fetishes and symbols. He is hidden by a coarse cloak and appears strangely deformed as he cackles and mumbles to visitors.

He is the underworld contact to go to for magical objects and Tullingi black magic. He essentially runs a pawn shop for anything magical, holy or exotic, often trading one object for another. He rarely accepts money: he wants artefacts. Then he can enchant a sword to give necrotic damage during the night or trap an otherwise useless ghost in armour for extra mental defence.

THE CITY DOGS



Marble sarcophagus with the myth of Selene and Endymion, 3rd century. Met Museum

There are many dogs in Dymesos, of all kinds. From pampered pets to feral mutts. They are all sacred: due to Philomenos, no Dymesian will ever dare to hurt a dog. This the dogs know, and they often exploit it. Yet the presence of the Father of Dogs in the city instils a certain discipline. Dymesian dogs are smarter than any other dogs, and have their own secret citizenship, laws and polis. They do not care for the politics of the humans yet keep many secret things in the city working.

THE TEMPLE

Look, it is that year. The year of the Goddess. We love her and her family. But heavens, the madness! My daughter ran off with a boy, came back pregnant and insisted that it was a demigod. My neighbour got cursed to kiss every flower he sees. Father told me it was the same last time and the one before, although he did find mother... Anyway, that is only half of it. Then there are the pilgrims. Great for business. But the priests, they all expect you to slaughter a lamb for them despite mostly being rural yokels. Nothing bad about the priesthood here – they help a lot – but those other priests...

DESCRIPTION

*Let us go to Aphrodite's temple to see her statue,
how finely it is embellished with gold.*

*Polyarchis dedicated it, having made a great fortune
out of the splendor of her own body.*

Nossis of Locri

The temple is located on an island connected to the city proper via a wide causeway. On the city side is the busy Colian quarter, home to pilgrim hostels, smaller temples, brothels, and merchants selling votive gifts. At the shore stands a tetrapylos where the main road between the Temple and the Palace meets the corniche around the quarter. The tetrapylos, guarded by palace and temple guards represents where secular power ends and the sacred rule of the temple begins.

The causeway is busy, usually full of petitioners, merchants, and gawkers. It ends at the main temple gates, flanked by magnificent sculptures of the goddess watching the proceedings with bemused expressions.

The temple island is covered by buildings centred on the grand temple. Over the years housing for the clergy, hospices and the numerous other functions of the priesthood have expanded. Today it is a city within the city, with labyrinthine passages.

In front of the main temple is an agora where everybody passes by. Unlike a normal agora there is little mercantile business going on, but there is plenty of activity as acolytes, slaves, pilgrims and priests mill around. There are sacred dogs everywhere, and maintaining their kennels is an important task.

Flanking the agora (and found almost everywhere) are beautiful sculptures of the goddess and other divinities, ranging from her aspect as the Radiant Beauty to the Mysterious Seductress to the wild Wrecker of the Unfaithful.

ENTERING

A young man said to his libido-driven wife: "What should we do, darling? Eat or have sex?" And she replied: "You can choose. But there's not a crumb in the house."

Jests of Hieroceles

Many people want to visit the temple to pray, be healed or visit the priests and their goddess. To enter one needs to be allowed through the tetrapylos and the temple gates.

The tetrapylos is straightforward: during the day and evening people are let past if they do not appear to pose any trouble. The temple guards will not let heavily armed people past. A few acolytes are present and can act as messengers or guides for a few obols.

The causeway is the main waiting place. The temple gates let in people who are judged as needy and worthy enough by the presiding priest. Generally, there are a number of slots available in the hospitals, bordellos, main temple or for talking with the priests. The acolytes and priests perform a rough triage and often provide visitors with a token for coming another day, or a time for appointment.

Donating money or goods to get in is fine and not bribery, but the priest typically judges the gift based on the apparent wealth and status of the petitioner – a prince better pay a princely sum. It is entirely possible to

cheat, but cheaters will *know* the goddess knows they cheated their way in.



SERVICES

Love, unconquerable,
 Waster of rich men, keeper
 Of warm lights and all-night vigil
 In the soft face of a girl:
 Sea-wanderer, forest-visitor!
 Even the pure immortals cannot escape you,
 And mortal man, in his one day's dusk,
 Trembles before your glory.

Sophocles, *Antigone* Line 781 (*Ode III*)

The **hospitals and hospices** are major centres of healing and midwifery. Typically, they contain sleeping halls, sacred washbasins, and rooms where healing herbs are burned while the visitors pray. Some are luxurious bathhouses, others little more than bunkhouses.

The **oraculum**s are chapels where priests perform auguries on sacrificial animals, give advice, or sleeping chambers where answers come in dreams. Many come to find their true love, pray for children, or solve other problems linked to love, health and life.

The sacred **brothels** are places where visitors make love with the hetairai acolytes and the hierodules as a sacred act to the goddess. While donations are strongly encouraged (this being Chiosia, after all) the key part is to dedicate it properly to the goddess.

Marriage **ceremonies**, witnessing of business deals and other formal activities are performed in the main temple or the side chapels.

There are many kitchens, weavers, workshops and storerooms for the everyday functions. Sacred perfumes

and cosmetics are made, as well as mundane food. Some scholars study or teach, but they are few: the Temple is not a place for celebration but for celebration. There is a notable joy in the air.

OTHER PLACES ON THE ISLAND

Nothing is sweeter than desire. All other delights are second.

From my mouth I spit even honey.

*Nossis says this. Whom Zêrunthia does not love,
 knows not her flowers, what roses they are.*

Nossis of Locri



THE LIBRARY

One word

Frees us of all the weight and pain of life:

That word is love.

Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, Line 1616 – 18

The temple maintains a library of scrolls. Most are accounting and records of donations to the temple. There is a fair bit of religious writing and hymns, erotica and poetry, often donated by authors and priests. As a place of learning it is fairly disorganised. As the priests like to say, the only word needed is 'love'.

THE RELIQUARIUM

*She spake, and loosed from her bosom the broidered zone,
 curiously-wrought, wherein are fashioned all manner of
 allurements; therein is love, therein desire, therein
 dalliance—beguilement that steals the wits even of the wise.*

Homer, *The Iliad*: Book XIV l. 216 – 217 (tr. Samuel Butler)

The presence of the goddess and her attendants mean that many places and objects in the temple have acquired holiness and divine powers. Some of the more potent ones, as well as the more valuable donations are hidden inside a locked chamber.

Some notable objects:

Mirror of Zêrunthia – a hand mirror the goddess often used. Looking through it reveals the inner beauty of people and things, and how to cosmetically reveal it. When used for dressing or make-up it gives advantage on appearance-relevant CHA and social rolls over the next few hours (or the person becomes dishevelled).

Fan of Pleasure – A decorated hand fan used by the goddess when she blessed couples. When used, it

heightens pleasure and sensual delights and diminishes annoyances and unpleasant stimuli.

The Collar of Philonikos – Once Philonikos was consumed with a vast rage, and the goddess created the collar and leash to hold him. After he calmed down, she left the collar in the temple. It is a golden dog collar that fits the neck of any being. When worn it acts as a divine Calm Emotions: it overcomes any mortal feelings or magic with calm and friendly obedience. If the leash is held, the holder can command the wearer as with a Suggestion spell with DC 30 to resist. While wearing the collar all dogs will respect and venerate the wearer.

Golden hair – Strands of hair from the goddess, containing some of her divinity. If woven into the hair of someone they grant +1 CHA.

Divine clothes – Pieces of clothing worn by the goddess. Sacred, gives bonuses to social interactions but does tend to cause drama.

A vial of nectar – Zêrunthia left this to her priests for special cases of healing beyond their normal powers. That is, healing people who have been cursed by demigods or lesser gods. It contains melam that can empower any (healing) spell.

THE SECRET GARDENS

Rooftop gardens with amazing plants, the perfect place for quiet meditation, a secret tryst or a diplomatic meeting. The presence of the goddess has made many of the plants semi-awakened and responsive to emotions.

THE SPIRE

Dymesos is dominated by the Spire of Zêrunthia, a tall tower rising from her temple island. The spire itself is merely a lighthouse, but it was built by cyclopes and when the goddess is in residence crowned with a radiant fire. A spiral stairwell leads up to one of the grandest views in all of Hesperos.

THE DEEP TUNNELS

There are cellars, hallways and sewers under the buildings forming the unwholesome guts of the island. Moisture is everywhere and strange creatures may hide – while monsters are kept away by the sacredness of the place, it attracts other strangeness. There might be *anything* down there.

One of the most profound secrets of the city is hidden in the depths. The current city is built on top of a buried, older city. Once an equally grand city thrived here but eventually was abandoned. It was buried in silt and mud that compacted over it into the foundation of the current city. Only some of the gods remember it.

THE PIT

One of the less well-known aspects of the Temple is the Pit: a cylindrical well 20 feet wide and 40 feet deep made of solid stone. This is where monstrous criminals are kept by the Dogs. Anybody trying to magically enter or leave the temple without the proper permissions also find themselves here. The walls are smooth and the well is filled with an antimagical field.



PRIESTS



There are almost 200 clerics and 2000 acolytes in the city, with about half residing on the temple island. It is a vast number, a city in itself.

Acolytes have been initiated into the goddess service, either by choice or being handed over by their parents. There are also hierodule slaves owned by the temple; while not acolytes they often perform the same functions (and are sometimes freed to become acolytes). Mixing up who is who causes serious affront.

Generally, the priesthood is far more good-looking, healthy and charming than most people... as long as they keep to the precepts of their goddess. This is due to the cult being centred on the life and love domains.

High priestess **Priline** is a wise, beautiful and observant lady. She is an amazing healer and orator, and totally devoted to her goddess every need. She may be less able to see how others exploit her faith, or just ignores it.

GUARDS

THE TEMPLE GUARDS

Temple guards are ordinary guards working for the temple organisation. They are well fed and equipped, and mostly handle crowd control. They are recognizable by wearing a buckle with the zeta for Zêrunthia.

THE DOGS OF SPLENDOUR

The Dogs are the elite guards, essentially paladins of Zêrunthia. They are recruited from the ordinary guards and devotees arriving as pilgrims, trained in the arts of defending the innocent and swearing oaths to the goddess. In return she blesses them with some of her abilities. They have a blue sash with embroidered golden dogs.

CRIME

Criminals handed over to the temple are judged by the priesthood. Some are merely forced to pay restitution or serve in the temple. More severe cases are *changed*: using divine powers their personality is altered, they may be charmed or geased to serve, or their bodies altered. Rapists and spouse-killers have been turned into women, dogs or ducks. The fate of blasphemers is kept secret, but is known to be horrific.

Trying to sneak in without permission is a crime too.

THE GODDESS



Falling in love with a God is not a death sentence. The story is only a tragedy if the God loves you back.

- Nathaniel Orion G. K.

When the Goddess resides in the temple, she holds court in the inner sanctum of the temple. When she is present extra rooms become apparent where none had existed before, and her entourage of divine servants and friends show up.

During her residence the temple is caught up in swirl of activity – massive numbers of pilgrims, fantastical demands on the hospitality with equally magical solutions, emotions running passionate. Nobody is unaffected.

The goddess looks *lovely*. Literally: she is the definition of lovely. She is like the most beautiful person you have ever imagined, while at the same time having mannerisms you didn't know you like. Her eyes are hypnotizing – deep kohl-rimmed pools that look into your soul. She leaves a perfume in the air that lingers, making one remember only good things.

She is also powerful beyond belief and strong-willed. Trying to manipulate or fool her can be amusing – or make her angry. Do not make her angry. She can turn you into a cat or bull, curse you to only love horses, cause you to love a hideous foreigner, or merely rip out your heart. But as long as visitors amuse, charm or interest her they are safe. Her priests know how to read her and often use their diplomacy to handle the situation when somebody overstays their welcome.

Her faithful dog/past lover **Philonikos** is always at her side, looking adoringly at her. Anybody threatening, rude or annoying merits a demigod growl. Functions like a **Moon Dog**.

Divine servants and friends: treat as **Devas** but with charm-related spells.

She is constantly surrounded by a Zone of Truth (she is not affected), and any willing touch by her heals and restores normal wounds and illness. Her effect is like being subjected to a constant Charm spell every turn even when she doesn't focus.

Like all gods, if she chooses to use one of her divine powers (can be treated as spells) infused with her power they bypass any non-divine protection – she can choose

to make saving throws fail, although it takes some slight effort from her. Conversely, her shield spells (divine aegis) is impervious to any mundane attack.

If she wants to seduce a mortal she can trivially do it, but it is boring. She is much more interested in donning a disguise and getting to know a person as they truly are and see if they fall in love with her despite the disguise. Sometimes she leaves the temple, having one of her devas pretend to be her (oh, how she loves crazy intrigue and madcap romantic plots...)

Her agenda is basically to enjoy herself, but if she encounters the princes, she may become aware that other forces are involved and may focus a bit – especially if informed by her attendants. She does not want the cycle of power to progress, and will be interested in derailing whatever plans Echthria and Pitatis may or may not have. Harming the princes is not her style: instead, she might tempt them with adventure, pleasure or knowledge. Hence, she concocts the Aegis plan.



THE AUDIENCE

No oath can be too binding for a lover.

Sophocles

Getting an audience is straightforward if one is patient. First reach the gatekeeper priest, who will set up a slot after a suitable donation (they might remark that princes are expected to make a princely donation to fit their nature). On the day, the group will be let into the temple. They get to see the fantastic bustle inside, the dogs, the beautiful demigods hanging around (great opportunity for fun social faux pas) and led to the groups going into the main temple for audiences.

When brought into the temple they will immediately notice the goddess: she is impossible to miss, despite the temple itself being fantastically beautiful – decorated with sculptures, growing plants, and amazing light. But she is far more lovely. She is attended by a number of priests and minor godlings.

The goddess greets them politely and warmly by name. She tells them she has been briefed by her priests and her daughter Ossa (one of the goddesses in the room) has told her wild tales of their adventures – implausible but charming (Ossa frowns). She asks them what they want.

Blessing the marriage is easy: she looks into the hearts of the couple, nods and explains that they have her blessing to get married, and the formal ritual can be done by her priests in an adjoining temple.

However (see the Aegis plan), she will also remark that while she wishes them luck, their kingdom is in danger. She knows the prophecy, and she fears that it will cause something terrible. Hence, she suggests that

they should try to find the Aegis of Aex – only then will Mesia be truly safe.



Sebastiano Ricci, *Selene and Endymion* (1713)

CAMPAIGN NOTES

In my game, Augustinos also asked who he would fall in love with. I played that the goddess got a bit flustered, and gave a nondescript answer. Later that turned out to be her daughter Ossa that she had foreseen as his lover...

THE AEGIS PLAN

Zêrunthia doesn't want the cycle of power among the gods to continue right now: she is doing fine. One trick may be to simply freeze the cycle by having the princes petrified. Doing it directly might be dangerous and impolite, but having it happen because of an empowered gorgon? She (or Ossa) warns them that Pitatis prophecy will bring ruin to Mesia; if they want to save their future kingdom, they need the Aegis of Aex.

Aex is a minor goddess of light and safety, daughter of truth and law. Her aegis is a magical protection for people, things and kingdoms. Myths about it say it made people impossible to truly defeat, and hence it was once given to the Cythosians.

The temple of Aex is sealed: the only way in is by speaking a magical formula in an ancient, dead language. Inside is a labyrinth of hallways filled with

rocks, with occasional rumbling heard. The temple is guarded by gorgons... and Zêrunthia will happily empower one of them with melas so it is bound to petrify the characters!

To make it easier to convince the princes, she decides to use her daughter Ossa to help them put themselves in harm's way. Ossa is an unknowing cat's paw in the goddess' scheme. What could possibly go wrong?



RAIDERS OF THE ARK OF AEX

We were filled with divine joy as we returned from the audience. Our pilgrimage accomplished, Hippias on his way to become king, beauty intoxicating our senses.

Joy and success are the most dangerous drugs, far more risky than undiluted wine or the juice of the poppy: we did not see the trap. What an amazing trap! It was a trap I feel blessed by to this very day to have stepped into. The mouse may treasure the cheese even after it is caught.

Augustinos Chrysodactylos

This is a divine caper story, which of course includes a hefty betrayal. In this case in the form of a multi-year time-skip. This is where the PCs become directly aware of how much the gods are playing them, and that they may be somewhat important game pieces.

Themes: audacity, divine intrigue

ONE LAST JOB

After the audience Ossa sneaks after PCs. If shapeshifters sent to intercept her, she will confuse them, and then return as Timon – but Eutara will notice the change in smell and threaten with knife. Ossa is impressed and reveals herself: “Good going, girl. I heard the kidney is a bit further down.”

She suggests a discreet tavern to discuss in, leads them to “The Alpha and Omega”. She is *talkative*:

THE ARK JOB

“Look, I want to help you guys. My mother *impugned* me when she said my reporting was unreliable. So I am getting even with her by making your life simple.”

“I deal with news. Things like what the Cythosians are doing (killing each other over who is the true khan) or what your sister is doing (sleeping with the chamberlain). Things like reputations (don’t worry, you have fine reputations, although you are known to associate with dark forces and people expect you to suffer a horrible fate sooner or later...).”

“Mother told you the Aegis of Aex would help you. Typical of her: *of course*, it would. It what it is *for*. Aex – who just between us, is the most *boring* goddess you can imagine – made it to ensure protection. It *is* protection. The twist is of course that it is locked away. Seriously locked away. As I said, Aex is boring. I’m all in favour of you mortals getting hold of the good stuff – the stories tend to be hilarious!”

“Anyway, it is in her Ark. Her hidden fortress/storeroom. Not anywhere fashionable like the Celestial City, not even with her granddaddies in the Underworld. Just outside everything, impossible to find. And even if you found it, you could not get in without the right passphrase. See what I mean? Endless quest, and the best libraries in Noria won’t help you with the important bits.”

“This is where I come in. Or, rather, my dear sister Peitho. She can convince anybody about anything. I will bet her that she cannot get boring Aex to spill the beans, you get the secret, go in, get the Aegis... ta-da! And Cyrus is your uncle!

“Oh, the other stuff in there... maybe be careful with it. Or not.”

“Now, do you have anything you can sweeten the deal for Peitho with? She is the goddess of persuasion, but that doesn’t mean she is immune to it.”

“By the way, Augustinos, did you notice how flustered mother got when you asked your question about future love? She didn’t even punish you. You did great!”

INTERRUPTION

A group of *beautiful* young men barge in. Ossa looks annoyed “Brother, and his bros. Ugh. Quick, get out the back door! I’ll make a scene!”

Finding something good to bribe Peitho with may take some creativity, but if they kept the knickknacks from the Lamia Queen she might be quite delighted with the death mask or bone flute of the lamia’s lover – that kind of seduction is catnip to the goddess.



LATER

If the PCs manage to find some good gifts Ossa will bring them to her sister and a few days pass. During this time the party may be celebrating Hippias' honeymoon, trade, or try to help with the diplomacy.

Eventually Ossa returns:

SOCIAL ENGINEERING ATTACK

"I told you Peitho delivers. We know the secret opening formula! Aex didn't even think it was important since she relies on the whereabouts of the Ark being unknown and it being unreachable. She is so stupidly stiff!"

"Her mistake was to admit what was stored there. I know how to find it now, because I am smart."

"OK, here is the thing: to get to the Ark you need a steed that can fly there. There is only one creature that can go *anywhere*, the Hēliokántharos. So, you need to get one, and then you can use it to fly."

"It needs to sniff out the right destination – to do that you need something that exists in the Ark. Fortunately I know what it is: the clay you mortals were made of. We just need some of it – here, let me unmake a bit of you!"

She swiftly grabs a finger of Augustinos, breaks it off with no effort, and has it turn into a small clod of clay. Looking at the pained man a bit surprised she quickly adds two and two together and replaces the finger with a golden finger. "Sorry. As good as new!"

"See you when you find a Hēliokántharos!"

THE SCROLL

The scroll Ossa gives the PCs has written, in *beautiful* handwriting:

What is the fastest? The mind. It travels through everything.

Place is the greatest thing, as it contains all things.

Nothing is stronger than necessity, for all must submit to it.

FINDING A HĒLIOKÁNTHAROS

Arcana/Religion DC 10 reveals the story about its creation, and why it can go anywhere. Nature DC 20 check to figure out where it lives. The main insight is that a dung-eater will live where giant creatures live.

- There are stories about islands inhabited by behemoths in the eastern sea. Investigations will reveal that Moconian traders have heard a fair bit about it, and a generation ago some nobles from Ray-Sia donated a giant lizard skull to the Temple.
- The giant/cyclops plains in central Hesperia may be another site.
- The dragon jungle in Pteia?

CAMPAIGN NOTES

In my game, the PCs went into the countryside and performed a ritual to ask Mainalios for guidance. He sent a lizard running across the altar: a sign that they should look for the thunder-lizards alias behemoths.

- There are stories about a giant monster, the "tarrasque" that lives in the underworld but rarely, in the year of Typhon, breaks free into the overworld

Another approach would be to collect a vast dung heap and hope the beetle will arrive. This might work, but would be a massive, stinky undertaking.

ASKING OSSA

Ossa: "You want to hear where they are? Well... there is a Norian playwright who has written a very funny play where one shows up. Lots of privy jokes, and a guest appearance of yours truly. And there is a Pteian farmer who swore he saw one fly past last month, but he was pretty drunk. Last certain sighting was by a Bidian pigment caravan in one of the eastern savannahs, but that was a generation ago. Sorry, but I actually don't keep track of animals very well. Insects are generally in my brother's domain... and we don't want to involve him."

FINDING THE BEHEMOTH ISLANDS

The giant skull is indeed in the Temple treasure chamber: very impressive.

Ray-Sia is an oligarchic city state, largely agricultural but with much trade with Chiosia and Moconia. It has had many ups and downs with them. Has many grand palaces and beautiful temples. Thinks ugly people should be hidden away. Many good poets.

Convincing Kleithon to sail to Ray-Sia may be tricky, but as he starts to realize that the Chiosian court is giving him the run-around and is not too interested in allying against piracy, he might be convinced that going east and talking to the Moconians may be just the right thing. Ray-Sia would be a good first stop to even find where the Moconian court is sailing.

Some local NPCs at Ray-Sia:

Trader Eurycratides the Stutterer – he knows the behemoth islands lie in the deeper sea, only the ichthyophagoi know for certain.

Oligarch Timachidas of Amisos – the Moconian court sailed north, he has heard rumours the king is looking for a Marvian alliance.

Zoilus Gynaikothoinas – the great lover, celebrated by ladies. Poet, raconteur, charmer. In need of quick travel due to an upset husband to one of his lovers. Would love to seduce Eutara.

Pembicara-Tanah ("Land-speaker"), Guide from ichthyophagoi. **Pencari-Laut** ("Sea finder"), **Pelindung-Makanan** ("Food protector"), **Pemegang-tambatan** ("Mooring holder"): Ichthyophagoi who may be encountered and help find the island.

PIRATES!



The party sails to Ray-Sia (or somewhere else). The Tyrant quickly figures out the attempt to ally with Moconia, and sends pirates their way. Captain Dicaearchus Phaiós is a feared pirate, and secretly helping the Tyrant (for some hefty payment). His ship, “The Grey Ship” sneaks up when the party anchors for the evening in bay.

THE GREY SHIP

The Grey Ship is fast and eerie. The wood is grey, and it seems to always be surrounded by a hint of mist. If it tries to evade another ship it has advantage on disappearing.

The ship has an **antimagic field** protecting it and everything within a few feet from it: ki, runes and similar have no effect there.

THE BATTLE

The battle is best handled with the **mob rules**.

The pirates start with a barrage of spears (50 thrown, 3 damage, every 2 hit). The **Pirates**: AC 12, 11 HP, +3 hit, 4 damage. Act on initiative 20. Archers send flaming arrows that start doing damage to the ship, or throw barrels of Alchemist’s Fire that force more crew to extinguish the fire rather than fight.

Sailors: AC 12, 11 HP, +3 hit, 3 damage. Act on initiative 10. 2 pirates/sailors are needed one hit. Starting mobs have 550 HP, reduce by 100/75 per round.

Inside the melee, 8 enemies around each PC: 4 hits/round, moving gives opportunity attacks: extra 4 hits. Dodge halves. Being prone also adds 4 hits.

One **big warrior** seems to lead them.

The fight would likely only be lightly in the pirates favour given the PCs, but the aim is to kill Kleiton and then retreat – that is the whole mission. Dicaerchus is basically using the chaos as a cover for taking him out,

DICAEARCHUS THE GREY

Medium human, neutral evil

Armor Class 19 (studded leather)

Hit Points 99 (18d8 + 18)

Speed 30 ft., climb 20ft., swim 20ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	20 (+5)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	9 -1)	17 (+3)

Skills Acrobatics +7, Athletics +3, Deception +6

Damage Resistances resistant to damage from magical effects and weapons.

Senses. Passive Perception 9

Languages Common, Orc

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Light-footed. The captain can take the Dash or Disengage action as a bonus action on each of his turns.

Sea Legs. The captain has advantage on Strength and Dexterity skill checks made while standing on a waterborne vehicle.

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

Magic resistance: He has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The captain makes three attacks: one with a whip and two with the sword.

Dahargian Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage. This first attack is poisoned.

Whip. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 5) slashing damage. If the target is Medium or smaller, it must make a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Instead of attacking he can use the whip to swing from one location to another, moving 20 ft. extra.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 150/600, one target, *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage. He has arrows coated in wyvern poison.

A creature subjected to this poison must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

CAPTAIN DICAEARCHUS PHAIÓS (“THE GREY”)

A famous and deadly pirate, known for his grey ship Paranomia (lawlessness). He is a quick, agile fighter who rarely shows emotion. In his youth he was an admiral for Dahargia, but after a disagreement with its king he became a privateer and pirate.

He has raised an altar to Asebia, the personification of impiety, and somehow gained the ability to annul magic around his ship. He has actually rebelled against the gods, subtly helped by Anaireus. He made a deal with the Grey Judges themselves to be outside the sight and power of the gods, in exchange for something utterly secret.

He uses an unusual thin Dahrgaian sword (works as rapier) and a whip-like weapon (also a Dahargian

speciality) that allows him to grab people or swing around the battle. He is also willing to use poison on his arrows and sword when he has a particular foe to bring down.

Treasure: 600 cp, 9000 sp, 1300 gp, 80 pp, Exquisite calligrapher's set in an ornamental wooden box (250 gp), an alabaster chalice adorned with silver and a scene of worship in relief (250 gp), an alabaster salt cellar adorned with platinum and a phoenix in relief (250 gp), a bronze bracer inlaid with ornate gold scrollwork (250 gp), an alabaster plate painted with pastoral imagery (250 gp), an electrum ring engraved with the seal of Dahargia (250 gp), two amphoras of olive oil (10 gp, 240 lb), a Lantern of Revealing (uncommon, dmg 179), A dark candle of hexing in a box, three barrels of cider (36 gp, 960 lb), three amphorae of fine wine (30 gp), 6 lb an ivory comb inlaid with ornate orichalcum scrollwork (250 gp)



BEHEMOTH ISLAND



In the East Sea there are some islands housing behemoth lizards.

These islands have dinosaurs. Since the dinosaur names in D&D are mostly Greek via Latin, they would be known by other names to locals speaking koine (or rather, the koine is the original greek). Here are some suggestions.

- Hadrosaurus: Bulk-lizard / “Bull lizard”
- Ankylosaurus: Fused-lizard / “Armor lizard”
- Stegosaurus: Roof-lizard / “Roof lizard”
- Brontosaurus: Thunder-lizard / “Thunder lizard”
- Triceratops: Three-horned face / “Tricorn lizard”
- Dimetrodon: Two measures of teeth / “Sail lizard”
- Pteranodon: Toothless wing / “Flying lizard”
- Velociraptor: Swift seizer / “Swift lizard”
- Deinonychus: Terrible claw / “Assassin lizard”
- Allosaurus: Different lizard / “Wolf lizard”
- Plesiosaurus: Near lizard / “Water lizard”
- Quetzalcoatlus / “Great flying lizard”
- Tyrannosaurus: Tyrant lizard / “King lizard”

The islands are mostly uninhabited, but locals at some nearby islands hunt there.

GETTING THE BEETLE

The giant beetle is happily eating dinosaur dung, flying from region to region. It is not particularly bright and might completely ignore PCs in its vicinity. However, when somebody tries to capture it, it will try to shake them off. Prepared PCs will bring a lot of rope or chain, and succeed with enough Animal Handling to calm it down. There is plenty of potential for slapstick humour here, especially given the presence of dinosaur dung.

Once properly captured and tamed enough it is time for farewells: despite its size it cannot take an entire ship crew, just a few heroes. But it will likely be a short trip...

UP, UP, AND AWAY!

Hippias gave the clay to the beetle to sniff at, nudging its interest. The black antennae waved around, then stiffened. The vast cover wings unfolded and it unfolded the flying wings with a strange sound. Then it lifted off, with the humans clinging to its back for dear life. Below Eutara waved.

Higher and higher it flew, passing through the clouds. Below they could see the island in the vast ocean. Above an impossibly blue sky. Higher and higher the beetle flew, through new layers of cloud until nothing could be seen below of the mortal world. It buzzed to and fro, searching the cloudscape. After an indeterminate time – for how can you measure time when you are racing the chariot of the sun? – it sniffed its way to a large flat cloud. It landed, and we stood in front of the Ark.



THE ARK OF AEX

My Ark is not a treasury. It is there to secure, contain and protect. Not protect the things inside, but the cosmos outside.

Aex the Protector

The Ark is the fortress/storeroom where Aex places important objects that should not get lost. The Aegis is just the most famous one.

It is located outside the world in a hidden demiplane, surrounded by the endless mists of the ethereal plane, looking like it is standing in a landscape of clouds under an eternal blue sky. To get there one needs to know where it is, something only Aex knows. If needed she can bring it to any place.

However, she might have underestimated the deviousness of Ossa, the courage of the mortals, and the curious powers of dung-beetles.

OUTSIDE

What is the fastest thing? The mind. It travels through everything.

Thales of Miletos

The fortress is a featureless white stone structure on a grey plain. It was built by cyclopes and blessed by Aex to be impregnable. It has no entrances nor exits, although from the inside it is possible to see and shoot outward. It is not possible to scry, teleport or otherwise pass in. One can walk around corners slightly more times than one should; it actually has eight sides with right angle corners.

On one side, in celestial, an inscription reads: "Only the fastest may enter". To enter it one needs to recite the right formula, upon which the entrance turns intangible and one can enter.

INTERIOR



The interior is bare, with vast galleries overlooking the outside and stone carvings showing heroic figures protecting the innocent, turning back floods and fire, making shields and building dams. There is a smell of stone, as if it was built just moments ago.

From the entrance there is a large hallway going to the central chamber, and a series of galleries around the circumferences. Along the outside, there are arced windows that allow seeing and shooting out without allowing outsiders to reach the defenders.

There are hidden stores of weapons, rations, and other tools hidden inside the walls, as well as empty rooms that could be used as barracks and stairs up to the roof of the Ark (overlooking endless mist and clouds). Finding

the way of opening the hidden doors requires great skill (Investigation, DC 25). The weapons are all finely, divinely crafted +1 weapons and armour. The rations are perfectly preserved dried food and water: bland, yet strangely fulfilling.



CENTRAL CHAMBER

What is the greatest thing? Place, since it contains all things.

Thales of Miletos

The doors to the central chamber say: "What is the greatest thing?" The proper response is "Place is the greatest thing, as it contains all things." When said, they become immaterial.

The central chamber is a spherical dome 150' in diameter, filled with light from the white stone walls and an apparent oculus showing the blue sky outside. In the middle of the floor is written in celestial: "To protect those who are not able to protect themselves".

The central chamber has eight gates leading off to the storerooms. The gates are unmarked and closed. On each it is written "What is strongest?". The proper response is "Nothing is stronger than necessity, for all must submit to it."



CLEAN-UP

The Ark is a neat place. When nobody is around walls



repair themselves, floors are swept, mislaid objects placed in a lost-and-found room near the entrance. It is as if the Mending spell was cast at a low, continuous level. After a long rest the storeroom and guards magically reset (destroyed guards are restored to full function).

If a party is defeated, they will find themselves in a bare room with thick stone walls. Inside the fortress there is no hunger, thirst or other biological needs – in principle prisoners could remain there eternally. At some point Aex and her servants will notice and deal with them.

This could also be an alternative to being petrified: Zêrunthia interferes with the alarm or convinces Aex that it is best to just leave them there: the PCs essentially experience an indefinite period of exceeding boredom without noticing time flowing, and are freed years later.

THE STOREROOMS

What is the strongest thing? Nothing is stronger than necessity, for all must submit to it.

Thales of Miletos

Each storeroom is circular (diameter 30') and has an altar and guard. Each of the stored objects is placed at a central altar with a terse description.

The walls are covered with fine relief showing the history of each artefact; if one is removed, they go blank (someone putting an object on the altar will see things change to fit it, a bit like the Legend Lore spell). Understanding the relief requires a DC 15 insight check; the way the story is depicted is often odd and disjointed, but always beautiful.

The rooms are linked to the main chamber through a 100' long hallway. If the alarm is triggered (that is, the guard perceives the intruder and the intruder does not give the right passphrase) an adamantium portcullis descends at the end, preventing escape. It can be lifted with a DC 20 Athletics check so people can crawl under. It quietly resets after a short rest.

The guardians are programmed to stop intruders from taking the artefacts, but as soon as they leave the storerooms and hallways they return to their guarding if the artefact is still there (replacing it with something else may also have this effect, if the not too intelligent guardians fail their INT checks). Otherwise, they will pursue the intruders throughout the Ark and beyond.

In the case of an alarm the main exit no longer lets out people: it acts as impervious stone unless another passphrase is given. On the exit wall is written: "What should you avoid?" and the proper answer is "Avoid

IRON AMPHISBAENA

Medium construct (metallic), Unaligned

Armor Class 16

Hit Points 192 (35d8 + 35)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	3 (-4)	10 (+0)	1 (-5)

Skills Stealth +7

Damage Immunities Poison

Condition Immunities Charmed, Exhaustion, Frightened, Paralyzed, Petrified, Poisoned, Prone

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Understands Celestial but cannot speak.

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Construct Nature. The iron amphisbaena doesn't require air, food, drink, or sleep.

Splitting. If the iron amphisbaena takes more than 20 points of damage at the same time it splits into two copies, each with the same number of remaining hit points.

Two-Headed. The iron amphisbaena has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks and on saving throws against being blinded, deafened, stunned, or knocked unconscious.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The iron amphisbaena makes two bite attacks and one constrict attack.

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 13 (3d6 + 3) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution throw or suffer one random poison effect:

1. **Poison Damage:** The target takes 13 (3d8) poison damage.
2. **Confusion:** On its next turn, the target must use its action to make one weapon attack against a random creature it can see within 30 feet of it, using whatever weapon it has in hand and moving beforehand if necessary to get in range. If it's holding no weapon, it makes an unarmed strike. If no creature is visible within 30 feet, it takes the Dash action, moving toward the nearest creature.
3. **Paralysis:** The target is paralysed until the end of its next turn.
4. **Frightened:** The target is frightened until the end of its next turn.

Constrict: Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 18 (3d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage, and the target is Grappled (escape DC 16). Until this grapple ends, the creature is Restrained, and the snake can't constrict another target. It uses the same stat block body style as in the previous section.

DESCRIPTION

The iron amphisbaena is a two-headed metal snake construct, with a long body made of hard metal rings. Like an iron cobra it has venomous bite injecting random poisons, but it can also constrict targets. If it is cut into two, both halves become active.

It was created by the gods as a practical, low-maintenance guard in certain places where mortals were not supposed to go.

doing what you would blame others for doing.” A phrase that is unfortunately *not* among the phrases in the scroll Ossa gave them.

Below are the suggested contents of the Ark. Of these only the Aegis and the Clay have to be there: feel free to place other major artefacts here to tempt the PCs.

“I DEVOUR”: A SPHERE OF ANNIHILATION.

It has no guard. However, it cannot be controlled as long as it hovers above the altar.

On the walls of the room are relief depictions of primordial chaos, and a strange sorcerer throwing the sphere against an unknown god. The actual story behind this is truly ancient and something the gods involved will not let mortals know.

“I CHARM”: THE NECKLACE OF HARMONIA



Polynices offering Eriphyle the necklace of Harmonia; Attic red-figure oenochoe ca. 450–440 BC. Louvre museum. Photo Marie-Lan Nguyen

A [beautiful, cursed necklace](#) giving immortality. Aex finally removed it from the mortal plane to prevent any more tragedies.

Guarded by an Iron Amphisbaena.

On the walls are depictions of the origin of the necklace and various misfortunes that happened to previous owners.

“I KEEP”: THE KIBISIS



Andromeda Helps Perseus Kill Cetus. Antikensammlung Berlin, Altes Museum. [Wikimedia commons](#), creator Zde CC BY-SA 4.0

The Kibisis is a sack with two carrying straps that can hold any kind of force or monster. It was made by Aex as tool handy for monster-hunting. It works as a bag of holding, but with no limit to the size of its opening or how large contents it can hold. It might not be empty...

It is guarded by an iron globe.

On the walls are depictions of how Aex wove it and lent it to various monster-hunters capturing dangerous monsters – medusa heads, some kind of living storm, a hekatoncherie.

“I FIGHT”: A JAR CONTAINING A SEALED DRAGON.

It is a fist-sized gem of a deep red colour. Inside a shadow flicks and twitches like a tadpole in an egg. If released, Ladon, an ancient dragon will burst forth, ready to exert vengeance on creation. It has multiple heads and a shining body. If released inside, he will take on human form, use magic to immobilize everyone, get the Aegis, and escape. “You have my gratitude for releasing me. I will devour you last...” He petrifies them.

Guarded by an Iron Amphisbaena.

On the walls are reliefs of how a monstrous creature was sired by Typhaon and how it ravaged the world and the celestial city. Finally, it is defeated by the gods, and sealed away.

“I CREATE”: A BOX CONTAINING THE CLAY USED TO CREATE HUMANITY.

If sculpted into figures, they animate and become real.

Guarded by an [iron golem](#).

The walls are covered with reliefs showing the creation of humanity by the gods using the clay.

“I TRANSFORM”: THE EKPYROTIC FIRE

O Ever untam'd Fire, who reign'st on high in Agêtôr's dominions ruler of the sky;

The glorious sun with dazzling lustre bright, and moon and stars from thee derive their light;

All taming pow'r, ætherial shining fire, whose vivid blasts the heat of life inspire:

The world's best element, light-bearing pow'r, with starry radiance shining, splendid flow'r,

O hear my suppliant pray'r, and may thy frame be ever innocent, serene, and tame.

Orphic Hymn to Fire

The source of all fire in the universe, literally the firstborn flame. This can burn anything, give life to anything, and transform anything's essence. It just hovers above the altar

Guarded by an [iron golem](#).

The walls have depictions of how primordial chaos was pushed back by primordial fire, and then how the gods pushed back the fire into just this single flame. In the process phoenixes, volcanoes and lightening emerge.

"I NOURISH": THE CORNUCOPIA



Pelike. Plouton with a cornucopia and Demeter with a sceptre and plough. By the Orestes Painter. 440–430 BC. National Archaeological Museum of Athens. Photo Marsyas (2007)

IRON GLOBE

Large construct (metallic), Unaligned

Armor Class 16 (metal plates)

Hit Points 200 (21d10 + 84)

Speed 40 ft., climb 20 ft.

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

Skills Athletics +6, Perception +3

Damage Resistances Cold, Fire; Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from Nonmagical Attacks

Damage Immunities Lightning, Necrotic, Poison, Psychic, Radiant

Condition Immunities Charmed, Exhaustion, Frightened, Poisoned, Prone

Senses Blindsight 60, Passive Perception 13

Languages: Understands Celestial but cannot speak.

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Construct Nature. The iron globe doesn't require air, food, drink, or sleep.

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

Siege Monster. The globe deals double damage to objects and structures.

Standing Leap. The globe can launch itself into the air by extending the rods within it like pistons. The globe's long jump is up to 25 feet and its high jump is up to 15 feet, with or without a running start.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The iron globe makes three melee attacks and can use its movement to do rolling attacks.

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

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

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

A big horn, filled with endless food and resources. Any land where it is present will become rich and fertile. Guarded by an iron bull.

The walls show how Rharias, Manalios and Zêrunthia together sacrifice a giant bull and consecrate the horn, giving it to humanity. It also shows how humans grow fat and complacent, and Agêtôr and Koruphasia orders the horn to be removed.

Weighted chain. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage, and the target is chain). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained. On subsequent actions the globe can pull in the chain; a resisted STR roll determines if the target is pulled to the globe or the globe to the target. The globe can capture multiple opponents simultaneously.

Rollover: The globe rolls at full speed towards and over enemies in a straight line, akin to a rolling sphere trap (this can be combined with the dash action, but does not allow other melee attacks). The globe can move through creatures' spaces, and Creatures can move through its space, treating it as Difficult Terrain. Whenever the globe enters a creature's space or a creature enters its space while it's rolling, that creature must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 22 (4d10) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. The globe stops when it hits a wall or similar barrier. This attack is not possible when one or more Medium or larger enemies are chained to it.

Lightning Cannon (Recharge 5-6). The globe extends a metal rod from one of its many facets and fires a bolt of lightning in a 20-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

DESCRIPTION

The Iron Globe is a construct made by the divine craftsmen to protect some objects from mortals. It obeys the instructions encoded into a plate with holes somewhere in its interior.

From a distance, the iron globe appears to be a ball five feet in diameter. Closer inspection reveals square plates on the surface, each crowned by a black hemisphere. Once the iron globe becomes active, it rolls toward a threat, deploying what weapons it deems necessary by means of the pistons beneath each plate on its exterior. Some pop open like a chest's lid, some fire outward, and others split open to reveal a blade, a spike, or a nozzle.

Normally it is placed to guard something, and when triggered will use lightening and try to roll over enemies, attacking them in the process. After the initial phase it will try to capture enemies using chains while pummeling them into submission. It focuses on prone or restrained enemies first.

Based on the Creature Codex 2018 Iron Ball monster, its small cousin.

IRON BULL

Large construct (metallic), Unaligned

Armor Class 19

Hit Points 190 (20d10 + 80)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+1)	11 (+0)	18 (+4)	2 (-4)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)

Damage Resistances Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from Nonmagical Attacks that aren't Adamantine

Condition Immunities Charmed, Exhaustion, Frightened, Paralyzed, Petrified, Poisoned, Stunned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Understands Celestial but cannot speak.

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Construct Nature. The iron bull doesn't require air, food, drink, or sleep.

Magical armor: Resistance against nonmagical physical attacks that aren't adamantine.

Magic Resistance: Advantage on saving throws against spells and magical effects.

Magic Weapons: Its attacks are considered magical.

Trampling Charge: If the bull moves at least 20 feet straight toward a creature and then hits it with a gore attack on the same turn, that target must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, the gorgon can make one attack with its hooves against it as a bonus action.

ACTIONS

Gore. Melee Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 18 (2d12 + 5) piercing damage.

Hooves. Melee Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 16 (2d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

Petrifying Breath (Recharge 5–6). The bull exhales petrifying gas in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in that area must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a target begins to turn to stone and is restrained. The restrained target must repeat the saving throw at the end of its next turn. On a success, the effect ends on the target. On a failure, the target is petrified until freed by the greater restoration spell or other magic.

DESCRIPTION

The iron bull is an artificial gorgon made of iron, intended as a guard for divine treasures. It is not smart, just straightforwardly attacks with great ferocity.

"I PROTECT": THE AEGIS



Athena going to battle with the aegis on her shoulders. Vatican G 23 Group, Walters Art Museum

The Aegis is a golden skin, the skin of an ancient monster killed by the gods and turned into an artefact. It confers invulnerability in a metaphysical sense. Exactly what it does is best left hazy: it is not just armour, but more protection against everything.

On the walls reliefs show Aex tanning it from the corpse of the monster and absorbing hurricanes and earthquakes in it, and scaring off an army of monsters and evil beings.



The chamber holds an altar, above which the Aegis hangs in the air. In front of it stands an iron bull, waiting. As soon as someone enters the middle of the hallway leading up to the chamber the bull charges at them – and a portcullis falls down behind them.

The gorgon breath is enhanced by melam from Zêrunthia – unlike normal gorgon breath saving throws will *always fail*. As the PCs feel their limbs stiffen and their flesh turn into stone, they will also notice the smell of a perfume they recognize from the temple of Zêrunthia. Then everything turns black...

CAMPAIGN NOTES

There is a problem if the PCs can get the aegis before the gorgon attacks: resourceful PCs might for example try to lasso it from afar rather than step into the room, making off with it – and then potentially being protected by Aex divine power against Zêrunthias attack.

The solution for the DM is to have the attack occur before they do anything. Normally the guardian would be responding only in a set fashion, but Zêrunthia's influence can change that. Also, merely having the Aegis might not be enough: it needs to be activated/attuned in the right way.

WAKING UP

WAKING UP

You wake up, standing where you stood. The Gorgon is frozen in place, turned into rock itself.

You see a man in dark traveler's robes and a hat hiding his eyes standing in front of you. His hands are decorated with golden rings. He is carrying the Aegis nonchalantly over his shoulder. There is no doubt about his divine power.

"Welcome back to mortality. Maybe you should think of getting home. You have been away some time..." The god turns to leave for his chariot parked outside.

Eutara waits outside. She has spent time with the goddesses – they were feeling sorry for her. She is with a very apologetic Ossa (who could trace the transformed finger to get to the Ark).

While Zeruthia has not said anything nor apologised, it is clear that blessing a marriage that one plans to make short is not entirely to her liking. Ossa is definitely feeling sorry, and ensured that she was taken care of. Eutara has spent years in the divine city, learning many things. She looks younger thanks to nectar and ambrosia.

She also has had a son (remember, Hippias had some time with her), Polysthenes. He has grown up in the celestial city and is also somewhat different...

Ossa is apologetic: "I didn't know! Mother fooled me into trapping you!" – she is indeed honestly sad for what happened. Yet she did not dare to try to free them. Her main excuse is that she needed a major god on her side to overcome the melam of her mother.

Anaireus is less emotional: "Family reunited. Very touching. Time to move, I don't have all year, you know."

CAMPAIGN NOTES

In my game, Polysthenes was a quiet, well-behaved but slightly odd figure. He is a mortal who has grown up among gods, learning to play hide-and-seek with them: he had an uncanny ability to not just hide in plain sight, but even make others forget about his existence. Something that came up a few times with his own parents.

When back on Hesperos, they noticed that the pet mimic Mimos was missing. Cue a zoom into the ark to an altar, protected by a giant golem, over which a magnificent chest is levitating. An angelic choir sings.

ANAIREUS AND THE AEGIS

What is Anaireus going to do with the Aegis? To some extent, taking it is just a way of annoying Aex. But he is



also aware of the upcoming mess and want to have an easy way of biasing it in his favour. He could offer the Aegis to a champion. Or have numerous factions compete for it. Or hand it to Suidas (or even Laossoos) depending on what produces the best rebellion.

Plus, when there is a god-killing plan around, he likes to hold on to the best protection.

MEETING AEX

In a dream after returning to the world the princes will meet Aex.

Aex is not vindictive. She doesn't like what has happened, but she is also entirely unwilling to cause any harm to anybody. However, were the heroes to return the Aegis somehow she would be impressed and bless them.

MEETING AEX

The goddess looks at you with a stern gaze. The kind of gaze that makes you feel like a kid in front of an angry adult who is unfortunately entirely right about your guilt.

"We did it to protect Mesia!"

The goddess does not smile, but her voice has a measure of tolerance in it. "You tried to commit a crime, you mostly failed, and you were punished for it. I have remedied the flaws in my security. I have no conflict with you." Her voice turns cold again. "However, certain other parties have stolen what is not theirs because of you. That must be remedied in the proper way."

THE TIMESKIP



Time births all things. Time heals all things. Time reveals all things. Time devours all things.

The oracle of Ar Panoptes

The timeskip allows the drama to unfold further without forcing a lot of downtime on the PCs. It also serves to throw in some surprises and perhaps shocks.

This also sets up the final act: in their absence Mesia has grown darker, and now the final conflict about who will become king is drawing close.

EVENTS DURING THE SKIP

This is an overview of the events during the timeskip. PCs can find out by asking Ossa, who has heavy editorialized versions, or when they return to the mortal world.

LOST PRINCES!

When the PCs do not return, the crew waits around for a while. Ossa appears and takes Eutara to the celestial city, convincing the crew they have ascended to the heavens.

Telesinos succeeds in coming back to Mesia, reporting on the adventures.

Zamolxis and the bard arrived and spread the word. Zamolxis became scribe at the court, but was recently jailed for sedition. Thanks to his stories – and a guilty Ossa helping – the princes have a glorious reputation. (“The rumours of your death or ascension have been a tad exaggerated. Dragons *may* have been mentioned.”)

When it looks like they are lost, King Churii assumes they are dead and argues that the northern expanses are inherited by the twins, making him as their guardian run them. The legal claim is slightly flimsy, but who argues with the King? (“The good news is that your lands are still in the family. It is just that they belong to your grandsons.”)

This becomes a real issue when Hippias appears: he is clearly the rightful heir. As Churii dies, to whom the lands pass will become a messy legal question. Making

the twins landless is something Kallistratos will deeply resent.

WAR!

When states defeat their foes in a battle, words fail one to describe the joy they feel in the rout of the enemy, in the pursuit, in the slaughter of the enemy. What transports of triumphant pride! What a halo of glory about them! What comfort to think that they have exalted their city! Everyone is crying: “I had a share in the plan, I killed most”; and it's hard to find where they don't revel in falsehood, claiming to have killed more than all that were really slain. So glorious it seems to them to have won a great victory!

Xenophon, Hiero

Mesia engages in a lot of war and expansion. Conquers several neighbouring countries.

Celreia: Aunt Praxilla died, and this provided the pretext for attack. The kingdom was taken in a brilliant war, making Motophthalmos and Vasileos truly famous. Made into vassals of Vindiga. (“Celreia is now farming for your sister, their capital turned into her granary.”)

Viviumia has fallen after a long, hard war. Once their defences collapsed they were incorporated into Mesia, and the people have been enslaved. (“The widows of Vivumia cry as they toil for Mesia.”)

The citystate **Bylisi** was beleaguered for ages, and turned out to be very tricky. The Mesian fleet did not succeed, and is currently in shambles – Monophthalmos is very much an army man rather than a naval strategist. Eventually a peace deal was met.

Tremia was defeated and ruthlessly put to the torch by Messaros Elaphos, gaining him a feared reputation as “the killer of Tremia”. He used some of his elementals to break the siege. The walls were breached and the streets flooded, then the firestorm began. (“Tremia is no more; your estates now extend west across the burned wilderness and the pile of rocks that used to be a city.”)

Ephos is like Bylisi holding out, strongly supported by Chiosia. Pirates harass Mesian merchants, and are successfully blockade-running to Ephos.

These wars have required getting many citizens to fight, recruiting mercenaries or barbarians, and even maintaining a standing army and armed slaves – policies that people hate and are draining the Mesian treasury. (“Your brother is winning wars, and making people hate war.”)



DEATH!

Their elder brother Vasileos has been killed by poison. Dark rumours suggest it was Monoptalmos or Messaros, but it was actually the sister. (“At a great feast in

Cumoneisos Vasileos suddenly fell; a snake crawled out of his cup. They say that his last action was to voicelessly point toward his brother. Some say accusingly, others beckoning. They held a great funeral pyre for him, burning part of the city.”)

Monophthalmos son Ptoliporthes has also fallen. During an early mission the young warrior was killed by Tremians. This has not made Monophthalmos a nicer person. (“Your nephew never got to raze cities, so your brother does it for his sake.”)

IS THE KING SICK?

King Churii is getting old and weak. (“Your father was a great man, but now his shadow is lengthening.”)

Monophthalmos has always expected to inherit the throne and is self-assuredly continuing his wars. Had he been as politically astute as his father or sister he would have noticed the moves against him. He would also have realised that the wars in the north, the presence of the hated Cythosian hordes, and the satyr rebellion, are weakening him.

FOREIGN INFLUENCE!

Rharias want to end the satyr rebellion, Messaros secretly protects it. He delays expeditions to wipe it out. (“The east is chaotic. Elaphos has led campaigns against bandits and monsters, but the happy chaos remains.”)

Avon begins to support another contender for the throne, Samarion of Vindiga (son of the sister of the PCs). Samarion is a former athlete: strong, popular, and good with people... and run by his mother.

There is an old Mesian tradition of inheriting the crown along the female lineage, that some bards increasingly mention. The priesthood has significant resources to fund him. (“Samarion of Vindiga, your sister’s son, is popular and by many regarded as just the man Mesia needs these days. Peace, prosperity, strength. A winning smile to win tomorrow.”)

High priest Dio has died. His replacement Phoebeidas is fairly competent, but allied with new claimant.

Monptalmos has an ally in Cleombrotus, the priest of Laossos. An old wise warrior who might be the best advisor he has. Very laconic. Normally handling the newly built and very impressive temple to Laossoos the brother has funded with his spoils.

BARBARIANS!

The Cythosians are still split between Aphia and Cythosia. (“Cythosians do what they are best at: killing each other in heroic ways.”)

They are hiring out their services in Mesia. Monophthalmos has hired Aphians, Samarion the claimant (via Avon) support Cythosians. There is an encampment outside Cannoria, led by the chief Chaeron the Strong of Aphia. Samarion is allied with Okammenes the Boar of Cythosia. Both are great warriors.

Much of Monophthalmos work with the Aphians is handled via his general Ligyrtiades Metrokoites – a very bad man, another reason the would-be king has a bad reputation.

CUTE KIDS IN THE ROYAL FAMILY!

King Churii’s youngest sons have grown up fast and are quite a handful for their tutors, servants and family. (“Your younger brothers are fierce little warriors. Both are full of surprises.”)

Eutaras daughter Elpincie has grown up to be an unhappy, isolated wife. She has had affairs in secret, but is closely guarded – Churii treats her as a royal treasure. Her twins are her only happiness and she supports them fiercely. They will rule the kingdom one day, she tells them.

The twins: Nicanor is mortal, Kallistratos is a god – Eurypylos, the Cythosian god of badassery. His blond hair is regularly dyed by his mother to hide his true ancestry.

CAMPAIGN NOTES

In my game, the PCs supported Myrsinos and helped him win against the Rharias priest. They also adopted the boy Messaros and taught him to become a warrior, eventually leaving him in the care of Monophthalmos.

The result was that the eastern region increasingly came under the sway of Myrsinos hedonistic not-quite-rebellion, drifting away from proper social mores and angering Avon. Messaros became the dark character described below, fated to play a role in the final battle.

What if the PCs fail at helping Myrsinos or take Avon’s side? It is not too hard to add another rebellion in the east, perhaps led by another satyr (maybe Myrsinos’ brother Hesychius?) or a more conventional rebellion.

If Messaros never joined, died or followed the PCs on their journeys Elaphos could be another eromenes of their brother, someone he became a father figure for after the loss of Ptoliporthes.



CAMPAIGN NOTES

In my game, the player who played Priamos had the druid stay behind when the brothers sailed on their journey. That meant that I had to check with the player what Priamos did in their absence.

In our case Priamos moved into the northern forests with his dryad wife Lametisa, forming a family (daughter: Triadaphyli). He tended nature, solved local crime (a running joke was episodes of “The Solstice Murders”), and summoned monsters. His interpretation of the judgement in the underground of “bringing the crown of Mesia here” was that he should destroy the kingdom!

To achieve this, he tried to bring in more wilderness, monsters and let the wars take their toll. He found a kind of ally in Myrsinos (who did not care in the least about Mesia) and a misunderstanding made him think Messaros shared his view (being a worshipper of Mainalios, after all).

THE TWINS: KALLISTRATOS AND NIKANOR



Lifetime is a child at play, moving pieces in a game.

Kingship belongs to the child.

Heracleitos

Kallistratos is actually a bastard, the result of a liaison between Elpinice the Beautiful with a handsome barbarian guard... and is the latest incarnation of Eurypulos. To hide his blond hair his mother carefully dyed his hair dark to deceive everyone.

Kallistratos grows up to be a strong, intrepid kid. He is secretly near-immortal and overpowered, but has not revealed his powers fully yet. Kallistratos is ambitious: he plans to become the new king of Mesia, unseating Demetrios. His big flaw is that he is a bit too wild, a bit too eager. Nikanor is often his voice of reason.

Nikanor is mortal, but trying to keep up with his brother. So far this has been possible, although he gets into far more scrapes and trouble than his twin. Nikanor and Kallistratos are inseparable: they are truly blood brothers. If Kallistratos has a fundamental weakness in this incarnation it is that he truly cares for Nikanor.

Demetrios Monophthalmos does not like his kid brothers: there is something creepy about them. Messaros is warmer, but a bit wary. When Demetrios tries to ascend to the throne, he may also try to get rid of the brothers by sending some Cythosian killers. That is going to end badly. (Why not Messaros? Because Messaros would actually tell him, to his face, that it is not proper and that he refuses – he is the one person who can say that to Demetrios).

Kallistratos fights like a human until mortally wounded; that is when he fully reveals his heritage, casts off his limitations and starts to truly mess with everybody.

The twins have trained with polearms; they love to use a xyston double-spear or a more standard hoplite dory spear that they whirl around in crazy and deadly ways that exasperates their teachers. While Kallistratos totally lacks discipline needed for being a good hoplite, his brother Nikanor is adapting to his style. They fight fiercely together in an odd way.

In a fight they giving each other advantage a la Pack Tactics to hit, with Nikanor giving people disadvantage on hitting Kallistratos.⁵

EURYPOLOS

As god of badassery he thrives on taking absurd risks and somehow succeeding. His incarnations tend to be somewhat short-lived despite his divine power: he makes loads of enemies, takes too many risks, and often ends up poisoned or betrayed by someone.

He has powers like a rune knight, but only when activating his divine heritage. He has “10 points of awesome” per day: he can ignore a D&D rule per point. For example, he can choose to succeed at something utterly impossible like running through 10 warriors with his xystos, pole-vault onto a building and then use the horrific corpse kebab as a bludgeoning weapon for one point. Or bless his brother with divine energy, making him very briefly a demigod.

⁵ Yes, basically I had them both use variants of the classic Polearm Master and Sentinel feat combo. Play them as power-

gamer but somewhat inexperienced PCs – lots of flashy moves, some cool combos but a lack of overall tactics.

ELAPHOS: DARK MESSAROS



"There is no difference between life and death."

"Why, then," said someone to him, "do not you die?"

"Because," said he, "it does make no difference."

Augustinos Chrysodactylos, The Mesian Civil War

Monoptalmos took Messaros as his eromenes, training him as a warrior. At first he saw it as a suitable revenge against his kid brother, but he came to like the young man. He bought Messaros' sister Epiphron, making her his slave mistress and having her bearing his kid Phobeus.

Messaros was at first confused and horrified, feeling abandoned by his teachers. But he was no coward, and he did bear what his erastes threw at him. He accepted the treatment of his sister: after all, this was a far better life than what she would have had. In fact, Monoptalmos was in many ways his new family. He learned to be a great warrior and how to handle the city.

As Messaros matured the relationship with Monoptalmos deepened. While no longer eromenes and erastes, they had deep link. Maybe it was as if Messaros was a trusted younger brother. The only one Monoptalmos could trust completely. What they explored together was private, beyond the strictures of society.

Meanwhile Messaros worked hard to reach his potential, becoming the terrifying Messaros Elaphos, the Stag Warrior – swift, merciless and deadly. He is feared for his savage treatment of Tremia.. Stories about him hint that there is something inhuman in his abilities... but do not let him hear that, or he will mess you up. He does not put up with back talk anymore. He has seen and done things outside of normal human experience.

As a person he is quiet and perceptive. He lets others do the talking and then acts with no hesitation. He is no philosopher, just a warrior – and content with it.

He is a secret worshipper of Manalios, with links to the satyr rebellion. During his campaigns he has several times met with Myrsinos, and now has blessings from Manalios.

He has his own group of elite warriors, sworn to him and secretly worshiping Manalios and Laossoos as a mystery cult. They are called Chilioktónos for their

infamous execution of 1,000 captured citizen-soldiers in Tremia – a name they bear with dark pride.

While he is recognized by his dread helm with antlers and old lion pelt, his most treasured possession is a cursed magical sword he gained in Valley of the Birds. The sword curses one to become a berserker, but after undergoing a horrifying initiation with Myrsinos it is under his control: it made the rage a part of him, allowing him to use the cursed sword freely while he is now able to rage like a barbarian. It connects him to Mainalios and Laossoos in a somewhat unhealthy way.

Messaros also possesses several gems of elemental summoning. These were gathered from the Valley of the Birds, and is how he destroyed Tremia.

Catchphrase: ominous quietness.

Stats: Level 10 champion Fighter, 1 level in Barbarian.

PHOEBUS

Phoebeus is a young kid, not aware of being anybody but one of the palace servants' kids. Messaros loves his nephew. That the little kid is not a citizen and will never inherit does not faze him: in a twisted way he is his and Monoptalmos' son.

Messaros may be a hard man now, but he doesn't want children hurt and quietly protects all of them... after what he did in Tremia.

EPHIPHRON

Ephiphron is a quiet, nervous woman. She was plucked out of rural poverty for reasons she does not understand, and generally find the palace and the "high people" too much. Even her own brother scares her sometimes. She prefers to keep her head down with domestic chores.

Catchphrase: "Yes, noble master."

AGESISTRATA OF ACAMANTIS



Demetrios Monoptalmos' wife, and a good reason for Ephiphron to worry. She is a proper noble-woman, and does not care one iota about her husband having sex or a bastard with a slave woman. She would not mind her

husband's dalliance with a man either, but Messaros is such a *commoner*. Worse, it stings that she has only had daughters after Ptoliporthes – she can see the gleam in her husband's eye when he sees Phoebus. He wants heirs.

Agesistrata may well betray Messaros at some key point, reasoning that her husband is better off without him (or Phoebus). If her husband finds out, it will be the end of her.

TROGON THE MYSTIKOS

Trogon hides in the shadows, eagerly watching the drama unfold. He is very keen on seeing it to the end, making him possibly helpful.

- Monophtalmos: "The student is the teacher now. And you love it."
- Messaros: "It is hard to pretend to fight against your lord, isn't it?"
- Samarion: "Mother's milk is addictive."
- Eutara: "You gained so much by losing your husbands."
- Mother: "Dyeing hair every week to hide that week of passion, hehehe."
- Kallistratos: "I cannot read you. Which makes your heritage entirely obvious, O lord of the hordes."
- Nikanor: "You know your brother will kill you eventually."
- Myrsinos: "You stole a cup, and won a kingdom. You enslave people by freedom, and fear anybody freer than you."
- Timon: "You pretended to swear an oath of loyalty. But the feeling isn't pretence anymore, is it?"
- Cimion: "You were a helper who became a slave who became a leader... but you aim to be king."
- Zamolxis: "You collect masters like others collect coins. Why do you think you were collected?"
- Suidas: "... (Trogon fears Suidas, since Suidas will kill him if he ever notices the creature. The Traitor has deadly secrets.)"



PERSONAE DRAMATIS



In the final act, things become personal. Here is a sketch of the plots based on [DracoNox's fractal actor system](#).

Demetrios Monophtalmos, the Bloody Brother: his goal is to become king, and fails if anybody else does. Actions: hold funeral, lean on council, recruit Cythosians, take key places, battle, defeat pretender, force everybody to acknowledge him.

Messaros Elaphos, the Dark Warrior: his goal is to protect Monophtalmos and the satyrs, fail if both gone. Help Montophtalmos actions. His moral code is to the wild *and* his leader, but also deep acknowledgment of honour debt to the brothers: if forced to choose he will be paralysed.

Samarion of Vindiga, the Pretender: goal to become king, make mother happy. Fail if not becoming king, or if mother is endangered. Actions: give speeches, lean on council, recruit Cythosians, get blessing from Avon, take key places to defeat Monophtalmos.

Kallistratos: his goal become king (or rather Khan) through force, but he does not know it yet. Fail if killed. Actions: be an insufferable kid, show off to cythosians, make proclamation in front of horde, defeat their leader. Start his own fraction. Fight against Monophtalmos. Become great Khan.

Nikanor: his goal is to be awesome like his brother. Fail if brother killed. Actions: follow brother along, protect him.

The Council: goal is to survive and prosper, fail if killed by Monophtalmos or pretender

The Cythosians are split, and there is a nasty competition between the two hordes. Mesia is playing them against each other, and uses them as mercenaries. Goal: to prove themselves brave warriors, bring home loot, unite.

Mysinios the Satyr is happy to spread his kingdom of wine, song and sex... although over the years it has become trickier to get good wine and fresh partners, so raiding has become necessary. Goals: to keep

dominating his corner. Fail: letting Avon wipe him out. Plans: if needed, send raiding parties against pretender, forcing them to spread their forces and hence help other groups win.

Avon: goal is to regain influence over kingdom, fail: have Monophthalmos and Mysinos continue to erode power. Actions: support pretender and ensure he wins, if desperate try to curse the enemies. Secretly supported by Suidas, who want Laossoos to lose. He might bring over the fateful Sacred Wine to trap Mysinos into addiction.

Suidas the Traitor: his goal is to embarrass or kill Laossoos. Fail if killed or Avon disgraced. He is advising the Avon leadership from behind the scenes, helping the pretender get the necessary support, as war breaks out he waits until the main armies are busy elsewhere to do a surgical strike against Cannoria in order to capture Pitanasias' arrow – a weapon that could kill a god if fired from a divine bow... which he happens to have hidden away in Noria. Burning down the Laossoos temple is nice too. He will improvise and use underhanded means to ensure there is a big showdown where Laossoos himself will be present and he can try to kill him.

Slaves: when the conflict truly breaks out, the slaves rebel. They do not want part here, but return to home or seize power. Once start, must escape or win. Their leader Cinadon was trained at temple in Viviumia, now leader of group soldiers. Good at psychology and psyops.



BACK FROM THE DEAD

*As a father, brimming with love, welcomes home
his darling only son in a warm embrace —
what pain he's borne for him and him alone! —
home now, in the tenth year from far abroad,
so the loyal swineherd hugged the beaming prince,
he clung for dear life, covering him with kisses, yes,
like one escaped from death.*

Homer, The Odyssey, Book XVI

This is the start of the final act. The princes return home, they meet their siblings and dying father, they participate in the funeral... and then the war of succession breaks out. What side(s) do they take? How do they handle the growing tragedy? And will they be manipulated by the discreet Suidas the Traitor into helping him commit deicide?

Themes: family bonds, war, fratricide, tragedy.

This part of the campaign has potential for railroading since there are some biggish set-piece events. However, the PCs have agency: they might not be the main players from the start, but they can affect outcomes. It is just a matter of deciding what they truly want, and if they want to be involved in the tragedy.

HOMECOMING

Tragedy is irresolvable conflict.

– Rita Mae Brown

LANDING

The divine chariot flies above Cannoria. You recognize your old home, and yet not. The city has a massive new defensive wall. There are numerous buildings in the fields outside. There is a large new temple next to the temple of Agêtôr with bronze shields gleaming in the sunlight along the entablature. The city seems larger than ever. But there is also an encampment outside where you once held your games, a cluster of yurts and barbarian flags.

As the chariot sets down Ossa embraces each of you while Anaireus looks on coldly. People walk past without noticing anything amiss, even as the snakes hiss at them.

When the princes return everybody thinks they are dead or ascended. There may be a tricky conversation at the city gates where the guards think the PCs are way too young to possibly be the famed princes.

CAMPAIGN NOTES

In my game, an old and limping dog recognized them – it was Eudontos, the dog they had bought Messaros when he was a boy! (Yes, totally an Odyssey reference) The guards let them pass: they did not want to mess with somebody on friendly terms with The Elaphos. A first hint that little Messaros is not all right...

Inside the city walls they see that the city is bustling but also changed. There are many, many slaves labouring in building construction. There are weapons everywhere.

ARRIVAL AT THE PALACE

You arrive at the palace. At the entrance stands the chief of the house-slaves keeping track of comings and goings. He interrogates you about who you are with growing confusion. He orders some slaves to bring you straight to the king. As you leave you hear him mutter: “The young lords are back! What does this mean?!”

Inside the palace things are bustling as always. But there is something in the air – a quiet apprehension – that you don’t recognize.

As you pass one new extension you see two twin boys fight with lances in a courtyard. They jump and make wild moves while their tutor shouts at them that they are doing everything wrong. As you pass they both stop and look at you with curiosity. The tutor tries to get them to concentrate.

As you pass the feast hall you see that it is decorated with shields belonging to Celreia, Viviumia, Bylisi, Tremia, and other places. The golden arrow hangs on a plaque near the ceiling, glittering in the darkness.

Inside the royal chamber your father sits in a chair covered with thick furs. He looks old and tired. At his side stands Elpinice: still radiantly beautiful, but no longer young.

“So, you show up after all?”

The new temple to Laossoos extends the old one to be as big as the temple to Agêtôr. But many people look poor, and they don’t see as many merchants as it used to be along the main throughfare. Somebody is telling a story about pirates up the coast. There are a group of Cythosians loudly trying to buy wine in broken Koine.

ARRIVING AT THE COURT

This is in many ways a bookend to the first adventure arrival. It is the same place, but most people have changed.

FAMILY REUNION

My brother invited me to a game of petteia. He moved the pebbles across the board with force rather than grace. But I soon understood that the game was not much about winning. While he thoughtlessly lost his pebbles he frankly inquired if I supported him as the new king, as father and Agêtôr intended. My game was more about avoiding saying anything while giving him a feeling he got what he wanted: far harder than capturing pebbles.

Augustinos Chrysodactylus, History of Mesia

King Churii Agelastos may be old and tired, but the surprise appearance of his sons is worth attending to. He listen to their stories with a sceptical expression. Once he might have told them to stop the nonsense, but now he listens. Elpinice, who now looks the same age as her mother Eutara, serves kykeon while the palace servants are trying to get a glimpse of the party from the doorway.

Noisily the twins barge in, excitedly demanding to know what is going on. Churii almost smiles and presents the younger brothers to the elder brothers.

After a while there is another visitor: big brother Demetrios Monophthalmos. He seems taller and bigger than ever, with frightful scars and a permanent scowl.

Behind him pads a lithe warrior, equally scarred and wearing a lion pelt over his shoulders: Messaros Elaphos, his right hand man. Monophthalmos is as surprised as everybody else but doesn't let it show. He treats the PCs as kids: he has a hard time taking them seriously. Messaros is quiet and observes their every move.

After a short while the king gets tired and Monophthalmos takes charge. He is clearly running the court. He yells at the slaves to set up a feast in honour of his returned brothers.



OLD FRIENDS

During the dinner he also inquiries into their adventures. He is mostly interested in finding out (1) are they a threat to his plans? (2) do they bring anything useful with them? Other people, like the priests Phoebidias and Cleombrotus and Nikos Cleisthenes (the son of the merchant, spending his inheritance) are more interested in the supernatural aspects. They may also, especially after drinking too much, reveal a bit about the goings-on. It is pretty clear that the king is not well, that Monophthalmos is largely in charge, Messaros is deeply scary, and that Mesia is having a tough time.

Over the next few days the PCs are guests at the palace. Phoebidias suggests that they perform sacrifices and a ritual homecoming ceremony at the temple. After all, they should show the thankfulness to the gods that they returned safe and sound, and the city will doubtless want to welcome them back as citizens.

This is also a chance to meet up with old friends, listen to rumours, and discover more about the recent past.

CAMPAIGN NOTES

It was at this point when the PCs accidentally discovered the divine heritage of Kallistratos. Paranoid after mimics, doppelgangers and other shapeshifting Hippias used his Ranger powers to check if everybody were human. And realized his stepson/brother was a god. It led to a very awkward family conversation where Elpinice was forced by her mother to reveal what had actually happened. It also made the fact that the Eurypylos-worshipping Cythosian bodyguard PC had beaten up Kallistratos a bit earlier in the day really funny.

Generally, when Kallistratos nature is revealed depends on when it is dramatically appropriate or if the PCs are suspicious investigators.

LOOK WHO'S COMING FOR DINNER

Soon a delegation arrives on a fancy ship in the harbour: it is their dear sister Philomena! With her son Samarion of Vindiga in tow. They make a grand entrance with sharing food gifts with people in the street as they ascend to the palace. In a few places there are shouts of celebration when people see Samarion (maybe spontaneous, maybe hired help). The group also has some skilled body guards, and the sailors are all military.

In the palace there is a chilly meeting between Monophthalmos and his sister. She explains that she is visiting because she heard that their dear brothers have reappeared, and of course to pay respect to their beloved father. Samarion is doing his best to look like the man of the family, but among the siblings it is clear who is pulling his strings.

Philomena views the PCs as a cute novelty. She doesn't take them very seriously either, but she is quick to find good put-downs about them and figure out how to use them in her schemes. Samarion is actually friendly: he is amused by seeing the princes almost unchanged from when they arranged the games he participated in as a kid.

At some points Monophthalmos and Samarion will try to have a one-to-one chat with each of the PCs, checking where their true loyalties lie. Both want to ensure that these wildcard brothers is not a threat to their ambitions.

Monophthalmos goes up to the temple of Laossoos and performs a major sacrifice in private with the priesthood. What the sacrifice is for and what oracles are found he tells nobody, but he can be overheard muttering something about a bird. He also declares Messaros polemarch of northern Mesia, responsible for its defence.

THE FUNERAL

THE KING IS DEAD

There is a cry somewhere in the palace. Then another one. You know what it means before the voices resolve into anything understandable. Your father is dead. The reign of King Churii Agelastos is over.

The death of the king triggers many things. As sons of the family the PCs need to play their role in the rituals. But simultaneously forces begin to move.

THE FIRST DAY



When the king dies, the funeral traditions come into play. The priests of the civic gods leave the palace (since the abode has temporarily become contaminated), and

the priest of Aidoneus shows up in dark robes to oversee the transition.

The women of the household led by the king's widow Elpinice prepare the body, washing it, anointing it and placing a wreath on the king's head. They add the coin for the payment/tip to the doorman of the court of the underworld.

There are reports of omens: people have seen something on fire moving across the sky in the north, and several witnesses saw a great eagle take off from the top of the palace in the early dawn.

FOUL PLAY?

Some may wonder, was the death natural? After all, it happened relatively suddenly. Unfortunately Mesian forensic arts are not particularly sophisticated, and investigating a royal corpse can be tricky. Medicine checks are necessary, but hard to do unless one is one of the women treating the body (Eutara may be very well placed here).

Is it foul play? Not much hinges on whether this was a natural death or a secret poisoning. However, if accusations are whispered things can turn nasty fast. Monoptalmos of course suspects Philomena – why did she arrive so conveniently close to the death? Philomena may suspect the opposite (although she does have a hard time imaging her brick head brother doing something clever: but maybe his boy-toy did?) Others may note that the PC group is full of strange people who have been in strange countries: maybe they did bring something dangerous with them?

Nobody suspects the god Anaireus.

THE SECOND DAY

On the second day the prothesis part of the rites takes place: the body is laid out for viewing, surrounded by dark robed women chanting dirges, crying, tearing their hair and striking at their torso. Representatives of the demes and phyles of Mesia show up, paying their respects.

Messaros talks to his sister Ephiphron, trying to place her out of harm's way: he is aware that war is coming and it will be dark. Hence, he gives her his savings so she can take Phoebus and hide outside the palace – ideally somewhere in the countryside, but he honestly do not know where would be safe.

The PCs may see some of this, helping them to piece together some of the complicated relationship between these people. Phoebus does look familiar – he has some of the appearance of a young Monoptalmos.

THE THIRD DAY

Before dawn on the third day the makhorka, the funeral procession, takes place. In the case of King Churii this is a grand occasion, leading out to a funeral pyre outside the city. There graveside libations of fine wine, sacrifices of sheep and bulls, personal sacrifices of locks of hair, and a final meal takes place. **Funeral orations** are held by poets and orators, who get handsomely rewarded for their work.

There is a discussion about the auguries from the sacrifices. None of the priests are present, so they hold no particular official meaning... but did not that liver lack a lobe? Wasn't the blood splatter very unusual? There are hushed conversations that quickly end in trailing silences.

A DINNER TO REMEMBER

*Son of Atreus, for it is to you that the people will give ear,
there is a time to mourn and a time to cease from mourning;
bid the people now leave the pyre and set about getting their
dinners: we, to whom the dead is dearest, will see to what is
wanted here, and let the other princes also stay by me.*

Homer, The Iliad, Book XXIII (tr. Samuel Butler)

Finally, the palace is thoroughly cleaned with seawater and hyssop, with special purification rituals for the women taking part. The priest of Aidoneus formally leaves, letting in the priests and acolytes of the civic gods. His caretakers take the ash from the pyre and place it in a funerary urn beneath an ornate tombstone depicting King Churii surrounded by eagles on a hill in the cemetery.

FIRST COURSE: POLITENESS

Afterwards there is a *peridin*, another funeral feast with the dead man as a host, honouring those who took part in burying him. This is where the politicking begins in earnest – neither Monoptalmos nor Samarion were crass enough to make their move during the three days, but now *it is on*.

SECOND COURSE: POLITICS

Monoptalmos and Samarion begins leaning on council members. Monoptalmos thought he had them through the influence of his father, but now many make vague noises about the will of Agêtôr, the good of the state, and even have the temerity to point out that kingship is not historically inherited as a primogeniture in Mesia.

On the other hand, Samarion finds that some of the council members have pretty bad views of his mother. And several are objecting to both their alliances with the Aphians and Cythosians!

DESSERT: DISASTER

As the discussion heats up there is a breakdown. Maybe Monoptalmos gets enraged and draws his sword, maybe Samarion takes exception to a comment about his mother, maybe somebody just drops a plate and everybody reaches for their weapons.

Chaos ensues: servants and council members flee for their lives, warriors pour in, priests make use of their clerical magic. Samarion makes his escape to his army with help from the high priest and the emissary from Avon, Monoptalmos rallies his troops: war ensues.

In the background, Aphians are sent to kill the twins, and maybe assassins show up for all the young princes.

CAMPAIGN NOTES

What about Elpinice the Beautiful, the widow? Had she been a heiress she would have had to marry the next male relative – prince Augustinos in this case. But she has little on her own, making it a matter for her kyrios: her step-father Hippias. Yes, until she marries the twins are treated as the grandchildren of their brother. Her beauty has snarled up the family tree.

In my game, Anaxos the Halkyone had followed the heroes, and now became smitten by Elpinice. Hippias was not too averse to the idea of the former sailor as a step-son. Whether Anaxos eventually successfully wooed Elpinice and they were married was never resolved in-game. What Elpinice felt was also never revealed.

THE MESIAN CIVIL WAR

As we fled the palace, I saw the table with the petteia board overturned, the pebbles scattered. I knew that soon human lives would be scattered like worthless pebbles by the forces of war.

Augustinos Chrysodactylus, History of Mesia

THE EVE OF THE WAR

In the struggle between those seeking power there is no middle course.

Tacitus, Annales (AD 117), II. 74

At this point the situation becomes very complicated. Monopthalmos rallies his troops inside Cannoria and his Aphians outside, and sets off to kill Samarion. Samarion and his mother are fleeing swiftly to their main troops south of Cannoria.

In the north a large Cythosian horde is approaching: Samarion sent a message as soon as the king died, and they will come south over a span of a week or two.

When Monopthalmos finds out about them he doesn't want to send his Aphians north (despite their eagerness) but rather sends Messaros and his light troops to prevent the barbarian invasion. He wants to crush his sister quickly.

What the PCs do depend entirely on their allegiances and goals: they have plenty of freedom to take sides, flee for their lives, or try to set things right.

CAMPAIGN NOTES

In my game, the PCs quickly retreated north to Calbium which Hippas claimed as his domain. This was simplified by them having access to griffins reared by Priamos. However, as the party arrived in the north, he realized he had forgotten his (very forgettable) son Polysthenes, and he had to return south.

Keeping a son hidden from a high-level Ranger is not easy, and Hippas soon found Polysthenes together with Phoebus in the care of Ephiphron in a safehouse in Cannoria, all arranged by Messaros. He helped them escape to Bracium, a seaside town out of the way, where they remained for the rest of the war.

He also led a fraction of the slaves to relative safety in Calbium, where they caused significant political upheaval.

Returning north he found himself embroiled in a lawsuit from his twin nephews. Just because there is a war on doesn't mean inheritance law stops.



SLAVE REBELLION



*Smooth are his words, his voice as honey sweet,
Yet war is in his heart, and dark deceit!*

–Moschus, Idyllium I, tr. R. Polwhele, lines 14–15

As Monopthalmos troops empty out from Cannoria the slaves rebel: they do not want to fight in this war. The result is civil war in the capital. The slaves and their allies are successful in taking much of the city, leaving the defensive city walls, palace and acropolis with the temples under Monopthalmos nominal control thanks to remaining troops.

Cinadon, their leader, is well aware that the situation is precarious. They cannot win against a full army, yet taking the city would be tricky – especially if the remaining troops could be brought over to their side. Negotiations via the priests ensue. The news of the approaching barbarians makes everything urgent.

This is where Suidas the Traitor makes his move: Avon throws its weight behind Samarion and sends out its troops straight to Cannoria. Monopthalmos is too busy pursuing his sister and rival in the south to intervene, Messaros is going north. After a brief siege the loyalists on the walls are defeated and the city nominally joins the Samarion side – with Suidas setting fire to the Laossoos temple with a fair bit of public support.

Yet this situation is unstable: sooner or later a wrathful Monopthalmos will return unless he is defeated, barbarians hope to loot the city, the citizens and slaves are not exactly allied, and Suidas coldly regards the whole situation as expendable. He just wanted to get the divine arrow.

CAMPAIGN NOTES

In my game, the arrow was quietly stolen by Zamolxis on behalf of Augustinos. When Suidas arrived at the palace he was briefly enraged, then quickly figured out who had it and began to adapt his plans to it.

If the PCs do not pick up the arrow themselves in the chaos, have a suitable NPC do it and bring it to them at the right moment. It might also turn into a sideplot if the PCs are trying to get it: who is the thief?

UNEXPECTED ALLIES



Messaros has contact with Myrsinos the Satyr. When Avon makes its move he sends a message about it. While Myrsinos lacks any real army he has enough followers to cause trouble – centaur archers, mischievous satyrs, a few ecstatically insane humans: if you want to cause trouble they are ideal. He sends them to the now relatively undefended Avon to cause maximal trouble. Suidas soon realizes that he needs to send troops back to chase off these interlopers, undermining his main force.

This is the point where other allies from earlier in the campaign also show up. The High Stymphaloi might be recruitable and could be truly troublesome. For a really dramatic situation the phoenix may show up, causing general devastation.

Samarion on the other hand may have cultured deals with Chiosian pirates, getting naval superiority.

The Cult of Meter may also send their finest warriors, driven by prophetic visions that the war will help bring Pitanasia closer to the heavenly throne. By default they may help Samarion, but are secretly more on the side of the PCs, whatever side that is.

DEFENDING THE NORTH WITH FIRE



Fate is a raging storm blowing over the Land.

Ancient proverb

Polemarch Messaros Elaphos is not the wisest or smartest person. However, over a life of battle he has learned many ruthless and effective tricks: he is a survivor and he will do what needs to be done. His light troops are not a match for the barbarians in a fair fight, so he will not give them any fair fight. Instead, he spreads out his troops in the forests north of Lincum – and as the horde moves south sets fire to the entire countryside with the enemy between two fire fronts.

This strategy buys time, stops the progress of the Cythosians, allows his guerrilla-like tactics to take out

many confused invaders... and makes all the forces of nature enraged. In particular, all dryads on the continent feels the genocide against their tree relatives. They are praying for vengeance.

CAMPAIGN NOTES

This leads to a crucial moment in my campaign: the dryad wife of Priamos urges him to avenge nature. He sets out to do so, flying in his wildshape over the burning forest, finding Messaros.

I had considered a Druid-Fighter battle (and was not looking forward to it), but Priamos instead sneakily wrote down where Messaros was and his defenses, turned into a carrier pigeon and delivered the tip straight to the leadership of the Avon troops – literally into the hands of Suidas the Traitor. Who did not waste a second in going with a very skilled death squad and assassinating Messaros in a hail of blessed arrows.

THE DEATH OF MESSAROS AND BIRTH OF TRAGEDY

*Just as an ash tree growing on a mountain top,
visible from every side, is chopped down by bronze,
its foliage crashing to the ground—that's how he fell.*

Homer, The Iliad, 13.209–213 (tr. Ian Johnston)

The key role of this event is that it pushes Monophthalmos over the edge: this is no longer about royal succession, but personal vendetta. Like in any proper tragedy people will now be motivated to lay down their lives for their dignity.

This situation can be resolved in other ways (especially if Priamos in your campaign has gone a different path):

Messaros kills Priamos – maybe not even deliberately, but accidentally by unleashing a firestorm across the druid's forest (or in a direct fight, if Priamos challenges him). Monophthalmos hears about it, and becomes filled concern. He must avenge his brother, but cannot – and the army is watching.

Messaros has betrayed the interests of Mainalios. The god punishes him by returning the rage he blocked, turning him into a deadly insane killer. He needs to be put down or he will kill everybody around him, including his loved ones. This might mean Monophthalmos has to kill his lover, or that the PCs need to face Messaros – and hence Monophthalmos wrath.

Suidas kills Messaros on his own: he is a skilled strategist and knows the value of taking out the enemy leadership. Especially if it means that the Laossoos-loved Monophthalmos will fly into an insane rage that will allow him to be led to a place where the gods will look on for the resolution and Suidas can have his shot at killing his divine father.

Note that Agesistrata may also be interested in betraying Messaros if Priamos is not available. That may make Monophthalmos kill his own wife.

It is possible to turn the roles around: maybe it is *Monophthalmos* that is killed. This morally forces the PCs

to avenge him: to not do it is to be a traitor to one's own family. Different killers produce different dynamics:

If Samarion kills him it might resolve the succession, but it also means the furies will be gathering. Becoming king by killing your uncle is simply not done.

If Suidas kills him it is part of a plan. Sure, it helps Samarion and Philomena grab the crown. But he wants to ensure that the PCs swear to avenge their brother, so that he can make them threaten him with the arrow (and bow) so he can implement his own patricide.

Messaros may be the strangest killer. The reason may simply be that Monophthalmos is going mad with bloodlust and Messaros realizes that to prevent him from razing *everything* he needs to be stopped. Yes, Messaros has some scruples. Or it could be Mainalios himself who orders it – or is it Suidas? As the Lamia Queen showed, it is entirely possible to falsify prophetic dreams. This would send none-too-bright Messaros over the edge, turning him into a suicidally deadly force bent on winning against Samarion so he can place the crown on the head of one of the PCs... and then hopefully be executed to atone for his crime.

In the following I will use the “canon” version where Priamos betrays Messaros to Suidas, but other pathways are clearly possible and can be inspired by it.



MONOPHTHALMOS' REACTION

The grief-stricken Monophthalmos swears an oath to find those responsible for Messaros' death and kill them and their families. This would be a bad idea even for a normal case, but this is over the top. Essentially a guarantee that he will drown in blood.

GRIEF

The bloody corpse of Messaros is silently carried into the tent of Demetrios Monophthalmos. The warrior's face turns the color of ash and stone. For an endless moment he just stares. Then he screams: “WHO DID THIS? WHO DID THIS? *I SWEAR BY ALL THE GODS THAT I WILL FIND THEM AND ALL THEIR FAMILY AND KILL THEM!!!*”

Sobbing he embraces the corpse, kissing the bloody lips and clumsily trying to arrange the brain-mixed hair better. When Cleombrotus the war-priest tries to approach he aims his sword at his heart without looking away from the face. “My lord. My lord. Please...”

Monophthalmos continues raging while the priest tries to calm him down. “The oracle was right – ‘The false bird will tell the Betrayer how to fell the flame’. I know why Suidas the Betrayer wants the city, and I will rather burn it to the ground than let him get control over it.”

Cleombrotus looks skeptical. “But who is the false bird?”

“I have a good idea who it is. *He will die too.* I will sacrifice him, and everybody close to him so dear Messaros will live again. *If I have to sacrifice a hecatomb of family to do it, I will!* Tell the death priests that I will not hold a funeral but a resurrection.”

“Is it wise? He is surely headed for the Island of the Warriors.”

“I WANT HIM BY MY SIDE. He would want that too. Now leave me, I have to win this. Send for the Boar. No more restraint.”

He also decides that he will bring Messaros back. Resurrections require a commensurate sacrifice, but Monophthalmos is not squeamish about paying the price. *Even if that is his entire family.*

The priests are not happy about it, but they do not want to confront him. So they preserve the corpse as well as they can and bring it with the army.

Ossa contacts Augustinos or other PCs in a dream, showing Monophthalmos swearing the oath. “This is bad news. Very bad news...”



PLANS ALWAYS FAIL, PLANNING IS ESSENTIAL

Meanwhile Suidas is expecting Monophthalmos to come for him. He looks forward to killing a champion of Laossoos. He plans to get the arrow, and then use the bow and arrow to kill Laossoos.

He will be annoyed by the lack of the arrow in Calbium (assuming the PCs or an NPC has stolen it), although he

quickly figures out where it was taken. The Satyr attacks also leads to a problem. Suidas prefers to have the arrow when Monoptalmos confronts him, so he becomes evasive.

The result is pursuit northward, towards the final confrontation with the PCs likely near Calbium.

CALBIUM



Calbium is a natural redoubt for the party: Hippias has a claim to the title to it thanks to his marriage with Eutara, she knows her way around there perfectly, the twins largely grew up there, it is far away from the main part of the civil war.

DESCRIPTION

It is a peaceful and pleasant place. Most of the time. I remember when Zenophilos was found dead in my forest – somebody had tied him to a tree and poured honey over him to attract the wild boars. That was a fun case.

Priamos

Calbium lies under the great mountain of the same name, overlooking the plains. It has a great defensive location with local water sources. The city wall is strong, 30 feet high and 10 feet wide, with several guard towers. In principle it can withstand a long siege if it has enough defenders (and there are no demigods among the attackers).

Surrounding it to the south are fertile plains inhabited by everyday farmers and shepherds. South of that, on the slopes on the other side of the wide valley, are deep forests.

East of the city is the Kleisoura, the pass over to Cythosia. It used to be well fortified, but not any more after the destruction wrought by the fall of Uncle Cyril and cousin Ajax. The Mesian kingdom has faintly tried to replace the guard towers and walls to keep the barbarians from coming and going, but due to the lack of funding due to the wars this has not happened. The Cythosian horde joining Samarion could easily walk in and then sensibly avoided the city on their way south.

The closest coastal city is Paleli, about two days west, run by Danaus Nauplius.

PEOPLE AND POLITICS

Do not underestimate the priestesses. They quietly glide around, looking meek and blessing people and animals. Studiously otherworldly. They also control the water and hence the life of everybody in the city.

Priamos

The local polis is fairly independent of the capital, although it regards itself as Mesian. The farmers outside are far more clannish, with their own strange local customs and vendettas.

Most of the polis people are on Samarion's side. They are tired of the war, the focus on a centralized military, and the barbarian incursions. They would like to have peace and trade.

Politarch Aegolius is a well-off farmer and merchant. Speaks for the polis, and both loves it, and has done nicely for himself under King Churii by supplying resources in exchange for favours. Will never sell out Calbium. (His name means screech owl: his parents were not too nice. He has taken to disprove his name by being very well reasoned and well liked.)

The local **strategos Callimachus hypókirrhos** (the orange haired: brave like a lion) is one of Monoptalmos men, organizing defenses competently. He is loyal to the crown and speaks of a united Mesia. He will judge princes by how well they measure up against their dead uncle Cyrus and cousin Ajax.

He is currently feeling profoundly ashamed of letting the Cythosians pass. Sure, he did not have the manpower to stop them, but he feels he has failed the crown. As compensation he is now strident about ensuring better defences no matter what.

Archon Basileus Athamas has been acting as chamberlain and implemented the will of king Churii in the local palace. A self-righteous man with a deep dedication to doing his job. Has long been the twins' caretaker and representative.



The local temple is dedicated to the daughters of Rharias: Aegaia the Victorious, Kaena the Lifegiver, and Moira the Green. The priesthood is naturally Rharias-aligned and want peace. **High priestess Amymone** is a righteous lady, Keeper of the Sacred Well (and responsible for water in the polis). Recently they have become concerned about something poisoning the local river, that upsets the local river deity.

Judge Oenopion: an old man, missing part of his left ear. Speaks in a solemn voice with thrilled rrrs. Used to be an administrator. Feels it is his main duty to keep civilians safe, keep the peace, and ensure proper justice is done. Likes Eutara, and wants to do what is good for her.

Iason Bdellos: a helpful scholar who might argue the case for a few coins. Thin, dark, hungry. Has a brother who often shows up as a suitable witness. Essentially an ambulance chaser smalltown lawyer.

THE COURT CASE



The forum is an established place for men to cheat one another, and behave covetously

Anacharsis

Who owns the land around Calbium? While this doesn't strictly speaking give kingship – that is determined by the local council of the strategos, politarch, the archon basileus and a few other citizens – it certainly has a large weight for the question. Since there is a dispute between Hippias and the twins, it has to be settled in a court case.

Judge Oenopion is a fair judge, but friendly to Eutara. That doesn't help as much as she might want: "What friend would I be if I did not try to give you, my dearest friend, the greatest gift of all: justice?"

Since the twins are minors, they are represented by Athamas. He is now mildly regretting his job since the twins are far too boisterous. (Kallistratos: "If Hippias dies, will I inherit?" Athamas: "only if you are not the killer... Nikanor, that goes for you too!")

The case is done in the agora, with most of the citizens watching with interest. There is a jury selected from them that have to be convinced.

The best lawyer on the PCs side is likely Eutara, but as a woman she is not allowed to be present ("I have met the Goddess of Law herself! Yet I must watch from afar.")

PRELIMINARY HEARING AND OPENING

The *anakrisis*: Oenopion clarifies what the dispute is about, checks that the involved are of age (or represented) and citizens. He also suggests arbitration, something likely to be rejected by the twins. Then the case moves to a formal lawsuit.

"As we heard during the *anakrisis*, there is a dispute between the Hippias of Cannoria and his brothers Nikanor and Kallistratos over the ownership of the lands around Calbium. Since arbitration was rejected, this is now a formal dike lawsuit."

Oenopion begins "Let us make an *ephegesis*: what does the law say?" This leads to a long and tiresome recitation of all relevant inheritance and gift law.

The legal battle consists of stating facts (evidence, laws, witnesses), and giving speeches on why these support the claimant that will convince the jury. Sometimes that leads to a deeper discussion.

ARGUMENTS

Who has the best claim? Hippias through marriage with Eutara, or twins by inheriting and gift from king Churii?

Eutara's marriage is irregular due to (1) Anchisteia, (2) the delay from *ekdosis* where her father Cimon of

Calbium gave her hand to Hippias, to the *gamos* religious rite.

- The judge finds both excusable: there are precedent – this is more Athamas feeling out the opposition than a serious argument.

A key issue is dowry: **was the dowry the land in question?** Cimon did hand over the deed to cattle, but did that mean the land only entered Hippias ownership at the full marriage? Shouldn't that have happened before a Calbian magistrate?

- Fact: Cimon actually agreed the land was the dowry, the cattle was just the gift-giving in the *ekdosis*. Argument: as soon as the full marriage occurred in Dymesos the dowry was unquestionably transferred. It might or might not have been transferred before, but that is irrelevant.
- Fact: The meeting happened in Cannoria, in the presence of witnesses and magistrates at the court. Argument: reasonably it must be possible to perform trade and marriage away from one's home polis.

Was the presumption of death erroneous, or correct?

Athamas argues it was a correct presumption, Hippias does not. If it was correct (even if factually wrong) then reasonably King Churii, as father of Hippias and married to the daughter of Eutara, could dispose of his inheritance as he wanted, and he gave it to the twins.

- Legal discussion: what does it mean to properly presume a man dead? If there is a corpse and burial this is simple, but people are declared dead even when they are not found.
 - Fact: Generally, it is agreed that long-term disappearance in a dangerous situation is good grounds for a declaration (the judge and others bring up various examples, ranging from war, disappearing in a monster-filled forest, not returning from a sea journey...)
- Fact discussion: Is ascending to the heavens dangerous? If it is, then it is reasonable to assume Hippias dead if he does not return.
 - Fact: numerous people have disappeared, been annihilated, or plain killed while trying to reach the Celestial City. Even normal flying using magic or flying creatures is known to be dangerous.
 - Fact: the gods can protect those they wish to help, and this protection is far superior to mortal protection.
 - Some may suggest to ask the priesthood for divine insight: do the gods acknowledge that Hippias and Eutara were in no danger during their absence? This ingenious approach will (1) delay the proceedings a bit, (2) produce answers very dependent on what is asked to which gods.

Was Hippias ever declared dead?

- Fact: The stories about his ascension to the heavens circulated, and Churii took it to mean he would not return and hence could dispose of the land as he wished. But there were never any legal procedure beyond the king declaring.

Did Churii formally declare the transfer of land?

- Fact: there are some witnesses who recall hearing him tell the twins “This land is yours” or “this land will be yours” at a few occasions.
- Fact: there is a scroll with the transfer described from a court speech. This leads to a big argument whether it is forged or not (it is, but who did it is unclear).
- Fact: the king did not leave any written will. Hence one ought to follow tradition.
- Discussion: how much legal force does informal decisions by kings have? If kings can just decide who owns what without asking courts, what remains of property? If kings are bound by formal laws, how can they be kings?
 - Was King Churii truly king of Calbium, or was that title either absent after the death of Cyrus, or belonged to Hippias? If Churii was not king of Calbium, does that not imply that his decisions about property there were not legally binding?
 - Discussion: this leads to a deep, and very political questions about the nature of Mesia as a league of allied kingdoms acknowledging the Cannorian crown as the central power. In the light of the current war, it is an explosive issue.
 - If Churii was king of Calbium by virtue of being king of Cannoria, then whoever is king of Cannoria will presumably have the same power, *unless* there is a new king of Calbium. If Churii was not king of Calbium, then either Calbium had de facto accepted annexation to Cannoria (most people in the agora loudly disagree!) or was held in an improper state.
 - This pits people who prefer a looser Mesian League against those who prefer a strong united kingdom.

CAMPAIGN NOTES

In my game, Hippias had brought a contingent of ex-slaves with their families from Cannoria to Calbium. While a good humanitarian gesture, he also promised them citizenship, something he strictly speaking couldn't do unless he was king. He arrived just in time for the court case. While things were going fairly well legally at first, when the rumor about the promised citizenships spread the citizens naturally turned against him – they did not want to dilute their citizenships with foreigners! And since the jury was 100% citizens, this meant that no matter how good his arguments would be he couldn't win the case.

The PCs solved it by annoying the twins enough that they declared they could defend the city better than their brothers and any number of ex-slaves, agreeing to arbitration by defeating the hydra. The judge quickly agreed, sidestepping the biased jury.

After winning (and accidentally befriendng the twins by saving Nikanor's life) they had to convince the strategos and politarch, while they got strong support from the priestesses. After some political intrigue courtesy of Eutrara the council did declare Hippias king: he became known as King Hippias the Hydra-Killer.

Monophthalmos represents the latter, while Samarion the former.

Should this be treated as a return of an exile?

- Legal precedent states that the form of exile determines the rights and property disposal. Full atimia removes all citizenship and ownership, but there are cases of partial atimia where property remains protected by the law. Argument: Clearly this is irrelevant since (1) Hippias was never formally exiled nor did he renounce his citizenship, (2) returning from erroneous declaration of being dead is legally very different from returning from exile.

Is any of the opponents an obviously bad man?

- Big debate where the twins may try to recast stories from Hippias' adventures in a bad light.

Is there any holy location in the lands?

- Fact: a sacred stream runs through the land, and there is a minor chapel devoted to Moira there. There is also an even tinier altar to the God of Every Humble Beauty, maintained by a sole farmer.
- Both sides may try to declare how they will be protected.

Will veneration of ancestors be done properly by this?

- Again, plenty of opportunity to declare a program of piety. Hippias and the twins need to show that they will venerate King Churii and uncle Cyrus properly.

How will this affect Eutara? As epikleros she has a role here, even though she cannot exploit the land herself.

- Fact: if Hippias gets the land as dowry, were she to divorce him she could in principle bring her possessions with her... except that her father Cimon has passed away. In theory politarch Aegolius as leader of her phratry in Calbium would act as her kyrios. If the twins get the land, then she would be landless, yet potentially provided by her grandchildren.

How will this affect the polis?

- Fact: kingship is conferred by the council of Calbium, not owning land or being of noble birth.
- Discussion about whether either side represents good potential rulers, or whether one might give rulership to one side and the land to the other.
- The debate about legal force of kings also resurfaces: if the polis determines who is the king, then the polis also has final say. While if kings have greater legal force, does that imply that Cannoria has a say over Calbium, or that Calbium is sovereign? At this point it might be relevant for Hippias and the twins to declare their political agendas and allegiances...

Land can only be passed to one male: how can the twins inherit it?

- Fact: there have been cases where it has been decided by casting lots.
- Fact: Splitting land has occurred in the past, but that was arbitration between family members where initial ownership was well understood. So maybe the twins could split the land between them were they to win, or even agree to share with Hippias, but this is outside the court case.
- If one of the twins were to go found a colony or voluntarily exile themselves it would solve things.

The proceedings may last days, depending on how good lawyering skills people have. The debate is also in danger to veer into issues of the role of kings and the self-

Kleiton Myrhos – a charming diplomat, with a secret agenda to rile up the twins against their elders.

LERNEAN HYDRA

Huge Monstrosity, Unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 172 (15d12+75)
Speed 30 ft., swim 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	2 (-4)	10 (+0)	7 (-2)

Skills Perception +6, Stealth +6
Damage Immunities Poison
Condition Immunities Poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages -
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Hold Breath. The hydra can hold its breath for 1 hour. It can also breathe through any head over water.

Multiple Heads. The hydra has five heads. While it has more than one head, the hydra has advantage on saving throws against being blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, stunned, and knocked unconscious.

Whenever the hydra takes 25 or more damage in a single turn, one of its heads dies. If all its heads die, the hydra dies. This damage can also be applied to the tail if the attack is from the rear.

At the end of its turn, it grows two heads or tails for each of its heads or tails that died since its last turn, unless it has taken fire damage since its last turn. The hydra regains 10 hit points for each part regrown in this way.

Reactive Heads. For each head the hydra has beyond one, it gets an extra reaction that can be used only for opportunity attacks.

Wakeful. While the hydra sleeps, at least one of its heads is awake.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The hydra makes as many bite attacks as it has heads (or tug of war attacks for pairs of heads). It also has a tail attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 10 (1d10 + 5) piercing damage. 2d10 poison damage, CON save DC15 or be poisoned

Poison Breath (Recharge 5-6): The hydra exhales poisonous gas in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Head Tug of War: Two heads make a grapple check vs the target, if they both grab hold, the target is Restrained and the ‘TUG OF WAR’ commences. Each head does automatic damage to the target each round. When the targets total HP drops to zero, they are torn apart and die instantly. The target is allowed Athletics and Dexterity checks at disadvantage to escape from one of its captor heads each round.

Tail attack: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. Hit: 15 (2d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage, and the target is Grappled (escape DC 18). Until this grapple ends, the creature is Restrained, and the hydra can't ensnare another target unless it has gained extra tails.

BONUS ACTIONS

Disengage the head attacks are so fast that they are impossible to make opportunity attacks against.

DESCRIPTION

The Lernean hydra is a worse kind of the ordinary hydra: a reptilian horror with a crocodilian body and multiple heads on long, serpentine necks. Although its heads can be severed, the hydra magically regrows them in short order. It also has a regenerating tail it can use to ensnare opponents. It is deeply poisonous and can breathe out a deadly miasma.

Normally it likes to lurk in the water, keeping a single head hidden in the reeds to watch for prey it ambushes with poison breath followed by a pounce. In an ongoing fight it likes to ensnare opponents with the tail and drag them underwater where some heads bite them while they drown, or torn apart in a tug-of-war.

Hydras are stupid, but not crazy. If they see someone with fire they avoid them, or if this cannot be avoided, attack them with all their might aiming at drenching them in water. They typically focus on killing one creature at a time, often going for more lightly armoured beings first.

(This is a beefed-up hydra as per [Alan McCoy's article at Angry Golem Games](#)

determination of the polis. Not to mention which side it should take.

AFTERMATH

If Hippias wins, he will now own much of the land around Calbium and have a good position for the Council to decide that he is indeed king. He may have to perform plenty of political intrigue (helped by Eutara) to get a good start.

If the twins win, they are still clearly too young to be kings. Athamos will step in as archon basileus in their stead until they come of age.

In either case Calbium needs to prepare for war: there are barbarian hordes around, and a very real risk that an army led by the raging Monophthalmos will come charging.

Messengers from the sides show up – what side are you on? Sister Philomena sends Theagenes the Phigalian, a skilled runner and messenger. Monophthalmos sends Kleituchos, the grandson of

THE HYDRA

He killed at the spring of Lerna the nine headed Lernaean Hydra, offspring of Typhon. This monster was so poisonous that she killed men with her breath, and if anyone passed by when she was sleeping, he breathed her tracks and died in greatest torment.

Pseudo-Hyginus, Fabulae 30

I might have summoned a few monsters. But it is all for a good cause: sowing chaos and destruction. Why are you looking at me like that?

Priamos

The Hydra has taken up residence downstream in the local river, about a day’s walk from Calbium. In many

ways it is not a major threat to the city, but it will prey on travellers and soldiers along the main road leading up to the city. The monster hides in a widening of the river into a reedy lake. It spews poison around it, killing cattle and people. It is messing up the life for the river god Achelous, the father of the local spring goddesses. The priesthood is very upset.

The hydra is only out for itself, but it is a pawn of various powers. In my campaign it had been summoned by Priamos to further destabilize the land. Suidas is aware of it and might lure enemies into trying to ambush him by going into the reeds. And behind everything, Echtria is hoping to cull the current crop of heroes a bit.

The hydra's blood is highly toxic, and can be used to poison arrows or weapons. Creatures hit by weapons (or wearing clothes) dipped in it have to make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 8d6 poison damage on a failed save and half as much on a successful one. However, the poison also slowly evaporates (Arcana or Nature DC 15 check to know this): sleeping or staying near such objects will, if a creature fails a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, make them poisoned for 1d4 hours.



FINAL SHOWDOWN



And it is the eternal rule that drops of blood spilled on the ground demand yet more blood.

Aeschylus, *Libation-Bearers* 399.

This is it. Everybody and everything is coming together, the prophecy may be fulfilled, the fate of the kingdom hangs in the balance – and it is the princes of Mesia who will determine it. The gods are paying attention.

The previous events may have produced wildly different outcomes. Rather than trying to cover all possibilities I will describe the situation as it happened in the campaign – Hippias trying to protect Calbium with his friends and family, Suidas and Monopthalmos drawing close, a final rushed quest to find the sacred bow of Pitanas, and a battle on top of the city walls that ended the war.

My original plan had been to make Kallistratos the main enemy, a barbarian demigod causing civil war and eventually leading to a battle in the burning palace of Cannoria where the story started. However, as the campaign developed Kallistratos did not have the chance to go fully divine and ended up somewhat on the PCs side. Instead, the tragedy of Monopthalmos and Messaros became a good driver of the plot.

DRIVE LIKE JEHU



Ossa shows up in dream, reading news from a scroll.

“Breaking: Pteia is defending against an invasion of mysterious female warriors seeking to reclaim an ancient sacred artifact. In local news, the Mesian capital has been partially looted by invading Cythosians. As you may remember, a few days ago the rebellious slaves under the leadership of Cimeon of Arvis joined forces with the Avonese, handily defeating the loyalists on the walls. Various scenes of chaos ensued, including the burning of the temple of Laossoos. When the Avonese had to return to deal with some trouble at home... this can’t be right... flying metal birds and centaurs?! They were replaced by Cythosians. Trouble ensued. The good news is that half of the capital is still left, defended by citizens and ex-slaves alike. Desperately.”

The situation is that several armies are rampaging across the land. Suidas leads the Avones and Cythosian horde (after reorganizing them) towards the place where the arrow (and bow) is – trying to time it so that Monopthalmos will catch up with him at the right moment.

Monopthalmos is trying to cut a straight path towards the people he needs to kill, and he doesn’t care much if they destroy his army. The Aphians are fine with charging at the Cythosians, while there is increasing dissension among the Mesians in the rank.

“I prayed to Laossoos for guidance, and he answered. Suidas is the god of stratagems, clever misdirection and betrayal. So I will ignore everything he does, all the reasonable things I ought to do. Instead, I will charge with overwhelming force at him and use brute strength. None of the cleverness. None of the thinking that he can exploit. Just hatred. Undying, eternal hatred. Hatred will save us all.”

Demetrios Monopthalmos, to Cleombrotus

Cleombrotus is divided: loyal to the warrior prince, yet recognizing the spread of insanity. The Aïdôneus priest keeping Messaros corpse concurs, but thinks his god approves: so many sent to the underworld, so much self-destruction... this is surely what he wants.

Ossa may act as a news service:

“Brother Demetrios Monophthalmos, hot on the trail of the Cythosians refused to take the bait and go against Avon, instead going straight north after the retreating Cythosians with his own Aphian troops. Apparently, there is some dissension in the ranks about not pursuing Samarion, who is believed to be hiding in Avon. The funeral of general Topaios will be held in the next few days.”

“Reports about monster skirmishes with the armies going north. There have been sightings of a gigantic flaming bird, which many take as an ill omen.”

THE FALL OF VINDIGA

“My sister deserved far more punishment than she got, and she understood it. I will rid the world of her spawn Samarion too. But it does not matter much anymore...”

Demetrios Monophthalmos, to Cleombrotus

In the south Monotphalmos side has defeated his sister and cousin. A strategic blunder made their defences crumble, and the Aphians charged in. Philomena committed suicide by throwing herself from the highest tower of Vindiga. Samarion escaped, found allies and is safe in hiding in the south. The Vindigan king is hostage, a nearly irrelevant issue.

CAMPAIGN NOTES

In my game, I rolled for the military success of various sides, and Samarion rolled a critical failure.

This ending of this side was a bit abrupt, so you may want to ignore this or change the story. One possibility is that it is Monophthalmos who defeats them (maybe a few days earlier) and she jumps to escape him – or even that he throws her out of the window himself, further establishing him as a villain.

Samarion may or may not make a comeback. Without his mother he is merely a decent politician.

PREPARING FOR THE SHOWDOWN

In those places which have been destroyed, let more places be destroyed. And in those places which have not been destroyed, let a breach be made there. Let his place become like chopped-up turnips! – Their rituals were alienated. Where there were bonds, that place was destroyed. Their place in the universe was eradicated.

Ancient fragment, Ni 9824 Seg. A ll.



At this point the PCs should ideally understand that (1) their brother has gone mad in a bad way, (2) Suidas the Traitor is somehow involved, (3) there are armies moving in their direction. Ideally, they also have the arrow and bow.

Given that they have a few days of preparation, this might also be where there is a bit of research and discovery: Eutara, going through the documentation from past adventures and the scrolls in the palace library (plus having had first-hand experience with the gods) may explain the story about Suidas and the link to the electrum scroll revealing the location of the Bow of the Winds. If that scroll was never found in the Lamia’s lair it might exist in the Calbium library. Of course, Ossa may also send helpful dreams.

If they do not have the bow, now is the time to try to quickly get it (assuming they can get there fast enough – in my game they had griffins to fly on at this point). It might also be that it will be provided by Suidas: he hid it, and he can likely just fetch it using divine means. That means that when the final confrontation happens, he will have the bow and either need to grab the arrow, or more deviously, hand over the bow to the arrow-bearer and then have them shoot Laossoos.

In my game they went on a rushed journey to Noria to get it and try to get back before Calbium was overwhelmed. During the journey over Cythosia Kallistratos began to remember more of his divine heritage... not always reassuring:

“I remember how I took the runes from Ar. Not how, I traded that memory for the storm rune, but I know I dragged them out of his mist just about here...”

“I killed a warrior on that rock. He challenged me, and I ripped off his arms and legs and beat him to death with them. Then I took his wives.”

“There used to be giants around here. I think I killed them since they insulted me.”

“Oh, I remember when we raided this city! It burned for days!”

“I could do it again. We will do it again. My horde will take this continent! I will give you nice kingdoms to rule.”

HIGH NOON ON THE CITY WALL

No man who fights with gods will live long or hear his children prattling about his knees when he returns from battle.

Homer, The Illiad, Book V. 407–409 (tr. Samuel Butler).

When the party arrive back at Calbium, they see an army breaching city walls but also monophthalmos army approaching fast. There are battles in the streets between wall and the defensible acropolis. The civilians are in the acropolis, while the militia and the ex-slaves are fighting a desperate battle.

Okammenes the Boar of Cythosia is outside, rallying his horde against the approaching Aphians, led by Chaeron the Strong of Aphia and Monophthalmos. It will be a magnificent, bloody battle that will settle once and for all who is Khan of the hordes.

But the mastermind of the drama is elsewhere.

A SHORT MASTERMIND

You see a halfling standing on the city wall near the breach. He waves at you as you approach. He is dressed as a warrior despite his short stature, but there is something *more* about him. A presence that others do not have, that you now recognize as divinity. He carries a lance, a shield bearing Rharia's lion, and an ironic smile.

"Look, I have sent my men to capture your near and dear. Crude, but I assure you that I can mentally order them to cut their throats and that you cannot get there in time, and I assure you that I am honorable – in my own way – to let them go if I get the bow and arrow.

I do not have a quarrel with you. Neither with your brother, really. Let this drama play to an end with the bow and arrow in my hands, and you will be heroes for a new era. Otherwise, this will be all an unnecessarily gory mess that we will all regret, and I will still stand with the bow in my bloodied hands."

At this point Eutara shows up, wiping a bloody dagger on her clothes, followed by a pale Zamolxis, Timon, Anaxos, Elpinice (and Polysthenes, if anybody asks). Suidas swears pungently, but keeps his composure. "My earlier offer still stands."

In fact, threatening the families may be exactly the wrong thing to do. Perhaps a better opening is to have Suidas reasonably offer to protect the city in exchange for help. He keeps negotiating, bringing up the threat only later.

What Suidas really wants is to stall things so that Monophthalmos comes charging at him, and the gods themselves will be watching due to his oath (and the general drama). Only then can he implement his plan.

THE DUEL: WORTH WATCHING

You feel them rather than see them, but the gods are watching. From the sky Agêtôr and Koruphasia look down dispassionately, while Rharias and Laossoos watch from the south. Pitatanis, Zêrunthia, Mainalios and countless lesser divinities all look on. Monothalmos doesn't speak, he charges with deadly precision.

It is very possible that there is a fight: treat Suidas as a level 15 Fighter Battlemaster with 5 levels in Rogue, able to use the Shield spell with divine reinforcement to prevent any damage. Plus whatever magic makes sense. The twins attack, but Suidas grabs the lance, turns it around impossibly fast and then uses it to sweep the twins 10 feet away – over the edge of the wall. They scream angrily as they fall.

"Brother, you always fall for that one."

ENTER, STAGE RIGHT



A savage desire eats away at you, drives you to murder, blood-sacrifice proscribed by divine law, whose only fruit is bitterness.

Theban maidens. Aeschylus, Seven Against Thebes 694

At this point Monophthalmos comes onto the city wall. He is bloody, and he does not care. He only has eyes on Suidas. A major duel begins.

THE SHOT THAT WAS HEARD AROUND THE WORLD

This is the key moment. Suidas uses Suggestion to get Hippias to fire at Laossoos. "King Hippias, please ensure peace for your city by firing your arrow at the god of war."

The arrow is divine, it is fired from a divine bow, and Suidas has placed various spells and powers in readiness to empower it over the centuries he has bided his time.

If Hippias fires successfully everybody sees the arrow fly strangely: straight, yet somehow sideways. Out from mortal reality and into divine reality, where it burrows into the chest of Laossoos himself.

When a god screams all of creation can hear it.

WHY STOP?

If I cannot influence the gods, I shall move all hell.

Virgil, Æneid (29–19 BC), VII. 312.

However, even if Suidas manages to commit divine patricide, Monopthalmos does not care. He keeps on attacking.

THE DUEL II: CHANGE THE GAME

"I admire your tenacity, warrior. You could have been content with your skill, your passion, your crown, but you want revenge beyond all reason. You have forgotten why you started out on this path. But you cannot best me. I am beyond your ability."

"You think you are clever. You think you are powerful. You think you have me exactly where you want me, a stupid raging pawn to play his part in your little betrayal drama. But I am not playing. To me you are just an obstacle in my pursuit of my true enemy. And now I am going to cut through you with brute force."

"Fool. No mortal can defeat me."

"Then I will not remain mortal. This is what I took from the ruins of the temple of your father."

Monopthalmos puts a circlet on his head. It glows like it was in a furnace, burning the flesh of his skull. His scream warps from the scream of a man in agony to something far worse as his flesh blackens and begins to change. Suidas does not look happy... indeed, he looks horrified. The skull looking back at him, eyes filled with fire and smoke grins. He rips off his eyepatch and attacks, surrounded by burning shadows

Ideally the circlet was the circlet from the Valley of the Birds – sacred to Laossoos and donated by the PCs ages ago to the temple. But it could be another circlet like that, if they never collected it.

It turns him into a **Death Knight**, but with the added power of life drain like a Wight. He is also blessed with Laossoos' power: in a very real sense he is a holy undead, at least for a few moments. That is all he needs.

THE DUEL III: TO THE DEATHS

He cuts into Suidas, a wide gash from throat to groin. Cracking his ribcage open as the man tries to scream, he reaches for his heart. They struggle as you see bloody pneuma flow from the halfling into the maw of your brother. Suidas whispers "father..." and goes limp. Monopthalmos raises his skull and roars. Then he quickly looks down, focusing on a bird so far sitting unseen on the tower. "You are next. Brother."

He throws a javelin of darkness, red fire, and golden power after the bird. It hits and explodes in a vast sphere. Your brother's burning body falls limply to the ground, trailing darkness. The ground shakes and in the far south you see the trees of the forest waving as if they are wailing in anguish.

Your brother screams: "Messaros, come back!"

REUNITED AT LAST

LOVE IN DEATH

Someone limps up on the wall. It is Messaros, his wounded body still draped in the bloody linen sheet. He is not alive, nor dead. Monopthalmos rushes over to him and embraces him.

"I did everything to get you back at my side, my love.

Sorry."

"Don't be sorry. We are together."

Messaros nods to the PCs, giving them a wan smile. Then he runs his sword through them both as they kiss. Their bodies seem to burn in black fire as they vanish from this world.

VARIATIONS

The previous drama can go in many, many ways depending on how the campaign has played out, how the tragic elements have been defined, and what the PCs do. There is a great deal of improvisation needed.

The most obvious one is **that the PCs kill Suidas using the bow before he has the showdown with Monopthalmos** and he hence cannot attack Laossoos.

Great! Except that now Monopthalmos will arrive and see that somebody has deprived him of his revenge – he will now fight against the PCs. The undead move may or may not be relevant depending on how good fighter the DM wants to make him. Whether it is kinslaying to kill a mad brother in self-defence is a good question, but if they turn undead it is likely OK. The PCs better perform a ritual purification afterward anyway. If they are losing, they may be saved by Messaros arriving – the borders between life and death are rather thin today.

Use the arrow at Kallistratos: he looks shocked, and then he dies. Suidas says: "You really shouldn't have done that to my half-brother. I am now honour-bound to avenge him... but I guess I do not have much honour. I will just leave you here with the leaderless, angry barbarians." Suidas starts to make his escape (but may run into Monopthalmos).

If arrow attack on monopthalmos: there is an earthquake as he dies. Suidas looks deeply annoyed, and turns to leave. "Mortals. You could have had it all, but now it will be the tender mercies of the furies."

The PCs will now have to deal with being kinslayers, finding some way of atoning for their crime before the furies catch up with them.

Does the arrow really kill Laossoos? If it is fired and hits him, it is not given that it is lethal. It might just be a flesh wound. Anaireus may have given him the Aegis. And Laossoos may have learned a few things from his devious son: faking death might be one of the most amusing stratagems ever.

But it could also be that one of the 12 has been killed for real. By a mortal, even. This fundamentally upsets the cosmic order until a new god of war can ascend. If Suidas survives he will aim straight for the job. But the Fates may have other plans. Maybe Monopthalmos' soul is far more suited, especially if he turns undead, kills Suidas (gaining his divine power) and then goes to the afterlife voluntarily. The PCs might find that their scary big brother will be with them for a long time...

Kallistratos does not do anything profound in this scenario on the wall, but he has two armies of barbarians

he wants to reveal his divinity to. This might go in all sorts of directions. In my game, after being shoved off the wall by Suidas he began to make his claim and ended up off-stage defeating first Chaeron the Strong and the Okamennes the Boar, proving his divinity and becoming a boy-Khan.

He can also be used if Suidas is doing too well: suddenly he gets hit with a divine lance from behind. Kallistratos and Nikanor can be formidable... but Nikanor is also mortal. What will Kallistratos do if he is killed?



HOME, SWEET HOME?

It is said that the wall of Calbium is haunted. Near the East tower there is a spot of cold that never goes away, filled with the whispers of death – but also promises of love reunited. Near the middle there is the place where a god died. The stones has turned to wonderous jaspis. The ruined west tower is most chilling still: the stones still bear the mark of kinslaying, and anybody sleeping in it will hear the voices of the furies.

–Augostinos Chrysodactylos, On Calbium

It is time for the epilogue. Get the players tell the story of their characters and finish their goals. The DM describes how the world is changing, and the gods are looking down and commenting..

AN EPILOGUE

Exhausted, the party can take stock. Hippias is now savior of the city, killer of the traitor-god and owner of a divine monster-hunting bow. Which may come in handy if the rumors of a giant flaming bird are true... Augostinos is bound to be declared king of Mesia, no matter what he says. He goes on to become a scholarly king, rebuilding the kingdom and fighting piracy together with his nephew Samarion, the king of Vindiga. King Hippias worked hard on keeping the kingdom safe from the monsters coming from the forest, where it is said the dryads continually summoning them to avenge their beloved Priamos.

So ends the saga of the three princes of Mesia.

THE WARRIORS' ISLAND



On a wild island somewhere there was the usual clang of sword against shield. Warriors were joyfully fighting forever. On a terrace overlooking the Island Laossoos and Rharias were watching the proceedings over a simple meal of ambrosia she had brought.

"I recognize those two newcomers, but a dog?"

"He was a very good dog. Totally deserves to be here. By the way, dear, you don't seem too sad about Suidas."

"I may be a goddess of hospitality but he had overstayed his welcome by a few millennia. Still, his last trick was a nice parting gift: he gave Myrsinos the satyr the chance to steal and drink some of my blessed wine."

"Oh. That is a lovely wine."

"Now imagine what it does to a mortal. He came crawling into my temple to beg for another sip. I am seriously thinking of making him properly immortal for what he did."

The war god laughed heartily. After a short silence, his wife asked: "Are you sad about Suidas?"

"A bit. You know, he had a decent assassination plan in motion. Had things gone slightly differently, we gods would have come watching Monophthalmos attempt his revenge, and he would have used his command to make Hippias shoot me."

"Oh dear."

"Might have succeeded, had not that griffon attacked too early. It is as I say, plans never really work. Don't overthink it."

"We may have to do something about the griffon, you know. It lapped up his blood."

"Yes, I saw. Not sure it would get along with the hippalektryons. Do you think it would be better as a constellation or as some monster race?"

THE UNDERWORLD

Somewhere below the Underworld Echthria was quietly celebrating. She went to her special cabinet and drank a glass of exquisitely rare nectar. Her plan had worked.

Thanks to the chain of events set in motion by making the arrow cause the prophecy she had made the Year of the God turn. Once Zêrunthia ruled, but as a Norian prince chose reason over emotion it was Koruphasia's turn to be Queen of Heaven. Then Agêtôr ascended, empowered by the power and authority of kings. But then chaos ensued, and at least in Mesia, formerly the most loyal and royal of the kingdoms under king Churii Agelastos, now turmoil and competition ruled. Sure, new kings were in charge but things would never be the same: the Year had inexorably turned towards making Echthria' dear wife Pitanatis Queen of the Gods. For a goddess of competition she was far too unambitious and needed a proper agent.

The best part was that everybody were blaming Anaireus the Rebel for the whole mess. He must be the culprit, right? Slave revolts, stealing the Aegis, even freeing the key mortals from that dungeon. Weird new ideas at the academy. He probably thought it was his idea all along. Echthria smiled a toothy grin.



SIDE QUEST: THE BOW OF THE WINDS

This quest could show up at different points in the campaign. I had originally planned to have it in the middle third, but it got delayed to the second-to-last game session. Depending on when it shows up the complexity of the dungeon and the powers of the bow may need to be adjusted.

Themes: solving riddles, trust and betrayal.

THE ELECTRUM SCROLL



In the lair of the Lamia there is an electrum scroll. The text is in late Rhomaoi, and written in an archaic kind of verse. In translation to koine, it says:

O Pitantis, Lady of Conquest and Competition, Bringer of Joy and Excellence.

Yes, holding the Bow of the Winds, the hunting bow that can shoot clear light and wind arrows.

Yes, defending the just from gods and men.

She gave it to Perdiccas of the North to defend the kingdom from the wild monsters.

Yes, the flying devastation drooling monsters.

Yes, he killed them with divine arrows.

When Amyntos the Grandson died, his sons, Glafkos, Xanthos, and Ypargos, claimed their innate rights and fought.

Yes, brothers fought brother over the fields of Normarvia.

Yes, from Anthos to Olome blood was shed.

King Ypargos the Brother-killer, prophesied that his sons would do the same and ordered the bow to be hidden.

Yes, to prevent the stain from blackening the Ambona throne the bow was hidden from mortal men.

Yes, hidden by Suidas the Begetter of Kings.

The hideout is the temple of emptiness.

Yes, the temple to the God that Does Not Exist.

Yes, the chamber that has no walls.

The keys are the provinces of the earth.

Yes, to safeguard all of Nomarvia in the time of need their strength will come together.

Yes, the representative-governors will journey to bring the keys they picked up so easily.

And then the bow shall ring the music of Pitantis.

Yes, then the bow shall defeat the enemies of the kingdom.

Yes, then shall the arrow fly.

The text gives hints of where to find the sacred bow. Most references are historical references. It is possible to do better research in Noria at the temple of Koruphasia by reading their scrolls and consulting with the scholars, especially for the last few points.

Perdiccas of the North: DC 15 History check – Perdiccas was a famous early Norian king, one of the kings that carved out and unified the kingdom from the scattered barbarians and post-Rhomaoi tribes. He is often depicted as The Monster Killer, famously defeating dragons.

Amyntos the Grandson: DC 15 History check – Another Norian king, possibly the original wearer of the legendary helmet giving dread prowess in battle. Also known for having cursed his own son. He was grandson of Perdiccas.

Normarvia, Anthos, Olome: DC 20 History check – ancient names for the greater Norian kingdom, and regions inside it.

King Ypargos the Brother-killer: DC 15 History – The son of Amyntos, the winner in the civil war and cursed both by his father and by his own actions against his family. A famous story recounts his attempts to atone for his deeds.

Ambona throne: DC 10 History – The ancient and sacred throne of Noria, said to have been given to the kings by Koruphasia herself to give respect and wise decisions.

Suidas the Begetter of Kings: DC 10 Religion, Suidas the Traitor is known as the ancestor of the Norian kings. A minor/demigod son of Laossos, he is known to have been ambitious, devious, and willing to cheat.

The temple of emptiness: DC 25 History – There is an unfinished temple in south Noria, that was never dedicated. Originally built by unknown people (perhaps a lost kingdom older than Noria) it consists of grand pillars with no roof that stand on a vast sterobate (masonry base): had the temple been finished it would have been among the largest buildings in Hesperia. Now it stands in the middle of an empty wilderness.

Representative-governors: DC 20 History – Ancient Nomarvia was divided into 12 regions, each with their own governor who represented them at the court.

The keys: The riddle is “the keys they picked up so easily” – they need to bring a stone from their region to their temple. A hint might be for the PCs to find another ancient poem that lauds a warrior with a sling as “throwing the easily picked up key to the braincase”.

Getting the stones can be hard. There is a need for a stone from each territory. Some have partially sunk into the sea, and the current divisions do not correspond to the past divisions.

THE UNFINISHED TEMPLE

We noticed more than a dozen huge columns rising above the forest canopy, ending without capitals. We landed on one of them, looking down. Below there was fairly dense forest, but we could make out overgrown masonry on a vast scale. As we looked, suddenly two huge blocks of stone came flying at us.

–Augostinos Chrysodactylus, History of Cannoria

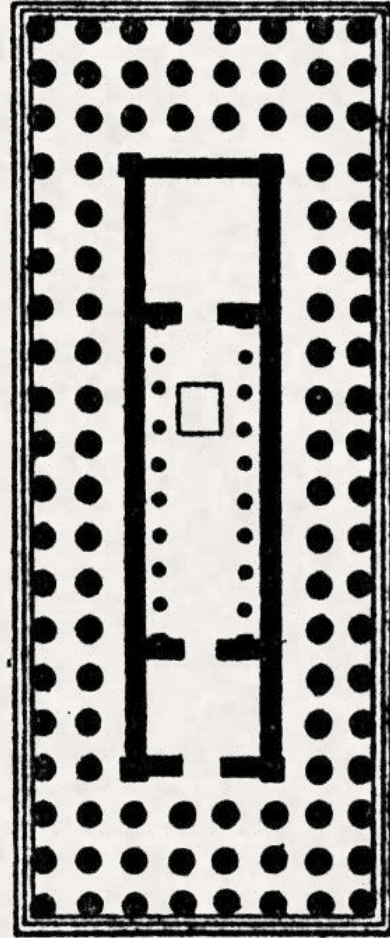
The temple is in the forests of southern Noria, a land of ruins and empty spaces. Somewhere between Aber and Ratra Lug. The locals know about it, but say it is best avoided – “it is a temple to nothing, and nothing has a tendency to bite.” They are right – there is a monster in the temple.

The temple itself is vast and overgrown. Huge stone pillars rise from the sterobate, but were never finished. The flagstones are overgrown by grass, trees and have small lakes in their hollows.

At the entrance stands two great stone lions flanking it. When entering the left one is awake and the right one sleeping. When leaving the roles have changed.

At the altar there is a big block of heavily eroded marble, with unreadable inscriptions and twelve bowl-shaped depressions (partially filled with moss).

If 12 stones from the different regions are placed in the bowls a gateway opens between the pillars, allowing access to a demiplane housing the bow. Depending on the campaign goals, this might be just be a chapel to Pitanasis with the bow easily accessible or a full dungeon testing the would-be users of the bow.



BIG CHIMERA

Huge monstrosity, Chaotic Evil

Armor Class 16 (Natural Armor)

Hit Points 189 (12d12+48)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	11 (+0)	19 (+4)	7 (-1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)

Skills Perception +10, Survival +6, Intimidation +4

Damage Resistances resistance to piercing, bludgeoning, cutting and fire damage.

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 18

Languages Koine

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Owl head. Great perception, keen hearing and sight (advantage on Perception checks that rely on sound or sight), beak attacks.

Wolf head. Also, great perception, keen smell (advantage on smell perception and tracking), bite attacks.

Human head. Able to speak and plan.

Three heads are better than one: it has advantage on saving throws against being blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, stunned, and knocked unconscious.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. It can do one beak, one bite attack, one quill attack, and either throw two rocks or use its four scimitars. If flying it can do a Talon attack or attempt to lift and later drop a target.

Owl Beak: Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (2d4 + 2) piercing damage.

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

Quills: Ranged Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, range 100/200 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Rock: Ranged Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, range 60/240 ft., one target. Hit: 21 (3d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Scimitar, Melee Weapon Attack +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target, Hit: 1d6+8 slashing damage.

Talon attack: Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 10 (2d6 + 8) slashing damage.

THE ANGRY CHIMERA

Mother said I should not talk to strangers. Just smash them to a pulp and eat them. Keep quiet!

A chimera has nested in the temple. The monster was sent by Echtria ("mother") to prevent people from accessing the monster-killing bow.

Usually, it notices intruders and quietly hides away at a high point, throwing rocks at them and shooting quills before jumping down and letting their bloodlust rip.

It has three heads; one owl, one human, and one wolf. It has four arms ending in human-like hands. The body is a human giant but covered in quill-like fur. It walks on two eagle-like legs, and has a lion-like tail. Its back is covered with long, sharp quills like a porcupine that it can shoot at opponents. It might be smarter than the usual monster, but that doesn't mean it is reasonable.

This monster can be nearly anything: a young dragon, a treant, a behir, a reskinned Guardian Naga or Deva.



THE SAFEKEEPING SPACE

This version of the dungeon is very simple: a straight hallway 10 ft. wide and tall. All surfaces are the same hard porphyry stone. It is dark and cold.

It is however blocked by massive polished blocks of stone every 80 feet, forming airtight seals. Next to each block is a monster stone head with an open jaw (an owl, a dragon, a wolf, a hydra, a lion, ...). If a hand is placed inside the jaw the block will ascend into the ceiling. If it is removed the block crashes down (doing 10d10 damage on anybody beneath and trapping them) and blocks the passage. There are always enough blocks to ensure that only one visitor will be able to reach the centre.

Opposite of the stone head is a niche in the wall. It is initially empty. But as the person waits, it will manifest the bow. If one were to just walk over to it, it is theirs for the taking. At this point the stones beyond that point all fall down and the trap can only be reset by somebody re-opening it from the outside after all stones have been lowered.

There is of course also risk that something annoying like stirges or a worse monster enters the hallway once it is open.

The central chamber is a domed gallery where the bow hangs among many identical bows. Only one can leave the chamber. The way of finding it is to test it. There is also an old man present who can give advice: he is **Dolus** and is constantly lying, and can make illusory copies of anything. If the bow is used against him, he turns out to be an illusion.

Suidas set it up it was to reward teamwork... and treachery.

ATTUNEMENT TO THE BOW



I sing of Pitaneas with shafts are of gold, strong-voiced, the revered virgin, deer-shooting, delighter in arrows.

To attune to the bow the user needs to perform a sacrifice to Pitaneas. If performed right (she refuses any meat that the supplicant has not hunted himself) there is a vision of the goddess in her divine forest. Pitaneas gives them an appraising look. "This is not a weapon awarded as an honour. It is a weapon you use to gain honour."

If asked about Laossos, Suidas or the others she just notes "I have no quarrel with them."

If asked about the prophecy, she answers: "Even gods must bow to fate. I am just more sensitive to the threads of fate than you are, and skip along them lightly, doing what must be done. As we all must do."

CAMPAIGN NOTES

In my game, the PCs found a way in by using the divine power of Kallistratos rather than getting stones from all over Noria (relieving us all from a potentially tedious fetch quest in the second-to-last session!)

Rather than having a party member betray the others the bow was taken by the outermost member out of mild *stupidity* – and that member was also unable to figure out a way to free the others! It could have been a hilariously sad ending to the campaign.

Fortunately, one PC fell asleep, and had a divine meeting in his dream. He found himself at Ossa's house where she was entertaining Anaireus and trying to convince him to help the mortals out.

"We have to stop meeting like this, mortal. At this rate, Ossa will be washing the dishes in my kitchen for an aeon to pay for my help.

Look, I like Suidas. I want him to succeed with the nefarious scheme he is doing. I am exactly the wrong god to ask for help in this matter. So why should I help you?"

Fortunately, it turned out that freeing the slaves and women was a good enough answer – he realized that the PCs in the long run may cause more mayhem than even a god-killer with that behavior. He lifted the stones, and the party gained the Bow of the Winds.





AFTERWORD

Having well polished the whole bow, he added a golden tip.

Homer, *The Iliad*, Book IV, III.

My campaign lasted from spring 2021 to early fall 2022 with mostly weekly gaming sessions. That is by no means the longest campaign I have run, nor the one with the most excessive worldbuilding. But it is one of the more cohesive storylines I have ever attempted, and that was a greater challenge than keeping track of climate simulations, centuries of world history, and starmaps.

Since I was interested in Social Value Orientation theory, I had started with a pantheon based on the ring in the theory, and then got the idea of an annually cyclic pantheon. From there a Greek-flavor world was obvious, and before I knew it, I invited my group to the campaign.

TROPES ARE YOUR FRIEND

What worked? Making it a Greek epic naturally provided a rough shape to the story. Making use of epics and myths that are if not well-known then at least hidden in the background structure of Western culture really helps getting things going. My players immediately understood their role as the plucky youngest princes and the need to go on quests. Many situations wrote/played themselves since we all have some of the involved archetypes hidden in our minds, an implicit structure due to all tropes descended from Greek culture. Tropes and clichés are not bad when they can act as guides to build something new on.

The epic structure also allowed me to split the storyline into parts rather naturally. That is an under-used trick for long campaigns in my view: it allows changing the set of main characters, the style of game, and many other things. It is refreshing. One should not be afraid of temporarily or permanently retiring PCs, or elevating NPCs into PCs.

NEXT TIME...

What would I now have done differently? I may have had a few too many “GM’s favorite NPCs” – young Messaros, later Anaxos, and eventually the Twins got away with a bit too much. At the same time, that led to memorable roleplay. As a GM, really enjoying a few characters or pieces of setting can be infectious.

I sometimes regretted not being closer to the Greek pantheon since there are elements there that are great for narrative purposes: the affairs of Zeus and Hera’s jealousy, the dynamics between the divine twins Apollo and Artemis, Athena’s conflict with Ares, the vast metaplot of usurpation and so on. On the other hand, making things feel familiar without being familiar made the players less likely to think “Oh, it is just Athena, we are totally safe” (something Arachne may foolishly have thought). Even hyper magic pixie girl Ossa broke off a PC finger without second thought.

Would the campaign have been better with a single clear antagonist? Maybe. I enjoyed having a sequence of opponents, many of which became antagonists because of the player actions. But I feel Suidas came into the story a bit too much out of the blue. On the other hand was fun to build up the scariness of Monophthalmos.

I think I did not smother my players with classicist infodumps too often, but I do know my friends and

family has suffered enough rants about details in obscure myths...

CARE AND FEEDING OF A NARRATIVE

A bad beginning makes a bad ending.

Euripides, *Æolus*, Frag. 32.

The real source of stress for me as a GM was trying to shape the narrative so that the prophecy would be fulfilled and that there would be a satisfyingly grand ending.

On the plus side, I had not decided everything when I started. On the minus side, I had not decided everything when I started.

To a large degree this stress was misplaced. Good players want a good narrative too, and often play along making it happen. I had good players.

Much of the large plot was developed while playing the first act. I had early on decided that there needed to be a conflict with the brothers, and got the idea that there should be seven brothers – but that required adding two new ones. From that constraint I got the idea of the reincarnation of Eurypylos, and hence the need for a hasty marriage between Churii and Elpinice. That gave me the idea for the necessary marriage with Eutara – reading Greek law gave me so many plot ideas! However, adding infant brothers was still unsatisfying so I decided to work towards getting a time-skip. The Monster Island arc could have been turned into a multi-year Odyssey, but it felt somewhat contrived (and I doubted my resourceful players would not escape it somehow).

The real GM nightmare was keeping track of the various options for how PCs or NPCs could interact. As the writeup of the final part shows, it is highly character-driven and requires at least one inciting incident to really get the tragedy going. But once it was going it flowed well – there was a change of pace as armies marched across the land while the heroes were rapid-questing to get what they believed they needed. I tripped on the finishing line with Suidas getting killed one turn before the “proper” dramatic encounter with Monophthalmos would have happened, but I still winged it and the ending felt good.

My advice is: define prophecies loosely, and plan for a open ending. Indeed, both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* end rather perfunctorily. You can do better: we have learned so many narrative tricks and methods in the millennia since Homer, and you actually know them from all other media you have consumed.

Or invoke a *Deus Ex Machina* – it is allowed here. Just make sure you give the appropriate libations and sacrifices afterward.

Anders Sandberg
Oxford, November 2022

THREE PRINCES

The King of Mesia is a powerful man, devoted to running his kingdom according to the will of the gods. He has powerful sons and a daughter wedded to a king... plus three young princes.

The princes are less enthusiastic about court life and prefer the freedom of nature, hunting and training. Now they have been called to court to perform a family tradition. A necessary duty they hope to escape as soon as possible.

Soon everything will be changed – fate will bring gods, monsters, magic, prophecy and black murder into their lives. Can they win? Can they save the kingdom? Can they save themselves?

