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ARCANA

1 LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Hannah Rose

SPELLS FEATS MAGIC ITEMS

2 GEMSTONE ARCANA

Mario Ortegón

Put your gems to use with this hoard of spells, feats, lore, and more

ORGANIZATIONS WORLDBUILDING

9 RELIGION CONSTRUCTION KIT

James Mendez Hodes

Beyond deities and pantheons, what elements make up a religion?

ADVENTURES

21 DIVINE TRIALS: HEROES OF THE STARS

Amber Litke and Sadie Lowry

A mythic trial to bond heroes with unbreakable ties

36 RESOURCES

ISSUE 23 ✧ DECEMBER 2022



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

At the close of the year, I want to take the opportunity to reflect a little on *ARCADIA*, creativity, and taking a chance to breathe.

January will mark two years of *ARCADIA*. So far, we've released 72 articles by 48 different authors, featuring 128 stat blocks, 17 subclasses, 45 spells, 100 magic items, and much, much more. (Many thanks to Reuben Hung's [ARCADIA Index](#) for these stats.) Tens of thousands of people have found inspiration and joy in our little magazine, which feels wild to say. More than the numbers, I absolutely adore hearing anecdotes from folks using *ARCADIA* in their games to tell stories, bring friends together, and introduce new people to the wonders of TTRPGs. Art and storytelling are magic.

One of the things that makes *ARCADIA* unique is its room for boundless creativity—we don't tell authors what to pitch beyond some examples and guidelines on scope, and we actively invite the weird, the wacky, the wonderful. Each author gets to write something they're really excited about, a concept that comes wholly from them, in their own voice and with authority throughout the development process. There's a ton of delightful collaboration (editors, playtesters, art, and more) that goes into each article, but it's a chance for the author's personal creativity to shine. And then that creativity inspires *your* creativity as GMs and players—and that's magic, too.

But, like everything else, creativity has its seasons. For many people, the end of the year brings a lot of reflection (deliberate or otherwise). It's a natural stopping point, a sign to look back over a neatly demarcated span of time and sum things up. And for those of us in the northern hemisphere, it's also a time of rest and renewal—a season to pause our

struggle for new growth as we appreciate simpler things, like food and warmth and the crystalized silence after the first snowfall. I hope that you can take time—a week, a day, a single breath here and there—to cherish something that renews you, that gives rather than demands.

With over two dozen articles in development at a time, it's always a challenge to carve out time to sit down and compose these letters. But they're really special to me, because it's a chance to talk to you in my own voice—to take a break from juggling everything and just *write*. It's a rest, a pause in the arpeggio of other tasks. I love these moments where I get to pick a topic I'm in the mood for and write as myself, without the parameters of a particular adventure, subclass, or campaign setting. As I look forward to the new year of *ARCADIA*, I realize that getting to talk to all of you on Discord, Patreon, and through these letters is another source of joy, renewal, and inspiration.

Renewal is a vital part of creativity. We need to rest and feed ourselves (literally and metaphorically) in order to keep creating, as hard as it is to do. So let us rest, recharge, take in the small things and the big world around us, and we'll be ready for what's to come in the new year.

Speaking of what's to come, I promised a few teasers for future *ARCADIA* articles. So, as a little gift from me this holiday season: Dragons. Explosives. Fantasy skateboards. New kinds of magic that reach new heights of nerdiness. Sharkboat. To borrow a phrase from Matt, 2023 *ARCADIA* is going to be *really freaking dope*.

De somnio ad itinere,
Hannah Rose
Managing Editor

GEMSTONE ARCANNA

PUT YOUR GEMS TO USE WITH THIS HOARD
OF SPELLS, FEATS, LORE, AND MORE

by Mario Ortégón

Gemstones have been a staple spell component in the core game for decades, but in the latest edition, many types of gemstones aren't represented as material components. What kind of magics can be wrought with a topaz? A moonstone? What about an amethyst?

This article provides ideas for the magical properties of gems, which you can use as a GM or player to enrich your stories. It also presents three categories of new gem-themed options: feats that allow characters to use gemstones in unique ways, spells that use underrepresented gems as components, and a gemstone magic item.

GEMSTONE PROPERTIES

Many seek gemstones for more than their monetary value, for they also believe gems hold magical and spiritual properties that can be harnessed by those sensitive to their power. In your campaign's world, these beliefs could have a measure of truth to them, or they might be rooted in superstition. Either way, these properties can offer interesting plot hooks and roleplaying opportunities.

This section describes concepts and categories associated with a gemstone's dominant color. In addition, the Individual Gemstone Associations table lists specific gemstones and what they most commonly symbolize. This list is by no means definitive—feel free to add or change properties to better fit the nature and cultures of your campaign's world. The associations by gemstone color are as follows:

Black. Black gems are associated with darkness, will-power, and the afterlife. They also embody solidity and

negation, making them strong conduits for defensive magics.

Blue. Blue gems are typically connected with the sky, water, and air. They make excellent components for magic that deals with communication, knowledge, and truth.

Brown. Brown gems are grounding stones that represent stability and the earth. They're often used in magic relating to animals.

Green. Green gems embody nature, growth, and fertility. They are aligned with magic that involves good luck, sight, and abundance.

Pink. Pink gems are traditionally associated with affection and compassion. They're components in magic that engenders harmony and good will.

Purple. Purple gems are connected to royalty, spirituality, and wisdom. They also embody magic itself, making them versatile spell components especially suitable for force fields, shields, and other manipulations of pure arcane energy.

Red. Red (and orange) gems are associated with courage, strength, and passion. They make effective components in magic related to fire, force, and vitality.

Translucent. Translucent gems are linked to wholeness and new beginnings. They're sought after as conduits of resurrection magic and to sustain arcane glyphs or dormant magical energy over time.

White. White gems are connected to mystery, light, and awareness. They're as useful for magic that conceals as they are for magic that reveals.

Yellow. Yellow gems evoke the concepts of energy, freedom, and self-expression. They're valued as components in magic that bolsters creativity or enhances movement.

INDIVIDUAL GEMSTONE ASSOCIATIONS

GEM	ASSOCIATIONS
Agate	Reason, revelation
Alexandrite	Fortuity, possibility
Amber	Good health, warmth
Amethyst	Stasis, temperance
Aquamarine	Vision, water
Azurite	Dreams, intuition
Bloodstone	Obscurity, the weather
Carnelian	Fearlessness, vitality
Chrysoberyl	Confidence, free will
Citrine	Energy, imagination
Diamond	Eternity, integrity
Emerald	Abundance, honesty
Garnet	Passion, victory
Jacinth	Breath, travel
Jade	Duty, falsehood
Jasper	Heartiness, persistence
Jet	Protection, the soul
Lapis lazuli	Eloquence, piety
Moonstone	Hidden truths, the moon
Obsidian	Earth, nullification
Onyx	Afterlife, conflict
Opal	Change, foresight
Pearl	Purity, understanding
Peridot	Closure, resolution
Quartz	Amplification, focus
Rhodochrosite	Affection, happiness
Ruby	Fire, sovereignty
Sapphire	Bonds, justice
Spinel	Courage, orientation
Tiger eye	Introspection, privacy
Topaz	Eyesight, illumination
Tourmaline	Adaptability, transience
Turquoise	Empathy, safe passage
Zircon	Fulfillment, relief

GEMSTONE FEATS

For groups that use feats, the following options give characters new ways to use gemstones.

ARCANE GEMOLOGIST

Prerequisite: Spellcasting or Pact Magic feature

You have studied gemstones extensively and can use them more efficiently as spell components. You gain the following benefits:

Gemcrafter. You gain proficiency with jeweler's tools if you don't already have it.

Gemstone Focus. Whenever you finish a long rest, you can touch a nonmagical gem worth at least 10 gp and imbue it with your magic, allowing you to use that gem as a spellcasting focus. When you do, choose one cantrip you know that has a casting time of 1 action. While holding this gemstone focus, you can cast that cantrip as a bonus action a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest. The effect ends if you die, if the gemstone focus is more than 100 feet away from you for at least 24 hours, or if you repeat this process to imbue a gem when you finish a long rest.



Spell Lapidary. You can channel your magic more efficiently through gemstones. The cost of gemstone material components for your spells of 6th level or lower is halved. This benefit extends to gemstone byproducts, such as sculptures or dust.

GEM AWAKENER

Your soul is magically attuned to gemstones, allowing you to awaken special properties in them. You gain the following benefits:

Ability Score Increase. Increase one ability score of your choice by 1, to a maximum of 20.

Gemstone Bond. Whenever you finish a long rest, you can touch a nonmagical gem worth at least 10 gp and magically bind it to you. While the bound gemstone is on your person, you gain proficiency in one skill associated with that gem's color, as shown in the Gem Skills table. If the gem has multiple colors, you choose which color applies for this property. The effect ends if you die, if the bound gemstone is more than 100 feet away from you for at least 24 hours, or if you repeat this process to bind a different gem when you finish a long rest.

Gem's Favor. When you or a creature you can see within 10 feet of you fails an ability check using the skill your bound gem grants you proficiency in, you can use your reaction to touch the gem and allow that creature to reroll the d20. They must use the new roll. If the ability check succeeds, you can't use the bound gem in this way until you finish a short or long rest.

GEM SKILLS

COLOR	SKILL
Black	Sleight of Hand or Stealth
Blue	History or Investigation
Brown	Animal Handling or Nature
Green	Perception or Survival
Pink	Persuasion
Purple	Arcana or Religion
Red	Athletics or Intimidation
Translucent	Medicine
White	Deception or Insight
Yellow	Acrobatics or Performance



GEMSTONE SPELLS

This section contains new spells that use gems as material components, suitable for player characters, antagonists, and other spellcasters in your campaign. As a GM, consider using these spells as story hooks, sending characters to either find the gemstone components or to develop the spells themselves.

The Gemstone Spells table lists these new spells, ordering them by level and denoting each spell's school of magic, the gemstone used as its material component, and which classes have access to it. At the GM's discretion, these spells can be accessible to additional classes or thematically appropriate subclasses, such as the Avarice Domain cleric, Circle of the Gilded druid, or Oath of Acquisitions paladin from Carlos Cisco's "Goldmonger Subclasses" in [ARCADIA 5](#).

AIR WALK

1st-Level Transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: S, M (a shard of raw tourmaline worth at least 10 gp, which the spell consumes)

Duration: 1 minute

You touch a creature and imbue them with the power to briefly walk on air. For the duration, at the start of each of their turns, they gain a flying speed equal to their walking speed. At the end of each of their turns, they lose this flying speed and fall if they are still aloft, unless they can stop the fall.

AMETHYST TOMB

3rd-Level Conjuration

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, M (an amethyst worth at least 100 gp)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You attempt to entomb a creature in crystal. A Large or smaller creature of your choice within range is surrounded by purple light and must make a Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the light solidifies, encasing the target in a shard of purple crystal large enough to contain them until the spell ends or the crystal shatters. While encased, the creature suffers the effects of the petrified condition with the following changes: they have vulnerability to thunder damage and are trapped in crystal instead of turned to stone. An entombed creature can be targeted by attacks and spells as normal.

The crystal shatters if the entombed creature takes 10 or more damage, or if the crystal is moved more than 10 feet in a single turn.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 4th level or higher, the duration is concentration, up to 10 minutes. When you use a spell slot of 5th level or higher, the duration is 8 hours. When you use a spell slot of 7th level or higher, the duration is 24 hours. When you use a 9th-level spell slot, the spell lasts until dispelled. Using a spell slot of 5th level or higher grants a duration that doesn't require concentration.

GEMSTONE SPELLS

LEVEL	SPELL	SCHOOL	GEMSTONE	CLASS
Cantrip	<i>Astonishing Presence</i>	Enchantment	Topaz	Bard, Cleric, Sorcerer, Warlock, Wizard
1st	<i>Air Walk</i>	Transmutation	Tourmaline	Bard, Cleric, Druid, Ranger, Wizard
2nd	<i>Rucio's Resolute Poise</i>	Illusion	Rhodochrosite	Bard, Cleric, Warlock, Wizard
2nd	<i>Soulstone</i>	Necromancy	Jet	Cleric, Druid, Warlock, Wizard
3rd	<i>Amethyst Tomb</i>	Conjuration	Amethyst	Druid, Sorcerer, Warlock, Wizard
4th	<i>Brinn's Exalted Cruiser</i>	Abjuration	Aquamarine, sapphire, or obsidian	Bard, Cleric, Druid, Ranger
4th	<i>Moonlit Transformation</i>	Transmutation	Moonstone	Bard, Cleric, Paladin, Ranger, Sorcerer, Warlock, Wizard
5th	<i>Marine Benison</i>	Transmutation	Aquamarine	Cleric, Druid, Ranger
6th	<i>Misiri's Buried Eye</i>	Divination	Tiger eye	Cleric, Druid, Wizard
7th	<i>Crystalline Barrier</i>	Abjuration	Quartz	Cleric, Druid, Wizard
8th	<i>Surge of Life</i>	Evocation	Carnelian	Cleric, Druid, Sorcerer, Wizard

ASTONISHING PRESENCE

Enchantment Cantrip

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, S, M (a chip of topaz)

Duration: 1 round

You magically project your presence to influence a creature of your choice that can see or hear you within range. The target must succeed on a Charisma saving throw or be unable to speak or communicate in any way until the end of their next turn.

BRINN'S EXALTED CRUISER

4th-Level Abjuration (Ritual)

Casting Time: 1 hour

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (a chunk of aquamarine, sapphire, or obsidian worth at least 300 gp, which the spell consumes)

Duration: 10 days

You bestow a blessing upon a vehicle you touch. The kind of vehicle determines the material component needed for this spell: aquamarine for waterborne vessels, sapphire for sky ships, and obsidian for land vehicles. For the duration, the vehicle's speed is doubled, it has resistance to nonmagical damage, and creatures occupying the vehicle suffer no penalty on ability checks made to navigate due to hazardous natural conditions, such as weather.

CRYSTALLINE BARRIER

7th-Level Abjuration

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self (15-foot radius)

Components: V, S, M (a prism carved from a single piece of translucent quartz worth at least 300 gp)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

A translucent barrier of crystalline energy manifests in a 15-foot radius around you. Until the spell ends, the barrier moves with you, centered on you. When you cast the spell, you attune the barrier to protect against one of the following damage types: acid, cold, fire, lightning, necrotic, poison, psychic, radiant, or thunder.

Creatures and objects of your choice within the barrier have immunity to the chosen damage type if the damage is from an attack, spell, or effect that originates from outside the barrier.

MARINE BENISON

5th-Level Transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 10 feet

Components: V, S, M (an aquamarine worth at least 500 gp)

Duration: 1 hour

You send a cloud of droplets to envelop a willing creature within range. For the duration, the creature can breathe underwater, gains a swimming speed of 40 feet, and can comprehend and telepathically communicate with aquatic Beasts they can see. In addition, while fully submerged, the creature has echolocation, which grants them blindsight out to a range of 60 feet. This blindsight can only detect things in the same body of water as the creature, and the creature can't benefit from the blindsight while deafened.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 6th level or higher, you can target one additional creature for each slot level above 5th.

MISIRI'S BURIED EYE

6th-Level Divination (Ritual)

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (two tiger eye gems, each worth at least 1,000 gp)

Duration: Until dispelled

You bury one of the gems you use as a material component for this spell in a patch of earth or stone large enough to hold it and keep the second gem with you. For as long as the first gem remains buried, you can cast the *scrying* spell on a location within 30 feet of the buried gem without expending a spell slot, using the second gem as the material component for the spell. Once you cast *scrying* in this way, you can't do so again until 24 hours have passed.

While the second gem is on your person, you automatically sense when a magical scrying sensor is within 30 feet of you and always know when you're targeted by divination magic. Additionally, whenever you're targeted by the *scrying* spell, you have advantage on the saving throw against it. On a successful save you can use your reaction to mislead the spell, sending the scrying sensor to a random location within 30 feet of the buried gem.

The spell ends if the first gem is moved from where it was buried or if *dispel magic* or a similar effect is successfully applied to either gem. In either case, the first gem crumbles to dust.

MOONLIT TRANSFORMATION

4th-Level Transmutation

Casting Time: 1 bonus action

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (a brooch or other heirloom adorned with a moonstone, worth at least 300 gp)

Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

You invoke the moon's power to reveal your hidden self and transform into an idealized version of you. You decide what you look like transformed, changing or enhancing as many details about your appearance as you wish, including your clothing, but you can't change your size nor dramatically alter your body type or arrangement of limbs. You gain the following benefits until the spell ends:

Moonlight Aura. Your body glows with pale moonlight, shedding dim light in a 30-foot-radius area around you.

Moonlight Weapon. A silvery weapon made of pure moonlight materializes in your hand, taking whatever form you choose. If you drop the weapon or throw it, it dissipates at the end of the turn. Thereafter, while the spell persists, you can use a bonus action to conjure it again.

You can use your action to make a melee or ranged spell attack with this weapon against a target you can see within the spell's Moonlight Aura. On a hit, the target takes radiant damage equal to $3d8 +$ your spellcasting ability modifier, and if they are a shapechanger, they instantly revert to their original form and can't assume a different form until the start of your next turn.

Moonlight Legacy. You gain one of the following magical effects when you transform, chosen by you when you cast the spell:

- Magical armor materializes around your body. Your base AC becomes $13 +$ your spellcasting ability modifier.
- Pearlescent wings appear on your back, giving you a flying speed of 30 feet.
- The spell's Moonlight Aura increases to a 60-foot radius.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 5th level or higher, the spell's Moonlight Weapon damage increases by $1d8$ for each slot level above 4th. Additionally, for every two slot levels above 4th, you can choose an extra Moonlight Legacy benefit when you transform.

RUCIO'S RESOLUTE POISE

2nd-Level Illusion

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

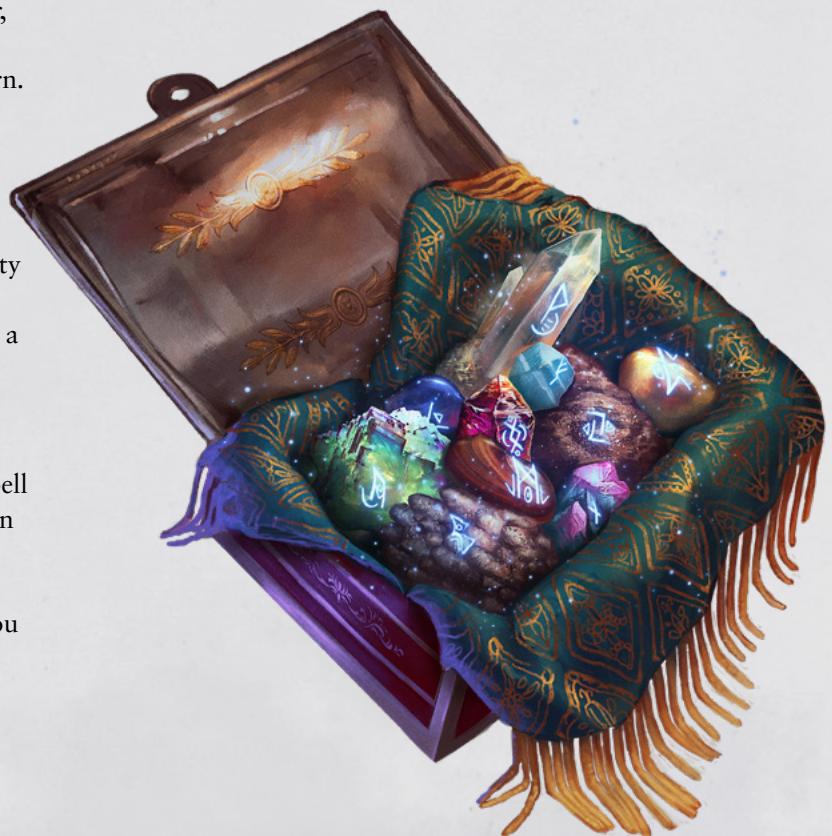
Components: V, S, M (a rhodochrosite worth at least 10 gp)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You imbue yourself with a spirit of whimsical grandeur. For the duration, you have advantage on saving throws against being frightened. In addition, whenever you take damage, that damage is reduced by an amount equal to your spellcasting ability modifier. Each time this occurs, an illusion makes it appear as if the attack, spell, or effect that damaged you instead failed to affect you. Any additional effects that accompany the damage (such as forced movement or being grappled) still occur, but the illusion causes creatures around you to rationalize those effects as something you did on purpose.

A creature who uses their action to examine you can determine the effect is an illusion with a successful Intelligence (Investigation) check against your spell save DC. If a creature discerns the illusion for what it is, the creature can see through it for the remainder of the spell's duration, though the spell's damage reduction benefit remains in effect.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, you roll $1d8$ and add the result to the amount of damage you reduce for every two slot levels above 2nd.



SOULSTONE

2nd-Level Necromancy

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: Self

Components: S, M (a jet with your name carved in it worth at least 100 gp)

Duration: 24 hours

You tether your own spirit to the gemstone used as the material component, forming a temporary bond with it. For the duration, while the jet is on your person, you have advantage on death saving throws. The spell ends early if the jet is destroyed, is more than 100 feet away from you for at least 1 hour, or if you cast the spell again using a different jet.

When you fail a saving throw against an effect that would result in you being possessed or gaining a level of exhaustion, you can choose to succeed instead and the jet crumbles to dust.

SURGE OF LIFE

8th-Level Evocation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, S, M (a blood-red carnelian worth at least 250 gp, which the spell consumes)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You bind the life force of a creature within range to the unbridled energies of creation. The target regains 1 hit point and can immediately spend one or more Hit Dice, rolling them to regain additional hit points as if they had finished a short rest.

For the duration, the creature can't die from exhaustion. Furthermore, whenever the creature would drop to 0 hit points as a result of taking damage, they instead drop to 1 hit point. Each time this occurs, you must make a concentration check to maintain concentration on this spell, as if you had taken the same amount of damage.

IMMANENT GEMS

This section introduces a new type of wondrous item: immanent gems. These magic-infused gemstones can be used as spellcasting focuses or in place of material components for spells. In your campaign world, these gems might be rare natural minerals, the work of masterful arcane gemologists, remnants of ancient technology, or something else entirely.

IMMANENT GEM

Wondrous Item, Rarity Varies (Requires Attunement)

This iridescent gem is infused with raw magical energy, filling it with infinitely folding patterns that look different at every glance. While you are holding this gem, you can use it as a spellcasting focus for your spells.

The gem has a number of charges dependent on its rarity, as shown in the Immanent Gem Rarity table, and regains all expended charges daily at dawn.

Universal Gemstone. You can use this gem to replace any gemstone material component with a gold piece cost. The maximum cost of the gemstone you can replace depends on the *immanent gem's* rarity, as shown in the Immanent Gem Rarity table. You can use the *immanent gem* in place of a material component that would normally be consumed by a spell by expending 1 charge per level of the spell. The *immanent gem* is not consumed when used in this way.

Exalted Casting. When you cast a spell using this gem as a spellcasting focus or material component, you can expend charges to enhance the spell's power. For every 2 charges you expend, the spell counts as one level higher than the spell slot you used to cast it, to a maximum of 9th level.

IMMANENT GEM RARITY

RARITY	CHARGES	MAX. REPLACEMENT COST
Common	2	100 gp
Uncommon	3	500 gp
Rare	5	1,000 gp
Very rare	7	1,500 gp

RELIGION CONSTRUCTION KIT

BEYOND DEITIES AND PANTHEONS, WHAT ELEMENTS MAKE UP A RELIGION?

by James Mendez Hodes

You already know how to create a new deity or pantheon for your own game. Each deity needs a name, alignment, domains over which they preside, and a symbol to represent them that their adherents carry. Once you have a group of deities, you connect them through mythology and history. This process is simple enough, but it doesn't answer the question that has a far greater impact on your world and player characters—what does this religion look like in everyday life?

You've probably noticed that who a real-world deity is and what they're the god of doesn't have much to do with how practitioners of that religion act. The god's nature and character do inform a religion's values and practices, but those are also shaped by the religion's history and the influence it wields in society, for better or for worse.

In the real world, there's no single element that every religion has without exception, and no religion in your campaign world has to have every element on a set list. But many share common elements, and by considering those, you can create religions with influence beyond the cleric in your party or the temple in the town. Their presence can guide how your NPCs act. You can build an authentic religion through a series of questions focused on fleshing out one of the most common—not universal—elements that almost all religions have: a community.

Without community trends and dynamics, a religion appears only when its associated deities or clergy appear. With them, religion becomes a way to create and describe characters faster and more thoroughly. In addition, religious communities seed conflict and connection into your world, just like other political factions, social movements, or cultures. GMs and players both get

more opportunities to bring their historical knowledge or personal experiences into the game.

Religious game content can be both emotionally evocative and deeply affecting, especially if you've experienced marginalization because of religion. Thinking about religious communities ahead of time helps to guide those experiences toward the positive.

You can use the Religion Creation Sheet at the end of the article (or the form-fillable version linked in the [Resources](#) section) as you follow these step-by-step instructions to create a religion of your own.

RESPONSIBLE REAL-WORLD INSPIRATIONS

It's almost impossible to create a religion entirely whole cloth. Our ideas about religion almost all come from somewhere—usually somewhere in the real world. Religions in printed game materials can, and often do, reflect concepts derived from real-world religion. The [System Reference Document](#) even contains a list of real-world religious pantheons, their deities, and those deities' purviews.

Accordingly, you might find it easier to make up a new fictional religion by basing it intentionally and directly on a real one. That's actually a good idea. It can be easiest to start with a religion you practice, one which many people you know practice, or a historical religion that you've read about extensively. You can then combine it with influences from other religions to make it fit your fictional world better. However, when you're working with touchstones from the real world, there are a few important things to avoid:

- Don't depict dangerous extremist versions of marginalized religions you don't practice.
- Don't take it upon yourself to criticize cultural trends, prejudices, and other aspects particular to a marginalized real-world group to which you don't belong.
- Remember that a systemically empowered religion in one region might be marginalized in another. Consider how different audiences in different regions might react to your work.
- Don't ever speak prayers aloud or act out religious expressions if they come from the real world. Just say your character's doing the thing without doing it in character.
- Don't base fictionalized versions of a religion on harmful misconceptions which originate outside that religion. For example, if the real-world enemies of a certain religion say that religion's members drink human blood, don't make the fictional version of that religion full of vampires.

Remember that even if you're operating in a fictional world, real-world people have experiences that intersect with elements of your game. You have the power to create anything, so create something that makes members of marginalized religions feel safe in your world. Employing safety tools in your game is always a good idea! Speaking of which ...

RELIGION AND SAFETY

Players frequently have conflicting access needs concerning religion. Some who belong to marginalized religions may have experienced violence or repression targeting themselves or their places of worship. Other players may have been pressured to adopt belief systems they don't agree with or have experienced other forms of systemic oppression through religious instruction or indoctrination. Others may not have grown up around intense religious experiences, positive or negative, and may not understand why topics that seem casual or academic to them elicit such strong reactions from other players.

One common solution to religion-related problems is to avoid talking about them. That probably won't work if you use this article. Make sure to discuss religious content with your players before introducing it—a session zero is a great place to establish content guidelines for religion and other intense topics, such as violence, romance, and systemic oppression. Find out whether your players want to avoid certain kinds of religious content. Are they okay with religion appearing?

What about conflict based on religion? If religious NPCs tell them what to think or do, would that stress them out? Leave space for players to explain their answers if they choose to, but don't press them to overshare about rough topics beyond what they need to establish clarity.

Use this process to establish clear, explicit guidelines on how players approach and present religion. Apply these guidelines to the process below and your game. During the game itself, when you approach situations or themes that players have brought up during your session zero, use safety tools (such as the ones found in the [MCDM Tabletop Safety Toolkit](#)).

You may find your players' creative preferences incompatible with one another. It's too bad if that happens, but it's better that you found out now before you filled a game with clerics, paladins, and deities.

CREATING A RELIGION

These step-by-step instructions will guide you through creating your own religion. Sentences in bold are specific instructions that correlate to the Religion Creation Sheet.

WHY BOTHER?

As you go through this article, keep one overarching question in your mind: **Why would people practice this religion?** This question is important for both good-aligned and evil-aligned religions. If you're creating an antagonistic religion in part to criticize the systemic oppression or harm enshrined in some real-world belief systems, it's easy to forget that people get emotional, financial, and physical benefits from their religions. These benefits often aren't clear or obvious to people outside the community, and if you're trying to call out a harmful or oppressive structure, either in character or out, understanding the ways people feel like they need this institution can be crucial to helping them get out.

The benefits people get from religion are varied. Doctrinal considerations—that is, whether you think a religion's outlook is spiritually “correct” or the best choice for you—aren't the only ones, and for some people, they might not even come up. A desire for social belonging, or access to social and economic spaces and support networks, has motivated the conversion of entire nations in our history. Irrational or coercive reasons also exist, but religion gives genuine benefits in terms of emotional support, community membership and networking, access to “third spaces” outside home and work, artistic expression, and backing for family endeavors like marriage or childcare.



EXAMPLE RELIGION: THE WHY

Throughout the article, I will use these sidebars to create an example religion alongside you, showing the process from beginning to end. First, I'm going to answer the most important question: why bother?

I want to introduce tiefling characters who have different cultural signifiers from the usual Middle Eastern and Abrahamic demon imagery I tend to see associated with them. During a visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, I see some Tibetan Buddhist paintings and statues of demonic-looking monsters who are enlightened protectors, despite their fearsome appearance. Researching them, I learn about how Buddhism spread through Mongolia after the Yuán emperors patronized Tibetan missionaries. I like the idea of a religion spreading because heads of state converted to it and made it fashionable, so there's "why bother?" answered. After a powerful demon converted to this faith and committed themselves to piety and wisdom, tieflings flocked to the demon's banner. Come for the social prestige, stay for the inner peace and enlightenment.

ORIGIN AND SCOPE

Every religion began somewhere, but not all of them stay there, and some grow until the influence of their birthplace is barely perceptible. The way a religion changes

when it travels or expands beyond its origin can be dramatic and influential, resulting in the creation of what is essentially a different sect.

Decide now whether the religious community on which you're focusing is a local religion, a world religion, or a mix between the two. As with any religious topic, exceptions to those categories exist, but you can imagine them as two opposite poles. This choice has implications for its relationship to the region where your religion is based, as well as its priorities and emphases within the community and concerning outsiders.

LOCAL RELIGION

For this article's purposes, a **local religion** is one practiced mostly by the people who live in the area of its origin. These religions have shrines, figures, or beliefs intimately tied to the land from whence they came. Individual trees, mountains, rivers, or ancient structures might have idiosyncratic gods and spirits, or be themselves sacred.

To its practitioners, a local religion often doesn't have a strong conception of membership. People don't usually think of themselves as faithful or unfaithful, though outsiders who follow other religions might have introduced the idea. Except for the clergy, worshippers don't have to profess (or even necessarily have) faith or belief in gods, wear symbols, or convert others to their practices. The religion is an implicit, accepted part of the community.

However, this dynamic might change in response to the appearance of a world religion in the local religion's space—especially if the world religion demands that its members practice it exclusively.

WORLD RELIGION

A **world religion** has spread far beyond its origins. Merchants, missionaries, or conquerors carry its stories and tenets to lands abroad. A world religion has an interest in spreading, perhaps through establishing religionists in immigrant communities or by acquiring converts in faraway lands.

World religions tend to have more clear-cut, public-facing identities than local traditions. Their practitioners identify themselves as belonging to specific religious identities, sometimes to the exclusion of other practices. They sometimes proselytize and attempt to recruit new members through missionary work.

EXAMPLE RELIGION: SCOPE

Like Tibetan Buddhism outside Tibet, the religion I'm making up is a world religion. My aforementioned demon monarch has placed their favorite priests and missionaries at the head of a fast-expanding network of temples and monasteries, making it easy for converts to join up. Missionary operations are colorful and attractive, with plenty of thought going into what we might call "branding" in 2022: easily recognizable iconography, events and services designed to bring in curious newcomers, and, of course, encouragement to support the religion financially. Priests and missionaries have to eat, too.

RELIGIOUS VALUES

Some religions use teachings, rituals and rites, and interactions with the natural or societal environment to laud, develop, or reward certain character traits in individuals. For this exercise, we can break those character traits down into six familiar options based on a creature's ability scores and explore how valuing these options influences the religion.

While not all adherents have a high ability score corresponding to their religion's values, many do. Player characters who grew up in the religion or practice it zealously might consider placing their strongest ability scores in the ones that correspond with a religion's favored values. NPCs associated with the religion likely have higher than average scores in those values.

Choose one, two, or three values below that this religion emphasizes, or roll a d6 to generate them randomly. Each entry comes with suggestions as to what traits a religion that upholds the value could have.

STRENGTH

A religion that values Strength emphasizes acts of physical service, contributing labor to public works, activities such as construction or farm work, or otherwise physically alleviating the burdens of others. Devotional practices might include martial arts or calisthenics. Athletes and warriors who practice this religion might perform public displays of devotion, dedicating goals or victories to their religion.

DEXTERITY

Practitioners of a religion that values Dexterity demonstrate their devotion through artistic pursuits such as dance, painting, or sculpture. In the mythology surrounding the belief system, trickster figures and underdogs could feature prominently.

CONSTITUTION

A religion that values Constitution tells stories about the importance of suffering for one's beliefs, extolling the virtues of martyrs who died for their beliefs or sages who underwent punishing austerities. Services run long and feature ecstatic, strenuous dances; uncomfortable seating; or taxing meditative rituals. The religion might also pass on customs concerning healthy eating, exercise, or preventative care.

INTELLIGENCE

A religion that values Intelligence encourages intellectual debate about doctrine, scripture, and the interpretations thereof. It might maintain schools or universities devoted not only to religious study, but also to other disciplines such as science and medicine.

WISDOM

A religion that values Wisdom has teachings that aren't easily grasped by logic and reason. They might incorporate riddles, paradoxes, and contradictions. Caring for sacred animals or plants or meditating in the wilderness could be important practices in such a tradition.

CHARISMA

Religious leaders in a tradition that values Charisma are big personalities, perhaps even celebrity figures who rely on stage presence, exciting preaching, and personal connections with their community to keep people coming back. Theatrical adaptations of myths and legends spread knowledge of the religion and pique potential converts' curiosity.

EXAMPLE RELIGION: VALUES

I want to pick two options that represent different, maybe even conflicting trends within the religion. Wisdom is an easy choice, as I want to maintain the Buddhist emphasis on meditation and contemplation in its fictional analog. To contrast it, I choose Charisma. After all, the demon monarch is a celebrity figure now, and converts want to be as cultured and elite as they are.

AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

Who's in charge of this religion? What formalized roles exist in its hierarchy, and what functions are they expected to fulfill for the religion's adherents? Alternatively, if the religion has no formal hierarchy,

how do participants divide tasks and responsibilities among themselves?

The organization chart of your religion could be as complex as that of any real-world hierarchy, but it doesn't have to be. It's a good idea to leave part of it undefined, as you may want to make some choices inspired by unexpected events in your campaign, but you should answer at least these questions:

- **High authority:** Who are the highest authorities in the religion? How do they hold on to power, and what are their most important responsibilities?
- **Popular authority:** Which religious people have the most contact with everyday worshippers? Who are this religion's equivalents of root doctors, village priests and ministers, and shrine keepers, and what necessary functions do they fulfill in the lives of the common people?



- **Protection:** If this religion came under attack by a hostile force, who would its leaders petition for protection? Would they go to peasant militias or a governmental power—or is the religious institution itself a source of protection via an armed self-defense force of templars or warrior monks?
- **Logistics:** Who makes sure that the religious authorities have enough food, water, shelter, and medicine? Does the religion operate businesses, beg for alms, or levy tithes to accumulate resources? Do the leaders take just enough, or do they live lavish lifestyles at the expense of others?

Write down the religion's high authority, popular authority, protection, and logistics with titles or names and short descriptions. Religions with very small memberships or strict egalitarianism might have "everyone" or "no one" as the answer to one or more of these categories. Pair each title with one or two character classes that could represent that authority. These classes allow you to create NPCs who fill those roles quickly and easily, and make it easy for players to understand who and what to expect when they appeal to or oppose someone in one of those roles. Player characters who share those classes might look to fill one of those important roles as they grow in power and responsibilities within the campaign world.

RESPONSIBILITIES BY CLASS

Let's look to real-world religions for inspiration here. While **clerics** and **paladins** are the obvious choices for classes associated with a religious institution, both have very specific sets of skills that tend to focus more on combat, spellcasting, exorcism, and supernatural healing than on preaching to and caring for a community. They make excellent chaplains and templars for embattled religions, but they might have less to do in peacetime.

In real-world religions, the class most broadly represented across many different continents and traditions is **bard**. Sacred oratory or performance and charismatic inspiration feature prominently in countless traditions. Bardic Inspiration and healing magic fit well with supporting and caring for communities. There's a prominent place for a bard in almost any religious tradition from the real world, in roles where social skills and supporting others are of great importance. Confucian [jūnzǐ](#), Mande funew, [Mevlevi Sufi](#) whirling dervishes, and Protestant youth pastors could all be bards.

Another common religious archetype is the **druid**. While the wilderness mystic in this game bears only

partial resemblance to [Celtic scholarly political and religious leaders](#) of the same name, most societies worldwide have developed local traditions focused on relationships with plants and animals. The carriers of those traditions became the linchpins of local religions. [Root doctors](#) in the Black Atlantic diaspora, Filipino [babaylan](#), or Central Asian and Siberian [shamans](#) could all be druids. The **ranger** offers a less magically focused take on similar themes, perhaps a closer match to a Shingon Buddhist [yamabushi](#); though yamabushi are usually not warriors, Japanese fiction sometimes casts them as adventurers with martial skills nonetheless.

Among the classes focused on arcane magic, the **sorcerer**, in particular in versions of the class that emphasize descent from mythical or folkloric beings, is also a common character of many world mythologies. Divine-focused sorcerers might operate outside the formal religious hierarchy as charismatic authorities unto themselves, or they might hold places of great renown inside formal structures, even passing down their offices to their descendants. **Warlocks** with relationships to deities and spirits might be in similar positions.

Finally, religions with traditions of scholarship that develop into magic might produce **wizards** in important roles. Japanese [onmyōji](#), Tibetan ngakpa, and some South Asian magicians derived from one of the Hindu religions might find the wizard class a particularly apt comparison to their roles. However, many worldwide traditions of magic are oral, which might require an alternative to the spellbook as a focus for magical power. As you create your religion, consider options other than textual records as a way to pass down information. Think about what other symbol, spellcasting focus, or item a wizard could use to record their magical knowledge and experiences.

Martial arts-focused classes like the **fighter** and **monk** might appear in religious hierarchies in security positions, though they would be less likely as common occupants of positions with administrative or social sway. **Rogues** with investigative skills might appear as inquisitors or guardians watching over communities in danger. The **barbarian** is a tough choice for a religious character, since there's an oft-uncomfortable overlap between the barbarian's Rage feature and harmful stereotypes of religious extremism. Battle trances as a religious or pseudo-religious practice certainly exist, and have existed in the past, but I'd recommend reflavoring the rage to represent deep focus and concentration rather than incoherent wrath.

EXAMPLE RELIGION: AUTHORITIES

The highest authorities are the demon monarch himself and the missionaries who originally converted them. These are personable, urbane figures who make friends and connections easily. They could be bards easily, but warlocks would be even more fun. I like the idea of a warlock contacting their patron and finding the Fiend quietly meditating or struggling to understand a complicated treatise on religious doctrine. I end up choosing bard for “high authority”—maybe the demon monarch himself is a bard—and warlock for “popular authority” to represent the missionary leaders.

What about protection and logistics? We’re too upright and respectable so far, so I decide rogues are in charge of both those responsibilities. There’s a network of rogues who fulfill community support roles, taking care of common believers but also leaning on them hard for tithes, kind of like the legendary ancestors of various real-world crime syndicates which extensively use religious themes and imagery.

DEVOTIONAL PRACTICE

What do practitioners of this religion do to study its tenets, internalize esoteric concepts, and help one another? The answers to this question provide your stock answers for what worshippers are doing when the player characters run across them, or what the heroes might look for if they go to find these religionists. As with the values, you might choose to give NPC practitioners of this religion the skill proficiencies associated with their devotional practices, or tailor the skill proficiencies granted by a background to the character who worships the religion.

Choose at least two devotional practices below. To make sure your practices have some range—one should match an ability score your religion emphasizes, while the other should not.

ACROBATICS

Calisthenic practices like stretching or whirling are used as a form of meditation or prayer in religions with an Acrobatics devotional practice. These rituals might figure prominently in the training of warrior monks or templars.

ANIMAL HANDLING

A religion with an Animal Handling devotional practice reveres certain sacred animals that must be protected and cared for. Alternatively, sacrificing animals to deities (and then feasting on them as a congregation afterward) features prominently in rituals and festivals.

ARCANA

There’s a magical tradition, perhaps a scholarly one, attached to a religion with an Arcana devotional practice. Magicians develop magical power through study of texts, training with teachers, memorization, and application of principles. Alternatively, the religion might teach practitioners to beware of magicians and study their methods to protect against them.

ATHLETICS

A religion with an Athletics devotional practice is closely intertwined with the performance of popular sports. Some sports may be considered religious rituals, performed at temples or in honor of the gods. Even in secular sports, athletes commonly make religious gestures when they score goals or win matches, or use the celebrity of their role to profess their faith and its virtues. Congregations maintain sports teams as a way to recruit and entertain new (especially younger) believers.

DECEPTION, INVESTIGATION, SLEIGHT OF HAND, STEALTH

A religion with a Deception, Investigation, Sleight of Hand, or Stealth devotional practice has experienced persecution, marginalization, and violence. The belief system might be outlawed, requiring its practitioners to conceal their true allegiance from inquisitors, law enforcement, or bigots.

HISTORY

A religion with a History devotional practice has narratives about its long past and how its beliefs have influenced world affairs and vice versa, which feature prominently in religious education or sermons. The religion might have an important scholastic tradition, founding and maintaining universities or seminaries.

INSIGHT

Religious practitioners of a tradition with an Insight devotional practice frequently discuss their feelings and emotional state with one another or with clergy in settings that resemble individual or group therapy sessions. Religionists counsel one another through conversation or shared study of texts. Alternatively, it might be a marginalized religion as described in “Deception, Investigation, Sleight of Hand, Stealth,” where individuals must make quick judgments about whether they can trust people they meet.

INTIMIDATION

Religious figures in stories from a belief system with an Intimidation devotional practice are depicted standing up to monsters, evil spirits, or bigots through the strength of their character and the force of their religious

convictions. Alternatively, the religion might have widespread bad habits of intolerance or bigotry itself.

MEDICINE

Religious figures from a tradition with a Medicine devotional practice work as village or itinerant healers or maintain public hospitals.

NATURE, SURVIVAL

Religions with a Nature or Survival devotional practice teach congregants to live in harmony with nature. They build shrines to venerate gods who dwell in trees or rock formations. Sacred hunts or ingredients for herbal cures frequently call practitioners out into the wild. Ascetics undergo meditation or punishing austerities in beautiful but harsh natural settings, such as deserts or mountaintops.

PERCEPTION

Religions with a Perception devotional practice might practice observational techniques as a form of meditation. They might also be secretive, using coded or concealed signs and symbols to indicate safe havens or places of worship to participants without alerting oppressive or inquisitive forces. On the other hand, those oppressive or inquisitive forces might hone their Perception to serve a carceral power structure within their own religion.

PERFORMANCE

Religious art figures prominently in a tradition with a Performance devotional practice, whether it be choirs, oratorios, ecstatic dance, puppet reenactment of religious stories, or poetry recitals.

PERSUASION

A religion with a Persuasion devotional practice maintains an important tradition of intellectual debate or public preaching. These discussions and sermons might concern the finer points of doctrine, or be aimed at justifying the religion to potential converts or intolerant outsiders.

RELIGION

A belief system with a Religion devotional practice exists in a setting where many other religions are present, and practitioners are used to interacting with people from different denominations or belief systems. The tradition also might not be practiced exclusively—its worshippers might follow one or more other religions at the same time.

EXAMPLE RELIGION: PRACTICES

I know one of my choices has to connect to either Wisdom or Charisma, and the other should not. I'd like both of these choices to add something nonobvious based on what I've come up with so far, so I opt for Animal Handling and Athletics. The former will represent an animal the religion sees as poised, peaceful, and wise. Since a lot of the players in my game like mounted combat, I go with horses. Athletics represents popular tiefling athletes who have used their renown to advertise their religious convictions.

PERSONAL HABITS

Many religions have rules about how individual believers should act, which come from any number of sources and have any number of justifications, ranging from scripturally or divinely mandated behaviors to simple fashions or trends that became nearly universal among practitioners. Those habits aren't necessarily consistent. For example, if a religion's scriptures mandate ten behaviors, it's quite probable that only half of those behaviors are common or even known among practitioners. The purposes of these behaviors can also be extremely diverse: to signal membership to other believers, to remind oneself of one's commitment to a religion, to adhere to specific standards of modesty or cleanliness, or to encourage a certain kind of thought.

Regardless of their stated origin and purpose, these habits reinforce an individual's sense of belonging to something bigger and more comforting than themselves. In the context of a roleplaying game, these habits are a quick way to signal to other players that a certain character practices a religion. They might also become plot points. The characters could identify a religious NPC from their dietary restrictions at a tavern, or exhort a villain to change their ways by calling out the fact that they have diverged from some basic habit of their belief system.

Create one or two habits for most of the categories below. On your list of habits, note whether the habit is broadly, moderately, or narrowly followed.

SPEECH OR WRITING

Speech and writing habits are rituals a practitioner follows or taboos they avoid when communicating with others, such as the following example behaviors:

- Never spell out the name of your deity or a great adversary in writing.
- Greet others by saying the word "Peace."
- Dedicate every text to your deity with a calligraphic inscription.

FOOD

Food habits include rituals a practitioner follows at mealtimes, restrictions on which foods should or should not be eaten (at all times or in specific situations), or guidelines for food preparers such as farmers, butchers, and chefs. The following behaviors are examples of food habits:

- When food is sacrificed to the gods, let the neediest eat first at the subsequent feast.
- Avoid eating the flesh of certain animals.
- Begin every meal with a group prayer while holding hands.

PERSONAL APPEARANCE

Personal appearance habits govern a religionist's hygiene or choices about dress, accessories, or grooming to indicate their convictions to others. The following behaviors are examples of personal appearance habits:

- Cover your arms and legs when in public.
- Grow your hair into long dreadlocks.
- Wear an amulet around your neck with protective inscriptions and charms inside.

HOME

Home habits have to do with the architecture, decoration, and organization of one's living space, as well as how to behave toward household members or guests. The following behaviors are examples of home habits:

- Never refuse hospitality to a stranger who comes in peace.
- Display no art that depicts a human or animal.
- Place a shrine to the god of liminal spaces by your door.

RELATIONSHIPS

Relationship habits dictate how practitioners behave toward others. These habits might change based on the other person's religion, how you know them, or their social status relative to you. The following behaviors are examples of relationship habits:

- Go to obnoxious lengths to pay for your dining companions' meals at restaurants, if you can afford it.
- Speak straightforwardly, without lies or ornamentation.
- Never physically touch others in public unless they're family members.

EXAMPLE RELIGION: HABITS

For personal appearance, I like the idea of horn decorations. Maybe the tieflings wrap their horns in cloth inscribed with scriptural quotations? I think those would look very cool, and my players are into the idea, so I write it down. For the home, I'd like to call back to the visual art I saw in the museum that inspired this whole line of thinking, so I write down that believers are expected to have a small statue or wall hanging depicting a religious figure or a scene from a parable displayed by the door of their dwelling. For relationships, I like the idea of something that represents a peaceful outlook, the same way a handshake indicates that one has no weapons up their sleeve. Actually, maybe it is a handshake—a double-handed handshake, maybe held for a little longer than most standard handshakes in this setting.

SACRED SPACES

What places in the world are set aside for religious practice? Choose one or more and list them on the Religion Creation Sheet. Sacred spaces fall into two categories: places of particular importance to the religion, and places commonly found within many religious communities. Choose a couple of options from each of the tables below for inspiration and record them on your sheet. If you can't decide, roll a d10!

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATIONS

d10	LOCATION
1	The birthplace of a deity or great religious leader
2	The first place made when the earth was created
3	A route a great prophet took while traveling to retrieve a sacred item or fleeing oppressors
4	The site of a great battle where many religionists were martyred
5	The temple where the world leader of the religion has their office
6	The temple where an oracle receives visions and dispenses prophecies
7	A mountain carved into the image of a cultural hero, frequently visited by pilgrims
8	The grave site of a great monarch, elaborately decorated and filled with treasures, now frequented by both pilgrims and tourists
9	The place where a great miracle occurred, with some natural formation that is the result of the miracle
10	The bones of a giant or monster slain by a religious hero

COMMON RELIGIOUS EDIFICES

d10	EDIFICE
1	A public square bordered with carved pillars depicting stylized faces of deities
2	A cave with recesses that hide a statue of a seated sage carved out of the cave rock
3	A storefront or other small commercial building with seats and a podium to function as a temple
4	An ancient tree, grove, or standing stone that is the abode of a god or spirit
5	A roadside shrine with a small stone image of a guardian figure adorned with flowers and gifts from visiting devotees
6	A grand marble-and-stone edifice filled with art, the result of vast financial investment and decades of hard labor
7	A community kitchen where volunteers and clergy serve meals or sacrificed food to anyone who visits, regardless of their religious background
8	A covered indoor training space with state-of-the-art sprung wood floors or enclosed courtyards, ideal for practicing dance or combat
9	A neighborhood school filled with scrolls and ancient texts, sometimes used for solemn study and other times basically a daycare
10	A lonely tower with a lime pit where the remains of the dead are exposed to be reclaimed by the elements and carrion birds



EXAMPLE RELIGION: SACRED SPACES

I know that one important geographical location will be a portal from the material world to the plane on which the demon monarch resides. It's an important stopover point in pilgrimages, with a town and temples on both sides of the portal to serve pilgrims' needs (and take their money). I also like the idea that a missionary at one point defeated an intelligent tarrasque just by arguing with it until it died of shame or boredom, so there's an important monastery built around the tarrasque's remains.

For common religious edifices, I need some elements of the religion that aren't just about rich and powerful people, so I write down the community kitchen from the list. Moreover, if horses are sacred, there need to be ranches where the faithful come to take care of horses, muck out the stables, et cetera. Perhaps there's some disagreement in the religion about whether riding horses is an okay thing to do?

COMPLICATIONS AND SCHISMS

Going through the process described above gives you a solid foundation for a religion that will help you generate player characters, NPCs, and communities. For a small religion, practiced perhaps only in one region or by a specific ethnicity, that might be all you need. But if you look to the real world, you'll find that even the smallest religious communities often have major divisions or disagreements that split people into different denominations or sects. You could go back over your choices and make up alternatives yourself, but this is an ideal place to involve other contributors.

Once you have your Religion Creation Sheet filled out, distribute copies to your players and invite each of them to choose one subsection to modify, and to suggest the reasons why a version of your religion with a different trait might have come to be.

If you have more than a couple of players, their modifications might give rise to more denominations than you'd like to keep track of to start. Once everyone has made their changes, discuss together which ones fit together best. One player's change to the religion's scope might fit well with another's suggestion for a different set of devotional practices that better fit a plane-hopping, evangelical faith. You should end the process with at least two or three distinct subgroups within the religion, which lend an air of real-world complexity and build in a way for you to make diverse characters who each read as part of the same greater demographic.

EXAMPLE RELIGION: SCHISMS

Two of my players are available to discuss and remix the religion. One of them immediately hits on the point that this religion must have begun as a local religion somewhere, and describes an alternate version—the original version, in fact—centered on the clerics in the community where the religion's great sage originated. She wants her character to be from that region, so the character's parents can practice that version of the religion and be confused when their kid returns with weird ideas from abroad that don't match their rituals.

The other player is playing a homebrew undersea ancestry and suggests that maybe there's an aquatic version of the religion where different authority figures are in charge: druids who can take terrestrial or aquatic animal forms to liaise between worshippers above and below the waves. He mentions that he has family members who practice different versions of Christianity and argue about it, so he asks that the land and ocean versions of the religion get along so that his character doesn't remind him of his relatives at stressful holiday meals. We all agree he deserves a break, and the other player ensures that he's okay with her character and her parents clashing over religion before we finalize that part, too.

RELIGION CREATION SHEET

WHY BOTHER?

ORIGIN AND SCOPE

Local Religion ————— World Religion

RELIGIOUS VALUES

Strength Dexterity Constitution Intelligence Wisdom Charisma

AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

CLASS	HIGH AUTHORITY	POPULAR AUTHORITY	PROTECTION	LOGISTICS
Barbarian				
Bard				
Cleric				
Druid				
Fighter				
Monk				
Paladin				
Ranger				
Rogue				
Sorcerer				
Warlock				
Wizard				

DEVOTIONAL PRACTICE

Acrobatics	Animal Handling	Arcana	Athletics	Deception	History
Insight	Intimidation	Investigation	Medicine	Nature	Perception
Performance	Persuasion	Religion	Sleight of Hand	Stealth	Survival

PERSONAL HABITS

Speech or Writing

Food

Personal Appearance

Home

Relationships

SACRED SPACES

Geographical Locations

Common Religious Edifices

COMPLICATIONS AND SCHISMS

DIVINE TRIALS: HEROES OF THE STARS

A MYTHIC TRIAL TO BOND HEROES WITH UNBREAKABLE TIES

by Amber Litke and Sadie Lowry

I BELIEVE THE STARS ALIGN SO SOULS CAN FIND ONE ANOTHER.

—RENÉE AHDIEH, *FLAME IN THE MIST*

The [ARCADIA 17](#) article “Divine Trials: Glory of the Sun” introduced a series of three connected celestial trials built by divine creators to test and refine heroes. The sun trial examines the heroic penchant for pride and ambition. “Shadows of the Moon,” from [ARCADIA 19](#), asks the characters to face their own darkness.

“Heroes of the Stars” is the last of these divine trials, designed for four 5th-level characters and meant to test those characters’ bonds, cooperation, and trust. Each article provides lore and hooks, and this last article provides suggestions for tying all three adventures together.

THE STAR TRIAL

It is the nature of mortals to draw connections to things that are greater than us. We see wrath and vengeance in tempests, tranquility in mountains, and stories in the stars, reflecting ourselves in the world around us. We draw figures in constellations, telling our stories in the skies for eons to come, and using constellations and star signs to group ourselves with others. Those under lion stars call themselves brave and loyal, while those under scales band together in justice and order.

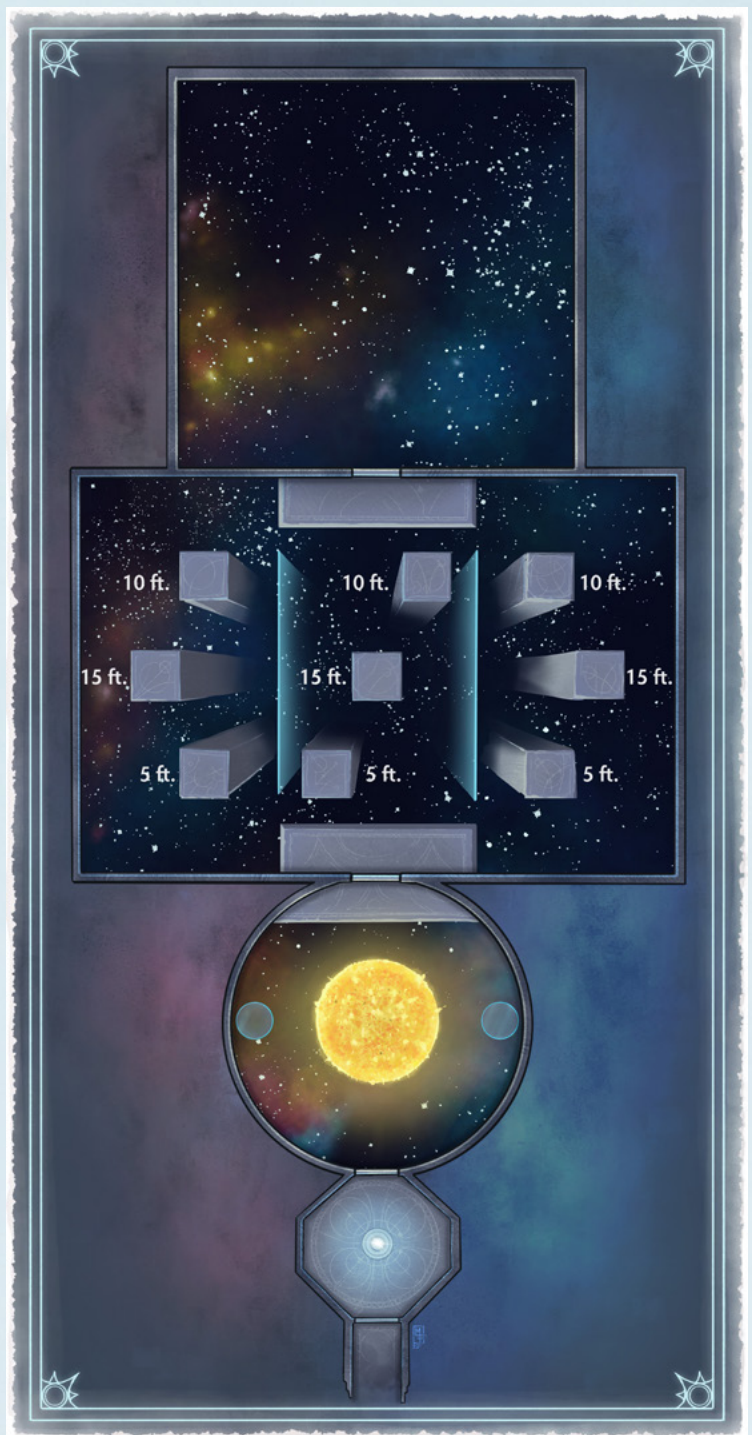
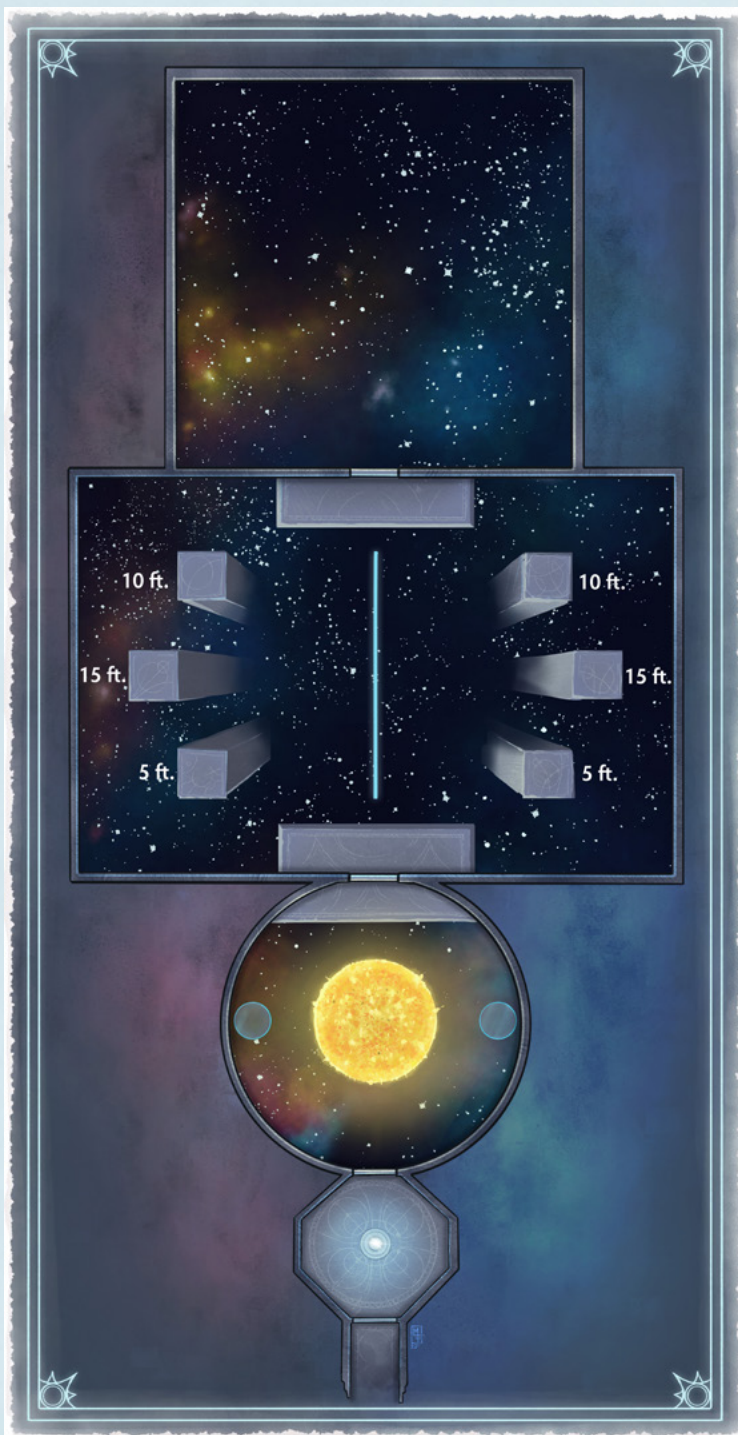
A group of heroes, originally at odds with each other, grew close through their adventures. But even as corrupt sovereigns, power-hungry liches, and conniving fiends tried to separate and tempt them with gold, power, and

promises untold, the group proved unbreakable. These heroes’ synergy and support of each other saw them fell a mighty enemy that threatened the land with bleak misery.

As a reward, a god wrote of this group’s deeds in the sky, in the form of constellations placed next to each other.¹ The god, hopeful that other adventurers might achieve the same level of commitment to heroism, tasked their angel Astraios to oversee a trial that would challenge characters. By testing and strengthening their relationships with each other, stalwart adventurers might one day stand hand-in-hand among the stars as symbols of defiance against temptation, tragedy, and evil.

As GM, you can create new lore for the star trial as you see fit. Astraios (room three) and Hiyadus (room one) are Celestial agents who might have additional connections to your campaign. Likewise, the star trial can be set up anywhere that its lessons might be of use to those with the capacity to be heroes. The entrance to the trial typically appears as an arched doorway in a remote landscape, such as the stone wall of an abandoned cathedral, the side of a shrine off the beaten path, or the sheer face of a seaside cliff. Its door is made of glittering black marble and stained glass depicting a mosaic of constellations in the night sky.

¹ This could be an adventuring party in your world’s history. Or, if your players have characters from a previous campaign, you could use them for this tale.



There are two map layouts provided—a map with two sets of pillars in Room Two: Constellatory Crossing for parties of 4–5 characters, and a map with three sets of pillars for parties of 6+ characters.

See the [Resources](#) at the end of this issue for downloadable, grid-optional versions of these maps.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

You can incorporate the star trial into your campaign with the following adventure hooks:

- A Celestial agent witnesses the characters' mistrust and quarrels, and suggests that the characters undertake the star trial before their fractured bonds invite disaster.
- Upon taking a dysfunctional group of misfit heroes under their wing, a benefactor tasks the characters with their first mission: complete the star trial.
- When bitter conflict gets one of the characters or an ally gravely injured or killed, the door to the star trial appears before the characters as a sign that they must bridge the divides that threaten to undo them.

TRIALS OF CHARACTER

The divine forces that forged the celestial trials won't be satisfied with every solution a so-called hero might use to pass the trials' challenges. Characters who circumnavigate (read: cheat) the trials by skipping them, such as with the *dimension door* spell, or by killing NPCs in non-combat challenges, find themselves redirected to the beginning of the challenge they sought to avoid with everything as it was when they first entered the room. This shouldn't dissuade creative and unconventional problem-solving—thinking outside the box is encouraged, but cheating has consequences.

If necessary, a disembodied divine voice tells heroes that their character is being tested, not their skullduggery, or gives a more direct warning. Killed NPCs don't need to remember their deaths, unless the GM wants to add a social consequence for violence, but killing a foe won't bring the characters any closer to success.

STARBOUND TETHER

The star trial relies on a new mechanic: the starbound tether. This tether is a faint line made of stars and stardust that connects two characters metaphysically. Prior to running the star trial, it is suggested that you as the GM think about which characters could be tethered together. Characters are tethered in sets of two, so in the case of an odd number of characters, consider tethering one character to an NPC companion.

This trial works best if you tether together characters who are distrustful of each other, share a mutual animosity, or don't have a meaningful relationship. That said, though, consider having a conversation with your players about which characters they would be comfortable having their own character tethered to. While the point of the star trial is to build relationships between divided characters, the comfort of your players should always be a priority.

Tethered characters are subjected to the following effect:

Starbound. Whenever a tethered creature takes damage, they instead take no damage and their tethered partner takes the damage they would have taken.

The characters shouldn't know what the tether does upfront. When the effect is triggered for the first time, consider narrating how an attack, spell, or other effect connects—but then the tether illuminates, and the character on the other side of the bond takes the damage.

ABANDONING A PARTNER

If a character intentionally leaves their tethered partner behind in a room to progress to the next room alone, Astraios's voice reprimands that character, who is judged by the stars. When the character leaves the star trial, whether after success or failure, that judgment comes to pass. For the next 7 days, whenever the character makes an ability check, attack roll, or saving throw, they must roll a d4 and subtract the number rolled from the d20 roll. This judgment can't be removed by any means.

STELLAR ANTECHAMBER

After the initial appearance of the star trial's arched doorway (or whatever other entrance you might wish to create), the characters can step through to enter the stellar antechamber that holds the first of the challenges they will face.

The antechamber is a small octagonal room with a 10-foot-high ceiling, and which features another arched doorway opposite the entranceway and a stone pedestal rising from the center of the floor. The area is filled with dim light once the characters enter. When they do so, read or paraphrase the following:

The entrance rumbles closed and vanishes, sealing you in an octagonal chamber. Pinpricks of light flicker into view across the dark stone ceiling, slowly illuminating the area in a soft golden light. Glittering words appear on the stone wall in front of you.

"Hone your soul in tests divine,
By entering this holy shrine.

This starlight test tries your accord.

What ties have you forged, and which are ignored?"

Beneath the poem, another line of text appears, shimmering into existence as though shaped by a thousand wakening stars: "Strengthen your bonds."

On the pedestal between you and the closed door across the room, a single golden star winks to life.



When any character approaches the pedestal, the star erupts to unleash a wave of energy that passes over the party. Golden starbound tethers form between pairs of creatures in the room, as determined by you (see “Starbound Tether” above).

A deep voice resounds in the mind of each character: “*Your bodies and souls are bound until this trial ends.*” The door across the room then rumbles open.

ROOM ONE: SCALES OF SYNERGY

The glass dome of this circular room’s ceiling measures 40 feet at its highest, with a magical night sky beyond filling the room with dim light. When the darkness described in the read-aloud text falls, not even characters with darkvision or the ability to see through magical darkness can see through it.

The door vanishes behind you, leaving you in a chamber set with two translucent floating disks and another doorway directly across from you. The domed glass ceiling of this circular chamber reveals a vast night sky beyond its many panes. That sky swirls with stars bound together as constellations of mythic and folkloric creatures, with the occasional shooting star hurtling across the firmament.

At the center of the chamber, a massive dragon whose form is seemingly made up of shimmering stars fixes you with glowing eyes. “To love is to know,” they announce. “To know is the key. We start here—with what you know.”

Darkness momentarily overtakes the room, and when light waxes again, the floor is gone. You stand on one of the translucent disks, whose thin, glass-like surface is all that stands between you and a burning star below you. The disk smolders with sweltering heat as the dragon stretches out on a ledge before the door. Across the room, a faint golden tether shimmers between you and the figure standing on the other disk across the void.

When the darkness falls, the party is magically divided so that each character sees only their tethered partner across the room. You will run this room one pair of tethered characters at a time, using the guidelines in the “Preparing This Room” sidebar below.

Hiyadus (HI-yay-dus, they/them) is a constellation dragon, using the **young brass dragon** stat block but appearing to have their body filled with stars. To each pair of tethered characters, the dragon explains that this room’s challenge is a simple one: the characters will be asked about each other, and they must answer correctly to progress.

MIND THE GAP

The point of the challenge in this chamber isn’t simply to reach the door—the gap and the bridges are symbols. But for players or characters who might not see it that way and have access to flight, teleportation, or some other means to move directly from a disk to the doorway, you have a few options.

At your discretion, you can nullify all flight and teleportation in the room, clarifying that answering the questions, not crossing the gap, is the win condition. You can also let the characters reach the ledge before answering the questions, only to have Hiyadus remind them that they must answer the questions before the door will open. You can also re flavor the challenge, so that the characters are in magic bindings or the equivalent of a *forcecage* spell, and the only way to free each other is to answer all the questions correctly.

TO LOVE IS TO KNOW

You can ask each character individual questions (such as “Character X, what is character Y’s greatest fear?”), or you can ask a pair of tethered characters the same question at the same time (such as “What is your tethered partner’s greatest fear?”). Each time a character answers a question correctly, the translucent disc they stand on extends toward their tethered partner, slowly building a bridge meant to meet in the middle of the chamber. Incorrect answers don’t advance the bridge—but at your discretion, blatantly wrong answers or insults toward the other character might shatter part of the bridge, hindering a character’s progress.

It takes a total of six correct answers for the two sides of the bridge to meet, whether in the middle of the chamber (with three correct answers from each character) or closer to the character with the fewest correct answers. Hiyadus might remark on such a character’s seeming lack of concern for their companions if the bridge doesn’t meet in the middle.

You can use the following sample questions in this test, or can use them as inspiration for creating questions that best fit your characters:

- What does the other character most deeply fear?
- What does the other character take great pride in?
- What does the character greatly desire?
- What is an activity the character finds joy in?
- Who does the character care most for?
- What has the character greatly suffered?
- What would the character change about themselves given the chance?
- Who does the character hate the most?

PREPARING THIS ROOM

In advance of running this adventure, it can be useful for you as the GM to ask the players Hiyadus's questions about their own characters ahead of time, so that the flow of questioning during play isn't disrupted. Have the players give you the answers before the session, and make a list to keep track of them. Some questions use language such as "deeply," "greatly," or "most," which is meant to make characters hone in on specific answers rather than generalities. However, in the event of multiple right answers, any one answer is acceptable. For example, if Orvi the bard is afraid of spiders, clowns, and failure, the dragon needs to be given only one of those options.

If a character guesses something that isn't listed but is a reasonable answer, their tethered partner can determine if the answer applies. For example, if Tibault the fighter says that Orvi is proud of her good memory, Orvi might realize that yes, she *is* proud of that, and she's surprised that Tibault noticed. Hiyadus counts this answer as correct, complimenting Tibault for observing his companions well.

Normally, the characters shouldn't make ability checks to find answers to the questions put to them, because the bonds between the characters as the players perceive them are pivotal to this trial. But for groups who are more into rolling dice than getting deep, a character who succeeds on a DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check can get a hint from the other character's player as to what the answer might be.

- What is the character's favorite food, color, or weather?
- What does the other character think about you?

When the bridge connecting the two disks is complete, Hiyadus is satisfied. They stand up and move to the side of the door as the glass bridge magically branches off and extends to the ledge where the dragon waits, creating a path to the exit.

After this trial has been run for all the characters, those characters appear together again on the ledge as the door automatically opens, allowing them to proceed to the next challenge.

DOING WELL ... OR NOT SO WELL

If a pair of tethered characters gets every question right, Hiyadus gives them a boon. In room two, each character can give themselves advantage on one ability check.

At your discretion, if a pair of characters get three questions wrong, the glass disks and any bridge extended between them crack as a warning. After six incorrect answers, the disk and any completed bridge shatter. Each character plummets into the burning star below them, taking 21 (6d6) radiant damage and 7 (2d6) fire damage as the star flares and they are consumed in light. Additionally, the characters are starcursed, with each taking a -1 penalty to saving throws for the remainder of the trial.

The characters are then teleported to the ledge with Hiyadus, who looks at them disapprovingly before soaring upward through the glass ceiling and into the darkness beyond, leaving them alone. The characters join their fellow party members in passing into the next room, but the party is no longer eligible to receive the *wings of flying* reward at the end of the adventure.

The disks and bridges also shatter if the characters are antagonistic to each other (cracking first as a warning). Characters who plunge into the star as a result take the same damage as above, as do characters who willingly step off a disk to avoid the challenge.

ROOM TWO: CONSTELLATORY CROSSING

Once the final pair of tethered characters finishes the challenge of the first room, all the characters enter this room, but are divided as tethered pairs to either side of a shimmering barrier (see "Dividing Wall"). Read or paraphrase the following:

Beyond the door stands a cluster of flat-topped structures floating in a starry void—divine architecture suspended within a celestial cosmos with no end. Rectangular stone pillars jut up from the darkness at varying heights. A broad platform across the empty expanse mirrors the one you stand on, and is set with an arched doorway. Nothing save the stars surrounds these isolated structures, but tempestuous winds swirl scathing stardust around you, even as meteors hurtle above and below.

A booming voice echoes across the void: "Each set of bound souls must cross their own path of pillars. Together, you must stand tall upon each. Only then will the way forward open to you."

This chamber's ceiling stretches 200 feet above the platforms and the bridge of pillars, and its floor is an endless void. The night sky illuminates the room with dim light.

To pass through this area, each pair of tethered characters must travel across a set of three pillars to reach the far platform and the next doorway. Alongside the physical challenge, the characters are tormented atop the pillars and tempted to betray their partners. As this challenge has a timed component, it's helpful to keep track of turns and have each pair of tethered characters take their actions before moving to the next characters.

DIVIDING WALL

As soon as the booming voice falls silent, an immobile, faintly shimmering barrier rises to gently push each pair of tethered characters toward one set of pillars, which become the path those characters must take across the chamber. The characters can see each other and faintly hear each other through the wall, which stretches across the room from one platform to the other, and extends from the top of the ceiling down into the void as far as the characters can fall. No creature can physically pass through the wall aside from the constellation griffon (see "Stellar Terror"). The wall is immune to damage, can't be dispelled or destroyed, can't be bypassed with teleportation magic, and extends into the Ethereal Plane to block ethereal travel through it. However, the wall doesn't block spells or attacks with ranged or reach weapons by characters wanting to target the griffon or another creature through the wall.

THREE OR MORE PAIRS

The map sets out two pillar paths for two sets of tethered characters. If you are running this adventure for a larger party, simply add more sets of pillars and dividing walls between them as necessary, with the walls shunting characters along the platform as necessary.

CROSSING THE PILLARS

The pillars are spaced in irregular lines and have their tops at different heights relative to the starting and ending platforms (as noted by the height markers on the map). Whenever a pair of tethered characters are standing on the same pillar at the same time, that pillar activates and starts to glow softly. The door on the far platform opens when the last of the pillars has been activated.

As normal, a character can move 10 feet across a pillar, then make a long jump that covers a number of feet equal to their Strength score. The nature of the gravity in the chamber means that jumping from a lower area to a higher area (or vice versa) is calculated by

simply adding the horizontal and vertical distances. For example, going from the platform to the first pillar is 10 feet horizontally and 5 feet up, for a total 15-foot jump. Likewise, jumping from the second pillar to the lower third pillar is 10 feet horizontally and 5 feet down, for a total 5-foot jump.

If a character can't clear the distance between pillars by making a normal jump, they must succeed on a Strength (Athletics) check with a DC equal to 10 + the number of feet their jumping distance can't clear. For example, a character with Strength 8 who needs to jump 15 feet must succeed on a DC 17 check.

If a character fails a check to make a longer-than-normal jump, they can attempt a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw. On a successful save, they grab onto the pillar 30 feet below the height of the pillar they jumped from, and can climb back up the smooth stone with a successful DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check. On a failed save, the character falls into the void, descending 500 feet into endless darkness each turn. This fall continues until the character's tethered partner uses an action to save them (as described in "Stopping a Fall"), until all the characters fall and are unable to save each other, or until any remaining characters are defeated by the constellation griffon (see "Resolving the Crossing").

KEEPING MOVING

Once both characters reach the top of a pillar to activate it, they have 1 minute to reach the next pillar before the pillar they stand on collapses. At the 30-second mark, the pillar starts ominously quaking. At 1 minute, the pillar collapses, with any creatures standing on it falling into the void.

STOPPING A FALL

If a character falls into the void, their tethered partner has a chance to help them. That partner can use an action to expend one Hit Die and flood the tether with magic, instantly pulling the falling character into an unoccupied space on the pillar or platform closest to them. A character can use this action even while falling through the void, allowing two falling characters to save each other.

Each time a character uses this action, the constellation griffon regains hit points using its Celestial Renewal trait (see the stat block). If a character runs out of Hit Dice, you might decide that they can expend a spell slot, lose one or more uses of a class feature, or gain one level of exhaustion to take this action. In such cases, the griffon still regains hit points by rolling a die equal to a character's Hit Die, even if a Hit Die is not expended.

PILLAR OBSTACLES

Each time a pair of tethered characters activates a pillar, stars flare crimson in the sky above, triggering a chaos constellation meant to test the characters' resolve and camaraderie before they move on to the next pillar. Choose or roll for an event on the Chaos Constellation table, avoiding or rerolling duplicates for a tethered pair of characters, and alternating which character is targeted if the event requires a target.

When the first pair of tethered characters reaches their first pillar, a **constellation griffon** manifests to harass all the characters during their crossings, as described at "Stellar Terror" below.

When each pair of tethered characters reaches the top of their third pillar, they face a difficult choice laid down for them at "Glittering Temptation" below.

CHAOS CONSTELLATION

d6	EVENT
1	Falling Star. A falling star plummets onto the pillar, forcing each creature on the pillar to make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 7 (2d6) fire damage and 7 (2d6) radiant damage and is knocked prone. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't knocked prone. The pillar begins quaking immediately from the impact, and collapses 30 seconds later if not already closer to collapse.
2	Heavenly Burden. The weight of the cosmos bears down upon one of the characters, vast and monumental. The character must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or have their speed halved until they are subject to a <i>lesser restoration</i> spell, a <i>dispel magic</i> spell, or similar magic, or until they reach the ending platform in this room.
3	Void Whispers. A horrifying, unknowable entity speaks to a character from across the void. The character must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened of the surrounding void, preventing them from jumping to the next pillar. This effect lasts until another creature uses an action to talk the character out of their fear.
4	Cosmic Force. A character becomes locked in a battle of physical will against an unseen force, and must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or become grappled by the force (escape DC 18). If the character succeeds on the saving throw or escapes the grapple, the force dissipates. This DC is lowered by 1 for each round another creature spends trying to help free the grappled creature, whether by using the Help action or through another method.
5	Astral Distortion. The surrounding cosmos distorts in aberrant and unfathomable ways in the eyes of a character. The character must succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw or be able to take only an action or a bonus action on each of their turns, not both. This effect lasts until the character is subject to a <i>lesser restoration</i> spell, a <i>dispel magic</i> spell, or similar magic, or until they reach the ending platform in this room.
6	Transcendent Visions. A character is overcome by visions of their greatest desires. The character must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma saving throw or become charmed by the void until another creature uses a bonus action to talk them out of it. While charmed in this way, a character believes that what they desire most is within the void, and attempts to walk off the edge of the pillar to reach it.

STELLAR TERROR

Once the first pair of tethered characters reaches the top of their first pillar, a **constellation griffon**—a great flying creature whose body is seemingly filled with stars—manifests above the pillars.

The voice booms once more as a griffon seemingly made of stars unfurls in splendor at the center of the room. "The guardian shall weigh your worth as you cross. Climb together, fight together, and create a bond worthy of the stars!"



The griffon divides their attention between each group of characters in the room, either harassing them equally or prioritizing characters who are having the easiest time with the physical crossing or the chaos constellations, at your discretion. If the griffon is reduced to 0 hit points, they don't die or disappear—rather, the stars that make up their form dim, and they remain as an observer to the remainder of the crossing.

GLITTERING TEMPTATION

When each pair of tethered characters activates their last pillar, a disembodied voice individually asks each character if they want to be written in the stars and remembered forever as a hero. Alternatively, the voice can offer something a character wants desperately. You're their GM—you know how to tempt the characters best. Rather than glory and renown, this could be riches, power, or a small miracle. Keep in mind, though, that the character won't actually receive what's promised, so try not to pick something that fulfills a character's foremost goal or would be crushing to not receive.

The price a character must pay for gaining their desire is simple: leave their tethered partner behind. The unseen entity assures each character that they will open the door for them, acting in their partner's stead. Should either of the characters accept the offer, the pillar beneath them collapses and plunges both characters into the

void—with the characters unable to use their actions to save each other as described in "Stopping a Fall" above.

If all the remaining characters participating in the trial finish the crossing and reach the far platform, any characters who fell as a result of this event are teleported to the platform and allowed to continue the trial. However, the character who succumbed to temptation and gave up their partner falls under the effects described in the "Abandoning a Partner" section near the start of this article.

RESOLVING THE CROSSING

If each pair of tethered characters activates all their pillars and reaches the ending platform without falling into the void, the arched doorway leading to the next room opens to their approach. If the characters didn't activate every pillar or if one or more falling characters remain trapped in the void, the door stays closed until those situations are rectified. The door has no visible lock and is immune to damage and magical effects.

In the event that a character somehow runs out of resources to assist a falling companion and is left alone (and thus unable to activate the remaining pillars), the constellation griffon retrieves the character's tethered partner.

If all the characters are defeated by the griffon, or if all characters fall into the void and do not—or cannot—expend resources to save each other, they fail the trial. The characters wake up outside the entrance point to the star trial and see that the door has disappeared.

CONSTELLATION GRIFFON

Large Celestial, Typically Chaotic Good

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 85 (10d10 + 30)

Speed 30 ft., fly 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Con +6, Wis +5

Skills Perception +5

Damage Resistances radiant

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, frightened

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages —

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Celestial Renewal. Whenever a character aids a tethered partner who has fallen from one of the pillars in the constellatory crossing, the griffon rolls a die of the same type as the character's Hit Die and regains a number of hit points equal to the roll.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The constellation griffon makes two attacks.

Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 4 (1d8) radiant damage. This attack is made with advantage if the target, or any object they are wearing or carrying, sheds bright light.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d10 + 4) slashing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Illuminating Star. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +6 to hit, range 60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (3d8) radiant damage, and the target sheds bright light in a 5-foot radius until the end of the griffon's next turn.

Stellar Ray (Recharge 6). The griffon unleashes a beam of stellar magic in a 40-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in the line must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 27 (6d8) radiant damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

ROOM THREE: EMPYREAL SEVERANCE

With the door from the constellatory crossing opened, the characters can pass through into the final section of the trial. The initial view into this 60-foot-high, dimly lit room is likely to be daunting, but any inspection or testing confirms that the floor is solid and can be walked on.

This enormous chamber appears to be the endless firmament. It is the night sky itself, suspended above the vastness of space where stars underfoot coalesce upward, and the constellations drawn between them shape a tall humanoid figure. Illuminated by this shimmering starlight, an armored angel stands before you, bearing long hair cascading down to frame a thick beard, and wings that fade out to become dappled stars. He is muscular and tall, his expression kind.

"Ah, I had hoped to meet you," he says warmly. "Tell me, how have you found my trials?"

Astraios (As-TRAY-ohs, he/him) is the divine arbiter of the star trial. He listens intently to any responses to his question, affirming the characters' difficulties and commiserating with their struggles. But he also redirects the conversation to talk about what they have learned or come to appreciate about each other.

When he feels the conversation has run its course, the angel prepares the final challenge of the trial. Read or paraphrase the following:

Astraios steps back and extends his hand, a massive axe suddenly manifesting in his grip.

"Let me see the strength of your bonds myself. Come! Our clash shall be one worthy of legends!"

ANGELIC SHOWDOWN

This final fight is meant to focus the characters' understanding of and dedication to each other. Astraios seeks to divide the party, hindering the characters strongly unless they take the time to aid each other. He uses his abilities and lair actions to isolate characters, then uses his Supernal Barrier bonus action to create walls and lock the characters down. His Weight of the Stars reaction and Resonant Nova action further hinder the characters' movements and communication, even as his Stellar Step bonus action and flying speed let him take the fight to individual characters, carving away at them with his astral axe.

LAIR ACTIONS AND ASSISTANCE

Astraios's lair actions are built to literally or figuratively isolate characters from each other, with each successful action forcing an isolated character's tethered partner to use an action to aid them. Characters who try to whittle Astraios down instead might quickly find themselves ensnared without help or left standing alone—and if so, the fight is working as Astraios intends.

At your discretion, you can reward characters for caring behavior, making losing actions in combat less of a concern. For example, whenever a character aids their tethered partner, you might have each character gain 1d6 temporary hit points. Likewise, when a character rises to the challenge of this trial by restoring hit points to or buffing an ally, grant that character an extra 1d6 force damage on their next damage roll as the tether shines with power. Because the characters are sacrificing actions to help their allies, additional boons shouldn't alter the balance of the fight.

Alternatively, characters who happily aid each other without needing these boons might instead earn Astraios's *wings of flying* at the end of the adventure (see "Completing the Star Trial"). In that event, a character's tether might still shine as a positive feedback loop when they lend aid to others, affirming the rightness of their actions.

LAIR ACTIONS

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Astraios can take a lair action to cause one of the following effects, but can't use the same effect two rounds in a row.

Effulgent Starlight. Astraios targets one creature he can see within 120 feet of him and engulfs that creature in glaring starlight. The creature must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be suffused with incandescent silver light for 1 minute. The affected creature sheds bright light in a 10-foot radius and can't benefit from being invisible, and any attack roll against the creature has advantage if the attacker can see them. While within 30 feet of the affected creature, the creature's tethered partner can use an action to draw the light into the tether, ending the effect.

Starstorm. Astraios targets one creature he can see within 120 feet of him, which must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 10

(3d6) radiant damage and is trapped in a vortex of starry light. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't trapped. While trapped in this way, a creature is blinded and restrained, they have total cover against attacks and other effects outside the vortex, and they take 10 (3d6) radiant damage at the start of each of Astraios's turns. While within 30 feet of a trapped creature, the creature's tethered partner can use an action to send a surge of celestial magic down the tether and dispel the starry vortex, ending the effect.

Testing Bonds. A glittering corona of light forms around one creature Astraios can see within 120 feet of him, which must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed by Astraios for 1 minute. While within 30 feet of the charmed creature, the creature's tethered partner can use their action to appeal to the charmed creature, ending this charmed condition.

ASTRAIOS, ARBITER OF THE STARS

Large Celestial, Lawful Good

Armor Class 17 (half plate)

Hit Points 133 (14d10 + 56)

Speed 30 ft., fly 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	19 (+4)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +7, Wis +7, Cha +5

Skills Athletics +7, Insight +7, Perception +10

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

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, stunned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 20

Languages all, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

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

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Astraios makes two Astral Axe attacks, or he makes one Astral Axe attack and uses Resonant Nova, if available.

Astral Axe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) force damage plus 9 (2d8) radiant damage.

Resonant Nova (Recharge 5–6). Astraios targets one creature that he can see within 60 feet of him, forcing that creature and each creature other than Astraios within 20 feet of the target to make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 14 (4d6) radiant damage and is deafened until the end of Astraios's next turn. While deafened in this way, a creature can't speak. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't deafened.

BONUS ACTIONS

Stellar Step. Astraios teleports, along with any equipment he is wearing or carrying, up to 30 feet to an unoccupied space he can see.

Supernal Barrier. Astraios summons a translucent starry wall 60 feet long, 5 feet wide, and 30 feet high at a point he can see within 60 feet of him. If the wall cuts through a creature's space when it appears, the creature is pushed to one side of the wall (Astraios's choice which side). Nothing can physically pass through the wall and it is immune to all damage, but it can be dispelled by a successful *dispel magic* spell (DC 15). The wall lasts until the start of Astraios's next turn.

REACTIONS

Weight of the Stars. When Astraios takes damage from a creature he can see within 30 feet of him, he thrusts the burden of the heavens upon that creature. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or take 5 (1d10) radiant damage and be knocked prone.



COMPLETING THE STAR TRIAL

If the characters are defeated by Astraios, they wake up outside the entrance point to the star trial and see that the door has disappeared. Each hears Astraios's warning in their mind: "Treasure your bonds, and treat each other well." The door reappears when the characters are more prepared for the trials that wait beyond it.

Astraios doesn't die when reduced to 0 hit points, since he has protection from on high. If the characters defeat him, the angel tells them happily to "trust those bonds you have demonstrated, through everything." He then gives the characters the rewards of the star trial: a *ring of shooting stars* and a +1 *weapon* of your choice.

If the characters treated each other well and earnestly tried to help each other, Astraios also praises their love for each other and additionally rewards them with *wings of flying*. With a warm smile, he says he hopes to see them captured in constellations someday.

EXPANDING THE STAR TRIAL

To turn this trial into a longer adventure, consider adding these trials and complications before the encounter with Astraios (or create your own):

- Within a field of stars and foggy nebulae, the characters are confronted by and must overcome visions of their tethered partners' fears or regrets.
- An adventurer (use the **veteran** stat block) is found cowering in a corner, claiming they were abandoned by their tethered partner during another party's trial. This adventurer, actually an agent of the trial, follows a pair of tethered characters and slyly tries to drive a wedge between them, encouraging conflict and paranoia.
- Seeing a pair of tethered characters in conflict, a divine agent shatters their tether—meaning they can't progress in the trial without it. To reform the connection between themselves, the once-tethered characters must truly reconcile or come to an understanding.

CONCLUSION

If the characters don't already know of the sun trial and the moon trial, Astraios explains the setup of the trials to them. He keeps their full details secret, but reveals that the sun trial is about the characters tempering their ambitions, while the moon trial is about each character facing their true self. Astraios also doesn't reveal how or where to find the other two trials. Instead, he smiles mysteriously, saying, "Fear not. Such greatness will come when you are most in need of it."

The angel then snaps his fingers, teleporting the characters to the place where they entered the star trial. The arched doorway has vanished, awaiting the next heroes ready to challenge the trial.

CONNECTING THE TRIALS

With all three trials now published, GMs have the option of playing them as a connected set of challenges. Each trial adventure takes one to two sessions and provides social encounters, combat, and puzzles. They are easy to run as standalone adventures, and can be quickly customized. The entrance to each trial can be set anywhere, their aesthetics can be tweaked, and their themes are universal.

For GMs who want to run all three trials, the themes of each can help determine which sequence of trials will create the greatest impact at your table. The following example orders and the arcs created by them can provide inspiration:

- **Sun, Moon, Stars.** The characters shed their abrasive pride and acknowledge their flaws. They then build better relations with their companions, having laid themselves bare.
- **Sun, Stars, Moon.** The characters set their pride aside and forge bonds of companionship, then lean on and prove those connections when their flaws are revealed.
- **Stars, Moon, Sun.** The characters bond with their companions before putting those bonds to the test when their worst selves are revealed. They then affirm their place and purpose as defined by those bonds, rather than by individual merit.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

The following adventure hooks give a few examples of ways to incorporate all three celestial trials into a campaign:

- A solar has a mission of grave importance in the Lower Planes for the characters, but must test their resolve to ensure they won't succumb to temptation in evil realms.
- A sphinx who guards a large collection of ancient knowledge and relics needed by the characters refuses access to anyone who hasn't passed the trials.
- A would-be benefactor doesn't like the cut of the characters' collective jib. The dysfunctional party members must succeed in the celestial trials to earn the benefactor's patronage.

CHARACTER PROMPTS

When preparing to run the trials, consider offering the players prompts in advance to flesh out their characters' heroic traits (or lack thereof). This not only helps them get into the mindset of these divine trials, but it can help you personalize the tests in each trial. Some example prompts follow, but you can tweak or replace them as you see fit:

- What is your character's idea of a true hero? How do they live up to that idea? How do they fall short of it?
- What flaws does your character struggle with? What part of themselves do they most want to overcome?
- What is your character's greatest regret, or the greatest mistake they've made? How are they trying to make up for it?
- What is your character's goal as an adventurer and a hero? What forces—external or internal—are preventing them from accomplishing that goal?
- What does your character fear—both externally and about themselves?
- What does your character think of the other party members? If the party has been adventuring together for a while, what memorable moments has your character shared with the other characters?

REWARDS

Characters who complete all three trials are visited afterward by a divine emissary who gives them a final reward: a *ring of lucent nebulae* (see the sidebar). In addition, the emissary declares that with the characters completing all three trials, the rings they've claimed in those trials are now awakened with additional power. When the *ring of lucent nebulae*, the *ring of shooting stars*, the *ring of the burning sun* (claimed in the sun trial), and the *ring of the gleaming moon* (claimed in the moon trial) are worn by characters who are attuned to them and all four rings are within 120 feet of each other, each ring gains an additional property.

RING OF LUCENT NEBULAE

The *ring of lucent nebulae* gains the following property.

Cloak of Luminescence. You can expend 1 to 3 charges from the ring as an action. For every charge you expend, one creature you can see within 60 feet of you gains 2d6 temporary hit points.

RING OF SHOOTING STARS

The star trial's *ring of shooting stars* gains the following property.

Tether of Stars. You can expend 2 charges as an action to cast *warding bond* from the ring.

RING OF THE BURNING SUN

The sun trial's *ring of the burning sun* gains the following property.

Fury of Icarus. When a creature you can see deals radiant or fire damage to you, you can expend 3 charges from the ring as a reaction. The triggering creature takes half the damage dealt to you and is blinded until the beginning of your next turn.

RING OF THE GLEAMING MOON

The moon trial's *ring of the gleaming moon* gains the following property.

Seeing the Truth. You can expend 1 charge from the ring as an action to gain truesight out to a range of 60 feet for 1 minute.

RING OF LUCENT NEBULAE

Ring, Very Rare (Requires Attunement Outdoors at Night)

While wearing this ring in bright light, you can cast the *guidance* and *light* spells from the ring at will. Casting either spell from the ring requires an action.

Additionally, the ring has 6 charges for the following properties. The ring regains 1d6 expended charges daily at dawn.

Sanctuary. You can expend 1 charge as an action to cast the *sanctuary* spell from the ring.

Blur. You can expend 2 charges as an action to cast the *blur* spell from the ring.

Weaving Colors. You can expend 1 to 3 charges as an action. For every charge you expend, you conjure a glittery, shifting cloud of color that fills a 30-foot cube centered on a point you can see within 60 feet of you. When a cloud first appears, each creature you choose in its area must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw, taking 3d4 radiant damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Each cloud then lingers as a defensive bastion for 1 minute. During that time, a cloud's area is heavily obscured, and you can designate creatures in the area as protected creatures. Whenever a protected creature takes damage, that damage is reduced by 1d4, to a minimum of 0.

RESOURCES

MCDM TABLETOP SAFETY TOOLKIT

<https://mcdm.gg/SafetyToolkit>

RELIGION CONSTRUCTION KIT

https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202212/ReligionCreationSheet_FormFillable.pdf

DIVINE TRIALS: HEROES OF THE STARS

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202212/HeroesOfTheStars.zip>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202212/StarTrialMap-30x58-140ppi-Alt.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202212/StarTrialMap-30x58-140ppi-Grid-Alt.jpg>

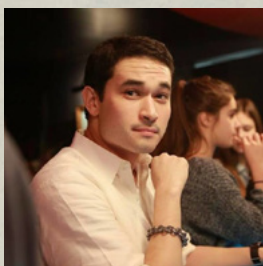
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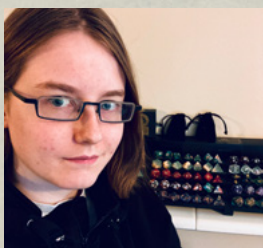
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