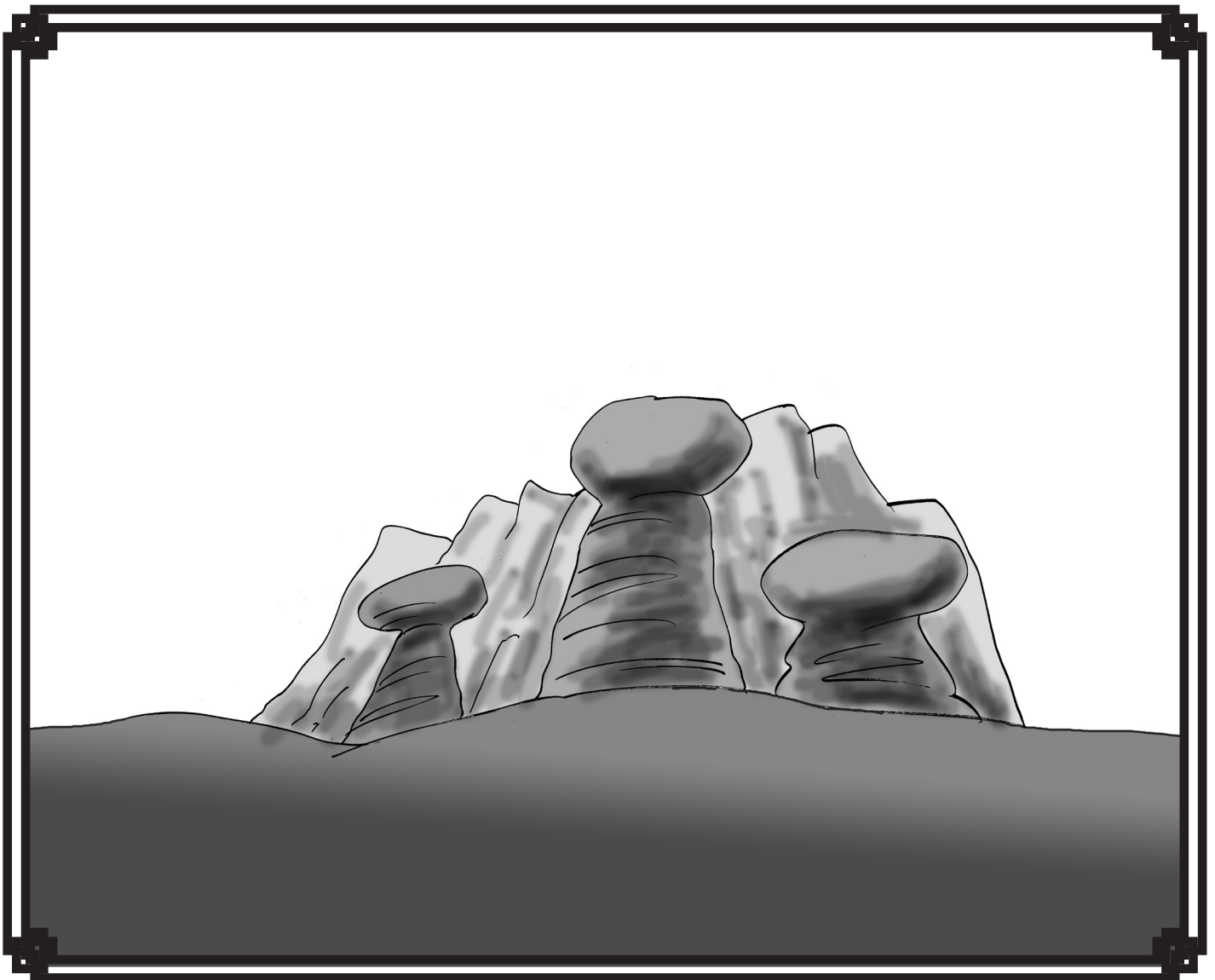


Starsmote Sandpit

A Sandcastle TRPG Scenario
for 3 to 6 Level-1 Characters

“This is a strong, well-conceived adventure with an excellent balance of adventure hooks and encounters based on a mix of geographic and story mythology encounters, as well as mixing fighting and roleplaying responses.”

-Donald J. Bingle, award winning game author



National Astronomical Observatory of Japan

Starsmote Sandpit

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Starsmote Sandpit

Sandcastle TRPG adventure for 3-6 Level-1 PCs

Starsmote Sandpit is an introductory adventure for the Sandcastle Table-talk Role Playing Game (TRPG). This scenario is intended to be run by a Game Master (GM) for a group of 3 to 6 players. It is designed to take about two game sessions consisting of 4 hours each to play through this adventure. But given the loose "sandbox" structure of the adventure, individual game groups may take significantly more or less time.

The GM should read the Sandcastle Core Rules and Game Masters' Manual (GMM), and have a basic understanding of the Sandcastle rules before running this adventure. It is recommended, but not mandatory, that players also read and understand the rules.

The GM should read the entire Starsmote Sandpit adventure scenario before running it for the players. The players SHOULD NOT read this scenario before playing the adventure because it contains information intended to be discovered through game play. Reading the scenario would spoil the surprise.

If the GM cannot read the entire adventure scenario before running it due to time constraints, it is possible to read the scenario while running it, staying a couple of pages ahead of the encounter he is currently running for the players.

TRPG scenarios contain two types of information. Most of the information is for the GM to help him adjudicate the game. Some of the information is for the GM to read or paraphrase to the players at the appropriate point in the adventure. This information for the players is referred to

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as “boxed text” due to the convention of enclosing it in a shaded box to offset it from the information for the GM.

Player Characters

Starsmote Sandpit is intended to be run for three to six level-1 characters.

This scenario begins with a chance for the PCs to interact with the adventurers’ guilds and get a feel for them. So if some players would like to wait to decide which guild their characters should join, it is possible to delay the choice. All characters should belong to a guild by the end of the adventure. It is possible and even advantageous for different PCs to join different guilds.

Background

Starsmote Sandpit, also known as Starsmote Crater, is an isolated patch of sandy desert, with ruins from a lost civilization. It is a barren wasteland prowled by dangerous creatures such as jackals and zombies. As the name implies, Starsmote Sandpit is an ancient meteorite impact crater, 12 km across where the Earth was “smote” by a falling “star.” The rim of the crater forms an effective barrier separating the desert environment inside from the surroundings. Because meteorite activity is spread randomly across the surface of planets, Starsmote Sandpit can be located anywhere in The Domain that suits the purposes of the GM. There are references in the adventure to the North Star and the constellation Ursa Minor, implying that Starsmote Sandpit is in the Northern hemisphere, but the Southern Cross could be substituted for the references if the GM wishes to place the adventure in the Southern Hemisphere.

An ancient religious organization, referred to as the Stargazers, incorporated meteorites into their beliefs. They collected meteorites as holy objects, and constructed a pyramid temple on the central uplift in this large meteorite impact crater. They believed that these rituals brought them closer to the heavens.

The last King-Priest of the Stargazers tried to make this sacred crater a Heaven on Earth by driving out all earthly influences. He constructed a powerful magical yellow energy generator in the pyramid, which began desiccating the crater and making it inhospitable to plants and animals. Finally, the crater turned into a dry, sandy desert, with the King-Priest’s mummified remains interned in a secret chamber beneath the pyramid along with his generator.

For millennia, Starsmote Crater has been shunned as a worthless and inauspicious desert; in a sense giving the King-Priest his wish, for an eternal existence free from

earthly interlopers. The only people who venture into the crater are adventurers. To serve the needs of the adventurers, the three adventurers’ guilds have small branches established in Bittersprings, a town just outside the rim of the crater.

Recently, Ramses, a sorcerer who considers himself the ideological, if not necessarily biological, heir of the King-Priest, penetrated the inner sanctum. There he found the remains of the King-Priest and the still functioning yellow energy generator. The magically preserved King-Priest rose as a mummy in response to the intrusion, but was impressed by Ramses’s devotion to the Stargazer religion. Rather than the King-Priest killing Ramses, together they started a plot to increase the power of the yellow energy generator until the entire world becomes a barren, lifeless desert.

Ramses acted as the leg man, acquiring the supplies needed for the plan to upgrade the generator, including a moon meteorite, a meteorite that was originally part of the Moon but was hurled into space by a different meteor blasting a crater out of the lunar surface. With this rare meteorite, the King-Priest mummy was able to increase the output of the generator. Now the desertification effects are spreading beyond the edges of Starsmote Sandpit. Bittersprings and the rest of the surrounding area are in danger of being slowly buried by the advancing sand dunes.

1) Bittersprings

Bittersprings sits just outside Starsmote Crater and serves as the launching point for forays into the Sandpit. The environment is dry and barren, but not as harsh as in the crater proper. The town is surrounded by sandy patches that give way to the surrounding terrain. A road, called Longroad by the locals, runs through Bittersprings connecting it to the outside world.

Bittersprings takes its name from its water supply, a sulfurous blend that smells terrible and tastes worse, but is otherwise safe to drink.

The town consists of a small branch office for each of the adventures’ guilds, The Imperial Spa Resort, Philip’s General Store, and any other businesses/inhabitants the GM wants to invent.

No combat statistics are provided for GMCs in Bittersprings, because trouble is not generally tolerated within the town. If a confrontation does occur, other adventurers stopping over at the guild branches will arrive to investigate, and quickly summon sufficient reinforcements to bring the situation under control.

1A) The Imperial Spa Resort

This Roman style bathhouse has seen better days. It is run by a single family, the Anthony's: a married couple, two adult children, and a grandmother, all humans. It offers lodging and food at the standard prices listed in the Core Rules. The rooms are clean and safe, but obviously decades, if not centuries, old. The food is good, but nothing elaborate; mostly bread served with different sauces made from fish, cheese, vegetables, or fruit for flavor. In its favor, the Imperial Spa Resort offers three baths (Men's, Women's, and Mixed) at no extra charge for guests staying the night. The murals in the baths may be faded, and colorful mineral crustation evident around the edges of the pools, but the baths themselves work as well as ever. And the hot, mineral-rich water does wonders for washing away the feeling of the desert after emerging from Starsmote Sandpit.

1B) Philip's General Store

The general store is one of the newer structures in Bittersprings. It's a two-story wooden building, constructed in the Wild-West architectural style and boasts the only glass windowpanes in town. The first floor holds the store, and the second floor is the proprietor's private home. Philip, a balding middle-aged human, considers himself an honest man. Even though he has an effective monopoly on supplies in Bittersprings, he doesn't price-gouge, charging only standard prices and offering any weapon, armor, or piece of equipment listed in the Core Rules. However, he's tired of adventures trying to take advantage of him. If a customer starts to annoy him, Philip just points to a painted wooden sign hanging behind the counter, as he is sick of repeating the same lines over and over. The sign reads, "No haggling, No bartering, No credit, No stealing, No refunds, No complaining."

2) Adventurers' Guilds

The PCs may visit the adventurers' guides in any order, going back multiple times or skipping over a guild. It is also possible to revisit a guild after having made a foray into Starsmote Sandpit. In fact, the party will almost certainly revisit the guilds if only to report the successful completion of a mission issued by the guild. Each guild lists two notable GMCs who the PCs are likely to meet when they visit.

Missions

Each GMC has an associated mission to give to the party. In general GMCs will wait until a party asks for a mission before offering the job, but depending on the play style of the group, the GM may want to have one or more of the

guilds summon the PCs and offer them a job to get the ball rolling. The missions are not mutually exclusive, and the party can be working for different guilds at the same time.

In this scenario, standard payment per completed mission is 25 c (total, not per character). In addition, completing both of the missions for a guild will earn members of that guild a +1 increase in reputation.

Information

Another important role of the guilds is to provide information.

Any of the guilds can provide the same basic background information:

- Starsmote Sandpit is a desert located in an ancient meteorite impact crater.
- The crater rim is an effective barrier, isolating the desert from the surrounding environment.
- Starsmote Sandpit holds scattered ruins of a lost civilization referred to as the "Stargazers."
- The Stargazers were a theocracy ruled by a King-Priest.
- The Stargazers were a Bronze Age society.
- Dangerous creatures prowl the Sandpit.
- The Stargazers were interested in astronomy and collected meteorites.
- The Stargazers practiced mummification and treated the canopic jars holding a mummy's organs as sacred objects.
- The peak of the most famous structure, a pyramid built on the central uplift of the crater, can be seen from almost anywhere in the Sandpit.
- The area around the pyramid is the most dangerous part of the Sandpit. Adventurers are generally advised to explore some of the other areas of the crater before trying to approach the pyramid.
- The pyramid has an open entrance leading to rooms inside.
- Some parties enter the pyramid and report finding nothing but empty rooms and corridors.
- Some parties enter the pyramid and report encountering monsters and traps.
- Some parties enter the pyramid and never come back.

More specialized information is listed under each guild. Follow the standard rules in the Game Masters' Manual (GMM) for guild information checks. The information is not tied to a specific GMC; anyone at the guild will provide roughly the same information. Both basic knowledge and

false leads are provided in this adventure. If the PCs ask questions not covered by the provided information, the GM should decide what insights the guild can offer.

2A) Beacon Sanctuary

Beacon Sanctuary operates a literal fortress in Bitterspings. It consists of a square keep and one attached cylindrical tower. Both are constructed from limestone, and sport distinctive plus “+” shaped arrow loops for windows. Despite the small windows, the interior is cheerily lit by magical illumination with subtlety shifting colors, even in the basement. The fortress acts as a barracks for wardens who patrol along Longroad, and as a refuge for survivors of bandit attacks along the road. In recent years, Longroad has been relatively safe, so right now there are few wardens or refugees, and most of the rooms are vacant.

Notable GMCs

Father Sven is small even for a dwarf, although he prefers the term “gnome.” He wears black robes and a red skull cap. His age is indeterminate, but his soft, caring blue eyes show long years of ministering to the downtrodden. He handles the cooking and administration at Beacon Sanctuary, as well as tending the seriously wounded or ill. He is a priest, but his volunteer activities in Beacon Sanctuary are completely independent from his ecclesiastic duties, although he would be willing to multitask if someone would like spiritual counseling. His small size and quiet, unassuming manner make it easy to forget that he’s in the room, even when you’re looking right at him. Father Sven has travelled extensively, but was never an adventurer, counting on being overlooked and underestimated to keep him out of trouble.

Mai is a young adult elf with long black hair. Her low-cut blouse and mini-miniskirt maid outfit barely keep her sexy figure covered as she prances about her duties doing the cleaning, waitressing, and nursing recovering patients. She flirts shamelessly with both men and women, but is actually all tease.

As a child, Mai was the sole survivor of a caravan attack on Longroad. The wardens found her and brought her to Beacon Sanctuary. Since then, she’s never been more than 2 hours walk from the fortress. It would be easy to assume that she is traumatized and afraid to leave, and maybe she is. But talking to her, she sounds like a perky, small-town girl who feels grateful to Beacon Sanctuary and the people of Bitterspings, and wants nothing more than to stay here and support her hometown.

Missions

Father Sven

I know you’re busy, so I’ll get right to the point. The sand dunes are advancing out of Starsmote Sandpit. It’s not happening overnight, but if you pay close attention and you’re patient, you can see that these past couple of weeks they’ve been making steady progress. And if you know where to look, there are definite signs of magical intervention: the dunes aren’t advancing crest-first, blown by the wind. They’re slithering up sideways like snakes. Something is causing the desert to expand, not just towards Bitterspings, but in all directions out of the crater. Someone needs to put a stop to this before the entire town is buried in sand.

Mai

Mai leads the party down into the crypt under the fortress, to a small chapel. At the head of the room is an ancient life-sized gold-inlaid statue of a winged goddess. The fingers of her outstretched right hand are curled as if to hold something, but are currently conspicuously empty.

Mai explains:

This statute was brought up out of ruins in Starsmote Sandpit and placed in this sanctum longer ago than anyone can remember. We call her our guardian angel. We’re not sure what exactly she represented to the Stargazers, but she must have been important. I mean look, they gave her a bust almost as big as mine. (After a pause, Mai reaches out and ever so tenderly touches the angel’s empty right hand.) Our angel used to hold a bronze scepter capped with an iron meteorite. I’m sure you’ve heard how important meteorites were for linking the Stargazers to the heavens. About a month ago the scepter disappeared. We leave our door open as much as possible, so that those in need can come in. But it seems like someone took advantage of our hospitality. The scepter has deep sentimental value for us but was completely non-magical, and really not all that valuable. There was no reason to steal it, unless this has something to do with the Stargazer ruins in Starsmote Sandpit. If you come across the scepter during your travels in the crater, the guardian angel and I would both be ever so grateful if you could bring it back.

Information

Basic Knowledge

* The only other people you’re likely to meet in Starsmote Sandpit are other adventurers. Not a bad lot, but hot-

headed. Try to keep them talking, and don't escalate any confrontations.

* Some people say that the Stargazer religion isn't entirely extinct, that there are still a small number of modern adherents practicing in secret.

False Lead

* Sometimes ghosts of the Stargazers will appear and tell stories about their culture. The ghosts can provide valuable clues.

2B) College of Recovery

The College of Recovery office is a single-story white stucco building with Moorish style pointed-arch doorways and windows. The building is shaped like a straight-edged "C" enclosing a raised courtyard with a fountain and large, striped canvas awnings.

The centerpiece of the courtyard is a 3 m tall obelisk brought up out of Starsmote Sandpit. A metal placard next to it reads, "This marble obelisk stood at the entrance of the pyramid in the center of Starsmote Crater. It was painstakingly removed and brought to the College of Recovery for study and display. The writing on it has now been fully deciphered. The four faces explain four different astronomical phenomena, reflecting the importance of astronomy in Stargazer religion. One face shows the reasons for day and night, as the Earth rotates from the lit side to the self-shadowed side. Another face shows the phases of the Moon based on the Sun-Moon-Earth angle. The third face shows a solar eclipse caused by the Moon blocking out the Sun's light. The final face shows a total lunar eclipse with the Moon passing through the Earth's shadow."

In the interior of the College of Recovery office, the colorful tile patterns covering the floors extend up to the height of the windowsills. Above that, the walls and ceiling are simple white stucco. But it can be hard to enjoy the original decor due to the number of shelves which have been placed along the walls to hold the countless oddities and curios collected for study. The College holds the only library in Bitterssprings. The selection of titles is dry and academic, and the books cannot be borrowed, so must be read on-site. But the library is airy and cool and the courtyard is even more pleasant for reading or games of chess if the weather is fair, so there is never a shortage of adventurers passing the time by studying up between expeditions.

Notable GMCs

This branch of the College of Recovery is run by two scholars who operate independent of each other.

Gyunghui Kim is a plump, middle-aged oni with bright red skin, a single horn in the middle of her forehead, and long, straight black hair. Gyunghui is originally from the lower realms where it was her duty to torture the spirits of the damned. However, she takes offense at being called a devil or evil; in her mind she was just a bureaucrat, meting out to each individual the punishment earned by his own sins. But she is also a gleeful sadist who loved her job. Gyunghui came to the mortal world to study the depictions of eternal torture in various cultures, hoping to expand her repertoire and earn a promotion in the infernal bureaucracy. Her office is decorated with scrolls and paintings of hellscapes. In the course of her studies, she became interested in the Stargazers, who envisioned the "good" afterlife as a barren desert completely devoid of water and life, and came to Bitterssprings to study the culture in more detail.

Lucky, a teenage heartthrob now in his mid-20's, had a short career as an adventurer, but an explosion of magical energy from an unholy rune in a demonic sanctum blinded his left eye and scarred his beautiful face. Now he wears white gauze wrapped over the left eye and surrounding scar tissue, hiding the disfigurement, and giving him an aura of tragedy and mystery. The incident convinced Lucky that it is better to study objects brought back by other adventures rather than take the risks himself.

Lucky's field of research is geology and his current fascination is meteorites. But it can be difficult to distinguish a fallen meteorite from a normal terrestrial rock. He came to Bitterssprings because the Stargazers have already done the hard work of finding and identifying meteorites; all he has to do is convince adventurers to recover the sacred meteorites from Stargazer ruins so they can be properly studied.

Lucky can be very charming, and more than one young heroine has undertaken a dangerous mission in hopes of finding a meteorite to win his attention. For his part, Lucky lives up to his squeaky-clean reputation and refrains from all vices, even in private, rather than risk disappointing his fans.

Missions

Gyunghui

Did you know that the Stargazer idea of Heaven was a barren and lifeless desert? Of course, I can see how eternal silence and solitude could be better than some of the alter-

natives for the afterlife: drowning in a river of blood with centaurs shooting arrows into you or having an oni skewer you and roast you over a fire. That smells great by the way, but you have to use the right seasoning. I can give you the recipe sometime if you're interested. Sorry, what was I ... oh yes. Starsmote Crater wasn't a desert when the Stargazers first arrived, they intentionally desiccated it to make it match their idea of paradise. I'm interpreting a stone tablet describing the desertification of the crater. Well, the bottom half of a tablet. (She gestures to a reading stand holding a black stone tablet with a rough break line running across the top.) It's fascinating to read the hardships the Stargazers willingly endured in pursuit of their idea of perfection: drought, famine, sandstorms with winds fast enough to skin you alive. Finally, their civilization collapsed from the hardships. But the top of the tablet, presumably describing how they started the desertification, is missing. Such techniques could have a variety of applications; applications which could be quite unpleasant if administered properly. If you can find and bring me the top half of the tablet, there will be a reward in it for you.

Lucky

They say that diamonds are forever. Diamonds form over billions of years, deep in the warm embrace of the Earth. But there is another type of stone which is even closer to eternity, meteors. Many meteors are even older than the world. They are pieces of material from the earliest stages of the Solar System. Meteors, and meteorites as we call them when they come down to us as shooting stars, give us clues to the conditions at the very beginning, before the world was born. The Stargazers understood the significance of meteorites and collected them. Now their precious meteorites sit gathering dust in crumbling ruins. I'm sure if they were alive today, the Stargazers would prefer that their sacred meteorites were recovered, studied, and displayed, rather than being forgotten. So for the memory of the Stargazers, and my own curiosity, I've painstakingly collected and cataloged meteorites recovered from Starsmote Sandpit. But the most important kind is still missing. Chondrites are some of the most primitive meteorites, preserving the conditions at the very beginning of the creation of the Solar System. Having a chondrite to study would be the second most beautiful way to feel the wonders of creation. The most beautiful is of course to see the first rays of the rising sun caressing the face of your beloved.

Information

Basic Knowledge

*Any complex traps in the Stargazer ruins have probably all been sprung or broken by now. But watch out for pit traps; simple yet deadly.

*Starsmote Sandpit contains sinkholes where the local environment can be much different from the surrounding desert. The sinkholes often hold Stargazer ruins so be sure to check them out.

False Lead

*Stargazer altars are warded by magic, but not very smart. Whenever you take an object off an altar, be sure to put something similar in its place.

2C) Slayers' Lodge

The Bittersprings branch of Slayers' Lodge is located in a desert nomad tent that looks like it was pitched yesterday and could be gone tomorrow. But stepping inside, it is apparent the lodge has been a fixture in Bittersprings for a long time. Wooden planks have been laid down on the ground to provide stable footing. Rich rugs including woven carpets, lion skins, bright red salamander skins, and zebra skins have been laid over the boards. Luxuriously upholstered chairs and sofas are scattered around the central stone-walled firepit where a wild boar or other game meat hangs on the spit. Hunting trophies and a well-stocked liquor cabinet line the perimeter. Placed in a spot of honor right next to the firepit is a set of shark jaws a full meter across, with a battered platemail armor boot set inside.

Notable GMCs

Captain Bruce is advanced in years, but call him "old" at your own risk. Despite the ample layer of fat on his body, his bulging muscles are still formidable. His short-cropped curly white hair stands out in stark contrast to his dark black skin. Still his most notable feature has got to be the peg leg. Captain Bruce had a long career as an adventurer, slaying a wide variety of monsters. But the story he tells the most is how a shark burst out of the water right next to his skiff and bit off his right foot. After that Bruce single-mindedly hunted sharks for 4 years, until he found the one with his platemail boot still in its belly. Soon after, he retired from adventuring to run a branch of Slayers' Lodge in the driest location he could find, Bittersprings outside Starsmote Sandpit. The way Bruce tells the story, there was no drive for vengeance or vindication in his great shark hunt, "I just had to get my boot back."

Natashia is Captain Bruce's teenage granddaughter. Her skin tone is a much lighter brown and she's thin as a toothpick, but the family resemblance is still unmistakable. She takes care of running the lodge when "the old geezer is too distracted recounting that same old shark story." Actually, Natashia loathes adventurers. Her father and mother are an adventuring pair, and Natashia hates having to follow them all over The Domain as they look for great deeds to perform and terrible monsters to slay. She hates being "baby-sitted" by Grandpa only slightly less. As far as she is concerned, the only place in the entire Domain that isn't completely stupid is the kingdom of Nova Camelot where the local branch of Slayers' Lodge celebrates successful kills and other heroics with gala hunt balls. She only got to visit Nova Camelot for one month during one of her parents' campaigns, but found herself naturally turning into an elegant belle of the ball. Since then, she's wanted nothing except to return to the pageantry and chivalry of Nova Camelot.

Missions

Captain Bruce

Before offering the party a job, Bruce will send Natashia out on errands. She storms out muttering something about, "never use the one good leg you got left."

We haven't told Natashia, because we didn't want to get her hopes up, but her parents have been busting their butts, and have finally managed to call in enough favors with the right people to get her a letter of introduction to the Court of Nova Camelot, which she has been begging for. But if she shows up without appropriate attire, her newfound social life will be doomed before it starts. Expensive gemstones don't cut it. It may be the Nova Camelot branch, but this is still Slayers' Lodge we're talking about. My granddaughter needs a trophy: jewelry that's exotic and dangerous to acquire. Adventurers coming back out of the Sandpit say that somewhere in there, there's a Stargazer tiara set with brightly colored stony-iron meteorites. I need you to find that tiara and bring it back for my princess.

If asked why he doesn't go looking for the tiara himself, Bruce simply replies, "I'm retired." If asked why he doesn't send Natashia if it is supposed to be her trophy, he explains, "I can't say it makes a whole lot of sense to me, but in Nova Camelot, a lady fair is supposed to be showered with gifts and have valiant deeds dedicated to her beauty, without leaving the court herself. I wish her luck; court politics are more vicious than fighting a demonic octopus in a pitch-black submerged cave with no air."

Natashia

Lately, parties coming back from the Sandpit have been bragging about beating roving bands of homunculi. The slayers are just happy to have something new to kill, but I've seen enough to know there's something fishy. Homunculi don't just appear out of nowhere, and they ain't smart enough to start trouble on their own. Someone or something has brought them in as goons. And judging from the way the homunculi have been attacking parties on sight, it's a good bet whoever's pulling the strings ain't up to no good. If you can find and eliminate the joker behind the homunculi before the situation gets out of control, I'll make sure that Shark-bait recognizes it as a worthy kill.

Information

Basic Knowledge

* There are many jackals prowling the Sandpit. Too many, so don't even bother bringing back a jackal trophy.

* The Stargazers are long gone, but some living statues crated by them are still lurking around the ruins.

False Leads

* Not every monster in the crater shuffles along in the sand. Watch the skies for giant birds who like to snatch up stragglers.

3) Starsmote Sandpit

Starsmote Sandpit is an ancient meteor impact crater about 12 km in diameter. The floor sits about 400 m beneath the surrounding terrain and is ringed by a rim of uneven height but averaging about 50 m above the surrounding terrain, giving the crater an apparent floor to rim depth of 450 m. The town of Bittersprings sits outside the edge of the crater, near a large marginal collapse zone. A marginal collapse zone is a stretch where the crater rim has collapsed into the crater, creating a gradual slope. There is a well-worn path on this slope, zig-zagging down to the crater floor.

A central uplift of marble bedrock appears as a hill sticking out from the sand which has accumulated in the crater. This central uplift serves as the foundation for a large pyramid, the temple/tomb of the final Stargazer King-Priest. This is the only well-known landmark in Starsmote Crater.

The rim surrounding the crater is tall and steep, but not unscalable. Climbing over the rim and into or out of the crater is a hard hike. Anyone in Bittersprings will attempt

to talk the party out of it if they hear talk of plans to scale the rim. But the task can be safely completed with 4 hours and a single successful unskilled TN 13 endurance check by each character. A failed check indicates that the character took a tumble somewhere and suffered 1d6 hp of damage. Provided the character survives the damage, he can still complete the hike.

(Educational Note: The dimensions of Starsmote Crater are not modeled on any one actual crater. They are within the plausible range for an impact crater, but by no means canonical. Impact craters show wide diversity. See the Reference Notes at the end of this adventure for more information about impact craters.)

For the convenience of game play, the map of Starsmote Sandpit is divided into hexagonal spaces 4 km across. (Refer to Player Handout 1.) The central space is where the pyramid is located and the top space, outside the crater proper, is where Bittersprings is located. The remaining spaces each hold one noteworthy encounter which are described later. Each encounter description includes the space where the encounter is located, but these should be considered suggestions. Except for the central pyramid, Starsmote Sandpit is poorly mapped. Any encounter could be placed in any space, but each space should include one and only one encounter.

Moving from one space to another requires 2 hours on foot or 1 hour on horseback. You can only move to adjacent spaces (touching along one side); it is not possible to walk along the line between the hexagonal spaces. Searching a space requires the same amount of time as moving between spaces (2 hours on foot or 1 hour on horseback). Some encounters occur when the party enters a space. Other encounters can only be found by searching the space.

It is possible for a party which is psyched up for adventure to go 48 hours without food, water, or sleep. This is more than enough time to enter and explore every space on the map and still walk the entire perimeter of the crater floor, possibly even including an ill-advised hike over the rim. So it is possible to ignore issues of time and supplies if that works with your group's playstyle. For groups who want to take a less exhausting approach to adventuring, 16 hours of exploration a day, along with 1 day's worth of rations and one waterskin worth of water is a sustainable pace. It is possible to camp in Starsmote Sandpit, but unless the party sets watch they will awake to find that during the night jackals quietly ripped open their packs and ate everything edible. The Starsmote Sandpit environment is harsh, and it is not possible to regain hp or pp by resting in the crater. Resting requires returning to Bittersprings.

It is possible to hunt for food and transient water pools in the crater, but unless a party is desperate, or wants to rough-it for fun, hiking back out to Bittersprings is the quickest, most reliable way to restock provisions.

3A) *Good Intentions [Space 1]*

The first time the PCs enter this space they will encounter Celest. Celest is skilled in stealth, and has had two weeks to learn the terrain, so assume that she is able to act first before the party notices her.

Her first action is to fire an arrow into the ground in front of the PCs. With a "whiz – thunk" the arrow buries itself halfway up the shaft into the sand. With a successful TN 11 awareness-based social sciences check, a PC can recognize that the shot was an intentional miss, a warning shot.

Give the characters a chance to react, diving for cover, reading weapons, raising their hands, etc., then read or paraphrase the following.

Following back along the path of the arrow which just struck the ground in front of you, you see a woman with long, braided red hair, wearing scalemail armor, and mounted on a fiery red chestnut horse. She appeared as if out of nowhere from behind a sand dune. Now she has another arrow nocked and ready to fire.

"Leave the crater now! There are no monsters and no treasure here. And any treasure there is is cursed. There is nothing interesting or exciting in the pyramid, so you need to leave now for your own safety. Don't make me hurt you."

Celest was part of an adventuring party with her dearly beloved younger sister, Luna. A couple weeks ago, during a foray into the pyramid, Luna made the mistake of putting on a cursed necklace that turned her into a poisonous reptilian creature, killing anyone nearby with a green magic aura (see encounter 4G for more details). Celest barely escaped the killing aura, and is now distraught. She wants to save her sister, but doesn't know how. For right now the best she can think of is to leave food and water at the pyramid for Luna and try to run off other adventurers before they mistake Luna for a real monster and kill her.

Celest rides in a large, western style saddle, with the reins of a bay horse tied loosely to the saddle horn. The bay is also saddled for a rider.

If the party attacks, Celest will loose the arrow she has nocked, then wheel and flee. Unless the PCs are also mounted, her speed advantage will let her make a clean get away. If mounted characters pursue, a chase will result.

Provided the PCs don't attack, Celest will keep her draw on the party, but will not actually shoot and will banter back and forth with them as long as the PCs keep talking. Celest's responses will be full of contradictions and in her ramblings she will often tell the PCs more than they actually asked. After two or three questions, she'll even lower her bow if asked politely. She won't dismount, wanting to keep the mobility the horse gives her.

Possible questions and answers:

- Who are you?

I'm Celest, an adventurer like you.

-Are you alone?

I'm the only one left except for my sister, but she's ... no wait. Yes, I am alone.

-What are you doing here?

Well I'm, um. I'm warning you, aren't I?

-Why do you have two horses?

Tammy belongs to my sister.

- What's in the pyramid?

Nothing! Certainly no monsters or cursed jewelry. Well, actually there is cursed jewelry which is why you shouldn't go there for any reason.

Once the PCs figure out enough to ask Celest directly about her "sister" read or paraphrase the following.

The woman's blue eyes start to tear up, and she inhales sharply as if her nose is starting to run. The bow and arrow slip from her hands as she breaks down crying. "Luna, you idiot! Why did you have to put on that necklace? Always looking for pretty things to wear; never using your head."

She opens her watery eyes to look at you, "Please don't hurt my little sister. I know she looks like a monster with that scaly skin and snake hair, but she's not a monster. Not really, the necklace did that to her. Underneath she's still the same good person ... the same vain, gawdy, clueless bimbo! She didn't mean to poison Michael and the others. The necklace did that to her."

After she cries herself out, Celest can give a more coherent account. She and her sister Luna were part of a party of five novice adventurers. Two weeks ago, they entered the pyramid looking for treasure and adventure. The pyramid was disappointingly empty, but in the "room on the right," Luna found a silver necklace set with turquoise stones. She fastened it around her neck with a mechanical click, and

almost before she could finish saying "How do I look?" she started screaming, "Get it off! Get it off!" Her skin turned green and scaly and her long, beautiful locks of flaxen hair coiled into hissing snakes. Celest froze up at the sight. The other members of the party rushed to help but succumbed to the poisonous green glow around Luna. Celest didn't know what to do, so she ran, and now hates herself for it, thinking there must have been something she could have done.

If the PCs say they are going straight to the pyramid despite her warnings, Celest will insist on going along, to help them avoid any trouble. And she will help, but if she ever thinks the PCs are a threat to her sister, Celest will literally shoot them in the back.

If a PC makes any explicit threats, such as offering to euthanize Luna, Celest will fight the offender to the death on the spot. Or at least fight to 0 hp; the other PCs can probably intervene before she finishes off an unconscious opponent.

If the party agrees to steer clear of the pyramid and Luna, at least for the short term, Celest will part ways with the party, but will keep an eye on them. Every so often as they explore the Sandpit the PCs will catch sight of a mounted rider with two horses, well out of bowshot, but still within line of sight. If the party gets into a fight they can't handle, the GM may wish to have Celest show up to support them with hexes and arrow fire to improve the odds.

Celest, Human Hexer

Level 1
defense: 11
hp: 4
pp: 2
Move: 10 m walk (20 m mounted)
Attributes: S -1, D -1, E -1, A +0, W +1, P +2
Resistances: RB +7; GY +6; OP +2; HR +2

Traits

Skills: Intimidation, Life Sciences, Stealth +1

Attack Actions

Bow [Major] +1 ranged 1d6 hp (normal damage)

Flail [Major or Interrupt] +0 melee 1d6 hp (normal damage)

Special Actions

Standard hexer abilities (refer to the Core Rules for full descriptions)

Counter Hex [Interrupt]

Hexes [Minor] (TN 13 HR)

Attack Hex

Defense Hex

Move Hex

Power Drain [Major] (cost 1 pp)

Notable Equipment

Bow

Flail

Scale mail armor

Money: 11 c 7 p

3B) Frozen Well [Space 2]

This encounter only takes place if the party takes the time to search the space. If they simply pass through the space, nothing of interest happens.

In the process of exploring, the PCs come across a sink hole about 4 m in diameter. There is nothing out of the ordinary around it, a particularly oblivious character might even fall into the hole before noticing it.

Looking down into the pit, it has two notable features. One is a sheet of solid ice about 6 m below the rim. The second is a case of stairs cut into the wall, winding down to an alcove which has been cut into the rock, creating a platform just above the sheet of ice. The alcove is about the same size as the ice sheet, 4 m x 4 m.

The ice and underlying water are clear, and a submerged altar can be seen at the bottom of the pit.

The sheet of ice is 10 cm thick, forming a lid on the underlying water. The ice can be easily chipped away by weapons or magical attacks (attacks automatically hit, simply roll damage; the ice cap automatically fails any energy resistance reactions.) The ice cap is hardened against blue damage and vulnerable to red damage. The ice sheet starts with a total of 20 hp. If reduced to 15 hp or less, a hole opens in the ice; if the ice sheet has 10 hp or less remaining, the hole is large enough for a character to dive through. If reduced to 0 hp, all large chunks of ice have been cleared from the surface of the water.

However the ice sheet will quickly refreeze, regaining 1 hp at the end of each turn (after all of the PCs have had a chance to act). This refreezing happens even if the sheet is reduced to 0 hp. If the ice sheet recovers to 11 hp or more while a submerged character is investigating the altar, the swimmer could find himself trapped, unable to fit through the hole to get out. If the ice recovers to 16 hp or more, the hole closes entirely, trapping the character without air.

As long as there is a hole in the ice, the water can be drunk or used to refill waterskins. The water is freezing cold and refreshing to drink. It is free from the sulfurous taste and smell of Bittersprings water.

Swimming down to the altar requires a TN 11 strength-based athletics check. Swimming back up from the altar also requires a TN 11 strength-based athletics check. When descending, every kilogram of gear (rounded down) the character is carrying adds a +1 bonus to the check, but when ascending, every kilogram of gear (rounded down) imposes a -1 penalty on the check.

The following items are set on the altar:

- An oddly contorted metal wand inlaid with seashells [0.5 kg]
- A metal tablet covered with cryptic glyphs [negligible mass]
- A pottery canopic jar with a falcon head lid [3 kg]

The canopic jar is the heaviest item on the altar and will require the most work to recover. One solution would be to tie a rope to it so that a character outside the well can pull it up, requiring an unskilled TN 12 dexterity check to avoid letting it slip out of the rope. If two swimmers try to raise the jar together, this is considered an assist action (+1 bonus). No more than two swimmers can effectively work together on this task.

The wand is a rank 1 chromatic (blue) evoker's wand as described in the GMM.

If anyone would like to investigate the wand or tablet further, have the player make an awareness-based social sciences check and consult the table below.

Artifact Investigation (awareness-based social sciences)	
Result	Information
7 or less	No insights.
8-12	The item is not Stargazer craftsmanship.
13-14	The item is not human craftsmanship.
15 or more	The item is merman craftsmanship.

The writing on the metal tablet can be interpreted with an hour of work and a TN 16 willpower-based social sciences check. It is a commemorative plaque in honor of "An agreement between the People of the Desert and the People of the Sea for coordinated research and information exchange to harness the power of the stars and the black void between them."

The tablet might be of interest to a collector, but for most people it is just a metal ingot that can be used in place of an equal weight of coins (25 c). If the party tries to trade the metal tablet or wand to the collector Elestar York (see encounter 3C), he will refuse at first, recognizing that they are not Stargazer artifacts. If the party is persistent and can convince Elestar that the items were in fact found on a Stargazer altar, he will become very interested in them.

The canopic jar will be needed to open the hidden chamber in the pyramid (see encounters 4B, 4H). It is easily recognizable as Stargazer craftsmanship.

3C) Archeological Dig [Space 3]

This encounter occurs if the party takes the time to search the space. If they simply pass through the space, nothing of interest happens.

From a distance the characters can see a roofless, crumbling, mud-brick structure. Approaching closer, they can hear intermittent scratching and tapping from inside. Looking through a door or window, they can see that a camp has been set up inside the walls of the structure. In the center, a large, square, knee-deep pit has been dug, and a shirtless man in a hat is bent over, working in the pit. The scratching and tapping sounds are coming from when he uses his handbroom or hammer in his work. The man, Elestar York, will notice the party as soon as they hail him, or shortly after they enter the ruins, provided the PC's aren't trying to be stealthy.

Provided the party isn't attacking or stealing anything, Elestar will greet them cordially. Read or paraphrase the following.

The man working in the pit carefully sets down his tools and sits down on the edge. He removes his broadbrimmed hat, revealing short blonde hair and distinctly elven ears, and uses his forearm to wipe copious streams of sweat from his forehead.

"G'day mates. Why don't cha take a load off and stay a spell. Don't get many visitors round these parts. Well, at least not many who are still breathing." He jerks his thumb towards a pile of dismembered zombies.

Elestar York, is an elven archeologist adventurer with an unusual accent (think Australian accent). He is well versed in the Stargazer culture and can help the party interpret any items they may have found.

Elestar is a proud member of the College of Recovery, he views the other guilds as friendly rivals. He will casually

ask what guild the characters belong to and preferentially speak with other members of the college; his second choice being PCs who have yet to join a guild.

If the party accepts his invitation to stay, he will show them the pieces he's studying right now. The most impressive pieces are:

- A magical round bronze shield with 7 stylistic bumps arranged in an irregular pattern on it [3 kg]
- A limestone canopic jar with a baboon head lid [4 kg]
- A bronze scepter capped by a cube of iron which has crystallin patterns crisscrossing its six sides [1.5 kg]
- A serving plate, 40 cm in diameter with a star chart painted on it and symbols indicating the phases of the moon around the perimeter [2 kg]

The shield is a Rank 1 chromatic (yellow) dragonslayer's shield. With a successful TN 9 awareness-based physical sciences check, the bumps can be recognized as representing the constellation Ursa Minor, with the North Star set in the center of the shield. Refer to the Starsmote Sandpit map pack for a picture of the dot pattern. It may be more fun, and educational, to show the players the dot pattern and let them figure out what it is for themselves without allowing a skill check.

The canopic jar will be needed to open the hidden chamber in the pyramid (see encounters 4B, 4H). Elestar doesn't know the details, but he has worked out that the canopic jars were used in some kind of ritual in the pyramid. If the party tells him they are going to the pyramid, he will try to "sell" them the jar in exchange for another item.

The scepter is the one stolen from Beacon Sanctuary in Bittersprings, the cube of iron at the head being a cut iron meteorite. Iron crystals aren't found naturally in any rocks on Earth, so it takes only a successful TN 10 awareness-based physical sciences check to identify it as a meteorite. A willpower-based physical sciences check can be made instead if consulting reference material. After recognizing the meteorite for what it is, it should be easy to conclude that this is the scepter stolen from Beacon Sanctuary if the party has received Mai's mission (see encounter 2A).

If asked about the scepter, Elestar explains that he acquired it by trade from another adventurer. About a month ago (or more, depending on how long it takes the party to reach this encounter), he traded a different artifact for it to a guy who was taking the whole Stargazer thing too far, even dressing in sandals, white knee-length robes, and a nemyss headdress (the iconic Egyptian pharaoh headdress). If asked what Elestar gave the man in exchange for the wand,

he'll describe a broken piece of a black stone tablet that he hadn't had a chance to decipher completely but was something about creating a dessert. From his description, the party should be able to recognize the tablet fragment as matching the description of the one Gyunghui Kim of the College of recovery is looking for (see encounter 2B).

The plate with astronomical markings was used both as a serving dish and a calendar. Encompassing the star chart is a ring with 12 notches indicating the 12 months, evenly spaced like on a clock. Then outside the moon phases is another ring, partially chipped away by age, with 30 notches to indicate the days. It is a beautiful example of Stargazer artwork but of no practical value during the current adventure.

Elestar is interesting in studying items, not collecting them, so he is willing to trade items from his collection for other Stargazer items found in Starsmote Sandpit. In principle, these trades are one for one. Other locations in Starsmote Sandpit have been stocked with interesting but not useful items that the party can use for trade. However, there are ways to talk Elestar out of items without having to trade.

- If the PCs convince Elestar that the scepter is stolen, he will give it up without trade. He's not entirely surprised, the guy who traded it to him was suspicious, even for an adventurer. But if the PCs mention that the scepter was taken from Beacon Sanctuary, that will trigger Elestar's sense of rivalry and he will refuse to hand it over without some kind of "finder's fee," essentially a trade.

- If the party plays on Elestar's comradery for the College of Recovery, telling him that the stone tablet he traded away is needed by a fellow researcher and he has a duty to help recover it for her, Elestar will give them one item if they promise to find the tablet and recover it, or at least to forget that he was the one who gave it away.

- Elestar won't accept money, per se. But if the party will make a supply run, buying and bringing him a list of basic supplies from Phillip's General Store [food, torches, cloth, ink, a blank logbook, etc.; total cost 20 c; total mass 20 kg] he will let them choose one item as payment for the supplies.

- If the party has figured out that the canopic jar is needed to open the secret passage in the pyramid (see encounters 4B, 4H), Elestar will be willing to loan it to them, provide the PCs promise to return it safely and allow him to catalog and study any items recovered from the pyramid.

- If the party offers to work for Elestar in exchange for an item, he won't trust them with archeological work or guard

duty. But his campsite is disheveled and in need of straightening. If a PC agrees to clean and cook for Elestar for a full day, he will agree to reward the party with one item. Have the character make a domestic science skill check; it can be either dexterity or presence based, depending on the character's approach (fastidious cleaning, or crafting simple ingredients into delicious home cooking). Other PCs can assist, adding a +1 bonus to the check, but in the end only one character can make the skill check. Rather than a set TN, make the roll and then consult the table below for the result.

Domestic Science Skill Check Result	
8 or less	The party has accidentally broken an archeological artifact. Elestar will tell them to leave immediately and won't deal with them again for at least 2 days.
9-14	As per his word, Elestar lets the party choose one item.
15 or more	Elestar is very impressed with the job the PCs did and lets them choose two items instead of one.

- If the party tries to steal an item, resolve it as a dexterity-based stealth check versus an awareness-based stealth check. If the party manages to steal an item, they might be able to get away with it, but Elestar will notice eventually and since he hasn't had any other guests, he'll know the PCs are the thieves. He will make the trip out to Bittersprings to register a complaint and the PCs will have to answer for their actions eventually. The exact punishment is left to the GM, but might include having to work in Elestar's camp to repay him (see above), a monetary fine, or reduction in guild reputation.

This is intended to be a role playing encounter, but if the party starts to act violent, Elestar will issue a challenge for a one-on-one duel of honor in hopes of evening the odds. Whether or not a PC accepts his challenge, he will then suit up in his speed armor and elven climbing claws. He's already wearing the bottom half of the speed armor and only needs to slip on the shirt, so it takes only 1 turn each to don the speed armor and climbing claws. If reduced to less than 5 hp, he will attempt to flee, using his climbing claws to scale the walls of the ruins to provide cover for his escape. He will then make his way to Bittersprings to register a complaint against the party. The punishment for attacking Elestar is left to the GM but might involve jail time or a dangerous mission to be undertaken without compensation. If the PCs manage to kill Elestar, a couple of months later he will rise as an apparition to haunt the ruins where he was digging. Eventually other adventurers will learn the truth from this ghost and set out to bring the PCs to justice in order to help the dead rest in peace.

Elestar York (Archeologist) Elf Harrier

Level 3
defense: 15
hp: 15
pp: 4
Move: 14 m (10 m without speed armor)
Attributes: S +0; D +3; E -1; A +0; W -2; P +0
Resistances: RB +6, GY +1, OP +0, HR +0

Traits

Skills: Engineering, Social Sciences +3

Attack Actions

Rank 1 elven climbing claws [Major or Interrupt] +2 melee 1d3 hp (normal damage)

Special Actions

Standard harrier abilities (refer to the Core Rules for full descriptions)

3 interrupt actions per turn

Cut and Run [Interrupt]

Dogged Pursuit [Interrupt]

Energy Shunt [Reaction] (cost 1 pp)

Fleet Footed [Interrupt]

Follow-up Strike [Interrupt]

Notable Equipment

Rank 1 speed armor

Rank 1 elven climbing claws

Money: 27 c 1 p

3D) Homunculus Ambush [Space 4]

This encounter occurs when the party first enters the space. A band of homunculi loyal to Ramses have laid an ambush. After he took up residence, Ramses sent squads of homunculi to all areas of the crater to lay claim to it and attack any intruders. Over the course of the last month, the other bands have succumbed to encounters with adventurers or wild animals. Now, Ramses's homunculi can be found only in the more remote parts of the crater. However, if the GM feels the PCs are having too easy of a time during the adventure, he could have another homunculus ambush occur somewhere else in the crater.

When the party approaches, the homunculi will spring up out of the sand in a half-circle pattern (8 m radius) in front of and flanking the party. The number of homunculi is the same as the number of members of the PCs' party.

The homunculi have been lying in wait and will get to act first. On their first turn they will stand up out of the sand

and attack with their energy spark ability. Two homunculi will target each character in the front half of the PCs' party.

After the first round of attacks, every homunculus not involved in melee will attack the nearest PC with its energy spark ability, if it has pp remaining; or move to engage the nearest PC in melee if it has used all of its pp. Any homunculus involved in melee will attack with its energy surge ability if it has pp remaining; or with a claw attack if it has used all of its pp. In addition, when a homunculus is targeted by an energy-based attack, if it has any pp remaining it will use an interrupt action and 1 pp to activate its energy armor ability. The homunculi intend to fight to the death, but might be intimidated into running away if the party tries to scare them off.

Homunculus

Level 0
defense: 13
hp: 3
pp: 3
Move: 8 m
Attributes: S -3; D +2; E -2; A +1; W 0; P 0
Resistances: RB +1; GY +1; OP +1; HR -1

Traits

Hardened Purple

Vulnerable Orange

Attack Actions

Claw [Major or Interrupt] -1 melee 1 hp (normal damage)

Special Actions

Energy Spark [Major] (att= +1; cost 1 pp; purple energy): A homunculus can shoot a spark of energy up to 8 m. A target struck by this spark takes 1d2 hp of purple energy damage.

Energy Surge [Major] (cost 1 pp; purple energy): All creatures within melee range of the homunculus must make a TN 11 OP reaction or take 1 hp of primary damage (purple energy). There are 0 hp of automatic damage.

Energy Armor (cost 1 pp; purple energy): This ability functions the same way as the energy shield enger special action but doesn't require a mote and only provides 2 points of protection. This energy armor lasts for 10 minutes or until the homunculus is reduced to 0 hp. The homunculus can choose to lower the shield earlier. The shield is hardened against purple energy and vulnerable to orange energy.

The homunculi are wearing an odd assortment of clothing: one is wearing nothing but a flat-topped fiddler's hat, another is wearing nothing but a vest, a third might be wearing only boots and gloves. There are no shirts, pants, or skirts, among the group, suggesting that the homunculi don't understand clothing very well.

After dealing with the homunculi, the PCs can find a shoulder pack, either on one of the bodies or dropped by a fleeing homunculus. The contents of the pack are:

- A wooden box [1 kg]
- 2 torches [0.5 kg x2]
- A coil of rope [2 kg]
- 1 full waterskin [2 kg]
- 6 healing potions [negligible mass]
- Money [18 c 3 p]

The contents of the pack are loose change and other items Ramses brought from outside Starsmote Sandpit that he had no immediate use for. Ramses didn't notice that one of the homunculi decided to wear the pack when he sent them out on patrol.

The money is 18 coins and 3 pieces worth of loose pieces. There are no whole coins in the mix. The largest denomination is half a coin (4 pieces).

The box is an ornately carved jewelry box. The fabric inside has an indentation where a circular item like a crown or a necklace used to be. Another indentation near the edge holds a silver key set with a large, oval piece of turquoise carved into a viper head cameo (the mass of the key alone is negligible). A successful TN 9 awareness-based social sciences check will reveal that the box and key are too new to be associated with the Stargazers. A successful TN 11 awareness-based arcana check will reveal that the key is magically enchanted. A successful TN 13 awareness-based arcana check will reveal that the key doesn't have any magical powers, but its aura is intended to trigger some kind of magical lock or switch. The necklace worn by Luna in the pyramid (see encounter 4G) used to be in this box and the key matches the lock on the necklace. If the PCs have seen both the necklace and the key, they can notice that the two items are of similar craftsmanship.

If anyone thinks to ask, the torches and rope are similar to items available in Philip's General Store (see encounter 1B).

The water in the waterskin can be identified by its smell and taste as having been collected in Bittersprings.

If taken alive for questioning, a homunculus can only offer a little information. He's not particularly smart and sounds

as if he hasn't really been paying attention to anything. He knows that the homunculi were created and brought to Starsmote Crater by "The Boss." The Boss is working on some project in the pyramid and doesn't want to be disturbed, so he sent squads of homunculi out to lay ambushes throughout the crater and attack any interlopers. The homunculus being questioned doesn't know how many other homunculi there are working for the Boss or any other specific information. "The Boss" is a reference to Ramses, but the mummy of the King-Priest has also made a big impression on the homunculus (see encounter 4I). He won't volunteer any information about the mummy, but if the PCs ask questions about mummies, pyramid builders, monsters in the pyramid, or similar topics, the homunculus will correct them, "That's the Other Boss."

3E) Sphinx [Space 5]

When the party enters this space, have all of the players make an unskilled TN 13 awareness check, or make the checks in secret for them. Characters who succeed notice a giant stone face protruding from the side of a windswept sand dune in the distance. This is the head of a stone sphinx. The party can continue to travel across the space without investigating it, taking the standard 2 hours to reach the next space. If they decide to get a closer look at the stone head, the detour and any resulting adventures take a total of 2 hours, the same as searching a space. Parties which take the time to search the space automatically find the sphinx.

The sphinx has the head of a human male wearing a nemyss (pharaoh) headdress and the body of a lion. Unlike the real sphinx in Egypt, this one has its paws tucked in front of it like a contented cat. The head, shoulders and forepaws are visible, the rest of the sphinx is buried under the dunes. Around the exposed part of the sphinx is a foundation made from the same kind of giant limestone blocks as the body. The statue is 20 meters tall from the top of the head to the foundation. The face has a cool regal disposition, with high cheek bones and a long, thin ceremonial beard.

A successful TN 11 awareness-based arcana check will reveal that the sphinx is magical.

As soon as anyone steps of the stone platform surrounding the sphinx read or paraphrase the following.

The eyes of the sphinx glow and with the scraping of stone on stone, the jaw lowers straight down, opening the mouth like a nutcracker doll's, and a booming, obviously magical and non-human voice ushers forth. "What casts the largest shadow anyone has ever seen?"

Having finished the message, the jaw raises again, closing with an audible boom. The eyes, staring straight forward and seeing nothing, remain ablaze as if waiting for an answer.

If the party wait without answering, the sphinx will repeat its question one more time, then if no answer has been given, the eyes will cease to glow shortly thereafter.

The answer the sphinx is waiting for is, “The Earth.” During a total lunar eclipse, the entire Moon enters the Earth’s shadow. More frequently and less dramatically, nightfall is simply a location rotating into the self-shadowed side of the Earth.

If someone gives a wrong answer read or paraphrase the following.

The stone jaw lowers again and the powerful voice speaks, “The foolish should seek the obelisk and learn from it.” With that, the mouth closes and the eyes dim.

After a wrong answer, the sphinx will not respond to any new answers for an hour. The “obelisk” refers to the one now standing in the courtyard of the College of Recovery (see encounter 2B). On the obelisk, the words “shadow” and “shadowed” are used in reference to the Earth.

If someone gives the correct answer, “the Earth,” read or paraphrase the following.

The stone jaw lowers again and the powerful voice speaks, “The wise may enter.” With that the forepaws of the sphinx unfold from in front of the chest and stretch forward slapping down on the surrounding stone platform. Cut into the now uncovered chest of the sphinx is a doorway with stairs leading down into darkness.

The stone paws of the sphinx move slowly, so anyone paying attention can easily dodge them. Anyone foolish enough to intentionally get under one of the paws as it slams down on the stone floor will be instantly killed and crushed into paste. All carried equipment, with the exceptions of any canopic jars or meteorite items, will be completely ruined. Items sacred to the Stargazers, the canopic jars or meteorites, will miraculously come tumbling out, carried by a wave of broken flesh just before the paw comes to rest on the ground.

The stairs are 2 m wide and go down at a 45 degree angle, 6 m down and 6 m back to a chamber under the sphinx. The chamber is 6 m wide, 3 m high, and 20 m long. It is completely dark requiring a light source to explore

properly, but there are no traps or other dangers so a foolish party could conceivably grope their way to the back.

The floor of the room is stone slab, but enough sand has leaked in over the millennia to give it a thin coating of grit. Not enough to conceal the stonework, but enough to make the room feel unkept.

Frescos depicting Stargazer daily life decorate the walls: planting and harvesting grain and fruit; hunting; and baking bread. As characters proceed down the corridor the scenes naturally evolve from gathering food to preparing and cooking it, then carrying it to large tables set in what appears to be a royal court with servants, nobles, and even pet cats. Just before the far wall, two figures painted larger than life sit on thrones, the King-Priest on the lefthand wall and the Queen on the righthand wall. A man dressed in unusual animal skins, probably a foreign dignitary, is presenting the King-priest with a black amulet. On the other side, a woman with an elaborate peacock feather headdress, also probably not a Stargazer, is presenting the Queen a scepter with a square, gray head.

The King-Priest and Queen depicted here are not the final ones. Their paintings are slightly different from depictions of the final monarchs found in the fire temple (see encounter 3F) and pyramid (see section 4). The King-Priest in this painting is the same as the model for the head of the sphinx. And the Queen is the model for the “guardian angel” in the crypt under Beacon Sanctuary (see encounter 2A). No awareness check is needed to notice these similarities/differences. If a player thinks to ask if the monarchs look familiar, the GM should provide the information. Otherwise don’t volunteer the information.

A doorway in the far wall leads to an inner sanctum, a 6 m x 6 m room with a low ceiling, just over 2 m tall. On the back wall of the inner sanctum, a gilded gold statue of the King-Priest stands on a pedestal. An amulet with a black, fist sized stone hanging from a bronze chain [1 kg] is wrapped around his raised hand.

Set at the statue’s feet, the characters can find the following items:

- A small non-magical limestone statue of the sphinx, with its legs in the tucked position in front of its chest [1.5 kg]
- A limestone canopic jar with a human head lid [4 kg]
- Money (16 coins of Stargazer workmanship featuring a sun emblem on one side and a crescent moon emblem on the reverse side.)

The rock on the amulet has been cut into smooth facets, revealing many small white inclusions of different compo-

sition. With a successful TN 14 awareness-based physical sciences check, it can be correctly identified as a chondrite stony meteorite. Lucky in the College of Recovery will reward the party if they give him this meteorite (see encounter 2B).

The statue of the King-Priest is not only prohibitively heavy, but also affixed to the stone pedestal. Even using magic, removing it as a trophy would require a team of workers, specialized equipment, and a wagon.

The canopic jar will be needed to open the hidden chamber in the pyramid (see encounters 4B, 4H).

The sphinx statue is a nice souvenir for answering the riddle, but of no practical value, except maybe for trade with a collector (see encounter 3C).

As the party is leaving the sphinx, if they look back over their shoulders just before the sphinx passes out of sight, they will see it folding its legs back under itself, covering the entrance.

3F) Fire Temple [Space 6]

This encounter occurs automatically if the party takes the time to search the space. If they simply pass through the space, nothing of interest happens.

The first hint of something amiss is the headache-inducing smell of smoke and excrement. As the party explores around, they will practically be at the rim of a sinkhole before they notice it; its low profile completely disappears into the gently rolling stony hills around it.

If the party is exploring at night, it will be much easier to find the sinkhole due to the glow from the flames at the bottom. This mysterious glow will be noticeable even before the smell.

The sinkhole is about 50 m across and 10 m deep. Looking down the PCs can see tongues of flame licking out from crevices in the floor of the sinkhole. A small, one-story square stone building stands in the middle of the depression. Stairs hewn into the wall of the pit lead down to the floor.

The sinkhole itself is a natural phenomena. With a successful TN 13 awareness-based physical sciences check a character can realize that the limestone collapsed over a natural gas deposit. Then the pit acted as a trap, allowing the slowly leaking gas to build up to concentrations high enough to be ignited. Then once lit by something, it would be almost impossible to put the fire out as long as gas leaks

continued. The building and the stairs are later additions by the Stargazers.

A small breeding population of salamanders lives in the flames of this sinkhole. It is unknown whether the fiery lizards first ignited the gas or were later attracted by the flames. The Stargazers managed to semi-domesticate the salamanders, but the beasts have long since gone feral again.

It is safe to descend the stairs, but as soon as a character sets foot on the floor of the sinkhole, there is a chance of getting burned. At the start of each turn, roll a die for each character on the floor of the sinkhole. A roll of 1 indicates a jet of flame has erupted near the character. A result of 2-6 indicates the character is safe for this round. The jets are random, so running or standing still have no effect on the chance of being hit by flames. A character subject to a flame attack must make a successful TN 12 RG reaction or take 1d2 points of primary damage (there are 0 hp of automatic damage). The damage is red energy.

There is nothing of interest in the sinkhole outside of the building. If the party insists on fully exploring the area, they will encounter a salamander which will attack them. (See the salamander combat statistics given below.)

The exterior of the building is charred black, obliterating any decorations it might once have had. The building can be entered by a single doorway on the side facing the stairs in the sinkhole wall. The distance from the base of the steps to the door is 20 m. Characters could climb through one of the windows on the other sides of the building (no attribute check required) but there is no real reason to.

The building interior is lit by light spilling in through the windows and an ominous flickering between the floor stones. (The chance for being hit by a random flame jet continues inside the building). The building consists of a single room, 10 m by 10 m square. A mural of some kind of religious ceremony is painted on the ceiling. Against the far wall is an altar with a large, red lizard the size of a pony curled up, resting under it. The salamander is fully awake and will attack the PCs, hoping for an easy meal. Unless the party is being particularly stealthy or particularly reckless, neither the PCs nor the salamander should be surprised by this encounter, so determine which side gets to act first as usual. Once wounded the salamander will become even more belligerent and fight to the death. It will pursue a fleeing party to the base of the stairs but will not leave the sinkhole.

Salamander

Level 1
defense: 18
hp: 12
pp: 4
Move: 10 m
Attributes S +0; D -1; E +1; A -1; W -1; P -3
Resistances RB +0; GY +2; OP +0; HR -1

Traits

Hardened Red

Vulnerable Blue

Fire Resistant: A salamander takes no damage from non-magical fire or lava.

Attack Actions

Bite [Major or Interrupt] + 1 melee 1d6+1 hp (normal damage)

Special Actions

Energy Surge [Major] (cost 2 pp; red energy): All creatures within melee range of the salamander take 1 hp of automatic damage and 1d3 points of primary damage (red energy). A successful TN 11 RB reaction is needed to avoid the primary damage.

The following items are on the altar:

- A pottery canopic jar with a jackal head lid [3 kg]
- An ornately crafted magical dagger with a red crystal for a blade [0.5 kg]
- A bronze cylinder embossed with salamander designs, with an open top and three legs for stability [1 kg]
- A golden tiara set with small, egg shaped pieces of black metal flecked with beautiful olive-green crystals [0.5 kg]

With a successful TN 13 awareness-based arcana check, the dagger can be recognized as a red chromatic blade. Even without an arcana check, the distinctive red crystal for the blade is a giveaway.

The bronze cylinder is a torch stand. It can hold a torch upright and be set on a table or the floor if the character wants to use his hand for something else. It could also be traded to a collector (see encounter 3C).

The canopic jar will be needed to open the hidden chamber in the pyramid (see encounters 4B, 4H).

In addition to the altar, there is a pile of blackened bones in the corner. It's an odd mix of dwarf and oni bones (including a horned skull), probably the remains of a previous adventuring party. There are links of chainmail and a broken sword mixed into the pile. The only things of value are 22 coins and 7 pieces scattered at the very bottom of the pile. Everything else has been gnawed or burned away.

The black metal "gems" set in the tiara are cut and polished stony-iron meteorites with abundant embedded olivine crystals. The meteorites can be identified as extraterrestrial in origin with a successful TN 10 awareness-based physical sciences check. This tiara matches the description of the one Captain Bruce wants the adventurers to retrieve (see encounter 2C).

The mural on the ceiling can be made out despite the layer of soot sticking to it. The mural depicts a chronological story starting with the funeral procession of a King-Priest. The Queen, wearing a crown, then comes to the fire temple carried on a litter. There she commits suicide by thrusting an ornate red dagger into her heart. The body is cremated in the natural fires around the temple, and the ashes mixed with clay. The clay is then formed into a statue of the Queen as a winged angel. Finally, the funeral procession pictured at the start of the mural carries the statue and the body of the King-Priest towards a pyramid.

The crown on the head of the Queen matches the one now on the altar of the temple, and the crown is not depicted on the head of the statue. The dagger used in the suicide is easily identifiable as the one on the altar. The Queen is the wife of the final King-Priest who committed suicide to follow him into the tomb. If they party has fought the living statue in the Queen's chamber of the pyramid (see encounter 4E), they will recognize it as the statue in the mural. The depiction of the winged statue of the Queen does not match the "guardian angel" in the vault under Beacon Sanctuary (see encounter 2A); for starters, the Queen's statue seems to be made of clay, while the guardian angel is gold gilded, however there is a thematic similarity between the two. If anyone thinks to ask about canopic jars, it's not a major motif, but the funeral procession does include four servants carrying four canopic jars (human, hawk, baboon, and jackal design lids).

If the GM feels that the party handled this combat encounter too easily, an additional salamander can ambush the party as they leave the temple. It was attracted by the noise and climbed up on to the roof. It will pounce on the first character to walk out the door.

3G) Cursed Ground [Central Space]

The pyramid in the central space has multiple chambers, holding different encounters, and is handled in detail in Section 4.

Travelling across the central space, avoiding the pyramid takes the standard 2 hours. Traveling to the pyramid or back takes 1 hour. Exploring the space in detail involves entering the pyramid, but the time needed to explore the pyramid will depend on the group's approach, and how far they explore, so there is no "standard" time for exploring the central space.

The evil influences from the pyramid temple have cursed the area around it. Each time the party enters the central space, they will have a random encounter of some kind. Roll once on the table below.

Cursed Ground Encounters (1d6)	
1	Jackal Attack
2	Sand Collapse
3	Jackals Scavengers
4	Zombie Attack
5	Lost
6	Harmless Encounter

The GM can use this same encounter table to create a random encounter at any time in Starsmote Sandpit if he feels the PCs are having too easy a time of it.

3G1) Jackal Attack

A pack of jackals decides to attack the party. The number of jackals is equal to the number of characters in the party. The jackals abandon stealth to make the final attack run at highspeed. Have all of the characters make an unskilled TN 12 awareness check. Provided at least one of the characters succeeds, the PCs' party will get to go first in combat before the jackals can close to melee range and attack. Otherwise the jackals will "appear out of nowhere" and get to attack first.

Jackal

Level 0
defense: 14
hp: 6
pp: 2
Move: 14 m
Attributes: S 0; D +3; E +3; A +3; W -1; P 0
Resistances: RB +3; GY +3; OP -1; HR -1

Traits

Pack Tactics [Free]: Any character who starts his turn within melee range of 2 or more hostile jackals must succeed on an unskilled willpower reaction or suffer a -2 penalty to defense until the start of his next turn. The TN for this reaction is 10 plus the number of hostile jackals within melee range. This effect is automatic and doesn't require any action on the part of the jackals.

Attack Actions

Bite [Major or Interrupt] +1 melee 1d2 hp (normal damage)

Special Actions

Pin Down [Interrupt]: As per the striker special action, using the same attack bonus as the bite attack.

3G2) Sand Collapse

A sand dune suddenly collapses just uphill/downhill or right under one of the PCs (determined at random, the first character to walk over a weak spot isn't necessarily the one who will trigger it.)

There are no signs on the surface of an underlying instability in the dune, but if the party is using a thumper staff (see Research Equipment in the Game Masters' Manual), it is possible to notice the change in sound as the staff bounces with a successful TN 12 awareness-based physical sciences check.

The target of the collapse must succeed on an unskilled TN 12 dexterity reaction or be buried up to the waist in sand. If the character freezes and remains motionless, he won't sink any deeper. Climbing out requires a successful unskilled TN 12 dexterity check, but an unsuccessful check result causes the character to sink deeper. After 3 unsuccessful checks, the sand covers the character's head. At this point the character no longer has enough freedom of movement to try to escape, and worse doesn't have any air so begins suffocating.

Another character can make an unskilled TN 12 strength check to attempt to drag the sinking character out, but before each strength check the rescuer must succeed on an unskilled TN 12 dexterity reaction or begin sinking himself. Using a long pole such as a quarterstaff or spear adds a +1 bonus to the dexterity reaction but imposes -1 penalty on the strength check. It is possible for additional characters to use the assist action on the strength check, grabbing the puller's ankles, belt, other hand, etc.; but the character who actually makes the strength check must first succeed on a dexterity reaction. Using a rope to lasso the sinking character from a distance allows the strength check to be

made without the need for a dexterity reaction. Lassoing the sinking character will require a successful ranged attack against a defense of 13.

3G3) Jackal Scavengers

A pack of jackals decides to follow the party, hoping they will drop dead or kill something. Have all of the characters make an unskilled awareness check. The character who rolls the highest is the first to notice the jackals. There are 1d3+3 jackals. They stay a couple hundred meters away, well out of bow range, but watching the party. If the party tries to confront the jackals, the scavengers will calmly, almost playfully, trot away, never letting the party close enough to attack, but staying within sight.

While the jackals are worrying, and will possibly cause the party to waste time, they pose no actual threat. After an hour they will get bored and stop following the party. The party may be able to scare the jackals off more quickly with a clever plan and TN 9 presence-based intimidation check. With a fresh carrion, it could be possible to lure the jackals into bow range.

3G4) Zombie Attack

The zombies of adventurers who died in Starsmote Sandpit rise up to attack the party. There is one zombie for every character in the party. The zombies spring out of the sand right under the characters so get to act first.

On their first turn, one zombie will attack each character, or the mount of a character on horseback. Then each zombie will use its minor action to fully emerge from the sand in a space adjacent to the character it attacked.

The zombies fight until destroyed. Judging by their rotting armor and rusted swords fused into the scabbards, the zombies were adventurers. But there is nothing salvageable left in their gear.

Zombie

Level 0
defense: 8
hp: 5
pp: 1
Move: 6 m
Attributes: S +1, D -1, E +1, A -1, W +1, P -1
Resistances: RB -1, GY +1, OP +1, HR +1

Traits

Hardened normal damage

Amphibious: Zombies don't breathe, so they can continue to act when submerged in water (or sand).

Attack Actions

Claws [Major or Interrupt] +0 melee 1d2+1 hp (normal damage)

3G5) Lost

Have all of the characters make an unskilled TN 15 awareness check (or make the check in secret). Regardless of success or failure, describe a harmless encounter to the players (see Harmless Encounter 3G6). However what really just happened was a Bermuda Triangle effect where even experienced groups with landmarks can lose their way.

If at least one PC succeeded on the awareness check, the party maintained their bearings and can continue traveling to their destination, either to the central pyramid or one of the other spaces.

If the awareness check was unsuccessful, the party has wandered off course. They think they've reached their destination, but actually they are in one of the other spaces, determined at randomly. (This is why the surrounding spaces are conveniently labeled 1-6.) The GM should continue describing the party's progress as if they were on course, but track their actual location in secret. The party won't realize they are lost until, either in exploring a space they find a landmark they recognize, or they try to back-track and don't find landmarks. Even in these cases the GM should try to maintain the delusion for as long as possible. ("You reach the center of the crater where the pyramid should be, but it has vanished without a trace." "You find another sphinx like the one you encountered earlier." "Tired and bleeding you drag yourselves back to the trail leading to Bittersprings, but you can't find the trail up the side of the crater. It must have been obliterated by a rock-slide or something.") Climbing the rim to get an overview of the crater will also let the party reorient, but carries its own risks (see the beginning of Section 3 Starsmote Sandpit).

3G6) Harmless Encounter

Have all of the characters make an unskilled awareness check. The character who rolls the highest notices something that poses no actual threat to the party. Possible examples include: a flock of vultures circling overhead, a sand rat, a heat mirage, or the skeletal remains of a horse. The purpose of these harmless encounters is to provide a smokescreen for other unskilled awareness checks, so that the players never know if they failed a check, or if there was simply nothing to notice.

4) Pyramid

The central pyramid temple/tomb of the Stargazers is the climax of this adventure. But the door is open and the party can visit it first if they like. Only the secret crypt of the King-Priest (encounters 4H and 4I), is protected by a magic ward, requiring 4 canopic jars to open. That is where Ramses, his remaining homunculi, and the mummy of the King-Priest are plotting to turn the world into a barren desert. Presumably the party will need to visit other parts of Starsmote Sandpit and collect the canopic jars (see encounters 3B, 3C, 3E, 3F) in order to unlock the ward. But a well-stocked party could conceivably adopt a siege approach, waiting a couple of weeks for Ramses to run low on food and open the ward from the inside to make a supply run.

The non-warded parts of the pyramid (encounters 4A-G) have been thoroughly explored by other adventuring parties. Any Stargazer treasures have long since been raided, but natural and magical dangers are still present. The temptation of overcoming these dangers and unlocking the secrets of the pyramid continues to lure adventuring parties to their doom. Now, the pyramid operates something like a morbid slot machine. The dropped gear and pocket change from doomed parties accumulates over time and it is possible to find a “jackpot” consisting entirely of items lost by previous adventurers.

4A) Pyramid Exterior

The pyramid is the tallest structure in the crater, made to look even taller because it is built on a central uplift of marble, raising it out of the sand dunes.

The sides of the pyramid are slanted and presumably were originally smooth, but now the mortar is chipping away and there are abundant hand and foot holds for climbing. The top of the pyramid can be reached with a successful TN 11 strength-based athletics check. On an unsuccessful check, the character tumbles back to the ground taking 1d3 hp of damage. The pyramid looks pointed from the ground, but actually the very tip is missing, leaving a flat platform, conveniently 2 m x 2 m. Scratched into the top of this block are the words “PYRAMID CLIMBERS,” with a list of 100 or so names etched beneath them. Any character who reaches the top is free to add his name to the list.

The interior of the pyramid is accessible via an open corridor, 4 m wide and 4 m high. The entrance is flanked by larger-than-life limestone statues of two slightly different King-Priests. Both have their arms crossed over their chests. One carries a khopesh short sword and a scourge whip in his hands. The other carries a scroll tube and

something that could be either a royal scepter or a magical wand.

Characters who search around the entrance of the pyramid will find a marble base almost completely lost in the gravel. It looks as though a large square object has been removed. This is where the obelisk now on display at the College of Recovery in Bittersprings (see encounter B2) once stood.

The interior of the pyramid is completely dark. The tunnel to the central chamber is 50 m long, but proceeding more than about 6 m down the corridor will require a light source. Any party foolish enough to go in blindly deserves what happens to them.

4B) Central Chamber

The passageway into the pyramid leads to the central chamber. The central chamber is spacious, 10 m x 10 m with a 3 m high ceiling. In addition to the corridor connecting to outside, there are open doorways in the center of each of the other walls. These lead to the encounters Trapped Hall (4C), Queen’s Chamber (4E), and Fallen Adventurers (4F). In addition there is a staircase (4H) leading to the secret crypt (4I) concealed in the same wall as the passageway to the outside.

The central chamber is littered with detritus. If anyone investigates the garbage, they will discover it is a disgusting mix of small bones, rotting leather equipment and rope, rusted swords, and rat dropping. Semi-clean patches of the floor reveal glimpses of an elaborate plaster fresco of a map showing what Starsmote Crater must have been like in its prime. The map is like a modern-day tourist map, with large pictures of buildings or notable activities like hunting or harvesting that are located only approximately. The map is far too old and inaccurate to be used for navigation. But a party that has explored Starsmote Sandpit can recognize the places where they’ve been. The sphinx (3E) and fire pit (3F) are easily recognizable. The ruins where there is now an archeological dig (3C), probably correspond to a tax/administration building. Where the frozen well should be (3B), there is a space where the original fresco has been scratched down and patched. The new plaster is painted with a couple of unremarkable sand dunes like the rest of the background. Characters who have heard but not solved the sphinx’s riddle (see encounter 3E) can search the map for obelisks. Only one is shown, standing near the entrance to the pyramid.

Red circles at the edges of the map mark the four cardinal directions. The East and West circles hold indistinguishable rising and setting suns. South is marked by the full disk of the Sun. North is marked by seven dots which should be

recognizable as Ursa Minor, the constellation hosting the North Star (see the Starsmote Sandpit map pack for the dot pattern). The GM can call for a TN 9 awareness-based natural sciences check to recognize Ursa Minor if needed. The size of the red circles is a little bit larger than a canopic jar. Overall, the map of Starsmote Sandpit is non-magical, but a magical aura can be detected coming from the red circles with a successful TN 12 perception-based arcana check. If the roll is greater than 14, the circles can be identified as magical switches, somehow linked to the wall fresco (see below).

The wall with the passage leading to the outside is decorated with a fresco showing a mummified King-Priest presiding over a supernatural court of angels and demons. The King-Priest sits, flanked by four servants holding large jars, on a raised platform at the top of a flight of stairs. One servant is fully human. The others have animal heads set on human bodies; the heads are those of a jackal, a baboon, and a falcon. A column of Stargazer text runs down the side of the illustration. A recent explorer has added a graffiti-like ink brush translation, “When the four guardians of the dead hold their sacred cargos at the four points of the compass, the door to Heaven will open.” The entire fresco is magical and can be identified as such with a successful TN 11 awareness-based arcana check.

The fresco is a magical security lock concealing the stairs (encounter 4H) to the secret crypt (encounter 4I).

The magical lock can be opened by placing four canopic jars on the four red circles on the floor fresco. Placing even one jar on a red circle will cause that circle to light up. The jars don’t have to contain the organs of the same individual. In fact, the four jars provided in this adventure (see encounters 3B, 3C, 3E, 3F) obviously come from two different sets, one of carved limestone and one made from pottery, just to worry the players. If the PCs have opened and spilled the contents of the jars, all they really need is the actual jars. If the PCs have broken one or more of the jars, a jar which has been glued back together will still work. The only requirement for the magical ward is that jars representing all four guardians (human, jackal, baboon, and falcon) are used.

Which jar is set at which compass point doesn’t matter, unless you want to include more real-world knowledge in the game and give the players an extra challenge when solving this puzzle-lock. In that case you can require that the correct jars are set on the compass points related to the four sons of Horus: South human, East jackal, North baboon, West falcon. See the canopic jar entry in the Reference Notes at the end of this adventure for more details.

As a modern practitioner of the Stargazer religion, Ramses understood the cultural references and was able to acquire a complete set of canopic jars from other members of the cult. In this way he became the first person in centuries to penetrate the secret crypt. He took the canopic jars with him when he entered and then closed the warded portal behind him to prevent others from following him. He didn’t count on the PCs finding other canopic jars in Starsmote Sandpit.

This central chamber has no permanent residents, but sometimes random inhabitants wander in. The GM could have a semi-planned encounter with other adventurers occur in the central chamber. If the party has not yet encountered Celest (see encounter 3A), you might want them to meet her here to give the party the background behind the Dressed to Kill (4G) encounter before they go to that room. Other “random” adventurers could have information to help the PCs with riddles they couldn’t solve or serve to introduce new PCs as replacements for ones who have died.

Dangerous monsters also wander in and out of the central chamber. The first time the party enters the central chamber, there is no chance for a random encounter. But each time the party leaves and returns, there is a chance they will encounter a combative monster. Roll once on the table below to determine if the party finds danger in the central chamber. Forgo this roll if there is a semi-planned encounter of your own you would like to run instead.

Central Chamber Encounters

1-3	No encounter
4	1 poisonous snake
5	2 jackals
6	1 zombie

Snake, Poisonous

Level 1
defense: 15
hp: 4
pp: 2
Move: 6 m
Attributes: S -4; D +3; E -3; A +1; W 0; P 0
Resistances: RB +4; GY +2; OP +1; HR +1

Traits

Skill: Athletics, Stealth +1

Attack Actions

Bite [Major or Interrupt] +3 melee 1d6 hp (green energy)

Jackal

Level 0
defense: 14
hp: 6
pp: 2
Move: 14 m
Attributes: S 0; D +3; E +3; A +3; W -1; P 0
Resistances: RB +3; GY +3; OP -1; HR -1

Traits

Pack Tactics [Free]: Any character who starts his turn within melee range of 2 or more hostile jackals must succeed on an unskilled willpower reaction or suffer a -2 penalty to defense until the start of his next turn. The TN for this reaction is 10 plus the number of hostile jackals within melee range. This effect is automatic and doesn't require any action on the part of the jackals.

Attack Actions

Bite [Major or Interrupt] +1 melee 1d2 hp (normal damage)

Special Actions

Pin Down [Interrupt]: As per the striker special action, using the same attack bonus as the bite attack.

Zombie

Level 0
defense: 8
hp: 5
pp: 1
Move: 6 m
Attributes: S +1, D -1, E +1, A -1, W +1, P -1
Resistances: RB -1, GY +1, OP +1, HR +1

Traits

Hardened normal damage

Amphibious: Zombies don't breathe, so they can continue to act when submerged in water (or sand).

Attack Actions

Claws [Major or Interrupt] +0 melee 1d2+1 hp (normal damage)

4C) Trapped Hall

The narrow passageway from the central chamber opens onto a wide hallway which is a room in its own right, 6 m wide and 20 m long. At the far end, an open doorway leads to the inner sanctum (encounter 4D). The walls of this hall

are painted with scenes of battle. A Stargazer army lead by a King-Priest is engaged with an army of oni. The leader of the oni army seems to be a giant being clubbed to death by the King-Priest himself at the far end of the hallway. However a closer inspection of the scenes show that the oni and giant have been repainted. The original fresco was abraded down and new layers of plaster and paint were used to patch the holes. It is impossible to tell who/what was originally depicted as the enemies.

About halfway down the corridor on the righthand side, two stargazer magicians (man and woman) hold a scroll of arcane writing unfurled between them, as if showing it to the viewer. The written passage gives a formula that will cause objects of extraterrestrial origin to vibrate softly, giving off a faint ringing sound. This is part of the secret of how the Stargazers could identify meteorites. A character who can successfully interpret the arcane writings (TN 12 willpower-based arcana) can use the arcane skill in place of physical sciences for the purposes of identifying meteorites or other objects from space. But actually, this inscription is the bait for a trap.

The 2 m x 2 m space in front of the portion of the fresco showing the magicians and the scroll is a pit trap. A pivot axis is hidden under the floor and the stone lid of the pit is balanced to tip down as soon as 10 kg of mass or more is placed on it. Anyone walking down the right side of the corridor, or moving to get a closer look at the magical scroll in the fresco will step on the pit trap and need to succeed on an unskilled TN 12 dexterity reaction or fall into the pit. A character who falls into the pit takes 1d3 hp of damage. Just as dangerous as the falling damage is the fact that after the weight has been dumped into the pit, the counterweight will drive the lid back up, closing the pit and trapping anyone inside.

The lid of the pit is well disguised, even after centuries of snagging intruders. It requires a successful TN 15 awareness-based engineering check to notice the slight gap around the stone lid or a successful TN 15 awareness-based domestic sciences check to notice the scratch marks on the lid and surrounding stones made by previous victims trying to catch themselves.

A character in the pit with the lid closed will be in total darkness unless he has his own source of light. He might be better off not being able to see, because the pit is littered with rat gnawed bones. The floor of the pit is 5 m down from the lid. Even if the character can climb up the walls (TN 15 strength-based athletics check), there is no handhold on the lid and no way to pull it open from the inside. The character is doomed to a slow death from dehydration/starvation unless allies above can open the lid for him.

Getting a character out of the pit is intended to be a teamwork/problem-solving encounter, so allow any reasonable plan to keep the lid open to succeed. The simplest would be to use a spear or other long pole to press the lid open. Another option would be to tie a rope to 10 kg of gear, and then hold the weight at the right height to keep pressure on the lid without letting it fall all the way in. Using one of the leg bones in the pit to jam the lid open might work, but it would first require opening the pit from the outside and then getting the bone up to the top of the pit.

Searching the bones at the bottom of the pit will turn up 10 c 7 p in money, and a grappling hook (2 kg) which is still usable (the rope has been eaten by the rats).

4D) Inner Sanctum

At the end of the trapped hall is a vandalized inner sanctum (6 m x 6 m) which now holds nothing of interest. There was a larger-than-life stone statue of the warrior King-Priest depicted in the trapped hall fresco, but the statue has been broken off at the ankles and lies on the ground beside the pedestal with the feet. His raised right hand was long ago hacked off at the wrist and carried away as a souvenir. A search of the room will turn up nothing else.

4E) Queen's Chamber

This 16 m x 16 m chamber is home to an animated clay statue of the final Queen. The Queen's statue gets smashed to bits by adventurers fairly often, but magically reforms over the course of several days. How much of the Queen's mind and soul still remain are open questions. The statue will attack anyone who enters the chamber. This could be the programmed reaction of an automaton or a devoted wife's conviction to destroy anyone who might disturb her husband's rest.

When the party first enters this chamber, read or paraphrase the following.

A pair of great stone pillars stand in the center of this room, their tops disappearing into the darkness of the high ceiling. Similar pillars, possibly ornamental, line the walls. The only furnishing in the room is a low table or bench near the central pillars. A young Stargazer woman is sitting on the bench. On a closer inspection you can see that she is a statue, not blinking, not breathing. Then she turns her head towards you and the painted eyes seem to focus on you.

Pause for a moment. Unless the PCs declare that they are attacking, continue with the following boxed text. If

anyone asks, the statue is recognizable as the one painted on the ceiling of the fire temple (see encounter 3F).

The stargazer woman opens her mouth. It is very lifelike, the lips part naturally, there are no signs of seams or joints. The movements are as natural as living flesh, but the inside of the mouth is a basin of fired clay. The jaw continues to drop, opening the mouth uncomfortably, unnaturally wide. A point of light forming inside that gaping maw is the only warning you get before a beam of orange light blasts out.

If the party has waited long enough to hear this full description, the Queen will get to attack first. On her first turn she will use her energy shot attack on the nearest character. Immediately following that, feathered wings will grow out of her shoulder blades, and she will fly up and start circling around the ceiling. The ceiling is 10 m high, placing the Queen right at the edge of the range of thrown weapons and torchlight. Her strategy is to attack with her energy shot and then maneuver to place the central pillars between herself and the party.

After she has expended all of her pp, she will move to engage in melee. She attacks whichever member of the party looks the least ready to engage in melee. One turn she will use her minor action to fly down and land right next to the target, then use her major action to attack. On the next turn she will use her major action to attack, and then use her minor action to fly back up to the ceiling. Even accepting the possibility of an interrupt action attack when she leaves melee, this strategy still enables her to engage and disengage on her own terms, minimizing the party's chances to strike back.

When defeated, the Queen shatters with a satisfying sharp "clink" and an explosion of pottery shards.

Queen's Statue (Gargoyle)

Level 1
defense: 15
hp: 15
pp: 3
Move: 10 m walk, 20 m fly
Attributes: S +2, D -2, E +2, A +2, W +0, P +0
Resistances: RB -1, GY +3, OP +1, HR +1

Traits

Skills: Deception +1, Athletics +1

Hardened Orange
Vulnerable Purple

Flight: At the GM's discretion, the Queen can fly over obstacles on the ground.

Attack Actions

Holy Touch [Major or Interrupt] +3 melee 1d3+2 hp (orange energy)

Special Actions

Energy Shot [Major] (att= +3, cost 1 pp, orange energy): As per the enger special action, but without requiring an energy mote, spoken incantations or hand motions. 1d6 orange energy.

Once the Queen has been defeated, the party can search the room. The party will find nothing of interest unless someone says they are looking up or examining the pillars. Anyone who thinks to check will see that one of the pillars along the wall is a little shorter than the ceiling, leaving a gap. This gap creates a small shelf where the Queen keeps souvenirs from fallen adventurers. Climbing up to the shelf requires a successful TN 11 strength-based athletics check. Once someone has climbed up, he will find:

- Angelic dagger (0.5 kg)
- Jewel inlaid greatsword (7 kg)
- Metal amulet (negligible mass)

The angelic dagger is gold gilded and the guard is crafted in an angel wing motif; pretty, but it functions as a normal dagger. Likewise, the greatsword with rubies inlaid in the pommel is a normal greatsword in terms of game mechanics. Sandcastle doesn't contain rules for selling treasure, so in terms of monetary value, the most valuable item is the metal amulet which could be traded for its weight in coins (6 c 6 p). It is simple in design, featuring a jackal head on the front with a blank back. It has a braided leather strap which is showing its age, and will snap if given a quick yank.

If the party revisits the Queen's chamber after destroying the Queen, roll 1d6. Make this check at most once a day, even if the party comes in and out during that day. If the result is greater than or equal to the number of days since the Queen was destroyed, the chamber is still empty. If the result is less than the number of days since the Queen was destroyed, then she has reanimated and is sitting in exactly the same place in exactly the same position as before, and will react to the party in exactly the same way, like a repeating video loop. Permanently destroying the Queen will require a plot device of the GM's invention.

4F) Fallen Adventurers

The corridor leading from the central chamber (4B) is 2 m wide and bends once at a 90 degree angle just before the room where the Dressed to Kill encounter occurs (4G). Near this corner Luna (see encounter 4G) has dumped the bodies of her adventuring companions. As the party approaches the corner read or paraphrase the following.

Before you can see them, you know by smell what to expect, corpses dead just long enough to be at their most odiferous. It looks like three fallen adventurers in this case. At least they seem to be really dead and not zombies. The trio of bodies lies just before a bend in the corridor. Their arms are stretched over their heads and there is a slight curve to how they lay, as if they were drug around the corner. A faint green glow from up ahead spills around that corner from some unseen light source.

These bodies were the adventuring companions of Luna (see encounter 4G) and Celest (see encounter 3A). After Luna unintentionally killed them with her new poison aura, she dragged the bodies here, just out of her sight. The bodies haven't been looted yet. They have the standard starting equipment listed in the Core Rules with the following additions:

- Scale mail armor (1 suit, 20 kg)
- Chainmail armor (1 suit, 25 kg)
- Money (20 c 2 p)

The metal armor is starting to rust from being left two weeks on a rotting corpse, but can be salvaged if it is washed and polished. Even before being washed, it can be worn effectively as armor, but the smell is horrible. The money is divided between the belt pouches on the three corpses (5 c, 8 c, 7 c 2 p).

4G) Dressed to Kill

This 6 m wide x 10 m long chamber used to be empty, but Ramses left a cursed necklace here as a trap. And a young adventuress named Luna fell for the trap.

When the party turns the corner, read or paraphrase the following.

The corridor empties into a room lit with green light where an abomination sits on a low stone couch against the far wall. The basic shape is humanoid. Scaly, clawed hands hold its legs folded to its chest. Unblinking reticulated pupils stare blankly at the ground. It has the trappings of an adventurer, from the elven chainmail armor, to the intricately carved quarterstaff within easy reach. It has a mass

of snakes for hair, writhing and hissing absently at nothing in particular. Perhaps the most unnerving thing is that despite the deep shadow under the couch, the monster cast no shadow, as if it itself is the source of the sickening green glow filling the room.

The monster is actually Luna, a transformed adventuress. Luna is surrounded by a poisonous green energy aura. Anyone who approaches within 8 m of her will be subject to the effects of the aura (see Luna's description below). She will notice the party normally unless they try to sneak up (in which case it becomes a dexterity vs. awareness contested stealth check). Her first actions will be to snatch up her quarterstaff and take a fighting stance, then shout in a reptilian lisp, "Don't come any clossser. I can't undo the lock."

Luna was part of an adventuring team with her older sister Celest (see encounter 3A). For Luna, the best perk of adventuring is finding beautiful items to use or wear. She feels that precious metals, gemstones, and exotic craftsmanship from lost cultures are the marks of true adventurers, even if the items aren't any more effective than unadorned standard items. Exploring Starsmote Crater was a hot, boring, disappointment to her, turning up nothing but old, dirty, broken relics until in this room she found a silver necklace worked in an intricate pattern of intertwined snakes and set with turquoise stones. In her excitement she didn't stop to wonder why it was so different from everything else in Starsmote Sandpit, and immediately fastened it around her own neck.

The necklace had originally been created by a coven of poison witches. To protect their high priestesses, the witches created magical necklaces which infuse the wearer with green energy. This gives her a poisonous aura which kills any who try to approach her. The energy infusion also transforms the priestesses into a gorgon-like scaly, reptilian creature with snakes for hair. The poison aura requires that a priestess lives in solitude, concentrating on her never-ending religious rites and living on offerings left by devotees. Not every priestess has the mental fortitude to endure a life of unbroken religious devotion, so the necklaces include a lock and key which can be used to remove the necklace. But the poison witches had some bad experiences where a supposedly pure priestess would remove the necklace temporarily to go carousing. So now the necklaces are made to lose their enchantment if removed even once.

Ramses recognized that the necklaces could also be used to create poisonous shock troops who would literally have enemies fall before them. So he stole one of the necklaces from the poison witches. He had included the necklace in his offerings to the mummified King-Priest before he

realized the King-Priest was obsessed with using yellow energy to transform the world. The King-Priest rejected the green (yellow's opposite) energy producing necklace, so Ramses placed it in an empty room in the pyramid, rightly figuring that without the key or any instructions the necklace would cause more harm than good. One of Ramses's homunculi later wandered off with the key when sent out on patrol (see encounter 3D).

Luna has never heard of the poison witches and would never have willingly given up her good looks if she had known the true nature of the necklace. But unfortunately all she knew was that the necklace was pretty. She also didn't notice that the clasp was really a lock, and at first didn't think anything of the slightly louder than expected metallic "click" when she fastened it around her neck. In the time it took her to strike a pose and ask, "How do I look?" the pains of transformation began to wrack her body. She started screaming, "Get it off! Get it off!" Her smooth, pale skin turned green and scaly; her eyes changed to reticulated pupils; and her long, beautiful locks of flaxen hair coiled into hissing snakes.

Her adventuring companions rushed to try to take the necklace off of her, but they succumbed to her poisonous aura or snake hair. Only her sister Celest, who had the good sense to flee, survived.

Luna has sat alone in this chamber feeling sorry for herself for the last two weeks, possibly longer, depending on how long it takes the PCs to find her. She's gone no farther than the central chamber of the pyramid, and only to dump her rubbish in with the rest of the garbage on the floor of that chamber. With lots of time to think, Luna has rehearsed over and over in her mind what to do if she is discovered. But when the PCs appear, in her fear she starts to panic and becomes confused about what she's already said. She might say, "I didn't know when I put it on." or "If you come any closer, you'll get hurt." when trying to explain that she has a poisonous aura. If the PCs state things they've already learned about Luna's plight, such as from her sister Celest, Luna will suddenly remember that she hasn't explained those parts yet and will repeat the same information back to the party. But provided they can keep Luna talking, eventually the party should be able to piece the story together. It would probably be best to stand back and shout to avoid the green energy aura.

From the hand mirror in one of her grooming sets Luna has learned of her hideous appearance and through touch has worked out that the tight-fitting silver necklace has a lock on the back. She has found the supplies Celest leaves her, so is huddling in this room, hoping that no wandering adventurers mistake her for a monster. In her own mind,

she doesn't want to kill anyone more than she already has. But in truth she is much more scared for her own life and will go on the offensive if she ever feels threatened.

She has figured out through accidental trial and error that the necklace gives her the ability to launch a beam of deadly green energy from her eyes (poison glance), and has worked out how to control it. She will use poison glance when she needs to make a ranged attack, but as a striker, she prefers to move into melee and strike enemies with graceful, ostentatious, almost dance-like blows with her staff.

This is intended to be a role playing encounter. The goal is to convince Luna to trust the party. Charm or deception checks would be appropriate. The presence of her sister Celest would add a +2 bonus to any of these checks. Any attempts at intimidation will send Luna into an almost berserker frenzy, figuring she won't be safe until all the PCs are dead.

Removing the necklace requires access to the lock, so the party will need to convince Luna to trust them enough to let someone behind her back. With the proper key (found in the loot carried by the homunculi in encounter 3D) the lock can be opened automatically with a single major action. Without the key, the lock can still be picked with any thin tool and a successful TN 14 dexterity-based engineering check. Since it is a magical lock, touching it and making a successful TN 14 presence-based arcana check will also open it. Unfortunately getting close enough to use the key or pick the lock (physically or magically) will require entering her poisonous aura and in addition Luna doesn't have conscious control over her snake hair, so it will use an interrupt action to attack anyone who moves into melee range.

Alternatively, the party can toss her the key and try to convince Luna to try to unlock herself. Having gotten into so much trouble already by not thinking, she will hesitate to try the key unless the party can promise that it will work (which they can't do without lying); but eventually Luna will choose the glimmer of hope offered by the key. She could clumsily use the key, but can't get the right angle to pick the lock herself, and the necklace is affixed tightly enough that she can't rotate the lock to the front.

Trying to sneak up on her and undo the lock is also an option, but Luna will attack if she notices the sneaker. Beating Luna unconscious (0 hp) and then removing the necklace is also an option. Beating her unconscious has the benefit that it will also subdue her snake hair, but it won't stop the poisonous aura. If this turns into a combat encounter, the GM should have Celest suddenly appear

behind the party and start firing arrows to make the encounter more challenging (see encounter 3A for Celest's combat statistics).

When the lock on the necklace is opened, there is a loud "click" and the green light aura winks out. The snakes on Luna's head unravel like knitted socks coming undone and turn back into beautiful blonde hair. The scales drop from her skin and her unblinking eyes start to blink rapidly and she squints as if suddenly coming into bright light as her reticulated pupils return to a round shape. If not under immediate physical assault, Luna will take time to check her appearance in a hand mirror. She turns her head back and forth, and holds the mirror high and low as if lost in the rapture of her own beauty. Then she breaks down into hysterical tears. If Celest is present the two sisters will clutch each other and cry together.

Aside from the now non-magical silver and turquoise necklace, the only other thing of note in the room is the disturbing number of dead snakes rotting in the corners of the room; as if they were attracted to the poisonous aura only to fall victim to it. The necklace has no monetary value, except maybe to a collector. But trying to fence it will almost certainly attract the attention of the poison witches from whom it was stolen.

If the party asks her to, Luna, and Celest if present, will travel with them and assist in combat encounters, but both of the sisters are too unnerved to be much help with riddle or role playing encounters for a while.

Luna, Human Striker

Level 1
defense: 14
hp: 6
pp: 2
Move: 10 m walk
Attributes: S +2, D +1, E -1, A -1, W -1, P +0
Resistances: RB +2, GY +0, OP +0, HR +0

Traits

Skills: Domestic Sciences, Entertainment, Social Sciences +1

Independent Action: The snake hair acts independently from Luna with 1 major action and 1 interrupt action of its own.

Poisonous Aura: As long as the necklace is active, all creatures within 8 m of Luna at the start of her turn are subject to her poisonous aura. The aura deals 1 hp of automatic damage and 1d2 hp of primary damage (green energy).

The primary damage can be avoided with a successful TN 12 GY reaction. The poisonous aura also sheds light equivalent to a torch (8 m radius).

Attack Actions

Quarterstaff [Major or Interrupt] +3 melee 1d6+2 hp (normal damage)

Snake Hair [Major or Interrupt] +3 melee 1d3 hp (green energy)

Special Actions

First Strike [Interrupt]: The snake hair can use an interrupt action to attack any creature who moves into melee range.

Poison Glance [Major] (att= +0; cost 1 pp; 1d6 hp; green energy): This ability is equivalent to the energy shot ability, except that it doesn't require an energy mote.

Standard striker abilities (refer to the Core Rules for full descriptions)

Backswing [Minor]

Counter Strike [Interrupt]

Hit Hard [Major] (cost 1 pp)

Pin Down [Interrupt]

Vengeance Strike [Interrupt] (cost 1 pp)

Luna can only use her striker abilities with her quarterstaff, not with her snake hair.

Notable Equipment

Ornate quarterstaff (pretty, but functions as a standard quarterstaff)

Elven chainmail armor

Three grooming sets (one for her hair, one for her face, and one with expensive cosmetics for special occasions) money (2 c 4 p)

Four days worth of rations

Seven water skins (four full, three empty).

4H) Stairway to Heaven (or Hell)

When four canopic jars are placed on the four red circles on the floor of the central chamber (see encounter 4B), read or paraphrase the following.

The fresco on the wall depicting a King-Priest in the after-life becomes pale and indistinct as the wall itself turns into a cloud of smoke. The smoke rolls into the room along the ceiling carrying a smell of incense that masks the stench of the room. Where there had been a solid stone wall a moment ago, now a 4-m wide case of stairs leads down into darkness.

After descending for about 10 meters, the limestone block staircase changes to a sloping tunnel hewn out of the underlying granite bedrock, very possibly predating the pyramid. This tunnel meanders for 200 m, descending and looping back under itself, leading to the secret crypt almost directly under the central chamber of the pyramid.

The tunnel is dark and quiet, but approaching the secret crypt, light and the sounds of activity become apparent.

4I) Secret Crypt

Entering the secret crypt is intended to be the climax of the adventures in Starsmote Sandpit. Although the characters have no way of knowing it, the missions from Father Sven (encounter 2A), Gyunghui Kim (encounter 2B), and Natashia (encounter 2C) are all tied to this encounter.

The secret crypt is a 14-m x 14-m room holding the mummy of the final King-Priest and the yellow energy generator responsible for the desertification in Starsmote Crater. Ramses and his squad of homunculi have come to join the King-Priest. And at Ramses's initiative, the yellow energy generator has been upgraded so that the desert is now spreading beyond Starsmote Crater.

As the party approaches, read or paraphrase the following.

The tunnel ends in a carefully carved chamber elaborately furnished with low couches and colorful wall hangings. In the center of the room stands a model pyramid a meter tall, covered with arcane runes. The top of the pyramid has been removed and set to the side. In its place, a brown rock with irregular white inclusions now crowns the pyramid. The entire structure glows with yellow light so intense that just looking at it makes you feel sweet and thirsty. The upward lighting gives the room a hellish quality. A figure wrapped entirely in strips of white cloth sits on a stone throne. Even without facial expressions, his posture shows that he is irritated. To one side of the room, a young human man with several days of stubble, dressed in white knee-length robes and a nemyss headdress, crouches on the ground, busying himself by sorting supplies. On the other side of the room, two ugly little humanoids amuse themselves by leap-frogging over one another.

Unless the PCs manage to sneak in or charge in shouting battle cries, the mummified King-Priest will be the first in the room to notice them. He straightens on this throne and in a booming voice asks, "Who dares to violate my inner sanctum?" Upon hearing that, Ramses and the homunculi stop and look up, then prepare for battle but do not attack.

Ramses has been with the King-Priest non-stop for a month or more now, and they are both sick of the other's company. Both think of himself as the leader of this endeavor, and their egos are grating on each other. Ramses's homunculi are fairly stupid, but just smart enough to be snide, making them even worse conversation partners. When the PCs appear, Ramses and the King-Priest will be suspicious and hostile, but so thankful for anyone different to talk to that they will parlay with the party first, rather than rushing to dispatch them.

With quicker reflexes than the mummy, Ramses will soon butt into any conversation between the PCs and the King-Priest. Ramses is cocky and will tell the PCs as much as they want to know about the plan. He's already made up his mind to kill the PCs as soon as he tires of the conversation, so it doesn't matter how much they know.

Ramses is whole-heartedly dedicated to the plan to use the yellow energy generator in this room to turn the entire world into a desert. He doesn't realize just how subtle the effects have been so far and how much time it will take, but he is resigned to the fact that it will take time. He doesn't fully understand the workings of the yellow energy generator himself and will try to dodge any questions about it, insisting that the moon meteorite he acquired and placed on top is the key to the plan.

The King-Priest had already achieved his goal of creating a desert in Starsmote Crater, and was content until Ramses arrived. Ramses's idea of supercharging the yellow energy generator with a moon meteorite intrigued him, and he agreed to the plan. But he is not fully committed to it. He would be willing to listen to arguments that the time is not right to end the world, or that Ramses's plan will attract unwanted attention that could jeopardize the desert paradise the King-Priest worked so hard to build. If the PCs are openly displaying any of the three meteorite artifacts found in this adventure (the scepter from encounter 3C, amulet from encounter 3E, and tiara from encounter 3F), add a +1 bonus for each one to all presence checks to influence the attitude of the King-Priest.

If given a promise to leave his inner sanctum in the state it was before Ramses arrived, the King-Priest will abstain from combat when Ramses attacks the party. If the PCs do a really good job of playing Ramses and the King-Priest off against each other, the mummy may even side with the PCs during the fight. Otherwise, the King-Priest will fight alongside Ramses as a fellow Stargazer when push comes to shove.

Ramses, Human Harrier

Level 1
defense: 15 (13 without shield)
hp: 7
pp: 2
Move: 10 m walk
Attributes: S -1, D +2, E +1, A -2, W -1, P +1
Resistances: RB +3, GY +2, OP +0, HR +0

Traits

Skills: Arcana, Social Sciences, Stealth +1

Attack Actions

Bronze Khopesh (truestrike rank 1 short sword)[Major or Interrupt] +1 melee 1d6 hp (normal damage)

Special Actions

Standard harrier abilities (refer to the Core Rules for full descriptions)

2 interrupt actions per turn

Cut and Run [Interrupt]

Dogged Pursuit [Interrupt]

Energy Shunt [Reaction] (cost 1 pp)

Fleet Footed [Interrupt]

Follow-up Strike [Interrupt]

Notable Equipment

Bronze khopesh (truestrike rank 1 short sword)

Livelong shield rank 1

King-Priest Mummy, Yellow Chromatic Hexer Animatron

Level 1
defense: 12
hp: 5
pp: 2
Move: 6 m walk
Attributes: S +1, D -2, E +0, A -2, W +0, P +2
Resistances: RB +0, GY +1, OP +1, HR +1

Traits

Skills: Arcana, Physical Sciences, Social Sciences +1

Hardened Normal Damage, Yellow
Vulnerable Green

Attack Actions

Fists [Major or Interrupt] +1 melee 1d3 +1 hp (yellow energy)

Special Actions

Standard hexer abilities (refer to the Core Rules for full descriptions)

Counter Hex [Interrupt]

Hexes [Minor] (TN 13 HR)

Attack Hex

Defense Hex

Move Hex

Power Drain [Major] (cost 1 pp)

Homunculus

Level 0
defense: 13
hp: 3
pp: 3
Move: 8 m
Attributes: S -3; D +2; E -2; A +1; W 0; P 0
Resistances: RB +1; GY +1; OP +1; HR -1

Traits

Hardened Purple

Vulnerable Orange

Attack Actions

Claw [Major or Interrupt] -1 melee 1 hp (normal damage)

Special Actions

Energy Spark [Major] (att= +1; cost 1 pp; purple energy):

A homunculus can shoot a spark of energy up to 8 m. A target struck by this spark takes 1d2 hp of purple energy damage.

Energy Surge [Major] (cost 1 pp; purple energy): All creatures within melee range of the homunculus must make a TN 11 OP reaction or take 1 hp of primary damage (purple energy). There are 0 hp of automatic damage.

Energy Armor (cost 1 pp; purple energy): This ability functions the same way as the energy shield eneger special action but doesn't require a mote and only provides 2 points of protection. This energy armor lasts for 10 minutes or until the homunculus is reduced to 0 hp. The homunculus can choose to lower the shield earlier. The shield is hardened against purple energy and vulnerable to orange energy.

Ramses was raised in the secret traditions of the Stargazer cult. He is one of the more zealous and ambitious members. But there is little room for ambition in an organization that values hiding its own existence. Unable to get humans to follow him, for a time Ramses busied himself creating homunculi flunkies, until their number started to

attract unwanted attention and a reprimand from the cult elders. Chafing under the rules of the organization that prevent him from trying to gain power, Ramses left his sect to make a pilgrimage to Starsmote Crater.

In the central chamber of the pyramid, he recognized the cultural references in the fresco and figured out how to open the magical lock. He left Starsmote Sandpit, and "borrowed" the canopic jars from another Stargazer sanctuary. He has taken the tricks he learned for covertly practicing his religion and applied them to larceny. In particular he collects low power magical items, or quirky non-magical items which seem of limited value so are lightly guarded, but may prove useful.

When Ramses reached the secret crypt, the mummy of the final King-Priest awoke, and Ramses immediately began worshiping him. The power of the King-Priest and the magical generator both impressed Ramses and whetted his appetite for more power. The yellow generator offered him a way to increase the power of the Stargazers without breaking the code of secrecy. Ramses was the one who figured out a way to increase the power of the generator with the addition of a moon meteorite. He set out on a crime spree to acquire the meteorite and other gifts for the King-Priest. Growing in confidence, he has even adopted the mode of dress of ancient Stargazers.

Ramses returned to the pyramid and put his plan in motion about 1 month before the start of the adventure. Since then, closed up in the crypt with nothing else to think about, he has become increasingly obsessed with the idea. And he is starting to think of the reluctance of the King-Priest more and more as holding him back, like the secretive and cautious nature of the modern Stargazer cult leaders.

When combat breaks out, Ramses will attempt to rush to the back of the party and attack whoever seems least ready to engage in melee; the two homunculi will fall back to provide ranged attack support, and the mummy (if he is participating) will take the frontline, going toe-to-toe with whoever will rise to the challenge. The first attack the mummy makes against a new target will be an attempt to use his power drain hexer ability. Once engaged in melee, so that he doesn't have to use his minor action for movement, the mummy will use hexes to weaken his opponent before making a melee attack. Once their pp are expended, the homunculi will move to the frontline flanking the mummy.

The model pyramid in the middle of the room blocks movement, forcing characters to maneuver around it. If someone tries to vault over the model pyramid during the

chaos of combat, it requires a successful TN 13 dexterity-based athletic check to jump over the top. In addition, a character cannot end his movement in the same space as the pyramid; the sides are slick and the top is too narrow to stop on. Only a character who has enough movement remaining to move to a space on the other side of the pyramid can attempt to jump over it.

Once all hostiles have been eliminated, the PCs can find the following treasures in the room. These items were all brought in by Ramses, so even if the PCs made a deal with the mummy, they are free to take these items.

- Stone tablet (2 kg)
- Rank 1 trueshield shortsword (Ramses's bronze khopesh)
- Rank 1 livelong shield
- Rank 1 wild armor (GM should decide the mass depending on its form)
- Moon meteorite (0.5 kg)
- Money (35 c)
- Complete set of 4 canopic jars (3 kg each)

In addition to the treasures listed above, there are other mundane supplies including rope, torches, two weeks worth of rations, a 50 liter barrel with 23 liters of Bittersprings water remaining, and a couple of empty boxes that have been converted in to a garbage dump and a commode.

The black granite stone tablet is easily recognized as the top half of the tablet wanted by Gyunghui Kim of the College of Recovery (see encounter 2B). With a successful TN 16 willpower-based social sciences check, a character can work out the general idea that it describes a yellow energy generator matching the description of the model pyramid in the secret crypt. The tablet states that this generator was created to turn the crater into a "sacred moonscape devoid of earthy contamination." The description of the generator is complete enough that the party can use it as a guide to return the generator to its original, lower power state (see section 5. Wrapping up the Adventure, below).

The moon meteorite is a fist sized hunk of rock blasted out of the lunar surface, but from appearances (without chemical analysis) it is difficult to distinguish from an ordinary rock. Using the magic incantation written on the wall of the Trapped Hall (4C), the moon meteorite can be identified as being of extraterrestrial origin with a successful TN 15 presence-based arcane check. The King-Priest, if he is still around, would prefer to keep the meteorite unless the PCs are adamant about taking it. He would be willing to promise not to use it to supercharge the yellow energy generator, well at least not for the next century or two.

The wild armor, still enclosed in a wooden box, was part

of the offerings Ramses presented to the King-Priest. The wild armor could take whatever form suits the tastes of the GM or players. If there are no strong opinions among the group, the armor can look like a white robe and a blue striped nemyss (ancient Egyptian) headdress.

The four canopic jars are a matching set made from pottery. They appear decades rather than millennia old, indicating that mummification is still practiced somewhere.

5. Wrapping Up the Adventure

As a sandbox adventure, the PCs can explore Starsmote Sandpit until they are satisfied and then leave. But assuming they keep trying until they have unlocked the passageway to the secret crypt and eliminated Ramses, their first decision will be what to do about the yellow energy generator. They would be justified in smashing it to pieces, thus eliminating the desiccating effects and allowing life to return to the crater. Or leaving the generator intact for further study, or out of respect for the Stargazers, is also a viable option. If the generator is left intact, it can be returned to its previous level of power simply by removing the moon meteorite (replacing the cap is optional).

Unless the party has a pressing reason to keep Ramses alive, it is probably best to assume that he bleeds out and dies. Even if the party does keep him alive, they will still earn the reward for completing Natasha's mission to "eliminate the joker behind the homunculi." (see encounter 2C)

Experience

It is possible to earn 3 xp from completing the adventures in Starsmote Sandpit. All members of the party will earn the same number of xp.

Survival	1 xp
Success	1 xp
Other Goals	1 xp

Parties who explore 4 or more spaces in the crater are considered to have survived Starsmote Sandpit. They earn 1 xp, even if they terminate their activities here.

Parties who reach the secret crypt and defeat Ramses have ended the threats posed to the outside world. This is considered succeeding in the mission and the party earns an additional 1 xp.

As a sandbox adventure, Starsmote Sandpit allows (encourages) individual game groups to create other goals of their own. Perhaps one of the PCs becomes infatuated with Lucky of the College of Recovery, forcing the party to

tactfully overcome potentially dangerous encounters with angry rivals; or perhaps someone swears to hunt down every zombie in Starsmote Sandpit; or maybe the GM decides that winged statues of two different Stargazer Queens in the same adventure can't be coincidence and creates a backstory and a series of encounters to connect the two women. If there is a homebrewed side-quest that the group becomes emotionally invested in, then the party can earn a 3rd xp for completing that side-quest as part of the Starsmote Sandpit adventure.

6) Continuing the Campaign

Starsmote Sandpit is a self-contained environment. Once the characters leave the crater, they could continue to operate in the local area and never hear about it again. Or, this adventure includes many hooks which could be used as the basis for further adventures. Possible ideas include:

- An elven noble passing through Bittersprings claims to recognize Mai as the lost granddaughter of Duke Liliquan. All of the Duke's family was believed to have been killed in an attack on Longroad. Now the Duke has grown old without any heirs, leaving his duchy vulnerable. Mai insists that she's never heard of Liliquan and she won't be leaving her home in Bittersprings. But just rumors of an heiress are enough to start trouble and soon Bittersprings finds itself embroiled in elven court politics, complete with kidnappings and assassination attempts.

- With her new tiara, Natashia is now ready to make her debut in Nova Camelot. Captain Bruce recruits the PCs to escort his granddaughter to her new home. The road to Nova Camelot is long and fraught with danger, and the party has to make the trip with a temperamental princess-in-training in tow.

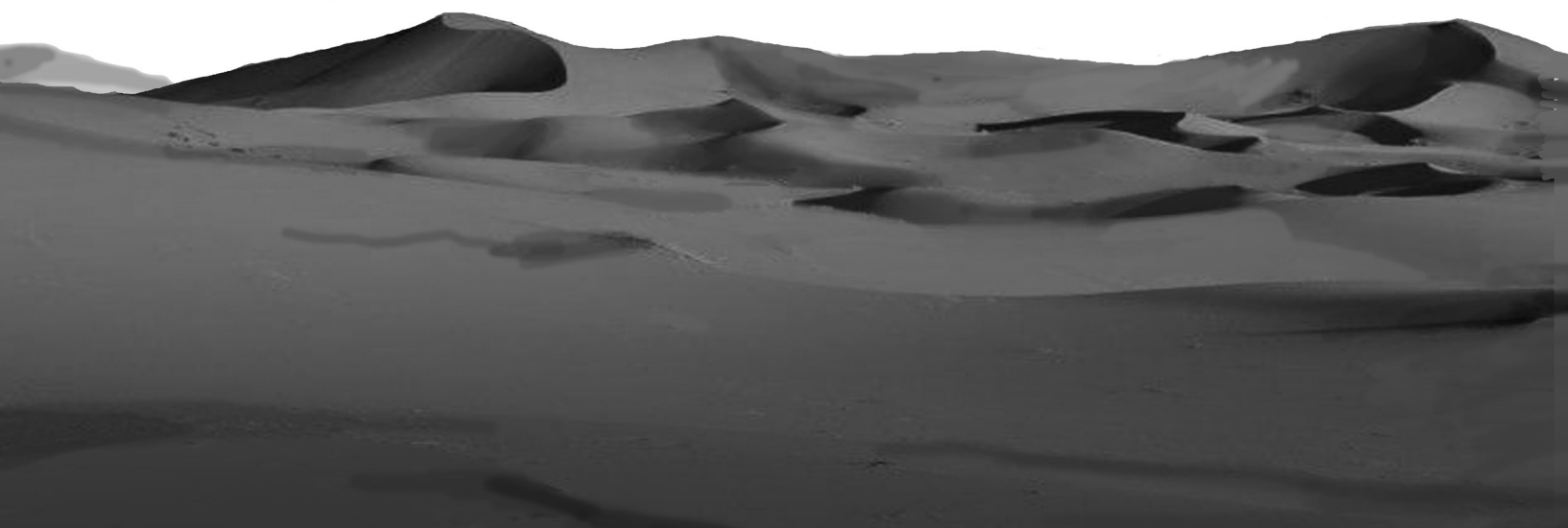
- Gyunghui Kim successfully interprets the top half of the tablet the party brought back to her. She is fascinated by the statement that the Stargazers worked to turn the crater into a "sacred moonscape devoid of earthy contamination." How did the Stargazers know what it's like on the surface of the Moon? And why did they associate their idea of heaven with the Moon? More expeditions into Stargazer ruins are needed to find the answers.

- At the GM's discretion, pulling back one of the wall hangings in the secret crypt (encounter 4I) reveals a tunnel leading to extensive catacombs where other mummified King-Priests and their servants are interned. This city of the dead has been awakened by the recent commotion and is preparing an army.

- What was originally depicted in the murals in the trapped hall in the pyramid (encounter 4C) and why were the frescos altered? Does this have anything to do with the cryptic tablet found in the frozen well (encounter 3B), which has also been removed from the fresco in the central chamber (encounter 4B)?

- Ramses is proof that the Stargazer cult didn't go extinct and is still active in the modern world. What are their motivations? Was Ramses a rogue in a harmless society of astronomy enthusiasts, or is there a widescale plot at work? To what ends?

- Trouble continues for the sisters Luna and Celest when the coven of poison witches decide that Luna was at least partially at fault for putting on the stolen green energy necklace. The witches now seek to capture and ritually sacrifice the "false priestess" in order to purify their coven. Their quest for vengeance also extends to the PCs for their role in the incident.



Reference Notes

Canopic Jars

In ancient Egypt, the process of mummification involved removing the organs from the body. The organs were then placed in jars to be interred with the mummy. The different organs (stomach, intestines, lungs, and liver) were placed in separate jars, referred to now as canopic jars. Canopic jars of various styles and materials were created over the course of Egyptian history from the Old Kingdom up through the New Kingdom (roughly 2575-1075 BC). The canopic jars in this adventure take their inspiration from the New Kingdom period when the jar designs featured the four sons of Horus: Imsety (human), Duamutef (jackal), Hapi (baboon), and Qebehsenuef (falcon). The four sons of Horus are also sometimes associated with the compass points: North (Hapi), South (Imsety), East (Duamutef), and West (Qebehsenuef).

External Links*

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/canopic-jar>

https://ancientegypt.fandom.com/wiki/Four_Sons_of_Horus

Impact Craters

Impact craters, or more correctly “hypervelocity impact craters,” are formed when objects strike a surface at high speeds. For example, an object falling from space to the surface of the Earth will have a velocity of at least 11 km/s, provided it manages to pass through the atmosphere without significant deceleration. When it strikes the surface, this high-speed object comes to a halt, losing all of its kinetic energy; but due to the law of conservation of energy, all of that energy has to go somewhere. This sudden release of energy can literally be called an explosion.

Some of the energy turns into thermal energy in the impacting object, causing it to melt or even vaporize in a matter of seconds. Most of the rest of the energy is transferred to the ground in the form of shockwaves. The pressures generated in the ground from these shockwaves far exceed the stress threshold of rock, pulverizing the surface, possibly melting parts near the impact site. Interactions between the shockwaves and the ground structure impart kinetic energy to these newly generated fragments. Some of the fragments are driven upward and outward, ejected from the crater. In extreme impacts some fragments may even be ejected from the gravity well of the parent body, flying off into space. Other fragments are driven outward and downward where they collide with the surrounding (still intact)

surface geology, pushing the surrounding material up into the distinctive crater rim. These fragments not thrown free of the crater form a “breccia lens” of mangled rocks which partially fills in the crater.

The processes described so far apply to all impact craters, including small “simple” craters. For larger craters (meaning larger/more-energetic impacting bodies) additional processes can come into play, creating a “complex” crater. In a complex crater, the sudden removal of large amounts of material decreases the pressure (weight) on the rock underlying the crater. This underlying rock had been at equilibrium, with upward and downward pressures balanced. With the sudden loss of the downward pressure, the underlying rock responds by moving up, giving the crater a flat bottom and forming a central uplift/peak. At the same time, the rim of the crater slumps back in, lowering the height of the rim and making a more gradual slope or terrace structure descending to the crater floor.

Starsmote Crater in this adventure is a fictitious complex crater, 12 km in diameter. It has experienced non-uniform slumping; the part of the crater rim where Bittersprings is now located has completely collapsed, while the rest of the rim is 50 m high on average.

At still larger energies/sizes, more complex features appear such as rings around the central peak and multiple concentric rings around the edge of the crater. At the extreme, some astronomers now believe that the trough structures covering almost the entire surface of Jupiter’s moon Ganymede are actually part of a single multiring crater. If confirmed, this will be the largest impact structure in the Solar System.

External Links*

<https://www.lpi.usra.edu/publications/books/CB-954/CB-954.intro.html>

<https://www.nao.ac.jp/en/news/science/2020/20200813-cf-ca.html>

Meteorites

Meteorites are small bodies which fall to Earth from space. They either were never incorporated into larger asteroids and planets, or were later blasted free of a parent body as part of a collision.

Based on the relative amounts of silicates and metal in them, meteorites are classified unimaginatively into three groups: stony meteorites, iron meteorites, and a transitional group of stony-iron meteorites.

Stony meteorites, those comprised primarily of silicates, can be further divided into two groups: chondrites and achondrites. Chondrites (meaning sand grains in Greek) take their name from the small round chondrules imbedded in them. Chondrites are material left over from the formation of the Solar System 4.5 billion years ago. Until they fall to Earth, these meteors float isolated in space. As such they have changed very little and preserve important information about the conditions at the birth of the Solar System.

Achondrites (no chondrules) result when a powerful impact on an asteroid/planet/moon blasts debris out of the parent body's gravity well to drift in space. Achondrites show signs of having been melted but can still tell us about the composition of the parent bodies. Achondrites believed to have come from the Moon or Mars are of particular interest.

Iron meteorites began as part of a larger body. When an asteroid melts either due to radioactive heat release or a collision with another asteroid, the heaviest elements, iron and nickel sink to the core and solidify. If this metal core is shattered by a subsequent collision, iron meteors can be released into space. In cases where the meteorite is observed as it falls, only about 5% yield iron meteorite finds, indicating that iron meteorites are a minority. But they are distinctly different from terrestrial rocks so that they are some of the easiest to identify. One possible characteristic is an interlocking pattern of metal crystals known as a Widmanstätten pattern. Forming this pattern requires a cooling time longer than can be achieved under terrestrial conditions. So the presence of a Widmanstätten pattern is a clear indication that the rock was not formed on Earth.

Stony-iron meteorites, consisting of roughly equal parts of silicates and metals, are some of the rarest meteorites to find. They can also be some of the most beautiful, containing precious and semi-precious gemstones. There are two classes of stony-iron meteorites. Pallasite meteorites consist of a metal medium, embedded with stone inclusions (possibly olivine or other gemstones). In contrast, mesosiderite meteorites consist of a silicate medium embedded with metal inclusions. The origins of stony-iron meteorites are still under debate, but they could have formed in the mantle region of a larger parent body where metals and silicates existed in comparable proportions and were then later freed by a catastrophic collision between asteroids. This element of mystery makes these meteorites important for study.

External Links*

<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/types-of-meteorites.html>

<http://chigaku.ed.gifu-u.ac.jp/chigakuhp/html/kyo/chisit-su/inse/index.html>

<https://www.britannica.com/science/iron-meteorite>

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