

THE TEMPLE OF THE STARS

CHALLENGE

A group of four characters of about 9th level should be able to investigate the temple. For lower level groups, do not have the obelisk fire *lightning bolts*, reduce the Thunder Orbs to one, and/or remove the Dunefish. For higher-level groups, add another Dunefish Swarm to the sandpit, and/or allow the obelisk to cast *chain lightning* instead.

LOCATION

The Temple of the Stars was built by the Asaatthi long, long ago, in a climate hospitable to the serpent-folk. But the Titanswar ravaged the entire world and now the Temple can be found in a desert-like environment, perhaps the Ukrudan Desert or the Bleak Savannah or the Desert of Onn.

BACKGROUND

Long ago, the Asaatthi built a complex of temples that tracked the movements of the stars and moons in order to keep track of the complex calendar that is now known as Serpentreckoning. The temples were to be visited on specific days: defences kept away thieves from the temple the rest of the year. Now, with the world changed, the Visiting Day for this Temple will never come again. Due to the temple's defenses, a swarm of dunefish have taken up residence in the soft sand that fills what used to be the sacred pool of the temple. They feed on anything foolish enough to get too close to the temple.

DESCRIPTION

From a distance, the party can see the broken columns and some of the stone lintels that lay half-buried in the sand-dunes around the ruins. The desert heat makes the scene hazy, and the central obelisk looks just like another broken column at this distance.

When the PCs get closer, use the map to describe the various areas:

A. Ruined Columns

These columns once supported the temple structure. Some of them are still standing, at least partially. Other pieces of rubble are buried in the sand nearby. A character that spends some time examining the architecture and succeeds at a DC 10 Intelligence (History) check will recognize the temple as Asaatthi.

B. Temple Steps

Once these wide, shallow steps led visitors to the temple to the sacred pool, where they could engage in rituals on a Visiting Day. Sand now covers many of the steps.

C. Sacred Pool

This used to be filled with clear water, but it is now filled with loose sand. A character looking at the space can make a DC 18 Wisdom (Survival) check to notice the ripples typical of a Dunefish Swarm. Otherwise, a PC that spends a minute or more observing the pool can make a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check, spying a Dunefish on a success.

If a character enters the sacred pool, the soft sand is difficult terrain and the Dunefish Swarm attacks the next round.

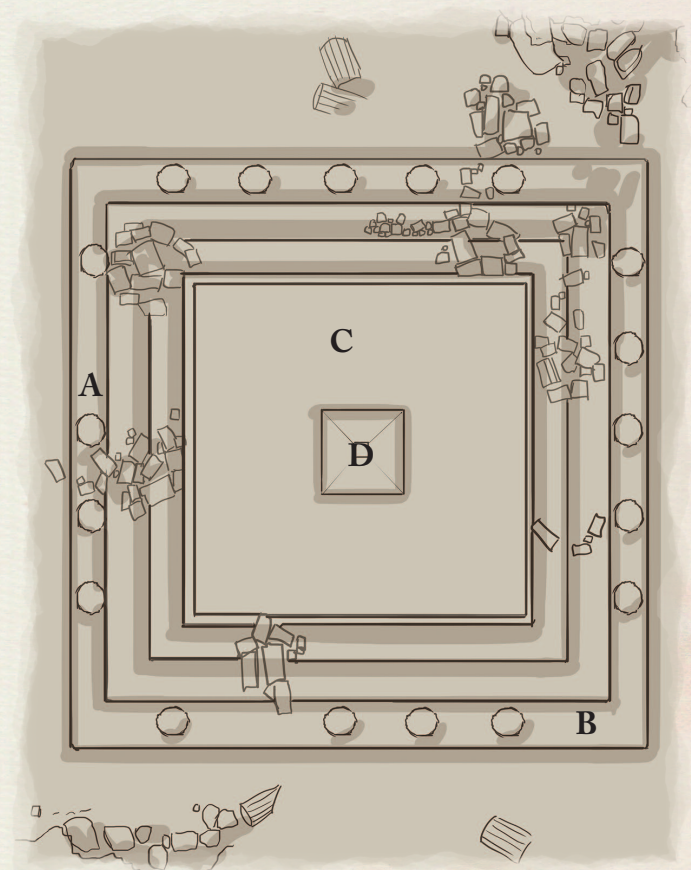
D. Obelisk

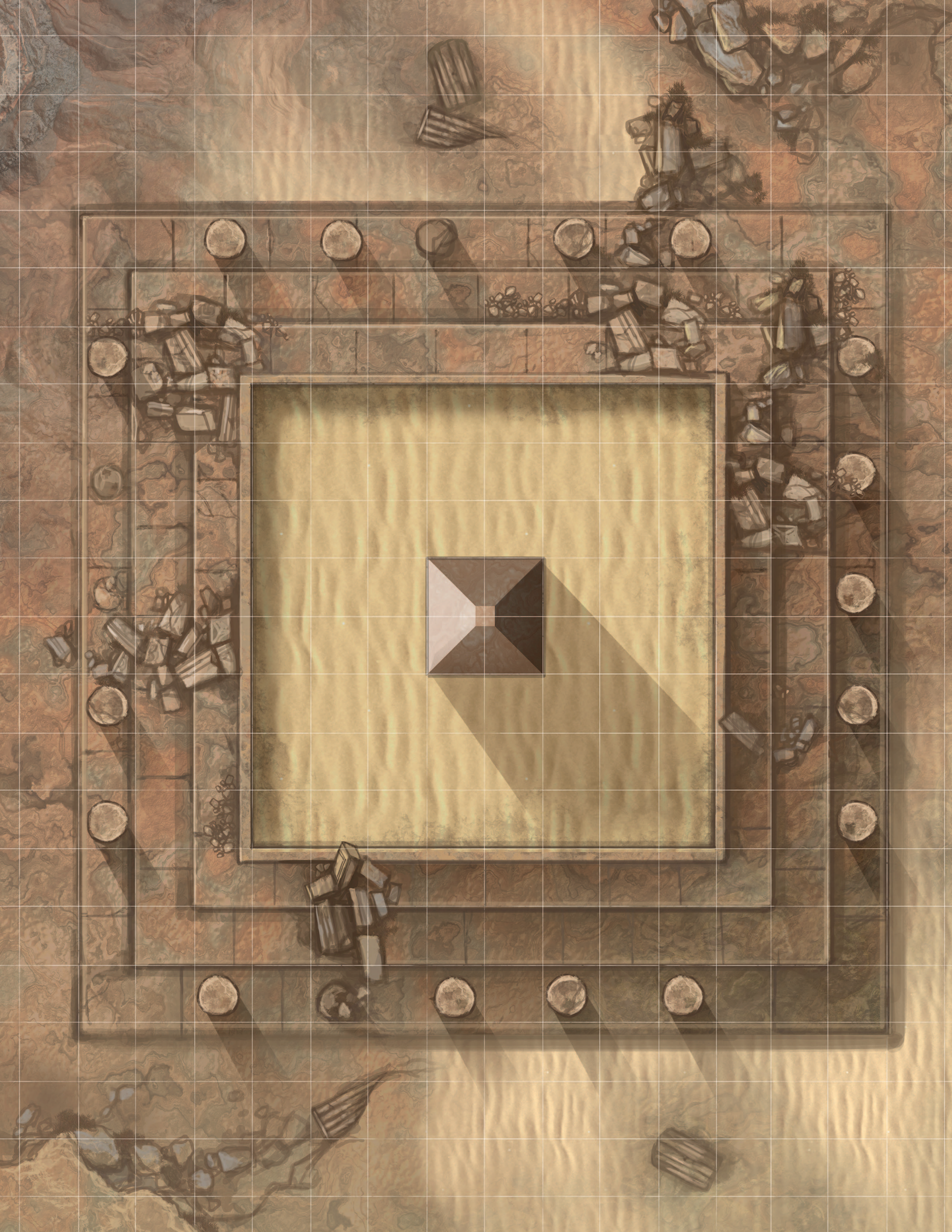
Positioned in the center of the sacred pool, the four-sided obelisk seems to be the only part of the temple that has survived intact. On two sides of the obelisk, about half-way up, are black bulges several feet in diameter. These are the Thunder Orbs, which stay in their recesses until someone enters the sacred pool.

At the top of the obelisk is a pyramid shaped capstone covered with carvings. The capstone is a series of smaller assemblies, and their configuration determines the temple's Visiting Day. A character within 5 feet of the capstone can spend an action to study it, making a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana or History) check. Asaatthi have advantage on this check. On a success, a character can spend four rounds to reconfigure it to make today the Visiting Day. On a failure, the PC must try random combinations and it takes eight rounds. Otherwise, if a creature is within 30 feet of the obelisk, its defense system activates and the Thunder Orbs are released. On initiative count 20, losing all ties, roll 1d20 for the obelisk's lair action. On a 20, the obelisk casts *lightning bolt*, targeting the nearest creature. On a 1, the obelisk casts *lightning bolt*, targeting the farthest creature within range of the spell.

REWARDS

The entire encounter is worth 4,500 XP. At the base of the obelisk characters might find a hidden compartment with offerings to the temple, such as a book of knowledge, a fangtooth weapon, moltleather armor, or a serpent fang.





DUNEFISH SWARM

Though they are called fish, these creatures are actually smooth-scaled reptiles with long sinuous tails and short, webbed feet. They ‘swim’ near the surface of the sand, seeking prey. When they find it, they leap from the surface, attacking with their tiny teeth.

DUNEFISH SWARM

Large swarm of tiny beasts, unaligned

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|--------|---------|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| 6 (-2) | 16 (+3) | 10 (+0) | 3 (-4) | 10 (+0) | 1 (-5) |

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 38 (7d10)

Speed 0 ft., burrow 40 ft.

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Blood Frenzy. The swarm has advantage on melee attack rolls against any creature that doesn’t have all its hit points.

Sand Swimmers. Dunefish can swim through sand as fish swim through the water, but they cannot move through solid rock or compacted dirt. They are able to breathe while sand swimming. They can use a bonus action to Dash as long as they move in a straight line.

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

ACTIONS

Bites. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 0 ft., one creature in the swarm’s space. *Hit:* 14 (4d6) piercing damage or 7 (2d6) piercing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer.

Desert Schools. It is uncertain what attracts these tiny reptiles, other than wounded creatures. Some say it is the scent of living beings, others the vibrations that people make as they travel the sand dunes, a few believe it is the fear and desperation of those lost in the desert that draws them. Some nomads follow the schools of dunefish, either hunting them for food (as dangerous as that may be) or to recover the treasures left behind when the dunefish attack a caravan or other group.

Tactics. Dunefish swim just below the surface of the sand, causing characteristic ripples that might warn of their approach with a successful DC 18 Wisdom (Survival) check. Once they find prey, they surround it and attack relentlessly until they are done feeding. They ignore any treasure and move on quickly to seek another meal.



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