

PUZZLE TIME — GIANTS —



Puzzle Time: Giants

Puzzles generally kind of suck, but they shouldn't! When you need a brain break or an activity to shake up the session's pace, puzzles and riddles are good tools to reach for, even if they feel anachronistic, belonging to an old-school tradition which doesn't apply to modern games. The issue I personally have is how divorced these challenges are from the themes of the dungeon and the mechanics of the game, but that's something I want to explore with this first foray into the puzzleverse: puzzles for giants!

Themes for a giant puzzle

When designing any challenge relating to giants, you should tap into one or more of the themes below.

ORDER

The six mainline types of giant in official modules fall into a rigid hierarchy, where even the lowest member of the ruling class has higher social standing than every giant of any other type. Your puzzles could reflect this by asking players to identify and replicate this hierarchy.

ELEMENTS

Most giant types are strongly associated with their environments or related elements. Some types toil away in volcanic forges, while others float above the clouds in magical fortresses. You could reflect this in your puzzles by requiring players to connect each type of giant to the appropriate element or environment.

SCALE

Depending on their type, giants range from 16 feet to 26 feet tall, with their god at the top of their pantheon storied to be 100 feet tall. Their furnishings, attire, weapons and every aspect of their crafting are similarly scaled, so regular-sized folk could not engage with anything giant-made conventionally. You could reflect this by setting your puzzle in an environment that would be trivial to a giant-sized person, but presents a significant obstacle to regular-sized people.

ENMITY TOWARDS DRAGONS

Giants and dragons historically clashed as primordial elemental forces. This ancient (yet present) conflict permeates every facet of giant society; literature, religion and yes, even puzzles. Your puzzles could reflect this by somehow denigrating dragons.

PRIMORDIAL

Giants as a species and civilization are ancient. Their society spans ages, through eras of prosperity and decline. Your puzzles could reflect this by requiring the players to decipher esoteric languages or contend with technology fallen into disrepair.

Puzzles

The example puzzles below presume a few constants.

- ★ Each puzzle was constructed by giants, for giants.
- ★ Each puzzle occupies a large, indoor chamber.
- ★ The goal of each puzzle is to open a mystical portal in an arcane archway.
- ★ Each puzzle includes options called Mutators, which alter the challenge in different ways. You should probably only use one Mutator at a time.



PUZZLE: THE SIXTH ELEMENT

The party needs to apply the correct element to the pedestal corresponding to each of the six types of giant. This is a puzzle that can be solved using in-game mechanics.

Setup

There are six pedestals in a circle. When the players enter the room, a bolt of lightning shoots from one of the pedestals towards the ceiling, and that pedestal crackles with elemental energy thereafter. Each pedestal is engraved with a different symbol. The pedestal being struck by lightning has the symbol associated with giants of the storm.

Solution

To solve the puzzle, the six pedestals need to have the following elements offered to them.

D6	SYMBOL	GIANT	SOLUTION
1	Υ	Hill	Dirt
2	∩	Stone	Rocks
3	⌘	Storm	Lightning
4	*	Cloud	Steam or smoke
5	⌚	Frost	Snow or ice
6	γ	Fire	Take a wild guess

Failing

When an incorrect element is applied to a pedestal, a bolt of energy blasts from the lightning-activated pedestal, dealing 2D10 damage to the offending character.

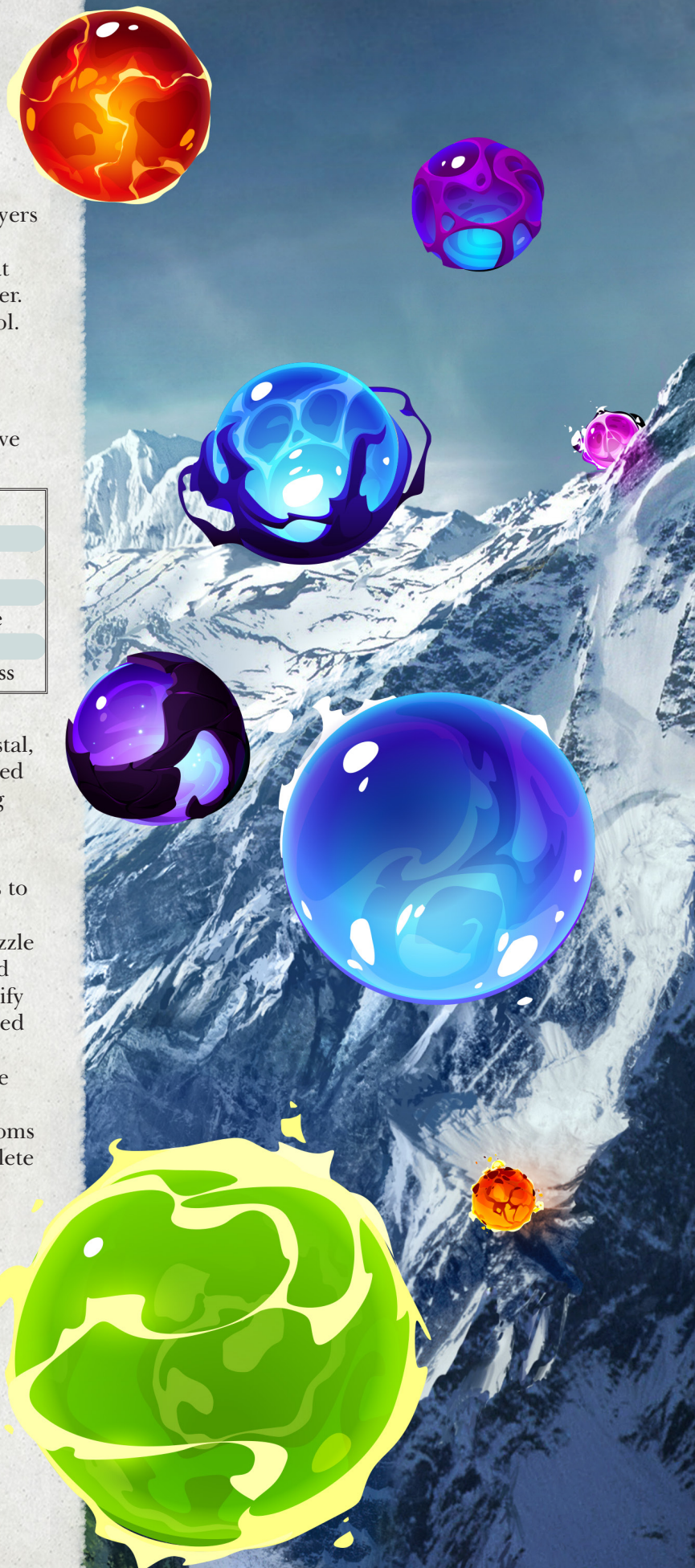
Mutators

Optionally, select one or more of these Mutators to alter the puzzle.

Runners up. Decrease the difficulty of this puzzle by describing some pedestals as already activated with the correct element in place. You could justify this by alluding to adventurers who had attempted this puzzle earlier, but failed.

Get your steps in. Increase the difficulty of the puzzle by putting more distance between each pedestal, so the party has to venture to other rooms and contend with the set dangers there to complete the puzzle.

Crush the critters. Transform the puzzle into a combat-puzzle by having the initial lightning bolt summon six different tiny elementals who explode with their unique elemental energy when vanquished. The players must dispatch the correct critter near the appropriate pedestal. While a critter's pedestal is not activated, it will respawn at the beginning of the next round when vanquished.



PUZZLE: THE BIRD'S EYE TEST

The party needs to arrange six pillars in an order matching the giant societal hierarchy. This puzzle does not use game mechanics, but instead provides a real-life physical challenge for your players.

Setup

At the bottom of a wide pit, there are six pillars. Each pillar has a magical rune ignited on the top to represent different types of giant. The runes bellow smog, soot and ash down into the pit, so anyone at the bottom is blinded. At the top of the pit is a tablet inscribed with the correct order of runes. When a character touches this tablet, they are instilled with a sensation of oneness with the giant temple, so they can magically sense the positions and movements of creatures and items around the six pillars and in the pit.

This would be a trivial puzzle for a giant who is more than 16ft tall, because they could stand in the pit and still see the runes on top of the pillars. If the players have a giant companion with them, you need to find a way to occupy that player or NPC. They could point to the roof and say, "The temple is testing us! The roof is closing in. I will hold it in place as long as I can, but please hurry!"

Solution

- ★ Ask you players to stand up and go outside to the park or backyard, or some other open space.
- ★ One or more players are nominated as spotters, whose characters are above the pit, touching the magical tablet. These players are given a chart or map that indicates the solution to the puzzle.
- ★ The other players are designated as movers, whose characters are in the pit, blinded by soot, pushing the pillars to their correct position. These players are blindfolded.
- ★ The six pillars are represented in the real world by six coloured objects. The positions these pillars need to be placed are represented by baskets or boxes.
- ★ From a distance, the spotters need to call out instructions to the blindfolded movers about where to find the appropriate items, and where to deposit them.
- ★ The dungeon master should patrol the game space and make sure nobody gets hurt while blindfolded or wanders into danger.

Failing

If the players can't get the pillars in the correct position, the roof lowers to a lethal point and any characters not in the pit are killed.

Mutators

Optionally, select one or more of these Mutators to alter the puzzle.

Spin to win. After the players put their blindfolds on, they must spin around 10 times until they're dizzy, as the smog confuses and disorients their characters.

Treasure. Place loot in the pit which the movers can physically pick up while doing the puzzle, but the spotter will have to direct them to it, costing valuable time.

Traps. Pin red paper to the ground which represents traps and hazards in the pit. If a player steps on one of these red zones, their character takes 1d10 damage after the puzzle is complete. The dungeon master should track this.

Credits

Gold Patrons: Anthony LoPresti, Antonio IP, Beth Goff, Bill Henderson, Brian Smith, Christopher LeFever, Clayton Fournival, Craig Savage, Dane Legare, Darien Barnes, GentlemanJimGM, George Mueller, harmen van lith, Humberto Hoffmann, Jacob Meyer, Jason Burt, JauntyJay, Jean-Sebastien Levesque, Jeremy Carroll, Joey Nebbeling, Justin Rossman, Karlo Melendez Pena, Kay Niekut, Kevin Donville, Koli Deveras, Kurt Mueller, Kyle Somers, Luke Hermann, Mario Zetina, Mark Rennie, Marsha Alexander, Muckelbear, NDG90, Patrick Walzer, Paul S, Ricardo Valadares Gontijo Lanna Valle, S Super, Sergio Collins, Shyama, SonOfSofaman, The 2nd most Epic Wizard from Mt. Skullzfyre, xFreshyJx, Zachary Shapiro

Everything Else: Matthew Perkins (@heyitsMattyP)

This work includes material taken from the System Reference Document 5.1 ("SRD 5.1") by Wizards of the Coast LLC and available at <https://dnd.wizards.com/resources/systems-reference-document>. The SRD 5.1 is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>.

Originally published 13/11/2023

Latest version 13/11/2023