

WISPS IN THE OASIS

In a moment of great need, when death looms closer and closer, the weary shall find the Oasis of Sphinxes to finally soothe their aching bodies and minds.

Old Saying

Deep within the heart of the treacherous Arijj Expanse, a mystical sanctuary known as the Oasis of Sphinxes reveals itself only to those most desperate and in dire need. This elusive haven is a marvel, a tale often whispered among caravans but seldom believed to exist. The oasis defies the relentless heat and desolation of the Arijj Expanse. It appears as a mirage at first, a shimmering veil of hope on the horizon. Upon approaching, however, the ephemeral oasis is as real as the scorching dunes around it.

At the heart of this sanctuary lies a serene pond, its waters crystal clear and imbued with life-giving properties. The pond is said to not only quench the thirst but also rejuvenate the spirit and body of those who drink from it. By night, the surface reflects the starlit sky, creating a mesmerizing spectacle. Guarding the oasis are three ancient sphinx effigies, positioned in a triangular formation around the pond. These statues are crafted from sun-bleached stone, etched with forgotten runes and hieroglyphs. They are rumored to be the guardians of the oasis, protecting it from those with malevolent intent. Legends speak of the sphinxes coming to life to pose riddles to unworthy visitors, denying them access to the oasis' life-saving waters if they are deemed unworthy.

MAGIC WISPS OF LIGHT

COUNTLESS ETHEREAL WISPS dance through the air, emitting a soft, otherworldly glow. These luminous entities are believed to be the spirits of the desert. They have the power to pose a challenge of bravery and combat prowess to those who reach the oasis. Legend has it that those who fail this test perish; their souls become another wisp to eternally guard the Oasis of Sphinxes.

TRAVERSING THE DESERT

Discovering the Oasis of Sphinxes is the unpredicted consequence of getting lost in a desert. This short encounter/adventure is best used as an impromptu destination after the characters lose their way in an arid region. Desert journeys are perilous. If the characters lack the attire or appropriate equipment for the climate, things can escalate in a matter of hours. During such a situation, if all climate obstacles are overcome, a character or guide must guide the group through the area to reach their destination (DC 16 Survival check). Failure means they end up finding the Oasis of Sphinxes.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

► **Lost in the Heat.** While traversing the Arijj Expanse, the party loses track of their surroundings and must face reality: they are lost in the scorching heat. Things quickly turn dire as the relentless climate threatens to end their lives. It is when the group feels that all hope is lost that an ephemeral vision appears before them. The Oasis of Sphinxes has appeared but whether this apparition is an augur of weal or woe remains to be seen.

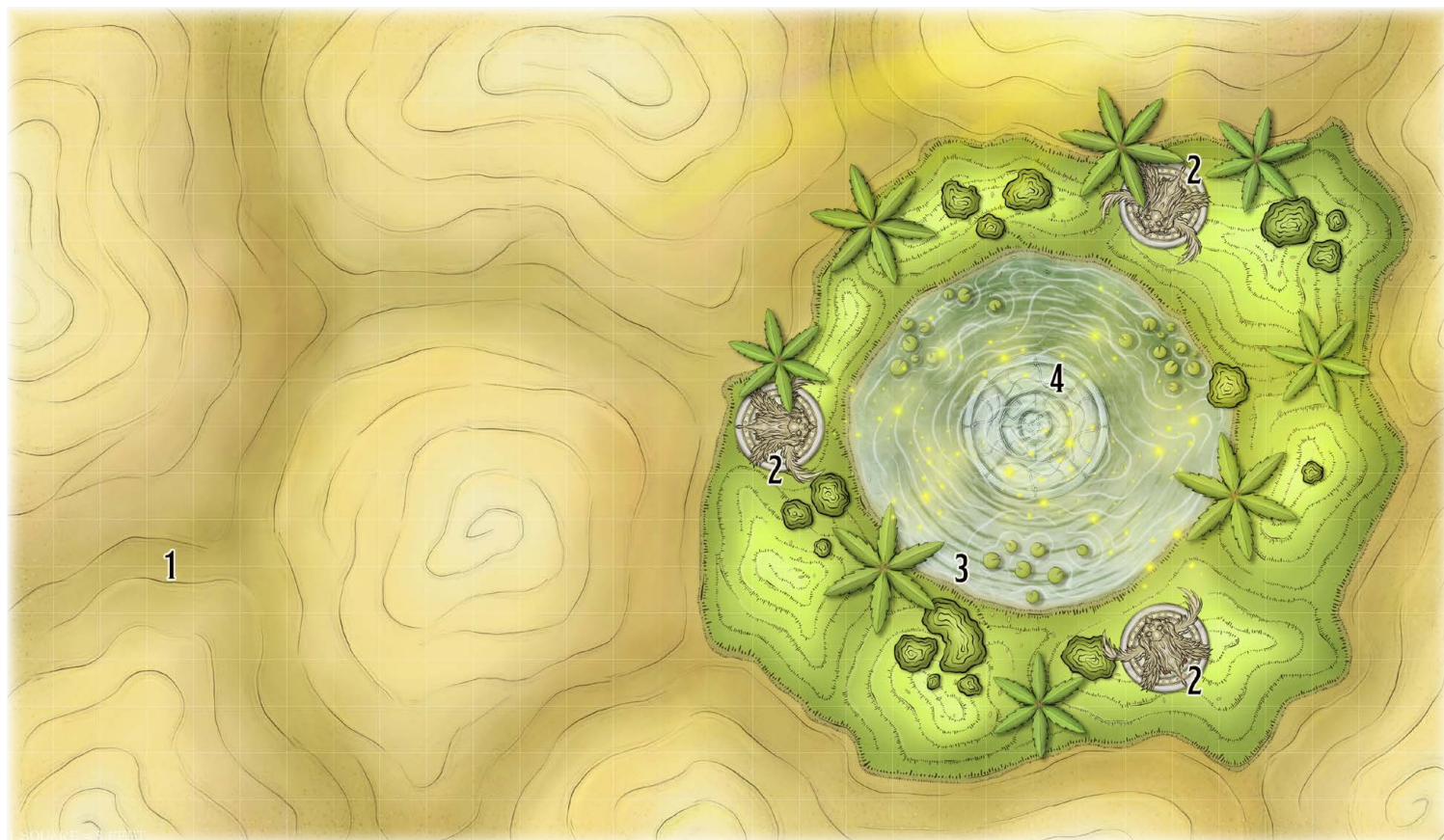
Level 3 Adventure

► **Danger.** The Random Encounters (see below) occur every 10 minutes and after loud noises (4-in-6 chance).

► **Luminous Wisps.** The flying motes of light in the oasis are of magical nature. They illuminate the area with an otherworldly glow. A *detect magic* spell reveals they are a mixture of conjuration and necromancy magic. They are souls trapped in the oasis (DC 16 INT).

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

d6	Details
1	A lone nomad (thug), draped in sun-faded robes, approaches the oasis seeking water. He offers to trade ancient desert tales for a night's shelter by the party's fire. Later on, he offers his mercenary services to the characters on their upcoming quests.
2	A mysterious merchant (djinni) riding a camel, laden with exotic goods and artifacts, stops at the oasis, offering rare items for a hefty price. The mysterious individual does not appear to need the oasis; as a desert being, he can come and go as he pleases.
3	A lost caravan (ten guards) stumbles upon the oasis, their camels weary and their supplies nearly exhausted.
4	As night falls, a ghost of a long-lost explorer appears, pacing the pond's edge, forever searching for a treasure he never found.
5	A mirage of a dilapidated ruin manifests a few hundred feet from the oasis. Creatures that leave for it cannot find their way back.
6	Unexpectedly, all of the arcane wisps vanish during the night and the Oasis of Sphinxes becomes dark and cold for 1 hour.



1. THE ARIJI EXPANSE

Desperation wanes and subsides as the mythical and elusive Oasis of Sphinxes appears. Palm trees, bushes, and the promise of fresh water await ahead.

The characters are fortunate, after a situation that spelled death and disaster, to find the Oasis of Sphinxes in the Ariji Expanse. Now, they can approach and rest before setting out once more into the merciless desert.

2. THE SPHINX EFFIGIES

Each limestone effigy portrays a heavy-built feline being with four feathered wings, long ears, and a penetrating gaze that follows the oasis's visitors.

There are myths about these sphinxes telling riddles and refusing access to the pond (DC 14 History), but they seem to be unfounded. The arcane runes etched on their limestone surface, when studied by a spellcaster, reveal that there was a transmutation spell embedded in them. Alas, it has long stopped functioning. The magic is lost.

3. THE POND

Lichens float on the crystal-clear, fresh water's surface. The water is not only safe to drink, it heals all wounds and diseases if a person drinks from it for three consecutive days. The *detect magic* spell reveals a strong magical presence at the bottom of the pond (10 feet deep). A magic circle from whence the oasis magic emerges.

4. THE MAGIC CIRCLE

The fifteen-foot diameter magic circle at the pond's bottom is the source of the healing waters and what causes the Oasis of Sphinxes to appear and disappear in the desert. A spellcaster may dive to study its surface and transcribe the *teleport* spell (DC 16 Arcana).

► **Disruption.** The circle is impervious to all physical damage but it can be deactivated with a *dispel magic* spell cast by a level-15 (or higher) spellcaster.

WISPS IN THE OASIS

THE WISPS THAT float over the magical pond are not dangerous when the characters arrive at the Oasis of Sphinxes. However, during their first night's stay, this changes. The wisps are trapped souls, their life-force empowers the magic circle but keeps them prisoner in the oasis. There are a hundred souls, the only way for them to leave is to be replaced by new souls.

► **Retribution.** This encounter occurs twice during the first day of the characters' stay in the oasis, at midnight and dawn. The floating lights coalesce into six **will-o'-wisps** that attack all humanoids present. They attempt to drain the lives of all present. Creatures that perish this way have their souls stripped and forever trapped in the Oasis of Sphinxes. At least until enough new souls are collected in subsequent encounters in the future.