

AXIOM'S EDGE

AN ADVENTURE FOR CHARACTERS OF 7TH TO 9TH LEVEL



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AXIOM'S EDGE IS A FIFTH EDITION adventure for three to six characters of 7th to 9th level, optimized for a party of four 8th-level characters. High atop the Epicouatl mountain range, an ancient temple dedicated to maintaining the fabric of reality has fallen under assault by otherworldly forces. As reality itself begins to unravel, can the heroes anchor the temple to the Material Plane and thwart the designs of a cosmic entity intent on "trimming" it from existence? This adventure takes place in the Epicouatl mountains of Cartosia, but the names of people and places can be changed to set this adventure in any remote mountainous region across a variety of campaign settings.

BACKGROUND

Perched atop one of the highest peaks in the Epicouatl range stands the Pantheon of Many Skies, a temple as enigmatic as the deity it serves. For centuries, this isolated sanctuary has been home to the Cosmonastic Order, a reclusive group of monks dedicated to Zau'ombis, the Weaver of Realities. Few in the nearby townships have any inkling of the temple's true purpose, viewing it as little more than a curiosity—a place where silent ascetics contemplate the stars.

In truth, the Cosmonastic Order maintains a continuous vigil against cosmic forces that threaten to unravel the very fabric of reality. Through intricate meditations and esoteric rituals, they reinforce the barriers between planes, helping to anchor the Material Plane against extraplanar incursions from Zau'ombis's ancient adversary: an inscrutable entity known as the Vorpax Axiom, a primordial force that seeks to "trim" reality, snipping away at what it perceives as tangled threads in the tapestry of existence.

The Axiom's agents, ethereal beings called the Shears, manifest as shimmering, multi-limbed humanoids that move in aberrant ways. They flit between planes, ever vigilant for opportunities to enact their master's will. For millennia, the disciples of Zau'ombis have held these forces at bay, their constant meditations forming an impenetrable psychic bulwark. However, a rare cosmic convergence has granted the Vorpax Axiom unprecedented power to pierce the veil between planes. Sensing this opportunity, the entity launched an assault on the Pantheon, aiming to sever this local lynchpin of reality and drag the Pantheon and its surrounding environs into the Astral Sea.

The attack began as a psychic onslaught. The monks, sensing the impending danger, entered a deep meditative trance to reinforce the Pantheon's defenses. Despite their preparation, the sheer force of the Axiom's will overwhelmed most of the Cosmonasts. One by one, they fell, their corpses now scattered throughout the temple. As the monks' psychic defenses crumbled, incorporeal manifestations of the Axiom's will began to materialize

within the temple's chambers. These spectral Shears now roam the halls, their presence accelerating the localized fraying of Material reality.

Only one monk, Master Yoren, managed to withstand the initial assault. Drawing upon the deepest teachings of Zau'ombis, he has enclosed himself in a protective telepathic barrier—a last desperate defense against the encroaching chaos. But his strength is waning, and without intervention, the Pantheon of Many Skies will soon be cut from the fabric of the Material Plane, with catastrophic consequences for the surrounding lands and beyond

ADVENTURE HOOKS

There are numerous reasons the party may find themselves ascending the mountainous path to the Pantheon of Many Skies. A few of these reasons are outlined below:

The Desperate Plea. A carrier bird arrives in a nearby town, bearing a cryptic message that simply reads "HELP" scrawled in shaky handwriting. Local officials recognize the bird as one known to nest near the isolated temple and, lacking the resources to investigate themselves, they hire the party to ascend the mountain and check on the monks' welfare.

Celestial Anomaly. An astronomer of some renown has detected strange disturbances in the night sky centered around the mountain peak where the temple resides. They hire the party to investigate, believing this phenomenon could have far-reaching consequences if left unchecked.

Dreams of Unraveling. While travelling through the Epicouatl region, members of the party experience vivid, disturbing dreams of a mountaintop temple being torn apart by impossibly thin silver threads. Upon waking, they feel an inexplicable urge to seek out this place, drawn by forces they don't understand but cannot ignore.

THE PANTHEON OF MANY SKIES

The Pantheon of Many Skies, a bastion of cosmic defence, now teeters on the brink of planar dissolution. Nestled atop the mountain, the temple complex consists of four primary structures interconnected by open-air walkways. As reality frays around it, the temple's very substance seems to flicker and shift, making navigation treacherous. Temporary instabilities in the laws of physics as a result of the Axiom's influence have structurally damaged parts of the temple, resulting in fallen columns and cracked walls in several places throughout. Unless otherwise stated, the Pantheon's features are described as follows:

Ceilings, Walls, and Floors. The temple is primarily constructed of locally quarried granite. Ceilings in the main chambers reach heights of 20 feet, while smaller rooms and

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corridors have 10-foot ceilings. Walls are 2 feet thick. Many surfaces are adorned with intricate carvings depicting cosmic phenomena and esoteric symbols.

Doors. Most doors within the Pantheon are made of sturdy oak reinforced with iron bands. They have AC 15 and 25 hit points. They are unlocked.

Light. During the day, the Pantheon is well-lit, relying on a combination of natural light from windows and skylights as well as torches in wall-mounted sconces. At night, the torches provide dim light.

Axiom's Influence. Throughout the temple, the encroaching presence of the Vorpal Axiom manifests in several unsettling ways. Reflective surfaces might show impossible geometries or glimpse of the Astral Plane, small objects might momentarily float or fall upwards as gravity fluctuates, and shadows might move independently of their casters, sometimes changing into alien shapes.

Shears of Axiom. The shears of Axiom are ethereal manifestations of the Vorpal Axiom's will, appearing as shimmering, multi-limbed humanoids that move in impossible patterns. Their forms flicker in and out of reality, leaving trails of stardust in their wake. These otherworldly entities are intent on "trimming" reality, attacking any creatures that resist the Axiom's influence. A shear uses **wraith** statistics, with the following modifications:

- Its type is changed to aberration.
- Its damage type is changed to psychic for all attacks.

- Its Sunlight Sensitivity Trait is replaced with **Reality Flux**. The shear has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.
- It does not have a Create Specter action.

The following areas are keyed to the provided map of the Pantheon of Many Skies:

I. FALLEN SHRINE

Stone steps ascend to a once-grand shrine, now in a state of eerie disarray. A large statue dominates the space, its form a strange amalgamation of humanoid and celestial features. The statue's surface seems to ripple subtly, as if viewed through heat haze. Fallen columns and shattered stone tiles litter the ground, and at the base of the statue lies a crumpled form dressed in religious garb. The air feels unusually heavy, charged with an inexplicable tension.

This shrine, dedicated to a child of Zau'ombis, marks the entrance to the Pantheon of Many Skies. The body of a Cosmonast lies crumpled at the base of the statue. If examined, misty tendrils of starlike energy can be seen slowly seeping from the monk's eyes, nose, and mouth. Nothing of value is present on the corpse. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that the monk died from an overload of psychic energy native to the Astral Plane.

A character who makes a successful DC 20 Intelligence (History) or DC 15 Wisdom (Religion) check recalls legends about Zau'ombis and this shrine, including Zau'ombis status as an ancient deity predating many commonly worshipped gods, and the temple is said to be built on the exact spot where the deity first manifested in the Material Plane. The Cosmonastic Order has maintained this site for centuries, though few know its true purpose. Legends speak of Zau'ombis as a protector against cosmic threats, though the nature of these threats remains vague in most historical accounts.

2. PANTHEON TERRACE

Stone pathways extend between the temple buildings, connecting them across a serene mountain terrace. Carefully tended gardens flank the paths, their blooming flowers ignorant of the danger present here. Ornate pillars stand at regular intervals, their surfaces etched with celestial motifs. Several paces to the west, a colossal statue looms, its features serene and observant.

This open area serves as the central hub of the Pantheon of Many Skies, connecting the various temple structures. Characters with a passive Perception of 15 or higher notice that the petals of the flowers subtly shift in hue—a consequence of the Axiom's astral influence on the Pantheon.

Encounter: Shears of Axiom. Moments after the party steps onto the terrace, three **shears of Axiom** materialise in the air and attack immediately. They fight until they are destroyed.

3. DORMITORIES

Two identical stone buildings flank the pathway, their wooden doors slightly ajar. Inside, austere quarters greet your eyes: simple beds, small writing desks, and storage chests compose the spartan furnishings. The scent of incense lingers in the air, mingling with an otherworldly ozone smell.

These twin structures housed the Cosmonastic Order, providing them with modest accommodations befitting their ascetic lifestyle. The dormitories are empty of monks, but evidence of their daily lives remains. Several leather-bound journals rest inside chests and atop beds. A character who spends a few minutes studying the journals can learn the following information:

- The crystal in the northern dormitory can be resonated with to temporarily increase attention and focus.
- Daily routines involved regular creation and destruction of intricate mandalas using sand as a meditation on impermanence, nightly stargazing sessions to observe and record unfamiliar constellations, and dietary restrictions based on the current phase of distant celestial bodies.

- Nothing in any of the journals would seem to indicate that the monks had any idea that an attack or disturbance of some sort was imminent.

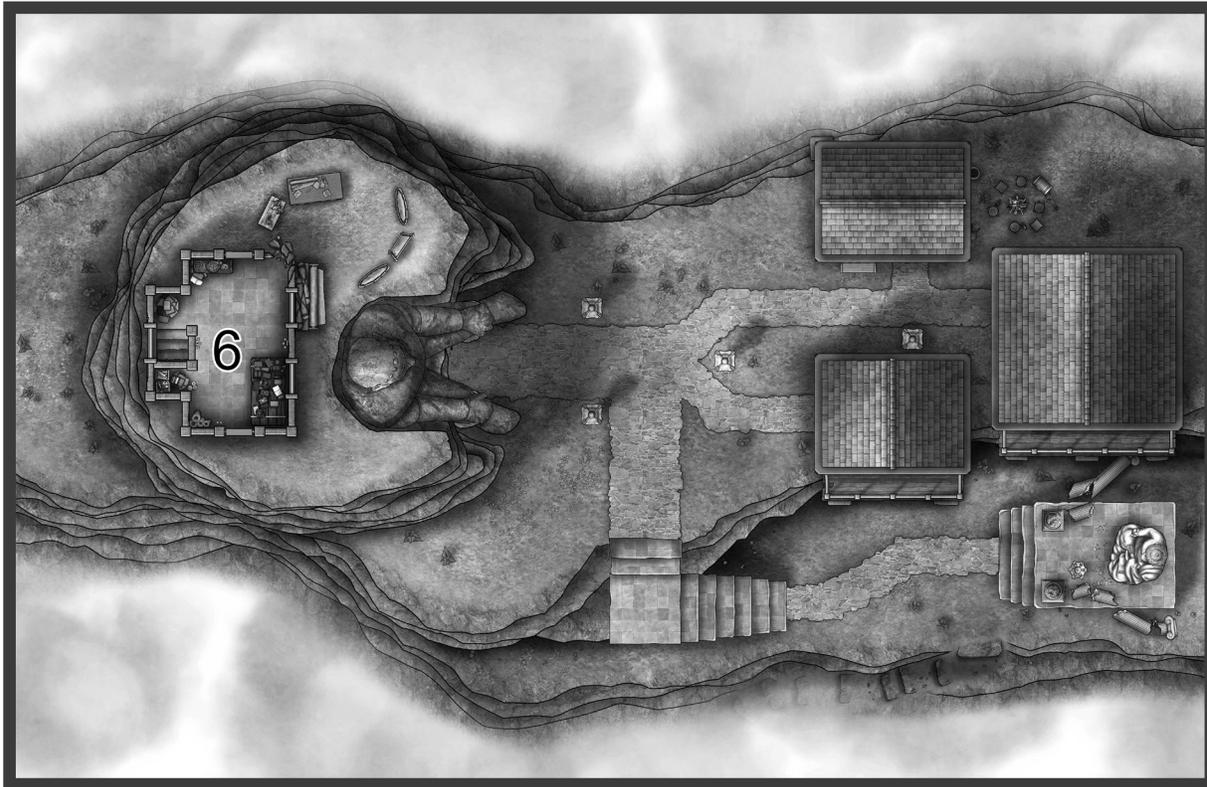
Resonating Crystal. In one corner of the northern dormitory, a small crystal sits on a pedestal. It hums faintly, the pitch changing erratically. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices that the humming briefly stabilizes when they focus their thoughts on their immediate sensory experiences. A character who spends at least three minutes with the crystal to focus their thoughts in this way will gain advantage on any skill checks made to anchor the temple to the Material Plane (see “Grounding the Pantheon”). This crystal was used by the monks to attune their minds to the fabric of reality during their meditations.

4. COMMON ROOM

The heavy wooden door swings open to reveal a spacious chamber, its air soured with the nascent aroma of death. Scrolls and astronomical instruments are placed deliberately on shelves and cabinets. Scattered across the floor lie the bodies of three monks, their faces frozen in rictuses of awe. Fine, star-like motes of light drift lazily from their unseeing eyes. A table in one corner of the room still holds the remnants of what was presumably their last meal.

This room serves the main gathering area for the Cosmonastic Order, a place for meals, study, and communal activities. Here, three of the monks had gathered to meditate together in their attempts to ward off the Vorpal Axiom's incursion. A character who makes a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices that some of the food seems unnaturally preserved, while other items have decayed far beyond what the timeframe would suggest (a day or two at most). This temporal inconsistency is a symptom of the Vorpal Axiom's influence.

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Treasure: Stone of Good Luck. The monks carry precious little on their persons, but nestled into one of their pockets is a *stone of good luck*.

5. STUDY HALL

As you enter, the scent of old parchment and ink fills the air. Rows of bookshelves line the walls, their contents a mix of ancient tomes and carefully rolled scrolls. A table dominates the center of the room, its surface covered in star charts, complex diagrams, and half-finished calculations. Ornate astrolabes and other celestial instruments are scattered about. The room feels unnaturally still, as if time itself has paused here.

This chamber serves as the intellectual heart of the Pantheon, where the Cosmonasts pursue their esoteric studies of the cosmos and reality itself. The bookshelves contain an eclectic mix of texts: treatises on planar cosmology, journals documenting centuries of astronomical observations, and tomes of complex mathematical formulas describing the fabric of reality itself. Many scrolls detail rituals for maintaining the balance between planes, while others contain maps of constellations not visible from the Material Plane. A stairway ascends to Master Yoren's quarters, above (area 6).

Encounter: Lingering Shears. As the party explores the room, three **shears of Axiom** materialise in the air and attack immediately. They fight until they are destroyed.

Hazard: Reality Flux Zone. A 10-foot diameter area near the center table fluctuates wildly between planar states. Any creature that starts its turn in this area must make a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, they experience a brief, disorienting vision of another plane and are stunned until the start of their next turn.

Planar Orrery. An intricate orrery, about a foot in diameter, sits prominently on one of the shelves. It depicts various planes of existence in delicate metalwork and glowing crystals. Characters can manipulate it to align different planes. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check allows a character to temporarily stabilize the local area by correctly aligning the Material Plane with its neighboring planes. This grants all creatures within 100 feet of the orrery with resistance to the first instance of psychic damage for 1 hour.

Cavern Access. A trapdoor in the floor can be opened to reveal a ladder that descends to Area 8.

6. MASTER'S STUDY

This chamber bears the scars of cosmic upheaval. Bookshelves line the walls, their contents in disarray. A

large desk dominates the room, strewn with scrolls and arcane instruments. In the northeastern corner, a section of the wall has collapsed, revealing the raw stone of the mountain beyond.

This room is the private study of Master Yoren. The Axiom's influence has churned it into disarray.

The Anchoring Codex. Buried among the scattered texts and papers in this room is the Anchoring Codex, which describes in detail the ritual referenced by Master Yoren (see area 8) which the party can undertake to assist in defending the Pantheon. Any character can read the Codex to learn the basics of the grounding ritual. However, parsing some of its denser sections to glean important, subtle insights into its specifics requires a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation or Arcana) or Wisdom (Religion) check. A character who comprehends these deeper aspects of the Codex gains advantage on their first check during the grounding ritual.

7. STORAGE ROOM

The air in this chamber is thick with dust. Shelves line the walls, laden with an assortment of supplies: rolls of blank scrolls, jars of ink, and bundles of dried herbs. Crates and barrels occupy the floor space, some sealed, others partially opened. At the far end of the western corridor, a section of wall stands slightly ajar, revealing the edge of a hidden doorway.

This room serves as the main storage area for the Pantheon, housing both mundane supplies and materials for rituals and studies. The secret door was opened by Master Yoren, who retreated to the cavern beyond in an attempt to strengthen his defensive efforts. A thorough search of the room reveals a variety of items used in the daily life and rituals of the Cosmonasts. These include specialized incense for meditation, rare pigments for creating mandalas, and carefully preserved herbs used in ceremonial teas.

8. CAVERN

A vast natural cavern stretches before you, bearing the unmistakable signs of ancient craftsmanship. Intricate glyphs and celestial patterns are carved into the very bedrock, forming concentric circles that radiate outward from the center. Crates, barrels, and makeshift shelves partially fill the space, holding an assortment of supplies and mystical objects. In the center of the cavern, seated in a meditative pose, is a lone figure surrounded by a shimmering, translucent barrier.

This cavern is the original Pantheon of Many Skies, carved eons ago by the first followers of Zau'ombis. The entire chamber serves as an ancient ward, a nexus of reality-stabilizing energies that the later temple was built to protect and enhance. The Cosmonasts maintained a cache of supplies here, both for emergencies and to support extended ritual

work within this powerful space, including preserved food, water, medical supplies, and additional components for reality-anchoring rituals.

Master Yoren. As the party approaches, they feel a gentle probing in their minds. Master Yoren (LG he/him human **priest**), an elderly man with a serene expression despite the dire circumstances, reaches out telepathically. His voice, calm yet tinged with urgency, echoes in their thoughts:

"Welcome, brave souls, to the Pantheon of Many Skies. I am Master Yoren, last of the Cosmonasts. Our situation is dire, but your arrival brings hope."

The party finds that they can respond to the monk telepathically in turn. Master Yoren can explain the following:

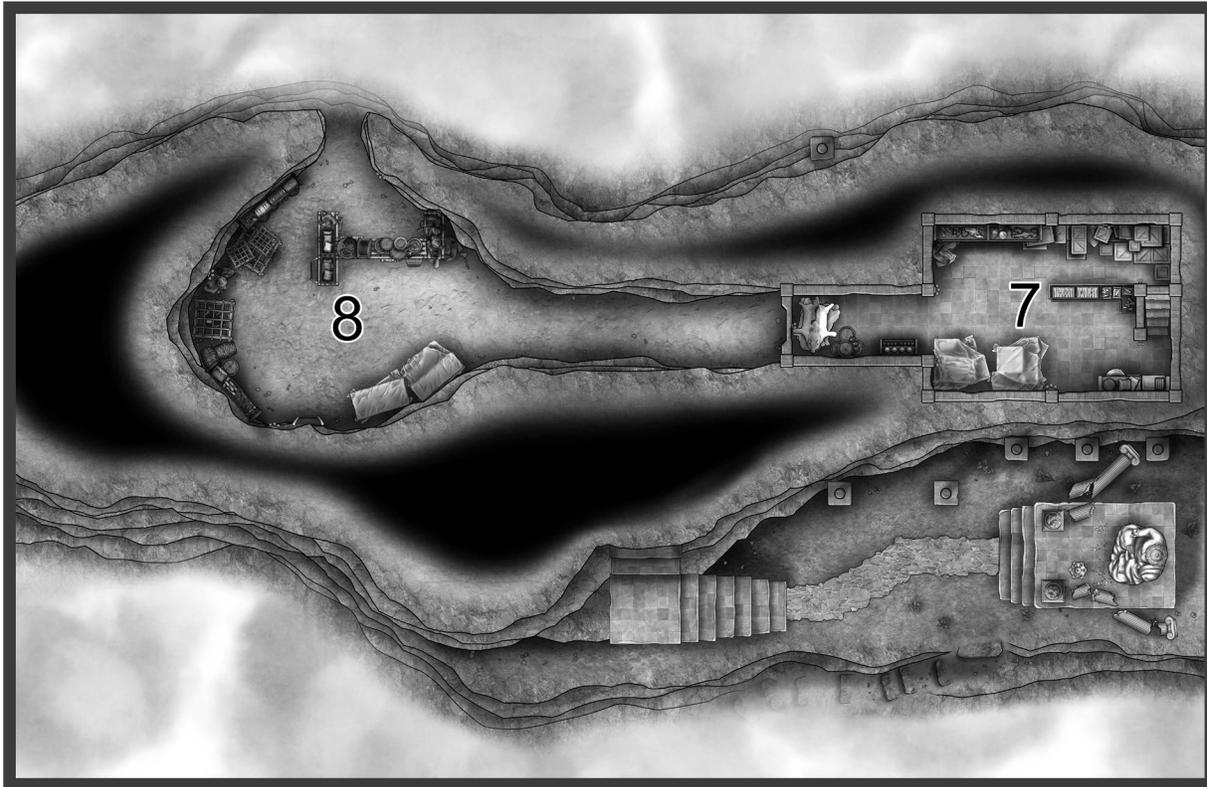
- This cavern is the original sanctuary, carved by the first disciples of Zau'ombis thousands of years ago.
- The recent assault overwhelmed the other monks, but Yoren retreated here to maintain the defenses.
- The entire chamber acts as a cosmic anchor, stabilizing local reality.
- The Vorpai Axiom, an ancient force of cosmic "pruning," seeks to sever this anchor point. During this very conversation, Master Yoren is the last defense against a manifestation of the Axiom ripping through the barrier between the Astral and the Material and pulling the Pantheon out of reality.
- To save the Pantheon and surrounding lands, the party must assist Yoren in performing a ritual to reinforce the cavern's grounding in the Material Plane. If the grounding of the temple can be sufficiently reinforced as Master Yoren baits the manifestation into a "psychic chokepoint" which it will emerge through, the party may be able to destroy it.
- A text on this very grounding ritual can be found in Master Yoren's quarters (area 7). Reviewing this text will help the party carry out the ritual.

Master Yoren advises that the party advises him when they are sufficiently prepared to face the manifestation of the Vorpai Axiom. He estimates he can hold his defenses for another few hours, giving the party some time to gather their strength. Once they begin the grounding ritual, Master Yoren will begin dropping his defenses and opening a chokepoint for the manifestation to push itself through. The effectiveness of this chokepoint depends largely in part on how successful the party's ritual is—a more successful ritual means a further weakened manifestation to combat.

GROUNDING THE PANTHEON

Once the party has prepared themselves appropriately, it is time for them to return to Master Yoren and advise him that they are ready to proceed. When they do so, Master Yoren directs them back up to the main floor of the temple to begin the ritual while he begins to lower his defenses.

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To succeed in this skill challenge, the party needs to accumulate five successful skill checks. Potential skill checks and their DCs are listed below. The GM is encouraged to consider any suggestions from the players, assigning an appropriate DC at their discretion. Be sure to accommodate any advantages gained by the party members if they were able to successfully comprehend the codex in the Master Yoren's study.

Athletics (DC 15): Physically interact with the environment in ways that affirm its reality, for example re-arranging the heavy stonework that has broken away from the shrine (area 1).

Arcana (DC 15): Identify and manipulate the subtle currents of magical energy flowing through the Pantheon. On a successful check, a character weaves these energies into a stabilizing pattern that reinforces the temple's connection to the Material Plane.

Religion (DC 10): Draw upon the teachings of Zau'ombis to align one's spirit with the cosmic order. A successful check results in a moment of profound clarity that ripples through the local reality, temporarily stabilizing it.

History (DC 15): Recall and vividly recount significant local events tied to the Material Plane. These memories act as anchors, reinforcing the connection between the Pantheon and the world it protects.

Nature (DC 15): Attune to the natural rhythms of the Material Plane. This could involve identifying local flora or sensing the flow of elemental energies within the temple.

Insight (DC 15): Perceive the subtle connections between mind and matter, using this understanding to strengthen the party's collective link to reality.

Perception (DC 12): Keenly observe and catalog sensory details of the immediate environment, grounding oneself firmly in the present moment and physical reality.

Performance (DC 10): Through song, poetry, or movement, express the essence of existence and its relation to physical reality and the Pantheon, inspiring allies and reinforcing the temple's connection to the Material Plane. For instance, a creative piece about the perceived beauty of the flower, the silence of the stone, or the patience of the mountain.

Failure Consequences: Each failed check represents a weakening of the grounding effect. The number of failures determines the strength of the Axiom's manifestation in the final confrontation. For every two failures, add one shear of Axiom to the final battle, to a maximum of three additional shears.

FACING THE AXIOM

After the party has accumulated five successful checks, the voice of Master Yoren reverberates in their heads, quickly explaining that a portal is opening and that the time to fight is now.

Master Yoren's voice echoes urgently in your minds:

"It comes! The Axiom breaches our reality! Now, on the terrace!"

When the party reaches the terrace, if they are not there already (area 2):

The air before you shimmers and tears, revealing a yawning void of swirling cosmic energies. From this rift emerges a being of impossible geometry—a writhing mass of silver threads and razor-sharp edges that constantly shift and reform. Its "body" pulses with an otherworldly light, and each movement leaves trails of distorted space in its wake. A sound like the rending of fabric mixed with discordant chimes fills the air, growing louder as the entity fully materializes on the temple grounds.

The manifestation of the Vorpal Axiom uses **young silver dragon** statistics, with the following modifications:

- Its type is changed to aberration.
- It loses its Shapechanger and Change Shape action.
- Its damage immunities are changed to force and psychic.
- Its breath weapons deal force damage instead of cold damage.

The manifestation of the Vorpal Axiom is joined by a number of **shears of Axiom** determined by the amount of failures the party accrued in the "Grounding the Pantheon" skill challenge. The manifestation and any accompanying shears fight until they are destroyed.

AFTERMATH

The resolution of this adventure hinges on the party's success in defeating the Vorpal Axiom's manifestation and reinforcing the Pantheon's connection to the Material Plane. If successful, the Pantheon of Many Skies stabilizes, its link to the Material Plane strengthened. The immediate threat of planar dissolution is averted, though the surrounding region may experience lingering effects of the cosmic disturbance for weeks or months to come. Master Yoren, weakened but alive, begins the arduous process of rebuilding the Cosmonastic Order. He assures the party that such a cosmic convergence, which allowed for this assault, is not expected to occur again for at least several centuries. Nevertheless, he may call upon the party for future aid in recruiting new disciples or recovering lost artifacts crucial to the Order's work.

Should the party fail to overcome the Axiom's manifestation, the consequences are dire. The Pantheon is severed from the Material Plane, creating a dangerous planar rift in the Epicouatl mountains. Reality in the surrounding area becomes increasingly unstable, with strange phenomena and planar incursions threatening nearby settlements. The party may find themselves organizing emergency evacuations or seeking out powerful allies in a desperate attempt to seal the rift.

Regardless of the outcome, the events at the Pantheon of Many Skies are likely to draw attention from various quarters. Planar scholars and cosmologists may seek out the party to understand what transpired. Other agents of the Vorpal Axiom might emerge, either seeking revenge or attempting to finish what was started. The GM can use these aftermath events as hooks for future adventures or to shape the ongoing narrative of their campaign.

REFERENCES

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>.

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