SCALES OF TRUTH

by Jacky Leung

Creature: *Naga* | **Level:** *12*

SYNOPSIS

Legends speak of a relic inside a mysterious shrine, hidden within the jungles of Numot and protected by two guardians. Though many locals dismiss tales of the shrine as myth, there are those who continue to explore the uncharted undergrowth. Your adventuring company is recruited by an archaeologist who claims to have clues to the shrine's location. In reality, the archaeologist works for a trio of medusa sisters who seek the relic inside the shrine. The trio has failed on multiple occasions to secure the relic from the nagas who guard it and so they lure adventurers to complete their goals instead. Your party unearths the truth upon their discovery of the shrine and its contents.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Scales of Truth is intended for characters of 12th-14th level. The legend of the shrine is well-known to the locals of Port Gebralt, a port city along a river that leads further into the jungles of Numot. The party is recruited by the archaeologist upon their arrival in the city.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Port Gebralt is a port city on a peninsula in Numot. It is a port of call for hundreds of races, nationalities, and creeds. Many individuals seek to strike business deals, and others hope to explore the lush jungles of Numot in the pursuit of treasure or new resources. Many adventurers have sought this shrine and while some return empty-handed, others are never seen again. An old tale about the shrine mentions important landmarks to guide the way. Professor Haltz recently deciphered the clues to the shrine's possible location but needs a group of adventurers to escort him through the dangers of the jungle.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **Professor Haltz** – Professional scholar and archaeologist. Egotistical, erratic, but brilliant field researcher. He is eager to explore and learn, which often leaves him short-sighted of dangers and social cues.
- **Captain Scalia** – Captain of a riverboat and has worked with Haltz in the past. Scalia is a brash but a jovial young woman. Very protective of her boat and doesn't believe in the stories about the lost shrine.
- **Stone Sisters** – A trio of **medusas** (Akurra, Egle, Ungla) who believe the relic within may remove their curse and lured adventurers to solve the shrine's puzzles in the past.
- **Yessire** – A **spirit naga** who acts as one of the guardians of the relic. Gloomy, meek, and spiteful. She does not enjoy being goaded or tricked.
- **Leilyra** – A **guardian naga** who acts as one of the guardians of the relic. Patient and calm, Leilyra shows compassion if she believes an individual worthy.

Professor Haltz (true neutral human **mage**) notices the party upon their arrival to the local tavern in Port Gebralt as new potential adventurers for hire. Haltz states to the party that he discovered the possible location of the shrine deep within the jungle. He desperately seeks to prove his theory true but lacks resources and the workforce to organize such an expedition.

Once the party locates the shrine and overcomes its many challenges, the Stone Sisters plead their case to acquire the relic to free them from their curse. Haltz learned the location of the shrine from the Stone Sisters and agreed years ago to help lift their curse. Whether the party agrees with the sisters' demands

or not, they ultimately face the two nagas, and a trial called the Scales of Truth.

CHAPTER 1 – JOURNEY THROUGH THE JUNGLE

You arrive in the bustling city of Port Gebralt. The sun is high and the air is warm from a coastal breeze. The town square is full of merchants, travelers, and locals partaking in the rush of daily life. You make your way to one of the nearby taverns to secure lodgings and rest after your journey.

The exotic herbs hung to dry around the main door, combined with the smell of cooking food, creates an inviting aroma. A tavern worker greets you and promises food and drink.

After your meal is placed in front of you, an older man with grey hair and odd spectacles introduces himself. *"Greetings. You all look to be very capable individuals. I could use your talents for an expedition deep into the jungle. You will all be paid well, and perhaps we may find some interesting treasures. Does that offer interest any of you?"*

When the characters meet Professor Haltz, the eccentric man is ecstatic at the prospect of the party joining his expedition into the jungle. This is what the Professor knows about the lost shrine:

- The shrine has been lost for centuries. Many other expeditions returned empty-handed, and some never returned at all.
- Three major landmarks in the jungle lead to the shrine's location. According to Haltz, he deciphered the clues from a map he inherited from a deceased cartographer.
- Haltz's research on the relic suggests it grants the user insight into the ultimate truth, though he does not know what kind of truth it portents. He believes it could be a religious artifact from a lost civilization.
- Haltz is willing to pay the party 1,000 gp along with any treasure they may find in the shrine.
- Many conflicting stories exist about the shrine, but all consistently mention guardians and wards protecting the artifact.

After accepting Haltz's offer, he suggests they locate his friend Captain Scalia, who owns a riverboat to help traverse the river through the jungle. A DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals Haltz is not forthcoming on how he acquired the information about the shrine's location.

TRAVELING THROUGH THE JUNGLE

While the party travels through the jungle, roll a d6 for possible encounters within the jungle and river. The party can roll either a single or group DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check to assist Haltz in navigating the jungle. On a failed check, the group becomes lost and double back to the starting point. For each success, consult the table and incorporate one of the three landmarks into your descriptions.

- **The Monolith**—a black monolith of jagged stone rests in a stone-lined grove
- **The Serpent Falls**—the rock formation resembles a serpent and water is pouring from its mouth
- **The Dais**—remnants of an ancient altar wrapped in vines

After the party finds all three landmarks, they arrive at the shrine.

d6	Obstacles
1	The characters stumble on a patch of quicksand covering a 20 foot radius. At the start of each turn, the characters must make a DC 15 Strength saving throw. On a failure, their speed is 0 until the start of their next turn, and sink 5 feet into the quicksand to a maximum of 50 feet. On success, the character's speed is halved until the start of their next turn. A character needs to succeed a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to climb out of the quick sand.
2	The vines in this area become thick, be careful not to get tangled. The area is considered difficult terrain. A successful DC 14 Strength saving throw keeps an adventurer from being restrained. On a failed saving throw, a **shambling mound** ambushes the party.
3	A group of **water weirds** ambush the party.
4	The characters find an abandoned campsite. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check uncovers a pouch of gemstones worth 300 gp.
5	The party discovers several burial mounds. If anyone searches them, a group of **wraiths** attacks the party.
6	The group hears a rumble from the jungle, the ground shakes and quivers. A **giant ape** and **tyrannosaurus rex** are battling each other, and the party is now in the middle of it.

When the party arrives at the shrine, read the following:

> You emerge in a clearing. A large stone structure as high as the canopy is covered in vines and trees. Nature has reclaimed the stone and rock. You notice a large opening ahead; the air is cool and moist.

Development

When the party explores the shrine, they find traps and the Stone Sisters waiting for them. Proceed to *Chapter 2*.

Chapter 2 – Shrine of the Twinned Serpent

The Stone Garden

As the party enters the shrine, the entrance opens into a large antechamber full of stone structures and bones. Read the following:

> The winding tunnel leads you into a dimly lit chamber. The ground is littered with bones, weapons, and other debris. Odd stone statues populate the room.

The bones belong to various races and large vermin on a DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check. The statues are victims of the Stone Sisters, but some are also **gargoyles**. A group of **bone naga** animates and ambushes the party upon entry. The interior of this chamber is dark and dimly lit.

The Three Goddesses

When the party continues further into the shrine, read the following:

> As you pass another darkened tunnel that opens into a second large chamber, you are greeted by large stone doors with two large snake carvings on it. A large pedestal with three figurines rests in the center. Broken stone columns and bones line the edges of the room.
>
> Three hooded figures surround your party and Haltz. Each is adorned with a golden mask. Two of them stand by the exit, and the third glides past the pedestal. They speak in unison with a discordant harmony.
>
> *"We seek your aid travelers, and promise you no harm will come to you."*

If the party becomes hostile, see tactics on the next page. Otherwise, the sisters plead their case to the party. The trio introduce themselves as former beauties and truth seekers who found the shrine years ago, but in their attempt to uncover its ancient secrets, they became cursed.

If asked about their curse, the sisters explain they were unable to solve the riddle on the pedestal and were afflicted with hideous forms. They believe the relic beyond the stone doors may cure them. Haltz reveals he met the sisters years ago in a previous expedition and wished to help them.

Read the following description when the pedestal is investigated:

> The three figurines resemble cloaked women. Their features are obscured. You notice three circular rings with carved words and snake icons.

Underneath the figurines are three rows of stone circles arranged as such:

Left Goddess	*Middle Goddess*	*Right Goddess*
Truth	*[snake icon]*	*[snake icon]*
Wisdom	*[snake icon]*	*Liar*

Solving the pedestal: The figurines on the pedestal represent three goddesses on a DC 12 Intelligence (Religion) check, and a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals the word "Wisdom" with two snakes on either side of it. Investigating the door reveals there is no obvious way to open it. The party must determine the nature of the goddesses on the pedestal: "the left one is wisdom, the middle is the liar, and the right goddess is the truth."

DEVELOPMENT

If the party fights the Stone Sisters: The Stone Sisters are each a **medusa** and Haltz is a **mage**.

Tactics: One of the Stone Sisters removes her mask to reveal her true nature, forcing the characters to save against their Petrifying Gaze or avert their eyes and be unable to see them. The other sisters stay out of the 30 foot range of the revealed sister. Each employs their snake hair and longbow effects to great advantage. Haltz joins the medusas and casts *fireball* and *cone of cold* if at least two of the party members are close together. He uses *counterspell* on powerful or restorative spells.

If the party accepts the sisters' plea to lift their curse: Haltz accompanies the party into the Hall of Truths in *Chapter 3*.

Once the pedestal is solved, the stone doors open.

CHAPTER 3 – HALL OF TWO TRUTHS

Once the party walks past the stone doors, read the following:

> Behind the stone doors, a long hallway with several rows of columns stretches forward. There are more carvings with the two serpents coiled together until you reach the end. Two large serpents, one emerald green and the other a dark charcoal grey, slither and coil near a large carving etched with gold.

THE TWINNED SERPENT TRIAL

While in this hallway, the adventurers are subjected to a *zone of truth* spell (DC 15 Wisdom saving throw). The two nagas are be aware of anyone who saved against the effect and view them with distrust.

If the party becomes hostile, see tactics below. Otherwise, the nagas challenge the adventurers with a riddle.

When the party reaches the end of the hallway, read the following:

> *"Greetings seekers,"* the emerald serpent hisses, *"there is one final test to prove your merit and determination."*
>
> *"You shall be judged like those before you."* The grey serpent hisses. *"If you prove worthy, you shall claim what you seek. A final query, seekers. You may only produce one answer."*
>
> The emerald serpent hisses a short passage. *"You faced truth, lies, and wisdom. All to test a theorem. The solution, of course, falls under criticism."*

The final trial is a riddle. Their solution should relate to the following:

- There is a "fourth" perspective, as truth, lying, and wisdom are the first three (as the three goddess pedestal).
- The fourth perspective is tied to utilizing truth, lies, and wisdom together.
- "Intentions" often fall under criticism.

On a successful DC 15 Intelligence or Wisdom ability check, you can provide the following as a clue: "There were three figurines in the previous chamber, each a goddess representing a use of truth." If Haltz is with

the party, they have advantage on this check. The hint relates to the fourth perspective.

DEVELOPMENT

If the party fights the two nagas: Yessire is a **spirit naga**, and Leilyra is a **guardian naga** that defends the shrine, its contents, and their sanctum.

Tactics: Leilyra first uses *geas* to command a strong character to protect her. Should that fail, she uses *banishment* the following turn. She casts *flame strike* if the party is grouped close together. Leilyra uses ranged spells and features such as *sacred flame* or *spit poison* to stay out of melee combat while casting *cure wounds* on herself or Yessire if needed. Yessire casts *lightning bolt* if the party is grouped close together and follows up with *dominate person* to gain a strong character as an ally in combat. Yessire uses *hold person* to make her Bite attack more effective. While in the shrine, the nagas have access to a group lair action (see below). If both nagas are defeated, proceed to *Conclusion, Path A*.

If the party attempts the trial: Proceed to *Conclusion, Path B*.

CONCLUSION – PATH A

Read the description below:

> With the dying breath of the last naga, the hooded sisters thank you for clearing the last of the obstacles to be free of their curse. They approach the wall with the gold inscriptions and chant in a foreign language. A flash of light and the sisters turn to face you. They unveil their hoods to reveal beautiful women with emerald eyes. One of them steps toward you, *"Thank you for your understanding and kindness. We failed the trials and in our foolishness, overstepped our bounds. Our punishment was those hideous forms. You have our eternal gratitude."*

The sisters are restored to their humanoid form. The party returns to Port Gebralt with stories of their adventures and exploits.

CONCLUSION – PATH B

If the party provides a satisfactory answer, read the description below:

> The two serpents rear their heads and look at each other for confirmation. They both nod and then give you a bow. The large snakes hiss low, and a small tremor erupts as the wall with the gold inscription begins to separate to reveal something inside wrapped in a red cloth.
>
> *"Take it. It is yours."* Yessire hisses.
>
> *"May you find more wisdom in your travels and life's journey,"* Leilyra gives her blessing.

The item is a book. An identify spell or DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals it to be a *tome of understanding* (see *Rewards* on the next page). Upon reading the text, the party learns of a ritual to cure the Stone Sisters of their curse. The party returns to Port Gebralt with stories of their adventures and exploits.

If the party did not provide a satisfactory answer, read the description below:

> Leilyra gives an endearing gaze to you, like a mother to a child. She hisses, *"There is wisdom in your words, and I believe you will gain more along your life's journey."*
>
> *"Yes, learn from these lessons and find your truth."* Yessire hisses.
>
> *"Read the inscriptions. Read and understand."* Leilyra hisses.

The inscription is a tale of the Three Goddesses and their meeting with a fourth. Through it, they gained greater understanding of the truth from the kindness and intent of their actions. Haltz deciphers the wall and learn the incantation to remove the Stone Sister's curse. The party returns to Port Gebralt with stories of their adventures and exploits.

REWARDS

Characters who complete this adventure may earn the following rewards:

XP REWARDS

Add the total XP of the creatures defeated by the party, then divide by the number of characters to determine individual rewards.

Obstacle/Creature	XP
Guardian Naga	5,900
Spirit Naga	3,900
Medusa	2,300
Bone Naga	1,100
Mage	2,300
Gargoyle	450
Quicksand Pit obstacle	500 per person
Shambling Mound	1,800
Water Weird	700
Wraith	1,800
Giant Ape	2,900
Tyrannosaurus Rex	3,900

TREASURE REWARDS

Item	Value:
Pouch of gems	300 gp
Expedition Reward	1000 gp per person

Tome of Understanding

Wondrous Item, very rare

This book contains intuition and insight exercises, and its words are charged with magic. If you spend 48 hours over a period of 6 days or fewer studying the book's contents and practicing its guidelines, your Wisdom score increases by 2, as does your maximum for that score. The manual then loses its magic but regains it in a century.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This adventure was largely inspired by the Egyptian myth of the deceased being judged by the scales of truth by the god Anubis. Taken into different context with nagas serving as the literal and figurative scales to the path of truth and enlightenment. Special thanks to my Team BAJA players who served as playtesters and their continuing love and support.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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