THE FALL OF PYGMALION

by S. T. Mannell

Creature: *Medusa* | **Level:** *7* | **CW:** *Implied parental abuse*

SYNOPSIS

Pygmalion, an ancient ruined city, sits at the heart of a blighted wasteland. Beneath the dead city's palace, there lies a vault with great, unclaimed riches within. Upon receiving a letter containing half of the vault's key, the characters are drawn to Pygmalion, and find it filled with statues and deadly constructs. Soon enough, they meet the letter's author—a medusa named Galatea. If they want the treasure, they must help her find revenge on the one who laid the medusa's curse upon her, uncovering the ancient secrets of the lost city in the process.

ADVENTURE HOOK

This adventure is intended for player characters of 5th-7th level. The more players are present, the lower their level can be.

The characters receive a direct invitation in the form of a letter. The specifics of the delivery depend on the campaign the DM integrates this adventure into.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

There are a few key secrets that you need to know upfront. First, that the Augur-King of Pygmalion, Ovid, cursed his daughter, Galatea. Second, that Ovid died thousands of years ago after locking himself inside of a vault while his kingdom crumbled.

Third, Galatea's perception of the passage of time is frayed, and she does not know that she is immortal and much older than she realizes.

Finally, Galatea's curse caused Pygmalion's collapse. Her petrifying gaze unintentionally dismantled the ecosystems surrounding and supporting the city, and now the countryside is a lifeless wasteland.

CHAPTER 1 – A SUDDEN SUMMONS

The tale begins during the characters' downtime between adventures. Wherever they are—perhaps resting in a tavern—they receive a letter from a flustered courier. Galatea carefully secured her anonymity while hiring the courier, and they cannot confirm the letter's sender.

THE LETTER

> The edges of the stiff white envelope are stained green, like bone dipped in algae. A wax seal pins the envelope shut, scintillating dully between drab copper and silver tones. Hefting the envelope back and forth, you feel a heavy thumb-sized object within.

Characters must make a DC 15 Intelligence (History) check to identify the letter's seal as the royal seal of Pygmalion. On a success, they know that Pygmalion collapsed over two thousand years ago, and they are aware of the many different accounts of what befell the city. Historians argue over the exact details, but generally agree that a war was fought over the marriage of Pygmalion's beautiful princess, Galatea.

When they open the letter, read or paraphrase the following:

> *"Greetings, heroes. Word of your deeds has reached me, and I ask that you lend me your skill. Enclosed in this envelope, you will find half of the key to the lost vault of Pygmalion, which I offer as proof of its existence. I await your aid within the throne room of Pygmalion's ruined palace, where, together with my half of the key, we will open the vault and claim its riches.*
>
> *I have included a map to the palace. Stick to the roads, for the way is dangerous. Your timely arrival will prove your worth."*
>
> The letter is signed simply with the letter "G." Half of a clock-winding key remains in the envelope.

Any character who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (History) check is familiar with the vault. Additionally, characters with criminal contacts in the area may have heard of the lost treasure.

Note: As a Tier 2 adventure, the characters are making names for themselves as heroes of the realm. This adventure might be their first taste of their reputation preceding them!

THE WASTELAND

The characters are a full day's ride from the wasteland. They know when they've arrived, as the earth quickly turns grey and lifeless, and the trees become withered and twisted. Rangers and druids do not gain any terrain or environmental benefits while in the wasteland.

> The air grows cold, still, and eerily quiet. There are no birds here, nor even insects. You hear the faint pulsing of your own blood inside of your head. A green fog descends on the party, thickening as you press on, until you can barely see the road a few feet before you.

Rangers or druids who succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom (Nature) check can tell that the wasteland is part of a magical curse that has severed the connection between flora and fauna. On a roll of 20 or higher, they spot evidence—a tiny stone bee lying by the roadside.

Keep to the roads! If the party leaves the road, they risk falling into quicksand. Rules for quicksand can be found in Chapter 5 of the *DMG*.

Eventually, the party arrives at the open gates and crumbling stone walls of Pygmalion.

DEVELOPMENT

The next chapter begins when the characters enter the ruins.

CHAPTER 2 – MEETING GALATEA

> Upon entering the city you find it empty save for the many statues dotting the streets. Some are frozen in terror, as though fleeing for their lives. Others are locked in eternal battle, leaping toward some unseen foe. Here and there, you see statues which have toppled over, cracking into pieces. You stop before a perfectly recreated human face lying amidst the cobbles.
>
> From the gates of the city, you can see the shape of the palace looming through the fog.

These statues are victims of Galatea's petrifying gaze. She was forced to petrify many of the guards in self-defense when they turned on her out of fear of the curse. Galatea is still haunted by accidentally turning hundreds of her own citizens to stone as she tried to flee the city.

STREETS OF THE LOST CITY

The characters must prevail over the dangers of the city streets to reach the palace. Several of the mad king Ovid's constructs prowl the streets amongst the crumbling statuary. The rusting metal that makes up these automatons squeaks and screeches loudly as they patrol.

If the characters fight the constructs, use the **animated armor** stat block. The constructs appear in groups of 1d4 + 1.

GALATEA'S FOUNTAIN

The party comes across a statue of a beautiful woman standing in the center of an ornate fountain at the base of the palace. The base of the fountain is 30

feet in diameter and dry. A message in the ancient Pygmalion language is carved into the bottom of the fountain. Characters with an Intelligence score of 20, the Linguist feat, or who succeed on a DC 20 Intelligence (History) check, can translate the message. It reads: “Dedicated to the King's fair daughter, Galatea. May she continue inspiring the sudden pilgrimages of princes from afar for many years to come!”

THE THRONE ROOM

A single, lit torch welcomes you to the palace, and you swiftly notice more—a path left for you to follow through the ruins. As you go, you find more and more statues. Some of these statues are less eroded than others, and you recognize styles of clothing from different nations throughout history. Eventually, you push through a narrow corridor crowded with stone figures, and find yourself in the throne room.

Here, there are easily a hundred of the eerie sculptures, and all seem as though they have been petrified in the midst of battle. Archers eternally knock their arrows. Mages permanently recite words from tomes. And at the back of the room, a woman sits on the throne.

ROLEPLAYING GALATEA

Your depiction of Galatea is a major part of the adventure and the characters’ conversation with her is an opportunity for your group to stretch their roleplaying muscles.

You may describe Galatea however you want, but there are a few key points to note: She is unarmed—her sword and shortbow are behind the throne—and wears a blindfold. Galatea only uses her Petrifying Gaze in self-defense.

First, she asks the party to listen to her story. If they refuse, they are free to leave, but she demands they return the fragment of the vault key. If they ask about the petrified adventurers in the throne room, she explains with genuine sadness and regret that many of them tried to kill her the moment they saw her. Her story is thus:

"I was princess here, long ago. I was young. I had suitors. They came in droves from neighboring kingdoms. Most of them were tiresome, but a few were not." She sighs. *"But... it was decided that I was an embarrassment. That I was immoral. A libertine. The court-wizard did this to me as punishment."* The snakes coiling around her neck and shoulders hiss, but her anger subsides quickly. "*I’d never wished harm on anyone in my life, but it wasn't long before I brought the whole kingdom to its knees. I stayed here, exiled from the world, in a great cemetery of my people."* She laughs, light as a feather. *"I think... that my punishment may have been too great."*

What Does Galatea Sound Like?

Galatea sounds tired. She speaks clearly and succinctly, but hundreds and hundreds of years of self-imprisonment wear on her.

What Does Galatea Want?

Galatea wants to kill the one who cursed her, and she is convinced that their death will lift the curse. She tells the party that as the city fell, she saw the court-wizard lock himself in the vault, to escape Pygmalion’s destruction. She is convinced that his magic has kept him alive. Furthermore, she takes her continued curse as evidence that he lives.

What Does Galatea Know?

She knows that it was really her father, Ovid, who cursed her, but she does not share this with the party, as his betrayal embarrasses her.

The world progressed without Pygmalion, but Galatea thinks that only a few decades have passed, not two thousand years. The party must prove this to her, or else she does not believe them.

Galatea’s sudden immortality is a severe burden on her memory and perception of time. She attempts to distract the characters with talk of treasure if they force the subject of her timeline’s inconsistencies.

What Does Galatea Need the Party For?

This will likely be the party's number one concern. Why does Galatea need them if she has both parts of the vault key?

First, she needs help navigating the palace because of her blindfold. She has become extremely attached to it, and hates taking it off, even when alone. While wearing the blindfold, she is considered blinded.

Second, and more importantly, she cannot get past the guardian of the vault's entrance alone.

DEVELOPMENT

Reaching an agreement with Galatea, or taking her piece of the key, prompts the next part of the adventure.

CHAPTER 3 – THE VAULT

The final part of the adventure takes place in the vault room beneath the palace. Galatea knows the way, but she needs the party to guide her around the statues littering the hallways.

THE VAULT'S GUARDIAN

A lone **shield guardian** guards the vault. Augur-King Ovid was an accomplished spellcaster, and he stored a single casting of the *wall of fire* spell within the shield guardian, which it can cast as an action after it is reduced to half of its total hit points.

A larger party is liable to steamroll the shield guardian before it can challenge them, even if they are far below the recommended tier for this adventure. If the party has more than three members, consider adding a group of the same automatons that patrol the city streets to this encounter.

If Galatea joins the party in combat, you can offer her role to a player, using the **medusa** stat block from the *Monster Manual*. While blindfolded, she is considered blinded. Also note that a medusa's Petrifying Gaze feature works against all creatures, including constructs.

OPENING THE VAULT

A ten foot tall circular marble door stands before you, set into the stone. Its face is patterned with tarnished brass and copper cogs, wheels, and springs. In the very center of the door is a small circular keyhole.

The door is magically sealed, two-foot thick marble, and can be opened without the key, but this is dangerous. A *glyph of warding* is inscribed on the door and any attempt to tamper with it triggers the rune to erupt with magical energy in a 20-foot sphere centered on the glyph. Each creature in the aura must make a successful DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 5d8 fire damage, or half as much on a success.

The two halves of the winding key stick together magnetically. Once the key is placed in the keyhole and turned, the mechanisms on the face of the door shift. The grinding, ratcheting noise of the door opening can be heard for three hundred feet. It takes thirty seconds to unlock the door, after which it swings open silently.

DEVELOPMENT

Entering the vault prompts the conclusion of the adventure.

CONCLUSION

You enter a long, narrow stone room beyond the vault door. Coins and gemstones sparkle brilliantly in the dim light within. A skeleton adorned with a thin crown rests on a pile of gold at the far end of the vault.

GALATEA'S REACTION

If Galatea has her blindfold on she asks the characters to describe what they see. Galatea immediately understands that the skeleton is her father and takes this as evidence of how much time passed without her noticing. With horror, it dawns on her that even if she could remove the curse, she might immediately succumb to her old age.

Put yourself in Galatea's position and imagine realizing you are unjustly cursed forever. It is a difficult role to play, so don't worry if it doesn't come across exactly how you want it to!

The party is free to ignore or help Galatea however they wish. She does not stop them from leaving, but fights back if they attack her for any reason. If the party searches for another way to lift the curse, she goes along with it, even if you decide that stripping

away her immortality will kill her. Galatea is liable to befriend the party if they convince her to live on as a medusa.

OVID'S REMAINS

The king's skeleton is so old that it turns to dust the moment it is touched or moved.

He still wears the shield guardian's command amulet, but the magic of the vault door has suspended its control. With the door opened the characters can now command the construct, if it is still intact.

By his left hand is his spellbook. Much of the paper has cracked under the weight of time, but a few pages may be saved. Characters can examine the spellbook's contents with a successful DC 19 Dexterity check to gently turn the pages. It contains the spells *wall of fire*, *mass suggestion*, and *delayed blast fireball*. Characters must copy these spells into their own spellbook while inside the vault, as the pages are too old to move very far.

THE LOST TREASURE OF PYGMALION

Use the "Treasure Hoard: Challenge 5 - 10" table on p. 137 of the *DMG* to decide the treasure within the vault. You can even ask the players to roll on this table themselves.

If you would rather not leave the reward up to chance, the vault contains the following:

- 2d6 x 100 cp
- 2d6 x 1000 sp
- 4d6 x 100 gp
- 2d6 x 10 pp
- 3d6 100 gp gemstones
- 1x *necklace of fireballs*
- 1x *cloak of protection*
- 1x *spellguard shield*

Feel free to add or remove items as you see fit.

EXPERIENCE POINTS

The experience points gained in this adventure depend on the method your group has chosen for levelling up. If using standard rules, use the values given in the core books. If using milestone experience, consider allowing the party to gain a level once they have opened the vault.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Thank you to Ashley Warren for the wonderful opportunity to work alongside so many other great writers and artists! The organization of the *Uncaged* anthology was a massive undertaking, and it's been fantastic to see so many people working hard to pull it together.

This adventure was heavily inspired by the Automata episode of the BBC podcast "In Our Time." In it, one of the guests talks about how Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* twists the gender politics of ancient myth. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Pygmalion's male gaze brings a female statue to life. In the myth of the Gorgon, the female gaze turns men to stone. The guests in the podcast posit that this sort of gender politics is always present in stories about automata. Male engineers try to create life and displace females in the process, and this leads to 'catastrophe for the human race.'

This was at the back of my head when writing Fall of Pygmalion. It's a bit on the nose, but my general goal was to take all of the above and use it to comment less on automata, and more on autonomy, something that women constantly have threatened. In this story, Galatea's autonomy is taken away once the curse is placed on her, and I wanted to give players the challenge of finding ways to give it back to her.

More than anyone else involved in the project, I would be remiss not to mention my partner, Julia Holden. She reads everything I write, in keeping with the commonly forgotten law that no male writer should ever publish anything without non-male editing. When she heard about *Uncaged*, it was her idea to tell a story about Medusa as a woman unfairly punished by her own father for promiscuity. This work is hers more than it is mine.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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