

The Guardian of Cihuaton

Game Design and Concept Document for a group encounter exploring
design differences between analog and digital games

Practical thesis project
by

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Core Design

Introduction

The party of 4-5 heroes arrives on a large open-air forecourt in front of a large, closed stone gate surrounded by high rise cliff sides. Next to it in the wall is a large relief that shows three figures of dwarven heroes. Close to the relief are 3 altars, on each 3 items of various nature are placed on top. There is a large pile of rubble in the middle of the plaza, it looks like a statue of some sorts was there at some point that crumbled into small parts. Three alcoves are located in the cliff side around the arena. Within these alcoves each, a large statue is situated. When a hero comes close to the relief and the altars, the relief will move, and one of the figures will lean out of it, slowly extending a hand with an open palm.

An item from any of the altars can be placed onto the hand. Upon placing the item, the figure in the relief will close their hand around it. At the same time, a statue (Aspect Bearer) in one of the alcoves will break free from the alcove and will make its way towards the center of the plaza to the pile of rubble. The statue carries the very item the heroes just chose.

Heroes can attack the Aspect Bearer walking to the center, it won't be deterred from its course, won't attack back and cannot be affected by controlling effects. When the Aspect Bearer reaches the pile in the center, it will infuse the Guardian with its remaining magical energy. The Guardian will then emerge from the rubble, bearing aspects of the offering it received.

Upon reaching a certain health threshold, the Guardian will crumble into rubble again, leaving it at its location on the plaza. Heroes may now place another artifact onto the relief's extended hand, repeating the cycle of an Aspect Bearer carrying it to the rubble pile, resurrecting the Guardian once more. The Guardian will then raise the remains of the first Aspect Bearer, creating an allied, smaller boss which fights alongside it, bearing aspects of its previous form.

This process will repeat once more, heroes placing an artifact onto the last figure on the relief. This time, the Guardian will raise the remains of both previous Aspect Bearers to fight alongside it. Eventually, in the last cycle, all aspects will unite as one within the big statue, retaining and combining their abilities and effects.

Only when the Guardian has been defeated for good, the portal will open and grant entry into the city.

Appearance

When the Guardian is in its active form, it looks like a giant old stone statue. The cracks between the rubble pieces are visible, the heroes can see the magic keeping it alive seeping from within. It bears ornamentation of Mesoamerican (Aztec, Maya, Inca) cultural resemblance combined with intricate lines in the style of traditional dwarven carvings. The Guardian stands over 4 metres tall. Depending on the artifact it received, its appearance will be slightly altered to reflect its current aspect abilities.

Combat

Phases

Nr	Requisite	Main Boss	Aspects	Players	Active mechanics	Intensity
1	Fight start Aspect 1 activated	Rubble, inactive	Aspect 1 moves towards center	- need to attack Aspect 1	- Boom	1
	Aspect 1 merges	Active, contains Aspect 1	---	- need to attack main boss	- Basic abilities - Aspect abilities - Boom	4
2	Boss HP 70%	Becomes rubble	---	- need to activate Aspect 2	- Volatile Overload	2
	Aspect 2 activated	Rubble, inactive	Aspect 2 moves towards center	- need to attack Aspect 2	- Boom	2
	Aspect 2 merges	Active, contains Aspect 2 Is healed for up to 15% depending on Aspect 2 damage	Aspect 1 active as support	- need to attack main boss - need to attack Aspect 1	- Basic abilities - Aspect abilities - Reinforcements - Boom - Healing crystal	5
3	Boss HP 50%	Becomes rubble	---	- need to activate Aspect 3	- Volatile Overload	3
	Aspect 3 activated	Rubble, inactive	Aspect 3 moves towards center	- need to attack Aspect 3	- Boom	3
	Aspect 3 merges	Active, contains Aspect 3 Is healed for up to 15% depending on Aspect 3 damage	Aspect 1 active as support Aspect 2 active as support	- need to attack main boss - need to attack Aspect 1 - need to attack Aspect 2	- Aspect abilities - Reinforcements - Boom - Healing crystal	7

4	Boss HP 30%	"Explodes", merges into final form that contains Aspect 1 , Aspect 2 and Aspect 3	---	- need to attack main boss	- Volatile Overload	9
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Aspects

Type	Effect	Description	Trigger	Item
Auras: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Passive effects that stem from the boss, can be negated by players to an extent. Focus on positioning 				
Aura	Fire	A. Players who are close to the boss catch on fire due to the heat, which deals x low damage over time B. When moving, the boss leaves a trail of fire as additional hazard lasting x sec/rounds. This fire deals x damage to everyone standing in it every x sec/rounds C. Attacks may ignite the target for x DoT	100% 100% 30%	Zincite Crystal
Aura	Frost	A. When in close proximity to the boss, players will gradually freeze, decreasing their movement speed by x% until stillstand, upon which they are frozen solid for x sec/rounds. Gain freeze effect in stacks B. The boss leaves slippery ice patches in his wake, which can knock players traversing it prone. Slipping drifts them to a random direction until no ice is under them C. Attacks may add a stack of frost to the target	100% 100% 30%	Quartz Crystal
Aura	Storm	A. When a direct attack hits the boss, a lightning bolt zaps down onto a player close to the boss and deals x (low) damage B. When moving, small tornadoes may spawn in places where the boss previously was (1-2 per movement). They move into a fixed direction, and contact will lift the player airborne shortly, letting them drop for x damage C. Attacks may create a gust of wind pushing players back	100% 100% 30%	Kyanite Crystal
Weapons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offensive aspect Offer a new, passive effect to attacks Grant specific attack abilities 				
Weapon	Blades	A. The boss attacks deal x% more damage Skills: B. The next attack causes a bleeding DoT, dealing x damage over x sec/rounds C. The boss dashes between 2-3 players, striking each with x damage, then returning to its starting position	100%	Dual Swords
Weapon	Range	A. The boss attacks have increased range. Will still try to be in melee range of tank Skills: B. The boss fires an arrow that bounces between adjacent players C. The boss shoots a volley of arrows into the air, raining down in a damaging aoe onto the player farthest away. Creates a damaging field at that players location for x seconds/rounds	100%	Bow
Weapon	Flail	A. The boss attacks ignore x% of armour and cannot be blocked. Blocking instead negates the damage received by x% Skills: B. The boss hurls the chained weapon towards the player farthest away (but still in reach) and pulls them close. They are rooted for x sec/round	100%	Morning Star

		C. The boss spins around with the weapon, dealing x damage every x sec/rounds in an AoE around it		
Personas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give character flavour • Grant a stat boost or passive effect • Player involvement; player focused mechanics 				
Persona	Agility	A. The boss gains evasion B. The boss gains increased movement speed/range of x Skill: C. The boss quickly dashes to the player farthest away, dealing x damage to all players in its way, then dashes to the player farthest away from the new location	30% 100%	Boots
Persona	Defense	A. The boss gains x% more max HP B. The boss takes x% less damage from attacks Skill: C. The boss slams the ground, creating a shockwave that moves outwards in rings, leaving loose rubble items in its wake. Players can avoid the wave by jumping/saves. The wave deals x heavy damage and for each player hit, the boss gains a stack of hardened armour, which reduces incoming damage by 25%. Stacks can be removed by throwing rubble at the boss.	100% 30%	Armor
Persona	Utility	A. The boss reflects x% of damage received back to the attacker B. The boss gains x HP per second as regeneration Skill: C. The boss targets a player and attempts to subjugate/control them. A shining bubble forms around them, becoming more intense over the course of x rounds/seconds. At least x other players need to be present within the bubble before it completes to save their friend. If failed, the targeted player is stunned within the bubble, taking heavy damage each round/sec for x rounds/seconds.	30% 100%	Crown

Boss Abilities

Attack	Description & Effect	Requisite
Basic Attacks Are used to convey weapon aspect traits and to fill the encounter		
Punch	Punches a player (tank) Deals x moderate damage Blades: Hits a player (tank) with the main hand blade Bow: Smacks a player (tank) with the bow Flail: Hits a player (tank) with the morning star	No weapon aspect Blades weapon aspect Bow weapon aspect Flail weapon aspect
Swipe	Swipes the air in front of the boss, targeted on one player (tank). Will hit other players closeby, too. Deals x moderate damage Blades: Strikes the air in front of the boss twice Bow: Shoots 3 arrows in quick succession in a cone shape in front of it, first left, then middle, then right. Deals moderate damage per arrow	No weapon aspect Punch was used in the action before Blades weapon aspect

	<p>Flail: Throws the flail outwards twice in a row in two straight AoEs in front of the boss for moderate damage</p>	<p>Bow weapon aspect</p> <p>Flail weapon aspect</p>
Slam	<p>Slams both fists onto a player (tank) Deals x high damage</p> <p>Blades: Throws each weapon in a line outward into a random direction like a boomerang, cleaving players for x moderate damage when passing through them each way</p> <p>Bow: Fires a flurry of arrows on one player (tank)</p> <p>Flail: The boss swipes the area in front of it with the flail for moderate damage. Players who are hit have their armour decreased by x% for the next incoming attack.</p>	<p>No weapon aspect Swipe was used in the action before Blades weapon aspect</p> <p>Bow weapon aspect</p> <p>Flail weapon aspect</p>
<p>Basic combat abilities Are available from the start, will be used throughout the fight no matter which aspects are active</p>		
Elemental Charge	<p>Imbues the arena with its aspect's element, evoking a storm targeting players. Takes on different forms depending on the aspect. Players will always have a 'closing' AoE telegraph around them indicating when the mechanic will fire, and what range it has.</p> <p>Fire: Damage dealt to player per AoE they're staying in -- need to avoid being hit by multiple Fields of the mechanic.</p> <p>Frost: Drops an icy patch at the location of the player. The patch will stay active for a longer while, meaning it should be placed away from the groups fighting area. Staying in the patch adds freezing stacks.</p> <p>Storm: Players randomly get a positive or negative charge, as indicated by an icon over their head/the color of the AoE. In order to avoid the lightning strike that will hit them when the mechanic fires, they need to overlap their AoE with a player of the opposite charge. If overlapping with a player of the same charge, both take double damage from the lightning strike.</p>	
Boom	<p>A player gets imbued by an overload of magic, infused by the boss. They will unleash a wild arcane explosion after x rounds/sec which will damage all other players on the plaza.</p> <p>To avoid killing other players, they will need to reach the top of the cliff side. In order to do this, they will need to use the pulley in the west or east of the plaza. Another player needs to come with them and fire the device to shoot the explosive player up.</p>	
Volatile Overload	<p>The boss channels an attack that culminates in an explosion of wild magic throughout the plaza. To avoid, players need to hold onto the thick vines covering the south-west and south-east walls of the cliff sides. There are 4 vines on each wall, a vine can only support one player each. Failure to hold on results in death.</p> <p>Fire: The burning heat in the arena scorch away some vines. The number of available vines is reduced from 4 to 3 vines per wall.</p> <p>Frost: The vines are frozen over and slippery. Climbing requires more actions/harder checks.</p>	<p>Upon defeating the Guardian</p> <p>A. Start of phase 2</p> <p>B. Start of phase 3</p> <p>C. Start of phase 4</p> <p>Fire aura aspect</p>

	Storm: The vines and players are positively and negatively charged. All vines on one side always have the same charge, while player's charges are randomized. Players can only climb on vines with the opposite charge.	Frost aura aspect Storm aura aspect
Reinforcements	The boss summons x supporting minions that deal damage to the party on top of the cliff side that attack with long range attacks down on the platforms. Their attacks are summoning rocks which fall and deal damage to players below. Players need to use the pulleys to get to them and get rid of them.	

Arena Features

Plaza

Surrounded by high cliffs, the plaza of Cihuaton is a large, oval space under the open sky. On the plaza, a pile of rubble in the center indicates a statue once was built there. Several devices and architectural features can be observed.

Vines

Around the southern half of the arena, strong jungle vines are growing on the cliff side, large enough to climb up on them.

Pulley

On the east and west sides of the plaza, two pulley systems are located which can ferry goods and creatures up onto the balcony.

Balcony

A balcony spans the lower half of the arena. It is connected to the plaza via the pulleys in the east and west. Upon this gallery, ballistas are situated pointing in the direction of the plaza. There are several alcoves with yet another kind of statues, the Dwarven Defenders who are staying inactive unless threatened or activated as reinforcements by the Guardian during the fight.

Gate, Relief, Altars

Located on the northern face of the cliffside, leading into the mountain, a large stone gate bars entry to the city. Next to it, a relief depicting three dwarven heroes as well as three altars displaying various offerings are located.

Alcoves

In the south, east and west, alcoves lead into the cliff. Within them, a large statue stand, which will become Aspect Bearers during the encounter. These alcoves are also locations for the three defensive devices to appear.

Feature	Description & Effect	Requisite
Pulleys	On the east and west 1 giant pulley each, which can be used to ferry players onto the cliff sides. Needs 2 players to activate, one staying back, and one being ferried. So there is always at least one players in the arena. Balconies can be used to safely get away from others in case of "Boom".	

Wall Vines	Climbable vines on the arena's walls which don't reach the top. Climbing doesn't grant any advantage except leverage from the ground for avoiding "Volatile Overload" Boss Ability	
Boss Defensive Device Beam	In each alcove once clear, a device spawns at Boss phase 3 and 4 sending out a bright beam targeting the Boss and following its position. Over a time period/number of rounds of X, it continuously heals the boss up to 10% of its HP. The effect only happens as long as the Boss is within the AoE	Tied to the Boss' phases (see above): 40% and 10%

Discussion

While the overall structure of the encounter was preserved in both adaptations, the shared design process highlighted some of the fundamental differences between both media.

The biggest contrast arguably was the presence of a human dungeon master in the TTRPG as opposed to the game system in the MMORPG. During the design process, the question of "how much can a DM keep track of without bogging down the pace and enjoyability of the session?" had to be considered whenever an ability or effect was created. On the other hand, an overly simplified approach to abilities and mechanics could easily make it seem too easy compared to existing encounters. Accordingly, tabletop encounters offer more impactful, strategic challenges to players, while digital encounters engage players with more complex, reaction-based challenges.

In this light, it also became apparent how different both media deal with the time effort groups are confronted when engaging with an encounter. In TTRPGs, combat sessions can easily last multiple hours, while boss encounters in MMORPGs tend to have a duration of a few minutes. As a consequence, strategies on how to deal with the encounter are often emerging throughout the fight in tabletop adventures, while MMORPG players tend to spend more time theorycrafting and creating potential strategies before the fight, which are then simply executed during the fight. Should it not work out, players can simply reset the fight and try something else.

This ties into another point: player "mortality". In TTRPGs, the death of a player character is usually final, resulting in a loss of the character to the player, which is why groups tend to avoid reckless or dangerous encounters where possible, and encounters are designed in a way to be beatable in the first attempt if players know what they are doing. MMORPGs are the opposite. In their persistent worlds, characters can die, but can be revived with no or only minor repercussions - which is why in these systems it is expected that the whole group can die when attempting to clear an encounter. Success is determined less by surviving the encounter, rather by how routinely the players can clear it.

This leads to the factor of replayability. While the encounter was designed with a core direction of making it so any media group could gain a considerable replay value out of it, generally speaking, a tabletop group does usually not replay the same encounter. Replaying and optimizing strategies of an encounter is, on the other hand, a big part of PvE end-game in digital multiplayer games. Designing encounter mechanics that were interesting for repetitive play, yet graspable enough to understand them immediately, was challenging.

Another difference is the playstyle. Of course, within the media of TTRPGs, there are countless systems with different rules and quirks, yet generally, the amount of available actions and resources (such as mana, spell slots, healing) are much more limited and valuable than in the digital counterparts.

This lead to a challenge when adapting abilities and creating metrics for the respective system -- when can the hard hitters actually hit hard and be punishing, and how much sustain and recovery potential is available in each system?

Lastly, the difference in how actions are performed - turn-based against real-time - also influences how mechanics and abilities of the encounter are designed, and whether they are feasible. This also applies to movement, available actions and absolute number of operations per fight, which are so much more reduced in TTRPGs in comparison to MMORPGs.

To sum it up, it would be inaccurate to consider the DM to be a limiting factor for TTRPGs in comparison with MMORPGs. With a DM acting as the administrator of the encounter, tabletop adventures trade complexity and automation for immersion and adaptiveness.

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Document put together with the homebrew creation website.

<https://homebrewery.naturalcrit.com/>

Ability tooltips were created using that_shaman's Tooltip Builder.

<https://www.thatshaman.com/tools/tooltips/>

THE GUARDIAN OF CIHUATON

AT THE GATES OF CIHUATON, A STONE CREATURE GUARDS THE ENTRANCE PORTAL. ONLY THOSE ABLE TO DEFEAT IT MAY SET FOOT INTO THE LOST DWARVEN CITY.

**A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ADVENTURE
FOR FIFTH EDITION**

**SESSIONS: 1-2
PLAYERS: 4
CHARACTER LEVEL: 10-15**

BY SABINE NEUSER & KILIAN SCHMITT

THE GUARDIAN OF CIHUATON

INTRODUCTION

The following information is **intended for the Dungeon Master**. If you want to participate in this adventure as a player, don't spoil the fun: Stop reading now.

ABOUT THE ADVENTURE

The Guardian of Cihuaton is a short adventure for characters levels 10-15, heavily based on combat and featuring a modular boss with different combat stages, reinforcements and powers. Not unlike a gladiator fight, the player characters need to overcome this enemy to prevail. At several points in the fight, the players must choose an offering to the Guardian, shaping and influencing its nature and fighting behavior. While there is a narrative frame and suggestions for situations which enable the players to role-play, the main focus is on the fight.

The encounter in this adventure is designed for use in any campaign. If taken simply for the encounter's worth and out of the context of a greater narrative, it toys with the idea of replayability of a boss fight. If the players are allowed to assemble their enemy based on different aspects each time they try to fight it – does it become a challenge to try out different options? To help with keeping the overview of this modular boss and all that is happening during the encounter, this adventure provides the map, a cheat sheet for the boss fight and a version of the guardian's stat block which can be printed out and folded so only the abilities determined by the player's choices are seen, hiding everything that is inactive. Of course, take all the liberties you like to adapt this adventure to your group's preferred style.

PREPARATION

Before beginning play, it is recommended that the Dungeon Master (DM) read through this entire module attentively. This is to understand and prepare for the challenges which the player characters (PC's) will face, for the encounter to run as smoothly as possible. It is especially important in regard of the boss monster's actions and abilities, as it is modular and not all of them will come to play - only those the PCs will choose. As per usual, it will be helpful to have all the PC's characters fully prepared in advance, so that the DM understands all the PC's strengths and weaknesses. There are also spells we'd advise to exclude, see below.

This document refers to spells and monsters found in the *Player's Handbook (PH)* and the *Monster Manual (MM)*, as well as *Xanathar's Guide to Everything (XAN)*, all official sources by Wizards of the Coast. However, it can be played without their use as a standalone adventure.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

In a small settlement at the edge of the *Maguuma Jungle*, the adventurers meet Marelda Emberstone, an old dwarf who came into the possession of an artefact proving not only the existence of the lost dwarven city of Cihuaton but also hints at its location. She promises riches and fame for those who set out to find the city hidden in the great volcano amidst the jungle, warning about a rite of passage travelers have to undergo to reach the city. The adventurers set off, traversing the jungle and reaching the great gates of Cihuaton sealed off to the outer world. A relief depicts a scene of the great heroes of the city also featuring a multitude of items on three stone altars for the adventurers to choose and give it to the heroes.

Upon offering the first choice, the rite of passage begins. A huge stone guardian rises from the rubble within the plaza, incorporating the aspect of the first offering. The adventurers have to overcome this massive opponent, having to choose two times more which other item to give, to influence the guardian's nature.

Only when the guardian is destroyed, the portal into the city of Cihuaton will open.

SPELLS AND MECHANICS FROM 5E EXCLUDED IN THIS ADVENTURE

We advise to exclude some of the most powerful spells from this adventure as to not break the encounter or cut it short drastically. It may also be helpful for DMs who use this adventure for the first time as there are many other factors to be aware of throughout the fight. You may follow these suggestions or keep the spells/exclude others to your own preference. After all, the element of surprise and improvisation may lead to the most satisfying experiences. As this adventure is set on character level 10-15, not all spells should be usable except if they are tied to items the player characters may possess. The DM may also decide to strictly limit the use of spells to the consumption of the necessary components and simply not provide them.

SPELLS ADVISED TO EXCLUDE

Level	Source	Spell	Reason
3rd	PH p. 243	Fly	It would be possible to send party members flying and out of reach of the Guardian.
7th	PH p. 238	Etherealness	Party would be able to simply step through the solid stone wall and enter the city.
7th	PH p. 266	Plane Shift	Possible to simply banish the guardian to another place of existence.
8th	PH p. 239	Feeblemind	Guardian could be incapacitated to use magic.
8th	XAN p. 161	Mighty Fortress	Too drastic an intervention into the arena.
9th	PH p. 283	True Polymorph	Guardian could be turned into less dangerous creature. Clashes with narration of obtainment new aspects.
9th	PH p. 288	Wish	Might lead to breaking the system, too powerful.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The city of **Cihuatón** is a mystery, a place that has long since fallen into oblivion. Where once an ancient culture of dwarves built roads, temples and forges, where once trade with other cities was flourishing, travelers today only seldomly find isolated, overgrown stone formations that testify to the past greatness.

That is: if ever anyone travels the almost impenetrable *Maguuma Jungle* at all. According to the legend, the builders of this city not only used dwarven craft but also resorted to magic to strengthen their structures and build their home greater than anything the region had seen before or ever since. They prayed to archaic gods and combined craft and magical prowess. In the west, a massive volcano towers above the treetops, its porous rock filtering the water of the rivers that emerge from it, flowing through the region and giving life to the jungle itself.

Unbeknownst to most, those very rivers sometimes carry more than just fresh water: small offerings, rare crystals cut by master craftsmen, gold jewellery and sometimes even items nobody can decipher their use... only one thing seems clear: these findings must come from the legendary city. It is one of those items, a relic undoubtedly dwarven in nature, washed ashore only recently, that sets this adventure off.

Disclaimer: the *Maguuma Jungle* is property of ArenaNet and belongs to the GuildWars2 lore. The location can be easily altered to fit the needs of other settings.

CHAPTER 1: LOST AND FOUND

The adventure begins at the edge of the *Maguuma Jungle*, where the adventurers come across a person who will significantly influence their immediate journey.

READ THE FOLLOWING

The last rays of sunlight pour through the windows of the small tavern called The Dead Frog. You have come here to find shelter for the night, have a decent meal and escape the loud shrieking and hollering animal noises of the nightly jungle. Aromatic wisps of steam curl lazily from a pot hanging over the hearth and you are just about to be done with this day, when you notice from a corner of the room a small, huddled figure having turned beady eyes towards you.

Upon being noticed, this only other patron, an old dwarven woman, approaches the adventurers. She introduces herself as *Marelda Emberstone*, a dwarven hermit searching for her ancestors: an ancient dwarven bloodline who have supposedly lived in this jungle several hundred years past. A couple of days ago, she found a relic in the banks of the great river of Oulumatu. She brought it home to study and it shows the way to a location where she is sure the ancient city of Cihuatón is to be found. Now she is in search for some brave and adventurous beings who will take upon the challenge of searching for this place. As she knows of a dangerous rite of passage, she is afraid to go there by herself, sending the adventurers out to scout the place and bring back confirmation of Cihuatón's location at the great volcano amidst the jungle. She warns the adventurers about this hardship to be expected and is willing to give them magical items she unearthed over the years in good faith of them returning to her.

WHO IS MARELDA?

Marelda is a very old dwarven woman in active search for the lost city of Cihuatón. She knows that her ancestral lineage goes way back to those ancient and magical dwarves who once ruled Maguuma Jungle. She already spent years in the vicinity of the city, combing through the forest, never being able to find solid proof of the city's whereabouts. Until now that she found the mirror artefact. She is heartbroken that her frailty keeps her from undergoing the adventure herself, but clings to the hope of someone else finally confirming her findings and giving her closure on her search.

MIRROR OF THE QUETZAL

Wondrous item, unique (requires attunement)

This artifact is a disc made of the blackest of obsidian, polished to a near-flawless smoothness. Intricate carvings in the form of a plumed serpent enclose the edge of the mirror and strange runes are etched into it. When attuned to this disk and look onto the black surface for one minute, the plumed serpent will shift slightly and you will see the clear picture of an ancient relief of three dwarves, feeling the pull of an ancient beckoning. You will know the way to the sight in the mirror.

→ Magical items to equip the party: see chapter *Magic Items*

CHAPTER 2: TRAVEL TO CIHUATON

After the adventurers agree to take Marelda's mission, one of them will have to attune themselves to the mirror and figure out the way to the city hidden in the vulcan. They will then get on their way through the jungle.

→ This travel can be adjusted to the needs of the players. It is possible to completely skip over and just narrate the travel but also to extend the playing time in order for the players and player characters to get to know each other better. There are no strict encounters designed for this part of the adventure, it is all about reaching the city. The adventurers will have to traverse the jungle, deal with the overgrowth and dampness, sharing the tasks of setting up camp and keep watch.

Suggested jungle-bound creatures for possible random encounters during travel: Number and encounter needs to be adapted to the party's challenge level.

- **Ankheg** (MM, p. 21)
- **Basilisk** (MM, p. 24)
- **Blights** (MM, p. 32)
- **Bullywug** (MM, p. 35)
- **Centaur** (MM, p. 38)
- **Couatl** (MM, p. 43)

CHAPTER 2: TRAVEL TO CIHUATON

After their travels through the jungle and following the way the Mirror of the Quetzal indicates, the heroes reach the vulcan. They will find small, overgrown, paths meandering upwards and ruins of a street, destroyed by time. Making their way upwards, towards the summit surrounded by thick clouds, the artifact will guide them to a great stairway, wide enough for several men to ascend it side-by-side. It leads to two entries into a great, sun-lit plaza.

WHEN THE HEROES ENTER, READ THE FOLLOWING:

You make your way up the sheer infinite number of steps, and find yourself at a great, open plaza. Looking around, you see yourself surrounded by steep cliff walls encompassing an oval area. Those walls are not natural, the whole surface seems to be covered with ornaments and you easily see that they are of the same cultural origin then the carvings on the artifact you have brought with you. This must be the architecture of the old dwarfs. In three alcoves, one right behind you and two on each side of the plaza, you see stone statues, like lifeless guards, quiet and looking into the middle of the square where an enormous pile of rubble, of smaller and bigger stones and boulders lies shattered.

Behind you, high above, spans a stone balcony, easily spanning 60 feet or more, following the plaza's curve. There are also several pillars and two structures on the plaza's sides, whose purpose you cannot make out from afar. Everything seems to be focused on the huge stone portal visible at the opposite side of the plaza, carved into the volcano. It is closed.

There is, however, another structure that catches your attention: Next to the portal, there is an oversized relief on the wall, depicting what you believe are several dwarves in ornamental clothes and attire. Their arms are outstretched and their faces are fixed on the entrance, on you.

Once the adventurers enter the plaza and start looking around or moving towards the portal, the gates behind them come crashing down, closing them in.

THE PLAZA

The plaza is a wide oval open space surrounded by high cliffs. On their edges high above, vegetation can be seen: treetops, palm trees and vines. On the side of the portal, the summit of the vulcan extends into the heights.

THE GATES

Now behind the adventurers are two massive stone gates which were open when they entered but are now closed.

THE BALCONY

A balcony spans the back side of the plaza. On top are 2 ballistas and 2 Dwarven Defender statues placed in alcoves.

THE PULLEYS

On the left and right side of the plaza are a pulley each which is connected to the balcony. Players can use them to get up to the balcony (which would be the best strategy for a player character affected by the "Boom" mechanic of the Guardian), but it always needs 2 people to operate: one who is lifted up, the other staying downstairs.

THE RUBBLE PIT

In the very middle of the plaza, there is a rubble pile consisting of boulders and stones of different sizes but all of the same material, rough greyish-brown stone with carvings of lines and patterns. Upon investigation, it can be seen that they once were fused together making one large structure.

MORE ITEMS

If the DM sees fit to provide the party with more healing potions (or other items), and the adventurers haven't already gotten them from *Marelda Emberstone* beforehand, they could be found here amidst the rubble.

THE PORTAL TO CIHUATON

On the concave north wall of the plaza, within the cliff side, there is a massive, closed stone gate which can be assumed is the last barrier between the world and the sealed city of Cihuaton.

THE RELIEF

A big part of the wall in the back right next to the enormous stone portal is taken by a huge relief. It depicts several larger-than-life dwarves in ornamental clothes and attire. Their arms are outstretched and their faces are fixed towards the entrance and the arriving adventurers. Those are the founding fathers/mothers and ancient heroes of Cihuaton, now watching over the safety of the city. When a player comes close to the relief, it will move, and one of the figures will somewhat lean out of it, slowly extending a hand with an open palm, waiting.

THE ALTARS

Close to the relief and the portal are three altars set into the stone. On each of the altars, there are 3 items carved of the same stone. Those are stone offerings.

THE STONE OFFERINGS

Nine offerings in total show a large selection of items which can be placed in the dwarf's hand. They are grouped in pairs of three. As soon as one item is lifted off one of the altars, the other items on that altar will turn into stone, melting into the top of the altars. The items from the other altars cannot be lifted off anymore. The offerings can be given to the statue in any order. Upon placing the item, the figure in the relief will close their hand around the item, turn its gaze towards one of the statues on the sides of the plaza.

THE ASPECTS

The stone offerings are symbols for the aspect the Guardian will be imbued with. Three times, the adventurers will have to choose an item to give to one of the dwarves depicted in the relief and three times, the Guardian will receive the powers of those aspects offered.

→ See more in the next chapter: *The Fight*

THE ASPECT BEARERS

In the eastern, western and southern part of the plaza and next to the stairs the party came from, there are alcoves in the cliff side. Within these alcoves, there is an immovable dwarven statue each, looking similar, but somewhat bleak, to the figures shown on the relief.

Activating the Aspect Bearers Once an offering is placed into the hand of the dwarf in the relief, with loud rumbling and shaking the entire plaza, one of the statues will break free from the alcove and slowly start making its way towards the center of the plaza where the pile of rubble is. The statue also carries the item that the relief was given.

- If the adventurers attack the Aspect Bearer, **the fight starts**. Roll initiative. If they don't, it won't be aggressive, only bringing the aspect item to the pile of rubble.

CHAPTER 4: THE FIGHT

THE RITUAL UNFOLDS

If the adventurers don't interrupt the first Aspect Bearer, it will bring the aspect to the rubble pile, merging with it and activating the magic. The Aspect Bearer will be destroyed and the Guardian rise with the first aspect active, giving it powers and abilities.

STAGE 1

Guardian, imbued with aspect 1 | Multiattack I

After the Guardian has been defeated for the first time (down to 240 HP), he crumbles to rubble and activates its stage action: Volatile Overload. Then, the adventurers have time to choose another offering to re-activate the Guardian and influence its nature. The second Aspect Bearer will bring the second aspect to the rubble pile for this. This time, when the Guardian re-emerges from the rubble, the Aspect Bearer 1 is with it and will also partake in the fight.

STAGE 2

Guardian, imbued with aspect 2 | Multiattack I | Aspect Bearer 1 as support

Once the Guardian is defeated for the second time (down to 160 HP), the circle begins anew. Another choosing of an offering, another Aspect Bearer. In Stage 3, 2 Aspect Bearers are support.

STAGE 3

Guardian, imbued with aspect 3 | Multiattack I | Aspect Bearer 1 and Aspect Bearer 2 as support

When the Guardian crumbles a third time (down to 80 HP), no Aspect Bearer will awaken. Instead, after the Volatile Overload, the Guardian will reassemble itself and this time, at its most dangerous, fight with the power of all 3 aspects. It will also have one more attack per turn.

STAGE 4

Guardian, imbued with aspect 1-3 | Multiattack II

After the adventurers defeat the Guardian a fourth time (down to 0 HP) the fight is over.

THE ASPECT BEARERS AND THEIR FUNCTION

The Aspect Bearers have two functions: First, they bring the aspects to the Guardian and then, one stage after, they reform from the rubble as support, fighting alongside the Guardian with attacks defined by the aspect they held.

Weakening the Guardian. Aspect Bearers are attackable on their way to the rubble pile. They will fight back but use their movement to get to the rubble. If the adventurers manage to bring down its HP to 1, it will still continue its way as it is not killable when delivering the aspect. However, the Guardian will start in a weakened state:

WEAKENED GUARDIAN

If aspect statues are defeated while on their way to bringing the offering to the Guardian, the Guardian's damage dice are affected in its next stage. E.g. every d10 becomes a d8, a d8 becomes a d6 etc.

In combat, the aspect will support the Guardian, using its fighting abilities. If the Guardian is defeated while an Aspect Bearer is still alive, it will explode with the Volatile Overload action happening when the Guardian goes down.

STAGE ACTION

The Guardian triggers Volatile Overload as a stage action. A stage action happens at the end of each of the Guardian's combat stages. After every stage (except for the very last one), when it crumbles to rubble, the Guardian releases this overload.

OPERATING THE PULLEYS

The pulleys on each side of the arena can be used to transport a creature up on the balcony. This is the only place where the Boom effect can go off without harming others. It doesn't need any check to work but takes an action of the operating creature.

THE DWARVEN DEFENDERS AND THEIR FUNCTION

The Dwarven Defenders are inactive statues. However, they will attack hostile creatures in melee range and use Shatter Ground and Stone Punch to drive them off the balcony. Once called to action by the Guardians Reinforcement ability, they will man the ballistas and attack hostile creatures down on the plaza.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Once, the Guardian has been defeated, the dwarven forefathers on the relief will raise their offerings high above their head and a deep, penetrating hum will fill the air. After a moment, the adventurers will hear the grating of stone upon stone and the gigantic portal, now glowing with the same magic that imbued the Guardian will slowly rise, opening the way into the city of Cihuaton.

READ

You catch a glimpse of a fiery, red glow coming out of a spacious corridor leading deep into the heart of the vulcan. You know that you are now at the threshold of a new adventure...

The adventurers will now either enter the city or go back to *Marelda Emberstone*. And at this point, this adventure ends.

MAGIC ITEMS

For a fight at this level, it is highly recommended to give the party some magic items beforehand. This can be either in preparation of the adventure or by using *Marelda Emberstone* as a provider of needed goods, or be found in the arena. Those are some ideas which could be useful. All of them at the same time will most likely be too much.

Strongly advised

Each player character should have a way to deal magical damage as the Guardian is resistant to non-magical damage - either by using spells or by having a magical weapon in their possession. Resurrection items. To avoid sudden deaths in a fight, which will take a long time, it could be helpful to give each player character one of these:

POTION OF RESSURECTION

Rare potion

This bottle has 1 dose of a mixture that can reverse death. As an action, you can feed it to another creature than yourself which will instantly come back to life with half of their HP.

Further Options

Some items (amulets, rings, armor ...) to gain advantage on certain ability checks also makes surviving the encounter more likely. The Guardian forces mostly constitution and dexterity checks.

For further equipment, items charged with additional spells (1x use each) are also always powerful, either for healing or damage.

Potions of temporary resistance against the elemental damage types used by the Guardian (either fire, cold or lightning) could help especially characters in melee range.

APPENDIX A: NEW CREATURES

THE GUARDIAN

Standing nearly 15 feet tall, this stone Guardian is a force to be reckoned with and the keeper to the city of Cihuaton.

Constructed by dwarven stonemasons and imbued with rare, yet powerful dwarven magic, it was created to guard the entry into the dwarven city when the time had come to seal it off.

Its only purpose is to carry out the rite of passage, separating worthy beings seeking entry into Cihuaton from those who are unworthy.

For this, the Guardian will fight relentlessly each and every time it gets invoked. The massive frame and weight of the Guardian allows it unimaginable strength which they use to take out intruders with a single blow. It is very versatile in fight and easily adapts to its modulation defined by the offerings chosen by its opponents and brought to it by the Aspect Bearers. Its powerful frame, weighing several tons, moves swiftly, far more so than one would think.

Rubble Borne. When the Guardian is defeated its body will collapse into rubble, the expelled magic causing a devastating explosion in a wide area.

Stone Stubbornness. This being is artificially made to fulfill its task and won't easily be distracted from doing so. It can't be frightened or charmed and it doesn't know exhaustion.

Magical Construct. As a magically imbued construct, it will lose its ability to move and turn into a simple stone statue if it is within an antimagic field but will be infused with magic and come to life again if the field disappears.

Rite of Entry. The Portal to the city of Cihuaton will only open once the Guardian has been destroyed entirely. To displace it, ban it to other realms or incapacitate it won't complete the ritual. Every stranger who wishes to enter must undergo this test or else be denied entry to the city.

STONE GUARDIAN OF CIHUATON

Large construct, unaligned

Armor Class 20 (natural armor)
Hit Points 320
Speed 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	14 (+2)	19 (+4)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Con +8, Wis +8
Damage Vulnerabilities force, thunder
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from non magical weapons
Damage Immunities necrotic
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages all
Challenge 16 (15,000 XP)

Magic Resistance. The guardian has advantages on saves against spells and other magical effects.

Imbued with Magic. The guardian's attacks are magical.

Legendary Resistance (2/Day ○○). If the guardian fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Auras

Three passive abilities apply for the rest of the fight as soon as an aura offering for the guardian has been chosen. They are defined by the activated aspects (fire, ice, storm).

Aura of Fire I (only if "Fire Crystal" offering chosen). The guardian is immune to fire damage.

Aura of Fire II (only if "Fire Crystal" offering chosen). Any hostile creature that starts its turn within 5 ft. of the guardian must make a DC 18 Con save or take 5 (2d8) fire damage.

Aura of Fire III (only if "Fire Crystal" offering chosen). If the guardian takes damage from a melee attack, there is a 25% chance for the attacker to ignite. Roll a d4: On a 1, the attacker takes 5 (2d8) fire damage.

Aura of Ice I (only if "Frost Crystal" offering chosen). The guardian is immune to cold damage.

Aura of Ice II (only if "Frost Crystal" offering chosen). Any hostile creature that starts its turn within 5 ft. of the guardian is briefly covered in thin ice and has -10 ft. of movement on its turn.

Aura of Ice III (only if "Frost Crystal" offering chosen). If the guardian takes damage from a melee attack, there is a 25% chance for the attacker's weapon to freeze to the guardian. Roll a d4. On a 1, the attacker is disarmed and must use an action or bonus action to retrieve the weapon.

Aura of the Storm I (only if "Storm Crystal" offering chosen). The guardian is immune to lightning damage.

Aura of the Storm II (only if "Storm Crystal" offering chosen). Any hostile creature that starts its turn within 5 ft. of the guardian, it has -1 on its next attack roll on this turn.

Aura of the Storm III (only if "Storm Crystal" offering chosen). If the guardian takes damage from a ranged attack, there is a 25% chance a lightning spark emits from the guardian's body. Roll a d4: On a 1, the spark hits the hostile creature farthest away from the guardian. The creature must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw. It takes 5 (2d8) thunder damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Actions

□ **Multiattack I (Stage 1-3).** *Melee Weapon Attack:* The guardian makes three attacks: one basic attack followed by two additional attacks of the active aspect.

Multiattack II (Stage 4). *Melee Weapon Attack:* The guardian makes four attacks: one basic attack followed by three additional attacks, one of each aspect.

BASIC ATTACKS

Fist Punch. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. Hit: 20 (3d8 + 7) bludgeoning damage.

Arm Swipe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5ft., up to three targets. Hit: 15 (2d8 + 7) bludgeoning damage.

ASPECTS ATTACKS

□ **Double Cut (only if "Sword" offering chosen).** *Melee Weapon Attack:* The guardian swiftly strikes the area in front twice with both bladed arms, no offhand. +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., two targets or double hit on same target. Hit: 22 (4d6 + 8) slashing damage.

□ **Leash (only if "Flail" offering chosen).** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 30ft., one target. Hit: 22 (4d6 + 8) slashing damage and the target must succeed on a DC 18 Strength saving throw or be pulled up to 25 feet toward the guardian.

□ **Rain of Arrows (only if "Bow" offering chosen).** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* The guardian shoots a volley of stone shards onto a target. +7 to hit, reach 60ft., one target. Hit: 22 (4d6 + 8) slashing damage and the target must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or be frightened for its next turn.

□ **Innate Spellcasting: Flame Meteors (at will) (only if "Fire Crystal" offering chosen).** The guardian creates up to two fire meteors sending them streaking toward a point or points within 120 feet of it. Each creature within 5 feet of the point where the meteor explodes must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw. A creature takes 12 (2d6+6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

□ **Innate Spellcasting: Ice Shard (at will) (only if "Ice Crystal" offering chosen).** The guardian forms and flings a sharp blade of ice at a target, which shatters on impact. On a hit, the target takes 12 (2d6+6) cold damage. Any hostile creature that is within 5 ft. of the target as well as the target must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, it is briefly covered in thin ice and has -10 ft. of movement on its next turn.

□ **Innate Spellcasting: Lightning Bolt (at will) (only if "Storm Crystal" offering chosen) (PHB p. 255, adapted).** A stroke of lightning forming a line of 100 feet long and 5 feet wide blasts out from the guardian in a direction of choice. Each creature in the line must make a Dexterity saving throw. A creature takes 12 (2d6+6) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Roll a d4: On 1-2, the targets get a positive charge, on 3-4, they get a negative charge (relevant for Volatile Overload).

□ **Pursuit Strike (only if "Boots" offering chosen).** *Melee Weapon Attack:* The guardian makes two attacks, dashing to a second target after attacking the first. +10 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. Hit: 12 (2d6 + 8) slashing damage. It doesn't provoke attacks of opportunity.

□ **Tectonic Ripple (only if "Armor" offering chosen).** *Melee Weapon Attack:* The guardian slams the ground, creating a circular shockwave in a circle of 15ft. radius from its position. Each creature within must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw. A creature takes 12 (2d6+6) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. On a hit, the guardian's AC gets +2 until it next takes damage.

□ **Bloody Conquest (only if "Crown" offering chosen).** *Melee Weapon Attack:* The guardian impales a creature within reach in a chosen direction. +10 to hit, reach 10ft. Hit: 22 (4d6 + 8) piercing damage. On a hit, the target must make a DC 15 Constitution save or take 7 (2d6) piercing damage at the start of each of its turns from a wound. Each time the guardian hits a creature with such a wound, the wound's damage increases by 7 (2d6) piercing damage. The wound can be healed by any healing magic or a successful DC 15 Medicine check.

Reactions

Parry (recharge 5-6). The guardian adds +4 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the guardian must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

Legendary Actions

The guardian can take 2 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The guardian regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Arm Swipe. The guardian makes an Arm Swipe attack (see Basic Attacks).

Heal Self (costs 2 actions). The guardian magically regains up to 45 (6d10+15) hit points but never more than the stage's maximum (320, 240, 160, 80 HP).

Lair Actions

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the guardian takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects. The guardian can't use the same effect two rounds in a row

Boom. *Ranged Spell Attack:* The guardian points at a hostile creature it can see which gets imbued by an overload of magic, showing itself in a flickering bubble which gets tighter and tighter each passing round. After 3 rounds, it will violently combust at the end of the affected creature's turn, creating an arcane explosion with a circular horizontal event horizon of 120 ft.. It will damage all other creatures on the plaza friendly to the target, dealing each 40 (6d10+10) points of force damage. To avoid killing others, the target will need to reach the top of the cliff side using the pulleys in the west or east of the arena to get up. It will need help from another creature operating the pulley.

Reinforcements. The guardian summons 2 Dwarven Gargoyles onto the balcony which will enter the fight with long range attack. arena to get up. It will need help from another creature operating the pulley.

Stage Action: Volatile Overload

Volatile overload happens at the end of each stage of the fight except for the final stage which ends with the true destruction of the guardian. After the guardian is struck down to 240 HP, 160 HP and 80 HP, but before it turns to rubble, it immediately triggers the following:

Volatile Overload. *Ranged Spell Attack:* For 3 turns, the Guardian sways and its magic becomes instable, getting louder and louder, actively not doing anything. After its 3rd turn, it collapses into rubble and a mighty explosion of arcane magic moves from the guardian's position across the plaza. To avoid being hit, creatures need to hold onto the thick vines covering the south-west and south-east walls of the cliff sides. Each creature hit by it takes 50 (8d10+10) force damage. There are 4 vines on each wall, a vine can only support one player each. Each creature must make a DC 13 Strength check if it is able to hold itself or else fall down and take the damage of the explosion. The vines are affected by the elemental aspect (offering) chosen for the guardian:

- **None** -
- **Fire** The burning heat in the arena scorches away some vines. The number available is reduced from 4 to 3 per wall.
- **Frost** The vines are frozen over and slippery. Climbing requires a DC 15 Strength check.
- **Storm** The vines and players are positively and negatively charged. All vines on one side always have the same charge, while a creature's charge is determined by the guardian's Lightning Bolt attack. Creatures can only climb on vines with the opposite charge. Creatures which haven't been hit by the guardian have a neutral charge and can climb both kinds of vines. The turn order is then temporarily rescinded until a new offering has been placed into the hand of the next statue in the relief.

The turn order is then temporarily rescinded until a new offering has been placed into the hand of the next statue in the relief.

THE ASPECT BEARERS

Aspect Bearers are stone statues of dwarven heroes long gone. They occupy 3 alcoves in the plaza facing towards exactly the middle where once a greater statue stood. Visitors may marvel at the intricate carvings but won't know about their nature until they already set the ritual in motion.

Courier of the chosen aspect. Once the Guardian is activated, one statue at a time comes to life, holding the aspect the visitors chose. From this moment on, its only task is to bring this aspect offering to the Guardian to let it resurrect and take the aspect in. It won't stop moving towards the pile of rubble even if it gets attacked as long as it hasn't delivered its aspect yet.

There are 3 Aspect bearers in existence, one for each aspect type (Weapon, Element, Persona).

ASPECT BEARER

Medium construct, unaligned

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 50

Speed 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	15 (+3)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Con +5, Wis +5

Damage Vulnerabilities force, thunder

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from non magical weapons

Damage Immunities necrotic

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages none

Challenge 5 (1.800 XP)

Magic Resistance. The guardian has advantages on saves against spells and other magical effects.

Actions

Multiattack. The Aspect Bearer makes two slam attacks.

Weaponized Slam (only when "Sword", "Flail" or "Bow" offering chosen). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. Hit: 12 (2d8 + 3) slashing damage.

Elemental Slam (only when "Fire Crystal", "Ice Crystal" or "Storm Crystal" offering chosen). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. Hit: 12 (2d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage + 5 (1d8) force damage.

Grappling Slam (only when "Boots", "Armor" or "Crown" offering chosen). *Melee Weapon Attack:* The Aspect Bearer strikes the target then tries to grapple it. +6 to hit, reach 5ft. Hit: 12 (2d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage. On a hit, the target must succeed a DC 15 Strength or Dexterity check or be grappled until the Aspect Bearer releases it at the start of its next turn.

THE DWARVEN DEFENDERS

Defenders are the ancient statues on the balconies near the entrance to the city of Cihuaton. Their dwarven creators intended them as a defense mechanism against intruders.

They are oversized copies of the dwarven clanspeople, stocky and broad stone constructs with expressionless, bearded faces, looking down on the plaza from the alcoves they are placed in. Their chiseled armor shows patterns and ornaments typical to the dwarves of Cihuaton.

Ballista Defender. Once imbued with magic by the Guardian, they come to life, defending the balconies they stand on and using the ancient ballistas for attacking enemies on the plaza below as it is the meaning of their existence.

DWARVEN DEFENDER

Medium construct, unaligned

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 50

Speed 20ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Con +5, Wis +5

Damage Vulnerabilities force, thunder

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from non magical weapons

Damage Immunities necrotic

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages none

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Magic Resistance. The guardian has advantages on saves against spells and other magical effects.

Innate Spellcasting: Shatter Ground (at will) Action to cast. Uses this to defend itself when enemy is in melee range. The dwarven defender uses his magic to shatter the ground in a 20 ft. radius around it, making it difficult terrain for 2 rounds. Each hostile creature in the area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 12 (2d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage and falls prone. The tremor deals 4 (1d6) bludgeoning damage to any payer character in the area at the start of each of their turns until the effect ends.

Actions

Multiattack. The Aspect Bearer makes two slam attacks.

Stone Punch. Melee Weapon Attack: Uses this to defend itself when enemy is in melee range. +5 to hit, reach 5ft., one target Hit: 15 (3d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage. On a hit, the target is knocked 15 ft. away from the dwarven defender.

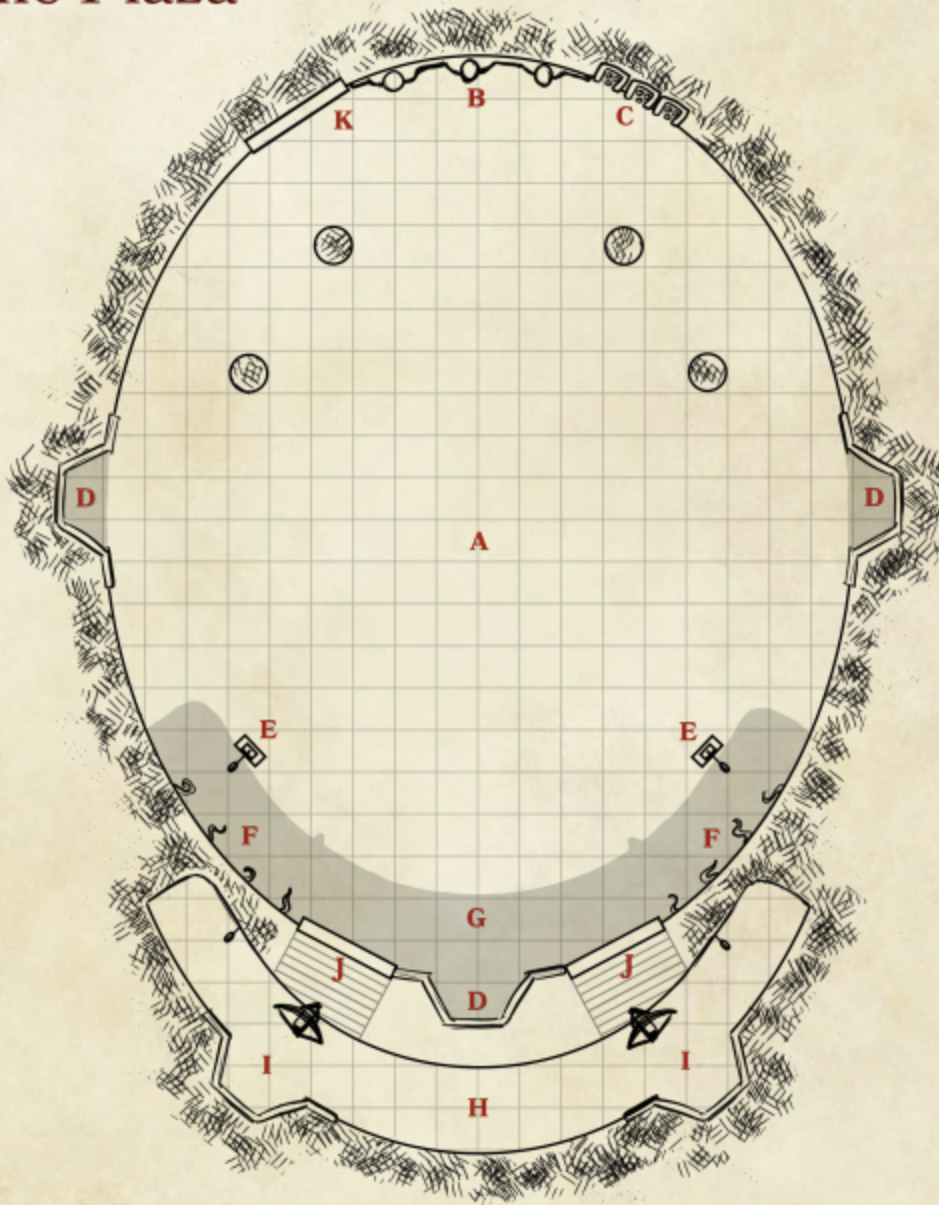
Ballista. Ranged Weapon Attack: Uses this to attack enemies on the plaza below. The dwarven defender mannes a ballista on the balcony, firing a stone bolt on a target below. Ranged Attack: +5 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. On hit 20 (4d8+8) bludgeoning damage.

APPENDIX B: ASPECTS

Aspect	Item	Visual Effect on Guardian	Abilities and Attacks
Fire	Fire Crystal	Flames licking the stone	Aura of Fire Flame Meteors Fire damage + several targets
Frost	Frost Crystal	Ice crystals on the edges of the stone	Aura of Ice Ice Shard Cold damage + less movement for target
Storm	Storm Crystal	Crackling sounds when moving	Aura of the Storm Lightning Bolt Lightning damage + charge target
Blades	Sword	Arms end in blades	Double Cut Slashing damage + 2 attacks
Range	Bow	Heavy bow	Rain of Arrows Slashing damage + chance of target being frightened, ranged
Flail	Flail	Giant flail	Leash Slashing damage + chance of pulling target to melee range
Agility	Boots	Agile, slim build	Pursuit Strike Slashing damage + 2 attacks, melee + ranged
Defense	Armor	Heavily armored with stone plates	Tectonic Ripple Bludgeoning damage + AC(+2) for Guardian
Utility	Crown	A row of crown-like spikes enclosing the head	Bloody Conquest Piercing damage + wound with increasing damage over time

APPENDIX C: MAP

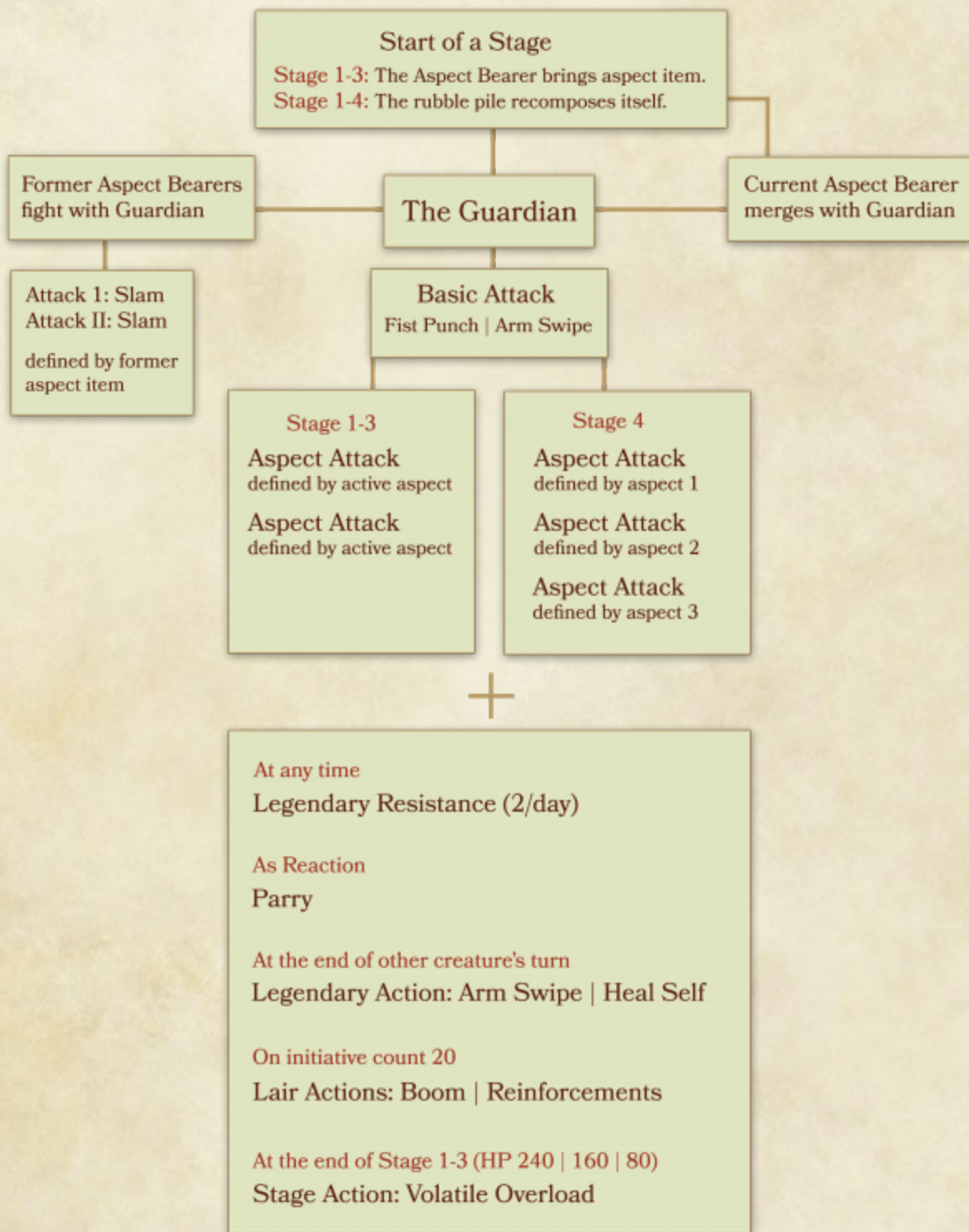
The Plaza



- A:** The Plaza , location fo the rubble pit where the Guardian emerges
- B:** The Relief
- C:** The Altars with the aspect offerings (3 each)
- D:** Alcoves, where the Aspect Bearers are in wait
- E:** Pulley
- F:** Vines on the wall (essential for evading Volatile Overload)
- G:** Shadow of the balcony - this is the exact location of the balcony
- H:** The Balcony as seen from atop
- I:** Alcoves, where the Dwarven Defenders wait and the Ballistas
- J:** Entry Gates, closed during the fight
- K:** Portal to Cihuaton, closed

APPENDIX D: OVERVIEW

The Fight



LEGAL DISCLAIMER

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Document put together with the homebrew creation website

<https://homebrewery.naturalcrit.com/>

THE GUARDIAN OF CIHUATON

Design Document for a Fractal encounter in the
Guild Wars 2 game system

By Kilian Schmitt & Sabine Neuser

Game System

The design of this encounter is aligned with the game system of Guild Wars 2. The encounter is structured like a fractal boss, an end-game PvE instance for 5 players.

Classes can fulfil any roles, there are no mechanics that would require a certain class or build. The range of available builds is diverse, meaning many different loadouts can be designed by players to tackle the encounter in a specific way.

Glossary

This section aims to explain systems that are specific to the game system used in order to illustrate the encounter document.

Boons

The opposite of conditions, these benefit the target by enhancing abilities or stats.

Break Bars

Break bars are broken by inflicting Crowd Control effects (CC). Boss monsters are usually immune to CC effects, instead breaking a bar interrupts their actions and stuns them momentarily. Break bars can appear periodically, or if the mob channels an attack.

Conditions

Opposite of boons, these damage or inhibit the target.

Downstate

When a player takes damage that reduces their hit points to zero or below, they are not immediately defeated. Instead, they enter a downstate (“going down”), in which they cannot move, and start with 50% of their normal hit points which gradually tick down. In this downstate, other players can interact with the downed player to revive them. Upon rallying, a previously downed player gets up and can fight as normal. Entering downstate several times in quick succession inflicts a penalty that decreases

the available health while downed, up to an immediate defeat on the highest penalty.

Fractals

Fractals of the Mist, in short fractals, are 5-player group instances with scaling difficulties. Fractals can be entered on different difficulty levels, classified in Tier 1, 2, 3 and 4. On higher tiers, enemies deal more damage, have more health, and more instabilities are active. In fractals, players can experience a short fragment of past events or stories while fighting challenging, repeatable encounters.

Fractal Instabilities

Additional random modifiers that apply to a whole fractal of the mist instance, such as enhancing enemies with Boons or decreasing player health. On each fractal tier, *[Tier-1]* random fractal instabilities are active, changing the encounter slightly. Not all instabilities can appear on every tier, and some instabilities (or combinations thereof) are excluded from appearing for certain fractals as a whole, as they would be incompatible with the fight.

Gliding

With the Heart of Thorns expansion, players obtained the ability to open up a hang glider to brace their fall and explore the world. This glider can also be used in some instanced content.

Setting

Sealed dwarven ruins in the Maguuma Jungle, unearthed when the pact crossed the region in order to defeat Mordremoth. The priory wants to enter the ruins and learn what became of the inhabitants, whether they were affected by the Rite of the Great Dwarf and whether Primordus' forces also attacked them. These dwarves seem to have split from those residing in the Shiverpeaks and Ascalon centuries ago, and their cultural identity shows heavy Hylek influences.

The Arena

Plaza

Surrounded by high cliffs, the plaza of Cihuaton is a large, oval space under the open sky. On the plaza, a pile of rubble in the center indicates a statue once was built there. Several devices and architectural features can be observed.

Vines

Around the southern half of the arena, strong jungle vines are growing on the cliff side, large enough to climb up on them.

Pulley

On the east and west sides of the plaza, two pulley systems are located which can ferry goods and creatures up onto the balcony.

Balcony

A balcony spans the lower half of the arena. It is connected to the plaza via the pulleys in the east and west. Upon this gallery, ballistae are situated pointing in the direction of the plaza. There are several alcoves with yet another kind of statues, the Dwarven Defenders who are staying inactive unless threatened or activated as reinforcements by the Guardian during the fight.

Gate, Relief and Altars

Located on the northern face of the cliffside, leading into the mountain, a large stone gate bars entry to the city. Next to it, a relief depicting

three dwarven heroes as well as three altars displaying various offerings are located.

Alcoves

In the south, east and west, alcoves lead into the cliff. Within them, a large statue stand, which will become Aspect Bearers during the encounter. These alcoves are also locations for the three defensive devices to appear.

Enemy Specifics

The Guardian of Cihuaton

"[Subtitle(s) based on aspect]"

Hit Points: 11.500.000
Break Bar: 1.000
Armor: 2597, standard
Hit Box: 200, large
Rank: Legendary

Stolen Skills: Throw Rock (low damage and provides 1s of knockdown (100 CC damage))

Appearance: Large stone statue, resembling a humanoid, very age worn. Looks dwarven, like a warrior. Appearance changes slightly depending on active aspects to make it easier for players to determine what they are fighting.

Aspect Bearers - Side Bosses

"[Subtitle based on aspect]"

Hit Points: 1.150.000
Break Bar: 500
Armor: 2597, standard
Hit Box: 120, medium
Rank: Champion

Damage: 80% of standard damage
Channel: All abilities will channel for 5s and incur a break bar.

Limitations: Will only use very simplified rotations consisting of mainly basic attack chains. Passive effects are active with the damage reduction.

Stolen Skills: Throw Rock (low damage and provides 1s of knockdown (100 CC damage))

Appearance: Depending on aspect. When not (yet) participating in the fight, the aspect will exist as an untargetable, immovable statue in its alcove - there are three alcoves on the ground level, and an aspect placed in each.

Behavior as Carriers: Upon activating the next artifact, the next aspect will break from its alcove and walk to the rubble pile of the Guardian boss. During this walk, the aspect cannot attack, be slowed or otherwise be controlled. Players can damage it while it is walking. Should its HP be reduced to 0, the aspect will become immune and finish its route - it cannot die. Depending on how much HP the aspect had left after reaching the boss, the Guardian's attack damage during the next combat phase will be affected as follows:

- 100-80% 2x Magic Surge
- 80-60% 1x Magic Surge
- 60-40% no effect
- 40-20% 1x Magic Corrosion
- 20-0% 2x Magic Corrosion

The Aspect Bearers will always activate following a fixed pattern throughout the fight - the first Aspect Bearer will walk to the Guardian from the southern alcove, the second will come from the East, and the third will be coming from the West.

Behavior during combat phases: The aspect will support the Guardian in combat, using the metrics listed above, as well as the aspect attack pattern visualized in the boss rotation section. This supporting Aspect Bearer will always be summoned with full HP, no matter how much damage the group dealt to the Aspect Bearer that walked up to the boss. If the Guardian was defeated while an aspect bearer is still alive, it will explode with a *Volatile Overload* within 5 seconds, potentially killing the group.

Balcony Statues - Reinforcements "Determined"

Hit Points: 30.000
Break Bar: 150
Armor: 1910, favoring power
Hit Box: 48, small
Rank: Elite

Stolen Skills: Consume Plasma (Provides all boons for short durations)

Appearance: looks like a statue of a stone dwarf, a small, sturdy humanoid. The armor shows patterns and ornaments typical to the dwarves of Cihuatón. Along the walls of the balcony, many small alcoves contain one statue each. They are about as tall as a human player character.

Passive Behavior: When close to a statue on the balcony, it will cause uneven ground on the walkway path close to it. Players walking on this ground will periodically take damage and be afflicted by Cripple. While passive, they cannot be attacked and are invulnerable to AoE or CC effects.

Active Behavior: When 'awoken' by the *Reinforcements* ability by the Guardian, one random statue will walk towards the closest ballista and start operating it according to the attack specifics listed below. When attacked, they will not change their behavior and will keep operating the ballista. If defeated, they will walk back to their alcove.

Defensive Mechanism - Crystals

Hit Points: 60.000
Break Bar: ---
Armor: ---
Hit Box: 48, small
Rank: ---

Stolen Skills: ---

Appearance: A mechanical device clasping a blue-ish crystal appears from the back of the

alcove, which is now empty since all the aspect bearers left to support the boss. The device is rooted in the stone walls, suggesting the underlying mechanism is hidden within the earth, possibly connected to the city. The visible parts are a dark bronze color, metal constructions with some light markings and ornamentations typical to the architecture of Cihuaton.

Active Behavior: The devices appear twice per fight. The first time they emerge is during the 3rd phase at 40%, the second time is during the final phase at 10%. Each device has a different effect on the boss. The Southern device heals the Guardian for 20.000 HP/second; the Eastern device applies 2s of protection per second to the Guardian; and the Western device applies 2s of retaliation per second to the Guardian.

Visuals and Subtitles on Aspects

Weapons

Sword Offering

Holds a Macuahuitl made from stone and obsidian in each hand
Adds *"Blade of Cihuaton"*

Bow Offering

Wields a massive bow half its own size, adorned with carvings
Wears ornamented quiver with arrows at the waist
Adds *"Arrow of Cihuaton"*

Flail Offering

Wields a large two-handed flail, the head like a Macuahuitl
Chain between pole and head of the weapon can be extended
Adds *"Warden of Cihuaton"*

Auras

Fire Offering

Embers and flames lick around the statue from

within cracks and joints
Adds *"Primordial Essence"*

Frost Offering

Covered in rime, small icicles form on arms and face of the statue
Cold fog swirls from within cracks and joints
Adds *"Winter's Presence"*

Storm Offering

Electricity and lightning around arms and head of statue
Adds *"Unbound Tempest"*

Personas

Boot Offering

Adds a lightweight cloth looking armor to the statue
Adds *"Whirlwind"*

Armor Offering

Adds a very bulky, heavy metal armor to the statue
Adds *"Bulwark"*

Crown Offering

Adds a light scale armor to the statue, and a helmet similar to crowns
Adds *"Commander"*

Encounter Specifics

Encounter Duration

Expected DPS: 50.000 for an average group

Enrage Timer: 10 minutes

Enrage effect: +200% more damage of boss

Gallery will man all ballistae

Tanking

The Guardian of Cihuaton encounter will employ a **random system** of tanking, where the boss will select a random target after new mechanics or after a fixed period of time, or after the currently targeted player died/entered down state.

The random system can be fun as it forces all players to pay equal attention to their

positioning, to know the fight and boss patterns, and where to stand if not tanking. As the encounter does not have any hardcore tank based mechanics that would require constant blocking, tanking the boss's attacks for a while does not hamper personal DPS too much, and the arena isn't that complicated to require one person taking care of moving the boss, aside from the times where the Aspect Bearers spawn from their alcoves - letting the boss disassemble far away from the Aspect Bearer's spawn increases the available time to damage it.

The boss will find a new target to attack under these conditions:

- Has attacked the current target for 15s
- The current target entered down state or was defeated
- Was interrupted due to a broken break bar

Effects of Crowd Control

Outside of the break bar mechanic, crowd control effects do not impact the boss, supporting aspects or the reinforcing balcony statues.

Controlling effects will reduce an enemy's break bar towards breaking it. Upon being successfully broken, the enemy is briefly stunned and will take more damage before resuming its attacks.

The Gallery

Players can (and need to) move up to the gallery, a walkway around the southern walls of the arena, in order to deal with the Boom and Reinforcements mechanics. They can also avoid the Volatile Overload mechanic while up on the gallery, however this is not a feasible solution for all party members due to the way to reach the gallery.

Players can enter the gallery by interacting with the front of one of the pulley systems on the south-eastern and south-western areas of the arena. A pulley can only ferry one player, and it

will need to be activated by another player by interacting with the lever on the left side of the contraption.

The activation time of the lever is 1½s, and the ferrying process takes another 1½s.

The Altars

Players can pick up an artifact by interacting with it. As soon as one item is lifted off one of the altars, all other items on that altar will turn into stone, removing the ability to interact with them. An item can be put back onto the altar by interacting with the altar, which in turn has all items reappear and be interactable again. The artifacts can be given to the statue in any order, by interacting with the extended hand on the relief.

Group Death

If the group wipes, players respawn at the entrance of the arena and the boss is entirely reset. Boss is back to the rubble state, and the aspects can be chosen anew without limitation.

Notable or Excluded Game Features

Mists Convergence - Fractal Instability

Adds enemies or mechanics from other fractal encounters to the encounter. Would interfere with the very mechanical nature of the fight. This instability is excluded from appearing in the encounter.

Stick Together - Fractal Instability

Players take more damage when not within 300 units of another player. Would be too frustrating for players who enter the arena balcony away from the group, as the unstable ground would deal very high damage to the player up there. This instability should only appear in the encounter on fractal tiers 3 and 4.

Gliding - Game Feature

While usually disabled in fractal instances, it is enabled and utilized in raids. As a simple means to descend from the gallery, deploying the glider

will be enabled.

The gliding feature will be usable during the encounter.

Portal Entre/Exeunt – Mesmer class ability
This ability can create a portal between two locations over a distance of 5.000 units, placing a portal where the Mesmer currently stands. This could be used to avoid dealing with the *Volatile Overload* mechanic properly - the Mesmer could place a portal close to a pulley, be ferried up, and activate the portal exit up on the gallery, allowing everyone to move up. This class ability will stay enabled, however will need to be monitored to determine whether players would abuse it.

Alternatively, the level could be manipulated to increase the distance from ground to gallery to over 5.000 units, however this would need heavy testing for performance impact (i.e. could players still see everything on the ground level clearly enough while up there.)

Watchwork Portal Device – Item

This item can create a portal between two locations over a distance of 6.000 units, similar to the Mesmer class's Portal Entre and Portal Exeunt ability.

The usability of this item is disabled in the instance of the encounter.

White Mantle Portal Device – Item

This item can create a portal between two locations over a distance of 6.000 units, similar to the Mesmer class's Portal Entre and Portal Exeunt ability.

The usability of this item is disabled in the instance of the encounter.

Attack specifics


Break Bar


- 1.000 CC damage required
- If CC is successful: Boss is dazed for 5s, replacing the aftercast of the skill
- If CC is unsuccessful: Boss proceeds with the ability, aftercast duration applies
- Players need to react quickly to break and interrupt the attack

Special Encounter Effects


Magic Effects: Inflicted by damaging Aspect Bearers.


Magic Surge
With a strong offering, the Guardian's strength increases.

 Magic Surge: +5% outgoing damage per stack

 Duration: Until dispersed


Magic Corrosion
With only a weakened offering, the Guardian's strength fades.

 Magic Corrosion: -5% outgoing damage per stack

 Duration: Until dispersed


Obsidian Armor: Caused by Defense Persona aspect.


Obsidian Armor
Increased defense. 1 stack can be removed by throwing rocks at the Guardian.


 Obsidian Armor: -25% incoming damage

Stonehealer's Blessing: Caused by Utility Persona aspect.

Stonehealer's Blessing
Heals periodically for a considerable amount.


 Stonehealer's Blessing: Regenerates health

 Healing: 2,500

 Interval: 1 second

Frozen Grasp: Caused by Frost Aura aspect.

Frozen Grasp
Proximity to the Guardian gradually freezes foes. Apply Slow and Chill at 5 stacks, at 10 stacks foes are frozen solid and lose agile boons. Stacks decay one by one if not close to a source of Frozen Grasp.




-  Frozen Grasp: The cold is claiming this character
-  Stack Threshold: 5
-  Cripple(5s): -50% Movement Speed
-  Chilled(5s): -66% Recharge and Movement Speed
-  Stack Threshold: 10
-  Frozen: 5 seconds
-  Alacrity: Boon removal
-  Quickness: Boon removal
-  Swift: Boon removal
-  Vigor: Boon removal
-  Duration: 2 seconds per stack

Ability Effects





Basic Attacks – Bare

Basic Attacks without Weapon aspect.







Punch
Punches foes.

-  Damage: 1,500
-  Range: 240
-  Cast: ¼s + ¼s

Swipe
Cleaves foes with both arms.

-  Damage: 1,700
-  Number of Targets: 3
-  Range: 240
-  Cast: ¼s + 1s




Slam
Slams the ground with both fists, dazing foes.

-  Damage: 2,500
-  Daze: 2 seconds
-  Number of Targets: 5
-  Radius: 240
-  Range: 240
-  Cast: ¼s + ¼s





Basic Attacks – Blade

Basic Attacks with the Blades Weapon aspect.





Stab
Stabs foes.

-  Damage: 1,700
-  Range: 240
-  Cast: ¼s + ½s

Double Cut
Strikes twice with both weapons.














-  Damage(2x): 1,500
-  Number of Targets: 3
-  Range: 240
-  Cast: 1s + 1s

Blade Throw
Throws returning weapons outwards, dealing damage to foes when striking them.

-  Damage: 2,000
-  Pierces
-  Range: 600
-  Cast: 1¼s + 2s












Basic Attacks – Bow

Basic Attacks with the Bow Weapon aspect.

Point Blank Shot Shoots foes with an arrow.  Damage: 1,500  Range: 600  Cast: 3/4s + 3/4s
Radial Shot Fires a volley of 5 delayed arrows in a cone to the front.  Damage(5x): 1,700  Number of Hits: 5  Pierces  Range: 600  Cast: 1 1/4s + 1s
Heartseeker Barrages a foe with 3 arrows, dealing more damage on consecutive hits.  Damage(3x): 2,000  +50% Damage increase on consecutive Hits  Number of Hits: 3  Range: 600  Cast: 1 1/2s + 2s

Basic Attacks – Flail

Basic Attacks with the Flail Weapon aspect.

Smack Smacks foes.  Damage: 1,000  Unblockable  Range: 240  Cast: 3/4s + 3/4s
Twin Strike Strikes the area in front in two quarters, first to the left, then to the right, cleaving all foes.  Damage(2x): 1,200  Number of Targets: 5  Unblockable  Range: 240  Cast: 1 1/2s + 1s
Corroding Swipe Swoops the flail across the ground in front, cleaving all foes and exposing their weak spots.  Damage: 2,000  Number of Targets: 5  Vulnerability(15s): +20% Incoming Damage  Unblockable  Range: 240  Cast: 1 1/4s + 3s





Aspect Abilities


Weapons – Blades

Serrated Blades: This ability incurs a break bar during the cast, which can be broken to interrupt it.

Serrated Blades




Sharpens weapons, inflicting bleeding, torment and poison with the next attacks.


-  Sharpened Edges(10s): Enhanced attacks
-  Bleeding(5s): 1,250 Damage
-  Torment(5s): 750 Damage, 1,000 Damage if Moving
-  Poison(5s): 750 Damage, -33% Heal Effectiveness

 Cast: 3s + 2s

Assassinate

Warps to a nearby foe to deliver a deep cut for up to 3 times.

-  Damage(3x): 7,000
-  Number of Hits: 3
-  Range: 600

 Cast: 3¼s + 3s

Weapons – Bow

One Thousand Arrows: This ability incurs a break bar during the cast, which can be broken to interrupt it.

One Thousand Arrows

Fires 2 volleys of arrows into the air, turning the area around the farthest foe into a debilitating battlefield which cripples and blinds foes passing through.

-  Damage(2x): 1,500
-  Pulse Damage: 500
-  Blindness(5s); Next outgoing attack misses
-  Cripple(5s): -50% Movement Speed

 Duration: 10 seconds

 Interval: 1 second

 Radius: 400

 Range: 6,000

 Cast: 5s + 2s

Reflective Shot

Shoots an arrow that bounces between nearby foes up to 5 times, inflicting weakness on hit.

-  Damage(5x): 2,000
-  Weakness(5s): -50% Endurance Regeneration

 Maximum Targets: 5

 Range: 600

 Cast: 1s + 3s

Weapons – Flail

Retribution: This ability incurs a break bar during the cast, which can be broken to interrupt it.

Retribution
Hurls the flail around itself 3 times, knocking down foes. Deals extra damage to disabled foes.

- Damage: 1,500
- +50% Damage increase to Disabled Foes
- Vulnerability(15s): +20% Incoming Damage
- Unblockable
- Radius: 1,200
- Cast: 6s + 3s

Leash
Grasps and pulls a foe with the chain of the flail, immobilizing them at the new location.

- Damage: 1,200
- Immobilize(2s): Unable to move
- Pull: 900
- Range: 900
- Cast: 1s + 3s

Persona – Agility

Pursuit
Dashes to the farthest foe in an evasive flurry, damaging all foes in the path, to deliver an attack at the target location. Then, dashes to the farthest foe from the new location, repeating the maneuver.

- Damage(2x): 3,500
- Damage on Dash: 1,200
- Evade: ½ seconds
- Range: 6,000
- Cast: 1¼s + 2½s

Persona – Defense

Tectonic Ripple
Slams the ground, freeing rubble from the floor and creating a circular, expanding shockwave, which deals heavy damage and knocks players down. Gains Obsidian Armor for each foe struck.

- Damage: 6,000
- Knockdown: 5 seconds
- Obsidian Armor: -25% incoming damage
- Radius: 6,000
- Cast: 1½s + 3s

Persona – Utility

Conquest
Targets a foe in an enclosing dome of magic to subjugate them. A subjugated foe is stunned and will take massive unblockable damage. If the target is not alone, it will resist these effects.

- Damage(5x): 1,500
- Stun: 5 seconds
- Allied needed: 2
- Duration: 5 seconds
- Interval: 1 second
- Radius: 240
- Range: 6,000
- Cast: 5s + 3s










Aura – Fire

Elemental Charge
Targets each foe with a meteor, plummeting on them with a delay. Being hit by additional meteors increases their damage significantly.

- Imbued by the element of fire
- Damage: 1,200
- +500% Damage increase on additional Hits
- Radius: 240
- Cast: 5s + 2s









Aura – Frost

Elemental Charge
Targets each foe with an icy surge, creating a lasting, slippery patch below them after a delay, which chills and applies Frozen Grasp. Movement results in knockdown, sliding across the ice until reaching solid ground.

-  Imbued with the element of frost
-  Knockdown: 5 seconds
-  Launch: 450
-  Chilled(5s): -66% Recharge and Movement Speed
-  Frozen Grasp: The cold is claiming this character
-  Duration: 20 seconds
-  Interval: 3 seconds
-  Radius: 240
-  Cast: 5s + 2s

Aura – Storm








Elemental Charge
Targets each foe with an incoming lightning strike and applies an electrical charge. Overlapping with allies of the opposite charge negates the lightning strike, while overlapping with an ally of the same charge doubles damage taken.

-  Imbued with the element of storm
-  Damage: 2,000
-  +100% Damage if duplicate Charge
-  Unblockable
-  Negative Charge: Find a positive ally
-  Positive Charge: Find a negative ally
-  Radius: 240
-  Cast: 5s + 2s

Encounter Abilities

Boom

Boom
Imbues a foe with a delayed, lethal magic detonation. The detonation damages every foe except the bearer, who needs to retreat to the gallery to save their allies.

-  Damage: 50,000
-  Detonation damages allies
-  Unblockable
-  The gallery is safe
-  Radius: 6,000
-  Range: 6,000
-  Cast: 15s + 30s

Volatile Overload











Volatile Overload: If an aura aspect is active, the vines in the arena that can be used to evade this attack are altered.

Fire: Number of vines reduced by 1 on each side.

Frost: Vines are slippery, time to climb up is longer.

Storm: Vines and players are charged, players need to climb on opposite charged vines.

Volatile Overload
Unleashes the magic held within upon being dispersed, resulting in a delayed blast lethal to any foe on the ground.

-  Damage: 50,000
-  Lethal detonation
-  Unblockable
-  The gallery is safe
-  The walls are safe
-  Burnt vines - choose carefully
-  Frozen vines - choose quickly
-  Charged vines - choose wisely
-  Radius: 6,000
-  Cast: 15s

Reinforcements

Reinforcements
Animates statues on the gallery to man ballistae and shoot foes.

- Number of Targets: 1
- Range: 6,000
- Cast: 2s + 1s

Reinforcement statues have the following active ability:

Ballista Shot
Operates a ballista to shoot foes.

- Damage: 5,000
- Unblockable
- Range: 6,000
- Cast: 3s + 2s

Reinforcement statues have the following passive ability:

Unstable Ground
Stomps the ground to injure and inhibit foes.

- Damage: 150
- Cripple(2s): -50% Movement Speed
- Interval: 1 second
- Range: 400

Defensive Crystals

Defensive Crystals
Supported by ancient mechanisms within the arena, the Guardian receives protection, retaliation and healing.

- Protection(2s): -33% Incoming Damage
- Retaliation(2s): Reflect damage back to its source
- Healing: 20,000
- Interval: 1 second

Passive Effects

Persona Passives

Spirit of the Scout: These effects are caused by the Agility Persona aspect.

Spirit of the Scout I
Periodically creates a cloud of smoke, blinding foes around.

- Blindness(5s): Next outgoing attack misses
- Interval: 20 seconds
- Radius: 240

Spirit of the Scout II
Periodically gains Swiftiness.

- Swiftiness: +33% Movement Speed
- Interval: 10 seconds

Spirit of the Warden: These effects are caused by the Defense Persona aspect.

Spirit of the Warden I
Gains increased health at the start of combat.

- Health increase: 15%

Spirit of the Warden II
Periodically gains protection.

- Protection(5s): -33% Incoming Damage
- Interval: 20 seconds

Spirit of the General: These effects are caused by the Utility Persona aspect.

Spirit of the General I
Periodically gains retaliation.

- Retaliation(3s): Reflect damage back to its source
- Interval: 10 seconds

Spirit of the General II
Periodically gains Stonehealer's Blessing to heal.

- Stonehealer's Blessing (10s): Regenerates health
- Interval: 30 seconds

Aura Passives

Aura of the Flame: These effects are caused by the Fire Aura aspect.

Aura of the Flame I
The radiating heat ignites any foe within range that has not been moving around for a while.

-  Imbued by the element of fire
-  Burning(3x|5s): 3,000 Damage
-  Duration: 5 seconds of standstill
-  Interval: 1 second
-  Range: 240

Aura of the Flame II
Drops lasting pools of hot lava when moving. Foes stepping on the pools take damage every second.





-  Imbued by the element of fire
-  Pulse Damage: 150
-  Duration: 15 seconds
-  Interval: 1 second
-  Range: 60

Aura of the Flame III
Attacks may ignite the target.





-  Imbued by the element of fire
-  Burning(5s): 1,000 Damage
-  Chance: 33%

Aura of the Ice: These effects are caused by the Frost Aura aspect.




Aura of the Ice I
The bitter cold grasps any foe within range of the Guardian, gradually inhibiting them with Frozen Grasp.

-  Imbued by the element of frost
-  Frozen Grasp: The cold is claiming this character
-  Interval: 5 seconds
-  Range: 240

Aura of the Ice II
Drops lasting patches of slippery ice when moving. Foes moving on these patches are knocked down and slide across until reaching solid ground.







-  Imbued by the element of frost
-  Knockdown: 2 seconds
-  Launch: 100
-  Radius: 60

Aura of the Ice III
Attacks have a chance to inflict a stack of Frozen Grasp.






-  Imbued by the element of frost
-  Frozen Grasp: The cold is claiming this character
-  Chance: 33%

Aura of the Gale: These effects are caused by the Storm Aura aspect.




Aura of the Gale I
Periodically attacks a random foe with a lightning bolt.

-  Imbued by the element of storm
-  Damage: 800
-  Vulnerability(5s): 3% Incoming Damage
-  Weakness(2s): -50% Endurance Regeneration
-  Interval: 10 seconds
-  Range: 600

Aura of the Gale II
Occasionally leaves lasting cyclones behind when moving. Foes stepping onto a cyclone are knocked high into the air, potentially taking falling damage.

-  Imbued by the element of storm
-  Knockup: 600
-  10 seconds
-  Interval: 3 seconds
-  Radius: 60

Aura of the Gale III
Attacks may push foes back.

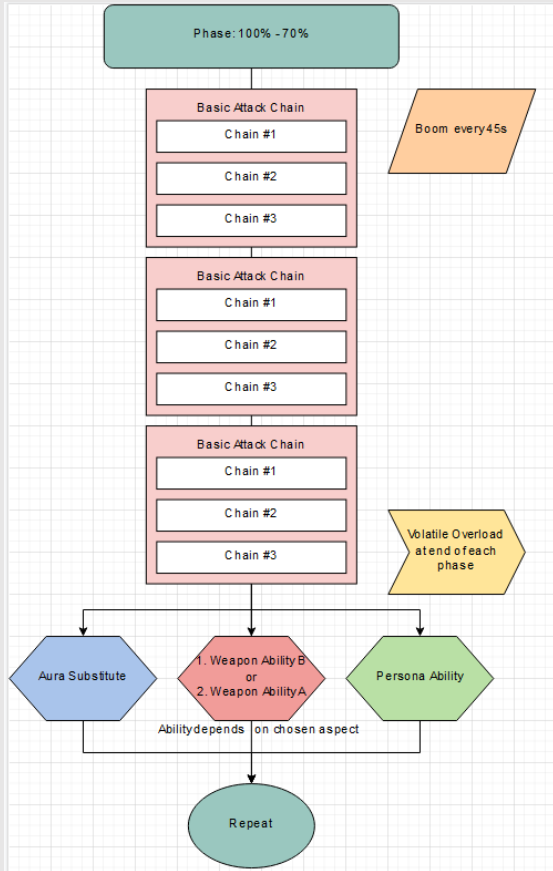
-  Imbued by the element of storm
-  Push: 130
-  Chance: 33%

Attack patterns and priorities

Pattern 1: 100-70% Boss HP

Active participants:

- Boss w/ Aspect 1
- Party



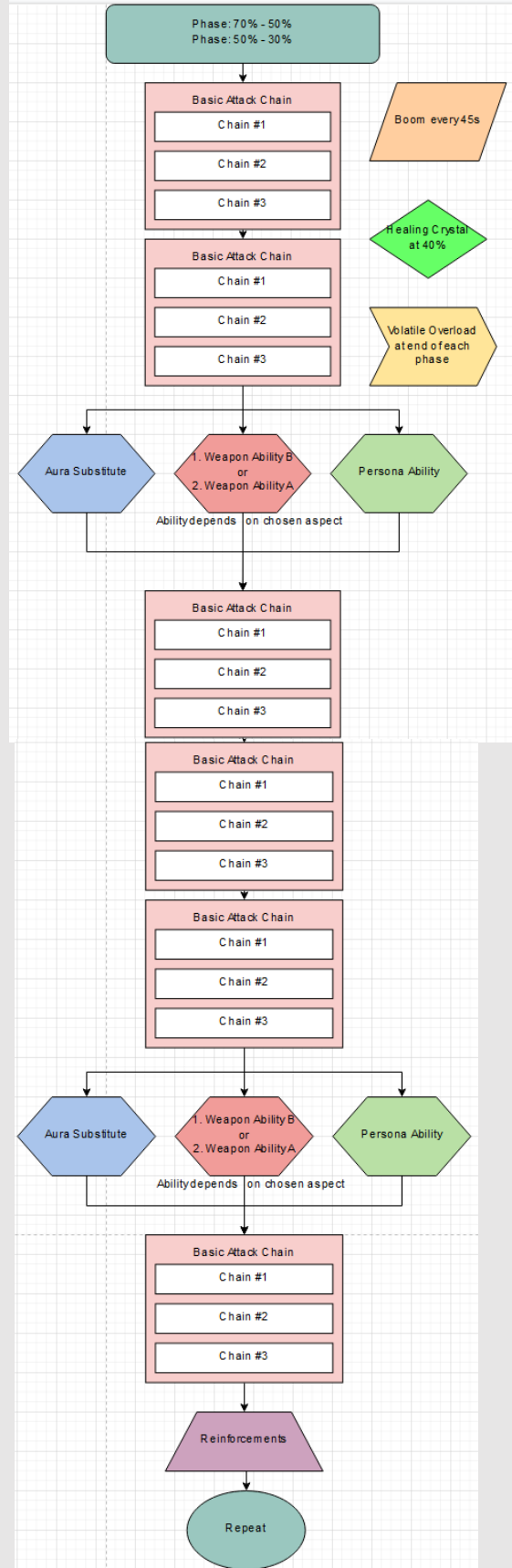
Pattern 2-3: 70-50% & 50-30% Boss HP

Active participants 70-50%:

- Boss w/ Aspect 2
- Aspect 1 Mini Boss
- Party

Active participants 50-30%:

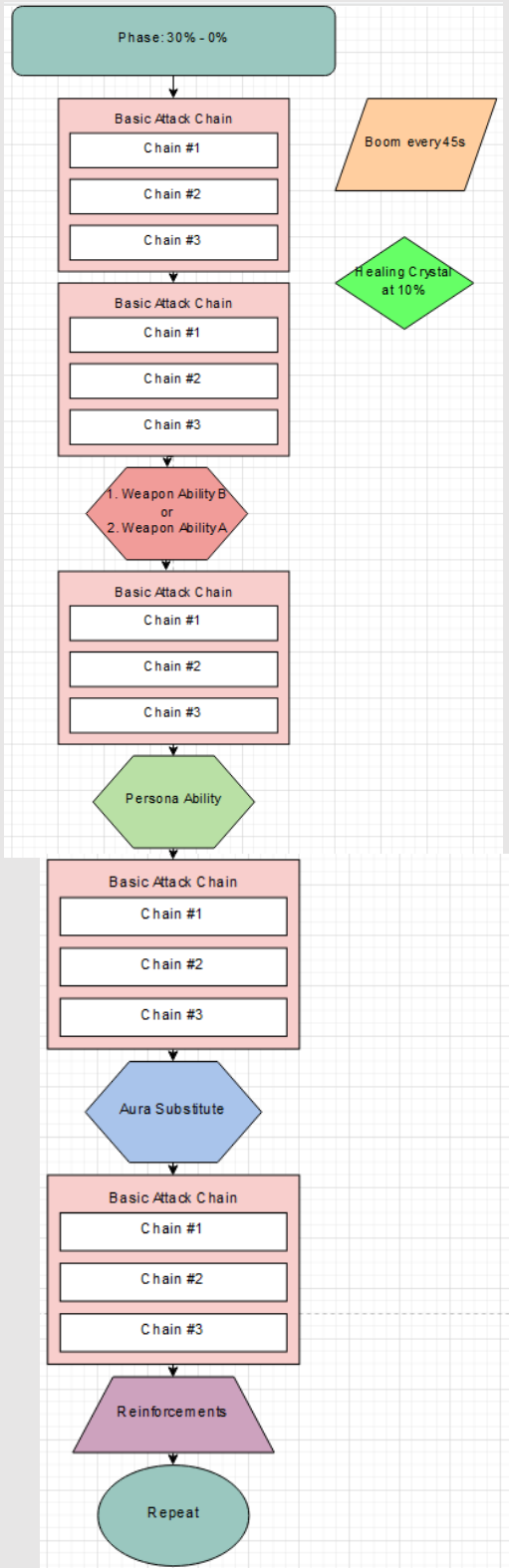
- Boss w/ Aspect 3
- Aspect 1 Mini Boss
- Aspect 2 Mini Boss
- Party



Pattern 4: 30-0% Boss HP

Active participants:

- Boss w/ Aspect 1, 2, 3
- Party



Pattern 5: Aspect Bearer

Same rotation as Pattern 1

Limitations:

- 80% of standard damage
- Every aspect ability used will have a minimum channel time of 5s
- Every aspect ability used will have a break bar of 500 during the channel, which means it can be interrupted if the aspect is focused
- Aspect bearers can never channel reinforcements or boom

Sample Gameplay and Encounter Rundown

Party Composition and Boss Selection

1. DPS: Dragonhunter
2. DPS: Daredevil
3. DPS/Support/CC: Berserker
4. Support/CC: Renegade
5. Heal/Support: Firebrand

The party assembles according to the list above, which is one of the several compositions considered 'meta' by the player base due to the easy accessibility to heals and buffs.

The group decides to activate the Crown, Blades and Fire aspects, in that order. Since their healer heavily relies on Aegis to support the group, the flail aspect would undermine that player's efforts. Overall, the group decides to activate the Aura aspect last to avoid being exposed to the strong passive effects of the Fire aspect too often.

Estimated Metrics:

Group DPS when at full capability: **50.000**

Group DPS during arena mechanics: **30-35.000**

Group Cleave DPS at full capability: **8.500**

Group Cleave DPS during mechanics: **4.500**

Phase 1 - First Aspect

First, the group activates the Utility aspect with the Crown offering. An Aspect Bearer, from the Southern alcove, starts walking to the rubble pile in the middle to carry the artifact to the Guardian. Within the about 15 seconds the Aspect Bearer walks, the group manages to reduce its health to 34%, meaning the boss will be slightly handicapped in the next phase.

The first phase goes relatively smoothly, as there aren't many mechanics to take care of, and because the Guardian is weakened by one stack of *Magic Corrosion*, which reduces its outgoing damage during the phase. This effect was applied because of the damage the players managed to deal to the Aspect Bearer.

Only one time, when the Guardian uses the Conquest ability simultaneously with the Boom mechanic, it becomes a bit chaotic to sort out who will help the person use the pulley system and who will stay with the target of conquest, but the group manages to keep everyone alive. While the Dragonhunter player is up on the balcony to safely wait out yet another boom mechanic explosion, the rest of the team phases the boss at 70% of its HP. The Guardian crumbles back into a pile of rubble - for now - and triggers the Volatile Overload mechanic. The group quickly runs to the vines on the south wall to climb up, safely evading the lethal explosion on the ground. The Dragonhunter player on the balcony meanwhile decides to wait up there instead of rushing down to a vine, rather putting up with the damaging floor for the mechanic duration.

Once the party has assembled on the floor of the arena, the Daredevil player uses her class's high mobility to quickly grab and activate the second aspect, the Blade offering. The rest of the team moves to the Aspect Bearer, activating in the Eastern alcove, to damage it while it moves to the center of the arena, to trigger the next phase.

Because one DPS player was still gliding down from the balcony, and the Aspect Bearer has a shorter path to the spot where the Guardian last collapsed, they only manage to damage it down to about 55%. Due to this, the Guardian won't gain any additional damage from the Aspect Bearer, but will still gain enough strength to keep its normal damage up.

Mechanic Timestamp	Attck	Phase 1 - Main Boss Utility										Asp	Attck
	-00:15	00:00	00:15	00:30	00:45	01:00	01:15	01:30	01:45	02:00	02:15		
Basic Attack Chain		XX	X	XX	X	XX	X	XX					
Utility Aspect Ability			X		X		X						
Weapon Aspect Ability 2													
Weapon Aspect Ability 1													
Aura Ability													
Boom				X			X						
Volatile Overload								X	X				
Reinforcements													
Healing Crystals													
Break Bar													
Aspect Bearer Explosion													
Main Boss		11,500.0	11,500.0	10,750.0	10,300.0	9,775.0	9,025.0	8,575.0	8,050.0	8,050.0			

Phase 2 - Second Aspect

Starting the next phase of the encounter, the Guardian rises anew, this time sporting two blades instead of attacking with its bare fists. From the rubble the Aspect Bearer left behind, it summons a smaller clone of its previous form. This smaller boss mimics its previous attacks, albeit more simplified - it also wears the Crown, making it easy for the party to determine what they are dealing with.

The group decides to focus on defeating this supporting aspect before attacking the Guardian, so they will not have to deal with too many mechanics at the same time. Trying to keep the two enemies close to each other, the party manages to inflict some collateral cleave damage onto the Guardian while focussing the smaller aspect.

When the smaller boss channels its Conquest ability, which the group already knows from the previous phase, it activates a break bar. Expending their abilities with crowd control effects, the group manages to interrupt the boss's channel and avoid the mechanic. However, now the a player is targeted for the

boom mechanic, taking another player with them to activate the pulley system and escape to the balcony. During that time, the Guardian channels its Serrated Blade ability to enhance its next attacks. Having just used most of their CC on the small aspect boss, the players remaining at the bosses don't manage to interrupt the boss's cast and need to be very careful about avoiding getting hit by the boss's next few enhanced attacks.

While up on the balcony to safely endure the boom mechanic, the player notices that the boss must have activated its Reinforcement ability for the first time, since one of the statues on the balcony moves out of the wall towards a ballista to shoot at the team down below. As the player conveniently is up already, he stays on the hazardous walkway a bit longer to take care of the statue before returning to the party down in the arena, where the other players have just finished off the small aspect bearer.

Directing all damage at the Guardian now, the party can focus on applying enough CC the next time the boss tries to cast its Serrated Blade ability, and soon drops it to 50% HP, which causes the boss to return to rubble once more, causing another Volatile Overload blast, which all players manage to escape by climbing on the vines.

Again, the Daredevil player uses her class's high mobility to quickly grab and activate the third aspect, the Fire Crystal offering. The rest of the team moves to the Aspect Bearer, activating in the Western alcove, to damage it while it moves to the center of the arena. This time, the group needs slightly longer to run up to the Aspect Bearer, but overall manage to decrease its health to 39% by the time it reaches the Guardian, barely gaining the bonus of *Magic Corrosion*.

	Phase 2 - Main Boss Blades Aspect 1 Utility							Asp.	Attck	
Mechanic Timestamp	02:30	02:45	03:00	03:15	03:30	03:45	04:00	04:15	04:30	04:45
Basic Attack Chain	XX	XXXXX	X	X	XX	XXX	X	XX		
Utility Aspect Ability		X								
Weapon Aspect Ability 2	X			X			X			
Weapon Aspect Ability 1			X				X			
Aura Ability										
Boom			X			X				
Volatile Overload							X	X		
Reinforcements			X			X				
Healing Crystals										
Break Bar		X	X			X				
Aspect Bearer Explosion										
Main Boss	7,800.0 7,472.5 7,405.0 6,955.0 6,430.0 5,980.0 5,750.0 5,750.0									
Aspect 1 - Utility	1,150.0 400.000 Defeat!									

Phase 3 - Third Aspect

Rising from the rubble again, the boss now embodies the aspect of Fire. It has one stack of *Magic Corrosion* in its buff bar, reducing its damage for the next phase slightly, thanks to the damage the party inflicted on the Aspect Bearer a few moments ago.

It summons clones of its previous forms, Crown and Blades. Like in the last phase, the players focus their damage onto the supporting aspect bosses before moving on to damage the Guardian, to reduce the time they are exposed to so many damaging abilities. The group begins with the blades aspect, again trying to cleave the other bosses while damaging it.

A high stress situation arises when the Blade aspect boss starts casting its Assassinate ability while the Guardian casts its Elemental Charge attack. The players narrowly manage to interrupt the Blade aspect's cast, but as a result two players fail to move away from each other before the Elemental Charge fires. Taking double damage from the summoned meteors, the Warrior player goes down. Two other players quickly run over to resurrect him before bleeding out, in turn the group lacks the capability to interrupt the Crown aspect's channel of Conquest. With the Warrior back on his feet, enough players manage to run close to the targeted player of the Conquest attack, and the party stabilizes.

They manage to finish off the aspect bosses without incidents and turn their full attention back to the Guardian. Once its HP reach the 40% mark, supportive devices appear in the now empty alcove around the arena. One healing the boss, and two enhancing it with the Protection and Retaliation boons, the two DPS players and the Warrior quickly spread to disable them to be able to safely damage the boss again. Having dealt with the devices, the boss only healed for a small amount, and the party finishes the phase at 30%.

Upon phasing the boss for the last Volatile Overload, four players run to the leftmost batch of vines - however, the fiery heat of the boss's Aura aspect has burned the number of available vines down to 3 per side. The Dragonhunter player can't reach the right batch fast enough, and gets hit by the lethal blast.

Mechanic Timestamp	Phase 3 - Main Boss Fire Aspect 1 Utility Aspect 2 Blades														Comb
	05:00	05:15	05:30	05:45	06:00	06:15	06:30	06:45	07:00	07:15	07:30	07:45			
Basic Attack Chain	XX	XX	XXX	X	X	XX	XX	XX	XX	X	X	XX	X	X	
Utility Aspect Ability		X			X		XX	X			X	X	X		
Weapon Aspect Ability 2		X													
Weapon Aspect Ability 1															
Aura Ability		X			X				X			X			
Boom				X			X				X				
Volatile Overload													X	X	
Reinforcements							X				X				
Healing Crystals								X			X				
Break Bar		X	X		X										
Aspect Bearer Explosion															
Main Boss	5,622,500	5,496,000	5,427,500	5,300,000	5,172,500	4,722,500	4,497,500	4,730,000	4,580,000	4,055,000	3,450,000				
Aspect 1 - Utility	1,150,000	1,022,500	995,000	505,000	Defeat										
Aspect 2 - Blades	1,150,000	400,000	Defeat												

Phase 4 - The Guardian

Instead of having to activate another aspect, in this final phase the boss is all alone, combining all aspects within itself to make a last, devastating stand to defend the city. With one damage dealer lost, the party has to be especially careful, as now the boss emerges one final time. Without smaller aspects attacking the party, all players can now fully focus their damage on the Guardian. The boss using all aspect abilities, with all of their passive effects active at once, puts considerable strain on the party.

While in previous phases the summoned reinforcements on the balcony mostly lined up with the timer on the Boom mechanic, now they

are offset of each other. The party decides to try and evade the reinforcement's ballista shots until the next person targeted by Boom enters the balcony, as to keep as many players as possible for as long as possible close to the boss.

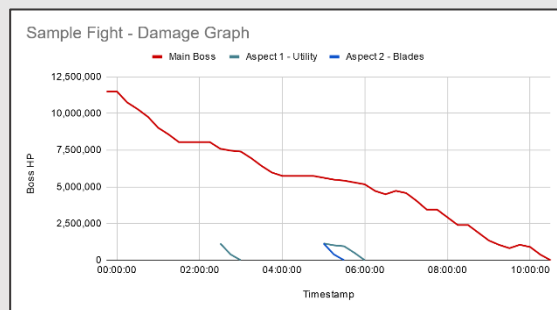
At 10%, the supportive devices around the arena emerge once again. The Daredevil player manages to take care of the healing and protection devices due to her classes mobility, while the warrior clear the retaliation device.

Shortly before defeating the boss, the encounter timer exceeds 10 minutes. This means, the boss gets the enrage modifier - dealing double damage and instructing all ballistae on the balcony to be manned by reinforcements. Playing defensively, the party manages to avoid the last attacks of the boss, and manages to defeat it with 4 players.

Mechanic Timestamp	Phase 4 - Main Boss Utility Blades Fire														Enrage	
	08:00	08:15	08:30	08:45	09:00	09:15	09:30	09:45	10:00	10:15	10:30					
Basic Attack Chain	XX	X	XX	XX	X	X	X	XX	X	XX	X					
Utility Aspect Ability		X				X			X							
Weapon Aspect Ability 2					X											
Weapon Aspect Ability 1	X							X								
Aura Ability			X				X					X				
Boom			X			X			X							
Volatile Overload																
Reinforcements				X			X						X			
Healing Crystals							X		X							
Break Bar					X											
Aspect Bearer Explosion																
Main Boss	2,925,000	2,400,000	2,400,000	1,875,000	1,350,000	1,050,000	825,000	1,057,500	907,500	382,500	Defeat					

Summary

Over the course of the encounter, will all mechanics and player deaths taken into account, the damage graph on the Boss HP looks as follows.



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<https://www.thatshaman.com/tools/tooltips/>