

THE GILDED LABYRINTH



CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW

Theme/Genre: Fantasy, Mystery, Exploration

Tone: Heroic with undertones of suspense and intrigue

Target Level for Players: Level 5

Expected Duration: 2 hours

Player Focus Preferences:

- Combat: Medium
- Roleplay: High
- Exploration: High

BACKSTORY AND SETTING

World Overview:

The Gilded Labyrinth is set in the land of Illureth, a sprawling kingdom known for its ancient ruins and magical artifacts. The kingdom, ruled by a benevolent queen, is full of whispered tales of a forgotten era marked by shadows and sorcery. Magical relics pepper the landscape, attracting adventurers and scholars alike with promises of power and peril.

Local Area:

This adventure unfolds in **Sunfire Haven**, a vibrant desert trading outpost perched on the frontier of the **Shimmering Wastes**—a vast, undulating expanse of golden dunes. Beneath its shimmering sands lies an

ancient maze known to the locals as “The Gilded Labyrinth.” Stories and superstitions cloak this enigmatic network; most believe it to be cursed, while others suspect it guards riches beyond imagination.

Historical Context:

Constructed by the Mirdral Empire, a civilization fixated on gold and arcana, the labyrinth was consecrated as a vault to safeguard treasures from marauders. But avarice became their undoing. A djinni named **Zalim**, captivated by their amassed wealth, cursed these halls, transforming the empire’s keepers into eternal guardians consumed by gold-lust.

Important NPCs:

- **Nara Veltrace** (Quest Giver): Driven and enigmatic, this archaeologist seeks the labyrinth’s answers, allegedly to restore Sunfire Haven. Skeptics wonder whether her goals mask personal ambitions.
- **Mirak Dunestrider** (Ally/Guide): A seasoned half-elf ranger, who navigates the desert with ease. Though his demeanor may be dour, his knowledge of the shifting sands and hidden secrets can be invaluable.
- **Zalim the Gilded Djinni** (Antagonist): Once a noble spirit, centuries of confinement have twisted Zalim into a resentful and cunning adversary. His desire for freedom fuels his thirst for vengeance against humanity’s greed.

PLOT HOOK

Opening Scene:

As the twilight descends, painting the Shimmering Wastes in hues of red and gold, the party finds themselves among the colorful chaos of **Sunfire Haven**. The marketplace bustles with the exchange of goods and tales both bizarre and mundane. Aromas of exotic spices blend with the laughter of traders, while lanterns flicker against the encroaching night.

A mysterious figure cloaked and hurried—**Nara Veltrace**—approaches the adventurers, her piercing eyes reflecting a mix of hope and desperation. “Adventurers, I seek stalwart souls for a venture into The Gilded Labyrinth,” she whispers, holding their gaze. “Riches await those who succeed, but more importantly, an artifact of untold power—the **Eternal Prism**.”

Their conversation is cut short by chaos as a young street urchin rushes past, crying out about ominous shadows slithering from the dunes. Alarm bells clamor around the outpost as cursed, wraith-like entities lurch into the fray. The party must fend off these glittering undead before Nara implores them with renewed urgency: “The labyrinth stirs. We must move decisively, lest all be lost to its awakening.”

Primary Objective:

Uncover the Eternal Prism within the Gilded Labyrinth to prevent its malign influence from spreading across Illureth.

KEY LOCATIONS

LOCATION 1: SUNFIRE HAVEN (STARTING AREA)

- **Atmosphere:** A vibrant tapestry of sandstone structures and vibrant tents forming a lively haven. There is a palpable tension, hinting at the strange happenings nearby.
- **NPCs:**
 - The **Barkeep** spins stories and whispers about the labyrinth's dangers.
 - A **Merchant** sells maps—some perhaps helpful, others treacherously inaccurate.
 - **Roleplay Hook:** Nara Veltrace negotiates assistance, promising artifacts of the ancients in exchange for the party's aid.

Encounters:

- **Golden Husk Zombies:** A skirmish erupts against 3-4 metallic undead, shimmering with cursed opulence.
 - **Abilities:**
 - **Metallic Reinforcement:** Resistance to nonmagical bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage.
 - **Golden Gaze:** Targets must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom save or be incapacitated for 1 round as visions of wealth paralyze them.

LOCATION 2: THE DESERT APPROACH (INTERMEDIATE AREA)

- **Atmosphere:** A journey through sweeping sands, rife with the illusions of mirages and ancient symbols carved into weathered stones. Eerie sights and sounds linger just beyond the periphery.
- **Challenges:**
 - **Trap:** Encapsulated by a sudden sandstorm, the adventurers must navigate through a crumbling ancient tunnel. Success demands Survival, Acrobatics, and Perception skill checks to avoid collapse and injury.
 - **Roleplay Interaction:** Mirak offers elusive insights into the labyrinth's enigma, subtly casting doubt upon Nara's intentions.
 - **Combat Encounter:** The party is beset by **Gilded Stalkers**, arachnid predators with a shimmering carapace matching the desert's golden sheen.

LOCATION 3: THE GILDED LABYRINTH (FINAL AREA)

- **Atmosphere:** A maze of kaleidoscopic corridors, echoing with the soft whispers of temptation. The air is charged with enchantment, and the passages realign with every breath.

Environmental Challenges:

- **Maze Puzzle:** Cryptic carvings line the walls, their solutions the key to navigating the labyrinth. Failure to solve them exacts encounters with guardians of gold.
- **Arcane Traps:** Inscriptions trigger detrimental magic if not deftly bypassed (DC 15 Arcana or Thieves' Tools checks).

Climactic Encounter:

Within the labyrinth's core, Zalim stands, bound to an intricate, golden plinth. The Eternal Prism floats, ensnared in an ethereal aura above him—a beacon of raw energy.

- **Negotiation or Combat:** Zalim offers a pact—release him, and he bestows wealth unending, albeit at great peril.
- **Final Confrontation:**
 - **Zalim's Abilities:**
 - **Legendary Actions:** Gilded Chains restrain foes (DC 16 strength save), glimmering with arcane malice.
 - **Goldstorm:** Launches a whirling torrent of metal blades, dealing 4d6 slashing damage within a 15-ft radius (DC 14 Dex save for half).
 - **Wish-Twist Aura:** Disadvantages saving throws within 10 feet, warping fate itself.

ENCOUNTERS AND CHALLENGES

Puzzle Mechanics:

Labyrinthine walls are etched with riddles that shimmer, requiring careful interpretation to stabilize the maze. False answers call forth **Golden Husk Guardians**—armor animated by dormant enchantments.

Example Puzzle Clue: *"I am made but not created, shining bright but cold to the touch—what am I?"*
(Answer: Gold)

CLIMAX AND RESOLUTION

Final Challenge:

The adventurers face a pivotal choice:

- **Destroy the Eternal Prism:** Sever its curse but obliterate the artifact. Zalim retaliates fiercely.
- **Contain the Prism:** Employ Nara's containment relic, risking that she may seize control if not wholly trustworthy.

Stakes:

- **Destruction:** The maze's curse ends but deprives scholars of powerful knowledge.
- **Containment:** Could usher prosperity or ruin, hinging on the trustworthiness of Nara's aims.

Narrative Conclusion:

Upon success, the labyrinth trembles, its stability unraveling. Guided by Mirak, the party must hasten their retreat amidst cascading gold and tremulous echoes (Survival check DC 13).

In Sunfire Haven, a hero's welcome awaits, tempered by unanswered questions about Nara's next moves and the true nature of what lies still hidden beneath the sands.

REWARDS

- **Gold:** 500 gp per adventurer, amassed from gilded foes and clandestine caches.
- **Magic Items:**
 - **Amulet of Radiant Protection:** Offers resistance against radiant harm.
 - **Golden Dagger:** A +1 weapon inflicting an extra 1d6 damage to the undead scourge.
 - **Potential:** The Eternal Prism if retained—tremendously potent yet perilously cursed.

Story Rewards:

- Earned esteem from Sunfire Haven's denizens.
- Acclaim for valiant deeds known throughout Illureth's sprawl.

SUPPORTING DETAILS

Stat Blocks:

- **Golden Husk Zombie**
- **Gilded Stalker** (Modified Phase Spider)
- **Zalim, Gilded Djinni** (Custom CR 8)

Handouts:

- Tattered remnants of an ancient map—a path into the labyrinth.
- A warning scroll, penned by a doomed explorer long entombed.

Atmospheric Music Tracks:

- **Sunfire Haven:** "Lively Bazaar" - cheerful, bustling ambiance.
- **Desert Approach:** "Echoes in the Sand" - mysterious, reflective tones.
- **Gilded Labyrinth:** "Whispers of Greed" - haunting, ethereal soundscape.

FLEXIBLE OUTCOMES

- Should players align with Zalim, intrigues against the crown or conflicts with Nara may emerge in future tales.
- Opportunities to thwart Nara exist should suspicions arise regarding her resolve and purpose.

POST-GAME WRAP-UP

Debrief Questions:

- What did you find most compelling about the session?
- Were any challenges particularly rewarding or overly daunting?
- How immersive was the adventure's narrative for your group?

Epilogue Options:

- Expand this one-shot adventure into a larger quest involving further exploration of the Mirdral Empire ruins, pursuit of other cursed artifacts, or uncovering Illureth's hidden histories.

This adventure into "The Gilded Labyrinth" offers a taste of Illureth's luxuriantly perilous magic, teasing the promise of deeper mysteries and legendary exploits awaiting the bravest.