

THE TALE OF TWO SPHINXES

by Jessica L. Washburn

CREATURE: *Gynophinx* | **LEVEL(S):** 17-20
CW: *Grief, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), abuse*

SYNOPSIS

In the beginning, a pair of sphinxes — one male and one female — guarded a desert temple in relative peace. They watched over a vault that held a magical ring that could change the world. The androsphinx — Bazymoros — succumbed to corruption; he denounced the trickster god who created him. Bazymoros forged a pact with the demon god, Baphomet, becoming violent and sought to claim the item in the name of his patron.

In an effort to save the world, the gynosphinx Asmuzi defeated him. She locked Bazymoros away, never again to see the light of day. The androsphinx remained as an example of what not to become. It has been so long since this battle that much of the knowledge of Bazymoros has disappeared from the collective memory of the races that inhabit the world. All that remains is the knowledge of the dangerous gynosphinx made from the flesh of human and creature. . . and the treasure she keeps.

The Tale of Two Sphinxes is a 3-4 hour adventure intended for level 17-20 characters.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Local stories tell of a vicious gynosphinx guarding a wondrous magical item — the Ring of the Sphinx. The adventure takes place in a lone desert temple and can be introduced in the following ways:

- the party has been asked to retrieve the item
- the party is lost in the desert, stumbling upon the temple

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

This is a 5 room puzzle dungeon based on the stages of grief/PTSD. Each room reveals the true legend of the sphinx, showing a different part of Asmuzi's recovery.

The gynosphinx and an androsphinx were created to guard the Ring of the Sphinx. (DMs are encouraged to choose a trickster deity appropriate to the campaign). The god had a benevolent streak and wanted mortals to have a way of keeping balance within the realm. The sphinxes were tasked with testing characters to determine their worthiness to wield the ring. While the ring has no good or evil properties, it is capable of shaping the world to the whims of its wielder.

All internal puzzles can be bypassed as each room is only separated by a simple, locked oaken door that can be easily smashed with a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check or lock-picked with a DC 10 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check. Breaking the door will trigger a treant and lock picks will trigger a potion in the following room. The person who picked the lock will need to pick the person to drink (using Table 1 for status effect). Not taking the time to solve puzzles also causes the release of Bazymoros. In order to complete the adventure at this point, the party will have to:

- Assist Asmuzi to defeat Bazymoros. Upon his defeat, Asmuzi deems the party unworthy, giving them a much weaker item in its place.
- Join Bazymoros and slay Asmuzi. Defeating her will not unlock the vault, as she reconfigured the vault with the trickster god to only be opened by her. If she dies, the item remains locked away until the end of days for mortals.
- Slay both Bazymoros and Asmuzi. The vault will not open until the end of days.

CHAPTER 1 – TRAUMA

The desert is oppressive; winds whip abrasive sand as the party marches on towards the First Temple of the World. You have wandered for hours when you crest one final dune, tired and nearly hopeless.

Before you, a large sandstone temple sits. The winds cease their abuse. Upon approach, you can see the temple shows no signs of aging. There is writing on a massive granite slab. There are no knockers or knobs on the door.

The granite slab holds a warning, the sound of Asmuzi’s voice ringing in the party’s heads:

*Beware all who travel here,
inside lies a treasure dear.
Respect the riddles of the keeper,
lest the treasure’s cost becomes steeper.*

FIRST ROOM: SHOCK

You enter a darkened room as torches light themselves on the wall. In the center of the room, a sword embedded in a pedestal. On the Northmost Wall, a simple oaken door; to the right of the door sits a mural of a beautiful, black sphinx. Her face has four claw marks that run across; her lion body - which lacks wings - looks powerful. On the Western Wall, there are eight bricks arranged in two columns, four bricks deep - all of which are engraved with writing. You see other images: a sun causing a fire on the Eastern Wall along with a handsome, white androsphinx. He has a fearsome look on his face, teeth bared in a snarl. His eagle wings are spread wide and the serpent headed tail also has its mouth open. On the Southern Wall, a painting of the sword in the pedestal.

A DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check reveals the following text that wraps around the sword’s pedestal, in Sphinx (or Common):

*I may be a beautiful work of art,
but I also am a piercer of hearts.
Here is where the story starts;
Begin to arrange the moving parts.*

These are clues to help the party arrange the bricks in the proper order. The sun and Bazymoros’ image to the east are titled “Rage Burning, Hot Like Sun” and “Lashing Out, And War’s Begun.” Asmuzi’s image is titled “Marring Face, Barring Beauty”; the sword is titled “Sharpened Words, Cut Right Through Me.” The eight bricks have a hand-hold and can be easily moved.

The DM can arrange the bricks in any order, so long that they are mixed up. A completed brick puzzle will read the following:

<i>Rage Burning</i>	<i>Hot Like Sun</i>
<i>Lashing Out</i>	<i>And War’s Begun</i>
<i>Marring Face</i>	<i>Barring Beauty</i>
<i>Sharpened Words</i>	<i>Cut Right Through Me</i>

Incorrect brick placements result in 1d10 lightning damage. For each additional mistake, add 1d10.

DEVELOPMENT

Completing the brick puzzle unlocks the sword from the stone pedestal. A DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check on Asmuzi’s picture reveals a slot where the sword fits. The party needs to decide who puts the sword into Asmuzi’s “heart.” Sliding the sword into the slot releases a horrible scream in the chamber. Everyone must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw. The adventurer that slid the sword into place rolls with disadvantage on their Constitution saving throw. For each character that has failed their saving throw, they need to roll 1d6 to determine which STAT will be affected until the end of the next room (see Table 1). For instance, if someone rolled CHA, they would have disadvantage on skill checks like Persuasion or Deception. The goal is to have the party rely on each other to solve the next puzzle or ask for assistance. If a character asks a companion for assistance, they do not have disadvantage on their check.

TABLE 1:

1 - CON	2 - CHA
3 - INT	4 - WIS
5 - DEX	6 - STR

SECOND ROOM: DENIAL

The room is dark, save for the glowing light of a lantern sitting in a boat to the far right. Water laps at the boats as they bump into the stone ledge. You are currently in a room with a 8-foot ceiling.

There are five expertly crafted boats, each containing an item somewhere in the boat. Creatures with darkvision can easily see the water bucket, heart of glass, and the lantern. They can see the water, though it is dark; they also see the riddle on the wall and 60 feet into the room (the length of the room is 120 feet). (Sink, Shame, Freeze, Bloom, Burst).

- **SINK:** A gold coin - on bench of boat
- **SHAME:** Water in the bottom and a bucket on bench
- **FREEZE:** A heart of glass - affixed to the prow (inside)
- **BLOOM:** A chunk of rose quartz - on bench of boat
- **BURST:** A lantern affixed to the prow (inside)

The riddle on the wall:

*In front of you five boats now sit.
This may be a test of wits.
One will sink and one will bloom,
yet another will freeze the gloom.
Another still will burst in flame
while the last sits quietly in its shame.*

If the party touches the gold coin, the boat travels 25 feet before turning to gold and sinking. The boat sinking triggers an encounter with 10 **giant sharks**.

If the party touches the heart of glass, the boat travels 60 feet, freezing the pool. It summons two **ice devil** constructs.

If the party touches the rose quartz, they become immediately entangled in vines and must make a DC 19 Strength saving throw to get out. On a failed save, they are grappled. It also summons a **marilith** construct.

If the party sets foot in the lantern boat, it immediately catches fire. They must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw to leap out of the boat. On a failed save, they take 1d12 fire damage.

The solution is to take the boat of Shame to the end of the room.

CHAPTER 2 – BARGAINING

Before you leave the previous room, you find an inscription upon the door:

*As you wander through Life's Garden
Sometimes, you may need to strike a bargain.*

Upon entering, the new room is lush and green. Four stoic figures sit on a bench: a child of 6-7 years old, a teenager, an adult, and a crone. When the party enters, the figures become more lively - happy to see them. The child leaves her place upon the bench and approaches the party, telling them that she looks forward to becoming an adventurer and is looking for items to get her started in exchange for information.

A character who makes a DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that each figure appears to be the same person at different stages of life. A character who uses the spell *true sight* can see the four stages of Asmuzi: pre-trauma, trauma, post-trauma, and as she is now.

- The child is the easiest (Persuasion DC 10). They seek trinkets or baubles that the party might not miss. The child wants an item from every person. Upon receiving items, the child provides information about the beginning of the temple and why it was created. The child's temperament remains happy.
- The teenager is looking for weapons (DC 15). They face problems head on and lack the means of protecting themselves. They want two weapons. Once the weapons have been given, the teenager gives information about Bazymoros' corruption. The teenager's temperament, while cocky, is uncertain - their eyes dart about the room, as if expecting something or someone at any moment.
- The adult is looking for armor (DC 20). They seek to be able to weather the blows that the world

- deals them. They seek the sturdiest armor amongst the party. The adult details Asmuzi's treatment under Bazymoros' tyranny (gaslighting/bullying). As she sits back down on the bench, her face opens with four claw marks that weep blood. Oblivious to the wounds on her face, she smiles sadly at the characters.
- The crone is looking for respect. They seek to give their knowledge freely, but wraps it in anecdotes and may lose their place often while speaking. If the party is patient, the crone smiles. She tells the party they are closing on the end of their journey; regaling the tale of Asmuzi in full and the great battle forgotten by the sands of time. If the party becomes impatient, the crone progressively shuts down. The aged one becomes upset and asks for the party to leave.

DEVELOPMENT

If the party manages to successfully bargain, the crone unlocks the door to the next room. All items that the party gave in exchange for the knowledge are returned. If the party is unsuccessful, they can proceed to the next room but the door will need to be broken or lock-picked.

CHAPTER 3 – DEPRESSION

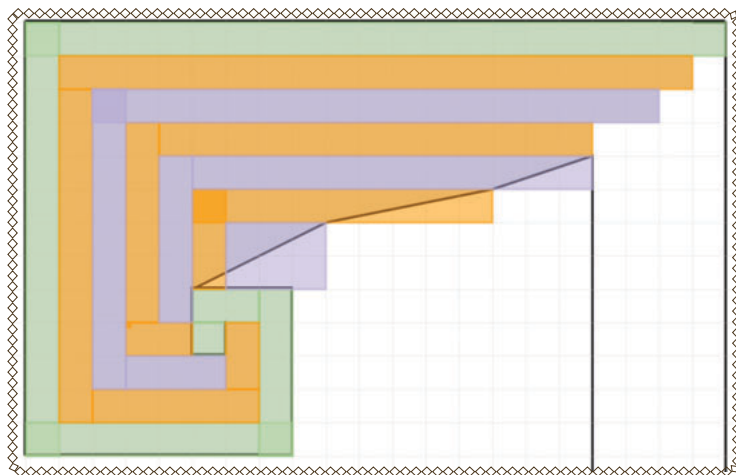
You enter a circular room with a beautifully painted nautilus on the floor. On the blank tiles in front of you is the following riddle:

*In this room you shall find
several tiles will put you in a bind.
Step on others to make things unwind.*

In this room, there are tiles that are safe (see the DM map: green/"unwind"), those that spawn monsters (pink/"bind"), and those that turn those monsters invisible (orange/"bind").

It is important to note that when a PC steps on a pink tile, they will spawn 3 to 4 **helmed horrors** that can only be damaged by the person who spawned them. Each pink tile has the capacity to spawn 3 to 4 helmed horrors. It will get overwhelming.

If the character asks for assistance with dealing with the monsters, their companions can then damage the constructs. If the character who spawns the helmed horrors steps on the orange tiles, it turns the monsters invisible. If the same person steps on the green tile, the helmed horrors pop back into view before despawning. The tiles are triggered when an object of 40 lbs. or more is placed upon them. They can use a *detect magic* spell to discover the runes (bind/unwind).



CONCLUSION – ACCEPTANCE

If the adventures successfully solve all or most of the previous puzzles, read:

You find yourselves in an impressive marble room. Before you sits Asmuzi, her face open and friendly. She bears the scars of a fight long since past. She only has one final riddle for the characters.

*"In the previous rooms, you have the links
To connect the dots for the story of the
Sphinx."*

If the party can explain what they have learned, Asmuzi will release the item from the vault. With her duties complete, she thanks the characters for releasing her from the bonds that have kept her in place for millennia.

If the characters brute force their way through the puzzles, read:

You arrive in a room filled with chaos and pain. Before you, Bazymoros the White and Asmuzy the Black are fighting to the death. Asmuzy has sustained damage, pleading for your assistance. Bazymoros is mostly unscathed and shouts that he was locked away unfairly.

Which side do you choose?

REWARDS

If they are successful in clearing the dungeon, the characters obtain the *Ring of the Sphinx* (Legendary item), as well as other trinkets that had been collected by Asmuzy before she needed to guard the vault full time. The Ring of the Sphinx can also be used by the party to summon Asmuzy, should they need her assistance in any future endeavors. This feature is independent of the three wishes.

RING OF THE SPHINX

Ring, legendary

A magical ring that has two lion paws grasping an amber cat's eye gem. While wearing this ring, you can use an action to expend 1 of its 3 charges to cast the *wish* spell from it. The ring has an additional property to summon Asmuzy to assist the party, should they have need of her in the future. In order to summon the gynosphinx, they must press on the paws; claws will extend from the ring, striking the gem and produces a clear ringing sound. While the ring has limited wish spell uses, the bearer of the ring can summon Asmuzy as needed once per day.

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AUTHOR'S NOTES

This module was a very personal writing experience for me. As a person who has experienced traumatic events not unlike Asmuzy, I wanted to make a module that reflected on the healing process and what it may mean to reach acceptance. For me, my own acceptance does not bring me joy — but it also does not bring me sadness. It simply is. The healing process is different for everyone. I only hope that my module provides a thoughtful way of understanding a process that is different for everyone and that we can use our time at the table to become more empathetic and understanding of others.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jessica is an aspiring writer and copy editor who looks forward to releasing more projects and supplements for *D&D* 5e. You can find her on Twitter as @HealthPakStream. She may or may not be a halfling bard.

ASMUZI

Large monstrosity, lawful neutral

Armor Class 22 (natural armor)
Hit Points 367 (21d20+147)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws	Dex +9, Con +14, Wis +9, Cha +11
Skills	Arcana +12, History +12, Perception +8, Religion +8
Damage Resistance	Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from Nonmagical Attacks
Damage Immunities	Psychic
Condition Immunities	Charmed, Frightened
Senses	Truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 18
Languages	Sphinx, Common
Challenge	21 (30,000 XP)

Inscrutable. The sphinx is immune to any effect that would sense its emotions or read her thoughts, as well as any divination spell that she refuses. Wisdom (Insight) checks made to ascertain the sphinx's intentions or sincerity have disadvantage.

Magic Weapons. The sphinx's weapon attacks are magical.

Spellcasting. The sphinx is a 18th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 17, +8 to hit with spell attacks). It requires no material components to cast its spells. Asmuzi has the following cleric spells prepared:

- Cantrips (at will): spare the dying, resistance, guidance, thaumaturgy, mending
- 1st level (4 slots): bless, cure wounds, inflict wounds, shield of faith
- 2nd level (3 slots): prayer of healing, blindness/deafness, aid
- 3rd level (3 slots): lesser restoration, spiritual weapon, bestow curse
- 4th level (3 slots): death ward, freedom of movement, guardian of faith

- 5th level (3 slots): beacon of hope, revivify, greater restoration
- 6th level (1 slot): forbiddance
- 7th level (1 slot): conjure celestial
- 8th level (1 slot): earthquake
- 9th level (1 slot): true resurrection

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The sphinx makes two claw attacks.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack.* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: (2d8 + 4) slashing damage.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Asmuzi can take 3 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. She regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

- **Claw Attack.** The sphinx makes one claw attack.
- **Teleport** (Costs 2 Actions). The sphinx magically teleports, along with any equipment it is wearing or carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space it can see.
- **Cast a Spell** (Costs 3 Actions). The sphinx casts a spell from its list of prepared spells, using a spell slot as normal.

LAIR ACTIONS

- On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Asmuzi can take a lair action to cause one of the following magical effects; she cannot use an effect again until she finishes a long or short rest:
- The flow of time is altered such that every creature in the lair must reroll initiative. Asmuzi can choose to not reroll.
- The effects of time is altered such that every creature in the lair must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or become 1d20 years older or younger (Asmuzi's choice), but never any younger than 1 year old. A greater restoration spell can restore the creature's age to normal.
- The flow of time within the lair is altered such that everything within moves up to 10 years forward or backward (Asmuzi's choice). Only Asmuzi will be immediately aware of the time change. A wish spell can return the caster and up to seven other creatures designated by the caster to their normal time.
- Asmuzi shifts herself and up to seven other creature she can see within her lair to another plane of existence. Once outside her lair, she cannot use lair actions but she can return to her lair as a bonus action on her turn, taking up to seven other creatures with her.

BAZYMOROS

Large monstrosity, lawful evil

Armor Class 22 (natural armor)
Hit Points 367 (21d20 + 147)
Speed 40 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	10 (0)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	23 (+6)

Saving Throws	Dex +6, Con +11, Int +9, Wis +10
Skills	Arcana +9, Perception +10, Religion +15
Damage Immunities	Psychic, Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from Nonmagical Attacks
Condition Immunities	Charmed, Frightened
Senses	Truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 20
Languages	Sphinx, Common
Challenge	21 (30,000 XP)

Inscrutable. Bazymoros is immune to any effect that would sense his emotions or read his thoughts, as well as any divination spell that he refuses. Wisdom (Insight) checks made to ascertain Bazymoros' intentions or sincerity have disadvantage.

Magic Weapons. Bazymoros' weapon attacks are magical. Spellcasting. Bazymoros is a 18th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 18, +10 to hit with spell attacks). He requires no material components to cast his spells. He has the following spells prepared:

- Cantrips (at will): mage hand, prestidigitation, ray of frost
- 1st level (4 slots): detect magic, magic missile, shield, thunderwave
- 2nd level (3 slots): detect thoughts, invisibility, Melf's acid arrow, mirror image
- 3rd level (3 slots): animate dead, counterspell, dispel magic, fireball
- 4th level (3 slots): blight, dimension door
- 5th level (3 slots): cloudkill, scrying
- 6th level (1 slot): disintegrate, globe of invulnerability
- 7th level (1 slot): finger of death, plane shift
- 8th level (1 slot): dominate monster, power word stun
- 9th level (1 slot): power word kill

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The sphinx makes two claw attacks.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack.* +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: (3d10 + 6) slashing damage.

Roar (3/Day). The sphinx emits a magical roar. Each time he roars before finishing a long rest, the roar is louder and the effect is different, as detailed below. Each creature within 500 feet of the sphinx and able to hear the roar must make a saving throw.

- **First Roar.** Each creature that fails a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw is frightened for 1 minute. A frightened creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.
- **Second Roar.** Each creature that fails a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw is deafened and frightened for 1 minute. A frightened creature is paralyzed and can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.
- **Third Roar.** Each creature makes a DC 18 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 44 (8d10) thunder damage and is knocked prone. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't knocked prone.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Bazymoros can take 3 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. He regains spent legendary actions at the start of their turn.

- **Claw Attack.** He makes one claw attack.
- **Teleport** (Costs 2 Actions). Bazymoros magically teleports, along with any equipment he is wearing or carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space he can see.
- **Cast a Spell** (Costs 3 Actions). He casts a spell from his list of prepared spells, using a spell slot as normal.