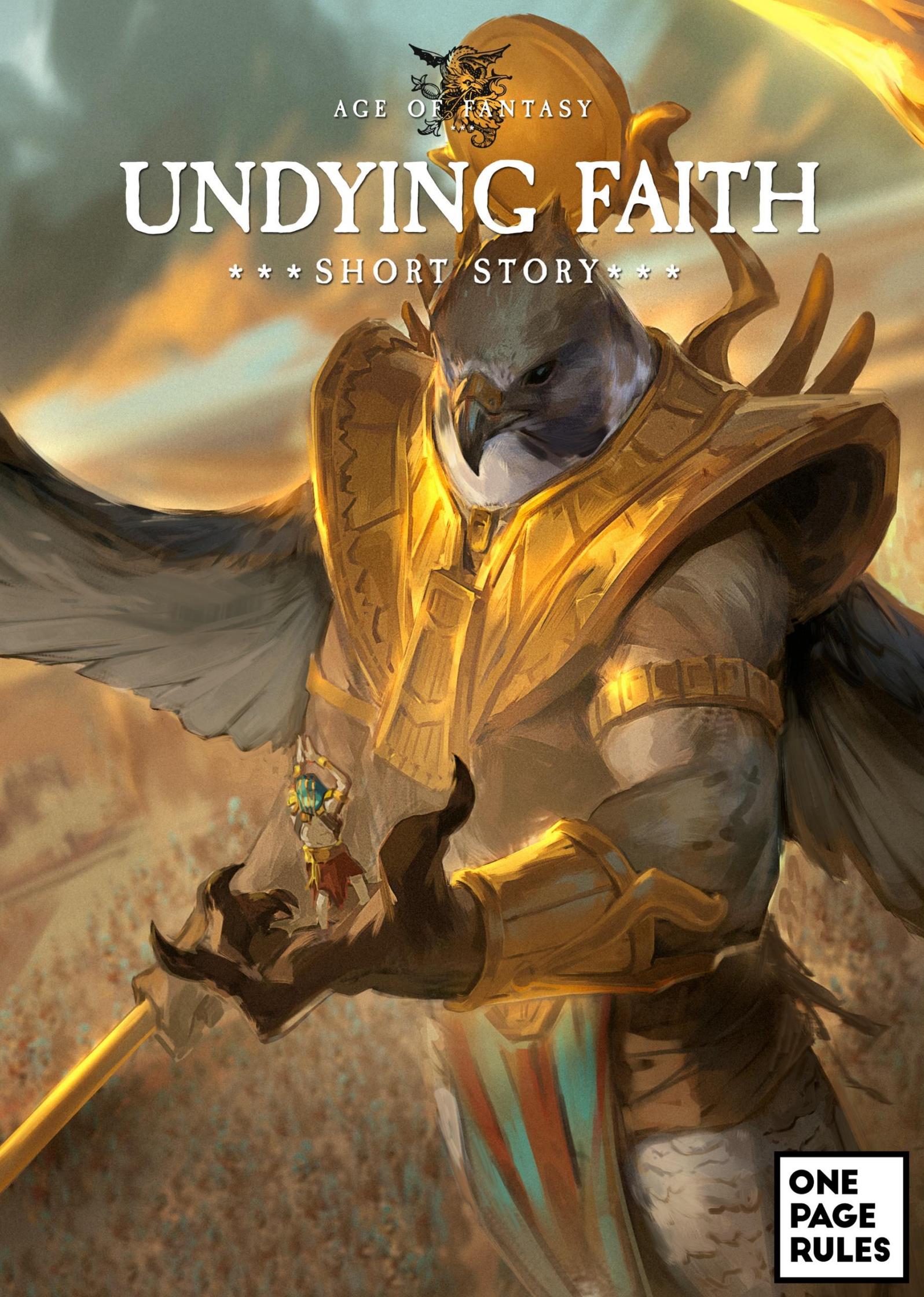




AGE OF FANTASY

# UNDYING FAITH

\*\*\* SHORT STORY \*\*\*



**ONE  
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RULES**

# AGE OF FANTASY - UNDYING FAITH

At the crest of a golden dune, a black-shelled scorpion darted between a pair of scoured rocks, pausing for a moment to look down on the scene below. A loud ring of blades sent it scuttling again, as two figures continued slowly circling each other across the sand-dusted courtyard. Beside it was the family home, framed by trees.

The building was two stories, a broad, flat first floor with a squat second level rising above, and the second floor was filled with a dozen members of the family watching the clash below. More faces filled the doorways and windows below, a varied group of desiccated and bandaged mummies in aromatic linens across embalmed flesh.

One mummy in particular kept a close watch on the fight, watching as the younger bandaged figure in the courtyard clashed against another undead in gleaming white, new bandages. Her mother's empty eye sockets tracked the action as her desiccated hand dropped to rub a talisman for fortune as the girl staggered back from a shallow cut across her shoulder, sending the wrappings into tatters.

As the other mummy swung, Ifarrata raised her own blade to block just in time, but her opponent twisted her blade as she spun, the turn locking the two curved swords and wrestling it from her weak grasp. The undead warrior caught the second blade as she shoved into the younger mummy, sending her sprawling onto her back. As she started to try to rise, she stopped, a pair of blades at her throat.

"Another loss, little one. I think you must accept your place is not among the Queen's army." Her elder sister Kemmera turned, sheathing both of her blades at her side once more. She turned back to her sibling on the ground, her voice softening. "I know you have dreamed of fighting beside me as one of the Queen's Guard, especially since my official commission, but you can barely wield a blade. Find a new dream, lest you follow me to your destruction."

Ifarrata stood stock-still for a moment, her rotting eyes feeling like they might come alive again into welling tears as the wind kicked grit into the edges of her peeling skin, before she ran back to the house, brushing past the bony frame of her mother's mummified form. Then she burst into a ragged sob of frustration as she slumped into a chair. A few moments later, she felt, as skeletal fingers gently twined through where her hair had escaped through a gash on her head wrappings.

"If I'm not to serve with Kemmera, to have our blades ringing together, then what is my purpose? For as long as I can remember I've wanted to be in the army with her." She held up a thin, bandaged arm, crisscrossed with small nicks and slices from the fight. "I know I may not be strong enough to be destined for the Guard itself, but to never see battle at all?" Her shoulders slumped as her mother squeezed her shoulder.

"There there, my little blossom: the sun is still shining, is it not? Surely that means the world has not truly ended?" Her mother tucked a wrapped finger under her chin, lifting her face up until her embalmed face met her mother's mostly-skeletal face and its eternal smile.

"You have a strong heart, Ifarrata, but it may be that your talents lie not in battle, but elsewhere." She stepped over to a stone alcove, pulling a pair of carved wooden antelopes from within. Passing them to her daughter, who still was curled up in the chair, the mummified skin on her face cracked and crumbled at the edges as she gave Ifarrata a tender smile.

"See how beautiful you have carved these? Indeed, your sister would be hard-pressed to render a spoon out of wood, even blessed as she is with her strength." Reaching down to Ifarrata's belt, she pulled her small carving knife out of its wire-wrapped sheath and pressed the handle into her small hands. "We all have our own ways of serving our Queen. Your sister was a warrior, I was a weaver, and before long it will be you and your siblings' turns to discover your own ways of honoring the Queen."

Ifarrata nodded slowly as the distant sounds of her brother calling their mother echoed down the stairs. However, as her mother stood to attend to her brother, Ifarrata clutched her carving knife tightly as she imagined it was a massive war blade.

She hopped off of the chair, walking over to the open window to stare longingly towards the distant dunes, and the unseen armies of the Queen's shambling forces beyond them. Holding the blade parallel to her chest in a salute, she solemnly pledged her intentions to the tickling desert breeze.

"Nothing will stop me from serving in the Queen's grand armies."

The words now echoed around the walls of a near-empty barracks. Nearly thirty years had passed, most of them spent in a stone carving apprenticeship. Ifarrata had obtained new wrappings for this occasion: Her bandages were a crisp, gleaming white, her visible skin splotchy and taut but not yet falling to rotten tatters, and bright bangles, necklaces, and a jeweled brooch adorned the new linen wrappings.

Sitting at the only chair in the room, behind a small squat desk that served as the only other adornment of note, the magistrate Priest leaned back. She wasn't able to tell if he was bemused or annoyed, but he leaned forward with a rattling sigh.

"Ifarrata of the Dune Orchards, this is the fourth time you have sought to pledge yourself as a soldier. The Queen will accept your service should you prevail, but a battle line can be broken by a single flaw. You must prove yourself against one of her guard-" There was a brief pause, "-again. You must show that your presence strengthens the army instead of weakening it."

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The guard who had been standing beside the Priest stepped forward, wordlessly hefting a bronze halberd the length of Ifarrata's torso as if it was no heavier than a reed.

The previous guards had been hulking forms that towered over her, but this was much smaller, and as her opponent stepped into the torchlight, Ifarrata saw the face of her sister, Kemmera. She gave her sister a nod of her head but said nothing as Ifarrata's mind raced. Steeling herself, she resolved to see her sister as nothing more than another adversary, the same as she had seen the other guards.

Drawing her scimitar, a gift from Kemmera before she left years ago, she raised it in a salute. Her sister did the same with the haft of her halberd, and out of the corner of her eye, she saw the magistrate raise his fist.

Rapping the wooden desk once, he intoned "Begin."

Kemmera charged forward, and Ifarrata dodged to sidestep her charge, her blade flashing out towards the stained bandages of her side. Quicker than she had anticipated, the halberd blade came up, deflecting her sister's stab harmlessly away. Her sister stepped forward with the movement, ramming a shoulder into her and sending her stumbling backwards, staggered.

The other Guards had done this before, as a part of the martial form that she presumed was taught to all the Guard.

Remembering their last two matches, Ifarrata already had her sword coming up to block the overhead swing.

Then her sister spoke,

"I am truly sorry, little one"

Then her elder sister twisted and pulled the halberd as she swung again, knocking Ifarrata's blade out of her hand. The other Guards had done this once before as well, but as Ifarrata went to catch the falling blade with her free hand Kemmera spun and angled the blow downwards, to where the last fight a week earlier had ended with that Guard's blade biting into the dead flesh of her leg. She had since re-stitched the bandage to almost like new, but the damage underneath remained.

Even despite Kemmera pivoting her grip at the last moment to connect with the wooden haft of the halberd instead of the wicked blade, it still meant that the full weight and force behind it was connecting with weakened, dried, brittle bone.

The finality of the bone snapping filled the barracks, as Ifarrata fell to one knee. There wasn't a sharp pain outside of a dull sense of discomfort, but she did acutely feel the pain of rage and familiar frustration as she knew what this meant.

With another sigh, the magistrate Priest stood. "I'm sorry, Ifarrata. You have conducted yourself well, and you have faith and devotion to your Queen, but the army needs soldiers able to stand firm against all foes who would trespass on our sands." His head tilted to look at her shin, the lower half laying perpendicular to the upper half as a thick aromatic resin slowly oozed from the break.

"May the Queen bless you in whatever way you choose now to serve her."

As the Priest reached the door to the barracks, he paused, nodding once to Kemmera before leaving. She saluted in response, then immediately turned to crouch next to Ifarrata.

"I am sorry, Ifarrata, but I was commanded to test you as I would any other candidates. I-" She paused.

"...I did see your stitchings, sister, over the injury. The Priest commanded me, commanded us, to exploit any weakness in battle."

Kemmera knelt, trying to help align the shattered bone, but Ifarrata could already tell the magic of the undead curse could only do so much to reform bone that had been partially reduced to dust and splinters. Ifarrata let out a wail of frustration and battered the offered arm batted aside,

"No! I can do this myself!"

Kemmera stood, silent for a long minute, before nodding in resignation. "Very well, little one. I only hope we shall meet again one day, and that you may be able to forgive me then."

Ifarrata lay there long after her sister left, watching the sun through the barracks window finish setting the evening sky ablaze, until the twinkling stars began to shine above the glow of the torches.

Finally, she sheathed her blade, her hand moving from the scimitar to the smaller wire-wrapped sheath of her carving knife, now adorned with an intricate string of stone beads she had chiseled herself. One hand tightly wrapped around the sheath and beads, her other hand reached for the desk to pull herself upright, and Ifarrata slowly stumbled to a stand.

Decades upon decades later, Ifarrata rose from a worn stool covered in nicks and spots of ancient rock dust. Bright bandages have since faded to grey-brown, and the carving and chiseling has left holes and patches in the bandages, too many for the studious mending to fully keep up with. Now grey and splitting skin can be seen almost as often as the wrappings.

Putting her weight on her feet again, there was a creak as Irifitet leaned heavily onto her workbench. Her injury from all those years ago had been wrapped by wood braces, leather straps, and tarnished bronze buckles, but it was still imperfect and ached on a basal level when she was not distracted by focusing on other tasks.

With a sort of quiet stubborn reverence, Ifarrata pulled a familiar scimitar and lovingly-gilded sheath from a pair of pegs above the doorway, and carefully belted it to her side. The blade and leather clacked against her leg brace, but she never felt its weight as a burden even all this time.

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The journey to the grand temple on the far end of town passed quickly, as she strode across familiar paths and passed under well-remembered archways. The temple itself was nearly complete, and Ifarrata felt a familiar surge of pride in knowing her work would usher in its completion.

As she climbed the scaffolding ladder with steady determination, her braced foot faltered with every other step. Finally she reached the head of the massive statue. It was a depiction of one of the servants of the mighty Desert Gods, a being in the shape of a man but with a skull and headdress and towering over even the largest of the necropolis pyramids.

This tribute was notably smaller than the God-Titans she had seen in the distant armies, but still easily matched the height of any building in the city and was only exceeded in height by the roof of the temple's main hall itself. Setting into a familiar seat, Ifarrata began to precisely carve the final detailing of the massive statue.

Hours later, and Ifarrata carefully and precisely gave her chisel pommel a final tap. After she had climbed down from the rickety heights, she felt the scimitar scabbard knock against her brace, sending her to almost stumble to one knee with a grunt of frustration. As she had a thousand times before, she muttered a curse upon the brace for what it represented.

She looked up towards the market. In the far distance, a dusty dark haze speckled the dunes near the horizon. There, the latest amassing of forces for the Tomb Queen was underway as thousands of mummified undead from dozens of cities and towns gathered to prepare to march towards distant battle.

The fates and whims of the gods may have guided her to be a sculptor, but she knew they could never fully draw out and replace her innermost desire; to serve her Queen in distant battle. It felt bittersweet, that she should see warriors in the market plaza passing by, never knowing that a single bad break had forever separated her from their ranks.

With a sigh, Ifarrata studied her handiwork one last time, a faint smile tugging at her cracked and dry lips before she turned to leave the grand temple, crossing the market square.

She saw the source of the commotion before the clamor of excited hushed voices reached her: Striding through the market's far edge was one of the God-Titans, a being taller than the highest points of the grand temple and empowered with a sliver of the Desert God's true power. This one looked to be an avatar of a hawk-headed deity, and she caught as much of a glimpse of it as she dared before bowing her head in reverence along with the rest of the crowd.

Then it passed with thunderous footfalls, and Ifarrata continued toward the center of the market. Even so, her curiosity could not be contained, and she found herself turning to see what the great being was here for. She had guessed amassing for the battle, but felt a deep sense of dread when she saw it had stopped at the entrance to the grand temple, its head slowly turning to face the market.

All of her confidence in her skill had vanished, and all Ifarrata could think of was that she must have made some mistake that would cause this being some great offense. She plunged deeper into the market, desperate to escape potential shame even as some sliver of her pride tried to reassert itself.

It was in the midst of all of these twirling thoughts that there was a rumbling drumbeat of shaking earth. Before she had time to turn, Ifarrata felt herself being plucked from the crowd by massive fingers that each equaled her entire height. She felt like she was experiencing every emotion at once, and a chilling void of emotion altogether, as the God-Titan carefully deposited her on its open palm.

There was a long minute as the unblinking eyes of the God-Titan stared at her, every secret feeling like it was being silently but surely unraveled and laid bare. The massive head turned, to look directly at her statue of its likeness, before it returned to face her again. After a pause, the head tilted as it regarded her with a curiousness she had never seen before.

Taking a deep breath, Ifarrata tried not to focus on the assembling crowd far below, including the grand temple's Priest, and instead raised her voice to address the God-Titan.

"Yes, oh great one, that is my work. Indeed," she said, more of her confidence returning even despite the extraordinary position she was now in, "I would say it is my best work in all my decades."

The God-Titan stared at her, and she saw its eyes narrow. Her response felt hollow in her ears as it was watching her, waiting as the silence roared ever louder in her ears. She realized it was because her answer was incomplete, that she had withheld herself, and that the piercing gaze of the God-Titan was probing her for the innermost truth. She felt the rising tide of duty, of taught acceptance of her future and the dismissal of her dreams, and some tiny spark deep in her soul flared, pushing back against the tide.

Ifarrata steeled herself, pointing towards the distant dark line on the horizon of the assembling army encampment. "I asked with all my essence to have been a soldier, to serve my Queen in glorious battle. Fate and the whims of the gods saw fit to instead guide me to be a sculptor, but I would beseech you to reconsider that future you have decreed."

The murmur of the crowd died out as her words rang across the market, and the massive entity holding her turned its gaze from the distant army she had pointed to back to her.

It cocked its head to the side, scrutinizing her wordlessly for an agonizingly long minute, before kneeling to place the hand onto the plaza grounds for her to step off. Ifarrata did so, bowing in deference, but when she stood back up she could see the God-Titan had turned away from her, a massive hand outstretched towards the grounds of the grand temple.

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With a hissing rumble, a thin river of sand began to swirl up around the God-Titan's legs, up to its hand before floating in a mid-air stream towards the grounds of the temple, glowing until they became a nearly-blinding white as they left the hand. The grains of energy raced and traced along the stones until they reached the statue she had carved, and began plunging into the stone, suffusing it with power.

The energy flowed into the statue for several seconds before the God-Titan abruptly closed its fist, dropping heavily to one knee with an impact that rattled the market stalls. She could see the huge form breathing heavily, winded from the exertion, but a different, much sharper cracking sound pulled her attention away.

With a crackling and crunching of stone, the statue's foot lifted. As she watched in awe, joints cracked and broke, freeing the statue's arms, waist, and neck to move and pivot. It turned to place both rocky hands on the carved double-pronged spear shaft, snapping it free from the base before whipping it around and into an upright stance.

Then the statue began to march, quickly making its way directly towards the marketplace and the God-Titan. The crowd parted, heads ducked in reverence to this miracle, and the statue finally stood before them, weapon at attention.

Much to Ifarrata's surprise, it was at attention facing her, its back to the God-Titan who had first animated it. She looked up, past her statue and to the avatar beyond, and the massive head just closed its eyes and inclined its head towards her.

Knowing that if she still lived then her heart would have been racing, Ifarrata turned to her statue, and issued her first command.

"Kneel."

Without hesitation, the huge carving slammed to one knee, one hand still holding the spear upright but the other sensing her intentions and placed flat to the ground to serve as a platform for her to climb onto. With a thrill of exhilaration, Ifarrata climbed onto the outstretched hand and it effortlessly hoisted her up to the level of its shoulders.

Ifarrata gave one final glance towards the crowd as they gave a rising murmur of excitement that soon built into a cheer. She returned the cheer with her voiced shout of joy, then reached down and drew her scimitar to flash in the setting sunlight.

She turned, leveling the point at the distant darkness of the growing army. If her arm wavered now, if the blade felt heavy, she did not notice it.

"Onwards. Let us go now and serve our Queen."

Then with ponderous steps, the God-Statue began making its way into the desert, carrying a warrior upon its back.

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## Mission Background

A warband beset by a sandstorm has sought refuge in an incomplete temple-city. They hope to complete the temple and appease the gods to end the storm, but first must contend with would-be raiders hoping for easy prey.

## The Battlefield

For this mission you'll need a 6'x4' table with at least 10-15 pieces of terrain on it.

## Attack & Defend

Before the game, the players roll-off, with the winner picking to be either the attacker or the defender.

## The Armies

For this mission you'll need two armies, with the attacking army having 25% more points than the defender.

## Deployment

The defender must first deploy their entire army in zone A, and afterwards the attacking player must deploy their entire army in zone B.

## First Turn

The attacker gets the first turn.

## Objectives

Before deployment, players have to set up a total of 4 objective markers.

The players roll-off to see who goes first, and then alternate in placing one marker each inside deployment zone A, at least 9" away from other objectives and the edges of the deployment zone.

At the end of each round, if a unit is within 3" of a marker whilst enemies aren't, then the objective is seized and remains seized even after leaving.

Shaken units can't seize markers, and if units from both sides are contesting a marker then it becomes neutral again.

At the end of each round players get 1 VP for each objective marker they seized, and at the end of the last round players get 3 VPs for each objective marker they seized.

At the end of the game players get 1 VP if they seized all objective markers, as well as 2 VPs if they have more non-shaken units than their opponent in deployment zone A.

The game ends after 4 rounds, and the player that scored most VPs wins.

## Special Rules

**Lashing Sands:** Whenever a unit moves over 6" at a time, it takes 1 hit for every additional 3" moved, rounding up.

**Complete the Carving:** The statue begins the game at the centre of zone A still unfinished, and may not be activated. At the beginning of each round, the defending player rolls one die, and adds the number of objective markers they seized, plus the current round number. On a 10+, the statue is finished, and the defending player may activate it for the rest of the game.

**Incomplete Statue:** The statue has Qua 3+, Def 3+, Great Weapon (A6, AP(2)), Stomp (A4, AP(1)), Caster(3), Fear(2), Tough(12), and Undead. It may only cast spells from the Mummified Undead spell list.

