

PATHFINDER®



CAT'S CRADLE

By Hilary Moon Murphy

Bounty: 4

Level: 1

Sanctioned for use with:



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HOW TO PLAY



PLAY TIME: 1-1.5 HOURS



LEVEL: 1



PLAYERS: 3-6

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GM RESOURCES

Campaign Home Page: pathfindersociety.club

Books: *Pathfinder Core Rulebook*, *Pathfinder Bestiary 2*

Maps: *Pathfinder Flip-Mat Classics: Desert*

Online Resource: Pathfinder Reference Document at paizo.com/prd

SUMMARY

The PCs accept a mission from Tidbit Wizelboom to recover her antique puzzle box. While tracking the bandits who robbed the Wizelboom caravan, dust mephits attack. After defeating the elementals, the PCs discover a young sphinx playing with the item the party seeks. The PCs must win back the puzzle box by defeating the sphinx in a battle of wits.



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ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Nestled within an oasis along the Golden Road, Eto is a haven for both visiting merchant caravans and the bandits who prey on them. Wizelboom's Wonders, a family business specializing in clockworks, became the latest target of thieves while traveling to the city. The Sand Scorpions found the Wizelbooms' main merchandise wagon unexpectedly well defended by constructs, but their residential wagon proved easier to burgle. The bandits made off with a clockwork puzzle box given to **Tidbit Wizelboom** (LG female gnome) by her grandmother. Tidbit is desperate to get it back since the heirloom contains letters her grandmother wrote her when she was young.

Meanwhile, a young sphinx named **Zandyk** struck out from his mountainous home to explore the world. Enchanted by tales of the cleverness of the legendary Old-Mage Jatembe, Zandyk wishes to study at the school Jatembe founded: the Magaambya. When Zandyk's wanderings lead him to stumble upon the Sand Scorpions' campsite, he eagerly asked them to join him in a game of riddles. The bandits fled, abandoning their cache of stolen goods. Dismayed by their unfriendliness, Zandyk enjoyed a meal of camel and became fascinated by an intricate puzzle box he found hidden in the camp. Unaware that her prized possession recently changed hands, Tidbit puts out a call for adventurers to track down the bandits and recover the stolen items.

GETTING STARTED

The adventure begins in Eto, a bustling settlement on the Golden Road in Osirion. The PCs could have recently arrived with one of the caravans or might have already spent a few days in the trade city. The Bent Coin tavern maintains a bulletin board where caravan merchants often advertise to hire guards, drivers, and other employees. A gnome merchant with shocking blue hair, Tidbit Wizelboom, glances appraisingly at the board before borrowing one of the bar stools to pin up a notice. The Bent Count's other patrons gather round to view the posted scroll. When the PCs investigate, they see an intricate drawing of a puzzle box covered in odd gears

WHERE ON GOLARION?

Eto is a thriving oasis town in central Osirion, nestled north of the Pillars of the Sun mountain range. It lies along the Golden Road, providing a natural stopping point for caravans. For more on Osirion, see pages 53–54 of the *Lost Omens World Guide*.



and mechanisms, plus a request written in Common, Osiriani, and Kelish.

Reward: Stolen Puzzle Box!

This antique puzzle box was stolen by a bandit raid on my caravan yesterday. It is a keepsake from my grandmother, and of immense sentimental value to me. I am looking for a few brave souls to confront the bandits and retrieve the puzzle box along with any other clockworks of mine you find with the Wizelboom mark. Adventurers bold, please inquire within!

–Tidbit Wizelboom, of Wizelboom's Clockwork Creation

The PCs find Tidbit inside the tavern tucking into a meal, and she happily answers their questions. She explains that the Sand Scorpion bandits attacked her caravan on the road west of Eto. She proudly recounts the bandits' failed theft of her main wagon: "My, were they surprised when the cart sprouted scimitars and defended itself!" Unable to get at her most valuable wares, the bandits robbed Tidbit's residential wagon instead. Tidbit

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SCALING ENCOUNTER A

To adjust for larger groups of PCs, use the following adjustments.

Five PCs: Increase the dust mephits' HP by 5 each.

Six PCs: Add another dust mephit to the encounter.

believes the bandits mistook the heirloom for a jewelry box and fears that they'll likely smash it open rather than take time to solve the puzzle.

Tidbit shows the PCs a map and points out a location near Pillars' Rise oasis that her sources claim serves as the Sand Scorpions' camp. As the PCs head to the oasis, remind them that they each have 1 Hero Point available.

A. DUST TO DUST MODERATE

After two hours of overland travel, the PCs finally arrive at Pillars' Rise, a small but lush oasis guarded by an ancient sandstone statue of a sphinx.

Creatures: A pair of mischievous dust mephits relax in the shade of the sphinx statue, and they immediately attack when they notice the PCs approaching the oasis. Use the map on page 5 for this encounter. The mephits

alternate between casting *glitterdust* and using their Breath Weapons against the PCs, then focus on flyby attacks with their claws. On round three of combat, buffeting winds pick up, forcing all flyers to land at the end of their turns. The mephits flee when reduced to 4 Hit Points.

DUST MEPHITS (2)

CREATURE 1

UNCOMMON N SMALL AIR EARTH ELEMENTAL

Perception +3; darkvision

Languages Auran, Terran

Skills Acrobatics +7, Stealth +7

Str +1, **Dex** +4, **Con** +1, **Int** -2, **Wis** +0, **Cha** -1

AC 17; **Fort** +6, **Ref** +9, **Will** +5

HP 16 (fast healing 2 [in dust or sand]); **Immunities** bleed, paralyzed, poison, sleep

Speed 20 feet, fly 35 feet

Melee ✎ claw +9 (agile, finesse), **Damage** 1d6+1 slashing

Arcane Innate Spells DC 17; **2nd** *glitterdust*

Breath Weapon ✎✎ (air, arcane, earth) The dust mephit breathes a cloud of dust in a 15-foot cone that deals 2d6 slashing damage to each creature within the area (DC 17 basic Reflex save). The dust mephit can't use Breath Weapon again for 1d4 rounds.

RIDDLES WITH THE SPHINX

After a brief exploration of the surrounding area the PCs reach a ruined bandit camp, where they find scattered equipment, abandoned tents, and a sphinx lounging over a half-eaten camel. The sphinx's tail twitches as PCs approach, but he doesn't move to attack. **Zandyk** (NG male sphinx) feels disconcerted by the crude and lethal reactions his appearance caused—not for fear of his own safety, but because of the brutish nature of the people he has met so far. As a result, he's having second thoughts about his plans to become a student. In his culture, riddles are a sacred trust, and none of the bandits waited around past the first line of his previous offerings. He addresses the PCs when they enter the camp.

"Are you here to attack me, too?" the sphinx asks sulkily. He extends his claws and plays idly with an intricately carved puzzle box. "I once dreamed of studying at the Magaambya to learn of your magic and history, but now I am close to



DUST MEPHIT

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A. DUST TO DUST



1 square = 5 feet

Pathfinder Flip-Mat Classics: Desert

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SCALING THE RIDDLE CHALLENGE

To adjust for larger groups of PCs, use the following adjustments.

Five PCs: The PCs need each of the four clues and the following number of Riddle Points to earn the riddle: 3/4/5/8/10.

Six PCs: The PCs need each of the four clues and the following number of Riddle Points to earn the riddle: 4/5/6/10/12.

abandoning my dreams and returning home to my mountain. Whenever I try to gift humanoids a riddle, they attack me like beasts!" From his lounging position, he narrows his eyes suspiciously at his visitors. "But are you any different?"

After the PCs respond, Zandyk cocks his head and challenges them to solve his riddle. If the PCs mention the puzzle box, Zandyk offers to include it as part of the bargain. PCs who succeed at a DC 12 Nature or Occultism check recall that sphinxes view riddles as a sacred contract between the riddler and recipient, and that fighting a powerful being like Zandyk would be disastrous for them. A PC that attacks Zandyk prompts him to pounce and pin them to the ground (Athletics +18) with retracted claws. Zandyk doesn't engage in combat, and if PCs attack as a group, he flies away with the puzzle box.

IMPRESSING THE SPHINX

Zandyk begins reciting his riddle, then stops abruptly, demanding the PCs impress him before he continues. PCs can attempt various DC 15 skill checks to encourage Zandyk with the following results.

Critical Success The PC gets Zandyk to smile, earning 2 Riddle Points.

Success The PC lifts Zandyk's spirits a bit, earning 1 Riddle Point.

Failure Zandyk is indifferent toward the PC's attempt. The PCs don't earn or lose Riddle Points.

Critical Failure Zandyk finds the PC's antics annoying. The PCs lose 1 Riddle Point.

The GM should allow players to approach the situation creatively, but Zandyk offers hints like "I would enjoy an intelligent conversation," or "I have

grown tired of eating raw camel." A PC can Make an Impression with a Diplomacy check or attempt a Lore skill check to conduct a civil conversation. PCs who wish to use tricky language and wordplay can astonish Zandyk with a Deception or Performance check. A PC who succeeds at a Cooking Lore or Survival check can prepare an appetizing meal with what remains of the camel, and those with Athletics, Crafting, or Survival can create pleasant shade for Zandyk by using the bandits' abandoned tents to erect a pavilion.

Alternatively, the PCs can help Zandyk unlock the puzzle box with a Thievery or Crafting check. A critical success on this check reveals the main compartment with Tidbit's grandmother's letters and a secret drawer containing a map. PCs who ask Zandyk a riddle of their own earn a +1 circumstance bonus on all their checks for the remainder of the challenge. If the PCs offer Zandyk a riddle, he guesses the answer (Bardic Lore +18) and is equally delighted whether he solves it or not.

THE RIDDLE CHALLENGE

Once the PCs have completed their efforts to improve



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the sphinx's mood, use the number of Riddle Points they earned to determine what happens next.

Fewer than 2 Riddle Points: Zandyk roars at the PCs and chases them off, refusing to even share his riddle.

2 Riddle Points: The unimpressed Zandyk gives the PCs his riddle, but he provides no additional hints.

3 Riddle Points: Zandyk provides one clue.

4 Riddle Points: Zandyk provides a total of two clues.

6 Riddle Points: Zandyk cheerfully provides a total of three clues.

8 Riddle Points: Zandyk offers a total of four clues to help the party solve their riddle.

The sphinx's riddle is below. As an in-game puzzle, the players as well as the PCs must work to solve the sphinx's puzzle. Some groups might guess quickly, while others need time and benefit from clues.

A legend that goes untold,

A scale that weighs no gold,

The blue of fishless seas,

I offer a rose and relief.

Beyond belief, I shrink realities.

What am I?

The answer to Zandyk's riddle is a map. The lines refer to the following: the legend that's the key to interpreting map symbols; the map scale for distance; compass roses and relief contours; and shrinking a huge geographic area into a small representation on paper. Knowing the PCs are adventurers, he chose this riddle especially for them.

Zandyk's clues are as follows.

- "You carry this."
- "You can fold this."
- "You can use it in a dungeon."
- "You use this when you are lost."

Development: After receiving the clues, the party can attempt three guesses to answer the riddle. Each wrong answer agitates Zandyk as he circles the PCs, hissing, "Wrong!" If the PCs correctly answer his riddle, Zandyk asks them to visit him at the Magaambya, his interest in studying there renewed. If the PCs managed to gain clues but fail to solve the riddle, Zandyk frowns. Dropping the puzzle box at their feet, he shakes his head and sighs dejectedly: "How disappointing. I thought I could learn from you." The PCs have one last chance to restore his dream by succeeding at a DC 20 Lore or Diplomacy check to convince Zandyk that there's more to learn than riddles.

GUIDELINES FOR RIDDLE SUBSTITUTION

GMs running games in languages other than English, or for players replaying the adventure, are encouraged to substitute another classic or original riddle for the riddle presented in this adventure. Appropriate riddles describe ordinary, common topics with fanciful language and wordplay. Pick pre-industrial topics that will be as familiar to the players as their characters. Selected riddles should be at least four lines long to work for the sphinx's challenge.

If the PCs failed to solve his riddle and gained no clues, the disgusted sphinx flies home with the puzzle box, denying them any chance at recovering it. Even if the PCs fail to recover Tidbit's heirloom, however, they can find enough Wizelboom clockwork pieces scattered throughout the bandit camp with a successful DC 20 Perception check, allowing them to earn the cash reward.

CONCLUSION

Tidbit Wizelboom dutifully rewards the PCs as long as they return any of her clockwork items, but she's overjoyed if they recovered her puzzle box. If they didn't solve Zandyk's riddle, she consoles them that sphinxes are touchy creatures and helps them find the answer. If the PCs never discovered the box's secret compartment, she shows them the treasure map hidden inside, saying, "I never dared seek it out, and after that riddle, I think you were meant to have it." The PCs are free to follow the map in search of treasure or to seek out new adventures.

OBJECTIVE

The PCs fulfill their primary objective if they bring back Tidbit Wizelboom's puzzle box. Pathfinder Society GMs, see Organized Play (page 9) for determining appropriate rewards.

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APPENDIX: GAME AIDS



Puzzle Box Bounty Poster
Zandyk



Dust Mephit



Pathfinder Bounty

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ORGANIZED PLAY

CHRONICLE SHEET

Characters playing this scenario for Pathfinder Society credit earn a Chronicle Sheet. If the PCs recover the puzzle box, they earn 4 gp each. Bounties don't grant downtime.

At the time of publication, the organized play program uses a version of the Slow advancement presented on page 509 of the *Pathfinder Core Rulebook*, simplified to 1 XP per 100 XP normally granted in core play. This adventure also grants the character 1 Reputation for a faction of their choice.

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Event Reporting Form

Date _____ Event Code: _____

Location _____

GM Org Play #: _____	-2	GM Name: _____	GM Faction: _____
Adventure #: _____		Adventure Name: _____	
Reporting Codes: (check when instructed, line through all if no conditions to report)			<input type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/> B <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> D
Bonus Faction Goal Achieved: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A		Scenario-based Infamy earned? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A	Fame Earned: _____

Character Name: _____		Faction: _____	
Org Play #: _____	-2	Level _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Grand Archive <input type="checkbox"/> Radiant Oath <input type="checkbox"/> Vigilant Seal <input type="checkbox"/> Envoy's Alliance <input type="checkbox"/> Horizon Hunters <input type="checkbox"/> Verdant Wheel <input type="checkbox"/> Slow Track <input type="checkbox"/> Dead <input type="checkbox"/> Infamy

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Bounty #4: Cat's Cradle

Character Chronicle #

Chronicle Code

L6M3

A.K.A. _____		- 2	
Player Name _____	Character Name _____	Organized Play # _____	Character # _____
Faction _____		Reputation _____	
Faction _____		Reputation _____	
Faction _____		Reputation _____	

Adventure Summary

While traveling through Eto, you accepted a mission from merchant Tidbit Wixelboom to recover an heirloom puzzle box and other goods stolen from her caravan by bandits. You were attacked by dust mephits as you searched for the bandits. While investigating their campsite, you encountered the sphinx Zandyk, who challenged you to solve a riddle in exchange for the puzzle box.

Items		Purchases		REWARDS
	Items Sold / Conditions Gained			
	_____		_____	
	_____		_____	
	_____		_____	
	_____		_____	
	_____		_____	
TOTAL VALUE OF ITEMS SOLD Add 1/2 this value to the "Items Sold" Box		<input type="text"/>		
Items Bought / Conditions Cleared				
_____		_____		
_____		_____		
_____		_____		
_____		_____		
TOTAL COST OF ITEMS BOUGHT		<input type="text"/>		
Notes				

FOR GM ONLY				
EVENT _____	EVENT CODE _____	DATE _____	Game Master's Signature _____	GM Organized Play # _____