

# THE BLASTED BATTLEMENTS OF TOUR TORIEL

## ASCENT TO PRIME: LEVEL TWO

This is an introductory adventure geared towards learning how to play the Cortex Prime roleplaying game. This adventure focuses on the plot point economy, Hinder, and test-created assets. It is the second in a series of five adventures that start very simple and slowly develop more complexity as you play.

If you'd like to give it a try, you'll need a few friends, some pens and paper, some tokens or counters, and some polyhedral dice. You can play online through video conferencing or face-to-face around a table. Each adventure takes a few hours to play: think of it like making your own movie.

Once you've gathered your players and materials, read the following aloud:

On the high plateaus on the roof of the world stands the spire of Tour Toriel, a tower of rock and ancient ruins that predates all of recorded history. Its master is the Dread Tyrant, who has suborned the will of every kingdom and city in the land. But now he has done something, high in his fortress, that has opened a terrible purple rift in the sky and caused calamity across the globe.

You are a band of heroes dedicated to finding out what has gone wrong in the spire and stopping it. You have fought your way through the forgotten dungeons beneath the fortress and now you have come up inside the battlements. All around you is ruin: ash and destruction, the wake of a dragon's rampage. But your course is clear: navigate through the Blasted Battlements and gain entry to the Keep. There, by hook or by crook, you will discover the source of this calamity and—hopefully—the means to end it.

My friends. We are going to teach each other how to play Cortex by playing a Cortex game. Last time we learned how to assemble dice pools and roll them; in this level we will add a whole bunch of player options to let you guys focus the game on the content that interests you. Throughout this adventure, I will be reading boxed text passages like this, and I will be using this ridiculous voice whenever I do so.

Let's play Cortex.



## LEVEL TWO CHARACTERS

The Keystone: Ascent to Prime adventure series is played with characters that start simple and pick up new complexities and options as you progress through play. To play this level, you'll need Level Two characters. If you played the first level, you can upgrade the characters you played and continue onwards. If you are starting here, you'll need to create new characters.

### UPGRADING TO LEVEL TWO CHARACTERS

Distribute the character sheets and archetype sheets to their players.

Read the following aloud, proceeding as the players complete the steps:

We're going to upgrade our Level One characters to Level Two characters before we start play. Don't worry, this won't hurt a bit.

First off, everybody gets one plot point to start with. Plot points can be tracked with physical tokens or tally marks on the character sheet. There's a place to keep track of them here in the upper right hand corner.

Secondly, we're going to unlock the Hinder SFX on our three distinctions. You can see on your archetype sheet, each distinction has three items under it, and the first one each time is labelled Hinder. Now, this is a bit of a repetition, but we're going to copy that over under all three of our distinctions. If you want to abbreviate it or even just write 'Hinder' on distinctions two and three, that's fine, but getting the full text on your sheet at least once is a good idea.

And that's it! We've got Level Two Characters!



## CREATING LEVEL TWO CHARACTERS

If you are starting the game here at Level Two, or bringing in a new player who didn't play Level One, follow these steps to create characters:

Create characters as described in Level 1: the Dungeon Beneath Tour Toriel.

Add two **6** assets representing items the heroes may have picked up along the way or had all along.

Everybody starts with one plot point (PP).

Add the Hinder SFX to all three distinctions.



BETHANY BERG



# RUNNING THE BATTLEMENTS

Set out the Plot Points Cheat Sheet, the starting doom pool (4 6 8), and read the following aloud:

In this, the second level of Ascent to Prime, we will be teaching each other how to score heroic successes, create assets, and use plot points.

Heroic successes are when you beat the difficulty by five or more. You get to step up your effect die when you roll really well. This is a little, fun mechanic that we are not going to worry about much.

We've used assets before, but now you can make them on your own. As long as you have the opportunity to do so in the developing story, you can roll to create an asset. That asset starts equal to your effect die and is good for one player for one scene.

Plot points are tokens that allow players to shift the developing story in directions that interest them, and to grease the wheels in their heroes' favor. As we get used to plot points, you're going to go through a lot of them: these are not big explosions of protagonist power, they are—and I am required as the GM to say this out loud—lubrication. Once we find our rythm, we will have plot points all over the place.

You earn plot points when you roll 1s on your dice and when you choose to Hinder one of your distinction, which means you roll it as a lowly 4.

You can spend plot points in three ways. First, before a roll, you can add an additional trait from a set into your pool—if you're doing something where two distinctions or two attributes or two skills apply, now you can roll both. Second, after a roll, you can spend a plot point to add additional dice to your total—if two dice is not quite enough, spend a plot point to add in a third. And lastly, at any point in the game, you can spend a plot point to turn any element of the story into a 6 asset, good for one player for one scene. Now that's a lot all at once, but we'll highlight all those options as we play. There's also this handy little card to remind us.

And finally, I will be using the doom pool to set the difficulty. The doom pool doesn't get used for everything; conflicts with Game Moderator Characters will use those characters' traits. Anything that doesn't have a trait block gets set with the doom pool. It starts at 4 6 8. This is not something you need to worry about too much, but you can always see exactly how bad things are by checking out how big the doom pool is.

Now that we have the general rules for rolling dice under our belts, the Battlements is actually a much more linear sequence of encounters. I have a map of the Battlements, and there's a player map available if you guys can unlock it. We'll be proceeding through the map on the way to your goal: the Keep.

That was a lot! Any questions?



## BATTLEMENTS MAPS

There are two maps of the Battlements: one for the GM and one for the players. The GM map is a simple network of encounters and the paths through them that will tell you which encounters the players may confront next. Start at the bottom node labelled Base Camp. Keep in mind—and remind the players—that they are often free to backtrack to an established camp in order to recover stress before pressing onwards.

The players do not start the level with their map, but they can unlock it once they climb a tower or otherwise get a bird's eye view of the fortress. There are two towers in the level: the Arcanery is near the players' start location, and the Ramparts is just past halfway.


## TEST CREATED ASSETS, LOOT, AND CAMP

Alongside plot points, the other big element introduced in this level is test-created assets. In addition to the general ability to take a moment to create an asset for an upcoming roll, this level uses these rules for making camp and finding loot. These are a sort of “training wheels” presentation of the test-created assets rules.

The level begins with a Make Camp roll. Players might return to this Base Camp later in the level or create another camp further into the Battlements.

At the end of each encounter, players may make a Loot Roll to see if they can find useful stuff in the wake of the action. This process is spelled out in detail on page XX.

## POTENTIAL HINDERS

Each encounter in the Garrison is accompanied by a list of potential hinders. These are prompts to help players get comfortable with rolling their distinctions at  to earn plot points.

These are merely suggestions; whether or not a player hinders a die roll is always up to the player. These lists are also nowhere near exhaustive; players can and hopefully will start finding their own reasons to hinder their rolls.

It's very rare that the GM will ever need to veto a hinder, although they might ask for more clarification and detail as to why and how a given roll is being hindered. More details are almost always a good addition.

Reading through the level, you may wonder if every single element presented here is a mere contrivance to spotlight the hinders of the player characters. You are correct! Every plot ever created for any medium is a long series of contrivances to highlight whatever the author wanted to highlight. Roleplaying games are the same; when it comes time to create your own plots, embrace the contrivance. This artifice is rarely apparent when you play, and in the rare instances when players notice, they'll think it is a clever plan on your part.






## (DON'T SWEAT) HEROIC SUCCESS

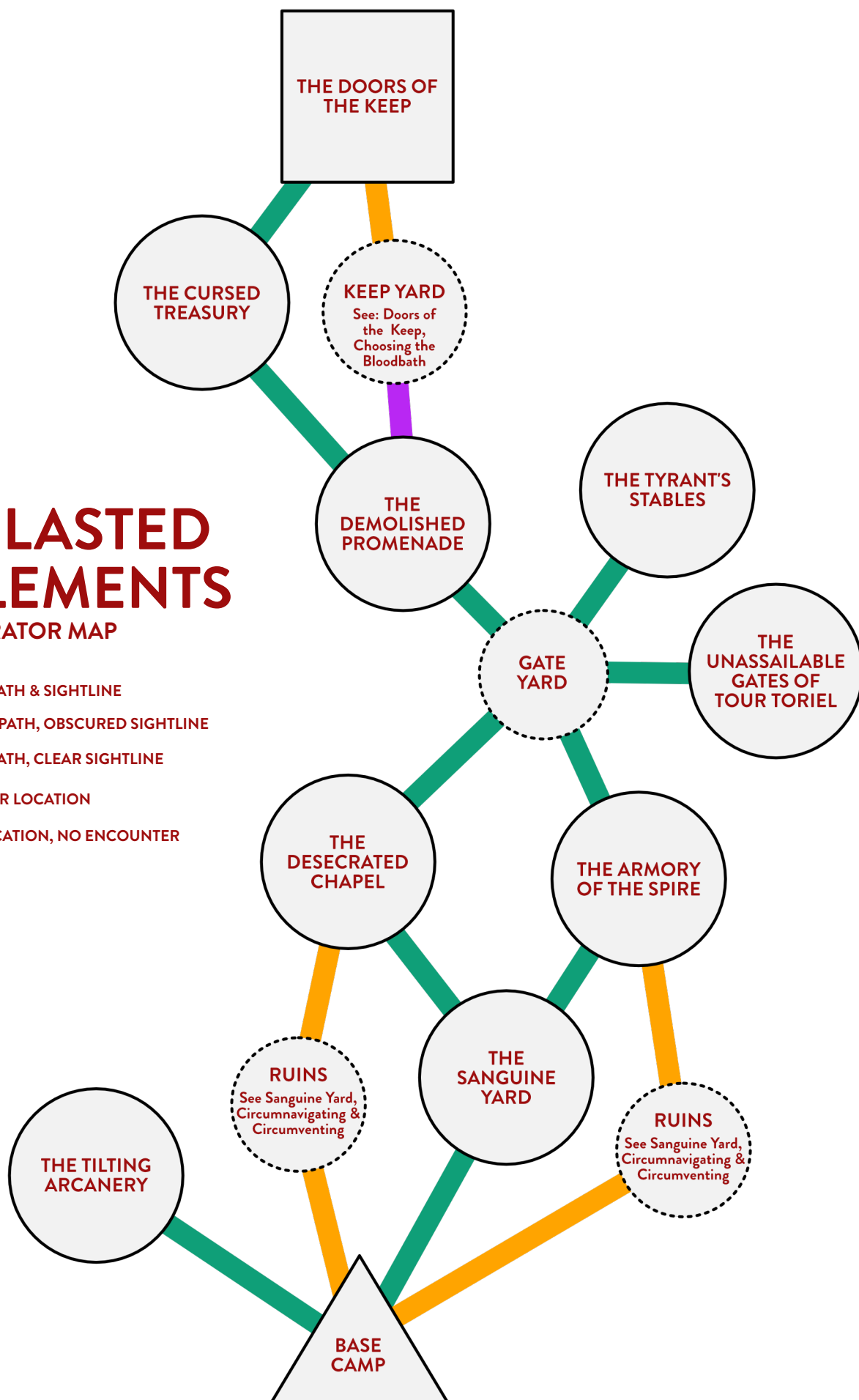
Starting in this level, players may start scoring heroic successes. This is a simple mechanic that recognizes when a player beats a difficulty by five or more. Do not worry at all if you miss some of these; no game economy will collapse for lack of a heroic success being properly identified. This mechanic exists purely to underscore excitement and enthusiasm at the table. As players grow accustomed to the mechanics, they'll spot their own heroic successes.



# THE BLASTED BATTLEMENTS

## GAME MODERATOR MAP

-  OBVIOUS PATH & SIGHTLINE
-  AVAILABLE PATH, OBSCURED SIGHTLINE
-  SUICIDAL PATH, CLEAR SIGHTLINE
-  ENCOUNTER LOCATION
-  MINOR LOCATION, NO ENCOUNTER









## GENERAL QUESTIONS

As the heroes make their way through the Battlements, they may have questions about the scenes of destruction around them. Here are some facts which you can reveal which won't derail the level:

- Great swaths of the fortress are either destroyed or inaccessible due to the destruction. This is entirely a contrivance to focus the players' path through the level; embrace this and share it explicitly with the players.
- The bodies all seem to have been exposed to the elements for about ten days. Most are covered in burns; some are rent asunder with claw marks of various sizes.
- There appears to have been some organized resistance to the dragon attack: the bodies of halberdiers are still in formation where they fell to the dragon.
- Yes, the purple rift is still visible in the sky above the fortress.





## BASE CAMP

### TEST-CREATED ASSETS

You've fought your way through the Dungeon and now face the prospect of cutting your way through the Battlements. Nobody knows you're here yet, so this is a prime opportunity to make camp and rest up. You can barricade the door behind you, scout a little perimeter, maybe even make a cheery fire.

This is our introduction to test-created assets. You all started the last session with a signature asset and picked up a few more assets along the way. This is how you make new assets yourself, and going forward this is a thing that you can do more or less whenever, context and story permitting.

Everybody is going to roll some part of this, and you're going to put together a die pool for whatever you're doing. On this and every other roll going forward, you have the opportunity to use the Hinder SFX on your distinctions. That means you swap out its usual  and roll a , instead, and you get a plot point for it. Here's some quick suggestions for how distinctions might be hindered while rolling to make camp.

### POTENTIAL HINDERS

**Elf of Loratha Forest:** you are accustomed to your accommodations possessing a certain level of... civilization. Loratha may be a forest, but even the meanest lodgings there are well-appointed, elegant, and at the very least clean. Are you going to put up with this kind of roughing it?

**On the Hunt:** You have never been so close to your quarry as now; the Dread Tyrant is right upstairs from you. Are you really going to stall the hunt just to take a little breather?

**Sharp Eyes:** Sure, everybody needs to take a break, but here, now? How many different dangers can your Sharp Eyes spot just from where your standing now? Your hypervigilance is often a boon, but is it causing you to doublethink yourself now?



## CONTRIBUTIONS

So let's start with something easy: barricading the door behind you. At the end of the last session, you came through that blasted-apart door. You're pretty sure no kobolds are following you up the stairs, but this seems like a reasonable safety precaution. Which one of you wants to put together a die pool for barricading the door? Tell us how you're doing it, pick an appropriate die from each set on your sheet, and roll them all together. I'm going to roll the Doom Pool, which we'll get to in a bit.

Roll the doom pool and add together two results to get the difficulty. Compare it with the player's total (their top two results, usually). For this scene, ignore dice that roll 1s; you've got other things to teach. Then read one of the following sections:

Your total is higher than my difficulty, so you successfully barricade the door. Pick an effect die from the dice you didn't add together for your result. What size is that die? That's the size of your new asset, **Barricaded Doors**. You could write it on your sheet but for this scene, just put that die out in front of you. We'll get to it later.

Your total is not higher than my difficulty, so you fail to barricade the door. It's just too busted up and the corridor is too wide. Your little camp is going to have a wide-open back door and not feel very safe. Now, this result is final: you cannot try again, and nobody else can try again, because Cortex keeps moving forward. A second attempt needs a change of circumstances: try it again in a different place or a different time.

Now go around the table and have each player describe what they're doing to help make camp. They might build that cheery fire or take the first watch or something all their own. If anybody is at a loss, tell them you'll come back to them after everyone else. Roll the Doom Pool for the difficulty each time. If they beat the difficulty, they create an asset of a size equal to their effect die. If they fail to beat the difficulty, they don't create an asset but since this is a low-stakes test, nothing untoward happens.

If any player's total is five or more higher than the difficulty, they have scored a heroic success. Whatever their effect die, step it up to the next-largest die size. If they roll ten or more higher, step it up twice; fifteen or higher, step it up three times; and so on.

If any player rolls a 1, add that die to the doom pool, give them a plot point, and describe some minor inconvenience that arises from their effort. They knock over some smashed barrels, creating a racket. The newly-created campfire stinks to high heaven. Even a stubbed toe can add some color and levity to the scene.



## PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Once everyone has done their part, ask for one player to make the roll to put it all together. (If you promised to come back to a player, just pick them to do this roll.) This is the big Make Camp roll, and not only do they roll their own dice, but they get to roll the assets that everybody else made to contribute. Roll the doom pool for the difficulty and compare it with their result. Read the appropriate boxed text:

Your total is higher than my difficulty, so you successfully make camp. You've got a little spot to take a moment to catch your breath. Everybody step down all your stress traits once. You've also got an asset, Base Camp, at the same die size as your effect die. One player can use that die in recovery rolls to further reduce stress traits for anybody who's especially hurt or demoralized. Or, if anybody wants to spend a plot point, you can open up that asset so that everybody can use it during this scene. Let's take a little time for you guys to get ready to push on into the next encounter; what are you all doing in camp?

Your total is not higher than my difficulty, so you fail to make camp. You had all these preparations, but you weren't able to pull them together into a safe space. Maybe it was because of the harsh conditions, maybe it was because trying to scrape together those contributions kicked up too much noise, but mostly it's because you've disturbed a wandersshade. Let's jump to the Wandersshade encounter, shall we?

## BREAKING CAMP

Once the heroes are ready to strike into the Battlements, describe the scene of devastation they move through. They came up inside what appears to be a mess hall. The alleyway outside passes between low, long buildings filled with burned bunks and lost ghosts: plainly barracks. If the heroes want to investigate the barracks, describe ruined bunks, charred footlockers, and restless spirits. There's no need to make a roll here because there's nothing to find.

At the far end of the alley is a wide open courtyard. That's the **SANGUINE YARD**, and if players head that direction, begin that encounter.

Down a narrower alley rises a lofty stone tower, plainly an Arcanery or mage's tower. The tower has burn marks up its sides, is missing a few chunks of wall, and is plainly unsafe. But it will have a nice view of the surrounding area. This is the **RUINED ARCANERY**, and if players go there, skip to that section.



# WANDERSHADES

## THE WANDERING MONSTER OF THE BATTLEMENTS

The Battlements are filled with the softly-glowing, translucent forms of wandershades. These are the least dangerous kinds of ghosts, little more than faint echoes of their living days. They wander through their old haunts, ceaselessly repeating the same routine tasks that filled their lives. They're harmless... unless you disturb them. Then they lash out at whatever is preventing them from losing themselves in repetition, at whoever is reminding them that they're dead.

You've disturbed a wandersshade, and it's like a blast of wind has set their hair flowing behind them. They raise their hands, which lengthen and sharpen into claws, and they screech at you through a mouth filled with suddenly pointy teeth...

This is a very simple encounter to throw into the game as an unfortunate consequence or interruption, or simply to liven things up. Disturbed wandershades will attack anyone who disturbs their routine, trying to silence or even punish whoever has reminded them of their excruciating death. They use their ghostly claws and teeth to attack.

Run this encounter like Ratkin Rumble in the last level, or Sanguine Yard in this level.

If the heroes somehow manage to disturb multiple wandershades, increase the Mob trait by one die for each additional shade, up to **6 6 6 6 6 6** (yikes!).

Wandershades can be put down through violence (their **Insubstantial** trait makes that difficult but not impossible), ritual banishment, or even talking them down and guiding them back to their routines. The heroes may also just flee. No matter the course of action, roll it as a test. Successful tests reduce or step down the Wandersshade's **Mob** trait.

As a Wandersshade is dissipated or returns to its routine, it may mutter something about its life or death. They might complain at military protocol and how they only want a little rest, or they might insist that their loyalty to the Dread Tyrant is undying. The wandersshade might wail that a dragon is sweeping through the Battlements, destroying everything in its path. If the heroes are looking for something, use this as an opportunity to give them a clue.

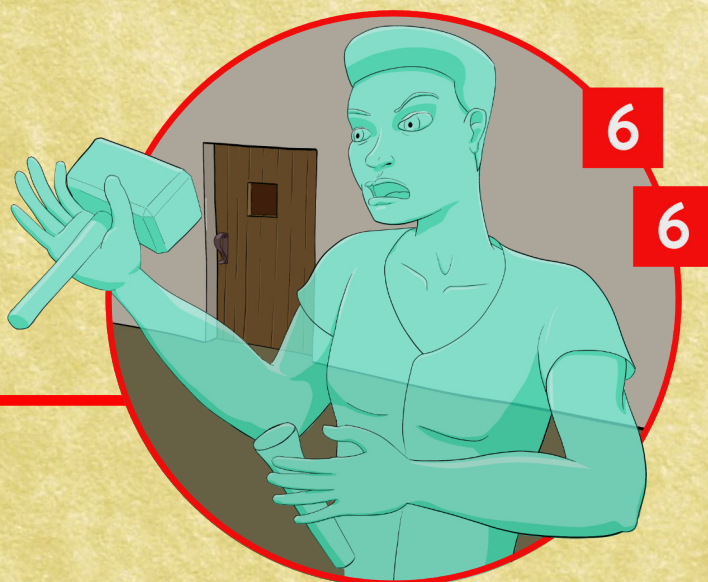
### WANDERSHADE

*Shhhh.... they don't know they're dead. Best leave them that way...*

#### MOB TRAIT:

LOST SOUL

INSUBSTANTIAL **10**





## POTENTIAL HINDERS

**Shepherd of the Outcasts:** these are souls in torment. Your allies have other priorities and only want to put them down and get past them, but your heart goes out to them. Are you going to just banish these spirits or take the time and make yourself vulnerable enough to lay them to rest?

**Slippery Sneak:** a wandersshade can usually be convinced to go back to its routine, but talking down a ghost requires an aura of trustworthiness that a Slippery Sneak may struggle to manifest. How untrustworthy do you come across?

**Caer Larionad Human:** most of the wandershades appear to be human. These are your people, some even look like your friends and family. Does this harrowing reminder of human mortality hinder your efforts?

**Heartbreaking Homewrecker:** the wandershades moan and wail about the regrets of their lives, and many of them only want to return to the comforts of their homes and loved ones. That's something that you've taken away from many, both living and now dead. Are you shaken by the wailing of the wandershades reminds you of the damage you've left in your wake?

## SIDEBAR: KILLING THE DEAD

It's easy to fall into the assumption that everything in an adventure that moves is there for the heroes to kill. Stepping outside that assumption can be hard, but will often yield a better story—if only by dint of featuring a greater variety of goals and methods.

That's why the Battlements are full of monsters that the heroes can't kill: ghosts are already dead! Instead, the heroes will need to banish them, dissipate them, or put them to rest... or simply get around or past them, if that's what the scene actually requires.

All of these endeavors are performed with the same dice mechanics of tests and contests, so everybody can be as creative as possible.

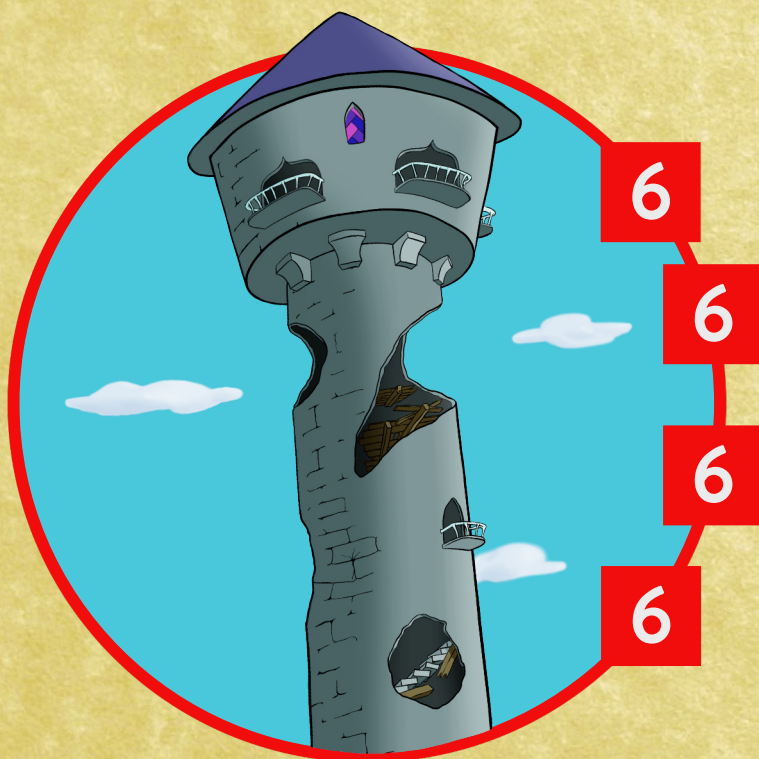


# THE TILTING ARCANERY

## A CRISIS POOL

This Arcanery has seen better days. What must have once been a lofty and regal tower is now scorched and teetering, massive rents blasted out of the sides of the structure. Even from your vantage point on the ground, you can see through these gaps to the smashed interior and sometimes clear through to the sky on the other side. With each strong gust of wind, the tower visibly sways. Only the very peak of the tower seems untouched: the top floor sports four small balconies overlooking the rest of the battlements.

The heroes might want to use the Arcanery to perform reconnaissance or to loot what's left in the penthouse floor. Either way, they'll need to climb it first. Ask which heroes will want to make the dangerous ascent. It may be necessary to remind the players that not everybody needs to be a part of climbing the tower, and there is little to no penalty for "splitting the party."



## PLAYER TURNS

Climbing the Arcanery is handled as a Crisis Pool. This is a pool of dice that represents the dangerous challenge the players are undertaking. Players attempt to overcome the challenge by rolling tests.

Set the difficulty of each test by rolling the whole crisis pool and adding two of its dice together. Describe the treacherous, half-collapsed masonry, the unbound fire spirit lurking in the broken summoning circle, the half-smashed bookshelf jutting out into the open air that is the only available handhold up. The beauty of a crisis pool is that you can make up whatever details come to you and make sense in the story, so you can make this sequence as colorful and thrilling as you like.

If the player succeeds, compare their effect die to the smallest die in the crisis pool. If their effect die is larger, remove the die from the pool. If the effect die is smaller, step down the smallest die in the crisis pool. (This is slightly different from a mob, since a crisis pool does not take stress.)

If the players fail, use an effect die from the rest of the crisis pool to inflict stress.

Succeed or fail, player hitches can be activated to add directly to the crisis pool instead of the doom pool (technically they add to the doom pool and then you can transfer them from doom to crisis, but that's just bookkeeping). What mistep has made the ascent harder, or what terrible sorcerous experiment have they disturbed?

Instead of confronting the climb, the heroes can spend their turn to create assets or make recovery rolls; use the crisis pool to set difficulty. Their precipitous circumstances are still quite dangerous, though, so a failure still inflicts stress. In the unlikely circumstance that the heroes wish to turn back halfway, they can backtrack and descend safely without the need for a roll.



## THE CRISIS POOL'S TURN

Once all the climbing heroes have had a turn, the crisis pool gets a turn. Describe some development that directly attacks one of the heroes. It might be falling masonry, an abandoned and angry familiar, or a particularly strong wind. Whatever the details, roll the pool and add together two dice for the difficulty. If the player beats that difficulty, they avoid harm; if they fail, inflict stress equal to your effect die.

### POTENTIAL HINDERS

**Initiate of the Arcane Mysterium:** this deathtrap is full of magical tomes, rare and magical materials, and arcane tools, plundered from across the world. That lost volume of *Histories of Arcane Inquiry* is right there, inches from your grasp, and all you have to do is put your weight on that half-burned support beam...

**Almost Graduated from Bardic College:** there is an older ballad about a folk hero who confronts an unbound fire elemental and lives to tell the tale, but the teacher of that class really disliked you—it was totally unjustified—and you skipped a bunch of those lectures. Do you remember how that folk hero outwitted the fire spirit?


**Veteran of the Ogrewar:** as a grunt in the war, you witnessed both the laughable arrogance of the wizard officers as well as the dangerous fallout of magic gone wrong. Many front-line fighters came away with a profound distrust of magic, a disdain for the haughty mages, or both; will your own unease or disregard make things difficult for you now?


## THE TOP

When the last die is removed from the crisis pool, the heroes have reached the top of the tower. Read the following:

The top room of the arcanery is remarkably preserved, probably thanks to the runework inscribed into the flagstones that make up the floor. This was plainly a work space, filled with trestle tables, bookshelves, and storage chests. The chests are all flung open and the bookshelves have large gaps in them. It looks like there were survivors of whatever happened to the lower levels of the tower and they grabbed some things before they evacuated. Four windows open out onto the empty air, providing a commanding view of the battlements and a circuitous path to the keep's entrance.

As you move around this room, however, the structure beneath you groans and shudders. No matter how protected this room is, it won't stay up here for long.

Once the heroes gain the top of the Arcanery, the GM should feel free to share the player map of the level. They might also suggest that this is a great opportunity to make a test-created asset, either a **Map of the Battlements**, a **Battle Plan**, or similar. At the low low cost of a , the heroes can use such an asset for the rest of the level.

There is also a great deal of sorcerous tools, materials, and grimoires here, and the heroes may wish to make loot rolls. Magical loot found in the Arcanery has a die cap of .



# THE SANGUINE YARD

## FIGHTING A MOB WITH ATTACKS, ASSETS, AND RECOVERS

You come upon a broad open space in the midst of the Battlements, a place so notorious that you all know its name: the Sanguine Yard, where the Dread Tyrant's armies train and his captives are executed. The gallows is set out in the center of the yard, but before it is arrayed an even more horrific sight: two massive ogre revenants, tearing into each other. As you watch, one digs its fingers into the half-rotten flesh of the other's arm and tears most of the bicep off the bone. But the grey skin and bulging muscle remaining only ripples and flows back across the bone, regrowing until it is whole again.

Then the ogres stop fighting, sniff the air, and turn to face you. As one, the ogres charge towards you, roaring and cackling at the promise of fresh meat.

This is a hefty combat encounter with some horrific monsters. This is a chance for the more martially-inclined characters to shine and for the GM to hand out some stress. While the dangerous encounter might be escaped and then circumvented, the heroes only skip it at their own risk.

### OGRE REVENANTS

*And you thought they stank when they were alive...*

#### MOB TRAIT

RAVENOUS MONSTERS

HULKING 8

UNHOLY REGENERATION 10

#### SCENE DISTINCTION

HAUNTED GALLOWS 8

Note that, while there are two ogres, they use the same trait block. The ogres fight as one unit and any stress they have is rolled when fighting either ogre.

### AN UGLY FIGHT

This encounter follows the same rough procedure as **RATKIN RUMBLE** in the Dungeon, but players now have more options on their turn.


The ogres take the first action; roll their **Mob** and **Hulking** to set the difficulty as they lay into the heroes. If the heroes are spread out, the ogres might explicitly attack only one or two for **Injured** stress, while the same terrifying attack deals **Demoralized** stress to everyone else. Invite all the players to roll a relevant die pool in response, beating the difficulty or taking stress equal to the ogres' effect die.






## PLAYER TURNS

Then go around the table with each player taking one of the following four actions:

**Attack the Ogres:** on a success, direct attacks on the ogres inflict stress; stress higher than  removes a die from the **Mob** trait and is eliminated. On a failure, the ogres inflict stress on the hero equal to their effect die.

**Create an Asset:** the heroes can get into position, prepare a devastating spell, or let out a warcry to inspire their allies. All of these make great test-created assets: **In Position**, **Prepared Spell**, **Warcry**. On a success, the hero gains an asset equal to their effect die. They may give this asset to another hero if they were setting something up for their ally to exploit. These assets last the entire encounter; if the player wants to keep it longer (and it makes sense to do so), they may spend a  to make it last the whole level. On a failure, the ogres' pool inflicts stress on the hero equal to its effect die—assuming the ogres can attack them.

**Recover Stress:** players with big stress may want to get rid of it, although this is not always possible. Players can take their turn to try and shake their **Demoralized** or **Exhausted** stress, but generally can't "walk off" **Injured** stress. Moreover, most of the heroes do not have high traits for these kinds of rolls. The exception is the Cleric, who has traits to support recovery rolls and whose **Divine Blessings** distinction gives them holy magic to heal injuries in the heat of battle. Assuming the hero can attempt it, addressing stress is a standard recovery roll. Set the difficulty by rolling the ogres' **Mob** trait (**Hulking** and **Unholy Regeneration** aren't applicable). On a success, eliminate the targeted stress if it's smaller than the effect die; otherwise, step it down. On a failure, the ogres get in a whack on the distracted hero and inflict stress equal to their effect die.

**Flee:** The heroes may attempt to flee, which is a simple test. Success means the character has escaped the ogres for now and can't be attacked by them. If everyone gets away, the encounter ends. However, the ogres don't just fade out of existence; they will be tracking the heroes' scent through the rest of the Battlements. Any failed test that might normally mean the players run into **WANDERSHADES** might instead mean the ogres finally catch up to them.

## POTENTIAL HINDERS


**Veteran of the OGREWARS:** you fought in the OGREWARS, and saw all manner of terrifying atrocities at their hands. Will facing them again shake your resolve?

**Verdas Jungle Goblin:** the ogres are huge and you are not. Will stabbing their ankles really be an effective tactic?

**Dwarf of Granite Hold:** the ogres take huge strides and can run you down before you get off a shot. Do your shorter legs struggle to keep you out of harm's way?

**Halfling from The Canton:** the ogres are huge and you are not. Will stabbing their ankles really be an effective tactic?

## OGRE TURNS

On their turn, the ogres can attack again, with all heroes rolling to defend. Alternately, the Ogres may use **Unholy Regeneration** to roll to recover their **Injured** stress. If the heroes can muster some means of interfering, they can assemble a die pool to use as the difficulty. Otherwise the regeneration succeeds and either eliminates **Injured** stress under  or steps down **Injured**.



## CIRCUMNAVIGATING AND CIRCUMVENTING

Players may want to circumvent the ogres in the Yard rather than go straight through the horrific and dangerous monstrosities. Who can blame them?

This tactic is only available if the ogres don't know where the heroes are, which means first succeeding in tests to flee.

The only route around the yard is through the half-demolished barracks. This is a test that each player must roll against the doom pool. Success means they've made it though the ruined barracks safely; failure means they've disturbed **WANDERSHADES** or attracted the attention of the Ogre Revenants.

Even if they've made it past the ogres, the ogres are still in the Battlements and still on the hunt. The players will also be unable to retreat to **BASE CAMP** without picking their way through the ruined barracks again.

## VICTORY

If the heroes fell the ogres, they will find that the ogres' belt pouches are filled with **Grove Glory Pipeweed**, a prized and rather potent drug from the Canton. A loot roll can turn this into an asset. Asset or no, any halfling far from home might be expected to indulge in a luxury from their homeland. If they happened to overindulge, that would definitely qualify as a **Hinder** at literally any point through the rest of the Battlements!

## AFTER THE YARD

Once the heroes clear the Sanguine Yard, they can enter the Armory or the Desecrated Chapel.

With the Sanguine Yard behind you, you are now facing a structure so squat, ugly, and fortified that it can only be the garrison armory. The building has no windows and only a single door, flanked by guardposts. The skeletal remains of both guards lie sprawled across the entryway. The walls are blackened with soot, and the back half of the structure seems to have been smashed.

To the armory's left, a short path leads up a slight rise between what might have once been rows of trees, but are now ranks of blackened trunks. At the top of the rise sits a stone chapel, more than a little singed but apparently intact.



# THE ARMORY OF THE SPIRE

## A TRAP WITH A BOSS

Ask who's going inside the Armory, and then read the following:

You step inside the dimly-lit armory and your skin immediately prickles. The air inside is cool, but that's not it: there's something very, very wrong in here. The moment you realize this, the doors behind you slam closed and a voice rings out: "Intruders! You may think my armory is vulnerable and short-staffed, but you will rue the day you came to loot my stores! Elmfinel will claim your souls!" With the doors closed and no windows, it's almost pitch black in here. The air stirs, brushing across your skin, and somehow that feels like a threat that something is coming for you.

Now I'm going to roll dice in a moment and you'll need to roll in response. Here's a few potential hinders for you to consider in this encounter.

## POTENTIAL HINDERS

**Almost Graduated from Bardic College:** you know the name Elmfinel—it's a cursed longsword from an ancient war, wielded by a tragic general. It's all a part of a Ballad sequence the details of which you... sort of remember. Will the gaps in your recollection obscure the answers you need?

**Elf of Loratha Forest:** so here's a question for you. You're an elf. How do you feel about cold iron? Because you are surrounded by it.





**Shepherd of the Outcasts:** this armory is haunted, and not just by wandershades but by a pitiful soul kept bound to this world by something evil. Sure, he's out for your blood, but does your sympathy for his plight complicate things for you?

**Veteran of the Ogrewars:** what was your worst experience in the ogre war and how is it right here? There's all sorts of bodies here in what was clearly a hopeless fight, but let's make this personal. Is there something here that absolutely staggers you?

**Haunted Armory:** this is a scene distinction. It's dark and spooky and there are sharp things absolutely everywhere in here. There are so many opportunities for you to have—or nearly have—bloody and fatal accidents. What terrible fate did you nearly escape and how does that hinder what you're trying to do?



## BOO!

Start the encounter by rolling     and adding the two highest; invite the heroes to beat this difficulty to successfully stand their ground; otherwise they'll flee into the dark corridors of the armory. Which is great start to an encounter, generally speaking.


## PLAYER TURNS

After the heroes show their resolve or careen off into the darkness, go around the table asking each what they do. This may be a test or not, depending.

There are torches on the walls; it's a test to light them in the darkness. Finding their way back to their friends, or finding a friend who fled into the darkness, is a test. All of these tests can be rolled against the doom pool.

Confronting or outwitting the ghost is a test, as is trying to unseal the doors using magic. Set the difficulty using Kor Bladesinger's traits for these tests. The heroes can only lash out at the ghost physically if he's manifested nearby, but they can call out to him anywhere in the armory and he will hear. Bladesinger is pretty chatty and will answer most questions, even if his responses are full of dire warnings and chidings from beyond the grave.

Importantly, the heroes can attempt to figure out what is happening around them. This may be spurred by the elements in **A STORY WRITTEN IN SOOT AND CORPSES** or the players' own initiative. Roll these attempts as a test; success creates an asset equal to the player's effect die. Such assets might be **The Sword is Cursed**, **The Ghost is the Quartermaster**, **Powered by Guilt**, or similar.

Any 1s the players roll adds the die to the doom pool and earns them a . Describe some extra detail going awry as they pick their way through the spooky darkness.

## BLADESINGER'S TURNS

When everyone in the armory has taken an action, it's time for the ghost of the quartermaster to act. Bladesinger's goal is simple and bloody: to kill the intruders. He can manifest anywhere in the armory at will, and will focus his attacks on heroes who have strayed from their friends.

Roll these attacks as tests, with Bladesinger inflicting stress if the player fails to beat his difficulty. If the player beats Bladesinger's difficulty, they might inflict stress of their own, depending on how they are defending themselves.

Alternately, Bladesinger might try to terrify a group of heroes again, causing them to panic and split up if they fail to beat his difficulty.

Then go around the table again.


## SCENE DISTINCTION


HAUNTED ARMORY 

### KOR BLADESINGER, GHOSTLY QUARTERMASTER

#### BOSS TRAIT

GUILT-WRACKED WRAITH

INSUBSTANTIAL 

ELMFINEL, THE CURSED LONGSWORD 





## A STORY WRITTEN IN SOOT AND CORPSES

As his people were slaughtered by the rampaging dragon, quartermaster Kor Bladesinger realized he could do nothing to stop it on his own. Desperate, he went deep into the armory and broke the seal on Elmfinel. Even with that cursed longsword, the quartermaster fell before the dragon. He might have died at peace, knowing he had done everything in his power, but Elmfinel keeps him tied to this world and torments him with visions of his loss. Now his ghost is fixated on defending the armory from all intruders, and unfortunately the heroes fit the bill.

Snippets of Bladesinger's fall are littered throughout the building. Sprinkle these into the scenes in which he stalks them through his armory:

- Kor Bladesinger's office, just off the entrance. The papers are mostly inventory and personnel records, but they paint a clear picture that equipping the garrison of Tour Toriel was a complicated enterprise involving a lot of people.
- There are bodies all through the corridors, most burnt, some with ghastly slashes through their bellies. They're clearly casualties to a dragon. Bladesinger furiously attacks heroes who try to investigate closer, shouting that they will not defile the body, always referring to the fallen by name: Josephus, Karalla, Black Anna, Kit, Jameson.
- Bladesinger's own body lies crumpled in the corner of a storage room. The ork's body is unarmed since his ghost carries Elmfinel, but the room bears all the hallmarks of a titanic battle between a fire-spitting, claw-slashing dragon and a capable warrior. The barrels and chests on the shelves are slashed by both claw and sword. The floor is covered in scorch marks—more than elsewhere in the armory—and there are steel-shod bootprints on top of the soot, implying that the fight kept going well after the first few blasts of fire.
- In the stone basement, in a room set apart from the rest, an empty sword case sits on a pedestal. The case is emblazoned with dead runes, and the floor is inscribed with a binding circle, one segment of which is broken with scuff marks. A set of shelves on the wall bear all the materials needed to refresh the binding circle as well a meticulously-kept maintenance schedule.

## SPLITTING THE PARTY

This encounter features an antagonist trying to split up the party and then attacking the heroes when they're alone. This may feel like a tactical move, but it's mostly a genre convention. That's how ghost stories work!

Players may still worry that splitting the party will put them at a significant disadvantage. The GM (or other players) may need to gently explain that the disadvantage of a split party is relatively minor, and comes with a powerful means to focus scenes and give individual players the spotlight.



## ESCAPING THE ARMORY

The doors are sealed shut by the power of Bladesinger's ghostly fixation. Any attempts to physically force them open again automatically fail: brute force can't undo guilt from beyond the grave.

The seal might be counterspelled, but that will require understanding what motivates the seal, and for that the heroes will need to confront the ghost. Luckily, he's a very chatty spectre, and a successful test will get him talking. Once the heroes understand that it is the ghost's grief that seals the doors, a counterspell can be performed with a single test. Roll Bladesinger's traits to set the difficulty.

Like any Boss, if Bladesinger gains stress higher than a die in his **Boss** trait, the **Boss** trait is reduced by one die and the stress is eliminated. What that looks like depends entirely on the players' methods.

The quartermaster can return Elmfinel to its case himself, reactivate the wards, and redraw its binding circle, but he'd have to be talked down. This follows the same exact dice mechanics as physically fighting him, inflicting **Exhausted** stress and reducing dice from his **Boss** trait. If he lays down the sword, his spirit passes on and the doors unseal.

Failing all else, if Kor is defeated and dissipated by force, the doors immediately unseal.

With Kor removed either way, the heroes can search the armory and make loot rolls. Weapon and armor assets created in the Armory have a die cap of 10.

If Bladesinger takes out everyone in the Armory and there are other heroes outside, the front doors will creak open, allowing the rest of the party to come investigate. Once they're inside, however, the whole encounter will begin again, except with their friends scattered through the armory corridors, slowly bleeding out.

## WIELDING ELMFINEL

Some player will inevitably ask about picking up and using Elmfinel, even after suffering at the hands of a tortured soul entrapped by the cursed blade. Explain that attempting to claim Elmfinel immediately adds a 10 to the doom pool, and then the player must roll a test against the doom pool.

If they succeed, their effect die becomes the asset rating, and they'll need to spend a PP to keep it for the rest of the session. (Yes, it's a loot roll.) Elmfinel comes with a Hinder SFX of its own, which is only half of its curse. The GM will reveal the rest if and when the blade is carried into the Keep.

If the player fails, they cannot bring themselves to wield the cursed blade: simply touching the hilt fills their mind with frightful and incomprehensible whispers. They simply can't hold it for long, let alone swing it in combat.

Particularly saucy players may ask about cleansing Elmfinel of its curse, which sounds awesome and is an appropriate subject for a whole different adventure.

## OUTSIDE THE ARMORY

If only some of the heroes went into the Armory, you can either run the scene with just the heroes who went inside or you can interleave the events inside the armory with events outside the armory. Maybe they try to pry open the armory doors from the outside; maybe they disturb some wandershades; maybe the ogres catch up with them. Maybe they make camp and chill out.

If you are very secure in your ability to juggle scenes, the other heroes might investigate the Desecrated Chapel at the same time. A talented GM can interleave alternating scenes from both encounters, but this can be a daunting task. If you start down this path and discover it's just too much for you or your table to keep track of, just focus on one encounter and finish it before switching over to the other one.



# THE DESECRATED CHAPEL

## PARALLEL CONTESTS

The chapel doors open as you step up to them, and a ragged-looking woman peeks out at you. Then she sighs in relief and welcomes you inside. Perhaps half a dozen smiling people are just inside the doors, evidently very glad to see you. They ask if you've seen any other survivors as they press food and wine into your hands. It's not much, one says, but we have to stick together if we're going to make it out of here. In short order, they explain that they have holed up here since the dragon attack, praying for someone to come save them. All of which is a lie.

This encounter is run as parallel contests for each hero in the chapel. The "survivors" are in fact demons who have infested the chapel after it was desecrated in the dragon attack. They try to lure the heroes away from each other using a variety of tempting illusions and then subdue them with infernal chains.

## POTENTIAL HINDERS

**Divine Blessings:** whenever you are in a chapel built by devout hands, you are buoyed up by the faith laid down along with the bricks. But when you reach out for that bulwark, it's not there. Is that absence disconcerting enough to hobble you?

**Heartbreaking Homewrecker:** it has been a very long slog up through the dungeons and it is going to be a long slog up to the pinnacle, and these nice people are all smiles and gentle touches and wouldn't it be nice to slip away into a dark corner to blow off some steam?

**Sharp Eyes:** you rely on your keen eyesight, and right now, everything you see is... perfect. Now, things don't sound quite right, and there's a pervasive rotten smell, so the question is: do you rely too much on how things look?


**Terminally Curious:** these nice people have an unexplained magic thingy that they'd like to show you! Are you curious enough about the mysterious artifact that you gloss over the inconsistencies in their story?

## PACK OF INPHESTAI

*Be... our... guest, be our guest, you've got questions? Roll a contest...*

### MOB TRAIT

DECEIVING DEMONS

PLEASING ILLUSIONS 





## FIRST ROUND: DISTRACTION

Go around the table and describe what temptations the “survivors” offer each hero, which may range from simple wine and rest to a “curious artifact that fell out of the Arcanery, can you make heads or tails of it?” The demons might even tell the Cleric that they have wounded in a back room and ask for healing. Roll the Demons’ dice and add two together to set the initial difficulty. If you roll any 1s, you might drop in mention of desecrated holy icons on the walls or thrown on the floor, highlighting that something is definitely not right here.

Then tell the player, flat out, that the “survivors” are lying and using illusions to deceive them; invite them to assemble a pool and roll for their character to resist these illusory temptations.

If the player beats their difficulty, tell them they notice something awry or have a bad feeling about this. The survivors look ragged and desperate, but they’re also far too happy to see adventurers invading their fortress. Remind the players that this is a contest, and it’s not over yet. Have them keep their totalled dice in front of them; you’ll come back to them in a moment.

If the player fails to beat the difficulty, describe how they are lured away from their allies into a concealed corner or back room. As soon as they’re out of sight, the “survivors” flick their fingers and summon floating chains from thin air. The chains wrap around the hero and a gag goes into their mouth. Explain that the player has two options: either they are taken out of the scene and will have to rely on an ally for rescue, or they can spend a **PP** to instead take a complication, **Bound in Infernal Chains**, equal to the effect die of your roll.

## SECOND ROUND: TEMPTATION

Then go around the table again. For heroes who have failed their contests, describe the demons turning their backs on them to prepare infernal rituals to harvest their life energy. Heroes who have been taken out do not get to act, but heroes who spent a **PP** to take a complication can attempt to recover that complication. As long as they still have the complication, they are bound and gagged and cannot warn the others.

Heroes who succeeded on the last roll are suspicious, so when you get to them, the demons now double down, expanding and deepening their temptations. That artifact they mentioned, it’s glowing and sparking with power. Now that we’ve got some wine, can we have a nice, intimate chat over there? Roll the demons’ dice again, putting together a total of two dice and trying to beat the total showing on the dice still sitting in front of the player.

If the demons beat the player’s total, invite the player to roll and try to beat the demons’ new total. If they succeed, evidence and suspicion continue to mount up. If they fail, it’s infernal chains for them, too.

If the demons fail to beat the player’s total, the illusion falls apart and the hero realizes the truth. The “survivors” are in fact demons, with glowing red eyes and horns and the pervasive stench of brimstone. The chapel is not barricaded and safe, but desecrated and befouled. Anyone bound by infernal chains are just around a corner or behind a pew; without the illusions, they are in plain sight.



## THIRD ROUND AND BEYOND: SEDUCTION

On the third time around the table, you may have heroes in four different states: taken out, bound by infernal chains, suspicious but not yet aware of what is happening, or fully aware of the danger they are all in. For those taken out, bound, or in contests, the third round proceeds the same way as the second.

Those who have realized that the “survivors” are actually demons may try to confront the demons or try to save their friends. Confronting the demons is a test and successes inflict stress (**Injured** for physical attacks and **Demoralized** for exorcism); any stress larger than the **Mob** die removes a die and is eliminated. Players still in contests will be able to roll the demons’ stress in their upcoming rolls.

Alternately, heroes who know the truth can try to help their friends see the reality of the situation. They may point out inconsistencies in the story, they might shout that the beguiling survivor is in fact a demon. They might just grab them by the shoulders and shake. Whatever the tactic, this is a test rolled against the demons’ dice. On a success, the hero creates an asset equal to their effect die and gives it to the hero they’re trying to convince. That’s one more die for their attempt to see through the pleasant illusions.

Heroes might also try to free their friends who are **Bound By Infernal Chains**. This is a straight recovery roll against the doom pool plus the complication’s rating. On a success, the complication is stepped down; if the player’s effect die is larger than the complication, it is eliminated altogether. Heroes who are freed can see through the demonic illusions.

Continue around the table until all the heroes are freed or bound. The demons have no desire to engage in an actual fight, and will flee once everyone is freed. (Alternately you can extend this encounter to include a fight or exorcism.)

If the demons manage to entrap all of the heroes, their life energies are harvested and the dessicated husks of their bodies are tossed into a corner. Their adventure is over.

## A CLEANSED CHAPEL

If the demon flee or are exorcised from the chapel, players may make loot rolls. Religious assets created in the chapel have a die cap of 10. Additionally, the chapel can be barricaded and even reconsecrated in a make camp roll, if the heroes need some time and space to make recovery rolls before proceeding onward through the Battlements.

## WAIT, WHAT’S A COMPLICATION?

A complication is basically a special kind of stress that doesn’t fall into the other three categories. Your opposition rolls your complications when they would, well, complicate your own efforts. We’ll use lots of complications in the next level.



# THE UNASSAILABLE GATES OF TOUR TORIEL

## A CONTEST WITH SUPPORT ROLLS

As you step into the next courtyard, a nightmarish silhouette looms high above you: the unassailable gates of Tour Toriel. These gates have held off assaults and invasions to the fortress for hundreds of years, before even the Dread Tyrant occupied the tower. They are no less terrifying from behind: tall spires of blackened stone buttressed by thick walls. The gate is topped by platforms where siege weapons rain destruction down on any foolish enough to challenge the spire. The gates are flanked by towers whose internal stairs lead up to the top.

Here's the thing: you've been hacking your way through a deserted garrison, and no sane army would attempt to besiege the tower. And yet you can still hear the cannons firing and the artillery crews calling out ranges. Something is happening up on the ramparts. Do you want to investigate?

To gain the ramparts, the heroes will need to fight their way up the tower stairs, which are populated by the ghosts of their defenders, still at their posts even after death. This is a contest: one hero may take the lead in pressing their advance up the stairs with the other heroes following behind. Go around the table for turns; the lead hero's player rolls to advance the contest. Other players may create assets for the leader such as **Cover Fire** or **Wind at Our Backs** or make recovery rolls for the leader or any other characters.

On the GM's turn, the Defenders roll to advance their side of the contest. Roll in **Insubstantial** if the hero leading the contest is using physical attacks to dissipate the ghosts; roll in **Magebane Ammo** if magic is being used against them. The Defenders always roll their **Mob** trait and the **Narrow Defensive Stairs** scene distinction.

Heroes may wish to avoid the stairs in favor of scaling the walls or other approaches. These can also be handled as a contest. Depending on the circumstances, they may not have the support of the other heroes and their success might not clear the way for the others.

If the Defenders fail to beat the players' difficulty, they lose the contest and are taken out. Alternately, if they face down a difficulty of 16 or more, the Defenders give in (technically they might hit a higher difficulty, but it is unlikely). Either way, they suddenly remember that they're dead, howling as they remember dragon flames engulfing them, and dissolve into thin air. The hero makes it up to the ramparts, and possibly clears a path for the rest of the party.

If the hero fails to beat the escalating difficulty, they are taken out: they are grievously injured or simply run out of the will to press on. A hero who is taken out cannot act for the remainder of the encounter. Another hero might take the lead for a followup contest or the heroes may retreat back down the tower. A losing hero can avoid being taken out by spending a **PP** and gaining stress, instead.

If the difficulty climbs higher than the lead hero thinks they can beat, they can always give in instead of roll, which will earn them a **PP** and allow them to describe how and why they don't make it to the top. They might get to a landing that they can barricade, for instance, or they might urge the others onward while they heroically hold off a wave of reinforcements coming down a side corridor. Another player can take the lead for the rest of the way up, starting a new contest.

A new followup contest resets the difficulty to the total of the first roll in that contest.



Throughout the contest and for all other tests in this encounter, use the Defenders as the opposition pool. Any hitches the players roll may be activated to inflict or step up stress: they might take a bullet (**Injured**), get momentarily separated (**Demoralized**), or simply tire out (**Exhausted**).

## SCENE DISTINCTIONS

**NARROW DEFENSIVE STAIRS**

## ORKISH TOWER DEFENDERS

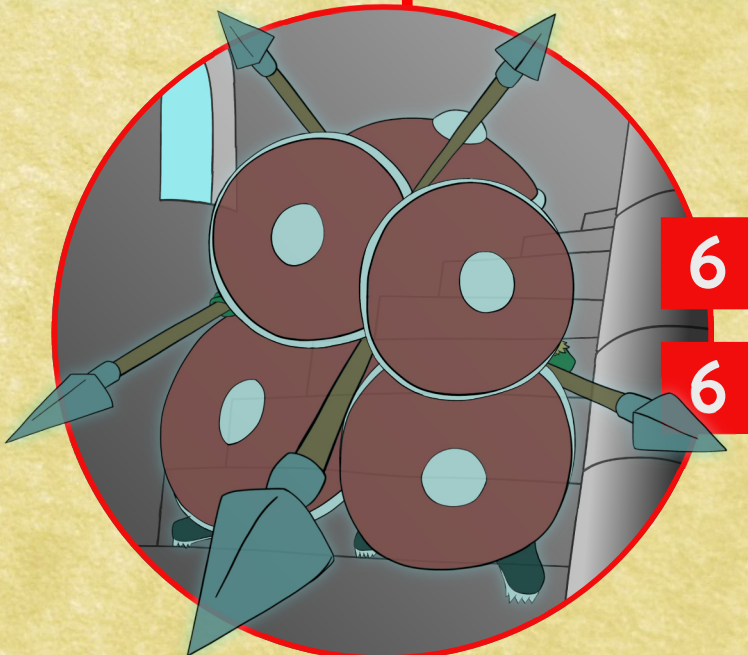
*In formation and in denial.*

### MOB TRAIT

**DEDICATED APPARITIONS**

**INSUBSTANTIAL** 10

**MAGEBANE AMMO** 8



## POTENTIAL HINDERS

**Narrow Defensive Stairs:** Castle stairs wind up their towers clockwise, which puts right-handed fighters at a disadvantage when climbing the stairs. Anybody who's right handed can use the scene distinction's Hinder to roll a 4 and gain a PP. (Or any hero can reveal that they're left handed and roll it as a 8!)

**Outlands Ork:** Siegecraft is a science among orks, and the gates are crawling with the ghosts of the orks who once defended them and still do. You are facing down the unquiet spirits of your own people; does that give you pause?

**Intiatie of the Arcane Mysterium:** These defenders are armed with magebane ammunition! This alchemical mixture can coat a ball or arrow, twisting the arcane forces around it and shredding spellwork. Does this make leveraging your magic harder?

**Over Hill and Dale:** The tower stairs are tight and enclosed. Not only does this greatly reduce the effective range of your shots, it's also distinctly uncomfortable to somebody accustomed to the wide open spaces. Does the cramped and claustrophobic tower limit your effectiveness?

**World Traveller:** The tower walls are festooned with the tattered banners of armies who tried and failed to assault the fortress. Do you find among them the emblems of your old friends and allies, and does the knowledge that they died here soften your mettle?



## ATOP THE RAMPARTS

If and when the heroes reach the ramparts, read the following:



The scene atop the ramparts is one of disciplined haste, as cannons fire into the sky and archers and musketeers fire through the parapets and murderholes. All of the soldiers here are ghosts and pay no attention to your intrusion. They are so intent, in fact, that a pair of them walk right through you, lugging an equally ephemeral cannonball between them. They load the ball into the cannon and then send it thundering out onto the battlefield below.

There is no besieging army, although the churned mud below is full of bodies and banners, all broken by this ceaseless ghostly barrage. These ghosts don't seem to notice that there's no one left to fight.

It takes a moment for you to realize, but one figure stands off to the side, watching but not a part of the defensive machine in action. More surprisingly, they're quite corporeal. A survivor?


While the survivor may be initially wary of the heroes, he will put up his hands in peace and introduce himself as Lieutenant Albert Brownfoot, a halfling soldier of the garrison. While mourning and trauma make him reticent, he can confirm what the heroes have probably already put together: a dragon sprang up out of nowhere, demolished the barracks and then laid waste to the rest of the battlements. He will also share that there are a handful of survivors holed up in the keep's foyer; he was with them for a time, then struck out to 'scout' the ruins, only to find his husband here on the ramparts, a ghost stuck in a loop.

Brownfoot can communicate with the survivors in the keep via signal mirror, and after making his report will explain that his comrades will open the keep doors for the heroes. The only problem is the four revenant ogres presently trying to bash down those doors. If asked how the heroes can help, Brownfoot is pessimistic, saying there is nothing to be done. Even if the survivors can fight their way to the gate, once outside, they'd be destroyed by this undying barrage. As Brownfoot watches his husband load the cannons, it is also plain that he is loathe to leave at all.

Players may wish to exorcise or otherwise disable the siege teams on the gates, which is good fodder for a test. Remind players that they can hinder this roll, too. If they incorporate him into the exorcism, players may spend a  to turn Brownfoot into a  asset. Roll the doom pool for opposition.

On a failure, the ghosts dissipate for a little while, but reform shortly thereafter and immediately get back to work defending their post. The players may only try again when they bring different resources or circumstances to bear, which is probably outside the scope of this session.

On a success, the gates finally fall silent. Players may also wish to send word to the outside world that the gates of Tour Toriel have been abandoned, although reinforcements will take weeks to gather and march. The ugly purple rent in the sky is not going to wait.

The ghosts are all firing ephemeral ammunition, but stores of the real stuff are here, too. Players may make a loot roll to pick up weapons and equipment from the stores. Ranged weapon assets created on the ramparts have a dice cap of .



# THE TYRANT'S STABLES

## TESTS AND REVEALS

As you cross the courtyard, the wide doors of the stable creak open and you hear movement and a soft knicker. A moment later, a horse pushes the door wider and steps out of the building. It's a fine animal, a prize stallion if ever you saw one, and it's undoubtably alive and whole. The stables are a little singed around the edges, but they look to have escaped the devastation. You can see a few more horses inside, wandering about like the untended animals they are.

But—and of course there's a but—everyone in the battlements died weeks ago, which inspires you to wonder what these horses have been eating. And that's when the lead horse leans down to nose at one of the many half-charred bodies strewn about the courtyard, and takes a big, bloody bite. The other horses step outside and start eating other corpses, as well.

To be clear, these horses don't seem hostile, and you could just walk past the stables entirely. Or you can look closer...

This is a wholly optional encounter that is not required to complete the Battlements or have the story make coherent sense. It is also, however, an opportunity for the players to make a few rolls, hinder some distinctions, and come away with some plot points.

Sprinkling a few such opportunities, or encouraging players to create their own, can provide an adventure with a little leavening. Let the energy at the table fall a little and allow everyone a chance to catch their breath before dashing into the next death-defying encounter.

## ROLLING TESTS

The horses in the stable are indeed not hostile, but they are under a mysterious and dangerous curse. The heroes can untangle the curse through a series of tests. Roll the doom pool for the opposition.

## POTENTIAL HINDERS

**Caer Larionad Human:** These are plainly Larionad stallions, the pride of your hometown. Is your impulse to put them down or save them, somehow? Does indecision handicap your ability to do either?

**On the Hunt:** You have slain uncountable beasts, but always in the field, on the hunt, where the outcome was determined by a fair contest of you pitting your abilities against the wilds. These animals never asked to be twisted into mockeries of their natural shapes. Can you bring yourself to cull them? Is it safe to let them free? How conflicted does this situation make you feel?

**Divine Blessings:** What has been done to these animals is a travesty, a perversion of all that this beasts were ever intended to be. What kind of divine powers could have allowed such abominations to exist in the first place?

**Elf of Loratha Forest:** These horses are clear perversions of nature; can you even stand to be near them?



## REVEALS

Most tests will be attempts to gather information, and there's a bulleted list of things the players might figure out below. On any successful test, describe the heroes figuring out one or more of the bullet points, whichever best suit their method of inquiry. On a failed investigative test, the heroes get nothing... or you can offer them a nugget of information for stepping up their **Demoralized** stress (especially for bad news).

- The Dread Tyrant's generals don't ride stallions like these into battle; they ride Fleshsculpted Destriers: horses warped by magic into terrifying monstrosities.
- These horses are cursed.
- Magic has made the horses' essence plastic, so that their bodies and temperments are malleable.
- Normally wizard handlers would apply more magic over the course of weeks to shape the horse to their specifications, but the process was halted halfway—probably by the dragon attack.
- There are also stories of Carrion Steeds, abandoned horses who resorted to eating corpses to survive, who inevitably progress to running down and eating the living.
- The horses have already developed a taste for flesh.
- If the horses continue to eat carrion, they will become Carrion Steeds.

Once you've revealed all of the information, tell the players that there's nothing more to discover. Don't try to do this in a clever way within the story: just tell the people you're playing with that there are no more bullet points on your list.

## RESOLUTIONS

At some point, the players will move from figuring out what's wrong to trying to fix it (or simply walking away). Nearly any solution can be handled as a test. Continuing the process as originally intended will take weeks, but the players may try to halt or reverse the process. They might also conclude that the only humane thing is to put down the horses. Even freeing the horses into the Toriel Highlands can work as a test of opening the main gates or finding a sally port. All of these tests are rolled against the doom pool.

There is no right or wrong answer, here. The function of this encounter is to provide an opportunity to express characterization (and maybe earn some plot points). Whatever the players choose to do will tell the table what kind of person their hero is.








# THE DEMOLISHED PROMENADE

## TIMED TESTS

There has only ever been one way from the gate yard up to the keep yard: the Promenade of Victory, a monumental covered stair where returning conquerors would end their march home in triumph. From the gabled roof and walls hung banners of glory and great arrays of trophies. Now, however, the roof has been caved in, smashed from the sky and reduced to smouldering rubble.

Even from where you stand, you can see that the ruin harbors the glowing forms of ghosts, all wearing the armor of the Summitwarders. These elite elven spellswords formed the honor guard of the promenade, and were apparently inside when the roof came down. The ghosts are still on duty, but they are scattered and confused. It's possible, if you move through the rubble quickly enough, that you can get through without having to fight them all.

Run this encounter as a series of timed tests. The players will need to make a number of tests equal to the number of players times two. They will have a limited number of beats in which to do it: the number of tests minus one. The result of each test rolled determines how many beats it takes. A success consumes one beat. A failure consumes two beats. A heroic success—beating the difficulty by five or more—consumes no successes.

Especially if the players are flush with plot points already, remind them that, before the mad dash begins, they can take a moment to prepare by creating assets with tests. By default, any test-created asset is only good for one player for one scene, but spending a  makes it available to everyone. The heroes might survey the rubble and form a **Plan** , rig a **Noisy Distraction** , perform a ritual on everyone's shoes so they have a **Fleet-Footed Blessing** , or even cloak the whole party in an **Invisibility Glamour** .

## RUNNING TIMED TESTS

An easy way to explain and track timed tests is with tokens and a scrap of paper. On the paper, draw a number of checkboxes equal to the tests the players need to make. Then set out a number of tokens equal to the beats they have to do it in. Each test—succeed or fail—ticks off one checkbox, and each result will consume one, two, or zero tokens.

Go around the table and ask each player how they are contributing to the effort to get the entire party up the ruined promenade. They might scout the best paths, ambush individual ghosts, or simply scramble up the stairs as fast as they can. Even helping their companions is a great test, and requires no additional dice mechanics. Whatever their method for getting the party to the top of the stairs, roll it as a test.

For most tests, set the difficulty by rolling the doom pool. If the players are directly confronting or circumventing the ghosts, roll the Summitwarders' dice instead. Assuming the players are only tangling with one or two ghosts at a time, their **Mob** trait is usually not applicable and does not go into their pool.

If the player's result beats the difficulty by five or more, that is a heroic success. Describe the hero's daring deeds, or invite the player to do so. This test costs no beats.

If the player's result beats the difficulty, they succeed at their part in the ascent. Describe that success with enthusiasm and then describe the ghosts looming overhead, patrolling their assignment or searching for intruders. This test costs one beat.

If the player's result does not beat the difficulty, their intended action goes sour. They stumble, get stuck, or get cut off by a ghostly patroller and have to backtrack. This test costs two beats.



Succeed or fail, if the players roll any 1s, describe a misstep or unfortunate circumstance that complicates but does not alter the result of their roll. Add the die that rolled the 1 to your doom pool. If the doom pool is getting large—five or more dice—spend one of the dice to inflict stress equal to the die size. Twisted ankles make for **Injured** stress, or the simple terror of being hunted by ghosts can make them **Demoralized**.

The GM does not take a turn during timed tests.

Assuming the players do not run out of beats, you will go around the table twice. When the last player makes their second test, the heroes have made it to the top of the promenade. They may have encountered a ghost or two on the way up, but they have not alerted the whole honor guard. All that is left is getting through the Cursed Treasury.

## POTENTIAL HINDERS

**Elf of Loratha Forest:** Elves live long lives, but they are not immortal. The elven ghosts here are reminders of your own mortality. Does that rattle you?

**Over Hill and Dale:** your home is the wide open wilds, with the wide sky above you and the endless landscape all around you. How well do you do in tight, constricting spaces, like this tight squeeze through the rubble?

**Outlands Ork:** the passage through the rubble is at times very narrow. As a noble ork, you are many things, but narrow is not one of them. Will your strong orkish shoulders and powerful orkish frame make it difficult for you to slip through the rubble?

**Verdas Jungle Goblin:** You are from the tropical rainforest, where the weather is hot and steamy all year round. How are you doing with these frost-wreathed ghosts?

## PINNED DOWN

If a player test would consume more beats than are left, the Summitwarders pin them down in the midst of the ruined promenade. Run this the same way as you ran the Sanguine Yard, using the Summitwarders mob. Players may still Hinder their rolls in the fight scene.

## SUMMITWARDERS, THE ELVEN HONOR GUARD

*These elite guards won't let a little thing like death get in the way of their duty.*

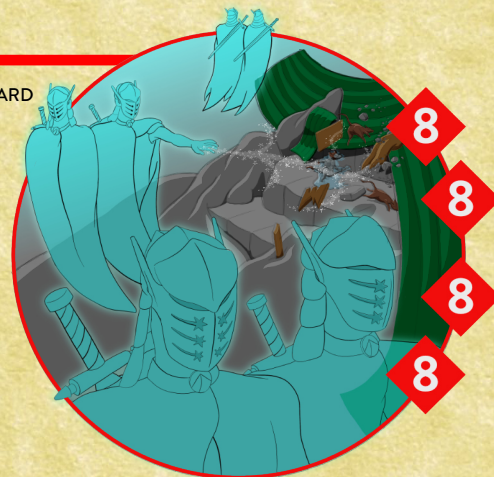
### MOB TRAIT

ELITE GHOSTLY GUARD

DISCIPLINE 6

KEEN EYES 6

FROST MAGIC 10



## ADJUSTING THE DEMOLISHED PROMENADE

You can make this encounter run longer or shorter by adjusting the number of tests and beats. Especially if you have just a few players, having everyone do three or even four tests will make for a drawn out and tense action sequence. You can also change the number of beats to make the encounter easier or harder: more beats than required tests will give the heroes more breathing room; fewer beats than tests will make things fraught and tense.



# THE CURSED TREASURY

## TESTS AND STRESS

The keep yard is full of shouting and roaring as four revenant ogres rail against a line of halberdiers and crumbling barricades arrayed before the tall keep doors. Through the melee you spy the commander waving to get your attention, then directing you into the half-smashed building on your left. It is a long building with a door near you and another door on the other side of the barricades. Walking through an ogre fight is suicide, but there is apparently a way around.

When you step through the near door, you find yourself in a glittering wash of golden light. This room is filled with gold, silver, and gemstones, spilling out of stacked chests and crates, barrels and sacks. Bejeweled sets of ceremonial armor, silken tapestries of exquisite embroidery, and statuary of solid gold with gemstone eyes are all strewn amid the piles of wealth. This must be the treasury of the Dread Tyrant: collecting the tribute of all the world into one place.

There is a clear path through the treasury, and at your feet is a dead body. One arm is extended into the piles of treasure, its hand closed around a few gold coins. The hand is blasted black; the arm is withered. The rest of the body is untouched, but her face is fixed in a rictus of agony. The treasury is quite plainly cursed. But all you need to do right now is walk through the treasury, without touching anything, which should be easy, shouldn't it?

Run this encounter as a series of tests, with each player rolling to make it through the treasury. Roll the doom pool for opposition. If the doom pool is large, take a moment to remind the players what they'll be rolling against.

There's no rush here, so players might take a moment to create assets for the upcoming roll, either for themselves or each other. A particularly loquacious (or bombastic) hero might counsel the rest on restraint and spend a **PP** so that everyone may make use of the asset they create. Players may also try to recover stress before attempting this tempting gauntlet.

On a successful test, a hero makes it through the treasury without incident.

On a failure, tell the player that they will be taking stress equal to the doom pool's effect die. Ask the player how they see their character failing. Perhaps they make a grab for some bit of treasure, which burns their hand for **Injured** stress. Or maybe they make it through without touching anything, but at the other end they bemoan all the missed opportunities that wealth represents, and take **Demoralized** stress. Or perhaps shouting down their inner monologue of base impulses just makes them **Exhausted**.

If a player takes stress that steps them past **12**, they are Taken Out of the scene. This doesn't mean death, but it may mean a nervous breakdown or a collapse into obsessive greed. That hero is no longer able to act and cannot make it through the treasury on their own. Another hero will have to roll a test to get their comrade through the treasury, whether that means talking them through to the other side or picking them up and carrying them.



## POTENTIAL HINDERS

**Dwarf of Granite Hold:** Your people have a storied reputation for greed; much of your culture revolves around material goods and material gain. And here is a whole treasury filled to the brim. Think of what you can do, what you could make, with just a handful of that wealth. Now, will those thoughts filling your head hamper your passage?

**Terminally Curious:** You spy among the gold and jewels a sorcerous artifact glowing with power. It looks like a tool to measure ley line energy, but it has extra glyphs and control rods of mysterious utility. The mundane treasures are untouchable, surely, but who would actually curse a useful tool? It must be safe to scoop up, right?

**World Traveller:** Sure, there are piles upon piles and chests upon chests of gold coin, but you also see ceremonial masks, bejeweled symbols of office, embroidered regalia: artifacts of peoples all across the world, essential elements of their religious ceremonies. How much does it pain you to just leave it all in the treasury?

**Slippery Sneak:** So many riches are laid out before you, and not all of them can be cursed, right? Right?



# THE DOORS OF THE KEEP

## A STANDOFF AND A CHOICE

You come out of the treasury behind the lines keeping the ogre revenants at bay, and the first thing you notice is the shining white walls. Everywhere else you have gone through the battlements, the walls have been scorched black, the ground layered with ash and soot. But you can see here in the yard: the scorch marks end abruptly. The dragon's rampage stopped here.

The commander approaches you, sword sheathed. "I don't know who you are," they shout over the roars of the ogres, "but you're not dead, so you're an ally. Come. It's safer to talk inside." They gesture towards the doors into the keep, which are immediately pushed opened by guards within.

This final encounter can proceed in a number of different ways. It can be a brief coda to the level, cooling down with some expository roleplaying. If the players insist, however, it can turn into a final bloody combat. It can even turn into a three-way battle if they like. Follow the lead of the players; if they want to cave in the heads of the Dread Tyrant's soldiers, that's their call.

## CHOOSING THE BLOODBATH

If the heroes attack the survivors, the soldiers' efforts focus on forcing them back out into the yard. The ogre revenants aren't particular in who they kill and eat, and will happily attack the heroes, as well. The players may wait until they are inside the keep before attacking, in which case the ogres are not in play... until the survivors win a test to push a hero back outside.

Run this encounter as you did the Sanguine Yard, although you'll have two mobs to roll attacks when it comes your turn. Players might maneuver the two mobs into conflict with a successful test, although this should only buy them one round of relief. If the

heroes specifically target Schiff, they must win a test with an effect die higher than 10, at which point the Garrison Survivors loses the **Commander Schiff** trait. If a hero attacks Schiff and succeeds with a smaller effect die, another soldier leaps forward to take the blow for Schiff.

This is a very difficult combat encounter, but not impossible. If the heroes emerge victorious, they will have free access to the keep. They won't have the details that Schiff would have provided, but none of these are strictly necessary for the rest of the campaign to function.

If the players initiate hostilities and then regret the decision, they may surrender. The garrison survivors and especially Schiff will accept a disarmed surrender on the grounds of keeping as many people alive as possible. Alternately, if all the players are taken out, they will be taken prisoner. In either of these cases, describe the survivors dragging the heroes inside and then proceed to the Talking with Schiff section.

## GARRISON SURVIVORS

MOB 6 6 6 6 6

DISCIPLINE 8

COMMANDER SCHIFF 10

DESPERATION 4

## OGRE REVENANTS

MOB 8 8 8 8 8 8

HULKING 8

UNHOLY REGENERATION 10

## SCENE DISTINCTIONS

DEFENSIVE LINE 8



## TALKING WITH SCHIFF

The commander brings you inside; ranks of survivors file in behind you and the tall doors thunder closed. The ogres pound on the door and walls, knocking free cascades of dust and gravel, but they lose interest quickly enough. Inside is a tight-packed foyer, with guard posts on either side. Wounded survivors lay stretched out in orderly rows. Crates of supplies, almost all empty, are stacked up against the walls.

The commander sits on the ground wearily, gestures for you to do the same, and introduces himself as Alexen Schiff. “You’re not part of the garrison,” they say, “so I’m guessing you’re a strike team from outside. Good. How can we help?”

Schiff has the following information and will gladly share it. They are weary, desperate, and crushed by betrayal; their only goal is keeping as many of their people alive as possible, but they are eager to see the Dread Tyrant pay.

- The purple rift ripped open the sky above the fortress almost one year ago. No explanation was given, and communications from within the keep and the court at its summit have dwindled to nothing.
- The Dread Tyrant’s favorite lieutenants and governors have returned to Tour Toriel, but once they ascend to the court atop the keep, they never come back out.
- Schiff sent people up into the keep to ask for directives and assistance; they have not returned.
- The keep is full of traps and enchantments to deter invaders, most of them dormant and unused for centuries. They were activated shortly after Schiff first sent runners upstairs.

- Since the rift opened, the Dread Tyrant has only come out of the keep once, ten days ago. “Honestly, I wondered if he was still alive.”
- Ten days back was when a dragon erupted out of the mess hall behind the barracks and laid waste with gouts of fire before anyone could react. The barracks were full of soldiers, and a thousand died in minutes.
- The remnants of the garrison patched together a counterattack against the dragon, but they were forced to retreat over and over. “It was like feeding a beast; we sent wave after wave of soldiers against her to no end; we kept falling back.”
- To get inside buildings, the dragon would shape-shift into the form of a tall, intimidating woman, destroy everything inside, and then come sweeping back out in her monstrous, scaled form.
- When the dragon reached the keep yard, the Dread Tyrant himself came down the steps from inside. He spoke with her briefly, after which she shape-shifted into her human form and followed him inside.
- As he went deeper into the keep, the Dread Tyrant ordered the soldiers back to their posts; the dead rose that night.
- The Dread Tyrant has ignored all attempts to contact him since.
- The survivors with Schiff feel betrayed and forgotten, and most simply want to escape the fortress.



## RESCUING THE SURVIVORS

The heroes may want to help the survivors of the garrison escape the tower. There are significant obstacles in the way.

Between the keep and the gates, there are four revenant ogres outside (and possibly six if the heroes avoided the fight in the Sanguine Yard), the Summitguard on the Promenade of Victory, and the Orkish Tower Defenders at the gates themselves. The survivors have wounded compatriots who cannot walk and would need to be carried on stretchers, which would require the entire escape route to be cleared of all combatants for at least an hour.

And, if it hasn't been done already, the siege crews on the Ramparts would need to be laid to rest. Otherwise simply stepping outside the tower would be suicide.

Running such an operation could be an entire session unto itself, and is outside the goals of this published adventure. All the pieces you'd need are already in this adventure, however, and could be re-used if you wanted to run the rescue as a sort of side quest session.

Otherwise, you might have Schiff assure the heroes that their scouts are combing through the ruins, including a number of secret tunnels and sally ports, and should have an exit strategy for the survivors soon. "You focus on what you came here for: fixing whatever's gone wrong up in the Tyrant's court."

## CODA

Read the following to bring the level to a close:

Schiff runs out of answers, and listens to whatever you're willing to divulge about your mission here. They gesture wearily around the foyer. "After holding out against the dead for days, we don't have much to offer in the way of assistance. But if you're going upstairs, you're welcome to anything you need. I don't know what has swallowed up the soldiers I sent into the keep, but if you mean to make it to the Tyrant's court, you'll need to find out and you'll need to beat it."

And we will find out what that is in the next level of Ascent to Prime: the Keep.







# RULES SUMMARY FOR THE BATTLEMENTS

All the new rules in use in Level Two are detailed below for ease of reference. In most cases, the rules you'll be using in each encounter are written out in that encounter.

## THE DOOM POOL

The doom pool is used to set the difficulty of all dice rolls not covered by a prepared GMC trait block. Simply roll the entire pool and add two of its dice together to get the difficulty. If necessary, select another die to serve as the effect die.

The doom pool starts with three dice:   . Whenever a player rolls a 1, something goes slightly awry for them. The die that rolled a one gets added to the doom pool and the player earns a  for their trouble. If there is already a die of that size, the GM may instead step up the smallest die in the pool.

Additionally, the GM can spend dice out of the pool to make things interesting. This is a useful means of managing a doom pool that has grown significantly larger than the dice pools that the PCs are rolling. There are three options:


**Add to Total:** When rolling to set the difficulty, the GM can add additional dice to the total. These dice are removed from the doom pool after the roll. This is particularly useful for big climactic confrontations.

**Interrupt Order:** When going around the table, the GM can spend a die from the doom pool to allow a GMC to take their turn earlier in the round. Play then proceeds as normal.

**Create Asset:** When a GMC is active in a scene, the GM may spend a die from the doom pool to create an asset of the same die size for the GMC to use. Be sure to name and describe the asset: more detail is (almost) always better.

## HEROIC SUCCESS

When a player beats the difficulty by five or more, they have scored a heroic success. To reflect this, the player may step up their effect die. If the player beats a difficulty by ten, step up the effect die twice; by fifteen, step it up three times, and so on.

If this would step up the effect die past , the player gets a second effect die which can be used for a separate effect. This might mean inflicting two kinds of stress or stressing two different targets, recovering two kinds of stress, or creating two different assets.



## PLOT POINTS

Plot points (PP) are a player currency tracked in tokens or tally marks on the character file. They are a rough measurement of protagonist power and ‘oomph.’ They can be used to grease the wheels of game mechanics and focus the story on things the player is most interested in. They are earned when the hero displays juicy characterization or suffers setbacks to their goals.

Plot points can be spent in three primary ways: to roll more dice in a dice pool, to add more dice to your total, and to gain 6 assets. They can also be spent to turn getting Taken Out into stress or to upgrade assets.

### SPEND A PLOT POINT TO ROLL ANOTHER TRAIT

Normally, a player’s dice pool contains one trait from each trait set and as many assets as apply. Players may spend a PP to roll an additional trait from any trait set already represented in their pool.

This allows a hero to be smart and charming (**Mental** and **Social**) or bob and weave through a swordfight (**Move** and **Fight**).

Players may do this repeatedly, spending additional plot points to roll additional traits into their pool, as long as they still make sense.

Additional traits must be bought with plot points before the roll.

### SPEND A PLOT POINT TO ADD ANOTHER DIE TO THE TOTAL

Normally, a player adds two of their rolled dice to compose their total. Players may spend a PP to add additional rolled dice to their total. Players may only add eligible dice; those dice that rolled 1 cannot be added to the total, even with a PP.

Players may do this repeatedly, spending additional plot points to add additional dice to their total, until they run out of eligible dice.

If a player adds all their dice to the total, their effect die is 4.

Additional dice for your total are bought after the roll.

### SPEND A PLOT POINT FOR A 6 ASSET

At any point in the game, a player may spend a PP to create a 6 asset representing an item or circumstance beneficial to them. This asset must be something that would reasonably be in the scene; a hero might find a crowbar in a warehouse, but not at the Duchess’ high tea.

### SPEND A PLOT POINT TO AVOID BEING TAKEN OUT

When a player is about to be taken out by a poor roll, they may spend a PP to avoid being taken out and instead gain stress equal to the opposition’s effect die. That stress should be appropriate to the danger they were exposed to in the roll, whether that be physical injury (**Injured**) or heartbreaking betrayal (**Demoralized**). They may still act for the remainder of the scene.

### SPEND A PLOT POINT TO UPGRADE AN ASSET

By default, a created asset is good for one player for one scene. Plot points may be spent to change that.

Players may spend a PP to keep an asset on their sheet for the entire level.

Players may spend a PP to “open up” the asset to any player character’s use.


Players may spend PP PP to make an asset usable by everyone for the remainder of the level.





Plot points can be earned in three primary ways: through activated hitches, the Hinder SFX, and giving in during a contest.




### EARN A PLOT POINT FOR ACTIVATED HITCHES

Whenever a player rolls a 1, the GM can activate that hitch by describing some detail that goes sideways or not quite right. This unexpected difficulty is always either too minor or too unrelated to the main action to change the success or failure of the roll.

The player earns a  and the die that rolled 1 goes into the doom pool.

### EARN A PLOT POINT WITH HINDER

When a distinction could hinder instead of help a hero's efforts, the player may choose to roll the distinction as a  instead of the usual . This is an SFX that applies to most distinctions. Players may hinder any distinction they are rolling: their own character distinctions, scene distinctions, or even motor pool distinctions.


The player earns one  for rolling the . That die has a one-in-four chance of rolling a 1, which might earn them a second , as well.

Hinder is always at the option of the player; you never have to hinder your roll.

### EARN A PLOT POINT BY GIVING IN

During a contest where rolls go back and forth as the difficulty escalates, players may elect not to roll and instead give in. The player still loses the contest, but they decide and describe for the table how they lose. They might describe a marginal loss that preserves their dignity, an interruption from outside the contest that prevents them from attaining their goal, or even a greater and more profound defeat than the GM would have unleashed.

The hero is unable to start a new contest about the same conflict until circumstances change, which usually means in a later scene. Another hero might step in to take up a new contest pursuing the same goals as the first contest.

Players who choose to give in earn a .



## TEST-CREATED ASSETS

Players may create new assets for use later in the story by making a simple test. These assets may be physical items (hero-crafted or hero-found) or more ephemeral advantages, such as an **Aura of Intimidation**, the **Cerulean King's Favor**, or gaining the **High Ground**. As with all rolls, tests to create assets must be plausible within the hero's current circumstances. The heroes won't find jelly tarts in the armory nor can they forge a sword in the kitchen.

The GM may also set a cap on how large the resulting asset might be: sure, they might dig through the garrison's garbage and find a **Discarded Dagger** **6**, but they won't be finding a **Discarded Dagger** **12**.

Roll the doom pool for opposition, unless a GMC is actively opposing the creation of the asset.

On a success, the asset is created with a die rating equal to the player's effect die. Heroic successes are useful here, as they step up the effect die.

On a failure, the asset is not created. In the midst of combat or another scene of action and danger, the failure might mean they gain or step up **Injured** or **Exhausted** stress equal to the opposition's effect die. Outside of action scenes, there is rarely much risk in a test to create assets, but if the asset was desperately needed, the hero might gain or step up **Demoralized**. Otherwise there is no consequences outside of lost time and possibly materials.

Assets are good for one scene, either the one they were created in or the scene they were created for. Players may spend a **PP** to make an asset usable for the whole session.

Assets are usable by only one character. This is often the hero who made the asset, but one

can set up a situation that an ally can exploit. Alternately, players may spend a **PP** so that anyone may use the asset.

There are two particular ways that dungeoneering heroes tend to use this rule, for Making Camp and for Finding Loot. Let's explore these two examples in detail.

## MAKING CAMP

Players will often need to make recovery rolls, but aside from the Cleric, serious injury can only be addressed in a safe and undisturbed place. The characters can make a safe and undisturbed place with a test. This is called a Making Camp test, even when it's less a matter of putting up tents and starting a campfire and more barricading the single door and ensuring nothing is lurking in the shadowed corners of a particular room.


To Make Camp, players assemble a die pool as normal. The context matters: making camp in the wilderness favors different traits than making camp in the middle of an active battlefield. Some distinctions' Hinder SFX might be used to earn a **PP**.

Make Camp tests are rolled against the doom pool. The GM usually adds the highest two dice results to get the difficulty, but can add any two of the dice to allow for pacing concerns or just to give the poor heroes a break. Any 1s the GM rolls can be activated as opportunities, to get a head start on recovering stress and complications, or to step up assets as the heroes settle into their rest.

If the test is successful, they've created a safe space. All stress traits are stepped down once, to start. Players might also use the camp to make recovery rolls.

The camp is also an asset. Name it something appropriate like **Hasty Camp** or **Fortified Safe Zone**. Its die rating is equal to the effect die. The camp is established and everyone may




make recovery rolls. One player may roll the asset's rating in their recovery rolls: this might be the hero who is most beaten up and their compatriots made camp around them primarily for their benefit, or it might be the hero who's going to be doing most of the rolling, like the Cleric. Any of the players may spend a  to "open up" the asset so that everyone may roll it in their die pools.

If the test fails, the heroes aren't able to create a safe and undisturbed space. The reasons why the attempt fails will depend on what is happening around them. An evergreen option here is to interrupt their efforts with an enemy combatant wandering into their position or on patrol, or catastrophe collapsing onto them. No matter how they deal with the interruption, the heroes can't make another Make Camp roll where they are.

The heroes can work together to Make Camp if each one focuses on a different aspect. One character might barricade the door while another character clears away rubble while the third makes sure those dark corners are unoccupied. Each player assembles a die pool and rolls against the doom pool to create an asset, like **Barricaded Door**, **Cleared Space**, and **Empty Corners**. Whoever rolls last adds all of those assets to their roll, which will both increase the chances of success and provide more options in selecting the effect die.




## FINDING LOOT

After each encounter is cleared, players may roll to search for loot. If successful, they may find a useful bit of gear that they can use as an asset. If they spend a , they can add it to their character sheet for the rest of the level (and possibly beyond).






A loot roll is not a roll to determine what gear a defeated enemy had on their person. This is a roll to see if the character can find something they're looking for, either on the new corpse in the room or in the room in

general. Since it's a roll for player action, it's bound to the same strictures as any other roll. Most importantly, if the task is impossible—like finding a laser rifle in the castle's midden heap—the roll cannot be made. Only things that would plausibly be found can be rolled for—but when our heroes are picking their way through an abandoned garrison, the stuff that dungeon-delvers most likely want is probably knocking about somewhere.

The player must declare what, exactly, they are looking for: a sword, a suit of armor that fits, a still-legible spellbook. They might explain their reasoning for why such a thing might be found here, or they might describe how they're searching, or some combination of both, or some other thing. More details are (almost) always good.


The GM may set a cap for how large the asset's die rating may be, to represent how useful the loot that can be found might be. As a rough guideline, use a  cap throughout most of the Battlements: no matter how good the roll, the players can find, at best, a  asset. Rooms that specifically stored the exact thing the player is looking for might have a  cap, instead. Later levels could have higher caps, or no cap at all.



For opposition, the GM rolls the doom pool. For your total, add together the highest two dice—or if you're feeling generous (or want that character to catch a break), any other two dice. Tell the player the difficulty that they'll have to beat.



The player then puts together a die pool as normal. The encounter's scene distinctions might be appropriate, here: if useful, it's rolled as a ; if it's a hindrance, it can be rolled as a  and earn the player a . The **Haunted Armory**, for instance, might be rolled as a  because there's all sorts of useful weapons in here, or it might be rolled as a  because everything is neglected and in disrepair.





Which way the scene distinction goes is entirely up to the player.

If the player rolls any 1s, they might activate traps or fall prey to the pervasive ruin and decay of the Battlements. That display case of the captain's armor might have a poison dart trap; the half-burnt weapon racks may finally collapse and fall over on top of the character; the alchemical ingredients may have been cursed to discourage thieves. Whatever the colorful description, give the player a  and add the die that rolled 1 to the doom pool.

If the player beats the difficulty, they find whatever they were looking for and gain it as an asset. Its rating is equal to their effect die or the cap, whichever is lower. They may use it for the remainder of the scene. Since loot rolls happen after an encounter is cleared, that's not usually very long. If the player wants to keep the asset, they may spend a  to make it last for the rest of the level. If a player searches for a sword and only scores a  effect die, they might toss it back instead of keep it.

Players can trigger a Hinder SFX on a Loot Roll to earn a  and then spend that  to extend the lifetime of the loot they find.





Players flush with plot points can spend one to keep a second effect die for a second asset: they found a **Forbidden Grimoire**  and a **Ceremonial Dagger** ! If they want to keep both for the whole level, that's two more plot points.

If the player fails to beat the difficulty, they do not find what they're looking for, but what is more, the roll establishes that that thing isn't there to be found. There are no do-overs on loot rolls. The hero can always search again after the next encounter.

## SIDEBAR: TURNING OTHER STUFF INTO ASSETS

It's not like the heroes walked into the Dungeon with only one piece of adventuring gear: just a shield or just a lute or just a book of scripture. They brought whatever stuff they would have plausibly brought along to a probably-suicidal assault on a magical fortress. All that other stuff just wasn't worth an extra die. Now that they're creating assets, players may want to turn that other stuff into assets. Use all the same rules and apply a little narrative wrinkle. Maybe they find a missing piece that completes their suit of armor. Maybe they find another shield, give it a heft, and decide they like their old one better.

## SIDEBAR: THE = ASSET

If the players are flush with plot points and want a sure thing, they can always create a  asset by spending a  and then spend another  to keep it for the rest of the level. Two plot points for a  can be a little pricey, but there's no risk.

## SIDEBAR: WHAT MAKES AN ASSET SIGNATURE?

Technically speaking, assets created this way only last to the end of the session and don't crop up in following sessions. If you want to keep something from session to session, you need to turn it into a signature asset. We'll introduce those rules in a later level; for now, our heroes will keep their loot without any further hassle.



## DEAR PLAYTESTERS

Thank you for taking a look at this document and perhaps even giving it a try.

I've got the next three levels of Tour Toriel in the pipeline and hope to release them in the coming months. After that, I hope to develop Keystone as an expansive game in its own right, and invite other creative folk to add their own imaginative spark.

But it starts here, with Tour Toriel, so I really want to get this right.

If you give this game a whirl, please tell me how it goes. You can email me at [keystonefeedback@joshroby.com](mailto:keystonefeedback@joshroby.com) or find me on twitter at @joshroby. (Admittedly I'm much better at responding via twitter; my emails are a mess!) Or you can find me on the Cortex Roleplaying Discord at <https://discord.com/invite/EGwwfwS>, where I am still @joshroby.

I do hope you enjoy playing Keystone, and I also hope you'll tell me about your game.

Thanks so much,

—Josh Roby



# CHANGELOG

## VERSION 0.1

Ta-da!

Glyphs: PP ▾ 4 6 8 10 12 ▾ 6 8 10 12