



TANARES
RPG FOR 5E

ADVENTURE IN THE REALMS OF MADNESS
• SAMPLE •

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INTRODUCTION

WELCOME TO TANARES, A TENSE, COMPLEX, shifting, fragmented, high-fantasy world where adventurers are rare and high-level adventurers are even rarer. The PCs (player characters) in this adventure are therefore *special*—part of a select group that could effect real change to all aspects of the scenario, from geography to sociology to politics.

An Imperial decree prohibits the gathering of groups of more than five such adventurers because every war waged throughout history provoked the **Malrokian Curse**. According to this allegedly divine punishment, detailed in the Evolutionist Sacred Scriptures, massive bloodshed is punished with natural catastrophes.

Teams of adventurers are encouraged to register in the Imperial records. In return, the Empire performs a powerful bonding ritual for each Team, magically granting powers that can be put to good use according to the Team's Specialization and its relationship with the people, the Empire, and possibly other Beneficiaries.

Chapter 1: The Trial is a sample from *Adventure in the Realms of Madness*, an adventure for the 5th edition of the world's greatest roleplaying game. It was designed for a group of level 3 characters, whose sheets you will find in **Appendix A**. It takes these characters through the process of creating a Team while facing a trial at the hands of the Empire.

ADVENTURE IN THE REALMS OF MADNESS

Adventure in the Realms of Madness is a 200+ page adventure book for the 5th edition of the world's greatest roleplaying game. It presents an open-ended adventure full of epic moments, including dragon encounters, time traveling, and surprising twists and turns as the PCs learn that the world

is complex and full of intrigue. The adventure is designed for characters starting at 3rd level (but you can have them start at 1st level and go on a few adventures before beginning the first chapter). By the end, they will likely be at least 12th level and will have learned that, in Tanares, a small Team can effect real change in the world.

This sample was designed as a crash course in many (but far from all!) aspects of the setting, such as Adventure Teams, the Penumbra Plane, the Empire, Arena fights, and more. It was also designed to be run in a single session, if the players (and especially the game master, or GM) so wish.

As a result, the chapter is longer than one usually sees in a one-shot, and in a few parts the characters' choices are limited to keep things moving forward. **In the full versions of our books, you will find sufficient information to enable as much player agency as required in a long campaign.**

Events are designed to give players a sense of the unique features of Tanares and the other roleplaying game books published by Dragori Games: *Tanares Campaign Sourcebook* and *Player's Guide to Tanares*. Players will learn about world history, Arenas, the new dragonblade and madwalker classes, part of the Imperial Capital, how to create a Team, and more. If you intend to run through this adventure as a player, stop reading now!

Not all features of the world are described here in full. The intention is to give players an introduction to interesting aspects of the game and the story. In the full *Adventure in the Realms of Madness* book, you will find a larger introduction with the main characters' and factions' motivations and allegiances, and more information about all the Teams and events, so you can easily take players through the story. This sample includes only the most relevant information for the trial.

RUNNING THIS SAMPLE AS A ONE-SHOT



If you want to speed things up and have **fewer encounters**, you may skip the goblin ambush during the road trip and the Penumbra Plane encounter at the Imperial Palace gardens.

If you want to speed things up even further and have **fewer interactions/exploration**, you may have the adventure begin with the road trip (to the Capital, not Skybell) and have all steps of Team creation done at once at the Registry (by the end of the chapter), entirely skipping Skybell, the interview with the representatives, the Penumbra Plane, and the murder investigation.

Potentially, the **longest part of the game session will be the murder investigation** (followed by the trial). If you want a shorter session that preserves all encounters and all steps of Team creation as designed, simply have no murder take place, or give the players less time to investigate it.

ADVENTURE STRUCTURE

Adventure in the Realms of Madness is designed to immerse players in the world of Tanares in one of the most important moments of its history. It has open-ended regions and cities to explore, treasure hunts, characters and factions with complex motivations, investigation, time travel, political intrigue, exploration of "super dungeons," plot twists, and more. What follows is subject to change due to it being a work in progress:

Chapter 1 introduces the characters to the Penumbra Plane and the Imperial Capital as they create a Team and face difficult challenges, including a murder investigation and a trial that might end in a deathmatch in the Arena.

Chapter 2 introduces many of the factions involved in the plot: the Empire, the Third Eye, D.E.A.T.H., and a few unknown agents, as characters investigate the whereabouts of two important Heroes who disappeared right before a fight in the Arena of Fate. The players will have to decide where their Team stands on many issues as the manhunt takes them through the most important district of the Capital.

Chapter 3 features a massive Imperial prison. Depending on the characters' choices in the previous chapter, they must rescue an important ally, obtain information from an imprisoned villain, and/or find a way to escape themselves (if they were arrested). Breaking out of the gigantic prison won't be easy and may involve making dubious allies.

In **chapters 4 through 6**, players dive headfirst into a complex, open-world plot as they settle in one of several possible headquarters and race against time to find the Artifacts of the Gods, without which they will almost surely die at the hands of a powerful villain. Characters begin to realize that everything is connected as the pieces of the puzzle start to come together. These chapters are not linear. The GM can present them in any order according to the players' priorities, the information they've learned thus far, and the alliances they made in previous chapters.

Chapters 7 through 10 describe the "super dungeons" where the Artifacts of the Gods are found and bosses are

faced. Players may explore dungeons with no doors, spinning floors of magical towers, an entire moving city, the ruins of the most advanced—now extinct—mystical kingdom in history, and many other extraordinary locations.

Chapter 11 is the climactic ending of the adventure. The PCs finally determine where they stand and face the final boss, all while exploring the most profound mysteries of the world. Avatar Dragons, time traveling, Artifacts of the Gods, the Malrokian Curse, super portals, the Penumbra Plane, and the creation of the world itself all come together in epic fashion.

FORMATTING

We recommend that you read this book, and the appropriate sections of the *Tanares Campaign Sourcebook* and *Player's Guide to Tanares*, until you feel comfortable enough to run a smooth session. The formatting in this book is designed to help you find what you need quickly.

Examples appear as italicized words in parentheses, highlighted in blue and introduced by "e.g." (e.g., *something*). These usually describe specific things that players might decide to do. The formatting is a visual cue to help you find information during a game.

You might see more words in **bold** than you're used to; this visual cue highlights important words that summarize the theme of a paragraph, or relevant names related to rules that are found elsewhere. Quickly search for a specific topic by focusing on these.

If the first letter of a word is capitalized, it means the word is a relevant phenomenon or institution in Tanares (e.g., *a Team is not merely a group of characters; Heroes are fighters in the Arena of Fate, not just people who perform heroic actions*). If you don't understand what the capitalized word means, you may want to look it up in the *Tanares Campaign Sourcebook*, the *Player's Guide to Tanares*, or *Adventure in the Realms of Madness*.

"PC" means "player character." If you see the word "characters" by itself, it could include NPCs (e.g., *"characters need to break the victim's fingers to open their hand"*—this is valid for the actions of both PCs and NPCs).

Text that appears in a box like this is a tip related to running the adventure. It often presents options to get players back on track when they deviate too much from the main storyline.

Text that appears in a box like this is meant to be read or paraphrased out loud for the players. It often describes an event or location.

Text that appears in a box like this is information about the world that does not quite deserve a section of its own, but understanding it might be useful to running the part of the adventure where it is located.

OTHER REFERENCES

Tanares is a rich world with detailed features, many of which are found in this book. For more in-depth information, consult the *Tanares Campaign Sourcebook* or the *Player's Guide to Tanares*. Those books can be used to enrich some of the material in this adventure.

In any case, this adventure is yours, as is any campaign you run in Tanares. You are not bound by any information in any book. You can change anything to your liking or to suit the needs of your campaign.

If you have the Tanares Poster Map, one of its sides is a world map and the other is a map of the Imperial Capital city that the players may consult freely; all the spoilers and secrets are inside this book. Characters—especially in the Capital—may acquire or have the map, receive it as a gift from an NPC, find it hanging on a wall somewhere, and so on.

STORY OVERVIEW

In Chapter 1: The Trial, the PCs create their Team while traveling from Skybell City to the Phantom Fortress, and then to the Imperial Capital. A few unknown agents sponsor the trial, a rare opportunity to quickly upgrade Team levels, as the best performers in the field could earn great rewards.

These are the steps that constitute the chapter:

- **Road Trip to Skybell City.** The adventure kicks off with an adrenaline rush: as the Team rides to Skybell City, they meet a large caravan stampeding in the opposite direction, headed to the Imperial Capital. It belongs to one of the highest-level Teams in the world. The PCs are caught in the middle of a large-scale ambush operation against these Heroes, who are scheduled to fight in the Arena of Fate. The PCs will learn much later that this event was not a coincidence and ties to a much larger story, to be developed in the next chapters.
- **Team Basics.** Characters describe their ultimate *Dream* as a Team when they register to participate in the trials. This is closely related to the choice of a *Beneficiary* and *Specialization*. These three italicized names are the basic choices in Team creation. Their first challenge, however, is far from basic, as the Team meets dreadful dangers in the Penumbral Plane.
- **Murder Investigation.** With a Beneficiary's first mission in hand, the Team must identify which of the other Teams is an impostor sponsored by an unknown agent with deep pockets and influence. The mission kicks off quickly when an unprecedented monster attack on one of the Empire's portal highways forces Teams to gather

in an outpost outside the Capital, where an NPC dies, prompting an investigation.

- **Team Deathmatch.** When the PCs arrive at the Capital, they are faced with a dire situation: they are accused of the very murder they investigated, as the impostor team forged evidence against them. The real evidence the party collected could save their lives, as a deathmatch trial by combat is set between the player characters and the impostors.
- **Introduction to Chapter 2.** If the PCs win the deathmatch, they visit the Arena of Fate district, the most noble and important in the world, to register in the Imperial offices. If the PCs befriended the high-level team ambushed during the road trip, they will have a valuable VIP ticket to watch the Arena fight the next morning. However, there is a problem: Avelum and Khloet, two of the most renowned Heroes in the world, are missing, just a few hours before the match. Did someone “disappear” them? What happened the previous night? Should the characters even find them, or would it be better to keep them from attending the fight? Find out in chapter 2 of *Adventure in the Realms of Madness*.

ADVENTURE FLOWCHART (CHAPTER 1)	CREATING A TEAM
Team, Assemble! Fight bandits on the road to Skybell Decide the Team's purpose Talk to the Beneficiary's representative	Basics State Dream Interview a Beneficiary Choose Specialization
Whose Crime Is It, Anyway? Explore and fight in the Penumbral Plane Investigate murder in the Phantom Fortress	Identity Engrave symbols Design banner Conceive name
Capital (City) Punishment Fight in a Team Deathmatch	Ceremonial Rites Register final choice of Beneficiary Start tracking Fame, Prestige, and Reputation Receive Team powers and first task

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Adventure in the Realms of Madness gradually pulls the PCs into far-reaching plots that go back to the creation of the world itself and some of its most important landmarks and events. This section provides background on world history that you can reveal to the players bit by bit as they make progress in the adventure.

THE MALROKIAN CURSE

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a White Dragon, whose rider is called Tamera, or Truth. With justice she judges those who deviate from the path of Evolution.



And I saw a second Dragon flying through the sky, carrying the Eternal Scroll. Bauron sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven.

The Dragons proclaimed, in unison, to every nation, tribe, language, and people:

“Hear ye, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave. Blessed are the Tanareans, for the gods’ dwelling place is now among the people.

“There shall be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

“A new rule now lies upon this land, to guide your free will. There is only one way to meet tragedy:

“Massive bloodshed will be punished with natural catastrophe.”

- Evolutionist Sacred Scriptures,
Book of Malrok, 14:5-12

Nothing helped shape the current government, society, and institutions of Tanares more than the **Malrokian Curse**.

It is unclear whether certain elements of the story are fact or fiction, scientific or religious, speculation or pure fantasy. What everybody agrees on is that something definitely happened a long time ago, and that event still exerts a profound impact on the world today.

Legend tells that, many centuries ago, after numerous wars, the gods descended upon Tanares in the physical shape of dragons, and decreed that any further incidents of massive bloodshed would be punished with natural catastrophes that would decimate all armies involved and forever change the history and geography of the region. These cataclysms are said to be brought forth by dragons.

Through all the generations since, the divine word seems to have been fulfilled. Whenever Tanareans tested the scriptures and history books by waging war, a mysterious cataclysm destroyed those involved, even entire nations.

The Malrokian Curse is the main agent of fragmentation and change in the world.

Each instance of the Malrokian Curse resulted in nothing less than a “reset” of the region where it occurred. The

cataclysms changed entire landscapes; vast kingdoms vanished in a matter of hours.

Tanarean records speak of four of these catastrophes, but some people say that several might have happened before the period of time covered by the available historic accounts. These abrupt geographical changes—such as kingdoms gobbled up by canyons opening in the earth, mountains raised in a single day, or massive floods and earthquakes bringing about vast destruction—have resulted in a rich land filled with caves, ruins, underground dungeons, and other never-explored sites that hold important secrets, technology, and magic of ancient civilizations.

THE FALL OF ARCANA AND THE RISE OF THE EMPIRE

The last of the cataclysm-provoking wars happened a little more than one hundred years ago, when struggling nations joined together to pillage Arcana, the capital of the thriving Mystical Kingdom. This realm was inhabited by descendants of the first Tanareans, wielders of incredible magical powers with strong ties to the **Tanarean Field**. (The Field can be thought of as a magical force field. It's an invisible net made of the subtlest substance in existence, which permeates and connects the whole universe, and whose infinite energy can be tapped and transformed to produce magic.)

The resulting cataclysm put an end to the Mystical Kingdom and almost all relevant armies in the world, creating a power vacuum that was filled by a mysterious individual who called himself the Emperor. He forbade the creation of new armed groups and assembled one of his own, the Ironhand, to control and supervise the populace. He then traveled the continent forging alliances with local nobles, suppressing all remaining armed groups, and killing anyone who resisted.

With the world weakened by the recent catastrophe, and with the philosophical support of the Church (in the sense that the gods didn't want war, and the Empire was there to maintain the peace), the Emperor was quick to consolidate all forces in the Ironhand.

Despite being a large army with outposts and troops all over the continent, the **Ironhand's** main purpose is to enforce the Empire's most important **decree**: the prohibition of gatherings of more than five armed people. This has been the law for almost two hundred years, with the Ironhand being the only exception.

If your group has more than five players, adjust this decree accordingly and tell the players that the forbidden number is six, seven, or whatever number matches the number of players plus one, so they can adventure in the same Team and occasionally have the company of a temporary ally.

This decree is considered the founding stone of the Empire and one of the few things that holds the fragmented world together, so it is enforced with a heavy hand. Taxes collected to maintain the Ironhand are high and infractions are severely punished. When an Ironhand trooper dies, a random

person who lives in the region is sequestered and subjected to a ritual that excises their free will and makes them into a new, brainlessly obedient trooper. This forced conscription may not be fair, but the practice is justified in order to avoid everyone's annihilation.

ARENAS

Ever since its founding, the Empire has been successful in keeping major cities and powerful nobles in check, mainly due to an important idea that satisfied the people's bloodlust and the nations' craving for autonomy: the Arenas.

Any legitimate claim or conflicting interest may be submitted to the Empire, who takes no side in the matter. Disputes between two parties (whether neighbors or entire nations) are settled in an Arena, a small surrogate for a traditional battlefield. Instead of armies, a few of the nation's most powerful fighters face each other in the Arena, thus avoiding the anger of the gods. The winning party gets what they want with the Empire's endorsement; the Ironhand is there to help them obtain (or maintain) it.

In time, Arenas became incredibly popular and successful. Those who fight in the world's biggest stage, the Arena of Fate, are called **Heroes**. They are responsible for determining the destiny of their regions; in their hands lies the power that once belonged to entire armies. They draw looks of admiration from the populace as they stroll around their region, and looks of contempt when they are in a rival region.

THE WASTELAND IS NO MORE

After the Mystical Kingdom fell, the region where the catastrophe took place became known as the **Wasteland**. A toxic purple mist formed there, filling the first several feet above ground level. Prolonged

contact with the mist caused hallucinations, stupor, depression, and other afflictions, rendering the place uninhabitable.

Its fumes never dissipated. On the contrary, they expanded. At first, people neglected that dead zone, considering it a grim reminder of how belligerence can invoke the fury of the gods. However, the Wasteland recently expanded to three times its original size. The mist rolled into roads and cities, reaching the Tanarean Central Sea, cutting off the Province of Seashores in the middle, and separating the north from the south.

Then, all of a sudden, right before our adventure begins, the Wasteland disappeared.

THE ADVENTURE BEGINS

The disappearance of the toxic fumes led to a few far-reaching consequences. The lands of the now-extinct Mystical Kingdom conceal mysteries about dragons, the Malrokian Curse, and unfathomable treasures and technologies.

The Empire claimed this new unoccupied territory, but it needs time to secure and chart the thousands of square miles inside these regions, not to mention carefully explore the structures, ruins, and cities therein.

Thus, the plan is to build Ironhand outposts in the most strategic locations around the border of this region, and to grant provisory occupation licenses to Imperial allies—mostly people with close ties to the Church and noble families. The licensees must keep trespassers out and refrain from advancing into the uncharted territory beyond their

backyard; if they comply, the Empire promises to upgrade their licenses to permanent ones.

This basically started a land rush by everyone who'd like to own a cheap piece of unexplored ground. However, in a world where it is forbidden to own private armies and adventurers are rare (and high-level adventurers even rarer), having resources does not always mean being able to protect what's yours. The simplest way to prove to the Empire that you can hold trespassers back is by sponsoring a registered Team.

Enter the adventurers.

THE TRIALS

Characters will find this is the perfect opportunity to start their adventuring careers with a bang. Perform well enough on the big stage, and they can skip years of struggling as a low-level Team—perhaps even receive their own headquarters in no time.

Three particular sponsors are following the trials taking place in Skybell, the city by the end of the road where the adventure begins. One belongs to a noble house, one represents the people from a city almost adjacent to a piece of land being licensed, and the third is the Empire itself. Each Team will choose one sponsor as their Beneficiary.

In normal circumstances, Teams choose a Beneficiary based on their own motivations. For example, a Team that dreams of performing acts of heroism should choose the People, and one that wants to sell their expertise to the highest bidder is usually better suited for Noble Houses. However, the scarcity of Teams in the setting means Beneficiaries are making *offers* to the characters, who must weigh all factors before choosing a sponsor.

Of course, things are not quite so simple. To receive what the Beneficiaries offer, Teams must first pass a difficult trial designed to test their individual and teamwork skills, in competition with other aspirants. The best-performing Teams receive the greatest rewards from the Beneficiary of their choice. A Team with a poor performance gets the smallest rewards or may even be declined by their preferred Beneficiary, instead forced to be content with whatever someone tosses their way.

THE IRONHAND

With many aspiring Teams gathered in the same location for the trials, the Ironhand presence is massive. Troops are everywhere, making sure no fighting—with potentially catastrophic consequences—breaks out. They are prone to shout warnings and react swiftly if adventurers do not abide by the rules.

If the characters are inclined to behave as if they were in a tavern and not a militarized Imperial site, you can have an Ironhand lieutenant explain the situation to them and politely request that they stay in line. Repeat offenses draw more serious warnings, and the lieutenant might threaten to disqualify them from the trials (if this happens, you can have another trial take place in a week or so).



Soldiers are the lowest ranked and most numerous in the army. They are easily identified by the trapezoid under the Ironhand symbol on the blazon they wear. Each soldier has undergone magical psychosurgery that deprives them of their memories and free will, and indoctrinates them into the hierarchy system of the Ironhand. The Empire keeps all knowledge of this procedure under lock and key.

Soldiers obey (or react to) only the commands of superior officers; it is thus not possible to trick them by saying, "Your lieutenant asked me to tell you that he ordered you to..." If a character reports a crime to a soldier, they won't leave their post; instead, they will give the location of the nearest non-soldier so the character can report the crime to that person instead.

The easiest way a character can get a soldier to do something they want is by manipulating (or becoming) a higher-ranked official. In this case, sometimes they can tell a soldier to "obey person X as if they were me," but that command lasts one day at most.

UPCOMING ARENA FIGHT

The Empire issued a decree annexing all lands that now can be explored, charted, or inhabited due to the settling of the toxic fumes that pervaded the Wasteland. A massive Ironhand outpost is scheduled to be built around the former Arcana.

In a surprising act of defiance, an association of scholars from both Yama and Reginheraht Provinces filed a claim in the Imperial Capital. They requested that an expert group of dragonblades, wizards, and other scholars, led by Reginheraht Magic Research Tower, be given the right to study the regions first, and, if the Empire denies this claim, that the matter be settled in an Arena fight.

Throughout history, the Empire has rarely been defied—and it has almost never lost an Arena fight. Ten years ago, the lodge that hosted the last challenger Team exploded two days before the fight, killing everyone inside. After that, many people believed that "the law applies to everyone" was just Imperial propaganda to legitimize the Arenas.

However, today the Empire is at one of its lowest, most fragile points. With clear skies over the former Wasteland, the world has lost its constant reminder of the dangers of waging war—and its reassurance that the Empire is the best way to save the world from catastrophe. This led to an even greater surprise: the Empire accepted the scholars' challenge and promised the highest level of Ironhand protection to the challenging Team within the city walls. Moreover, witnesses report that they no longer see Ironhand troops entering the new lands. These moves restored some of the Empire's popularity.

The challenging Team is expected to arrive at the Imperial Capital today, and the fight is scheduled for the day after tomorrow. Excitement levels—and ticket prices—have never been higher.

It is in this atmosphere of tension and anticipation that the adventure begins.





CHAPTER 1: THE TRIAL

TEAM, ASSEMBLE!

THE BEGINNING OF THE ADVENTURE ASSUMES THAT the players have already created their characters, registered their names in the trial records, and paid for a stagecoach to take them to Skybell City's Cathedral, where the first part of the trials take place.

You can have "session zero" happen during this stagecoach ride, facilitated through a friendly and chatty coachman, an older human by the name of Throldge Hors. **He is worried that the PCs are late for the beginning of the trials**, but that does not prevent him from smiling warmly and encouraging the teammates to discover common ground. This has the following benefits:

- It gives the players a chance to introduce their characters and/or get "in character" and share some of the background they've created. They can discuss the reasons they might be together, their relationships with one another, what they want to accomplish, and why they want to be a Team (with a capital T).
- It prepares the players for the questions they will soon be required to answer, in case you didn't have the chance to discuss things in a full "session zero."
- You can have them think about their symbol, flag, and beneficiary beforehand, according to the brief instructions in this chapter or the more extensive instructions in the *Player's Guide to Tanares*.
- You can share or tease some of the information in the "Adventure Background" that you deem most significant.

Here are some of Throldge's possible questions and gossip:

"So, you're taking the trials, huh? It's pretty rare, finding adventurers such as yourselves. How do you know each other?"

"I can't believe the Wasteland is no more. My grandpa was but a toddler in Ahimoth when the Arcana War erupted right under his nose. And now the Empire has agreed to fight in the Arena for the right to explore the ruins! It's truly a new world."

"Where do you see yourselves in a few years?"

"What kind of missions do you think you'll excel at?"

"I heard there's an eclectic bunch sponsoring the trials in Skybell. Are you Imperialists or heroes of the people? Do you intend to defend or work for a noble house?" (Measure the party's intentions and lower their expectations with the following replies):

(People): "Most adventurers start out as idealists who fight for the people, but that's like flogging a dead horse, if you ask me. Their problems are small and endless, and working for them doesn't always mean you're doing much good or changing the world."

(Empire): "Bah! They're oppressive and take too much from us honest workers. Can never really know what to expect from the world's largest beast. But I guess you're safer inside the system. You know the saying: if you can't beat them..."

(Noble houses): "Yep, there's where the coin's at. Doesn't mean they'll just give it to you, though. They're self-centered, immersed in their own little games, and you must truly show you're on their side before you're showered with riches."

Make it clear to the players that they are about to undertake an official procedure for creating a Team in a serious, military-controlled environment; as such, the stereotypical beginning of gathering at a tavern is not to be expected.

ROAD TRIP

A black wooden stagecoach pulled by two skinny horses carries the PCs along a large Imperial road that connects Skybell to the Capital, in an almost straight southwest-northeast line.

There are two other stagecoaches a little ahead on the road. After a winding uphill section, they slow down and pull over to the side of the road. The PC stagecoach is required to quickly follow suit as a large and apparently rich caravan with several knights and carriages stampedes in the opposite direction, making a lot of noise.

FIRE IN THE COACH

The three stagecoaches stop in their tracks as soon as they get back on the road. The caravan behind the PCs halts; with all the turns and hills, only the back end of the caravan is visible.

Flaming arrows whiz through the dry air, coming from the road ahead. One of them hits your wagon. Throldge slaps the fire out. "Stay put. I'll see what's going on."

He walks to the wagon ahead and speaks to the coachman. As he glances back to check on you, his expression changes from mild worry to wide-eyed despair. Suddenly, you feel a flash of heat. BOOM. A blinding explosion. A fireball destroys the wagon ahead, killing Throldge, the coachman, and the horses, and blocking the road ahead. As the flames engulf the wagon's structure and contents, you hear hurried movement approaching from the sides of the road.

With a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check, the characters can hear noises that indicate combat behind them, focused on the large caravan that just passed them going the other way.

From the forest in front of the party emerges **Brath**, the bugbear. Three **goblin infiltrators** and one **goblin witch** accompany him. Brath is under clear orders: strike the caravan and, after eliminating all opposition, search the wagons for valuable items.

Ask the players to roll for initiative.

Brath may attack any PC who has left the wagon, focusing on whoever he identifies as the weakest target. Brath and the goblin infiltrators position themselves to block the party's way to the goblin witch. If they can move before the party, they attempt to trap the party inside the wagon, blocking its exits. They spare no efforts to wipe out the party.

Light and climate. It is very early morning, with the sun already visible in the sky and some gray clouds.

Ground and vegetation. The caravan travels along a dirt road through a dry region. The grass rises up to the ankles while the bushes lose their foliage to the constantly blowing wind. Dry shrubs are an important factor in the fight.

Wagon. The PC stagecoach is a wood-and-steel structure covered by a heavy cloth. One can exit through the front (climbing over the coachman's seat) or through the back. During combat, the PCs might get trapped inside the wagon. On a DC 12 Intelligence check, a character can think to use their action to cut the cloth and exit through the resulting hole, which is considered difficult terrain to climb through.





Flaming arrows. In this combat, stray flaming arrows (coming from the goblins fighting the caravan) can hit the dry shrubs and start a fire in the thicket around the road, but they can also hit the PCs' stagecoach, or even the PCs themselves.

Treat a flaming arrow as a creature with the lowest initiative roll. At the end of each round, roll 3d10 and check the table to see what has been hit:

D10 RESULT	TARGET
1-6	Dry shrubs
7-8	Wagon
9-10	Creatures

Arrows can't hit the same target twice in the same round (each number from 1 to 6 is considered a separate target).

Dry Shrubs (1-6)

A shrub on fire deals 1d4 fire damage to any creature that enters or starts its turn in its space. The fire spreads every time the same number is rolled, increasing the affected area to include all adjacent squares. The increase in radius can occur up to two times for the same target.

After arrows strike a shrub three times, if the d10 roll shows that the same shrub would be hit a fourth time (or more), that arrow instead targets a PC. The arrow has +3 to hit and deals 1d6 piercing damage + 1 fire damage on a hit.

Wagon (7-8)

Third time's the harm. If a third flaming arrow hits the wagon, the lingering flames concentrated inside the stagecoach burst out. Any creature inside the wagon takes 1d4 fire damage. The wagon and the area it occupies are considered **on fire**, dealing 1d4 fire damage to all creatures that enter or start their turn there. Once the wagon is on fire, any further arrows that would hit it target a PC instead.

A character can use their action to remove an arrow from the wagon. If it is already on fire, putting it out takes one minute.

Accurate Shot (9-10)

The flaming arrow targets any creature at random (except those that have full cover) as a ranged weapon attack. The flaming arrow has +3 to hit and deals 1d6 piercing damage + 1 fire damage on a hit.

Beating this encounter awards the party with 700 XP.

THE DUST SETTLES

Squires run to make a cordon and isolate the carriages; you hear someone shout "Gotta get moving; sitting ducks here!" Other unarmed aides take essential stuff from the unsalvageable wagons. On both sides of the road are dozens and dozens of dead goblins; it looks like something incredibly powerful quickly put them down.

Standing on the roof of the main carriage is a bearded wizard looking around. He lays stern eyes on your party. After a second that feels like one hour, his beard arches upward—is he smiling? You see his lips moving, and after a while the wind carries the following words to your ears: "Fear not, for your destiny is already written. Fear not, for bravery can change it."

As soon as the message ends, a tall and thin human named **Rigilia Choween** introduces herself as the spokesperson for the **Reginheraht Tower Team** and asks if the party is all right. With her pitch-black hair tied up in a bun, she has an elegant demeanor, wears light leather armor and tiny reading glasses, and carries a thick book under her arm.

If the party killed or incapacitated any enemies in the last encounter—even if merely in self-defense—she profusely thanks them and reveals that, even though **Khloet, the Summoner**, or **Avelum, the Wizard**, could handle half the horde with one arm tied behind their backs, the horde was a distraction. It seems that the goblins were meant to draw attention away from the back of the caravan, for reasons that

they still need to investigate. If not for the party's intervention, the attackers' operation likely would have succeeded. She cannot (or will not) say more about the event.

FURTHER ANTICIPATION OF WHAT LIES AHEAD

If you feel that the conversation with the coachman on the road was not satisfactory, Rigilia is another great opportunity to talk about the questions that the PCs soon will be required to answer. If the players still seem unclear about what a Team means, she can provide an example:

"On behalf of **The Elevators**, the Team who owns the large caravan you've just seen, I thank you and wish you good luck on your journey to become a renowned Team. They call themselves The Elevators, and elected a Tower as their symbol, because the Team was born with the Dream of researching and discovering the deepest magical secrets of Tanares, and using that knowledge to increase the overall quality of people's lives. It suits them that Reginheraht Magic Research Tower is their headquarters."

They don't have much time to waste, so Rigilia gives the party two **rewards** in thanks: a bag with 50 gp, and a large, thin, golden-plated VIP ticket granting the bearer the right to watch the next Arena of Fate fight from special baignoire seats that could be sold for up to 150 gp in the Capital. The **fight** takes place in two days. If the Team in the caravan wins, the characters are invited to an after-fight dinner party where they will get to meet the Heroes in person; Rigilia will be in the cabin to receive them and share more details.

If the characters spared any enemies, the survivors are more scared of what will happen to them if they loosen their tongues than of the party's threats and intimidation, which don't work. However, the goblins start talking if the party

hurts them physically, threatens to take them to their masters, or succeeds on a DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check related to protecting them or allowing them to flee the region, never to be seen again. The **goblins reveal information** in the following progression:

- "We got a tip that the caravan would come by this road today. Good opportunity to get rich." This is a partial lie, as they were hired to stage the ambush.
- "We were after a treasure hidden in plain sight in a bunch of worthless junk."
- "Some of us took the job because the man with the golden smile gave us good gifts. Most of us were just afraid of the fiercest among us—the most terrible one."
- "Our rewards would be greatest if we attacked you and the caravan at the same time."

If the party **loots** the enemies, they can find the following items:

- **Goblin Witch:** 5 ep, a staff that can be used as an arcane focus, and any spell scrolls she has not used in combat (check her stats in Appendix K1).
- **Brath, the Bugbear:** Hide armor, three javelins, one shield, one morningstar, 10 sp, and 12 gp.
- **Goblin Infiltrators:** Each goblin has a scimitar, leather armor, a shortbow with 10 arrows, 4 cp, 7 sp, and 1 ep.

When you are ready to move on, a squire comes and says he's arranged for the first stagecoach (the one in front of the three-wagon caravan) to take the PCs to Skybell. The two groups part ways, and the much faster caravan speeds off in the opposite direction.



SKYBELL CITY

The stagecoach takes an uneventful trip to the north-eastern entrance of Skybell City and drops you off in the back gardens of the most important church in Tanares. An Ironhand soldier points at you and says, in an emotionless tone, “Next.”

This soldier stands by a pedestrian wooden door at the back of the cathedral, which he opens as you approach. When you cross the threshold, all of the remaining light and sound disappear.

You are in one of the largest rooms you’ve ever seen. The flickering dots of light from thousands of candles stretch to your right and left as far as the eye can see, barely illuminating imposing stone statues behind them. A thundering choir of many feminine voices reverberates all around you. The melody is at first beautiful and loud, then spooky and whispery. Above the whispers, a deep male voice says:

“The Dream is a Team’s pulsating heart. It is the beacon that guides your every move. Here and now, before the gods and saints, declare your final goal—what you hope to accomplish as a Team.”



Team 2’s brooch

SKYBELL CITY

Skybell is a large city that faces the Central Sea, a gigantic lake in the middle of the continent. It is almost as big and busy as the Imperial Capital itself, although its large streets and buildings suggest a more peaceful demeanor by making traffic seem smaller.

From afar, the city gleams white from its buildings’ stones, smudged with the vivacious green of plentiful gardens and sprinkled with the cerulean blue of the expensive fabrics swaying in the wind that kisses the terraces and balconies by the sea, where the nobility lives.

*One who climbs the slopes toward the northeastern edge of town and away from the docks finds what is simply called **The Cathedral**, the administrative and religious center of the Evolutionist Church in Tanares. Its gardens are right by the road when the PCs’ stagecoach arrives.*

*The **garden**, where various fighters, mages, and Ironhand soldiers now gather, is protected on each side by titanic statues of Bauron and Tamera, each half-dragon, half-human. At the top, inside each dragon’s mouth, thousand-pound bells toll with distinct but complementary tones, representing the differences between the two gods and their creations.*

*Every dawn and twilight—when it is considered to be day and night in equal measure—the **bells** reverberate throughout Skybell City and can be heard several miles away.*

HELPING THE PLAYERS FORM A DREAM STATEMENT



A Team’s Dream can range from grandiose and abstract (e.g., “Become the richest and most powerful Team in history, successors to the Imperial throne”) to concrete and down to earth (e.g., “Rebuild the town of Lilypad and return it to its former glory by protecting its interests in the Arena”).

The Team should not merely choose an activity (e.g., “treasure hunt”) or confuse the Dream with a common mission (e.g., “Get revenge on whoever ordered the goblin attack against us on the road”). If such improper statements are made, the deep voice (that of a cleric) may reply, “That is not a true purpose, but a mere quest or action. A Dream requires a long-term goal that assumes an ongoing activity.”

Another way to steer players in the right direction is by having the whispering choir suggest minor adjustments (e.g., if the players are discussing whether to open a shop that sells draconic items, suddenly whisper “Best of its kind” or “Largest breeding ground” or “Hatch Avatar Dragon eggs” or even all of these, guiding them into coming up with more ambitious, longer-term goals).

DREAMS THE EMPIRE WOULDN’T ACCEPT

Dreams such as “Become crime lords in Fisherman’s Wharf” or “Assassinate the Emperor and become the new rulers of the world” or “Create the world’s most influential new religion by hunting down all Evolutionists” are interesting but would not be accepted in trials sponsored by the Empire—or at an Evolutionist Cathedral.

If the players want to come up with such a Dream, it’s considered a **Hidden Agenda**. Explain this to the players and tell them they must devise a lie to tell the agents of the Empire for registration purposes.

Both the stated Dream and the Hidden Agenda (the actual Dream) must be written down on the Team Sheet.

After the players decide on their Dream, instruct them to summarize it in a single sentence and write it down on the **Team Sheet (Appendix B)**. The cleric’s voice then responds:

“A Team with no purpose, or with no freedom to pursue it, is but a leaf carried into chaos by the winds of life. Go forth, Team Number 2, for you are free to choose what part you will play in Tanares’ evolution.”

The whispers of the choir increase in volume as the room slowly grows brighter until a loud, high-pitched scream makes the room almost blindingly white and then abruptly ceases, leaving you only with echoes in a long corridor with three carpets. The one on the left is green, the one in the middle is red, and the one to your right is blue. Big plaques lean loosely on easels in front of each carpet, and a horizontal banner hanging above and across all three plaques reads:

“A strong team finishes what it starts and is never off track. Choose your path, and never look back.”



INTERVIEW WITH A BENEFICIARY

Team 1 was in the carpeted room before the characters entered and **changed the plaques' positions**. If the PCs wish to further inspect the plaques, a successful Wisdom (Perception) check will notice the following:

DC 13	The plaques are poorly aligned on the easels.
DC 15	The colors in elements of the plaques (such as the frames and regions on the map) do not match those in the corresponding carpets, in contrast to the otherwise perfect organization seen thus far.
DC 18	The dust—or rather, the lack thereof—on the base of the easels does not match the position of the plaques, indicating that they have been moved. There is a soft footstep trail on the blue carpet.

The green carpet's original plaque was the Empire, the red carpet's original plaque was the People, and the blue carpet's original plaque was the Noble House.

Because Team 1 moved the plaques, now the green carpet (Empire) is by the People's plaque, the red carpet (People) is by the Noble House's plaque, and the blue carpet (Noble House) is by the Empire's plaque.

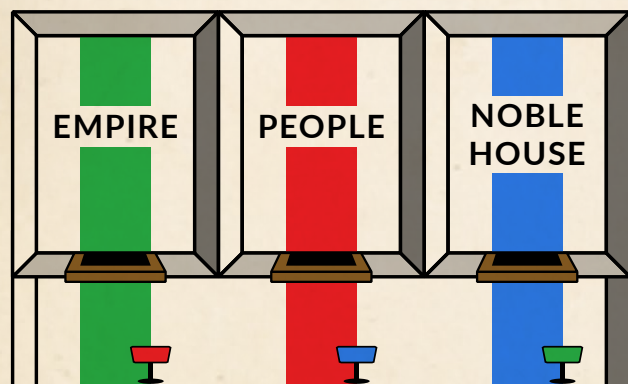
If the characters approach the plaques and read them, show the players the three plaques in **Appendix C**. Their titles and organization follow the current positions, not the original ones.

Each carpet continues into a small room at the end of the 500-foot **corridor**.

The three **doors** at the end of the corridor are identical. All are closed and unlocked. If left open, they swing shut by themselves. Each door leads to a room where an NPC representing the corresponding Beneficiary awaits. A door connects adjacent rooms.

MEETING REPRESENTATIVES. CHOOSING SPECIALIZATIONS.

Here are the rooms where each representative is located, according to the Beneficiary:



If the characters suspect that the rooms do not correspond to the position of the plaques, simply knocking on the doors will prompt a telling response from inside (e.g., a feminine voice responding elegantly might tell the characters they are talking

to *Mariahnnah Lisprolis, representative of the Noble House*). If they believe they followed the wrong carpet down the hall, they can simply choose a different door with no consequences.

All three **rooms beyond the doors** look alike; they are square (30 x 30 feet) and simple. The carpets run across the entire room and continue beyond a door in the far wall, which, given the sunlight peeking through the cracks, leads outside. Next to the door is a window through which one can see an Ironhand soldier stationed.

A single person—the representative—sits at the other side of a wooden table to the left of the entrance. There are enough chairs positioned for the Team to sit.

These NPCs will talk only to the entire Team, meaning the party members have to decide together which door to go through. After a room is entered, Beneficiaries will frown upon Teams that **change their minds** and try to go back or use a door that connects to an adjacent room. This will mean fewer rewards gained at the end of the chapter, as word of the blunder will spread.

Each representative wants the Team to choose them, so they are all willing to converse and explain how a partnership could benefit the Team. This is a good opportunity to reveal to the players more information found in the **Introduction**, including aspects of the trials and **Team creation**, especially the choice of **Beneficiary** and **Specialization**.

Regardless of which Beneficiary the Team chooses, it's up to the Beneficiary to accept and close the deal. And their decision on whether to accept the Team happens only after the trials end, and depends largely on the Teams' performances. Therefore, attempts to **convince the representative** with arguments (persuasion, intimidation, etc.) have little effect. The most characters can accomplish is to have the representative promise to watch their Team carefully or place little importance on any possible failures, which could impact the Team's classification at the end of the day.

Repeating: make it abundantly clear, in case the Team picked the "wrong" door, that their Beneficiary is established only when the trials end. The interview does not lock in the Team's Beneficiary.

Characters can't **linger** in the room too long, as there are other interviews to conduct and the trials are only beginning. A good way to keep the meeting short and interesting is by having the representative allow each character a single question; an Ironhand officer shows up to escort the Team outside if they seem intent on staying.

All interviews require the Team to choose a **Specialization**. If the characters aren't sure what to pick, the representative can show and explain the information in **Appendix D**.

SPECIALIZATION LIMITS

For full details on Specializations and the other steps of Team creation, see the *Player's Guide to Tanares*.

Ending the Interview. If the interview goes badly (e.g., a dragonblade in the party tells *Mariahnnah* they are a member of D.E.A.T.H. or tries to intimidate her), jump to "Portal to the Capital" (page 24). Otherwise, to end the interview, have the representative lean on the table, reduce the volume of their voice, and offer the party their first mission. They pledge to accept the party as their Benefactor if the mission is successful. Note that from rumors and agents throughout the city, all Beneficiaries know that one of the Teams in the trials is almost certainly an impostor and already has an unknown sponsor, apparently one with deep pockets and

influence. The impostor Team's motivation is unknown, but they can't be allowed to infiltrate the house and lands of the sponsors of the trials.

The Mission. The Team must take the first possible opportunity to interact with and investigate the other Teams to determine which might have hidden agendas. If the party finds any kind of evidence, they must deliver it to the representative at the Minor Arena where the Imperial trials will take place (or, if the trials are over, at the Sponsors' wing of the Arena of Fate district's hotel). The party must not share their evidence with anyone else.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS	LIK'S RESPONSE	ARMUR'S RESPONSE	MARIAHNNAH'S RESPONSE
(Knocks on door without asking anything)	A thick, scratchy voice replies: "Enter!"	An old and high-pitched male voice hesitantly replies: "The door is unlocked."	A smooth, sweet female voice replies: "Yes?"
(Enters but mistakes the representative for one of the others)	Guffaws, almost falling from his chair, and says: "I never thought a Team could fail just by opening a door! We should update the trials rulebook!"	He looks confused and says: "I guess destiny decided you should come to me. I don't think I appreciate knowing you wanted someone else."	She scribbles something in the smallest of personal notes and asks: "I don't mind not being who you thought I was, but it is troubling that I am not who you wanted me to be. Tell me: why should I want you, if you did not want me?"
Biggest benefits of region?	Its beauty, size, infrastructure inherited from the Ironhand, and strategic importance (in case the Team becomes the permanent owner).	Abundance of human resources and proximity to the city and its roads makes it a less-isolated way of life.	A large patch of land with incredible growth potential; accessible, beautiful, with the chance to find useful things the Mystical Kingdom left in uncharted areas.
Biggest disadvantages of region?	Dependence on watercraft and sea vessels; takes longer to get back to civilization.	No infrastructure; construction will take time.	Tempting for trespassers; almost no construction there (but resources are being invested into infrastructure).
Worst danger of the job?	Enemies that pretend to be allies; ambushes and sabotages by marauders.	Lack of infrastructure and support; stray aberrations from what used to be the Wasteland.	Unknown perils in uncharted areas; trespassing scavengers and treasure hunters from Yama and Reginheraht.
Any specific enemies?	D.E.A.T.H., Third Eye, pirate factions, and other malicious groups with many members.	None in specific.	D.E.A.T.H. (at least, this is what Mariahnnah believes).
Relationship with other event sponsors?	Allies. They are basically working for the Empire's benefit.	Indifferent. The Empire doesn't help as much as it should; House of Lisprolis is resentful for grabbing more valuable lands to the east.	Allies. The Empire keeps the peace in the world and wants to preserve the Mystical Kingdom's knowledge; counting on Ahimoth's friendship in the cordon as cordial neighbors.
Example of a secondary job that may be offered?	Play a tactical part in a sabotage mission against a pirate camp.	Remove a band of thieves causing a ruckus in Ahimoth City.	Escort travelers who want safe passage through the region (as long as they don't penetrate deeper into what used to be the Wasteland).
Can we accept any secondary job?	As long as it does not violate Imperial rules or cause the Team to neglect the primary work.	Yes, especially if it attends to our people's variable and abundant needs.	As long as the Team does not deviate from the main job.
Can payments be received in advance?	No. If a Team member dies in the line of duty, the Empire will send their family twice the payment for the period served.	Income is seasonal and depends on the productivity of farms and commerce, so it's possible (but not guaranteed) to make part of the payment in advance.	Proportional payments can be delivered when a House emissary visits the region.
Extra payment if Team solves a bigger problem than expected?	None that can be promised in advance.	All resources are already funneled; there is no room in the budget.	Can payment be reduced if the Team faces no extraordinary problem?
Possibility to make specific requests for a headquarters?	Depends. To be evaluated by superior. Team will have to justify that it is needed for them to do the job.	There is no headquarters to build. Better accommodations can be negotiated in the city, but their nicest vacant house is already reserved for the characters.	Yes, especially if the Team performs well in the trials.

THE EMPIRE'S REPRESENTATIVE: LIK EIRENION, IRONHAND LIEUTENANT FROM SEASHORES PROVINCE

Description. Lik Eirenion (LE) is a middle-aged bald male human scarred from repeated visits to the Wasteland. He is proud to reveal where his scars come from, but won't say much about his battles or whatever else he has done to earn the burns, rashes, and oddly colored smudges here and there on his dry skin. He is beefy, and his belly shows signs that the fat is slowly winning the battle against his muscles.

Glass eye. The sullen man's right eye is made of glass and is a magic item that allows him to detect magic and evil. He says that, since he "only needs one eye," Lik himself removed the "useless one" with a spoon, invoking the lack of scars around the right eye as proof that he did not lose it in combat. In truth, his eye popped out in his youth, when a particularly heavy hand hit the side of his face in a slapping contest.

Motivations. Lieutenants outrank only soldiers in the Ironhand hierarchy, which puts Lik, on paper, in a minor role in the decision as to which Teams will benefit the Empire. He resents having been a lieutenant for so long, and his dissatisfaction may become evident in remarks that he is there more to provide information to the Teams than to evaluate them—unless the Team shows they are ambitious and comfortable with evil deeds (see "Secret intent," below).

Cult of the Shadow Wing connection. Lik is an ambitious man. His desire to quickly climb the Ironhand ladder led him to Dillsgar, the Supreme Captain of the Ironhand, who recruited Lik to the Cult of the Shadow Wing, an end-of-world sect that Dillsgar secretly leads. The cult operated inside the Wasteland, seeking to expand it until it covered the entire Tanarean surface, which Dillsgar would rule while mounted on Zarumag, the Black Dragon of Corruption. But the group suffered a major blow with the disappearance of the Wasteland, and Lik does not know what the cult's next steps will be—nor is he willing to ask Dillsgar and risk his fury in this delicate moment.

Secret intent. Lik is on the lookout for adventurers and Teams inclined to perform evil deeds, especially if motivated by high ambition. These are often the easiest targets to recruit, which could increase his renown in the cult. Lik's interest in the interview quickly spikes if the Team attempts to bribe him or suggests that they are willing to break the law or do whatever it takes to get a nice position in the trials.

Land grants. The Empire is not granting licenses for third parties to occupy and protect the lands and coastal patches of sea due to the strategic relevance of the Turtlepoint Peninsula region; it needs to remain under close watch by the Empire. Loyal Teams who serve well may receive nobility titles and become permanent owners of the lands they protect in the future, though. The Empire's lands are the biggest being offered in the trials because of exactly that—if granted to third parties, they could divide the region into

several zones. The Empire is also studying the possibility of allowing Teams with bad results in the trials to occupy smaller and less relevant zones around the strait, although far fewer incentives will be offered to them.

Turtlepoint Peninsula. There are more than 1 million square miles in the Central Sea and all its islands and patches of land; moreover, massive bloodshed is almost impossible in the water. This makes the sea the weakest link in Ironhand forces, as most resources are allocated in the land outposts. The exception is the tip of the Turtlepoint Peninsula, where a massive castle serves as the headquarters of the Ironhand.

The castle is built at the far end of a cliff that bifurcates the water into two courses that rejoin a few hundred feet afterward, through a massive hole in the rock that forms the peninsula. The bottom portion of the top part of this hole has a few hatches that lead to the castle's cellar.

On the inverted shell of a dragon turtle, the Empire built the biggest ship in all of Tanares. It is tall enough to reach the top of the hole on the Turtlepoint Peninsula, connecting the ship with the castle on top of the cliff. The Team with the best performance who chooses the Empire as its Beneficiary will have the honor of navigating the seas in this wonder of nautical engineering.

Rewards and secondary jobs. Secondary jobs are like side quests that allow Teams to deviate from their standard mission during downtime. As Teams are beacons of power in the world, people may knock on their door to request help in a variety of situations. Given the relative inaccessibility of the location where one can expect to be stationed if working for the Empire, the vast majority of such side jobs should come from the Ironhand, who are busy setting up new outposts in more advanced positions inland.

For the main job of patrolling and securing the routes to the northwestern gaps in the Mystical Province's mountain range, the Empire can give other rewards noted in the plaque. The only coin the Team can expect from this Beneficiary comes from side missions.



THE PEOPLE'S REPRESENTATIVE: MASTER ARMUR JASPERIN

Description. Armur Jasperin (N) is a cunning and sharp-minded old gnome whose looks notoriously resemble those of a dwarf with friendly but tired facial features; he uses that to his advantage and even wears a disguise to look like a dwarf (see why in chapter 5). The last few years have been rough on him, but the gnome still has some hard-earned possessions, and he makes a point of using them to present himself very nicely, although not in an extravagant manner. He eventually reveals a bit of anger over the fact that mere decades ago, some of the lands taken by the Wasteland's expansion were his, so if it were up to him, he would simply claim them back. He knows, though, that he cannot compete with the Empire, so he bites his lip and doesn't stir up trouble.

As he is more than 300 years old, Armur witnessed the last Malrokian Curse from his shop in Ahimoth and finds it outrageous that the Emperor—who also was alive at the time—chooses to have such a short memory. Characters can take advantage of that and negotiate better terms with the gnome if he's made to feel that he is stealing the Team away from the Empire (or if the Team promises to use red as its main heraldic color).

Merchant consortium. Over the decades, Armur has earned the respect of friends and competitors alike, which eventually earned him the lifelong title of Master in the consortium of merchants he cofounded. Under the motto "A wrecked home is better than homelessness," Ahimoth stood its ground as ghost towns multiplied in the region due to the expanding Wasteland and its destructive beasts.

In truth, it was their proximity to the Capital and the robustness of their crops and surrounding farms that kept them alive, allowing them to survive attacks and rebuild many times. The attacks, however, were becoming more frequent and deadly, and many people left Ahimoth despite their respect for Armur's faked optimism. The city won't be able to hold on for much longer; its situation is dire. Armur tries to mask his concern by becoming verbose and elusive if the Team asks about Ahimoth.

Financed by the Third Eye. For a long time, Armur has hidden a secret: he is a deep infiltrator in the city of Ahimoth and was recruited by the Third Eye, a criminal enterprise that earns big bucks with its intelligence network and operations in the underworld of the Arenas. The group is the Empire's primary antagonist. Armur survived the situation in Ahimoth in better shape than his associates because of the regular payments the Third Eye sent his way.

Being a well-connected regional leader who just wants to live comfortably, Armur was a perfect target for the agents of the Third Eye, who, for reasons unknown to the gnome, seeks the Artifacts of the Gods. They feel certain that one of these legendary items lies in one of the many ruins the Mystical Kingdom left behind. (If pressured to talk more about the Wasteland and the Mystical Kingdom, Armur could let slip something about the search for the artifacts.)

Motivations. Despite his connection with the Third Eye, Armur's main interest is just surviving and leaving a nice legacy and land behind for his children and grandchildren. That requires keeping his head down. As a representative of the people of Ahimoth, his main line of discourse is that the city is not in as good a shape as it could be. Expanding into the southern lands that just became available would be a nice way to have more farms and sell more to neighboring cities, especially the Capital. This could help rebuild the southern district, which was destroyed in the last attack from aberrations that stampeded out of the Wasteland.

What Armur really wanted was to also get hold of the nicer, bigger, and more well-positioned lands to the east, but rumor has it that a northern Noble House made the Empire an offer it couldn't refuse. Such lands are more at the heart of the connection between the provinces of Yama, Capital, Mystical, and Reginheraht, and with the right allocation of funds could indeed become a rewarding investment.

Primary work. Although Ahimoth lies in the middle of a straight line between Arcana and the Capital, due to numerous water bodies in the way, any road coming from the west and the Capital must travel east for several miles before turning south. With the eastern lands going to an investor with deep pockets, Ahimoth could lose its healthy commercial position and become isolated from the rest of the world. Therefore, securing the fertile lands south of Ahimoth is more a matter of survival than enrichment. The city and its people depend on the influx of resources that come in through its trade routes.

Thus, the Team is needed for many jobs to revitalize the region, drive away or bring to justice criminals who have started to pop up, secure roads and crops, rebuild destroyed parts of the city, and help build structures not only in Ahimoth but in the lands around the city and maybe even to the north. Armur is working with the Empire to obtain permits to build bridges across some of the water bodies mentioned above, which would hinder sea navigation but provide a more direct road south from the Capital.

Rewards and headquarters. With a good portion of resources going toward the newly licensed lands, Armur can't offer to pay the Team much. But persuasive characters can pressure him into agreeing to better terms by suggesting that they'll consider partnering with other Beneficiaries.

The lands Ahimoth obtained have precarious buildings that house poor farm workers or that miraculously survived monster attacks. The city has scarce ways to contribute to building anything of relevance in the lands. If the Team wants to build a headquarters, they would have to do the heavy lifting themselves. On the plus side, Armur is quick to agree that anything the Team builds is automatically their property.

What the gnome can really offer in the way of rewards is human resources in the city, as well as discounts in lodges and all kinds of shops. If the Team is willing to travel back and forth, every day they can find numerous offers of jobs, as most everyone needs help with something. That could be a good way to quickly earn some coin and even material for their headquarters (if they want to build one).



THE NOBLE HOUSE'S REPRESENTATIVE: MARIAHNNAH LISPROLIS, NIECE AND ADVISOR OF YOUR GRACE (EDHELL LISPROLIS)

Description. Mariahnnah (LG) is an elegant and polite middle-aged elf who wears cerulean garments of the highest quality. A fine ring draws attention to her long, dry hands. The jewel is so big that one can see in it the design of an orchid, symbol of House of Lisprolis. Many people in Skybell City treat her with deference, bowing as she passes.

Motivation. Counselor to the matriarch Edhell Lisprolis, she volunteered to watch over the trials, but she says it was an act of humility before her House and in accordance with her position. She is honest and has true interest in preserving the knowledge that could be retrieved from the extinct Mystical Kingdom. She seeks lawful, good, hard-working adventurers to chart the lands the House obtained while preventing scavengers from trespassing on their way to the depths of the province.

D.E.A.T.H. House of Lisprolis cofounded the Draconic Evolutionist Assembly of Tanarean Helpers; at the time, it was merely a religious association with the main objective of understanding the role of dragons in the world. The first historical record of a draconic appearance is found in the Evolutionist Sacred Scriptures at the time of the Malrokian Kingdom's demise, where it's said that the gods Bauron and Tamera descended to Tanares in the form of dragons and decreed what became known as the Malrokian Curse: "Massive bloodshed will be punished with natural catastrophes."

Over the centuries, D.E.A.T.H.'s studies have led them to discover that all Malrokian Curse incidents throughout history have been caused by dragons. Eventually, their objective became finding and exterminating the Avatar Dragons, under the belief that this would free Tanareans from the curse. Others in D.E.A.T.H.'s ranks have come to believe that the gods want their creations to evolve to the point where they can exterminate all Avatar Dragons and determine their own destiny.

Mariahnnah is eager to say that, today, D.E.A.T.H. focuses on the "Draconic" part of their name and neglects the "Evolutionist" part. She says House of Lisprolis sided with the Church and parted ways with D.E.A.T.H. after the latter changed its studious, peaceful philosophy. She also says that one of the House's main goals is to prevent D.E.A.T.H. from scavenging Arcana and securing the research of Torygg Addin-Zaiba, the most famous expert on dragons in world history. If D.E.A.T.H. learns the locations where Avatar Dragons have lain dormant for centuries and discovers how to kill them, that could lead Tanares into a new dark age where the Empire is no more and the draconics likely rule supreme.

Unbeknownst to Mariahnnah, House of Lisprolis only faked its schism from D.E.A.T.H. so it could continue to exert influence in the Church and Empire. Edhell actually shares the top rank of D.E.A.T.H. with three other women.



Orchid: House of Lisprolis symbol

Dragonblades. If there is a dragonblade in the party, Mariahnnah takes great interest in them and tries to be friendly and cordial when writing down their name and asking questions. If the dragonblade reveals their affiliation with D.E.A.T.H., though, she has a hard time hiding her contempt, remarking that the association operates outside the law and one should refrain from openly affiliating with them in Imperial lands. (This will provide an opportunity for a better deal when the Team meets with Edhell later; she tricked Mariahnnah into thinking this is just a ploy to "keep your enemies closer.")

Headquarters and negotiations. Mariahnnah is quick to say that her House can find dozens of Teams willing to work for them and that any negotiations to improve what was stated on the plaque would have to wait for the trials. Opulent headquarters and fortresses are being built as the characters speak. A Team that proves loyal and worthy could gain permanent ownership of them, but that could take a while. If the Team is chosen as a Benefactor of House of Lisprolis, the House will be happy to listen to any reasonable requests to improve or modify the construction plans.

Katis. The representative has some arcane knowledge and uses an owl familiar (named Katis) to spy on the candidates throughout the trials. The spying becomes more conspicuous if Mariahnnah suspects that one of the characters is a member of D.E.A.T.H.



PORTAL TO THE CAPITAL

When the interview ends, the representative rings a little bell to call an Ironhand soldier to escort the aspiring Team out the door on the other side of the room. Through the door is a hall where the carpet ends.

Standing in front of many dark and narrow tunnels is **High Priest Taram Hemsfield (LG)**, a human cleric of the Arena. Taram is a dignified and famous Hero who has fought in the Arena of Fate. He solemnly congratulates the Team on the path chosen. If there's a cleric in the party, he remarks that the path they chose is tough, but rewarding and blessed by the gods, as it plays a crucial role in the evolution of their creation.

"Good morning; my name is Taram. I will escort you to the Imperial Capital using a magnificent method of transportation that many have never had the honor of enjoying. It is an Imperial secret, and I ask that it remain so. You are hereby identified among your peers as Team 2. Pin this brooch in a visible spot."

Taram approaches and hands each of you a round blue brooch with the number 2 in white.

Taram escorts the Team through a series of dark, narrow tunnels. The number of corners turned, doorways entered, and stairs climbed (both up and down) is mind-numbing. It is a deliberate design intended to keep trespassers away from the main room.

Finally, one of the corridors ends in an exquisite circular room with a high ceiling. Many arrows are arranged around the middle, pointing away from the center; from afar it looks like a weird drawing of a sun. Some arrows have recognizable names written inside them, such as "ISH" and "Deverell." A few are in different languages; others are in unrecognizable symbols, like a code.

You hear a series of slow, arrhythmic buzzes coming from bright turquoise oval portals spaced around the circumference of the room. A soldier stands silently between every two portals. Taram walks past the center of the room, turns to you, and extends his arm toward the portal directly opposite the corridor through which you entered. An arrow reading "Capital" points toward it. "Quickly. There's no time to waste."

When the characters cross the portal's threshold, the next part of the adventure begins.

WHOSE CRIME IS IT, ANYWAY?

This section begins with an unorthodox journey through the dangerous Penumbra Plane, used as a shortcut to get the party from Skybell City to the Capital. But the transit is cut short by an unheard-of obstruction: for apparently the first time in history, a monster from the depths of the plane attacks an entourage on a portal highway.

Taram instructs the party to detour to another exit: an Ironhand fortress a few miles east of the Capital. Once there, everything seems fine. The party designs a symbol, engraves its weapons with a blacksmith, and returns to their room to design a banner and rest from the Penumbra Plane fight, while waiting for the other Teams to arrive so everyone can take the road to the Capital.

However, to everyone's surprise, a body shows up outside the party's room, and all evidence seems to point to one of the characters as the killer. Now, there is much more at stake than just winning a trial. It seems like the only way to avoid execution is to investigate the crime and find the real perpetrator.

TELEPORTATION, INTERRUPTED

You feel as if you've gone underwater—a dark, purple water—but you can still breathe. You fly forward and upward at incredible speed, as if hurled by a catapult. You see the city of Skybell receding beneath and behind you, as if cloaked by purple glass. A white dot is the only thing that grows in size: you see it is Taram. He paces easily toward you, as if walking while being propelled forward by a great wind. And you do see a large blue strip glowing faintly underneath his feet like a magical highway. Two Ironhand officers accompany him. He slows down as he approaches you and says, reassuringly: "It is perfectly normal to throw up, lose your balance, or lie on the ground if you need to hold onto something. You get used to it."

Taram looks around. A million stars and shooting stars are above you, and the world is small under your feet. "The Penumbra Plane is a dark mirror of the physical world. A place where the laws of physics, space, magic, and even time do not work quite as expected. This is the place where dreams and nightmares come—or are they born here and come to us down there? Anyway, we are still toddlers trying to learn about this marvelous and dangerous realm.

"Portals are the most incredible and most advanced use of the Penumbra Plane. They are the result of

an ancient secret ritual performed simultaneously at the places where a teleportation spell begins and ends. A portal cuts through the fabric of this plane to make a safe highway we can use for quick traveling." You feel as if you have started to descend rapidly as Taram continues his lecture. "I say 'safe' because, outside of this highway, the plane is an incredibly dangerous environment. It is impossible to predict what dangers you might encounter here. This is the main reason why we are so slow in understanding it and learning new uses for it. Impossible... impossible!"

As Taram widens his eyes and points behind you, you realize that he is not merely repeating the word for effect. "This has never happened before! Quick, get behind me! What in the gods' name...!" Just as you spot your final destination—a tiny, bright turquoise dot at the far western end of the empty landscape, a dot that seems to be the Capital—an aberrant dragon lands on the highway ahead of you, which explodes into a million tiny blue crystals with the sound of shattering glass. You abruptly stop moving. Weirdly, the inertia doesn't throw you forward, as expected. Quite the opposite, in fact, as the beast's landing impact pushes you backward.

Have the players make a series of rolls and resolve them according to the following table:

ROLL (1D20)	NATURE OF THE ROLL	SUCCESS	FAILURE
First roll	DC 16 Strength saving throw	PC manages to stay on their feet and does not lose ground.	The failing character with the worst roll in the party is hurled 20 ft backward and falls off the highway, disappearing into the abyss. Make the second roll to determine if they notice that their brooch came loose. (If two PCs are tied for worst roll, this happens to both of them.) Other failing characters are thrown 10 ft backward.
Second roll	DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check	Even amid all the confusion, the character notices that their brooch came loose quickly enough to try to grab it in midair. Make the third roll.	The character does not notice the brooch (Taram does, though). Take note of that character's name; this will be important later in the chapter.
Third roll	DC 14 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check	Even while spinning out of control, the character manages to secure their brooch.	The character misses the brooch and falls into the abyss. The brooch tumbles into the gloom and lands on another part of the highway, where Taram grabs it after his fight with the aberration.

If a PC falls into the abyss, Taram shouts to the rest of the party that their colleague will not die from the fall and that they should jump after them. Meanwhile, Taram intends to face the **penumbra dragon (Appendix K2)** and slow it down so it does not go after the PCs. Taram also makes it clear that this aberration is not a beast the PCs can safely face, and if they stick around, he cannot guarantee their safety.

Even if all PCs succeed on the saving throw, read the following:

Taram points to a particularly unremarkable spot about 45 degrees southeast and shoots a beam of light into the nothingness. He shouts, "Run toward the light! Aim for the Imperial Palace!" What do you do?

If the characters **hesitate**, they hear Taram commanding the Ironhand soldiers: "Go to the Phantom Fortress and have the officers prepare for the trials! I will send all Teams there as soon as it is safe!" The soldiers promptly follow his orders and jump into the abyss, toward the light. Combat then starts between Taram and the aberration.





THE PENUMBRAL PLANE



1 - The trajectory of the portal runway originated in Skybell; 2 - The destination portal to which the PCs were headed; 3 - The jumping point; 4 - Taram's light beacon

If the PCs **jump** after their falling comrade or toward the light, one second after they leave the edge of the runway, they begin falling uncontrollably, down and forward. It is a steady plunge with no acceleration toward the vast golden dome of the Imperial Palace.

Ask each PC whether they want to jump toward the light (white line) or toward their falling comrade (blue line). Then have each player roll a Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to determine **where they land**, according to the following table.

CHECK RESULT	OUTCOME
1-3	The PC stumbles over the edge of the runway when attempting to jump and falls almost straight down anywhere in Zone 1 .
4-6	The PC jumps with little force and falls on the roof or right next to the Cathedral in Zone 2 .
7-10	The PC does not adjust well to the falling physics of the Penumbra Plane and lands anywhere in Zone 3, before the hospital .
11-13	The PC starts the fall roughly but manages to adjust and do somersaults to gain distance, landing between the hospital and the park, in Zone 4 .
14-17	The PC makes a decent jump and gains a lot of space, landing in Zone 5 —almost at the center of the park if they tried to reach a falling comrade.
18+	The PC makes an almost perfect jump and adjusts well to the physics of the plane, landing anywhere they choose in Zone 6 —either right before the wall that surrounds the palace or right near their falling comrade.



The falling comrade lands at the end of the blue line; the white line shows the trajectory a PC takes when jumping toward the light hovering above the Imperial Palace. E = Main entrance to the Imperial Gardens; an encounter awaits the PCs shortly afterward, near the water mirror.

When they land, it is as if they had fallen from 3 feet, not thousands. They are by themselves, in the unsafe part of the Penumbra Plane. Describe things to be as dark, moody, and suspenseful as possible.

USING THE POSTER MAP

If you own the giant poster map of the Imperial Capital, this is a good opportunity to show it to the players and let them see where each PC fell. This view from above is what the PCs saw when jumping down, and they roughly know where each of their comrades fell.

Atmosphere. Interaction With Objects in the Material Plane.

The Penumbra Plane is a gloomy and strange mirror of the Material Plane (or Physical Plane, where the laws of physics are known and predictable). Characters feel as if they are spirits roaming the streets of the Capital, passive observers to the activity of the people in the city, who cannot see them. Sometimes people disappear in front of the PCs' eyes, or pass through them in a flash. Characters can pass through people and animals, but not walls and surfaces.

Penumbra Behavior. Emotions and Shortcuts. There is no one certain way to manipulate the behavior of the Penumbra Plane, where the laws of space and time are sometimes randomly bent. Strong emotions originated in the Material Plane can sometimes deform the penumbra or even project a monster. Likewise, emotional connections to certain places, objects, or people can create shortcuts between two thresholds. For example, if a PC inside a penumbral tavern holds a piece of cloth worn by a friend and thinks about them lovingly, the next door they go through could lead them directly to the room closest to that friend.

Symbols. Much of the Penumbra Plane operates on symbols. For example, if a tavernkeeper hates a certain song and PCs drinking in the tavern sing it, that could attract a monster projected by the tavernkeeper's rage. The influence of symbols while exploring the Penumbra Plane is an important part of chapter 2.

Prolonged Exposure. Although this should not happen in this chapter, characters who spend too long on the Penumbra Plane may become progressively crazier and suffer hallucinations and debuffs on Wisdom checks; moreover, they start to draw penumbral monsters toward them. Check the *Tanares Campaign Sourcebook* for all rules and information related to this environment.

Getting Together. The first thing the PCs need to do is get together, as they probably fell in different zones; each of them roughly knows where the others are. Sounds from the Material Plane can be heard if PCs are nearby, but distant sounds quickly fade, making the penumbra quiet enough for the characters to shout and be heard by the others.

Destination: Imperial Palace. The PCs need to get on the runway that begins at the Imperial Palace and projects itself upward and eastbound. It is common knowledge that the main entrance to the palace is at the east gate. Walls around it are 40 feet high, smooth on the Material Plane, and even smoother in the penumbra, requiring a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check to be climbed. Once the PCs approach the gates, they see a faint blue strip ahead. It is not difficult to enter the palace, as guards often open service doors or even the main gates for visitors or people leaving.

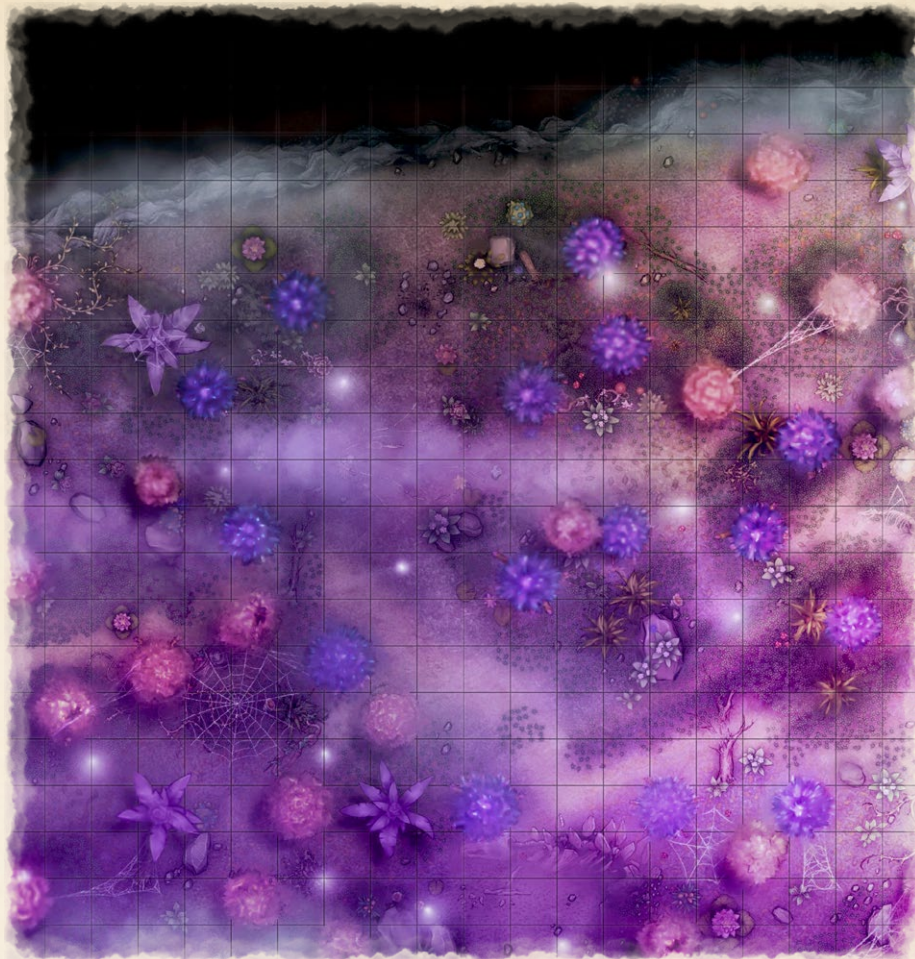
Monsters await the PCs after they cross through the gates and enter the Imperial gardens.

Light. Bioluminescent plants and fungi glow purple and blue, creating bright light in an area 30 feet around them and dim light for a further 15 feet. Those plants and fungi are the only sources of light near the water mirror, as the sun, although visible in the penumbra, barely illuminates the environment, which even during the day is always in dim light.

Ground and Vegetation. The Imperial gardens' vegetation covers the combat area in exotic plants, rocks, and moss. Have the PCs make a DC 14 Intelligence (Nature) check before rolling initiative (madwalkers have advantage); on a success, they recognize **penumbral bushes** (Appendix K2). All aberrations know the effects of the penumbral bushes and avoid stepping in threatened spaces.

Enemies. The PCs must face six manifestations of emotions that permeate the Penumbral Plane: two **Lesser Pain**, two **Anger**, and two **Lesser Grudge** manifestations (Appendix K2). Each is the size of an adult man. They appear 30 feet away from the party and attack whichever hostile creature is closest to them.

When the manifestations fall to 0 hp, they **disappear** into the gloom, leaving nothing behind.



Penumbral bush

HANDLING A TOTAL PARTY KILL

Each GM has their own way of dealing with a total party kill (TPK), and we encourage you to use the one you think is best. However, if you want the same characters to continue this adventure even if they die in the Penumbral Plane, you can have them wake up fully recovered in what looks like a simple hotel room with walls made of stone (it is actually Team 2's room in the Phantom Fortress). Their equipment lies on a table, each item engraved with the symbol of what looks like a flattened sun, beside two messages that the players can read in **Appendix E2 and E3**. Then jump straight to "Murder Investigation."



Read the following if the characters keep on the path toward the Imperial Palace:

As you approach the Imperial Palace, a large blue runway seems to enlarge and pull you in. Once you are captured, its stream hurls you eastbound at incredible speed. Mere seconds later, you are headed toward a two-story stone building in a fortress in the middle of nowhere. Before you can take in any more details, you pass through a bright oval turquoise gate. You feel increased air pressure and land on a slippery slide, feeling the hardness of the material beneath you.

The slide ends several feet below, in a small curve upward designed to put you down slowly and smoothly. You instinctively land on your feet in a large stone room. The slide retracts behind a wall, which closes again. Ironhand officers are running in different directions. You recognize the soldiers who were with you and Taram; they apparently arrived before you.

THE PHANTOM FORTRESS

Although much smaller than the Ironhand Supreme Headquarters, the fortress is a large Ironhand complex that serves the nearby Imperial Capital, located just a few miles away. The party is teleported to a two-story building (merely a fraction of the compound) that is much longer than it is tall, and the nearest portal outside the Capital. The building has a kitchen, quarters, blacksmith, library, and more to serve the characters, as well as a few lieutenants and many soldiers led by Major Broock.

A lieutenant, having received the orders issued by Taram and transmitted by the soldiers, informs the party that they are welcome and safe there. Officers are clearing the building—normally quarters for soldiers and lieutenants—to receive the Teams. In the meantime, the party can get their equipment engraved by the fortress's blacksmith. This is a necessary step for the trial, and it is recommended that the Team do it before resting. To find the blacksmith, the Team can turn right from the south exit of the room, past the well.

The characters will return to the Phantom Fortress in chapter 3, where the rest of the compound is described. You can refer to it now if the PCs deviate from the course of the adventure (e.g., falling in the water pit or escaping from this wing).

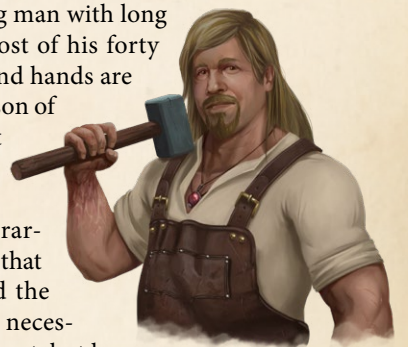
If the characters want to explore instead, there's not much else to do. No other Teams will arrive in the fortress for a while, so all the party can do is walk around finding locked doors and pathways that are blocked by officers.

ENGRAVING SYMBOLS

Read "Locations | E5" for more on the Forge.

Koraldur Smith is a strong man with long blond hair. Having spent most of his forty years at the forge, his arms and hands are covered with scars. The fifth son of a noble family from Ben'net Province, he volunteered to join the Ironhand but never got an official title in its hierarchy, as it soon became evident that he lacked the discipline and the stomach for the job. He isn't necessarily brave, intelligent, or smart, but he picked up substantial knowledge about heraldry thanks to his family background and is always eager to exaggerate the quality of his work.

Koraldur has been instructed to **engrave** symbols on whatever equipment is brought to him by someone wearing a brooch (or their companions) and to register new symbols in a log. Having engraved thousands of Ironhand items with the same symbols, he is ecstatic at the opportunity to apply his skills in another fashion.



If the PCs are not sure what to choose as their **symbol**, Koraldur can offer some help: “Decide what your Team’s all about, and convey as much of your essence as possible in a single, simple image. If you all have something in common or something that stands out, that’s a good choice too. For example, if you live inside a volcano, your symbol could be a volcano. Or if everyone on your Team is a wizard, the symbol can be an arcane one, or a grimoire. Have you thought about the name of your Team? Maybe you can illustrate that in your symbol. Or what about your Specialization—maybe something related to that?”

With magically enhanced forge fires, it shouldn’t take more than a few minutes for Koraldur to engrave all of the characters’ requested equipment. He advises that anything other than metals has to be engraved in the Artisans’ Workshop (“Just turn left when you leave the forge and you’ll find it”).

Once the blacksmith engraves their weapons, an officer escorts the characters to their room, where they’ll find instructions on how to design a banner.

FUN WITH FLAGS

At first the party finds the door to the Artisans’ Workshop locked, with a handwritten sign that says:

“Back in a few hours. Our staff is out getting supplies to attend to the incoming Teams. P.S. We asked the officers to put our leaflet about flag design in each room!”

Inside their room, characters will find the leaflet shown in **Appendix G**.

The workshop will be open during the “Murder Investigation” part of the adventure. Read about it in “Locations | F.4.”

Heraldry and Symbols

You can find full instructions for designing a Team’s symbol and banner in the “Adventure Team” section of the Player’s Guide to Tanares, where you will also find a heraldry guide for Tanarean organizations, cities, families, and Teams.

LONG REST

If the characters have already engraved their equipment and start to ask around, wanting to leave the fortress or go back to the portal, an officer hands them the letter from Taram (found in **Appendix E2**, assuming they haven’t read it yet), as if it had just arrived.

In general, officers inform the characters that it should take a while to deal with the unprecedented attack on the portal runway. For the sake of isonomy and safety, all Teams eventually will be transported to the same location (the fortress), and the characters will be served and treated well there. They are forbidden to trespass in locked or protected areas, mainly the portal through which the Team arrived.

When describing the party’s room, say that a strong wind blows through the **window**, then ask if they want to close it. The party’s sleep will be uneasy and troubled, tormented by the following nightmare:

NIGHTMARE MODE

If your players are too good to achieve anything less than a perfect outcome in the upcoming murder investigation, you can spice things up by having a five-minute private session with each player at this time. Roll a die in secret and, regardless of the result, whisper to each of them the nightmare below, as if they were the only one who had it. This might also spark the idea that one of the PCs from Team 2 snuck out of the room during the long rest and may actually be the murderer, which makes the investigation—and trial—more difficult.

You feel wet. It is blood, pouring from your mouth and drenching your blue robes. You have no teeth. A sharp, acid pain in your limbs, then your body, then your soul, as goblins endlessly torture you with daggers, while others, mounted on golden dragons, fly by and watch. A wizard comes to the rescue; with the wave of one hand, you all fly away. You feel safe, but not for long: the mage falls into the open slit of a gigantic canyon. As you widen your view, you see it is not a fissure on the ground, but the vertical pupil of a gigantic, raging eye...

You wake up in your room. Its isolation in the fortress makes it nearly impossible to hear what is going on beyond the thick walls, but you sense the buzz of activity. Something tells you the other Teams have arrived.

If there are madwalkers in the party, this long rest does not make them lose their Insanity Points. If the window was left open before the long rest, PCs with a passive Perception score of 12 or higher will notice the odor of cat feces coming from the garden outside (F.15). If the PCs met Avelum previously, they recognize him in their dream.

When the characters leave the room, proceed to the “Murder Investigation” section.

MURDER INVESTIGATION

After resting or staying in their room for a while, the PCs have a surprise waiting for them in the hallway outside: a dead body with evidence that could incriminate them. The stiff, heavy corpse of Vang Irinniena is right outside their room, so when they try to open the metal door to leave, at first it budes only a few inches. If the PCs look through the crack, they see the victim’s bare ankles and leather slip-ons, and a bloodstain on the floor.

ACTION	ABILITY CHECK	SUCCESS	FAILURE
Kick the door open	DC 14 Strength (Athletics)	Door opens and breaks the victim’s leg	Door opens
Push the door open a few more inches	DC 6 Strength (Athletics)	Door opens a bit more, revealing the body outside	Door does not open

You see an old woman lying on the ground, clearly dead. It’s hard to say what draws your attention first. A golden-plated dagger is inserted in the middle of her stomach, from which a dark stain spreads across her long, dark blue vest sprinkled with stars. The stain becomes more vividly red upon reaching the stone floor and trails toward the west corner of the corridor, as if she had crawled there—or was dragged.

The victim’s eyes are wide and her body is stiff. Her index finger sticks out from her rigidly closed right hand, which leans against the door. Her left hand is firmly closed in a fist and holds a piece of smooth beige fabric. You see a blue brooch pinned close to her heart. On it is the number 3, written in white.

Crime scene description. Describe the Team’s symbol engraved on the dagger (if any; it’s possible that the party’s actions prevented the dagger from having a symbol).

On the lower part of the door, near the victim’s finger, letters are written in blood. They are the first four letters in the name of the PC who lost a brooch (or any other PC in the party if no one lost a brooch).

Exiting the room through the window. If the characters leave their room through the window instead of the door, every door that leads back into the compound has two soldiers guarding it. One of them rushes inside to call a lieutenant, and the other orders the characters to halt. A lieutenant quickly comes and asks the characters what they’re doing out on the grounds. If they reply that their door wouldn’t budge, the officer escorts them to their room, which leads to finding the body.

An officer sees the crime scene. Any officer (except soldiers) immediately interprets the writing on the door as the name of one of the characters. That PC’s hands are tied behind their back; two soldiers and one lieutenant are assigned to escort

the character, who is free to wander around with their Team or stay in their room. Other soldiers are called to stand by each door in the building; if questioned, the officers explain that once the Ironhand is authorized, the prisoner will be taken to the Capital and almost certainly executed.

Other party characters. Characters not under arrest are briefly questioned. Officers in charge believe the writing on the door specifically points blame at one character; the others are allowed to roam freely through that wing of the fortress (no escorts, and their hands are not tied). If the characters don’t investigate what happened, you can have curious NPCs pepper them with questions and suggestions.

Helpful officer. The lieutenant escorting the arrested PC, Harold Pennc, is secretly assigned to observe the party’s actions. Whenever they behave strangely, he may step in and ask what they’re doing. If they invite him to join their investigation, he begins trusting and helping the team. You can use this officer to steer players away from fruitless asides or use his authority to have NPCs cough up relevant information more quickly.

Body not reported. Failure to immediately report the body to an Ironhand officer is a crime and prevents the players from reaching the best ending to the chapter, as it casts suspicion on the good faith of their actions. It’s also more difficult to get information from NPCs if only the characters (and the murderer) know about the crime.

Investigating the body and crime scene. This is a complex scene. It is recommended that players specify where they want to take a closer look and what they are looking for, which could require successive skill checks.

After a broad Intelligence (Investigation) check (regardless of its result), you can inform the players “Your analysis of the scene indicates that there are a few spots deserving of a closer look: the victim’s left and right hands, the chest wound, the corridor, and the victim’s body.”

INTELLIGENCE (INVESTIGATION) CHECK RESULT	LOCATION	INFORMATION LEARNED
13	Body / Corridor	Other than the dagger wound, the only visible wounds on the victim are a few bruises on her legs. The kind of stone that makes up the floor here suggests that there should be abrasions on her knees or elbows.
15	Left hand	There are small smudges of still-fresh black ink on the victim’s left hand.
17	Right hand	The writing on the door is in blood and seems to match the victim’s. The width of the lines matches the size of her right index finger.
WISDOM (MEDICINE) CHECK RESULT	LOCATION	INFORMATION LEARNED
10	Body	This kind of rigor mortis is usually found only in bodies that have been dead for at least twenty hours.
13	Body / Corridor	Other than the dagger wound, the only visible wounds on the victim are a few bruises on her legs. The kind of stone that makes up the floor here suggests that there should be abrasions on her knees or elbows.
19	Wound	The stab wound is a bit larger than the inserted blade could produce, indicating a different murder weapon, or that the victim was stabbed more than once in the same spot.
INTELLIGENCE (NATURE) CHECK RESULT	LOCATION	INFORMATION LEARNED
15	Body	The victim’s stiffness and the coloration around her pupils may be the work of some kind of poison you cannot identify.
20	Body	One of the main ingredients of the poison is clearly cockatrice bile. (From now on, the character will recognize it if it is seen.)

Characters need to break the victim's fingers to open her hands. If a character lost their brooch on the Penumbra Plane, it is found in Vang's closed right hand. In her left hand is a piece of beige fabric tightened by a rubber band. A DC 8 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that it used to be part of the opening of a bag, and that there is a bloodstain on the bottom of the fabric and many black ink smudges on her fingers. If the same check beats a DC 12, it reveals that the bag was cut by a sharp tool.

If the Ironhand is following the characters, they won't allow extreme actions like breaking the body's fingers or removing the dagger.

WHAT HAPPENED?

Taram finds the missing brooch. If a PC lost their brooch on the Penumbra Plane, Taram finds it on the ground and tells Yvank, one of the lieutenants in Skybell City, to teleport through the other portal and return it to them.

The brooch ends up in Garry Landen's hands. The Ironhand is a bit understaffed with the attack on the Penumbra Plane on top of the trials, so Yvank is busy. Fortunately for him, Garry appears, claims that Team 2 are good friends of his, and says he'll deliver the brooch for the lieutenant. Garry takes the brooch and learns the name of the character who lost it. (The names of all the characters can be found in records kept in Skybell City.)

Garry's voice is heard by Vang Irinniena. A short while after Garry and his Team get to the fortress, he climbs the outside north wall of the building through his room's balcony and reaches the roof, where he meets Major Broock, who commands the fortress. Unbeknownst to Garry, a female mage (CG) from Team 3 by the name of Vang Irinniena is smoking a pipe on another balcony nearby. She hears Garry say incriminating words, which she reproduces on the letter that may be found in the library. Shortly afterward, a griffon shrieks and flies just a few feet above Vang, headed west.

The events below take place while the characters are in their room designing a banner or taking a short or long rest. This all happens in about thirty minutes, starting either about one hour before the characters wake up or shortly after they enter the room (if they didn't take a long rest).

FIRST FIVE MINUTES

Vang rushes through the fortress trying to hear the voice again. Vang could not see who was talking on the roof, but Garry's voice had an unusual pitch. She dropped her pipe on the balcony and moved quickly through the fortress, talking to every male she could see, trying to identify the voice. Myysa Teek, Vang's teammate, observed her strange behavior and asked what was going on, to which she replied, "Trying to find an impostor. I know what he sounds like." She tells Myysa to engrave their weapons without her.

Vang finds Garry in the dining hall. Vang finds Garry at a messy small table at the corner of the dining hall and realizes his voice is the one she heard. She can't hide her

contempt for him and storms out, knocking down a chair on the way. A halfling named Oord Mimim III (from Team 4) was stealing food from the nearby kitchen and hid behind a counter when he saw Vang approaching. The only thing he heard in the argument was Garry yelling, "It could have been a minor illusion!" and then a chair falling.

0:06–0:15

Vang writes a letter exposing the impostor. Vang goes to the library, finds a desk, and starts writing a letter to Master Armur Jasperin, representative of the People who gave Team 3 the same mission the characters could have received (finding the impostor).

Garry makes a paralyzing poison and soaks a bag of gold. Meanwhile, Garry, not quite a specialist in poisons but having learned a lot from one of his teammates (Zahlla, a gloomfolk), concocts a powerful poison that paralyzes its victim, using ingredients whose traces remain on top of the small table in the dining hall. The body of a victim remains as hard as a rock for a few minutes, then enters a state of normal rigor mortis, as if it had been dead for more than twenty hours. Wearing leather gloves, he soaks his bag of used coins with the substance and rushes after Vang.

Garry knocks on Team 3's door and sees Vang in the library. He heads to Team 3's room and knocks on the door. No one answers. He then sees Vang in the nearby library through an opening in its east door. Garry enters the library.

Xan'quoi Petre hears someone knocking on Team 3's door. At that time, Xan'quoi Petre (from Team 7) was about to knock on Team 6's door. He and Ysseppa Rob'erta are romantically involved and, as members of rival teams, they want to keep this a secret. He stops when he hears Garry knock on Team 3's door so he won't be seen. After he hears a door open and close (which he assumes is Team 3's door but is actually the library door), he proceeds with finding his lover.

Vang stops writing and takes the bag of gold. Vang stops writing her letter when Garry calls her out. (The letter was left upside down on the desk and can be read in **Appendix E1**.) Garry offers the mage a bag of gold in exchange for her silence. Vang takes the bag, pretending to accept the offer, and they continue to converse for a little while.

Vang is attacked. Suddenly, Vang's body petrifies from the poison, and Garry stabs her in the stomach with a golden-plated curved dagger.

Garry hides Vang's body and slices the bag with the murder weapon. With much effort, Garry manages to hide Vang's body in an unused closet in the library near the desk; some blood spills on its floor. He can't open Vang's petrified hand to get the bag back, so he removes the dagger from her stomach and uses it to slice the bag out of her grip. Part of the fabric (now bloodstained) remains in Vang's left hand.

The bell tolls and coins fall. A bell tolls as Garry slices the bag, startling him so that he spills a few gold coins. He quickly collects them but misses two coins: one under the desk and another inside the closet.

Garry wears habit found in the closet. Deciding he's wasted enough time, Garry leaves the gold bag in the closet, where he also hides the bloody dagger. He grabs a blue habit from a hanger and uses its cowl to cover his head. He then leaves the library through the south door.

Xan'quoi Petre and Ysseppa Rob'erta go to the library after the bell tolls. Xan'quoi and Ysseppa decide that neither of their rooms is safe for a rendezvous, and they look for a hidden spot in another chamber. They enter the library barely a moment after Garry left it, then get hot and steamy at the far end of the room, between two bookshelves.

Garry gets a second dagger from his room and takes it to the blacksmith. Garry rushes to his room to get a second dagger (similar to the murder weapon) and visits the blacksmith, pretending to be a member of Team 2. He pins the character's brooch on his chest if he has it (or he creates an illusion of a brooch) and asks the blacksmith to engrave Team 2's symbol on his dagger.

Zianna Belikk'a sees Garry but mistakes him for a ghost. Zianna Belikk'a (from Team 4) is near the "Phantom of the Fortress" painting, which depicts a librarian in robes similar to the one worn by Garry. Frightened by the phantom's story, she glances over her shoulder just as Garry passes through the south corridor toward the blacksmith, wearing a librarian's robe and holding a dagger. Zianna mistakes Garry for the phantom and runs as quickly as she can back to her Team.

0:16–0:30

Garry returns to the library and is heard by Xan'quoi and Ysseppa. While the blacksmith works on his dagger, Garry returns to the library and takes the murder weapon and the bag of coins from the closet. First he throws the weapon through the window, aiming at some bushes outside the first floor. Then he takes the chair next to the desk and climbs on it to carefully place Vang's grimoire and the bag on top of the third-to-last bookshelf, hidden behind a dusty, heavy tome, figuring it would take months until someone found the items. He leaves the chair at an odd angle near the desk. All of this is heard (but not seen) by Xan'quoi and Ysseppa, who lie in hiding two bookshelves away.

Garry plants the body outside Team 2's door. Garry drags Vang's body outside the characters' room while they are likely resting or designing their banner. With the corpse stiff but still able to be manipulated, Garry dips the index finger of Vang's right hand in her own blood and uses it to write, on the door of the room, the first four letters of the name of the character whose brooch was lost (or any character's name, at random) as if the mage had died while writing.

Garry adds the dagger to the crime scene. Garry returns to the blacksmith—who has finished engraving his dagger with Team 2's symbol—and, avoiding witnesses, sneaks back to where he left the body. If he has Team 2's brooch, he forces it into Vang's right hand (the one with a stiff index finger) and inserts the dagger into the same wound in her stomach, as if it were the murder weapon.

Garry returns to the library and is heard again by Xan'quoi and Ysseppa. The murderer returns to the library, where he removes his habit and hangs it on the back of the chair. Xan'quoi and Ysseppa hear him again. Since the library seems a little too busy for a tryst, they return to their rooms, one at a time, hoping not to be seen together. Ysseppa leaves first and is seen by Adm'erio Shosshan (from Team 5); one minute later, Xan'quoi leaves and is seen by Bobbum Vonoblom (from Team 6). Neither Adm'erio nor Bobbum attribute any significance to what they saw, but they are able to recall what they observed.

Garry spreads false rumors. Finally, Garry walks around the fortress and talks to Bobbum, the NPC he deems most likely to innocently spread false rumors. He feeds Bobbum a few lies about interactions that never happened between Vang and the PCs, and then settles in the middle of the dining hall where he can be seen by everyone, reinforcing the idea that he was there all along.

MAKING ADJUSTMENTS



Be sure to have a good grasp of the events described here so you can improvise and adjust if the party veers off course. For example, if they take a long rest before engraving their weapons, Garry can still throw the murder weapon out of the window and go to the blacksmith to get his second dagger engraved; however, he'll find that Team 2 has not yet chosen a symbol. Thus, the dagger found in the body would have no symbol on it. Since it is not incriminating evidence, finding the murder weapon is no longer a requirement for a perfect outcome.

Likewise, if the characters never retire to their room, they would find the body in the hallway when they arrive at the room for the first time, not when leaving it.

As another example, if one of the characters wants to take a long rest hidden in the library, you can have a patrolling officer come by and kick them out.

LOCATIONS

The following descriptions apply to the entire building, unless described otherwise in a section:

Walls. The fortress is built with blocks of dark basalt, finely cut and assembled with little mortar, giving a smooth and grooved aspect to the walls. A creature that wishes to climb them must succeed on a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check. Internal walls are 1 foot thick, external walls are 2 feet thick, and outside walls are 5 feet thick. Some external walls, mainly those in the civil wing, are covered with vines and bindweed.

Floor/pavement. Made of flat, polished, dark-bottomed plates. A DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that the walls and pavement were magically shaped and set.

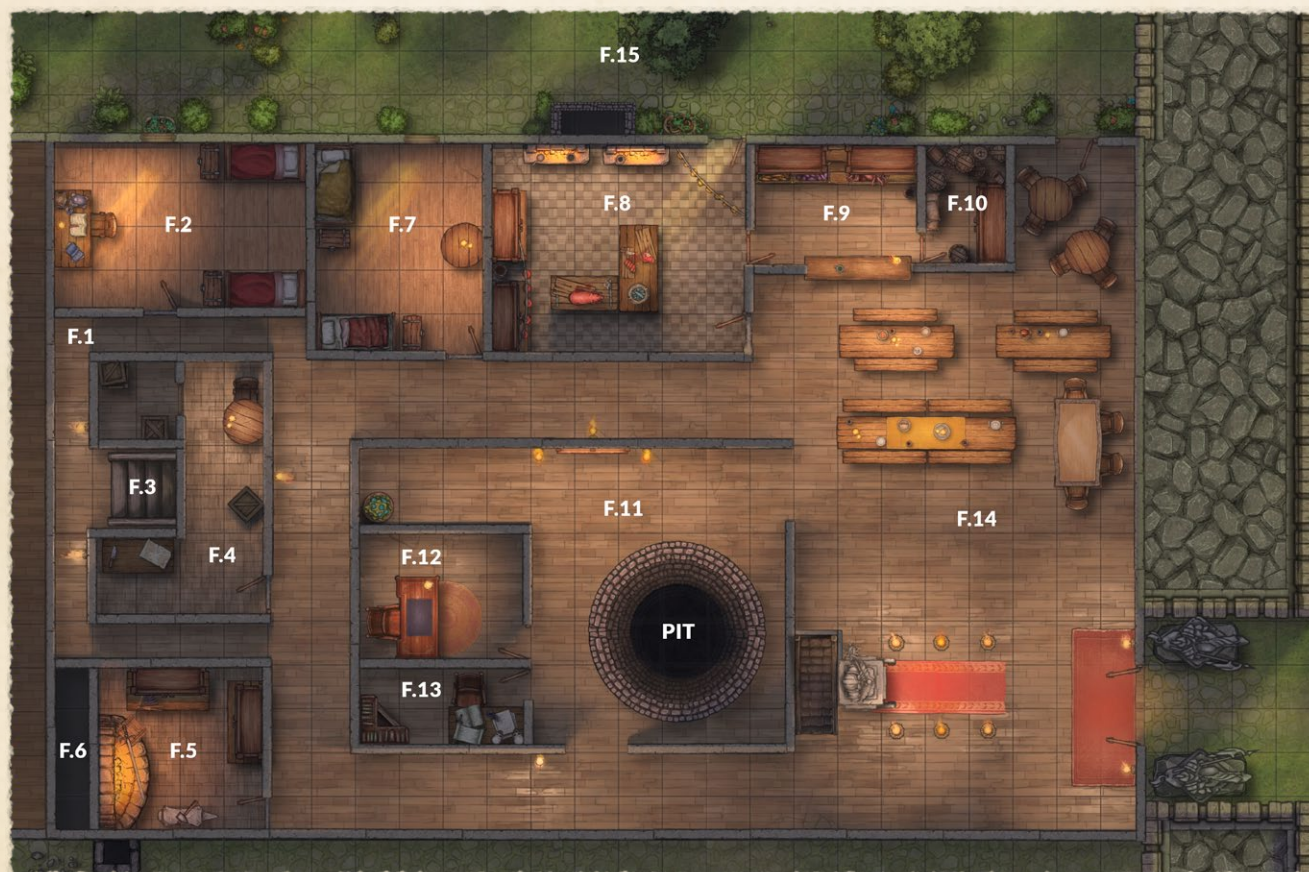
Corridors. All corridors in the fortress are 5 feet wide and 10 feet high at their highest point. *Continual flame* torches illuminate the halls every 15 feet.

Ceilings. The arch-shaped ceilings are made of finely embedded basalt blocks reinforced by oak rafters. They are 10

2nd Floor



1st Floor



feet high in the central portion of a room or corridor and 7 feet high in the edges and corners.

Doors. Most doors are made of good quality wood with iron clips and reinforcements, and provide excellent sound insulation. Some are old and a little stuck, but nothing that requires any special effort to open. Doors that access restricted or external areas are specially reinforced and well maintained. Sometime after the PCs arrive in the fortress, the door to each Team room is marked in white chalk with the number of its assigned Team.

1ST FLOOR

F.1 CORRIDOR OUTSIDE TEAM 2'S ROOM

Since Vang was not bleeding profusely, the **blood trail** leads down the hall to the west but disappears before reaching the corner.

Right next to the dorm room, the players can consult a map of the building (**Appendix H**).

F.2 TEAM 2'S ROOM

This room contains two or three bunk beds, a small study desk, and several trunks where the characters can store their personal belongings. A window to the north leads to the garden and internal patio (F.15). Like Team 4's room, this one was used by low-ranking servants and soldiers visiting the fortress.

F.3 WEST STAIRCASE

This wood-and-stone staircase connects the western part of the civil wing to the bedrooms and library on the second floor. A DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that the **handrail** on the right side is slightly darker than the one on the left. A subsequent DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that the discoloration is due to the continued use of this staircase by Ironhand officers going to get records and books in the library, moving in a hurry and with ink-dirty hands.

Specks of blood may be found at the top of the steps on a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. Anyone who follows the specks sees that they lead to the south entrance of the library (F.16) on the second floor.

F.4 ARTISANS' WORKSHOP

This small room—made even smaller by the inclination of the west wall as a result of the stairway in F.3—functions as a sewing workshop that stores the materials and tools for maintaining Ironhand uniforms. A seamstress named Hadggala commands the staff. Characters who use the location for repairs or sewing of fabrics have advantage on their checks.

F.5 BLACKSMITH'S FORGE

This room houses the forge and contains the materials and tools necessary for creating, maintaining, engraving, and repairing weapons and armor. A magically heated forge consumes charcoal to "spice" up the steel. It takes up all the

space on the west wall, except for a small hatch that opens into the cesspools. Hundreds of tools and consumables are immaculately organized on several shelves. A special shelf holds the symbols and seals the blacksmith uses to mark the goods whose taxes were cleared and thus have permission to enter the Capital. A chimney leaves the forge and releases smoke through an opening on the south wall. The magical forge speeds up the work of any blacksmith who has been attuned to it. The blacksmith (**Koraldur Smith**) spends most of the day here.

If the characters come here while **investigating the murder**, Koraldur remembers that a man stopped in the forge a while ago (exactly how long depends on how much time the Team spent in their room) wearing a habit and hood with a Team 2 brooch. He asked the smith to engrave the Team's symbol on a dagger, after the other members of the Team had already done their other weapons.

The man kept his head down the whole time, so Koraldur assumed he was ashamed at having forgotten the dagger, which is sometimes a spare or secondary weapon. He can't remember other details and can neither confirm nor deny that the hooded man was one of the party.

The blacksmith can be easily **bribed** into telling an officer or signing a statement that the hooded man was not one of the party members, especially if told that one of the characters lost their brooch. However, he can take his word back just as quickly if pressured or if he realizes that things are much more serious than a simple question of who engraved what. A DC 13 Charisma (Intimidation) check has the same effect.

If the party brings the **librarian's habit** to the blacksmith, he positively identifies it as the one worn by the man who brought him the dagger.

F.6 CESSPOOLS

This passage connects the latrines on the second floor with the castle's pit system. A hatch underneath the forge is used to eject the remains of coal and scalding metals directly into the pits; due to the bad smell, the blacksmith keeps it closed.

F.7 TEAM 4'S ROOM

This simple room contains two bunk beds, a round table with a water jug, and some trunks where visitors can store objects and clothes. It is similar to Team 2's room and smaller than the rooms on the second floor. Officers pushed Team 4 into accepting this room because they're all halflings, but the joke is on them, as the proximity to the kitchen meant the Team would have volunteered for this room anyway.

F.8 KITCHEN

Always smoky and dark, this room is where the food is prepared. On the north side, two kilns serve as stoves, so large that chubby servants can hide inside; beside them are a stove and a smoker. A service entry to the north gives access to the gardens of the inner courtyard, where further ahead servants sleep. A cistern that collects rainwater supplies most of the kitchen's needs for water.

F.9 CANTEEN

Part of the kitchen extends to this area through a doorless hole in the wall. An opening in the south wall is used as a counter to serve food to troops that line up in the dining hall. A sliding wooden panel closes the opening when the building is vacant. Nonperishable food and kitchen utensils are stored here in a series of shelves and cabinets. A door to the east leads to the pantry.

F.10 PANTRY

Perishable foods such as pickles, cans with larded meat, beer kegs, sausages, butter, fruits, smoked or salted meats, and all kinds of herbs and spices used to prepare meals are stored here.

F.11 CENTRAL HALL (PORTAL AND PIT)

This open room with no exterior doors overlooks the Great Hall to the east and the corridor to the south that leads to the forge, opposite the Phantom of the Fortress painting that hangs on the north wall (see **Appendix F**).

Major Broock, the commanding officer, spends most of his time in the offices in the southwest corner, where the doors are always locked and Ironhand soldiers stand guard inside.

It is quite common for the Capital to send **prisoners** to the fortress. They are locked away in the dungeons, where they await psychosurgery that inflates the Ironhand ranks. After an incident where a prisoner escaped the Penumbra Plane by entering the same portal through which he came, Major Broock revamped the portal room on the roof, ordering that a kind of slide be built, protected by a retractable wall that hides the mechanism and prevents the traveler from escaping through it.

The Pit. This is a 15-foot-radius circular opening protected by a 3-foot wall from which protrude two chains attached to the ceiling by pulleys. It's disguised as a water well but is actually an elevator that takes prisoners to the underground dungeons or hoists them up. The bottom of the pit is 100 feet below and just slightly lit, revealing what appears to be the water reflection at the bottom. Voices and wails can be heard from the pit if the room is quiet. (More about this in chapter 3.)

F.12 AND F.13 MAJOR BROOCK'S OFFICE AND LADDER ROOM

These doors are locked and constantly guarded from the inside by attentive soldiers on duty, who ring a loud bell to call reinforcements as soon as they detect a lockpicking attempt. (More about them in chapter 3.)

F.14 GREAT HALL

This large multipurpose hall is the main meeting area in the fortress. Here, meals are served, announcements made, meetings held, and petitioners told to wait to speak with one of the Ironhand officers.

Entrance Hall. A huge double wooden door reinforced with iron and adorned with figures that resemble lions leads

outside the fortress. If a visitor enters the Great Hall, an 8-foot-tall statue of the Emperor gives them a cold welcome. Behind the statue, a stone and wood staircase leads to the second floor, where a mezzanine enclosed by a railing lets people observe the activity in the area below. Next to the statue and beneath the higher steps of the stairs, a doorless entrance leads into the central hall.

Dining Hall. To the north, officers, employees, and the occasional visitor can eat in one of three rows of solid tables made of dark wood. A fourth table, perpendicular to them, is reserved for high-ranking officers or nobles visiting the fort. Next to them, an exit leads to the inner courtyard gardens.

F.15 GARDENS/INNER YARD

This open area includes a garden with spices and ornamental plants, a small orchard with apple trees and blueberries, a chicken coop in the far north, and a cistern that collects rainwater to supply the kitchen.

A DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check on the bushes near Team 2's window reveals that the smell of feline feces comes from **cat ivy bushes**. They give off a terrible smell of feline feces if touched, which is probably why the gardener did not trim them.

If Garry threw the **dagger** from the library window, a DC 8 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds the murder weapon hidden in the bushes. A DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check on the dagger finds traces of beige fibers, similar to the bag found in the library and in the victim's left hand.

When Garry hurled the dagger through the library window, it fell between the branches of the bushes and dislodged some of the cat ivy branches, which then gave off their rancid stench. The **smell** is so strong and nauseating that, after a few minutes, it can wake sleeping characters with a passive Perception of 12 or higher if the windows are opened, and a passive Perception of 16 or higher if the windows are closed.

2ND FLOOR

F.16 LIBRARY

(South entrance description - "blood trail")

This seems to be a more reserved area for studies, farther away from the bookshelves to your right, where a closet stands near the door. The room is very dark except for a candle that burns on the desk to your left, next to some parchments and a pen. There is a closed window opposite the door. A blue robe hangs on the back of a chair turned halfway between the desk and the window, 5 feet away from the desk.

A trail of blood spatters leads up to the south entrance of the library. There is a diamond-shaped opening in a thinner wooden door on the south and east entrances. Most of the books in the library are written in an ancient language, and it's not easy to determine their subject. There are also books on tax collection, regional descriptions, old maps, heraldry

compendiums, and property and land laws that predate the Empire.

Desk. If the characters look at the parchments on the desk, show them the incomplete letter found in Appendix E1. A successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that in a small gap between the desk's leg and the wall behind it, there is a darkened coin that was once a gold piece but now is devoid of value (see "Coins," below).

Chair/Habit. Nothing stands out about the chair. The faintest sign of blood may be detected on the habit, but it is impossible for the naked eye to see.

Closet. The closet is unlocked, and if the characters open it they see nothing but darkness. If they have darkvision or provide light, they see a bloodstain inside and a single hanger on the floor. Even without darkvision or light, the floor is still slick, so the characters can perceive the stain on a DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check, which also finds a coin just like the one behind the desk.

Window. The window can be easily opened and shows nothing but the empty gardens outside and the outer wall of the fortress to the right. Directly underneath the window are bushes and a few leafless trees surrounded by shrubs; the tree branches almost reach the window's parapet. With a passive Perception of 15 or higher, the characters can smell the stench of feline feces coming from the cat ivy below (see F.15).

Gold bag. To find the bag, the characters need to search the room for two hours or succeed on a DC 21 Intelligence (Investigation) check. If they heard testimony from Xan'quoi Petre and Ysseppa Roberta about the sound they heard two bookshelves away, the characters can find the bag with a mere five-minute search or a DC 6 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Anyone who handles the bag with no particular concern for their own safety is slightly poisoned; its effects will be felt in a few hours (when the Team fights in the trial).

Coins. The two coins dropped in the closet and behind the desk, as well as the hundreds of coins in the gold bag, used to be gold pieces. Garry is a redeemer and previously "leached" the coins to perform abilities, so they no longer have value. If anyone in the party is a redeemer or has ties to redeemers, they instantly recognize the patterns on the coins as telltale signs of a redeemer's work; otherwise, they can recall the meaning of the patterns with a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

F.17 CORRIDORS AND PATHWAYS

The ceilings of the second-floor corridors are 10 feet high in the center and 7 feet high in the corners due to their arched shape. In the southern exterior wall, embrasure holes are



carved every 5 feet; in the event of an attack, soldiers can target enemies at the fortress's main gate.

F.18 LATRINES AND BATHING ROOM

This room has copper bathtubs and a smoker with bathing essences and supplies. Five small cabins on the left wall serve as latrines that are nothing but holes in a stone elevation, protected by a wooden bulkhead. Characters can remove the screen to have space to enter and descend through the cesspools (F.6).

F.19 TO F.21 BALCONY ROOMS

Teams 1, 3, and 5 are housed here. These bigger rooms are more comfortable and have small wooden porches that provide an overview of the inner courtyard. All of them have four single beds, desks, chests, and wardrobes for guests to store their belongings.

F.22 AND F.23 INNER ROOMS

Teams 6 and 7 are housed here. These rooms are similar to the others but smaller and with no windows, which gives them a claustrophobic feel—something soldiers don't mind.

F.24 MEZZANINE

This section overlooks the Great Hall on the floor below. There's a 5-foot passage around the walls, protected by a handrail. A straight staircase connects the floors, passing behind the statue of the Emperor.

NPCs

Each relevant NPC can be found in a particular location, either alone or with the rest of their Team. Their behavior and willingness to help vary according to whether the crime was reported, a lieutenant has joined in the investigation, or the party shared relevant information (especially in the form of a question) with them beforehand.

Each relevant NPC is mentioned in the "What Happened?" section that begins on page 32. Read more details about the characters' encounters with them in this section.

GARRY LANDEN (TEAM 1)

LE male human redeemer

Tall, elegant, and seductive. Garry dresses in fine, elaborate garments, is always well groomed and stands with a haughty posture. His short brown hair and thick, oblique eyebrows contrast with an easy smile that reveals gold teeth and a dimple in his jaw. His pianist hands are long, thin, and knobby.



Garry is a sociopathic murderer but is an expert in acting otherwise. He calmly denies any participation in the events, presents good arguments or reasonable excuses for

TEAM	NAME	FOUND AT...	RELEVANT INFORMATION	COMES CLEAN IF:
1	Garry Landen (LE male human redeemer)	1st floor; sitting on dining room table (F.14)	The murderer. Read "What Happened?" and "NPCs Garry Landen."	(Never)
3	Vang Irinnienna (CG female human)	1st floor; hall outside Team 2's room (F.1)	The murder victim. Read "What Happened?" and "Murder Investigation."	(Can't; dead)
3	Myysa Teek (LG female dwarf)	2nd floor, by the latrines (F.18)	Read "What Happened?" Vang rushes through the fortress trying to hear the voice again." Found Vang's pipe on the floor of Team 3's room's balcony. Knows Vang is left-handed; recognizes her handwriting on the letter; knows she was after an impostor and that Vang knew what he sounded like. Bobbum told her the rumors he heard from Garry, as if they were true and without mentioning Garry's name.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Party lets her see Vang's letter Lieutenant is helping the party Bobbum's rumor is disproved Party takes her to Vang's body (she is suspicious of the bloody right index finger, as Vang was left-handed)
4	Zianna Belikk'a (CG female halfling)	1st floor, outside the Artisan's Workshop (F.4)	Read "What Happened?" Zianna Belikk'a sees Garry but mistakes him for a ghost." Saw a "phantom" with golden dagger in hand heading toward the blacksmith.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Treated kindly Her cousins are persuaded to let her speak
4	Oord Mimim III (CN male halfling)	1st floor, dining hall near the main exit (F.14)	Read "What Happened?" Vang finds Garry in the dining hall." High-pitched, nasal voice. Overheard argument between Vang and Garry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insistence, pressure Persuasion Bribed with food
5	Admøerio Shosshan (N male half-elf)	1st floor, looking at the "Phantom of the Fortress" painting (F.11)	Read "What Happened?" Garry returns to the library and is heard again by Xan'quoi and Ysseppa." Deep voice. Has great knowledge of poisons. Saw Ysseppa leaving library; doesn't know her name but can describe her. Knows about trials that happened in another city (reveals motive after reading Vang's letter).	(Has nothing to hide and has no problem talking to the party.)
6	Ysseppa Rob'erta (CG female half-orc)	2nd floor, with Xan'quoi Petre, balcony overlooking main hall	Read several paragraphs of "What Happened?" Read "NPCs Xan'quoi Petre and Ysseppa Rob'erta" Overheard what happened in the library after Garry killed Vang.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persuaded by Xan'quoi.
6	Bobbum Vonoblom (CN male gnome)	1st floor; blacksmith (F.5)	Read "What happened?" Garry returns to the library and is heard again by Xan'quoi and Ysseppa." Whispery voice. Heard Garry's false rumors, which he spread to Myysa as if they were true. Gossipy; saw Xan'quoi leaving library and knows about his romance with Ysseppa.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Party or Ironhand intimidates him. Party is insistent on asking for specifics or demands details.
7	Xan'quoi Petre (NG male human)	2nd floor, with Ysseppa Rob'erta, balcony overlooking main hall	Read several paragraphs of "What Happened?" Read "NPCs Xan'quoi Petre and Ysseppa Rob'erta" Stutters, shy. Overheard what happened in the library after Garry killed Vang. Knows about trials that happened in another city (reveals motive after reading Vang's letter).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persuaded of the relevance of the situation or of what they heard. Party reveals they know about his secret romance with Ysseppa.

everything, and coolly states (in his scratchy voice) that he's been "at the dining hall all day, as anyone here can testify."

He is friendly to the party and **volunteers** to help with anything they need. ("I can't sleep anyway; too anxious about the trials.") If they allow him to join them and they get too close to the truth or find incriminating evidence, he tries to sabotage it by volunteering for tasks such as "taking the murder weapon to the Ironhand officers," "taking the venom to my teammate who is an expert and can identify it," or "searching these bookshelves." He looks for ways to get rid of the evidence or pin the crime on the characters even more solidly.

Garry never goes as far as fighting the characters or running for it if he is **accused**. He simply states that his innocence will be proven. If provoked, he says it was Bobbum who told him about an altercation between Vang and Team 2. "I considered the gossip irrelevant because Bobbum seemed too talkative and prone to lying, and I don't like that at all."

If asked about his **encounter with Vang** in the dining hall, he initially dismisses it as untrue. But if the characters present sufficient knowledge of the discussion, he says, "Look, I didn't want to say this because you seem nice, and I hate gossip. The thing is, Vang came to me to warn me about you, as if you were ill-intended pranksters, after she had just

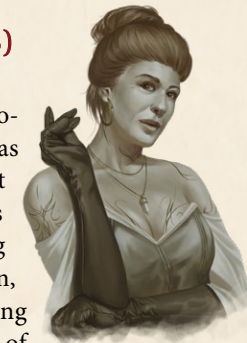
come out of a discussion with one of you. I told her that, as a mage, she could handle a few pranks or minor illusions. She stormed away, furious, and I remained here until now, hoping she forgets about me."

As soon as he notices that the Team is investigating the crime, he tries to gently **touch** each character with his previously poison-soaked gloves. Most of the poison's potency has worn off by now, so the characters are only slightly poisoned; they'll feel the harmful effects in a few hours (when they fight in the trial).

VANG IRINNIENNA (TEAM 3)

CG female human

Vang has the typical vanity and arrogance of wizards. In her youth she was considered quite beautiful, and that still shows in her older age. She wears several earrings and exposes her long neck, keeps her hair in a circular bun, and dresses in well-tailored clothing with an excellent fit. Several tattoos of arcane symbols cover her skin, but they are done with such mastery that it is difficult to determine where the art ends and the arcane focus begins.



MYSSA TEEK (TEAM 3)

LG female dwarf

After losing her left earlobe in combat, Myysa started combing her hair into long, complex bob braids that partially hide her ear and scars. The braids are decorated with small metal rings that represent skill in weapons and forging (dwarf men wear them on their beards). She wears a breast plate detailed with flowers and cornucopias, which at first sight can make her look like a cleric of the Children of Tamera; this impression quickly fades when one sees the huge two-handed ax with the symbol of Dorsi tied to her back.



Myysa is a longtime friend of Vang and is genuinely worried about her. She hasn't seen Vang for a while and assumes she is conducting some kind of investigation. Finding Vang's beloved pipe dropped on the balcony and her friend's mention of an impostor has given Myysa an upset stomach, so she is pacing back and forth by the latrines, and every now and then she goes to Team 3's room to check if her friend has returned.

Her mind is poisoned against Team 2 thanks to Bobbum, who relayed the **false rumor** planted by Garry. She is quick to ask "Where is my friend?" when she sees the party and has difficulty trusting them. A DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check, or showing the victim's letter, especially through an accompanying officer, **convinces** Myysa that the party has Vang's best interests at heart, and in any case it couldn't hurt to share information.

Myysa recognizes Vang's **handwriting** on the letter found in the library. If she is taken to the body, she will notice

that the blood is on Vang's right index finger. This leads her to suspect that Team 2 is being framed, as Vang was a notorious lefty.

ZIANNA BELIKK'A (TEAM 4)

CG female halfling

Zianna is small even for halfling standards, which draws more attention to her big blue eyes; she avoids wearing flashy or colorful clothes and prefers baggier vests of boring pigments. Among humans, she could be mistaken for a human child—and would get lost in a crowd just as easily.



The pale and fearful halfling is quick to hide behind her older cousins, Oord Mimim II and Oord Mimim IV (brothers of Oord Mimim III; see below). They are hanging out by the Artisan's Workshop, waiting for their custom banner to be finished.

Not long ago, Zianna was reading the story behind the **Phantom of the Fortress**, which scared the little poop out of her. As she looked behind her shoulder, she saw a man in a blue habit holding a golden dagger, moving from east to west. She was sure it was a sighting of the Phantom himself, but it was actually Garry, who had taken his second dagger from his room, gone down the stairs in the entrance hall, and at that moment was going to the blacksmith to have it engraved.

Zianna is quick to talk about the Phantom, especially if she knows about the crime, and attributes it to him. If she sees the body, she mentions the dagger in the Phantom's hand and describes him. Her cousins are a bit protective of her given the recent scare, but they allow the party to talk to Zianna, as long as they show they are not a threat.

OORD MIMIM III (TEAM 4)

CN male halfling

Oord is a fearful and hungry halfling with a high-pitched nasal voice and brown hair worn in a short mohawk that leans to the front. He is always seen chewing something.



He snuck into the kitchen after hours to steal food, so anyone who approaches him directly or mentions a crime, a witness, or anything similar causes him to throw his hands up and yell "It wasn't me!"

At first, he is not willing to talk about anything to anyone, but the smallest insistence or pressure applied by the party loosens his tongue if they promise not to share how he learned what he knows (and if he can speak to them privately, in case an officer has joined them). Bribing him with food achieves the same effect.

When he was near the kitchen's storage, he saw Vang quickly coming in his direction and hid behind the counter so he wouldn't be caught stealing food. He heard an **argument**

between Vang and Garry, but the only sounds he clearly identified were Vang knocking down a chair on her way out of the dining hall as Garry yelled “It could have been a minor illusion!” He points to the table where Garry sat.

After meeting with the party, Oord is no longer comfortable being around Garry, who is also found in the dining hall, so he joins the rest of Team 4.

ADMÖERIO SHOSSHAN (TEAM 5)

N male half-elf

A proud, noble, and normally reserved historian, this half-elf is willing to talk to the characters about any subject they wish. With long black hair and always with one hand touching his stomach in an elegant demeanor, his voice is very deep



and pompous. He has a tattoo in the shape of a green leaf on the back of his left hand, as do all elves from the woods south of Kolachi City, where he was born.

The only thing of relevance he saw was Ysseppa leaving the library. He doesn't know her name but describes her as “a strong half-orc who walked as if she wanted to break the floor beneath. Her stomping was as hard as the lines in her face.”

You can use Admøerio to disclose important information found in the introduction to this book. Regarding the **trials** specifically, he knows about the ones that already took place in Deverell City. If the Skybell City trials follow the same pattern, the Teams will be pitched against each other in the Arena, so Team 1 would face Team 2, Team 3 would face Team 4, and so forth. This might change if something unexpected happens. For example, Deverell's Team 6 was caught taking bets on their match; they were disqualified, and consequently Team 5 faced Team 7.

The historian is also deeply knowledgeable about all kinds of **poisons**. Merely talking about the rigor mortis of Vang's body or taking him to analyze it prompts him to mention the rare *Cockatricean Rock*, made out of a simple mixture of cockatrice bile, water, and blue orchid powder, an intensely blue powder that looks like fabric dye. Some of this powder lingers on the table in the dining hall where Oord Mimim III said Garry was sitting; it is visible to the naked eye.

Admøerio is fascinated by the story of the **Phantom of the Fortress** painting, which prompts him to visit the library. While there, he is too absorbed in flipping through the books to notice anything out of place.

XAN'QUOI PETRE (TEAM 7) AND YSSEPPA ROB'ERTA (TEAM 6)

NG male human, CG female half-orc

Xan'quoi and Ysseppa are found on the balcony of the second floor, overlooking the main hall below. **Xan'quoi** is enormous, over 6 feet tall and 250 pounds of pure muscle, with a mustache that makes him look like a walrus. Although he fights well, he is timid and awkward at social events, which

makes him look like a buffoon. To make matters worse, he has a severe stuttering problem.

Ysseppa is a strong half-orc with crude manners, short sentences, trust issues, and a good heart. She is proud of her origins; despite being bullied as a child, she has always displayed her fangs and refused to trim or remove them when she had the opportunity. This leads her to respect Xan'quoi's flaws and get furious when someone makes fun of him. She has vitiligo, but it is mostly hidden underneath her finely polished armor and has yet to spread to her face.



As soon as Ysseppa sees the party approach them, she puts herself between them and Xan'quoi, as if to protect him—or prevent him from speaking. She is not in a talkative mood and curtly answers any questions directed to the gladiator.

The couple **opens up** if the characters say they know about their romance (the main reason they are keeping things a secret) or reveal that there was a murder and what happened in the library is relevant. In this case, Xan'quoi steps forward, stuttering, and convinces Ysseppa that “this is more important than hiding our love.”

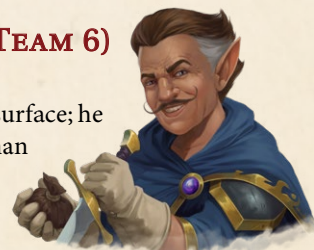
Xan'quoi says (stuttering): “I left my room to meet Ysseppa in hers. As I was about to turn left at the corner, I heard someone knocking on Team 3's door. I waited until I heard a door open and close. Then I quickly went to her room and entered. A little after the bell tolled, we decided to go somewhere more private where no one would interrupt us. We went to the library and chose the last corridor to make out—”

That's when Ysseppa interrupts him: “Not relevant what we do. We after a book. South door opens. We hide. Saw nothing. Only heard. Door opens. Door closes. Door opens. Window opens. Window closes. Chair moves. Book and something else placed two bookshelves away. Chair moves. Something drags. Door closes. Door opens. Door closes. Silence. Little later, door opens. Door closes. We go away. Library too busy.”

BOBBUM VONOBLOM (TEAM 6)

CN male gnome

Bobbum is a gnome from the surface; he grew up with strong ties to human society and absorbed some of its flaws, like an excessive taste for wine. In his belongings, one may find some bottles, and he always carries a goatskin around. He dresses in blue traveling clothes and combs his hair with wax, forming a tuft that has turned a bit gray near



the temples. From time to time he combs and oils his thin whiskers, which curl around his cheeks.

Bobbum is a verbose and arrogant gnome who may be **found** first in the blacksmith's forge or, if he was already confronted by the party, somewhere on the second floor, where he blabs about his meeting with them to Ysseppa and Xan'quoi. His voice is shrill when making accusations and whispery when gossiping. If the characters ask if he saw someone leaving the library, he has no problem telling them to talk to Xan'quoi, whom he hates for being the boyfriend of his secret crush, Ysseppa.

Garry charmed him after the crime. During a friendly conversation, Garry dropped the “news” that he had witnessed a serious altercation between “someone in Team 2 and Vang, who was afraid and in tears.” However, Garry said he “hates gossip” and “trusts his good friend not to tell anyone the source of what is going on in the fortress.”

At first arrogant and provocative, Bobbum treats the party as if he had personally witnessed them killing Vang, even requesting Ironhand reinforcements to protect him from “this gang of evil-doers.” He does not know about the crime until someone reveals it to him, though. He is quick to disclose that “I know for a fact that these people had an altercation with Vang; they are up to no good.” When asked for details, he hesitates and then reveals that “my friend's account is as good as if I had seen it with my own eyes.”

Proud to have “earned the trust of his longtime friend” (he had in fact met Garry for the first time that day), he is grandiose in saying that you can arrest him or even kill him, but he will not betray that trust. It is a lie, for strong intimidation or harassment by an accompanying lieutenant makes him reveal that his source is Garry.

ENDING THE INVESTIGATION

Investigation stalled. If you feel like the investigation has stalled, maybe because the characters ran out of ideas or didn't want to share their findings or go to the Capital, stir things up. For example, you can have the body be found. Or have a large group of officers accost the party, citing reports that the Team has been behaving strangely, and demand explanations or any evidence they've found. You can also have the officers say the time has come for the Team to be taken to the Capital and formally accused.

Investigation concluded. If the characters find evidence and come to a conclusion as to the real perpetrator, they should share it with an officer, who asks if they will travel to the Capital to present their case. If they agree, a neutral officer is appointed as guardian of the evidence and the party is conducted to the hidden portal that takes them directly to the Capital.

Once you feel the session is ready to move to its next part, go to the next section.

OUTCOME	HOW TO ACHIEVE IT	WHAT MUST BE DONE (AT LEAST)	CONSEQUENCES
Perfect result	The party is not seriously suspected and commits no discovered infractions; evidence collected against the murderer is robust.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The body is immediately reported, lieutenant joins the investigation; AND The poison is found and delivered; witness puts Garry at the concocting location; AND Murder weapon is found and secured; AND At least one of the coins dropped in library and the redeemer's bag of coins are found next to the victim's grimoire, fabric matches the one in victim's hand; AND Letter to Master Armur is found and put in front of Myysa Teek. 	Garry is arrested despite his claims that he's being framed by his accuser, Team 2, whom he challenges to a trial by combat in the Arena. Beneficiaries gather and offer significant rewards if the party agrees to fight, with substantial advantages in the trial (if you believe one is still necessary); the fight is heavily in the party's favor.
Medium result	The party presents some evidence against the murderer, but suspicions against them remain.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter to Master Armur is found and put in front of Myysa Teek; AND The party did not meet the representative of House of Lisprolis (or the meeting went well); AND At least the murder weapon, the bag of coins, or the poison is found. 	Team 1 teleports to the Capital first and accuses the party mainly through Garry's false testimony. The dispute is likely to be settled in the Arena under equal conditions, at best.
Bad result	The party does not present solid evidence against the murderer, in which case Garry is happy to offer a false testimony and put the last nail in Team 2's coffin.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The party achieves neither the perfect nor the medium result (e.g., <i>they go to the Capital without reporting or investigating the crime</i>). 	If the party demands a trial by combat, it will be heavily to their disadvantage (see “The Trial”). Otherwise, they are arrested and released only when Taram hears what happened, confirms Team 2 lost a brooch, and conducts his own investigation. Absolution is offered in exchange for accepting chapter 2's mission.
Other	The party prevents any kind of reasonable accusation.	For example, they successfully conceal the body and get rid of all evidence against them, erase the memories of witnesses, fabricate evidence against another Team, and so on.	Assuming the party is still a participant in the trials, they fight Team 1, as was planned all along in the schedule.

CAPITAL (CITY) PUNISHMENT

As in Skybell, the party is taken outside the building and deeper into the Phantom Fortress's structure until they get to a portal. It takes them directly to a dark tunnel, at the end of which is a strange sight: the prows of two ships, facing each other.

A loud crowd is starting to gather in the stands. The worst seats are occupied by people who didn't have enough funds for the Arena of Fate tickets. In the best seats are those with pockets deep enough to pay for both fights, and too excited to wait until tomorrow—they want to see some action now. The crowd doesn't seem to notice as the party is discreetly taken around the battlefield and into a recess at the center of the **Arena**, near the bleachers.

Mërryl Jdgemant (LN), or simply “the Judge,” is an incredibly old human woman who sits in a center position behind a large oak table covered by a canopy. Facing her, on the dirt road outside the battlefield where the PCs' wagon parks, are a few senior Ironhand officers and members of Team 1. Next to the table, under a giant umbrella, the three representatives sit in comfortable chairs; they flew in from Skybell City (of course, the party recognizes only the one they spoke with earlier).

Mërryl is a foul-mouthed, impatient magister with the authority to assess the problem. Roleplay Mërryl as a fair but incredibly tough judge who keeps everything in order (e.g., *only one character should speak at any given time, and she demands that characters end their sentences with “in my opinion” when they are statements of opinion and not facts*). She takes the word of apparently neutral parties (like Ironhand officers) more seriously. She reasonably considers all valid arguments and points brought to her attention.

The Treasurer. One of the highest positions in the Imperial hierarchy. The Judge is adamant that she will not involve the Treasurer based solely on “words that were maybe uttered according to a letter that maybe the low-profile victim wrote, that may have a distant relation to the reasons why a third person killed her. Or not. Therefore, the office of the Treasurer must not be involved in these proceedings.”

THE TRIAL

The following assumes **Team 1** teleported ahead and submitted some evidence to the Empire. If the party was successful in disposing of all evidence, Team 1 manufactures false testimonies, accusing Team 2 of Vang Irinniena's murder, in order to take Team 2 out of the picture and fight Team 4 in the trials. This happens even if the PCs do not consider Garry Landen a suspect.

Revisit the table of outcomes under “Murder Investigation” to check what happens. Most likely, when the PCs get to the Minor Arena where the trials are scheduled to take place, many officers and an Imperial magister are there with Team 1, all with somber demeanors.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

ORDER OF BUSINESS	
Accusation	The party learns that they stand accused of murder; Team 1 is moving for Team 2's disqualification under the testimony of Garry Landen, presented when he arrived. The spell <i>Ritual of Judgment</i> (see ahead) is initiated.
Opening Statements	The involved parties loosely (and briefly) engage in conversation; Garry repeats his accusations; Team 2 is given the opportunity to declare their innocence and address the judge. You may end the proceedings here if you wish to skip to the combat , or in other cases, when reasonable (e.g., <i>Team 2 achieved a Perfect Outcome and requests to fight Team 1, refusing to indulge any more conversation</i>).
Witness selection	First the plaintiffs and then the defendants declare up to two people they will bring forth as witnesses. At this point, all relevant NPCs from the Phantom Fortress have teleported to the Capital, but only those who get called as witnesses are brought to the judge.
(Plaintiffs' selection)	Garry chooses to testify himself (he will be questioned by his teammate Zahlla), and his second witness is quite peculiar: select the NPC whom the party is most likely to want to call themselves, based on the opening statements.
(Defendants' selection)	Present the list of available witnesses (Appendix I) to the players, who need to select only two to cross-examine. A PC may also take the stand.
Cross-examination: plaintiffs' witnesses	Garry chose the defendant's star witness, hoping the PCs would fall for a legal maneuver: once Garry finishes his testimony, he rests his case, opting not to call his second witness to the stand. The defendants cannot call that witness if they selected two others to take the stand. (They need to select the same witness on their turn.) If the PCs complain, the judge replies, “ <i>One is not free to disobey the law by claiming ignorance. You should have asked about it before allowing the ambition of questioning three witnesses to blind you.</i> ”
Cross-examination: defendants' witnesses	The party calls their selected witnesses to the stand, in any order they choose. In both cross-examinations, the caller gets to ask their questions first. If both parties called the same witness, Garry cross-examines first. Only one PC may ask questions of a witness. This PC may confer with teammates during the cross-examination.
Final statements	The Judge allows Garry to speak first, and then a representative of the party.
Ruling	Based on the evidence the PCs discovered and on how the trial developed, the judge issues the sentence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She finds the evidence against Team 1 inconclusive, or she is convinced (of their innocence or guilt). • She finds the evidence against Team 2 inconclusive, or she is convinced (of their innocence or guilt). • If she finds the evidence inconclusive, she may be inclined toward the innocence of either Team 1 or Team 2.

PHYSICAL EVIDENCE (IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE)

EVIDENCE	RELEVANCE	BEST REINFORCING WITNESSES
Second dagger (found in bush)	Indication that Team 2 was framed because a second dagger with their symbol was inserted after death. Traces of beige fibers found on dagger help tell the succession of events.	Ironhand medic Koraldur Smith Xan'quoi Petre / Ysseppa Rob'erta
Letter to Master Armur	Indicates the murderer's motives. Explains ink on victim's left hand (indicating that the writing on the door might've been a frame). Reduces suspicions of Team 2 (if they didn't meet Mariahnnah Lisprolis or if the meeting went fine).	Mariahnnah Lisprolis Myysa Teek
Traces of poison found on dining hall table	Indicates premeditation, inconsistent with a passionate stabbing that would explain Team 2's symbol on the alleged murder weapon. If Oord Mimim III's testimony is produced, it ties Garry Landen to the murder and reinforces the “bag of coins” evidence.	Admøerio Shosshan Ironhand medic Oord Mimim III
Bag of redeemer's coins	Indication of how the victim was poisoned. Connection to Garry strengthened (if Oord Mimim III's testimony is produced and coins are found in the library). Presence of grimoire next to it indicates library as the real crime scene, helps tell succession of events.	Oord Mimim III Xan'quoi Petre / Ysseppa Rob'erta Harold Penn Admøerio Shosshan
Blood traces found in library; no abrasions found on victim's elbows or knees	Indicates the real crime scene and that the body was moved after death (indicating that Team 2 was framed).	Ironhand medic Xan'quoi Petre / Ysseppa Rob'erta
Blood on right finger, ink on left finger	Indicates that the writing on the door might've been a frame-up.	Myysa Teek (can testify that victim was left-handed)
Librarian's robe	Reduces suspicions of Team 2 because anyone could have engraved the symbol at the blacksmith's forge. Indicates the library as the real crime scene, reinforcing that Team 2 was framed.	Zianna Belikk'a Koraldur Smith

CROSS-EXAMINATIONS (IN ORDER OF RELEVANCE)

Refer also to the “NPC” section of “Murder Investigation” when needed. Ask additional questions according to what happened in the chapter. Most of the plaintiffs' questions will, in the end, be connected to the information the PCs extracted.

WITNESS	BEHAVIOR AND TENDENCIES (CHANGE-ABLE ACCORDING TO EVENTS)	PLAINTIFF'S PROBABLE CROSS-EXAMINATION (ESPECIALLY IF GARRY IS UNDER SUSPICION)	BEST INFORMATION FOR THE PCs TO EXTRACT (THESE “LOOK GOOD” IN FRONT OF THE JUDGE)
Garry Landen	Confident and eloquent. Seems mildly outraged that the credibility of his account is being called into question. Treats Team 2 as if he is sure they are guilty.	Did you have any sort of interaction with Team 2? Yes. When no one was watching, they offered me a bag of gold coins if I were to petition to fight against Team 7, so that they were paired with Team 4, whom they deemed the weakest. I said that such a request was impossible, to which they replied ‘not if something happens to Team 3.’ I got scared and pretended to accept—you know the saying, keep your enemies closer. Later on, from far away—I was at the dining hall the entire time—I saw the victim having a heated argument with Team 2. I think I earned their trust, for afterward they asked me to help them dispose of incriminating evidence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That he “never talked to the victim.” (Oord Mimim III can contradict that.) • That his meeting with House of Lisprolis's representative went just fine, in his estimate—“the representative might feel otherwise, of course.”
Oord Mimim III	Frightened. He is worried that he will end up being the one sentenced for stealing food from the fortress.	Where were you when this alleged argument took place? (Hesitates). Garry Landen does not let him finish. Would you say you're easily intimidated? Yes. Have you ever lied to get away from a scary situation? Hmm... yes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He saw Garry Landen sitting at the table where traces of poison could have been found. • He witnessed a heated argument between Vang and Garry.
Ironhand medic (coroner who examined the body)	Calm and precise. Treats as if they were successful in all skill checks related to the body and are willing to share their findings.	Were you able to determine who killed the victim? No. How much of an expert would someone need to be to administer this poison? Not at all.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concurrent cause of death: lethal dose of poison followed by repeated stab wounds to the chest • If the murder weapon was found, he can confirm that, in all likelihood, the engraved weapon was inserted into the victim's wound after death.

WITNESS	BEHAVIOR AND TENDENCIES (CHANGEABLE ACCORDING TO EVENTS)	PLAINTIFF'S PROBABLE CROSS-EXAMINATION (ESPECIALLY IF GARRY IS UNDER SUSPICION)	BEST INFORMATION FOR THE PCs TO EXTRACT (THESE "LOOK GOOD" IN FRONT OF THE JUDGE)
Myysa Teek	Depressed but informative.	<p>Do you have any sort of medical knowledge? No.</p> <p>Do you know if the victim was unable to move or write with her left hand? No.</p> <p>If a spell were cast on this letter to make it seem like Vang wrote it, would you notice? No.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vang was left-handed, and the finger dipped in her blood was from her right hand. Confirmation that the letter found in the library was the victim's.
Mariahnnah Lisprolis	Same as in Skybell.	<p>Was an artifact ever mentioned in our meeting? No.</p> <p>Murders, trials, and suspicions aside, would you consider hiring my team for one of your lands? I had nicer meetings with two other teams, but... I think... yes, perhaps.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> That it is possible the words in Vang's letter could have been uttered by a member of Team 1; even though no artifact was directly mentioned in their meeting, Team 1 seemed interested in knowing what had been discovered already in the lands. That she never met Team 2 (if that is indeed the case).
Xan'quoi Petre or Ysseppa Rob'erta	<p>Xan'quoi is hesitant and stutters. He doesn't think he has anything useful to say.</p> <p>Ysseppa is laconic; outraged to be put under the spotlight; wants to get out of there as soon as possible.</p>	<p>Did you hear an argument or fight while you were in the library? No.</p> <p>Did you see someone get killed? No.</p> <p>Did you see any dagger, grimoire, or gold bag? No.</p> <p>How about coins falling on the ground? No.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reinforces the allegation that the library was the actual crime scene, that a redeemer's gold bag was involved, and that a dagger was thrown into the bush below.
Admōerio Shosshan	Calm and precise.	<p>What is the relation between redeemers and the poison in question? None that I know of.</p> <p>Do you remember ever seeing me not in the dining hall? No.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can serve as an expert witness regarding the poison.
Koraldur Smith (expert on weapons who examined the dagger[s])	Mildly worried he did something wrong; recalls what happened but seems unsure about things.	(Garry waves his hand to dismiss the witness when asked to proceed with his cross-examination. He doesn't want Koraldur to recognize his voice.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If the murder weapon was found, he can confirm that, in all likelihood, the engraved weapon was inserted into the victim's wound after death.
Zianna Belikk'a	Frightened; easily intimidated; she now knows, however, that she saw the murderer and not the ghost	<p>Do you have anything to say, at all, that would help us identify the murderer or the circumstances under which the murder took place? Sorry, I don't think so.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can confirm that someone wearing librarian's robes crossed the building's south corridor with a golden curved dagger. The path does not make sense for someone staying in Team 2's room.
Harold Penn, Ironhand lieutenant	Helpful lieutenant who could have followed or escorted the PCs during their investigation; his behavior here is completely dependent on earlier events.	<p>Did you ever see me anywhere relevant? The roof, the gardens, the library, the corridor where the body was found, or an area of restricted access? No.</p> <p>From all you've seen and heard, can you positively, beyond all reasonable doubt, confirm that a redeemer is the murderer? No.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> He can confirm that Garry is the only redeemer who has been in the building recently. Besides that, he's a character witness, whose account the judge takes seriously. All he has to offer is what he learned from following the party in their investigations.
Master Armur Jasperin	Same as in Skybell.	<p>What do you know about this "impostor" the victim mentioned? Not much. It was my guild who brought it to my attention. They may be rumors, but worth keeping an eye out for.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirms that he met with Team 3, reinforcing the suspicion that the letter found in the library is genuine.
Bobbum Vonoblom	Surrendered; will tell the truth, but he doesn't know much.	<p>You talked to me several times throughout the evening. Where was I? At the dining hall.</p> <p>Did you ever see me leave? No.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nothing. He admits not seeing the victim, as he was spreading rumors that Garry initiated.
Lik Eirenion	Same as in Skybell. As an officer of the Ironhand who was not at the scene, he refuses to talk about the case or serve as a witness.	Nothing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nothing.

SENTENCING

There is no way to predict everything that can happen in the trial. You must assess the judge's ruling based on the evidence presented. To believe that Team 2 is innocent, the judge would have to conclude that Garry is outright lying, but a mixed sentence is possible (e.g., *she is convinced of Team 1's innocence but finds the evidence against Team 2 inconclusive. In this case, Team 2 would receive none of the spell's effects*).

RITUAL OF JUDGMENT

2nd-level transmutation (ritual)

Casting Time: 1 hour

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Instantaneous

You conduct a special religious ceremony designed to prepare a trial by combat under the eyes of the gods. When you cast the spell, choose up to 12 creatures within 60 feet to be judged, then indicate one other willing creature present (yourself included) who will be the Judge of the case and witness the combat.

At the end of the ritual, the creature instituted as the Judge will decide which creatures are deserving of each of the effects below based on the evidence and indications presented, acting as a representative of both the law and the gods. The possible effects are:

Blessing of Righteousness. Granted to those whom the Judge is convinced to be innocent, and thus worthy of the gods' protection during combat.

Lasting 5 minutes, this blessing grants temporary hit points equal to twice the creature's character level or CR.

Also, for the duration, after an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw, the player may choose to reroll the d20 and use the new result. This effect can be used up to 3 times.

Blessing of Law. Granted to those whom the Judge believes to be innocent, despite the lack of concrete evidence.

Lasting 5 minutes, this blessing grants the creature temporary hit points equal to the creature's character level or CR.

Also, for the duration, after an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw, the player may choose to reroll the d20 and use the new result. This effect can be used only once.

Curse of Suspicion. Granted to those whom the Judge believes to be guilty, despite the lack of concrete evidence.

Lasting 5 minutes, this curse applies a –2 penalty to all of the creature's d20 rolls that result in an odd number (before modifiers).

Curse of Condemnation. Granted to those whom the Judge is convinced to be guilty.

Lasting 5 minutes, this curse applies a –3 penalty to all of the creature's d20 rolls that result in an odd number (before modifiers).

In addition, if the player gets a 20 on a d20 roll (before modifiers), it must reroll the die and use the new result, even if it's another 20.

The Judge must pronounce their judgment at the end of the ritual, explaining the reasons for their decision and then deciding which of the effects above each creature will receive. If not, the ritual fails. If there is so much doubt in the Judge's mind that not even a reasonable suspicion could arise, the Judge may opt not to grant any effect to some or all of the creatures involved.

Creatures receive the effects of the ritual as soon as they engage in the trial by combat. The effects are automatically dissipated if another creature not in the area of the ritual interferes in the combat in any way. Conjurations, animal companions, pets, and other creatures of that sort, at the GM's discretion, will not be considered an intervention for the purposes of dispelling the effects.

"By the power invested in me by the supreme authority of the Glorious Empire, in light of all the physical evidence and testimonies produced, I hereby declare that..." [State your conclusion]

"Considering that the Teams in front of me were already supposed to face each other in the trials—and by that I mean the tryouts, not these legal proceedings—I believe it suits that this matter be also settled in the Arena, in a trial by combat. This time, however, the parties will fight to the death."



ARENA: THE CONTEST

THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM

Merryl orders officers to escort you and Team 1 to opposite sides of the Arena. She points her finger first to Tabek (the silent bard), then to Zahlla (the scorpion), and then to Garry, as if counting. She asks Team 1 if it is only the three of them. Zahlla replies, in a scratchy but melodic voice that shows a touch of fear, “No; the most frightening of us only appears if absolutely necessary.”

Noticing that the fight is about to start, the crowd cheers loudly as you are pushed onto the battlefield.

PCs must begin combat in one of the four spaces near the Arena’s gate, and at the same half of the battlefield, before the cleric finishes his speech. As they choose their places, the magically amplified voice of Arybaraug Lawe, a cleric of the Arena standing at the helm of one of the caravels, says the following. He makes grand gestures and emphasizes a few random words in a poor attempt to seem lively, as his life’s experience is behind books, not in front of crowds:

“Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Arena of the Drowned! To forever remember the consequences of waging war and provoking the wrath of the gods, the battlefield in front of you honors the ships and lives lost throughout the centuries to the Western Ocean’s Eternal Storm, which rages on since the Malrokian Curse was first laid upon the blessed land of Tanares!

“The big caravels on each half represent shipwrecks; this is further illustrated by the debris and water at

the bottom of the pit that divides the Arena into two halves. Two wooden bridges connect the two sides. But this is not the only way to cross to the other side! A rope connects each crow’s nest to the floor beside the boats!”

As the cleric leaves the battlefield, you see Team 1 moving swiftly into position. Tabek strikes his drum so forcefully that for a second it silences the people in the stands; then they erupt even more loudly as he points the tip of his mace to the sky. You’ve already lost the first part of the fight, for the crowd’s in their corner.

If any PCs were slightly poisoned (by touching with bare hands the golden-plated dagger, the bag of coins, or the poison itself, or by letting Garry touch them), add the following, directed to the specific characters who were poisoned:

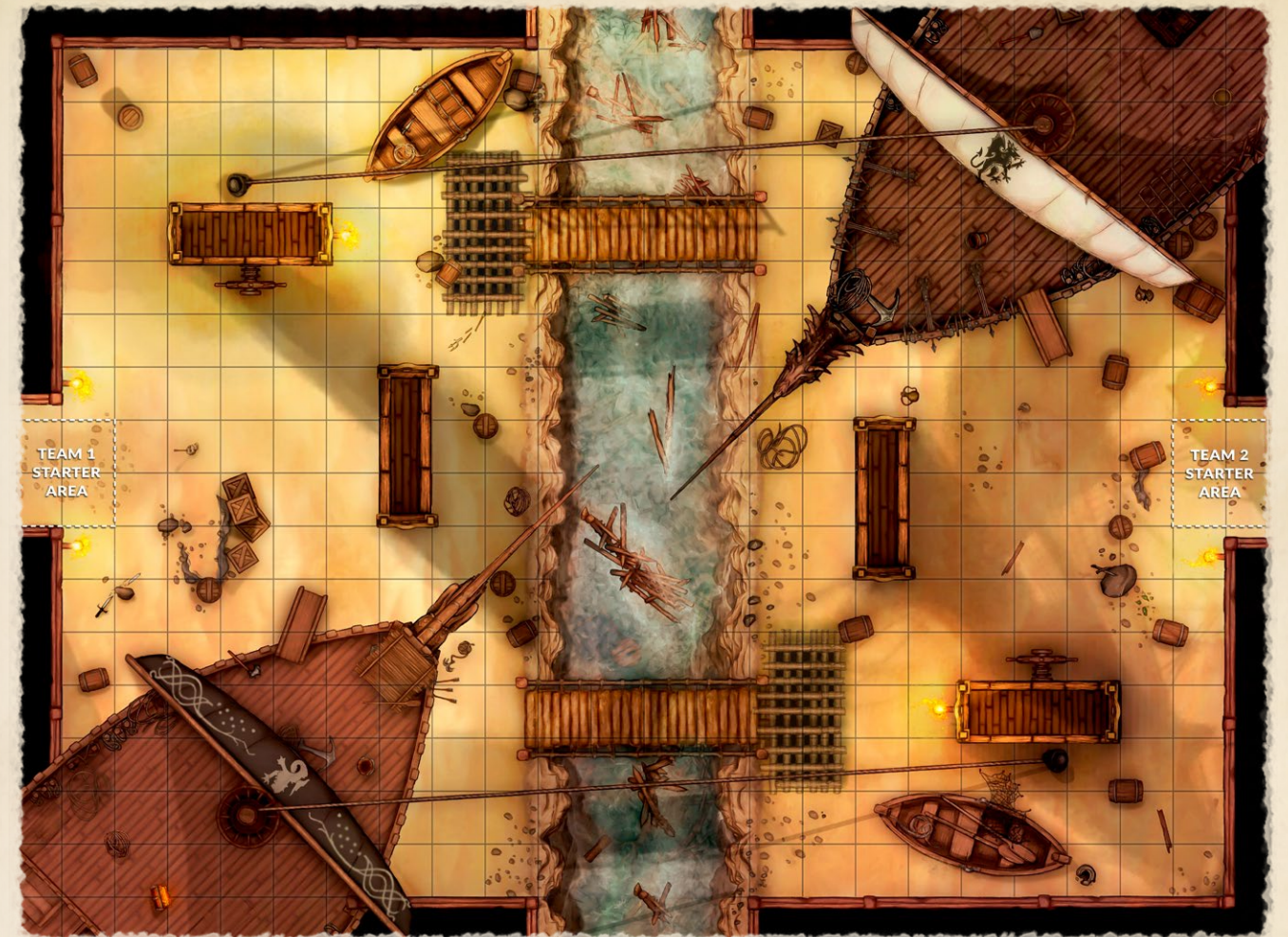
To make matters worse, you suddenly don’t feel so well.

The poisoned PCs have disadvantage on their initiative roll. When the dice are rolled, Arybaraug shouts, “The death-match starts NOW!”

FEATURES OF THE ARENA

Battlefield; pit and bridges. The Arena is split by a 20-foot-wide pit. Each side is connected by two wooden bridges (AC 13, 15 hit points). There is a trapdoor at each end of each bridge, as shown. The pit is 15 feet deep and littered with debris at the bottom, making it difficult terrain. A creature can climb out of the pit using its walls.

Rudder. Aligned with the trapdoor at the end of each bridge is a 5-foot-wide, 15-foot-long wall. A rudder that controls the nearby trapdoor is attached to it. When the



rudder activates the trapdoor, any creature standing on it must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw. On a success, the creature moves safely to a space of its choice within 5 feet. On a failure, the creature falls through the trapdoor, which leads directly into the pit at the center of the Arena. It is not possible to climb out of the pit through the trapdoors. By the side of each of these walls are canoes that are treated as difficult terrain.

Caravels. Two prows of caravels are at the northeast and southwest zones of the Arena; their decks can be accessed by ramps on their sides. A 15-foot-tall mast with a sail rises to a crow’s nest from which a rope connects to the other side of the Arena. A creature who climbs to the crow’s nest has half cover and can use 5 feet of its movement to slide to the end of the rope.

Wall. On the ground next to each caravel’s bow, there is a wall of heavy boxes that is 15 feet long, 7 feet tall, and 5 feet wide. The wall can provide full cover to creatures.

THE COMBAT

When the combat begins, only Garry, Zahlla, and Tabek can be seen; Bagasse is hidden inside Tabek’s drum and was not affected by the ritual. Whenever one of her three allies is reduced to 12 hit points or fewer, Bagasse leaves the drum. She is the only one who engages in a melee fight; the other three use their abilities from a distance.

Each member of Team 1 has a unique combat style (for their stat blocks and further tactics, see Appendix K3):

- **Garry** seeks positions that allow him to see at least one ally and one enemy, enabling him to shoot rays at both on the same turn.
- **Zahlla** attacks from afar and constantly moves through the Arena, deploying her traps in the best possible way.
- **Tabek** tries to keep the PCs in his line of sight so he can cast spells on them.
- **Bagasse** takes the lead as soon as she leaves Tabek’s drum, attacking whichever hostile creature is closest. When this happens, show page 74 to the players.

Handling enemy death. Players cannot choose to kill their enemies, nor are they considered permanently dead if they fall to 0 hit points. The GM may track death saving throws as if Team 1 were PCs.



CLOSURE

THE FIGHT ENDS

Victory. Ironhand officers step onto the battlefield; they tie the wrists and ankles of fallen enemies and put dead bodies in black bags. The crowd's excitement matches how good the fight was.

Mërryl approaches with a cane in one hand and Arybaraug's forearm in the other. They both congratulate the PCs on the victory (and acquittal) earned, and say that the next step in creating the Team is the last: everything for the bonding ceremony—which will transform the party into a true Team—is prepared inside. The ritual will also heal any wounds the PCs suffered in the fight.

Draw. The crowd erupts in excitement at the incredibly rare outcome. Consider this a “great” fight for the purposes of the table in the next section. Then apply the “Defeat” outcome described below.

Defeat. You can handle this situation in one of two ways, the simplest of which is ending the adventure. If you want to continue the story, have Taram arrive from Skybell City during the fight and talk to Mërryl, who shares with him all that was said and done earlier in the day. Once she knows more about the case—such as the PCs losing a brooch in the Penumbra Plane—Mërryl orders the clerics on duty not to treat the ongoing match as a fight to the death.

Alternatively, the fallen PCs also undergo the bonding ceremony, except that it begins while they're unconscious. Make adjustments to the experience described in the next section accordingly.

BONDING CEREMONY

You lie down on stone beds, your feet all pointing toward the center of the dark room whose only light comes from the dark purple fire of torches, which emits a nicely scented mist. A metal sculpture of two intertwined dragons hangs from the ceiling and spins, projecting complex shadows that slowly circle the room around you. In between the evenly spaced torches stand women in bright red robes. They vocalize a beautiful, melodic sound in harmony.

The lights. The shadows. The shapes. The spinning dragons. The weariness from the last fight. The mist. The pleasing room temperature. The vocalization. All of this together makes you almost uncontrollably groggy and sleepy.

One of the red-robed women approaches, a chalice in her hand. She puts the cup to your lips and has you sip a bitter, thick liquid that burns as it flows down your throat and spreads into what seems like every cell of your body. Meanwhile, she says:

“The gods created not one, but millions of creatures. It is only through community, through climbing on the

shoulders of those who came before us, that we can aspire to evolve to the divine condition. Together.

“Only through death can one appreciate life; die alone, so you can be reborn as siblings.”

You feel as if you're sucked at immense speed through a dark tunnel into nowhere. You instinctively try to open your eyes. Unsuccessfully.

What wakes you up is the insufferable stench of feces, as if it had accumulated for years and taken on a brand-new smell. It is so bad that you can taste it—a bit sweet. A little light, finally. Metal bars. Or are they stone? On the other side, Avelum. Tired. So tired, you see him age before your eyes. He takes his necklace off and stretches his hands to you, offering it. Taram appears next to him, signaling that it is all right for you to take it. The moment you touch the necklace, you see it: a young woman—no, two young women in the shadows, approaching Avelum and Taram from behind. You want to scream, and you desperately do. But no sound comes out. Then you hear the following:

In Fratrem Tuum Invenies Confugerunt

You wake up. The stone beds are behind you. You are on your feet. Each of your right hands rests on a companion's left shoulder. The woman in red robes returns and says, “You have suffered the agony of darkness and the breath of light; reborn as siblings, bonded for life.”

“As a collective newborn, you need a new name. Decide unanimously, and in unison proclaim.”

All the PCs are alive, well rested and at full HP. Treat them as if they took a long rest. Wait for the players to decide on a name and proclaim it in unison. They are now truly a Team, with a capital T. The following results are suggested for the Team's first configuration (use your subjective evaluation to determine how good the Arena fight was for the spectators):

The **loot** awaits the PCs in an adjacent room. The rewards for winning the Arena fight are based on the performance in this chapter, according to the next table. They are cumulative, so if the “Perfect” outcome was achieved, the loot also includes the “Medium” and “Standard” ones (lines 4, 5 and 6 of the table).

If the Team won the trial and achieved at least a “Medium” outcome in the murder investigation, all three representatives leave **gifts** in that same room: a treat to entice the PCs into forming a relationship with them. The Empire leaves a *longsword +1*, the People of Ahimoth leave a *bag of holding*, and House of Lisprolis leaves a pair of *boots of elvenkind*. The heroes get all of them.

The Team can choose any Beneficiary in the Arena Registry, in which case they can obtain more rewards based on their performance in this chapter.

ACHIEVEMENTS	RESULT (BUSINESS)	RESULT (DISCOVERY)	RESULT (HEROIC)	RESULT (SHADOW)	LOOT RECEIVED
1. No conflict against the Ironhand; overall obedience of the rules	+1 Prestige (otherwise, -1 Prestige)	+1 Prestige (otherwise, -1 Prestige)	+1 Prestige (otherwise, -1 Prestige)	+1 Prestige (otherwise, -1 Prestige)	—
2. Party survived the Penumbra Plane	+3 CP	+5 CP	+3 CP	+7 CP	—
3. Vang's body quickly reported	+1 Prestige (otherwise, -1 Prestige)	+1 Prestige (otherwise, -1 Prestige)	+1 Prestige (otherwise, -1 Prestige)	+1 Prestige (otherwise, -1 Prestige)	—
4. “Perfect” investigation outcome, or the judge is convinced that Team 1 is guilty and Team 2 is innocent	+1 Prestige, +6 CP	+1 Prestige, +10 CP	+1 Prestige, +6 CP	+1 Prestige, +6 CP	(If the Arena battle was won) <i>illusionist's ring, heavenly pendant, potion of water breathing, penumbral armor, twin handaxes of the 33 souls</i> - Appendix J
5. “Medium” investigation outcome	+1 Prestige, +3 CP	+1 Prestige, +5 CP	+1 Prestige, +3 CP	+1 Prestige, +3 CP	<i>longsword +1, bag of holding, boots of elvenkind</i>
6. Victory in the battle against Team 1	+5 CP	+7 CP	+10 CP	+5 CP	200 gp and four citrines valued at 50 gp each
6.1. It was a “great” fight	+2 Fame, +1 CP	+2 Fame, +1 CP	+2 Fame, +3 CP	+2 Fame, +1 CP	
6.2. It was an “average” fight	+1 Fame	+1 Fame	+1 Fame, +1 CP	+1 Fame	
6.3. It was a “bad” fight	-1 Fame	-1 Fame	-1 Fame	-1 Fame	

REGISTRATION. TEAM REWARDS.

It is nighttime when the PCs wake up from the ritual and leave the stadium. From here, they are free to roam the Capital, assuming they were not arrested or defeated in the Arena fight. They are instructed to present themselves before midnight (that is, within the hour) at the Registry at the end of

the alley south of the Arena of Fate, to sign their Team's name in the Imperial records and receive information about their Beneficiary's offers, like the location of their headquarters.

When they arrive, have the Team choose one of the three Beneficiaries. The PCs can consult copies of the plaques they saw in Skybell (**Appendix C**). We suggest applying the following modifiers according to their choice:

BENEFICIARY CHOSEN	IF THE PARTY CHANGED INTERVIEW ROOMS IN SKYBELL	SPECIALIZATION: BUSINESS	SPECIALIZATION: DISCOVERY	SPECIALIZATION: HEROIC	SPECIALIZATION: SHADOW
The Ironhand's Turtlepoint Navy Squad	Lose 1 Prestige before calculating the next columns	+1 CP for each positive Prestige	+1 CP for each positive Prestige	+1 CP for each positive Prestige +5 CP on achievement 6	+1 CP for each positive Prestige
Ahimoth City's Merchants Guild	Lose 1 Fame before calculating the next columns	+1 CP for each positive Fame +5 CP on achievements 4 and 6	+1 CP for each positive Fame	+1 CP for each positive Fame	+1 CP for each positive Fame
The Noble Skybell House of Edhell Lisprolis	Lose 1 Fame if Business or Discovery, or lose 1 Prestige if Heroic or Shadow, before calculating the next columns	+1 CP for each positive Fame +3 CP on achievements 1 and 3	+1 CP for each positive Fame +3 CP on achievements 4 and 5	+1 CP for each positive Prestige	+1 CP for each positive Prestige +5 CP on achievement 2

Teams gain one Level for every 10 **Career Points (CP)** earned. The table shows the rewards gained in each level.

The list of features, headquarters, facilities, and staff choices is found in the next chapter, and depends on the Beneficiary chosen.

UNEXPECTED MEETING

When the PCs are done creating a Team, Rigilia Choween storms into the room and falls on the ground, bleeding. “Thank the gods, someone I know!” she says, out of breath. “Avelum... Khloet... attacked... gone... please help us... find them!”

TEAM LEVEL	REWARD
1 (0–9 CP)	1x Team Feature
2 (10–19 CP)	1x Team Headquarters (Main Hall level = 1; max. facilities = 2)
3 (20–29 CP)	2x Team Staff
4 (30–39 CP)	1x Headquarters Expansion (max. facilities = 3)



Up next: Avelum and Khloet disappear just hours before their fight begins, and the PCs become involved in a frantic manhunt through the Arena of Fate district. The party is pulled into intrigues of the highest echelons of power in Tanares, appearing in the crosshairs of organizations such as the Empire, the Third Eye, and Teams that are way above Team 1's league.

Note: Appendices A and B are the character and Team sheets for player use. You will find them in the sample from *Player's Guide to Tanares*. Also, some pages are on a different format to make them printer-friendly.

APPENDIX C: PLAQUES

C1: GREEN CARPET'S PLAQUE



THE NEIGHBORHOODS OF LAW-ABIDING citizens and the association of merchants from Ahimoth City's Southern District humbly ask for the help of Teams willing to do good for the people of Tanares!

Ahimoth City is one of the last large cities standing in the former Wasteland's outer rim. We who live here love our home. For decades, we watched as the toxic reminder of the last world war slowly but surely approached our doorsteps.

We won't lie—the situation here isn't easy. Weeks before the mist vanished, a few aberrations destroyed most of the houses and establishments in the Southern District. But with the dawning of this new age, optimism runs high in town. Every person with enough funds to spare chipped in to buy a presence in Skybell's trials, so that—hopefully—YOU can join us in the effort to rebuild, expand our territory, and make Ahimoth great again!

SPECS

Beneficiary: Ahimoth City's Merchants Guild.
Lands granted: 460 square miles, 300 square

miles, 180 square miles

Primary work: Trade and construction security; general help for the people. A lot of back-and-forth to be expected between Ahimoth City and granted lands.

Secondary jobs: Numerous. Variable payment.

End-of-year payment: 5,000 gp / Team

Headquarters: House in Ahimoth (please consult with our representative)

Representative: Master Armur Jasperin



C2: RED CARPET'S PLAQUE



YOUR GRACE, EDHELL LISPROLIS, RESPECTFULLY seeks a Team to honor the legacy of the most ancient lineages north of the Central Sea, and to work to build us a future that is even greater than our past.

The Lisprolis provenance goes back centuries; some of the oldest history books in Stravian and Ben'net Provinces tell the tales of the firsts of our name. It was with sorrow that we witnessed the names of similar noble families be forever erased from history in Reginheraht, Yama, and, above all, the Mystical Kingdom, in three consecutive and devastating Malrokian Curses.

With Arcana now free from divine punishment, the Addin-Zaiba family can hopefully live on. Protecting their legacy from the hands of thieves and disrespectful treasure hunters can only help our brothers from the east (and Tanares as a whole) in their evolutionary efforts. The buried knowledge must come to light—just not the light of marauders' torches.

SPECS

Beneficiary: The Noble Skybell House of Edhell Lisprolis

Lands granted: 308 square miles, 270 square miles,

200 square miles

Primary work: Land and road protection; charting and exploring the granted lands for the best opportunities for regional development.

Secondary jobs: Few. High payment.

End-of-year payment: 20,000 gp / Team

Headquarters: Strongholds under construction; sizes proportionate to the land area. Team may request special rooms and sections.

Representative: Your Grace's niece and advisor, Mariahnnah Lisprolis



C3: BLUE CARPET'S PLAQUE



YOUR GLORIOUS EMPIRE, KEEPER OF THE peace and evolution in Tanares, will position Teams around and on the Turtlepoint Peninsula to stave off pirates and other marauders seeking the dangerous magic and treasure found in the Mystical Province.

The tall mountain range at the eastern side of the former Mystical Kingdom serves as welcoming natural protection against trespassers from the west; however, there are weaknesses in gaps at the northwestern section. Despite the overwhelming presence of troops in the region, there are many wide and complex areas of land and sea in the surroundings. The Empire requests experienced and intelligent adventurers to control some of the numerous entry points, thus preventing trespassers from gathering near the gaps.

SPECS

Beneficiary: The Ironhand's Turtlepoint Navy Squad
Lands granted (including water and mountain zones): 560 square miles, 500 square miles, 460 square miles

Primary work: Protection of the coast and seas;

tactical support in Ironhand operations.

Secondary jobs: Some. Fair payment.

End-of-year payment: Payment for outstanding performance is possible in the form of land, property, ships, invaluable prestige within the Empire, or nobility titles.

Headquarters: Already built (castles, fortresses, and ships that formerly sheltered Ironhand troops).

Representative: From Seashores Province, Ironhand Lieutenant Lik Eirenion



APPENDIX D: SPECIALIZATIONS

New adventurers are often too excited about discovering their potential for greatness and don't stop to think about the path they will take to achieve their collective mission. As a representative who will likely hire some of the Teams that come your way, it is often to your benefit that you are able to identify a Team's Specialization—or, if they're not sure, that you can steer them in the right direction.

The Specialization is often a mixture of what a Team can do best and what they want to do as they build their reputation in the adventuring world. It indicates what kind of missions the Team is most interested in and most proficient in accomplishing.

Pursuing a Specialization creates a virtuous circle. People come to a Team with missions that require investigation. Completing a mission makes them better investigators. The improved reputation brings more difficult and more rewarding missions that make them even better investigators, and put them on a more efficient path toward accomplishing their ultimate purpose.

It is important to note that a Team may choose any kind of mission, even those unrelated to their Specialization. But they will be sought primarily for the field of work they're proficient at, and the more they diversify away from that, the less straightforward their path to greatness will be.

Below are four Specializations that Teams can choose, along with examples of missions they will be expected to perform.

BUSINESS

Business Teams are all about investment and intelligent progress.

They know that not everything can be achieved with fireballs and slicing down enemies and monsters. In a world where some people are quick to grab their swords and destroy things, great power can lie in the hands of those who are proficient in constructing the world they'd like to live in.

EXAMPLES OF MISSIONS

Independent (Entrepreneurs)	Running a self-owned business (shop, transportation, construction company).
For-hire (Facilitators)	Helping other businesses (finding a rare item for a shop or safely taking it through dangerous territory).

DISCOVERY

Discovery Teams are all about finding what is hidden.

They often specialize in techniques of interrogation, investigation, or exploration of uncharted territories.

EXAMPLES OF MISSIONS

Independent (Explorers)	Explore remote caves or ancient ruins for treasures and knowledge. Slowly build an intelligence network.
For-hire (Investigators)	Track down the thieves who stole a magic item. Out of seven captured suspects, find out which one is the murderer.

HEROIC

Heroic Teams are all about protection and representation of a beneficiary's interests.

They often have their ears to the ground, attentive to dangers and threats that could jeopardize a group, a city, or even an entire nation's existence or prosperity. Their combat-centered services can also be hired by those with the coin to pay for it.

Not all heroic Teams are grandiose in their mission and humble in their hearts. If their activity centers around protecting the headquarters of a criminal organization, this is also "heroic" (for the criminals).

EXAMPLES OF MISSIONS

Independent (Heroes of the People)	Rescue people stranded by a sudden river overflow. Scare bandits away.
For-hire (Heroes of the Arena)	Slay a monster that is terrifying a village. Fight in the Arena to settle a dispute against a neighbor.

SHADOW

Shadow Teams are all about pulling the world's strings—silently.

This is the rarest of the Specializations, as most people don't even understand how such Teams operate. Not to be underestimated, they specialize in missions accomplished through unconventional, supernatural, and occult means.

EXAMPLES OF MISSIONS

Independent (Occultists)	Building an intelligence network. Digging up long-forgotten arcane secrets for their own use.
For-hire (Whisperers)	Manufacturing and spreading rumors to steer a local governor or populace toward a particular belief or cause.



APPENDIX E: LETTERS

(1)

Dear Master Armour Jasperin,

Hoping to see you forthwith to discuss a matter of great concern, I write to you while my memory of it is still fresh. You are right: there is indeed a Team here with a hidden agenda.

These impostors are, I'm afraid, more deeply connected than we thought. I don't know who to trust, for thirty seconds after I heard the following words, a griffon—certainly carrying a high-ranked Ironhand officer—flew over my head as I stood on the balcony of my Team's room.

The words I heard were: "Tell the Treasurer that the meeting with Lisprolis did not go well, but we might have overestimated their knowledge about the artifact. Team 4 is the weakest. I will devise a way to take advantage of that."

I couldn't see who uttered them, but I ha

(2)

Dear Team 2,

I am sorry for not properly fulfilling my role of escort and protector. I hope this finds you well, recovered from your wounds, and willing to forgive me not only for my failure but also for not being there with you, as I am hard-pressed to understand what happened whilst still running a thousand things here in Skybell.

An attack in a portal highway is unheard of, and the only reason I can fathom such an event occurring is that it is somehow related to you – or me. Until further investigation amasses more conclusive findings, I will avoid long-distance trips through the Penumbra – and so should you.

For the sake of isonomy, all other Teams shall be sent to your location. The fortress is mere portal-seconds away from the Capital; I will soon issue an authorization for all Teams to directly teleport to the Capital. Until then, rest well, as you will need all your strength for the upcoming trials.

With my blessings and warmth,

Taram Hemsfield



(3)

P.S.: Knowing that you'd likely need more time to rest than the other Teams, I took the liberty of assigning you a provisory symbol; I will make sure you get to change it for something else when the trials end.

I chose the symbol of a portal with tentacles coming out of it, as your recent experience is the only thing I am certain no other Team in the world shares with you. I also like that it resembles the sun I proudly carry at the end of my staff as an homage to our dear gods, representing the warmth and life of Tamera and the destructive power of Bauron.



So that their blessings may be a beacon of light in the unknowing darkness of your future journeys, I chose your banner to feature a yellow symbol on a purple background.

Taram Hemsfield



APPENDIX F: PAINTING - PHANTOM OF THE FORTRESS



The Phantom of the Fortress - unknown, 19 I.A.

This painting depicts the first—and only—librarian of this fortress, which was one of the first prison complexes and Ironhand outposts in Imperial history. More than one hundred years ago, a noble madwalker of exquisite natural talent wanted to be famous, recognized the world over. Moreover, he wanted to put his estate at the Empire's disposal, making it valuable—or rather, invaluable. He posed to himself the challenge of recovering and learning the ancient knowledge of building portals, so that he might build one right here. It once belonged to an equally ancient civilization, extinct in the Cold War, centuries ago. He succeeded. The cost: his life. It is said that, greatly distressed for dying before his efforts were recognized, his spirit swore never to leave the estate, pledging his services to the first person to speak his name out loud. Legend says he scribbled his very difficult name in the most important excerpt of the book collection currently in the library on the second floor. The problem is, almost all the books there have annotations in nearly illegible calligraphy. With the vast estate now an Ironhand outpost and prison complex where most of its occupants are illiterate, the spirit seems destined to roam endlessly, masterless...

DESIGNING A FLAG OR ARMORIAL BEARING

~ a cute tutorial by Sozzannia Flogg ~

DESIGNING A TEAM'S FLAG IS EASY, SIMPLE, AND fun! It's easy because you can ignore everything that follows and just design whatever you want (though this risks people misinterpreting who you are and what you do). It's simple because there are only three steps involved (shape, colors, and symbol). And it's fun because ART! Right?

Sozzannia, employ a more serious tone. The Major won't approve this.

As we all know, there is a limit, established by decree, to how many armed people with the same interests can get together. A Team's heraldry—the set of symbols and emblems that represents your group—helps enforce this decree and allows quick recognition by people and the Ironhand.

Without further ado...

STEP 1: CHOOSE YOUR FLAG'S SHAPE

The most common shape is a horizontal rectangle, as it means nothing in particular and stretches nicely in the wind. Businesses and merchants tend to like round flags (coins, right?), the mystical triangle is often associated with the arcane or unknown, and kite-shaped flags resemble shields carried in combat. You can also use unorthodox shapes, no problem (but they may take longer to craft at our workshop!).



STEP 2: DEFINE PATTERN AND COLORS

Patterns are simple geometric shapes in another color. They can divide your flag into different sections (like a cross that separates it into four areas) or not (like a checkered pattern or simply a frame that follows the shape).

Your pattern and colors must be simple; otherwise, your flag could be mistaken for a regular piece of cloth or artwork. It should be visible and quickly identifiable from afar. Remember, we're in the realm of symbols, where one should convey as much meaning as possible in as few messages as possible.

Speaking of meaning, I don't understand what this last sentence is supposed to mean. You know what, cut the entire paragraph.

EXAMPLES	COMMON MEANINGS
Red	Activity, violence, passion, destruction, speed
Green	Nature, healing, life, evolution
White	Peace, order, stillness, stability
Yellow	Fear, wealth, disgust, caution

STEP 3: CHOOSE A POSITION AND COLOR FOR YOUR SYMBOL

Unless you're a minimalist, the symbol is your flag's most important and distinguished element. Any flag can have a red background color, but when you associate it with a white symbol, it communicates something that is likely unique in the world. Take the Ironhand flag, for example:



1 It has a red background, to convey the (correct) idea that the Ironhand is swift in action; it doesn't stall when there is a problem; and it acts in times of violence or conflict. These concepts are represented well in the flag's memorable background.

2 Its symbol, an outstretched hand, is a universal signal for "stop" or "halt." It symbolizes the policing activity, a good part of which is enforcing Imperial decrees. The hand has five fingers, reminding us that in many regions five is the maximum number of armed people allowed to gather. Finally, it's in harmony with the name of the institution—it makes perfect sense that a hand represents the Ironhand.

3 The symbol is large and occupies the center of the flag, representing that the Ironhand can be anywhere. And it's white to remind us that, despite the violent and active (red) background, the police are ultimately there to keep the world in peace and order, stable, and free from new incidents of the Malrokian Curse.

That's it! Hope you enjoyed it!

Bibliography: G., Dragori [2021]. "Heraldry: designing a Team's symbol and flag." In: *Player's Guide to Tanares*, 1st Ed. (hardcover book).



APPENDIX I: WITNESS LIST

Trial participants who confirmed they were outside their rooms at the time of the murder and after the rooms were locked down



Garry Landen
(Team 1)



Myssa Teek
(Team 3)



Zianna Belikk'a
(Team 4)

Representatives and Ironhands



Lik Eirenion
(representative)



Armur Jasperin
(representative)



Oord Mimim III
(Team 4)



Admōerio Shosshan
(Team 5)



Bobbum Vonoblom
(Team 6)



Mariahnnah Lisprolis
(representative)



Koraldur Smith
(blacksmith)



Ysseppa Rob'erta
(Team 6)



Xan'quoi Petre
(Team 7)



Harold Pennc
(lieutenant in charge)



Coroner
(examined the victim's body)

APPENDIX J: MAGIC ITEMS

PENUMBRAL ARMOR

Armor (scale mail), uncommon (requires attunement)

This armor grants the wearer +1 to AC while in the Penumbra Plane or in dim light.



TWIN HANDAXES OF THE 33 SOULS

Weapons (handaxes), uncommon (requires attunement)

A pair of magical hatchets that grow more powerful if they claim enough humanoid lives. Every time their wielder kills a humanoid with them, the hatchets shout out how many humanoids they have slain. They become +1 hatchets once the count gets to 33. They reset the count whenever they are attuned to a new user, and the axes will not activate their magical properties when separated.

x2

ILLUSIONIST'S RING

Wondrous item, uncommon (requires attunement)

This ring allows its user to cast *minor illusion* once a day. If a creature uses its action to examine the illusion, it may discern it as such with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check. The illusion will become faint to a discerning creature.



HEAVENLY PENDANT

Wondrous item, uncommon (requires attunement)

Once a day, when this item's bearer rolls Hit Dice, they can choose to reroll and take the second result. If both rolls have the same result, the item loses its magical properties.

POTION OF WATER BREATHING

Potion, uncommon

You can breathe underwater for 1 hour after drinking this potion. Its cloudy green fluid smells of the sea and has a jellyfish-like bubble floating in it.



APPENDIX K: CREATURES

K1: ROAD TRIP

BRATH, THE BUGBEAR

Bugbears are intelligent and tactical creatures with a knack for ambushes, especially Brath. His aggressiveness and strength make him a natural leader of goblinoid tribes and a good plundering companion.

BRATH, THE BUGBEAR

Medium humanoid (goblinoid), chaotic evil

Armor Class 16 (hide armor, shield)

Hit Points 27 (5d8 + 5)

Speed 30 feet

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)	11 (0)	9 (-1)

Skills Stealth +6, Survival +2

Senses darkvision 60 ft, passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Goblin

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when Brath hits with it (included in the attack).

Surprise Attack. If Brath surprises a creature and hits it with an attack in the first round of combat, the target takes an extra 7 (2d6) damage.

ACTIONS

Morningstar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft, one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Javelin. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft or range 30/120 ft, one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) piercing damage if melee, or 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage if ranged.

GOBLIN INFILTRATOR

Goblins specialized in infiltration and looting; often used as scouts, they swiftly attack their targets in large groups, overwhelming their targets before they know what hit them.

GOBLIN INFILTRATOR

Small humanoid (goblinoid), neutral evil

Armor Class 13 (leather armor), 15 (with shield)

Hit Points 14 (4d6)

Speed 30 feet

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	14 (+2)	10 (0)	10 (0)	8 (-1)	8 (-1)

Skills Stealth +6

Senses darkvision 60 ft, passive Perception 9

Languages Common, Goblin

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Nimble Escape. The goblin can take Disengage or Hide as a bonus action on each of its turns.

ACTIONS

Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft, one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft, one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

GOBLIN WITCH

Some goblins show particular aptitude in handling magic on the rare occasions they find grimoires or scrolls; as valuable members of their tribes, a single spell can tip the scales of an encounter.

GOBLIN WITCH

Small humanoid (goblinoid), neutral evil

Armor Class 14 (studded leather armor)

Hit Points 14 (4d6)

Speed 30 feet

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	14 (+2)	10 (0)	14 (+2)	10 (0)	8 (-1)

Skills Stealth +5

Senses darkvision 60 ft, passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Goblin

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Nimble Escape. The goblin witch can Disengage or Hide as a bonus action on each of her turns.

Spellcasting. The goblin witch is a 1st-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). The goblin witch has the following wizard spells prepared:

- Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt*, *message*
- 1st level (2 slots): *magic missile*, *thunderwave*

ACTIONS

Ritual Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft, one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Scroll Specialist. The goblin witch can use her action to activate one of her scrolls, ignoring their class prerequisite; Intelligence is her spellcasting ability for these. If the goblin witch tries to use a 2nd-level magic scroll, she must succeed on a DC 12 Intelligence check. On a failed check, the spell disappears from the scroll with no other effects.

The scrolls in her possession are:

- *Cure wounds* at 1st level (3 uses).
- *Thunderwave* at 2nd level (1 use).
- *Web* at 2nd level (1 use).
- *Locate animals or plants* (1 use).



K2: PENUMBRAL PLANE ENCOUNTERS

PENUMBRAL DRAGON

A rare and powerful creature generated from the condensation of powerful vibrations, energies, emotions, thoughts, and nightmares that dragons have evoked throughout the centuries. Even though it has self-awareness and high intelligence (unlike most other penumbral aberrations), it is not similar to the dragons of the Physical Plane. With an unnatural appearance, it is not uncommon to see numerous tentacles writhing from their heads and tails, seemingly devoid of eyes.



ADULT PENUMBRAL DRAGON

Huge dragon, neutral evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 237 (19d12 + 114)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	12 (+1)	23 (+6)	10 (0)	15 (+2)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +11, Wis +7, Cha +9

Skills Perception +12, Stealth +6

Damage Immunities psychic

Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 22

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 15 (13,000 XP)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the dragon fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The dragon can use its Frightful Presence. It then makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 18 (2d10 + 7) piercing damage plus 4 (1d8) psychic damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 14 (2d6 + 7) slashing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. Hit: 16 (2d8 + 7) bludgeoning damage.

Frightful Presence. Each creature within 120 feet of the dragon and aware of it must, at the dragon's choice, succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or if the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the dragon's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Psychic Breath (Recharge 5–6). The Adult Penumbral Dragon exhales psychic energy in a 90-foot line that is 10 feet wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 19 Wisdom saving throw, taking 58 (9d12) psychic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The dragon can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The dragon regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Detect. The dragon makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Tail Attack. The dragon makes a tail attack.

Wing Attack (Costs 2 Actions). The dragon beats its wings. Each creature within 10 feet of the dragon must succeed on a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw or take 14 (2d6 + 7) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. The dragon can then fly up to half its flying speed.

TARAM

Medium humanoid (cleric of Tamera), lawful good

Armor Class 26 (*Cloak of Tamera* +3, *Scepter of Tamera* +3, and *shield of faith* always active)

Hit Points 153 (18d8 + 72)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Wis +10, Cha +7

Skills History +7, Insight +10, Medicine +10, Persuasion +7, Religion +7

Senses passive perception 15

Languages Common, Celestial, Infernal

Challenge 14 (11,500 XP)

Scepter of Tamera. *Scepter, legendary (requires attunement by a cleric of Tamera).* A golden scepter with a sun in its tip. It can be used as a holy symbol and a spellcasting focus. As an action, the user can make a melee weapon attack with it. The *Scepter of Tamera* is a +3 mace, and it deals an extra 9 (2d8) radiant damage on a hit.

The Scepter also intercepts enemy attacks and protects its user as if they were using a +3 *heavy shield*, but this effect does not stack with any shield the user has donned.

Cloak of Tamera. *Cloak, legendary (requires attunement by a cleric of Tamera).* This holy cloak gives the user the protecting embrace of Tamera. It protects as a suit of +3 *studded leather armor* and gives the user the constant effect of the *shield of faith spell*, but weighs as much as a simple robe.

Supreme Heal. Taram rolls the highest possible numbers when restoring hit points with a spell.

Divine Strike. Taram can infuse his weapon strikes with divine energy. Once on each of his turns, when Taram hits a creature with a weapon attack, he can have the attack deal an extra 2d8 radiant damage to the target.

Blessing of the Champion of Tamera (2/day): Taram has been blessed as a champion of the arena in the name of the Evolutionary Church, and received the boon of Tamera. When Taram casts a spell, he can choose to make all creatures have disadvantage on their saving throws and all his damage dice to cause the maximum amount of damage.

Spellcasting. Taram is a 17th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 18, +10 to hit with spell attacks). Taram has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, light, sacred flame, spare the dying, thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *bless, cure wounds, guiding bolt, shield of faith*

2nd level (3 slots): *hold person, lesser restoration, spiritual weapon*

3rd level (3 slots): *beacon of hope, remove curse, spirit guardians*

4th level (3 slots): *death ward, guardian of faith, banishment*

5th level (2 slots): *flame strike, greater restoration, mass cure wounds*

6th level (1 slot): *heal, true seeing*

7th level (1 slot): *fire storm*

8th level (1 slot): *antimagic field*

9th level (1 slot): *mass heal*

ACTIONS

Offensive Caster. If Taram casts a spell with his action or bonus action, he can, as part of the same action, make an attack with the *Scepter of Tamera*.

Scepter of Tamera. (legendary) Melee Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft, one target. Hit: 7 (1d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 7 (2d6) radiant damage. If it's Taram's first attack in this turn, the attack deals an additional 9 (2d8) radiant damage.

Pray for a Miracle. Taram can pray for Tamera to help on a difficult task ahead. He describes what he seeks and rolls a d20. On a result of 18 or higher, Tamera intervenes. The GM chooses the nature of the intervention. If Tamera intervenes, Taram can't use this action again for the next 7 days. If he does not succeed, Taram can use this action again after finishing a long rest.





PENUMBRAL BUSH

Although the Penumbral Plane is known for its monstrous manifestations of emotions, it also has native flora and fauna that resembles what is found in the Physical Plane, but completely adapted to the gloomy environment and with dark and nightmarish features of their own. The penumbral bush is hostile vegetation with dark leaves and purple flowers with faint bioluminescence; it tries to entwine and feed on all creatures, which are usually drawn to it by the strange beauty of the flowers.

The penumbral bush flowers are capable of mitigating the Penumbral Plane's effects on non-native creatures if they are brewed into a *potion of unseen madness*, containing the flowers' essence mixed with emogum blood. A successful DC 18 Intelligence (History) check will grant such knowledge, from which it is possible to brew the potion with a successful DC 13 Intelligence check using the appropriate tools, such as alchemist's supplies or a herbalism kit. Consuming the substance will generate the effects described in **Mitigating the Effects of the Penumbral Plane** (see *Tanarec Campaign Sourcebook*) for 3 days.

PENUMBRAL BUSH

Medium plant, unaligned

Armor Class 5

Hit Points 4 (1d8)

Speed 0

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (-4)	1 (-5)	10 (0)	1 (-5)	3 (-4)	1 (-5)

Condition Immunities blinded, deafened, frightened

Senses blindsight 30 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 6

Languages —

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Twine. Any creature that passes within 5 feet of or through the penumbral bush must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or be grappled (DC 10 to escape). Until this grapple ends, the creature is restrained and the penumbral bush can't Twine another target. The penumbral bush can only grapple creatures up to one size larger.

Emotion Drain. Any creature that ends its turn grappled by a penumbral bush must make a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw, taking 2 (1d4) psychic damage on a failed save.

EMOGUM ABERRATIONS

The emogum are aberrations generated in the Penumbral Plane as embodiments of emotions, created by the invisible collective emotional energies released in the air by beings inhabiting the Physical Plane.

Born from intense negative feelings released by Tanarean creatures in the Material Plane, they look and behave like their name. Explorers and scholars debate why only the result of negative feelings have been found; the leading theory is that these vibrations, being more dense, accumulate, join energies of a similar nature, condense, and ultimately give birth to aberrations. Positive feelings are believed to spread naturally and could even dissipate the denser vibrations. Most emogum are relatively common and simple, like the manifestations of Anger or Fear, which become attracted

and feed upon similar feelings, and can even provoke or intensify these emotions in their victims. However, some emogum are much more complex, powerful and rare, such as the Penumbral Dragons.

ANGER

Anger is a destructive, powerful, contagious emotion, and the emogum it creates is no different. These creatures are strong, aggressive, and exist solely to spread death and destruction, attacking any beings or objects they come across, with no apparent provocation or motive, as if they were trying to quench an endless rage. Additionally, Anger can instill violence and aggression in creatures around it; its victims will often fight back frenetically, cursing and yelling, to little avail. Some gloomfolk hunt these creatures as a rite of passage, seeking to spark the chaotic inner flames of rage.

ANGER

Medium aberration, chaotic evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 37 (5d8 + 15)

Speed 30 feet

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	10 (0)	16 (+3)	3 (-4)	13 (+1)	11 (+1)

Damage Resistances psychic

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages understands Deep Speech but can't speak

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Anger Aura (10 ft.) A creature beginning its turn in or entering the Anger Aura must make a DC 11 Wisdom save. On a failure, it will start to feel irritated and angry, often shouting, yelling, and becoming more aggressive. Until the creature finishes a short rest, it will suffer a -1 penalty to its AC and gain a +1 bonus to damage from Strength- and Dexterity-based attacks. Only one Anger Aura can affect a creature at a time. Spells and effects such as *calm emotions* and *minor restoration* nullify the effects of the Anger Aura. If a target's saving throw is successful or if the effect ends for it, the target is immune to the Anger Aura for 24 hours.

ACTIONS

Rage Spikes. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage. The target must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw or be moved 10 feet in any direction Anger chooses. Anger can only move creatures that are Large or smaller.



GRUDGE

Grudge is a feeling that grows stronger with time, festering in the hearts and minds of those who fuel it by the simplest of actions: not allowing it to go away. A person overcome with it no longer cares about others and starts acting recklessly or even self-destructively in order to attack the target of their grudge. The Grudge emogum is a sturdy monster with thorny skin that lives to awaken feelings of loathing and aversion in other creatures, with its attacks affecting the mind as well as the body, making its victims see it as that which they hate the most. Grudge blurs their minds to the point that they seek nothing other than destroying it, regardless of whether any or both sides can survive the encounter.

LESSER GRUDGE

Medium aberration, neutral evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 16 (3d8 + 3)

Speed 30 feet

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)

Damage Resistances psychic

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages understands Deep Speech but can't speak

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Grudge. When a creature receives damage from a Grudge attack and fails its psychic damage saving throw, it will come to view Grudge as the creature it hates the most; all its attacks against creatures other than the Grudge have disadvantage. This effect disappears if the Grudge is killed, if the creature is affected by *calm emotions*, or if it takes short rest. If a target's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the target is immune to this effect for 24 hours.

ACTIONS

Loathsome Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage. The target must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw or receive an additional 3 (1d6) psychic damage.

PAIN

Pain is an inevitable survival mechanism for most sentient beings, but it can often become worse than the problem from which it derives. The Pain emogum embodies many aspects of this intolerable feeling as it can inflict pain in a variety of ways and intensities, from the abrasive and crushing sensations caused by its scales and tentacles, to the sharp, excruciating pain of its fangs and spines driving through flesh. These creatures live to inflict endless pain; they often capture and torture their victims slowly, with growing intensity, until their bodies and minds can no longer bear the torment and deep anguish.



LESSER PAIN

Medium aberration, neutral evil

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points 22 (4d8 + 4)

Speed 40 feet

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	3 (-4)	7 (-2)	14 (+2)

Damage Resistances psychic

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages understands Deep Speech but can't speak

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage.

Excruciating Pain. The Pain targets one creature it can see within 30 feet. The target must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the target takes 9 (3d4 + 2) psychic damage, walks exactly 5 feet, trying to get as far away from Pain as possible, and, until the creature takes a short rest, the next time it takes damage, this effect ends and the target takes 5 (2d4) extra psychic damage.

K3: THE TRIAL



GARRY LANDEN

ZAHLLA ZOWERINA

TABEK TCHOPIN

GARRY LANDEN

Medium humanoid (human redeemer), lawful evil



Armor Class 14 (Magic bonus)
Hit Points 22 (4d8 + 4)
Speed 30 feet

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (0)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	10 (0)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Wis +3, Cha +6

Skills Deception +6, History +2, Insight +3, Persuasion +6, Religion +2

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Draconic, Elvish

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Special NPC. This is a special NPC. Death Saving Throw rules apply to it when its hit points are reduced to 0, just as they would to PCs.

Ray Increment (6/day). Once per turn, when Garry shoots a ray, he can increment one of them (either his Positive or his Negative Ray). He can choose one of the following increments:

- **Minor Charge**
 - Positive Ray: it heals one target for 10 (3d6) instead of giving temporary hit points.
 - Negative Ray: the damage dealt increases to 13 (3d8).
- **Courage/Fear**
 - Positive Ray: it no longer grants temporary hit points. Instead, the target of the ray has advantage on Wisdom saving throws for the next minute. If the creature has the frightened condition, it can choose to end the condition instead.
 - Negative Ray: it no longer deals necrotic damage. Instead of making an attack roll, Garry makes the target make a Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, the target is frightened for one minute. The frightened target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.
- **Modify Speed**
 - Positive Ray: it grants 2d6 temporary hit points and its target can Disengage as a bonus action on its next turn.
 - Negative Ray: it deals an extra 3 (1d6) necrotic damage, bringing the total to 7 (2d6) necrotic damage, and the target must make a Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the creature's moving speed is halved for one minute. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. If Garry shoots a ray with his action, he can use his bonus action to shoot a second ray. If he uses his action in any other way, he cannot shoot a ray with his bonus action. Only one ray per turn can be incremented.

Positive Ray. Ranged Spell Attack: reach 60 ft., one creature, grants 3 (1d6) temporary hit points.

Negative Ray. Ranged Spell Attack, +6 to hit, reach 60 ft., one creature. Hit: 3 (1d6) necrotic damage.

Charismatic leader of Team 1, Garry's powers have a peculiar origin—strong feelings people deposit on valuable metals, mainly gold pieces. That way, he has double incentive to amass riches.

Redeemer is one of the four new playable classes the Tanares RPG brings to the 5th edition of the world's greatest roleplaying game. Read all about it in the *Player's Guide to Tanares*.

ZAHLLA ZOWERINA

Medium humanoid (gloomfolk rogue), neutral evil



Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 26 (4d8 + 8)
Speed 30 feet

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	10 (0)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Int +4

Skills Acrobatics +5, Intimidation +2, Investigation +4, Sleight of Hand +5, Stealth +7

Senses darkvision 30 ft, passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Deep Speech

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Special NPC. This is a special NPC. Death Saving Throw rules apply to it when its hit points are reduced to 0, just as they would to PCs.

Flaming Arrow (3/day). As a bonus action, Zahlla can light up one of her arrows. Her next Longbow attack deals an extra 3 (1d6) fire damage.

ACTIONS

Sting. Melee Weapon Attack: +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 2 (1d4) piercing damage and the target must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw, taking 2 (1d4) poison damage and is poisoned on a failed save. The target must repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success or taking 2 (1d4) poison damage on a failed save.

Claws. Melee Weapon Attack: +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 2 (1d4) piercing damage and the target is grappled (Escape DC 10).

Rapier. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Longbow. Ranged Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Deploy Trap. As a bonus action, Zahlla can place small glass spheres on the floor in a space within 5 feet of her. The spheres activate when a creature enters the space. A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals the presence of the trap. Zahlla does not activate her traps when going through them, but the space they occupy is treated as difficult terrain.

• **Sleep Spheres (2/day).** The creature must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, it falls asleep and is considered unconscious, and it can make a new saving throw at the end of its turns, ending the effect on a success. The sleeper can also be awakened by taking damage, or if someone uses an action to shake or slap the sleeper awake.

• **Venomous Spheres (2/day).** The creature must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, it is poisoned, taking 2 (1d4) poison damage at the start of each of its turns. The poison lasts for one minute. The creature can make a new saving throw at the end of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

• **Oil Spheres (2/day).** The sphere explodes on the creature, covering it with flammable oil for one minute. If lit, the oil burns for two rounds, and the creature takes 5 damage at the start of each of its turns. Zahlla can also, as a bonus action, throw the Oil Sphere against an enemy within 20 feet of her. The target must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, getting covered in oil on a failure.

Gloomfolk is one of the new playable species the Tanares RPG brings to the 5th edition of the world's greatest roleplaying game.

Read its lore in the *Tanares Campaign Sourcebook* and all about playing as one in the *Player's Guide to Tanares*.

TABEK TCHOPIN

Medium humanoid (half-orc bard), chaotic neutral



Armor Class 14 (studded leather)
Hit Points 32 (5d8 + 10)
Speed 30 feet

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (0)	10 (0)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +4, Cha +4

Skills Acrobatics +4, Deception +4, History +2, Insight +2, Intimidation +6, Medicine +2, Perception +4, Performance +4, Stealth +4

Senses darkvision 60 feet, passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Orc, Goblin

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Special NPC. This is a special NPC. Death Saving Throw rules apply to it when its hit points are reduced to 0, just as they would to PCs.

Spellcasting. Tabek is a 3rd-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). Tabek has the following bard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *minor illusion*, *vicious mockery*

1st level (4 slots): *bane*, *charm person*, *healing word*, *hideous laughter*

2nd level (2 slots): *blindness/deafness*, *suggestion*

Relentless Endurance (1/day). When Tabek is reduced to 0 hit points but not killed outright, Tabek can drop to 1 hit point instead.

Savage Attacks. When Tabek scores a critical hit with a melee weapon attack, he can roll one of the weapon's damage dice one additional time and add it to the extra damage of the critical hit.

ACTIONS

War Cleave. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 8 (1d10 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

War Drum. As a bard, Tabek can, once per turn, use his War Drum to either help his allies or harm his enemies, generating the following magical effects:

- **Contagious Rhythm (2/day):** As a bonus action, Tabek can play a contagious rhythm. All allies within 60 feet that can hear it add 1d6 to their next attack roll. This benefit lasts until the end of Tabek's next turn.
- **Disruptive Rhythm (2/day):** As a bonus action, Tabek can cast *vicious mockery*.

REACTIONS

Release the Beast. As a reaction, when Tabek or one of his allies starts their turn with 10 or fewer hit points, Tabek can open his War Drum to release Bagasse, the furious goblin.

BAGASSE

Small humanoid (goblin), chaotic neutral



Armor Class 14 (leather armor)
Hit Points 38 (7d6 + 14)
Speed 30 feet

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)	11 (0)	11 (0)

Saving Throws Dex +5

Skills Acrobatics +5, Intimidation +2, Stealth +7, Survival +2

Senses darkvision 60 ft, passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Goblin

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Special NPC. This is a special NPC. Death Saving Throw rules apply to it when its hit points are reduced to 0, just as they would to PCs.

Nimble Escape. Bagasse can Disengage or Hide as a bonus action on each of her turns.

Light Weapon Mastery. Bagasse can use light weapons as if they had the finesse property.

Bloodlust. If Bagasse surprises a creature and hits it with a melee weapon attack, the creature takes an extra 4 (1d8) slashing damage from the attack.

Frenzy Attack. After using her Multiattack, Bagasse can use her bonus action to move up to 10 feet and perform an additional melee weapon attack. The target of this attack must be a different target than the ones from her previous attacks this turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Bagasse makes two Deadly Handaxe attacks.

Deadly Handaxe. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.

REACTIONS

Surprise! When Bagasse breaks free from inside the War Drum, she can immediately use up to half her moving speed and make one melee weapon attack against a creature within reach.

Read all about these four characters in
Adventure in the Realms of Madness.



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