

compatible with

MAZES



Return to DARK TOWER™

Fantasy Roleplaying



Return to **DARK TOWER**


FANTASY ROLEPLAYING

A new evil has taken the **DARK TOWER**. Will you rise to fight against this Adversary, and become a hero of the **FOUR KINGDOMS**? Over the course of a campaign of quests and marches, you will: fight fiendish monsters, raise allied armies, and unearth ancient lore - until you can marshall your forces to lay siege to the Adversary and the Dark Tower itself.

A thoroughly modern roleplaying game based on the exciting boardgame **RETURN TO DARK TOWER™**, powered by **polymorph™**, and compatible with the award-winning **MAZES** Fantasy Roleplaying.

For 2-6 players, ages 13 and up if you're brave enough...

powered by


polymorph



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Return to DARKTOWER™

Fantasy Roleplaying


by **Chris O'Neill**
based on **MAZES** Fantasy Roleplaying

Copy Editing by Graham Sternberg
Additional Editing by Adriel Wilson & Patrick Clapp
Production by Heather O'Neill

9th Level Games
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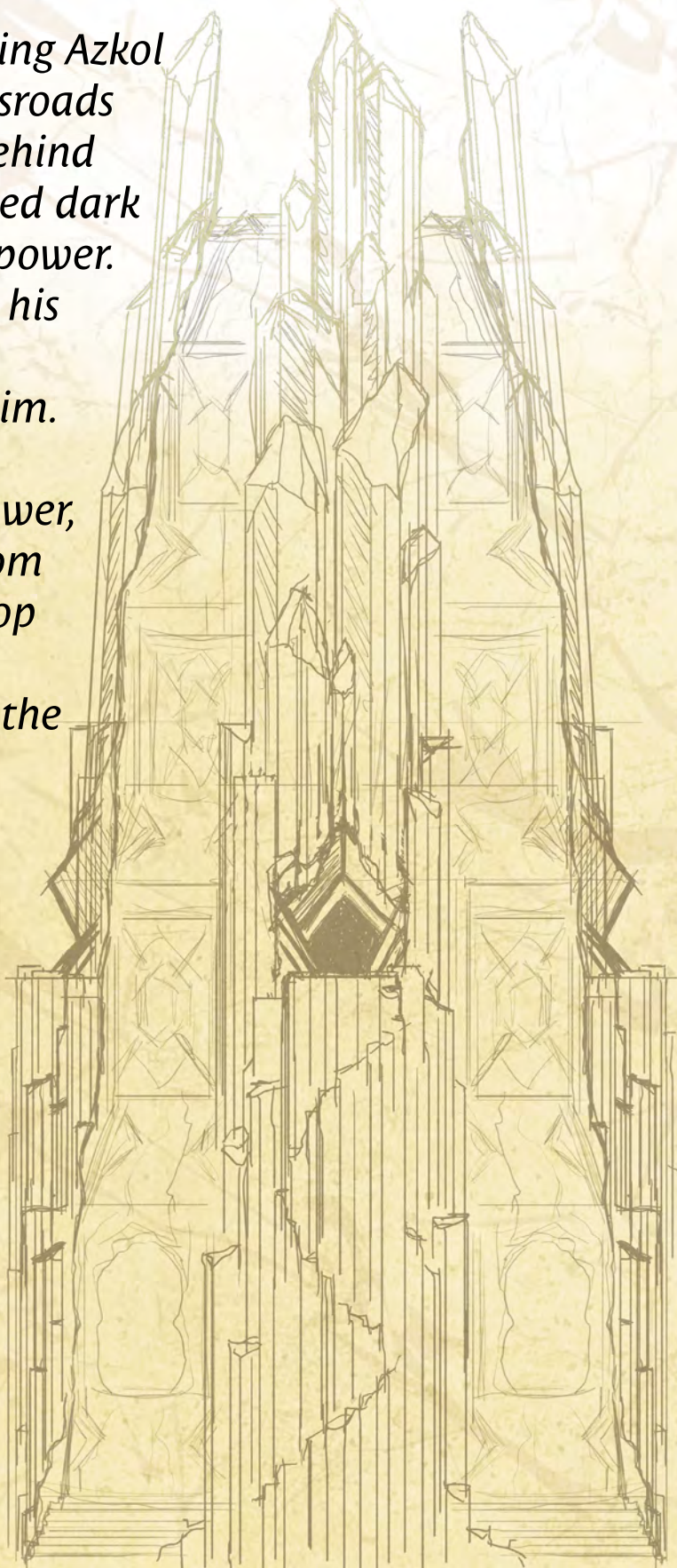
This book has been laid out in
KOPIUS, Costa STD, and AZKOLS KERNING.

built with  **polymorph™**

“Long ago, the sorcerer-king Azkol built a Tower at the crossroads of the Four Kingdoms. Behind its ebon walls, he practiced dark sorcery in his search for power. As Azkol’s madness grew, his apprentice, the sorceress Nimet, plotted against him. She stole his wondrous treasures and fled the Tower, then recruited heroes from the Four Kingdoms to stop him. One hero prevailed. Azkol was defeated, and the Tower lay vacant.

“A new Adversary has claimed the Dark Tower.

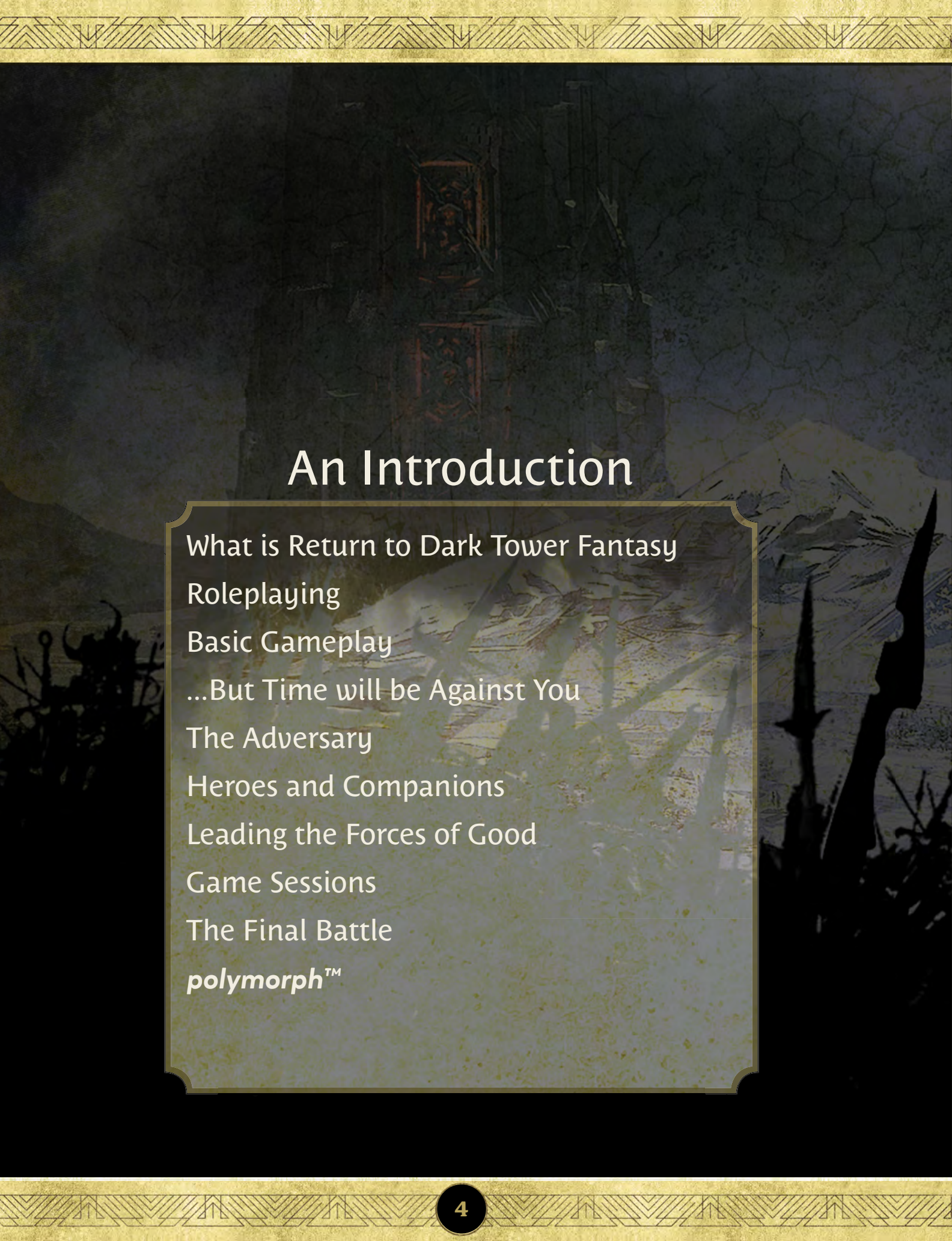
“It grows in power, spreading corruption and calling forth wicked creatures from afar. This foe cannot be defeated alone. Heroes from the Four Kingdoms must gather...and return to Dark Tower.”



Return to DARK TOWER

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An Introduction

What is Return to Dark Tower Fantasy

Roleplaying

Basic Gameplay

...But Time will be Against You

The Adversary

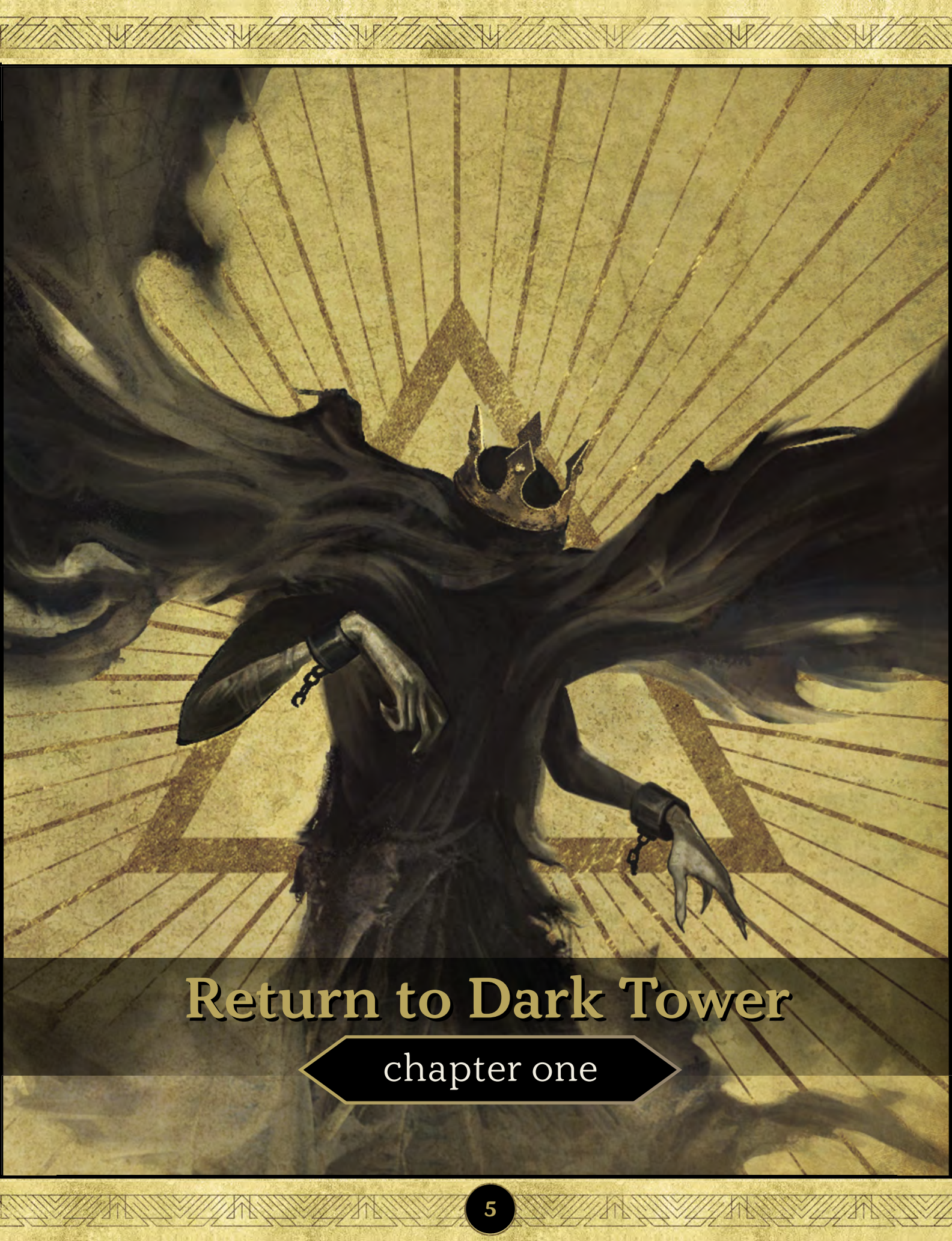
Heroes and Companions

Leading the Forces of Good

Game Sessions

The Final Battle

polymorph™



Return to Dark Tower

chapter one

WHAT IS RETURN TO DARK TOWER FANTASY ROLEPLAYING?

RETURN TO DARK TOWER FANTASY ROLEPLAYING is a complete fantasy **RPG** based on the hit board game **RETURN TO DARK TOWER** by Restoration Games and inspired by the original Dark Tower board game from the 1980s.

RETURN TO DARK TOWER FANTASY ROLEPLAYING is more than just another fantasy **RPG**. As well as being an **RPG** set in the exciting world of **THE FOUR KINGDOMS** (the

lands surrounding the Dark Tower), it's a system for running an epic campaign against an unstoppable foe – a game designed to harness everything that you love about the board game experience and combine it with everything awesome about fantasy role-playing.

You can find game aids, sheets, a glossary, and other resources at 9thlevel.com/resources

BASIC GAMEPLAY

Return to Dark Tower is designed to be played over a series of game sessions collectively called “The Campaign.” During each campaign, the players will create a new **ADVERSARY** (or choose one of the existing great evils, such as the Bane of Omens or the Ash Strider).

One player will take on the role of the **ADVERSARY** and will act as both the Game Master for that campaign and play the part of the great villain. They will run the game sessions, and plot against the hero players – using the resources laid out in this game manual to crush them!

The other players will each create an epic **HERO** and a stalwart **COMPANION** – champions of one of the Four Kingdoms. Together, they will quest to assemble allies, armies, and artifacts of great power to aid their cause. They will take on quests and delve down into dungeons in order to build up their own power and remove their enemies' advantages.

TIME WILL BE AGAINST YOU

If the heroes cannot defeat the Adversary quickly, the nefarious plots and machinations of the evil mastermind will come to fruition as the mastermind breaks the

SEALS binding it within the Tower. These seals are represented by **CLOCKS** that are built into the Adversary's sheet.

To emulate the race against time, player actions cost time, which is represented by filling in the **CLOCKS**. For instance, traveling across the Four Kingdoms has a cost in time, as does going down into dungeons, taking on companion quests, cleansing regions of evil, and spoiling other machinations of the Adversary.

THE ADVERSARY

Return to Dark Tower is a game about a league of great heroes gathered to fight against a single enemy – the **ADVERSARY**. The player chosen to portray the **ADVERSARY** of a Dark Tower Game is playing the villain character – **AGAINST** – the other players. Because of this, the **ADVERSARY** is personifying both a single huge threat and all of the minions and monsters at that threat's disposal. As such, that player has a special **ADVERSARY SHEET**, similar to a character sheet but designed to make it easy to track the machinations uniquely applicable to that evil force.

As the **ADVERSARY**, you will have a set of fiendish plots – called **SEALS** – that will increase your power when they come to fruition.

Each Seal is tracked by a “resource clock” that fills up over time. If the heroes can't diffuse the plot – through a quest, negotiation, defeating a monster, etc. – the clock fills, the seal is broken, and the **ADVERSARY** readies itself for the **FINAL BATTLE**, giving you access to greater options, more powerful monsters, and darker abilities.

Over time, the breaking **SEALS** cause **RPG** sessions to become “harder” and “deadlier.” In addition to the harder foes and monsters the broken **SEALS** provide, the heroes will also struggle under “The **RISING DARKNESS**” as the game progresses. This mechanic gives the heroes increasing disadvantages when taking specific actions later in the game.

HEROES AND COMPANIONS

The hero players are the **LEGENDS** of the **FOUR KINGDOMS**. You aren't just some nameless adventurer at the beginning of your career – you are a hero of high renown leading your forces to save the world!

Each player creates a Hero using the simple rules provided in this book, and compatible with other **MAZES** Fantasy Roleplaying games, by deciding on a character class and answering 3 key questions.

The answers to these questions and your class determine your **ROLE** and your **EDGES**. Each player then makes a **COMPANION** – another fully fleshed out roleplaying character, who either bolsters **ANOTHER** character's **HERO** or fills a role not being played by one of the other Heroes.

Creating both a Hero and a Companion allows for “troupe style” play, meaning that players can participate in events spread across the world map of the Four Kingdoms, without the need for complicated in-game explanations or weird story hooks.

Your **HERO SHEET** includes not only the character sheet but also the hero's **COMPANION** and information on their **FORCES**. Depending on the Quest and session, you may play your Hero or your Companion.

MAZES

COMPANION and **HERO** characters are compatible with **MAZES** Fantasy Roleplaying and can be used in **MAZES** games. Your **MAZES** characters can also be used as **COMPANIONS** in a **RETURN TO DARK TOWER** game.

LEADING THE FORCES OF GOOD

The Hero is also a leader of a force of allies – soldiers, outlaws, thieves, wizards, or perhaps something stranger. These **FORCES** provide narrative options for a character during roleplaying and become your major resource for the final battle, utilizing **polymorph's** exceptional ability to change scale and scope without altering core rules. The rules are the same – you roll your die – regardless of whether you are acting as an individual, or as a large group.

This will be familiar to **MAZES** players because it is similar to the **MAZES** Edge of “**RETAINERS**,” but the mechanic carries much more significance in the context of Return to Dark Tower. **FORCES** are akin to the **WARRIORS** featured in the **RETURN TO DARK TOWER** Board Game, but also function like “hit points” for the final battle. Throughout the game, the character and companions can take on **MAIN QUESTS** (handled with an **RPG** session) or **SIDE QUESTS** (handled by assigning heroes and companions to an activity “off-screen”) to gain additional forces.

GAME SESSIONS

Each game session in the campaign features 3 distinct phases – **QUEST**, **TALLY**, and **MARCH**.

THE QUEST PHASE

QUEST is the core, traditional roleplaying session – going down into a dungeon to battle a monster and loot treasure, a session of politics or intrigue, etc. The **QUEST** aims to either give the **HEROES** a resource for the **FINAL BATTLE** (negotiating with Bone Hills mercenaries to join your army, acquiring a magic staff from a tomb in the Lost Lands, etc.) or to foil an **ADVERSARY'S SEAL** (stopping the emergence of the Soul Lich in the Irontop Mountains, saving the village from plague in Three Rivers, etc.). These result in tangible rewards that are counted in the **TALLY** Phase.

THE TALLY PHASE

TALLY is an inventory of resources, and replaces the traditional fantasy treasure hoarding and shopping steps. Questions that can be addressed in the **TALLY** include: What do our forces look like? What are our advantages? Are we ready to attack the Tower, or do we need more support? The Tally


is a formal process conducted at the **END** of a **GAME SESSION**. The players gain treasure, clear corruptions, and make plans. The Adversary claims Darkness, makes moves, and advances clocks.

THE MARCH PHASE

Finally, the players **MARCH**. The wrap-up of the session includes decisions about what the Heroes are going to do in the next session – take on a new quest or proceed to the final battle, decide which heroes and companions are going to play, and where they want to go. These decisions will cost time (and possibly resources).

During the **MARCH**, the **ADVERSARY** charts the party's plans and sets up what they want to do next, where they want to go, and how they want to spend their precious time. While certain **HEROES** and **COMPANIONS** are playing, others can be assigned to activities that spend time to produce resources or effects.

The Adversary then advances their plots based on the outcome of the game session and the new time spent. Then, they go away to prepare for the next game session.



THE FINAL BATTLE

Eventually, the Heroes will need to lay siege to the Tower – or the Adversary will break their final seals and unleash their wrath upon the Four Kingdoms – bringing the campaign to a climactic battle.

The final session of a **RETURN TO DARK TOWER** game will result in a battle game where the two sides clash. Depending on what **FORCES** the Heroes have gained, and which **TREASURES** they have found, they will attack and defend against the powers of the **ADVERSARY**, bolstered by whatever **SEALS** have been broken up to that point. This Final Battle switches between grand storytelling and ground-level roleplaying to create a satisfying and epic end to the campaign.

ONE DIE TO RULE THEM ALL

RETURN TO DARK TOWER FANTASY

ROLEPLAYING is built using the **polymorph™** system, where each player has a single polyhedral die that represents their character's abilities and their role within the adventuring party – choosing a **d4**, **d6**, **d8**, or **d10**.

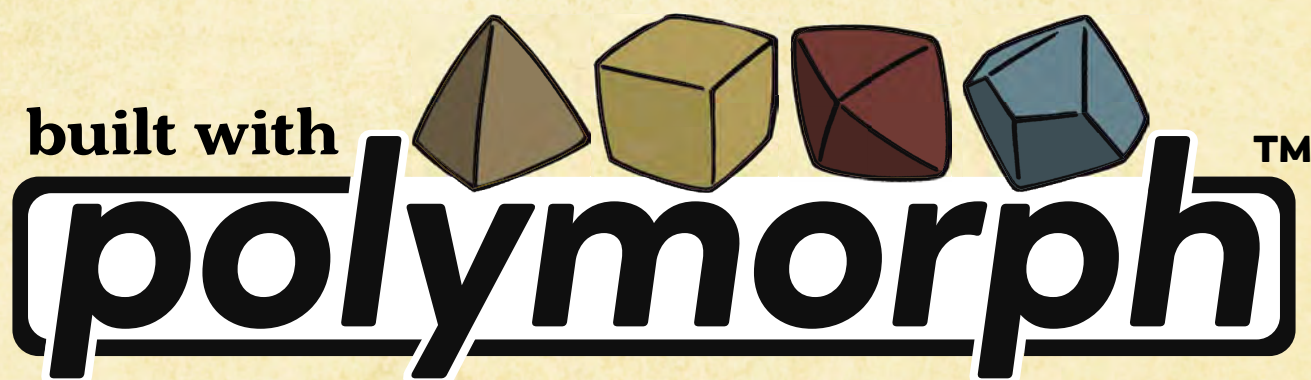
Each Hero is defined by that single polyhedral die, and you roll that die to determine all of your actions whether that be fighting a dragon, leading a charging army, crafting a potion, or healing the sick.

The Adversary can require you to make a roll to determine whether you succeed at a task. When that happens, you **ALWAYS** roll “your die.” To determine whether you succeed or fail, roll the die that you selected for your hero and look at the **RESOLVER** on your character sheet (or on the sides of the **RETURN TO DARK TOWER PLAYER TOWER**).

One glance is all it takes to know if you succeed or fail – there is never any math, modifiers, or need to open up the rulebook to find a rule. If you roll any of the numbers associated with the relevant category (i.e., books for an attempt to decipher a scroll, boots for an attempt to hide from one of the **ADVERSARY**'s servants) then you succeed.

Sometimes, we refer to this process of “rolling your **polymorph** die” with the dice notation “**pd.**”

If your hero has a special ability that could impact the roll, you might get to roll with Advantage – rolling two of your die and succeeding if either is a success. Contrariwise, when the odds are against you, you may have to roll with Disadvantage – needing to roll two of your die, but failing unless both dice succeed.



About Roleplaying

What is Fantasy Roleplaying?

Telling Stories Together

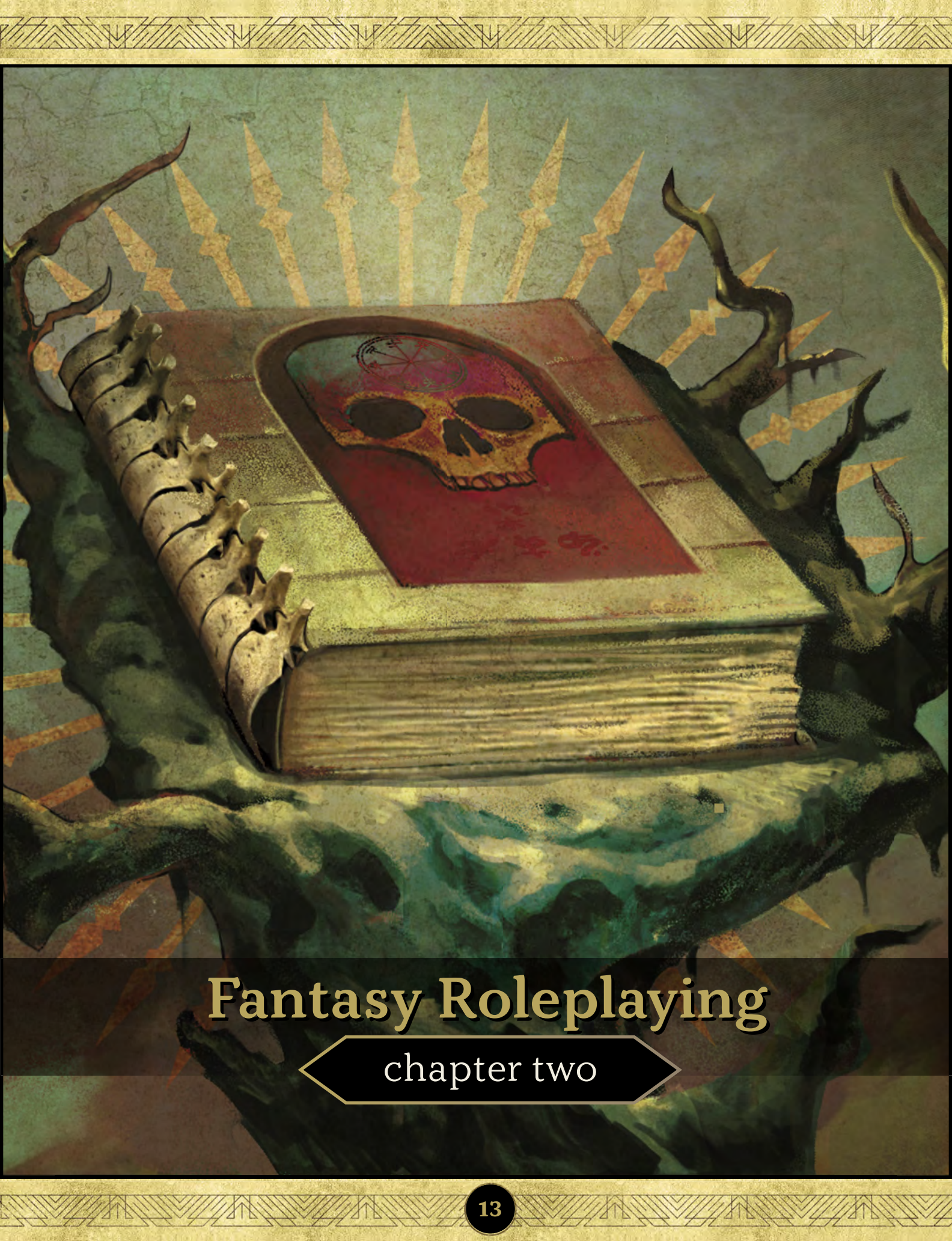
Rulings over Rules

What Should a Game Look Like?

What is Mazes Fantasy Roleplaying?

Using OSR Resources

What do I need to Play?



Fantasy Roleplaying

chapter two

IS THIS DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS? OR, WHAT IS FANTASY ROLEPLAYING?

There are dungeons. There will be dragons. There are definitely funny little dice. No, this isn't that specific game, but Return to Dark Tower is fantasy roleplaying. This game is based on **MAZES** Fantasy Roleplaying (which uses the **polymorph** game system) and the board game Return to Dark Tower. It is a roleplaying campaign that provides rules for heroes facing off against the forces of darkness across the Four Kingdoms and ultimately attempting to destroy the evil at the heart of the Dark Tower itself.

If this is your first **RPG**, welcome – we wish you all the best on your new journey. If this is your millionth **RPG**, welcome back – we hope that you find something new and exciting in these pages and these worlds. Even if this is old hat, read on as **RETURN TO DARK TOWER** may be a bit different from

some of the other roleplaying games that you have played before.

If you don't know what any of this means, no worries, there is enough here to teach you how to play the game – though having a guide show you how to play is easier.

Roleplaying games are different from other types of games. Roleplaying is playing a **CHARACTER** under a set of rules that govern a world – a mix of improv storytelling and game playing. The game component is the set of rules that guide you through creating your character, exploring a space or a theme with them, and hopefully telling stories with them. **RPGs** combine writing and acting in a form that isn't like anything else.



TELLING A STORY TOGETHER

PLAYING A GAME TO FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENS

At the core of every roleplaying game is the idea we are playing to find out what happens. In a different way than a board game, a video game, or even other storytelling games, a roleplaying game requires you to play to uncover the story. But we don't just get to see what happens, we don't just know what will happen, or get to say what will happen. We have to **PLAY** to see what happens.

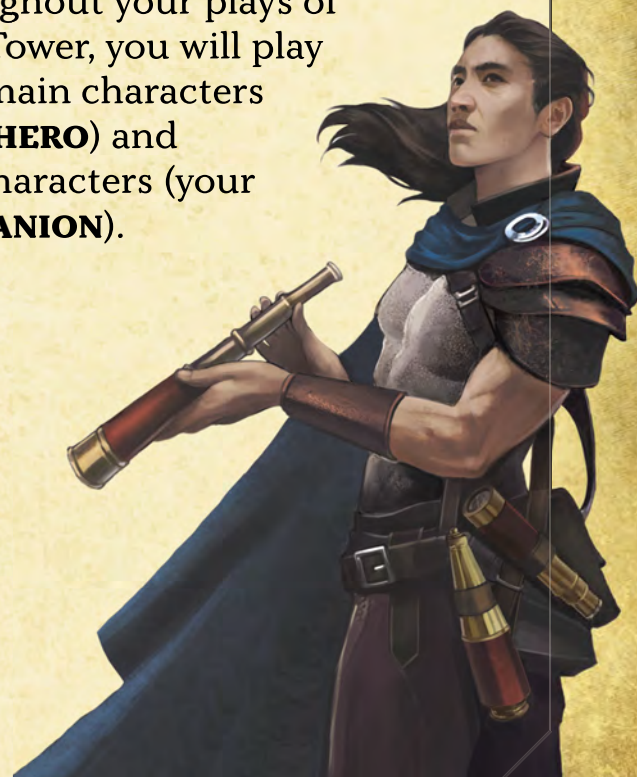
When you are faced with a decision or an event, it's not always going to play out the way that you want – or even the way that you expect. At their core, these experiences are about the thrill of success and failure amid a growing, emergent narrative.

RETURN TO DARK TOWER is about a specific type of fantasy story: the gathering of heroes to face an existential threat to the world. As you play, you and the other players are going to share the creation of this story together – not through exposition but through the deeds and actions of your characters.

One player, called the **ADVERSARY**, leads the story. The **ADVERSARY** guides the story, determining how everything in the world works, and

playing all of the characters not played by the other players (known as non-player characters or **NPCs**.) They take on the role of the world, the monsters, the mysteries you will face, and most importantly play the part of the Enemy that you have gathered to stop. You may even take on the role of the **ADVERSARY**. Because the Adversary's responsibilities have a bit more complexity than those of the other players, it's usually best if someone with some experience acts as the **ADVERSARY** for your first game.

The other players are the heroes of the story – the player characters. Throughout your plays of Dark Tower, you will play both main characters (your **HERO**) and side characters (your **COMPANION**).



RULINGS OVER RULES

We hope that you find the rules in this tome easy to grok and even easier to use. They are a groundwork, not a comprehensive set of explanations for every situation that might arise. This is by design. Part of the thrill of old-school roleplaying was always the idea that you could try anything, regardless of whether there was

an applicable black-letter rule. We hope that these rules will give you all the tools that you need to “adjudicate” your actions in the game and, if they don’t, that it will be easy for your playgroup to make a ruling to cover it.



WHAT SHOULD A GAME LOOK LIKE?

First, each of the players will create their characters. It is best to have the players make characters together, since these characters are all being used as part of the same story. Each player will make one Hero and one Companion.

Each session of a Dark Tower game will comprise of a few distinct “phases” of gameplay. Each session will advance the clocks of the Adversary leading to the breaking of seals on the Dark Tower – and drive the players towards the final, climactic battle with the Evil at the heart of the Tower.

During each game session, the characters are going to go on a Quest. Return to Dark Tower has very specific rules about how Game Sessions work, and in specific how a Quest works. These rules are explained in more depth in Chapter Nine (starts on page 138).

During a Quest, the Adversary describes a scene to the players. Each player then has a chance to describe what their character does. Depending on their actions, the **ADVERSARY** may ask the player to roll a die, pay a cost, or spend a resource.

Over the course of a Campaign, the players will take their characters through an expanding world – they may become rich and powerful, or they may die along the way. No matter what happens, the goal is to have a good time and tell engaging stories.

WHAT IS MAZES FANTASY ROLEPLAYING

AND HOW IS RETURN TO DARK TOWER FANTASY ROLEPLAYING COMPATIBLE?

MAZES Fantasy Roleplaying is a complete system for playing a specific type of fantasy game – a dungeon delve. **RETURN TO DARK TOWER FANTASY ROLEPLAYING**, on the other hand, is a “wider” system – focused on telling an epic, sweeping story through a campaign (a campaign is an interconnected series of adventures telling a complete story).

The characters in Return to Dark Tower are larger-than-life heroes, whereas the characters in **MAZES** are boots-on-the-ground adventurers. Dark Tower expects to be played over a series of games, whereas **MAZES** is primarily played as one-shots. All that being said, **MAZES** and Return to Dark Tower are essentially “the same system” being used to run different games, and most material from one game can be directly used in the other with no changes.

If you are looking for more information on how to run roleplaying sessions, how to create deeper characters, and the like, we suggest you pick up a copy of **MAZES** Fantasy Roleplaying available from finer hobby stores everywhere (or from 9thlevel.com).

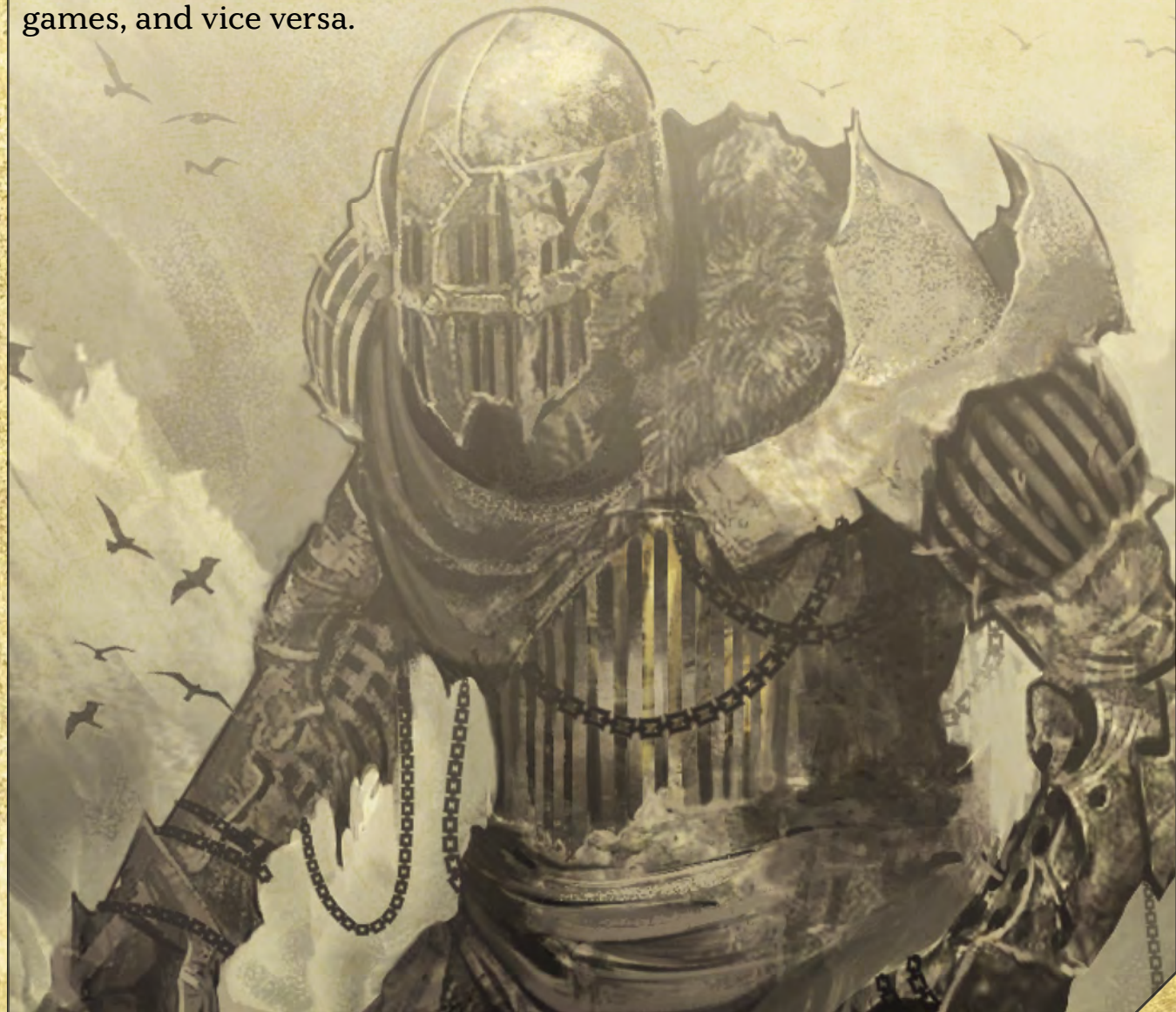
Much of the system of **MAZES** is identical to the system in **RETURN TO DARK TOWER FANTASY ROLEPLAYING**. However, there are differences that should be kept in mind when importing content from one system to the other, namely:

1. **RETURN TO DARK TOWER's** **HEROES** and **COMPANIONS** are the same as **MAZES'** Characters, but some Edges are slightly different. If using a **HERO** from Dark Tower within a **MAZES** game, treat **FORCES** as the Edge > Retainers (page 68, **MAZES FRP**).
2. Dark Tower uses **DANGER** instead of tracking **HEARTS**. When translating from **MAZES** to **DARK TOWER**, just ignore the Hearts value and track Danger as normal. When taking characters from Dark Tower and using them in **MAZES**, set your Hearts according to the rules on page 39 in **MAZES FRP**.

3. When you are playing **MAZES**, rolled “1”s are called **KEYS** (they are called Banners in **RETURN TO DARK TOWER**). Deal with them according to the rules of whichever game you are playing. They serve a similar function in both games, just with a slightly different mechanical edge explained on page 38 for **RETURN TO DARK TOWER** and pages 28-29 in **MAZES FRP**.

4. You can use characters created in **MAZES** as “companions” in your Dark Tower games, and vice versa.

5. You can use any **MONSTERS** or **HAZARDS** from **MAZES** in your **DARK TOWER** games (and by using the **MAZES OSR** Translation tools, you can create **DARK TOWER** monsters from any **OSR**-style game from the last 50 years of roleplaying history). To translate a Monster or Hazard between the **MAZES** and **DARK TOWER**, treat **LEVEL** as **DANGER** and vice versa. See page 20 in this book, or pages 178-185 in **MAZES**.



USING OSR RESOURCES

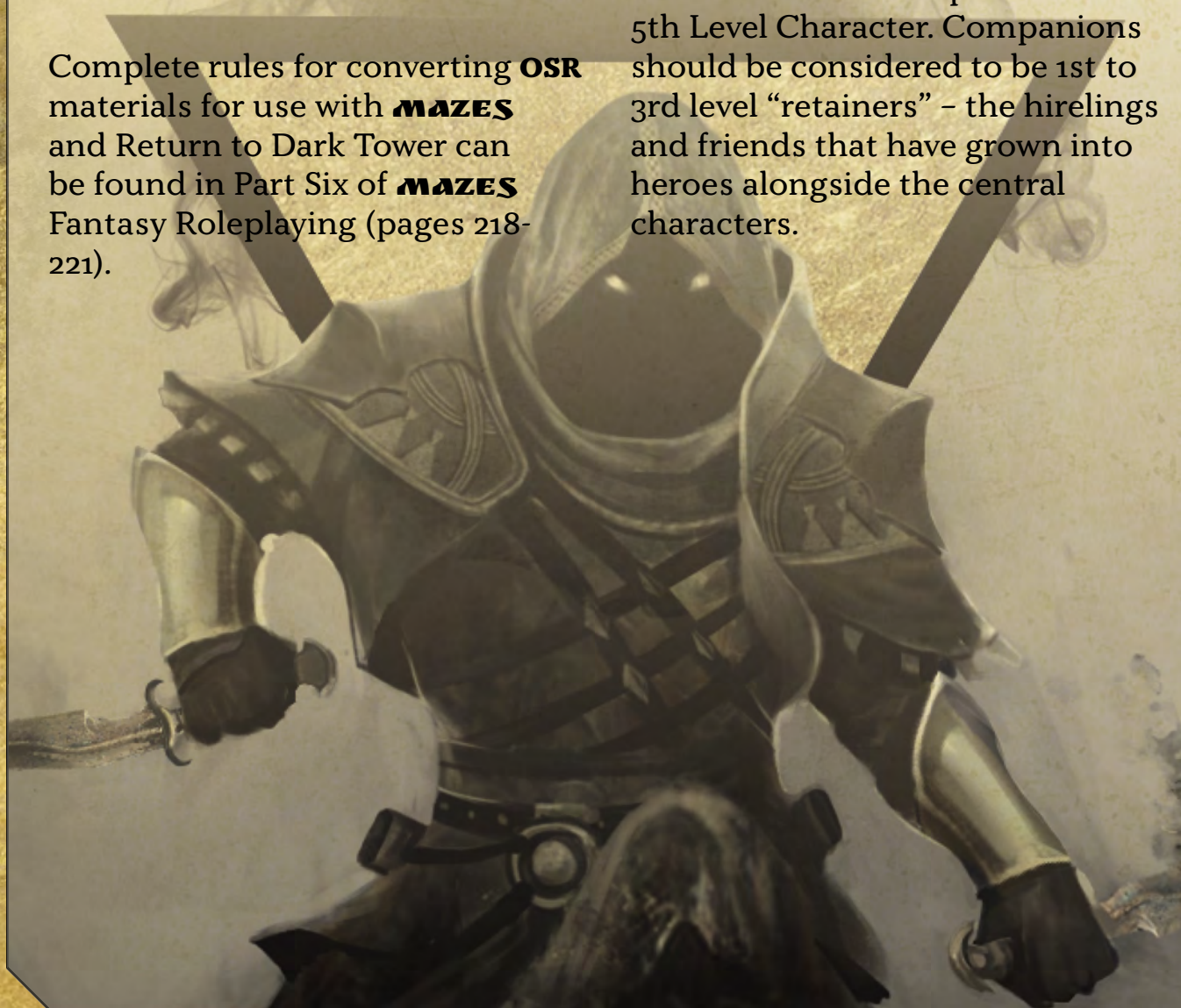
There is a class of roleplaying material out there for what is commonly called the Old School Renaissance, or usually just **OSR**.

MAZES and by extension **RETURN TO DARK TOWER FANTASY ROLEPLAYING** are not **OSR** games but **MAZES** makes it easy to translate **OSR** materials into **MAZES** compatible material, and anything that works for **MAZES** works with Return to Dark Tower.

Complete rules for converting **OSR** materials for use with **MAZES** and Return to Dark Tower can be found in Part Six of **MAZES Fantasy Roleplaying** (pages 218-221).

Of special note with **RETURN TO DARK TOWER FANTASY ROLEPLAYING**: your starting Heroes are the equivalent of 9th Level characters in most **OSR** systems, including Old School Essentials, et al.

They are “name level” characters that have raised strongholds and acquired followers. Traditional **MAZES FRP** Characters are assumed to be the equivalent of a 5th Level Character. Companions should be considered to be 1st to 3rd level “retainers” – the hirelings and friends that have grown into heroes alongside the central characters.



WHAT DO I NEED TO PLAY?

You have in your hands all the rules that you will need to play.

In addition to this book, each player will need some dice. Specifically, polyhedral dice - at least one **d4**, **d6**, **d8**, and **d10** (what we call a “**polymorph set**”). It’s better to have a few of each die type, as each player can use 2 or 3 of their “die” during a single roll.

In this game, only the players roll dice, but the **ADVERSARY** may find it helpful to use dice and tokens for tracking resources and effects such as Darkness, Treasure, and the like.

You will need **HERO SHEETS** (one for each player) and one **ADVERSARY SHEET** (see pages 204 & 205) and some writing implements. You can download the sheets and other accessories from 9thlevel.com/resources. It also helps if you have the **RESOLVER** (page 208) available on the table. Alternately, you can use the official Return to Dark Tower Player Tower or Screen.

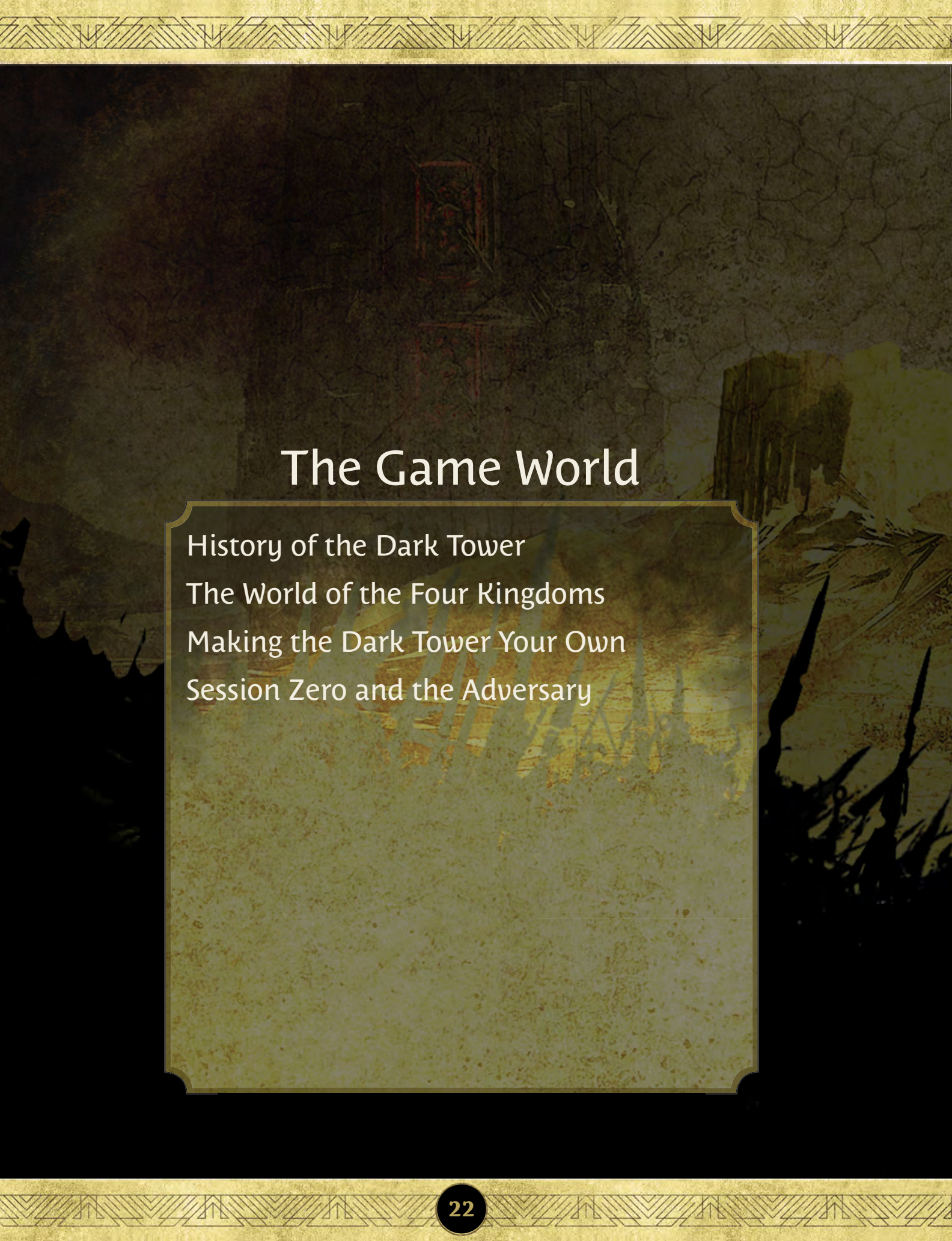
It can also be helpful to have a physical representation of the world map on hand. This can be the map from this book, the board from the board game, or the

MARCH SHEET (see page 207).

While not necessary for gameplay, some players like to have paper or a journal on hand for taking notes and scribbling ideas and maps. There are also **TALLY** Sheets that make keeping track of **TALLY** phase actions easier (page 206).

Lastly, we suggest using tokens to track game resources, though these are also not strictly necessary. The four most common tokens are Spirit, Danger, Treasure, and Corruption. Some Adversary players will want tokens for Darkness, Claim, and other things. All of these can be tracked with paper and pencil, but there is something visceral and fun about using brass coins or crystal gems to represent treasure or watching literal hearts disappear from damage. Tokens are also available in the **PLAYER TOWER** game set.

Since this is based on the exciting world of the Dark Tower board game, you can also use the components of the board game in your Return to Dark Tower RPG sessions, such as the map, the miniatures, or anything else. The actual pieces of the board game are highly evocative, and add something to the game that a cardboard chip or pencil check never could.



The Game World

History of the Dark Tower

The World of the Four Kingdoms

Making the Dark Tower Your Own

Session Zero and the Adversary



The Dark Tower

chapter three

HISTORY OF THE DARK TOWER

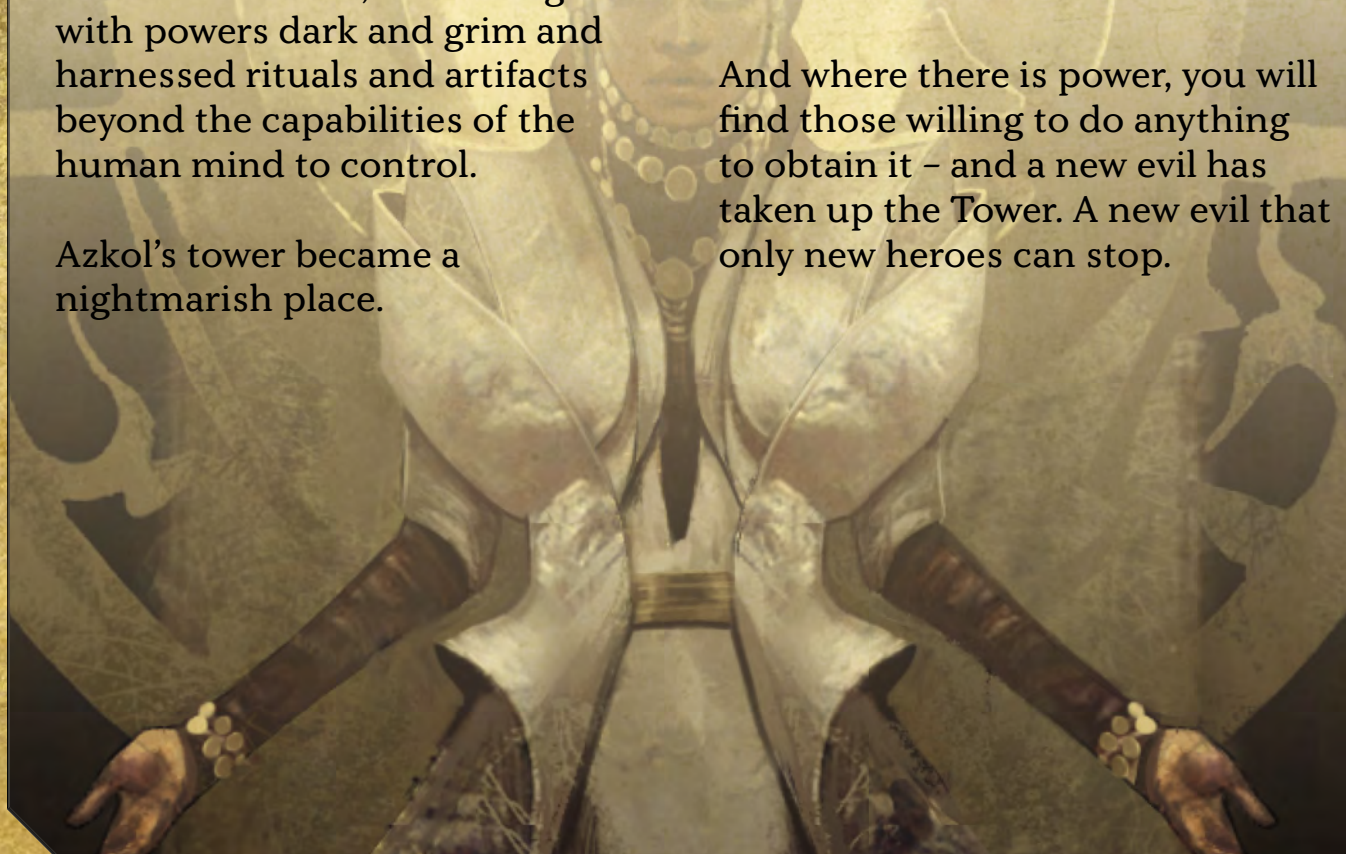
In the Four Kingdoms, the default setting of our game, the Dark Tower is the physical manifestation of a Great Evil. A sorcerer named Azkol was trying to gain ultimate power over the Four Kingdoms, so he built a mystical tower at the crossroads that served as the kingdoms' geographic center. There, he hoped to unlock the secrets of the Staff of Ultimate Power. Over time, he gained both power and might, but the secret of the Staff still eluded him. He sought more powerful magics and dangerous secrets. Meanwhile, he slowly lost his grip on reality: in pursuit of the Staff's secrets, Azkol bargained with powers dark and grim and harnessed rituals and artifacts beyond the capabilities of the human mind to control.

Azkol's tower became a nightmarish place.

A living, breathing reminder of power's corruptive effects. His apprentice, the wizard Nimet, stole Azkol's most powerful artifacts. She fled from the Tower and gathered a force of heroes to defeat the sorcerer-king before he succeeded in attaining the secrets to ultimate power, casting him and his wickedness into the endless Abyss of the Shadow Worlds.

An age has passed since then. The Tower fell into ruin and memory. The regions surrounding it became a wasteland that none would pass – even forgotten, the Tower still reeked and pulsed with evil and vile intent.

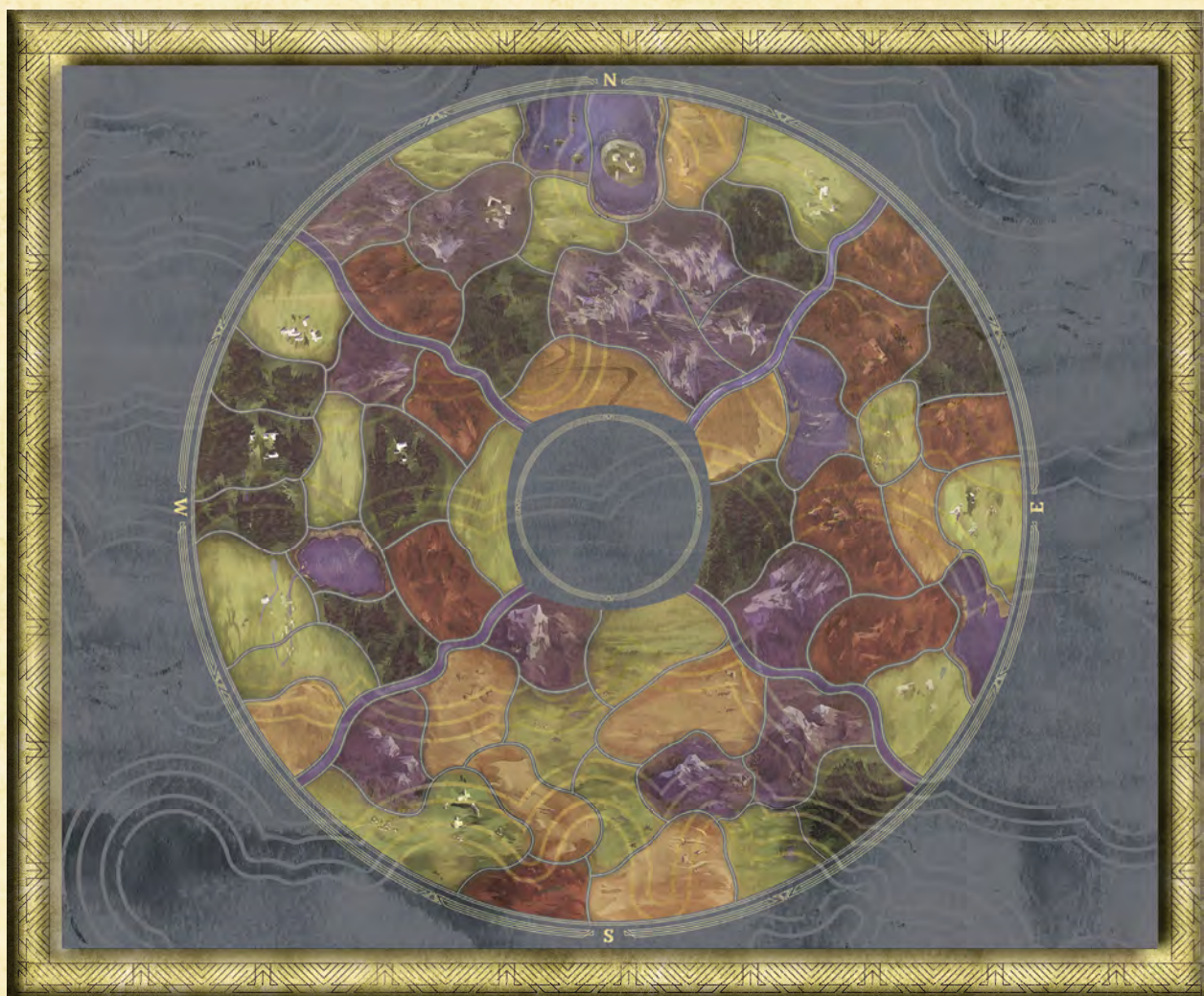
And where there is power, you will find those willing to do anything to obtain it – and a new evil has taken up the Tower. A new evil that only new heroes can stop.



THE WORLD OF THE FOUR KINGDOMS

While you don't always have to play *Return to Dark Tower* in the Four Kingdoms, it is the assumed setting. The Tower, once dormant, has new masters. The kingdoms have changed names and kings many times over their lives; once they may have been called the Red Nation, the Blue Kingdom, the Greenlands, and the Yellow

Republic, and before that, they were called other names that have been lost to time. When using the **RETURN TO DARK TOWER** board game or official roleplaying materials, we call them The South, North, East, and West Kingdoms – but in your hands, they could be renamed to whatever is most appropriate for your game.



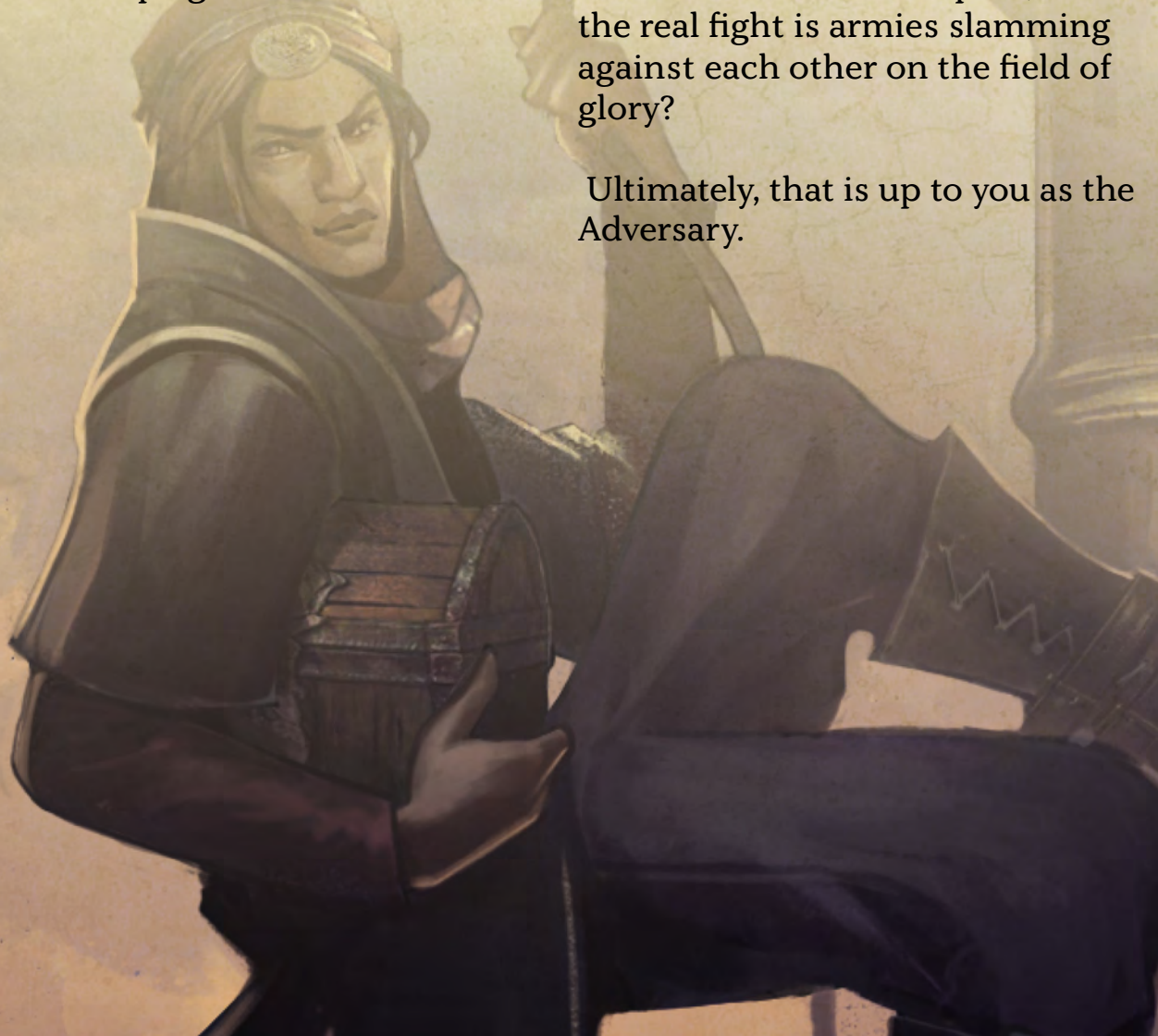
MAKING THE DARK TOWER YOUR OWN

The Dark Tower does not need to be the same from campaign to campaign. When someone takes on the mantle of the Adversary, it becomes their prerogative to decide what the Tower actually is. Depending on the preference of the player cast in the role of the Adversary, the Tower plays a different role in each game. Specifically, the nature of the tower dictates what the final game of the campaign will look like.

Part of the genius in the boardgame is that each time you play - it's against a different Dark Overlord, so the strategies and storytelling are always different, and we wanted to capture that feeling in the **RPG**.

Is your tower a dungeon that needs to be explored, with the Adversary on a throne in the highest reaches? Or is your Tower a battlefield command post, where the real fight is armies slamming against each other on the field of glory?

Ultimately, that is up to you as the Adversary.



SESSION ZERO AND THE ADVERSARY

The first session of a Return to Dark Tower game is called “**SESSION ZERO.**” It’s a preface to the game, like reading the back of a book or watching a trailer for a movie.

During Session Zero, players create characters together, create their companions, and define the Adversary (either using existing Adversaries or communally creating their own Adversary).

Creating your Heroes and companions together is essential, as these characters do not represent brand-new adventurers, but rather the greatest champions of the Four Kingdoms brought together by fate and the existential threat of the Adversary to decide the future of the world. These characters are assumed to have had lives and adventures prior to these games. For instance, the Heroes have had time to build a company of followers (represented by their **FORCES**).

When defining the Adversary for a campaign, players may choose to adopt one of the pre-generated Adversaries included with this game. This guidebook contains a section of monsters and hazards - the Folio of Foes and Fiends. Each

of the Level 5 monsters within are the Adversaries from the board game, and each is available to be used as the Adversary of your campaign.

You can also decide that you want to create a unique Adversary. If so, the method for doing that is on page 152.

Once an Adversary is selected (or created) the players need to detail why their Hero is involved. This is generally done with a short storytelling component (which can be roleplayed out or can just be discussed openly) where each Player explains how their Hero has been wronged, affected, or called to aid against this Adversary.

If following the Quandos Vorn method, a way of creating an enemy communally (page 153), the Heroes’ involvement is built into the Adversary Creation process itself. When using one of the classic Adversaries, each player needs to define their Hero’s involvement for themselves.

At the end of Session Zero, players also define what the opening Adventure will be - as if they were handling a **MARCH PHASE**. More on this later.



Game Mechanics

The Core Mechanic

Your Role is Your Roll

Rolling the Dice

The Action

The Save

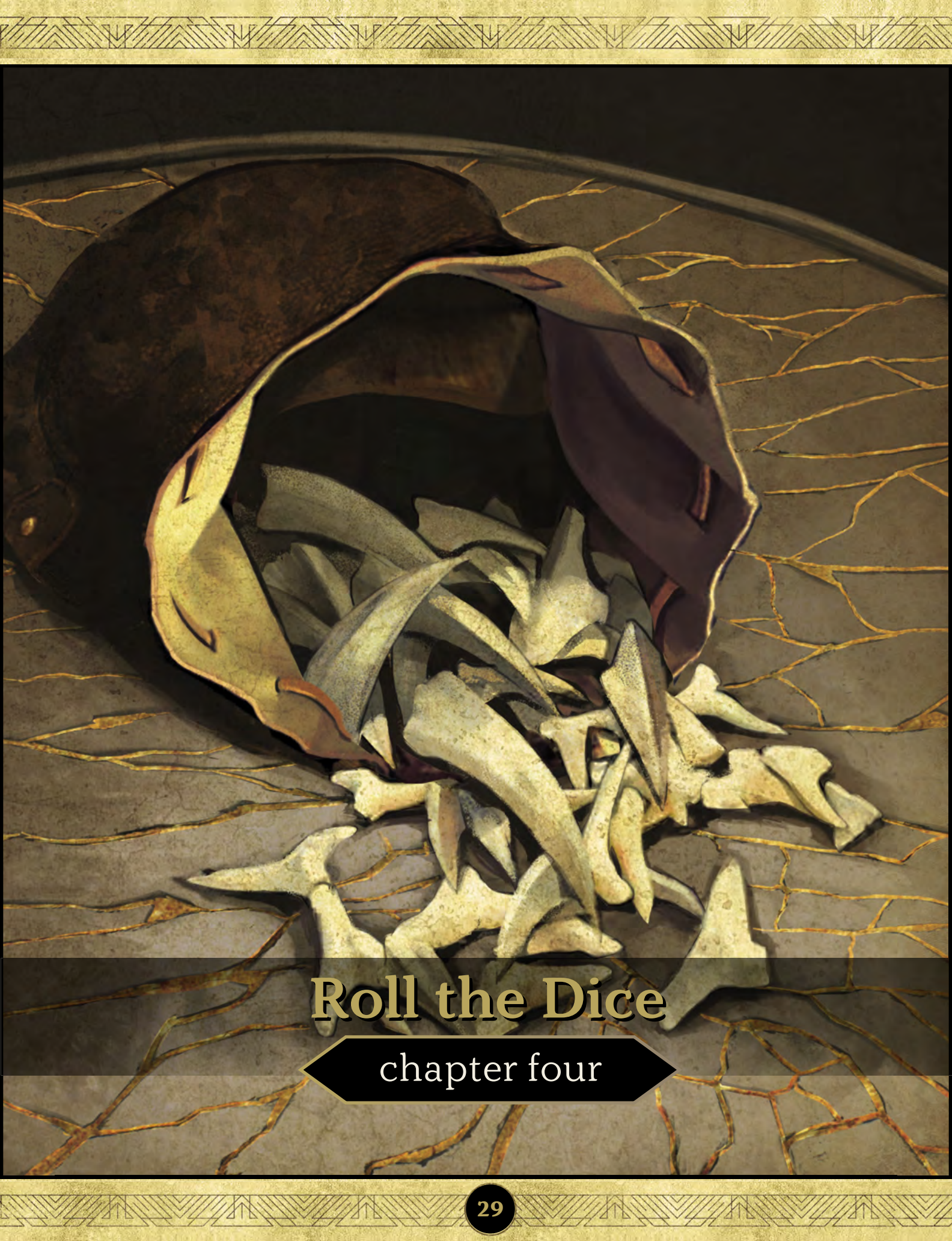
The Effect

‘Vantage

Just Do It

Resolving Dice Rolls

Actions at Scale



Roll the Dice

chapter four

THE CORE MECHANIC

Within **RETURN TO DARK TOWER FANTASY ROLEPLAYING** only the players roll dice; the **ADVERSARY** never rolls dice. The Adversary is both an impartial storyteller and the enemy of the party, but all actions in the game are player-facing, that is to say, the Adversary doesn't roll dice to attack the players. Instead, the players roll dice to defend against the attacks of the monsters and other perils the Adversary sends against them.

YOUR ROLE IS YOUR ROLL

Each character is controlled through the use of a single die: they each have a **ROLE**, which in turn defines which die they **ROLL**.

The choice of **ROLE** and the selection of a few Edges are the primary decision points when making a character.

Depending on their **ROLE**, each player will have a specific **DIE** to **ROLL**.

YOU ONLY EVER ROLL YOUR DIE.

This die will be a **d4**, a **d6**, a **d8**, or a **d10**. Each Die has advantages and disadvantages built into it.

There are 4 basic roles. Each role has distinct strengths and weaknesses, based purely on the math associated with rolling that specific die.

THE FOUR ROLES ARE

THE PARAGON is represented by the **d4**

THE VANGUARD is represented by the **d6**

THE FIGHTER is represented by the **d8**

THE SENTINEL is represented by the **d10**

No matter what happens – you will **ALWAYS, ONLY, EVER** roll **YOUR DIE**.

ROLLING THE DICE

There are three types of rolls that you may make – the **ACTION ROLL**, the **SAVE ROLL**, and the **EFFECT ROLL**. If you are a **d4**, you always roll the **d4**, if you are a **d8**, you roll the **d8**. Need to make an Action Roll? Roll your die. Effect Roll? Roll your die.

Most actions are resolved by rolling a die to determine if you succeed or fail at that action. The success or failure of Action and Save rolls is determined by **THE RESOLVER**. The adversary will assign a particular type of action to what you are attempting to accomplish (Books, Boots, Blades, or Bones). You then consult the chart to determine the static numbers associated with the relevant action. You succeed on an action if you roll one of the numbers shown for that action type, or if you get one of two special results (the Banner and Reinforce).

When your character is good at something, or the situation is favorable, they may gain a second die roll which allows the player to roll twice and succeed if only one of those rolls is a success. This is called **ADVANTAGE**. If the odds are against the character or they are lacking in an area, they also gain a second die roll, but they must roll two successes to succeed. This is called **DISADVANTAGE**.

THE ACTION

Taking an **ACTION** is the primary character activity that takes place on a player's turn (for more information about player turns, see **MOMENTS**, page 45).

An **ACTION** (or Action Roll) is a roll that a player makes to determine whether their character succeeds or fails at whatever it is they want their character to do. Rolls are active, making an action roll requires that it be your turn, and taking your Action uses up your "turn." The player describes the action that their character is trying to take, then the Adversary tells them what kind of **ACTION** they need to roll against – Books, Boots, Blades, or Bones.

	Books <i>tactics</i> 2 3
	Boots <i>march</i> 3 4 5
	Blades <i>battle</i> 4 5 6 7
	Bones <i>defend</i> 5 6 7 8 9

Let's say that you are trying to run from a crab-bear down a corridor. The **ADVERSARY** says, "roll Boots." Regardless of your die type, you roll your die and hope that you roll a 3, 4, or 5 – the target numbers for **BOOTS** (conveniently spelled out on your character sheet).

THE SAVE

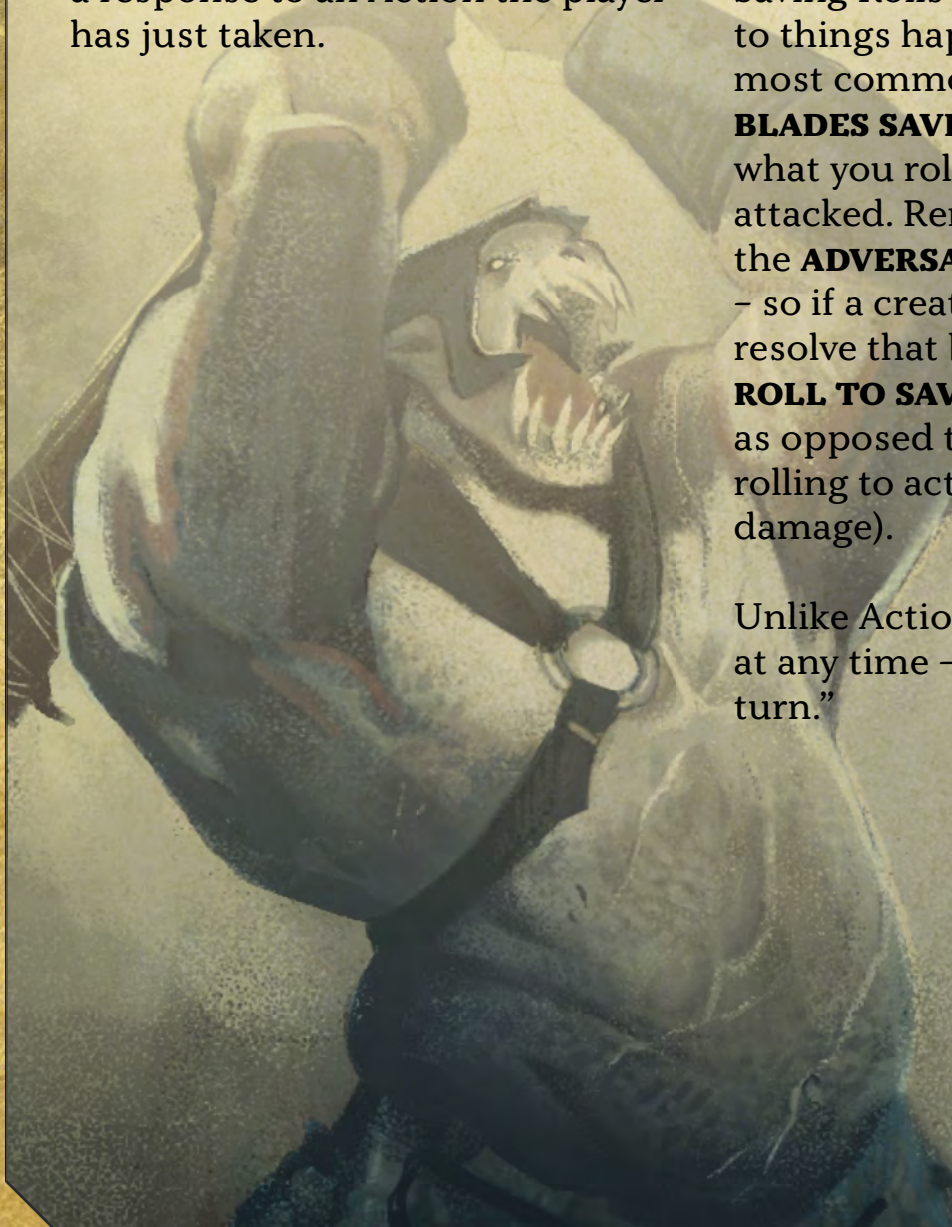
Making a **SAVE** is the primary character activity when it is the **ADVERSARY**'s turn.

A **SAVE** (or Saving Roll) is a roll made to avoid something that the **ADVERSARY** is doing against a character. A **SAVE** is almost always taken off-turn, unless it is a response to an Action the player has just taken.

A **SAVE** might be required on-turn if, for example, one of your characters wants to open a door and the **ADVERSARY** asks them to make a **BOOTS SAVE** because opening the door triggers a trap, causing the floor to fall out from under the character.

Saving Rolls are your responses to things happening **TO YOU**. The most common kind of save is a **BLADES SAVE**, which will usually be what you roll when you are being attacked. Remember, in **MAZES**, the **ADVERSARY** never rolls dice – so if a creature attacks you, we resolve that by having the player **ROLL TO SAVE** (not take damage), as opposed to the **ADVERSARY** rolling to act (trying to inflict damage).

Unlike Actions, Saves can happen at any time – and do not use “your turn.”



THE EFFECT

An **EFFECT** determines the impact of something that the player has done. After some actions are successful (and some, rarer actions that fail), the **ADVERSARY** will ask you to roll for the action's effect. The most common version of this Effect Roll is a "damage roll" during combat.

Effect rolls are part of an action or save and can be affected by **EDGES**, just like any other roll. Sometimes, an effect is simple – you've hit something with your sword so you roll effect to determine the amount of damage done. Sometimes, it's more of a "pointer" for something like distance or scale: you throw the smallfolk adventurer up onto the ledge, roll effect to see how far they go.

Unlike Actions and Saves, Effect rolls are not about trying to hit specific numbers, but about trying to get high numbers. When you are rolling for Effect, the total number you get is the damage you cause in combat, and in non-combat situations, higher numbers abstractly indicate how successful a character's attempt was.

When rolling for Effect, if you roll your **CROWN** (the highest number on your die) it results in the die "exploding." When a die "explodes," roll it again and add the results together. This new number is your total Effect score. If an "exploding" die rolls another **CROWN**, continue rolling and adding the numbers together until you roll something other than a **CROWN**. Because of this, while larger dice have a higher Effect on average, smaller dice explode more often.



'VANTAGE

The primary way that you can affect dice rolls is through '**VANTAGE**: positive effects provide **ADVANTAGE**, and negative effects **DISADVANTAGE**. When you have **VANTAGE** – either good or bad – roll your die twice (or roll two of your die if you have them).

If you have Advantage, you succeed if **EITHER** roll succeeds. If you have Disadvantage, you only succeed if **BOTH** rolls succeed.

While an **ACTION** or **SAVE** has **VANTAGE**, it's possible to have significantly better or worse results than you could obtain with a normal roll. When rolling with Advantage, if you succeed on both rolls, this is a **CRITICAL** and should result in a better outcome (at least giving you Advantage on your Effect Roll). While rolling with **DISADVANTAGE**, if you fail on both rolls, this is a **FUMBLE** and results in a worse-than-anticipated outcome.

If you have Advantage, and succeed on **BOTH** rolls, it's a **CRITICAL**.

If you have Disadvantage, and fail on **BOTH** rolls, it's a **FUMBLE**.

You could also gain **ADVANTAGE** and **DISADVANTAGE** on effect

rolls. Since you are not rolling against a target number, **VANTAGE** is handled differently. When you have Advantage on an effect, roll an additional die and take the higher result. For a Disadvantaged Effect, roll twice and keep the lower result.

If you have Advantage on an Effect Roll, take the **HIGHEST** result. If you have Disadvantage, on an Effect Roll, take the **LOWEST** result.

When you have multiple sources that could provide **VANTAGE**, you can only receive the benefit from one of them. They do not stack. You have **ADVANTAGE** if any Edge or situation would give it to you (even if more than one thing is giving you Advantage). You have **DISADVANTAGE** in the same manner. So, you always either roll one die (standard) or two dice (**VANTAGED**).

If you are in a situation where you have both Advantage and Disadvantage, they cancel each other out. Regardless of how many instances of Advantage or Disadvantage there are, if you are simultaneously affected by both, roll only one die.

JUST DO IT

Players have a lot of power and control over what is going on in the game. They describe their actions to the **ADVERSARY** who will either narrate what happens because of your character's choices and, actions or, if there is a chance of failure, ask you to roll dice to see if it works.

A central premise of fantasy roleplaying is that the characters are the heroes (or at least the protagonists of the story that they are in). As the protagonists, we assume that they have the requisite skills and abilities to succeed most of the time. When a character tries to do something that they should consistently be able to do, it just happens. Don't waste time rolling dice. Warriors can take care of their weapons; Wizards can read ancient tomes; Robbers can steal; and Hunters can smell game on the wind. It's something that your character can do – it's intrinsic to their class, so it's not interesting if they fail at it.

Asking questions like “can I do such and such” is often used as the basis for a dialogue with the **ADVERSARY** about the details

of the environment or in search of an acknowledgment that the character can, in fact, do the thing in question. Although often phrased in a way that acknowledges the possibility of failure, they can be a way for a character to gain knowledge about their environment without rolling. However, this doesn't mean that nothing requires a roll. If there is a meaningful chance that the character won't succeed there should always be a roll.

When there is a chance that a character could fail, or whenever they are being actively contested, **ROLL THE DICE.**

EXAMPLE

*As the Brutal Warlord enters a room, the **ADVERSARY** tells them that they see the spoor of Frost Trolls. There is no roll necessary: the Brutal Warlord has encountered Frost Trolls before – they know the tracks and how to spot them. Now, if the player wants to actively track the trolls, the **ADVERSARY** may call for a **BOOKS** roll (if the tracks are hard to read), or a **BOOTS** roll (to keep up with the troll).*

RESOLVING DICE ROLLS

At the most basic level, when you take an **ACTION** or make a **SAVE**, you roll your die, attempting to roll one of the target numbers listed on your character sheet for one of the **FOUR CORE RESOLUTIONS** – Books, Boots, Blades, or Bones.

Because of the distribution of these numbers, each Role is more or less likely to roll a particular **CORE RESOLUTION**– resulting in each Role behaving mechanically differently in the game.

BOOKS

Roll **BOOKS** when you are testing knowledge, perception, and mental powers. Books also covers anything sensory: listening, seeing, remembering.

When you are trying to roll **BOOKS**, you want to roll a 2 or a 3.

The **PARAGON (d4)** is the best at rolling **BOOKS**.

Play a **d4** if you want to be knowledgeable, smart, or perceptive.

	Books <i>tactics</i> 2 3
	Boots <i>march</i> 3 4 5
	Blades <i>battle</i> 4 5 6 7
	Bones <i>defend</i> 5 6 7 8 9

BOOTS

Roll **BOOTS** when you are testing any physical movements or athletic activity: running, jumping, sliding, dodging, skulking. Boots are a character's reflexes, agility, and dexterity.

When a character is testing **BOOTS**, they need to roll a 3, 4, or 5.

The **VANGUARD (d6)** is the best at rolling **BOOTS**.

Play a **d6** if you want to be fast, agile, or sneaky.



BLADES

Roll **BLADES** – whether or not you are actually using a blade – whenever you are taking violent action. This can be any type of attack: barehanded, with a weapon, or with a spell. If you are trying to hurt something (or Saving to avoid being hurt), then you want to roll Blades.

When testing **BLADES**, you need to roll 4, 5, 6, or 7.

The **FIGHTER** (d8) is the best at **BLADES**, being more accurate than the Sentinel (who does more damage).

Play a **d8** if you want to focus on offense.

BONES

BONES is both your body's health and your overall strength and endurance, but it is also your will and self-control. Roll against **BONES** whenever you need to steel your resolve or resist pain and disease. Roll against **BONES** to save versus poisons, or to avoid getting sleepy during an all-night watch.

When testing **BONES**, you need to roll a 5, 6, 7, 8, or 9.

The **SENTINEL** (d10) is the best at rolling **BONES**.

Play a **d10** if you want to dish out damage and focus on defense.

A note about the Paragon: You may have noticed that a PARAGON can't roll BONES naturally. They need to rely on a special resolution to succeed at BONES rolls, instead (see BANNER & REINFORCE).

BANNER AND REINFORCE

While you are making rolls, two special results may come up. These are shown on your character sheet as the **BANNER** and the **REINFORCE** result. Your **BANNER** represents your core self – the sum of your knowledge and capability, which is represented by the result 1 (one). **REINFORCE** – the “crown,” or the top of your die – can either result in success or failure, based on your **FORCES**.

Whenever you roll a 1, if the action is something that your **CLASS** or **ASPECT** would be good at, it's a success. This is the **BANNER BONUS**. A Banner result is not like the other **RESOLUTIONS** in that it's a bonus to the other potential **RESOLUTIONS**, not a direct roll. You don't try to roll your **BANNER**, it just happens when you're trying to succeed at a **BOOKS**, **BOOTS**, **BLADES**, or **BONES** roll.



*Let's say that your party is looking for a thief in a crowded room. The **ADVERSARY** calls for a **BOOKS** roll. Normally, you would only succeed if you rolled a 2 or a 3, but if you are playing a character whose Class would be good at spotting a thief in a crowded room – like a Devious Swindler (who is familiar with the hidden thief's tricks) or a Silent Spymaster – then you would **ALSO** succeed if you rolled a 1.*

Every die has a “crown” – the highest number that the die could roll (a 4 for the **d4**, a 10 for the **d10**, etc.). When you roll the crown on your die, what happens is based on your Hero's **FORCES**, and the bonus you receive for rolling the crown is called **REINFORCE**. When rolling this, if your **FORCES** could assist you in the success of the action, it succeeds; they come to your rescue, give aid, or whatnot.

When you are playing a Companion Character (and not the main Hero), and you roll **REINFORCE**, it's successful if it's something that their Hero could do – showing what the Companion has learned from traveling with them.

Always determine **SUCCESS** before looking for a **REINFORCE**. If you roll a 4 on a **BOOTS** test, it's a success, regardless of whether it's a crown for your die or not. In that instance, your roll succeeds because you **ROLLED BOOTS**.

*Ironwolf is a Vanguard (d6) Relic Hunter who is trying to dodge through a hall crowded with bugbears. She rolls **BOOTS** to dodge through the crowd. If she rolled a 3, 4, or 5 – she would successfully Dodge. If she rolls a 6 (her crown), she could be assisted in the Dodge by her assistants. If she had rolled a 1 it would have succeeded as well, since her class is Relic Hunter, and running away with the treasure seems like something she could do.*

REINFORCE results are affected by the state of the **RISING DARKNESS**. While the Rising Darkness (page 158) is Twilight, Reinforce results require negotiation, which generally means that they players have to give something up to the Adversary for it to be successful. When the Darkness reaches **NIGHT**, they fail.

CHAOS

There will always come a time when one of the standard options for actions and saves doesn't quite work; where the outcome is still dictated by chance, but the core of the action can't be directly attributed to a character's strengths or weaknesses.

In these situations, you can make a **CHAOS ROLL**. On a Chaos Roll (or Save), the character is successful on any **EVEN** result (2,4,6,8,10) and fails on any **ODD** result (1,3,5,7,9).

CHAOS Rolls can be used for other effects when a die roll would make something too easy, and it keeps the Adversary from ever needing to roll a die.

Uses for Chaos Saves and Rolls

Saves against random effects, determining who gets hit by a trap, stumbling around in the dark, determining the random recipient of a monster's attention, success and failure at true games of chance (where you aren't cheating, obviously.)

ACTIONS AT SCALE

Within the fiction of Return to Dark Tower, there are times when the players are going to want to take actions that are “larger” than themselves. These actions are “bigger” than simply being a **HERO** or their **COMPANION**, but are actions taken on the “world stage.” **Mass Combat, Ancient Rituals, Final Battles.**

In most situations, this will be the player taking on the role of their Hero’s Forces acting autonomously. In other situations, it will be as the Hero acting as the leader of their forces or the combined forces and armies that the player has brought to bear. In other situations, it could be the players acting in control of a city or region, or utilizing the power of a Magical Ritual – anything that is beyond the scope of simple human interaction.

When taking these kinds of actions, we say that the characters are acting “**AT SCALE**” and while we use the same dice and mechanics we use different words to express the change in scale, so instead of Books, Boots, Blades, and Bones – we are using **TACTICS, MARCH, BATTLE, and DEFEND**. Banner and Reinforce are the same, except they affect large groups instead of

single individuals when rolled at Scale.

When we take actions at Scale, you still only ever roll your die – and if you have an applicable edge, treasure, or situation, it could have advantage or disadvantage like normal. If you look at the Resolver, you will find the “**SCALE**” version written under the standard version, to make it easy.

	Banner <i>banner</i> 1
	Books <i>tactics</i> 2 3
	Boots <i>march</i> 3 4 5
	Blades <i>battle</i> 4 5 6 7
	Bones <i>defend</i> 5 6 7 8 9
	Reinforce <i>reinforce</i> 4 6 8 10

When acting at scale, the real difference is in the effect. When you are a single person – your actions can affect things on the scale of the individual. When you are acting as an army or performing an ancient magical ritual, you are really changing and affecting things on a large scale. When you take **DANGER** effects – they aren't for you, they are for the region or a Force. When you “do damage” you are counting the number of Warriors that are lost, or the number of attackers that are rebuffed, the number of ships sunk, or the number of dragonriders pulled from the sky.

Actions at Scale are “more abstract” than standard actions, and should only be used sparingly. They are included in the game because so much of the Epic Fantasy genre results in massive battles and titanic magics – and we want to include that in the sandbox for you to play with.

Scale effects are the core of the **FINAL BATTLE** and you can learn more about that on page 146.





Player Resources

Rolling Dice versus Spending Resources

Moments

Spirit

Treasure

Danger

Consequences

Corruption

Bonds



Pay the Price

chapter five

ROLLING DICE VERSUS SPENDING RESOURCES

Besides rolling dice to resolve actions, players can also resolve actions by spending some of the various resources they have access to. Whenever it is appropriate to spend a resource, the player **DOES NOT** also make a roll - even if there would normally be a possibility of failure. Spending the resource takes the place of the roll.

Throughout these rules you will find that the game will often prompt the players to either

ROLL THE DICE or **PAY THE PRICE**.

Rolling against the Resolver, paying Spirit, using a Treasure, taking Danger, taking Corruptions, or gaining Bonds - are all tools allowing you to create memorable stories. It's fun to let the dice clatter and see what happens - but sometimes, you care more about the story, and that is where Resources come into play. They allow us to limit character actions, but also to create options for players to take control of the story.



MOMENTS

There is no need for clear “timing” vis a vis the order in which each character acts and the amount of time their action can take; this is a narrative experience, not a tactical simulation. To keep the game more about rulings than rules, we are actively trying **NOT** to over-explain.

Each player gets a Moment. Taking an action in game “spends” your Moment. A player’s Moment can be a roll, a description, an action, or spending a resource. The most important timing rule is that **EVERYONE** gets a Moment before anyone else gets another Moment.

After every hero player has had a Moment, the Adversary narrates the world’s response.

The structure of play during a session is as follows:

- ▷ In any order, each player takes a Moment or passes
- ◻ For their moment, each player explains what they are doing
- ◻ The Adversary may have that player roll or spend a resource

After all the players have gone, The Adversary takes their turn. The player’s rolls in response are Saves and do not count as Moments.



SPIRIT



Each character has between one and four points of Spirit available to spend. Spirit represents the special “powers” that each character possesses – whether it be magic, training, wealth, or lineage. Spending Spirit allows your character to take the spotlight and gain control of a situation. Spirit can be spent for several things, but primarily it is spent to take some narrative control of the game – either through the use of magic or a character ability, or more directly with something like a flashback.

A character’s **SPIRIT** is defined by their **ROLE**. Each **ASPECT** has a different way of “portraying” spirit and what they can do with it.

Role	Spirit
d4	4
d6	3
d8	2
d10	1

SPENDING SPIRIT

A character spends their Spirit taking special actions like casting magic spells. During a game session, the character doesn’t naturally refill their used **SPIRIT**, however a character can push themselves and refill their **SPIRIT** by taking a **CORRUPTION**. This can also occur when they “Stand” as a result of a **DANGER ROLL** action (see page 51).

Between games (specifically, during the **TALLY PHASE**), a

character’s **SPIRIT** returns to its starting level.

When a Character spends a **SPIRIT**, they are putting themselves at the center of the story and doing something extraordinary. Players have discretion to attempt any effect that suits the story and their **HERO**. The effect a player hopes to achieve by spending a **SPIRIT** must then be approved by the Adversary. However, if the expenditure is approved, it is guaranteed to

succeed. **SPIRIT** spends **NEVER** require a roll.

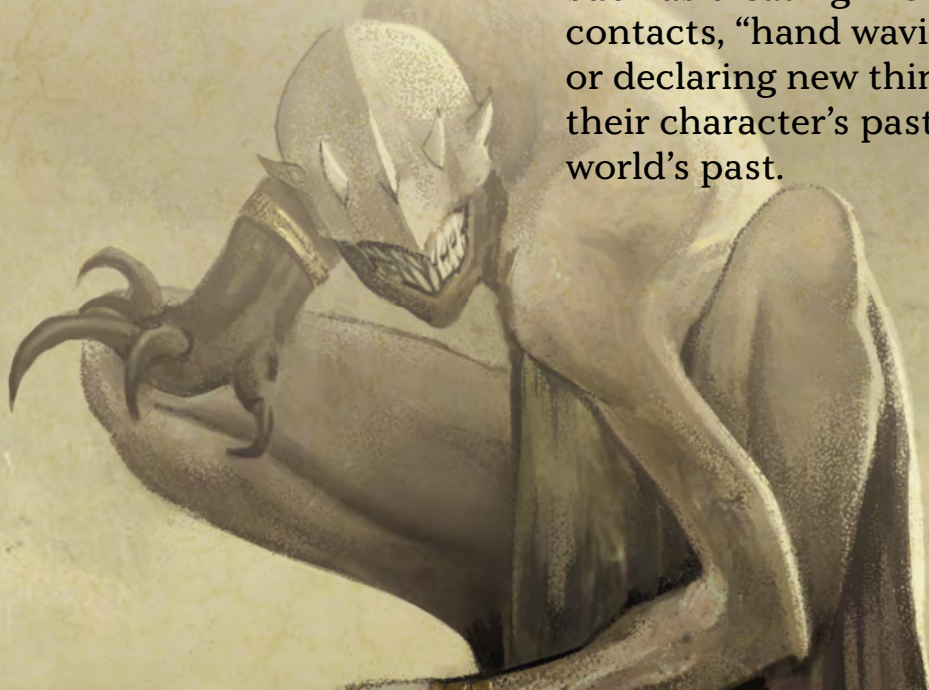
Each of the Aspects in Return to Dark Tower uses **SPIRIT** in a slightly different way, but they have some things in common. How a character might use their **SPIRIT** is described under **ASPECTS** (page 69) as well as specific examples given within some class descriptions.

Aspect	Spirit Spends
Sword	Martial actions, action moves, military strategies
Shadow	Sneaky plots, sleight of hand, misdirection, criminal pasts
Sorcery	Magic, spells, mental power

The **UNDAUNTED AEGIS** is **SWORD Aspect**. When they are spending a **SPIRIT**, it manifests as a combat ability – wrapping an enemy in their sword-chain, trumpeting their arrival to boost the spirits of the army, etc. The **ORPHANED SCION** is a **SORCERY ASPECT**, so when they are spending **SPIRIT**, it is usually going to be to “cast a spell” from their spellbook (though it could also be something narrative, like having a flashback about seeing their town destroyed by the **GAZE ETERNAL** when they were a little boy to galvanize them in the fight).

SPENDING SPIRIT FOR FLASHBACKS AND OTHER DETAILS

Regardless of their Aspect, a player can always spend a **SPIRIT** to establish something about the game world and their character, such as creating friends and contacts, “hand waving” details, or declaring new things about their character’s past – or even the world’s past.



CLEANSING EVIL

In addition to using Spirit to fuel their special abilities, characters can also expend Spirit to counteract the works of the Adversary. When the Adversary takes action (either directly or through their minions), there is a mark left in the fabric of the world. Heroes can spend Spirit to find clues and traces of this corrupting influence or to remove its effects. This is called “Cleansing.”

Cleansing is also how the players can “thwart” actions that the Adversary is taking behind the scenes – while they are still ticking clocks. If a party spends Spirit while in an appropriate area or region, they can “hold back” a seal, effectively erasing some of the tick marks that the Adversary has invested.

*During the **MARCH PHASE**, the Heroes decide that they want to stop The Harbinger of Winter from bringing more Frost Trolls out of the mountains. The Adversary says that the Frost Trolls are marshaling in the **UPPER ICE FANGS** and that the heroes will need to send a party there to halt their progress.*

TREASURE

Within Return to Dark Tower, all treasure and wealth have been abstracted. This isn't a game about accounting or shopping – and it's not even about the accrual of wealth. **TREASURE** is a group resource shared in common by the party that represents the Heroes' access to goods, equipment, and spending money.

Treasure is fungible. It rises and falls, it is spent, lost, and gained over the course of a game session. It represents the total of the free and available goods that the party has access to – their equipment and gear, their loose cash, and their other physical and immaterial goods. Through the course of an adventure, a party will spend Treasure for effects and gain Treasure as loot and rewards.

GAINING AND USING TREASURE

TREASURE is abstract. It's not a pile of coins, it's just the idea of a pile of coins. Whenever the party acquires things of value, regardless of type, they add a **TREASURE** token to their pile.

That evil mercenary had a chest of gold? A Treasure. A pile of magic

scrolls in the Wizard's room? Nice. Two Treasures. Treasure can be used as equipment, to generate advantage, and ultimately to pay expenses. Treasure can also be spent as a negotiation point with the Adversary.

SPENDING A TREASURE TO CREATE EQUIPMENT AND ADVANTAGE

A player can spend a **TREASURE** to have the necessary equipment on-hand to accomplish a task. This works simply: you tell the Adversary what equipment you have, and you spend the Treasure. It's similar to how spending Spirit

works, but for physical items.

While the party could have anything in their packs, the items players spend treasure on should be kept within reason. They should be things that the

characters could conceivably have. It makes sense that you may have packed fishing poles, antitoxin, wolfsbane, a hammer and pitons, or even a cage of doves. It is unlikely that you have a lock of a princess's hair (without an accompanying Flashback explaining where you got it), the key to an ancient chest, or a long-lost amulet of protection. Ultimately, the Adversary is the arbiter of what is a "fair" or "in keeping with the story" spend, and they can refuse a spend for any reason.

Most of the time, expending treasure is done in place of making a roll. (Oh, we have a ladder? We don't need to make a **BOOTS** check for this wall). Sometimes, however,

the party will need to find a way to create Advantage that doesn't come from their Edges. Treasure can be used to create temporary Advantage.

"I reach into my pouch and pull out marbles to pour down the stairway," (creating Advantage against soldiers coming up the stairs) or "We packed lanterns, so we can light them to see in this darkness," (creating a success) or "I have a Potion of Invisibility in my bag," (creating a potential Advantage in stealth, or an automatic success in walking past some guards) or "I spend a treasure to have hired trumpeters to announce us when we enter the castle." (Creating Advantage on a social roll to prove that you are important).

TREASURE IS A GROUP RESOURCE BUT A PERSONAL CHOICE

Treasure is held in common by all of the players. The players should track their treasure via tokens, a d12, or with any other type of play aid.

Any player may spend a **TREASURE** as their action – they do not need agreement from the other players, or even to ask the other players to use it.



treasure

DANGER

Return to Dark Tower abstracts **DANGER**. There are no hit points, shield ratings, hearts, or other granular measurements of a character's health. Whenever a character fails at a dangerous action or save, they add a **DANGER** to their Danger Pool.

DANGER gained by a Companion is recorded against the Hero - the Companion is an extension of the Hero.



Danger gained by your **FORCES** is applied to your **HERO**, since your Forces are an extension of your Hero, or is applied by reducing **FORCES** (generally as the result of a Battle Consequence).

Whenever a character receives a Danger; they need to make a **DANGER ROLL** (rolling their die against the Danger).

THE DANGER ROLL

Whenever a Character takes Danger, they add a Danger to their total, then that player rolls their die:

△ If they roll **HIGHER** than their current **DANGER**, they are fine and suffer no other ill effect except the failure result. They also now have a higher total **DANGER**, making the next Danger roll more dangerous.

▣ If they roll **LOWER** than their current **DANGER**, they suffer a Consequence and then clear their Danger. See **CONSEQUENCES** on page 53.

⊠ If they roll **EXACTLY** their **DANGER**, they “clear” all their Danger with a dramatic move called Pulled from the Jaws of Defeat (see the next page).

DANGER CLAIM

During the **TALLY PHASE**, each player rolls their remaining Danger in dice against the Adversary's **DARKNESS CLAIM** (see page 157 for more on this), then clear this Danger.

Darkness Pool



FROM THE JAWS OF DEFEAT

There is nothing more dramatic than a glorious turnaround. In the midst of the action, when the character has **FAILED** and taken **DANGER**, sometimes they still find a way to come out on top. This is called Pulling Victory from the Jaws of Defeat.

When a player is rolling against their current **DANGER** and they roll the exact amount of **DANGER** that they have, this triggers a **FROM THE JAWS OF DEFEAT** action.

When a player triggers a From the Jaws of Defeat action, the player first removes all of their accumulated Danger (just like Clearing Danger after a Consequence), then they get to take an immediate additional action.



CONSEQUENCES

In Return to Dark Tower, our characters are larger-than-life Heroes and their stalwart Companions. They are the protagonists of the tale and, as such, are always going to find a way to keep on going. These types of heroes only get hurt so that they can show their grit and gumption. They only die in a heroic sacrifice. All that being said, there are still consequences for dangerous actions.

When a Hero suffers a consequence, they are “out” for the rest of the scene and return to play with a Corruption.

The character’s absence should be explained within the fiction of the moment. The character could be shot by an arrow and knocked down, caught under rubble, or imprisoned by the Adversary’s guards – whatever feels right and removes the character from the scene.

The Corruption represents the Adversary’s slowly growing power. The Corruption can be random, determined by rolling against the **CORRUPTION LIST** (page 56 - roll a **d12** for row, and a Chaos for column), or may be related to something that has happened in the scene.

In addition, when a hero suffers a consequence, the Adversary **CLAIMS** 1 Darkness. (See page 157 for more on this idea).

Consequences behave differently during the Final Battle, however. There, consequences become much more serious. Consequences taken during the Climactic Battle could be deadly or otherwise have far-reaching effects. (See page 146 for more on the Final Battle).

CLEARING DANGER

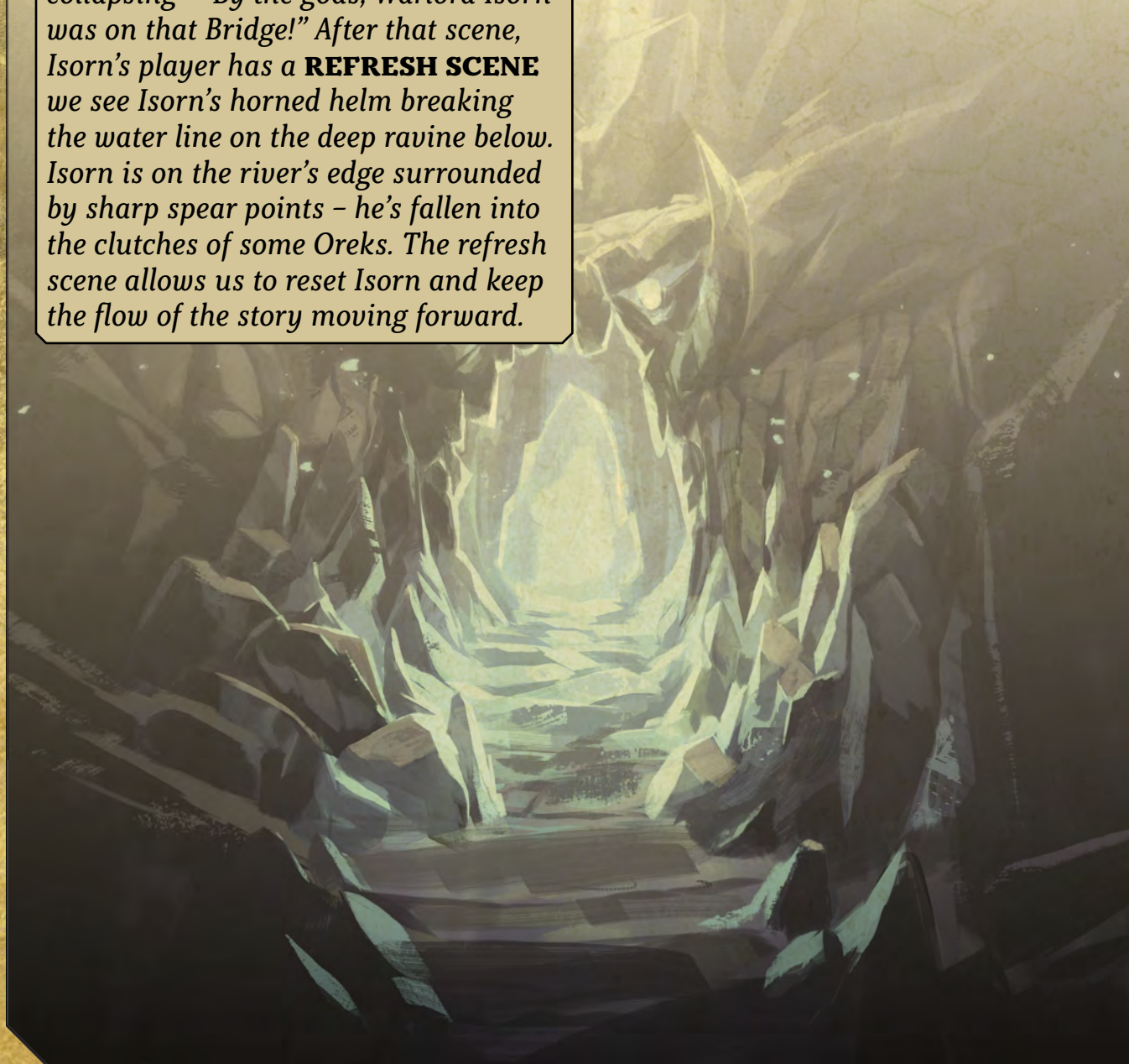
After suffering a Consequence, remove all of a character’s Danger and reset their Danger to Zero (0).

REFRESH SCENES

After any scene in which a character or characters “fall” from Danger, there is a **REFRESH SCENE**. A refresh scene is an interlude, designed to give the narrative the ability to bring a fallen hero back into the action.

*A failed **DANGER** roll results in a bridge collapsing - “By the gods, Warlord Isorn was on that Bridge!” After that scene, Isorn’s player has a **REFRESH SCENE** we see Isorn’s horned helm breaking the water line on the deep ravine below. Isorn is on the river’s edge surrounded by sharp spear points – he’s fallen into the clutches of some Oreks. The refresh scene allows us to reset Isorn and keep the flow of the story moving forward.*

Refresh scenes should be short and sweet: set up the situation, allow the character(s) to have a moment of roleplaying, and get them back into the action. When players need a little railroading to get them back on the plot, this is a great way to move the action back to where you want.



CORRUPTION

Corruptions are a special kind of cost that players accrue as a result of certain actions or because of Adversary fiat. All Corruptions limit a character in some way and have a method for removing (or clearing) themselves. Corruptions are most often taken as a result of “going down” or from specific hazards (such as being frozen or poisoned).

A **CORRUPTION** can be treated like any other Edge, in that it describes a character, can be invoked, and explains how and why things happen. Unlike other Edges, Corruptions are (generally) **NEGATIVE** and **TEMPORARY**.

You can only have one instance of any particular Corruption, and only three total Corruptions. If you would take a corruption that you already have, you must select another corruption to take. If you can't take another Corruption (because you already have three), then you must give the Adversary a **FIAT** (page 144).

FAILING A SAVE

In some situations, you will gain a **CORRUPTION** because you failed a **SAVE** roll (for example, when fighting against the Lingerin Rot



you could fail your Blades roll and take the **CORRUPTION: Poisoned**). In other situations, an obstacle or environment can impose a **CORRUPTION** instead of doing damage (for example, the Murder Ghost doesn't do damage when it hits, it saps strength – causing the **CORRUPTION: Feeble**).

CLEARING A CORRUPTION

It is not expected that a character will clear a Corruption during a single gameplay session. During a campaign, however, characters can clear Corruptions by taking the specific actions listed with each Corruption.

REST AND RECUPERATING

Healing and Recuperating is an action that a player can take during the **TALLY PHASE** to remove certain Corruptions. It means that the specific **HERO** or **COMPANION** requires time to heal and refresh. Taking this action does two things – it makes that Hero or Companion unavailable in the **NEXT GAME** session, and it adds 1 to the Adversary's Claim for this session for each **HERO** taking Rest and Recuperate as an action.

CORRUPTIONS

Aquaphobic	Arrogant
Crestfallen	Cruel
Cursed	Disreputable
Fatigued	Feeble
Feral	Feverish
Greedy	Indolent
Lost	Meshuggenah
Reckless	Selfish
Shaken	Snobby
Suspicious	Tempted
Timid	Uncertain
Vain	Weak

AQUAPHOBIC – You are afraid of water. You are **DISADVANTAGED** while in watery environments. Clear this by adventuring in a watery environment.

ARROGANT – You need no one's help. **REINFORCE** results are automatically failures. Clear this when you fail a **DANGER ROLL** as the result of a **REINFORCE** result.

CRESTFALLEN – Rolling a **BANNER** (1) is automatically a failure. Clear this condition by taking a **BOND** at the end of a game session or take a different random Corruption after failing a **DANGER ROLL** caused by rolling 1.

CRUEL – You are filled with the need to destroy your enemies, no matter the cost. You are **ADVANTAGED** on **BLADES** rolls until you hurt an innocent in the process then **CLEAR** this Corruption, but gain another Corruption at random.

CURSED – You are under the eye of a dark hex. You are **DISADVANTAGED** when you make a **DANGER ROLL**. Clear this Corruption by traveling to a **CITADEL**.

DISREPUTABLE – Your reputation has been significantly damaged. All companions that travel with a **DISREPUTABLE** Hero are also considered to be disreputable and cannot travel with any other hero until the Disreputable Hero clears this by embarking on an adventure to repair their reputation.

FATIGUED – You are very tired. You are **DISADVANTAGED** on **BOOTS** rolls. Clear this Corruption by spending a session Resting and Recuperating.

FEEBLE – You feel physically weak and tired. You are **DISADVANTAGED** on **BONES** rolls. Clear this Corruption by spending a session Resting and Recuperating.

FERAL – The niceties of civilization fail you – your world is brutal and savage. You are **ADVANTAGED** on all **BLADES** and **BOOTS** rolls, but **DISADVANTAGED** on **BOOKS** and **BONES** rolls. To clear this Corruption, the character needs to take the Corruption: **LOST**.

FEVERISH – You are taken with a strong fever, chills, and pain. It is hard to concentrate. You are **DISADVANTAGED** on **BOOKS** rolls. Clear this by spending a session Resting and Recuperating.

GREEDY – You cannot spend Treasure. Clear this Corruption by taking a **BOND** with another player character.

INDOLENT – This character is acting lazy. They cannot be selected for the next game session, and they will not travel out of their home kingdom. This can be cleared by another character taking a **BOND** with you.

LOST – You are lost in one of the many uncharted regions of the Four Kingdoms. This effect occurs off-screen, during which this character cannot be played. To clear this Corruption, roll on the random **REGION SELECT** Table (page 78) and move the character to that region.

MESHUGGENAH – You are being a dimwitted ninnyhammer. At the end of a session, you lose one treasure before spending anything. When you are faced with a choice, if you could select it randomly, you must. This can be cleared by taking a **BOND** with another character.

RECKLESS – You are unafraid of the consequences of your actions. You may choose to act recklessly at any time, gaining **ADVANTAGE** on the roll. If you fail this roll, you immediately take a **DANGER**. Clear this Corruption by taking a **BOND** with a non-player character who is weaker than you.

SHAKEN – The forces of evil have scared you to the bone. You have **DISADVANTAGE** in all combat situations that include a foe of Third Level or higher. Clear this Corruption by defeating a foe of Fourth Level or higher.

SELFISH – You always want to have the most, and cannot spend Treasures or other resources to help the other players. Clear this by taking a **BOND**.

SNOBBY – You only use the finest gear. You must spend a **TREASURE** every time you select this character to play in a session. Clear this with a **BOND** taken by another character.

SUSPICIOUS – No other player can provide you **AID** on a roll. When you roll a **BANNER**, it's considered a failure unless you take a Danger. Clear Suspicious by taking a **BOND** with another player character at the end of a game session.

TEMPTED – The allure of the darkness is strong, and the Adversary is bewitching or beguiling you into siding with them. You gain **ADVANTAGE** on rolls against Danger – you are flying dangerously close to the sun. To clear, this character must take a **BOND** at the end of a session that speaks directly to the temptation.

TIMID – You are unwilling to approach the Tower and the Adversary. You are **DISADVANTAGED** on all rolls against the Tower, the Adversary, and all rolls while in regions that touch the Tower. Clear this corruption by taking a **BOND** with another character.

UNCERTAIN – You don't trust yourself and your abilities. You are **DISADVANTAGED** on all rolls until you fail three times, after which you may clear this **CORRUPTION**.

VAIN – You are much too good to fight with plebeians. You are **DISADVANTAGED** on all **FORCES** actions and on all rolls made while fighting Level 1 or Level 2 foes. Clear this Corruption if you fail a **DANGER ROLL** against a Level 1 or 2 foe, or are saved on a Danger Roll by a **REINFORCE** result.

WEAK – You are tired, bruised, and weakened. You are **DISADVANTAGED** on **BLADES** Rolls. Clear this Corruption by spending a session Resting and Recuperating.

CORRUPTION AS NARRATIVE

Some Corruptions will give you roleplaying options (by affecting your character's feelings and demeanor), and others may have story effects (such as dictating that you've become lost in the woods). There is some great meaty drama and gameplay to be had by leaning into Corruptions related to greed, selfishness, and anger – for a scene or two. When you have opportunities to use your Corruptions for roleplay, we encourage that play behavior. It is important to note, however, that when your Corruptions provide story elements, it is usually at the expense of playing that character for a session.

BONDS

BONDS represent the social and emotional ties between characters. Characters do not start with **BONDS**, players create them together after a game session.



During the Tally, each player may create a **BOND** between any pair of heroes and/or companions, or between a character and a non-player character, region, or the like (the **BOND** can be written down on the Character Sheet in the **HANDSHAKE** box). Bonds are a formal way of creating links between the players' characters and between their characters and the world. Bonds tend to be written as a relationship between a character and another character. When these **BONDS** are tested or activated in play, the players are driven to act by those Bonds. This drive is both a roleplaying prompt and a story guidepost. Lean into your bonds.

Bonds can be "resolved" in-game, and doing so is the same as taking a **REFRESH SCENE** (page 54). When something negative has occurred

but the character's **BOND** could be brought into play, the player can "resolve the bond" instead of taking time to do a **REFRESH SCENE**. So, in some ways, a bond is almost like a pre-acted **REFRESH** scene.

At the end of a game, a broken bond or a bond that didn't come into play can be resolved and replaced with a different bond, ideally something that the player feels will be relevant during the next adventure.

Sir Churrus has a bond to "protect Vando the Scion at all costs." When something threatens Vando, Churrus must act to protect her. The Jaded Sellsword, Gaz, has a bond to keep the secret of the people of Ulamel's Hollow (that they are actually peaceful werewolves).

*During play, Churrus takes a **DANGER**, which lands Churrus and Vando in prison. At the time, Churrus was actively protecting Vando, so the **GM** tells him to clear his danger and reveal the secret of Ulamel's Hollow to get Churrus and Vando out of prison. After the game, Gaz's player resolves his now-unachievable bond and replaces it with "Gaz has to Stop the Gaze Eternal from falling upon Ulamel's Hollow".*

Making Characters

The Player Sheet

Roles and Rolls

Aspects

Classes

Companions

Player Sheet

Creating a Character

*From Where do you Hail?
What Role do you Play?
How do you Solve Problems?
Who are you in the Four Kingdoms?
Which Class Style do you Favor?
What is your Best Attribute?
Who are your Forces?
Why Must you Defeat the Adversary?
What do you Look Like?
What is thy Name, Adventurer?*



Heroes of the Four Kingdoms

chapter six



THE PLAYER SHEET

Each player in **RETURN TO DARK TOWER FANTASY ROLEPLAYING** needs a **PLAYER SHEET**, which includes not only the **RESOLVER**, but also everything that you need to know about your **HERO**, their **COMPANION**, and their **FORCES**. The player sheet records your characters and tracks your pertinent info, your role, your aspect, class, and edges; as well as

recording your current location, bonds, corruptions, and resources.



WHAT IS A HERO?

Your hero is a **LEGEND** of the **FOUR KINGDOMS**. You aren't just some nameless adventurer – you are a legendary hero leading your forces to save the world!

A **HERO** is a powerful warrior or wizard, and they have taken on the responsibility to fight against the Adversary. You should imagine that your Hero character is well-established, with followers, a backstory, and a life before the Dark Tower came.

Your Hero is the “primary” character that you are going to play in the campaign. Every game session must include at least one player's Hero (though it could include other Heroes as well).

ICONIC HEROES VERSUS DRAMATIC CHARACTERS

Return to Dark Tower is not focused on long-term character development. You are not grinding out experience to gain levels of power – you are already a great Hero. We may see our Heroes and Companions grow and change, but that growth is not the primary motivator for our story. Epic Fantasy tales like this are often dramatic; the heroes experience an event and then resolve a character arc, being changed by the event for good or ill. However, we don't see those characters “level up” over time – this is the end of their journey, not the beginning.

WHAT IS A COMPANION?

Each Player also makes a **COMPANION**. A Companion is another fully fleshed-out **RPG** character, but not the protagonist. The Companion's primary role is to bolster **ANOTHER** Player's **HERO**.

Companions are less powerful than Heroes, but offer the ability for each player to have an interesting part to play in any story, even when their Heroes are

elsewhere in the Four Kingdoms or otherwise occupied. When you are playing your Companion, remember that you are “support” for the Hero characters, and that they are the star of this episode of the story. Sometimes, Companions are “named” members of a Hero's forces, but they do not have to be. Companions provide color, specialization, and friendship to the party mix.

WHAT ARE FORCES?

Each Hero is also the leader of a force of allies: soldiers, outlaws, thieves, wizards, or perhaps something strange or unique. These forces provide narrative options for characters during roleplay and are your major resource for the final battle.

Primarily, Forces are a special **EDGE** that each Hero has. Forces are always “deployed” with the Hero, meaning they are available for that hero to use. Part of what they do is resolve and assist the Hero when the player rolls a **REINFORCE** result (the top number on their die).

Forces can also be used “like a character,” and can be used to take their own actions. Instead of

taking an action with their Hero, a player running a Hero can instead take an action with their **FORCES**. When the player uses their Forces to take their own action, any rolls that the Forces make are the same as the Hero (roll the same die, etc.). The exception to this is during a large-scale scene, which we talk about more on page 40.

Throughout the game, the character and companions can take on **MAIN QUESTS** (handled with an **RPG** session) or **SIDE QUESTS** (handled by assigning heroes and companions to an activity “off-screen”) to gain additional forces or some other resources.

This equates to the **MAZES** Edge of “**RETAINERS**” when playing in a **MAZES** frame but means much more in the context of Return to Dark Tower. Forces are akin to the **WARRIORS** in the Board Game but also act like “hit points” for the final battle.

Depending on the Quest and session, you may play your Hero or your Companion. Each adventure will generally involve some companions and at least one Hero.

While playing a Companion, rolls with the **REINFORCE** result are reinforced not by the player’s **FORCES**, but by the **FORCES** of one of the **HEROES** currently being played.

ROLES AND ROLLS

A great party is a mix of different roles, where all of the players are providing different skills and expertise, while each being good at specific types of actions. Someone provides the offense, while someone else plays defense. Someone should be mobile, while someone else provides utility.

While there is an endless combination of character concepts, classes, and backgrounds, there are only four roles. By combining a role with your other options, you will create a unique play experience. Your choice of Role will determine what types of actions that you will be most successful at (and where you should therefore focus activities).



Choose your role based on **WHAT YOU WANT TO DO IN THE GAME**. Then choose a **CLASS** based on **HOW YOU WANT TO DO THAT THING**.

It’s okay to be a **SORCERY FIGHTER**, a **SHADOW SENTINEL**, or a **SWORD PARAGON**. Remember, you will have the most fun (and the most success) when you choose a role that will support what you like to do in games. If you want to beat things up, play a **FIGHTER**. Picking **PARAGON** and then trying to beat things up will likely be less fun.

THE PARAGON

*Seize the d4, Paragon!
This is your die.*











*You are the expert. You
are the “smallest” die, but
it “explodes” the most.*

*You have 4 SPIRIT
(the most) but are
the most susceptible
to DANGER.*

The **PARAGON** is the most cerebral of the character roles, focusing on thinking, talking, and their senses over combat and action. The Paragon uses their special skills more than other roles, and they shine when they are rolling against **BOOKS**.

They are “the best” at what they do; they roll their **BANNER** and **REINFORCE** far more than other roles, allowing them to succeed even in harsh situations. They have more **SPIRIT** than other roles, allowing them to take more direct control without risk.

Choose the Paragon because you want to:

-  Be the best at an ability
-  Use your instincts and intelligence
-  Solve problems
-  Investigate and use perception
-  Talk a lot
-  Make decisions
-  Use special abilities rather than basic combat
-  Leverage your Forces

The Paragon’s weakness lies in their low ceiling for **DANGER ROLLS**, and combat rolls in general. They are easy to hurt and require help or defense from other players. When a **PARAGON** goes down, they are not likely to get up unscathed.



Role

THE VANGUARD

*Snatch up the d6,
Vanguard!
This is your die.*










*You are always at the
forefront of the action.*

*You have 3 SPIRIT and are
only moderately afraid
of DANGER, a good mix.*

The **VANGUARD** is the most active of the character roles. They are pretty good at everything – physical action, combat, and skills. They shine when they are rolling against **BOOKS** and **BOOTS**. The Vanguard also excels when the story focuses on non-combat action, especially if their Edges

are being called into play. By their nature, the Vanguard is a great fit to back up other characters.

Choose the Vanguard because you want to:

-  Always be in the thick of it
-  Use your instincts and intelligence
-  Be great at physical activities, like running and climbing
-  Talk a lot
-  Be a decent fighter, but are okay not being the best at it
-  Use a blend of special abilities and basic combat
-  Occasionally get saved by your forces

The Vanguard's biggest weakness is that everyone else is "better" than they are at specific things, though everyone else also has bigger weaknesses.



Role

THE FIGHTER

*Take up the d8, Fighter!
This is your die.*



*You are here to smash
faces.*






*You have 2 SPIRIT
and are very good at
avoiding DANGER.*

The Fighter takes center stage when the battle starts. They are at their best in combat scenes. The Fighter is always in the middle of the action during a battle, generally acting on the offensive. They shine when they are rolling **BLADES**.

The Fighter is the most suited to the hard life of being a hero. They are best in combat, but still

capable in **BOOTS** and **BONES** situations. They are somewhat limited in the **BOOKS** department – but they do have 2 Spirit. The Fighter is better when they are surrounded by other character roles. Fighters are good solo characters, but they are also great team players.

Choose the Fighter because you want to:

-  Stab it, kill it, set it on fire!
-  Be good at physical activities, like climbing and swimming
-  Survive a beating
-  Dish out some hurt
-  Focus primarily on basic combat

Your greatest strength is on the attack. A warrior-type class with the fighter role is a beast in combat. Take center stage when violence is on the menu.



Role

THE SENTINEL

*The d10 awaits you,
Sentinel! This is your die.*



*You are the shield that
guards the Kingdoms.*








*You have no fear of
DANGER, but only 1 SPIRIT,
which means you are
hard to stop but are
lacking in depth.*

The **SENTINEL** is the most defensive of the character roles. You are good in combat and especially good at brawn and health-type tests. You do the most damage and have the greatest effect – but the Fighter is more accurate.

Your strength is in your staying power. You are strong, hale, and hard to take down. You can take conditions, spend hearts, and still be effective at most things. The Sentinel is the safest of the

characters – but also the one that can deal the most devastating effects. Since they will seldom “roll” Reinforce, the Sentinels get better value out of their Forces by sending them to act independent of the Sentinel.

Choose the Sentinel because you want to:

-  Be safe and keep others safe
-  Be strong and hardy
-  Soak up damage and laugh at it
-  Defend the party
-  Deal the most damage
-  Focus primarily on basic combat
-  Use your forces as an extension of yourself (taking their own actions)

The Sentinel is weakest when it comes to using their **BANNER** ability and on **BOOKS** rolls. Unlike the Paragon, who strives to utilize their **BANNER** bonus often, the Sentinel's Banner and Reinforce come into the play the least.



Role

ASPECTS

An **ASPECT** is the way that a character approaches the world. **ASPECTS** provide some of the flavor that gives depth to the mechanics imposed by a character's Role. Each Aspect is sub-divided into Classes, which further describe each character. An Aspect is also a signpost indicating the equipment you carry and the experiences of your life. Most importantly, it determines what it looks like when you spend Spirit.

Successful attacks made by the **d4** and the **d10** have a correspondingly different Effect, but they could both take the same form "in the fiction" – a sword, a fireball, or a smashing shield. The form the attack takes is based on your **ASPECT**.

While there are many potential **ASPECTS**, Return to Dark Tower provides three core options: Sword, Shadow, and Sorcery – the holy trinity of the heroic adventure story.

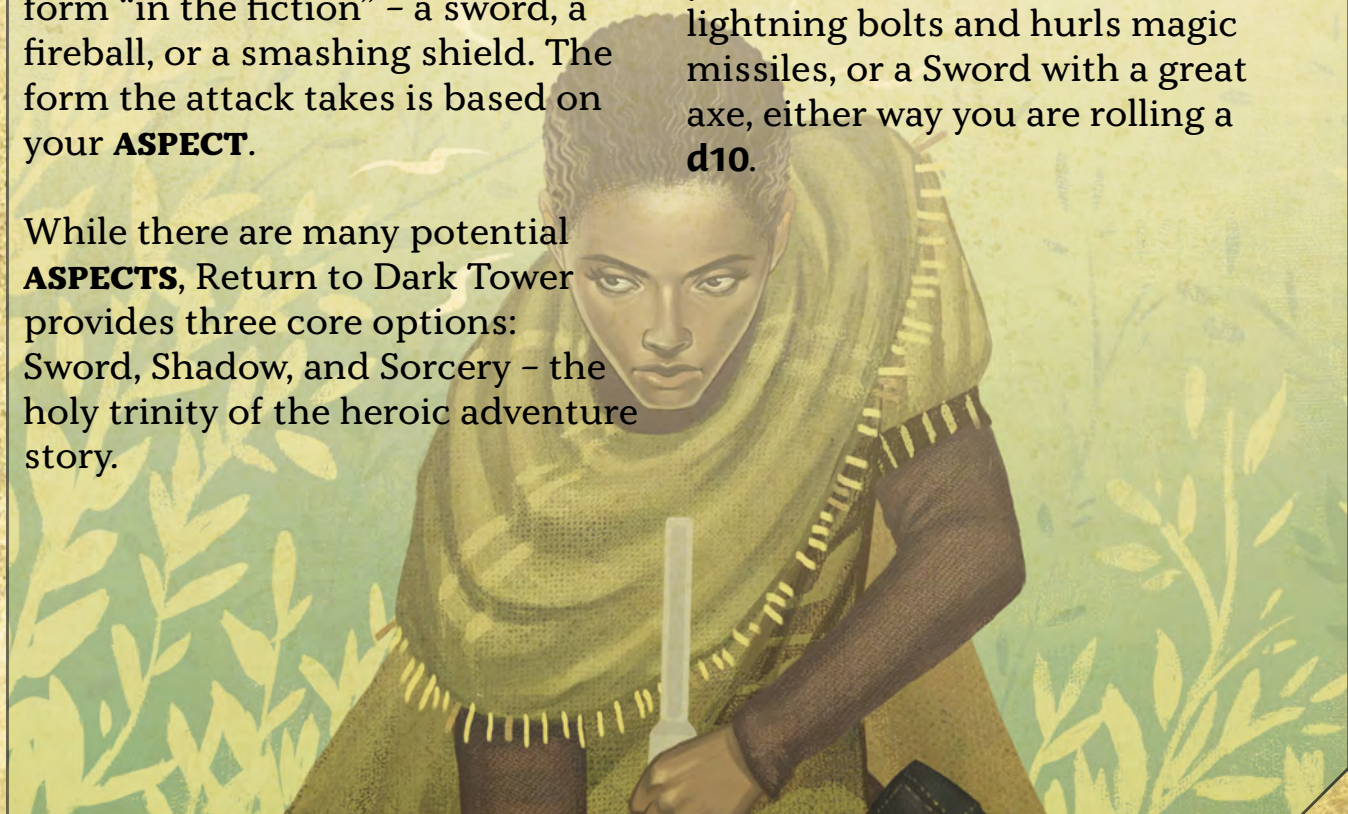
In Return to Dark Tower, you select your Aspect by answering a simple question:

How Do You Solve Your Problems?

I SOLVE PROBLEMS...

...by the edge of my **SWORD**.
...from the embrace of the **SHADOWS**.
...with my eldritch **SORCERY**.

A character with the Shadow Aspect wielding a dagger might be a **d6** or a **d8**, depending on if they have chosen the role of a Vanguard or a Fighter respectively. If you are a Sentinel, regardless of whether you are a Sorcerer that shoots lightning bolts and hurls magic missiles, or a Sword with a great axe, either way you are rolling a **d10**.



SWORD ASPECT

I solve problems by the edge of my **SWORD**.



The Dour Archwright



The Relentless Warden



The Brutal Warlord



The Undaunted Aegis

Choosing the **SWORD** Aspect means that you are a martial character. You are a warrior, mercenary, soldier of fortune, or the like. You are most likely armored and have weapons and fighting skills. Your core power comes from your knowledge of, and abilities in, combat.

Vanguards and Paragons might focus on speedier things – like rapiers and cutlasses; whereas the other roles may be inclined towards large weapons like greatswords, war clubs, and heavy maces. Sentinels and Warriors tend to wear scale or plate armor, whereas the other roles tend towards lighter armors like chainmail or leather.

When a **SWORD** spends **SPIRIT**, they are utilizing their combat knowledge or experience as a warrior, resulting in actions that take the form of martial maneuvers, well-thought-out attacks, strategy and tactics, the use of special equipment, or coordinated actions.

Example **SPIRIT** spends for **SWORDS**:



A coup de grace to end a climactic battle



Setting a shield wall with your retainers to receive a Titan's charge



Spinning with your scimitar and attacking everyone in the room



Breaking the chains that bind you



Calmly ignoring that you have been blinded while you land the killing blow







Throwing an axe to cut a rope



A flanking maneuver that cuts off a large force's retreat

SHADOW ASPECT

I solve problems from the embrace of the **SHADOWS**.

-  **The Relic Hunter**
-  **The Silent Spymaster**
-  **The Spidersweb Assassin**
-  **The Devious Swindler**








Choosing the **SHADOW ASPECT** means that you have embraced the shadows – your name is a byword for stealth, subterfuge, and skill.

Since your focus isn't on military weapons or sorcery, your weapons are more likely to be handheld, stealthier, and more "common": knives, daggers, poniards, and even the occasional hammer. Your weapons also tend to be more ornate, like jeweled rapiers or complicated hand crossbows.

Armor is less typical for **SHADOW** characters, who tend to focus more on ease of movement or style. Shadows almost always wear leather armor of some kind – jackets, vests, jacks. It is common for Shadow Aspect characters to wear fancy clothes when possible, eschewing armor for polished or professional looks.


Spending a Spirit as a Shadow-Aspect character is usually related to your preparedness and abilities, as well as your elusive, rogue-like qualities – flashes of insight, timely gear, carefully laid traps and plots, sleight of hand and misdirection, and ancient techniques.


Example **SPIRIT** spends for **SHADOWS**:


-  **A knife to the back that ends a climactic battle**
-  **Striking with a poisoned knife**
-  **Triggering a trap that you laid behind your foe**
-  **Escaping from a locked room**
-  **Running across a tightrope over a stream of lava**
-  **Pulling off a wig to reveal you were there all along**
-  **Your forces pulling off their hoods to reveal they had been there all along**


SORCERY ASPECT

I solve problems with my eldritch **SORCERY**.

 **The Reverent Astromancer**

 **The Haunted Recluse**

 **The Lightning Arbalester**

 **The Orphaned Scion**

Choosing **SORCERY** means that you want to use capital “M” Magic and wield mysterious powers. You may be a thinker or a fighter, but your core power comes from the magic that you wield. You most likely know spells, wield a magic item, or have powers from a magical lineage.


Sorcerers may carry swords or other military weapons, but they tend to use magic as their attack form – casting spells of lightning, fire, or force. It is common for a sorcerer to carry a wand, staff, orb, dagger, or other talisman.

Few sorcerers wear armor, but they may enrobe themselves in magical defenses either in the form of spells and illusions or


magical rings and amulets of protection. Sorcery Sentinels may be protected by magic armor or cloaks of fire. Most Sorcery characters wear robes or practical tunics with cloaks.


Spirit is very important to a Sorcerer, the very core of the Sorcery aspect; you spend Spirit to cast spells, utilize powerful items, and have rare materials.


Example **SPiRiT** spends for **SORCERERS**:


 **Cast a magic spell**

 **Summon a demon**

 **Hurl a fireball to damage the whole room**

 **Have knowledge of an ancient and forgotten god**

 **Let your dragon blood flow and breathe fire**

 **Suck the soul out of an enemy with your Death Wand**

CLASSES

Your **CLASS** is a special type of **EDGE**. The **CLASS** itself describes the character and can be used like any other **EDGE**. Each class also provides a character with three other **EDGES**.

Everyone has a **CLASS**, even if it is something that you made up. A Class is always a descriptive name (an Adjective and a Noun) and then a set of 3 **EDGES** (or sets of choices). When creating your own classes, you can follow the process below, or you can simply assign 3 Edges and a Class name to a character.

The Adversary will determine which classes are available in the adventure that they are running, but we assume that you will have access to the Classes listed in this book (pages 94-121).

The classes defined in this book are not all of the possible classes in Return to Dark Tower. In addition to these, you may use any class that is compatible with **MAZES** Fantasy Roleplaying, or you could even create your own. If you want to create something specific, talk with your **ADVERSARY**.

How Do CLASSES Work?

A Class is an **EDGE**. When you take a class, write down the name of the **CLASS** in the **CLASS** box on the Player Sheet under the Hero or Companion. The Class defines your Banner Bonus and defines what it is that you do in the world – are you a wizard or warrior, a noble or a barbarian, etc.

Each Class is defined by one statement and two questions, each of which correspond to an **EDGE** the character will possess.

The statement is an “always”: every member of that Class will always have this **EDGE**.

*The Silent Spymaster is always **STREETWISE**. Spymasters have a large repertoire of criminal and shadowy skills.*

Next, there is a question, which determines what style of that Class your character belongs to. The styles for most Classes will subscribe to a simple divide – internal versus external, offensive versus defensive, etc.

*As a master of whisperers, are you **QUIET** or **LEARNED**?*

*Do you find out secrets by sneaking around (**QUIET**), or are you more cerebral, studying your foe's habits and lives (**LEARNED**)?*

The final question determines the trait that has allowed the character to excel at the Class.

*Do you have **FRIENDS**, **WEALTH**, or are you just **FAST**?*

*Are you good at spying because you have a network of friends and acquaintances (**FRIENDS**), because you have a lot of money (**WEALTH**), or because you never get caught because you are so fast (**FAST**)?*

Each Character Class also has some additional information listed with the class – Names, and Kit. All of this information is presented as a guide to help players

and Adversaries to make cool characters – none of it is meant to be proscriptive, and it does not have any specific mechanical function.

Names are a list of potentially cool names for characters of this class. Kit is a sample description of a character's equipment – what they might be holding, using, wearing, or hiding on their person.

USING THE RETURN TO DARK TOWER CLASSES IN MAZES

When using these characters in **MAZES**, you do not automatically get the "**FORCES**", but may take the **EDGE RETAINERS** instead of any other **EDGE** listed with the class. When you take **RETAINERS**, you gain the **FORCES** listed as your **RETAINERS**.

The Companion





COMPANIONS

When creating a new **HERO**, the player first chooses a **ROLE**, then a **CLASS**, then selects **3 EDGES**, and finally defines their **FORCES**.

A **HERO'S** class defines its **ASPECT**, and their Role defines their **ROLL** and **SPIRIT**.

When creating your **COMPANION**, you also select a **ROLE** and a **CLASS**, but they do not have **FORCES**, **SPIRIT** or **ASPECT** (all of which are “shared” with your Hero).

When a Companion uses **FORCES**, or needs to Spend **SPIRIT** - they use the resources of the **CURRENT HERO**. Companions can spend treasure like any Hero.

THE BOON COMPANION (page 120) is a special class which allows you to create a specific companion outside of the existing classes, or you can use any **MAZES**-compatible Class (*like the classes described on page 87 of the **MAZES** Fantasy Roleplaying core book.*)



CREATING A CHARACTER

At the heart of all roleplaying is the concept of “the character.” The character is your avatar in the fantasy world. The real magic in fantasy roleplaying is putting yourself in the boots of these imaginary characters and “living” the adventure.

To create a new character, you will answer a series of questions from the perspective of that character.

Record the answer to each question in the appropriate location on your character sheet.

FROM WHERE DO YOU HAIL?

Which Kingdom and Territory do you call home? You can choose any territory or roll randomly if you want (roll a **d4** to determine the Kingdom, and a **d20** to determine the Territory in that Kingdom).

Based on your Home Territory you receive an additional **EDGE** – either an Edge that your Kingdom is known for (listed with the Kingdom) or Champion of the Regional type for your Kingdom. See page 78.

WHAT ROLE DO YOU PLAY?

The answer selects your Role, which in turn defines your Roll and Spirit.

HOW DO YOU SOLVE PROBLEMS?

The answer defines your Aspect, and your Aspect determines what Classes are open to you.

WHO ARE YOU IN THE FOUR KINGDOMS?

The answer is your Class, which determines your first Edge.

WHICH CLASS STYLE DO YOU FAVOR?

Choose one of two options for your second Edge.

WHAT IS YOUR BEST ATTRIBUTE?

Choose one of three options for your third Edge.

WHO ARE YOUR FORCES?

You have a group of followers – soldiers, wizards, or perhaps something exotic (a flock of crows, ghosts, or something even stranger).

WHY MUST YOU DEFEAT THE ADVERSARY?

This may be answered (and we argue should be answered) as part of a Session Zero (a game session that occurs before you actually play where you create characters and establish things about the game).

While your **ROLE** defines the types of actions that you want to do in the game, and your **ROLL** determines which actions you are best suited to accomplish, **WHY**

you need to stop the evil will have the biggest impact on the story.

WHAT DO YOU LOOK LIKE?

Describe your appearance or select from the options provided with your class.

WHAT IS THY NAME, ADVENTURER?

Introduce yourself to the rest of the party.

The Hero

Edges

Role

Bonds

The Companion

Location

Resolver

Banner
banner
1

Books
tactics
2 3

Boots
march
3 4 5

Blades
battle
4 5 6 7

Bones
defend
5 6 7 8 9

Reinforce
reinforce
4 | 6 | 8 | 10

Forces

danger

spirit

corruption

treasure

Return to
DARK TOWER
Fantasy Roleplaying

THE HEROES

FROM WHERE DO YOU HAIL?

THE KINGDOM OF THE NORTH

Though as varied in landscape as all of the Four Kingdoms, the North is the coldest and driest of the four. The people that live there are as strong and tough as bears. Falcons and eagles hunt the skies, and fish fill the cold lakes and rivers. Coins bearing double-headed falcons can still be found in the barrows and tombs of the forgotten empire that once held all of the North. Most northerners live in mountain towns that rely on deep mines and hard timber forests for their wealth.

HEROES that hail from the **NORTH** can either take **TOUGH** or **MOUNTAIN CHAMPION** as an Edge.

1	Broken Lands
2	Dayside
3,4	Egan's End
5	Fivepint
6	Forest of Sorrow
7,8	Greenbridge
9, 10	Lodestone Mountains
11	Lower Ice Fangs
12	Peaks of the Djinn
13,14	Pearl-of-the-North
15,16	Radiant Mountains
17	The Muted Forest
18	The Tundra
19	Tower Scar Desert
20	Upper Ice Fangs

THE KINGDOM OF THE EAST

To the East lies the oldest of the human cities, as well as the ruins of the ancient race that once called the griffon-haunted crags and canyons home. The Kinghills and the Tombstones alike are home to a vigorous people, as well as tales of an ancient kingdom that has faded from memory. The cosmopolitan towns of the East are home to many merchants and traders, and the Easterners are known for traveling far and wide in search of goods for their colorful bazaars.

HEROES that hail from the **EAST** can either take **TRAVELED** or **HILLS CHAMPION** as their Edge.

1	Big Sister
2	Bleak Wastes
3	Copper Grove
4,5	Dragontooth Lake
6,7	Duwani
8	Forest of Shades
9	Greater Tombstones
10	Inner Kinghills
11,12	Jewel Hills
13,14	Lake of Songs
15	Lesser Tombstones
16	Outer Kinghills
17	The Decaying Wilds
18,19	Three Rivers
20	Utar's Barrows

THE KINGDOM OF THE SOUTH

Once the most powerful of the Four Kingdoms, the South is still the wealthiest and haughtiest. A land of sparkling sands and skyscraping mountains, the South is famed for its lions and lion-hunters, its jewel mines, and the Watchers – the first humans to settle in the harsh climates of the south.

HEROES that hail from the **SOUTH** can either take **KEEN** or **DESERT CHAMPION** as their Edge.

1	Archmont
2	Azkol's Bane
3	Bone Hills
4	Howling Desert
5,6	Irontops
7	Little Sister
8,9	Middle Sister
10,11	Mtns. of the Watchers
12	Pine Barrens
13	Sands of Madness
14	Southern Wastes
15,16	The Cloister
17	The Emerald Expanse
18	The Throne
19,20	Ulamel's Hollow

THE KINGDOM OF THE WEST

The Kingdom of the West is home to dense forests and herds of wild unicorns. The most peaceful of the Four Kingdoms, the West is nevertheless home to warriors and wizards and is known for producing particularly fine archers and bows. Kingdom Dragons, the violent scourge, are more likely found in the West, particularly in Cloudhold and the Hissing Groves.

HEROES that hail from the **WEST** can either take **ACCURATE** or **FOREST CHAMPION** as their Edge.

1	Akartus
2,3	Anza
4	Ash Hills
5,6	Cloudhold
7,8	Delmsmire
9	Hissing Groves
10,11	Idran Forest
12	Lonelight Hills
13	Lost Lands
14	Plains of Plovo
15	Plains of Woldra
16	The Empty Glade
17,18	The Grass Sea
19	Weeping Waters
20	Yellowpike

KINGDOMS AND REGIONS

To determine randomly, roll a **d4** for Kingdom (1. **NORTH**, 2 **EAST**, 3 **SOUTH**, 4 **WEST**), and a **d20** for Region. Select one of the two “traditional” edges that your Kingdom is known for.

KINGDOM OF THE NORTH



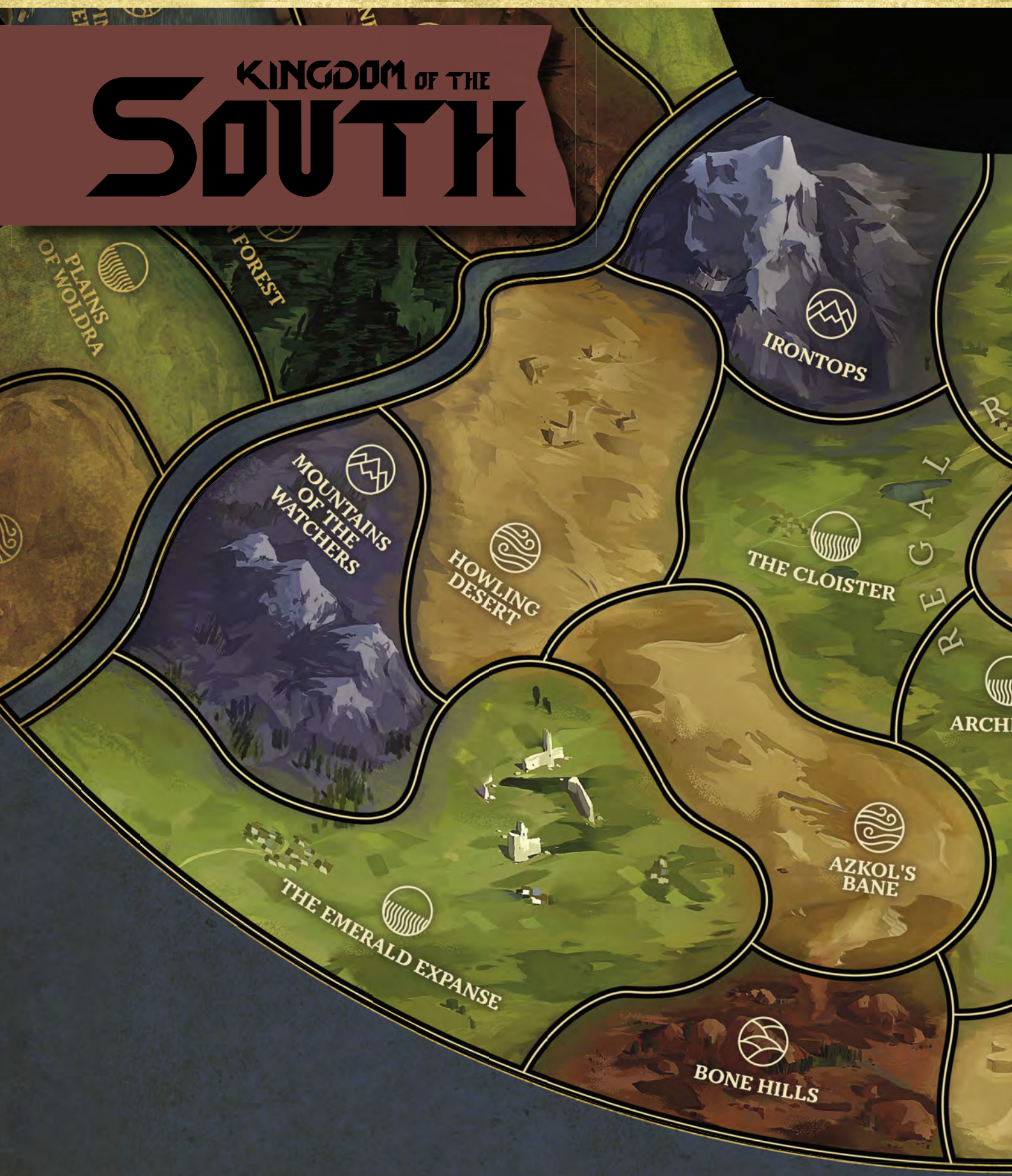


KINGDOM OF THE WEST





KINGDOM OF THE SOUTH





KINGDOM OF THE EAST





WHAT ROLE DO YOU PLAY?

Answer the question, “Why am I an adventurer?”, and then record your **ROLE**, **ROLL**, and **SPIRIT** on the Hero Sheet.



“...because I am a seeker of knowledge and glory.”

Your **ROLE** is the **PARAGON**. Seize the **d4**, Paragon! This is your die. You are the best at what you do. Your **ROLL** is the **d4**. You have 4 Spirit.

“...because I want to stay in the heart of the action.”

Your **ROLE** is the **VANGUARD**. Snatch up the **d6**, Vanguard! This is your die. You always take the first step into danger. Your **ROLL** is the **d6**. You have 3 Spirit.

“...because I am here to fight! I hit it with my sword.”

Your **ROLE** is the **FIGHTER**. Take up the **d8**, Fighter! This is your die. You are the sword against the darkness. Your **ROLL** is the **d8**. You have 2 Spirit.

“...because someone needs to keep everyone safe.”

Your **ROLE** is the **SENTINEL**. The **d10** awaits you, **SENTINEL**! This is your die. You are the strong shield of the party. Your **ROLL** is the **d10**. You have 1 Spirit.

HOW DO YOU SOLVE PROBLEMS?

The answer will define your Aspect. Depending on how you answer this question, you should have a broad idea of what kind of character you are. Your Aspect determines the options you have for Class and defines how you spend your **SPIRIT**. Your Class defines what you do best, and the types of actions that you want to

do in the game.

Your choice of **ASPECT** determines what Classes are available to you.

How Do You Solve Problems?
I solve problems...

...by the edge of my **WORD**.

...from the embrace of the **SHADOWS**.

...with my eldritch **SORCERY**.

WHO ARE YOU IN THE FOUR KINGDOMS?

The answer is your Class, which determines your first Edge. Turn to the list of Classes associated with your chosen Aspect and choose the Class that best represents your idea of the character. The Class you choose will determine your options for the next few questions as well.

To start, record the **CLASS** on your character sheet, and also record the first **EDGE** (which is written as: **"THE [CLASS] IS ALWAYS [EDGE]."**)

Advanced players may choose to create classes from whole cloth, choosing a character concept (the class) and deciding on three Edges.

WHICH CLASS STYLE DO YOU FAVOR?

Each Class presents two options – the core styles of that class – presented as a question. Choose one of these options and record that as your second Edge. Each Class offers a choice between two different “poles” for a character.

This choice is posed in the form of a question. Are you aggressive or defensive? Do you use magic spells or magic items? Do you have refined skills or useful henchmen?

WHAT IS YOUR BEST ATTRIBUTE?

What is your best attribute?
What is it that people see in you and remark on – are you fast, or cunning, or friendly?

Each Class offers a choice of three different “attributes.” Choose one of the three listed options, and record that as your third Edge.

These edges are the most common “attributes” associated with a character of your type. Your best attribute will tell you a lot about how you are going to be the most successful because leaning into your best attributes is the easiest way to succeed at rolls.

WHO ARE YOUR FORCES?

You have a group of followers – soldiers, wizards, or perhaps something unique. While this choice is mostly narrative, deciding who your warriors are in this battle will go a long way in deciding what kind of stories you tell. If you have a few Giants that look to you as their King, that’s very different from a coterie of assassins that are waiting to learn all your lessons before poisoning you and your friends.

Generally, you and your Forces are going to be “similar” – which is reinforced by the fact that they roll the same die as you – Fighters generally follow Fighters, etc.

At the start of the game, you will record the starting number for your **FORCES** – equal to your “crown” (the highest number on your **DIE**).



Role	Starting Forces
Paragon	4
Vanguard	6
Fighter	8
Sentinel	10

Throughout the game this number can change – it can go down, as you lose **FORCES** as a consequence of failing rolls, because of Claims in the Tally Phase, or through story actions.

You can also increase your number of Forces by sending your Hero out to recruit. When your **HERO** isn’t being played, they can spend the month increasing the number of their **FORCES** equal to a **pd** roll. If they are in their home Kingdom or Champions of the region type, gain Advantage on this roll. (This is an **EFFECT** Roll which can explode, see page 33). See more on this in the **MARCH** section 144.

WHY MUST YOU DEFEAT THE ADVERSARY?

Why you need to stop the evil will have a much bigger impact on the story than just the simple mechanics.

Why you are a Hero will color every decision that you make in the game. When determining your character's motivation, make a choice that puts you and your followers directly in the way of the Adversary. This will provide clear motivations and story hooks from the jump. The reason can be personal, epic, or just a good hook.

If you are hard-pressed, you could roll on this chart:

Roll	Character Motivations
1	Destiny. The fates have put me in the way of the Adversary.
2	Virtue. It is the righteous thing. The adversary must be stopped.
3	Design. Stopping the Adversary will secure my legend.
4	Vengeance. The Adversary killed someone close to me.
5	Debt. I owe someone my life.
6	Vision. To quell the visions of destruction that haunt me.
7	Daring. The greatest adventure requires the greatest heroes.
8	Violence. This is fun. Raaaaaah!
9	Desire. My bloodlust can only be quenched by the Adversary.
0	Vital. I will defeat the Adversary to prove I am the strongest.

WHAT DO YOU LOOK LIKE?

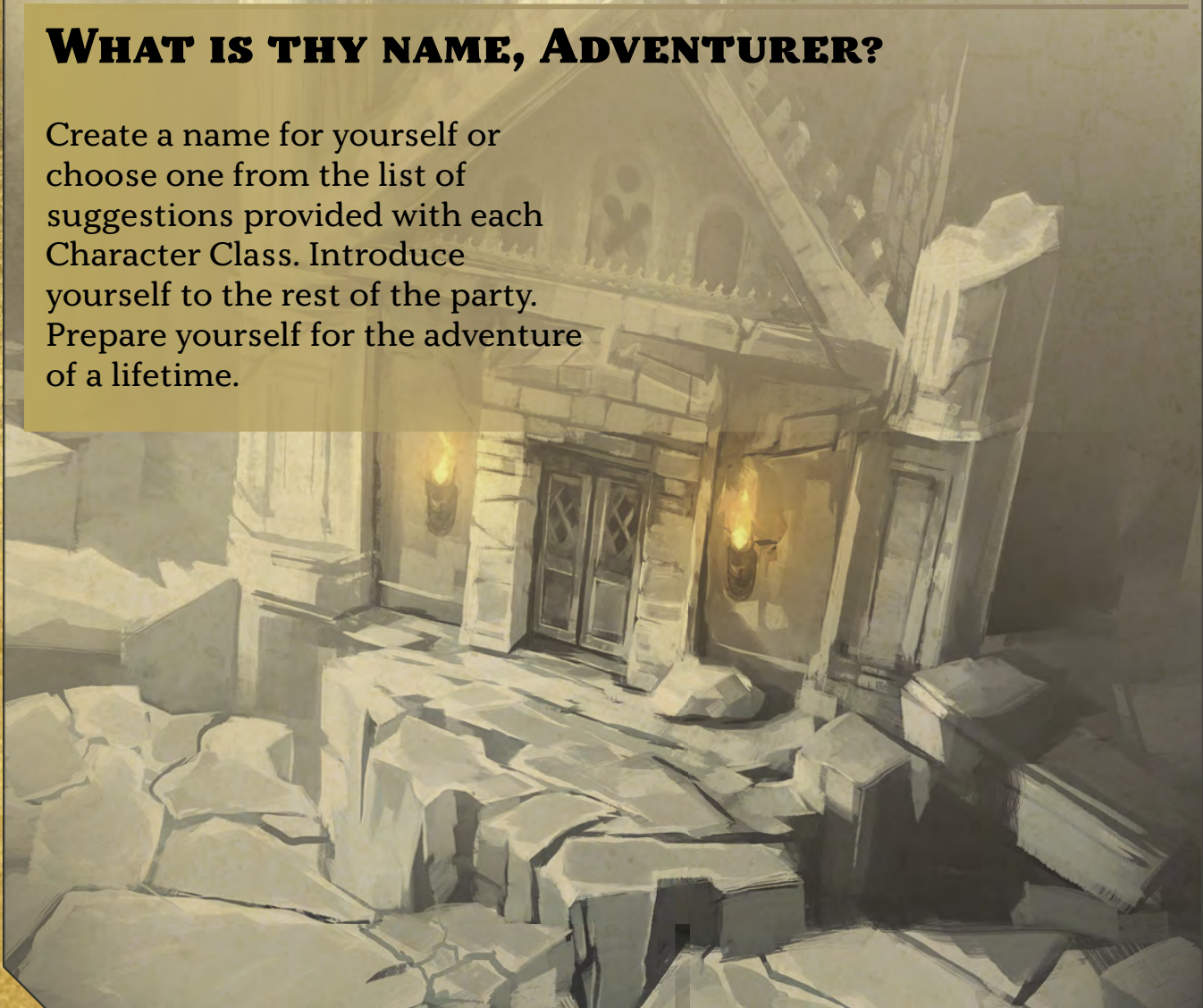
You are free to determine what your character looks like in any way that you prefer.

Some helpful options are listed with your class as ‘kit,’ the kind of clothing, gear, or accouterments that a class of that type would have. You can record these on your character sheet or summarize them for the other players.

If you have been playing **RPGs** for a long time, remember there is no “shopping trip” coming up. If you want your character to be wearing a rich ermine cloak or a shining suit of knight’s armor, they are, and this is the time to make that decision. If you want to have red hair or purple skin, or be from a strange town, it’s up to you. How you look does not define your mechanical abilities.

WHAT IS THY NAME, ADVENTURER?

Create a name for yourself or choose one from the list of suggestions provided with each Character Class. Introduce yourself to the rest of the party. Prepare yourself for the adventure of a lifetime.



Location



Resolver

Banner
banner

1



Books
tactics

2 3



Boots
march

3 4 5



Blades
battle

4 5 6 7



Bones
defend

5 6 7 8 9



Reinforce
reinforce

4 | 6 | 8 | 10



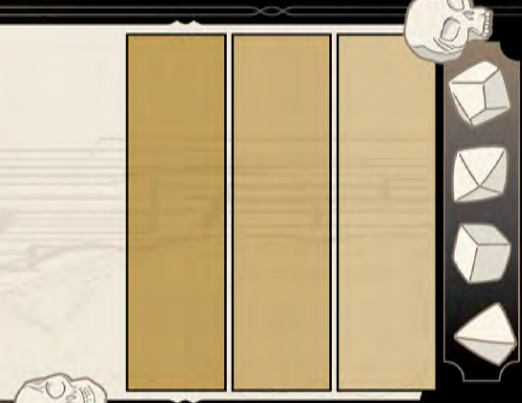
Edges



Bonds



The Companion



The Hero



Role



Forces



danger

spirit

corruption

treasure



Class & Edge Descriptions

THE Relic Hunter
THE Reverent Astromancer
THE Dour Archwright
THE Silent Spymaster
THE Haunted Recluse
THE Relentless Warden
THE Lightning Arbalester
THE Brutal Warlord
THE Spidersweb Assassin
THE Orphan Scion
THE Undaunted Aegis
THE Devious Swindler
THE Boon Companion
Edges



Classes and Companions

chapter seven

THE RELIC HUNTER

Shadow Paragon

*The Relic Hunter always has a **MAGIC WEAPON**.
As an explorer, are you **LOREWISE** or **GEARWISE**?
Are you **AGILE**, **LEARNED**, or **QUIET**?*

Relic Hunters are specialists in acquiring and using ancient magic, treasures, and weapons. One part scholar, one part tomb robber, one part crazy. Some Relic Hunters are in it for the money, others are in it for understanding history- but all of them walk the fine line between thief and explorer.

The forces of the Relic Hunter are a **Company of Acquisitionists**. Acquisitionists provide Advantage in carrying, cataloging, and moving all kinds of cargo. They reinforce the Hunter of Relics with their knowledge, their connections, and sometimes even their muscles.

Names: Samson, Larria, Doctor Indus, Phineal

Kit: Ancient weapon, a mix of styles in clothing and armor, a heavy cloak, old scrolls and books, an oilskin tube filled with maps





“Impossible is for those without sufficient imagination”



***“The greatest weapon to wield against
the dark is light itself.”***

THE REVERENT ASTROMANCER

Sorcery Paragon

*The Reverent Astromancer always has the **ALGEBRA OF THE STARLIGHT CONJUNCTIONS** spellbook.**

*As a sky watcher, are you **LEARNED** or **ACCURATE** with missile weapons?*

*Are you **DEXTEROUS**, **FAST**, or **KEEN**?*

The Astromancer is a diviner, illusionist, and master of the celestial magics. Before taking up arms against the Adversary, they were a scholar or a court advisor - and now, they are desperately fighting against the omens and portents that they see in the sky every night.

The forces of the Astromancer are **ASTRAL PROJECTIONS**. Astral Projections provide Advantage in divination, far-seeing, and communications. They reinforce the Astromancer with their spiritlight bolts, magical attacks, and blinding shields.

Names: Amnatha, Tiffany, Xerxes, Ubuche

Kit: Astrolabe, Telescope, Drafting Tools, Crystal Ball, Court Clothing

If using the Astromancer in a **MAZES game, you can replace this Edge with **SKY MAGIC** or **DIVINATION MAGIC**.*



THE DOUR ARCHWRIGHT

Sword Paragon

*The Dour Archwright is always **GEARWISE**.
As a sapper and engineer, are you **TOUGH** or a **VETERAN**?
Are you **WELL-ARMED**, **LEARNED**, or **TRAVELED**?*

The Archwright was a builder, and now they have been forced to become a demolisher and destroyer. Archwrights understand building and fortification, as well as machinery, locks, and engineering. Most Archwrights are strong of limb, but probably past their prime - turning to smithing and building after their fighting days are behind them.

The Forces of the **ARCHWRIGHT** are a **SQUAD OF ENGINEERS**. Engineers provide Advantage to building and solving tough situations. They reinforce the Archwright with insight, strong arms, and the occasional hammer to the knee.

Names: Baelor, Strongarm, Sheila, Gurd, Brooks

Kit: Leather Apron and vest, various tools, heavy hammer, 10 foot pole, lanterns, well-worn boots





“What we’ve built stands long after we’ve left this world.”



**"The right person in the right place
can accomplish more than an army"**

THE SILENT SPYMASTER

Shadow Vanguard

*The Silent Spymaster is always **STREETWISE**.
As a master of whisperers, are you **QUIET** or **LEARNED**?
Do you have **FRIENDS**, **WEALTH**, or are you just **FAST**?*

The Spymaster has eyes everywhere - paid informants, fifth columnists, dupes, and trained spies. The Spymaster uses the powers of the criminal world for the good of the people - and their most potent weapons are stealth, wealth, and the ability to not get caught.

The Forces of the Silent Spymaster are a **WEB OF SPIES**. Spies provide Advantage in gaining information, navigating social situations, and finding rare items. They reinforce the Spymaster with their poisonous pens and sometimes with a poisoned dagger.

Names: The Upright Man, Shelob, The White Rook

Kit: Disguises with matching papers, running boots, a sharp knife (and 5 more hidden all over their person)



THE HAUNTED RECLUSE

Sorcery Vanguard

*The Haunted Recluse always has the **PSALMS SUNG AT DEATHS DOOR** spellbook.**

*As a possessed hermit, are you **LOREWISE** or **INTIMIDATING**?*

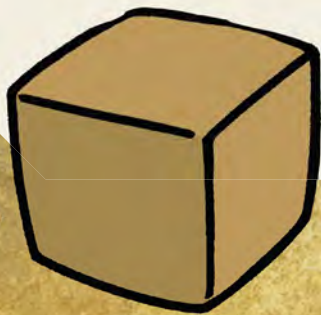
*Are you **KEEN**, **OLD**, or **DEADLY**?*

The Recluse has come out from their hermitage to take up the fight against the Adversary. They are usually strange and socially awkward, but ultimately kind and caring. As sextons and grave watchers, the Recluse is bent on destroying creatures of the Shadow Realms, especially Higher Undead like Vampires and Wraiths.

The forces of the Haunted Recluse are a **HAUNTING OF GHOSTS**. Ghosts provide Advantage with their knowledge or through their ethereal nature. They reinforce the Recluse with their spirits and dark magic.

Names: Old Ned, Alucard, Virginia, Red Betty, Samizdor

Kit: Heavy cloak, dark well-worn robes, a lantern with an eerie glow, ancient jewelry, a skull pendant



If playing **MAZES, you can replace this edge with **NIGHT DOMAIN** or **SUMMONING MAGIC**.*



***“True magic comes from the spirits of the dead,
and they do not serve willingly.”***



“You cannot run faster than I can pursue.”

THE **RELENTLESS WARDEN**

Sword Vanguard

*The Relentless Warden is always **TRAVELED**.
As a pursuer of the wicked, are you **INTIMIDATING** or
QUIET?
Are you **ACCURATE**, **TOUGH**, or **WELL-ARMED**?*

The Warden is a bounty hunter and forest ranger, a deft hand at travel and combat. Though the Warden has been all over, and knows people in every tavern and waystation on the border, they tend to be loners that prefer the company of animals over people. Their time in the wild places of the world have brought them closer to the natural world.

The Forces of the Relentless Warden are a **PACK OF WILD ANIMALS**. Wild Animals provide Advantage in wild spaces as trackers and attackers. They reinforce the Warden through tooth and claw.

Names: Arax the Bear, Marjorie, Gi, Bumpy, Young Pete

Kit: Hunting leathers and riding boots, cold weather cloak, trapping and hunting gear, camping supplies



THE LIGHTNING ARBALESTER

Sorcery Fighter

*The Lightning Arbalester is always **ACCURATE**.
As a magical artillerist, are you **GEARWISE** or
INTIMIDATING?*

*Are you **FAST**, **KEEN**, or **LOREWISE**?*

The Arbalester is a ranged fighter that specializes in the more destructive forms of magic and alchemy. Armed with wands and bombs, the Lightning Arbalester is here to rain down destruction on their enemies - and hopefully not cause as much collateral damage as last time.

The Forces of the Lightning Arbalester are a **COMPANY OF ARTILLERY**. Conventional archers, engineers, and scouts travel with a Lightning Arbalester to provide ground support and protect the living weapon.

Names: Ixidor, Jaya, Burn, Smilin' Jax, Bryth

Kit: Traveling gear, army boots, potion belt, thick goggles, slightly singed overcoat





“I don’t need weapons, I am the weapon.”



“Just because you don’t take an interest in battle doesn’t mean that it won’t take an interest in you.”

THE BRUTAL WARLORD

Sword Fighter

*The Brutal Warlord is always **DEADLY**.
As a blood-soaked general, are you **ARMORED** or **STRONG**?
Are you **TRAVELED**, a **VETERAN**, or **HALE**?*

The Warlord is a leader of fighters - a brutal and direct answer to a threat. The Warlord fights side by side with their armies - clashing on battlefields and pursuing their foes across the Four Kingdoms. Warlords are in the business of dealing death, but strive to live honorable lives that protect and serve their people.

The forces of the Brutal Warlord are an **ARMY** of **WARRIORS**. Warriors provide Advantage in combat situations and reinforce the Warlord with sword and shield.

Names: Isorn, Captain Brienne, Kothar, The Stone

Kit: Great axe, javelins, steel helm, bracers, rich fur cloak, horse and banners, silver mead horn



THE SPIDERSWEB ASSASSIN

Shadow Fighter

*The Spidersweb Assassin is always **QUIET**.
As a knife in the dark, are you **ACCURATE** or **PRECISE**?
Are you **CUNNING**, **CHARMING**, or **TRAVELED**?*

The Assassin is a professional killer, not a warrior. The difference is not subtle - assassins care about results, not honor. Few assassins ever want to get close to their targets, preferring to use snipers, stealth attacks, misdirection, and lies to get to their targets. Something has turned their sights from their career to the battle against the Adversary.

The forces of the Spidersweb Assassin are a **GANG** of **KILLERS**. Killers come in all forms, and they provide Advantage to Assassins both as backup knives and as parts of complex traps and plots. From the center of the web, the Assassin always gets their prey.

Names: Crowe, Night Sister, Sai, Henry the Dead

Kit: Light chainmail under a gray cloak, longbow, daggers, thieves tools, poison making gear, soft shoes





"The beauty is that both glasses are poisoned."



*"Standing against the Darkness is not enough.
We must bring light as well."*

THE ORPHANED SCION

Sorcery Sentinel

*The Orphaned Scion always has **THE CANON OF THE BURNING EXORCISM** spellbook.**

*As an arcane defender, are you **ACCURATE** or **PRECISE**?
Are you **YOUNG**, **OLD**, or **CUNNING**?*

The Scion is a fated prophet, the last in a line of forgotten mystics. Channeling arcane and divine powers, the Scion is a point of hope and light in the Darkness - a shield against the worst that the Shadow Realms can spit out.

The forces of the Orphaned Scion are a **CULT OF TRUE BELIEVERS**. Believers provide Advantage from their faith and belief, offering everything to the scion. They reinforce the Scion with devotion, fearlessness, and even their lives.

Names: The Golden One, Muad, Sister Xi, Jewel

Kit: Amulet of a Lost Religion, ornate robe, brass bracers, library of books written in a forgotten language

If playing **MAZES, you can replace this edge with **FORGE DOMAIN** or **ABJURATION MAGIC**.*



THE UNDAUNTED AEGIS

Sword Sentinel

*The Undaunted Aegis is always **ARDENT**.*

*As the shield against the darkness, are you **ARMORED** or **TOUGH**?*

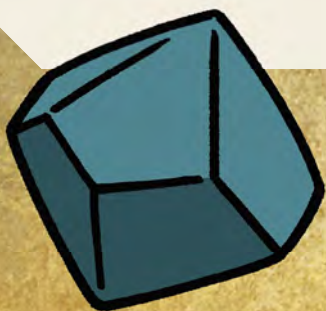
*Do you have a **MAGIC ITEM**, a **MAGIC WEAPON**, or are you just **DEADLY**?*

The Aegis is a knight or champion of a cause, a defender of an ideal. The Aegis is sworn to uphold a creed, and they have little choice but to take up their holy arms and defeat the Adversary. The Aegis might be a deadly combatant, or they may be the wielder of a mighty magic - but whichever path they walk, they do so with perfect knowledge that they are on the side of Good.

The Forces of the Undaunted Aegis are an **ORDER OF MONKS**, sworn to silence and action. Monks provide Advantage with their unarmed combat skills as well as their strong wills and execution of duty. They reinforce the Aegis with wisdom, discipline, and a flurry of blows.

Names: Syr Krestel, Barefoot Holtman, Greig, Zen

Kit: Mendicant robes or Knight's armor, a red cloak, a shining sword or a hardwood staff.





“Protect the weakest link and it will protect you”



***"If Luck is a Lady, then I am
the diamond around her neck."***

THE DEVIOUS SWINDLER

Shadow Sentinel

*The Devious Swindler is always **LUCKY**.
As a gambler and scofflaw, are you **BEAUTIFUL** or
CHARMING?
Are you **KEEN**, **DEADLY**, or **DEXTEROUS**?*

The Swindler is a master at getting what they want - through looks, charm, or guile. Some are thieves, some are con artists, all of them are gamblers of some sort. The Swindler approaches social situations like a Warlord does a battlefield - surveying their foes and planning for all eventualities.

The forces of the Devious Swindler are a **COTERIE OF ADMIRERS**. Admirers provide Advantage in social situations and reinforce the Swindler with their wealth, friends, and good times.

Names: Locke, Dax, Holiday, Orlando, The Gryphon

Kit: Decadent robes, supple boots, climbing gear, deck of cards, lockboxes secreted in multiple regions



THE BOON COMPANION

Any Role, Any Aspect

The **BOON COMPANION** is always a close friend and confidant to a Hero.

What is your Sobriquet?

Your sobriquet or moniker – what people call you - is important as a sidekick. Are you Miras the Horselord, or Zaida the Efreet? It could be your lineage (the Goblin), a job (the Shieldbearer), or a calling (the Prophet). Your moniker acts like a “mini-class” that’s just for you.


As a trusted traveling companion, what is it that you are known for? *(Select from the edge list below)*





Agile, Ardent, Armored, Beautiful, Champion, Charming, Cunning, Fast, Gearwise, Intimidating, Keen, Learned, Lorewise, Lucky, Old, Quiet, Streetwise, Strong, Tough, Traveled, Young


Which type of Enemy are you best against? *(Select from the list below)*

Beast, Humanoid, Magic, Melee, Stealth, Undead

The Companion









***"I will follow you to the gates of the
Dark Tower and beyond."***

EDGES

In addition to a character's **ASPECT** and **ROLE**, characters are further fleshed out through the selection of **EDGES**. An Edge is like an adjective – it describes a character. An Edge can be anything about a character that defines them. Players use Edges to explain why a character can do something (or could do something), or why they should have Advantage while doing something. Using an Edge in this way is called “invoking” or “calling” the Edge. Most of the time, a player will invoke an **EDGE** to gain **ADVANTAGE** on an **ACTION** or **SAVE** Roll, but an Edge can also be invoked to gain information.

Example:

*Rhys the Lightning Arbalester has the Edge **KEEN**. While trying to sight an Enemy at a distance they gain Advantage to their Action Roll. Later, when called to make a Save to see if they notice someone creeping up behind them, they are Advantaged on that Save Roll. Finally, while in a subterranean catacomb, Rhys's player asks: “I have Keen – so do I notice any markings on the floor?”*

Edges should be simple, straightforward concepts like **KEEN**, **BEAUTIFUL**, or **MAGIC WEAPON**. They should be specific but not too specific. **TWO-HEADED AXES** is too specific, but **WELL-ARMED** is good. It encompasses the benefits that **TWO-HEADED AXES** would have provided, while also being more versatile.

Some things act like an **EDGE** without being from the Edge list, most notably **CORRUPTIONS** and **CLASSES**. Players and Adversaries can invoke a Class or a Corruption in the same way that you would invoke any other Edge.

When creating a character, you may find that you have an idea that the list of **EDGES** included in **RETURN TO DARK TOWER** doesn't account for – that's okay, most **EDGES** you will ever need are on the list here, but the list isn't supposed to be comprehensive. In that case, talk with the **ADVERSARY** about your idea.

The list of potential Edges is endless. If there is a specific concept for an Edge that a player wants, discuss it and decide if you want to add it to the list. Don't just create **EDGES** willy-nilly though – our experience is that these edges cover most of what is needed for a fantasy adventure game. Also keep in mind that new Edges should be similar in scope to the list of sample Edges, rather than something akin to a second Class for that character. Classes are a kind of Edge, but their scope is sufficiently broad that a character in possession of two Class-level Edges might tend to hog the spotlight a bit.

Edges
Class Identity
Class Style
Best Attribute

ACCURATE
AGILE
ARDENT
ARMORED
BEAUTIFUL
CHAMPION
CHARMING
CUNNING
DEADLY
DEXTEROUS
ENEMY
FAST
FRIENDS
FORCES (Retainers)
GEARWISE
HALE
INTIMIDATING
KEEN
LEARNED
LOREWISE
LUCKY
MAGIC ITEM
MAGIC WEAPON
OLD
PRECISE
QUIET
STREETWISE
STRONG
TOOLS
TOUGH
TRAVELED
VETERAN
WEALTH
WELL-ARMED
YOUNG

ACCURATE – You are an expert marksman. Gain Advantage when fighting from a distance. Spirit spends using Accurate are for taking careful aim when you are calling shots – like knocking apples from children’s heads.

AGILE – You have excellent control of your body, flexibility, and balance.

ARDENT – You are resolute, strong-willed, and able resist pain and temptation. Can be used to gain Advantage against Humanoid and Undead Foes.

ARMORED – Gain Advantage when resisting damage and while defending in general. You can spend Spirit to negate all the damage you take from an attack – throwing your shield in the way, perhaps. Can be used to gain Advantage against Melee Foes.

BEAUTIFUL – Physically handsome and alluring. Can be used to gain Advantage against Humanoid Foes.

CHAMPION – You are especially well-trained or adapted to a particular type of terrain. When dealing with mundane things in that area, you may be able to gain Advantage. You know how to survive in those wilds, deal with the people of those regions, fight the monsters that dwell there, etc. When you choose Champion, you have to choose one of the six terrain types: Deserts, Hills, Mountains, Lakes, Forests, or Grasslands.

CHARMING – Likable, friendly, and interesting to talk with. Can be used to gain Advantage against Beast and Humanoid Foes.

CUNNING – Mentally slippery, fast, strategic, and sly. Can be used to gain Advantage against Beast and Humanoid Foes.

DEADLY – You are Advantaged when it comes to rolling **DAMAGE** – it could be because of poison, skills, magic, razor claws, burning rage, or something else.

DEXTEROUS – Deft, sleight of hand, strong hand-eye coordination.

ENEMY – You have a grudge against Beasts, Magic, or the Undead. You have studied them and their ways, and when dealing with Foes of this **TYPE**, you may gain Advantage. (Note: You cannot be an enemy of Humanoids, Melee, or Stealth **TYPES** but there are many **EDGES** that you could take that give you Advantage in those situations).

FAST – Physically fast, fleet of foot, and quick to react. Can be used to gain Advantage against Beast Foes.

FRIENDS – You have contacts willing to help you, or from whom you can gain knowledge or succor. Choose a type: Friends in... High Places, Low Places, Wild Places, or Dark Places. Friends can act as a source of information, “I’ve seen these marks before, while with my friends, the Bugbear Tribe.” Spending a Spirit on Friends is like spending treasure, as it allows you to get help from the Friends, or provides “prepared assistance” while you are in a Maze. Can be used to gain Advantage against Humanoid Foes.

FORCES (Retainers) – You have people that follow you, providing you with additional hands and feet on the ground. Retainers are still “the character” mechanically – meaning that you roll for them with your die – but they are separate from the character. When taking retainers, define what type of retainers they are – guards, servants, torchbearers, an apprentice, etc. You may have a few generic retainers or one “named” retainer. Spending Spirit on Retainer activity will allow them to take actions outside of the norm (like having your torchbearers map a part of the maze complex without you needing to be there).

GEARWISE – Knowledge about gears, clockwork, machines, traps, and locks. Gearwise allows for setting and disarming traps, picking locks, and other mechanical activities. Spirit spends for Gearwise will usually result in setting or disarming a trap, or making something work or not work, which would otherwise take a lot of time.

HALE – Healthy, hearty, and resistant to poisons and disease. Slow to tire. Take Advantage on all Healing saves and you are immune to any corruptions that affect your health.

INTIMIDATING – A formidable, overawing, or threatening demeanor. Can be used to gain Advantage against Humanoid Foes.

KEEN – Alert, sharp eyes and ears, great senses. Can be used to gain Advantage against Stealth and Beast Foes.

LEARNED – Well-educated and intelligent. You are well-read, well-spoken, and have a deep understanding of the world around you.

LOREWISE – Knowledge about ancient and mysterious things. Myth, religion, the old world, unnatural monsters and ancient spells. Gain Advantage when you are dealing with the strange and the unnatural. You can spend a Spirit to do ritual magic, or to know ancient runes, and to make up interesting details about the world. Can be used to gain Advantage against Undead or Magic Foes.

LUCKY – You're naturally lucky, and things always seem to go your way. You are Advantaged on all Chaos Rolls and never take the Marked condition. Ties always break in your favor.

MAGIC ITEM – You have an item like a magic mirror or a magical figurine, or a class of expendable items like potions that is powerful and provides you Advantage in specific types of situations.

It could be anything as long as it is: A) specific (like a Cloak of Invisibility), B) obtainable (you can't have The Gravemaw Slaying Spear), and C) is allowed by the Adversary. Magic Items are a great Edge to add to a character as a reward. Any Magic Item from any traditional fantasy **RPG** is fair play. Can be used to gain Advantage against Undead or Magic Foes.

MAGIC WEAPON – You have a magical weapon. It acts in many ways like **WELL-ARMED** (giving you Advantage in many combat situations), but it is a single weapon (unlike Well-Armed). Your weapon isn't just a "magic sword," it should have a name and a story, i.e. "Baldur's Bane, an axe that grows cold in the presence of dwarven ruins and was forged by a giant to slay the dwarf king." Spending a Spirit will allow the weapon to do amazing things. Can be used to gain Advantage against Undead or Magic Foes.

OLD – You are old and wise. You have seen much of life and are advantaged on all rolls about experience, history, and wisdom. You suffer Disadvantage on all **BOOTS** and **BLADES** rolls to move or fight, due to your old and worn-out body.

PRECISE – Gain Advantage when fighting in melee you are precise and in control. Spending a Spirit on Precise would result in you having a very controlled and deadly strike. Can be used to gain Advantage against Melee Foes.

QUIET – Stealthy, balanced, capable of sneaking and not being seen. Can be used to gain Advantage against Stealth Foes.

STREETWISE – Ability to perform crime – picking pockets, forgery, con jobs, fencing, etc. Knowledge and experience on the hard streets. You gain Advantage on criminal activities and can spend Spirit to have already committed a crime in preparation for whatever you are currently facing. Can be used to gain Advantage against Stealth Foes.

STRONG – Physically strong. Advantaged when lifting or breaking things.

TOOLS – You have specific, focused tools without spending **TREASURE**. You are assumed to have all of the tools that your Class or Edges would require at all times. When you spend a Spirit on Tools, you are providing a creation of your craft to complete a task.

TOUGH – Physically capable of taking a hit. Holds up against the elements. Take advantage whenever making a **DANGER SAVE**.

TRAVELED – Wise about the ways of the world and people. You have been around and seem to know a little about everywhere and everyone. You can spend a Spirit to know someone from a faraway place.

VETERAN – You are a Veteran adventurer and are well-prepared for the road ahead. If you would take a Corruption, you may instead “take Veteran.” As a Veteran, you have seen worse, and you shake it off. Effectively, Veteran gives you a free refusal of a Corruption. You get **VETERAN** “back” after any session in which you did not Quest.

WEALTH – You have wealth beyond what you are carrying with you. Your equipment, retainers, etc. are of the finest quality. When in situations where you would spend **TREASURE** to purchase something, roll with advantage to not lose the Treasure. While dealing with common activities, you can use Wealth for advantage in your dealings. Can be used to gain Advantage against Humanoid Foes.

WELL-ARMED – You bristle with weapons and nearly anything you touch can be used as a weapon. You can spend a Spirit to change what you are armed with, resulting in a different bonus – a two-handed weapon (gain advantage on damage rolls), a one-handed weapon and a shield or dirk (gain advantage on defense rolls), or a single blade or paired weapons (gain advantage on attack rolls). Can be used to gain Advantage against Melee Foes.

YOUNG – You are young and untested, a fresh green sprout. You are Advantaged on all physical activities outside of combat but are Disadvantaged on rolls about experience, wide knowledge, and combat.



Spellcasters & Spellbooks

Magic in the Four Kingdoms

The Fiction of Magic

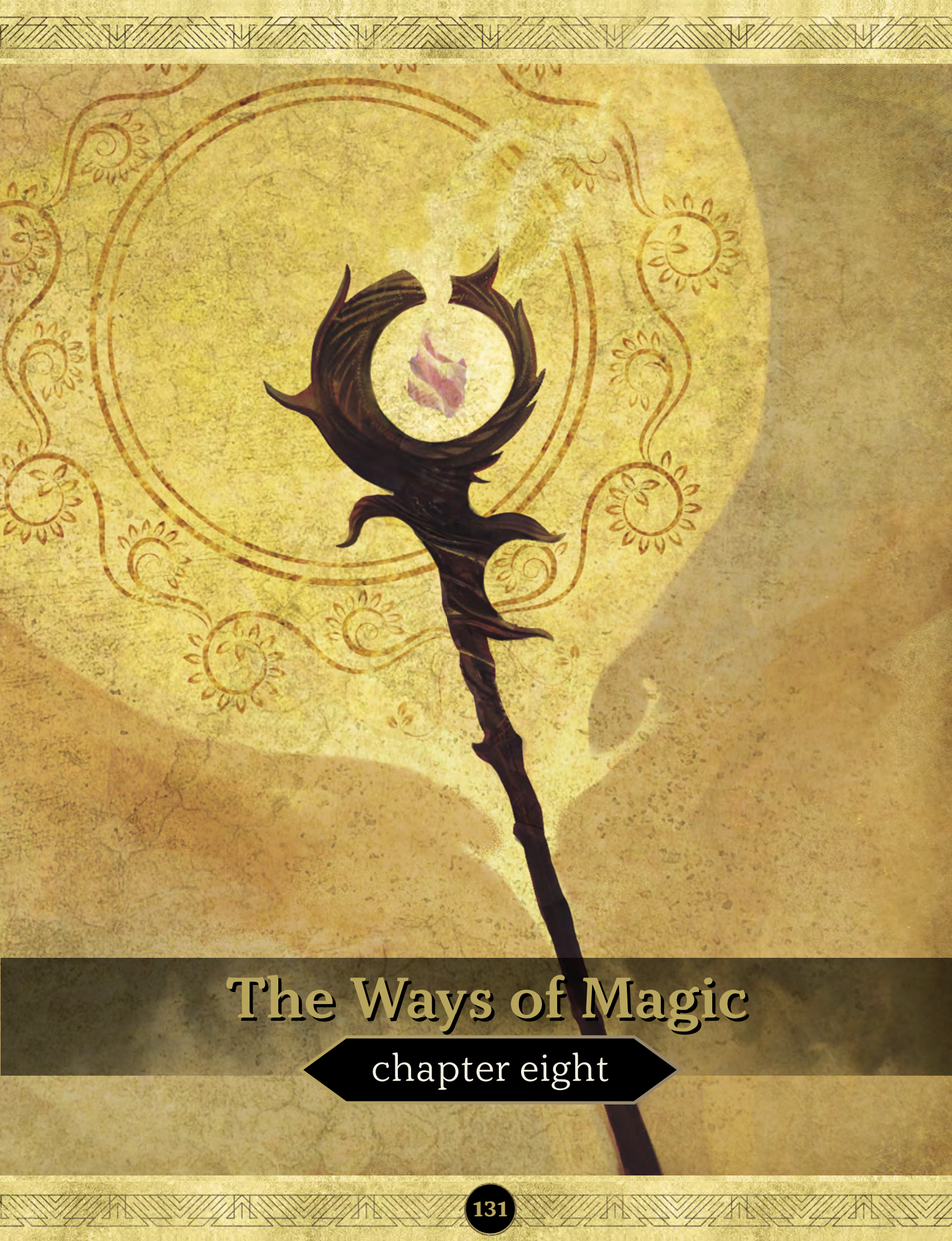
On Magic from Mazes

Spellbooks

Psalms Sung at Death's Door

Canon of the Burning Exorcism

Algebra of the Starlight Conjunctions



The Ways of Magic

chapter eight

MAGIC IN THE FOUR KINGDOMS

Magic is ancient, primal, and very scary in the lands surrounding the Dark Tower. Magic dominated the ancient world until it fell under the weight of Azkol and the Dark Tower. In this benighted era, control and knowledge of magic have diminished, but it is still a part of the lives of even the most common folk.

Magic is infused in the natural order of the world. It is the

explanation for most things.

Magic is living and breathing – and everyone from the lowliest urchin to the mightiest king is subject to its all-encompassing power.

Players have access to Magic in a variety of ways, most often when playing Sorcery Aspect characters that cast spells or have magic power. Characters of any Aspect could also have magic items or weapons.

THE FICTION OF MAGIC

For many actions in Return to Dark Tower, a player can use “Magic” as the “fiction” of their action. When a character has access to Magic – whether it be in the form of a spell, item, or something else – you may use “magic” descriptively when narrating the actions that your character takes. In most situations, however, this does not mean that, mechanically, the character is using their magical power, or draining Spirit to produce these effects. Instead, they are simply taking Actions (and rolling their die).

These actions might be considered “spells” in other games and would use up some of your resources. However, in **RETURN TO DARK TOWER FANTASY ROLEPLAYING**, the idea is that you **ARE** “magical” and so the flavor of some of your actions are going to be magical, even if you don’t spend any resources. Just as a martial character may use the fiction of a sword or an axe to describe what is happening when they roll **BLADES**, a magical character might describe their **BLADES** rolls as a fireball or swarm of ghosts attacking their foe.

ON MAGIC USERS FROM MAZES

If using the **MAZES** rules, feel free to utilize the complete rules on Magic from Domains to Schools, mages to wizards, and everything in between. You can utilize **SPiRiT** just as you would use **STARS** in a **MAZES** game.

You can also use Spellbooks in **MAZES**, instead of Domain and School.



SPELLBOOKS

In the world of the Four Kingdoms, you need a **SPELLBOOK** to cast spells. Each Spellbook contains 5 spells – one or two cantrips, two or three incantations, and a powerful ritual. “Spell” is a generic term for any casting that the mage does, with cantrips, incantations, and rituals being specific forms of spells found in Spellbooks.

CANTRIPS are well-worn, well-trodden magical effects memorized by casters. Cantrips can be cast without using Spirit by making an Action Roll. The caster always gets the effect, but if the caster fails the roll, they “lose” this cantrip until the next game session and cannot cast it again.

The type of roll is included with the cantrip and is based on the following rubric.

CANTRIP	SAVE VERSUS
Knowledge, information, communication, intelligence	BOOKS
Movement, speed, agility, dodging	BOOTS
Violence, attacking, destroying	BLADES
Protection, defense	BONES

When a sorcerer casts an **INCANTATION**, that’s done by spending a **SPIRIT**. Incantations are powerful and dangerous combinations of words, gestures, runes, and magic – well beyond the typical use of the arcane arts. This means that the wizard is going beyond the general and mundane magic they have. They are investing power into the action. In these cases, the mage doesn’t make a roll; they explain the effect and the Adversary will adjudicate.

RITUALS are a powerful and potentially dangerous activity. In **RETURN TO DARK TOWER**, casting a ritual is an action that your mage does “off-screen” as a Campaign Action. During the **MARCH PHASE**, a caster can perform a ritual by spending their time

doing that. Casting a ritual requires no other resources than limiting that character from play for a session.

During an “At Scale” scene, a desperate mage could try to use a ritual - and would use the Scale Actions to resolve it, with consequences usually being treasure and lives - not just spending Spirit.

PSALMS SUNG AT DEATH'S DOOR

Psalm Sung at Death's Door is typically a small, thick prayer book covered in black leather and illuminated with gold foil. The pages are fine vellum, and the runic letters almost glow with an eerie light.

Ghostlight (boots cantrip)

Night Domain, Divination School

This cantrip suffuses the necromancer in a spectral radiance, and allows the caster to peer into the realm of Death. While enchanted by this cantrip, the caster can see in the dark, detect undead creatures, and know when the living hover on death's door. Additionally, while clothed in the ghostlight, the caster is invisible to the living for a brief period.

Speak with the Dead (books cantrip)

Night Domain, Divination School

Using this cantrip, the caster can speak to the spirits of the recently deceased (within a few days) in a particular area. This cantrip can be intensified by spending a Spirit to speak to a long-dead spirit.

Summon Skeletal Warrior (incantation)

Night Domain, Summoning School

Using the full force of their necromantic arts, the caster calls forth a skeletal warrior from the lands of the dead, causing it to

erupt from the earth. This creature will fight and protect the caster, as well as follow commands.

Charon's Ferry (incantation)

Night Domain, Evocation School

A dangerous, yet powerful, trick, the caster is transported across a region or through an obstacle by stepping briefly into the realm of death and boarding the Ferry of the Crossing. The Necromancer may bring their allies along, however all who travel this way (except the caster) must save versus bones or be marked by the Ferryman (take the marked condition or a Danger).

Seal the Tomb (ritual)

Night Domain, Abjuration School

Tapping fully into the power of life and death, the necromancer seals a rip in the veil between the two realms. This ritual requires a consecrated place (such as a Citadel) to build a mystical lock. When complete, this destroys or drives out all of the undead in a region and creates a mystical ward that prevents the summoning or contacting of the dead in surrounding regions.

CANON OF THE BURNING EXORCISM

The Canon of the Burning Exorcism is a practical guide to dealing with dark forces. The large tome is usually pressed into thin leather pages treated with fire-suppressing oils and bound between hammered-brass covers. The entire book is locked with a strong chain, which can also be used to hang the book over a shoulder to be carried on a pilgrimage or adventure.

Sword of Flame

(blades cantrip)

Forge Domain, Conjunction School

Sliding their hand across the blade, the caster conjures a yellow-gold flame that encases a blade without harming it. This grants the edge **DEADLY** to the wielder of the blade. The blade ignites flammable materials and can be used to hit incorporeal and intangible enemies.

Benediction for the Zealous

(bones cantrip)

Forge Domain, Abjuration School

When faced with the true darkness, the faithful need to fight with fire. This Benediction makes the faithful immune to the ill effects of fire and heat for a few minutes.

Blazing Coat of Many Colors

(incantation)

Forge Domain, Evocation/Illumination School

Wrapping themselves in a cape of scintillating light, the caster

becomes a bright beacon that is protected against most magical attacks for a short time. They also emit such a bright light that it is hard to look at them directly, granting them the edge **ARMORED** for a short time against any foe that requires sight to aim. Lastly, the Coat illuminates an area with a light as strong as daylight.

Angelic Flame

(incantation)

Forge Domain, Summoning/Conjunction School

More than a fireball, the Angelic Flame is a devastating attack – a focused beam of angelic light and fire that burns away demonic and evil runes, spells, and other protective wards, as well as doing considerable damage.

Ritual of the Final Expulsion

(ritual)

Forge/Night Domain, Abjuration/Enchantment School

Most magical evil forces summoned from other realms or allowed to escape into the land of the Four Kingdoms cannot be truly destroyed. They can only be sent “back” to the plane where they originated. The Ritual of Final Expulsion can be used against a trapped entity or imbued into a weapon to allow the permanent exile of a magical being. Once exorcised, the being cannot return.

ALGEBRA OF THE STARLIGHT CONJUNCTIONS

The Conjunctions is both a working astrologer's codex – with complete data on eclipses, star signs, and the related maths needed for their computation – as well as a repository of powerful astromancy. Generally a thick but compact tome, easily carried, the Conjunction's onion-skin pages are covered in a tiny script from top to bottom, daunting all but the truest astrologer.

Horoscope

(books cantrip)

Sky Domain, Enchantment/Illumination School

The heart of the astrologer and astromancer's work is the casting of a horoscope. The caster asks a question about a person and casts their chart – gaining insight from the Adversary in the form of a yes or no question.

Horns of the Star-Goat

(blades cantrip)

Sky Domain, Evocation School

Channeling astral lightning through their outstretched fingertips, the astromancer hurls a devastating force that crashes through doors and furniture – breaking glass, wood, and even metal. The blow resembles a rushing goat made of starlight. Spending a spirit on this cantrip allows it to break through magical or magically sealed barriers.

Phantasmal Terrain

(incantation)

Sky Domain, Illumination School

The caster can use the illusory powers of starlight to change the nature of a region from one type to another (such as a Desert into a Forest). Though merely an illusion, it is effective enough to fool even the most ardent predator.

Moons of Ioun

(incantation)

Sky Domain, Conjunction School

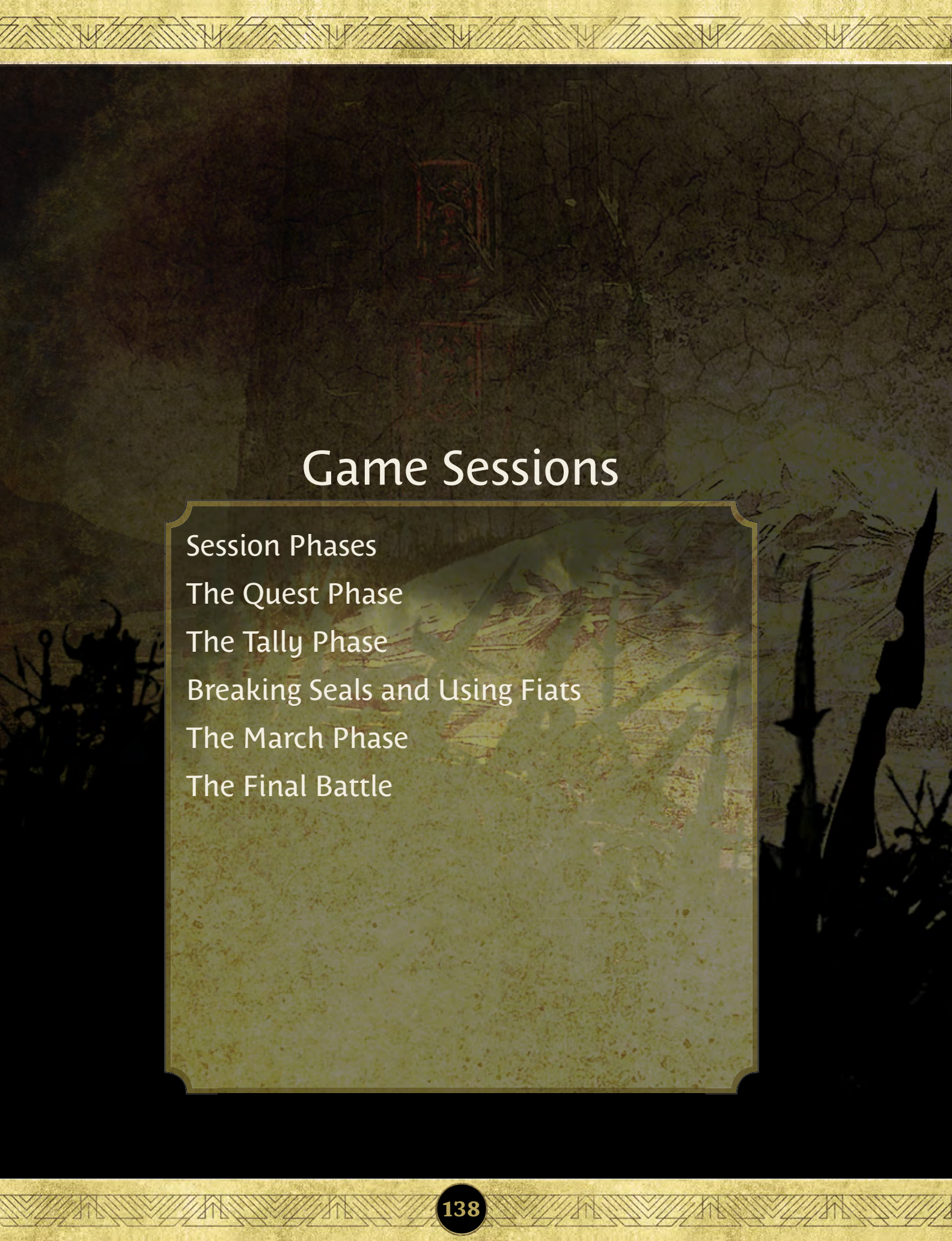
The caster pulls heavenly matter from the sky to form small satellites that float about the caster providing a form of Armor for the current battle. The floating orbs provide light and deflect blows. They also hold the caster floating in the air, providing a limited form of levitation.

Ritual of Syzygy

(ritual)

Sky and Night Domains, Evocation School

Using ancient mathematics and the ultimate test of will, this ritual pulls a heavenly body into syzygy between the land and the moon or sun, causing an eclipse. This can be used to speed up or slow down time, to ruin or complete a prophecy, or to change the polarization of the energy flow of even a site such as the Dark Tower!



Game Sessions

Session Phases

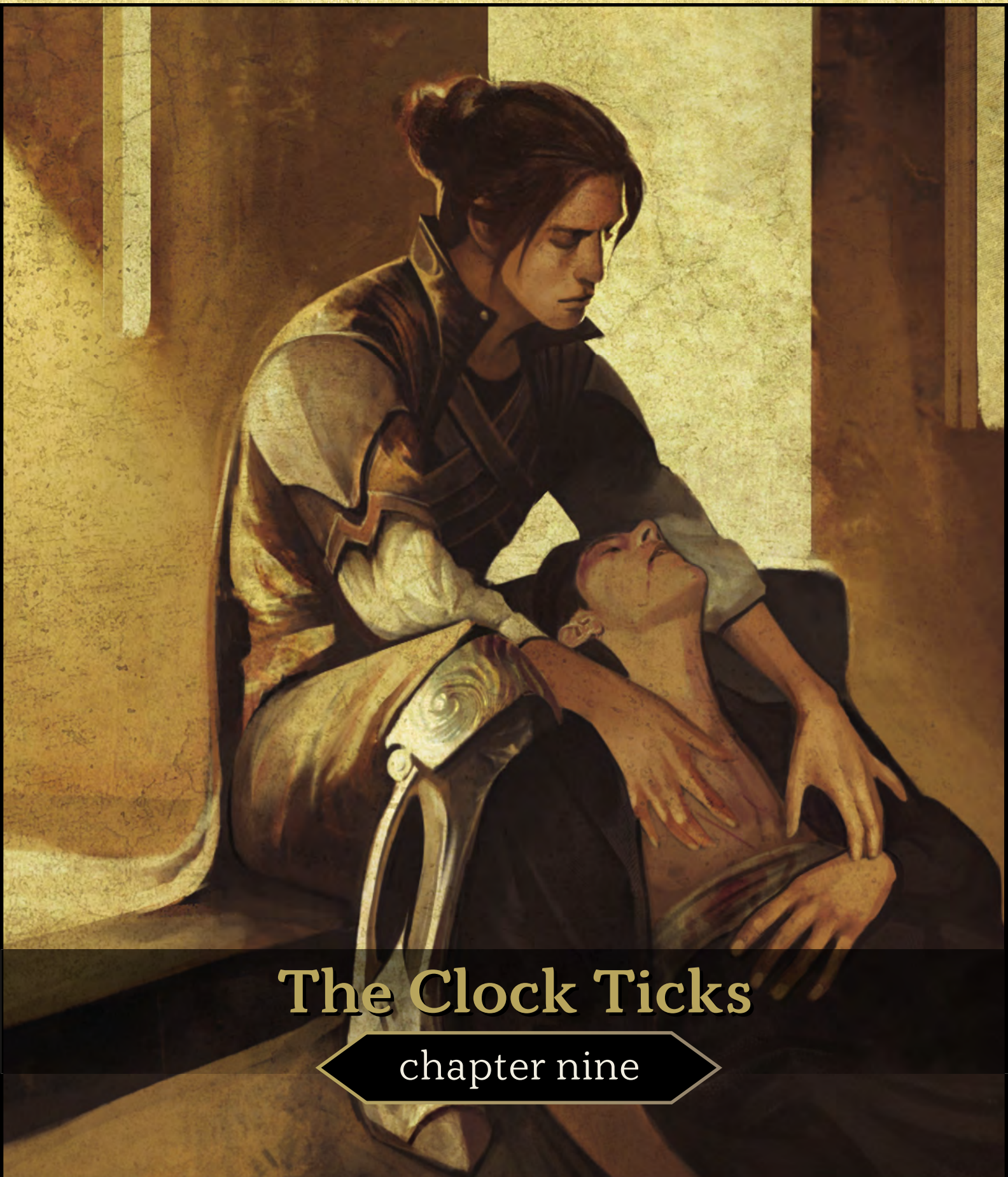
The Quest Phase

The Tally Phase

Breaking Seals and Using Fiats

The March Phase

The Final Battle



The Clock Ticks

chapter nine



SESSION PHASES

Each **SESSION** of Return to Dark Tower follows a three-part structure. With the exceptions of Session Zero and the Final Battle, which have a special structure.

△ **Session Zero**

◻ **The Quest Phase** *(The Adventure)*

☒ **The Tally Phase** *(End-of-Game Records)*

◻ **The March Phase** *(What's Next)*

☒ **The Final Battle**

SESSION ZERO is only used before game play begins. We use it to create characters and companions, define the adversary, and setup the “pre-game” March Phase.

The first thing that the players do in each Session is “go on an adventure,” during the **QUEST**

PHASE. This could be a dungeon crawl, a town encounter, a quest to save a relic or person. Ultimately, it's a scene in the larger story, played out to see what happens.

At the end of that adventure, the players have some **OUTCOMES**. Those outcomes form the basis of the **TALLY PHASE**. During the Tally Phase, we calculate the effects that this session has had on the game world.

Finally, in the **MARCH PHASE** the players make a decision about what they want to do in the next session, and how they want to use the time of characters “off-screen.” Where are the **HEROES** going to spend their time in the next Session? Which **QUEST** will be the center of the Session Activity?

During the March Phase the **FINAL BATTLE** may be triggered, which means that the next session is the last session, and that the regular session rules aren't used, instead the Final Battle rules are used.

THE QUEST PHASE

During the Quest Phase, the player characters first “arrive” at the door to adventure. The chosen hero(es) and companions should begin this Phase as “close” to the action as possible. For example, if the adventure takes place in a trap-filled crypt, there is no need to narrate the overland journey to the crypt. Instead – assuming the crypt is the most important part of the story – the adventure can begin at the crypt’s entrance.

Also remember that, during Session Zero, the players set up and decided on the first adventure – the opening salvo in their mission to defeat the Adversary. This adventure might be a dungeon hiding an artifact or a diplomatic mission to gain the trust of a temple, settling a dispute between two guilds or purchasing a black-market weapon, or maybe it’s defeating a Frost Troll let loose by The Bane of Omens to destroy a village on the Plains of Plovo.

Regardless of the “type” of adventure, at the end of each session the Adversary and the Players determine the status of the Region in which the adventure took place. A Region can be free from the Adversary, fall to

the Adversary, or lost. This is not a hard and fast mechanical question, but rather a narrative one.

Did the Players halt the Adversary here, prevent the Adversary from conquering the region, save the region from the Adversary’s rule, or the like? If so, then the Region is free, cleansed of the evil presence, and Won to the players’ side. If a Region is Won from the Adversary during the **QUEST PHASE**, the Region is counted towards the Players during the Final Battle. As a bonus, when a region is freed from the Adversary, choose a region adjacent to it and also claim that as Won by the Players.

Did the players fail here? If so, then the Region Falls to the Adversary.

If the answer isn’t clear, or if there are some other strange circumstances (such as the Irontops erupting in lava and destroying everything in the Region), the Region is Lost and counts neither for nor against the players.

Regions can also be **LOST** or **FALL** during the Tally Phase.

THE TALLY PHASE

During the Tally Phase, the players and the Adversary update their sheets and clocks based on the outcomes of the completed adventure, as well as where the players have decided to go—and what they have decided to do—next.

The core action of the Tally Phase is resolving “claim.” **CLAIM** is how much **DARKNESS** the Adversary is going to gain from the completed adventure and how many Treasures or other resources are gained by the Heroes. Most importantly, it affects which **REGIONS** are Free, Lost, or Won.

Using either a map or the “Realm Tally Sheet,” mark each Region in which an activity occurred. Each Region will only ever get one mark, because once an action has occurred in a space on the map, nothing else will happen there in this story. Mark if the region is **LOST**, **FALLEN**, or **WON**.

By performing actions in certain regions, you can “block” areas of the map which can be part of the strategy of both sides – using Adversary Fiat or off-screen character actions to ensure that your foes can’t get to certain place. Also remember that additional areas of the map can be “claimed” during the March phase.

Player Action	Claim Outcome
Questing	Add Treasure, Increase Forces by pd [*] , or Extend Influence ^{**}
Diplomacy	Set the Region to WON
Recruit & Reinforce	Increase your Forces by pd [*]
Rest & Recuperate	Resolve a Corruption per its rules
Gather Information	The Adversary answers questions
Bonding	Gain a Bond

****Note:** When increasing Forces, this is an Effect Roll – so if you roll your CROWN, the die “explodes.” Roll your die again and add the results together.*

***** Extending Influence:** If it makes sense narratively, you can forego another Outcome to your adventure and include another adjacent Region as WON. You can only do this if you WON the region.*

CALCULATING PLAYER CLAIM

Each player receives a Claim for each Region the players Won during that session. The claim's effect is based on the action that the player's character (Hero or Companion) took in that Region.

CALCULATING DARKNESS AND ADVERSARY CLAIM

At the end of the Adventure Session, each player may have some amount of unresolved **DANGER**. When this happens, each player rolls **Npd** (roll your die N times, where N is your current danger). E.g. If A player has 3 Danger at the end of the Quest Phase, they roll their Die 3 times. This is rolled against the following chart.

Danger	Adversary Claim
1	Gain a FIAT
2-3	Gain a DARKNESS
4+	Gain NOTHING

After the players roll, the **ADVERSARY** adds any Darkness generated by the Danger Claim and the Darkness gained from the preceding Quest Phase (from players going down or other actions) to their current **DARKNESS POOL**.

SPENDING DARKNESS

After determining the effect of any unresolved Danger (if any), the Adversary may spend their Darkness to advance their clocks and issue Fiats.

To advance a **SEAL CLOCK**, the Adversary spends **1 DARKNESS** to advance the clock one tick. The exception to this is the final tick on any **SEAL** (the one required to break the Seal), which requires darkness equal to the number of **PLAYERS** in order to advance.

To advance the **RISING DARKNESS**, the Adversary spends darkness equal to the next level on the **RISING DARKNESS** (*i.e. it costs 3 Darkness to go from 2 to 3.*)

The Adversary cannot raise the Time Clocks via Darkness, only through Fiat and the March of Time.

BREAKING SEALS AND USING FIAT

When a Seal's final tick is cleared, the Seal is broken, and the Adversary can perform the action associated with that Seal.

A Fiat is similar to a Seal, but at a larger scale. A Fiat is the ultimate act for the Adversary; similar to a player spending Spirit, a Fiat allows the adversary to just "do" something – like make their side more powerful, Claim a Region, or inflict corruption.

Fiats are always going to be bad news for the players – and most will drive the story in a certain direction.

EXAMPLE FIATS

- △ Give a **HERO** a (resolvable) Corruption.
- Increase the **LEVEL** of a **FOE**.
- ☒ A Region previously **WON** by the players is **LOST**.
- ☒ A Region currently neutral **FALLS** to the Adversary.
- △ Demand a specific Hero goes on a specific Quest.
- Use a character's bond to sideline them for session.
- ☒ Advance the Clock by a tick.

THE MARCH PHASE

The players start the March Phase by resetting **SPIRIT** to their starting values and then setting their **DANGER** back to 0.

The Adversary advances the **TIME CLOCK** by one tick – this is the **MARCH OF TIME**.

After calculating and spending Darkness and Claim – we plan the next session and what our characters will be doing.

If the Adversary desires, they can spend a **FIAT** to make the players do something specific (a Ruin opens in the Lesser Tombstones, a Hero is kidnapped and marked by the Bane of Omens, etc.).

Otherwise, the players decide what their agenda is, and the Adversary will tell them where they can accomplish that goal. Then the players decide which Hero (or Heroes) will go on that Adventure, and which Companions will accompany them. This sets the Stakes for the next Quest Phase.

Each Hero is assigned to one of the tasks below. The tasks are then resolved in the next Tally Phase (except for Questing, which is resolved during the next, aptly named, Questing Phase).

QUEST

The Hero and selected Companions are going on an adventure.

DIPLOMACY

The Hero is sent to a region to sway it to the player's cause.

TRAVEL

An Adventure or Diplomacy can occur in any region of the Kingdom they are currently in, or any region that borders their current Kingdom. If they take the travel Action, they put themselves in any Kingdom - spending this session travelling.

GATHER INFORMATION

The Hero goes out to gather rumors, find information, do research, and otherwise spends their time finding details about an Adversary's plots and Seals.

RECRUIT & REINFORCE

The Hero attempts to increase their own forces. This could also mean casting a Ritual.

REST & RECUPERATE

The Hero heals and deals with a Corruption

BOND

The Hero creates a Bond with another Character.

Quest

Diplomacy

Travel

Gather

Recruit

Rest

Bond

THE FINAL BATTLE

TIME RUNS OUT

During each **MARCH PHASE**, take a moment to decide if the next session is the final session, the **FINAL BATTLE** between the Heroes and the Adversary.

The Final Battle is usually a decision between the Adversary player and the Hero players. During the March Phase, the group decides that the next session will be the **FINAL BATTLE**.

If the **ADVERSARY'S SECRET** has not been unlocked by the time that the **MARCH OF TIME** is full, the **ADVERSARY** may choose to begin the Final Battle, regardless of the wishes of the **HEROES**, and gets to announce the place of the conflict.

If **NIGHT FALLS**, the Adversary is free to act – but this does not necessarily require the Final Battle to start.

If it is not **NIGHT** and the **MARCH OF TIME** has not expired, but the Heroes have unlocked the Secret of the Adversary, the **HEROES** are allowed to determine the time and place of the clash.

Otherwise, the Adversary and the Heroes agree on a time and place to settle this once and for all.

Great and
Terrible



THE CALL TO ARMS

For Each **REGION** that the Adversary has **WON** plus each remaining **FOE**, the Adversary gains an **ARMY**. If an Adversary is **HUGE**, they count as an army themselves. If a **FOE** is Huge, they provide a bonus **ARMY**.

For each **REGION** that the Heroes have **WON**, and for each of their own **FORCES**, they receive an **ARMY**.

An **ARMY** can be used like a **FORCE**, but primarily it is a “hit point” for the final battle. During a **SCALE** clash - instead of testing **DANGER** (when its against the heroes) or **LOSING HEARTS** (when its against the Adversary), that side loses **ARMIES** equal to the **pd** roll.

FINAL BATTLE PHASE

Follow the rules for the March Phase, and all of the **HEROES** and the **COMPANIONS** travel to the place that will be the site of the **FINAL BATTLE** – usually the **DARK TOWER** itself, but it's possible that the story has lead us somewhere different.

The **FINAL BATTLE** replaces all of the usual phases of the last session – instead focusing on creating scenes where each player (including the Adversary) gets an opportunity for a final, cinematic scene for their characters. This scene should result in a **DANGER ROLL** (or **ROLLS**) or at least a series of **ACTION** rolls.

In between these scenes, narrate the actions of your forces and armies as they clash on the field of battle. Pull back from the heroes and use the **SCALE** rules to show armies attacking Titans, Dragons laying siege to villages, and epic clashes between wizards.

During the final session, the Players are looking to use all of the treasure, magic, and forces that they have acquired. They are leveraging the Regions that they have won throughout the game.

For each **TREASURE** spent, take the stage and create a scene that results in a potential Victory for the Heroes.

The Adversary is looking to leverage their open Seals and remaining Foes. For each Foe and Seal, create a scene that shows their effect on this final battle – how it undid the last Heroic Victory.

THE EPILOGUE

At the end of this struggle, it should be clear to all whether the Heroes will take the day, or the Adversary shall claim victory. Roll the Dice. Spend your very last resource. And may the Gods Above and Below protect you. Huzzah! This will be a day long remembered in song and myth!

Being the Adversary

The Adversary Sheet

Creating the Adversary

Hazards in the Four Kingdoms

Everything is Player Facing

Clocks, Seals, and Secrets

The Rising Darkness

Hazards



Within the Dark Tower

chapter ten



THE ADVERSARY SHEET

You can copy the Adversary Sheet on page 204, or download a form-fillable version from 9thlevel.com/resources.

1 - THE RESOLVER. The left-hand side of the Adversary Sheet is the **RETURN TO DARK TOWER FANTASY ROLEPLAYING** Resolver.

2 - NAME. The Name of the Adversary and any notes that you feel are relevant.

3 - THE SECRET. As long as the players have not unlocked the **SECRET**, the Adversary has the edge **TERRIBLE**.

4 - The Adversary's EDGES.

5 - The Adversary is always Level 5.

6 - HEARTS. The number of **HEARTS** the Adversary has.

7 - THE MARCH OF TIME. As the party uses **TIME** as a resource, this ticks up the clock. When the clock is full, The Adversary may move to the **FINAL BATTLE**.

8 - THE DARKNESS. The world is "Light" until this section has its 4th mark, after which the world moves to "Twilight". When this is full, "**NIGHT FALLS**" and the **ADVERSARY** is free to move about the game world.

9 - SEALS. Each Seal should have a name and a brief description of the effect.

10 - SEAL CLOCK. When you claim **DARKNESS** and spend them on advancing these clocks, fill in a wedge for each Darkness spent. The final wedge costs one Darkness per player to fill. The seal is broken, or activated when the clocks are completely filled.

11 - FOES. Name of the Foes that are part of the Adversary's plots.

12 - FOE EDGES. Foes can have up to 2 edges.

13 - FOE LEVEL. At the start of the game, the Adversary names 4 foes (one each of levels 1,2,3, and 4). They may later add additional Level 1 and Level 2 foes from seals or other story activities.

14. FOE HEARTS. The number of Hearts each foe has.

15. DARKNESS POOL from **ADVERSARY CLAIM**.

16. Unspent **FIATS** from **ADVERSARY CLAIM**.

Return to Dark Tower

Fantasy Roleplaying

THE ADVERSARY

Resolver

	Banner <i>banner</i> 1
	Books <i>tactics</i> 2 3
	Boots <i>march</i> 3 4 5
	Blades <i>battle</i> 4 5 6 7
	Bones <i>defend</i> 5 6 7 8 9
	Reinforce <i>reinforce</i> 4 6 8 10

Darkness Pool

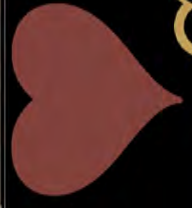





Fiat



The Adversary



March of Time



Great and Terrible



Edges

1,2,3 **Light**. Reinforce succeeds.
The Adversary confined to the Tower.
4,5,6 **Twilight**. Negotiate Reinforce.
7+ **Night Falls**. Reinforce fails.
The Adversary is free.

Foes

		
4	2	
		
3	1	

Seals

CREATING THE ADVERSARY

In Return to Dark Tower a singular foe – a powerful evil – has taken over control of the vast powers of the Dark Tower. You are that evil.

There are 3 ways to create the Adversary:

- △ Choose an Adversary from the World of the Four Kingdoms
- Create your own Adversary
- ☒ Create an Adversary with the players using the **QUANDOS VORN** Method

CHOOSE AN ADVERSARY

The simplest method is to select one of the Adversaries that appear in the board game Return to Dark Tower. Each Adversary is ready to be unleashed against the players and fully detailed on pages 168-175. You can also download sheets for these Adversaries at www.9thlevel.com/resources.

Even if you don't want to use an existing Adversary, you will want to review these premade Adversaries for ideas about what an Adversary and a Seal should look like.

CREATE YOUR OWN ADVERSARY

To create your own Adversary, first think about the kind of antagonist that you want to play. Do you want to be a warrior-god? A wizard of unearthly might? A treasure-hungry dragon? A spider lord of whispers and dark delights? Or something unspeakable perhaps?

Give your villain a name.

Determine a few Edges that define your Villain. These should be your signature, go-to moves.

Select (or create) one Foe each of levels 1, 2, 3, and 4. Record them on your sheet as well – including their edges and hearts (listed in the respective Monster section). You can use Hazards from this book or from any **MAZES**-compatible supplement.

Now, think of your grand plan. How do you accomplish it? Write down pieces of the plan as **SEALS**. Review the Adversaries in this book to get good ideas for some Seals. Look at the **FIATS** on page 144 for other ideas.

Now, get ready to place the players in danger, and keep them there.

THE QUANDOS VORN METHOD

The Quandos Vorn Method is named after the enigmatic villain of Robin D. Laws' *The Gaeen Reach RPG* (itself based on the enigmatic villain of Jack Vance's *Gaeen Reach* novels).

Each player, while making their **HERO**, is asked a simple question – **WHY HAVEN'T YOU DEFEATED THE ADVERSARY?**

Each of these statements is then used to craft one of the Adversary's **SEALS**, and bringing the statements together creates the outline of who the Adversary is. The best practice is to use these statements to define a characteristic (the Adversary is the greatest fire mage in the world), a source of power or wealth (they have a vault of ancient treasure), a powerful item (they have an amulet of immortality), or a power (they are a god born out of time and space) that the Adversary has. Then, describe **WHY** this item or

power is stopping the players from defeating the Adversary. Finally, by describing the way the players could surmount that obstacle, each item or power reveals a **SEAL** that can be addressed or attacked in some way.

This is the preferred method for creating a new Adversary as part of Session Zero play.

Example:

The party and the Adversary have determined that the Adversary is named The Invisible Dread.

Brian's character Yellow Lemons decides that he hasn't been able to defeat the Invisible Dread because the Adversary possesses a magic sword called "The Shadow of All Good Deaths" that allows him to both turn invisible and teleport at will. Until the party can find an answer to that sword, they will be stymied.

The Adversary writes this down and then creates a seal "The Shadow of All Good Deaths".



HAZARDS IN THE FOUR KINGDOMS

Hazards (which is a catchall term that includes monsters, obstacles, challenges, etc.) have two “stats” in **RETURN TO DARK TOWER FANTASY ROLEPLAYING** – **HEARTS** (♥) and **LEVEL** (⚡).

HEARTS are the amount of damage or degree of effect needed to resolve a Hazard. Think of it like a player’s Danger Roll – when players do something to address the Hazard, have them roll their effect and reduce the hearts of the Hazard by that amount.

LEVEL is an abstract term for the general power of a Hazard, and informs how serious the effects are when a player fails to save against a Monster’s attack or fails at their attempt to address a Hazard. Since you aren’t rolling dice as the Maze Controller, you apply an effect based on the **LEVEL** of the Hazard



and its description.

Sometimes, it is appropriate to call for a **CONSEQUENCE** when a player fails on their action (I jump over the chasm, and fail the roll, so I fall). Other times, Consequences will occur when the player is **SAVING** against the action of the **ADVERSARY** (the Oreks attack you, the Gaze Eternal uses its magic to take control of your mind).

The chart below is a guide for applying Consequences for failed Actions and Saves.

Level	Enemy	Danger	Social	Battle
Level 1	Henchmen	advantaged	1 Spirit	1 Force
Level 2	Monster	normal	0 Spirit	pd Forces
Level 3	Elite	normal	1 Spirit	pd Forces
Level 4	Marquee	disadvantaged	1 Spirit	2pd Forces
Level 5	The Adversary	disadvantaged	3 Spirit	2pd Forces

EVERYTHING IS PLAYER FACING

The Player is always the “acting force” in the fiction of the game. As the Adversary, you never roll dice to see if something succeeds or fails. Instead, you define what a Hazard is, and what it takes to defeat or overcome it, and then you let the story happen.

For a Monster, this means that you never “roll to attack the players.” Rather, you state that the Monster attacks and the player rolls to defend or avoid it. You might say, “the Mormo rakes at you with its undying claws, what do you do?” The player then rolls to see if they escape harm. If the player succeeds, the Monster’s attack misses or is otherwise prevented. If the player fails, they take the damage or other effect associated with the Monster’s attacks.

For a Trap, you describe the environment and let the players investigate and, if they discover the trap, explain how they approach it. The player might ask: “as a Spidersweb Assassin who is Cunning, do I notice anything about the door?” You know the door is trapped (or you spend a Darkness to make it trapped – take that!), so you reply: “it appears to have a strange mechanism in the handle.” You don’t roll to see if the

player finds the trap, or if the trap affects them. The player rolls to see what they discover, avoid, or withstand.

During a social situation, or similar, let role-play go as far as it can, but whenever the players push for outcomes that aren’t guaranteed (like lying, cheating, inspiring, romancing, etc.) have them make a roll. **BOOKS** for logic, knowledge, perception; **BOOTS** for physical grace, movement, dance; **BLADES** for intimidation and verbal violence; and **BONES** for standing firm against fear, danger, and the like.

During a Battle, when dealing with large-scale forces, you still have the characters roll – but when they are rolling, it is to determine success or failure with regard to the larger picture, not just their individual character. Blades rolls for large scale are at the level of Forces – when there is an effect, it’s affecting several people, not just one person. See page 40 for more on Scale.

Against the Adversary, it works similarly to a Battle. When the players are facing the machinations of the Adversary, treat it like a large-scale battle – except if it is the Final Battle.

When the players can directly interact with the Adversary, you should treat the Adversary as a powerful Monster.

CLOCKS, SEALS, AND SECRETS

On your Adversary Sheet are several **SEALS**, each with a matching **CLOCK**.

Seals are ticking time bombs that are set off by spending enough Darkness (we call advancing a Seal by spending Darkness “ticking a clock”). Every Adversary has two required Seals: **RISING DARKNESS** and **THE MARCH OF TIME**. In addition, each Adversary has several other Seals that are all specific to that Adversary.

Each Adversary in this book includes a few example Seals. An enemy can have as many clocks as you want – and feel free to add new ones as the game evolves – but remember that you only have so much Darkness, so spreading it out across too many clocks isn’t going to get you anywhere.

When creating a new Adversary, it is helpful to think of some things that you may want to spend Darkness on. These can be used to define your Seals, and could include things like wandering monsters, special actions for a boss monster or a lieutenant, traps, gaining control of regions, blocking regions or region types, etc.

When a Clock is filled, the Seal is opened, and its effect is “added” to the game. This occurs during the March Phase, as the opened Seals could affect what the players are going to do next.



Great and Terrible



CLAIMING AND SPENDING DARKNESS

The most common ways to gain Darkness are introducing a Hazard to the players, causing a player to “do down,” and Claims during the Tally Phase.

During the Tally Phase, the Adversary is going to Claim some amount of Darkness. This can be saved to serve as their fuel for the next session, or can be used to tick clocks, add foes, or the like.

Every Adversary’s first clock is called **THE RISING DARKNESS**. It starts at 0 and is raised by spending Darkness. As the Clock fills, the “Darkness Level” rises (see the Rising Darkness on page 158). As the Darkness rises, the world itself seems to gray – our cinematic adventure gets more dangerous and threatening.

Darkness can also be used to fuel the obstacles, traps, and monsters populating adventures. In these instances, you will spend Darkness just as the characters spend Spirit and Treasure – to let you do things like cast a spell, escape Deus-ex-Machina-style, do additional damage, avoid things the players have done, etc. These “Darkness Spends” are a way of creating custom actions within a session

(without creating additional rules to handle every occasion), while maintaining a sense that the Adversary’s ability to stymie the players—although great—is not unlimited.

When you spend Darkness for player-facing activities, it accomplishes three positive goals. First, it signals to the players that they are succeeding (because you have to spend a resource to stop them). Second, it helps to reinforce the idea that Darkness is something the players should fear. Finally, it makes your adversarial behavior feel more fair; even though you may be walking them into chambers filled with natural gas or shooting poison darts at them, linking those actions to an important resource makes it feel fairer than just tormenting them whenever you want “because I said so.”

Finally, when the chips are down against the bad guys, you can spend a Darkness to stand up a dropped Hazard. This will allow you to keep an interesting encounter going even when the party slaughters everything that it sees.

THE RISING DARKNESS

The Adversary is being held back (often physically) from directly affecting the Heroes. The Rising Darkness Clock on the Adversary sheet represents the Adversary's growing influence, and how close it is to being able to confront the Heroes directly. The Rising Darkness Clock is also a barometer of the danger facing the Heroes and a way to provide pacing and control to a story. As the Darkness rises, things get harder for the characters. Over the course of a game, it will continue to rise and get deadlier, culminating in a battle with the Adversary, itself.



THE RISING DARKNESS is more expensive to tick up than other clocks – since it is such a powerful, overarching effect. To raise the level of the Rising Darkness, you spend Darkness equal to the level you are going to (so, going from 4 to 5 requires 5 Darkness).



LIGHT **1, 2, 3 DARKNESS**

When the world is **LIGHT**, the Adversary is confined to the Tower, and their influence on the world is minimal. While the **RIISING DARKNESS** is 3 or less, things look “bright” and the world is still “covered in Light and Hope.”

During **LIGHT**, the party’s lamps are shining, and their bellies are full. While it is still Light the players **ALWAYS** succeed when they roll **REINFORCE**.

TWILIGHT **4, 5, 6 DARKNESS**

Come **TWILIGHT**, The Adversary is gaining control and is nearing its escape from the confines of the Tower. They can take more direct actions against the players but are still prevented from intervening directly.

TWILIGHT reigns while the **RIISING DARKNESS** clock is filling, but not yet full (i.e. from 4 to 6). This is the main meat of any campaign. There are no advantages or

disadvantages when things are in this **TWILIGHT** state.

When a character rolls **REINFORCE**, they may spend a **SPIRIT** or **TREASURE**, or make a deal with the Adversary, to succeed. In some situations, they may be able to take a narrative concession – succeeding, but at a cost. This is called a “negotiated success”.

NIGHT FALLS **7+ DARKNESS**

When **NIGHT FALLS**, The Adversary is free from their constraints and can act directly against the heroes – even attacking them, if they so choose. If the **RIISING DARKNESS** would be greater than 6, things are bleak, and **NIGHT FALLS**.

The characters **ALWAYS** lose on a **REINFORCE** roll – your underlings can do nothing to help you at this point. The mood is dark, gritty, and scary. When rolling against **DANGER** at **NIGHT**, the roll is **DISADVANTAGED**.

CONSEQUENCES OF FAILING AGAINST HAZARDS

Level	Enemy	Danger	Social	Battle
Level 1	Henchmen	advantaged	1 Spirit	1 Force
Level 2	Monster	normal	0 Spirit	pd Forces
Level 3	Elite	normal	1 Spirit	pd Forces
Level 4	Marquee	disadvantaged	1 Spirit	2pd Forces
Level 5	The Adversary	disadvantaged	3 Spirit	2pd Forces

TIME IS RUNNING OUT

Time is inexorable and always moving forward. During each March phase, we advance the Time Clock one. The Adversary can increase that time further by spending Fiat.

When the **TIME CLOCK** is filled, time has run out for the Four Kingdoms and the plans of the Adversary are reaching fulfillment. Once that happens, the next session of the game is the **FINAL BATTLE** (see page 146).

DEFINING SEALS AND HAZARDS

When you define a Hazard, you will assign it a Level and Hearts, and then provide any necessary Edges (as you would a character). Remember, everything is player-facing – edges don't provide you Advantage, but they could impose Disadvantage on the players or provide guideposts on how to spend Darkness when adjudicating the Hazard.

HAZARD HEARTS

A Hazard – whether it's a character, a monster, a trap, or an environment – will always have a **HEARTS** score, which we denote with a ♥. The Hearts of a Hazard represents how much abstract stress it can take before it is overcome. So, Monsters have Hearts to represent the damage they can take in combat before being defeated, but a locked door, a flaming wall, or a bridge of mental energy could have **HEARTS** as well, representing the durability of the obstacle or the effort needed to overcome it. When attacks or other endeavors are successful against a Hazard, reduce the Hazard's Hearts by the **EFFECT ROLL**.

Most Hazards don't have the option of taking Corruptions, so when an obstacle runs out of **HEARTS**, you can only refill its Hearts by spending a **DARKNESS**. If you do, reset the Hazard's Hearts to its starting value.

HAZARD LEVEL

When creating an obstacle, you need to define the potential effect it could have, or its general power level – called **LEVEL** (this is called **DANGER** in **MAZES FRP**). Level determines the Consequences that a Hazard inflicts in combat, as a failure, or as a trap.

Levels range from 1 through 5. A Level of 1 is low, a Level of 3 is very dangerous, while a Level of 4 or 5 is reserved for named enemies and the Adversary themselves.

When a player fails a roll against a Hazard, use the chart to determine the **CONSEQUENCES** based on the Hazard's Level.

**The dice notation pd refers to your polymorph die – roll your die and take that result as a number.*

FOES

Over the next few pages are examples of foes that you may use in a **RETURN TO DARK TOWER** game. They are all of the foes that appear in the base Return to Dark Tower board game. For additional foes, you

can use the Hazards described in **MAZES** Fantasy Roleplaying or use the tools there to convert any **OSR/** Old School fantasy **RPG** monster for use in your game.

A hazard record looks like this:


HAZARD NAME

Edges

L X H X (Level X, Hearts X)

A description of the monster or hazard and its effects in the game.

An Adversary is a special type of **FOE**, but their record also contains a section for Secrets and Seals.

FOE NAME				
Level	Hearts			
<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Edge</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Edge</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Edge</td> </tr> </table>		Edge	Edge	Edge
Edge				
Edge				
Edge				
<div>Secrets & Seals</div> <div>  </div>				

HAZARD EDGES

Hazards, like player characters, have Edges. You are free to assign to your Hazards any of the pre-made Edges found in this book. You can also give your Hazards any player Edge, or Edges of your own creation.

Some of the most ubiquitous Edges are described below, for your reference.

AREA – Attacks from this Hazard apply to every adventurer in the same room or area.

ARMORED – This enemy is well-armored or shielded. Adventurers are Disadvantaged when rolling **EFFECT** against this Hazard.

BALEFUL – This Hazard is inherently caustic or dangerous, causing damage to all that come in range. The Hazard may emit burning flames, intense cold, poisonous gas, acid, crackling electricity, or some other damaging effect. When making attacks against this hazard, the player will always take a **DANGER!**

BEAST – This Hazard is bestial and animal-like. Though cunning, they lack the intelligence to make plans.

DARK – This Hazard is a harbinger of doom and adds to the overall Darkness of the World. When encountered, take an additional Darkness (2 Darkness instead of the usual 1).

DISEASED – This creature is a disease-riddled plague carrier. Whenever this creature deals damage, the target needs to make a **BONES** save, or they take a corruption **SHAKEN**, **WEAK**, or **FEVERISH** (see page 56).

FLYING – This Monster can either fly at will or is considered to be flying at all times. Attacking a flying creature without being at the same altitude imposes Disadvantage. Flying creatures can cover great distances on the world map.

GRAPPLING – This Hazard attempts to grapple, hold, and stop its targets. Escaping from a grapple is required before you can affect this hazard (usually accomplished by making a Bones save to break free).

HORDE – This Hazard is a swarm or large mob. Even if you are a better fighter than the Horde, it will take time and energy to disperse and destroy it. A Horde requires multiple saves to defend against its actions (equal to its Level).

HUGE – This Hazard is much larger than the characters. Attacks against it are always Advantaged (because of its large size), but effect rolls are Disadvantaged.

HUMANOID – This Hazard is a person, or at least person-like. Humanoid enemies may be reasoned with, bargained with, or swayed by charm and wit. They often can be paid off.

IMMORTAL– Once defeated, this monster will always return to terrify other adventurers or hunt down those that slew it. The method for delivering a final death to an immortal being is different for each of these special creatures.

MAGIC – Hazards of this type have Magical abilities and magical resistances. They require magical means to harm them, either magic weapons or spells. Magic Foes may be wizards or spellcasters. Or just made from magic.

MELEE – These enemies like to close with their prey – and are adept at fighting. They create Disadvantage for ranged fighters and Heroes not of the Sword Aspect.

MINION – This Monster is weak and not a threat to the party. Minions do not add Darkness when encountered, and actions against them are Advantaged.

NAMED – A **NAMED HAZARD** is a special type of enemy. Named Hazards are like Characters, in that they have a role to play in the world that is greater than just being defeated by the player characters. All Level 4 and Level 5 enemies are **NAMED**. Named Hazards will often use Darkness to “escape” rather than be defeated – so that they can appear again later. Named Hazards can take Corruptions to refill their Hearts without having to spend a Darkness.

NEUTRAL – Neutral encounters do not immediately add a Darkness to the party when encountered unless the party provokes violence. When this happens, the party takes a Darkness.

RESISTANT – This Hazard only loses 1 Heart, regardless of Effect roll, when damaged by non-magical things.

SLOW – This Hazard does not move quickly. All Boots Saves against this Hazard are Advantaged.

STEALTH – This Monster is especially talented at dodging attacks and remaining hidden. Attacks against this monster are always Disadvantaged when the monster is not actively attacking.

SUMMONER – This hazard can call forth a particular type of creature to their aid. This can be done once for free, but additional uses of this Edge require spending a Darkness.

TERRIBLE – This enemy is beyond the party’s current ability. Fighting something like this is going to take its toll on the party. All actions against this foe are always at a Disadvantage, and all failed Action and Save rolls against it result in a Corruption or damage. The Adversary is always **TERRIBLE** until the party has completed a specific quest that negates this advantage. On the Adversary Sheet is a mark called “Great and Terrible” with a lock to record if this quest has been completed..

TRAP – This Hazard is a machine and is susceptible to the Edge **GEARWISE**.

UNDEAD – These unliving creatures are cold to the touch and lack the typical vulnerabilities of living creatures (they don't need to eat, breathe, etc.). Effect Rolls against the **UNDEAD** are Disadvantaged unless they are Magic.

VULNERABLE – This enemy is vulnerable to a specific attack, weapon, or item. Characters using the appropriate tool are Advantaged when rolling **EFFECT** against this Hazard.



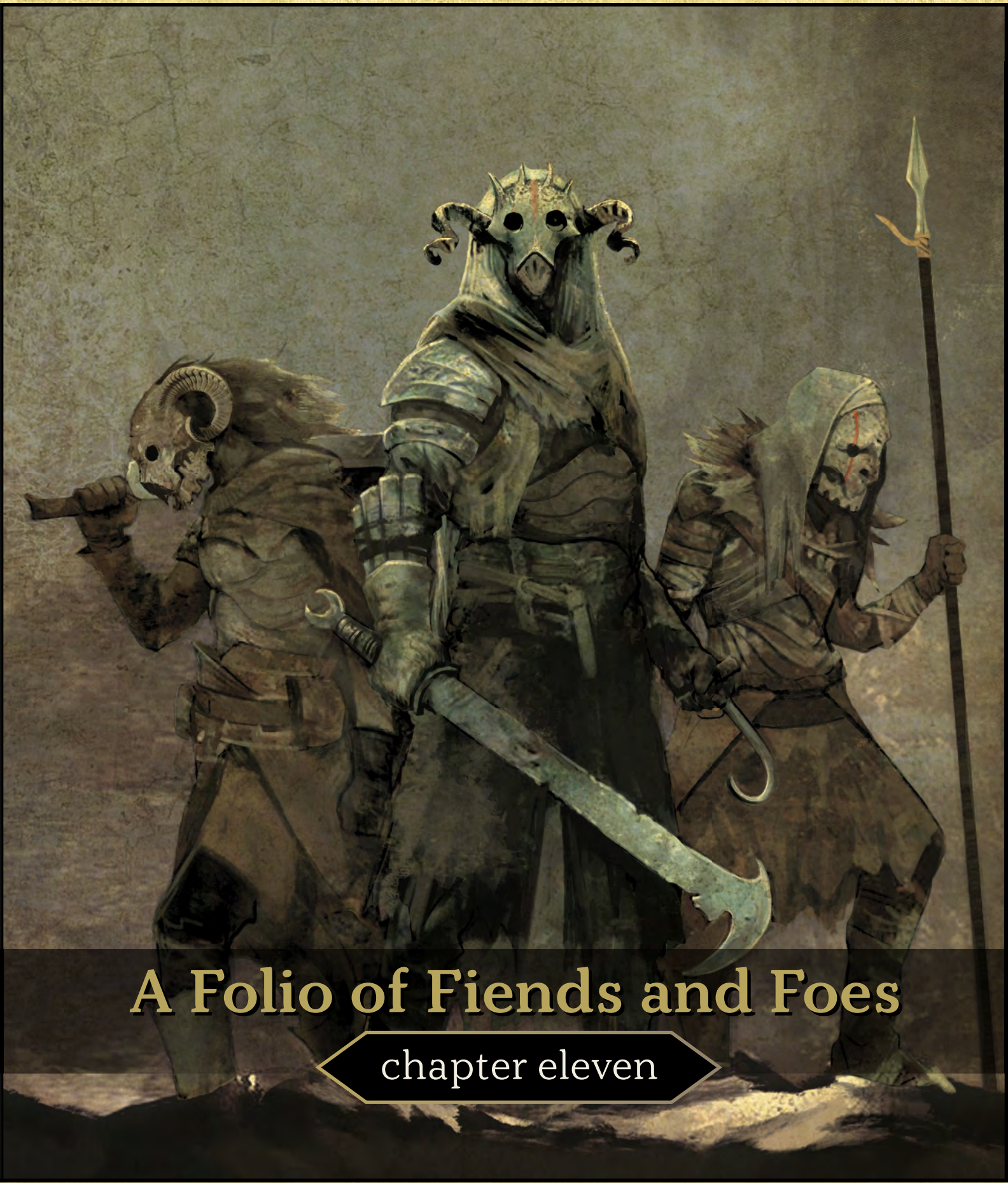
Adversary & Foe Descriptions

Adversaries

Ashstrider
Bane of Omens
Empress of Shades
Gaze Eternal
Gravemaw
Isa the Exile
Lingering Rot
Utuk-ku

Foes

Brigands
Clan of Neuri
Kingdom Dragons
Frost Trolls
Lemure
Mormo
Oreks
Shadow Wolves
Spine Fiend
Striga
Titan
Widowmade Spider



A Folio of Fiends and Foes

chapter eleven



THE ASHSTRIDER

5

13

Beast

Fast

Magic



THE ASHSTRIDER is a being of flame and hatred. It wants nothing more than destruction, and its minions and monsters are mostly just taking advantage of the Chaos in the wake of this monstrous magical being.

Secrets & Seals

FEAR THE WELL. Ashstrider remains Terrible until the heroes can bless their weapons with the ancient magics housed in the Well of All Rivers.

VOLCANOES ERUPT! Mountains erupt into lava, destroying nearby regions (**LOST**) and making all Mountains impassable.

RELEASE THE HOUNDS Ashhounds, small ashstrider-like dogs, are added to the Foes (L1).

BANE OF OMENS

5

11

Agile

Deadly

Stealth



THE BANE OF OMENS is the

greatest assassin in the Four Kingdoms, and perhaps beyond. After a lifetime of killing for kings and lords, the Bane has taken it upon themselves to satisfy an ancient prophecy and claim the mantle of Emperor of the Four Kingdoms.

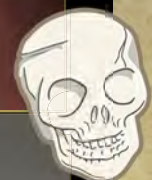
Secrets & Seals

TRUE NAME. Until the heroes can find the true name of the Bane of Omens, he will always remain one step ahead of them.

THE BLACK MARK. Put the Black Mark on one of the Heroes. Assassins all over the world are now targeting them for death.

TIP THE SCALES. The Hero with the Black Mark spends nights as the pawn of the Bane of Omens, killing and undoing the work of the Heroes.

PROPHECIES. The Tower provides the location of the Crown of Conviction – the last piece needed to satisfy the Prophecy of the Black Emperor.



EMPRESS OF SHADES

5

17

Ardent

Stealth

Undead

THE EMPRESS OF SHADES

has ascended to the tower to spread her kingdom of rot and death from the underworld across the Four Kingdoms. A demon shade from the Shadow Worlds, the Empress of Shades prefers to let her minions work in secret – but once she has completed her machinations, she will send the world into an eternal twilight from which she will rule.

Secrets & Seals

PLANES WALKER. The Empress is all but invulnerable while she remains in the Shadow World. The heroes will need to retrieve a key to the Shadow World in order to fight her directly.

GREEN RIDER. Unleash a plague on the world. Choose a region type, those areas become plague-ridden. This seal can be opened multiple times.

ARISE SKELETONS. Raise an army of skeletal warriors in each region affected by plague.

GAZE ETERNAL

5

16

Armored

Magic

Lorewise



No one truly knows what

the **GAZE ETERNAL** wants. An immortal sorcerer, the Gaze has once again returned to the Four Kingdoms and this time it looks like they are trying to use Azkol's tower to destroy the world. We may never know their reasons. The Gaze Eternal's machinations are strange and patient – pulling strings and making plays across decades and dimensions.

Secrets & Seals

GLASS OF HOURS. The Gaze Eternal had already seen everything that the heroes have done and will do - unless they can secure the Glass of Hours that will allow them to step out of time for 60 seconds.

CLOCK OF IRANZ. A giant clock is erected in any region which causes the sun to become stuck in the sky, bringing disaster to weather and farms.

AZKOL'S CALCULATIONS. The Gaze Eternal finds Azkol's book with the mathematics needed for a powerful spell to create Clockwork Dragons.

PORTAL TO YESTERDAY. Send the Heroes to another time where they will unknowingly encounter the person that will someday become the Gaze Eternal and provide the secret the Adversary needs to accomplish this goal.



THE GRAVEMAW

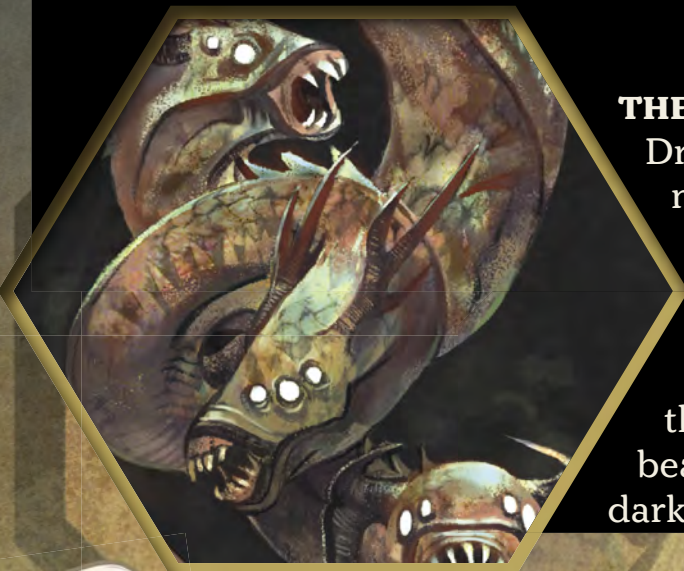
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30

Beast

Huge

Melee



THE GRAVEMAW was once a Kingdom Dragon, but eons of dark magic and mutation have turned it into something unknowable and strange. A worm of massive size with many heads and countless eyes, the Gravemaw has waited – perhaps slumbering – beneath the Tower since the days of Azkol. The beastlord has arisen and is spreading its dark mutations across the world.

Secrets & Seals

ALCHEMY. The heroes need to decant a poison that will make the Gravemaw susceptible to attack. That poison can only be made from the living blood of a Kingdom Dragon taken under the light of a full moon.

HEADS AND TAILS. The normal beasts of the world begin to grow second heads and strange limbs. Mutated animals follow the will of the Gravemaw.

DARKNESS BELOW. Mutated Dirt Wurms erupt from the deserts and destroy villages and buildings. They hunt the heroes across any Desert Region.

LINGERING ROT

5

0

Melee

Diseased

Undead



THE LINGERING ROT is both a demonic undead entity and a disease. A crawling mycelium feasting on death and decay, the Lingerin Rot isn't an Adversary, it's more a force of Entropy – a law of nature, but a law of nature that is hungry and relentless. The Rot can appear anywhere its spores have spread and it can take over control of the living and dead to exert its mindless will.

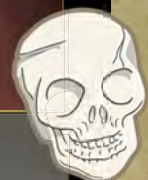
Secrets & Seals

PANDEMIC. Without protection from the spores of the Lingerin Rot, the heroes will fall to its mind control. They must find a way to prevent themselves from being infected.

SLEEPER AGENT.. One companion (not currently being played) is attacked and its brain is filled with venom. They are an unknowing pawn of the Rot.

WATER LIKE BLOOD. The lakes are filled with fungal spores, transforming their water into a blood-like substance. This leads to a rampant spread of the Lingerin Rot to all Lakes.

SKULLROT. Wherever the Rot has spread, mushroom-encrusted skeletons begin a slow march across the land, harvesting everything.



UTUK KU

5

24

Baleful

Magic

Undead



A generation ago, a Frost

Troll King was defeated in battle and left to die in the highest mountains. In the cold and the quiet, the Troll whispered to all of the dark gods: give me the strength to achieve my vengeance, and I will do thy bidding. **UTUK-KU THE ICE HERALD** was raised into a creature part demon and part troll by the Gods of Ice and Death. He quickly sated his vengeance, and now seeks to Herald in the Final Winter – a never-ending season of cold and death. He is the willing and exuberant prophet of the end times.

Secrets & Seals

BY THE FORGE. Powered by the Gods of Ice and Death, the heroes will need a weapon forged by the Gods of Life.

WINTER COMES. A cold snap makes everywhere in the Four Kingdoms freezing and inhospitable. It starts in the mountains, then passes to the lakes and hills, and then to the grasslands, deserts, and forests.

OLD FOES. Utuk-ku raises their foe Utuk-rho from their grave and unleashes the Titan against a Hero's home, freezing the settlement solid and covering it with Trolls.

THE EXILE

5

9

Charming

Neutral

Wealthy



THE EXILE is

a strange

foe. Unlike the other Adversaries, The Exile is willing to talk it out – for a price. They want to rule the world, but only because they are wealthy – not because they are mad, evil, or otherworldly – just greedy.

Secrets & Seals



BLOODY LIES. The True Adversary is hidden behind a smokescreen named The Exile. Until you unmask **THE EXILE**, the heroes do not know the true enemy.

BRIGANDS

2

2

Humanoid

Stealth

Minion

BRIGANDS are everywhere in the Four Kingdoms. Disenfranchised warriors and thieves, brigands are a threat on every road and forest outside the major cities of the Four Kingdoms (represented on the map as the 4 “settlement types” of Village, Citadel, Bazaar, and Sanctuary). Brigands care more about treasure and gear than fighting, and would rather steal than fight.



CLAN OF NEURI

3

6

Dark

Humanoid

Magic

The **CLAN OF NEURI** worship dark spirits and demonic entities. They can be swayed to the cause of an Adversary for a variety of reasons, but are single-minded and psychotic about achieving the shadowy goals of their clan priest-chiefs. They prefer to use magic and guile rather than straight violence, nevertheless, a slaving death cultist is never something you want to fight on the battlefield.



KINGDOM DRAGON

4

16

Armored

Beast/Melee

Flying/Huge

Many dragon types exist, but the Four Kingdoms are home to a singular breed of powerful, large, bestial dragons. **KINGDOM DRAGONS** do not speak, but still have the cunning of an alpha predator. These huge monsters are covered in thick, metallic scales, and they attack prey with razor-sharp teeth and massive claws. Kingdom Dragons do not breathe fire or gas, but their bite and claws more than make up for that shortcoming.



FROST TROLL

3

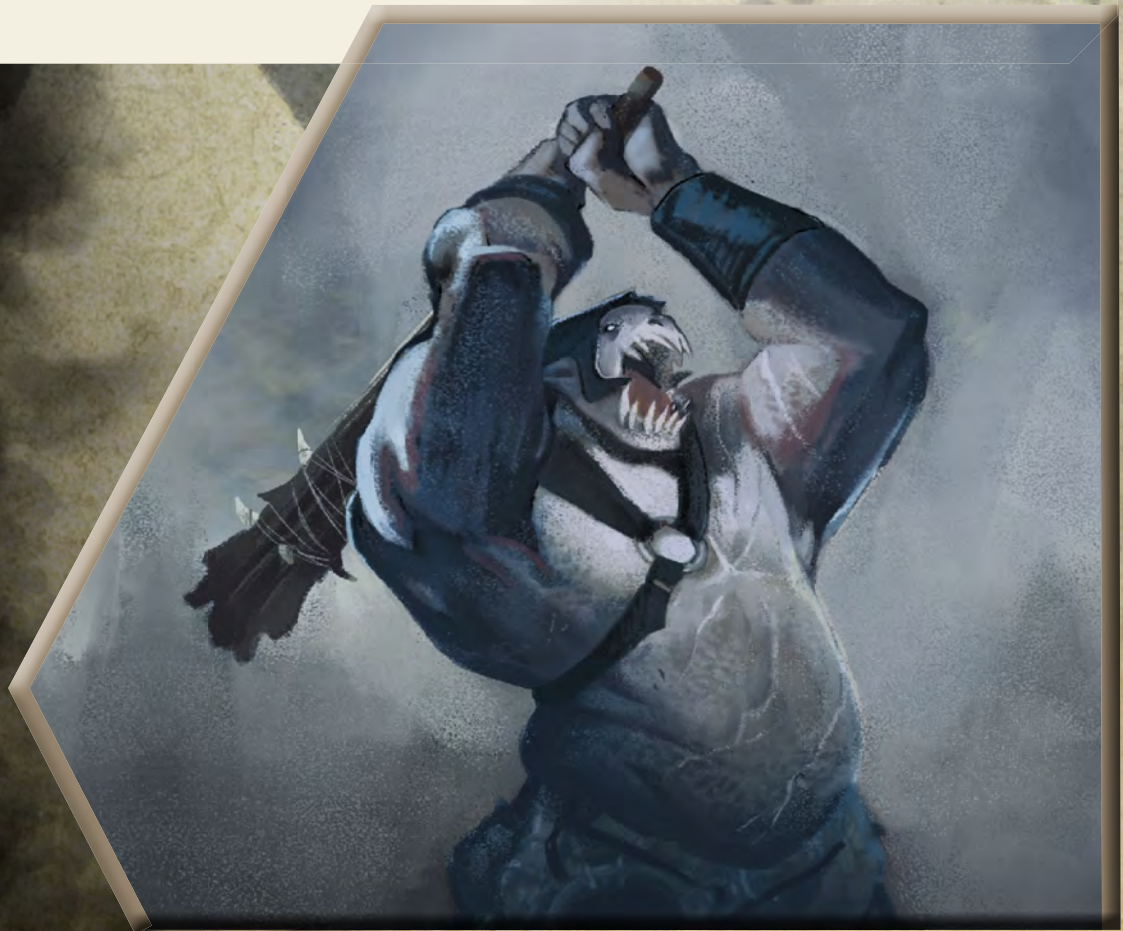
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Grappling

Humanoid

Melee

FROST TROLLS are much larger than humans but do not reach the size of giants or titans. With faces that are mostly jaw, their small black eyes are susceptible to bright lights. They have massive arms and swing clubs and axes of wood, bone, and rock. Frost Trolls delight in destruction - loving to burn and break buildings and other constructions.



LEMURE

3

9

Magic

Summoner

Undead

The **LEMURE** is a fearsome specter of the dead, appearing in guises both grotesque or beautiful. Lemures seek to drag souls with them back into the underworld. When faced with powerful magic, lemures will summon skeletons and other animated dead to aid them. A Lemure is seldom found outside of a civilized area and prefers to haunt shrines, dungeons, and graveyards.



MORMO

4

6

Dark

Stealth

Undead

The greatest thing to fear about the **MORMO** is that you don't know they are following you until it's too late. A Mormo is a hunter of spirits, seeking to feast on corpses while the spirit leaves the body. They live in the shadows and haunt dreams and darkness. If a Mormo can get someone alone, they may choose to haunt them rather than eat them. In these cases, the Mormo enters the person's spirit, which manifests as a particularly strong corruption. They use this hiding place to get closer to vulnerable targets and rich feeding grounds.



OREKS

2

4

Diseased

Melee

Undead

OREKS are a shambling cancer. They spread like a disease, taking lives and replacing them with an undead curse that makes their victims into the walking dead. Oreks reek of sulfur and corruption, and their host bodies are constantly falling apart unless they satisfy their need to kill. The energy of death and destruction keeps their skeletal and rotting flesh frames together – to seek out more pain and destruction.



SHADOW WOLF

2

3

Beast

Stealth

SHADOW WOLVES are hybrids of otherworldly shade and the finest hunting wolves – forming an unholy predator that will never give up a scent once it has it. Shadow Wolves always hunt as a pack, and though they are mostly corporeal, they are so good at hiding that they often seem to simply disappear into darkness and wooded areas. Shadow Wolves will attempt to remove guardians from around prey whenever possible. They are patient and persistent.



SPINE FIEND

2

9

Beast

Magic

Scuttling out of nightmares, these demonic beasts delight in killing and rending flesh. Covered in bone-like claws and horns, **SPINE FIENDS** seek to murder anything in their way. While they are demonic, they are simple beasts that lack subtlety or strategy - seeking only to kill and eat.



STRIGA

4

12

Baleful

Magic

Undead

The **STRIGA** is a fearsome foe that has sold its soul in exchange for power and immortality. Undead, but intelligent, the Striga is a weapon. A master of sword and magic, the Striga can be a hunter or a guardian, a general or an assassin.



TITAN

4

24

Armored

Huge

Melee

A **TITAN** is a warrior Giant, a survivor of some earlier age brought back with dark magic and spite. The Titan is a force of destruction, crushing everything in its path with a giant fist and massive weapon. Titans often destroy habitations without noticing, stomping on humans like a child would stomp ants.



WIDOWMADE

3

6

Beast

Dark

Stealth

The **WIDOWMADE** are the endless spawn of a demon-spider queen. Each Widowmade is born with one purpose: the destruction of a single individual. The Widowmade is part spy, part nightmare. The Widowmade can puppet other creatures by planting venom sacks into their brains that drive them mad. Once hatched, the Widowmade Spider relentlessly pursues the death of their victim for the glory of their creator.



Adversary Advice

Being the Adversary

Balancing Enemy and Storyteller

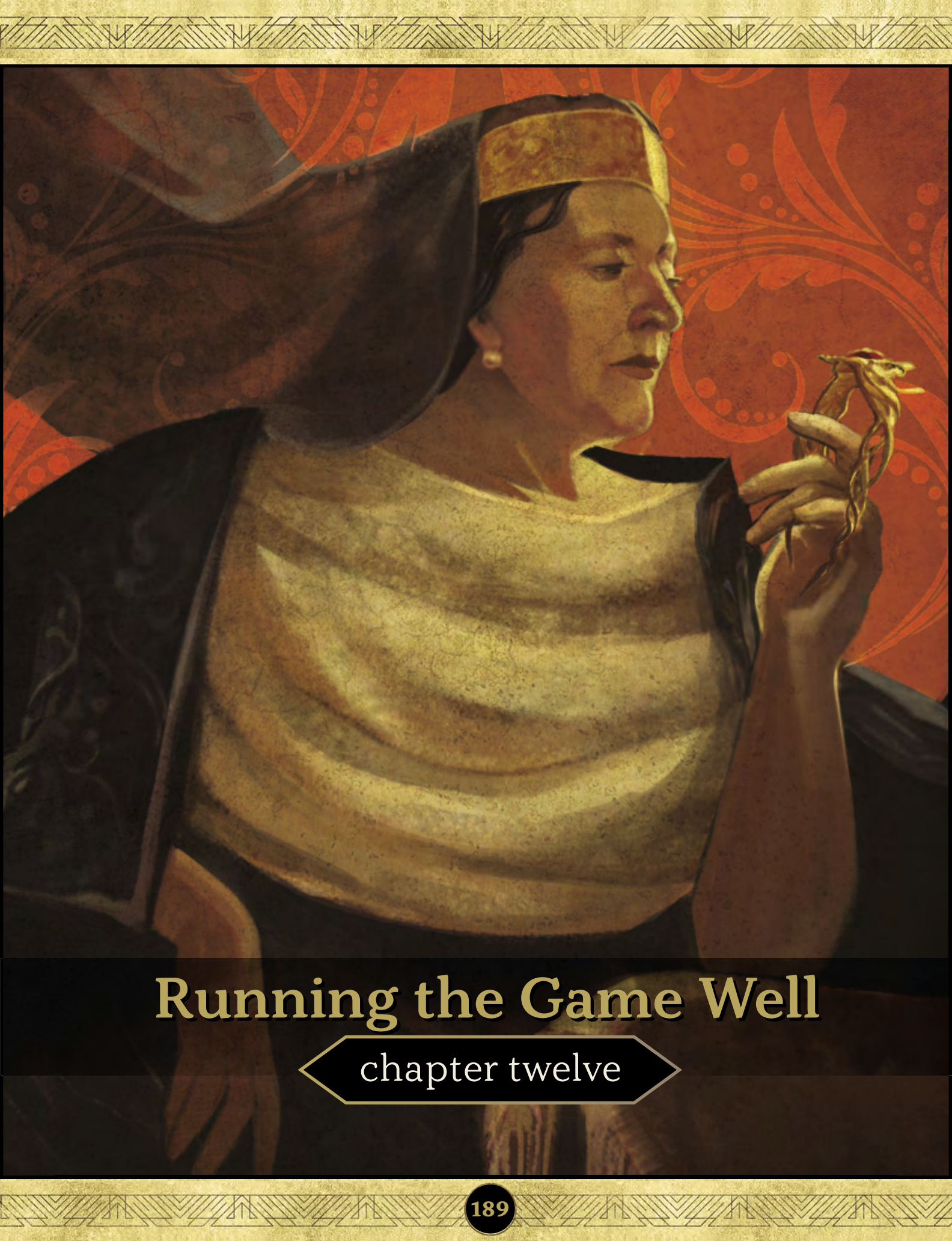
Emulating Tales of High Adventure

Telling a Story Together

Maps are Seldom Accurate

Rules and Systems

The Door to Adventure



Running the Game Well

chapter twelve

BEING THE ADVERSARY

RPGS are unique among games in that there is a storyteller who is both the helpmeet of the players and also their adversary. It is a unique position within all of entertainment, and since you have read this far into the rulebook, we assume that you want to join their ranks.

The player that runs the game in an **RPG** is called by many names. Originally, in the early 70s, they were referred to as “referees” or “judges,” which is derived from large-scale military and historical war gaming. In those games, the Judge set things up and acted as an impartial overseer of the game rules. The referee was also impartial, interpreting and creating rulings.

But, the Dungeon Master was different.

“Dungeon Master,” or “**DM**,” was the iconic name given to referees running games of Dungeons and Dragons. The **DM** didn’t just set up a game, they built a “dungeon,” which they dared players to enter and defeat. The unexpected thing about this was that the Dungeon Master wanted you to beat their dungeon. They wanted it to be fun to accomplish, but also hard. It

was supposed to be skill-intensive, but surmountable.

Since those days, we have had a horde of games offer different takes on the referee – not only with different names, but also different “core values.” The Game Master, the Storyteller, the Guide, the Mayor, Your Friend the Computer, the Facilitator, and a million others. We have fought and debated, destroyed, exiled, recreated, and rebuilt the role. Often, we have tried to remove it, or at least recast it – changing its form from adversary to facilitator and back again.

In **RETURN TO DARK TOWER FANTASY ROLEPLAYING**, we call this role the **ADVERSARY**.

YOU ARE THE ADVERSARY

As the Adversary, you are the master of ceremonies, and you have a unique role in the game: host, storyteller, and ultimately... well...an adversary to your players. You are the only one that knows the full extent of the perils that the adventurers will face.

You control the flow and timing of the game. You are “in control”

more than the other players: you control the speed of play and you get to decide when the story ends.

You also control the world that the players are inhabiting. You are the maker of monsters and the creator of challenges. Although the players determine what quests they will pursue each game session, it is your responsibility to identify the available quests and plan the sessions.

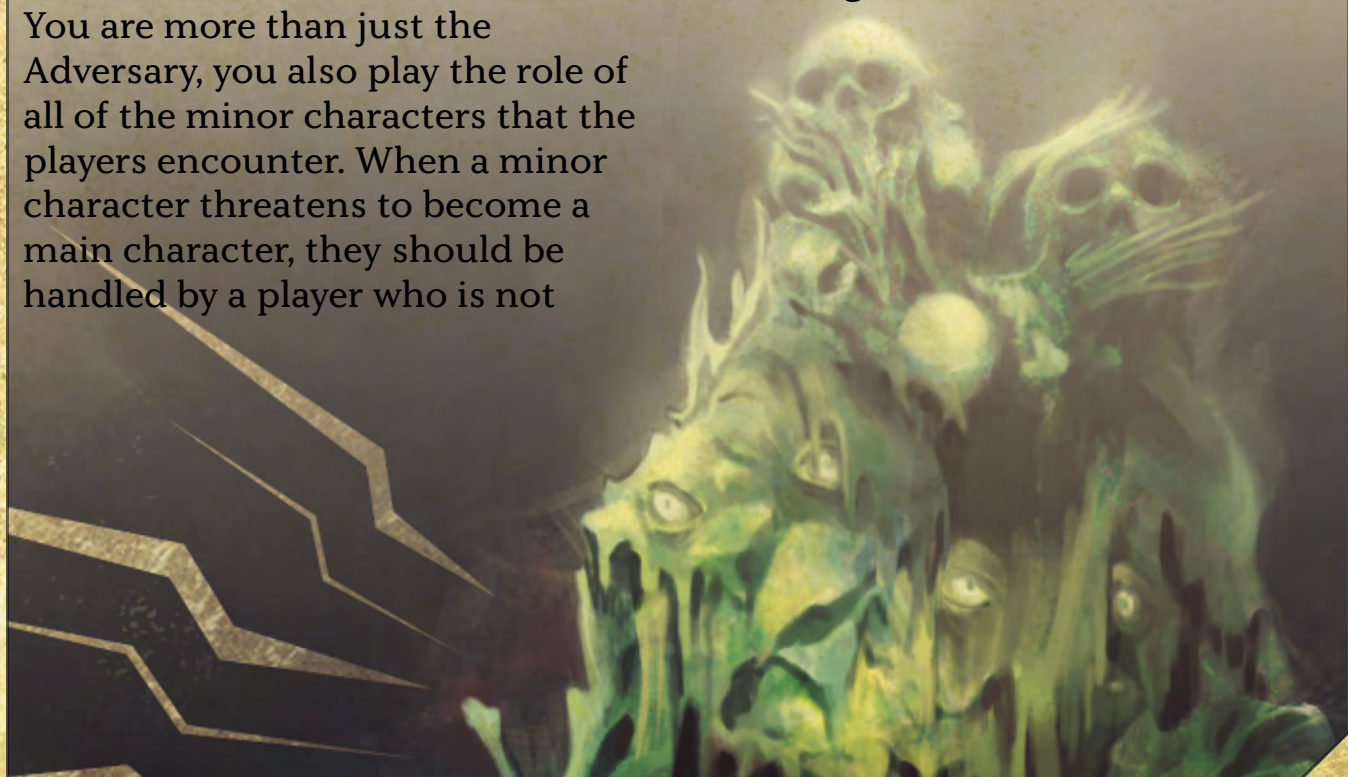
As the Adversary, you should never be the main character. Your job is to let the other players take center stage – to be the protagonists of the story. When the Adversary “plays” too much, or focuses more on their pet characters, the other players will become bored.

You are more than just the Adversary, you also play the role of all of the minor characters that the players encounter. When a minor character threatens to become a main character, they should be handled by a player who is not

the Adversary – perhaps even becoming a Companion.

As the Adversary, you are the Hazards the Heroes encounter. You are the voice and the brain of the monsters, traps, and challenges in your game – the antagonists that your players will come up against. As the Monsters, you should be trying to win. Trying to survive. Your perspective should be that of a competitor trying to defeat the adventurers that have come into your maze.

Unlike many games though, the Adversary is also a character in the story. You have a form and a will and a goal. Striking the balance between adversarial participant and facilitator can be difficult but rewarding.



BALANCING ENEMY AND STORYTELLER

When you are running Dark Tower, remember that you are not just the Storyteller, but also the Enemy.

As a Storyteller, be an advocate for your players. Help them do cool things. Encourage them to spend Treasure, burn Spirit, lose Forces, take Danger, and go for the gusto. Reward them with Advantaged rolls and Treasure when they do interesting things. Keep the story moving forward; forgive and forget

minor issues in favor of the story.

As their Enemy, break seals and try to beat them down. Cheer when they get hit with massive swords and lose Forces or take Danger. Cackle with glee when they fall into acid pits. Make sure that you gather and claim as much Darkness as you can to open the Tower and bring on the **FINAL BATTLE!**

EMULATING TALES OF HIGH ADVENTURE

Each **polymorph** game tries to tell a different kind of story and create a different kind of play experience.

RETURN TO DARK TOWER

emulates a very specific kind of story – one that we commonly refer to as “Epic Fantasy.” Specifically, Dark Tower is a game about gathering resources and allies to defeat a powerful enemy.

Epic Fantasy is at its best when it’s fast-paced and filled with cool characters and changing locales. We always start in the middle of the action. We don’t have a long introduction to fantasy economics or the trade wars of the past. We have a sword. We are in danger. What do we do?

These worlds are fantastic and deadly. They are filled with weird beasts and strange languages, but mostly they are full of broken places. Our characters are powerful, but still human. They have a reason for their adventuring. Their tales aren’t about gaining power and prestige, they’re about bringing an end to a specific evil: the Adversary.

In Epic Fantasy, the stakes are the fate of the world. These stories are about saving the lands of the Four Kingdoms; no one is just looking for a paycheck (even if they keep saying they are). The goals of the party and the players are to kill the Adversary – or at least stop their schemes one last time.

TELLING A STORY TOGETHER

We look at roleplaying as a conversation between the players and the Game Master. These tips will make your game easier to run, as well as more immersive and interesting for everyone playing.

The Adversary should always be asking questions and only ever suggest actions as a last resort. The game is the most compelling when you describe a scene, then the characters take up the torch and fill in the details.

That said, when you are playing with newer players you will likely need to direct them more often, and that's okay as well. Over time, you can start to pull away from showing them the norms of the game and start asking them more open-ended questions about their characters. The degree to which each player wants to role play varies from player to player. Not every player wants to "get into character," but if you address the Characters, rather than the players, it will drive the players to act "in character." Some players will never do this – and that's cool – but a few players talking and acting in character will drive a story forward, and increase the immersion and excitement for everyone.

Make sure that every player gets a chance to shine. Not every player wants to have the spotlight on their character but try and make sure that every character has something to do. When a player chooses an Aspect and a Class, they are signaling to you what they want to do during the course of the game. If no one chooses a Sorcery Aspect, it should be a very different game than if they are all mages.

When you are plotting your game sessions, remember that there are four core roles that the players are choosing: the Paragon, the Vanguard, the Fighter, and the Sentinel. Paragons want to win through strategy, Vanguards want to explore, Fighters want to fight things, and Sentinels want to survive. By making sure that you have all of those elements in your mix, the players will all find the chance to shine.

Since the game features both Heroes and Companions, make sure that each session features different Heroes than the last session. Optimally, every Hero should be seen at least once – preferably twice – during the lead-up to the final battle.

MAPS ARE SELDOM ACCURATE

RETURN TO DARK TOWER has a well-known map, but never let the details on a map stop your story. The map can be wrong. The lands around the Dark Tower are under attack. Large overland maps are woefully outdated if they were ever accurate to begin with. When you make a map, be ready to change it. Be willing to follow the characters' lead. Be ready to knock down

walls, generate secret doors, and generally forget entire areas of maps.

When it comes to designing the map of any dungeon that the players are exploring, include a few rooms to explore and nothing more. Each map is probably an entire night of play in and of itself.

RULES AND SYSTEMS

Dark Tower is a “rulings” over “rules” game. This means that the rules are a set of guidelines to facilitate play, but that making a “ruling” at the table always takes precedence. There isn’t a rule for everything – by design. You can’t look in the index to find the answer to every edge case and position. As the Adversary, you will sometimes have to make a “ruling” on how to do something or what happens. It is our goal to make arbitrating those rulings as easy as possible by giving you all of the tools that you need to make quick, simple decisions.

The underlying systems in **RETURN TO DARK TOWER FANTASY ROLEPLAYING** strive to be an elegant, rules-lite system. Our goal is to make as few

“rules” as possible, then let each ruling organically and naturally grow out of the rules that are already defined and designed. When you add content, it should seem like it was already there – it’s a specific implementation of the core toolkit that has already been laid out.

Before you make up any new “rules” or add a “subsystem,” try to see if one of the core tools can accomplish the job. At your disposal are: the core rolls (action, save, and effect rolls); aspects and edges; ‘vantage; spirit and danger; corruption; treasure; darkness; moments; hazards; threat and level; flashbacks; and resource spends.

THE DOOR TO ADVENTURE

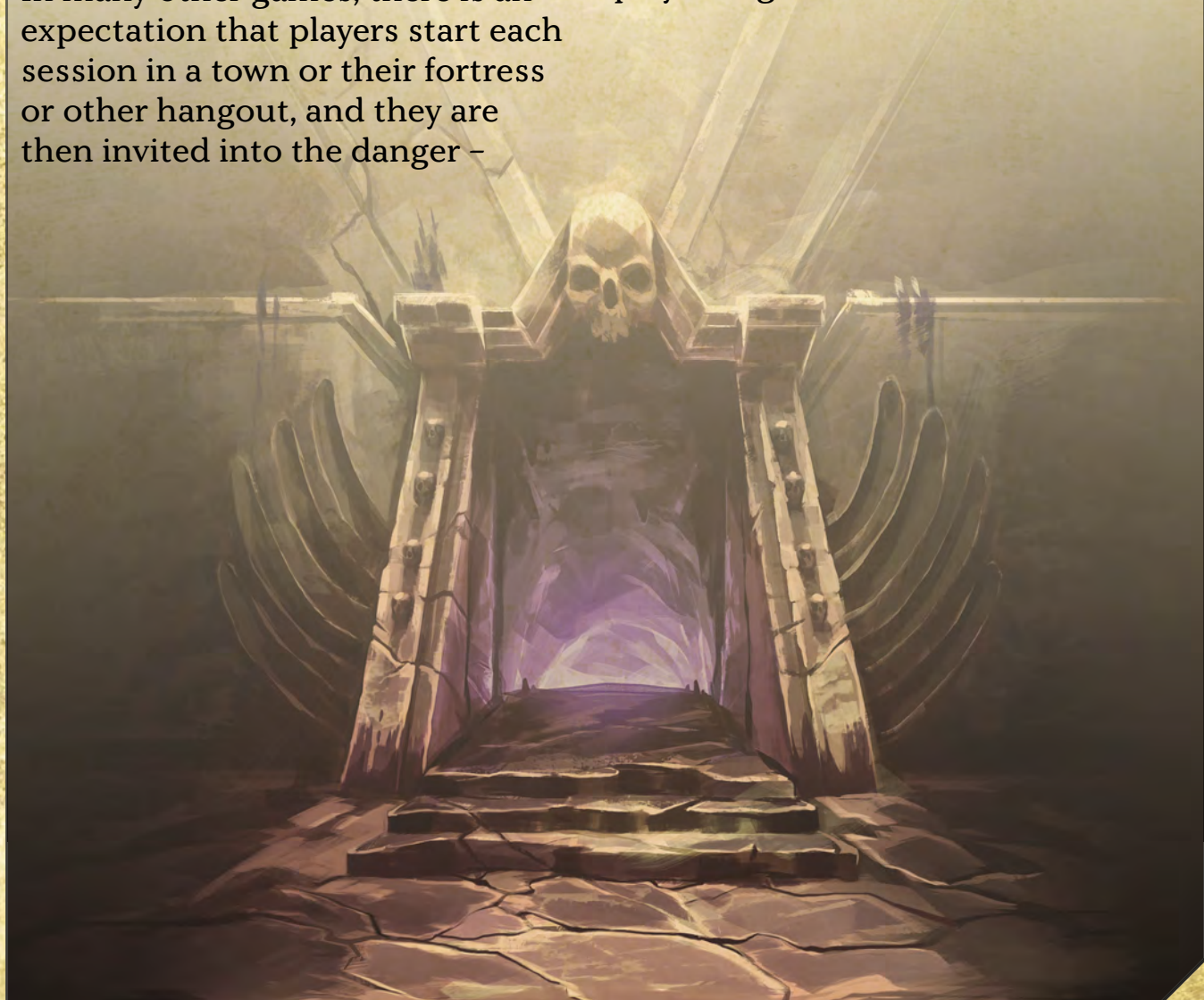
We start at the
DOOR TO ADVENTURE.


Don't waste time at the start of a session – get to the Quest as soon as possible. The session should begin just as the party is about to enter the dungeon or start a conflict. Don't hesitate to put the characters immediately into boiling water.

In many other games, there is an expectation that players start each session in a town or their fortress or other hangout, and they are then invited into the danger –

whether it is through a mystery, a request, or some dangerous event. In many cases, the party enters a place and looks for a “quest giver.” Skip all that noise – start at the door into the dungeon.

In a Return to Dark Tower campaign, you know ahead of time where you are going to start - you set it as part of the **MARCH** Phase. Don't get bogged down - put the players right into the action.





Safety Tools

Safety

Special Note

Open Door Policy

Enthusiastic Consent

Transparency and Content Warnings

Lines and Veils



It's Dangerous to Go Alone

chapter thirteen

SAFETY

9th Level Games truly wants everyone to be able to embrace and enjoy the tabletop experience. To do that, we need to be aware that the improvisational nature of roleplaying leaves open the possibility that the game will cross into areas that may be uncomfortable or even triggering for our friends (and doubly so when playing with people that we don't know well - or even at all). It's important for players to feel comfortable and safe when they are engaging in roleplaying games.

It is imperative when gaming with people that you don't know (or just don't know very well) to set boundaries and expectations before playing. Explaining the safety mechanics is a good way to have this conversation in a no-worry, pressure-free environment. Even when you are gaming with people that you know well, having a conversation about boundaries and a discussion of whether you should use specific safety mechanics is a good idea (especially if you have been playing with that group for a long time - things and people change).

A SPECIAL SAFETY NOTE FOR THE DARK TOWER

Since the **ADVERSARY** in a Return to Dark Tower campaign is more directly antagonistic to the player characters than in many **RPGS**, it increases the likelihood of "someone taking it personally" when you do awful things to their character. Be aware of this risk, and remember that everyone is here to play a game and have fun. For that reason, we strongly encourage you to read this section and use these tools.

OPEN DOOR POLICY

We strongly believe that all games should have an Open Door - anyone can leave the game for any reason at any time, and they will not be judged for doing so. If you need to go - do. It could be for an emotional reason, a bio break, to take an important phone call, or just because you know that you need to leave the game. No one should ever be questioned, made fun of, or coerced to stay and play - even if that means there aren't enough players for that particular game to continue.

The important part of having an Open Door in your game is making

sure that everyone understands that the goal is comfort and safety. Players should feel comfortable leaving if they need or want to. While not required, if you don't plan on returning, let someone that you trust know (so that they don't come looking for you). You are not required in any way to explain or defend your decision—take the door, and stay safe.

ENTHUSIASTIC CONSENT

Ask permission if what you're about to say or do affects another player – even if you are confident that it's for the better! An enthusiastic yes means yes, anything else means no! No means you should say something else, do something else.

TRANSPARENCY AND CONTENT WARNINGS


Transparency means being upfront with your players about what to expect. You don't need to spoil your plots, but players need to know what they are getting into. If your game is going to be a lighthearted romp through the neighborhood while Trick-or-Treating, tell them. If it's going to be a serious exploration of body horror, make sure they know.

LINES AND VEILS

Lines and Veils are a tool for setting expectations at the begin of a campaign. At the start of the game, establish what lines **YOU** don't want to cross during the course of the story, and tell your players/your group what those lines are. Ask and allow space for everyone to establish and communicate their own lines. When anyone establishes a line, everyone else needs to respect that line without discussion. It is not a topic for debate, it is a hard line establishing a subject that someone doesn't want to include in their roleplaying games.

A veil is similar to a line, but less cut and dried. When someone establishes a veil, they are acknowledging that something can/will occur in the game world, but that they would rather not directly roleplay that activity. They don't want a graphic description of the details, instead the players should acknowledge the fact that it happened and move on. Again, ask for and allow space for everyone to establish and communicate their veils.

No discussion, no debate – respect everyone's lines and veils!



Appendix

Epilogue

Phase Sheet

Adversary Sheet

Player Sheet

Resolver



Return to Dark Tower

Epilogue

AN ODE TO THE DARK TOWER, OR CHILDE CHRISTOPHER TO THE LIONEL KIDDIE CITY CAME

When I was a kid, there were only a few ways to find out about new toys and games. You could see a commercial, you could see a picture in the Sears Catalog, or you could go to the toy store and stare in wonder at the aisles.

So imagine my tiny brain exploding when I saw a commercial (starring Orson Welles, for what it's worth) about an electronic game where you played heroes who fought monsters and dragons while attempting to siege a tower. I was amazed. I was floored. I needed this game.

And then, in the Sears Catalog, there was a big spread of the game. The board, the tower. It was right next to Dungeons and Dragons – my favorite new thing in the world. My avarice took hold of me – I couldn't live without this game.

I would ride my bike down the street and up the hill, to the Lionel Kiddie City – a toy store that I can still navigate from memory in my dreams. The first aisle was new products; you walked through the front doors and past the specials and new items – then baby toys, dolls, action figures (where I spent

most of my time), construction sets, trucks and cars, and then bikes and sports. I would drop my bike on the front sidewalk and run into the store. In the first aisle, amidst a wall of copies, was Dark Tower. The box was **HUGE** – bigger than any game I had ever seen. It was as big as the Star Wars Death Star Playset (the biggest toy I had ever seen). I made pilgrimages to this display every chance I got. I was obsessed.

And, unlike most of these tales, there is no heartbreak. I did get a copy of the Dark Tower for Christmas, or maybe my birthday, that year. It was expensive, but I had a lot of aunts and uncles that didn't yet have kids of their own.

For many years, the Dark Tower was an every few weeks thing. Break it out, set it up, forget how to play, play until someone got totally wrecked by the dragon, and quit playing. Soon though, Dungeons and Dragons, Risk, and forgotten gems like Elric! and Shadowlords took over the space that the Dark Tower once held on my Mother's fabled Kitchen Table.

In High School and throughout college, people would reminisce

over the Dark Tower. It became a sort of grail for some people. It was such an ambitious and insane product – and it hit the market at the exact right time to be indelibly burned into the right minds.

The Tower itself was mesmerizing. It was a computer game and a board game and a roleplaying game. It had this amazing art that literally lit up. Art that seriously affected my development as an artist, graphic designer, and especially as a consumer of roleplaying games and fantasy art.

The miniature buildings, the flags, the peg boards. In retrospect seem – okay? Less somehow. The gameplay is, well, politely I will call it “of its time.” But the art hidden within the tower. When the tower would screech and a dragon, Pegasus, or brigand would appear in the window and light up with a tinny electronic noise. The dreams it held have never wavered.

When, after close to forty years, I heard secret tales that Restoration Games was working on a sequel – I was excited. One of the eventual designers (Brian Neff) is a good friend, and I got to play several early versions of the game. I was struck right away at how well they had done in capturing the “feel” of that game, and I was once again standing in Aisle 1 of Kiddie City

looking up at the wall of board game boxes, dreaming of playing the Dark Tower. After playing the playtest versions of the Return to Dark Tower, I was immediately struck with how aligned the game was with our (then just coming out in Zine format) **MAZES** Fantasy Roleplaying. “So, Brian, do you think that Restoration might...”

Suffice it to say, the little kid looking up at the wall of Dark Towers, and the college kid that looked back on the Dark Tower with such fondness and admiration – they are in me today, and excited to share this game with you.

Chris O'Neill

9th Level Games

February 2023



9TH LEVEL GAMES

Resolver



Banner
banner

1



Books
tactics

2 3



Boots
march

3 4 5



Blades
battle

4 5 6 7



Bones
defend

5 6 7 8 9



Reinforce
reinforce

4 | 6 | 8 | 10

Darkness Pool



Fiat



The Adversary

5



March of Time



**Great and
Terrible**



Edges



1,2,3 **Light**. Reinforce succeeds.
The Adversary confined to the Tower.
4,5,6 **Twilight**. Negotiate Reinforce.
7+ **Night Falls**. Reinforce fails.
The Adversary is free.

Foes



Seals



Location



Resolver

Banner
banner

1



Books
tactics

2 3



Boots
march

3 4 5



Blades
battle

4 5 6 7



Bones
defend

5 6 7 8 9

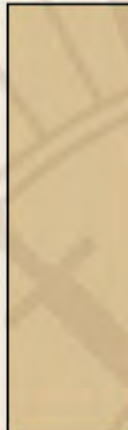
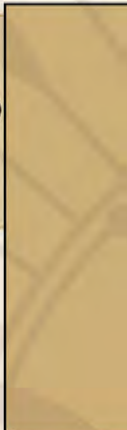


Reinforce
reinforce

4 | 6 | 8 | 10



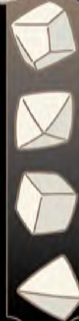
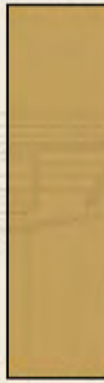
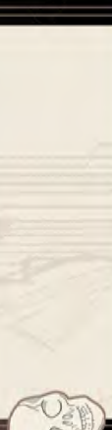
Edges



Bonds



The Companion



The Hero



Role



Forces



danger

spirit

corruption

treasure



Return to DARK TOWER

Fantasy Roleplaying

THE TOLLY

NORTH KINGDOM

- ☐ Broken Lands
- ☒ Dayside
- ☐ Egan's End
- ☒ Fivepint
- ☐ Forest of Sorrow
- ☐ Greenbridge
- ☐ Lodestone Mtns..
- ☐ Lower Ice Fangs
- ☐ Peaks of the Djinn
- ☐ Pearl-of-the-North
- ☐ Radiant Mountains
- ☒ The Muted Forest
- ☐ The Tundra
- ☐ Tower Scar Desert
- ☐ Upper Ice Fangs

EAST KINGDOM

- ☐ Big Sister
- ☐ Bleak Wastes
- ☐ Copper Grove
- ☐ Dragontooth Lake
- ☐ Duwani
- ☐ Forest of Shades
- ☐ Greater Tombstones
- ☐ Inner Kinghills
- ☐ Jewel Hills
- ☐ Lake of Songs
- ☐ Lesser Tombstones
- ☐ Outer Kinghills
- ☐ The Decaying Wilds
- ☐ Three Rivers
- ☐ Utar's Barrows

SOUTH KINGDOM

- ☒ Archmont
- ☒ Azkol's Bane
- ☐ Bone Hills
- ☒ Howling Desert
- ☐ Irontops
- ☐ Little Sister
- ☐ Middle Sister
- ☐ Mtns. of the Watchers
- ☐ Pine Barrens
- ☐ Sands of Madness
- ☐ Southern Wastes
- ☐ The Cloister
- ☐ The Emerald Expanse
- ☐ The Throne
- ☐ Ulanell's Hollow

WEST KINGDOM

- ☐ Akartus
- ☐ Anza
- ☐ Ash Hills
- ☐ Cloudhold
- ☐ Delmsmire
- ☐ Hissing Groves
- ☐ Idran Forest
- ☐ Lonelight Hills
- ☐ Lost Lands
- ☐ Plains of Plovo
- ☐ Plains of Woldra
- ☐ The Empty Glade
- ☐ The Grass Sea
- ☐ Weeping Waters
- ☐ Yellowpike

Quest

Diplomacy

Travel

Gather

Recruit

Rest

Bond

Return to DARK TOWER



Quest



Travel

Diplomacy

Gather

Recruit

Bond

Rest



Banner

banner

1



Books

tactics

2 3



Boots

march

3 4 5



Blades

battle

4 5 6 7



Bones

defend

5 6 7 8 9



Reinforce

reinforce

4 | 6 | 8 | 10

