

# Ascension Begins With A Single Step

*Aeruth was once a land of wonder, a place where none knew hunger or poverty or fear. A happy place, where no one should have wanted for anything. And yet, there were those that wanted. Those that yearned to have more. None could say for certain how greed curled its way around the heart of the people who had what they wished. Whatever the cause may have been, the fact was that those who took from others soon began to take from the land itself.*

*As man took from the land, the Gods who had built and preserved it watched. Waited. Observed, to see if they would turn back from their path of destruction. Finally, after centuries of deliberation and the slow, aching death of the world, they passed their judgment. The land that had been exploited fought back, bringing death and destruction upon humanity. Millions were lost to the flames that ate through steel and brick mercilessly, to the floods that capsized even the sturdiest ships, to the earthquakes that felled mighty bridges and thunderstorms that smote the tallest of towers.*

*Even now, the fury of the Gods remains unabated. Only an impassioned plea to the divine will quell their anger, but the voices of mankind cannot be heard when shouted from the land below.*

## A Warning

If you are looking for a fun game of adventure, this is not your game. If you are looking for a fantasy of empowerment, where you can overcome every obstacle with ease and come out the other end happily, this is not your game. There are many wonderful games where you can find this, many worlds looking for heroes to burst through the door to fulfill epic deeds and have their praises sung - this is not one of those games, not one of those worlds. This is a painful game of sacrifice, of enduring, of what it takes for ordinary people to save the world. This is a game designed to make you think, to make you cry, to make you hurt and yearn for more innocent days. No one will ever know of the sacrifices your party makes, of the great deeds that are done and the blood that is shed.

Even so, it is a game where victory CAN be achieved, but not without great personal cost. It is a game of deep connection, of personal bonds, of love in all its strange and myriad forms and the things that we do for love.

Be warned that themes of sacrifice, blood, and death will be prevalent in this game. It is necessary that before you begin play, as a table you all go over your limits. What you are and aren't willing to have mentioned in the game. Whether you will scale back the level of violence, or speak of it in metaphor or in passing. At any point, you are allowed to interrupt play and express your discomfort, or to opt out of a given Challenge or experience as necessary.

It is important to make use of safety tools and support tools at your table, in order to create a safe roleplaying environment for everyone present. You may choose what you wish, but here are a few suggestions:

- **The X Card by John Stavrapoulos** (<http://tinyurl.com/x-card-rpg>): A card marked with an X that you can tap on or raise any time that you wish to edit out references in the game, or to not engage with content further.
- **Lines and Veils originally by Ron Edwards**: Lines and Veils are set before and during the game, with Lines representing hard limits on topics, themes, or specifics you do not want tackled in their entirety. Veils refer to topics that can be discussed or brought into play, but which should be kept “out of sight” through fade to black, covert mentions, or other narrative devices that do not center such topics.
- **The Full Deck Method by Bebarce**: A deck is split between all players evenly, with players slipping cards to the GM and each other discreetly. Each suit represents a different statement: Hearts for Thank You, Diamonds for Involve Me, Clubs for Move On/Change, and Spades for Please Stop.
- **Other tools are also available as listed in the TTRPG Safety Toolkit:**  
[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1S-6ScLR\\_XaZRfgX502QsYL3pfmyJGL0C](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1S-6ScLR_XaZRfgX502QsYL3pfmyJGL0C)

This being said, safety tools are not a replacement for constant and active communication before, during, and after the game. Make use of whatever you need to ensure you can tackle the journey ahead of you. And above all things, take care of each other.

## From Humble Beginnings

You are residents of a small town at the base of Moriah, the Mountain of the Gods. You have lived your whole lives in the shadow of the most holy, blessed by your close proximity to those who reside upon Moriah’s peaks. You will have lived a fraction of your lifetime living, breathing, and believing in the goodness of the gods, only now seeing the true power of their wrath.

But first, you must be born.

Each of you should have a character sheet or piece of paper and a form of writing implement, and ready yourself to create your characters. Begin by writing one of the following onto the sheet:

- A Name
- An Occupation
- What You Wish For
- What You Think About Your Town

When you have filled in a single one of these details, pass the sheet to the person to your right. Do this until you have all received a sheet with these four details defined. When you have

settled on the beginnings of a resident before you, you may choose to create up to 10 Memories and/or Relations.

Memories are precious moments in your life, events that have irreversibly entrenched themselves into your consciousness - for good or for ill.

Relations are the bonds that you share with others at the table, whether familial, friendly, or otherwise. Ensure that you have permission from the player involved, as well as for the nature of the relationship being suggested.

Once you have found yourselves, give your town a name, and in doing so breathe life into it. Name its town square, its many streets, its brightest corners and darkest ones. It must be lived in, well-worn - a place worth protecting not because it holds strong significance to the world at large but because it holds a special place in your hearts.

## The Challenges of the Mountain

*It is the seventh year since the beginning of the Time of Judgment, but because of your town's proximity to the Mountain of the Gods you have been spared much of their divine wrath. You have seen party after party of priests, sellswords, and sworn heroes attempt to ascend Moriah in order to plead with the gods. All have returned as the skies continue to thunder and the earth begins to shake. Few will speak of what it is they had encountered, though you have eyes and ears to tell you that they did not descend without consequence. Even so, there are some things you have gleaned from the stories and hearsay of those who survive.*

*Only the worthy may ascend to petition for the salvation of Mankind. Those who journey forth will be faced by obstacles, trials designed to test both known and unknown qualities in order to prove the nebulous quality known as worthiness. These may be physical barriers, antagonistic creatures, or trials of the spirit. What is known is that no two journeys towards the top of the Mountain are ever the same, its winding roads and looming peaks marked by treachery after treachery.*

*Those who descend from the Mountain speak vaguely of its challenges and the means of dealing with them, saying only that one should choose to ascend only if there is nothing they would regret leaving behind. Bring only what you are willing to give. Bring only what you are not scared to have them take.*

## Upon The Old Road, We Seek Redemption

Firm of conviction or wavering in your heart, your minds have each been made up. Now is the time to say... not goodbye, but see you later. If you believe that you might not return, if your heart falters here, then you may as well not ascend at all. But there is no harm in taking the

path. No harm in seeing what it is that the gods demand of you, and stepping back should fear overwhelm. So you take with you the barest essentials - clothing, water, food, and a single sentimental object. A reminder of what is at stake.

The path towards Mount Moriah is not steep or treacherous, but as a road traveled only by the foolhardy. Each step taken is like wading through water, as if the ground itself is clinging to those who trek the path, begging them not to approach the peak of the gods. Pleading with your group to remain within the confines of an ordinary life. Ignore their warning at your own peril.

One by one, apart or together, you have all found yourselves standing at the base of Mount Moriah. State to each other, one by one, the reason you have found yourself in front of this place. Tell each other what you are fighting to save, or why you have decided there is nothing left for you save a plea to the gods. Once you have done so, breathe deeply, and look upon the that which bars you from ascending the mountain.

## Challenge: The Gate to Moriah

DEMAND: 1

An impassable barrier, woven tightly from thorny vines and knotted branches. Before it lies a stone altar of roughly hewn rock, a crudely sharpened piece of metal laid flat atop it.

You may try, if you wish, to bypass the gate. Try whatever means you wish - burning, cutting, yelling, or pleading. Despite your efforts, the gate remains closed. As a group, or separately, lay your frustrations bare. Spend as much time as you wish discussing your plans before turning the page.

## On The Nature of DICE and Sacrifice

*DICE are the tools by which the Gods determine the fate of mankind, a conduit for the wild magic that governs the laws of reality. When one invokes the DICE, they do not command magic to do its bidding. Instead, they ask, and the magic answers as it pleases. This is done by stating the challenge to be overcome and the method with which it will be overcome, and rolling your DIE. Either its blessing empowers you with the strength to overcome or endure, or else its value will fall below what is needed and falter. Note that you do not have to act alone - each person who wishes to work on overcoming a challenge may contribute the results of their own DIE to your collective total. After all, there is strength in numbers.*

*A Demand is given as a value +  $\Omega$ ,  $\Omega$  representing the number of living pilgrims within the group. A value such as  $2\Omega$  denotes the number of pilgrims multiplied by the number before it.*

*The DICE of the Gods cannot be gained or refined through any other means save the spilling of human blood. Whether that of the innocent or guilty, all blood weighs the same when it trickles from the veins of those fated to die.*

*These are the known forms by which the DICE may manifest.*

- *A four-sided pyramid made of crudely carved stone and stained in blood*
- *A six-sided cube born of obsidian and etched in steel*
- *An eight-sided diamond that gleams only beneath the moonlight*
- *A ten-sided container that holds weeping bamboo sticks*
- *A twelve-sided box wreathed in ivy and thorns*
- *A twenty-sided jar that houses a little world*
- *A hundred-faced creature with a thousand eyes*

*It is only when a life has been given to the mountain that the first of the DICE will find its way into the hands of those who are attempting to ascend Mt. Moriah. Of course, this is not where this story of blood and death ends.*

*The first sacrifice will grant onto the remaining pilgrims a four-sided DIE, with which they may attempt to tackle the challenges up ahead. But sometimes, challenges may prove insurmountable even with a collective effort.*

*If you should encounter failure at any point on your journey, you now collectively have a choice to make.*

*First, you may descend without physical consequence. None of the things you have overcome will keep you trapped. If you descend by yourself, your character will fade away from the narrative of this tale, and you may choose to take up the mantle of What Comes After or excuse yourself from the table. If you descend as a group, this is where your story ends. You return to a life of normality... for as long as it can be maintained. But you know now, the power that the Gods on their mountaintop wield. How little time you have left with those you love. How precious it is. You may hope and pray for another group to come after you, one with more vigor. More determination. More hope.*

*Second, you may choose to give of yourself for strength. The DICE are hungry things, but they reward those who feed them. If you give them a part of your body - a finger, a toe, an organ, an eye - then they will temporarily gain power. **For every body part you sacrifice, your DIE will evolve to the next highest form and you will be allowed to reroll your result.** The more that is given, the better your DIE becomes, though with two caveats. First, such an improvement is only ever temporary - after the Challenge is completed, the DIE returns to its former state. Second, what is given to the gods may not be retrieved, and one only ever has what they brought with them to the mountain to give. You may not cut off the same twice. Of course, those who came to the mountain sans limbs or function in a body part may make use of this power*

*equally, gaining the equivalent result a blood sacrifice would. You, more than anyone, would understand humanity's cruelty.*

*Third, **you may sacrifice one of your own in order to overcome the challenge in its entirety.** A life given is a worthy price for the gods to recognize your conviction, and it is not without further reward. **For every member of the group you sacrifice, the remainder receive a permanent boost to their DICE.** An evolution from d4 to d6, d6 to d8 and ever upwards, meaning that the challenges up ahead become even easier. Of course, this journey was begun without the power in your hands. In order to truly begin your climb, you **MUST** give that which must not be given. Blood for blood. Life for life. A single death, in order to save so many others.*

*In times of desperation, rather than choosing to sacrifice the flesh, you may choose a different form of sacrifice. Each Memory, Relationship, or other indexed facet of yourself that you offer to the gods by crossing them off your character sheet adds a single point of value to your own DIE roll. As with sacrifices of the flesh, anything freely given in this way may not be reclaimed. And such an offering will not be accepted unless you have DICE of your own to invoke.*

At this point you may, if you wish, choose to descend from the base of the mountain and live out the rest of your short lives. There will always be other heroes, other pilgrims, others desperate or despondent or forthright enough to take the necessary step. It does not have to be you. You do not have to do this dreadful thing.

But you know, don't you? Deep inside of yourselves, you know that to descend here and now will weigh on you. As you watch your crops turn to dust beneath your fingertips, as your children wail from the pain of their hunger and the floods erode the foundations upon which your homes have been built, you will know that you could have fixed this. You could have changed things, and instead turned aside. This is not a decision so easily made, not least because the gods will only accept a sacrifice in deepest blood.

If you are willing to press onwards through the challenges on the road before you, you must now choose who will be given to the gods that govern the world. Describe, in as much or as little detail as your group is comfortable with, how they are killed. But remember to treat them with respect, and allow them to speak their final words. These are thoughts that will linger with you. Thoughts that will fester as you continue your journey ever onwards. Ever upwards.

Where once there was nothing, you now find that the blood of your compatriot has seeped deep into the altar. It solidifies, coagulating into little pyramids of congealed blood and stone. Soft to the touch, but its form endures when picked up. Take them - there will be one for each of you. It is the power which you have justly earned. Do not let your ally's sacrifice be in vain.

Of course, for one of you this marks not an ending, but a beginning. As stiffness settles into your immobile corpse, you can feel something calling to your wayward soul. Turn the page to What Comes After - you are only the first of many who will have to contend with your formless future.

Once you have done so, follow the instructions contained therein. When you are ready, pick up the thread of this narration. You are now the first Voice that will guide the pilgrims hoping to ascend Mt. Moriah, and to introduce them to the Challenges ahead.

## RESPIRE: A Small Clearing

Tranquility, embodied by pale blossoms of yellow and blue. There is a faint scent of pollen and evening dew in the air that settles onto the skin and clothes. Here, in this place, you feel a sense of quiet. The world itself is inviting you to close your eyes and dream peacefully. To think of the future that you are soon to create.

In all things you do, think and reflect on the future.

*For fallen friends, speak of the future you wished to create with them, and that they desired to make with you.*

*For everything you have sacrificed, speak of the dreams you had once fulfilled, both little and small.*

*For your own peace of mind, talk about one goal you have for a peaceful world. Who you wish to become.*

## On Rest and Respite

*There are times, both in and out of character, that you will need some time away from the horrors you have been forced to endure. While you are always encouraged to take some out of character time away as needed for your own wellbeing and comfort, the game will also enforce purposeful breaks in-character. This not only draws you outside of the challenges, but also invites you to provide meaning and depth to the world that you inhabit. For each place of Respite, you will be given three possible prompts.*

*For Fallen Friends: This is a prompt to reminisce on any allies that have been sacrificed since your last Respite, and even to engage in a flashback scene with the Whisper that once carried their name.*

*For Everything You Have Sacrificed: This is a prompt to create memories or discuss futures related to what you have chosen to give up since the last Respite.*

*For Your Own Peace of Mind: This is a prompt for everyone, in order to bring some reflection and depth to the pilgrim you are bringing up the mountain.*

You may stay in this place of Respite for as long as you like. Some may even choose to end their journeys here, taking up residence on Mt. Moriah and slowly becoming one with the world.

Understanding its peace, and understanding its pain. A character that chooses to remain in a place of Respite will no longer be playable.

## And Now?

And now, you must wait on the challenges that will be set before you by the gods of the mountain. They shall test you. They shall try you. They shall attempt to break you. But you must endure the best that you can. After all, you are human. It is your soft and fleshy weakness... but it is also your truest strength.

## What Comes After

You are dead... but not truly dead. Gone now is your mortal form, your prison of human flesh and pulsing blood. You are the leaves upon the trees, the air that flows across the mountaintops, the rivers that run between the valleys, and you are furious. You understand now - you are the world, and the world is you. It's pain is your pain, and you have spent too long holding back your anguish. Humanity pierces you, stabs you, wounds you with every movement, and if this continues on for too long you will die. Even so, perhaps an accord can be reached. But you must know that mankind understands your suffering. That their sympathy is born of genuine regret. Misery. Pain as none of their little kind have ever known.

As one of many Deities, it is your task to select or create the obstacles that those who wish to save their human world must overcome in order to prove the worth of their kind. To weave the path ahead, to provide glimpses into the wonder and terror, and even to hold dialogues and share truths of the world with them. You may be an angry god, but you are not a terrible one.

You, singularly or collectively, will present new **Challenges** and **Respites** for those that remain to overcome. For each Challenge, one Deity shall take on the role of **The Voice**, and other Deities (if there are any) shall become **The Whispers**. This position rotates among Deities, unless there is collective agreement on there being a primary Voice.

## The Voice

The Voice is the lead narrator for that particular Challenge. They will, using either prompts given for specific Roads or their own inclination, introduce and elaborate on the scene that our pilgrims must overcome. They must describe the environment before them and reinforce the lessons which they wish to impart on those facing the challenges. When a challenger wishes to meet the demands of a Challenge, it is they who describe the outcome of the action taken, whether successful or unsuccessful. It is also they who first prompt the need for sacrifice, should a Challenge's demand not be met successfully.

## The Whispers

The Whispers are other deities, other narrators. They help bring the scene to life, but act more directly as characters - enticing or judging the actions of those who have come to Mt. Moriah. Sometimes, they may provide their own wisdom, or provoke the ire and anger of the pilgrims. During moments of Respite they take the form of Memory, assisting those who remain in reliving their lives and times. Reminding them what it is they are fighting for, and giving them the strength and courage to continue on.

## Forging The Path Ahead

In order to test the worthiness of mankind, you must prepare for them a series of tests. A Road to be filled by you as a collective. Your average Road will have a minimum of ten Challenges to endure, and a maximum of forty, with approximately one place of Respite for every four or five challenges. In order to create a Road, you may either use a pre-existing Road as detailed within this book, or you may create one of your own, conjuring up Challenges and places of Respite in a form based on the examples given above.

When creating a Road, you must remember that it is not meant to punish in its entirety. Only to test. Do not force the pilgrims who seek to protect those waiting in the world below to give of themselves in vain. Even if you seethe with anger, you must remember that they have given up much to be here. The difficulty of the Challenges should scale accordingly, starting from the relatively simple before escalating towards a Demand that will force the hands of those ascending Moriah. Even so, be aware of your players. What it is they can tolerate, what it is that they fear. Ensure that all of you have discussed such things beforehand, so that you can carefully weigh what to present.

A Road is not an assortment of bric-a-brac, of dredged up lost things without rhyme and reason. Each Road must have Challenges that align together in some way - a common thread, a shared theme, something that weaves them together and may give those who travel it an idea of the answers that the gods seek.

## Judgment

Once all Challenges have been overcome, it is now necessary for those who remain to prove that mankind is worth saving. To be privy to the judgment of the divine who dwell within the world. Of course, it would be unkind to render such judgment to those who do not know what it is you seek.

When the first new Deity is born - that is to say, when the first of the pilgrims is sacrificed - they must pose to the group a question for them to reflect on for the remainder of their journey.

Though you may deliver this question in whatever way you wish, it must be done in such a way that those ascending the mountain may still remain in awe of you. After all, this will be your first proclamation as the Voice of the Gods.

It may be a very simple question, or it may be a winding question, but it must be one that can be answered fairly and truthfully. Below are a few examples of questions that may be presented to those seeking to climb Mt. Moriah. If you choose to conceive of your own questions, think carefully on what meaning may be drawn out of the Road and Challenges you set before them.

- Why is humanity worth saving?
- What is the difference between a man and a beast?
- How can you make people coexist with the natural world?
- What is the difference between a good and bad memory?
- What can change the nature of a man?

It is important that, despite the suffering and hardship they endure, there is an answer that they can reach. That is why gentle nudges or periodic and subtle reminders of the upcoming judgment should be woven into the Challenges they overcome. Of course, the nature of your final judgment is at your discretion, as the Gods of this world. A tribunal, a council, a fight to the death, a memory relived - anything that will allow you to discern the truth that those who have ascended the mountain have reached.

From there, based on what you have seen and heard, you must decide on your course of action. What the future of humanity is, and the future of the planet. When you have come to your conclusions and presented them, this is where the game ends. You may speculate, not as gods and humans but as fellow players, what happens to the world after that. Whether mankind learns anything from the mercy of the gods, or how the world falls into ruin. But for those that make their way to the mountain's peak, and those who have fallen at its wayside, this is where they must be left behind.

## The Road Less Traveled

*The Road Less Traveled is meant to be undertaken by those new to the workings of MORIAH, and as such contains only 10 Challenges and 4 Places of Respite. Rather than being an ascent of Mt. Moriah, it is instead a descent into its innermost workings. A journey towards its heart.*

*It contains the following: mentions of blood, death, acid, choking, feces*

### CHALLENGE: A Winding Brook

DEMAND: 2+Ω

Water winding through the impassable earth, dyed a crimson red with the blood of your fallen friend. It bubbles to you their secret longings, their deepest regrets, their final thoughts as it laps at your damp shoes. When you try to look towards its origin, you see a lattice of leafy bristles within a gaping mouth. Beneath the sunlight, the mouth curves. A friendly smile. A rictus grin. You blink, and the mouth is gone, replaced by a whispered invitation to bathe within the ripples. To settle down and rest.

## CHALLENGE: The Rising Tide

DEMAND: 4+Ω

Lapping at your ankles, it is impossible to ignore that the more you press onwards, the higher the water begins to rise. Soaking through the clothing you have chosen to wear upon your ascent, it clings to you with the sudden chill of frost piercing through skin and bone. Teeth chattering away, the murky depths seek to claim you in their grasp. And ever present is the gaping mouth, beckoning you to where you belong.

## RESPITE: An Oasis In The Murkiness

Land, or the illusion of it. Stone solid enough to bear the weight of those of you that remain. Rough beneath your fingertips, shiny with the water's touch but not so slick that you cannot find your footing. Around you the wind of the mountaintop is chilly, enough that you must huddle together for warmth. From the cave's mouth you feel warmer breezes, deep exhalations that smell faintly of brine and cheap perfume. Still, the cold is not biting, and there is some reprieve in the gentle feeling of warm bodies against your own.

In all things you do, think and reflect on warmth.

*For fallen friends, speak of the little moments in which you enjoyed a hot meal or warm beverage together, eating until you had your fill.*

*For everything you have sacrificed, think of your body and times when you felt the sensation of chill seeping into your flesh and bones.*

*For your own peace of mind, think of those who you wish to hold closely to you, to share warmth with when all this is over.*

## CHALLENGE: The Yawning Mouth

Demand:7+2Ω

It breathes. This is the first thing that comes to mind when you see the mouth, carved as it is into jet black rock. Wind blows through leafy tendrils, masses of vegetation that pull and press against your body, wrapping themselves around you. The further you tread in, the more that the

stone presses against you. Jagged stalactites and stalagmites you're forced to dodge and weave around, threatening to impale you with their touch.

## RESPITE: A Present Song

From the depths of the caverns, beyond the scope of your sight, you can hear the faint melodies of strange and wistful songs. The voices are high and keening as they call out to their unseen audience, the reverberation of the walls around you thrumming in reply. If you listen carefully to the words you can make out the music of your childhood - the bouncing rhythms of step-in-time games, the lullabies that used to be sung at your cotside. There are traces of other lives within the bars sung to you.

In all things you do, think and reflect on youth.

*For fallen friends, think of the games you played together as children, or that they watched you play.*

*For everything you have sacrificed, think of the mischief you made or the trouble you got into, so easily excused by your youth.*

*For your own peace of mind, think of a child being gently lulled to sleep, on who that child might be and whether you wish to return to that time of peace.*

## CHALLENGE: The Poisoned Cavern

Demand: 5+3Ω

Breathing is difficult within its confines, the air thoroughly suffused by the cloying scent of bitter almonds and smoke. Your lungs suffer beneath the weight of the oppressive air, your only visible reprieve being an entrance heading further in. What little light you carry is already dwindling, snuffed out and choking slowly. The world dims around you, clouded as your thoughts are by the cocktail of gasses wafting through the air.

## CHALLENGE: The Viscous Cavern

Demand: 8+3Ω

The ground is thick and dripping, oozing black ichor and sickly green moss from beneath the thinning soles of your shoes. Every step threatens to drag you deeper, the already unstable surface upon which you walk rising up towards your ankles. The dripping liquids spatter onto your thighs, seeping into your skin. Hastily carved out nooks in the wall provide a temporary reprieve until you find your fingers gently clasping waterlogged flesh.

## CHALLENGE: The Caustic Cavern

Demand: 6+4Ω

You feel a sharp sting as something hits your face, threatening to pit and scar whatever it touches. Piece by piece your clothing begins to fall apart, the water you trudge through searing at both body and mind. Your skin threatens to slide away from your very skull - idly, the thought resonates that perhaps it would help, if only to ease the pain. But no matter how much skin you slough off, tear off, it will burn through the muscle and bone to the deepest part of you.

## RESPITE: Glimmering Life Beneath The Water

Swimming alongside your pacing feet, threading through the stone as if it is second nature, you see little glimmers of life. Silver-finned fish fanning through the water, neon pink and blue eels that slither towards an exit you cannot yet see. They are cool to the touch, eager to wriggle out of your grasp, but they are full of vim and vigour. As they dance through your fingers and squirm towards their destination, they leave a faint trail of blooming blue lights in their wake.

In all things you do, think and reflect on the lights.

*For fallen friends, think of the wishes that you've made together - on birthday candles, on shooting stars, or in the dim glow of a firelight.*

*For everything you have sacrificed, think of the sparks of inspiration you have created with your talents and passions.*

*For your own peace of mind, think of the moon and sun - of emerging from this darkness to bask in their light.*

## CHALLENGE: The Waxen Cavern

Demand: 10+4Ω

There is a smell that threatens to gag you - salt water and fresh fecal matter caked across the walls. But further examination reveals nothing but soft, waxen material that carries the impression of your fingertips at even the most gentle of provocations. Mostly grey to your light-starved eyes, it nevertheless exudes a faint red glow. Beneath your feet, the cavern floor moves. Up. Down. In. Out. A steady, beating rhythm, one that matches the ever-increasing pace of your own heartbeat. But you are not. Stuck, trapped, within the ever-hardening ambergris.

## CHALLENGE: Beyond The Belly Of The Beast

Demand: 12+4Ω

Winding tunnels of flesh that groan beneath your feet, growing smaller and smaller the further forth that you venture. Already battered and bruised by what you have endured, you try not to

think about the liquids assaulting your already worn-down body. About the bones that are strewn amongst the thick folds, decaying with age and partially submerged. About the exhaustion that creeps into your body, daring you to rest your eyes if only for a moment.

## RESPITE: What Lies Beyond

Sunlight, cutting through the cold wind, allowing you to bask in all of its glory. Evaporating the thick mucus and slime that has accumulated upon your body, providing you with a semblance of cleansing. The ground is firm beneath your feet - solid dirt and the smell of maple. The temptation to lie on your back and bask in nature's grasp is strong. The urge to hold hands or clasp your fellows that have come this way, made it this far, is even stronger.

In all things you do, think and reflect on your bonds.

*For fallen friends, think of the things that brought you together... or tore you apart.*

*For everything you have sacrificed, think of how you forged a lasting connection with another person.*

*For your own peace of mind, think of those who you wish had been here instead - who would have given their lives for you.*

## CHALLENGE: The Illusion Breaks

Demand: 15+5Ω

There are no cracks on the cavern walls, no fortuitous places where sunlight can peek through. You look this time, truly look, to find that your calm has been provided by an incandescent lure dangling from a thread far above you. There is a deep rumbling that shakes the walls around you, a loathsome noise that rattles your body and soul. It takes you far too long to realize that the rumbling noise is laughter. Echoing deep within your mind, piercing your thoughts.

## CHALLENGE: The Loathsome Cetacean

Demand: 18+5Ω

The only means of living is to escape, to find a way upwards and outwards of this cavernous monstrosity. Though the walls are enclosed, when you look upwards there is a singular hole at the top to bring in the scent of the mountain air. Hundreds of feet above you, scarcely large enough to fit a person, it dangles there. Waiting for you to attempt to endure. Is it false hope? Is it your demise? Nothing is certain except the possibility of death.

