



# FLAMES OF FREEDOM

EVERY EMPIRE HAS ITS END



A time-sensitive adventure for a party of 17th level.

## BACKSTORY

The Vanguard Grounds have never enjoyed peace. Whether it is because of historically tyrannical rulers or its weaker neighbors, war seems to always loom above the citizens. Five years ago, the bloodthirsty orc Garag'thak Irontusk, leader of the Irontusks, took control from the Honorbound Council in a bloody civil war. Now, with power usurped and the country in disarray, Ashim of the 9th Gale, leader of the now-defunct Honorbound Council, has formed a rebellion, starting yet another civil war. This time, Ashim is not alone and plans not to spill any more blood than needed, requesting aid from the strongest adventurers known to the land.

## ADVENTURE SUMMARY

To begin, the party is recruited as mercenaries by Ashim of the 9th Gale, a hobgoblin diplomat. He welcomes them to his camp, where they are promptly ambushed by Garag'thak's forces, which had followed the party's trail.

Upon defeating the assassins, the party can spend some time within the camp, meeting the various factions of the rebellion, assessing their forces, and preparing their own input on the upcoming siege. Once the party has met the various factions of the rebellion, they lead the army's forces into a battle minigame, which influences the success of their battle.

With the rebellion in full swing, the party marches alongside their forces, approaching Firetower (the capital) and fighting Garag'thak inside his war room. With Garag'thak defeated, the party restores balance to the Vanguard Grounds. Peace triumphs. Or they die.

## PLOT HOOK

The party is contacted via magical message by Ashim, asked to meet him in his Riviro Mountains hideout. They are warned against using magical transport, as such transport can easily be tracked by Garag'thak's mages.

# CHAPTER 1: VIVA LA REVOLUTION

In which the party learns of the rebellion.

### Before the Adventure

If you are playing this adventure as a one-shot, this is a perfect time for the party to introduce their characters. Talk with your party about their relationships. Ask them about how long they've been working together, the type of jobs they usually take, and how well-known they are in the area. Give them time to describe themselves and even interact a little bit. Since they're close to 20th level, it's assumed they've worked alongside each other at length and have built up numerous feats. Consider taking around 10-15 minutes to discuss some of the things they are most well-known for.

Once you've discussed the party's behavior and past, dive into their opinions regarding rulership, order, betrayal, and war. This will influence their relationship to the many factions working alongside them in the rebellion, as well as the possibility of switching allegiance.

If you are playing this adventure as part of a long-running campaign, ask yourself if an NPC they know could replace Ashim or if you wish to change the country in which the war takes place as a whole. Such changes could make the adventure feel more personal.

You may proceed to the next subchapter.

### Rebellious Tendencies

Read this:

*"All it took was a letter. A letter delivered by a hurried messenger with a troubled look to him. Inside was the call for aid from one Ashim of the 9th Gale. Though you've never met the man, his fame has not escaped your ears. He was, at one point, believed to be the most honorable man alive, advocating for peace in times of war and forming a semblance of democratic government in an otherwise troubled country. Surely, the least you could do is an audience. Now, advised by Ashim to avoid teleportation – so easily noticeable due to the power of tyrant Irontusk's mages, you step through a dense, ancient forest, gradually coming upon a hidden clearing bathed in dappled sunlight.*

*Here, amidst the towering, centuries-old trees and the mountainside, lies Ashim's camp, a sanctuary hidden away from the prying eyes of Garag'thak's forces. Tents of various sizes and shapes are scattered throughout the clearing, each adorned with the vibrant banners and sigils of different factions within the rebellion. The soft rustle of wind through leaves mingles with the sounds of activity: blacksmiths hammering on anvils, elves practicing archery in the distance, and hobgoblin strategists deep in heated discussions. The aroma of hearty meals being prepared over open fires wafts through the air, tantalizing your senses. The air is filled with a sense of urgency despite the late hours, but also of unity. The camaraderie among the rebels is palpable, transcending the racial and cultural divides of the Vanguard Grounds. And you've arrived."*

Bring the party to map 1, area 1. They are greeted by two hobgoblin guards in samurai-esque attire, both of which interrogate them briefly, then realize they are Ashim's guests. Thus, they are allowed within the camp and asked to wait briefly, as Ashim will be with them shortly, once he's been woken up.

The party now has a few moments to talk amongst themselves. Begin by asking each party member for a **DC 16 Intelligence (History) check**. On a success, you can reveal the information in the *Backstory* section of this adventure, detailing Garag'thak's influence upon the region as a reign of terror, as well as Ashim's legacy of peacekeeping. This will serve as a good baseline for the party to start from.

**GM NOTE:** Alternatively, if you are more interested in a story with political intrigue and deception, consider giving the party conflicting narratives. Is Ashim a peacekeeper or a coward? Perhaps Garag'thak has brought by prosperity for the orcs, but sadness for the others. Mud up the details, giving the party a chance to doubt themselves and their allegiance.

Additionally, ask the party if there's anything else they would've liked to do during their travel on their way to the camp, such as making sure they weren't followed, buying magical items, or other such things, but do not give them prompts. Once the party has decided on the things they would've liked to do, ask them for appropriate checks or provide the requested information, following the guidelines below:

- If a party member wants to make sure they are not being followed, ask them for a **DC 19 Wisdom (Perception) check**. On a successful check, they'll notice about halfway during their journey that a group of **orc** scouts are watching from very far away (around 600 feet). If spotted, the **orcs** will instantly retreat, leaving the party alone. Alternatively, the party can choose to use spells such as *invisibility* or teleportation magic to attempt to hide. They must make a collective **DC 20 Dexterity (Stealth) check** to hide from the scouts. If there are more successes than failures, the party successfully hides. This will have an influence later in the adventure.

- If the party asks for magical items, such as *potions of healing*, spell components, or items, decide on which ones are available to the party and negotiate their prices. If you are playing this adventure as a one-shot, it is highly likely the party doesn't have any gold, so allow them to pick 1 very rare item, 1 rare item, and 2 uncommon items to have. Magic items are integral to combat at this level.

- If a party member wants to gauge the surroundings and ground for battle plans, they must make a **DC 18 Wisdom (Survival) check**. On a successful check, they gain a better understanding of the terrain, which will have an effect later in the adventure.

- If the party comes up with other funny/interesting endeavors, feel free to ask for appropriate checks or short vignettes of the party's travels.

Once the party has had some time to discuss the things they've wanted to do, they will be approached by Ashim.

Read this:

*"Amidst the vibrant tapestry of Ashim's camp, an older hobgoblin man emerges, his presence commanding respect and attention. Dressed in the flowing robes of a bygone era, Ashim's attire exudes an aura of traditional elegance. His robe is adorned with intricate embroidery, featuring motifs of dragons and cherry blossoms, each stitch a testament to the craftsmanship of his people. With a serene countenance, Ashim approaches your party, his steps measured and deliberate. His grizzled face bears the wisdom of years spent in both diplomacy and conflict. His salt-and-pepper beard frames a pair of sharp, observant eyes that seem to pierce through pretense and into the hearts of those he encounters."*

The party now meets Ashim of the 9th Gale (see "Ashim" sidebar).

### Ashim of the 9th Gale (LG hobgoblin veteran)

**Information:** Born into a highly-respected noble family, Ashim took to studying and combat in equal measure, but he gave up the blade in favor of being an advocate for peace. His inner conflict regarding the rebellion is that he is brining combat and death even though he wishes for peace. As such, he is utilizing the party to minimize the amount of death. If they cut off the head of the snake, perhaps he'll feel less guilty.

**Roleplaying as Ashim:** Ashim is equal parts lawful and conflicted. He believes deeply in his cause but is terrified it'll change him forever. Portray him as a mix of a sage and a remorseful old man. He should stir up empathy and respect from the party, coming across as truthful, respectful and experienced, but humane.

Ashim will welcome the party and introduce himself, telling them that they're is much to work out. Give the party a few minutes to introduce themselves, then have Ashim explain to them the importance of secrecy. Then, proceed.

Read this:

*"Suddenly, the serenity is shattered as the air resounds with the clash of steel and the hiss of arrows. From the dense woods surrounding the camp, Garag'thak's assassins emerge like wraiths, their dark forms illuminated only by the sun glinting off their sinister blades. Swift and deadly, they descend upon the camp with ruthless precision, their attack coordinated and relentless. Torches flare to life, revealing the grim faces of Garag'thak's loyalists, their crimson banners unfurling in the night breeze. In the midst of the ambush, the camp's inhabitants rally, weapons drawn and determination etched upon their faces."*

As the threats descend, Ashim will shout that it's most likely because they haven't had time to hide the party from scrying. Then, the camp will quickly get in position to defend itself.

The party must fight **one stone golem**, **one mage** and **two assassins**. Explain how there are countless other forces, which are being handled by the various guards and members of the camp. If the party had managed to hide their tracks and not be followed on-foot too, they must only fight **one assassin**.

**GM NOTE:** If your party is better suited to certain scenarios or you want to make for an easier encounter, feel free to change the configuration of the combat. If you want to make for a more difficult encounter, you can even change it to them fighting two stone golems instead of two assassins. This fight should feel like a major "test drive" of high level combat – easy to understand monsters and a way to get used to high-level mechanics.

Once the party has defeated the ambushers, you may proceed to the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 2: WARGAMES

In which the party meets their crew, then prepares for battle.

### Meeting the People

With the threat defeated, Ashim will suggest the party quickly meet up with the various factions of the rebellion as they pack up and move camp, lest they get discovered again. The party can now explore the various locations and tents of map 1, meeting the factions of the rebellion.

The main goal of meeting the factions is to get an idea of their beliefs and combat abilities. Once the party has met all of its forces, you may proceed to the next subchapter.

**GM NOTE:** Remember to take notes during the interactions the party has with the various factions. It will influence the war minigame within the second chapter. Remind the party to take notes as well! It will help them out aplenty. Write down each time a group's morale is increased or decreased.

## AREA 1 - POINT OF ARRIVAL

This is where the party arrives.

## AREA 2 - FORGE TENT

Read this:

*“To the side of the camp is a large half-tent, outfitted more for crafting than sleep. All gathered around a large table, and a few mannequins are five or so dwarves, all in enchanted metallic armor.”*

This tent is the home of the Runehalt dwarves, master armorers and berserkers, led by Kovacs Kathbar (see “Kovacs Kathbar” sidebar).

### Kovacs Kathbar (LN dwarf)

**Information:** Kathbar and his dwarves were contracted by the rebellion as mercenaries, akin to the party, though they are citizens of the Vanguard Grounds. His people are the minds behind parts of Garag’thak’s armor, but have now switched sides. Their main interest is money and their contract specifies that for each dead dwarf the rebellion must pay 10,000 gold.

**Roleplaying as Kathbar:** Kathbar is a tried and true capitalist, doing whatever it takes to make the most amount of money possible. Play him as cold and forthright. He won’t care for the party if they have nothing to offer him.

As the party comes to Kathbar, he is trying to piece together parts of the original armor schematics he built for Garag’thak, which the orc had him destroy. He’ll disclose what he’s doing, but decline speaking with the party if they don’t have anything to help him with.

The party can attempt to help in piecing together the schematics either with a **DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) checks** or spells such as the *legend lore* or *enhance ability* spells (spells that can either acquire information or provide aid with Intelligence checks). If a party member is proficient with tinker’s tools, they can make the **Intelligence (Arcana) check** at advantage. If a party member succeeds at the check or casts a helpful spell, Kovacs will be grateful, and the dwarves’ morale will be increased by 1.

If the party extensively bothers Kovacs without offering up any aid or fails in aiding him, the dwarves’ morale will be decreased by 1.

## AREA 3 - MINOTAUR KITCHEN

Read this:

*“Leaning up against the side of the mountain is a collection of minotaurs, all cut up and bruised, but smiling, gathered around a steaming pot of stew. Despite having just been through a fight, they are enjoying themselves.”*

The party now meets the minotaurs, led by Spiritspeaker Odyr (see “Odyr”) sidebar.

### Odyr (CG minotaur)

**Information:** Odyr is the elder of the minotaur tribes, having just recently finished his trial of beasts. He is a druid who specializes in shapeshifting with most of his people being either druids or barbarians with a distinct love for battle and food. Odyr is simultaneously very similar and very different to Garag’thak. Both are warriors from traditionalist communities. Odyr’s main gripe with Garag’thak is his use of technology, thus leading to the minotaurs joining the rebellion.

**Roleplaying as Odyr:** Odyr is a traditionalist, whose love for nature is only met by the love for battle. Though not bloodthirsty, he deeply loves a good fight. He, on the other hand, hates experiments and armor, thus not aligning himself with the dwarves. He is obsessive about respect and showing it. If anyone jokes with him, he’ll feel slighted as an elder and shun them.

As the party arrives, Odyr and his people are cooking. When they approach, if they do not greet them with a bow or ask Odyr about his title, they’ll need to make a **DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) check**. On a success, they can proceed normally. On a failure, Odyr will ask them to leave.

Once they make introductions, Odyr will ask the party if they want a taste of his food. If they accept, he’ll ask them to help identify the ingredients. To do that, a party member must succeed on a **DC 18 Intelligence (Nature) check**. On a success, they’ll convince Odyr of their connection with nature and his people’s morale will be increased by 1.

If any party member that is not a druid or ranger attempts to cast a spell or use a magic item, or if no one identifies the food's ingredients, the minotaur's morale will be decreased by 1.

## AREA 4 - ASHINA FIREPLACE

Read this:

*"Resting calmly around the embers of a fireplace are a collection of hobgoblins, all of which are dressed in robes of a jade coloring, their armor bearing a few streaks of silver coloring. In the middle, a single, taller hobgoblin with a katana to his side, the scabbard glowing in the darkness."*

The party now meets the Ashina family, led by Ryu Ashina (see "Ryu Ashina" sidebar).

### Ryu Ashina (LG hobgoblin)

**Information:** Ryu Ashina is the young head of the Ashina family, sent to die on the front lines of stupid wars by Garag'thak. After surviving countless battles and being named a traitor, he realized he was being manipulated and turned his family against the orc. He is the wielder of the Silver Dragon Blade, a blade only used for healing magic. He is a vehemently honorable individual, racked with survivor's guilt over the men who died saving him in the front lines.

**Roleplaying as Ryu:** Ryu's main detriment is his trauma. War has changed him, and the 27-year-old is wise beyond his age, using his connection to his holy blade with desperation. When portraying him, get across his psychological need to save everyone and keep everyone alive.

When the party arrives, Ryu is sitting by the fire, trying to keep his calm. He'll refuse to speak with the party first. Any party member can make a **DC 16 Wisdom (Insight) check** to gauge his mental state. On a successful check, they'll discern his anxiety.

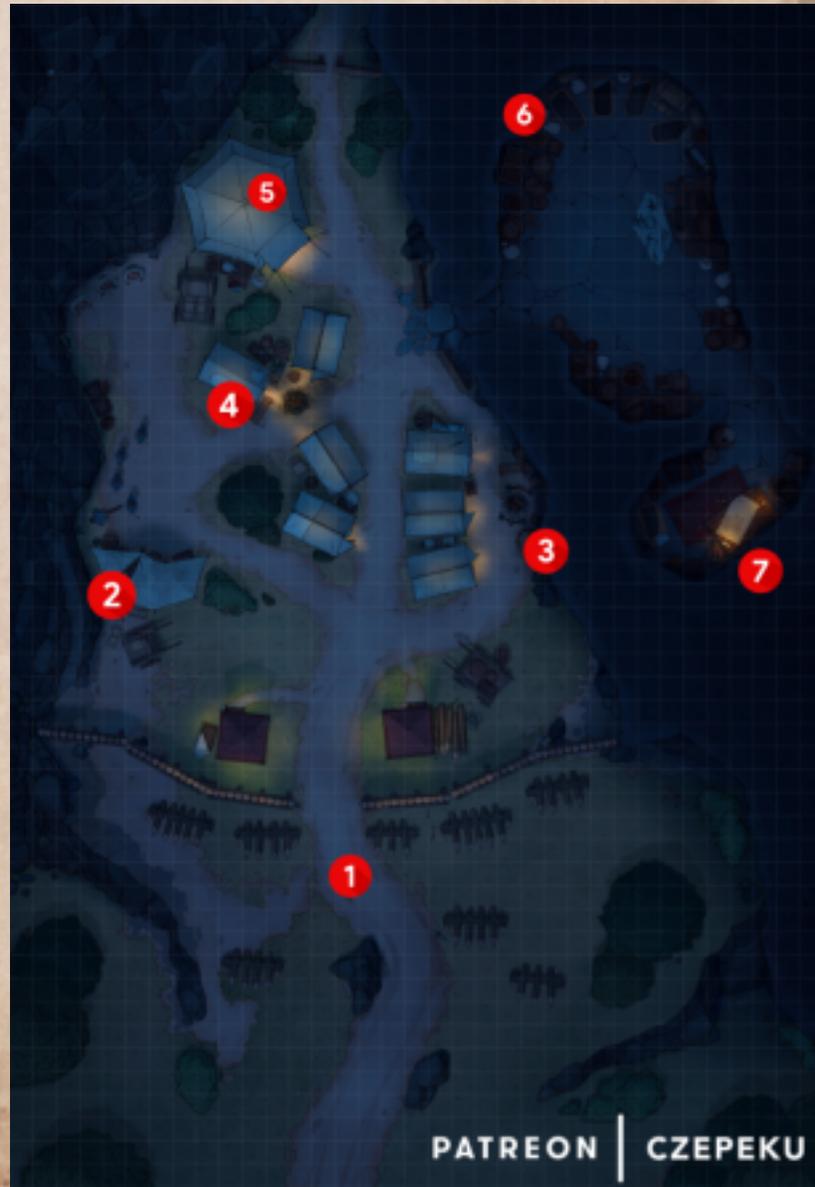
If pressed about it, he'll confess he doesn't have any healing magic left, but one of his men is injured. Any party member can then persuade Ryu to let them help with a **DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check**. On a success, Ryu will lead the party to an injured comrade, Sazed, which they can help by healing him for at least 30 hit points or making a successful **DC 19 Wisdom (Medicine) check**. If the party successfully heals the comrade, the Ashina family's morale will be increased by 1.

If the party fails to heal the injured hobgoblin or mishandle Ryu's anxiety, the Ashina family morale will be decreased by 1.

**GM NOTE:** What constitutes a mishandling of someone's anxiety varies from GM to GM. As far as we're concerned, minimizing Ryu's fears without aiding or belittling him would constitute the harshest form of failure.

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MAP 1



## AREA 5 - LEADERS' TENT

Read this:

*"Inside the main tent of the camp are four beds, four chairs and a large table. On each of the beds, old yet not beaten, are hobgoblin military leaders, joined by none other than Ashim. Each of them looks grizzled, but their eyes show a determination unlike any other."*

The party now meets the old members of the Honorbound Council, led by Ashim.

**GM NOTE:** If you feel the need to add more NPCs and personalities, feel free to do so by giving distinct personalities to each of the members.

Ashim will mention himself as the leader of a few thousand men, all of which have defected from the army and joined the rebellion against Garag'thak. They specialize in quick strikes, but lack healers or means of defense. Ashim will then offer up that both he and the party look at the maps of the region. If the party has made a successful **Wisdom (Survival) check** to study the surroundings earlier in this adventure, The hobgoblins' morale will be increased by 1.

Their morale cannot be decreased, as they fight to the death with utmost devotion.

## AREA 6 - PRIESTS OF TI'IPALO

Read this:

*"Stepping into the cave, immediately to the left you are greeted by an odd sight. A group of priests, all of which have pierced water skins dangling above their heads as they lay down, as if being tortured, yet all of them are smiling."*

The party now meets the Priests of Ti'ipalo, led by Zdro Virkas (see "Zdro" sidebar).

## Zdro (NE elf)

**Information:** Zdro is a warlock and the head cultist of Ti'ipalo, also known as "The All-Encompassing Embrace", a kraken posing as a god. He is the "god" of drownings, water, embraces, and ritualistic sacrifice, which Zdro discovered underneath an island of the Vanguard Grounds and started worshipping vehemently. He's joined the rebellion in search of religious freedom, bringing his cultists, who specialize in healing, with him.

**Roleplaying as Zdro:** Zdro tries to be as warm and unassuming as possible, posing as a simple cleric of an illegal religion. He will defend his faith at all costs and deny any allegations of them being a cult. He is also a lover of hugs.

As the party arrives, Zdro's clerics are all praying, which Zdro will welcome the party to join. If at least two party members join, each party member who is praying must make either a **DC 16 Intelligence (Religion) check** or a **DC 20 Charisma (Deception) or (Performance) check**. On a success, the cultists' morale will increase by 1.

If the party insult/question the religion or fail on the **Charisma (Deception) or (Performance) check**, the cultists' morale will decrease by 1.

## AREA 7 - THE MOONDAUGHTERS

Read this:

*"At the farthest end of the cave, curled up into balls and sleeping soundly are a collection of orcish women, with only two of them still awake, keeping watch. They are dressed in a variety of attires, ranging from armor to but a few pieces of cloth and leather. What's sure is that all of them are sleeping with their weapons beside them."*

The party now meets the Moondaughters, led by Rogmasha Thundercaller (see "Rogmasha" sidebar).

## Rogmasha (CN orc)

**Information:** Rogmasha, the leader of the Moondaughters, formed the clan as a response to Garag'thak's dominating views, taking away the right of battle from orcish women and undermining their position within orcish society. As a result, the Moondaughters retreated from city life and now live within the most dangerous regions of the Vanguard Grounds.

**Roleplaying as Rogmasha:** Rogmasha is a fighter at heart, using her combat prowess and survivalist instinct to lead her people as well as possible. She harbors a deep hatred for Garag'thak and his ways, wanting to ensure equal rights for her sisters.

When the party arrives, Rogmasha and her second-in-command, Zorre, are arm wrestling due to being too tense to sleep. The party can join their game. Beating Rogmasha requires a series of three successful contested **Strength (Athletics) checks** against her, whose modifier is a +10. Three consecutive failures cause a loss. If a party member successfully beats Rogmasha at arm wrestling, she'll be overjoyed to see she is fighting alongside strong allies, increasing her people's morale by 1. If a party member loses to her, her people's will be decreased.

**GM NOTE:** As Rogmasha's quarrel with Garag'thak is slightly political, you could encourage the party to discuss the issue as an alternative means of raising her morale by 1.

## Best Laid Plans

During this subchapter, using the information they have gathered, the party must orchestrate a battle plan benefit of their warriors. All the planning happens while the camp is moved, giving the party no time for anything more than a short rest.

**GM NOTE:** As this adventure only has 2 combat encounters, it's recommended you don't grant the party a long rest between them. High-level combat is more lenient on the party as is, so the limited resources should help with the tension.

The minigame is centered around a 5-role system, akin to a more complex rock-paper-scissors, but with 5 roles. The roles have the following matchups:

## WARGAMES MATCHUP TABLE

Role	Strong Against	Weak Against
<b>Defenders</b>	<i>Brawlers, Assassins</i>	<i>Healers, Artillery</i>
<b>Brawlers</b>	<i>Healers, Artillery</i>	Tanks, Assassins
<b>Healers</b>	<i>Assassins, Defenders</i>	<i>Brawlers, Artillery</i>
<b>Assassins</b>	<i>Brawlers, Artillery</i>	<i>Defenders, Healers</i>
<b>Artillery</b>	<i>Defenders, Healers</i>	<i>Assassins, Brawlers</i>

When a battle is declared, each side of the battle (the party and the GM) each secretly chooses an army **they haven't chosen before**. Once both armies are chosen, they are revealed to the other side. Then, the party can have one member roll a **DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation) check**. On a success, they'll be told the role of the other army and can then choose their role.

**GM NOTE:** Alternatively, if you want to create a fun guessing game, you can choose to give context clues, not the full role.

Then, the battle begins. If one role is strong against the other, that side rolls 1d8, while the other side rolls 1d4. If both armies have the same role chosen, then both roll 1d4. Once the dice are rolled, each army adds +1 to the roll for each increase in morale, a -1 for each decrease in morale. Then, reveal the total of each army. The army with the higher number wins. The army with the lower number suffers losses as per this table:

## WARGAMES LOSS TABLE

Total Number	Losses
1 or lower	<b>Great Losses.</b> Most of the army is lost. Morale is decreased by 2 in the next fight.
2-3	<b>Medium Losses.</b> There are some losses. Morale is decreased by 1 in the next fight.
4	<b>Minor Losses.</b> There are minor losses. There is no loss in morale.
5 or higher	<b>Perfect Retreat.</b> There are no notable losses. Morale is increased by 1 in the next fight.

Each faction within the party's army has different roles, different special abilities and different flaws. When chosen for a battle, the party must then choose **one** role the faction will fulfil in that battle.

## WARGAMES ARMY FACTION TABLE

Army	Possible Roles	Ability	Flaw
The Runehalt Dwarves	None	<b>Experimentation.</b> The Runehalt Dwarves can be any role.	<b>Disloyal.</b> On a loss, the Dwarves switch sides. Treat the fight as though it had major casualties.
The Minotaur Tribesmen	Defenders, Healers	<b>Joy of Battle.</b> The minotaurs don't lose morale from previous lost battles.	<b>Traditionalists.</b> The Minotaur cannot fight a battle if the Dwarves fought the previous one.
The Ashina Family	Healers, Artillery	<b>Expert Healers.</b> The Ashina Family decrease losses suffered by 1.	<b>Fear.</b> The Ashina Family reduce morale in the next battle by 1.
The Hobgoblin Army	Brawlers, Defenders	<b>Honorable Deaths.</b> On a loss, the Hobgoblin Army increase morale in the next battle by 3.	<b>Honorable Death.</b> The Hobgoblin Army reduce the losses suffered by the enemy by 1.
The Cult of Ti'ipalo	Assassins, Artillery	<b>Holy Sacrifice.</b> If the cultists suffer medium or great losses, morale is increased by 1 for the next battle.	<b>Religious Fanatics.</b> If the cultists win the battle, the next battle has its morale decreased by 1.
The Moondaughters	Assassins, Brawlers	<b>Iron Will.</b> The Moondaughters have their morale increased by 2.	<b>Captured.</b> If the Moondaughters lose the battle, the morale is decreased by 1 (in addition to the morale loss from a lost battle).

In order to finish the chapter, the party must win 3 fights in a total of 5 fights. If they lose 3 fights, it will impact the next chapter.

For the sake of brevity and ease, there are no distinct armies with special powers or morale as part of the GM's army. Simply choose a role in secret, await the party's choice, and then reveal the role if need be. Alternatively, don't disclose the role, but give worldbuilding details about a specific clan of orcs and their powers. Feel free to improvise!

If your party has no way of deciding on a role in secret from another room, you choose first, write your answer down on a sheet of paper and only reveal after they've chosen.

**GM NOTE:** If you have the time at your disposal, feel free to add special abilities and armies of your own!

Once the party has won or lost 3 battles, you may proceed to the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3: PEACE ABOVE ALL

In which the party kills a tyrant.

### Spoils of War

If the party has won 3 battles, read this:

*"As you stand amidst the rallying forces of the rebellion, the sight before you is awe-inspiring. A multitude of warriors from different races and backgrounds have united under your banner, their spirits burning brightly with newfound hope. Your leadership has led to success. The rebels march in unison, their footsteps echoing with a resolute rhythm that seems to shake the very earth beneath them. Banners of various factions wave in the wind, each symbolizing a distinct facet of the Vanguard Grounds' diverse populace."*

*The air is charged with a collective determination, and as you lead this valiant procession, you can't help but feel the weight of their expectations. Though Garag'thak remains elusive, the rebels know that their moment is at hand. The walls of Firetower, a menacing fortress of black stone, draw ever nearer. The fate of the Vanguard Grounds hangs in the balance, and the final chapter in the struggle for freedom and justice is about to unfold within the shadow of the city's towering walls. Then, Ashim comes to you with a plan."*

If the party has lost 3 battles, read this instead:

*"As the rebellion advances toward Firetower, the toll of the relentless conflict becomes increasingly apparent. Tired and weary, the rebels bear the scars of their hard-fought battles. The once-thriving forces have thinned, their numbers diminished by the relentless onslaught of Garag'thak's loyalists. Amidst the weary and battered ranks, your party stands as a beacon of resilience, a symbol of unwavering determination. The weight of leadership and the burden of mounting losses weigh heavily upon your shoulders. It is at this moment, as the sun dips below the horizon, that Ashim, the wise hobgoblin diplomat, calls upon you."*

Additionally, if the party has lost the 3 battles, each party member gains 2 levels of exhaustion.

Then, the party may proceed to their meeting with Ashim.

Read this:

*"With an air of solemn resolve, Ashim shares a final plan, a daring strategy that could turn the tide in your favor for a final time. The campfire's flickering light dances across his aged features as he imparts his wisdom, and the fate of the rebellion rests upon the choices you will make in the challenging moments that lie ahead. He suggests you sneak into Garag'thak's war room with a final, mad siege on Firetower. All or nothing. Nothing left to lose, everything to gain."*

The party now has their plan set up. Proceed to the next chapter.

## An Iron Tyrant

Read this:

*“As your party breaches the imposing gates of Firetower and steps into the heart of the city, you are led through a labyrinthine network of darkened corridors and winding staircases. The architecture of Firetower is oppressive, its obsidian walls adorned with gruesome trophies of conquest. Finally, you are ushered by your warriors into Garag’thak’s inner sanctum, his war room. They guard the door, keeping reinforcements away, while you step within with bated breath. The war room is a chamber of sinister grandeur. Crimson banners bearing Garag’thak’s sigil hang from the vaulted ceiling, their edges tattered and stained with the blood of countless battles. At the center of the room, a massive circular table dominates the space, its surface etched with a sprawling map of the Vanguard Gronds and beyond. Miniature figurines and markers are meticulously arranged, depicting troop movements, fortifications, and strategic positions. The chamber is dimly lit by flickering torches set in ornate sconces, casting long, dancing shadows on the walls and lighting up the patches of still fresh blood. The air is heavy with the scent of death. At the head of the table, Garag’thak sits calmly, his axe still bloody. He is a hulking figure, draped in a cloak of deep crimson and obsidian armor adorned with fearsome spikes and horns. His eyes, cold and calculating, fix upon your party as they enter.”*

The party now meets Garag’thak Irontusk (see “Garag’thak” sidebar).

### Garag’thak Irontusk (LE iron tyrant)

**Information:** Born into a traditionalist orcish clan and changed by his wars against goblin engineers and alchemists, Garag’thak became an advocate of augmented weaponry. Now, he wears a heavily-enchanted suit, an exoskeleton, and other magic-tech augments to enhance his strength beyond that of any mere orc. Augmentation, he thinks, is fair, as long as it makes you mighty, for might makes right. Strength is the only way to truly lead.

**Roleplaying as Irontusk:** Irontusk is a confident brute with a tactician’s mind, yet no booksmarts. Complex magic is past his understanding and appearances play an important role into how he assesses targets. He’ll take on the intimidating ones first, only switching targets if he notices healing. He believes healing to be protection for the weak, which he cannot tolerate. He is arrogant, brash and aggressive.

When the party meets Garag’thak, he has just defeated the swathes of soldiers that have poured into his war room. He’ll greet the party arrogantly, asking if they too have come to die. He won’t hesitate to speak with them if they are open, but once they’ve shown him the slightest sign of weakness, he’ll begin the fight.

**GM NOTE:** While the possibility that the party aligns with Garag’thak is not excluded, he is not the type to offer them a deal – he is far too confident in his abilities to even consider defeat. If, however, the party offers up a deal or an alliance, they must make a DC 18 Charisma (Deception) or Charisma (Persuasion) check. On a success, Garag’thak will agree to align with them.

Unless the party aligns themselves with Garag’thak, they must fight him in his lair.

### LAIR ACTIONS

When fighting inside his lair, Garag’thak can invoke the ambient magic to take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Garag’thak takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects:

- **Obsidian Ward.** Garag’thak absorbs obsidian bits of armor from around the chamber. Until next round at initiative 20, his AC is increased by 2 and he gains resistance to one damage type of his choice.
- **Searing War Plans.** Garag’thak activates a magical map on the obsidian table, causing it to erupt in flames. Each creature within a 20-foot radius, 60-foot wide cylinder of the center table must make a **DC 18 Dexterity saving throw**, taking 6d6 fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.
- **War Room Warcry.** Garag’thak’s war room resonates with the echoes of past battles. Each creature of Garag’thak’s choice within the lair succeed on a **DC 18 Wisdom saving throw** or become frightened of Garag’thak for 1 minute. An effected creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

Once the party has defeated Garag’thak or aligned with him, you may proceed to the next subchapter.

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## MAP 2



## The End

If the party has brought Garag'thak to 0 hit points, read this:

*“As Garag'thak collapses to his knees, the room trembles as if mourning the fall of its malevolent master. The monarch's eyes lock with you all, one by one, and for a brief instant, a glimmer of remorse flickers through his gaze. He utters a hoarse, bitter laugh, realizing the inevitable. With a final exhalation, Garag'thak succumbs to his wounds, his reign of terror brought to a decisive and irreversible end.”*

The party has either succeeded in aiding or destroying the rebellion. They have arrived at one of the following endings:

- **Tyrant's Fall.** With their aid, Garag'thak has been defeated. As such, the party is rewarded with a medal, the title of noble and all the land and privileges that come with it, totaling over 50,000 gp each.
- **Last Second Shift.** The party has decided to align themselves with Garag'thak at the very last moment, bringing about damnation to the rebellion. In return, Garag'thak gives them all the titles and belongings of the rebels, totaling over 200,000 gp each.

# THANK YOU!

A BIG THANK YOU TO ALL OF THOSE WHO FOLLOW AND SUPPORT ME, WITHOUT YOU I COULDN'T HAVE BROUGHT THIS PROJECT TO LIFE.

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