

Raid on Chateau Fekenstein



A fantasy gamebook of magic, war, heroism & betrayal

By Al Sander

(picture 'The Castle' ©Franca)

Your Character

As can be seen from your *character sheet* on the page following, your character has 4 attributes, **Endurance**, **Mental Fortitude**, **Luck** and **Education**. These four attributes start at the level indicated (although your choice of background skills may change the starting scores). Your current scores will almost certainly go up and down during your adventure, but cannot go above the starting value unless otherwise indicated. Mark any changes in the current score section in the box with each attribute. All your attributes start at full value, including any increases you may have from your background choices below. The attributes are as follows:

Endurance – this is a combination of your strength, hardiness and overall wellbeing. You start off with a slightly higher **Endurance** than an average person does, although this is almost certainly going to decrease as your adventure progresses. If your current **Endurance** score ever reaches 0 or below you are dead or dying, which usually means the end of your adventure unless otherwise stated.

Mental Fortitude – this is your ability to focus your willpower (especially useful when casting spells), your determination when faced with adversity and your ability to withstand shocking conditions or sights. Having trained so many years as an arcanist, your **Mental Fortitude** is unusually strong. Some would even call you a stubborn cuss. If your current **Mental Fortitude** ever reaches 0 or below your mind is shattered. Normally this means your mind is shattered by the hardships you have endured, plunging you into a state of non-functional insanity. If this happens under the strain of casting a spell the resulting backlash of uncontrolled magic is usually catastrophic. In either case, it typically means your adventure is over.

Luck – ever since Acais Notwen demonstrated via arcane methodology that personal luck is a quantifiable substance that exerts influence on the world, there have been spells and devices that can tap into this naturally occurring form of power. You start off with a normal amount of **Luck**, although one of your background choices may adjust this. Your current **Luck** will rarely change and cannot go lower than 0 but apart from having abysmal luck, having such a low score will not otherwise affect you.

Education – your **Education** attribute primarily measures the degree and depth of your magical training although it does give a general idea of your level of knowledge in other related academic fields. Your many years of study mean you are very highly educated in comparison to the general population. Your current **Education** score is unlikely to change significantly (if at all) during the adventure and will not be reduced to 0 or below.

In addition to these four attributes, you have a number of skill listed, and other spaces for skills to be filled in on your *character sheet*. You will find out more about choosing your skills and what they do under the background section on page 3.

You also have a space for equipment you start with or find in the adventure. Starting equipment will be dealt with in the equipment section on page 6.

Finally you have a space on your *character sheet* for notes. At various points in the adventure you will be asked to write down something in this notes section or check the notes section to see if you have a particular note listed.

Character Sheet

ENDURANCE

Starting Endurance = **6**

Current Endurance =

MENTAL FORTITUDE

Starting Mental Fortitude = **7**

Current Mental Fortitude =

LUCK

Starting Luck = **5**

Current Luck =

EDUCATION

Starting Education = **9**

Current Education =

SKILLS

Major Study: **BMA (Arcane Theory)**

First Minor:

Second Minor:

Combat Training: **Basic Training**

Advanced Training:

Combat Experience:

EQUIPMENT

Dagger

Wand

Chameleon Cloak

NOTES

Background

You were busily trying to fail your first year at the moderately prestigious University of Andringham through of combination of wine, women (at least, your mostly rebuffed attempts to get a woman even talking with you let alone anything further) and the study of the esoteric art of statistics (otherwise known as games of chance), when the lands that make up Talandtar, which is to say the entire world, went to war.

You had been brought up on a steady diet of war stories, like most of your peers. However, the absence of a father (due to a previous, smaller war) and the all too real tales told by your strange Uncle Phelpenton (Phelps to those that know him) had perhaps given you more insight into the realities of war than your classmates. Thus you didn't cease study to join the war effort. No, in fact, for the first time in your life you started to apply yourself (which is to say you started going to all your classes and studying damn hard) and by dint of this unaccustomed effort (and a very humbling discussion with one, fortunately sympathetic, dean) you managed to pass the first year of your studies... and the second, in fact, all the way to the forth year which left you the proud owner of a Batchelor of Magical Arts (Arcane Theory) and what you thought was a clear path into post-graduate study.

At this stage the war was into its forth year and your country was struggling; ongoing fighting on two borders, a tense state of not war on another and ongoing skirmishing on the last (although that was nothing new in the Province of Dacros, which had always had problems from the near-humans for as long as it had been established; it's just that the problems were now worse – men and equipment being pulled out onto other fronts). But (even ignoring what the propaganda was saying for a minute) you knew that it was bad for every country, ally or foe. The countries of Talandtar had locked their horns in a death grip, each side having a greater understanding, ability and stockpile of magic than ever before in history. It was clear (to your young self at least) that even the surviving countries of this terrible conflict were going to be left terribly, terribly maimed. Not to mention the inhabitant and those that waged war on their behalf.

Thus your desire for further study (but not your only reason as the study was more than a little rewarding in itself), and thus both your excellent marks and your carefully cultivated contacts within the facility. You were sure to be able to go on and study for at least another three years (possibly as much as another five if you were to load the dice in your own favour) and by then, surely by then, the conflict would be over (one way or another) and if your county was not sacked and its people put to the sword, well, then you could live out the rest of your (long and surely prosperous) life. But you were not selected for further study, despite your marks (and your contacts). You even know (or think you know) the reason, rather the person, behind this (shocking, at least to you) decision. The facility second professor, Professor Gaulire, was in a position to influence the choice of student to go on and, well, it would be little surprise if he held a grudge against you for the little piece of *unpleasantness* you involved yourself in, the third year of your study. Thus you went to war.

At this point in time your skills consisted of the following:

BMA (Arcane Theory) – *already included on your character sheet, the Batchelor of Arcane Arts gives you a very good understanding of the creation and formation of both spells and magical equipment. You have also mastered a number of small (generally not very useful) spells and rituals.*

In addition to this field of study, you had an interest in two further minor areas of study. Select two of these skills and add them in the first minor and second minor areas of your *character sheet*.

Arcane Manipulation – this minor field of study taught you about the magical manipulation of objects (primarily objects as it is extraordinarily difficult to manipulate within the field generated by living creatures) from a distance. A very practical course of study, you learnt a number of moderately useful spells and rituals.

Divinatory Means and Methods – you were taught about many of the seeming endless ways with which you can magically sense your surrounding, determine the truth of what you can sense and divine both the past and the future. In theory this minor field of study should have been a great help with games of chance but it is almost impossible to use undetected amongst fellow students – they knew all the tricks also.

Elemental Studies – one of the easier and more practical fields of study and one in which you have quite some natural talent. This minor course of study taught you the basics about manipulating, refining and summoning the five basic elemental substances (and some of the lesser tertiary substances). You were also taught a number of not very useful spells and rituals.

History of the Arcane Arts – this minor gives you a good idea of where the magic that exists today came from and at which points in history major discoveries were made. A very studious course of study, selecting this skill increases your starting **Education** score by 2 (adjust your character sheet).

Life Systems – this minor specialization taught about using the arcane arts on living creatures. The skills you learned were the very basics of what arcane healer and changers are required to learn for their studies. Interestingly enough you learnt that even dead creatures contain living creatures inside them (you were given a very dead piglet to study, that is dissect, at the beginning of one term – those that were unable to arrest the decay of the piglet by mid term were very unpopular with the rest of the students). You learnt many spells and rituals, none of which were particularly useful except possibly the one that stops infections in minor wounds. You have used that.

Leaving behind your life at the University (and possibly you fear, soon to be life in general), you were trained as an officer (given your station) and as a battlefield arcanist (given your prior studies). Basic training was unspeakable. You don't wish to remember the pain and exhaustion of those weeks. You started off (you thought) fit and ended up fitter than you had ever been in your life.

Officer training and studies in your specialty were difficult but interesting and you couldn't do anything but excel at the arcane aspects of your training. One notable exception was flight. While you did not lack the ability to master flight spells and devices, you found the process of flying highly nauseating. Luckily for you, as you have found out since that the life span of an aerial arcanist is measured in weeks (3 weeks is what you were told was average).

However, after a much too short period of time (as the war was not going well and training times were at almost down to half what they had been at the start of the conflict) you graduated and were sent (with many other young men) to fight.

At this point, you had picked up some further skills as follows:

Basic Training – already included on your character sheet, the rigors of basic training increased your **Endurance** (also already included on your character sheet) and taught you the basic weapons of war; close combat weapons such as daggers and polearms, ranged weapons such as javelins and

crossbows, magical implement, especially wands (given the strength of your natural talents) but also including devices.

Although training was short, you were able to develop one further skill in the time allowed. Pick one of the following and add it to the advanced training area of your *character sheet*.

Close Combat Training – *rightly or wrongly you decided to concentrate less on the magical skills offered and more on the martial training available. This rigorous course of study built up your strength and endurance even further (reflect this by adding 1 to the starting **Endurance** on your character sheet) and taught you the usage of many more hand-held weapons such as swords and axes.*

Combat Elementalism – *this is the traditional subset of skills known by any competent war wizard. You were taught how to rapidly forge shields of air to deflect blows, create waves of fire and many other spells useful in a combat situation. Your skills with a wand were also finessed allowing greater control and power for the same expenditure of effort. You must be proficient in **Elemental Studies** to gain training in this area.*

Combat Manipulation – *you developed your basic manipulation skills further, learning spells that allow you to throw objects, push aside (deflect) incoming attacks as well as learning the basics of creating shaped objects of pure force. By the end of your training, the strength you could manipulate through magic was greater than your own physical strength. You must be proficient in **Arcane Manipulation** to gain training in this area.*

Combat Precognition – *this strange but highly useful skill allows to always have warning a fraction of a second before any event occurs (due to the large number of variables taking place at any time in a particular situation, it becomes extraordinarily difficult very quickly the further ahead you try and perceive). Mentally taxing, the spells taught do not guarantee survival on the battlefield (as that depends on your reaction time and the nature of the threat) but it will aid you to a large degree. You must be proficient in **Divinatory Means and Methods** to gain training in this area.*

Dissipation – *this interesting skill utilises your encyclopaedic knowledge of spell creation and formation to find fault in the casting of other magician's spells and to quickly and subtly break down or warp their magic. This range of skills and spells used to be the definitive mark of a talented battlefield mage but is less useful in this modern age where devices (which are practically impossible to interfere with) are more common on the battlefield than cast spells.*

Healing – *not the area in which you have all that much natural talent, healing allows you to provide slightly better than basic first aid upon another and more talented healing upon yourself. Provides not only the ability to close and mend wounds but the spells taught also provide good resistance to infection and disease. You must be proficient in **Life Systems** to gain training in this area.*

Shifting – *you are only moderately talented in this set of skills but with shifting you can change, to a moderate extent, various bits of your body. Some spells you were taught allow you to change your vision to that of a cat's, (allowing you to see in dull light) hardening or creation of scales over portions of your body to protect them and many other minor shape-shifts. Full body shape-shifts (which are dangerous at the best of times) are largely beyond your skill. You must be proficient in **Life Systems** to gain training in this area.*

Once you finished your basic training you almost got sent to the front. It happened like this. You got your marching orders (telling you to go to the front obviously) but somehow your Uncle Phelps (the

crazy man he is) found out about these orders (in theory impossible as *you* didn't tell him), who, through the miracle which is the 'old boys network', got in contact with the *Matarkh* of Personnel and told him in no uncertain terms that, "The last three battlefield arcanists sent to the front had been killed," that it was, "A death sentence" to send you to the front and, "A waste of valuable talent in the war effort." So given you families general social standing, the orders to send you to the front got scrapped and you were instead sent out as support.

This is not to say things have been easy for you. For the last three months you have suffered under almost constant aetheric bombardment, been sent forward to hold the line against determined assaults twice and have aided in turning a near rout into a more ordered retreat. You have suffered through the mud and rain, the lack of decent food and the constant stress. You know you have it easy compared to the men at the front but are sure only one thing has enabled you to survive this long.

Choose one of the following and add it to it to the combat experience area of your *character sheet*.

*You quickly **Learnt a Few Tricks** – these tricks consist of (highly dangerous) magical shortcuts that boost the power of any of the spells you know, although not without cost. Any time you use one of your magical skills, you can add +2 to any roll you make, so long as you subtract 1 from your **Mental Fortitude**. Too many shortcuts will cause enough strain to break your mind, but using this knowledge has at times proven to be a (literal) life saver.*

*You have **Seen the Worst** war has to offer and it holds no fear for you – you are one of the 'lucky' few who is able to thrive in the high tension arena of battle. You found that horrific sights and being under attack did not cause you to freeze up or mentally break like many of your fellows. Your reactions in combat are swift and you will rarely lose **Mental Fortitude** due to unpleasant sights you may run into.*

*You found that **Luck Favours You** – it took being in extreme danger for you to realise just how naturally lucky you are compared to others. Sniper fire aimed at you instead strikes someone else who just happens to step in the path of the crossbow bolt at just the right (or wrong depending on perspective) time, the bunker holds out just long enough for you to get out, and many other such occurrences that have happened over the last months. Increase your starting **Luck** score by 2 on your character sheet.*

Equipment

You start the adventure with your *dagger*, a multipurpose tool used for any manner of tasks including defending yourself, a *chameleon cloak*, which allows you to blend in with most backgrounds when still or (to lesser effect) when moving slowly and a *wand*, a device only trained arcanists (especially those with training in the elements or with manipulation) use to focus and enhance their natural talents. It is possible for a wand to burn out through overuse, but in that case the situation was probably so dangerous you would have died if you *hadn't* have used your wand.

You are well enough regarded that you can requisition 3 points of equipment from the following list:

- (1 point) ***Elixir of healing*** – a basic healing salve that restores 1 point of lost **Endurance**.
- (1 point) ***Sword** or **axe*** – your choice of one of these two advanced weapons.
- (1 point) ***Portable hole*** (maker) – a substance that dissipates unprotected stone creating a hole.
- (2 points) ***Sphere of devastation*** – an unstable iron sphere that can be activated to explode with elemental fire after a (variably set) duration.
- (3 points) ***Superior elixir of healing*** – like an *elixir of healing* but restores 2 points of lost **Endurance**.

Introduction

Every day near the front is different and on this day you are shaken awake after far too short a time sleeping and told to report immediately to First Sept Lokan's bunker, deep within the trench complex. The aetheric bombardment is light this pre-dawn but that is more than made up for by the light but steady rain which has long since turned the trenches into a slurry of mud. You are wise to the way of the trenches however, carefully selecting planks of wood that aren't going to tip you into mud and taking a path which is longer but more navigable. With all this you manage to make your way to your destination only covered in mud up to your knees.

Inside the bunker, warmed by a small (woodless) fire, First Sept Lokan awaits. He gets straight down to business.

"The Chateau Fekenstein. We cannot bypass it and we cannot take it." You had heard rumours. Lokan notices your questioning look.

"Yes, what you have no doubt heard is true. They have some sort of device shielding the chateau. A few of these devices have started to turn up at the front and we have nothing to match it; it takes an immense amount of bombardment to overcome the device and we don't have enough here, not without stripping the entire front to overcome this one *Zhan-cursed* fortress. A physical assault against their bombardment, without support; it would take ten thousand men, and all to capture a place guarded by but five hundred."

He looks at you sideways. "We would dearly love to get hold of one of these devices and where an army would fail, one man alone might be able to slip undetected through their defences..." You feel the blood drain out of your face and you hold the edge of the table for support. This is a suicide mission! Lokan cannot control his face any longer and rolling laughter bursts from him like water through a broken dyke.

"Your face... your face!" He struggles mightily against his laughter. "I was... I was just pulling your horns. Of course you're not going in alone. You will be part of a small but highly skilled team. Your mission is to infiltrate the chateau, retrieve the shielding device intact, or at the very least disable it and then escape to give word so we can begin our assault. You will be the magical support. Come, I will introduce you to the rest of the team.

The rest of the team turn out to be just through the door, somewhat deeper into the bunker complex. There are six competent and fit looking men within. They are introduced as:

First Trooper Charl – the troop leader and second in command to yourself, Charl's motto is to 'be prepared' and he does just that by packing away as many devices as he can (such as *lockbusters*, *spheres of devastation* and others) that only require minimal arcane talent to utilise.

Trooper Storn – this chunkily built man is one of the team's two heavy weapon specialists and he has enough arcane talent to use his *staff of fire* with efficiency. A replacement troop for a man lost on the last mission, Storn has a friendly and ready smile.

Trooper Trihsder – the second heavy weapons specialist, Trihsder is a quiet man with a wine-stain birth mark covering one side of his face. In addition to his *staff of fire* he carries a huge, probably impractical but very impressive, battleaxe, slung across his back.

Trooper Valis – short and wiry with a slightly swarthy foreign look to him, Valis is the troop’s infiltration specialist. He has a tendency to fade into the background even in a well lit room and carries several razor sharpened knives for ‘close work’.

Trooper Rosenberg – this mean looking, scar-faced man is the troop’s close combat specialist. He carries two short swords and is able to use them in either hand with skill. He was rumoured to be a poet before the war.

Trooper Ringo – the sniper of the troop, Ringo carries a custom built overpowered crossbow with a range of arcane bolts. Tall and solidly built, he is the oldest of the troops and is a proven survivor who has been in the worst of the fighting since the wars inception.

As soon as you are introduced Lokan gets down to business. Each member of the troop, of *your* troop you suddenly realise, has a *chameleon cloak*. There is an extra one put aside for you (this is already on your *character sheet*). You note with pleasure that the cloak is made out of real chameleon hide so is far superior in function to a device made out of less suitable materials. Out of all of the many, many, forms of invisibility developed over the centuries, the blending-in properties of the cloak are the most subtle and certainly the least taxing for the user.

Lokan outlines two basic plans for getting to the chateau. The first of which is to leave during the day and slowly make your way there, relying on the cloaks to shield you. Constant bombardment of the chateau, while mostly ineffective, will keep the defenders’ heads down. The second plan involves leaving at night and making much faster progress. Although you will be impossible to spot by normal means at night, there are several devices which improve night vision. Thus, you would still be supported by bombardment of the chateau to reduce the chance of your detection.

Once there, you will enter the shield (created by the shielding device) and via use of rope and climbing devices possessed by your troop, scale the wall during this bombardment (hoping little of the energy from the bombardment gets through the shield around the chateau) and infiltrate your way in, secure the device, then flee either the way you came or through any other egress as the situation allows. You are unsure about the viability of this plan but your men seem confident enough. Unless, you reflect to yourself a little disconcertingly, this is just false bravado.

You snap out of your thoughts. The others are looking at you and you realise they are waiting for you to make your choice.

Turn to **1**.

1

You consider the two options given carefully, and then make your decision. No matter which choice you make, if you have skill with **Combat Precognition**, decide now if you want to activate it for the first part of your journey. Having the precognition spells active will help you avoid dangers but will be very mentally draining upon you.

If you want to make the slow, daytime approach, turn to **30**.

If you want to wait out the day and start your raid at nightfall, turn to **86**.

2

Your last ditch efforts fail. A blast of fire erupts from Storn's staff, engulfing you in its agonising grasp and sending you spiralling down into blessed darkness.

Your adventure ends here in failure.

3

The scream of the aetheric munition gets agonising loud as it hurtles down towards you. You feel a brief, intense burst of energy strike your body, warping your body into a new and terrible form while wiping consciousness from your mind.

You do not know it, but the terror round that struck too close to where you lay, transformed you into to a monstrous form. In this new form you proceed to tear apart your stunned and unprepared companions before slinking off across the war ravaged fields – one more monstrosity created by this, the most terrible of wars.

Your adventure ends here in failure.

4

Your dagger scores the wrist of the enemy troop but he is still able to let out a piercing blast on the whistle before he finally falls. You begin to free the prisoners, hoping somehow that the alarm was not raised but soon hear other enemy troops approaching. You abort the mission and concentrate on recouping what you can from your failure.

What happens next is a hard fought rear guard action in which you and the your troops hold off the enemy long enough for some of the prisoners to escape out of the stream with the hope that some may make it to friendly lines. There are too many enemy troops. You inflict casualties on them far in excess of your numbers but the enemy bring up devices of destructive power which finally overcome your spirited defence and sent you into darkness.

Your adventure ends here in failure.

5

To your horror you fumble the sphere, which drops to the ground at your feet. The sphere explodes with enough destructive energy to vaporise your body.

Your adventure ends here in failure.

6

You try and strike the encircling ring of necromantic corpses as a unit but the attack falters, staggers, and then is stopped in place. You bury your weapon into the spine of a corpse and twist, severing the spinal column and causing it to flop to the ground. You take the chance to look around and are disheartened.

Trooper Trihsder is on the ground, being torn into by two of the creatures, First Trooper Charl is standing in a circle of de-animated corpses, swinging his heavy axe in a brutal arc but he is still being hard pressed by three of the creatures. The rest of the troops are getting separated and inexorably being ground down as unit cohesion is lost.

You go for your wand, determined to save what you can of your troop, even if it means failure of the mission, when a heavy weight strikes you from the side. You are flung to the ground and hit it hard. Dazed, you cannot act as several of the corpses leap upon you and start to tear you apart.

Your adventure ends here in failure.

7

You lie senseless on the ground. The world is blurry, you cannot see properly and your brain refuses to process what little you can see. You feel magic being activated and a wave of heat passes over you. There is screaming that goes on and on and a horrible, all too familiar smell of burnt flesh. Your pack is ripped from your back.

Focus returns to you and you see Trooper Storn standing over you, his *staff of fire* in one hand, still smoking from its activation and your pack in the other. He looks subtly different, but you cannot tell how before he lines up his *staff of fire* and, with a tight lipped smile, activates its power. You desperately try and muster your concentration for a spell but the flames engulf you, destroying both your concentration and your body.

Your adventure ends here in failure.

8

You climb the wall steadily, just behind First Trooper Charl. The wall is rain slicked but the devices your band possesses make it easy but strenuous work. You pass several windows too small to enter and are tempted to approach one to look inside but resist with the thought you yourself might be seen.

A particularly viscous series of bombardments leads to tragedy. Energy flares through the shields and strikes the wall next to you, sending small fragments of shattered rock into and through your shoulder, tearing it apart in a bloody gout. Worse still, the fragments sever the rope above and you fall, jerked short after about 10 feet by the other length of rope secured below you. You swing uncontrollable back and forth along the wall. Sadly, even a potent device such as your chameleon cloak cannot keep up with your quick movement. One of the enemy troops on the wall soon picks you out and gives a shout.

It is an open question as to whether the blood loss from your wound or crossbow bolts from troops using you as target practice at the top of the wall ends your life.

Your adventure ends here in failure.

9

It is a weaselly little clerk that does it. He doesn't even notice Trooper Ringo, just caroms off him when he tries to cut the corner, taking a stack of obviously important paper from one room to another. The clerk's little shriek as he tumbles to the ground, in the process scattering paper everywhere, turns everyone's eyes towards him and then to your team.

You try and fight your way out. The casualties you inflict on the various support staff that try and stop you are immense (including that one clumsy clerk who is the first to go), but all too quickly combat hardened troops arrive, many carrying powerful devices and backed up by a formidable arcanist. You make your stand and die.

Your adventure ends here in failure.

10

You try to move. You try to focus your will. You desperately try to do anything to save yourself but your wounds are too severe and the pain too great. Unconsciousness and later death are the final relief to your tortured form.

Your adventure ends here in failure.

11

You leave Trihsder behind, telling yourself it is for the good of the mission. The other troopers are not happy but accept your decision. You find it harder to accept and feel fate start to turn against you. Reduce your current **Luck** by 1 point as you continue to the base of the hill holding the chateau.

Turn to **21**.

12

The stairs lead to a large, well-appointed pantry, beyond which is a spacious kitchen. Even at this hour the kitchen is busy, with harassed looking army cooks preparing vast quantities of basic meals (and small quantities of better furnished meals, obviously intended for the officers). You don't want to risk sneaking through such a busy room so decide to create a small diversion. You know so many easy-to-cast cantrips which would be applicable in this situation, but settle on creating a small oil fire at the far end of the room.

Under the cover of the resulting smoke and with the cooks rushing over to put out the fire, you and the rest of your troop move across the kitchen and out. You find yourself in a servants' hallway. On one side is a mess hall, currently occupied by dozens of off duty enemy troops. You decide instead to head up s servants' stairwell to the second floor of the chateau.

Turn to **75**.

13

You and the surviving members of the team make your way back towards friendly territory. You keep a low profile, which consists mostly of worming your way through the mud churned fields and you make the best speed possible while still retaining some of the concealing benefits of your cloaks.

There is no pursuit and only minimal bombardment from the Chateau. You grin as the first rays of dawn appear over the horizon; your 'little distraction' has done the trick.

You have made it back to the no man's land between enemy and friendly lines. If you had **Combat Precognition** active, lose 1 point from your current **Mental Fortitude** at this point from the strain then decide if you want to keep using it (knowing the cost) or let the spells drop. If you are *infected*, reduce your current **Endurance** by 1 point also due to the draining effect the infection has on you after your recent exertions.

If you are carrying the Shielding Device, turn to **25**.

If Trooper Storn is carrying the Shielding Device, turn to **78**.

If Trooper Valis is carrying the Shielding Device, turn to **50**.

14

You cannot shield yourself against the necromantic energy; it extinguishes your mind and spreads corruption through your body. As your troops crowd around attempting to help you, your body shifts and starts to move again but it is not you that motivates your body but some dark and malevolent energy that sees your team as little more than a feast for its dark appetites.

Your adventure ends here in failure.

15

You head into a room adjoining to the ballroom which contains the shielding device. This room has been used as a planning/war-room. In the centre of the room, surrounded by comfortable chairs, is a table which contains maps showing the allied trenches and the chateau and has numerous little metal figures representing troops. There is a smell of stale cigar smoke in the room and several of the chairs still have small tumblers on them, either empty or in cases still half filled with strong spirits.

"Right," you state, "we need to get through this wall", pointing to the solidly worked stone wall covered in tapestries. "Charl, get out one of your *portable hole* making devices," you command.

Charl hang-facedly admits that this is one of the few devices he didn't bring, not having enough arcane ability to activate one himself.

If you possess a *portable hole* and wish to use it, turn to **46**.

Otherwise, a frontal assault on the troops guarding the ballroom doors is your only option, turn to **68**.

16

At the far end of the hall is an uncovered window with a narrow opening. You send the *sphere of devastation* hurtling out the window and not a moment too soon. The sphere explodes outside the chateau. You see the flash of released energy and faintly feel its effects from where you stand but no more. You wait to see if the explosion has generated any alarm but it seems like explosions outside the chateau are commonplace enough not to excite any interest.

The troops drag the dead bodies of the enemies into the armoury and you tidy up the signs of battle as best you can. The armoury itself is the most solidly built room you have seen so far in the chateau and it is filled with stacks upon stacks of weapons, armour and destructive devices. At your instruction, First Trooper Charl rigs up one of his *spheres of destruction*, timed to explode at a decent interval into the future. You hope this will set off all the other devices in the armoury and provide a

'distraction' when you need one. Under notes on your *character sheet* write down that you have *rigged the armoury*.

If you have the **Dissipation** skill you may be able to weaken the containment on some of the other devices present, making it more likely that there is a chain reaction of explosion. It will be strenuous, but if you want to do this, turn to **28**.

Otherwise you quickly head down the servants' stairwell; well aware that time is ticking, turn to **75**.

17

You finally finish your bit of spell work and duck underwater. You can 'breathe'. The experience is a little odd but you have made stranger changes to yourself in the past. You push against the current and continue forward, trailing a rope behind you (and carrying a *stonemeld* device borrowed from Charl, which you hope to use to attach to the rope, once you have reached another part of the tunnel that contains air). It is draining work pushing against the current. You make a goodly distance, possibly most of the way to the chateau, when you feel a strange tingling passage of dissipating wild magic pass through you and you realise you have passed through the shield around the chateau. Shortly afterwards the tunnel is blocked by iron bars. On the other side of the bars are a number of bits, human bits such as parts of limbs, which are pressed against the bars due to the flow of water, but are too large to make it through the gaps in the bars. You turn away in disgust, cursing this latest twist of fate but then realise another device may get you through the bars – a *lockbuster*. Even underwater, a *lockbuster* should release enough energy to melt the top of one of these bars and let you and the other troops pass through.

You tie off the rope against one of the other bars then make your way back to First Trooper Charl. After getting a *lockbuster* from one of the many pouches on his pack, you work your way against the current again towards the bars. You are straining for breath; the gills are simply not as efficient as your normal breathing. Fortunately your skill in **Life Systems** allows you to maximise the air that is reaching your lungs allowing you to reach your goal.

You press the *lockbuster* firmly against the top of one bar and move back slightly. There is a flare of light (and heat if you were closer) and you can feel the elemental energy being directed into the iron bar, melting it away almost instantly, even underwater. Once done, you grab the bar and pull on it. It bends downwards letting a flow of body parts through the now larger gap. Looking beyond the bars, there is a small-sized stone-worked room. The stream flows into the room via a natural tunnel on the far side. A shaft at the roof of the room leads up and is filled with air! This is the way on.

You tug the rope to let your troops know you have found a way on and wait for them to work their way along the rope to the iron bars. Once there, you help them through and up into the air filled shaft.

Turn to **89**.

18

A wave of enemy soldiers surge over you and the remaining troops. Even though you prevail, it is too late. Your enemies have taken this time to regroup and reorganise. You face a second wave, then a third. There is no need for a fourth.

Your adventure ends here in failure.

19

You attempt to fend off the corpse but it forces you down and pulls you into a corrupt embrace, its rotting filth making you weak with nausea. The creature's head lunges for your neck and you block it with an arm, which it worries like a dog with a bone. You cannot concentrate enough to cast a spell and you feel the strength in your arm draining, the creature is clawing at you and trying to work its mouth around your arm. It is inhumanly strong.

The creature's head suddenly shatters, Trooper Storn's heavy sword imbedded deep within. As the animated corpse slumps down he pulls you free. Lose 1 point from your current **Endurance** due to your wounds and a further 1 point from your current **Mental Fortitude** unless you have **Seen the Worst**. Looking around, your troop is fighting desperately with hand weapons but are being pushed back into a circle. "We can't use devices," pants Storn, "Too much chance of them being seen from the chateau. Can you do anything?"

If you have the **Dissipation** skill and wish to use it, turn to **39**.

If you have the **Combat Elementalism** skill and wish to use it, turn to **49**.

If you have the **Combat Manipulation** skill and wish to use it, turn to **60**.

Otherwise, turn to **90**.

20

The flat area at the top of the chateau tower has been heavily reinforced with four well shielded turrets at the corners allowing a good field of fire for the bombardment pieces housed within. Miserable enemy troops huddle down in the turrets, occasionally loading and activating the stubby bombardment devices, sending a trickle of fire back at the trenches.

Camouflaged by your cloaks and the continuing rain, none of the enemy troops react as you make your way down the stairwell and into the top story of the chateau itself. You send Valis out to have a scout around and he soon comes back with his report. If you had **Combat Precognition** active, lose 1 point from your current **Mental Fortitude** at this point from the strain then decide if you want to keep using it (knowing the cost) or let the spells drop.

According to the information gained by Valis, the top story is almost completely deserted due to the occasional penetration of bombardment through the shields which makes this story unsafe for the enemy troops. The level below contains as well equipped infirmary which has about fifty patients in it at current from all accounts, most with fairly minor wounds. There are also a number of rooms which have been converted into barracks, which you intend to stay well away from, as well as what can only be the armoury, which is guarded by a small contingent of troops. Valis has also located a little used servants' stairwell leading to the second floor of the chateau – this is the obvious way on.

If you want to head towards the armoury with view towards sabotage, turn to **37**.

If you want to concentrate on the mission and head down the servant's stairwell, turn to **75**.

21

You are almost at phase two of the raid – insertion into the chateau. As you and the remaining troops ready the equipment you will require for the infiltration, you keep catching a faint hint of magic that seems different from the background energies you are used to at the front.

If you want to take a short time to track down this out of place magic, while the troops are still readying themselves, turn to **36**.

If you want to focus with your mission and ignore this strange magic, turn to **42**.

22

You throw yourself to one side, avoiding the missile which impacts further down the hall in a burst of elemental energy. The battle is over; your troops unhurt apart from minor wounds. While they stand there panting after the brief but intense fight, you search the bodies (and body parts) of your dead foes for a key. Unable to find one, you look up to see that First Trooper Charl has already applied a *lockbreaker* device to the lock and is about to open the door, another *sphere of devastation* (how many does he have you wonder?) in the other hand.

Charl prepares a *sphere of devastation* to throw through the now open door but there is no need. The room (which is indeed the ballroom) is empty apart from the shielding device sitting on a pedestal in the centre of the room. Inconceivable! Do they feel so secure they have no one guarding it on the inside or is it that the device is dangerous to be near when it is functioning?

You and the rest of the troop move into the room and you move towards the device, your arcane senses open, turn to **87**.

23

You go down their lines, providing what healing you can. If you are using the **Life Systems** skill, lose 1 point from your current **Mental Fortitude** due to the strain. You notice that another couple of *elixirs of healing* have appeared amongst them courtesy of Trooper Ringo. You can only hope that your own troops won't miss the expended supplies later on. Add that you have *healed the prisoners* under the notes section on your *character sheet*.

Having done what you can, you prepare to move up to the chateau's ground floor.

If you want to head up the narrow stairs, turn to **12**.

If you want to head up the larger stairwell, turn to **56**.

24

As the necromantic energies rage through your body, you somehow manage to shield the core parts of your body and mind from its destructive forces. When the dark energies finally bleed out of your body, its power spent, you have lost 1 point from your current **Endurance** and 2 points from your current **Mental Fortitude**.

Carefully picking yourself up off the floor you approach the safe again. Under the gaze of your worried troops, you examine the safe again, confirming the necromantic trap is now gone. You work at the safe with shaky hands, applying *lockbreakers* (it takes three) until you get it open. Within is an item wrapped in waxed hide, about the size of a small chest or large book. You extract the item then open the hide to examine its contents

Turn to **35**.

25

You lift your head to get a better view of the terrain ahead when CRACK, pain explodes at the back of your head, sending you reeling to the ground.

Roll 2 dice, adding +3 if you have **Combat Precognition** active and a further +1 if **Luck Favours You**.

If the total rolled is less than 10, turn to **7**.

If the total is 10 or higher, turn to **33**.

26

You use your knowledge of shifting to attempt to create gills to filter out the air you require from the water, just as fish do. This is a subtle, difficult little feat of magic.

Roll 2 dice.

If the total is 6 or higher, turn to **17**.

If the total is less than 6, you just cannot work the changes and consider your other options.

If you possess the **Elemental Studies** skill and wish to use it, turn to **48**.

Otherwise you must admit defeat, turn to **61**.

27

In the instant Van Payne is distracted you strike at him with your hand and in that moment, shift. The pain is terrible as the bones and muscle shift in your hand but you force the change by the power of your will, lose 1 from your current **Mental Fortitude**.

Your hand now a spike, you plunge it into the enemy necromancers stomach and as he gapes at you in agony, you change further, hand growing spikes that probe and pierce Van Payne's internal organs. He tries to speak, only to cough up blood. He totters and falls backward. You let your changed hand revert to its normal state, albeit covered in gore and you grab Van Payne's discarded wand for yourself. Hearing the sound of combat, you turn to see how the rest of the troop is doing.

At the door, your remaining troops are attempting to hold back a wave of enemy soldiers. It quickly becomes obvious they cannot hold.

If Trooper Rosenberg is still with you, turn to **73**.

If Trooper Rosenberg is not with you, but you possess a *sphere of devastation* and wish to use it, turn to **99**.

Otherwise, turn to **18**.

28

You spend as much time as you dare, carefully weakening the protective magic shielding around the most destructive of the stored devices. You are dripping with sweat before you have finished as it is painstaking and nerve-wracking work. Finally you have done all you can. Lose 1 point from your current **Mental Fortitude** due to the strain and under notes on your *character sheet*, write that you have *removed armoury protection*.

Using a key taken from one of the dead guards you lock the armoury door behind you and quickly head down the servants' stairwell; aware that time is ticking, turn to **75**.

29

You raise your weapon and fend off the corpse, dancing backwards to gain room to move. It lurches forward, pressing its attack mindlessly and for a few moments it is all you can do to keep out of the creatures grasp.

The creature's head suddenly shatters, Trooper Storn's heavy sword imbedded deep within. The shock of this gruesome attack costs you 1 point from your current **Mental Fortitude** unless you have **Seen the Worst**. Looking around, you see your troop is fighting desperately with hand weapons but are

being pushed back into a circle. “We can’t use devices,” pants Storn, “Too much chance of them being seen from the chateau. Can you do anything?”

If you have the **Dissipation** skill and wish to use it, turn to **39**.

If you have the **Combat Elementalism** skill and wish to use it, turn to **49**.

If you have the **Combat Manipulation** skill and wish to use it, turn to **60**.

Otherwise, turn to **90**.

30

It feels more than a little strange to you as you and the rest of the team work your way along to the forward trenches in the early dawn light and then you boost yourself up into no man’s land. This is the disputed ‘killing ground’ between your lines and the chateau. There is a steady drizzle of rain, reducing your visibility. As you slowly worm your way forward across the yielding fields of mud, you are somewhat comforted by the fact you are barely able to see the rest of the troop. In fact, it takes an effort to keep from getting separated. In the distance you can see the searing lights of bombardment and feel the release of their violent magic thrum through your body even from where you are.

This is by far the longest day you have ever experienced. Your slow crawl towards the chateau is interrupted only by the need to avoid regions of torn-up and rusty barbed wire, occasional and disgusting finds of decomposing bodies and body parts, and once a large detour to avoid an area containing a partially expended aetheric munition which was slowly releasing its dangerous magical energies into its surrounding. The rain briefly stops to show you the sight of the chateau rising up on the hill ahead of you. Then tragedy strikes.

You have only a moments warning, a difference in tone to the background noise of constant bombardment. Your experience tells you the munition has fallen short and is coming straight for you! You flatten yourself into the ground.

Roll 2 dice and add your current **LUCK** to the total rolled. If you have **Combat Precognition** active, add a further +1 to this roll.

If the total rolled is less than 10, turn to **3**.

If the total is 10 or higher, turn to **43**.

31

You recover your wits and quickly respond with combat magic of your own. Van Payne drops his arcane hold of you in surprise and then you are engaged in a titanic battle against the shear power of his magic. Somehow in the next moments you manage to draw your wand back to your hand and you realise two things. Firstly, you are far more skilled than Van Payne at combat magic and secondly, it won’t matter, given his vast edge in power. Seconds more pass as you deflect, dissipate and trade blows with Van Payne. You grimly smile every time you finesse a successful strike upon him, but you are battered both physically and mentally by his blows which you cannot completely avoid. This is a battle you cannot win. Lose 1 point from both your current **Mental Fortitude** and your current **Endurance**.

Out of the corner of your eye you see Trooper Ringo raise his crossbow and shoot. Van Payne deflects the bolt, then with a snarl, directs the full force of his magic against Ringo, shattering him against the wall. In the moment Van Payne is distracted you act, casting the most powerful spell you can muster.

Roll 2 dice, adding your current **Mental Fortitude** to the total rolled.

If the total rolled is less than 10, turn to **44**.

If the total is 10 or higher, turn to **76**.

32

You test the trap by moving your hand closer while your precognition spells are active. As your hand gets close, there is a scream of intense danger from your magical senses. Touching the safe is not an option!

If you possess **Arcane Manipulation** and wish to use it, turn to **40**.

To head out of this room and work out a plan to get at the shielding device, turn to **15**.

33

You sensed the presence of the blow at the last moment and started moving; too slow to avoid the blow entirely, but you shifted just enough that it expends much of its energy on the back of your helmet before striking the base of your head. You lie on the ground, stunned but not completely senseless.

As your eyes come back into focus, you see Trooper Storn standing above you. He activates his staff and a wave of fire engulfs the rest of your team. You are shocked by Storn's actions and your mind refuses to process what you have seen for critical seconds, which Storn uses to finish murdering your companions, then he turns and tears the pack off your back. The *shielding device*! Storn must be after the *shielding device*, but why?

Trooper Storn is standing over you, his *staff of fire* in one hand, still smoking from its activation, and your pack slung over his other shoulder, the weight of it causing him to sag slightly. He looks subtly different, almost Alfen, but you quickly put this out of your mind as he raises his *staff of fire* and lines you up. With a tight lipped smile, he activates its power. You attempt to snap out of the shocked paralysis that has held your mind and try to desperately muster a defence.

If you have the skill **Combat Elementalism** and wish to use it, turn to **98**.

If you have the skill **Combat Manipulation** and wish to use it, turn to **65**.

Otherwise your only option is to try and throw yourself out of the path of the flames.

Roll 2 dice, adding +2 if you have **Seen the Worst**.

If the total rolled is less than 10, turn to **2**.

If the total rolled is 10 or higher, turn to **70**.

34

You unleash the most powerful magic at your disposal. Charl hurls a *sphere of devastation* into their midst also and then your troops rush in and finish the job. The fight is short and deadly but apart from a few minor wounds to your troops, it is also one sided. While the rest of the troops stand there panting, you search the bodies (and body parts) of your foes for a key. Unable to find one, you look up to see that First Trooper Charl has already applied a *lockbreaker* device to the lock and is about to open the door, another sphere of devastation (how many does he have you wonder?) in the other hand.

Charl prepares a *sphere of devastation* to throw through the now open door but there is no need. The room (which is indeed the ballroom) is empty apart from the shielding device sitting on a pedestal in the centre of the room. Inconceivable! Do they feel so secure they have no one guarding it on the inside or is it that the device is dangerous to be near when it is functioning?

You and the rest of the troop move into the room and you move towards the device, your arcane senses open, turn to **87**.

35

Inside the wrapping is an old and well worn tome. Powerful magic radiates not only from the tome but also away from the tome and you realise what this is. Back before modern magic, when devices were not so common, one rare device was a *tome of power*, which focuses and enhances the magic of a person attuned to it – much like a wand except a bit broader in application. Terribly hard to make and requiring a mammoth expenditure of arcane resources, tomes of power are never made these days. The process is just too uncertain.

The enemy's arcanist in the chateau has somehow acquired this tome and successfully attuned it. This makes them especially dangerous. You would dearly love to try and break their attunement and form your own with the device, but not only would it take too much time it would be immediately obvious to the other arcanist. You take the device – note *tome of power* under equipment on your *character sheet*.

Now you must try and get to the shielding device, turn to **15**.

36

You move away from the troops although you do notice Trooper Valis is shadowing you, obviously at the instruction of First Trooper Charl. The foreign magic is elusive and you go a surprising distance from the troops in an attempt to pin it down.

Roll 2 dice and add your current **Education** score to the roll. Add a further +2 if you have *fought against corpses* in your notes section on your *character sheet* and +1 if you are skilled with **Divinatory Means and Methods**.

If the total rolled is less than 14, you are unable to pick up the scent and return to your troops. Turn to **42**.

If the total rolled is 14 or higher, turn to **51**.

37

There are four enemy troops guarding the door to the armoury, which is closed but not locked. As you and the troops slowly inch your way forward, twice other soldiers come from upstairs to get more munitions. You are going to have to time the attack well and even if you are successful, it is going to limit the amount of time you can stay in the chateau before your presence is discovered.

There is a sudden flurry of activity as your troops make their move. The enemy go down quickly although the last one has just enough time to activate and release a *sphere of devastation*. Time seems to slow down as you watch the sphere tumbling over and over through the air towards where you are standing.

If you have the Combat Manipulation skill and wish to use it, turn to **16**.
Otherwise, turn to **96**.

38

You draw on your mastery of healing magic to shield your vital being from the dark energies raging throughout it. Your body is a battleground in which you hold the home-ground advantage and finally, at great cost to yourself, you drive the necromantic magic from your system. Lose 1 point from your current **Endurance** and 1 point from your current **Mental Fortitude**.

Looking up, you see Van Payne slowly moving away, his back towards you. He is heading towards the door where the balance of your troop is desperately trying to stop a tide of enemy soldier from getting through the door into the room. You get to your feet unsteadily and lurch towards Van Payne. He is so engrossed in his latest spell-casting that he does not know you are behind him, even as you draw the dagger from his belt, until you apply the same dagger to his throat and *cut*.

As Van Payne falls to the floor, you secure his wand for your own use and move to help your men at the door. It quickly becomes obvious they cannot hold much longer.

If Trooper Rosenberg is still with you, turn to **73**.

If Trooper Rosenberg is not with you, but you possess a *sphere of devastation* and wish to use it, turn to **99**.

Otherwise, turn to **18**.

39

You study the magic animating the creatures. It is clear (to one who possesses significant training such as yourself) that the troops were killed by aetheric bombardment. This sometimes 'imprints' a fragment of their memories in their corpses but even in this case they should not animate. Sending in a quick magical probe you determine that the corpses have more recently been tainted by a residual necromantic energy, just enough to animate them with the imprinting they have suffered just enough also to motivate them.

It is simple to cleanse the taint of necromantic energy, sending them sliding back to the ground. The troop stands around you panting with exertion, unhurt... except for Trooper Trihsder, who collapses to the ground, his leg a bloody ruin.

One of the other troops applies an *elixir of healing* to his leg but it is soon obvious that the healing power of the elixir is being negated by the taint of necromantic corruption left in the wounds the creatures inflicted. His eyes roll up and he drops back, unconscious from the pain of his wounds.

If you were wounded by the corpses, your own wounds are starting to fester; add *infected* to the notes section on your *character sheet*.

Turn to **72**.

40

Not wishing to touch the safe, you draw upon some of the easier arcane manipulation spells, using magic to move and activate the *lockbuster*. Not having a valid target, the necromantic trap around the safe does not activate, even as you use a second and then finally a third *lockbuster* to destroy the lock on the safe. Still using your manipulation magic, you pull open the safe. Within is an item wrapped in waxed hide, about the size of a small chest or large book. Applying more arcane force, you pull the item towards you until it is in your hand, then you open the hide to see what is within.

Turn to **35**.

41

You ready yourself for another assault, your surviving men prepared to hold the door, when there is a massive explosion that rocks the chateau and sends you to the ground. Dust and stone crumble from the roof where the force of the explosion has caused the roof (and walls) to crack and twist. You were

half expecting the explosion so get to your feet and quickly gather your men. The way up to the higher levels of the chateau is blocked by rubble and fire. Smoke fills the air. You head downwards.

You make it to the ground floor. The situation is in chaos, enemy troops running everywhere in disarray. No one seems to notice you and the other troops, even when you are intermixed with a mob that are trampling towards the now open fortified doors in the front of the chateau. Flowing out through the front doors with the crowd, you and your troops keep moving, staying together, whereas the enemy soldiers collapse with exhaustion not far from the chateau or scatter in all directions.

Fairly soon you are at the base of the hill, making good progress back to friendly lines. Turn to **13**.

42

You make your way up the mud-slicked hill, the chateau growing larger before you. You can see the shield ahead of you, shimmering with the dissipation of wild energies absorbed from the bombardment. Your arcane senses reassure you that the energy is at a low level and is unlikely to be harmful (at least in the short term, who knows what the long-term consequences of absorption of wild magic has on the body are), so you step through. There is a tingling shudder of energy pass through you but otherwise no ill effects, so you motion the troop through. On your *character sheet* under notes, write that you have *studied shielding effects*.

Slowly and very carefully, you make your way to the far side of the chateau where the constant bombardment, some of which you note is getting through the shields (albeit at a reduced energy level), is likely to be least. You sight the top of the imposing walls and your troops get out rope and various climbing devices (such as a *stonemeld* device which attaches itself to the wall, giving you a hook to anchor the ropes to) from their packs to aid your climb. Then you begin.

If you have **Combat Precognition** active, turn to **53**.

Otherwise roll 2 dice, adding your current **Luck** to the total rolled.

If the total rolled is less than 8, turn to **8**.

If the total rolled is 9 or 10, turn to **69**.

If the total rolled is 11 or higher, turn to **84**.

43

The scream of the aetheric munition gets agonising loud as it hurtles down towards you. You feel the munition explode frighteningly close, but by chance most of the energies released roll over you or are expended into the ground. You curse the 'friendly fire' and look around at the rest of the troop. For a moment you think no one was harmed, but then you see Trooper Trihsder writhing in pain under the cover of his chameleon cloak.

You crawl over and inspect him for damage. You quickly determine that he was caught at the edge of the blast, the magical energies tearing into his unshielded arm and shoulder. You stare in horror even as one of the other troops pours a *elixir of healing* onto the wound. He has been hit by a terror munition, the energies within designed to shift his form into another, more inhuman form while simultaneously destroying his mind. You can see his partially transformed arm, a thickly scaled monstrosity that ends in a clawed hand. From his transformed arm you can feel the magical forces trying to spread through the rest of his body. Regular healing is not going to help here.

If you have the skill **Shifting** and wish to use it, turn to **58**.

If you have the skill **Dissipation** and wish to use it, turn to **67**.

Otherwise, turn to **72**.

44

Van Payne reacts with blinding speed and turns your strike aside. This was your last hope. He engulfs you in magical force again. He smiles a horrible smile of triumph, drawing forth necromantic energy and sending it searing through your form, killing you instantly and animating you in the same moment as a necromantic living corpse. Your personality still dimly infuses your changed body but you are under the complete control of Van Payne. You are his latest creation.

Your adventure ends here in failure.

45

You rid Trihsder's body of the last of the aberrant energy, which allows the previous healing to start to take effect. His arm and shoulder remain transformed but there is little that can be done in the field or even, you fear, back in the hospital facilities. Trihsder regains consciousness. In the notes section of your character sheet, write that you have *fought against corpses* and that you have *healed Trihsder*.

He is too weak to go on but is adamant he can make it back to your own lines safely. He shucks off his heavy equipment including his weapon (which unfortunately no one else can use well enough to make it worth while bringing) and you see him slowly worming his way back to safety under cover of his *chameleon cloak*. Your small troop, weakened but still functional, continue on to the base of the hill containing the chateau.

Turn to **21**.

46

"Luckily that I *did* bring one," you state, with a laugh in your voice, bringing out your *portable hole* device. You apply the device to the wall and activate it with a touch of magic. You try and focus the device still further to increase its speed as the effects of the device are going to be obvious from the other side.

The stone starts to melt away like water. Charl prepares a *sphere of devastation* to throw through the gap but there is no need. The room (which is indeed the ballroom) is empty apart from the shielding device sitting on a pedestal in the centre of the room. Inconceivable! Do they feel so secure they have no one guarding it on the inside, or is the device dangerous to be near when it is functioning?

You and the rest of the troop squeeze in through the hole you have created in the wall and you move towards the device, your arcane senses open, turn to **87**.

47

Your head clears enough for you to act. Seeing the weakness in the design of Van Payne's spells you apply magical force *here* and dissipate just enough *here* and his spells collapse. Wild-eyed, Van Payne draws greater power and greater again. Each spell he casts, you unravel. He is actually not that skilled at casting combat spells, you ruminate calmly as you spend just enough energy to draw your wand back into your grasp. All he has going for him is raw power, and you know where that is coming from.

Although it seems like an age, only seconds have passed. You can hear the sound of combat erupt at the door to the chamber but you remain focussed on your task. Van Payne draws upon his natural necromantic talent and starts a skilful, powerful, powerful spell. This is what you have been waiting for. With an effort of will (lose 1 point from your current **Mental Fortitude**) you sever the connection between Van Payne and the *tome of power*. Without the tome to augment his skill, the vast amount of

energy bound within the spell cannot be contained and you feel his mind snap with the effort. The backlash from the now uncontrolled spell channels through Van Payne's body, rotting him in an instant as you watch. He collapses to the ground, little more than a putrid corpse. Game, set and match.

Turning to the door of the chamber, you see the rest of your team fighting to hold the door against a wave of enemy soldiers. Trooper Ringo is already dead, lying glaze-eyed in a pool of blood, not all of it his own.

If Trooper Rosenberg is still with you, turn to **73**.

If Trooper Rosenberg is not with you, but you possess of *sphere of devastation* and wish to use it, turn to **99**.

Otherwise, turn to **18**.

48

Using some of your basic elemental spells, you form a large pocket of air around the heads of the entire troop. It is a strain to concentrate on so many (even simple) spells at once and you struggle to keep concentration as you push your way upstream against the current. You make a goodly distance, possibly most of the way to the chateau, when you feel a strange tingling passage of dissipating wild magic pass through you and you realise you have passed through the shield around the chateau. Shortly afterwards the tunnel is blocked by iron bars. On the other side of the bars are a number of bits, human bits such as parts of limbs, pressed against the bars due to the flow of water but too large to make it through the gaps. You turn away in disgust, cursing this latest twist of fate and try and think of how to get through.

First Trooper Charl moves towards you till your air bubbles are mixed and suggests using a *lockbuster* device from his gear. Even underwater a *lockbuster* is going to generate enough energy to melt the top of the bars so you go with his suggestion. You press it firmly against the top of one bar and move back slightly. There is a flare of light (and heat if you were closer) and you can feel the elemental energy being directed into the iron bar, melting it away almost instantly. Once done, you grab the bar and pull on it. It bends downwards letting a flow of body parts through the now larger gap. Looking beyond the bars, there is a small-sized stone-worked room. The stream flows into the room via a natural tunnel on the far side. A shaft at the roof of the room leads up and is filled with air! This is the way on.

You head towards the shaft, followed by the rest of the troop. As each person reaches it, you release the spell binding area around them with relief. Due to the strain of holding multiple spells, you have lost 1 point from your current **Mental Fortitude** before you are done.

Turn to **89**.

49

You quickly draw your wand but know you are limited to elemental magic that won't be visible from the chateau. You draw upon the power of elemental air, magnified through your wand, to knock the corpse down then drain the heat out of the rain (using your mastery over the element of *fire*) until the corpses are covered in a thick layer of encasing ice. Looking around it appears at first none of the troop has been hurt, but as you move off, Trooper Trihsder collapses, his leg a bloody ruin.

One of the other troops applies an *elixir of healing* to his leg but it is soon obvious that the healing power of the elixir is being negated by the taint of necromantic corruption left in the wounds the creatures inflicted. His eyes roll up and he drops back, unconscious from the pain.

If you were wounded by the corpses, your own wounds are starting to fester; add *infected* to the notes section on your *character sheet*.

Turn to **72**.

50

You hear a terrible CRACK and turn to see Trooper Valis slumping bonelessly to the ground, Storn standing above him. In one hand is a short baton he used to strike Valis down, in the other is his *staff of fire* which he raises up to cover you and the other troops.

You are stunned by this turn of events. First Trooper Charl spits out, “What do you think you are doing Storn!”

Storn smiles a tight smile and his face shifts subtly, becoming more Alfen in features. You recognise the faint release of magic signifying the end of an ongoing shifting enchantment. “You didn’t really think we would let you keep the device did you?” explains the Alfer masquerading as Storn. “The device is ours; bad enough one tribe of you ‘mud-men’ have thieved our secrets. We WON’T let another get hold of them!” he shouts in sudden fury (under notes on your character sheet, record that you have *heard Storn’s Rant*).

He activates his staff but while he was speaking you were not idle.

If you have the skill **Combat Elementalism** and wish to use it, turn to **88**.

If you have the skill **Combat Manipulation** and wish to use it, turn to **65**.

Otherwise your only option is to try and throw yourself out of the path of the flames.

Roll 2 dice, adding +2 if you have **Seen the Worst**.

If the total rolled is less than 7, turn to **2**.

If the total rolled is 8 or higher, turn to **70**.

51

It suddenly clicks in your mind that this magic you are detecting traces of is necromantic magic. Narrowing your senses to the appropriate form enables you to quickly trace the taint to a small but fast flowing stream. Investigating the stream further, upstream it disappears into the hill upon which the chateau sits. The taint of necromancy is stronger here, coming from the water-carved hole and you find bits and pieces of what can only be flesh and bone scattered around the entrance.

Thinking back to your initial briefing, you conclude that this river must be where the chateau collects its well-water from, although it is difficult to believe them foolish enough to be dropping dead bodies infused with necromantic materials down their well. This is however, potentially an alternate way into the chateau. A way that would let you avoid the dangers of your current plan. You could work your way back along the stream then use the climbing devices your troops possess to scale the chateau’s well. What could be easier?

If you want to get the troops together and implement this new (and possibly crazy) plan, turn to **83**.

Otherwise, you rejoin your troop and continue with the original plan of infiltration, turn to **42**.

52

Twice you have to avoid small groups of enemy soldiers as you attempt to track the magic down.

Finally you find the right place; your finely-tuned senses smell the scent of necromantic magic through

this door. Waiting till the hall is clear First Trooper Charl applies a *lockbuster* to the door and it rapidly does its job, accelerating the rusting process to a point where the lock almost dissolves away as you watch. Luckily the chateau is an older building - many structures today use more modern alloys which would be proof against this particular device.

You cautiously enter the room, wary for magical traps. This is one of the chateau's more richly appointed rooms, now taken over by the resident necromancer if the tomes of magic on the shelves and the displays in their small glass jars littered at points across the room are any indication. There is a strong taint of necromancy coming from behind a picture above the ornate bed. Behind the picture is a safe. You think another *lockbuster* (Charl has at least several more left) will do the job of opening it but the strong aura of necromancy on the safe suggests a trap to you.

If you have **Combat Precognition** currently active, turn to **32**.

If you possess **Arcane Manipulation** and wish to use it, turn to **40**.

If you possess **Dissipation** and wish to use it, turn to **63**.

If you want to risk applying the *lockbuster* to the safe, turn to **80**.

To head back and work out a plan to get at the shielding device (as that is your mission), turn to **15**.

53

You narrow down the focus of your precognition spells to only include dangers from scaling the wall, this gives you a clearer reading in a narrower band. Then you climb the wall, making steady progress and keeping just behind First Trooper Charl. The wall is rain-slicked but the devices your band possesses make it easy but strenuous work. You pass several windows too small to enter and are tempted to approach one to look inside but resist with the thought you yourself might be seen.

A sudden spell fuelled intuition leads you to suddenly scuttle across the wall several feet to your left and only just in time. A particularly viscous series of bombardments partially overloads the shields. Energy flares and strikes the wall where you were moments ago, sending small fragments of shattered rock into the air. Restore 1 point of current **Luck** for this fortunate escape.

The rest of the climb is uneventful and one after another, you and your troops carefully slide between the crenulations at the top of the wall and onto the chateau proper.

Turn to **20**.

54

You are not powerfully skilled at offensive magic but focus what you do have through your wand to some effect. Charl hurls a *sphere of devastation* into the midst of the enemy soldiers then your troops rush in to finish the job. The enemy is staggered by events and the fight is mostly one sided. One of the enemy troops fires a crossbow which arcs past Trooper Storn, narrowly missing him, and straight towards you.

Roll 2 dice, adding +1 to the total if you have **Seen the Worst**, +2 if you have **Close Combat Training** and +2 if you have **Combat Precognition** spells active.

If the total rolled is less than 7, turn to **95**.

If the total rolled is 8 or higher, turn to **22**.

55

You troop tightens up and strikes as a focused unit, hacking through the animated corpses and out of the trap. You make speed till the creatures are out of sight, then Trooper Trihsder collapses, his leg a bloody ruin. You are surprised it carried him so far.

One of the other troops applies an *elixir of healing* to his leg but it is soon obvious that the healing power of the elixir is being negated by the taint of necromantic corruption left in the wounds the creatures inflicted. Trihsder's eyes roll up and he drops back, unconscious from pain. If you were wounded by the corpses, your own wounds are starting to fester. Unless you possess the **Healing** skill, add *infected* to the notes section on your *character sheet*.

If you possess the **Healing** skill and want to attempt to rid Trihsder of the corruption, turn to **77**. Otherwise, turn to **72**.

56

You and the troop make your way up the wide stairwell to the busy ground floor of the chateau. There are enemy troops everywhere, mostly support staff such as clerks busy with paperwork (which it seems you cannot avoid, even while under siege) and cooks over to one side of the building, busily cooking for the large number of enemy troops being processed through the mess hall. The gates of the chateau have been converted into a fortified area; no chance you can get near that. Much of the rest of the ground floor seems to be barrack space for the support staff. It is going to be hard to get through the ground floor without being seen.

Trooper Valis leading the way, you move as a team in very short bursts, trying to find a way to the second floor before you are noticed.

Roll 2 dice, adding your current Luck and adding a further +2 if you have **Combat Precognition** active.
If the total rolled is less than 11, turn to **9**.
If the total rolled is 11 or higher, turn to **79**.

57

Your mind freezes. You cannot think of any spell quick enough to stop the alarm being raised. Almost without thought, you grasp the dagger at your side and throw it in one smooth motion. It turns end over end as it flies.

Roll 2 dice, adding your current **Luck** and adding a further +2 if you have **Close Combat Training**.
If the total rolled is less than 11, turn to **4**.
If the total rolled is 11 or higher, turn to **94**.

58

Life systems magic, such as shifting or healing, is always hard to work on others. You clear your mind of the distractions around you and focus on channelling the wild shifting magic out of Trihsder's body, including drawing some of that magic into yourself.

Roll 2 dice.

If the total rolled is less than 6, you lose control of the magic and it lashes through both yourself and Trooper Trihsder. Extensive damage is done to your body before you are able to expel the energies.

Lose 1 from your current **Endurance** and turn to **72**.

If the total rolled is 7 or higher, turn to **81**.

59

You are killed instantly by Van Payne's magic but you are also animated in the same moment by its dark power into a necromantic animated corpse. Your personality still dimly infuses your changed body but you are under the complete control of Van Payne. You are his latest creation and you stumble to your feet, ready to help your controller destroy the rest of your men.

Your adventure ends here in failure.

60

You quickly draw your wand and use it to magnify the power of your already strong talent in manipulation magics. You are busy for a time, knocking down corpses with concentrated strikes, turning their blows to shield your troops and hammering at any that draw too near. It doesn't require skilled manipulation but you have multiple spells active at any time which is highly draining. Before the last of the corpses is finally disabled, you have lost 1 point from your current **Mental Fortitude** from the constant strain of your spells. With the battle (skirmish really) finished, you look at your troops for injuries. At first it appears none of the troop has been hurt, but as you start to move off Trooper Trihsder collapses, his leg a bloody ruin.

One of the other troops applies an *elixir of healing* to his leg but it is soon obvious that the healing power of the elixir is being negated by the taint of necromantic corruption left in the wounds the creatures inflicted. Trihsder's eyes roll up and he drops back, unconscious from pain.

If you were wounded by the corpses, your own wounds are starting to fester; add *infected* to the notes section on your *character sheet*.

Turn to **72**.

61

You leave the stream, cold and dejected (not that you weren't already wet, muddy and cold). You make your way back to the initial staging point for the next phase of your plans. You have lost some time, but even worse, you know you have lost some of the respect of the troops. Reduce your current **Luck** by 1 point.

Turn to **42**.

62

Sadly for you, in modern warfare, effects from devices are so much quicker and more powerful than even a talented arcanist like yourself can hope to match. The fire strikes your impromptu shield of water and air and tears through it in a blast of superheated steam. You are shielded by some extent by your magic, but not enough. You feel the flames engulf you and hear a terrible screaming coming from your own flame seared lungs. You sense more than see Storn leave, satisfied he has finished you.

You fight against the rising tide of unconsciousness, looking for a way to desperately save yourself. The only thing that can aid you is any healing skills or supplies you might possess.

If you have the skill **Life Systems**, an *elixir of healing* or a *superior elixir of healing*, turn to **91**.

If you have no healing available, turn to **10**.

63

Very carefully you bleed away the dark energies surrounding the safe, picking at it with your skills until it finally unravels and dissipates. Whoever set the trap is powerful but not particularly skilled; the construct you unravelled was crude. It takes three *lockbusters* to get into the safe. Pulling it open, you see within an item wrapped in waxed hide, about the size of a small chest or large book. You extract the item then open the hide to examine what is within.

Turn to **35**.

64

You ready yourself for another assault, your surviving men prepared to hold the door when the sound of approaching enemies turn into cries of alarm and the sound of close and furious combat. The prisoners! They have made their move, attacking with such abandon that they have thrown your foes into disarray, at least momentarily.

Although tempted to try and link up with the prisoners and aid them, you know you still have a mission to complete. Instead you move upwards through the chateau, several times avoiding enemy troops who are heading down towards where the fighting rages. You get to the roof of the chateau. It is abandoned, not only due to the fighting below but also because the aetheric bombardment is now reaching the chateau. Stone explodes nearby as one bombardment hits and reality warps and shifts as the result of another strike, a near miss. Getting climbing equipment from your packs, you quickly make your way down the wall at high speed; the risk of being seen is far less than the risk of being bombarded by your own side.

Finally you are down and you move away from the chateau, circling around so you are moving back towards friendly lines.

Turn to **13**.

65

You recite the briefest spell you know to push the end of the staff out of alignment. Unfortunately, devices such as staves are quick. Storn's aim is spoiled by your quick spell but the edge of the wave of flame erupting from the staff still strikes you. You feel the flames engulf you and hear a terrible screaming coming from your own flame seared lungs. You sense more than see Storn leave, satisfied he has finished you. You fight against the rising tide of unconsciousness, looking for a way to desperately save yourself. The only thing that can aid you is any healing skills or supplies you might possess.

If you have the skill **Life Systems**, an *elixir of healing* or a *superior elixir of healing*, turn to **91**.

If you have no healing available, turn to **10**.

66

You cannot resist as you are drawn towards Van Payne. You note with horror that he starts to draw upon his necromantic spells – whatever he intends is going to be nasty. Out of the corner of your eye you see Trooper Ringo raise his crossbow and shoot. Van Payne deflects the bolt, then with a snarl, directs the full force of his magic against Ringo, shattering him against the wall. In the moment Van Payne is distracted, you act.

If you possess skill with **Shifting** magic, turn to **27**.

Otherwise roll 2 dice, adding your current **Endurance** and adding a further +2 if you have **Close Combat Training** or if you have **Combat Precognition** active.

If the total rolled is less than 12, turn to **85**.

If the total rolled is 13 or higher, turn to **92**.

67

You attempt to harmlessly dissipate the energies running wild through Trihsder's body; not an easy feat even with your high degree of competence.

Roll 2 dice, adding your current **Education** to the roll.

If the total rolled is less than 14, turn to **72**.

If the total rolled is 14 or higher, turn to **45**.

68

The enemy troops are not particularly alert, it looks like they are waiting to go off shift, but there are a lot of them. Your men stealth closer and you bless the effectiveness of the *chameleon cloaks* once again. Meanwhile you prepare to use your most destructive magics.

If you possess either the skills **Combat Elementalism** or **Combat Manipulation** or you have a *sphere of devastation* and wish to use it, turn to **34**.

Otherwise, turn to **54**.

69

You climb the wall steadily, just behind First Trooper Charl. The wall is rain slicked but the devices your band posses make it easy but strenuous work. You pass several windows too small to enter and are tempted to approach one to look inside but resist with the thought you yourself might be seen.

A particularly viscous series of bombardments leads to tragedy. Energy flares through the shields and strikes the wall next to you, sending small fragments of shattered rock into and through your shoulder, tearing it apart in a bloody gout. You hang from the wall by your securing rope, desperately trying not to call out in pain. Unless you possess the **Life Systems** skill or use any type of *elixir of healing*, you rapidly bleed out on the wall, ending your adventure. If you can apply some sort of healing to yourself, you stop the bleeding but still lose 3 points of **Endurance** from your wound (although you do gain back the normal amount healed if you used an elixir and heal back a further 1 point if you have the **Healing** skill).

You cannot make it up the wall under your own power, but are assisted by Charl and Storn who, after much silent straining, carefully slide you between the crenulations at the top of the wall and onto the chateau proper.

Turn to **20**.

70

The blast of flame doesn't hit you directly but you are unable to avoid it entirely. You feel the flames engulf you and hear a terrible screaming coming from your own flame seared lungs. You sense more than see Storn leave, satisfied he has finished you.

You fight against the rising tide of unconsciousness, looking for a way to desperately save yourself. The only thing that can aid you is any healing skills or supplies you might possess.

Roll 2 dice, adding +1 if you have the skill **Life Systems** or +3 if you have the skill **Healing** and +2 if you use an *elixir of healing* or +3 if you use a *superior elixir of healing*. You can only use one elixir before pain overcomes you.

If the total rolled is less than 13, turn to **10**.

If the total rolled is 13 or higher, turn to **91**.

72

You turn away. There is nothing further you can do; the magic continues to ravage his form but his body's natural defence works to counter the magic as well as it can. You have no good options left. You cannot bring Trihsder with you. The mission is too important to abort even with such an early casualty. Talking with First Trooper Charl you come up with the following less than ideal options. Under the notes section of your *character sheet*, write that you have *fought against corpses*.

If you want to assign Trooper Rosenberg to escort the wounded member of the group back to your own lines, knowing it will weaken your troop still further, turn to **97**.

If you want to leave Trihsder hidden here as best you can in the hope you can retrieve him on your return, turn to **11**.

73

Trooper Rosenberg literally leaps into the fray, over the top of Charl and into the midst of the enemy troops. He is a whirlwind, his two swords slashing bloody ruin to his foes. You see him struck once, then twice in return, but the foes around him are hampered by their close quarters and strike their own companions more than they do Rosenberg. Although Rosenberg falls, his sacrifice gives Storn a chance to move back and unleash the flames from within his *staff of fire* across the enemy. Their screams and the smell of cooking flesh are hideous. The fight is soon over; Rosenberg dead in the midst of a circle of foes. You hear more enemy troops on their way. Your own hope of survival is if you previously organised some sort of distraction.

If you have *freed the prisoners* and *healed the prisoners* both noted on your *character sheet*, turn to **64**. If you have *rigged the armoury* and *removed armoury protection* both noted on your *character sheet*, turn to **41**. If you have one of *freed the prisoners* or *rigged the armoury* noted down on your character sheet, turn to **82**.

If you have none of these, turn to **18**.

74

There are four guards outside the cell containing the prisoners. They are alert looking so your troop slowly inch their way forward, getting closer and closer. Trooper Valis gets within two paces of the enemy when one of them looks around in surprise. There is a flurry of brutal action as your men attempt to take them out before they can raise the alarm. As you watch, one of the enemy troops falls back and raises a whistle towards his mouth.

If you possess **Combat Elementalism** and wish to use it, turn to **94**.

Otherwise, turn to **57**.

75

At the end of the stairwell is the chateau's second story. Once plush palatial-like bedrooms and halls, this level has now obviously been taken over as officer territory. A quick scout by Trooper Valis reveals you are in the right place. In the centre of the level, in what must once have been the ballroom, you can feel the thrumming power of the shielding device. Valis confirms the worst. It is well guarded by a dozen troops outside the room with no idea how many more are inside. Over the constant beat of the shielding device, you catch a faint wiff of another altogether more unpleasant kind of magic.

If you want to investigate this other magic, turn to **93**.

If you want to find some way of getting to the shielding device, turn to **15**.

76

Van Payne pays for his brutal saying of Ringo as your spell powers through a gap in his defences and hits him full force on his head which explodes backwards in a shower of gore. You go to one knee as your body's reaction to the battle strikes you. You force yourself up again and turn as you hear the sound of fighting behind you.

At the door, your remaining troops are attempting to hold back a wave of enemy soldiers.

If Trooper Rosenberg is still with you, turn to **73**.

If Trooper Rosenberg is not with you, but you possess a *sphere of devastation* and wish to use it, turn to **99**.

Otherwise, turn to **18**.

77

Healing is always harder to work on another than on yourself. Their life energy instinctively resists any attempt to change the body, even to its advantage such as with the healing of infection. This is going to require all your skill.

Roll 2 dice.

If the total rolled is less than 7, turn to **72**.

If the total rolled is 7 or higher, turn to **45**.

78

You hear Storn speak behind you, "Well, I guess this is the end then." Something about the tone of his voice makes you glance backwards. You are shocked to see Storn, *staff of fire* in hand, pointed at you and the surviving troops. His face is subtly different, somewhat Alfen. He smiles a tight smile and activates the staff, sending searing waves of flame towards you.

Even as your mind desperately tries to comprehend Storn's actions, your body acts instinctively to try and hurl itself out of the path of the fire.

Roll 2 dice, adding +2 if you have **Seen the Worst**.

If the total rolled is less than 10, turn to **2**.

If the total rolled is 10 or higher, turn to **70**.

79

It is almost comic the way you move through the ground level in fits and starts, dozens of the enemies all around you but none seeing you. Valis locates a stairway up to the second floor and you are making cautious progress towards it when a small group of enemy officers pass some short distance away. Amongst them is a well-dressed, gaunt man who stinks (to your magical senses) of necromancy. He appears to be in discussion with an older, superior officer. Apart from having to clamp down on your magical emanations to remain unseen by the enemy arcanist, they pass without incident. You do notice however, that the enemy arcanist... the necromancer, has left a faint magical trail behind him, up the stairs in the direction you are going.

You move up the stairwell to the chateau's second story. Once plush palatial-like bedrooms and halls, this level has now obviously been taken over as officer territory. A quick scout by Trooper Valis reveals you are in the right place. In the centre of the level, in what must once have been ballroom, you can feel the thrumming power of the shielding device. Valis confirms the worst. It is well guarded by a dozen troops outside the room with no idea how many more could be inside. However, you can still detect that faint trail of necromantic magic heading to a different area of the level.

If you want to investigate this other magic, turn to **52**.

If you want to find some way of getting to the shielding device, turn to **15**.

80

As you touch the *lockbuster* up against the safe, the necromantic energy stored within strikes into you. The energy ravages through your body, tearing at both your physical form and your mind. You desperately try and draw upon your powers to save yourself.

Roll 2 dice, adding +3 to the total rolled if you possess the **Healing** skill.

If the total rolled is less than 10, turn to **14**.

If the total rolled is 10 or higher, turn to **24**.

81

You successfully release the magic raging through Trihsder. Some of the energy you have drawn into yourself. Although this is a little dangerous to hold for too long, the energy stored will make it easier for you next time you attempt to use shifting magic. Add +2 to your roll next time you use the **Shifting** skill in this adventure. For now, turn to **45**.

82

Were your preparations enough? It is down to fate and the will of the gods.

Roll 2 dice, adding your current **Luck** to the total.

If the total rolled is less than 12, turn to **18**.

If the total rolled is 13 or higher, and you *freed the prisoners*, turn to **64**.

If the total rolled is 13 or higher, and you *rigged the armoury*, turn to **41**.

83

When you explain the new plan there are some mutters and dark looks, but troops seem prepared to follow your lead. With you in the front and First Trooper Charl next in line, you make your way into the stream.

It is cold! It is also difficult work pushing against the flow of water and you hate to think what harm the lingering necromantic taint is doing to you. You get to a point where there is no breathing space, the passage is completely water filled. You know that holding your breath and pushing your way through the water will not get you far. You estimate you have covered only a fraction of the distance required. Your only chance of further progress is to use your magic abilities.

If you possess the **Shifter** skill and wish to use it, turn to **26**.

If you possess the **Elemental Studies** and wish to use it, turn to **48**.

If you don't possess either of these two skills, you have to admit defeat and go back to the original plan, turn to **61**.

84

You climb the wall steadily, just behind First Trooper Charl. The wall is rain slicked but the devices your band possesses make it easy but strenuous work. You pass several windows too small to enter and are tempted to approach one to look inside but resist with the thought you yourself might be seen.

A particularly viscous series of bombardments overload the shields momentarily. Energy flares and strikes the wall just to the right of you, sending small fragments of shattered rock flying, including one piece that scores your shoulder on the way past. You silently curse. Lose 1 point of **Endurance** unless you possess the **Healing** skill, in which case you spend a few minutes to close the wound and repair the worst of the damage, taking no loss.

After a short time, you are able to continue up the wall again until you reach the top and carefully slide between the crenulations at the top of the wall, onto the chateau proper.

Turn to **20**.

85

Van Payne smiles a horrible smile of satisfied triumph as he sends his necromantic energy searing into your body. You collapse to the ground.

If you possess the **Healing** skill, turn to **38**.

Otherwise, turn to **59**.

86

You wait out the day in nervous preparation, listening to the ongoing aetheric bombardment of the chateau. Finally night falls and you gather up your troop. You make your way along the trenches to the nearest point in the line to the chateau, then boost yourself up into no man's land. Keeping as a unit you quickly move towards your destination, hampered by the dark and the drizzling rain. You feel horribly exposed, despite your *chameleon cloaks*, and struggle to make good time through the slicks of mud, broken and rusty lengths of barbed wire and the occasional rotting corpse.

The sky is lit by the flash of bombardment and you see a rise ahead upon which sits the chateau – you are getting near to your destination. As you think this, your foot sinks into the ground and a

putrescent stench wafts out. Looking down in disgust, you realise you have stepped on the chest of a ripe corpse and your foot has broken through the ribs, releasing the pent up corruption inside. As you pull your foot free, trying to control your gorge, you notice a number of other corpses around; from what you can see they were all struck down by earlier bombardment. You go to move on when the corpses start to shift – some sort of necromancy is afoot!

As you hiss a warning to your troops, the dead men rise all around and lurch towards your badly outnumbered band. As you begin to form a plan, your legs are grabbed from below as the corpse you stepped on tries to drag you down.

Roll 2 dice and add your **Endurance**. Add a further +2 if you have **Close Combat Training** and carry either a sword or a hand axe and +1 if you have **Combat Precognition** active.

If the total rolled is less than 13, turn to **19**.

If the total rolled is 13 or higher, turn to **29**.

87

You move across the polished marble ballroom floor. The pedestal is of dark ebony and has carved dragons at its tip, looking defiantly outwards. It is hard to make out the shielding device through the energies that radiate out from it but its vague form seems almost to be a small, stylised shield – very archaic in design, not like a modern device at all. You study the device from a step away and quickly determine the simple arcane sequence required to turn it off, which you do.

The shielding device shifts and melds into itself, the energies steadily reducing, until all that is left is a small round shaped piece of metal. You pick it up. It is surprisingly heavy. You know that you have stirred up a hornets nest with your actions and have literally minutes or less to get out of here. You need to decide who is going to carry the device. You could carry it yourself but you know the weight of it would slow you down. You look at the troops and suddenly Trooper Storn pipes up, volunteering to take it. An actual volunteer! Now you have seen everything in this mans army. Storn already carries a heavy load with his *staff of fire*. Perhaps Trooper Valis would be a better option. With his proven stealth skills, he has the best chance of getting the device back to friendly lines. You decide quickly. Write down under the notes section on your *character sheet* who is carrying the *shielding device* out of Storn, Valis or you.

Decision made and the device stowed away, you turn to leave. The air explodes with raw power and you feel reality scream as it is torn open and abruptly closed again. You catch sight of a gaunt man, an enemy arcanist, who has just appeared... teleported, next to the pedestal that housed the device. Such power! Waves of force radiate from him. You and your troops are flung around the room like rag-dolls. You strike the tapestry covered wall and also black out as you feel several ribs crack. Lose 1 point from your current **Endurance**.

“THIEVES, BEGGARS, CURS! How DARE you invade my home, steal my device,” he screams. “Once I have finished with you, you will wish you had never crossed the path of Aldoff van Payne!”

As he is screaming, with but a motion, his magical force tears your hand weapon(s) from you, then your *wand*, sending them across the room. He motions towards you and you feel a circle of force enclose you like a clenched fist, drawing you closer towards him. You have never seen such power in an arcanist before. You must defend yourself.

If you possess the **Dissipation** skill and have the *tome of power*, turn to **47**.

If you possess either the **Combat Manipulation** or **Combat Elementalism** skill and wish to use one of them, turn to **31**.

Otherwise, turn to **66**.

88

As the imposer was speaking you desperately attempt to draw water from the ground with the intent to use your command of elemental air to concentrate and interpose it between you and the false Storn.

Roll 2 dice.

If the total rolled is less than 6, turn to **2**.

If the total rolled is 6 or higher, turn to **62**.

89

Once your head breaks the surface of the water you take a deep breath, and immediately regret it. The air is putrid, both with stench from necromantic 'materials' as well as waste product. This must be the chateau's means of waste disposal, at least in a siege situation. Trying not to gag, you and the rest of the troop use rope and devices originally brought to scale the outside walls of the chateau, to cover the distance to the top of the shaft. Aware that you are inside an enemy fortification with no easy way out except the way you came, you take great care to be as silent as possible.

First Trooper Charl is at the top of the shaft first. There is a cover across it, no doubt to keep out the stench and he carefully lifts it. Soon, he slides the cover across and motions you and the rest of the troops up. You are in a small room, a closed door on one side and a partially open door on the wall to its left. The walls are clay, covered in wood planking for the most part. There are large supporting beams running up the walls and across the ceiling. You believe from this you are in the basement of the chateau. The small room you are in is largely empty of anything of interest, but not so the larger room you can spy through the open door.

The first thought you have is that you are looking into a torture chamber. The stink of necromantic magic is strong however and you realise this is somebodies twisted idea of an experimental facility. The dead, or parts of the dead, are littered through the room, some of them twitching with animating necromancy. Looking at the remains of the uniforms on the bodies you realise it is your own countrymen... prisoners, who are being experimented on. In the notes section of your *character sheet*, write that you have *seen the experimental chamber*.

Given the time of the day, or just plain luck, the room is empty. Your troop quickly makes a reconnaissance of the room and of the corridors through the doors off both the 'privy' and the 'experimental room'. Soon you have a good idea of the layout of the cellars. Two ways up have been located, one leading from a storage room containing large quantities of food. Another is a larger stairwell located at the end of the main corridor. Most importantly, you have located the cells where the prisoners are being held. Unfortunately the prisoners are guarded by about half a dozen enemy troops. Your mission is to recover the shielding device but you cannot help but think of the prisoners. If you had **Combat Precognition** active, lose 1 point from your current **Mental Fortitude** at this point from the strain then decide if you want to keep using it (knowing the cost) or let the spells drop.

If you want to continue with your original mission and head up the narrow stairs, turn to **12**.

If you want to head up the larger stairwell, turn to **56**.

If you want to attempt a rescue of the prisoners, turn to **74**.

90

You realise you are going to have to break out of the closing circle and, in a hissed whisper, order an attack before charging in the fray. Only a determined strike is going to get you free of this trap.

Roll 2 dice and add your current **Endurance**. Add a further +2 if you have **Close Combat Training** and carry either a sword or a hand axe and +1 if you have **Combat Precognition** active.
If the total rolled is less than 13, turn to **6**.
If the total rolled is 13 or higher, turn to **55**.

91

You desperately hold onto consciousness long enough to apply healing to yourself. You feel the worst of the burns mending to the limit of healing possible. As your body relaxes from the reduction in pain, you feel yourself slip away.

Turn to **100**.

92

Van Payne made a bad mistake thinking you were harmless just because he had disarmed you. In his moment of distraction you strike; first a blow to his groin that doubles him up, then as he raises his head to let out a howl of anguish, you strike him with your open palm into his neck with the full force of your body behind the blow. You hear the cartilage in his neck break but the blow did not kill him. Van Payne is still desperately trying to breath... to speak so he can cast a spell, when you take the wand from his limp grasp and plunge it into his right eye, finishing him. *'Good riddance to bad rubbish'* you reflect as you turn to see how your surviving troops are doing.

Your troops are at the door to the ballroom, attempting to hold back a wave of enemy soldiers attracted to the room by the sounds of battle. It is obvious they cannot hold for long.

If Trooper Rosenberg is still with you, turn to **73**.

If Trooper Rosenberg is not with you, but you possess a *sphere of devastation* and wish to use it, turn to **99**.

Otherwise, turn to **18**.

93

Here you are, in the middle of an enemy stronghold, trying to track down an elusive scent of magic that seems 'wrong'. No wonder the rest of the team give you odd looks. The taint of magic is faint.

Roll 2 dice and add your **Education** score to the total. Add an extra +1 if you possess **Divinatory Means & Methods**, an extra +2 if you have *fought against corpses* in your notes section on your *character sheet* and another +2 if you have *seen the experimental chamber* in the notes section on your *character sheet*.

If the total rolled is less than 16, you cannot track the scent down and try to work out a plan to get at the shielding device, turn to **15**.

If the total rolled is 16 or higher, turn to **52**.

94

The whistle is knocked out of the enemy troops hand by your strike and moments later he slumps to the ground, Charl's axe sliced clear through his throat. You grab the keys and start releasing the prisoners. There are about sixty prisoners in all, in various states of health. You quickly outline the way you came in and tell them to make their way back to friendly lines while you continue on the mission. You are shocked when they refuse. One of them speaks up and explains for all of them.

“Some of us lads will help the worst of the wounded get out, that is for sure, but the rest of us want to help.” You hear murmurs of assent from the others. “Some of us have been taken away... for experimentation. We want to have our revenge for that.”

You come to an agreement. They will give you time to get further into the chateau before they strike. With luck, their attack should provide diversion enough that your recovery of the shielding device is made easier. Add that you have *freed the prisoners* in the notes section of your *character sheet*. You prepare to leave then look over their brave but ragged line. With a bit of healing they would provide a much more effective force.

If you possess the **Life Systems** skill and wish to spend serious effort to heal some of the prisoners, or if you wish to give them an *elixir of healing* of any type to do the same, turn to **23**.

Otherwise you prepare to move up to the chateau’s ground floor.

If you want to head up the narrow stairs, turn to **12**.

If you want to head up the larger stairwell, turn to **56**.

95

You throw yourself to one side, but you are too slow. It strikes you and explodes in a burst of elemental energy. You slump against the wall, trying not to fall. Trooper Ringo applies an *elixir of healing* to you which eases off the pain. Lose 2 points of current **Endurance** unless you possess the Healing skill, in which case you are able to enhance the elixir’s power and only lose 1 point off your current **Endurance**. The battle is over; your troops unhurt apart from minor wounds.

They cannot locate any keys on the bodies so First Trooper Charl applies a *lockbreaker* device to the lock and prepares to open the door, another *sphere of devastation* (how many does he have you wonder?) in the other hand.

Charl readies the *sphere of devastation* to throw through the now open door but there is no need. The room (which is indeed the ballroom) is empty apart from the shielding device sitting on a pedestal in the centre of the room. Inconceivable! Do they feel so secure they have no one guarding inside the room or is the device dangerous to be near when it is functioning?

You and the rest of the troops move into the room and you move towards the device, your arcane senses open, turn to **87**.

96

You are frozen in shock as the sphere spins closer to you. Then, almost of its own accord, your hand reaches out to grasp the sphere.

Roll 2 dice, adding +2 to the total if you possess **Close Combat Training** or have **Seen the Worst**, and adding +3 to the total if you have **Combat Precognition** active.

If the total rolled is less than 7, turn to **5**.

If the total rolled is 7 or higher, turn to **16**.

97

You send Trooper Rosenberg away, burdened by the form of Trihsder. He is moving clumsily through the mud, much more visible as he is less able to use his cloak to conceal his form; you can only hope they make it back to friendly lines. You cannot help but wonder if you have made the right decision, if

the further weakening of your troop will not cause the failure of your mission in the times ahead. There is nothing for you to do now but go on.

Turn to **21**.

98

You desperately draw water from the ground and use your command of elemental air to try and concentrate and interpose it between you and the flames. It will require an enormous effort of will to succeed. Reduce your **Mental Fortitude** by 1 unless this would bring it to 0.

Roll 2 dice, subtracting 3 if you were unable to reduce your **Mental Fortitude**.

If the total rolled is less than 7, turn to **2**.

If the total rolled is 7 or higher, turn to **62**.

99

Your men are about to be overwhelmed! You pull out your *sphere of devastation*, prime it and send it hurtling over the head of your troops. There is an overwhelming blast of unstable elemental energies that tear the enemy troops apart. Seconds later, Storn is able to unleash the flames from his *staff of fire* over the survivors. The stench is terrible. Your men seem mostly unharmed by the blast except Trooper Valis, who sports a nasty (and fresh) burn down his shoulder and upper arm. Valis glares at you but you are both soon distracted by the sound of more enemy troops on their way. Your only hope of survival is if you previously organised some sort of distraction.

If you have *freed the prisoners* and *healed the prisoners* both noted down of your character sheet, turn to **64**.

If you have both *rigged the armoury* and *removed armoury protection* noted down on your character sheet, turn to **41**.

If you have one of *freed the prisoners* or *rigged the armoury* noted down on your character sheet, turn to **82**.

If you have none of these, turn to **18**.

100

Consciousness waxes and wanes like the tide. There are times of unendurable pain and times of blessed relief when cool unconsciousness pulls you into its embrace. You have fragments of visions, memories; fire burning into you, a muddy field filled with flowers, your mother's face after having received news of your father's death. You drift for an unknown time, and suddenly you are aware.

You are lying in a bed and are weak... so weak. You try and turn your head. You try to speak. You hear a woman's voice coming closer but spiral into unconsciousness again. Some time later, perhaps that day or perhaps days later you recover consciousness again. You are feeling stronger and take in your surrounding. You are in a hospital ward and you can see rows of beds lining both sides, filled with the injured and dying. You rest and gain your strength as the days past. Your memories of the last fight, the betrayal you suffered at the hands of Storn, return but there is nothing you can do now. You worry about the bandages that cover much of your body and some of your face but the doctors and nurses just offer evasions to your questions.

Despite your feelings of failure over the mission and your worries on your future, it is a relief when you see First Sept Lokan enter and make his way to your narrow bed.

The first thing you ask about is the other men, but Lokan shakes his head. “None of them survived,” he says gently. You are crushed. You feel deeply responsible for the men’s deaths (although if you have *healed Trihsder* noted on your character sheet, this is somewhat offset by finding out he, at least, made his way back safely). If only you had been faster at the end. If only you had picked up on the signs and recognised Storn for the traitor he was. Lokan interrupts your self recriminations.

“Set your mind at rest”, he exclaims. “The loss of such brave troops is always a blow and yes, you did lose the device, but the main part of your mission was a success.”

His eyes start to gleam in memory. “A patrol came upon the remains of your unit shortly after you fell. We quickly determined that your primary mission was a success and began the assault. It was bloody work but not as bad as we feared; it seems you left the fortress in a state of chaos from your earlier insertion.”

He sighs. “We drew forth memories of ‘Storn’s’ betrayal from your mind. Some will no doubt find fault that you lost the device, but listen to me. Even before the mission someone must have leaked word for that *shazen* Alfer to have replaced poor Trooper Storn. The initial leak, the replacement of Storn by an Alfen infiltrator, the disposal of Storn’s body; all these point to a failure at many levels well before your so called ‘error’.”

He reads from your face your unspoken concern about your wounds. “Don’t fret about your injuries. I will not lie and say you won’t be scarred to some extent by the fire but you avoided the worst and from what the doctors have said, should recover well. But for now, rest; we need your kind back at the front.”

Bonus Section: Success Points

It’s a sad but true fact that even though you succeeded the mission where almost everyone else would have failed, you are put in front of a review board that determines the success or failure of the mission from your superiors’ perspective. You start off with **0 success points**. “Sure, you got the shielding device, but did you have to get your whole troop killed?” you get asked. Add points for the following:

- +2 points; you end the adventure with the *tome of power* in your possession.
- +1 point; you *healed Trihsder*.
- +1 point; you *freed the prisoners*.
- +1 point; you have *seen the experimental chamber*.
- +1 point; you *heard Storn’s rant*.
- +1 point; you have *studied shielding effects*.

Tally

0 points; you succeeded but you are a complete failure according to your superiors. It is unlikely you will ever see promotion and you will almost certainly be sent to the front lines in punishment.

1 or 2 points; the review board begrudgingly agrees you are not a complete failure. Although you can kiss your chances of promotion goodbye, at least you retain your current duties.

3 or 4 points; many nits were picked in your going over by the review board but you gave a good account for yourself. You are going places (assuming the war doesn’t kill you).

5 points or more; you *can* walk on water (at least, without using spells or devices that is) as far as the review board is concerned. Congratulations! Your overwhelming success is almost certain to result in a new, harder mission.