

THE BURDEN OF GLORY

This is an adventure created for **GenCon 2017 and run at special events**. It offers the Storm Knights a choice between saving the inhabitants of a hardpoint, uprooting a stela, and making a key discovery about a potential ninth cosm. Based on the results of those adventures the default map changed and the guilt of the elves was revealed — what will happen in your world?

PLOT SYNOPSIS

The Possibility Wars have raged for almost a year. The Storm Knights are already a team that's been working together for weeks. They are stationed in Lincoln University, a hardpoint inside the Living Land. In fact, it's one of the last remaining hardpoints in Missouri. Edeinos raids overwhelmed and destroyed the others. The team's mission here was two-fold: defend the Core Earth foothold in the zone against edeinos raiders, and scout the surrounding area for Wonders.

Lincoln University's campus is heavily fortified. Between the Storm Knights, a mixed force of regular soldiers, and ROTC stationed there, all attacks have been repulsed with minimal casualties. The search for so-called "Wonders" hasn't fared nearly as well. The adventurers themselves have yet to encounter one, and the last group of scouts sent out didn't return — they're one day overdue.

ORIENTATION

There are three major personalities found on campus (see below). There are also groups of primitive humans scattered around Jefferson City, all on friendly terms. A few weeks ago news came in from the primitives, tales of great deeds done by Storm Knights fighting in Mark Twain National Forest. Everyone's spirits are up thanks to the tales.

PROFESSOR HAWKMAN

People look up to Hawkman because he is the tallest man in the hardpoint and the most tenured member of the surviving faculty. He's a professor of anthropology and spends much of his time studying the primitive humans who live near the school. Even before the Possibility Wars he was obsessed with the "Mound Builders", an ancient



The objective is a stela. Time to take it down!

tribe who lived in the area and disappeared thousands of years ago. Hawkman believes the Mound Builders are linked to advanced cultures in South America, and he hopes the emerging Wonders across the land will offer proof of that connection.

Quote: "The Mound Builders knew something, and they were trying to warn us!"

MAJOR SHARPE

Andre Sharpe is the highest ranking military commander on site. He's a dour but distinguished looking older man with dark skin and white hair. Sharpe is an officer with the United States Army Corps of Engineers. His efficient leadership and tireless work to fortify the hardpoint's defenses have earned the respect of all the soldiers under his command. He speaks with measured, precise diction and chooses his words and actions carefully.

Quote: "Archimedes once boasted that he could move the entire world with a long enough lever."

REBECCA HAISLEY

Rebecca was Student Body President before the Living Land changed everything. She rose to the occasion and is widely acknowledged as the leader of the entire civilian population, not just the students. She's outgoing, irrepressible, and unabashedly nerdy. She wears her high school mathlete championship medal as a makeshift badge of office.

Quote: "School spirit is what's keeping us from transforming, so let's see some pep, people!"

ROMANCE AND CONNECTIONS

Any of these characters are candidates for a **Romance** card. All will perish if steps aren't taken to save Lincoln University before the end of the adventure! As a Connection, any of the three grant a +2 bonus on attempts to requisition materials—see **Preparations** below.

A NEW ARRIVAL

Before a search party for the missing scouts can be formed, the uncommon sound of a loud engine disrupts the everyday noises of the jungle surrounding Lincoln University. A strange looking gyro-copter is incoming, and the Storm Knights and leaders of the school are quick to gather on the football stadium field where it lands to meet the pilot.

The daring, square-jawed courier introduces himself as Rex Steele, and offers a hearty handshake to everyone and begins speaking quickly and excitedly.

"I bring news, Storm Knights! Straight from Quinn Sebastian and the Delphi Council. Tales of hope and defiance have been spreading through this zone like wildfire, and you've been given clearance to uproot the stela we found. It was planted in the Ashland Wildlife Research Area north of here. As far as we can tell there's no backup stelae, so when it goes this whole zone returns to Core Earth! Now we can make Baruk Kaah pay for spreading out so fast, and get back some of our own world!"

"The timing is tricky. The Possibility Energy that spread with the stories has had time to saturate and protect the population, but that fades if we wait too long. Too early or too late and we get a repeat of that nasty business in Nashville, and nobody wants that."

"Maps aren't that useful in the Living Land, but this should get you close enough to the stela. The edeinos are probably shoring it up, so just look for a ton of bad guys and it should be easy to find. Reality storms have been thick along the border, so it doesn't look like we can attack from the Core Earth side. They thought I was crazy to try to fly through and get the message to you. I admit, it was touch and go for a bit there. You're the closest group with a chance on this side, you've got to get rid of that stela before they install a backup or hope starts to fade."

Rex sticks around long enough to repair his plane and answer any questions he can, then climbs back into his gyro-copter and heads back north. The most likely line of questioning involves the Nashville stela tragedy. A group of rogue Stormers and operatives uprooted a stela near Nashville that connected three zones.

AVAILABLE WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT

Weapons	Tech	Result	Damage	Ammo	Notes
Frag Grenades (2)	22	Always	18	1	Range 10/20/30, Medium Blast
Machete	23	Always	Str +2	—	Survival becomes Favored
C4 Explosive	23	Success	18	1	Small Blast, AP 10, timer detonation
M-4 Carbine	23	Success	13	30	Range 50/100/200, Short Burst
M-240 Machinegun	23	Good	15	100	Range 100/500/1k, Long Burst, Bulky
Barret M-82	23	Outstanding	16	10	Range 100/1K/2K, Bulky
LAW Rocket	23	Outstanding	25	1	Range 100/250/500, AP 4, heavy weapons

Other Gear	Tech		Notes
First Aid Kit	23	Always	<i>First aid</i> tests are Favored
Stab Vest	23	Always	+3 Armor, Torso, Max Dex 10
Laser Sight	23	Success	Ignore 1 point of <i>fire combat</i> penalties
Nightvision Goggles	23	Success	Eliminates Darkness penalties
Riot Shield	23	Good	+3 defense, Min Str 6
Tactical Armor	23	Good	Max Dex 8, Armor +4, Fatigues

The attack was a success and the zones flipped back to Core Earth, but countless civilians within were reduced to "What Ifs" in the process. The assault wasn't approved by the Delphi Council. Rex repeats a rumor that a rogue government group sponsored the attack.

According to Quinn, the energy generated by the stories circulating in this zone will prevent the same thing from happening again. Rex believes him, but not everyone does.

PREPARATIONS

If they haven't already, let the Storm Knights introduce themselves to each other. The strike team leaving for the stela has a few options. Lincoln University has weapons and equipment which could come in handy, but they can't take everything—the Ord soldiers need that equipment in case the hardpoint is attacked.

Each character must try a *persuasion* test against Major Sharpe to see what he can spare. Even on a failure he offers a first aid kit, two frag grenades, and a machete. A successful test means he offers any "Success" items from the **Available Weapons and Equipment** chart as well, and so on.

He's reluctant to offer the "Outstanding" items because he believes their loss puts the hardpoint at risk. The *persuasion* test assuages those fears. Note that some characters may not actually want any of the items at all. If their personal axioms don't support them, those items just make a disconnection more likely during a *Surge*. Storm Knights know they don't need weapons or explosives to destroy the stela, only their control over reality.

RECRUITING SOLDIERS

The force may consider recruiting soldiers from the hardpoint to come along. Sharpe is against the idea, noting they're already undermanned thanks to the disappearance of the recon team.

The Storm Knights also know that Ords won't be much help against the stela anyway. Since its right on the edge of dangerous reality storms, the odds of any troops actually making it to the conflict are low.

COSM CARDS DURING SCENE ONE

Don't bother dealing Cosm cards until the group sets off for the stela in Scene One. During the trip out (or back), cards may have the following effects.

Deep Mist: If the **Deep Mist** Cosm card is played the reality storm worsens and engulfs the attackers. Any Ord soldiers flee and are never seen again. Storm Knights must make a DN 14 *reality* test to weather the storm's effects:

- **Mishap:** The hero loses an add in *reality*. If the character has no adds, he transforms.
- **Failure:** The character disconnects.
- **Standard:** No effect.
- **Good:** The character gains 1 Possibility.
- **Outstanding:** The character gains 2 Possibilities.

After the storm's effects are resolved, each player gains 1 Possibility for the inconvenience posed by the card.

Dino Attack: A Tyrannosaurus affected by the nightmare tree growing through the temple described in Scene Three attacks the travelers. See **Horrorsaurus-Rex** on page 18.

Lost Treasure: This card produces the Commtrol (see page 11) if it hasn't already been found. Away from the temple it's found in the clutches of a dead body—one of the missing scouts. Wearing the Commtrol guides the user unerringly towards the vanishing temple. If played after the temple has been dealt with, it provides a bio-tech device that heals three Wounds (from the same person or between different people) before it runs out of power.

Perils of the Living Land: This card either triggers the reality storm described in the **Deep Mist** above or applies a -2 penalty on attempts to cross **The Tarpit** (see page 6). Each player gains one Possibility for the added danger.

SCENE ONE: THE JOURNEY NORTH

Standard Scene. Sporadic mist covers the Missouri jungles and a massive reality storm rages in the distance to the north. Compasses don't work in the Living Land, but enough natural landmarks remain to keep navigation by triangulation possible. Taking a vehicle moves the group north quickly at first, along vestigial roads and clearings, but as soon as they hit the vicinity of the Ashland Wildlife Research Area the trees become too thick for driving.

THE TARPIT

An entirely new feature in the area is a wide tarpit inside the boundaries of the thickest jungle, and the assault team must cross it to reach the stela. Traversing the pit is an Easy (DN 8) *survival* test. On a failure the character loses one weapon (his choice) to the sticky swamp. A success allows passage without incident. A Good success lets the player "pass on" a +2 bonus to the next character to

pass over, and an Outstanding result decreases the DN by two for all subsequent travelers. Remember a machete makes these tests favored!

THE TRAPPED EDEINOS

After the team completes their passage across, they hear the strangled cries of an edeinos out in the tar. It hisses in desperation.

"Humansssss, help me!"

Some may not be kindly disposed towards edeinos, and there aren't any known friendly tribes in the area. If the squad ignores his plea or attacks, the lizard-man attempts one last gambit:

"I have information...important information! I trade it for my life!"

Rescuing the pitiful creature is a Dramatic Skill Resolution. All four steps are survival, DN 8. Wary adventurers may be on the lookout for an ambush, but a *find* test or Alertness card proves the creature is alone in the area.

If the heroes move to help the trapped edeinos immediately they have five rounds to complete the



The landscape of the Living Land is dotted with new hazards for the unwary!

rescue. If they negotiate first or tarry then they only have four rounds to save him. At the end of the last round he disappears under the tar after warning the group that a massive warband of Redjaws is headed for Lincoln University.

If a good natured attempt was made these last words are a warning given in gratitude for at least trying. If not, they are a curse spat at the humans with his last breath, exulting that the Redjaws will gain some measure of revenge for him.

DAYBASKER'S STORY

If rescued, the miserable creature introduces himself as Daybasker, a scout for the Goldsun tribe. His tribe are no friends of the local Redjaw clan. Baruk Kaah's Redjaws are driving them steadily west. The Goldsuns aren't interested in war, they just want to hunt these lands and enjoy Lanala's bounty. Daybasker saw several things of interest to the strike team while he was scouting.

The Redjaw Attack: A massive Redjaw warband is heading towards Lincoln University, or "the human village" as Daybasker calls it. The force is a hundred strong, and led by Atanakta. He's easy to spot in a fight. He's the fat one with the orange neck flaps...riding a Tyrannosaur!

The Temple on the Mound: There is a strange temple an hour away, one of the wonders that sometimes appears in the Living Lands. He was afraid to enter, but he saw a number of humans with guns (the missing recon team) go inside. Only one emerged, and he was heavily wounded. Daybasker comforted the dying man as he babbled about how important the site was, and how it could change the course of the war. The human perished before he could say why.

Once Daybasker finishes his tale he asks to leave so he can report back to his tribe. He says nothing about it, but if the encounter is friendly the Goldsuns aid Lincoln University (see Scene Four). If the rescuers are rude or threatening he's grateful for his life, but counts the information he shared as fair exchange and no more help is forthcoming.

DAYBASKER

It's hard to tell much about Daybasker's appearance while he's covered in tar. A find test spots his bright

blue eyes, quite different from the usual yellow-slitted eyes of edeinos. He also wears yellow paint, rather than the familiar red of the local tribe. He avoids conflict when possible, and has a reputation among his tribe for being incredibly lazy.

Quote: (Raspily) "Ifff you help me, I'll help you..."

DIFFICULT DECISIONS

With the new information from Daybasker the assault team has a difficult choice to make. They can go off mission and investigate the temple, proceed as planned, or head straight back to Lincoln University to help defend it. There's no wrong call here, but circumstances make it likely that the force can accomplish any two of these tasks—not all three.

Press on to the stela: If they head straight for the stela and uproot it, the temple in Scene Three vanishes without the Law of Wonder to support it. The conquering heroes may return to Lincoln University just in time to participate in the battle, and it's a Core Earth zone if they succeeded!

Divert towards the temple: If the team goes for the temple first it takes enough time that they must choose between defending their base and proceeding with the mission. If they try to repel the attack against the campus, a backup is installed in the meantime and the zone remains intact.

Head back to the hardpoint: If they head back first and repel the attack the assault group can re-provision and head back out after the temple or the stela. As above, if they hit the stela first the zone collapses and the temple disappears. If they do it last a backup stela is in place in a secret new location and the zone remains intact even if the known stela is uprooted.

Give the players time to discuss their choices, and remind them that whatever they choose is being recorded at the end of this session and affects the course of the Possibility Wars!

- If they choose to go to the stela proceed to Scene Two.
- If they divert to the temple jump to Scene Three.
- If they return back to the hardpoint see Scene Four.

SCENE TWO: THE STELA

Standard Scene. The assault team crests a hill and sights the stela jutting out of the valley below. It's in the center of a clearing, with thick trees all around. The top of the hill makes a good sniper's position, overlooking the stela about 50 meters away. The attackers may approach using *stealth* (DN 8) or simply attack.

An Easy (DN 8) *find* test spots skeletal gospog wrapped in the vines of the trees below—silent guardians for the stela below. A Good result or better detects that a few of the trees don't contain gospog, they are massive undead creatures themselves!

Once the intruders are spotted, attack a tree, or start the contest against the stela, the gospog pull free of the vined trees and shamle towards the fray.

UPROOTING THE STELA

Storm Knight know that physical attacks are useless against a stela—actually harming it requires them to get within 10 meters and start a Dramatic Skill Resolution using *reality* to disconnect the stela from the Darkness Device's network. This is a Dominant Zone so the DN is 14.

Once Step B is completed, Rec Pakken dimthreads more gospog in, adjacent to each attacker—including any distant snipers! If all the initial defenders are defeated before Step B finishes, these reinforcements appear immediately.

Once Step C is finished, the ravagon Pakkoat appears on the scene via dimthread next to the stela, eager to tear apart any

Storm Knight he encounters. If every Gospog of the Fourth planting is defeated before Step C then Pakkoat appears on the scene early, flying from the south and landing atop the ridge.

The DN of the *reality* test increases to 16 for the final step. Once its completed the stela crumbles and the axioms immediately shift to Core Earth. Any Living Land Cosm cards are replaced with powerful Core Earth cards!

What happens next depends on the situation. If there won't be time for another encounter, the ravagon and any remaining gospog stand and fight. If time is tight or it's early enough for another battle the ravagon flees and any remaining gospog are swept away by the Core Earth axiom wash.

- **Gospog of the Fourth Planting** (one per two heroes): See page 17.
- **Gospog of the First Planting** (two per hero to start, two more per hero arrive via dimthread after Step B is completed): See page 17.
- **Pakkoat, The Hunter** (Arrives via dimthread after Step C is completed): See page 18.

GOSPOG TACTICS

The gospog are fearless but not very bright. When first activated they shake loose from the trees and move towards any Storm Knights they see. When in doubt, a character may test *stealth* against the gospog's *find* (DN 8) to avoid becoming a target. If anyone is within reach they All-Out Attack. After the first round they Run towards opponents and Multi-Action to attack if they can.

PAKKOAT'S TACTICS

Unlike the gospog, the ravagon is more concerned with protecting the stela than chasing after Storm Knights. He's bloodthirsty and delights in doing the latter, but he stays focused on the



stela and remains close by. He uses maneuver or intimidate to Stymie those working on uprooting it, and Multi-Actions to slash at them with his claws as well. He'll use the trees or the stela itself as cover from attackers at a distance.

OUT OF TIME?

If the session is nearly over and the stela is still standing, announce that the Storm Knights can feel a growing charge near the object—it must be the backup stela activating. Overhead dozens of dimthreads are forming, meaning reinforcements are imminent. The assault team has one final round to try to remove the stela before the opportunity is lost for good.

If the right Steps don't appear on the Drama card all isn't lost, remind the players about the Last Ditch Effort option. They have to make the last test with an extra -2, and another -2 for each step needed, but if they succeed the stela is uprooted and the day is won!

If they fail, any steps they gained are lost and have to be attempted all over again. That means a second player may try, but now at -8! If the stela is still intact after the heroes' turn ends, the battle is over and they are forced to flee.

If it's still early in the session, the group can head back home to help fend off the Redjaws, whether they know about the impending attack or not. The temple, however, has disappeared for good.



SCENE THREE: THE VANISHING TEMPLE

Visible over the tree-line nearby is a surprising structure, a four-tiered temple of gleaming gold. Twisted roots and branches interlace across the outside, as if they were holding it down or trapping it in a web. There wasn't a mound in this area, but the temple is shaped much like one, and sized to completely cover one. As the explorers approach they feel goosebumps rise on their flesh.

The World Laws and axioms of Orrorsh are now in effect.

Anyone with unused Cosm cards must exchange them for an Orrorsh Cosm card now. The vegetation strangling the temple is all part of a single, massive nightmare tree, but it's only present here because of the **Law of Wonders** in the first place.

Outside the edifice is a rusted M-16 jammed into the ground before a pile of rocks just large enough to cover a human body. This is the resting place of the scout who Daybasker met, and the lizard-man tried to give him a "human burial."

If uncovered, the scout looks dried and mummified. That's notable since usually corpses rot down to nothing but bone after mere hours in the jungle. The body sustained wounds from some kind of cutting weapon, possibly a pincer. His equipment is decayed beyond use.

THE FIRST RING

The only visible opening is a hole blasted into the lowest level of the temple. A successful *evidence analysis* test determines it was a C4 charge, and the explosives were definitely placed on the outside by the missing recon team.

It's dark inside, so the expedition must provide its own light. An Easy (DN 8) survival test makes torches if no other options are available. Enough light comes through the opening that there's only a -2 Darkness penalty within the first ring if no light source is present.

The surfaces inside look like cool, dark stone. Golden circuitry and embossed plates appear on many surfaces and walls. The roots visible from the outside wind along the interior as well,

completely choking off some passages and making the chambers feel more claustrophobic than they normally would.

There are abstract pictographs all around the chamber, and a metallic door at the top of a set of steep stairs leading up towards the next tier. If the explorers spend a little time examining the pictographs (and a successful *evidence analysis* test) the abstract shapes begin to make sense and tell a story.

An advanced civilization with a passing resemblance to the Aztecs or Incas thrives on another world. They explore other realities, and then discover an unstoppable Doom headed towards their world from the sky. They use their knowledge of the cosmverse to flee their native cosm and set up colony sites on others. Their ships, temples like this one, are called "lifeboats." The lifeboats travel and spread pieces of their culture to many worlds. Most of the peoples they interact with are strange and unrecognizable. The ancient elves of Aysle stand out clearly and unmistakably as one of the races contacted.

THE ASCENDING STAIRS

There are two bodies in this ring, and they have the same shriveled appearance and wounds as the soldier buried outside. Dried blood leads from their current position, up the steep stairs, to an archway that connects to the next level up.

With the unfortunate troopers is another kind of body, a dessicated humanoid beetle larger than a man. Its shell is shattered from bullet impacts, and its pincers and mandibles match the wounds found on the dead men. Evidence analysis reveals the creature, whatever it is, was dead long before the gunfire hit it.

The door in the archway is already open, and the stairs continue into a darker set of chambers on the next tier of the temple. The only sound is a low ambient hum that courses through the temple.

THE SECOND RING

It's darker here (-4) without a light source. The vegetation is thicker as well, covering entire patches of the floor. If anyone tries to cut into the roots a dark red sap oozes from them like blood.