

Scene 1: The Cage

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SITUATION

A whelping cage. Brinestump Marsh, southwest of Sandpoint. Night, or close enough to it that the difference doesn't matter inside a cage.

NARRATION

Dark in here. Wet. The smell is mostly each other.

Eight goblins crammed into a whelping enclosure — the Licktoad tribe's holding pen for young who haven't proven anything yet. The bars are close. The marsh presses in from every direction. Outside, torchlight and the low noise of a village that has decided tonight is significant.

Inside the cage: eight goblins who have not been told what happens next, only that something does.

[BEAT: the eight, in darkness]

NARRATION

Bubble Bomb's vials tick against the iron bars every time she shifts. She shifts a lot.

Rrrahah Bäähh mutters under his breath — prayers, or something in that direction. Whatever god takes Razortooth clerics, it's listening, or it isn't, and either way the teeth are still enormous.

Sneaky Scorch watches. Doesn't touch anything. Not yet.

Screech Sagg hums something. It is almost a song.

Shvub-Mah has already clocked the latch — distance, mechanism, the exact angle of the thing. He's not going to use this information. He just needs to have it.

Frizzel Brizzel counts the gaps in the cage wall. Also the shadows beyond them. Also what moves in the shadows.

Uhuhh Shehee is vibrating. There is no other word for it. She is very still and completely taut and vibrating.

Wee Goo is sitting on someone.

[BEAT: the dares begin]

NARRATION

Chief Rendwattle Gutwad does not come to the cage. Gutwad does not come anywhere — the Teeter Chair is six feet off the ground and he is not a small goblin. His advisor Slorb comes instead, nasal voice carrying over the marsh noise, overdressed for the occasion, important in the way that people are important when someone else is powerful.

The Licktoad tribe has decided these eight need proving. So there are dares.

There are always dares.

[GAMEPLAY: The dare challenges play out here. Each dare is a discrete challenge for the player. Outcome: all eight are declared worthy.]

One dare is confirmed: a course of wooden pillars driven into the marsh mud, spaced for jumping. The goblins must hop the full run without touching the water. The pillars are uneven. Some wobble. The marsh beneath them is not friendly.

[BEAT: the cage opens]

NARRATION

The latch moves.

Light hits the cage — torchlight and marsh dark, which is its own kind of murk, but it is not the inside of a cage and that distinction is everything.

The tribe is there. Every goblin who lives in Licktoad village, which is not a large number, but they are loud and they are close and they are looking at the eight with the specific expression of a group that has decided to be impressed.

Slorb speaks. The words are Gutwad's words, officially, because Gutwad's words are too powerful for lesser goblins to hear directly. This is the story. The story doesn't hold up if you look at the Teeter Chair situation, but goblins are not a people who look too hard at structural logic.

The declaration goes out.

[BEAT: the declaration]

NARRATION

Heroes of the Licktoad tribe.

Eight of them. These eight. Whether the tribe wanted heroes or not is not a question anyone thought to ask. The cage is open and they are standing in front of a crowd that is cheering, and Gutwad is on his chair looking like he had planned all of this, and the marsh is dark and loud around all of it.

Bubble Bomb's vials stop rattling — she went still when the light hit.

Rrrahah Bäähh's prayer ends mid-word.

Sneaky Scorch looks at everything he didn't touch in the cage and calculates what he can touch now.

Screech Sagg's hum becomes something that might be remembered later.

Shvub-Mah notes that the latch works exactly like he thought it did.

Frizzel Brizzel shifts his count from cage gaps to crowd positions.

Uhuhh Shehee stops vibrating.

Wee Goo gets off whoever he was sitting on.

[BEAT: the mission]

NARRATION

Then Slorb says there's a ship.

A ship, run aground in Brinestump Marsh. The tribe wants to know what's on it. Simple. Go find out. Bring back whatever matters.

The crowd cheers this too. The crowd will cheer anything tonight.

The eight look at the marsh. The marsh looks back — dark water, denser dark beyond it, the specific silence of a place that has things in it.

They've been declared heroes.

Might as well start.

[END OF SCENE — transitions to: Brinestump Marsh approach]

Scene Notes for Downstream Agents

Art Director:

- Opening image: cage bars in close foreground, eight distinct silhouettes packed inside, torchlight leaking in from outside. Dark and compressed. The vials at the bars are a detail worth keeping.
- The cage opening: light expansion — darkness to torchlight-and-marsh. The crowd visible as shapes at first.
- Chief Gutwad on the Teeter Chair is a strong visual anchor: obese goblin, six feet off the ground, trophy-laden Moot House behind him. Slorb at his side, overdressed.
- Tone reference: the goblins are not cute. They are feral, crouched, sharp. The crowd is the same.

Composer:

- Pre-opening: close, damp, low. The vial-ticking and the hum of Screech Sagg are the only sounds.
- Dare sequence: escalating tension with comedic register — chaos, not dread.
- Cage opening: the shift from confinement to noise and crowd. Should feel like pressure releasing into noise, not triumph.
- Declaration beat: a single comic-absurd swell. Not heroic — the joke is that it lands like heroic.

- Mission assignment: the marsh sound returns underneath. Something larger than the celebration starting underneath the noise.

Game Designer:

- The dare sequence is a gameplay block — this scene hands off to mechanics at [GAMEPLAY: The dare challenges play out here] and resumes at [BEAT: cage opens].
 - Scene opens and closes the narrative frame for the tutorial/prologue level.
 - Characters are introduced here via their opening actions — these are player-facing establishing beats, not cutscene-only information.
 - Slorb and Gutwad are the quest-givers for Act 1.
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