**D&D 2013 Stronghold Revisited: Exploration of Ket**

Game Background and Startup

**The Story**

For many years the nations of Perrenland in the north and Ket in the south had been at peace. Trade had flourished, and incursions of strange creatures had dwindled to nothing. The Keepers of Brightstone patrolled the mountain pass (the Great Pass, as it had become known as) that separates the two great nations, and kept relations regulated and orderly. For 8 years the regulated peace remained in force. Then 2 years ago – unexpectedly as often preludes a looming crisis – rumours of unusual and mysterious activities began. There were reports of new excavations, mining, and grand building projects throughout Ket. Indeed it was true that new riches had been discovered in new mines to the south. But within mere weeks of these reports contact with Ket came to a halt. At first the regular trade caravans did not come. Then all means of magical contact with Ket ceased. Finally, the southern opening of the Great Pass was destroyed in a cataclysmic series of landslides.

Since, no means of access to Ket has been found, and only until recently has the southern portion of the Great Pass been fully evaluated for excavation and clearance. Attempts to enter Ket via the air have been met with failure – birds do not traverse there, magicians do not sail the air, and those who have attempted to journey overland have returned with empty hands and blank journals. Even the scryers say their vision is blocked by mysterious means, and Divinations reveal little information that is useful. It is as of a magical barrier has enshrouded the region, removing it from site and sense.

From Regions and Kingdoms farther south and east, beyond the boundaries of Ket, have been heard unreliable reports of encountering immense chasms and keep gorges preventing conventional access to the interior of Ket itself. Rumours have recently been heard of professional adventuring parties making attempts to explore and ascertain the fate of this vast and once-great region.

**The Clues**

On a more concrete level, here is what is actually known at this time. It has been 12 years since the fortress of Brightstone was rebuilt and re-equipped, mastered over by a bold band of adventurers (your older characters) under the Baron of the Lands, Lord Ordin of Krestible. The mountain pass over which Brightstone keeps constant watch has been reopened, and a peace treaty between Perrenland to the north and Ket to the south was executed and maintained for over a decade.

About 10 years ago, formal trade began, with regular merchant caravans traveling both north and south. Trade flourished and cultures were exchanged. Incursions of wild beasts and inhumanoids slowed, then ceased altogether.

About 3 years ago, Kettish caravans began carrying even more wealth – larger and more gemstones, strange magical rocks, and tales of new major building projects were heard. In fact, caravans from Perrenland did report back about fantastic castles and walls. There was even a story about a grand excavation and a levitating rock, upon which a castle was being constructed.

Then 2 years ago the Kettish caravans stopped altogether. The last caravan from Perrenland only traversed a few miles into Ket, and was forced to turn back, reporting destroyed roads, a burned village, and chasms and rocky outcroppings were none had existed before.

Finally, about 22 months ago, in a cataclysmic landslide, a full mile of the southernmost portion of the Great Pass – just at the border of Ket, had sealed the Pass, rendering it unpassable.

About this time initial attempts to ascertain what happened began. This much is known:

* No Divination magics have been able to reveal any useful information. The operating theory is that they are being blocked somehow (rather than the Gods choosing not to respond to magical inquiry). Only entities of great power could create such a blockage.
* No magical means of transport have allowed access to Ket. Teleports simply will not work (no one has been able to activate a teleport to go into Ket – only to within a few hundred yards of its borders). Flight-related magic fail to function once the border to Ket is reached.
* Long range viewing from high in the mountains (at the borders of northern Ket) reveal little, for the land seems enshrouded by an opaque mist cover from the air. Best views into the land from its borders only penetrate a hundred yards or so.
* No formal adventuring party has yet gone into Ket. There are stories of parties entering from the east and south of Ket (far away), but as of now no specific information has been received – possibly because those early adventuring parties may not have made it back alive, or possibly because there hasn’t been anything substantial to report.

**The Mission**

Your characters arrive in Krestible (Perrenland), from various regions, in response to calls for adventurers to explore Ket. Since high magics will not work to gain information or access to Kettish lands, more conventional means are needed in order to explore the region.

Excavations of the rubble at the southernmost part of the Great Pass have been in progress for about six months by now. Enough progress has been made (both by means of conventional excavation and magical digs) to allow normal overland access thru the pass and back into Ket. Nothing from Ket has come into the Pass during this time.

Lord Ordin, the Baron of Krestible, is recruiting balanced and competent groups of adventurers. Those of lower experience have been preferred, given the extreme dangers and reluctance to risk scarce veteran explorers in the initial exploratory efforts.

Lord Ordin is looking for a mix of the following skills and professions:

* Fighters and Guards (both magical and non-magical, to keep parties safe)
* Chroniclers (to map, make journals, and tell the tales of things discovered)
* Mountaineers (skilled in guiding and traversing mountainous/rocky terrain)
* Appraisers (to evaluate discoveries both mundane and magical)
* Naturalists (skilled in dealing with nature – both flora and fauna)
* Healers (to help keep the party nourished and alive)
* Leaders (those who can keep parties together and run the missions)

Think of your future mission(s) as something akin to a Lewis & Clark expedition. Note that your party does not have to have every one of these roles filled.

**The Keepers of Brightstone**

Your older group of characters have been watching the Great Pass and keeping the peace for well over a decade. They have had limited opportunities to go adventuring, but each player should advance their older character a full 2 experience levels and adjust their character sheet accordingly. If you do not have an older character or if he/she met her demise, worry not.

Your new, younger group of characters will travel from Krestible to Marikest, and from Marikest into the Pass to Brightstone. Once at Brightstone your group will be formed (may include NPCs), leader(s) and roles chosen, and will be finely equipped. What this means is the following:

Each of your new characters will be able to select up to 1000gp worth of non-magical clothing, adventuring gear, armor, and weapons from the Players Handbook (or other approved equipment sources). Masterwork items are available. You may choose those items yourselves. However, do not make those selections now – wait until the game commences. Just be ready to make your selections.

Additionally, each of your new characters will be mentored personally by one of the older characters or by a major NPC. This will take place *in game*, so don’t worry about it now.

Finally, each mentor (the older characters and NPCs) will award his new student character with **one** magical item of up to 2000gp value. This may be a weapon(s), armor, wonderous item, ring, scrolls, potions, etc. Consult with the GM and the DMG. Your older characters (and the NPCs) will determine what type of item to award the younger characters (your new characters will not get to choose). These are items stored in the treasure trove at Brightstone, and will be awarded to assist your new adventuring group – better their odds against adversaries.