

THE ASHEN PROPHECY



CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW

- **Theme/Genre:** High Fantasy with Elements of Mystery and Doom
- **Tone:** Heroic with a Tinge of Foreboding
- **Target Level for Players:** Level 5
- **Expected Duration:** 2 hours
- **Player Focus Preferences:**
 - Combat: Medium
 - Roleplay: High
 - Exploration: Medium

BACKSTORY AND SETTING

WORLD OVERVIEW:

The world of **Ardenfell** is a land balanced on the edge of fragile peace between ancient kingdoms and wild, untamable forces. Magic flows freely through the land, but it comes at a cost: for every grand miracle wrought, an equal tragedy is destined to follow.

LOCAL AREA:

The adventure begins in the **Looming Vale**, a haunted expanse of rolling ashen fields surrounded by jagged cliffs and scattered with the ruins of a pre-apocalyptic civilization. The Vale is said to have been cursed two hundred years ago when the arrogant King Solivar attempted to harness the power of a mysterious **Primordial Obelisk**. His fatal mistake not only led to his kingdom's collapse but also to recurring apocalyptic plagues in the form of "Ash-born Blights" every few decades. Whispers have begun again of a new catastrophe brewing in the Vale.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

The prophecy of the Ashen Obelisk speaks of a final resurgence where the barrier between mortal and Primordial realms will shatter. Heroes and villains fought fiercely to prevent calamity in centuries past—but the prophecy foretells that "at the third toll of ashfall, the Heir of Ash shall rise." This is the third toll.

IMPORTANT NPCs:

- **Irys the Ashkeeper:** The local custodian of ancient lore, Irys resides in a crumbling library outside the Vale. She is a cautious, secretive woman whose knowledge of the Obelisk makes her both an ally and a potential threat. (*Motivation: To safeguard mankind from forbidden knowledge.*)
- **Mayor Halric Selthorne:** A weary leader of the town of **Drifthollow**, which lies near the Vale. Halric is desperate to protect his people from the mysterious disappearances and ash storms consuming the land. (*Motivation: Protect the town and save face with his people.*)
- **Eilara Valthyn:** A renegade scholar and an explorer who believes activating the Obelisk may provide answers to the prophecy—and perhaps unlock immense power. (*Motivation: Egocentric hunger for transcendence.*)

PLOT HOOK

OPENING SCENE:

The party finds themselves in **Drifthollow**, a foggy, remote town teetering on the edge of panic. Devastating ash storms have begun to lash the countryside, disrupting trade and swallowing nearby farms. Survivors speak of eerie murmurs in the winds and shadowy figures stalking the Vale.

As the frightened townsfolk congregate in the tavern, Mayor Halric bursts in with sweat glistening on his brow. He frantically calls for adventurers to investigate the **Whispering Obelisk** located deep within the Looming Vale. A band of villagers who ventured out to assess the ruins has not returned. The survivors claim to have seen shadowy humanoid figures rising from ash.

Primary Objective: Investigate the Obelisk and uncover the connection between it and the Ashen Prophecy.

KEY LOCATIONS

LOCATION 1: DRIFTHOLLOW – THE STARTING AREA

- **Atmosphere:** A muddy, grim seaside town with thick fog muting the light of its scarce lanterns. Most buildings are weather-worn, and the ash storms have left layers of soot on structures and clothing alike. The air is heavy with foreboding, and worry lines the faces of villagers.
- **Important NPCs:** Mayor Halric, a drunk elder named **Old Talmis** (who claims he “saw the pale lord” near the ruins), and several frightened villagers.
- **Encounters:**
 - **Roleplay:** The party can gather information from villagers and Old Talmis. When sufficiently probed, Old Talmis lets it slip that screams were heard from the direction of the Obelisk. His tales, though muddled by drink, hold kernels of truth.
 - **Minor Combat:** A group of 3 **Ash-Stirred Wolves** (CR 1 each) prowling the outskirts of the town may ambush travelers if they explore too far before preparation. Use these wolves to hint at the dangers within the Vale.

LOCATION 2: THE BLIGHTED FIELDS – THE INTERMEDIATE AREA

- **Atmosphere:** The once-fertile fields of the Looming Vale are now a desolate expanse of blackened soil. Strange runes glow faintly in scattered patches. Lingering ash on the air stings the lungs, and whispers can be faintly heard, growing louder the closer the party gets to the heart of the Vale.
- **Encounters:**
 - **Puzzle:** A **Rune-Locked Door** embedded in a cliffside leads to the Obelisk. This ancient doorway requires deciphering runes to be activated.
 - **Mechanics:** The party must align runic symbols etched on obsidian slabs while ash begins forming humanoid shapes behind them. Use an in-game countdown to stress the players.
 - **Hints:** Information gathered from Irys or the texts about the ancient Solivar dynasty provides contextual clues to the runes.
 - **Minor Combat:** If the puzzle is not solved in time, 4 **Ash Revenants** (CR 2) awaken and attack. These creatures rise from the swirling ash, their forms shifting and unpredictable.

LOCATION 3: THE WHISPERING OBELISK – FINAL AREA

- **Atmosphere:** A massive, fractured black-and-red obelisk rises from a shallow crater, surrounded by swirling ash storms. The winds scream like countless voices, and shadowy figures writhe within the ashen maelstrom. This is the heart of the prophecy, where heroes will be tested.
- **Challenges:**
 - **Boss Encounter: The Ashen Heir** (CR 6), a humanoid figure seemingly birthed from ash, wields devastating fire and necrotic magic.
 - **Tactics:** The Heir uses **AoE spells** to control the battlefield and summons lesser **Ashlings** throughout the fight. Halfway through the battle, it causes the Ash Storm to intensify, blinding any characters not protected by magical items or wards.
 - **Final Roleplay Decision:** If the party defeats the Ashen Heir, they may choose to destroy the Obelisk (risking further ash-storm calamities) or seal it with ancient magic (requiring a significant personal sacrifice by one of the party members). This choice will have far-reaching consequences for Ardenfell’s future.

ENCOUNTERS AND CHALLENGES

COMBAT ENCOUNTERS:

- **Ash Revenants** (CR 2) use ash to obscure vision and attack at range with necrotic empowered strikes.
- **Ash-Stirred Wolves** (CR 1) are fast-moving predators meant to harass and lead players into ambushes.
- **The Ashen Heir** (CR 6, custom monster). Powers: Necrotic strikes, firestorm AoEs, ash-based summoning.

ROLEPLAY ENCOUNTERS:

- Dialogue with Irys the Ashkeeper allows for foreshadowing; she can reveal secrets about sealing the Obelisk but hesitates to fully trust the party unless they agree to safeguard the wider world. Use her enigmatic nature to challenge the party's own moral standing.

PUZZLE/TRAP MECHANICS:

- The **Rune-Locked Door** requires intellect and team coordination. Players can attempt Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Insight) checks to deduce how the runes align. Successively solving the puzzle brings them closer to understanding the Vale's history of calamity.

CLIMAX AND RESOLUTION

THE FINAL CHALLENGE:

The Ashen Heir becomes increasingly unstable after it is reduced to low health, threatening to obliterate the entire Vale in an apocalyptic explosion. The party must either strike it down before this occurs or enact a magical sealing ritual that binds the calamity once more.

OUTCOME STAKES:

- **Success:** The Ashen Prophecy is averted (for now), and Drifthollow is safeguarded—but the Obelisk remains a potential threat for future campaigns.
- **Failure:** The Vale collapses, consumed by an expanding maelstrom of ash, marking the rise of the Primordial, changing the landscape and narrative of Ardenfell forever.

REWARDS

LOOT:

- **Ashened Ring (Rare):** Grants resistance to fire and necrotic damage. The ring whispers to its wearer, reminding them of the ashes from which it was forged.

- **Obelisk Shard:** A potent magical focus with the strange ability to amplify damage spells. This shard occasionally glimmers with forgotten arcane energies.
- **Gold:** 500 gp worth of salvaged treasures from the ruins. These treasures tell stories of lost civilizations.

STORY REWARDS:

- Reputation boost in Drifthollow and neighboring settlements. The tale of their bravery spreads across the region.
- The party is remembered as heroes—or warned of in stark legends, depending on the outcome of their decisions.

SUPPORTING DETAILS

STAT BLOCKS:

- Custom stats for the **Ashen Heir** and **Ash Revenants** provided at the end of the document for direct reference.

MAPS:

- Hand-drawn map of Drifthollow, the Blighted Fields, and the Whispering Obelisk Crater detailing key landmarks and threats.

HANDOUTS:

- A scrap of parchment containing partial runes from the Obelisk left by previous scholars for player engagement.
- Opening lines of the Ashen Prophecy: "At the first toll, the field shall blacken..." Provides hints and foreshadowing for attentive players.

FLEXIBLE OUTCOMES

- If the party bypasses the Rune-Locked Door through brute strength, they may face additional Ash Revenants in another wave but skip the puzzle entirely. This allows for a more combat-focused approach.
- **Unexpected Player Actions:** If players ally with Eilara, she can provide a shortcut to the Obelisk by divulging her research—but only if they promise to let her study the artifact afterward. This creates potential future plots.

POST-GAME WRAP-UP

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS:

- What moments stood out to you during the game?
- Did you feel you had opportunities to explore different playstyles (combat, roleplay, puzzles)?
- How did the tone of the game land for you?