

# Trials of the Grail

DISTILLED

DEMO

JASPER MCCHESENEY

Thanks for your interest in TRIALS OF THE GRAIL. This demo contains excerpts from several of the game's chapters. With luck, they'll tell you whether TOTG is a game you'd like to play.

TRIALS OF THE GRAIL is available in print and as a pdf. For more information, go to:

*[primevalpress.com/games/totg](http://primevalpress.com/games/totg)*

primeval  
games press 

[primevalpress.com](http://primevalpress.com)

## INTRODUCTION

TRIALS OF THE GRAIL is a game about quests. It is about searching for the larger than life, which when found will make things better—for you, your country, your world.

Questing has been an archetype of the human imagination since time immemorial. Every culture has myths of the brave hero who ventures into the unknown in order to save his people. In Western culture, the quest is epitomized by the legend of the Holy Grail. It is a quest that began in the middle ages and continues to this day in novels, comic books and film.

TRIALS OF THE GRAIL is also about judgment. An easy quest is no quest at all and every character who searches must be tested. In stories like PERCIVAL and GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT it is God who judges but in other stories the hero may be judged by society, a lover or himself.

In TRIALS OF THE GRAIL, there is no single quest to play through and no single judgment to pass. Rather, TOTG provides tools. With them you can explore the concept of questing and make it your own. We'll talk about how to do this more in Chapter 2.

## TENETS

There are six critical elements, or **Tenets**, in every game of TOTG. They don't deal with specifics but with broad themes and ideas. Your group will have to decide what each one means in your game.

- ◆ The players' characters are **Questors**. Who is a Questor?
- ◆ They're looking for the **Grail**. What is the Grail? What does it stand for?
- ◆ The Grail will heal the **King**. Who is the King and how is he ill?
- ◆ The King is connected with the **Land**, which must also be healed. What is the Land and how is *it* ill?
- ◆ To pass judgment and obtain the Grail, the Questors will carry out deeds of **Virtue**. What does Virtue mean and what deeds are virtuous?
- ◆ Ultimately they strive for **Wisdom**. What is Wisdom?

All the Tenets will need to be considered together. Brainstorm with your group to come up with answers.

## MYSTERIES

Mysteries are questions that a Questor has about the world. They are the world's secrets, waiting to be uncovered. Many are personal and relate to a Questor's own history or family, like "Who is my real father?" These are the most potent mysteries. Others are impersonal, dealing with larger matters that many people might wonder about, like "What happened to the lost kingdom?" The Questor takes it upon himself to solve these mysteries, though, so they're also important to him.

Mysteries are assigned a level based on how important they are, both to the Questor and in general. For a Lead Questor, take 15 points total and distribute them between several Mysteries. Put at least 10 points into personal Mysteries. For a SQ, take 10 points and use them however you like (personal or impersonal). Create at least two Mysteries and no more than five.

Keep in mind that you aren't defining *answers* to any of your Questor's Mysteries yet, just questions. Answering them is part of play. Create Mysteries that don't directly deal with the Grail, since all the Questors are investigating that. A Questor's Mysteries should also be unique and not shared with another Questor.

*Elaine has 10 points to use for Alice's Mysteries.*

*"Years ago, Alice was granted permission to dig at a site but at the last minute the government revoked her license and granted it to someone else. She never found out who it was or why he was favored. She still wants to know." Elaine ranks this mystery at 6 points.*

*Additionally, "Alice has heard stories about a small but rich tomb, half-buried in the desert but occasionally unearthed by sand-storms. She's always wanted to know what's out there." 4 points.*

When Mysteries are finally answered, they give a Questor Wisdom. See Chapter 6.

## EARNING VIRTUE

There's only one way for Questors to earn Virtue: by doing good deeds. Suffering personally as a result of those deeds helps too.

*Jack is playing Darrel, a hard-boiled investigator (and SQ). Darrel was hired by a wealthy heiress to find dirt on her ex-husband. Darrel discovers that she has connections to an old murder. Although her patronage could really help him, he looks into her past anyway and eventually hands incriminating evidence over to the police.*

The GM determines when a Questor has accomplished something virtuous. Noble but failed efforts don't count. Accomplishing something good will often demand a Trial but doesn't have to. Shielding someone counts but only if the Shield actually takes an Infirmity.

When something virtuous is done, the Questor's player rolls dice to see how much Virtue he gets. The number of dice depends on how virtuous the act was. A trivial, every-day act (relative to who the Questor is) doesn't deserve a roll at all, while saintly beneficence grants 5 dice or more. The decision ultimately rests with the GM but it's usually a tough call so he's encouraged to discuss it with the players.

*Darrel saved the heiress's ex-husband from blackmail and may help a murder victim see justice. The GM decides this is moderately virtuous and gives Jack 3 dice to roll.*

## EPIPHANIES

In every Questor's career there are moments when he gains sudden insight: the curtain of reality is pulled back, God speaks to him, he masters himself, the pieces fit together. These are **Epiphanies**. They allow a Questor to heal his Infirmities and to gain Wisdom. We'll discuss both processes shortly.

Epiphanies can *only* be created by a player spending Narrative Points. As a player, you must set the scene, say what happens, if anything, and describe how your Questor is enlightened. State what kind of experience it is, on an emotional, intellectual or spiritual level. Every Epiphany is unique, though they will usually have the same general flavor throughout your game, based on how you've defined

Wisdom. It's something your group may want to talk about during set-up.

*Joan is controlling the Lead Questor, Captain Willard, who commands an English naval ship in the mid-eighteenth century. He currently has a level 3 Infirmity to Fight and a level 2 to Survival, having been injured in a vicious ship-to-ship battle. Joan wants him to be healed. She tells the GM that she wants to spend some Narrative Points to accomplish this.*

*"The next day is remarkably calm and mild. Willard takes the advice of the doctor and has the men row him to one of the islands. He sits in a chair and reads. After a while, he falls asleep and dreams. He sees himself floating on the ocean. He's all alone, hungry and tired. He drifts on and the sun beats down on him. It seems like ages. Then a dark face suddenly appears before him. It's an islander but dressed as a priest. The man gives Willard a warm smile and then slowly begins to administer the last rights. Willard feels calm like he never has before.*

*"In a start, he wakes up. It's evening. Dazed, he first wonders if the dream foretells his death. But then knows that the priest saved him—or at least saved his soul. He wants to speak with the islanders again."*

## TRIAL EXAMPLE

Now that we have all the pieces of Trial resolution in place, it's time for a longer example.

*The GM is describing a tournament that the Questors have just arrived at. "There are dozens of knights, many well known to you, including Sir Birovac."*

*James is playing the Lead knight, named Mallory. "Oh, Mallory really hates that guy. He'll do everything he can to fight him."*

*"Your knights have come late to the tournament, so we'll have a Trial to see if Mallory can fight him. I'd say it's a test of Manner."*

*Mallory has a Manner Talent of 3 and a Skill of 1. "Complexity?"*

*The GM thinks it's a pretty ordinary sort of Trial. "Normal complexity," he says, "Difficulty two." The Target is therefore the usual 7 minus Skill (here 1) or 6.*

*"Target six," says James and rolls his three dice. They come up, 1, 4, 7. "One success."*

*"Mallory fails the Trial," says the GM. "No matter how many clerks and organizers he talks to, he can't manage to get a spot against Birovac, unless they both defeat a lot of other knights and make it to the end of the tournament. So Mallory has a chance but it'll take time and luck."*

*"He'll go for it."*

*"Remember he has to take an Infirmity, level one. What'll it be?"*

*"Uh, let's say he makes a fool of himself before the other knights, running around trying to get special dispensation. So minus one to Manner."*



*Later, Mallory is dueling Sir Birovac. They've fought on horseback until their lances broke and*

*now are on the ground with mace and sword. James says, "Mallory is going to try to outlast Birovac. Nothing fancy, just keep giving and taking hits."*

*"Okay. So Survival, right?"*

*"Yeah."*

*"Well your goal is pretty simple then. Minus two Complexity. But it's hard, since Birovac is no lightweight. Difficulty four. Roll."*

*Mallory has a Survival Talent of 6 but a -1 Infirmity (from some earlier Trial) so he only rolls 5 dice. His Skill is 0, so with the -2 Complexity the Target is 5 ( $7 - 0 - 2 = 5$ ). James rolls and gets, 8, 6, 5, 10.*

*"Four successes. Okay. Mallory just stands there in the dirt, implacable. He gets railed on again and again but every time he just grunts. He returns the favor, hit for hit. Birovac eventually starts to stagger and after a couple more blows, collapses from heat exhaustion. Mallory is pretty weak too and after gloating over his enemy for a second, lurches to sit down in the shade. Birovac won't think he's the better knight now."*