

*the Last challenge*

# the Last challenge

a role-playing game by Ben Wright

*1<sup>st</sup> October 2009*

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## what is the Last challenge?

This is a role-playing game about the last, great adventure of a number of legendary heroes, and the lives that led them up to this point. Each player will take the role of one of these great heroes, and will also play minor roles in the life stories of the others. There is no Game Moderator, or GM- instead the players have a great deal of autonomy when telling stories about their heroic character, and the tales unfold with the ideas and co-operation of the other players. The 'Last Challenge' of the title is the final climactic struggle that all the heroes are present for, one that will end their adventuring careers, one way or another, forever.

This game can be played with as few as 2 players, but around 4 or 5 is ideal. You'll need some sheets of paper, at least 2 per player (although you can make copies of the character sheet at the end of this book if you want a neater one). You'll also need some 6-sided dice; no more than 20, but you can get by with 10.



## creating the world

The heroes will grow up and adventure in a shared world. Empires can rise or fall during their lifetimes- often as a result of their actions- and the heroes may trek all over the world in pursuit of glory and riches. The world, and the heroes themselves, need to be created before the game starts.

### **GROUND RULES**

It's important at the outset to have some agreement as to what the heroes' world is like. You can happily set the game in a pre-existing world which the players are familiar with (from fiction or from another game), but it's best when you have complete freedom as a group to paint the world as you see fit. It is more important to reach a consensus on how the world works than to establish any details about geography or countries. For example- deciding how widespread magic is and what role it fulfils in society is more useful than establishing the history and laws of a specific college of magic. The more general you keep your ideas, the more possibilities you have to work with during the game. An important consideration is to avoid letting the world be a monoculture- assuming that different areas of the world will have different traditions, laws and legends gives the most freedom to create interesting and distinct heroes. A quick check-list of what is useful to establish is given in a sidebar.

#### **World Checklist**

- How widespread is the use of magic?
- Are there non-human races, and how do they fit into the world?
- How prevalent are monsters?
- Do the deities of the world take an active role in mortal affairs?
- What level of technology is commonplace?
- How much more powerful than ordinary people will the heroes be?

#### **Example: Lumin**

- *Heroes are chosen by fate and far surpass ordinary men.*
- *The gods favour mortals who impress them with luck and favour.*
- *Magic is a common tool.*

*This is an example of a minimal world definition, that leaves most details unspecified.*

#### **Example: Ebonaria**

- *There are no gods, only goddesses, who brought light to the world.*
- *All magic is either light or dark- i.e. good or evil.*
- *Any magic practised outside of the priesthood is considered suspect.*
- *Non-human races ('children of the light') are only found in the forgotten corners of the world.*

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### **Cartography**

If you wish, you can have a sheet of paper in the centre of the table which will become a map of the game world. However, you should avoid putting anything on the map unless it is strictly necessary. Rather than drawing a map, then finding ways of using it in the game, it is better to invent locations when they are needed in one of the stories and adding them to the map then. It's also an idea to draw the map in pencil and keep a rubber on stand by- the heroes may well raise or destroy mountains or empires during the course of the game so anything on the map is subject to change.

If a map seems like too much effort, you can always keep a sheet of paper on the table and add important places, kingdoms and names to them as they crop up. Less work, but not as pretty to look at.

- *Monsters ('children of the dark') can be found anywhere not patrolled heavily.*
- *Heroes are just strong warriors and sages.*

*This example makes a few more details concrete, but also gives potential for interesting stories without constricting the players too much.*

### ***the camp~fire***

All of the heroes have gathered at one particular place in preparation for the last challenge. Exactly what this challenge is, and why the heroes have gathered for it, are questions only answered towards the end of the game. Where they have gathered should be established now, to help set the scene. It needs to be somewhere remote or inaccessible- so no-one else will arrive to interrupt their stories and so only the heroes are present for the final challenge. It could be a remote cave in some snowy mountains, a lost glade in an uncharted valley or the inner sanctum of a particularly holy temple. It need not be a literal camp-fire- the name is meant to suggest intimacy and comradeship between the heroes as they tell their life stories. Even if the heroes are about to fight one another to the death, for the time being they are at peace.

#### ***Example: The Temple of Murderous Winds***

*The temple was created by a priesthood lost to the ages, near the summit of the tallest mountain in the world. It is bitterly cold, and the mountains blizzards blow past the entrance in a never-ending howl. Friezes depicting grisly scenes of murder adorn the walls. Deep inside, a set of stone steps leads up to an altar with deep grooves cut into it. At the base of the steps the heroes have lit a fire against the bitter cold, and are warming some cold meat to soften it.*

### ***creating the heroes***

Each player has a character sheet for the hero he will play. Naturally, each hero needs a name. The abilities of the hero are given as attributes. There are 4 'key attributes', which are used to resolve actions:

- **Might** represents the brute strength and power of the hero. Battles and feats of strength or endurance use Might. All heroes start with a Might score of 1.

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- **Cunning** is used to create or solve riddles, play tricks on people, or simply know certain important facts. All heroes start with a Cunning score of 1.
- **Majesty** is a measure of how well the hero can influence others- through being likeable or through intimidation. All heroes start with a Majesty score of 1.
- **Sorcery** represents how artful the hero is in their chosen field or fields of magic. Magic is handled very generally, rather than having a prescriptive list of spells or magical effects. It helps define a hero if his magic has consistency of form, but as far as the rules are concerned any effect can be created by any level or form of magic. All heroes start with a Sorcery score of 0.

All heroes also have 3 other attributes, which are used differently:

- **Power** is a measure of how much political power the hero wields in the world. Rather than measuring an attribute of the hero, it measures any standing army, political influence and authority he has. All heroes start with a Power score of 0.
- **Riches** measure the personal fortune the Hero has amassed. Treasure of this kind is often 'easy come, easy go'. All heroes start with a Riches score of 0.
- **Fate** represents the strength of the challenges the hero faces. As a hero experiences success, more difficult problems are thrown in his way. When he suffers setbacks, the pressure is lifted slightly. All heroes start with a Fate score of 0.

Heroes can gain other attributes in three categories and can have a number of examples in each category. Each example is named separately. Heroes start with none of these attributes. The categories are:

- **Artefacts** are powerful weapons or other objects, possibly magical or blessed by the gods. Each artefact is associated with 1 key attribute (record this in brackets).
- **Followers** are named companions to the hero- not as famous or as powerful, but still well-known. Each follower can lend assistance only once during each story the hero tells.
- **Gifts** are inherent abilities a hero possesses which are highly unusual. An ability to fly or to turn aside blades with your flesh would be a gift.

Note that this minimal starting position describes the heroes at the very start of their great lives; not as they are when they are telling the stories. During the course of the game the attributes will increase (and sometimes decrease) to reflect how the hero grows during the course of his life.

Each hero should also have a sheet on the table in front of them that will be used for 'hooks'. These hooks are a simple list of things about the character that might be an interesting basis for future stories. At the start of the game, the only hooks will be things mentioned in the character's introduction. As stories are told, hooks that are dealt with can be crossed off and new ones (enemies, outstanding problems, etc.) added. These sheets are just used to jog the memories of the players so good ideas don't go to waste. There is no need to deal with all of the hooks a character has, and some can be left as 'untold stories' at the end of the game. Any player can add something to the hook sheet of any player, but additions should be limited to things mentioned in the course of play that might be interesting to explore later.

## **Attributes**

### ***Key Attributes:***

Exactly 2 of these will be used by a hero when rolling dice. They represent the core abilities of the hero.

**Might**

**Cunning**

**Majesty**

**Sorcery**

### ***Other Attributes:***

**Power** - a character can spend a point of Power permanently to keep telling a story after losing a challenge.

**Riches** - a character can lose 1 point of Riches instead of 2 points of other attributes when a story ends in failure.

**Fate** - how difficult challenges for that hero will be. Unlike all other attributes, a higher score in Fate makes things more difficult for a character rather than easier.

### ***Specific Attributes:***

When points are spent on these attributes, they are spent on named examples of them. Heroes can have as many different examples of these attributes as they can get their hands on.

**Artefacts** – can only be used in a roll involving the associated key attribute. Each point in the artefact lets the hero re-roll 1 die.

**Followers** – when a Follower assists, a hero may place a number of dice showing the face he wants before rolling for a challenge. These dice come out of the pool he would normally roll. The number of dice placed in this way is equal to the number of points spent in that follower. Each follower can only assist the hero once per story.

**Gifts** - for each point you have in a gift, you may use that gift to by-pass one challenge per story. This is done after the Antagonist has selected a key attribute for the challenge but before any dice are rolled. You get no closer to completing the story, but you may avoid a hopeless challenge.

## **playing the game**

Once the world, the immediate setting and the heroes have been made ready, the game can begin. The game starts with a round of introductions for the heroes, and moves on to then the story-telling.

### ***Introductions***

Each player introduces the hero he intends to play. The hero announces his name to the others (as if such an introduction is necessary for such a famous figure). The player provides a brief physical description of him. This can include tantalising hints as to the hero's past and abilities through his weapons, adornments or clothing. However, you should avoid describing any particular event of his past, as that is supposed to be established during the course of the game. The more you narrow down your options at the start, the less freedom you have during the game to go where the mood takes you. Any obvious hooks that are mentioned can be added to the hook sheet during the introduction- it's probably best for a player not performing his character's introduction to do the writing for this.

After the introductions, the game begins with the heroes questioning one another about their past exploits.

#### ***Example: Kasimir Khan***

*This man is short but muscular. His beard is grey with age and his arms lashed with scars, but he still moves lightly. He's removed his cold weather gear, and is wearing a faded tunic with the emblem of the Lameril Republic on it. Before he sat down he unslung a greatsword from his back. The glow from the fire glints off a decoration on the cross-guard that includes the emblem of Lilia, Goddess of Burning Light.*

*"The Khan is honoured to be in such illustrious company," he declares, and offers a gourd of strong spirits around.*

#### ***Example: The Shadow of Umbrax***

*It is difficult to look directly at this woman- the edges of her silhouette seem to flicker and dance. She seems to be wearing a midnight black cloak and hood, with some thin leather armour underneath. A deep hood has been thrown back, revealing a pale and young-looking face. She refuses offers of food, and seems untroubled by the low temperature.*

*"I have not eaten for many years now," she says, softly, "You probably already know at least one of my names, but the one I have always preferred is the Shadow of Umbrax."*

### ***telling stories***

The main part of the game revolves around telling stories. Players take it in turns to tell a story about the hero they've created, and the hero gains attribute points at the end of the stories based on what he did in the story. A story begins with one of the heroes asking a question of another about his history. The hero then relates the story that answers the question, in one of two forms. The shorter form is the vignette, which is good for stories at the start of the hero's career or if the session is running short on time. The longer one is the full story, which can involve all of the players at the



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table. The hero telling the story chooses which form to tell. When he has finished, he then asks a question of another hero, setting up the next story. In the interests of fairness, questions should be asked of heroes such that the number of stories each hero has told is kept as equal as possible.

### **questions**

A good question should give the hero telling the story lots of potential to work with. It can build on things mentioned on the hero's hook sheet, build on details that have been established about the world or play to the particular strengths of the hero. Questions that undermine the hero, by seeking to damage him in some way or that are otherwise unsporting, are discouraged. Most of the time, the question should avoid including the outcome of the story (although as mentioned later this can be worked round). So, rather than asking to hear about the time the hero rescued a princess, ask about the time the princess was kidnapped and let the player telling the story work from there.

#### **Good Questions**

There are three things to bear in mind when coming up with questions:

- Chronology - it's easier to keep track of things when all the stories in the game are assumed to be in chronological order. In particular, the stories for any hero must be told in chronological order, otherwise the development of the hero's attributes won't make sense.
- Generosity - ask questions that give a player a broad scope to come up with an entertaining story. Don't ask questions designed to make the hero look foolish or demolish existing story threads or relationships.
- Open-endedness - don't ask a question that answers itself, unless how the hero gets to that outcome has potential to be interesting.

### **vignettes**

A vignette is a very short story. In this game, a vignette is told by the hero who features in it, with no input from the other players. It should be short, to the point, and entertaining. Vignettes are a good way to get a feel for the character's personality and areas of expertise. Although a player may be able to tell a longer story by himself that is still entertaining, it is worth remembering that the other players do not get to participate in a vignette and so keep it short enough to give them ample time to tell their stories.

#### **Example: Out of the Cradle**

**Kavita the Wise** - *"Great Khan, many stories of your exploits have been told in my land. I would ask you- is it really true that you slew your parents before you were out of the cradle?"*

**Kasimir Khan** - *"True indeed- but that does not tell the whole story. You see, my mother and father were gifted land to farm by the king, but only until their first-born son was out of the crib. They were selfish and scheming people, with many allies in the town, so they hatched a plan. They kept me in the cradle long past the time I should have been walking on my own two feet. I grew stunted and weak, but I watched and learned. I soon knew they were treating me badly, but could do nothing about it."*

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"The king was furious, naturally, but could not take the farm away from them without going back on his word. So, not long after my twelfth birthday he sent one of his most trusted guards with a jar of ambrosia- a gift from the goddesses to the kingdom- to sneak into the house when my parents were working and feed me a little of it. This he did for several weeks, a couple of mouthfuls a day, until he grew careless.

"My father discovered him climbing through a window and took him by surprise. Father took one look at the guard's uniform and realised the king was acting against him. He would have killed the guardsmen where he stood, but I suddenly found myself standing on my own feet and threatening to stop him. He laughed, confident that I was weak as a kitten, but what none of us knew was that ambrosia is only meant to be eaten a mouthful a week, and the dose I had been given was far more than a wise mortal should attempt. I struck my father once, but the strength the ambrosia gave me meant he was thrown out of the window and landed on my mother in the next field. Both were killed, and the guardsmen helped me escape the town that very night.

"I never did learn his name."

#### **Example: Five Years of Reflection**

**The Shadow of Umbrax** - "Kavita, you said that the Caliph of Sulomoria swore revenge on you for tricking him out of the golden horn. Did he ever do so?"

**Kavita the Wise** - "I evaded his soldiers for quite some time, but when the floods came one year I was helping refugees make their way up the Munlai valley



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*and met a patrol on the road. With the floods, I had nowhere to run to, and they ran me to ground before I could make myself blend into the crowds.*

*"The trial was a sham, of course. The Caliph wanted me to suffer, so suffer I would. He knew that torture would be pointless, and decided that death would be too swift. So he sentenced me to live out my life in the Tower of Solitude, a special prison cell in the tallest tower of his palace. It could only be reached by a single winding stair, and only the jailer and the Caliph knew where the secret entrance to that stair lay. The jailer of the Tower was a hereditary position, given to one of the most loyal of the Caliph's subjects. The Caliph revelled in the idea that I would I would die old and insane from lack of human contact.*

*"I spent my time in quiet meditation. By the end of the first year the jailer, impressed with my stoicism, gave me better rations than I was entitled to. By the end of the second year, he had started to bring me books to pass the time. By the end of the third year, he had committed the unforgivable crime of speaking with me. At the end of the fourth year, he brought me trail provisions, a cloak and the key to my cell.*

*"At the end of the fifth year I left."*

## **STORIES**

A story is a longer tale than a vignette, structured into a series of scenes. All players can participate in a story. A story can end in success or failure for the hero. The players each fill one of the roles below.

**Hero** - The hero sets up the story, elaborating on the question asked of him. He also has responsibility for framing scenes in the story. The scenes should be ones that will be interesting and have potential for conflict. Scenes about preparation, or buying supplies, are unlikely to be interesting enough to warrant a scene. Unlike an ordinary role-playing game, The Last Challenge will run through a number of quests during the course of a single game of session, so the hero should be encouraged to elide any part of the story that is not immediately exciting. The hero should also bear in mind the likely number of scenes a story will have; this hinges on the Fate score of the hero- there will be approximately 2 scenes for each 7 points of Fate. The hero gets to narrates the actions of his Followers, and can assign roles to other players (apart from the antagonist)- these can be Followers of the hero, or any other character that is participating in the scene.

**Antagonist** - The antagonist is the player who asked the question. The antagonist takes the role of all characters in the world not currently played by another player, but is primarily concerned with the forces arranged against the hero. The antagonist may take the role of a particular enemy, or represent an organisation or distant enemy and take the role of the minions sent to harass the hero. The antagonist takes the scene established by the hero, and introduces a challenge into it. This conflict should follow naturally from the scene described by the hero. The antagonist also narrates the conclusion of the challenge after the dice rolls have been made. Like the hero, the antagonist can assign roles to other players- but these can only be miscellaneous characters and not the hero's Followers.

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**Extras** - The other players can be given roles to play by the hero and the antagonist but there are a couple of rules to follow. A player can only have 1 role at a time. If the hero or antagonist wants to give a player another role, then the current character has to be dropped, and cannot be assigned to another player during this story. The job of playing the role reverts to the hero (if the dropped character was a Follower) or the antagonist. Once a player has been assigned a character, he has complete autonomy over the character. If a player playing a Follower wants to act against the hero, he can. If a player assigned a character nominally on the side of the antagonist wants that character to aid the hero against his master's wishes, he can.

Each part of a story begins with the hero setting the scene, then the events are played out until the antagonist decides to introduce the challenge. The players then describe what the characters they are playing do in the challenge, and dice are rolled to see how well the hero does. After the roll, the antagonist briefly narrates the outcome of the challenge. If the story ends after that challenge, the hero narrates its conclusion, then asks a question of another hero. Otherwise, the hero introduces the next scene and the story continues.

### **Example: Scenes and Roles**

**The Shadow of Umbrax**- *"When my Guildmaster told me my final task was to steal the gem from the sceptre of the High Priestess of Lillesa, I did not know whether it was because he thought I would succeed or because he thought I would fail. I took refuge in what my training had taught me, and started to plan for the mission as I had been taught. I began by watching the routine of the Temple Guardians- in particular one who always went to a certain tavern after his watch ended."*

**Kasimir Khan** - *I'll take the role of the Temple Guardian. He's basically an enemy.*

**The Shadow of Umbrax**- *You be the barmaid.*

**Kavita the Wise** - *OK.*

### **Example: Introducing a Challenge**

**The Shadow of Umbrax**- *"Getting over the wall was the easy part. Now I have to wait for the gap in the patrols so I can unlock the Sanctum door with the key copy."*

**Kasimir Khan**- *"The guard stumbles a little before he turns the corner, and stops to adjust his clothing. The next guard will appear any second, so you're going to have to make a break for it before the first guard is out of sight." That's a Cunning challenge.*

### **When Heroes Meet**

The rules are written on the assumption that when one Hero tells a story, the other heroes are not involved. Their players participate by taking the roles of other characters in the story.

However, if your group is comfortable with making things a little more complicated, you can introduce another hero as the Antagonist or in a supporting role in a story. The complication arises because there is less freedom with what can happen to a hero than to other characters. The story should never take advantage of another hero's presence to belittle his achievements or undermine his character in some way.

The golden rule is that while Followers, minions and other characters can be played by any player, a hero should only ever be played by the player who created him.

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### **Example: Narrating the Conclusion**

*The Shadow of Umbrax-* "I could scarcely believe I had escaped with both my life and the jewel. My Guildmaster betrayed no emotion when I handed him the gem, but he weighed it in his hand before tucking it into an inside pocket.

"'Your training is complete' he told me, 'And I already have your first posting organised. You will be put at the disposal of the Caliph of Sulomoria, who I understand has many enemies.'

"'And he has engaged our services because he wishes to have fewer, I take it.' I said, and I swear I saw the flicker of a smile in the corner of his mouth."

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### **meeting challenges**

A challenge is a problem the hero needs to overcome, and calls for a die roll. The antagonist selects which of the 4 key attributes (Might, Cunning, Majesty and Sorcery) is the most appropriate for the task at hand. If the hero is attacked by a man with an axe, Might is the natural choice. If a magical barrier prevents the hero's entry, it is Sorcery. The hero then chooses how to tackle the problem by selecting one of the other key attributes. This choice has to make sense in the story, by representing a credible approach to the problem. The sum of those 2 attributes is then the total number of dice the hero rolls. The antagonist rolls a number of dice equal to the hero's Fate score.

The winner is the side with the largest set of dice showing the same number. The challenge can end in a draw if the largest sets on each side are the same size. The value shown on the dice in a winning set is the number of victory points scored by the winner. If more than one set is large enough to beat the biggest set of the loser, the winner can pick the highest valued set that beats the loser's best even if it's not his largest set.

Note that the 'victory points' earned in a challenge are usually only important when the hero defeats the challenge; if the hero loses a challenge it typically does not matter by how much he lost. If a challenge ends in a draw, the story continues but the hero receives no victory points.

The players should make sure that the challenge is more than just the rolling of some dice, by describing events and what characters do to try to overcome the opposition. Making challenges interesting and exciting is an important part of the game.

#### **Example: A Simple Challenge**

**Kasimir Khan-** *"While you are tending the wounds of the woman, her husband bursts in.*

*"Hand her over!" he shouts, 'She's my wife and you have no business interfering!"*

**Kavita the Wise-** *"She is my patient, and that makes her my business. And no husband has the right to treat a wife in that manner. You are no husband to her."*

**Kasimir Khan-** *"His eyes bulge and he turns redder.*

*"Seems like you need to be taught some manners, scribe!" he hefts a club and attacks you." That's a Might challenge.*

**Kavita the Wise-** *I shall meet him with scorn, maintaining my dignity while fighting him off and insulting him with every blow. I'll make that Majesty. Might plus Majesty is 5. My Fate is 4.*

**Kasimir Khan-** *I roll a pair of sixes. "He catches you a little off-guard and tries to deliver a mighty blow to your head."*

**Kavita the Wise-** *Four ones! "I lean back just enough for the blow to miss, and his momentum carries him too far. I give him just a little push and he stumbles straight into a water barrel."*

**Kasimir Khan-** *One victory point for you.*

**Kavita the Wise-** *"He drags himself out of the barrel, sopping wet and with a stubbed toe. He waves the club at me one more time- 'I shall let the mayor know how you treat people of good standing in this town!' and leaves with as much dignity as he can, which is very little."*

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### *Large pools*

If either the hero or the antagonist has more than 10 dice to roll, both sides discard an equal number of dice until neither has to roll more than 10 dice.

### *Re~rolls*

Artefacts give one side or the other re-rolls- these re-rolls can be used with any die in the initial roll but must be made together and the re-rolled result must stand. Usually, only heroes have Artefacts, but if it's dramatically appropriate (such as during a quest to recover an artefact) the antagonist may get the benefit of one. An Artefact can only be used if its associated key attribute is being used by the hero in that challenge.

### *placing dice*

Followers allow the hero to place a number of dice on whatever number he wishes before the rest are rolled. This number is the number of points spent in that Follower. These dice come out of the hero's pool (so cannot be more than he would normally roll) and must be placed before the rest are rolled. If a Follower betrays a hero and aids the antagonist, the antagonist gets the same benefit. A Follower can only be used once per story by each side.

### **Example: A Complicated Challenge**

**The Shadow of Umbrax-** *"Even before the door closes behind the two of you, you sense trouble. A dim lamp illuminates a dozen or so men wearing Vilithane uniforms, armed and looking for a fight. The meeting was a set up, and violence is on the cards."* Might challenge.

**Kasimir Khan-** *"If they thought numbers and surprise would be all they needed, they were wrong. The first thing I do, even before I draw my sword, is smash the lamp so we're fighting in darkness. That'll help even things out, when they can't tell friend from foe."* That'll be Cunning.

**Kavita the Wise-** *As his Follower, naturally I'll assist him.*

**The Shadow of Umbrax-** *Your Fate is 12.*

**Kasimir Khan-** *Might is 6, Cunning 4, so I roll 8 and you roll 10.*

**The Shadow of Umbrax-** *I get three twos. "The darkness and confined space causes the soldiers no end of trouble, and if they hit you it will be more by accident than through skill.*

**Kasimir Khan-** *My squire lets me place 2, so I'll place them as sixes.*

**Kavita the Wise-** *"I hug the wall and lash out with my dagger whenever an enemy gives his position away."*

**Kasimir Khan-** *I get no sixes on the rest, though. "An unlucky blow sends me reeling. In desperation, I draw the Light of Lilia, and hope she will guide my attacks." I re-roll 3 dice, and still don't get a six.*

**The Shadow of Umbrax-** *You lose, then?*

**Kasimir Khan-** *I'll spend a point of Power to carry on. I'm pretty close to the end of this. "Just as it looks like I'll be overwhelmed by the Vilithane ambush, a*

### *the Last challenge*

*detachment of town guards arrive, drawn by the noise. The soldiers cut and run, leaving my squire and I to explain what happened to the local magistrate. It'll cost me some face with the governor, but at least I'm still alive and know who my enemies are."*

### *skipping challenges*

Gifts can be used to skip challenges. This represents using one of these peculiar abilities in a way that side-steps the challenge, avoiding the risk of failure. However, doing so is unheroic and thus doesn't bring the hero any closer to victory. Gifts can only be used once for each point invested in them. Naturally, the Gift has to be made relevant in some way to how the hero by-passes the challenge.

Power can be used to deal with a failed challenge. Normally, a story ends in failure if a hero fails a challenge. A hero may spend a point of Power *permanently* in order to carry on telling the story. This does not negate what just happened; but the hero can use his influence or minions to persevere and get another chance to succeed. He starts a new scene, just as if the challenge had ended in a draw.





## *the Last challenge*

### **Example: A Skipped Challenge**

**Kasimir Khan-** "The storm lashes at the narrow mountain path. The air is alive with some dark magic- like some spell is seeking you out." That'll be a Sorcery challenge.

**The Shadow of Umbrax-** "I have no defence against dark sorcery. I press myself against the mountainside and hope the Kiss of Darkness will hide me from divination as well as it hides me from sight." I'll invoke that Gift, which gives me 2 more uses this story if I need them.

**Kasimir Khan-** "It takes nearly an hour, but the storm gradually loses intensity until there's no sign of any devilry in the clouds."

**The Shadow of Umbrax-** "Now the skies have cleared a little, I carry on with my ascent. I hope whoever was looking for me with dread magic doesn't find me until I've reached the summit."

### *temporary attributes*

Sometimes, it may be appropriate for a hero or his enemies to have access to an attribute (particularly an Artefact) on a temporary basis. This can only happen with the agreement of both the hero and the antagonist, and the attribute only persists for as long as it makes sense to do so in the story. It does not remain with the hero after the end of the story, unless it is bought as the hero's reward as described in the 'Rewards' section. These temporary attributes may still be used in challenges until the hero loses them.

### **success and failure**

If the hero ever loses a challenge, then he has 'failed' the story. If a hero builds up a total of victory points greater than or equal to his Fate during a story, then he 'succeeds' at the story. In both cases he wraps the story up with a couple of sentences of explanation as to how it ends. The reason that 'failed' and 'succeeds' were put in inverted commas is because those are rules terms and indicate how the hero's attributes change at the end of the story. As far as the hero is concerned, he may still succeed at his task if he 'failed' the story, and may still suffer a defeat even if the rules say he 'succeeded'.

This is to allow a hero a hollow victory where he achieves his goals but pays a deep personal price, and to allow noble defeats where a hero suffers what is nominally a set back but is the stronger for it. It also allows a neat solution if the question that prompted the story forced a particular outcome. If the story is about how the hero rescued a princess, then win or lose the princess will be rescued at the end of the story. If the princess is rescued but the hero is grievously wounded this allows the story to end in failure for the hero.

### **timing**

Because it's usually not certain that a story will end with a particular encounter, sometimes it can be hard to judge when is the time to start the most dramatic scene of the story. If a story runs past that point, it can be an anticlimax. If a story ends prematurely, it can be unsatisfying. However, you are encouraged to go with what the dice say and develop a plausible reason to the story ending when it does. What the hero was sure would be the final encounter could turn out not to be- Grendel's

## *the Last challenge*

mother, anyone? If the story seems to end too soon it could simply be that the preparation for the final showdown was the most interesting part of the tale, and the showdown itself was short, best described as part of the ending narration.

If you don't want to be that flexible, your group can decide on a story-by-story basis if you want to set aside the normal rules for when stories end. If it ended 'too soon', then you can add an extra scene, with a challenge as normal, but whatever the outcome the hero is considered to have 'won'. The stakes for the scene are personal ones- so if the hero fails the story effectively ends as a 'noble defeat', as above. Similarly, if the meat of the story has ended in a climactic scene but the hero lacks enough victory points to end it normally, the antagonist can choose to gift the missing points to the hero so the game can move on.

### **Unreliable Narrators**

One common tool in story-telling is that of the unreliable narrator- where the facts as told in the story may not be entirely accurate. Used well, this can give a story much greater depth and interest. However, it's probably best avoided in this game as it risks making very difficult for the players to keep track of exactly what happened, and what versions different heroes have told.

There is one easy way unreliable sources can be used in the game- by saying that the version of events that reached the hero asking the question is not exactly how it happened. Stories get embellished in the telling, so the legend may have been exaggerated or changed as it was passed from person to person. Even so, this should be done sparingly so as not to reduce the questioner's input in the stories.

## **REWARDS**

If a hero tells a vignette, then that hero can increase 2 different attributes by 1 point each. His Fate score increases by 2 points. This represents the hero becoming stronger, but also makes the challenges he faces in future that much tougher.

If a hero tells a full story, and is successful at the end of the story, he can increase 3 different attributes by 1 point each. His Fate score also increases by 2 points. The hero grows in power more quickly than through a vignette, but at some risk of failure. If a hero tells a full story but fails in his task, he must reduce 2 different attributes by 1 point each. His Fate score decreases by 1 point. The hero has become weaker as a result of this failure, but the challenges he faces in the future will not be quite so tough. The hero may choose to lose a single point of Riches instead of reducing 2 other attributes.

The changes in attributes should reflect the events of the vignette or story. If all the players are in agreement, a hero may spend more than 1 increase point in a given attribute. This gives that player an advantage, allowing him to concentrate his abilities more, but sometimes it may be the most appropriate way for the hero to develop. It can also be a way of rewarding a player for a particularly entertaining story. All players may spend both points from their first vignette on the same attribute if they wish, to kick-start their heroes. Attributes cannot be pushed below 0.

Artefacts can grow in power, accumulating 1 point per story, but if that seems too slow or unrealistic then heroes can trade in points of Riches and Power to increase the strength of an

## *the Last challenge*

Artefact when they receive it on a point-for-point basis. These points have to be spent before the main reward is received, so you can't spend Power or Riches you didn't have at the start of the story.

### **Example: Out of the Cradle**

*This was Kasimir Khan's first story, the opening vignette, so he can spend 2 points on the same key attribute if he wishes. He wants to spend them both on Might, and that seems entirely appropriate. He also increases his Fate by 2.*

### **Example: The Guildmaster's Gem**

*This was a long story for the Shadow of Umbrax, and it ended in success. She can increase 3 different attributes by 1 point. She wants to increase Cunning, Majesty and Power. Cunning, because she executed a daring robbery. Majesty, because having completed her training she now has more confidence and stature in the underworld of assassins and thieves. Power, because her new posting puts some of the power of the Caliph at her disposal. The other players agree to those awards. Her Fate also increases by 2.*

### **Example: The Light of Lilia**

*Kasimir Khan has recovered the legendary sword, the Light of Lilia, but returned to find the temple despoiled. He slew the demon responsible, and the High Priest has declared that Kasimir should keep it, in recognition of his heroism, as there is no-one left at the temple who can wield it as it deserves to be wielded.*

*He makes a donation of 2 Riches to help rebuild the temple. He receives a 3-point Artefact, and also increases his Majesty and Might by a point each. Naturally, his Fate increases by 1 point.*

## **multi-session play**

If you plan to play The Last Challenge over a series of sessions, it is best if you end each session after a complete round of stories from the heroes. Then, anyone can start by asking the first question in the next session.

If a player can't make a session, it's easy to omit his hero simply by having no questions asked of him- in all places in the rules that talk about heroes having told an equal number of stories, only count stories in the current session. If a player can only start the game after the first session, he gets to introduce his hero and a 'free' vignette to start his hero off. Naturally, missing a session will probably mean the hero will lag behind the others in power, but those are the breaks. If a player has to miss the final session, then simply have his hero stand as an observer.

## *the Last challenge*

### **Fate**

It is important to have an understanding of how Fate affects a hero. Fate not only makes each individual challenge harder, but also increases the number of challenges that must be met to complete a story. Early on, a story may only have 1 or 2 challenges, and you should frame scenes accordingly. As Fate increases, the stories will have more challenges in them, and thus become more convoluted.

The game is designed so that Fate increases ever so slightly faster than a hero can match. The requirement to spread attribute points around means that a successful story lets a hero increase his best attribute and 2 others. This means, on average, that the hero gets  $1 \frac{2}{3}$  more dice from a story. Fate, on the other hand, increases by 2. The hero starts with an edge, but will gradually have that eroded. In practice, Followers and Artefacts may let a hero keep up better, but as each individual challenge gets harder and the hero needs a larger string of successes to win, it's inevitable that eventually he will fail.

When he does, it's assumed that his most important attribute won't be one of the ones reduced. On average, he loses  $\frac{2}{3}$  of a die from his rolls, but Fate goes down by 1. This should make future challenges slightly easier.

You can think of this as describing the life story of the hero- early on, with the impetuosity of youth, he has success after success. As he gets older, he suffers more defeats, his tasks become labyrinthine and morally ambiguous, and eventually he is happy to subside into legend after one final great task.

## the Last challenge

When the game draws to a close, because of time constraints or some pre-arranged number of stories has been reached, the heroes prepare for the eponymous Last Challenge. This is not only the end of the game, it is the end of their heroic careers. Whatever happens, they will take no further part in any adventures. This end game should only begin when all heroes have told an equal number of stories.

### *the parting of ways*

The last challenge is for the hero alone; any friends he has made will not be able to help him. Each hero does the following, if appropriate, in turn.

- **Power** - the hero leaves behind his kingdom or position of privilege. He assigns appropriate characters to the other players if he wishes, and plays a very short scene showing how he parts with his position and how he leaves his comrades and rivals behind. However, as recognition of his greatness, he receives an Artefact with a number of points equal to his Power. The hero specifies what the Artefact is, but can elicit suggestions from the other players. His Power then falls to 0.
- **Riches** - the hero cannot take wealth where he is going. His Riches score falls to 0.
- **Followers** - even the most loyal companions cannot accompany the hero on this last adventure. For each Follower he has, the hero plays a short scene, assigning the roles of the Followers to other players. This scene shows the hero leaving them behind at the river, or the cave-mouth, or wherever the last stage of his journey to the camp-fire began. Each Follower gives the hero something, be it a keepsake, some sage advice, or even a passionate kiss. The player assigned that Follower then picks a key attribute for the hero that the parting gift relates to. That attribute then increases by a value equal to points value of the Follower, minus 1. The hero then loses the Follower.

Once every hero has done these steps, they are each alone and prepared for the final challenge.

### **Example: Goodbye Squire**

**Kasimir Khan-** *You be my squire. We'll part ways at the foot of the mountain.*

**Kavita the Wise-** *"Great Khan, this is as far as I can go with you. The mountain is treacherous."*

**Kasimir Khan-** *"There is no shame in that. You have stood by me for many years without complaint, and it is long past time you already made a name for yourself. Speaking of names, you told me when we met that you would serve as long as I did not ask what yours was. Will you indulge an old man, now that you will walk with me no longer?"*

**Kavita the Wise-** *"You already know my name, and I will walk with you still in spirit."*

*"There's a blinding flash of light, and where the squire stood there is the avatar of Lilia, smiling."*

### *the Last challenge*

"Go now, gentle warlord, with my blessing.

"She lays a kiss on your brow, and is then gone."

**Kasimir Khan-** The squire had 5 points, so...

**Kavita the Wise-** Your Majesty increases by 4 points.

#### **Example: The Grey Brotherhood**

**Kavita the Wise-** I need someone to be the head of the Brotherhood.

**The Shadow of Umbrax-** I'll do it.

**Kavita the Wise-** "The Brotherhood accompanies me to the first minor peak in the mountains, just below the snowline. There is a small shrine here."

**The Shadow of Umbrax-** "I ring the bell on the shrine, shaking some powdered snow from it, and bow to the mountain.

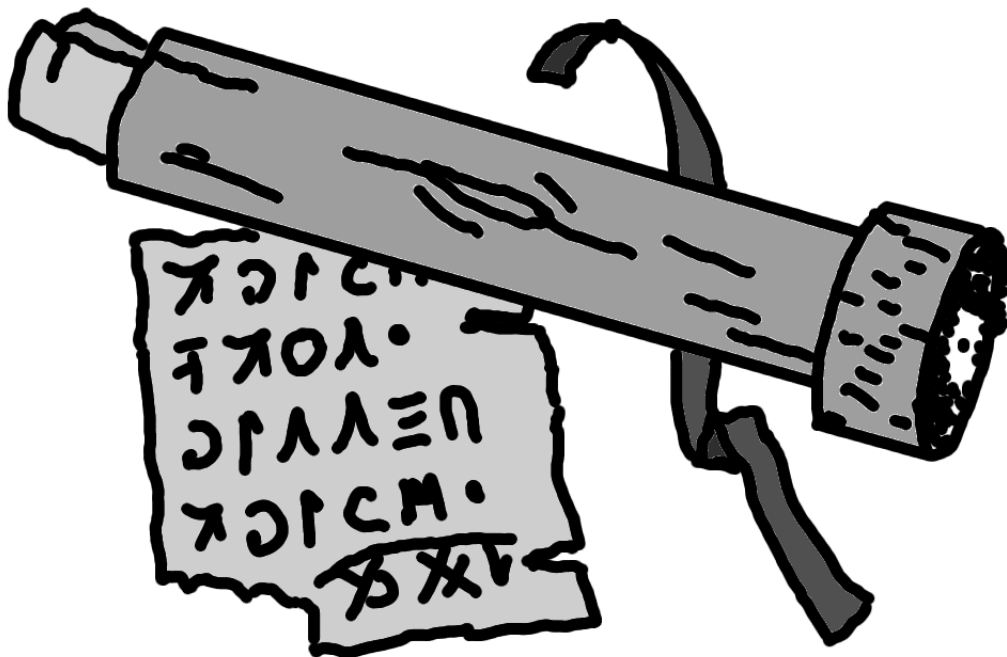
"You have guided us with great wisdom, great Kavita. I only hope that I will be able to lead the Brotherhood wisely enough that I do not disgrace your memory."

**Kavita the Wise-** "Wisdom can be slippery. I have never claimed to be infallible. I do not think you could ever disgrace my memory. Go in peace, and let the monastery prosper."

**The Shadow of Umbrax-** "We would present you with a gift to take with you as you ascend. The Black Scroll of Jandrahan was placed in our library for safe-keeping, but I believe if anyone can read it without succumbing to its evil, it is you. I hope it is of service to you in your task."

**Kavita the Wise-** "I thank you. I sincerely hope I am not called upon to use it."

**The Shadow of Umbrax-** As you might have guessed, it's a 2-point Artefact for Sorcery.



## *the Last challenge*

### ***the reveal***

The hero with the highest Fate attribute (if there is a tie, choose randomly between the tied players) then gets to describe what the Last Challenge is that has gathered all the heroes to its location. The hero should talk up the background of the challenge, hopefully drawing on things described in previous stories to draw as many story threads together into an all-encompassing final breath-taking quest. Unlike the rest of the game, which is told as flashback stories, the Last Challenge is meant to be occurring to the characters in real time. The hero delivering the reveal decides on the specifics of the Challenge. There are 3 basic forms the challenge can take.

### ***gentle twilight***

The heroes have gathered for a non-confrontational end to their lives- they ascend to godhood, turn to stone or simply live out the rest of their lives in seclusion. Each hero gets an opportunity to briefly describe what happens to his character as part of this retirement, then you skip straight to the Epilogue. This type of reveal is really intended for when time constraints prevent one of the other two alternatives, or neither seems appropriate given the characters that have been created.

### ***contest of champions***

The heroes have gathered for a final test of their strength- against each other. From this contest, only one will emerge victorious. The prize for this contest may be godhood, the chance to change the entire world in some way, or to cheat death and be reunited with a lost love. Starting with the hero who revealed the nature of the challenge, each hero declares whether he will participate in the contest or merely observe. Heroes who participate gain a new attribute- Endurance- equal to their Fate scores.

Starting with the Hero with the highest Fate score and proceeding clockwise, each participating hero gets to attack another participant. The attacker chooses one key attribute, and the defender the other. Then a challenge roll is made as normal. The loser has his Endurance reduced by the victory points his opponent scored. When a hero loses all his Endurance, he is slain or otherwise knocked out of the contest. Although the mechanics are framed turn by turn, in actuality the contest is a continuous rolling battle involving all of the participants.

Observers are free to comment on the battle taking place. An observer can, when the order of play passes him over, choose to intervene in the conflict. From that point on, he gets to make attacks like a participant. He has no Endurance score, however, and will be killed or wounded badly enough to stop him fighting the first time he loses a challenge. This is intended to reflect an observer attempting to seize glory from the rightful winner, or intervening to defend an ally who is faring badly at the cost of his own life.

Once only a single combatant remains, proceed to the Epilogue.

### ***Example: The Pantheon***

***The Shadow of Umbrax-*** "Here, on the tallest mountain in the world, one is as close as one can be to the goddesses. They have watched over the world since time began, but for the first time ever they feel a change must be made among their celestial order. Mankind has become too numerous for them to adequately monitor, and they no longer understand the actions of mortals as they once did. Here, at the oldest temple of all, where Alithane first Fell, there is the final

## *the Last challenge*

*contest where mortal will join the ranks of the goddesses, to finally fill the void left when Alithane was destroyed.*

*"I intend to be that chosen one- I have been closer to the black heart of Alithane than anyone, and only I can restore balance to the pantheon."*

**Kasimir Khan-** *"I have never allowed those touched by darkness free reign; I will not do so now. I must stand against you, if only to ensure that the taint of Alithane cannot pollute the pantheon as it once did. If I fall, I fall for the noblest of causes."*

**Kavita the Wise-** *"I have no more desire to rule as a goddess than I have a desire to rule as a queen. But I have come here today to record the course of the battle so that the histories may be complete. Then, at last, I can go to my rest."*

**The Shadow of Umbrax-** *"Ring the gong, then, and let battle be joined."*

### *a dread foe*

The heroes have gathered to fight a great opponent, a demon, god or monster from the dawn of time, that none of them individually can hope to defeat. They may be called to destroy a great evil for the good of the world, for their own glory, or simply for some great treasure it guards. The foe they face has two attributes- Might and Endurance. Both are set to the revealing hero's Fate score to start with. The revealing hero leads the charge against the enemy. Each hero clockwise after him declares whether he will fight with the hero, or with the foe. Fighting with the foe is generally reserved for evil-minded heroes.

Each hero who fights against the foe, including the revealing hero, gains a new attribute- Endurance- equal to his Fate score. For each such hero apart from the one who delivered the reveal, the foe gets a single extra point of Might, and extra Endurance equal to that hero's Fate.

Each hero who fights with the foe also gets an Endurance score equal to his Fate, but the Foe has its Might reduced by 1.

The fight then proceeds in a similar fashion to the Contest of Champions, but heroes can only attack enemies rather than any hero. If a hero attacks the foe, he chooses 1 key attribute and the other is automatically his lowest. If a hero attacks another hero, they each pick one attribute. The foe does not get to make an attack, but can still damage heroes when they attack it. Rolls for the foe are made by the player to the attacker's right. When a hero loses all of his Endurance, he is slain in battle. If the foe loses all of its Endurance, it has been defeated and the surviving heroes can celebrate. If any heroes who sided with the foe are still alive at this point, they yield the battle. If the foe prevails, then the Last Challenge ends in glorious failure for the heroes. In either case, move to the Epilogue.

### **Example: Ancient Evil**

**Kasimir Khan-** *"So there are just three then, who answered the call I put out across the land? Just three who have heeded the warning of prophecy and will spend their lives to defeat Alithane once and for all? Aeons ago she was entombed here, in the temple she herself built, but she has finally cracked the final seal. If we do not stop her here, she will sweep across the world and leave no living thing to tell of her passing. Who will stand with me?"*



## *the Last challenge*

**The Shadow of Umbrax-** "I have seen what only the merest whisper of her power can do, and it almost destroyed me. What she brings is madness, and I will not hesitate fight against her to the death."

**Kasimir Khan-** "Kavita, what do you say?"

**Kavita the Wise-** "I... I have read the Black Scroll of Jandrahan. Things... seem clearer to me now than they did. I think that... Alithane must be allowed her triumph, no matter the cost."

**The Shadow of Umbrax-** "Has she stolen your wits?"

**Kavita the Wise-** "She has allowed me to see. All I had to give her were my eyes. I will bring her here now."

"I ring the gong."

**Kasimir Khan-** My Fate is 18, so Alithane's Might and Endurance start at 18, like my Endurance.

**The Shadow of Umbrax-** My Fate is 11, so her Might is now 19 and her Endurance 29.

**Kavita the Wise-** I'm fighting with her so her Might goes back down to 18. My Fate is 15, making my Endurance 15.

## *the epilogue*

Each hero gets an opportunity to narrate his final dramatic moments- whether falling in battle and delivering a final speech to whoever is there to listen, chronicling the Last Challenge for posterity or returning to the world to live a life of blissful obscurity. He also narrates an epilogue concerning the mark he has left on the world, or how he has shaped it through his life or how his legend has affected people who hear of it. Once all heroes have done this, the game is over.

### **Example: Alithane Defeated**

**The Shadow of Umbrax-** "Can Alithane ever truly be destroyed? The goddesses could only commit her to imprisonment. Was the victory, bought here with blood, a true one? The legends of the Shadow of Umbrax will never die, and neither will she. She will watch, undying and forever young, ready to act should Alithane return from death."

"And maybe, once in a generation, she will take an apprentice to keep the old skills alive."

**Kasimir Khan-** "There can be no greater end to a warrior's life than to fall in battle, and surely there can be no battle greater than one against the root of all evil. No-one knows who dug his grave, and placed his sword as a marker, but it is said that if you watch it for long enough, you will see an apparition of a squire weeping over the hard-packed earth."

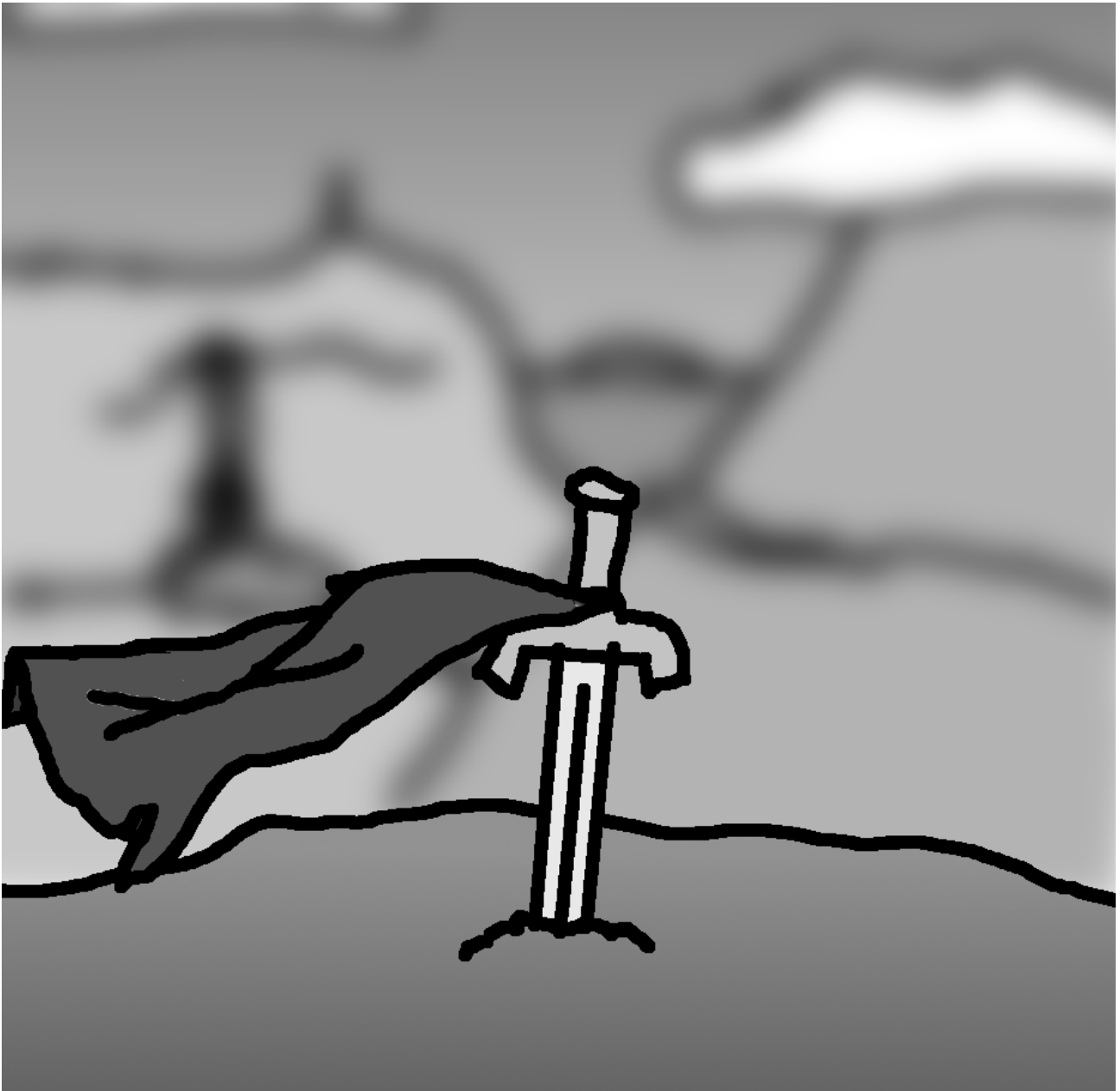
"But the stories of his life live on in the world below, and give hope to those in need that one day someone both mighty and righteous will come to aid them, inspired by his memory."

## *the Last challenge*

**Kavita the Wise-** "The Grey Brotherhood never came to learn that their order's founder became corrupted. They carried her teachings across the entire world, bringing wisdom and prosperity to those that heeded them. She came to be revered more than any except the goddesses themselves.

"Her last words were to her to the man who killed her, scant seconds before he himself was slain by the mad goddess. If only he had lived, then perhaps they could have been added to the books of her wisdom.

"If there is one things that my life, and Alithane's life teach us, it is this- No-one is so good or wise that they cannot fall into evil."



## *the Last challenge*

### the effects of ageing

If you intend to play a long game, you may want to include factors that represent the age of the heroes, and adjust their attributes accordingly. This is an optional rule. If use it, there are four milestones that apply changes to the key attributes of all heroes. These are applied only when each hero has told the same number of stories as the others.

*Age of Majority*: +2 Might

*Age of Maturity*: +2 Majesty

*Age of Nostalgia*: +2 Cunning, -2 Might

*Age of Decrepitude*: -2 Might, -2 Majesty

### strategy

It is perfectly possible to play The Last Challenge 'optimally', always increasing your best key attribute, using Followers and Artefacts to bolster it. You can position yourself to make sure you are the strongest come the final challenge and tell stories calculated to improve your hero as much as possible.

Playing that way is dull.

The real skill is in adapting to what the other players give you, and abandoning one idea in favour of another if things don't go the way you expect. An interesting life for your hero is one full of variety. Even if you want one predominant mood for your hero's stories, giving them variety will help bring the hero to life. The best way to enjoy the game is to give the other players plenty of ideas they can work with, without complaining if yours are never taken up, and looking to reincorporate things that have gone before when telling your own stories.

#### **The World**

During a game of The Last Challenge, the players will create a world, populate it with geographic features, kingdoms and monsters, and create legends of larger-than-life heroes who, eventually, die, retire or disappear.

In short, it can be used as an entertaining method of world creation for another game.

## **specific outcomes**

There are certain outcomes to stories that crop up time and time again in heroic literature. As they're so common, they have their own write-ups here, together with some suggested outcomes should they end well or badly. Each includes a brief description as to what the build-up to that outcome might be, and suggested attribute changes for won or lost stories. Some of them involve much more drastic changes in a hero's attributes than usual, as befits particularly dramatic events. As with ordinary awards, these should only be applied if the players reach a consensus that they are appropriate- and the details are guidelines that you can adjust to fit the situation better if they are out of place. Certain stories may end up fitting one of these if successful, but another if they fail.

### **Betrayal by a Follower**

*Situation:* One of the hero's Followers attempts to betray him. Whether or not the betrayal is successful, the Follower repents of his actions and returns to the hero's side by the end of the story. Depending on the outcome of the story, the bond between hero and Follower will be either strengthened or weakened. If the Follower dies as a result of his betrayal, Death of a Follower is more appropriate.

*Winning:* +2 Cunning, +1 Follower, +2 Fate.

*Losing:* -2 Follower, -1 Fate.

### **Conquering Hero**

*Situation:* The hero scores a great victory in battle, conquering a country for himself, or for the glory of whichever liege he served at the time. In either case, there is plunder and honour aplenty. If the story was won, this success comes with few drawbacks. If the story was lost, then the victory was secured but at great cost to the hero. If it is more fitting that the battle was lost, use Noble Defeat instead.

*Winning:* +1 Power, +2 Riches, +2 Fate.

*Losing:* +1 Riches, -1 Might, -1 Majesty, -1 Power, -1 Fate.

### **Courting a Queen**

*Situation:* The hero desires a consort, either as a trophy or as a valued equal. Snaring the heart of the queen (or arranging a marriage of convenience) is no easy task. Succeeding will bring either power and respect or a trusted companion. Failing will make the hero seem politically unsavvy and mean much loss of face.

*Winning a trophy:* +1 Majesty, +2 Power, +2 Fate.

*Winning an equal:* +3 Follower, +2 Fate.

*Losing:* -1 Majesty, -1 Power, -1 Fate.

### **Cursed**

*Situation:* The hero has a curse placed on him. Sometimes, the effects of the 'curse' are more beneficial than an problem. If it's the other kind of curse, success might entail lifting it at the end of the story. If the curse is a serious problem, it will have side-effects that inhibit the hero's ability to operate in polite society.

## *the Last challenge*

*Winning- cursed with awesome:* +3 Gift, +2 Fate.

*Winning- curse lifted:* +2 Cunning, +1 Sorcery, +2 Fate.

*Losing:* +1 Gift, -2 Majesty, -1 Power, -1 Fate.

### **Death and Resurrection**

*Situation:* The hero is killed, but is brought back to life by divine intervention or the clever actions of his Followers. Seeing what lies beyond death can bring insight into many forms of magic, and typically reveals deep truths. However, it is physically draining. If the story ends in failure, the hero may learn nothing but be greatly weakened by the experience.

*Winning:* +2 Sorcery, +2 Cunning, +2 Fate, -1 Might.

*Losing:* -2 Might, -1 Fate.

### **Death and the Hereafter**

*Situation:* The hero is killed, but finds some manner of returning to walk the world from beyond the grave. Being dead can carry some advantages, but the touch of death can leave a mark on a hero that makes others wary of them. Returning to walk the earth may sap the strength if the return is troubled.

*Winning:* +2 Sorcery, +2 Gift (dead), +2 Fate, -1 Majesty.

*Losing:* +1 Gift (dead), -1 Might, -2 Majesty, -1 Fate.

### **Death of a Follower**

*Situation:* A Follower of the hero dies, heroically or tragically. Some of the pay-offs depend on how many points were invested in that Follower. The death of a Follower is tragic but the hero may receive money or position as a result. The hero will also become more worldly.

*Winning:*  $+(X/2)+1$  Majesty,  $+(X/2)+1$  Power, +1 Riches, +2 Fate, -X Follower.

*Losing:*  $+(X/2)-1$  Majesty,  $+(X/2)-1$  Power, -X Follower, -1 Fate.

### **Defence of the Realm**

*Situation:* The realm the hero commands or is an important figure in is attacked. Some of the changes depend on how much Power the hero has. Winning proves the hero's might and will be rewarded with greater responsibility. Losing demonstrates a lack of forethought, but worse than that the entire kingdom might be over-run, with concomitant loss of power and treasure.

*Winning:* +2 Might, +1 Power, +2 Fate.

*Losing:*  $+(X/2)-1$  Cunning,  $+(X/2)-1$  Riches, -X Power, -1 Fate.

### **False Accusations**

*Situation:* A whispering campaign is conducted against the hero at court, or he is framed for a heinous crime. Success implies exoneration. Prevailing shows the hero is clever and persuasive. Suffering the lies to continue leaves the hero wiser but with robs him of powerful friends.

*Winning:* +1 Cunning, +2 Majesty, +2 Fate.

*Losing:* +1 Cunning, -3 Power, -1 Fate.

## *the Last challenge*

### **Fulfilling the Prophecy**

*Situation:* The hero has a role to play in some ancient prophecy. What role that is, and how it affects him, are unknown. Living up to the legend marks the hero out for greater challenges and helps equip him for them, but failing makes him a pretender to the legend and much weaker.

*Winning:* +1 Might, +1 Cunning, +1 Majesty, +1 Sorcery, +3 Fate.

*Losing:* -1 Might, -1 Cunning, -1 Majesty, -1 Sorcery, -2 Fate.

### **Heist**

*Situation:* The hero takes part in a daring robbery, jailbreak or other such caper. Good preparation will be rewarded with valuables, poor performance punished with loss of status and humiliation, not to mention showing himself as not as smart as he thinks he is.

*Winning:* +2 Cunning, +1 Riches, +2 Fate.

*Losing:* -1 Cunning, -1 Power, -1 Fate.

### **Journeying to Hell and Back**

*Situation:* The hero winds up in Hell, or anywhere else mortal men are not meant to tread, and returns. Secrets of the underworld may be revealed to him. A Follower of his may be overjoyed with his return, or strengthened by accompanying him. He may even gain a Follower during his journey. If he is unlucky, he may feel that he has left an important part of himself behind.

*Winning:* +2 Sorcery, +1 Follower, +2 Fate.

*Losing:* -2 Sorcery, -1 Fate.

### **Noble Defeat**

*Situation:* The hero suffers an important defeat on the battlefield. This can be a tragic but honourable end to a lost cause, where the hero loses men and face but improves personally- but it can also be the result of his own weakness.

*Winning:* +2 Might, +1 Cunning, +1 Majesty, +2 Fate, -1 Power.

*Losing:* -1 Might, -1 Power, -1 Fate.

### **Quest for Immortality**

*Situation:* The hero strives for immortality, through his magical research into life itself or a quest in search of an item or person who can give it to him. Winning this fabled prize is a great coup indeed, but fate has a way of conspiring against those who try to cheat it. Sometimes the prize is not worth the price, and sometimes a hero can be humiliated by a failed attempt to reach this goal.

*Winning:* +4 Gift (immortality), +3 Fate.

*Losing - success at a price:* +1 Gift (immortality), -2 Majesty, -1 Cunning, -2 Fate.

*Losing - failure:* -1 Majesty, -1 Power, -1 Fate.

### **Quest for the Artefact**

*Situation:* The hero pursues a particular artefact of wondrous power. The pay-offs may vary depending on how many points of Riches the hero devotes to the task. 'Losing' this quest means the Artefact was not as powerful as it was advertised.

## *the Last challenge*

*Winning:* +X+3 Artefact, +2 Fate, -X Riches.

*Losing:* +X-1 Artefact, -X Riches, -1 Fate.

### **Sacrificing an Artefact**

*Situation:* The hero returns an artefact from whence it came, or otherwise destroys it, to atone for some failure or because it has turned on him. The effect hinges on how powerful the artefact was.

*Winning:* -X Artefact, -X Fate.

*Losing:* -X Artefact, -1 Fate.

### **Slaying a Great Monster**

*Situation:* A dragon or some other monster of incredible strength and endurance must be killed. Nothing proves the strength of a hero like a victory of this kind, but failure may leave the hero maimed and robbed of many troops.

*Winning:* +3 Might, +2 Fate.

*Losing:* -1 Might, -1 Power, -1 Fate.

## *the Last challenge*

### **artefact ideas**

Apart from providing re-rolls in challenges, Artefacts can have other interesting uses. These have no rule effect, but they make the Artefacts more interesting and can serve as hooks for stories, or as a justification for a hero being able to employ a particular key attribute in a challenge. Some examples are given here- names more fitting to the game you are playing can be readily applied. The descriptions are intended to serve as inspiration for your own origin stories for Artefacts, but can be used as written if you wish.

#### **Blood Crown**

Sorcery 5

This dread artefact was supposedly forged by letting the blood of innocents drip into molten gold. The dark metal it is made of is heavy and sharp, its jagged edges cutting into the head of anyone who wears it.

#### **Cloak of Unsight**

Cunning 4

Woven from the gossamer wings of fairies from the wildest places of the world, this cloak can make a single person vanish from sight if he is careful how he moves. Creatures allied with the fey may take a very dim view of a person who carries one, however.

#### **Forge of Notdan**

Cunning 2

A complete weapon-smith and armour-smith's forge that can be miraculously folded away into a pack no larger than a normal travelling pack. Although it takes a few minutes to fold or unfold, items forged using it are generally of extremely high quality.

#### **Gainsleff**

Might 3

Gainsleff, or "Gain's Bequest", was forged by the sword-master Gain under great duress. It is blessed to cut through steel as easily as paper, but yet it is cursed; it is said that whenever the sword is unsheathed, a man must die before the sun sets.

#### **Shield of Burning Light**

Might 4

The Shield of Burning Light is normally kept under a thick cloth cover, because its surface shines nearly as brightly as the sun. It can dazzle enemies who fight against it and light up dark areas, but it also burns the arm of the warrior bearing it and can only be used for short periods without causing serious harm.

#### **Sorrowful Phial**

Majesty 2

It may contain the tears of a nymph, collected by moonlight and blessed by a priestess. The glow it provides makes the bearer seem radiant, and if consumed it can cure even mortal wounds.



## *the last challenge*

### **Magic Carpet**

Cunning 3

An enchanted rug, created by djinni, that can fly through the air when commanded by its owner. Useful for getting in and out of places, or otherwise playing tricks on the unsuspecting. It's one flaw is that it cannot fly if there is even a single grain of sand on its upper side.

### **Scroll of Ancient Wisdom**

Majesty 3

This scroll is precious not for its contents, but for the history and significance surrounding its writing. Its presence can also cause great pain to ghosts and other monsters. The verses written upon it hold a truth that will cause a demon to confess all its sins.

### **Tongue of Nekketh**

Sorcery 3

The necromancer Nekketh was said to have rediscovered the ancient language with which the ancients sang the universe into being. This mummified lump of ageing flesh whispers blasphemies still, and if its language could be recovered, mayhap so too could be Nekketh's power...

### **War Ring of Midnight**

Majesty 4

These ancient rings were forged by a forgotten empire for its greatest leaders. The wearer of such a ring can communicate with any man who has pledged allegiance to him, and can see through his eyes. They are highly coveted for their strategic value, but are also a symbol of the loyalty their bearers inspire in others.

