

LEANHEART EDGE

LEANHEART EDGE

A fantasy castle role-playing game by Ben Wright

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1. Introduction

Leanheart Edge is a role-playing game where you play significant lords and commanders attempting to rebuild and defend an abandoned castle - Leanheart Edge itself - sandwiched between two powerful empires. The scattered remains of a fallen country and the reinforcements sent by one of the empires must learn to co-operate in order to act as a bulwark against a greater foe.

This is a rules-light game where the character attributes are used to define the character as much as they are used to demonstrate their abilities. Dice-rolling is limited to critical situations where there is a real risk of loss.

A central feature of the game is the Council that rules Leanheart Edge. This Council is made up of player-controlled characters. The decisions of the Council can send characters quite far afield. Because of this, the game can support a larger number of players than many other role-playing games.

The extent to which the characters co-operate, and the extent to which they betray one another for political gain are both up to the players. The game can be played at either extreme, or somewhere in the middle.

As the thrust of this game is about the long-term fortunes of Leanheart Edge, it is best suited to sustained play over a number of sessions, giving the stronghold time to develop. The sessions need not be particularly long, nor particularly frequent.

The details of the world are left largely undefined, with the intention that you create them in play as and when they are needed. This means you can tailor the world to your

tastes and don't need to read up on geography and history before getting stuck into play.

Unlike role-playing games where the abilities of a character follow an inevitable upward trajectory, in this game it is possible for characters to become weaker as they suffer defeats and other setbacks. How far they are prepared to go in risking themselves and their personal assets for the good of the castle is up to them.

The Game Master

The Game Master, or GM, is typically the player that introduces the game to the other players and encourages them to play it. Rather than controlling one of the main characters of the story, the GM fills the role of the rest of the world, sets the challenges the main characters face and acts to keep the game flowing smoothly and make sure everyone gets a fair opportunity to enjoy themselves. Non-Player Characters, or NPCs, are under the control of the GM.

Due to the rules-light and somewhat episodic nature of the game, it is possible to play without a full-time GM by rotating the duty around players who are not currently involved in the scene, or by agreeing to GM through group consensus.

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What You Need

Each player needs a character sheet, on paper or on a copy of the sheets in the back of this book. Leanheart Edge itself has a sheet to keep track of its progress.

This game uses dice in a number of sizes, from four-sided (d4) up to twelve-sided (d12). Although it's convenient to have multiple dice of each size, it's not strictly necessary as only the final total of the dice is important.

Quick History

Leanheart Edge was once a proud castle, part of the Middle Kingdom and controlled by one of the five Houses that ruled that area. As the Holy Monarchy to the west gained in strength, uniting the petty baronies of the plains, Leanheart Edge became the most significant obstacle to the nascent Empire's attempts to absorb the Middle Kingdoms. An informal truce developed, allowing the Empire to turn its attention elsewhere.

The uneasy status quo remained for a handful of generations, long after the Empire reached the full height of its power, principally because by then the Empire had plenty of other enemies without starting a new fight on its doorstep. Eventually, however, the independence of the Middle Kingdoms was too much of an annoyance and the Empire attacked in earnest.

After a thirty-day siege, Leanheart Edge fell. With its loss, the great legions of the Empire were poised to take the Great Houses one by

one. By good fortune or bad, depending on your point of view, the Empire came under assault from the sea, and a hasty treaty was signed with the Middle Kingdom so that the Imperial army and navy could pull back to defend its own territory.

So matters rested for another hundred years or so, but everything changed when the Khaganate attacked.

It swept through the city states and inconsequential warlords to the east of the Middle Kingdom and barely slowed down when it hit the Kingdom's main force. The Houses were ruined, their lords fleeing for their lives. At the battle of Lively Hill, the last of the Middle Kingdom's forces were all but annihilated. At winter fell, the Khaganate pulled its troops back to solidify its control over its earlier conquests.

The Empire, blind-sided by a new and dangerous enemy with easy access to its least defended border, offered a deal to the displaced Lords - a covert alliance to hold back the Khaganate and retake the Middle Kingdom.

The remnants of the Great Houses were quick to accept the offer. The Empire itself can offer only a token force without inviting its other enemies to strike, but with money and support from Imperial lands Leanheart Edge can be rebuilt.

It's up to its defenders to make the gamble a success.

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Leanheart Edge

The name 'Leanheart' is of obscure origins, although some claim it is a corruption of 'Lionheart'. The 'Edge' part of the name is far less cryptic; the castle stands on a peninsula of cliffs overlooking the southern sea.

At its location, there is only a short border between the Middle Kingdom and the Empire, so the castle could command that bottle-neck even against a much larger force. Further north, jagged mountains peaks divide the two countries. It is possible to cross them in small groups, but it would be a fool's errand to try to take an army through them.

The keep is built on the very point of the cliff, with a long and winding staircase down to a tiny landing point, used principally to allow escape and direct reinforcement from the sea. Mighty walls ran across the join between the

peninsula and the mainland, fencing off a large area and keeping the keep out of range of most siege weapons.

The lack of walls on three sides of the ward meant that no ranges were built into the castle, although there was plenty of room for stables and other buildings. A wide zig-zag path ran down one side of the peninsula to a set of docks, allowing larger ships to supply the fortification untroubled by any invading army.

The walls were breached by the Empire when the castle fell. The docks, keep and other buildings were abandoned afterwards, and in some cases little remains of them.

The strategic value of the position has not diminished, although now it defends the Empire rather than keeps it out. It would be an excellent headquarters for any attempt to retake lands currently under the heel of Khaganate.



2. Seasons

The basic unit of time in the game is the season. During each season, Leanheart Edge will face a number of problems. If it handles them well, it will prosper. You can try to make each play session an entire season long, or if you prefer more involved stories make each season last a number of sessions.

Preparing for Play

Before or at the start of the first play session, create characters and the attributes for Leanheart Edge itself. Players pick a character from the list in turn, and assign their attributes as they wish. Once all the characters have been created, assign attributes for Leanheart Edge, as described in its chapter. At this point, the initial membership of the Council can be established. The role of the Council is covered in its own chapter.

It is important that the players communicate what sort of game they want to play. The amount of skulduggery that goes on at the Council should be agreed beforehand, and while there is opportunity for the players to steer the game towards the sorts of activities they want it can help to talk about what you want out of the game before you begin.

The first season of the game is spring.

Start of the Season

The Council meets at the start of the season. During this meeting, each character brings one problem to the Council's attention, whether they are part of the Council or not. These problems can be drawn from the examples given for that character, or invented

by the player. The GM then adds one more problem, drawn from the list in the Leanheart Edge chapter or invented himself.

The Council then decides how these problems will be addressed, and who will be assigned to deal with each of them. As there are more problems than characters, some doubling up will have to occur. If multiple problems are in the same general area, one or more characters can be sent to deal with all of them at once.

When making the decisions as to who deals with what, it can be useful to turn an eye to out-of-character considerations, such as which players are most interested in that aspect of the story, which characters have the best attributes for a problem and which players have taken a back seat recently so should be given an important task to bring them into the spotlight more.

Playing out the Season

When the Council meeting is concluded, the characters split into their respective groups and head out.

It's up to the GM whether to switch between the groups scene to scene, making sure that no-one has a chance to become bored or zone out of what's going on, or whether to concentrate on one group to the conclusion of their task before turning to the other. In the latter case, it is a very good idea to give characters not in that story strand something to do by letting them speak for non-player characters. This not only keeps all the players interested, but provides an opportunity to develop side characters in an interesting way. These characters can be leaders of bodies of

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soldiers, allies named as attributes in the character description or local figures where that part of the story is taking place. The players voicing them are not restricted to merely speaking for them; they can also act on their own initiative to help out the principal characters. Even if the GM is switching between groups, he can do the same thing to bring the minor characters to life.

Over the course of the story, the characters will be presented for difficulties. For minor problems or situations with little risk, the GM can adjudicate success or failure and specifics of the outcome based on the strength of the attributes of the character. For tougher situations, or ones where there is significant risk to the character himself, the Challenge Roll rules in chapter 5 are used.

When starting a challenge, the GM should have a clear idea in mind of what the stakes are the confrontation, and what the consequences for success or failure will be. In order to provide a sense of momentum, the outcomes of previous Challenge Rolls need to be considered when the GM sets the difficulty for the current challenge.

Every strand of the story needs to end in a stronghold challenge, where the problem itself is dealt with in some way. It does not have to be a permanent solution, just a resolution that benefits Leanheart Edge for that season. The difficulty of this final challenge should be based on how well the mission has gone up to that point, the number of characters dealing with it and the ingenuity they have displayed so far. Characters that have finished their assigned mission can still participate in the rest of the season, if appropriate, helping out other characters with their problems.

End of the Season

Once all the the story-lines related to the problems have come to a conclusion, there is another meeting of the Council. During this meeting character attributes and stronghold attributes can be improved. As part of Council business, certain characters may be singled out for praise or censure. Other Council business, as described in its own chapter, takes place during this meeting.

Rest

Remove stress from all attributes, for characters and for Leanheart Edge. Wounded characters remove their wounds.

Improvement

A character who successfully dealt with the problem or problems put before him, as adjudicated by the GM, can improve one of his attributes by one step.

If the character was on the Council, he can choose instead to donate his improvement to the castle itself. The Council decides what attribute will be improved. A character cannot be forced to donate an improvement in this way, but a selfish character might earn the ire of the rest of the Council.

The castle can gain a new attribute at d4 by spending 2 of its improvement points. There must be some logic to how the new attribute was gained, and the Council can decide what the new attribute is called. In this way, the stronghold can gather larger armies, expand its territory or build extra facilities.

A character can gain a new attribute at d4, but only by persuading another character to donate an improvement point to him in the same season as he earned an improvement point. Reciprocal arrangements in future seasons are usually the best way of arranging this.

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Long-Term Plans

While at the outset Leanheart Edge will be fighting for its continued existence, once it has become established the Council can become more proactive. Rather than merely responding to incoming threats, it can make plans against the Khaganate itself, or expand its influence in other ways. Once this happens, then the GM substitutes the Council's plans for the problem he sets at the start of the season. If that goal is reached, then progress is made.

Many of these goals will not have a direct impact on any attributes, but they can change what types of problems the stronghold faces or how difficult it is to meet them.

With sufficient effort, the GM might provide an opportunity to reconquer somewhere occupied by the Khaganate. If this is successful, then the players have a second stronghold with its own attributes to their name. The GM sets the attributes and their values initially, and the character can work out amongst themselves how the new acquisition will be ruled. Characters given responsibility for the new stronghold can donate their improvements to it, as for Leanheart Edge. Mobile assets, such as soldiers, can be moved between strongholds by mutual agreement.

It is up to the players whether the problems will continue to centre around Leanheart Edge, or whether they will follow the current front of the war.

Death

If a character is killed, as described in the challenges chapter, then a new character for that player can be introduced at the start of the next season. The player picks one of the unused characters from the list, and assigns attributes as usual.

The new character cannot begin with Council membership, even if he normally would have it. An explanation needs to be provided for the new character arriving at the castle, but it is easy to claim he is newly arrived in the area, has been posted to it by the Empire, or has been in hiding up until that point.

Defeat

If Leanheart Edge's attribute decay to the point that they are almost useless, the Empire might decide to end the agreement. The players might prefer to try to fight their way out from under the problem, or even abandon the castle completely in favour of a new base rather than end the game.

3. Characters

There is a set panel of characters to choose from. You can select any character that hasn't already been claimed by another player.

These characters have set names, backgrounds and list of attributes. You can customise the character by choosing gender (altering titles as appropriate) and assigning dice to the attributes presented. The character description will list a number of dice, and you can assign them to the attributes however you want, one dice to one attribute. Some characters are lucky enough to begin with a seat on the Council by right, others do not.

It might seem like the set characters allow for only a little variety, but the complete freedom to assign attribute dice allows the same character to be played in very different ways. For example, if you create a Magister Bellamus with his best attribute dice in magic, you can play him as an arcane

powerhouse with a put-upon and browbeaten apprentice and an unreliable magical artefact. If you do the opposite, you can play him as a bumbling fool with an unaccountably good reputation with his peers, who keeps having to be rescued by his long-suffering apprentice. Alternatively, you could assign the dice the same way as for the latter but play the character as old and past him prime, with an apprentice who stays with him out of loyalty and friendship.

Attributes

Attributes are rated from d4 (the worst) to d12 (the best). When an attribute changes by one step, the size of the dice moves up or down the chain d4 - d6 - d8 - d10 - d12.

Characters that only get a d10 as their largest dice at character creation can still improve their attributes to d12 later on.

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Lord DeRanguil

LAST OF HOUSE DERANGUIL

COUNCIL MEMBER

DeRanguil was the smallest of the Middle Kingdom houses, but it boasts one of the most illustrious histories. The current Lord DeRanguil is the last living member of the House. Although young, he fought alongside his father at the Battle of Lively Hill only to see his father fall to the Khaganate forces.

Attribute dice: 2d10, d8, 2d6, d4.

TRAINED SWORDSMAN

The young Lord has been tutored in personal combat. At d4, he barely avoids disgracing himself. At d10, he is an accomplished combatant who can hold his own against several enemies.

DERANGUIL HORSEMEN

The retinue of the previous Lord DeRanguil were mostly wiped out, but the young scion had already begun to gather loyal bodyguards. At d4, he has a dozen or so respectable swordsmen. At d10, he has 30 experienced and loyal fighters.

WILDERNESS TRACKER

DeRanguil loves to hunt, and has spent many seasons in the forests and open plains of the Middle Kingdom. At d4, he has a working knowledge of the area. At d10, he can discern troop movements by their trail and find shortcuts through rough terrain.

MIDDLE KINGDOM HISTORIAN

He spent many hours studying the history of his family as a child, and even if the library was lost to the enemy the knowledge lives on in what he remembers. At d4, he can recall the history of towns and villages enough to impress the locals. At d10, he has a near-encyclopaedic grasp of old rivalries, alliances and forgotten places in the Kingdom.

DERANGUIL WEALTH

He was able to liberate some of the family wealth from the DeRanguil estate just before it was occupied. At d4, he has a small bag of heirloom jewellery. At d10, he has a chest of jewellery and precious stones and box of bars of gold.

MAGIC OF FIRE AND STEEL

The family technique was taught to him. At d4, he can create fires that burn without fuel or with an unnatural light. At d10, he can produce sheets of flame that scorch enemies and raise a metal golem to fight for him.

Problems

- The Khaganate soldier who killed your father - the Head-Taker - wants to collect your head to extinguish the family line.
- A strange wild beast has been attacking the cattle of farms near a forest.
- The brother of a man you killed in a duel many years ago comes looking for satisfaction.
- The Khaganate commander of the forces occupying the DeRanguil estate is brutally oppressing its citizens.
- An old scroll turns up that you recognise as related to the ancient tale of a forgotten treasure hoard - and there are signs that someone is already looking for it.

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Lord Vilverim

THE GENERAL WHO FLED

COUNCIL MEMBER

The House of Vilverim had the largest army of the Middle Kingdom and suffered the greatest losses against the Khaganate. At the Battle of Lively Hill, Lord Vilverim made the fateful decision to retreat with what remained of his forces. This sealed the fate of the Middle Kingdom, but allowed hope that it might rise again.

Attribute dice: d12, 2d8, 2d6, d4.

SEASONED GENERAL

Vilverim was in charge of the Middle Kingdom armies and has vast experience. At d4, he has lost confidence in his abilities and is a shadow of his former self. At d12, he is sharper than ever.

VILVERIM RIDERS

VILVERIM BOWMEN

Although the bulk of the Middle Kingdom army was lost at Lively Hill, and most of the rest deserted soon afterwards, a few remained as an informal bodyguard of sorts. They are commoners drawn from all of the Middle Kingdom Houses, but see themselves as an elite unit. At d4, the unit is around 40 experienced soldiers. At d12, the unit is around 200-strong.

IMPERIAL RESPECT

Lord Vilverim fought the Imperial armies for years, holding them at bay before the Khaganate swept the Middle Kingdom aside. His name is recognised in Imperial lands. At d4, commanders know his reputation. At d12, he is respected as a war commander even by civilians.

BORN SURVIVOR

After a troubled childhood where he avoided accidental death many times, Lord Vilverim is famously difficult to kill. At d4, it looks a little like his luck might be running out. At d12, cheating death is almost commonplace.

MAGIC OF WATER AND WEATHER

The Vilverim family magic manipulates water, seas and weather conditions. At d4, he can produce water from nowhere and defend himself from the worst of bitter weather conditions. At d12, he is a master of weather control and can summon large quantities of water from nowhere.

Problems

- An Imperial auditor arrives and insists on interfering with the business of Leanheart Edge, ostensibly to prevent the Middle Kingdom contingent from taking more than their fair share.
- A unit of deserters from the Middle Kingdom armies have set themselves up not far from Leanheart Edge, their leader calling himself a warlord.
- A Khaganate caravan containing plundered treasure is passing by close enough to consider an attack.
- A large Khaganate scouting force has been seen, and it needs to be stopped without revealing that Leanheart Edge is being rebuilt.
- There is discontent amongst the ranks of his forces as someone is spreading the rumour that you needlessly abandoned some of your forces at Lively Hill.

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Lord Altanos

DWELLER IN SHADOWS

COUNCIL MEMBER

The House of Altanos was the first to be attacked by the Khaganate. While most of the House's lands were taken swiftly, Lord Altanos fought a war intended to delay the enemy enough to buy the rest of the Kingdom time. Even though it proved fruitless in the end, his unorthodox tactics were a thorn in his enemy's side.

Attribute dice: d12, d10, 3d6, d4.

MASTER OF STEALTH

Altanos learned how to stay out of sight and move quietly as part of his campaign. At d4, he is passably stealthy. At d12, he is a shadow that is seldom seen.

ASSASSIN'S TOOLS

The Lord's preferred weapons are knives and small crossbows. Quiet and effective. At d4, he is not much of a threat to a skilled enemy. At d12, he is positively lethal.

THE BLACK GUARD

This group of five elite soldiers dress identically to Lord Altanos and surround him almost all the time, making it difficult to pick him out specifically. Primarily intended as a measure to protect him from assassination, the guards receive extra training. At d4, they are little more than decoys. At d12, they are highly skilled killers.

TERROR OF THE KHAGANATE

Altanos' actions against the Khaganate forces have given him a reputation. At d4, his name is known amongst the invaders but he is considered little more than a nuisance. At d12, he is feared throughout the newly conquered lands.

METHODS OF INTERROGATION

The Altanos House has for many years practised one or two unsavoury means of governance. At d4, the weak-willed can be cowed by his torturer act. At d12, he has an extensive knowledge of all kinds of interrogation techniques, some particularly unpleasant.

MAGIC OF LIFE AND DEATH

The Altanos family magic verges on necromancy, letting him contact the spirits of the dead and place withering curses on his enemies. At d4, his spells are unreliable and weak. At d12, he is a master of forbidden enchantments.

Problems

- Khaganate assassins have come for you.
- An Imperial noble touring the Middle Kingdoms has been captured, although the Khaganate does not know the significance of the prisoner, and is held in a fortress that simply cannot be taken by force.
- A large bandit strike force is heading for Leanheart Edge, and the best way to deal with it is to learn what route it is taking and ambush it.
- Dead creatures are rising in the forbidden marsh.
- One member of your Black Guard has turned traitor, and is causing mayhem in the castle.

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Lord Shadrell

THE MONEY-COUNTER COUNCIL MEMBER

The House of Shadrell generated its influence through trade. It would deal with anyone, no questions asked, and its position meant it could grow rich from trade into and out of the Empire, even during times of war. Lord Shadrell only fled his mansion when it became clear that the approaching Khaganate army could not be bought off.

Attribute dice: d12, 2d8, 2d6, d4.

MASTER MERCHANT

Being a master merchant is about contacts, reputation and a keen instinct for aggressive trade. At d4, his fortune is lost and his primary contacts killed, leaving him with only his guile. At d12, he escaped with much of his wealth and retains business contacts.

FRIENDS IN STRANGE PLACES

Not all of his dealings have been above board. He can get in touch with criminal or disreputable elements, even within the territory occupied by the Khaganate. At d4, he can make an introduction and hope for a favourable reception. At d12, he can get in easy touch with a wide variety of unsavoury characters he has dealt with before.

FIENDISH TACTICIAN

Lord Shadrell has a devious streak when it comes to strategy. At d4, he has a few tricks up his sleeve. At d12, he can hoodwink entire armies into disadvantageous situations.

SEDUCER

As an appreciator of the finer things, Lord Shadrell has something of a reputation as a seducer. Although these liaisons seldom last, his partners are not unwilling. At d4, his loss of position and years of easy living have dulled his seductive ability, leaving only the

most desperate or libertine amenable to his advances. At d12, he remains in the prime of life and as persuasive as ever.

ENGINEER

He pursues architecture as a hobby, but takes it seriously enough to make it a proper study. At d4, he knows about common engineering practices and can design simple structures. At d12, he is renowned Empire-wide for his designs for bridges, houses and other large constructions.

MAGIC OF STONE

The Shadrell family magic revolves around the manipulation of stone. At d4, he can walk through walls and twist stone into fanciful shapes. At d12 he can create golems and raise up earthworks of vast size in short order.

Problems

- An Imperial merchant arrives out of the blue, holding an extremely old debt bond for Leanheart Edge that has just come due.
- A huckster arrives, calling in an inconvenient favour that you owe him.
- A former lover from an exotic locale arrives, claiming that by the customs of his homeland you must return with him. The lover has a large army to take you by force if he is met with refusal.
- A Khaganate general has acquired a nigh indestructible siege engine. Leanheart Edge's best chance is to find a way to disable it before it can be brought to bear.
- Khaganate scout forces are using an important bridge. If it can be properly fortified and defended against a counter-attack, their scouting runs will be severely hindered.

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Yeoman Harly

THE SURVIVOR

The House of Dameril was all but extinguished after its army was ambushed just before the Battle of Lively Hill. A soldier, Harly, rallied what troops he could and fought through the enemy to safety. The survivors of the skirmish stayed with him. After a long and arduous journey, they found their way to an Imperial outpost, where they heard about Leanheart Edge. The troops treat Harly as their commander, even though he is a commoner.

Attribute dice: d12, d10, d8, 2d6, d4.

AXEMAN

In his previous life, Harly was a woodsman. When pressed into service as a soldier, he kept his axe. At d4, he can fend off enemies in a *melée* press. At d12, he's a virtuoso wielder of the axe and a serious threat.

DAMERIL IRREGULARS

The mismatched soldiers that Harly drew to him are an unconventional fighting unit, but they are useful for just about any assignment. At d4, they are a handful of weary and cynical survivors. At d12, they are several hundred cynical veterans with experience in every aspect of warfare.

ONE OF THE PEOPLE

Whereas noble captains are often treated with disdain by commoners and distrusted when they bring their armies with them, Harly is more likely to be welcomed or offered help. At d4, this has minimal effect. At d12, he's renowned amongst the peasantry as a hero; one of their own who outdid the nobles.

HEALER

In both his career as a woodsman and in his time as a soldier, he has learned to patch up injuries. At d4, he can perform rudimentary

first aid. At d12, he can treat even grievous wounds and knows many folk remedies for diseases and other maladies.

YOUNG MASTER DAMERIL

The last member of the House of Dameril is in Harly's care, young enough to still need a guardian. At d4, the young master is suffering from a weakening illness and can do little himself. At d12, he is healthy and on the cusp of manhood, a respectable swordsman and clever assistant.

DAMERIL LIBRARY

The old Lord Dameril was fascinated with natural philosophy and tales of far-flung places. The library he built up was housed some distance from the main estate, so was not captured. Harly recovered as much of it as he could. At d4, there was only opportunity to grab a handful of books. At d12, the entire library was loaded into carts and taken to Leanheart Edge. It might even contain some volumes about Dameril family magic, which would otherwise be lost.

Problems

- Some of the Irregulars are laid low with an unusual ailment.
- Young Master Dameril disappears.
- A guerilla force of unknown allegiance is plaguing the borders between the Empire and the Middle Kingdom. It will take unconventional measures to defeat it.
- Hungry wolves are bolder than usual and coming out of the wilderness to attack villages.
- An obnoxious Imperial flunky insists that you hand your troops over to someone 'properly worthy to lead them'.

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Captain Curzwell

AMBITIOUS SOLDIER

COUNCIL MEMBER

Curzwell sees an opportunity in Leanheart Edge to make a name for himself. He has a distinguished career as an officer in the Imperial Army. He is too much of a pragmatist to let enmity with Middle Kingdom lords stand in the way of his advancement.

Attribute dice: d12, d10, 3d6, d4.

TRAINED SWORDSMAN

MASTER BOWMAN

Like all soldiers in the Imperial army, he has been received training in the tolls of his trade. At d4, he barely met the requirements for his position. At d12, he displays complete mastery of that weapon.

OLD CAMPAIGNER

Curzwell has seen a lot of action on the field of battle. He is very familiar with the specifics of conducting an extended campaign and the various unplanned-for incidents that can mar an otherwise successful season of fighting. At d4, this is an edge he has in large battles. At d12, he is an expert at reading an enemy commander's next move.

IMPERIAL INFLUENCE

He still has allies in the Imperial army and its high command. Although officially left to stand or fall on its own strength, Leanheart Edge can benefit from occasional covert or overt assistance. At d4, Curzwell called in most of his favours to get a posting, and can't push his luck much further. At d12, his network of supporters and allies is as extensive as ever.

ARMOURER

As an optional part of his training, Curzwell learned how to forge his own weapons and armour. Although he is too important to be

called upon to do so full-time, an extra skilled armourer is an asset to the castle. He can also identify recovered equipment and work out where it came from, useful when Leanheart Edge does not know what all of its enemies are. At d4, it is a hobby for him. At d12, he can forge masterpieces, which can make impressive gifts.

FISHERMAN

Curzwell grew up in a fishing town. Although that chapter of his life is long closed, he can still sail a boat, bait a hook or cast a drift net. At d4, he can pass for a seasoned sailor as long as he doesn't have to do anything complicated. At d12, he is more skilled than most professional sailors.

Problems

- A rogue Imperial detachment is preying on towns and villages in the Middle Kingdom, and needs to be stopped in a way that won't seem like an attack on the Empire itself.
- An elite Khaganate unit is harrying the borders of the Empire, and it will take sustained effort to eliminate it.
- An old friend from your previous posting arrives at Leanheart Edge with an unusual request.
- Ill discipline in the ranks of the Leanheart Edge soldiers necessitates a field exercise to whip them into shape.
- A coastal village would provide strategic benefits, if only it could be wrested from an entrenched Khaganate force.

LEANHEART EDGE

Magister Bellamus

IMPERIAL WIZARD

COUNCIL MEMBER

As a representative of Imperial Wizardry, Bellamus is present not only to lend his expertise to Leanheart Edge but to learn what he can about Middle Kingdom traditions of magic. His posting to the stronghold came about after he made too many enemies within his college.

Attribute dice: d10, 2d8, 2d6, 2d4.

CLASSICAL EDUCATION

Bellamus has received the fullest education that the colleges of the Empire can provide, in everything from philosophy to theology. This learning can become useful in some quite unexpected situations. At d4, he remembers a smattering of details. At d10, his erudition is considerable.

MIRROR OF PROPHECY

He has been gifted with a rare and powerful artefact that shows visions not of the future, but of something similar to it. It is this similarity that gives the user insight into future events. For example, it may show an army losing a battle, but all that can be inferred for sure is that there will be a battle. The army may yet lose the battle, but not in the way the mirror showed. At d4, the mirror's visions are infrequent and indistinct. At d10, it shows a great many visions, enough to overwhelm anyone who tries to discern the truth of all of them.

WIZARDLY INFLUENCE

As a representative of Imperial Wizardry, Bellamus can call for assistance from specialists if there is time enough for them to travel to him. At d4, many of his former colleagues have severed ties with him. At d10, he still has substantial clout not just with wizards but with mundane authorities within the empire.

BATTLE ARCANUM

Battle Arcanum encompasses all Imperial magic that can be used in a battle. At d4, he can offer an edge to his allies. At d10, he can sweep the battlefield with fire, thunder or fog.

FLESH ARCANUM

Flesh Arcanum is all about manipulating living things. Although this can be used to heal, it is more often used to create elaborate flesh constructions from animals. At d4, the scale and strength of the arcanum is severely limited. At d10, Bellamus can create disturbing horrors of bloated flesh to do his bidding, sometimes out of people.

TRAVEL ARCANUM

Travel Arcanum is a selection of spells that allow Bellamus to move over land or sea much more quickly than usual. At d4, he can only use it on himself and a couple of allies. At d10 he can move a fair-sized army along with him.

APPRENTICE VILLIA

Like all respectable wizards, Bellamus has an apprentice. At d4, Villia is an embarrassment. At d10, he is at the end of his apprenticeship and can help Bellamus with magic.

Problems

- Villia reads a magical text he was not supposed to. Chaos results.
- The Mirror of Prophecy shows itself being destroyed.
- A deputation of arrogant Imperial Wizards arrives.
- A strange, magical wind sweeps Leanheart Edge, making sea travel impossible without magic.
- A Khaganate force with many magicians is wreaking havoc in the plains of the Middle Kingdom.

LEANHEART EDGE

Associate Turnbull

DISGRACED SCRIBE

COUNCIL MEMBER

If you're going to try to fight your way to the top of the Imperial civil service, learn from Turnbull's mistake and don't try to do it by framing rivals for acts of indiscretion with members of the Imperial family. Being sent to oversee the administration of Leanheart Edge seemed a fitting punishment.

Attribute dice: 2d10, d8, 2d6, d4.

ARTS OF PERSUASION

Wheedling diplomacy? Yes. Empty promises? Sure. Blackmail? Absolutely. Turnbull has an extensive repertoire of ways to make people do what he wants. At d4, he finds himself surrounded by strangers who aren't the easy marks he's used to. At d10, he has fallen on his feet and is as devious as ever.

BREAKING AND ENTERING

Sometimes a word in the right ear is not enough to get his way, so Turnbull is no stranger to getting in where he doesn't belong. At d4, he falls back on this technique only as a last resort. At d10, it's part and parcel of his normal operations.

BRIBERY, CORRUPTION AND PETTY LARCENY

A bit of money in the right pocket can make all the difference. Turnbull is not only adept at making the right overtures to get results, but he has practice at identifying those likely to succumb to a little light corruption. At d4, he always takes a risk with this attribute. At d10, he can present offers well and has a fine instinct for spotting a complicit target.

IMPERIAL INFLUENCE

Despite his disgrace, he still has pull in Imperial lands, mostly among those he has involved in unscrupulous dealings in the past. At d4, the remoteness of his new posting makes use of these erstwhile allies difficult.

At d10, he still has agents who can communicate his wishes to them and make their lives difficult if they refuse to help him.

ILL-GOTTEN GAINS

Turnbull has a secret chest of gold and electrum bars he took with him when he moved. At d4, it's not a huge cache but enough to grease the wheels. At d10, it's a substantial amount but one he would find difficult to dispose of all at once without attracting unwanted attention.

COURT ETIQUETTE

Apart from the rare occasions when a representative of the court heads all the way to the fringes of the Empire, etiquette is a good way to make other people feel uncomfortable, inferior or out of their depth. At d4, he is out of touch with current trends. At d10, he remains in the loop on the tastes and foibles of the Imperial gentry.

Problems

- A pampered member of the Imperial family is visiting Leanheart Edge.
- An influential merchant arrives, claiming that his stolen gold and electrum has been hidden somewhere at Leanheart Edge.
- A hostile Imperial governor is going to send a report to the Emperor lambasting Leanheart Edge's Council.
- A Khaganate captain has laid claim to a small town. Taking it by force might be impractical, but he might turn a blind eye to his 'enemies' if approached in the right way.
- One of your blackmail victims has taken out a hit on you. Can the culprit be traced and dealt with?

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Commodore Lushka

PIRATE LORD

Lushka is possibly the most successful pirate of the Imperial coast. As the Empire looks to defend its borders more vigorously, times are getting harder. By wheedling his way into the Leanheart Edge hierarchy, Lushka sees a way of securing a retirement that doesn't involve the gallows.

Attribute dice: d12, 3d8, d6, d4.

THUNDERCHILD

Lushka's flagship was once an Imperial warship. Like most warships, it is a little too big and heavy to be a very effective pirate ship, but it fits Lushka's new ambitions perfectly. At d4, the ship was badly damaged when captured and has yet to be returned to fighting trim. At d12, it is in perfect condition and has a hand-picked crew of experienced corsairs.

ARMADA

Like any successful pirate, Lushka has a small flotilla of other captured ships, used mostly to haul extra cargo. At d4, he just has a pair of sloops and his former attack ship, the latter damaged from the battle that won the Thunderchild. At d12, he has over a dozen cargo haulers and five combat-ready ships will full crew.

CORSAIR EXTRAORDINAIRE

It's not just luck that has led to Lushka's success. He has a natural talent for fighting on-board ship and an instinct for naval battles. At d4, his reputation is larger than his skill. At d12, he's a genuine terror of the seas.

BOOTY

Over the years he's been active, Lushka has amassed considerable wealth. Most of it is carefully hidden in coves up and down the coast, waiting for a time when it can be spent without being obviously the fruits of criminal

endeavour. Naturally, he has to split it with his crew, but it's a significant amount of money. At d4, it's enough to settle down comfortably. At d12, it's a hoard worthy of the Emperor, even if it would take seasons of work to recover it all.

SEAWARD NAVIGATOR

He is also a skilled navigator, knowing a number of paths through treacherous waters. At d4, he has only a small advantage over other captains. At d12, he has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the coast and can manoeuvre the Thunderchild like a much smaller ship.

LINGUIST

It's not just the Imperial coast Lushka has plundered. He's headed out to exotic island nations and even towards the Khaganate itself. In the process of exploring those far-off reaches, he has a working knowledge of a number of languages. At d4 he can talk about matters of sailing in a few common tongues. At d12 he is completely fluent in just about every language of nations that sail the sea.

Problems

- Your pirates are unruly, and a lack of discipline is starting to hurt Leanheart Edge's interests.
- The previous captain of the Thunderchild is back, with an even bigger ship, looking for revenge.
- Pirates from the far south are muscling in on Lushka's territory and attacking the ships supplying the castle.
- A treasure map.
- A Khaganate fleet is approaching Leanheart Edge, attempting to take the stronghold through speed.

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Olbo Webster

FAMILY PATRIARCH

The area around Leanheart Edge has been largely ungoverned since the Empire captured the castle itself. The farmers looked out for themselves, forming into familial clans that feuded with each other. The largest is the Webster family, headed by Olbo Webster. He's not exactly overjoyed at Imperial and Kingdom interests impinging on his territory, but he fancies himself as the local authority.

Attribute dice: d10, 3d8, d6, 2d4.

THE FAMILY

The sons, daughter, cousins, brothers and sisters of the Webster clan are fiercely loyal to the family and no strangers to fights or skulduggery. At d4, they are more enthusiastic than effective. At d10, they are a capable network.

MOTHER WEBSTER

Old Mother Webster has a foul mouth and a fierce temper. She walks with the aid of a cane but uses it to beat people. She terrifies people who are not part of the family, and plenty who are. At d4, she is a nuisance. At d10, her aggression coupled with the natural deference people feel towards the elderly lets her get away with all kinds of things.

YOUNG OLBO

Olbo's son is a fine, strong lad, if a bit simple. At d4, he can fetch and carry. At d10 he's a brick wall of a man who wrestles bulls for fun.

FARMLANDS

The family farm has grown through marriage, appropriation of abandoned land and just plain theft. At d4, it is suffering poor harvests and animal sickness. At d10, it can feed all of Leanheart Edge and then some.

BRAWLER

Olbo is not afraid of a fight, as long as it's dirty. He's not too good with proper weapons, but knives, fists and farm implements are deadly in his hands. At d4, he can hold his own against trained fighters. At d10, what he lacks in finesse he makes up with strength and determination.

POACHER

Olbo knows how to sneak through wooded or grassy areas to poach game, and those skills come in handy in other circumstances. At d4, he can't get away with hiding for long. At d10 he's a shadow that drifts through the night like an owl.

BROWBEAT

Olbo is famous for his shouted lectures. Anyone who crosses him can get harangued for up to twenty minutes. His volume, vitriol and vulgarity are legendary. At d4, only family members are cowed. At d10, he can make total strangers think twice, with his family backing him up menacingly.

Problems

- Young Olbo has got a local girl in the family way. Her family want marriage, she wants nothing more to do with him, and you're damned if you'll let anyone bad-mouth your son.
- A family feud erupts over a snub at a birthday party.
- A land-owner tries to reclaim some of the land that your family now works.
- Your daughter brings a Khaganate nomad to a family meal, saying they are courting.
- A soldier from a nearby scouting force said you were too chicken to fight him one on one.

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Fercic

KHAGANATE DESERTER

Fercic left the Khaganate army, for reasons he refuses to share. Although initially reviled and threatened with imprisonment, he helped the Imperial forces secure the castle when they first arrived. While not exactly trusted, he has at least convinced everyone else he is not an infiltrator for his former army. His skill at arms helps make him useful, and thus tolerated. His hatred for his former comrades is apparently sincere.

Attribute dice: 2d10, 2d8, d6, d4.

PIKEMAN

The bulk of the Khaganate soldiery uses pikes to fight, and so does Fercic. At d4, he can fight properly when in formation, but isn't very strong at other times. At d10, he is a master wielder of many kinds of pole-arm.

EYES IN THE KHAGANATE

He may have left the Khaganate army, but he still has secret contacts in it. They can pass him information. At d4, he might get warning of a major troop movement a day ahead of time. At d10, he receives regular and detailed reports on what most of the Khaganate army is doing.

WIDE TRAVELLER

His life as a soldier has taken him all over the Khaganate, and into the lands of its other enemies. He knows a lot about these distant lands. At d4, he can recognise someone from one of these exotic places. At d10, he remember details of customs and places that he can use to pass as one of them or gain the trust of foreigners.

BLACKSMITH

At one point Fercic worked as a blacksmith, mostly shoeing horses for the army. His training didn't include making weapons or armour, but he can make tools and

ornaments in iron. At d4, he was never very good. At d10, he could comfortably make a living from blacksmithing, and can identify specific pieces of work and identify strengths and weaknesses of iron objects.

INNOCENT FACE

Despite his foreign looks, Fercic was born with an innocent face, which certainly helped him gain something approaching acceptance at Leanheart Edge. At d4, his boyish looks have lost their edge due to age and scars. At d10, he still radiates the charm of a troubled angel.

MEDITATION

Fercic doesn't say much about his religious practices, but they include regular meditation. He can use these moments of quiet to steady his nerves or gather his strength before a major confrontation. At d4, his meditation is largely rote, without any heart in it. At d10, it's a significant part of his preparations for battle and his air of peace can calm down others around him.

Problems

- You receive word that there is a Khaganate spy at Leanheart Edge.
- A Khaganate unit is combing the area looking for deserters to drag back for punishment.
- Nomads from Khaganate lands are interfering with Leanheart Edge business, but need not be enemies.
- Your old unit is attacking the farms near Leanheart Edge.
- An Imperial general passes by with prisoners from Khaganate lands, who you know not to be soldiers but refugees with no love for the Khaganate armies.

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Mancilo

EXOTIC SHAMAN

Mancilo originally came from an area that was culturally similar to the Khaganate, but not part of it. As the armies have swept west, he had been driven ahead of them to escape being captured and forced to use his magic for the Khaganate's ends. He hopes the advance will be stopped at Leanheart Edge and he can live something approaching a normal life. His form of magic is very different to Imperial wizardry or the Middle Kingdom family techniques.

Attribute dice: d12, 2d8, 2d6, 2d4.

SONG OF THE MORNING

SONG OF THE EVENING

SONG OF THE NIGHT

Mancilo's magic is linked to the time of day, but is incredibly versatile. At d4, his magic can perform only simple cantrips during that time. At d12, his magic is as powerful as any Imperial wizard's.

WADROLLO THE HAWK

Mancilo has a hawk as a working pet. He can use it to send messages, hunt for food and other simple tasks. At d4, Wadrollo is just a messenger. At d12, the hawk can find the recipient of its message by name, searching the countryside, and can communicate simple ideas like direction and number of people after flying reconnaissance.

GENTLE WORDS

In his capacity as shaman, Mancilo can treat maladies not of the body but of the soul. By talking to troubled people, he can help put their minds at rest or give them motivation and inspiration to overcome their difficulties. At d4, his unfamiliarity with non-Khaganate customs hampers his skill in his new home. At d12, his empathy and compassion are nearly supernatural.

KEENEST OF EARS

Long years spent travelling in the wilderness have given him excellent hearing. At d4, he can overhear conversations he isn't supposed to. At d12, his hearing is so good that he can even tell when someone is lying by the changes he hears in their voice and heartbeat.

KHAGANATE HISTORY

As a student of the land, Mancilo knows a lot about the Khaganate's history; the disparate peoples that are now gathered under one banner. He knows about the internal conflicts of the Khaganate. At d4, he can provide insights into peaceful dealings with Khaganate representatives. At d12, he can sow divisions in enemy ranks with a few simple words and convincingly pass off his allies as Khaganate troops to all but the most careful of eyes.

Problems

- Something is interfering with your magic, a sure sign that a major working is in progress, probably by Khaganate forces.
- War-weary survivors of a massacre arrive at Leanheart Edge. They are so troubled by what they've been through that they are impulsively starting fights and sowing other discord.
- A magical curse has been placed on the castle, one you think you recognise.
- Some Khaganate troops have been seen with magical enchantments that make them incredibly strong in combat. Undoing the magic is essential, but perhaps you can learn to replicate it first...
- Giant birds are attacking farmers.

4. Leanheart Edge

The castle itself is the centre of the game, and had its own attributes. Only members of the Council can use these attributes, as a rule, and even then only if they are in an appropriate place to draw on them. At the start of the game, Leanheart Edge has very poor attributes, but as fortune smiles and it becomes better established they can improve. Like character attributes, they can be stressed and reduced. If there are no Council members at the castle, but there is a character there, he may draw on the attributes to defend the castle.

As the game starts, there is a fixed selection of attributes for Leanheart Edge. The dice are assigned as a group, starting with the player who picked his character last and working backwards. Start again with that player if there are still dice left to assign.

Attribute dice: d8, 2d6, 3d4.

THE KEEP

The keep was the heart of the castle, five floors high and with a siege engine on the roof. It overlooks the bay and the rocky ground at the base of the cliff. It was never breached by Imperial forces, but the garrison was compelled to surrender. It has since fallen into disrepair. At d4, it's nothing but a shell, with even the floors gone. At d8, it is still a perfectly serviceable keep and a good centre of operations. If restored to d12, it is fully repaired, with a giant catapult or ballista on the roof ready to fire at invaders from land or sea.

THE WALLS

The walls ran in a part circle sectioning off the keep and the rest of the peninsular from the outside. Although they once boasted an impressive gatehouse and defensive towers, most of them were destroyed when the Empire attacked. At d4, much of the stone has been taken by locals for their houses, and the walls can no longer even keep out animals. At d8, the walls are largely intact but the defensive features are currently unusable and the gatehouse has only a hastily-built wooden gate. If restored to d12, they are stronger than ever before, with guard towers, a triple-portcullis in the gatehouse and wooden hoardings to protect soldiers on top of the wall.

IMPERIAL SPEARMEN

IMPERIAL CROSSBOWMEN

Imperial forces have been sent to hold the castle, alongside any Middle Kingdom soldiers who are still under arms. Only a tiny proportion of the Imperial armies has been sent. At d4, each unit has about 150 soldiers, known for discipline problems. At d8, there is an experienced fighting force of around 300. If improved to d12, each unit boasts 500 or more experienced soldiers.

LOCAL FARMING

The castle can only survive if the farms around it are prosperous and provide sufficient food. Since the fall of the castle, the farmsteads have not been formally part of any kingdom and they are already chafing under the new rulers. At d4, the farms leave a lot of land untilled, are suspicious of the inhabitants of the castle and are reluctant to supply food or go out of their way to help. At d8, the farms make a healthy surplus, will

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more readily supply food if there are assurances they will be protected and will now and again pass on rumours and unusual sightings. If improved to d12, intensive farming provides a large surplus of food and the farmland is well-protected with wooden stockades.

SEA PORT

In its heyday, Leanheart Edge was a trade hub thanks to the docks at the base of the cliffs. Although the docks have been washed away by storms, a temporary pier has been built to accommodate smaller vessels. At d4, it's a ramshackle affair that needs rebuilding after every storm. At d8, the stone harbour wall remains and forms the basis of the new dock complex. If improved to d12, the docks can handle a number of large ships and are fortified to prevent attacks from the sea.

New Attributes

New attributes for the castle are specified by the Council. When the spend of an improvement point is made, the castle has use of the attribute, even if in the story the facility is still under construction.

Some new attributes are additions to the castle itself, such as an infirmary, facilities for training soldiers or a treasure vault. Additional defences, such as a new outer wall or more defensive towers, can also be built.

Other new attributes to add more troops, footmen, horsemen or warships as the Council decides is needed.

Attributes can even relate to the larger area around Leanheart Edge, as is the case for the farmland attribute. Merchants could be encouraged to trade by improving roads or coaching facilities. A network of watchtowers could warn the castle of enemy attacks ahead of time. A wall could even be built encircling the entire Leanheart Edge area, as a first line of defence against an invading army.



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Problems

The GM can pick a problem from this list each season, or make one up.

- People are falling ill. Disease, poison or foul magic?
- A terrible storm is approaching, threatening any docked ships and the port itself.
- There are mysterious murders in the castle.
- Some strange beast is killing livestock in the farms.
- Imperial troops start brawling with Middle Kingdom troops over old grudges.
- There is a terrible harvest, threatening starvation.
- Troops are starting to desert the garrison, after rumours of an invasion.
- The governor of the neighbouring Imperial province is making trouble for the castle.
- Bandits driven out of the Empire have started attacking caravans around the castle.
- Displaced nomadic tribesmen from the east try to settle near the castle, causing friction with the local farmers.
- A disgraced nobleman arrives at Leanheart Edge, followed by Imperial troops there to arrest him.
- Ghosts haunt the keep.
- A terrible but mysterious omen in the sky fills everyone with dread.
- Strange creatures have come down from the mountains.
- One of the Empire's other enemies tries to land a force near Leanheart Edge.
- Pirates. Lots of them.
- There are rumours of a hidden underground vault in the castle.
- A merchant who controls the supply of arms to the castle soldiers is raising his prices extortionately.
- An advance force of the Khaganate tests the castle's defences.
- A group of Khaganate opportunists attack by sea.
- There is a spy for the Khaganate in nearby Imperial lands.
- Khaganate raiders are plundering outlying farms.
- Khaganate scouts have been seen in the forests nearby.
- A large, well-equipped Khaganate force is heading directly towards Leanheart Edge.
- Khaganate sorcerers plunge the entire area into darkness during the day, causing much panic.

5. Challenges

Challenges are risky situations your character faces, with uncertain outcomes. If the challenge goes badly, your character's resources and strength will be depleted. Challenges can be fights, battles, political wrangling, explorations, investigations, magical endeavours or any other obstacle your character might face. There is not necessarily an opponent, just a problem.

Challenges come in two main types - personal challenges and stronghold challenges. The GM will assign each challenge a 'Rank', which affects both the difficulty and how many attributes can be brought to bear against it.

A personal challenge is an obstacle in the way of your character and their immediate retinue, with no wider implications for Leanheart Edge itself. Personal challenges have Ranks from 1 to 3.

A stronghold challenge is a threat against or opportunity for Leanheart Edge as a whole. Although your character takes the lead in addressing it, it can affect everyone. Characters can co-operate on a stronghold challenge, pooling their attributes to face it. Stronghold challenges have Ranks from 3 to 5.

In most cases, once a challenge has been stated by the GM, there is an opportunity to avoid facing it, yielding the fight without risking the loss of more than you can afford.

| Rank | Personal | Stronghold | Difficulty |
|------|----------|------------|------------|
| 1 | Yes | | 5 |
| 2 | Yes | | 10 |
| 3 | Yes | Yes | 15 |
| 4 | | Yes | 20 |
| 5 | | Yes | 25 |

Using Attributes

You need to select a number of attributes equal to the Rank of the challenge to use. You can only use attributes that are appropriate to the challenge in some way. As you describe how your character will face the challenge, you can try to position him so that his favoured attributes are shown to be relevant. For example, if he was leading soldiers to intercept a small invasion force, you could describe setting up an ambush so that his 'Wilderness Tracker' attribute can be used.

If your character has a seat on the Council, he also has access to Leanheart Edge's attributes. As with his own attributes, he can only employ one if it is appropriate to the challenge. Unlike his own attributes, he might be in competition with other Council members for access to the attributes. If your character is not in the immediate environs of Leanheart Edge, many attributes might be unavailable unless suitable arrangements were made ahead of time. For example, the main armies of the stronghold are only available to a travelling character if they were sent out with him.

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An important exception is when Leanheart Edge itself is under attack. Any character can make use of its defences to repel the attackers.

If there aren't enough appropriate attributes available you can select fewer attributes than normal. This is unlikely to be to your benefit.

Outcome

Roll all the dice for the attributes you selected and add up the total. Compare that total to the difficulty of the challenge.

| Roll - Difficulty | Outcome | Attributes |
|-------------------|---------|--------------------------------|
| +5 or more | Success | Remove stress from 1 attribute |
| 0 to +4 | Success | No change |
| -5 to -1 | Failure | No change |
| -10 to -6 | Failure | Stress 1 attribute |
| -15 to -11 | Failure | Stress 2 attributes |
| -20 to -16 | Failure | Stress 3 attributes |
| -25 to -21 | Failure | Stress 4 attributes |

If you have scored a success, you have defeated the challenge. If you have scored a failure, then all is not lost. You always have the option of stressing an extra attribute (on top of any stresses you are required to apply) to turn the failure into a success.

If you are required to stress an attribute, it must be an attribute used in the challenge. Mark off that the attribute has been stressed. If you are lucky enough to be able to remove stress from an attribute, it need not be an attribute used in the challenge, and can even be from a Leanheart Edge attribute, assuming you currently have access to that attribute.

You and the GM collaborate on describing the outcome of the challenge, based on the dice roll.

Stressing Attributes

If you ever stress an attribute that is already stressed, then you do not stress it again. Instead, you permanently reduce the attribute by one dice step. Stressed d4 attributes cannot be reduced, and you must stress different attributes used in the challenge instead. A single attribute can be stressed multiple times in the same Challenge Roll. If you are using one of Leanheart Edge's attributes, you can stress it instead of one of your character's attributes.

A stressed attribute is one that is under pressure. Stress can represent low morale in a body of soldiers, a niggling injury in a sword-arm, a temporary shortfall of money or some other transitory issue with the attribute.

When an attribute is reduced, this is a serious change in the attribute itself. This can be desertion or casualties amongst fighting men, a serious wound to the sword-hand or a loss of wealth.

Wounds and Death

You can choose to have your character take stress on his own health rather than on an attribute. Mark off the Wound box.

If you take a stress on health rather than an attribute when your character is already wounded, then your character dies.

This can only be forced to happen if the other attributes in the challenge were at the d4 level and are already stressed. On the other hand, you may choose to have your character sacrifice himself heroically.

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Co-operation

If multiple characters are contributing to a stronghold challenge, then their players need to agree on how the stresses are split between them. If any of Leanheart Edge's attributes were included, they must agree on which of those receive stress. If they can't agree, then one random player applies all of the stress to their character and Leanheart Edge as they see fit.

Character Against Character

Should co-operation break down and one character stand in opposition to another, then a slightly different procedure is followed. It is treated as a personal challenge, with a Rank the GM sets, and both characters select and roll attributes. The final total of the opponent is treated as the difficulty, and the outcome read off the table as usual. There can be only one winner, but either character can choose to stress an attribute to add 5 to their total. This can be done in response to the other player doing so, but each character can only take this extra stress once per Challenge Roll.

6. The Council

Under the authority of the Empire, Leanheart Edge is ruled by a Council. Its starting membership is Imperially-appointed, drawing on trusted Imperial politicians, commanders and the remnants of the Middle Kingdom. It has been given suzerainty over the castle of Leanheart Edge and the farmlands around it. It is expected to handle its own affairs with minimal support from the Empire itself.

To that end, it is allowed to operate as an independent state. Naturally, that tacit support would evaporate should it ever start working against Imperial interests. The Council is free to appoint new members, change its procedures and so on. As long as it continues to act as a buffer between the Empire and its enemies to the east, it will be permitted to exist.

Procedures

Day-to-day affairs are decided by a simple open vote of Council members. The Prolocutor, the chairman of the Council, does not vote himself but breaks ties.

There are two important meetings each season, one at the start and one at the end. Strictly speaking, the meeting at the close of one season would be the same as the meeting at the start of the next, but it's more convenient for play to treat them as separate occasions. At the start of a season, the Council hears what problems it has to face and decides who will be sent to deal with each of them. At the end of the season, reports are heard on how they fared and other business is conducted.

A new Prolocutor is elected at the start of each season, with ties being broken randomly. The old Prolocutor gets a vote.

Any Council member can nominate someone as a new member. If a second Council member agrees, the proposal is put to the vote. The nominating and seconding members do not vote. The Prolocutor can nominate and second new members.

The Council can cast out a member by a simple vote. That member can vote on their suspension. However, even if the vote succeeds, the Prolocutor can veto his ejection.

Votes to change how the Council is run can also be vetoed by the Prolocutor.

The Heroic Game

If the Council always makes decisions in the best interests of Leanheart Edge, putting aside whatever personal differences they have, the stronghold will be best placed to face its challenges. In this sort of game the tone is typically optimistic, with each season bringing improvement.

The Cut-Throat Game

On the other hand, if the members of the Council are concerned primarily with their own wealth and influence, they will work against each other and jockey for position in an unseemly manner. Leanheart Edge is merely a means to an end for them, and they won't hesitate to weaken its position if will improve their standing. Even if the characters are less Machiavellian, mutual distrust between historical enemies might inhibit the efficient functioning of the Council. It is essential that any character betrayal is not the

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result of out-of-character problems, nor should the risk be taken that it could be interpreted as such.

The Mid-Game

Usually, the game will fall somewhere between the two extremes. It is important that all the players understand what tone the game will take, and are happy with it. Some characters might be heroic and some cut-throat, or every character can have moments of both.

Council Developments

In the course of the game, it's entirely possible that the politics of the Council will change dramatically. Ultimately it's up to the GM how to handle specific situations, but some likely possibilities and suggestions as to how to handle them are presented here.

Minor Council Members

With a small number of players, the Council might only have a small number of members, particularly if some players pick characters who do not start with a seat. In this case, for each player-controlled character on the Council, there is also a minor Council member. These minor councillors do not have attributes and do not face challenges, they only hold votes at the Council. At the start of the game, each minor member is allied to one of the player characters on the Council, voting as they direct. During play, however, their allegiance can shift as bribery, intimidation and other politicking take place. They can even become allied to non-Council members, allowing a vote by proxy.

The Informal Council

If no player chooses a character with a Council seat, then the arrangement with the Empire is rather more informal. The

characters do their best to keep the stronghold safe with only minimal support from their stronger neighbour.

The Figurehead

If only one player chooses a character with a Council seat, then that character is nominally in charge, at least as far as the Empire is concerned, but in practice he must act with the approval of the other characters or be unceremoniously removed from his position. The figurehead can assign Leanheart Edge attributes to other players as needed.

Tyranny

If it somehow becomes the case that there is only a single member of the Council left, that character can assume complete control of all aspects of Leanheart Edge. He can permit other characters to use its attributes, but retains overall control until he is ousted from his position.

Rogue Characters

A character who is exiled from Leanheart Edge, or chooses to abandon it, remains as a character but outside the control of the stronghold and possibly even working against it. Each season, the character introduces a problem related to his own activities. Even if he isn't opposed to the Council, his conduct still makes trouble for the stronghold somehow.

Council-in-Exile

If there is more than one rogue character, then they may form their own Council, challenging the legitimacy of the original Council. Each Council deals with its own problems, but the GM-set problem each season it always related to the opposing Council in some way. Should the Council-in-Exile take control of Leanheart Edge itself,

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then their roles are reversed. Rival Councils can poach stronghold attributes from each other, where it makes sense to do so.

Betrayal of the Empire

The most controversial decision the Council might make would be to change sides - to ally itself with the Khaganate and oppose the

Empire itself. This may well cause those on the Council with personal loyalty to the Empire to leave in disgust. Support from their new allies will be hard to secure, and the betrayal might drive the Empire to attack Leanheart Edge with full force. Unless the Khaganate has been enjoying significant military success, it's unlikely the stronghold will be able to hold the Empire off.



7. Magic

Magic is an established part of the world, but it is not exactly commonly practised. It takes considerable patience and effort to master even the most basic spell, and only a few privileged individuals have the luxury of the opportunity to learn it. It is not an everyday part of life, as even the most straightforward workings have potential for disaster.

Imperial wizardry is the product of political agreements between the the main colleges of wizards and the Imperial throne itself. By allying themselves with the Empire, the wizards enjoy protection and patronage, and have Imperial law to enforce the rule that only they may practise magic.

The Houses of the Middle Kingdom each have their own, unique tradition of magic, which were only ever taught to the immediate family of the Lord. Their refusal to obey Imperial edicts regarding the use of magic were one of the causes of friction between them and the Empire. The threat that the Khaganate poses has made the disagreement seem less important since the agreement to co-operate at Leanheart Edge.

Laws of Magic

MAGIC CAN DO THE IMPOSSIBLE, BUT ONLY THE IMPOSSIBLE

This limitation means that any task that can be achieved by mundane means cannot be performed by magic. Directly killing an enemy, for example, is known to be beyond magic. As people can recover naturally from all but the worst diseases, magical cures are incredibly rare. Magical diseases, on the other hand, are more common. Flight is one of the most frequently mastered disciplines,

although care must be taken that should the magic falter there will not be horrible repercussions. The dead cannot be brought back to live through magic, which has led some to speculate that perhaps there is an as yet undiscovered mundane means of doing so.

Many practitioners get around the limitation by exaggerating scale or shortening time-frame, but the behaviour of magic is not always consistent.

MAGIC CAN BE REVERSED

Every spell's effects can be reversed. This acts as an extra constraint on spells, preventing any spell from causing permanent changes, but also provides a means for even the magically-ignorant to deal with spells they encounter.

The reversal of the spell is always something that can be done with no magical talent, and always something poetically appropriate to the spell. A spell to turn someone into a frog can traditionally be reversed by the kiss of someone of the opposite gender. Someone aged be a century might be restored to youth by the tears of a child, and someone keeping themselves young through sorcery might have their true age reassert itself if they even see their reflection. The reversal is not always the same for the same spell, and isn't known even to the caster. After the spell is cast, someone with magical knowledge can attempt to discern what the reversal might be.

Traditions of Magic

Imperial wizardry codifies magic by its application, leading to such fields as Travel Arcanum, Divination Arcanum and Communication Arcanum. Imperial wizards typically know a handful of such branches, some better than others.

The magic of the Middle Kingdom is rather different. Each House has a medium, such as stone, through which they can work their magic. This gives their magic greater versatility for less dedicated study, but many of their spells are somewhat ad-hoc and not very efficient.

Little was known about the magic of the east until recently, when spell-casters from the Khaganate made their presence known. In this tradition, there are no limitations on the kind of spell any practitioner can cast, but their strength depends on the time of day. The day is divided into four quarters, and the use of magic in each of them is taught as a completely different discipline. The division is as follows:

3am - 9am: Song of the Morning

9am - 3pm: Song of the Afternoon

3pm - 9pm: Song of the Evening

9pm - 3am: Song of the Night

8. The Game Master

The GM, or whoever is currently taking on that role if you don't have a permanent GM, is responsible for throwing obstacles in the paths of the characters, creating compelling aspects of the world and making sure all the players are enjoying the game.

Despite the seemingly adversarial nature of a GM, it is not appropriate for him to 'play to win' by making every Challenge Roll as difficult as possible, or by using his narrative power to undermine what the other players are trying to do. Denying them any narrative input turns them into watchers rather than participants.

Neither should the GM turn every quest into a cakewalk, by making the challenges as easy as possible or outright narrating incredible successes without any drama. The balancing act is in making success difficult enough that it feels like a genuine victory without making that victory too unlikely.

Scene Flow

In a fantasy role-playing game with significant travel, there's a tendency to plot out encounters like a string of beads, one after the other. While this approach can help convey the passage of time, and provide a structure for a series of set difficulty battles, it's less appropriate for Leanheart Edge. Elide time spent travelling when you can. Let the characters arrive at their destination and then let them deal with all the problems and side-stories at once. It helps create a sense of a vivid world. When a group of characters arrives at a distant location, it can be a

smaller version of the decisions that the Leanheart Edge Council makes - who deals with what, and how.

By consolidating what might otherwise be a series of disconnected scenes into a larger, single scene, you can save time and give the players meaningful choices. By moving straight to the next significant part of the story rather than stalling the action with minor scenes, you can keep the level of player involvement high.

Responding to Suggestions

When players have their characters introduce a problem at the seasonal Council meeting, it's more than a way to allow them some time in the limelight. It allows them to directly influence what happens to Leanheart Edge, and steer the course of the game towards activities they find rewarding. Often, the character who introduces the problem will be well-suited to solve it, so players can signal to the group what they would like their characters to do.

At other times, you should be responsive to player suggestions when narrating scenes, even if that player's character is not present. Using those suggestions makes players feel like they have more impact on the story, and means you can keep some of your ideas back for a later scene.

NPCs

Non-Player Characters are at their best when they have independent goals. Rather than simple quest-givers, henchmen or victims,

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they should be prepared to negotiate, complain or assist as befits whatever agenda they have.

Reincorporation

Wherever possible, re-use non-player characters that have appeared before. By having NPCs who have dealt with representatives of Leanheart Edge before, they will have already have formed opinions about the enterprise and respond in a more realistic way. Developing relationships between the main characters and the rest of the cast gives the story more texture.

When introducing an NPC for the first time, you might want to establish that he has met one of the characters previously. You can frame the new character as a potential ally or potential obstacle with that description.

Voicing

When a player is acting on behalf of an NPC, it's important for the GM to make it clear how much autonomy the character should demonstrate.

At the simplest level, the player just speaks on behalf of the character, turning to the GM to make decisions for him. At the most complex level, the GM can allow the player to invent his own agenda for the character and act accordingly. In the latter case, both the GM and the player voicing the NPC must keep on their toes so they don't work at cross-purposes. Sometimes the GM might have to revise what plans he has made to accommodate what has just happened - this is not a bad thing unless the player in question is clearly attempting to wrest overall control of the story in his own direction and disregarding the GM's plans entirely.

Red Herrings

Not everything you introduce to the story must be relevant to the main story-line. In fact, it creates a more vivid game world if there are things that aren't. This helps flesh out NPCs and provide ideas for future problems. Characters can demonstrate what sort of people they are in how they respond to this minor matters, or indeed if they notice them at all. By having a rich tapestry you avoid signalling the main aspects of the plot too obviously.

Call for a Challenge Roll

Challenge Rolls should only occur when a significant risk is present. If the situation has no potential for an immediate set-back for either the character or the interests of Leanheart Edge, the outcome should be adjudicated based on attributes rather than rolled for. The natural place for a Challenge Roll is at a climax of some sort, after preparations have been made and some groundwork laid that will let you decide how difficult the challenge is going to be.

Setting Difficulty

There are two major factors you should consider when setting the difficulty of a challenge.

The first factor is what the narrative suggests. If all the discussion of the task has talked it up as difficult, then play to that expectation. Similarly, if the consensus was that the task was going to be easy, then it would be unsporting to make the Challenge Roll as difficult as possible. The outcomes of previous challenges at that location can be used to guide the difficulty of the current challenge. Often, past successes will make challenges easier and vice versa. If the

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opposite is the case, it will usually be because an enemy has responded to his early failures or has grown over-confident.

The second factor is what the game needs. A character who has suffered reductions in attributes already is probably overdue being cut some slack. A character who has gone from strength to strength can weather a tougher challenge and probably needs to be taught that pride comes before a fall. In the same way that the story can suggest that a task will be relatively easy, the players can signal their belief about its difficulty by how many and which characters they choose to send to deal with it. While confounding those expectations every now and again prevents them from becoming complacent, most of the time you should take your lead from their assumptions. The length of a particular story arc is also important. The more Challenge Rolls that the characters are called upon to make, the more stresses they will pick up on their attributes and the harder it will be to succeed at the rolls without suffering reductions in attributes.

The categories of difficulty for Challenge Rolls are broad. For either a personal or stronghold challenge, there are only three levels of difficulty. This means you don't have to be particularly precise in setting the difficulty.

Attributes

You should be generous when deciding what attributes can be used in a challenge. While it can become dull when a player keeps using the same rationale to incorporate a strong attribute, allowing for somewhat unusual justifications encourages imaginative play and can promote variety.

When a character wants to assist another through some early preparation, there are two ways you can choose to adjudicate it. The first is to take the help into consideration when setting the difficulty of the Challenge Roll. For stronghold challenges, you can allow characters to provide attribute dice even if they are not present for the plan's fruition, as long as they were a significant part of the preparation.

Skirmishes and Battles

Not all combat-related attributes are suitable for every fight.

A scuffle with a small number of opponents is a personal challenge, and personal combat attributes and elite units are of use in it. Rank and file soldiery can rarely contribute meaningfully on account of the small number of enemies.

A small-scale skirmish, such as an ambush, can be either a personal challenge or a stronghold challenge. All units of soldiers can fight effectively, and personal skill can make enough of a difference to still be useful.

A large battle is a stronghold challenge. Personal skill won't make enough of a difference to alter the course of the fight. Units of soldiers and tactical attributes can be used.

Stressing Attributes

Sometimes a character will behave in a way that shows disregard for one of his attributes, or is a calculated but punishing use of it to gain some situational advantage. Other times the narrative might suggest that an attribute is under pressure. In these cases, you can force the attribute to become stressed. This should be done rarely, and only when the

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consensus at the table is that there should be some sort of repercussion for what has happened.

In some cases, it might be appropriate to force the character to take a stress as a wound, although you should hesitate to do so if the character has already taken that wound stress, as a further one kills him.

Ending a Mission

The last step of a quest should almost always be a stronghold Challenge Roll. The difficulty should depend on the number of characters participating and how well the quest has gone up until that point. As a dramatic conclusion to a story arc that might be the last Challenge Roll a character is called upon to make, you can afford to err on the difficult side.

This final roll usually determines success or failure of the mission itself; unless you think there is a compelling reason to separate the two. As it is always possible to succeed at a roll, if you are able to stress an extra attribute in the process, narrow victories can always be squeezed from the direct of circumstances. If this is the last Challenge Roll for a character this season, then he doesn't have to worry about further stresses and can act accordingly.

Over the course of a season, the 'sweet spot' you want to aim for is to have a little under half of the characters reduce an attribute and for almost all missions to succeed, to balance progress and setbacks.

Choosing Problems

If the problems that the players choose reflect their wishes for the direction the story takes, then the problem you choose reflects your wishes. As you pick your problem last, you can consider what types of problems have

already appeared and pick one that either complements an already established problem or explores a different area to any of the others.

Many of the suggested problems for you to set are significant threats to Leanheart Edge, and you should not shy away from talking them up as the biggest problem that season and setting the difficulty accordingly.

The Long Term

In a long game, a character might enjoy enough success that all he attributes the player cares about are rated at d12. At this point, he probably has enough political clout and resources to set himself up independently of Leanheart Edge. He leaves Leanheart Edge and its Council behind in order to pursue his own ambitions. For Middle Kingdom characters, this might entail giving up their ancestral lands entirely and becoming a noble in the service of the Empire or establishing a new fiefdom far away. If significant lands have been reclaimed from the Khaganate, then a character might assume personal control over them.

The upshot is that by that point the character is too powerful to remain a part of the ad-hoc arrangements of Leanheart Edge. Even if his loyalties still lie with it, he has too many other responsibilities to take an active interest. The character becomes an NPC, and the player introduces a new character from the unused ones in the list.

If Leanheart Edge's attribute reach similar levels, then the castle has grown strong beyond even its earlier heights. As described earlier, the time is ripe to take back land the Khaganate despoiled, and split up Leanheart Edge's resources to better protect the larger area. Eventually, the Middle Kingdom itself might rise from the ashes.

Character Sheets

The blank character sheet that follows can be used for any character. You can record your name, the character's name and whether or not he is a member of the Council.

There is space for his attributes, their dice and a check box for when they become stressed. A stress box is provided for becoming Wounded.

The final section has space for brief descriptions of the suggested problems you can choose from at the start of a season. You can copy the suggestions from this book into the space, to save having to refer back to it. As

problems are solved you can erase them and write in your own ideas as they come to you, so it's easy to pick one during a Council meeting at the start of a season.

Stronghold Sheet

The blank stronghold sheet can be used for Leanheart Edge or any other stronghold you control during the game. It has the same attribute space (without a Wounded box, of course). The space for problems is intended to be used to write in the current season's problems.