

# **Tragedy and Triumph**

A Roleplaying Game of Forgotten Heroes

# The Heroes and the Forgotten

Herakles. Beowulf. Cúchlainn. Arjuna. Thor. Aladdin. King Arthur. Gilgamesh. Jesus. Sun Wukong. Ilmarinen.

Names that echo through myth and history, heroes that have inspired generations, subjects of poems, music, literature, plays, whose great deeds are forever remembered. They live forever in the stories people have told each other from generation to generation, enchanting children and adults alike..

This is not who you are.

You are the ones who were discarded, the ones who have no songs or stories, the ones who slipped out of humanity's collective memory. You don't even get to be the great villains or beasts the heroes defeat, or the mentors or lesser characters who help them on their way to greatness. You were left behind.

Left behind in the Silence, the Forgotten Land, the Unremembrance. Your home has many names, none of them important because who would speak of it save you who are already there, and what need have you to speak of a place you cannot leave?

There is little to speak of even should you want to. The sky is eternally overcast, no sun or moon or stars to divide the eternal gloom into days and nights. Most of it is wrapped in the thick fog that rises from the oily sea and shadowy bogs, and the few crumbling mountain peaks that rise above it are swept by a keening wind that cuts through cloth and thoughts alike. Everything is murky, grey, and rotting.

Everything apart from the Pit. In a place of gloomy half-light it is the only perfect darkness, a spiral of worn, water-slick stairs going down into the black depths. It's the only permanent landmark here, where everything else shifts and slides when nobody looks, where the landscape forgets its own form from one minute to the next.

It's where everyone goes when they can no longer stand the grey, when the cutting winds around the peaks is no longer enough to empty their minds of sadness. Down they go, some slipping on the treacherous steps to fall silently into the darkness, some disappearing into the shadows still on their feet. Many go alone, but sometimes one leaving will pull others with them, like a flock of birds flying south as winter comes, together circling the echoing darkness until they are all lost from sight.

Now your time has come. You have lost the will to stay among the weak and tired, your own weaknesses and exhaustion carrying you here, to the edge of the Pit. Perhaps you look around in a last farewell to a place you can no longer stand, perhaps you take that first step without looking back. Soon enough it is all the same; soon enough all memories of the Grey Land fades and all you can see is the cracked, damp stone of the next step before you, each one deeper in shadow than the last. Maybe someone is following you, or maybe you are following them. It no longer matters.

You are all alone.

## Who Are You?

**Name the three most important events of your story.** These are the things for which heroes are remembered. Make them big! Each of them should be either a great Triumph – the defeat of a dangerous enemy, a journey to a fabled location, the theft of an unattainable object – or an equally great Tragedy – the mistaken slaying of your beloved, death at the hands of your own child, betrayal by your dearest friend. Most heroes have at least one of each, but not all.

Give a brief description of each of these events to the other players. You can each tell your whole

story at once, or you can take turns with one episode each. Groups who enjoy telling stories may wish to ignore the 'brief' and give more detail, but you should make sure everyone is in agreement on the difference between adding color to the narrative and hogging the spotlight. Make a note of each on your Heroic Scroll.

**Name your three advantages.** These are the abilities that feature in your Triumphs, the personality traits that set you apart from mere mortals, the skills and gifts that help you win victory over your foes. **Rank one above the others.** This should be the one you use the most often, whether it is your great strength, your sharp tongue, your cloak of invisibility, your skill at arms, or something else. Note them on your Heroic Scroll, clearly marking the one you rank highest.

**Name your three weaknesses.** Every great hero has some weak spots, vulnerabilities, something that makes them less than perfect. These should be the common threads of your Tragedies: Your tendency to trust too much, your penchant for despair, the one weak point of your unbreakable armor. **Rank one as your greatest weakness.** This is your biggest fault, the one thing that will always trip you up. Note all your weaknesses on your Heroic Scroll, clearly marking the one ranked highest.

Last but not least, **name yourself.** Everyone else may have forgotten who you are, but you can still remember.

Now you are ready to step into the final dark of the Pit.

## The Descent

The secret of the Pit is this: It is empty. It contains nothing but what you bring with you. There are no great monsters there, no spirits to prey on your fears and hopes and dreams, nothing but you and your story.

The promise of the Pit is the chance to relive that story one last time, to perhaps make it a little brighter, a little more striking, a little more touching.

A little more memorable.

During your descent into the Pit you will each take turns to face one of your Triumphs or Tragedies until you have all relived your full story.

When it is your turn, **choose one of the triumphs or tragedies** as noted on your Heroic Scroll and **describe the opening scene. Name the two possible outcomes correlating to success or failure.** Then **divide four roles in the story among the other players.**

## The Triumph

If the scene is a Triumph, all but one of the roles should be *obstacles* and the last should be a *helper*. One may be the wooden giant you are trying to slay; one may be his army of leaf-men; one may be the forest itself, dark and full of grasping roots and stinging briars; one may be the blessing of a goddess guiding your steps and whispering in your ear. **Hand each of them a die.** Your main obstacle should have a d10, the other forces arrayed against you should have a d6 each, and one single role that may help you should have a d8. **Take 2d6 for yourself.**

**To successfully complete the Triumph you must reach the key goal.** Name this goal clearly and explicitly. It should be simple and unambiguous – 'Slay the dragon', 'Steal the key to the Garden of Love', 'Marry the king' – so that there can be no doubt about whether you have achieved victory or not.

There are three steps that must be completed before you can attempt the final challenge of your Triumph:

1. Face each of the *obstacles* at least once each,
2. Be aided by your *helper* at least once,
3. Gain at least one *mark of triumph*.

You must also avoid getting *three marks of failure*.

**The other players will now take turns setting scenes featuring the obstacles.** These need not relate to the role or roles they have in the scene, but should conform to the general description of the Triumph you have previously given. Each scene should be focused on one of the obstacles, though the others may be present as well.

Together you and the other players play out the scene, you describing your actions and they each playing the role or roles they have been given. Players whose roles are not present in the scene may still offer color commentary, ideas on what could happen next, or advice to you on how to proceed.

**At least once during the scene you must face a *challenge* to defeat the obstacle.** When this happens the player having the role of the obstacle rolls their die, and then you choose one of the advantages noted on your Heroic Scroll to use against it. **If you are using the advantage you ranked highest you roll both your dice, otherwise you roll only one of them.**

**If your result is at least as high as the obstacle's, you have succeeded.** Continue to play out the scene until it is time to move on to the next.

**If your result is lower than the obstacle's, you have failed.** You will get one more chance to defeat this obstacle, so continue to play out the scene until there is an appropriate opportunity for this. Then repeat the same procedure as above. **If you fail again, you can get aid from your helper,** if their role would be helpful in the current situation. That means the helper rolls their die and you use their result instead of your own, but every time you call on your helper in a scene the size of their die is reduced by one, from d8 to d6 to d4 to d3 to d2, and finally to nothing. (The next scene, whether the helper is the same or not, they will start anew with a d8.)

**Once the scene is concluded you will earn *marks of triumph* or *failure* or both.**

- If you successfully completed the scene without the aid of your helper and the obstacle's final roll was four or higher, you gain a mark of triumph.
- If the obstacle's die rolled the highest possible result but you still succeeded, you gain an (additional) mark of triumph.
- If the obstacle's final roll was four or lower and you failed the challenge, you gain a mark of failure.
- If you used your highest ranked ability at any time during the scene but still failed both attempts, you gain a mark of failure.

If you end any scene with three marks of failure, your Triumph has been averted. Did you misremember your own story? Has reliving it changed what actually happened? You don't know. You only know that what was one of your most cherished memories has become a lie.

Once you have faced each of the obstacles, gained one or more marks of triumph, and at least once received help (successful or not) from your helper, you are ready to face the final challenge of your Triumph. If there are still parts of the story that has not been told you may at your option play them out as full scenes above in the hopes of earning additional marks of triumph, but note that this also risks adding more marks of failure. If you do not wish to take this risk you can instead play out these scenes without challenges, simply collaborating on a description of the events.

The final scene will have you face the main obstacle of the Triumph (which you should already have faced once during the scenes leading up to it) and try to reach the key goal. This works the same way as described above, except you earn double the marks of success and failure for this scene.

If you still have less than three marks of failure after the final scene is completed, you have completed your Triumph. Note the total number of marks of triumph and failure you earned.

## The Tragedy

Structurally and mechanically a Tragedy works exactly the same as a Triumph, but the meaning of each element is different. Therefore the mechanics are repeated here with some changes in wording, but every interaction with the rules will be exactly the same.

If the scene is a Tragedy, all but one of the roles should be *comforts* and the last should be an *adversary*. The comforts are the support you have from your friends, your loved ones, your trusty allies, your own abilities, while the adversary is someone or something that is working against you. **Hand each of them a die.** Your main comfort should have a d10, the others should have a d6 each, and the adversary should have a d8. **Take 2d6 for yourself.**

**To successfully complete the Tragedy you must reach the key goal.** Name this goal clearly and explicitly. It should be simple and unambiguous – 'Be slain by the dragon', 'Lose the key to the Garden of Love', 'Become the widow of the King' – so that there can be no doubt about whether you have achieved victory or not.

There are three steps that must be completed before you can attempt the final challenge of your Tragedy:

4. Face each of the *comforts* at least once each,
5. Be hindered by your *adversary* at least once,
6. Gain at least one *mark of tragedy*.

You must also avoid getting *three marks of comfort*.

**The other players will now take turns setting scenes featuring the comforts.** These need not relate to the role or roles they have in the scene, but should conform to the general description of the Tragedy you have previously given. Each scene should be focused on one of the comforts, though the others may be present as well.

Together you and the other players play out the scene, you describing your actions and they each playing the role or roles they have been given. Players whose roles are not present in the scene may still offer color commentary, ideas on what could happen next, or advice to you on how to proceed.

**At least once during the scene you must face a *challenge* to reject the comfort.** When this happens the player having the role of the comfort rolls their die, and then you choose one of the weaknesses noted on your Heroic Scroll to use against it. **If you are using the weakness you ranked highest you roll both your dice, otherwise you roll only one of them.**

**If your result is at least as high as the comfort's, you have rejected that comfort.** Continue to play out the scene until it is time to move on to the next.

**If your result is lower than the comfort's, you have failed to reject it.** You will get one more chance to reject this comfort, so continue to play out the scene until there is an appropriate opportunity for this. Then repeat the same procedure as above. **If you fail again, you can be betrayed by your adversary**, if their role would be useful for that in the current situation. That means the adversary rolls their die and you use their result instead of your own, but every time you call on your adversary in a scene the size of their die is reduced by one, from d8 to d6 to d4 to d3 to d2, and finally to nothing. (The next scene, whether the adversary is the same or not, they will start

anew with a d8.)

**Once the scene is concluded you will earn *marks of tragedy* or *comfort* or both.**

- If you successfully completed the scene without being betrayed by your adversary and the comfort's final roll was four or higher, you gain a mark of tragedy.
- If the comfort's die rolled the highest possible result but you still succeeded, you gain an (additional) mark of tragedy.
- If the comfort's final roll was four or lower and you failed the challenge, you gain a mark of comfort.
- If you used your highest ranked weakness at any time during the scene but still failed both attempts, you gain a mark of comfort.

If you end any scene with three marks of comfort, your Triumph has been averted. Did you misremember your own story? Has reliving it changed what actually happened? You don't know. You only know that what was one of your worst moments has changed into something happier, though probably far less memorable.

Once you have faced each of the comforts, gained at least one mark of tragedy, and at least once has been betrayed (successful or not) by your adversary, you are ready to face the final challenge of your Tragedy. If there are still parts of the story that has not been told you may at your option play them out as full scenes above in the hopes of earning additional marks of tragedy, but note that this also risks adding more marks of comfort. If you do not wish to take this risk you can instead play out these scenes without challenges, simply collaborating on a description of the events.

The final scene will have you face the main comfort of the Tragedy (which you should already have faced once during the scenes leading up to it) and try to reach the key goal. This works the same way as described above, except you earn double the marks of tragedy and comfort for this confrontation.

If you still have less than three marks of comfort after the final scene is completed, you have completed your Tragedy. Note the total number of marks of tragedy and comfort you earned.

## **What Does It All Mean?**

Perhaps nothing. After all, nobody knows what happens to those who enter the Pit. Are they forgotten for all time? Do they return to their stories, living them over and over again? Do they find a place in the songs and stories parents tell their children?

If you want, you may use the Scales of Judgement to see if the new telling of your story makes you worthy of remembrance.

Add up all the marks you have earned. If you have fifteen or more you have broken the chains of your fate and can now take your place among the great heroes of myth and legend.

If your marks of triumph and comfort are at least two more than your marks of tragedy and failure you are now a celebrated hero, remembered for your great deeds.

If your marks of tragedy and failure are at least two more than your marks of triumph and comfort you are now a tragic figure, remembered for your struggles against fate and your own nature.

If the difference between your number of marks of tragedy and failure on one hand and triumph and comfort on the other is less than two, you are now an ambiguous character, a hero with a darkness in them or a tragic figure that nevertheless achieved greatness.

If your total number of marks is less than fifteen, you are still forgotten. Having passed down into the Pit you are now not even remembered by yourself as you go wherever stories go when they are no longer told.

In either case, your story is now over. You have passed through the eternal darkness of the Pit and need no longer wonder what might have been.

## **Sample Heroic Scroll**

Name: Margora

Advantages: Courage, the Golden Spear of the Sun, eyes of the hawk

Weaknesses: Pride, loyalty, lust for adventure

## **Sample Tragedy Setup**

Margora is facing one of her tragedies, the death of her lover Amhir at the hands of Hiwa, a former friend and ally consumed by jealousy.

Margora's player assigns the roles of the comforts 'Amhir's love' (d10), 'Margora's and Amhir's beautiful home' (d6), and 'Wealth and sufficiency' (d6) as well as the role of the betrayer 'Hiwa's jealousy' (d8) to the other players, then sets the scene by describing Margora and Amhir having breakfast together as the sun shines in through the curtains wafting gently in the balmy breeze.

Now Margora's player must face each of the comforts at least once and describe how her weaknesses overcome them and provoke Hiwa into murdering her lover. Note that as none of the players are given the roles of Amhir and Hiwa themselves, anyone, including Margora's player, is free to describe their actions within the confines of their own role.