

THE HUNT FOR HROTHGAR THE RED

A DARKHEART STORY

DARKHEART/PEN AND PAPER—THE SERIES
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RULES, GAME PLAY, AND GENERAL STYLE
Taken from and based on John Harper's famous *Lady Blackbird*, onesevendesign.com, and Timothy Adamson's *Lady Blackbird Companion*

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<http://penandpaperseries.com>

VERSION
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You traveled far to reach the realm of Northdale, home of the Dark King, Hrothgar the Red. Since years he schemed against the lands across the sea; the brutal assassination of Turgal, king of the dwarves of Karia, would not be the last of his crimes.

To prevent war, the Council of Eocmor gathered a secret party to accompany Uric, son of Turgal, on his mission to enter Northdale and put an end to the life of Hrothgar.

But alas! The journey starts ill-fated, as a vicious storm crashes the ship on the shores of Shemarq, the rocky plains inhabited by outcasts!

How will the heroes find their way through the hostile plains? Will they make contact with the mysterious Menelae, once the rulers of the land now known as Northdale? And if they reach Trebardoc, the melting pot, how will they learn about Hrothgar's whereabouts without being noticed?

Will they finally reach the Castle of the Dark King, hidden in the mountains of Ta-Karmal?

And even if they do, how will they defeat Hrothgar the Red, not only taking revenge but also preventing an upcoming war?



THE REALM OF NORTHDAL

The peninsula reaching into the Grey Sea was once ruled by the mysterious Menelae. Scholars believe, that it was Hrothgar the Red himself, who drove them into the toxic swamps of the north hundred years ago. Today, famous meadows have become barren plains, and the peasants flee into the deep woodlands or try to survive as part of the human scum that populates the sinful cities.

TREBARDOC

The thriving pirate city at the cape of Eawdun profits from the absence of anything close to formal laws; and Hrothgar's treasurers profit from the danegeld paid by merchants and pirates alike. It is here, where Hrothgar's rein is slackening more and more, and the first rebellious voices call out.

THE BARREN PLAINS OF SHEMARQ

Situated between Trebardoc in the east and the island of Maywold in the west, the plains of Shemarq are a stony desert littered with rocks shattered by demonic forces. The remains of its capital are inhabited by outcasts, which have to fear the pirates as well as the minions of Hrothgar.

THE BEAWOLD DELTA

Nearly all rivers in Northdale merge with the river Beawold. Its massive delta is a wetland, scattered with fertile meadows. Life is hard, but as the river is used as a waterway towards the mountains, several villages cling to the stream, providing the traders with food and shelter.

THE VELDT

On the eastern shore of Northdale lies the Veldt, a vast marshland which is nearly inhabitable, as its water is thick with a blueish, shimmering salt. In its heart live the

salt people, sturdy farmers and merchants, who have their own secrets to survive and who are allowed to follow their ways unharmed by Hrothgar's minions—much to the dismay of the Dark King, as people whisper.

THE MOUNTAINS OF TA-KARMAL

The thick, dark forests of Ta-Karmal are the refuge of the last free Northdalians, as well as the wild beasts of the mountains. Here they hide from Hrothgar's minions, despite living in their direct neighborhood; secrecy is their first and foremost commandment to survive.

THE VALLEY OF THE BLOOD LAKE

Hidden in the southern part of the mountains of Ta-Karmal lies the Blood Lake. Legend has it that Hrothgar slaughtered the Menelae in this valley, causing their blood to create the lake. It is here, where Hrothgar hides in the ruins of a once-great castle of a forgotten past.

THE PEOPLE OF NORTHDAL

The Northdalians: Mostly humans, settlers of old, who suffer from the rule of the Dark King.

The Salt People: Mysterious dwellers of the Veldt, selling their blue salt and serving forgotten demons for protection against the Dark King.

The Menelae: A gracious, cat-like folk, rulers of the past, seldom seen these days.

The Remnants: Rebellious rangers, humans, dwarves, and elves from the south, hiding in the woods.

The Townsmen: Merchants and craftsmen of all races, living side by side with the pirates.

The Pirates: The vermin of the seas can meet in public in the cities of Northdale.

URIC, SON OF TURGAL

Dwarven prince on a quest for revenge

TRAITS

Dwarven Noble

Etiquette, Educated, History, Lore, Wealth, Connections, Clan of Turgal, Languages

Warrior

Battle-Hardened, Melee Weapons, Dagger, Shield, Axe, Brawl, Throwing, Chainmail, [Two-Axe Style], [Outnumbered]

Bold

Brave, Reckless, Rescue, Escapes, [Outnumbered], [Suicidal]

Cavern-Dweller

Tunnels, Strong, Dim Light, Sense of Direction, Ores, [Endure], [Hold Breath]

Tags in [brackets] are qualities you don't have yet. You can buy them with advances. See the Rules Summary below, under Keys.

Key of the Mission

You hunt down Hrothgar the Red, not only for personal revenge, but also to foil his plans of an upcoming war. Hit your key when you take action to complete the mission. BUYOFF: Give up on your mission.

Key of the Warrior

You crave the crash and roar of battle the tougher the better. Hit your key when you do battle with worthy or superior foes. BUYOFF: Pass up an opportunity for a good fight.

Key of the Impostor

You are not the legal heir of Turgal's throne, but no one knows. Hit your key when you successfully act as prince. BUYOFF: Make it public.

Secret of Leadership

Once per session, you can give someone else a chance to re-roll a failed roll, by giving them orders, advice, or setting a good example.

Secret of Destruction

You can break things with your bare hands as if you were swinging a sledgehammer. It's scary.



TIRED



EXHAUSTED



BRUISED



INJURED



DEAD



MAD

RULES SUMMARY

ROLLING THE DICE

When you try to overcome an obstacle, you role dice. **Start with one die.** Add a die if you have a **trait** that can help you. If that trait has **any tags** that apply, add another die for each tag. Finally, add any number of dice from your personal **pool of dice** (your pool starts with 7 dice).

Roll all the dice you've gathered. Each die that shows **4 or higher** is a hit. You need hits equal to the **difficulty level** (usually 3) to pass the obstacle.

LEVELS: 2 EASY—3 DIFFICULT—4 CHALLENGING—5 EXTREME

If you pass, discard all the dice you rolled (including any pool dice you used). Don't worry, you can get your pool dice back.

If you don't pass, you don't yet achieve your goal. But, you get to keep the pool dice you rolled and **add another die to your pool.** The GM will escalate the situation in some way and you might be able to try again.

CONDITIONS

When events warrant or especially when you fail a roll, the GM may impose a **condition** on your character: Tired, Exhausted, Bruised, Injured, Dead, or Mad. When you take a condition, mark its box and say how it comes about. [Note: The "dead" condition just means "presumed dead" unless you say otherwise.]

HELPING

If your character is in a position to help another character, you can give them a die from your pool. Say what your character does to help. If the roll fails, you get your pool die back. If it succeeds, your die is lost.

KEYS

When you hit a Key, you can do one of two things:

- ☛ Take an experience point (XP)
- ☛ Add a die to your pool (up to a max of 10)

If you go into danger because of your key, you get 2 XP or 2 pool dice (or 1 XP and 1 pool die). When you have accumulated 5 XP, you earn an advance. You can spend an advance on one of the following:

- ☛ Add a new Trait (based on something you learned during play or on some past experience that has come to light)
- ☛ Add a tag to an existing trait
- ☛ Add a new Key (you can never have the same key twice)
- ☛ Learn a Secret (if you have the means to)

You can hold on to advances if you want, and spend them at any time, even in the middle of a battle!

Each key also has a buyoff. If the buyoff condition occurs, you have the option of removing the Key and earning two advances.

REFRESH

You can refresh your pool back to 7 dice by having a refreshment scene with another character. You may also remove a condition or regain the use of a Secret, depending on the details of the scene. A refreshment scene is a good time to ask questions (in character) so the other player can show off aspects of his or her PC—"Why did you volunteer for this mission?"—"What do you think of prince Uric?" etc.

AURORA OF GOLVARIA

Elven ambassador on Turgal's court

TRAITS

Elven Diplomat

Etiquette, Educated, Wealth, Connections, Authority, Convince, Argue

Master Sorceress

Spellcaster, Channeling, Wind, Shield, Sense, Blast, [Heal], [Hide]

Athletic

Run, Fencing, Duels, [Rapier], [Acrobatics]

Charm

Charisma, Presence, Command, Nobles, [Servants], [Soldiers]

Scholar

Literacy, History, Culture, Cosmology, Geography, Heraldry, Languages

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Key of the Paragon

As an ambassador, you act for your country and your people. Hit your key when you demonstrate your status or when your ambassador traits overcome a problem. BUYOFF: Quit your service.

Key of the Mission

You find and hunt down Hrothgar the Red, not only to prevent an upcoming war, but to mend the fragile relation to the dwarves. Hit your key when you take action to complete the mission. BUYOFF: Give up on your mission.

Key of the Hidden Longing

You have a total crush on Rogar, but you don't want him to know it. Hit your key when you make a decision based on this secret affection or when you somehow show it indirectly. BUYOFF: Give up your secret desire or make it public.

Secret of the Pillar City

You are raised in the Pillar City and given the secrets of Magic. You have the Sorceress trait and the Spellcaster tag.

Secret of Inner Focus

Once per session, you can re-roll a failure when doing Sorcery.

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ROGAR OF SUKATRI ABBEY

Paladin of the Order of Luminien

TRAITS

Paladin of Luminien

Etiquette, Educated, Cosmology, Authority, Convince, Rank, Command, Strategy, Tactics, Languages

Knight

Brave, Equestrian, Fencing, Duels, Longsword, Breastplate, Discipline, Acrobatics

Charm

Charisma, Presence, Empathy, Soldiers, [Commoners]

Reputation

Trustworthy, Fearless, Honorable, [Reliable], [Heroic]

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Key of the Paladin

You are a loyal paladin of the Order of Luminien. Hit your key when you do something to benefit the Order. BUYOFF: Dishonor the Order.

Key of the Hero

You do what needs to be done, no matter the cost. You like to be considered one of the good guys. Hit your key when you act on behalf of others. BUYOFF: Act selfishly.

Key of the Brokenhearted

You no longer form bonds of love or friendship. Hit your key when you succumb to nostalgia or rebuff the affection of others. BUYOFF: Fall in love.

Secret of the Light of Destiny

As Luminien you can call forth the Light of Destiny to destroy all demonic forces around you. You can only do that once, like, once ever.

Secret of Rank

You are a lieutenant in the Order of Luminien and have the associated responsibilities and privileges.

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KASHA OF RU'HARI

Rogue and Traveller of the Lands of all People

TRAITS

Hoodlum

Quick, Brawling, Dagger, Criminal, Dirty Dricks, Tough, Streetwise, Escape

Athletic

Run, Endurance, Sneak, Reflexes, Acrobatics, Archery, [Fencing]

Thief

Alarms, Balance, Bluff, Lockpicks, Eye for Details, Stealth, [Trailing], [Traps]

Clever

Keen, Tricks, Notice Flaws, Observant, Negotiations, [Tactics], [Planning]

Tags in [brackets] are qualities you don't have yet. You can buy them with advances. See the Rules Summary below, under Keys.

Key of the Daredevil

You thrive in dangerous situations. Hit your key when you do something cool that is risky or reckless. BUYOFF: Be very careful.

Key of the Secret Mission

The sultan of Ru'Hari sent you to learn about the Council of Eocmor and the Dark King. Hit your key when you act on behalf of your mission. BUYOFF: Discard the mission or make it public.

Key of Banter

You have a knack for snappy comments. Hit your key when you say something that makes the others laugh or when you explain something from the view of a foreigner. BUYOFF: Everyone groans at one of your comments.

Secret of Reflexes

Once per session, you can re-roll a failure when doing anything involving grace, dexterity, or quick reflexes.

Secret of Stubbornness

Once per session, you can keep your pool dice when you succeed (so go ahead and use 'em all).

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RUNNING THE GAME

Tips, tricks, and advice for the GM

LISTEN & ASK QUESTIONS, DON'T PLAN

When you're the GM, don't try to plan what will happen. Instead, ask questions—lots and lots and make them pointed towards the things you're interested in. Like, prince Uric tries to rough up some scoundrel in a bar, and Kasha's player doesn't react. So ask Kasha's player, "You are streetwise, do you really think you should let Uric bash those scum if you want to keep a low profile?" And then, when Kasha wants to stop the prince, "What do you say to Uric? How do you calm him down?" and a few more like that.

Also ask questions like:

"Did you forget anything when you left your camp in a hurry?"

"The fire probably spreads out of control, doesn't it?"

"That sounds like a bold plan. What's the first step?"

"Do the two of you end up somewhere quiet together? Does anything happen between you?"

"Do you know anything about the Menelae? What are they like? Is it normal for them to wander Northdale?"

Keep that going at a steady pace and the game flies along pretty well. Part of the job of the GM is listening to what the players say, catching it, turning it around and looking at it, and seeing if there's anything else to be done with it.

The GM's job: Listen and reincorporate, play the NPCs with gusto, create interesting obstacles, and impose conditions as events warrant (especially when rolls fail).

SAY YES, LOOK FOR THE OBSTACLES

By default, characters can accomplish anything covered by their traits. They're competent and effective people, in other words. It's no fun to ask for a roll when there's no

cool obstacle in the way. Just say yes to the action, listen, and ask questions as usual. But also, be on the lookout for the opportunity to create obstacles as the action develops. Because you're asking leading questions and listening closely, they'll be all over the place, so it won't be too hard to spot them.

Obstacles can be people (pirates, outcasts, Hrothgar's minions, citizens, farmers), weather, monsters (plain prowlers, marshland boards), situations (fires, ambushes, negotiations, chases, escapes) or anything else you can imagine.

If a character tries something not covered by their traits, that's an obstacle right there: lack of experience and training. Lots of fun things can go wrong when you don't know what you're doing! Also, players will sometimes try things they're bad at so they can fail and add dice to their pool. It's a fine move for them and it gives you the chance to create more trouble, so everyone wins.

CONDITIONS

A condition constrains what the player should say about their character. It's a cue to tell the GM and players to pay attention to that thing and use it as material for the developing fiction. Gaming is just us saying stuff to each other, right? So you're like, "What do I say now?" and you look down and go, "Oh, I'm still mad from this demon we met. I bet I have still visions. 'Rogar, right behind you! Believe me, it's not just a peasant!'" For the GM, the conditions can create opportunities or give permissions. "You're injured, right? The Blind Guards can smell blood. They notice you despite your disguise and call an alarm." Sometimes a condition will become an Obstacle in its own right, calling for a roll to deal with it.

OBSTACLES & DIFFICULTIES

SHIPWRECKED

There's a reason why no one built a port on the shores of Shemarq.

OBSTACLES: Find provisions: 3. Fight the outcasts: 3. Negotiate with the outcasts: 4. Deal with the beasts: 4.

ESCALATIONS: Outcasts call for a hunt. You get lost. You starve.

THE SIEGE OF LAHYRST

Getting fresh provisions in the village of Lahyrst, you find yourself amidst a raid of outcasts.

OBSTACLES: Stay alive: 3. Flee: 3. Help the villagers: 4.

ESCALATIONS: You don't get provisions. You make yourself a target. Outcasts are trailing you.

PARLAY WITH PIRATES

To find the path to the castle of the Dark King, you'll have to deal with someone who knows.

OBSTACLES: Find a pirate's den: 3.

Make yourself a name: 3. Arrange a deal: 5. Spot their traps: 4.

ESCALATION: The pirates simply get at you. They prepare a trap. Someone informs Hrothgar's minions.

FIND ALLIES

You better not face the Dark King alone.

OBSTACLES: Find the rebels: 4. Convince them that your case is not lost: 4. Travel to the salt people: 3. Get help from the salt people: 5.

ESCALATION: You get lost in the Veldt. You meet a traitor. You become a tool of the rebels.

INTO THE WILD

In the dark forests of the mountains you should better know the way.

OBSTACLES: Find a track: 4. Deal with the beasts: 3. Deal with the Menelae: 5. Avoid Hrothgar's minions: 4.

ESCALATION: You get lost. You make

more enemies. Hrothgar learns about you.

THE BLIND GUARDS

Sooner or later, Hrothgar will learn about you and send his Blind Guards and the feared Cave Shamans.

OBSTACLES: Notice the ambush in time: 5. Fight the blind guards: 4. Fight the cave shamans: 4.

ESCALATION: The guards capture one of you for the king. They infect you and you become blind.

FIGHT HROTHGAR THE RED

Hrothgar the Red is known for his dark magic. You'd call in for some help before confronting him directly.

OBSTACLES: Sneak into the castle: 4. Overcome Hrothgar's magical defenses: 5. Withstand his mind control: 4.

ESCALATION: Hrothgar takes control of one of your party. Fight the king and yourself at the same time.

More Traits, Keys, and Secrets

TRAITS

Bounty Hunter

Demand, Disarm, Follow, Intimidate, No Mercy, Tireless, Tracking, Traps, Tricks of the Trade

Guard

Awareness, Cudgel, Defend, Disarm, Line of Duty, Notice, Restrain, Unflinching

Explorer

Curious, Aware, Nimble, Hardy, Ancient Lore, Languages, Ruins, Monsters, Myths, Maps

Keen

Insightful, Aware, Coiled, Liars, Traps, Danger, Sense Motives

Cunning

Deception, Misdirection, Disguise, Codes, Sneak, Hide

Pirate

Black Market, Dagger, Drink, Blood Money, Hard, Kidnap, Racketeer, Ruffian, Cutlass, Treacherous, Contacts, Underworld

Hrothgar's Minion

Cruel, Cutlass, Axe, High Pain Threshold, Brawl, Night Vision, Hunt as a Pack

Cave Shaman

Tracks, Wildlife, Spellcasting, Fire, Blast, Summoner

KEYS

Key of the Dark King

You are cursed to serve the Dark King. Hit your key when you spread terror in his name. BUYOFF: Break the curse.

Key of the Rebel

The Dark King is your greatest foe. Hit your key whenever you strike a blow against his rule. BUYOFF: Make peace or flee the country forever.

Key of the Traveler

You love exploring new places and meeting new people. Hit your key when you share an interesting detail about a person, place, or thing or when you go somewhere exciting and new. BUYOFF: Pass up the opportunity to see something new.

Key of the Vow

You have a vow of personal behavior that you have sworn not to break. Hit your key when your vow significantly impacts your decisions. BUYOFF: Break your vow.

SECRETS

Secret of the Castle of the Dark King

You know how to find the secret lair of the Dark King.

REQUIRES: You learn about it from someone who has the secret.

Secret of the Otherworld

You know how to contact the demons of other worlds. You have the Cave Shaman trait and the Summoner tag. REQUIRES: Trained by a shaman.

Secret of Experience

Once per session, you can use tags from more than one trait when you make a roll. REQUIRES: Experience in a wide variety of dangerous situations.

Secret of Teamwork

When assisting an ally, you may give more than one pool die. REQUIRES: A team.

PEN AND PAPER—THE SERIES



Learn more about Northdale, the adventuring party, and the players at

www.penandpaperseries.com.

Also, the ambush of the blind guards is on Youtube!





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Unspent XP

Unspent Advances

Dice Pool



TIRED



EXHAUSTED



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RULES SUMMARY

ROLLING THE DICE

When you try to overcome an obstacle, you role dice. **Start with one die.** Add a die if you have a **trait** that can help you. If that trait has **any tags** that apply, add another die for each tag. Finally, add any number of dice from your personal **pool of dice** (your pool starts with 7 dice).

Roll all the dice you've gathered. Each die that shows **4 or higher** is a hit. You need hits equal to the **difficulty level** (usually 3) to pass the obstacle.

LEVELS: 2 EASY—3 DIFFICULT—4 CHALLENGING—5 EXTREME

If you pass, discard all the dice you rolled (including any pool dice you used). Don't worry, you can get your pool dice back.

If you don't pass, you don't yet achieve your goal. But, you get to keep the pool dice you rolled and **add another die to your pool.** The GM will escalate the situation in some way and you might be able to try again.

CONDITIONS

When events warrant or especially when you fail a roll, the GM may impose a **condition** on your character: Tired, Exhausted, Bruised, Injured, Dead, or Mad. When you take a condition, mark its box and say how it comes about. [Note: The "dead" condition just means "presumed dead" unless you say otherwise.]

HELPING

If your character is in a position to help another character, you can give them a die from your pool. Say what your character does to help. If the roll fails, you get your pool die back. If it succeeds, your die is lost.

KEYS

When you hit a Key, you can do one of two things:

- ☛ Take an experience point (XP)
- ☛ Add a die to your pool (up to a max of 10)

If you go into danger because of your key, you get 2 XP or 2 pool dice (or 1 XP and 1 pool die). When you have accumulated 5 XP, you earn an advance. You can spend an advance on one of the following:

- ☛ Add a new Trait (based on something you learned during play or on some past experience that has come to light)
- ☛ Add a tag to an existing trait
- ☛ Add a new Key (you can never have the same key twice)
- ☛ Learn a Secret (if you have the means to)

You can hold on to advances if you want, and spend them at any time, even in the middle of a battle!

Each key also has a buyoff. If the buyoff condition occurs, you have the option of removing the Key and earning two advances.

REFRESH

You can refresh your pool back to 7 dice by having a refreshment scene with another character. You may also remove a condition or regain the use of a Secret, depending on the details of the scene. A refreshment scene is a good time to ask questions (in character) so the other player can show off aspects if his or her PC—"Why did you volunteer for this mission?"—"What do you think of prince Uric?" etc.

