

## ***Heroic Measures***

**Daniel Eison and Sam Zeitlin**

▣ **Players:** 2-6 + GM ▣ **Run time:** 1-3 hrs ▣ **Tone:** *Serious, clinical* ▣ **Play space:** *circle of chairs, space to stand and act scenes* ▣ **Materials:** *HOLST form (see last page), pen, name tags* ▣

**Content Warning:** *Illness, death, end-of-life medical decision-making*

### **GM Instructions**

*Read this whole document through before play so you know what to expect. During play, read plain text aloud; do not read italic text aloud. Ask each player to choose a race, class, and name as they would in a traditional fantasy RPG (e.g. Belgaria the elf ranger, Cyrus the half-orc bard), and make name tags. That's character creation; character development will happen in-game. As you read the following, feel free to improvise details and use your own words, but stick to the main points.*

*Note: feel free to change Krondar's name, pronouns, and honorific as you see fit.*

### **Introductions**

Krondar the Mighty is dying, and this time it looks like it's going to stick. Years ago, in the deepest chamber of the Tomb of Terrors, the defeated lich blasted him with a final fell curse and... nothing happened, or so you thought. You all shared many more heroic adventures, but the evil magic lurked in Krondar, working insidiously on his spirit until one morning last week you couldn't rouse him from slumber. At first, you thought he'd just had more ale than usual, but then you noticed his open eyes roving sightlessly and the cold rigidity of his limbs. You rushed him to the local healer, who tried the usual spells and potions in vain—nothing could break your companion out of his comatose state. Gold being no object to successful dungeoneers like yourselves, you had him teleported to St. Winifred's in Avalonia, where the greatest diviners in the realm could discover what was ailing your friend and how it could be remedied.

I'm afraid the prognostication is grim: the lich's curse has worked on Krondar's spirit so fully and so long that his soul is being entirely destroyed, never to inhabit this plane or any other ever again. He will certainly die and can never after be contacted, never summoned, and never resurrected. Even now, our strongest magics could not communicate with him. Our efforts have stabilized him for now, but it is impossible to say when he might die: it could be today, or next week, but it will be soon. I am sorry to say that his chances of recovery are slim to none.

There are several choices to be made, however, and that is why I am here to speak with you all. I appreciate you taking the time to meet with me, and I will try to keep this brief so that you can return to your friend's bedside. Could we start by introducing ourselves and our relationship to the patient? I'm Dr. [your name here], attending cleric in the Intensive Healing Unit, and I've been in charge of the team taking care of Krondar this past week. You are all his adventuring companions, yes? What are your names and professions?

*Go around the circle and give each player a kernel of relationship to work with, e.g. "Oh, yes, Elric, I saw in the social worker's note that you were Krondar's childhood friend, correct?" Ideas for relationships to use: sibling, cousin, childhood friend, lover, spouse, in-law, business partner, mentor, protege, comrade in arms, friendly rival, etc. Try to keep it relatively equal status, so avoid things like servant, commanding officer, or liege lord. Keep it brief! There will be time to expand these later.*

Thank you. I'm sure you all have a lot of questions, so let me do my best to answer them now.

Answer as many questions as there are players plus one (e.g. three players get four questions). Some answers to likely questions:

- ❖ *Is there anything we can do to reverse the curse? No.*
- ❖ *What about [magical mcguffin]? No, even that won't work.*
  - *e.g. What about a genie's wish? The curse is so entwined with Krondar's essence that disentangling it in such a way would wreak havoc on the entire multiverse.*
- ❖ *Is there any chance he'll recover any function at all? Unlikely. It's impossible to say for sure. He may be able to see you or hear you, but without intervention he will never walk or talk again.*
- ❖ *Can he hear or see me now? We think he can hear you.*
- ❖ *Is he in pain? At the moment, we think our spells are keeping him mostly comfortable. As the curse progresses, or if he becomes more awake, he may develop more pain.*
- ❖ *Can we get a second opinion? We have already consulted with the Arcane Order, the Golden Circle, the Wise Ones, and clerics of every god in the pantheon. Several of the options we're going to discuss were their suggestions.*

For anything else, make it up. Be sure to sound authoritative yet sympathetic. If they persist in trying to figure out ways around the premise of Krondar's doom, remind them first in-character that there is really nothing to be done, then out-of-character that this is not the game that everyone signed up to play.

### **Initial Recollections**

Since Krondar cannot now speak for himself, nor did he ever put his wishes into writing, and he has no other family we could contact, you must make those decisions for him. I know this is not an easy thing to ask, but we want to make decisions the way Krondar would have, and you know him best of all. So when the time comes to decide, please try to determine what Krondar would have wanted.

To aid you in this task, we will use a Mirror of Recollection. It is a powerful artifact, enchanted to project our minds into the past, allowing us to relive brief scenes exactly as they occurred. Together, we can visit the important moments that defined Krondar's life. We find that this helps people remember the kind of person the patient was before they became sick, what was important to them, and what values they held, so we can make good decisions for them now. In order to guide you through the mists of time and memory, I must know a bit more about each of you and your relationships with Krondar. Please, if you feel up to it, would you answer some questions for me? *[Go around the circle for each question:]*

- ❖ *How did you first meet Krondar?*
- ❖ *What about Krondar most inspired you, and what did you find the most unpleasant?*
- ❖ *For you personally, what is best in life?*
- ❖ *How do you define suffering?*
- ❖ *When it comes to Krondar and his condition, what are you hoping for?*
- ❖ *Again when it comes to Krondar's condition, what are you most worried about?*

### **Memories in the Mirror**

Thank you so much for sharing. We're now ready to use the Mirror to look back at Krondar's life. We will pull a scene from each of your memories. Because it is from your perspective, you will not be bodily present in the memory, so choose something you witnessed but were not central to. Some interaction with your other companions, for instance, as they will be able to manifest as themselves. Because it is Krondar we want to learn about, focus on him and really try to inhabit his persona in your memory. When it is your memory in the Mirror, do your best to really become Krondar, if that makes sense. *[If this does not make sense, clarify out-of-character that each player will play Krondar in turn when it is their scene, so they will not be playing their own character.]* While we are in these memories, I will be watching and making sure that the Mirror does not malfunction. It is an ancient artifact and can be a bit finicky at times. If I detect anything wrong with the mnemonic enchantment, I will let you know. So if you hear my voice speaking or whispering to you, I suggest you heed my advice so we get the memory as accurately as possible. *[This is a*

*way for you, the GM, to give some direction to the scenes by whispering suggestions bird-in-ear style or announcing that the players should “try a different way.” Also feel free to step into the scene as an NPC as needed.]*

If you have a memory already chosen that you think will be helpful to our understanding of Krondar, we can visit it, but the Mirror tends to guide us to certain kinds of memories: Times when Krondar was asked to risk something valuable to him, or demonstrated his commitment to an ideal, or had to choose between the good of the one and the many. Times when Krondar had to rely on others, or felt great joy, or hurt, or betrayal, or had to withstand great suffering. Times that show how he would want to be remembered. Who would like to go first?

*Play out up to six scenes, allowing each player to be Krondar at least once. In a smaller group, if fewer get you where you need to be, then move on. The goal is to be able to answer the question, “What would Krondar do?” with at least a little confidence. Don’t try to fully flesh out all of his intricacies, because the care decisions should still feel uneasy. In scenes, push toward moments when decisions had to be made. Try to keep pacing brisk, skipping forward in time and making suggestions. If players don’t come up with scenes on their own, prompt them that the Mirror is showing you something out of a typical fantasy quest, and ask them about the import of that moment. For instance: “I see you all standing before a jeweled idol, the bodies of kobolds strewn at your feet. Why was this moment important for Krondar? What happened here?” If you want to prepare for the game, consider jotting down a few prompts ahead of time.*

### **Decisions**

Thank you for sharing those memories. I feel privileged to have gotten to know your companion a little better. He seems like a truly remarkable individual. You were all close to Krondar, so you all have a say in the decisions we are making, but it is usually best to appoint one person to be the official representative and proxy decision-maker. This person will sign the paperwork and be the final arbiter if there is irreconcilable disagreement. Which of you will fill that role? *[Choose.]*

Now that we’ve established that, let’s discuss the options for his treatment. We will use this HOLST form *[see below]*, or Healer’s Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment, to document the choices.

Our intensive-care Evokers can attempt to burn back the curse and shock Krondar back to consciousness. This process is, in all honesty, extremely painful, and unlikely to work given the advanced state of his curse. If it does succeed, we might see the curse recede enough for him to wake up and have as much as a few more years of life. Due to the intensity of this magic, however, even if it works he may have to stay here at St. Winifred’s indefinitely. If it fails, he will die in significant agony. If there were anything left of Krondar at that point, we could attempt one of the other options, though it would be significantly less likely to succeed.

Those other options are as follows, and are mutually exclusive:

The Druids of the High Forest can blend Krondar’s essence with a hardy creeper vine. The plant would take over all of his functions and many parts of his body, its natural resilience slowing the curse significantly. He would remain bonded to this symbiote for the rest of his life, and would not be able to do much more than a plant can—a sort of persistent vegetative state—but he would be alive in the forest. When he did die, his body would return to nature.

The Artificers’ Guild can transfer him into a brass head that you could bring home. It may not be all of him as you knew him, but it would be at least some simulacrum of his personality. He could see and hear you, but unfortunately, he’d only be able to answer yes or no questions. He could have partial or even full

consciousness in there. The curse may progress, but we don't know for sure. For devotees of a nature god, becoming so unnatural might be terrible anathema.

The Alchemical Order can petrify him, which should halt progress of the curse entirely. You could take him home. We don't think he would be conscious at all. If we are someday able to figure out a cure for this curse, we could theoretically cure him. If not, he might well remain a statue forever.

Our on-staff Necromancer and professor of pathology can raise him as a zombie. This would reanimate his body, but his consciousness and interactivity would be severely limited. He could go home, but would need upkeep with suitable undead nutrition, intermittent repair as his flesh rotted, and regular infusions of necrotic energy from a qualified wizard. Followers of some gods, it goes without saying, would find this to be an abomination.

Our team of palliative illusionists and analgesiomancers cannot halt the progression of the curse, but they can offer him relief from his suffering as the curse advances and he dies. They have pain-relieving spells here at the hospital or potions you can administer at home. If you wish, they can also offer him comforting visions: For instance, he could experience his god's welcoming embrace or a reunion with his ancestors. They can also give you a chance to say goodbye to him (or at least a reasonable facsimile of him), which we feel helps immensely with the grieving process. He would not necessarily have to stay here, so Krondar could go home with you if you wish.

Based on what we know of Krondar and what we discovered in your memories, which path do you think honors him best? What would he have chosen for himself?

*Allow participants to discuss. When a choice has been made, fill out the HOLST form and have the designated proxy sign it. If they are not coming to a decision, remind them that a choice has to be made, and that the designated proxy will be allowed to choose if they cannot all agree. Once it is all settled and signed, stand up to deliver the following:*

Thank you. I know this has been difficult, but I do feel like we've accomplished something important for your friend. The depth of your feeling for him is very clear. Now, I suggest you go back to his bedside to spend some time with him, though if you need some time for yourself, please feel free to stay in this room for as long as you would like. I have other patients to see, but I will be available for any questions you might have as we go forward. Thank you for sharing your time with me today.

*Move towards the exit of the room. Give the participants a chance to follow you or stay. Stand in a corner and watch. For those who stay, allow them to interact further as they and you see fit. Call an end to the scenario when it seems appropriate.*

**Debrief:**

*Thank everyone. Acknowledge the difficulty of the subject matter. Remove name tags and de-role. Thank each other for cool roleplay moments. Ask about feelings the scenario brought up. Discuss real-life experiences with illness and death that may have informed play, if participants are comfortable sharing. Discuss, if participants are comfortable, whether they have thoughts about the kind of care they would want at end of life or have discussed these issues with loved ones.*

## Healer's Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment

St. Winifred's



Avalonia

First follow these orders, then contact Healer. A copy of the signed HOLST form is a legally valid Healer's order. Any section not completed implies full treatment for that section. HOLST complements an Advance Directive or geas and is not intended to replace that document or spell.

Patient Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Patient MRN: 4543621

Patient Date of Birth: 4 Harvestmoon 1417

### A. CURATIVE PYROMANTIC REVIVIFICATION (CPR):

- Attempt Revivification
- Do Not Attempt Revivification

### B. OTHER MAGICAL INTERVENTIONS:

- Full Treatment – primary goal of prolonging existence by magically effective means (*choose one*):
  - Vegetal symbiosis
  - Mechanical cephalization
  - Petrification
  - Reanimation
  
- Comfort-Focused Interventions – primary goal of maximizing comfort. Relieve pain and suffering with analgesiomancy and potions as needed. Do not use treatments listed above.
  - Use illusion magic to enhance comfort.
  - Teleport to home. Return to St. Winifred's only if comfort needs cannot be met.

**ADDITIONAL ORDERS:** \_\_\_\_\_

### C. INFORMATION AND SIGNATURES:

Discussed with:

- Patient (has capacity)                       Legally Recognized Decision-maker: \_\_\_\_\_
- ~~Advance Directive available and reviewed~~                       No Advance Directive/AD not available

Signature of Healer:

My signature below indicates to the best of my knowledge that these orders are consistent with the patient's medical condition and preferences.

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Patient or Legally Recognized Decision-maker:

I am aware that this form is voluntary. By signing this form, the legally recognized decision-maker acknowledges that this request regarding resuscitative measures is consistent with the known desires of, and with the best interest of, the individual who is the subject of the form.

\_\_\_\_\_