

Glory to the Dwarves!

By Robert Prag

Introduction

Glory to the Dwarves is a live-action collaborative storytelling game for five or more players. Each player shall portray a dwarf, most belonging to one of three great clans at the first meeting in a generation, on the occasion of the death of the Mountain King. The core device of the game is storytelling, in boasts or confessions, with structured praise and assurances. If the idea of reveling in living underground, shouting in unison, or boasting of your prowess in battle or at the forge gives you pause, consider selecting otherwise; but if you long to fill your great stone hall with merriment and kinship, read on!

First, we must assure that our players feel safe in this space. If your group already has preferred safety mechanics, use them. If not, we recommend placing a hand upon your head to speak as yourself (to negotiate a scene or memory, or to object to something said by another dwarf) and having the host remind everyone that actors are more important than the dwarves, and that they are free to leave at any time.

Now then, let us speak publicly of the structure of the Clansmeet. First, in your clans you shall remind one another who you are and your relationships (while your actors invent these facts from whole cloth). Upon arriving at the Clansmeet you shall introduce yourselves by clan, and then shall be a time of socializing, trading, and general merrimaking. Once that dies down, your host shall call all dwarves together for toasts and boasts, wherein each dwarf shall speak boldly of their accomplishments, as others echo how they feel each speaker best exemplifies dwarven values and calls for a toast to whichever nuggets of accomplishment or virtue feels best celebrated.

After one round of boasts and toasts around the room shall the host be first to mention the Mountain King's passing and the need for a new ruler of Dwarven kind, then dismiss the dwarves to again mingle and discuss. When the hour draws late or the fires of conversation die down, the host shall again call the dwarves together, first to settle the matter of a new ruler, then to end the evening with the rite of absolution and affirmation.

When all that is settled, dwarves, you shall have met well and survived the first day of the Clansmeet.

Forming Clans: if you have seven or more players (host included), the host shall describe each of the three great clans and put an equal or near equal number of players in each, as amicably as possible. If you have eight or more players and enough experienced LARPer among you, make one of them the wanderer instead of a member of a great clan. If you have five or six players, use only two of the great clans.

The Host (the MC/GM)

The Host is a member of Clan Glintvein, who are known for their metalworking and alchemy. Your role in this game is much more that of supervision and direction than equal participation; you are at once (likely) the physical host to your space as well as the only person with the script, responsible for moving the game along using it, especially if you feel you're getting behind the time estimates. Your last and most important judgment call will be exactly when to call game-time down after the wanderer's confession, trying to capture the emotional truth of the crowd reaction without permitting it to cross into making actors scared or uncomfortable while exploring the scene.

Running the LARP (Scenes)

Traveling: Your clan should select your elder (by no means played by the oldest actor) who is your de facto leader in case of ambiguity. Each dwarf takes a name, and as you walk around the play space, you should collectively discuss what your clan has undertaken in the last 30 years. Consider how you walk and carry yourselves as dwarves of your clan, and ensure that you enter the Clansmeet feeling like a tight group. At the end of this your elder should let the host know you are ready. (20-30 minutes)

Introductions: The host shall introduce themselves and then each of the three clans and their elders, and allow the elders to introduce their dwarves. After these introductions (no more than three sentences each), the host shall introduce the wanderer last, if present. (10 minutes)

Socialization: All dwarves shall now take time to visit and socialize, greeting one another and speaking outside their clans for a short while. (20-30 minutes)

Toasts: The host shall instruct all dwarves to sit again by their clan, with the wanderer beside the host. Each dwarf shall in turn tell a tale to boast of their accomplishments, at the end of which a dwarf from each other clan must agree that the speaker is great indeed according to their own understanding of dwarven virtue, thereby ensuring each story is applauded at least twice and framed positively in the views of the other clans, as it would demean all dwarves to degenerate the honor of any dwarf. At the end of each clan's boasts, all dwarves shall shout "glory to Clan [name]!" After the great clans, the wanderer and the host shall give their boasts, followed by

shouting "glory to the dwarves!" (30-45 minutes, as this is a key scene.)

Discussion: The host shall now explain that the Mountain King is dead and that one of the clan elders shall become the new Mountain Monarch, and then release the dwarves to discuss amongst themselves who should be monarch (or any other dwarven business). (20-30 minutes)

Election: The dwarves must now publicly vote for which elder should be the next Mountain Monarch; however, dwarves are forbidden from voting for their own elder (if you have only two clans, omit this rule). The host shall vote only to break a tie. Once the vote is complete, have everyone cheer their new ruler, then deliver this scroll to the Monarch and have them lead the last ritual as their first duty. (5-15 minutes)

Absolution: As your first royal duty, Monarch, you are to take a position between the host and the wanderer, then invite all dwarves to admit weakness and failing, so that their kith and kin may remind them of their dwarven greatness. Starting with the host and ending with the wanderer, they shall describe a weakness, failing, or conundrum which bothers them, and (as with the boasts) it is incumbent upon the dwarves of the other clans to recast their failing as an excess of another dwarven virtue. Finally, when the wanderer gives their confession, yours is the choice to start a final round of forgiveness, or to yell "get them!" and end the game with all dwarves rushing around the wanderer. (30-45 minutes, as this is the second key scene.)

Debrief: As yourselves, reflect briefly on what you like about dwarven kinship and what you wish to leave behind in the mountain halls.

Clan Ironhammer

Clan Ironhammer are proudly great smiths and miners; their mastery of metal is unequalled. They believe first and foremost that a dwarf is defined by the work and the great works that they inevitably produce, and view problems as first and foremost requiring the right tool ~ especially when that tool requires expert forging or rare metals. They value industry and resolve, like all dwarves, and believe hard work is best demonstrated by its rewards.

Clan Ironhammer dislikes luck and the talk thereof; they admit there are many things they do not know but reject the idea that there is design in any portion of that. They prefer things that are intricate and demonstrate prowess or mastery, and are the clan most accused of loving gold and gems and valuing jewels and jewelers more than others find practical.

Clan Ironhammer believes that preparation, discernment, industry, perseverance and pragmatism are vital virtues. They believe each dwarf is an individual first and must always demand their worth. The master-apprentice relationship of training and service is a very strong and important bond for Clan Ironhammer, sometimes going so far as to introduce oneself by naming your former master (usually as a teacher). Even beyond apprenticeship, Ironhammer believe most strongly in formal education of their young.

Clan Ironhammer believes that anything with a worthy outcome is a worthy endeavor, and that a failed construction or object is best viewed as a lesson.

The clan's great claims are that their founders forged the Hammer of the Gods, and the Crown of the Mountain Monarch.

Dwarven Etiquette

Dwarves may seem coarse from the outside, but their etiquette is well considered and consistent:

1. Never contradict another dwarf: Even if you were there, a dwarf must recognize latitude in storytelling and delivery, and always remember that your memory is also flawed.
2. Never presume against a fellow dwarf: Do not suggest that they are wrong, nor unable to complete what they attest, nor that they are in failing health (or dead), unless you are their kin or elder.
3. A dwarf is always justified: To whatever extent possible, you must assume other dwarves follow the dwarven virtues and ascribe whichever of those apply to them.
4. Critique is a challenge: Do not criticize work but to say you would do it better.
5. Dwarves are to the point: Dwarves have things to do, and time is valuable. Say what you mean plainly and quickly.
6. Keep promises: Dwarves fulfil their obligations and settle their debts.
7. Keep and be wary of grudges: All dwarves must remember those who have wronged them, and must repay hostility as its own kind of debt.
8. A dwarf respects the honor of others: A dwarf does not challenge the promises or grudges of another.
9. Always speak up: if another dwarf begins a call and response, or calls a toast, or otherwise requests participation you join them.
10. Respect the dwarves: Only a dwarf can be trusted to be respectful to dwarven standards.

Clan Rockbeard

Clan Rockbeard are great miners and masons, whose engineering and prowess with great structures of the earth are known far and wide. As with any truly massive project, they believe strongly in family and unity, as great weights are best borne by the many; even the worst daydreamer can produce a great insight. In speech and plan, their focus is very much on who was involved and could support whom, and they have a very collectivist view of accomplishment.

Clan Rockbeard dislikes inequality and individualism, and believes that all advantages must be turned to families, the clan, or all dwarven kind wherever possible. They also prefer the durable to the ephemeral, sometimes to the farcical extent of claiming “anything worth writing or singing is worth carving.”

For Clan Rockbeard, planning, cooperation, discussion, togetherness, industry, perseverance, and pragmatism are among their highest virtues. They believe that great works must be recognized for their own sake, and that a dwarf has no higher calling than to build alongside their clan; likewise they believe that any project undertaken by many must be worthy, and thus it must be valuable. .

Clan Rockbeard believes that the unity and togetherness of the clan, and all dwarves, are paramount and prefer to do as much together in a collective as possible; they often sleep in great halls and eat communally, feasting and singing late into the night during good times.

The clan's greatest achievements are the construction of the mountain city of Tarhaz-dur and its central palace, the famed Hall of the First King.

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Clan Evershield

In a thousand battles against a hundred enemies, clan Evershield have shown themselves to be the heartiest, most resolute and least wavering force to be found. As the greatest warriors of dwarven kind, they view all life through the tapestry of pride, might and victory over one's adversaries. Far from wrathful, Clan Evershield pride themselves on being very measured with their use of force, reserving their terrible capacity for violence for only the most deserving of enemies. They are the most widely traveled of the clans and most frequently deal with the nations of Humans and Elves.

Clan Evershield dislikes vanity and conceit; they very much value weapons, tools and structures, but not their decoration. They believe in merit and courage and honesty, and they are famously blunt when critique is warranted.

Clans Evershield holds strength, courage, strategy, cohesion, industry, perseverance, and pragmatism in the highest regard. They believe all worth is shown in the face of adversity, and the measure of a dwarf is what challenges they've bested in their time. They believe that the worth of any goal is measured against the adversity encountered in achieving it.

Of all the clans, Evershield believes most strongly in honor and keeping one's word in the face of adversity; they believe that they must have complete trust in one another, as it may be a matter of life and death.

Clan Evershield's great accomplishments include slaying the dragon Niraf, repelling the great goblin horde, and forging the axe and mail of the First King.

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The Wanderer

Wanderer, though your disguise is marvelous and magical, you are not a dwarf but a magician and trickster belonging to another species of comparable height. You have magically disguised yourself to be a dwarf of the lost Clan Firecuff, who were workers of great technical wonders.

Whether or not you present yourself as an elder is wholly up to you; for much of the evening, your goal. You don't actually know what the virtues and values of Clan Firecuff were, but as long as you can remember what you've already said and sound positive and pro-dwarf, hopefully the general spirit of acceptance will carry you. Besides, how hard can it be to pick up the rites and rituals of dwarvenkind from the rest of them in real time. At the end of the evening, your confession must be an admission of your true motives; this is essential and how you get to the conclusion to do so is entirely up to you. As soon as the crowd reacts the game will end (the Host will determine this timing, though you may call it instead if you feel the reaction has turned strongly against you). You should receive a motivation slip with this.

Wanderer Motivation: Wizard

You are a powerful wizard, here to find brave and capable dwarves to help you with an important quest to battle the lightning-spitting dragon Taryn and retrieve Laquemza, the Topaz of Earthen Binding. You have infiltrated the Clansmeet to find dwarves that can help both make what you will need and to join you to fight. You hope to provide no offense beyond the depiction and to appeal to their virtues (or egos) in enlisting their aid. You should turn your confession into your call to action.

Wanderer Motivation: Diplomat

You are a diplomat sent by the human king Alfred the Shrewd, here to ensure that an open-minded and pliable dwarf next takes the Mountain Throne. King Alfred wants the dwarves to more readily sell their wares and especially weapons, as well as negotiate passage for human forces across the surface of dwarven lands. You should use your confession to reveal your true role and hope that you have sufficiently aided the Monarch as to be in their good graces.

Wanderer Motivation: Killer

You are a mercenary of the Band of the Gold Lion who accepted a hefty price to accompany a thief into a dwarven hall, and who cut down several dwarves in escorting your ward out, including some in regal attire. You can't prove you killed the king, but greatly fear he was among them; you have come here to seek atonement and forgiveness, at least for you sellsword brothers and sisters if not yourself. Whether you offer yourself as a sacrifice or beg for forgiveness in your confession is your great decision.

Wanderer Motivation: Trickster

You are a legendary thief and general master of derring-do, doing that which sounds remarkable and noteworthy in each moment of your life. You are here because you should not be; you want to eat the dwarves' feast and drink their meads and beers because it isn't available to you. You have no great agenda besides convincing the dwarves that you're better at being them than they are. Similarly you wish to sway the selection of the Mountain Monarch just to say you were able to do so. However it happens, you must get carried away and confess your infiltration and identity.

Host's Setup and Advice

Ensure your players have enough space to walk around for the travel while forming their clans. Ensure that players are divided roughly evenly between the clans; it's more important that they like the members of their clans than that they be even size, but avoid having a major clan with only one member.

Print the whole game on single sided paper. The only page that needs cutting is the wanderer, as they should get the background and one of the four motivations (and, critically, don't get a copy of the etiquette guide below).

If you are playing with the wanderer make sure that their motivations match the tone you are going for; the Killer is going to lead to a much darker ending to the game than the Trickster, for example.

If you're running too fast or too slow you should adjust the socialization times.

Don't let the voting and electioneering for Mountain Monarch bog down; if they seem to deadlock or like the dwarves need to sleep on it, tell them to do so and lead the absolution ritual yourself.

Feel empowered to tell someone to wrap up a boast or atonement speech if it is straining the patience of other players.

Remember this game is much more about the social dynamics between dwarves and how activity inclusivity informs interaction than it is about the details of characters or who rules the mountain.

Above all, remind your players to have fun being a group of rowdy dwarves.

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