

## THE PEOPLE UNDER THE MOUNTAIN

### Key

*Void:* The King was but a fool and an enemy. Neither grieving nor suffering are yours to bear.

### Spirit

*Protean:* You are Legion. Some already savour the taste of victory, others haven't forgotten the losses suffered at the hands of the Knights, all of you burn with lust for vengeance.

*Alien:* The Knights are nothing more to you than sharp metal shells, and their thoughts and feelings only matter to you as cracks in their armour, useful to hit where it hurts the most.

### Bonds

*The People under the Mountain:* You laugh when you hear the Knights and their people describe you as monsters, all fangs, claws and black magic. In truth you have two legs, two arms and a head: No one would be able to tell you apart from a human being, yet you are everything they are not. The lands of the King's men are a reflection of yours, making every mirror of water a frontier to be crossed, but the forces that govern your worlds are always at odds. For you, war is a natural condition, as constant as the alternance of night and day. Now that their King has fallen for your trap, these few craven Knights are all that's left to stop you.

*The King:* He accepted your Tyrant's challenge, and he looked at his reflection in the lake under the Mountain to face him. He killed him and was

killed by him. Yet your people know no loyalty, nor did they ever hold the illusion of a just reign: The strongest are fast to rise and take the reins, but there is always someone ready to replace them on the saddle. You need only throw the Knights into disarray to ensure you will be able to regroup before the Kingless people. You will reclaim both shores of the lake and finally cease mimicking the enemy to defeat them. You will be free.

*The Knights:* You despise them and their pitiful fabrications. Their honour is a lie, as is their friendship. You will pit them against each other, plucking at the chords of their grief for the King's death. You have reaped your Tyrant's last breath and you are ready to unleash His curse upon one of them: Your victim will not be able to leave the darkness under the Mountain, forever at your mercy. The choice is up to the Knights, for only betrayal can power the spell, but deceiving them will be the sweetest of games. The wound that struck their King down was inflicted by a blade, not fangs or claws: It will confound them in their ignorance. You will fan the embers of their fears and you will watch as they find a culprit among themselves.

*Quote:* "You think we lurk in the night because we are cunning and treacherous. In truth, it's more like we are duelling with our left hand. We only want there to be a challenge".

### Body language

*Intangible:* You are a voice in the darkness, you cannot touch or be touched. You can only graze and whisper and suddenly shout, to catch your victims by surprise. You will break their spirit.

## Darkening

*At any time you can point to a Knight and impart him one of the two following instructions. You can weave them into an on-going dialogue or action sequence, or use them as a prompt during a moment of silence. You can never intervene during an Impression.*

► *More:* For a scene, the Knight's reaction to grief is brought to excess.

► *Less:* The Knight behaves almost in contrast to his natural disposition, but his reaction is still upsetting and excessive.

## Epilogue

*Each Knight has three Impressions at his disposal, for a total of fifteen. Keep count and, once in a while, check the condition of the King's Mask: When every Impression has been played out or the Mask has been mostly torn apart, you must initiate the Epilogue.*

*To start, lament the end of the storm and the imminent break of dawn. Alas, the Knights will soon be able to depart. But before they do it, they are called to pay homage to the King by kneeling before his Mask. They must all do this, one after the other, no exceptions. Call for them and remind them if necessary.*

*None of the Knights have been given instructions for this phase, so you need to be ready to guide them through it. Each time one of them kneels before the Mask, speak to him as if you were the King, and ask him in a whisper which of his comrades is to blame for*

*your death. Force him to give you a name: He cannot refuse and he cannot blame himself. However, without you suggesting it, the Knight can also insist that the fault lies with the People under the Mountain. Once he has accused someone, he must give you all the fragments of the Mask he had kept after a Suggestion. Note the name he chose and the number of fragments, and let him go.*

*After all five Knights have paid homage to the King, you will begin the final tally: Each single fragment given by a Knight counts as one vote towards the person they blamed. The curse of the People under the Mountain will befall the Knight that got the most votes. In case of parity, choose among the nominees at your own discretion. If all five Knights insist on blaming only the People under the Mountain, the curse won't affect any of them.*

*If one of the Knights was cursed, wait for them to try and leave the cave and physically restrain them, or take the lead and drag them to the depths of the Mountain yourself. In any case, announce that the curse of the Tyrant under the Mountain has found its victim, and compel the other Knights to make a last, tragic decision: Will they forsake their comrade to go back and save the Kingdom, or will they stand together for one last battle?*

*If the Knights have all refused to accuse each other, spell out the dead King's blessing and recognise the Squire as your legitimate heir. Even in the darkness under the Mountain, the Knights have found a glimmer of hope.*

## Prologue

*You dictate the beginning and end of the game. It is important for the Knights to understand this and learn to follow your instructions. To demonstrate, have them stand in line and start reading the following introduction. Each time a Knight is mentioned, his player should step forward to be recognised by the others: Wave them over with your hand.*

The Mountain sang from its depths like an organ pipe, its caves as vast as bellows and its steps carved into keys. It wept under the strength of roaring currents as they twisted into merciless whirlwinds on their way to the mountaintop. On the highest peak a circle of armoured men stood together in defiance of the raging storm, huddled around the stone altar where the King's remains rested.

Loyal to his title, the First Knight stepped forward alone, placed his helmet beside the wooden pyre and lowered his scarf, revealing the scarred skin below. Only four comrades stood in wait around him: A less-than-symbolic number, but war compelled brevity. He cleared his throat, unflinching even as a gust of wind swept away the beginning of the eulogy.

«... Seventh of his name, unrivalled in wisdom and valour. Honour Him».

He went quiet then, perhaps fearing that the cold would make his voice waver. He freed his left hand from its gauntlet and took a dagger from his belt, cutting deep into the palm. A scarlet drop stained the King's lips, and the man donned his helmet again before returning to his place in the circle.

He gave way to the strongest of Knights, who had been the victor of many jousts. A silver chain hung around his neck as proof of his valour, until he tore it from his gorget to leave it on the altar.

After the Champion came the Stable Master, bearing the golden bridle of his finest steed. His legs, bowed by years of riding, trembled as he went back to stand amongst the living.

Then it fell to the Last Knight, their youngest, to offer his proud face to the winds and bring a knife to his left temple. He cut off a braid of hair as black as the raven's eye.

At last, the Squire stepped forward to offer the sweat of his brow, as he set firewood around the remains and fought with flint and steel to tear a spark from the wind's grasp.

In otherworldly silence, the five men stood and stared at the flames, bright against the twilight sky and the mist rising from the lake below. Then, before the stench of burnt flesh could tarnish the solemnity of the rite, they sought refuge in the bowels of the Mountain.