

Ashes of Ascension

In the wreckage of Armageddon, the Avatar has ascended and evil was vanquished. But what dark force tries to rise from the ashes of ascension?

ASHES OF ASCENSION is a 13-part quest chain that was run at HOBLOTH 3 in Austin. It takes place an unspecified time after the end of Ultima IX. Each player can pick and choose quests to participate in, and not all quests need to be successfully completed to defeat the final villain.

System

To provide additional depth to the Ashes quests, the HOBLOTH system was expanded upon. Much of the inspiration for the additions (and also many of the quests) came from Alliance LARP (<http://www.alliancelarp.com>).

Here are the rules as were presented to the players in their journals:

Welcome to Ashes of Ascension! This quest chain involves traveling to far flung locations in Britannia, battling deadly monsters and solving pernicious puzzles.

In the end, you will save Britannia from a new age of darkness... or die trying.

These quests will utilize a number of mechanics and items that require explanation beyond the rules of the HOBLOTH.

HEADBANDS: Headbands are used to mark people who are participating in an AoA quest. Because each quest will take the participants away from Buccaneer's Den, you will be wearing a headband while on the quest and may not interact with anyone not wearing a headband.

WHITE headbands designate PCs.

GREEN headbands designate NPCs, either townsfolk or monsters (some monsters will wear tabards or masks instead.)

ORANGE headbands designate marshals or others who are part of the quest but not physically present.

POTIONS: There are three kinds of potions that may be found in the questing.

ORANGE- Healing. Has the same effect as the Heal spell.

WHITE- Magic Armor. Absorbs the next weapon blow, causing it to have no effect regardless of its power.

BLUE- Spell Shield. Absorbs the next hostile spell that strikes you. (For second circle spells, this only protects the drinker.)

To use a potion, pour the sand onto the ground. (Outdoors only. All AoA quests are outdoors, but if something changes, do not pour sand indoors. Track your potion use and pour them out after the fact.) If using it on someone else, they must be within arm's reach. Inform them what benefit they've gained as you use the potion.

Potions may be used in any AoA quest. Leftover potions may be used in Capture the Keg.

SCROLLS: Scrolls allow the reader to cast the inscribed spell once. Read the incantation slowly. Then crinkle up the scroll and touch the target of the spell with it (for Heal/Resurrect) or throw the balled up scroll at the target (for Fireball). NOTE: At the end of each battle, CLEAN UP THE CAST SCROLLS.

STATUS EFFECTS: Some enemies will cause some non-standard status effects. All negative status effects last 10 seconds. They will usually be delivered by packets much like the fireballs, but smaller.

SLEEP: You fall asleep on your feet. You may not defend yourself.

FEAR: You flee the source of the effect.

BERSERK: You perceive everyone as an enemy and attack the nearest target.

FROZEN: You cannot move your legs.

KNOCKBACK: You are forced to move 5' away from the source of the effect. The effect ends immediately after you do.

BY VOICE: If you hear any enemy or marshal call out "Spell Name/Status Effect by voice!" anyone who can hear it is hit by the spell or effect.

OTHER:

OOC- Placing a hand or weapon on your head marks you as being Out of Game or making an Out of Character comment or question. I and possibly other marshals will frequently make use of this to narrate.

"YOU SEE"- I am unable to actually properly furnish various dungeons and lairs, so I will frequently just tell you what you see at any given point or location. Roll with it.

While this looks like a lot, I tried to make them as intuitive as possible- what happens when you are afflicted with Sleep is hopefully pretty obvious. I wound up never making use of Knockback. Potion colors were as close as I could get to what I felt people would expect from Ultima- heals were as close to yellow as I could get my hands on, for instance.

For those reading who do not know HOBLOTH terms: Rangers and Shepherds are people who volunteer to NPC- Rangers in a combat role, Shepherds in an RP role.

The Quests

Ashes of Ascension: The Beginning

The Time Lord has learned that Britannia is in peril, and calls upon the heroes to save it.

Duration: 1 hour.

Script: The Time Lord appears in Buccaneer's Den.

"I greet thee, heroes, Avatars, and legends! I am called the Time Lord. I am a defender and protector of this land, but my power may be used only to guide and influence. An old threat rises anew to cast its shadow across Britannia. I see any of thee who would answer my call to come with me to Terfin, the

very place of the Guardian's defeat and the Avatar's ascension. There, thou wilt learn what awaits, and what thou must do to save all. Who will answer my call?"

The Time Lord then opens a moongate to the Guardian's throne room. The moongate is narrated only, and the 'Fellowship Hall' location serves as a stand-in for Terfin.

"This is the throne room of the Guardian, the very center of the Barrier of Life and the ritual of Armageddon. Where the Avatar sacrificed herself and even now watches over thee. And here there is one who would speak with thee." The Time Lord waves a hand and summons the spirit of Batlin (played by Houston Dragon).

"Heroes! Hear and heed my words. In life I was called BATLIN, and I was the lieutenant and agent of The Guardian. Great was my power, but in the end it came to naught. For I was betrayed and was brought to my death at his hands. And for this reason, I was overjoyed when he in turn was ended by the Avatar. And so was Britannia saved.

"But Britannia is never saved for long, is it? As thy friend with the Hourglass can tell thee. The Guardian was prepared even for Armageddon. Great is my hatred, and so I will help thee, even though we would never be allies else.

"In this place, wounded by Armageddon, life and death are a handsbreadth apart. Thus I call upon the spirit of the Dark Lord of Britannia, that he may tell thee what awaits thee. And may thou all die in the saving, so long as thou dost prevent the Guardian's return!" Batlin then calls up the spirit of the Dark Lord of Britannia (Blackthorn, played by Starr Long!) and disappears.

Blackthorn: "I am called, but it is by my will that I return. Once, I was called Blackthorn. Ages ago, the Shadowlords put their hooks in my soul, and when their darkness was gone I was banished. An age passed, and the Guardian found the holes and hooks left behind... and I did his bidding here. I tell thee this that thou wilt believe that now he is gone, even from the beyond that is beyond life I would cast Armageddon myself to prevent him from ever returning. I cannot, and so I turn to thee.

"When the Guardian faced the Avatar, he fully expected to prevail... but was prepared for the hero to turn the tables somehow. And so, when the fury of Armageddon struck, much of his power was transferred to a gemstone which adorned his throne. From this he can be reborn.

"But the nature of the Guardian and the Avatar was a balance of symmetries, and so some of the strength of the paragon of virtue was also retained... but in the sigils that constrained the Barrier.

"What's more, the Guardian's plan did not fully succeed. His essence was too much for the gem to hold, and much of it seeped into the throne itself, like blood from a wound. What remains of the Fellowship has recovered the gem, but I know not what has become of the shattered fragments of the throne.

"I can help thee little now, but know that it was I who enchanted the seeing glass that stood in this chamber to show the Guardian what he wished to see. I have made it so the Time Lord can show thee what thou wilt need. Good luck, heroes! From what lies beyond life, I shall watch, and hope."

The Time Lord then narrates the locations of the quest items: "Mirror, show us what we need to see!" "The Tear of Sacrifice was shattered in the outpouring of energy. Its fragments were taken to Minoc, where they were placed inside Covetous for safekeeping.

"The Writ of Honesty's physical form did not survive. But if a new one were to be wrought, it would

contain the power as surely as would the old. The same is true for the Crook of Humility, also lost in the destruction.

"The Dagger of Valor, the Quill of Justice, and the Chalice of Honor were taken back to their respective cities. The Chalice was stored in the dungeon Shame, now cleared of threats and made safe, and its entrance sealed as it was in the days of Blackthorn. A passphrase is required to open it up again, and learning that phrase requires solving this challenge. It has been said that the author of this challenge retired to Buccaneer's Den at the end of their life.

"The Heart of Compassion was looted by monsters and taken into Despise.

"And the Ankh of Spirituality was taken by Wyrmguard, out of spite, after the Guardian fell.

"As for the throne, this revelation comes as a surprise to me, and even this mirror can show me little. I will investigate this by my own power.

"Now I will return thee to the Den. Prepare however thou wouldst, my friends, and I will return for thee when the time doth come to undertake one of these adventures.

"Walk in virtue!"

[Conjures moongate]

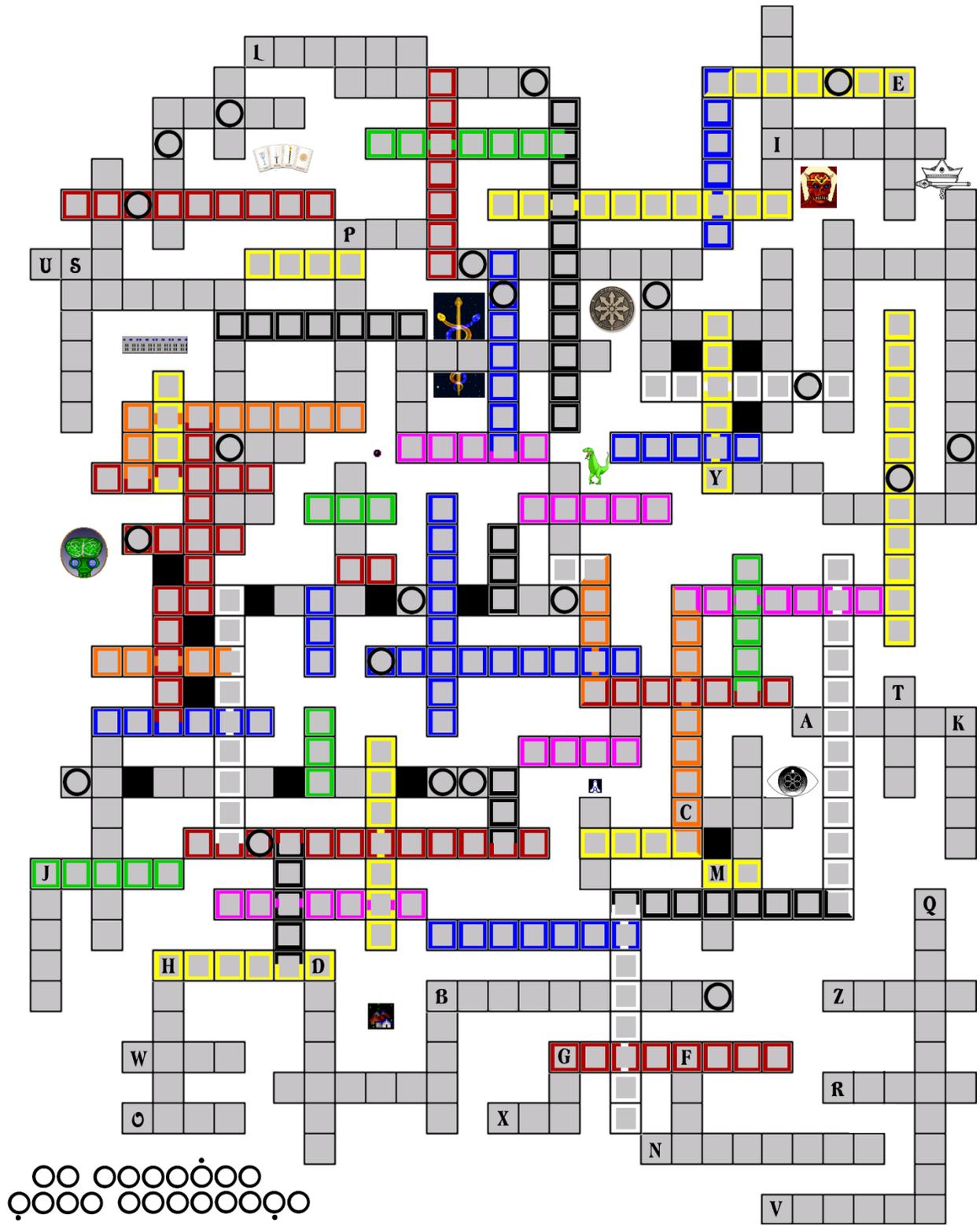
Props: Time Lord costume. This was a blue banyan and a large hourglass, with a silver circlet. Also, 10 copies of the Shame puzzle, handed out for people to work on together.



Slashing Dragon with the Time Lord. Photo credit- Santiago Zapata

The Crossword given to the players did not have the letters on it- instead three copies of a transparency with the letters but nothing else were hidden around the event site.

Notes: This one was pretty straightforward. I am indebted to Starr for coming out to play Blackthorn, and he did a spectacular job of it, as did Houston Dragon as Batlin. I instructed everyone in the Ashes special rules, as well as handing out the journal pages for it, and assured everyone that I would remind them before any given quest that used them. I will say that finding an hourglass that was larger than about 6" on Amazon or Etsy was a challenge.



Shame puzzle, with first round of hints

Ashes of Ascension: Sacrifice

The Tear of Sacrifice was taken back to Minoc, but had been shattered in the fury of Armageddon. Its fragments were placed in Covetous, where now there are monsters between the heroes and the Tear.

Duration: 2 hours.

Script: Sacrifice is a series of puzzles while monsters attack. Fighters are to keep the monsters away from those who are working on the puzzles. Sacrifice had 14 players signed up, and 5 rangers.

The Time Lord transports the players to the entrance to Covetous (the Battlefield). The Fort was used as an NPC staging area.

Stage 1: The heroes enter Covetous and are met by a band of Headlesses.

Stage 2: Deeper into the dungeon, they encounter another band of Headlesses accompanying a single Reaper.



Headlesses and a reaper (masked). Photo credit- Irma Hermida

Stage 3: The heroes reach the door to the vault. It contains a set of runes which are a puzzle:

ᚷᚢᚦ ᚱᚢᚳ ᚱᚱᚱ ᚰᚢ ᚱᚱᚱ ᚰᚱᚱ ᚰᚱᚱ

ᚱᚱᚱ ᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱ ᚷᚢᚦ ᚱᚱᚱᚱ ᚱᚱᚱ ᚱᚱ ᚱᚱᚱᚱ

ገሰቱ ጽዮን ለእኛ ስለሆነ ማለታችን ስለሆነ
የእኛ ስለሆነ ጽዮን ስለሆነ ጽዮን ስለሆነ

ከ ተገቢው ስለሆነ ስለሆነ ጽዮን ስለሆነ
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ጽዮን ስለሆነ ስለሆነ ጽዮን ስለሆነ
የእኛ ስለሆነ ስለሆነ ጽዮን ስለሆነ
ገሰቱ ስለሆነ ስለሆነ ጽዮን ስለሆነ
ጽዮን ስለሆነ ስለሆነ ጽዮን ስለሆነ

While working on solving it, they are attacked by a series of waves of Headlesses. After they've been working for ~15 minutes, headlesses attack one of which drops a ripped portion of the solved puzzle:

የእኛ ስለሆነ ስለሆነ ጽዮን ስለሆነ
ገሰቱ ስለሆነ ስለሆነ ጽዮን ስለሆነ
ጽዮን ስለሆነ ስለሆነ ጽዮን ስለሆነ
ገሰቱ ስለሆነ ስለሆነ ጽዮን ስለሆነ

ገሰቱ ስለሆነ ስለሆነ ጽዮን ስለሆነ
ገሰቱ ስለሆነ ስለሆነ ጽዮን ስለሆነ
ገሰቱ ስለሆነ ስለሆነ ጽዮን ስለሆነ
ገሰቱ ስለሆነ ስለሆነ ጽዮን ስለሆነ

ገሰቱ ስለሆነ ስለሆነ ጽዮን ስለሆነ
ገሰቱ ስለሆነ ስለሆነ ጽዮን ስለሆነ

TRFYHFTM DM KFRIMFTY FDM MFAFRKY DFN NIM NIT
NBTM TF TMMKFRF RY DFN FRYT MIRMKTMM

The cryptogram is actually a ROT13 with the exception of the double letters, which cycle through each other only. Once translated, the runes spell out an inner puzzle, which needs to be solved to figure out the words of power to open the door:

Thou doth seek to find the Tear
and promise thou wilt keep it well
know that it doth lie quite near
but first thou needst to learn the spell

A weapon found in the stump of a tree
reverse now its name and take just the start
the second word's letters are three
reverse the first and add the last part

This verse holds the word to make portals open
but in portions that may be unexpected
translate the portents and mayhaps thou wilt win
able to teleport as thou hast directed

(The first paragraph is filler and introduction. The second paragraph's first sentence instructs you to find the word "AXE" (from the Magic Axe in the stump in Jhelom in Ultima 5). Then, reverse it (EXA) and take just the start (EX). The second word has three letters- reverse the first (by which I mean, reverse the first word, EX, into XE, then add what's necessary to turn it into a three letter Word of Power: XEN. The last paragraph has the syllable POR in each line. The final solution is "EX XEN POR", which opens the door.)

Once spoken, the door opens.

Stage 4: Inside is another Reaper and another set of Headlesses. They drop as loot colored stones, one of each of the virtue colors. In the center are 8 boxes, each of which has a quote about virtue on them (the 8 responses the Codex gives you when finishing Shrine quests from Ultima V):

- [Honesty](#): "A dishonest life brings unto thee temporary gain, but forsakes the permanent."
- [Compassion](#): "Only a detested life owes its pleasures to another's pain."
- [Valor](#): "Those who fear to try, know not their limits and thus know not themselves."
- [Justice](#): "Those who inflict injustice upon others, cannot expect fair treatment unto themselves."
- [Sacrifice](#): "None live alone, save they who will not share their fortune with those around them."
- [Honor](#): "It is the guilt, not the guillotine, that constitutes the shame."
- [Spirituality](#): "To forsake one's inner being is to abandon thy hopes for thyself and thy world."
- [Humility](#): "Pride is a vice, which Pride itself inclines one to find in others, and overlook in oneself."



Placing the stones. Photo credit- Jana Piper

(The quotes placed on the boxes did not include the virtues- identifying them was the puzzle.)

Once the players place the stones in the correct boxes, the broken Tear appears. Heroes have until the final quest to piece it back together.

Notes: This one showed me how difficult it is to scale encounters using this hybrid Amtgard/Alliance combat system. I gave monsters additional armor to offset the players' numerical (and eventually, damage and magic) advantage, but as it happened many of the most skilled combatants chose to Ranger, and the first *three* encounters here wiped the party. Fortunately, no one seemed to really mind, and they progressed nonetheless.

Then the cryptogram was simply too difficult. I dropped more 'solved' sections than I had originally anticipated, and in the end, for time, helped them with the translation when it was clear that they were on the right path to solving it, but actually doing the rest of the grunt work would be boring.

I felt like the stones at the end was mere busywork, but that was enjoyed. And was no less busywork than many puzzles in the games! Vanzilar took the shattered Tear and had it constructed in under an hour.

Combat Stats: Headless- 1 additional armor in each hit location

Reaper- 3 additional armor in each hit location, infinite Fireball spells (must wait 10 seconds between castings)

Props: 8 ~1" stones wrapped in colored duct tape, one for each color.

Printouts of the cryptogram and the 'solved' cryptogram, the latter to be ripped into pieces for monsters to drop.

The shattered Tear, which was this: <https://www.puzzlemaster.ca/browse/novelty/plastic/8542-3d-crystal-puzzle-gem-diamond-pink> (a 41 piece 3D puzzle of a diamond, which I decided was close enough to an upside-down tear).



The completed Tear of Sacrifice. Photo credit: Paul Lester

Ashes of Ascension: Honesty

The Writ of Honesty was destroyed in the Armageddon. At Moonglow, however, it is possible to prove thy honesty and be worthy of the creation of a new one.

Duration: 1.5 hours.

Script: Players RP talking to two scholars of Moonglow, and then the mayor of the city. 8 players, 2 rangers.

Stage 1: The players were divided, at random, into two groups of four, and each ranger took charge of one group. Everyone was handed a blank journal page and a pencil.

Both groups were given the same instruction: they would be asked a question. They were to reflect honestly upon that question, and then write their answer on the journal page. Then they would be given the opportunity to talk about their answer with their group, but this was strictly optional.

The questions were:

Group 1: In thy life so far, what is thy biggest disappointment or failure?

Group 2: If thou wert to die this evening with no opportunity to communicate with anyone, what wouldst thou most regret not having told someone? Why haven't thou told them?

Stage 2: Everyone was instructed to find someone from the other group and share something hard to be honest about. Each pair found a spot of privacy for this conversation- no rangers supervised.

Stage 3: Finally, everyone was gathered in front of the mayor of Moonglow (played by me). He asked them a final question and charged them to answer honestly: "In time of need, wouldst thou be willing to perjure thyself to help a friend?"

If everyone answered 'yes', no one would earn the writ. Anyone answering No showed that they valued Honesty highly enough to be worthy of it. They were given an "Unsigned Writ", which was a scroll with this picture on it:



(The picture is from Lords of Ultima, for the Shrine of Honesty.) They were instructed to bring the Writ to the Shrines to see it empowered into a true Writ of Honesty.

Props: The Unsigned Writ.

Notes: This one went remarkably well- people were happy to have an excuse to spend time discussing and meditating over virtue. Afterward the mayor of Moonglow was asked if he truly felt that Honesty should always come first, and there was a discussion of virtue relativism that was pretty interesting! 4 of the participants answered "No" to the final question, which was actually more than I had expected.

Ashes of Ascension: Valor

The Dagger of Valor was returned to Valoria after the battle, and is now the trophy for winning the Tournament of Valor. 8 players, 3 rangers. I dismissed two of the rangers at the beginning, as I cut their bit for time.

Duration: 1.5 hours.

Script: Master of Ceremonies: "Welcome, Squires, Knights, and Heroes! Welcome to the Tournament of Valor!" Goes on to note that the tournament seems to be increasingly popular, as there are a bunch of people coming to participate from the mainland.

I was going to have two of the rangers fight first as an 'opening act', but I cut that. I think I actually wound up with 7 players so one of my rangers was slotted in as a contestant to make the brackets work.

Rules for the tournament were essentially the same as the HOBLOTH boffer tournament- each match went to the first person to win two bouts, bouts used normal Amtgard rules, lose two limbs you're out, atomic clock timing on hits.

Contestants were paired up randomly. The final winner was then made to fight the “winner of last year’s Tournament of Valor”, as played by Lord Jouten. If the player wins, they get the Dagger. If not, Jouten was to note that the players were new here, and ask why they were entering the tournament. Upon hearing the story of the Guardian and the Time Lord, he was to offer them the Dagger to aid in their fight.

Props: The Dagger of Valor. Purchased from Dark Knight Armoury, “Ready for Battle Basic LARP Dagger”.

Notes: Jouten wound up winning his championship defending bout. He improvised at that point, however, asking the winner, Dravyn Darkmoor, why he deserved the Dagger of Valor. He then gave it to him for having a good response, but also for taking a solid shot to the face and not even flinching.

Ashes of Ascension: Cowardice

Monsters have gotten their hands on the Shard of Cowardice! Our heroes must get it from them before the Wyrmguard do.

Duration: 1 hour.

Script: The Shard is in the hands of trolls. The one actually holding it is, unsurprisingly, a coward, and will flee from any attackers. The rest of the NPCs will be waves of attackers while the shard-holder continues to run away. If it is killed, another troll will grab the shard if possible. The shard can be used, once, to summon an Ice Elemental, which can freeze players in place to help the shard holder escape. During an early wave, a gazer will be present to reinforce the trolls.

Combat stats: Trolls- 2 extra armor at each location.

Ice elemental- 3 extra armor at each location. Unlimited Freeze packets, 10s cooldown. Once can By Voice Freeze.

Props: The shards were just large black stones purchased from Orchard Supply Hardware. I got a bag. I have a lot left over.

Notes: This one didn’t go according to plan but worked out well anyway. If I recall correctly, the first wave of trolls wiped the party, which let the coward flee farther up. We reset further up the field and they fought the second wave, with NPCs respawning when instructed by me. We didn’t use the initial idea of letting the shard summon an ice elemental. Instead, when the players got their hands on the shard, an ice elemental spawned between them and the exit. A lot of players were dropped in that final push but the one holding the shard made it out, which made it a success for the heroes.

Combat stats: The gazer could throw “Sleep” as a packet but was otherwise weak.

Ice elemental: 3 armor per location, can throw Freeze as a packet.

Ashes of Ascension: Honor

Shame has been emptied of monsters but is now thick with puzzles and traps. At its heart: the Chalice of Honor.

Duration: 2 hours.

Script: First, the players need to have solved the crossword presented at the end of The Beginning. (If they hadn't, I was going to run the quest just for the fun of it, but they wouldn't get the Chalice at the end.)

Stage 1: A player needs to recite the phrase "IN HARMONY WITH INFINITY", the solution to the crossword. (They should also make sure to note the letters that make up TWO with the dots over them, as they will need that later.) This opens the entrance to the dungeon.

Stage 2: The players are presented with a stack of pages of cardstock with lines, whirls, and patterns on them. They must be put together like a jigsaw to open the next door. When they do they should also take note that there is a prominent "3" in the center of the final patterns.

Stage 3: I'm afraid I have lost the notes on this one. I took a bunch of colored card stock and put runes on each one. I used painters' tape to put one rune on each of most of the squares on the chess board. Then I wrote instructions on a sign that were something like: "The Truthful will be the greatest ally to the monarch; the Loving, to their friend. But only the Couragous may pass. And in passing, should take note of their path." The solution was that to cross the chess set they could only step on the red runes. They also needed to see that the all-red path spelled out "SEVEN."



Puzzles in Shame. Photo credit- Jana Piper

Stage 4: They approached the four statues near the chess set and were told that each one would ask them a riddle. The riddles, in order, were:

Riddle 1:

Tall as a house

Round as a cup

All the king's horses

Can't draw it up

What is it?

(Answer: WELL)

Riddle 2:

If you've got it, you want to share it

If you share it, you haven't got it

What is it?

(Answer: SECRET)

Riddle 3:

Walk on the living, they don't even mumble

Walk on the dead, they mutter and grumble

What are they?

(Answer: FALLEN LEAVES)

Riddle 4:

Who makes it, has no need of it

Who buys it, has no use for it

Who uses it can neither see nor feel it

What is it?

(Answer: COFFIN)

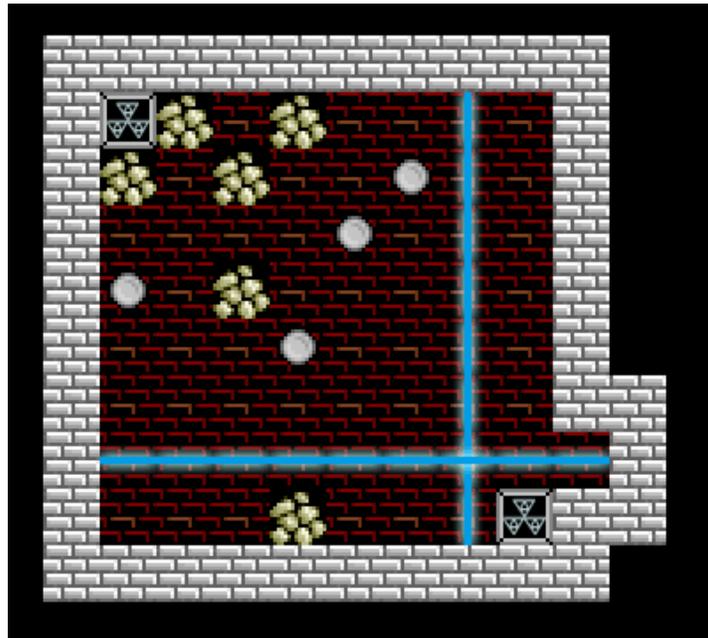
Stage 5: Next up, we go to a 4x4 grid board, with a knight and a rook on it, of opposing colors, starting in opposite corners. Here the players must play Survivor

(<https://www.thezorklibrary.com/history/survivor.html>) The heroes play as the Wizard, and must move in a Knight's jump, which causes the square they leave behind to become a pit. (This was represented by placing one of the runes from the previous puzzle onto the square temporarily). They must move to a square that is both unoccupied and not a pit. I played the Mage, who could move to any non-pit

unoccupied square. The Wizard can pass his turn. The Wizard wins when all squares are pits except the one he is on and the one he will be occupying.

Given that the wizard can pass, the Mage piece is actually irrelevant and the game boils down to covering the 4x4 grid in knight's jumps. Until the players realized this, I continued to play the Mage, but after that point I stopped to make things easier and quicker.

Stage 6: Back to the full chess board, but with one additional square added to the board. White pawns represented walls that can be moved; black pawns represented walls that block movement. An X was taped in the upper left and lower right squares, and the aforementioned additional square was up and right from the lower right corner. See diagram:



Belts were used to represent the blue 'lasers', which are emitted from both sides. The yellow rocky tiles are the white pawns (movable), the circular pillars are the black pawns (immovable). A hero starts standing in the upper left corner and all actions are made by that participant. If the hero winds up standing on a square that has a beam passing through it, the puzzle resets and they return to the upper left corner. The active hero may push a white pawn one square away from themselves unless there is another pawn or either color in the way (or the edge of the board). A single white pawn moved into the row or column with a beam doesn't do anything, as the beam is emitted from both sides, but two such pawns allows one to talk through the now safe space between them.

Stage 7: Solving that puzzle leads to the innermost vault. It is locked with a padlock with three number dials on it. The combination is, therefore, 2-3-7, as found in previous puzzles.

The Vault is full of treasure, and also the Chalice, and has a sign which reads "The Honorable will take only that which they need." If any player takes anything except just the Chalice, the Chalice disappears and the quest is failed.

Originally the Chalice was going to have 3 rebuses on it which would need to be translated into oaths which would be spoken at the Shrine during the last quest of the chain, but constructing the rebuses did not happen, and so this was skipped.

Notes: I had originally planned to cut the riddles and Survivor, but my players did extremely well at the early puzzles, and also knocked out all 4 riddles very quickly.

About the puzzles:

- The first one in the dungeon, piecing together the pseudo-jigsaw, is one that I stole directly from an Alliance San Francisco game a few months ago. Thanks, Jim, for the idea. 😊 His was much neater than mine.
- The runes making the correct path across was obviously ripped straight out of Indiana Jones. As that's the scene that almost every single person I talked to about this quest while I was making it asked me if I was going to use a version of, this should fail to surprise. I was afraid it would be too easy but they did try a few other variations before trying red-only.
- Riddles! The first riddle is from Zork 2 originally, and I had honestly completely forgotten that it also appears in Ultima V. The second riddle I took from the movie Mirrormask, and as a spoiler it also appears in my game (The Dark Unknown). The other two I just found online.
- Survivor is from Return to Zork. In it, you play Survivor twice, once as each side, but when you play the Mage side, the Wizard was not allowed to pass- that was added as an "advanced rule" when you played the Wizard at the end of Return to Zork. I had considered making the players play both sides, but when I had to be the Wizard I needed to have a system for making all my moves, and I was afraid that the players would win just because I screwed up my knight's coverage without them even needing to do anything right, so I just skipped it. I almost cut this entirely but my players seemed raring to go to do more puzzles, and we were doing good on time, so I re-included it.
- The King's Puzzle is from The Dark Unknown. It is inspired by the Royal Puzzle in Zork III (lot of Zork references in this quest!). I didn't include the solution in this document so as not to spoil it for anyone who might play DU down the road.

Props: The Chalice of Honor that I ordered on Etsy did not arrive in time, so I used a stone chalice that I already had. Because I worried about it getting damaged, however, as soon as the quest was over we swapped it out for a plastic one someone had from another quest at the HOBLOTH. Besides that, my props were a LOT of paper with things written on them. For the jigsaw I taped 18 pieces of card stock together with painter's tape, flipped that over, and drew the pattern (the overall finished grouping was not a perfect square- there was a 4x3 section and then the other 6 pieces were on the edges not lined up with the grid). Then I carefully removed the tape and shuffled them.

For the Indiana Jones puzzle I just had about 50 pieces of quartered card stock which I wrote a rune on in sharpie.

For everything else I made use of the large chess pieces already present.



The intended Chalice of Honor

Ashes of Ascension: Humility

A new Crook of Humility must be made, and so the heroes are off to New Magincia to try to do so.

Duration: 1 hour.

Script: This quest is a straight-up redo of the quest to get the Rune of Humility from Ultima VI. 6 players talk to a variety of NPCs to try to find which is the humblest. That person, according to the governor of New Magincia, will have the power to bless a shepherd's crook into being the Crook of Humility.

The shepherds playing NPCs were not given full Name/Job/Bye style scripts, but rather a broad outline of their character and the manner in which they can be revealed to have some pride in them where appropriate. The residents of New Magincia are:

1. The Governor, who I played. He tells the players that the humblest can bless the crook, and asks the players to come tell him when they have figured out who is humblest. If the players try to talk to him as well (which they did not when the quest ran), he will eventually note that in his spare time what he enjoys doing is practicing juggling, and that he is actually kind of proud of his progress in learning how.
2. A farmer. Can be cajoled into talking about how humble farming is.
3. Fisherman. While there are several in town, considers herself to be the best at it.
4. Feels that the virtue of Honesty forces her to say she is the humblest person in New Magincia.
5. A wood carver. Recently finished his apprenticeship, and hopes to get better but it currently still not a match for his teacher. This is the humblest person in town.
6. The Innkeeper. Fond of noting that serving others is the humblest thing he could think of, which is why he took on this job.
7. A mage, which he knows is an odd job in New Magincia. His name is Majestro. His chosen name alone is the hint that he is not the humblest.

Players must talk to everyone and return to the governor with #5's name. He will put his hands upon the plain crook and transform it into the Crook of Humility.

Notes: I made Jouten play the humblest partially because people had trouble believing that he could be the humblest person in New Magincia. It worked, though they did figure it out.

Props: The Crook of Humility was the lowest budget prop. I got a “LARP Crook” that separated into several pieces. (the-larp-store.com, “Shepherd’s Crook White”.)

Ashes of Ascension: Hatred

The shard of Hatred is in the hands of a foul dragon! It must be defeated if the heroes want to get their hands on it.

Duration: 1.5 hours.

Script: This is a single, long, drag-out fight. The Dragon is made up of 5 people with strips of fabric tying their belts together into a rough pentagon- one (me) the head, the other 4 the claws. The head has an endless supply of fireballs, invoked by calling out “Dragon’s breath!” and throwing a packet.

There is an extra ranger helping this fight- they stand off to the side with an orange headband (denoting that they are out of game), and they track the dragon’s total hit points. This relieves the people playing the role of the parts of the dragon to know how much damage other parts of the dragon have taken.

The dragon has 100 hit points. Each limb has 40 hit points (note: I think. I changed the numbers at the last minute upon seeing the composition of the players), and if a limb runs out of hit points it stops fighting back but also stops being damageable. The head cannot be killed before the dragon dies.



The Dragon, preparing for combat. Photo credit- Jana Piper

When the party first approaches, the dragon is scornful. The fight begins, and the intention is that the dragon will kill all of the players. In fact, the dragon's hit points are not even tracked during this phase.

When the PCs are dead, however, we do not go into the usual back off and reset. Instead, the dragon rages. Something along the lines of: "Hate! I hate thee all. My hatred for thee is so great that were I to inscribe thy names and the depth of my hatred upon each scale upon my vast body, it would only show the tiniest sliver of the hate I bear for thee. My hatred is too great to kill thee only once! BY VOICE: RESURRECT! HATE!" (The astute reader will note that the dragon's speech is inspired by AM from "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream".)

If the players lose this phase of the fight, the dragon flies off with the shard, but if they win they get the shard and the dragon's treasure.

Notes: It is important for the people playing the dragon to practice briefly before starting to get used to walking around while constrained in how far they can drift from other parts of the body.

The multi-player dragon idea is one that I took from particularly epic Alliance LARP encounters I've been a part of. I originally brought a large piece of fabric with the intention of putting holes in it for each person to stand in, but without a great deal of hemming/strengthening the fabric just tore until the holes were all unusable. The strips of cloth wound up being a better solution overall anyway, I think, though one came untied and we just had to keep an eye on each other to make sure we didn't get too separated.

Ashes of Ascension: Spirituality

The Ankh of Spirituality was taken by the enemy. Our heroes need to take it back.

Duration: 1 hour.

Script: The Wyrmguard have taken the Ankh to one of their fortresses, so the players will have to assault the Fort to get it back. First, however, they have to get there.

Stage 1: First, they need to fight their way up the mountain pass to the fortress. This entails fighting their way through two packs of monsters. First is a group of trolls with a Giant. The second group, once that one is defeated (or wins) is trolls with two giants.

Then they reach the fortress. Rangers play Wyrmguard. We started in the fort, with bowmen at the "towers" (not really towers, but the sides with crenellations). The party is given three attempts to storm the fort- after a third failure, the Wyrmguard affect a magical escape with the Ankh.

Notes: Again, tuning is hard. I think I wiped the party on the first giant fight and reduced the stats for giants on the second.

The players succeeded on the second assault on the keep. There were three wyrmguard left alive and, best as could be told, all the players were dead. I had been about to call out that the players should rez and reset when I was backstabbed by Wind, who killed me and the other wyrmguard on my side of the fort. We died silently enough that she was able to cross to the right side and kill the last wyrmguard, at which point the players rezzed as all foes were dead. It turns out she had climbed the back wall of the fort and managed to jump in with a weapon and without making enough noise for us to notice. This was probably the most epic moment of my quest chain and I want to give her props for it.

Combat stats: Trolls we'd seen before, here they had 1 armor per location.

Giants had 3 armor per location and dealt 2 damage, and the first giant was played by Jouten with his giant sword. Their armor was reduced for the second fight and the rangers playing them were asked to dial back their own skill for better balance.



Assault on the keep. Photo credit- Paul Lester

Ashes of Ascension: Justice

The Quill of Justice has, ironically, been stolen! The heroes must find the culprit among Yew's inhabitants.

Duration: 1.5 hours

Script: The above was the original outline for the quest. I rewrote it on the flight to Austin, in part due to having fewer shepherds than I would have needed for what I originally had in mind.

In the new version, the High Judge of Yew tells the heroes that the Quill is here in Yew, but will only allow itself to be given to someone who has performed a feat of Justice. And it just so happens that Adelus had his purse stolen yesterday in the morning- perhaps the heroes can find the thief?

This quest did give each person a Name/Job/Bye script, with permission to deviate and improve for minor things. I hovered nearby out of game and fed answers to people where necessary, and at one point told the players that they should ignore a specific inconsistency because it had come about merely through NPC improvisation.

Unfortunately, the scripts did not survive the week, so I will summarize here. Note that the quest took place in the evening.

Adelus: Left the tavern after eating breakfast the previous day's morning, and upon getting home discovered that he was missing his money pouch. The pouch not only contained currency but also an amulet that was important to him and is more important for him to have returned than the money itself.

Brand: The tavernkeeper. Important bits of information are that Adelus had paid for his breakfast just before leaving (and so still had his pouch then), that Caine and Deirdre were both present when he left, and that Caine came in this morning and paid off a large bar tab.

Caine: Jeweler. Claims he hasn't seen the amulet, no one has tried to sell it to him despite the fact that his shop is half pawn shop. Caine says that he paid off the bar tab because Eric repaid a debt owed to *him* and that's where the money came from.

Deirdre: Writer. Has bits of additional information about each person. Most importantly, that Eric has family elsewhere to whom he sends money frequently.

Eric: Says he found the pouch on the road. It had money in it but no amulet when he found it. He used the money he found to pay his debt to Caine this afternoon, and if the money was actually Adelus's, Eric vows to repay him for what he unwittingly took.

Putting it all together, the intent is for the players to find one specific inconsistency- Caine repaid the bar tab this morning, saying he got the money from Eric paying him back, but Eric didn't do so until the afternoon. If this is pointed out to the Judge, he orders Caine's home and shop to be searched, which turns up the amulet. The players are given the Quill.

Notes: Extra props to my NPCs for playing these roles, they did spectacularly. Also, yes, all the names except the first one are from Amber.

Ashes of Ascension: Falsehood

The final blackrock shard is in Deceit, guarded by monsters. The heroes must get it from them.

Duration: 1.5 hours.

Script: Here the heroes find 2 fire elementals and 2 ice elementals. There is a twist here, however- it is a puzzle boss fight. The elementals are immune to damage *except* from the elementals of the opposite element. The challenge for the players is to arrange the fight to get the fire elementals to hit the ice elementals with their fireballs and vice versa with their ice balls. Once there is only one kind of elemental remaining, it is vulnerable to damage from the players.

Notes: This quest was rained out by an amazingly torrential downpour. It was agreed that no one would be upset by me narrating this as a failure just to let the bad guys win *one*, so we said that the Time Lord was unable to open a gate to Deceit in time because of the Imbalance storm going on.

Monster stats:

Fire Elementals: 10 hit points once they start taking damage, endless supply of fireballs with a 10 second cooldown. Immune to damage from all sources except Ice Elementals while there are any Ice Elementals still living.

Ice Elementals: 10 hit points once they start taking damage. Endless supply of ice balls with a 10 second cooldown. Ice balls are like fireballs except instead of setting you on fire, they cause you to be Frozen (can't move lets for 10 seconds). Immune to damage from all sources except Fire Elementals while there are any Fire Elementals still living. Immune to being set on fire by a player who has taken damage from a fire elemental- they need to get hit with a packet directly.

Ashes of Ascension: Compassion

The Heart of Compassion has been taken by monsters into the dungeon Despise. The heroes much fight their way in and get it before the Wyrmguard does.

Duration: 1 hour.

Script:

Stage 1: Fight Orcs.

Stage 2: Orcs + Giants.

Stage 3: 2 extra-buff Giants. While the players are fighting them, the remaining Rangers come in from behind as Wyrmguard and attack the players from behind. There were 4 Wyrmguard, two of which had bows. They also considered the giants to be foes, turning things into a three-way melee.

Stage 4: Once that fight was wrapped up, the Heart was found, but was shattered in pieces! The Time Lord suggests that they bring the broken Heart to the shrine later and use its power to repair it.

Notes: The heart starts out shattered because the first heart I ordered actually arrived broken. The heart was purchased from peoplecrystals on Etsy, and they were *very* quick about replacing the broken one for free.

Not a lot to say about this one. I think the scaling got a bit better, which is good because this was the second to last quest.

Combat stats: Orcs: 1 armor per location.

Giants: 3 armor per location, damage as represented by their weapon.

Wyrmguard: 1 armor per location, damage as represented by weapon.

Ashes of Ascension: DOOM

DOOM is a two part quest. First, the Time Lord brings the heroes to the Shrines, where each of the sigils are empowered/recreated. Then the Codex is read to learn how to defeat the Guardian. Part two is to battle the Guardian's forces.

Duration: 1.5 hours.

Script: Stage 1: This was the first quest for which I put back on the full Time Lord costume. I walked the site and called that the Time Lord was calling all adventurers to come to the final battle. After ensuring

that everyone with a sigil or shard was there, we step through to the Shrine (again using the Fellowship Hall).

The Time Lord makes a brief speech about how well the heroes have done, and how they have fought for the virtues. He then asks for each sigil in turn to be brought forth. The same quotes as used back in Sacrifice (the Ultima V shrine quest resolution quotes) were read for each virtue. The hero holding each one was bidden to step forward and kneel.

The Unsigned Writ of Honesty was turned into the Writ of Honesty.



Winfield holds the empowered Writ of Honesty. Photo credit- Noni Valentine

The shattered Heart of Compassion was repaired.

The others were empowered with their virtues.

The two shards were brought forward and placed on the altar, where they were destroyed.

Then the Time Lord brought forth the Codex, and read the following aloud:

“Thou hast renewed the virtues. Now thou dost have a window of opportunity to unmake the Guardian for all time.

He will be surrounded by his allies and servants. So it will be both virtue and force of arms that carries this day.

Now the Time Lord shall return thee to Terfin, where all must be saved.”



The Time Lord with the Codex. Photo credit- Santiago Zapata

Stage 2: The players are told that they do not need to physically bring the sigils to the final battle, for fear that they will get damaged or hurt someone. The Dagger of Valor is explicitly allowed to be used as a weapon, however.

The first wave of the fight is a group of Wyrmguard outside the throne room. They are designed to be not trivial pushovers but a fairly easy fight. Two have bows but they were vastly outnumbered.

Stage 3: The real fight begins. We have two ice elementals, two fire elementals, and I think a gazer, and a single Wyrmguard. The Wyrmguard respawns as often as necessary. The boss monsters respawn once each, and then only on my signal.

After a brief while into the fight, I emerge as the Guardian (with a Guardian mask on). As the Guardian I rail against the heroes, throw various spells and effects, and generally act arrogant and like their swordblows are beneath me.

There is one more NPC with an orange headband, who basically plays the role of the virtues. At his judgment, he might make one of the following calls:

“Spirituality fills thee! By voice: HEAL!”

“Humility fills thee! By voice: Magic Armor/Spell Shield!” (caller’s choice.)

These two calls could be made as often as deemed necessary. The following call were made once for each remaining virtue:

“Compassion/Valor/Honesty/Justice/Sacrifice/Honor fills thee! By voice: RESURRECT!”

At three points, the Guardian would attempt to make use of the anti-principles embodied by the shards. When he called out “I call upon the power of Hatred/Cowardice!”, the Virtue-caller would narrate loudly: “But Hatred/Cowardice has betrayed the Guardian! No effect!”

However, as the Imbalance Storm allowed the Guardian to gain the Falsehood shard, he was able to use its call once:

“I call upon the power of Falsehood! By voice: BERSERK!”

Finally, after each of the virtues was used at least once, the Guardian calls out “Enough of this! Thy power is nothing before me! BY VOICE: DEATH!”

The Virtue-caller then, after giving the players a moment to die, calls out, “Darkness surrounds thee! Thou dost hear a voice in the blackness. ‘Thy work here is not done. The virtue doth support thee. Return and finish thy task!’ INFINITY FILLS THEE. By voice: RESURRECT! By voice: MAGIC ARMOR! By voice: SPELL SHIELD! By voice: PLUS ONE DAMAGE!”

At this point, the heroes make short work of the remaining monsters and finally, surrounding the Guardian, slay him as well. As he falls to his knees, he cries out, “DAMN YOU, HEARTH OF BRITANNIA! DAAAAMMMNNN YOOOUUUUU!” And then it is narrated that the face of the Guardian departs from the human that he had been possessing, who is, however, still dead.

And thus do the heroes save the land of Britannia once more.



The final battle. Photo credit- Isabelle Desfossés

Notes: The best thing about this was after it was done, I talked for a bit thanking everyone for participating, thanking my rangers and shepherds, and all that stuff, and as soon as I finished, the skies opened up and it started raining. Perfect timing, except that I still had to clean up.

Richard Garriott did actually join the final charge during DOOM as Shamino. He took an arrow to the chest almost immediately, and a few minutes later had to leave to take care of his daughter, but I appreciated it anyway.

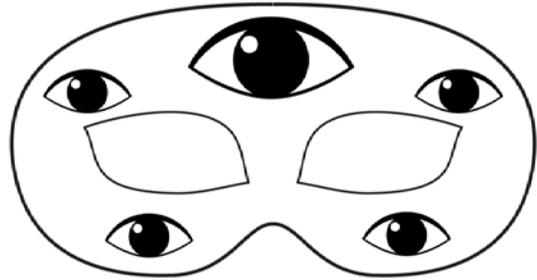
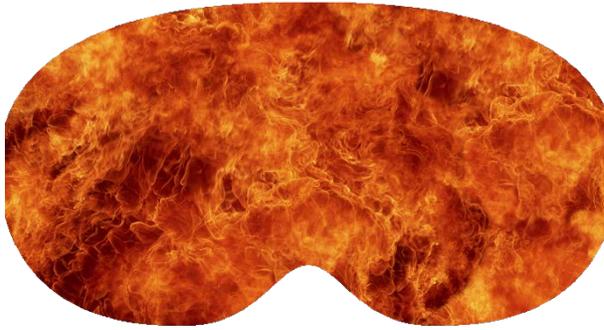
In the original draft, each sigil would have its own unique power to help its wielder in the final battle. Bonus damage, immunity to strikes to the back, magebane, and so on were on the table as options, but I wound up deciding late in the process that I didn't want to create player conflict by having eight people participate in a quest and then have to figure out which one person gets the trinket at the end. Also, it meant some of the more unwieldy sigils didn't have to be carried into combat. I think the group buff version worked perfectly well.

Props: The empowered Writ of Honesty was printed on the same kind of scroll paper as the unfinished one, and simply said "Writ of Honesty" across the top and "AHM" in the center. I couldn't think of anything better.

The Codex of Ultimate Wisdom is a prop I had made for a previous event. It's a large blank book with a leather cover on it made by this etsy merchant: <https://www.etsy.com/shop/AsphodelsAttic> . The cover shows the Codex symbol.

I also had the biggest mask of the set for this one- the Guardian's face. The eyeholes were remarkably small, but I managed to survive the fight well enough. Because I haven't described them so far, the

masks were printed on transfer paper and put onto white bandanas purchased at Michael's. Through this I discovered that Kinko's/Staples/etc no longer have inkjet printers.



The masks

Epilogue

No, there wasn't an epilogue quest, but I wanted a place to put some final notes.

I want to take this opportunity to say thank you again to all of my rangers and shepherds, though. Also, my friend Tyler, with whom I brainstormed the initial forms of these quests. Shadow of Light, for being my guinea pig tester for the crossword. All my players, for being great about all the little adjustments and party wipes. Starr Long, for coming out to be Blackthorn. And of course Rustic for putting on HOBLOTH 3 in the first place.

This was a huge undertaking, much larger than it looked when I started. I blame the various members of plot staff in Alliance SF for making it look easy. I spent most of a solid month working on all of this, writing, sewing tabards, making headbands, sourcing props, and I was glad that in the end it was all worth it.

I also regret that I couldn't just let people keep the sigils at the end of the event. However, this was motivated by two things- one, the same issue as just mentioned, where I didn't want people fighting over who gets to have them, and two, well, I really blew through my budget on this and justified it by having at least some of them be things I could use for other occasions. Unfortunately, I wound up running out of time before I could come up with some other something to hand out to people as a thank you for participating. This is something I'd definitely do differently if I do this kind of thing again.

I hope this document was interesting to some of you. Walk in virtue, and maybe I'll see you next time!

The final page of this document is the solved version of the Shame crossword, for those who are curious. Don't turn the page if you still want to work on it, or are afraid of a monster at the end of the book.

Some random stats:

- Total quests: 13 (1 rained out)
- Trips to Michael's: 17
- Trips to other hardware stores, etc: 4
- Puzzles: 14
- Puzzles in some way inspired by Zork: 3
- Virtues: 8

