



PILGRIMAGE to the CENTER of the EARTH

ABOUT THIS GAME

“Pilgrimage to the Center of the Earth” is a freeform LARP by Rebecca Maxfield about religious experience, specifically minority religious experience. All players play dwarves in a fantasy setting who live on the surface and are making a pilgrimage to a religious site in the underground dwarven realms. The game does not require a GM and was originally designed to be played over video chat by 4-6 players over 2 hours. This document is adapted for in-person play, with a GM as guide.

COSTUMES AND PROPS

- Wear something comfortable, as though you are going to travel.
- You will need a change of clothes that will represent the clothing that pilgrims wear to enter the inner part of the shrine. This should be an actual change of clothes, not something to wear on top of your travel clothes. If you wish, you can decide as a group in advance of the event what you want pilgrim clothing to look like and/or what values you want it to embody. No player should buy anything for this.
- You will need a small amount of food and/or drink (no particular symbolism) to consume during the game.
- (Optional) You may, if you opt to create your character in advance, bring props representing the items you select from under Items. This is not a requirement.
- GM will provide clay.

BEFORE PLAYING (30m)

- Create your characters using the guiding questions under Character Backgrounds and any other details you choose. Take a look over Play in case you want to decide in advance on the answers to personal questions and conversation topics that may arise. Choose your items from under Items.
 - Give your character a name. Here’s a name generator that may help if you feel that your character would have a dwarven name (the site has other generators as well): https://www.fantasynamegenerators.com/dwarf_names.php
 - When all players have created their characters, introduce them to the group.
- As a group, make any advance decisions that you wish about the theology and practice of dwarven religion in this run of the game (eg. mono/polytheism, what a house of worship looks like or contains, important rituals, the nature and significance of the religious site you are visiting). You may also opt to skip all or part of this step and wing it in-game, accepting that any player’s statement about religious worldbuilding is “canon”.
 - Sexism, homophobia, transphobia, or other real-world bigotry should only be a feature of the fictional religion if players explicitly decide together in advance that they want this.



- Make any necessary decisions about what content you do not want to appear in the game, using eg. the lines and veils system (lines = this thing is not a part of the world, veils = this may be mentioned or alluded to but is not featured prominently or described in detail). Establish other safety mechanisms of your choice regarding content that may arise during play, such as the X card or traffic light system.

CHARACTER BACKGROUNDS

Distribute these among the players through decision or random dice roll. Duplicates of any answer are fine, but there should be some variety among the group of pilgrims. You're not limited to these if another option leaps out at you that you're interested in playing.

How long has your family lived on the surface?

- Generations and generations. As far as I know, my ancestors were some of the first dwarves to ever live among humans and other non-dwarves.
- Five generations. All the ancestors I've personally met grew up on the surface.
- Three generations. My grandparents were the ones to move. I might or might not have/be in touch with cousins who still live underground.
- My parents were the first generation in my family to come to the surface.
- I'm the first in my family to live on the surface.

How would you describe your relationship to religion and faith?

- I devoutly believe in the divinity or divinities of the dwarven religion. I believe that they are the origin of the world, watch out for me, and deserve to be worshipped.
- I believe in the divinity or divinities of the dwarven religion. Not all the stories of our religion are literally true but these stories, and the rituals and worship that we do, are a way that we try to understand and relate to a power or powers greater than ourselves.
- I don't believe in a "higher" power, but I believe in the community and its rituals.
- I don't believe in any of it.

What is your neighborhood and social circle like? (Has this always been the case, or have you moved/has the area changed?)

- I live in a dwarf neighborhood/enclave. Most people I interact with regularly are dwarves.
- Most people around me are humans/other non-dwarves, but there's a dwarf community here too.
- Most people around me are humans/other non-dwarves, but there are a few dwarves around.
- My immediate family and I are the only dwarves I interact with regularly where I live.
- My life keeps me traveling from place to place.

Do you wear a beard? (Dwarves of any gender grow beards.)

- Yes, I wear it long.
- Yes, a short trimmed one.
- No, I'm clean-shaven.



Decide why you have chosen to make this pilgrimage and to make it now. Some options:

- It's a religious obligation.
- I want to be closer to the divinity/divinities.
- Basically, tourism.
- It's the done thing or would get me cred.
- I'm seeking something and maybe I'll find it.
- My family wants or would have wanted me to.
- I'm going on behalf of someone who can't go.
- I'm about to embark on something new.
- Something great recently happened to me.
- Something terrible recently happened to me.
- I want to meet other dwarves.

ITEMS

This is a non-exhaustive list of items you might have brought with you -- you are not limited to the contents of the list if you have other inspiration. During play, your character will decide on at least one item to leave at the shrine, and, of the remaining items to bring back, one item to get blessed. Before play, choose about four or five each (duplicates among players are fine).

- My tools
- My ancestor's tools
- My wedding ring
- A piece of clothing or jewelry handed down from a parent, grandparent, or other ancestor
- A religious amulet/garment I wear regularly
- A religious amulet/garment I wear on special occasions
- A dish/glass/other tableware which is special for religious or non-religious reasons
- My copy of a religious text
- My cloak, coat, boots, or hat
- My weapon
- A piece of jewelry or a sword that I smithed
- An object that I made in my trade that is not traditionally closely associated with dwarves (eg. an article of clothing, a food item that I grew or cooked, my art or writing)
- An object that I made in my trade which is largely not part of underground dwarf society (eg. something I woodworked)
- My key to my guild's documents chest
- My diary
- My ancestor's diary
- My will
- Recognition for my efforts in some field: medal, diploma, professional license, etc.
- Food or drink
- My hair/beard
- A stone from my current home
- A stone from my ancestors' home underground
- A household religious image
- Someone's ashes/remains
- A gameboard or pack of cards
- A lantern
- A first aid kit
- A musical instrument
- My kid's stuffed toy
- My habitual or favorite garment/weapon/doohickey of specifically non-dwarven design/manufacture
- A letter to a friend or relative, or from one

PLAY (1h30m)

Your characters met on the pilgrimage route at one of the inns in the underground dwarven realms where many pilgrims eat and stay the night on their way to the religious site. Between families/groups traveling together and locals at their usual tables, you all, though traveling on your own from different places on the surface, wound up at a table together, and you've been continuing together since. You've had time to learn basic facts about the life of each member of the group and why they are here.



Over the course of (at least) several days in game time, you will journey from one location in the playing space to another, following the GM, on your way to the religious site, and perform rituals to get into the appropriate mindset for entering the shrine. Each one should be “suggested” in-story by one of the characters, whose player will set the scene initially by describing (in or out of character) the environment and mood where it will take place. The player who began each scene will also assess when the conversation seems to have concluded, and wrap it up. (You may also converse while traveling from one location to another.) These rituals do not need to be performed in the order written, but the most efficient order gameplay-wise will be to begin with one of the activities in the first group, walk around while doing one of the activities in the second group and end in a new location, do one from the first group, etc.

While stopped:

- Share a meal with your fellow pilgrims and strengthen your bonds of community. While you eat and drink together, each character should spend approximately 2 minutes talking about a) your impressions of a cool thing you saw while on this journey underground, b) an anecdote of a frustrating situation or person at your job, or c) upcoming plans when you return from the pilgrimage. This is more of a conversation than a series of monologues.
- Focus by making miniature altars or shrines together. Take approximately 3 minutes to make a few clay miniatures each and show them to each other. Player skill at sculpting need not represent character skill; you can describe if you need to. When you are all done, destroy them together. In the absence of clay, this can be a drawing activity (as it is in the virtual version).
- Chant together as an act of concentration and worship. On a hum, a (held) syllable, or a word/name/short phrase that is significant in your worldbuilding, everyone will begin on a different pitch (note) and gradually come to unison (the same pitch). Repeat this process 3 or 4 times.

While traveling:

- Tell your fellow pilgrims your favorite story from your religion. Is it about the actions of a divinity and/or believer(s)? Is it from scripture, commentary, subsequent miracles/revelations, history, anecdote, or even joke? Tell the others what you like about this story. Each character should spend approximately 3-5 minutes on this.
- Share your plans/considerations for which of the items you brought you intend to leave at the shrine, and which you intend to get blessed. Discuss the significance of the items you are considering (especially items you may leave at the shrine -- see below) and seek other pilgrims' advice on your decision if needed. This conversation should take approximately 15 minutes.

Next you will arrive at the religious site. It is time to leave an item here, as an offering or with whatever other meaning leaving it may hold for you. Before an item is left here, its worthiness and personal significance to the giver must be established through a speech in praise of it. It is traditional, though not absolutely required, that this speech be given by another pilgrim, not the one who is offering it. Take 1-2 minutes each to deliver your encomium of the object being left.



After offering your items, prepare to enter the inmost part of the shrine. Do so by washing your hands and changing into your special clothing. Once washed and changed, do not speak. When all players are ready, the GM will lead you into the unlit shrine together. You may close your eyes if you want. Sit in the dark and feel the presence of the divinit(ies) of your religion underground, of members of your community around you, of nothing meaningful, or any other interpretation of this experience. When you are ready, leave the inner shrine.

Once you have left the inner shrine, you may speak. Change back into your travel clothes, and begin your long journey home from the religious site (with your item that has been blessed at the site).

Each character should take 1-2 minutes to talk about what you will tell someone (decide on a specific person or people) back home about your experience of the pilgrimage. Like the meal, this can be more of a conversation than a series of monologues.

ENDING PLAY

Leave your characters to complete their journey home without you.

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