

In dreams, what death may come

A scenario for Dying Earth

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This scenario is designed to be woven into your group's current game as it takes place whilst the characters are asleep. It is aimed at any level characters, although may be more suited to the mood of a Turjan-level game.

An Unsettling Start

The premise of this scenario is that a cursed trigger item will slowly draw the PCs into an ghastly dream world. As their sleep becomes less and less restful they start to lose their grip on the real world. Finally in the dénouement they will have to find a novel means of defeating their enemy to escape back to reality.

The scenario starts when one of the PCs handles the trigger item. This could be anything: a rather shiny terce, a mug in a tavern, or a small strange shaped bone found in a pie.

If you would prefer more a more dramatic encounter, this might suffice. The PCs are on the road traveling to their next destination. It is getting late and night is drawing in. As they near their they spot a lone tree from which hangs a gruesome bundle: the half-rotted remains of what may have once been a man. As the characters approach, birds of carrion flap their great wings and fly off in a raucous cacophony. The darkened sun is setting and the long shadow of the hanged man falls across one of the PCs. As it does so, a great dark patch passes portentously over the face of the sun, plunging all into near darkness. It is this shadow that triggers the events that will eventually come to pass.

How long the man has been hanging here is unclear but well picked bones poke out from the remains of his clothing. Beneath him on the ground are his spilled possessions: a rotting leather pouch containing a few terces, a small aquamarine gem and a small pot of dark unguent (this is nothing but a clove scented shaving balm). Should anyone touch the corpse it collapses to the ground in a shower of bones and dried up sinews.

Any attempt to contact the spirit of the dead man will fail as it has been claimed by another. Any attempt to read what happened here shows nothing but a deeply unhappy soul committing suicide. The gossip at the local inn will yield the usual tall tales: a failed love affair, a morbid fear of wheat, or a rope salesman proving his wares. In any case, the truth is not to be discovered here. Let some time pass to allow the PCs to forget this encounter as just another red herring along the way. Then ...

Troubling Events

Some time after the above encounter, the PC who touched the trigger has a strange dream. Pushing his way through a dark forest, he sees up ahead in the gloom, on a hilltop, the shadow of a ruined castle. Suddenly he wakes up. Each night the dream progresses a bit more but anyone to whom he recounts the dream also experiences the same progression, starting from the beginning.

In fact, those in the dream have had their consciousness pulled from their bodies and into some strange netherworld. All those who are at the same stage in the dream will meet each other and will be able to remember their common experiences.

Distressing Dreams

The dream takes place over several nights in the sequence described in the table below. Do not feel obliged to tell the dreamers on which night they currently find themselves as much of what happens in

the dream is forced upon the characters. Such is the nature of dreams. Do not try to avoid this - the effect that is sought after is terror and impending doom. The PCs will not be able to change the order of the dreams but by running through the wood it is possible to catch up with the dreamer in front and experience two dreams in one night, but only if the PC has already visited them, or has been told about them by someone else. It is not possible to fly or teleport through the dream. It's a dream! The rules are different.

Any spells cast during the dream are spent and any pools diminished are not regained in the morning. Pools which require a night's rest are not refreshed if the dreamer loses a night's sleep. Should a dreamer try to sleep in the dream world, on closing their eyes they will be haunted by the eerie visions of that which triggered the dream, be it a mundane item or the hanged man.

The castle should always be present in the dream, if only in the background. Sometimes it may seem distant and serene, at others it hangs over the scene as if intently observing what is going on. Include other gothic elements in your descriptions: dark clouds, a lack of bright colors, the distant sounds of bells, dead or twisted trees. This will work even better if the real world adventure that is taking place at the same time is happy, fun or brightly lit.

The continual presence of the castle is no coincidence. The castle is actually a nightmarish honeytrap that feeds off dread and weakness. Once weakened by the dream, the participants will not be able to resist the castle's final onslaught.

Night	Dream	Effects
1	As above, the dreamers find themselves in a dark wood	None
2	The dreamers behold a shrieking shade as they progress through the wood towards the castle.	Wherewithal or lose a night's sleep.
3	The shade returns, in more melancholy mood. Its neck is bent at an awkward angle. Perception to recognize the dead man from the tree.	Wherewithal or lose a night's sleep.
4	The dreamers reach a dark, cold stream. Peering into it they see their hearts' desires, lying broken and torn at the bottom of the water. Should they plunge in, Swimming with a limit of 1 to avoid drowning. In any case, whatever was in the stream slips away from them.	Each dreamer who drowns starts again at the first night.
5	The stream is behind the dreamers. Suddenly a great boar burst from the undergrowth and charges. A horn sounds and the boar reins in at the last minute, charging off at a tangent. The boar is unaffected by magic but can be physically wounded, although this will only be for show. Its blood is deep red and leaves a trail through the wood. Tracking to follow the trail if the boar is not wounded, otherwise its trail is obvious. If the boar is followed, skip to Night 7, otherwise go to Night 6.	Wherewithal or lose a night's sleep.

6	<p>Going back along the path down which the boar came leads to a small clearing where the body of a beautiful woman is lying. On a first visit, she has obviously been recently crushed by the boar. The only way out is to return to Night 5 on the next night. On their second visit she has decayed further. On a third visit, her spirit rises up and screams curses at the cowards who have not avenged her death.</p>	<p>Such unfortunates as meet the ghost will be haunted forever in their dreams by this woman and never be able to rest properly. This is the end of the dream for them.</p>
7	<p>The boar's trail leads to a clearing in which a purple clad warrior fights the boar. In the background is a steep cliff atop which sits the castle. The warrior kills the boar after a bloody fight but is obviously wounded. As he staggers away from the corpse of the boar a gigantic stone head falls from the sky and crushes him.</p> <p>The PCs can help the warrior but he will not be grateful. Killing the boar is his duty. If they interfere too much he will be distracted and the boar will kill him. Go to Night 8, or Night 9 if the boar is dead.</p>	<p>Athletics to avoid being crushed for anyone standing close to the warrior if he is killed by the giant head.</p>
8	<p>The boar will then set about the PCs. One by one it will hunt them down and kill them.</p>	<p>Anyone who is killed by the boar ends up back at the start.</p>
9	<p>After the boar, the path leads up the steep cliffs. The carrion crows from Night 1 return to harry the climbers.</p>	<p>Athletics to avoid falling back to the start.</p>
10	<p>At the top of the cliffs stands the ruined castle. A dank mist hangs in the air, concealing many of the entrances at ground level, whilst the ruins of three tall but broken towers loom over the top of the fog.</p>	<p>Perception with a limit of 1 to find an entrance or wander in the mist for another night.</p>

The Dread-Filled Dénouement

Once the PCs make their way into the castle, they are trapped there in their dreams until they can find a way out. Time in the dream passes much more slowly than in the real world so you will have to take this into account if they are involved in any waking adventures, or even just paying for room and board. Each time a PC enters a new room you may consider that two hours of real time have passed. Also, in the ruined castle, attempting to rest takes one hour of real time but for no benefit (see above). Being in the castle also drains life-force. PCs must make a **Health** check every two hours. If they lose all their **Health** they will die, their dream body will become a wraith trapped here forever and their real body an empty and decaying husk. This stolen life-force is what feeds the castle.

The castle itself has no fixed structure. Doors and passageways do not always return someone from whence they came. There is also no definite number of rooms. Some theorize that the number of rooms changes to accommodate the size of the group inside. Most rooms have at least three exits through ornate doors, darkened passageways, creaky trapdoors or tottering balconies, which don't lead outside the castle but into the high recesses of the more cavernous chambers. Indeed, the ceilings of the rooms are often difficult to discern, being lost as they are in dim light, poor upkeep and sheer distance.

The décor is early gothic ruin. Think ivy growing on the inside, rotting furniture, unplanned water features, impromptu archways and teetering staircases. Most rooms are deserted although it is often possible to discern movement in the shadows, hear receding footsteps in the corridors and sobbing echoes in the larger rooms.

There are a few fixed features which anyone lost in the castle might encounter. These are the chapel and the bell tower. Everything in the castle is designed to deny hope to those trapped here. The chapel is no exception. Rotting pews, overgrown with moss, ferns and ivy line the nave. Great crumbling arches define rubble strewn aisles on either side. At the top of the nave is the semi-circular apse. Where one might expect window are faceless alcoves in which sit unfinished black statues of giant tortured beetles. Where one might expect an altar, there is the broken and festering corpse of some long forgotten deity. Its head has long since crumbled away and limbs have been hacked off and disappeared but its body has been kept alive by its supernatural fortitude, even whilst pinned to the ground with nine large iron spikes. These have been driven deep into the stone floor and are unmovable. The rib cage has burst open, perhaps even from the inside, and a great blasphemous stone inscribed with terrible profanities has crushed all internal organs to pulp. And yet the god lives on in torment.

Pedantry with a limit of 1 to recognize Nom, an ancient deity of tranquility. It is possible to save Nom from this predicament but only at the cost of his life. The cruel iron spikes that hold him down also maintain his life force. This wretched job requires a **Wherewithal** tally of 10. What's more, as any attempt is made to free Nom, black tentacles will spew forth from the stone in his middle and apprehend his saviors.

Black tentacles, magical limbs.

The stone can create up to 6 of these which will stop any attempt to free Nom. Each tentacle can reach up to 20' and will fight until destroyed. The magic rating is purely defensive and is related to the carvings on the stone. If the stone can be destroyed the tentacles will die. The stone has **Health** 20 and **Magic** 15 but the tentacles will try to prevent attacks against it.

Attack (Speed) 15 Defence (Dodge) 8 Magic 4 Health 10.

Freeing Nom provides the PCs with their first sliver of hope. Although Nom dies in the process, he is freed from the castle. As soon as Nom is dead the castle reacts. A great distant clanging noise starts up. This is the bell tower, another trap for the PCs. Each ring of the bell charges the air with a desperate melancholy and chills the PCs to the bone. It is as if the bell is causing their very bones to sound in some terrible disharmony. Whatever the method by which it works, the PCs must now make a **Health** check every hour whilst this terrible cacophony continues. It is obvious that the bell must be stopped from ringing.

The bell is in the bell tower. The PCs might spy this through a hole in the roof or from some ruined balcony but whenever they attempt to get close they find some blocked corridor, an unexpected turn, or that they have accidentally come in the wrong direction. The noise of the bell does not consistently indicate its direction. In fact, the only way for the PCs to track the bell is to block their hearing. Only if they cannot hear the bell can they reliably use their other sense to find it. In the meantime, they may well have lost quite some **Health**.

Finally the PCs will arrive at the bottom of the bell tower. Forbidding steps lead up and even with ear plugs the sound of the bell still penetrates to rattle the brain around in its case. At the top, fixed on a lintel of bone over a floor made from some strange spongy sinewy substance sits the bell. Arches in the wall look out over the dark forest, the dank swamp and the foul swamp. Great pumping veins imbedded in the walls give off a dull glow that eerily illuminates the scene. The bell is the beating heart

of the evil castle. Made of cracked black metal, or perhaps stone, it looms over the PCs and strikes at them with its clapper.

The key to defeating the bell is hope. This is not something that can be provided by a spell or by a skill. Rather, the PCs have to show that somehow they expect to defeat the bell. During this encounter, any time a PC describes what they will do once they escaped the dream, a crack in the bell will appear to lengthen. This is almost imperceptible at first but after two such cracks appear **Perception** to see the cracks lengthen. It takes 10 such cracks to split the bell.

The Evil Bell.

Anyone who is struck by the clapper loses from a point from Attack, Defence and Magic simultaneously as the bell drains their life force. The bell is immune to physical attack and has very strong magical defences. It really can only be harmed by hope.

Health 10 Attack (Forceful) 10 Defence (Parry) 10 Magic 20

Once the bell is defeated, the PCs wake up, to face whatever dangers have crept up whilst they have been asleep.