

The Dreaming Dead

Written and Game Mastered by Yiorgos Bereveskos

Background

This one-shot was made for Dungeons and Dragons 5th edition and was run for a level 4 party.

Length: 1 session

Content Warnings: Body Horror, Gambling, Insects (mass of worms), Eye Horror, Petrification

The Setup

The players have all departed the world of the living. How each character died is up to their player. The session opens with each player describing their character's last moment before death took them. One by one, they awake atop a grass hill. Stone statues with heads turned to the sky dot the hillside and surrounding lowlands. Standing at the apex of the hill is a figure in tattered yellow robes with a head wrapped in obscuring bandages like the head of a mummy.

The party is in the land of the dead, and have one day to find a means of escape. If they can escape in time, their souls will return to the world of the living, allowing them to be reborn. If they do not find a way out in time, their souls will become lost in the lands of the dead, and their bodies will turn to stone. Escape requires the party to acquire bait to attract Zoi, the world serpent. Those devoured by the world serpent in the lands of the dead will have their soul rejoined with the world of the living.

Bait can be collected from the denizens of the lands of the dead. Some may have to be slain, while others may simply need to be outplayed at a game of dice.

Characters

Si-Wang, the Beckoning

- Found standing at the apex of The Sanctum of the Dreaming Dead.
- They wear tattered yellow robes with a head wrapped in obscuring bandages like the head of a mummy.
- Welcomes the player in the lands of the dead and tells them they have one day to find the means of summoning the world serpent to carry the party home to the lands of the living.

- Tells them that once they have the means of summoning the serpent, the party must meet them on the shores of the facade.

Si-Wang's Poem (the number of keys matches the number of players):

Four keys to open the gate

Four keys to wipe clean the slate

Four keys to reset your fate

Four keys, find them before it is too late

Muerte, Consort of Stars

- Intercepts the party as they travel through the Boreal Forest.
- Muerte appears as a winged creature with the body and antlers of a head with the wings, tail, and head of an owl. One of Muerte's horns is silver and is one of the pieces of bait the party needs.
- Offers to trade them some bait in exchange for the soul of one of the party members. They do not need to decide now whose soul they are going to surrender.
- If they refuse the deal, Muerte can be attacked and killed. Doing so allows the party to take the bait from Muerte's corpse. However, the party member who dealt the killing blow is cursed. (*Curse: AC reduced by 2, charisma checks and saves are at disadvantage.*)
- If they make the trade, before the party leaves for the shore, Muerte shows up and asks a party member to stare at the stars with them. The party can choose to fight Muerte at this stage. The one who kills them receives the same curse.

Morae, Guardian of the Boreal Forest

- Found in a clearing at the heart of the Boreal Forest.
- Morae appears as a giant wolf with eyes covering her body. These eyes all blink in unison and follow whichever party member is talking. One of Morae's eyes is silver and is the bait.
- Morae is not immediately hostile and listens to the party's plight.
- Morae is unsympathetic, but does give the party the chance to earn her bait. If the party brings Morae, the head of Muerte, she gives the party her bait.
- The party can instead choose to attack Morae.
- Killing Morae causes the forest to wither and rot. Leaving the forest becomes more difficult as the rapidly rotting forest threatens to poison them. Occasional DC 18 constitution saves are required to stave off the rot while the party traverses the forest.

Thanatos, The Hollow King

- Found in the Rotting Mountains.
- Thanatos appears as a blood-covered humanoid nervous system, floating ethereally amid the high mountain passes. Thanatos's brain is silver and is the bait.
- Thanatos attacks the party on sight. If Thanatos kills a party member, he can extract their nervous system and replace it with his own. The Hollow King then does everything in his power to get a piece of bait before fleeing for the shore. If the remaining party members can stop The Hollow King before he reaches the shore, they can recover the body and attempt to revive their fallen party member.

Maut, The Worms that Walk

- Found in the Blair along with Bas and Deces. The three of them are sitting on bodies using a soldier's shield as a gaming table where they play games of liar's dice.
- Maut appears as a collection of large worms, forced into a vaguely humanoid shape. The worms are then wrapped in a bloodstained cloak that, from a distance, does a decent job of hiding Maut's frightful form. One of the worms is silver in coloration.
- Maut acts friendly toward the party. They also speak plainly and without euphemism. After a polite conversation with the party, Maut offers them a game of liar's dice. If the party wins, they get Maut's bait. If they lose, Maut attempts to eat the losing party member.
- If the party accepts the challenge, two of the party members play on behalf of the party. Two others play as Bas and Deces.

Bas The Blood Stag

- Appears as a blood-covered stag with a canine mouth. Its large rack impales several human bodies. The limbs of these bodies move to operate the dice during the game.
- Bas cannot speak, so instead the corpses in her rack mumble words on her behalf.

Deces the Liar

- Appears as a decayed centaur with a skeletal upper half. During the game of liar's dice, Deces should be as honest as possible.

Zoi

- Appears as a great serpent that breaches the mirror surface of the facade and devours the party, allowing their souls to return to the lands of the living. Can only be summoned if each party member has a piece of bait.

Locations

The Sanctum of the Dreaming Dead

- A large grassy hill littered with stone statues of people looking up at the sky.
- The long and a brownish green color.
- Acts as the starting point for the one-shot and is centrally located.

The Boreal Forest

- An immense pine forest to the north of the Sanctum.
- Home to Muetre and Morae
- Survival checks are required to successfully navigate to the center of the forest.
- In the middle of the forest runs a river of clear water. If the party drinks this water, they have disadvantage on wisdom saving throws, but their max hp increases by 10.

The Rotting Mountains

- Crumbling snow-capped mountains south of the Sanctum.
- The mountains are a perilous place. Successful survival checks are needed to navigate the terrain.
- Successful DC 16 dexterity saves are required to dodge rockfall. (4D6 bludgeoning damage on a fail)
- Successful stealth checks are required to avoid the dragons that circle the peaks of the Rotting Mountains.
 - If they fail, a black dragon wyrmling will fly down and attack the party.

The Blair

- The Blair is a wretched fog-covered battlefield, littered with corpses and swarming with flesh-eating flies.
- Successful survival and constitution checks are required to get safely through the Blair.
- The Morn Light Inn can be found at the edge of the Blair.
- **Morn Light Inn**
 - Valketh, Mistress of the Morn Light Inn
 - A Lich that gave up seeking immortality and chose to open a bar in the land of the dead.
 - Can warn the party about Maut
 - Bone Saw

- A skeleton bard that has had his instrument grafted to his body.
 - In need of a new pinky finger. Can't leave the Inn to find a new one.
 - If the party helps out Bone Saw, he can give the party a trick die that allows them to decide the number on the face (useful for cheating at liar's dice).
- Gishrak
 - A fish man who challenges the party to a drinking game
- Jharm-vishla
 - A skeletal centaur and former partner of Jharm-vishla.
 - Asks the party to deliver a love not to Deces.
 - If the party does so, Deces leave before the final game, giving the players better odds of winning the game.

The Shores of the Façade

- White sand shore that meets a great ocean stretching onward forever.
- Once the party has the bait, they can walk out onto the surface of the water.
- The mirror-like surface is only disturbed by the coming of Zoi.

Mechanics

- Staring at the stars as they wield over head
 - DC 15 wisdom save or else the character is paralyzed, looking at the stars.
 - They make this save every round. If they fail two more times, they are turned to stone. A success does not end the paralysis effect; it only buys them another round. If by force, the character is made to look elsewhere or their vision is blocked, the paralysis ends.