

The Curious Contraption

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AN ADVENTURE FOR DUNGEON WORLD

This is a one-off adventure designed for use with Dungeon World. Whether you've never run a game before or you're a veteran GM, I hope this book provides plenty of ideas to kick-start your game.

Before the game

Read through this book and familiarise yourself with the background, NPCs, items and locations. Use what you like, replace what you don't.

Prep your stuff. My personal checklist is: printed (or hastily scribbled) monster stats; lots of paper; at least 5 pens (in case I lose the first 4) and a beer. Amend this checklist to suit!

Try and relax for about 20 minutes before the game starts. Have a glance over the *impressions* to give yourself a feel for the type of adventure you're about to run.

At the table

Remind everyone of the basic rules: "When you do something, you roll 2 dice and add a stat. On a 10+ you do it; on a 7-9 you do it with caveats; on a 6- you mark XP and something happens which you probably won't like." Explain anything else as it comes up in play.

Start by reading the *introduction* aloud and asking the players *questions*. Try to ensure each player answers at least one. Focus on throwing the players into the action.

If the players go off on a tangent, do your best to roll with it. Use the NPCs' instincts as a guide, then present the situation

to the players and ask “what do you do?” Don’t be afraid to ask for a moment to consider what happens next.

After the game

Thank everyone for playing and make it clear the game is over. I normally say something like: “Good game, all. Any comments, concerns, questions, witty limericks..?” (No-one’s offered a limerick... yet.)

If there are concerns, try and discuss what could be done better next time there and then.

Pat yourself on the back for a job well done!

DOCUMENT REFERENCE

You’ll see the following icons throughout this book:

- 🗨️ This is something to be **read aloud** to the players - usually an introduction of some kind. “You” means “you, the player” in this context.
- 👁️ This is something **interesting or useful**. If your players are spouting lore, discerning realities, or otherwise investigating, this highlights something they might find out.
- ⚠️ This is a **custom move**. Custom moves work the same way as any other move - they’re just designed for a specific adventure. Custom moves might be in relation to a specific area, situation, creature, item - practically anything.

Introduction

☞ You're in a clearing in front of an abandoned mansion. There's a strange contraption of glass and bronze ahead of you. Someone is fiddling with the bell-jar apparatus at the bottom of it. The contraption has already started sparking and fizzing. You hear the footfalls of the interloper's companions rapidly approaching.

QUESTIONS

- ▶ Why must the contraption never be used again?
- ▶ Where is the nearest settlement from here?
- ▶ (For the smart PC) What might happen if the contraption is destroyed?
- ▶ (For the strong PC) Who do you know that tried to kill the master of that castle? When was the last time you saw them alive?
- ▶ (For the sneaky PC) Who else did you avoid on the way here? How long until they realise you're here?
- ▶ (For the divine PC) How is the contraption interfering with your gods' presence? Has this made your abilities too powerful to control, or less effective than normal?

IMPRESSIONS

- ▶ A musty citadel on a mountain, deemed unlucky to locals
- ▶ Choked forest all around
- ▶ The smell of worm-eaten books
- ▶ Distant whispering and chanting
- ▶ The creaking of doors opening and closing
- ▶ The rattling of bones, or chains



Background

WHAT THE PLAYERS DON'T KNOW

Many years ago, a powerful wizard named Dirastratus fled his homeland after a ritual to speak to the dead he conducted went very wrong. Hunted by witch hunters and hired mercenaries alike, he fled for many years before finally settling in this abandoned castle. Believing himself free from his hunters, he delved further into studies his people had considered forbidden. Lost in his pursuits and closed away from the wider world, Dirastratus barely noticed as years of isolation became decades... and decades, centuries.

Over the long years, scores of would-be heroes came to slay the 'foul necromancer'. Most of them became fodder for the wizards' experiments, their souls burned as fuel and their bodies discarded or toyed with by the wizards' less scrupulous 'students'.

Eventually, it was not dark rituals or a templars' blade that killed the wizard - simply time. Dirastratus died in his sleep, only to find his own soul trapped by an instrument of his own making. With no way to continue his beloved experiments, Dirastratus' immense mind finally curdled into madness.

But the stories of the wizards' home have not been forgotten. Now, a new interloper, hungry for knowledge, has been drawn here. If the PCs don't stop them, they will return the wizard to the land of the living - and this time, he will not be content with simple study!

Fronts & Grim Portents

DANGER: THE GLASS CONTRAPTION

Place of power (impulse: to be controlled or tamed)

Grim portents

- ▶ The glass contraption is activated
- ▶ Whoever activated it is granted their hearts' desire
- ▶ Whoever granted the wish breaks free

Impending doom: Destruction

DANGER: THE WIZARD IS FREE

Power-mad wizard (impulse: to seek magical power)

Grim portents

- ▶ The wizard is released
- ▶ The wizard finds a body
- ▶ The wizard completes his research into the afterlife
- ▶ The wizard turns his research against the living

Impending doom: Chaos

DUNGEON MOVES

- ▶ An adventurer's half-burned soul returns from beyond
- ▶ Dirastratus plays poltergeist
- ▶ A lightning storm strikes the soul tether on the roof of the mansion
- ▶ One of the interlopers' rivals turns up
- ▶ One of the merchants' products is cursed
- ▶ The feral vampire in the lower study smells the players' fresh blood, and breaks free
- ▶ The wizard possesses the body of the interloper

ITEMS

The six-bladed knife (touch, 1 weight)

A curious flick-knife once carried by the witch hunters of Dirastratus' homeland. Each time the blade is opened, it is made from something new - one time it may be made from pure diamond, another it may be constructed from hatred rendered solid. Despite it's name, the blade rarely (if ever) appears as the same material twice.

The saddle of Sultan (5 weight)

Lying across his skeletal remains is the bridle and saddle of Sultan, Dirastratus' former palfrey. Sultan's soul is trapped in the soul tether, but if the saddle is brought close it will break free and come to rest in the saddle itself. From then on, whoever holds the saddle will be able to summon Sultan. The ghostly mare can ride as fast as any normal mount, but carry no load bar it's rider. Sultan can pass through any non-magical wall or obstacle as if it wasn't there, but it's rider cannot.

The study group

The bedroom

The observatory & soul tether

The lower study

Warlords' chamber

Stables

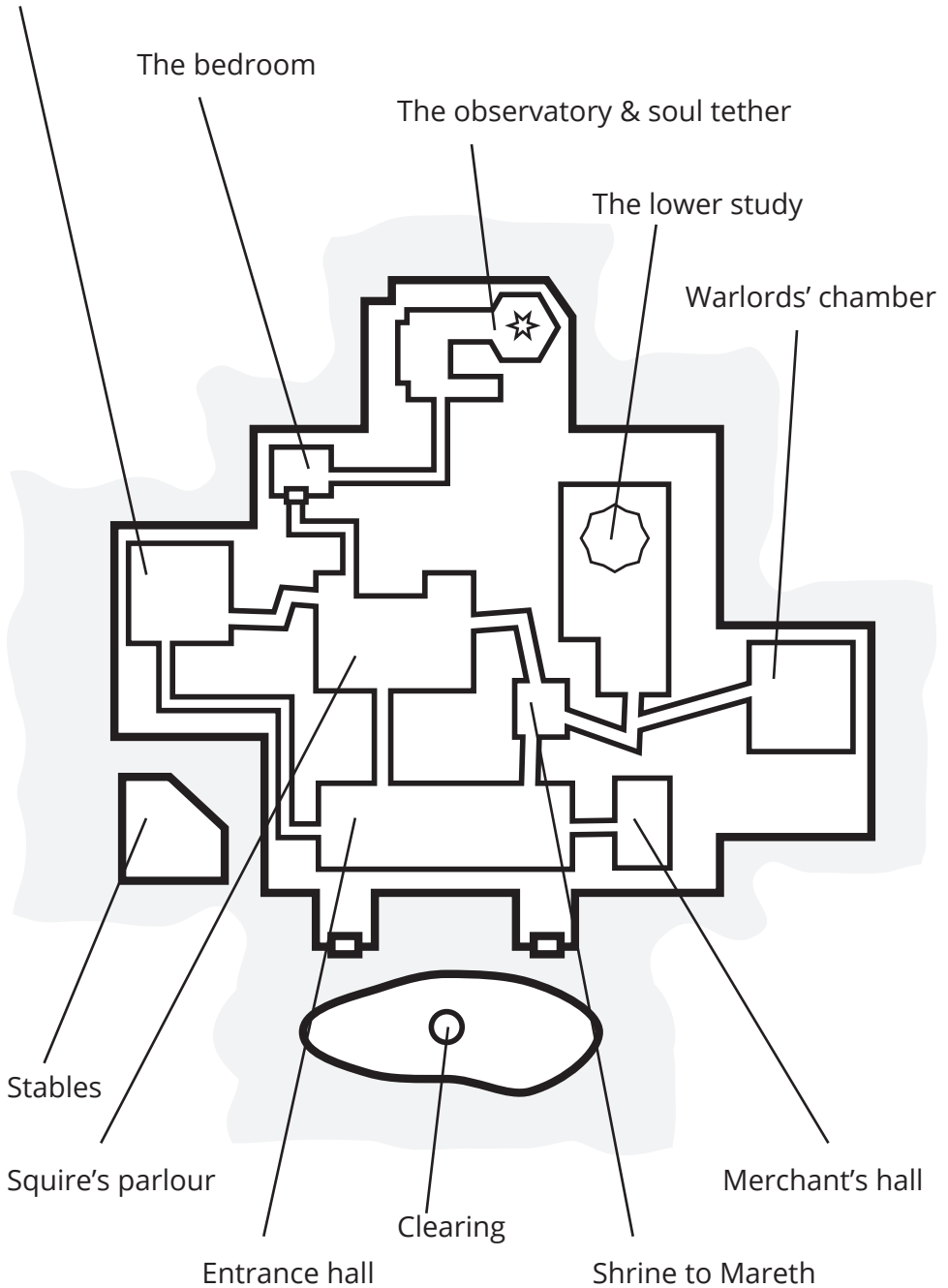
Squire's parlour

Clearing

Entrance hall

Shrine to Mareth

Merchant's hall



Locations

THE CLEARING

Though few dare mess with it, the curious contraption is well-known to the locals. The interloper is here, caught mid-ritual by the players. (*Solitary, d10 damage near, 12 HP 1 Armour. Instinct: to activate the contraption*)

Who is the interloper?

Choose your favourite, or roll randomly to decide who the interloper is.

1. **Siegfrund Jarl**, a professor of phrenology with a perfect memory, attempting to learn how to unlock the latent powers of the mind.
2. **Bahlgahast**, a vampire thrall armed with a venomous whip, looking for a cure for her terrible thirst.
3. **Euclides**, an old centaur with an eye of pure mercury, seeking a weapon to end his races' constant civil wars.
4. **Ambrose Addlefizz**, a gnome warlock drawn here to corrupt the contraption in the name of her gods.
5. **Gutrek**, a crippled orc ranger who wants to become the best pathfinder in the world.
6. **Leta Ray Fi**, exiled from the faerie realm for accidentally learning the name of her king. If she can find a way to forget the name, she believes she may find a way home.

THE STABLES

The wizards' old stables, long since abandoned. The interloper's companions were messing about in here when they heard the PCs approach. (*Group, d8 damage close, 6 HP 2 Armour. Instinct: To see what the contraption does. 👁 A saddle of fine leather, well preserved, still lies on a skeletal steed. Though 5 weight, it could fetch an excellent price.*)

THE ENTRANCE HALL

The front door is locked and barred, possibly by magical means. Inside, half a dozen football-sized stone runes hang from the ceiling. More are spread throughout the building. (*⚠ When the runes are activated, roll+INT. On a 10+, the runes will glow when you are near. On a 7-9, all the runes in the mansion will glow for the next few hours, alerting anyone else living here of your presence.*)

THE WARLORD'S CHAMBER

The room appears to be a laboratory. A suit of armour lies on an operating table, half-opened as though in the middle of an autopsy. (*👁 The interior of the armour was once filled with blood and guts, but seems to have been partially replaced with wooden carvings.*)

THE SQUIRES' PARLOUR

Before the wizard made this his home, the former occupants used this room for parties. Several unbound spirits feverishly dance around, doomed to constantly re-enact their cherished memories. (*Horde, d6 damage close, 3 HP. Instinct: to haunt*)

THE MERCHANT'S HALL

A passing trader once rented this space from the wizard to sell his wares. Though the shop closed long ago, he - and more bizarrely, his products - still linger. *(The trader sells common supplies - adventuring gear, rations, bandages etc. He will answer a single question from anyone who buys something from him. 👁 Though his wares appear solid, they will crumble to ash when the players leave the mansion.)*

THE LOWER STUDY

A balcony-level overlooking a sunken pit, containing a beastly vampire. *(👁 The silver guard rail meant to keep him contained has become pitted and eroded from years of neglect.) (Solitary/ large, b[d10]+2 damage close, 16 HP 2 Armour. Instinct: to feed)*

SHRINE TO MARETH

A wicker effigy of a man made from raven feathers, stood in a simple altar to the death god Mareth. *(⚠ If you make a blood offering to Mareth, then the next time you die you find yourself back at this altar at half health.)*

THE WIZARD'S BEDROOM

Lavishly decorated but faded with age. The wizards' crumbling skeleton still lies in the bed. *(⚠ When you read his diary, you discover something before it crumbles to dust. Roll+INT. On a 10+, you discover 2. On a 7-9, you discover 1. On a 6- you discover 1, but the wizard discovers something about you.)*

- ▶ A rote or lvl 1 spell, usable once
- ▶ An interesting and useful fact about the wizards' life

THE STUDY GROUP

A cabal of liches are studying Dirastratus' notes in an upper library. They do not take kindly to interruptions. (*Group, d8 damage near, 6 HP 3 Armour. Instinct: to learn forbidden truths*)

THE ROOFTOP OBSERVATORY

Dirastratus has already partially broken free of the tether. It's only a matter of time until he fully crosses over. (*Solitary/arcane, d10 damage reach 2-piercing, 16 HP 2 Armour. Special quality: spectral. Instinct: To return to the lands of the living*)

THE SOUL TETHER

Mounted on the highest point of the mansion like a lightning rod, the soul tether traps ghosts. It requires life essence to function properly - blood will do. (⚠ *When you attempt to empower the soul tether, roll+CON. On a 10+, you suffer d4 damage and the wizard suffers d8 (ignoring armour.) On a 7-9, you both suffer d6 damage. On a 6-, you suffer d8 damage and the wizard suffers d4. Every time you use it after the first, you take +1 forward but suffer an additional 2 damage. 👁 If the fine saddle from the stables is brought near the tether, it will become invested with the soul of Sultan, Dirastratus' faithful steed - see ITEMS.)*

Epilogue

▲ When Dirastratus has been defeated, the tether is destroyed and a freed soul will offer the players useful information.

Whoever earned the most XP this session, choose which of these three souls you most want to meet and which you definitely don't want to meet:

- ▶ A witch-hunter, with secrets of his forgotten order
- ▶ A lesser demon, who knows the path to great power
- ▶ A grizzled mercenary, who remembers where their stash is kept

When you've chosen, roll. Roll+1 if the glass contraption was not activated either. On a 10+, it's the one you wanted. On a 7-9, it's not your first choice, but not your last either. On a 6-, it's the one you didn't want.

Useful items

Dungeon Supplies Either d6 rations, adventuring gear, ammo or bandages; (mix and match as you see fit) or 3d6 coin. Your choice.

Dented mail A bit worn in places, but basically whole. Here's hoping it does better for you than the last guy. 1-armor, 1-weight, 10-coin.

Vial of bloodweed You can volley this vial at something. The victim deals -d4 damage ongoing. Thieves may be able to do more with this...

Liber Tenebrae, vol. IV Collect the whole set! When you consult the book, take +1 forward to your next Spout Lore (1 use only.)

Sigil of Mirkasa, goddess of battle Return to the deities' priest for an appropriate blessing (and possibly a material reward.)

Healing Potion When drunk, heal yourself of 10 damage or remove one debility, your choice.

An assassin's docket A sealed envelope containing the name of a prominent magistrate, a 20-coin retainer, and the sigil of a local noble house.

Tagit-spiked spirits Whoever drinks this will fall into a light sleep. Thieves may be able to do more with this...

Renaissance Dust A rare and valuable reagent, used in certain rituals. Worth d6x10 coin to the right buyer.

Terrorfang a well-forged short sword, probably made for a noble (and dropped in fear shortly thereafter.) Close, 1 weight, d8+8 coin.