

Dweller Among the Dead

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All your life you have lived among the graves of your ancestors, who settled in their turn at the necropolis beyond the western gates when the City fell to ruin. Here, beneath the shadowed sepulchres of the seven Priest-Kings, you mark the hours with studied steps. You take the Sun Road only when its namesake is highest and your shadow shortest, lest the latter's darkness fall upon a boundary stone. You move your few belongings from your home on those nights appointed by the stars, and on those days when the family of the other residents have arranged to pay their respects. Before crossing a threshold you place a hand over your heart, fingers wide, then close them in a fist.

Such is life in the City of the Dead. Every day is freighted with extra labor and consideration. It is all you have known from birth, a programming that has become automatic, or rather should be automatic. Of late your mind wanders, your steps falter. This cannot not last forever. Not for you.

This is a single-player game. You will need paper, a writing instrument, and three dice: one twelve-sided and two six-sided. To begin, you will use only the two d6, one for your left hand and the other for your right. The **right-hand die** represents conformity to tradition, while the **left-hand die** represents impulses and needs that pull you away from orthodoxy and ritual.

You are a member of a society which is bound by rigid law and tradition, both codified and unspoken. The Liminal People, who dwell in the space between the living and the dead. The laws are not necessarily rational, on their face.

THE STRUGGLE

To begin, we establish the broad scope of the tradition which troubles you. Roll your **right die**.

1. The interaction with and handling of the dead.
2. Gender roles and dynamics.
3. The use of and locomotion through the space we share with the dead.
4. Sexual mores.
5. Food and food handling.
6. Religious practice.

Note your result. **Roll again** and note this result.

It is now time to roll our **left die**. This will establish a narrative attitude or direction for this phase.

1. An act you are required to do every day that has begun to chafe.
2. Something you wish to do, but are never allowed.
3. Something you didn't know you were meant to do, or not do, until you had already transgressed and were punished.
4. A broad attitude or dynamic that you think is awful, just really garbage, ok?
5. The stars speak to you in different voices.
6. Who makes the Law?

Note this.

Now, take these three rolls and from them build the narrative of your discontent. The two right-hand rolls may be interrelated, or separate things that are still a cumulative pain. They are the law or laws that chafe and the left-hand die is why and how it chafes.

The Player rolls a 2 and a 4, followed by a 5. They write that they, Seria, and their lover Kamala have wished to be consummated in the central catacomb for over half a year, but the Law states that two women may only do so when the Sun is passing through the apex of The Maiden. They must wait, and be chaste, though their hearts say this taboo is foolish. When they look into the night sky they see only blessings and love to reflect their own for one another.

Every evening at the appointed time the seven Priest-Kings gather together and project into the minds of every resident of the City of the Dead a single, never-changing **focal image**. For seven seconds it is all anyone sees, then life continues as usual. What is this **image**?

Having established all this, we move on to the ACTION.

ACTION?

Sort of.

Roll your **left die**.

1-2. You are hesitant to actually violate the Law but speak out against it.

3-4. You attempt to hide your violation of the Law.

5-6. You are blatantly defiant of the Law.

Write down how you violate (or speak of violating) the mores and practices of your hidebound People.

Next, roll your **right die** to see who catches, witnesses, and/or reports you.

1. A family member.
2. A friend.
3. You know their face, but not their name.
4. An elder, or one of the seven Priest-Kings themselves.
5. The stones testify to it.
6. You are convicted on the testimony of the dead.

Write down the story of how you are betrayed.

PENANCE

There can be no trial. You did what you did, you think and feel what you think and feel. The Priest-Kings deliberate over your sins and consider how best to make an example of you, then set you back on the right path.

Roll your **right die**.

1. You must never be allowed alone, ever under the eyes of the community, watchful for any backsliding.
2. You must fast until the next new moon.
3. You may drink only from the cisterns sunk at the peaks of the Priest-King's ziggurats.
4. You must sup for three moons on corpsemeal alone.
5. You must attend at every exhumation and reinterment at any hour of the day or night until your mind and body are judged sound.
6. Each week you must stand before the Council of the Dead and with a skeletal hand around your beating heart testify to your orthodoxy.

To who or what did you look to as an example, when you clung to the Law?

1. A family member.
2. An elder of the People.
3. One of the seven Priest Kings.
4. The story written in the branches of a tree grown from the heart of a Priest King long dead.
5. A legendary Saint.
6. The God whose voice you listened for at the mouths of urns.

As always, write down your experience of penance.

It may or may not take. It is at this stage that you will roll your **left hand** vs your **right hand**. If your left d6 is higher, then your rebellious spirit is too strong and you are unable to conform again. Continue to **Purgation!** If the right, then you have successfully suppressed your inner self for the “good” of society and the game is effectively over! This is depressing! Congratulations!

You may choose to forgo this roll and simply continue the game. Or to narrativize this as a speed bump by returning to the **STRUGGLE** phase to see how your inner turmoil continues to manifest itself.

PURGATION

Of course, you backslid. **How?**

You are labeled an apostate and driven (**right die**):

1. North to the Crystal-Blue Mountains
2. South to the Jungles of Stone
3. East to the great Gate and into the ruins of the Dead City
4. West to the Oceans of Sand
5. Down to the Atrium of Time
6. They don't care, they just want you out (pick any of the above).

Who watches you go (**right**)?

1. A family member.
2. Your accuser.
3. The Priest-Kings.
4. You feel the eyes of the dead.
5. Everyone.
6. No one.

Adrift

You are free, the structures that have bound you falling further behind with each step. The world expands before you, the sky yawning like an ocean.

Where **did** you lay your head, before your exile (**right**)?

1. A small family mausoleum, it held six coffins.
2. A sepulchre from which you disinterred a body; it had overstayed its lease.
3. An expansive undercroft to the church of a god no one recalls
4. Curled up inside a dusty urn.
5. In a crumbling chapel, disguised as an Incorruptible.
6. Within a cenotaph to the soldiers of a forgotten war.

What weighs on you (**right**)?

1. The stars.
2. You feel the weight of the Law still on your heart.
3. The lonely road.

4. The memory of betrayal.
5. You may never see your family again.
6. Free of the Law, you must find your own meaning.

The die in your **left** hand now becomes a **d12**. Roll it as you ask

What gives you hope?

1. The stars.
2. That fragment of the Law which still holds meaning.
3. The empty road, full of promise.
4. The knowledge that you are done with those who betrayed you.
5. With luck, you will never see your family again.
6. You are free from the strictures of the Law.
7. Words spoken by your old role-model in orthodoxy, now seen in a new context.
8. The sight of something in the natural world that is alien to the City of the Dead. What it is?
9. The focal image of the Priest-Kings no longer comes with its payload of guilt.
10. For the first time, you are unaware of any graves whose borders you must respect.
11. The taste of your first simple meal beneath the open sky.
12. You are followed, and find that they are a friend.

Soon after your departure, you are faced with (roll **twice**):

1. A strange beast.
2. A hostile intelligence.
3. A pursuer with cryptic intentions.
4. A feature of the landscape your experience could not prepare you for.
5. A strange new message in the stars.
6. A signal of Doom for your old home.
7. Injury, scarcely overcome.
8. A message to bring back. Do you bother? Why?
9. Maddening silence.
10. Unexpected aid.

11. Evidence of the Old World, before the fall of what is now called the Dead City.
12. Pangs of doubt and regret.

In the far reaches, you find:

1. A warm greeting.
2. An uneasy peace.
3. You keep walking and walking, never settling on anything.
4. A different—but still old—Law, forged by others.
5. A new Law, written by you.
6. The Beast Men find you peculiar, but will accept your strange ways so long as you're peaceful.
7. Like you, they were cast out—but many years ago. Now they are many.
8. It's almost impossible to believe that such a wonder could be made by the hands of human beings.
9. They say the Sun grows too old and fat and will soon consume the Earth. For its few remaining days they take pleasure in their mouldering palaces and feast beside the torpid river.
10. A life of toil in freedom.
11. A sea, of water or of trees or of any other landscape. Or perhaps it is within?
12. Lasting peace.

Every evening at the appointed time the seven Priest-Kings would gather together and project into the minds of every resident of the City of the Dead a single, never-changing **focal image**. For seven seconds it was all you would see, then life continued as usual.

Now—far from the Priest-Kings and the life you knew—the **image** does not come, but the moment does. You are conditioned for it, wired from birth to anticipate those seven seconds of reflection—the length of one unhurried breath—but there is no mind now to fill it but yours.

What do you see?