

Bleakwood Tower

A Sandcastle TRPG Scenario
for 3 to 6 Level-0 Characters

“Straight forward enough for beginners, but imaginative and interesting enough to hold the attention of even jaded longtime gamers.”

- Jeremy Wilson, creator of the Freegrazers RPG



National Astronomical Observatory of Japan

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Sandcastle TRPG adventure scenario for 3-6 Level-0 PCs

Bleakwood Tower is an introductory adventure for the Sandcastle Table-talk Role Playing Game (TRPG). This scenario is intended to be run by a Game Master (GM) for a group of 3 to 6 players. It is designed to take about 2 hours to play through this adventure, though individual game groups may take more or less time.

The GM should read the Sandcastle Core Rules and Game Masters' Manual (GMM), and have a basic understanding of the Sandcastle rules before running this adventure. It is recommended, but not mandatory, that players also read and understand the rules. However as an introductory adventure, Bleakwood Tower is designed to let the players learn the rules as they play.

The GM should read the entire Bleakwood Tower adventure scenario before running it for the players. The players SHOULD NOT read this scenario before playing the adventure because it contains information intended to be discovered through game play. Reading the scenario would spoil the surprise.

If the GM cannot read the entire adventure scenario before running it due to time constraints, it is possible to read the scenario while running it, staying a couple of pages ahead of the encounter he is currently running for the players.

TRPG scenarios contain two types of information. Most of the information is for the GM to help him adjudicate the

game. Some of the information is for the GM to read or paraphrase to the players at the appropriate point in the adventure. This information for the players is referred to as "boxed text" due to the convention of enclosing it in a shaded box to offset it from the information for the GM.

Player Characters

Bleakwood Tower is intended to be run for 3-6 level-0 characters. If the players do not have the time or knowledge of the rules needed to create level-0 characters, the GM can create characters quickly, by assigning all attributes a value of 0 and using the suggested starting equipment for level-0 characters.

If one of the PCs falls to 0 hp during the adventure, give the player the option of creating a different level-0 character who is assumed to have been trailing the main group and has finally managed to catch up with them.

Background

This adventure is set in Meadowbrook, a stereotypical/generic fantasy town, and a small castle in the neighboring forest of Bleakwood, an equally stereotypical/generic dark, spooky, fantasy woods. The castle, consisting of single, 3 story tower is simply called Bleakwood Tower.

The main antagonist of this scenario is Eric, a dwarf and the master of Bleakwood Tower. The dwarf Eric is a mad scientist/wizard obsessed on creating a new lifeform. He is irredeemably evil, but at the start of the adventure he merely appears unpleasant because he knows he is dependent on Meadowbrook for supplies to continue his research.

The PCs first encounter Eric in Meadowbrook during one of his shopping trips.

For his research, Eric acquires a wide variety of exotic animals, and slaughters them to use their organs in his attempts to create a new lifeform. One of his acquisitions was a panther that he kept caged and fed sausages purchased from the Meadowbrook butcher. When Eric decided that the panther would be of no further use in his work, he left the poor creature to starve. The panther breaks out of its cage and follows the scent of its accustomed food, sausages, to the butcher's shop. Upon breaking into the shop, the panther is discovered by the butcher and his wife, and kills both of them, but not before being severely wounded by a butcher cleaver.

The ruckus from this fight awakens the entire town of Meadowbrook, including the PCs. Investigating, the PCs

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Author: Ramsey Lundock, Ph.D.

Illustration: Ryuji Fujii

catch a glimpse of the panther before it runs away. At this point, the fear and anger of a double murder, with an obviously non-human killer still on the loose, turns the citizens of Meadowbrook into a riotous mob, and the flow of the mob carries the PCs to within sight of Bleakwood Tower.

What happens from there will depend on the actions of the PCs. If they explore the tower, they will encounter the now severely wounded panther and Eric's other experiments. The dwarf himself is on the 3rd floor, absorbed in his work and oblivious to any noise the party causes while exploring his castle. He will only notice them when they reach the 3rd story. But by that point his experiment to create new life finally succeeds and he unleashes his new monster on the group.

1) Meadowbrook

Read or paraphrase the following to the players.

You live in the town of Meadowbrook. It is a typical town in The Domain, or at least you assume it is typical, having never visited any of the others. People here go about their daily lives rarely giving a thought to the monsters lurking in Bleakwood, just outside the safety of town. "Leave the dangerous work to heroes." is an oft heard expression.

Today the weather is fair and warm, perhaps a little too warm, and almost without realizing it you find yourself pausing for a rest in the town square as you go about your business. In the center of the square stands a large stone fountain, with streams of water shooting out from the mouths of the giant fish statues. Looking around you see other people resting in the town square.

Stop and ask the players to introduce and describe their characters. Meadowbrook is small enough to assume that the characters have already met and know each other's names.

After character introductions are over, read or paraphrase the following to the players.

While you are loitering in the town square with your friends, an overlaid handcart with a distinctive fishy smell rumbles past pushed by a dirty, grumpy looking dwarf. The cart is piled high with barrels, boxes, and buckets. Numerous sacks hang from the sides, making it hard to see the cart underneath, and making it impossible for the dwarf to see where he's going. With a loud 'thud' he plows straight into a young woman wearing a red skirt, white blouse, and an apron. She tumbles to the ground with a shriek. The cart lurches to a stop, water from the

buckets sloshing out over the other contents and onto the ground.

"Watch where you're going, woman! I have valuable specimens here." sneers the dwarf.

The woman picks herself up, brushes the dirt from the dancing pig embroidered on her apron, and fixes her curly golden hair. She looks angry and confused but upon seeing the dwarf she sighs and forces a tight smile, "Good afternoon Eric. I didn't realize you were in town today. Does this mean you'll be coming by the shop later for your usual sausages?"

"Why would I want to buy your sausages?" the dwarf yells, leaning against his cart, trying to get it moving again.

"Oh, well, you do seem to like them. You always buy so many."

"I ain't never eaten your sausages. Now out of my way."

The woman gives a confused smile, then tilts her head and shrugs. "Good day." she chimes as the cart rolls past.

The dwarf replies, "Ung!"

As the cart lumbers on, a bright red octopus tentacle slithers up out of one of the larger pots and starts feeling around the surroundings.

The dwarf is Eric, the denizen of Bleakwood Tower and the main antagonist of this adventure. The woman is Wilma Ham, the butcher's wife.

If the characters try to confront Eric, he does his best to ignore or insult them, but cannot be provoked to violence unless attacked first. Wilma is quick to try to defuse the situation, insisting on taking the blame for the accident, and reassuring everyone that she's unhurt. If a fight does break out, the town guard will quickly arrive to stop it.

Eric is unlikely to stop if the party tries to talk with him, but Wilma is more than willing to chat. If the party doesn't think to talk to Wilma themselves, she smiles at them and says, "Good day." to break the ice.

If asked about herself Wilma can provide the following information:

"I'm Wilma Ham. My husband and I have a butcher shop. Our specialty is sausages, not too spicy, just right for breakfast. Please come and try them sometime. Just look

for the sign with the dancing pig.” She smiles and points to the embroidered pig on her apron.

“Today is such a nice day that I took the long way round for my shopping. But now I need to be hurrying home. Fredrick will be waiting.”

If asked about the dwarf she replies:

“Oh, that’s Eric. He lives in Bleakwood Tower. Some people say that he conducts unholy experiments in the Tower. But he never causes any problems in town, well no big problems, and he pays honest coinage for his purchases, so most people just try to stay out of his way and ignore his rudeness.”

If someone decides to take Wilma’s suggestion and buy some sausages, they cost 1 p for one sausage or 1 c for a dozen, and come wrapped in wax paper printed with a picture of a dancing pig.

Nothing else of interest happens that day.

2) Murderous Night

Read or paraphrase the following to the players.

You are awakened in the middle of the night by a scream cut short. By the time you make your way out on to the street you can hear shouting, “Demon! There’s a demon on the loose.”

The street swells with a crowd of townsfolk. Your everyday friends and neighbors’ faces are almost unrecognizable in the dim flickering torchlight, twisted in to masks of fear and anger. With a mind of its own, the mob presses forward, carrying you with it.

You find yourself in front of a small shop. A sign with a familiar looking dancing pig swings in the wind. The glass window has been shattered; a man’s body lies slumped over the sill, half inside, half out. His face, arms, and body are covered with long, deep cuts gushing bright red blood. On the floor you can see a woman with curly golden hair, her throat torn out, her mouth still open from the scream you heard earlier. Above her body, two yellow reticulated eyes glow in the darkness.

“Gwaaaa!” growls the demon.

Someone yells, “Demon!”

The eyes disappear and you see what might be a long tail. With a crash, the back door of the shop breaks open and a

shadow slips out into the moonlight.

Chaos erupts in the street around you. Everyone is running in different directions and shouting.

“Don’t let it get a way. After it!”

“It’s coming this way. Run for you lives!”

People grab objects at random to use as weapons, some of the more excited folk stabbing at random passersby in blind panic. With all the pushing and shoving, before long you find yourself running out of town and charging headlong into Bleakwood.

“It ran this way.”

It’s scary to run into monster infested woods at night, but the horrors of Bleakwood can’t be worse than the rage and homicidal mania on the once friendly faces of the people of Meadowbrook. The canopy of trees blots out the light of the full moon, plunging you into darkness. The tree branches scratch your face and tear at your hair and clothes. The roots and stones trip you time and time again, but you arise from the cool, damp soil and keep running with no idea what direction. The crowd thins out. The yelling and screaming fades into the distance. You break out of the tree line and find yourself in a clearing with a small group of others.

You look around as you catch your breath. Before you looms a three story, stone-masonry, square keep with crenels along the top. This must be Bleakwood Tower. A foul-smelling moat encircles the tower. Lights are visible through the upper story windows. From the open door you hear the clang of metal on metal, and the growl of the demon. “Grwaaa!”

Conveniently all of the PCs and only the PCs have arrived outside of Bleakwood Tower. As they take stock of their situation, the party will find that everyone is carrying one improvised weapon. If the PCs have not already been assigned improvised weapons, determine the type of weapon on the Random Improvised Weapons Table on the next page.

Most parties should get the hint that the adventure calls for them to enter the tower. If some players suggest other courses of action, remind them that it is a cold night, and the tower would offer them some protection from the elements. If they still refuse to follow the scenario, improvise. Once the party decides to approach Bleakwood Tower proceed to the following section.

Random Improvised Weapons Table (1d6)	
1	Torch (1 handed; 1d2 hp; red energy)
2	Pitchfork (large improvised weapon; 2 handed; 1d3+1+S hp; normal damage)
3	Hammer (small improvised weapon; 1 handed; 1d2+S hp; normal damage)
4	Kitchen knife (small improvised weapon; 1 handed; 1d2+S hp; normal damage)
5	Barstool (large improvised weapon; 2 handed; 1d3+1+S hp; normal damage)
6	Broken glass bottle (small improvised weapon; 1 handed; 1d2+S hp; normal damage)

3) Bleakwood Tower (Exterior)

3A) Moat

Read or paraphrase the following to the players.

The moat is approximately 3 meters wide, with a bank of about 2 meters on the inside between it and the tower. Garbage, excrement, and the bodies of birds and small animals can be seen floating in the clouded water. Here and there bones of larger animals or rusted scraps of metal stick up out of the moat. The smell increases to nauseating intensity as you approach. On the far side, a wooden panel lying on the ground looks like it could be flipped over to form a crude drawbridge.

It is impossible to judge the depth of the water by looking at it, but it is only 1 meter deep at the deepest part in the middle. Because Erik dumps not only his garbage and chamber pot in the moat, but also unsuccessful experiments from the lab, the water is contaminated with acid and bacteria. Anyone falling into the moat must make a TN 10 GY (endurance) reaction or suffer 1 hp of primary green energy damage. There are 0 hp of automatic damage.

The moat can be jumped with a successful TN 11 strength-based athletics check. Climbing up the opposite bank, either by intentionally fording the moat or as the result of a failed attempt to jump over it, requires a minor action, but no check. Crafty characters might pull a log out of the woods to make a bridge. Making a bridge like this allows the moat to be crossed safely without the need for a check.

Once one or more characters have crossed the moat, the wooden plank on the far side can in fact be laid over the moat to form a bridge.

3B) Door

Read or paraphrase the following when a PC approaches the door.

A simple wooden door hangs crooked in the door frame, the bottom sticking into the soft dirt around the tower and the top tilted back into the darkness inside. As you approach the door, no sooner than you realize that a pair of yellow reticulated eyes are peering out of the shadows inside, one of those shadows leaps out and ambushes you. “Gwaaa!”

The panther automatically goes first, attacking the first character to approach the door.

Wounded Panther

Level 0
defense: 12
hp: 6
pp: 1
Move: 12
Attributes: S +1; D +3; E +1; A +2; W -1; P +0
Resistances: RB +3; GY +1; OP -1; HR -1

Attack Actions

Claw [Major or Interrupt] +1 melee 1d2 hp (normal damage)

On each of its turns the panther will attack a character chosen at random. It attacks until reduced to 0 hp.

After the combat have each character make an awareness-based life sciences check. The character who rolls the highest recognizes the panther for what it is. The characters can also see that in addition to having been seriously wounded before the fight (wounds Fredrick inflicted in self-defense during the panther’s rampage in the butcher shop), the panther is thin and malnourished.

4) 1st Floor

The first floor of the tower serves as Eric’s kitchen and storeroom. This is where he keeps his handcart and where the panther was imprisoned.

4A) Main Room

Read or paraphrase the following when the PCs enter Bleakwood Tower.

The first floor is a single room. The center of the room is occupied by the handcart you saw in Meadowbrook earlier today. Most of the packages have been removed. On the left wall, there is a metal cage, broken from the inside. Scraps of shredded white paper are strewn about inside and around the cage. A simple kitchen with a, currently unlit,

fireplace is at the back of the room. In between the kitchen and the cage is a pile of disheveled white paper. Above the paper a shield, painted with a yellow half-moon on a black field, hangs on the wall with two longswords crossed behind it, forming a kind of crest. A staircase to the level above runs along the right wall.

The interior of Bleakwood tower is 16 m x 16 m, making it a convenient 8 x 8 squares on a 2 m grid. This is the same size as a chess/checkers board. A checkers board can be used as the battle map for these encounters, if specialized game maps are not available. A shogi board (9 x 9) is also acceptable.

Investigating the scattered white paper reveals that it was butcher paper printed with a dancing pig design the PCs will recognize from the butcher shop. The paper smells like sausages.

The two longswords and shield are only loosely secured to the wall. They can (and should) be used by the PCs. Refer to the Core Rules for the equipment statistics. The heraldic symbol on the shield doesn't have any cultural significance (unless you want it to). Eric claims it as his family crest, but it isn't well known.

The kitchen contains normal supplies, and two knives which could be used as small improvised weapons but nothing else of interest. The pantry is stocked with root vegetables, but there are no sausages in the kitchen. If properly prepared, the food in the kitchen could be used to make one week's worth of trail rations for one person.

4B) First Floor Stairs

One of the steps is loose, when climbing up the stairs the lead character must make an unskilled TN 9 dexterity check or fall and take 1 hp damage.

5) 2nd Floor

5A) Main Room

The second floor of the tower is Eric's bedroom and study. A zombie, one of Eric's failed attempts to create life, lies on the table. Eric has instructed the zombie to attack anyone other than himself who attempts to move past the table.

Read or paraphrase the following to the players when the character climb the stairs to the second floor.

Five torches placed around the walls light this room, and a fire burns in the hearth. A bookshelf lines the wall opposite

the fireplace. Coffins sit in a row on the floor in front of the bookshelf. One appears to be empty, another is occupied by a long-dead corpse, and the final one is still closed. Set macabrely between the coffins is an unmade bed with a large footlocker. Near the head of the stairs, a closed coffin stands in the corner with a target painted on it. Four daggers are stuck in the wood around the bullseye. On the far side of the room, an interior wall with two doors partitions off an area from the main room. A short, cluttered desk is set against the interior wall, with charts of some kind hanging above it.

On a low table in the center of the room lies a body in a black robe, surrounded by strange experiment equipment. The head of the body is a bare skull with purple gemstones set into the eye sockets. The hands and feet are muscular, covered with brown fur with long nails that could almost be called claws.

As soon as any characters try to touch or attack anything on the table or move past the table, the zombie in the black robe rises to attack. The characters should be on guard by this point, so roll initiative to see which side acts first.

Because of the clutter in the room, only one character at a time can engage the zombie in melee, unless one of the characters explicitly maneuvers into position by running around the table or jumping on top of it, etc. The daggers stuck in the target painted on the coffin, placed conveniently near the head of the stairs, can be used as thrown ranged weapons by characters not involved in melee.

The first time the zombie is struck in melee combat, it falls apart. The skull and left hand go flying off. After that, the head, hand, and main body act as separate monsters. The main body continues to use the stats given below, minus any hp already lost. The body will attack the nearest PC each turn, moving closer to attack if necessary. The stats and tactics for the severed skull and hand are given below.

Fall-apart Zombie

Level 0
defense: 10
hp: 10
pp: 1
Move: 6 m
Attributes: S +1; D -1; E +2; A -2; W -2; P -4
Resistances: RB -1; GY +2; OP -2; HR -2

Traits

Slow Reflexes: This zombie cannot make interrupt actions.

Attack Actions

Bare Hand [Major] -1 melee 1d2 hp (normal damage)

Flying Skull

Level 0
defense: 11
hp: 2
pp: 3
Move: 10 m
Attributes: S -3; D +2; E -2; A +1; W +1; P +2
Resistances: RB +2; GY -2; OP +1; HR +1

Special Actions

Eye Beams [Major] (att= +1, cost 1 pp, purple energy): Rays of purple light shoot out of the gemstones in the eye sockets and deal 1d2 hp purple energy damage if they strike the target.

Self-Destruct [Major or Interrupt] (cost 1 pp, purple energy): The skull explodes into a ball of unholy purple flame. All creatures within melee range of the skull are caught in the blast, taking 1d2 hp of primary damage and 1 hp of automatic damage. A successful TN 11 OP (willpower) reaction is needed to avoid the primary damage.

Self-destruct can be used as an interrupt action when the skull is targeted by a melee attack. Using self-destruct destroys the skull.

After separating from the main body, the skull will fly over near the desk and hover there. On the first and second turn, the skull will target a character not involved in melee with its eye beams attack. (If multiple PCs are not involved in melee, determine the target randomly.)

Starting from the 3rd turn the skull will try to use its self-destruct attack. At the start of its turn, if there is a valid target (a PC not involved in melee) within 10 m, the skull will use its minor action to fly straight towards the target and then use its major action to detonate using the self-destruct special action, catching the target in the blast. If there are no valid targets in range, the skull will use both its major and minor actions to move (hustle) towards a target. Based on where the skull detonates, additional PCs might be coincidentally caught in the blast (i.e. be within melee range of the skull). But the skull will not make an effort to target multiple PCs.

If the skull is targeted by a melee attack when it has only 1 pp remaining, it will use an interrupt action and the final pp to detonate its self-destruct attack, catching the

attacking PC in the blast. The self-destruct attack is resolved after the melee attack, but can be used even if the skull has been reduced to 0 hp (similar to the striker vengeance-strike ability).

Jumping Claw

Level 0
defense: 13
hp: 2
pp: 3
Move: 14 m
Attributes: S -1; D +3; E -2; A -4; W -3; P -1
Resistances: RB +3; GY -2; OP -3; HR -3

Traits

Scurry: The jumping claw can move through a space occupied by a hostile creature. The jumping claw cannot end its movement in the same space as another creature. At the end of its movement if it would not have enough movement remaining to move back out of an occupied square, it cannot enter that square.

Attack Actions

Punch [Major or Interrupt] +2 melee 1 hp (normal damage)

The jumping claw uses its small size and scurry trait to weave between the PCs, moving towards the rear and attacking the character nearest the down stairs. Once in melee range, it springs its fingers to jump up and slam itself into the target, delivering a punch of surprising speed and power.

After all of the monsters (all parts of the zombie) have been defeated, the party can search the room.

Doors

In addition to the stairs by which the PCs ascend, there are two doors on the far side of the room. One is a sturdy wooden door locked with a security lock. The words, "Red Star" are inscribed next to the lock. The key to open the door up to the 3rd story can be found in this room (see Keyring below). The correct key is the one marked Betelgeuse. Eric made the "Red Star" inscription to help him remember the correct key. The lock is trapped; inserting the wrong key, or attempting to pick the lock, causes the key (or lockpick) to electrify, doing 1 hp of yellow energy primary damage to the character holding the key. There are 0 hp of automatic damage. A successful TN 10 GY (endurance) reaction is needed to avoid the primary damage. Behind the locked door is a flight of stairs (area 5C) leading up to the 3rd floor (area 6A).

There is also an unlocked, untrapped wooden door leading to a small closet under the stairs (area 5B).

Keyring

As the PCs explore the room, have all of the characters make an awareness-based domestic sciences check. The character who scores the highest notices a keyring lying beneath the table. This is Eric's spare keyring. It has 3 keys labeled Polaris, Sirius, and Betelgeuse.

Desk/Charts

If they examine the desk, the PCs find Eric's journal lying open on top of it. Give the players Player Handout 1 when they find the journal. The other, loose-leaf pages on the desk consist mainly of calculations. With a successful TN 12 willpower-based physical sciences check a character can realize that the calculations are celestial mechanics, related to the positions of astronomical objects. A successful TN 14 willpower-based physical sciences check reveals that the calculations are intended to determine the position of the full moon in the sky.

The charts above the desk are old-fashioned astronomical charts. For example:

<https://www.nao.ac.jp/en/gallery/weekly/2014/20140313-old-illustration.html>

<https://eco.mtk.nao.ac.jp/koyomi/exhibition/057/>

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Bed/Footlocker

The unmade bed itself contains nothing of interest. The footlocker is locked with a security lock, requiring the proper key to open. The words "Brightest Star" are engraved above the keyhole. This is a note Eric made so that he wouldn't forget the correct key (Sirius). He has a low opinion of other people's education and assumes no one else will understand the reference. Inserting the wrong key, or attempting to pick the lock, triggers a magical booby trap electrifying the key (or lockpick), doing 1 hp of yellow energy primary damage to the character holding the key. There are 0 hp of automatic damage. A successful TN 10 GY (endurance) reaction is needed to avoid the primary damage.

Inside the chest, the PCs can find a pouch containing 95 coins, a number of healing potions equal to the number of PCs, 2 flashbang vials (rank 1), and 2 chromatic splash

vials (rank 1, orange). If anyone wonders why a mad scientist experimenting with evil powers would have holy water (orange chromatic splash vials) in his locker, you can include a memo in Eric's journal (see above) or other notes to the effect that holy water is a useful thing to have on hand when evil-energy-powered test subjects go out of control.

Coffins

Two of the coffins are occupied (one opened, one still closed). The long-dead human corpses inside were intended to be used as parts for Eric's experiments to create new life. Since Eric has changed his tactics to use sea creatures instead, the coffins and corpses are not relevant to the rest of the adventure.

Bookshelf

The bookshelf contains various volumes on natural history, such as geology, astronomy, anatomy, as well as books of arcane lore. Most of the books are oversized, heavy, poorly organized, and/or in bad condition. But a PC who takes the time to search the bookshelf and succeeds on a TN 11 willpower-based physical sciences check will find a physical sciences field guide, which is small and sturdy enough to be carried on future adventures. Characters looking for answers to the key riddles (see Doors and Bed/Footlocker mentioned earlier) by consulting either the field guide or the library as a whole can identify the correct key with a successful TN 12 willpower-based physical sciences check for each lock.

5B) Closet

This small closet has an arched stone ceiling and stone walls. It is a hollow space left under the stairs, probably to conserve building materials, which has had a door affixed to make it a closet. Here Eric keeps his spare clothes, laundry supplies, and other uninteresting mundane household items. Characters who take the time to search the closet (the player must state that a deliberate search is made, but no check is needed) will also find a dwarf-sized suit of leather armor (defense +1). The armor can be resized for larger characters following the normal rules in the GMM.

5C) Stairs

Read or paraphrase the following to the players when the characters start to climb the stairs.

The sporadic metallic clanging you have heard since entering the tower seems to be coming from upstairs. Climbing the dark stairs, you can see faint light at the top.

There is nothing of particular interest or danger on this flight of stairs. However, it will become the staging ground if the PCs decide to use stealth or quick-attack tactics when entering the laboratory above.

6) 3rd Floor

6A) Laboratory

When the characters reach the top of the steps, read or paraphrase the following.

This room is lit only by a torch hanging near the ceiling; the fireplace on the far wall is currently unlit.

In the center of the room beneath the torch stands a glass tank larger than a man, filled with clouded blue liquid. Perched above the tank, the dwarf you saw earlier in Meadowbrook adjusts a complicated mechanical contraption, his tools ringing loudly against the metal frame.

A nauseating stench of rancid seawater fills the room, coming either from the central tank, or from two aquariums containing living, swimming fish set on a table next to the stairwell. Inscrutable experimental equipment lies scattered on tables along the walls and sticks out haphazardly from an empty coffin and opened crates set about the room.

Even more equipment hangs down through a hole in the ceiling above the tank. On the other side of the room, what looks to be a staircase with a door at the bottom promises a more civilized way to reach whatever is up on the roof.

Eric notices the PCs almost immediately unless every PC who climbs to the top of the stairs makes a successful TN 10 dexterity-based stealth check. Even with successful stealth checks, Eric will notice if a lit torch is brought up the stairs.

Assume that Eric notices the party just as the last PC enters the room. Unless the PCs spring into action immediately, their encounter with Eric begins with role playing. Eric will notice the party, squint in confusion, and then ask bluntly, “What are you doing here?”

Secure in his own home, Eric is a complete sociopath; he has no remorse for starving the panther or for its subsequent rampage. His comments go along the lines of, “None of my business.” “Leave me alone; I’m almost finished here.” “Go away! And put all my stuff back where you found it.”

If asked about his experiment, Eric leers at the party, “You want to see?” He then throws a level and sets the experiment in motion.

Eric has just finished his preparation for the experiment. If the party manages to surprise attack Eric without talking to him, he doesn’t realize that anything is amiss and uses his last action before being attacked to smugly throw the lever, setting the experiment in motion.

The nest of metal beams where Eric is sitting is an overly large and complex governor, a device for driving astronomy observation equipment to track a celestial body. When activated, the governor moves the coelostat on the roof into position to steer the light of the full moon straight down onto the tank, the final ingredient to complete the experiment.

After Eric throws the switch, read or paraphrase the following to the players.

With whirling gears and clanging metal, the contraption above the tank snaps into place and a pure white beam of moonlight shines straight down through the hole in the ceiling like a pillar of light, illuminating the tank of murky blue fluid.

The liquid churns violently for several seconds, revealing indistinct shadows trashing about inside. Just as the clamor seems to be abating and the liquid is settling into a damped sloshing, there comes an ominous “Tap, tap ... tap, tap.” from the tank itself. Then shards of broken glass fly outwards and a wave spills out of the tank, soaking everything near the floor with a slimy, greasy fluid, and sending a waterfall down the stairs.

Standing in the remains of the tank is a nightmare incarnate. The body is the shell of a great sea-turtle, but it stands upright like a man, perched on a thicket of giant crab legs, bent in impossible directions, but somehow providing an unsteady, ever-shifting balance. Two moray eels thrust in and out from the foreleg holes in the shell, and a large octopus forms the head. Somehow that octopus head manages to roar and the beast lumbers forward out of the wreckage of the tank.

For extra drama, rather than saying “Tap, tap,” you might want to actually tap on a drinking glass if one is available.

For reference about how shadows behave when light strikes from directly above, please refer to this article about Lahaina Noon:

<https://www.naoj.org/en/news/topics/2012/05/25/2534.html>

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Blue Vat Horror

Level 0
defense: 12
hp: 8
pp: 2
Move: 6 m
Attributes: S +1; D -2; E +2; A -2; W +1; P +1
Resistances: RB -2; GY +2; OP +2; HR +2

Traits

Hardened Blue
Vulnerable Red

Attack Actions

Flailing Limbs [Major or Interrupt] +1 melee 1d3+1 hp (normal damage)

Special Actions

Energy Burst [Major] (cost 1 pp, blue energy): This attack hits one creature within melee range with a blast of blue energy for 1d2 hp of primary damage and 1 hp of automatic damage. A successful TN 11 RB (dexterity) reaction is required to avoid the primary damage.

Eric, Dwarf Hexer

Level 1
defense: 12
hp: 5
pp: 2
Move: 10 m
Attributes: S -2; D +1; E +0; A -1; W +1; P +1
Resistances: RB +2; GY +1; OP +2; HR +2

Traits

Skills: Arcana, Physical Sciences +1

Leather Armor: Eric's protective gear for working on dangerous experiments is equivalent to leather armor.

Attack Actions

Tool (improvised weapon) [Major or Interrupt] -2 melee 1 hp (normal damage)

Thrown Tool (improvised weapon) [Major] +1 ranged 1 hp (normal damage)

Special Actions

Attack Hex [Minor]: -1 to all attacks until the start of Eric's next turn. A successful TN 12 HR (willpower) reaction is needed to avoid the penalty.

Defense Hex [Minor]: -1 to defense until the start of Eric's next turn. A successful TN 12 HR (willpower) reaction is needed to avoid the penalty.

*Eric has the full range of hexer abilities (refer to the Core Rules), but is likely to only use attack hex and defense hex during this encounter.

If the PCs used a surprise attack, they will have 2 turns to act before the vat horror starts to attack: one while the mechanism is moving, then another after the vat horror has used its action to shatter the tank. Otherwise, determine which side acts first as normal.

From his perch above the floor, Eric will use his hexer abilities to weaken the party. He will use defense hex to try to weaken the PC nearest the vat horror and use attack hex to interfere with any PC who attempted to attach him last turn. If he takes any damage, Eric will climb up through the hole in the ceiling, and out through the coelostat on the roof. He will also retreat up through the hole to the roof if the vat horror is reduced to 0 hp, or if any PC attempts to climb up the wreckage of the tank to approach him. Once on the roof, on his next turn, Eric will place a cover over the hole and latch it in place to prevent others from following.

The vat horror uses simple tactics; moving to attack the nearest PC and continuing to fight until it is reduced to 0 hp, or all PCs within melee range are reduced to 0 hp. When multiple PCs are within melee range, the vat horror will attack whoever dealt damage to it most recently. It has a 50% chance of using its energy burst, as long as it has pp remaining. On turns that it doesn't use its energy burst, the vat horror attacks with its flailing limbs. After expending all of its pp, the vat horror uses its flailing limbs every turn. If a PC flees, the vat horror will make its parting shot, but will not automatically pursue. It will move towards the

nearest viable target, be that the character who fled or a different target.

Tank Wreckage

The remains of the tank form an effective obstacle, and the PCs may have to maneuver around it during combat. If a character attempts to move through the area occupied by the tank, he must make an unskilled TN 9 dexterity reaction or slip on the wet glass and fall, resulting in 1 hp of damage from falling on the broken glass. (Assume the vat horror automatically succeeds on this check.)

Eric is suspended above the tank in the metal governor hanging from the ceiling. The broken tank could be used as a step to reach up and grab the metal machinery. But unless the player explicitly says that the climber is taking some precautions to protect his hands (searching a laboratory bench for gloves, throwing a cloak over the jagged edged of the tank etc.) the climber takes 1 hp of automatic damage (normal damage) before the climbing attempt is allowed. Actually climbing up to Eric's perch requires a major action and a successful TN 12 strength-based athletics check. On an unsuccessful check, the character falls down on the shattered tank, taking an additional 1d2 hp of normal damage.

Door

The door to the roof is locked with a security lock. Above the lock are carved the words, "Unmoving Star" a reference to the Polaris key. Fortunately, this lock is not trapped. But the lock will force the PCs to interrupt their hot pursuit of Eric up to the roof, in order to discuss who is carrying the keyring, or if anyone thought to bring it at all.

Research Equipment

While certainly creepy, the laboratory contains nothing of further relevance to the adventure. There are enough tools and instruments scattered around the workspace to make a tool set if collected.

7) Roof

7A) Stairs to Roof

The stairs up to the roof are included in the roof description because the fight on the roof will start on the stairs. If Eric succeeds in escaping to the roof, he'll be waiting at the top of the stairs for the door to open. If a PC gives chase immediately and has the key to the door in hand, allow that character to reach the roof before Eric can lay his ambush.

Eric is carrying three tools heavy enough to be effective improvised weapons (hammer, wrench, screwdriver). As soon as the door at the bottom of the stairs opens, and he has a clear shot at the lead character, Eric will attempt a defense hex and then throw the hammer, followed by another defense hex and the screwdriver on the next turn he has an opportunity to target the PCs. He saves the wrench for melee combat. If a PC closes to melee range before Eric has thrown the wrench, he will fight with whatever he has in his hand. Once in melee, he will use his minor action to attempt either an attack hex or a defense hex (alternating each turn) to soften up the target before using his major action to attack.

If the party waits too long before going up to the roof to fight Eric, he will get tired of waiting. By tying together some chains and cables, he will make a line and climb down the outside of the tower, escaping, possibly to become a reoccurring villain.

7B) Roof

A coelostat sits in the middle of the roof, surrounded by a 50 cm high solid wooden pen. Actually, the pen is the bottom part of a rain shelter used to protect the instrument. The upper half of the enclosure has been dismantled and the wooden panels set aside to give the coelostat inside a clear view of the sky. A coelostat uses a pair of mirrors to steer light from a heavenly body into an instrument. The mirrors move to track the object as it moves across the sky, but the direction of the output beam remains fixed. This is why Eric constructed it, to steer the moonlight straight down onto his experiment tank.

More information about coelostats, including a photo and short video can be found at the following links.

<https://www.nao.ac.jp/en/gallery/weekly/2015/20151020-mitaka.html>

<https://www.nao.ac.jp/en/access/mitaka/facilities/solar-tower-telescope.html>

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8) Wrapping Up the Adventure

After defeating Eric, the party's first decision will be what to do with him. Since Sandcastle doesn't include instant death rules, Eric will still, technically, be alive after being

reduced to 0 hp. The party would be justified in finishing him off (or just letting him bleed out) to prevent him from causing further trouble in the future. Or depending on their moral bent, the PCs may want to patch him up to take him back to Meadowbrook for a proper hanging. Any attempts to talk sense into him will fail.

The zombie and vat horror and only loosely stitched together and will die when reduced to 0 hp.

If an animal lover decides to try to save the panther, the attempt is automatically successful. Like recovering from all wounds in Sandcastle, nursing it back to health will take a week. After that the panther can be released or handed over to a GMC animal handler. Sandcastle does not include any rules for domestication or animal training by the PCs.

Returning to Meadowbrook, the PCs will find the townsfolk still scared and angry, but also more than a little embarrassed about the chaos last night. Above all, they are cold, sore, and tired from a night of running through the woods. The townsfolk will be grateful for information the PCs can provide about the true nature of the “demon” and the elimination of the treat. Getting rid of Eric, who no one liked anyways, will also be appreciated.

In recognition of their bravery, the PCs will be unofficially regarded as “heroes” in Meadowbrook. Heroes in the sense that they are now expected to undertake further adventures to accomplish more great deeds.

Treasure

Experienced players may want their characters to loot the tower for everything of worth. Sandcastle contains no rules for fencing the spoils of victory, so everything of worth is not much: 2 longswords, 1 shield, 7 days trail rations, 95 coins, a number of healing potions equal to the number of PCs, 2 flashbang vials (Rank 1), 2 chromatic splash vials (orange), 2 suits of leather armor, 1 physical sciences field guide, 1 tool set, and 4 daggers. The characters will have already obtained some of the equipment on this list.

Experience

1 xp surviving the night in Bleakwood Tower
1 xp eliminating all threats (including Eric)

9) Continuing the Campaign

The contents of Eric’s desk and bookshelf and the posters on his wall could be used to plant information to lead to further adventures. For example, information about

Starsmote Sandpit or the ancient civilization known as the Stargazers could be used to foreshadow the other introductory adventure provided by NAOJ.

Eric’s reference materials could also be used to impart any scientific information the players/characters should know. In particular, if anyone has questions about the coelostat or governor used in the experiment, you can use Eric’s books to pass the needed information on to the players.

If the PCs continue their adventuring careers, they now have enough xp to be level 1 and will need to choose skills and a combat style. Actually, this adventure is designed to help new players decide which combat style they would like for their characters.

Characters who enjoyed melee, or liked getting a longsword would make good strikers.

Characters who enjoyed maneuvering around the battlefield, or liked getting a shield or leather armor would make good harriers.

Characters who were impressed by the energy attacks of the flying skull and vat horror, or liked using a torch as a weapon, or liked getting the chromatic splash vials, would make good energers.

Characters who were impressed by Eric’s hex abilities or liked getting the flashbang vials would make good hexers.

At some point the PCs should also join one of the adventurers’ guilds described in the Core Rules and GMM. The next NAOJ adventure, Starsmote Sandpit contains additional information about the guilds.