

*I remember watching the mugs as I gingerly tried to carry the coffee to the bereaved without spilling it on their immaculate living room carpet. Within a breath the steam disappeared and the dark fluid frosted over. A chill crept across my neck and I looked up to see poor little Lucy standing just outside the window. For a moment it all seemed a horrible mistake. It was not her body the police found alongside that hateful highway. She had simply been lost, as we first suspected, and just now found her way home.*

*I was about to relay the good news to the Kohlmans and the Reverend when I saw their faces blanch as they stared at me...rather, beyond me. That was when I realized that it wasn't Lucy outside, but her reflection against the darkened window. Soon I would learn that both the police and I were correct. That was Lucy's body in the ditch and she did indeed find her way home.*

# Dread Quick Reference

As the title suggests, Dread is a game of horror, but it is also a game of hope. The thrill of Dread lies within the tension between desire and loss. You will take on the role of someone trapped in a story that is only as compelling as it is hostile—someone who will find themselves making the sorts of decisions we hope never to face in real life. Those who play will participate in a mutual telling of an original macabre tale. The goal of Dread is to sustain the delicate atmosphere that is necessary to produce the hand quivering emotion that lends its name to the game.

Dread is a game of the imagination, and a dark one at that.

It should be said that Dread is not necessarily a game for everyone. While the main purpose of Dread, as well as that of any other game, is to have fun, Dread, like a good game of Truth or Dare, should make you uncomfortable from time to time. If this does not sound like fun, then please do not play Dread.

If, however, you desire a game that focuses on alienation, tension, anxiety, fear, and all those other delicious emotions that draw an audience of millions to horror novels, stories, comics, and movies each year, then by all means, enjoy.

## Preparing for the Game:

- The host creates a unique character questionnaire for each of the players' characters.
- The players then fill out the character questionnaires.
- The players should introduce their characters to the rest of the players.
  - Do not reveal any information the other characters wouldn't know.
- Stack the tower and pre-pull 3 blocks for every player you have less than 5. (This is the only time a character isn't lost when the tower tumbles.)

## During the Game:

- The host describes all that happens to and around the characters.
- Players contribute by declaring what their characters are doing.
- A player must pull if his or her character is attempting to do something the character is conceivably capable of, but that is either:
  - Outside the character's realm of experience,
  - Or performed under duress or aggravated conditions.
- If the player declines a pull, his or her character fails at the action he or she is attempting to accomplish.
  - This failure can not be so drastic that it would remove the character from the game.

## Important Terms

- Character: The role the players adopt during a Dread game, as defined by their questionnaires. Or, anyone who populates the story being told, whether they are controlled by a player or the host.
- Host: The player who creates the framework for the story, adjudicates conflict in the story, and controls all the other characters.
- Player: Generally speaking anyone playing Dread, but specifically those players who have only a single character and no hosting duties.
- Pull: The act of removing one block from the tower and placing it on the topmost level.
- Questionnaire: A list of questions designed to flesh out the main characters of the story.
- Session: Each time a group of players gathers to play Dread.
- Story: An entire plotline that may be played over one or more sessions. Also referred to as a game.
- Tower: The basic metaphor of the Dread game. A stack of blocks that are pulled and restacked as the game progresses. A version is available commercially under the trade name Jenga®.

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- **Exception:** If there is time in the story to do so, the player may attempt to avoid the pull by changing the circumstances so that they are more beneficial, so that his or her character does not fail outright.
  - If the circumstances change enough to make the task easily accomplishable, the character succeeds.
  - Otherwise, the player may still be asked to pull (though possibly for a different reason).
- If the player pulls successfully, the character succeeds.
- If at any time during the game a player causes the tower to collapse, his or her character is removed from the game. If the character was attempting an action at the time, he or she fails.
  - **Exception:** If the player deliberately knocks the tower over, his or her character succeeds in a dramatically appropriate way, but is still removed from the game.
- Once the tower tumbles, re-stack it and pre-pull, as at the start, but with three additional blocks for every character removed from the game. (Characters can be removed if the tower tumbles during this re-stacking.)

### Pulling:

- You must use 1 hand at a time, though you may switch hands at any time.
- The block being pulled must be from beneath the topmost complete level.
- After being pulled, the block must be placed atop the tower, laying in the opposite direction of the blocks in the level beneath it.
  - Place the block within the topmost layer if it is incomplete.
- After placing the block on top, wait a few moments to see if the tower will collapse.
- Players may change their minds about what part of a complex action a particular pull represents at any time during the process.

### Abandoning the Pull:

- At any time during this process, the player is allowed to abandon the pull.
  - If a block has already been dislodged, it is not necessary to return it to its original place; it may be left partially pulled.
- If the player abandons a pull, the character fails at the action the pull represented.
- If the tower collapses because of a pull that was abandoned, the character is still removed from the game.

### Complex and Difficult Tasks:

- The host can request more than one pull for a complex or difficult action.
- Each pull represents a significant step in the task
- The host decides which significant steps require pulls.
- At any time before, during, or immediately after any pull, the player may decide which portion of the action he or she is pulling for.
  - The player does not need to pull for every portion of the action, within the constraints of common sense: If one portion of the action is dependent on another, it may not be completed without the prerequisite portion first being completed.

### Ways to Remove a Character:

- Died,
- Fled in terror,
- Fell into a catatonic state,
- Imprisoned,
- Called away to visit a sick loved one,
- Possessed by a malignant spirit,
- Monstrously transformed,
- Knocked unconscious,
- Trapped in a cave-in,
- Hospitalized,
- Called in to work a double shift,
- Drugged or inebriated,
- Grounded by over-protective parents,
- Paralyzed,
- Prematurely aged by fear,
- Crippled in a car accident,
- Chased off by fellow characters because of poor manners,
- Arrived too late for the ship's departure,
- Ejected from the ball for forging an invitation,
- Left to find a better career,
- Joined a cult,
- Regressed to a child-like state,
- Seized by a paranoia strong enough to cause him or her to fear the other characters,
- Realized that he or she was also putting his or her family in danger,
- Stricken with grief,
- Embarrassed to the point of flight,
- Or consumed with uncontrollable joy.

## Conflict between Players' Characters:

- It is recommended that this method not be used for most conflicts between players' characters, especially verbal ones.
- When a character tries to do something to another character, the target can usually be assumed able to avoid it.
- If a player doesn't want his or her character's action to be avoided, he or she can risk one or more pulls from the tower.
- The player of the character who is willing to step up the conflict should pull one or more blocks and declare his or her intentions towards the other character(s).
  - The intended result of the pull can not be so drastic that it would remove the other character from the game. *This is only possible through a collapsed tower.*
- The player of the target must either accept the intended result, or pull to defend.
  - If this player then decides to retaliate, he or she has the option to pull again and declare his or her intentions against the other character(s).
  - This process continues until one side refuses to pull, or the tower collapses.
- If the tower collapses during this conflict, the character of the player responsible is removed from the game.

## Elective Pulls:

- Players always have the option to pull a block without being asked to. There are a number of reasons why one may want to do this. It usually represents the player's character putting forth more effort than he or she would normally put forth on a given task, but can also represent dumb luck, fate smiling upon the character, or some other subtle form of fortunate intervention. The player should indicate just in what way the extra effort is being used, or how luck shines upon the character, but the host ultimately decides how it affects the story.

## Creating a Questionnaire

- Creating questionnaires is more art than science.
- Take into account the needs of the story, your players, and the characters themselves.
  - The story needs leading questions that tie the characters into the plot and each other.
    - Every character questionnaire must address why the character participates in the story. What is it about this character that keeps him or her from quitting? What is it that keeps the character in the game? After all, if the character doesn't want to be in the game, the player might as well topple the tower and be done with it.
    - If you are building a game with certain types of characters in mind, ask leading questions that tie characters to the motives, careers, or social standings that you require.
  - The story needs questions that help the characters through some of the foreseeable hardships or expose them to greater danger.
    - Ask questions about what belongings they might have with them at the beginning of the story.
    - Ask questions about disabilities, weaknesses, addictions, and failures.
    - Find out what shames a character, what excites a character, and always what a character fears.
  - The characters need questions that define their strengths and limits.
    - Character capabilities need to be well defined in the questionnaire to avoid slowing down play with discussions on just what the character can and cannot do.
    - The more details you draw out of the characters' questionnaires, the easier it is to draw them into the story.

## Mismatched Opponents and Circumstances:

- If one character clearly has an advantage over another, his or her player may be required to make fewer pulls.
  - If this character is the aggressor, then his or her player must make at least one pull.
- Likewise, the disadvantaged character's player may have to pull more than once.
- Which pulls aren't required depends on the nature of the character's advantage, and should be decided by the host.

## Some Possible Reasons to Electively Pull:

- To be extra aware in a situation;
- To accomplish a task swiftly without sacrificing quality;
- To improve the chances of having the drop on someone;
- To exert extra effort while holding a door closed;
- To ask the host for a clue or idea you don't have, but your character might;
- To improve the accuracy of an attack;
- Or to avoid a hazard you suspect, but your character isn't currently aware of.

- The players need questions that lead to interesting answers and inspire players to breathe life into their characters. The players need to invest themselves in their characters.
  - Ask questions that deal with a character's habits and daily life.
  - Ask questions about occupations, hobbies, achievements, and goals.
  - Try putting in twists. Provide questions that lead the player away from the sort of character he or she thinks the questionnaire is about. These questions can catch the player by surprise and create more-interesting characters. Be careful to balance this with the player's need to invest in the character. Don't present the player with a twist that can't be reconciled.
- Leave room for surprises.
  - Leave as many important details about the character as possible up to the player. If you need someone who starts the game with a specific element, force that element, but no more – and let the player decide why.
  - Let go of control. The answers players come up with often add whole new layers of pressure to the character.
  - Don't be afraid of leaving questions open-ended. The host has to approve any answer a player puts on a questionnaire, so you can have problematic answers re-written, rather than needing to make it impossible to give a problematic answer.
  - Through the questionnaire, you can leave some details of the story up to the players.
- There is no hard and fast rule on how many questions, or of which types, you should include. A baker's dozen is a good number to start with.
  - Try to spend equal time on the character's capabilities, shortcomings, personality and appearance, psychology, and social interactions with the other characters.
- Don't forget to ask for the character's name.

## A Sample Questionnaire Template

- A question to establish profession, archetype, and/or hook
- A question about a specialty
- A psychological question
- A question about a drawback related to the profession
- A psychological and/or physical question
- A question about a relationship
- A question about appearance
- A question about a hobby, skill, or quirk
- A question about the character's world view
- A question about a fear, phobia, or psychological weakness
- A question about the character's equipment
- A personality question
- What is your name?

## Filling Out a Questionnaire

- The goal to filling out a questionnaire is not to create a character that will survive and thrive in any environment the host throws at you, but to create an interesting character that makes the story worth participating in.
  - Consider what sorts of flaws your character will have to heroically overcome and try to bring them out in your answers.
  - If you are stuck on the answer to a certain question, move on and return to it later.
- If a question is unclear, ask the host for clarification or explanation.
- If a question requires knowledge of the other characters in order to answer, either ask the host for more information, or skip the question until after the characters have been introduced.
  - When dealing with these sorts of questions from other players, be as helpful as possible without revealing any important character secrets.
- Always assume the presence of a silent "and why?" at the end of each question.
  - It will create a better understanding of the character.
  - There will be less room for misunderstanding during the game itself.
  - The greater the depth with which you answer, the more you make the character your own.
  - You do not have to answer all of the silent 'why's in print, but you should at least consider them.
- The host has to approve your answers, and may ask you to expand or rewrite some of them.



This is just an overview of the rules. Find out more, including where to buy the full rules, at [www.tiltingatwindmills.net](http://www.tiltingatwindmills.net).