



CREATURE HORROR FOR 3 TO 5 PLAYERS

MAGPIE

“What is black and white – and red all over?” When a group of students make a field trip out to a national park they discover just how dangerous magpies can be.

Genre: Creature Horror

Number of players: 3 to 5

Run time: Approx. 3 to 4 hours

Magpie is a great game for starting with Dread. It wastes no time in getting players into the action and allows for plenty of scope for players to pick their own path. It's a straightforward narrative about fleeing a dangerous place – but how players accomplish that and who they help along the way is up to them. Plus since the monsters in this story are numerous and many of them can fly, the game master can use their own discretion and make monsters appear at any time they deem dramatically appropriate. The text below is only a suggestion – feel free to paraphrase or make up your own descriptions. This is just a framework and the more you engage with your players and the less you read from a screen the better!

CONTENTS:

- [Character Creation](#)
- [Rules](#)
- [Sound Effects](#)
- [Music](#)
- [Setup](#)
- [Act 1](#)

MAGPIE

www.DreadTower.com

- [Act 2](#)
- [Act 3](#)
- [Epilogue](#)
- [Credits](#)

CHARACTER CREATION:

> [Download character sheet as PDF](#)

> [Download character sheet as plain text Word doc](#)

Magpie is set in New South Wales, Australia and in this game players will be taking on the roles of students from an ordinary high school who are about to set out on the field trip of their lives. All the players are given identical character sheets that will help shape their personality and skills. They are also able to have a single item in their pocket. Take note of what classes they excel and struggle in and adjust player checks accordingly. (For example, the player who loves geography will only have to make 1 pull to navigate using a map whereas other players would have to make 2 pulls.)

RULES:

Dread is a role playing game that is played with no dice and no numbers. Instead, we use a Jenga tower resolve player actions.

- The tower starts with 3 blocks missing.
- Whenever players make an action they must pull blocks from the tower.
- The GM will tell you how many blocks to pull. Simple actions may only need a single block pull, but riskier actions require more block pulls.
- Normal Jenga rules apply: only pull with one hand, blocks get stacked back on top of the tower, the block being pulled must be from beneath the topmost
- complete layer, etc.
- Risk-free actions (like searching a suitcase) may require no pulls, but the game master may offer things like asking players if they want to do a thorough search. For example pull 1 block to search the suitcase – and find the hidden compartment!
- If the tower topples, then that means the end for that player's character – usually via a grisly death.
- Player death will only ever occur from a tower falling over – but that doesn't mean the player characters' can't get seriously hurt.
- Players can choose to sacrifice themselves by smacking down the tower. This is their "go on without me" moment as they face the zombie

horde with only a baseball bat. They allow the rest of the players to move to the next point of safety, but at the cost of their life. Make this spectacular.

- After a tower collapses, the tower is rebuilt, minus 3 blocks and then minus an ADDITIONAL 3 blocks for EVERY player character that has died/left the game. In this way the longer the game goes, the closer to another tower collapse you get.
- That's basically it, but [the full rules for Dread can be purchased here for \\$12.](#)

SOUND EFFECTS:

This adventure comes with several mood-setting sound effects. You can just play the embedded sound files straight off the page here, but for full effect we recommend using the QLab show files since it's programmed with loops and transitions for a seamless audio experience.

- [Download the QLab software \(Mac only\)](#)
- [Download the Magpie QLab show files](#)
- [About using QLab](#)

When you load up the QLab show file there's an opening set of sounds to play – but after you can play the sound groups in any order you require. Although the project is set up such that you can also get away with just playing the groups in order, don't forget to take a look at the horror sound effects nested at the bottom. Familiarise yourself with the different sound groups and have fun with it.

MUSIC:

In addition to sound effects, some music can also be great to help set the mood for a scene.

- [Somber background music](#)
- [Scary & Suspenseful music](#)
- [Epic Horror music](#)

SETUP:

To run Magpie, you'll want to have the following set up your players.

- Printed character sheets
- A Jenga tower or similar
- Device for referencing the games notes on this webpage
- Pens/pencils
- Speaker system for running sound effects (optional)
- Stickers and sharpies so people can make name badges (optional)



OUR STORY BEGINS...

*This section is for the game masters' eyes only.
Spoilers ahead for players.*

ACT 1

OPENING: On board the bus

[Play Opening Music/Bus sound effect]

Set the mood for the game. Remind players that they are all year 11 students from Beaumont High School about to embark on a camping trip with their fellow classmates. They'll be adventuring deep in the beautiful Australian bushland and spending the weekend hiking and camping. Players start on a bus winding its way through a bush road. The bust jostles over the uneven terrain and its sides are slapped by the overhanging foliage that threatens to swallow up what remains of the narrow road.

[Feel free to paraphrase or make up your own descriptions. This is just a framework and the more you engage with your players and the less you read from a screen the better!]

Ms.Pulli yells out trying to be heard over a couple dozen rowdy students: "Might as well turn your phones off. Zero bars out here."

>> While the background music is playing, this is a good time for the players to introduce themselves. But you can also do character introductions before starting the game if you prefer.

Finally the bus pulls up to a clearing and you all disembark. Once the engine of the bus shuts off you suddenly realise how far away from civilisation you are. There isn't a single distant car to be heard.

Ms. Pulli addresses the students: “Alright welcome everyone. I hope you are ready for a big weekend of bushwalking because the warmup starts now. Behind me is the entrance to the hiking trail that leads to the campsite. There’s multiple paths but they all end up in the same place. Mr. Lewinski has driven ahead in the 4WD with your luggage – then we can set up tents. Alright everyone – hop to it!”

> Not long after everyone is off the bus, have players hear the bus drive off in the background.

Hike to the campsite:

Mr. Madison approaches the players: “It’s your lucky day everyone. You’re in my group.”

>> Mr Madison is a friendly dork of a teacher. This is an opportunity for small talk among the players as they warm up into their character. Mr. Madison will also try to entertain his students with riddles:

Mr Madison asks: “What starts life walking on four limbs, then two limbs, then three limbs?” (Answer: humans)

“What’s black and white – and red all over?” (Answer: a newspaper)

Toilet break:

After a bit of walking and talking, Mr Madison will excuse himself to pee.

“Sit tight for a minute – nature calls.”

A couple minutes later, a horrifying scream echoes across the hills. You recognise it instantly as Mr Madison.

[Play Scream sound effect]

NOTE FOR THE GM:

Finally it’s time for players to start making decisions. You don’t need to prompt them with all the options listed here unless players are shy and need a little direction. These aren’t the only choices players might make. Allow them freedom to make up their own plans if they seem reasonable.

Follow the sound and find Mr Madison (1 block)

A player will likely try to find the missing teacher. Whoever suggest this can lead the way and make the pull. Players spot him at the bottom of a steep embankment. You can't tell if he's ok, but he isn't moving.

If players want to go down to help Mr Madison, it's 2 blocks to get down the steep embankment. After the first player goes down it's only 1 block - since the lead player has found a safe route down.

Mr Madison is face down, turning him over will reveal his bloodied face and the red hollow sockets where his eyes used to be. The player who turns him over will need to make a 1 block pull to avoid vomiting and panicking. The player can of course opt to just freak out for free.

Mr Madison has a water bottle and a walkie talkie on him. No one responds if you try the walkie talkie. But it's a useful item for later.

Next challenge:

- From here players will likely move ahead on the path to find the [supply vehicle](#).
- If they choose a different path, have them encounter a [wounded survivor](#)

Leave and keep going (1 block)

The group picks up and hurries along down the path, heedless of branches that scrape and scratch at their arms and legs as they move through the narrow bushland path.

Jump to: [Finding the supply vehicle](#)

Cut through the trail and find help (2 blocks)

It means cutting through the scrub, but perhaps the players can find another group on a nearby walking trail. You slog through the bush until you come to another path. It's quiet and you don't hear anyone walking or talking in the distance. There's a splash of something red in the distance. If players approach nearer they will see that it's a bright red backpack. Perched atop it is magpie.

Jump to: [Finding the backpack](#)

Finding the backpack:

There's an abandoned backpack in the pathway. What will the players do?

Approach the bag (3 blocks)

If a player goes to approach the bag, make a 2 block pull as the magpie flies at them and attacks them. The bird is surprisingly aggressive, even for a magpie. This leaves the player with some nasty slashes along their arms. They'll want to get those bandaged up at some point.

Once the magpie has flown off they'll see the backpack was shredded by some animal and the contents are spilling out. There's some book, a compass and some muesli bars. Did the magpie do this? And if so then why would they leave food behind?

Next challenge:

- [Go back to Mr Madison](#)
- [Follow the trail to the supply vehicle](#)
- If they choose a different path, [have them encounter the wounded survivor](#)

Throw an object at the magpie (2 blocks)

Throwing an object only antagonises the bird. Make a 2 block pull as the magpie flies at whoever threw the object and attacks them. The bird is surprisingly aggressive, even for a magpie.

Once the magpie has flown off they'll see the backpack was shredded by some animal and the contents are spilling out. There's some book, a compass and some muesli bars. Did the magpie do this? And if so then why would they leave food behind?

Next challenge:

- [Go back to Mr Madison](#)
- [Follow the trail to the supply vehicle](#)
- If they choose a different path, [have them encounter the wounded survivor](#)

Use a makeshift weapon against the magpie (1 block)

If a player uses a decent weapon against the bird it will be a bit easier to defeat. The bird is resilient and even after taking a battering will fly away seemingly unharmed.

Once the magpie has flown off they'll see the backpack was shredded by some animal and the contents are spilling out. There's some book, a compass and some muesli bars. Did the magpie do this? And if so then why would they leave food behind?

Next challenge:

- [Go back to Mr Madison](#)
- [Follow the trail to the supply vehicle](#)
- If they choose a different path, [have them encounter the wounded survivor](#)

Finding the supply vehicle:

MAGPIE

www.DreadTower.com

When the forest finally opens up to a clearing, you find the supply vehicle flipped on its side. It's a red 4WD and there's smoke seeping from the bonnet. Perched atop of the van is a single magpie, but no one else is here. The bird fixes its gaze on you as you move up to the van.

Judging by the tracks in the dirt, it seems to have turned over after driving a wheel up a boulder and over balancing. Because it's on the side you cannot see into the 4WD. If you call out for help no one responds.

>> Climb up onto the 4WD to check driver/retrieve luggage (2 blocks)

Free action if the player is especially good at sports or athletics in their character sheet.

Clambering atop the 4WD and peering into the windows will reveal the corpse of Mr Lewinski. A closer examination will reveal that his body is covered with scratch marks and his eyes...his eyes have been plucked from their sockets. Have the player who spots this gruesome detail first have to make a 1 block pull to avoid a total freak out. Might still be fun to have them stumble back and fall off the 4WD.

Players can also open up the back seat door and retrieve their luggage and backpacks. Players will likely want to go through and sort out the optimal gear loadout. Give them time, but if they take too long have Mr Lewinski shudder to life and start to clamber out of the 4WD drive. If the players don't run away quickly then Mr Lewinski will attack the players.

Mr Lewinski will chase the players into: [Act 2](#)

Investigate the area (1 block)

There's no evidence that anyone else has been in the area. The only human disturbance (aside from your tracks) are the fresh tracks left by the 4WD. It occurs to you that following the vehicle tracks is your best way of leaving this place. But you were driving through the national park on off-road tracks for a long time. You're in for a long hike.

Players will likely want to get the luggage too.

Then let them **jump to: [Act 2](#)**

Finding the wounded survivor:

There's an uneasy groan coming from behind those trees. Looking around there isn't anyone visible, but you can still hear the occasional painful moan.

Search for the source of the sound (2 blocks)

Fanning out you search through the bush land looking for the source of the sound. As you begin moving the voice goes quiet.

If players talk to each other the mystery person will call out to you.

If players keep quiet they will eventually find a classmate hiding in the leeway of a bush.

Pushing through the bushes you spot a familiar face - it's a student from your class: Johan. They're not doing so great as their leg is badly broken. You can see the bulge of bone under the skin of the leg where bone should not be.

> Think of interesting ways that Johan might be connected to a specific player character. "You recognise Johan, but you've never seen them up close before. You've spent many hours watching them at basketball practise admiring their technique. Oh crap, do you have a crush on Johan?" Maybe they're a crush. Maybe Johan is a bully, or someone who helped with your math homework. Something that plays off what someone has put in their character sheet will deliver the most satisfying results.

Jump to: [Helping Johan](#)

Call out to the mystery person (0 block)

Recognising the voices of their fellow classmates, the mystery person returns the call: "Over here! It's me, Johan. My leg is all messed up and I can't move."

Pushing through the bushes you spot a familiar face - it's a student from your class: Johan. They're not doing so great as their leg is badly broken. You can see the bulge of bone under the skin of the leg where bone should not be.

> Think of interesting ways that Johan might be connected to a specific player character. "You recognise Johan, but you've never seen them up close before. You've spent many hours watching them at basketball practise admiring their technique. Oh crap, do you have a crush on Johan?" Maybe they're a crush. Maybe Johan is a bully, or someone who helped with your math homework. Something that plays off what someone has put in their character sheet will deliver the most satisfying results.

Jump to: [Helping Johan](#)

Helping Johan:

Players have several possible options in dealing with Johan, the injured student:

- Carry Johan (requires two people since they cannot talk on a broken leg)
- Build a makeshift stretcher from branches and clothes (will probably break later on, but will do for now)
- Find a safe place for them and tell them to sit tight while they get help
- Give them medication or use knowledge of plant life to give them some kind of pain killer

However players handle Johan it will likely either boil down to leaving them alone or bring them along. In either case Johan is not likely to survive for long, but if they do die make it good and traumatic for the players.

Next challenge:

- [Find the supply vehicle](#)
- [Venture forth into the bush and into Act 2](#)

ACT 2

In which players are learning the full extent of the danger.

They will face many challenges as they try to flee the national park and find help.

Depending on the actions players took in act 1 they may be better prepared for some of these challenges. But of course, being loaded down with supplies makes it harder to flee when danger comes. Whereas Act 1 was fairly structured, Act 2 is more freeform and allows players to dictate their direction. Their goal is fairly straightforward - they need to leave the park and get help.

So what's attacking people?

It's important to understand what the creature is in this story. Magpies are aggressive birds when they want to be - and in this story we've turned that up to 11 and given them some additional powers to boot.

The magpies thirst for human blood. They are attacking in vast swarms and descending on people and slashing and tearing away with beaks and talons. The magpies have a fondness for eyes. Any corpses the players find should be missing their eyes.

Once a magpie has plucked the eyes of a human, they are marked. A short time later, that corpse will rise up and seek out other humans to hunt. The zombie like creatures cannot see, but they can hear. If there are magpies in the area, these walking corpses will work in tandem with the birds.

This means that human bodies you have found previously (like Mr Madison) may catch up to our players and attack them. But the eyeless corpses are just the minions - the real danger is the magpies. Since they can fly they can conceivably descend and attack at any time. (Which is super convenient for the Game Master!) Start by having small groups magpies attack the players, and slowly build up to bigger and bigger swarms. Players can probably swat down a couple of birds with a sturdy branch, but against a swarm of fifty birds it's better to just run like mad.

The Shrine

To add a nice moment of dread, have players stumble across a giant shrine of objects collected by the birds over the years. The top most layers are objects the players may recognise - school shoes or a teachers' glasses with the lenses pecked out. But should the players dig they'll find artifacts from different eras; tape from cassettes or a vote Mayor Trillby badge from 1986. The shrine speaks of untold numbers of disappearances over the years - not to mention the strange formation of the piles hints and an unearthly intelligence displayed by the birds. Feel free to play with how it looks and feels depending on the location. Players might stumble upon it when falling down a ravine - or deep with a cave that they choose to take shelter in from the rain.

Act 2 challenges may include:

- Crossing perilous terrain (steep hills, cliffs, thick uneven bushland etc)
- Crossing river that is wide and fast flowing (bonus points if they try to make a raft!)
- Lack of food and water (can even force players to leave food behind due to a swarm of attackers)
- Making makeshift weapons/equipment
- Climbing a tree for a vantage point (definitely have a bird attack someone up in a tree!)
- People getting injured and needed to be treated (like sprains from running or falling from a tree)
- Discovering a location where a dozen students were massacred by the birds. It looks like they were fellow survivors -they had equipment and tried to get help. But they failed. Good opportunity for the players to be attacked by a mob of eyeless corpses.
- Getting caught in a thunderstorm, having to find shelter and dealing with being soaked and freezing. Feel free to let them get settled into a cave, then drive them back out into the rain with a swarm of birds and/or corpses

- Finding a teacher alive and well. Ms Pulli has been doing it tough and is able to help the players as a strong ally...for a time. Kill her off at some point so players' have the rug pulled out from beneath them once more
- Being attacked at any time by either birds or eyeless corpses

Act 2 should eventually lead to:

- Camping for the night (prompt the players by saying they're getting exhausted if they're trying to push on through the night)
- Finding a vehicle of some kind in Act 3

ACT 3

In which players can see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Make them work hard to try and survive. Try to kill a couple players here if you haven't already.

The morning:

Give the players some downtime. They'll have to rustle up some breakfast from their supplies if they have any or try their hand at scrounging for food. It's very hard to hike on an empty stomach. This is also a good time for character interactions to flourish as they almost get to feel like regular campers.

Eventually though, you should have a magpie swarm and several eyeless students catch up and attack them.

How do they escape the park?

- **Park ranger:** Have them run into a park ranger in a small cabin outpost. The ranger will radio for a fellow ranger to bring a 4WD around to pick up the players. Of course, the 4WD will come coasting down the hill and crash into the cabin. The ranger driving has been swarmed by birds! Players will have to fight the birds off if they want to get that 4WD and drive out.
- **The Hunter:** Players hear distant gunshots. If players are grave enough to investigate they'll find a Hunter - and she has a ute that can players can ride in the back of it. If they can convince the Hunter to drive them out of there. Feel free to have the Hunter swarmed by magpies and pressure the players to steal the ute and flee.
- **Hitchhike:** Players hear the sounds of traffic not far off. Following those sounds they find a road! It isn't long before a car pulls over and picks the students off. They think they're home free. You've been happily driving for a couple minutes when the driver spots someone else in the middle of the road. Driver slows down to help this lonely person out - but when they turn around

the figure has no eyes! This friendly driver is going to be pretty insistent that this eyeless person needs help. Good luck convincing them otherwise.

It's not over yet:

Any good horror movie has one more trick up its sleeve. The players are nearly out of the woods - literally - when they will come upon the bus the students drove up in. The entire bus is packed full of birds. You can see their wings pounding against the glass. The magpies spill out of the bus in a giant swarm - the biggest one yet. A thousand black and white birds spattered with bright red blood.

If the players are driving swarm the car such that they cannot see. Make this a spectacular action setpiece, culminating in the car crashing and flipping over. When the dust settles the surviving players will see the "thanks for visiting" sign that marks the entrance to the national park. Have players crawl/run to beyond that point and they are home free - the birds will settle and watch the players leave past that point, cawing all the while.

EPILOGUE

What does life look like for the survivors after that point? Do they change schools - maybe even change towns? If there were any interpersonal threads (romances, feuds, promises etc) this is where they should be resolved.

Give one of the characters a fright when they see single magpie, then bring the story to close.

I love this creepy cover of [Smells Like Teen Spirit](#) as a closing song.

CREDITS:

Thanks for playing!

Story and sound design by [Kyle Evans](#).

The Dread system was created by [The Impossible Dream](#).