Doom Sword

A DIY LARP for 2+ Tragedy-Inclined Players

Long ago, the Doom was sealed away by a mighty hero wielding the legendary Doom Sword. The sealing of the Doom ushered in an era of peace and prosperity. Art, culture, and magic flourished throughout the land. All this time, the Doom Sword lay dormant, guarded by the Doom Ward.

This time of peace may be about to come to an end. The diviners have spoken; they say the seal upon the Doom has weakened, and the Doom soon will be unleashed. ***Unless.*** *Unless the seal can be strengthened by a willing sacrifice upon the blade of the Doom Sword.*

A random assortment of people have been chosen by lot to contemplate the Doom Sword. The hour draws nigh. At the end of this hour, one person must throw themself upon the Doom Sword, taking their place alongside the mighty hero of old and sacrificing their life to save us all. The rest will be left to mourn and contemplate what might have been.

Mechanics & Set-Up

The Doom Sword is in the middle of a large room or outdoor space. To access it, two people must simultaneously place their hands upon the Doom Ward for at least thirty seconds. Once they have done so, the Doom Sword is permanently accessible and anyone within touching distance of it may throw themselves upon it. The LARP ends when someone throws themself upon the Doom Sword or when an hour has passed without someone doing so. (If playing with fewer than four people, consider ending in half an hour instead.)

The Doom Sword should ideally be represented by the most ridiculous fantasy sword anyone present possesses, but can also be represented by an index card if needed. The Doom Ward may be represented by any object which is big enough for two people to touch at once. Objects that can be dramatically flung away once the Doom Ward is deactivated are especially good.

Once you have built your characters and determined your relationships (as described below), you may begin the game. Someone should start a timer – ideally one that beeps loudly when expiring – and declare, "Game start."

Character Creation

Each player should pick a name for their character that is some kind of innocuous noun, like Sunlight or Ribbon. Then, roll a 6-sided die to determine each of the following:

Profession: 1 is least important to the continued functioning of society while 6 is most important. Picture a sort of pleasant pastoral medieval fantasy society. A socialite or bandit might be a 1, while a high priestess or physician might be a 6.

Pick whatever profession feels right and whatever you do, do not share the number you rolled with anyone; this is not "debate how important farmers are individually vs on aggregate for an hour LARP."

Tragedy: How tragic has your life up until this point been, on a scale of 1-6? After rolling, determine the nature of this tragedy.

Martyrdom Quotient: How much do you personally want to throw yourself on this sword, on a scale of 1-6? Or simply pretend to roll the die and write down a 6.

Introduce yourself. Your name, profession, and potentially your tragedy are all public; your martyrdom quotient is private. Write down everyone else's names.

Character Relationships

For each other character, roll 1d6 to determine:

Relationship Closeness: If you roll a 6 for someone else, inform them that the two of you have a close, positive relationship. If you roll a 1, inform them that the two of you have an intense negative relationship. Ignore other rolls; there's no difference between a 2, 3, 4, or 5. Note down any 1s or 6s others roll for you. Anyone who did not end up with at least two close relationships of some sort (or one, for a 2-3 player game) may choose to reroll.

If two people both roll a 6 for each other, the pair are Soulmates. (You may have multiple Soulmates.) If both roll 1s for each other, they are Mortal Enemies. If one person rolls a 1 and the other rolls a 6, they have a complicated but intense relationship. (It does not matter who rolled which number.)

Work with the other players to determine the exact nature of these relationships.

Sacrifice Quotient: How much do you want to throw this person onto the Doom Sword, where 1 is "I would sacrifice my life for them even if I weren't planning on doing that already" and 6 is "why are we even having a debate rather than impaling this person immediately?" Keep your sacrifice quotient for each other character private.

You may choose to skip rolling for close positive and negative relationships and assume those are 1s and 6s, respectively. You may instead choose to roll if you want the potential challenge of figuring out why you want to save your Mortal Enemy and/or sacrifice your Soulmate.

Doom Sword: Extended Edition

As above, but DOOM SWORD: Extended Edition is a two-hour-long boffer LARP instead of a one-hour-long parlor LARP. Suggested minimum of 10 PCs and a similar number of NPCs.

In this version, the Doom Ward is unbreakable until ten minutes before the end of game. Being one of the two people to break the Doom Ward is considered a high honor and should be hotly contested.

Additionally, after someone has thrown themself on the Doom Sword, someone else must pick up the Doom Sword and become its Wielder. Everyone should very much want to be the wielder by default unless they choose to be a secret coward. It is known that it takes either great martial prowess or great strength of spirit to effectively wield the Doom Sword.

While the assembled group debates who should be the sacrifice, wielder, and ward-breakers (all but sacrifice and wielder can overlap; this could be two people, total, or it could be three or four), the Doomed Ones will attack in waves, drawn by the magic of the ebbing Doom Ward. The Doomed Ones are monsters of all kinds; some humans twisted into hideous things, some mocking shades of the PCs' absent loved ones, and some that defy description but not hastily thrown-together costuming.

Combat Rules

Combat is **lightest touch**. It involves melee weapons only – these are the only weapons that work on Doomed Ones for some reason – and should be very dramatic. All weapons are equivalent; a knife hurts just as much as a halberd. You may decide what weapons it makes sense for your character to wield. Stabbing is legal if your weapon's tip is safe to stab with.

Hit Locations

There are no hit points or health points. There are five hit locations: your two arms from shoulder to hand, your two legs from hip to foot, and your torso. The head and neck are not valid targets, nor is the groin.

If you are hit in the arm, you lose the arm. Put your arm behind your back so it is not in the way of your torso. You may pass a weapon in your disabled arm to a free hand if you have one. If not, hold the weapon or shield behind you out of the way. If you physically cannot hold your arm behind your back, hold it as tightly to your body as you can; hits to this arm now count as torso. If you lose both arms you are still up, but can't do much. Hits to the shoulder of an injured arm count as torso.

If you are hit in the leg, you have two choices. You can either post on your uninjured leg, meaning that leg cannot move from that spot until you are healed, or you can drop to your knees. If you have one functional leg, you may walk on your knees. If you lose both legs, you must go to your knees and cannot knee walk. Hits to a leg that is already injured do nothing.

Hits to the torso drop you. If you are dropped, fall down dramatically (if safe) or kneel with your weapon(s) held against your chest. Wait for someone to heal or kill you.

Death

Doomed Ones are frail creatures that disincorporate the moment they are dropped. They may reincorporate and return later, or perhaps many Doomed Ones may look similar; no one truly knows. Doomed Ones who disincorporate should leave the battlefield with their weapon(s) over their head.

A Doomed One can kill a dropped PC by touching the PC with their weapon and loudly announcing, "I will now bring your final doom upon you." The Doomed One loudly incants an ancient chant of death in a lost language which sounds coincidentally like counting slowly down from ten to one in English. If no one interrupts the chant, the Doomed One announces, "Rise now as a Doomed One" and the now-former PC does so immediately. If the chant is interrupted at any point before this it must be restarted from the beginning. The experiencing of being chanted over by a Doomed One, even if the chant is interrupted, is deeply traumatic.

Magic

This pleasant but potentially doomed generic fantasy world is a place brimming with magic. So much so that ordinary people forced to live through extraordinary times can find it within themselves to access the magic that has lived inside them all along. Magic is acquired via **spells**, performed via **calls** with embedded **keywords**, and fueled with **essence**. Some rare heroes can **push through** the effects of magic.

Keywords

All calls must contain one of five mechanical keywords. Four of the five keywords have a duration of thirty seconds. Do your best to estimate this and give others the benefit of the doubt when they estimate. In all cases, it is the target, not caster, whose time-keeping matters. Being dropped ends any effect. Effects can overlap.

Ground: The target falls to their hands and knees on the ground and is incapacitated for thirty seconds. The target cannot fight, move, or speak for the duration but is aware of what is happening around them.

Pinned: The target cannot move their feet (except minor adjustments to avoid falling over if needed) for thirty seconds. If the target is kneeling or lying down when hit with the call, they may not get up from their knees for the duration. The target can still fight and use magic.

Command: The target must follow the caster's command to the best of their ability for thirty seconds. There is no restriction on the type of command, but targets should disregard any command that would put any player or NPC in an out-of-game unsafe situation. Commands cannot force the target to spend essence.

Shield: The target is immune to all harmful magic and weapon strikes for thirty seconds. This does not end any harmful effects that were already on the target. When struck with magic or a weapon, the target should shout, "shielded!" in a smug tone.

Heal: The target is restored to full health with all functioning limbs.

Calls

To perform a call, **point** with a free hand or weapon at a target within roughly ten feet, say the target character's **name** if you know it or a short descriptive phrase if you don't (e.g., "monster in the red mask," "human in blue"), and then loudly say a **short descriptive sentence** that includes the keyword itself and the flavor of how you are doing the keyword. If the target seems confused, repeat the keyword again at the end of the sentence.

This is more difficult to do than simply shouting something like "lightning bolt" or "ground pain" but that is the point – casting powerful magic requires concentration and may mean you need to take a step back from the thick of the fighting to do it.

If you think someone may have just performed a call on you but you aren't sure what happened, you may ask, "Clarify?" and they should repeat the mechanical keyword.

Magic is tiring! You may make a call at most **every thirty seconds**. You don't have to count this precisely, but you shouldn't be chaining your calls together one right after the other. Take a few breaths in between.

Example Calls

Calls tell the target how the keyword is being applied and should affect roleplay. For example, "Writhe on the **ground** in agony," "Bow to the **ground** in awe of my goddess," "Cower on the **ground** in fear," "Fall to the **ground** stunned," "Roll on the **ground** laughing at my joke," and "Be pulled to the **ground** by vines" are all very different magic and should feel very different emotionally to the target, but they all do the same thing: incapacitate a person on the ground for thirty seconds.

Examples for pinned include, “Your foot is **pinned** to the spot by an ice block,” “You are **pinned** in place with fear,” “You are **pinned** in place with shame from my insult,” “You are **pinned** by thick vines.”

The command being given does not count as the descriptive sentence for command! *How* are you commanding the target? “By the power of my goddess, I **command** you to fight your allies!” “Be overwhelmed with fear as I **command** you to flee!” “Believe that I am your friend and follow my **command** to defend me.” “With a powerful guilt trip, I **command** you to go away and think about what you’ve done.” “With an intimidating roar I **command** you to fight me!”

Examples for shield might include, “You are protected by the **shield** of my faith,” “A wall of fire **shields** my body,” “You gain a **shield** of pure magic.”

Examples for heal can range from the magical to the mundane, especially if you’re doing it out of combat. You might say, “I will **heal** your wounds with my knowledge of herbalism,” “This enchanted bandage will **heal** you,” “A feeling of peace courses through you as I **heal** you,” “A cleansing flame sears your wounds and **heals** you,” or “by my mastery of magical arts, be **healed**!”

Spells

Each PC may select two spells. At the time you select each spell, select the flavor that you’ll be using with the spell. If you want multiple flavor options, you may select the same spell twice with different flavor.

After selecting your two spells, pick one of the two to be your signature spell. This spell costs one less essence for you to cast. This can make it free. It is strongly suggested that PCs coordinate so that at least one person has Slow Heal as their signature spell.

Invoke Ground (2 essence): You use the ground keyword in a call.

Slow Ground (1 essence): You spend ten seconds with both feet planted firmly in place and at least one free hand performing magical gestures. If you manage this uninterrupted (i.e., not wounded, forced to move, or affected by a harmful spell), you use the ground keyword in a call. For fairness, try to err on the side of counting slowly.

Invoke Pinned (1 essence): You use the pinned keyword in a call.

Invoke Command (2 essence): You use the command keyword in a call. Note that the flavor you select may logistically limit the kind of commands it makes sense to give, so be thoughtful.

Invoke Lesser Command (1 essence): You use the command keyword in a call that must compel the target to do one of the things on the following list, selected at the time you select this spell: fight you, fight one of your allies, stay away from you.

Invoke Shield (2 essence): You use the shield keyword in a call.

Invoke Heal (2 essence): You use the heal keyword in a call.

Slow Heal (1 essence): You spend ten seconds with both feet planted firmly in place and at least one free hand performing magical gestures. If you manage this uninterrupted (i.e., not wounded, forced to move, or affected by a harmful spell), you use the heal keyword in a call. For fairness, try to err on the side of counting slowly.

You should think about why your character knows each spell, how they learned it, and what it feels like to cast it. Note that in-game, spells are not categorized this way. Someone who has Slow Heal and Invoke Ground with fire flavor will be seen as a very different kind of magician than someone who has Slow Heal and Invoke Ground with a plant theme.

You may use harmful spells on your fellow PCs if you choose. This will be obvious to everyone and may have repercussions.

Once per game, you may upgrade a single spell from single-target casting to sound-of-voice casting. Loudly announce, "[All/All enemies/All allies] within the sound of my voice, [call]." You pay the same essence cost for the spell as normal.

Push Through

Especially determined humans (that's you) and some powerful Doomed Ones may push through the effects of magic. When pushing through magic, the **mechanical effect** is negated but the **roleplay effect** still happens.

For example, if you are targeted with, "Writhe on the ground in agony" and push through, you are still in agony. You should scream, grimace, etc. However, you are able to stand and continue fighting rather than falling to the ground. If you are targeted with, "Be overwhelmed with fear as I command you to flee" you are still very frightened, but manage to keep it together and stay put. If you are targeted with, "Your foot is pinned in place by a block of ice" your foot is indeed coated in ice, but you are able to wrench it free in a moment rather than thirty seconds.

You may push through someone else's shield, but should make it very obvious you are taking extra effort to attack them in a way their shield does not protect against. If they

renew their shield with a new call, you must spend another essence to push through again if you wish to continue making effective attacks against them.

When pushing through something, you should ham up your roleplay immensely and/or say "push through" or a sentence containing it so the caster knows you aren't merely ignoring the effect.

For example, if you are screaming in obvious agony while fighting, you don't need to say "push through," but if you're stoically remaining put in the face of fear, you probably should. If you are pushing through someone's shield you should be extra obvious about it so they know to take the hit.

Pushing through an effect costs **1 essence**.

Essence

Every PC starts out with **6 essence**. Essence is not affected by being dropped or being healed; it remains the same and is neither lost nor reset.

Essence can be regained by being incredibly, overwhelmingly dramatic. This is not just your garden-variety oh-no-I-weep-for-my-lover-wants-to-throw-herself-on-the-Doom-Sword drama. This should be levels of drama that significantly enhance someone else's game. This can be social drama or combat drama.

Social drama might be something like confessing a long-held secret to someone whose opinion of you will be changed by the confession, publicly proposing to your star-crossed lover from a different social class, or giving a genuine speech in support of your greatest rival because you admit they will do the job better than you will.

Combat drama is showy flourishes that make the fight look like something out of a movie. Critically, you *cannot* perform combat drama while under the effects of a shield call, as that takes all the risk out of it! Combat drama includes things like spinning in a full 360 circle before or while making an attack, carrying on about a minute's worth of witty banter with an opponent while actively engaging them with blows, or a solo charge against overwhelming odds.

Don't be a spotlight hog! You can only regain essence via combat drama **once per fight**. There isn't a strict limit on how often you can regain essence via social drama, but if you've done it two or three times, you should probably take a breather and help someone else be dramatic instead.

If you see another PC do something incredibly cool or impactful to your game that you think should help them recover essence, you may go briefly out of game to suggest that they recover essence.

Ending the Game

The game ends in one of three ways.

If the Doomed Ones kill every PC, the game is over and the PCs have lost. The land is doomed.

If two hours pass and no one has thrown themself upon the Doom Sword and/or no one is wielding the Doom Sword, the game is over and the PCs have lost. The land is doomed.

If, in the last ten minutes of game once the Doom Ward can be broken, someone throws themself upon the Doom Sword and someone else takes up the Doom Sword, the game is over and the PCs have won. The land is saved – at least for now.

The wielder of the Doom Sword is assumed to now have wide-reaching magical powers and may choose to make some dramatic pronouncement, such as, "With the power of this bloodied sword I cleanse the land of the Doom, now and for as long as there is breath in my body!" Such a dramatic pronouncement instantly drops all Doomed Ones who may be present at the time.

Example Character Sheet

Name: Ribbon
Profession (4): Temple acolyte

Tragedy (6): Orphaned at a young age when bandits killed both her parents, Ribbon was taken in by the temple. Tragedy struck again when the kind priestess who took her in was accused of apostasy, fraud, and murder and executed. Ribbon secretly believes that the accusation was false, but can tell no one this for fear of being investigated as an accomplice. Despite this, she remains a devout servant of the temple.

Martyrdom Quotient (6): Ribbon believes she can best serve her gods by sacrificing herself to the Doom Sword. In the afterlife, she will be reunited with her beloved priestess.

Close Relationships

Sunlight (soulmate, sacrifice quotient: 1): A fellow acolyte, Sunlight is Ribbon's best friend in all the world. Ribbon refuses to acknowledge that this friendship is anything more than platonic because she fears being hurt again. She would do anything to save Sunlight.

Blueberry (positive, sacrifice quotient: 3): A farmer, Blueberry was a friend of Ribbon's parents and maintains a strong presence in her life. Ribbon likes Blueberry but finds the reminder of her parents painful.

Hearthfire (negative, sacrifice quotient: 1): The magistrate who passed the sentence on Ribbon's priestess savior. Ribbon has hated Hearthfire ever since and believed that he should have investigated more carefully. Ribbon believes Hearthfire's unworthy blood would soil the Doom Sword.

Spells

Slow Heal (0 essence, signature): Ribbon calls upon the god of healing the target is enveloped in a soft glow, gently cleansing them of their injuries.

Invoke Command (2 essence): By the power of a relevant god or goddess, Ribbon commands the target to do something.