

BLACK DREAMS

FATE + FICTION

is our line of original and classic short stories. Situations, characters, and other elements from the story are expressed as Fate RPG Aspects. Read and enjoy the stories on their own, then mix the Aspects you like into your own Fate Core or Fate Accelerated game!

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Fate Accelerated Edition
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Fate was originally
created by Rob Donoghue
and Fred Hicks

By Gary E. Weller

“Man, why’d you have to go do that?” Luther frowned at Malcolm. Luther didn’t want to see his cousin right now.

“What?” Malcolm’s wild-eyed expression didn’t help Luther at all. It was all a front. Malcolm knew what he did. Malcolm always knew.

“Scaring that guy,” Luther clenched his jaw and waved his hand in annoyance. Malcolm was a real son-of-a-bitch at times. It wasn’t enough that he had to be hard on the street, but that hardness came back home too. It was like he carried around the weight of the entire history of every black person on his shoulders. It gave him attitude. It gave him pride. More often than not, it gave Malcolm trouble. Lots of trouble.

Luther knew that feeling, though. He knew that slow burn that was rolling through Malcolm. It could ignite at a thought, or a glance, or a word. Even an imagined slight could turn up the heat into a roiling boil. It’s something that every black man has. It’s something that never goes out. It’s because Luther knew that he, Malcolm, and every other black man were the ‘others’ when it came to everyone else.

It was the hurtful words that seemed to cause much of the anger that Luther had fostered. It was the stereotypes that seemed to block him from being more of a success in the world. Luther knew what his fate was going to be unless he got lucky and hit it big with some fat contract. It was also the overuse of ‘er’, when it should have been ‘a’, when it came to networking and finding a way out of the ghettos of Philadelphia, that kept Luther at a slow burn.

Luther didn’t want to be an ‘inside one’ or an ‘outside one,’ he just wanted to be himself. He knew he didn’t deserve to be treated as an ‘other’ either, but he learned a long time ago that life didn’t care what was deserved. It was like when dinner was served at home, you either eat it or you go hungry.

At least those were the good days when your ears didn’t get popped for not being grateful for the pile of food on your plate.

Still, the ignorant folks along with their hatred and bigotry brought Luther closer to his own family. They were tighter than anyone else’s that he knew. It was the same with Malcolm. He knew for a fact that the few white people he knew didn’t go to see their Gramma just to hold hands and listen to ramblings about the church, choir, switches, or in rare instances, what it was like to be black in her time.

It was even rarer when Gramma started talking to Luther about having the ‘sight.’ She also told him how awful it was to have black dreams and black desires because of the ‘sight.’ When she said that, it always confused Luther. He didn’t understand what she had truly meant until now. Over time she taught him how to let go of his anger and channel it. Gramma taught him how to just keep it on a simmer. She held on until he could ‘see’ on his own.

She would have been angry at Malcolm too. Malcolm used to be able to ‘see,’ but that was a long time ago.

Situation Aspects

Dude was steppin' out in our hood with a wrong attitude.

This situation can be tagged to turn a non-violent situation into a violent one. Characters can use it as justification for violent actions, and it can be used to compel characters who might not otherwise resort to violence to do so.

Character Aspects

Cousins

This Aspect establishes the relationship between characters, adds emotional baggage and possibly Consequences, and establishes the existence of other characters in the form of (at least) parents, aunts, and uncles.

Consequences

Yeah, it's like that.

When someone has the Character Aspect of *black dreams and black desires*, a character that is killed gets to stick around, at least for a little while, as a ghost.

Boosts

They usually ended in disappointment.

A character with precognitive sight seems to get a bonus to resist being compelled by Situation Aspects, because they can see the outcome.

"Shit, Luther," Malcolm rolled his eyes, and leaned back exaggerating the motion with his head. "You saw how he was looking at me."

"So?" Luther didn't want to let it go. This was Malcolm's fault and he wanted his cousin to know it.

"So what?" Malcolm was starting to get mad now. He stood up to his full height, which had Luther by four inches. "What do you mean, 'So?' Dude was steppin' out in our hood with a wrong attitude." Malcolm began to lean towards Luther. "He was the one who looked at me like that. I was provoked, cuz."

"Did a look ever kill you?" Luther didn't back down. He stood there face to face with Malcolm expecting a right cross from his larger cousin. "Did an ignorant look ever really hurt you?"

"Shut up." Malcolm was frowning now. "You think I'm clowning?"

"Nah, man," Luther knew that Malcolm would never get it. He was just too hard – another urban statistic. "You're just being a clown." Luther turned away from Malcolm. The dumbass was hell bent on being ignorant – ignorant, hard and mad at the world.

"Nigga," Malcolm yelled, "I'm gonna beat the black right offa you!" Luther knew what to expect and braced himself for it. Gramma had taught him. Luther could almost visualize Malcolm lunging at him. He could see the larger man's fist coming up quickly to aim the strike at the base of the neck. Luther stopped and waited.

It was almost like an electric shock when Malcolm's hand and body passed through Luther. It was obvious that Malcolm wasn't expecting that. Malcolm landed on the sidewalk, rolled over and looked up at Luther with wide eyes.

"Yeah," Luther nodded, "it's like that." Malcolm had no words. "You know, it's one thing to be full of pride," Luther shook his head at Malcolm, "but it's another thing to be as ignorant as the ones you hate."

"Luther?" Malcolm was scared. He was looking up at his hands as they started to fade. "What's happening?"

"Motherfucker," It was Luther's turn to be angry. He tried to keep the simmering contained, but seeing Malcolm start to fade lifted the lid. Tears welled up in Luther's eyes and started to roll down his cheeks. "You're dead!" he screamed.

"Luther!" Malcolm shouted as he faded.

"Both of you so ignorant and itchy to kill." Luther sat on the curb and let himself cry. Malcolm was another black man who got shot. Another black man who would never see his wishes come true.

Gramma was right, black dreams and black desires were horrible. They usually ended in disappointment.

About *Black Dreams*

by Berin Kinsman

I hope you enjoyed Gary's story. That would make me happy, and I know it would make Gary happy. Yet even if you didn't, I hope you can see how even a piece of fiction you don't like can be mined for ideas, and ways that those ideas can be remixed and reimaged and used as material for your own Fate RPG game.

Now let's deconstruct the story, pick out some of the elements that are present, and discuss ways that you might use those as possible Aspects in your own Fate RPG game. Understand that the following interpretations are only *my* interpretations, and not the only possible interpretations. The object of Fate+Fiction is to help you learn how to mine stories for pieces and parts that you can adapt for your own purposes.

Let's begin by trying to summarize the story. This is obviously more about race than it is about supernatural powers, although it ties the two together allegorically. That's one of the reasons I selected this story. Many roleplaying games are exclusively about the cool powers, with no real focus on characterization, social commentary, emotional impacts, or the things that really drive good fiction. It's about the roles that are imposed upon people, and the choices people have regarding whether they want to accept those roles, unwittingly allow themselves to fall into those roles, or take steps to not allow other peoples' perceptions and expectations define them. I think that's more interesting to roleplay than "I see dead people", and it certainly does give the power some context that makes it more interesting and integral to the story and the setting.

The Situations

There are as few Situation Aspects that we can pull out of this story. These Aspects, or something like them, can then be adapted to your own Fate game. Let's take a look.

Dude steppin' out in our hood with the wrong attitude.

A stranger enters a territory, either accidentally or intentionally, without showing proper respect. There are expectations as to what needs to happen to the interloper. A player could Invoke this to try to get a bonus based on the righteousness of his cause. The gamemaster can Compel a player to do something stupid to defend his turf, or to warn off a character who doesn't belong there.

Luther didn't want to be an 'inside one' or an 'outside one,' he just wanted to be himself.

This could seem to be a Character Aspect, but it also makes a good Situation Aspect. It reflects that way that, in real life, Aspects get attached to people involuntarily. Luther feels that the world views him in a certain way, which acts as an obstacle and drives him to behave in a certain way. If you utilize an Aspect of this type in your own game, it can be used to inspire a player to play their character against a stereotype, or to compel other characters to treat a specific character or type of character in a certain way.

Malcolm was another black man who got shot.

This may feel as if it should be a Consequence, but it's really the whole point of the story. Why did Malcolm get shot, and why does this keep happening? Renaming it *to inner city black men don't like being disrespected* doesn't feel like it covers it as well. Use it to Invoke a sense of injustice and whatever call to action that might entail (violence, or reason?), and use it to Compel the best or worst behavior.

Situation Aspects

Luther didn't want to be an 'inside one' or an 'outside one,' he just wanted to be himself.

Other people perceive you in a certain way, and attempt to define you based on that (false) perception.

Malcolm was another black man who got shot.

This is the counterbalance to the *dude steppin' out* Aspect above.

Character Aspects

Tired of being disrespected.

There's a lot in my life that I have no control over, but I can exert some power over this guy and take it out on him.

Just to hold hands and listen to ramblings about the church, choir, switches, or in rare instances what it was like to be black in her time.

Gramma provides context for both Malcolm's rage and Luther's power and level-headedness.

Consequences

Black dreams and black desires

A sort of precognitive sight that also allows you to see dead people.

Alternately, the mundane frustration of wanting something society won't allow you to have.

The Characters

Now let's examine the characters in the story. For your own Fate game you don't need to use these exact characters. Look at existing player characters and supporting characters, and see who might fill the same roles in relation to the Situation Aspects. Who might the relevant Character Aspects, or something similar, be appended to?

Malcolm in this scenario fills the role of the character that plays into the negative stereotype. He feels disrespected, so he must return the disrespect with aggression. He's been sucked in by the *dude steppin' out in our hood with the wrong attitude* Situation Aspect. In your game, this role is the character that falls into the worst possible behavior for the genre or setting. They're going to open the door they know they're not supposed to open, touch the thing they've been told not to touch, kiss the girl they know they shouldn't kiss. They don't do it because they want to; they do it because the needs of the story, by way of the Situation Aspect, tell them to. If they didn't, here would be no story. It's using the rules to railroad someone, but it can help if you have indecisive players who'll sit for hours weighing options rather than doing something.

Luther, on the other hand, is the voice of reason. He has the Character Aspect *black dreams and black desires*, which in the story seems to be a combination of precognitive sight, intuition, and the ability to see dead people. He doesn't seem to be able to change things, but it's implied in the references to Gramma that people can be warned, and by changing their attitudes and actions they can change their fate.

Gramma fills the role of mentor, instructing Luther on how his gift works and why it's a mixed blessing at best. She also acts as a connection between the characters, or could be in an expanded story. This can be a good NPC role to fill, especially if two player characters don't get along; a common NPC with some measure of authority becomes the bridge and the impetus to work together.

Consequences

Not every action has a clear or specific consequence, and sometimes we need to dig a little bit to discover them within a story. Here's what I found.

Black dreams and black desires were horrible.

Luther has to live with the fact that Malcolm died because Malcolm wouldn't let go of hate and listen to reason. The price of the power is the guilt and remorse that the person presumably has to live with. Sure, it was the other person's beliefs and actions that drove them to do what they did, but characters with at least an ounce of compassion and empathy must experience some degree of survivor's guilt, and second guess how they could have changed things if maybe try tried harder or did something differently. Emotional consequences could lead to other temporary Aspects, such as addiction or other self-destructive behavior.

We can look at that another way: from Malcolm's point of view. He wanted respect. That he did not receive it because of the culture of discrimination, ate him up inside. He had *black dreams and black desires*, but of a profoundly negative, non-supernatural sort. His decision to return hate with hate is what got him killed.

Boosts

Boosts are another set of elements that don't always make themselves explicit within a story. It often takes some probing and a little bit of imagination to discover something that could potentially provide a Boost in a Fate game.

There aren't any real Boosts explicitly detailed in the story, but I can speculate on some possibilities. Malcolm doesn't hang around long after he's been killed, which is one explanation for why Luther doesn't see dead people all the time. Perhaps, though, Luther gets a Boost to use the sight when someone is killed in his presence, or when he has a strong emotional tie to the person, like he has with his cousin. Malcolm doesn't fade because he's going away – the Boost is just wearing off.

It's a conditional use of powers, Stunts that only work under specific conditions more or less, or require a certain emotional charge to work. I'm not sure that's what's happened with Luther here, but it's certainly something to consider for other powers used by player characters in other games.

Boosts*Emotional charge*

Powers get a bonus under special conditions, or manifest Stunts only under specific circumstances.

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