

5 MINUTES INTO THE FUTURE

VOL 1.2

TARGETED DREAM INCUBATOR

**HORIZON SCANNING
REAL TECH
FOR YOUR GAME**

YKNOT.ME

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Disclaimer: A little knowledge is a dangerous thing

Each issue of 5 Minutes into the Future (5MF) looks at one real world developing technology and tries to make it something fun to add to your games. But I am not a scientist. Or a technologist. I am almost definitely dumbing things down to a level I understand, or unwittingly misinterpreting the science and theories involved in the technologies presented.

I am also making stuff up about crazy impossible impacts of the technology, to make it interesting for your games.

So, please! Don't treat anything in here as truth!

If you have a better understanding than me, by all means get in touch on our Discord server (see the sidebar or footer) and explain it to me, I'd love to learn more.

If you want a better understanding than I can provide, go check out the links I give for the source material – I would always encourage everyone to broaden their own learning.

Oh, and there is no implied challenge or slight to any person or organisation about the technologies I cover or the game systems I give added rules for. I love the systems, and I am amazed and awed by the tech – if I wasn't, I wouldn't write about it. If you believe there's a permission I need, or a credit I've missed, please get in touch.

Otherwise, enjoy issues of 5MF for what they are, some (hopefully) fun stuff to include in your game that are more interesting because they have roots in the real-world.

Technology Volume 1.2:

The Targeted Dream Incubator (TDI)

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Disclaimer: A little knowledge is a dangerous thing

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What is Five Minutes into the Future?

Five Minutes into the Future (5MF) are a series of zines scanning the horizon for cutting edge technologies being developed in the real-world right now.

Each 5MF guide will present one technology that is in development as of the date of the zine's release.

You'll get a break down of what the technology does, or what the creators hope it will do, at least. I try to stick close to reality here and discuss what makes this interesting and important without getting too bogged down in the science.

Then I get into the realms of speculative fiction and present some possible implications of including the nu-tech in your game's setting, covering three different levels of integration:

- bleeding edge tech,
- high tech, and
- accepted tech.

For each level of integration you'll have some story hooks for using it in your games in a selection of genres including:

- modern,
- heist,
- espionage,
- technoir,
- near future,
- superhero,
- cyberpunk,
- modern/techno horror,
- hard sci-fi, and
- (post)-apocalyptic.

All of which is system neutral and easy to mix and match.

Finally, you'll get some rules crunch for using the technology, or related ideas (like relevant character options), in your games. You will see rules for:

- Fate,
- Powered by the Apocalypse, and
- 5e modern D20 systems.

If you'd like me to feature another specific game system, please get in touch on the Discord (link below). Can't promise to oblige, but I'm happy to try!

NB: Rules presented will generally be for the core rule systems, for licence reasons. For Powered by the Apocalypse games I'll list which specific game the crunch is for as they don't share a common set of rules.

What is the technology?

This issue's technology is the Targeted Dream Incubator (TDI)

Why is it important?

The new technology monitors your body and detects when you enter different stages of sleep. An app then plays recordings that help introduce specific elements to your dreams. This can potentially aid creativity, brainstorming, sleep-assisted learning, problem solving or be used to treat and confront nightmares and mental health issues.

What is the background to the technology?

TDI has been developed as part of MIT's Fluid Interfaces group who specialise in creating wearable technology interfaces. They have used a new hand worn sleep-tracking device called a Dormio which has lessened the need to use bulky and expensive lab equipment to perform sleep studies.

The tests, which were reported in a scientific journal (in September 2020), show that around 65% of dreams recorded by the experiment's subjects contained the imagery that the TDI experiment had set out.

The results show that while it may not be possible to control someone's dreams – it is definitely possible to influence them.

How does the technology work?

Targeted Dream Incubation works by combining data from the hand worn Dormio device with recording and playback from an app, that is triggered by the data recorded.

The Dormio measures heart rate, electrical changes on the skin surface and how relaxed the fingers are to determine which stage of sleep the wearer is in.

There are several distinct phases of sleep you experience as you move from light sleep to heavy sleep, and you go through this cycle several times a night. Most dreaming takes place around the Rapid Eye Movement (REM) phase in heavy sleep. However, some dreaming occurs in the hypnagogia phase which is much earlier, in the light sleep part of the cycle.

The Dormio records all these bio-signals and sends this data to a special app. When the data indicates the wearer has entered the hypnagogic state the app activates a prerecorded prompt.

For the experiment, the participants had previously recorded themselves talking about a tree. This recording was played to them by the app during their hypnagogic sleep.

As the hypnagogic state ended the app woke up the sleeper with a loud sound. When they awoke the app would record what they said, as they had been told to record any details about their dream. They could then go back to sleep.

This cycle repeated several times.

The researchers discovered that about 65% of the time the snippets of dream diary recorded would mention trees.

Anecdotally, they also reported that the dream diaries would become more bizarre, and that the dreamers reported a deeper level of immersion in the dreams, the more cycles of hypnagogia they experienced.

What is next for the technology?

The report writers point out that this is just the start of their research, that Targeted Dream Incubation needs to be tested further and refined. Tests could be designed for all aspects of dreaming, such as the effects on creativity, sleep learning, problem solving, nightmares and the treatment of stress disorders. The Dormio glove can also continue to help with research by making sleep studies cheaper and easier to undertake.

Where can I find out more?

Check out the links below for more information:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1053810020300416>

<https://www.livescience.com/dream-manipulation-machine.html>

Implications for your game

It's clear that the Dormio, and the Targeted Dream Incubation process have tremendous potential to help us:

- understand our sleep and dreams better,
- develop our potential through understanding how dreaming helps our creativity and learning, and

- treat disorders with dream components.

Which is all great, but how does that work for your setting and make for a more interesting game?

Bleeding edge tech

(Bleeding edge technology is the newest tech, clearly more advanced than anything else available, and gives a significant advantage to those who control it).

As a bleeding edge technology the Dormio and Targeted Dream Incubation process remains:

- mostly a tool of research, and
- a plaything for the incredibly rich.

However, it is increasingly common for large corporations to swoop in and fund promising research, or to snap-up graduates, researchers and faculty staff for their own R&D sections. Sometimes even entire teams are transplanted wholesale, so it is entirely possible that the TDI could also end up circulating in the boardrooms and corner offices of corporate high-fliers at this stage.

Techno-horror

No-one quite remembers when the new professor, Donaldson, started at the University's psychology department but they brought with them a lot of brand new technology, including the as yet unreleased Targeted Dream Incubation technology.

Pretty soon Professor Donaldson was running regular sleep and dream experiments on student volunteers and paying double what any other department did, thanks to the backing of some wealthy patron, and naturally everyone wanted to be involved. Next came the dream clinic for those with problems sleeping, depression, anxiety, stress, creativity

blocks, nightmares. So one way or another in no time half the campus were using TDIs every night.

That's when people started to dream of the dark city, a place of shadow and lightning, impossibly large buildings and a lurking menace, just waiting to be freed.

It was Besrat who first discovered the app that ran as part of the TDI had been tampered with. She had set up a camcorder to film as she slept and said that instead of playing back the dream prompts she had recorded that instead, as the Dormio registered her entering the hypnagogic state, the app played a strange hissing language she couldn't recognise. Watching it back filled her with cold revulsion.

She tried to confront Donaldson but they just threw her out and threatened to have her expelled. That's when she started warning everyone who would listen. But it was too late, the dreams had changed. The menace that lurked in the dark city was free, everyone felt it.

Next came the disappearances. Several students just vanished with no trace during the middle of the night from locked rooms, sometimes there were long scratch marks on the walls or a little blood, but mostly, nothing. Besrat was one of them. That's when we stopped sleeping.

Professor Donaldson also disappeared, but we found a book in their office filled with strange writings and, we think, something that might put back whatever we set free. But we have to record the words on the app, put the Dormio back on and head back into the dark city...

This is obviously just one way to use the TDI in a techno-horror themed game.

You could also run this situation forward into a Forbidden Planet, monster of the Id setting where the dream-demon was

able to run amok and bring the dark city into the real world.

Targeted Dream Incubation allows influence and perhaps, in a fictional setting, outright control of, dreams – that’s a powerful tool, but like any tool it can be wielded as a weapon or used to hurt

Look to influences such as Nightmare on Elm Street, Flatliners, and many stories in the Cthulhu Mythos to see the effect of dream horror and the bleed into the protagonist’s real lives, of terror that began as just a dream. By providing a means of dream manipulation the TDI can be both a threat and a way to fight back.

Superheroes

In a Superhero setting the TDI can be a prototype tool for both heroes and villains to use.

Techno-magical or techno-spiritual heroes could use TDI to enter dream worlds inhabited by spirits, seeking answers to riddles, making bargains for aid or battling malignant nightmare creatures. Using the sleeping prompts to help guide them to the right dream world or navigate these strange places in their sleep.

Or perhaps mentor NPCs could use the Targeted Dream Incubator to guide a whole group of heroes into these worlds to do battle, learn who they really are and return wiser.

‘Doctor’ villains could use the TDI to treat their unsuspecting patients before activating them in the middle of the night as literal ‘sleeper’ agents to do their bidding in a dream state before waking with no knowledge of the crimes they have committed.

Larger than life detectives can use the Targeted Dream Incubator to sort through difficult investigations in their dreams, like mind palaces, using the increasingly bizarre dreams through hypnagogic cycles to strip back a problem to its roots and

finally awaken to their “eureka!” moment.

Meanwhile prisons designed to contain supervillains may keep their inmates in a chemically induced hypnagogic state, controlling their dreams to punish, or rehabilitate them.

And of course the TDI is an excellent trigger for origin stories for both heroes and villains. Heroes could be formed because the TDI triggers long repressed super powers with dreams of heroic deeds undoing what alien parents or an ancient nemesis had done to lock the powers away.

Villains, however, could come about because the dream activates past traumas that their own mind had protected them from. Dreams meant to free them from the psychological damage of dead but cruel controlling parents might end up imposing that personality on them. Dreams meant to break down inhibitions go too far and create an uncontrollable sociopath, or open a mind to possession by evil.

High tech

(High tech is slightly more available than bleeding edge tech, and all well-monied groups have access to the technology but it isn’t yet common enough that it turns up on the street).

At this stage expensive hospitals and therapy centres have access to Targeted Dream Incubation technology or even to use the Dormio for alternative sleep therapies.

Rich people can buy the equipment and have it customised. Shrinking the Dormio into a fitness tracker watch or ring, or using AI and scanning

equipment to dispense with physical hardware altogether.

Vocal prompts might also be replaced with evocative soundscapes, subliminal instructions delivered in static hiss, subsonic pulses or wavering magnetic fields trying to achieve different effects.

Technothriller

There are a number of ways that the TDI can accentuate the paranoia and suspicion of a technothriller. Sleep is a time of vulnerability and the idea that someone uses it to take advantage of us is scary. Also the membrane between dreams and hallucinations is thin and porous, and at some point you may question the reality that you see.

What if a rich person were using the Targeted Dream Incubator to gaslight their spouse? A thoughtful gift of an expensive watch or ring merely a way to deliver hurtful dreams.

The TDI becomes a way to manipulate, by:

- Making them relive past traumas like the death of a child as punishment for perceived guilt,
- undermining their trust in others and isolating them, or
- guiding them towards taking a specific decision, like a business merger they have resisted, or a change to their will.

Can the player characters discover the source of the change in personality of their rich benefactor before the spouses plan is complete?

Of course it may not just be a loved one looking to deceive and manipulate during sleep. Spies, agents and other state and non-state actors might all attempt to use the TDI to gain influence over a high profile or high powered subject. Or alternatively use the TDI to intensify the fear caused through interrogation or torture.

Heist

In a heist game the objective is obviously to steal something, or possibly to con somebody.

Using Targeted Dream Incubation to con someone is very similar to the technothriller entry above, except it is probably the player characters doing the conning. A TDI enabled con can also form part of a longer heist plan in a very similar way.

The con-person typically uses TDI to create a need in the mark, and then arrives to fill that need. For example, they:

- amplify a fear that something will happen and then arrive to allay that fear (or prey on it), or
- create a desire that they can fulfill.

Using TDI to steal is slightly different though. In this case, players may be implanting subconscious suggestions like:

- if the vault manager has had dreams of purple elephants for a week, chances are the new override password he chooses will be purple elephant,
- to implant a fear response in the head of security to spiders and then flood the security control room with them come heist day, Or
- implant the name of one of the thieves crew in a corporate executive's dreams so that when they meet for the first time they will seem familiar and can be convinced they already know them.

Perhaps, there are even ways to steal secrets from people in their sleep using the Targeted Dream Incubator? By presenting their dreaming self with prompts or sounds from their waking life

they may speak out loud and give away secret information.

Of course, getting marks to go to bed wearing the Dormio, and installing an app with the recordings needed is not an easy task. Which is why the Dormio has to have evolved by this point to be placed into jewellery, or a mark's own smart watch, or even to be able to detect key changes in sleep phases from an external scan. While audio prompts can be delivered by hacking phones, by placing micro-speakers in the walls or other means.

Accepted tech

(An accepted technology is one which has now been fully absorbed into

everyday life and is now unremarkable for the people in that society, being adapted and modified to fit a variety of lifestyles and needs).

TDI is now common place, a smart phone may have replaced the Dormio, or a small sticky dot attached to the hand or head. People use it:

- recreationally to live their ideal dream life,
- in conjunction with drugs to experiment, or
- to inspire art and creativity.

Cyberpunk/Black Mirror

In a dystopian black mirror Cyberpunk setting, Targeted Dream Incubation is built into every smart device around the home and is primarily used to deliver personalised advertising into the dreams of millions of users.

You want your 'dream-car', your 'dream-holiday' or to live your 'dream-life' at the best clubs and casinos in town? Want to listen to your favourite celebrity endorse

your 'dream-kitchen appliance'? Well, now you can!

Or rather, you have no choice but to have specially pre-selected consumer goods shoved at your brain based on your digital history. If you want your smart-fridge, and smart-car, and smart-air-conditioning, and smart-lamps, and the apps and programs and digital services you subscribe to for work or home-life then you have to suffer the sully of what was the last advertising free place in the world. Your dreams.

Of course, you can rent a dream through your smart phone or other smart appliance, it's the latest entertainment fad (since the 8th iteration of 3D TV failed to take off). There are a whole industry of dream-stars, you can follow your favourite dream-series and discuss it at work the next day, but even here there's still advertising. Of course, this has also taken sleep learning to a new level, with everything from languages to corporate learning available as dreams.

For some, 'dream-work' has made sleep a sickening extension of waking life. Interspersed with adverts of an endless parade of grotesques with plastic smiles selling poorly designed plastic tat to people who don't need it, but buy it to fill the ever increasing void of what we've lost.

Of course, some people enjoy having what they will never get in real life even if for just a short time and are willing to accept another empty corporate promise for the small price of the pillaging of their soul.

But what happens when people have no refuge from it any more, how long until they snap? Do we get serial killers or activists? Dropouts or the-next-phase-of-human-existence? This may be the last straw.... But what comes next?

Post Apocalypse

What comes next? Well, here's one possibility...

Our obsession with the Targeted Dream Incubator caused the end of the world. You know that thing about humans not using most of their brain? We thought we'd debunked that, that it was just an outdated idea, but it turns out that our brains house way more than we ever thought possible. We held in our brains the shared human psyche, a dream-space where what it means to be human was hard coded and dreaming helped manage it.

When the TDI was commonplace and in use across the globe it was discovered that certain frequencies of audio prompts caused shared dreams – not just similar dreams, but actual shared content, share a frequency - share a dream. The phenomenon spread around the world but no-one realised that these shared dreams were changing and undermining the shared human psyche.

Then we reached the tipping point. So much had changed so quickly, it was like a psychic scream that shattered the minds of billions leaving them twisted drooling animals of instinct, no longer connected to the human race. Billions more were physically unable to sleep again. Ever. They died over the next few months, of exhaustion, suicide, accidents.

Some survivors tried TDI again, but even without using the specific frequencies it seems the gateway to the psyche was jammed open now and they died screaming in agony or altered like the others.

A very few, now called TiDIlys ("tidilys") were able to use the Targeted Dream Incubator to reach the psyche realm and became adept at deciphering its crazy roiling mass for answers about what had happened, what is happening and what

may happen. But it is a dangerous task and the more a TiDIly touches the psyche the more messed up and less human they seem to become.

Rules and game information

So far everything has been system agnostic advice, but here's where you get some tools to help embed the technology into your game.

Below are rules for Fate, Powered by the Apocalypse, and a 5e D20 modern system. (And if you would like us to consider giving information for other systems, please contact us on the Discord).

But first, here are some generic rules that can apply to most games.

Setting up and using the TDI

Before it can be used the Targeted Dream Incubator might need to be set up, if your game setting requires that.

An easy-ish science or technology roll is probably sufficient.

This will then allow the TDI to be used. Using it is just a matter of wearing the Dormio on your hand and having the app running while you sleep.

Bonuses from using the TDI

Successful set up allows a bonus to one roll over the next 24 hours, which roll should be decided at the time of the setup.

However, be aware it is the person who set up the TDI who decides what roll the bonus is applied to – not the user!

For example, the person who sets up might be:

- a lab researcher who uses the bonus to a science, knowledge, or research roll to assist their findings,
- a con artist who uses the bonus on a deception roll,
- an interrogator using fears and nightmares to get a torture roll bonus,
- a psychiatrist treating a patient and uses the bonus towards a medicine check, or
- an advertiser who uses the bonus on a persuasion roll to buy their product.

It is possible that the person setting up the TDI is the user, or is trying to empower them and has their best interests at heart, in which case bonuses the user might get include:

- to a willpower or resistance roll, such as confronting a fear or addiction,
- to an art or craft creation roll, representing their inspiration, or
- to an investigation or puzzle solving roll representing a sudden revelation.

It's also possible that the TDI might allow a bonus to more esoteric rolls, such as:

- fighting, binding or dealing with nightmares and dream creatures,
- shaping dreams, communicating with other dreamers, and travelling through dreamscapes, or
- fortune-telling and mind control.

Destroying the TDI

The Dormio is a fairly fragile bit of kit and the intention to break it is generally sufficient without need of a roll.

Should the Dormio be customised into watches or jewellery it obviously takes on a more robust form and a roll may be required.

Destroying the TDI app could be as simple as deleting it or as complicated as having to destroy every piece of smart technology in the vicinity, depending on the setup.

In some settings, superhero for example, destroying the TDI could have consequences for a dreamer who is using it at the time – what these are will depend on the story but could include neurological damage, mental illness or being lost in a dreamscape and unable to wake.

Mind altering effects on the TDI

The effects of using the TDI whilst on drugs, or following meditation, tantra, rituals, prayer, or other potentially mind altering states are entirely up to the GM but might include bonuses, penalties, re-rolls or the opening of strange realms and other oddness.

Hacking the TDI

One of the simplest (though not necessarily easy) ways to use the TDI to affect someone else is by tampering with it. Recording different prompts on the app, or hiding that a different app will run, or sneaking in alternative sources for auditory ques. This sort of tampering will usually require fairly difficult Computer rolls.

Fate

Item: Targeted Dream Incubator

The TDI is setup using Crafts skill, or if your setting has an altered skill list; Science, Technology, Dreaming or something similar.

A Mediocre (+0) result is sufficient to get the system to work, but any shifts created on the roll become a bonus to be spent adding to other rolls during the next 24 hours.

Aspects

The TDI has the following aspects:

- Dream manipulation

- Eureka!
- Experimental

Stunt: Dream Warrior

You are adept at controlling your dreams, and regularly enter a lucid dream state (a Mediocre +0 roll for you, but for most people the target is Good +2). Only characters in a lucid dreaming state can make rolls in a dream, other characters are limited in the responses they can make to things which have no mechanical effect. Dreamers use their mental stress track for everything.

Additionally you can enter other people's dreams to help them (or not). You can move around other's dreams and/or a shared dreamscape with a Mediocre (+0) roll and can take one additional dreamer with you for each shift, but unless they are lucid dreaming they are unable to make rolls for themselves.

Dream Warrior can only be used if the GM has introduced a Dreaming skill or similar.

Powered by the Apocalypse: (Apocalypse World)

Move: 40 Winks

This move is available to any PC who uses a TDI.

By setting up and using the TDI while sleeping for at least an hour, Roll +Cool.

On a 10+, describe your rockin' dream and awaken with 3 Hold to deal with a situation that is related to the dream. If unspent, the Hold is lost after 24 hours.

On a 7-9, describe the beginning of your rockin' dream and the GM will tell you how it changes into something more bizarre. Awaken with 1 Hold to use in a related situation over the next 24 hours.

Additionally, choose one side effect to roleplay from this list during the same 24 hour period:

- you have nervous twitches,
- you have an irrational fear of some element from your dream,
- you have an irrational compulsion to undertake a non-Move related action (dig, spend, clean, gather together all blue objects you can find etc), or
- you have a massive headache which makes you surly and sensitive to light.

Notes:

- If someone else sets up the TDI for the user, have them use the Help/Hinder Move. If a Hinder Move is used and the 40 Winks roll fails the PC who used Hinder describes the dream and gains 3 Hold to be used in relation to the dreamer and dream over the next 24 hours..
- If the user is under the influence of drugs or other mind altering effects roll 4D6 instead of the usual 2D6, but ignore any dice which shows an odd number.

Move: TiDIly Winks

This Move is available to pick up as an Advanced Move to any character who has developed a spiritual or warped relationship with the TDI during the story.

By setting up and using the TDI while sleeping for at least an hour, Roll +Weird.

On a 10+, your dreams foreshadow real life in veiled and twisted ways, describe your portentous dream. At one point in the next 24 hours you can call for any one Move to be re-rolled (it doesn't have to be one of your rolls) as you see what is to come and try to change it. The results of the second roll stand.

On a 7-9, you get the same result as 10+ but when calling for a re-roll you take 3 Harm and;

- lose something of what makes you human, forever;
 - your ability to laugh,
 - your sense of taste,
 - your ability to read facial expressions,
 - your ability to fall in love,
 - your ability to empathise, or
- gain something that makes you seem inhuman
 - a desire for fresh blood,
 - peeling strips of flesh,
 - sensitivity to light,
 - sharpened teeth,
 - a grey, dead palour,
 - an inhuman obsession, or
 - a predatory way of moving.

Notes:

You cannot perform this move during the same sleep as the 40 Winks Move.

All the notes in 40 Winks apply here as well.

Tags

The TDI has the following tags:

- Fragile
- Slow

5e modern D20 rules

Item: Targeted Dream Incubator

Technology level

The technology level and availability for the Targeted Dream Incubator is;

- As bleeding edge tech (level 2, Rare)
- As high tech (level 2 / 3, Uncommon)
- As accepted tech (level 3, Common)

Setup

The TDI is setup using a DC10 Intelligence (Computer Use) roll. For each additional +5 DC gain Advantage on one roll in the next 24 hours. Remember, it is the person who completes the setup who decides at that point what roll(s) will be affected. The only other variable is that the user must sleep using the TDI for at least 1 hour (generally this can only be done as part of a long rest).

The TDI has 4hp and can generally be damaged without an attack roll unless it is contested in some way.

More advanced (level 3) versions where the Dormio is built into a watch or jewellery have AC 12.

TDI and magic

If your setting includes magic, then any Advantage generated from the setup/ use of the TDI can apply to rolls made when using spells.

In a sleeping/dreaming state a dreamer can attempt to become a lucid dreamer with a DC15 Intelligence check (it is possible to use Advantage on this check). Once lucid a magic user can use non-physically manifesting spells that they know within the dream.

With a DC18 Intelligence check, the lucid dreamer can actually tap into the unconscious well of magic inside them. This means they can use non-physically manifesting spells that they do not know (but which otherwise they meet all criteria for). The GM may rule that this extends to spells which would not normally be part of their allowed spells.

New Feat: Power Nap

The character can use a TDI during a short rest. All other rules remain the same.

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