

# Quoth the Raven



Whatever you do,  
Don't Fall Asleep!

# What Screams May Come

## Be Afraid, Be Very Afraid

Can you feel it? Can you sense that warm numbness flowing through your blood? Slowly, your breathing becomes even and rhythmic, while your head begins to droop. Now that feeling reaches your eyes and they begin to sink. The darkness closes in now, and your mind begins to wander off into the blackness. Yet even as you slip away to a place you know not where, you begin to scream. You've entered a nightmare, and now there is no escape.

All who dream have, at one time or another, shivered in the chill of sweat soaked sheets, shuddered with the thumping of their hearts, listened to the echoes of their screams in the dark. More than just bad dreams, they are windows into the darkest corners of our soul, revealing our deepest fears and insecurities. Indeed, it opens a vista we would prefer to ignore, yet cannot resist to watch. Nightmares are the spectre that haunts the subconscious, lurking in the corners of the human mind, waiting to escape and spread their terror. Who can help but gape in perverse curiosity at that horrible dream, losing ourselves in the horror.

Ravenloft itself is like a nightmare, especially if you're an outlander. The world is a dark and twisted parody of reality, filled with haunting memories and shocking terrors. All the rules are twisted against you; all your power and bravado are nothing more than distant memories as you run screaming in the misty void. There is no waking up from this dark dream, no escape for your soul, no end to the horror. All the more sick is our fascination with that grim place, with its shadows and its terrors. Like a nightmare, Ravenloft tattoos itself into our mind, a dark vision of destruction, terrifying and enticing.

In this issue, you will read of the ungodly terrors that haunt not only the mists, but also the foggy realm of dreams. Furthermore, there are tips and techniques for sadistic dungeon masters to create nightmares for their hapless players, plaguing their precious characters even in sleep. So, dear readers, sit back, boil up a pot of coffee, and make yourself comfortable like Alex up on the cover. After you're finished reading this issue, you won't want to sleep either.

Pleasant Dreams,

ScS.

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# Six Days in the Land of Nightmares

## An Original Short Story

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*By Doctor Anton Rutland*

Day One:

My hands still shake as I write this on the water logged remains of my personal journal. All the previous pages have been blurred beyond legibility from immersion in the harsh salt water around this forsaken island. Thankfully most of my notes in the professional journals survived, due only to their leather case.

I keep this writ now not as a record of my journeys, but as a last memoir of my life for I am surely dead. This tome will be all that remains of me along with my precious notes and what is left of my botanical samples.

My trip began with little renown. I set out from my native Lamordia and journeyed partially by boat and partially by carriage across the breadth of Darkon until I reached the Nocturnal Sea. My profession as a botanist had made me curious of the plants of the Eastern Core, of which I have seen few, save descriptions in texts. I had set out to gather seeds and samples of interesting flora in Darkon, Nova Vassa, or even Vechor if the currents were favorable.

In order to save time, I elected to travel by boat rather than overland to reach the Eastern coast of Nova Vassa, bypassing the wind blasted and utterly uninteresting mountains separating the two nations. My voyage was cursed with an ill doom from the start.

The captain of the aged vessel I traveled on was a drunken lout who was so afraid of pirates that every day he drank himself into a stupor before the noon. If ever another vessel, even a rowboat, came within sight he immediately dropped sail. The mate was a dark looking individual who always managed to look unshaven and dirty no matter how much sea spray he was doused with. The crew was a stout but callow group who cared only about their next layover in a serviceable port. I was the only passenger save a gentleman from Richemulot who kept to himself. He had the feel of the devil about him, to lapse into the vernacular. I saw little of him except when he ventured above deck to converse with the mate. He never stopped smiling his wide toothy smirk, and his eyes seemed to look through ego as another looks through thin mist.

So it was of little surprise that when a small storm came upon us the crew was unable to do much but delay our sinking. The waves lashed out and the thick darkness obscured all. The sails were torn down, taking much of the masts and a good part of the deck with them. Soon the ship was taking on water and the brave crew wasted no time

fleeing into the life rafts, leaving me to fend for myself.

I am not certain of what transpired after this. I ventured out on the deck tightly clutching my satchel of specimens and notes to my chest. I remember seeing the white-capped wave reach for me but I remember not it striking me. The next thing I recall was being washed onto the shore of this accursed island still clutching my drenched bag.

I have spent many hours wandering the rocky shore of this island in order to guess at my location. Given the size of the island, it could not be L'île de la Tempête or the map speck labelled the Isle of the Ravens. We had passed Liffe days previous so I doubted it was that island. However we were still not Southerly nor Westerly enough to have reached Graben.

No, the only island I could have been marooned on was the Nightmare Lands.

I had, of course, heard the tales of this land. My time in sailor's taverns had taught me that much. It moved through the sea like a giant turtle, never staying in the same place and sometimes even vanishing entirely. The land was ever changing so that in a blink of an eye the lush forest I saw before me could change into a barren desert and plains could instantly become towering volcanoes. No men lived on it save a race of head hunting cannibals that were spirits made flesh.

I sat on the rough, water blasted shore and carefully looked at the thick forest. My Lamordian bred patience won as I saw nothing rudely shift or change. It was a wood like any other. Smirking at the gullibility of sea-addled sailors, I decided to explore my surroundings. While I was there, I might as well see what species grew on such an infamous land.

It did not take me long to reach the edge of the woods and once I penetrated the outer foliage I found a manageable amount of underbrush. From there, it was not long before I found a path winding through the woods. I smiled to myself over the reputation of the 'trackless woods' of the Lands of Nightmares.

My arrogance did not last long. Here I am, after several hours on the trail, and I have still not seen any villages or sign of habitation. I have seen trees of more varieties than I have ever known but no recognizable fruit or berries. My belly rumbles and I ache to test the edibility of some nearby red berries. But I resist. I resist!

I resist by writing this. I may die and my bones may become sun-bleached remnants, but my resistance will live on. As will my work.

Day Two:

Still wandering.

Hungry now. I thought I was hungry yesterday, but I was wrong. Today I am hungry.

I write this sitting in a small oak grove beside the trail I have been following for the past day. I am unsure if it leads anywhere. Using the sun to keep my bearing I know the trail has been going straight but I have repeatedly passed close to the shore, which seldom curves itself. There is a shortage of the familiar coastal bays and inlets of my home. Other times I would swear the path has curved completely round so that I am heading backwards, but I have not yet come to any crossing or fork in the trail.

For a minute, my mind hearkened back to the sea shanties about shifting landscape but the sheer absurdity of this is still apparent. I am still not that hungry to have been

driven to insanity.

But I must be moving ever forward. I am in an oak grove now when earlier the forest seemed to consist primarily of spruce and birch trees.

I made my bed under a particularly large birch the previous night. The leaves and bark markings made the genus obvious, but I am unsure of the species. It is by all means a *betula* tree, but does not appear to be *betula alleghaniensis* nor is it *betula pendula*. Since I appear to be the first to classify it, I hereby christen it *betula papyrifera*, based on the thin paper like bark that peels from it.

It proved to be an adequate bed although my sleep was far from restful. Given the recent trauma I have suffered, it is no wonder my dreams are so horrific and vivid.

I grow tired. My time on boats and in carriages has ruined my fortitude.

I regret the loss of some of my instruments and tools. I am sure that with a compass I could easily navigate my way through this wood.

I have found some lovely specimens, though I've come across a large variety of *Dionaea muscipula* and some other flora I am utterly unable to identify at all. I cannot even speculate at the genus, although I took several pollen samples and leaf clippings. I am thankful I had so many empty specimen containers intact in my satchel.

I am unsure of what is to come I...

Strange. I could have sworn I just saw something move in the woods. Out of the corner of the eye. But looking closer, I see nothing and hear nothing. I hear animals in the distance, but they seldom come close. Perhaps it is...

I saw the movement again. But there is nothing there but a large fern. An unusually robust *Thelypteris inaborensis*, but hardly strange.

Mayhap I am losing my mind.

But if I was, would I ask that?

Day Three:

The bush is following me. I see it everywhere.

Why does the bush follow me?

Thick gobs of sunlight drip down on me. The light clings tight to my clothes like a second skin. My hands are slick with it. Like sap.

My stomach throbs with my heart. The juices of the fruit mingle with my sap; I am now part of the fruit.

The fruit is me and I am the fruit.

The path I stick to. Leaning on trees. The pine needles fall off like dust. Why don't they stick to me? Does the sunlight not touch them? That is why they are shady. The sun doesn't like them. Tricky plants, very cunning.

My stomach throbs again. I'm no longer hungry. The small red berries were too hard to ignore. They taste of citrus acid with a faint melon aftertaste. Bitter and hard with tough stretchy skins. Like people, you have to work hard to get past the skin to get at the red juices. The sap.

My feet no longer touch the ground. I dance along the path bouncing off tree and bush. Except for one. That one. It follows me. I stay just out of reach.

I think there is just one. It does move fast. Could there be two? Or more? Am I stalked by a pack of bushes?

I see a face in the bushes. The bushes have faces. I was right. Now I can hit them. The faces smile at me. Lots of teeth.

Day Four:

My head hurts and I know not where I am.

I am only guessing it is the forth day. I can see the sun outside, but I do not know how long I was out.

Yesterday, or so I assume, I tried one of the tamer looking berries. I am unsure of what occurred but when I awoke I found myself in a small hide tent. A small wooden frame supports several patchwork pieces of leathery hide sewn together. The structure does not look very stable, as if a strong breeze could tip it over. But it is holding up remarkably well. There is an image of a fierce looking snarling Coyote on the wall just above my head.

I am covered in thin fur blankets sewn together from several different animals. My bag was beside me along with all my books, but sadly not my specimen case. I decided to take up my pen again.

A small boy enters the tent and leaves me a bowl. He was dressed only in leggings and overly large slipper-like shoes. His hair was long for a boy and tied back with a leather strap. I venture a look at the bowl; it is full of a thin green broth. I can see leaves floating in the liquid. Too chopped up to identify species. It smells horrid. I eat it with relish. Then I decide to sleep again.

I was woken up by someone entering. A welcome change from the dream of the giant shrub with the jagged teeth of a coyote attempting to eat me. But the welcomed interruption came from an unwelcome and familiar face. It was the other passenger on the doomed voyage, the Smiling Man.

He sat down on a small fur blanket laid on the ground beside me. There is no floor to the tent, just dirt and grass. He lit his thin pipe and exhaled wispy grey smoke. "I see you are finally awake," he said. I remember his words clearly; his voice had that strange accent found along most the Western Core.

"Where am I?" I asked him. He continued smiling and told me, "You are in a village of the Abber Nomads. Native people here. You're lucky we found you."

"We?"

"Me and them," he said continuing to pollute the air with his foul weed. "We go way back, me and the Abber. Dropped by here now and then."

The small boy returned and reclaimed my emptied bowl. I smiled at the youth who ignored me. The child spoke a few quick lines to the Smiling Man who replied back with equal fluency.

"You speak their language?" I inquired.

"Yes. In a way. You could call what I'm doing cheating."

"Oh?"

"I'm using magic." He said it with a wider grin, a sign of his obviously flawed character.

I, of course, scoffed at the absurd notion. It was then that it became apparent I had to take what he said with a grain of salt. Magic indeed.

He then explained that I had been eating a hallucinogenic fruit and had become



feverish and delusional as a result. In that, I believed him. He told me that the Abber would be staying in this place out of respect for my condition but would soon have to move.

"If you need anything look for Red-Rock. The boy who brought your food."

I noted that and returned to my rest.

Day Five:

The Abber village contained almost thirty five individuals of varying ages and genders. They all dressed in hides and had long black hair that they had decorated with bones and beads.

After emerging from my bed early this morning, I left my hut to explore my surroundings. They had erected their huts around a large fire that was being used by the women folk to roast a few small rabbits which were added to bowls of stew. A few children ran about playing or doing odd tasks while the men worked on fixing damaged tents or clothing.

I quickly noticed that the village was set atop a small hill above a thin forest of sparse trees with heavy green underbrush. The better part of a mile away the woods thickened into the dense brush I remembered.

"How far away did you take me?" I asked the Smiling Man when I found him.

He thought for a second before replying, "Only a few hundred yards."

I blinked. "You must think I am a fool, sir. The woods were much denser where I was."

"That was two, three days ago." He replied as if it answered everything.

I scoffed at him. "Do you really expect me to believe that?"

He shrugged. "Believe what you will," he said lighting up his black wood pipe with a long match.

"That's absurd!" I exclaimed. "If the land changes as the legends speak, how would these people live? They would never be able to find food. If everything was different, they would need to learn everything all over again each day."

The Smiling Man just smiled. It was a condescending smile from one who thought himself superior. I remembered it well from my days as a schoolboy. "Not everything changes." He spoke again, "The sky is still blue, and fire is still hot. Things still fall down. Only the land changes. Some plants may not burn as well as before or some fruit might not be as healthy. And the changes aren't sudden. They're never sudden. You can prepare for them. To some extent."

I just nodded. "Never sudden?" I asked. I still remembered the swirling delusions of the previous few days of twisting forests and trees moving around me.

The Smiling Man took a long puff on his pipe and rubbed his chin. "The Abber are not the only things in the Forest of Everchange. Not by a long shot. There are many things out there that would like nothing more than to find a paranoid, scared, and disoriented individual. Abber legends say they can be anything, even plants. And then there's Morpheus."

"Morpheus?"

"The ruler of this land. Or part of it. The woods and wilderness around you is just part of the Nightmare Lands. Morpheus rules this place, and it bows to his will. If he



wants the land to change, it does. At least according to legend."

It was at that time the Abber began to pack up their tents and supplies. They moved efficiently, deconstructing each tent in minutes. In under an hour, there was almost no sign the Abber had ever stayed there except for some flattened grass and a few patches of ash.

I looked around for Red-Rock, the child that had brought me food. I could not see him anywhere. Bringing my concerns about the youth to the Smiling Man, he conversed with one of the Abber in their strange language.

"They say he is gone."

"Gone where?"

"Out of sight."

"Then let's find him." I encouraged. "What was he doing? Where was he going?"

The Smiling Man shrugged helplessly. "You do not understand the Abber. They only believe in what they can see, what they can touch. If they cannot see it, it does not exist. The boy wandered off for some reason and has not returned. To the Abber, it is as if he never existed."

"But how?"

"Nothing lasts in this land. Nothing is permanent except change, so nothing is real to them but that. They cannot see the boy so he is forgotten."

I walked away from him at that point. I felt naught but disgust for the Abber. Things do not just disappear, and science is always true. I did not have to see math to believe in it, or observe the pollen of a *papaver orientale* to know it existed.

I did see some marvellous specimens of that plant that day, with plumage much more pronounced and colourful than the Hazlan variety. I plucked a few samples and mourned the loss of my sample case. It had vanished when the Abber had found me, most likely dropped. I stored the flowers in my pocket on the odd chance I stumbled across it.

That day we hiked north for a few miles before stopping and setting up camp by the edge of a pale blue river. In the distance, I could just make out a clear lake.

"It's called Langour," the Smiling Man told me. I ignored him and fell asleep wrapped in my blanket. Overhead, I could see the stars.

It took me some time to recognize any of the constellations; they were all much farther to the side than I expected. I could see new unrecognizable stars rising from the east. It was if the island had drifted several hundred miles to the side. But that was impossible. I must have simply been tired for I soon drifted off to sleep.

#### Day Six:

I awoke and broke my fast with the rest of the Abber. They ate a white tuber that had been skinned and boiled. I had never eaten anything exactly like the round root before, but found it to be a tougher and less sweet variety of the yam. I spent the morning attempting to create a functional name. It was apparently a staple of the Abber's diet.

Sadly, my naming skills and my other abilities suffered from distraction. My mind was amidst a chaos of thoughts from my night. Dreams of bushes haunting me, chasing me. Always the bushes.

After a while, the Abber began to organize hunting partners in case game was spotted. I ventured out into the woods. I took the time to examine some lovely flowers

and bushes including a deadly looking thistle. Surprisingly sharp thorns covered the plant and I managed to pull off a small yellow flower.

The woods were thick again; only in this area the underbrush was dense and thick. Thistles and nettles stung me through the thin fabric of my trousers; there were no paths in this area.

I must have wandered for hours and eventually entered a large rocky clearing with several rotting logs scattered on the ground. I was about to leave when I noticed my sealed specimen case half buried under one of the logs. I ran over and removed my precious case. A quick check found all my specimens and notes there and intact. I sat down and quickly placed my newer finds in with their elder brethren. I pulled out my quill and hastily jotted down a few brief observations.

Then I heard the footsteps behind me. Turning, I saw Red-Rock walking up through the clearing.

"Hello, Doctor," he said quietly walking up. I returned the greeting. Then I began to wonder how and when he had learned to speak Lamordian.

As he approached, I felt my eyes grow heavy. He sat down beside me on the rock. I smiled despite myself. He seemed to become a blur through my eyelashes, and the blur no longer looked like the small boy I once knew. I saw whatever it was advance on me. I tried to stand up but instead fell forward as if my entire body had been transformed by some miracle of alchemy to solid lead. I could no longer keep my eyes open.

I dreamt the same dream again. The bush. Always the bush with the coyote teeth, only this time with little Red-Rock's eyes. I recognized the dark eyes but not the malice behind them.

When I awoke, I found the smiling man sitting on a large rock smoking his pipe. A trio of Abber were skinning a large animal on the ground a few yards from me. I shook my head to clear it.

"What happened?" I inquired.

"You were almost killed."

I scowled at him and his continually smug look. He thought he knew everything. He thought I was helpless. That I was an idiot. But I am a doctor, a scientist, and he is just a grinning imbecile. I stood up and dusted myself off, picking up my satchel. I turned and began to head towards the village again.

The fool hopped off his rock and joined me. "I'm leaving today," he told me. "Managed to get word to associates, they managed to sail here and meet me. You're welcome to come along. We're going back to Darkon instead of Nova Vassa, but it's better than here."

I continued to scowl at him and his continual grin. I thought I saw a bush move out of the corner of my eye. My left eye twitched in reflex.

"Yes, I think I will join you. I have done enough research and think it is time to return home."

I clutched my bag tightly to my chest again. I had a dozen samples of strange plants native to this mad land. And I was curious to see what would happen if they were crossbred with some good, hearty Lamordian plants.

I am sure the experiments would yield something of interest.

# The Abber Nomads

## An Anthropological Study

By David "The Jester" Gibson

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*By Cheny Bruyere of l'université d' Port-a-Lucine*

The existence of the enigmatic Abber Nomads of the Nightmare Lands has long been known, but little of their culture has been discovered. It is known that they make their home in the Forest of Everchange and have a Stone Age level of culture, but beyond that much has been shrouded by the Mists. Until now.

I set out during the early days of spring to learn what I could about these curious and unique people. After the long overland trek, I booked passage on a ship that could take me to the Abber's home island. It was a much longer sea voyage than I had thought, for the navigator had some trouble finding the island. Once there, I hired a Shaman (more on those strange exiles later) to escort me through the woods to the nearest tribe. Walks Alone, as was his name, gave me rudimentary lessons in Abber language and culture which proved invaluable. I reached a village within a couple of days. I had brought with me gifts of food, blankets, perfumes and glass beads, with which to win over the Abber. After my initially chilly reception, I believe I earned their trust and confidence.

### Lifestyle

The Abber Nomads possess a primitive, stone-age level of technology. They lack both the knowledge and skill

necessary to craft metal weapons and tools. Instead they use stone, obsidian, wood, bone and antlers to fashion their items. Obsidian is rare in the Nightmare Lands but is occasionally found and is highly valued. As a stone-age society, they have no written language and have only a rudimentary system of numbers, but no knowledge of math. They are a savage culture with no leaders or organized religion. However, this does not mean the Abber are unintelligent or incapable of learning.

The Abber make their homes in simple huts constructed with a wood frame and stitched leather hide spread over top. These structures are collapsible and can quickly be erected in a matter of minutes. It is a lightweight form of housing that is designed so the Abber can live nomadically. The Abber continually move from place to place in search of food or resources. These huts are decorated on the inside with painted images of animals. Most Abber paint pictures of beasts they feel a connection to or empathy with. Swift and agile Abber favour small or quick moving animals, while others may feel kinship with creatures known for strength or toughness. These totem animals play an important part in an Abber's life.

**Meals:** At the end of each day, the tents are set up in a circular pattern with a large space in the middle that acts as a communal living and cooking area. A large fire pit is quickly dug in the middle of this space for cooking and other

activities. The entrances to the huts always face inward towards the fire pit with the outer walls of the huts acting as a barrier to keep out wild animals or hostile creatures. Abber never permanently settle in one place and are always traveling. They only camp for a day or two, three at the longest, and then move on. They own nothing nor make anything that cannot be packed up and moved on a moment's notice. As such, they have little use for most material possessions.

After traveling and hunting for the day, the Abber set up camp close to nightfall. The men set up their huts while the women prepare the evening's meals. There is a wide variety of food in the Abber diet. Given the range of terrain and flora found in the Nightmare Lands, which is just as diverse as rumours state if not more, the range of food should not be unexpected. Prepared food includes a range of vegetable soups and stews made from scavenged plants including any nuts, berries, roots or fruit found during the day's travels. Meat is eaten less often and consists of any game the hunters come across while the tribe wanders. Active hunting is rare, as Abber seldom go off on their own.

One thing that caught my attention about the Abber's cooking was that the women never prepared more food than was required to feed the tribe. This first became apparent after a couple of hard days in a veldt-like region of the forest where fresh vegetables and fruit were scarce. We subsisted on a watery soup made from the few edible roots that were unearthed. Logically, it would seem sound to keep extra supplies of food prepared, such as dried meat or bread, but this is not the Abber way. For reasons that will be explained in greater detail later, the Abber do not plan for the

future, even so much as making extra food in the event of famine.

Likewise, when food is plentiful, the Abber do not cook sparingly and instead joyfully feast as if it were their last day. They drink and eat their fill, while making sure no one in the tribe goes without. They live and eat strictly for the moment. It is worth noting that while they eat much, they do not gorge or waste any food or drink. Everything is used and the Abber never take more game or pick more fruit than they need for a single day. They use all the bones from their prey and use all the hides and parts of all animals.

The nomads eat out of wooden bowls with bone or wooden utensils. Unlike most stone age cultures, they do not engage in pottery. The making of kilns is a long and time consuming process that requires staying in one place for too long. They cook their food on spits or in the organs of the day's catch, such as the stomach or intestines. I was mildly repulsed by this but the sack-like skin worked surprisingly well as a container. If done properly, a single stomach can be used for several days and even up to a week before it needs to be replaced. Some Abber have traded with outsiders for metal pots which they use with relish.

**Dress and Appearance:** The Abber dress in hide tunics and breeches sewn from the skin of slain game. These mostly come from deer and elk but also from other animals. I am unsure of the name of many of the beasts, or if there is a Mordentish word for them, but the Abber name roughly translates as 'spawn of wandering mind'. The hides of the creatures adorn the bodies and huts of the bravest and most skilled warriors of the tribes and it is a status symbol to have slain one of these creatures. I did

not have the privilege to see a living spawn so cannot describe what they look like and what descriptions I did get seemed wildly contradictory.

In addition to their plain buckskin dress, the Abber decorate their clothes and hair with feathers, small bones, and stone beads of bright colours. They keep their hair long and braided or tied back with small leather strips. They are a rugged and fit people. Their dark hair and skin help protect them from the range of weather of the Land. For a savage people, they are tall and robust, often standing several inches higher than good Mordentish stock. Despite this, they tend to be skinnier and less bulky than many of the other people of the Core.

**Trade and Diplomacy:** The Abber have no form of money or currency. What little trading there is, is done individually through barter. There are no trade goods and no Abber would consider holding something that was needed from a fellow nomad. Only unnecessary things such as a well-made tunic or a good bow would be traded. Decorative items are also sometimes exchanged. It is worth noting that Abber are only this generous to other Abber and do not view strangers and non-tribesmen in this manner.

Strangers who do not know the way of the Abber are treated coldly at best. The Abber wait to see if the stranger is real or something else. They do not specify what the 'else' is, but it probably is not human. A newcomer must prove their worth and show they can work and will not be a burden to the tribe. I had to prove myself able to work and capable of assembling a hut and shooting a bow before the Abber would even let me walk with them. It was several days before I was acknowledged.

**Hunting:** For hunting, the Abber primarily use javelins. These javelins are seldom used as ranged weapons and are used more as pole arms in close combat. For striking from a distance, the Abber use bows. The arrows for these are often coated in a mild poison that induces paralysis and unconsciousness in the prey. Abber men also carry long knives and axes made of flint or obsidian, but these are primarily tools and only used in combat as a last resort. In addition, they often use large tanned leather shields as protection, but other than those they seldom use body armour.

It is worth noting that when hunting or preparing for battle the Abber paint themselves with symbols and images they believe will aid them. They strip off their tunics and adorn their arms and chest with stylized representations of animal spirits they hope to channel. The spirits are reputed to make them faster, tougher, and aid in their accuracy. The paints tend to be bright colours, usually reds, whites, yellows and blues, and are made from roots and other carefully crushed and prepared plants. If hunting or fighting in a situation that calls for stealth, the Abber will instead use earthy colours of black, brown, and green.

Having once seen the preparations for a battle between an Abber tribe and a fearsome creature, I can say I had trouble picturing a creature that would be more terrifying than the eight half-naked and war paint adorned warriors armed with their javelins and chanting.

While most of the Abber I encountered were amicable after their fashion, not all of the nomads are as receptive. Some tribes and individuals, having been taken unfair advantage of by traders, attack all non-Abber at sight. I was told to be wary whenever I was

alone in case such a hunter may spot me.

On a similar note, not all Abber limit themselves to hunting animals. Some outcast Abber have been known to hunt two-legged game. These outcasts are typically reviled by regular Abber as weak minded. It is believed they have all been reduced to insanity and lack the strong will of a true Abber. These outcasts are sometimes even cannibalistic and believe that by eating the flesh of their fallen foes they gain his strength and power or have control over his spirit. I doubt these legends are true but I was not about to interview one to find out. These renegades are just as nomadic as other Abber, but often make their huts and clothing out of leather made from humans, and sometimes decorate their small camps with the heads of slain foes.

## Society

The Abber have a flexible egalitarian society with no hierarchy or leaders. Food is divided up equally regardless of role, gender or age. If any task requires coordination and leadership, individuals suggest courses of action and the person the most people agree with is unofficially designated the leader. This change in rank lasts until the job is done or someone suggests a better strategy.

**Family:** Interestingly, the Abber also have no system of marriage. They encourage their youth to sinfully mate without matrimonial bonds, either within the tribe or with members of other tribes encountered while traveling. These brief romances last as long as both parties are interested, then they both go their separate ways. The Abber view relationships and emotions, even one such as love, as impermanent. Children produced from these illicit affairs are

viewed as being children of the entire tribe. Everyone in the group takes responsibility for the raising of the child as if it were their own, which it very well might be. The concept of fatherhood is entirely unknown, there is not even a word for it. I am not even sure the Abber know positively how babies are made. They just accept the change of condition like they accept the change in terrain. Of course, given the indecent number of men most Abber women lay with, it is no wonder the identity of the father is treated as a mystery.

After a new child is born, the mother is helped out of the hut with the child and looks about the surrounding area. She then names the child based on what catches her eye. Thus, Abber have a wide variety of names based mostly on animals and the environment. This is just the first of the many names an Abber has during his/her life. When Abber reach maturity, they are given a new name based on their skills. As Abber change jobs or find talent at different skills, they change names. If the Abber has no appreciative skill, he is named after a favoured possession or physical attribute. Thus, Abber have several names over the course of their lives.

During my time with them, I was given a name that loosely translates as Glass-eyed Spirit. I assume the spirit reference applied to my fair skin and grey hair and the glass-eye to my spectacles. After I had been with the tribe for several weeks, they re-named me Curious Scratch Painter from my habit of constantly asking questions and writing down the answers in my various notebooks.

### **Relations with other Tribes:**

Abber tribes have no set membership; individuals can come and go as they please. Most stay with the group for



there is safety in numbers, but if an Abber is separated he will wander off on his own until he encounters more Abber. Newcomers are welcomed into the tribe as if they had always been there, no questions are asked. Given the quick adaptation to life in the new tribe, I conclude that either all Abber tribes live identically to those I spent time with or the Abber are a mentally flexible people. I venture it is probably both.

On the rare days that Abber tribes encounter each other, they form one single large camp for the night and then go their separate ways the following day. The two tribes share goods with those who need them and all are treated equally. When the groups split, they form two tribes that are often quite different from the two tribes that originally met.

**Recreation:** When the Abber are not traveling or working, they gather around the central fire pit as a community. Fire is important to the nomads. They view flame as a symbol for the world's ever-changing chaos that gives life and supports the Abber. Fire changes the wood to ash and the raw to cooked. Fire is never the same twice, and yet fire is still fire.

Around the bonfire, these curious people engage in various rituals or activities. The most important of these is the Storytelling. They gather in a circle around the fire and begin to tell a tale, one person starts the story and the person beside him continues the story unbroken. This goes on until all the Abber have contributed to the story. This is more than just entertainment as the stories are unique and different with every telling, but often reinforce the shared legends and beliefs of the Abber. No one keeps track of the story or preserves it in any way. The importance

is in the telling, not the story itself. The Storytelling is a serious ritual for the Abber and they frown on unnecessary humour or disrespectful elements. During my stay, a trader from Nova Vassa attempted to redirect the Storytelling to a more bawdy and crude direction which only resulted in him being cast out from the tribe. Let this serve as a warning for all who participate in the Storytelling!

The nomads also have a love of music and are skilled at crafting simple horns, flutes and drums. They also use a local instrument that looks like a long, hollow, wooden pole called a Didjeridu. Their songs are improvised and unique but surprisingly complex and ranged. During my stay, I witnessed the Abber performing sombre slow ballads, intricate dance songs, and some of the most soulful soaring love songs I have ever heard. These are done unaccompanied by lyrics or voice; the Abber are not singers. For more ritualistic songs there is occasional chanting to rhythm, but this is rare. More often the Abber take the opportunity to dance and make merry. The type of song depends on how the day went. Days of hardship end with slower songs while days of plenty end with upbeat celebration to match the feasting.

While the skilled nomads play music, the rest of the tribe dances around the fire. This is especially true during nights of lively music when the Abber dance enthusiastically for hours around the fires until they collapse with exhaustion. Younger Abber men sometimes test their courage and strength by attempting to leap over the fire during the dance. Fatalities and serious burns are almost unheard of, but most young men nurse a few large blisters throughout their years.



**Tattoos and Totems:** Tattoos play a large role in an Abber's life. Similar to the war paint, the tattoos are believed to focus the spirit of an animal or creature into the body of the Abber. The most common animals include bears, ravens, serpents and large cats. The preparation of these tattoos is a carefully guarded secret known only to the skilled artisans (and their apprentices) who make them. In addition to the coloured dye (most often a blue, black or red) the Abber must provide a piece of the animal they wish to get imprinted on them, such as a feather or bit of fur. This extra ingredient is mixed in with the ink, which is then placed under the skin through a hollowed thorn or sharpened bone. The needle (or needles) is attached to the end of a long stick and the head is tapped repeatedly with a small hammer over the skin. The artisan slowly and laboriously works on the illustration, sometimes for hours, although it is not unheard of for more complex or large tattoos to take days. The tattooing is not taken lightly as it taxes the constitution of both the artist and his 'canvas'. Most Abber choose their spirit animal as their tattoo, although many refuse to harm their totem beast and instead bear tattoos of other respected creatures.

As mentioned earlier, every Abber has a chosen animal. The animal is chosen in private (or rather the Abber is chosen by the animal's spirit) when the person reaches maturity. They did not discuss it with outsiders except to say it was a personal ritual that involved fasting and walking in the Dreamtime. The spirit animal is believed to watch over the nomad at all times and give aid when it can. During times of stress and trouble, Abber often invoke the name of their animal.

According to legend the Abber Shamans can create tattoos that are inhabited by the totem spirits. These living tattoos can separate from their wearer and directly offer their aid. I suspect this is mostly myth, but the Abber talk reverently of such bearers. To have such a tattoo is viewed as a great honour, but also a great responsibility.

**Dreamwalking:** There is one other ritual the Abber engage in, one that is reserved for special occasions or in times of emergency. It is known as Dreamwalking. The Abber, while they sleep like you or I, never dream. It is how they survive in this strange land without succumbing to the subconscious creatures or falling into madness. However, by ingesting a broth made from a rare plant, the Abber fall into a trance in which their spirit can enter a world they say the rest of us enter when we sleep. It is known as the Dreamtime or sometimes the Dreaming. As long as they remain in the Dreaming, they can reputedly enter the minds and dreams of all sleeping people as well as walk the space in-between. When the Abber enter this unconscious realm, they retain their personalities and full mental faculties. They remain rational in a world of irrationality. I have my doubts of a subconscious plane where all minds dwell, but there is no doubting the Abber beliefs. Personally, I think the broth just induces a hallucinogenic effect the Abber attribute to entering the dreamworld. It is worth noting that the nomads say the unprepared plant does produce 'waking dreams and visions' so my suspicions may not be unfounded. However, there is no doubting the Abber's convictions.

The Dreamtime is only entered in select circumstances, most often when they seek guidance of a problem beyond

their knowledge and wish to commune with the spirits, especially the spirit of their totem animal. During Dreamwalks, the spirit animal often acts as a guide aiding the Abber through the Dreamtime and helping steer the traveler away from hostile spirits or other dangers. The Abber also Dreamwalks when one of their number becomes feverish and starts to hallucinate. The Abber believe this natural condition is caused by the soul being removed from the body and the Dreaming must be entered to retrieve the wayward mind and return it to the flesh. While I doubt the validity of these journeys, there is little doubting the effectiveness. I have seen myself a traveler infected with a deadly fever. A Shaman entered the Dreamtime and claimed to have retrieved the stolen soul from an 'ennui'. The trader's fever broke immediately after and he made an almost shocking recovery.

It is worth noting that the Abber Shaman are reputed to be able to enter the Dreamtime at will, without the aid of the drug. This is not accomplished lightly and only Shaman of some skill and experience risk this.

**Law and Justice:** There is little crime in an Abber community. Partially because everything is shared, no one wants for anything, and few own anything of value, but also because there is but one serious punishment. Offenders are cast from group and must immediately make their way away from the tribe on their own. For the Abber, this means the offender immediately ceases to exist, and for the criminal the community vanishes. They must survive on their own until they encounter more Abber, by which time they have hopefully learned their lesson. Lesser crimes, such as personal insults, are dealt with individually with the victim

demanding services from the offender. Typically the offender has to do the chores of the victim for a day or so. Only one crime warrants a death sentence and that is the purposeful cold blooded slaying of another Abber. The slayer is promptly held at javelin point while the tribe debates the actions and decides if it was murder or just an assault gone wrong. If the accused has shown no remorse and it is decided he meant to strike fatally, he is immediately slain.

**Death:** Death is not truly feared by Abber; it is merely another change. Given that nothing is permanent the Abber realize neither is life, but then neither is death. They treat the body as if it could return back to life at any moment, although they are wise enough to know such resurrections are rare, if not unique. There are several Abber legends of people not enjoying the other world and returning or being too stubborn to die. There are also more stories of spirits from the Dreaming or elsewhere entering the bodies of the suddenly slain and impersonating the dead Abber. Possessed corpses are viewed as aberrations; spirits should not be of the flesh and are rejecting their nature.

The Abber have no funeral rites or rituals for the dead. They return the body to camp and place it as if was sleeping on its sleeping role and then leave it there. They sometimes leave a small fire burning nearby to scare away animals for a time. If the spirit of the dead wishes to return, it can. If not, the body will return to the land. The possessions of the deceased are divided up equally among the tribe. Any personal possessions such as a good weapon or favoured tool are left with the body.

**Language:** One of the larger obstacles I encountered after moving in

with the Abber was the language barrier, which proved quite substantial. The Abber tongue is unlike any other language spoken on the Core. While the language is not impossible for outsiders to learn, it is no simple feat to master. Even after several months with the Abber, I still had trouble with many words and phrases. Part of the difficulty with the language is the unique tenses and great diversity of subtle words. The language has an impressive vocabulary to describe almost any situation, as the Lamordians have many words to describe varieties of snow and weather and the Mordentish language has numerous words to describe the thickness, temperature and colour of mists. So the Abber language describes everything in such detail. With the terrain ranging from a freezing tundra in some months to a barren desert other times, the Abber can detail the terrain, plants and animals for any conceivable environment. This is combined with the language's total lack of a future tense to describe what will or could be as well as only a rudimentary past tense. The reasoning for this is described below.

## Beliefs

The most complex and misunderstood facet of the Abber's life is their philosophy. Inspired by the chaotic and seemingly random landscape, those who make their homes with the Abber quite literally do not believe in anything they cannot see. If they do not see something or someone, it does not exist. They make no long term plans and do not plan for the future. Likewise, they have only a limited view of the past. They view everything as impermanent, including memories and ideas.

This philosophy impacts all facets of Abber life - how they eat, how they

raise their children, even how they talk. Given that they do not believe in what they cannot touch, they have no concept of math or abstract thought. Their cosmology reflects this disbelief. They have no creator-god or deities, and worship no spirits.

Abber have only the most simplistic creation myths. They believe the world is a hallucination of a larger being that is beyond thinking, thus nothing is truly real including individual Abber. It is pointless trying to understand anything as it can all change with the being's mind. It is a disturbing idea that all the world could be an illusion or creation of some higher being.

As the Abber firmly believe that the world is impermanent and could end at any time, they do not take anything for granted. They acknowledge that the sun could very well not rise the next day and that everyday is a gift. Thus, they do not squander this gift, but treat each day and each other with respect. However, they believe that by looking after each other and the land, there is a better chance it will last one more day. They know that there is no certainty that there will still be Abber tomorrow, but if they fail to look after the Abber that are here today and they all die, there will certainly be no more Abber tomorrow. It is the same with the land. If they hunt all the deer, there will be none left for the future.

This is a strange contradiction in the fundamental Abber philosophy. They live a detached lifestyle with no plans for the future and yet they watch over the land for the very future they believe will never come. They preach that all things are connected and that it is the responsibility of the Abber to look after themselves, each other and the world.

For they are as much the world as the rocks and the trees. Although personally, the constant lessons they insisted on giving to me on responsibility quickly grew annoying. There is only so much preaching one anthropologist can take.

**Cosmology:** The Abber believe firmly that the world they see around us is only part of a large cosmology which is tied to the mind and the spirit of every living thing. The Dreamtime is a part of this larger world in the same way as this world is just a fragment. Imagine three overlapping circles; this is how the Abber imagine the larger world - one whole that is divisible into different spheres, each a world separate unto itself but accessible through the proper means. However, in keeping with the larger Abber worldview, these spheres are always changing. The 'circles' are forever changing in shape and size and the connections between the worlds grow stronger and weaker randomly. All things for the Abber are connected. If something affects one world, it affects every world.

As mentioned earlier, the Abber do not dream. They claim this is because they know how the separations between the world of the physical and the world of the mental works. With practice, they can ignore the overlap between worlds, which allows them to better see the physical world. In essence, they believe they can better 'see' the real world. I am hesitant to believe that dreams are simply the mind entering another world or state of being, or that someone can just cut themselves off from dreaming, but it has long been observed that Abber sleep peacefully and are especially adept at seeing through illusions.

**Lord of the Forest:** Only a few things are believed to be permanent. They believe firmly in two entities that

live in the Nightmare Lands. These creatures, who are not spirits, are seldom directly talked about but respected and feared. The first one is known by a plethora of names that translate best as phrases such as 'the Imp of Everchange' or 'the Lord of the Forest'. After many fruitless attempts and much research to better classify such a bizarre being, I finally found direct reference to him.

In an obscure journal of one Doctor Illhousen is described a member of the enigmatic 'Nightmare Court' known as Morpheus. He talks about a powerful red-skinned male whose lower body is a fine mist. This Morpheus rules over the Everchanging Forest and favours chaotic nightmares or rapidly changing imagery. I believe this Morpheus is the one mentioned by the Abber. A malicious trickster spirit that rules the land and controls, to some extent, the altering wilderness. The Abber speak of what happens when he is near and how the changes in the environment increase in rapidity. It is told his presence is what warps the land, although the Abber doubt that his removal would make anything less chaotic.

**The Serpent:** The other entity the Abber believe in is a large winged serpent with brightly coloured scales. There is repeated imagery of winged snakes in Abber tattoos and hut paintings. They respect and fear the flying reptile. Their legends tell of a time long ago, when the Abber first arrived in the land. They were young and inexperienced and knew not how to survive. Many of their number died in fights with dreams or had their souls taken from them. Only a few Abber survived.

Then, one day after many long months, a brave Abber warrior of

unknown name encountered the winged serpent during a trek in the Dreamtime. The serpent first acted as the spirit guide of the Abber but only led him into danger and obstacles. One by one, the Abber overcame the difficulties the snake thrust him into. As the Abber overcame the danger, he grew in wisdom and strength, taking the powers of those foes he vanquished. At last he realized what the serpent was doing. He knew what he had to do and left the Dreamtime and returned to his people. That was how the Abber learned how to live in the land by not trusting the environment. By being suspicious and cautious and not believing anything.

The serpent's motives are still debated to this day. Some believe the serpent was playing a joke while others maintain it was trying to teach the Abber the lesson. Others say it was just a legend. I myself am not sure, but find myself reading and re-reading a description in Dr. Illhousen's journal about a creature he calls 'the Rainbow Serpent'. It begs future research.

**Magic:** A final point of interest regarding the beliefs of the Abber is their opinion of magic. Magic is viewed as manipulating the bonds of the three realms, but given their fluidity, magic does not always work as planned. As outsiders often learn, in the Nightmare Lands magic can often be unpredictable. However, the Abber's philosophy and mental conditioning have a side effect towards magic. As long as an Abber denies the world and cuts their sleeping mind from the Dreamtime, they cannot use any form of magic. It is the price they pay for being able to thrive in the Nightmare Lands. Even the simplest of cantrips seems to evade their grasp. There is an exception to this in the form of the Shamans of the Abber, who are

able to use magic at a cost.

## Shaman

In most ways the Shamans of the Abber resemble their brethren, but they differ in one key aspect. While the majority of Abber steel their mind against the madness of the world by accepting the change and cutting themselves off from the mental and spiritual worlds, the Shamans embrace those worlds. Thus, the Shamans embrace the madness of the land and become mad as well. They seek to discover the truth of the world. By doing this, they gain some measure of control which allows them to cast spells without fail. It also grants them other abilities of which they speak little.

Shamans are the religious and spiritual leaders of the Abber people. Their services are used to heal the sick, commune with spirits and aid travelers. However, regular nomads find the Shaman's acceptance of the madness disturbing, making them somewhat unwelcome in most communities. Additionally, the path of madness and knowledge the Shamans walk is also a perilous one that often attracts too much of the wrong attention. Nightmare beasts or worse are often drawn to the Shamans, so the Shamans never live with other Abber. The nomads fear what they are and what they bring. Instead, the Shamans live alone or with a disciple. They make a permanent home where they spend all their time, usually close to the edge of the Forest of Everchange or close to the rocky beaches near the Ring of Dreams that circles the outer shore of the island. The other Abber leave the Shamans alone unless they are needed. Otherwise, they treat the Shamans with a mixture of respect and fear.



The Shaman live in more permanent variants of Abber houses that are built larger but are harder to move. They dress in a similar style, but instead of the standard leather from 'natural' creatures like deer they favour wearing the skins of hostile creatures or hides they claim to be from nightmares. I am unsure how one can skin a nightmare but the clothes made from such beasts do not resemble any hide I have ever seen before. While only some Abber warriors dress in this manner, all Shamans do. I am not sure if they dress in this manner to show their skill at dispatching nightmarish creatures or if they are attempting to frighten dangerous predators that live in the woods.

The Shaman often act as the link between newcomers to the lands and other Abber. Most Shaman learn at least one foreign tongue. Interestingly, the Shaman I encountered said he had never met anyone who had hailed from Dementilue before, but he still spoke in an almost flawless Mordentish. When I inquired from whom he had learned my native tongue, he merely smiled and said it was something he picked up during a nap or two.

## Conclusion

It was with some mild regret that I left the Nightmare Lands and the Forest of Everchange, but I had to return to my home and report my findings. That, and I needed to spend some time back in a sane world that did not change.

It was also a welcome relief to get some real sleep for a change. While in the Nightmare Lands, I dreamed vividly each and every night and many times I was unsure whether or not I was sleeping or awake. My first night on the returning boat that was bringing me to Nova Vaasa, I awoke from a deep slumber and felt I hadn't slept a wink, for I remembered nothing.

Someday I will return to that island in the Nocturnal Sea and continue my research. There is still much I do not know about the Abber, and even more I fail to understand. Several of my initial theories of their lifestyle proved to be wrong or horribly misguided and even now I doubt all my conclusions are entirely accurate. In many ways, it would not surprise me in the least to find the Abber knew perfectly well how to craft masterwork firearms but chose not to because they disliked the smell, or other such amusing thoughts.



## Abber Race

Abber are regular human regarding character creation in that they have the same bonuses and disadvantages as all humans do. They are simply another ethnicity with as much diversity in the populace as between them and other types of humans. However, an Abber born and raised in the Nightmare Lands is slightly different due to the environment. They tend to be more

mentally flexible and strong willed while less adept at dealing with people.

\*Abber gain a +2 bonus to their Wisdom scores while suffering a -2 penalty to their Charisma as long as they were raised in the Nightmare Lands. An Abber raised elsewhere is simply a regular human and has no stat modifications.

\*Abber almost universally take the feat Dreamless Slumber (see below) at

first level. Any Abber that does not is treated as a pariah or is viewed as a Shaman in training.

- \*Abber are most commonly Chaotic in alignment. This is not a rule, but a guideline. There are Lawful Abber but these are very rare.

## The Abber Hero

- \***Classes:** For non-Shamans only classes that do not grant spells at first level are permitted. Common classes include Barbarians, Fighters, and Rogues. Rangers are common, but only at low levels. Many Abber have a few levels of Ranger and Multi-class with either Barbarian or Fighter. With most Abber being chaotic, Monks and Paladins are rare. Shamans typically start as Druids or Sorcerers, but it is possible to be a Abber Cleric. Wizards are unknown, as there is no written Abber language. Shaman Bards are very rare given the solitary lifestyle of most Shaman.

- \***Recommended Skills:** Craft (Carpentry, Weaponsmithing), Handle Animal, Heal, Hide, Knowledge (Geography, Nature, Planes), Listen, Move Silently, Search, Sense Motive, Spot, Survival,

- \***Recommended Feats:** Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Endurance, Iron Will, Point Blank Shot (plus derivatives), Run, Self-Sufficient, Stealthy, Toughness, Track, Weapon Focus (Javelin, Short Bow).

- \***Sample Male Names:** Bear Eye, Crooked Bow, Deer Horn, Drum Spirit, Raven Wing, Hart Speed, Large Hut, Long Arm, Tall Legs, Wolf Glare.

- \***Sample Female Names:** Brown Eyes, Broth Maker, Eagle Feather, Fair Skin, Fire Dancer, Long Braids, Rain Caller, Root Hunter, Stag Grace, Wind Singer, Voice of Drums.

**Note on Clerics:** Abber Clerics do not worship gods, but instead revere the spirits. Their spells are said to be gifts of the other world and their divine powers a blessing from their totem animals. Clerics must select a time to meditate in reverence to receive their spells. They do not have holy symbols and instead use the bones and a skull of their totem as a divine focus. They typically adorn these atop staves. Available domains include *Animal*, *Chaos*, *Fire*, and *Trickery*. Abber Clerics cannot turn or rebuke undead but instead can turn dream creatures such as Dream Spawn or Dreamweavers.

## Feats

### Dreamless Slumber

Allows for sleep without dreams or nightmares. In addition to this, it grants some protection against illusions and dream related spells and psionic powers. This feat cannot normally be turned on and off; the recipient simply never dreams again. It also strengthens the mind against other mind altering effects.

**Prerequisites:** Wisdom of 12, and before taking this feat the person must spend over two straight years in the Nightmare Lands, or have been born there.

**Benefit:** The hero is immune to all dream related spells and psionic powers such as *Dream* or *Nightmare*. This feat also grants a +4 bonus to Will saves against Illusion related spells. Madness saves are also receive a +4 bonus, as do



checks to recover from the effects of madness.

**Special:** This feat prevents the use of divine and arcane spell casting. Once this feat is taken, the user loses all access to spell casting. If a class is later taken that permits spell casting the character chooses to either keep the feat or gain spell casting, but cannot do both. Abber Clerics and Shamans give up this feat when they choose to follow the path of magic.

## Abber Shaman

The Shaman act as medicine man and protector of the other Abber, but are forced to live outside the villages of the very people they defend. It is only available to Abber divine spell casters or spell casters who have spent many years living among the Abber and have mastered their ways.

**Hit Dice:** d8.

### Requirements:

**Alignment:** Chaotic only. The ways of the Shamans are not for the inflexible.

**Base Will Save:** +5

**Skills:** Heal 4 ranks, Knowledge (Nature) 6 ranks, Knowledge (Planes) 2 ranks, Survival 6 ranks.

**Spell casting:** Ability to cast 3rd level Divine spells.

### Class Skills:

Concentration, Craft, Handle Animal, Heal, Knowledge (geography, nature, and planes), Listen, Search, Sense Motive, Spell craft, Spot, Survival, and Swim.

**Skill Points at Each Level:** 4 + Int modifier.

### Class Features:

**Armour and Weapons:** An Abber Shaman is proficient in all Simple

Weapons. Shaman are also proficient in all light and medium armours. They are not prohibited from wearing metal armour, but it is mostly unavailable for them.

**Detect Dreamers:** At 1st level, Shaman who encounter dreamers walking through the Nightmare Lands (after leaving their Dream Sphere or through magic) can identify them as such. The Shaman makes a Spot check against a DC of 20 minus the Dreamer's Wisdom modifier. Dreamers who wish to avoid detection can make a Bluff check to avoid this.

**Craft Dreamcatcher:** At 3rd level, the Shaman can craft a magical item known as a Dreamcatcher. This enchanted device first allows the user to locate paths through the nether of the dreamscape. It then allows a dreamer to find and open portals out of the Dreaming, which can take the dreamer back into the real world. By exiting through a portal the dreamer 'awakens' in another place, wherever the portal exits. This works as per the spell Teleport. Abber cannot leave the Nightmare Lands through this method. To create a Dreamcatcher requires a Craft (carpentry) check with a DC of 25. Shaman do not easily part with Dreamcatchers and request some form of service before passing them on.

**Detect Dreamspawn and Nightmares:** Abber can detect disguised dream creatures such as Dream Spawn or other such creatures made flesh. The Abber makes a Spot check against a DC of 20 plus the creature's Wisdom modifier. The creature cannot avoid detection as easily as dreamers and make their Bluff check at a -2. Shaman are adept at finding living nightmares.

**Dreamwalking:** The most mysterious power of the Shaman. The

Abber meditates and enters a deep trance from which he projects his dream self into the Dreamtime or the dreams of sleeping individuals. The Shaman must make a Will check of DC 25 to enter the Dreaming. This can only be attempted once every day. The Shaman may safely remain in the Dreamtime for 10 minutes

per level. If he does not return to his body before this time has elapsed he suffers one point of temporary Con damage. For each additional 10 minutes he fails to return he suffers the loss of another point. While Dreamwalking the Shaman's body is totally helpless.



Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort	Ref	Will	Special	Spells Per Day
1	+0	+2	+0	+2	Detect Dreamer	+1 level of existing class
2	+1	+3	+0	+3	-	+1 level of existing class
3	+2	+3	+1	+3	Craft Dreamcatcher	+1 level of existing class
4	+3	+4	+1	+4	Detect Dreamspawn	+1 level of existing class
5	+3	+4	+1	+4	Dreamwalking	+1 level of existing class

# Knowledge in the Nightmare

## Dream Quest of the Abber Nomads

Somewhere in the swirling mists is a land enshrouded in dark dreams. These are the nightmare lands, a scrap of land where the realm of dreams mixes with reality. This is the realm of the Nightmare Court, the malignant entities that torment all who sleep with hideous night terrors. In this dark corner of the world only a few humans can survive; they are the Abber Nomads, the mysterious men who cannot dream.

These enigmatic primitives have scrounged their living from the nightmare lands since the birth of the demiplane, and perhaps even before that. Though seemingly barbaric, their knowledge extends back untold ages. These nomads are also reputed to be amateur prophets, divining much that is hidden. Many scoff at the sage barbarians, convinced that no single mortal could know so much, and yet to the amazement of the denizens of the Core, every single Nomad knows more history, more lore than any library in the Core. Seemingly endless fonts of knowledge, the Nomads share their wisdom with those who earn their respect. To a lucky few individuals, these noble wanderers share the source of their knowledge; the dream world.

The mind, say the nomads, is connected to a place and time where all intellect, energy and matter originated. This is the dreamtime, a mystical event that birthed the universe. A sleeping mind can enter this dreamtime, and instantly learn anything that ever was, is, or will be. All that is needed to enter

this dreamtime is to know where to look within one's own mind.

Yet there is a dark side to this ability, which the nomads are loath to admit. Just as the dreamtime exists within the mind, so too exists an evil place. This is the Nightmare Land, the domain of the Nightmare Court. Not merely a physical place, it is also a hideous thought in the brains of all men. The Nightmare Land lies in the darkest corners of the psyche, spilling its vileness into the minds of mortals. Those who seek out the dreamtime must first trek through this horrible plane, where they are stalked by the most terrible dreams ever imagined.

### The Quest

To a rare few friends, the Abber Nomads have confessed that the dream quest is a valuable ritual which serves a wide variety of purposes. The dream quest is most often used by the shamans of their race, who enter the dream time to learn specific facts to better help their tribe. In other cases, the dream quest is undertaken by young nomads as a rite of passage to enter adulthood, or by older nomads to become elders. The nomads have also used this ritual to heal broken minds, helping the mad to enter the healing euphoria of the dreamtime to expel their insanity.

The goals of a dream quest are indeed varied. Those characters who have been taught the ritual of the dream quest have found a great resource available to them. A successful dream

quest can potentially heal insanity, break enchantments, divine the future or even establish momentary contact with beings infinitely distant.

## The Journey Begins

The journey of the dreamer begins with the ritual the Abber Nomads call “The Walk to Wirikuta”. In this ritual, the dreamer spends twenty-four hours fasting and physically exerting himself until he reaches a profound state of exhaustion. At this point the dreamer sits close to a burning fire and meditates on the blaze. At this moment, the conscious mind has been so weakened that the will of the dreamer is capable of breaking through the barrier that separates the waking mind from the world of the sleeping mind, known as Wirikuta. A successful will save against a DC 15 allows the sleeper to “walk to Wirikuta”. Failure indicates the dreamer must spend another hour meditating before attempting again. Each hour spent meditating after the first grants a +2 bonus.

The Abber nomads themselves find this phase extremely difficult. Since they are normally unable to dream, the DC becomes 20. To make this feat possible to the nomads, they use a smoking weed known as peyote. This drug is often shared with non-nomads who are new to the experience of the dream quest. Those who use this drug gain a bonus of +5 to their will save to “walk to Wirikuta”.

Once the sleeper has entered Wirikuta, the dream quest begins. The dreamer’s body will remain comatose in the real world, unable to move or to awake. The character is considered helpless until the end of the dream quest. In this dream world, time moves at a different pace. A single hour in the

dream world is but a minute in the real world.

While in the world of the dream, the character retains all of his equipment, spells, hit points and any other qualities he possessed upon entering the dream quest. Should the character be brought to 0 hit points in the dream he will awake, unharmed physically but wounded mentally. When a dreamer is awakened in this manner, it forces the character to make a will save against a DC 15 or suffer 1D6 temporary wisdom damage. Should a dreamer fail a fear, horror or madness save while in the dream quest he is ejected into the real world and automatically suffers 1D6 points of temporary wisdom damage.

## The First Test

The goal of a dream quest must be clearly known to the dreamer. Not only must the dreamer understand his true goal, but he must be plainly aware of his motivations. Though seemingly simple, most non-nomads have discovered that they were unready and unprepared for this first, crucial step. Though unawares, many mortals are in fact conflicted beings. Within their minds rage constant battles, not only between their good and evil motivations, but also between their lawful and chaotic tendencies, their desires and their fears, their intellect and their instinct. These battles have little impact on the waking mind, but to the dreamer in Wirikuta, this battle becomes a raging melee.

When the dreamer enters this state, the dungeon master asks the dreaming player to explain the ultimate goal of this quest. The dungeon master must then decide whether this goal abides by the dreaming character’s alignment. The dungeon master must take into account the character’s past actions, to ensure

that this quest is in keeping with the character's past behaviour. For example, an impulsive character who behaves violently and selfishly enters a dream quest to discover the location of a lost child, so that his party can find her and earn the trust of a local noble. Though noble, this goal runs contrary to the player's behaviour and chaotic alignment, so a conflict is initiated.

In the event that a conflict is initiated, the dreamer is confronted by fragments of his own personality. The dreamer enters a strange world, not unlike the location where he entered his trance, with the exception that he can see his own body, sitting before the fire in meditation. The shadow of this meditating figure appears to be a gaping passageway leading into the earth.

There, at the tunnel, the dreamer is confronted by a creature who appears to be his identical twin, a creature who behaves as an exaggerated stereotype of the alignment trait with which the quest conflicts. For example, the above character would be confronted by a loud, boorish thug. This creature has a quarter of the dreaming character's hit points, and suffers a -4 penalty to all attack actions and skill checks. If the sleeper possesses the spell casting ability, this doppelganger casts spells like a caster of one level for every four levels the sleeper possesses.

This creature attempts to prevent the dreamer from continuing forward. The sleeper can use physical force to destroy the fragment, or use diplomatic skills, or find some way to trick the fragment, such that the creature is unable or unwilling to prevent the character from continuing on. Once this test has been accomplished, the dreamer enters the dreamland beyond.

## The Maze of the Mind

Once the dreamer defeats his doppelganger, he enters the labyrinth of his own unconsciousness. This maze is often described as a long series of hallways, filled with doorways, though some have described it as a hall of mirrors, and still others say it is a cavern with glowing reflective pools. Whatever the shape, this maze makes up the character's subconscious. Somewhere within this maze is the dreamer's racial memory of the dreamtime. Once the character finds this memory, the journey can continue.

At each portal is a room filled with some memory from the dreamer's mind. These memories are the most significant memories of the character, times of joy and sorrow, of triumph and terror, and even a few of those mundane moments that strangely stay with the brain for decades. With the opening of a given door, the dreamer may suddenly find himself in his own past; fighting his first battle, at the funeral of a long lost friend or even reliving his own birth. In any case, the memory lasts but ten minutes before the character is expelled back into the hallway.

This maze tests a dreamer's intellect to its utmost as they try desperately to deduce the location of the passage to the dreamtime. The character must make an intelligence check every ten minutes to find the next probable entrance to the dreamtime. The DC to this check is equal to 25, but the check receives a bonus of +1 for each previous attempt.

There is the possibility that the dreamer unlocks a particularly painful memory. If the intelligence check is failed by more than five points the dreamer experiences a moment when he was physically harmed. In this case, the

dreamer suffers 1d6 points of damage. For every additional failure the damage is increased by 1d6. Dreamers brought to zero hit points are awoken, and must make a will save against a DC of 15 to avoid 1D6 points of temporary wisdom damage.

Furthermore, if the character rolls a natural 1, he accidentally unlocks a terrifying memory. Whether a moment of profound fear, or some forgotten childhood terror, this illusion causes the character amazing mental distress. The dreamer must make a fear save against a DC of 15 +1 for every memory previously opened. If the fear save succeeds, the dreamer shakes off the terror and escapes. On a failed save the dreamer awakes in the real world, immediately suffering 1D6 points of temporary wisdom damage.

When the intelligence check finally succeeds, the dreamer continues down the path to the dreamtime, entering the dark world of the Nightmare Lands.

## A Land of Peril

Those who pass beyond the maze of memory can feel a compelling force drawing them forward, leading them to the dreamtime. Sadly, the path to the dreamtime passes beneath the foreboding shadow of the Nightmare Lands, forcing those who would seek knowledge to challenge the grim power of the Nightmare Court. Upon entering these lands, the dreamer risks drawing the attention of the Nightmare Court. These vile entities are ever watchful of prey, but often distracted. There is the possibility that a cautious dreamer may even avoid drawing their vile intrusions for a time. The trek across the Nightmare Lands takes the dreamer eight hours, or 8 minutes in the real world.

The physical landscape of this dread domain varies with the dreamer. Many describe this fell place as a desert, made of grey ash and broken by towering rock structures eroded into horrible silhouettes. Others have claimed that these lands are an endless forest of gnarled trees and stinging thorns. Whatever its shape, these lands remain a place of evil where brave dreamers fear to tread. The land itself is treacherous; roots reach out to trip the dreamer, sands shift and fall away revealing sheer cliffs, the landscape attempts to trip or ensnare the traveler.

Every hour, the dreamer will be challenged by the land, in a manner devised by the dungeon master. For example, the earth may part and a ravine could split the earth, trapping the dreamer on one side, forcing him to jump the distance. Or, a massive raptor might break through the clouds, forcing the dreamer to hide from its watchful gaze. Alternately, the dreamer may be confronted by a mysterious man who asks for help, forcing the character to determine if the wanderer is genuine or some malicious agent of destruction. Whatever the danger, the dreamer must make a related check or save to avoid the peril. The DC of these checks should vary according to the strength of the dreamer; usually a DC of ten plus the character class level of the dreamer. The dungeon master should allow the dreamer to use creative means of meeting the challenge, either by using a skill, a spell, good role-playing, or some other problem solving technique.

On a successful check, the dreamer avoids damage and continues unmolested for another hour. On a failed save, the dreamer will suffer appropriate damage and worse yet, attract the attentions of the Nightmare



Land. The dreamer will suffer at least eight challenges and perhaps more if he or she gets lost or sidetracked. If a dreamer can avoid attracting attention, he or she has escaped into the dreamtime. Otherwise, he or she is beset upon by the Nightmare Court.

## What Dreams May Come

When a character in the Nightmare Lands attracts the attention of the Nightmare Court, he alerts the dreadful entities to his presence. One of the Nightmare Court will be sent to halt the dreamer's progress to the dreamtime; the foul being will wait at the border between the domain and the dreamtime, waiting patiently for the unsuspecting victim. Once the dreamer reaches the end of the nightmare lands, he will be ensnared in a hideous nightmare of the entity's devising. This nightmare should be based upon the dreamer's own history, and twisted to suit the particular member of the Nightmare Court who has sought out the dreamer.

Though the nightmare may take any form, it ends after an hour of dream time or one minute of real time. The traveler will make a madness save against a DC equal to 12 plus 1 for every time the dreamer aroused the attention of the Nightmare Court during his trek through the Nightmare Lands. On a successful save, the character throws off the effects and continues on to the dreamland, shaken but unharmed. On a failed save, the character continues on into the dreamtime but is mentally damaged. Upon returning to the waking world, the dreamer suffers from the madness effect *nightmares* and the ability damage according to a failed madness save. The character will be haunted by the nightmare court until he throws off the effects of madness.

## Enlightenment

Once a character has entered the dreamtime, he or she has access to an unlimited font of wisdom and power. The dreamtime is the source of all that was, is and ever will be; energy, matter, time and thought become one at this primal point, infusing the dreamer with infinite intelligence and a power limited only by the dreamer's perception.

However, as potent as this primordial power is, the dreamer remains a flawed vessel. The dreamer has but one instant to use the power of the dreamtime before his own mind is overloaded by the infinite possibilities and shuts the gateway. Once the gateway is shut the dreamer awakes, taking with him the knowledge or the power he sought.

The dreamtime can be used to accomplish one of several goals. It can be used to divine the answer to one, and only one specific question. This question must be answered in a single sentence, though this answer is as specific as the dungeon master can be at that point in the adventure. Possible questions answerable by the dreamtime include the means by which a disease may be cured using herbs, the location of a loved one, the secret vulnerabilities of a villain, or the means of destroying an artefact.

Alternately, the power of the dream time could be used to alleviate the effects of a failed horror or madness check. At the completion of the journey, the dreamer is cured of one madness effect and the ability damage associated with that particular madness. This ability could be used to cure madness contracted from the journey itself.



## Spirit Guides

Above knowledge and mental health, there is still another goal available to a dreamer who has survived the journey. The Abber Nomads have long carried the ritual of harnessing the power of ancestral spirits and recruiting an animal totem to aid them. Upon entering the dreamtime, a dreamer may petition the spirits of his ancestors, whoever they may be, for a spirit guide. The dreamer makes a charisma check against a DC equal to 10 plus his character level. On a failed check, his petition is denied and the dreamer is sent back to the waking world empty handed. On a successful check, the dreamer is granted a guide based upon his moral alignment.

The spirit guide is an agent sent to assist the living. The spirits exist only in the minds of their charges, though their effects are always felt. The primary purpose of a spirit guide is to make future journeys into the dreamtime safer. A spirit guide guards the dreamer during sleep, protecting him from dreadful entities that would plague his sleep. As well, the spirit guide appears when the dreamer is confronted with an illusion, revealing phantasms and figments as mockeries of reality. Finally, the spirit guide acts as a guide of lost minds back to sanity, quickening mental healing.

A dreamer who possesses a spirit guide gains several advantages to future dream quests. The host of a spirit guide gains a +2 bonus to the intelligence check to find his way through the maze of the mind, and a +2 circumstantial bonus on checks to avoid the perils of the Nightmare Lands. Even in the waking world, spirit guides grant a +2 bonus to will saves to resist the nightly predations of dream creatures, such as dream spawn. As well, upon spotting an

illusion, the character is immediately granted a chance to disbelieve. Finally, the spirit guide grants a +4 bonus to recover from madness effects.

Spirit guides are helpful spirits, but they are proud and demand the respect of their charges. Spirit guides select their charges based upon their alignment at the time of the petition. Should a dreamer voluntarily change alignment, the spirit guide becomes insulted and leaves. As well, spirit guides require special attention from their hosts, demanding different offerings depending upon their alignment. Good spirit guides require their charges to commit charitable deeds, while evil guides require their hosts to harm one other being each week, and neutral guides require hosts to balance extremes of good and evil. If the host cannot accomplish one such deed at least once each week, the spirit guide becomes offended and withdraws.

Spirit guides see themselves as moral and ethical guides for their hosts, often entering the dreams of their charges and lecturing them upon their behaviour. Spirit guides encourage their charges to maintain the same alignment they possessed when they first petitioned for a guide. As well, these guides have been known to comment on all aspects of their host's life, from the company they keep to their manner of dress. Many spirit guides, especially the lawful guides, require their charges to carry some icon in the image of their animal form. Chaotic guides prefer their hosts to paint or tattoo their likeness on their own skin.

Furthermore, spirit guides are secretive beings. They find it greatly insulting when their hosts discuss them with others. When a host makes such a faux pas, he or she must make a

charisma check against a DC 15 or insult their spirit guide and drive the totem away. Spirit guides are not blind to circumstance; the guides remain patient and tolerant when it would be unwise or

unhealthy to obey these directives. However, once a guide has been insulted, he or she immediately withdraws from the host, never to return.

# Homeward Bound

## An original story

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*Darkness...*

“Beaona!”

*Sound everywhere...*

“Beaona! Beaona!” My heart is pounding. I look about, pulling my arms up around my head, listening. *Crickets...wind...* just the usual night time noises, nothing more. I sigh, slouching. It must have been a dream, though I remember nothing of it. Of course, Beaona is not here, not here in the wilderness; she is at home. There is a pain in my back, a burning, throbbing sensation somewhere between my shoulder blades. I am soaked, even through my clothes, and yet my throat feels like parchment. Something smells unpleasant.

*Water.*

How long have I been asleep? I must have dropped off after supper. *Water.* I have been hunting in this wilderness for too long and need some proper rest in a real bed, and some real food cooked by a good cook, and fine ales, and wines and...and...*Water.* My throat and tongue are so dry as to be almost alien: they feel so apart from me, as if the rest of my body has forgotten them. *Water.* Why is it so...*Water.* I scramble about me, ignoring my cramped and complaining joints, searching for a canister. I find one on my belt and tug at it. *Water.* There is a snapping sound. My belt has...*Water.* I uncork the bottle and put it to my lips, swallowing rapidly. It smells...tastes wrong. My throat...my tongue is returning to me, and I extend it, lapping at the liquid as it enters my mouth. It tastes foul, but it's such a good feeling I continue. I reflux, gagging, and pull the bottle away, letting it fall. It tastes disgusting, stinks. I spit and gag. My stomach contracts, and the reflux overcomes me once more. I double over, bringing a hand up to my mouth. It reeks too, and I thrust my arm away. What happened to me?

I lie on my side cradling my stomach, and the pain begins to subside. The fire must have died because I can see no trace of it. I shiver; the wind is biting. Leaves rustle nearby. I turn my head to see several shapes towering over me, looming, their periphery shifting along with a dry, rustling sound. A wolf howls in the distance, and several others pick it up. The sounds hang in the air, a melancholy chorus, growing, wavering, failing, but refusing to die completely; I can hear it even when the wind blows hardest, though I

should not be able –a pining, a dissatisfaction, a hopelessness, an anger, a loss. The noise reaches into my chest and expands. My eyes itch. Shouldn't I be somewhere?

I think it for the best if I return home; for I feel so confused; I do not remember if I came out here to hunt, if have already, or even if there was some other purpose. And beside, I would see my fair Beaona again –I am never so tired as to not think of her. Although I do feel weary; indeed, I have never felt this exhausted. I am cold too; why did I let the fire die? “Nabs! Nabs!” Where has my dog gone? I feel dizzy, and the pain in my back is beginning to irritate. I reach round, feeling, but cannot manage to touch the spot. I rub my hands together, looking about me, trying to make anything out; but it is too dark. I could light a fire. *Fire?* I shudder. A fire, with its bright orange flames, with its wicked, burning tongues, revealing me, licking up at me, who could possibly want that? I shiver and swallow. What the hell is wrong with a fire, I light one every night? The thought of warmth is appealing, a close, snug warmth that surrounds me, caring, protective. I feel so alone. I shiver again, shaking my head; I am being ridiculous. A fire then. Carefully, I reach into a pocket and touch the tinderbox. It feels smooth but has several deep gouges running across its surface. I sigh and fold my bottom lip with my teeth; how have I damaged it, I keep nothing else in that pocket? The metal is itchy-warm against my fingers. I pull it out, then slip it back again and look up. Black clouds stream across the pale expanse; they are flat but ragged, allowing small amounts of moonlight to slip through the fractures. Moisture wells in my eyes. I reach into the pocket and again remove the tinderbox. It tingles, itches...*burns*. I hold it out on my palm, regardless of the irritating sensation, and wait for a small break in the cloud, for the light to touch its surface.

*Pain...*

The tinderbox shines, dull in the weak light, and I feel a sudden urge to throw it away. Strange. I resist and read the inscription instead, “To Hershel, for those cold nights alone, Love Beaona”; it is very faint in the gloom but I know it well. Then it is gone again, taken by the night. I relax and put the tinderbox away.

I consider a fire once more, but cannot bring myself to use the box, not when it's damaged...it wouldn't be right. It'll probably be dawn soon, anyway. Feeling another stab of pain, I reach round for the spot on my back again; I feel my muscles stretching, aching, so I pull one arm with the other, moving it further around me. My jacket is torn. I follow the tear and, finally, my fingers reach the spot and begin exploring. There are dents there, dents and bumps on a small area of my back...and they burn. I shall have to ask our priest, Telemus, to look at them for me. I hope I can make it home tomorrow.

My eyes are adjusting to the light, so I look once more at the trees behind me. They descend rank and file into the murk, transient, grey and ghost-like, fading into and out of existence, dancing to a concert of dry whisperm. Other things begin to appear: boulders, large and small, peppered across the horizon; long-grass, plants and bushes too, though all too sporadic to be considered lush; and furthest off of all, hills, my hills, drained of vital colour, melting into the pre-dawn haze. I turn my attention to my camp.

It is a mess; how has it come to be this way? It is a wreck, a dustbowl in which equipment has been abused and discarded. Pans, torches, rope, clothes, all lay bent, broken or torn in the silt around me. Was I poisoned? Did I destroy all of this in a fit of madness? I send my eyes further abroad, looking for my hound. “Nabs,” I croak softly, my voice weak and foreign-sounding. There is no response. The wind blows harder, and the wolves answer, howling for something only wolves understand.

I pull my jerkin close about me and feel the material give. Like many others, it is ruined and I shall have to discard it –but it is too cold to remove just now, so I shall wait for the dawn. Then I shall find my dog and go home.

\* \* \* \*

I am so weary; I have walked since sunrise from my chaotic campsite to these hills, my homeland hills. The evening air is fresher here, cool and pure. I drink it in and look ahead of me. The steep trail is far narrower than I remember; tufts of coarse grass and bracken have invaded and will soon overwhelm it completely. I would almost doubt it the same place but for the expansive rock-fascias that remain, stretching along the hillside, forming natural breaks between the many outcrops and overhangs. The great pines too stand as I remember, tall and lean on either side, packed together tightly into dark and desolate copses. The weakening sun can no longer contain their shadowy captives; they seep out across the trail, forcing the light back, driving it into ever-reducing pools. I walk on, amid this light and shadow, ascending as well as my weary frame will allow; for I feel tired, more fatigued than I can recall; and yet at the same time I sense a great strength, an untapped reserve.

I stop for a moment, staring, and allow myself a weak smile. I used to walk this same stretch with Nabs when she was a pup, teaching her to track any folk visiting the village. She picked the skill up fast and was soon helping me hunt real game further afield. Ironically, I could have used her earlier. As it was, my ineptitude forced me to abandon the search; she was always the better tracker.

What ever happened at that camp, I could find no sign to indicate any struggle. The only tracks in the area were from a large wolf, and it did not enter the site, only circled at a distance. Perhaps Nabs chased it away. I only know that I was caked in filth and unkempt. I must have been poisoned and become delirious with fever. That is the only suitable excuse for me discarding my things. I have left a lot of them there; most of them were ruined. From the damage, I must have been there for at least several days.

The pain in my back has reduced, though when it strikes I can do nothing for it: the herbs I collected en route have proved ineffective, and no amount of scratching grants relief. At times, the burning is so pronounced and each bump so distinct that had I the time I fancy I could draw them all. To add further distraction, I am growing evermore hungry, and no provision I have will suffice to satisfy my appetite. The only things available to me are some pickles I salvaged from the site, and these remain untouched; I fancy something else. If only I could get a clear shot at something, then perhaps I could

get myself some fresh meat. I lick my lips...*meat*. A pain lances through my back, arching me over. I curse, staggering against a rough-barked pine trunk, and wait for the burning to subside. I am so close to home now, perhaps I should wait; but just one shot at something, anything, is all I'd need. Saliva builds in my mouth until a small trickle escapes and runs down my chin. The burning recommences, but I ignore it, spitting my mouthful onto the earth. I listen to the nearby stream lap over the rocks, to the wind tickle the grass and pine needles. Unrecognisable yet strangely familiar smells fill my nostrils. I tilt my head backward close my eyes and welcome them in...

I open my eyes, and look ahead. The light has almost lost the daily struggle: it is fading fast, suffocating as the darkness finally overwhelms it. A wolf howls mournfully, its sombre tones carrying through the dense firs. I step forward again, reaching for my bow; should it be that wolves walk this close to home, I shall be prepared.

\* \* \* \*

Absolutely everything is overgrown, and the pathway, always narrower here, has vanished entirely under a sea of grass and weeds; nobody could have come this way for some time. Whatever has occurred at the village, what ever has allowed the presence of wild beasts so close, is beyond me. What could have caused this in such a short space of time?

The wolf calls again, and others answer it, their song echoing about me. I look up; the moon, mostly obscured by trees, reaches where it might. I move to avoid it, making my way into the cover of the densest woodland; some things I have learned. The trees here press closer about me, diminishing my vision, but I prefer them to the pain. I hear nothing though, and my ears work better than most; in all my years of hunting, no woodland creature ever got the catch on me, and I fear not the loss of one sense when others function. And yet now I am unsure; that I hear nothing bodes ill; can a wolf frighten every creature from its den, every bird from its nest?

Something catches my attention, back where the path should be; there is a shape, tall and lean, moving with purpose, flitting between the mast-like trunks. A silhouette...a person? My heart thumps. I want to cry out, to call whoever it is, but something within chokes and I remain silent. Slowly, I move to a crouch, keeping the figure in view, attempting to discern it more closely. It has stopped, not more than twenty-yards away; but it is hard to focus in this murk and I cannot see more than what the dim light gifts me. Its head turns this way then that. I swallow, hoping the noise fails to carry. It is only now that I can see the irregularity of the form: the head, large and elongated seems to be searching the shadows, as a child peering into some secret hiding place. I watch it tip back, inhaling deeply. This it repeats several times and although something inside urges me to run faster than I ever have, I find myself transfixed. Hair covers it, several strands of which have trapped the moonlight, their tips glowing silver. What manner of creature is this, what hideous terror roams the lands about my village? A howl, forlorn and imploring cuts through the space between us, and I almost cry out. A pain rips through my back and I almost drop my bow. But mere pain shall not defeat me, not now, not with

this thing so close. I fix my hand firmly about the weapon and position myself to shoot. The beast stands between two trunks, with arms outstretched supporting itself against them. It calls out again, and others echo it. I falter for a second; how many are there? I bring the bow up again and re-take my aim, pulling the arrow back until the fletching touches my ear. The beast's head turns as the bow creaks in protest; but it is too late, the arrow has left. An eldritch howl sends a chill cutting through me, and for the first time since my apprenticeship, I fail to re-nock. The arrow lays somewhere beside me, but I do not reach down for it immediately. Instead, I scan about me, searching for the beast. The force of the shot should have dropped a deer in its tracks, but I can see no body. I reach down, moving my hand amongst the undergrowth. My fingers touch the arrow...and another. How odd; I must have drawn two at once. I wait for several seconds, my bow ready, but there is no movement; perhaps the beast lies dead beyond my sight. I place the bow across my back, still sprung, and draw my blade. The steel's ring sounds shrill and menacing, even here; I hope the noise is enough. I move carefully through the trees until I stand at the edge of the old pathway. Bending down, I scan the blades of grass for a sign. If only Nabs were here; she would have told me in a heartbeat where the creature had fled. My fingers slip on a thick film, and I raise them to my nostrils.

*Pain...hunger...*

I feel the hand, my hand, move toward me, with blood on the fingers, reaching for my mouth; I am so hungry. Just a little...*pain*...Familiar words, terrifying in their resonance, echo through my head "*I bind you.*" Somehow, I force the arm away and wipe the hand through the grass. I sigh; it feels like my own again. I collapse onto the ground and lay still, my eyes closed, breathing heavily. Slowly, the pain subsides. If I am sick, then perhaps it is causing hallucinations. That would explain it; perhaps there was nothing there at all, perhaps it is all in my mind. I shiver as a shadow passes over me...it's back. I roll to the side and quickly find my feet, leaping backwards even as I ready my blade. There it is, stooping in the very spot where I lay, a devil, a monster, half-human and hair covered, its grotesque wolfish head tracking my every move. I look at the maw, at the large yellowing teeth; but it's the eyes, quick, green and piercing, that fix me fast, grasping at something inside. I look into them and my heart turns leaden, aching, sending its poison out to my limbs. What enchantment is this? Slowly, it raises two powerful arms and begins staggering toward me, its fingers outstretched. Its movements are ungainly and laboured, and I cannot resist a shiver as I feebly raise my weapon, waving it before me with pathetic menace. Another howl splits the air, and somehow powerless I slump yet closer to earth. It continues forward, faster now, its huge clawed hands reaching for me. It is an abomination, a demon...I must resist...must fight. I snap out of the trance, moving my blade round in an arc to block the creature's advance. The blow cuts the brute across the arm and it roars in pain. It is a beast, nothing more. I strike again, and again, my blade slashing at the beast's ungodly form.

A white flash...pain. I am on my knees, defenceless, with blood trickling down my chin. It is my blood; it struck me. I reach for my sword. I cannot see it; everything is blurred; I cannot focus...



Another flash...I am on my front, face down in the grass. I cannot see anything. I am pinned with my sword-arm trapped beneath me. I hear a tearing sound and feel the material of my jerkin rip apart. Claws on my back, cutting...the pain is excruciating. Surely, this must end now. I break down despite myself, and tears well. There is a flash...and words echo, "*I bind you to the beast.*" An unnatural scream of agony ruptures the night air, echoing both within me and without.

Silence...

I sit up slowly, supporting myself with both arms. My head reels and my vision, unclear, strains for something to fix on. I reach across for my blade, patting my palm down against the grass, finding it several feet away. It feels cold and heavy. I am shivering. I look about me again; the creature is nowhere in sight; perhaps I injured it enough and it has fled. After all, who understands the thoughts of beasts? I bring a sleeve across my face then wipe my blade on the grass, before sheathing it. Carefully, I push myself to my feet. The encounter has weakened me considerably, and my legs are no longer firm enough to carry me for much longer. I bend forward, but can discern no track or mark of the creature's passing—it must be light-footed indeed. I begin towards home; it is better to press onward while my strength holds.

\* \* \* \*

It is nigh on midnight. The village, perfectly still, lies shrouded in moon-kissed darkness: no torch or candle flame flickers, leaving the pale effluence to cover everything, revealing to me the monstrous deformity of these squat houses for the first time. The walls reject me, and door and alleyways predate my attention; moreover, the pits of darkness each harbour stare back, mocking me, their depths impenetrable. I walk on. There is no sign of life anywhere—everyone must be sleeping-- but I hear...I am sure I hear breathing nearby, deep and low. I listen, drawing my blade. But there is nothing, my mind is playing tricks on me; do I hear my own breathing then? I must persuade myself of that. Circling about, I replace the sword in its scabbard. If only I could see better, I could assuage my mind with the truth of light. I look onwards down the dark street and my heart sinks; is there really no light, no life, no torch or lamp to guide me? I should settle now for a slither of candle flame escaping the broken boards of a beggar's lodging. But as a beggar I have nothing. I move on.

I keep to the shadows, though they bait me, and I hear... No, I shall ignore it all; I am unwell, and fatigued. Everything shall be well when I see Beaona again. And Nabs, where she is I cannot guess, though I should search for her be it at the ends of this earth.

I reach my home, and turning stare upon it as if for the first time. It sits like some black and crippled beast, old and arthritic, bowed low and begging; the wooden porch-pillars are worn and disfigured, and the thick-walled outer shell, burdened, leans forward into the street. There is no sign of life here either; and yet a sense of such deep regret pervades the air that I pause and look up at the building once more. I smile sympathetically. I shake my head and step into its shadow. "Beaona, be waiting for me,

please, wake me from this cursed dream and show me the sun again.” A low feral whimper escapes between the slats of the rough wooden door. My breathing stills and I listen. It sounds desperate and confused, and is accompanied by a faint scratching. A chill creeps up my back, erecting the hair on my neck. Nabs? The door is before me, the very door I have longed for so long to open...but now. “Nabs, is that you?” The noise stops. I reach for the handle, taking the cold metal in my hand, turning it slowly. “Nabs, is that you lass?” I can hear nothing. I push the door open but step backwards, waiting. My chest feels as though it is consuming itself from within. All is still. Foregoing all sense and sensation, I step into the shadowed hallway. The whining comes again, suffusing my body with icy pinpricks; never has this felt so familiar and yet so alien. “Nabs! Beaona!”

I step into the main room and move to the shutters, pulling them open. Thin strips of moonlight break in, igniting drifting particles of unsettled dust and throwing the area into a conflicting web of light and shadow. I wince as the light strikes me; curse my back. Recovering, I turn, then stop and stare. She lay there on the straw mattress, my fair Beaona, her wedding gown blood-caked and tattered, her hair all matted and tangled. Powerless to compose myself, I move closer, staring; I cannot turn my eyes away. Her skin, so smooth and wan, seems set in a strange permanence both beautiful and ghastly; and with her green eyes, wide-open and staring, she looks up at the dusty wooden ceiling like a neglected china doll. “Oh, who could forget you, Beaona?” I run to her, and then stare into her eyes –those maddened green eyes- and a chill runs down me; can I hear breathing...can she yet live?

I stand a while, motionless. My hands feel so apart from me that, even should I persuade them to move, I should hardly believe what they touched real. Helpless, I watch them descend, see them reach down to her porcelain skin, watch them touch it. Warmth greets my fingertips...my Beaona...alive. I so want to believe. But her wounds are so grievous; how can she live? I lean over and begin to examine her. She smells...*meat*. My stomach bursts into activity and I can feel the saliva build again in my mouth. I push myself away, another spasm of pain rippling through my back. I push over a small wooden cupboard and bring my hands about my head. My breathing is hard and heavy, and I can feel perspiration build on my forehead. I lean against a wall for several minutes then reach once more toward her, ensuring that I do not draw too close. A small circle of dry blood and torn fabric near her ribcage reveal an old wound, mostly healed, and lacerations cover her arms and neck. What ever happened to her must have occurred many days ago. Why has everyone left her like this, to fend for herself? I look at her yet closer, running a hand through my hair. Many parts of the dress have been re-stitched, and the fabric has darkened in places. What has happened? And why is she even in this dress?

A high-pitched whimper echoes from the back room. “Nabs.” I break away and walk to the kitchen. “Nabs, girl, where are you?” The kitchen is empty. I stand staring at broken stools and crockery strewn across the floor. A knife handle sticks up from the table, prominent in its solitude. I take it, pulling it from the old wood. It is my knife, my skinning knife. But I took this with me, I am sure. Why would I leave it here like this?

A terrible whining erupts from behind the scullery door, and the scratching, desperate and unrelenting, threatens to overwhelm the solid panels. “Nabs. Never you worry girl, I’ll have you out of there in a moment.” I run to the door grab the handle and pull hard. It fails to move; it is locked, the latch down. I flick the latch, swing the door wide and bend forward with arms outstretched. “Nabs. Nabs, it alright, I’m...” Silence. Black silence. My limbs are leaden, weak, frozen; there is no strength in me and I slip to the floor, powerless. Only my heart pounds, fast and fragile like the wings of a trapped moth. And then, as quickly as it came, it is gone. My breath escapes me and I take a lungful of musty air. Coughing, I pull myself to my knees. “Nabs?”

\* \* \* \*

I have watched over her through the night, and she is resting well. It is a wonder I did not notice, but the excitement of my return must have affected my senses; in the early grey light, the lacerations I noticed have proved themselves but the effect of shadows, and although there remains a hole in her dress, there is no wound. That I reacted in such a way is unsurprising, with the place being deserted and in darkness, and considering my fragile condition.

I look upon her, and reaching down run my fingers through her hair. “Beaona, why did you kill her? Why lock her in?” My eyes feel sore, but there is nothing more to give. I place a palm against her dress and feel the damp material. I shall have answers; but not now; for I will not awaken her should she be under some sickness. I will go to the shrine; herbs and extracts may be there, and Telemus may know of things that can help her.

\* \* \* \*

The entire village is broken and deserted: the new light reveals doors and shutters, all smashed and rent, hanging from their hinges. The surrounding walls too are bludgeoned to the point of destruction, and every one of them marked with the claws of powerful beasts. It must be the creature I wounded, the one that should have slain me...it did this.

The shrine too looks deserted; but strangely this building, at least from the outside, appears untouched. I walk up to the entranceway and stare for a moment into the shadows. My friend Telemus, the old priest, should be standing here granting blessings to all who enter; and yet now only silence greets me. What has befallen him? I step inside. Here everything is intact, the altar remains as it always has, and the ornamentation too...except for one piece. I cannot remember what the piece was, but neither it nor the priest is here. “Telemus. Telemus, can you hear me?” The question resounds, an uncertain and chill repetition; but it finds no answer. I scan the immediate area, looking for herbs, oils and anything else medicinal –if Beaona awakes and tells me her ills, I may be able to help her. I see it, the missing thing, lying against the wall. Of course, it is the hammer, the silver hammer of the hound –I do not remember its name; but what is it doing out of place? I approach it, reaching down reverently to collect it.

My finger close about it, then stop; coldness is slowly spreading up my hand. I look down at the bright silver head, at the pattern on the hammer, a mastiff hound, its mouth fastened onto some frightful beast. My back...of course. What the...

*Pain...blinding light...*

*"I bind you to the beast,*

Telemus, please, for blessed Hala's sake...

*Never rest, never sleep,*

No...

*And inside the darkness keep,*

*My back...*

Telemus, why are you doing this to me? Please, stop the pain. Please, Telemus, no more pain...

*When the witch-light come."*

*Darkness...yes...soothing obli...*

The light has faded since I arrived; how long have I slept? Why Telemus? Why? I look across the floor towards the hammer, just three-feet away. I shall not touch it again. Why did he strike me with it? I stand slowly. The pain has gone, at least for now. I walk to the rear of the shrine; there is an old parchment laying there, held by a stone, and near it several pieces of dried papyrus. I move the stone and lift the parchment.

*Dearest Hershel,*

*May you forgive me, my friend, for the pain I have inflicted on you. However, there was no other way, for I cannot allow the beast-curse to claim you, and I have no time to test for it now; there is someone behind this evil, and I must find out more about him lest the entire village be lost. The hammer with which I struck you has a power I know little of, but silver is a metal of the light, and it should protect you until we next meet. I hope its effects are bearable, for should you already be afflicted, you could suffer terribly; you could wander for many days before your own mind returns to you.*

*When you find your way back here, go to the old hawthorn grove to the south; I know a wise-woman there who may understand more of this mischief maker. I hope to have learned how to combat him by the time you reach there. I also hope that you, as a good man, will choose to champion that cause.*

*I understand that you dear wife, Beaona, will fear greatly for you; so I have written a small letter to her, which I should be glad if you pass on. She will be in great danger here, as will your hunting dog. In fact, without aid, soon this place will succumb. I pray that you and they remain safe in these dark times.*

*Your friend,  
Telemus*

I place the stone back into place. A small slither of sunlight breaks in, touching me. My dog is dead, and I shall mourn her; but at least there is reason now; I can see a way out for Beaona and me. I look for the note, but cannot see one; perhaps Telemus mistakenly took it with him. No matter, I will write a note for her myself, tell her to hold fast until I return. I take a small piece of charcoal and write upon the papyrus:

*Dear Beaona,*

*I must go away for a while, to help Telemus. I shall return as soon as I can. Do not worry for me.*

*I will love you always,*

*Your Hershel*

I place the charcoal down and, carrying the note in one hand, set off for home.

\* \* \* \*

It is as I left it; Beaona remains asleep on the bed, though her breathing is easy and her colour has returned. I smile as I move across to her; everything will soon be well again. I look for somewhere to place the note, for somewhere she will see it easily and know I have returned. I look about me, at the worn and broken furniture, at the dusty bedspread and the threadbare curtains, and finally at the mantelpiece. There, I shall put it there and she will see it. I place the note down, carefully stepping over the small cupboard knocked over last night, and then lean an ornament against it.

I stand back and look at Beaona. I have the curse; but at least I have a chance to save her. I must check her for the curse too. Silver is a metal of the light...silver will tell me. What do I have that's... I reach into my pocket and touch the tinderbox. All I would need is a little silver, just enough to test for a reaction. I pull it out. A tingling sensation begins, but there is no mark on my skin. Just a little to penetrate the skin is all I need. I walk into the kitchen and pick up the knife from the table. This should take a small slither. I place the tip of the blade against the surface and look down. I begin to cut into the metal, but stop, dropping the weapon. The marks, the gouges, look so similar. I do not understand. Perhaps I shall not do the test, but get help instead. I walk back to Beaona.

There is mess all about me, but there remains no time to fix everything. The least I can do is move the cupboard back. I bend forward and lift the old wooden cupboard

back up onto its legs. There is something sticking out of the door, a corner of something...a piece of papyrus. I pull at it, trying to free it; but it is stuck, so I open the door. A box dislodges itself and a dozen pieces of papyrus spill out onto the dirty floor, each with a small note scrawled on it. I pick one up and read it:

*Dear Beaona,*

*I am sorry, my love, but I must go away for a while. Keep yourself safe, and answer the door to nobody. I will return as soon as I have spoken with Telemus.*

*Your loving Hershel*

I read another, and another, each one written in my own hand. A chill overcomes me as I look about at the old dusty furniture, at the detritus and the faded fabrics, and though I try to remain standing, my legs begin to buckle and I can only stagger towards the doorway; how many times?

*Heat...pain...*

I kick over a chair, then pick it up and throw it against the wall, smashing it. How many times have I done this? How many times have I failed? I bring my fist down on the cupboard, splintering the wood. The room stares at me; it is laughing at my stupidity. I look at Beaona. Even she is laughing at me with her sparkling green eyes.

“No, Beaona, don’t laugh at me. No. I can do it, I can; my mind’s not messed up...” I walk into the kitchen, crunching crockery underfoot. I pick up the knife and stab it down hard into the table. “I hate this place...this cursed place. Shut up Nabs, stop whining or I’ll put you away until you learn.” I kick the parlour door and it slams resoundingly. “I said shut up Nabs. Daddy doesn’t care anymore. Hoawwww to you too. Shut up, damn you and leave me alone! Daddy’s wants to get him some meat. Daddy wants some fresh red *meat*.”

*Dimming red...fading...*

\* \* \* \*

*Darkness...*

“Beaona!”

*Sound everywhere...*

“Beaona! Beaona!” My heart is pounding. I look about, pulling my arms up around my head, listening. *Crickets...wind...* just the usual night time noises, nothing more. I sigh, slouching. It must have been a dream, though I remember nothing of it.



# What Screams May Come

## Nightmares in Your Campaign

In the dead of night, the mind slips beneath the veil of sleep and walks amongst the land of dreams. In those nocturnal wanderings, the sleeper visits unknown visions and gazes into bizarre vistas, exploring the strangest corners of the psyche. Many of these reveries are forgotten before the sleeper awakes. Some are pleasant and happy, while others are confusing and befuddling. Finally, there remains one other form of dream, a vision that is neither pleasant nor forgettable; it is the nightmare, raw terror in its purest state.

Nightmares are an excellent addition to a Ravenloft campaign, both as a means of generating fear and as a story telling device. However, including nightmares in a role-playing campaign requires special effort on the part of the dungeon master. Bad dreams are difficult to reproduce by any means, let alone through a role-playing game. It is difficult to transmit the disturbing imagery and the raw emotion of a nightmare to a player sitting across a table.

Though a daunting task, running a nightmare can be a rewarding activity. This article is intended to offer dungeon masters a variety of techniques to use when designing a nightmare and when unleashing it upon a hapless player. With an honest effort and a little luck, your players will be developing a serious case of insomnia.

### Design

The design of a nightmare is a task that will tax the creativity of even the

most imaginative dungeon master. The goal of the DM is to create a vision of terror that will etch itself into the minds of the player. The nightmare itself can take on any form imaginable, though the dungeon master may wish to remember certain elements that are common to the best nightmares.

**Vulnerability:** An element common to nightmares, and to most other forms of horror, is vulnerability. To feel fear, the dreamer must be separated from the source of his confidence. Within the nightmare, the dreamer is helpless to escape or confront the terror that haunts him. Hopelessly vulnerable, the character is stripped of all security. This element of vulnerability can be accomplished by any number of means. The dungeon master can create a threat more powerful than the character; strip the victim of his strengths, or combine both approaches.

The element of vulnerability is best accomplished by allowing the victim to begin the dream with his strengths, with each resource taken away, one at a time. This gradual fleecing allows the victim to fully grasp the scope of his vulnerability, pondering the ramifications of each loss and dreading the next. A useful side effect of this approach is that the victim is brought to question his own security. Though but a dream, the nightmare has pointed out the character's real vulnerabilities, revealing the true danger that exists. Adding vulnerability to a nightmare will help rob the victim of confidence and spread fear throughout his waking life.

For example, a dreamer begins his dream surrounded by his adventuring party as they enter a forest. As the dream progresses, night falls and the forest becomes thick and foreboding. As the group tries to make its way through the twisted woods, the dreamer looks back and realizes that one member of the group has vanished. After a brief search, the party moves on. The night grows dark as the moon is obscured by clouds, the wind blows cold through the bare branches of the wood, suddenly the victim hears the sound of rustling brush, and when he glances back, another friend has vanished, leaving only a walking stick behind. Panicked, the party begins to move quicker, the clawing branches scratch at the victim's face as he runs, suddenly he hears one of his companions cry out for him, but as he looks back, he sees nothing behind him but empty forest. In terror the victim runs, following his only remaining companion, yet the frightened adventurer steadily outpaces him. Suddenly the victim breaks through the forest, entering a vast hollow, and finds the torn cloak of the last remaining man. He is alone, even as he hears the sound of footsteps behind him.

**Dark and Familiar:** Dreams are composed of equal elements of memory and imagination, blended together into a single reverie. Though the rational mind would reject this unreal mismatch of reality and fantasy, the sleeping mind easily accepts the strangeness as fact. The dungeon master should attempt to borrow as many images from real life, whether that is the life of the player or the player's character, and mix those images with the strangeness of the nightmare.

This mix can produce a dreamscape more disturbing than either

element on its own. The familiar element gives the dream reality; it allows the player to accept the nightmare as fact, rather than perceiving it as an illusion. Familiar elements useful for nightmares include familiar locations, characters, symbols and everyday events. The element of strangeness is used to slightly warp these familiar elements, giving these images a sinister taint that will help build up the dreamers fear. Alterations should be subtle, to preserve the familiarity, as well as gradually building up the level of fear.

For example, the dreamer begins the dream, waking up in her home. As she goes down the steps to the kitchen, she notices that the house is strangely quiet. There is a grandfather clock in the corner of the living room, and each tick seems to echo off the walls. Suddenly the hour chimes, and a cuckoo springs out, crying the dreamer's name with each chime. As she leaves the house, she finds the sky is black. In the city street, a mist wafts down the hill, glowing white in the light of a huge white moon. Standing in the fogbank is a small silhouette, the shape of a little child. Somewhere in the darkened street she hears the sing song voice of her little sister, beckoning to her from the swirling mists.

**Climax:** Though a nightmare should be evenly paced, it is important that the dream have a distinct ending. While it may be cliché for a nightmare to have a dramatic ending it is important that the dream end while it is fresh, rather than linger until it becomes boring, effectively going out with a bang rather than a whimper.

The nightmare must be plotted so that it will slowly but steadily build towards its climax. The end itself can take many forms, so the dungeon master

should feel encouraged to be creative with the climax itself. A common end to the nightmare is the death of the character, though this may be problematic in practice. The actual event of death may be prolonged, involving details such as blood loss, dismemberment, penetration of the body by weapons, and other trappings that ultimately drag the climax out beyond its use. The DM will find it better to end the nightmare with abrupt stimuli that imply immediate death or some other horrid fate.

For example, the dreamer experiences a nightmare where he awakes inside of a coffin, resting in a crypt. The character flees his grave, running through the crumbling tomb. Eventually he reaches the entry, when suddenly the iron doors slam shut, burying him alive. The dreamer then awakes, covered in frigid sweat. Other climactic ends could include the touch of a cold hand from behind, the lights suddenly going out, a scream, or the character falling.

A malign paradigm shift can be an excellent climatic end to a nightmare. In this shift the dreamer suddenly realizes some foul truth that instantly and irrevocably destroys his former perception of the world. For example, through the nightmare the dreamer tracks a mad killer who takes fingers as his trophy, mimicking the dreamer's own quest in the waking world. Following a trail left by the killer, the dreamer turns a corner and finds his own mother, carrying a basket of tinder and kindling. The dreamer frantically warns his mother of danger, demanding she return to the safety of her home, even as she laughs and dismisses the danger. Finally she turns to go, dropping a few branches from her basket. The dreamer

picks the wood up, and is about to call to the woman, when he realizes that amongst the bundle is a pale, severed finger.

## Playing the Sandman

Dungeon masters who seek to incorporate nightmares into their campaigns will find the task quite taxing. It is difficult to convey the raw horror of a night terror to a player sitting across a dinner table with his hands stuffed in a bag of chips. There is no easy way to incorporate a dream into an adventure, though there are different approaches to using nightmares.

**Role-playing:** The first and most straightforward manner of using a nightmare is to run the dream as a part of the adventure. In the nightmare, the character is free to act in the dream as if he were awake and inside of the dream world. This approach has the advantage of its simplicity; the dungeon master merely alters the rules and runs the nightmare as part of the game.

The advantage of this approach is the hidden nature of the nightmare. With a little effort, the dungeon master convinces the player that the nightmare is occurring in the game. The result is that the player will react to the dream as if it were real, fearing for the safety of his character. To add to this illusion, the dungeon master can allow the other players of the group to role-play their characters, acting the parts as figments of the dreamer's imagination. To further the perception of the dream as real, the dungeon master should make fake rolls from behind his dungeon screen, perhaps even going so far as confiscating all of the character sheets.

Though simple, this technique has several disadvantages. The nightmare is so similar to an ordinary role-playing

situation that the players may feel cheated. The free will of the player can easily interfere with a carefully scripted dream, ruining the story envisioned by the dungeon master. To make the experience special the dungeon master must not rely on a script or story, rather, the DM must create a nightmare based on a frightening scenario. In this technique, the dungeon master creates a role-playing environment where the setting itself frightens the player.

For example, at the end of a game day, the dungeon master opens a new scene with the dreamer, supposedly the next morning. The dungeon master allows the player to role-play a short time normally, but then begins the nightmare. The dungeon master describes a brilliant flash of light, and then explains to the player that the world has suddenly become frozen in time. After the player explores this frozen world, the dungeon master confronts the player with a nemesis, a creature who lives between the seconds. The nightmare then continues as the player is stalked by the nemesis.

Special caution must be paid by the DM to keep the player engrossed in the dream. It becomes too easy for the dungeon master to frustrate the victim by creating a situation that appears impossible to survive. As well, the dungeon master must avoid backing his victim into a corner. Terror can be prolonged so long as the victim perceives some possible escape.

**Narrative:** An ambitious dungeon master may decide to narrate a nightmare to his players, effectively weaving a tale of terror for his player. This approach has many advantages, allowing the dungeon master to fully use his creativity, creating a story as intricate and disturbing as he wishes. This

technique can accomplish a nightmare scenario with only fraction of the time it would take to play out a role-played nightmare, and allows the dungeon master to emphasize certain elements that may be used as foreshadowing in latter parts of the game.

Though easy to create, a narrative carries its own challenges. Unlike the role-played dream, a narrative is easy for the dreamer to ignore. The narrative must be designed to flow smoothly, using details that emphasize the plot and draw interest to the story. The key to the narrative is to be appealing, inviting the audience to create their own mental picture of this disturbing dreamscape, drawing them into the imaginary world. Descriptions must be vivid, but also succinct; it is critical to say within the audience's attention span, offering them as much information as they can digest.

Reciting a narrative takes up valuable game time, and may prove boring to players who are not involved. The dungeon master should put serious thought into recording the nightmare on paper, and allowing the dreamer to read the nightmare himself. While a printed copy may lack some of the drama of a compelling recital, a paper version opens up new opportunities. The dungeon master should consider compiling a series of pictures and text to add to this printed nightmare. The finished product may be a collage of words and sinister pictures.

For example, the dungeon master takes a player aside and explains that her player is going to experience a nightmare. He then hands her a black folder, a candle, and instructs her to sit in a dark closet and read the folder contents by candle light. When the player opens the folder, she finds a page of text, bordered by pictures of hundreds

of human eyes, cut out of magazines. The paper itself seems smeared with a red stain in many places, with a single crimson thumbprint in the corner.

## Props

Nightmares can be profoundly disturbing experiences, combining both visual and physical illusions to terrify the dreamer. It is only fair that the dungeon master offer his victims a similar mix to generate terror. A prop allows a player to examine an element of the game, to understand it. Props and other aids can be an excellent addition to a nightmare experience, giving a disturbing reality to the fiction of the game. Though an intimidating task, the inclusion of props into the game can be a simple and rewarding affair, especially when nightmares are concerned.

In a nightmare, there are often objects of considerable significance. A

ticking clock that echoes in the dark, a child's doll found in the street, a flickering candle; these are all objects that can be easily reproduced and brought to the gaming table. Yet there is more than a dungeon master can do, to add to the experience.

The dungeon master can choose to create his own props, to mimic the dreamlike strangeness of a nightmare. For example, the dungeon master can paint a box black, and cut a small hole in the top, just big enough to put a hand through. At the climax of the nightmare, the dungeon master can instruct a player to put his hand into the box and retrieve what is inside, pulling back a fake eyeball (purchased from a novelty shop), a quivering heart (made from jello) or even a nest of worms (preferably gummy). Any number of cheap parlour tricks can be played on players, adding a new and exciting element to the game.

# Perilous Pursuits

## Dark Dreamer

By Jason True

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*Matthew ran as fast as his legs could carry him down the twisted hallway. His two companions, his older sister and her friend, had already succumbed to the shadowy figure that had been hunting them during the course of the night. Alone and confused, he didn't know how much farther he could continue. Muscles burning painfully from the exertion, the young fighter finally paused to regain his bearings and catch his breath.*

*"This is insane," Matthew said to himself. Martha, his sister, had said the same thing before the dark figure stalking them had gotten to her. With a long sigh, he looked around at the hallway that seemed to bend at odd angles every hundred feet. "It is like a horrible nightmare..."*

*"You do not know just how correct you are," a gravely voice replied from the web of shadows behind him.*

*Matthew spun around, but he only got the chance to see a dark-skinned face with a black beard before the sensation of cold metal went through his throat. Matthew clutched at the gaping hole in his neck, but it was too late. He was quickly losing consciousness, and there was nothing he could do to staunch the blood flow. Everything was going black except for the gleaming eyes of his assailant.*

*A scream filled the air as Matthew woke up, wrapped tightly in the blankets of his warm bed. His hands flew to his*

*neck to search for any sign of injury, but no gash or blood remained. Only a rapidly beating heart and a layer of sweat gave a sign that he might have been in any sort of danger. Even the terror from the bad dream was quickly subsiding in the comfort of his familiar bedroom.*

*"It was only a nightmare," Matthew reassuringly told himself.*

*"You do not know just how correct you are," a gravely voice replied from the darkness at the foot of his bed...*

The Dark Dreamer prestige class are for those who have chosen to serve those mysterious creatures that live within the realms of our dreams. While most dark dreamers serve a particular dream spawn, it is not unheard of to have a member of the Nightmare Court sponsor a character to further their own nefarious plans in the waking world.

## Dark Dreamer

Bards and monks tend to be the most qualified to become a Dark Dreamer due to their abilities, but anyone can fulfill the requirements and take this prestige class. Many wizards and sorcerers are drawn in by the promises of arcane powers and secret lore their dreamland masters offer. Rogues, rangers, and even fighters will become scouts or bounty hunters for the denizens of dream by combining their



previous abilities with their newly granted ones. Clerics seldom take this class due to the conflict in allegiances, but there have been a few followers of dream gods that have taken up this class as well.

**Hit Die:** d6.

### Requirements

To qualify to become a dark dreamer (dkd), a character must fulfill all of the following criteria.

**Alignment:** Any non-good

**Skills:** Disguise 3 ranks, Knowledge (planes) 4 ranks, Move Silently 3 ranks, Speak Language (Oneiros).

**Feats:** Alertness, Iron Will, Skill focus (disguise).

**Special:** A new member must successfully find a dream spawn (typically an ennui) to sponsor him and then undergo a bizarre and oftentimes horrific initiation ritual. Initiates who pass the test with their sanity intact become pupils in the art of dreams and nightmares.

### Class Skills

The dark dreamer's class skills (and key ability for each skill) are Alchemy (Int), Bluff (Cha), Concentration (Con), Craft (any) (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Disguise (Cha), Gather Information (Cha), Hide (Dex), Hypnotism (Cha), Innuendo (Wis), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (arcana) (Int), Knowledge (the planes) (Int), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Perform (Cha), Search (Int), Sense Motive (Wis), Spellcraft (Int), Spot (Wis).

**Skill Points at each Level:** 4 + Int. Modifier

### Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Dark Dreamer prestige class.

**Weapon and Armour Proficiency:** A dark dreamer gains proficiency in all simple weapons, but not with any type of armour or shields. Note that armour check penalties for armour heavier than leather apply to the skills Balance, Climb, Escape Artist, Hide, Jump, Move Silently, Pick Pocket, and Tumble.

**Lullaby (Su):** Once a day, as a standard action, a dark dreamer can murmur softly in Oneiros, causing his foes to become drowsy. All opponents within a 20-foot radius centered on the dark dreamer must succeed at a Will save (DC 10 + class level). Creatures who fail the save are fatigued for 1 round per level of the dark dreamer class. This is a sonic, mind-affecting ability. The dark dreamer can use this ability two times a day at 4<sup>th</sup> level and three times a day at 7<sup>th</sup> level.

**Detect thoughts (Su):** At 2<sup>nd</sup>-level, a dark dreamer is granted the ability to read the surface thoughts of another as if they cast the spell of the same name. This ability can be used once per day as if cast by a sorcerer of an equal level to the dark dreamer's prestige class level. The number of uses a day increases by one time per day for every two levels above second until 8<sup>th</sup>-level, where it can be used at will.

**Summon Dream Spawn (Sp):** A 3<sup>rd</sup>-level dark dreamer has served the realm of dreams faithfully enough that he is allowed some assistance in his tasks. Once per day, the dark dreamer may summon 1d4+1 grey morphs to

serve him. A 6<sup>th</sup>-level dark dreamer is capable of using this ability twice daily. In addition to the extra use, the dark dreamer may choose to summon 1d3 shadow morphs in place of the grey morphs. At 9<sup>th</sup>-level, the dark dreamer has proven himself worthy in the eyes of the dream spawn. He may use this ability three times a day. As well, he may choose to summon 1 ennui instead of the previous grey and shadow morphs. This ability functions as a *summon monster* spell with the exception of the notes mentioned above.

**Sleepwalker (Sp):** While the dark dreamer serves his dream spawn masters in the waking world, there are times that their services are needed in the dream world. At 5<sup>th</sup>-level, the dark dreamer is taught the basics of manipulating the Veil of Sleep. By parting the Veil, the dark dreamer is capable of transporting himself either to the Nightmare Lands or to a particular dreamscape and back once a day. At 10<sup>th</sup>-level, the dark dreamer

can travel between these realms at will. While the dark dreamer can use this ability as a means to transport himself to a new location through another person's dream (as per the *Dream Travel* spell), he cannot enter or leave a domain whose borders are closed at the time.

**Greater Lullaby (Su):** When dark dreamers reach 10<sup>th</sup> level, they have nearly become masters of the Oneiros language. Instead of merely fatiguing their foes, a dark dreamer can now lull them into a deep sleep with their words. This ability replaces the standard lullaby ability. As a standard action, a dark dreamer can murmur softly in Oneiros, causing his foes to become drowsy. All opponents within a 20-foot radius centered upon the dark dreamer must succeed at a Will save (DC 20) or be affected as though by *sleep* cast by a 10<sup>th</sup>-level sorcerer, except that it can affect creatures of any HD. This is a sonic, mind-affecting ability.

## The Dark Dreamer

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort	Reflex	Will	Special
1 <sup>st</sup>	+0	+0	+2	+2	Lullaby (1/day)
2 <sup>nd</sup>	+1	+0	+3	+3	Detect thoughts (1/day)
3 <sup>rd</sup>	+2	+1	+3	+3	Summon Dream Spawn (1/day)
4 <sup>th</sup>	+3	+1	+4	+4	Detect thoughts (2/day), Lullaby (2/day)
5 <sup>th</sup>	+3	+1	+4	+4	Sleepwalker (1/day)
6 <sup>th</sup>	+4	+2	+5	+5	Detect thoughts (3/day), Summon Dream Spawn (2/day)
7 <sup>th</sup>	+5	+2	+5	+5	Lullaby (3/day)
8 <sup>th</sup>	+6	+2	+6	+6	Detect thoughts (at will)
9 <sup>th</sup>	+6	+3	+6	+6	Summon Dream Spawn (3/day)
10 <sup>th</sup>	+7	+3	+7	+7	Greater Lullaby, Sleepwalker (at will)

# La Confrérie des Rêveurs

## A Cabal of Dastardly Dreamers

By Jason True

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*Even as I pen these words for you, my friends, to read, I fear that my time is rapidly growing to an end. I have been spending the last three years researching more about a mysterious organization known as La Confrérie des Rêveurs. I realize that this document may never leave the confines of this horrible place, but you should use the details to protect yourselves if you can find it.*

*You have my sincerest apologies for not delivering this information in person, but my captor approaches even now. May Ezra bless and protect you from the horrors that come for us while we sleep.*

*Jonathon Velaquex*

### Background

While you might not be familiar with the name, La Confrérie des Rêveurs, it has been around for nearly a century. It was founded by a trio of ennui, who were growing frustrated at their lack of control over the waking world. While the ennui and the lesser dream spawn could feed off of sleeping mortals, they had little influence on the other side of the Veil of Sleep. It was next to impossible for them to cross into the waking world, and their powers were not nearly as great as they had wished.

It was in 655 BC that their dark desires were answered. A bard named Gulliver Dreamsong crossed over into

the Nightmare Lands. An entertainer and a strong believer in the influential nature of dreams, Gulliver was easily influenced by the gifts that the ennui offered him. In return for being their eyes and ears in the waking world, they would grant him the ability to influence and control aspects of the dreaming world. Thus, the first dark dreamer was created (see Perilous Pursuits).

Gulliver left the Nightmare Lands with a new purpose in life. He would not only influence his audience to buy his evening meal, but they would also be influenced to dream in certain ways. For the first month that he was back, Gulliver studied several ghost stories and tales of horror from the local region. By taking the most frightening aspects, the crafty bard created new stories to frighten the village folk. For the first couple of weeks the dream spawn fed well off of the frightened villagers. Unfortunately, the initial fear of the stories wore away. The villagers' dreams improved and the ennui no longer had the power they wanted.

Gulliver moved on to a new city with a different audience and repeated his task. He met with success again, but it was short lived. One man could only do so much. Even with his masters' gifts, he couldn't do all the research, planning, and implementing by himself. He needed assistants to help him do his work. After a month of searching, he found five assistants. With his new

helpers, Gulliver was able to cover more areas in less time.

Over the next several years, Gulliver continued to please his masters. Each time that his influence lessened in an area, he would move to a new city. He gathered several more assistants over that time. In fact, two of the original assistants proved themselves well enough to become dark dreamers as well. The group had grown larger and more powerful, and La Confrérie des Rêveurs was born. The organization slowly spread throughout the Core and into the Mists. The Nightmare Land also had an influx of patrons as other dream spawn wanted a greater control of the waking world. In fact, even members of the Nightmare Court provided some support.

This growth continued but slowed in pace. While La Confrérie des Rêveurs brought about the changes that their masters desired, these changes took a lot of time and energy. It was in 742 BC that a group of dark dreamers suggested creating locations in each of the cities to house their members. By creating a caste system, they could allow the public to come to them without ever knowing the true intentions of the organization. The first few headquarters were established in Dementlieu, Mordent, and Richemulot. The dark dreamers set their assistants to work, and it was only a matter of time before the people began to come to them...

## Organization

La Confrérie des Rêveurs is a rather complex and perplexing organization. It is composed of four circles, and the farther you work your way toward the center circle the more diabolical the organization becomes. With all the illusions and subterfuge the

inner circles use, I am not surprised that most of the average members know nothing about the true goals of this cult. However, I am getting ahead of myself. You should know what each of these four circles are and what they mean.

The first and outermost circle is consisted of people that are titled the 'awakened'. These men, women and children are our neighbours and loved ones who have shown an interest in the concepts of this organization. Most awakened will spend a couple evenings a month meeting with other members and discussing their dreams. In fact, this simple activity was how I first became involved with La Confrérie des Rêveurs activities.

The second circle is referred as the 'light sleepers'. These are the people who perform the more menial labours of running the various headquarters. While their tasks vary between individuals, most of them are responsible for recording and organizing the information about everyone's dreams. A light sleeper will sit for hours among the awakened and take detailed notes about what is being said. Later on, the light sleeper will compile the information for use. What is the use for all of this information? Well, the awakened believe that it is just a social club to talk about their dreams. The light sleepers learn that it is for a higher purpose. Dreams have certain meanings, and the organization can both help and harm people with enough information about what effects these dreams have. Most light sleepers are content with knowing that they are knowledge collectors, but it is the next circle that truly puts this information to use.

The third circle is known as the 'dark dreamers'. If the light sleepers are the subordinates of the organization,

then the dark dreamers are their superiors. The dark dreamers were the light sleepers who showed a particular aptitude in gathering and using dream information. However, it is not only this ability but a particular mindset that allows them to advance. The dark dreamers serve the true leaders of the organization, and they need to be able to stomach the chores that their dark masters assign them (see Perilous Pursuits).

The fourth and final circle is composed of the true masters of this organization; the 'eternal slumber'. It belongs to the Nightmare Court and various dream spawn. I do not know the names of many of these fiendish masters, but my research had been proven when I followed a dark dreamer into the Nightmare Lands and saw what transpired there.

## Membership

Since every intelligent being is capable of dreaming (with the possible exception of elves), membership to La Confrérie des Rêveurs is open to anyone. While any man, woman, or monster may join, it takes certain criteria to work your way towards the innermost circle.

To be an awakened, a person need only show an interest in the organization. This person will go to one of the many headquarters that are being established in our cities and talk to the people working there. The new member will be questioned about their dreams, thoughts and feelings. After twenty minutes of this, the person will be initiated into the organization. To be an active member, they need only attend a few times a month to share their dreams and experiences.

If an awakened member shows an active interest in the organization and the

significance of dreams over time, then they will be interviewed more thoroughly. The organization will examine their skills and abilities and may offer them a more meaningful position in the organization. Most awakened will accept this new position of responsibility and become a light sleeper. They will then spend more time at the headquarters gathering, organizing, and interpreting the dreams of the others.

While the light sleepers are working on the day-to-day responsibilities and information gathering, their superiors are watching them. If a light sleeper proves to be efficient in their activities, then they will be assigned certain tasks to see if they are capable of becoming a dark dreamer. I am unsure just what the specific tasks are, since they seem to change between individuals. However, the gist of the trials seems to revolve around using this dream information for a sinister purpose. If the light sleeper proves capable of pleasing their masters, then they undergo a ritual that inducts them into the next circle.

Membership in the final circle seems to be reserved only for the creatures that live in the Nightmare Lands and haunt our dreams. I would assume that a dark dreamer that proved themselves time and again might be able to join this circle, but there is no information to accept or reject this assumption.

## Goals

There are many goals of La Confrérie des Rêveurs, but only the innermost circles know the true reasons why the organization does what it does. Most people who know of this society (including the awakened members) view



it as a social club, where members have the opportunity to get together and discuss your dreams with other people in a casual and comfortable environment. If you are having strange dreams or bad nightmares, then someone might be able to help interpret or ease the images.

However, most people don't realize that the true goal of the organization is to use these dreams to enhance the power of the dream spawn and even the Nightmare Court. The light sleepers know that they gather dreams because information is power, but they do not know that the power comes from the particular way this information is being used. The dream spawn gain power and sustenance from tormenting dreamers, and this information shows trends and patterns on how they can best abuse the dreamers. By employing their dark dreamers in the waking world, the eternal slumber can ensure that people are troubled enough during the day to have worse dreams at night. If a particular concern or fear is waxing or waning, the dark dreamer can act accordingly to provide new fodder for their masters to use.

## Headquarters

The headquarters for La Confrérie des Rêveurs can be found in most of the major cities throughout the Core, although there seems to be a higher concentration of them in Borca, Dementlieu, Lamordia, Mordent, and Richemulot. I have also seen headquarters in some of the islands that float among the mists, which worries me as to just how far the organization can reach.

It should be noted, however, that the above locations are little more than safe houses and meeting places. The main headquarters can be found in the

City of Nod within the Nightmare Lands. They have converted one of the abandoned buildings to a meeting place for the dark dreamers and their masters to meet and plot their next activity...

## Personalities of Note

### Margaret Maddigan

**Female human Ari3:** CR 3; SZ M Humanoid (5'9"); HD 3d8+3; hp 19; Init +2; Speed 30; AC 13 (touch 13, flat-footed 11); Atk +3 (1d4, MW dagger); AL LN; SV Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +4; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 12, Chr 16.

*Skills and Feats:* Bluff +7, Diplomacy +7, Gather Information +7, Innuendo +5, Knowledge (local) +6, Knowledge (nobility) +6, Perform +7, Sense Motive +5, Spot +5; Dodge, Expertise, Mobility. *Languages:* Vaasi\*, Darkonese, Elven.

*Signature Possessions:* masterwork dagger, pendant (with family emblem), potion of cure light wounds, and ring of protection +1.

Margaret Maddigan is the seventeen-year-old daughter of a wealthy merchant. Margaret has long strawberry-blonde hair and deep hazel-green eyes, but her life of luxury has left her complexion slightly pale. While thin for her height and age, she does not look ill or malnourished. In fact, it is only the deep and sombre tone of her voice that makes her petite figure seem abnormal.

**Background:** Margaret was born to a wealthy merchant and his wife. Due to a difficult labour, Margaret's mother passed away before her daughter was even a month old. Margaret's father raised her with the help of a nanny, but he has shown her much more love and



kindness than would most men in his position. Even when he would have to leave on business endeavours, he would either take her with him or make sure to arrange something special for her in his absence. He even paid for the finest tutors to teach his daughter the arts of math, business, etiquette and the fine arts.

So much doting would spoil most children, but Margaret grew up without the poor attitude that had been expected by everyone other than her father. In fact, she turned out to be quite a charming and polite young woman. Her father attributes her behaviour to learning the subtleties from all the business transactions she was around as a child. Whatever the case, Margaret is an intelligent and caring person.

It was on her seventeenth birthday that Margaret's father gave her some disturbing news. He had arranged for her to marry the son of one of the local noblemen. While the boy was handsome and bright, his manners and social skills were somewhat lacking. Even though Margaret protested, her father assured her it was for the best. The young man would be able to support her for the rest of her life. Plus, such a union of families would help a large number of people. Unable to turn her back on so many people in need, Margaret reluctantly accepted the engagement.

**Current Sketch:** Within the last two months of her engagement, Margaret has been starting to have terrible nightmares. In her dreams, she sees terrible images of her future husband transforming into a monster and terrorizing the land. Even though her father dismisses these dreams as "cold feet", the severity of the nightmares has been increasing over

time. Margaret has been losing sleep and her eating has become sporadic. The healers that examined her can find no mundane or magical reason for her to be so plagued, but her condition continued to worsen. In fact, these dreams have been starting to affect some of the housekeepers that have been near the girl.

In an attempt to cure her malady, Margaret's father has sent her to La Confrérie des Rêveurs in hopes that they can discern the significance of these horrible dreams. She has been seeing Frederick Pip, a high-ranking monk in La Confrérie des Rêveurs, but his help has been only minimal. She and her father spend close to two hours a day meeting with him, and there has been some progress. If things do not improve more rapidly, however, Margaret will bring her future husband to these sessions as well. According to Frederick, it would be best to share and discuss her fears with the person that is causing them.

### Frederick Pip

**Male human Mnk6 / Dkd3:** CR 9; SZ M Humanoid (5 ft. 10 in. tall); HD 6d8+3d6+18; hp 55; Init +3; Speed 50 ft.; AC 19 (touch 19, flat-footed 16); Atk +7/+4 melee (1d8+1, unarmed attack), +9/+4 (1d6+3/1d6+3, quarterstaff +2), +10/+7 ranged (1, MW shuriken); SA flurry of blows, lullaby (1/day), stunning attack (6/day); SQ detect thoughts (1/day), evasion, purity of body, slow fall (30 ft.), still mind, summon dream spawn (1/day); AL LE; SV Fort +8, Ref +11, Will +13; Str 13, Dex 16, Con 15, Int, 13, Wis 17, Chr 14.

*Skills and Feats:* Balance +10, Bluff +7, Diplomacy +10, Disguise +9, Escape Artist +7, Gather Information +4, Hide +6, Jump +8, Knowledge (planes) +5,

Move Silently +6, Profession (scribe) +6, Sense Motive +8, Speak Language (Onerios), Tumble +10; Alertness, Expertise, Deflect Arrows, Improved Disarm, Improved Trip, Improved Unarmed Strike, Iron Will, Skill focus (Disguise).

*Languages:* Vassi\*, Balok, Oneiros.

*Signature Possessions:* quarterstaff +2, 15 masterwork shuriken, robes of protection +2, 2 potions of cure moderate wounds, and 1 potion of sleep.

Frederick is a man in his late twenties. His hair is dark brown and cut short, which keeps it out of his pale blue eyes. He tends to favour loose fitting robes of dark blue or black. His skin is deeply tanned from his time spent outdoors, but most people do not notice the muscled arms and legs that are hidden beneath his voluminous robes.

**Background:** Frederick Pip was born and raised in Paridon, and it was there that he joined the Divinity of Humanity. Being a rather devote follower, Frederick kept his mind, body and soul pure from negative influences that would lead him astray. His training helped hone his mind and body, but his soul did not receive these benefits.

One night as he slept, a four-armed monster visited Frederick in his dreams. The nearly featureless creature spread out its large bat-like wings and lowered its flaming green eyes to his face. Frederick shuddered as he expected the fang-filled maw of the beast to tear out his throat, but the killing blow never came. Instead, the monster merely told him to seek out La Confrérie des Rêveurs. Frederick awoke from the dream bathed in sweat. When his friends went to search for him the next day, he was gone.

Frederick had left Paridon and entered the mists surrounding his homeland. He traveled for several weeks before he found a small sign outside a building in Port-A-Lucine that simply read La Confrérie des Rêveurs. Frederick entered and talked to the dark-haired woman who was running the front counter. After Frederick explained his terrible dreams for several minutes, the woman introduced him to the headquarters leader. By that evening, Frederick had been inducted into La Confrérie des Rêveurs as a light sleeper. It only took a couple of months before he had become a dark dreamer and learned the truth behind that terrible dream that night.

**Current Sketch:** Frederick has been working for Xarthna, who visited him that fateful night, ever since his initiation into La Confrérie des Rêveurs. He has been moving from city to city while looking for new supplies of fear to feed his master's great appetite. These searches have recently brought him to Nova Vaasa.

From his conversations with the local people, Frederick learned about Margaret's recent engagement and how important it was to everyone in that area. Frederick reported this information to his master even as his own plans were brewing in his head. By the end of the week, several dream spawn were plaguing the girl's dreams. Frederick started a new headquarters for La Confrérie des Rêveurs, and it was already gathering quite a crowd by the time Margaret and her father came to him for help.

Frederick has been meeting with the merchant and his daughter every day under the pretence of helping them, but help is not what he is really providing.

Instead, he is subtly feeding their fears during the day so that their dreams are all the worse at night. In fact, he has begun planting ideas in the minds of other people as well. He hopes to spread as much concern and fear as possible to keep everyone worried and frightened. Recently, he has suggested that Margaret's fiancé join the counselling in hopes of polluting the young man's mind and dreams as well.

### Xarthna

**Male ennui Sor10:** Cr 16; SZ M Outsider (6 ft. 7 in. tall); HD 8d8+10d4+36; hp 92; Init +7; Speed 30ft., fly 60 ft. (average); AC 16 (touch 13, flat-footed 13); Atk +15/+10/+5 melee (1d4+2, four claws), +17/+12/+7 melee (1d8+4, flaming long sword +2), +16/+11/+6 ranged (1d4, MW darts); SA lullaby, memory drain, spells: SQ alternate form, damage reduction 30/+3, dark vision 60 ft., detect thoughts, fear eater, invisibility; AL LE; SV Fort +11, Ref +12, Will +16; Str 15, Dex 17, Con 14, Int 14, Wis 17, Chr 19.

*Skills and Feats:* Alchemy +8, Bluff +14, Concentration +8, Craft (armour smith) +8, Craft (weapon smith) +8, Disguise +16, Hide +11, Intimidate +13, Knowledge (arcane) +10, Knowledge (planes) +10, Listen +10, Move Silently +11, Scry +8, Sense Motive +12, Spellcraft +8, Spot+10; Alertness, Craft Magic Arms and Armour, Craft Wand, Craft Wondrous Item, Flyby Attack, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Skill Focus (Disguise).

*Languages:* Onerios\*, Draconic, Infernal.

*Sorcerer Spells per Day:* 6 / 7 / 7 / 7 / 6 / 3. Base DC = 14 + spell level.

*Sorcerer Spells Known:* 0-Arcane Mark, Dancing Lights, Daze, Detect Magic, Flare, Ghost Sound, Light, Mage Hand,

Read Magic; 1<sup>st</sup>-Charm Person, Magic Missile, Shield, Sleep, Summon Monster I; 2<sup>nd</sup>-Darkness, Minor Image, Misdirection, Summon Monster II; 3<sup>rd</sup>-Lightning Bolt, Major Image, Summon Monster III; 4<sup>th</sup>-Lesser Geas, Scrying; 5<sup>th</sup>-Mind Fog.

*Signature Possessions:* flaming long sword +2, 10 masterwork darts, wand of charm person, and wand of sleep.

Xarthna is a terrifying figure to behold in his true form. He stands over six feet tall, and his leathery wings stretch out to an impressive ten-foot span. While he vaguely resembles a humanoid creature, most of his features are indistinct. His skin is a smooth and nearly featureless charcoal grey with only a white fang-filled maw and eyes of green fire disturbing this bland visage. Vicious claws that adorn his four unnaturally long arms add to the horrific view of this monster.

**Background:** Not a lot is known about Xarthna's history, and he isn't sharing many details with others. While he wasn't one of the three original founders, Xarthna has rapidly risen through the ranks of La Confrérie des Rêveurs over the past two decades. A rather ambitious ennui, Xarthna has strived long and hard to find ways to increase not only his own powers but also the powers of the organization itself.

If the rumours are correct, Xarthna was one of the first ennui to find a way to convert the captured fears of dreamers into arcane magic. The exact procedure is unconfirmed, but he has earned a great deal of respect among the eternal slumber circle for his accomplishments. Shortly after joining La Confrérie des Rêveurs, he used his

collection of dark dreamers to find him many more subjects from which to create new sources of fear. He converted this psychological energy into spells that fuelled both himself as well as his magical experiments. After a few years of this, Xarthna had gained the abilities of a sorcerer as well as created several magical weapons and tools for his minions.

**Current Sketch:** In the past year, Xarthna has focused his attention toward the domain of Nova Vaasa. Previously overlooked, this domain had a lot of untapped potential for a power-hungry ennui to exploit. It only took a couple months of searching before one of Xarthna's dark dreamers found an area of particular potential to terrorize.

It seems that the daughter of a Nova Vaasan merchant is arranged to be married to a minor nobleman's son. While this event is nothing unusual, a great number of people are relying upon the outcome to help improve their state of affairs. The merchant and many of his clients hope to gain political favour by having this nobleman on their side. As for the nobleman, he hopes to revive the state of business within his land.

Studying the situation, Xarthna designed a plot that would eventually ensnare the entire local population. He decided to torment the dreams of the merchant's daughter in hopes that her fears would slowly spread to all of the people who are counting on this marriage to better their lives. Sending both his mortal and dream spawn minions to work, Xarthna now waits to reap the benefits of his plan.

*Doctor's Log: Monday (755 BC)*

*It seems that patient number 57, Jonathon Velaquex, continues to suffer from paranoia and delusions of grandeur. It has been two weeks since he slept more than fifteen minutes, and we are concerned that this insomnia has only aggravated his condition. We will give him an increased dose of opium tincture in hopes that it will sedate him enough to keep him asleep for a few hours.*

*I will send another message to his friends after we see the effect that the sleep has upon him.*

*Dr. Richmond*

# Miles to Go Before I Sleep

## An Original Short Story

By Joseph "Bela" Zeffelmaier

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"Syyyylusssss.....heeeelllmmmeeee...saaavmmmeeee....."

Sylus Andropov woke with a start. Sweat dripped from his brow, and he wiped it away with his big, callused hand. His eyes darted around the room. Phantom images played in his mind. What was that? A hunched demon in the....no, just his nightstand. For a moment, he saw a snake slithering through the air, only to blink his eyes and find it had vanished. However, when he turned to the left, he saw it. The thing that stalked him as he slept. A huge cloaked figure with pin-point eyes. It stood by the door, glaring down at him. In one fast move, he grabbed an oil lamp and threw it hard. It shattered on what he thought was his nocturnal foe. Only then did he realize it was simply his coat stand.

The large man staggered into his washroom and splashed water on his face. Then he turned to see what his reflection would reveal. The face staring back was old, fifty-one now. His shaggy grey hair hung in clumps around his face. He reached up and rubbed his beard, the only place where his once-black hair still showed. Though older than most of the people he knew, he was still strong and healthy. A few more wrinkles, a few less black hairs, but a life spent on the sea had made him tougher than most. His skin still held a deep tan, even though he hadn't sailed the seas in several years.

His skin still damp with sweat and cold water, he walked to his window and threw it open. Despite his wretched nightmares, this sight couldn't help but bring a smile to his rugged face. His cottage was settled in the hills of Nova Vaasa, overlooking his beloved waters. The Nocturnal Sea rolled and splashed on the shore below, and the wind carried its scent. Taking a deep breath, Sylus shook the remnants of his restless sleep away. He leaned on the windowsill, letting the chill autumn wind bring him back to his senses.

It had been several months since he'd been sent home from Illhousen's Clinic for the Mentally Distressed. He'd been the captain of the Wayfarer, and they'd been hired by Dr. Gregorian Illhousen to travel to the distant Nightmare Lands. It was a sailor's myth, a

distant island where the laws of nature held no sway, from where all nightmares emanated, where terror grew straight out of the soil. Still, Sylus was confident, perhaps foolhardy, and through treacherous and forgotten mist ways, the Wayfarer found its destination. But before they could even set foot on the shores, disaster struck. A crew of undead sailors pulled themselves from the murky depths and descended upon Sylus and his crew. They suffered many losses, but the hardest to bear was a young man named Aylor Andropov. His own son had fallen to the claws of the monsters, and ever since, his memory of what occurred in the Nightmare Lands was hazy.

When he'd returned to Nova Vaasa with Gregorian and his shattered crew, he found himself beset with horrible dreams. Each night, he awoke screaming his dead son's name. From dusk to sunrise, his mind was flooded with horrible and lurid images of the Nightmare Lands. Finally, he committed himself to the clinic of Dr. Illhousen. There, the good doctor had discovered the truth. Sylus had attracted the attention of the lunatic Lords of the Nightmare Lands. For the crime of aiding Illhousen, the Dark Forces there had punished Sylus by torturing his mind. Fortunately, Dr. Illhousen brought in some allies, and together they left their physical forms and ventured into the Nightmare Land. Traveling through Sylus' memories, they faced the Nightmare Court's minions and drove them from the Captain's mind. Since that horrible night months ago, Sylus had found a measure of peace in his life, and retired from a life spent on the sea.

Still, the strong man couldn't tear himself from the familiar waves entirely. He'd settled in the hills that stared down on the sea, and every morning sat on his porch, smoked a pipe, and watched the waves. It was a happy ritual for him, one that always set his mind at ease. He hoped this morning would be no different. It had been a long time since he'd had a nightmare, but in the past week, he'd had three. Each one was different, but carried a familiar feel. He found himself in a land with no sun, just a strange red sky. He was in the ruins of a building, a clinic, and he was fairly certain he knew what clinic it was. Dead bodies had been pinned to the walls by planks of wood. Lightning erupted from the earth and raced into the sky. The howls of madmen filled the air. Everywhere Sylus looked, he only caught glimpses of people running from shadow to shadow. And once, just once, he'd seen the devil himself, a tall man in tattered robes darker than the depths of the seas. He was at the edge of his sight, in a dark corridor of the ruined clinic. Sylus had cut his way through seemingly endless cobwebs, and there was the Cloaked Man. Sylus couldn't see his face, but two blazing yet cold eyes peered beneath the hood. A swarm of spiders crawled over the robes, in and out of them, and their numbers seemed



infinite. Sylus stood paralyzed as the Cloaked Man reached out, revealing a skeletal hand. Arachnids large and small crept out of his sleeve and leapt towards Sylus' face. He woke up screaming, hearing the words in his mind. Words he heard every time he finally pulled himself into consciousness, when the nightmare could no longer hold him.

“Syyyylusssss.....heeeelllmmmeeee...saaavmmeeeeeee.....”

Rubbing his eyes, Sylus leaned back in his rocking chair. He was a legend among mariners, the only man to ever sail to the Nightmare Lands and live to tell the tale. But it was clear to him he hadn't escaped entirely unscathed. So he tried to lose himself in familiarity. Lighting his pipe, he drew a deep breath of the smoke and let it swirl in his mouth. Blowing it past his thick beard, he tried to clear his mind. He listened to the sweet song of sea birds. He fell into the soothing sway of his rocking chair. And as he had a thousand times before, he let his eyes take in the Nocturnal Sea. He was old, and not a man of books, but he was far from stupid. He knew quite well that these were more than dreams, but he hadn't decided what to do about them. Perhaps it was time to track down his old friend Gregorian.

It was still early and the mist flowed over the waters below. He didn't see any ships heading out for an early catch of fish just yet, but it was only a matter of time. Though he'd vowed to stay on land until the end of his days, he still enjoyed watching the great vessels. What he saw this morning wasn't a great vessel. It was a tiny thing pushing through the morning mist...so small, in fact, that Sylus had to squint to see it. And Capt. Sylus Andropov had perfect vision. In the hazy fog, he couldn't make out just what it was at first. He thought it was perhaps a large piece of flotsam. Spurred on by instinct, Sylus went inside and got his old spyglass. Placing it to his eye, he managed to spot the thing just as it approached the distant shore.

It was a raft, and a small one at that. Sylus couldn't imagine such a tiny and fragile thing surviving the choppy waters, and yet somehow it had. It carried on it a single passenger. The man was cloaked in the strangest of fabrics, a cloth that seemed to shimmer in the light. That was the only feature he could discern of the strange figure. The man didn't even make any attempt to pull his raft ashore. Once the rickety things were close to dry land, the man simply leapt into the air and landed on the shore without missing a beat. The raft heaved and jumped in the waters, and eventually drifted back out to sea. Sylus followed the strange man as long as he could. The man walked from the

shoreline and headed straight inland. He moved quickly and even the sharp-eyed Captain had difficulty keeping track of him. Before to long, the stranger had moved into the woodlands not far from the sea. From there, Sylus lost sight of him.

He lowered his spyglass. Sylus Andropov had seen many things in his time...strange things that would chill the blood of a Falkovnian soldier. But something about the stranger from the sea raised the hackles on his neck. He couldn't shake the feeling that he'd see this stranger eventually, look him in the eyes. "Wonder what I'll see." he mutters to no one at all.

After he'd eaten his breakfast and written a few lines in his journal, he donned his long coat. There was still a bit of warmth in the autumn air, but the breeze of the sea had a way of cutting through that. Tying his long hair into a ponytail, he walked to his small stable. There, he found his grey stallion awaiting him. It only took Sylus a few minutes to saddle the animal, and soon he was on his way to Illhousen's Clinic. It had been a long time since he'd seen the hospice, or spoken to its owner. The place held too many haunting memories for him. It was a dark time in his past, one that he wanted to put far behind him. He'd actively tried to push thoughts of the Clinic from his mind. It wasn't that he bore any ill will towards the Doctor. Indeed, he considered Gregorian a true friend, and owed him a great debt. But a part of him, a large part, feared that if he grew too close to the man, or spent any more time in the Clinic, that he'd draw the attention of the Nightmare Court again. He'd nearly lost his mind tangling with the twisted overlords of the Nightmare Lands, being used as a pawn by enemies he couldn't fight or even comprehend.

But it hadn't helped. Ever since his release, he'd avoided both Illhousen and the Clinic like the plague. And now, the nightmares were back. The Nightmare Court had found him again. He owed it to the Doctor to investigate. If the fiends had tracked him down, then it stood to reason that Gregorian wasn't safe either. The whole wretched scenario was beginning again, and Sylus had been pulled out of his life of peace. In his youth, he was a fine warrior, a sailor gifted with the cutlass. In those lawless days, he yearned for excitement, for battle. He still bore the scars from the time when he was a pirate and a raider. The love of a kind woman and the birth of their son had changed him. He tore down his Jolly Roger and hoisted the flag of a Merchant Captain. Those days were long past. He'd simply wanted to retire in a quiet place and spend the rest of his days free of worry. Clearly, the sins of his past weren't ready to let him go just yet.

Several hours passed before Sylus reached his destination. He hadn't pushed his horse too hard, as he knew he'd reach the Clinic by mid-afternoon. And indeed, the sun was still in the sky when he arrived at Illhousen's Clinic for the Mentally Distressed. Or at least, where it should have been. Sylus' eyes grew wide as he rode over the hill, and saw nothing. Where once stood the proud medical complex, only a vast empty space remained. Sparse grass grew there, as though the earth had been burned a while ago, and nature was finally repairing the damage. But nothing remained of Illhousen's Clinic. It was as if it had been wiped clean off the land. Sylus spurred his horse down the hill, and saw that several men stood about the blighted area, measuring and shouting to each other.

One of them waved to Sylus, and walked over to meet him. The Captain dismounted and greeted him cordially. "Am I horribly lost, sir? Was this not where Illhousen's Clinic for the Mentally Distressed once stood?"

The man scratched his head. "Not for over half a year, sir."

Sylus gaped. "What...what happened to it?"

"No idea. Guess it just up and vanished. Strangest thing. One day it was there, then the next...gone. No one seems to have the first clue as to where it went. But tell ya true...for something like that to happen, it's gotta be witchcraft. Only explanation I can think of. Bet it was some of them stinkin' mystics from Hazlan. Been seein' their sinful kind around these parts too often."

Sylus suspected that wasn't the case at all, but kept his opinion to himself. "And that's that? What of the people inside? The staff, the patients?"

"Gone. No one found hide nor hair of 'em. Like I told ya...witchcraft."

Sylus leaned against his horse. Over six months. His friend had disappeared so long ago, and he'd never noticed. He lived less than a day's ride from the Clinic, and made no attempt to visit. His own fear had kept him away. Only when he felt he needed the Doctor's help did he return. Too little, too late.

Snapping out of his reverie, he noticed several of the men laying down heavy

beams over the now-abandoned site. One of them consulted a large drawing. “What...what are you people doing?”

“What they pay us for. Laying down the foundation for the...uh...the...Kalin! What’re they calling this thing now?”

The man with the schematic yelled without looking up. “The Egertus Asylum!”

“Right, right. The Egertus Asylum. Y’ask me, they’re loons themselves if they want to build the new madhouse on the same place the old one disappeared. But the money’s been paid, and some of the staff’s been hired. So we build ‘til they say otherwise.”

This entire thing sounded odd. “The name. Who’s in charge of this new place? Is it Gregorian Illhousen?”

“Nah, that’s not it. It’s ah...ah...” The worker checked a bill of sale. “Here we go. Dr. Darres Arkoth. New to these parts.”

“I want to speak to him.”

“Good luck. He’s hardly ever here. I hear he’s got a place in Briarton, just down the way, but that’s about all I know. You’d think he’d want to be around more, but I guess he trusts our reputation.”

“Briarton, you say?” The worker nodded. With one swift move, Sylus leapt onto his horse and rode off.

This time, Sylus rode at a much less leisurely pace. He’d hoped to find answers at Illhousen’s Clinic, but instead found a myriad of questions at the future site of the Egertus Asylum. Who was this Dr. Arkoth? What was his interest in the cursed land where the Clinic once stood? Sylus supposed it could be some bizarre coincidence, but he seriously doubted it. Luckily, he was no stranger to Briarton. It was a tiny fishing village on the coast, not too far from his home. He couldn’t imagine why a doctor would want to settle in such a small, rough hamlet. But if the captain’s luck held, then an old friend would still be residing in Briarton.

# Refuge of the Mad

## Hospices and Sanatoriums of the Core

By Dmitri Zorin

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The nature of the Realms of Dread implies that now and again those who delve too deeply into the mysteries and secrets that permeate its countries may witness events or phenomena that send the mortal mind spinning into a vortex of insanity and madness. It should thus come as no surprise that, throughout the years, a number of people took it upon themselves to cure and remedy such mental disorders in their fellow countrymen, and to profit in the process.

### Barovia, Teufeldorf

#### Hospice of Three Thousand Wounds

Situated in the mountains northeast of Teufeldorf, this institution is the only one that sports competent personnel in all of Barovia. A considerable number of Hala's clerics and a number of gundarakites have taken on the responsibility of tending to those in need at the Hospice. The Hospice is itself a group of buildings made from dark, scantily worked timber and thatched roofs, occupying a picturesque glen of large conifer trees, fifty yards from a small mountain lake with crystal-clean water. The complex consists of a shrine to Hala, a two-storied hospice, personnel lodgings for the staff and several storage buildings. The site, aside from being revealed to be somehow sacred to Hala, was noted to be affecting the patients in a calming way, though whether it is a result of Hala's blessing or the simple effect of the beauty of the surrounding nature remains unknown.

The hospice is not devoted to tending exclusively for those suffering from mental distress. Barovia is in constant dire need of competent healers and medics, so clerics of Hala here gladly accept everyone in need of healing. Those suffering from light physical injuries are tended to by minor clerics with gundarakites from Teufeldorf assisting, while those who require an ambulatory care (like madmen) are taken into custody on the second floor of the hospice. In no way do any of the staff force any restriction of movement upon the hospice's visitors (lunatics and madmen being the only exception, of course - but they've always been accompanied by their relatives so far), and those few of pestilence-ridden patients who happened to stumble upon this oasis of tender care and understanding have preferred to move along. However, the faithful working at the office return to the topic of building the 'lepers' house' now and again, and the issue still stands.

Devotees of Hala do not need to pay for care they receive at the hospice, while others are expected to make some form of donation at the shrine, thus thanking Hala herself for help provided. There is no fixed fee for non-worshippers as clerics fully understand the diversity of wealth existing in those who may be seeking their help. All money raised this way goes towards buying food and clothing for patients and improving the general lifestyle.

The staff itself consists of Sister Belegana Bogush (human gundarakite female Clr7 of Hala), Clr5 (2), Clr3 (2), Clr1 (5), Exp3 (1), Exp1 (1), Com1 (7) (Experts and Commoners being volunteers from Teufeldorf).

Although the hospice is not a sanatorium per se, the very care and attention of the staff allows for a +2 morale bonus to all recovery checks made in its care. Note, however, that the hospice doesn't employ any hypnotists or any of the new methods of tending insanity, so the patients can still make only one recovery check per month. However, the tranquility of the place also helps to facilitate the healing; the DC of recovery check is lowered by 1 every month and the morale bonus increases by +1 for every month after the first spent in the hospice. Adding the fact that the patients are not subjected to dubious science experiments and are treated with genuine care, one can easily understand why several adventurer parties have left their mentally unstable comrades here throughout the years.

## **Dementlieu, Port-a-Lucine**

**Notre Mare De la Pifie, Sanatorium for Mentally Unstable.**

Subservient to the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Dementlieu, this sanatorium is but a wing of the faculty building. Richly decorated with swirling mist motifs and various saints of the Church of Ezra, it houses a chapel to the Goddess of Mists, which is supposed to give the patients the succour and support required to recover from their plight. The sanatorium can house up to 60 patients at a time, being one of the largest establishments of its kind in the Core.

Students of the University are taken here to see for themselves the

subjects of lectures or as a kind of practical studies and laboratory works, practicing different techniques in tending mental disorder as well as examining the bodies of those unfortunates who die in their care in operational theatre. The populace of Port-a-Lucine in general and Masters of the University in particular consider this a beneficent practice, since "you can't do them any more harm anyway". Unfortunately, such a cavalier attitude results in the chance of stumbling on an incompetent alienist and having one's mind crawl even further into the cold and welcoming darkness of insanity.

The number of tutors and students attending to the patients is far too large to detail completely, but a small list follows: Dean Serge Dubois (male human dementlieuse Wiz5/Clr7 of Ezra), Professor Jean Remy Bernard (male human dementlieuse Clr5/Msm3), Wiz5/Brd1/Mps1 (1), Brd2/Wiz2 (6), Clr 4 (3), Clr 1 (6).

The game mechanics for recovery checks described on p. 76 of Ravenloft Core Rulebook remain unchanged. The advantage (as told by many of patients' relatives) is that one doesn't need to pay anything for the treatment – the state cares for the mental state of its subjects, as Lord-Governor and other officials like to mention.

## **Kartakass, Harmonia**

**Meistersinger's House of Care.**

After the unfortunate fire in 738 BC, when the previous house of misery burnt down, maladies and a fierce climate started taking their toll on the fair folk of Harmonia. In response, the construction of the Meistersinger's House of Care was ordered. The House, as it is known among Kartakans, was built on the site of fire, but since only the



orphans, diseased and insane were to dwell inside, none of the authority figures took any exception.

The building itself sports meagre architecture; it is a two-storey house built of wooden planks with slated roof and lacking any artistic extras. A wooden sign near the low field-stone wall names the establishment as “Meistersinger’s House of Care”. The lower floor is divided between a dozen rooms for sick and injured while the upper floor (sporting iron bars on windows as well as in the corridor leading to the stairway) is given over to the few madmen who happen to dwell here. Attendants and volunteers live in the town, so patients are left to their own devices in the night time.

Unfortunately, the house seems to be haunted by at least one spirit, the ghost of an orphan who died in the fire more than twenty years ago. The phantom’s appearances provoke fits of rage and madness from the inhabitants of the second floor and delirium from those who sleep on the first one. However, no one has been killed or even injured by the spirit yet. The staff still has to witness the apparition, so no action has been taken to date.

Since the laws of Harmonia require all lepers and plague-ridden to be driven from the city, such people cannot ask for help in The House, though they are always rejected. Other citizens of Harmonia can be taken into care for a fee of 5 canticles (cp) per week of care, those who can claim Kartakass to be their homeland must submit 5 dirges (sp) per week of care, while outsiders (i.e., those from other countries) should pay as much as 5 ballads (gp) per week. Orphans are allowed to stay in the House without charge, as homage to those who died in the fire,

The attendants are few, numbering the only practicing doctor from Harmonia, who is a Kartakan expatriate from Gundarak. Dr. Voltar (kartakan male Exp4), and several of his assistants: Exp2 (1), Exp1 (2) tend to patients. The number of volunteers changes now and again, with people coming and going as they see fit. Being mere municipal employees, attendants care little for the well-being of their patients, focusing on getting paid on time and ensuring that one stayed in the hospice for as long as possible.

Natural healing occurs at a normal rate and any person in mortal danger is tended immediately. After immediate care, patients are left to fight their illness themselves, including mental illnesses. With the intrusions of the restless dead, a morale penalty of -1 applies to all recovery checks, with the penalty increasing by -1 every month as the spirit pays more and more attention to the person in question. If the spirit is put to rest the checks should be made with no modifiers.

## Lamordia

### Dr. Shpee’s Asylum

In the south-western part of Lamordia, on a rocky cliff, surrounded with a pristine pine forest, stands a white-washed brick abode consisting of a tower and a two-storey main building. Once used as a lighthouse, it now houses Dr. Shpee, his attendants and his subjects, patients of the Asylum. The building itself was repaired a decade ago with new habitants moving in. Before that time it has been standing vacant for about half a century.

The exact details of why it remained uninhabited and who lived in it before remains a mystery that feeds local legends. Most such stories elaborate on

the ghost stories in this way or another and mention an untimely demise of lighthouse warden's wife and child during a savage storm, his following descent into madness, bizarre and disturbing experiments and, finally, suicide.

The Asylum provides apartments for 16 patients, a surprisingly low number, considering the size of the building. Nevertheless, many patients seem not to linger in here, receiving proper treatment and complete riddance of any sign of insanity. The fee for care is 3 gluttons (gp) per week. People of note, such as adventurers, might negotiate a lower rate, but people like that have never applied for such care before. A small yet beautiful park stands nearby helping to improve the rate of healing with its picturesque view. Although Dr. Shpee is not a hypnotist himself he does understand the awards of this advanced technique and employs two such specialists. So the general mechanics for recovery checks remains unchanged from what is presented on p. 76 of RL 3E Core Rulebook.

The sanatorium staff consists of 6 people: Dr. Shpee (human falkovnian male Wiz7), Wiz5/Msm1 (2), Wiz3 (1), Ftr2 (2).

The dread possibility in this case might be that Dr. Shpee is in truth Dr. Vjorn Horstman, Minister of Science of Falkovnia himself, working covertly in this removed base of operations on Falkovnian uber-soldiers breeding programs known as project Sandman. (See Quoth the Raven #4 for further details). The restoration of patients to their former mental health in this case is nothing more than a charade, with Vjorn's attendants simply pitting unfortunate patients (those who fail to recover within two months or whose

funds are low before that time) against psychological testing and chemical therapy in hopes of gaining a relatively sane and stable subject. Those who survive are smuggled back to Falkovnia. The reason behind this removal of research grounds abroad is the recent magical cataclysm that recently destroyed castle Falkenstein, the previous base of operations. Not wanting to attract undue attention to the research and upset at the prospect of starting all over again, Vjorn Horstman has taken personal interest in the outcome of the research project.

## Nova Vaasa, Egertus

### Dr. Illhousen's Clinic for Mentally Distressed

Once the most famous and respected clinic throughout the Core, the first sanatorium to introduce progressive hypnotic treatment of patients, the Clinic suffered a major setback from which it was unable to recover. One misty night a good half of the Clinic's building, with staff and patients along with Dr. Illhousen himself, simply vanished. Rumours of nightmarish creatures and fiends that prowled the wing that had vanished were found insubstantial and the case was closed so as to pacify the folk.

In the years that followed Dr. Illhousen's disappearance, Dr. Eberabacht's Sanatorium in Kantora raised in status (see below), but couldn't eclipse the clinic in Egertus. At roughly the same time, Dr. Illhousen's nephew, one Amadeus Emelring, returned to Nova Vaasa from his studies at Pont-a-Lucine University, and took over his uncle's cause. He quickly gained confidence among Dr. Illhousen's assistants because of his sharp mind and uncanny ability to cooperate with

people. Soon he was chosen the new caretaker of the Clinic for Mentally Distressed. Firm in his intentions to live up to his uncle's good name, Amadeus chose to keep the old name of the establishment. Now the two clinics can boast roughly the same number of patients and apply essentially the same methods (see below). Surprisingly, the state of the affairs didn't provoke a healthy competition; instead the staff tries to save as much funds as they can on their patients.

The Clinic's main building is two-storied, made of mortared stone decorated with bas-reliefs of various mystical beasts and gargoyles with two-sided slated roof. The hospital houses rooms for preliminary examinations, a mess hall, attendance rooms, storage and kitchen as well as doctor's office and various staff offices. Both the northern and southern wings have one storey each, 20 rooms for patients in every wing, along with guard stations and restrooms.

Eager as he is to try innovative techniques in tending mental illness, like mind-affecting concoctions and ethers to surgical intrusion, Amadeus understands the implications of such actions and the side-effects that will inevitably affect his patients' health. So for now he reserves to the proved method of hypnosis only.

Fortunately, his decision only benefits the patients, since, despite the fact that the staff takes no particular pleasure in doing their work, it is done honestly. The fee is 2 bridles (gp) per day (taxes in the capital are the highest in the country, hence the price) and the mechanics for recovery checks remain unchanged from what is presented on p. 76 of RL 3E Core Rulebook. This is one honest-working clinic, if a bit costly. The situation may well change,

considering Dr. Emerling's fascination with brand new methods. If this is the case, the clinic may quickly become a den of vile experiments on human (and humanoid) psyche, just like Kantora Sanatorium (see below).

The staff: Dr. Emerling (human nova vaasan male Sor5/Sch2/Mps1), Wiz3 (2), Wiz1 (3), Exp4 (1), Exp3 (3), Exp1 (10), War1 (8).

## Nova Vaasa, Kantora

### Dr. Odziemkowski's Sanatorium

Built of grey stones on the outskirts of Kantora, this clinic is second only to the infamous Clinic in Egertus. The building itself is octangular in shape and has three stories. The doors are made of wood reinforced with iron bands and all windows are covered with iron bars, offices included. The roof is tiled, sporting stone gargoyles near the rain-pipes, the chimney pipe always sending puffs of smoke into the sky of Kantora.

Inside, the building sports 24 separate singular cells on the first two floors, with fire-hoses at hand in case strong spray of cool water is needed to calm the patients. The third floor is devoted to various offices of Dr. Odziemkowski and his assistants, with furniture including at least modest sleeping cots for the frequent cases when staff has to stay in Sanatorium overnight.

The Sanatorium was established by one of Dr. Illhousen's early students and has since languished in the shadow of its eastern neighbour. With the mysterious disappearance of Dr. Illhousen and a significant part of his clinic's staff and patients, Dr. Odziemkowski's practice quickly started to attract more and more clients. Since the main aim of Dr. Odziemkowski is to keep the amount of expenditure low,

while quickening and making cheaper the recovery process, he constantly seeks new ways of tending to mental illness. From exotic conscience-altering drugs brought all the way from Rokushima-Taiyoo and Sri-Raji, to surgical interference with the works of brain and heart the good doctor searches for a new, cheaper method of curing dementia. He still practices more mundane methods, such as hypnosis, so the chance of healthy recovery remains.

The fee for tending is 1 bridle (gp) per day. No discounts. If the patient is still in care but the money didn't arrive in time, poor soul is automatically assigned to "special treatment" (see below).

The 1d8-5 bonus stated in RL 3E Core Rulebook p.76 remains the same, along with the number of recovery checks (4 per month) and success results being 1 point restored to the decreased ability score (of player's choice) and the reduction of further recovery checks' DC by 1. However, if the patient remains in the custody of Dr. Odziemkowski for more than 1 month, he may attract an unwanted attention (subject to DM's judgment) and be assigned a course of "special treatment". If latter is the case, the patient is subjected to a number of experiments of dubious medical value and may as well be on the road to his grave without much outside interference: The recovery check bonus drops to 1d8-7 and the character starts suffering 1d6 points of temporary Strength, Dexterity and Constitution damage per week due to severe damage of internal organs as a result of doctor's experiments.

No one has stopped the doctor so far and even if the fact of his experiments is brought to the surface, it's doubtful that he'll be judged and

found guilty, since the Sanatorium pays taxes and keeps insane locked and safe in its walls, and as far as Prince Othmar is concerned, that's the idea.

The staff numbers Dr. Odziemkowski (human nova vaasan male Brd5/Msm3), Sor5/Msm1 (1), Sor4 (2), Sor1, Exp4 (1), Exp3 (2), Exp1 (3), War 1 (4). All of the employees live in Kantora, with doctor himself sometimes spending nights in his office in Sanatorium. Warriors offer the brute force necessary to sometimes quell the breaks of violence among the patients. At all time, be it day or night, two of them are inside the Sanatorium.

A story of note happened in the walls of Sanatorium some time ago. When the doctor had begun his new methods of mental healing several of the patients were particularly unstable. As the experiments neared their logical conclusion (i.e., subject's death, which is to say was a recovery from madness from Dr. Odziemkowski's point of view), one of the patients, a devotee of Ezra from Nevuchar Springs, refused to leave with his body's death. His spirit remained in the secret rooms and corridors of Sanatorium, haunting for several years. He manifested on the eve of his death and the day of first moon in January, a holiday of remembrance in Necropolis. This haunting is the reason why, despite his early forties, Dr. Odziemkowski's hair is completely white.

The haunting may continue, if it suits campaign's ends. If the PC is subjected to the experiments, the Doctor might reconsider the practice if the party helps investigate the haunting and put the spirit to rest. A fact that doctor wants the truth of his work to be kept in private at all costs should be taken into consideration.

# The Hoffmann Hospital

## A Nightmarish Sinkhole of Evil

By Joseph (Bela) Zeffelmaier

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[NOTE-This entry uses the format for Sinkholes of Evil as described in the Ravenloft Dungeon Master's Guide]

**Sinkhole Rank:** 3

**Taint:** Fear (Agony, Despair)

**Description:** The land of Lamordia is well known for its scientific advancements. The chilling realm prizes cold logic over foolish superstition. So much so, in fact, that magic is almost unheard of there. Throughout most of the Realms of Dread, the Hospices of Hala provide healing for wayward souls but Lamordia's religious beliefs are few and far between. Most Lamordians do not believe in any gods, and those that do, believe that the deities must have abandoned the world of man centuries ago. Hala's witches and warlocks are difficult to find there, where their preaching goes largely unheard.

Still, Lamordians require medical attention just like any other who live and breathe. For those who are ill or require the most advance treatments and surgeries, the Hoffmann Hospital awaits. Built in 695 BC, shortly after a conflict with Falkovnia, the Hospital was originally intended for those wounded in the bloody battle against Vlad Drakov. However, once the non-aggression pact between the two lands was forged, the Hospital opened its doors to any in need. The waiting list is long, but those willing to pay the high prices gain access to the most cutting-edge treatments in all the

realms.

The Hoffmann Hospital is a large, looming structure of black stone. It seems more like a small castle than a house of healing. Two large metal spires jut from the rooftop, and the sturdy walls can withstand even the fiercest of snowstorms. The Hospital's courtyard is surrounded by wrought iron gates and a cobblestone path leads to the massive oak doors. Inside, those in need must register at the front desk before they are led into the Hospital proper. The Hospital has the capacity to hold fifty patients at a time, though it is almost never that full. Some of the rooms are padded, for those in need of psychiatric care, but most are well-furnished and warm, for those who need time to recover from illness or injury. In the center of the complex is a large surgical room with rows of seats above it. There, some of the finest physicians are trained in the art of medicine, watching Dr. Berthold Hoffmann perform his groundbreaking techniques.

**Historical Notes:** The public is well aware of the Hospital's rise from military refuge to state-of-the-art clinic, yet no one alive today knows of its darker history. The ground on which the Hoffmann Hospital stands remains tainted from horrors committed many



years ago.

It was a time before Lamordia first appeared in the Mists. In the dark and frozen lands, a murderous cult had claimed the area as their own. The cultists were particularly vile, infamous for defiling their victims before sacrificing them. They worshipped no gods known to man, but a fiendish denizen of the Pit they called Malgorboth. The creature was a patron of fear and terror, and demanded that its sacrifices be overwrought with horror before it would accept them. For a decade, the cultists captured the most innocent and pure victims within their reach, then spent weeks “preparing” them for the sacrifice. It was their hope to summon a servant of their dark master, a being of pure malevolence that they would unleash upon the “faithless.” One dark night, their entreaties were answered.

They had abducted twenty young men and women who were taking their vows to enter the local clergy. The cultists slowly tortured them over the course of a week, finally sacrificing them one at a time, forcing the others to witness as each one fell under the blade. Malgorboth was apparently pleased and a hideous monster was sent to the mad cultists. A pulsating mass of rank and slimy flesh, the beast devoured the bodies of the victims while the heretics went to bended knee, praising the name of Malgorboth. But their worship was short lived. The local clergy had finally tracked them down, and descended upon the cultists with righteous fury. Caught completely unawares, the heathens were cut down quickly. Dealing with Malgorboth’s emissary was another matter. Having exhausted most of their might, the clerics were not equipped to slay the monster. With the last of their

power, they drove the thing into a cave as the High Priest used his magic to seal it there.

The battle and the cultists were forgotten in the years that followed and by the time the land was pulled into Ravenloft, it was as if the cult’s horror had never happened. Malgorboth’s creature lay sealed in the earth, eventually slipping into hibernation. The foul creature subsisted on fear, and the Realms of Dread supplied it with enough to survive, but not enough to grow in strength. Centuries passed, and in 695 BC, the soldiers of Falkovnia stormed onto Lamordian soil. While Drakov’s men weren’t prepared for the fierce winter and Lamordian firearms, they still did their damage. A military doctor named Baltus Hoftmann built a field hospital for Lamordia’s wounded on the very ground above the sleeping monster. Already tainted by long-forgotten sins, the evil soil soaked up the pain and suffering of the dying soldiers. Beneath the clinic’s floorboards, something evil slowly stirred.

In 696, Baron Von Aubrecker forged a treaty with Falkovnia, and rewarded Hoftmann’s bravery by commissioning an advanced medical facility where the field hospital was built. After a year of hard work, The Hoftmann Hospital opened its doors. Settled in the far South of Lamordia, the Hospital has tended to the unhealthy of Dementlieu and Falkovnia, as well as Lamordia’s own. However, in recent years, it has become more difficult to get in. It is now considered by many to be the most advanced clinic in all the Realms, and it trains the most brilliant doctors from numerous domains. As such, only the wealthy can afford to get treatment there, and the staff tends to specialize in more severe injuries and



illnesses. Still, the Hospital does good business under the direction of Dr. Berthold Hoftmann, the current Head Administrator and grandson of Dr. Baltus Hoftmann.

But all is not well in the Hoftmann Hospital. A dark, spiritual malaise has settled in its halls. Patients have been becoming aggressive or fearful, often screaming out in their sleep. Night terrors have become more and more common, with patients enacting their terror while still unconscious. Dr. Hoftmann has tried to keep these events under wraps, and so far has done his job well. Most of the maddening occurrences happen in the dead of night, when his students are not around. He has sworn the staff to silence, and has increased his supply of sleep-inducing drugs. Hoftmann knows something is very wrong at his beloved Hospital, but cannot fathom what. Like most Lamordians, he refuses to believe in the supernatural, and as of yet has seen nothing to shake him of his disbelief. Clinging tightly to his logical mind and medical training, he is certain that it must be some new virus or some sort of psychological illness that spreads through the air.

Within the cellars of the Hospital, a foul creature is slowly shaking off its many years of rest. Sensing the sick and dying above it, the beast is using its ability to manipulate the emotions of others to produce the fear it needs to rebuild its strength. Currently, it is still weak, but far from stupid. It has been attacking the patients in their sleep to produce the most amount of fear without drawing undue attention to itself, for it has no desire to face off against a battalion of priests again. However, it has chosen a pawn that it is subtly prodding. When it has regained its full

strength, it will need him to shatter its prison. Then, the true terror can begin.

**Special Effects:** All Fear, Horror, and Madness checks made in the Hoftmann Hospital suffer a -2 penalty.

**Residents:** Dr. Berthold Hoftmann, Head Administrator; A brilliant man in his mid-thirties, the events over the past few months have taken their toll on him. He was once a handsome, well-spoken, compassionate man. Many the young women hoped to make him her husband. Now, his eyes are red, his skin sallow, and his face dotted with a patchy beard. Many fear he's losing himself to the stress of his work. He is considered to be one of the most brilliant men living in Lamordia, and his advances of medical science are quickly gaining him fame. But he is stymied by the sudden sleep-induced madness claiming his Hospital. He fears it may be the same disorder that struck the Von Aubrecker family, the strange, rampaging insanity that poisons that line. While he has yet to suffer from the nightmares, his mind is not unscathed. He has begun pioneering some radical techniques in his attempt to find a cure to the disease. He has ventured into the beginnings of brain surgery, and so far, has met with all failures and no successes. Still, he learns from each mistake, and presses onward. His laboratory is filled with bizarre equipment of his own making, and his private journals are filled with theories that many would consider the ravings of a lunatic.

Otto Krieger, the caretaker; A tall and surly man in his fifties, Otto was an athletic lad who'd dreamed of joining the personal guard of the von Aubrecker family. He came from a destitute family and believed indenturing himself to the

wealthy Baron would bring him the riches he'd always desired. However, a crippling injury involving an overturned carriage cut that dream short. Though he did not lose his legs, the bones never healed properly and left him with a limp he still carries today. He still burns with resentment over what might have been, and growls at every wealthy noble who seeks aid at the hospital. Still driven by greed, he's gotten into an arrangement with Victor Mordenheim. The famous madman pays good money for the corpses that Krieger supplies him with, though he wastes most of it on alcohol. Otto has also begun thieving from Dr. Hoftmann, stealing some of his private inventions and notes, and selling them to Mordenheim. Good fortune has never graced Otto, and he was recently evicted from his small flat in Neufurchtenburg. Since then, he's taken up residence in the Hospital's cellars, unknown to the rest of the staff. There, the Lurker has begun whispering to him in his dreams, promising him the wealth and power he believes he deserves. When the Lurker is back to full strength, it will have Otto

break down the enchanted wall holding it prisoner. Little does the caretaker suspected that he will be its first victim.

The Lurker, which is the name Otto Krieger has given the creature living in the bowels of the Hospital. In truth, it is a Greater Fihyr (See Monster Manual II), a grotesque aberration that feeds on negative emotion. The Lurker resembles a floating brain, perhaps 7 feet in diameter. Its body is covered with a thin, slimy skin. Numerous eyes and mouths dot its surface, making the creature seem almost unreal in its hideousness. It moves along the ground on a series of tentacles, all of various sizes. Currently, it resides in a walled-up antechamber in the Hospital's cellar, and not even Otto Krieger is aware the chamber even exists. Ancient runes keep the Lurker inside, though if these runes were discovered and destroyed from the outside, the Lurker would be free. So the beast bides its time, using its *emotion control* abilities to torment the patients above it. Their nightmares strengthen the fihyr and soon it will be ready to stalk the world above again.

# Walking after Midnight

## Sleepwalking in Ravenloft

In the dead of night the world of man falls deathly still. The burden of daily life leaves the mind and body exhausted, driving the living to the sweet succour of slumber. In the state of sleep, the mind wanders off to the world of dreams as the body lies still. Yet in the lands of the mists, all is not as it was meant to be, for even as the conscious mind lies dormant, the body stirs. Idle hands are the devil's workshop, and who can say what fiends prowl the night.

Sleepwalking, or autonomic activity, as it is known to the alienists of the core, is a rare but well known phenomenon. Though asleep and unconscious, the sleepwalker rises from his bed and moves about, as if awake. In this state of unconsciousness, the sleeper may enact any range of strange activity, from wandering miles from home, to even performing daily rituals such as shaving or preparing meals. Learned scholars can relate tales of even stranger activity, as sleepwalkers act out their hidden desires, even attacking loved ones in their state of unconsciousness. There is precious little help for those who are afflicted with this strange dementia, for few understand the enigma that is sleepwalking.

### Restless Slumber

Though rare, sleepwalking is a well known phenomenon, for very rare is the culture that has not been confronted with this puzzle. There are many varied theories to the cause of this

strange behaviour, though no single theory suffices to explain the mystery.

**Mild Dementia:** Sleepwalking is often viewed by alienists as a minor form of dementia. Indeed, there is much evidence to support this theory, that sleepwalking is a form of mental release. In times of great stress and turmoil, the unconscious mind may actually take over for the conscious mind, attempting to complete tasks that the waking mind is unable or unwilling to accomplish.

In times of great stress and anxiety, the sleepwalker's subconscious mind attempts to take on tasks to relieve the workload of the conscious mind. The walker might dress, prepare meals, or travel to places of work. Unfortunately these attempts are usually in vain, since the subconscious mind lacks the skills and attention that is critical to so many tasks. As well, those who suffer from reoccurring nightmares often suffer from sporadic episodes of sleepwalking. As their dreaming minds suffer from night terrors, their body physically acts out the terror, vainly searching for some lost place or object, striking at imaginary monsters, or in some extreme cases conversing with phantasms.

The psychological community of Ravenloft has precious few insights into the treatment of this disease. Treatments are often limited to preventative measures, such as tying the sleeper to his bed, locking doors and windows, or even placing bells on the afflicted.

A character afflicted by a madness or horror effect has a base 1% chance to sleepwalk each night. Characters

suffering from the *nightmares* horror effect, *amnesia*, *suicidal thoughts* or some dysfunction have a base chance of 5%. This base chance is modified by +5% if the character is presently under a great deal of stress.

**Enchantment:** Though the mind sleeps, the body lies unused, an idle tool for some wily sorcerer to borrow. In the land of Hazlan it is a common fear that while a person sleeps his enemies have the opportunity to awaken his body and use it as a tool for their fiendish ends. Scholars from that land report several examples of arcane research dedicated to discovering some means of taking control of a sleeping body. Though there are no proven cases of such enchantment, many wizards have devised theories as to how the feat may be accomplished.

It is believed that a variant form the spell, commonly known as *domination*, can be used to control the actions of a sleeping victim. Mages postulate that such a spell would not affect the waking mind, but would lie dormant in the subconscious until the victim enters slumber. Sages further theorize that such a spell would require an added material component for the sympathetic magic, perhaps requiring the use of the victim's personal objects, such as a pillow or blanket.

Once such conditions are met, the enchanter may use his pawn at his leisure. The duration of this variant spell would begin the moment the victim lost consciousness, though said victim would remain at sleep throughout the normal length of a *domination* spell. It is believed that the unconscious mind may still attempt to throw off the effects of the enchantment, just as if they were awake to begin with. While sleepwalking the victim would be unable

to awaken until the malignant magic is dispelled. Though unconscious, the sleepwalker would serve the enchanter just as skilfully as a conscious thrall.

**Fiendish Possession:** Though the more sophisticated areas of the Core often subscribe to the dementia theory of sleepwalking, the populace of more rustic lands is more inclined to ascribe sleepwalking to a more malignant source. Possession by fiendish creatures is blamed for most episodes of unconscious activity. Indeed, the infamous Inquisition of Tepest has recorded many encounters with infernal influences, who have worked their vile will through the bodies of hapless sleepers.

Those poor, unsuspecting victims who undergo the horrors of demonic transposition are often subjected to bouts of sleepwalking. While their mortal mind dreams of the abyss, their consciousness is replaced with the infernal intellect of their tormenter. This is a weak form of possession, distinguished from true possession in that the sleeper can reassert domination upon awakening. Indeed, the demon must be cautious not to cause the sleeper to awake, and must quickly work its evil before the sleeper awakens naturally.

Though there are numerous prescribed means of protecting a victim of this foul possession, the Inquisition rarely takes the steps to prevent the demon from returning. Sleepwalking is seen as a failure on the part of the victim, for no demon could enter the mind of a true believer of Belenus. Victims of sleepwalking are subjected to harsh trials to prove their faith in their god, in many cases revealing the devotion of the sleepwalker to be wanting. Sleepwalking and other unconscious activity are established

forms of evidence used against those who are believed to be in league with the forces of Hell. Consequently, the most common cure for sleepwalking is death.

A fiend who is in possession of a victim may force them to sleepwalk whenever they are unconscious. The sleeping mind is partially insulated to this attack, so the fiend must make a charisma check against a DC equal to the victim's opposed will save to initiate this episode. While sleepwalking, the victim is completely at the fiend's disposal, though the sleeper remains inhibited by the state of unconsciousness, as described below.

### To Walk after Midnight

While sleepwalking, a character becomes an NPC under the control of the DM. The sleepwalker may be motivated to commit any number of acts, depending upon the situation. Normally, the sleeper moves around his or her domicile with no particular direction. In cases where a character is under a great deal of stress, he or she may attempt to act out daily routines, such as dressing, traveling to places of work, or preparing meals. In certain strange cases, where a sleeper feels an insufferable amount of anxiety, he or she may attack those around them, striking them, grappling them, or even attacking them with weapons or other objects. In the cases of magical domination or fiendish possession, the sleeper is directed by the malignant will that commands them.

A typical episode of sleepwalking occurs over a four hour period. Two hours after falling into slumber, the sleeper begins to move. The episode of sleepwalking will continue for four hours afterwards. Two hours into the episode, the sleeper is compelled to return to their original location, though

for one reason or another, this may be impossible. By the end of the episode the sleeper collapses once more and returns to normal sleep.

While the conscious mind rests, the unconscious mind retains access to the body and its plethora of functions. Though asleep, the walker appears to be awake in almost all respects, though his behaviour is noticeably different. The sleeper sees through droopy eyelids, walks with a slow shuffling gait and mumbles silently as if to no one. Sleepwalkers can only move at half of their base speed, though they may move by any means of movement normally available to them, including climbing, swimming or in some stranger cases, flying or burrowing.

The subconscious mind has access to a great many skills, though the highest functions remain locked. Certain skills are completely unusable, including any check that relies upon perception or social interaction. While sleepwalking, the character takes a -4 penalty to all attack rolls, saving throws and skill checks. Spell casters and characters that have access to special abilities may use them while sleepwalking.

Though the sleeper is impaired by his unconsciousness, there remains one advantage that the subconscious possesses. Magical forms of enchantment or telepathy are based upon entering and controlling the conscious mind, not the subconscious. While sleepwalking, the walker receives a +4 circumstantial bonus to resist any effect that would control or discern his thoughts. Spells and effects that target sleeping or unconscious characters still apply.

Though the sleeper's consciousness rests, the body is further taxed by sleepwalking. During an

episode of sleepwalking, a character cannot recuperate, healing neither hit points nor ability damage. Spell casters may relearn spells normally, though they are denied the use of any they cast while sleepwalking.

## **Rude Awakenings**

A typical episode of sleepwalking lasts only four hours, though a sleeper can be prematurely awakened by a number of ways. A sleeper is instantly awakened by receiving damage, vigorous shaking, loud sudden noises or other stimuli. Sleepers who are awoken in this manner regain consciousness, but also suffer from a severe shock. Sleepwalkers forcibly awoken must make a madness save against a DC of 15, or suffer from severe mental trauma. On a successful save the sleeper avoids

any damage, while on a failed save the victim suffers 1D4 points of constitution and wisdom damage. This ability damage heals normally, though episodes of sleepwalking continue to prevent normal healing.

Episodes of sleepwalking triggered by unnatural intrusions may prove more difficult to interrupt. A sleeper induced to sleepwalk by a domination effect or by fiendish possession can only be awoken by physical damage. As well, for the purposes of awakening, such a sleeper ignores an amount of damage equal to the charisma modifier of the caster. For example, if a character is induced to sleepwalk by a sorcerer who has a charisma modifier of +3, that sleepwalker will not be awoken unless he or she suffers 4 points of damage from one attack.



# Minds in the Mists

## Psionics Archetypes

Throughout the demiplane of Ravenloft there are those extraordinary individuals who wield powers beyond nature. Wizards research arcane energies in musty libraries, while priests gather in temples bargaining worship for a spark of their deity's divine essence. To the layman, these spell casters wield amazing power with ease, yet all spell casters are painfully aware of their own limitations. Wizards and sorcerers tap arcane energies through complex gestures and costly materials, while priests depend completely upon their gods. Human spell casters forever envy the magical creatures of the demiplane, and the ease by which they wield magic. Compared to a vampire or hag, mortal spell casters are clumsy and graceless.

Yet there are rumours of another form of magic, a variety of mortal who channels the eldritch energies of the universe with preternatural ease. It is said that this power comes not from worship or from arcane rituals, but from the pure force of the mind and the body. Dismissed as freaks or flukes of nature, these psions, or mind-casters as they are sometimes known, possess a mastery of power that defies even sorcerers.

As diverse as they are rare, psions appear without warning. Psionic powers have been found amongst all the peoples of Ravenloft, from the mysterious vistani, the knowledgeable natives of Hazlan, to even the superstitious denizens of Tepest. Psions take on many forms to reflect their singular powers, so

only the wise may spot these mysterious masters of mentalism.

## Archetypes

The psion as described in the psionics handbook is in many ways inappropriate for a character class in Ravenloft. The use of power points, crystals and other high magic trappings makes psionics conflict with the gothic atmosphere of Ravenloft. However, the true conflict between psions and the theme of Ravenloft is not based upon mechanics, but only upon the flavour of the class. With minor modifications, the psionic class can blend seamlessly into the atmosphere.

Archetypes are basic character types, to be used as a guide to creating a character. Though these archetypes apply to the same class, they reflect a completely different theme to flavour the character. Each archetype proposes the development of certain powers, skills and feats to better define the character.

## Wild Men

Sages say that humans have escaped the savage brutality of nature, that mankind is set above animals by civilized behaviour. Even still, there are those who would argue that man is no more than animal, a creature in denial of its savage roots. These cynics point to the wild men, filthy barbarians who emulate animals and live in complete savagery. Found in lands such as the

Frozen Reaches, Tepest or even Darkon, these wild men dress in flea-ridden rags, communicate in growls and eat meat raw.

Wild men are a form of savage clowns, performing like trained animals for the amusement of their marginally less barbaric lords. In urban lands such as Richemulot or Dementlieu, wild men are transient street dwellers, dismissed as subhuman maniacs. Despite their occupation as human amusements, wild men are feared for their prowess in battle. Their cracked nails carve flesh like claws, their teeth rend like fangs and their skin turns blades like hardened leather. Those who have faced them tell even stranger tales, suggesting that these savages can heal mortal wounds in moments, vanish into thin air, or even change their shapes. Most wild men live out short violent lives as human war hounds at the beck and call of barbaric masters. Few wild men ever rise above the savagery of their occupation, but those who do often gain fame and renown as mighty warriors.

Wild men are masters of psychometabolism, the power to change their shape and manipulate their own life-force. Wild men appear to be filthy barbarians, with jagged teeth and cracked nails. When manifesting a power, their appearance changes only slightly. However, as they enter the fray the change becomes clear. Many warriors doubt their own eyes as these flea-ridden barbarians shrug off mortal blows, run as fast as stags, and strike with the strength of a charging bull. These barbaric psions revel in combat, howling with the joy of battle and relishing the taste of blood. While wild men appear to be savage simpletons, in reality they are as bright as any human. Only in the presence of trusted friends

do they drop their savage guise and reveal their true nature. Wild men are warrior-philosophers, gaining strength by emulating the simple purity of animals and forsaking the hypocrisy of so called civilization.

These savage warriors forsake the complicated excess of humanity and revelling in freedom. Wild men trust instinct and impulse, applying their formidable strength at every opportunity. Though frightening in appearance, they are said to be loyal companions and insightful advisors, always advocating action and cultivating in their allies the simple purity that is the source of their own strength.

Wild men focus their progression on powers and feats useful for personal combat. These psions take powers such as body adjustment, claws of the bear, combat recognizance and painful touch. Wild men take skills such as concentration and stabilize self, to better survive melee. Very rarely do wild men build psionic items, for they prefer to remain independent of materials. Wild men take feats such as speed of thought, inertial armour and psionic fist to complement their combat abilities. They may also take feats such as ambidexterity, weapon focus in claw or bite attacks, and even multiattack to use bite and two claw attacks at the same time.

## Travelers

From the depths of the billowing grey fog comes the traveler, the mysterious nomad of the mists. Without so much as a word the traveler comes and goes, taking only what he can carry, leaving strange coins from many foreign lands. Woe to the bandit who mistakes this stranger's harmlessness for helplessness. The traveler is said to be

able to appear and disappear at will, to walk on walls and fly through the air, even to bend time and space. Often solitary and always silent, the traveler has been spotted in every domain of Ravenloft, wandering back and forth across the demiplane in a trek without end. There are even those who swear that the traveler is more than one person, perhaps even a race unto themselves.

Though often confused with the vistani, travelers are drawn from all the natives of Ravenloft. From an early age these youngsters are compelled to free themselves of the ties that bind them to earth, to be completely free. As this wanderlust grows, the impulse manifests physically, enabling the neophyte traveller to escape the confines of civilized life. A traveler gains the power to climb sheer walls, to move freely through restraints, to traverse long distances instantly, and even to fly. The consuming quest for ultimate freedom separates these travelers from others of their race, even as their powers warp them into preternatural creatures. Though capable of moving miles in the blink of an eye, a traveler prefers to walk from fogbank to fogbank, letting the mists take him where they will. Travellers are compelled to wander the earth without end, finding whatever the mists reveal to them.

Travellers are psions devoted to psychoportive powers, and accordingly they focus on movement. These nomads are often dressed in strange clothing, garbed in an eclectic collection gathered from years of travel. Travellers are usually encountered alone, though they have been known to travel with merchant caravans or adventuring parties. These psions shun the confines of civilized life, making as little contact with society as possible. These

wanderers take temporary employment as scouts, guides, messengers, or cartographers to earn enough to support them on their endless travels.

Travellers prefer to avoid conflict, using their powers to evade and escape, attacking only as a last option. Naturally, these psions focus on powers that can increase their movement, either by teleportation or by increasing their movement rate. A few travelers take powers such as baleful teleport or dissipating touch to better defend them from the denizens of the dark realms. Travelers often take the feats speed of thought, mental leap or mobility to increase their movement.

## Wild Talents

In the shadows she hides, her head buried in her hands. Through the walls she can hear the mob chanting their curses, calling for her to be burned. "I'm not a witch," she sobs one last time, just as the doorway is forced. Through the splintering portal, she can see the endless sea of torches and pitchforks. The fear and terror explodes inside the young girl like a torrent surging through a broken dam. She sees the first man through the door, watches as his murderous sneer is suddenly shattered by the crushing grasp of an invisible claw. The terror repeats itself again and again, until the posse is dispersed. Alone, in the ruins of her home, cowers the wild talent.

Wild talents are individuals blessed and cursed with amazing power. Most arcane scholars liken talents to sorcerers, in that their power is an innate, hereditary trait. However, unlike sorcerers, the power of a wild talent is without limit. Whatever the cause, wild

talents have the ability to channel fantastic energy through their bodies, shaping it with their minds into the powers they manifest. With these forces they can move object with their mind, set fires, even convert matter into energy. Though these energies are endless, the act of channelling them is physically taxing, making a strong physical fortitude a helpful trait for a wild talent.

The powers of a wild talent manifest at adolescence, triggered at random by strong emotions or stress. In this early stage, the wild talent's power is intense and uncontrollable. Odd phenomena occur in the presence of wild talents, leading to speculations of ghostly haunting, demonic possession or even witchcraft. Wild talents must eventually learn to control their powers or are they are inevitably discovered and destroyed. Once the talent learns to control the energies at work the power and intensity diminishes, but becomes much more reliable.

Talents are social outcasts, forced to live outside society. Most wild talents perish quickly in the outside world, so those wild talents who remain are the natural survivors. Stoic and self reliant, these wild talents shun the world that rejected them. Many talents live as hermits on the fringes of society, surviving on their own. These "savants" are feared but respected, even sought by their society in times of crisis. Other talents seek out material wealth, joining the underworld or working as mercenaries.

Wild talents focus on the discipline of psychokinesis, though they of all psions are the most likely to add powers from other disciplines to their repertoire. Wild talents do not focus their powers

on any particular theme. Aggressive talents gain powers such as concussion and disintegrate, while withdrawn talents learn powers such as invisibility or inertial barrier. Sages report a strange breed of wild talent that focuses their talents upon fire. These pyrokinetisists, or pyromaniacs as they are often called, gain powers such as matter agitation, control flame and white fire. The powers of a wild talent are limited only by their ability to withstand the trauma of psionic energy. The feat "body fuel" is an appropriate addition to the talent's repertoire, reflecting the physical cost for limitless power.

## Daydreamers

Eccentric scholars and raving madmen have been known to claim that the world is nothing more than a dream, dreamt by the denizens of Ravenloft. Though difficult for most to accept, there exists a strange race of people who seem to corroborate this outlandish claim. These creatures are said to perceive the universe as fantasy, and themselves as lucid dreamers. These "daydreamers" have the ability to conjure energy, objects and even creatures using the force of their imagination. This strange magic seems to manifest at random, as individuals suddenly "awaken" to reality.

Daydreamers are the most likely of all psions to remain in society. Though their perspective has changed considerably, daydreamers remain attached to their former life, balancing their disbelief of reality with their genuine need for companionship and stability. As they age, these dreamers are eventually consumed by their own fantasies and delusions, slowly taken out

of reality and entrapped in a hallucination. These daydreamers fall into madness and are lost to the world as they retreat into the dark corners of the world to fantasize without interference from the outside.

Daydreamers are masters of the discipline of metacreativity. These psions focus their powers on the creation of objects, taking powers such as creation and astral construct and learning skills such as craft to better augment their creations. Dreamers care little for creating “real” items, so they are the least likely of all psions to take item creation feats. Instead they focus on metapsionic feats to increase the power and duration of figments of their potent imaginations.

## Prophets

Though the vistani are celebrated for their abilities to foretell the future, there exists another breed of prognosticators. Neither wizards nor priests, these prophets receive mysterious visions from a “second sight”. This ability allows them to peak through the veil of reality and see into the past, present and future. While frightening, the power of these prophets is mostly benign. Shunned by society at large, these prophets live on the fringes of society as hermits, keeping company only with those who seek them out.

Though commonly hermits, prophets are the most socially accepted of all psions. The visions of the prophet are recognized as useful tools, so prophets are retained as advisors. The strange powers of the prophet keep them apart from society, though even the most superstitious of folk will seek out the prophet under the right circumstances.

Despite the good they do for their society, prophets are never viewed as heroes, merely as tools.

Prophets are advisors and guides, neither combatants nor negotiators. These seers shun conflict, preferring to work behind the scenes, supplying their allies with useful information. Augury, know location, remote viewing and divination are the most common powers learned by prophets. Prophets are the least likely of psions to branch their studies into other disciplines of psionics. Prophets follow no set pattern when determining feats and skills, though they very rarely take a feat that has no use outside of combat.

## Charmers

A smile that sparkles like diamonds, a voice like woven silk, eyes that peer into your soul and fill you with confidence; these are the hallmarks of a charmer. Like a warming breeze they enter a community, winning friends with their amazing personality. They rally whole villages to their cause, inspiring generosity in even the most miserly folk, uniting the masses behind a lofty goal. And then they go, taking with them a fortune in gold and family heirlooms, never to return.

The charmer is often confused with sorcerers or enchanter, even learned sages rarely make the distinction. This seemingly small misconception has insulated the charmer from discovery, for while base magicians cast their hexes with strange words and flashy hand gestures, the charmer uses nothing more than the force of their personality.

Charmers discover their power so gradually that they rarely understand the



supernatural nature of their gift. To the charmer, his powers are merely extensions of his natural, formidable powers of persuasion. With the skill of a master burglar the charmer enters the minds of his mark, entering the secret chambers of their psyche, making alterations and manipulating the mind. The charmer begins experimenting in childhood, with family and neighbours. The charmer quickly learns to use his powers to avoid labour and obtain whatever baubles he desires. Eventually, like a cuckoo bird, the charmer outgrows his home and enters the world, living like a parasite off of whomever he comes across.

Though amazingly charismatic, charmers are, in truth, sociopaths of the highest order. For most of their lives these men and women have been unable to form relationships with others, unable to help but use their charms. They have learned to see humans, not as equals, but as pawns, to be manipulated and used. Love and honesty have become lost in the impenetrable web of lies and deceit, forgotten and forsaken by these psions. Even those few psions who retain some spark of goodness cannot help but stifle a chuckle when their companions speak passionately of that fictional thing called innocence.

Charmers rely upon their supernatural powers far less than other psions. Most charmers possess such skill in social interaction that they make their living without the use of their supernatural powers. None the less, charmers devote almost all of their advancement to the enhancement of their telepathy powers. Charmers regularly use simple powers like charm and telempathic projection to augment their charisma, relying on higher powers, such as domination, only as a last resort.

More than any other psion, charmers rely on mundane skills. Charmers are experts in bluffing and diplomacy. Many such psions rely on social interaction, so the skills gather information, innuendo and sense motive are immensely useful. The intimidate skill is taken by those psions who enjoy the fear of their enemies, and used with much abandon. The psychoanalyst feat is immensely useful to a charmer, as is the skill focus feat taken in bluff or diplomacy. Many charmers take the improved psicrystal feat to augment their psionic trinkets and gain multiple benefits. Finally, many charmers develop feats to achieve the trigger power feat to use their charm power as often as they wish.



# Credits

## Contributors

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**Stephen Sutton aka ScS** [stephencsutton@hotmail.com](mailto:stephencsutton@hotmail.com). Creator of Knowledge in the Nightmare, What Screams May Come, Walking after Midnight and Minds in the Mist. This is my first time taking credit for any of my work on the Netazine, but since I've only produced a little this issue, I think it's the right time to start. I'd like to thank all of our contributors this month for putting together an amazing array of material. We couldn't have produced this issue without you guys! I'd also like to thank everyone who submitted but didn't make it into the issue; keep trying guys, and don't be afraid to ask for help.

Coming Soon!

Quoth the Raven Presents



Fiends