

TAMING THE NIGHTMARES



In this game the players take the role of dream-whisperers (DWs), agents of Morpheus. DWs are gifted individuals able to influence dreams as they themselves slumber. Beyond mere lucid dreaming DWs can communicate with dreams and send them to other sleepers. DWs travel the great plains of the dreamscape where dreams run as wild horses. Most dreams are well-mannered fillies easy to whisper and send on their way to the sleepers. The real challenge for the DWs does not emerge until midnight when the herds of wild nightmares appear - demonic black steeds with burning hooves. The dread nightmares gallop into sleepers' dreams causing panic and unlocking the sleepers' deepest fears. Sleep itself can be destroyed by a rampaging nightmare - wrenching the sleeper out of her dreamtime. Indeed the fear of a nightmare can persist - even in waking hours until the poor mortal fears even sleep itself lest the nightmare return!

Practical requirements: Paper and pencils (or pens - one writes the other writes) and a tarot deck. Aces are high but the Major Arcana beat aces.

Dream Whisperers

A DW is still a regular person. Each player decides who her DW is in the mundane world. Answer the following questions at the very least:

Age? Sex? Race? Nationality? Physical characteristics? Occupation? Family?

How does the DW appear on the dream plain? In a form similar to his physical appearance or totally changed as a dream-whisperer avatar?

DWs have three prime stats known as *Oneiroi aspects*.

Phobetor - Ability to whisper nightmares (starts at 1, max 5)

Phantasos - Ability to whisper dreams and make offerings (starts at 1, max 5)

Hypnos - Depth of sleep (starts at 2, max 9). If *Hypnos* drops to 0 during the night-time the character awakens with a start, *Rub* increases by a point.

Split another 3 points between *Phobetor*, *Phantasos* and *Hypnos*.

Rub - Your (relationship to a) problematic situation, an issue that plagues you. Fear is tied up in the *Rub*. Name the *Rub* - use something from your own life or the life of someone you know (starts at 2). The higher the *Rub* the more difficulties it causes. At 9 the individual develops somniphobia (fear of sleeping) this drops *Hypnos* to 1. If the *Rub* becomes greater than 9 then the individual suffers a psychological breakdown and leaves play. If *Rub* drops to 0 then the individual has come to terms with and accepted his relationship to the issue, he knows how to proceed and deal with it in a healthy manner.

You can gain another point to an *Oneiroi aspect* for each point you increase your *Rub* by, to a max *Rub* of 7.

If a player loses his DW to a breakdown then he creates another one, or turns a sleeper into a DW.

Sleeper

Sleepers need to be generated in the same way as DWs. Sleepers do not have avatar forms though - they only appear as themselves in the dreamscape.

Stats

Hypnos [choose 3 - 7, max 7]

Rub - As for DWs, though sleepers may have a recurring dream linked to their *Rubs*. [starts at *Hypnos* +2, max 9].

Connection - Every sleeper is somehow linked to a DW and possibly other sleepers.

Play structure

The game proceeds in cycles of four distinct phases [daytime, evening-tide, midnight and the wee small hours], each player gets to frame one scene per phase. The DW with the lowest *Rub* acts first, cut the deck to break ties. When on the dream plains (i.e. not during the day) the scene will contain a conflict check of some type.

Daytime - the sleepers and DW go about their day to day business. Hints of their *Rubs*. No conflict checks, pure roleplay, no blocking allowed. Narration must remain within the realm of the real world and DWs/sleepers cannot die. Sleepers recover a point of *Hypnos*, DWs may gain two points of *Hypnos* or get therapy and reduce *Rub* by a point. Sleepers leave play (happy) if their *Rub* is 0 during the daytime.

Evening-tide - drifting off to sleep. Players take it in turns to set the scene as their DWs return to the dream-planes. During this phase each DWs may *whisper a dream* or make an *oneiroi offering*.

Dream whispering

System: DW chooses who he is trying to send the dream to (a sleeper or another DW). DW draws a number of cards equal to his *Phantasos*. The player to his left representing the dream draws a single card. The dream card is revealed and the dream controller describes the nature of the dream, drawing on the card for inspiration. The DW then reveals his highest card and narrates his success at sending the dream – if his card is equal or higher; or his failure - if his card is lower. A failing DW can burn a point of *Hypnos* to try again.

Success means the dream is sent, the target may reduce her *Rub* by a point or increase her *Hypnos* by a point (DW's choice).

Failure means that the dream goes awry – increasing the target's *Rub* by a point or reducing the target's *Hypnos* by a point (dream controller's choice). The DW narrates this – using the cards for inspiration if desired.

Oneiroi Offering

System: DW chooses which aspect he is trying to increase and narrates how he is making his offering. DW draws cards equal to his *Phantasos*, the opposition to his left draws cards equal to 1 plus the current value of the desired aspect. Reveal high cards simultaneously. If the values are tied or the DW has the higher card then the offering is accepted, the DW describes what happens and increases his aspect by a point. If the opposition has the higher value then the offering is rejected. The opposition narrates this. Regardless of the outcome, the DW has the option of burning a point of *Hypnos* to make another offering during the same scene.

Midnight – the nightmares arrive. A herd of wild nightmares appear on the dream plain, one nightmare per DW plus the lead nightmare, the herd alpha. The players jointly describe how this takes place. Each DW can either: *whisper a dream*, make an *oneiroi offering* or *whisper a nightmare*.

Nightmare whispering

System: The DW describes his approach to the beast and draws cards equal to his *Phobator*. The nightmare handler to the DW's right draws three cards for the nightmare's will. The nightmare handler reveals the highest card and describes the nature of the nightmare – again using the card as inspiration. The DW reveals his highest card, succeeding if it is equal to or better than the nightmare's card.

With success the DW has two options: either send the tame nightmare to a Sleeper/DW so that it may help her understand her predicament, or goad the nightmare into spreading terror. Either way, the DW narrates what happens, including the details of the nightmare. A tame nightmare visits a character so she may learn about her *Rub* – decrease the target's *Rub* by two points. A goaded nightmare taps into the target's fear relating to her *Rub*. Increase the victim's *Rub* by 2 and reduce her *Hypnos* by a point. The target may burn a point of *Hypnos* to limit the *Rub* increase to a single point (player to DW's right decides for sleepers).

If the DW fails to whisper the nightmare then his *Hypnos* is reduced by a point and the nightmare controller narrates the nightmare running wild.

Wee Small Hours – final round of the night – at the end of this round any remaining wild nightmares will gallop into sleepers' dreams. Each DW can either: *whisper a dream*, make an *oneiroi offering* or *whisper a nightmare*. A DW who successfully whispered to a nightmare at midnight may try to *whisper the lead nightmare*.

Whispering the lead nightmare

System: Same as nightmare whispering. Except the lead mare's will is 5. She increases or decreases a *Rub* by 3 and reduces *Hypnos* by 2 if a whisper fails.

After each DW has had his scene in the small hours any wild nightmares remaining charge into sleepers' dreams. The DW with the lowest *Rub* chooses which sleeper is visited by the first wild nightmare and describes this in graphic detail. Then the DW with the second lowest *Rub* chooses...etc. Each sleeper can only be visited once – after all sleepers have had a nightmare the wild nightmares visit the DWs. Anyone visited by a nightmare (including the lead mare) loses a point of *Hypnos* and has his *Rub* increased by 2. A character may spend an additional point of *Hypnos* to reduce the *Rub* gain to a single point, whoever created the sleeper or DW decides whether or not to burn this additional *Hypnos*.

The End

The game either ends when all sleepers have left play or when the players decide the story has run its course.

Immersion

Players are encouraged to immerse themselves in the roles of sleepers, dreams or nightmares when not playing dream-whisperers.

I've included some aspects of genuine therapy as a bit of an experiment and to score brownie points with the judges. Or perhaps not.

Anything seemingly omitted from this game should be regarded as a fruitful void – until actual play suggests otherwise...