Monster The Nightmare Chronicles



The Nightmare

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> ell known in legend, tavern-told tales of terror, and awful, recurring dreams suffered by those who have encountered them, nightmares are cunning and malicious shadowy beasts. Typically ridden by powerful evil entities, mortals rarely see wild nightmares—those unbound to a rider. They are often described as "flaming black devil horses," but they have no particular link to devils and, indeed, are not even horses.

Koaster Chroaicles Dathfinder



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In the Wild

On their home plane, nightmares live in small, roaming packs, relying on speed and stealth to hunt down prey and to elude those who would capture and tame them. Nightmares are observant and curious, learning constantly about the world around them, just like rangers and other mortals who study the natural world. Nightmares remember foes, the tactics those foes use, and the perils of substances and items they have encountered before, so luring nightmares into traps is very difficult.

Within a pack, although there are struggles for dominance whenever a leader is destroyed, there is absolute loyalty—even when a leader is badly wounded—because the experience of a leader is highly valued by nightmares. This makes nightmare packs incredibly canny foes. They communicate over great distances by releasing (or spitting) fireballs into the air; the shapes and hues of these flames have meanings specific to a pack. Because they are far too intelligent to challenge powerful intruders or travelers, they will hide until such perils have passed or until they can catch a creature alone or at a disadvantage.

Nightmare packs seldom deplete all the food in a given area or do anything to attract much attention to their presence if they know that powerful foes are nearby. They view the world around them—both their own plane and the mortal world—as a hunting ground to be husbanded and mastered for long-term exploitation, not merely as a buffet. They may treat prey cruelly, but unless angered, they will not kill needlessly, thereby wasting food.

In the mortal world, nightmares are drawn to roads because they represent markers back to where they entered the plane; instinctively, a nightmare wants to know where it came from, even if it never returns there. However, mortal legends about nightmares being compelled to stay on a road, being unable to cross a road, or being stopped in their tracks by running water are all nonsense—either fanciful embellishments or mistaken observations of magic successfully used against nightmares.

Physiology

Nightmares have black hides and horse-shaped bodies with long, flowing black manes and tails. In rare instances, individual hairs turn white or blue-white, usually the result of magical attacks.

Nightmares have burning red eyes, visible at a considerable distance, but their eyes become solid black when they lower a translucent eyelid that protects against harmful gases, smoke, dust and sand. They can also close their eyes entirely to hide their blazing gaze. They are well aware of their own appearance and know how to conceal it when approaching prey or deceiving other creatures as to their true nature.

Any nightmare can, at will, lengthen its legs slightly to achieve greater height for itself and its rider by "shifting" substance from its central mass. A nightmare can also briefly slim down its body to fit through a narrow space, such as between trees in a thicket or through a narrow doorway, by shifting substance into their limbs, neck, and head. Either change can be done repeatedly and in both "directions" while moving or fighting if need be and without discomfort. They can't change their basic body shape or color with this limited ability, but they can lengthen their lips to cover their sharp fanged teeth and douse their personal flames utterly for as long as they desire.

A nightmare can never be harmed by its own flames, and the creature involuntarily confers its innate fire resistance to riders. This resistance protects a rider against the nightmare's own flames, including conflagrations started by the nightmare's flames; the nightmare cannot withdraw this resistance from the rider.

Nightmares do not require sleep, though an exhausted or wounded nightmare will often lie quiet for long periods, going torpid while its body heals. In extreme cases, this torpor may last for up to a week.

Nightmares do need moisture, which they can drink or absorb through their hides from their surroundings, and they can eat grains and vegetables; they will even dose themselves with herbal medicines by seeking out and eating the right leaves, barks, roots, and shoots. However, they crave live prey—red raw meat. Most nightmares can enjoy both cooked and raw flesh; some, however, have developed particular preferences regarding the state and nature of meat: its source, its age, the amount of blood, how afraid the victim was, and so on. Nightmare bites can easily sever limbs, but their long fangs are primarily made for raking the skin from flesh and the flesh from bone of the dead and dying.

Nightmare Sex

Nightmares are hermaphroditic; that is, they have the internal reproductive organs and retractile genitalia of both genders. A particular nightmare usually chooses to act as one gender, but if needed to replenish a pack, it can shift its gender. Nightmares, however, cannot fertilize themselves.

Alchemical Uses of Nightflame

Alchemists and daring adventurers have on occasion managed to bottle pieces of nightmare flesh submerged in *oil of fire resistance*, the blood of a red dragon or phoenix, or salamander essence. This allows them to create brief gouts of flame at will by probing the liquid-immersed flesh, allowing small bubbles of sweat to escape from it. The flesh won't float in the flame-quenching medium, but the sweat will rise up through it and burst into flame when meeting air at the open top of the bottle without affecting the bottle's contents.

Such bottles can be hurled as incendiary "bombs" since they can be readily thrown in a non-flaming, unignited state. They explode into flame only when the sealed bottle shatters on impact.

Nightmare flesh has been described as sharp and smoky in flavor, even sulfuric. It can be safely ingested only by creatures who take no harm from flames raging inside their bellies or by mortals when it has been thoroughly

boiled in one of the flame-quenching substances mentioned above.

Of course, there are horrific tales of mortals mating with nightmares, usually involving agonizing deaths for mortal females when the resulting nightmare young are born, but the truth behind these stories is that nightmares can only mate with mortals if shapeshifting magic is used. In these cases, the mortal genes almost always predominate, resulting in human offspring who have burning eyes, fangs, and, very rarely, the ability to sweat flames at will, as a nightmare does. (Treat these characters as tieflings.)

Nightmares give birth to live young after a gestation period of 340 days (comparable to mortal horses)the gestation of a nightmare-sired tiefling is only a little shorter, roughly 333 days. The young are ungainly and unsteady, lacking balance and control over their plane shift ability; they are not yet able to exude enough flame for what mortals call the "hooves of hell" fire attack. Otherwise, they are just smaller (lower hp) versions of adult nightmares. Given sufficient food, they'll grow to adulthood swiftly-in a month or less.

Human tales about gaining magical abilities, even temporarily, by engaging in sex while "riding a nightmare" are mere fancies. However, there are persistent rumors that the intensity and reach of certain dark rituals can be increased if you prepare yourself in certain secret ways and then ride a nightmare. Particular respected sages insist these rumors are true.

Nightflames

A nightmare creates flames at will by releasing a particular secretion with its sweat, which ignites on contact with air, causing long wisps and streamers of flame in the air; even a small amount of their sweat can trigger a great amount of flame. Exertion alone can't involuntarily cause a nightmare to flame but deep wounds can; typically, the edges of the wound will burn continually.

The manes and tails of nightmares never burn or emit flame and can be handled safely at all times: "safely" in this case being a relative term that says nothing about the attitude of a nightmare so handled but merely confirms that fire damage will not come to a mortal from a mane or tail—though it usually will from the rest of the nightmare's body.

Nightgloom

All nightmares have a seldom-mentioned ability to create shadows (or gloom) around themselves though the strength of this ability varies widely in intensity from individual to individual. Some nightmares can hide themselves in a cloud of seemingly impenetrable darkness, even in brightly sunlit conditions, but this is very rare.

More often, a nightmare can exude what

more than one observer has described as a "moving cloud of shadow" around itself, generating this gloom at will. This ability can be used and ended in an instant, dissipating in a round by silent act of will. Most often, a torpid nightmare that can't find a cave or dark place to bide in will create its own shade; it is much less frequently used in hunting. For some unknown reason, nightmares seem reluctant to use it while advancing to attack, though they often gather shadows when stalking prey. This gloom stalking is a tactic nightmares use to learn more about them, when they don't intend to attack and merely desire to remain undetected.

Nightmare Battle Tactics

A nightmare can move in near-silence with its flames doused and wait with great patience, immobile if need be, for long periods of time. Tales frequently tell of human adventurers perishing because they thought nightmares were merely equine statues and climbed onto them to try to scale walls. That is, of course, before the nightmares broke their stillness to attack.

The so-called "hooves of hell" attack, in which a nightmare races along leaving raging fire in its wake—often in a ring around a foe—is nothing more than a rush of nightflame, which it takes a nightmare some time to replenish. Easily setting combustibles ablaze, they use the resulting firewalls against weak or exhausted prey or against creatures swift enough to try to escape the nightmare. Typically, a nightmare will use hit-andrun attacks to bite and hoof-slash opponents before bringing the great fire of its "hooves of hell," for such a blaze can ignite combustible surroundings and destroy or forewarn other prey into flight and attract the attention of competing nightmares and other predators.

Nightmares and Their Riders

Nightmares must be defeated in combat before they will suffer being ridden by any creature. Often, they will flee or turn on injured or weakened riders, but nightmares that have experienced long and mutually profitable rider-mount relationships may aid and even rescue longtime companions with loyalty and even tenderness. A continued career with the rider is likely more beneficial, they judge, for themselves and their offspring than going off alone.

However, a nightmare that has only recently been mastered often seeks to trick or harm its rider if it believes it can do so without fatal reprisals. Any entity who seeks to ride a nightmare should be ready to deal death to it at a moment's notice. A simple and widely known blood binding, which any creature can perform involves mingling a few drops of the blood from rider and nightmare. This ritual makes it impossible for a nightmare to fail to hear or understand any command voiced by the rider regardless of language barriers; their minds are linked so orders are clearly understood.

Additionally, it prevents them from acting in any way against a sleeping rider. A bloodbound

Vampiric Nightmares

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Nightmares can become vampires by devouring vampires, but the powers this gives them vary widely from nightmare to nightmare. They always gain regeneration but seldom the usual vulnerabilities of a vampire.

Elder nightmares who happen to be vampiric or who become vampires usually gain all vampire abilities and vulnerabilities with full understanding of them and as much control over them as any other

sort of vampire has.

rider never suffers from the horrific dreams suffered by other mortals who have encountered nightmares, even if sleeping near other nightmares the rider is not bound to. The nature of blood binding forces a nightmare to regard attacks on its rider as an attack on itself; even if the attacker is another nightmare related to the bloodbound nightmare, the bound mount will defend its rider as vigorously as if it were itself threatened with death.

It should be clearly understood that there is a difference between a nightmare serving as a mount and a nightmare temporarily suffering a rider to sit on its back. There are innumerable true tales of mortals mistaking a nightmare for a horse, such as after a nightmare has set a barn afire and the owner rushes to it seeking to secure valued or beloved property and leaps onto it. In such an instance, the nightmare

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obligingly gallops off to where it can hurl the rider onto rocks to dash it to death and dine on the remains, or it simply bucks its prey to the ground and proceeds to bite it, trample it, and burn it with a swift and tight ring of fire.

Elder Nightmares

Some, but not all, nightmare pack leaders are elder nightmares.

A nightmare becomes an elder nightmare by consuming the lives of at least seven magical beasts more powerful than itself or by swallowing and digesting magic items, dissolving them slowly over years and even decades of mortal time with great discomfort and, all that time, becoming greater than most nightmares knew possible. This is not a road to enhanced abilities explicitly known to a nightmare and is typically gained by accident. However, elder nightmares always realize, after the fact, how they achieved this state, and they may or may not choose to share this knowledge with a favored successor.

This greatness manifests in three ways: increased vitality (+1d4 Strength, +1d4 Constitution, and 2d10 additional hp); the ability to open planar portals both for self and nearby companions, such as the rest of a nightmare pack; and—very rarely subsumption of some magical ability from a beast or item they have consumed. For the latter, the elder nightmare gains and can use or emit a magical power, ability, or discharge effect in addition to their innate nightmare abilities. Most elder nightmares grow slightly larger than "ordinary" nightmares and may gain the ability to shift the appearance of their eyes at will. Their eyes may even seem like human ones; for instance, they could have blue or green irises complete with black pupils and white corneas.

Nightmares, Nightmares Everywhere

The nightmares, of the bad-dream variety, in mortals who encounter these creatures are caused by trace contact with the nightflame caused by nightmare secretions, not merely by seeing a flaming black horse with fangs. This means that almost everyone who is burned by a nightmare will have a horrific dream.

For victims that have been burned by nightmares many times before, the dream

still occurs but may not engender terror because of its very familiarity; however, this also means that the mortal need not be burned by a nightmare to suffer the bad dreams: they only need to come into contact with something that the nightmare has recently come into contact with. such as a door or tree trunk, or for the nightmare to pass close. Young mortals are especially susceptible to the bad dreams, occasionally forming permanent psychic

links to a particular nightmare.

These dreams can act as conduits that permit deities or their servitors to send visions into the opened minds of the dreamers—even persisting after awakening. This is why priests sometimes stand vigil over those who've seen nightmares, hoping to hear what is recalled of dreams and learn from the visions.

Warriors fated to die in battle sometimes dream of riding a nightmare down a long and wild path to their own dooms, even if they've never seen a nightmare in their waking lives.

There are dark cults whose members revere nightmares as sources of power and seek to ride them, untamed—not bloodbound. They are the source of the screaming, burning riders sometimes seen clinging to the mane or, if being dragged, the tail of a nightmare galloping through the night.



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Nightmare, Karabasan

This huge horse has a crimson coat, fiery steel hooves, and a mane and tail of living flame. Enveloped in a cloud of reeking brimstone, its entire body radiates heat. An evil intelligence lurks behind its ever burning eyes.

Karabasan

XP 12,800

NE Huge outsider (evil, extraplanar, fire) Init +8; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +17 Aura cloud of brimstone 20 ft.

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DEFENSE

AC 28, touch 12, flat-footed 24 (+4 Dex, +16 natural, -2 size) hp 161 (14d8+84) Fort +15, Ref +13, Will +6 DR 1/—; Immune fire Weaknesses vulnerability to cold

OFFENSE

Spd 40 ft., fly 90 ft. (good)
Melee bite +19 (2d6+7 plus 1d8 fire), 2 hooves +14 (2d6+3 plus 1d8 fire)
Space 15 ft.; Reach 10 ft.
Special Attacks cloud of brimstone (DC 23), heat, immolation (DC 23)
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 15th)
1/hour (self plus 1 rider only)—plane shift

TACTICS

During Combat A karabasan typically charges on the first round of combat, enveloping opponents in its cloud of brimstone. It focuses its attacks, first, on any creatures dealing cold damage to it.

Morale A karabasan fights until reduced below 30 hp, then uses its immolation ability. If any enemies still survive, it flees, using *plane shift* if necessary.

STATISTICS

CR 11

Str 25, Dex 19, Con 22, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 14
Base Atk +14; CMB +23; CMD 37 (39 vs. trip)
Feats Alertness, Cleave, Improved Initiative, Improved Overrun, Iron Will, Power Attack, Run

Skills Acrobatics +17, Bluff +15, Fly

+17, Knowledge (arcana, planes) +14, Perception+17, Sense Motive +17, Stealth +17, Survival +14 Languages Abyssal, Ignan, Infernal ECOLOGY

Environment any (Elemental Plane of Fire) Organization solitary or pack (6-18) Treasure none

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Cloud of Brimstone (Su) As a free action, a karabasan may surround itself with a 20-ft.radius cloud of sulfurous smoke that chokes and blinds opponents. Anyone in the cloud must succeed on a DC 23 Fortitude save or be nauseated while within the cloud and be blinded for 1d6 minutes after leaving the cloud. The noxious cloud lasts 1 round and provides concealment to the karabasan against creatures 5 ft. or farther away, but it does not obscure the karabasan's vision at all. The save DC is Constitution-based.

- **Heat (Ex)** A karabasan's red-hot body deals 1d8 extra fire damage whenever it hits in melee. Creatures hitting a karabasan with natural weapons or unarmed attacks take fire damage as though hit by the karabasan's attacks.
- **Immolation (Su)** Once per day, a karabasan can burst into flame, unleashing a wave of elemental fire in a 20-ft. burst. All creatures within this radius take 10d6 fire damage unless they make a DC 23 Reflex save for half damage. The save DC is Constitutionbased.

A karabasan, or fire mare, is a mighty elemental horse possessed of a malign intelligence. They roam in packs across the Elemental Plane of Fire and occasionally serve more powerful elemental outsiders.

Typical Physical Characteristics

A karabasan resembles a powerful horse of prodigious size with a fiery crimson coat and flaming mane. Karabasans can grow up to 16 ft. long, and weigh 4 tons or more.

Habitat & Society

Karabasans are descended from cauchemars brought to the Elemental Plane of

> Fire ages ago. Over time, they adapted to the hellish conditions, becoming

more animalistic and less intelligent and replacing some of their nightmarish abilities with others more suited to their new elemental habitat. While they lost the ability to visit the Ethereal Plane, they learned from the genies how to travel to the Elemental Planes instead.

Karabasans are carnivorous and hunt lesser denizens of the Elemental Plane of Fire such as small elementals, magmin, and mephits. As outsiders, karabasans do not need to eat when visiting other planes, though they often prefer fresh or even still-living meat.

Karabasans live in nomadic packs, ranging the wilds of the Elemental Plane of Fire, but individuals serve as allies to other evil outsiders. Efreet, in particular, favor karabasans as mounts, but the fire mares are not simple domesticated horses. A karabasan serves only in exchange for payment, whether that is the promise of power, the granting of wishes, or more mundane treasures.

Otherwise, karabasans must be coerced into service. Azers have been known to capture and harness fire mares to pull brazen war chariots in their wars against the efreet, but the karabasans turn on their azer masters with no hesitation if given the chance. Ω

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