

## Monster ENCyclopedia: Nightmare

This is a series of articles about specific monsters from D&D's history. Each entry takes a look at the origin of one D&D creature, and tracks its appearances and evolution across different editions. We have now reached the second half of our alphabetical tour and the “N” creature is the preferred steed of evil villains from Warduke to Lord Soth—the nightmare.

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### Origins

The English word “nightmare” comes to us from the Old English “mare”, which is the name of an incubus or demon, often with a goblin-like appearance. This creature was said to ride on the chests of sleeping people, bringing them bad dreams, or nightmares. Despite “mare” also meaning female horse, there doesn’t appear to be much historical relationship between nightmares and horses. However, there is a 1781 oil painting by Fuseli, titled *The Nightmare* which shows a mare crouched on a sleeping woman. The pitch-black head of a horse with unnaturally white eyes watches over the scene from the background.



*The Nightmare* by Fuseli (1781), image from [Wikipedia](#)

While there is no evidence that Gyax had this painting in mind when creating the horse-like creature depicted in the *Monster Manual*, it could easily have served as inspiration if he was familiar with the work. Equally likely though is that Gyax was simply exploring a play on words with the dual meaning of the word “mare”.

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## 1st Edition

Whatever the inspiration for the Dungeons & Dragons version of the nightmare, the *Monster Manual* describes it as a gaunt and skeletal hell horse with an oversized head, a jet black coat, and a wild and rugged mane. It has red eyes, and nostrils from which orange flames protrude. Its hooves burn like embers, and sharp fangs protrude from its mouth.



*Monster Manual* (1977)

Although it doesn't specify which plane they originate from, the *Monster Manual* notes that nightmares are lower planar creatures often used as mounts by other evil denizens. Unsurprisingly, this has given them the alternative names of "demon horses" and "hell horses". Part of the appeal of such a mount to its rider is likely the nightmare's ability to fly and travel into the ethereal and astral planes.

Even without a rider, a nightmare is a dangerous foe. They are ill-disposed to most forms of life, and will attack without provocation. As well as a bite (fang) attack (2-8 damage), and burning hooves (two attacks, each doing 4-10 damage), the nightmare is also able to breathe out a cloud of hot smoke which causes a -2 penalty to attacks and damage if the saving throw is unsuccessful. It has an extremely good armor class (-4), high speed (15" or 36" in flight) and 6+6 hit dice.

*Dragon* #50 notes that nightmares are carnivorous, and that they particularly enjoy the meat of some lesser demons and devils (particularly manes and lemures). Failing to feed a nightmare its preferred diet may make it hostile to its owner. According to the article *Arrrrgh!!!* in *Dragon* #118, nightmares have a high pain threshold, being more resilient than griffons, hippogriffs and perytons and similar to wyverns. The 1st Edition *Players Handbook* notes that nightmares are not susceptible to *invisibility to animals* because of their high intelligence.

Nightmares have low-key appearances in a number of 1st Edition adventures, including the drow series (D1-D3). The device of the drow House of Noquar is a bronze nightmare's head and the drow of Erelhei-Cinlu, particularly nobles, keep nightmares as steeds. The affinity of drow for these exotic mounts extends right up to Lolth herself. The Stable of the Nightmare in level two of *Q1: Queen of the Demonweb Pits* houses Lolth's personal steed, cared for by two manes. Her nightmare is wearing *horseshoes of a zephyr*, which,

given that these allow a steed to travel without touching the ground, seems a little redundant for a flying mount.

A nightmare appears under the entry for *Ride of the Night Hag* in the *The Official AD&D Coloring Album*. It is being ridden by the night hag Strovolla, who rides across the astral reaches seeking aid from fiends. The nightmare is described as having a mane and tail of silvery black, gleaming red eyes, nostrils and hooves of orange fire, and pale yellow fangs. Together Strovolla and her steed are dangerous opponents and few challenge them.



*The Official AD&D Coloring Album*, p9 (April 1979)

Inside one of the burial mounds of Dolem Moor in *C5: The Bane of Llywelyn* is a lone nightmare, and similarly, the article *Grave Encounters* in *Dragon #114* lists nightmares as potential encounters in evil-enchanted graveyards. In *C6: The Official RPGA Tournament Handbook*, the nightmare residing in Keep Anelle is an aggressive individual. It viciously attacks any intruders, except, apparently, the hellcat living nearby.

A slightly more unusual nightmare can be found in *Dragon #42*. The characters in the adventure *The Mansion of Mad Professor Ludlow* are children on a camping trip. While exploring the mansion, they may come across a motionless nightmare which only reacts if mounted by a character carrying something magical. If that happens, the nightmare animates, and returns back to hell, taking its rider with it.

AD&D had more than one evil version of the paladin, and the nightmare is an obvious choice of potential steed for such a class. *The Anti-Paladin NPC* in *Dragon #39* suggests a 25% chance of an anti-paladin's special warhorse being a nightmare. The arrikan, a neutral-evil paladin variant detailed in *A Plethora of Paladins* in *Dragon #57*, also has a chance to call a nightmare as a steed, but this is only 5%, and only a single replacement steed can ever be called if the first one perishes.

For those considering the potential of nightmares as transportation, the article *The Ups and Downs of Riding High* in *Dragon #50* looks at the suitability of the flying creatures in the *Monster Manual* as steeds. Nightmares are deemed to be suitable primarily for undead riders. The section on a nightmare's carrying capacity is

confusing. It declares that the “semi-material” nature of the nightmare means that it can carry only undead on its back, but if it has a rider and is traveling to the ethereal plane, it can carry up to 6,000 gp of additional weight for some reason.

The planar nature of the nightmare is explored only peripherally in 1st Edition. In *Deities & Demigods*, the nightmare is included on the encounter tables for both the astral and ethereal planes. In *The Inner Planes* in *Dragon #42*, the nightmare is a rare encounter in the elemental planes of Earth, Water and Fire, as well as being attracted by “warps” into the negative plane.

The *Monster Manual II* lists the nightmare as a very rare encounter for a typical abyssal layer. It is also very rarely encountered on the 1st, 8th and 9th layers of Hell, but merely rare on layers 2-7. Finally, the *Manual of the Planes* clarifies that nightmares can be found on the planes of Tarterus, Hades, and Gehenna. The encounter tables in the *Manual of the Planes* again confirm that nightmares are visitors to the ethereal plane (alone or in pairs), as well as the astral (in groups of up to four).

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## 2nd Edition

There were some notable omissions from the first few volumes of the 2nd Edition *Monstrous Compendium*. As an (over-)reaction to some of the negative publicity the game had received during the 1980s, TSR decided not to include demons and devils in 2nd Edition. Predictably, all this did was annoy D&D fans, so two years into the release cycle, the lower planar denizens were restored, albeit with the offensive names “demons” and “devils” filed off and replaced with “tanar’ri” and “baatezu”. Several other creatures, including the nightmare, were incidental casualties of this policy, and also had to wait until *MC8: Monstrous Compendium Outer Planes Appendix* was released to see print.

Technically, the nightmare did appear in one 2nd Edition adventure before then. In *A Rose for Talakara* in *Dungeon #25*, the villain keeps a nightmare named Blackspike. Despite being a 2nd Edition adventure, the reference given for the nightmare is the 1st Edition *Monster Manual*. Curiously, the XP value for the nightmare differs from the 1st Edition *Dungeon Masters Guide* but is consistent with what would eventually appear in the *Monstrous Compendium*. An entry for morale—a stat new to 2nd Edition—is also included, but it is listed as “special” instead of the “elite (13-14)” value which eventually appeared in the *Monstrous Compendium* entry.



*MC8: Monstrous Compendium Outer Planes Appendix* (1991)



Other than the new XP value and the addition of morale and diet (carnivore), the statistics for the nightmare in the *Monstrous Compendium Outer Planes Appendix* are unchanged from those in the *Monster Manual*. The description, however, is greatly expanded, with the nightmare getting a full page to itself.

We get a little bit more about their combat abilities. Their burning hooves will set combustibles on fire, and their cloud of hot smoke has a range of 10 feet and requires a save vs. paralyzation to avoid the penalty. The fact that their flight is a magical ability is spelled out, and we learn that they can understand commands from evil riders (why only evil riders?) and that they use “empathy” to communicate with each other, which is regrettably vague.

In 2nd Edition, nightmares have a bit more personality than they did previously. Although they willingly serve as mounts for any mission involving evil, they now have ambitions of their own. Nightmares are compared to magical weapons with large egos—you can never be entirely sure that they are going to do what you want them to do.

The *Monstrous Compendium Outer Planes Appendix* is the first time the Gloom Meet is mentioned. This is a gathering of lower planar denizens on the plane of Hades, and takes place one per decade. Nightmares play a key role in spreading the word that the time of Gloom Meet is approaching, and the likelihood of encountering one of the creatures is higher during this time. Once the Gloom Meet begins, the nightmares announce this with a terrifying charge through the planes.

The *Monstrous Compendium* entry notes that nightmares are unrelated to horses, despite their resemblance. It also clarifies their “carnivore” diet. Although they are in the habit of eating the flesh of fallen opponents, they require neither food nor air to survive. It is suggested that they gain their strength solely through their service to evil.



1992 *Trading Cards Factory Set*, card 610/750 (1992)

The first color picture of a nightmare—or at least of a nightmare without a rider—seems to be in the 1992 *Trading Cards* set, where it appeared on card #610. The 1993 set also included a nightmare, but we’ll take a look at that in the Dragonlance section below.

The nightmare was reprinted in the *Monstrous Manual*. Other than a new (color) picture, the entry is the same as the one in the *Monstrous Compendium Outer Planes Appendix*.



*Monstrous Manual* (1993)

*CR4: Deck of Encounters, Set One* includes two run-ins with nightmares. In *A Nightmare on Four Feet* a pair of nightmare-riding wraiths attack the PCs with no warning. A more interesting encounter is *Tiger by the Tail*, in which the heroes discover that a nightmare happens to be stabled next to their steeds at an inn. It has been secured there by an evil wizard using a magical bridle. The nightmare resents being the wizard's captive, so the most efficient way of resolving the situation is for the PCs to simply let the beast free. It will leave the inn, but returns during the night to slay its former captor.

*Steed for a Wizard*, one of the encounters in *CR5: Deck of Encounters, Set Two*, is with a nightmare who was summoned by an ambitious wizard's apprentice to slay his master. This did not turn out well for the apprentice, as it rebelled against his control and killed him. This is consistent with 2nd Edition's emphasis on nightmares with more personality. In another encounter in the same set (*Grazing*), a nightmare has no qualms about abandoning her rider if the battle goes against him.

There isn't much additional lore on nightmares in other generic 2nd Edition products, although as we'll see below, they have a significant presence in some of the many campaign settings. We get a brief mention in the article *The Demiplane of Shadow* in *Dragon #213*, which includes nightmares on that plane's encounter list, and in the *DMGR7: The Complete Book of Necromancers* it is noted that a necromancer would need to be at least 18th-level to attract a nightmare as a familiar.

Finally, during the 2nd Edition era, TSR produced the *Spellfire* collectable card game. The nightmare featured on card #76 of the *Birthright* expansion, but the card simply recycled the artwork from the *Monstrous Manual*.

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### 3rd Edition

The most significant change to the nightmare in 3rd Edition is a visual one. Despite the written description making no mention of additional fire, the nightmare in the *Monster Manual* now has both a flaming mane and a flaming tail. It has also picked up weight, and is no longer skeletal in appearance. As we'll see, this depiction became the norm from this point forward. The nightmare is categorized as an "always neutral evil" outsider.



*Monster Manual* (2000)

In terms of its description and statistics, the nightmare remains remarkably similar to its earlier edition cousins. It has more hit points (6d8+18, an average of 45, up from 33) and does more damage, now split into physical and fire damage (1d8+4 + 1d4 fire for each of the two hoof attacks, and 1d8+2 from its bite, an average of 29 points if all attacks hit, compared to 19 points in 2nd Edition). It has the same special abilities: *flaming hooves*, defensive smoke, and the ability to travel into the astral and ethereal planes. The smoke attack is now cone-shaped but extends slightly further, to 15 feet. It gives the nightmare a measure of concealment against opponents, without impeding its vision. The astral and ethereal travel abilities are specified as being the same as the equivalent spells cast by a 20th-level sorcerer. The nightmare has the *alertness* and *improved initiative* feats.

For the first time, there is a mention of nightmares "haunting the dreams" of those who have crossed them, but this appears to be poetic license with the description, rather than a new ability. Although nightmares are still used as mounts by powerful evil creatures, they appear to be more reluctant to allow others to ride them than before. While mounted, they cannot fight independently unless their rider makes a successful ride check. Their carrying capacity is specified as being up to 900 pounds. The *Arms and Equipment Guide* lists them as "untrainable".

The advancement entry indicates that some nightmares can be huge in size, with up to 18 hit dice. When the nightmare was updated for the *Monster Manual v.3.5*, a huge version was given its own stat block as a *cauchemar* (French for "nightmare"). The 3.5 nightmare also gained darkvision 60 ft., and its environment was amended from "any land and underground" to specify the Gray Wastes of Hades as their home.



*Book of Challenges* (2000)

The line from the 2nd Edition monster statistics block indicating a creature's diet was not carried over to 3rd Edition, leading to some confusion over what nightmares eat. The vampire Lythia, in *Dying of the Light* in *Dungeon* #84 keeps two nightmares which she uses to draw her carriage. Under the seat, she keeps a leather sack filled with platinum filings which she uses to feed the pair.



*Dragon: Monster Ecologies* (2007)



The 3rd Edition *Manual of the Planes* maintains nightmares as possible encounters in the astral and ethereal planes, as well as the Tarterian Depths of Carceri, the Gray Waste of Hades, the Nine Hells of Baator and the Abyss. No specific mention is made of their presence in Gehenna, but the encounter tables imply that they can still be found throughout the lower planes.

Just in case a player wants to play a nightmare character, the article *Monsters with Class* in *Dragon #293* suggests that the Effective Character Level (ECL) of such a character would be 10, meaning that it would be treated as ten levels higher than ordinary humanoid adventurers. This article was a preview of *Savage Species* but the nightmare didn't make it into that book, probably because it isn't a particularly playable race.

The *Tome of Magic* includes the fiendbinder class, which uses truenames to bind fiends and other creatures into service. The cauchemar nightmare is one of the creatures that can be bound by a fiendbinder of at least 5th level.

In *Expedition to the Demonweb Pits*, the adventurers visit the planar city of Zelatar. While there, there is a possibility that they can persuade a group of cauchemar nightmares to help them navigate the city. So bored are the nightmares with acting as mounts for dignitaries and merchants, that they will cooperate with the party as long as their intention is to leave Zelatar, and provided the heroes are reasonably competent riders.



*A Practical Guide to Monsters* (2007)

Towards the end of 3rd Edition and continuing into the 4th Edition era, Wizards of the Coast published a number of books aimed at children under its Mirrorstone imprint. The second of these, *A Practical Guide to Monsters* includes an entry on the nightmare. The block of "Nightmare Facts" notes that a nightmare is six feet tall at the shoulder, weighs 1000 pounds, and is a solitary creature that might be found in any habitat. The book advises that it is a good tactic to attack a nightmare on a windy day so that its poisonous smoke disperses.

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#### 4th Edition

In the 4th Edition preview book *Wizards Presents: Worlds and Monsters*, we get both a first mention, and a first glimpse of the nightmare. There is a black and white illustration in the Shadowfell section, and it is noted that the shadar-kai capture nightmares to use as mounts, implying that the steeds have been displaced from the lower planes to inhabit a new home.



*Wizards Presents: Worlds and Monsters* (2008)

The depicted nightmare is both heavily armored and heavy. There is nothing remotely skeletal about this beast, and it has extensive ornate barding covering its legs, head and neck. This is likely magical barding because it appears to cling to the nightmare despite no visible straps or means of attachment.

The nightmare which appeared in the *Monster Manual* a few months later is not armored, but retains the well-defined muscular appearance. It is also the most flame-engulfed version we've seen so far, with fire now leaping out from the nightmare's head and torso. In death, these flames go out, and its mane and tail turn to ash.



*Monster Manual* (2008)

Mechanically, this is a simpler beast. It can no longer shift between planes, but gets a short-range teleportation ability instead, although the text notes that some particularly powerful individuals are capable of traveling to the Shadowfell. It has 138 hit points, nearly three times its 3rd Edition average. The nightmare has lost its bite and smoke breathing capabilities, and is limited to attacking with hooves (a +18 attack doing 1d8+6 damage plus 5 ongoing fire damage). The only special attack it has is to leave a trail of fire behind it with its *hooves of hell* when it charges. This seems to be the first version of the nightmare that is resistant to fire (although not immune), and it is able to extend its own fire resistance to a rider of sufficient power (13th level).

Although it is still described as intelligent, its intelligence score has dropped to subhuman levels and it is incapable of communicating in any language. The nightmare seems to be back to a carnivorous diet, which could explain the dramatic weight-gain. Nightmares have a taste for human flesh.

In theory (although not always in practice) nightmares of earlier editions were solitary creatures. These Shadowfell-dwelling versions are very much herd animals, even attacking in wolf-like packs. They get their name from the terrifying dreams experienced by survivors of their attacks. Nightmares enjoy spreading fear and terror and are known to let their targets think they have escaped, before closing back in for a kill.

Although they are still used as mounts by powerful evil creatures, such riders must now first defeat a nightmare in combat, and give the beast a choice of service or death in order to compel it to serve as a mount. Despite this rather onerous requirement, the *Adventurer's Vault* includes the nightmare on a list of potential mounts for adventurers. With a price tag of a mere 25,000 gp, the nightmare compares favorably with a wyvern (21,000 gp) or a mantichore (45,000 gp), and has a faster flying speed than either of them.

*Open Grave* offers a slightly more powerful nightmare, Maheghoda the Black Course, ridden by the death knight ruler of a city populated by undead. Although Maheghoda is a unique creature with improved hit points, AC and attacks, it does not have any new abilities.

The article *Codex of Betrayal: Alloces* in *Dragon* #373 mentions that Alloces, the devil known as the Butcher of Nessus, claims to have created the first nightmares. Although the same article also states that his claim is unlikely to be true, it acknowledges that Alloces has bred new, more potent nightmares. Quite how this lore dovetails with the nightmare's new home in the Shadowfell is unclear here, but a later article offers an explanation, as we'll see below.

The adventure *E1: Death's Reach* introduces creatures called shadowclaw nightmares, but contains frustratingly little in the way of description or explanation as to what these are. They can clearly be mounted, so could be horse-like in nature. They are also large shadow beasts, like the nightmare, but unlike the nightmare, they are undead and capable of reanimating once slain. Are they relatives of the nightmare? It is impossible to tell from *Death's Reach*.

A boxed set released towards the end of 4th Edition, *The Shadowfell: Gloomwrought and Beyond*, provides a little more detail of the shadar-kai relationship with nightmares. We learn that some shadar-kai have mastered a tactical maneuver where they leap from the backs of their nightmare steeds directly into combat. Svyn, the religious leader of the network of mountain caves known as Thyrin Gol, roams the Shadowfell on the back of a nightmare steed named Sear, searching out the mysteries of the plane. There are also rumors

that a jet-black unicorn has seized the leadership of the herd of nightmares living in the nearby Gol Mountains.

According to *Underdark*, deep within the Shadowdark a pair of nightmares is chained to the body of a purple worm, which is used as a bridge over the River Lathan, also known as the River of Souls.

Strangely, it is the nightmare's last 4th Edition appearance that provides the most detailed version of the creature. Following on from the *Essentials* reboot, a number of monster update articles appeared in the online magazines. The nightmare gets a two page write-up in *Dungeon* #198.

Some of the earlier characteristics of nightmares are restored here. They are again described (but not illustrated) as “gaunt”, and there is a nod to their plane-shifting powers as a possible explanation of their ability to teleport short distances. Nightmares are again said to be predominantly solitary, except in the Shadowfell, where they hunt in packs. The predatory nature of the creatures is emphasized—so grisly can the deaths of their victims be, that some of them remain behind as vengeful spirits.

The seemingly throwaway comment from the 3rd Edition *Monster Manual* that nightmares can invade dreams is repeated here, it seems that they somehow haunt the dreams of survivors of their attacks, as well as appearing in dreams as a foreshadowing of encounters still to come.

The damage inflicted by the nightmare's hooves has been boosted from 1d8+6 (plus 5 fire) damage, to 2d8+7 (plus 5 fire damage), and it is given a *shroud of smoke* defensive ability, which is another tip-of-the-hat to earlier editions. All nightmares can now travel to the Shadowfell, as well as take their rider with them when teleporting.

The discrepancy between their “lower” planar and Shadowfell habitats is addressed. The article makes it clear that in addition to the Shadowfell, there are also populations of nightmares in the Nine Hells and the Abyss. These herds are even given leaders. A stallion named Sin's Reward leads the nightmares of the Nine Hells. He wears spiked iron barding and is constantly surrounded by a cloud of black smoke and embers. Thunder of Hooves is a mare who has grown to enormous size, and mutated to grow an extra pair of legs. She rules over the herds of the Abyss by brute force.

Although these two rulers hate each other, they meet in the Shadowfell once each year to mate and produce three exceptional foals. One of these offspring remains on the Shadowfell, while the other two return to the home planes of each of their parents. The article suggests that these two rulers were originally servants of Vecna, but have been corrupted by their home planes, and that Vecna now plots their demise. The article finishes with a mention of the legendary Gloom Meet and the role that nightmares play in announcing this planar event. It is said that one way to find the location of the Gloom Meet is to follow the trail of scorched hoof prints.

This update does a good job of blending in traditional elements of nightmare lore, and it is a pity that it was published so late in the 4th Edition life-cycle. The 4th Edition *Monster Manual* would have been greatly improved by entries of this quality. Sadly, the article recycles the picture from the *Monster Manual* so we don't get a new illustration to accompany the update.



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## 5th Edition

The 4th Edition of D&D is sometimes viewed as the red-headed step-child, and 5th Edition a welcome return to the more classic lore of earlier editions. While this is often true, the 5th Edition nightmare (found in the latest *Monster Manual*) has more in common with its most recent sibling than any of its earlier cousins.

Now officially classified as a “fiend”, a nightmare can attack only with its hooves (a +6 attack doing 2d8+4 bludgeoning and 2d6 fire damage). It lacks a bite attack and although it is described as appearing “in a cloud of roiling smoke” this has no mechanical effect and the nightmare isn’t capable of producing any form of smoke cloud once it has appeared. It has a fiery mane and tail, as well as the standard hooves wreathed in flames. It no longer creates a flaming path behind it, but it does burn brightly enough to illuminate the area around it (a 10-foot radius, with dim light for a further 10 feet). It has an armor class of 13 and 68 hit points, putting it somewhere between its 1st-3rd Edition and 4th Edition ancestors.



*Monster Manual* (2014)

Looking at the illustration, you’d be unlikely to use the words “skeletal” or “gaunt” to describe this beast. Nightmares remain willing to serve as steeds for exceptionally evil riders, but they require a sacrifice before they exhibit any level of loyalty to the creatures they serve. A nightmare’s red eyes glow with malevolence. It is completely immune to fire, and grants resistance to fire damage to any rider.

This nightmare cannot teleport like the 4th Edition version, but it has regained the ability to move to and from the Ethereal Plane, taking up to three willing creatures with it. It cannot travel into the Astral Plane. It has recovered some intelligence, comparable to a typical human, and can understand three languages (Abyssal, Common and Infernal), but cannot speak. The alternative names of “demon horse” and “hell horse” from the original *Monster Manual* are reiterated in this latest description.

The most notable change to the 5th Edition nightmare is the introduction of a completely new origin story. Nightmares are now created by removing the wings of a pegasus and transforming the noble creature to evil using dark magic. This lore comes out of left-field, and seems a little impractical. Once created, can

nightmares breed with each other? If not, then who has been going to all the trouble of capturing pegasi to turn into nightmares? And to what end?



*Monster Manual* (2014)

Ultimately, the 5th Edition nightmare is rather disappointing. It is mechanically rather boring, and what little lore is included in the *Monster Manual* is at odds with most of what we know about the creatures from previous editions.

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### **Nightmare variations**

There are creatures very similar to nightmares, but which are not evil. In *Setting Sainly Standards* in *Dragon* #79, St. Bane the Scourger (a good saint, not to be confused with other D&D Banes) rides a white beast sharing the characteristics of a nightmare, but which is neutral good in alignment.

There is a similar white nightmare in *S5: The Dancing Hut of Baba Yaga*, which glows “brilliant white like the sun”. This is the steed of Light, one of the personifications of primal energy that Baba Yaga has captured as part of her plan to permanently evade death. When mounted by Light, the nightmare becomes insubstantial. Darkness (Light’s counterpart) also has a nightmare which becomes insubstantial when ridden. This steed is the traditional inky black, but its coat is so dark that it seems to absorb all light. Both of these nightmares are neutral evil.



*Lords of Darkness* (2001)

In *Countdown to the Forgotten Realms* in *Dragon* #277, the new champion of Zhentil Keep, Scyllua Darkhope, also rides a white nightmare. The *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting* reveals the nightmare's name to be Targaraene. Although this seems to be an otherwise ordinary evil nightmare, its coat is not the only strangely coloured part of it. Both its eyes and hooves are imbued with blue flames. The cover of *Lords of Darkness* gets this right, but unfortunately, by the time Darkhope and Targaraene make their final stand in the adventure *Shadowdale: The Scouring of the Land*, this detail has been forgotten, and the illustration shows a white nightmare with yellow flames.



**Darkhope's Fall**, *Shadowdale: The Scouring of the Land* (2007)

*The Plane Below: Secrets of the Elemental Chaos* mentions flame steeds, which are nightmares originating in the elemental plane of fire instead of the Shadowfell. These steeds serve efreet and fire giants.

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### Nightmare relatives

The *Planar Handbook* details a lesser nightmare. This isn't the undead Mystaran creature we'll get to a little later, but simply a slightly less powerful version of a normal nightmare. The ability to travel the planes has been removed and replaced with the ability to always know where true north is. This has to rank near the top of a list of monster abilities least likely to ever be relevant during a D&D game. The entry for the lesser nightmare includes a section on using it as a mount/servant for a blackguard. It's hard to view this uninspiring variation as anything other than an excuse to water down an ordinary nightmare to make it more balanced for use as a player character's mount.



**Lesser Nightmare**, *Planar Handbook* (2004)

The black unicorn (detailed in *Unique Unicorns* in *Dragon* #190) is also sometimes called a nightmare, but isn't a direct relative of the true nightmare. Similarly, the article *Destriers of the Planes* in *Dragon* #243 details nine magical steeds with planar origins, one associated with each alignment. Although none of them are noted as related to nightmares, the charnabalk is an emaciated, coal-black equine with smoldering eyes, native to the Abyss, and some sort of common ancestry with the nightmare seems quite plausible.

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### Nightmare parts

In *The Ecology of the Cockatrice* in *Dragon* #95 mentions that the blood of a nightmare is one of several potential components required to make a liquid capable of magically preserving cockatrice tail feathers.

The *mystic rope* spell (*Wizard's Spell Compendium Volume III*) requires a miniature rope of braided hairs from the mane of a nightmare as its material component. According to *Ecology of the Scarecrow* in *Dungeon* #183, hairs from a nightmare's mane are also woven into "nightmare thread" by hags. Laced with the filaments of dark dreams, this thread is used to stitch together a scarecrow and keep its spirit bound within the cloth and stuffing. If an adventurer somehow obtains some of this precious commodity, burning the thread turns him or her into a terrifying vision in the eyes of an enemy.

In *Dragon* #147, hoof of a nightmare is listed as an alternate component for the illusionist's *phantom steed* spell. This improves the capabilities of the steed by one level. However, with a price tag of 5,000 gp per hoof, and low availability (an alchemist has only a 5% chance of having 1-4 hooves), this seems more like a business opportunity for a nightmare-hunting adventuring group than it does a viable boost for the group's illusionist, especially since that's not the only use for the hooves. *Dragon* #317 expands on the optional rules for power components as a replacement for spell XP costs, mentioned in the *Dungeon Master's Guide v.3.5*. The hooves of a cauchemar nightmare (all four) can be used for a *planar ally* spell. In order for the hooves to remain useful, they must be stored in a jar filled with a special oil that allows the supernatural flames to continue burning.



**Nightmare's Hoof**, *Dragon* #317 (2004)

In *Ring in the Deep*, a tournament adventure for GenCon 2010, the heart of a nightmare can be wielded against a cinderhoof trampler to give a number of special bonuses. The cinderhoof trampler is a minotaur variant (from the *Monster Manual 3*) who has eaten the heart of a nightmare in order to gain burning hooves. However, using a heart as a weapon against a minotaur seems to be something unique to this adventure.



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## Nightmares and other monsters

Right out of the gate, the *Monster Manual* emphasizes the role of the nightmare as a steed for D&D's traditional bad guys. Demons, devils, night hags, spectres, vampires and liches are all given as examples of creatures who use nightmares as mounts.

*New Denizens of Devildom* in *Dragon* #75 details a number of new arch-devils. Bathym (a Duke of Hell) rides a nightmare into battle, while Alocer (another Duke) considers his nightmare as suitable for travel about his estates, as well as when going to war. The arch-devil Mammon rides a nightmare of largest size. He is still riding it in 1999's *Guide to Hell*.



**Mammon on Nightmare**, *Guide to Hell* (1999)

When encountered in *OP1: Tales of the Outer Planes*, Asmodeus is riding a nightmare. *Nine Hells Revisited* in *Dragon* #91 notes that devils appoint intermediaries (dark nagas, hell cats, imps, and the like) to command nightmares on their behalf. The same article notes that nightmares (and other mounts) are difficult to transport on the River Styx. They must be blindfolded and made to lie down, and the charonadaemons will charge a triple fare for the required space.



*Manual of the Planes* (2001)

Narzugon devils are probably the fiends most associated with the nightmare. First introduced in the 3rd Edition *Manual of the Planes*, they are consistently depicted astride the evil equines. They have mastered the art of mounted combat, and tend to be protective of their steeds, withdrawing from combat if their nightmares become seriously injured.



*Fiendish Codex II: Tyrants of the Nine Hells* (2006)

In 4th Edition, narzugons are known as hell knights, and are servants of Asmodeus. The illustration in the *Monster Manual 3* shows one riding a somewhat skeletal nightmare, a rarity for later edition artwork.



*Monster Manual 3* (2010)

The artwork in 5th Edition's *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* is uncannily similar to the 4th Edition illustration although the nightmare steed has picked up some weight and has a few extra visible spikes. The spikes are part of the *infernal tack*, a new magical item consisting of a bridle, bit, reins, saddle, and stirrups as well as spurs worn by the rider. The *tack* forces the nightmare to serve the wearer of the spurs until either the tack is removed or the wearer dies. Of course, in order for the *infernal tack* to work, a nightmare needs to first be subdued, since it never willingly accepts forced servitude. However, once bound, some nightmares do eventually form a strong bond with their masters.

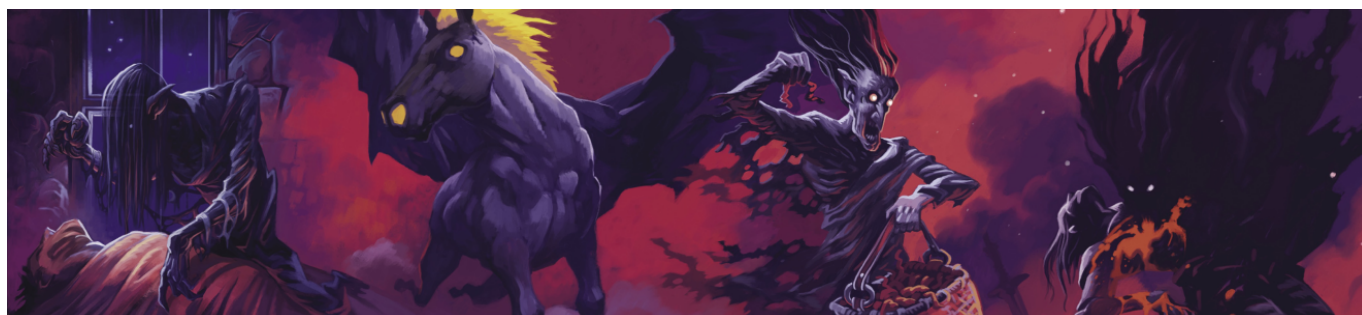


*Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* (2018)

Other fiends have also been known to use nightmares as mounts, including mezzodaemons (*Dragon #113*) and succubi (*Fiendish Codex I*).

Another creature with a strong link to nightmares is the hag. The annis hag Vyedma uses a nightmare as a steed in *I8: Ravager of Time* as does Nuala, the resurrected sorceress who is one of the main protagonists of the adventure. Nuala also has a *Leomund's secret chest* which is guarded by a nightmare. If the recalling chest is used to return the secret chest by anyone other than Nuala, the nightmare appears and attacks. It retreats to the ethereal plane once seriously wounded.

The *Monster Manual v.3.5* mentions that night hags ride nightmares, and they are depicted together in the *The Ecology of Night Hags* in *Dragon #324*.



**Night hags with nightmare**, *Dragon #324* (2004)



One of the most powerful hags in D&D history was Malagarde, the Hag Countess, appointed by Asmodeus to rule over the hellish layer of Malbolge for a time. *Fiendish Codex II* notes that once Asmodeus's daughter Glasya took over control of Malbolge from the Hag Countess, she also tried to co-opt the hag's steed, a monstrous nightmare named Bloodcurdle. Although this steed initially pretended to accept its new mistress, it then threw Glasya into one of the Lakes of Bile. As a consequence, Bloodcurdle now faces a grueling schedule of torments each day. He's still being tortured by Glasya in 4th Edition (*Dungeon* #197).

Death knights are also closely associated with nightmares. According to the original *Fiend Folio*, they can summon replacements every ten years. Two of the most infamous death knights, Lord Soth and St. Kargoth, are covered under their respective settings—Dragonlance and Greyhawk—below.

Perhaps because of their astral traveling ability, Githyanki have been linked to nightmares since 1st Edition. *OPI: Tales of the Outer Planes* includes an astral encounter with a group of githyanki knights riding huge nightmares. The description of the stables here includes piles of molten rocks and troughs of boiling lava, but it isn't clear if these are needed to care for the nightmares, or a byproduct of their residency. *A Guide to the Astral Plane* notes that githyanki knights tend to ride nightmares into battle only when their combat abilities are important, because the knights are faster when unmounted.



*Polyhedron* #159 (2003)

*Polyhedron* #159 includes a d20 mini-game which allows players to take on the role of githyanki invading a human world. One of the feats available to these characters allows them to replace their fiendish servant with a nightmare steed.

In 4th Edition, even though nightmares can no longer travel to and from the Astral Plane, the connection to githyanki remains. They serve as steeds for high-level githyanki in several sources (*Monster Manual*, *Dragon* #377, *The Plane Above: Secrets of the Astral Sea*).

Arch-fiends, hags, death knights and githyanki seem to make the most use of nightmares as mounts, but throughout D&D history, a wide variety of other creatures have ridden them. The *Battlesystem Fantasy Combat Supplement* mentions that drow elves may ride nightmares, and the *Dungeoneer's Survival Guide* expands this to races of the Underdark in general, many of which employ nightmare steeds.

In the 3rd Edition *Manual of the Planes*, powerful members of the Unseelie Court ride nightmares during their Wild Hunts. Nightmares are also ridden by the banesworn, the servants of the Iron General of Chernoggar in *The Plane Above: Secrets of the Astral Sea*.



Other nightmare riding creatures include shades (*C6: The Official RPGA Tournament Handbook*), tieflings (*Dungeon #116*), wights (4th Edition *Monster Manual*), medusas (*DDEX2-04: Mayhem in the Earthspur Mines*), mummy lords (*DDEX3-16: Assault on Maerimydra*) and in 4th Edition particularly, powerful shadar-kai (*Monster Manual 2*). *Enemies and Allies* has Strabo, a half-dragon cleric of Erythnul, riding a nightmare. Riders are not limited to medium-sized creatures. The adventure *Demonblade* in *Dungeon #97* has a nightmare ridden by a nine-foot tall troll.

Some creatures are fated to be mere caretakers of nightmares. The nightmares in *Expedition to the Demonweb Pits* are being looked after by babau demons, and appointing minor demons and devils to do this job isn't uncommon. In *The Dancing Hut* (*Dragon #83*), the three nightmares stabled in Baba Yaga's hut are watched over by four diakkas. More than 25 years later, in *Dungeon #196*, her nightmares are still being looked after by diakkas, although there are now only three of them.

Slasraths, ray-like flying creatures of Gehenna (described in *Planes of Conflict*) seem to be about the only creatures that view nightmares as food, but then slasraths will eat almost anything. *Planes of Conflict* also mentions that the mighty baernaloths sometimes have nightmares as companions.

The shadow unicorn, from *Ravenloft Monstrous Compendium Appendix III: Creatures of Darkness* is said to be able to speak the language of nightmares, even though nightmares are not known to speak a language of their own. Finally, the blood fiend (from *City of the Spider Queen*) has the ability to become a nightmare as an alternative form.

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### Nightmares and gods

Although nightmares do not have a deity of their own, they are associated with a number of gods. The original *Deities & Demigods* mentions their association with the god Hades, and *Welcome to Hades* in *Dragon #113* notes that Hades' chariot is drawn by four nightmares, who are stabled on the roof of his palace.

An article on creating a pantheon of elemental gods (in *Dragon #77*) suggests that nightmares would be an appropriate creature to associate with the Fire God. Hypnatia, the Mistress of Dream, from *Dreamlands: Variant Planes of Dreams* in *Dragon #287*, is said to have thousands of children who tame nightmares.

*Complete Divine* lists cauchemar nightmares as allies of Nerull, and ordinary nightmares as allies of Vecna. The Master of the Hunt (a lesser god from *Dragon #342*) counts nightmares as his allies, and his herald, Herne the Hunter, also rides one.

Additional links between nightmares and the gods of the Dragonlance and Greyhawk settings are covered in the relevant sections below.

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### Summoning nightmares

Although it seems creatures of the lower planes can readily use nightmares as mounts, the *Monstrous Compendium Outer Planes Appendix* contains a rather convoluted process for Prime Material Plane residents to secure one as a mount. A wizard of at least 5th-level must start by casting a *mount* spell to attract the attention of the nightmare, followed by a *monster summoning III* spell, and then finally a *wall of fog*, after which a nightmare will come galloping out of the mists. Once this is done, anyone (not just the caster) can

offer the nightmare oat-like flakes of platinum worth at least 200 gp in value to secure its services for 72 hours.

Apparently, this isn't the only way to call a nightmare into the world. *S6: Labyrinth of Madness* has a statue which uses a special version of *monster summoning* to summon various monsters, including a nightmare. In the article *Pleasant Nightmares!* in *Dragon* #186, a nightmare haunts a castle built on an ancient evil unholy spot. Its appearance can be stopped using an *exorcism* spell, but this only works half of the time.

In 3rd Edition, *The Book of Vile Darkness* simplifies this process by having a *call nightmare* spell. It is a demonologist spell, but is also available to sorcerers and wizards. The summoned beast remains in service for a week, or until the caster moves more than 150 feet away from it. The catch? The material component for the spell is a soul! If a soul seems a high price to pay, the alternative summoning rules in *The Summoner's Circle* in *Dragon* #302 allows a spellcaster to expand the list of creatures summonable using *summon monster V* to include a nightmare with only a few days of research.

Also worth a mention is the *conjure nightmare* spell from *Dragon* #221. This spell summons a nightmare which serves willingly as long as it is given only evil tasks to do. It will rebel if given tasks that do not have an obviously malicious purpose. The spell is quite expensive to cast, requiring 200 gp of platinum flakes. More importantly, the nightmare is not summoned from the lower planes, but from the Plane of Dreams, where it is plucked from a random sleeper's nightmares. This means that the nightmare only remains summoned until that sleeper awakens, which could prove rather inconvenient, since the caster has no control over which sleeper's dream the nightmare is plucked from.

In 5th Edition, a nightmare can be summoned from the Lower Planes (the *Monster Manual* doesn't specify how), but displays no particular loyalty to its summoner unless a worthy (and edible) sacrifice is offered to it upon arrival. *Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus* notes that while in the Nine Hells, casting the *find steed* spell will result in a nightmare being called.

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## Nightmares and magic

Nightmares are the inspiration for several magic items, including some things typically found in stables. *Bazaar of the Bizarre* in *Dragon* #47 details the *horseshoes of Hades*. When all four are attached to the hooves of a normal horse, it is transformed into an uncooperative and likely hostile nightmare.



**Nightmare Harness, *Dragon* #234 (1996)**

The *nightmare harness* from *Dragon #234* is a magic item made by a lich in order to summon a nightmare. It is studded with platinum and precious gems which glow with an inner fire. Once summoned, the nightmare will serve the lich indefinitely, but should the nightmare die while in service, the harness crumbles to dust. This is similar to the narzugon's *infernal tack* introduced in 5th Edition and covered above.

Also capable of summoning a nightmare is the *darkest bridle* from *Dragon #244*. Made of black leather studded with onyx, when cracked against the possessor's leg, the bridle summons a flying steed. The creature summoned is determined randomly, with a nightmare the least likely monster to appear. A *saddle of the nightmare* (detailed in *Adventurer's Vault*) allows the rider of a teleporting mount to travel with the steed, even if that would not normally be the case.

There are at least two types of magical figurines which transform into nightmares. The most well-known of the two is one of the *figurines of wondrous power* first detailed in the 1st Edition *Dungeon Masters Guide*. There it is described as a "small, nearly shapeless lump of black stone" vaguely resembling a quadruped. The *obsidian steed* figurine becomes a nightmare upon the utterance of the command word. It will allow itself to be ridden, but should the rider be of good alignment, there is a 10% chance that they will be dropped off in Hades.

Bizarrely, the description of the *obsidian steed* in the *Dungeon Master's Guide v.3.5* makes no reference to nightmares. Instead, it says only that the steed transforms into a "fantastic mount" capable of traveling to the Astral and Ethereal Planes. The *goat of travail* figurine, however, becomes an enormous creature with the statistics of a nightmare. In the 5th Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide* the figurine is back to changing into a nightmare, but the workmanship has improved, since the illustration clearly resembles a horse.



**Obsidian Steed**, *Dungeon Master's Guide* (2014)

The second type of figurine is the *equus*, introduced in *Dungeon #22*. This is a magical piece of jewelry that polymorphs on command into a beast of burden. Although a nightmare is not one of the standard options for creatures into which the *equus* polymorphs, it is mentioned as a possibility for an evil version of the item.

One of the four functions of a *wand of darkness*, first detailed in *Dragon #102*, is to summon a nightmare. This costs three charges. The nightmare is under the control of its summoner, and serves for 90 minutes. It can transport a rider to the Astral or Ethereal Planes. A *staff of fiendish darkness* (*Magic of Faerûn*) can be used to summon a nightmare at a cost of two charges. (This item was renamed to be a *runestaff of fiendish darkness* in the *Magic Item Compendium*.)

The warrior Ardenor Crush, who has been reincarnated into the body of a hobgoblin, is detailed in *FR15: Gold & Glory*. He wears an amulet that allows him to summon a nightmare. In *Marco Volo: Arrival*, the

malevolent artifact known as the *Dragonking's Eye* possesses transport gems that can be used to summon extraplanar allies, including a nightmare.

*Dragon #76* notes that although a *potion of fire resistance* is ineffective against the most powerful of devils, it does work against the magical fires produced by a nightmare. The article *The Many Facets of Gems* in *Dragon #83* states that diamonds are supposed to provide protection from creatures like spirits, ghosts and nightmares.

One of the many creatures into which a *paddleboard of wondrous transformations* can polymorph its target is a nightmare. This item is detailed in *Dragon #134*.

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## Al-Qadim

Nightmares are listed as appropriate monsters in the encounter tables in *MC13: Monstrous Compendium Al-Qadim Appendix*, and the entry for noble efreeti indicates that a typical household in the City of Brass includes 2-4 nightmares. Similarly, the article *Campaign Journal: Scimitars Against the Dark* in *Dragon #198* lists nightmares as creatures suitable for an alternative “Dark Arabia” version of the setting.

The *ALQ4: Secrets of the Lamp* boxed set provides more detail on nightmares in the City of Brass. The Sultan of the Efreet and the master of the City is Marrake al-Sidan al-Hariq ben Lazan. He is known to lavish his affections on two prized racing nightmares. He frequently bets large amounts on the two creatures, named Eversmoke and Black Onyx, and he is even rumored to sleep in the stable with them before important races.



*ALQ4: Secrets of the Lamp* (1993)

Another efreeti noble, Miraz Amak, owns a prized racing nightmare named Steam. She is albino and thus a silvery white color. He has been hiding her from the Sultan, whom he knows would covet her. Many of the other efreet rulers in the city keep nightmares as steeds and to pull bronze chariots. Nightmares are also the chosen mounts for most of the archers in the efreet legions. *Secrets of the Lamp* includes a racing sequence involving this colorful cast of characters, complete with rules for DMing the event. It is one of the more interesting uses of nightmares in a D&D adventure.



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## Birthright

The initial Birthright boxed set lists nightmares as creatures found in Cerilia, but they don't appear in any of the published adventures or accessories for the setting. However, the Shadow World is a faerie realm that exists in parallel to Cerilia. This realm has horses made of shadowstuff which, much like nightmares, function as steeds for the denizens which dwell there. Although not explicitly related, if a shadow steed crosses from the Shadow World to Cerilia, it becomes a nightmare, at least according to *Bloodspawn: Creatures of Light and Shadow*.

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## Dark Sun

Although nightmares do not seem to occur naturally on the Dark Sun world of Athas, *The Will and the Way* indicates that they can be summoned from the lower planes using psychoportive psionic powers.

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## Dragonlance

Nightmares feature quite prominently in the Dragonlance setting by virtue of their association with Lord Soth. This is particularly true of artwork depicting the death knight, perhaps the most iconic of which is *Lord Soth's Charge*, painted by Keith Parkinson for the 1987 Dragonlance Calendar.



**Lord Soth's Charge**, 1987 *Dragonlance Calendar* (1987), image from [Parkinson Art](#)

Lord Soth must take quite good care of his mount, since he can only summon a new steed once per decade (*DL15: Mists of Krynn*). This is a restriction he appears to have inherited from the generic death knights in the *Fiend Folio*. By the time Dragonlance was updated to 2nd Edition with the *Tales of the Lance* boxed set, Soth was able to summon a new nightmare steed more frequently, every four years.

According to *DL16: World of Krynn*, Soth's nightmare has the rather underwhelming name of "Moggi". Moggi and the thirteen nightmare steeds belonging to his death knight warriors are stabled near the top of the tower of Dargaard Keep, which makes sense for flying mounts. ("What is Lord Soth's nightmare's name?" would be an excellent D&D trivia question.)

Nightmares seem to be only rarely encountered in the Dragonlance setting other than in the company of death knights. There is an encounter with a pack of ten in *DLT2: Book of Lairs* but these are dreamwraith versions summoned into existence by a vampire.





*The Bestiary* (1998)

There was a brief period when Dragonlance used the SAGA Game Rules, instead of any edition of D&D. The monster book for this version of the setting was titled *The Bestiary* and contains the least fiery version of the nightmare ever published. The written description also plays down the visible flames, stating that an unobservant person might mistake it for a purebred horse.

This version of the nightmare has a paralyzing breath which builds up with the creature's bloodlust. The book is written largely from the perspective of Caramon Majere, so perhaps the details should be taken with a pinch of sulfur. The editor's notes for the nightmare (the editor being—in character—Bertrem the Aesthetic) mentions that great herds of nightmares have recently been reported in the plains of Nightlund, but since this isn't supported in any other Dragonlance sources, perhaps this is simply a case of ordinary horses being mistaken for nightmares.

In 3rd Edition Dragonlance, nightmares are given a link to the evil god Chemosh, who occasionally rewards his servants with a nightmare steed (*Bestiary of Krynn, Revised, Spectre of Sorrows*). In *Holy Orders of the Stars*, the night hag druid herald of another evil god (Morgion) also rides a nightmare.



1993 Trading Cards Factory Set, card #446/750 (1993)

As noted above, the nightmare also featured as card #446 in the 1993 *Collector Card* set. The card carries the Dragonlance logo simply because the picture is cropped from the cover of a Dragonlance novel (*The Cataclysm*), published the previous year.

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## **Eberron**

In the Eberron setting, nightmares inhabit the Demon Wastes (*Explorer's Handbook*) and the valley of Ahdryatmin on the continent of Sarlona (*Secrets of Sarlona*). On the continent of Argonnessen, the great dragon Zenobaa keeps a herd of 101 cauchemar nightmares known as “sky-blazers” (*Dragons of Eberron*).

Although Eberron has its own planar topology, distinct from the Great Wheel, nightmares remain planar inhabitants. They can be found on the plane of Lamannia, the Twilight Forest (*Eberron Campaign Setting*). In the adventure *Whispers Behind the Door* which was part of the *Xen'drik Expeditions* campaign, a night hag dwelling in a pocket dimension/dreamscape rides a nightmare equipped with mithral barding.

The adventure *Greater the Fall* (also part of *Xen'drik Expeditions*) gives Eberron's nightmares a slightly different spin. It states that they are “drawn from the pits of Khyber itself”, and if slain, they disappear into rancid mist.

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## **Exandria**

*Critical Role: Call of the Netherdeep* includes three enraged nightmares as an encounter in *Betrayer's Rise*, the temple of the Betrayer Gods in Xhorhas.

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## **Forgotten Realms**

In Forgotten Realms lore, nightmares are usually associated with specific riders. However, they do occur in the wild in a few places, including the Daggerford area (*N5: Under Illefarn*), Undermountain and in the ruins of Myth Drannor (*Undermountain: Stardock*).

A solitary nightmare appears on the encounter tables for Ashanath and the North County in *Unapproachable East*, and in *Shining South*, nightmares are listed on the encounter tables for Veldorn. The same source notes that the previous queen of Dambrath, Yenandra, was transformed by her daughter into a spectral guardian. She is now known as the Nightmare Queen and patrols the countryside atop her nightmare steed, which was transformed from a horse into a nightmare as part of the same ritual.

The Zhentarim skymage prestige class from *Lords of Darkness* can call a flying monster, such as a nightmare, to serve as their personal mount. According to *Power of Faerûn*, nightmares are also found in the stables of the Flaming Tower, a Zhentilar military outpost on the southern edge of the Border Forest.

One of the characters in *City of the Spider Queen* is a drow ghost champion of Kiaransalee by the name of Taharak. He rides a nightmare and leads a group of scouts who patrol the cavern of Maerimydra ethereally. Detailed in *Serpent Kingdoms*, Chassan is a death knight able to summon a nightmare as a mount. As the leader of the Ack'ta tribe of firenewts in the Peaks of Flame, he is a very unusual example of a death knight.

Prince-Consort Imbrar Heltharn, the fallen king of Impiltur is a powerful death knight who favors a nightmare steed. If his mount is lost, he is able to summon a replacement after a year and a day have passed. The same is true of Lord Vanrak Moonstar, another Faerûnian death knight, who resides in the level of

Undermountain known as Vanrakdoom. These two are detailed in *Champions of Ruin* and *Vanrakdoom*, an adventure published online to support that book.



**Imbrar Heltharn**, *Champions of Ruins* (2005)

In 3rd Edition, the Forgotten Realms experimented with a unique cosmology, rather than using the Great Wheel. One of the fiendish planes of this cosmology, Fury's Heart, includes nightmares among its residents. *Deity Do's And Don'ts*, the web enhancement for *Faiths and Pantheons*, associates nightmares with a number of Faerûnian deities: Cyric, Ilneval, Loviatar, and Set.

Far to the west of Faerûn lies the continent of Returned Abeir (at least during the 4th Edition era). *Dragon* #376 notes that in the region referred to as the Windrise Ports there lies a volcanic mountain range known as Nightmare's Hoof, which probably indicates that nightmares are also found on this continent.

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## Greyhawk

In the Greyhawk setting, the god Incabulos has a strong association with nightmares. He often rides a huge nightmare, accompanied by six night hags who have similar mounts (*World of Greyhawk*).

*Dragon* #88 provides some more detail of the gods of the Greyhawk setting. The goddess Syrul rides her personal nightmare Flamedevil when she travels to the Prime Material Plane. If he is slain, she can revive him after 13 days. Syrul is also sometimes accompanied by other nightmares.

According to *WGR5: Iuz the Evil*, the estate of Zengrunddin in the Horned Lands is patrolled by cambion guards riding nightmares. In the Almorian Lands, Duze Szeffrin, once one of Ivid's best generals, now serves Pazrael (*WGR7: Ivid the Undying*). The demon prince has gifted him a nightmare steed capable of breathing a *stinking cloud* three times a day. Nightmares are also found in Lyzandred's demiplane in *Crypt of Lyzandred the Mad*.



*Dungeon #89 (2001)*

The adventure *Headless* in *Dungeon #89* is set in the Crystallist Mountains and features a powerful derro loremaster named Eldrua. Eldrua has created four simulacra of herself, each of which rides a nightmare summoned from Orcus's court in the abyss. These simulacra have been raiding the outlying regions of Sterich in order to hunt heads.

St. Kargoth, the King of Death Knights, is first detailed in *Setting Sainly Standards* in *Dragon #79*. There he rides a glowing green chariot driven by six nightmares, each of maximum hit points. In *Demogorgon's Champions* in *Dragon #291*, St. Kargoth rides a single nightmare into battle, as does Lady Lorana Kath of Naelax, one of his offspring.

In the *Living Greyhawk* adventure *COR7-07: Storm Harvest*, the heroes have to explore the ruined tower of a deceased evil wizard Targandor. He specialized in experimental crossbreeding of various creatures, and his notes mention that he was able to successfully crossbreed a bulette and a nightmare. The resulting monster had the abilities of a bulette, but the color and fire of a nightmare. Indications are that the creature was sent elsewhere shortly after the conclusion of that experiment, so it is possible that it is still roaming Oerth.

This isn't the only nightmare crossbreed appearing in the Greyhawk setting. *GEO4-05: Vision of a Lighted Path* features an advanced half-dragon nightmare, and *VEL4-03: War of the Rings* includes a half-fiend cauchemar.

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### Historical Reference

*HR4: A Mighty Fortress* suggests that nightmares would be appropriate (but rare) creatures for an Elizabethan setting, while *DMGR5: Creative Campaigning* notes that they could form part of the Fomorian alliance in a campaign set in Celtic Ireland.

The article *Red Sails: Tempests on the Steppes* in *Dragon #290* gives advice on running a campaign set in Eastern Europe during the Dark Ages. One of the included adventure ideas includes a vampire cleric riding a nightmare.

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## Kingdoms of Kalamar

The *Player's Guide to the Sovereign Lands* for the Kingdoms of Kalamar setting includes the restorer prestige class, which is able to select a nightmare as a monstrous steed at 5th level.

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## Mystara

The Mystaran version of the nightmare appears in *AC9: Creature Catalogue* and originates from that setting's Sphere of Death. The description is similar to the AD&D version, but the illustration gives the nightmare a whole mouthful of fangs rather than the two oversized canines we saw in earlier artwork.



*AC9: Creature Catalogue* (1986)

These creatures have the standard fang and burning hoof attacks, as well as a smoking breath attack (here a cloud) which imposes penalties not just to attacks and damage but also to saves and armor class. Replacing the AD&D nightmare's ability to travel into the ethereal and astral planes, this version can turn invisible (including its rider) three times per day. The mere presence of a Mystaran nightmare is sufficient to instantly kill plants, insects, and small animals within thirty feet, as well as causing paralysis in creatures of 3 HD or less.

In the early 1990s, TSR relaunched Basic D&D with the Challenger series of accessories and adventures. The adventure packaged with the DM's screen (*Escape from Thunder Rift*) includes the lesser nightmare as a new monster. As can be expected from the name, this is a wimpier version of the ordinary nightmare, with few hit dice, and weaker attacks. Bizarrely, the lesser nightmare is an undead creature summoned by a powerful cleric or wizard, so it takes half damage from edged weapons and can be turned.

The planar version of the nightmare was reprinted in *DMR2: Creature Catalog*, but both the picture and text are recycled from the *AC9: Creature Catalogue* version.

*AC11: The Book of Wondrous Inventions* mentions Ch'thon of the Black Arts, who rides through dimension on a nightmare named Whelm. The *Savage Coast Monstrous Compendium Appendix* details inheritor liches, one of whom also has a nightmare as a steed.





*In Search of the Dungeon Master* (1983)

Prior to being given D&D statistics in the *Creature Catalogue*, the nightmare (or rather a nightmare) gets a mention in *AC1: The Shady Dragon Inn*, as Warduke's steed. Warduke is one of several D&D characters whose home setting is debatable. He does first appear in the D&D adventure *XL1: Quest for the Heartstone*, but the accompanying line of toys carried "AD&D" branding, and *Dungeon #105* later retroactively placed Warduke in the Greyhawk setting. Confusing things further, Warduke (and steed) appeared in an episode of the D&D cartoon series, which isn't set in Mystara but in a world referred to as The Realm.

This steed also got its own plastic figure (pictured below) as part of the LJN toy line. It is worth noting that the plastic toy seems to be the first time a nightmare was depicted with a fiery mane and tail. Perhaps the artist who painted the nightmare for the 3rd Edition *Monster Manual* drew inspiration from this toy?



*LJN Nightmare* (1983), image from [Alex Bickmore's Super Toy Archive](https://www.super-toy.com/)

While we are on the topic of the D&D Cartoon series, Venger, the main villain of the series, also rode a nightmare. It could be argued that this is pretty lazy, given that Venger has wings, but according to the *Animated Series Handbook*, Venger has a flying speed of a mere 30 ft., compared to the 90 ft. of his nightmare, so his choice of steed makes practical sense.



**Venger on Nightmare** (1983), image from [D&D Cartoon Encyclopedia](#)

## Planescape

The Planescape setting narrows down the native plane of nightmares to Carceri (*Planescape Campaign Setting*), but they are still encountered on other planes, including Pandemonium (*Planes of Chaos*), the Gray Waste, and Gehenna (*Planes of Conflict*).



*Planescape Monstrous Compendium Appendix* (1994), image from the [Norman Rockwell Museum](#)

The *Planescape Monstrous Compendium Appendix* reprints much of the *Monstrous Compendium* entry for the nightmare, along with a new, full-page color picture. This illustration is noteworthy not only for the fairly limited amount of fire visible on the nightmare's body, but also because it shows the beast with a strangely serpentine tail.

The statistics and lore for the nightmare are unchanged from earlier 2nd Edition sources, but Planescape adds an intriguing story of what happens at the end of a nightmare's life. There is a Hill of Bone in the Gray Waste covered in the bones of generations of nightmares, and ancient individuals travel to this hill to die. Some lingering evil force remains behind in the skulls of the deceased beasts, so that the Hill continues to echo with neighs and snorts. It is said that nightmares will sometimes retrieve the bodies of their fallen kin from other planes, so that their bones can be laid to rest here.

*Planes of Conflict* includes a more detailed description of the Hill of Bone. If seen from above, the entire hill resembles a horse-shaped skeleton, and a careful observer might notice that parts appear to move from time to time. Some believe that the Hill itself may one day come to life. Travelers visiting this place should be careful not to remove any of the bones. Doing so will invoke the wrath of the entire nightmare race, and the perpetrator will be hunted across the planes, until the bone is recovered.

Given the risks of owning the remains of a nightmare, it is surprising that a nightmare skull can be purchased for a mere 100 gp, at least according to an advert for "Parts & Pieces" in *Uncaged: Faces of Sigil*.

The Planescape-themed card game *Blood Wars* featured the nightmare in *Escalation Pack 3: Powers and Proxies*, but the card simply reuses the artwork from the *Planescape Monstrous Compendium Appendix*.

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## Ravenloft

There is a nightmare in the original *I6: Ravenloft* adventure, in the crypt in Strahd's castle marked "Beucephalus, The Wonder Horse. May the flowers grow ever greener where he trods (sic)". This nightmare is identified as Strahd's steed, but it isn't clear why he keeps it in a crypt. Curiously, the text in the TSR Silver Anniversary version of the adventure changes the gender of Beucephalus, but doesn't fix the incorrect verb form. It reads "...ever greener where she trods." In 5th Edition's *Curse of Strahd*, Beucephalus's gender has reverted to male, but he is still living in the castle's crypts. At least his crypt now has an enlarged door, so that he can comfortably enter and exit his home.

In *I10: Ravenloft II: The House on Gryphon Hill*, Strahd again has a nightmare as a steed, and in his guise as the Creature, will ride it into battle. Nightmares are also potential random encounters on the Moors surrounding Mordentshire.

The adventure *RQ2: Thoughts of Darkness* features the domain of Bluetspur. Early in the adventure, one of the protagonists, a malicious human thug going by the name of Bonespur, calls forth his pet nightmare to escape the PCs. He does this repeatedly during the course of the adventure, in a manner that seems contrived to keep him in play as a plot device.

The domain of Nova Vaasa is known for its horses, and the best steeds in Ravenloft originate from the herds dwelling in its grassy plains. However, according to the *Ravenloft Campaign Setting*, some people believe that these beasts are replaced by herds of nightmares once the sun sets each day.

During his stay in Ravenloft, Lord Soth inhabited the domain of Sithicus. He was joined there by his nightmare, who features in the adventure *When Black Roses Bloom*.

The shadow elves of *The Shadow Rift* make use of nightmares for their elite troops.



**Toy Nightmares**, *Forged of Darkness* (1996)

Unique to Ravenloft are *toy nightmares*, hobby horses which transform into nightmares. These are cursed items, however, and although the summoned beast will serve for thirteen days and nights once summoned, thereafter it will turn on its master.



*Denizens of Darkness* (2002)

The 3rd Edition Ravenloft monster books *Denizens of Darkness* and *Denizens of Dread* treat the setting's nightmares as separate creatures ("dread" nightmares). Although they are slightly more powerful than other 3rd Edition nightmares, they are earthly bound, having lost the ability to fly.



*Denizens of Dread* (2004)



*The Gothic Earth Gazetteer* notes that a nightmare would be an appropriate creature to use in Ravenloft's *Masque of the Red Death* alternative Earth campaign setting.



*Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft* (2021)

*Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft* introduces dullahans, headless undead warriors that are the remains of villains whose desire for vengeance has consumed them. Like death knights and narzugons, dullhans often choose nightmares as steeds.

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## Ravnica

According to *Guildmasters' Guide to Ravnica* nightmares often accompany Rakdos cultists, participating in the dark and destructive entertainments that the guild offers.

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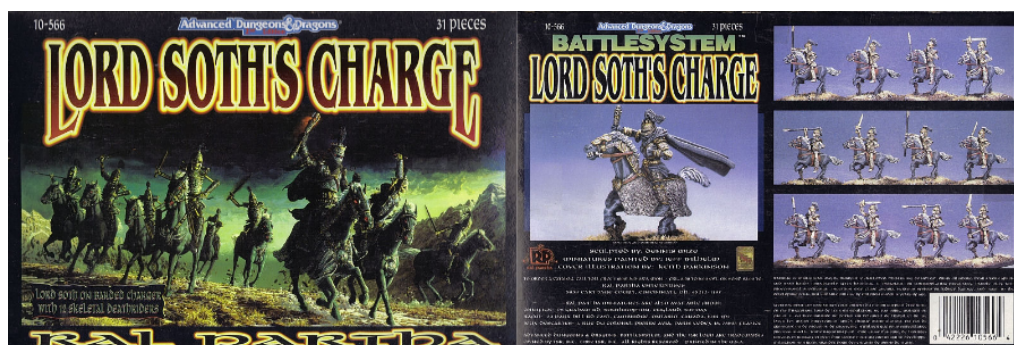
## Theros

Nightmares compete with harpies and lamias to haul doomed souls away for punishment in Tizerus, the deepest ward of the Underworld (*Mythic Odysseys of Theros*). They are closely associated with Erebus, God of the Dead.

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## Miniatures

There have been several nightmare miniatures produced for D&D. Ral Partha's 1987 boxed set *Lord Soth's Charge* has not just Lord Soth on his steed, but includes his entire entourage of twelve death knights, all similarly mounted. Curiously, the back of the box shows the flames of the nightmares painted an insipid white color.



*Lord Soth's Charge*, Ral Partha 10-566 (1987), images from [Lost Minis Wiki](#)



Wizards of the Coast produced two nightmares as part of its pre-painted plastic minis series. The figure from the *War of the Dragon Queen* set was a blackguard riding a nightmare, while the following year's *Desert of Desolation* set included a nightmare by itself.



**Blackguard on Nightmare**, *War of the Dragon Queen* #25 (2006), image from [MinisGallery](#)



**Nightmare**, *Desert of Desolation* #30 (2007), image from [MinisGallery](#)

WizKids began producing a licensed line of pre-painted miniatures in 2014, and the *D&D Icons of the Realms: Rage of Demons* set included a nightmare.



**Nightmare**, *Rage of Demons* #31 (2015), image from [MinisCollector](#)

The *D&D Icons of the Realms: Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus* set from 2019 includes both a nightmare and a narzugon that can be attached to the nightmare to make a mounted mini.



**Narzugon on Nightmare**, *Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus* #44 and #45 (2019), images from [MinisGallery](#)

Figure #29 in the *D&D Icons of the Realms: Mythic Odysseys of Theros* set from 2020 looks a little different from the flaming-maned nightmares of previous miniatures. It appears to be based on the artwork from earlier *Magic: The Gathering* cards rather than on nightmares depicted in D&D sources.



**Nightmare**, *Mythic Odysseys of Theros* #29 (2020), image from [MinisGallery](#)

The optional mounted rider from *Descent into Avernus* was repeated in the 2022 set *D&D Icons of the Realms: Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft*. This time, the nightmare's rider is the headless undead creature known as the dullahan. The dullahan figure can be detached at the waist and inserted onto the nightmare.



**Nightmare**, *Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft* #48 (2022), images from [MinisGallery](#) and [CoolStuffInc](#)

Gale Force Nine sculpted Strahd von Zarovich astride a nightmare as part of its *Collector's Series* of resin miniatures.



**Strahd von Zarovich on Nightmare**, Gale Force Nine *Collector's Series* (2016), image from [Gale Force Nine](#)

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### Video games

The *Planescape: Torment* game introduced a relative of the nightmare, a creature known as a sohmien. These are said to have been created when the last of the nightmare lords was attacked by fiends who no longer wanted to have to barter for permission to use nightmares as steeds. Where the lord's blood fell, sohmien sprang forth. They resemble misshapen horses with dead white eyes and six large spikes protruding from their necks.



**Sohmien**, *Dragon* #262 (1999)

In the *Neverwinter* MMORPG, it was possible to unlock a nightmare as a mount, both a “heavy inferno nightmare” and a “heavy mystic nightmare” version.



*Neverwinter* (2013), image from [Arc Games](#)



*Neverwinter* (2013), image from [Arc Games](#)

The clicker game *Idle Champions of the Forgotten Realms* features a nightmare, not only in the game but also in a promotional adventure *A Fool's Errand* released in 2021.



*A Fool's Errand* (2021)



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## Nightmare names

Beucephalus, Black Onyx, Black Strider, Blackspike, Bloodcurdle, Bloodfire, Eversmoke, Faras, Flamedevil, Kabus, Kadis, Maheghoda, Manam, Moggi, Rusub, Sear, Sin's Reward, Steam, Targaraene, Thunder of Hooves, Yubusat, Whelm.

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## Comparative statistics

						
Edition	<b>BECMI</b>	<b>AD&amp;D (1st Edition)</b>	<b>AD&amp;D 2nd Edition</b>	<b>D&amp;D 3rd Edition</b>	<b>D&amp;D 4th Edition</b>	<b>D&amp;D 5th Edition</b>
Source	<i>AC9: Creature Catalogue</i>	<i>Monster Manual</i>	<i>Monstrous Compendium Outer Planes Appendix</i>	<i>Monster Manual</i>	<i>Monster Manual</i>	<i>Monster Manual</i>
Size		L	L (6' at shoulder)	Large	Large	Large
Type				Outsider	Shadow magical beast (mount)	Fiend
Alignment	Chaotic	Neutral (evil)	Neutral evil	Always neutral evil	Evil	Neutral evil
No. Appearing	1 (1)	1	1	Solitary		
Armor Class	-4	-4	-4	24	27	13
Hit Points	7 HD	6 + 6	6 + 6	6d8 + 18 (45 hp)	138 hp	68 (8d10 + 24)
Speed	150' (50') Flying 360' (120')	15"/36"	15, Fl 36 (C)	40 ft., fly 90 ft. (good)	10, teleport 10	60 ft., fly 90 ft.
Abilities	Intelligence 13 Morale 12	Int High	Int Very (11-12) Morale Elite (13-14)	Str 18, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 13, Wis 13, Cha 12	Str 23, Dex 19, Con 26, Int 5, Wis 12, Cha 15	Str 18, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 13, Cha 15
Senses				Alertness, Improved Initiative	Perception +12, darkvision	Passive Perception 11
Saves	Fighter 7			Fort +8, Ref +7, Will +6	Fort 26, Ref 25, Will 24	
Attacks	3	3	3	2 hooves +9 melee, bite +4 melee	Hooves +18 vs. AC	Hooves +6 to hit
Damage	1-12/2-12/2-12	2-8/4-10/4-10	4-10/4-10/2-8	Hoof 1d8+4 and 1d4 fire, bite 1d8+2	1d8+6 damage and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends)	13 (2d8+4) bludgeoning plus 7 (2d6) fire damage
Special Attacks	Paralysis aura, noxious vapours		Burning hooves	Flaming hooves, smoke	Hooves of Hell	
Special Defenses	Invisibility	Smoking cloud	Paralyzing cloud			Confer Fire Resistance, Illumination, Ethereal Stride
XP	1650	600 + 8/hp	2,000	CR 5	800	700 XP
Treasure	Nil	Nil	Nil	None		

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