

# The Night is Dark and Full of Terrors...

## AN ALTERNATIVE HORROR & FEAR MECHANIC FOR 5TH EDITION

The creeping sensation that unspeakable doom lurks around the catacomb's corner. The unnerving but thrilling chill experienced while investigating an eerily familiar murderer. The pinpricks of twisted delight while exploring a hag's lair. How does a DM evoke such an emotional impact in his or her players? For some, calling for an ability check and imposing a frightened or madness condition (as per the DMG's recommendation) may fall short. Thus, dear reader, I've drafted this simple rule which plays upon the true source of player dread: the unknown shadows that play in their own minds. For, in the words of G.R.R. Martin's Melisandre, "*the night is dark and full of terrors.*"

There are two variations of this rule: The first for DMs who have a clear idea of the nature of the threats facing the PCs, and the second for DMs improvising those threats spur of the moment. The "nature of the threat" can be as simple as "a night hag" or as complex as "the exiled sister of the night hag Jenny Greenteeth seeking revenge," depending upon the needs of the DM's adventure and the group's play style.

### RULE #1 — DM KNOWS THE THREAT

When the DM presents a threat (monster, person, place, object, or event) unknown to the players that inspires fearful speculation among them, each time a player makes a speculative statement or theory about the threat that is false, the threat gains a **terror** (chosen from the list below or created by the DM). However, should a player correctly guess the threat's nature, the DM is obligated to reveal it for what it is then and there, and the player who guessed right gains Inspiration.

### RULE #2 — THREAT IS UNKNOWN EVEN TO THE DM

When the DM presents an entirely unknown threat (monster, person, place, object, or event) to the players that inspires fearful speculation among them, each time a player makes a speculative statement or theory about the threat that the DM decides is false, the threat gains a **terror** (chosen from the list below or created by the DM). However, should the DM like a player's idea about the threat's nature and choose to run with that, the player gains Inspiration.

### THE TERRORS (D8)

- 1. Curse Giver.** Any time a PC takes action against the threat, it may respond by cursing that PC in a manner that suits the nature of their offense; this curse should be more potent and more "fairy tale" than *bestow curse*.
- 2. Frightener (Jump Scare).** When the threat chooses to reveal itself before a player guesses its nature, the PCs are surprised or otherwise caught off guard. Ideally, this occurs once there's been some build up.
- 3. Life Leech.** A poor innocent soul is psychically connected to the threat. If the threat is destroyed, the innocent will die or suffer terribly as well. How can their fates be extricated from one another?
- 4. Possessive Tempter.** The threat can subtly communicate with the PCs (e.g. whispers, telepathically, veiled message in a coocoo clock), offering them things they desire or playing off their flaws in exchange for deliberately making a false guess about its nature (granting it an additional **terror**). Classically, if a person gives into the threat's temptations more than once then they will be charmed, frightened, or even possessed.
- 5. Tragically Misunderstood.** The threat only appears monstrous. In actuality, it is simply hideous, the subject of prejudice or oppression, misguided, or otherwise misconstrued as evil. However, the truth of its nature is commonly discovered only too late. What clues are there as to its tragic nature?
- 6. Truth Stealer.** The threat learns intimate details about the PCs (i.e. roleplaying characteristics and backgrounds) and can create illusions as per *major image* (cast at 6th level) drawn from their pasts.
- 7. Shadow Stalker.** Ever lurking at the edges of perception, the threat remains invisible or hidden so long as it is remains unknown. This may involve a monster being shrouded in dim light or darkness, a nobleman spreading misinformation about himself among the populace, or an ancient witch queen's spell hiding a castle.
- 8. Sin Eater.** The threat feeds off of a particular sin or vice (e.g. such as the PCs' flaws), and as long as it is fed it is impervious to harm. Only starving the threat makes it vulnerable or causes it to wither.