

Night Hag Syndrome

The scientists at the university had been trying to understand sleep paralysis, AKA Night Hag Syndrome. Sleep paralysis is when you are waking up from sleep and find yourself unable to move. This commonly comes with a feeling of suffocation, auditory and visual hallucinations, and an overwhelming feeling of fear. People who experience this phenomenon often report seeing supernatural beings sitting on them or ominous presences lurking just outside their field of vision.

Human cultures around the world have explained sleep paralysis as the activity of evil spirits or demons. Scientists dismiss this all as folklore; they have simple neurological explanations for everything. In this case, at least, they were wrong.

You and a few others had signed up for the university's experimental new procedure. You each have a history of unusually common and frightening sleep paralysis episodes. This made you perfect subjects for testing their new system. The framework was supposed to prevent sleep paralysis by synchronizing your REM sleep patterns. You would all sleep at the same time, using transcranial magnetic stimulation to encourage your brains to all produce similar EEG brainwaves. The theory was that if one brain couldn't coordinate the sleep cycle, the other brains could influence it to match the group average, forcing it into normal sleep patterns.

And for the first two weeks of the study, this seemed to work. None of you had any incidents of sleep paralysis. But you could feel a pressure building up in your mind. Like the sleep paralysis wasn't prevented, just delayed. Like the night hag from your dreams wanted to be free. Each night you slept undisturbed, it grew in power. And tonight, something went wrong. The night hag escaped.

You all awoke a few minutes ago to find the lab in shambles. The technician watching you overnight, Caroline, had died, her throat and chest crushed. And you saw the thing escape, the thing you had seen in your hallucinations before.

Somehow, the study has made your nightmare real. And it is loose in the lab. Or maybe this is still the dream, but more concrete and real than you ever had before.

- ✦ Why am I convinced that we are still in the dream?
- ✦ What personal connection do you and I share outside of the sleep study?
- ✦ What specific detail always showed up identically in your sleep paralysis hallucinations and mine?
- ✦ What form did the night hag take when you could see it?
- ✦ What unusual technique did the scientists employ to make the sleep study work, that may explain the night hag's escape?
- ✦ Which part of sleep paralysis left me most terrified?

The Pirate Tree

Two hundred years ago, the pirate Blackbeard amassed a great fortune through pillaging the coast of North America. But when the British Navy defeated him, none of the stolen treasure was found. According to Blackbeard's ledger, he hidden his wealth "in a location known only to him and the devil."

Local legends claim that Blackbeard buried his treasure in Trenton, New Jersey, shortly before sailing to his death. The most lurid of these tales said that the pirate knew of his impending demise through some prophetic ability. He chose to hide his gold rather than lose it to the British Navy. In the middle of the night, while a howling thunderstorm blew, Blackbeard and his crew buried their treasure beneath a black walnut tree. To guard the treasure, they chose by lots one of their members to act as a sacrifice. A Spaniard was selected and shot in the head with an enchanted bullet that left no wound. The magic of the bullet would enchant the Spaniard's ghost to guard the treasure, if any treasure hunters should try to take the loot. An enormous black hound was similarly sacrificed. The two were buried standing upright, above the chest of treasure. For centuries, the hoard has remained hidden beneath the tree, which came to be known as the "Pirate Tree".

But that was centuries ago, when people believed such silly superstitions. This is the year 1926, and you don't believe these ridiculous ghost stories. But some local schoolchildren recently found a human skull with strange markings, buried beneath the Pirate Tree. Miss Florence Steward, who owned the land with the tree, hired the lot of you to dig beneath the tree. If the skull was the Spaniard's then Blackbeard's lost treasure might be found tangled in the roots of the tree.

As you spent hours digging, the group of you talked about what might be found tangled in the tree's roots. Somebody—Horace maybe—suggested that you could take the treasure for yourselves. Miss Steward wasn't present for the dig, so she would never know if you found anything. You all agreed to the pact, to keep the pirate gold for yourselves and split it between yourselves.

As your shovel hit against a solid mass, you could hear a dog howling in the distance. The mass turned out to be a chest containing Blackbeard's treasure, just as the stories said. The amount of wealth found in that one chest was staggering. Gold and silver and jewelry, seized from countless raids on sailing ships and coastal cities. The finest piece of treasure was an enormous silver chalice, still bearing a red stain of blood or wine.

As you lifted the chest from the ground, Horace noticed footprints in the loose earth around the hole, like those of an enormous hound. You could see more appearing, as if an invisible creature was circling around you silently. As night began to fall, you hurriedly loaded the box in the truck and drove away. One you had a cousin with a cabin in the Pine Barrens, so you headed there. They use the cabin for bootlegging purposes, so it's remote and secluded. No one around, nothing at all except pine trees for miles. You figured that this would make a perfect place to hide the treasure and lie low while you figured out what came next.

Almost immediately, Horace became afraid that something bad was going to happen. You heard a dog howling in the distance, getting closer each time. Whenever the hound howled, Horace acted like he had foreseen his own death. You could see ghostly lights in the distance, slowly approaching. Horace said that it was the ghost of the Spaniard, come to reclaim the gold. In a panic, Horace raced out of the cabin. As he left the porch, something knocked him to the ground. His flesh was torn apart, as if by an enormous animal's teeth. Over his screams, you could hear the growling of a ferocious attack dog. But you couldn't see anything attacking him.

Now Horace is dead, lying just outside the cabin. And the invisible beast is still out there in the Pine Barrens, somewhere. As you huddle inside, wondering what to do, you can hear an unearthly voice, laughing and taunting you in Spanish

✦ What was my personal connection did we both share with Horace?

✦ Why did I want to claim the goblet as my own? What was strange or unsettling about the goblet?

✦ What special expertise did Miss Steward hire me for?

✦ Why was I reluctant to steal from Miss Steward, and how did you convince me to go along with it?

✦ My cousin was the bootlegger who owned the cabin. What helpful secret did she show me about this place?

✦ Only you and I can speak Spanish, so only you and I know the voice was actually saying what exactly?



These scenarios are licensed under a **Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported License**. View the license here: http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/deed.en_US

Background is 'Grunge Texture 21' by amptone stock. All artwork is used under its Creative Commons license

If you have questions, comments or reports of actual play, then I'd love to hear about it at nickwedig@yahoo.com. To hear more about this game or other things that I made, visit my website at nickwedig.libraryofhighmoon.com