The Nightmare Horse

You're no "kind" of fairy, you're the Nightmare Horse, unique and yourself: beguiler, bewitcher, dweller in night sky and deep water.

In the circus you can be star, guide, opener & closer of doors, problem solver, and cook. You're always there as a dangerous friend.

You might play someone by dragging them under, or by taking their breath away. You might play a situation by changing your form & seeming, or by disarming the situation.

(And do not dare to speak for me, Hob, saith the Nightmare Horse.)

The Nightmare Horse:
a playbook for
Under Hollow Hills

Large Print Version

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a lumpley game

The Nightmare Horse

To play the Nightmare Horse, create your name, your summer & winter imagery, your place, your plays, your trappings, and your bindings.

Your Job

Your job as a player is to:

- Make your character vivid.
- Play your part in the circus.
- Take the bad with the good.

Your Name

You don't have a name. You are the Nightmare Horse.

Choose a title that you've adopted for others' convenience.

Examples: Lord Blue, Her Serene Majesty, Chef, Captain.

Your Summer & Winter Imagery

Choose 1 for summer & 1 for winter: Still water, the drowned moon, the crescent moon, rushing falls, salt spray, a thunderstorm, a wild orchard, hyacinths, irises, a chill wind, a twisting horn.

Choose 1 for summer & 1 for winter: Long hair, striking face, sharp teeth, shaggy hair, sleek hair, long legs, shapely legs, long neck, tossing head, mesmerizing eyes, beauty, poise, grace, control.

Choose 1 for summer & 1 for winter: Glossy black, velvet black, iron black, salt-and-pepper, russet, spruce blue, midnight blue, twilight blue, sea green, moss green, bone pale, smoky gray.

Choose 1 for summer & 1 for winter: Rich clothing, elegant clothing, rare jewels, silk mask, silk robes, understated clothing, tasteful clothing, high boots, brass-soled shoes, bare feet.

Choose 1 for summer & 1 for winter: Mannish, womanish, androgynish, boyish, girlish, childish, queerish, sexy, sexless, charming, forbidding, enticing, unapproachable, —.

You can choose 2 sometimes if you want to, why shouldn't you?

Choose your pronouns for summer and winter as well.

Example:

Summer	Winter
● A twisting horn	○ The crescent moon
● Long hair, beauty	○ Long hair, control
● Twilight blue	○ Glossy black
● Rich clothing	○ Understated clothing
● Queerish, sexy	○ Queerish, forbidding

Begin play in full summer: mark the summer column.

Your Place

In the circus, at need, you can take all of the listed roles.

Plays

You can make all of the obvious plays and the Nightmare Horse plays.

Mark +2 next to your choice of three plays, +0 next to two, -1 next to two, and +1 next to all of the rest. These are only your plays' starting rolls; you'll have many opportunities to change them.

Mark: +2, +2, +2, +1, +1, +1, +1, +1, 0, 0, -1, -1

Trappings

You get all of the listed trappings.

Bindings

Everybody introduces themselves. On your turn, tell everyone your name, your playbook, your summer imagery, your place in the circus, your wagon, and any of your other trappings you think the others might find noteworthy.

Once everyone's introduced themselves, go around again for bindings. On your turn, ask for volunteers:

- One of you, I've fallen in love with you, though naturally I keep the fact from myself. Who? I can never put you off.
- One of you, I've caught you opening a door you had no business opening. Who, and what door? I can never again draw you out, nor disarm any situation that you're a part of.

If no one volunteers, so be it and move on. If more than one volunteers, accept them all, choose one, or ask them to decide between them, as you like.

On the others' turns, volunteer as you choose.

The Nightmare Horse

Name: _____

Summer	&	Winter
○		○
○		○
○		○
○		○
○		○
Pronouns:		Pronouns:

Place

- Star;
- Guide, opener & closer of doors;
- Problem solver;
- Cook;
- Always there as a dangerous friend.

Plays

- You can make your Nightmare Horse plays. To play someone, you can drag them under; or take their breath away. To play a situation, you can change your form & seeming; or disarm it.
- You can make all of the obvious plays. To play someone, you can confront them; draw them out; open up to them; put them off; size them up; or waylay them. To play a situation, you can: call for a line; sniff the wind; use your trappings; or weather the storm.

Trappings

- A glamorous wagon, pulled by dancing matched geldings.
- A magical cabinet: reach into it and it will deliver an outfit marvelously well-suited to the occasion at hand.
- A sharp sword of mortal bronze, stolen from some drowned warrior of ages past.
- A silver necklace, or bridle, but who dares place it around your neck?
- A traveling kitchen, tidy and spare, with labeled jars of delicate spices and many fresh, novel things.
- A polished lake stone, always icy cold, that remembers the secrets of past worlds.
- If you'd like to add any other prostheses, sensory aids, communication aids, or mobility aids, please do:

Bindings

- I've fallen in love with —, though naturally I keep the fact from myself. I can never put them off. Who?

- I caught — opening a door they had no business opening. I can never again draw them out, nor disarm any situation they're a part of. Who?

Nightmare Horse Plays

Drag Them Under

Your Roll: ___

When you drag someone under, roll. On any hit, choose 1 of the following.

- You seize physical hold of them and drown them. (Choose this only if you're near water, and in a position to put your hands bodily on them. They can't stop you.)
- They forget utterly who they are.
- Their thoughts fill with paranoid, undeniable, commanding nonsense, creating enemies and dangers from air.
- They fall into a deep sleep, troubled by nightmares, unable to force themselves awake again.
- They feel a terrible weight pressing on them, a terrible cold filling their mouth and nose, a terrible silence engulfing them and they can't seem to get free.

On a 10+ hit, you can choose to release and spare them at any time. On a 7–9 hit, though, you can't, and they must somehow find their own way back. On a miss, they realize the danger they're in and they're able to get away, if they flee right now.

Take Their Breath Away

Your Roll: ___

When you take someone's breath away, roll. On any hit, your eyes meet and they catch their breath. They can't proceed with what they were doing until they've answered you. On a 10+ hit, choose 2 of the following to say, and you're telling them the truth. On a 7–9 hit, choose 1.

- At this moment, for me the moon rises and sets in your eyes. Will you close them against me?
- At this moment, at any other soul's approach but yours, I would flee. Will you come closer?
- At this moment, no one but you may touch me in safety. Will you?
- At this moment, I will bear no one on my back but you. Will you ride me?
- At this moment, I'm wearing my silver necklace, and if you place your hand on it, I'm yours. Will you?
- This moment is fleeting and there is no other like it. Another instant and I may never be yours. Will you come to my arms?

On a miss, they take your breath away instead, and choose 1 against you, if they like, or else they may dismiss you, which you may take as a cruel insult.

Change Your Form & Seeming

Your Roll: ___

When you change your form & seeming, roll. On any hit, you take the form of a beautiful person; a beautiful horse, with or without a horn; or your true form, the Nightmare Horse, terrible, bloody-fanged and -hooved, drenched in icy water. You remain in this form until you change it again. On a 10+ hit, you can also change any one element of your summer & winter, if you want to. On a miss, choose: take your true form, the Nightmare Horse, or else take the form of your choice and step at once to full winter.

Disarm a Situation

Your Roll: ___

When you disarm a situation, first disarm yourself, and then roll. On a 10+ hit, everyone else present must disarm themselves as well. On a 7–9 hit, everyone else present must individually choose: disarm themselves, or else insult you and everyone else here and declare themselves enemy to all. On a miss, after a moment's hesitation you take your arms back up again.

The Obvious Plays

To Play Someone

Confront them. Your roll: ____

Draw them out. Your roll: ____

Open up to them . Your roll: ____

Put them off. Your roll: ____

Size them up. Your roll: ____

Waylay them. Your roll: ____

To Play a Situation

Call for a line. (No roll)

Sniff the wind. Your roll: ____

Use your trappings. (No roll)

Weather the storm. Your roll: ____

Consequences

Summer & Winter

When you step toward summer, erase one of the marks in the winter column and mark the same line in the summer column.

When you step toward winter, erase one of the marks in the summer column and mark the same line in the winter column.

Whenever you step toward summer or toward winter, take 1 from one of your plays' rolls and add 1 to a different play's roll. Choose intentionally, to match your feeling about the change. Keep to a minimum of -2 and a maximum of +3.

Insults

When someone insults you, you're allowed by fairy law and your fairy nature to answer it. It's considered to be your own unimpeachable right to weigh the insult and respond in due measure, so only you can choose what form your answer should take and how extreme it should be. Other fairies may gossip, but no fairy would rightly stand before you and assert that you've overstepped.

Beholden

When you are beholden, fairy law and your fairy nature demand that you make good and deliver the balance. If you are recalcitrant or uneager to do so, your debtor may consider it an insult or a worse offense.

Violence

Violence in fairyland is considered visceral, irrevocable, and horrifying. When you're wounded, shocked, affronted, or dismayed, you must immediately choose 1:

- You die.
- You withdraw at once in a cold, dignified fury.
- You writhe, moan, and curse in a display of melodramatic agony.
- You step immediately and fully to winter.
- You consider yourself cruelly mistreated and maimed, and will long nurse your injuries and your grudge.

True death: there are only a few things that can truly kill a fairy. Cold iron is one; there are others. There's no coming back from true death.

Under Hollow Hills

There is a traveling circus under the Hollow Hills.

It travels by moonlight, small wagons creaking in the night silence. It travels lost roads, where fireflies and whisps hover to watch it pass, where goblins peer down from their treebranch perches, and owls. It travels the night world and the day world, fairyland and the living earth, and places otherwise, and no border can keep it. It has mysteries to pose, drama to perform, it has music, juggling, acts of death-defying peril, pratfall comedy. It has dangerous secrets to tell.

Step up, step up. Come great, come small, come revelers all!