

Horror Factor: Something to Fear

Horror factor has always been in Palladium's games. It's worked fairly well; it was even expanded on in *Rifts World Book 11: Coalition War Campaign*. I've recently begun looking at Horror Factor differently after including Nightbane (AKA Nightspawn) characteristics in a Palladium Fantasy game I run. Well, I eventually started reading over the Nightbane books, cover-to-cover, again because I'd renewed my own interest.

The more I thought about Horror Factor and how it's used, particularly after being more than a little cruel to my players when rolls were failed, the more I thought it wasn't adequate, especially for a setting such as Nightbane, where horror and insanity should be much more pervasive in a game. The idea of prolonged exposure and the effects it could have is what really prompted me to write this, particularly after reading **Between the Shadows** and **Through the Glass Darkly**. *Through the Glass Darkly* gives a number of good points on running a Nightbane game, particularly on page seven (that's right, the very first page of actual printing) where the author, Kevin Hassall, discusses the core ideas behind Nightbane. To truly run Nightbane as a horror game, one must be able to permeate the atmosphere of the game with a sense of foreboding and suspense. An important tool in accomplishing this base task is horror factor.

For these reasons, I've developed the following as a possible alternative. These rules are suitable for any of Palladium's games, but I feel they are most appropriate for Nightbane.

Horror Factor Defined

There are three types of horror factor. There's the "true" horror factor, the type that results in a person being, well, horrified by the features of an encountered creature. The second type is more psychological and results in a paralyzing fear or terror. The third is a simple surprise, causing a person to be stunned.

Category one horror factor (HF1) is, for all intents and purposes, what results from encountering a hideous, frightening, disgusting, and, for lack of a better term, horrific creature. This type of horror factor would generally elicit a reaction in game terms where a character was simply taken aback at the hideousness of the creature. In extreme cases, it could cause a character to become nauseous or physically ill. HF1 is assigned to Nightbane with stigmata features in their morphus, situations in which torture is witnessed, or certain demons which have a particularly hideous visage.

Category two horror factor (HF2) is caused by the aura of fear projected by some powerful supernatural creatures. This effect is almost purely psychological, rather than physical. A character simply sees a creature and is able to feel the power or evil that radiates from it. This is especially true of Nightlords and their minions, creatures of magic, Nightbane, and vampires. This category of horror factor will generally cause more debilitating behavior, such as temporary paralysis, catatonia (curling up into a fetal position), or fleeing, when encountered. Prolonged and/or continuous exposure to category two horror factor can eventually destroy a person's mental barriers. HF2 is assigned to supernatural creatures, especially Nightlords, Vampires, Werereatures, and situations in which torture is experienced.

Category three horror factor (HF3) is the most basic type and can easily be categorized as Awe Factor. This caliber is simply a matter of surprise when a creature exhibits some type of natural abilities. This is typically assigned to some d-bees, such as Wolfen or Atlanteans. Reactions to this category are typically a stunned look and loss of an action. HF3 is assigned to any d-bee or other-dimensional creature which exhibits superpowers or special abilities or is obviously a non-human. Wolfen, for example, would surprise a person who happened across them simply because of their inhuman characteristics. Atlanteans, however, would not elicit an immediate response, instead requiring a roll against HF3 when a special ability is exhibited openly.

Ultimately, it is up to the game master which category a creature falls into, but these should prove to be decent guidelines when making the decision.

Prolonged Exposure and Long-Term Effects

Category one horror factor, while still potentially harmful to one's psyche, is more likely to make a character sick. In the case of failure, repeated witnessing of torture could, eventually, lead to a distaste and queasiness when exposed to it. There is also the chance that a character could become

desensitized to the situation and never bat an eye and even the most gruesome vivisection if repeatedly successful in saving versus HF1.

Category two horror factor, the most incapacitating form of fear and terror, results in the worst long-term effects. When a save versus horror factor is failed, the character runs the risk of being unable to confront the source of this fear. After two consecutive failed saving throws versus HF2, the character develops a minor phobia of the supernatural. Any creature that exhibits HF2 will be included in this phobia. A character with a minor phobia is subject to the following penalties: -2 on all combat actions, -2 attacks per melee, and -6 to save versus HF2.

A minor phobia can be overcome with three consecutive successful saves versus HF2. Continued failure will result in additional negative effects. After four additional, consecutive failures to save versus HF2, a character develops an acute phobia to the supernatural (anything radiating HF2). This results in a character's inability to act in situations involving the creatures. Additionally, a character with an acute phobia has a 40% chance of fleeing; otherwise the character is simply paralyzed with fear and terror (there is no saving throw to avoid this). If the character, when exposed to the source of his terror, is able to make seven consecutive successful saving throws, the acute phobia is lifted and the character has faced his or her fear. Continued failure will result in the character being reduced to a catatonic state.

Alternative Fast Play (HF2): Roll to save versus horror factor as normal. If the save is failed, make three additional rolls to save versus horror factor. If one save is failed, the character receives a minor phobia (if the character already possesses a minor phobia of the creature, the character receives an acute phobia). If two saves are failed, the character is thrown into a catatonic state.

Category three horror factor, due to the basic nature of it and the relative weakness of the category, cannot cause harm to a person's psyche. Instead, repeated exposure to HF3 results in a character becoming accustomed to the differences in the Megaverse, able to witness any mortal creature without flinching.

Saving Versus Horror Factor

When saving versus horror factor of any category there are degrees of success and failure. Rather than present a set of tables or something similar to determine the outcome of a failure, I'll simply present a number of possible outcomes. It would be a good idea to decide what reaction or outcome a creature is likely going to cause prior to running the game in the interest of saving time. Base your decision on three factors: (1) the creature radiating the horror factor, (2) the character involved and their mental endurance, and (3) the location.

The creature radiating the horror factor is the most important factor to consider. The type of horror factor will determine a likely outcome. To save a little time, the possible outcomes that follow are organized by horror factor category. The character and their mental endurance also play a large part in determining an outcome. A character with a high mental endurance, even if he or she fails, is going to remain much more calm compared to someone with a low mental endurance. Lastly, the location should be considered. This is only a minor factor but important enough to mention. When a person is scared out of their wits, they are not likely to be thinking clearly. For instance, someone who is in the middle of a forest and is confronted with a Deevil is likely to have only one concern, getting away. In the middle of the forest, that's not a difficult task. Just run in the opposite direction. Unfortunately, if that same person were to encounter the Deevil in an underground chamber, the character may not be thinking clearly and will look around and see nothing but walls. In this situation, the person stricken with fright is more likely to curl into a ball and hide out in a corner somewhere.

As I just illustrated, a number of factors play into this decision. Now I present you with a few outcomes.

- **(HF1)** The character feels sick to his or her stomach, as if they are about to vomit. The feeling is distracting in combat and makes it a little difficult to concentrate or think clearly. Though this is not debilitating, it will make the character slow to act, particularly at the source of his or her fear. During the first melee, the character loses initiative, -3 to all other combat rolls, and -15% to all skills. Each

subsequent melee, the character is -6 on initiative (all other penalties remain the same as in the first melee).

- **(HF1)** The character is immediately stricken with abdominal pain and vomiting. This could be due to the overwhelming stench of the creature or simply because the sight is so disgusting to behold. During the first melee, the character is unable to act. Each subsequent melee, the character is -3 to all combat rolls, and -20% on all skills.
- **(HF2)** The character becomes overwhelmed by the aura of [power, fear, terror, magic] emanating from the creature. (S)he drops any weapons in hand and begins to back away into the nearest corner. Once there, they will drop in to a crouch and attempt to hide as best they can. The character has no initiative and can take no actions except to move to the nearest corner.
- **(HF2)** The character is terrified of the cause of the fear, drops any weapons in hand, and immediately attempts to run in the opposite direction.
- **(HF2)** The character's survival instinct kicks in and they immediately attempt to destroy the cause of their fear. In this case, the horror factor works for the character, giving them a +1 to strike (with any weapon, including ranged) and +2 initiative.
- **(HF3)** The character is surprised momentarily by a display of a creature's abilities (seeing a Nightspawn's becoming for the first time, witnessing an Atlantean create a sword out of thin air, etc.). The character is -3 to their next action only.
- **(HF3)** The character is held in awe by the creature before him/her and is momentarily stricken senseless. The character's next action is lost, allowing any attacker a free action.

Bonuses Versus Horror Factor

Bonuses are generally assigned by O.C.C. Well the problem is that many people have a high Mental Endurance, regardless of "occupation," and are able to subject themselves to things that might be devastating to the psychological state of those with a lower Mental Endurance. To determine a character's bonus to save versus horror factor, use the attribute table for mental endurance (save versus insanity). OCC bonuses are in addition to any attribute bonus.

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