

ROGUESSTATE™

A Player's Guide

Sample file

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WEREWOLF CREATED BY MARK REIN • HAGEN

Sample file



LEGENDS OF THE GAROU

Cry for Help

Sometimes folks scream. Sometimes they do it out loud, and sometimes it's in their eyes. See it all the damn time. That's one of the perks of being Garou, you make people want to scream. You scare them. It's natural — we're predators. The Curse follows us, and that means people walk across the street to avoid us, rent-a-cops finger their flashlights nervously when we walk into a market, moms hold their babies tight when we smile. And they all want to scream, but they don't know why.

So when the guy started chatting me up at the bar in Cairo, I was the one getting nervous.

He wasn't used to drinking, that much was obvious. His eyes were bloodshot — from crying, maybe? His fingernails were ragged and dirty, and he had big yellow sweat stains under his arms. I don't know why he picked me, but he sat down next to me and started talking.

I make it a point to get a story out of every bar I go to. I find someone too drunk to get scared of me, buy 'em a round, and ask them for a story. It sounds less ridiculous if you're trashed. I've used drunk stories at

moots, occasionally. Just dress 'em up a bit, throw in a werewolf or something, and bang, instant legend.

Hey, don't knock it. I didn't earn the "Speaks Until Sunrise" thing by reciting the phone book at moots, right?

Anyway, this guy. He's obviously a native, but he's not from this neighborhood. My Arabic isn't fluent, but it's close, so I mostly just listen and throw in comments when I need to. Finally, he tells me his name is Ahmed. I look over at him, still a little wary of the whole situation, and ask him if he's got a story.

It was the saddest thing I ever saw. Two tears roll down his cheeks, and then he coughs and says, "Yes, I have a story." I nod to him, and he motions me back to a table. I'm figuring he beat his wife, cheated on her, robbed a bank, killed somebody, something like that. He's clearly scared, maybe guilty. We sit down, and he looks me square in the eyes, and tells me I'm not going to believe him.

Now I'm intrigued, and I say, "Well, Ahmed, why don't you tell me your story and I'll worry about believing it then?" And he nods, slumps back in his chair, and says, "Let me tell you my story."

...

I was fine until the dreams started coming. I don't know why — suddenly, over the course of a few weeks, I started having them. To call them “nightmares” would make them seem trite and childish. Perhaps that's how this sounds to you?

I would dream of myself and my wife. In my dreams I saw the shame of not being able to have children. I would see myself, naked and abashed, in front of a crowd, while a horrible man — an American — with a stick beat me and shouted to the crowd that I was not a man. I was a freak, he said. Incomplete and unable to sow my seed. If I could not, he would, he said, and the crowd roared with approval. And as I knelt there, bloodied from his beatings and crying from his words, I looked and saw my wife in our bed, cheering like the rest of them, waiting for someone who could give her children.

I think that was the first dream. That was the first time I woke and saw my wife there, sleeping peacefully. I woke up her and told her I'd had a nightmare, but that I couldn't remember it. She held me and I shook, still frightened.

She knew never to mention the incident to me by the light of day. What a man says and does at night in a half-dream does not reflect who he is. I am a strong man by day. I did my job, sat in my office and answered my calls, and only felt a bit tired. I was still a strong man then.

The next dream came later that week. I had forgotten about the first and was standing in the shower when the door opened. My wife came in to surprise me. Sometimes she does that, if she knows I am unhappy or tense. I washed her hair and touched her gently, but something was wrong. I felt a strange tension in her kiss that was never there. I asked her later what was wrong, and she responded that it was nothing. I knew this wasn't true, but she insisted, and finally I let the issue drop so that we could go to sleep.

It wasn't until after she'd fallen asleep that I remembered she had spent the afternoon with her sister — and her sister's young daughter. My wife was feeling jealous and sad. She couldn't tell me how she felt; I admit I would not have heard the pain in her voice. I would have heard only accusation. How blind. How stupid.

I dreamed that night of wandering in a vast building, through empty, gray hallways with locked doors. From behind each door came shrieks of passion and I recognized them as my wife's: but I couldn't open even one of the doors. Whoever was pleasuring my wife so, it was not I. I knew, in my dream, that I never could, because every time we lay down together she hated me

more and more for being sterile. I woke up, not with a start but with a quiet whimper. I woke her, and asked her if she loved me despite my inability to give her a family. She said she did, and held me again. And again, come the dawn, neither of us mentioned it.

The next day I could do little work. I sat at my desk and tried to do my job, but everyone who passed me by seemed to be staring and laughing. Every time I picked up a pen to write, every time my fingers touched my keyboard, my hands shook. I spent time in prayer, but I could not focus.

I think that is when the feeling began. I tried to explain it to my wife once, before... before yesterday. I tried to explain it, but words fail. The feeling is simply *wrong*. As though the entire world is a few seconds off, a few inches to the left of you. You miss jokes and laugh at the wrong things. You see food and it doesn't make you hungry, but the strangest things arouse your base emotions.

I saw trash on the street on my way home that day, and immediately wondered what was for dinner. The thoughts were connected, but I had not connected them. The feeling is much like dreaming, that slow, artificial stage of the dream where you wonder, “Am I about to wake up?” But you know you are not. As terribly out-of-touch and unreal as you feel, you know that there is no escape, none but... sleep.

That night was terrifying. I remember the wind outside my home, my wife locking the windows and then checking them again. She was worried. She knew I was uneasy. I sat in my chair and tried to read, and then tried to pray, but again all I could feel was that something was wrong, something was off, something was alien. I felt like a stranger in my home, even in my body. I never took a drink of alcohol in my life before yesterday, so I could not liken the feeling to intoxication, but it was similar. I have never understood the fascination some cultures have with drink. I don't know why a man would want to poison himself to the point of sickness or unconsciousness. I only know that the night after my second dream, as the wind howled like a demon in the streets, I felt that something was changing.

Vague, I know. I am sorry. I said my story was strange.

That night, I dreamed again, but it was different. My nightmares never repeated themselves, but simply got worse and more gruesome. There were elements that remained the same however; many of them featured my wife, most featured a bed. The one I had that night had both, and was so insidious that I didn't know I was dreaming until the creature's fangs were....

I'm sorry. The dream. I dreamed I was standing in front of my bed, as though I had gotten up and returned. I climbed into bed quietly, so as not to wake her, but her eyes fluttered open and she smiled.

My friend, you should see my wife's smile. A more compassionate woman was never born, and when she smiles, you can feel Allah's blessings and love stir you. The greatest crime is that this beautiful, giving woman married me, for surely any children of hers....

I'm sorry. She smiled, and reached for me. We kissed, and then an instant later, as is the way of dreams, we were making love. Her mouth close to my ear, I heard her whispering something, but could not quite understand. Her hands clutched at my back and I heard her say "Why," but the voice was not hers. It was a terrible, thick whisper, as a person might produce if forced to speak while being strangled. I raised my head to look at her, but she forced my face down to her bosom with such power that I could not even lift my head. The voice was coming clearer now, and she was repeated that same word — "why" — over and over. I tried to pull away, but she kept me close, her hips still rocking, and I helpless to escape her. I never, during this whole disgusting scene, knew that I was dreaming. I believed what I saw, Allah forgive me. I cried out against her, calling her name, calling her words that no man should use with his wife. She laughed, and simply held me fast.

And then she released me, and I lifted my head up and saw her smile.

Imagine the face of an angel. Imagine a face that gives you hope, that reminds you of the presence of the divine. Imagine eyes that you've looked on every day for ten years, a gentle mouth that cannot help but laugh and urges you to do so. Imagine, if I may be so bold, the face of your wife, if you have one.

Now imagine that mouth filled with the fangs of a thousand serpents, leering at you, her legs still wrapped about your waist.

I woke with a scream. My wife awoke as well, and tried to comfort me, but I would not let her. I turned from her, shaking, and she turned and lay with her back to me, curled into a tight ball.

She was still lying that way in the morning, when I rose to go to work.

The "wrong" feeling was never as strong as the first time I felt it, but it was constant thereafter. It didn't seem to matter what I did or where I went, what I ate or drank, what I said to my wife or whomever else I spoke to. I always felt a few seconds behind the world — or perhaps ahead? I said earlier that I had trouble finding words to describe it. Mostly, I just felt tired.

Although I slept on the nights that I had the nightmares — obviously — I never woke feeling rested. Instead, after a dream, I slept fitfully, a few moments at a time. I got up and paced, but could never quite put a finger on what was wrong (beyond the dreams, of course). But mercifully, after the third dream, I was not visited by the horror again for more than a week. During that time, I apologized to my wife for pulling away from her. She also apologized for feeling jealous of her sister — she repeated that she did love me.

Are you married, my friend? Ah, well, may you be so lucky one day. Married couples spend a great deal of time apologizing. When Shamara and I were first married, I thought this was a sign that our marriage would not last, that we would either split apart or grow old despising each other. But when I told my father of my fears, he laughed at me. He said that if you see someone every day, of course you will cross each other sometimes. The same would occur, he said, with our children.

Father died before I found I was unable to sire children. I'd like to think he wouldn't have thought less of me, but I don't know. I have six brothers, you see.

The dreams did not return until my review. Misfortunes come in packs, do you not find that true? The management of the company was changing, and they decided to review all of the employees to see who would be more in line with the new regime. It was a very stressful time for me — I had a roughly equal chance of losing my job or receiving a promotion, depending on how much the management changed. Every day a manager or assistant — or worse, a consultant — would walk through the office and take notes, ask insipid questions, and then move on. The feeling of "wrongness" returned in force, and three days after the reviews began, I found I had caught a cold.

Getting sick in Cairo isn't the same as getting sick elsewhere, especially not after Jackal Fever. Even a simple illness brings images of suffering and lingering death in the streets or in some foul-smelling hospital. It was only the flu, as it turned out, but I stepped gingerly around the house and the office, kept awake and functioning only by swallowing far too much medication. (I couldn't, of course, afford to miss a day of work — it might have reflected badly.) Soon after I fell ill, I had another dream.

In the dream, I felt fine. I was running down the street, but not being chased — I was running simply to feel alive. I ran past my house, and away from the city, feeling the hot morning air in my lungs. That part of the dream was the best I've felt in months.

It ended too quickly, however. The ground turned to sand beneath my feet and I found I could not stop running. The sun burned overhead and I felt my flesh begin to blister and peel away, but yet my legs would not let me stop. I clenched my fists so hard my palms bled, tried to force myself to stop, to change direction, anything, but I could not. I was running into the setting sun, and I could not shut my eyes even to blink. Before long I couldn't see at all.

Finally, I collapsed. I could feel sand underneath me — cool, night sand — had I really run all day, I thought? I reached down to rub my aching feet...and found they were no longer there. I had run until my feet had been worn away, ground down to nothing by the sand.

I woke up, quietly. I nearly panicked because I couldn't see — but that was only because the room was dark, of course. I felt for my feet, as absurd as that must seem, but they were still there. I did not wake my wife on purpose, but she awoke as I was sitting in bed pawing at the covers for my own feet. She asked me what was wrong, and I told her about the dream. At least this one did not feature her. She suggested that I see a doctor, and at the time, I think I agreed. But the damned light of day convinced me otherwise.

I left that morning for thinking to call my doctor from work. When I got to the office, however, I found that the company's decisions had been made. I was going to receive a promotion and a small raise. The elation I felt almost washed away the "wrong" feeling and I sat at my desk that day beaming. The mood was dampened only by the employees that were not so fortunate passing by with the boxes from their offices. Many of them were glaring, not only at me but at anyone who had remained employed. But what were we supposed to do? Quit in protest? It wasn't that I didn't feel for those people, but it wasn't in my power to help them. I took a long lunch that day, just to avoid those glares. They made the feeling worse, and sometimes I felt as though I could hear their thoughts, their accusations, through the glares. I know how strange that must sound, but I told you this story was going to be hard to believe.

And yet thus far, it isn't so far-fetched, is it? Just nightmares and vague feelings. Well, my friend, let me assure you that after that day, the story becomes more unbelievable.

That night, I went home and shared the good news with Shamara. Like me, she forgot all about the nightmares as we discussed what we could do with the extra money, what responsibilities I would have now, and so on. Just before we fell asleep, I heard a voice in my

head, Shamara's voice. It softly, but quite clearly said, "Now if only we could have children."

It took me quite a long time to fall asleep. When I finally did, I had another nightmare. This one, while not as violent or insidious as some of the others, was in a way the most important.

I dreamed I was sitting on my bed with Shamara asleep beside me. I pulled the covers back and saw that my feet looked...rotten. They were both swollen and purplish, and when I moved them, they felt numb or dead. I sat up and pulled my right foot close and moved my toes, and my big toenail felt loose. I pulled on it, and it came off in my hand.

Beneath the nail was a hollow. My toe — perhaps my foot — was hollow, a gored hole, and clinging to the nail was some greenish-white stringy flesh. I am sorry, I do not mean to disgust you, but that was the dream. I dreamed that I was rotting from the inside. After I saw that, I woke up, and found that my wife was sleeping peacefully. I could not bring myself to wake her. What did she need to hear, that I was having another nightmare brought on by my insecurity? Why disturb her sleep?

And besides, she already knew there was something rotten within me. She'd thought it — I'd heard her.

I got out of bed to pray, but gave up after a few moments. As I walked away, the feeling of "wrongness" changed. Instead of a sick, paranoid feeling that something was wrong, I instead felt that something was making these dreams happen. I looked around my darkened living room, and thought I saw something scurry under a table. I considered — just for a moment — turning on the lights and looking.

Why did I not? I asked myself that question the next day, when sunlight made me feel whole again. I think the reason is that I knew that I was not dreaming. Suppose I had found it, the little devil that robbed me of the sanity. It's one thing to fear nightmares, but what can you do when they come to life, but scream and go mad? I was not ready then to go mad. I did not go looking for the thing in the dark.

I went back to bed, but I did not sleep. The morning found me lying on my back, staring at the wall, breathing lightly, afraid. I went to work that morning still feeling as though something was sitting on my shoulder, waiting for me to sleep again.

I busied myself with my new job, dealing with employees and clients, very grateful that my desk sat near a window and that the sun streamed in for most of the day. I stayed late that evening, however, and when I left, the sun had set.

As I walked to my car, I realized that I hadn't been outside after dark since the nightmares began. The parking lot was almost empty, and as I neared my car, I saw something move in the shadows to my right.

I don't know why I followed it. I think perhaps I was feeling bold because I was at work, away from home, and not shaking in terror of a nightmare's passage. Perhaps it was because I was dressed and not vulnerable in my nightclothes. I don't know. Perhaps I was simply going mad, and accepting it.

I walked towards the shadows where I'd seen the movement, and called out for the thing to show itself. I don't know what I expected to happen. A stray dog, perhaps. Something mundane and comforting that would let me laugh off the nightmares and the fear. But the comforts of the mundane were gone by then.

A hand reached out from the brush at the edge of the parking lot. It was no bigger than a child's, but it was blood-red and the nails were sharp and pointed. Its palm was upturned as though asking for alms, and as I stood there dumbly, trying to make sense of what I saw, it spoke.

How to explain such a voice? I'd always imagined the voice of the *djinn* as being deep and resonant. This creature's voice was more like a blistering wind. It was sibilant and quiet, but I heard it inside my head just as I had heard my wife's voice the night before. "Ahmed," it said, "why did you look for me?" I had no answer to that. As I said, I'm not sure why I went looking.

It continued: "I know that you are afraid, Ahmed, but why do you seek out what you fear? Why do you not shun it? By walking towards your tormentor, you have cost us both our freedom." I didn't know what it meant by that. Had I known, I would have run away as fast as my legs could carry me. I should have been afraid, but instead, I was angry. I knew that this monster was responsible for tormenting me and robbing me of my will and sleep, of driving me to madness every night. So I reached out and grabbed its wrist and jerked it into view. I will regret that action for the rest of my days. What, after all, could possibly be gained by forcing evil into the light? Won't evil defend itself? It certainly did in my case.

The creature was human-shaped, but only three feet high. It was blood-red from head to toe, and had wicked-looking fangs. It had no hair that I recall, but I do remember its eyes. Like a damned serpent, slit and yellow and evil, and they burned with hatred for me. It looked down at my hand, still clutching its wrist, and its lips curled back into a horrible scowl. And then it said one word, and disappeared. Simply vanished away like... a dream.

The word? "Done."

I got into my car and drove home. I felt like a man being led to execution. I walked in the door and found my wife asleep on our sofa, waiting for me. I did not wake her. I walked to my bedroom, undressed, and lied down.

The dream was not long in coming.

In it, I was the creature. I was my normal size, but my skin was red and my fingers ended in those black claws. I walked through a terrifying dream world where the sands rose up in the cities and the buildings were covered in webs. I saw people, but I looked at them as though through frosted glass — I saw them as blurry and incomplete, and I hated them. Allah forgive me, but I knew them to be real people and I hated them for that reason. I was like a dream brought to a cruel state of awareness, a reflection in a mirror. I knew that when the real people walk away, when the dreamer awakens, I would vanish.

And then the dream changed and I became myself and I was home, away from that fearful place of the other side of nightmares. But now I was only a few feet tall, and I was hiding in my living room, under tables and behind furniture, like a rodent. I was afraid of... not people. People were harmless. They wouldn't believe me if they saw me. But there was something howling outside, and it wasn't the wind. I was afraid of that wild howl, that chaos in the desert. I was afraid of that, and of what might happen when the sun rose.

I awoke then, and I knew it was over. The feeling of wrongness was gone, as was the feeling of being controlled. In its place was the knowledge that the creature — the *jann* — was inside my head. I would suffer no more nightmares myself — but someone would have to, because nightmares were my food. Its food. Our food.

It's part of me now. It isn't so hard to accept. I had to accept that I was sterile. I'm used to coming to grips with myself. Most men are, I think.

I left the bedroom that night and found my wife still asleep on the sofa. Some new part of me cried out in hunger, while the old parts of me cried out in horror. I raised my hand up and pointed to her. I saw her face crumple as the dreams began.

Hunger had won, it seems.

She endured a week of dreams before she left me. She went to her sister. I followed. Not in my car or on foot, but through the world of nightmares, I followed. And I found that her sister's dreams were better. But best of all, I found the nightmares of a child.



I know, my friend, that I sound insane and that, even if this were possible, it would make me a monster. But I'm not the monster, you see. I wasn't, at least. The *jann* is the monster, and if I don't feed that *jann*, it will feed on my dreams. And haven't I dreamed enough?

I have no need of food or drink, although drink comforts me somewhat. I know that to drink this stuff is forbidden by the Prophet, peace be upon him, but I think I am beyond hope now. I can walk through dreams invisible. I have power now. I think I made out better than the *jann* in the end.

But the *jann* brought its fears with it, you know. The creature has nightmares too. They are formless and indistinct, but they all involve that howl in the desert. Even monsters know fear, even the creatures of Hell are afraid to go looking in the dark. I am braver than the monster. I won the battle — I have not lost my freedom.

• • •

Ahmed finished his story and then quaffed his drink almost triumphantly. I shook my head. I could have verified his story, if I'd wanted, but I already knew what had happened.

I thanked him for his story and left. I waited for him outside; he left about a half hour later. I followed him, wearing the wolf form, just to make sure. I should have just ambushed him in the parking lot — creeping around Cairo at night is nuts — but I wanted to see it for myself.

I got to watch a few blocks later. He stopped at an apartment building, looked up, and nodded. I could see the conversation in his head — he was making agreements with the Bane. He looked around to make sure he was alone (completely missed me, but then I'm not easy to spot) and then stepped into the Umbra.

I followed him. He looked about the same, only his skin was a little redder. He was clawing his way up the side of the building. I changed to Hispo form and jumped at him. He landed underneath me. I felt bones give.

I'd never seen a fomor in the Umbra before. I could see the Bane that had him squirming around under his skin. He looked horrified and for one crazy second I was thinking, "How come he doesn't recognize me?" He managed to gasp out "What are you?"

I couldn't exactly answer him normally, so I spoke to his mind. And I answered him so he and the Bane would both know their numbers were up.

"I am the howl in the desert," I said. Then I took his throat out.

The Bane tried to flee, but we Striders aren't known to be slow. I don't know if it's gone for good, but I do know it was good and scared when I caught up with it.

So that's the story. No world-shaking elders or giant dragons. No ancient vampires or anything like

that. Just a guy named Ahmed who let his fear get the better of him. I think maybe he could have saved himself. Taken a vacation with his wife. Gone to a doctor. Prayed really hard, hell, I don't know. Maybe once it starts, there is no way to stop it, short of killing the Bane. But that's a damned depressing thought.

You know, I can't blame Ahmed. Everybody's got buttons. Most of us are lucky enough that some Wyrmspirit doesn't decide to push them. Most of us don't ever have to go looking for the thing in the dark.

Sample file

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Matthew McFarland wishes to thank Chris Horvath, Kimmaree Horvath, Tiffany Jendruck, Ally Chilson, and Michael Goodwin for their input and assistance.



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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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Introduction: Two Made One

So what you're telling me is the Weaver and Wyld are making their own forms, too? Jesus. That's all we need.

— King Joris Albrecht

Ever since the Sundering, the worlds of spirit and flesh have been held apart by the Gauntlet. Each world grew accustomed to the separation, and where once the two were all but identical, now each has become its own entity, populated by its own residents. Those who dwell in the physical world live out their lives without any true contact with the spirit plane; some feel a longing for a half-remembered unity, or even seek out contact with a greater universe, but most simply live in ignorance. And the creatures of the spirit world watch them in turn, feeding on their emotions and actions, remolding the spirit world to match its inaccessible twin. For the most part, these spirits are as powerless to affect the physical world as mortals are able to interact with the Umbra; the two worlds reflect each other and still mirror one another, but the Gauntlet holds firm.

But sometimes something leaks through. Sometimes something wriggles through the Gauntlet from the other side of reality and finds itself a home in the land of the flesh. A spirit manages to seep into a physical host that has somehow become more “open” — most often a human, but not always — and begins a new relationship. Spirit and flesh become one

again, a strange new gestalt of material intellect and spiritual drive.

They are servants of the Wyrms, and the carefully “assembled” operatives of the Weaver. They are the surreal manifestations of the Wyld, and the rarest of supernatural allies for the Gaian cause.

They are the possessed.

More than Just Fomori

When a spirit using the Charm: Possession inhabits a material body, it's not a temporary joyride. Possession is a lengthy process that winds up infusing a measure of the spirit's power into its host body, power that can change the host in unusual ways. The host may be outwardly unchanged, but empowered with strange and potent psychic abilities. Conversely, the host's body may mutate into a parody of its former shape, with freakish powers and debilitating weaknesses that exaggerate the changes it's gone through. The host usually retains most of its free will — and in most cases, may not really understand what has happened to it. But sometimes the spirit is able to exert