

# Nights of Dread

Geheimnisnacht and Hexensnacht are the two nights of the year which fill many in the Old World with dread. It is believed that during these nights, the barriers between living and dead, the natural and Chaos, become blurred allowing the unwary and dangerous to cross from one realm to the other.

## *The Chaos Moon*

These Nights of Dread are the only nights that one can count the Chaos Moon – Mórrslieb – to be in its full phase. With Mannslieb – sometimes called the White Moon – in its new moon phase, the nights of Geheimnisnacht and Hexensnacht are cast in an eerily reddish light, ranging from a dull, listless rust colour to a deep, bloody red. The smaller moon's illumination distorts vision by blurring the contrast between light and shadow, dulling the former while deepening the latter.

Though its phase is a constant during the Nights of Dread, the Chaos Moon's journey across the night sky is surely not. The moon could rise from any direction and set where and when it pleases. The Chaos Moon could also remain in place for as long as several hours before moving to another part of the sky. The erratic orbit and behaviour of the celestial body easily confuses an individual's sense of direction and passage of time.

In keeping with its bizarre nature, the Chaos Moon can be seen in different parts of the sky by different observers at the same time. On Geheimnisnacht 2510 I.C., one observer in Middenheim noted that the Chaos Moon was in the north-eastern sky at 10:00 PM while an Altdorfer noticed it in the southern sky at the same time.

There are many stories of an animated face appearing on the Chaos Moon when it is in its full phase. The "expressions" most often reported are smiles or grimaces as if the moon was reacting to some event it was "observing". A number of scholars explain this phenomenon as nothing more than an illusion only a few people appear to perceive at any one time.

The Chaos Moon also plays havoc on werereatures. Normally, these shape-changers are only affected by the full phase of Mannslieb, but on Geheimnisnacht and Hexensnacht it is the influence of Mórrslieb that forces weres into their animal forms.

## *Geheimnisnacht*

The Night of Mystery is the more infamous of the Nights of Dread. It falls in the waning days of summer and, more often than not, marks a change in the weather. Day temperatures on Geheimnistag are usually quite warm and suddenly cool off when a breeze arises during the night. Those in denial over the true nature of the night claim it is the sudden drop of temperature that chills men's spines and not the dread of the night.

In many places in the Old World, Geheimnistag is marked by village fairs or festivities where families gather in preparation for the night. It is also a time when the in the business of making and selling protective charms make in the most profit. The early hours of Geheimnisnacht is also a time when children dress in costume go from home to home gathering treats that will see them through the night.

Once the sun's rays disappear beyond the horizon, shutters and doors of homes and inns are closed and bolted. Fortified villages and roadside inns secure their gates and light large bonfires from within to keep the creatures of the night at bay. Boatmen plying their trade on the rivers will likewise find a safe place to drop anchor (sometimes in the middle of the waterway) and batten down the hatches with a prayer to the gods to see them safely through the night.

Only the foolhardy or suicidal would dare travel under the gaze of the Chaos Moon. Most settlements have stories of the reckless lover who never reached home after a night debauching another's wife or the disappearance of an impulsive warrior who trusted his sword more than the warnings about the dangers of the night from his fellows. It is said in larger towns that murders and mayhem are more likely to occur during Geheimnisnacht than at any other night of the year.

Psychics, wizards and the insane are very sensitive to the effects of Geheimnisnacht. The feeling of dread – and, in the cases of the more demented of this population, exhilaration -- experienced by these groups of people is heightened once the Chaos Moon casts its red light upon the landscape. Sanatoriums in Altdorf and other large cities keep extra guards on duty in case of violent outbreaks by their charges, while many wizards are known to exercise extreme caution. Spells cast during Geheimnisnacht generally have a higher degree of spectacular success or catastrophic failure than at any other time of year except Hexensnacht.

## *Hexensnacht*

There are fewer horror stories associated with being aboard during Hexensnacht than Geheimnisnacht for the simple reason that fewer are willing to brave the outdoors in the cold winter night.

Witching Night is a favourite time for covens of witches and other practitioners of black magic (demonologist and necromancers, to name two) to gather as there is less likelihood of discovery. Such gatherings are not without their own risks. A small number of witch-hunters are known to be on the hunt during this wintry night as well as foraging parties of starving mutants and Beastmen, both of whom would rather dine on such gatherings of evil wizards than form an alliance.

Isolated farmsteads and small villages are also likely targets of raids by hungry fell creatures, particularly in the war-ravaged northern provinces of the Empire. Many of the community spend New Year's Day (Hexenstag) shoring up their defences and sharpening weapons while praying to the gods that they can survive the long night.