

# *Labyrinth of Dreams*

There is a place where dreams dwell and nightmares roam. Deep underground, where the sun can't reach, the only light is the muted glow that emanates from the paths themselves. The land is a dizzying array of twisting corridors with towering walls, constantly shifting. A person could travel forever through the Labyrinth and he or she might never cross the exact same path twice. The young ones always ask, just how big is this land? No one quite knows for sure and to climb the walls is a fool's errand. The closest means of measurement is attempting to travel from the Center to the Far Reaches. This is, of course, more easily said than done. The corridors can be perilous, and nightmares (or riches) may await around any given corner. With all of this danger, surely there has to be a safe place for the people of this world. Yes, it exists, and it is wondrous.

There is a place both connected to, but not entirely of, this world. Separated from the Labyrinth proper by metaphysical barrier known as the Veil, is the Dream. Imagine a world of infinite potential filled with people who are constantly trying to tap into it. Distance and time are mercurial here. It is here that the people of the Labyrinth, well, most of them anyway, transcend their lives underground and revel in sheer possibility in its most basic form. In this four times divided land the landscape is equal parts, strange, mutable, and amazing. The structures that fill its endless terrain range from small stone cottages to elegant manors made of light and stardust. It is in this place that the alien mixes with the mundane. The only limits here are the imaginations of the populous.

To live in the Labyrinth is to surrender yourself to possibility. All, save a few, are inherently connected to the Dream and gain unique perspective on what defines reality and how trifling limited thinking can be. Those that are cut off, the Earthbound, gain a different sort of perspective. They understand that things are not all light and rainbows. For every dream there is a nightmare lurking in the shadows. They are two sides of the same coin. Stagnation is death. One must keep fighting and moving lest they surrender to darkness and despair.

## *Once upon a time...*

Long ago, there was a terrible event known as the Great Cataclysm. Not much is known about it other than that it was a time of terrible destruction and sorrow. People had fallen into despair and struggled to survive these terrible times. That all changed when people started having visions of a woman, cloaked in midnight, beckoning them to her. The people took this as a sign of salvation and heeded the call. The mass exodus led the people underground into a world of dark and twisting corridors. The refugees began to doubt their actions. What if they had traded one dark fate for yet another? Despite the doubts and reservations amongst the people one thing was clear, there was no turning back.

It was not until they finally rested their tired heads that they saw past the surface of this world. Those who had heard the call were transported via their dreams to a world of pure creation and possibility. This second reality would come to be known as the Dream, with those first people given the title of "Dreamer". Perhaps by luck or just by proximity to the magic steeped walls of the Labyrinth, over time more and more refugees gained the ability to access the Dream. Soon, they began carving out a way of life between the two realities. Once they did it was quite clear that nothing would ever be the same.

## *Labyrinth Society*

In the Labyrinth, the denizens who are attuned, and therefore connected to the Dream, are so known as Dreamers. They are so known because of their ability to access the Dream while they sleep. This is no trifling ability. It is a metaphysical function of their being. Dreamers spend eight hours awake and then fall into a sort of stasis where they sleep and access the Dream. After a month's time they awake, have eight hours of productive activity in the physical Labyrinth, and then the cycle repeats. When they are awake in the physical world, Dreamers try to make the most of it. They'll explore or try to recreate some form of art from their stasis, as if to bring a piece of the Dream into the physical world. Depending on how fantastical the creation there are some that have managed to even succeed

That being said, the very idea of a piece of the Dream being brought into the physical is strange. Life in the Dream can be so very different than in the physical Labyrinth. While there aren't structured hierarchies in either reality, there is a sort of fluid pecking order in the Dream. Deference is paid to those with more experience, talent, or knowledge but that is the extent of it. It would generally behoove the less experienced to heed the advice of those to whom deference is paid, but there is no obligation behind it. To force a person into a path not of their own creation is anathema. Only the individual can truly know and discover their own path to self-actualization of their chosen craft. Dream society is idyllic in that there is no formal structure, only a few social truths that are upheld by the masses. These truths are as follows:

- 1) Guide but do not force. Everyone discovers their own potential in their own way in a way only they can ever truly understand.
- 2) The answer to cruelty and violence is not more of the same. To do so is to craft Nightmares.
- 3) Sometimes the correct path is not the easiest. Some things can only be learned or achieved through a difficult winding path.

There are also those who simply are cut off from the Dream. They are known as the Earthbound. Existing among the Labyrinth's population are a small percentage of people who are not attuned and therefore cut off from the Dream. They do not fall into stasis and so experience a regular sleep cycle. If a child is found to be Earthbound, he or she is given to nearby band of Earthbound to be raised permanently. This is not done to shun the child or because they are considered lesser, but simply for safety purposes. Dreamer parents cannot provide adequate protection to an Earthbound child while they are in stasis. It is for that reason that Earthbound form small nomadic bands of perhaps 5-7 people, on average, that traverse the Labyrinth. Unlike Dreamer society, each of these bands has a leader who is usually the eldest. While people never seem to get along one hundred percent of the time, it is a general policy among the Earthbound to not make war with other bands. There are already so many dangers that lurk in the Labyrinth, it makes no sense to them to add more violence on top of that.

Life for an Earthbound can be rather physical as they are the ones who find themselves facing the nightmares that have escaped the Dream. Some might see this as a curse, to be forever cut off from a place of wonder and possibility. Many though see it as a calling, to be able to take up arms against what lurks in the dark. They protect the Dreamers who cannot defend themselves. They are the first and last bastion against the nightmares lurking in the dark. Dreamers are only afforded eight hours to be productive within the Labyrinth at a time. Earthbound are free to explore what secrets may lie within the Labyrinth with no worry that they might run out of time and fall back into stasis leaving them vulnerable to dangers lurking in the dark. Given the time, who knows what an Earthbound could accomplish within the winding corridors of the labyrinth?

## *Religion and Deities*

Mother Night- Many, many years have passed since the people first heard the call of the strange woman. She has come to be known as Mother Night. It is said she resides at the center of the Labyrinth forever dancing beneath a glowing moon, weaving stars into the ceiling. She has four physical aspects that embody her: the Sentinel, the Tracker, the Priestess, and the Weaver. One might have a small shrine to the Sentinel for strength or protection, or to the Tracker for keen eyes and quick feet. The Priestess is the patron for those looking to help others or seek knowledge through visions, and many look to the Weaver for knowledge and cunning. It must be noted though that so much time has passed since the exodus that though many pray to her for protection and luck through her four aspects, she is thought to be more myth than reality, a lovely dream at the center of a mysterious labyrinth. Still, people continue to construct minor shrines and offer up a prayer for luck or some such thing every so often. Whether or not these are answered is debatable among the denizens.

## *The Nature of the Labyrinth*

It is quite obvious that the environment of the Labyrinth consists of subterranean corridors and rooms. Because it is entirely enclosed and underground there are no seasons, nor is there a sun or moon to provide light. However, that is not the entirety of it. There is an interconnected system of waterways that run throughout the labyrinth. The cleanest of them can be told by the Golden Hydrozoa that inhabit the water way. While most of the paths are made of dimly glowing stone work, there are a few areas where a softly glowing grass acts as a replacement. It is in these areas that most plant life grows. The plant life is interesting considering it flourishes without the light of the sun, or any other light source really. Perhaps it is because of this that the plant life that survives here possesses a bioluminescent quality to it. Furthermore, plant life here is seen as a double boon because when someone happens upon it, it provides light as well as food for a time.

Unfortunately, these seemingly random botanical hideaways are few and far between. Even if a person were to find one, it is exceedingly difficult to find it again after they leave, even after only a few turns...sometimes three of the same one.

In fact, at first glance it would seem that navigating the Labyrinth relies entirely on chance. Sometimes that is the case, but there are some Earthbounds who are experienced enough in survival to tell you that there are ways to tell the paths apart and even predict the shifts. How could they possibly manage such a feat? Perhaps by climbing the walls and seeing it for themselves? Certainly not, as anyone who's tried will tell you that the higher you climb, the taller the walls become. There is only one possible way. Far above the towering walls is a vast expanse of luminous crystals dotting the stone canopy that encloses the Labyrinth. The crystals are said to form patterns and provide some sort of guide for navigation for those with a knack for tracking and trailblazing.

This environment does not necessarily carry over to the Dream. Things are far more... varied. For one thing, there is actual weather there. Nothing unbearable or dangerous, but there is certainly a variety of climates. For instance, a person in the Wildwood would not expect to be experiencing the same conditions as someone in the Fortress of Ice and Iron. The Dream is not there to be unpleasant and dreary, and if one does not wish to remain in one area of the Dream they merely need to think of where they wish to go and start walking. The land will rise to meet them and within moments they are at their desired destination. Unlike the Labyrinth proper, which has some form of stable reality and order attached to it, the Dream has no such limits. Distance and time are irrelevant here. Distance is what you make of it; a mere illusion of the mind that is to be transcended. Time exists but bears little influence over anything. A performer might put forth a masterpiece and at its conclusion look up and find that five minutes have passed, or it might be five years. It truly matters not as time does not have the same foothold here as it does in the Labyrinth proper.

### *Here there be monsters: The creatures of the Labyrinth*

Lurkers- Monsters under the bed are quite real, and these are it. Legend tells these were the first creatures to escape the Dream. Beings of primordial fear, they feed off the terror they inspire. They will drain a person until it can feed no more or the victim dies, whichever comes first. There is however a way to keep them at bay. They abhor the light. As beings of darkness they are harmed by its presence. It is because of this that it is not uncommon for people to sleep with lanterns nearby.

Wolves of the Stone- The story goes that these creatures were born from the howl of the wind as it traveled through vacant corridors. Wolves of the Stone tend to travel in packs hunting down anything unlucky enough to be traveling alone. It is said though, that a traveler quick of wit

and keen of eye might be able to pick out the Alpha of the group and present it with a tribute of food. The food is said to take the place of the traveler in the wolf's belly and allow the traveler to escape with their life. Some believe this to be mere poppycock, but none are truly willing to test this idea out.

Falling Stars- Humanoid beings of crystal and light that are summoned when someone has passed on. They ferry the bodies from the labyrinth so long as proper death rites are observed. A warning to those who would ill prepare the dead or summon them when they are not needed, these beings are not to be taken lightly and have been known to ferry off the living against their will before.

Knights of Old- Clad in all armor, these men are found primarily towards the center of the labyrinth, but not always. The term "men" is used loosely here for though they are sentient it would seem, they are not mortals. They do not eat, sleep, or even breath. They have their purpose and their code and none can make them stray from their path. They are powerful fighters and woe be unto those who cross their path for they are prone to challenge wayward denizens of the labyrinth to single combat. The results needless to say are generally unpleasant.

Beasts of Viscera- These creatures take the form of normal animals, with one noticeable difference, their forms are inverted so that the viscera that generally remains inside of a creature now resides on the outside. No one knows why these vile creatures exist. There are no legends surrounding these crimes against nature and reality. They simply are. For these to be things of the dream, one would have to shudder at the thought of the darkness that spewed these beings forth.

Golden Hydrozoa- Aquatic gelatinous creatures that trail tangled tentacles, they are generally harmless unless allowed to reside in larger bodies of water where their size can expand in proportion to the increase of area. As they grow larger they are far more dangerous as their sting is far more potent. They are seen as a sign of good luck, as they indicate safe drinking water, and reside only in the purest water ways.

Fool's fire- Floating balls of light of varying colors, these things are commonly used for a light source in lanterns and jars. However, it is not the captured ones that can pose danger. They are quite alluring and can lead travelers of the Labyrinth astray. Now, sometimes the detour can lead to a fantastic find of a treasure trove or a mystic artifact. Other times it can lead someone to straight into the maw of a beast of viscera or a pack of stone wolves. It is certainly a game of chance when following these things, one surely only a fool would play.

Motleys- Everyone has fears. Everyone has had nightmares. The thing is when a dreamer has fears they can manifest in the dream. This is how motleys are born. They have no set form and vary from person to person. They can be as small as a bee or as big as a tower. One thing is for sure though; the more powerful the fear, the more powerful the manifestation. Lately, there's

been rumors of things other than the usual creatures being seen in the labyrinth. Could these be motleys that've grown powerful enough to cross to the Earthbound world?

## *Noteworthy places*

Earthbound side:

Oubliettes- Every so often an unlucky wanderer will encounter a space where there should be something only to find Nothing. Not merely the lack the monsters, but the lack of corporeal reality. It's hard to tell where these voids until it's too late. The denizens of the Labyrinth refer to them as oubliettes because once someone goes through they are never seen again.

The Far Reaches- The further out from the center of the Labyrinth one goes the stranger and more fluid physical reality becomes. Walls are constantly shifting and if one is not careful a person could become lost or trapped among the changing walls. Honestly, though, the shifting walls might be the least of concerns since it is far easier for motleys and other terrible creatures to manifest as the veil between reality and Dream is the thinnest.

The Center- The closer one gets to the center of the Labyrinth the more stable reality becomes. Walls shift far less, in fact they barely move at all. No one has even gotten to the center but the brave few who have have said that the darkness that is ever present throughout the Labyrinth shrinks back and one is able to see even without a lantern. It would indeed be a nice place to reside if not for the Knights of Old who frequently inhabit the areas surrounding the center.

Cavern of Dreams- This place is a large, open cavern whose walls are emblazoned with various murals. Bioluminescent plants line the clear stream that runs through the area and double as a sort of light source for the cavern. While Dreamers do not necessarily all sleep in the same area of the Labyrinth, this place is a favored resting spot for many as it allows a large number of Dreamers to gather together and provide safety in numbers as they dream and wake.

Circles of the Earthen Men- Scattered across the labyrinth are circular chambers known as the Circles of the Earthen Men. They are so named for the presence of statues depicting humans whose names are long since forgotten. They line the walls as if standing sentinel over the room and whoever may occupy it for a time. These circles are especially important to the Earth bound as they act as a steady food source. The statues may change but in each circle an ever

ripe apple tree and a small fish pond lie at the center, a small reprieve from the trials presented by the labyrinth.

Dream side:

Resplendent Conservatory- In this land of eternal spring, music and perfume seem to permeate the air. Performers forever push their talents, always looking for that next fantastic performance. Diplomats circle each other in an ever evolving game of chess, thinking up new and innovative ways to entangle their opponents and the world around them. Many healers take refuge here, practicing stranger and stranger techniques to wondrous effect.

The Wildwood- Those with a knack for tracking and trapping favor the summer lands. The flora that makes up the Wood is just as fantastical as the fauna that resides within. Uncharted and strange, the Wood is a wonderful place to those with an affinity towards the waters and the wild to explore, track, and traps to their hearts content.

The Bazaar Ephemera- Within each tent of this sprawling marketplace is a chance to come face to face with the unknown. Merchants hawk goods both mysterious and mundane alike in the crisp autumn air. Peer into a stall and one might find anything from a scholar purchasing an obscure text in a dead language to an occultist meditating in a wellspring of power. Whatever your needs, the market can provide.

Fortress of Ice and Iron- Betwixt snowy peaks lies a fortress made of ice. From here, some of the greatest warriors and crafters the Dream has ever known have been molded. In this icy abode, crafters constantly develop new and unique ways to stand out and make their mark in their chosen media. Those who take up the art of fighting hone their skills, fine tuning them into stylistic art forms almost incomprehensible outside the Dream.

## *Food and Fashion*

Food:

When it comes to the basic human need of sustenance, Dreamers find that such a notion is beyond them. They do of course know the notion of food, and partake quite regularly... in the Dream. It is hypothesized that because of their constant connection to the

Dream, their body has developed an alternate way of gaining nutrition by way of subconscious absorption of ephemeral energies that make up the Dream. It does not occur to most Dreamers to eat food from the physical Labyrinth because why would they waste time feasting upon mundanity when they could be doing so much more with the eight hours they are awake?

If a denizen of the Labyrinth is an Earthbound, it is absolutely imperative that they find nourishment the old fashioned way because they cannot gain nutrition from that which they are not connected to. The Earthbound have nothing to fear though as there is plenty of food to partake of if they know where to look. Certain flora and fauna are quite edible if scattered about various locations of the Labyrinth. Aquatic creatures such as fish and crustaceans are general staples of an Earthbound's diet. Apples and fruit from various bioluminescent plants generally provide the extra nutrients they need that cannot be found in the aquatic reflection of one's daily life. It is possible that the various nightmares that cross the Veil could be used for sustenance but truly only the especially brave or the incredibly foolish would try this. Goodness only knows what effect consumption of such would do to a person.

Clothing:

Earthbound fashion sense consists of sensible clothing cobbled together from sturdy but comfortable fabrics and possibly leather. The colors they wear are more subdued and practical. This is not necessarily out of inability to create otherwise. From an Earthbound's perspective it is just safer to wear sensible things and there are better things to do than make elaborate clothing that would be terrible to run in if you got attacked. Survival is important, no piece of clothing is worth impairing one's ability to react if beings of the Dream decide to liven things up with their appearance.

On the opposite end of the spectrum lies the fashion choices of Dreamers. They very much value form over function. It's all well and good to make something that does the job, but if it doesn't catch the eye or seem interesting then what's the point? Rich, vibrant colors are always in style, as are metals and gems. The most eccentric have even been known to drape themselves in attire made of unorthodox materials. Things like a gown comprised of shadow and spider web or armor made of solid ice are not out of the realm of possibilities. Creativity and imagination are the life-blood of the Dream and it is a fact clearly seen in anything that Dreamers create. Why wouldn't their wardrobe included in that?

*Not dead, merely dreaming: Life, Death, and the Labyrinth*

For Dreamers, Death is a fleeting concept for the most part. Dreamers do not age in the Labyrinth while in stasis which leads to a far longer life span. Once they hit the age each individual likes best, Dreamers just stop ageing in the Dream. Furthermore, people do not simply die in the Dream. They can be wounded, lost, brought low, but never something so permanent as death. This could be because that if a Dreamer dies in the Labyrinth proper their being that resides in the Dream just continues on. The Dream serves a dual purpose of being their fantastical escape from the Earthbound world as well as their afterlife.

Earthbound are not connected to the Dream and as such do not benefit from an extended life. They possess the normal life span of a human and can die just as normally, be it from natural causes or otherwise. Any children that are born in the Labyrinth are generally raised by Earthbound until about the age of five, which is when the connection to the Dream manifests (or doesn't). If the child is a Dreamer, a safe place is found for them to reside while they are in stasis. In the rare event the child is not then they are included among the Earthbound and are taught the perils and honor of the status.

Should a person die, the body is to be prepared in a certain fashion. The body is anointed with various designs using a paste made of various bioluminescent vegetation. It is then wrapped in a cloth and then left at the edge of an encampment. A special incense, that is used solely for the purpose of summoning Fallen Stars, is then lit and left burning by the body. It is said that the colored smoke and smell of funerary herbs summons them. They arrive in due time and ferry the body away to parts unknown.

### *A strange(r) new world:*

Recently in the Labyrinth, people have been disappearing. It used to be maybe once every five years someone would disappear without a trace but now it's become more frequent. Denizens claim that more oubliettes are appearing and that anyone who gets too far into the Outer reaches just forgets how to find their way back. They aren't dead and that's for certain. If they were the Fallen Stars would make their presence known, so one can only wonder as to where they are being spirited away.

These disappearances don't limit themselves to the Earthbound side, though, as people who are still living but reside in the Dream have started disappearing as well. A person might start walking to get to the Bazaar Ephemera to meet someone and is never heard from again. People are starting to wonder if oubliettes might be manifesting in the Dream now, or something else is causing these people to disappear.

*Every denizen of the Labyrinth knows...*

...that the Dream is just as real as the Earthbound labyrinth.

There is no doubt in anyone's mind that the Dream is real. For Dreamers, the world of the Dream can possibly seem even more real than the Earthbound side of things.

...that fear can be deadly.

Fear leads to nightmares. Nightmares don't necessarily stay things of intangible imagination here.

...whether they are a Dreamer or an Earthbound.

From the time a person reaches the age of five they are aware if they are able to access the Dream or not. Accessing it is not a conscious decision anymore than maintaining a heartbeat is.

...that change is inevitable.

Nothing truly stays the same on either side of the Veil. The world is in constant flux and one must change with it to thrive.

...community is important.

There are many terrors lurking in the dark. It would be foolish to face the dangers alone.

## *Inspiration*

Movies:

- Jim Henson's Labyrinth
- Jim Henson's MirrorMask
- Guillermo del Toro's Pan's Labyrinth
- Christopher Nolan's Inception

Books:

- Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking Glass by Lewis Carroll
- The Wonderful Wizard of Oz by L. Frank Baum

Gaming:

- Dungeons and Dragons
- Changeling (both new and old World of Darkness versions)
- Amnesia: the dark descent

