

Incubo: the Bargainer's Art of Despair

Knacks: Betrayal (Denunciato), Failure (Debolezza), Guilt (Colpevole), Regret (Rammarico), Terror (Timore)

Apprentice Degree: The Night Terror

Adept Degree: The Little Death

Master Degree: The Mind Killer

Centuries ago, a small group of Senators found the means to contact certain otherworldly beings, negotiating with them for Sorcerous powers. Of these men and women, none was more sinister than the cold, calculating Varian Laurentios (whose descendants would eventually become Vodacce's wicked Lorenzo family). Moreover, no Bargainer's Art was quite so reviled as Laurentios' gift, Incubo. It may not have been as gruesome as Porté, nor as horrifying as the art currently called Mairbh, but it allowed Laurentios and his followers to violate his enemies in the most heinous way imaginable—by penetrating their minds and corrupting their very dreams.

A schemer and a bully even before the Bargain, Laurentios turned paranoid once he received his gift—a condition exacerbated by his inability to sleep, and certainly helped along by the murder of Albion Necros. Many scholars who have studied the Bargain and the events surrounding it suspect that Laurentios may have been the nameless Senator who went mad when the creatures appeared, “clawing at the marble walls until his hands bled from the effort.” A few believe that the nature of this Sorcery is responsible for the evil reputation attributed to the Lorenzo family, while others say that it was the inherent wickedness of the bloodline that attracted this particular Sorcery to its progenitor: like seeks out like—or, in this case, evil seeks out absolute evil.

Interestingly, once Incubo reverted to a bloodline Sorcery, it manifested only in men (much as Sorte manifests only in women). It took several centuries, but eventually, certain groups with an interest in doing such things were able to hunt down and eliminate the last surviving members of Laurentios' bloodline who manifested his Sorcery. It was probably the loss of this potent magic that led the Bianco family to seek out other dark powers and make the pact with Legion that eventually led to their downfall in the Fourteenth Century.

Apprentice Degree

An Apprentice Incubo Sorcerer (an Incubus, if you prefer) does not have the power to affect another person's dreams in great detail; he can use his Knacks to nudge a sleeper into dreams of failure or regret, but cannot shape those dreams in any meaningful way. Nevertheless, the victim will have a restless night, and will be exhausted and weakened when he wakes. If the Sorcerer succeeds at his roll, all of his victim's Target Numbers—for any action he attempts—are increased by the Sorcerer's Mastery Level for the rest of the day (or, at least, until he can get a couple hours of uninterrupted sleep). The Sorcerer can increase this penalty by 1 for every Raise he takes when making his roll.

To use this power, the Sorcerer must spend some amount of time mentally “travelling” to the target's dream world and sculpting the target's dreams (rolling Resolve + one of his Sorcerous Knacks for success) before returning to full consciousness. The amount of time this takes, and the ease with which it can be performed, is dependent on the target's location.

| Target is in... | TN for Success* | Apprentice | Time Required | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| | | | Adept | Master |
| Same Building | 5 x Opponent's Trait | one hour | one hour | one hour |
| Same City | 10 x Opponent's Trait | two hours | one hour | one hour |
| Same Province | 15 x Opponent's Trait | four hours | two hours | one hour |
| Same Nation | 20 x Opponent's Trait | eight hours | four hours | two hours |
| Same Continent | 25 x Opponent's Trait | — | eight hours | four hours |
| Anywhere on Terra | 30 x Opponent's Trait | — | — | eight hours |

* The Trait used to set the TN is determined by the Knack used; see below for details.

The target must be asleep the entire time for the Sorcerer to affect his dreams; the GM (or a player whose character has been targeted) may spend a Drama Die to rule that the target is awake when the Sorcerer attempts to influence his dreams. (The Sorcerer can determine immediately whether or not a target is asleep.) The GM and the player may bid Drama Dice (as if countering the activation of a Hubris) to achieve the result they desire. While shaping another person's dreams, the Sorcerer cannot move or speak, but he remains aware of his surroundings, and can return to full consciousness very quickly (requiring one Action in combat, and a mere moment or two otherwise) if threatened, though doing so will abort the use of his Sorcery.

An Incubus loses the need—and indeed, the ability—to sleep. This makes him immune to his own Sorcery, and provides him with the Odd Sleeping Habits Advantage (from the *Invisible College* book) if he didn't already have it. However, it also has a deleterious effect on his appearance and personality, as his body rebels against its unnatural lack of sleep. The Sorcerer becomes irritable and gaunt, with pale skin and dark circles beneath his bloodshot eyes, and his speech becomes slurred. While this has no in-game effect, it allows the Sorcerer to be recognized for what he is (unless he can convince those around him that he is simply suffering from insomnia).

Adept Degree

In addition to increasing the range of, and decreasing the time necessary to use, his Apprentice ability, an Adept Incubus can manipulate a target's nightmares in greater detail, using his Sorcerous abilities to inflict the specific effect described under each Knack. The time required to shape a target's dreams is still dependent on his location in relation to the Sorcerer (according to the chart below), but success is determined through a contested roll of the Sorcerer's Resolve + Knack vs. one of the opponent's Traits (determined by the Knack being used). No target may be affected by more than one Knack in any given night, and the Adept effect replaces, rather than adds to, the Apprentice effect (though the Adept may still use his Apprentice ability to instill general nightmares in a target, if he wishes). Like the Apprentice ability, the Adept abilities last for the entire day after the target has the nightmare, though a few hours of peaceful sleep will allow him to shake off its effects prematurely.

| Target is in... | Time Required | |
|-----------------|---------------|-------------|
| | Adept | Master |
| Same Building | one hour | one hour |
| Same City | two hours | one hour |
| Same Province | four hours | two hours |
| Same Nation | four hours | four hours |
| Same Continent | — | eight hours |

Master Degree

In addition to improving his Apprentice and Adept abilities (as indicated on the charts above), an Incubo Master can take an active role in a target's dreams, using his own abilities to overcome

whatever obstacles a target's unconscious mind throws at him. When using his Adept ability, the Master may choose to grant his target up to three (the Sorcerer's Mastery Level) Free Raises on the roll to resist the Sorcery. If the Master still wins the contested roll, each Raise translates into one XP, which the Master may use to increase his Traits or Knacks, buy a new Skill, or save for later use.

Sorcerous Knacks

Because Incubo is a Bargainer's Sorcery, using one of the Knacks below does not require the expenditure of a Drama Die, except as noted below (though Drama Dice may be used to increase the total of a roll, as usual).

Betrayal (Denunciato): When using his Betrayal Knack, an Incubo Adept fills a victim's dreams with images of safety and security, surrounding him with loving family members, good friends who toast his health, and lovers who whisper sweet words beneath moonlit skies. From there, the Sorcerer plants seeds of mistrust. Friends and lovers sneak off together for secret trysts, and family members plot the target's demise for money, a cherished heirloom, or a larger share of their inheritance. As the dream progresses, these scenes become more elaborate, the betrayals more bloody and vile. By the time he wakes, the target is generally so befuddled, he has no idea who he can trust.

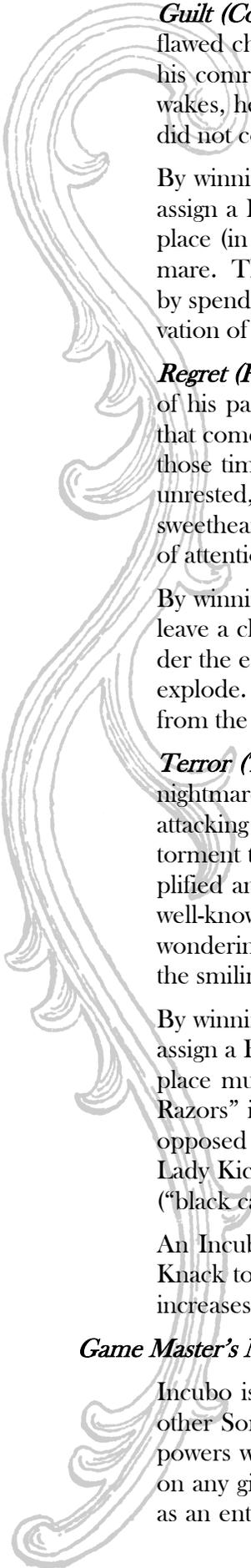
By winning a contested roll of his Resolve + Betrayal against the target's Wits, the Adept can implant a sort of "psychic poison" in the victim's mind. This "poison" remains dormant until the victim enters combat, at which point it takes on the following characteristics:

-1 Wits / 1 Round / 1 day

The victim of this quasi-poison loses one point of Wits at the end of every full Round (10 Phases) of combat. As his Rank in Wits goes down, he becomes increasingly paranoid and unstable, whether in combat or not (he does not continue to lose Ranks in Wits outside of combat, but lost Ranks do not return until the character gets a decent amount of sleep—without significant interruption from this Sorcery or some other source). When the character reaches a Wits of zero, he enters a berserk state similar to the Bearsark Advantage (from the *Vendel • Vesten* book): he becomes immune to the effects of being Crippled (but not Knocked Out), and he receives a +5 bonus to all Brawn rolls (including Wound Checks) and damage rolls. However, the character becomes convinced that *everyone* is his enemy, and will not stop fighting until the field is cleared of moving bodies (at which point he collapses, unconscious) or until he is Knocked Out. Until then, he receives a Fear Rating equal to the Mastery Level of the Sorcerer who targeted him, but only to his friends and allies (perhaps reflecting their reluctance to fight their companion, despite the paranoid accusations he flings at them between attacks).

Failure (Debolezza): An Incubo Adept can use this Knack to haunt a target's dreams with visions of helplessness and inadequacy. A pickpocket may find himself unable to outrun the town guard, a Swordsman may see himself cut to ribbons by a lesser opponent, and a trained acrobat may picture himself falling from a high wire time and time again. Regardless of the specific nature of the dream, a victim wakes with his confidence in his own abilities completely shaken: obstacles will appear larger and more intimidating, opponents seem quicker or smarter, and his own actions feel perpetually doomed to failure.

By winning a contested roll of his Resolve + Failure against the target's Brawn, the Sorcerer may select one Knack the target possesses; for the entire day following the nightmare, the victim is considered to have a Rank of 0 in that Knack (if the Knack is Sorcerous or part of a Swordsman School, this will *not* affect the victim's Mastery Level). The Sorcerer may attempt to affect more than one Knack with a single nightmare, but each additional Knack targeted provides the victim with a Free Raise on his roll to resist the Sorcery.



Guilt (Colpevole): Using this Knack, an Incubo Adept torments a victim with visions of his own flawed character. The target might dream of seducing brother's wife, accepting money to betray his comrades, or drinking himself into a stupor at an important social event. When the victim wakes, he will be haunted by pangs of exaggerated guilt, tormented by memories of missions he did not complete or loved ones he has failed, and utterly convinced of his own worthlessness.

By winning a contested roll of his Resolve + Guilt against the target's Panache, the Sorcerer can assign a Hubris (or a Flaw, if the target is a Villain) of his choice to the target, which remains in place (in addition to the target's regular Arcana, if he has one) for the entire day after the nightmare. The GM can attempt to activate this Hubris normally, as can the Sorcerer who instilled it, by spending a Drama Die. While under the effects of this Knack, the target cannot resist the activation of this—or any other—Hubris or Flaw in any way.

Regret (Rammarico): An Adept Incubus who makes use of this Knack causes his target to dream of his past, focusing not on happy memories or his loving family, but on the loss of innocence that comes with growing up. If the dreamer recalls a happy memory, it is only to remind him that those times are long gone, never to be reclaimed. When he wakes, the target will feel drained, unrested, and overcome—to the point of obsession—with memories of a dead parent or childhood sweetheart. He will have great difficulty focusing on matters at hand, and his clumsiness and lack of attention will leave him prone to misadventure.

By winning a contested roll of his Resolve + Regret against the target's Finesse, the Sorcerer can leave a character morose to the point of distraction for the entire day after he wakes. While under the effect of the Regret Knack, the target is considered Crippled—even his Drama Dice fail to explode. Furthermore, any Drama Dice the target rolls that produce an odd result are *subtracted* from the target's roll rather than added to it.

Terror (Timore): With the Terror Knack, an Incubo Adept twists a target's dreams into literal nightmares: a horrific series of images that leave the victim paralyzed with fear. Slashing claws attacking from a curtain of inky darkness, mangled bodies, dripping blood, and similar images torment the target. If he has a fear of cats, heights, or some other common phobia, it will be amplified and used against him relentlessly. Even worse—the Sorcerer can use a familiar face or a well-known location as a key element in the nightmare. When the victim wakes, he will be left wondering what sort of horrors lurk in the shadowy corners of his favorite alehouse—or beneath the smiling face of his best friend.

By winning a contested roll of his Resolve + Terror against the target's Resolve, the Sorcerer can assign a Fear Rating equal to his Mastery Level to a specific person, place, or object. A person or place must be specified in some detail—thus, “Renato Marchello,” or even “the Captain of the Razors” instead of “a member of the razors;” or “the Pig and Whistle tavern in Gottkirchen” as opposed to “an alehouse in Eisen.” Objects do not require the same degree of specificity (“Old Lady Kichener's pet cat Winky” would be going too far), but they must be qualified in some way (“black cats” would be appropriate; “all cats” would not).

An Incubus can grant his target a number of Free Raises equal to or less than his Rank in this Knack to resist the Sorcery. If the Sorcerer wins the contested roll anyway, each of these Raises increases the Fear Rating assigned to the person, place, or object in question by one.

Game Master's Notes

Incubo is among the most powerful of the Bargainer's arts, and would probably outstrip all the other Sorceries if it were not for the severe limitations on its use. An Incubus may only use his powers when a target is sleeping, giving him no more than an eight-hour window to use his gifts on any given day. Furthermore, it takes a considerable amount of time to use Incubo—as much as an entire evening to affect a single, distant target—and the effects of Sorcery, while potent, can

be fairly easy to work around (or resist altogether with the sacrifice of a Drama Die or two).

In the Poisoned Shadows campaign, the most significant limitation on Incubo is the fact that it is truly a dead Sorcery, provided with mechanics solely for the sake of completing the list of Bargainer's Arts. Agents of Die Kreuzritter (taking on the role of the Rilasciare, in this case) wiped out the Incubo bloodline before turning their attention to the von Drachens and their Zerstörung Sorcery. If Incubo was to manifest itself again in Théah, the practitioner would have to maintain an extremely low profile to avoid being detected and hunted down with every resource available to the dark knights.

Incubo's effect on the Barrier is complex. Essentially, the Barrier requires the raw elements of creation to mend itself, and relies on certain natural processes to channel those elements into useful form. By disrupting one of those processes—sleep—Incubo erodes the Barrier's ability to repair itself, providing longevity to the rifts opened by careless Porté Sorcerers.

