

TROUBLED MINDS

5E RULES FOR FEAR, HORROR, AND MADNESS

Overwhelming terror and the fragility of the human mind are staples of horror. In Dungeons & Dragons, the Ravenloft campaign setting has a history of including special rules for fear and horror and the 5th edition Dungeon Master's Guide includes optional rules for madness and a Sanity ability score. These rules have always seemed like footnotes or addendums rather than full subsystems that could drive the kinds of horror stories they hint at.

The Sterling Vermin Adventuring Company's **Troubled Minds** is a complete set of rules meant to bring themes of terror and madness to your D&D 5e campaigns. These rules incorporate some elements of AD&D and D&D 5e while also including original mechanical and thematic improvements. While these rules were written with the intention of being used in a gothic horror setting they can be adapted to other genres of horror simply by changing what events trigger Sanity saving throws.

NEW ABILITY SCORE: SANITY

Sanity measures your mental wellbeing and ability to stay calm and collected.

Sanity Checks. Sanity checks are uncommon as mental stability functions mostly as a passive resistance to loss of self-control and mental faculties. A Sanity check can model attempts to push the limits of your mind or steel yourself against terror.

The DM might call for a Sanity check when you try to accomplish tasks like the following:

- Endure long periods in isolation or inhumane conditions
- Understand the ravings of a lunatic
- Recognize insanity in others

Sanity Saving Throws. Sanity saving throws are typically made against one of the following: fear, horror, or madness. Each of these types of Sanity saving throws have their own triggers described below. The DM should feel free to create additional triggers for their game.

FEAR & HORROR

Fear. The least consequential Sanity saving throw, the DM may call for a Sanity saving throw against fear when one of the following conditions is met:

- When you see an aberration, undead, or fiend for the first time
- When you see a trusted ally or beloved friend killed
- When you are surprised by a gruesome or grotesque creature

The DC for a fear saving throw varies based on the triggering event, typically ranging from 10 to 14. The standard DC for Sanity saving throws against fear is 12. When you fail a Sanity saving throw against fear, roll a 1d6 and consult the fearful reaction chart below to determine how you react.

Fearful Reaction

d6 Result Explanation

1-2	Fight	You must use your movement each turn to position yourself within weapon attack range against the subject of your fear. While under this effect you cannot take any movement actions away from the subject of your fear. On your turn, you must take the Attack action against the subject of your fear if it is in weapon range. This effect ends after 1 minute.
3-4	Flight	You must use your movement each turn to move as far as possible away from the source of your fear. You must take the Dash action on your turn if you are able to see the subject of your fear. If you are no longer able to see the subject of your fear you may also take the Hide action. This effect ends after 1 minute.
5-6	Freeze	Your movement speed becomes 0 and you have disadvantage on all attack rolls and ability checks. You may repeat this saving throw at the end of every turn. On a success, this effect ends. Otherwise, this effect ends after 1 minute.

Horror. When a character is confronted by a nightmarish revelation or experiences a brush with oblivion, they must succeed on a Saving throw against horror. The DM might call for a Sanity saving throw against horror when one of the following conditions are met:

- When you discover a horrible and momentous revelation
- When you discover you are all alone against a powerful and malevolent supernatural force
- When you see your entire party defeated at the hands of supernatural creatures

The DC for horror saving throws varies, typically ranging from 12 to 16. The standard DC for Sanity saving throws against horror is 14.

When you succeed on a Sanity saving throw against horror you push through the overwhelming terror of the moment. When you fail a Sanity saving throw against horror, you must immediately roll on the fearful reaction chart. When you fail a Sanity saving throw against horror by 5 or more you also gain a lesser insanity.



MADNESS

Madness. Madness saving throws are rare and highlight the toll of the extreme horrors you are subjected to. Examples of events that might trigger a Sanity saving throw against madness include:

- When you commit a heinous act that goes against your own beliefs and values
- When you read a tome that gives you insight into the mad outer realms
- When you are tortured extensively or isolated from all human contact for long periods of time

Madness saving throws always have a DC of 16. If you fail the saving throw you gain a lesser insanity. If you fail the saving throw by 4 or more you gain a greater insanity instead.

When you gain a lesser or greater insanity as a result of a Sanity saving throw against madness, roll on the appropriate chart below to determine which insanity you have acquired.

Lesser Insanity Chart

d8	Lesser Insanity
1	Addiction
2	Amnesia
3	Fragile
4	Mute
5	Nerves
6	Obsession
7	Superstition
8	Thanatophobia

Addiction. When you gain this lesser insanity you or your DM should determine a substance or behavior that you are addicted to. Whenever you experience stress or duress you must succeed on a Sanity saving throw (DC 12) or do everything in your power to indulge in your addiction as soon as possible. Each time you succeed on this saving throw the DC of the next saving throw increases cumulatively by 1. The DC resets to 12 once you have failed.

Amnesia. You forget all personal details about yourself prior to the moment you received this insanity.

Fragile. Your mind is weakened by the things you have seen. Your Sanity ability score is reduced by 2 points while you have this lesser insanity.

Mute. You have a difficult time opening your mouth and actually saying anything. Each time you wish to speak you must succeed on a Sanity ability check (DC 12). You must succeed on this ability check to cast a spell with verbal components.

Nerves. You have disadvantage on Sanity saving throws against fear and horror and all saving throws against the frightened condition.

Obsession. When you gain this lesser insanity you or your DM should determine what is the subject of your obsession. Whenever an opportunity to pursue or focus on the subject of your obsession arises, you must succeed on a Sanity saving throw (DC 12) or uncontrollably persevere on your obsession for an hour. While persevering on your obsession you have disadvantage on all ability checks that would require attention on a subject other than your obsession, cannot maintain concentration on a spell unless the spell targets your obsession, and cannot carry on a conversation on a subject other than your obsession.

Superstition. Each time you encounter an aberration,

celestial, fey, fiend, or undead creature for the first time, you must succeed on a Sanity saving throw (DC 12) or the DM will give you a false piece of information that you are certain is true.

Thanatophobia. When you start your turn and you have less than half of your maximum hit points, you must make a Sanity saving throw (DC 12) against fear. Whether you succeed or fail, you do not have to make this saving throw again for another 10 minutes.

Greater Insanity Chart

d6	Greater Insanity
1	Delusional
2	Hallucinations
3	Insomnia
4	Narcissism
5	Unhinged
6	Violent

Delusional. When you gain this greater insanity, roll on the delusional chart below. Whenever you make an ability check using the Insight, Investigation, or Perception skills you must add your Sanity ability modifier in place of the normal ability modifier if your Sanity ability modifier is lower than that number. When you fail an Insight, Investigation, or Perception ability check the DM gives you false information related to one of your delusional themes. You are absolutely certain, and cannot be convinced otherwise, that this false information is true.

Delusional

d4	Theme	Description
1	Paranoid	You constantly see evidence of a conspiracy against you.
2	Grandiose	You are convinced of your own greatness, even going so far as to believe you have supernatural abilities or are divinely chosen.
3	Religious	Everything you witness is the result of a war between the forces of your god and your god's enemies.
4	Reference	You interpret remarks, events, and objects in your environment as being messages directed at you specifically.

Hallucinations. You see things that aren't there. You have disadvantage on all saving throws made against illusions. After each long rest you must make three consecutive Sanity saving throws (DC 14). For each failed Sanity saving throw the DM can give you false sensory information without specifying that it is not true that many times before your next long rest.

Insomnia. Just before you take a long rest you must succeed on a Sanity ability check (DC 12) or you only gain the benefits of a short rest and must wait 24 hours before trying to take a long rest again.

Narcissism. When you wish to take an action that does not directly benefit you, you must succeed on a Sanity saving throw (DC 14) or you cannot take the action.

Unhinged. You are hanging onto what remains of your sanity by a thread. Your Sanity ability score is reduced by 4 points while you have this greater insanity.

Violent. Whenever you could resolve a situation by violence, you must succeed on a Sanity saving throw (DC 14) or enter a violent rage for 10 minutes. While in a violent rage you are immune to the charmed and frightened conditions and must attempt to resolve the triggering situation by violence rather than any other

means.

Mental Health Issues & Entertainment

These rules were designed to model the way mental health issues are used in horror stories and, more specifically, to model the diminished sense of agency and self-determination common in the horror genre. These rules are in no way intended to make light of mental health issues or to accurately reflect any mental health conditions.

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