

Three common nightmares & WHAT THEY MEAN

SCARY DREAMS HAVE so much energy! Even the most terrifying nightmares carry creative, healing, and spiritual gifts. When we unwrap our disturbing dreams and nightmares, we understand how these gifts can empower us in our waking life.

Many people report anxiety dreams or dreams with distressing content. Nightmares have been on the rise since the outbreak of the pandemic, but the most common themes remain the same as always: that we are trapped, chased or attacked by shadowy men or aggressive animals, or we find ourselves in the midst of an apocalyptic disaster.

Let's have a look at why such nightmares come, and how we can work with them to discover any personal meaning they may have for ourselves and our life situation. Only the dreamer can know for sure what their own dream or nightmare signifies for them personally, and the best way to find out is by doing dreamwork to unwrap the deeper meaning.

disaster nightmares

Have you ever had distressing dreams of fires, tsunamis, hurricanes, or other natural disasters?

During the pandemic, many people report dreams of giant bugs taking over the planet. Other common disaster nightmares are scenes of warzones or other man-made disasters such as shipwrecks or plane crashes.

Some natural disaster dreams may reflect our relationship to our planet, our reaction to current news events, and our fears about the future, but more often this type of nightmare flags up emotional upheaval, helplessness, and terror in the face of unwanted changes. When such dreams arise, it can mean that we are feeling overwhelmed during an extremely challenging time. Drowning in dreams often seems linked to feeling overwhelmed by emotions or a life situation.

If you have this kind of nightmare, see if you can build a bridge between the core emotion in the dream and something you are currently dealing with in your life. Ask yourself: "When did I last experience that sense of 'I'll never make it!' in my life?" Or: "When did I last feel so desperate?" Often it will be possible to connect this feeling to something in our life: "Oh, right—I've been feeling like I'll never make the deadline for this project and it's making me feel totally panicked and desperate."

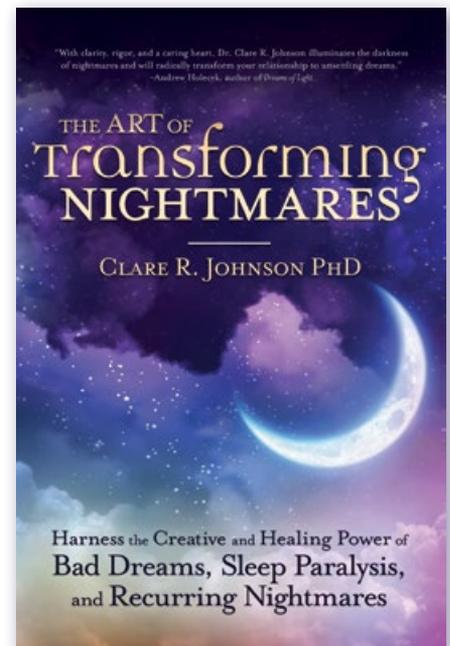
Dreams are mirrors. They show us how we are really feeling and remind us to act to change our lives for the better, by enlisting help, creating a plan, or changing unhelpful behaviors so that we can move forward with joy instead of fear.

scary animals and frightening beasts

Have you ever had nightmares involving animals who bite or chase you, or mythological beasts whose power paralyzes you with fear?

When dream animals want to get our attention, they might attack us, pin us down, roar in our faces, scratch, bite, or pursue us. They might even rip us to pieces and kill us. But this doesn't mean that they are negative energies—in fact, dream animals are fascinating to work with. Their instinctive, wild energy can reveal our conflicts and the shadowy aspects of ourselves or other people in our lives. They may also have a shamanic significance, linking us to the spirit world.

A nightmarish animal or beast is trying to wake us up to something that needs addressing within us, or in our life. Nightmares come to propel us towards psychological wholeness. We can get to the heart of an animal



**THE ART OF TRANSFORMING
NIGHTMARES: Harness the Creative and
Healing Power of Bad Dreams, Sleep
Paralysis, and Recurring Nightmares**
by Clare R. Johnson PhD
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nightmare and discover any message it may have for us by asking some key questions: “Which qualities does this animal embody for me?” “How does it feel to go through life in this animal’s skin?”

Vividly imagine yourself as that animal, seeing the world through its eyes, feeling its energy move through you, speaking with its voice. What does it want or need? What is it afraid of? What wisdom does it offer?

being trapped

Have you had terrifying dreams of being trapped in a burning building, or in a crashing airplane? People often report nightmares of being stuck in terrible situations, screaming for help but nobody comes to their rescue.

Such nightmares are often linked to feelings of helplessness, a lack of emotional support, and a belief in one’s inability to change a situation.

If you have a nightmare like this, ask yourself: “Where in my life do I feel trapped and powerless, as if there’s no way out?” Or ask: “Where do I need to take action in my life?” And, crucially: “Who can I turn to for help in my life?”

When we do empowering imaginative work with a nightmare, equipping our dreaming self with resources such as a sense of safety, a strong ally, or magical powers, we can often break the cycle of bad dreams.

Our dreaming mind wants us to be whole and healthy. All dreams come to help us—if they can’t get our attention in any other way, they create shocking scenarios to make us sit up and listen to what’s going on within us.

We need to listen to our dreams and nightmares, because they speak to us right from our own heart and soul and have wonderful gifts of insight and wisdom to share with us.

My new book, *The Art of Transforming Nightmares*, aims to empower dreamers by giving them practical tools to resolve nightmares and other disturbing sleep experiences in healing ways.



clare R. johnson, PhD, is the board director and past president of the International Association for the Study of Dreams. A lucid dreamer since the age of three, she later became the first person in the world to write a PhD on lucid dreaming as a creative tool. An international speaker and teacher, Clare also shares her transformative lucid dreaming techniques on ocean retreats and in her new series of online video courses. She is the author of seven books, including *Llewellyn’s Complete Book of Lucid Dreaming* and *The Art of Lucid Dreaming*.

WHAT TYPE OF DREAMER ARE YOU?

A keystone of my book is the Nightmare Quiz, which I’ve created to help you deepen your understanding of your relationship with sleep and identify the type of sleeper and dreamer you are. Based on your quiz results, you can then use *The Art of Transforming Nightmares* to identify the nightmare relief techniques that will be most effective for you. You will identify with more than one type of sleeper/dreamer and will probably fit into quite a few categories. Go through the following list and choose from the fifteen different types:

- ❖ **The nightmare sufferer:** If you feel terrorized by your nightmares, suffer from recurring nightmares, or are fearful to the point of not wanting to go to sleep, don’t despair! It is possible to turn this situation around and reduce your nightmare frequency, as well as harness the healing and creative energy of these strong dreams.
- ❖ **The traumatized dreamer:** Past traumas can have a relentless grip on us until we take active steps to free ourselves. When we work with our nightmares, we can release old hurts, build up our inner resources, and forge new, healthy patterns in our relationships, bringing light into all areas of our lives.

- ❖ **The agitated sleeper:** If you suffer from disturbed sleep, violent nightmares, sleepwalking, or sleep terrors, this can make for a bewildering sleep experience and can seriously disturb your bed partner. Once the root psychological cause is understood and resolved, these may no longer return.
- ❖ **The insomniac:** If you have difficulty falling asleep or spend hours wide awake in the middle of the night, you could put your alertness to good use and perhaps experience a wonderful lucid dream by using the techniques in the book.
- ❖ **The lucid dreamer:** Having a raised level of conscious awareness in your dreams and nightmares is an excellent thing, because it enables you to do powerful healing and transformative work while the nightmare is actually happening.
- ❖ **The anxious or depressed dreamer:** Sleep can be exhausting for people with depression or anxiety. You might be too anxious to fall asleep, or wake up in a state of extreme anxiety during the night, or have awfully vivid nightmares, or have no dream recall whatsoever but wake up feeling depressed every morning.
- ❖ **The visual and imaginative thinker:** If you fit this description, you're lucky, because many powerful nightmare solutions involve visual thinking and a lively imagination. You are naturally close to your dreams and visions, so any imaginal journey you undertake is likely to lead you quickly into a space of transformation.
- ❖ **The mythical dreamer:** If your dreams and nightmares create powerful stories or have recurring themes or archetypal images, it can be both therapeutic and a creative boost to mythologize these stories and create art or fairy tales from them.
- ❖ **The child prodigy dreamer:** If you had an inclination towards memorable consciousness-related experiences as a child, such as flying lucid dreams or out-of-body experiences, and so forth, then you fall into the category of "child prodigy dreamer." We all have our younger selves within us and can reconnect with them anytime, through visualizations, imaginal journeying, and lucid dreaming.
- ❖ **The health-challenged sleeper:** Pain and discomfort in the body can and does directly affect our dreams. Working with healing mental imagery can be highly effective as a response to physical health issues and has been shown to help health issues ranging from asthma to chronic pain.
- ❖ **The psi dreamer:** If you have frightening dreams that then seem to come true (precognitive), upsetting dreams of deceased loved ones, nightmares that seem telepathic, and so forth, then you are a psi dreamer. Sometimes a psi dream may carry both precognitive or telepathic elements and also have a personal message for us.
- ❖ **The out-of-body traveler:** Out-of-body experiences (OBEs) can be such wondrous and inspiring events, but if we carry too much fear with us, the OBE can become another frightening realm where we feel out of control and very alone. If you are suffering from fearful OBEs, the first thing to do is to reduce your fear levels.
- ❖ **The lucid void visitor:** The void is a space of infinite potential and an absolutely fascinating space to experience and explore, but it can be supremely frightening. The wonderful thing is we are effortlessly lucid and alert in this state, and that is a gift. When we learn to transcend fear and turn our time in the void into an adventure in consciousness, we lift off into amazing and liberating experiences.
- ❖ **The sleep paralysis explorer:** It can be terrifying to feel locked inside your body and unable to wake up while scary things are happening. But sleep paralysis is a state where we are naturally lucid and aware, and this gives us the huge advantage of being able to explore and utilise this state as a springboard for fabulous lucid dreams or as a meditative space for healing. The first step is to release our terror.
- ❖ **The spiritual dreamer:** Sometimes nightmares turn into the most luminous, transformative experiences quite spontaneously. Such experiences are gifts that can bring solace and nourishment during very difficult times in our lives. It can take a long time before we grasp every layer of meaning of such powerful dreams, and it can be helpful to work with them.