

Night Terrors: Troubled Sleep and the Stories We Tell About It

Alice Vernon

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Parasomnias, or sleep phenomena, are more common than people think, and Alice Vernon's *Night Terrors* is a fascinating exploration of sleep in these most difficult states. In the course of the book, Vernon draws on her own long history of troubled sleep, as well as upon cultural and scientific resources, to show what such events say about people, time periods, and humanity as a whole.

The book studies a variety of parasomnias in detail, one per chapter, including sleepwalking, hypnagogic and hypnopompic hallucinations, sleep paralysis, night terrors, and lucid dreaming. Its approach is multidisciplinary, featuring both scientific explanations for the phenomena and brief examinations of how they have been perceived throughout history. It considers case studies, surveys, works of literature, paintings, and movies, with the knowledge that parasomnias tell stories about the people who experience them and about the sociocultural contexts they exist in. Such stories have their own practical uses, too, as with healing trauma and improving waking-hour skills in sports and video games.

The volume strikes an engaging balance between its personal accounts and its academic exploration. Vernon hasn't experienced every type of parasomnia, but she gives detailed examples of the ones that are part of her sleep history, including sleepwalking, sleep paralysis, and hypnopompic hallucinations. Her anecdotes range from funny (while sleepwalking as a teenager, she told her mother that she needed to take a cake to Gwen Stefani) to terrifying (feeling phantom hands on her neck or dragging her out of bed by her ankles). And in the course of such eerie stories, Vernon proves to be an empathetic guide, too, using humor and quips to bring the horrors to a welcome halt.

Troubled sleep reveals much about individuals and societies claims *Night Terrors*, Alice Vernon's captivating psychological study.

CAROLINA CIUCCI (November / December 2022)

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