



Let The Daemon Have The Last Laugh

The eternal damnation of Markus the Mad, the Dark Jester

By Nicodemus Kyme of Altdorf

"We can afford to wait no longer," Kurn decided, slamming his warhammer down hard with impatience. The timbers of the derelict coaching inn shook dangerously as Kurn forced an ugly split down a thick table strewn with maps and charts.

"Very well," a voice issued from the shadows. The Reiklander, Steiner, walked back from the doorway through which the fading daylight spilled.

"Then let us begin," Hausser added, sat unflinchingly at the table struck by Kurn, his Marienburg pistol close to hand, "Reiner is out."

"My band," Kurn began, "Ulric's Fangs, has been attacked on no less than three occasions," he continued, beard bristling with anger, "Here, along the south forest road." He indicated a winding dirt track upon the outstretched map.

"Mine too," said Hausser. "They wore the flamboyant garb of travelling players but beneath the gaudy face paint was not the flesh of true men," he added darkly.

"Tainted by the Ruinous Powers," Steiner concurred. "Huddled in a ramshackle cart, upon their bodies sigils that stung the eyes and made my men sicken."

"Your men have no stomach," a voice like Kurn's countered.

"What?" Steiner wheeled to face him, blade half-drawn in the sheath.

"I said nothing," Kurn protested defensively.

"Deaf oaf," came Hausser's retort, at least it sounded like him.

"I'll see you dead for that," Kurn promised, ignoring Steiner, red rage fixed upon Hausser as he advanced toward him.

"No sport in killing a silk-swaddled merchant boy," Steiner said without moving his lips. In the growing darkness Hausser couldn't tell and face twisting in anger, reached for his pistol. The three men circled each other, now intent on making reparations for the insults thrown at them when suddenly Steiner caught a glimpse of colour in the corner of his eye.

"Wait!" he warned, pointing to the decaying rafters that supported the inn's roof.

There, sat squat, barely able to contain his muffled laughter was a gaudy Jester, complete with carnival mask.

"Still awaiting Reiner?" he taunted, flitting quickly to another rafter as Hausser's pistol shot embedded the timber with a 'thunk' in his wake.

"Now, now merchant boy," he chided, wagging his finger in mock remonstrance, "that was rude."

"Reiner won't be joining us I'm afraid," the Jester informed them, "The cat got his tongue."

The three men flinched defensively as the macabre creature threw something that landed on the table with a loud, wet 'splut'.

It was Reiner's tongue.

"Sigmar's hammer!" Steiner swore, repulsed at the dismembered tongue. Kurn roared, charging at a beam that led to the roof.

The Jester leapt athletically before Kurn could land his hammer strike. Thick dust motes and loose tiles came crashing down as the roof threatened to cave-in completely. The Jester dodged the debris expertly as the mercenary captain's cowered, flipping and somersaulting to land deftly upon the table. For a moment the macabre creature regarded them silently and then began to laugh. Deep at first, thick with menace, it rose slowly yet inexorably to a high-pitched shrieking bout of hysteria as the Jester began to shake uncontrollably, quaking as if he might burst. Kurn backed away, feeling the backles on the back of his neck rising, convinced in the knowledge that there was now someone else in the room.

"Daemon," he breathed, wide-eyed with terror.

Hausser looked to Kurn and then back to the Jester. He had stopped shaking and looked up at the three men. In the growing dark his eyes flared hellfire red.

Steiner drew his sword, knuckles white.

"Sigmar, preserve us," he whispered.

"He won't save you," a new voice answered, deep and booming with malign resonance. It emanated from the Jester's mask.

"Now we have some fun..."



A DARK DISCOVERY...

The day upon which the travelling players of Papa Noigal's troupe visited the sleepy village of Markus Schnapp will be one forever etched in memory. They swept into the village square full of the promise of death-defying stunts, heart wrenching tales of daring do, star-crossed lovers and fallen heroes wracked by ambition. What they delivered was quite different...

Markus had been sent to work in the fields, a punishment for shirking his chores, a boy of only sixteen he was oft lost in his imaginings of becoming a great hero of the Empire, desperate to be respected by his kin. Alas, destiny thought otherwise...

Little did Markus realise then as he headed off far into the outlying barley and corn of his home, grumbling at his rough treatment that such an act would both save and damn him.

Hours he toiled in bright summer sunshine that threatened to wither the crop such was its strength, a curious stench of over-ripening fruit ever present upon the waning breeze. Weary and in foul mood Markus returned to a scene of horror the likes of which no theatre could ever hope to contrive; his family, friends and fellows all slain. A disease ran through the entire village, homes burned and bodies rotted with frighteningly accelerated decomposition. Fruit sagged from sickened black boughs like deflated intestine, livestock lay dead infested with flies, maggots and other putrescence.

For long moments Markus stumbled from corpse to corpse recognising people he had known, that he had loved. Curiously no woman or child could be found amongst the decaying carnage and yet there was something amidst the horror that drew him. Where the hastily erected stage had been Markus noticed a face smeared in thick mud made slick by whatever devilry had been at work there. He pulled it, dazedly, from the mire. It was a mask, fashioned from a deep green lustreless wood.

Without knowing why and powerless to stop himself, Markus turned the mask around. For a moment all else was forgotten; his feeling of loss ebbed, the notion of standing amidst the chaos faded and all that was left was Markus and the mask and the seeming promise of all his unconscious desires, all for the taking within the mask.

As he placed it upon his face it seared his skin, foul boils and pustules erupting immediately upon his flesh conjoining, horribly, mask and boy as one. For the mask held the spirit of a powerful daemon, bound within, that had now merged with a fresh host. The boy, Markus Schnapp was no more, the daemon that possessed him a trickster, it warped his form into that of a terrible Jester, a dark, mocking figure that sought only malice and suffering through his macabre humour. Markus has been driven mad by the daemon and wanders the forests and villages of the Empire occasionally in the company of those that destroyed his former life such is the dark irony of Chaos, harbouring the daemon, waiting for it to fill him utterly and gorge itself in a flurry of bloodshed and violence...

THE DARK JESTER IN MORDHEIM

Dramatis Persona: The Dark Jester is a special character and follows all the rules as given on p.152 of the Mordheim rulebook.

Hire Fee: 75 gold crowns to hire; +30 gold crowns upkeep cost.

May be Hired: Only Carnival of Chaos and Possessed warbands may hire the Dark Jester any body else just doesn't have the right sense of humour!

Rating: The Dark Jester increases a warband's rating by +55 points.

Profile	M	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Ld
Jester	4	3	3	3	3	2	6	2	7

Weapons/Armour: The Dark Jester has a skeleton 'hobby horse' (counts as a club) and a sack of spikes (counts as a morning star) which he wields in humorous fashion in combat.

Skills: The Dark Jester has the following skills: *Leap, Acrobat, Lightning Reflexes, Jump Up and Dodge.*

Special Rules:

Loner: The Dark Jester is used to walking the lone path, content with the schizophrenic comforts on the daemon he harbours. As such he never has to test for being 'All-alone'.

Confound and Confuse: In combat the Dark Jester uses a series of distraction and confounding 'tricks' to gain the upper-hand on his hapless adversaries. At the start of each combat turn (his and his opponents) he may select one of the 'tricks' below to use in that round.

Sidestepper The Dark Jester weaves and bobs in combat as he were a puppet hung from preternatural, prescient strings. In hand-to-hand combat the Dark Jester has a special dodge save of 4+ that cannot be modified by the strength of the attack.

Babbling banter The Dark Jester babbles inanely and taunts his opponents distracting them and opening up their defences as they recklessly try to silence him. All enemy models in base-to-base contact with the Dark Jester are at -1 to hit in hand-to-hand combat and their opponents are at +1 to hit those affected.

Trip The Dark Jester lures his opponent toward him with a few cutting taunts and then deftly steps aside their fatal swipe to upend them into the dirt. The Dark Jester may forgo rolling to 'wound' after a single attack and may instead elect to 'trip' his opponent. The Dark Jester rolls a D6. On a roll of 2+ his opponent is tripped and counts as 'knocked down'.

THE DAEMON WITHIN...

The daemon that Markus harbours within the mask is a malicious creature that yearns for cruelty and carnage. When battle is joined on the blood-soaked streets it takes little provocation for the beast to surface to the misery of all... At the start of each of the Dark Jester's turn before movement roll a D6. On a roll of 1 the daemon has emerged to possess the Dark Jester's form, imbuing him with rage and near invulnerability! Whilst possessed by the daemon the Dark Jester's strength increases by +2, he is frenzied and may re-roll all missed hits in close combat. Furthermore he is immune to psychology but must always move towards the nearest enemy at +D6" move and cannot perform any Jester tricks.

Whilst in daemon form the Dark Jester is impervious to pain and ignores all injuries but still roll to wound as normal.

At the start of each subsequent turn roll a D6 on a roll of 6 the Dark Jester returns to normal and suffers any wounds and must make injury rolls for any attacks that take him to zero wounds and beyond whilst he was possessed all at once! This may of course result in the Dark Jester being 'out of action' but such is the fickle nature of chaos...