

Malevolent Maine

Episode 5: The Gray Fool

Malevolent Maine is a horror podcast, and may contain material not suitable for all audiences. Listener discretion is advised.

A vengeful spirit of a girl murdered on the Saco River, a tree haunted by a witch's ghost, and a summer camp where every year a camper goes missing... or do they? These are some of the stories we're investigating for future episodes. We make Malevolent Maine because we can't turn away from the dark truths hidden in our great state. Your support is vital to keeping the lights so we can drag new mysteries into them. If you'd like to help us expand our research even further, visit us at patreon.com/malevolentmaine where you'll find exclusive content. We're working hard on our newest side project, The Black Tarot, and episode one is available exclusively for our Patreon supporters. Once again, that's patreon.com/malevolentmaine, for all of our special content. If you've got a story that your friends and family don't believe, feel free to send it on to us. After all, we believe you.

Have you ever had a dream so disturbing it stayed with you long after you woke? What if you kept having that same dream over and over again? And then what if you found out you weren't the only person having that same dream?

This is Malevolent Maine.

Guys, what was that?

I saw it with my own eyes

No, seriously, what was that?

It's just not scientifically possible.

I can't explain it.

Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God.

This stuff is wild, man. It's real wild.

But... what was that?

Good evening MMers! This one might keep you up at night. This episode is all about bad dreams, or we should say, the same bad dream... over and over again, by different people, at different times.

[KATIE:] "It starts with me waking up in a desert. The sky is gray. The sand is deep red and coarse. It feels really scratchy on my bare feet. All over the sand are white trees, or at least they look like trees that have been bleached white. That's all I can see, sand and white trees stretching out in all directions. I start walking. I don't know where I am going, but I know I need to go there. I walk for hours and never get to where I am supposed to be. I don't know where I am or why I am there. And the whole time I feel scared.

That was a listener, Katie from Freeport, who sent us that recording. On its own, it's a fairly spooky dream, though not one we would typically spend much time on here at Malevolent Maine. Bad dreams are just that, dreams. However, not long after we got the message from Katie, Joe from Standish wrote us, .

He said, "I've been having this weird dream. It's been happening for a few weeks now. I go to sleep and almost immediately wake up in this freaky desert. The sand is coarse and gets everywhere, and there are these white pillars everywhere. At first I thought they were trees, but when I got close they were bleached bone. And not regular bone, it was covered in these tiny spurs almost like there was something wrong with whatever died and left them."

The same desert. The same bone-tree things. It was the exact same dream as Katie.

We reached out to both Katie and Joe and did a little investigating. As best as we could confirm, these two don't know each other. They have never met. They did have one social media connection, but it was a friend of Katie's cousin, who she met only once who had started his own Soundcloud music career. This individual went to high school with Joe, ten years ago. Other than that, these two individuals have no connection to each other. It should be impossible for these two to be having the same dream, and yet, they are.

According to the Dream Dictionary a dream desert is a fairly common symbol. Geographically deserts are often arid landscapes with little precipitation, therefore little vegetation. This often makes it a perfect metaphor for lack of growth or a stagnation in one's life. However, a desert can also represent loneliness or loss of emotion.

Wandering alone in a desert represents feelings of isolation or lack of a clear goal in life. That feeling of being lost in your real life manifests itself as a vast, expressionless landscape with no clear destination in mind. Desert sand can also symbolize the passing of time, like sands in an hourglass.

The bone trees get a bit more complicated. Trees can often represent Protection, Balance, Strength, Transformation, or Resurrection. Bones, on the other hand, can symbolize worry or misfortune.

So what are we to make of this? Could this just be a dream about worrying about stagnation? Or could it be something more sinister?

A month after Katie left her message about her dream, she called us again. She sounded different. There was an exhaustion in her voice that hadn't been there before. She'd been having the dream again and again. Every night in fact.

[KATIE:] I'm closer. I don't know where I'm going, but I know I'm getting closer. I keep walking. Only, I'm not sure that I'm actually moving my feet. I look behind me and there aren't any footprints. But I'm close. I'm very close. There's something in the distance, but I couldn't make it out. It's dark and huge. I don't know what it is, but I'm drawn to it. I must go to it."

We received several other stories from listeners about dreams of a desert full of bone trees. Again, each person told nearly the exact same story, and again these people seemingly have no connection. It's important to note that we hadn't published this story. That these various dreams of a vast desert aren't the work of copycat fans of our show.

One listener, who only used the username 'cistus_cat' wrote to tell us about the dream. I've asked my fellow investigator, Lucas, to read cistus_cat's email.

[LUCAS:] "Tonight I reached it. The black building at the edge of the horizon. I don't know how I got to it. It felt like I've been walking forever and not getting any closer, but last night there I was. It was a giant upside down pyramid. Or at least, that's the only way I can describe it. Every time I leaned one way or the other and looked at it, it seemed to have sides that folded or unfolded, like the shape was something I couldn't fully understand. I don't know how it was balanced there, but the point was resting on the desert sand. It was jet black stone, onyx maybe, and there was an open door, like an open mouth. And it was drawing me towards it."

Inside cistus_cat discovered a maze of black, glass-like walls. Tight hallways twisted and turned in a labyrinthine mess. They seemed to turn back on themselves, bending at odd angles, but never once coming back on themselves. Inside the maze was completely silent, not even cistus_cat's footfalls echoed off the black stone. It was as silent as the grave. Here's Lucas again, reading cistus_cat's words:

[LUCAS:] I got lost pretty easily. There was no way to know which direction I was going or where I had been. Directions didn't make sense. Angles seemed wrong. I would turn around and suddenly there would be a dead end where I had just come from and an open path ahead of me. It made no sense, and yet... I still felt like I was getting closer."

Getting closer to what? What lay at the center of this maze? What lived inside this inverted black pyramid?

We followed up with several of the listeners who had written in about having the same dreams. We didn't hear back from all of them, but those that did all spoke about the black pyramid at the edge of the desert and the endless maze inside. Again, none of them were told about this beforehand; all of them volunteered it on their own.

A side note here. At Malevolent Maine we often look to the past to help make sense of what is currently happening. Often there are recordings of these kinds of events happening before. So when we realized that these bone desert dreams were more than just a coincidence we looked to history for an explanation.

It turns out shared dreams of the bone desert aren't unheard of. In 1963, for example, several people in Maine began complaining about dreams of a desert filled with bone-like spurs. By the end of the year the dreams ended, though anyone who knows their history will know the world was forever changed. On November 22, 1963 President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Texas.

Going back even further there are reports of desert dreams and great black pyramids from 1837. Here's a passage from Joseph Price, a cooper who lived in Falmouth, Maine at the time. I've asked Tom, one of the investigators here at Malevolent Maine to read the passage:

[TOM:] I dreamt it again last night. It was the same as ever. Endless sand. Spurs of bone. There was the pyramid in the

distance, black as night, inverted. I walked its hallways, as a snake coiling about itself again and again. And at the end, if an end you could call it. The horror of what awaited me there is beyond my ability to put into words. At the heart of this inky morass... a man.

A man at the center of the labyrinth. Who could this be and have others dreamt of him? More on that in a second.

It is important to note that not long after Joseph Price's journal entry, the American government forcefully relocated over 16,000 Cherokee Indians, an event that has come to be known as the Trail of Tears. The long, difficult journey from the American southeast to what is now modern day Ohio during the winter months of 1838, claimed the lives of over 4,000 Cherokee.

Both sets of recorded dreams took place not long before major American tragedies. Could these dreams be harbingers of disaster? Could whatever these dreams represent foretell the coming of death and tragedy?

We at Malevolent Maine are careful that we don't suffer from apophenia when investigating such unusual occurrences. Apophenia is the tendency to perceive a connection or meaningful pattern between unrelated or random things. It's easy to get lost down the rabbit hole of connecting these paranormal events, however the keen observer has to eliminate such desires. While these dreams seemingly precede tragic historical events, that could be nothing more than coincidence.

We couldn't find any other records of bone desert dreams in Maine, though there were several others from across the country. We were also surprised to find these same dreams - endless desert, bone-like trees, upside down black pyramid - appear in European history as well. There was one interesting note we found from Jehan (G-ohn) Champlain, a French merchant in 1520. Champlain reported a dream similar to the one Katie called us about. He claims to walk through an empty desert, searching for something he does not know and cannot name. He mentions bones,

"like those of some long dead giant" sprouting from the sand. He even mentions the black pyramid. "A great ebony cenotaph turned on its point, suspended as if by magic, greeted me," he writes. Historically speaking, Champlain's dreams align with the Spanish conquistadors' attacks on the Aztec empire, which led to millions of deaths.

We mention Champlain's diary only because we found it interesting that Jehan Champlain was the grandfather of Samuel de Champlain, the man who established the first European colony in Maine, on St. Croix island, part of modern day Calais, in 1604. It would appear that Maine has a long history with this strange phenomenon.

Back to the man that Joseph Price, in his journal from 1837, claimed to see at the heart of the black pyramid. Here's Tom again, reading from Price's journal.

[TOM:] "The man wore the motley drapings of a jester or fool, though they were coloured shades of gray. His skin is ashen gray, like soot, and his neck is bent at an odd angle as if broken. He stares at me, and will on occasion walk towards me, pointing. He does not smile, only stares with smokey eyes."

That journal entry was dated September 21, 1837. Three days later, Joseph Price was found hanging from a beam in his barn, from an apparent suicide.

A jester dressed all in gray, silent as the grave? When one pictures a medieval court jester they tend to think of a brightly dressed silly man with a pointed cap with bells on it. He often scampers about making a fool of himself with slapstick antics or silly rhyming puns. Contrary to this pop culture portrayal, the role of court jester was actually a fairly prestigious position often occupied by those of incredibly quick wit. They often took on the role of advisors to the monarch they served in addition to being entertaining at parties. They were one of the few people in the court who were allowed to speak freely and frankly to the king and as such they were treated

respectfully. They were one of the few people who could deliver "brutal truths" to a monarch. There was even something called the Jester's Privilege which meant they were protected from the things they said or mocked. As a symbol of this right, the court jester's appearance mimicked that of a king. The cap with bells mirroring a crown, and their marotte, the carved stick often with a head on it, symbolizes a monarch's scepter. Even when kings did dismiss a jester, they were never overtly punished. Some were ex-communicated but it is rare to find evidence of a king physically punishing a jester, let alone executing them.

Still, there is something disturbing about the image of a fool dressed in gray, eyes staring somberly from a head twisted at an impossible angle. It is such a jarring image, one that sends a chill down the spine. You can imagine our shock when, as we were preparing for this episode, we received another email from Joe, our listener in Standish who had previously written about the dreams of the desert.

He wrote to tell us that he continued to have dreams of the desert, and unsurprisingly he told us of the upside down black pyramid and the impossible maze inside. But what he wrote next shocked us. I'm going to read it to you now.

"So, I'm in this maze, and nothing makes sense. I turn left but I'm still facing the same direction, or I get to a dead end and go to turn around but suddenly there's a solid black wall behind me and now the path is open where it used to be a dead end. Then I turn one last corner and I'm at the center of the maze - I don't know how I know this, but I do - And I see him. This gray jester - like something out of a fairy tale, except he's wearing all gray, like all of the color has been washed out of him. Even his skin is gray. It's almost like a black and white picture come to life, but that's not right either. His head is on crooked, bent at a sharp angle, like it's been broken. It's kind of just hanging limply there, like a puppet with a broken string. And he's staring at me with these cold, lifeless eyes. I try to turn away, but he's somehow always standing in front of me, maybe ten feet away. I started running blindly, taking turns

left and right, and it's like he's following me, except he's still right in front of me somehow. I know it doesn't make sense, but that's how it felt. Then he points at me, and even his arm is lifeless somehow. I keep thinking of a puppet, like a marionette, but the strings are cut so everything droops. He reaches out with a finger that seems impossible wrong and he whispers, "Kneel before the King Beyond the Desert." That's when I woke up. I didn't even know I was screaming, but I was. It was the scariest thing in my life. If that's what I'm going to see in my dreams, I don't ever want to sleep again."

We'll talk about this so-called "King Beyond the Desert" in a moment, but before we do we want to share a surprising discovery we made about the Gray Fool. He was such a strikingly unique figure that we had to see what we could dig up about him, and incredibly we found quite a lot.

Based on our research, we suspect that the Gray Fool was actually a man named Sanson de Craon (**Kohn**) from the Thirteenth Century. Sanson was the third son of an aristocratic French family and came to notability during the Seventh Crusade when he followed Louis the IX into battle. After they returned from the crusade, Sanson was tapped to be Louis' court jester. For a few years Sanson fulfilled the role dutifully, always providing sage advice to the king, and entertaining the king's guests with songs and long bawdy tales. However one winter, according to the court records, Sanson began complaining of strange dreams. Dreams of him walking through a desert.

Sanson became erratic and irritable, often talking nonsense as opposed to the sharp wit he had exhibited before. His last conversation before he was removed from his role with King Louis was strange to say the least. He rambled about the end of days, the need for humanity to submit to something. He urged King Louis to kneel before the King Beyond the Desert. Soon after this he was released from King Louis' services. Oddly enough that wasn't the end of Sanson's days as a jester. He relocated to Scotland and was quickly taken into the court of the King there, Alexander the Third, who appreciated Sanson's manic and

crazy behavior. His term there lasted only a short amount of time, mere months, before he was removed, again for requesting his King submit to the King Beyond the Desert.

Sanson traveled from Scotland, roaming Europe for a few months before he found himself in a role as a Jester in Poland. This appointment lasted only a few days. The Duke of Greater Poland was Boleslaw the Pious, and Sanson as in his previous two positions, suggested he should kneel before this King Beyond the Desert figure. Bolesław took this very poorly and turned Sanson out into the street and ordered his guards to turn him into a proper fool. The soldiers tore off his clothes and forced him to wear drab, patched gray clothing. That's when things turned even more violent as they dunked him repeatedly in water until he was gasping for air. They then threw him wet into foundry ashes and dragged him through the street. It all culminated with a public hanging in the town square.

It would appear that the story of Sanson de Craon, the Gray Fool, doesn't end there. He has been appearing in dreams for over seven hundred years, inside a geometrically impossible black pyramid at the edge of a vast desert.

So who is this King Beyond the Desert? There are no records of this title ever referring to any individual and clearly the bone desert is nowhere on Earth. Who is this figure that drove de Croan mad and bent him to his will? Why does he demand submission? And why do only some people receive his nightmarish messages?

These are questions we simply don't have answers to. We tried to reach out to our contacts - cistus_cat, Joe from Standish, and Katie who started this entire investigation with her original phone call. We never heard back from cistus_cat. Our emails were bounced back to us, labeled undeliverable. We found an online obituary for Joe stating he passed away unexpectedly in his home mere days after we last spoke with him. As for Katie...

We received one last call from her just as we were putting the finishing touches on this episode. She called our office at 1:13 in the morning. None of us were here to answer it. We're going to play you her message in its entirety.

[KATIE:] Goodbye. I'm going back to the pyramid again. The walls are made of midnight but I know the way now. I can't get lost inside. Not anymore. He's waiting for me. Not just the Gray Fool with his dead eyes and his voice like sand, but his master. The King Beyond the Desert. He's calling to me and I have to answer. I was scared before, but I'm not now. It wouldn't matter if I was. I have to go to him. I have no choice. I have to kneel before him. And when I raise my head up and look into his eyes... this will all be... over...

Katie Clark has been declared a missing person by the State Police. As near as anyone can tell, her call to us was the last communication she had with anyone. Her apartment was left completely untouched, her cellphone on the night stand beside her bed. It was as if she simply walked out of her life or simply disappeared. If you have any information concerning her disappearance we urge you to contact the authorities. And if you start having dreams of an unending, lifeless desert, please, reach out to us.

Stay safe out there, Maine.

Malevolent Maine is Lucas Knight, Tom Wilson, and myself, Chris Estes.

If you'd like to read more about our investigations check out our website at malevolentmaine.blogspot.com/

While there, don't forget to check our merch store. And, if you're so inclined, support us on Patreon at patreon.com/malevolentmaine

Thank you for listening to Malevolent Maine.

And as always, stay safe out there, Maine.