Sanctum Secorum

Episode #29

Creep, Shadow!

Compatible With DCC RPG

Sanctum Secorum Podcast
Episode #29 Companion

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Campaign Tools

Shadows, Followers, and Whispers

Sometimes the darkness has a will and a voice. And sometimes the shadows want things beyond the simple suffering of mortal men.

The creatures presented below are variants of the shadow-as-a-monster (DCC RPG core rulebook pg. 425), but have extended or diminished functions when compared to their more straightforward counterparts. Refer to appropriate notes on each creature for combat potential.

It should be noted that it is more than likely that these insidious shades will not be fought in the traditional fashion. These are the shadows who follow you home, and should be treated more like sentient curses than simple enemies in the dungeon floor.

Shadow mechanics:
In addition to direct Judge involvement, there are a few ways in which a character can contract one of the shadows listed below[1].

- Spending at least a turn IN COMPLETE DARKNESS in a suitable location (dungeon, gravesite, cursed grove) forces a roll on Table A: Touch of Shadows, below. Note that this just references the environment, a character's infravision or other senses are irrelevant.
- Touching a shadowed item forces a roll on the Touch of Shadows table. Old, inherited objects are often infested with echoes of the umbral places where they've lain hidden. This is up to the Judge's discretion, but anything described as ancient, old or dark should trigger a roll.
- Taking a lone guard shift in a darkened place (dungeon, shady forest, cold cave) forces a roll on the Touch of Shadows table.

Table A: The Touch of Shadows

Roll (d7)	Shadow
1	The shadows flicker unnervingly, but there is no further effect.
2	A Shadow of the Past reaches out to the character. They need to roll a STA check (DC 15) to shrug off its grasp.
3	A Follower from Darkness falls in step with the character. On a successful STR check (DC 15) they are staunch enough to avoid the effect.
4	The Uninvited reach through the ether, latching onto the character's dreams. Make them roll an INT check (DC 15) to resist their presence, failure indicates infection.
5	Whisperers take interest in the character. They should roll an AGI check (DC 15) to avoid their advances.
6	The Loving Nightmare chooses the character as their paramour. They need to roll a PER check (DC 15) or be the target of infatuation.
7	The character loses their nerve as the shadows around them dance and scream. Make the character roll a LCK check (DC 15) to hold their ground, or they must flee towards the nearest light.

A Shadow of the Past

"You begin to notice that not all of your memories are your own. Aeons old events haunt you, and the objects and people around you remind you of other times, long gone. You speak all but forgotten words and use expressions lost to time and those around you."

1 *Note that many of the following creatures are fairly involved, and will increase gameplay complexity. I would advise using them sparingly, just to keep the players on their toes in dark places. Table A: The Touch of Shadows is provided for general reference, and to make it possible to make players really regret creeping around in complete darkness.*

A shadow of the past generations has stepped into the character's soul sphere, and is slowly making itself known. This is not necessarily a bad thing, for there is much to learn from the bygone years. But the touch of a shadow is often painful to those who bear it, and results may vary.

The Shadow:

Initially, the carrier slowly notices that they are using a variety of archaic expressions new to them, and keep suffering strange déjà vu effects in the most mundane situations.

After 1d7 days of carrying the Shadow of the Past, the PC must make a will save, subtracting the cumulative number of days that they have carried the shadow, and consult the table below (keeping track of the rolls). Keep making checks each 1d7 days, until the shadow is gone

Table B: The Shadow of the Past	
Roll	**Effect**
0 or less	The character loses their mind to the pressing shades: a persistent mind from the past takes over their body. Re-roll their mental stats (Personality, Intelligence and Luck) and their alignment; additionally, rename the character and play them differently.
1-5	The character is confused and bereft of motivation. They suffer a -2 to all saves (effect is cumulative and permanent).
6-10	The character is slowly broken, as the memories of past logic assaults their minds. They suffer a -2 to all rolls including saves (effect is cumulative, until the shadow is banished).
11-15	The old memories take too much room in the character's mind and body. They suffer -2 to all skill rolls, regardless of their occupation (effect is cumulative, until the shadow is banished).
16-19	The shadows haunt the character: they suffer nightmares constantly, yelping and screaming in their sleep. If not soothed during rest, they suffer -1d to all actions until they sleep well.
20-21	The character finds that they can speak a language they'd apparently forgotten. Roll 4d10 and compare to Appendix L of the DCC rulebook (a result of 4 is Alignment tongue, a result of 20 is Ogre, a result of 39 is Undercommon, and so on; on a roll of 40 the player chooses). If the result is a language the character already knows, roll again. The effect is permanent.
22-23	The character remembers power and blood. Roll 1d5: (1-3) They gain a +1 to a random weapon type, as Warrior's Lucky Weapon; (4) They know how to make things bleed, increasing their crit die and range to those of a Warrior of a similar level; (5) They remember mayhem and carnage, gaining a Deed Die as a Warrior of a similar level. The effect is permanent, and the skill increases as levels are gained (if appropriate).
24-25	The character notices that they are more nimble, more skilled. They gain the equivalent skills from the Thief skill list appropriate to their alignment and level: Roll 1d12: (1) Backstab; (2) Pick Pocket; (3) Climb sheer surfaces; (4) Pick lock; (5) Find trap; (6) Disable trap; (7) Forge document; (8) Disguise self; (9) Read languages; (10) Handle poison; (11) Cast spell from scroll; (12) Sneak Silently & Hide in Shadows. The effect is permanent, and the skill increases as levels are gained (if appropriate).
26	The character learns a lost prayer to a forgotten god, gaining the equivalent cleric skill or divine spell (use 1d20+LVL+PER for spell check): Roll 1d12: (1) *Lay on Hands*; (2) *Turn unholy*; (3-6) random 1st-level spell; (7-8) random 2nd-level spell; (9-10) random 3rd-level spell; (11) random 4th-level spell; (12) random 5th-level spell. The effect is permanent, and disapproval applies as normal.
27+	The character gains insight into magic, and the ways of wizards, gaining intuitive arcane abilities (use 1d20+LVL+INT for spell check, roll for mercurial effect normally). Roll d12: (1-4) random 1st-level spell; (5-8) random 2nd-level spell; (9-10) random 3rd-level spell; (11) random 4th-level spell; (12) random 5t -level spell. The effect is permanent.

The Light:

After the first roll on Table B the character becomes aware of the shadow following them. They know the effect they have suffered, and that it is caused by an ancient memory, a shade in their footsteps,

although they may not be able to put the experience into words (Judge's discretion on how this is described).

There are three ways to get rid of the Shadow of the Past:

- *Succumbing to the weight of ages*: Result one or less on Table B.
- *Fulfilling a yearning*: A suitable deed (killing a specific creature, doing penance, giving a sword to an orphan; Judge's discretion) will banish the shadow, as the echo from the past is allowed to fulfill its destiny. The Judge should choose a situational, suitable action that will become obvious to the affected character (DC 15 INT check, reduced by the result of each d7 roll). The character is aware that the shadow wants something, and can search for the solution in other ways as well.
- *Fighting*: When the character carrying the Shadow is unconscious, the Shadow can be attacked, and may prey upon nearby creatures (will only attack opportune targets within 5'). Use the stats and behavior in the DCC rulebook (pg. 425) with the exception that the Shadow of the Past attacks Personality, and if someone is slain by the shadow, they suffer the effects of 0 or less in Table B, and the Shadow (apparently) disappears and the effects end.

A Follower from Darkness

"The dark seems to cling to you. Even in daytime, there is a dull gleam to the sun, and the shadows around you seem longer. In the night it is much worse: torches flicker, candles are inexplicably extinguished and the hounds bay when you walk near."

Sometimes, a young shadow chooses to follow someone, to move to a better hunting ground and to discover the dark places of the world. Too weak to attack or to subsume the target, it stalks their steps, causing unlikely and unpleasant events unwittingly.

The Shadow:

There are a number of simple effects the Follower brings, most of them negative:

- The character is gloomy and unpleasant during the daytime, with a -4 to all social checks.
- During the night (or in darkness) lights around the character flicker and fail. Every turn candles are blown out, there's a 50/50 chance for torches to be extinguished, and even lanterns might fail on a 25/75 likelihood. The effect reaches 10' from the character.
- When sleeping, the character suffers from constant dreams of a child following them, a dark dog guarding their rest, or similar. The dreams are uneasy, but not nightmares.
- The character has a blindsense of 10', as the shadow tries to keep them alive until it finds a suitable brooding place. The effect is only apparent when critical to the carrier's survival.
- If the character dies during the time they are infested with the shadow, they are returned to 1 HP by the infiltrating shadow. They will forever carry a dark side within them, pushing and prodding them towards the umbral hells (Judge's discretion), and the infestation continues as described above. This effect only occurs on the first instance of death, after that the shadow's powers are spent; if the character dies again, the Follower will choose a new host nearby at the next opportunity.

The Light:

The character may not be aware of the shadow following them, and may put the effects down to stress and the general trouble of being a reaver of graves. Any soothsayer, Wizard or Cleric may discover that the character is carrying a shadow with an investigation and a successful search (takes time to diagnose and a DC 10 skill check).

There are three ways to get rid of a Follower:

- A New Ground: If the character sleeps in complete darkness (no light within 30'), the shadow will slip into the nearby shade, never to be seen again.
- A Burning: If the character spends 8 or more hours in direct sunlight (no clouds, no winter), or in a place with very, very bright light, the shadow will scream and disappear.

- Combat: If forced to fight through magic or entrapment, the Shadow will fight as the DCC rulebook (pg. 425), but it will attempt to flee at the first opportunity. Forcing the shadow to manifest in this way requires a ritual and magical force (Judge's discretion), as stealth is its main protection.

The Uninvited

"They say the night is dark and full of terrors. You now know this to be true. Every night it comes. A shadow falls upon your resting form. And every night, the terror wells in your paralyzed body, and you scream without a voice. The morning finds you tired and bleary, with the images of the night's terrors playing over and over in your mind. You cannot take this much longer."

The Uninvited are shadows only in the widest sense of the word: they are creatures from beyond the veil of this reality, existing solely in the void between worlds. They are sometimes able to reach out to the creatures of this plane, in places where the raw, umbral darkness is the deepest.

Those touched by the Uninvited suffer horrible nightmares when they try to sleep. They lay in their beds, seemingly awake but unable to move, as eldritch apparitions torture them nightly. They cannot awake themselves from the nightmare, nor can they combat the horrors in any way.

The Shadow:

The Uninvited torture the character in their sleep, causing endless amounts of anguish and distress:

- Each night, starting with their first rest after getting touched by the Uninvited, the character needs to roll a DC 15 Will save. A failure means that their actions on the following day are all rolled with -1d.
- After d7 days of infestation, the character starts to wear down: a random stat is reduced by d3 points permanently, as the lack of sleep takes its toll on them and their life energy bleeds into the space between worlds. This effect continues each following d7 days, until the character perishes.
- If the character spends an extended period of time in a location rich with eldritch or inter-dimensional magical energies, such as the sanctum of an ancient magus or a pocket dimension created to hold untold riches (surprisingly likely places for delvers to end up in), there is a 5% cumulative chance each turn for the Uninvited to break through the veil of realities, using the unwitting carrier as a conduit between planes. See section Combat below for stats and specifics.

The Light:

The character is acutely aware that something strange and horrible is haunting their rest, but the specific nature of their nightly visitor may vary: the Uninvited cannot manifest fully in this reality, and mortal minds interpret their presence in different ways. The Judge should feel free to improvise nightmarish creatures and events that repeat for the character each night. Classic suggestions include strangling hags, small gray aliens and horrid equine beasts, strangling, cutting or otherwise molesting the character[2].

A witch, a Cleric or a Wizard may recognize the character's descriptions of their repeating nightmares on a DC 10 skill check. There are three ways to rid oneself of the taint of the Uninvited:

- Meditation: Utilizing the ancient eastern practices of the yogis and monks, the character has to enter a deep meditative trance, remaining awake but resting for 1d7 days (should be rolled in secret, each time this method is attempted). The character's mind must remain alert and ready, depriving the Uninvited from the chance to infect their dreams and preventing them from consuming their life essence. How these practices are learned is up to the Judge, but I would recommend rolling increasingly difficult Will and Fortitude saves each day (starting from a DC 5, and increasing by 5 on each failed save) to see whether the character falls asleep, and resetting the day counter when a save is failed.
- Death: If the carrier dies (is brought to 0 HP or below and incapacitated), the Uninvited lose their grip and recede. If freed from the shadow's presence this way the carrier is scarred for life, and has to roll a DC 8 Will save each night in order to rest without nightmares, suffering a -1d to all actions the following day if save is failed.

2 *Stories and research into sleep paralysis should act as suitable inspirational reading here.*

- Combat: The Uninvited can be lured out of their vessel by inundating the character with eldritch power. This can be done through ritual magic, or finding a suitable magical location where this sort of power lays dormant. Utilizing this power, the Uninvited will attempt to break into this reality more fully, manifesting as a Shadow centered on the infected individual. This shadow can be fought normally, but the carrier is unable to join in the fight, as they are held aloft by umbral energies. The Uninvited functions as the Shadow in the DCC rulebook (pg. 425), with the following changes: its attack deals d3 permanent stat loss on a random stat, and it has 2d20 action dice.

Whisperers

"Sometimes the darkness isn't just the absence of light.
Sometimes, it is a shuffle, just beyond the edge of hearing.
A skitter, that you're sure you heard but no one else did.
A word, whispered in your ear by a soft trembling voice."

Being alone in a dark place can make you hear things, as your ears become more sensitive to the micro-sounds around you. These sounds are often scary, but usually just tricks your mind plays on you. But sometimes, they are the actions of trickster spirits called the Whisperers, also known as the Knockers or sometimes Pixie-Ghosts.

These spirits can choose to follow a particularly interesting or easily spooked individual out of the dark places where they dwell. While not all that deadly, the afflicted individuals are often marked as madmen for hearing sounds and words that are decidedly not real to others.

The Shadow:

The Whisperers distort the perceptions of the character they choose to follow. The effect is subtle, and non-lethal, mostly causing confusion rather than calamity; note that none of the effects listed below include any sort of compulsion or coercion.

- During nighttime or in darkness the Whisperers make the character hear things. This effect is up to the Judge's discretion, but should be pronounced and disturbing. If the character stands guard alone, they are entirely sure that something is moving beyond the light of the party's dying fire. If the character is scouting ahead in a darkened dungeon corridor, they hear footsteps preceding

them around corners. And when the character is resting in a peaceful inn, they're sure someone whispered their name outside the door to their room. These events should be fairly frequent, and occur in situations where there is a good chance to cause confusion and embarrassment.

- When specifically trying to listen for sounds, the character's perception is always distorted and subtly different from other observers: when others hear wind, the character hears a great body drawing breath; when others hear rocks falling, the character hears the clang of combat; and so on.
- If the character engages in introspection or prayer, asking for answers from a higher power beyond them, they will hear answers to their questions that may seem nonsensical or even whimsical at times[3].

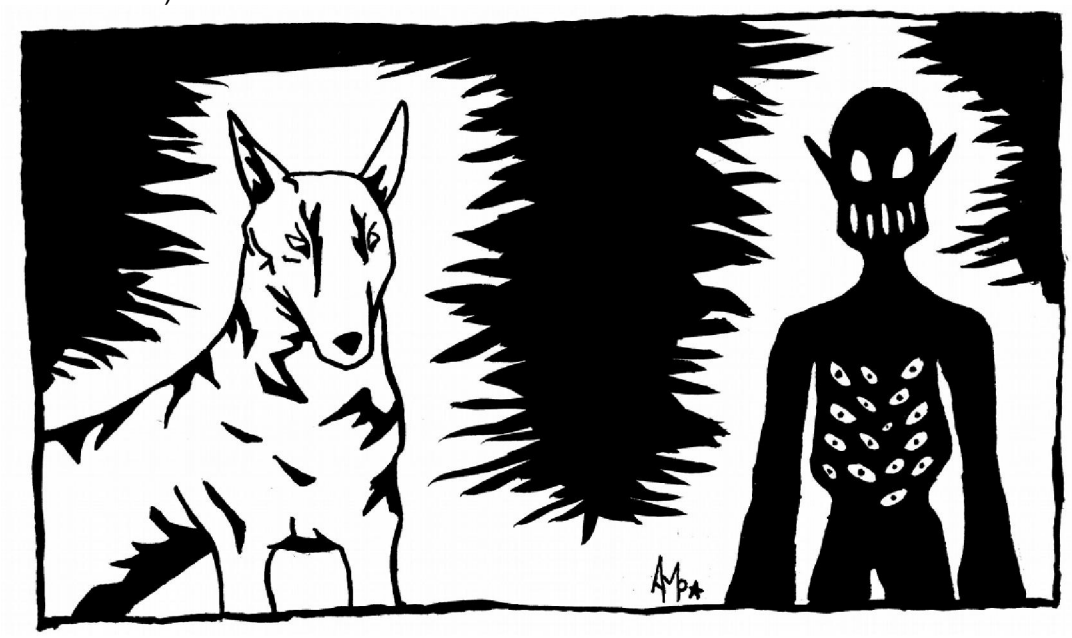
The Light:

Despite being fond of darkness, the Whisperers aren't exactly shadows. Nor are they constantly present around the character, rather following them around like invisible, stray cats. Thus the usual methods of excising eldritch, dark presences are more or less useless against them.

A soothsayer, witch or a miner (or similar occupation), as well as a Wizard, may recognize the affliction on a successful DC 10 INT check. Anyone whose patron is the King of Elfland recognizes the symptoms as a touch from the fae.

This said, there are a few methods to get rid of the Whisperers:

- Complete disregard: The Whisperers revel in the confusion and chaos their antics cause in those afflicted. If, however, the target ignores their calls and trickery stoically, they become bored and leave to find more juicy entertainment. If the character manages to ignore the effects of the Whisperers, withstanding them without obviously reaction for a sufficient time (a session or two, Judge's discretion), they are gone.
- Bribery: Like other fae creatures, the Whisperers are fond of strange bargains and trickery. If the character ends up conversing with the creatures they may reveal a quest they require the character to complete. This can range from anything to singing a sonata to the gibbous moon with a mouth full of acorns, to a sacrifice of gold and jewelry at an ancient cairn stone (Judge's discretion).



- Beseeching the King of Elfland: As members of the fae kingdom, the Whisperers fall under the jurisdiction of the King of Elfland. A Patron Bond: King of Elfland spell (DCC rulebook pg. 148) cast on the character with a result of 18 or more calls off the Whisperers (in addition to other effects).

3 I recommend using zen koans or old-timey proverbs as the answers to the character's meditation, and leaving the interpretation of these messages entirely up to the player.

The Loving Nightmare[4]

"Few things are more tragic and horrible as the loveless shadows, forgotten into the dark places of the world, and doomed to forever wander in agony and loneliness. Sometimes these forlorn spirits latch on to the living, making their amorous advances known with odd little fortunes, strange dreams and jealousy. Eventually they become so attached to their charges the shadows will want them to join them on the other side of the veil. But doing so means death."

The Loving Nightmares are the memories and ghosts of those who died with unrequited love in their hearts. These forlorn creatures stalk the umbral realms in search for sustenance, forever hungering for the warm touch of a lover's embrace. The only thing they remember from their past lives is the yearning; all other traces of who they once were are gone.

When a Loving Nightmare finds a suitable target, they latch on, and begin following them through the ever-present shadows. Initially, their power is weak and subtle, and they can only show themselves to their charges in complete darkness or deep sleep. But as the bonds strengthen, they will start taking a more active role in their target's lives, eventually being present in every one of their waking moments.

Initially, the services of a Loving Nightmare seem innocuous and beneficial. But as they attach themselves more and more fully to their paramours, problems start to arise: a jealous shadow is a troublesome companion for a living lover.

As a final step in the pact between the lover and the shade, the Nightmare will try to cause the demise of their beloved, either through coercion, lies or trickery, so that the two souls could finally be together.

The Shadow:

There are three stages to the process of attachment with a Loving Nightmare, each with distinct effects and signs. Judge's should note that all of these effects are hidden information, and that the infatuation progresses at a pace suitable to the narrative of the game (I would suggest one or two sessions for each stage).

STAGE 1: Desire. The Loving Nightmare finds their charge, and starts following them. During this period the shade has little power over the material world, but it attempts to use it to benefit their paramour subtly.

- Each time the character would roll a Luck check count their Luck as if it was 5 points higher than it actually is.
- During this time, the shadow visits the character in their sleep, appearing as a lovely mirage, inviting but not quite there.

STAGE 2: Passion. As the Nightmare's commitment towards their beloved deepens, the effects of the shade's presence become more involved.

- In addition to the earlier effect to the character's Luck, the Loving Nightmare endeavors to protect their paramour, increasing their saves by +3 each.
- They also gain a 5 HP buffer, which is always spent first before any damage is taken by the character.
- During this time the Loving Nightmare visits the character nightly as an alluring figure of suitable nature, and the pair interact pleasantly in an umbral dreamscape. People observing the character may notice a strange shadowy presence near them, especially in situations where the Nightmare's beneficial effects take place.

STAGE 3: Attachment. By this time the character and the Nightmare have likely formed a strong bond: the shade's special protections are a powerful boon to any delver, and the shade's goal is to make the character as dependent on them as possible. So, as in most relationships, things take a turn for the worse.

- The Loving Nightmare has finally gathered enough power to affect the material world around their

4 *NOTE TO JUDGES: This particular shadow is very involved, and may take time from the usual schedule of dungeon shenanigans to resolve and play through. Additionally, by its nature, the Loving Nightmare explores themes of love, jealousy and relationships, and thus much of the direct content is left to the Judge's discretion.*

attack with a +5 bonus, dealing 1d8 damage per successful attack. The use of this attack is at the discretion of the Judge, although the character can guide the shadow (see below), and should feel confident that they are in control.

- The Loving Nightmare is present within the character's mind, as a constant voice and figment of memory. They can communicate and commune mentally at all times, and still continue to spend their nights together in an shadowy dreamland.
- However, by this time the Loving Nightmare has grown possessive of their charge, and suspicious of others around them. It tries to subtly turn the character against their companions, and failing that, may even attack them at inopportune moments, such as when the character is getting healed (Judge's discretion).
- Finally, at this point the Loving Nightmare's goal is to cause the demise of the character. The primary method of doing so is to withdraw its assistance at a crucial moment where it is needed the most. It will never harm the character directly, but may cause situations where the character is at risk, ideally blaming misunderstanding or claiming to pre-emptively protect the character when this happens. The shadow will never directly admit to trying to get the character killed.
- Most of how this final phase is played out is left to the Judge's discretion. If the character dies during this phase of the infatuation, they cannot be revived (through anything short of a divine intervention or an extensive quest), as they are forever bound to the Loving Nightmare in an umbral embrace.

The Light:

The character in question will likely realize that they are being haunted or followed by some sort of shadowy being early on, but as the effects of the Loving Nightmare's infatuation are mostly positive and innocuous, they may not seek to be rid of the creature until it is too late. Any writers, bards or actors (or similar occupations) immediately recall similar stories if they are confronted with the character's experiences. Clerics may roll DC 15 spellchecks to recognize the Loving Nightmare as an undead, umbral presence upon the character.

Finally, there are three known ways to banish a Loving Nightmare:

- Soothing the Nightmare: Words are the key to love. A sufficiently skilled logician may prove to the Nightmare that it cannot be in love, as love is merely a folly of the nervous system. A suitably eloquent bard may use a song to remind the shade of how death conquers love, and everyone goes to their grave alone no matter what. A sure-worded poet may use allegorical phrase to make the shadow realize that releasing that which you love is a much grander thing than suffocating it. Basically, this interaction is left to be handled between the Judge and the player (or their surrogate, it may be possible for others to interact with the Nightmare as well, see below). I suggest playing this option out in-character, or as a series of difficult Personality skill checks.
- Banishing the Nightmare: As it has been mentioned before, the Loving Nightmare is an undead shadow. This means that Cleric abilities and spells that target the undead or extraplanar beings can have an effect on it, once its presence is known. This includes Turn Unholy, Banish (DCC rulebook pg. 269), Binding (DCC rulebook pg. 271), Exorcise (DCC rulebook pg. 288) and Speak with the Dead (DCC rulebook pg. 294). Use the stats for the shadow (DCC rulebook pg. 425) for resistances and reference, with the caveat that the character carrying the Loving Nightmare has to consciously allow any effect to take place. Any temporary effect is just temporary, and the Loving Nightmare returns to their beloved after the effect duration is over.
- Combat: If there is an attempt to bring forth the Loving Nightmare without divine aid at the side of the party, the shade will draw power from the energies used to do so, and will possess its paramour in order to protect their union[5]. The consequences of this resolution vary with the stage of the relationship:

STAGE 1: The possessed character attacks the people trying to separate the living and the dead, but will come to their senses once their blood is spilled. Even a single point of damage ends the effect, and the Loving Nightmare is gone.

5 *Note how this is brought about is up to the Judge and the players. There is no unified structure, and even a harsh argument between the paramour and the rest of the group about the shadow's presence may bring about enough conflict.*

STAGE 2: The possessed character fights those who threaten the union until it falls unconscious or dead. If revived, the character is free of the Loving Nightmare.

STAGE 3: The possessed character will fight anyone nearby until either side is dead. If the character dies during this, they cannot be revived (through anything short of a divine intervention or an extensive quest), as their soul will be forever tied to the Nightmare's embrace.

For more great DCC RPG goodness, check out Ari-Matti Piippo's blog at https://knightsinthenorth.blog/

Curses

While most curses encountered are dangerous, few are powerful enough to threaten the life of the target. However, there are practitioners well versed enough to threaten the life, or even very soul, of their victims. Such witches and warlocks are exceedingly rare, and care should be used in introducing such curses.

Curse of the Captive Reflection (Major Curse)

This curse, one of the more dire practices of the Riff women, is rightfully feared. A method of capturing the affections of a desired lover or of binding the soul of an unwary foe, the *Curse of the Captive Reflection* is some of the darkest witchcraft practiced. Fortunately, the circumstances under which this particular curse may be laid are uncommon.

The curse may only be placed on the night of an autumnal blue moon, and the witch placing the curse must capture the reflection of their target within a glass mirror using only the moon's light. In regions where practitioners know this art, candles and lanterns burn all night under such circumstances, although a clever witch can likely separate a target from a light source with little trouble should they desire. As the reflection is caught in the specially-prepared mirror, the words of the curse are uttered. Unlike many curses, rather than simply having a flat Willpower save DC of 16, the strength of this curse varies with the witch's level of devotion to the task. In this case, the witch makes a curse check (1d16 + Perception bonus) and the resulting number is the target number for the victim's Will save to avoid being caught under the witch's power.

Subjects held by this powerful curse are subject to every capricious whim of the witch who has them enthralled, so long as the witch holds the mirror on their person. The victim is unable to refuse even the most self-destructive order without being physically restrained by their comrades. This curse is only broken by the shattering of the glass mirror.

Curse of the Mason's Knot (Major Curse)

This curse, while it takes a bit of forward planning, is especially feared. Much like the *Curse of the Captive Reflection,* there are some very specific actions that the witch must take in order to put this curse into motion and thus, fortunately, it is not frequently used.

The first step towards inflicting this curse upon someone is to measure the shadow of the intended victim, using a length of string, optimally without them being aware of what is being done. Surreptitiously accomplishing such a task is not easy and requires an Agility check vs. DC 13 to accomplish (if the intended victim is vigilant for such behavior, the DC is increased to 18). Once that is accomplished, the witch must then put the string in a box and place it inside a wall. Finally, the witch must personally perform the masonry work to seal the box into the wall. Only once the masonry is completed is the victim required to make their save. As the witch mortars each brick into place, she must recite the following verse:

Shadow measured full and whole
Capture now your master's soul
Into a tomb of brick and stone
Left in darkness all alone

This curse kills its victim in 40 days (the traditional length of a period of mourning) and traps their soul within the box, bound into the string. The only way to break the curse is to somehow locate the box and break it out of its tomb prior to the 40 days running out. At the end of the allotted time, the victim simply drops dead, with not so much as a mark on them.

Fiction

The Blood-Drinking Box

Part 5

From behind the growls alerted Z, Sevoi, and Frila to the other two large cats as their eyes reflected the torch light.

Elvee and Serak looked forward and behind.

It was Blacyn that voiced everyone's thought, "Com'n get it, yah' bastards!"

The large, hairless cats, properly called tirgefrabs by their creator, leapt forward from above and below.

The crew of the Cinmora responded in kind.

Serak moved forward as Rappi backed to him. Rappi's force screen activated again, adding to his protection. Serak flung his remaining dagger, burying deep into the cat's flank. Blacyn and Madis fell onto the wounded cat with warhammer and falchion. Having the above ground advantage, proved well enough to Madis as his blade found the cat's freshly wounded flank. The cat curled back swiping at the fighter. The other cat they faced, took the opening attacking Serak and it missed.

Elviodia threw her javelin, targeted for the outer-most cat. The javelin chipped the stairwell harmlessly to the side. Sevoi flung his net out which the cats leapt to avoid.

Z moved inward, fists ready to deliver upon the inner-most cat. The cat dodged away from Z and struck out at her pawing the air. The outer-most cat swiped and also found stale air in its attack on Sevoi.

Sevoi figured his attack would prove better if the torch was elsewhere, spotting Rappi he handed the Halfling the torch.

The four tirgefrabs growled and spewed vomit inward among the crew. All but one stream of the putrid liquid was avoided. Elviodia moved her face in-time for her flank to be struck by the nasty fluid.

The group countered as best they could. Elvee drew her dagger and swiped at the nearest tirgefrabs, sending a deep cut into the flank of the hairless cat. A scream of pain steeled the elf's determination against this new found opponent. Sevoi struggled to fold his net for another casting. Z sent a solid blow to her cat, though the damage of her strike went unnoticed. Both Blacyn and Madis finished the cat they had attacked sending its blood showering about nearby, ending the horrible creature.

Quickly the three remaining cats faded into the darkness to climb and leap the walls with amazing agility. None of the other crew members could see further than the dwarf and Madis and they relayed the latest information to the others. In silence the crew drew closer and remained on guard toward the darkness for several moments afterward.

Elvee spoke, breaking the silence, "Let's move."

Blacyn and Madis took the lead and brought the crew the rest to what was understood as the ground, but the darkness can often make the greatest of illusions.

The torch that Z had dropped was just burning out and it did sit atop a solid floor; however, the floor was a long bridge that spanned what appeared to be a huge pool of sparkling, golden liquid. As the crew closed neared the bridge they could see that it was illuminated with a faint pallid glow and a wretched odor filled the air.

"Crew, let's get a count on supplies." The elf ordered once the crew reached the bridges base. "I have daggers left, two more days' cheese and bread and water."

Blacyn grumbled, "Strange, this bridge ain't a normal thing; built…different, not like the rest o'this stinkin' hole in thah'ground. I got mi'hammer, three axes, and two days rations o'beef."

Madis thought for a moment, "my blade, scimitar, a few daggers, and my sap, oh, yeah' a'bit of ale."

Sevoi whispered, "My net, we all have daggers. I have a few days of meat and cheese."

Frila said, "My sword, dagger and a couple'o'skins of ale."

Z calmly said, "My hands."

Serak lied, "Daggers, my short blade, a couple days of rations, an apple, and some wine."

The Halfling finished with, "Two daggers, and several rations. I also gots our pack of potions…um, six left."

Elviodia nodded.

Madis observed, "So, what the hell is that?" The fighter pointed toward the location where the bridge led. The dimness revealed a large, steep pile or mound.

"If it ain't attacking me I don'care right now," Blacyn said eyeing the golden pool that rippled ten-feet below the bridge. "I wonder how much could be got fer that water?"

Rappi glanced over the side and instantly saw past the shine and witnessed the danger. Pointed to the source of the ripples within the pool he said, "I think those would be pretty happy to see you take a closer look, dwarf."

Everyone looked finding where the Halfling's attention lay. The ripples within the golden pool were being caused by slime-coated creatures whose dark-speckled skin was sickly yellow, reminiscent of blown glass.

Elvee called out, "Hold, I know this kind of magic. It has ancient roots among the elves; Nollonapia's enchantments, a very powerful diabolic working." She observed. "If this form is of a bridge, it probably requires the most agile of us to cross.

Z smiled, "I guess that would be me."

Elvee ordered with an answer, "Yes, Z; Frila, you and Madis and I will go. Master Serak, you can come along if you care to chance it. Blacyn, Rappi, Sevoi…hold the bridge."

Blacyn added, "Fine by me, Mate."

Serak answered Elvee's offer excitedly, "Hells yes I'm in."

Rappi said, "Us three are holding the bridge," his voice quaked, "What if those cat-things come back."

Blacyn answered with a shrug, "Let'em come."

Rappi gave the dwarf a disheartened glance and said a little prayer to someone. The elven woman nodded and began to trek across the bridge without further conversation.

"Who invades my domain!" boomed a disembodied voice as the bridge crew began to trek across. Everyone looked around as the vast cavern fell silent again.

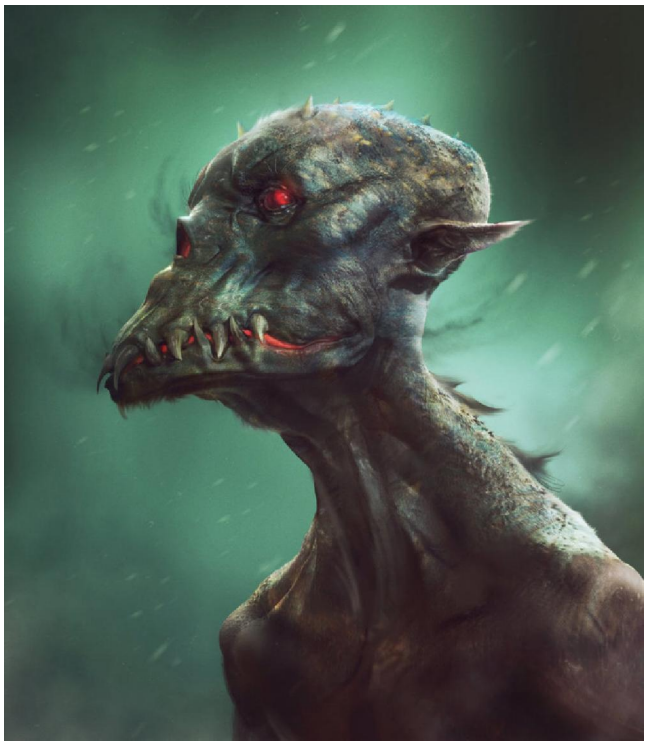
Serak broke the silence as he began to chuckle. A few of the crew looked toward the new ship's master, and his chuckle grew into full laughter. Frila began to smile. In Serak's mind, this was more exciting than he had ever wondered about as an adventurer, and he could only guess at what riches were awaiting inside. The Chelaxian quickly calmed himself once he realized he was the only one laughing.

Elviodia led Serak, Madis, Z, and Frila across the span. From the elf's recollection of Nollonapia's enchantments they were a fairly more convincing set of illusions that were usually joined with another incantation of some manner to produce a state of realism. She called back to those following her and told them of the problems they may be facing ahead.

No one said anything in return.

A short while onto the bridge, still within sight of the three holding the part's rear, the first obstacle revealed itself. This portion of the bridge was slick, probably the same substance that made up the golden water below. Traversing it to continue along the bridge would take some nimble footing, as Elviodia had estimated. One by one the five members crossed to the relative safety of the un-slicked portion.

Not everyone witnessing the passing of the first of the bridges obstacles delighted when the party crossed to the safety of the next arched span.



Sitting atop the huge pile of refuse in the center of the cavern, cloaked in an enchantment of invisibility, the demonic quasit, Elzemon, gritted his jagged teeth as he glared at the party past the tips horns, which curled before his squash, skull-like face. Elzemon had been trapped by Nekros the Grotesque. His assigned duties, far below the station Elzemon felt he should hold, were to maintain the prison his master had created by controlling servitors to capture lawful blood that he may keep the locks of the trap sealed. However, the ways of demon-kind cut a tricky path and Elzemon's hatred for Nekors was insurmountable. Nekros had not been direct enough in the details, and Elzemon was able to manipulate other minds than that of Nekros' servitors. He found a bumbling necromancer named, Rhalabhast, and leaked the secrets of the trap.

The crew had made it this far; past Nekros' foul tirgefrabs, now they are making past Nekros' Nollonapia bridge. The quasit found it a ripe time for a few dangerous games to be added.

Cautiously the party stepped down the length of the bridge. Madis grumbled about the unbearable odor, and his opinion was not far from that of the rest of the crew Elviodia's hand came up in pause as she discovered the next slick portion of the bridge. She ordered traversing this section in similar to the last. Frila crosses first, the barbarian taking a ready pose on the safe side allowing room for the others to cross.

Serak went after, searching the dimly lit darkness with the roguish talents that had been taught to him. Z was next and turned back to offer her hand as the big fighter, Madis, made his way. Half the distance across his footing gave and he dropped grabbing the bridge with his free hand as he dangled from the side.

Z gasped, dropped to her stomach, straining to reach the fighter. Elvee too lay on her stomach, the same as Z, reaching from the other side of the enchanted span. Serak glanced back, then down, seeing the sickly ripple cross the golden water below Madis, "To hells!"

Frila looked back quickly, then ahead again. Her warrior instinct warning her now would be the perfect time to attack, when situations were dire.

Elzemon saw his chance and took flight, invisibly spreading his leathery wings to gain altitude before striking. The quasit paused, found Madis' dangling form and flew straight toward the man, terrible claws bared to rake his flank.

Madis, not realizing he was under attack, simply pulled himself up quickly enough that the quasit flew through the location where he had been. Elzemon missed his attack, dispelling his invisibility enchantment, exposing himself to everyone.

Frila was first to take notice of the wrinkled barely two-foot form of Elzemon. "Attack!" she screamed and it echoed through the huge cavern.

Serak responded the fastest and was quick to release his dagger, burying in one of the leathery wings of the little demon bringing a painful shriek in reply.

Z helped Madis onto steady ground as Frila stood ready for an attack from the tiny demon screaming, "Devil!"

Elzemon growled disgust at the insult.

Elviodia realized Frila's mistake, "No, barbarian; demon!" and let fly her own dagger aimed for the winged outsider which the demon pitched out of the way.

Frila chuckled, "Does it matter?"

Elzemon snapped in his raspy voice, "Do it, meat-bag, yes!" and invoked its outsider-ability to cause waves of fear within the hearts of those of weak will.

Elviodia, the usually stalwart first mate, trembled in her core at the thought of the group meeting a demon here. Suddenly the encroaching darkness, the hairless cats, the very thought that something more treacherous lay ahead of her already weakened crew, began to flood into her mind, trampling her consciousness. Filled with doubt and dread, she turned and wordlessly made haste for the way the crew had come.

To the others of the crew, a cold shudder shot up their spines as the realization of what Elzemon truly was. Z's response was little, as she had no distance weaponry with which to reach the quasit.

Frila drew a dagger and let fly for the abyssal creature.

In moving to avoid the flying blade, Elzemon had ducked straight into Madis' own thrown dagger; severely impaling the small demon. With a horrible scream, that filled the cavern, Elzemon dropped to the bridge, landing on his feet.

Z was on-top of the demon before Elzemon could stand firm, and the brawler sent a hard blow into the demon driving the small creature to the bridge in a heap.

Elvee, under the influences of the magical fear that had been cast upon her, ceased to flee just prior to crossing the slickened portion, the effect died away as its source was beaten into unconsciousness. Her vision cleared of the confusion that clouded her mind and she saw in the dimly-lit darkness the image of Blacyn, Rappi, and Sevoi staring back at her with varying looks of concern.

Blacyn asked, "We heard Frila's warcry, Elviodia; you and the others are too far into the darkness for me to see. How fares the battle?"

Gaining her composure, Elviodia said, "It can be handled dwarf, mind the bridge." She walked back toward her expeditionary crew and the fallen demon. Upon returning, Elviodia found Z and the others wrapping the demon tightly within restraints.

Serak said the instant she spotted Elviodia, "I wanted to kill it"

Madis kicked the little monster, "Nay, brother, this lil'piece of hell c'n get us a nice profit."

Serak rolled his eyes though he could not argue with the fighter's logic.

Elviodia did not like being enchanted, even more-so because her own blood tells of how difficult it should be to enchant an elf. Feeling as if she had let her race down, she allowed the need for retribution to gnaw at her heart. "The coin would be well worth the trouble, Master Serak. The chances of letting this filth be a slave once again would be death enough to it."

The party continued onward, Elviodia giving orders to Z that she should attend the quasit and if the beast should begin to get close to being disruptive, she will be the one to kill it if need be.

Reaching the large pile the party gazed upward in silence.

Madis was first to remark in stunned anoyance, "It's a pile of…"

"…dung." Serak finished for him with a short chuckle.

Frila added with a queer smirk, "We came all this way for a pile of poo?"

Elzemon began to laugh through his newly broken and quickly healing face, but Z was fast to break it again with another solid fist, silencing the little demon.

Madis crinkled his nose.

Serak quipped, "That explains the odor."

Elviodia moved forward, "No, there has to be something more."

She led the group around the fifty-foot wide pile of guano to the other side. There they found a set of large, opaque-glass doors. Madis, Serak, and Frila stepped up to carefully and tried to look through the darkened glass.

Serak looked at the doors latch, which possessed a moderately made lock, considering the ones his father had taught him about. Shaking his head, Serak looked back to the pretty figure of Elviodia, "Can't see anything."

Z said nothing, looking about and keeping a short leash on Elzemon.

Frila pondered, "It's glass, surely it can be broken."

Serak asked, "Frila, dear, allow me a chance to get through this. Glass doesn't take kindly to being broken."

Frila finished with a smile, "Doors this large will surely throw falling glass all around us. Please, Master Serak, continue." She motioned toward the door for Serak.

Serak winked at her and set to work pulling a small roll of tools from a sack over his shoulder. His father had given him the set of finely crafted picks and files before he disappeared. For a brief moment, Serak's heart filled with the grief of possibly never seeing him again.

To Be Continued

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