

of them live in special academies, where they perfect their arts. Some become wanderers, freely offering their services and teaching to any who are ready to receive them. Several of the most famous spirit dancers have joined the Sovereign's Finest and have attracted many youths eager to become their apprentices. Spirit dancers in Jarzon are another rare exception to the requirement that adepts join the priesthood, and their dances are often a part of sacred performances and mystery plays. The spirit dance is an

important sacred rite to the Roamers as well, and some adepts learn and practice it around their campfires.

Each spirit dancer teacher interprets the sacred spirit dance in their own way. Spirit dancers see these different interpretations as complementary, sometimes forming different schools or lineages around the interpretations of inspired master teachers. They celebrate the diversity of their techniques and regard them all as valid ways to approach the mysteries of life.

## THE POWER OF SHADOW

Anwaren's fall into madness at the creation of the world brought the power of Shadow into Aldea, a power that has persisted since that time, waxing and waning in strength. It desires nothing less than to take and consume all of the souls of the Eternal Dance, to extinguish the light of every soul, everywhere, forever. The Exarchs of Shadow are its most powerful manifestations and from them emanate the legions of darkfiends.

During the dark times of the Empire of Thorns, Shadow nearly consumed the whole world before the forces of life and compassion could push it back, but Shadow still lurks in the borderlands of civilization and finds its way into every opening it is given, seeping into hearts and minds in order to corrupt them.

### SHADOW-TOUCHED

Places, items, and even creatures can be touched with the power of Shadow, making them conduits for its power and influence.

#### PLACES

A Shadow-touched place is infused with the power of Shadow. Examples include the former strongholds of the Shadow Lords, the lairs of Shadow cults, haunted woodlands, terrible wastelands devastated by the Shadow Wars, and the like.

#### ITEMS

A Shadow-touched item is similar but only affects those carrying or holding the item. They include ancient occult artifacts or things associated with previous corrupt acts, such as a murder weapon or implement of torture.

#### DETECTION

Any ability able to sense supernatural evil, such as the *detect evil and good* spell, can reveal the nature of a Shadow-touched place or item. Such places and things are considered desecrated and unhallowed.

Natural beasts tend to avoid Shadow-touched places and things, becoming skittish or aggressive the longer they are around them. Natural plants tend to become blighted there, so long-time Shadow-touched areas tend to be barren, or else the plants there take on a sinister and menacing quality.

#### CORRUPTION AND SHADOWSPAWN

What's more, Shadow-touched places and objects can allow the power of Shadow to influence living things in contact with them. People can become corrupt (see **Corruption**, following) and other life may be twisted and transformed. In particular, anything germinated or born in a Shadow-touched area becomes shadowspawn (see **Shadowspawn** in **Chapter XII**). This includes people, as a living soul from the Eternal Dance cannot enter a form born in a Shadow-touched area. Any such unfortunate creatures are soulless monsters, joining the number of shadowspawn in the world to do the work of the exarchs.



## CORRUPTION

In living souls, the touch of Shadow manifests as corruption, a stain upon the soul, a dimming of its light and essential goodness, bringing it out of balance and weighing it down, dragging it towards Shadow, as it once dragged all souls of the Dance.

### BECOMING CORRUPT

Characters can become corrupt in two ways: by performing a corrupt act while in contact with a Shadow-touched place or item or by calling upon the powers of the occult. See **Chapter XI** for details on occult magics.

When there is a chance of corruption, the character must make a Wisdom saving throw, with the Difficulty Class determined by the nature of the act, as shown on the **Corruption Table**, and set by the Game Master. Uses of the occult have a save DC of 10 plus twice the level of the spell or spell slot used (whichever is higher). So an occult use of a cantrip is a mere DC 10 while an occult use of a 9th-level spell is DC 28.

#### CORRUPTION

DIFFICULTY	ACT
10	<i>Minor transgression.</i> These are things that can be justified as “harmless” or “victimless” like lying or petty theft, but which the character still knows are wrong.
15	<i>Significant transgression.</i> This is any deliberately harmful act, whether attacking a person with the intent of injuring or even killing them without cause, or deliberating inflicting mental or emotional harm.
20	<i>Major transgression.</i> These acts rise to the level of causing true and lasting harm, including killing or maiming a person, or causing them lifelong trauma or injury.
30	<i>Mortal transgression.</i> The most heinous of corrupt acts, such as the murder of a friend or loved one to the betrayal of the light to the forces of Shadow.

A successful save means there is no effect other than the consequences of the character's actions. A failed Wisdom save means the character acquires 1 point of Corruption. Characters with 1 or more Corruption points are considered corrupt or Shadow-touched and can be detected as such (see Detection, previously).

### CONSEQUENCES OF CORRUPTION

Corruption has two primary effects on a character: increasing weakness and the potential for madness.

#### WEAKNESS

A character's Corruption score applies as a penalty to their Constitution and Wisdom scores. This means a character with Constitution 13, Wisdom 12, and two

points of Corruption has an effective Constitution 11 and Wisdom 10. These penalties reflect the impact of Corruption on the character's physical and mental well-being.

Victims of Corruption experience these penalties to Constitution and Wisdom as physical and mental symptoms. Physically, they suffer fatigue, weakness, nausea, and constant, gnawing hunger. Mentally, they feel growing fear, anger, paranoia, and mistrust. The ability score penalties affect their modifiers and all attack rolls, checks, and saving throws using those scores, including further Wisdom saves against Corruption.

#### MADNESS

When a character gains a Corruption point, they must roll an additional Wisdom saving throw with a DC of 9 + their new Corruption point total (DC 10 for their first point). A failed save results in a bout of short-term madness for 1d10 minutes. If the character's modified Wisdom score is less than 10, a failed save results in a bout of long-term madness for 1d10 x 10 hours. Actions taken while the character is thus afflicted *can* accumulate further Corruption but do not result in additional saves against going mad.

#### LOST TO SHADOW

If the accumulated Corruption score exceeds a character's Wisdom, they are afflicted with indefinite madness each time they gain a Corruption point. If a character's accumulated Corruption score exceeds their Constitution, they perish. The following night, an undead shadow arises from the place where the character died.

### SHADOW INSPIRATION

A corrupt character who deliberately chooses to commit a corrupt act or to give in to an opportunity presented by their flaw can choose to draw inspiration from the power of Shadow. The character gains inspiration and can spend it to gain advantage on a roll. Shadow inspiration does not prevent other characters from having inspiration. Shadow inspiration can only be given to another character by exhorting them to perform a corrupt act. If they accept, there is a chance of them gaining Corruption. In this way, Corruption sometimes spreads. Anyone performing a corrupt act using Shadow inspiration must roll a Wisdom saving throw against Corruption, regardless of whether they are in contact with a Shadow-touched place or item; they have drawn the attention of Shadow to them by calling upon it.

### SHADOW-TAKEN

Some choose to give in fully to the temptations of corruption, embracing and drawing strength from it rather than struggling against it. Such individuals are known as “Shadow-taken.” This must be a conscious choice; it cannot be forced or coerced, and it is largely permanent. Being Shadow-taken has the following effects.

## CORRUPTION

The character continues to accumulate Corruption points, to a maximum score of 20. They automatically gain a Corruption point for choosing to become Shadow-taken.

## ALIGNMENT

The Shadow-taken character's alignment immediately changes to evil if it was not already.

## CORRUPT POWER

The Shadow-taken character no longer suffers Constitution or Wisdom penalties from Corruption. Instead, the character may choose to replace any one ability score lower than their Corruption score with that score, having it increase as their Corruption increases. This choice is permanent once it is made. Occultists typically choose their spellcasting ability for this.

## UNLIFE

The Shadow-taken character cannot be raised from death. Instead, on the night after their death, the Shadow-taken becomes an undead creature based on their total Corruption score: 1–4: ghoul, 5–9: ghastr, 10–14: wight, 15+: vampire. Some especially corrupt Shadow-taken even choose to end their mortal lives in order to attain this unliving status.

## REDEMPTION

Shedding the influence of Shadow is a long road, so it is little wonder that many victims choose to embrace it, or struggle feebly against it, until madness or death claim them.

Corrupt characters can attempt to shed Corruption points by acting in accordance with a good ideal even if it is not the character's own. Each time the character does something in accordance with a good ideal that earns them inspiration, they may spend their inspiration to remove 1 Corruption point.

Note that characters can still gain Corruption while working toward redemption, so it is often a struggle against the character's flaws and corrupt impulses. Corrupt characters may also find themselves in need of inspiration for other things, rather than spending it to remove Corruption, also tempting them with the promise of Shadow inspiration instead.

The Shadow-taken have a more difficult path. It requires a significant act of contrition to start them on the road to redemption. The Game Master decides what is required and when the requirement is fulfilled. Even then, redemption is by no means assured; the character must still go through the process outlined here to eliminate their Corruption score and immediately loses all of the benefits of being Shadow-taken when they turn towards redemption, which can have serious consequences. Indeed, if the character's Corruption score exceeds either their Wisdom or Constitution scores, and they reject it to seek redemption, the character gains their redemption immediately, then perishes.

