

Curing Dark Wounds

These guidelines are written specifically for characters who are attempting to shake off a long-term wound or debility caused by an encounter with the Darkness Between the Stars – for example, if a wound inflicted by a Darkmorph had started to fester, or if brushing against a weird amorphous blob of darkness had left a character with “permanently” reduced MPs.

These assume both a spiritual (Darkness) and physical (wound) element to the PC’s condition, but can be used or adapted by GMs for any situation where a character is attempting to shake off a long-term curse or impediment inflicted by a brush with the Darkness Between the Stars.

Methods

At the GM’s discretion, a character may try any of the following. Each may be attempted once per character. If a specific treatment doesn’t work, they will have to try something else.

- A day of prayer in a chapel.
- Ten days of sun, warmth, rest – somewhere with a warm climate, plenty of light, and no overshadowing taint of darkness.
- Pilgrimage. (May be attempted once per major pilgrimage site – i.e. city of Lotus, Dome of the Icons, Icon City.)
- Bathing in a legendary healing spring, where mineral-rich waters bubble through rocks which glow with their own inner light - which is probably located somewhere very remote so that the PCs must make a big detour to get there, and which may initiate some adventure or complication.
- Weird experimental medical procedures, probably conducted by some remote and untrustworthy genius, requiring rare ingredients or considerable expense, and/or other adventures and twists that the GM wants to throw at the PCs along the way.
- Laying to rest (i.e. permanently defeating/destroying) the specific Darkmorph that inflicted the condition (or its boss... whatever works best for the story).
- Anything else that feels right that the players or GM come up with.

In order for a possible treatment to work, the player will have to succeed in a challenge. Assuming that the condition is both spiritual and physical, the PC may roll on Mystic Powers (or simply Empathy if they do not have Mystic Powers), or on Force (or simply Strength). The player should use which ever will give them the largest dice pool.

However, by default, the roll is absurdly difficult – i.e., taken at -4. Nobody should be able to reliably cure this by just wandering into a chapel with a high Empathy score – this takes some effort.

The GM should prompt the players, asking what particular steps they are taking to make sure the treatment works. Get them to think about this from their characters’ perspectives. This is a roleplaying opportunity, and a chance for the players to think through the dilemma in terms of the setting and their characters’ beliefs.

Modifiers

Modifiers to the challenge are:

- Default: -4
- Blessed at the start of the attempt: +3 (as per the Talent)
- Undergoing Pilgrimage, or being treated by a rare, specialist Medicurg to cure the condition: +4
- Relevant talisman (see below): +1
- Advised and supported by a competent spiritual counsellor or Medicurg: +2
- Adherence to Sacred Rites (see below): +0 to +2
- Seeking out a source of strong natural light to undertake or prepare for the attempt: +1
- Prayer or meditation in chapel to undertake or prepare for the attempt: +1
- Specific steps to banish Darkness from their life (see below): +0 to +4
- Any impressive story-driven obstacles overcome by the character along the way: GM's discretion.

The character's chance of success is therefore highly dependent upon who they are and how they attempt to address the problem.

Talismans

A character could use a Talisman to get a +1 to the roll. But which Icon's Talisman would be appropriate?

If a player is rolling Force then the rules (page 57) say that The Deckhand is associated with Force rolls; likewise, The Faceless is associated with Mystic Powers. That's simple, but perhaps a bit dull.

More interestingly, the GM can ask the player how the character understands their current predicament, and therefore what Icon the character thinks is relevant. This is more interesting as it allows the player to reflect (and perhaps the group to discuss) how the characters perceive what is going on, and what the role of the Icons is in their lives.

For example, whether a player rolls against Force or Empathy or Mystic Powers the character might think "I am facing an unknowable curse, the consequence of an evil beyond mortal understanding, and in such a situation we can turn only to The Seeker – the Faceless One – who alone can aid us against what cannot be known." Is that "correct"? Who knows – but it sounds pretty cool and in keeping with the setting, so, if that's what the player decides, run with it.

However, players might consider this in other ways – and none of these are wrong. E.g.: "I cannot know what I should or should not do to cleanse myself of a curse that none understand, and so I cede all control to the will of the Icons and the eddies of fate and chance – and so let the Gambler throw the dice as he may." Or: "I feel my spirit seeping from me, a curse from some dark ghost, it seems. This is the realm of The Butcher, the dark aspect of The Lady of Tears. And so I hold a talisman to the Lady in my hand, and I beg her mercy, though I expect none." Etc.

There are no right or wrong answers. Have fun with this.

Sacred Rites

The Church of the Icons teaches that there are nine Sacred Rites (rulebook page 238). Other groups may have a slightly different list of rites – for example, a character from a world where ancestors are revered may consider honouring ancestors key, but may be unimpressed by the Church's talk of Mission. So the exact list may vary between different characters. But whatever someone's specific culture, those who adhere to such rites are presumably walking in the light of the Icons, and should have less to fear from the darkness.

So, when a character is trying to shed this taint of the darkness, the GM and players can discuss to what extent the PC has lived in accordance with their culture's version of the rites.

This can be a good excuse to reflect on the character in a little more depth.

The list of Sacred Rites in the rule book includes items which are easy to check off, and some which are harder to pin down.

Is the character honouring a Life Bond (faithfully married, or living as a grieving widow or widower)? That should have been obvious from their past roleplaying and backstory.

Likewise, in an ongoing campaign, where the crew has gone through at least one full segment (month), did the character give one ninth of their income as Alms in the last segment?

Others are harder to pin down. Players may not have had the opportunity to roleplay Creed, Blessing, Fast, etc.

But the GM and players can still go through these and discuss whether the character is living in accordance with Sacred Rites.

If the character clearly does adhere to a couple of these, give a +1.

If the character adheres to most of them, give a +2.

This should be an opportunity for some interesting reflection on the characters. It is also a way to reward characters who are genuinely (based on the setting's notion of morality) virtuous. Campaigns can too easily reward PCs who are selfish and dishonest – this is an opportunity to reward those who are more moral.

Specific Steps

In some cases, the PCs will have performed actions which directly gave the GM Darkness Points, such as killing innocents. If that is the case, then indirectly the character is now suffering because their behaviours have generated Darkness which the GM spent inflicting the condition which the character is now suffering from.

Can the character make amends for their past transgressions, and so step away from the darkness?

This is an area where the players may have ideas, and the GM can judge how these might work.

For example, if a character killed an innocent (and so generated Darkness Points), then do they seek

out the victim's parents or orphans or spouse, and beg forgiveness or attempt to make amends?

Alternatively, a character undertaking a pilgrimage to cleanse themselves of their condition might offer to undertake an oath to do nothing which might call the darkness into their lives until the pilgrimage is complete. Presumably this would mean doing nothing which might give the GM Darkness Points – and if there is some peril in the course of the pilgrimage then they might struggle with not re-rolling any challenges.

This, again, is an opportunity for roleplaying and reflection.

Examples

A character (-4 default to start with) with a Strength of 4 (+4) who goes into a chapel (+1) and prays for a day, having lived a dissolute life and making no further efforts, has (4+1-4) only one die to roll.

On the other hand a character (-4 default) with Empathy 5 (+5) and Mystic Powers 3 (+3), who has lived according to the Sacred Rites (they have honoured their Life Bond, given Alms regularly, maintained the Fast during the last segment of the Merchant, and always prayed several times per day, so ticking off four of the Rites and getting a +2), has a capable Medicurge accompany them (+2) as they make a pilgrimage to the temple city of Lotus (+4), where they find an ancient mountain-top temple where they receive a Blessing (+3) as they sit in the baking sun (+1) and humbly submit themselves to the judgement of the Icons, is going to be rolling (5+3+2+2+4+3+1-4) sixteen dice.

Who the character is and how they approach their condition will make a huge difference to how easily they can shake off the darkness.