

- the shadow -

"I have seen three ages in the West of the world, and many defeats, and many fruitless victories."

Middle-earth has been under attack by the forces of darkness since its creation. Through each Age, the world has been threatened by the designs of a Dark Lord, a powerful Enemy relentless in the desire to dominate all. Sauron the Great, an evil spirit of immense power, might already be far closer to victory than any dare dread.

The presence of the Enemy weighs upon the hearts of most inhabitants of Middle-earth, with the exception of a fortunate few living in the havens of the north-west. Multitudes living to the East and South worship him as the only god they have ever known.

The Free Peoples of the North are among those few who have cherished a glimmer of hope: the knowledge that, as powerful as he appears to be, Sauron can be resisted and even defeated by steadfast opposition. Countless battles have been won or lost by alliances of the peoples of Middle-earth, and though the Shadow has never failed

to return in a new shape, even after the most resounding defeats, neither has hope ever fully deserted the hearts of those who fight against it.

But the Shadow does not solely rely upon instruments of war and the devious deeds of its servants to breed fear and doubt in its enemies. The temptations that dwell even in the hearts of the brave have ever been the ally of the Shadow. Valiant warriors, adventurers and kings can all stray from their path willingly, given the right circumstances. No matter how pure they believe their motives to be, or how just the ends, giving in to their darkest desires will eventually lead them to exert their power for personal gain or the domination of others.

SOURCES OF CORRUPTION

Adventurers accumulate Shadow points to represent the growing burden of grief, doubt, weariness and self-interest that comes to rest on the hearts and minds of those who oppose the Shadow. While much corruption can be attributed to the anguish caused by the Dark Lord's deeds, the Shadow works best when exaggerating and nurturing weaknesses that are already present. As the Twilight of the Third Age approaches, the sources of corruption multiply and increase in severity. Heroes mainly risk gaining Shadow points in four ways:





- Experiencing distressing events (see **Anguish**).
- Crossing or dwelling in an area tainted by manifestations of the Shadow (see **Blighted Places**).
- Committing despicable or dishonourable deeds, regardless of the end they sought to achieve (see **Misdeeds**).
- Taking possession of a cursed or tainted item or treasure (see **Tainted Treasure**).

ANGUISH

... suddenly he knew that he was imprisoned, caught hopelessly; he was in a barrow.

Living the life of adventurers in a world where the light is fading, heroes will often be reminded of their own fragility, and that of the world they know and love. When a Player-hero witnesses a distressing event or directly experiences a disturbing situation, they must make a Wisdom saving throw against Corruption, which is typically at Difficulty Class 15.

The table below provides a number of examples to help the Loremaster decide if a situation requires a Wisdom

saving throw. The column to the right indicates how many Shadow points a Player-hero gains if the saving throw is failed.

BLIGHTED PLACES

There was no movement of air down under the forest-roof, and it was everlastingly still and dark and stuffy.

Darkness seems thicker in the lair of a wicked beast, and the air itself hangs gloomily where black treachery was once committed. Grief and suffering never abandon the pits once inhabited by servants of the Dark Lord or the plains where bloody battles were fought.

When a Player-hero enters or lingers in an area that has been infused with malice by the darkness and has become Blighted, they must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. If the saving throw is failed, the Player-hero gains 1 point of Shadow.

Adventurers will usually only enter a Blighted place when they really need to, but they could also stumble inadvertently into one in the course of a journey. The Loremaster can optionally represent this by asking the players to make a Wisdom saving throw against Corruption when travelling through regions where the Shadow falls more strongly. The

ANGUISH

SOURCES OF ANGUISH	EXAMPLE	SHADOW GAIN
Natural but unexpected tragic event, or very grievous occurrence.	Serious or mortal accident, death in the family, natural catastrophe.	The Player-hero gains 1 Shadow point only if they fail the Wisdom saving throw with a 1 or a 2.
Gruesome killing, dreadful experience, Orc-work (senseless destruction), display of the power of the Enemy.	Awakening in a haunted tomb, discover a traitor among friends, discovering villagers savagely mutilated, seeing the mustering of a Shadow army.	1 Shadow point if Wisdom saving throw is failed.
Harrowing experience, physical and spiritual torment, Sorcery.	Slavery, torture, the Black Breath, haunted by a Wight, seeing the Eye.	2 Shadow points if Wisdom saving throw is failed.
Experience directly the power of the Enemy.	Interrogated by the Eye, captured by the Nazgûl.	Gain 1 Shadow point regardless of the outcome of the Wisdom saving throw. Then, gain two additional points if the saving throw is failed.



Blighted Lands table below shows the frequency of tests needed should the Loremaster deem a test required when travelling through a Blighted place found in the different types of regions.

It is left to the discretion of the Loremaster to determine whether a given place is considered Blighted or not. It is possible for an area found within a region classified as Wild, Shadow or even Dark not to require any Wisdom saving throws to traverse. As far as the accumulation of Shadow is concerned, the various region types as classified on the Loremaster's Map serve as guidelines for the Loremaster to decide whether the region currently traversed by company is Blighted or not, with Free Lands being rarely Blighted, and Dark Lands being mostly so.

When is an area Blighted?

If the Loremaster isn't sure and needs a hard and fast rule to determine if an area currently traversed by the company is Blighted, they can roll a d20 and check the results against the **Blighted Lands** table below. If the area is Blighted, Player-heroes travelling through it are required to make DC 15 Wisdom saving throws against Corruption per the table. The Blighted test could be repeated if there are other reasons to consider the place to be unwholesome. For example, an area that has been inhabited for centuries by minions of the Dark Lord, or is currently infested by them; the soul of a village has been tainted by a terrible murder or act of treason, or the spirit of a place is being poisoned by dark sorcery, or similar.

BLIGHTED LANDS		
TRAVERSED REGION	AREA IS BLIGHTED ON A...	WISDOM SAVING THROW FREQUENCY
Free Lands, Border Lands	1	Only when required by current adventure.
Wild Lands	1-3	Once every fourteen hexes crossed
Shadow Lands	1-5	Once per two hexes crossed
Dark Lands	1-7	Once per hex crossed

MISDEEDS

"You can say that I was too strong and took it by force. For I am too strong for you, halfling," he cried; and suddenly he sprang over the stone and leaped at Frodo.

Even the most virtuous heroes can find themselves in circumstances that tempt them to do something that would call their integrity into question. Such misdeeds can be the result of an accident or misunderstanding, but could also result from the temptation to achieve a noble goal by nefarious means. In a time when the Darkness is growing ever stronger, those who fight it must master and overcome the darker impulses within themselves.

The Loremaster should usually warn the players when they are about to carry out a Misdeed. This can sometimes be a judgement call, but the Misdeed table below can be used as the basis of the Loremaster's decision.

If the Loremaster determines that a Misdeed has been committed, the guilty character automatically gains a number of Shadow points (see table below). Player-heroes do not make a Wisdom saving throw when committing a Misdeed, as they are not being tempted by the Shadow: they are willingly embracing its ways.

MISDEEDS	
ACTION	SHADOW GAIN
Accidental misdeed	-
Violent threats	1 point
Lying purposefully, subtly manipulating the will of others	2 points
Cowardice, theft and plunder	3 points
Unprovoked aggression, abusing own authority to influence or dominate	4 points
Torment and torture, murder	5 points

It is important to note that merely attempting to do something despicable is a Misdeed, regardless of whether the action achieves its intended objective or not. If the action is classed as a Misdeed due to circumstances that

the players are unaware of, for example if they ambush someone they completely believe to be guilty of a heinous crime (unprovoked aggression), but who later turns out to be innocent, they should not immediately gain the Shadow points. Instead, their behaviour when the mistake comes to light determines if they take the points or not. If their reaction is one of contrition and an earnest attempt to put the situation right, then the points can be waived at the Loremaster's discretion. This shouldn't be too easy an option, and could result in a side-quest for the Player-heroes.

TAINTED TREASURE

There for ages his huge bones could be seen in calm weather amid the ruined piles of the old town. But few dared to cross the cursed spot, and none dared to dive into the shivering water or recover the precious stones that fell from his rotting carcass...

It may not tarnish like silver or rust like iron, but gold can corrupt faster than both, as it is often sought after with a fierce desire. The treasure found within the lair of some dead monster or buried in a long-sealed tomb may be tainted, its sheen able to drive men to distraction and fill their hearts with greed.

TAINTED TREASURE		
TREASURE PROVENANCE (EXAMPLES)	DC	SHADOW GAIN
From the hoard of a Troll	12	1 point
From the hoard of a Dragon	15	1 point
Stolen from an ancient barrow	12	2 points
From a stronghold of the Dark Lord	15	1 automatic point. Then gain 3 additional points if test fails.

Player-heroes must pass a Wisdom saving throw against Corruption upon finding tainted treasure, or suffer the Shadow points indicated on the table opposite.

CONSEQUENCES OF CORRUPTION

He did not go much further, but sat down on the cold floor and gave himself up to complete miserableness, for a long while.

Adventurers who dare to challenge the encroaching darkness face the risk of being overcome with grief or worse. In gaming terms, a Player-hero must be careful not to accumulate more Shadow points than he is able to get rid of.

When a Player-hero's Shadow point total exceeds their Wisdom score, they have been made Miserable, as their spirit is weakened by too much grief, sorrow and dark experiences.

New Condition: Miserable

- A Miserable creature has disadvantage on attack rolls.
- The creature automatically fails Charisma ability checks.

A Miserable character can temporarily counter the effects of the Miserable condition by spending inspiration. Using inspiration removes the disadvantage on one attack roll, or enables the player-hero to make a Charisma ability check at disadvantage.

BOUTS OF MADNESS

"What have I said?" he cried, "what have I done?"

When a Player-hero who is Miserable rolls equal or less than difference between their Shadow point total and their Wisdom while making an ability check, attack roll or saving throw, they experience a bout of madness.

For example, a Player-hero with Wisdom 10 and 15 Shadow points, suffers a bout of madness when they roll five or below while making an ability check, attack roll or saving throw. If they gain another point of Shadow then the bout is triggered on a roll of 1 – 6, and so on.

When this happens, the player relinquishes control of their character to the Loremaster for a short period of time. The Loremaster plays out the crisis, making the character do something they will later regret. Here are some examples of the consequences of a bout of madness:



- **Rage** – the character broods over real or imaginary wrongs until they react aggressively to a perceived threat or source of opposition.
- **Wretchedness** – the hero descends in a deep state of depression. They cannot propose any task for the length of the crisis.
- **Desperation** – the hero cannot find a trace of hope in his spirit, and thus cannot use inspiration until their heart is again lifted.
- **Lust** – the character feels an irresistible desire for an object not belonging to them, and tries to secretly take it.

If at all possible, the Loremaster should ground the consequences of a bout of madness either on the reason required the roll that triggered the crisis, on the player-hero's Shadow Weakness, or on one of their Shadow Weakness Flaws (see Degeneration below).

More often than not, the crisis provokes an aggression of some type, verbal or physical, upon the most likely and available target. The Loremaster should pick the most appropriate pretext and build the episode upon it.

Usually, a bout of madness is resolved right after the Player-hero got the 1 result, but the Loremaster can choose to postpone the reaction, letting the player keep control of their character, only to snatch it from them at a later, more appropriate moment. (The Loremaster might choose to do so especially when the roll that provoked the bout of madness wasn't dramatically relevant.)

A Miserable Lifstan has entered a ruined tomb in Mirkwood with Trotter and failed a Wisdom (Perception) ability check by rolling a 1. The young Barding has been feeling uneasy since he descended the rotting steps leading to the underground chambers, and he secretly blames his friend Trotter for leading him into such a place. When a Spider suddenly emerges from the inky darkness, the Loremaster decides that Lifstan flees the place immediately, leaving Trotter to face the critter alone.

When a bout of madness finally passes, the character regains control and sees their mind finally cleared of the tangle of fear and doubt he fell into before facing the crisis. In gaming terms, a player who suffered a bout of madness cancels all the Shadow points they have accumulated since their last bout of madness, and replaces them with a single 'permanent' Shadow point.

Permanent Shadow points may not be removed in any way – they are permanent corruption of the spirit and there is no magic that can undo them; however, they are considered as normal Shadow points for all other purposes.

DEGENERATION

In addition to 'resetting' their Shadow points, every time a Player-hero suffers a bout of madness they develop a new Shadow Weakness Flaw. Their Shadow Weakness determines the precise nature of their degeneration, as the various Shadow Weakness Flaws are taken from a list directly corresponding to their chosen Shadow Weakness.

A Shadow Weakness represents an individual's main inner fault; their susceptibility to a certain kind of temptation

DEGENERATION

SHADOW WEAKNESS	1	2	3	4
<i>Curse of Vengeance</i>	Spiteful	Brutal	Cruel	Murderous
<i>Dragon-sickness</i>	Grasping	Mistrustful	Deceitful	Thieving
<i>Lure of Power</i>	Resentful	Arrogant	Overconfident	Tyrannical
<i>Lure of Secrets</i>	Haughty	Scornful	Scheming	Treacherous
<i>Wandering-madness</i>	Idle	Forgetful	Uncaring	Cowardly



or behavioural flaw. This vulnerability is exploited by the corrupting power of the Shadow, gradually twisting the Player-hero's behaviour. Each list presents its four Shadow Weakness Flaws in order of increasing seriousness: the first time a Player-hero fails and is taken by madness they develop the first Shadow Weakness Flaw on the list, then the second, and so on.

A flawed adventurer has not lost the possibility of being a hero. Many of the characters described in the books display the influence of the Shadow to some measure. In most cases, they were able to keep their weaknesses in check, avoiding corruption's direst consequences.

Degeneration Consequences

The first entry on each list serves as a 'warning' of sorts for a player: their character is beginning to slip into Shadow. A player can actually choose to use this to their advantage, by properly roleplaying their new Shadow Weakness Flaw, they can gain inspiration, just as they do when portraying their hero's characteristics derived from their background.

Reaching the second entry means a character has continued on their ever-darkening path. In addition to their new Flaw, any skill or feature that their Shadow Weakness Flaws would impair automatically loses advantage. For example, the Rohirrim love their horses as kin and may have advantage on Animal Handling checks. A Rohirrim with the Curse of Vengeance who becomes Brutal no longer treats horses as kindly as he once did and loses his advantage on Animal Handling checks.

The third tier is a precarious one and reaching it signals that a character is likely destined for retirement, tragedy or villainy. In addition to their third Shadow Weakness Flaw, Player-heroes that have fallen to this point suffer disadvantage on **all** social ability checks, unless their Flaw would directly suggest otherwise.

For example, a Deceitful hero does not suffer disadvantage on Charisma (Deception) ability checks, a Cruel hero has no problem making Charisma (Intimidation) checks and so on.

Note that the behaviour implied by the third tier Shadow Weakness Flaws is, in many cases, the sort of conduct that

leads to Misdeeds; the Player-hero's descent into darkness is thus hastened.

The fourth and final tier places a Player-hero on the cusp of becoming an NPC. In addition to their final Shadow Weakness Flaw, **all** Charisma checks suffer disadvantage, as do Wisdom (Insight) ability checks. Worse by far, whenever presented with a situation where their fourth Shadow Weakness Flaw is relevant, the Player-hero must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw to remain in control of themselves. Failure means they act as their fourth tier Shadow Weakness Flaw indicates. At this point, their friends may very well insist that they leave the company, and the Player-hero is forced into retirement.

Failure Aggravation

When a Player-hero fails at an ability check, a Shadow Weakness Flaw may dramatically worsen its already negative outcome.

If the consequences of a failed roll may be affected by a Shadow Weakness Flaw possessed by a Player-hero, the Loremaster can severely aggravate the outcome of the action, turning it into a truly catastrophic effort.

For example, a Brutal hero attempts to impress a crowd using Charisma (Intimidation). The player fails the roll, and the Loremaster determines that the adventurer actually drew his sword and harmed someone in his overzealous attempt to intimidate.

SHADOW WEAKNESS DESCRIPTIONS

Every time a Player-hero develops a Shadow Weakness Flaw, they are taking a step towards their complete defeat at the hands of the Shadow. They are renouncing their higher ambitions and embracing simpler, more primitive emotions. They are trading respect for arrogance, love for lust, trust for suspicion.

This section describes each Shadow Weakness and Flaws connected to it. The Loremaster can use the definitions listed here to determine the effects of a bout of madness, or to decide whether or not a Shadow Weakness Flaw should affect a Player-hero's abilities.

Curse of Vengeance

"I wish I had Gandalf here! Curse him for his choice of you! ... As for you, I will throw you to the rocks!" he cried and lifted Bilbo in his arms.



Individuals who live by the sword are ever tempted to draw it, either literally or figuratively, when their will is thwarted or when they deem their honour to have been impugned by an insult.

As corruption spreads in the hero's spirit, their behaviour worsens, leading to more extreme violent reactions.

Brutal

A Brutal hero reacts violently to provocations and shows little restraint under most circumstances.

Cruel

A Cruel adventurer doesn't care if their actions cause pain and suffering to others, and is needlessly savage with their enemies.

Murderous

A hero becomes Murderous when they start to consider killing as a perfectly natural way to achieve a goal or simply to make things go their way.

Spiteful

The hero often repays real or imagined wrongs with vicious rudeness. Depending on the provocation, the hero may be simply very impolite, or downright insulting.

Dragon-sickness

...he fell under the Dragon-sickness, and took most of the gold and fled with it, and died of starvation in the Waste, deserted by his companions.

Adventurers who find themselves on the road to seek lost riches run the risk of catching the age-old disease capable of turning a pile of enchanted gold into bitter ashes. As the Shadow tightens its grip on their hearts, the world shrinks around them and their closely guarded possessions.

Deceitful

A Deceitful adventurer feels no shame in misleading others with lies and stratagems, as long as their machinations further their ends and needs.

Grasping

Grasping describes the desire to accumulate gold and precious items above all else, just for the sake of possessing them.

Mistrustful

When your prized possessions start to weigh you down and become a treasure to be guarded, even the good advice of friends appears to mask dubious intentions.

Thieving

A Thieving adventurer has discovered that anything they desire can be theirs – they just have to take it. They earned the right to take all they want when they sacrificed the love of their peers and their own self-respect.

Lure of Power

"It is by our own folly that the Enemy will defeat us," cried Boromir. "How it angers me! Fool! Obstinate fool! Running wilfully to death and ruining our cause."

When a man is given a position of authority, either by rank, lineage or stature, he may end up mistaking his own wishes for those of the people he should be guiding or keeping safe. Power is the quintessential temptation, and provides the Shadow with an easy way to win the hearts of those who desire it.

Arrogant

An Arrogant hero doesn't miss an opportunity to underline their own importance, often belittling their peers and companions.

Overconfident

Overconfidence denotes overweening pride, a sentiment that blinds a hero to their own limits and weaknesses. They will set out to do anything they set their mind upon, regardless of the consequences that might befall others.

Resentful

A Resentful adventurer is often bitter and angry with the people they ought to protect, as they feel that they risk their life for individuals that fail to recognise their actions on their behalf.

Tyrannical

A Tyrannical hero escalates their actions and desires to the level of a just cause. Their disregard for the lives of others is so profound that they will go to any length to achieve their ends, regardless of the cost or methods employed to accomplish them. Any dissenting opinion is considered to be utter betrayal.

Lure of Secrets

"The roots of those mountains must be roots indeed; there must be great secrets buried there which have not been discovered since the beginning."

Inquisitiveness and curiosity are desirable virtues in an individual, but knowledge can be put to malicious use and learned individuals can look down on others as ignorant fools. Secrets are dangerous, as the very desire of uncovering them may corrupt the heart.



Haughty

A Haughty character doesn't recognise easily the wisdom found in the words and actions of others, and tends to turn aside all advice and offers of help.

Scornful

A Scornful hero treats the propositions of others with disdain, making use of every opportunity to mock them for their presumed inadequacy.

Scheming

A Scheming adventurer keeps their thoughts and intentions to themselves at all times, never giving advice and heeding only their own judgement. They might sometimes agree with the propositions of others, but only to be free to follow their own choices later.

Treacherous

When an adventurer becomes Treacherous they cannot be trusted to keep their word. They are ready to betray their own friends and allies if it would be to their advantage.

Wandering-madness

"I feel I need a holiday, a very long holiday, as I have told you before. Probably a permanent holiday: I don't expect I shall return."

Wandering without ever really settling down might be the destiny of most adventurers, but it carries the risk of never finding something to live for. The road goes ever on and on, it's true, but whither then?

Cowardly

A Cowardly hero cares only for their own safety under any circumstances, and will go to any length to save themselves when a threat arises.

Forgetful

Forgetful indicates that a hero is often daydreaming and absentminded, and finds it difficult to remember even important things.

Idle

It takes a lot to stir an Idle adventurer into action. He is easily distracted, and must be cajoled to fully participate in endeavours.

Uncaring

An Uncaring adventurer is losing touch with the world outside of themselves. They can't bring themselves to feel compassion and quickly loses interest in matters that do not concern them directly.

SUCCUMBING TO THE SHADOW

When a Player-hero has developed the full complement of four Shadow Weakness Flaws related to their Shadow Weakness, they are in risk of totally succumbing to the Shadow.

A Player-hero already displaying all four Shadow Weakness Flaws who suffers yet another bout of madness is hopelessly lost and is taken out of play.

What happens to a Player-hero that falls under the Shadow is up to the Loremaster, who might find a way to incorporate the fallen hero's destiny into the plot of the ongoing story. Generally speaking, a Player-hero that succumbs is likely to disappear quickly from the game, probably as a consequence of one of the following events:

- **Return to Valinor.** When the burden of the Shadow overpowers an Elf, they will seek to leave Middle-earth as soon as possible, to sail for the Uttermost West and be healed of the sadness and misery of this world.
- **Madness.** When a Man, a Hobbit or a Dwarf falls under the Shadow, they succumb to madness. More often than not, this will result sooner or later in the death of the hero as the madman kills themselves, threatens others to the extent that they must be killed or starves to death in some solitary place, forsaken by men and beasts.

