

IRON HEROES
ARCANE CORRUPTION
by Jeremy Puckett

“Power corrupts. Absolute power is kind of fun.”

—Anonymous

Since time immemorial, man has sought control over his own existence. The human imperative to rule—rule the self, rule over others, rule of the world around us—has driven our species to heights of nobility and depths of depravity. In this search for control, man frequently turns to powers outside of himself for aid. This can be as simple and innocuous as rubbing two sticks together to build a fire—an ability man does not possess without the use of tools. It can be as dangerous as calling upon nonhuman forces for aid and succor.

This document is meant to address the corruptive allure of power, the siren song of magic. Corruption begins in the hearts of the corruptible, and those most drawn to power are often those least capable of using it wisely. Dark whispers lead a man down a darker path, and even the noblest intentions can turn into a road to hell.

Tread lightly. The devil walks close behind.

WHAT IS CORRUPTION?

Corruption (ke-rup'shen):

1. *n.* Marked by immorality and perversion; depraved.
2. *adj.* Venal; dishonest.
3. *v.* Decay; rot.

The dictionary definition of corruption does little to lend to understanding of the phenomenon, but much to comprehend the gravity of the results. Corruption is “marked by immorality and perversion”—a broad condemnation at best, but one that quickly summons up images to the reader’s mind. In a more personal sense, corruption is the twisting of things that were once good in the bearer’s mind but are now turned to evil. A father’s love for a child is love, but when he begins keeping that child in a cage “for his own good,” then love has turned to perversion.

In a physical sense, corruption is “decay” or “rot,” again the twisting of normal to abnormal. A dead body laying at rest is a sad sight indeed, but that body a few weeks later is said to have “corrupted.” By the same token, the corpse that moves—but is not obviously decayed or damaged—is said to be “corrupt.” Thus, that which is *similar* to the human condition, but moved even somewhat out of true, can become horrible to the observer.

Mystically speaking, however, corruption is the practice of consistently doing something that the caster knows or suspects is counter to his own morality in exchange for power. By consistently compromising his ethics in this trade, he moves further and further from normalcy and closer to darkness. The darkness that he serves twists his body and mind, altering him until he can no longer recognize himself in many ways. The final corruption occurs when the caster finally stops caring about whether what he is doing is right or wrong, whether it is hurting himself or others—at this point, he is truly damned.

Still, as with all too many things in the human experience, people who should otherwise know better or hold themselves to a higher standard of responsibility often seek a road to power that cannot be granted without risk. Moral, even good, men and women can turn to this path, seeking to use the darkness to fight in the name of light. A few even manage to achieve their goals and then turn their back on the power—but these few are a shockingly tiny minority. Once true power is achieved, only the most saintly or iron-willed of humans can turn their backs on it.

Power is sought for reasons of its own: self-aggrandizement, wealth, love, or more. In the end, it all comes back to control. The wise and the noble understand that the ultimate use of power is to not use it at all. Those that seek power often believe that they search for something else, and that power is simply the

means to that end, but turning to corrupt forces for that power inevitably achieves only one result: power sought for power's own sake.

MECHANICS OF CORRUPTION

Corruption is slow to accumulate, at first, but as an arcanist grows in strength, the rewards reaped can cause even the most noble of minds to consider the risk acceptable. The promise of power lures even the otherwise intelligent to accept the possibility of corruption in exchange for personal might. Taint lurks in the most innocuous of magics, however, and even virtuous casters understand that when they ask for aid, anyone or anything might answer.

In this system variant, any arcanist risks the possibility of corruption, whether voluntarily or through mere chance. Casters that take great risks are more vulnerable to the short-term penalties of corruption, which gradually accrue into major and long-term deficiencies. Still, corruption offers power of its own, and clever casters can turn their weakness into strength. Some even are willing to accept the penalties accrued from any amount of corruption just to seek the benefits, which can be significant.

This system first assumes the use of the *Iron Heroes* arcanist class and its accompanying magic system. With some effort, these corruption mechanics can be transported into other magic systems, making changes where necessary, a few conversion notes will be included at the end of the document regarding these changes.

When an arcanist casts spells, he calls upon chaotic and unpredictable powers—powers that man was never meant to possess. These powers have the chance of warping and twisting the caster's body and mind, ultimately damning his soul. Certain actions taken can increase the chances of corruption, while others can reduce it. The initial brush with corrupt powers can cause an arcanist to rethink his chosen profession, looking only at the short-term penalties—and the chance of long-term death or madness.

An arcanist can gain *corruption points* through the use of magic, as well as certain other magical actions. When he casts spells that are more powerful than he can otherwise control, or when he casts in the presence of a powerful outsider, or upon making a mystical pact, among other things, the arcanist gains corruption points. These points carry penalties with their accumulation, and both time spent not using magic and specific ritual actions can reduce them.

A caster that gains too many corruption points sees them become *taint tokens*. These tokens are permanent, short of extreme effort to remove them, and carry significant long-term penalties. These defects are divided into *paths*, general themes of corruption and devastation that happen to a caster as he advances along them. The accumulation of taint tokens is not always bad, however, as a clever and bold arcanist can use them to gain access to *corruption feats*, special abilities available only to characters that have reached a certain level of physical and mental depravity.

The specifics of these mechanics are discussed in their own sections, below.

CORRUPTION POINTS

Magic is inherently corruptive to some degree. As a source of great and unknowable power, magic is the ultimate lure for many who seek control over their own lives and the lives of others. However, when the words of power are invoked and aid from beyond is called, there is no telling ahead of time what will answer that call.

Whenever an arcanist casts a spell, he must immediately make a Will saving throw with a DC equal to the channeling check DC. If he succeeds on this save, he suffers no corruption. Otherwise, he gains 1 corruption point. If the arcanist is within 60 feet of an outsider that has more Hit Dice than he does, this increases to 1 point per the highest mastery rating of the spell. As beings from beyond normal space and time, outsiders possess a good deal of raw magical power within their own bodies, power that is drawn to an arcanist like a lightning rod. This counts even for outsiders the arcanist himself summons, and he is considered to be close enough for the extra corruption to occur if the spell succeeds.

The lure of corruption offers easy answers to the dilemmas inherent in magic, but only at a steep price. If an arcanist fails a channeling check, he may choose to gain corruption points in order to succeed on it

instead. He gains 1 corruption point for each point by which the channeling check would have failed, and the spell succeeds. As well, he automatically fails the subsequent Will save to avoid corruption, and gains further points as noted above.

An arcanist that invokes a mystical pact suffers 1 corruption point for every +1 of the pact. So, an arcanist who makes a pact that offers a +5 bonus gains 5 corruption points. If the pact involves the sacrifice of a living being, he instead gains 2 points of corruption for each +1 of the pact. Murder warps the mind and soul, creating an open channel for corruptive powers to seep in.

The arcanist can increase the power of his spells by allowing raw magical power to flood through his body, making his spells more difficult to resist, but at a high price. The arcanist can increase the saving throw DC of any spell he casts by +1 in exchange for suffering 3 corruption points. The arcanist may do this multiple times for a single spell, but the maximum DC increase cannot exceed the arcanist's Charisma modifier (minimum +1).

While the arcanist has any number of corruption points, he suffers a -1 penalty to all Wisdom checks and Wisdom-based skill checks as his mind begins to fray at the edges. If the arcanist has more corruption points than his Wisdom score, the penalty increases by 1, and increases by another point for each like amount.

As well, the arcanist suffers from a general physical malaise, causing him to recover from wounds less quickly. Increase the amount of time it takes to convert reserve points to hit points by one minute for every point of penalty the arcanist currently suffers. Finally, his Constitution score is considered to be this amount lower for purposes of natural healing. The character's effective Constitution score cannot be lower than 0, and this affects only natural healing.

As an example, an arcanist with Wisdom 12 and Constitution 10 who currently has 40 corruption points suffers a -4 penalty to Wisdom checks and Wisdom-based skill checks. It would take him 5 minutes outside of combat to convert a reserve point to a hit point, and his Constitution would be considered to be 6 for purposes of natural healing (recovering reserve points).

A character can continue to accumulate corruption points as long as he likes, but his ability to avoid permanent taint worsens with each passing day. At the start of each day an arcanist has corruption points greater than his Wisdom score, he must make a Wisdom check (DC 10) to avoid converting them into taint tokens. If he succeeds, nothing happens for the day. If he fails, he immediately loses a number of corruption points equal to his Wisdom score and gains 1 taint token.

At any time, a character with more corruption points than his Wisdom score can convert them into taint tokens. He may lose a number of corruption points equal to his Wisdom score and gain 1 taint token. This acceptance of the inner darkness carries a commensurate decrease in existing penalties, but carries its own kind of weight.

A character seeking to be cleansed has a number of options open to him. The simplest manner of losing corruption points is to simply not use magic. A character loses 1 corruption point after spending an entire week without using any magic at all. This means not casting spells, using a magic item, utilizing an aspect of power—nothing. If the character expends so much as a single point of mana during this time, he gains does not decrease his corruption pool.

Not all pacts of power are used for evil ends. An arcanist capable of making an arcane pact can use this ability to reduce his current levels of corruption. This pact cannot involve the sacrifice of a living being, only monetary treasures (ritual incense, purifying herbs, and so on). At the conclusion of the pact, the arcanist decreases his corruption pool by the amount that he would otherwise have gained as a bonus. This counts as the caster's use of an arcane pact for the week.

Finally, faith can aid a spellcaster in cleansing himself, if his belief is strong enough. An arcanist with the Child of Faith trait can spend one hour in prayer and meditation to reduce his corruption pool by an amount equal to his Wisdom bonus (minimum 1). Alternately, an arcanist that does not have the Child of Faith trait can spend four hours in cloistered prayer and meditation with a friendly character that does have the trait, gaining the same benefit. The arcanist may only do this once per day.

At the discretion of individual GMs, possessing certain mystically significant materials (such as silver, jade, crystal, or others) may reduce the amount of corruption a character suffers or negate it entirely. As a general guideline, allow a material to absorb 10 points of corruption for every 100 gold pieces in its cost. Individual GMs may rule that the material absorbs all corruption the character would suffer, or all but 1, or some other amount, until the material reaches its limit. When a mystical material absorbs its maximum level of corruption, it is destroyed; even before then, the value of the material is ruined by corruption.

These materials should never be allowed to absorb already present in a character, only stave it off or prevent it from occurring initially.

TAINT TOKENS

Whether by giving in to the lure of the darkness, or simply seeking a respite from the physical and mental pain of corruption, a character can gain taint tokens. As mentioned above, the arcanist accumulates taint tokens when he decreases his corruption pool, willingly or unwillingly.

A character with any number of taint tokens no longer suffers malaise or distraction from possessing corruption tokens. The first brush with true darkness salves the character's bruised mind and body, offering respite and succor.

Unfortunately, others can intuitively sense the character's inner darkness. It unnerves and frightens them, making them more likely to distrust the caster and to react to him with hostility. On all Charisma checks or Charisma-based skill checks (except Intimidate and Use Magic Device checks), the character suffers a penalty equal to the number of taint tokens he currently possesses. He gains no special bonus to Intimidate checks simply from having taint (but see "Path of the Beast," below).

As a character gains more taint tokens, he progresses down a path of damnation. The GM may select the character's path or allow the player to do so. A path should be an ironic or personal method of corruption, exposing the character's flaws and weaknesses, while at the same time building on them and turning them into strengths. Once on a path, the character remains on that path until the end of his life, or until he somehow no longer possesses any taint tokens. A character that loses all taint tokens, and then later gains more, may select a different path or may resume the same one.

A character's advancement along his path is as follows:

Taint Tokens	Path Level
1-5	1
6-10	2
11-15	3
16-20	4
21-25	5
26-30	6

A character may have no more taint tokens at any time than 10 + his character level. If he would gain tokens beyond this amount, he dies or goes irrevocably mad (becoming a catatonic vegetable, occasionally raving and screaming). The character is destroyed in every important way, and perhaps others will learn a lesson from his sad and desperate tale.

Losing taint tokens is a great challenge, even for the mighty. The lure of path abilities and corruption feats causes some to ignore their slipping sanity or deformities, while those of good intentions find that the price of being cleansed may be too high.

The simplest way to lose taint tokens, as with corruption points, is to just not use magic. For every full month the arcanist goes without using magic, of any sort, he loses 1 taint token. Obviously, this is harder than it sounds. Dark arcanists should see opportunities for power during these times, while those of more noble bent should be offered the chance to help others with their powers—or to see others suffer should they *not* use them.

Outsiders, as channels for the energies of magic, can draw forth the taint out of a willing individual, or one that is unconscious or otherwise helpless. Doing so is not without a price, however, as the concentrated chaotic power of the taint can disrupt the essence of even such a powerful being, and it invariable leaves scars on the subject.

An outsider with more Hit Dice than the arcanist can choose to draw the taint out of him, in whole or in part, with a touch and 1 hour of concentration. At the end of this time, the outsider and the arcanist make Fortitude saving throws (DC 15 + number of tokens removed). Whether the save is successful or not, the tokens are removed and both the outsider and the arcanist permanently lose 1 point of Constitution per token removed. On a failed save, the outsider and the arcanist also suffer 1 negative level for each token removed. This process may be undertaken once per year. Typically, celestials perform this task only for a

truly worthy (if misguided or unlucky) individual seeking a path of redemption, while infernals do so only to avoid the destruction of a particularly useful minion.

Individual GMs may include more ways in which to cleanse the taint in their own game, but such methods should be no easier—and often harder—than those given here. Removing the taint should form a significant task for a character, not simply something to be done during down time.

PATHS OF CORRUPTION

The choices that follow are merely a sampling of the innumerable ways in which a person can destroy himself. GMs are encouraged to create their own paths, highlighting a given character's fears and flaws, turning his strengths against him and making his basest weaknesses into his greatest (or only) strengths. Most offer physical or psychological changes, which take some days or weeks to occur.

The following paths are examples of ways in which the taint can progressively corrupt and empower a given character. As a character's taint grows (see above), his progression along the path grows. A character can only be on a single path at a time, and only if a character is somehow completely purged of the taint and then acquires it anew can he change paths. Even in such an unlikely case, the GM is encouraged to send the character down the same path, unless he has demonstrated major character alteration.

Some path ranks force a character to take on more corruption points under specific circumstances. This represents the degenerative nature of evil—once starting down the dark path, the road to hell becomes steep indeed.

Path of the Beast

Bullies and dominators are drawn to this path, one that begins to emphasize their physical prowess over all else. In the end, the Path of the Beast transforms a character into a hulking abomination, filled with rage and wrath. Some find the transformation comforting, however—they just got tired of being small. Others prized their physical strength beforehand and now find that they have nothing else.

This path is attractive to individuals whose magic has always been a method to intimidate and terrify others, as well as those that see only violence as an acceptable solution. Brutes seek to gain control over others not with cleverness but with raw power. To a brute, nothing else is important.

Rank 1: The character becomes larger and more vicious-looking than before. His body weight nearly doubles as his height increases by several inches. The character does not necessarily become stronger at this point, just more feral and dangerous in appearance. If he did not possess it before, the character gains the Savage Appearance trait, losing one of his previous traits in exchange for it. As well, the character suffers a –1 penalty to Intelligence and Wisdom.

Rank 2: The character develops a frighteningly short temper, pushing him to brief acts of rage. If the character is injured or insulted, he must make an immediate Will save (DC 15) or fly into a fury and attack the source of the pain. The character attacks for a minimum of 1 round, and attacks with his most lethal manner of attack, but at the end of that round, he regains control of himself. Unless he is further attacked or insulted at this point, he calms down and understands what has happened. The character suffers a –1 penalty to Intelligence and Wisdom, but gains an enhancement bonus to Strength equal to his mastery rank in his tertiary magical school (minimum +1).

Rank 3: The character now gains fury tokens as a berserker would. He also gains a single berserker ability of his choice; once selected, this cannot later be changed. Additionally, the character can use fury tokens to stoke the power of his magic. He may spend fury tokens as part of the casting of any spell that causes direct harm (hit point damage, ability score damage, or negative levels) to increase the saving throw DC of the spell by +1 per token spent. Casting a spell in this fashion requires a Concentration check (DC 15 + twice tokens spent) or fail to cast the spell due to blind rage. The character additionally suffers a –1 penalty to Intelligence and Wisdom.

Rank 4: The character's temper worsens into a bloodthirsty savagery that only death or extreme measures can resolve. When the character fails a saving throw against his anger (see Rank 2), he attacks the source of his anger until one or the other of them is dead. Only if the character is knocked unconscious can there be any chance to avoid death. When the character awakens, he must immediately make another Will save (DC

10) or perceive everyone near him as a threat, causing him to attack indiscriminately until death or unconsciousness. The character suffers a –1 penalty to Intelligence and Wisdom, but his Strength bonus increases to become his rating in his secondary school (minimum +1). The character now gains an enhancement bonus to his Constitution score equal to his tertiary magical school.

Rank 5: At this level of degeneration, the character becomes truly monstrous. He gains natural claw and bite attacks; the claws inflict 1d6 points of damage (plus half his Strength bonus), and the bite deals 1d4 points of damage (plus his whole Strength bonus). He can no longer be even remotely confused for human, possibly causing problems with monster-hunting locals and adventurers. Additionally, he suffers a –1 penalty to Intelligence and Wisdom.

Rank 6: The character's degeneration into monstrosity is complete, as his flesh is replaced with hideous scales or hide, he grows another foot, and his face twists completely beyond recognition. His enhancement bonus to Strength is now equal to his mastery rating in his primary magical school, while his enhancement bonus to Constitution is equal to his mastery rating in his secondary magical school. He increases to size Large, giving him natural 10-foot reach and a –1 size penalty to attack rolls and defense. He gains a natural armor bonus to defense equal to his Charisma bonus (minimum +1). Finally, if they were higher previously, the character's Intelligence and Wisdom scores fall to 3; otherwise, they suffer another –1 penalty. At this point, the character is effectively a feral, magic-wielding cannibal and brute.

Path of the Coward

Full of fear and selfishness, cowards are those that seek to preserve their own lives at any cost—even the lives of their companions. A coward has no friends, and he sees no end higher or greater than the preservation of his own existence. Cowards will abandon anyone or anything to save themselves, betray any confidence to eke out one more moment of life.

This path epitomizes those that use their power only for selfish ends, from the healer who saves his best medicines for himself to the abjurer that uses his magic only when he is personally threatened. Few cowards reach the end of this path, for few willingly accept the risk that it entails.

A character with the Brave trait cannot walk the path of the coward.

Rank 1: When battle comes forth, the coward's pulse pounds and his heartbeat quickens. Fear is his constant companion in the midst of danger. When combat begins, before initiative is rolled, the character must attempt a Will saving throw (DC 10 + half his own character level). If he succeeds, he may act normally for the duration of the combat. If he fails, he is shaken for the duration of the combat.

Rank 2: The character has learned to turn his cowardice into an aid in combat, allowing him to strike at an opponent's unguarded flank while they ignore him. The character gains +1d6 of sneak attack damage, which stacks with any existing sneak attack damage the character possesses. When the character is the subject of a fear effect (including uses of the Intimidate skill and his innate combat cowardice), he suffers a –2 penalty on relevant saves and checks; his natural tendency is to give in to the fear.

Rank 3: By this stage of corruption, the character is living in a nearly constant state of fear, one that heightens his awareness of his surroundings to superhuman levels. The character gains a bonus to Listen and Spot checks equal to his mastery rating in his primary magical school. However, this preternatural awareness also creates an understanding of just how many things can harm the character. The character gains a phobia, an unreasoning fear. The character should pick a particular type of creature, event, or action (approved by his GM) for the phobia. When exposed to this phobia, the character must attempt a Will save (DC 25) or become panicked for 1d6 minutes.

Rank 4: The character's combat cowardice worsens at this stage; he is never without crippling fear when faced with mortal danger. From this rank onward, if he succeeds at his Will save at the beginning of combat, the character is shaken for the duration of the combat. If he fails, he is frightened until he is out of sight of the current battle; if he attempts to return after running away, he must attempt the Will save again, this time at a –5 penalty. However, the character has also learned to utilize his terror-filled strikes at opponents' vitals. The character gains +1d6 of sneak attack damage, which stacks with any existing sneak attack damage the character possesses.

Rank 5: The character's terror shows him the truth of battle—it is easier to cope with when you can attack unseen. If the character can find an adequate hiding place while frightened or shaken from his combat cowardice, he is no longer frightened or shaken. If he begins an encounter hidden from view, he does not save to determine his combat cowardice's effect until he leaves hiding. As well, the character gains a bonus on Hide and Move Silently checks equal to his mastery rating in his primary magical school.

Rank 6: At the final stages of corruption, the character can no longer even attempt to control his fear for his own life. If the character suffers damage while under the effects of his combat cowardice, he automatically cowers until he dies or until the threat is removed. However, his fear for his own life has been honed into a razor-edge, making him like any other rat—deadly when backed into a corner. If the character initiates a surprise round by attacking a foe, he does not give in to his combat cowardice until the surprise round is over. If he actually hits a flat-footed foe with a melee attack during this surprise round, the attack is treated as a *coup de grace*.

Path of the Deceiver

Some people seek to have power over others by exploiting one of the most basic precepts of life: people will believe any lie, delivered well enough, because they either fear it to be true or they hope that it is. Deceivers get their strength from lies and deception, from exploiting the trust so common to mankind. They use and abuse those around them, moving on when there is no more to take. False in word and deed, deceivers prefer subtlety to brute force, and many see an art in destroying a man with him never the wiser.

Deceivers are among the most common and most advanced of the corrupted. They understand the value in taking “acceptable risks,” and even when things are at their worst, they can find a way to be pleased. No one is better at being happy in miserable circumstances than a man who can lie to himself.

Rank 1: On the surface, a character following the path of the deceiver gains only benefits. He does not suffer a penalty to Charisma-based skills for being tainted, and he appears more physically fit than ever, perhaps even refining his looks in some minor fashion. Like all lies, however, beneath the surface, terrible changes are brewing. The character suffers a permanent reduction to his Constitution score of 1 point.

Rank 2: Despite his somewhat lessened health, the deceiver continues to smile and make friends. The character gains a bonus to Bluff and Diplomacy checks equal to his mastery rating in his tertiary magical school. This newly found eloquence comes at the expense of his physical development, however. The character suffers a permanent reduction to his Strength score of 1 point.

Rank 3: The lessons of lies are prominent in the character’s psyche, and darkness teaches him his craft even more effectively. The character gains a bonus Social feat of his choice. For the purposes of selecting this feat, the character’s Social mastery rating is considered to be equal to his mastery rating in his primary magical school (if it is higher than his normal Social mastery rating). The character’s health continues to worsen; he suffers a permanent reduction to his Constitution score of 2 points.

Rank 4: Lies are a comfort and a shield to the deceiver, his greatest weapons and allies. At the start of combat, the character may pick a single foe to be the target of his venomous lies. By spending a full-round action spinning deceptions, the character gains a potent defense against that enemy. Until the end of the encounter, the character gains a bonus to his active defense equal to his ranks in the Bluff skill against the chosen foe. Unfortunately, the character needs this defense, since his ability to attack is so reduced. The character suffers a permanent reduction to his Strength score of 2 points.

Rank 5: The deceiver can weave his lies with elegant simplicity. The character’s bonus to Bluff and Diplomacy checks is now equal to his mastery rating in his primary magical school. As well, his understanding of deceptions increases so that he himself is harder to deceive. The character gains a bonus to Sense Motive checks and Will saves against illusions equal to his mastery rating in his tertiary magical school. His health continues to deteriorate, causing him to suffer a permanent reduction to his Constitution score of 3 points.

Rank 6: A master of the border between truth and falsehood, the character no longer has any qualms about his place in the world or his role as a consummate liar. Kingdoms can be brought low by a single word from a true deceiver. Characters attempting to make Sense Motive checks against the character’s Bluff check gain only half the normal bonus based on circumstances that would normally count against the deceiver. The effects of the character’s Bluff checks are twice as potent as normal; that is, a Bluff check that would normally last for one round now lasts for two, twice as many tokens are generated from the character’s Bluff checks, and so on. Frail and virtually helpless by this point, the character suffers a permanent reduction to his Strength score of 3 points.

Path of the Fleshwarper

The corruption of the flesh can walk hand in hand with the corruption of the spirit. Mortification of the body is the initiation into the path of the fleshwarper. Characters following this path seek to destroy or

modify their own bodies until they no longer resemble anything truly human. Fleshwarper either despised their bodies before their corruption or regarded their own form as sacred, making its desecration one more step down a path of damnation.

Rank 1: At first, the character's growing corruption merely shows itself upon the skin as discolored patches or bruises. These are easily concealed, though as time passes, they become more prominent. In his sleep, the character has fitful dreams in which he mutilates himself or is mutilated by others. Often, he will scratch or claw at his own skin during these dreams, though not enough to leave more than a few marks. The overall damage to his internal tissues, however, causes his hit point total to permanently decrease by 5 (to a minimum of 1).

Rank 2: The character's knowledge of his own body is intimate and thorough—perhaps unnervingly so to those who hear him speak of it. When exposed to any effect that requires a Fortitude saving throw, the character gains a bonus on the save equal to his mastery rating in his tertiary magical school. Unfortunately, the character's desire for self-mutilation continues to take its toll on his body, permanently reducing his hit point total by 5.

Rank 3: By this point, the character has acquired a number of unpleasant scars and tattoos, though they can still be hidden with the careful application of makeup and heavy clothing. This scarification has deadened his nerve endings enough that he feels little pain and experiences less bleeding than normal. The character automatically stabilizes when reduced to negative hit points and is immune to wounding effects. The character's mangled tissues groan under the strain of his fetish, permanently reducing his hit point total by 5.

Rank 4: No longer is the character's physical deterioration in his own hands—from this point onward, the corruption in his body is steering the changes. The character's flesh begins to alter and thicken, possibly also changing color or becoming seemingly piecemeal or patterned. The character gains a natural armor bonus equal to his mastery rating in his tertiary magical school. His Fortitude save bonus increases to his mastery rating in his secondary magical school. Only through concerted effort can the character continue to pass as human; Disguise checks are now necessary to protect the fleshwarper's secrets. The character's mind begins to fracture from the changes, however, and he suffers a permanent reduction to his Intelligence score of 2 points.

Rank 5: Twisting from true and warping uncontrollably, the character's skin and muscle have begun to flow like water. His new shape is something out of a nightmare, concealable only with the greatest of difficulty (–5 penalty to Disguise checks). Anyone who sees the character for what he has become is likely to become horrified or attempt to slay him as a monster. The character's grotesque body offers him a potent defense, however. He gains damage reduction equal to his mastery rating in his tertiary magical school; this damage is penetrated by magic attacks as normal. The character's mind suffers from his deformity, however, and he suffers a permanent reduction to his Wisdom score of 2 points.

Rank 6: No amount of makeup or costumes can prevent the character's identification as a true monster. A character that has degenerated to this level is no longer human even in the loosest of senses. The character's creature type changes to aberration, and his natural armor bonus increases to equal the mastery rating of his primary magical school. His mind is nearly destroyed by the transformation, causing him to suffer a permanent reduction to both Intelligence and Wisdom of 2 points.

Path of the Lunatic

Not just the body but the mind as well suffers when exposed to darkness. Those that follow the path of the lunatic rarely saw the world as others did even before their corruption—instead, they viewed it through a lens of distortion. As the taint seeps into their bodies, their minds shift yet further from true, granting them hideous insight into the nature of reality even as they are pushed farther from it.

Rank 1: The character develops a feverish gleam in his eye, one that is different somehow than the minor mental instabilities granted by “normal” levels of corruption. He may occasionally speak apropos of nothing, react to invisible stimuli, or quietly stare into space for minutes on end. His deterioration is noticeable mostly by his close friends, but even strangers will remark on his unusual behavior from time to time. The character suffers a –2 circumstance penalty to Listen, Search, Sense Motive, and Spot checks, as well as to initiative checks. He is simply distracted much of the time.

Rank 2: By this stage of corruption, the character has become clearly mentally distressed. He begins to exhibit signs of borderline paranoid schizophrenia—holding conversations with people that aren't there, having extreme and inappropriate emotional reactions, arguing loudly with himself, and so on. His mind

has begun to not merely slip, but to fracture. The character's circumstance penalty increases to -4. Still, madness grants the character a buffer from outside influences, and he gains a bonus to Will saving throws against mind-affecting effects equal to his mastery rating in his secondary magical school.

Rank 3: Madness brings insight, and it is no different with the lunatic. The character gains a bonus feat of his choice. He must meet all prerequisites (including mastery ratings) as normal. The strain of learning the secrets of the universe is taking its toll on the character, however, and he suffers a permanent reduction to his Wisdom score of 1 point.

Rank 4: Retreating into his own private world, the character begins to block out influences that might disrupt his delusions. The character's bonus to Will saves now applies to all Will saving throws, not just those against mind-influencing effects. Additionally, anyone attempting to use a mind-influencing effect on the character finds his own mind assaulted by the character's madness. If the character succeeds on the Will save against a mind-influencing effect, the individual that generated the effect must attempt a Will saving throw at the same DC or suffer 1d6 points of Wisdom damage. The character's mind warps further, causing him to suffer a permanent reduction to his Wisdom score of 1 point.

Rank 5: The character is unpredictable in combat, mainly because he himself does not know what he will do from moment to moment—and more so, since he is only marginally interacting with things that are really present. The character gains an active bonus to his defense equal to his mastery rating in his primary magical school. Retreating further still from reality, the character suffers a permanent reduction to his Wisdom score of 2 points.

Rank 6: Insight into the ultimate nature of the cosmos completely shatters the character's mind, leaving only a husk that can barely interact with the world at all. Outside of combat, the character is a raving madman, sometimes speaking with uncanny insight and others with barely-relevant lunacy—and sometimes not speaking at all for minutes or hours on end. When threatened, the character is treated as being confused, making his actions largely random. Only when his mind brushes with reality does his true power become evident. The character's bonus to Will saves increases to equal his mastery rating in his primary school. Additionally, the character's mana limit increases by his number of taint tokens, and he can willingly suffer Wisdom damage when casting a spell to gain +2 to the spell's saving throw DC for each point of Wisdom damage suffered.

Path of the Pure

In some ways, those that seek the path of the pure are similar to deceivers: they have grasped on to the power of lies. In the case of the pure, however, the lies are all internal—by convincing himself that he is untainted, the purist creates a mystical feedback loop that allows him to perpetuate the lie to others. Within, though, the taint continues to rage, eventually destroying the character as surely as any other path. As the lie continues, the purist seeks to destroy other tainted beings to calm the raging doubt within his own heart—only by striking out at others can he continue to believe in his own righteousness.

Some characters are led to believe that the path of the pure is a “cure” for the taint. By embracing the darkness initially, they are told, they gain immunity to its power—like exposing a man to the pox to keep him from dying from it later. Truthfully, though, the path of the pure is not a cure at all. Indeed, those that walk it tend to die suddenly and inexplicably as the taint within them spirals out of control without treatment.

Rank 1: A character following the path of the pure seems to gain only benefit. He no longer detects as tainted or corrupted to any power or ability that would detect such things, and he suffers none of the usual penalties for being tainted or corrupted. On the other hand, he cannot take corruption feats—doing so would be an acknowledgement of his own state. As well, the character has so blinded himself to his own folly that he no longer has any conception of his weakness. The character no longer keeps track of his corruption or taint—the GM does so in secret. Whenever the character has enough corruption points to gain a taint token, he does so automatically. If the character increases the rank of his path, the GM should inform him of such.

Rank 2: The second rank of this path is usually reached very quickly by those walking it—running from their own taint causes purists to instead travel deeper into it. At this level of corruption, the character gains an uncanny sense of the corruption of others. He can use a full-round action to make a Spot check; if he succeeds, he notices if creatures within 60 feet are corrupted or tainted. The DC of this spot check is 30 to notice a creature with only corruption points; it is reduced by 1 per taint token creatures possess. If the

character discovers a corrupted or tainted individual through use of this ability, he must attempt a Will save (DC 10) to avoid taking immediate hostile action against that individual.

Rank 3: The flame of righteous anger burns bright within the purist, making him powerful indeed against the impure. When the character uses magic that requires a saving throw on a corrupted or tainted creature, the saving throw DC is increased by the character's path rank. The DC to avoid attacking corrupted or tainted creatures right away becomes DC 15. The character *must* attempt the Spot check to find corrupted or tainted whenever he is exposed to new people for the first time. The purist's paranoia becomes great, and he seeks evil in every heart.

Rank 4: As the taint increases, the character seeks ever more desperate ways to avoid knowledge of the terrible truth. His quest to destroy other tainted creatures becomes a burning obsession. If the character goes more than one week without participating in the destruction of a corrupted or tainted creature, he becomes fatigued until he does so. Should he become fatigued during this time for some reason, he instead becomes exhausted. The character gains a +4 bonus on Spot checks to notice corrupted and tainted creatures.

Rank 5: The hidden darkness in the character's heart is directing him now, and woe betide any that oppose his mad crusade. The DC to avoid attacking corrupted or tainted creatures right away becomes DC 20, and the character cannot choose to allow a corrupted or tainted creature to surrender or run away in a fight. The character gains a bonus to melee attacks against corrupted and tainted creatures equal to his primary magical school mastery rating.

Rank 6: There is a color to the taint, one that jaundices the eye and makes all that it sees infused with its own hideous hue. The character now has great difficulty telling pure from corrupt—even with his special ability to sense the taint in others. The problem is not picking out the darkness, but rather seeing the light. Whenever the character first meets a character that does not suffer from corruption or the taint, the GM makes a secret Will save (DC 20) on the character's behalf. If the save fails, the character detects that individual as corrupted when he makes his Spot check to detect such. From then on, any attempt to sense the taint in that individual's presence detects him as corrupted rather than his actual status. The character's righteous fury fuels his blows; he gains a bonus to melee damage rolls against corrupted and tainted creatures (including those he simply *believes* to be corrupt) equal to his primary magical school mastery rating.

CORRUPTION FEATS

Corruption feats are abilities that can be gained by corrupted or tainted characters. They require no actual feat slot to purchase, but a character can have no more corruption feats that would be appropriate for a character of his level, minus the character's two 1st-level feats and any class-based bonus feats (so, up to one feat at each even level).

Every corruption feat has a "buy-in" cost, the minimum number of corruption points or taint tokens a character must currently possess to have the feat. If a character falls below this amount, he loses the feat. If he recovers that amount, he can either select the feat again or choose to take a different one in its place. For the purposes of calculating qualification for buy-in costs, a character is considered to have additional corruption points equal to his number of taint tokens times five, unless his Wisdom is lower than 5, in which case use the character's Wisdom score as the multiplier. (Thus, a character with Wisdom 12, 25 corruption points, and 4 taint tokens is considered to have 45 corruption points for purposes of buying corruption feats.)

Many corruption feats require you to gain more corruption points to activate their powers (as listed in the Cost entry). If you exceed your Wisdom score in corruption points due to the activation of a corruption feat, you must immediately attempt a DC 10 Wisdom check to avoid converting corruption points into taint tokens.

Black Blood [Corruption]

Your blood changes into an inky ichor, making your corrupted state readily apparent to anyone that sees you get cut.

Prerequisites: 10 taint tokens

Benefit: Your blood turns into a viscous, oily fluid that flows slowly and burns normal flesh on contact. You automatically stabilize if you fall below 0 hit points. Additionally, if you suffer any hit point damage from a slashing or piercing weapon, your blood can harm anyone who touches you. For 1 round after being cut, anyone who touches you suffers 1d6 points of acid damage per 5 taint tokens you currently possess. You can use this as an offensive tactic, cutting yourself as a move action and then touching an opponent to damage them, but your touch attacks are not considered armed (unless you have the Improved Unarmed Strike feat or some similar ability).

Bolt of Doom [Corruption]

By calling on the corruption within you, you can strike down your foes with your hate.

Prerequisites: 20 corruption points

Cost: 1d6 corruption points

Benefit: As a standard action, you can unleash a bolt of raw, seething power from your outstretched hands. This bolt requires a ranged attack roll to strike a target, but its mystical nature denies its target his active bonus to defense. The bolt inflicts 1d6 points of damage per 10 corruption points you possess.

Devil's Sight [Corruption]

Like a demon from hell, you can see in pitch-black conditions.

Prerequisites: 5 taint tokens

Benefit: You gain darkvision to a range of 30 feet, plus 30 feet for every 5 taint tokens you possess beyond the prerequisite. Darkvision is only in black and white, but otherwise it is like normal sight. You can see without any light at all, though your vision cannot pierce magical darkness.

Flee the Scene [Corruption]

You can escape from dangerous situations with a scream and a flash of darkness.

Prerequisites: Path of the Coward (Rank 1)

Cost: 5 corruption points

Benefit: You can only use this feat if you are currently under the influence of a fear effect. You can spend the activation cost of this feat to attempt a Hide check even while being observed.

Hellfire's Embrace [Corruption]

By concentrating upon your hate and rage, you can cause the taint to boil through your flesh and burst into flame. You suffer no damage from this power, but the same cannot be said for your enemies.

Prerequisites: 50 corruption points

Cost: 1d4 corruption points/round

Benefit: As a move action, you can burst into flame. These flames do not harm you, and they burn as long as you continue to pay the cost. With a melee touch attack that counts as an armed attack, you can strike foes to deal fire damage equal to 1d6 + 1d6 per 50 corruption points you possess. If an enemy touches you (by striking you with an unarmed attack, for example), he takes this damage as well. An enemy that grapples you takes the damage each round the grapple is maintained; an opponent that pins you or is pinned by you takes double the listed amount.

Inhuman Prowess [Corruption]

Evil guides your hand and eye, making you uncannily skilled.

Prerequisites: 10 corruption points

Cost: 1 corruption points/+1 bonus

Benefit: When making a skill check, you can call upon the powers of darkness to aid you. For every corruption point you accept, you gain a +1 bonus to the skill check. You cannot gain a bonus greater than half your character level (rounded up), and you cannot use this ability on a skill to which you already gain a bonus from a corruption feat or path ability.

Killer Instinct [Corruption]

Your corruption has heightened the bestial side of your mind, making you a vicious monster in combat.

Prerequisites: Path of the Beast (Rank 1)

Cost: 5 corruption points

Benefit: If you spend the listed cost at the beginning of combat, before initiative is rolled, you gain a +5 bonus to your initiative check. Additionally, you can spend the listed cost to make a *coup de grace* as a standard action rather than a full-round action.

Life Thief [Corruption]

You can sustain yourself on the blood or agony of your foes, drawing strength from them even as they fall into death.

Prerequisites: 10 taint tokens

Cost: 5 corruption points

Benefit: As a standard action, you can make a single melee attack against a foe. If you hit, you regain reserve points equal to the amount of damage you inflicted upon your foe. If your reserve overflows, you heal a number of hit points equal to one-half the overflow. (For example, your reserve has been depleted by 4 points, and you use this ability to inflict 14 points of damage on your foe. You reserve completely refills, and you heal 5 hit points.) If your reserve is full and you have no hit point damage when you use this ability, you gain no benefit from its use.

Mouth of Madness [Corruption]

Your words hold within them dark truths of the cosmos, truths best not heard by the sane.

Prerequisites: Path of the Lunatic (Rank 1)

Cost: 5 corruption points

Benefit: As a full-round action, you can speak aloud the dark ravings of your subconscious mind, destroying the sanity of those nearby. Anyone within 60 feet of you and that can hear you when you use this ability must attempt a Will saving throw (DC 10 + half your character level + number of taint tokens you possess) or suffer 1d6 points of Wisdom damage. You suffer 1 point of Wisdom damage.

Poisonous Spittle [Corruption]

You grow a bulge in the back of your throat, one that allows you to secrete a gob of sticky venom that you can then spit at your enemies.

Prerequisites: Path of the Fleshwarper (Rank 1)

Cost: 5 corruption points

Benefit: As a standard action, you can spit a glob of poisonous spittle at a target within 30 feet as a ranged touch attack. If this attack hits, the target must attempt a Fortitude saving throw (DC 10 + half your character level + number of taint tokens you possess) or suffer 1d4 points of Strength or Dexterity damage (choose before the attack roll is made). If the save is failed by more than 5 points, the target is also blinded for 1 round.

Polyyps [Corruption]

Your body is covered with small nodes of flesh that writhe and pulse. You can concentrate to burst them, causing unfortunate effects for those nearby.

Prerequisites: 10 taint tokens

Cost: 1d6 corruption points

Benefit: As a move action, you can burst the polyyps on your body to spray viscous fluid around you in a gout. All living creatures within 10 feet of you must attempt a Fortitude saving throw (DC 10 + half your character level + number of taint tokens you possess) or become nauseated for 1 round. On a successful save, the victim is instead sickened for 1 round.

Serpent's Tongue [Corruption]

You speak with the persuasive powers of the devil himself.

Prerequisites: Path of the Deceiver (Rank 1)

Cost: 5 corruption points

Benefit: As a standard action, you can attempt to implant a reasonable-sounding suggestion in the mind of a creature within 30 feet. The creature must be able to hear you and understand your language. If the creature fails a Will saving throw (DC 10 + half your character level + number of taint tokens you possess), it follows the suggestion to the best of its ability until the beginning of its next round. The GM has the final call on what sounds “reasonable.” (For example, “Jump into this boiling lava” would not be reasonable, while “Hold off your companions for a moment while I escape” would be.) This is a mind-affecting, language-dependent effect.

Shield of Doom [Corruption]

Your taint protects you from harm.

Prerequisites: 20 corruption points

Cost: 1d6 corruption points/minute

Benefit: As a free action, you can gain the benefits of this feat. While this feat is active, you gain a bonus to your active defense of +1 per 10 corruption points you possess.

Speed of Darkness [Corruption]

The shadows in your soul are reflected in the quickness of your body. In combat, you can seemingly flicker between the moments, though this power exacts a terrible toll from you.

Prerequisites: 15 taint tokens

Cost: 10 corruption points/round

Benefit: You must decide to use this ability at the beginning of your turn. For the rest of your round, your ground speed increases by 20 feet, and you can attack with blinding speed. During a full attack action, you can make a single additional attack at your highest base attack bonus. This extra attack and all regular attacks you take in a round where you use this option suffer a –2 penalty. You gain a +4 bonus to your active defense until the beginning of your next round. While you use this ability, your body is a shadowy blur.

Touch of Obsidian [Corruption]

Your hands harden into terrible claws, forming black talons that allow you to shred flesh and bone with ease.

Prerequisites: 5 taint tokens

Cost: 1d4 corruption points/round (see below)

Benefit: Your fingernails harden into black talons that you can extend and retract as a free action. You gain two natural claw attacks (which count as armed attacks). You can attack with both claws at your highest base attack bonus as a full attack action, or attack with one of them as an off-hand attack. You cannot gain the benefit of iterative attacks with these claws. Your claws inflict 1d6 points of damage + one-half your Strength bonus.

If you pay the listed cost, your claws count as magic weapons until the start of your next round.

Undead Companion [Corruption]

The taint in your flesh draws one of the undead to you, seemingly entranced by your smell of death. This creature serves you willingly, though it still demands appropriate license to ravage the living.

Prerequisites: 50 corruption points

Benefit: You gain the services of an undead creature. The specific type is chosen by your GM, though as a recommended guideline, your companion should have a Challenge Rating no higher than your character level minus 3. This creature is intelligent, even if its kind is normally not so, and it can understand your commands and wishes. It will obey you to the best of its ability, though it seeks to preserve its own

existence as much as possible. If you do not let it destroy the living on a regular basis (GM's call), it will leave you—or perhaps turn on you. Should your companion depart or be destroyed, you can call for another by gaining 10 corruption points (increasing your “stink” and drawing their attention).

Wings of Darkness [Corruption]

You can summon forth your inner corruption to give you flight in an emergency.

Prerequisites: 10 taint tokens

Cost: 1d6 corruption points/minute

Benefit: As a full-round action, you can extrude inky-black wings from your back. These wings rip through your clothing, leaving it in tatters; it also destroys light armor. You cannot manifest the wings while wearing medium or heavy armor. While you have these wings, you can fly at a speed of 30 feet (clumsy). By doubling the corruption cost, you can increase the speed to 60 feet or the maneuverability to good; by tripling the corruption cost, you can gain both of these additional benefits.

CORRUPTION AND NON-SPELLCASTERS

The power of corruption is not limited only to those that cast spells and invoke the forces of the cosmos. Other folk with the desire for power can find themselves drawn to corrupt methods of gaining it, sacrificing their humanity—perhaps even their souls—for a chance at glory and strength. Some stumble into corruption unknowingly, perhaps from a close brush with a tainted creature or due to being the victim of a tainted magical effect.

Either way, the rules for corruption work the same for non-spellcasters as they do for the magically inclined. They can gain corruption points and taint tokens, follow a path of corruption, and even gain corruption feats. The only question is how the initial infection with evil occurs. A number of options are available for the discerning GM:

- Perhaps the natural attacks of certain aberrations or outsiders (or corrupted creatures, see below) have a chance to inflict corruption points. A good general guideline allows a Fortitude save to avoid the effects of corruption (DC 10 + ½ creature's HD + creature's Charisma modifier); a failed save inflicts corruption points equal to the damage dealt.
- Being the target of a corrupt spellcaster's magic might carry its own risks. Whenever a spellcaster with any corruption points casts a spell that affects a character, that character must attempt a Fortitude save (at the same DC as the spell) to avoid corruption points equal to half the spell's mana cost.
- Ingesting tainted food or water might automatically inflict corruption points on the character, or might be avoided with an appropriate Fortitude save.
- Some regions of the world may be so thoroughly inundated with evil that even being present in them risks a mortal's soul. Each day in such a tainted wasteland, the character must make a Fortitude save (DC 10 + number of previous saves) or accumulate corruption points equal to 1d6 + number of previous saves.

Generally speaking, characters that already possess one or more taint tokens are immune to all of these effects, though characters merely suffering from corruption points are not. Taint tokens represent a compromise with evil in a way that corruption points do not, whether or not that compromise was consciously reached; darkness recognizes its own and offers special leeway.

Obviously, magic-dependent effects of corruption feats and paths do not function quite the same way for individuals unable to cast spells. When a corruption feat or path ability refers to a character's rating in a magical school, and he does not possess any magical ability, instead refer to the following table:

Effective Mastery Ratings for Non-Spellcasters

Level	Primary Mastery	Second Mastery	Tertiary Mastery
1	1	-	-
2	1	-	-
3	2	1	-
4	2	1	-

5	3	2	1
6	3	2	1
7	4	3	2
8	4	3	2
9	5	4	3
10	5	4	3
11	6	5	4
12	6	5	4
13	7	6	5
14	7	6	5
15	8	7	6
16	8	7	6
17	9	8	7
18	9	8	7
19	9	8	7
20	9	8	7

Characters with the Dark Pact feat gain +1 to the effective mastery ratings presented on this table.

Characters with no spellcasting ability can rid themselves of corruption points simply by not gaining any more, just as spellcasters can by avoiding magic for a time. A character incapable of making an arcane pact cannot reduce his corruption points in that manner.

CORRUPTED CREATURE

Humans are not the only creatures vulnerable to the hideous power of corruption. Animals and beasts caught in the path of darkness sometimes emerge from their close call alive—but *changed*. A corrupted creature is the result of such a brush with evil, a monstrous mockery of a once-pure living being, remade in the image of nightmares.

SAMPLE CORRUPTED CREATURE

Corrupted Dire Lion

Large Aberration (Corrupted)

Hit Dice: 8d8+32 (68 hp)

Initiative: +2

Speed: 50 feet (10 squares)

Defense: 17 (–1 size, +2 Dexterity, +6 natural)

Base Attack/Grapple: +6/+18

Attack: Claw +14 melee (1d6+8)

Full Attack: 2 claws +14 melee (1d6+8) and bite +8 melee (1d8+4)

Space/Reach: 10 feet/5 feet

Special Attacks: Corrupted claws, improved grab, pounce, rake 1d6+4

Special Qualities: Darkvision, fast healing 2, frightful presence, low-light vision, scent

Saves: Fort +, Ref +, Will +

Abilities: Str 27, Dex 15, Con 19, Int 4, Wis 10, Cha 14

Skills: Hide +6, Listen +6, Move Silently +9, Spot +6.

Feats: Run, Skill Application (Listen, Spot), Weapon Focus (claw, 1)

Corruption Points: 22

Challenge Rating: 7

COMBAT

A corrupted dire lion prefers to attack from hiding, pouncing upon prey suddenly to rend them apart. Corrupted dire lions are clever enough to attack heavily-armed characters first, preferring to down them as quickly as possible.

Corrupted Claws (Ex): Any creature struck by the claws or bite of a corrupted dire lion must attempt a Fortitude save (DC 16) or suffer 1d6 points of corruption and 1 point of Constitution damage.

Darkvision (Ex): A corrupted dire lion can see in the dark up to 60 feet. Darkvision is black and white only, but it is otherwise just like normal sight, and a corrupted dire lion can function just fine with no light at all.

Fast Healing (Ex): The corrupted dire lion has fast healing 2, allowing it to heal 2 hit points each round as long as it is above 0 hit points.

Frightful Presence (Su): Any creature within 30 feet of a corrupted dire lion must attempt a Will save (DC 16). Creatures with 5 Hit Dice or less are panicked on a failed save, while creatures with more than 5 Hit Dice are shaken on a failed save. A successful save negates the effect and renders the creature immune to the frightful presence for 24 hours.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, a corrupted dire lion must hit with its bite attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it can establish a hold and can rake.

Pounce (Ex): If a corrupted dire lion charges, it can make a full attack, including two rakes.

Rake (Ex): Attack bonus +13 melee, damage 1d6+4.

CREATING A CORRUPTED CREATURE

“Corrupted creature” is an acquired template that can be added to any animal, magical beast, or vermin (referred to hereafter as the base creature).

A corrupted creature uses all the base creature’s statistics and abilities except as noted here.

Size and Type: The creature’s type changes to aberration (corrupted). It retains any previous subtypes or descriptors.

Speed: The creature’s base land speed increases by +10 feet.

Defense: The creature gains a +2 natural armor bonus to defense, or its existing natural armor bonus increases by +2.

Special Attacks: A corrupted creature retains all the special attacks of the base creature and also gains the following special abilities.

Corrupted Claws (Ex): The natural attacks of the creature are infused with the essence of evil. Any creature struck by the natural claws or bite of a corrupted creature must attempt a Fortitude save or suffer 1d6 points of corruption and 1 point of Constitution damage. The saving throw is Charisma-based.

Special Qualities: A (template creature) retains all the special qualities of the base creature and also gains the following special qualities.

Corruption Points: The corrupted creature has an effective corruption point pool equal to its Hit Dice plus its Charisma score.

Darkvision (Ex): The corrupted creature can see in the dark up to 60 feet. Darkvision is black and white only, but it is otherwise just like normal sight, and a corrupted creature can function just fine with no light at all.

Fast Healing (Ex): The corrupted creature gains fast healing 2, allowing it to heal 2 hit points each round as long as it is above 0 hit points.

Frightful Presence (Su): Corrupted creatures emit an unremitting aura of horror, one that can terrify weak foes and cause even the mighty to tremble with fear. Any creature within 30 feet of a corrupted creature must attempt a Will save. Creatures with 5 Hit Dice or less are panicked on a failed save, while creatures with more than 5 Hit Dice are shaken on a failed save. A successful save negates the effect and renders the creature immune to the frightful presence for 24 hours. The saving throw is Charisma-based.

Abilities: Change from the base creature as follows: +2 Strength, +2 Constitution, +2 Intelligence, –2 Wisdom, +4 Charisma.

Skills: The corrupted creature gains a +4 racial bonus to Hide and Move Silently checks.

Challenge Rating: Increase from the base creature by +2.

NEW FEATS

DARK PACT [LORE]

You have studied magic at the hand (or claws) of a being of unimaginable power and darkness. Though you are not yourself an arcanist, you understand enough of the workings of magic to cast a small number of spells. The cost to you will be great in time, but you consider the sacrifice worthwhile.

Base Mastery: 1

Special: You cannot take this feat as an arcanist. If you have corruption feats or path abilities that rely on your mastery rating in your magical schools, add +1 to your effective mastery ratings (see above).

Benefits: You learn how to cast spells from one school of magic, chosen when you gain this feat. Once selected, you cannot later change your decision. You have a daily mana limit equal to your character level plus your Constitution score. Otherwise you cast spells like an arcanist from your chosen school. You gain a mastery rating of 1 in your chosen school.

Expanded Mastery 2: Your mastery rating in your chosen school increases by 1.

Expanded Mastery 3: Your mastery rating in your chosen school increases by 1.

Expanded Mastery 4: Your mastery rating in your chosen school increases by 1.

Expanded Mastery 5: Your mastery rating in your chosen school increases by 1.

Expanded Mastery 6: Your mastery rating in your chosen school increases by 1.

Expanded Mastery 7: Your mastery rating in your chosen school increases by 1.

Expanded Mastery 8: Your mastery rating in your chosen school increases by 1.

Expanded Mastery 9: Your mastery rating in your chosen school increases by 1.

SANGUINE SACRIFICE [LORE]

Through ancient writings and the teachings of obscure cults, you have discovered a dark truth: blood is power. By sacrificing your own blood, or that of others, you can gain benefits similar to those invoked by an arcanist making a pact. No pact is forged, however—the power is drawn directly from your life force.

Base Mastery: 1

Benefits: If you have a slashing or piercing weapon in your hands, you can spend a move action to cut yourself with it, drawing forth blood to gain temporary bonuses. For every 5 points of damage you inflict on yourself, you gain a +1 bonus to attack, check, or save you make before your next action. You must decide to use the bonus before the roll is made, and you can only have one bonus in effect at a time. If you do not use this bonus before the start of your next round, it is lost. You cannot gain a bonus greater than your character level in this manner.

Cutting yourself before casting a spell to gain bonuses to the channeling check does not cause you to make a Concentration check.

Expanded Mastery 2: If you are an arcanist (or can otherwise cast spells), you can cut yourself to use your blood in place of mana. You can convert 5 hit points into 1 mana in this way. You can instead bleed a helpless humanoid victim for power, but the conversion is 10 hit points for every 1 mana gained; a victim stops being useful at –10 hit points (when he dies). The mana gained from this blood sacrifice must be used within 1 minute, or else it is lost. You cannot hold more mana from blood sacrifice than your character level.

Cutting yourself before casting a spell to gain mana for the spell does not cause you to make a Concentration check.

Expanded Mastery 4: The flow of blood through your body is a siren song, one that cannot be ignored. When your blood is spilled, it calls to you, and you can respond in kind. When you suffer a critical hit in combat, you gain a bonus to attacks, checks, and saves equal to one-quarter the damage you suffered (rounded down) for 1 round. If you are an arcanist (or can otherwise cast spells), you may choose to instead gain temporary mana equal to one-half the damage you suffered. If you do not use this mana within 1 minute, it dissipates. These bonuses may not exceed your character level.

Expanded Mastery 6: As long as blood flows in your veins, wounds cannot overcome you. While you have at least 1 mana available, you gain the benefits of the Diehard feat. When you are at negative hit points, you convert 1 reserve point into 1 hit point every round, as long as you have reserve points remaining.

Expanded Mastery 8: Blood calls out for blood, and you can call hard enough to make the blood of your foes respond. When you score a critical hit against an enemy with a slashing or piercing weapon, you inflict a wound that refuses to close. The foe bleeds profusely, losing 1 hit point each round until he

receives magical healing of any kind, or until someone performs a Heal check (DC 15) on him. Multiple attacks that inflict this effect stack, each causing 1 hit point of blood loss each round.

Expanded Mastery 10: You are a master at using blood efficiently and well—not a drop is wasted with you. When you cut yourself to gain bonuses or mana, you only inflict 2 points of damage per point of bonus or mana gained, and when you bleed a helpless victim, you gain 1 mana for every 5 points of damage inflicted.