

## Cloak of the First Ones

Púrdimal – The Black Toad of the Empire. South of Khirgár the Sákbe Road abruptly takes on a wooden construction as it leads the traveler through the dismal Swamps of Ksárul which seemingly but unsuccessfully attempt to secret the city of Púrdimal under the peak of Thénu Thendráya. Live growth attacks the planks, the pilings, and even the reserved-side rest-platforms discouraging a casual progress even if one were so inclined. Black clouds of midges thankfully inhabit the air *below* the heights of the road, even as the ubiquitous green- and brown-hued miasma invests itself in the traveler's clothing. Indeed, this sight and stench are the precursors to the sub-human Hehecháru who ply the poor tourist with trade of Ssár-wood staves and several varieties of the stinky (but, we are assured, edible) crustaceans that inhabit the swamp.

It is little wonder that within this environment a number of diseases occasionally present themselves to native and tourist alike. One is particularly tragic in that its affliction is reserved for the youngest and oldest and those who for some time already have been in poor health. Its youngest surviving victims are the most devastated as they must live the remainder of their lives terribly scarred.

The disease is named the Cloak of the First Ones because after the victims' open scars heal the new skins take on a slightly scaly appearance reminiscent of the Hehecháru (it is a popular if apocryphal belief that the Hehecháru or 'First Ones' are a sub-human race who had interbred with some aqueous denizen of the swamps). Children believe (without ever being told in so many words) that the disease is contracted by accepting items from the Hehecháru.

In fact, the disease is caused by harmful organisms that occasionally grow on some of the swamp-crustaceans. The immune system of the healthy adult is normally able to subdue the bacteria but the young, old, and infirm are often not so fortunate. The victim will initially develop a full body rash accompanied by mild fever. The disease

then progresses to pustules that commonly affect the face, under arms and knees, and genitals. The pustules begin to leak and finally burst, recurring until the organisms have been subdued by the immune system or (quite rarely) the poor victim dies. If left untreated the disease may well progress to one or both eyes, blinding the poor soul and leaving the orbs a disheartening cloudy-blue. The mortality rates are actually quite low: 1-2% in healthy children under 10; 4-5% in the elderly; 5-6% in the already infirm.

For those without access to magical healing there is no cure *per se*, but a treatment is available in the form of a peculiar concoction, called *Süt'ró*, derived from certain botanicals and the milk or sap of a massive swamp reed and which is moderately addictive. The alternative to this application, however, is even less acceptable.

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### New Character Defect

PCs and NPCs who grew up in the Swamps of Ksárul may have been exposed to the Cloak of the First Ones. Assuming they survived, the affliction has left them scarred at the very least. You may use the following Defect Templates for your characters.

#### Cloak of the First Ones, Level 1

The disease has left some mild scarring on the face. Fortunately, the progression of the disease was halted fairly quickly. *The character is considered homely and suffers some prejudice*, as characterized by the Ugly defect (T:EPT p.28), but suffers no other effects.

##### Cloak of the First Ones (Level 1):

Ugly defect lv.1 [+1BP]

Total: 1BP

#### Cloak of the First Ones, Level 2

The disease has left some mild scarring on the face. Fortunately, the progression of the disease was halted fairly quickly. *The character is considered homely and suffers some prejudice* as characterized by the Ugly defect (T:EPT p.28).

Additionally, treatment with *Süt'ró* has left the character with a life-long addiction: *The character still has some ability to control the addiction. When presented with an opportunity to indulge... the character must make a Willpower Stat check to resist* as characterized by the Addicted defect (T:EPT p.24).

##### Cloak of the First Ones (Level 2):

Ugly defect lv.1 [+1BP]

Addicted defect lv.1 [+1BP]

Total: 2BP

#### Cloak of the First Ones, Level 3

The disease has left moderate scarring on the face and genitals. Additionally, the disease had progressed to the point of leaving him or her blind in one or both eyes: *The character has difficulty judging distances... The angle of vision is also greatly reduced, meaning the character sometimes fails to notice things*, as characterized by the level 1 Physical Impairment defect *One Eye* (T:EPT p.27); or completely *Blind* as characterized by the level 2 Physical Impairment defect (T:EPT p.27). What's more, the effected eye has turned a cloudy-blue which is deemed by Tsolyáni culture to be... exceptionally bad. *The character suffers significant prejudice... While blue eyes are easier to conceal than simple ugliness, they also provoke far worse reactions*, as characterized by the level 2 Ugly defect (T:EPT p.28).

Additionally, treatment with *Süt'ró* has left the character with a life-long addiction: *The character still has some ability to control the addiction. When presented with an opportunity to indulge... the character must make a Willpower Stat check to resist* as characterized by the Addicted defect (T:EPT p.24).

##### Cloak of the First Ones (Level 3):

Lv.2 Ugly [+2BP]

Lv.1 Addicted [+1BP]

Lv.1 Physical Impairment: *Blind in One Eye* [+1BP]

Total: 4BP

Lv.2 Physical Impairment: *Blind in Both Eyes* [+1BP]

Total: 5BP