



Be Careless What You Wish For

Curses In *In Nomine*

by Jo Ramsay

"I hate you," Annette spat at the phone as she slammed the receiver down. All the thoughts in her mind were of how much she detested her step-mother, or "Bitch Queen" as Annette affectionately called her. Now she had thrown out all of Annette's old books, and still had the temerity to tell her that she would probably go to Hell for swearing and blasphemy when the girl lost her temper again over the phone.

"I hate you. I wish you were dead. And I wish you would go to Hell, where you belong!" She closed her eyes for a moment, fairly shaking with rage and impotence.

In the street outside, the traffic hummed, but the room was suddenly very, very quiet. Then someone else coughed from inside the room.

Annette's eyes blinked wide. A man was suddenly sitting in her spare armchair, with a clipboard and a sheaf of notes.

"It's Annette Cordwell, isn't it?" he asked pleasantly. "Take a seat. I'm delighted to be able to fit you in today; as you may know, we have a very busy schedule."

"What? Who? How did you . . . ?"

"Please sit down, and I'd deeply appreciate it if you could keep the questions to a minimum. You wanted someone to suffer a terrifying and inescapable doom?"

She shrugged, totally lost.

"I'll need their full name. Come on now, be a good girl and we'll get through the paperwork quickly. You wanted someone to suffer so badly that you got a line straight through to the infernal regions, and so here I am. Curses are my business, you see. So what's the name?"

She told him.

"Ah yes. You're not the first to mention her. So would you like illness? Lost pets? Cuckolding? Seduction of siblings? Parents? Children? Tooth rot? Plague of lawyers? Nightmares? . . ."

He ticked off boxes on a checklist as she either nodded or shook her head dumbly, continuing through a long list of potential evils. Finally he nodded and jumped to his feet, offering a hand to shake.

"Wait," she said nervously. "If you're a demon, aren't you going to ask me to pay for this, or sign in blood, or something?"

"My sweet," the demon grinned. "Nice little girls who are going to Heaven don't wish for their stepmothers to never have another quiet night's sleep in their life. So you could say that you paid for my services when you summoned me. I'll be along to collect in . . . hmm . . . 18 years, three months, and 2.5 hours precisely. Good day."

He tucked the little clipboard under one arm, and walked out of the front door, kicking the cat on the way out.

What is a Curse?

A curse is a purely malicious wish for evil things to happen to an enemy. In the most notorious curses of all, the malediction is passed down in the blood from generation to generation of innocents, or can drag a man's soul screaming to Hell for eternity. As a punishment, they are time-honored and effective. As such, curses have always been popular with demons and ethereals alike. Curses for their enemies, as well as love potions for their lust-objects, have also been one of the first requests that budding sorcerers have traditionally made of summoned spirits.

Curses in *In Nomine* fall into three main types. Some curses are temporary, whether they draw the attention of evil spirits, or strike the victim down with a plague of bad luck (a traditional hex). Any demon or mortal who knows the rare Songs of Malediction (see below) can issue this type of curse. There are curses that strike generations, in which a demon or ethereal personally plots revenge on generation after generation of the misbegotten mortal who offended him. And there are personal curses that are invoked by a Superior, or a powerful ethereal god, which can involve any amount of strange effects for the hapless victim.

A fourth category includes curses that aren't strictly curses at all. If clairvoyance runs in a family line, that isn't necessarily because an ancestor called down the wrath of Heaven or Hell and was specifically cursed with the Sight. Humans have shown an admirable ability to explain any number of misfortunes or strange events as "it's a curse."

Although it is possible to curse an ethereal or celestial, and most divine curses do concern rebellious angels, it is more common for malevolent curses to be enacted against humans who have offended inhuman entities or mortal sorcerers.

What Curses Can't Do

Free will is an important concept in the game. Unless your *In Nomine* game is very dark, no mortal can ever be born damned, and no man can lose his soul to Hell unless he deliberately chooses to hand it over, either through binding himself as a Soldier of Hell, or through his own actions. This doesn't mean that demons can't tell someone that he is doomed, so he might as well throw away conventional morality and live that life of debauched serial murder that he always dreamed about. It also doesn't mean that demons can't attempt to corrupt everything a hated mortal owns or loved. After all, a demon's life can be dreadfully harsh, and the poor things need all the entertainment they can get.

Demonic Curses

A demon's life is never easy. Between being bullied by Princes, threatened by angels, teased by ethereals, dragged howling to the corporeal plane by wannabe sorcerers, and rained on by the weather, the tensions of modern living can really get to an Infernal. Against many of these problems, there is no recourse except to hide or grovel. Most demons can't outgun a pack of Malakim (even if they were fool enough to want to) or take on a group of ethereals on their home turf. They learn to take out their frustration on creatures weaker than themselves and plot silently

against the day when their tormentors fall into their power.

But sometimes, it happens that even such a weak and foolish creature as a mere mortal should thwart the will of one of Hell's minions. Hell may have no fury like a woman scorned, but Earth has no fury like a tricked demon, and revenge is as certain as it is cruel. It is in cases like these that demons turn to curses. Cases where the demon has come to hate a specific mortal so much that any price is worth paying, if only the treacherous gutbag can be made to suffer, and to cower before the might of the Inferno. At the reception chambers of the Prince of Fate, those who dare beg for a curse to be placed on an enemy are not turned away. Kronos is, naturally, the master of curses. He is the Prince of Fate, and that includes all manners of dooms, evil omens, and fatalistic prophecies. He and his Demon of Curses, Maraxion, maintain an open door policy, with the approval of Asmodeus. Cursing mortals is considered to be a fine and worthwhile occupation for otherwise idle demons, and keeps them into mischief.

MARAXION, DEMON OF CURSES

Djinn Baron of Fate

Corporeal Forces - 4 Strength 8 Agility 8

Ethereal Forces - 4 Intelligence 6 Precision 10

Celestial Forces - 6 Will 12 Perception 12

Suggested Word Forces: 8

Vessel: Human Male/4, Charisma +1

Skills: Dodge/3, Driving/2, Fast-Talk/5, Fighting/4, Lying/6, Seduction/3

Songs: Anathema/6, Attraction (Ethereal/3), Malediction (all/6), Numinous Corpus (Acid/4, Tongue/5), Shields (all/4)

Attunements: Djinn of Fate, Impudite of Fate, Fated Future, Inescapable Doom, Baron of the Book of Days (16th century)

Special Ability: He knows automatically when a mortal has spent all his Essence out of sheer spite in the attempt to curse a fellow, and may spend 8 Essence to appear instantly at his side.

Special Servitor Attunement: "Inescapable Doom" - The user may spend 3 Essence to curse an object (commonly a coin, or piece of paper). If the person whose name is specified in the curse accepts the object of his own free will, he becomes unable to resist any demonic powers, and the user of the attunement may locate him at any time as if he were attuned to the victim. A celestially aware creature may detect the cursed item as if it were a relic/0

Description: Maraxion is a flamboyant demon with no trace of social conscience, who delights in watching mortals drag each other into the pit. He works closely with Hatiphas, the Demon of Sorcery (*Corporeal Player's Guide*, p. 72.), but takes a more laid back, populist approach. Cursing people is likely to incline a sorcerer's soul toward Hell, so the Djinn rarely has to waste time enticing mortals to use their powers for the dark side. He is a patron also of malice and hatred, and of gleeful condemnation of others, and uses his natural powers of persuasion to encourage these sentiments in those who he approaches.

Kronos (and many demons of Fate) find his relaxed approach to be painfully unprofessional, but no one can argue that the Demon of Curses is an effective worker. If he has a flaw, it is that he is fundamentally lazy and prefers to be reactive, waiting to be begged for curses.

As well as allowing his name and summoning rituals to be bandied freely around the corporeal plane, for use by any sorcerer who can draw a vaguely round summoning circle and has a malicious bent, Maraxion and his minions sell their services to other demons in Hell. It has been a popular service.

The Sepulchre of Inescapable Doom

The Demon of Curses' beachhead in Shal Mari is a jet black building, adorned with neon signs proclaiming that curses can be bought, sold, and traded within. Yes, it's gaudy. Yes, it's completely unnecessary, but Maraxion is a rampant self-publicist and likes the notion of himself as the Malison Supremo. The interior is dark and forbidding, forcing the image of grand and terrible dooms into a supplicant's mind through careful use of light, incense, organ music, and traditional cursing implements displayed on the walls. There is also a bar, which has proven to be a nice little earner, being popular with trend-setting demons despite the almost palpable miasma of doom, gloom, and despair.

As a curse peddler, Maraxion is in competition with any number of Lilim (who are more than willing to hire themselves out to go and torment any mortal of the client's choice, for a price) or Shedim (who don't require much encouragement). But there is a certain status in having a curse upon one's foes laid competently by a demon of Fate, and the Inescapable Doom's staff insist that satisfaction will be guaranteed.

Curses purchased here usually involve the Songs of Malediction, although more specialized dooms can be custom designed, if the price is right. As usual, it is never possible to alter a mortal's fate or destiny simply by singing a Song, and demonic minions of Fate are often left to do the actual legwork.

New Songs

These two Songs are restricted to infernal use only.

Malediction

(Secret Song, available only to Servitors of Kronos)

This is the Song which demons of Fate use to curse those who are unfortunate enough to draw their ire. It is only taught to demons who hold the rank of Knight or above, partly to keep it rare, but also because a user can expect to be on any number of angelic hit-lists if he is careless with the power. The Corporeal Song is used to intimidate a victim with the singer's supernaturally keen power and knowledge. It is a slow and subtle curse, knowing in advance when one will die, and is favored alongside nastier measures. The Ethereal version, known also as the Song of Hexes, can be used in combat.

The Celestial Song of Malediction is particularly well-loved by demons, and when it has been used in an area, word gets around the local infernal population very quickly. Every passing demon is encouraged to try his luck on the hapless mortal, and demons often vie with each other as to who can come up with the most creative affliction for the victim. Although increased demonic activity is likely to draw angelic attention, the fact that most of the demons have no personal motive for targeting the same victim can make the root cause difficult to track down.

Corporeal -- Both singer and victim sense the precise time and date on which the victim will die, barring celestial interference.

Ethereal -- The victim of this song suffers a run of terrible bad luck for a number of days equal to the check digit (CD). Effectively, all rolls are made at a penalty of -1. If the victim spends Essence during this period to improve mundane contests, then instead of adding a bonus to his rolls, each point has the opposite effect.

Celestial -- One of the most feared weapons in Kronos' armory, this Song brands the victim with a celestial brand for CD weeks. This mark is sensed automatically by any demon within line of sight

and with a successful Perception roll by anyone else. It is equivalent to having a target pinned to the victim's back saying "Kick me!" It is a point of pride for any passing demon to torment the marked man. Fate and the Game actively encourage Servitors to do so.

Essence Requirement: 5; the Corporeal version only requires 1 Essence.

Degree of Disturbance: no disturbance for the Corporeal Song, other versions have a disturbance of the check digit plus the performer's total Forces.

Song of Anathema (Infernal Only)

This rarely used song is the infernal analogue to the Song of Witness (*Liber Canticorum*, p. 80). It is reserved for powerful, vengeful demons, who desire to devote many years of their time to inflicting retribution upon not only a hapless mortal who has thwarted them, but on his descendents as well. The singer swears a dreadful oath in which he calls out the precise punishment that will be visited on his victim. Both the demon and his victim sense the new bond between them, and appropriate effects such as discordant music, thunderclouds, sulphurous fumes, and breaking mirrors accompany a successful song. The demon himself is then responsible for acting on his oath and enforcing the curse, but he will be forever able to locate the cursed man on a successful perception roll, as if he were a Djinn. However, if any cursed person (which may include the original victim or any descendents who were included in the curse) dies and escapes Hell, the demon takes the same number of points of dissonance as he originally spent Essence for this Song.

Since fulfilling a curse can be demanding of a demon's time, servitors are supposed to ask permission from their Princes before performing a Song of Anathema. Since most demons who know it are sufficiently powerful or Distincted to be allowed to manage their own time, this is often waived in practice. What is more common, when a mortal had deeply offended a demon who knows this Song, is that he will grab a lesser demon, force it to learn the Song, and then to sing it and carry out the curse on the furious one's behalf.

This Song is treated as a Celestial Song for game purposes.

Essence Requirement: 10 *Degree of Disturbance:* the check digit plus the singer's total forces.

Ethereal Curses

Ethereals curse mortals out of hubris and spite, much as demons do. Even the nature of the curses is often similar. Traditionally, the victim is informed of his impending doom and then the ethereal or its lackeys set about realizing the threat. Although they do not have knowledge of the Songs of Malediction, many ethereals who are associated with malice or bad luck can simulate a hex quite effectively, or even produce more exotic effects such as turning victims into appropriate farmyard animals.

Since Uriel's Crusade, this type of curse has become more and more rare. It is almost guaranteed to draw angelic attention -- of the fiery sword variety -- and even the most malicious or vengeful ethereals are inclined to think that it isn't worth the effort.

A Sorcerer's Curse

Sorcerers in *In Nomine* work through rituals, summoning and binding both demons and ethereal spirits to their will. In practice, there are no rituals for "pure" cursing. If a sorcerer believes he is carrying out a successful hexing ritual, he will have effectively summoned some evil spirit to perform the curse. The more usual routine is for the sorcerer to summon a suitable entity and send

it off to afflict the victim in its own way. It is well known that demons and demonlings are unlikely to complain about being given this duty -- or at least, not as much as they whine about almost anything else.

Angelic Curses

Although there are stories of mortals who have been cursed by God or by angels, these have always proved to be natural human paranoid attempts to explain their own bad luck. The most effective and the most common curse pronounced by Heaven happens when an angel is made Outcast, and sent to wander the Earth without rest or respite for eternity, or until he repents and seeks the light again. Many legendary cursed "mortals," such as the Flying Dutchman or the Wandering Jew, are Outcast angels or Renegade demons, in perpetual exile from their home planes.

But there are some mortals who could reasonably claim to have been cursed by Heaven. Children of the Grigori, who often have strange abilities running through their family line, are sometimes taught about their ancestors who once incurred the wrath of God.

Lifting a Curse

There are some curses that cannot be lifted by any means short of a Divine Intervention. A family with celestial or ethereal ancestors carries a spiritual taint far beyond the level at which even mortal genetic engineering could remove the bad blood.

For lesser curses, there are some standard means by which the affliction can be removed.

- A. If the curse was a one-off punishment, then the symptoms may be curable by either natural or supernatural means, and that will be an end to the matter. More often though, this isn't enough. Usual approaches would be to find and kill the person who laid the curse, or force them to retract it (if possible,) or to locate and destroy the demons or spirits who have been ordered to carry the curse out.
- B. Maraxion's "inescapable dooms" are both easier and more difficult to lift. A would-be rescuer must find the item used to lay the curse, and return it to a servant of Hell, who must take it willingly. If the item has been destroyed, then life gets more difficult; refer to plan A.
- C. If a curse was personally created by a powerful ethereal or a demon Prince, then an Archangel could lift it. This might be painful for the curse's victim, or even dangerous. More devout angels feel that months of prayer and purification certainly can't hurt a petitioner, if this is the chance they want to take.

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