

# The Shackled Court



ile harbingers of black bargains, the Shackled Court are still the most approachable of the Uncreated of Ancalia. The dead city of Bakare is the throne of the Chained Lady, and under her shadow come merchants, refugees, and fools of every description. Like all her Court, the Chained Lady offers her prey their dearest desire in exchange for the few good and true things that the petitioner still has. In the end, the bargain always shows itself to be a ruinous one.

The Shackled will move directly to violence if they must or if a pact obliges it, but they much prefer to barter with humans, especially those in some dire need. They'll offer the thing the petitioner desperately needs, but only at some terrible price: their love of a child, the sight of their eyes, a beautiful woman's loveliness, a brave man's courage, their trust in their friends, or some other virtue or intangible. The Shackled choose carefully, always offering a price that their prey can at least find thinkable, however horrific it may be.

The goal of the Shackled is to convince humans to willingly give up their virtues and subtle blessings in exchange for limited, temporary aid that doesn't permanently solve their problems. A Shackled will always keep its bargain, even if it means its own destruction, but they'll interpret the terms in whatever way is necessary to make their promise an eventual curse to the recipient.

Of course, this can't happen too quickly or too obviously, or there is small temptation to deal with it. Indeed, one in every nine bargains is perfectly fair, even generous. These "lucky" petitioners are meant as judas goats for other humans, luring them in with tales of how they "cleverly" overcame the Shackled and won the best of their deal.

If driven directly to combat, the Shackled are among the least effective of the Uncreated. They lack the raw violence of the Incendiaries or the mind-bending influence of the Poxed and the Rotten. Instead, they fight with their slavish cultists, or rely on magically excising vital capabilities from their assailants. These thefts are never permanent unless the victim willingly assents to the loss, but they last long enough to complicate a bloody combat.

The Shackled are particularly ready to retreat from a losing fight. The only time they'll stand without fail is when a pact has pledged their martial service to a petitioner.

## Debtors to Hell

The Shackled are notorious for their cults. Indeed, a hunter is more likely to find a Shackled at the heart of a cult of desperate pact-makers than they are to find one preying upon victims in the wild. Every petitioner to the Chained Lady's court in Bakare must make obeisance to her as a goddess, and the rituals that those "highest" in her favor must perform are enough to damn a petitioner in both body and soul.

The Shackled love their cults, if perhaps in a way only comprehensible for an Uncreated. They are marvelous engines of lust, need, and betrayal to their patrons, seething morasses of anguished men and women who trade more and more to their master in exchange for the strength to ascend higher in the cult. These devotees see the tremendous wealth and munificence bestowed upon their leaders, but they cannot understand the gnawing terror and desperate fear that poisons these black hierarchs. Even surrounded by the treasures of their god, these ecclesiastics can only remember what they have paid.

d20	Favored Appearance	Method of Ruin	Present Desire
1	Beautiful maiden with teeth of jewels	Asks for petty acts that combine to evil	Convince enclave that trash is precious
2	Book that writes itself to communicate	Buys the treachery of a client	Crush a potential source of vital goods
3	Box containing the prey's dear desire	Cheaply empower a totally vile client	Destroy a persecutor of its cultists
4	Bright treasure-object that whispers	Drive an honest trader out of business	Devour a person's dearest treasure
5	Dragon with its treasure embedded in it	Gives free foretaste of addictive things	Enhance its cult's influence in the area
6	Emaciated thing that walks behind you	Gives too much of the promised good	Get a lightly-held trait that's very rare
7	Golden bull with a voice of char and ash	Goad a client to mad terror at their deal	Get an enclave to waste its vital goods
8	Grinning peddler draped with goods	Goads buyer into self-destructive act	Get enclave to commoditize human life
9	Huge blood-drinking insectile thing	Gulls the clever into thinking they'll win	Get someone to seek protective slavery
10	Huge serpent with solid gold eyes	Leads clients into needing greater aid	Get useful tools for its own cult's use
11	Hulking shape dripping sweet fragrance	Offer an easy "solution" to a dire burden	Incite warfare with well-placed gifts
12	Hunched woman with fists welded shut	Plant bargains to activate at dire times	Make a gifted innocent its cult leader
13	Manikin with a huge sack of evils	Provides a good that destroys the client	Make an unfit person an enclave's lord
14	Maw fringed by many tentacles	Reveals their dealings to create mistrust	Persuade a holy person to join their cult
15	Mirror-dwelling man of gold	Steals the purchased thing from another	Persuade client to sell their own family
16	Spider-thing with webs of woven gold	Takes what the client will need later	Plant a new cult in a strong community
17	Squat, huge-mawed swallower of joys	Targets fools for terrible bargains	Provoke person to trade a life for a good
18	Tree fruited with treasures and poison	Targets outcasts as vectors of treachery	Strengthen its cult's military ability
19	Wears the face of a familiar merchant	Trades foolish desires for a vital good	Trick an enclave leader into a dire deal
20	Withered miser with burden of gold	Twists wording to be excessively literal	Want to obtain someone's great treasure

# The Chained Lady

On the cursed isle of Iyasu, in the broken city of Bakare, there is a great vault door. The door is thrice as tall as a man and wrought of leprous gold and soft, gelatinous gemstones. It yawns wide in its chamber beneath the former kantiba's palace, and from this Night Road pours a thousand and one servants of misery. Greatest and worst of these servants is the mighty Uncreated known as the Chained Lady.

Her shape is entirely lost under a voluminous mesh of beautiful golden chains, piled and coiled around her in such profusion that she cannot stand, and must be carried on a golden palanquin carried by her slaves on their ulcerated backs. Only glimpses of the ravishing shape below can be caught through momentary partings of the links, only the flash of jewel-nailed fingertips and the curve of lush red lips. Her voice is ambrosial to all who hear it.

She is queen both of her court and of the cursed city of Bakare, once the stronghold of the Henok family and a great trading port. Unlike the other Uncreated, she welcomes visitors and merchants from far lands, offering them those treasures that her servants have gathered from wretched human bargainers in exchange. She sells them for human sacrifices, exotic occult components, and promises of deeds of blasphemous evil to be committed back in their homelands. The Chained Lady never cheats, but her prices are terrible and inescapable.

Slaves are a regular currency in Bakare, but these slaves are willing thralls, having paid horrible prices to Shackled patrons for the chance to be taken from their hellish homeland. Most imagine that nothing can be worse than the husk-haunted ruin of their former home. Few understand that the merchants who buy them could never allow them to mix with the public and reveal the merchant's unholy trade with Uncreated powers. The slaves sold in Bakare are intended for uses that leave no witnesses.

Most actual business is conducted with the lesser Shackled abominations that squat on the wharves of the city. Only the richest and most interesting traders are permitted an audience with the Chained Lady herself, and these men and women are offered precisely those treasures or services they most desperately desire. Very few of them have the will to deny the Lady's price for such things, though those who resist are permitted to depart in peace. The Lady does not coerce business.

The bulk of Bakare's population is made up of Shackled cultists, those clever and useful enough to have won a place on the island. They live in sumptuous splendor compared to their mainland brethren, but they are owned body and soul by the Shackled, and must serve them in a hundred horrible ways to avoid being discarded in gruesome fashion. They can be redeemed if their worship is accepted by a Godbound or other deity, but their souls are otherwise doomed to a terrible fate.

The Chained Lady is always in the company of at least two Bound Oligarch chamberlains and a Large Mob of human cultist servitors who have the statistics of Elite Warriors. If assailed, the Bound Oligarchs will hold their actions each round, using them to offensively dispel any enemy powers used against the Chained Lady if their Words can plausibly do so. They will do nothing else, not even defend themselves or defensively dispel attacks used against them. The Chained Lady will use her own actions to attack the interlopers, but will seek to retreat as soon as the Bound Oligarchs are destroyed. The Large Mob must still have at least 10 hit dice left to carry her palanquin to safety at a rate of 60'/round. If they too are destroyed the Chained Lady will not be able to flee, and will instead use her Knowledge powers to try to buy her life with offers of their dearest desires.

## The Chained Lady

AC: 2	Move: As carried
Hit Dice: 50	Save: 5+
Attack: Autohit x 2 attacks	Damage: 1d10 chain straight
Morale: 9	Effort: 11

The terrible Lady wields the Words of Wealth, Knowledge, and Command. Her direct combat abilities are not as formidable as those of her peers, but she has access to a much wider variety of minions in her service, and she will never be found without at least a Large Mob of them present to serve her with their lives. When under attack, she fights with lashing tendrils of golden chain that can stretch to the horizon to strike a foe. If fighting a foe resistant to physical damage, she can instead use a psychic assault of unspeakable promises to inflict the same 1d10 damage.

This veiled queen among the Uncreated can be carried at a rate of 60'/round by her bearers, provided they have not been slain. Without minions to carry her jeweled palanquin, she cannot move.

The Chained Lady's *Cold Breath* forces any Godbound engaged with her to Commit four points of Effort before they can Commit Effort to any other purpose. This Effort can be taken back once the Godbound disengages, but not until they leave the Lady's presence.

The Chained Lady may take two actions every round. Each of the powers listed on the table below consume one action to trigger.

### d6 The Chained Lady's Tactics

- Commit Effort and make a request of a visible foe, one that does not require them to physically harm themselves or their allies nor spend more than one round doing it. If they don't use their next action to comply, they take 2d10 damage straight from psychic strain, with a Spirit save for half.
- Commit Effort and target a visible foe. They must save versus Spirit or become obsessed with looking past the Lady's veil of chains, closing to melee range and spending their action vainly pawing at the links. They may make a new save at the end of each round to break free.
- Commit Effort and target an enemy. That enemy may instantly choose to take a round's worth of actions. If they accept, they take 2d12 straight damage at the end of the bonus round. If they refuse, they must make a Hardiness save or lose their next round's action.
- Commit Effort. Any gold, silver, or jewels on assailants instantly turn molten, inflicting 1d6 straight fire damage for every point of Wealth they carry before it cools.
- The Lady briefly parts her chains, ensuring the success of the next hit roll against her. The enemy who makes this roll will instantly lose a friend or lover chosen by the GM. Ordinary mortals will die, while others lose feelings. The Lady veils herself again at the end of the next round or after she is struck by a hit roll.
- Commit Effort. The Lady consumes 2d6 hit dice worth of allies, gaining that many hit dice from the sacrifice.

## The Shackled Band

Most Shackled Uncreated work alone, using their corrupting powers to provide any necessary goods and their own cunning strength to satisfy any demands of service. In the case where a Shackled is too weak or unable to provide a good or service personally, it will seek to make bargains with humans who can. One in nine of these bargains is perfectly fair and even generous to the client, the better to lure them into deeper, darker promises or persuade them to entice their friends and family into similar deals.

The Shackled don't do overt deception as well as some other Uncreated. They can offer trick bargains, but they don't usually have strong powers of illusion or false seeming. Instead, they commonly catch their potential clients alone, subdue them if they struggle, and make their offered deal. They'll honestly release a victim if they refuse to bargain, but few victims believe their assurances, and some poor fools have gotten themselves into deals from which they could have just walked away. More appealing-looking Shackled can often get close to a client without having to use main force to restrain them.

Peddler-imps are the most common variety of Shackled, and usually appeal to lonely survivor bands, harried hermits, or small and weak enclaves. They can't stand up to even a small mob of angry humans without cultist defenders of their own, so they prefer to catch their clients alone or when the potential buyer is helpless.

Bound Oligarchs represent the stronger variety of Shackled, one that usually targets strong enclaves or worthy heroes. They can provide much with the miracles of their Word, but still prefer to have cultists or Mob of peddler-imps close when dealing with dangerous sorts.



### Peddler-Imp

AC: 6	Move: 30' scuttle
Hit Dice: 4	Save: 13+
Attack: +4	Damage: 1d6 bite or punch
Morale: 9	Effort: 2

These Shackled are neither especially clever nor possessed of great power, though they can provide amply for the usual requests of desperate Ancalian survivors. They have at least one combat power and two corrupting powers, and their *Cold Breath* requires a foe to commit two Effort before they can commit Effort to other powers. They usually act alone, though major entities can summon Mobs of them.

d6	Peddler-Imp Tactics
1	Offer a bargain to the most susceptible-looking assailant, who can take it or leave it at their discretion.
2	Attack an enemy who refused the creature's bargain.
3	Scuttle to a more advantageous position on the battlefield, climbing with effortless nimbleness.
4	Hurl flecks of molten gold at an opponent, doing its normal damage as a fire-damage ranged attack.
5	Lash a cultist ally into more zealous obedience, giving them an immediate extra action. If used on a Mob, the Mob gets to reroll its next attack and take the better roll.
6	Use a combat power on the most badly-injured foe.

### Bound Oligarch

AC: 4	Move: 30' stride
Hit Dice: 12	Save: 5+
Attack: +10 x 2 attacks	Damage: 1d12 crush
Morale: 10	Effort: 5

The Oligarchs are the officials and factotums of the Chained Lady. Each one is bound to a Word appropriate to their kind, and their *Cold Breath* requires Godbound to commit three Effort points before they can activate any other powers that require Effort. Most have two combat powers and two or three corrupting powers. Bound Oligarchs may take two actions each round.

d6	Bound Oligarch Tactics
1	Commit Effort to summon up a Small Mob of human cultists equivalent to a Mob of trained soldiers. The cultists appear at the start of the next round.
2	Attack the most richly-dressed enemy present.
3	Commit Effort and offer a bribe to an assailant to cease their attack. The target must save versus Spirit or spend their next action considering the offer.
4	Commit Effort and turn all Wealth a visible target carries into muck and filth.
5	Use a combat power on the most intimidating foe.
6	Relocate so as to be behind cover or allied protectors.

## Combat Powers

The Shackled fight by tearing away portions of their enemies, stealing both physical objects and insubstantial capabilities from their prey. They have unusually strong *Cold Breath* auras, forcing commitment of one more point of Effort than an Uncreated of similar power from one of the other Courts. Mundane objects taken by a Shackled are destroyed, while magical ones merely pass into the creature's possession. Intangible qualities or physical abilities that it "steals" return at the end of the encounter, unless the victim consents to the theft.

**Bartering Pain:** When hit with a normal attack, the creature can Commit Effort as an Instant; the attacker must then either immediately reroll the attack, taking the second roll even if it's worse, or be automatically hit by the next attack that targets them.

**For A Life:** When the Uncreated drops a target to zero hit points, including Mobs, it may Commit Effort as an Instant. The target may choose to revive instantly with full hit points, but is completely enslaved to the Uncreated until dawn. Such thralls are usually set to attacking their former allies.

## Corrupting Powers

Shackled give their wretched victims the things these victims think are precious, be they gold, food, survival, or revenge. In exchange, they take much that the bargainer can't afford to give. This bargain must always be at least semi-voluntary on the victim's part; they cannot be given a choice between agreement and some dire death. Once the pact is sealed, however, the Uncreated can take their full measure of price. It's possible that a Shackled could be persuaded to give a trait back, but that would doubtless come at its own terrible price.

**Familiar Friend:** The Shackled can attach itself to a powerful leader or "interesting" victim, acting as a familiar and appearing instantly when called, assuming it finds it pleasing. The Shackled often takes the form of an animal or comely companion while doing so.

**Pactmaker's Promise:** The Uncreated can sanctify a freely-made bargain between it and a petitioner. Both must carry out their agree-

## Words, Gifts, and Abilities

The Shackled usually display gifts of Wealth, Knowledge, and Passion, using them to provide for their petitioner's needs, identify their true desires, and manipulate their hearts as part of their bargains.

Wealth gifts and miracles most often revolve around giving a desperate seeker the supplies they need to survive another week in Ancalia. It's not unknown for a Shackled to simply steal the goods from a nearby enclave, leaving enough of a trail to track them to the new possessor. Such likely-fatal tricks will be avoided if the petitioner seems like they could be an interesting long-term thrall.

Knowledge identifies a subject's true, deep desires, including those it would never voice even to itself. The Shackled will not scruple about satisfying these wishes, sometimes using one thrall's promised obedience to fulfill the dark needs of another.

Passion is usually used in a negative sense to carve away virtues or feelings as part of a petitioner's price, but the Uncreated can use the Word to inspire false feelings in others. "Love spells" are a common request for the young and foolish. They do not end in happiness.

**Opening the Shackled Way:** As its action, the creature exposes its vulnerabilities to a chosen enemy. If the foe attacks it during the next round, the hit is automatic and for maximum damage. The assailant automatically fails their next saving throw, however.

**Raise the Price:** Once per round, as an Instant action, the Uncreated may Commit Effort when an enemy does something that requires Committing Effort. The target must Commit an additional point of Effort, or their triggered ability fails and they lose their remaining actions for the round.

**Rob the Right Hand:** Once per round, the Uncreated can steal a weapon or object from a visible foe's hands as an On Turn action. Worthy foes can save versus Evasion to keep hold of it. If the creature Commits Effort, it can do this to all foes in melee range at once.

**The Price of Pain-Ease:** As an On Turn action, the Uncreated may target a creature they've just harmed with their normal attack and Commit Effort. The creature continues to suffer damage at the start of each of their rounds as if from one successful hit by the Uncreated until they obey an order from the creature or the fight ends.

ment, following both letter and spirit. The Uncreated always will, even to its destruction, but if the human does not, their mind and body become utterly subject to the Uncreated forever after.

**Purchased Truth:** The Shackled can act as an oracle, giving a petitioner the knowledge they most desperately desire. They may do so for no price at all if their information can be canted to lead the seeker to their own destruction.

**Slivering the Soul:** The Uncreated is able to excise emotions or relationships from the subject. Courage, faintheartedness, love for family, fear of a foe, or any other emotional trait or social bond can be carved away into nothingness. Once excised, the creature can never feel that emotion or reforge that bond again, barring divine miracles.

**The Jewel of Desire:** The Uncreated can provide any mundane good the petitioner might seek, in volumes appropriate to the Uncreated's power. These goods function normally and appear quite ordinary.

## Weaknesses

The Uncreated of the Shackled Court are fearsome manipulators and swift to build a cult of desperate devotees, but they are weaker than their brethren in direct confrontations. The extra burden of their *Cold Breath* can complicate things for novice Godbound, but they don't hit as hard as Incendiaries, and they haven't got the direct-damage abilities of the Rotten or the Poxed.

They're also short on easy escape abilities, as they can't disappear as quickly as some other Uncreated. If a pantheon can get past a Shackled's cult and its evil bargains, the abomination is likely to be in trouble. This trouble is compounded if it's promised to protect an acolyte. The thing may have expected the human to die too soon to concern itself with such things, but until that happens, it's forced to remain and fight on his behalf.

The excisions and thefts that the Shackled take are merciless and can't be remedied with conventional magic. The divine gifts and miracles of the Godbound can fix these spiritual wounds, however, if the heroes have the right Words to remedy the ills.