

# Host of Shadows

## Night Magnitude 120

### Performing the Ritual

Performing this ritual takes at least 10 minutes of roleplaying. This ritual targets an Imperial army. The general responsible for the army must be present throughout.

During the ritual the casters must be in a strong Night regio.

This spell is an enchantment. A target may only be under one enchantment effect at a time.

### Effects

The target army loses any existing army quality and instead gains the *Host of Shadows* quality.

The general of the target army experiences a roleplaying effect: you feel an urge to conceal your true intentions from others, especially with regard to military matters. Anyone who attempts to probe into your plans must have sinister motives.

The effect lasts until the start of the new Profound Decisions Empire event.

### OOO note

This item is a ritual text.

Any character with the Night Ritual Lore skill can master this ritual. You must have a free slot or experience point to master a new ritual. After an appropriate period of roleplaying spent studying these pages, it should then be brought to a referee who will add the ritual to those you have mastered. Doing this does not 'use up' the ritual text.

This ritual cannot be learned by other means; it cannot be taught by a character who knows it unless the ritual is added to the body of Imperial Lore by the Conclave.

## Ribbon ID: 13141

### Host of Shadows (Army Quality)

The army is surrounded by a magical shroud that makes it difficult for observers to gather information about it. When it is moving, the army can evade detection in a limited way. The army can pass through enemy territory, or potentially avoid the effect of curses such as Thundering Tread of the Trees in a territory they pass through.

The general can issue the *Walk as Smoke* attacking order.

#### Walk as Smoke

- During this season, the army can move through one territory, regardless of whether it is in Imperial control, without stopping.
- If the army uses this ability to pass through a territory containing an enemy force then the ability of this army to capture territory is increased by one-fifth.
- The information provided by an enemy army with the Scouting quality about this army is greatly reduced.
- Any effect that would harm or impede travel through the chosen territory is greatly reduced in effect and may be nullified.

This attacking order allows the army to move through a named territory as part of their normal movement while avoiding dangers such as enemy armies, and the effects of curses such as Thunderous Tread of the Trees.



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# HOST OF SHADOWS

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As Sveta Stoneheart has spoken, so I have responded, This is an old ritual. It is similar in power to that which was lost; it lets mortals move as shadows; it conceals warriors from the eyes of spies and scouts; it weaves the power of Night to grant aid on the battlefield.

But be clear, oh you children of Vard and Ushka.

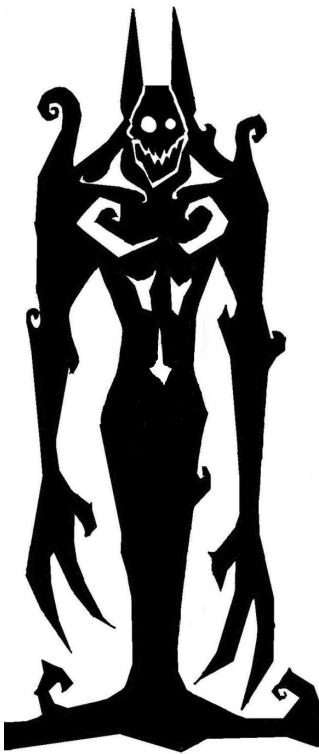
This is a magic for the people of Varushka. It is for them to wield, and them alone. It will not be shared with any who are not of the old blood. It is not a treasure to buy the favour of outsiders. Cast it where you will, but the knowledge is for Varushka only.

If I discover that it has become known outside Varushka, then I will rouse in my slumber and take my vengeance on those who have stolen this gift – or upon those who have shared it unwisely.

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## The Rite of Shadows

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In the time of my grandfather, there was a struggle between the people of the forest and the people of the hills. The people of the forest outnumbered my grandfather's people greatly. The struggle raged, and while my grandfather's people used all their cleverness to delay the larger force, they were slowly pressed backwards. They had to surrender their land, and many of their people were taken as slaves.

In the end the bargainers met with bargainers from other tribes. They spoke for three days and nights of the crescent moon. They knew that the people of the forest would not stop when they had taken the lands of my grandfather and enslaved their people – they would press all the way to the Great Lake, and to the marshes in the east, making all the land of the hill folk their own.

So the bargainers came together and they called forth the shadow beneath the trees which came in the form of a great crow with amber eyes. They bargained a spell from it, a potent magic that would allow my grandfather's people and their allies to slip past the armies of the people of the forest into the heart of their lands. They walked as smoke, as shadows beneath the Autumn moon. When they moved they slipped through the trees like spirits. When they made camp, their fires burned without light or smoke. Where they went, the mists settled around them.

In this way they slipped past the walls of the people of the forest and fell upon their children, and upon their wisest ones, and upon their leaders, and slaughtered them. Blood soaked the earth beneath the trees. The people of the forest, denied their children, and their wisest ones, and their leaders, sued for peace and never came again into the land of the people of the hills.

This is the spell that the bargainers wove, the Host of Shadows that sends warriors to walk beneath the trees as spirits.

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## Regarding Walking as Shadow

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The spell weaves an enchantment around the army, using the war leader as the focus. When the army moves, it is hidden from casual sight. The eyes of those who look for the army will be deceived, blinded, distracted. Even magical forces, even the hungry wolf, even the searching sovereign – all are deceived.

When the army is stationary, mist and shadow guard their camp. Their fires burn dark, and while they produce heat produce little light. The paths of scouts, beasts, and wolves are twisted away from their camps. If any come too close, the vigilant scout sees easily through the gloom, easily outflanks the unwary watcher, and silences them before they can bear witness to others.

When the army fights, it appears suddenly. Defenders are taken by surprise, driven back, confused. Their presence is known when they strike – the shroud is lost, the enchantment begins to unravel – but the ability to be where the enemy does not expect warriors has served its purpose.

Above the army during the day fly black ravens with amber eyes. At night, black owls with amber eyes roost in the trees around their camp. When the army fights, black crows feast upon the fallen.



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## Working the Rite

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The ritual is old. It was formulated before the Empire, before there was a Varushka. Details on its performance are scant.

The original text says *“paint the face and hands of the war leader; let warriors and bargainers alike press palms against armour and shield; share bloodwine; evoke the name of the shadow beneath the tree, and the light of the crescent moon, and the silence of the deep caves, and the three stars.”*

For modern magicians, the Virtuous Beasts of Varushka and the runes of Wintermark (Diras and Wyr obviously) seem to be the obvious things to paint on the hands and face of the “war leader” (general in this context). The presence of warriors who might fight alongside the target army, especially if they make oaths or promises to do so, resonates the the magic. It is noted that many of the painted caves bear walls marked with ancient palm-prints created with vivid pigments and blood – perhaps cutting the hand before pressing it against the wargear of the general would be an appropriate way to harness this resonance.



Bloodwine appears to be a reference to blood magic – warm wine mixed with blood from the ritualists and the general. The blood of scouts, stealthy individuals, and naga would be especially appropriate to this rite.

The names of the shadow beneath the tree, the light of the crescent moon, and the silence of the deep caves are not commonly known. Most likely invocations including these ideas, or other symbols of shadow, mystery, and the unknown would be equally effective. The three stars is most obviously a reference to the astronomic sign of the Lock, which governs the law that things may be

hidden.