

The Cold Watch



A web enhancement for Midnight Express Episode 19

And above all, watch with glittering eyes the whole world around you because the greatest secrets are always hidden in the most unlikely places. Those who don't believe in magic will never find it.

Roald Dahl

The Knights of the Cold watch were covered in Midnight Express Episode 19, and during the conversation Wendell_Burke and BK tackled a number of ideas for stories using this enigmatic society of monster hunters. Presented herein are three NPCs with plot hooks that can be used in your game.

Conceptually and thematically the knights have a lot in common with a hunters-based chronicle. They have seen a truth that they cannot (in good conscience) ignore, but pursuing it consume their life and leave them isolated from Changeling society. As presented in 'The Shadow Court', the knights are distrusted and even ridiculed by the Unseelie Court. They are truly outcast and live violent, misunderstood lives. The three personalities below try to capture this mood at various stages of the hunt.

Readers will note that no game statistics are presented for the personalities. This is

deliberately left as a job for Storyteller, and in some cases may not even be required. Each of these figures can be used in a purely narrative sense, or if you prefer, can be created as player-characters. These are simply ideas; the joy and creativity lies in musing on how you might use them in your own chronicle.

Arlana ap Aill is an older knight who has seen the horror of nightmarish chimera and wants to retire from active service. Now she seeks someone to take up the mantle.

Valerian ap Liam is a Seelie Kichain who has recently undergone his Chrysalis and knows that darker things escaped Arcadia during the Resurgence. Despite counsel from the local Crystal Circle, he is delving deeper into these Dreams.

CDR Leeche is a Kichain who voluntarily chose the mists after a lifetime of service, but the knowledge locked his Fae mien is needed by the local freehold as they face a terror from the past.

Arlana ap Ailil, *the flickering ember*.

It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness

Amnesty International motto

Background: Scion of the Ailil, and Sidhe knight of the Unseelie, Arlana is a veteran of the Accordance War. However, very few Kithain would recall fighting alongside (or against) her as - even by her own admission - she was willfully absent from most of the major conflicts. Some (especially those within the Ailil ranks) see this as a source of shame and justification for shunning her in the local Court. Arlana doesn't crave power, has abandoned political manoeuvring, and does not seek to better herself or her House - in short, a failure by every standard of the Sidhe.

During the Accordance War the Sidhe knight operated across the battle lines stalking the chimera that were just as great a threat as the civil discord that led to brutal infighting across Concordia. In the moments that she took human form against the gnawing Banality of the Autumn World, Arlana witnessed visions of

creatures slithering, striding, flying and oozing from the Arcadian Gates. Their nightmare scent lingered, warm currents of smoky dampness that marked their passing, leaving rotted footsteps in the Dreaming.

When she spoke to other Kithain over the coming months, none could remember the sight or smell of the chimera, and explained it as a hallucination brought on by experiencing concentrated Banality. The blatant lack of imagination and willful ignorance took her by surprise, but also convinced the Wilder of the need to pursue and investigate these creatures. As the violence of the Accordance War escalated in the wake of the Night of Iron Knives, Arlana found these creatures in disturbing proximity to atrocity. Again any conjecture that these chimera were either responsible for, or feeding on, the murderous activities of the Fae was met with scepticism. Neither Court could entertain the idea that their actions may have been manipulated - pride alone discounted her testimony.

Since then, Arlana has fought an invisible battle against the darkness. Considered mad, obsessed,



or both by other Kithain, she has maintained a vigil that has become an all-consuming duty. She denies any attempt to name her as the 'first' Knight of the Cold Watch, and as the societies' records are sparse there is no way to prove this assertion in either direction.

Recently though, Arlana has begun to realise that her quest will not be resolved by any member of the Cold Watch in her lifetime. Slaying chimera has become a burden that forced early-onset Grumpdom and even now Banality clings like a second set of armour to her form. A number of younger knights have stayed in her sights over the years but she is now all-too-aware of the storied status that being named her successor would carry. However, she needs to pass along a lifetime of experience before either Banality or a chimera takes her life. Arlana's humility and desire to follow simple duty above all else are exactly the traits that cause other knights to treat her as a living legend, a source of irony within the ranks and a grating inconvenience to her future plans.

As Winter approaches, Arlana needs to make a choice. She understands the utter waste the loss of her knowledge would represent, but she wants to ensure that those she passes it on to will use it to continue the hunt rather than for political gain. David Ardry's disappearance has caught her in a difficult situation and accelerated the need for action and as Concordia braces for a new War, she can see familiar chimera gathering on the edge of the freeholds that will decide the coming battles...

Image: Arlana's age is difficult to gauge although most would guess early 40's. She is the product of an active life dictated by regular training and punctuated by life-threatening violence. Her armour is well-worn with numerous adjustments made over the years in the name of practicality and comfort. Whilst her speech is usually clipped and direct (never having lost the arrogant tone that is an Ailii's dirchright) she is capable of warmth. Those who know her well will speak to Arlana's compassion and that she has an unguarded 'soft' side that her duty relegates as an indulgence. She is measured in speech and poise, and her demeanour aligns better with passion than fanaticism.

Roleplaying hints: Given her drive, it is easy to imagine Arlana as a dangerous, obsessive fanatic, but nothing could be further from the truth. Her focus on the hunt, and a general sense of constant vigilance are by-products of long experience, but the Cold Watch does not dominate her every waking thought. Arlana is a good conversationalist when around those she considers worthy of her time. She makes friends slowly, but firmly, and has a strong sense of loyalty to those she likes. Music has an especial place in her heart, and many of the Dreamers she has cultivated over the years have been small-scene musicians. The music collection she maintains (on LP only, she's never had time for CDs) is eclectic but there is something for almost any mood. When the issue of the hunt arises, there are equal measures of desperation, weariness, and devotion in her voice.

In your chronicle: Arlana presents a very flexible character (like any Knight) and the following are a scattering of ideas.

The oath circle could see new chimera of a menacing nature around their local freehold, or hear reports from some of the local Childlings and Wilders. Their investigation could bring them into contact with Arlana.

Arlana could act as a mentor for one of the characters, with no indication of her allegiance. This could be gradually revealed over a number of sessions resulting in an offer to join the Knights.

The decision to pass along her knowledge could be difficult due to a recent betrayal. Arlana chose poorly and the younger Sidhe used the knowledge to slay a chimerical threat, leveraging the action for political gain and turning his back on the Cold Watch in favour for temporal power and plaudits. However, this short-sighted Sidhe has angered a larger threat that could destroy the local freehold. The characters are recruited by Arlana to expose the upstart Sidhe and combat the rising threat.

Arlana has created a Treasure that stores her stories of the chimera and intends to record all of her experiences for the next generation of Knights. However, there is a specific item needed to activate the Treasure that can only be found in the Dreaming. The characters are recruited to locate the component, but are stalked by

someone (or something) that doesn't want such a potent Treasure to be forged.

Valerian ap Liam, *the empty dreamer.*

The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt
Sylvia Plath

The moment you doubt whether you can fly, you cease for ever to be able to do it
Peter Pan, J.C.D. Barrie

Background: Valerian was on 'gap year' work for a landscaping business when he underwent the Chrysalis. The business owner had gladly taken the young man in when he saw that Valerian had an eye for the small details and touches that made a garden design 'pop'. As the year drew to a close, Valerian's reputation was established, business was steady, and he was increasingly glad of his creative time and the possible future.

His Chrysalis was not kind. Working on an estate, Valerian went out for a reconnaissance of the grounds and the fall down a rocky slope broke his ankle and right wrist. Laying in the dying light, the dappled shadows slithered at his touch, the fiery autumn leaves seemed to gleam with unearthly flame, and the foliage took on a surreal

lustre.

Valerian spent a night in the cold fighting off unconsciousness and was found by an oath circle at dawn. Following the resonance of his Chrysalis, the circle found the boy maddened by pain, raving about the forms of darkness that peered like predators around his injured body. He insisted that they were waiting for him to die, and even claimed that other searchers had been chased off by these creatures.

The young Kithain healed quickly at Court and House Liam welcomed their latest Wilder with hearty celebration. The guest of honour, it was remarked, was serious beyond his years but a good fit for the House. His design work, once examined, held small reservoirs of inspired Glamour. The Court agreed that his arrival, though under trying circumstances, was deeply welcomed.

In a few weeks, Valerian was fit to return to work but he already knew that it was fruitless. The spark of inspiration that allowed him to see a garden as a place of respite, beauty, or communion with nature had been corrupted by his night on the estate. He never admitted that the creatures he saw were made of earth and stone, leaf and twig - muscles made from tree



roots, scales from bark and leaf litter, teeth of exhumed bone and claws of petrified wood. This was his waking nightmare and he could no longer see nature as restful and beautiful, only savage and predatory.

The morose Liam knight has spent consulting with members of the Crystal Circle who have simply put his visions down to a traumatic Chrysalis and reply to his investigations with sad tones and barely concealed pity.

Valerian decided to confront the experience and returned to the estate one night only to discover an older knight of House Leanhaun on patrol. Once an uneasy truce had been called, the two began to discuss their reasons for hunting on the estate - reasons that that were frighteningly similar. The Leanhaun knight had been similarly afflicted by these chimera, and explained the role of the Knights of the Cold Watch.

In the weeks following their meeting, the Seelie Court has remarked on Valerian's frequent solo trips and the grim resolve that has replaced his mournful demeanour.

Image: Valerian is only eighteen but constant outdoor work has tanned his skin to bronze and given him an athletic frame. His neat-cut hair is usually under a broad-brimmed hat, and his sunglasses are not usually far away. He prefers looser clothing like cargo pants and cotton shirts, and his well-worn boots complete a very 'un-Sidhe-like' mortal Seeming. His Fae mien amplifies his appearance and his voice is usually practical earthy colours.

He is sombre and his eyes have the occasional haunted look. He speaks in low tones (which has made him a curiosity to the local Sluagh) and since his screaming when brought from his Chrysalis he has not raised his voice. Normally, this even temper and practicality would make him a noble with prospects, but he is convinced that something is 'broken' in his soul and this lends an air of fatalism that most Changelings find disturbing, especially other Sidhe.

Roleplaying hints: Speak calmly about even the most horrendous topics and never let any trace of self-pity show. Valerian's social graces are not lacking, but his 'matter-of-fact' approach is at odds with not only courtly behaviour, but the expectations other Kith have of the Sidhe.

Whilst most still feel a sense of grief and sympathy over his circumstances, this is a diminishing resource that will soon be replaced by scorn and avoidance - but he does not seem to care.

Valerian's internal life is quite vivid as he fantasises about stalking the creatures that stood vigil over his Chrysalis. On the issue of his creative loss, he will accept any discussion non-committedly but has started to wonder if there are other ways of achieving the same 'high' that creation gave him. Without some intervention (Leanhaun knight aside) Valerian is on a path to self-destruction.

In your chronicle: Whilst compassionate, the Court is waiting for Valerian to heal (both body and mind) and take his standing seriously. In any other circumstances he could be a Commoner favourite, and amass serious personal power. It is still possible, but the motivation will unlikely be internal.

Valerian may be the latest in a number of Changelings who have been tormented by the chimera of that estate. A local Kichain could control the bestial chimera and select victims - meaning that Valerian's circumstance is no accident, but some deliberate attempt to warp the Chrysalis. The Leanhaun knight could be the last victim who found the truth and now needs Valerian's strength to confront the Kichain. It could be that the creatures are powerful chimera who escaped from Arcadia and now control a local Kichain, not the other way around. For an extra level of horror, the Kichain could be a Knight of the Cold Watch who has tamed the beasts rather than killing them and now seeks to create the next generation of Knights by exposing them to the Arcadian beasts during their Chrysalis. The local Court would take such a perversion very seriously, and the player characters could easily become involved in an investigation that causes them to revisit their own coming-of-age in Changeling society.

Another option would be to link Valerian and the Leanhaun through their mutual loss of creativity. The Leanhaun has surmised that the creatures feed on creativity and the only way to regain it is to slay the one that fed from each of them. This could lead to increasingly dangerous confrontations and the player characters could be assigned as caretakers for one of the NPCs.

Perhaps these stories of creativity-theft are true and when it appears as though some local Dreamers have been affected the Court begins to panic.

MR Leethe, *Filed under 'Forgotten'*

In order to understand the world, one has to turn away from it on occasion

ALBERT CAMUS

Background: A decade ago, MR Leethe decided to turn his back on the Dreaming and very few people noticed straight away. A freehold frequently notices knights and heroes, but rarely does it heed the comings and goings of a single Eshu archivist. MR Leethe dutifully served the freehold, organising records, preserving local histories, and scribing accounts of the Chrysalis and Saining of local Kichain. His keen mind could often piece together disparate stories, providing insights that made him a valued advisor.

No area of the archives was left untouched and Leethe often mentioned that he could sense the power of a story simply by running his hands over a book. The frisson at the touch of a powerful story was something he couldn't describe - but the expression on his face when speaking of it

told more than simple spoken word. Some stories - he claimed - ached with a longing to be told, as though they knew that every story has a time, and every story knows it's time.

Leethe's encounter with the first Cold Watch journal coincided with a particularly vicious attack on a Mew. The resident Kichain claimed they were assaulted by a pack of chimera that acted with a united consciousness - a type of 'hive mind' that focused on the Redcaps in the Mew even when other Kich stepped joined the defence.

The Baron immediately called it an 'Unselvie plot' and given his natural dislike (and distrust) of Redcaps did little to investigate. When Leethe spoke at Court of the need for further inquiry he was politely (and firmly) told that this was 'an isolated incident' and he should not worry any further.

The Cold Watch journal recorded incidents of dangerous chimera, claiming their Arcadian heritage and that a greater purpose drove these creatures. A single entry in this bestiary recorded a chimera that had been fought after it purposefully attacked a squad of Redcap militia in the Accordance War - to the point of ignoring the Trolls who came to their aid.

Armed with this information, Leethe confronted



the Baron and demanded more action. He spoke of these Knights, the journal, and the Baron's duties under the Escheat.

The Baron's rage at being lectured in his own Court should have been a further clue that something was amiss, but Leeche was dismissed from service and exiled from the Barony under charges of 'consorting with the Unselie', 'subversion', and 'gross disloyalty'.

Shunned by the Court and driven from the city, Leeche fell into deep melancholy. The sense of betrayal gnawing at his self-confidence was magnified when news reached him that the Dew had been attacked a second time. All three of the Redcaps present had their fae stripped away by the chimera who ignored every other Kithain in the room. The Baron had used this as an excuse to annex Unselie holdings and a protracted shadow war was now in progress.

Disillusioned, Leeche allowed his fae mien to fade away and simply became human once more.

Nowadays, CDR Leeche lives in a gated community for retirees. He's a regular in the community spaces and has a reputation for good stories, gardening (his tomatoes are excellent) and amateur detective work. The baked goods and lunch invitations he receives as thanks for finding lost jewellery and other knick-knacks have filled his frame and the grey has seeped into his hair. He's well-regarded by the other residents, an always smiling, always helpful gentleman. He's even started seeing Miss Nancy (a spinster who lives a few doors up) who's convinced him to start dancing again.

In all life is very good.

Image: CDR Leeche's mortal form is a Greek man in his early 60's, with greying curly black hair and a lustrous moustache. His eyes twinkle as though always thinking of humour (or as Miss Nancy will accuse him 'mischief'). The former Eshu's voice remains strong and firm and his stories are still vibrant and entertaining. He always carries two wooden 'worry balls' in his pocket that help him to think, particularly when helping a neighbour to find a lost item. Leeche doesn't realise that these are actually a Treasure he took into exile - the item guides the user to lost items that have an emotional value. Their very useful for finding a

lost teddy bear or a widow's wedding ring, but not so much at finding buried treasure.

The other Treasure in his possession is a bronze letter opener with a lions' head. This is actually a dagger, but currently only slices open bills and lunch invitations.

Roleplaying hints: CDR Leeche is, ironically, at his happiest in life right now. He has plenty of friends, time for his garden, and a very good reputation with visiting grand-children who all want to hear his fantastic stories. He's perceived as a friendly 'community-minded gentleman' by the residents who look out for him. He'll respond to most folk with good humour (and some light-hearted jibes at himself) and is a very good listener.

In your chronicle: The Eshu represents a very different approach as he's never met the Knights before. If he had, life would be different, but one might question if it would have been better. Leeche took the journal with him into exile and it is currently untouched in his modest library (he did this so the Baron wouldn't destroy it).

He mostly represents a way for the oath circle to interact with a Kithain who has turned their back on Changeling society and made a good mortal life. However, if the knowledge in the journal (or his mind) becomes useful again, the circle might be sent to re-awaken Leeche. It's unlikely that he'll remain good-natured at being asked to help the society that betrayed him, but if lives are at stake he'll assist.

This will be a story about past wrongs and balance. He has a good life in the gated community and the question of whether he's return to the Dreaming is one with no easy answer. He may well undertake a quest with the circle on the understanding that he is to be left alone afterwards to continue a mortal life.

Meeting the Knights of the Cold Watch would be an interesting experience for him and there may be a role as archivist. If you wanted to mix ideas, Arlana might even be interested in securing his help to build her Treasure, and perhaps entrust him with its safe-keeping.

Overall, CDR Leeche shows that it would be possible to interact with plots concerning the

Knights without actually having the Cold Watch appear on stage at any time.

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