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Faces of the Tarnished Souk: Belladonna, the Face of Love Unrequited

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Dedication:

To Clinton Boomer and Jonathan McAnulty
—For bringing us the *Coliseum Morpheuon*.

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Belladonna, the Face of Love Unrequited

Originally brought to the Khan's island as a young slave, Belladonna survived by adapting and evolving, eventually breaking free from her chains to become a savvy broker of others' desires and the adored proprietor of the Coliseum Morpheuon's most popular festhall, the Nightshade Palace. Though she can take any shape she pleases, Belladonna's natural form is a beautiful half-elf maiden with long auburn hair, sparkling green eyes, and a face that could launch a thousand ships. Her radiant fey beauty masks a terrible truth: after years of living in the treacherous realm of Dream, constantly sparring with walking nightmares, Belladonna's mutable taskshaper nature altered her very essence to adapt her to her surroundings, transforming her into a nightmare herself. Fiercely self-reliant and motivated by a burning desire to survive, stoked by a lifetime of cruel betrayals, she now draws personal power from a primal dream archetype as universal and undeniable as the pain of a broken heart: "The Unrequited Love". Because the nightmare she exemplifies requires subtlety, and in the interest of maintaining a profitable hospitality business, Belladonna suppresses her frightful aura and presents herself to others as free-spirited, friendly, and frolicsome. As the observant hostess of the Coliseum's most popular nightspot (and an expert eavesdropper), she always knows who's in town, who they're meeting with, and what dirty deals they're discussing over drinks. Those who walk into the Nightshade Palace have no trouble finding her – she's the looker with the white tiger. While most of the time the white tiger is a simple magical pet, it is cover for a secret – sometimes the tiger is actually the wanted abolitionist outlaw *Le Loup Solitaire*, prowling around in disguise.

Dreamburning and Belladonna

Hope: Belladonna stands over a kneeling figure who gazes up at her with desperate, pleading eyes filled with tears. She coldly lifts her chin and looks away; the figure cries out in heartbreak and crumbles, scattering on the wind like a pile of old, dirty leaves.

Aspiration: Belladonna has a recurring dream wherein she peels off her own face, revealing a shifting mask of a thousand unremarkable visages. No longer pursued for her beauty, she disappears into a crowd of strangers, left to herself and at peace.

Goal*: Belladonna dimly recalls a time, back when they were both terrified child slaves struggling to survive, when she and *Le Loup Solitaire* cared for each other. But now when she envisions his face it is twisted into a rabid, snarling dog – no longer the trusting boy she could have loved. (*This dream is degraded, one step from being burnt away forever.)

In the Tarnished Souk

The Nightshade Palace is a sprawling complex of pillow-strewn silk tents, lavish feasting pavilions, and smoky

gambling dens. It is a cornucopia of exotic indulgences, serving all manner of food, drink, and vice. Customized red velvet *rope tricks* dangle from clouds of glowing haze, providing private rooms for patrons to meet, drink, and revel. Belladonna and a diverse staff of servers and entertainers bustle about with enthusiastic attitudes, always encouraging indulgence and excess – for after all, this is a dream.

Lore

Characters may learn the following information via Diplomacy (Gather Information) or Knowledge (Local) skill checks:

DC 15 – Belladonna is a beautiful half-elf woman who runs the Nightshade Palace, a popular festhall.

DC 20 – She is a skilled taskshaper with nymph heritage. A lovesick fool says, "She's the girl of my dreams, but that dream has become a nightmare."

DC 25 – She is a versatile shapeshifter and mimic. A glance at her can stun, dazzle, or frighten onlookers.

DC 35 – She is vulnerable to cold iron, silver, and good weapons. She is evil and has become a living nightmare that feeds on heartbreak.

DC 45 – She and the outlaw *Le Loup Solitaire* were childhood friends. *Le Loup* is in love with her and secretly visits her, disguised as a white tiger. The seers predict that she will break his heart, soon and fatally.

How To Use Belladonna

- Belladonna is an engaging hostess, happy to facilitate the PCs' socialization with other NPCs. Her talents of disguise and mimicry also make her a peerless spy, infiltrator, or saboteur.
- Per the Khan's decree, table games of chance are the only tests of skill allowed outside of the Coliseum's venues. The Nightshade Palace holds high stakes games of dice and cards nightly.
- Lecherous men beware; should a fool coarsely proposition her, Belladonna would enjoy scaring the life out of him - literally.
- *Le Loup Solitaire* believes that he is Belladonna's true love and can 'save' her from life as a nightmare. He's wrong. Belladonna ends his delusions, clearly and brutally, by publicly betraying him to the Khan. *Le Loup* is crushed, the Khan's hounds close in, and the PCs may aid *Le Loup* - or watch him fight to the death, alone.
- Belladonna plagues a PC's dreams with *night terrors*, crafting nightmares of a lost love. Then, to compound the pain, she mimics the lost love while the PC is awake, prolonging the torture.
- If playing "The Dragon's Mate" (Coliseum Morpheuon, Chapter 10): Belladonna sabotages the Dragon's courtship by counseling him on the inevitability of alienation and heartbreak.