

# The Karnee Curse and How It Works

[By Holly Lisle](#)

## The Nature of Karnee

### A. Definition of Karnee

Karnee is shapeshifting from birth as the result of a curse handed down from generation to generation. It is intrinsic magic for the affected character, not controlled by magic but (sometimes and with varying effectiveness) by concentration and self-control.

#### Details of Karnee

##### a) **The Karnee forms: quasi-feline quasi-lupine mammal-aquatic bat-like**

The shapeshifter in change won't grow heavy fur or fins or scales during the shift. In the feline and lupine forms (which are only vaguely feline and lupine) the body is covered with a very short, silky close-lying coat of hair like the summer coat of a thoroughbred. The forms do not mimic any existing animal, so anyone seeing a shifted Karnee will not mistake it for a natural wolf or wildcat or dolphin or whatever. The Karnee forms all have in common that they maintain the original pigmentation of the victim, that they are sleek and sexy in an exotic way, and that the victim's human origins remain vaguely apparent.

##### b) **The Karnee advantages and disadvantages**

When in the Karnee form, the victim experiences euphoria and a restless, bounding energy. He is tireless, fearless, and

sometimes plain crazy. This comes from the chemical witches' brew his body dumps into his bloodstream to effect the change.

The result, though, is that when the Karnee's body reverts to true form, he will experience a downward spiral of emotions that is severe exact proportion to the upward cycle he just left. This dark mood will be accompanied by exhaustion and fear, and will improve gradually as the body regains equilibrium. The downswing will be slightly longer than the upswing, and will be lengthened if the victim can't replenish expended fuel. The victim will have a voracious appetite following a shift.

The Karnee curse tends to cause enormous shame in its victims during their down-cycle. They recall perfectly their actions while they were Karnee, and what they recall is so different from anything they would do in their normal or down-phase that they have difficulty facing their own actions.

▪ **(1) Advantages listed**

- (a) Precognition
- (b) Shapeshifting
- (c) Magic-sensing
- (d) Heightened physical senses
- (e) Hardiness
- (f) Extended youthfulness

▪ **(2) Disadvantages listed**

- (a) Uncontrollable rages
- (b) Inadvertent shifting
- (c) Post-Shift depression
- (d) Lack of self-control while in Karnee form
- (e) No control of Shift form
- form will usually, but not always, be appropriate to surroundings (water-form if near water) ; air form if on cliffs, mountains, etc.
- (f) Death-sentence by non-Karnee

c) **Bones, skin, etc.**

Karnee bones are always harder to break than normal human bones because even when the Karnee is in human form, the bones retain properties of the elasticity that allows them to reform. Karnee skin is more flexible, so will be resistant to the signs of aging. The Karnee will look young long past youth. Karnee are harder to kill because their bodies will react to a threat with the Karnee Shift, and will reform around and rapidly repair trauma sites.

#### **d) Karnee effect on magic**

The Karnee curse does not confer any sort of magical ability, but it doesn't confer any magical blocks, either. The Karnee will have to learn the physics of magic just like anyone else, but can have as much or as little magical talent as any normal human.

## **B. Heritability of the curse**

Karnee is the specific curse passed on to the offspring of the Sabir and Galweigh families for the past four hundred years. It travels down the family tree in the following manner:

- If only one parent has Karnee genes, no matter whether the parent is a full Karnee or a minor carrier, the curse will not show itself in any form, though the offspring will be a carrier of the curse.
- If both parents have only a some Karnee genes, then the curse will be active in all offspring to varying slight degrees, but at most will only manifest in invisible ways—heightened senses, slight precognition, a berserker reaction to rage that can in most cases be passed off as a bad temper, and a marked increase in sexual appetites and in fecundity.
- If the parents each have some Karnee genes and the child receives fifty-one percent or better of the Karnee-positive genes, the infant will be Karnee. From birth, he or she will exhibit spontaneous shapeshifting; the

frequency of this will lessen as the child begins to understand that people see this as a bad thing and don't approve; after time, the child will gain some self-control. Children in the same family can exhibit varying degrees of affliction, with some being Karnee and some having no visible curse at all. The inheritance pattern mimics that of a multi-gene variable-intensity recessive trait.

## **C. Method of action**

The maximum affliction includes all the characteristics of minimal affliction—heightened senses, slight precog, the berserker reaction, and heightened sexuality—but adds total-body involvement in the form of variable shapeshifting. Adrenaline and other hormones and neurotransmitters flood the system and stimulate the Karnee curse, causing the victim's body to reform totally.

Bones become enormously plastic in the initial stage of the change—they stretch and reshape. Muscles flow, tendons slide along the fascia to new locations, organs re-form to allow for the differences of the body cavity, skin stretches like elastic. The change conserves mass—a 180 lb. man will still weigh 180 pounds in his new form, minus the very small amount of fuel burned to effect the change.

When the new form is achieved, everything takes on a temporary appearance of solidity, but this is false. The bones are already beginning to drift back into their natural shape, taking the rest of the body with them. In Karnee and non-Karnee forms, they remain more flexible than human bones. The change can be partial or complete, and can last from a brief, weird, slight alteration of facial features that lasts for merest seconds to a total-body alteration that lasts for as much as a day.

The shifts are triggered by strong emotion, but the longer the

hormones and neurotransmitters and whatnot build up in the bloodstream between episodes, the less emotion it will take to trigger the response, and the more severe the response will be.

## **D. History of the Karnee curse**

Two of the main characters, Kait Galweigh and Ry Sabir, were born with the Karnee curse. This is the pertinent information on that curse.

### **1. Origins**

Origins first. The curse happened as the result of both magic and the backlash of magic. An early Galweigh progenitor attempted to put a curse on a Sabir enemy—and while the curse affected the man it hit with the left-hand spiral of the curse, the backlash from the spell struck the caster with an equal force, and with the right-hand spiral of the curse. Twin curses with equal power and results that will look identical to all but the sufferers. Because of the rules of magic in this world, both curses are aligned in effect (that is, one won't do good things because the other does bad).

However, initially the curse seemed like a failure. Nothing visible happened to either the caster or the victim, and nothing visible happened to their children, or their grandchildren. In fact, the results didn't show up in full force until about a hundred years down the road, when both Galweigh and Sabir offspring, legitimate and otherwise, lost track of their ancestors and started to intermarry.

### **2. Potential threats**

Karnee is one of a number of physical conditions present in people in the world of Matrin that will result in an automatic death sentence for the carrier, if found. On Abjan, The Day of Infants (See Matrin Calendar, part 3, ), infants found to carry the Karnee curse are killed for the good of society. The

vast majority of people in Ibera strongly support this measure—to understand why, you have to look at the nature of the Karnee curse, and at the threat its carriers pose.

Karnee offers a slight precognition, and heightened senses. Those will be dangerous to people who have something to hide.

- It offers increased childbearing potential. It will therefore be a threat to non-Karnee bloodlines.
- It offers increased hardiness. That will be a threat to people who can't hire the Karnee into positions where this hardiness will be an advantage, and who are forced to face those who can. Or those who might have made enemies among the Karnee.
- It offers the ability to shapeshift (albeit usually in an uncontrolled manner and into an unchosen form), and means that the carrier's true nature can not be seen by the people around him or her—a frightening idea to anyone with only normal abilities and only one form.

### **3. Twin nature of the curse**

Go back to the history of the casting of the original curse for a moment. Let's posit that the curses are, because they are twins from the same spell, linked. The sufferers of one can identify the sufferers of the other, and these people are somehow drawn to each other—but drawn with equal parts of rage and lust. Dark passions with an undercurrent of sex, attraction, desire, and instinctive hatred. Let's also posit that the Karnee of both the right and left handed strains are equal, and are capable of controlling each other, of fighting each other as equals, but that either is, in that regard, superior to regular people.

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