

Shade-Scourges

Description: a square pyramid made out of clear yellow crystal, with elaborate wires embedded and spiraling into a center ball. The ball occasionally flashes dark blue, or green. At each lower corner of the pyramid is a small depression, sheathed in some metal. If a person picks up the Shade-Scourge using their thumbs and forefingers, they can hear the ball screaming.

Not every necromancer is evil, but almost none of them are *nice*. Anger one, and they'll make you wish you hadn't. Infuriate one, and they will make you wish you were dead. *Appall* one, and mere death will be the *nicest* thing that happens to you.

Shade-Scourges? Case in point. The item traps the soul of a recently-dead person before it can go to its fate, and torments that soul. Forever... or at least until the accumulated death energy powering the artifact runs out. And that's the tricky bit; because the death energy comes from all the people that the soul *personally* murdered in life. It doesn't have to be directly -- the first Shade-Scourge was constructed to capture and torment Emperor Leopold II, and it's still working a century after his death -- but it does have to be murder. Simply killing people in battle, or executing them after a trial, or anything

else besides the deliberate unjust taking of a human life doesn't count.

Oh, and breaking the Shade-Scourge has no effect on the soul. The pyramid is simply there to allow regular people to savor the screams.

What does one do with an item like this? What *can* one do? Tormenting souls like this is awful, and it doesn't become any less awful when it's done to mass murderers (at least, that's what the angelic calculus says, and it's exquisitely designed to quantify ethical and moral questions*). But the spell structure was deliberately designed to be as difficult to sabotage as possible without getting into 'karmic backlash' territory. Stopping the spell prematurely is a task for a top-shelf magical adept. As in, 'one of the ten best in the world.' And they all have fairly full schedules. Saving the screaming shade of Stalin is not likely to be on their priority list.

Maybe just not touch the corners? Not that anybody knows whether or not having an audience makes things worse. But it's something, right?

*Life gets *weird* in universes where Good and Evil can be actually *graphed out*.

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