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THE BOOK OF SKELOS

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WELCOME TO A WORLD OF SORCERY

“READ, IF YOU DARE, WHAT SKELOS WROTE, WITH DEAD HANDS FUMBLING HIS SILKEN COAT; AND FOLLOW THE SHIPS THROUGH THE WIND-BLOWN WRACK — FOLLOW THE SHIPS THAT COME NOT BACK.”

The Book of Skelos delves into the deepest mysteries of sorcery in the Hyborian Age, dramatically expanding the rules for sorcery and all things magical for gamemaster and player characters alike. Included within these pages are rules and guidelines on handling player character and non-player character sorcerers, the usages of sorcery in campaigns, a host of magic items, creatures of the Outer Dark, and new skills and techniques to bolster any sorcerer's repertoire.

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- New sorcerous archetypes — the industrious Alchemist, cunning Charlatan, enlightened Sage, devoted Sorcerer, and the primitive Witch Doctor — for player characters to become, with new sorcerous backgrounds, educations, and natures.
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- Developed with leading Conan scholars, this is the darkest sorcery of the Hyborian Age revealed at last, as Howard created it!

This book requires the *Robert E. Howard's Conan: Adventures in an Age Undreamed Of* corebook to use.

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INTRODUCTION

THE BOOK OF SKELOS

Not for naught had he gained access into darksome cults, had harkened to the grisly whispers of the votaries of Skelos under midnight trees, and read the forbidden iron-bound books of Vathelos the Blind.

— “Black Colossus”

I am Alcimedes, and this is my testament. You hold in your hands the culmination of a lifetime’s work.

I have followed the mysteries of Skelos for seven decades and more; traveled to the far, dark corners of the world; spoken with sages, mystics and... other things best not spoken of by night. I have collected versions of *The Book of Skelos* in many forms. It is not, as some have surmised, a simple book of spells, an instructional work on the black arts, though it certainly holds such secrets. Nor is it a mere history or polemic.

The Book of Skelos is all these things, and far more.

This annotated edition of *The Book of Skelos* is the final result of my researches, drawn from my experiences at no small cost. Ofttimes, I think that Skelos speaks to me down the ages from the first inscriptions of the Book, and some whom I have spoken to voice similar thoughts. Given Skelos’ interests and probable capabilities, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that the reader of the Book is likewise examined.

I beg of you, allow this poor scholar a warning: the secrets and mysteries examined herein are often disturbing, heretical to many faiths, and not for the weak-willed or faint of heart. I have faced many obstacles in the acquisition of both the Book itself and the knowledge used to annotate it, not all of them physical. To read the Book is to court madness and disaster for the unwary, and even those of the proper

constitution have fallen due to circumstance. I say this as a man who has not escaped these consequences unscathed.

Within these pages, I will illuminate you on all aspects of Skelos’ writings. I examine the attitudes, history, and traditions of so-called sorcery, along with its pale cousins in deception and chicanery. I will reveal to you the cataclysmic history of our world, including the ages that both precede and follow it. Many of the annotations I provide address the modern age, to better advise the seeker of knowledge. I have also provided indications, rumors, hearsay, and logical conclusions on current events that might be pursued.

Alongside these earthly concerns, I provide additional commentary regarding Skelos’ explorations of otherworldly realms. Skelos’ writings speak of the dread Outer Dark, genesis of the many demons and abominations that plague far, haunted places or exist beneath the civilizations that comprise our age. Skelos explored the inexplicable realm of the unconscious, places collectively referred to as the Kingdoms of Dream and Nightmare, where the gods themselves are said to dwell. At the last, I present to you Skelos’ taxonomy of beings of the Outer Dark in all their varied and malefic forms.

In my travels, I have encountered many who style themselves sorcerers and the votaries thereof, and I provide advice for those who seek these paths. I include more contemporary adaptations of sorcerous forces, an examination

JOURNAL OF THE WANDERERS CLUB

THE BOOK OF SKELOS

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One of the great mysteries of *The Book of Skelos* is its origin. Some rogue scholars and madmen have claimed to have seen the original hard-baked clay tablets that teach the languages of the never-dead gods in tongues themselves lost to cataclysm. Others have seen the name "Skelos" written in a crabbed hand across the flayed skins of long-dead beasts.

Of the author's origin, there can be no certainty. If all the stories are to be believed, Skelos was a man, a cult, a creature from beyond, a curse, and a mighty city. It is likely the origin of Skelos is lost forever. No doubt, the truth lurks within these many tales, waiting to be unearthed by those brave and wise enough.

Skelos' writings, according to my own research, speak of potent forces beyond the ken of modern minds. Such feats as contained in these pages, such surreal places of dream, and creatures of nightmare surpass our scientific method, however open, just as do *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*.

With that in mind, it is worthwhile to briefly discuss some possibilities for the "identity" of Skelos, however far-fetched, as an intellectual exercise if nothing else.

- Skelos is said to have studied at the feet of the people of Yag, a race hailing from the fringe of space and who educated primitive men in a forlorn effort to raise them

up as companions. Perhaps some knowledge he gained allowed him to indefinitely extend his life.

- Skelos is a lost city, destroyed in one of the great cataclysms that wiped out previous civilizations. Possibly, it was a city that predates the Hyborian Age.
- Skelos was a demon of the Outer Dark, and the knowledge contained in this work is a means to corrupt those that read it. (The descending into madness of some of our own friends lend credence to this.)
- Skelos is a name given to the followers of a great, ageless cult, acquiring and passing down knowledge through the ages, preserving it against calamity. We are all familiar with the stonemasons of Solomon and their eventual evolution into the Knights Templar. Perhaps the cult of Skelos is the origin of both.

Regardless of the origin of *The Book of Skelos*, I have uncovered fragments, translations, and references to said book over the Classical Age through to our very own. These copies have genealogies as complex as any noble house, and the accuracy of any given text can only be surmised. Deduction and magic make poor bedfellows.

With that, I present what texts I could reasonably verify for open discussion amongst our group.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This article is presented here to members of the Wanderer's Club. I hesitate to publish this, even among such open-minded colleagues and scholars as yourselves, as the material calls forth even more incredulity than the Hyborian Age itself.

We move from the fringe of archaeology and firmly into the occult aether of magic. That the latter even exists is a topic of speculation among our number, and anathema to the broader academic community after the exposure of many hoaxes.

I ask you to look upon this article with the eyes of a denizen of that world. As we discuss the Greek pantheon, we do not consider authenticity but belief. Readers of the age and the tome's authors believed in its veracity, and therefore we should respect that. Though my own experience lends credence to the fragments I have here assembled, I shall refrain from editorializing.

Whether any incantation, spell, or work in these pages is real magic, I will not say. Know only that it was real to them and that, I think, is perhaps the most consistent thread of human perception, across all our lost and remembered ages.



- J.K., September 12, 1936

of the bleak, black arts of necromancy, and the calling and binding of the terrible beings that hail from the realm called the Outer Dark. You will find my examinations of many of the artifacts of previous, oftentimes inhuman, ages of history, and my thoughts on modern wonders here alongside Skelos' own words on such topics.

At the last are mysteries reserved for those who have achieved an advanced level of understanding, those who wish to leave their stamp upon history — to mold the very fabric of it — and the people that tread the dust of forgotten ages in search of wisdom, adventure, and profit.

The path of the sorcerer is not an easy one, oh seeker. May you find what will aid you within these pages and continue the work begun so long ago by Skelos and continued by me. May you be preserved against the terrors that forever haunt those who seek such otherworldly power. Lastly, may the gods always stand between you and harm in all the empty places you must walk.

Chapter 1: An Unnatural History

The history of sorcery predates humankind's own origins, and contained within this chapter is an annals of pre-human civilizations, ancient beyond reckoning. Though unwitnessed by mortal eyes, sorcerous visions into these pre-diluvian epochs yields an understanding of sorcery itself.

Chapter 2: Artifacts of the Hyborian Age

A catalog of great artifacts and workings, some of the items described within this chapter are the Serpent Ring of Set, the Heart of Ahriman, the Mirrors of Tuzun Thune, the Shining Trapezohedron, and a curious dark staff of wood said to be from another world.

Chapter 3: Kingdoms of Dream & Nightmare

The veils that divide this world from others are all-too-thin, and sorcery as well as dreams may serve as the vessels between realms. Presented herein are dreamlands such as Kuth, Andarra, and Tothra, and the means to reach them.

Chapter 4: Sorcerers in the Mortal Kingdoms

Many and varied are the traditions of sorcery that have arisen as humankind flourished and diverged from its primitive origins. The many different paths of magic within each culture is discussed within these pages.

Chapter 5: Sorcerers and Their Followers

All humans are social creatures, and even sorcerers require fellowship. The primal organization of sorcerers is the cabal, organizations born of sorcerers, their agents, and their supplicants. Here are described means by which these cabals function, and strive against one another.

Chapter 6: Advanced Rules for Sorcery

For those who wish to pursue this dreadful path, the guidelines by which sorcerers are made are found here: new origins, archetypes, backgrounds, as well as a further exploration of the skills and talents by which sorcery is wrought. Additional magic practices and techniques include necromancy, astrology, mummery, herbalism, new petty enchantments, weird science, and spells of varying purpose and potency.

Chapter 7: Sorcery Campaigns

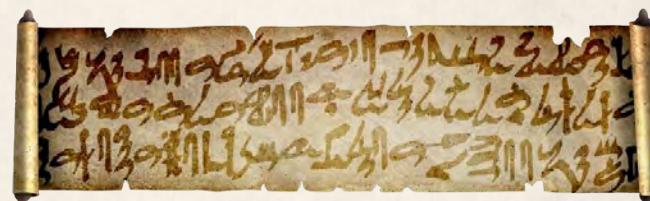
Sorcerers are willful and barely-controllable beings, and presented in this chapter are the means by which their actions might be guided, as well as the goals and forces that shape their corporeal existence.

Chapter 8: A Taxonomy of Terrors

Many sorcerers dabble in the creation of unnatural life, and these formula determine how existing creatures can be modified to greater potential and ability, to shower terror upon the mortal world.

Chapter 9: A Sorcerer of the Age

Lastly, an example of this new breed of sorcerer finds a home within these pages, rounding out its lamentable contents with his own sinister presence.



CHAPTER 1

AN UNNATURAL HISTORY

“I tell you it is not poison!” she cried. “Since his birth he has been guarded so closely that the cleverest poisoners of the East could not reach him. Five skulls bleaching the Tower of Kites can testify to attempts which were made — and which failed. As you well know, there are ten men and ten women whose sole duty is to taste his food and wine, and fifty armed warriors guard his chamber as they guard it now. No, it is not poison; it is sorcery — black, ghastly magic —”

— Yasmina, “People of the Black Circle”

The further we attempt to peer into the mists of time, the more obfuscated the image becomes. Of natural history, “The Nemedian Chronicles” speaks volumes, but of history unnatural, of the twining course of magic through the world of men and that which came before men, far less is known. Those who do possess such knowledge often guard it avariciously if, indeed, they are sane or healthy enough to record their discoveries for posterity.

While our primary subject is that of the Hyborian Age, that era is by no means the origin of the sorcerous art. Pushing through the mists, we glimpse the wavering scenes of civilization such as Valusia and Lemuria, where sorcery helped form societies by those who wielded its power. Beyond that, we stretch tentative fingers into the pre-human civilizations and briefly caress the Outer Dark — a place and a temporarily outside the realm of natural law.

In attempting to trace any history of sorcery, insofar as such an endeavor is even possible, we leave the natural world behind. If there is one commonality all sorcery evidences, it is the fact that sorcery is a disturbance of the natural order. Powering spells requires sacrifices of blood and contact with the Outer Dark. Both methods are bizarre and profane. There are those scholars who have asked why the works of Skelos or the iron-bound tomes of Vathelos the Blind are not filled with wizards in pursuit of noble ends.

The answer is simple — the toll of sorcery upon the mortal coil is one of corruption, debasement, and eventually death.

WHAT IS SORCERY?

We may first ask “What is sorcery?” There is no simple answer. While nearly all agree it is a violation of the natural, there is a counter-theory that argues it must be part of the natural order by its existence. If the natural world encompasses the totality of all cosmology, then magic, too, no matter how seemingly perverse, must be included in that definition. Scholars may debate such semantics, but they do not concern us here. Rather, we seek to uncover a ready definition of the sorcerous arts.

The most commonly agreed upon solution to this query is that sorcery is that science by which the life force of living beings and/or the raw power of the Outer Dark is used to bend or outright break reality as it is known to mortal beings. Surely, the demons, gods, and other things from that selfsame Outer Dark must have different definitions, but they are no more ours to know than colors seen by animals that man cannot perceive. Simply put, man has not the tools to truly understand sorcery. We are always in the gray mists of uncertainty, and all the rules of sorcery are most likely mere suggestions. What has worked for

an Acheronian thaumaturgist may not work for a Stygian wizard using that vanished culture's dusty books.

Sorcery is therefore not codified. It is not a science nor is it an art. Instead, it is an arrangement with forces beyond mortal ken. Those sorcerers who live to make a name are adroit at making deals, unspoken and otherwise, with the cosmos. As in any deal, a price comes with any powers conferred. In the Hyborian Age, some few powerful sorcerers made their name, but many more still made their name in the Thurian Age and even before. Some of these wizards are extant even in the Hyborian Age, though it is unclear if their existence can be called life.

THE EVOLUTION OF SORCERY

The ebb and flow of civilization is one of cyclical time. From barbarism civilization rises, and to barbarism civilization eventually returns. The pre-history of Earth is not the story of civilization's success, but instead it is the story of its ultimate failure. The Hyborian Age ends with the Picts — the most persistent of the so-called savage cultures — sacking the Hyborian kingdoms and closing that era of civilization. In the modern world, despite the great advances in archaeology, nearly all trace of this era,

and its predecessors, has been lost. The collapse of man back into degeneration is near total, an erasure of ages of which modern man is scarcely aware.

Time, as understood by cultures we might call savage, is a circle. The linear notion of progress from Stone Age brutes to complicated civilization wielding iron and steel is an illusion. Time loops, and all progress only heralds its own collapse. What then persists? What can men point to as a through-line for what we call history? The answer is sorcery. Scholars have long speculated in private that the "natural" state of mankind is not that of order but chaos. Civilization and culture, then, is perhaps the aberration, while sorcery and the Outer Dark are the true natural states of the cosmos.

A provoking and disturbing thought, indeed. If true, man struggles endlessly against an uncaring cosmos and an impenetrable universe. Our brief periods of order are the exception and not the rule. Like sandcastles, they are wrecked with each tide, the only cycle and constant we can count on.

Perhaps, then, this is the true secret of those who practice sorcery and the ultimate truth which drives them toward corruption and madness. What if the chaos of the Outer Dark is more real than our so-called reality? What



if, instead of sorcery being an intrusion into the natural world, civilization and our imposition of so-called reality is the truly profane?

An academic point, perhaps, and one that is not likely to be proven anytime soon. The notion does, however, offer a parallax view, a way of seeing through the eyes of sorcerers and, perhaps, the dark beings they summon and make pacts with.

Whatever the true cosmological situation, it is evident the human mind deals best with operant reality. Sorcery, beings from the Outer Dark, gods that lay dreaming under ancient seas — these are not things man can reconcile with reason. The history of sorcery, then, is the history of mankind's — and pre-human sentient beings' — interaction with another order of being.

PRE-HUMAN SORCERY AND CIVILIZATIONS

Sorcery has likely always been part of sentient beings' culture, but it is foolish to think the first beings to practice such arts were men. The pre-history of our pre-history is, going back far enough, a history of pre-human civilizations on Earth. The most famous among these are those beings called the serpent men. We have no proper names for their kingdoms and cities, and it is likely the human tongue could not pronounce them if we had.

All but vanished now, serpent men practiced forms of sorcery which might be vaguely recognizable to a human wizard. In the lush jungles that once stretched across the Thurian Age, demons of the Outer Dark were purposed toward shaping this culture's sorcery.

It is known, from the Thurian Age and the records kept by those in the court of the legendary King Kull, that serpent men possessed advanced sorcerous ability. A fragment of a scroll from the period translates as, *"The serpent kingdoms have forgotten more about sorcery and the Outer Dark than man shall ever know."*

What abilities these were remains unclear. Persistent rumor holds that serpent men could take the form of humankind, and Nemedian scholars suggest the varying types of serpent folk are some evolutionary consequence of such polymorphic talents. Perhaps, these scholars allege, all serpent men began as giant snakes, children of Set, and had the power to change shape. In time, three distinct species were formed. Whatever the truth of that, the few serpent men ruins known in the Hyborian Age suggest architecture based not on physics and natural forces but on manipulating energies the mortal eye is unaware of.

An anonymous entry scrawled in the margins of *The Book of Skelos* suggests that serpent men form the bridge between the utterly inhuman beings associated with the elder gods and mankind as known in the Hyborian Age.

If so, this author argues that serpent men are some evolutionary intermediary stage, though no other later scholars agree with, nor pick up, this argument. Serpent men are discussed at greater length in the *Conan* sourcebook *Horrors of the Hyborian Age*.

Yet, before the serpent men were races not even humanoid in appearance, and their magic is not something for men to understand. Indeed, the level of these cultures is so advanced that, to a modern eye, their magic might look more like technology. Of these strange species, nearly all hail from the Outer Dark, and it is here we see a time eons past when the mortal world and beings of the Outer Dark commingled.

In this vein, the much-storied Tower of the Elephant is cited as an example of such unnatural construction processes. It is said that Yara's tower was built by that being known as Yag-kosha in a single night.

Yag-kosha brings us to another interesting point. Serpent men are known to have existed — some say they move hidden among men in the Hyborian Age — but Yag Kosha is possibly even older, an alien from across the vast gulfs of space. Other species, too, such as the winged ones haunting jungle-covered ruins along the Black Coast and elsewhere, suggest pre-human civilization predating even serpent men. What vanished races and powerful sorcery might have disappeared into the mists of time long before the appearance of man? Scholars can only guess at this.

Who can say what strange, alien cultures rose and fell before mankind? We, too, may be but a moment in history. A species that shall have its time and then pass forgotten. Sorcery, however, will persist. It is this connection with the infinite which gives true immortality, or so say passages in *The Book of Skelos*.

PRE-CATACLYSMIC SORCERY AND CIVILIZATIONS

After the serpent men culture began to erode and the Thurian Age dawned, human civilizations became ascendant. Hoisting themselves up from rude savagery, the Thurian Age produced many cultures, some civilized and some barbaric. Among the barbarian cultures, the best known are the Atlanteans and the Picts. The Picts, curiously, seem to represent the only other constant besides cyclical time. They are there at beginning of the Thurian Age, they are a causal factor in the end of the Hyborian Age, and persist through the ages to what we would call history — a scant 5,000 years — ignoring the vast millennia of man gone before. But we digress.

It is not our purpose here to illuminate these cultures. (Interested gamemasters might wish to consult the *Conan* sourcebook *Ancient Ruins & Lost Cities*). Whether Commoria or Grondar or any other of the Thurian kingdoms, all

YIG AND SET

The Great Serpent Yig was the chief deity of his so-named serpent men. It is unclear whether Yig was a mythical god in the terminology that mankind understands, or rather one of the Great Old Ones. In either case, serpent men's worship of Yig involved the sacrifice of humans to this fell, looming power.

In time, as the serpent men fled, retreating into the dark corners of the Earth while men rose to power, Yig may have evolved into Set. The connections seem strong, though no single fact or piece of history proves that Yig and Set are the same god or being. Certainly, Stygian theocracy is predominated by serpent images dedicated to the god Set. Perhaps Stygian culture and societal structure owes something to the vanished serpent-ruled kingdom of Valusia.

practiced some form of sorcery. During this age, a split became apparent in sorcerous arts — that practiced by so-called savages like the Picts, and that practiced by civilized men such as the mighty empire of Valusia. The way of the shaman or “witch-doctor” has traditionally been aligned with somehow being more natural, while those who truck with more civilized eldritch powers ironically skirt the unnatural. This distinction is not always clear, however, and there is no end of examples of profane powers in either tradition.

THE TECHNOLOGY OF MAGIC

Not all sorcery involves mystical power drawn from worlds unknown to most men. Frequently, technology — albeit very clever technology — passes for magic. What matters if a fine machine or mystic power does the work if, to an average man, there is no difference? In short, it does not.

Any advanced technology is likely to be as inexplicable to most as the dark powers drawn from demonic beings. A series of mirrors and lenses, properly arranged, presents as a scrying device like that of a crystal ball. Any “sorcery” may very well be scientific in nature. Alchemy might be naught but the rudiments of advanced chemistry. These, though, are merely the clever devices of men. Long ago, in ages undreamed of, other technology existed. Among that is technology wielded by the Elder Gods, those Mythos beings whose names are best not uttered unprepared.

The elder things, the weird fungus-like flying crustaceans called the mi-go, and the Great Race of Yith possessed powerful items which can kill outright,

A better point of division is that between Eastern and Western sorcery that coalesced in the Thurian Age. In the Hyborian Age, learned men accept that Eastern mystical powers draw on confounding the mind, obfuscating the senses, and subjecting targets to mesmerism. In the West, illusion serves few. Instead, summoning beings and raw power from the Outer Dark is more common. None can say for certain how the dichotomous traditions came to be, but many scholars speculate that each were the native traditions of non-human cultures hailing from either the East or the West.

Acheron is worth closer examination. It was an empire powered by sorcery. Wizards served as rulers and the mighty city of Python was said to have been erected using construction methods entirely unnatural. Not since Acheron's fall has the Thurian continent seen such an openly thaumaturgic tradition replace monarchical rule.

Serpent Men and Sorcery

Proto-humans toiled under the sorcerous compulsions, and all-too physical whips, of serpent men. It was in the kingdom of Valusia where the serpent men ruled. In time, man struggled against them and, eventually, Valusia became the human kingdom known during the days of King Kull. Valusia, under the rule of the serpent men, was a world of sorcery and magic. In the books of Vathelos the Blind, the author supposes men stole sorcery from their serpentine masters as the great kingdom of Valusia shifted from the worshipers of the Great Serpent Yig, to the many-faced gods of men.

project a mind into other dimensions, and otherwise transform the mundane into the surreal. Most of this technology lies outside the purview of this work. However, the gamemaster may wish to inject elements of this into their campaign. After all, Conan himself encountered radium lighting in “Xuthal of the Dusk” and the elephant-headed thing called Yag-kosha was a being from space — and likely had scientific knowledge about a great many things Hyborian Age mortals could not fathom.

In a sense, these ancient cultures leave behind their achievements for others to pick amongst and scavenge knowledge beyond that of their time. Those in the Hyborian Age are more than aware that their civilization exists in the shadow of former, greater empires. Some of those empires were inhuman, and their technology equally so.

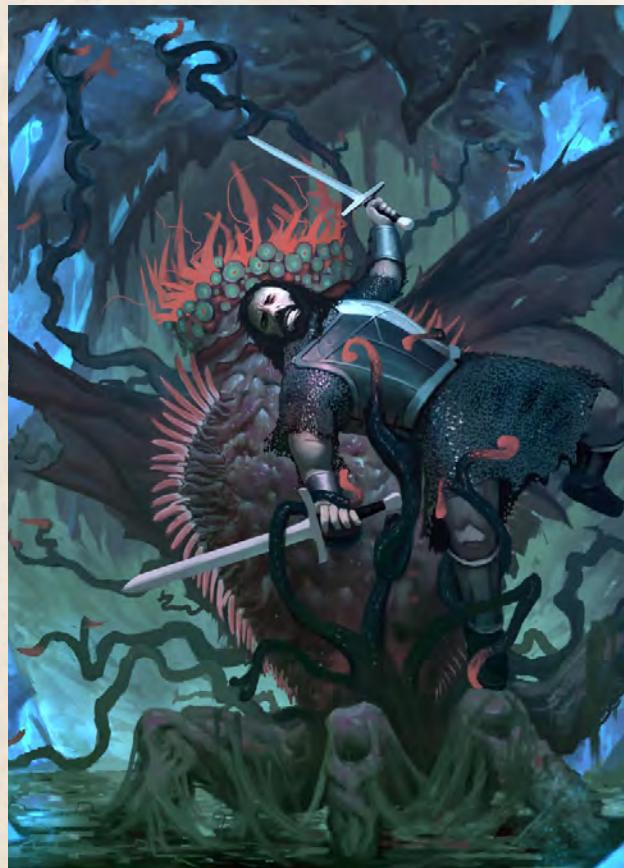
Others, however, were not.

By the Hyborian Age, serpent men have all but vanished, and their sorcerous powers are lost to all but the most intrepid of researchers. Some of these researchers have evidence that another race infiltrated the serpent men in much the same way the serpent men would later infiltrate the human iteration of Valusia. This race is known only as the "elder things".



INHUMAN CIVILIZATIONS

No doubt, there are a great many more inhuman civilizations which at one time raised mighty works upon the Earth. The original works of Skelos cover far more than can be described within these pages. This is a small sample of the better-known cultures which flourished upon the earth in eons past.



ELDER THINGS AND SHOGGOTHS

The many-eyed, lumbering, slime-riden horror of the shoggoth is more likely to lurk in the path of the player characters. The elder things themselves are supposedly extinct, though their servitors remain. Trying to make sense of the motives of a shoggoth is nigh impossible, but it appears some were left behind for a single task. Even now, epochs gone from their masters, they may yet fulfill that original programming.

They should be used sparingly, if at all, for they are fearsome opponents and rare in the extreme. Should a gamemaster wish, an extant city of these beings might exist somewhere. Perhaps it has not interacted with men in the geologic time since their creation. What would they make of these bipedal, fragile creatures?

ELDER THINGS

A cyst-like barrel some six feet in height with wings: this is the human way of describing the creature called an elder thing (or sometimes an "old one"). Far larger than any man, elder things existed scores upon hundreds of millions of years before men came to scourge the Earth. Some billion years may have passed since they first crossed the great voids of space to colonize the Earth. Not even dinosaurs were here to witness their arrival. With tentacles, or stalk-like appendages, they are made of tougher stuff than man. The Book of Skelos suggests they were capable of a hibernating the course of entire epochs. So it is not impossible one may yet wait in the depth of some forgotten city preparing only now to wake.

Little is known of their technology, save only that it was very advanced. However, it is mentioned in several inhuman texts that the elder things created the shoggoths, a monstrous, shape-shifting type of servitor of immense bulk and devilish ingenuity. If so, their technology might be biological in nature. Who is to say they did not fashion weapons, slaves, and conveniences as men fashioned rude tools from the bodies of their prey?

Elder things are discussed at greater length in *Horrors of the Hyborian Age*.

DWELLERS OF THE DEEP

In dim antiquity, these sea-dwelling beings — also known as "deep ones" — flourished over many of the wet and coastal regions of the earth. However, part of this was due to their ability to breed with human stock. Unlike other alien entities, unions between dwellers of the deep and

humans produce viable offspring. The resulting hybrids look human upon birth and, even later, can pass for the degenerate, inbred, or simply ugly.

*The tide flowed out over the beach,
lapped at the ocean, and the waves
turned a deeper, more sinister green.*

— “The Pool of the Black One”

Because of this, dwellers of the deep yet infect some human communities, though it is very rare. They tend to cluster around water and worship twin entities known as Hydra and Dagon, dubbed “Mother” and “Father” — reputedly grotesquely oversized specimens of their species. Pure-blooded dwellers of the deep are a gray, fish-bellied color, looking something like upright frogs fused with the more nightmarish stages of certain deep-dwelling monstrosities. Their technological level is generally that of men, though some reports claim they possess technology of vanished races. These accounts are most often heard on a drunken evening in seedy Messantian dives and ought to be viewed with skepticism.

In the royal courts of Zingara, a rumor persists that the ruling family itself has the blood of these deep ones in its veins and travels to a secret city of these profane creatures to breed once every five years. Anyone caught discussing such nonsense is put to death in the most public of venues.

Dwellers of the deep appear in the *Conan* corebook on page 336.

THE GREAT RACE OF YITH

To try to determine whether Great Race of Yith exists or not is to fundamentally misunderstand them. Little is known of these enigmatic creatures, and legends are at odds. It is unknown how anything is said of them at all, as they apparently dwell an incomprehensible distance beyond humankind's place at the shore of the stream of time. Yet their very nature gives rise to scholars and others claiming to have spoken with them, through a most curious means.

Most accounts describe these “Yithians” as huge, conical in shape, with a few appendages protruding from a cluster atop the cone. One of these appendages features a row of yellow, glowing eyes. This latter protuberance is presumably the creature's head. Other legends speak of them as an insectile race, hand-sized scarabs existing in great swarms, each grouping sharing a single mind.

Some testimonies, so it is said, claim that the Yithian home planet was destroyed tens of millions of years ago, leaving their race without a home. They projected themselves across space and time, to this world, while their bodies were destroyed. Others claim to have traded places with these strange beings, and described Yithian cities, intact and wondrous.

The Kosalans, an ancient and advanced human race, have counted Yith life forces among their number, if their extant myths are to be believed. These Yithians were not, however, called by name but seen as divine spirits that infested the bodies of men. This is not at all a common myth, and has thus far been found in only one stone stelae found on what would have been the Kosalan migration trail from Lemuria all the way to the West. The stela is long lost, however, many sorcerers seek its location, as it may be a potential gate.

Yithians are described in *Horrors of the Hyborian Age*.

VON JUNZT AND THE GREAT RACE OF YITH

Von Junzt's *Nameless Cults* speaks of the Yithians as an extinct race that once warred with the likes of elder things and mi-go. However, in its original German iterations up until the third printing, that volume asserts the Great Race are time-travelers of a sort. They do not themselves physically move through various ages, but project their life force into beings of any given era.

If this is to be believed, some of more well-known explorers and scholars of the Thurian Age, and perhaps the Hyborian Age as well, are bodies inhabited by Yithian time voyagers. Some claim that Skelos himself is host to one of the Great Race of Yith, or at least that he was for some of his career. That would certainly explain the broad base, and arcane depth, of his knowledge.

Yithian technology is perhaps the most advanced of all and is scarcely comprehensible to the minds of those within the Hyborian Age. Even von Junzt, writing uncounted millennia later, could not fully understand its workings. In any case, several ancient human cultures contain stories of Yithian visitations of their own pasts as well as the future, though they are not understood as such. Even von Junzt saw fit to omit the strange descriptions of machines which fly, tube-like weapons that spout fire, and devices that wipe out entire cities with the fire of a thousand suns.

CHAPTER 2

ARTIFACTS OF THE HYBORIAN AGE

These walls were hung with black velvet tapestries, and between the tapestries hung shields and crossed weapons of fantastic make. Here and there too, stood figures of curious gods — images carved of stone or rare wood, or cast of bronze, iron or silver — dimly reflected in the gleaming black mahogany floor.

— “The God in the Bowl”

Rare, powerful, and not to be trifled with, artifacts of the Age are both wondrous and terrible. Many of them have survived untold eons, and will doubtless outlast even the Hyborian Age itself. They are potent and terrible things, and the gamemaster should not merely introduce these into a campaign without careful thought. While the described mechanical effects are not always earthshattering, much of their power must be conveyed through narrative. These are not natural things. Like all magic, they somehow break the boundary between the safe world of the real and the unknown. These items should be handled with all such cautions and warnings.

THE SERPENT RING OF SET

Famed, feared, and fought for, the serpent ring of Set appears as a rather simple ring of a copper-like metal. It takes the form of a snake coiled thrice around the finger. Curiously, instead of a menacing open, venomous maw, the snake has its tail in its mouth. This is no accident and is a symbol, called the ouroboros, known to secret societies such as the cults of Set.





The ring symbolizes the eternal, the unending cycle of life. Does it also represent the cycles of barbarism and civilization and return to the former? Perhaps part of the dark knowledge symbolized in the ring is that all things ebb and flow, and it is only those knowledgeable in certain mysteries who can detect, and exploit, these waves. Or, perhaps the symbolism is lost to all but those who worship Set. They do not speak and their knowledge has long since passed.

The ring's most famous bearer is the dread Stygian wizard, Thoth-Amon. Thoth-Amon knows the true secrets of the ring as only a sorcerer can. Otherwise, the ring merely seems a good luck charm, something that imparts better fortune but no more. However, for a sorcerer, especially one steeped in the ways of Father Set, the ring takes on more ominous power.

Yellow gems are set as the serpent's eyes, and smearing human blood upon them unlocks the ring's ability to increase the potency of a sorcerer's spells. Further, the ring can summon and bind to it a slave, sometimes called "the Haunter of the Ring". This haunter serves the ring and the one that bears it. Who is this slave and from whence does the spirit come? We do not know, but it is written that a sorcerer using the ring over time believes their own essence

THE SERPENT RING AS PATRON

The serpent ring and its haunter function as both Patron and Familiar. So long as the ring's demands for blood are met, it will aid a sorcerer into bartering their soul for powerful spells such as *Astral Wanderings*, *Enslave*, and *Summon a Horror*. The *Barter Your Soul*, *Pact*, and *Patron* talents can all be obtained using the ring as if it were a living sorcerer. Player characters possessing or using the ring in such a fashion must be wary, for those that possess it but do not keep up its demand find that it plays tricks on the mind, leading foolish owners to ascribe any luck they might possess to its influence.

is drawn into the glittering eyes and coppery scales. Perhaps the haunter is its previous bearer, now condemned to live out a kind of unliving thralldom as servant to the ring they once believed they mastered.

Thoth-Amon and the Serpent Ring of Set are described on page 357 of the **Conan** corebook.



THE DREAMING NEEDLE

This is a strange artifact insofar as it is not portable. The dreaming needle is an obelisk of unknown construction. Some believe that there is more than one such dreaming needle, making identification difficult. According to scholars of the age, only a scholar or sorcerer of incredible skill can tell for certain. A character must make a Dire (D4) Linguist, Lore, or Sorcery test to recognize one. Consequently, a layman is unlikely to understand any of the sigils marking the stone.

Speaking of stone, the dreaming needle is supposedly constructed of strange, alien rock. If true, it must be imbued with powers of endurance, for the needle has appeared in accounts dating back to before the Cataclysm. Indeed, it reappears again and again in dusty scrolls from Valusia, Acheron, and beyond. This seems unlikely as it has passed through many public hands, and surely would have been spirited away by someone in the know down the years.

For all that history, what does the stone look like and what, supposedly, does it do?

It stands twenty feet in height and is four-sided. Each side is purportedly covered in glyphs which confound

GATEWAY TO THE DREAMLANDS OF KUTH

The dreaming needle serves as a Familiar for any spell cast to enter or leave the Dreamlands. Whether this allows for possession is solely up the gamemaster and should be a plot point rather than a randomly rolled event or Complication.

translation. Even people who speak the dead languages of Lemuria and Acheron cannot decipher their mystery. Various descriptions indicate a round, fist-sized opal in the center of each side. Other descriptions indicate a carved hollow for these stones, but they are missing in other descriptions.

As to what the needle does... most believe it is a gateway. The four sides represent different states of places in dream, and portals to each may be opened by sleeping under the obelisk's shadow. At least that is what common legend holds. Uncommon is another idea: the stone is not a portal but a compass. It exists simultaneously in this world and in the world of dreams. People with certain powers, or maybe we should say curses, know how to use the stone to locate a dreamer anywhere in the waking world. That is to say, if you can find their dream body, you can trace it back to the waking location. One legend speaks of being able to use your own dreaming self to enter and possess the body of another, trapping them in the world of dreams. What if this happened through the ages? Who might not have been who they seemed down through our known history? An interesting, if perhaps unanswerable, question.

EMERALD SLIVERS OF YAG

Emerald sticks, sharp on either end and invaluable — who can resist? They weave into the legend of Conan himself; these are the stuff of great sagas. Some years after Conan's adventure at the Tower of the Elephant, the stories of these slivers began to appear. Supposedly, they are pieces of the tower itself, broken remnants produced when the tower fell upon the death of the wizard called Yara.

Now, this tower was said to have appeared in a single night. If the tower had such magical power, the theory goes, so would any remaining pieces from it. Further, various accounts of the tower attribute it with being festooned with gemstones, so large emeralds would not be out of place.

While many a fortune hunter has set off in search of these huge gems only to return with an empty purse, a few sorcerers apparently did, as well. A Corinthian



account tells of a sorcerer who sought the slivers not for their value in coin or their power in magic, but for the knowledge they contain. According to this document, these are not emeralds, they are crystals from the planet Yag itself. They are also a book, a very large book, stored with the memories of that race. At least, that is what the thieves in the Maul told each other over ale one evening, or assure would-be customers when attempting to sell such items.

THE GREAT LIBRARY OF YAG

The emerald slivers of Yag count as a somewhat heavy (Encumbrance 8) reference library for the Linguist, Lore, and Sorcery skills. Accessing the library requires a successful Average (D1) casting of the Astral Wanderings spell. Once accessed, the library can be used by the casting sorcerer as if it were a normal library. A character with 10 emerald slivers of Yag can use them as an academic library (see page 143 of the CONAN corebook).



THE HEART OF AHRIMAN

Without doubt one of the most powerful artifacts we know of, the Heart of Ahriman, should not be taken lightly. Its powers are unknown but whispered of. Kingdoms fall when the Heart is near. Some who see it, will kill for it, without hesitation. The dead may be raised and those same dead cast again asunder. It protects the wielder, but it likewise ensures all who see it shall covet it.

What, then, is the Heart of Ahriman? No one is certain. A gemstone of some sort to be sure, massive in size and rich in luster. It draws blood to itself like iron to a magnet. Much blood has been spilled in pursuit of this object. Object is perhaps the wrong word for this. Perhaps even artifact is wrong. Was this wrought by man or some other fashion?

Some believe the heart is alive, a being of sentience. Does a god's heart explain this device? We know only that great rulers have sought it throughout history. To possess the heart, it is said, is to possess the will to rule and to bend the will of the people thus ruled. How many wars, how many wide-eyed innocents lay slain in fields of battle because the Heart compelled their leaders to ever-greater slaughter?

One common thread runs through all documents that speak of the Heart — blood empowers it. The more blood, the more power. As to its powers, they are largely shadowy. Yes, kingdoms topple when the Heart wills it, but how? Armies tremble, but how? Simpler powers, in comparison, involve raising the dead. The Heart, placed upon a corpse, shall make of that corpse an Ahriman mummy (see the Mummified Sorcerer in the **CONAN** corebook, page 339). Such a mummy is there for the sorcerer to command and, should they wish, dismiss back to dust.

The Heart's last location was the Aquilonian city of Tarantia, buried deep in the Earth under a temple of Mitra, a secret known only to the most senior members of Mitra's cult. The Heart was given to Xaltotun after a lengthy endeavor, and used in part of a grand conspiracy to overthrow the king using Acheronian sorcery. Conan recovered the Heart from Xaltotun, and afterwards, had a long, if bloody, reign. It is perhaps beneficial he kept the Heart in the earth and not at hand.

THE HEART OF AHRIMAN

The Heart of Ahriman is an artifact of unrivaled power. When possessed by a sorcerer, the sorcerer can reduce the Difficulty of any spell casting by one step. This is in addition to any bonuses from Offerings or Circles of Power. If the Heart is present at a scene of carnage — such as a massed battle or a sacrifice of over one hundred people — the Heart gains additional power and provides 2 bonus Momentum to all sorcery spell castings.

MIRRORS OF TUZUN THUNE

Tuzun Thune was known as a wizard of "the Elder Race". Thune's story, and that of his mirrors, comes not from the Nemedian Chronicles, but whispers told of the times prior, also called the Thurian Age. King Kull of Valusia visited Tuzun Thune, seeking a cure to an existential crisis. The wizard, according the story, showed him his mirrors. One of

these mirrors, wrought of “the deepest magic”, took Kull’s attention, but only so that he sat there looking at his own reflection. In fact, he sat so long he began to question the nature of his reality and self. Was he the man looking at the mirror Kull? Or was the man in the mirror the real Kull with a real life on the other side? We know very little, but Kull’s story continued.

However, the story offers several interesting possibilities. For one, perhaps the mirror draws some life force from those who peer into it. If so, might it make a double of this person and further, might the lost life force cause the original to think the duplicate is the real person? Possibly.

A stronger possibility, or at least one held by more so-called experts, is that the mirror (perhaps all of them) are portals to other worlds, quite possibly those of dream. Perhaps the Kull in the mirror was a dream Kull, existing in Kuth or Tothra or who knows where else. The mirrors, too, might show more ordinary places, but we cannot know.

If they do peer into the world of dream, perhaps they also serve as portals. More than one wizard in Earth’s great eons has been obsessed with mirrors and reflection. Seers peer into reflective pools, vampires hate mirrors, and fairy tales have their beauties looking into such polished glass. Is there some magic there of which science is unaware?

SHINING TRAPEZOHEDRON

This artifact has been called “a crazily angled stone” by one sorcerer, and the description remains remarkably consistent throughout the ages. The Shining Trapezohedron is wondrous and terrible, and the best documented of artifacts these authors have come across. That is not to say we know what it does or how it works. We do not. Perhaps no man, no human, can. The Trapezohedron is most likely the oldest artifact included in this work, for it comes from a time before men walked the Earth. Scholars find many rare and oblique references to this unearthly artifact, hinting that the stone appears again and again throughout the ages.

Ragged and shaped by unknown hands, the stone serves as a scrying mirror to the cosmos. There is, it is said, no space or time into which this stone cannot peer... if one appeases the god who dwells within. For he is that which is known as the haunter of the dark. The crawling chaos that is Nyarlathotep.

But this elder god demands blood and sacrifice for the arcane knowledge of nigh visual and aural omnipotence. Those who bargain with such forces, as we have noted, never get the better end of the deal. Space and time are contained in but a rock. Could it be we all live inside?

VISIONS OF THE UNIVERSE

The Shining Trapezohedron is a material artifact embodying a casting of *Visions of Exalted Wisdom* (see page 106) bound with considerable skill. It can be used by any sorcerer with the Sorcery skill at Expertise 1+, as a Simple (Do) Sorcery test. Using the artifact grants the sorcerer two questions as per the spell, but carries a risk of a sanity-blasting sight.

Every use of the artifact forces the player to roll 1 . If an effect is rolled, the Trapezohedron gains Momentum equal to the number of questions asked that day, which it can use to Display a scene of cosmic horror. All looking upon the Trapezohedron are subject to this threat.



GIRDLE OF WOMEN'S HAIR

No simple girdle, this potent artifact has passed through many hands, sorcerers and others. A strangely wrought golden serpent head serves as the buckle, while the belt itself seems woven from women’s hair. Gemstones festoon the belt. One can feel the sorcerous power running through the girdle, and such a sensation may cause one handling it to reflexively cast it away.

What strange power does an even stranger object impart? Chiefly, a protection from sorcery. It is curious that sorcery can only combat itself, but perhaps only the Outer Dark knows its limits. Stroking the lustrous hair gives the wearer another chance at shrugging off fell hypnotism, too, should he have mind to do so.

GIRDLE OF WOMEN'S HAIR

Any d20 that fails to roll a success when resisting mesmerism or the *Enslave* spell can be re-rolled once if wearing this artifact. The result of the second roll must be accepted.

THE STAFF OF MANY NAMES

Perhaps the second oldest artifact described within these pages, the origin of the “staff of many names” is unknown, and it has born many titles as it has made its way through history. Able to be carved, yet apparently indestructible, it has seen ages come and go, made of material from the oldest era... even said to have been from the trunk of the first tree in the world, while others claim that it is from wood that grew under another sun, on a world other than the Earth.

In appearance, the staff is more than a yard long, and as thick as an axe or spear-haft. Up and down its shaft are carved runes and glyphs of unknown provenance, and the wood it is made of is dark gray. Looking upon it overlong is unsettling, and holding it for more than a moment gives a sense of its strange power.

In the Hyborian Age, the staff is viewed as a token against the undead, a force against necromancy. Given the proliferation of evil items associated with the Outer Dark, which many a volume mention, it is comforting for some to believe that some counter to these also exists.



THE STAFF OF MANY NAMES

The staff is a powerful magical artifact which, whether ultimately benevolent or not, refuses to aid those it deems evil or unworthy. It is equivalent to a regular staff in its physical properties, but has the following magical abilities:

- **It serves as a Familiar as per the talent on page 308 of the CONAN corebook.**
- **It is indestructible.**

- **When in the presence of creatures from the Outer Dark, it will bolster any Discipline test its wielder makes by +1d20.**
- **Should the staff strike such a creature of the Outer Dark or undead, the attack counts as an enchanted one (see *Magic Artifacts* on page 143 of the CONAN corebook) and the staff gains the Vicious 1 Quality.**
- **When striking undead creatures, the staff allows the wielder to re-roll any  that fail to get a result, but the second roll must be accepted.**

CHAPTER 3

KINGDOMS OF DREAM & NIGHTMARE

The man did not at once reply. His dreamy sensuous gaze rested on Natala, and he drawled, “Of all my rich visions, this is the strangest! Oh, girl of the golden locks, from what far dreamland do you come? From Andarra, or Tothra, or Kuth of the star-girdle?”

“What madness is this?” growled the Cimmerian harshly, not relishing the man’s words or manner.

— “Xuthal of the Dusk”

There are, of course, a hundred thousand storied kingdoms stretched across the great gulfs of time as measured by man. Each among them has its tale to tell, of kings and queens, rebellions put down by tyrants, heights of culture and civilization followed by the concomitant fall thereof. Yet beyond them all are kingdoms persisting beyond time as measured by man. Indeed, such kingdoms have no maps in the dusty libraries of the great cities of the Thurian continents; for these realms, the map is the territory and the whole of it exists in a space not quite real.

Collectively, these are called the Kingdoms of Dream and Nightmare, though they have been known by many other names down the decades and eons. Some texts place a kingdom here or there on a long-forgotten map, but these are apocrypha. Astrologers, some pre-human, have placed these kingdoms among the night sky, Kuth of the Star-girdle being the most common example. They say these kingdoms exist in the voids above, but this is mere speculation... Though it may not be far off the mark. When the people of Yag winged their way across the haunting chasms of space and Outer Dark, they may have passed through Andarra or Tothra or any of a hundred other dream realms whose names are long forgotten.

Menhirs and monolithic henges, both human and otherwise, mark points in the curtain of night where these megalithic builders hoped to draw down the Kingdoms of Dream and Nightmare, fettering them to the mortal world

for ease of travel. What incantations or profane summoning activated these portals is dimly remembered even in the emerald tablets of Valusia, but there are other means of access to these worlds.

THINNING REALITY

Also known as oneiric attenuation (as so labeled in only one of the three known copies of the iron-bound volumes of Skelos), the essential sorcery required to travel between this world and those of dream is akin to thinning the hide of a slain beast. Scraping the inside of the skin, the hunters shave layers of leather until the skin is thin enough to be worn comfortably. Imagine a continuation of that process, whereby the flesh is thinned to the thickness of silk, and then razored so thin that a single finger could easily push its way through from one side to the other. This is the means of travel. The border between the waking world and the dream realms is eroded until passage is possible.

It is a singular gift of sentient creatures that they may pass this border whilst in sleep. However, such dreamers have little to no control over where they cross or where they go once there. There are those trained to direct their minds, and therefore dreaming bodies, as a man awake navigates with a map. However, your average man, no matter how stout of will, stumbles like a newborn child in snow.

"I too am a son of Jhebbal Sag, out of a fire-being of a far realm. Zogar Sag summoned me out of the Misty Lands. With incantations and sorcery and his own blood he materialized me in the flesh of his own planet."

— “Beyond the Black River”

Like the water-clocks of Nemedia, a source known as *The Book of Eibon* asserts the dream and nightmare realms and those of Earth turn like gears whose teeth occasionally touch. During such times, the two realms catch and briefly sync. This is only the opinion of the sages who wrote said text. It is entirely likely the realms are more like a series of arras, each a curtain that touches only when the right cosmic winds blow. However the arrangement, the worlds do touch and interfere with one another. Passage between our world and that of the night sands, also sometimes called the Misty Realms, is possible.

METHODS OF TRAVEL

Wizards and those who dive into the dark arts no doubt have the most reliable, or “safest”, means of entering these dream worlds, but they do not have the only ones. Throughout the ages, various means of entering the dream worlds have appeared. Means of leaving are, unsurprisingly, less easy to come by. Dreamers have been warned.

Directed Dreams

Lucid dreaming is a term only recently come into the lexicon, and the authors hesitate to use it here. However, there exists a broad tradition of monastic orders who left their bodies during dream and set off where they willed. They were not the puppets of their subconscious minds, but the pilots.

Among the Hyborian Age, certain monks in Khitai seem to possess this ability, as did the priests of Kuthchemes. Shamans, in their way, also direct their dreams and should be considered as different masters of this technique.

Lotus or Golden Liquid

Many cults use lotus in sacred rites to achieve altered states, using this remarkable plant to achieve heightened states of detachment. Its use in sorcery is well known, and it is for this reason that it is so feared, and yet so highly sought-after.



The golden liquid of Xuthal is another matter. Its express purpose seemed to be to heal and preserve those lost in lotus dreams. The mortal coil must continue to thrive, or at least survive, while the dreamer is lost in realms such as Kuth. Ironically, the development of this liquid may have enabled the addiction of the citizens of this decadent city. It is, however, quite rare. The secrets of its making lost to time.

The many uses of the lotus are described on page 166 of the *Conan* corebook and the golden wine of Xuthal appears on page 93 of this volume.

Spells and Artifacts

Spells and artifacts, such as talismans, can also transport a dreamer consciously to dream worlds. The talisman need be something representative of both the dreamer and the destination. For example, the dreamer's hair bound in flowers that grow in Kuth (no easy feat to get those) could make a fetish taking the dreamer there.

Artifacts, on the other hand, can be more neutral, but are thus infused with great power and are quite rare. Certain dreaming stones, lenses, and other small rare objects may be imbued with such power. However, the most reliable physical transports come in the form of large standing stones such as henges and obelisks. Deep in the Pictish woods, for millennia, civilized men have spoken of stone circles which take the sleeping to worlds unimaginable. Perhaps such legends were true. Included in this volume, the authors have researched verifiable (a relative term here to be sure) artifacts serving as dreaming portals.

WAKING FROM THE WORLDS

Far more was written on the subject of entering these worlds than leaving them. Powerful spells and artifacts often offer a reliable way out, should one survive to begin with. Yet far more methods of entry offer no such portals home. Waking from an aware or "lucid" state in these realms is not as simple as waking after a restful night's sleep.

There are fragments from early versions of *The Book of Eibon* that refer to guides in these worlds who, for a price, offer dreamers a way home. Anchors to the waking world, too, are written of, though the authors have not found the nature of these.

Intrepid dreamers be warned.

Ancient Portals

There are places in the dark corners of the Earth that intersect with these worlds. Some are marked by boulders worn down by time, but, if one looks closely, one can see they were once decorated — though so long ago that it was with no human hands.

Deep in the jungles of Kush, such a place exists in tribal legend. In the deserts of Hyrkania, too, such a place of intersection is said to be. Others are mentioned in books written in a tongue no human could ever speak. The Great Old Ones knew of such locales, but where they are now is not among things man was meant to know.

GETTING LOST IN DREAMS

While many traverse the border between this world and the dream worlds, few return. Getting lost in the nightmare lands is all too easy. A veritable population of the lost have collected over the eons in these Kingdoms of Dream and Nightmare and other demesnes — locales unknown to most folk of the Hyborian Age. Some of these travelers have not aged in all the years they've been trapped, and some sorcerers have even purposely entered the Kingdoms to escape the ravages of time. Returning is, regrettably, by no means guaranteed.

Tales of ghosts and apparitions are attributed to the lost coming near to the world again, though few scholars of the age are even aware of such theories.

Of those Kingdoms of Dream and Nightmare, little concrete information is known. It is little wonder that such realms built of deep imaginings of the mind refuse to reify under the observation of men. It is perhaps best to say that the kingdoms defy solidification, categorization, or codification. Several attempts to map them have failed over the eons, though extant maps are sometimes found in dusty tomes. The shifting borders of these planes are not the sorts of thing one can accurately record. Speculation runs the gamut of possibilities as to how the kingdoms and realms interact.

And yet these kingdoms persist — in story and song, in the very fabric of the bones of the human species. We know that they are there; some shadow realms forever haunting our own.

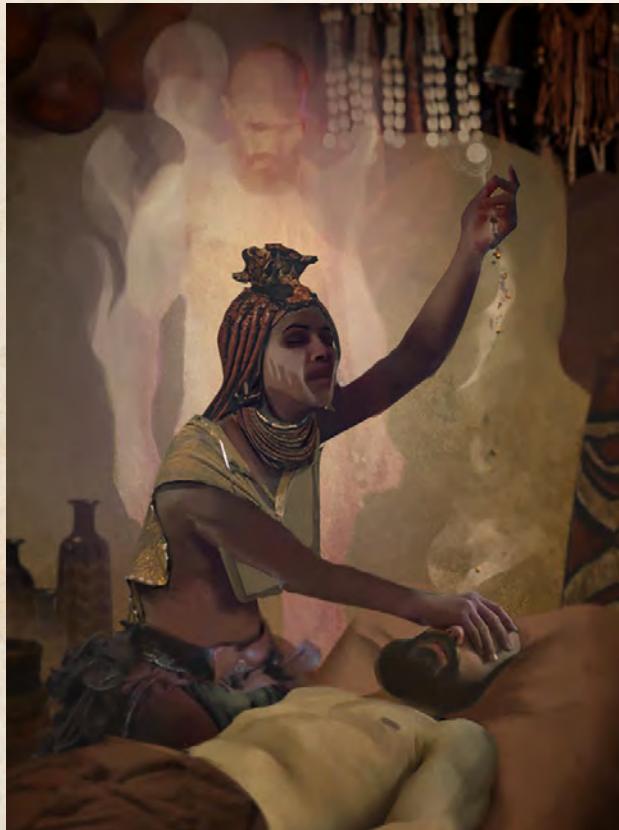


THEORIES OF SORCERY AND DREAM

It should be noted that the difference between sorcery and dreams is, for all intents and purposes, unidentifiable. Several theories hold that sorcery draws its power from dream, that objects of the imagination, are pushed through the barrier of dream and reality like a solid object through wet muslin. According to this hypothesis, mankind produces or directly influences a collective dreamscape which can be accessed by all during sleep, and manipulated by those in the know. Sorcerers, then, tap the raw *ylem* of dream — the very stuff from which the universe is formed — to take forms from that world and impose them on our own in the form of magic.

Of course, such a theory ostensibly refutes the long-held idea that all sorcery draws on the Outer Dark for power. To those who see these two ideas as incompatible, a third option emerged — the dream realm is a buffer area, an outland between the Outer Dark and our world. Tapping directly into the Outer Dark leads to madness, but a sorcerer cloaking in the mantle of dream may interact with the Outer Dark forces at less risk of insanity.

All or none of these theories may be true. Who is to say?



THE THREE KINGDOMS

The following pages describe three of the more commonly known otherworlds: Kuth of the Star-girdle, Andarra, and Tothra. These are perhaps only fleeting rumors that sorcerers or scholars might encounter while immersed in their studies, or they may be actual locales whose positions are bargained from demons of the Outer Dark. Perhaps player character sorcerers may endeavor to visit one or more of these kingdoms, whether seeking enlightenment, lore, or refuge. It may be also that a visit to one of these places is inadvertent, perhaps the result of some encounter with a powerful supernatural entity or intervention from a potent god or demigod, should such things exist.

KUTH OF THE STAR-GIRDLE

The best-documented of the dream realms, Kuth of the Star-girdle is the only kingdom which is given a seemingly psychical locale. In ancient astronomical charts, the "Star-girdle" refers to a constellation. Tradition holds that shamans, sorcerers, and even common dreamers traveled to these stars and brought back knowledge of what they found there. Some of these voyagers suggest it is indeed a psychical place visited in dream, while others suggest the stars we see are but echoes of that dream world and not, in themselves, actual places.

The common theme across most cultures is that Kuth is the realm of mortal dreams. Sentient creatures visit the realm during sleep, though few bring back tangible memory of their visits. The topography of Kuth appears to change with the dreamer. Any given culture may paint its worldview upon Kuth to some extent. A Nordheimer, for example, might visit a vast wasteland of ice and snow, while a Kushite finds a fertile jungle of cascading waterfalls and brightly colored birds. These differing interpretations may in fact be separate parts of Kuth, existing for a time as long as that culture is extant on Earth, and then morphing into something new or vanishing altogether.

It may serve to broadly divide Kuth into two different potentialities. The first is a realm created by the dreaming minds of collective mankind. The second a realm existing apart from man and which man only visits, contributing something of his own psyche to the landscape for a time. In either case, humans go to Kuth. They plunge into that world unconscious, and only a few of strong mental vigor have the ability to shape aspects of that place and bring them forth to Earth.

When casting the *Artifice of Yag* spell (page 101), the sorcerer brings forth part of the dream world and reifies it in

KUTH AS A HERO OR GOD

People of the Hyborian Age were relatively unconcerned with the reality of their gods. Most believed they existed, but some also considered the possibility that they did not. The Hyborian Age gods, including those of kingdoms not properly Hyborian, had smaller sects; their priests, though wielding political power, rarely sought to expand their local religion as a rule, and saw fit that their gods might exist within a panoply of others, or, in fact, be but alien creatures of the Outer Dark.

Kuth himself is an example of such. Kuth is mentioned as far back as the Thurian Age, the time of Atlantis and Lemuria. Lemuria, so far from Atlantis, knows him as Kuthera, though the similarity is certainly not coincidental. To the folk of that age, Kuth was not a place, but a man. He ruled the kingdom of dream which holds his name. The nature of his rule has long since vanished, and it is not certain whether he ever had physicality at all. Nevertheless, in the scant remnants that survived the Cataclysm, Kuth is identified as a god or demi-god of a previous culture. The only culture ever to have been labeled as worshiping him is that of Kuthchemes. No doubt, many cultures were trod under the sandaled feet of Thurian Age conquerors, and Kuth's legacy was thus conscripted to the pulverized pumice resulting from their expanding empires.

the here and now. By shaping such primordial mental ylem, the sorcerer affects the very real world of the Hyborian Age (or any other which they find themselves in). Again, this is but a theory. If true, the Yaggite known as Yag-kosha may be a powerful dreamer who imparted his talents to the wizard Yara. Yara's tower came into being in merely day because it was drawn from Kuth to Zamora via the medium of the sorcerer's mind and body. How else might one explain a splendidorous tower of glassy gemstone erected in an evening where none stood before?

An Antechamber to the Other Worlds

If Kuth is the realm of mortal dreams, it is no accident that it serves as a portal to the other dreaming realms. Man must first access that oneiric terrain most familiar to him before pushing deeper into the vast sea of the collective unconscious and reaching worlds drawn wholly in the charcoal of minds both inhuman and unknowable.

A partial account from the days of ancient Acheron indicates Kuth may have long been the antechamber to the realm of Andarra, Tothra, and beyond. Written by an unknown source, the fragments remaining of this document refer to

THE STAR MAIDENS AND THE PLEIADES

The Star Maidens — identified with the seven stars in a constellation — are sometimes ascribed as the object of Kuth's advances. Other times, they are known as his sisters. In nearly every account, the Star Maidens favor mortal women with their powers, not men. Several papers posit our notion of witchcraft traces all the way back to the feminine worship of the Star Maidens and the power they imparted to their worshipers.

During the Hyborian Age, several mystery cults devoted to the Star Maidens remain. The members of these cults, like the dreaming priests of Kuthchemes, can travel back and forth from Kuth but only when the Star Maidens are visible in the night sky. The cults are only for females and insist that the dreams of women are different from, and more powerful than, the dreams of men.

In the religion of the Star Maiden cults, the Seven Maidens forever keep Kuth's advances at bay. He is not the ruler of the dream world that bears his name, but a puppet of the seven sisters. In many civilized kingdoms, such knowledge is heretical.

The way of the Star Maidens to Kuth, is to dance under their likeness in the night sky. The road is supposedly among the safest routes to any of the dream worlds. The cults go so far as to claim they can consort with the dreams of Andarra without corruption, though this seems extremely unlikely.

The most outrageous claim of the cult is that an age existed before the Thurian during which women, not men, ruled both the dream and waking worlds. It was the abuse of their powers which caused the first cataclysm, upending this lost age, and ushering in the male-dominant Thurian and Hyborian Ages. The next age, heralded by yet another cataclysm-to-come, shall return the world of the waking and the dreamer to the female bosom, though not in a gentle way. The daughters of the Star Maidens have been the slaves of men for too long. Vengeance is near at hand... when the stars are right.

"dreaming priests" that traveled to other realms via Kuth, and who served as guides for others on similar journeys. These dreaming priests were from the city of Kuthchemes, existing contemporaneously with Acheron, though separate in rule. Kuthchemes, according to this account, is an extension of the name Kuth. In the tongue of the people of Kuthchemes, the name translated to "the seat of Kuth".

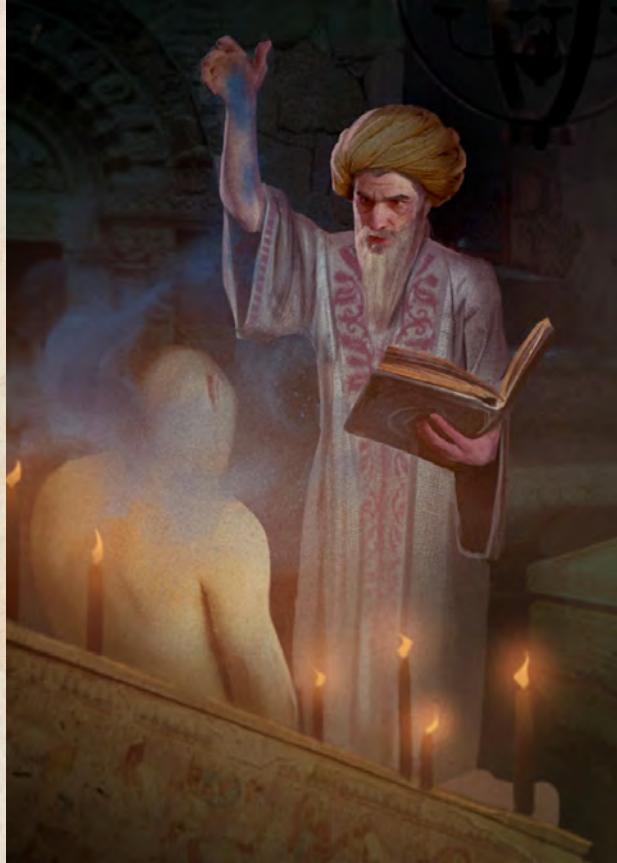
The unnamed Acheronian scholar goes on to note that a foul being from the Outer Dark, possibly residing in

Kuthchemes, was brought forth accidentally by the dreaming priests who could not send him home. The noted sorcerer, Thugra Khotan, is in this account the last great dreaming priest to venture into Kuth from Kuthchemes. The sleeping potion he drowned down preserved his mortal coil by tethering it to Kuth for some three thousand years. In this way, he was able to survive and plague the latter Hyborian Age. The latter is the speculation by other scholars but, if the Acheronian document holds water, Kuthchemes was something of a pilgrimage destination for dreamers seeking passage into Kuth and the other dreaming realms. A few scattered references of pilgrims traveling from Python to Kuthchemes exists, though none are considered canonical.

Kuth in the Hyborian Age

The city known as Xuthal is aware of Kuth of the Star-girdle, though its people seem not to worship Kuth or his demesne in any way we can recognize. Instead, that culture fell into hedonistic dream, its inhabitants drinking potions of viscous gold fluid to take them into dream more often than they existed awake. Such are the perils of dream travels, for what mortal delight can compare to that of our imaginations?

Many shamanistic traditions of the barbarian cultures suggest influence from Kuth. His ability to travel between the waking world and the world of mortal dream at will,



for example, is not unlike the shamanistic ability to enter an other-space and perceive that which conscious minds cannot. From the Black Kingdoms to the Picts, witch-doctors, shamans, and “medicine men” are often attributed with the ability to peer into another realm attached to ours but somehow different. Some linguists have even traced the word Kuth into barbaric languages, though the work of these “scholars” is not regarded well by most of their peers.

Kuth as the Realm of the Dead

There exists scarcely a culture in Earth's history that does not have some vision of a world after death. When the mortal coil ends, when the worms take up their role and reduce us to dust, what comes after? In the Hyborian Age, the existence of a world beyond death is very much taken for granted. Whatever travails suffered in the flesh do not end in death. For some religions, such as Mitra, this is a release — the movement to a better place. For others, such as the Cimmerians, the afterlife is a grim, gray place of unceasing struggle.

Regardless of a given culture's views on what comes after the bonds of the living, most people believe the life force, or soul, of a being transports itself from this realm into another afterward. The art of necromancy is obsessed with reversing this process; with somehow stemming the inexorable march toward that other place of bodiless existence.

To the common person, the world of mortal dreams was also that place to which the life force of sentient beings went after death. The times and places where the land of the dead and living intersect therefore become instances of Kuth and the waking world intersecting. All of us shall go to Kuth after we have died. In our brief lives, we shall pay a visit there each night, a down payment on a long-term residence.

Contacting the spirit world is therefore a matter of traversing to Kuth with, hopefully, some element of consciousness remaining. Sorcerers may ask questions and favors of the dead and, given enough power, draw them back to the mortal world for a time. So, too, strong emotion may cause a tear between these two worlds, enabling brief visits from one world into the next. Perhaps there are forces — love, magic, and even hate — eroding the barrier between the dead world of dream and the waking world of living.

This is no small assertion, however. If true, it offers the beginnings of an explanation for the afterlife. If we dream in the world of the dead, then the barrier is not so impregnable as we think. This life, however we so encapsulate it, is but a glimpse, an eye-blink into a world that, while seeming to be the end all and be all of reality, is perhaps the reverse.

In any event, the legends of Kuth, those that we may yet find, suggest the dead live in the world of dreams, too.

We visit not merely the unconscious ether of the collective race, but that place to which we go when we die. How the two worlds interrelate aside from these few junctures is no doubt the subject of a great many lives. There are those sorcerers who have, in the Hyborian Age and elsewhere, attempted to resurrect entire epochs. Perhaps that very thing is possible. Perhaps what we know of time is but a constraint placed upon us while here.

ANDARRA, REALM OF IMMORTAL DREAM

Do demons dream and, if so, where do they dream? Moreover, do their dream worlds intersect with our own? If so, Andarra is that realm. The mortal mind is not likely to comprehend any conscious thought of a demon, to say nothing of the workings of their unconscious mind should they even have them. Surely, a place made up of the dreams of a demon or elder god would be mad, chaotic realms of no morality and fewer laws. Perhaps, the entire realm of Andarra exists only in the mind of those Outer Gods who yet lie dreaming. What then happens to that world, and our own, when they wake?

TOTHRA, REALM OF TIME

Among the little-known philosophers of Khitai, certain schools of thought hold that dream permeates all time. In dream, weeks might happen in the flutter of an eye. We dream of times past and times yet to come. These philosophies hold two things: we cannot know if we are truly alive while awake or truly alive in dream, and the notion we possess of time does not apply in dream.

The word Tothra is mysterious to most scholars, though some few have discovered dead languages where it meant "time". While the connection is tenuous, the experiences of those who claim to have visited Tothra suggest it is, in some way, a realm of time.

Shamans travel to many worlds in their search for truth and wisdom for the tribe. Among the most precious of these places visited is a realm in which times flexes and stretches like newly cut flesh before tanning. There, they can predict whether the winter ahead is harsh, when the rains shall fall, and what prey animals shall migrate early due to hunting by rival tribes. These shamans are widely believed to visit Tothra.

Time Out of Joint

One cannot imagine Tothra, only an approximation. Take all the events of one's life and ball them up, crush them, then scatter them across a clear river. That is Tothra, except every life there is thus and the river is the stars in the sky. All times converge in Tothra. When tales speak of time-traveling

THE DREAMS OF GODS

The sorcerer is likely only concerned with the philosophy and metaphysics of a place such as Andarra as directly pertains to their work. Indeed, most sorcerers have as little practical knowledge of Andarra as they do of how magic truly interacts with the waking world. Instead, they are making deals with beings in this place while those beings rest and are, perhaps, more willing to accede to mortal requests. They may likewise tap into this realm to alter the minds of those in the waking world, though, serving as conduit, they would be well advised not to let too much of that dream stuff get on them.

In either case, the sorcerer is an interlocutor between worlds, offering that which the Outer Dark demands in return for favors in the world of men. What price is later exacted remains between the sorcerer and the demon. Surely, few sorcerers come out ahead in such bargains, if they are bargains at all.

A toll is inevitable, though. The sorcerer gives some access to the mortal realm that, for whatever reason, the dreaming god did not possess. This arrangement is mostly one-sided, however.

wizards going back and forth through the time stream, they are in Tothra.

Dreamers in Tothra might glimpse the end of Atlantis, the rise of the Sons of Aryas, or the rise of the Egyptian pyramids. All things are possible. Time here is soft, and it is only the conventions of the human mind which keep most from going where they will in time in Tothra. That convention, and the beasts lurking there.

Tothra is populated with all beasts from all eras. Dinosaurs lurk next to saber-tooth, next to steel beasts no Hyborian can properly imagine. It is a dangerous place. It is the Mesozoic mixed with the Thurian mixed with an age far off when man's time finally ends.

For all these reasons, it is a place maddening to minds made of lesser mettle.

People and Places and Temporality

If Tothra is a place out of time, the accounts of dreamers make more sense. Men have met their children and great-great-great grandchildren in Tothra. One scholar from Nemedia speaks of seeing a man much like himself living in a high mountain temple. He knew the man to be his descendant, but the generations between them were uncountable. So, places and people are fluid inside Tothra, its reality pliant and mutable based on the one journeying there. If there is topography, like the other dream realms,



it is an ever-shifting one. Like dunes, once trod upon their shape is lost. Once one steps into the world, one can no longer map it.

Temporal Implications for Sorcery

To move though time, or even look through its stream, is a powerful sorcery, indeed. The future and the past are the sorcerer's window. This alone has power, but what if he enters and brings something out? Like a sorcerer might push a dream object into reification, a sorcerer can, in theory, draw an object out of time. Yet time, or perhaps nature or the gods, knows this is unnatural. As we have said time and again, the unnatural is not meant for this world and this world knows it. Thus, such objects, people, or even places so pulled tend to erode, or break, or go mad. Some few persist as they were.

OTHER DREAM WORLDS

Surely, if Kuth, Andarra, and Tothra exist, other dream realms lie in the outlands *ylem* of the mind, as well. Such hinterlands are no doubt inhabited by their own horrors and marvels. Perhaps they are simply other names for places persisting since the beginning of time.

The world Conan visits in "The Frost-Giant's Daughter" could be the realm of Ymir and have nothing to do with Kuth of the Star-girdle. The sleepy places named by those decadent dwellers of Xuthal may be nothing like what is described here. If there are dream worlds, they are no doubt many and varied. Like stars in the night, what inhabits them cannot be cataloged in a book, or a hundred books, or a thousand libraries.

KULL AND BRAN MAK MORN

A story of Kull's reign tells of his trip through the ages. Summoned by a spell cast by a Pictish shaman, Kull traveled all the way from the Thurian Age to a time, hundreds of thousands of years later, where he met the Pict chieftain Bran Mak Morn (a descendant of Kull's closest friend and ally, Brule the Spear-slayer, a legendary Pictish warrior). Kull fought alongside Bran against the Romans, then was drawn back to his era when his purpose was fulfilled.

Similarly, there is a man named James Allison who has incarnated throughout time, experiencing these many lives with a dawning awareness. He has been Brachan the

Kelt, the *Æsir* called Genseric the Strong One, Gorm of the Bison People, Hengibar the Wanderer, and others. In these and other lives, Allison fought at Marathon, Cannae, Clontarf, Agincourt, Austerlitz, and Gettysburg. He fought alongside the Macedonians beneath Alexander's banner, and rode cattle down the Chisholm Trail.

The important realization for the sorcerer is the possibility exists. The slim chance is there that humankind, through sorcery, has access to a world of amalgamated eras and, if one has a strong mind, may untangle them and take oneself to times long past and those not yet to be.

CHAPTER 4

SORCERERS IN THE MORTAL KINGDOMS

“By black, primordial sorcery that spawned and thronged in the depths of this black primal forest, that painted shaman had transferred the soul of a captured enemy into the foul body of a serpent. It was the revenge of a fiend. And the screaming of the blood-mad Picts was like the yelling of all hell’s demons.”

— “Wolves Beyond the Border”

Sorcerer, shaman, medicine man, and mesmerist — the role of wizard goes by many names in various cultures, but all Hyborian Age kingdoms know those who trade in the dark arts. The kinds of sorcery practiced in each region differ, as do the nature of sorcerers in said culture. Broadly, if one travels the dusty Road of Kings, they find sorcery and sorcerers distrusted, but there are exceptions. Particularly in “barbaric” cultures, shamans are valuable members of tribal society.

Yet nowhere is sorcery fully embraced by all. The layman always reserves at least suspicion for anything that touches the Outer Dark. Magic is uncommon, unnatural, and misunderstood across all cultures. A fist of naked steel, a cutpurse in the night — these are things men can understand. Speaking with creatures whose very visage can drive a man mad? Only the powerful or the foolish would entertain such notions.

It is an era in which men cut their own life from the tapestry of fate by might and guile. Those who circumvent this natural order are mistrusted and feared. A man or woman cannot take shortcuts in this life and not be viewed as an unnatural cheat by their peers. Of course, few sorcerers would call any simple mortal their peer to begin with. From the coast of the Western Ocean to Khitai, those who understand any element of how the unnatural intersects with the rational world are few and singular. The following

are ways in which sorcery manifests in the kingdoms of that lost and mythic age...

THE BARBARIAN LANDS

As a people, so-called barbaric cultures believe what they can see, and mistrust forces they cannot. When a form of sorcery is practiced, it is steeped in superstition and reserved for shamans. In the North, a person’s worth is in their body and mind. While tribes value seers and shamans for their abilities to foresee and guide, it is the stout heart and blade alone that are fully trusted.

Shamanistic traditions predominate with the peoples of the North, while some primitive forms of alchemy are practiced on the side. Petty enchantments (see page 163 of the **Conan** corebook) go far in these cultures, while mesmerism is disavowed. Many would-be mesmerists have fallen under a northerner’s blade.

Perhaps it is the cold climate — the ice and snow and mists create a mindset ill-suited to mental illusions — but northerners detest trickery. Meet someone with a blade if you are to meet them at all. Shamans of various tribes also practice precognition and fortune reading in various forms.

Knowing how harsh Ymir's next winter will be is invaluable to a people living in such unforgiving climes.

By nation, the following specifics apply, but a traveler may encounter crossover as they would in civilized lands. Adopting the traits of one's enemy is not for organized armies alone. Barbarians are clever and fight with guile, as well as brawn. A Cimmerian warrior can do well knowing the potential effects of Nordheimer rune magic. The famed adventurer-king Conan took with him his people's suspicion of sorcery as he ventured into the wider world, but he also took their ability to adapt. He is not alone.

CIMMERIA

Of all the northern peoples, Cimmerians use sorcery the least. Their distrust of magic is near legendary in the civilized world, but they do not fear it as such.

Sorcerers in Cimmeria

Called shamans by the Cimmerian tribes, sorcerers in this gray and misty land have very well defined and limited roles. Petty enchantments and small bits of witchcraft form the

basis of Cimmerian sorcery. To pierce the veil of time and look into the possibilities of tomorrow, shamans often invoke Morrigan and Macha's names. Throwing bones might tell a shaman the fortune of a single human or the entire tribe.

Fate is nebulous, though, for Cimmerians, and shamans take this into account. Thus, any prescient visions they receive are not interpreted along a single, linear line. While theirs is a grim outlook — in which the afterlife leads to a land of gray wastes and mists and the gods rarely answer — it is also one of free will. Whatever a shaman reads about tomorrow, he always realizes that man can make what fate he will of this life.

Witchcraft is a mainstay of Cimmerian sorcery, and it is cloaked in superstition. Omens are seen in cloud formations and the patterns flocks of birds make against the slate-colored sky. In these, like bones, the future is read. Forbidden by most tribes is a kind of magic by proxy using straw figures representing one's enemy. By manipulating the created doll, the shaman can inflict harm on — or control — the enemy at a distance. That is the legend, at least. As noted, it is forbidden by most tribes and any that practice such sorcery risk exile by the surrounding tribes.



Relationship to the Outer Dark

Cimmerians do not tolerate shamans who tread close to the Outer Dark. Those practicing forbidden magics are killed or driven from the tribe. In the gray hills, one sometimes encounters such wandering exiles and tales of them are told to frighten children. This is not to say that Cimmerian witchcraft is “good”, only that it tends away from direct interaction with the raw power of the dark realm. It is no accident that Cimmerian shamanism is comparatively weak — there is no power like that found in the cosmos’ darkest shadows.

NORDHEIM

The Vanir and *Æsir* have a more robust magic than the Cimmerians. A combination of bardic magic, witchcraft, and rune magic, Nordheimer shamans provide both guidance and religious stewardship for their tribes.

Sorcerers in Nordheim

Nordheimer sorcery is inextricably linked with Ymir worship. Whereas the Cimmerian chief god Crom involves himself little in the affairs of men, in the North, Ymir’s influence is more readily felt. From Ymir comes written language in the form of runes and the right to invoke a blood oath. Runes are pervasive in Nordheimer culture. Not only are they written language — a kind of magic all its own — but they themselves represent aspects of fate and cosmology. Reading runes is a common shamanistic process allowing Nordheimers to see the future.

Unlike Cimmerian’s concept of free will, Nordheimers believe in a single strand of fate called, *wyrd*, which is woven at birth for each being.” One shall never know the exact shape of this string, but one shall never deviate from it either.

If fate is inescapable, the consequences of one’s fellows are not. Here enters the blood oath — a rite of vengeance sworn by a wronged person or tribe. A blood oath fuels an individual or tribe with certain powerful vitality until the oath is complete. Many are the enemies that have witnessed a Vanir or *Æsir* fight on after death should have felled them. Such tales are woven into Nordheimer sagas. Of course, taking such an oath ensures that the person’s heart winds up on Ymir’s board and does not make it to Valhalla.

Relationship to the Outer Dark

The most widely known form of dark sorcery is the rejection of a blood oath. One may swear such an oath falsely. Receiving the benefits, the individual seeks not retribution or justice but power for themselves. It is said such men turn into revenants, haunting the icy peaks of the great northern mountains. On the winter wind, their screams of regret are heard on the winter solstice.

HYPERBOREA

The final barbaric land is far Hyperborea, a place of mystery and dark magic. Unlike their other northern cousins, Hyperboreans are known for dealing in magic, particularly the dark arts.

Sorcerers in Hyperborea

Hyperborean witches and warlocks are important members of the social caste of tribal life. However, they also sometimes lead, unlike most witches. This tradition seems to stretch to pre-cataclysmic times, though, ironically, a Hyperborean witch’s oral history is probably the best source for the veracity of this theory. In any case, Hyperborean witches and shamans are powerful individuals. A particular and peculiar aspect of their belief structure focuses on sacred lakes, though outsiders have yet to penetrate the meaning behind these lakes.

In addition to witchcraft, blood magic is extremely prevalent among Hyperborean shamans. Of all the barbaric magic known in the Hyborian Age, Hyperborean shamanism is one of the few that deal directly with the Outer Dark. This makes shamans of this culture both more potent and more feared than most. Some few travelers suggest the power of a Hyperborean witch or warlock rivals that of a genuine sorcerer.

Relationship to the Outer Dark

Hyperborean sorcery draws directly on the Outer Dark. Sacrifice is common, and the skulls of enemies are collected and piled in mounds from which witches draw power. Some portion of the life essence of an enemy remains attached to the skull, and a pile of them can serve like a lightning rod. Though called by different names, some Hyperborean gods are mere masks for Great Old Ones and the grotesqueries that come with them.

THE BLACK KINGDOMS

South of Stygia lie the Black Kingdoms, both a specific territory and a collective term for several nations. Largely tribal in nature, theirs is a tradition of witchcraft, shamanism, and powerful worship. The lush, fertile terrain imbues their sorcerous beliefs with a focus on life force and essence. Likewise, forms of animism and spiritualism infuse the culture of the myriad tribes comprising various nations.

Most tribes discourage the darkest arts, though some embrace the Outer Dark. Damballah, he who is named Set in the north, is particularly powerful and evil. Unlike the “uncivilized” cultures of the North, the southern kingdoms’

relationship with sorcery is integral to nearly all aspects of their culture. A unique form of magic practiced here is the progenitor of *vudun*, though this name is not common.

Sorcerers in the Black Kingdoms

The witch doctor is an iconic role in nearly every tribe and kingdom south of Stygia. These sorcerers are usually men, though some sub-cultures allow or even prefer women. These witch doctors function as healers, priests, and conduits to other worlds. They alone see the true face of the creator and other gods inside all things. These spirits, or *orishas*, take many forms and go by many names.

In some belief systems, they are all aspects of one or a handful of deities; in others, they are a large pantheon of polytheistic deities of various specialization. The most feared systems of belief, and the tribes who practice them, know that *orishas* are masks for Elder Gods and Great Old Ones from the Outer Dark. Tribes worshiping Damballah hold this belief.

As everything has a spirit — be it man, beast, or rock, witch doctors understand the sorcerous means of manipulating, stealing, and even trading these spirits. There are oral histories of men whose souls were placed in monkeys, whose bodies then swung from trees and walked on all fours. Similarly, the *zuvembie* is one whose life force has been stolen and directed by the witch doctor. Most such practices at least skirt the Outer Dark. However, witch doctors also take spirits from the sick and mad to heal or relieve them.

Not everything dealing with the *orishas* must touch the Outer Dark, though outsiders rarely understand the nuanced differences. In fact, *orishas* fall along two lines: the first worship the faces of various gods mostly removed from the Outer Dark, while the other branch deals directly with the masks of elder gods, demons, and other natives of the Outer Dark.

Deal-making is central to this form of sorcery. Offerings, trades of information, and the selling of souls all contribute to what amounts to a strange barter system by which the shaman or witch doctor gains certain favors from the *orishas*. One of the most unique deals made is that which allows the *orisha* to “ride” a willing steed. This steed may be the witch doctor or another person. When such a deal is struck, the *orisha* enters the target and possesses them. The consciousness of the human becomes subservient or is temporarily cast into one of the dream realms or the Outer Dark. This is very dangerous sorcery, but the rewards can be enormous.

A rude form of alchemy, known as *bô*, is also found among these cultures. *Zuvembie* creation requires such knowledge, as do some medical techniques.

In such a short space, it is impossible to catalogue the depth and breadth of the many forms of sorcery found in the Black Kingdoms, but this section offers an idea of what potential magics are available to these cultures.

Relationship to the Outer Dark

It is not always easy for a layman, even a native, to discern whether *orishas* represent non-mythos deities. As mentioned, some, like Damballah, are clearly associated with the Outer Dark. Others are less clear. What is certain is that some tribes embrace the sorcerous power of the Outer Dark and are therefore feared by the tribes around them.

THE CIVILIZED LANDS

The supposedly civilized kingdoms are home to the most corrupt, evil, and powerful sorcerers. Perhaps it is civilized man’s thirst for power which drives them to seek the darkest and most profane abilities in the Outer Dark. Whatever the cause, the typical image of a sorcerer is that of a civilized wizard dealing in human sacrifice and the darkest of dark arts.

The civilized lands are likewise the most populated and familiar with the ills of sorcery. While few have direct experience, stories of sorcerers spread like wildfire through the densely populated cities of civilization. Sorcerers themselves may live in such urban areas, or secrete themselves away in remote redoubts where they call upon demons and their ilk for favors and knowledge best left to madmen and the minions of evil. Civilized sorcery, it is commonly known, leads one to become a minion of evil. It is only a matter of time.

Sorcerers in Civilized Lands

Most “sorcerers” in the civilized kingdoms are actually scholars. They may know some theory, a petty enchantment or two, and even a genuine spell, but a real sorcerer would dispatch them with ease. The thing about civilized folk, of course, is they believe what is apparent. That means the cities have a fair number of charlatans who combine a bit of alchemy, prestidigitation, and science to produce effects which appear truly sorcerous. A good many aristocrats have such men in their employ, or even as viziers. But a true sorcerer? Rarer than an honest Zamorian.

Yet, if one is to find a true sorcerer, chances are they are a product of civilization. The needed level of literacy, access to knowledge, and access to others who practice the dark arts means that civilization tends to produce them more frequently. Further, the ambitions of civilized men push those so inclined toward bargains with the Outer Dark. A barbarian may be content with a full belly and a warm bed; those covetous individuals produced by civilization are not.

It should be noted, as well, that civilization is where power in the Hyborian Age resides. When the age ends, and the gleaming towers fall, such will no longer be the case. For now, though, the most power is concentrated in civilized kingdoms. Also, powerful sorcerers often ally with

kings and rulers, making them tolerated by those beneath them. In a barbarian village, a real wizard would be hung for his corruptive influence. Of course, this does happen in civilization, too, but wizards living there have learned to hide their true abilities until they are potent enough to have no fear of mobs.

ZAMORA

Zamorians have some familiarity with magic from both bloodline and history. Zamora's "towers of spider-haunted mystery" are sometimes home to wizards such as Yara. Zamorian religious cults, too, have their own bargains with the Outer Dark. Where Stygia has a sorcerous ruling caste, Zamora has a healthy respect and fear of those wizards who aspire to rule.

TURAN

Turan is an interesting case for several reasons. It is a kingdom that commingles East and West, as well as barbarism and civilization. While the Bori swept out of the North in the millennia after the Cataclysm and founded the Hyborian kingdoms, this happened so long ago it is barely remembered. The Hyrkanian founding of Turan, on the other hand, is comparatively recent. Turan therefore combines views on sorcery that fit both barbaric and civilized views.

It also mixes Eastern and Western sorcery. Thus, one finds mesmerists and necromancers, summoners and hypnotists, all inside the courts of Turanian rulers. Citizens in a city might see wizardry as part of civilization's corruption, or they may view it as something unnatural — an affront to the steppe nomads from which they descend. How a Turanian will react to sorcery or in what way a Turanian sorcerer manifests is idiosyncratic, based on the aspects of their culture they choose to focus upon.

Sorcery in Civilized Religion

A moment needs to be taken to discuss the way in which sorcery infiltrates organized religion. While shamans in uncivilized worlds routinely bind religion and sorcery, it is a bit different with the mighty churches and cults of great cities and their rulers. Priests, as a rule, do not practice sorcery. In fact, they may be expelled from their orders for doing so. Orastes, once known to Conan, was so expelled and wound up stealing the Heart of Ahriman (see page 14) from under the Temple of Mitra.

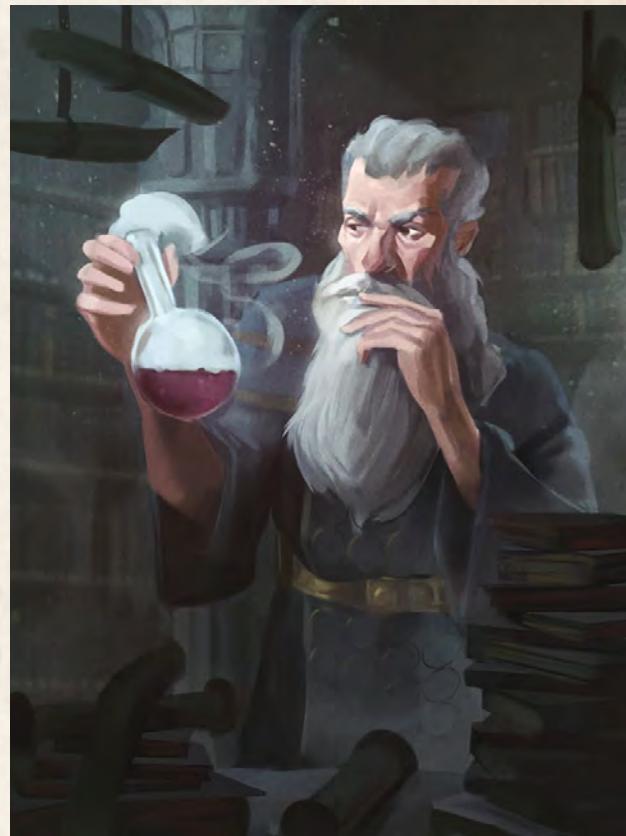
Yet many priests seek power, and playing on belief is a quick and efficient way to gain that power. Some few take the next step and decide that the gods themselves — or at least Outer Dark natives playing gods — can deliver more power unto them. They sometimes prove themselves right.

CONAN AND SORCERY

While Conan is a barbarian, most of his encounters with sorcery occur while in civilization, especially when he is king. The presence of wizards in the civilized world sheds some light on their relationship with the nations of the age. In both "The Scarlet Citadel" and "Phoenix on the Sword", Conan encounters sorcerers bent on powers they plan to employ to wrest control of kingdoms from their rulers or populace.

This is important, because it demonstrates what the powerful sorcerer wants from the civilized world: to rule it. Xaltotun, Tsotha-lanti, and Thoth-Amon all seek power over men. Sorcery and civilization is not merely the quest for knowledge of the Outer Dark, but the use of that knowledge to become a ruler of men. In this way, for all their sorcerous aspirations and exploration of the unnatural, a sorcerer among the civilized seeks despotism as any other would-be ruler. In this, their common, corrupted humanity is displayed.

Conan himself, as king, was the barbaric antidote to all sorts of civilized corruption. In the case of sorcerers, he was often the only force able to stand against them.



Where is the line between such a wizard and his religion? We must take it on a case-by-case basis. Know, too, that a priest can demonstrate sorcerous power through technology and science. That does not make them a wizard, but puts them in the camp of those who also pretend to have powers they do not have. Not every “wizard-priest” need actually bargain with the Outer Dark. They might merely understand a bit of alchemy and the science of optics.

Relationship to the Outer Dark

Civilized sorcerers often have the greatest access to knowledge and thus more often reach the Outer Dark. In short, civilized sorcerers are almost universally evil. Seeking ultimate power in the corrupted kingdoms of the age leads inexorably to that umbra known as the Outer Dark. While these men and women draw great power forth from that place, they leave behind bits of their mind and soul until nothing truly human remains.

KHITAI

In the mysterious East, the legacy of Lemuria runs stronger than in the West. Those Lemurian refugees, escaping the death of their civilization, brought powerful magic with them to the continent. Much of that knowledge founded the sorcery traditions found in Khitai.

The Khitan mind is nearly as alien to the West as that of pre-human cultures. This is an exaggeration, of course, but one that highlights the stark difference between the two cultures. In Khitai, a history of accepted sorcery exists. Herbalists and mesmerists, for example, are not regarded with the fear and suspicion they are in the West. Having men of such knowledge in the courts of rulers is also common.

Of course, Khitai knows of the Outer Dark, and its sorcerers do not rely on herbs and mental tricks alone. Some go further. Some bring forth the dead from other realms and purpose them toward the sorcerer’s own ends. There is nowhere on the continent, regardless of how far away from what one knows, where real sorcery does not corrupt.

Sorcerers in Khitai

As mentioned above, herbalism and mesmerism are strong traditions in Khitai. Poisons that feign death or that open portals to dream worlds, and poisons mixed from strange alchemy are all things a court vizier likely knows how to make. Likewise, bending the mind through tricks, the application of the sorcerer’s will, and esoteric uses of language also features in the daily power of Khitan wizards.

In Khitai, a wizard can wield considerable power and influence without resorting to contact with the Outer Dark. Because the culture has a tradition of such “magic”, a Khitan wizard sticking to such powers can gain positions of respect.

At the very least, the wizard is more likely to keep their head intact than in the West.

Real, powerful magic from the Outer Dark also lures Khitan sorcerers. Immortality and necromancy are two kinds of sorcery pursued in Khitai. The tombs of great emperors are filled with living mummies — not unlike those in Stygia. The pursuit of immortality and the raising of the dead are not, however, unique to Khitai. There are two kinds of magic, though, which are.

Gong Tau

Representing the art of curses and hexes, the practice of *Gong Tau* is feared through Khitai. Children are warned against picking up random dolls and toys, for they may be hexed and pass the hex unto them. In truth, most practitioners of *Gong Tau* pick their targets carefully, for the sorcery relies on the theory of reciprocity. There is a scale in the universe, and one’s deeds will be tallied in the end. It is therefore most common that a hex is placed on someone in return for a slight or injury. To do otherwise tips the scales out of balance and endanger the *Gong Tau* master. There are rumors that one can avoid this through black magic, of course.

Sorcery of the Five Ghosts

In the belief system of much of Khitai, spirits feature prominently. These ethereal dead are classified into five different kinds of ghost. Sorcery of the Five Ghosts uses these spirits to attack and harass the enemy, as well as to scry in places the sorcerer could not otherwise see. A form of necromancy, Five Ghost Sorcery deals with the Outer Dark and the dream land of Kuth. Using dead souls to torment the living is a dubious practice at best. More than one sorcerer found they could not control these spirits and were dragged into the nether realms, forced early into the world of death — the House of Shades.

Relationship to the Outer Dark

While herbalism and mesmerism need not venture into the fringes of the Outer Dark, most other Khitan sorcery does. Just as their civilized western counterparts, Khitan sorcerers seeking real power bargain with things man was not meant to know. The results are as predictable in the East as they are in the West.



THE PICTS

Picts deserve a separate section apart from other barbaric cultures, because they are very, very different. The Pictish people persist from age to age and, in time, may yet prove the end of Hyborian Age civilization. They do this through might, survival skills, and an embrace of both sorcery and the Outer Dark. It has been said by Nemedian scholars that the only thing preventing Picts from becoming the most powerful sorcerers in the world is their lack of actual culture. Perhaps, but their shamans are likely the most powerful of any barbaric culture's. Sorcery is bound up in their beliefs. Many Pictish tribes are at ease with that which lies in the dark corners of the Earth and beyond.

Sorcerers in The Pictish Wilderness

Pictish shamans worship gods, and those gods were old when man was young. Many of these gods are beings from the Outer Dark: Elder Gods and Great Old Ones. This gives the Pict shaman a great deal of power. His gods are those beings with which civilized sorcerers make deals, yet the deals the Picts have in place are very, very old. For one, their bargains with the Great Old Ones are cultural rather than individual. A Pictish shaman more likely seeks power for the tribe, for his people, than for himself. They are still evil, but their evil is spread across an entire people instead of one mind — likewise, the resulting madness. Perhaps this is to blame for the degeneration of the Picts as a race, at least in the eyes of civilized Hyborians.

Some shamans, or lay Picts under shamanic direction, go so far as to mate with these beings from the Outer Dark. This is a degenerate practice, but it produces beings whose blood runs thick with sorcerous power. Again, because the Picts go further than others, they also have greater power than most.

In addition to such nefarious deals and couplings, Pictish shamans focus on the summoning and binding of animals. This practice goes back to the once all-God Jhebbal Sag and need not relate to the Outer Dark. There are many Pictish tribes who practice this, and other more innocuous shamanism, exclusively. Not all Picts are evil, any more than all Zamorians are thieves... but there are tendencies.

Relationship to the Outer Dark

Save only for Stygians, the Pict's relationship to the Outer Dark is the most open and often total. They breed with foul creatures, embrace black magic, and routinely utilize human sacrifice. It is little wonder the Hyborian kingdoms so fear these savages...

STYGIA

All matters considered — both natural and unnatural — there is no nation of this age producing more potent sorcerers than Stygia. Moreover, their ruling structure involves high priests of Set, many of whom also utilize the power of the Outer Dark. Were this not enough, Stygian blood is old, and sorcery pumps it like a fell heart. Not every great sorcerer is Stygian, of course, but the odds of a great sorcerer coming from that stock is higher than for any other nation.

Sorcerers in Stygia

As in other societies, civilized and otherwise, Stygian sorcerers are feared. Unlike elsewhere, Stygian sorcerers also fulfill a societal role. The Black Ring, that circle of which Thoth-Amon was a member, holds power of a sort that rivals the priesthood of Set. Nowhere else do such openly evil wizards travel, live, and operate as freely.

It serves the reader to remember that Old Stygia saw the rise, heyday, and fall of its pupil, mighty Acheron. That Acheron did not conquer Stygia, despite its sorcerous power, and that Stygia is the civilization which survived, speaks to the power of their magic.

Alchemy and poison are common for a Stygian wizard, as is the use of lotus. Perhaps they travel to dream worlds



such as Kuth and Andarra whilst imbibing such potions and potencies? Necromancy is a near legendary practice of Stygian wizards, for who in any city has not heard of Stygian mummies? Immortality is not merely a magic Stygians explore — it is their obsession.

Stygia has forgotten more necromancy than Acheron ever knew. The vampire queen Akivasha, hidden deep within Stygia, is a creature that achieved immortality in a way never recorded elsewhere in the chronicles of the day. Father Set and the Outer Dark are so deeply related that such achievements, such defiance of natural laws, are possible.

Unlike any culture perhaps save the Picts, all this sorcery is also bound up in an organized system of belief centered on Set. A Stygian priest and wizard show little if any light between them. As an authoritarian theocracy, Stygia enforces uncommon control over its people. To be a member of the ruling elite, some exposure to sorcery is inevitable. This is not to say that all priests and rulers are wizards, but it is very likely they are at least advised by one. The integration of sorcery and the aristocracy in Stygia is unparalleled since the days of Acheron. More than one

Nemedian scholar has wondered why they do not, therefore, stride right over the other peoples of the day.

One explanation may be that Stygian society was infiltrated by the serpent men (see pages 7–9). Lesser known in the Hyborian Age than the Thurian, the serpent men erected gleaming cities when man could not yet stand upright. They are as old as time and just as patient. If they sit at the apex of some Stygian monarchies, they may simply bide their time before, as those Nemedian scholars fear, running over the rest of the world.

Relationship to the Outer Dark

Stygia's relationship to the Outer Dark is total. While not every man or woman on the street is corrupted by that cosmic mutagen, society as a whole certainly is. This is an evil empire. Only Acheron could rival the wretchedness of Stygia, and that empire is three millennia gone. One hopes the concomitant corruption infecting all those so close to the Outer Dark prevents the Stygians from expanding their borders from the western shores of the Vilayet to the Western Ocean itself.

Conan glared at him unspeaking, feeling a chill along his spine. Wizards and sorcerers abounded in his barbaric mythology, and any fool could tell that this was no common man. Conan sensed an inexplicable something about him that set him apart — an alien aura of Time and Space, a sense of tremendous and sinister antiquity. But his stubborn spirit refused to flinch.

— The Hour of the Dragon

CHAPTER 5

SORCERERS AND THEIR FOLLOWERS

“Once I was a common man, nor have I lost all human attributes in the numberless eons of my adept-ship. A human steeped in the dark arts is greater than a devil. I am of human origin, but I rule demons.

You have seen the Lords of the Black Circle — it would blast your soul to hear from what far realm I summoned them and from what doom I guard them with ensorcelled crystal and golden serpents.”

— The Master of Yimsha, “The People of the Black Circle”

Sorcery in the mortal kingdoms is a difficult subject to address. Those that seek out the unnatural powers and knowledge afforded by the path of sorcery are labeled as heretics, madmen, and worse. These appellations are not entirely inaccurate. The will, intellect, and obsessiveness needed to achieve even the barest mastery of the occult attract those already inclined towards risk in pursuit of power and knowledge. The study of sorcery is often a solitary one, for the acts and demands of such appall the narrow-minded. But do not confuse those of narrow-minds with those who are simply incapable of conceiving of another perspective on the world.

History shows that the greatest power rises from that of a group: a cabal or religious sect — a group of like-minded scholars dedicated to the discovery of dark secrets, or a court of nobles beholden to a wizard who promises them untold power. All provide advantages for those delving into the labyrinthine mysteries of sorcery, and all are dedicated to the narrow vision of their master. They are no less dangerous for that.

A sorcerer that cultivates a following enjoys the benefits of protection and martial power that a lone practitioner does not. So, too, do those that offer their obedience in exchange for arcane secrets. There is always a price to be paid for such coalitions; most matters of sorcery are double-edged blades, and as likely to harm the wielder as the intended target. The

internal politics of a given group can give rise to resentment and betrayal. In that vein, such groups have harsh edicts in place and harsher punishments for those who break them. Such edicts are often enforced by the supernatural power available to the group, and tales abound of the gruesome fates of those that betray their fellows. Some of them are even true.

“Why have you delayed?” mocked Hadrathus. “Why have you allowed so many of your allies to fall pierced by arrows and spitted on spears?”

“Because blood aids great sorcery!” thundered Xaltotun, in a voice that made the rocks quiver. A lurid nimbus played about his awful head. “Because no wizard wastes his strength thoughtlessly. Because I would conserve my powers for the great days to be, rather than employ them in a hill-country brawl. But now, by Set, I shall loose them to the uttermost! Watch, dog of Asura, false priest of an outworn god, and see a sight that shall blast your reason for evermore!”

— The Hour of the Dragon

FOLLOWERS AND STANDING

Sorcerous cabals are nothing if not pragmatic, regardless of their ethos. As such, standing within the cabal is often based on the power and usefulness of a given follower. As one descends the power structure of a given cabal, the more numerous the followers become. There is but a single Master, a small number of votaries, their acolyte servants, and the group of footpads, mercenaries, and unwitting dupes found among the initiates. For more information on the specifics of these followers, see page 66. Depending upon the nature of the cabal, one rank may be valued over the other. After all, what use is a disloyal servant even if they command a measure of power? Conversely, a loyal follower is likely to prove far more helpful, despite their limited knowledge or influence.

The most useful followers to the master of a given cabal are votaries, who serve as the Master's direct servants and lieutenants. The votaries have different names, depending on the organization, such as "The Four of the Black Circle". Their participation and knowledge of at least some of the inner mysteries of sorcery are quite potent when contributing to the success of a given ritual casting or great work. Acolytes, while not as useful, still contribute significantly. As such typically have some standing within a given cabal despite their limited power.

As noted on page 66, including initiates in a cabal is a chancy proposition when attempting rituals or great works. To these lowly followers, the arcane, soul-destroying energies involved work against any such castings, leading to disaster. Most Masters and their direct lieutenants adhere religiously to this maxim, though in desperate times they may call upon their initiates and damn the risk. Of course, there's always the option of including initiates in the casting in another way... as human sacrifices.

The second benefit is that of occult power. A group of sorcerers can raise far greater occult energies than even the most potent of individual sorcerers. While cases exist of a single sorcerer taking advantage of the life force released by battles and other calamities, it is both easier and safer for a cabal to distribute such demands and thereby lessen the impact. Indeed, a multitude of voices calling into other realms is more readily answered than the demands of one. But, as with the internal strife that sometimes rises within a group, there are invariably those who covet more power than is their share, and thus we return to the necessity of binding pacts, oaths, and consequences to mitigate such.

The third benefit of followers to a sorcerer is that of influence, the ability to extend one's reach beyond the members of their immediate cabal. Curiously, this is most common in the so-called "civilized lands", such as Nemedia and Aquilonia, where sorcery and petty enchantment are ever-present, but openly shunned, political tools as much as paths to supernatural power.

That is not to discount the influence of sorcery in other kingdoms: serpent-haunted Stygia openly practices sorcery, while the spirits and ancestor-worship found in the Black Kingdoms interleaves with the various cultures of that unexplored place extensively. Even the savage Picts have forms of magic they utilize against their enemies. Wherever one travels, the echo of sorcery holds some sway over mundane matters, leaving its indelible mark upon all.

ANATOMY OF A SORCEROUS CABAL

Cabals function in some ways like simplified player characters. Each has three main attributes, ranging on a scale from 1-12:

- **Might** represents the cabal's talent at employing brute force and naked violence.
- **Sorcery** indicates the breadth of the cabal's magical resources and eldritch allies.
- **Influence** measures the degree of social and political power that the cabal has in the region and its ability to induce cooperation by the authorities.

Minor cabals tend to have low (1-3) scores in these attributes, while world-spanning conspiracies have ratings of 10-12.

Cabals can roll attribute tests. To roll an attribute test, the gamemaster rolls 2d20 and adds the relevant attribute and any bonuses granted by Boons. When two cabals oppose each other, their tests are compared and the cabal that generates the highest Momentum wins. If both are equal, both sides fail. Unlike characters rolling attribute tests, cabals rarely roll more than 2d20. For further information on Struggles, see *Struggles* on page 98 of the *Conan* corebook.

Cabals have **Power**. Power is the currency of occult ambition, and represents a nebulous mix of cash, arcane secrets, and willing minions. Cabals draw Power from locations occupied by their Strongholds and expend it to create new Boons, further their dark schemes, and undermine their enemies. A cabal deprived of its sources of Power will rapidly wither into helplessness. While it rarely comes up, a cabal can stockpile no more Power than twice its highest attribute.

Just as player characters have equipment and Talents, cabals have **Boons**. Boons are specific entities, minion groups, special resources, or hidden Strongholds that are in service to the cabal. Cabals buy these Boons with Power and use them to strike at their enemies, fortify their homes, and fulfill the dark commandments of their masters. They can be lost in struggle with other cabals or organizations, and some require a regular upkeep of Power.

The power of a cabal is centered in the Boons known as **Strongholds**. A cabal can have no more than one Stronghold in any given location; it may have multiple safe houses and satellite lairs, but these are all counted as part of its single main Stronghold. A Stronghold is necessary for a cabal to draw Power from the location, though the existence of rival Strongholds in the same region limits the amount of Power that can be used.

Some locations are too small or trifling to provide significant amounts of Power. Even so, Strongholds are vital to the cabal. Those that lose all their Strongholds are effectively destroyed — their members scattered and disorganized, making them easy prey.

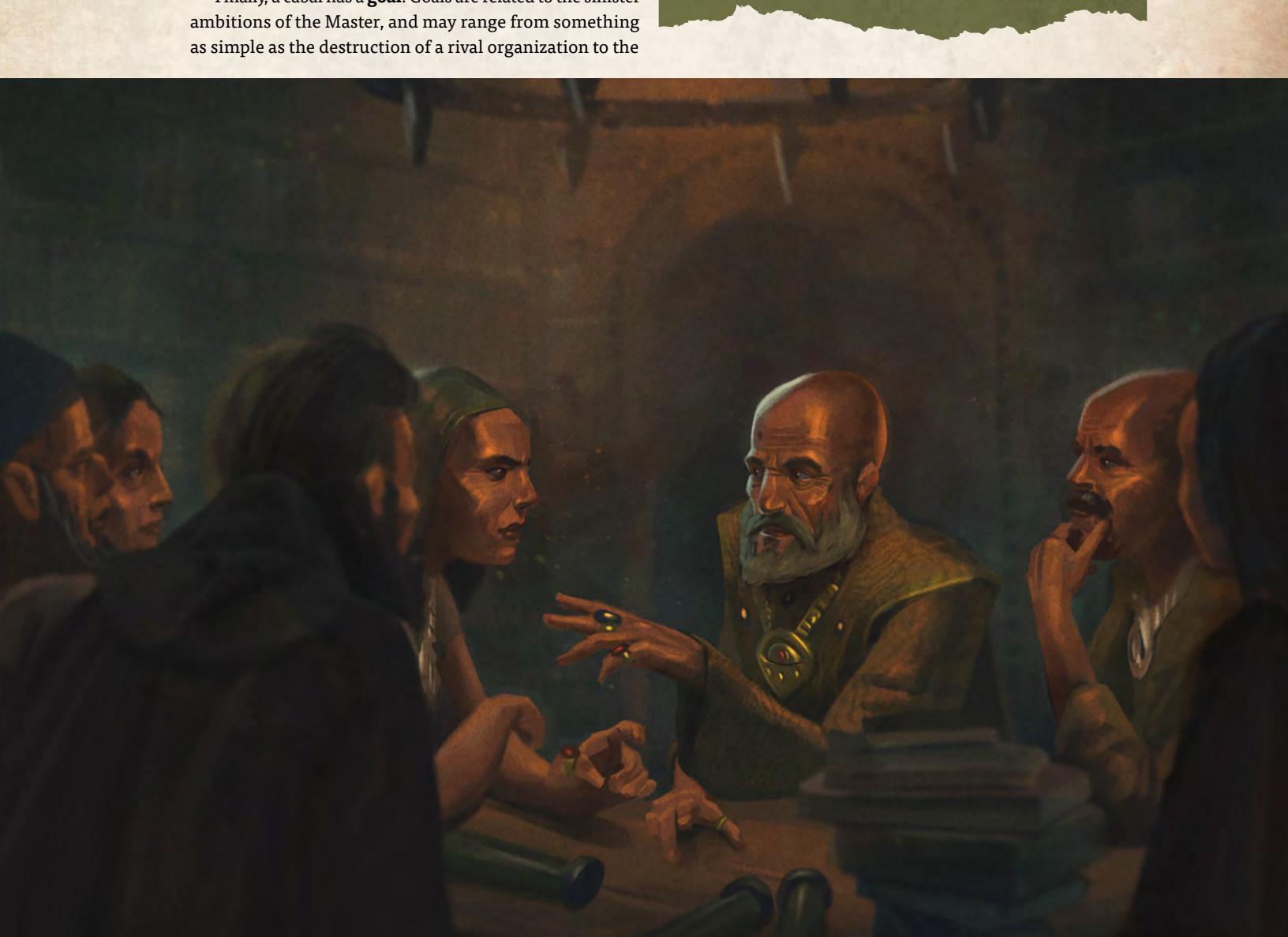
Finally, a cabal has a **goal**. Goals are related to the sinister ambitions of the Master, and may range from something as simple as the destruction of a rival organization to the

WHAT'S IN A LOCATION?

Locations for cabals are defined narratively as areas of control, places where the cabal holds total sway. But what does that mean in practical terms?

For the purposes of mechanics, location refers to a specific area where the cabal's power faces few, if any, internal challenges. They can range anywhere from a single hidden fortress or chamber to an entire city, but are rarely larger than that. Cabals are, by their nature, secretive and deceptive, and to hold control over an entire region (anything larger than a single city-state and its surrounding environs) risks exposing the cabal to undue risk if it has but a single Stronghold.

If a cabal wishes control of a region — an area ranging in size from a collection of closely located city-states, to a nation, such as Stygia — it needs multiple Strongholds, lest the cabal faces rebellions, civil wars, and other strife. Thus, there is the necessity among warring cabals to destroy or take over rival Strongholds, using the rules outlined here.



more esoteric demands of ritual and occult cabal sacrifices. Some goals require the expenditure of Power, while others compel the cabal to attack enemy Boons or construct new edifices to their Master's glory. Completion of a goal strengthens the cabal.



BURNING BOONS

Boons have Vigor, much as player characters do, representing their cohesion and effectiveness. A Boon that takes damage is physically harmed, disorganized, demoralized, or otherwise hindered. A Boon that loses all its Vigor is destroyed or hopelessly compromised. Some Boons can be sacrificed, losing all vigor permanently, to gain extra abilities or become more powerful for a single defined purpose. This is called Burning a Boon. Once burnt, a Boon is gone and must be repurchased if it is to be used again. Given that Burning a Boon can often mean that a non-player character or other physical asset is removed from play, additional efforts may be required to reacquire a Boon that you have burnt, as subsequent non-player characters will not wish to befall such a fate.

It is not unheard of for Boons to become angry that they were burned: managing non-player characters and dealing with their feelings can lead to many interesting conflicts.

DETERMINING LOCATION POWER

To assign a location's maximum Power, the gamemaster should consider its overall wealth, sorcerous significance, and population. A location that has nothing to provide would have a maximum Power of 0. A location with just one interesting feature, like a hunting camp near a prehistoric stone ring that still has occult resonance, might be Power 1. Small hamlets or ancient places of power might grant Power 2; towns, valuable frontier forts, or impressively laden caravans might give Power 3; cities or locations of great power might grant Power 4; and the most impressive sites of population, wealth, and occult significance in the region might give Power 5.

BOONS

Most cabals have at least one Boon, if not more. Boons might be eldritch abominations forced to do the cabal's bidding, useful occult laboratories, squads of thugs or mercenaries, trained assassins, control of a profitable business, or any other specific resource that the cabal's leadership can command. Boons without the Hidden Quality are known to everyone in the region, including hostile cabals. The general populace may not be aware that they're servants of unholy evil, but the occult world is more attentive to such things.

Boons are specific to a location. They are organized or built in a certain place and cannot easily be moved to a different one. Some Boons have the Mobile Quality and can move to a new location. Others require expenditure of Power to replant them in a different place, or cannot be moved at all, should a Boon be geographically specific.

Boons often have an attack and defense attribute. Attack describes which attribute tests and damage is rolled when a cabal's Boon attacks a rival Boon. Defense is the damage value rolled in when a Boon successfully repulses an attack and inflicts harm on its defeated foe. Some Boons might be extremely devastating against enemies, but easily disrupted by foes, while others may not be very useful in destroying a hostile power, but are very dangerous to enemies who would dislodge them from their position. Some Boons lack one or both types of damage, and instead provide a special benefit to the cabal.

Boons come in three types, representing the uses which cabals have for them: **Might Boons** are tools of brute violence and physical force; **Sorcery Boons** consist of spells, monsters, and eldritch relics; and **Influence Boons** represent corrupt politicians, cabal-backed spies, and flawless local reputations. Each Boon also has a rating, with level 1 Boons being small groups or minor entities, up to level 7 Boons, which are the equivalent of a standing army or a pet demigod! A cabal cannot buy a Boon with a higher rating than it has in that attribute. Thus, a cabal with a Might score of 1 cannot recruit a private army with a Might score of 7, irrespective of how much they might want to.

The examples that follow include all three types of Boons, along with the Power cost to create them and any Upkeep cost required over time. The gamemaster can always add new entries to this list or edit existing ones to fit their campaign.

The pages that follow cover several example Boons that a gamemaster can apply to a cabal. While most of them are phrased as malevolent or monstrous, a gamemaster designing a player character-based organization can alter most of them into more benevolent forms. Stronghold Boons, notably, have a few special rules.

MIGHT BOONS

These Boons relate to brute force and the license for direct violence. A cabal that deals with its problems through intimidation, furtive murder, and ostentatious displays of force is likely to invest heavily in Might Boons and prove talented at their use.

Entries in the Attack column indicate Might (M), Sorcery (S), Influence (I), or special (*, described in the Boon's entry). Entries with no listed attack or damage might still do so, using methods described in their following writeups.

Ambush

The cabal has arrangements to trick attackers into entering a deadly killing ground, or into an intolerable political situation. Like other Boons, the Ambush can be used to interpose between an attacking Boon and its intended target. If the Ambush is Hidden when it does so, the attacker must roll their attack test twice and take the worse result.

Cabal Assassins

A highly trained group of professional killers. Once per turn, the cabal may use the team to instantly attack an enemy Boon that is launching an assault against another Boon at that location. If the assaulting Boon survives, its attack goes through normally.

STRONGHOLDS

Strongholds are not included on any of the tables because Strongholds are special Boons. While other Boons are categorized as Might, Sorcery, or Influence, Strongholds don't have a type, and cannot be affected by attacks or special powers that affect only one type of Boon.

Strongholds cannot be moved once they are created. Strongholds can be attacked normally, but they have no offensive power and do no damage on a successful defense. They can be given the Hidden Quality as any other sort of Boon, and all of them have the Structure Quality. Strongholds must be purchased at level 1, and the Improve Stronghold action can only upgrade them one level to the next at a time (1 to 2, 2 to 3, etc.). The cost of upgrading a Stronghold is equal to the new level's cost. Strongholds have no upkeep cost.



MIGHT BOONS

| Boon | Level | Cost | Upkeep | Vigor | Attack | Damage | Defense | Notes |
|-----------------------|-------|------|--------|-------|---------|--------|---------|--|
| Cabal Thugs | 1 | 2 | 0 | 6 | M vs. M | 1 | 1 | — |
| Corrupt Guardsman | 1 | 2 | 0 | 6 | M vs. I | 1 | 1 | — |
| Fortified Lair | 1 | 3 | 1 | 10 | — | — | 2 | Structure |
| Murderer | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | M vs. M | 2 | — | — |
| Ambush | 2 | 3 | 0 | 10 | — | — | 3 | Structure, Special Defense if Hidden |
| Cabal Mercenaries | 2 | 4 | 1 | 10 | M vs. M | 2 | 3 | — |
| Expert Arsonist | 2 | 3 | 1 | 4 | M vs. I | 2 +2 | — | ×2 damage against structures |
| False Front | 2 | 3 | 0 | 20 | — | — | — | Structure |
| Corrupt Guard Captain | 3 | 4 | 1 | 8 | M vs. I | 2 +1 | 3 | Burn to automatically hit target |
| Cabal Assassins | 3 | 5 | 2 | 15 | M vs. M | 2 | 3 | Interrupt Incoming Attack |
| Hired Killer | 3 | 4 | 1 | 12 | M vs. M | 2 +2 | — | Attacks without losing Hidden |
| Saboteur | 3 | 4 | 1 | 10 | M vs. M | 2 +2 | — | ×2 damage to Structures, Stealth |
| Free Reign | 4 | 5 | 2 | 16 | — | — | 2 | Might Boons gain +1 Attack and Defense |

| MIGHT BOONS (CONT.) | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|-------|------|--------|-------|----------|--|---------|---|--|
| Boon | Level | Cost | Upkeep | Vigor | Attack | Damage | Defense | Notes | |
| Secret Police | 4 | 6 | 2 | 20 | M vs. I | 2  +3 | 4 | Spend 2 Power to reveal Hidden | |
| Siege Weaponry | 4 | 6 | 2 | 16 | — | — | 3 | Structure, re-roll failed Attack or Defense | |
| Sleeper Agents | 4 | 6 | 2 | 20 | M vs. I | 2  +3 | 4 | Spend 2 Power to become Hidden | |
| Cabal Champions | 5 | 8 | 3 | 25 | M vs. M | 3  | 4 | — | |
| Military Favors | 5 | 9 | 0 | 10 | — | — | — | Burn to Attack and destroy a Boon | |
| Sudden Assault | 5 | 8 | 2 | 20 | Special* | — | — | Allows moves and Attacks in one turn | |
| Entrenched Fortifications | 6 | 10 | 2 | 50 | — | — | 4 | Structure, can't move | |
| Howling Mob | 6 | 10 | 4 | 30 | M vs. * | 3  | 4 | Attacks the lower of Might or Influence | |
| Sanctioned | 6 | 10 | 4 | 15 | — | — | — | Can't move, re-roll failed checks | |
| Fanatical Populace | 7 | 12 | 6 | 50 | M vs. I | 4  | — | — | |
| Standing Army | 7 | 14 | 7 | 30 | M vs. M | Special | 4 | Target loses 30 Vigor | |

Cabal Champions

The cream of the diabolical crop, these troops are superbly trained and gifted warriors in service of the cabal's fiendish plans for the world.

Cabal Mercenaries

A step up from ordinary thugs, these sell-swords have more discipline and precision than the ordinary run of street rabble.

Cabal Thugs

Ordinary street scum with no future and no use beyond that of brutish intimidation. These thugs can still be used to rough up locals and stifle minor resistance.

Free Reign

The local authorities tacitly allow the cabal's minions to use whatever force they wish, provided it doesn't get too hard to overlook. All of the cult's Might Boons in this location gain +1 on all attack and defense tests.

Corrupt Captain

The local leader of the constabulary or other law enforcement is in the cabal's pocket. Aside from this Boon's usual abilities to attack and defend, the cabal can burn the Boon to automatically hit a target it is attacking. The Captain wildly oversteps his legal boundaries and will inevitably be fired or arrested, but not until he's done grave damage to the enemy.

Corrupt Guardsman

A local member of the town or city guard is on the take, and willing to ensure that the right people get into the wrong situations.

Entrenched Fortifications

The cabal has heavily fortified the location, with multiple refuges, tunnels, and lines of retreat. This Boon cannot be moved once it is created.

Expert Arsonist

An ordinary thug with an unusual love for fire, the arsonist's attacks do double damage versus Structure Boons.

False Front

A seemingly harmless and unassociated organization that serves as a buffer and supply line for the sorcerers' true purposes.

Fanatical Populace

Large numbers of the locals are utterly obedient to the cabal and willing to bury foes under the sheer weight of bodies. Vast numbers of initiates are ready to fight and die for their cause.

Fortified Lair

The cabal has arranged for at least one well-fortified refuge or temple within the region.

Hired Killer

A lone murderer of uncommon talents, the hired killer is extremely hard to pin down. If Hidden, it doesn't lose the Quality when it attacks a target, whether the attack is successful or not.

Howling Mob

The cabal has blended ideology and savagery into several clubs, societies, and secret circles willing to fight on its behalf. The mass movement opposes the worse of an enemy's Influence or Might attributes when forcing a defense check.

Military Favors

The sorcerers of the cabal have allies or blackmailed servitors among the legitimate military forces of the area. They can force this ally to use their authority to strike and destroy any single Might or Influence Boon at that location. This action burns the ally, destroying this Boon. The victim may interpose another Boon to absorb the attack, however.

Murderer

While lacking the finesse of a trained assassin, the murderer is willing to kill people at the bidding of the cabal without hesitation. They are, however, quite sloppy, and are often caught.

Saboteur

This agent specializes in destroying buildings and equipment. Their attacks do double damage against Boons with the Structure type. If an attack against a Structure is successful, the Saboteur doesn't lose any Hidden Quality it may have.

Sanctioned

The cabal's minions are virtually untouchable by the local authorities, with license to use whatever violence they wish against enemies and troublemakers openly, acting as the local authorities' agents. All Might Boons may roll attack and defense tests twice in this location, using the better roll.

Secret Police

These secret enforcers monitor the cabal for troublemakers and the disobedient, as well as watching for external threats. Once per turn, the cabal may spend 2 Power to activate this Boon. The lowest-ranked enemy Hidden Boon in the location is then revealed. If more than one enemy Boon would qualify, the one there longest is revealed.

Siege Weaponry

The cabal has access to siege engines and an adequate number of soldiers trained to use them. Once per turn, a Might Boon in this location may re-roll a failed attack or defense test. If the test fails again, this Boon is destroyed.



Sleeper Agents

The cabal has either sponsored or created a network of hidden agents willing to do its bidding. Once per turn, the cabal may spend 2 Power and apply the Hidden Quality to this Boon without spending an action to do so.

Standing Army

The cabal effectively controls a standing army, having complete and unchallenged mastery of a major formation of trained military personnel. If an attack by this Boon is successful, the target takes 30 points of Vigor damage.

Sudden Assault

The cabal has arranged the infrastructure for a lightning raid on this location. On their turn, the sorcerers may activate this Boon, immediately doing 2  damage to it. Once activated, one or all of the friendly Boons at another location may move to the Sudden Assault and make attacks in that location. At the end of the turn, any or all these Boons may be moved back to their originating location. This action sacrifices any Hidden Quality the Sudden Assault may have.

SORCERY BOONS

Sorcery Boons rely on the supernatural, on gifts and powers that defy mortal understanding. They can rot the strong from the inside out, render the most cunning into gibbering

idiots, pauperize the mighty, and otherwise gnaw at a target's weak points. Many Sorcery Boons allow the attacker to pick any attribute to defend against the assault. These attacks are often less effective or convenient than those of more mundane Boons, however.

Entries in the Attack column indicate Might (M), Sorcery (S), Influence (I), or Any. Entries with no listed attack or damage might still do so using methods described in their following writeups.

Cursed Warrior

This minion is laced about with black blessings and damnable gifts, transformed into a fearsome weapon of ruin. Cursed Warriors are created using a normal Toughened human, of a type determined by the gamemaster (see the Encounters chapter in the *Conan* corebook, or another desired sourcebook), and then assigning some Horror Qualities.

Dark Experimenters

The cabal conducts numerous experiments in search of greater power. Sometimes these experiments prove useful, but always at a dire cost. This Boon can be burnt to restore a number of Vigor equal to its current Vigor to any other Boon at its location. This healing may be split up over multiple recipients, if desired.



Dark Fane

The cabal has a strong and darkly potent temple at the location. One Sorcery Boon of the sorcerers' choice has its upkeep cost eliminated, and all Sorcery Boons at that location gain a +1 bonus to their attack and defense checks.

Eldritch Spawning

Terrible things are bred in dark places. Once per turn, at the end of the turn, the cabal can tap this spawning pit to purchase any level 1 or 2 Sorcery Boon. The Boon can do nothing the turn it is made.

Enthralling Cabal

These cabal members are impossibly charming and persuasive. Once per turn, their honeyed words can negate an incoming attack at that location that targets the cult's Influence. They may be of any rank within the cabal.

Grave Retribution

If the Boon this charm is attached to is destroyed, its destroyer takes 4 \spades damage automatically.

Hellish Nexus

The cult has opened a path into the Outer Dark, one that they use as a travel nexus between far-flung earthbound points. On their turn, a cult may freely move Boon's between locations with a Hellish nexus without using the Move Boons action. The nexus itself cannot be moved once it is created.

Hidden Shrine

A secret fane has been built to dark powers, and its worship feeds their evil. One Sorcery Boon of the cabal's choice has its upkeep eliminated. As with the Dark Fane, this Boon can be anywhere.

Hidden Ways

The cabal has mastered secret paths through the Outer Dark. Once per turn, the cult may spend 1 Power to move any single Boon at this location to a different location, automatically granting it the Hidden Quality when it arrives.

Hypnotic Master

A charismatic teacher exerts an unnatural influence over minions and foes, using pawns to strike where enemies are weak. This sorcerer can be either a votary or Master within the cabal.

Lord of the Outer Dark

These awful engines of otherworldly ruin are not so much servitors of the cult as avatars brought forth to wreak divine madness. See page 123 for guidelines on creating Horrors and using Lords of the Outer Dark as Patrons for a sorcerer or cabal.

| SORCERY BOONS | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------|-------|------|--------|-------|-----------|--|---------|---|
| Boon | Level | Cost | Upkeep | Vigor | Attack | Damage | Defense | Notes |
| Hypnotic Guru | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | S vs. Any | 1  | — | |
| Minor Curse | 1 | 2 | 1 | 5 | — | — | — | Attached, victim rolls checks twice |
| Petty Sorcerers | 1 | 2 | 0 | 5 | S vs. Any | 1  -1 | 1 | |
| Protective Rite | 1 | 3 | 1 | 5 | — | — | — | Burn to use Sorcery attribute to Defend |
| Dark Experimenters | 2 | 3 | 0 | 12 | — | — | 2 | Burn to restore Vigor to other Boons |
| Hidden Shrine | 2 | 3 | 0 | 12 | — | — | 2 | Structure, one Boon has no upkeep |
| Minor Abomination | 2 | 4 | 1 | 10 | S vs. Any | 2  | 3 | Berserk |
| Scourging Ritual | 2 | 3 | 1 | 8 | S vs. S | 2  +2 | — | Only harms or can be blocked by Sorcery |
| Cursed Warrior | 3 | 4 | 2 | 8 | S vs. M | 2  +2 | 3 | Berserk |
| Hidden Ways | 3 | 5 | 2 | 16 | — | — | — | Structure, move and hide Boon |
| Mind-bending Adept | 3 | 4 | 2 | 10 | S vs. I | 2  +2 | 3 | |
| Sorcerous Atrocity | 3 | 4 | 1 | 16 | — | — | — | Burn to destroy any one Influence Boon |
| Enthralling Cabal | 4 | 4 | 1 | 20 | S vs. I | 2  +4 | 3 | Per turn, negate an Influence attack |
| Grave Retribution | 4 | 4 | 1 | 16 | — | — | — | Attached, if destroyed, do 4  Vigor damage to attacker |
| Major Abomination | 4 | 5 | 2 | 25 | S vs. Any | 2  | 3 | Berserk |
| Unholy Ward | 4 | 4 | 1 | 20 | — | — | — | Structure, prevent Sorcery attack |
| Dark Fane | 5 | 7 | 0 | 20 | — | — | 4 | Structure, boost Sorcery Boons |
| Eldritch Creche | 5 | 5 | 2 | 10 | — | — | 4 | Structure, can buy any Level 1 or 2 Boon |
| Plague-bringer | 5 | 6 | 3 | 20 | S vs. Any | 2  +2 | 3 | Targets take 1  additional Vigor or Power damage/turn |
| Outer Dark Nexus | 6 | 5 | 2 | 10 | — | — | — | Structure, unify multiple locations |
| Miasma of Doom | 6 | 10 | 4 | 20 | — | — | 2 | Hostile Boons there take 1  Vigor damage/turn |
| Unearthly Horror | 6 | 10 | 4 | 25 | S vs. Any | 3  +2 | 4 | Berserk |
| Lord of the Outer Dark | 7 | 14 | 7 | 50 | S vs. Any | 6  | 4 | Berserk |
| Pact of Damnation | 7 | 14 | 8 | 30 | S vs. Any | — | — | On a successful hit, the target and one other Boon are destroyed |

Major Abomination

A truly horrific entity from the Outer Dark has been summoned forth to serve the cult. Such creatures can strike in many ways, using their occult powers to blast and blight a foe. See page 123 for guidelines on creating Horrors.

Miasma of Doom

The location is oppressed by potent sorceries that inflict grave troubles on enemies that dare enter the area. At the start of the cabal's turn, all enemy Boons in that location take 1 \diamond damage, whether they're Hidden or not.

Mind-bending Adept

This sorcerer strikes at the wills of the cabal's foes, twisting and breaking their determination with the force of his magic. Treat this sorcerer as a votary for purposes of ritual magic.

Minor Abomination

This eldritch entity is one of the more minor beings of the Outer Darkness beyond the world, though it remains more than a match for any ordinary human. See page 123 for guidelines on creating Horrors.

Minor Curse

This curse is attached to an enemy Boon in the location. So long as the curse remains attached, the enemy must roll any attack or defense tests twice and take the worse result. The curse is destroyed if its host perishes, but otherwise cannot be harmed except by another Sorcery Boon's attack.

Pact of Damnation

This Boon can attack any non-Hidden target in the region, regardless of its location. If the attack is successful, the target is automatically destroyed, but the cabal must sacrifice another Boon at the Pact's location to fuel this attack. The victim can interpose another Boon to save the original target, as normal for an attack.

Petty Sorcerers

While the curses and spells of these sorcerers are unimpressive in power, they make for very flexible assailants. Treat Petty Sorcerers as acolytes for the purposes of rituals.

Plague-bringer

These creatures or cursed adepts infect those who fight them with madness or disease. Any non-Structure Boon harmed by the Plague-bringer, either in attack or defense, suffers 1 \diamond damage at the end of each turn thereafter until a Bolster Boon action is taken on it.

Protective Rite

The cabal's magical forces are used to protect its holdings. During an enemy cabal's turn, the sorcerers may burn

this Boon to force all attacks that turn to target the cult's Sorcery attribute rather than the usual defensive attribute, regardless of the location of the attack. A cabal may have only one Protective Rite Boon at a time.

Scourging Ritual

This spell is harmless against ordinary humans, but strikes deeply against sorcerous powers. It can harm only Sorcery Boons. If a cabal wishes to interpose another Boon to protect its target, that defending Boon must also be a Sorcery Boon.

Sorcerous Atrocity

The cult infects a social movement or influential organization with a monstrous occult curse that produces a Sorcerous Atrocity — an act or rumor of an act sufficient to utterly discredit the target. The Boon may be burnt in order to automatically destroy any one Influence Boon in the location. As usual, the targeted cult may interpose another Influence Boon to defend the intended target, destroying it in its place.

Unearthly Horror

A mind-wrecking abomination, the Unearthly Horror is an engine of ruin for its summoners.

Unholy Ward

At any time before the dice are rolled, this ward may be triggered to nullify a Sorcery attack at its location. Each time the Unholy Ward is triggered, it takes 2 \diamond damage. If the Unholy Ward is destroyed in the process of negating an attack, the strike goes through to the target and is automatically successful.

INFLUENCE BOONS

These Boons reflect the cabal's control over the levers of social and economic power in the region. Whereas Might Boons involve physical force, and Sorcery Boons touch on eldritch impossibilities, Influence Boons deal with money, law, and social favor. A wealthy cabal of sorcerers entrenched in local society is likely to have many such Boons.

Entries in the Attack column indicate Might (M), Sorcery (S), Influence (I), Any, or special (described in the Boon's entry). Entries with no listed attack or damage might still do so, using methods described in their following writeups.

Active Conspiracy

The location seethes with conspirators eager to complicate any plans against the cabal. Any Boon that attacks the Active Conspiracy must roll its attribute test twice and take the worse result.

Blackmail

A juicy piece of blackmail forces an enemy Boon or its handlers to act against its owner's best interests. Burn this Boon to force another non-Hidden Boon at the location to make an attack against any target, including itself. Special powers related to its attack may be triggered, but not unrelated abilities such as extra Power gain or special penalties to enemy rolls.

Blades in the Dark

The cabal has forged ties with the kingdom government and gained control of a secret society dedicated to cleaning up sorcerous activity. This society can be used as a devastating weapon against their enemies, but failure to control the Blades can spell doom for the cabal. Once per turn, the cabal can trigger Blades in the Dark, choosing any location in the region. They then roll 1d20. On a result of 1-17, all enemy Boons in that location are destroyed, Hidden and otherwise. On a result of 18-19, the secret society has discovered too much. The former result occurs but the Blades in the Dark Boon itself is destroyed, along with all allied Boons at its location. On a roll of 20, the cabal's secrets are catastrophically compromised. The entire cabal is destroyed by the ensuing response.

Cabal Recruiters

Simple street-level recruiters, these servants are susceptible to hostile interference, but quite effective when left alone.

Common Zealots

Irrational, uncompromising, and joyously self-sacrificing, these servants and supporters make life much harder for rivals at the location. All Upkeep costs for enemy Boons in this location are increased by 1 point.

Corrupt Merchants

These minions use the power of their money and business contacts to force rivals into compliance.

Crime Boss

A brute at heart, however polished their exterior, the crime boss translates influence into raw violence.

Economic Domination

The cabal practically owns the location's financial arrangements. No other cabal can harvest Power with its Stronghold at that location. If both have this Boon, no one can harvest.

Forbidden Pleasures

The cabal knows how to give someone the things they desire, however horrible these needs may be. This Boon may target any one of a foe's attributes when attacking, rather than a specific one.



Friendly Official

This obliging local official makes life miserable for rival organizations in the location. Once per turn at any time, the official may make an attack on a rival Influence Boon in the location.

Hidden Treasures

The cabal has used its secret knowledge and ruthless influence to wring power from hidden places in this location. They earn two extra points of Power at this location each turn. A cabal can have only one Hidden Treasure per location.

Ignorant Army

A host of minions and lackeys are under the spell of the cabal, even if almost none of them realize the nature of their obedience. Their sheer numbers and veiled nature make them difficult to root out. At the end of each turn for its owner, this Boon heals 2 lost Vigor.

Infiltrated House

This organization puts up a charming front, but its leadership has been wholly subverted.

Infiltrator

The cabal has an ally on the inside of a hostile Boon. The Infiltrator is attached to an enemy Boon in the location.

| INFLUENCE BOONS | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-------|------|--------|-------|-----------|--|---------|---|--|
| Boon | Level | Cost | Upkeep | Vigor | Attack | Damage | Defense | Notes | |
| Cabal Recruiters | 1 | 2 | 0 | 5 | I vs. I | 1  +1 | — | — | |
| Friendly Official | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | I vs. I | 1  | 1 | Free Influence Boon attack per turn | |
| Infiltrator | 1 | 2 | 0 | 5 | — | — | — | Attached, keeps a Boon from Hiding | |
| Profitable Business | 1 | 3 | 0 | 8 | — | — | — | Structure, each turn, gain 1 Power | |
| Blackmail | 2 | 3 | 0 | 10 | — | — | 2 | Burn to force an enemy Boon to attack | |
| Common Zealots | 2 | 4 | 1 | 10 | I vs. I | 2  | 3 | Enemy Influence Upkeep increases by +1 | |
| Officious Bureaucrat | 2 | 3 | 1 | 12 | I vs. I | 2  | 2 | Cannot harm Might Boons | |
| Trained Cadres | 2 | 3 | 1 | 8 | I vs. I | 1  +2 | — | — | |
| Infiltrated House | 3 | 5 | 2 | 16 | I vs. I | 2  +2 | 3 | — | |
| Persuader | 3 | 4 | 2 | 10 | I vs. I | 3  | — | Once per turn, pay two Power to Hide any Boon | |
| Obfuscated Membership | 3 | 4 | 1 | 10 | — | — | — | Attached, Hide host once per turn | |
| Reliable Resources | 3 | 4 | 0 | 16 | — | — | 4 | Structure, each turn, gain 1 Power | |
| Crime Boss | 4 | 4 | 1 | 20 | I vs. M | 3  +2 | 4 | — | |
| Economic Domination | 4 | 5 | 2 | 16 | — | — | 2 | Enemy Strongholds cannot harvest Power | |
| Forbidden Pleasures | 4 | 5 | 2 | 25 | I vs. Any | 2  +2 | 3 | Can target attribute of choice | |
| Seducer | 4 | 4 | 1 | 16 | — | — | — | If attacker misses, burn to turn attacker into your Boon | |
| Active Conspiracy | 5 | 7 | 2 | 20 | — | — | 4 | Attackers roll twice and take the worse result | |
| Corrupt Merchants | 5 | 5 | 2 | 20 | I vs. I | 2  +4 | 4 | — | |
| Subverted Authority | 5 | 6 | 3 | 20 | I vs. Any | 3  +2 | 3 | Targets cannot attack until Bolstered | |
| Hidden Treasures | 6 | 10 | 0 | 10 | — | — | — | Structure, each turn, gain 2 Power | |
| Ignorant Army | 6 | 10 | 4 | 25 | I vs. I | 3  +2 | 3 | Each turn, recovers 2  Vigor | |
| Troubadour | 6 | 10 | 4 | 20 | I vs. I | 4  | 2 | — | |
| Blades in the Dark | 7 | 20 | 8 | 30 | — | — | — | Berserk, can annihilate foes | |
| Suffocating Control | 7 | 14 | 8 | 30 | I vs. I | Special | — | Targets successfully hit become incapable of acting | |

So long as the Infiltrator survives, that Boon cannot become Hidden.

Obfuscated Membership

The organization keeps churning handlers or Boon members, making it difficult to keep a fix on a Boon. Obfuscated Membership may be attached to an allied Boon. At the end of each turn, the owner may inflict 1  damage on the Obfuscated Membership to make it, and its host Boon Hidden.

Officious Bureaucrat

Cold-hearted and ruthless, these functionaries can wreak havoc with the lives of enemies of the cabal. They are poorly suited for handling those that do not know, or do not respect the law, however, and cannot attack or do damage to Might Boons.

Persuader

The Persuader conceals maneuvers advantageous to the cabal under a thick cloud of backroom deals and secret maneuvering. Once per turn, the owner of the Persuader may spend 2 Power to apply the Hidden Quality to any other Boon at that location. The Persuader may not Hide itself with this ability.

Profitable Business

The cabal has a money-making prospect in this location, and gains 1 additional Power point at the end of each of its turns. A cabal can have only one Profitable Business in a location at once.

Reliable Resources

The cabal has built lines of supply and persuasion in the location, bonds and resources that are difficult for enemies to touch. They earn an extra point of Power at this location each turn. A cabal can have only one Reliable Resource per location.

Seducer

This snare is designed to catch and sway a powerful enemy Boon, seducing it to the cabal's side. If an enemy Boon attacks the Seducer and misses, the cabal may burn it to instantly take possession of the attacking Boon. They may do so even if the Boon is of a level their own attributes could not normally support. The Boon remains at its current level, until it is destroyed or burnt.

Subverted Authority

The cabal knows how to paralyze an enemy Boon with blackmail, seduction, intimidation, and a host of other complicating burdens. If the Subverted Authority Boon hits its target, the victim is unable to perform any actions until its owner applies a Bolster Boons action to it.

Suffocating Control

The cabal owns the social, legal, and economic context of the location. Nothing happens without its tacit permission. Any target hit by Suffocating Control becomes unable to perform any action, defend against attacks, or trigger any ability until the Suffocating Control either leaves the location or is destroyed.

Trained Cadres

These loyal soldiers of the cabal are eager to work on its behalf, performing whatever deeds their superiors find useful.

Troubadour

Charming, compelling, famous, and beloved, this performer can move public sentiment in the cabal's favor whenever it proves useful for their masters.



BOON QUALITIES

Some Boons have special qualities as indicated below. Others, such as Hidden, can be applied by the right actions or special Boon abilities. These qualities all share the same special handling rules regardless of type.

Attached

These Boons may be "attached" to other Boons at the same location. Boons with beneficial effects can be attached to allied Boons, while hostile curses can be attached to non-Hidden enemy Boons. This attachment is automatic and cannot be resisted, and may take place at any time during the owner's turn. Once attached, this Boon may not be removed, and is destroyed if the host Boon is destroyed. It may be targeted separately, should an enemy wish to destroy a burdensome curse or eliminate a problematic blessing. Attached Boons are always Hidden if their host is hidden and revealed if their host is revealed; the Conceal Boon action need only conceal its host to hide it as well.

Berserk

The Boon must be carefully contained and directed or else the cabal runs the risk of catastrophic loss of control. A Boon with the Berserk Quality suffers the usual penalty the first turn that upkeep is not paid on it: it loses half its maximum Vigor, rounded up. On the second consecutive turn, however, it loses no Vigor. Instead, it runs wild, becoming an uncontrolled Boon that will attack the weakest Boon

(gamemaster's discretion) in the location each time the former owner's turn comes up. It automatically penetrates any Hidden Quality to find its prey, though its attack does not remove the Hidden Quality from a target. A Boon that goes Berserk cannot be regained. It will continue to attack until it is destroyed or runs out of targets. If it lacks any valid Boons to target at that location, it will simply wait until prey comes within its reach.

Hidden

Almost all cabal Boons are hidden from the mundane attention of the world, but Boons with the Hidden Quality are invisible even to the cognoscenti of the unknown. This anonymity is hard to maintain given the paranoia of the occult world, and once compromised, the secret is soon out to everyone. Thus, a Boon that loses its Hidden Quality becomes known to all, not just the one that revealed it. A Boon that is Hidden cannot be attacked or otherwise targeted by a rival cabal, barring special circumstances. This normally includes any Boon special abilities that require selecting a specific target. Attacking or defending with a Boon deprives it of any Hidden Quality, but using its special powers or benefits does not compromise its secrecy.

Structure

This Quality represents a Boon that is chiefly a building, edifice, or hardware collection. Most structures can be relocated to other locations with the Relocate Boon action, though some are permanently fixed at the site of their construction. Some Boons gain special benefits when attacking structures.

CABAL ACTIONS

The entries below list the probable actions a cabal might take. When making original actions, the gamemaster can resolve any questions of success with an attribute test, with Power costs applied as seems appropriate.

Attack Boons

The cabal picks one or more Boons and launches attacks against one or more targets in the same location. Targets cannot be Hidden. If the defender has other Boons in that same location, they may substitute another in place of the target, allowing other Boons to shield them. Any Boon used to attack or guard automatically loses the Hidden Quality.



To make the attack, both attacker and defender roll the attribute tests given in the Boon's description. If it says "M vs. I", for example, the attacker launches a Might Struggle against the defender's Influence.

If the attacker succeeds, the target takes the listed attack damage. If the defender succeeds, the attacking Boon takes the listed defense damage. On a tie, neither take damage, but Complications ensue or Doom is generated.

The attacker can strike with as many Boons as they wish, regardless of their location, but a Boon can only attack once per turn. A target can defend as often as they wish, assuming they have Vigor left.

Cultivate Location

The cabal tries to improve a single location, making it a more valuable source of Power. This usually requires cultivating a stronger base of followers, deeper tendrils of influence, and greater control over the available wealth of the place. For very small locations, it might mean bringing in outside money or devotees to populate the place.

Cultivating a location requires spending three times the improved Power level of the place; thus, to make a Power 1 hunting camp into a Power 2 cabal recruiting center would require spending 6 points of Power. The cabal then rolls 3CD and adds the level of Stronghold present at the location. If the total is greater than the new Power level +6, the attempt is successful and the site's maximum Power increases by one.

On a failure, the attempt is not yet a success, but the cabal can attempt this action again on their next turn without spending any additional Power. If they choose to use their turn to perform some other action, their attempt falters and they must pay the Power over again the next time they try to Cultivate the site.

Disband

The cabal safely releases one or more Boons from service, removing them from their locations and no longer obliging them to pay upkeep. Boons with the Berserk Quality cannot be peacefully disbanded. Sorcerers that use such dangerous Boons must either pay their upkeep or see that they are "tragically" destroyed in conflicts.

Conceal Boons

The cabal attempts to conceal one or more Boons at a single location. One point of Power must be spent for each Boon that is to be Hidden. If no other sorcerers have Boons at the site, the attempt is automatically successful and each Boon gains the Hidden Quality. If one or more other cabals are present, however, the actor must succeed on an attribute check against their rival, both using the better of their Sorcery or Influence scores. On a success, the concealment is successful, while on a failure the attempt is in vain and the Power spent is lost. If several enemy cabals have Boons

in the location, it can be prohibitively difficult to hide anything there, as someone is bound to discover it.

Investigate Location

The cabal investigates a single location for hidden hostile Boons. The sorcerers must have at least one Boon in the location. Both they and the owners of any Hidden Boons roll an attribute check of the better of their Sorcery or Influence attributes. If the investigator wins, all the enemy's Hidden Boons at that location lose the Quality. Note that the investigating Boon may be Hidden, and retains this Quality even if it fails to uncover the foe.

Relocate

The cabal moves one or more Boons to a different location, assuming such a shift is plausible. In a normal region, any Boon can be moved to any other location, and each such move costs 1 point of Power. If the Boon is not Hidden, any rivals in the target location may make an immediate free Attack Boon action against it with any Boons they already have at the site. If the Boon is Hidden, it moves without the enemy being able to prevent or detect its arrival.

Bolster Boon

One or more damaged Boons at a single location are given time to recruit, refit, and reorganize. This restores damage equal to 1 Δ plus the relevant attribute of the cabal. Thus, a cabal with a Might score of 5 repairing a Might Boon restores 5+1 Δ Vigor. Stronghold repair always uses the cabal's best attribute. Any number of Boons may be helped by this action provided they are all at a single location, but each can only be Bolstered once per turn.

Serve Cause

The cabal turns inward, dedicating itself to unholy prayer, fortification of its holdings, and cultivation of its Boons. The cabal gains Power equal to its lowest attribute.

Create Boon

The cabal brings forth a new servant or establishes a new stronghold, whether by bribery, persuasion, or summoning up the unholy powers of the Outer Dark. The sorcerers must pay the Power cost for its recruitment, and may not use it for any actions this turn, but it can be used for defense should another Boon at its location be attacked. Only one new Boon can be created each turn. However, it must be created in a location where the cult already has at least one other Boon.

All created Boons begin play Hidden, except for Strongholds. A Stronghold created in a location that already has a Stronghold of a rival cult begins play without the Hidden Quality, as it is just too difficult to build an entire new sorcerous nexus without drawing the attention of an existing power.

Improve Stronghold

The cabal fortifies an existing Stronghold. A Stronghold can be improved by only one level per turn, and it costs Power equal to the new cost of the Stronghold. Thus, going from a level 3 Stronghold to level 4 costs 4 Power. A damaged Stronghold cannot be improved until it is fully repaired, and this action may be taken only once per turn.

CABAL TURNS AND ACTIONS

While it is rare for foes to reappear during several adventures, especially sorcerous ones, there is always the possibility

that such opponents have made larger plans than the player characters are aware of, grand designs that stretch beyond the death of any individual members or even entire groups. A whole campaign could be constructed around the defeat of an organization or cabal. In that vein, these rules are provided for running one or more cabals as recurring opposition. These rules are optional and provided as something for the gamemaster to use or discard at need.

The gamemaster should run a cabal turn once per game month, or once between adventures in an ongoing campaign featuring recurring cabals as allies or foes. This turn represents what the sorcerers have been up to over

CABALS AND ACTION

Player character actions can have a substantial effect on a cabal, even if they aren't represented by their own allied organization. The outcomes of adventures and player character choices have their own independent effect on a cabal and its Boons, quite aside from the system here. Conversely, a cabal can rarely act directly against the player characters. Even the smallest cabal has too many institutional concerns to turn them all toward the destruction of a group of individuals... usually.

If the player characters destroy a cabal's base of operations in a location, the sorcerers lose their Stronghold Boon there. If the player characters kill a god-monster in the sewers beneath the city, that resource is lost to its owner, regardless of its current Vigor. If the player characters manage to forge a new alliance between their organization and a determined group of hunters in a new city, their faction will gain that Boon without spending Power or a turn to do it. The actions of the player characters are applied directly to the cabal during an adventure, and no other rolling is required.

Player characters may also eventually seek to establish their own cabal to increase their reach in the region and deal with problems they may not have the time to personally address. Experienced player characters will gradually accumulate old friends, trusted allies, and indebted souls that owe them much for their aid. Out of these friends and a location cleared of occult influence, the player characters can hope to found their own organization. This, of course, opens them to attack by other cabals in a way that landless wanderers are not.

The gamemaster should be open to this possibility as soon as the player characters have accumulated enough resources and allies to make it plausible. Some player character groups will have no interest in this, preferring to work alone, or to form no more than a background support organization that doesn't bother to use the

cabal rules. The gamemaster should follow their lead on this, but if the player characters do decide they want to have a cabal of their own, they should be able to take the actions and adventures necessary to build it.

A starting player character cabal begins with a single level 1 Stronghold, a rating of 3 in its best attribute, and 1 in its other two attributes. It may also start with a Boon or two, depending on what kind of allies the player characters bring to the enterprise. It may pick a goal in the same way as any other sorcerers and may advance in attributes by spending advancement points from successful achievement of these goals.

Like any other cabal, these Boons start the game Hidden. Even once revealed, however, the gamemaster should resist the temptation to have the other cabals gang up on this upstart. Even if it is true that the player characters want to destroy all of them and smash all their unholy work, from an individual group's perspective, that is the exact same case with all their other rivals, too, rivals who are likely much more powerful and threatening than this new organization. The locals may come to hate the player characters more than they do each other, but this is a matter of learned experience rather than automatic malice.

Just as with fighting a cabal during an adventure, aiding sorcerers should also apply its effects outside of the system framework. If the player characters manage to enlist an expert Bowman to their cause, then their cabal gains that Boon, whether it could normally afford or be permitted to have it, or not.

The player characters are the wildcards in the cabal system, the rulebreakers that can smash Boons and create aid with a single evening's adventure. It's precisely that unpredictable prowess that provides them their best chance of survival in facing down the horrors of a blighted region.

the past few weeks, though turns can be run more often in times of dramatic activity, or less often when a region is largely quiet. During the cabals' turn, each takes one action. These actions represent schemes and efforts that take place offstage, and are quick ways to abstract the success or failure of some plan. This section includes a list of common actions, but the gamemaster can always create new ones. Anything that might be accomplished in a month might qualify as an action.

A cabal turn begins with a list of the cabals in the campaign. The gamemaster rolls randomly to pick a cabal or selects one to start the turn and then progresses down the list, rolling over to the top until each has had the opportunity to act. This random process is repeated each new turn.

On their turn, each cabal begins by collecting Power from locations that have a Stronghold. The amount of Power depends on both the Stronghold and the location: the bigger the Stronghold, the more Power it can draw, and the more significant the location, the more Power it offers. The lower of these two are used as the cap: a level 5 Stronghold in a location that offers only 3 Power can only draw 3 Power.

If more than one cabal has a Stronghold in the location, the maximum Power that the location provides is reduced by 2 points per additional Stronghold. Thus, if three rival cabals are fighting for control over a city that would normally offer 5 Power, none of them can draw more than 1 Power until at least one of the Strongholds is destroyed.

Next, the sorcerers pay upkeep on any resources that require them. If there's not enough Power to pay for all necessary upkeep, any lacking the payment will lose half their maximum Vigor as damage, rounded up. Boons reduced to zero Vigor are destroyed or hopelessly demoralized.

Boons with the Berserk Quality are more dangerous, representing entities or forces that require constant propitiation to be controlled. If they go out of supply, they become uncontrollable and will automatically attack another Boon in that location, using the Attack Boon action. The choice of target will be determined by the gamemaster.

Next, the cabal may take one action. The list on pages 46–48 covers the most common actions, but you might choose to improvise if the cabal wants to do something else of importance that should take a full turn to accomplish.

Once the action is complete, the cabal may take a single Create Boon or Improve Stronghold action to represent its general growth and advancement. All Boons and Strongholds automatically begin with the Hidden Quality, concealing them from prying eyes. A Boon that loses its Hidden Quality becomes a known factor to all other cabals, as such secrets are too hard to keep once the veil of discretion has been pierced. While it lasts, however, the Boon cannot be targeted for an attack by an enemy.

Finally, the sorcerers pursue their goals. Some goals can be completed just by spending sufficient Power on it, while others require the destruction of enemy Boons or expansion to new locations. If the goal is successfully completed, the cabal may choose a new goal to pursue. A cabal may abandon a goal if it proves impractical, but any investment of Power in it is lost and the cabal is unable to perform any actions or construct any Boons for one turn thereafter as it struggles with the setback and aligns with its new focus. Additionally, completing a goal gains the cabal **advancement points**. These are like player character experience points, and may be spent to increase the cabal's attributes.

Once every cabal has had a chance to act, the turn is complete, and you can adjust the local situation to reflect any new realities or recent upheavals in the region.

CREATING CABALS

This section provides tools to guide the gamemaster through cabal creation, giving information they need to fit the sorcerers into their campaign, create cabals and twisted villains, and to enact their foul plans.

Some cabals will need more elaboration than others. If the gamemaster intends to make a group a major antagonist, with regular and repeated clashes with the characters, it should be fleshed out thoroughly. An understanding of its historical roots and its grand accomplishments can give the gamemaster background material and inspiration for the kind of plans and accomplishments that the cabal has achieved. The gamemaster might even go so far as to detail several different branches of the cult within the region, drawing up notes on their Strongholds and secret sanctums in various locations.

Most cabals don't need this kind of development. Particularly in the early days of a campaign, a gamemaster already has enough creative work to do. Instead, it can be more beneficial to just do a quick sketch of the cabal, perhaps only establishing its current manifestation and goals. If it turns out that the cabal is useful or important, more can be added.

Cabals commonly contain horrible people doing horrible things, and while it's possible that a cabal might have peripheral members who don't really understand what the cabal is about, or fresh followers yet to taste of the abominable pleasures of the cabal, it swiftly becomes clear that to advance or even remain, they must partake in these corrupt practices.

Cabals of sorcerers can also pursue singularly hideous pastimes. As a gamemaster, it's often best to leave the nature of these horrors merely insinuated rather than detailed. Getting too specific about what the cultists are

doing with kidnapped children, for example, and it's easy to cross the line from evocative to queasy. Aside from that, horrors that are left to the imagination are often the most effective. The gamemaster should use lurid description of the cabal's activity sparingly, to set a mood, and let the players' imaginations fill in the rest of the details.

CABAL ATTRIBUTES AND BOONS

Very small or local cabals start with attributes of 3, 1, and 1, arranged to suit their priorities. They have one level 1 Stronghold in their home location, and a total number of Boons whose levels do not add up to more than 3. Such a cabal is either very new, very specific to a family, or very badly hurt from recent conflicts. A given campaign might have one or two such small organizations at most, usually in those places most important to the player characters. Most cabals of this size are too small or local to be worth detailing, unless they have an important, personal link to the player characters. Perhaps a family member joined the cabal years ago, gradually becoming a mindless thug in service of some sinister design.

Moderately powerful cabals have attributes of 5, 4, and 2. They have one level 3 Stronghold and two level 1 Strongholds in the region. Their total Boon levels don't add up to more than nine. These sects dominate a particular section of the region, and usually are at daggers drawn with their rivals. Most campaigns have the most powerful sorcerous cabals at this level, with three or four at most, and often no more

than two or three. These cabals are powerful enough to strongly influence their home area and are usually interested in expanding and deepening their power.

Extremely powerful cabals have attributes of 7, 5, and 3. They have one level 5 Stronghold, two level 3 Strongholds, and two level 1 Strongholds. Their total Boon levels add up to less than 18. There should never be more than one cabal of this power level within a region, and many regions are simply too small to sustain such a hegemony of evil. Forces of this size are usually constantly at war with the rest of the cults and other cabals in the region, many of whom might have put aside their immediate differences to fight against this overwhelming threat. Cults at this level have their tendrils deep within governments and can deliver overwhelming force when their plans require it.

The details and flavor of individual cults can be determined by the gamemaster. As always, the gamemaster should feel free to sketch them loosely until specifics become necessary.

AN UNHOLY HISTORY

These tables serve to generate details about the history and origins of the cabal. The gamemaster can place the cabal's geographic origins anywhere that might be convenient for the campaign. If the cabal was originally founded in a distant land, they might have migrated to another region sometime in the past, or this branch of the cabal might just be a shadow of larger, more terrible forces gathering elsewhere.

AGE OF THE CABAL

| Roll | Date of Foundation |
|-------|--|
| 1–3 | Unfathomably ancient, its origins lost in the mists of prehistory. Roll 6 times on <i>Important Historical Events</i> table. |
| 4–6 | In ancient days, in the earliest days of human civilization. Roll 5 times on <i>Important Historical Events</i> table. |
| 7–10 | Heir to a lost human empire, such as dread Acheron. Roll 4 times on <i>Important Historical Events</i> table. |
| 11–13 | Perhaps a thousand years ago. Roll 3 times on <i>Important Historical Events</i> table. |
| 14–17 | Yet young, within the past few centuries. Roll twice on <i>Important Historical Events</i> table. |
| 18–20 | Upstart, founded within the past few decades. Roll once on <i>Important Historical Events</i> table. |

FOUNDER OF THE CABAL

| Roll | Founder's Identity |
|-------|--|
| 1–2 | A humble peasant wracked with unholy visions. |
| 3–4 | A scholar who learned too much and shared it too widely. |
| 5–6 | A noble who used their wealth to indulge in the occult. |
| 7–8 | A priest who made contact with a foul, mad god. |
| 9–10 | An artist driven by visions of something vast and nameless, at the fringes of dream. |
| 11–12 | An alchemist or artisan who devised unearthly machines, driven by impossible energies. |

FOUNDER OF THE CABAL (CONT.)

| Roll | Founder's Identity |
|-------|---|
| 13–14 | An outcast or marginal person “gifted” with new sight. |
| 15–16 | A sorcerer or occultist delving into unholy and forbidden truths. |
| 17–18 | The chance encounter of a soldier or warlord with the horrors of the Outer Dark. |
| 19–20 | Some pre-human Horror or demon of the Outer Dark created the cabal, as a means to achieve inhuman ends. |

IMPORTANT HISTORICAL EVENTS

| Roll | Event |
|------|---|
| 1 | Briefly an open and accepted faith before becoming warped by its dreadful doctrines. |
| 2 | Summoned its Patron at least once and have learned much from this terrible power. |
| 3 | Created a powerful artifact or spell. |
| 4 | Destroyed and absorbed a powerful rival cabal. |
| 5 | Toppled a troublesome ruler or government. |
| 6 | The Masters and votaries have interbred with some foul entity, resulting in blasphemous offspring whose power has continued to wax since their hideous births. |
| 7 | Obtained or stolen an incredibly powerful relic which the cabal worships but fears to use. |
| 8 | Forced from its homeland. |
| 9 | Established a foothold in a pocket of the Dream Realms or the Outer Dark. |
| 10 | An uprising by its victims nearly destroyed the cabal. |
| 11 | Its Master and nearly all its votaries were consumed by a ritual gone awry. |
| 12 | Preserved an ancient bloodline in the remains of ancient kings, seeking a way to resurrect this dread dynasty. While not as powerful as a bloodline tainted by the Outer Dark, they move more freely among men. |
| 13 | Seized control of an office of a kingdom and ruthlessly suppressed and persecuted any potential enemies. |
| 14 | Nearly destroyed by a rival cabal in a secret war and still recovering from the aftermath. |
| 15 | Secretly controlling a sizable community or region. |
| 16 | Destroyed a group/order/legion whose companions and friends now seek bloody vengeance. |
| 17 | Constructed a Stronghold or temple within which its worldly (and otherworldly) treasures are kept. The place is fiercely defended. |
| 18 | Profaned the holy places of an opposed faith or cabal. |
| 19 | Its sorceries provided it with enormous wealth and influence, at the expense of its leader's sanity. |
| 20 | Time is running out: the cabal has lost something it desperately needs to regain. |

ENEMIES OF THE CABAL

| Roll | Enemies |
|-------|--|
| 1–3 | Clergy of a beneficent faith, who counts the cabal as heretics and diabolists. |
| 4–6 | Rulers who see the cabal's power and atrocities as threats. |
| 7–9 | Peasants dreading the cabal's demands and sacrifices. |
| 10–14 | Scholars that know the true price of the powers the cabal commands. |
| 15–17 | Traitors and the power-mad within the cabal's own ranks, wounding the cabal with strife. |
| 18–20 | Rival cabals who despise the cabal and seek its secrets. |



ORIGINAL FOLLOWERS

| Roll | Followers |
|-------|--|
| 1–2 | The desperate and wretched, the dregs and outcasts. |
| 3–4 | Foolish scholars who were seduced by the promise of forbidden knowledge. |
| 5–6 | Rulers and nobility desiring more power than men should have. |
| 7–8 | Clergy of some faith drawn to the power the cabal's Patron offered. |
| 9–10 | Peasants, long-tired of their station, finding strength in the cabal's wealth and might. |
| 11–12 | Artists drawn to the unearthly visions and delights of the cabal's rituals. |
| 13–14 | Merchants and trade houses drawn by the allure of wealth and influence. |
| 15–16 | Another cabal's followers seduced into the mysteries of this new sect. |
| 17–18 | A tribe of subhuman degenerates worshiping the Master of the cabal as god. |
| 19–20 | A group of sell-swords and mercenaries attracted to the power of the cabal's Patron. |

DEGREE OF SECRECY

| Roll | Practices |
|-------|---|
| 1–2 | The cabal meets at Strongholds or deep within the bowels of the earth, shunning the day. |
| 3–4 | The nobility of their region conceals the cabal's holdings and meetings. |
| 5–6 | The corrupted priests of a faith help conceal the cabal's activities as being the divine mysteries of an accepted religion. |
| 7 | The cabal masquerades as a seemingly beneficent organization. |
| 8 | The cabal hides within the ranks of a mercenary company or military unit, using that group's discipline and martial ritual as a cover for the cabal's own, more sinister rites. |
| 9–10 | The cabal conceals its activities in a center of learning, masquerading as scholars dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge. |
| 11–12 | The cabal haunts far, demon-haunted fanes, disdaining civilization. |
| 13–14 | The cabal has criminal allies that use campaigns of terror and intimidation to hide their brethren. |
| 15–16 | The cabal never meets in person, using occult means to gather invisibly from afar. |
| 17–18 | The cabal relies on familial blood ties, using the bloodline's discretion. |
| 19–20 | Once enlisted, a curse is laid upon all who ally with the cabal, ensuring their silence. |



PLANS FOUL AND DARK

These tables describe the cabal's current condition and ambitions. The details given here largely refer to specific branches or groups of the cabal itself, though small cabals might exist in only one location. Two groups worshiping the same diabolical Patron might have very different ways of arranging their affairs and express very different desires of their unholy god. The gamemaster should pick and choose these aspects as desired.

ATTITUDE OF THE CABAL

| Roll | Attitude |
|-------|---|
| 1–3 | Coldly rational and logical, inhumanly so. |
| 4–6 | Largely rational, but often subject to the bizarre demands of the cabal and its Patron. |
| 7–9 | Understandable goals achieved by the foulest of means. |
| 10–14 | While lunatic in purpose, the cabal approaches its goals rationally. |
| 15–17 | Much of the cabal has troubles functioning in a society. |
| 18–20 | Exposed to the terrible secrets of the cabal, many members are openly mad. |

MEETING PLACES

| Roll | Location |
|-------|---|
| 1–2 | In the slums, the cabal's meeting place is disguised as an abandoned building. |
| 3–4 | At the estate or villa of a wealthy member. |
| 5–6 | In a temple twisted to the cabal's own ends. |
| 7–8 | Beneath the earth in caves, caverns, and sewers. |
| 9–10 | Far from civilization in hidden groves and blasphemous wilderness. |
| 11–12 | At social gatherings held by influential followers. |
| 13–14 | Within the halls of a government holding the cabal has infiltrated. |
| 15–16 | At a hospice or infirmary where the cabal has easy access to sacrificial victims. |
| 17–18 | In the mist-shrouded confines of tombs and cemeteries, where Death holds sway. |
| 19–20 | In a place of cultural significance that has some occult meaning. |

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CABAL

| Roll | Trait or Quirk |
|------|---|
| 1 | An ancient and inhuman tongue is the cabal's ceremonial and ritual language. |
| 2 | All in the cabal share a common feature: a brand, tattoo, or mutilation. |
| 3 | The cabal's members are repulsed by some substance or symbol; an Elder sign, for example, or the pungent oil from a sacred tree. |
| 4 | The cabal's members all bear some subtle, inhuman deformity. |
| 5 | The cabal's members heavily favor specific occult symbols and paraphernalia. |
| 6 | The cabal has a specific, totemic animal that serves it. |
| 7 | The cabal has a subdued Horror at its disposal. |
| 8 | The Master is inhumanly beautiful and seductive. |
| 9 | The cabal's members cannot speak a particular word, phrase, or language. |
| 10 | The cabal's members do not feel pain, translating it as another sensation entirely. |
| 11 | The cabal's members carry a subtle but awful plague which produces strange but explicable physical phenomena: e.g., spasmodic hand movements. |
| 12 | The cabal's members require some unwholesome substance to nourish themselves. |
| 13 | The cabal's followers and acolytes are hypnotically subjugated. |
| 14 | The cabal's members are subtly disquieting and repulsive; a hideous scent hangs around them at all times. |
| 15 | The cabal's members cannot reproduce and require "new blood" to maintain their numbers. |
| 16 | The Master and/or votaries are immortal, made so through hideous rites. |
| 17 | The cabal's members cannot perceive certain objects or colors. |
| 18 | Without certain rituals regularly performed, the cabal's members slowly wither and decay. |
| 19 | The cabal's members do not bleed and must be dismembered, or their bodies otherwise destroyed utterly, to be killed. |
| 20 | The Masters and votaries of the cabal can sacrifice themselves to generate sudden Power. |

| MEANS OF CONTROL | |
|------------------|---|
| Roll | Method |
| 1-3 | Threats of violence against loved ones. |
| 4-6 | Blackmail with the crimes committed for the cabal. |
| 7-9 | Addictions to strange substances or unholy pleasures. |
| 10-14 | Sorcerous bindings and compulsions laid upon them. |
| 15-17 | Threats of ruin at the hands of the authorities the cabal controls. |
| 18-20 | Twisted devotion and love. |

| LEADERSHIP OF THE CABAL | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Roll | Government |
| 1-2 | A single Master controls all. |
| 3-4 | The Master has a few of trustworthy lieutenants, other than the votaries. |
| 5-6 | A single Master with a more-or-less trustworthy functionary. |
| 7-8 | A terrible and inhuman Patron and its chosen spokesperson. |
| 9-10 | The Master is first among equals in a sorcerous council. |
| 11-12 | Some inhuman and alien system that daunts sanity. |
| 13-14 | A council of the Master, votaries, and acolytes constantly at each other's throats. |
| 15-16 | A council of the Masters, votaries, and acolytes that can mostly work together. |
| 17-18 | Guided by auguries and portents, the only guarantee of power is the correct interpretation of the signs received. |
| 19-20 | Following the path of an ancient, possibly pre-human, prophecy. |

| ULTIMATE GOALS OF THE CABAL | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Roll | Goal |
| 1-2 | Destruction of a community or a group opposed to it. |
| 3-4 | Revenge against a rival, a kingdom, or a traitor. |
| 5-6 | Political power around its centers of activity. |
| 7-8 | Depraved pleasures that no civilized people permit. |
| 9-10 | Powerful sorcery or eldritch artifacts. |
| 11-12 | Worshiping dark powers with bloody sacrifices. |
| 13-14 | Bringing forth an unholy abomination. |
| 15-16 | Creating some enormous atrocity or disaster. |
| 17-18 | Destruction of its parent group. |
| 19 | Wealth beyond mortal imagination. |
| 20 | Destruction of the world for its Patron. |

| CABAL ASSETS | |
|--------------|---|
| Roll | Asset |
| 1-2 | Non-human allies willing to lend their aid. |
| 3-4 | A large supply of thugs and brutish warriors. |
| 5-6 | Infiltrators within local government and watches. |
| 7-8 | Vast mundane wealth. |
| 9-10 | Blackmail materials which consign the powerful to silence and inaction. |
| 11-12 | Unholy abominations at its command. |
| 13-14 | Friends and members among elite society. |
| 15-16 | Some mind-influencing power or item. |
| 17-18 | Several criminal enterprises. |
| 19 | Perfectly disguised as a benevolent group. |
| 20 | Control over a vast network of spies and informants. |



MINIONS AND NAMES

The gamemaster should pick a suitably imposing name for the cabal or generate one using the Adventure Title generator on pages 9–10 of the *Gamemaster’s Toolkit* and identify any particularly interesting minions it might have in its service. Where combat statistics are needed for these minions, the gamemaster can refer to the *Encounters* chapter of the **Conan** corebook (or other sourcebooks) and pick something appropriate. Multiple rolls might produce several minions, or these entries might be blended together.

“Is Yezdigerd your vassal?” Yasmina tried to keep the timbre of her voice unaltered. She had felt her knee pressing something hard and symmetrical under a fold of velvet. Subtly she shifted her position, moving her hand under the fold.

“Is the dog that licks up the offal in the temple yard the vassal of the god?” returned the Master.

— “The People of the Black Circle”



SERVANTS OF IMPORTANCE

| Roll | Servant |
|-------|---|
| 1–2 | A barely human savage or maniacal warrior, kept penned up when not needed for merciless bloodshed. |
| 3–4 | An alien Horror that has made a compact with the cabal, either through sorcerous rites or some hideous bargain. |
| 5–6 | A seductress or seducer, specializing in appearing helpless and in need of aid. |
| 7–8 | A local official in too deep, desperate to escape the cabal but forced to use their authority on the cabal’s behalf. |
| 9–10 | A crazed alchemist or philosopher, capable of building uncanny devices, but requiring awful ingredients for their completion. |
| 11–12 | A merciless crime boss who directs their unwitting minions at the secret command of the cabal. |
| 13–14 | A monstrous entity that looks like a harmless human, but possesses secret and terrible powers. |
| 15–16 | A mad sorcerer versed in unholy wisdom, yet too unstable to function as the cabal’s leader. |
| 17–18 | A brutalized victim of the cabal, hollowed out and helpless in their obedience. They yet have a useful social position. |
| 19 | A cold and ruthless mercenary, skilled and willing to hire their services even to monsters like the cabal. |
| 20 | An avatar of their Patron, almost uncontrollable in its terrible power and summoned only in dire need. |



| MINIONS OF THE CABAL | |
|----------------------|---|
| Roll | Minion |
| 1–2 | A foolish street thug with grandiose plans. |
| 3–4 | A merchant meaning to use the cabal to advance themselves. |
| 5–6 | A corrupt member of a military or watch who cares only for the bribes they receive. |
| 7–8 | A sneak thief or other petty criminal that simply does what they're told. |
| 9–10 | A famous artist or philosopher inspired by the cabal's Patron. |
| 11–12 | A lecherous businessman seeking terrible pleasures. |
| 13–14 | A second-generation servant of the cabal, serving due to familial ties. |
| 15–16 | A beggar or gamin used as fodder for the cabal's rites. |
| 17 | A respected elder in a community, concealing a hideous secret. |
| 18 | A group of primitives worshiping the Patron or Master of the cabal. |
| 19 | An ambitious scholar being manipulated by the cabal in exchange for petty secrets. |
| 20 | A would-be sorcerer seeking favor from the cabal. |

CABAL ADVANCEMENT

A cabal gains advancement points by accomplishing specific goals. The cabal can spend advancement points to increase their attributes, at an advancement point cost equal to the attribute's new rating. Particularly with organizations run by player characters, the gamemaster might grant an advancement point or a flat attribute increase as a reward for a successful related adventure.

The goals provided below are examples.

Commit Atrocity

The cabal must do something horrible in a location where it has a Stronghold. The location's maximum Power decreases by 1 due to the destruction and horror of the atrocity, but the cabal gains 1 advancement point. This atrocity cannot be committed in a location with a rival cabal's Boon present, as it interferes with the process.

Destroy an Enemy

The cabal must destroy enemy assets with a total number of levels equal to the cabal's highest Boon, earning 1 advancement point for success.

Drive Out a Foe

The cabal must destroy an enemy Stronghold, earning 1 advancement point if it succeeds.

Expand Influence

The cabal must establish a Stronghold in a new location and maintain it for a number of turns equal to the cabal's highest attribute, gaining 1 advancement point if successful. This Stronghold cannot have the Hidden Quality during this time, as its outreach is too obvious.

Purge Treachery

Inflict 2 \spadesuit damage each turn to any one Boon for a number of turns equal to the cabal's highest attribute to gain 1 advancement point.

Serve Patron

The cabal directs Power toward the eldritch ends of its Master or Patron. The cabal must spend Power equal to its lowest attribute plus its highest attribute to complete this goal, earning 1 advancement point if it does.

Tighten Control

The cabal can take no action except Create or Bolster Boon or Improve Stronghold, and must maintain this discipline for a number of turns equal to its highest attribute, earning 1 advancement point if it does.

Terrorize Enemy

The cabal must perform the Attack Boon action for a consecutive number of turns equal to its highest attribute. At least one Boon must actually attack each turn. If the cabal maintains this onslaught, it gains 1 advancement point.

CHAPTER 6

ADVANCED RULES FOR SORCERY

“Many things he taught me — ” She paused, smiling enigmatically, with wicked mystery gleaming in her dark eyes. Then she tossed her head.

“He drove me from him at last, saying that I was but a common witch in spite of his teachings, and not fit to command the mighty sorcery he would have taught me.”

— Salome, “A Witch Shall be Born”

The Book of Skelos... a series of fragments, scrolls, palimpsests, and manuscripts. Much of it is scarcely legible; still larger portions of it are inscribed in languages which have not been read or spoken in millennia — the meaning of the characters etched into the pages long forgotten.

The content itself is most likely taken from an even greater repository of wisdom — from the libraries of an advanced civilization, perhaps. Others whisper that the pages are filled with the wisdom of a fallen god. Whatever the truth, it has long since been consigned to the eddying tides of history.

This chapter is dedicated to those secrets which might be gleaned from those pages comprehensible to human eyes. There are many arcane secrets within the Book which cannot be deciphered — cautious scholars that have studied the books remain grateful for this fact. Entire lives have been spent pursuing the hidden wisdom of *The Book of Skelos*. Those men and women who have poured their lives into such research have ended as gibbering lunatics. Some whisper that those who end up mad are the lucky ones.

This chapter also considers the genesis of the sorcerer, and how it is that such people come to be. The lore that magicians utilize in making their magic is uncovered — to the extent it can be — and some new wonders of alchemy laid bare. Most importantly, within these pages lie spells

that sunder reality and allow those things which exist in the Outer Dark to slice their way into this one...

SORCERER CHARACTER GENERATION

Sorcerers are as oft born as made. The following tables may be substituted for any player character destined to assume the role of a sorcerer. These tables reference terms found in the **Conan** corebook character generation chapter, and can be used in parallel with the tables found there. None of these tables change the basic rules of character generation; they just provide alternatives which make sorcerers more intriguing in play.

STEP ONE: HOMELAND

All nations produce sorcerers, but the lands to the south and the east tend to produce more sorcerers than others. Stygia runs with the blood of peoples long steeped in magic. There are no changes needed to the regular character generation Homeland table, but players should consider how their homeland might create an interesting backstory. If uncertain



about the homeland that best suits your character, come back to this section later. Remember, only naked ambition and moral flexibility are the toll demanded to begin on the path to the Outer Dark.

STEP TWO: SORCEROUS ATTRIBUTES

Sorcerers must be intelligent and willful to survive. It is recommended that any sorcerer-to-be select from the following table instead of the regular attribute table found

in Step Two of Character Creation on page 17 of the *Conan* corebook. Whether the player does this is ultimately up to them, but this table is biased towards sorcerers.

STEP THREE: CASTE

While there are a few hedge witches and similar practitioners, sorcerers don't tend to come from the manual labor classes. Most sorcerers are power-starved members of the priestly or noble classes, but a considerable number are also outcasts who learn the secrets of sorcery the hard

| OPTIONAL SORCEROUS ATTRIBUTES | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Roll | Attribute Aspects | Mandatory Attribute | Mandatory Attribute | Optional Attribute | Optional Attribute |
| 1-4 | Unwavering Intelligence | Intelligence | Willpower | Awareness | Agility |
| 5-8 | Powerful Presence | Personality | Willpower | Intelligence | Brawn |
| 9-11 | Mighty Stature | Brawn | Personality | Intelligence | Willpower |
| 12-14 | Charming Performer | Agility | Personality | Awareness | Coordination |
| 15-17 | Scientific Mind | Awareness | Intelligence | Willpower | Coordination |
| 18 | Wise and Friendly | Intelligence | Personality | Coordination | Brawn |
| 19 | Charismatic | Personality | Willpower | Awareness | Intelligence |
| 20 | Strong and Resolute | Brawn | Willpower | Personality | Intelligence |

way. The table below allows the player to determine caste with a view to playing a sorcerer. As always, the player can choose the result that's most fitting.

| SORCEROUS CASTE | |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| Roll | Caste |
| 1-4 | Outcast |
| 5-6 | Escaped Serf/Slave |
| 7-8 | Merchant |
| 9-10 | Craftsman |
| 11-12 | Herder |
| 13-16 | Priesthood |
| 17-20 | Petty Nobility |

STEP FOUR: SORCEROUS BACKSTORY

The events that craft a sorcerer's history are as many and varied as their eventual demises. While there is no change to this optional step, the player should consider how sorcery might have had a part in their life before play. When determining the background event, look at the result with sorcery in mind. Was your herd bountiful because of some pact made with a shadow in the wood? When you defeated an opponent, was it because of your fell powers rather than strength of arms?

STEP FIVE: SORCERER ARCHETYPES

There are five distinct sorcerous archetypes and, while any character can learn Sorcery, these archetypes are most likely to be successful in pursuing the dark arts. A player creating a sorcerer character should choose one of these rather than rolling. This is the most important choice the player will make when devising their character.

“Many things he taught me — ” She paused, smiling enigmatically, with wicked mystery gleaming in her dark eyes. Then she tossed her head.

“He drove me from him at last, saying that I was but a common witch in spite of his teachings, and not fit to command the mighty sorcery he would have taught me.”

— Salome, “A Witch Shall be Born”

ALCHEMIST

Sitting amongst braziers and oils, the alchemist stirs the mixture, waiting for the metal in the fire to glow, so that a turn of a screw might preserve the mixture for the next stage. The metal glows, the ratchet turns, wine is sipped, and the process is renewed. The moon sets on another night spent ennobling metals.

While much of the population calls you a wizard, you know that, unlike mere ritual, there is method and procedure governing your works. You might not understand why a cause commands an effect, but they're recorded, confirmed, and you have mastered their preparation and use.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Expertise and +2 Focus in the Alchemy skill

CAREER TALENT: Alchemist (see page 58 of the CONAN corebook)

MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Counsel, Healing, Persuade, and Society

ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Animal Handling, Sorcery, or Thievery

EQUIPMENT:

- Alchemical laboratory, alchemical field laboratory, and personal library
- Seasonally appropriate clothing and traveling gear
- A mule or horse
- Three ingredients



CHARLATAN

"Behold my curative powers. I command you Bezoar, Picatrix, Gastrolith! Infuse this medicine with your power! Quickly drink this concoction, and you will feel no pain or fear. Yes... I can see its working! Are the aches dying away? No... that bottle is a gift. You'll not need to pay for it. Still, if you would have more, I'd be happy to add some of your goats to my caravan."

You're not a wizard or a sorcerer, but there are plenty who will pay you to pretend to be one. Why work for a living when you can just wave your hands? Most fools could not tell real magic from what you engineer by imagination alone.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Expertise and +2 Focus in the Persuade skill

CAREER TALENT: *Force of Presence* (see page 76 of the CONAN corebook)

MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Insight, Society, Stealth, and Thievery

ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Alchemy, Healing, or Lore

EQUIPMENT:

- Personal library of fake lore
- Seasonally appropriate clothing and traveling gear
- A fast riding horse
- Several bottles of colored water or similar gimmicks
- Choice of two from: portable alchemical laboratory, personal library, or healer's bag



SAGE

When powerful people need answers, you are the one they seek and while sorcery is dangerous, little else offers the opportunity to learn more about the world. You pursue knowledge for your own reasons, but the pursuit is an obsession willingly financed by kings and would-be rulers.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Expertise and +2 Focus in the Lore skill

CAREER TALENT: *Scribe* (see page 72 of the CONAN corebook)

MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Sorcery, Alchemy, Insight, and Persuade

ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Insight, Lore, or Society

EQUIPMENT:

- Sorcerous accouterments
- Personal library
- Seasonally appropriate clothing and traveling gear
- A mule or horse
- One ingredient



SORCERER

Delving through broken ruins or drunk on their own power, sorcerers are a constant threat to the kingdoms of the Hyborian Age. Each sorcerer is born out of their own obsessions and, even though some might be useful or even amicable in nature, they should be watched for the moment that their sanity fades. Then, one ceases to be companion and becomes the sacrifice!

CAREER SKILL: +2 Expertise and +2 Focus in the Sorcery skill

CAREER TALENT: Patron (see page 84 of the CONAN corebook)

MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Alchemy, Counsel, Healing, and Lore

ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Animal Handling, Command, or Thievery

EQUIPMENT:

- Sorcerous accouterments

- Personal library

- Seasonally appropriate clothing and traveling gear

- A mule or horse

- Three offerings

NOTES: Prior to learning any spells, you also need the Sorcerer talent (see the CONAN corebook, page 84).



WITCH DOCTOR

In the Black Kingdoms, there is no distinction between healer and wizard. If you are a doctor, you are expected to cope with the root cause of all maladies including those inflicted by curse or animistic spirit. When the curses are lifted, it becomes the responsibility of the witch doctor to find the culprit and ensure such things can never happen again. The tradition of the witch doctor may be a local phenomenon, but there are healers in many lands who take up sorcery in the hopes of finding miracle cures. Many are embittered when these promises turn out to be empty.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Expertise and +2 Focus in the Healing skill

CAREER TALENT: Bind Wounds (see page 67 of the CONAN corebook)

MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Insight, Observation, Lore, and Sorcery

ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Animal Handling, Counsel, or Survival

EQUIPMENT:

- Sorcerous accouterments

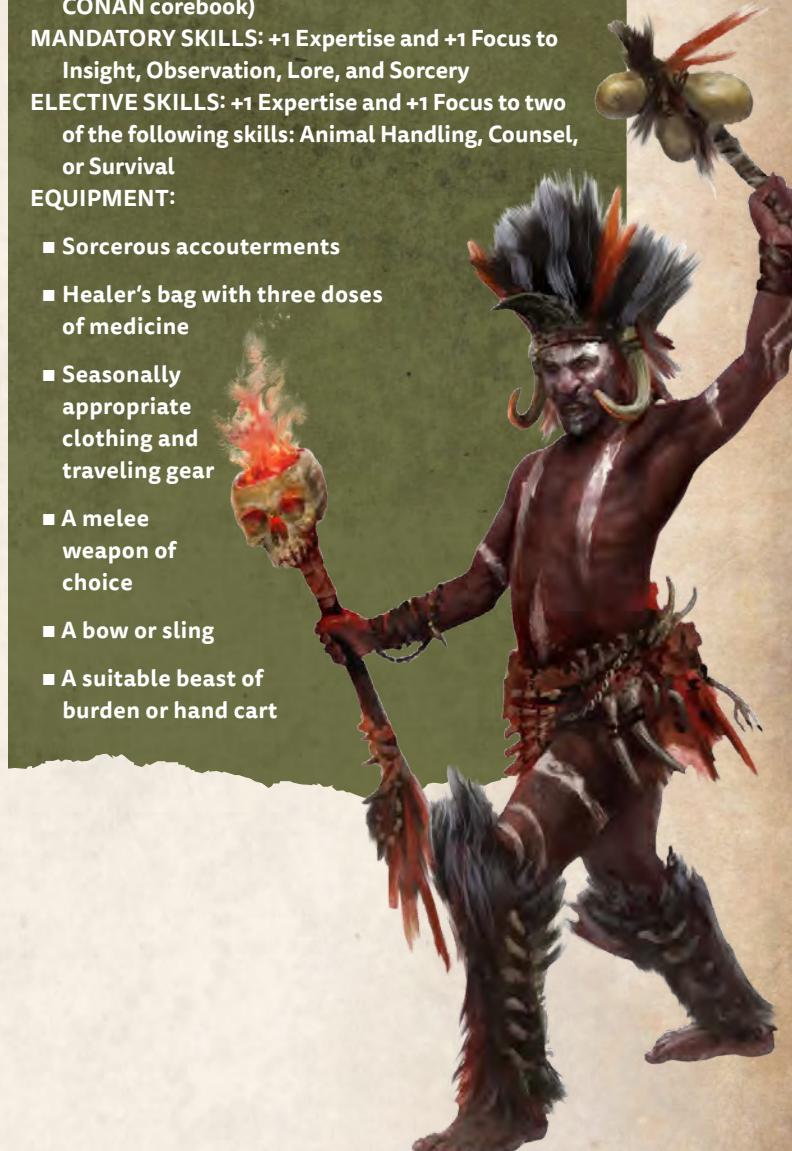
- Healer's bag with three doses of medicine

- Seasonally appropriate clothing and traveling gear

- A melee weapon of choice

- A bow or sling

- A suitable beast of burden or hand cart



STEP SIX: SORCEROUS NATURE

The natures of sorcerers are quite often far removed from those of mortals. They seek out challenges and secrets relentlessly. The table below includes natures from the *Conan* corebook, and new natures described in this volume (in italics). Players playing a sorcerer should use any talents they gain here to continue their career.

| SORCEROUS NATURE | | | |
|------------------|---------------|-------|---------------------|
| Roll | Nature | Roll | Nature |
| 1–2 | Inspirational | 11–12 | Practical |
| 3–4 | Learned | 13–14 | <i>Unholy Birth</i> |
| 5–6 | Sneaky | 15–16 | Cursed |
| 7–8 | Scheming | 17–18 | Academic |
| 9–10 | Curious | 19–20 | Driven |

Academic

It is your nature to learn — whether about the seasons and the clouds they bring or the darkest inhuman lore of broken civilizations. You have seen entire libraries reduced to ash and know that unless lore is retained in memory, it will soon vanish beneath the plow of history.

Attribute Improvement: +1 to Intelligence

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Alchemy, Lore, and Sorcery

Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Craft, Insight, or Linguistics

Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills

Cursed

You were born marked by the powers of the Outer Dark. Your family home was destroyed, leaving you orphaned. Those who took you in were robbed and killed. For whatever reason, the hex upon you leaves you to suffer and puts those you love in the grave.

Attribute Improvement: +1 to Brawn

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Counsel, Observation, and Survival

Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Discipline, Resistance, or Sorcery

Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills

Driven

You saw something wonderful, or have an idea so profound it scares you. You know you can bring that sensation back if only you work hard enough. Whatever this wonder was, it crystallized your will and is now your utmost goal.

Attribute Improvement: +1 to Willpower

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Command, Discipline, and Resistance

Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Persuade, Society, or Sorcery

Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills

Unholy Birth

Your mother was a humble woman who slept unknowingly near a place of great power. At night, she was visited by something other than a mortal, and you were conceived. When you were born, there was a great argument as to whether you should be allowed to live. In the end, someone stole you away into the night and raised you apart from your people.

Attribute Improvement: +1 to Awareness

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Command, Discipline, and Resistance

Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Insight, Linguistics, or Sorcery

Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills

STEP SEVEN: SORCEROUS EDUCATION

As with archetypes, the education that a neophyte sorcerer obtains is important in determining how the player character came to know of the true power of sorcery. Players can choose any one of the following educations instead of those in the *Conan* corebook, if desired.

Apprenticed to a Sorcerer

At an early age, you were handed over to a sorcerer. Perhaps they initially planned to sacrifice you, but for whatever reason they kept you on and trained you. As time progressed, the sorcerer introduced you to their dark patrons and offered to make you a sorcerer as well.

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Discipline, Lore, and Sorcery

Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Linguistics, Persuade, or Society

Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills

Equipment: A token from your former mentor, given in friendship, respect, or under great duress

Haunted by Ghosts

While your family tried to teach you about the world, you faced other challenges. At night, you were visited — sometimes by voices, sometimes by presences, sometimes by nothing but the nagging doubt you were going mad. Over time, you listened to the voices, understood their teachings, and watched the ghosts argue amongst themselves and paint the walls with violent shadows. The spirits dwindled over time from a handful to just a single mentor, and now even that mentor has grown distant.

| SORCERY STORY | | |
|---------------|---|--|
| Roll | Select Sorcery Story | Skill Improvements |
| 1–2 | Survived a failed summoning | +1 Expertise and Focus to Discipline and Insight |
| 3–4 | Survived a war between your Patron and another sorcerer | +1 Expertise and Focus to Discipline and Lore |
| 5–6 | Survived witchcraft | +1 Expertise and Focus to Discipline and Sorcery |
| 7–8 | Led a witch hunt | +1 Expertise and Focus to Command and Society |
| 9–10 | Cured a serious illness | +1 Expertise and Focus to Healing and Resistance |
| 11–12 | Bargained for a great treasure | +1 Expertise and Focus to Persuade and Society |
| 13–14 | Gained the favor of a demon | +1 Expertise and Focus to Lore and Sorcery |
| 15–16 | Flogged in the street | +1 Expertise and Focus to Persuade and Resistance |
| 17–18 | Stranded in a strange place | +1 Expertise and Focus to Athletics and Survival |
| 19–20 | Stole a book of sorcery written in an ancient tongue | +1 Expertise and Focus to Linguistics and Thievery |

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Insight, Lore, and Sorcery

Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Discipline, Linguistics, or Persuade

Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills

Equipment: A small trinket associated with the dead or necromancy

Mystery Cult Adherent

Your family always followed a faith hidden from the regular world. It may be a harmless faith, but other faiths can be dangerously intolerant; so, it is better to stay hidden. Now, you have learned the lesser mysteries and are ready to progress into the deeper secrets.

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Discipline, Insight, and Stealth

Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Alchemy, Lore, or Sorcery

Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills

Equipment: A holy symbol of your god

Ostracized Acolyte

You studied their false path and learned that it offered little in true power. They just needed a thug who would do as they were told. That was never going to be you, and when you rebelled, you were cast aside. Still, you learned enough that finding other masters would not be too difficult.

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Healing, Lore, and Melee

Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Alchemy, Sorcery, or Stealth

Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills

Equipment: A stolen grimoire from your master's library

STEP EIGHT: SORCERY STORY

Sorcerers often have different stories than that of regular folk. A sorcerer can use either this table or the *War Story* table from the *Conan* corebook, as desired. As always, the player is encouraged to customize the general theme of the war story to make it unique.

STEP NINE: CUSTOMIZATION

As you approach the completion of your character, this final step is vital in producing the type of character you wish to play. Your free talent should almost certainly be spent on a talent that contributes to your sorcerous inclinations, but this needn't be another spell. A sorcerer can gain a lot from other talents: while the easy option is to pick a spell, it is worthwhile holding onto the last talent until you can properly decide what sort of character you want to play. Likewise, it's foolish to place all your skill points into Sorcery or Alchemy.

Your character might not have a core skill such as Athletics, Acrobatics, or Parry and you might consider spending those skill points in places where you have an obvious gap. If you can't think of a suitable skill, consider a Discipline talent. Discipline talents can be very useful when you have a low Resolve.

THE SORCERY SKILL

The Sorcery skill is the foremost skill that the sorcerer uses to control spells and confront the unknown. While its predominant use is in casting spells, it can be used for much more than this. Sorcery is an investigative skill used to recognize sorcery on more than the intuitive level. Sorcery is an academic skill allowing sorcerers to read and



recognize actual sorcery from the hokum of superstition and the blatherings of the insane. Sorcery is a tactical skill, allowing sorcerers to warn their companions about threats lurking in the darkness. Sorcery is also an experimental skill, allowing sorcerers to craft new spells and find new applications for the spells that they know.

SORCERY AS AN ACADEMIC OR INVESTIGATIVE SKILL

When facing a sorcerer, it is unwise to face them while in a hurry. Even chasing a petty alchemist back to their laboratory is unwise. Until you know the extent of their powers, you could be facing anything. Luckily, the Sorcery skill enables the sorcerer to recognize the capabilities of their enemies in several ways.

Recognizing Spells and Petty Enchantments

Any player character with the Sorcery skill can attempt to recognize a spell by its effects. After all, it is fair to say that if a sorcerer has turned someone into a spider, they used the *Shape of a Beast* spell to do it. The Difficulty for recognizing a spell or other power is a Dire (D4) test for skilled characters, decreasing to Daunting (D3) if you have the Patron talent, and Challenging (D2) if you possess the spell itself. When dealing with petty enchantments, the same test is made with the Alchemy skill.

Effects are not the only way to discover a spell. If a sorcerer becomes aware of the offerings or ingredients in

another sorcerer's possession, they can attempt to deduce the spell from this information. The Difficulty for this is the same as if they had witnessed the effect of the spell.

Recognizing a spell is quite valuable. If a sorcerer knows that another sorcerer can cast a given spell, they can take suitable protections against the spell. These protections are generally realized as bonus Momentum that can be applied when a spell requires a Struggle or when a sorcerer attempts counter-magic.

Recognizing Sorcerers Through Their Arts

Sometimes a player character might attempt to pursue a sorcerer, or needs to identify them for some other purpose. There are several ways that a sorcerer might be unmasked. The most obvious is by the sorcerer's name. There is a good chance that a sorcerer might recognize the name of one of their rivals, but to gain reliable information about a sorcerer from name and reputation alone is a Challenging (D3) Sorcery test. This can be reduced based on mitigating factors such as sharing a homeland or common tradition, but as each Momentum nets one piece of information, it is unlikely to provide very much detail. Indeed, for every accurate piece of information, the sorcerer is likely to hear two or three things that are completely wrong.

If a sorcerer visited libraries or sages, their journals are often copied as a means of payment. As sorcery is never entirely written down, there is little risk in others recording their private notes. Further, having an emergency source to return to for knowledge can be a boon in of itself. Reading

a sorcerer's notes is no mean feat. But, as their travels can be unraveled from these notes, should a fellow sorcerer succeed in a Daunting (D3) Sorcery test, they can ascertain the sorcerer's next destination. Momentum can also be spent to ascertain why this travel occurred. The main difficulty in tracking a sorcerer this way is that they are prone to using pseudonyms, and without a reliable description this test can be even harder.

By far the easiest way to recognize a sorcerer is when they cast a spell. If at any time a sorcerer witnesses a casting, they can make a Challenging (D2) Sorcery test to see if the incantation matches any they have previously come across. Whether the spell has been written or performed, this will confirm that the sorcery used is the same.

Legends of Fell Magic

The same gossip that gives sorcerers the knowledge to recognize sorcerers through their arts also allows sorcerers to make guesses at the abilities or dangers of magical sites. Much of this is pure hearsay, but prior to investigating any mysterious ruin, a sorcerer can prepare anyone assisting them with suitable tales and admonitions. There is some danger in doing this, as incorrect information may place the player characters in grave danger, as truths they take for granted turn out to be mere rumor and conjecture.

The gamemaster should allow the sorcerer to deliver this knowledge as a monologue, and it is recommended that the gamemaster award bonus Momentum for a particularly good performance. Once the sorcerer finishes preparing their companions, they should attempt an Average (D1) Sorcery test, with all Momentum going into the Momentum pool. Any consequences from this test cause all player characters to lose 2  Resolve as the encounter begins.

Unmasking Fakes and Tracking Sorcerers

The Sorcery skill is excellent for unmasking magical fakes and alchemy. There is a taste to true sorcery that lingers in the air, charging it with the unnatural. Characters with the Sorcery or Insight skill can take a Minor Action to make a Challenging (D2) test and recognize whether any effect has been caused by trickery, alchemy, or sorcery. This test requires little effort, and player characters may choose to

spend 1 Momentum on any standard skill test to gain the same information. Should the sorcerer want more information, additional research is needed.

Unraveling the components of a trick or alchemy is covered by the Alchemy skill, but learning more about sorcery always uses the Sorcery skill. As a Simple (D0) test, Sorcery can uncover the consequences caused, or offerings used, in casting the spell — and whether a spell came from an artifact or whether the spell was cast by something inhuman. With a suitably high Momentum spend (2-3, depending on the task), a sorcerer can even track a rival for a short distance by following the arcane influences upon the environment.

SORCERY AS AN EXPERIMENTAL SKILL

The spells outlined in the *Conan* corebook represent an entire school of magical endeavor. They each have Momentum spends that allow a sorcerer to produce customizable effects. Players may wish to create new Momentum spends — and this is fully within the scope of the existing spells. It is possible that, in reading eldritch tomes, a player character comes across an effect they wish to mimic, or a unique circumstance emerges not defined within the existing rules.

If the effect is within the scope of an existing spell, and the player character knows that spell, a Challenging (D3) test is all that's required to add the new spell to their repertoire. If a player character does not have such a work and is instead attempting to discover new applications through trial and error, they must undertake research as a downtime action. To perform research, the player character must attempt a Dire (D4) Sorcery test, spending at least one offering.

If this test is successful, the gamemaster should consider the nature of the spell and the effects desired. The player may have their own ideas about what they would like to achieve, so this might be as simple as negotiating the Momentum cost of that effect or agreeing to the proposed alternative effect. If the player does not suggest an alternative effect or Momentum spend, the gamemaster should consider the matter and return with a Momentum spend equal to 1 plus the number of Momentum rolled by the player character.

MOMENTUM SPENDS FOR SORCERY

| Spend | Cost | Description |
|-------------------------|------|--|
| Cast in Whispered Tones | 1 R | When casting in whispered tones, observers must make a Difficulty X Observation test where X is the Momentum spent by the caster to hide their magic. |
| Listening to Shadows | 1 R | The lingering shadows whisper secrets to any sorcerer wishing to hear them. When using Sorcery to gather information, Momentum spends can be used to learn about any sorcerer that has cast a spell in that place. |

Ultimately, what this effect does is up to the gamemaster, but this should be an opportunity for the gamemaster to increase the options of the player character, rather than add a +1 to damage or some similar effect.

Chris asks his gamemaster if he can engage in research as a part of his downtime, and the gamemaster agrees. Chris makes his research test, scoring 2 Momentum, but doesn't have any clear idea what he wants to gain from the research. The gamemaster asks which spell he wants to research, and Chris says Form of a Beast.

The gamemaster comes back with a solution. Chris' character currently uses the spell to take on the shape of a raven to spy on the activities of the city. The gamemaster proposes that as a 3 Momentum spend, when Chris' character takes the form of a raven, the character can take the form of a locust instead. The locust has no additional abilities beyond that of the raven but is substantially smaller, making it a much better disguise. It's a strange twist, but a substantive improvement that increases his options for subterfuge, so Chris agrees.

RITUAL AND SACRIFICE

Its own theater of activity accompanies the working of spells. Spells may include the beating of drums, strange cries and dances, the preparation of offerings, and a vast panoply of actions. Many of these activities occur when the sorcerer is in seclusion, their effectiveness untested till the last few elements are brought together, and the promises made by camp fire shadows are put to the test.

Sorcerers trained by the same Patron will repeat a spell in a similar manner, but sorcery is more art than science, and each caster places their own emphasis on different aspects of the spell. It is ultimately up to the player and gamemaster to determine what it looks like when a spell is cast, but the following should serve to make an informed choice.

Magic Is Obvious and Not Sedate

While not every sorcerer must scream to the heavens as they cast a spell, nor engage in lengthy verses from forgotten tongues, all castings make noise. This is usually equal to at least that of a conversation. Likewise, while not every spell features strange dances or posturing, it is obvious to most outsiders that you are engaging in something unnatural when casting a spell. However, as noted above, only a learned sorcerer can make any sense of what another wielder of the arcane attempts.

Magic Is Unnatural and Mysterious

Every time a spell is cast, it bends shadows, darkens a room, or slows the falling of leaves. It taints the place where the powers are called upon and lets those powers linger on in observance. Magic is not a thing of gross spectacle. It is horrific and alien in its nature.

RITUAL MAGIC

In dark places, cowled figures unite their unholy powers to perpetrate castings of immeasurable power. Together they chant, cackle, and sacrifice until the stars are right and their spells come to fruition. A cabal of sorcerers is broken into four tiers; the Master, votaries, acolytes, and initiates.

The most powerful spells are usually brought into being by cabals working from within circles or other places of power. These castings are called **ritual magic**, or **rites**. Ritual magic is an extension of the teamwork rules as found on page 100 of **Conan** corebook and the Sorcery rules found on page 159 of the same book. The rite may include twice as many members as the Master has Sorcery Expertise.

The Master

Every group casting has a Master. Often, the Master is the leader of the cabal, but the Master can be any sorcerer who knows the spell that the cabal seeks to cast. In game terms, this means that the Master must have the talent for the spell that is to be cast. The Master, and only the Master, must possess this knowledge or the spell cannot be cast. Leadership ability is separate from the position of Master. In many cases, the magician who looks like the Master is simply the loudest and boldest present. These magicians may even believe they are responsible for the magic when they are not.

The Master is responsible for making the Sorcery test for the rite. As per teamwork rules, they may use Doom, Offerings, or Fortune to improve the casting. If the Master fails their test, then the efforts of the cabal fail. As per usual Sorcery rules, every roll that is not a success causes a Consequence, and rolls of 20 cause additional Consequences.

Votaries

Votaries are followers who also have the specific spell talent needed to cast the spell. They resolve their involvement in the same manner as an acolyte, but their involvement is a much more significant boon to the Master. If the ritual is successfully cast, the Master gains 1 bonus Momentum for every votary that contributes to the rite.

Acolytes

An acolyte is any character or creature with the Sorcery skill. Any acolyte present can assist the Master with the spell. As per teamwork rules, they roll 1d20 against their

Sorcery target number, with any successes transferring to the Master in the normal way. As with usual Sorcery rules, every roll that is not a success causes a Consequence, and rolls of 20 cause additional Consequences.

Initiates

The cults of sorcerers contain many members who willingly involve themselves in the workings of their Master. These untrained masses are ill suited to complicated castings and their inclusion is dangerous, to say the least. Many sorcerers prefer to keep them away from earshot lest they corrupt the casting with their presence. Others desire power so much that they throw caution to the wind, with vast castings with hundreds in attendance. The works that come from such rites are inherently unstable and corrupt.

As per teamwork rules, initiates roll 1d20 against their Willpower, with any successes transferring to the Master in the normal way. As with usual Sorcery rules, every dice that is not a success causes a Consequence, and rolls of a 19 or 20 cause additional Consequences.

Initiates are at great risk during rites. During a rite, a Consequence can inflict an injury upon any initiate. These injuries are often unnatural in origin, and Doom can be spent to inflict Resolve damage on any witnesses.

HUMAN SACRIFICE

Human sacrifice is one of the darkest paths to power. It offers power in addition to any other mechanism, though the cost is great. Every time a sorcerer turns to human sacrifice, they risk their sanity as they convert the very souls of their fellow mortals to little more than fuel.

The first time a character attempts human sacrifice, they automatically fail any of the Discipline tests that follow, until the spell is cast. Choosing to engage in human sacrifice is a choice that can never be undone. There is a line, once crossed, beyond which one is no longer the same person... perhaps not even a person at all.

When making a human sacrifice, the caster must first select their victims. The victims selected are intrinsically subjective. Eldritch tomes might say that virgins of royal blood are the most powerful sacrifices, but it's the personal connection between the sacrifice and caster that determines how much power is released.

A human sacrifice, where the sacrifice is recognized as being a sapient being, grants the sorcerer 1 bonus Momentum should the casting of the spell be a success. This Momentum must be immediately used in conjunction with a spell or it will be lost. If the sacrifice is recognized as being a greater sacrifice — perhaps said virgin of royal blood — it offers 2 bonus Momentum. If a sacrifice is regarded as subhuman, it can never offer bonus Momentum.



GREATER SACRIFICES

Each sorcerer's research inevitably finds a sacrifice cleaner and purer than any other. Whether this is a princess with golden eyes or the youngest son of a kingdom makes no difference. These claims of superior power are in no way accurate as the lore of sacrifice is riddled with superstitious belief. The additional power gained is entirely drawn from the sorcerer's own mind. Belief, in this case, creates reality.

In game terms, the sorcerer must explicitly state what their perfect sacrifice is prior to attempting its procurement. Once this has been stated, it can never be changed. Greater sacrifices are much harder to come across, and obtaining or rescuing the sacrifice may be the focus of an entire adventure.

Greater amounts of power require greater numbers of victims, but this in turn requires additional assistance. The sacrifice of ten victims can be completed by a single sorcerer and grants 1 additional bonus Momentum, 2 if they are all greater sacrifices. Larger sacrifices require assistance, which makes them a case of diminishing returns. Sacrifices made by assistants reduce the total bonus Momentum by 1, and every twenty victims require a low follower or initiate (see *Ritual and Sacrifice* on page 66) to aid in the working. Consequently, a sacrifice of 100 victims offers the same return as a sacrifice of ten, and it is only when

IN-GAME KNOWLEDGE OF SACRIFICE

Most sorcerers work on the principle that more sacrifices are better than fewer, and sacrifice additional victims that do not aid in the actual casting. Their research might have told them to sacrifice a dozen children on the full moon, but the two extra deaths do not add any additional power to the casting. The sorcerers engaged in these foul rites are in no position to attempt any sort of empirical measurement.

Regardless of the numbers slain to fuel their mad works, the sorcerer must be in position where they can witness at least some portion of the sacrifice. They cannot hide from the sacrifice and still take its power. The Outer Dark demands one enter with eyes open.

1000 sacrifices are brought to the slaughter of battle that a sorcerer can gain another bonus Momentum.

Having selected a victim, the sorcerer must now steady their nerves. This is a Discipline test, where the Difficulty is equal to the bonus Momentum the sorcerer seeks to claim. Failing this test causes Resolve damage equal to twice the bonus Momentum the sorcerer seeks to claim. If no successes are rolled, the sorcerer immediately suffers an additional Trauma and cannot proceed with the sacrifice. Once the sorcerer steadies their nerve, they have one final chance to step back from the abyss before the atrocities begin. They can choose to stop or others can choose to stop them.

Interruption

Sacrifices of this nature take time to prepare and, despite all precautions, it is not uncommon for a sorcerer to be interrupted during the ceremony. No sacrifice is necessarily dead until the sorcerer casts their spell. The gamemaster may decide important non-player characters are tied to the altar or buried in sacrificial pits when the player characters arrive. Interrupting does little but stall the sacrifice. Player

characters seeking to stop a mad sorcerer must slay them or force them to flee. It is not enough to simply turn up on time.

Casting the Spell

Once the sorcerer has seen off any intruders, they cast their spell. The spell needn't be a ritual, though it would be strange if the sorcerer went to all this effort and it were not. All the sacrifices are now considered dead. The exact details of the sacrifice are between the player and the gamemaster, although, if large numbers of dead are required, the sorcerer may have to wait for the battle to finish before the casting of their spell.

Realization and Consequences

With the power of their sacrifices used and the casting complete, the sorcerer may become drunk with power or filled with terrible regrets. The scene of ruin surrounds them, and they must endure the sight.

The sorcerer must make another test to steady their nerve with the Difficulty being equal to the bonus Momentum obtained by the sacrifice. The gamemaster may choose to increase the damage done by inflicting Consequences or Doom, as it's not uncommon for sorcerers to be driven power-mad by such spectacles.

Voluntary Sacrifice

A person may volunteer for sacrifice. This might consist of someone that has joined a cult, been mesmerized by sorcery, or sought to trade themselves for another. These sacrifices count as greater sacrifices and as acolytes, regardless as to whether they have the Sorcery skill. Voluntary sacrifices can withhold teamwork dice should they so wish, although this allows another initiate or acolyte to contribute in their place. Voluntary sacrifices cannot withhold bonus Momentum nor avoid their fate, as even voluntary sacrifices are tied to the altar.



SACRIFICES

| Numbers Slain | Minimum Assistants Needed | Momentum Gained |
|--|---------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 10 | 0 | 2 |
| 100 | 5 | 2 |
| 1,000 | 50 | 3 |
| 10,000 | 500 | 4 |
| A Greater Sacrifice Is Included | — | +1 |
| Multiple Greater Sacrifices Are Included | — | +2 |

NECROMANCY

Sorcery violates the very reality in which most mortals live out their days. Yet necromancy is the largest affront to the natural known to humankind. Death should be, by all rights of reason, inviolate. Those who practice necromancy know this is untrue. The world of law and reason can be rent open like a suppurating wound by powers of the Outer Dark. Not only may the dead rise and the forward march of age be turned back, but all manner of natural law and sanity may likewise be reduced to mere suggestions in the face of such maddening power.

WHY EXPLORE SUCH FELL ARTS?

A fair question, for any sorcerer who begins on such a path inevitably loses themself to it while seeking this power. A natural being cannot interact with the unnatural at such an advanced level and come away intact. In fact, the natural becomes the unnatural. Without exception, violating the supposed inviolate rules of life and death insure both caster and target shall never be natural again.

In short, sorcery corrupts; necromancy corrupts absolutely. There are no necromancers of any power who are recognizably human. Certainly, their visage may retain that façade of mortality, of the natural, but the being has long since ceased to exist on this world of everyday folk. The Outer Dark taints, it mutates, it seeks the spaces between the cells of being and pushes them apart to form new, horrific visions of body and mind.

In iron-bound books from Nemedia, crumbling parchment found in dusty Stygian tombs, and green stone found in alien cities from before the time of humankind, necromancy finds its record. Yet the breadth of this discipline is scarcely scratched. Perhaps, its full measure is not comprehensible to the wholly human mind. Even still, over the eons in which humankind and the Outer Dark has played dice against death, some few definitions of the necromancer have appeared. This practitioner of the necromantic arts is, broadly, a thief of souls, a defiler of time, and a raiser of the dead. These three roles are explored below. They should by no means be considered the totality of the art, only that sliver that previous devotees have purposed to record or stayed sane long enough to understand.



A THIEF OF SOULS

Each living being is imbued with a life force — some call it a soul. All sorcery, to some degree, draws on this primordial ylem to power itself, but necromancy plays with it in ways only beings of the Outer Dark can teach. To fall victim to a necromancer is to feel one's soul tugged at, toyed with, and, ultimately, bent to the sorcerer's purpose. Necromancers are said to swap souls, placing the consciousness of one being in the body of another. They are said to steal souls outright, taking another's life force to prolong their own, beyond mortal ken. Finally, they can store such power, trapping souls in rare objects, totems, and precious gems of uncommon facet and beauty.

While this ability to draw out, to bend, and even to snuff out such life force is mysterious, three uses are codified by scholars and madmen down the ages. No doubt, demons and many-tentacled nightmares possess other manipulations of being, but these uses are not cataloged here.

"The wizards of Acheron practiced foul necromancy, thaumaturgy of the most evil kind, grisly magic taught them by devils."

— The Hour of the Dragon

Soul Theft (Spell)

Difficulty: Dire (D4)

Duration: Special

Cost to Learn/Cast: 5 Resolve

With the tutelage of demons, the sorcerer has learned to filch the life force of another, drawing this soul from any living being, though humans are most common. Pulled from the body, the mortal coil and that which persists beyond are split in twain. This is a painful process and often results in death for the victim.

Soul theft requires that the sorcerer make physical contact with the intended victim. This contact can be achieved through astral wanderings or in the shape of an animal. Upon casting the spell, the sorcerer and victim engage in a Struggle of Sorcery versus the target's Discipline. If successful, the sorcerer can place the soul within an object, animal, or person — including their own selves. The place the soul is located is called the **host**. Whatever soul is within the host is transferred to the body.

This process is very painful and causes the victim to suffer an immediate Trauma, reducing all but the most stalwart to a catatonic state. Over time the soul may awaken and learn to use its new body, but should the host contact any part

of their original body at any point, they must succeed in a Discipline Struggle to retake, or resist retaking, that body.

While a soul is within a body, it is ultimately limited by that form. The sorcerer's character should retain a note of their actual attributes, but change their Agility, Brawn, and Coordination to that of their new body. In addition to this, any other attribute above 9 is reduced to 9, or the body's attribute, whichever is higher.

A DEFILER OF TIME

Time presses ever-forward, culminating in death. The necromancer seeks to pause or even revert this, again breaking natural law. The life force of any mortal is inextricably bound to the temporal world, and time's arrow moves in only one direction... at least it should. This aspect of necromancy should not be mistaken for mind-projecting spells which fling one into times past or yet to come. Instead, necromantic time obsesses only over decay and death.

Ambitious wizards no doubt quickly realize that if age may be kept at bay, it may also be reversed. By drawing on the souls of others, a powerful sorcerer can extend their life indefinitely. Thugra Khotan, also called Natohk the Veiled One, persisted for millennia after his supposed demise, and beautiful, seemingly young women in lost cities are sometimes revealed to remember such distant times as those of Valusia.

Time and death become malleable the more one pulls on the Outer Dark. Of course, in so doing, reality becomes malleable, too, and the mind cannot suffer that for long. A sorcerer may become young again, stealing the life of those around. Yet, in the end, the sorcerer will go mad.

A RAISER OF THE DEAD

Perhaps the most associated power of necromantic arts is that of reversing death. Whether it be a loved one brought back from the House of Shades or an army raised from the dust of their defeat, turning the once-living into the unliving is a powerful magic, indeed. From rude, dumb corpses purposed with singular tasks, to vampiric entities smarter than any mortal foe, a host of different sorts of dead may be brought back from the worms' banquet.

Of course, bringing the dead back does not alone guarantee obedience. A sorcerer must pit their will against the last echoes of the dead thing's soul to command them. What good does an army do if the sorcerer cannot give it orders? What good is a revivified lover if they return to the one with whom they were unfaithful? Yes, rare sorcerers may reclaim the dead, but even rarer is the sorcerers who can then control them.

Compel the Dead (Talent)

Prerequisites: The sorcerer must have Curse and both the *Placate the Dead* and *Raise the Dead* spells.

Once a sorcerer has mastered the basic spells, they can learn a greater mastery over the dead. *Compel the Dead* allows the sorcerer to maintain their undead minions for extended periods. While within close range, *all* undead summoned or controlled by the sorcerer remain active for an indefinite period. Once an undead being leaves close range, the spell used to raise the dead begins to wane and the undead returns to the grave at the end of the spell's duration. This countdown continues even if the undead returns to close range.

If a sorcerer with *Compel the Dead* takes control of a free undead creature, then the talent takes effect immediately, so long as the sorcerer was not the creature's original summoner.

Raise, O Acheron!

One could be forgiven in thinking that raising the dead means only resurrecting living beings — it only makes sense. Yet the collective life force of a place, a people, a time may, too, be brought back from the dust. Twisted dreams drove people to raise the likes of mighty Acheron — not merely a citizen, but the cities and their populations, the roads and porticos, the empire itself.

All are fortunate that such efforts failed, but that does not prevent another from trying in the future. Could one raise an extinct race? The entire epoch before the Cataclysm? What about worlds, in the Outer Dark which have died? Could one, in fact, raise a dead god if it came to that?

This is the most potent of spells and must be guided by the gamemaster. First, they should determine the scale of object to be resurrected. Is it an era, a race, a single city? Then, the cost must be determined. The power for this spell must be vast. It may require a sacrifice equal to that which the wizard wishes to resurrect. An entire city might have to die in Corinthia so that some part of Python might be recovered from the dust. This is a horrific power and its cost should accurately represent the complete violation of natural law it entails.

A Summation

While we have herein addressed three distinct aspects of necromancy, one should not assume they exist wholly apart from one another. In fact, sorcerers typically combine elements of each into even stranger powers and spells. Accounts aver the ability to steal a soul from remote antiquity and forcibly place it into a fleshy body of the now. Skelos wrote of a beautiful Brythonian girl, her hair spilling like gold off the pale cliff of her white shoulder. He reached to touch

that shoulder and she turned, only to reveal her eyes were those of a Valusian serpent man fifty millennia dead.

Likewise, stolen time was allegedly once imparted into a gem via a human soul and, there stored for some ten score years, opened later to impart the soul's memories upon a willing sage. There are combinations of magics we cannot imagine. There are, most probably, some we are better off not imagining, but *The Book of Skelos* records a few specifics hinting at what other abilities might lurk in the penumbra of the Outer Dark.

METHODS OF RESURRECTION

There are those who claim a veil separates the world of the living from the world of the dead. Such scholars know nothing — it is no veil, easily parted, but an impenetrable wall. These two realms are not simply juxtaposed as the borders of Koth and Shem on a map! These worlds oppose each other diametrically. Life and death have nothing in common save for the former always leads to the latter... unless one violates that rule with powerful sorcery. As previously noted, only the forces found in the Outer Dark can hope to form a hole in this wall and, even then, that hole is only temporary.

And yet resurrection is possible. The rejection of the yawning maw of the abyss is possible. One can occasionally refuse an invitation to the House of Shades. Three distinct methodologies appear when one collects the sum of mortal knowledge on the subject.

Profane and unnatural though they be, the following powers may be gained in time.

Become/Create Zuvembie

Those who wish to outlast death cannot expect to do so in mortal form. In what is called "the Black Ceremony", certain demons of the Outer Dark are invoked to turn the living sorcerer into a necrotic being capable of commanding animals, ensorceling the living with their voice, and raising a dead man whilst his blood remains warm. This newly dead corpse is at the sorcerer's command. These are the powers of a zuvembie. But the zuvembie no longer speaks with a human tongue nor thinks with a human mind. A zuvembie is not an animal, but it cannot be properly called a human being either. The slaughter of human beings becomes its purpose after death. Still, the being retains some glimmer of its former self — it knows it beat death.

Dew from a nighthawk's wings must be prepared with the ground bones of a snake and the blood of a male vampire bat. When the concoction is ready, the sorcerer imbibes it and thus completes the Black Ceremony. Having drank the Black Brew, the sorcerer is now a thing unnatural... a zuvembie.

ZUVEMBIE

To become a zuvembie, a sorcerer must learn a unique spell, *Become a Zuvembie*, and cast it as a Challenging (D2) Sorcery test. Success kills the sorcerer and allows the zuvembie spirit to take over their body. This spell is handed down only through the rites of certain Setite heresies, and obtaining it is a great challenge requiring a pact with the heretics. This often includes the immediate casting of the spell in a place of the Setite's choosing. When the sorcerer is converted, they increase their Brawn attribute by +2 and gain the attacks, Soak, and special abilities of the creature.

A zuvembie retains all previous talents, skills, Expertise, and Focus. The newly formed creature is neither wholly of this world nor the next, but walks a delicate line between the two. The older a zuvembie gets, the closer to the many-tentacled horrors of the Outer Dark they walk. Eventually, those tentacles grab them and spirit them away from the worlds of humankind.

The sorcerer must attempt a Resolve test every three time increments at Challenging (D2) Difficulty. Any failure results in the loss of 1 Resolve. When reduced to 0, the Outer Dark reclaims the zuvembie.

ATTRIBUTES

| Awareness | Intelligence | Personality | Willpower |
|-----------|--------------|--------------|-----------|
| 8 | 8 | 8 | 11 |
| Agility | Brawn | Coordination | |
| 8 | 10 | 8 | |

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

| | | | |
|-----------|---|----------|---|
| Combat | 2 | Movement | 3 |
| Fortitude | 5 | Senses | 3 |
| Knowledge | 3 | Social | 2 |

STRESS AND SOAK

- Stress:** Vigor 15, Resolve 16
- Soak:** Armor 3 (Dead), Courage 5

ATTACKS

- Claw-like Nails (M):** Reach 1, 4^W, Persistent, Grappling
- Angry Eyes (T):** Range C, 4^W mental



SPECIAL ABILITIES

- Fear 2**
- Harbinger of Doom 1**
- Kiss of the Zuvembie:** If the zuvembie grapples someone that has wronged them, they can savagely bite the character. The "Kiss" always hits the head location and counts as a Reach 1, 8^W, Vicious 1, Fearsome attack.
- Poison to the Guilty:** If a character that has wronged the zuvembie is hit by their nails or teeth, the attack gains the Intense and Fearsome qualities instead of Persistent.

DOOM SPENDS

- Enticing Voice:** By taking a standard action and spending Doom equal to the Courage of the target, the zuvembie can paralyze the guilty. Minions and Toughened non-player characters are afforded no protection from this power, but player characters and Nemeses may pay the zuvembie twice the Doom to make an Average (D1) Discipline test to resist.
- You Have Wronged Me!**: When a zuvembie is prevented from attacking a target that would be affected by Enticing Voice, the zuvembie can spend 1 Doom and take a Minor Action to add that target to the list of those who have wronged them. **Zuvembie Minions:** When a zuvembie is in the presence of animals, it counts as if they had cast the spell *Commune with the Wild* at 2+X successes, where X is the amount of Doom spent. In addition to this, any one slain by a zuvembie is immediately animated for the scene as if by a *Raise the Dead* spell with 2+X successes. Using this spend is not an Action and can be done at any time.

The Sleep of Death

There exists a poison whose recipe can be found scrawled in the margins of the iron-bound books of Vathelos. Its singular purpose is not merely to kill, but to force anyone who imbibes the liquid into a state past death — a sleep of death. It is believed that Thugra Khotan, the onetime sorcerer king of Kuthchemes, used this method to outlast three millennia between the end of Acheron and the present day.

In this way, Thugra Khotan escaped all his enemies, including the abyss. If the abyss already thinks a sorcerer dead, no demons are likely to escort them to the Pits of Arralu, after all. The user of this potion does not wake during the period of rest. They make no plans, no deals, no words. While the ages turn, the sorcerer lies in an enduring sleep untouched by time and subject only to whatever dreams might haunt them.

One century or ten... it does not matter — the body fails to age and, though it takes on an almost inhuman leanness, it does not rot. Mind and flesh remain intact at the end of this repose. Prior to the Cataclysm, some unknown number of sorcerers steeped in the words of Skelos entombed themselves in hidden redoubts, hoping to wake some long while after to rule new worlds. No doubt, some of these sleepers remain.

The poison combines the seed of a serpent man, the crushed petals of a flower found only in the hills at the northern tip of the Vilayet, and menstrual blood of a virgin. This concoction is cut with sharp, tangy wine and drunk in a single go. Once the components are gathered and mixed, the sorcerer makes a Resolve test with a Difficulty equal to the number of centuries they would sleep.

NECROMANTIC TALENTS

The following powers are learned by those peering into the dark arts of the dead.



The Eternal Chain

Prerequisite: Sorcerer or Necromancer

Maximum Ranks: 2

Experience Point Cost: 400

The *Eternal Chain* talent allows the sorcerer to cast any spell they possess on a target that is not within eyesight. The sorcerer must have a lock of hair, tooth, vial of blood, or similar representation of the victim to cast the spell, but, once this is obtained, the sorcerer can cast spells on the target as if the target were within reach. Using *The Eternal Chain* to target a spell normally increases the Difficulty of casting the spell by one step. This increases to two steps should the target take refuge within a Circle.

When a second rank is taken, the Difficulty of casting the spell no longer increases, save on targets inside of Circles.

Vital Essence

Prerequisite: Life Eternal

Maximum Ranks: 2

Experience Point Cost: 1000

Vital essence allows the sorcerer to drain the life force of a character in a manner equivalent to human sacrifice. This essence can be stored within the sorcerer and allows the sorcerer to retain their youth. Additionally, the essence may provide Momentum to any spell cast instead.

If a human sacrifice is made near the sorcerer, the sorcerer can take some of the loose power and restock their hoard. The sorcerer takes and houses Momentum equal to the number of times they have taken the *Vital Essence* talent, but the sorcerer can't leave the sacrifice with more essence than the rite produced.

Volkus has Vital Essence 3 and stands at the sacrifice of ten victims. He already has 1 Momentum. When the sacrifice is completed, 2 Momentum become available to him. Volkus could take both points, but, as the rite only obtained 2 Momentum, the second point must be immediately used or discarded.

Using the Momentum stored by the Vital Essence causes the sorcerer to age at a phenomenal rate, becoming their true age in moments. The only thing that can forestall this is the act of claiming the essence of another. So long as the sorcerer has 1 point of Momentum, they can pause aging, but the Momentum held does not make the size of the sacrifice needed any fewer.

Once all the Momentum has been used, the character ages immediately, taking 1 Wound for every century they have been alive up to 400 years, at which point the character is reduced to dust. Any who witness this lose 3 Resolve, and if the character is incapacitated by this, it causes all who witness it to lose an additional 3 Resolve. Being reduced to dust is a traumatic event causing the witness to immediately suffer 2 points of Trauma.

Necromancer

Prerequisite: Patron

Experience Point Cost: 200

A necromancer is a sorcerer that has abandoned or just never learned the practices necessary to contain the corrupting elements of sorcery. They count as if possessing the *Sorcerer* talent, but instead of picking any spell, must choose between the spell *Raise Up the Dead* or the *Skinwalker* talent.

Skinwalker

Prerequisite: Necromancer

Experience Point Cost: 200 (note: free if taken as a part of the Necromancer talent)

A skinwalker engages in symbolic cannibalism and the theft of specific body parts to act as ritual components. Every time the Skinwalker talent is used, a ritual component is either worn or eaten. If eaten, no test is

required, but the item is used up permanently. If worn, a Daunting (D3) Sorcery test must be passed, or it will rot into uselessness. This counts as if the sorcerer was casting a spell.

When this talent is chosen, the skinwalker must pick one body part from the table below, gaining its associated power. A skinwalker can only carry their sorcery focus in one body part at any one time. Any additional components will rot away when claimed.

| SKINWALKER FOCUS | | |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Body part | Power | Effect |
| Eyes | Empowers spell | The skinwalker takes one pair of eyes and converts them to an offering. This must be done prior to the casting of a spell. |
| Heart | Rejuvenate | The skinwalker gains the Brawn of the one whose heart they've eaten for one scene. |
| Hand | Gain the dominant skill of the victim | The skinwalker gains the skill Expertise and Focus of the victim's best skill for one scene. |
| Face | Gain the visage of the person eaten | The skinwalker gains 2 bonus Momentum on all disguise checks to appear like the victim for a scene. |
| Tongue and Ears | Speak any language the owner spoke | Speak any languages spoken by the victim for a scene. Gain the ability to cast one spell known by the victim once. This permanently destroys the tongue once the spell is successfully cast. |

| NECROMANTIC CORRUPTIONS | | |
|-------------------------|------------------|--|
| Roll | Malformation | Effect |
| 1–2 | Cataracts | Vision is permanently impaired. Any use of sight for any skill except Sorcery is one step more Difficult. |
| 3–4 | Boils | The sorcerer's face becomes a bed of boils and pustules, reducing Personality permanently by 1. |
| 5–6 | Eyes of Distrust | The sorcerer's eyes do not invite trust or compassion. Suffer one step of Difficulty on any Social Interaction test. |
| 7–8 | Soul-tether | A fragment of the sorcerer's soul tethers to the Outer Dark. Any time a Complication is incurred, it counts as two Complications, including if more than one Complication is rolled at the same time. This includes Consequences. |
| 9–10 | Avarice | Power is often found in wealth. The sorcerer now covets both. They are hard pressed to pass up any large sum of money, no matter what must be done. |
| 11–12 | Become an Island | What need has a sorcerer of friends and allies? From now on, the sorcerer must attempt a Challenging (D2) Discipline test any time they aid someone in a way that does not directly benefit them. |
| 13–14 | Blasphemer | The only gods are those from the Outer Dark. The sorcerer looks with derision upon the mere petty gods of mortals. Mitra... Ishtar... it matters not. |
| 15–16 | Pale Skin | The sorcerer's skin is the color of fresh milk, drained of hue and color. They stand out in a crowd, and few are liable to forget them. |
| 17–18 | Phobia | In the sorcerer's interactions with unnatural forces, they have acquired a paralytic fear. Select a semi-rare event or object as a phobia. Every time the sorcerer encounters this, they must make a Challenging (D2) Discipline test or freeze for part of the scene. |
| 19–20 | Soul Drain | The sorcerer's soul, being tied to things unnatural, finds itself constantly taxed. Each day, the sorcerer must perform a blood sacrifice on a living creature to sustain their life. Failure to do so inflicts 1 Wound. |

Counsel of the Dead

Prerequisite: Necromancer

Experience Point Cost: 400

Necromancers find learning spells incredibly easy and, by calling on the dead to advise them, can attempt sorcerous feats far beyond those of lesser practitioners. The dead must be bribed, and they tell as many false tales as true, making these feats expensive to achieve.

A necromancer casting a spell they haven't learned through other means must increase the Difficulty of that spell by two steps and pay three times the regular casting cost. Also, when using offerings to gain additional dice, the necromancer only gets 1d20 for every three offerings used.

Corruption

Prerequisite: Necromancer

Experience Point Cost: 400

Necromancers find that over time their bodies are racked with malformations, making them sturdier if less appealing. At any point, a necromancer with the *Corruption* talent can spend 1 Fortune point to gain 4 successes on a Sorcery skill test. Once the test is complete, the corruption begins to manifest. Roll or select a malformation from the table on the previous page. After a day of slow change, the malformation begins to manifest, causing the effects noted.

Beyond Madness and Sanity

Prerequisites: Barter Your Soul, Iron Will, Jaded, and Necromancer (or Sorcerer)

Experience Point Cost: 800

The necromancer is now beyond traditional ideas of sanity. They may regain any Resolve lost to the learning of spells. The process for regaining this Resolve is utterly debased, and requires the necromancer to seek out that which would drive others mad. It costs the necromancer 200 experience points for every point of Resolve regained by this process.

Mere sorcerers can, with the gamemaster's permission, also learn this talent, but each point of Resolve costs 250 experience points to regain.

Unaging

Prerequisite: Life Eternal

Maximum Ranks: 3

Experience Point Cost: 1000

The immortal necromancer, by engaging in unspeakable rites, separates their mind from their frame and, in the ritual murder of their body, preserves it against the tortures of aging. The first rank teaches the necromancer the poison known as the sleep of death. By imbibing this venom, the necromancer can sleep away the eons preserved for antiquity or simply avoid aging as the night passes. The second rank

teaches further preparations which allow the necromancer to cease aging entirely and retain their current age for all eternity. The third rank returns the necromancer to a more youthful state. This talent does nothing to remove the scars the world inflicts and, after a few centuries, the mask of youth becomes a map of minor mutilations leaving the necromancer looking for even greater magic to hide the passage of time.



ASTROLOGY, MESMERISM, AND THE MUMMER'S ARTS

Sorcery is by no means a simple, singular tradition, and any capable practitioner of the arcane arts will utilize a variety of useful means to achieve any hoped-for goals. The processes that rule evolution also guides human activity: to thrive, one must find a means of exerting the least effort possible to achieve the desired state. While sorcery in and of itself offers considerable power, for many uses it is too great a cost.

Other paths of knowledge and lesser traditions of lore can be invaluable, chief among these are: **astrology**, the study of the stars and their influence upon the terrestrial world; **mesmerism**, the mysterious workings of the mind; and **mummery**, the practical purposes by which deceit and sleight of hand might be used to mimic magical effects or to achieve the same results without risk.

ASTROLOGY

Even before the Cataclysm that wiped out that ancient world and set fresh the cycle of ages, humans have looked to the heavens for answers, seeking wisdom amongst the brightly arrayed patterns of constellations, trying to divine truth from solitary stars winking from the seemingly infinite, nighted gulf. From the stars, humankind has sought to learn the secrets of the universe, from understanding stellar influences that shaped their birth, to recognizing the correct course of action based on cosmic principles and arrangements of the celestial bodies, and finally, to foreseeing the future within the patterns of movement throughout the firmament.



ASTROLOGY IN THE HYBORIAN KINGDOMS

From the primal need for understanding the self by observing the outer universe, varying paths of this star-knowledge — astrology — have risen, become formalized, and codified. Many of these traditions have been lost with the passing of time, or been incorporated into more dominant bodies of lore. Despite these varied paths, each as different as is the cultures that birthed it, the principal body of astrological knowledge predates the Hyborian Age by millennia, and will likely outlast it, a testament to the eternity of the stars themselves.

Due to this universality and longevity, a great wealth of knowledge within these traditions spans them all, and thus a Shemitish astrologer-priest will discover a great much in common with a Khitan diviner, and both should be fully able to converse with a Nemedian soothsayer, each recognizing in one another's work a commonality of lore and wisdom.

Different countries place different degrees of stock in such divination, with two extremes being the aforementioned Shem, with its unbroken caste of holy astrologers that prognosticate from atop ziggurats of enameled red clay, to remote Nordheim, whose denizens pay scant attention to the stars, instead believing that destiny — *wyrd* — is

woven by the Norns and not guided at all by any movement of the twinkling jewels set inside the great skull-dome that sits over the Earth.

Most other kingdoms fall somewhere between these two extremes, with the courts of civilized kingdoms such as Aquilonia, Brythunia, Nemedia, Zingara, Argos, Corinthia, and the like having a royal astrologer on hand for divinations and forecasting, though the more advanced of these countries find this tradition somewhat antiquated and frequently almost ceremonial in nature. Other lands, such as Zamora, Stygia, Koth, Khoraja, Khauran, and Turan are all more pragmatic about astrology, paying it due heed at all levels of society. When a child is born, parents will consult an astrologer to learn whether the stars presiding over the birth were auspicious, and even the lowliest farmer uses some form of astrological knowledge to divine the seasons from the movement of the stars across the heavens. Similarly, the horse tribes of Hyrkania look to the stars to navigate, and for portents indicating the best times to move their tent-cities and to raid, while practical sorcerers look to astrology to determine the times when spells and major magical workings will have their greatest efficacy.

Herein are guidelines to the uses by which the practice of astrology might be used alongside, in service of, or even in place of magic by the sorcerers of the Hyborian Age.

THE ASTROLOGER TALENT

In addition to the Sorcery talents described on pages 83–84 of the *Conan* corebook, characters focused on star-lore are advised to take the Astrology talent, described below. Unlike a true magical ability, Astrology is an Intelligence and Lore-based talent. Most (but not all) with this talent should have a reasonable collection of star maps and charts describing the astrological effects from the interrelation between the celestial bodies and their arrangement in the heavens.

Astrologer

Prerequisite: Scribe

Experience Point Cost: 200

The astrologer is knowledgeable about the movement of the stars throughout the heavens and its influence upon terrestrial and supernatural matters. When attempting to perform a sorcerous activity, the astrologer can spend an hour consulting the stars themselves, or star charts and almanacs, to determine the influence the arrangement of the stars will have on that activity, performing a Lore (D1) test. Attempting this test without the time to consult the stars or the relevant resources increases the Difficulty by one step. Success with this test means that the astrologer can determine a fortuitous alignment of the celestial bodies that will aid the casting of the spell.

In game terms, each Momentum gained allows the astrologer to re-roll 1d20 when casting the desired Sorcery spell, if the spell being cast is directly relevant to the divination and the alignment of the stars (at the gamemaster's discretion). Any Consequences created by this roll indicate that the stars are not right, or are out of alignment, adding an equal number of Consequences to the casting should it be attempted.

ASTROLOGY AND OTHER SKILLS

As astrology requires considerable training to learn and master, it is best used in conjunction with other skills, particularly the following:

- **Survival:** An astrologer may re-roll 1d20 on a Survival test relating to navigation attempts using the stars for guidance, but must accept the new result.
- **Lore:** Any attempts to identify stars or seek knowledge about astrology or the movement of the celestial zodiac uses the Lore skill. An astrologer may roll +1d20 on any such Lore tests.
- **Counsel:** When an astrologer attempts to counsel an individual, either providing comfort to them when they have lost Resolve or Trauma, or as a means of giving guidance and advice, the astrologer may spend

one hour and make a Lore test, consulting star-charts or the stars themselves (D1), otherwise the Difficulty is based on the amount of Trauma the one being counseled is currently suffering. Each success on this test allows the astrologer re-roll 1d20 for the Counsel test, but the new result (or results) must be accepted.

Ultimately, the gamemaster should be the arbiter of what activities are governed by the movement and arrangement of the stars and planets, and whether the talent can be brought to bear for a specific action or skill attempt.

DETERMINING ASTROLOGICAL AUSPICES

As an optional rule, the gamemaster might award an additional point of Momentum to an astrologer's test whenever the player makes an in-character pronouncement about the astrological arrangement and how it affects the physical world and events that will come to pass. This can (but does not have to) be phrased in the following format:

- **State:** A general prediction based on the overall condition, such as claiming conditions are excellent, fair, middling, neutral, detrimental, or even prohibiting the activity to be attempted.
- **Affected Bodies:** Here the astrologer names the affected stars or planetary bodies, whether the Earth, the Sun, the Moon, or others. This can also be abstracted to "the Heavens", "the spheres", or some element of orbits.
- **Celestial Alignment:** Usually this indicates an arrangement such as "aligned" or "out of alignment", but it could also be described as "in retrograde", "in turmoil", "new", "still", "stagnant", "positioned", "obscured", "climbing" or "ascendant", "descending" or "descendant", "poised", "full", "eclipsed", or even "on the horizon".
- **Animal Names:** The Hyborian Age calendar and method of time-keeping designate years, months, weeks, and even hours, with types of animals such as Lion, Serpent, Elephant, Dragon, Wolf, etc. A cryptic utterance linking at least two of these animals sounds sufficiently esoteric, such as "in the House of", or "in pursuit of", or "ascendant over", or "in repose before".
- **Magical Effect:** The most important part of a proper pronouncement about astrological auspices should be the overall effect this will have on any spell cast, justifying why it is more (or less) Difficult, or why Momentum is being granted. This should be in the form of claiming how the magical forces are able to influence the real world, or are prevented from doing so.

Ultimately, however, the choice of an award is up to the gamemaster, and should be an encouragement for roleplaying, rather than a requirement to utilize the talent. If the player and gamemaster are content to skip the need for an in-character description in favor of a simple test, the roll should suffice, but should not be awarded the additional point of Momentum.

ASTROLOGICAL DIVINATION

Though a potent influence in spellcasting, astrology is perhaps even more important to those without magic at all, from the lowliest of peasant farmers to crowned kings and queens. All will consult the stars, seeking guidance for a plethora of activities: childbirth, agricultural matters, military endeavors, and even to know that which is hidden, whether the most fortuitous time for a conspiracy, insight into one who has not yet been met, and even a glimpse into one's own unknowable self. This astrological practice is called divination, and for many astrologers it is their sacred duty, or their primary means of livelihood.

When using this ability, the astrologer must first contemplate the nature of the question being asked, whether general or highly specific, using the table below. A general rule is that each consultation must take at least one full day and an additional number of days equal to the Difficulty multiplied by itself, thus a Simple (D0)

divination would take 1 day ($1+[0\times0=0]=1$), while an Epic (D5) divination would take 26 days ($1+[5\times5=25]=26$). The astrologer should be utterly devoted to this task for a majority of each day, and the divination test is made at the end of this period. As with most activities, Momentum can be spent to reduce the time required to conduct the activity.

It must be stressed here that no matter how successful an astrological divination is, ultimately it is up to the gamemaster to determine how accurate the predictions or insights might be. Similarly, the outcome of events, even when divined correctly, are still open and may be influenced by the players and gamemaster. Fate does not always run its course, and the stars sometimes lie. They influence, and one might track meaning in their placement in the heavens, but they are not commands, and the clamor of human action may cause even the counsel of the stars to be silenced.

ASTROLOGICAL TRAPPINGS

No small amount of sorcery concerns the power of belief, and there is no better means of bolstering faith than through material, tangible items. In this case, the astrological practice is no different. Astrologers or sorcerers with the *Astrology* talent should invoke the trappings of this body of lore, best sorted into three categories: environment, costume, and paraphernalia.

| ASTROLOGY | |
|------------------|---|
| Difficulty | Example Tasks |
| Simple (D0) | Identifying a person's astrological influences, whose birth date and time are known. Making a general prediction of health and prosperity or the lack thereof. Identifying the seasons, solstices, and other key astrological dates. |
| Average (D1) | Identifying a person's astrological influences when their date and time of birth are unknown. Gaining insight into someone's character and their likely state of mind. General counsel relating to vague or highly variable decisions. Identifying astrologically favorable conditions and instances suitable for large endeavors. Identifying past astrological influences in a general sense. |
| Challenging (D2) | Understanding why a specific course of action was taken, when it was shrouded in secrecy. General counsel relating to specific decisions and potential outcomes. Identifying astrologically favorable conditions for sorcerous workings or other magical endeavors. |
| Daunting (D3) | Relevant counsel relating to specific decisions and their outcomes, particularly when involving other active beings or supernatural forces. Identifying specific former astrological influences, such as the influences the stars had on an exact day and hour in the past, or on a certain person, group, or event. |
| Dire (D4) | Insight into the soul of one whose identity is shrouded in secrecy, or is tainted by sorcerous influence. Identifying key moments when it is best to take specific action, down to the day and the hour. |
| Epic (D5) | A highly specific prediction, to the date, about an exact incident that has yet to occur. A prediction of events to come in the far future, beyond a human lifespan. Insight into the soul of a supernatural being or similarly unknowable entity. |

Astrological influences in the environment can range from the very location the astrologer practices in, such as having astrological imagery emblazoned or engraved into the walls, ceiling, or floor of the astrologer's workspace, or it might require standing stones outdoors, about which the astrologer stands in certain designated spots at various times of day or night to gain insight. Environment is the equivalent of an Astrology Facility.

Costume includes garments such as robes, hoods, hats, jewelry, skullcaps, footwear, tunics, staffs, and wands. These are often embroidered with astrological imagery such as stars, moons, the sun, and the various beings and creatures making up the celestial zodiac. These can even be tattooed onto the astrologer's body, so long as they are visible. Costume is the equivalent of an astrology kit.

As far as paraphernalia goes, star charts are essential, as are astrological tablets, calendars, or zodiacal charts, whether carved into clay tablets or scribed into the moldering pages of skin-bound grimoires. Furthermore, additional tools may also be utilized in the practice of this lore, such as primitive-to-sophisticated telescopes, astrolabes, orreries, star disks, lenses or prisms, special mirrors, dowsing rods, pendulums, crude magnets, sundials, and a near-bewildering array of devices and artifacts. Paraphernalia is the equivalent of astrology resources.

Astrological equipment costs the same as its sorcerous counterparts.

MUMMERY

The risks of magic are as obvious as they are high, and often requiring preparation, concentration, and ritual. Though sorcerers possess mighty power, it is a strength to be measured out carefully, used when necessary, and only if required. Wasteful are the sorcerers who expend this precious resource when it is not called for, for such wanton usage of power inevitably leads to doom, whether from the forces it was bargained from, or because such wasteful displays of power reveal too much. For many sorcerers, their source of magic is a closely guarded secret, kept from others for fear it can be exploited.

*"You laid your trust in magic and mummery," answered Ascalante carelessly.
"I trust my wits and my sword."*

— "The Phoenix on the Sword"

For these and other reasons, the art of sorcery is often augmented or even substituted by that of mummery, the skillful sleight that gives the illusion of true power, with little cost or danger to self. Mummery can be many things:



producing items from thin air or causing them to disappear, substituting one thing for another discreetly, casting one's voice to another location or creating sounds without a natural origin, knowledge of things that are private or secret, manipulating or transforming small objects without touching them, or even effects in the immediate surroundings that appear to have no cause other than magic.

Those who lack the discipline of sorcery will instead choose the pretense of magical power, being nothing more than mummers. These *fakirs* and charlatans can be found commonly upon the streets, in the markets, and even within noble courts, presenting a semblance of sorcery without any substance at all. To true sorcerers, however, the virtue of such mummery is self-evident, and thus, a practical part of most sorcerous training is in mummery, implying more than what is being said and demonstrating power without actually spending it.

THE ART OF DECEPTION

A practical sorcerer employs every resource available, and the best are those that serve to bolster the sorcerer's reputation, deepening the mystery and exaggerating the true extent of the sorcerer's ability. Ideally, enemies, and even allies, of a sorcerer will have no clear image of what the sorcerer is capable of, a condition a prudent sorcerer does much to plant and cultivate.

Tsotha displayed a broad ring of curious design on his finger. He pressed his fingers together and on the inner side of the ring a tiny steel fang darted out like a snake's tongue.

"It is steeped in the juice of the purple lotus which grows in the ghost-haunted swamps of southern Stygia," said the magician.

— "The Scarlet Citadel"

To this end, a sorcerer will put to use skills that are seemingly unconnected with the workings of magic, such as Acrobatics (contortions), Discipline (withstanding pain or acting beyond human tolerance), Stealth (discreet activity, appearing to move unseen), Insight (gleaning information about subjects through observation of their reactions to certain questions), Thievery (sleight of hand, misdirection), Alchemy (chemical agents to mimic sorcerous ability), Persuade (convincing others of a particular falsehood), and even Society (surreptitiously investigating a subject by speaking with others).

Another invaluable aspect of mummery is the practice of mesmerism, discussed on pages 82–87, and a well-rounded sorcerer will combine mummery and mesmerism with actual sorcery, to achieve the greatest of all results with a minimum of effort and risk.

MUMMERY TALENTS

Unlike sorcerous talents allowing or influencing true magical power, both mummery talents are based on the Personality attribute, as each depends greatly upon showmanship or the ability to impress and sway others.

General Skill: Persuade

Chicanery

Prerequisites: Persuade Expertise 1, Stealth Expertise 1

Experience Point Cost: 200

This talent allows the player character to perform minor tricks that seem to be outside the realm of possibility, the equivalent of parlor tricks — whether guessing the result of a playing piece before it is cast, identifying the owner of an item, appearing to know information about a relative stranger, bending or deforming objects, casting one's voice to another place, or producing small items apparently out of thin air (or conversely, making them vanish into thin air). None of these tasks are inherently magical, and each relies more on misdirection, sleight-of-hand, careful questioning and observation, or other bits of inherent trickery.

In game terms, the player character may re-roll 1d20 on any task relating to sleight-of-hand, identification of items, manipulating objects, revealing hidden information, or making things appear or disappear. The second result, successful or not, must be accepted.

Mummer

Prerequisites: Chicanery, Sorcery Expertise 1

Experience Point Cost: 400

The true mummer has a bit of the sorcerous art, able to direct scraps of magical energy into superficial effects. These minor glamors, often called *cantrips*, do little other than support other skills. They add to attempts at impressing others, whether by cowing them through theatrical displays of power, or by impressing them into believing the sorcerer knows greater magic than is being displayed. This can range from causing candles, lamps, or torches to flare (or dim), fluttering curtains or causing brief winds to whip through interior spaces, or creating rattles, creaks, or other ominous sounds where there is no apparent cause. It can also be used outdoors, to startle animals into frightened squawks or screeches, or to cause flocks of birds to suddenly flee.

Using this talent, a character may spend a trapping as a resource for any successful skill use relating to magic but not intrinsically magical in nature, whether Command, Persuade, or Thievery (used for misdirection and sleight-of-hand).

CEREMONY AND RITUAL

Like deception, ceremony and ritual are two of the greatest tools in a mummer's arsenal, though these are not always couched in such terms. A successful mummer does everything possible to couch illusions and mummery within the

context of belief, so that much of the effort required to pull off the act of mummery is already complete — supplied by the intended target or targets. Many are the charlatans who dress in the robes befitting a sorcerer and use esoteric language to frame an act of mummery as if it were true magic, or invoke the gods and other spiritual beings while performing mummery, as if beseeching their divine power to transcend the material world. Cryptic utterances are voiced to conceal sleight-of-hand, and seemingly mystic glyphs are displayed or otherwise brandished to draw the attention away from the mummer's true actions.

MUMMERY

| Difficulty | Preparation Time | Example Tasks |
|------------------|------------------|---|
| Simple (D0) | Instantaneous | Identifying the nature of mummery being practiced, if the sorcerer is looking for it. |
| Average (D1) | 1–2 minutes | Simple effects, such as producing a small item from nowhere or causing it to vanish. Casting one's voice nearby without moving one's lips, or casting a voice across the room. Manipulating a small object without seeming to touch it. Identifying a certain item from a variety of similar items. "Guessing" at a secret through leading questions and careful study of the subject's reactions. |
| Challenging (D2) | 1–2 hours | Causing a burst of air to rush through a room, causing candles and flames to gutter, or to flare up. Casting multiple voices or sounds from a variety of locations within a particular location. Appearing to be in more than one place at the same time, or seeming to move instantly between two locations. Bending, breaking, or otherwise transforming an object within plain sight without seemingly to touch or otherwise handle it. Revealing unknown (but not especially cryptic) information about a subject or item, seemingly upon first exposure. |
| Daunting (D3) | 4–8 hours | A minor display of seemingly magical power, incorporating a variety of small phenomena, such as wind, sounds, and movement in the environment. Astounding feats of physical contortion or tolerance, seemingly outside human ability. Possessing knowledge that only one subject would know, such as the location or nature of an item close to them, or something that has been mislaid. |
| Dire (D4) | 12–24 hours | A larger display of seemingly magical power, such as causing a cacophony of sounds, fires to be extinguished, a rush of wind, something to fall over, etc. Causing an object of size and mass greater than a human being to disappear while in plain sight, with some degree of theatricality. Revealing hidden or cryptic information about the activities of a subject, or the location of an item seemingly lost. |
| Epic (D5) | 1–2 days | Simulating the effects of weather or geological activity (a thunder crash, ground shaking, storm, etc.) within a small area. A large-scale display of seemingly magical power, with many witnesses and within plain sight. Knowing detailed secrets of an individual or about an object, including information they have taken pains to conceal, or knowledge seemingly lost to time. Complicated schemes involving several or many participants or techniques, involved to mislead one or more subjects. |

When couched with ceremony or ritual, the mummer may add +1d20 to any roll relating to mummery, though the intended audience for this mummery must be predisposed to believing that the ceremony or ritual has some effect and significance. This bonus is at the gamemaster's discretion based on the circumstances and the involved parties.

TRAPPINGS OF MUMMERY

The trappings of mummery are manifold: ranging from specially tailored garments with secret pockets or pouches; to specially weighted game pieces or cards; to items of equipment with concealed features or hidden attributes; to collapsible or otherwise easily disassembled items that seem to be solid and permanent; to complex mixtures designed to create smoke or other alchemical results with little actual effect. It can even include architectural features, such as halls with deliberately constructed acoustics, hidden tunnels, and secret compartments.

The range of potential trappings is so great and diverse that no attempt is made to describe individual items or preparations. A character with the Chicanery or Mummery talent receives a kit known as a mummer's robe. This robe can hold three loads of trappings to start with. These trappings are resources that require the Mummer talent to use and are expended when a Complication is rolled when using mummery. A character without a mummer's robe will find that all mummery tests increase by one step of Difficulty.

FEATS OF MUMMERY

The table on page 81 lists a variety of potential feats of mummery, and assigns each a suggested Difficulty and a guideline for how long the task would require to prepare beforehand. Usually, these occur instantly, but the time spent to prepare the feat can vary greatly, from those manifestations that take no preparation at all, to complex ruses that require a variety of tasks to be completed. In these cases, the gamemaster might require the mummer to succeed in other skill rolls, whether those suggested or from others appropriate to the task.

These suggestions are mere guidelines and should be adjusted as required by the gamemaster, based on the conditions and circumstances the act of mummery is being performed. For example, a mummer entering a hostile king's throne room for the first time may have had no time to prepare for any of these feats, while a mummer who is within his own hall may have a variety of these effects readied for use.

As mentioned above, skills commonly used to support feats of mummery include Acrobatics, Alchemy, Discipline, Insight, Observation, Persuade, Society, Stealth, and Thievery, as well as actual use of Sorcery.

As a note, the gamemaster should be careful to ensure that mummery does not become a panacea by which sorcerers can achieve their exact ends without risk. It is, to be certain, mere charlatanry, and the workings of mummery are readily obvious to practitioners of true magic. It may even be that excessive fakery of this sort draws a response from real sorcerers, who do not wish their sacred art to be cheapened through petty theatics.

Some of these feats require forethought and planning, careful manipulation of the environment, long-term observation, delicate preparation of specific conditions, and may even take days of surreptitious information-gathering and study. In these cases, if the mummer spends an appropriate amount of time in such preparation, the suggested Difficulty is unmodified. Conversely, the Difficulty of each type of task is increased by one step if the suggested time for preparation is not undertaken.

However, a mummer can reduce the time required to set up one of these acts of mummery by spending 1 Fortune Point per point of Difficulty, to lower the time required for prior preparation. This does not lower the Difficulty of the task itself, and these Fortune points do not become successes or Momentum. Instead, they simply allow the seemingly impossible to be performed with less time for preparation. In this fashion, the mummer can explain that the conditions were already carefully prepared earlier through use of advance knowledge, stealth, the use of spies, or whatever seems appropriate. If these seem unreasonable or incredulous, the gamemaster can veto such expenditures of Fortune to create wildly improbable events from occurring.

"Witch, priest and wolf," muttered Xaltotun grimly, and laughed. "Fools, to pit your charlatan's mummery against my arts! With a wave of my hand I brush you from my path!"

— The Hour of the Dragon

MESMERISM

The labyrinth of the mind is perhaps the greatest of mysteries, an unfathomable expanse equal in significance to that of the starred heavens, and perhaps more enigmatic. The quest for self-knowledge dominates much of philosophy, but the understanding of the self is a secret tradition known to few. Despite this veil of secrecy, there is a practice by which a skilled user might lead (or mislead) others by seizing control of their senses and will, almost as a rider wrestles with the reins and directs another being to the

rider's will. The practice of mesmerism (also known as hypnotism) allows the user (the mesmerist) to use tones of voice and elements of body language, even sleight-of-hand, to affect the minds of other living beings.

This practice was first devised in the East from Vendhya and far Khitai, and over the centuries it has spread west throughout the Hyborian kingdoms, as part of sorcerers' repertoires, and as superstition and myth. Now it is well established as a technique sorcerers can use in support of actual magic, or in place of it. A rare few individuals are naught but mesmerists, without any magical ability, as the techniques are rarely taught outside of sorcerous apprenticeships and circles.

It is important to remember that mesmerism is not mind reading, and does not include any sort of telepathic (unspoken) communication other than gesture. If the mesmerist wishes to learn some secret known to the subject, the mesmerist must ask for this information and it must be spoken aloud or otherwise acknowledged.

MESMERIST TALENTS

Primarily, mesmerism consists of placing the intended subject within a mesmeric trance, a highly suggestible hypnotic state described below. Once in a mesmeric trance, the subject's natural defenses are lowered against further suggestions or commands, and they can be easily led or

misled. The uses to which this can be put are manifold, ranging from lulling someone into a trance (or even to sleep) when they would be otherwise prone to act, confusing them when they would normally be clear-headed, causing someone to believe in a falsehood or illusion, and convincing someone to do something they are not inclined to do. Perhaps the greatest manifestation of this ability is an extension of this last aspect, to instill in a subject an instruction to perform an act they might not otherwise commit, without realizing where this command comes from, or that they are being compelled to do so.

Each of these astonishing applications of mesmerism must be accomplished through one of two talents, described below. Each of these talents can be taken additional times.

General Skill: Sorcery

Mesmerist

Prerequisite: Patron, Discipline Focus 2

Maximum Ranks: 3

Experience Point Cost: 200

This talent, taught by a Patron either from the East or trained there, allows the mesmerist to use the Sorcery skill when attempting to place an intended subject into a mesmeric trance (described on page 84). Once the subject is in this mesmeric trance, the talent grants the mesmerist 1 point of bonus Momentum per rank of the talent for use on the



mesmerism. Once the subject is in a mesmeric trance, the mesmerist can use the Sorcery skill in place of a Personality skill (such as Command or Persuade) to suggest a specific course of action, inaction, or other condition from the Mesmerism table on page 85.

Master of the Mind

Prerequisite: Mesmerist, Discipline Focus 4, Willpower 11+

Maximum Ranks: 3

Experience Point Cost: 400

The mesmerist excels in the mesmeric arts, delving deeply into this esoteric practice to a degree unimaginable to the uninitiated. The *Master of the Mind* is a force to be reckoned with, achieving a profound understanding of the human psyche and behavior, able to exert this extraordinary mentalism upon even the most unwilling subjects. This talent allows the user to put subjects in a mesmeric trance, and each rank lets the mesmerist roll +1d20 on mesmericism tests, reroll 1 on when rolling damage from Displays, and provides +1 Momentum when using the *Enslave* spell.

THE MESMERIC TRANCE

All possible actions of the mesmerist depend on the subject or subjects being in a mesmeric trance, a highly suggestible attitude in which natural inclinations (and disinclinations) are weakened. This state is not one of complete passivity, and, in fact, the subject can be highly agitated or excited, flush with energy, yet less able to recognize the mesmerist's role in their condition. The most common means for a mesmerist to induce a mesmeric trance are by using voice, eye contact, rhythm, gesture, dance, or manipulation of a physical item. Other means are also possible, such as the design of certain symbols and the arrangement of items within a space, but these are less common and generally less effective.

To bring a subject into a mesmeric trance, the mesmerist must have the Mesmerist talent, and must spend one round utilizing whatever method of mesmerism is desired.

In this round, the mesmerist must have the full attention of the subject. The subject does not necessarily need to know that the mesmerist is there, or even at work, such as when a mesmerist is creating rhythm, moving some item in the environment, or even appearing to be doing something not directed at the subject. In these cases, the mesmerist may need to make a successful Stealth test if they wish to avoid being noticed, or a Counsel, Command, or Persuade test to successfully weave the attempt at mesmerism into normal speech without calling attention to it.

The mesmerist must succeed in an Average (D1) Sorcery test, modified by any applicable talents relating to mental resistance or cultural resistance (see *Resistance to Mesmerism* on page 86), as well as Resolve Soak. If this test fails, the

mesmerist's attempt is revealed to the attempted subject. With each Complication, the subject receives an additional 1 of Resolve Soak for the remainder of the round against further attempts at mesmerism.

If this test is successful, and the target is plunged into a mesmeric trance, the mesmerist can then attempt to use Sorcery in place of an appropriate Personality skill to sway the target into a desired state of mind or towards a particular action, described in "Mesmerist Techniques", following.

"Mesmerism!" muttered Conan, crouching and digging his toes hard against the marble.

His eyes blazed. This brown dog was playing with him, making sport of him! But this mummary, this child's play of mists and shadows of thought, it could not harm him. He had but to leap and strike and the brown acolyte would be a mangled corpse under his heel. This time he would not be fooled by shadows of illusion — but he was.

— "Man-Eaters of Zamboula"

MESMERIST TECHNIQUES

Like any able sorcerer, the mesmerist has a repertoire of techniques, ranging from the most superficial, bringing tranquility to the mind of another, to the most serious — utter domination over another being's will. Once the subject is in a mesmeric trance, the mesmerist must persuade them to enter a desired mental state or to perform a specific course of action. This is represented as a Struggle (described on page 98 of the *Conan* corebook), pitting the mesmerist's Sorcery skill against the subject's Discipline skill, modified by the Mesmerism table.

Generally, the effects of any of these techniques lasts for one round and affect a single subject within close range. The mesmerist may spend additional points of Momentum to surpass these limitations, based on the following guidelines outlined on the Mesmerism Momentum Spends table.

As with all abilities, the mesmerist may spend Momentum, Doom, or Fortune to achieve greater results. Grand uses of mesmeric abilities inevitably require such expenditures.



| MESMERISM | | |
|---------------|------------|--|
| Desired State | Difficulty | Description |
| Tranquility | +1 | The subject is tranquil and feels at ease, buoyed by a sense of wellbeing and overall safety. Skill such as Observation, Insight, Resistance, and Discipline are increased by one step of Difficulty due to the relaxed state. |
| Misdirection | +2 | The mesmerist can cause the subject to experience the sensation of hearing a sound or seeing something that is not there, but is sufficiently distracting. In this case, the gamemaster should suggest an appropriate distraction, allowing a successful Challenging (D2) Observation test to see through the ruse. |
| Befuddlement | +3 | The subject becomes confused and bewildered, lacking a sense of identity or place. Goals that seemed clear are now absent, and friend becomes indistinguishable from foe. The subject must succeed in an Average (D3) Discipline test to take any action while befuddled, and if unsuccessful, any actions the subject attempts are increased by three steps of Difficulty. |
| Illusion | +4 | The mesmerist draws from the subject's memory or imagination to suggest a suitable illusion that cloaks a place or appearance with this conjectured reality. To resist this, the subject must succeed in a Dire (D4) Observation test to determine some clues to its illusory nature, or a successful Dire (D4) Discipline test to become suspicious and shake free from the illusion. |
| Enthrallment | +5 | The subject's will is utterly dominated by the mesmerist, and the mesmerist may order them to perform one action that would normally be resisted. This can range from dropping a weapon, attacking a loved one, or revealing information to the mesmerist. Resisting this requires a successful Epic (D5) Discipline test, with additional d20s awarded to the subject based on how abhorrent the requested command is — from +1d20 for minor tasks ("Drop your weapon"), +2d20 ("Betray your friends to me."), to +3d20 ("Kill your companion" or "Jump off that tower to your death."). Failure means that the subject does as is commanded, to the best of their ability. |

| MESMERISM MOMENTUM SPENDS | | |
|---------------------------|------|--|
| Momentum Spend | Cost | Effect |
| Duration | 1 | Lasts one additional round. |
| Duration | 2 | Lasts one full minute beyond the initial round. |
| Duration | 3 | Lasts ten minutes beyond its initial use. |
| Duration | 4 | Lasts an hour beyond its use. |
| Subject | 2 | Affects an additional subject, with an additional +1 per subject beyond this. |
| Subject | 4 | Affects a small group of up to six people. |
| Subject | 5 | Affects all who behold the mesmerist. |
| Range | 2 | Any within earshot of the mesmerist will be affected. |
| Range | 3 | Any who behold the mesmerist will be affected. |
| Delayed Effect | 2 | The mesmerism seemingly has no effect, but up to an hour later, the subject will unconsciously act at a time specified by the mesmerist. The outcome of the mesmerism is determined at this time. |
| Triggered Effect | 4 | The mesmerist may implant a trigger into the subject, whether a word, a specific condition, or some other cue, that causes the subject to act in the fashion the mesmerist desires. The outcome of the mesmerism is determined at this time. |
| Concealment | 1 | The mesmerist may add one step to the Difficulty of the subject (or subjects) ability to detect the use of the ability. |

MESMERISM AND OTHER SKILLS

The talents provided by the mesmerist are powerful adjuncts to sorcery, often serving in place of the actual practice of magic. To the lesser, unenlightened mind, such powers are one and the same. Mesmerism is not just useful for its applications towards sorcery, however, and the hypnotic techniques taught to the mesmerist may bolster other skill use, particularly those involving social interaction, whether in groups or with individuals.

- **Animal Handling:** Fakirs of the East frequently use mesmerism as a means of lulling dangerous animals, such as asps or cobras, into a trance through movement, voice, or the playing of a musical instrument such as the flute. This talent can also be extended to other animals, though animals have an innate resistance to such tricks. Though it is extraordinarily difficult for a mesmerist to place an animal in a mesmeric trance, and even more difficult to communicate to the animal what the mesmerist wishes, there is still a place for these techniques to calm and otherwise sway animals from violent reactions, or to allow the mesmerist safe passage.
- **Command:** A mesmerist turned to leadership might use the rhythm and inflection of voice taught by this art to calm or steady followers, to subtly exhort them into action, or to help them overcome fear and paralysis in the face of danger. In the rare case when a sorcerer leads an army, the conjunction of the skill and talents is as obvious as it is useful.
- **Counsel:** A common state of the traumatized is panic, and the mesmerist can use the mesmeric trance to steady someone whose resolve has fled, assisting them in a return to rationality and normal sense. In some cases, a mesmerist might use the more esoteric of the disciplines to help someone willingly forget something, or to train them to behave or feel differently.
- **Discipline:** Mesmerists might employ this art for their own use, with a mantra or self-inflicted mesmeric trance to enable them to withstand anticipated or ongoing mental trauma such as horrific sights, torture, or distressing news and experiences.
- **Healing:** Many are the healers who embrace the ways of the mesmerist, whether trained or intuitively, to soothe patients before chirurgery, or to bring them out of shock when they are injured. The mesmeric arts can be used also to aid severely injured patients, helping them think clearly and calmly despite their agonies.

■ **Insight:** Though mesmerism does not allow for any mind reading or any obvious glimpses into a subject's thoughts, a mesmerist might use the tricks of voice and sight to lull others into revealing information or betraying their own thoughts. Furthermore, those who undergo mesmeric training learn to distinguish the small, involuntary verbal and nonverbal clues expressed by others, signaling interior thoughts or attitudes.

■ **Lore:** Mesmerism in and of itself is of little use in divining secret lore, but the mesmeric trance is a useful tool for remembering information that may have been forgotten. If desired, a mesmerist can invoke a mesmeric trance upon a subject and question them about any information the subject may have learned but forgotten. This process allows the subject to re-roll a failed Lore test, though at one step increase to the Lore test's Difficulty.

■ **Persuade:** A mesmerist can utilize the talent to express an idea or opinion in such a fashion that seems more reasonable than it would otherwise. For willing or neutral subjects, the mesmerist might gain extra Momentum per rank of the talent when using mesmeric abilities, while a hostile subject might be brought to a neutral state. If any Complications are rolled while attempting to sway someone using mesmerism, the mesmerist's "ruse" becomes obvious and may provoke a hostile reaction.

■ **Resistance:** As with Discipline (above), the mesmerist can use mesmeric methods and the mesmeric trance as a means of withstanding severe pain or intense and long-term physical discomfort. The Eastern tradition of the fakir includes many examples of this mastery of mind over body: prolonged immersion in water without breathing, exposure to intense cold or heat, standing immobile for prolonged periods of time, sleeping on beds of nails, or even faking the state of death.

Ultimately, the gamemaster has the final say on whether the techniques of the mesmerist are applicable, and whether the conditions are appropriate for it to be brought to bear on the situation.

RESISTANCE TO MESMERISM

Not all the kingdoms of the Hyborian Age are as familiar with mesmerism and the hypnotic arts, as these practices (or their like) have crossed the globe from the East and have found little purchase in the more barbaric lands to the North. People from these cultures unfamiliar with mesmerism are less susceptible to it, and mesmerists will have a more difficult time exerting their art upon such folk. The

primary countries isolated from the tradition of mesmerism are Cimmeria, Hyperborea, and Nordheim (Asgard and Vanaheim), and those from those regions gain this benefit.

At the gamemaster's discretion, a character from one of these less-influenced countries will be more resistant to mesmerism, gaining the equivalent of the *Blessed* talent described on page 65 in the *Conan* corebook, but only in situations relating to mesmerism. If the intended subject of the mesmerism attempt already has this talent, the Difficulty of any mesmerism attempt against them is increased by one step. Similarly, natural animals are proof against attempts at mesmerism, though hypnotic techniques can be used in conjunction with the Animal Handling skill, as mentioned above.

Picts are an exception to this, being equally unfamiliar with Eastern mysticism and the practice of mesmerism, yet all-too-familiar with their own version of hypnotic magic. Thus, despite their lack of exposure to the Eastern tradition of mesmerism, Picts are just as susceptible to the hypnotic arts as are civilized folk from other kingdoms and cultures.

But Conan was not a son of the East. Its traditions were meaningless to him; he was the product of an utterly alien atmosphere. Hypnotism was not even a myth in Cimmeria. The heritage that prepared a native of the East for submission to the mesmerist was not his.

He was aware of what Khemsa was trying to do to him; but he felt the impact of the man's uncanny power only as a vague impulsion, a tugging and pulling that he could shake off as a man shakes spider webs from his garments.

— “The People of the Black Circle”

Wherever plants grow and people dwell, there are those who use them for a variety of purposes. Herbalism is widespread, practiced throughout the Hyborian Age kingdoms, from the northern and southernmost reaches of the continent to its breadth, whether solely or in conjunction with other techniques, to aid others, or even to do them harm. Traditions of herbalism vary wildly in practice, but all are united by their general principles, and a Nordheimer midwife might find herself using the very same plants (or methods) as a Stygian alchemist, or utilizing different preparations to achieve the same result.

Herbalists that remain in one place often cultivate gardens — sometimes called *pharmacopeia*, or more simply, herb gardens — or tend to the wild growth of plants in the environment nearby. They also trade or barter with one another, in some cases even opening shops — often called *apothecaries* — to sell their wares. It is common for herbalists to have a deep and intimate knowledge of the plants and patterns of growth in their region, keeping track of what is growing where, when it is best collected, and how it can be harvested most expediently.

Many herbalists practice to support others, through apothecaries or other dealers, or providing their wares and services to physicians, priests, alchemists, and even sorcerers, and for this reason they are regularly associated with such folk.

THE HERBALIST TALENT

Though the use of herbs to modify human health and activity consists of several different pursuits, for ease of use it has been condensed into one broad and all-encompassing *Herbalist* talent. Though an immensely practical application for its direct influence on sorcery, it is also utilized without any magical adjunct whatsoever, a tradition practiced by healers, midwives, physicians, and even illicit dealers throughout the whole of the Hyborian and southern kingdoms, and throughout the lands to the East.

General Skill: Healing

Herbalist

Prerequisite: Healing Focus 2, Survival Focus 2

Maximum Ranks: 3

Experience Point Cost: 200

The herbalist is skilled in the variety of processes and disciplines that involve the use of herbs in treatment, from identifying plants (whether growing wild or gathered and prepared), to knowing their uses and risks, to familiarity with the various methods by which these plants can be prepared and administered. The *Herbalist* talent provides the character with the ability to make a Healing test and determine what herbal remedies or treatments will be most beneficial to a particular subject, and in what doses.

HERBALISM

While much of sorcery concerns the evocation and direction of supernatural energies, the most common arts are those concerning the material world, most particularly the virtues of herbs and other natural substances, which might be used in healing and towards other effects. The best-known of these is the lotus, the strange and terrible flower whose petals and essence are put to many occult uses, but there are many other, equally important herbs, roots, plants, and flowers equally useful to the practicing sorcerer, both as adjuncts to the use of magic, or in its stead.

In some cases, this might be identifying the effects of plant life on the subject. Furthermore, the talent provides the fundamental knowledge for creating *herbal concoctions* (described on page 89).

When operating outside in an environment the herbalist is familiar with, any successful Survival tests relating to finding, identifying, or avoiding dangerous plant life get an additional Momentum added to the result. If the test is unsuccessful, no additional Momentum is gained.

For simplicity's sake, the tradition of herbalism has been presented as a single talent rather than as a variety of disciplines, such as botanist (someone specializing in identifying plants and their characteristics), naturalist (a specialist in knowing plants in their environments), or apothecarist (a preparer of medicines and treatments from plants). With this combination, the herbalist becomes a generalist — understanding the application of herbal remedies to address temporary ailments, injuries, and overall health.

HARVESTING AND PREPARING HERBS

A character with the *Herbalist* talent can use the *Survival* skill to forage for herbs and other plants for a variety of uses.

This can be time-consuming and an exhaustive, deliberate process, in which the herbalist does their best to ensure that the material being gathered is intact, clean, and fresh. Plants are harvested whole, leaves are cut, berries picked, sap drained, bark peeled, floral petals collected, grasses gathered, roots dug, pollens and molds scraped, along with many other means of collection. Some herbalists are meticulous about keeping these separate, while others might simply gather their finds all together and sort them out later — the difference owing as much to tradition as it does personal taste and expediency.

When gathering herbs for use, the gamemaster should set the Difficulty of the task based on the *Gathering Herbs* table (see next page).

When gathering herbs for concoctions, an herbalist may re-roll a single d20 per rank of the *Herbalist* talent, but must accept the second result(s). A Complication results in the herbalist spoiling or depleting the environment in some fashion, whether through over harvesting or inadvertent destruction of the very plants sought. In this event, all future attempts at harvesting herbs in that area are increased by one step of Difficulty until the area has been restored in some fashion, either through natural processes or intervention by an herbalist.



| GATHERING HERBS | |
|------------------|--|
| Difficulty | Conditions |
| Simple (D0) | A carefully tended herb garden or pharmacopeia, such as can only be cultivated by an experienced herbalist. |
| Average (D1) | A dense and old forest or thick jungle, such as those in the Pictish Wilderness, the Barachan Islands, Khitai, Vendhya, Kush, Darfar, Keshan, and the Black Kingdoms. A well-represented botanical garden, such as might be found in the capitals of countries like Aquilonia, Turan, Vendhya, or Khitai. |
| Challenging (D2) | Partially cultivated countries with a mix of forest and natural landscape, with adequate water flow, such as Aquilonia, Turan, Argos, Koth, Zingara, Nemedia, Brythunia, western Shem, etc. |
| Daunting (D3) | Countries whose terrain is a mix of woods, plains, hills, desert, or steppes, such as Cimmeria, the Border Kingdom, Zamora, Hyrkania, and the center of Shem. |
| Dire (D4) | Mostly desert areas such as eastern Shem, Khoraja, Khauran, Punt, Zembabwe, Iranistan, and Stygia. Arctic regions such as Asgard, Vanaheim, and Hyperborea. |
| Epic (D5) | Barren wasteland such as the desert between and to the north of Zamora and Turan, and the tundra at the north of the Vilayet Sea. |

A basic success yields one unit of herbs, the equivalent of a single dose. The exact amount could range from a single root to a basket full of leaves, a palm-full of berries, or a pouch full of leaves. Additional points of Momentum can be spent for additional units, at the rate of one unit per point of Momentum. As noted above, a character with the *Herbalist* talent gains an additional Momentum, if the test is successful.

Once gathered, herbs can be used fresh and as-is, but for the most part these units of herbs are prepared through a variety of processes. They can be combined or used singly, mashed and used in ointments and unguents, dried, chopped or shredded, decocted or distilled into alcohol or purified water, powdered, concentrated into sap or even hardened resin, cooked, or even transformed through flame into ash. Similarly, the herbalist can prepare herbs to be taken by mouth, drunk when mixed into water or wine, smeared onto wounds, soaked into bandages, inhaled with steam or as smoke, or even massaged into the skin and muscles. Other less-common means of administering herbs are also used, depending on the tradition or the requirement.

HERBAL CONCOCTIONS

Rather than specifying each potential herb, its preparation, and its possible use (singly or in combination with others), and forcing herbalists into carrying portable apothecaries with them constantly, or being restricted to only plants they can find in their immediate surroundings, each basic unit of herbal material is prepared into a **concoction**. Each concoction is flexible and generic, usable for a variety of purposes, altered slightly when the exact need is determined. Each concoction takes one full day to prepare and requires a Simple (D0) Survival test, with an additional d20 per rank of the *Herbalist* talent. Additional Momentum

earned through this test yields additional concoctions, or can be spent to reduce the preparation time as normal. The resulting concoctions are then used as the building blocks for all specific recipes, described on page 91.

The *Herbal Concoctions* table lists the most commonly known and utilized herbal concoctions, as well as several rare and unique ones.

Each concoction has a Lore Difficulty associated with the exact recipe, which the herbalist must successfully test to know. Recipes differ wildly with tradition and include a wide range of ingredients, but once an herbalist has successfully made the Lore test, the recipe is considered known and can be attempted repeatedly.

The Momentum cost is the number of Momentum the concoction takes to make, and must be spent when the herbalist is attempting to create the concoction. This figure also determines the number of basic concoctions that must be spent to create the desired specific concoction.

USING HERBALISM WITH OTHER SKILLS

As noted above, there is a rich tradition of herbalism that has little to do with sorcery, and thus the herbalist will find other skills as necessary as they are of interest. While Healing and Sorcery are the most obvious skills used in conjunction with herbalism, the following list provides other skills which might benefit from its application.

- **Alchemy:** Many alchemical formula require the use of exotic plants, whether in their raw form or prepared by the herbalist's arts: dried, powdered, or distilled. With a successful Survival test based on a Difficulty determined on the rarity of the ingredients required (if the gamemaster does not have an

COMMON AND UNCOMMON HERBS OF THE HYBORIAN KINGDOMS

Tens of thousands of species of plants grow throughout the lands of the Hyborian Age, knowing no borders but those imposed by climate, soil type, and access to water. Some are incredibly rare, familiar to only a few herbalists, and others are commonplace across the continent, known by a double-dozen names. The incredible array of this botanic cornucopia makes it impossible to provide any authoritative or exhaustive list, but gamemasters with a desire for verisimilitude may use this reference as a source from which to draw detail when describing the plants sought after and used by herbalism-using characters.

While these are grouped by primary uses, many medicinal herbs are used for a variety of ailments and conditions, in a variety of forms, and as such some appear multiple times. In some cases, herbs that are toxic in their natural form can even be curative when used in small, controlled doses, in combination with other herbs, or when prepared for alternative use.

Curatives

The following herbs can be applied directly to injuries, whether used as balms, disinfectants, or pain-eases, and can serve to speed and enhance the natural process of healing: alder, amaranth, arnica, barley, basil, bryony, chamomile, centaury, comfrey, daffodil, hazel, mullein, rose, sage, willow, and yarrow.

Antidotes and Restoratives

These herbs are used to specifically restore vigor or improve health, to counteract toxins, fight infections, rid the body of illness, and can be used to treat a variety of viruses or diseases. They are usually taken in teas or ingested in another fashion: agrimony, amaranth, anemone, angelica, anise, basil, chamomile, chervil, cowslip, cypress, fennel, garlic, ginger, iris, juniper, mint, mugwort, nettle, oak, rosemary, sage, sorrel, thyme, valerian, and yarrow.

Narcotics, Hallucinogens, and Stimulants

These herbs are often used to sway the attitude or mood of the subject, and are frequently used in rituals or in sorcerous preparations. Some of these herbs are thought to attract (or repel) spirits, demons, and other magical beings. These herbs are ingested, or burnt and the smoke inhaled. In some cases, they are used recreationally. The most notable of these — the many varieties of the lotus — is addressed extensively in the CONAN corebook on page 166. Others include anemone, asafetida, betel nut, bloodroot, chamomile, cyclamen, damiana, datura, fennel, fern, mallow, poppy, and thistle.

Poisons

The following herbs are considered poisonous when ingested or handled, affecting the skin, organs, or mind, with symptoms ranging from skin irritations, blindness, madness, or death. They are often brewed into poisons or are in rare cases applied to weapons or other surfaces. Notable examples include azalea, belladonna, bloodroot, bracken, euphorbia, foxglove, hellebore, hemlock, henbane, holly, hyacinth, ivy, jequirity, larkspur, laurel, manchineel, mangrove, mistletoe, moonseed, nightshade, oleander, privet, strychnine, and wolfsbane.

Other Uses

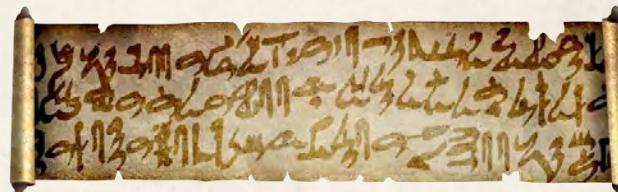
This list does not even scratch the surface of herbal applications that are not represented by game-specific effects, such as remedies for digestive issues, cosmetic applications, the ill effects of aging, health improvement, insect or animal repellent, birth control, or long-term mood alteration. Should any of these treatments or uses be of interest, the gamemaster is encouraged to work with the player to determine the exact in-game effects, using these rules as guidelines.



| HERBAL CONCOCTIONS | | | | |
|--------------------|------------------|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Concoction | Lore Difficulty | Momentum & Concoctions | Description | |
| Basic Concoction | Simple (D0) | —, +1 per additional concoction | A single unit of herbs that can be modified or crafted to suit a single subject, aimed at achieving a desired condition or state. Each basic concoction takes one hour to create. Modifying a basic concoction requires a successful Healing test, with each success allowing 1 concoction to be transformed into the equivalent of a specific concoction. Physically, this represents a small measure of herbs, whether a pouch of dried leaves, phial of liquid, or small jar of paste. | |
| Ritual Incense | Average (D1) | 1 | A specific blend of herbs intended to be burnt as part of a religious or sorcerous ritual, assisting in a euphoric or focused state of mind. If used, the incense is consumed and the user gains 1 Momentum for a single spell, ritual, or religious activity. Only one person can gain the effects of a single unit of ritual incense; for additional users, more incense must be burnt. Normal incense, while aromatic, does not have this effect. | |
| Elixir of Clarity | Average (D1) | 1 | This minor concoction, when imbibed and combined with a successful Average (D1) Resistance test, is a quick restorative, offering clarity and refreshment to the user within a minute or so of its consumption, adding +1  Soak against ongoing temporary mental state or condition. If a Soak roll has been made and failed, a new one can be attempted. Additionally, 1  or Resolve (pick one) are instantly restored. Only one dose of this may be consumed per four-hour period. Further doses in this time frame have no effect. | |
| Healing Poultice | Average (D1) | 2 | A medicinal mix of healing herbs used as a Resource in conjunction with the Healing skill, listed on page 141 of the <i>Conan</i> corebook. | |
| Sleeping Potion | Average (D1) | 2 | The effect of this draught is obvious, aiding the drinker into entering a deep and profound sleep. When consuming this potion, the subject must attempt an Average (D1) Resistance test to remain awake, or can simply choose not to fight its effects and go to sleep with its assistance. While so drugged, the subject will sleep deeply for 4  +8 hours (with each effect counting as an additional hour), and is considered Staggered. Typically, such sleep is desired as part of the healing process, and for every full four hours, the sleeper can make an Average (D1) Discipline or Resistance test (pick one per period) to restore points lost due to Harms. The imbiber may heal 1 Harm per 3 Momentum. | |
| Berserker Draught | Challenging (D2) | 3 | Often brewed in Nordheim and mixed with mead. Consuming this potent liquor instills in the drinker a frenzied, near-feverish state of mind, adding a re-roll on a single d20 for any Discipline or Resistance tests and increasing Courage soak by +1  . The effects of this draught last for roughly an hour. For four hours afterwards, the user is considered Staggered, as per the condition described on page 127 of the <i>Conan</i> corebook. | |
| Narcotic Elixir | Challenging (D2) | 3 | The effects of this bitter narcotic allow the user to enter a blissful, trance-like state, allowing greater access to the dream-realms. When consumed, the user must attempt a Challenging (D2) Discipline test (but can willingly reduce this test by one step of Difficulty). If successful, any attempts at magic relating to dream voyaging gain an additional d20 for each use of this elixir. It can be drunk or even concentrated into powder and burnt, and the effects last for roughly four hours. For all other activities, the user is considered to be Dazed, as per the condition described in the <i>Conan</i> corebook on page 126. | |

HERBAL CONCOCTIONS (CONT.)

| Concoction | Lore Difficulty | Momentum & Concoctions | Description |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|---|
| Blindness Potion | Daunting (D3) | 3 | A hideous poison, this liquid (sometimes a powder) is quite bitter and must be masked in heavily spiced food or strong drink. When it is consumed, the subject must attempt a Daunting (D3) Resistance test. Failure means that the user suffers temporary blindness, as described in the <i>Conan</i> corebook on page 126. The effects of this drug are temporary, lasting only an hour, but multiple doses can be administered in the hope of causing permanent or more long-term blindness. In such cases, the Difficulty is increased by one step per additional application of the drug, with any failed dice adding another day to the overall term of blindness. A Complication rolled on this Resistance test results in blindness that lasts for an additional four hours. |
| Love Philter | Daunting (D3) | 4 | This potion is popular in the Black Kingdoms and as a part of folk magic or even witchcraft, common throughout the Hyborian kingdoms. When this philter is consumed (often with wine), the imbiber must make a Daunting (D3) Resistance test or enter a highly suggestible emotional state where their desire is intensified towards an existing friend, loved one, or coveted other. The euphoric sense of desire is temporary, lasting little more than a day per dose, but if used strategically, can strengthen existing relationships or bonds. Unwise use of this drug can sometimes go awry, such as when concealed and unwelcome feelings become obvious. Despite folk tales and ribald jokes, the philter does not create new or unwanted attraction, and can only strengthen (and embolden) existing desires. |
| Cordial of Conjoined Dreaming | Daunting (D3) | 5 | Up to five subjects may imbibe this cordial at once (requiring a single concoction apiece), and its effects are only useful in conjunction with others who have drunk it. Often mixed with wine or drunk in its pure state, this cordial's effects are only possible when the users are in the same zone and are asleep, able to dream normally. For this reason, wine is used for its sedative properties. The dreamers under the effect of the cordial enter a shared dream-state, able to speak to one another as if they are present together, and from there can journey further into other dream-worlds, depending on the ability of those in the shared dream. |
| Paralysis Draught | Daunting (D3) | 3 | This drug, akin to the sleeping potion described above, places the user into a waking state of paralysis, where they remain conscious but are unable to move, immobile and defenseless. When consumed, the subject must make a Challenging (D3) Resistance test. If the test is failed, the draught affects the subject, stiffening them immediately. Even the slightest physical movement (including speech) requires an Epic (D5) Discipline test until the draught's effects wear off, a period usually lasting four hours, plus an additional four hours per failed d20 result in the Resistance test. If the test generates a Complication, the paralysis lasts a day instead of four-hour increments. |



HERBAL CONCOCTIONS (CONT.)

| Concoction | Lore Difficulty | Momentum & Concoctions | Description |
|-----------------------|-----------------|------------------------|---|
| Drug of Madness | Dire (D4) | 4 | A ghastly drug, this powder is made from forbidden and poisonous herbs, sometimes mixed with the venom of serpents and other awful substances. The use of this drug is often considered to be witchcraft, and forbidden in many countries. When consuming this (mixed with food or drink), the subject must make a successful Dire (D) Resistance test or be driven mad for a period of a day. When maddened, the victim is prone to irrational acts and fears, reacting in extreme fashion to the most minor provocation. Any rational action requires a successful Dire (D4) Discipline test, and the attempt paid for with a point of Doom. A Complication on the Resistance test when this is consumed results in an ongoing state of madness that can only be cured through the treatment of a healer or through powerful magic. The gamemaster may take over running the character if required. |
| Golden Wine of Xuthal | Dire (D4) | 5 | Each unit of this draught, made by the skilled herbalists and wine-makers of the dreaming city of Xuthal, instantly restores 5 Vigor or 1 Wound when drunk, refreshing energy and restoring damaged flesh almost instantaneously, taking a minute per point. In addition to the Dire (D4) Healing test to know the recipe, the herbalist must make a successful Dire (D4) Lore test to even know such a recipe exists. |

immediate idea, this should be equal to the Difficulty of the alchemical preparation), an herbalist can transform one Concoction into an Ingredient. Such attempts require a single load of herbal concoctions, which is lost in the process.

- **Healing:** When using a single concoction, an herbalist can re-roll a single d20 on any Healing test, but must accept the second result. This is described in Herbal Concoctions table, starting on page 91.
- **Resistance:** An herbalist can use concoctions to help a patient fight off diseases or recover from the effect of poisons, etc. When doing so, the herbalist modifies a single concoction for the patient based on their exact state, directed towards the unwanted condition, allowing the patient to re-roll a maximum of one d20 in a Resistance tests, assuming there is adequate time to consume the concoction and a successful Healing test is made beforehand. The result of the re-roll must be accepted.
- **Sorcery:** Many spells require rituals to enact, and sorcerous traditions often require the burning of herbs to improve the magical environment, purify the area, or even assist the sorcerer in attaining the proper mind-set. In such cases, two herbal concoctions may be burnt or otherwise consumed to turn a third concoction into an Offering. This is a Challenging (D2) Sorcery test with Momentum allowing the herbalist

to convert additional concoctions into Offerings at the cost of 1 Momentum each.

- **Survival:** When foraging for the ingredients for herbal concoctions, an herbalist may re-roll a single d20, but must accept the second result. Similarly, they can do the same when making Survival rolls to avoid poisonous plants, find edibles and water-storing plants, identify the area by its flora, assess the type and density of local game and its feeding habits, and (based on the area) make natural implements such as rope.

The gamemaster should be the ultimate arbiter of whether the *Herbalist* talent can be used in conjunction with a skill, and in most cases, should require the expenditure of a load of herbs when utilized.

"I asked a love potion of Totrasmek, not suspecting the depth of his guile and hate. He gave me a drug to mix with my lover's wine, and he swore that when Alafthal drank it, he would love me even more madly than ever, and grant my every wish. I mixed the drug secretly with my lover's wine. But having drunk, my lover went raving mad and things came about as I have told you."

— Zabibi, “The Man-Eaters of Zamboula”

PETTY ENCHANTMENTS

The markets hum and bustle with the calls of vendors hawking their wares. Certainly, amongst the rich scents of fresh meats and the sweet sparkle of trinkets, the average traveler can find simple alchemical concoctions and petty enchantments. The wise sell-sword knows that spending a little coin on strengthening your armor or reinforcing your flasks pays off when facing down his fate.

A sorcerer knows there are secrets to be discovered in this world. Formulas hinted at in ancient tomes calling for ingredients not found in any common marketplace. Found in old words describing older promises in languages that twist the air with their utterance. Hints of ancient formulas wrested from the lips of creatures that *should not be*, perfected through trial and error throughout the ages. These are the petty enchantments that cannot be found for sale at the bazaar, the ones which promise power but inflict a different cost.

Let the workaday alchemists toil over their flames for a pittance. You have grander plans in mind.

Regarding New Petty Enchantments

The following petty enchantments are similar in nature to the information in the **Conan** corebook; they are to be treated as talents for the Alchemy skill. Binding these petty enhancements will still be done through use of the Craft skill (see the Alchemy and Craft skill descriptions in the **Conan** corebook, pages 56 and 63). Where common petty enchantments are frequently bound to a glass sphere, remember that there are other methods of encasing one's mixtures.

Alchemical and Sorcerous Synergy

By combining spells with petty enchantments, a clever sorcerer can create some truly spectacular — or truly insidious — effects. Acting in a manner akin to combining sorcerer talents and spells, the clever alchemist can conjure up alternative binding agents to deliver a particularly memorable result.

For example, Aruru the Sorceress wants to attack an oncoming group of Zamorian thieves. She combines her spell Venom on the Wind with her prepared Shimmering Abyss. She creates a cloud of mist as her binding agent and sends it after the Zamorians, who can only watch in wide-eyed horror as their doom billows towards them.

Acidic Powders, Gases, and Liquids

There are a great many varieties of chemicals that, over years of study and careful refinement, the alchemist may transform into weapons. Particularly vicious and destructive, this seems to be the petty enchantment of choice for the cruellest sorcerers. The kindest of these still have the potential to do great harm. An alchemical concoction of acid not only burns an opponent, but the horrible experience of that could leave a victim scarred emotionally, as well.

A powder is this petty enchantment's mildest form, usually requiring either some sort of liquid or heat to set off its natural chemical reactions. An activated powder could do anything from setting toxic fumes into the air to creating a terrifying reaction.

For those of the craft preferring to use manipulation and persuasion, there is a powdered mixture called "Set's Serpent" that, when lit, turns its flames a dark purple. As the heat consumes it, the spent powder solidifies into long, twisting, and unnatural tendrils. To the uneducated, it is a portal leading from the unknown, from which poisonous fumes and horrible tentacles reach.

The liquid forms of this enchantment are the more dangerous, commonly used as an Area attack (see the **Conan** corebook, page 152). Shattering acid, for example, is prepared in a bottle specifically created to explode as widely as possible. This ensures physical damage as potentially numerous victims over an area must deal with shrapnel from the exploding glass, as well as the mental trauma and the physical harm from the burning acid.

Mitra's Heavenly Gaze

This powder, in small, carefully controlled doses, may be taken as a method of encouraging visions. Priests, shamans,

ACID POWDERS, GASES, AND LIQUIDS

| Potency | Difficulty | Damage |
|-----------------|------------------|--|
| Toxic Powder | Simple (D0) | 3 Persistent |
| Set's Serpent | Average (D1) | 3 Persistent, Fearsome |
| Simple Acid | Challenging (D2) | 4 Incendiary |
| Harsh-Fume Acid | Daunting (D3) | 4 Persistent, Incendiary |
| Blistering Acid | Dire (D4) | 5 Persistent, Incendiary, Fearsome |
| Shattering Acid | Epic (D5) | 5 Persistent, Incendiary, Intense, Fearsome |

or visionaries seek out a talented alchemist with the ability to create this fine, plain-looking powder. Those who are aware of its consciousness-enhancing effects praise it as proof of their gods' judgment. No two experiences are the same. One person takes the powder and speaks of the most spiritual experience ever, where suddenly they saw the world as Mitra himself must see it, in colors and shapes and sounds unknown previously. Such a person emerges from their visions with a sense of euphoric purpose, certain of their path in life. The next person takes the powder and speaks of terrors unknown, of visions of their own death, of feelings so strong the fright alone might kill them.

These are the effects in carefully controlled, small doses. The insidious and reckless alchemist can use this petty enchantment for far more sinister purposes. This powder, when used in higher quantity in battle against enemies, causes extreme and immediate reactions. Use of Mitra's Heavenly Gaze may be made as an Area attack (see *Conan* corebook, page 152). Whether taken willingly or not, mental damage is done to the victim, as their mind becomes their own worst enemy. The more damaging the alchemist wishes the drug to be on initial intake, the more difficult the process to create

| MITRA'S HEAVENLY GAZE | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Difficulty to Prepare | Initial Mental Damage |
| Average (D1) | 2 Non-lethal |
| Challenging (D2) | 3 Non-lethal |
| Daunting (D3) | 4 Non-lethal |
| Dire (D4) | 5 Non-lethal |
| Epic (D5) | 5 Non-lethal, Stun |

Once this drug is ingested (whether through force or voluntarily), each victim or group of victims rolls 1 . The number on the die determines the effect of the drug, be it good or bad. Part of the danger of using this powder in battle is that, despite an Alchemist's best intent, they may end up strengthening the enemy... or weakening themselves.

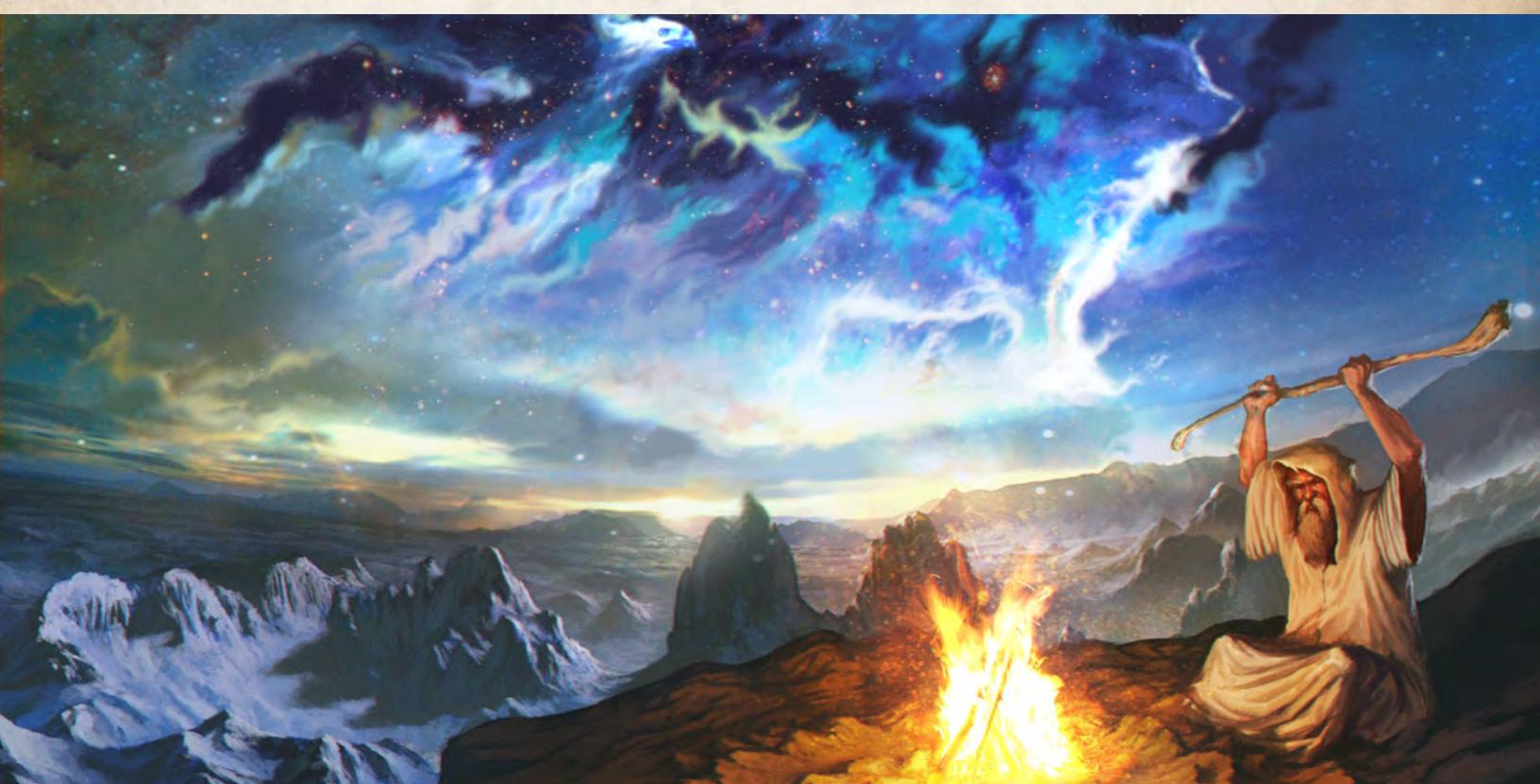
The psychedelic effects of this powder wear off in a matter of hours.

| MITRA'S HEAVENLY GAZE MENTAL EFFECTS | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| § Roll | Mitra's Judgment |
| * | Gain 1 Fortune point for use through the spell's duration. |
| ** | Overcome weakness — for one scene subject of spell acts as if all Wounds are treated. |
| 3-4 | Cursed (Dazed, Hindered, Poisoned, etc. at the gamemaster's discretion) |
| Effect | Second Wind — subject of spell replenishes all lost Resolve. |

Withering Unguent

When properly bottled, this viscous, yellow oil looks innocent enough. Yet, when tossed towards your enemies or poured onto an inanimate object, watch as the target ages! New locks become old, strong swords become rusty. There is even a rumor that the master thieves of Zamora promise fortune and infamy to the one who can find a source of this rarest of oils; for certainly, that thief shall become a ruler of the shades.

Where resins and the ingredients needed to produce them are easily found in cities, not so with the



components of Withering Unguent. It serves as the mirror opposite to resins — where alchemical resins build up and reinforce, Withering Unguent does the opposite. The unguent has many uses, none of which are of a lawful nature. The unguent is specifically attuned to react to non-living matter. When poured on any inanimate object, it will cause the item to suffer a Break (see the *Conan* corebook, page 121). Used as a splashing Area attack, it degrades the quality of any inanimate object the yellowed oil touches.

If a player character has layered their armor, when attacked with Withering Unguent only the top or outermost layer is affected. Any item affected, but not completely broken or destroyed, by the Withering Unguent may be repaired for four times the normal price. It is not cheap to find the materials to properly and safely clean and restore items damaged by this oil. If applicable, these should be applied to items as damage to Structure, described on page 121 of the *Conan* corebook.

WITHERING UNGUENT

| Difficulty | Result to Inanimate Objects |
|---------------|-----------------------------|
| Daunting (D3) | 3 of damage |
| Dire (D4) | 4 of damage |
| Epic (D5) | 5 of damage |

Shimmering Abyss

This shimmering, black powder seems to hiss and whisper even when properly contained. A particularly dangerous alchemical creation, this powder is tremendously reactive. When released, its effects inspire madness in all the victims caught in its area. Depending on its potency, enemies have been seen to froth at the mouth, fall into horrible laughing, screaming, and gibbering fits, or outright turn on their allies. Accounts of armies turning on their own in cannibalistic violence are not unheard of.

Through many years of experiments and study, alchemists who unlocked this secret discovered different potencies. The gentlest of these sinister powders produces a

violent, visceral fear reaction. The worst of these powders have reduced victims to little more than terrified, screaming animals, attacking friend and foe alike. Those few poor souls able to fight through the maddening gibberish coming from their own mouths scream of things man was never supposed to know. Little wonder this power is called, Shimmering Abyss.

An Alchemy test — base Difficulty Simple (Do) — is performed when using this devious powder. The powder's effect depends on the number of successes; Momentum may be spent to enhance this test.

Any Traumas taken due to this powder are twice as difficult to heal. The application of some Golden Lotus (see *Conan* corebook, page 166) counteracts this and allows normal healing.

Mesmerizing Talisman

A beautiful, silver pendant, much like the ones bought along the main thoroughfare at a city's market. But, if you look closely, the strange, reflective metal of this pendant draws you in. Keep it under your shirt until you need to use it, for once exposed, its shining beauty will certainly catch attention.

Be they potions, paints, or other wearables, regular talismans help to protect a mind from harm, providing Soak against Resolve damage. The Mesmerizing Talisman — powder, paint, or pendant — has the opposite effect. It shimmers, silver and fluid, and commands attention. Likewise, it serves as an excellent distraction, lowering your opponent's guard and allowing you to get in a particularly good strike.

Each time the wearer attacks, this petty enchantment acts as though the wearer's weapon has the Stun Quality (see *Conan* corebook page 153). Every time the wearer rolls an Effect on their , they have an option of either using the weapon's original Effect, or using the Stun provided by wearing this talisman.

The Difficulty to create such a petty enchantment is equal to the number of uses each talisman has, up to a maximum of five uses. In addition, the number of ingredients required in the item's construction must match. The only exception

SHIMMERING ABYSS

| Momentum | Effect per Momentum Used | Damage |
|----------|---|--------|
| 0 | Fearsome, Backlash | |
| 1 | Burning (mental damage only) | |
| 2 | Blind | |
| 3 | Dazed | |
| 4 | Deaf | |
| 5 | Gamemaster or player character, as appropriate, may spend 3 Doom (3 Momentum) to activate a character on the opposing side to turn on their allies. | |

is when Momentum is spent, in which case the number of ingredients needed may be reduced by 1 for each point spent.

| MESMERIZING TALISMAN | |
|----------------------|----------------|
| Difficulty to Create | Number of Uses |
| Average (D1) | 1 |
| Challenging (D2) | 2 |
| Daunting (D3) | 3 |
| Dire (D4) | 4 |
| Epic (D5) | 5 |

Potion of Strength Over All

A blessing as much as a curse, the alchemist who exploits the secrets of this petty enchantment has at their fingertips the means to create legends. Warriors blessed with this enchantment plow through their enemies like scythes through wheat, inspiring awe as they sweep through the battlefield. Sorcerers needn't waste a single ounce of skill on their spells when some well-placed threats and clever use of this potion create the fear and awe that will win them whatever they want.

This potion is a one-use item. Its creator may fine-tune its potency to allow for a greater duration but, once activated, the effects cannot be halted or otherwise paused. Drinking the potion is a Minor Action capable of being interrupted but, once activated, any touch affected by the user counts as an attack, whether to friend or foe, to the living or the inanimate. When this happens, the drinker makes an attack as usual but, when about to roll damage — after all Momentum and/or Fortune spends — add 3  to the total. When the potion wears off, the user suffers 4  Fatigue.

Much as with spells, there is no way to protect the user of this enchantment from its effects. Due to the potential power of this mixture, more ingredients than usual are required. Like other talismans, however, for every Momentum spent during the item's creation, the maker may reduce the number of ingredients needed.

| POTION OF STRENGTH OVER ALL | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Duration | Difficulty | Ingredients Required |
| 1 Round | Average (D1) | 2 |
| 2 Rounds | Challenging (D2) | 4 |
| 3 Rounds | Daunting (D3) | 6 |
| 4 Rounds | Dire (D4) | 8 |
| 5 Rounds | Epic (D5) | 10 |

Khemsa did not glance at him, but went straight to one of the arched doors and placed his open hand against the heavy bronze lock. With a rending shudder the portal buckled inward. As the girl followed him through, she saw that the thick teak wood hung in splinters, the bronze bolts were bent and twisted from their sockets, and the great hinges broken and disjointed. A thousand-pound battering-ram with forty men to swing it could have shattered the barrier no more completely.

— “The People of the Black Circle”

WEIRD SCIENCE

Science in the Hyborian Age is a strange concoction of superstition, magic, and the remnants of wisdom possessed by civilizations from the unfathomable past, not all of which were human or even of this planet. Some of these long-ago peoples possessed technologies well in advance of those commonly found today. A few left scrolls and tablets containing records of their achievements, and others built examples of such devices then locked them away in moldering tombs or temple complexes.

Also, human knowledge is not the only sort available to those willing to seek answers to questions that few dare ask. The serpent men and other pre-human creatures once walked the Earth, strange life-forms from the Outer Dark penetrate the void between worlds, and demons and gods can provide glimpses and hints of lore from the far past or the distant future.

Seeking knowledge from any of these sources might allow the most dedicated sorcerers, priests, scholars, and tinkerers to unlock or uncover methods of creating wonders of which few would even dream. Many folk call this knowledge magic, but the devices themselves are no more supernatural than an iron sword or a wooden pulley.

While the range of these wonders is vast, some of these technologies are better understood than others, although all are vanishingly rare and typically only found in the possession of the powerful who guard their secrets well. However, a few such devices are small enough to be portable and can be found in the possession of individuals who were either lucky enough to find them or daring enough to steal them. The following is a list of some the extant wonders of weird science in the Hyborian Age.

CONSTRUCTS USING FLAMMABLE GASES

Both cracks in the ground leading down to natural gas pockets and fermenting manure give off flammable methane gas, and a few lost civilizations learned some of the secrets of harnessing these resources. Tapping and channeling natural gas, or fermenting manure in sealed vats, can insure a steady supply of these gases.

Most use these gases for heat and light. Many small fires in a well-ventilated space beneath a floor warms a cold room, and gas jets which exit into porous stones glow brightly when the gas is lit. Also, someone who understands the system can turn the light and heat on or off by simply moving a lever or a valve, an act which can evoke awe in a temple's worshipers or a queen's subjects.

Of course, anyone going to the trouble to install a network of gas pipes might also install other pipes for defensive purposes. At the turn of another lever, a high priest or sorcerer could either fill his treasure room with odorless suffocating gas or activate jets of leaping flame. Suffocating gas causes everyone affected to suffer $3\spadesuit$ damage every turn. Victims taking an Injury suffer the Staggered condition until they escape or fall unconscious and die. Flame jets shooting out from walls and doorways burn anyone within Close range and are a $3\spadesuit$ Incendiary attack. Some of these flame jets are also designed to function as Area attacks.



However, there are risks to using flammable gases. Anyone observing their operation for a few minutes, and making a successful Challenging (D2) Craft test, understands them well enough to cut openings in the gas pipes, filling rooms with suffocating gases or jet of flame, depending upon whether an open flame is present in the room or not.

Succeeding at a Daunting (D3) Alchemy test also allows a character to understand that filling a room with these gases, and then having someone make fire or open the door while carrying a candle or torch, could cause a vast explosion. While they are more likely to simply burn down a few palaces and temple complexes, fortifications that used flammable gases have been blown up, either by accident or through the cleverness of besiegers.

STEAM POWER

To residents of this savage age, the few sorcerous citadels and grand temples which use the secrets of steam are particularly impressive. Locomotives and steamships are beyond the ideations of current inventors. However, large and exceedingly sturdy boilers can produce steam pushing huge pistons, allowing vast doors to swing open with the touch of a lever. The same system can also cause a dais bearing a grand statue of a deity to raise, lower, turn, or force air through vast trumpets, creating reverberating calls that can be heard throughout an entire city. Science makes gods speak!

Devious sorcerers and high priests wishing to deter brigands put these same steam systems to more aggressive uses. By installing a series of small steam pipes in doorways and in the walls of corridors, especially those leading to treasures, they arm their redoubts with defenses that can send jets of live steam to scald the meat from the bones of thieves and other intruders.

Moving a lever can activate some of these traps, while others release their steam anytime someone attempts to open a door without first touching a panel, using a second key, or performing some other action. These jets of steam are narrow, but they affect anyone who is in front of one and within Close range. Anyone caught in this steam suffers $3\spadesuit$ physical damage to a random hit location, and the same amount of mental damage (roll once for both). Damage inflicted by steam ignores Soak. Targets suffer this damage once a turn for as long as they remain in the area affected by the steam jets. Characters can move out of this area normally and the limited capacity of the boilers means that the steam cannot continue for more than 5 turns.

Characters that have a few minutes to examine the steam pipes and other portions of this system can make a Challenging (D2) Craft test to determine how to disable the system by attacking steam pipes with a sword or an axe. This Difficulty rises to Daunting (D3) if the character can

only briefly examine the system. Characters who succeed at one Difficulty step higher also discover how to disable this system without risking the person hacking at the steam-filled pipes being struck by a jet of live steam, doing the same damage as a described above.

PORTABLE DEVICES

The following objects are ones that player characters and others may find, purchase, or steal. In general, a skilled artisan can repair and maintain these devices if they wear or suffer minor damage, but repairing badly damaged devices or building new ones is either impossible or requires lengthy study that is likely to fail.

Dart Guns

These unusual devices use compressed air to propel darts. These weapons all contain both a small reservoir that can be filled with compressed air, as well as a built-in pump that can refill this reservoir. While their range and power is limited, dart guns are silent and have both the Hidden and the Subtle Qualities. As a result, assassins especially favor them.

All dart guns can fire three darts before the owner must spend six turns doing nothing but using the pump to refill the air reservoir. Reloading a dart requires a single Minor Action and the weapon can be carried with one dart already loaded. However, the air reservoirs cannot hold air indefinitely. If not recharged with the pump, dart guns leak one shot per day until empty. A dart gun requires a Daunting (D3) Craft test to repair if worn or if it suffers minor damage, and an Epic (D5) Craft test is required to repair extensive damage or to build a new one. Dart guns typically come in two sizes: small and large.

A small dart gun is no larger than a medium-sized locket, a writing stylus, or some similar small handheld object. The dart gun can hold a single dart at a time. It fires it at a range of Close, and does $3\spadesuit$ damage. Darts from small dart guns are usually poisoned. Small dart guns have the Hidden 3 and Subtle 3 Qualities.

Large dart guns are the size of a flute, a riding crop, or any other item as least so long as a human forearm and as thick as a thumb. The dart gun can hold a single dart at a time, fires them at a range of Medium, and does $1+3\spadesuit$ damage. Large dart guns have the Hidden 2 and Subtle 2 Qualities.

Navigational Instruments

These instruments include magnetic compasses, as well as devices like astrolabes or sextants. A compass allows the user to find magnetic north and requires no more than one turn to use. Other devices provide the user with +1d20 to all tests to determine the user's location in relation to a

known location or to a map. Using any instrument other than a compass requires several minutes of uninterrupted activity and the ability to see the open sky. No one understands how to create magnets, but a Dire (D4) Alchemy test allows someone to use a lodestone to create a compass. Most navigational instruments require a Daunting (D3) Craft test to repair.

Portable Clocks

Bulky clocks wound with special keys were once made long ago by jewelers. While no one alive can replicate their tiny gears or minuscule pierced gemstone bearings, a few lucky individuals have found one of these items in sufficiently good repair that simply cleaning it allows it to function. Broken clocks cannot be repaired without the aid of gods, demons, or sorcery. A handful of princes and queens own such trinkets, but ship captains also covet these devices, since they provide +1d20 to all Sailing tests to determine location on the open sea.

Telescopes and Magnifiers

Telescopes reduce the Difficulty of Observation tests caused from increased range by one step, meaning that an Observation test at Medium range suffers no increase in Difficulty and one at Extreme range suffers only two steps of increase in Difficulty. Particularly finely made telescopes reduce the Difficulty of Observation tests caused by increased range by two, meaning that tests at both Medium and Long range suffer no increase in Difficulty. A telescope's housing can be repaired and small scratches polished out of the lenses, but the secrets of lens grinding have been lost to all but a handful of aging parchmenters and perhaps a few secretive sorcerers, so broken lenses cannot be replaced.

Hand lenses are more common than telescopes, although they are still exceptionally rare. They magnify objects they are placed near and provide +1d20 to any test to search a location or perform any sort of fine manipulation that careful observation can aid, like disarming a trap or locating the catch for a secret door.

INHUMAN TECHNOLOGIES

Long before humans evolved, other intelligences inhabited the Earth. Some created vast cities and impressive wonders before their days ended in extinction or retreat to the Outer Dark. A few of the devices created by such creatures survive and, while no one can repair or duplicate these incredible devices, some have learned to use the handful that still function. Any of these devices is worth whatever price the owner wishes to ask and serves as a magnet for thieves.

Glowing Crystals

Strange glowing crystals can occasionally be found in pre-human ruins. Some are sorcerous devices, but the majority seem nothing more than sources of light. A crystal the size of a child's fist can give off as much light as three or four bright torches. However, anyone who studies the lore about such items and succeeds at a Dire (D4) Sorcery test learns that such crystals are somewhat fragile and potentially deadly, because they contain a strange glowing gas that is lethal if inhaled. The gas dissipates swiftly, but deals 5 \diamond Intense damage to those within Reach range of a broken glowing crystal for two turns after it breaks. If not broken, these crystals seem able to continue to glow for millennia.

Yithian Electrical Gun

Treasure hunters have discovered a handful of strange box-like constructions in the most ancient pre-human ruins. Some versions of this device are boxes roughly two hand spans on a side, with a jewel-like button on one side, and a round glass window jutting slightly out of the front. Others are curiously shaped wands which end in glowing spheres. Most are dead and when opened reveal a baffling array of wires, crystals, and minute metal parts that mystify even the cleverest jeweler.

However, a few still function. These devices are potent weapons that fire lightning at foes. The wielder need only aim the weapon at a target and depress the button. A Dire (D4) Sorcery test allows a user to understand how to use the device, but if this fails, the only alternative is a process of trial and error that could prove fatal to the unwary.

The device's ranged attack has the Knockdown and Unsubtle Qualities, does 6 \diamond damage, and has a range of Long. These devices possess 1 point of armor Soak, but any attack that damages them disables them. Also, these devices occasionally cease working for no known reason, having used up the lightning contained within them. Some can fire many hundreds of bolts of lightning before this occurs, others only a handful. The only way to restore these artifacts is to seek the aid of gods or demons, or a member of the Great Race.

Yithian Mind Transference Device

One of the rarest wonders is also the most desirable for anyone who wishes to regain their lost youth and cares little for what this goal might cost others. These devices are bulky and relatively fragile crowns made from complex constructs of wire, crystals, and tiny metal parts. There are stories that one was recovered from bizarre and inhuman ruins, however the other two known to exist were both found in the possession of individuals who seemingly went mad for a few years and then recovered. Other such devices found seem to have been deliberately destroyed, but at least two still retained their terrible function.

Using this device is relatively easy for the exceptionally foolish. A character simply places the crown on their head and adjusts the various moving crystals until something happens. The result is seldom pleasant — the individual's mind is sent to occupy a sentient entity in a random location in time and space, while that entity's alien consciousness now occupies the user's body.

If the entity is familiar with the use of these devices, it can swiftly reverse this transfer, leaving the user with nothing more than 6 \diamond mental wounds due to extreme disorientation and the brief horror of occupying a completely alien body. If the entity does not understand these devices, then the character is lost among the stars and eons and must rely on luck or the dubious beneficence of uncaring gods to ever have a chance of returning to their world.

A handful of sorcerers have learned to use these devices and recorded their notes. A daring sorcerer could also make a deal with a god or a demon to learn how to use this device. Most who learn enough to avoid having their minds transferred to some unknown elsewhere, use the device to trade bodies with someone else who is within Reach range of the device.

This subject is typically restrained and many sorcerers imbibe a slow poison before using this device to avoid having to deal with the threat posed by someone occupying their previous body. However, unless the subject is blindfolded, they can see exactly what the sorcerer does to active the device. Unless prevented from doing so, if the individual can make a Challenging (D2) Sorcery test, they can duplicate these efforts and almost instantly reverse the transfer. However, once the victim's body moves out of Reach range, the attempt fails.

Regardless of how it is used, the user and their victim both retain their Awareness, Intelligence, Personality, and Willpower, and gain the Agility, Brawn, and Coordination of their new body. In addition, both individuals retain all their Skills and Talents, but for the next three days find that any task which relies on Agility, Brawn, or Coordination suffers one additional step of Difficulty if occupying a human body. This penalty is higher if the user is now in an alien form. After this time, the individual has adapted to their new body. Also, anyone who switches to a new human body suffers 4 \diamond mental damage due to the extreme disorientation produced by this device. An alien body transfer causes twice that amount of mental damage and incurs a +2 penalty to the previously mentioned abilities.



NEW SPELLS AND MAGICAL EFFECTS

Many and varied are the spells of the sorcerer. Most translations of the great works of Skelos focus entirely on the most obvious of incantations and miss the most powerful of magics. Only in seeking out the oldest translations were these powers uncovered. Buried deep within the text in cyphers ripped from the darkest wells of insanity await seven new powers. These powers, rich in reward, are marvels of the sorcerer's fell arts. Breaching the domains of Life, Dream, Hope, and Death in ways petty necromancy can never hope to approach, these powers are not to be used lightly. Few are the warnings about such powers, for few have survived their misuse.

ARTIFICE OF YAG

Difficulty: Varies

Duration: Caster's lifetime

Cost to Learn/Cast: 2 Resolve and offerings equal to the cost of the item in Gold.

When the *Artifice of Yag* begins, the caster enters a trancelike state. In this state, the realm of dream draws over the waking world as the sea does the shore. In the mind's eye of the sorcerer, swords are forged by sickle-toothed dwarves and temples are carved by the whirlwind. Then, as the dream rolls back, the caster clings onto his imaginings and forces them to remain tangled in the waking world.

While it is easy to imagine an object, it is hard to replicate any object that you could not fabricate in other ways. Once this spell has been successfully cast, a skill test of a



Difficulty equal to the task must also be made. Usually, this is a Challenging (D2) Craft test but the final decision is up to the gamemaster. Constructing a mighty city could require a Lore or Command test to properly envisage the domain. If this test is failed, the item is imagined incorrectly and will either fail upon use, crack and crash around you, or slowly vanish as if a mirage.

ARTIFICE OF YAG MOMENTUM SPENDS

| Type | Momentum Cost | Effect |
|---------------------|---------------|--|
| Reduce Casting Cost | X | Reduce the casting cost by X offerings |
| Rend/Reinforce Item | X | A caster aware of its construction can destroy any item dreamt into existence, at a Momentum cost equal to 1 plus any reinforcement the caster placed upon the item. |
| Summon Inhabitant | X | Where a building or dwelling is created, its inhabitant can be brought into being. These mimics of life are unaware that they are soulless creatures and will continue their lives as imagined by the caster when he summons them into creation. Each mimic increases the Difficulty by one step. The inhabitant fades away if a Challenging (D2) Counsel test is not made to imagine them correctly and, if the working fades for any other reason, then so does the inhabitant. Inhabitants are generally weak and unskilled though a Field of Expertise can be increased by +1 for every Momentum spent. Attributes can be increased by +1 for every Momentum spent. |

| EXAMPLE CREATIONS | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------|
| Difficulty | Offerings | Creation |
| Average (D1) | 5 | A sword |
| Challenging (D2) | 6 | A sword covered in eldritch runes |
| Challenging (D2) | 20 | A small dwelling underground |
| Daunting (D3) | 40 | A carved sailing ship |
| Dire (D4) | 50 | A villa |

Difficulty Note

For most castings, the Difficulty of the spell is equal to the availability of the item desired. The advantage this spell offers is that, rather than wait for the item to be constructed, it is made available almost immediately. Any item that can be carried is available after the spell is cast, but larger items may take a night or longer to be cemented in the world. This is ultimately decided by the gamemaster.

Alternative Effects

This spell can be used to repair any regular item. The item must not be fully destroyed, and the amount remaining can be used as a discount on the number of offerings.

Thumedes discovers a villa fallen to ruin. Only half the building remains intact. Normally, the villa would cost 50 gold and have an availability of 4. Thumedes casts Artifice of Yag, and the ruin is swept up in dream. The spell Difficulty of 4 is met thanks to a wisely spent Fortune point and 25 offerings are used in the casting. Before him stands a freshly cleaned villa appointed as befitting a magus of his station. Thumedes must now attempt a Craft test to see if the villa stands overnight...

TO GIVE TO AIRY NOTHING....

Summoning items from the land of dreams is inherently dangerous. There is no telling what might cling to a casting. Opening the world to the land of dreams is not something that should be done lightly. Its consequences could be nightmarish. Remember, every failed dice on a Sorcery test generates a Consequence, sometimes in the form of Doom!

If the caster is in a dream world and wishes to make an addition to the dream or to make a creation that they do not want to bring back with them, they can also use this spell. The Difficulty of the spell remains the same as if they were purchasing the item in question. So, the Difficulty to remove or add a door to a wall is no more difficult than the Difficulty to create a door. Using this spell within dream worlds removes any requirement to pay offerings in the casting of the spell, but the caster cannot later improve the item and bring it into reality.

BID HYDRA TO WAKEN

Difficulty: Average (D1)

Duration: Seven days of continual storms

Cost to Learn/Cast: 3 Resolve

All sailors fear the storm and, when they dream of its danger, it is of Hydra they dream — the mother of the dwellers in the deep. With feral anger and an overwhelming appetite, Hydra feasts on ships and sailors alike. Yet there is blessing to be found in Hydra's wrath, and those wise enough to know when to call upon her, can find boons in her power.

Awakening the nightmare that is Hydra for even a moment is a foolish proposition. The eternal personification of the nightmare storm is unrivaled in destructive power, capable of ravishing coastal towns and ships at sea, as Hydra lifts the waves and crashes her tail upon the shores of the waking world.

Khemsa stood silent for a space, gazing into the shadows from which those glimmering eyes gave back his stare with burning intensity. Then his hand went into his robe and came out again, and from his opening fingers a shimmering feather of sparkling dust sifted to the flags. Instantly a flare of green fire lighted the enclosure. In the brief glare the forms of seven men, standing motionless behind the bars, were limned in vivid detail; tall, hairy men in ragged hillmen's garments. They did not speak, but in their eyes blazed the fear of death, and their hairy fingers gripped the bars.

— “The People of the Black Circle”

| BID HYDRA TO WAKEN MOMENTUM SPENDS | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------|---|
| Type | Momentum Cost | Effect |
| Awaken the Tempest | 1 | Mighty storms slowly build and waves lash the land. Ships are threatened and every day every ship within Hydra's view must make a Difficulty (D3) Sailing test lest it be sunk. None are spared and any ship within sight of shore requires the captain to make a Difficulty (D4) Command test or return to shore. |
| Bid Hydra to Slumber | 1 | This reduces the tempests duration by one day per point of Momentum. |
| Appease Hydra | 1 | This stops Hydra from visiting the worst of the destruction upon the sorcerer's head, reducing any sailing test Difficulties and damage dealt by Hydra by 1 for every Momentum spent. |
| Grant Favorable Winds | 3 | While awakening Hydra is a dangerous proposition, she can ferry her supplicants at great speed. Using this Momentum spend grants 3 bonus Momentum to any Sailing test for the vessel the sorcerer travels on to make its destination. However, Hydra is not a caring or gentle mother. This journey is never smooth, and the entire crew is at risk, with player characters needing to make a Daunting (D3) Sailing or Athletics test every day of the journey or suffer 6 damage. On arrival, the captain of the vessel must make an Epic (D5) Sailing test or the ship shatters on the shore, causing all the inhabitants to suffer an additional 6 damage. |

FALSE RESURRECTION

Difficulty: Epic (D5)

Duration: Special

Cost to Learn/Cast: 4 Resolve and offerings equal to the Brawn and Willpower of the character being revived.

By calling on the memories of the recently dead, the sorcerer reaches into dream and crafts a replica of the person's soul. Into this shell of memory and imitation, a shard of the Outer Dark is placed. Barely aware, this shard merges with the dream to give it a semblance of life. This false soul is placed within the body of the deceased, where it creates the illusion of full revivification.

The false soul is a fragile thing and, upon revivification, it counts as if it had 3 Trauma and 3 Injuries. Momentum can be spent to heal these Harms on a 1 to 1 basis, but even then, every time the body suffers additional injuries, the soul is at risk. Every time a Harm is rolled, the player must attempt a Discipline test equal to the number of Harms that the revived one has taken. Failure means that the revived one is instantly killed.

Resurrection can easily go wrong. The false soul can be easily corrupted, as a failure to understand the person leads to internal contradictions and madness. Should the spell be attempted and fail, the result might be less than appealing.

OPTIONAL FAILURE TABLE

| Roll | Effect of Failure |
|------|---|
| * | The body has all the semblance of life but is unresponsive. When unobserved it moves around. |
| ** | The character reanimates but the mind begins to drift into daydreams. Every game session, an Average (D1) Discipline test must be taken or <i>all</i> skill tests are made more difficult by one step. This is cumulative, and when a character fails for the fifth time, the character is treated as if a 1 had been rolled on this table. |
| 3 | The character reanimates, but the body begins to decay. Reduce Personality and Brawn by 1 for every success that the sorcerer failed to achieve |
| 4 | The character reanimates, but its senses are dulled. All skill tests requiring sight or hearing increase in Difficulty by one step. |
| 5 | The character reanimates, but the body is cursed. It rises as an undead Minion the next time it dies. |
| 6 | The character reanimates, but the body is cursed. The shard of the Outer Dark (see below) emerges when the body is next slain. |

SHARD OF THE OUTER DARK (TOUGHENED, HORROR)

| ATTRIBUTES | | | |
|---|--------------|--------------|-----------|
| Awareness | Intelligence | Personality | Willpower |
| 8 | 8 | 10 | 10 |
| Agility | Brawn | Coordination | |
| 10 | 9 | 9 | |
| FIELDS OF EXPERTISE | | | |
| Combat | 1 | Movement | 1 |
| Fortitude | — | Senses | 1 |
| Knowledge | — | Social | — |
| STRESS AND SOAK | | | |
| ■ Stress: Vigor 9, Resolve 10 | | | |
| ■ Soak: Armor 4 (Incorporeal), Courage 6 | | | |
| ATTACKS | | | |
| ■ Touch of Endless Cold (M): Reach 1, 6  Intense, Stun | | | |
| ■ Creeping Terror (T): Range C, 8  mental, Area, Stun | | | |
| SPECIAL ABILITIES | | | |
| ■ Dread Creature 1 | | | |
| ■ Fear 2 | | | |
| ■ Feed upon Fear | | | |
| ■ Incorporeal 4 | | | |
| ■ Unliving | | | |
| DOOM SPENDS | | | |
| ■ Beacon from Beyond: The Shard can spend 1 Doom and a standard action to use the <i>Summon a Horror</i> spell. If it does so, it will summon any 1 Horror that could be summoned with an Average (D1) Sorcery test. The type of Horror is up to the gamemaster but, once decided, this is the only Horror that the Shard can summon. The summoned Horror remains so long as there are visible victims for it to consume, but it is in no way controlled by the Shard. | | | |

SLAVES OF DREAM AND DARKNESS

Difficulty: Varies

Duration: Special

Cost to Learn/Cast: 3 Resolve to learn. Daily cost of 3 Resolve for one non-player character.

While standing on the cliff face that separates the Outer Dark from the Misty Realms, the sorcerer calls upon the memories of people who were or are to exist and bids loose



souls or creatures looking inwards to inhabit these shells of imagined flesh. Entire realms of such creatures have been created by uncaring gods.

While resurrection lets you create a false soul for a body, slaves of dream and darkness allow you to build a false body for a soul. It does not provide a soul in of itself, though *False Resurrection* can be used to provide such a thing as can *Summon a Horror* or *Steal a Soul*. It is akin to the *Artifice* of Yag in many ways but, where the *Artifice* of Yag creates things, *Slaves of Dream and Darkness* can create people.

Difficulty Note

For most castings, the Difficulty of the spell is Average (D1), which creates a living immobile body, warm to the touch but ultimately of little use.

Alternative Effects

■ **Regeneration:** The caster can use this spell at Epic Difficulty (D5) to cause a limb to regrow. The patient must be entirely unconscious for the time the spell runs its course (5 days minus 1 per Momentum spent). The limb attaches fully formed, but must be restrained until the patient's soul can claim dominion over its newly attached appendage. Regeneration is a traumatic event and causes 6  mental damage

■ **House the Unholy:** If the caster grants the fabricated body to a summoned Horror with the *Skinwalker* talent or the *Incorporeal* special ability, the Horror is not subject to any duration limits till the body is injured. Once the body is injured, the Horror is subject to all normal durations as the creature within the body causes its shell to buckle and break. *House the Unholy* grants no additional leeway or control over the horror.

"First he sat at my feet and learned wisdom. But he was not satisfied with what I taught him, for it was white magic, and he wished evil lore, to enslave kings and glut a fiendish ambition. I would teach him none of the black secrets I had gained, through no wish of mine, through the eons."

— Yag-kosha, “The Tower of the Elephant”

| SLAVES OF DREAM AND DARKNESS MOMENTUM SPENDS | | |
|--|---------------|---|
| Spend | Momentum Cost | Effect |
| Grant Mobility to the Body | 1 | Slave becomes a Minion gaining Vigor and Resolve as appropriate. All attributes are set to 7. |
| Empower the Body | 2 | Slave becomes Toughened, gaining Vigor and Resolve as appropriate. All attributes are set to 7. |
| Increase Attribute | X | Increase any 1 attribute by X. |
| Zukala's Jest | 3 | The form created is particularly beautiful or appealing and can be used to manipulate the lustful or weak of will. The non-player character created gains +2d20 for all Persuade tests involving seduction. |
| Permanence | 5 | The body gains the potential to live independently of its caster and is no longer subject to the daily Resolve costs to live. The slave now lives on until the death of the sorcerer, at which point it must make a Daunting (D3) Resistance test. If this test is failed, the slave dies. Otherwise the slave is considered a regular character. |

THE GLUTTON'S CURSE

Difficulty: Challenging (D2)

Duration: Special

Cost to Learn/Cast: 2 Resolve

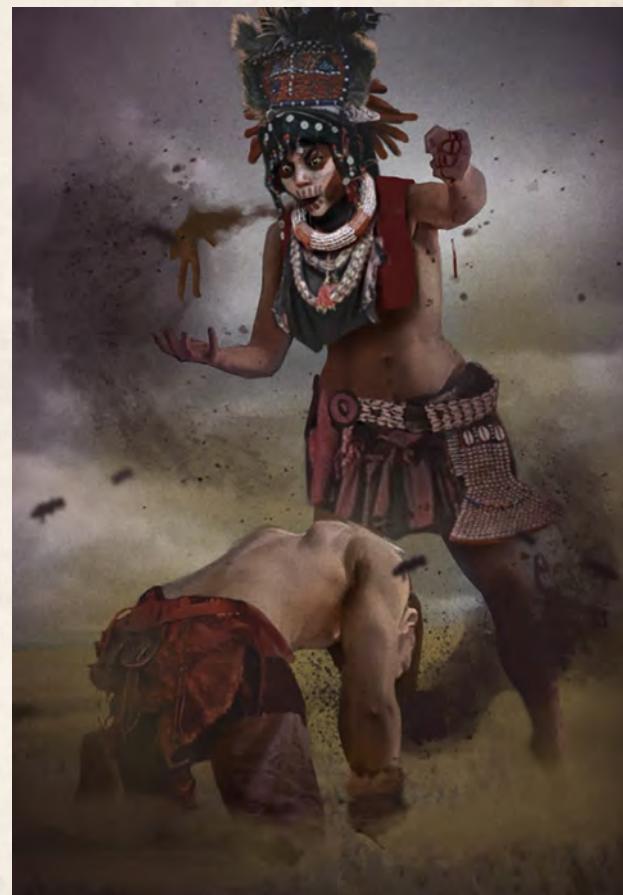
By ritually consuming a symbolic replica of the victim, the sorcerer places a seed of corruption within their victim. Caught in a violent nightmare made real, the sorcerer's victim must violently purge this corruption or it fills their body and quickly leads to a vivid death.

The Glutton's Curse covers several similar curses where the effects are similar in theme. The victim begins vomiting an unnatural substance. Common examples are blood, bees, oil, water, or even small stones. Every round that the victim is affected by the curse, the substance fills the mouth and nose in overwhelming amounts and must be vomited free. The choking the victim feels from this curse causes 3  damage. This damage is simultaneously physical and mental with cover and armor providing no soak.

In addition to this, the victim must make a Daunting (D3) Resistance test or gain the Staggered condition.

Alternative Effects

For 1 Momentum, the curse can be used to determine truth. So long as the victim only speaks the truth, they will not take damage.



| THE GLUTTON'S CURSE MOMENTUM SPENDS | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|--|
| Spend | Momentum Cost | Effect |
| Duration | X | The curse lasts for (X) rounds. |
| Violent Display | 1 | Any character viewing the display must make a Challenging (D2) Discipline test or also lose 3  Resolve. |

OPENING THE EYES OF KUTH

Difficulty: Average (D1)

Duration: 1 scene

Cost to Learn/Cast: 1 Resolve

The caster lies upon the ground and falls first into a trance, then into a deep sleep. As the caster dreams, the dream and waking worlds merge, allowing the traveler to enter the dream and for phantasms to escape in kind.

Difficulty Note

The Difficulty of the casting is equal to the number of travelers who would accompany the sorcerer. The sorcerer can cross alone into the dream worlds as a Simple (D0) test.

Alternative Effects

For X Momentum, the sorcerer can use the spell to display a scene of cosmic horror.

SCENES OF COSMIC HORROR

These scenes cause 2 Resolve damage for every Momentum spent to any that witness them. These can be triggered as Consequences or deliberately summoned to terrify onlookers. Some of the more dangerous monsters may be able to look back through the mirror and make their way to our world.

If you look too long into the Outer Dark, the Outer Dark also looks into you.

VISIONS OF EXALTED WISDOM

Difficulty: Varies

Duration: 1 scene

Cost to Learn/Cast: 2 Resolve and offerings equal to the number of visions sought.

There are many spells with which portents of times to come and visions are bestowed. One of the most common involves the caster whispering mystic truths over a pane of glass. As the caster's breath moves over the pane, visions and portents are reflected.

Another casting involves the sorcerer giving offerings up to fire so that visions might dance among the smoke. Regardless of how the sorcerer chooses to bring forth wisdom, the visions are never entirely under the caster's control. Visions of profound, soul-rending beauty and utmost horror may be displayed for any that would dare look over the caster's shoulder.

Difficulty Notes

When seeking *Visions of Exalted Wisdom*, the caster essentially engages in a type of metaphysical research. The spell shows what the caster thinks they wish to see. The basic Difficulty of this spell is equal to half the number of questions the sorcerer would put to the mirror, though Momentum may be paid to add an additional question as per usual. The gamemaster should endeavor to provide accurate information where possible.

Alternative Effects

For 2 Momentum, the sorcerer can use the spell to display a scene of cosmic horror instead.

OPENING THE EYES OF KUTH MOMENTUM SPENDS

| Type | Momentum Cost | Effect |
|---------------------|---------------|---|
| Mortal Tongues | 1 | The sorcerer gains the ability to speak with any mortal dreamer. |
| Infinite Tongues | 3 | The sorcerer gains the ability to speak with any sleeping entity, from cats to gods. |
| Retrieve a Treasure | 2 | The sorcerer and each traveler may take one item that can exist in the waking world from the land of dream. |
| Anchor Spell | 1 | Anchor the spell to a location so that travelers can return to the waking world without the sorcerer's aid. |

VISIONS OF EXALTED WISDOM MOMENTUM SPENDS

| Type | Momentum Cost | Effect |
|-------------------|---------------|---|
| Endless Curiosity | X | Ask X additional questions. |
| Mental Fortitude | X | Gain X Soak against visions from the mirror. |

CHAPTER 7

SORCERY CAMPAIGNS

Even as he thought this, he felt a faint movement of air; a shadowy wind, rising from the well, stirred his black mane. Conan's skin crawled. He tried to tell himself that this well connected somehow with the outer world, but his instincts told him it was a thing unnatural. He was not merely inside the hill; he was below it, far below the level of the city streets. How then could an outer wind find its way into the pits and blow up from below? A faint throbbing pulsed on that ghostly wind, like drums beating, far, far below. A strong shudder shook the king of Aquilonia.

— “The Scarlet Citadel”

All sorcery perverts, mutates, corrupts and otherwise breaks the rules of natural law. The unnatural is the intrusion of another world into this one. Every act of sorcery is a tear in the fabric of reality from which leaks a piece of the profane, the mad, the Outer Dark. That realm is not a place of reason or even normal corporeal existence — what comes from there cannot mingle with our world with impunity.

This chapter addresses the manifold aspects of sorcery and its treatment in campaigns, and is therefore recommended for the gamemaster's eyes alone. Just as the natural world struggles to reject the pernicious influence of dark magic into the real world, this chapter should be avoided by players for similar reasons: exposure to the unnatural secrets of the universe are of no benefit to the sane and unspoiled mind.

THE OUTER DARK

Is it a place or a non-place? Something that exists in this universe or in another? The nature of it defies explanation. It might be said the human mind cannot, by definition, understand it. This is a mercy. It is entirely possible that comprehending the contents of the Outer Dark is worse than madness borne of trying.

BEYOND THE VEIL

As with Chapter 9: Gamemastering in the CONAN corebook, this chapter provides a nuts-and-bolts examination of gamemastering tools, techniques, and other suggestions for adventure and campaign creation, establishing and maintaining tone, handling sorcerer player characters, and the role of sorcery in the Conan game. As such, players reading this might find that doing so lessens their appreciation of the mystery that is Hyborian Age sorcery.

And so, be warned...

Alien worlds, planets incomprehensible, and creatures doubly so lurk in the Outer Dark, and they have always influenced Earth, though none can say why. Our epoch, that of humankind, was preceded by many civilizations long since forgotten — the time of the Great Race of Yith, that of the elder things, the ascendancy of the serpent men, and others far too many and horrible to list within these pages. The creatures of these civilizations — not “people” — came from the Outer Dark.

Few know of the existence of any of these previous civilizations or these Elder Gods. The Outer Dark is a realm

one taps into to power sorcery, not a realm populated by sentient horrors. Those who know better are invariably corrupted by this knowledge.

BETTER LIVING THROUGH SORCERY

Conan provides sorcerers with a relatively limited repertoire of spells and avenues to occult power. This is intentional. While they are few, they are flexible. Too much circumscribing of special spells, magic schools, and the like only serves to work against the themes Howard infused into his prose. Conan's world is one of comparatively rare but powerful magic. As all magic is unnatural in Conan's world, it must then be rare in the game and somewhat mysterious.

This puts more of a burden on the gamemaster. From a narrative standpoint, the gamemaster must do more heavy lifting. While mechanical effects are outlined, not all the in-game effects are, as the mechanics are only part of the content of any spell. In this section are tips and suggestions for incorporating narrative with mechanics, and vice versa. Spells, artifacts, and other sorcerous ideas are defined more vaguely than one might normally expect. Herein we guide the gamemaster toward methods of narrating the excitement and danger of Howardian sorcery.

INJECTING THE OUTER DARK INTO THE HYBORIAN AGE

Robert E. Howard's universe exists in part in cohesion with his fellow author H.P. Lovecraft's loose cosmology known as the Cthulhu Mythos. Howard incorporated aspects of Lovecraft's cosmic history and universal history into his own setting, and Lovecraft reciprocated, making them both one and the same (to a certain degree). Therefore, the Outer Dark is particularly suited to the weird fantasy of CONAN. In fact, one might say it puts much of the weird into the fantasy. But injecting it into your game is not without peril.

The original Conan stories present a certain kind of weird sword and sorcery, but they are not ever wholly Mythos stories unto themselves. Howard scholars have tied the Outer Dark and Hyborian Age magic directly together. However, a little goes a long way. In Conan's stories, it is the unknown which is most feared. That these sorcerous powers might have their origin in a space out of space, or born through esoteric manipulation of physical and scientific forces, is largely academic. Our heroic Cimmerian, as well as the player characters, do not know from whence magic comes. Simply that it is.

WHAT IS HOWARDIAN SORCERY?

Both the history of gaming and fantasy literature and film draw heavily on Howard's writings; so heavily, in fact, that many of his innovations seem commonplace now. Think, for example, of shared worlds. Howard produced a single world for most of his stories, one with a deep, well-developed history and underpinnings the reader was never meant to explicitly see. The presence of this allowed Howard to portray a coherent world that was consistent from one story to another, but also where things that were mere suggestions fit into a grander picture.

His treatment of sorcery, as broad as it was, was equally diverse; it inevitably hinted at some unifying cosmological and metaphysical principles, but did not detail those for fear of limiting their effect upon the readers' imaginations and his own ability as a storyteller. Broadly drawn, too, are ritual sacrifices that power spells, dark arts practiced by black magicians, and artifacts of terrible power with storied histories. Other pulp writers were working similar veins, but Howard was simply the best at mining such rich ore.

Defining what Howardian sorcery is becomes an exercise of untangling Howard's original ideas from the vast, collective unconscious of what we take today as "fantasy magic". Howard's magic has no common elements — all of it is unusual. There are few spells with precise effects, and much of what sorcerers do is science, alchemy, and trickery. When real magic appears, it is dark, powerful, and unexplained. You'll find no theory of magic or a "magic system" in Howard's work. He hints that sorcerous powers come from dark, evil places, but he never theorizes about how they are powered. Magic, like much in the world of Conan, remains mysterious.

Strip Everything Un-Howardian Away

A very famous story involves a sculptor explaining how they produce a piece. When asked, they say, "I take a block of marble and chip away everything that is not the sculpture." Fantasy magic never originated as a solid mass but, over eighty some years, Howard and his contemporaries have commingled with later works and popular culture's conception of magic and its use. Accreted around the central armature of the old fantasists, we now have a substantial "block" if you will.

In *Conan*, magic is far less codified and more mysterious. Wizards in the Hyborian Age learn not from schools but from random patrons, some of which are demons. This is a darker magic. In fact, there are only a few instances of "good" sorcery or sorcerers. Sorcery is not just unnatural, it is essentially evil.

That is a paradigmatic shift from most modern fantasy, where a Manichean battle between good and evil magic



often serves as a central tension in the narrative. No such duality exists in the world of *Conan*; sorcery is almost always evil and is rarely opposed by itself. Instead, it is men, brave but mortal men, that stand against the dark tides of corrupting magic.

Why, in practical terms, is this so? In the simplest terms, Hyborian Age magic is slow. Wizards cannot summon columns of fire and ice to kill a charging enemy. In fact, in most of the stories, wizards often resort to something more mundane when attempting to halt a certain charging Cimmerian — tomb dust and flame powder among them. Tricks, mummery, and mesmerism are more commonplace than actual sorcery. Magic is ritual and rituals require both time and timing. It is seldom a quick affair. To the common person, however, the two are indistinguishable.

The power of Howardian sorcery is vast, but it moves slowly and mysteriously. It lacks “firepower”, if you will, in favor of manipulating fate, events, mortality, and even time.

When in Doubt, Keep it Mysterious

Magic is unnatural and, not surprisingly, mysterious. There are no clear rules or laws governing magic. There are instead tendencies, but no two wizards would necessarily give the same answer as to the workings of sorcery. Demons are

contacted, bargained with, and in return they deliver power. How that power works is rarely explored in the stories.

In many settings, sorcery is rather commonplace; the mystery is gone. That must be set aside in *Conan* if it is to feel like a Howardian slice of sword and sorcery. Strange things occur without explanation. A pool turns men into miniatures off the western coast. A seeming immortal awakens after millennia on an isle in the Vilayet. Fell sorcerers seek artifacts whose power is even more mysterious than their own in more than one tale.

Howard never explains why these things are. They simply exist. We know only that they violate natural law. As soon as one begins to explain the unknown, it becomes less interesting. Over the course of roleplaying history, many explanations for magic have appeared. The gamemaster knows them. The players know them. It’s hard to turn back the clock to the wide-eyed reader clutching a copy of *Weird Tales* who had never heard of such a thing as a sacrificial ritual.

To do this, the gamemaster should feel free to wield a firm hand when it comes to the unnatural in the world they paint. Sorcery is not to be trifled with. Supernatural beings should be feared. Conan himself spends some fair amount of time running from horrors rather than fighting them.

Conan is not as drastic as all that — Howard's take on the mythos was far more pulp — but it does set one end of the spectrum. In Howard's work, brave heroes fear not the darkness, but plunge ahead seeking treasure and experience. Heroes in **Conan** can go mad, but not as readily as Lovecraft's protagonists.

Narration Comes Before Mechanics

You, as a gamemaster, must resist the urge to lean too heavily on "the rules". By necessity, we have created rules for magic. These rules are flexible and seek to model the magic in the original stories. Narration comes before dice rolling. The effects of some of the things done by Thugra Khotan in "Black Colossus" are not written down anywhere in the rules. Akivasha the vampire is not a vampire in the traditional sense. There is no "race" of her kind.

The more we categorize and number the unnatural, the more mundane it becomes. As gamemaster, you'll note sorcery is purposefully simplified. The depth comes from you and your players' imaginations, not a tome of rules and spell descriptions.

There Is **ALWAYS** a Price

A wizard does nothing for which some price is not exacted. It might be a bill due immediately, or they may pay over time — but pay they must. Magic drains life force, it corrupts, and, if it fails, it can easily backfire on the user. Sorcery is a harsh mistress. No surprise, as it taps into forces from the Outer Dark.

Play this up in your games. We have mechanical suggestions later but, again, narration will go a lot farther. Some examples feature below.

- After casting a spell, describe the fatigue the player character feels. Describe how their bones feel as fragile as glass and their mind's corners flicker with horrors they cannot, thankfully, lock onto.
- Give them nightmares. Associating with dark forces creeps into one's subconscious. Besides the roiling terrors that wash over the sleeper, you may also inflict penalties by day for the lack of proper sleep.
- Slowly alter their appearance. Consider sorcerous power like radiation — it mutates and exposure is cumulative. Few powerful sorcerers in Howard's stories look entirely human any more. Their visages alter, hands become more talon-like. It should not be a transformation of cartoonish nature, but a subtle physical movement away from being human.
- Have non-player characters react negatively to their presence. It need not be overt. Simply imply that others often get a sense of unease or disturbance when near the player character.

- Directly tempt the player character with greater gifts that they know will cost them more humanity. Temptation is part of the bargain one enters into when sorcery becomes their obsession. Dangle power before sorcerous characters. Actively provoke their addiction to the dark world of magic.

CREATIVE SPELLCASTING

Sorcery in **Conan** should be tremendous, terrifying, or leave onlookers in awe. The purpose of this section is taking a spell and making it into a memorable event. There is no common sorcery in **Conan** and, for the most part, hopefully your game will have no common spells.

WHAT'S AN OFFERING?

There are no lists of components needed to bring a spell into being. Instead, offerings are required. Each spell is a violation of the natural order, and the caster makes a pact with profane forces to make this happening. This requires some sort of offering. These can vary from simple tokens to mass sacrifices.

The practical, in-game, reason for offerings is to curry favor with dark, sorcerous masters. Consider offerings, like coins for the ferryman on the River Styx. Simply making an offering guarantees the caster nothing. You have attempted to bribe dark powers that are essentially corrupt. These powers may yet very well reject you. It is only after the offering is made that the success or failure of the spell becomes known.

Because the nature of sorcery tends toward evil, the nature of offerings leans toward the unwholesome at best. Below are examples of different kinds of offerings for different spells.

Necromancy Spells

In dealing with death, the afterlife, and aging, certain kinds of items serve as offerings.

- Some body part of the dead person or creature to be contacted, raised, or otherwise manipulated. These might include fingernails, hair, or entire appendages.
- Some body part of the caster requesting something from the death. One does not merely get to use dead flesh, a trade must be made. The sorcerer might have to shave their head and offer all the hair to contact a dead man. To raise a dead person, they give up life force and may have to sever a finger or worse. However, examples need not be personal as a rule.

Sorcerers attempt to avoid using their own life force and body when they can, of course.

- Aging spells require a trade. The caster offers something important to them in return for extended life. If one drains the life from another, they need to subject years of their own life to the bargain. Blood for blood. Years for years. Such are the rules of necromancy.

Summoning Spells

Think of these offerings as bait. The caster wants to bring a certain kind of being to them. That requires something which attracts that being.

- Animals require food, though it may be very specific kinds of food. Trying to lure fish requires a worm, to make a metaphor, while trying to summon a saber-toothed tiger requires human flesh. Fresh, bloody human flesh. A severed hand at the very least.
- Unnatural beasts have more refined tastes. One does not hold out a handful of nuts and hope the squirrels show. No, there are creatures only summoned by flesh of likewise unnatural creatures. A white ape would be summoned by the skin of a giant Child of Set. Getting the latter may be far more dangerous than whatever one hopes to do with the former.
- Demons and creatures of the Outer Dark. These require true names as offerings, as well as human sacrifices. The greater the entity one desires access to, the greater the sacrifice. This need not merely be a numerical value. Certain creatures are only intrigued if the wizard possesses the mettle to slay someone close to them — a friend, a lover, a child.
- Elder Gods are only approachable through complex rituals coupled with ancient artifacts constructed solely for the purpose of calling them. Human sacrifice is common here, as well. To even proffer one's self before a true god requires hundreds if not thousands of dead. Sometimes this is ritual sacrifice, sometimes purposeful battle.

Animalistic Spells

These are spells which combine the flesh of mortal with that of a beast. They are not summoning spells.

- A body part of the animal the caster wishes to bind with is always required. That is fairly easy if one wants the vision of a hawk and very dangerous should one seek to gain the savagery and depravity of a dweller in the deep.

Voyaging Spells

Any kind of travel whether via dream, astral, or through time requires symbols of such a journey.

- The caster requires something from the place they wish to visit — a dried flower from Kuth, a gemstone from the Outer Dark, an item displaced from the era they seek to visit. These offerings must always be accompanied by knowledge of the destination, as well. The sorcerer demonstrates to the powers of the cosmos that he knows this place and thus deserves the chance to visit. Capricious fate is under no obligation to send the petitioner where they wish.
- These might also be tied to particular items, locations, or even bloodlines — such as the journey only being undertaken when a certain item is in the sorcerer's possession and can be used in the ritual (for example, a gem in the shape of a serpent's eye), or the arrival limited to a specific place (like a black stone obelisk), or a travel through time and space, but only able to interact with one's ancestors or generations-removed offspring.



USING SPELLS

Spells run through the sorcerer like galvanic current runs through the human body. The sorcerer is a conduit for forces that are anti-nature, anti-life, and anti-rational. This section covers other effects and conditions which have not previously been addressed. Like much else with sorcery in these books, narrative content supersedes mechanics.

GAINING NEW SPELLS

No libraries in the Hyborian Age hold tomes where one might discover forgotten spells. Only a handful of books — and fewer copies of each — contain methods and rituals for producing spells. The *Book of Skelos*, were you to find one of the three known extant copies, could lend you such knowledge. The *Slivers of Yag* (see page 13) imparts alien knowledge, as well as the methodology of casting that race's spells. The *Book of Eibon*, tracing its roots to the dawn of the Thurian Age, contains knowledge allowing one to call forth gods one cannot easily then dismiss.

Apart from books like these, sorcerers do not go about in search of "spell books" or anything of that sort. Trial and error is the most common way of learning, or rather creating, spells, for each wizard fashions their own version of even codified spells.

SPELL EFFECTS ON NON-PLAYER CHARACTER SORCERERS

How are the effects of spells from non-player character sorcerers different? You pull out all the stops, especially when they fail. A gamemaster that delights in torturing players is not likely to keep them for long. It simply is not fair. Granted, sorcery is dangerous and they risk a great deal every time they tap its power. Still, turning them to pulp is not usually well received.

But non-player character sorcerers are another matter. If they fail or suffer Complications, have fire burst from their eyes, blood pinprick from their pores, dark clouds gather overhead. Use the fates of unlucky enemy sorcerers to display the greatest effects you can think of.

Successful spells, too, may be embellished with all the pulpy prose the gamemaster can muster. Imagery like that of the stories ought to serve as a model here. Be wary of making the dressing into the cake, though. All the thunder and lightning you summon for atmosphere should not further penalize the player characters, unless of legitimately does so by the rules.



Trial and Error

Of course, trial and error has its commitments and dangers. For every time a sorcerer seeks to learn a variation on a spell, they must spend months in experimentation, trying different combinations of words and offerings before they ever attempt the actual spell. Once they try, see *Sorcery as an Experimental Skill* on page 65.

Gaining Knowledge from a Patron

The most common and “safest” way to acquire new spells is via a Patron. That Patron may be a fellow sorcerer or a being from the depths of space and time. The former exacts a price in human terms; the latter exacts a price no smart man pays.

There are no rules for determining the nature of these prices. This is a matter of gamemaster discretion and narrative value. A Patron, human or otherwise, may send their would-be pupil on a quest of some sort — one with its own dangers. Alien entities may demand first born children, years of a sorcerer’s life, a limb, the death of a loved one, or any other perverse sacrifice. Demand is kept deliberately vague so that the gamemaster can add their own flavor to the cost. Is the Sorcerer routinely buying the choicest of slaves? Hearty meals for their master? Or simply vast amounts of lotus incense?

More commonly, alien entities contacted are those who are in some way bound or have had their puissance curbed. Thus, rectifying this situation is nearly their top, if not only, priority. The sorcerer must find a way to unbind the being from whatever hell to which it has been condemned. The fallout for this may be personal, but is far more likely to affect others. Entire cities have been razed by demons so freed by sorcerers seeking power; yet another reason sorcery eventually corrupts the soul.

THE STARS ARE RIGHT

Under the alignment of the stars, when the wheels of the cosmos click like tumblers in the universe’s own lock, secrets reveal themselves in shimmers, and glints, and terrifying moments of maddening clarity. The stars above influence that which lies below. Perhaps all our mortal acts are but mere shadows of that greater truer world of curtained night.

Astrology provides a bonus to sorcery by determining if a specific time is especially auspicious or inauspicious for casting a given spell. However, sorcerers can also plan their spells well in advance to achieve optimal effect. In this case, sorcerers use astrology to determine exactly when and where they may best cast a particular spell. A sorcerer with the Astrology talent can take an hour to examine the stars, or star charts and almanacs, and then perform a Challenging (2) Lore test to learn the best time and place to cast this spell.

Each Momentum gained allows the sorcerer to add +1d20 (up to the normal maximum of +3d20) when casting that spell, and also allows a re-roll of the d20 if the player does not like the first result. However, this impressive bonus only applies if the sorcerer casts the chosen spell at the correct day and time. In this way, the help is limited.

This “right” time is determined by rolling 1  and 2d20. A result of 0 on the  means that the 2d20 roll is the number of hours in the future the spell must be cast. A result of 1 on the  means the 2d20 indicates how many days in the future the spell must be cast, and a result of 2 on the  means the 2d20 indicates how many weeks in the future the spell must be cast. Complications on the initial roll either increase hours to days and days to weeks, or mean the spell must be cast at a distant location.

Also, if the  rolls a 1 or 2, roll a third d20 to determine when in the day this spell should be cast: a result of 1 means shortly after midnight, a roll of 11 means shortly after noon, and a roll of 20 means immediately prior to midnight of the next evening, with other results indicating intermediate times. Making another Lore test for the best time to cast the same spell will never produce new or different information until the previous time has passed. Each spell has a different time, and sometimes place, when it is most auspicious to cast.

Astrology is also used to determine when another sorcerer that the astrologer has met would gain the most benefit from casting a particular spell. While astrologers can use this knowledge to aid an ally, it is also possible to learn when enemies are most likely to cast a particularly powerful and dangerous spell, and thus are more vulnerable by virtue of being so focused.



Unique Celestial Alignments

There are a few exceptionally powerful spells, known as **grand workings** (page 115), which require specific celestial configurations such as complex planetary alignments that only occur every few decades, or centuries. Some of these grand workings can only be cast during immediately obvious astronomical events, like during total solar eclipses or when a certain comet streaks across the sky.

However, others require subtler events. If a sorcerer finds a grand working which can only be cast during a rare astronomical event, a Daunting (3) Lore test made by someone with the Astrology talent allows the sorcerer to

determine when this event next occurs. Unfortunately, a successful Lore test might reveal that the event will not occur for decades or even centuries.

RARE AND UNIQUE OFFERINGS

In addition to ordinary offerings of gems, precious metals, or living sacrifices, there are also a variety of exceptionally rare or unique materials which can alter or influence sorcery. Most of these materials have resonances and connections beyond the boundaries of the physical world, because they themselves are of abnormal origin. Fragments of demons or similar eldritch creatures are one source of such materials, as are meteors, and other alien matter fallen to Earth. Others are simply naturally attuned to specific spells and are difficult to obtain because they are found in unusual locations. These materials differ in both rarity and also power; there are two categories of these materials, which are referred to as rare materials and unique materials.

RARE MATERIALS

Rare materials are difficult to acquire, but most scholars are at least somewhat familiar with the means of obtaining them. However, knowing how to acquire something, and succeeding at doing so, are often quite different. Most rare materials consist of specific portions of various horrific remains, crystals only found in the deepest caverns, fragments of recently fallen meteors, the heart of a sorcerer, or other unusual treasures. Rare materials can occasionally be found for sale, but the price is always quite high and usually worked out between the sorcerer and the seller. Relic hunting thieves are sometimes employed for such purposes.

If a sorcerer uses a rare material when casting a spell, this material adds +2d20 to the spell (up to the normal maximum of +3d20). Using a rare material in a ritual always destroys it, since the material must be burned, powdered, scattered to the wind, or perhaps dissolved in wine and drunk. Each rare material can only be used once.

Every rare material also has unique magical properties allowing it to provide an even greater bonus when casting a single spell. An Average (D1) Sorcery test allows a sorcerer to determine which material specifically enhances a given spell. When used in this fashion, the rare material provides the spell with +3d20 (up to the normal maximum of +3d20), and the sorcerer can also treat one of these extra dice as having automatically rolled a 1. Otherwise, the process of using a rare material to cast an associated spell is identical to using it normally.

UNIQUE MATERIALS

While rare materials are difficult to acquire, unique materials are both difficult to locate and nearly impossible to obtain, to the point that some scholars regard them as legendary. Some are utterly unique items like a gemstone from the forehead of a statue of Set that was worshiped for 500 years, the skull of a powerful mummy 1,000 years lost, an item blessed by a god, a fragment of a strange glowing meteor, or a single scale or tooth from the demon lord Ammut.

Acquiring any one of these items requires an epic quest where everyone involved risks their life. Any such items provide +3d20 (up to the normal maximum of +3d20) to any spell in which they are used. The sorcerer can also treat one of these extra dice as having automatically rolled a 1, and the material provides an additional 2 Momentum to the spell. This is an exceedingly potent bonus, but most sorcerers regard this use as exceptionally wasteful because they are only likely to encounter such materials once or twice in a very long lifetime.

Empowered Tools

Unique materials can also be transformed into permanent items which can enhance any spell. The sorcerer sets the item in a wand, a crown, or perhaps a large ring which the sorcerer must use or wear when casting the spell. To create such an item, the sorcerer must succeed at both a Challenging (D2) Sorcery test and an Average (D1) Craft test. If both tests succeed, the sorcerer possesses an item that provides +1d20 to any spell where the sorcerer uses it, and +2d20 to a single spell to which the material is most closely attuned. *For example, a ring made using a tooth from the demon lord Ammut might provide +1d20 normally and grants +2d20 when used to cast Raise Up the Dead because of Ammut's association with the dead.*

Grand Workings

A few impressive materials have sufficient power and mystical connections that ancient sorcerers could use them as the basis for creating exceptionally powerful spells known as grand workings (see page 115). A grand working designed around an impressive material can only be cast if the sorcerer uses this material in the working.

CIRCLES OF POWER

Certain locations are more deeply connected to otherworldly energies than others. Locations with a particularly strong bond to such energies actually make sorcery easier to perform. Casting any spell within a circle of power lowers the Difficulty to cast the spell by one step.

A few locations have sufficient mystical power that innately enhances sorcery. However, sorcerers deliberately created most existing circles of power, human and otherwise. Such created circles are often found in ancient ruins. Identifying an existing circle of power is easy for a sorcerer, requiring a few minutes and a Simple (D0) Sorcery test. Sorcerers can also divine the presence of nearby circles of power, by spending a scene looking over the landscape, meditating, or examining a map. A Challenging (D2) Sorcery test then allows the sorcerer to locate any circles within a quarter of a mile.

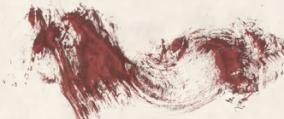
Sorcerers who have a redoubt or other permanent home can imbue a room within their dwelling so that it functions as a circle of power. Accomplishing this is a complex and time consuming task requiring at least a month of work by the sorcerer. In addition, the materials needed to create such a circle of power cost 30 Gold, and successfully creating a circle of power also requires a Challenging (D2) Sorcery test. If this roll fails, half of the cost to create the circle of power is wasted. Some sorcerers build their towers or palaces around existing circles of power. One reason that sorcerous towers are often tall is because some natural circles of power are located well above the ground. One wonders what being might have found or created such airborne circles.

GREAT CIRCLES

A few exceptionally potent sites contain ancient circles more powerful than normal and that reduce the Difficulty of any spell cast within them by two steps. All of these sites are naturally puissant locations which were enhanced by ancient sorcerers or pre-humans and are usually part of ancient ruins.

A sorcerer desiring a great circle, but who cannot locate one of these rare wonders, can instead locate a natural circle of power and create their own circle of power within it, thus creating a greater circle. Balancing the magical energies raises the difficulty of the Sorcery test to create a circle of power in a region that is naturally powerful to Dire (D4), and the process is also exceedingly dangerous. Any d20s failing to report a success count as if the player rolled a 20. If a Complication is rolled naturally it counts for two Complications. Another limitation to this technique is that the sorcerer must locate a natural circle of power.

Attempting to create circle of power within a circle of power that was created by another sorcerer is useless, since at best the process replaces the older circle of power with a new one that provides exactly the same bonus and carries the same terrible risk of failure.



GRAND WORKINGS

Sorcery is both powerful and dangerous, but ordinary sorcery spells have strict limits to their power. A spell might summon a storm, or rip open the earth over a distance of several hundred yards, but spells that completely level a kingdom or even a large city are normally beyond the ability of any sorcerer.

There are a few spells that can produce such vast or impressive effects, like sinking an island or crossing a continent in a single step. However, they have severe limitations that prevent their regular use. Some can only be cast during rare celestial alignments that only occur once every few centuries. Other require unique materials that are nearly impossible to obtain. A few of these spells can only be cast at a particular time and date in a specific location, such as a spell which can only be cast on a specific remote mountain plateau, when Jupiter and Saturn align.

Anyone seeking to cast this spell must be present at this time and place to cast it, as must anyone who is interested in making certain that this spell is not successfully cast. One potentially interesting consequence of this limitation is, if the area is relatively small, there may only be room for a single sorcerer to perform their ritual. If more than one sorcerer wishes to try, then they must work out who can attempt the spell before the appointed moment passes.

It's important to remember that the following spells do not merely benefit from unique offerings or rare astrological alignments; they can only be cast under such conditions. Without a unique offering or an astronomical event that may only occur once every 893 years, the spell is merely useless words on an antique parchment drawn in the wind when spoken. But, if the sorcerer possesses all of the necessary prerequisites, then these spells can literally reshape the world.

The difficulty of casting these spells also makes them equally challenging to acquire. Sorcerers are unlikely to keep track of spells which cannot be cast for 400 years, and only the most powerful sorcerers willing to attempt to acquire various unique materials are likely to possess copies of those spells. Also, no human Patron trusts a student

sufficiently to offer to teach them the most powerful of spells, since doing so invites competition. Instead, sorcerers must turn to inhuman Patrons and looting ancient ruins to locate copies of these spells. Because of their rarity and difficulty, even the most powerful sorcerers are unlikely to know more than one of the following spells and, depending on their timing or other requirements, may not have yet been able to cast it.

BLESSING OF DIVINE FAVOR

Difficulty: Dire (D4)

Duration: Until the next sunset

Cost to Learn/Cast: 4 Resolve

Locating the Spell: Sorcerer-kings worshiped by their populace sometimes know this spell, but stealing from them is exceptionally difficult. Beltash, the sorcerous high priest of the temple of Adonis in Eruk, is rumored to have used this spell and to still have another dram of celestial copper in his personal treasury.

Having spent 4 Resolve, the caster must cast this spell at sunrise, after powdering and ingesting at least a dram of celestial copper. This material is a reddish-gold metal found only in rare meteors. Because it does not tarnish, and is as hard as hammered bronze, celestial copper is sometimes used in jewelry, but sorcerers hoard most of the small fragments that fall to earth.

This spell grants the sorcerer the ability to seem touched by divinity and wonder, so that all who see them or hear their words react with awe and obeisance. Until the sun next sets, the sorcerer seems inhumanly powerful, persuasive, and almost everyone rushes to do their bidding. Even after the spell ends, everyone who was affected still believes that the sorcerer is exceptionally charismatic, persuasive, and is likely to be surprised when they encounter the sorcerer when not empowered by this spell. However, this spell has no effect on Horrors, undead, or on any creature of unearthly origin. While this spell is in effect, unearthly creatures all treat the caster as if the sorcerer possesses the trait Inhuman Personality 1.

BLESSING OF DIVINE FAVOR MOMENTUM SPENDS

| Type | Momentum Cost | Effect |
|-------------------------------|---------------|---|
| Sounds of Inhuman Language | 1 | The sorcerer understands, and is understood by, anything remotely human for the duration of the spell. |
| Vision of Celestial Wonder | 1 | Anyone looking at the sorcerer is struck by their majesty. Said observer cannot attack, insult, or otherwise threaten the sorcerer. Works on humans and animal alike. |
| Speech of Unavoidable Command | 2 | Anyone hearing the sorcerer speak must listen. All Command, Counsel, and Persuade tests so made gain +3d20 and one of these d20s counts as a 1. |



DAY OF BURNING

Difficulty: Dire (D4)

Duration: One full day

Cost to Cast/Learn: 4 Resolve

Locating the Spell: This is one of the more common grand workings, since it can be cast more frequently than many. It is most often known by sorcerers who are part of fire-worshiping cults and in the ruins of temples devoted to fiery deities. Some sorcerers believe that gazing into the mysterious flaming jewel known as the Heart of Ahriman imparts knowledge of this spell.

The spell can only be cast when Venus transits the Sun in a particular path, which only occurs once every 110 years. This spell must be cast at the sunrise following this event.

This spell transforms water into fire. When casting this spell, the sorcerer imbues a small vial of water with the essence of fire. If the sorcerer then pours it into a river, the entire river, from where the sorcerer pours in the vial, becomes a river of liquid flame that incinerates all ships, fish, docks, and everything flammable within a few meters of the banks.

If the sorcerer tosses the contents of the vial up into the air, then any rain falling that day is a rain of fire. If used to transform rain, the spell affects an area up to 100 miles on a side. Anyone who falls into the fiery river, or is out in a torrential burning rain, suffers a 3^W Incendiary attack once a turn. Someone who is out in an average rain which is burning, or is splashed by a burning river, suffers a 1^W Incendiary attack once a turn, and a light rain inflicts a 1^W Incendiary attack once every three turns.

OPENING THE GATEWAY BETWEEN

Difficulty: Dire (D4)

Duration: 1 scene

Cost to Cast/Learn: 4 Resolve

Locating the Spell: The serpent men of Valusia, and a few of their human servants, used this spell to create a secret network of permanent gateways across the land. These gateways have long since fallen into dust, but records of this spell still exist in a few ancient Valusian ruins.

This spell can only be cast if the caster takes a glowing crimson pearl, dissolves it in a glass of wine, and drinks it at the conclusion of the spell. Glowing crimson pearls are exceedingly rare and found in only in certain waters.

The sorcerer must find or construct a doorway like opening. This opening must have a solid top, bottom, and sides, but can be made from any materials and can be any size. When casting this spell, the sorcerer must name and visualize a location which he has either visited or of which he knows great detail.

DAY OF BURNING MOMENTUM SPENDS

| Type | Momentum Cost | Effect |
|--------------------|---------------|---|
| Imbue with Venom | 1 | The sorcerer transforms the river or the rain into deadly and lasting venom that kills all plants affected and all people or animals who drink it. This causes the land to remain utterly barren for the next decade, after which time the soil recovers. This rain is greenish black and exceptionally bitter. Anyone drinking this water suffers 5 ^W damage. |
| Blight to Blessing | 2 | Water imbued with the essence of growth. For the next decade, all plants and animals are unnaturally abundant, and heal at twice the natural rate. |

| OPENING THE GATEWAY BETWEEN MOMENTUM SPENDS | | |
|---|---------------|---|
| Type | Momentum Cost | Effect |
| The Door Opens Both Ways | 1 | A dark shimmer in the air marks the doorway at its destination. For the duration of the spell, anyone can travel through the gateway in either direction. |
| Enduring Doorway | 1 | The doorway lasts until the sun next sets. |
| Terrifying Doorway | 1 | The sorcerer may wish to ensure that any pursuers regret their decision. The spatial distortions are trying on the mind. Anyone traveling through the gateway suffers 2 mental damage and, if they open their eyes at all, instead suffer 8 mental damage. |
| Permanent Doorway | 3 | Opening the gateway so that travelers pass through another doorway at the spell's destination. Any sorcerer possessing two crimson pearls can cast this spell, travel through the doorway, and drink a glass of wine containing the second dissolved crimson pearl, thus creating the link between the two doorways for as long as both doorways stand. |

If the spell is successful, the doorway shimmers and turns as black as night as the ritual opens a rent in space which connects the sorcerer's current location and the other location. For the next scene, anyone who walks through this doorway emerges at the desired location. From the other side, the doorway is invisible. Instead, people suddenly appear.

If the sorcerer has not visited the spell's destination and is misinformed about that location, the doorway may lead to someplace vaguely similar to what they imagined and described. Traveling through the gateway is simple, and requires only three steps, but travelers should keep their eyes firmly closed lest they witness unnatural spatial distortions too terrible to look upon. Anyone traveling through the gateway with their eyes open suffers 4 mental damage.



RAISING THE UNNATURAL HORDE

Difficulty: Dire (D4)

Duration: Until the next new moon

Cost to Cast/Learn: 4 Resolve

Locating the Spell: The demon lord Ammut knows this spell, and any who can successfully bribe or threaten him can gain both knowledge of this spell and the components necessary to cast it once.

This spell can only be cast outdoors on the night of the new moon, and casting it requires that the sorcerer create a special incense containing at least one ounce of powdered scale or tooth from the demon lord Ammut — not easy to come by. To use this spell, the sorcerer must also retain at least a pinch of this powder.

This spell raises an army of unnatural creatures utterly loyal to the sorcerer who summoned them. To give orders

| RAISING THE UNNATURAL HORDE MOMENTUM SPENDS | | |
|---|---------------|---|
| Type | Momentum Cost | Effect |
| Hideous Possession | 1 | If within sight of a crowd of humans when casting this spell, the sorcerer may transform up to 1,000 people into demonic creatures for the next month. These creatures are loyal to the sorcerer. At the end of a month, all the demonic creatures transform back into ordinary humans, but any who died remain dead, and while the survivors retain only fragmentary memories of the last month, the horror of the transformation inflicts 4 mental damage on every survivor. |
| Legion of Iron | 2 | If cast near a large quantity of iron or a huge deposit of iron ore, this spell clads any army of up to 100 individuals in invincible iron armor, giving them semblance of living statues of metal. They each gain 2 Armor Soak on all locations for each point of Momentum spent. |

to this terrible legion, the sorcerer need merely touch the remaining Ammut powder, or the object it was stored it in, and give a command. A sorcerer losing this powder can no longer give commands and, if this powder is burned or otherwise destroyed, the army ceases obeying any previous orders and immediately turns on its creator. This spell summons roughly 1,000 Toughened ghouls (see the *Conan* corebook, page 338).

REND THE EARTH'S BONES

Difficulty: Dire (D4)

Duration: One day of continual earthquakes

Cost to Cast/Learn: 4 Resolve

Locating the Spell: Legends say that more than 1,200 years ago the sorcerer Jashir, living in a tower outside of the Turanian city of Akif, used this spell to rip the lost city of Sariban from the coast and sink it into the Vilayet Sea. These same legends claim that the ruin of Jashir's tower contains the text of this spell.

The caster can only perform this spell at midnight on a night when the demon star Algol pulses with a fiery red glow. This event happens only once every 1,217 years and only for one night. The caster must perform this spell outdoors and at a location where they can see the region they wish to affect. Determining when the next time Algol pulses requires a Daunting (3) Lore test by someone with the Astrology talent, but nothing can hasten this time.

Calling upon the Earth's deeply buried rage is risky but grants the sorcerer exceptional power. This spell allows the sorcerer to reshape the landscape over a vast area. This reshaping is a violent and terrible affair where the ground shakes and may even split open. While the worst of the

damage occurs within the first hour, the earth continues to shake in the affected area for the next full day.

Moments after the spell is cast, the earth in the affected region emits a terrible rumbling noise. These sounds panic animals and an Average (D1) Animal Handling test must be made to calm them. All other characters must make a Challenging (D2) Discipline test or lose 5  mental damage to Resolve. Also, regardless of the way this spell is used, being within the area affected by it causes 7  damage due to shaking and potential rubble.

SUMMONING THE LOYAL SERVANT

Difficulty: Daunting (D3)

Duration: 20 years

Cost to Cast/Learn: 3 Resolve

Locating the Spell: Tomes containing this spell are found in the ruins of ancient temples of Set and in a few of the vastly older shrines of the serpent men.

This spell can only be cast amidst the ruins of a particular temple of Set located in the middle of a desert. Also, the spell can only be cast during a particular alignment of Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars that only occurs once every 271 years.

This spell causes the back wall of the temple to glow with an unearthly green light so that it depicts a hideous creature resembling a wasp-winged bird with a scaled, reptilian head, surrounded by smaller creatures of similar type. While this glow persists, one person, typically the sorcerer who cast the spell, can touch their bare back to the wall. This causes intense pain and 3  of damage to both Resolve and Vigor. A few agonizing seconds later, the glow fades and the sorcerer now has the wasp-winged

| REND THE EARTH'S BONES MOMENTUM SPENDS | | |
|--|---------------|--|
| Type | Momentum Cost | Effect |
| The Angry Earth | 1 | The sorcerer utterly devastates an area up to 150 miles on a side, wracking it with earthquakes sufficient to make all manmade structures topple. The sorcerer may even cause all or part of an island to sink into the ocean. |
| Reshape Landscape | 1 | The sorcerer raises or eliminates a small mountain range, shifts the course of a river, closes a pass in a mountain range, or raises an island. The area affected can be up to 400 miles long and 75 miles wide. No such changes are more precise than natural terrain and are not under the sorcerer's control. |
| Shaping Stone | 3 | The sorcerer creates simple walls and earthworks, enabling them to create thick solid walls that surround an area up to ten miles on a side, with walls up to 30 feet high and equally thick. The spell can also precisely shape the course of up to 40 miles of a river. It can also create custom-made caverns or a natural bridge to an island, a small island sculpted to the sorcerer's specifications, or even crude pyramids. |

| SUMMONING THE LOYAL SERVANT MOMENTUM SPENDS | | |
|---|---------------|---|
| Type | Momentum Cost | Effect |
| Dauntless Messenger | 1 | One of the several small wasp-winged bird tattoos detaches from the sorcerer who can then tie a small message to this creature and bid it travel to any location the sorcerer knows. These serpents fly three times as fast as a human can travel on foot. Once it has delivered the message, it vanishes and reappears on the sorcerer's skin. If slain, it reappears as a tattoo of an obviously dead creature, but gradually heals within a full lunar month. |
| Swift Steed | 1 | The large creature leaves the sorcerer's back, able and willing to carry the sorcerer and up to three others on any journey that lasts no more than seven days. The serpent travels twice as fast as a fine horse ridden hard and three times as fast as a person can travel on foot. After this journey, the serpent becomes a tattoo for another week before it can be summoned again. If slain, it reappears as a tattoo of an obviously dead wasp-winged bird, but gradually heals within a full lunar month. |
| Loyal Spy | 2 | One of the several small tattoos detaches from the sorcerer's body. The sorcerer can see through its eyes, hear through its ears, and direct the serpent with their thoughts. When summoned in this fashion, the small flying creature must return to being a tattoo when the sun next rises, and cannot be summoned again for one full day. |
| Deadly Guard | 3 | The sorcerer summons both the large winged creature and three smaller winged creatures to guard a location. These beasts guard the location for a full lunar month and attack anyone the sorcerer does not admit. When summoned like this, all the serpents defend the location to the death. The four creatures must all rest for a week before being summoned again for any purpose and, if killed, they must rest for a month. |

bird tattoos on their back and sides — in full color and exquisite detail. By intoning the last stanza of this ritual, an act requiring Average (D1) Sorcery test but no cost of Resolve, the sorcerer can cause the tattoo to take life and uncurl from their back.

This creature willingly serves the sorcerer for the next 20 years but, immediately after that, it begins to become restive. If the sorcerer does not free it within the next two days, on the third day it erupts from the sorcerer's body, killing the sorcerer in the process. Treat the large form of these creatures as a Creature of the Far Reaches of the Skies (*Conan* corebook, page 347), and treat the smaller creatures as having the same characteristics as a wise old bird (*Conan* corebook, page 324). Regardless of their size, all these creatures have large wasp-like wings, the bodies and legs of a bird of prey, and the scaled head of a prehistoric bird.



SUMMON THE MISTS OF OBSCURATION

Difficulty: Dire (D4)

Duration: Permanent

Cost to Cast/Learn: 4 Resolve

Locating the Spell: If one can read their inhuman tongue, copies of this spell are sometimes found in the ruined towers of ancient serpent-man sorcerers. Also, a sorcerer who can teach it likely inhabits any city that was recently protected by this spell.

This spell requires the sorcerer to obtain an ounce of viridian earth-blood, an exceptionally rare, thick green liquid occasionally found seeping from the walls of the deepest caverns. Some scholars believe that the serpent men used this substance to protect their settlements from outsiders.

Under this spell, a specific region becomes exceptionally difficult to find. This spell can only be used to hide relatively discrete locations, like a city or town, or a single valley, plateau, desert oasis, small island, or clearing in a vast forest. This location can be no more than 25 miles on a side. This spell raises the Difficulty of attempts to find the location under even the best conditions to Dire (4). At night, during a storm, or in any other conditions which make navigation on land or by sea more hazardous, the Difficulty increases to Epic (5). Leaving the locale is simple, but finding it again is no easier than traveling there the first time. There is no obvious barrier to finding the location. Instead, even the most skilled tracker wanders off course, and seemingly straight paths either gradually disappear or inexplicably avoid the location.

ROBERT E. HOWARD AND THE CTHULHU MYTHOS

We have previously touched on Howard's relationship to Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos. Howard was friends with Lovecraft, and the two exchanged many letters. Lovecraft thought very highly of Howard, a younger writer, believing that Howard possessed a natural gift for storytelling and injecting his work with characters full of emotion, something at which Lovecraft himself was less adroit.

A few points of literary criticism are useful in distinguishing Howard's horror from Lovecraft. Where Lovecraft's cosmos was bleak, unknowable, and ultimately would grind down any mere mortal, Howard's cosmos was full of danger, but danger that humanity might at least contend with, if not understand. Howard's horror is filled with action while Lovecraft's focuses on existential dread. This is an important distinction, for in Lovecraft's mythos there is no "winning". Struggle is futile. For Howard, struggle defines man's existence, or at the very least, his characters' existences.

"It is the individual mainly which draws me — the struggling, blundering, passionate insect vainly striving against the river of Life and seeking to divert the channel of events to suit himself — breaking his fangs on the iron collar of Fate and sinking into final defeat with the froth of a curse on his lips," Howard wrote in a letter to Lovecraft. Lovecraft conversely, was rather concerned with man's ultimate submission to the powerful and maddening. The two philosophies make for very different styles of gaming, but have a good deal of overlap.

Just how connected is the world of Conan to the world of Cthulhu? The answer is slightly complicated but certainly

SUMMON THE MISTS OF OBSCURATION MOMENTUM SPENDS

| Type | Momentum Cost | Effect |
|---------------------|---------------|---|
| Boon of Familiarity | 1 | Anyone who visited this location at least three times, or has lived there for at least a month, develops a sense of its location and can find it again without penalty and can lead others to this location. |
| Calling the Lost | 1 | Individuals and small groups of less than a dozen travelers who are both lost and do not seek the protected location can stumble upon it without penalty, but larger groups and anyone attempting to travel there deliberately, cannot. |
| Entrapment | 1 | There are no penalties to find the location, but the above penalties apply to all attempts to leave. |
| Prone to Accident | 1 | Those looking for the site take 4  damage to Resolve whenever a Complication is rolled. This is in addition to any Complication normally incurred. |
| Eternal Separation | 2 | Attempts to leave this region are as difficult as attempts to find it. In either regard, travelers will count as "Prone to Accident" and take the damage listed there. |

navigable. At the time both authors were writing, Lovecraft edited other pulp authors' works and injected passing references to his own cosmology and setting. This was more rewarding to Lovecraft than any grand scheme, and when other authors took the Mythos up on their own, it wasn't with any grand unification of worlds in mind. They were simply friends having some fun building a shared mythology.

That isn't to say that Howard didn't emulate Mythos stories. As all young writers must, he looked to a more experienced writer from time to time. However, Howard's stories, even those consciously set within the Cthulhu Mythos, were always his own.

Purely from the view of continuity, though, Conan and Cthulhu do inhabit the same universe. Two fragments Howard left behind made this explicit, as do several finished stories, though by more than one removed, perhaps. *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* ("Nameless Cults"), written by Howard's Friedrich von Junzt, is his answer to the *Necronomicon*, and would later appear in works by Lovecraft. Thematically, too, some horrific aspects of Lovecraft — gibbering horrors, elephant-headed horrors, gods beyond time, things man was not meant to know, and more all appear in Howard's work, repeatedly.

It is in the way that the characters of these stories deal with these horrors where the split occurs. Conan takes up sword against Thog in Xuthal, despite seeming hopeless. Lovecraft's characters go mad or run away, for the most part, or rely on allies to struggle against the forces of the Mythos.

WHAT THE RELATIONSHIP MEANS FOR CONAN

On its most basic level, the above means that dwellers in the deep fight Turanian soldiers on the shores of the Vilayet, or Nordheimers struggle against the machinations of an Ymir that seems to be more cosmic horror than a thinly disguised Odin. It means that Hyborian Age magic taps into that same Outer Dark from whence the Great Old Ones come. It means an epic campaign could revolve around the attempt to awaken dreaming Cthulhu somewhere out there in the Western Ocean.

Practically, the gamemaster most likely will want to be sparing with the amount of cosmic horror a game includes. Howard's Conan stories all had measures of the fantastic, and many of those were of the cosmic horror variety. There are books that drive readers mad and things lurking in pits, worshiped as gods that come from that same Outer Dark. However, a steady diet of these will quickly veer away from the weird fantasy of Howard. Yes, he had toad-like beasts worshiped as gods, but he also had man-apes like Thak and more common horrors like huge spiders.

A good example of Howard's take on cosmic horror is Yag-kosha, the alien being trapped in a tower he was

forced to create for the human sorcerer, Yara. Whereas Lovecraft might have made Yag-kosha, this elephant-headed being from an alien planet, the villain of the piece, Howard makes him a tragic figure. However, Conan runs in the end, escaping only with his life and not the treasure the young Cimmerian thief sought.

Below are ideas and points the gamemaster may wish to consider when injecting the mythos into a *Conan* game. These are merely some of the possibilities, but hopefully serve to spur the imagination. They are divided into broad categories: Semi-natural Terrors; Things Man Was Not Meant to Know; and Fear, Dread and Madness.

Semi-Natural Terrors

This book emphasizes the unnatural nature of the sorcerous — a broad term for anything "magical" — but in the Conan stories, many of the terrors and dangers Conan faces are only partly unnatural. Thak, Satha, even the frost-giant's daughter, Atali — all have the form of the recognizable. None of these are alien in the way Yag-kosha or Nyarlathotep are. Yet they make the skin crawl, or can. They cause fear. They are not natural, but they are not alien either.

From giant spiders to white apes, the host of creatures that Conan encounters would be called "monsters" by most. For Howard, though, such a term would be too mundane. Semi-unnatural creatures exist, but are rare. They have no ecologies of their own and are often singular creatures. Therefore, one aspect of Howard's mythos is that which is almost alien.

Part of Conan's appeal is the aspect of humankind vs. nature. To preserve that, some of the "alien" encounters must have natural elements. Atali, her white feet dancing naked across the snow, is not of this world, but she is nonetheless a beautiful, barely clothed human woman.

Again and again, Howard takes the recognizable and just slightly perverts it. Thak is almost a man, or anyway might one day be. Gray apes likewise possess recognizable qualities of real apes. Even the Dafari cannibals are human, though their practices revolt most people. This subtle tweaking of reality is part of Howard's weird fantasy.

As gamemaster, bear in mind that twisting the normal just enough provides chills for characters in the Hyborian Age, but might not be as upsetting to the players of those characters. To make such creatures truly notable, the gamemaster should display the ways of a commonplace creature as a formidable terror here.

Let's take the man-ape, as an example. They are big and they are strong, but most players aren't likely to worry about an ape as an encounter. But, if the gamemaster builds up to it, having human bones hung from trees around the wet swamps of the Vilayet... a non-player character screams then disappears into the mist, his decapitated head is thrust back like a challenge, eyes wide in terror and not quite dead.

Suddenly, familiar becomes the formidable, the mundane becomes the monstrous.

Incidentally, that is something the gamemaster ought to keep in mind — even semi-natural terrors nearly kill the mighty Cimmerian.

Things Man Was Not Meant to Know

The utterly alien — that which is not recognizable as any Earthly creature — are things that terrify the most. These are what put the weird in “weird fantasy”. Howard created many such tropes of weird fantasy which are now classic. Unfortunately, they are well known and lose some of their purity through over-familiarity.

Part of the gamemaster’s role is creating new weird fantasy the players have not seen before. There are mechanics to reflect how the characters react, but the players want to be surprised, too. The tentacular terrors of Lovecraft are well known, too; they are also classic.

But Howard hinted at vast depth in his mythos, in his cosmology. Take Yag-kosha. It is a sentient alien being that literally flew across the depths of space from an alien planet called Yag. That implies a cosmos filled with such creatures. There is science fiction to Yag-kosha and the Yaggites, and there is incredible science in display with Lovecraftian races like the Yith. Extrapolate from these hints and see what you come up with. This work and others in the line have hints to help, but the task is ultimately the gamemaster’s own.

Deep history is something the gamemaster can play up, as well. Conan’s world exists on a scale of geologic time.



Civilization rises and falls into barbarism. The former civilizations vanish and entire ages are forgotten, but all were equally real. In Howard’s universe, they were. Thoth-Amon’s serpent ring appears tens of thousands of years after the Hyborian Age is dust and turns up in the 1930s, in Howard’s story “The Haunter of the Dark”. Ymir is revealed as something monstrous and altogether alien in “The Cairn on the Headland”, set in the 1930s, as well. That is weird fantasy, creepy and alienating all the same.

Howard’s stories are full of this, and not just his tales of Conan. Most players probably are not overly familiar with his entire oeuvre. That means there are new things to be found, new elements of this vast and connected history to interject, all existing within the same tone and historical continuum.

Serpent men, too, are often under used in this regard. Instead of passing them off as foes of the week, consider that they had an entire culture which rose and fell before man understood fire. That, too, is alien and strange. Look in the unusual corners of Howard’s work. The weird is there, ready to be used.

Fear, Dread, and Madness

The first two categories lead inexorably to the third. The results of encounters with the above may result in fear, dread, and madness. Player characters do not go insane as often as Lovecraftian characters do, but encounters with elements of weird fantasy take their toll beyond the physical.

Sword and sorcery is inherently more heroic than cosmic horror, but as has been said, they have their points of overlap. Emotional and mental fatigue is part of that mix. The mechanics for tracking mental damage and fatigue exist for a good reason: they are part of Howard’s stories.

Conan’s might and knack for surviving is not merely a result of his brawn and cleverness: his mind is strong. He feels his skin crawl and grips his sword. He cuts through hordes of enemies and comes away a sane man. Howard puts his Cimmerian hero through the mental wringer just as much as he does the physical. That is important to remember.

This is where good roleplaying, mixed with the rules, really pays off. You don’t want to traumatize your players. But playing characters that have been traumatized, who teeter on the brink of madness... now that can be a good time for all.

In “Xuthal of the Dusk”, Conan grimly prepares to slay his nubile companion rather than let her die of thirst or exposure. He, too, is at his mental limits and would spare her what he knows lies ahead. There are grim, gritty aspects to the Hyborian Age modern minds may find insurmountable.

That said, it is still heroic fantasy, and dwelling too long on the grim is not part of the Howardian mythos. At the end of the day, mostly non-player characters crack and go mad, while heroes and rogues alike turn to face their dooms with fires in eyes and blades in hand.

CHAPTER 8

A TAXONOMY OF TERRORS

And their magicians made a terrible magic to guard the city; for by their necromantic arts they re-created the dragons which had once dwelt in this lost land, and whose monstrous bones they found in the forest. Those bones they clothed in flesh and life, and the living beasts walked the earth as they walked it when Time was young.

— “Red Nails”

Manufacturing a consistent supply of unnameable horrors can be an exhausting task. The gamemaster must devise a steady stream of interesting and horrible entities to torment players with and provide worthy adversaries for their characters. However, while this chapter is full of the tools for making awful Horrors, it's important to understand the role of combat when it comes to the Horrors themselves. While creatures of the Hyborian Age are vicious, primal versions of their later selves, they remain mortal. Such is not the case with Horrors. Some may be immune to mortal weapons, others fall to a well-placed blade or arrow, and yet others have some terrible vulnerability that will dispel them from the mortal realms entirely.

Player characters are potent but still wholly mortal. Even experienced dog-brothers and sword-sisters can be laid low with a single unlucky hit. Combat is never a safe bet in Conan, and it's never a tool the player characters can employ with impunity against Horrors.

VARIETIES OF FOUL FOES

This section provides the tools for fabricating new and original unearthly horrors. By using the templates for statistics and Qualities for unique traits provided here, the gamemaster should be able to quickly conjure up these foes.

The first table provides basic statistics for a wide variety of different creature types. Each type is provided four ranges of statistic modifiers for their appropriate type: Minor, Major, Diabolical, and Unearthly. When a type of creature is needed, such as a Minor amorphous horror, the gamemaster can consult these values directly, using the first value in the line. The creature is made more powerful by modifying the attribute by the Major, Diabolical, or Unearthly modifier. Stress and Soak are provided as ranges, derived directly from the attributes or modified by the nature of the entity.

If the gamemaster decides that this amorphous horror has a particularly brutal acid attack (for example), it can be assigned the Diabolical Damage Quality, while keeping the rest of its statistics intact.

Once the basic template is selected, the gamemaster can add Qualities from the next list. These are traits such as Vitriolic, Undead, Disguised, Ravenous, or some other



MINOR, MAJOR, DIABOLICAL, AND UNEARTHLY

For the purposes of the generator, Horror statistics are broken down into four categories to make it easier for the gamemaster to quickly create an abomination from the elder world as needed.

The categories follow this format:

- **MINOR HORRORS** have the lowest appropriate statistics and represent a weak form of a given creature type. Optionally, the gamemaster can also treat Minor Horrors as Minions.
- **MAJOR HORRORS** are typical specimens of their type, with average statistics. Major Horrors, depending on type, are often found as leaders of lesser creatures. Major Horrors can be, optionally, considered Toughened foes.
- **DIABOLICAL HORRORS** are serious threats by themselves, having exceptional statistics for their type and possessing special abilities above and beyond lesser forms. Diabolical Horrors are always considered Toughened.
- **UNEARTHLY HORRORS** are the exemplars of their type, with statistics in the highest ranges, commanding lesser forms, and always possessing one or more special abilities. Unearthly Horrors are always at least Toughened foes and entirely suitable as Nemeses.

suitable qualifier. These modify the creature's statistics by improving some traits while worsening others. They also provide a basic idea of the type of special powers the creature might have, or their unique abilities.

Finally, the gamemaster should complete the creature by considering its special type of horror (see page 131). What's so terrible about it? Is it an Impostor horror, taking the place of its victims and creating havoc in people's lives? Is it more of a Pursuit horror, playing up the terror of being hunted and the steady crumbling of hope as every sanctuary proves insufficient? Is it a Contagion horror, infecting its victims with some awful condition or turning them into vectors for a curse upon their loved ones and others around them?

The horror of a creature doesn't add specific new abilities, but it does encourage the gamemaster to think about how the creature behaves and what its goals might be, and can be a touchstone for adding special traits that strengthen this dread.

AMORPHOUS TERROR

Amorphous terrors are formless spawn of the Outer Dark. Almost all are impervious to mundane weapons, and able to flow through even the smallest gaps to reach their wretched prey. The Minor statistics might be used for exceptionally small blobs and piles, while the stronger rows usually imply progressively larger monstrosities. These statistics can also be used for other creatures that have a basically pliable body shape.

ATTRIBUTES

| Awareness | Intelligence | Personality | Willpower |
|------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|
| 8/+1/+1/+1 | 6/+2/+1/+1 | 4/+1/+1/+1 | 8/—/+1/+1 |
| Agility | Brawn | Coordination | |
| 8/+4/+2/+2 | 8/+2/+2/+4 | 6/+2/+1/+1 | |

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

| Combat | Movement |
|------------|-----------|
| —/+1/+1/+2 | 3/—/+1/+2 |
| Fortitude | Senses |
| —/+1/+2/+3 | —/—/+1/+2 |
| Knowledge | Social |
| —/—/+1/+2 | —/—/+1/+1 |

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 8–25, Resolve 8–13
- **Soak:** Armor 3–6 (Flowing Form), Courage 3–6 (Horror)

ATTACKS

- **Flailing Tentacle (M):** Reach 3, 4 
- **Maddening Cry (T):** Range C, 6  mental, Area, Stun
- **Bludgeoning Pseudopods (Varies):** Reach 1/2/3, 3 , Stun, Knockdown

Note that attacks don't include bonus damage from attributes.



ARMORED ABOMINATION

Armored abominations are like hulking brutes (below), but focus more on extreme resilience rather than sheer damage absorption. Some armored abominations might be relatively more vulnerable once you get past their tough



exterior, but doing so isn't easy. Golem-like creatures and other entities made of tougher stuff than ordinary flesh might use this template, and most of them are also immune to Bonus Damage from mundane weaponry.

| ATTRIBUTES | | | |
|------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|
| Awareness | Intelligence | Personality | Willpower |
| 6/—/+1/+1 | 6/—/+1/+2 | 3/—/+1/+1 | 6/—/+1/+2 |
| Agility | Brawn | Coordination | |
| 6/+1/+1/+2 | 10/+1/+2/+2 | 6/—/—/+1 | |

| FIELDS OF EXPERTISE | |
|---------------------|-----------|
| Combat | Movement |
| 1/+1/+2/+1 | —/—/+1/+1 |
| Fortitude | Senses |
| 2/+2/+2/+1 | 1/—/+1/+1 |
| Knowledge | Social |
| — | —/—/+1/+1 |

| STRESS AND SOAK | |
|-------------------------|---|
| ■ Stress: | Vigor 12–22, Resolve 8–16 |
| ■ Soak: | Armor 4 (Impenetrable Skin), Courage 6 (Fearless) |
| ATTACKS | |
| ■ Adamantine Fists (M): | Reach 1, 6 [◆] , Grappling, Stun |

Note that attacks don't include bonus damage from attributes.

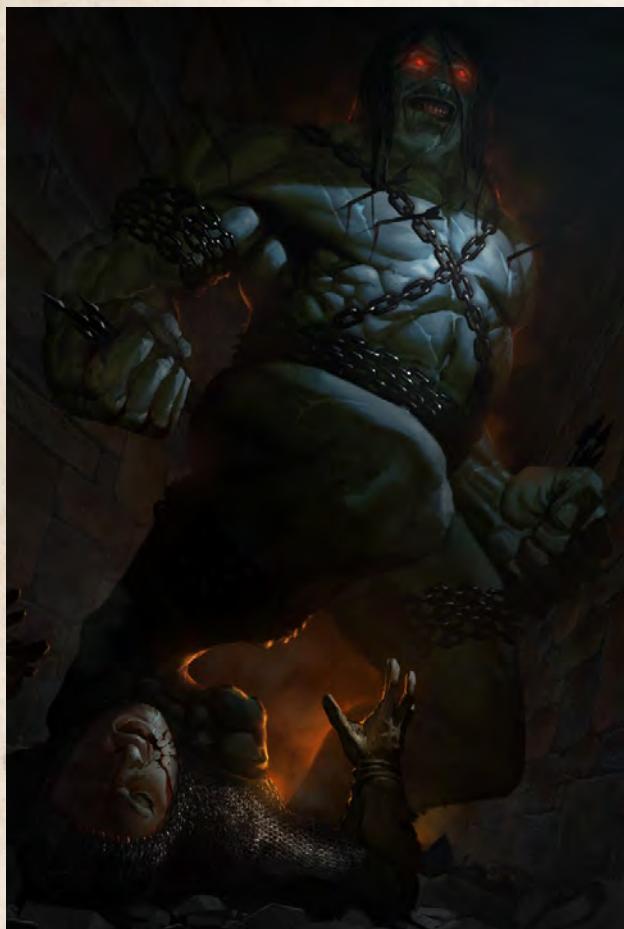
HULKING BRUTE

Hulking brutes are the giants and other titanic creatures that threaten to smash troublesome characters into a fine paste. Most of them aren't difficult to hit, due to their size, but they're notably hard to bring down. Minor statistics might be used for some particularly large and brutal humanoid, while the Diabolical modifiers are fitting for a towering occult abomination.

| ATTRIBUTES | | | |
|------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| Awareness | Intelligence | Personality | Willpower |
| 8/—/—/+1 | 3/—/+1/+2 | 4/+1/+2/+2 | 7/+1/+1/+1 |
| Agility | Brawn | Coordination | |
| 7/+1/+1/+2 | 10/+1/+1/+2 | 3/+1/+1/+2 | |

| FIELDS OF EXPERTISE | |
|---------------------|------------|
| Combat | Movement |
| 2/+1/+2/+1 | 1/—/+1/+1 |
| Fortitude | Senses |
| —/+1/+2/+3 | 1/+1/+1/+2 |
| Knowledge | Social |
| — | —/—/—/+1 |

| STRESS AND SOAK | |
|-----------------|---|
| ■ Stress: | Vigor 10–20, Resolve 7–16 |
| ■ Soak: | Armor 2–4 (Tough Hide/Bony Plates), Courage 1–3 |



ATTACKS

- **Rending Grasp (M):** Reach 2, 3 Grappling, Knockdown, Vicious 1
- **Savage Roar (T):** Range M, 4 mental, Vicious 1
- **Stomp (M):** Reach 1, 7 Stun, Vicious 1, only against prone enemies.

HUMANOID THING

Humanoid things are basically a human but somehow touched by the powers of the Outer Dark. Constructs of occult science or made by ordinary humans, hideously altered by eldritch influence... all are represented here. A humanoid thing usually has a physical attack in addition to whatever weapons they might wield, and are significantly sturdier than ordinary humans.

| ATTRIBUTES | | | |
|------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|
| Awareness | Intelligence | Personality | Willpower |
| 8/-/+1/+1 | 5/+1/+1/+2 | 8/+1/+1/+2 | 8/-/+1/+1 |
| Agility | Brawn | Coordination | |
| 8/-/+1/+1 | 9/-/+1/+1 | 8/-/+1/+2 | |

| FIELDS OF EXPERTISE | |
|---------------------|------------|
| Combat | Movement |
| 1/+1/+1/+2 | 2/+1/+1/+2 |
| Fortitude | Senses |
| 3/-/+1/+1 | 1/-/+1/+1 |
| Knowledge | Social |
| — | 0/-/-/+1 |

| STRESS AND SOAK | |
|--|--|
| ■ Stress: Vigor 12–16, Resolve 11–15 | |
| ■ Soak: Armor 0–2 (Filthy Hides), Courage 2 (Insane or Inhuman) | |

| ATTACKS | |
|---|-----------|
| ■ Heavy Stone Club (M): Reach 2, 2H, 4 | Knockdown |
| ■ Crude Spear (R): Reach 3, 2H, 4 | Thrown |
| ■ Talons (M): Reach 1, 3 | |

Note that attacks don't include bonus damage from attributes.

OUTER ENTITY

Outer Entities are for the avatars of the gods in the Outer Dark, lieutenants of uttermost darkness, and other serious perils. Even a Minor Outer Entity is sufficient to terrorize a group of experienced player characters, and an Unearthly specimen can give a hardened pack of veterans a bad time. If the Nemesis modifications are applied to such a creature, it might end up so powerful that direct conflict ceases to be a practical response. Most Outer Entities are immune to mortal weapons.

At the gamemaster's option, Outer Entities can possess the *Patron* talent (see page 84 of *Conan*). Outer Entities usually have the *Sorcery* talent, as well, unless they are somehow cut off from the occult forces that sustain them. They have a host of other special Qualities, including Flight, Incorporeality, or whatever else suits these satraps of cosmic evil.



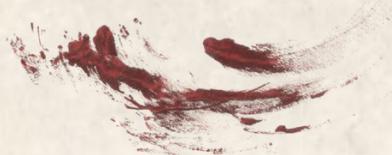
| ATTRIBUTES | | | |
|----------------|--------------|---------------------|-------------|
| Awareness | Intelligence | Personality | Willpower |
| 10/+2/+2/+1 | 8/+2/+4/+6 | 6/+2/+2/+4 | 12/+1/+1/+2 |
| Agility | Brawn | Coordination | |
| 6/+2/+4/+6 | 8/+2/+4/+2 | 8/+1/+2/+1 | |

| FIELDS OF EXPERTISE | |
|---------------------|---------------|
| Combat | Movement |
| —/+1/+1/+1 | —/+1/+1/+2 |
| Fortitude | Senses |
| —/+1/+1/+2 | 1/—/+1/+1 |
| Knowledge | Social |
| 2/+1/+2/+3 | —/—/—/+1 |

| STRESS AND SOAK | |
|--|--|
| ■ Stress: Vigor 8–18, Resolve 12–20 | |
| ■ Soak: Armor 6 (Horror), Courage — | |

| ATTACKS | |
|---|--------------|
| ■ Gargantuan Maw or Pincer (M): Reach 3, 8 | Vicious 2 |
| ■ Demonic Grasp (M): Reach 2, 5 | |
| ■ Unholy Wrigthing (T): Range C, 6 | mental, area |

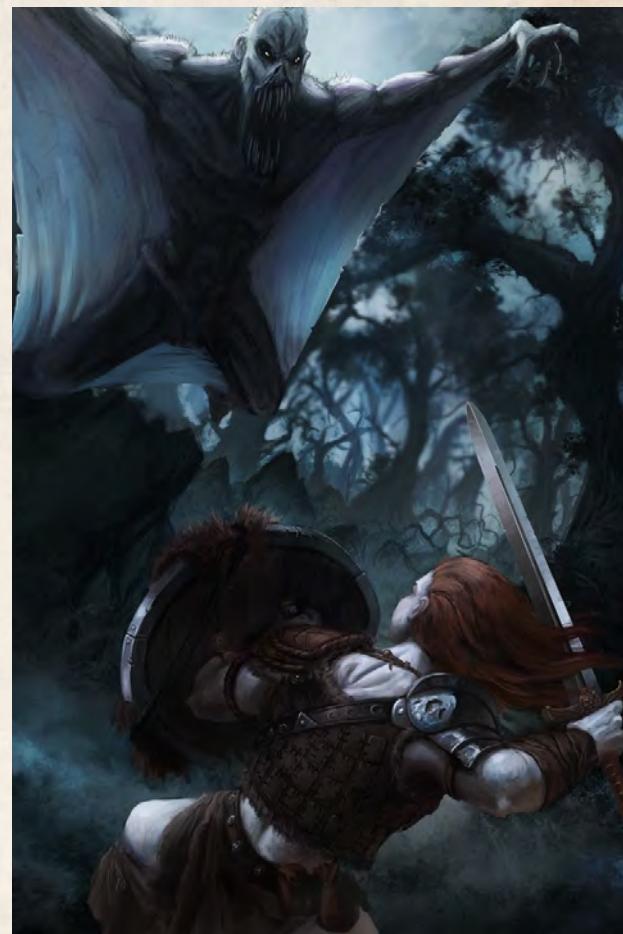
Note that attacks don't include bonus damage from attributes.



STALKING HUNTER

Stalking hunters are usually solitary abominations that hunt their prey from cover, waiting for a moment of carelessness or weakness before they dare to strike. They tend to inflict vicious damage on a target with their uncanny precision or brutal physical weaponry, but they avoid pitched battles and even fights. The stat lines here are for eldritch creatures that favor stealth and swift murder. Stalking hunters often possess Qualities like Insubstantial or Flight to better vex their prey.

| ATTRIBUTES | | | |
|----------------|--------------|---------------------|-----------|
| Awareness | Intelligence | Personality | Willpower |
| 7/+1/+1/+2 | 7/—/+1/+2 | 7/—/—/+1 | 7/—/+1/+1 |
| Agility | Brawn | Coordination | |
| 7/—/+1/+1 | 7/—/+1/+1 | 7/—/—/+1 | |



| FIELDS OF EXPERTISE | |
|---------------------|---------------|
| Combat | Movement |
| 1/+1/+1/+2 | 3/—/+1/+1 |
| Fortitude | Senses |
| —/—/+1/+1 | —/+1/+1/+1 |
| Knowledge | Social |
| —/—/+1/+1 | —/+1/+1/+2 |

| STRESS AND SOAK | |
|--|--|
| ■ Stress: Vigor 7–11, Resolve 7–11 | |
| ■ Soak: Armor 0–6 (Inhuman), Courage 6 (Horror) | |

| ATTACKS | |
|---|--------------------|
| ■ Jagged Claws and Teeth (M): Reach 1, 3 | Vicious 1 |
| ■ Sword (M): Reach 2, 4 | Parrying, Toxic 2 |
| ■ Horrific Visage (T): Range C, 4 | mental, Area, Stun |

Note that attacks don't include bonus damage from attributes.

UNDEAD HUMANOID

Undead humanoids are zombies, skeletons, vampires, and other largely tangible horrors risen from an unquiet grave. Aside from their particular statistics, undead are predictably immune to the sort of things that only trouble the living: poisons, diseases, suffocation, hunger, and other mundane concerns like Bonus Damage from mortal weaponry. Many have special vulnerabilities or special defenses. From the shambling risen corpse to the master nosferatu or the wicked, ancient, and mummified sorcerer, the undead strike fear into the hearts of their opponents from beyond the grave. Undead always have the Unliving Quality.

| ATTRIBUTES | | | |
|------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| Awareness | Intelligence | Personality | Willpower |
| 5/+1/+2/+3 | 5/+2/+2/+3 | 7/+1/+2/+3 | 7/+2/+2/+4 |
| Agility | Brawn | Coordination | |
| 5/+1/+1/+1 | 8/+2/+2/+2 | 8/-/+1/+1 | |

| FIELDS OF EXPERTISE | |
|---------------------|------------|
| Combat | Movement |
| —/+1/+2/+1 | —/-/+1/+1 |
| Fortitude | Senses |
| 2/+1/+1/+1 | 1/-/+1/+1 |
| Knowledge | Social |
| —/+1/+1/+1 | —/+1/+1/+1 |

| STRESS AND SOAK | |
|---|--|
| ■ Stress: Vigor 7–9, Resolve 7–9 | |
| ■ Soak: Armor 4 (Bodies Without Number), Courage — | |

| ATTACKS | |
|--|--|
| ■ Many Tiny Bites (M): Reach 1, 4  Armor Piercing 1, Persistent 2 | |
| ■ Unnerving (T): Range C, 3  Mental, Area | |

Note that attacks don't include bonus damage from attributes.

VERMINOUS BEAST

Verminous beasts can represent supernatural monsters that are usually small, vicious, and commonly found in packs or swarms. They're not hard to kill, but they come in such numbers that they can be a serious threat to characters. The statistics for verminous beasts usually apply to a small group of the creatures. A horde of chittering beetle-rats might actually be treated as five Major foes, even though they number in the scores. The most common Qualities for Verminous Beasts are Swarm and Incorporeal (representing the beasts' innumerable bodies parting away from attacks).

| ATTRIBUTES | | | |
|------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|
| Awareness | Intelligence | Personality | Willpower |
| 6/-/-/+1 | 4/-/-/+1 | 4/-/-/+1 | 6/-/-/+1 |
| Agility | Brawn | Coordination | |
| 8/-/+1/+1 | 6/-/-/+1 | 5/-/-/+1 | |

| FIELDS OF EXPERTISE | |
|---------------------|-----------|
| Combat | Movement |
| —/-/+1/+1 | 2/-/+1/+1 |
| Fortitude | Senses |
| 1/-/-/+1 | 1/-/+1/+1 |
| Knowledge | Social |
| — | — |

| STRESS AND SOAK | |
|---|--|
| ■ Stress: Vigor 7–9, Resolve 7–9 | |
| ■ Soak: Armor 4 (Bodies Without Number), Courage — | |

| ATTACKS | |
|--|--|
| ■ Many Tiny Bites (M): Reach 1, 4  Armor Piercing 1, Persistent 2 | |
| ■ Unnerving (T): Range C, 3  Mental, Area | |

Note that attacks don't include bonus damage from attributes.

HORROR QUALITIES

Once the basic framework of the creature is decided, the gamemaster can start adding trimmings. If the gamemaster already has an idea as to what sort of entity is desired, the next step is to increase or decrease its statistics to fit the goals for the creature. For additional inspiration, the Horror Qualities table (below) offers a set of example Qualities to apply to the creature. Each Quality offers a set of likely modifiers. Those marked with a plus increase that statistic by one step, for example from Minor to Major, while those with a minus decrease it by one degree.

Monsters marked with Special should likely have some special ability added to better express their Quality. Thus, an average hulking brute with the Vitriolic Quality may have attacks (fist blows) that are caustic. The sprays of vitriol it emits are hard to evade, but it is accustomed to overwhelming its opponent quickly and is more likely to flee in the face of stiff resistance.

In addition, several characteristic words are offered to help inspire descriptions and definitions of the Horror. These terms can be used as touchstones for adding special abilities or giving its appearance certain traits. The gamemaster might even add on entirely new abilities to the entity

| HORROR QUALITIES | | | |
|------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Roll | Quality | Modifiers | Characteristic Words |
| 1 | Amorphous | Fortitude+, Combat+, Move – | Mottling, bulging, slumping, rolling, tendrils, absorption |
| 2 | Disguised | Knowledge+, Special | Plastic, shells, falseness, mind-reading, husks, cloaks, flaws |
| 3 | Flaming | Brawn+, Soak+, Vigor – | Eerie light, smoke, char, ash, insubstantially, explosions |
| 4 | Frozen | Soak+, Vigor+, Movement – | Hardness, translucence, cold, numbness, whiteness, brittleness |
| 5 | Hulking | Vigor+, Brawn+, Movement – | Height, obesity, gnarled, disproportionate, lumbering, unstoppable |
| 6 | Immaterial | Fortitude+, Movement+, Brawn – | Gaseous, shadowy, intangible, flickering, wispy, invisible |
| 7 | Inanimate | Fortitude+, Brawn+, Movement – | Hard, glowing, skittering, metallic, stony, mechanical |
| 8 | Multi-limbed | Combat+, Movement+, Fortitude – | Spidery, tendrils, many-jointed, folding, winged |
| 9 | Parasitic | Social+, Special | Sucking, burrowing, leeching, infesting, bloated, subtle |
| 10 | Ravenous | Combat+, Fortitude+, Coordination – | Blades, maws, frenzied, emaciated, indiscriminate, sleepless |
| 11 | Resilient | Fortitude+, Brawn+, Special | Numb, armored, masochistic, tireless, part-inanimate, redundancy |
| 12 | Seething | Fortitude –, Special | Glowing, radiant, sickly, ulcerous, contained, explosive |
| 13 | Skeletal | Fortitude+, Brawn – | Bones, fragile, silent, worms, relentless, yellowed |
| 14 | Sonorously | Social+, Combat+, Brawn – | Song, hypnotism, shattering, allure, compulsion, ultrasonic |
| 15 | Swarming | Brawn –, Special | Hives, nests, tiny, clouds, insectile, buzzing |
| 16 | Tiny | Knowledge+, Brawn –, Movement – | Delicate, sharp, skittering, hidden, ambush, disarming |
| 17 | Toxic | Brawn+, Knowledge+, Special | Nauseating, gaseous, green, sickly, stinging, biting |
| 18 | Undead | Willpower+, Brawn+, Special | Cold, still, silent, moaning, rotting, bony |
| 19 | Vitriolic | Brawn+, Combat+, Resolve – | Acrid, fuming, puddles, slime, clouds, discolorations |
| 20 | Warded | Fortitude+, Special | Runed, steely, protected, sealed, confident, reckless |

if particularly inspired by an idea. These entries are simply suggestions and ideas. The gamemaster can always add their own, perhaps making up ones to specially fit unique circumstances or origins.

DEFINITION OF QUALITIES

These unique Horror Qualities are in addition to other Qualities provided in the *Conan* corebook on page 307–310.

Amorphous

Amorphous creatures are usually shapeless slime-blobs, though some can adopt more specific shapes. They tend to move slowly, but are hard to kill and often have multiple tendrils or pseudopods with which to crush prey. Their sheer abnormality is also unusually frightening.

Disguised

Disguised creatures look like something else, usually a perfectly normal human. Whatever their true form or

nature, most of these entities have the special ability to masquerade among normal humans without difficulty. They usually have an increased Movement skill bonus to avoid detection.

Flaming

Flaming monsters are on fire, or create fire, or otherwise relish heat. Their burning blows are especially painful, and their heat makes them hard to approach to hit or target, but their flaming forms are also usually somewhat easier to disperse by enemies.

Frozen

Frozen monsters are icy, either made of frozen water in some part or simply very cold. Such rigid frost makes them hard to hurt or destroy, but also slows down their movement in comparison to other things.

Hulking

Hulking monsters are huge, with corresponding advantages to their Vigor and damage. Their size does make them easier to hit.

Immaterial

Immaterial creatures might be composed entirely of mist, or be mere spiritual echoes, or be composed of congealed shadow. They're unsurprisingly hard to hit, frightening, and swift in motion, and their very immaterial nature makes it difficult to inflict damage. Most of these creatures require sorcery or some special substance to hurt them.

Inanimate

Inanimate foes either look like an inanimate object or are composed of inanimate objects. They might be golems, automatons, cursed furnishings, or anything else that never knew normal life. While slow, their obdurate forms are tough and hard to bring down.

Multi-limbed

Multi-limbed creatures have more than one set of arms, legs, tentacles, or other extremities. Most of them gain extra attacks from this, and the extra-legged creatures are usually faster, but this kind of biological extravagance also makes it easier to disable them.

Parasitic

Parasitic creatures somehow require hosts for survival, draining their blood, souls, vital energy, or other components to maintain their existence. Most are quite skilled at the means they use to acquire victims, and should have a special power related to the way they catch and maintain wretches to sate their hunger.

Ravenous

Ravenous monsters are frantic to consume. They attack in a blur of fangs and tendrils and move so aggressively that they're very hard to avoid. This same berserk hunger also harms their self-preservation instinct, however, and makes them easier to hit.

Resilient

Resilient creatures are somehow remarkably hard to kill, being tougher and harder to hit than most creatures. They may keep fighting for a round or two after suffering one or more Wounds, or they might regenerate a certain amount of Vigor each round, or they might be impervious to all but sorcery-infused weapons or some special substance.

Seething

Seething things are just that, imbued with weird, unearthly energies, glowing with radiant sickness. Their glowing claws and talons leave unhealing burns as well as bloody wounds, though they themselves are rarely the sturdiest of foes. Enemies often risk terrible poisoning from them; being hit by one or remaining near one for more than a minute or two forces an Average (D1) or higher Resistance test, with Fatigue or Despair being a suitable penalty for failure.



Skeletal

Skeletal foes aren't necessarily undead, but even the living examples are emaciated, thin, and bony. Their lack of flesh makes it hard to find something to hurt, but it also provides less support when damage is finally done to the things.

Sonorous

Sonorous enemies use sound in some nefarious ways. Sirens might daze victims with their golden voices, while banshees could inflict terrifying shrieks that drain the strength from those that hear them. Sonorous attacks tend to be hard to avoid, with creatures gaining bonus Momentum to attack, and the Area Quality, but less immediately damaging than a more tangible blow from an enemy.

Swarming

Swarming enemies usually come in large numbers, with correspondingly small or fragile creatures making up these terrible hordes. Some of them might require fire or other area-effect weapons to harm them, as individual creatures are too small to effectively target. Others might be treated as single entities, with a whole swarm sharing a single attack sequence and pool of hit points.

Tiny

Tiny foes are usually very hard to hit, having one or two steps of improvement on their armor, at the cost of inferior damage, movement, and Vigor. Tiny foes may be found in numbers large enough to threaten characters, or they might act in secret, using their small size to creep in unnoticed and perform dark deeds.

Toxic

Toxic enemies are poisonous or diseased. They spread venom or sickness as described in this section, with each attack usually forcing a Resistance test to avoid the plague. Most are unusually skilled at stealth or ambush, the better to strike unawares and incapacitate an enemy with their venom before their victim has a chance to strike back.

Undead

Undead creatures usually share a similar set of immunities. Many are Inured to Pain, Inured to Fear, and any other effect that relies on a living form for its harm. The mindless undead are usually totally fearless, while even those capable of recognizing harm tend to be reckless in their violence.

Vitriolic

Vitriolic monsters fight using caustic substances. They breathe sprays of searing liquid or have desiccating talons. It's possible that their hits might even cause Persistent damage (see page 274 of the **Conan** corebook) as the acid burns into their prey.

Warded

Warded creatures are specially blessed against certain types of harm. One might be impervious to sword blows, while another is immune to arrows, and a third can only be injured by open flame. This is a completely uncanny effect in most cases, and the sheer impossibility of what they see is especially disturbing to some heroes. The ward itself may be the result of sorcery, alien biology, or the simple physical nature of the creature. Mechanically, such warding manifests as an unusually high soak in a very specific circumstance.

TYPES OF MONSTROUS HORROR

Monsters can be further modified by "types of horror", distinct flavors or styles of nastiness that make them unique or awful. They usually don't involve changes to the creature's combat statistics, though they might prompt the addition of a special power or Quality. The gamemaster uses the adjacent list to get a suitable style to customize a desired entity. Each type is described in the pages following.

| HORROR TYPES | | | |
|--------------|-------------|-------|-----------|
| Roll | Type | Roll | Type |
| 1–2 | Body | 13–14 | Impostor |
| 3–4 | Consumption | 15–16 | Mystery |
| 5–6 | Contagion | 17 | Pursuit |
| 7–8 | Debility | 18 | Revulsion |
| 9–10 | Domination | 19 | Sexual |
| 11–12 | Expulsion | 20 | Violence |

Body Horror

Body horror is about the defilement, perversion, or treachery of a victim's flesh. Monsters that focus on body horror provoke some terrible change in a victim, altering their form in ways grotesque or dehumanizing. The alteration should not be a complete transformation, because the special frisson of horror here comes from the juxtaposition of intimately familiar and self-identified flesh with something utterly wrong. A beetle can be unpleasant to look at. A very large beetle can be especially repulsive. A human-sized creature that is part beetle and part human is horrific.

Lengthy transmogrification processes work particularly well, such that the creature enacts some hideous change on a victim or prisoner over time. These changes might turn the victim into a more suitable servant for the entity, or it may just be an impulse of an unfathomably alien mind.



Consumption Horror

Consumption horror is about eating, both literal and metaphorical. A Horror that deals in consumption devours its prey. This may be a visceral, bloody process of agonizing death by inches as fanged worms burrow into a paralyzed host, or it might be a steadily growing despair as an entity slowly devours a host's memories of everything good or happy in their lives. Such creatures often do lingering damage to a victim they hit, excising body parts or crippling mental abilities.

Giving a monster an especially horrible way of eating a person is the simplest way of applying this type of horror, as more abstract forms of consumption can be hard to put across at the table. If the gamemaster has a monster eat something intangible, the horror needs to come from the consequences of that consumption and the demonstrated effects it has on the victim's life. A wound writhing with gem-colored maggots is repulsive in of itself. A cold and empty space where a person's power to hope once was can only be perceived in its consequences, whether in sudden adherence to a cabal's doomsday machinations, or a swift and anguished suicide.

Contagion Horror

Contagion horror is about the spreading of sickness. To be infected is bad enough, but the real horror of these creatures is that they spread their plague either directly or through unwitting hosts. The foul effects they inflict

can be passed subtly to those near them or might be transmissible through an afflicted non-player character or character. They make something awful happen, and then their victims intentionally or helplessly spread that awfulness to others.

Conventional disease is an easy pick for a contagion horror, but the gamemaster can add almost any phenomenon to an occult creature's malevolent effects. An entity might pass on a lethal aura that makes loved ones die, or inflicts sadistic misfortune that never quite kills the bearer, or transforms the victims into secret and unknowing slaves of the creature.

Debility Horror

Debility horror is a particularly tricky one to use because it is about helplessness and weakness. While a certain thrill of futility is part of a lot of cosmic horror, heavily emphasizing this can wear on some players. If adding this to a monster, perhaps the best way to handle it is by giving the monster the ability to utterly debilitate one or two crucial abilities, such as the power to talk to anyone about it, or the power to find it. In a more general sense, it might enfeeble the heroes in other ways, weakening their combat abilities or otherwise narrowing their scope of action. If nothing else, monsters like this certainly tend to frighten the players, whether the player characters are feeling bold or not.

Domination Horror

Domination horror is about enthrallment and the loss of volition. The creature seizes the minds or bodies of others and makes them serve its own purposes. This might be a hypnotic mental effect, or a direct seizure of their flesh with an embedded control node, or even a more abstract sort of social or financial domination. The crucial issue is that the creature is making people do things that they very much do not want to do, but have no power or choice to resist.

For extra moral ambiguity, it's possible that the creature's control is not complete. The victim can resist the impulses, but at some terrible cost in physical health, madness, or mental ability. Obedience to the creature becomes a matter of choices as to whether the victim is willing to pay the price to avoid performing the terrible acts demanded of them by their alien master. Domination horrors that allow at least some small measure of resistance play up the moral terror of the creature. Not only does it compel grim obedience, but it shows its victims that they really are willing to do such things if resistance comes at such an awful cost.

Expulsion Horror

Expulsion horror is the terror of not belonging. The creature isolates its victims somehow, forcing them out of their circles of family or community. They might frame the victim as the perpetrator of some horrible crime, or cause their presence to be hurtful or dangerous to their loved ones, or infect them with some loathsome Quality, or even make them become adherents of some utterly outcast social group.

Their victims are alone, abandoned by all they once knew. The powers of these creatures are often perceptual in nature, changing the victim's perception of their social circles or the perceptions of those friends. Others induce physical changes that make the victim a figure of disgust or revulsion in the community. Some simply murder everyone the victim loves, forcing them to stay away from those they care about. The special horror is that of solitude and knowing that no one can help.

Impostor Horror

Impostor horrors are those that assume false identities or usurp existing lives. Their dread lies in the falseness of the creature. When posing as another, it steals the rights and emotional ties that the true person deserves, and when posing as a victim, it plunders the very identity of the one it torments. These horrors often have extensive shape-shifting and mind-reading abilities. The true bearer of an identity might be killed and consumed, or they might just be left to pick up the pieces of the life the creature has shattered. Some victims might be spirited away, used for hideous ends as the impostor takes its place. Identifying an impostor should always be possible, but remain an effort for wary characters.

Mystery Horror

Mystery horrors are about the unknown and the provocation of the players' own imaginations. Mystery horrors don't ever reveal themselves directly until after the victims have been whipped into a proper frenzy of terror, acting only through agents and second-order effects. These horrors show glimpses and hints of their nature, enough to give the victim's imagination something to fix on, but they don't manifest until after their prey has already been driven into a panic.

The natural imagination of the players (and player character's) is going to create most of a mystery horror's terrors. Players are experts at identifying what terrifies them, and if they are given hints and fragments, they'll patch it together into something terrible. Some of these creatures might have the power to manifest as exactly what their victims are terrified of meeting, and might not be able to take tangible form until their prey are suitably frantic.

Pursuit Horror

Pursuit horrors touch on the ancient, primal panic of being chased. Playing out their special terrors requires that the horror be something that the players know is very bad to encounter, and then showing them that the horror knows of the heroes and is hunting them. A monster springing out of nowhere is good for a shock, but an extra-dimensional hound relentlessly seeking them through the angles of space and time allows the players to luxuriate in anticipation.

Pursuit horrors should never be so inexorable that the player characters' efforts at flight and evasion are useless. If the creature can simply teleport to the player characters at any time, then the hope of evasion is lost. There's none of the pleasure of the growing panic as successive efforts at escape are methodically foiled. The player characters need to have a sense that running or hiding is useful if they are to get the full horrific benefit of a chase. Without the rational hope that they can throw off the monster, they'll never get the satisfaction of that hope's bitter failure.

Revulsion Horror

Revulsion horrors are simple; they are disgusting. Something about the monster is just naturally nauseating or repugnant. Biological taboos of excrement, decay, and carrion might play into its nature or some particularly horrific necessity for its existence, or some horrible habit or craving it induces in its victims. Revulsion horrors inspire a desire to flee or destroy them not necessarily because of what they do, but because of what they so manifestly are. Revulsion monsters tend to have special abilities related to the things that make them so repugnant. Jets of filth, horrible urges, reeking stenches, and defilement of beloved principles or beliefs might all figure into their powers.

Sexual Horror

Sexual horrors are the ones easiest to use badly in play. Sexual trauma and sexual identities can be extremely delicate topics for a group, and a gamemaster is advised to simply put this category of horror aside unless they have a very keen understanding of their players. At most, it should be something hinted at and insinuated in the contexts rather than a fact directly pushed at the players.

Particular care should be taken with issues of changed identity or new impulses. For gamemasters that do have a group comfortable with horror of this kind, a simple rule for creating sexual horror is to mingle unwilling categories and alter chosen identities. Making victims experience what they don't want to experience, become what they don't want to become, and be made to desire things that are utterly anathema to their self-conception are all easy roads to revulsion. Even in this case, however, these events are best applicable to non-player characters and peripheral events rather than the player characters themselves; it is just too easy to use them badly in all but the most intimately familiar groups.

Violence Horror

Violence horrors share their particular dread with many of the other varieties, but they play a special role in campaigns where direct confrontation with evil is a viable choice. A violence horror is not deterred by mortal struggles. The player characters know or learn very early that a direct fight with the creature is suicidal, and their only hope of survival is to avoid it long enough to escape or to find its secret weakness. For sorcery-based campaigns, this sort of behavior might be normal for any eldritch horror, but not all campaigns have that trait. It should be possible to escape the horror, even after a sudden clash with it. If the player characters see no rational hope of fleeing from a monster like this, they'll likely just assume that they're doomed and decide to go down fighting. Such a creature might be particularly slow, or it might stop to do something horrible to a person it has downed, or it might be temporarily driven back by some substance. The creature may not even have combat statistics, instead inflicting a certain amount of damage each round on any mortal luckless enough to be caught by it.



CHAPTER 9

A SORCERER OF THE AGE

The thought came vaguely to Conan that the spells of magicians were more closely bound to their personal beings than were the actions of common men to the actors.

— “The People of the Black Circle”

SERAFUS OF NEMEDIA

Born to a noble house in Nemedia, Serafus was favored by order of birth: far enough down the course of inheritance that his elder siblings were expected to carry on with management of the family's estate and holdings, and yet not far enough down to be viewed as unwanted. A childhood and youth spent in studies, whether in his father's meager library, at the feet of a series of tutors, or within the great lyceum in Belverus, his nation's capital.

Despite his family's pious observances toward Mitra, he felt no strong religious fervor. Though possessing a wide breadth of interests, he nonetheless began to favor the forbidden discipline of sorcery, his studies taking him down strange, unwholesome, and dangerous paths. Many pursue magic for power, whether to revenge some past slight, to greater their status amongst their peers, or to gain some illicit taste of the supernatural. Serafus is, instead, a scholar and an academic, wildly obsessed with the nature of sorcery itself, the manifestations of the unreal and the otherworldly.

At the onset of his still-brief sorcerous pursuit, Serafus had a strange and fateful dream in which he was standing upon the shore of a boundless sea within an immense

BACKER CHARACTER

Presented on the following page is a character created by a backer for the *Robert E. Howard's Conan: Adventures in an Age Undreamed Of* Kickstarter campaign, provided here for use by the gamemaster or as a player character.

cavern, of a scale beyond comprehension. Some thing — in semblance most akin to an elderly man with a long staff and a great, tangled beard — borne on a shell-shaped throne beneath which the waves surged and thrashed and twisted, came across these dreaming waters to Serafus, and spoke to him. The elder one, come from the great abyss, offered the Nemedian exactly what he wished, in return for an ephemeral and meaningless price. What use is a soul without knowledge?

To this end, Serafus uses his family's fortune strategically to increase his access to blasphemous knowledge — hiring mercenaries and traders to seek out rare or forbidden volumes — no occult subject or field of magical lore being too outré or damning for his ever-growing hunger. He thus far has kept his studies and his experiments a secret, but he yearns to exert these strange and terrible powers, to feel the exultation of sorcery enacting his will upon the world.



Player characters might encounter Serafus as a potential employer, being hired by the young Nemedian to retrieve some bit of lore from a forgotten ruin, a long-sealed tomb, or even the archives of temple. More than once, Serafus has discovered that the priests of Mitra have in their possession grimoires and other artifacts of great significance, keeping them from the world, and he would gladly put a theft into motion. Alternatively, Serafus might be sought as a source of information, or even as a potential rival, holding onto some volume or talisman of use to another.

ATTRIBUTES

| Awareness | Intelligence | Personality | Willpower |
|-----------|--------------|--------------|-----------|
| 9 | 12 | 11 | 14 |
| Agility | Brawn | Coordination | |
| 7 | 8 | 8 | |

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

| | | | |
|-----------|---|----------|---|
| Combat | — | Movement | 1 |
| Fortitude | — | Senses | 1 |
| Knowledge | 3 | Social | 2 |

STRESS AND SOAK

- Stress:** Vigor 7, Resolve 10
- Soak:** Armor —, Courage —

ATTACKS

- Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 3 1H, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1
- The Abyss Gazes Also (T):** Range M, 5 mental, Blinding, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- Sorcery:** Serafus knows the following spells: *Atavistic Voyage*, *Haunt the Mind*, and *Venom on the Wind*. As well, he is able to craft a wide variety of petty enchantments.
- Thirst for Knowledge:** In his boundless pursuit of lore, Serafus has learned much across a wide range of subjects. He is considered to have Inhuman Intelligence 1 when making Knowledge tests.
- Dreams of the Great Abyss:** Unknown to Serafus, his Patron is an Elder God sometimes at cross purpose with other such beings. The tasks and errands he performs for the elder one occasionally benefits humankind, usually by thwarting greater evils from being done. For this reason, every time Serafus spends Doom while acting towards his Patron's ends, he may attempt a Challenging (D2) Social test. He gains no Momentum from this test, but success returns 1 point of Doom to the pool.

DOOM SPENDS

- Student of an Elder God:** Due to his special tutelage in sorcery at the feet of an Elder God, Serafus may spend 2 Doom to gain the benefit of 1 Fortune point on any test related to Sorcery or arcane Lore. Due to this strange pact, Serafus must pay 1 Doom to use Fortune or Doom in any other way.
- This Mortal Staff:** Rather than gaining Doom instead of suffering a Complication, Serafus may spend 1 Doom (2 in total) to turn any Complication he rolls into an unexpected benefit, a consequence of his Patron Elder God looking out for him. He may do this for multiple Complications, either combining them or handling them as individual strokes of good fortune.





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- Conan the King
- Nameless Cults
- Ancient Ruins & Cursed Cities
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- Conan and the Shadow of the Sorcerer
- Legendary Beasts & Otherworldly Horrors

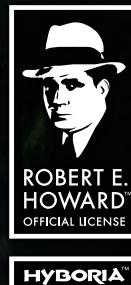
ACCESSORIES

- Gamemaster Screen
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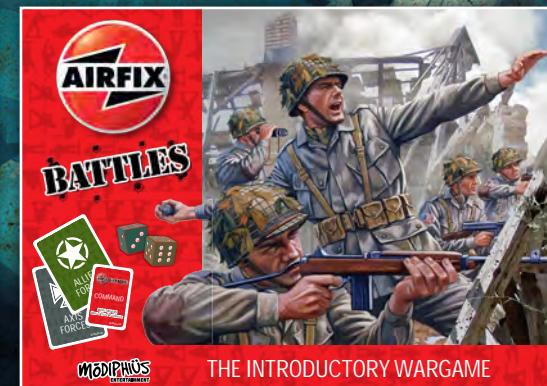
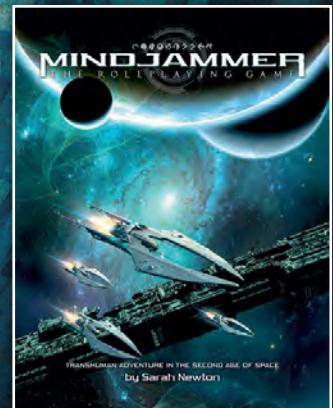
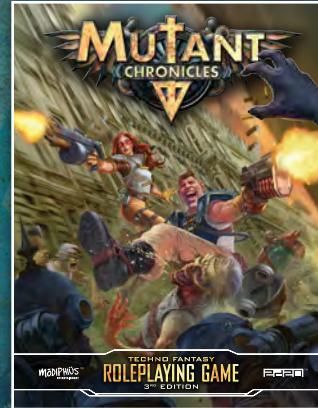
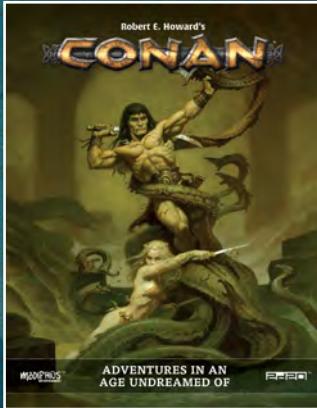


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