

## The Question

At the heart of the Underworld, there is a place where the rivers of oblivion converge and drip from vast cracks and crevices to the immense caverns that sit, spider-like, where all tunnels of the Labyrinth connect; there the waters cascade down into rain shed on the tomb of titans. In this place forsaken by human memory, there is a ziggurat of black stone and unimaginable size, space itself bending to accommodate its height. Centuries ago, a ghost climbed the steps of this forsaken temple, braved howling winds and laughing-mad Whisperers; at the altar he cast off his name, and asked something. And the cavernous depths of the ziggurat answered with one question, which the ghost took in his heart, sheltered and nurtured and let fester until it seeped into his very being.

Now the first level of the temple is dominated by the expanse of Kurnugia, the City From Which None Return, barring the way up and controlling access to the ziggurat's higher levels; its temple district in which reside the prophet-magistrates rises from the flat expanse where the stairs interrupt, while the slave-quarters spill down along the stairs to the earth and the shores of the black lake that pools below the city. Kurnugia is of cyclopean make; enormous slabs of rough-hewn stone and carried by moaning ghost-slaves to be assembled in forts and temple walls whose broken angles and lines reveal the madness of their architects. The shrine-towers of the temple district are made of iron, extracted from the walls of the Labyrinth, their dark facets reflecting the endless agonies of the slaves sacrificed at their top. These are not the living quarters of the priests, who prefer their squat palaces of stone, capped by domes of glass, where they recline on silken cushions while drinking the Wine of Endless Remembrance and smoking exotic herbs in which they mixed the souls of punished slaves, captured in crystal by sorcery and ground to dust.

Theirs are not the lives of their servants, who lead fitful and short existences in their abodes of clay, their narrow alleyways patrolled by sadistic mortwights. The closer to the temple district one is, the higher one's status and the lesser one's freedom; in the plazas facing the temples' doors, janissaries are trained into true war-ghosts by their masters, reshaped into fanatic soldiers with twisted devil-bodies. Far below, beggar-masons gather at the passage of a mere mortwright pleading to be granted a day of work, and chain-gangs are led into the deadly caverns of the Labyrinth to extract the stone to the tune of ancient working songs - but those who fail to find work also escape the eyes of the soldiers, and meet in the darkest alleyways where the stairs are broken and eroded to a gentle slope; there they make plans to kill their betters and steal their riches, or to racket their fellow slaves. Below even them, the fishermen on the shore venture on the waters of the black lake to feed the throng above them, their status as slaves a polite fiction, for who would bother policing them on these deadly flows?

On every turning of the calendar the dim red light of the Nameless Moon, refracted from the cracks in their ceiling into the infinite droplets of the rivers that rain upon the city, casts Kurnugia in a crimson glow. Then the prophet-magistrates gather, and the blood of countless hundreds rains down the steps of the ziggurat, painting the whole city red and marring even the black lake

below. Then the slaves themselves are prone to dancing in the streets, taken with delirious joy, washed in the violence and death that gave them birth. On this day, the priest-king of Kurnugia comes out of his personal temple in his full attire and glory, and raises his hands to the sky; in a blessed moment where the red moon aligns perfectly, all - sky and earth and city and people and waters - are as one, blending into an expanse of pure red that is at once spilled blood and setting sun; in that moment the priest-king asks:

“WHO IS HE?”

He receives no answer. And so the nephwrack lowers his hands, the moment passes, and the tremendous power of the ritual sacrifice is channeled to some other, more practical purpose, by him and his magistrates. But the priest-king is not satisfied, and as he goes back to his chambers he already makes plan to improve the sacrifice, to perfect it, and to finally obtain the answer that he seeks.

(No antagonist stats here; the stats for war ghosts, mortwrights and nephwracks are sufficient for most purposes. The prophet-magistrates are also nephwracks, though weaker than the stated example - Essence 4 and fewer Charms.)

### **Shaping ritual: A Question That Demands Reply**

You have delved into the deepest recesses of the Underworld, and kneeled at the altar of dead gods. Whispers filled your mind - expressions of purest agony, demands to bring death to the world, melancholy remembrance of things lost that can never be recovered. Whether you rein in this madness and make yourself its master or ride its wave with the thrill of pure abandon is up to you, but the angry, confused, sad, painful, *burning* question engraved in your soul will never leave you alone.

#### *Shaping rituals*

- When the sorcerer begins takes a shape sorcery action, he may ask an imperious question, voice booming like thunder and demanding acknowledgement - of his name, the name of his faction or master, or the titles of the dead gods that empowered him, according to his vanity or loyalty. For every subservient character within medium range who answers as loudly as they can, the sorcerer may draw one sorcerous mote, up to a maximum of the highest value of Intimacies towards the thing called upon among all contributors.
- The sorcerer may cultivate the question in his heart like a personal obsession and source of insane focus. He forms a Principle expressed as the question “Who is he?”. This Principle is relevant for the purposes of social influence whenever the character faces the prospect of uncovering the secrets of the Labyrinth or the Neverborn, the lost history of Creation, or the question of faith or loyalty in the dead and dying gods to whom he pledged allegiance, no matter how insincere. Once per day, he may reflexively draw a number of sorcerous motes equal to this Principle’s level; if he chooses to upgrade this Intimacy to a higher level, he instead gains twice the new level.

- It is known to those who study the occult that necromancy draws power from blood; but one who follows the power of dead gods gains even greater power from sacrificing all they hold dear in their name, shedding their attachments to this world until they are nothing but mad, empty shells animated by fanatic devotion and blind hatred of all that exists. Once per day, the sorcerer may take a miscellaneous action to make a sacrifice of a ghost or living being, gaining 3 sorcerous motes, 5 if the sacrifice is a sapient being; furthermore, if the sacrifice is personally the subject of one of the sorcerer's Intimacies, he may roll (Willpower + Intimacy rating) and gain the successes as additional sorcerous motes. All such motes are retained until the next sunrise.

### **Red Moon's Harvest**

**Cost:** 10sm, 2wp

**Keywords:** None

**Duration:** Three rounds

Raking the nails of two fingers across his palms, the sorcerer's blood comes gushing out; he spreads his arms, letting it drip to the ground, and soon the skies turn to black and red clouds gather - then blood rains down from above. This spell affects all characters to medium range of the caster; for every turn that a character has their skin exposed to the rain, they must roll against a poison (Damage 3i/round, Duration 6 rounds, -3 penalty). Characters who are crashed while suffering the effects of Red Moon's Harvest do not take damage from it - instead, they enter a delirious trance, laughing and dancing without a care for their original desires. If they come within short range of a character not under the same effects, they will attempt to make them join their revelry forcefully - though they will not attempt to harm them, they may use grappling to force them to succumb to the rain. This effect lasts for 6 rounds, interrupting the poison's duration - any effects that would reduce the duration of the poison will also reduce this effect's duration.

**Special activation rules:** Red Moon's Harvest can only be cast once per scene, unless reset when a rain-poisoned opponent falls into Initiative Crash.

A sorcerer who knows Red Moon's Harvest as his control spell may concentrate solely on the control of his spell, to the exclusion of any other action - including defense. In this case, he may expand it out to long range on the turn following the casting, and may keep the blood-rain going for as long as he concentrates in this fashion. The blood of the sorcerer is also hallucinogenic in the same manner as the spell itself, allowing it to be used as any ordinary poison provided the sorcerer draws enough blood to cause himself one point of lethal damage; this blood loses his potency at the end of the scene.