

On The Dissemination of Knowledge

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I. Background

Any practitioner worth their weight in salt will have a fully-stocked library. Not only do books in the world of the practice serve as integral and potentially life-saving resources, they are also symbols of status. There are several things a Lord needs to maintain their seat - allies, a tactical mind, and effective tools. All of these things, on some level, come from one source. Different practices have different common monikers for them - tomes, research papers, volumes - but for the purpose of this discussion, they will herein be referred to as 'books.' As the old adage goes, knowledge is power. What this treatise sets out to explore in brief is the history of knowledge in the practice, what institutions exist pertaining to knowledge, and how these institutions shape our history.

To start, one must address common knowledge on how books are disseminated. All of us were once novices so it is only fair to bring everyone to a baseline before in-depth explanations are given. Collated knowledge is typically traded between practitioners in exchange for certain goods and services which are too innumerable to be listed in this text. Book-trading primarily occurs between those who know each other intimately, be they students, friends, offspring, or even rivals. After all, it is far too dangerous to lend out powerful knowledge to unknown agents, lest it disappear into the night or be turned against you. I would hope this to be universally known, but to address any future quibbling I'll say it here. **All knowledge is powerful.**

This system results in knowledge moving slowly, if at all. Practitioners have incentive to hoard what knowledge they do have, across generations even, if said practitioner is tied to a family. Not only that, because one's tendency to hoard knowledge is directly proportional to how useful said knowledge is, even a particularly sought after book might take centuries to spread across the world - if ever. But some works like *Famulus* are nearly universal and updated regularly. How can this be?

II. Independent Researchers

Ah yes, nearly everyone has the mental image of some long-bearded wizard in a deep purple robe sitting in a tower somewhere, working on their spells. What fewer know is that this stereotype actually has some basis in reality. Over 1000 years ago, practitioner families learned that the wisest way to accumulate power over generations was to have a primary heir, concentrating all of a dynasty's resources in a single decisive hand. What happens to all of the talented heirs not quite so lucky? Some strike out on their own, some plot to murder their siblings, and others become *researchers*.

It is the latter this section will focus on. Researchers are practitioners who have devoted their entire careers to plumbing the depths of the practice. Like practitioners at large, most researchers devote themselves to a particular field, although there are some exceptions. Unlike most practitioners however, researchers concern themselves with the accumulation of *knowledge*, not power. This was an effective way for an unlucky sibling to still contribute to the wellbeing of their family, or perhaps less charitably, prove that their kin were wrong in their decision of inheritance. Regardless, not being in a position to squabble for power meant researchers were able to devote all of their time to exploring the practice, and had no incentive to hoard the knowledge. In fact, one of the most notable researchers in the field of War Magic, Antonio Margheriti, would've never become a researcher if not for the untimely death of his father Dominic in a duel and some creative shuffling of the line of succession. But in the world of the practice, politics cannot be avoided entirely. A successful researcher must interact with his peers.

The first scholarly circle formed some time in the 6th century, BCE, wherein early Greek researchers would share knowledge between each other. With an entire life devoted to exploring magic, researchers often circulate their knowledge to earn prestige, and in turn piggyback off the work of others. For centuries, this was the most effective way to circulate knowledge, a practice that entrenched essential texts in the most powerful families - whether that be by having a researcher of one's own in the family or by employing one as a tutor.

III. Scrivener Houses

What is a practitioner to do when they don't belong to a well-to-do family, yet still have that internal spark which thirsts for knowledge? Join a Scrivener House of course! A Scrivener House, is, perhaps predictably, a collection of scribes united by a common purpose. This can vary from organization to organization, but typically does some variation on performing research, preserving knowledge, and disseminating books. Some of the more well-known houses boast greater power and prestige than even the most pedigreed families. The Evangelical Order of St. Barnabas, The Journal of The Spring Court, and Penguin Publishing (no relation) are titans of their respective fields. The roles of Scrivener Houses and independent researchers do differ somewhat.

The most common way for a house to accumulate knowledge is by being gifted a copy of research by one of the aforementioned independents. In olden days, a house was likely to pay for research as well as the right to reproduce it - a task originally done by hand, although more technologically-savvy houses have swapped to typewriters. As time went on however, an academic unable to secure a scrivener contract was more likely to be the subject of ridicule. In modern day, transactions only occur when either the most talented independent researchers or least reputable Scrivener Houses are attached to one end of a given deal. Houses are also known to produce their own research on occasion, but scribes tend to lack the funding, contacts, and creative freedom to produce the most notable of texts. The most vital thing to understand about houses however, is their relationship to the dissemination of knowledge as a whole.

When the reproduction of a text by a Scrivener House is completed, a limited number of copies have been penned and the text is unlikely to be reproduced for some time - if ever. This means that the process for distributing these books is highly selective and only grows more so with more obscure works. Individuals likely to receive copies are the scribes themselves, allies of the Scrivener House, patrons of the house, the author, powerful lords, and talented researchers which the house seeks to woo. An *immensely* popular book might see a total print run of 1,000 copies every decade, a miniscule number. And yet, Scrivener Houses are the primary force in the world of the practice for injecting and disseminating new knowledge.

IV. The Destruction of Knowledge

Scribes are, of course, human - approximately 95% of them anyway. They hold in them their own biases, flaws, and personal vendettas that at times hinder the creation and spread of new research. Both researchers and Scrivener Houses have a great deal of latitude in deciding what works to delve into, replicate, and distribute. It should come as no surprise then that practices which are seen as distasteful to some see less printed works. One need look no further than the evangelical tome *Encyclopaedia Sanctum*, which has seen regular updates ever twenty years more or less since antiquity, as compared to *Kobold Koba'los* - a foundational goblin text which hasn't seen a new revision since the 14th century! Why does this happen?

There is little shortage of options Scrivener Houses have amongst researchers. All across the world, there are bright young mages looking to gain acclaim from the practitioner community from the comfort of their home. This gives Scrivener Houses the ability to selectively produce works which are tasteful, historied, prestigious. What do I mean by that? A 'tasteful' work is one which satisfies certain sensibilities. To most scribes, a book of divining diagrams is more pleasant than a travel guide to the abyss which is more pleasant than a DIY on Goblin arts & crafts. A historied work is one with centuries or millennia of repetition behind it. Many Scrivener Houses were created to produce works in a certain practice, and thus there is exceedingly little space set aside for burgeoning practices such as technomancy. Prestigious works are those most likely to impress patrons and prospective contributors of Scrivener Houses. This means houses are more inclined to produce the work of notable dynasties, exacerbating above problems.

Even with the problems of *creating* aside, texts still need to survive long enough to be circulated if they are to take hold in the practitioner community. Many works in fields such as Goblin magic, Cultism, and Harbingerism, are so repulsive to certain practitioners that they will go out of their way to destroy them. This problem is self-sustaining, with practices unable to accrue credibility as it is difficult for researchers to find works to build on. Zealots continually seek out works to be destroyed and Scrivener Houses refuse to publish new ones.

-The Books you read are not simple inanimate objects. They are shells, carriers of the *ideas* inside of them. You take up a book to gain knowledge, amusement, distraction. The ideas break from their cover, and latch onto your mind. There they settle, grow, reproduce, wither, grow old, and die the death of the forgotten. Ideas strive to survive: only the most powerful do. Or the most insidious.

Consider, the text of a god buried in the Abyss by wise practitioners in ages past. They sought to destroy the name of the god, but here it is in this text. Every time it is read, the name grows in strength a little, settles a bit further into minds and reality. One day, settled in hundreds or thousands or millions of minds, the name could pull the god back up.

Consider a most frustratingly modern of phenomena, the exponential curse. A self-perpetuating ritual, taking the form of some message or "Electronic Mail". Once it has latched into your mind, it is a threat. Share this curse to others, it will say, or I will destroy you.

Consider that ideas are living things. They can be exterminated. Extirpated. Made Extinct. Consider that this may not be from Market Forces, or boredom, or corruption. Perhaps the knowledge you seek is lost for a good *reason*.

-Excerpt from *These Words Live In You* by Mendacious, a Mind-Binder

V. Foundational Texts

There are certain seminal works which charter the path, not only of a practitioner's career, but of their practice as well. For example, *Implementum* has sent entire generations of young practitioners down the path of taking a personal tool connected to one's self, as well as influenced works which include special directions for including an implement in a ritual. Which books become foundational texts and which fade into obscurity is largely decided by Scrivener Houses, as discussed above in 'The Destruction of Knowledge.' But what effects does that have on a given practice?

Once again, I will use evangelism as an example as it has one of the greatest collections of research. I assert that the flood of research into the forces of creation has resulted in a more structured, more catalogued and indeed safer field. Who is to say that the early evangelists, harnessing a power as great as the angels, did not enact incredible and unintentional devastation. I imagine the rampant forces of creation much like that of a cancer, growing beyond control and causing untold damage. Consider for a

moment, the millennia of innovation required to produce the modern rituals and vows which protect evangelists. Were it not for extensive research and tradition, it is my belief that evangelists would unleash a veritable Sodom and Gomorrah anytime they tapped into that all-powerful wellspring of creation.

Consider by contrast a practice like Scourge - which deals fundamentally not with Bogeymen, but with the Abyss, described in Scourge texts similarly as a wellspring of change. Any Scourge will tell you of the inherent danger which lay in staring into the Abyss, but where are the centuries of foundational works in the Scourge field? Far and few between. If there are any volumes cataloguing all of the most notable bogeymen, I have not come across it despite many such works describing thrones. It is my proposition then, that the lack of concrete research in these 'distasteful' fields has created a gap which makes dealing in them more dangerous and wild. Perhaps all fields of the practice may one day be understood with crystal clarity. An element of peril will always exist, but in cataloguing dangers, in sharing the most effective techniques, and in standing on the shoulders of giants, there may be a way to reform unsavory practices into something concrete, reliable, and effective.

-Amongst many of those I have interviewed, enforced education was often marked as one of the great downfalls of local magical traditions. "They did not give us anything new: they burned what we had and built their own lodges atop our ashes" as it was put by a *Thurs* Troll who spoke to me of the times of christianization. This pattern has often repeated itself in the history of practice, as in mundane history: those perceived to have "lost" are forced, either in the moment or in the generations thereafter, to accept and work within the Practice taught to them by the "winners".

This is often portrayed at the time as a natural victory of superior Practice, of more sensible frameworks of knowledge, of more fundamental understanding of magic. While it is sometimes the case that western practitioners have had superior force, trickery, or audacity on their side, none of these strictly imply the superiority of the system of western Practice itself. A J'inn Oni once joked with me that "They shoot your horse, and claim to have won the race"

It seems to be agreed upon, by both those I have interviewed and the historical journals of conquering practitioners, that this front of superiority is in fact part of the point of the whole exercise. By not only claiming that their Practice is superior, but in forcing the children of their foes to learn western Practice (if they are taught at all), it

strengthens those very same claims. If there are none left to practice in older ways, then there is none to oppose a practitioner when they say that they have won. At the same time, this put the original conqueror and their descendants at an advantage. "In one hundred years, I was taught what his children learned in ten." One Starlit Heartless told me of their now deceased master.

It could be said that the standards themselves were a weapon...

-Excerpt from *Oni Wars: An Oral History, Volume 1: Prelude* by Lady Carillon, practice undisclosed.

VI. The Computing Revolution

The digital age is perhaps the most exciting thing to happen to the world of the practice since the Seal of Solomon. With the ability to instantaneously share information and communicate, previously obscure texts may be shared without sacrificing power. There is still the rampant distrust within practitioner communities to overcome, but the advent of computers has the potential to extend scholarly circles from beyond the scions of prominent families to practitioners everywhere. Research new and old can be scanned and uploaded, at which point there is virtually no limit to the number of practitioners that can be influenced by it. Not only that, but this also allows for more diverse contributions as magic is shared not only from stuffy stone towers, but also from battlefields where the most innovation tends to happen. Necessity is the mother of invention after all.

Anyone who believed this is without caveat is naïve and likely unsuited to the practice. There exist numerous obstacles to such a bright future. First and foremost, spirits are sluggish in accepting technological change and even practitioners tend to lag behind the times. I cannot be certain how or even if the universe will attempt to penalize those gaining knowledge in this way, but we live in a world that detests the new so it certainly would not surprise me. As the sharing of knowledge over the internet becomes more widespread, practitioners should prepare for sudden outages, drive corruptions, and plain old user error as the universe stretches to accommodate this sudden shift

from precedent. Perhaps magical knowledge learned over the internet will be less potent than its paper counterpart for a time, but this should eventually normalize.

One should also keep in mind that while this is an innovation many stand to benefit from, a privileged few stand to lose quite a lot more. It is difficult enough for independent researchers to distinguish themselves from amongst their peers without the sudden entrance of potentially thousands into the rat race of publication. Scrivener Houses also stand to lose much from the arrangement. Powerful houses have remained that way by tightly controlling the flow of knowledge. As always with change, violence is likely. I shudder to think what steps Scrivener Houses might take to stem such a change, but technomancers are likely to suffer the most. Even still, these efforts are not likely to succeed. A bell cannot be unrung.

VII. In Conclusion

If nothing else, it is my sincere desire that this text has inspired you to consider the seeds from which magical knowledge is derived. The practice did not always resemble what it does today. There was a time without Oni. There was a time without demesne and implement. There was a time without us. It is in the preservation and dissemination and knowledge that advancements are made. Ponder the theory that Chronomancy emerged from blood mages building on the practice, differentiating themselves, and eventually growing so skilled at using time in transactions that the field broke off from blood magic entirely.

What new fields are there to be discovered? How might existing practices be made safer or more effective? These are the questions I challenge future generations to answer. No man is an island, and knowingly or not, all practitioners are influenced by the work of those who came before them. A work published today may very well redefine the practice forever. It all lies in who reads its words and decides they are true.

Consider what has been discussed thus far. In the time before history, practitioners traded scraps of knowledge, distrustful that anything they gave away would one day be used as a tool to bring about their downfall. Small flames in the darkness that is ignorance were lit, linking brilliant minds which pushed forward the practice step

by step. In time, these select minds were joined by orders of scribes seeking to catalogue, replicate, and advance magic. Entire disciplines have been sculpted by what works rose to prominence, setting forth a precedent and basis to be improved upon. Equally, practices have been directed by what knowledge was lost forever to the sands of time. In the new and beckoning age, there exists an opportunity to revolutionize how knowledge is generated and shared, obstacles though there may be.

A practitioner cannot hope to achieve greatness if he or she fails to recognize the immense value inherent in knowledge. Books are more than dusty collections of words - they are the keys to unlocking the true potential of magic. When a new practitioner awakens, they are affirming to the universe that their words matter. I hope the next generation recognizes this to its fullest potential.