



Phelantar's Guide
to
Poisons and Curses for
The 13th Age Roleplaying Game



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Curses

Curses are minor, but persistent and difficult to remove, magical effects that cause trouble or harm for the poor afflicted fool. Some curses are much more potent and dangerous, but these are also commensurately rarer. Most people will meet or know someone who has been cursed for their infidelity at some point in their lives, but nobody in several Ages has seen the Curse of The White Scourge enacted.

Very little magical talent is needed to inflict a minor curse on someone, merely the knowledge, the time, and the correct materials. The more potent the curse, the more magical power is required, growing exponentially. Some of the necessary power can be mitigated by using special materials or spending more time gathering the energies or even multiple participants. The line between afflicting a curse and casting a magical ritual begins to blur very quickly as the curses become more potent.



Any character (or NPC) can cast a minor curse. For a non-magical user, a curse takes between 2-4 hours to enact. A magic user can cut this down to less than an hour. In addition, it takes special materials and components. These can vary depending on the curse, but almost always includes something taken from the target (blood, clothing, hair, valued possession) to use as a focal object. Generally, these materials are not expensive and usually not difficult to come by in a decent sized town. The cost of a large meal or a night at a decent inn can frequently get what one might need for a minor curse.

A curse, in many ways, is a very loose thing to perform. The same curse performed by different people might be done different ways. One might chant and dance in a dark, incense-filled room with the focal object at the center. Another might have to wait for a stormy night and draw cryptic arcane symbols in the muddy ground with a quartz crystal while carrying the focal object. If a character is performing a curse, they should be encouraged to make up something fun and



interesting to describe how they're inflicting the curse. A GM should similarly be unique and strange if an NPC is performing one.

To inflict a curse, the character has to learn how to do the curse, gather the materials, perform the ritual, and make a Background check at a DC 20. Typically, this background check will be made with Wisdom or Charisma, but a player who can make a case for something else should certainly be allowed to do so. If players go above and beyond the requirements (getting the perfect focal object, spending 8 hours instead of 2, and so on) they should get a bonus to their check for each extra thing they do. These bonuses do stack with one another. If the player does not succeed, the curse does not take effect, but it can be attempted again once players gather new ritual materials and wait a full 7 days.

So what does a minor curse do? Mechanically it has two effects. First is that inflicts a -1 to one attribute solely for purposes of Background rolls. A curse of infidelity mentioned earlier probably has a penalty when the victim rolls Background checks involving Charisma, for example, though the caster might instead inflict a curse on Wisdom instead. There should be few concrete elements to a curse. Even the examples given later should be tailored to the player (or GM's) needs.

The second effect is that the curse has a Quirk, much like a magical item. And yes, it counts as a magical item for purpose of overloading chakras. The quirk is determined by the caster after the ritual is performed and a character has a lot of freedom here to create as well, though typically an ironic curse is most popular. When a curse is inflicted on a character, instead of determining when the quirk comes out themselves, the GM will decide every so often that the curse has taken effect. For a minor curse, this shouldn't happen more than once or twice a session.

Curse of Infidelity

-1 Charisma and the person cursed frequently embarrasses themselves (acting like a klutz, inappropriate choice of words) in some manner while around people they find attractive.

The Bully's Curse

-1 Strength or Dexterity and the person cursed acts meek and timid in the face of authority (moral, legal, organizational).

Curse of the Dullard

-1 Intelligence and the person cursed has difficulty remembering basic facts and information for short periods of time. They might forget their name, how to ride a horse, where they're at, or what they're working on.



Curse of Weakness

-1 Constitution and the person cursed becomes incredibly sensitive to pain and discomfort. A paper cut might feel like a gaping wound, being saddle sore might nearly cripple them, a bruise might feel like a shattered bone.

Lesser curses (more frequently known as hexes) are more potent than minor curses, though they still pale in comparison to major curses. They are also more difficult to learn and perform as well as usually requiring some magical talent. The benefit is that hexes are also more difficult to dispel and can be performed on something more than an individual. For example a family could be hexed, as could a house or a sword. The scope is still limited, however. A single family could be cursed, but not their extended family or their entire bloodline. A house could be cursed, but not an entire estate.

Casting a hex is not very different than a minor curse. Hexes take more effort, materials, and time, however. A typical hex takes 6-8 hours to cast, even for a dedicated magical user. It requires the use of two focal objects, as well as many more materials or perhaps more expensive materials. Perhaps most difficult of all, however, is the knowledge of how to perform the ritual. Minor curses are common and even a small village will have someone who knows a few of those. Finding how to inflect a hex is a bigger task and might even be a small adventure in and of itself for a player seeing it out. They might have to study with a night hag, find and decipher a tome of magic, or spend a great deal of time researching how to create it from scratch.

For a player to cast a hex, they must first take the **Hex Casting** feat. Any character or class can take this new Adventurer Tier feat, much like the Ritual Casting feat, and a character who gets the Ritual Casting feat for free can instead take Hex Casting. Unlike Ritual Casting, individual hexes are acquired during play. Once players have acquired a hex, the procedure is similar to a minor curse. They need two focal objects, the ritual knowledge, the hexing materials, and time. They then roll against a DC of 30. Again, this will typically use Wisdom or Charisma, but players and GM have flexibility to use something more appropriate if they need it. Additional time or materials can still be used to gain a bonus to the roll. An Adventurer Tier character is likely to require this in order to cast any hex at all.

Mechanically, hexes have more options. A hex can be used like a more potent minor curse, with a -2 penalty to an attribute (or -1 to two attributes) for purposes of background checks and a quirk that occurs more often. In this case, the player or GM creates it exactly how they would a minor curse. But if more detrimental effects are desired, add one or two of the following effects.

- Victim takes +1d4 additional damage per level
- In a particular circumstance relating to the curse, the victim rolls 2d20 for rolls and takes the lower of the two.



- Victim deals 1d4 per level less damage per hit.
- Victim has a -3 to defenses to be spread appropriate to the curse (-1 to all defenses, -3 to a single defense, -2 to one defense and -1 to another)
- Upon a missed attack, you deal the miss damage to yourself or an ally
- You receive one less die of healing when you are healed in battle.
- Once per session, the GM may ask you to re-roll any dice roll you make.

Here are a couple of examples, building off two of the minor curses earlier.

Hex of Enfeeblement

-2 to Strength, -1 to AC, -2 to PD. The victim or victims are frequently in a state of pain or discomfort from even the most minor of daily things for short periods of time. Clothing feels like steel wool, walking over rough terrain is akin to stepping on glass, and aches are increased tenfold.

Mansion of Madness

While in this house or mansion, all characters have a -1 to Intelligence, a -1 to Wisdom, and upon a missed attack the victims do miss damage to themselves or an ally. The victims have occasional, but severe, problems with reality and memory. They may forget information, see things that don't exist, don't see things that do exist, or otherwise perceive things in an odd or strange way.

Breaking A Curse

So the a player (or maybe multiple players) have been cursed or hexed and they want that sorted right away. Maybe that shiny new fort given to them by a local lord has been cursed for generations and it needs to be broken. No curse is unbreakable. Every curse or hex has a breaking condition that will remove it. Minor curses have minor conditions. Hexes have bigger and more difficult conditions. Every curse or hex can be broken by destroying the focal items beyond any hope of repair. When a player or the GM creates a curse, they must set a condition or conditions that will break it. Taking additional conditions which break it will add a bonus to the roll to inflict the curse.

For minor curses, the victim might have to apologize or otherwise make amends for what caused them to be cursed. An adulterer might have to apologize and offer support to their (possibly former) spouse or significant other. A miser might have to donate to charities or otherwise help those in need. A know-it-all might have to spend time teaching people instead of lecturing them. It is a task which should require effort, but not in excess.

For a hex, the effort must be greater. The might have to hunt down the same tome of magic used to cast the hex originally and destroy it with holy flame. They might have to spend days cleaning a cursed house with arcane reagents and elemental infused incense. A certain monster



must be slain and its body used as an arcane ritual of dispelling. Removing a hex should be an adventure to itself, although probably not one that takes many sessions to resolve.

Epic Curses

More powerful curses exist than a hex. There are curses which haunt families for generation. Some curses doom entire towns to tragedy and destruction until only haunted ruins remain.. Some artifacts are so powerfully cursed that their names, as well as the names of their holders, are passed down for Ages as part of tales of woe and tragedy.

So how do you perform an epic curse? You don't. Epic curses aren't a game mechanic, they're a plot device. They should be made unique and special for the particular campaign, character, or story. Learning how to cast an epic curse should be a big part of a campaign, along with collecting the materials and actually casting it. Stopping an epic curse from being cast, or breaking one that already has, should similarly be a real focal point for a campaign. Exactly how they work, what they do, or what they require is up to a GM or their group to determine.

Here are some ideas that you can use as starting points or plot hooks.

The Doom of Horakth

This curse wiped a city called Horakth from the map, literally. No historian or scholar has ever determined where Horakth might have been or when it existed.

The Curse of the Lost

This curse removes the target(s) from all memory and writing. For all intents and purposes, they cease to exist. They cannot normally be seen, heard, or touched. If someone does manage to perceive the victim, they immediately forget about them shortly thereafter. Even writing is not fully immune from this effect, with the ink fading after a few months.

Fate of the val Herbests

Every member of the val Herbest family, be they blood related or not, is cursed to rise from their grave after their death and serve the lich known only as the Heir of Bone. No attempt to avoid the curse (such as burning their body) or to end the family line through lack of children has thus far succeeded.

The Blade of Karlet

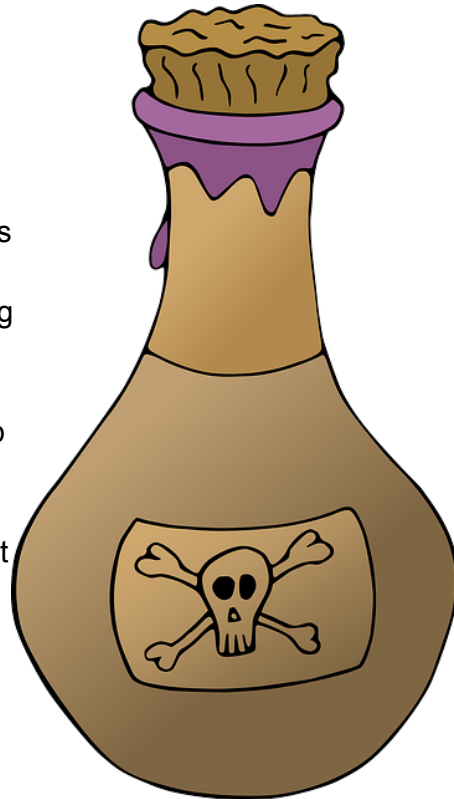
The bearer of this silver blade is doomed to kill everybody he holds dear and destroy everything he believes in. Even death is no release, as the bearer will live to a ripe old age.



Poisons

Poisons are the dirty solution to many of life's problems. Merchants poison successful rivals. Nobles make succession cleaner with careful application of toxic chemicals. Adventurers poison nests of kobolds and goblins poison the wells of towns. It seems obvious to say that most poisons are intended to kill, but the reality is that poisons can be a much more subtle tool in a conflict than merely killing a rival. Weaken a gladiator before a big match and clean up on the betting. Make a business rival ill before a key negotiation and steal a contract out from under him. Fight a duel with a poisoned blade to make up for your lack of skill.

Despite the perception that poison is a "low" tactic, only fit for thugs and savages, the reality is that poisons of all sort are used at every level of society, from the gutters to the halls of nobility. It may be gauche, it may be frowned on, it may be seen as dirty, but that doesn't stop it from being effective and that's what continues to bring people to use it to solve their problems.



Poisons tend to come in several distinct varieties. The weakest poisons, often nicknamed miasmas, are also the only ones not intended to kill outright. Miasmas weaken the victim, physically or mentally, often emulating some sort of illness or ailment. Banes are the most straightforward poisons, killing their victims within hours or days. Many banes cause a great deal of pain or suffering as they kill their victims. The last and most subtle of poisons are nicknamed toxins or corruptions. These poisons kill their victims over weeks, months, or even years. The best are almost indistinguishable from some sort of sickness or old age.

Players can apply poisons to a weapon the same way they would a magical oil or a rune. The poison will then be applied to anybody being hit with that weapon over the course of a fight. Applying them to something else, like say the spoon of an unsuspecting diner, is a different story. This requires a Background roll, appropriate for the occasion and character tier. Poisoning a mug of ale in a run down tavern might be a normal adventurer tier (DC 15) background check. Poisoning the an ambassador while at a banquet set by the the highest noble in the land is probably going to be a very hard epic tier (DC 35) background roll.



More importantly, this roll is done secretly by the GM, on behalf of the player. The player indicates their background, the attribute they are using (frequently Dexterity, but Wisdom or Intelligence might be appropriate too), and the GM makes the roll. The GM indicates to the player how successful it appears to their character.

Some poisons presented here operate in multiple stages: the initial dose, getting better, and getting worse. At every full rest up, a character who has been poisoned rolls a saving throw. Bonuses may be applied from magic items or class features may be used, but they do not stack with one another. You can get the benefit from a magic spell or the benefit from an antidote, but not both at the same time. On a successful saving throw, the poison improves by one stage. If this saving throw is at the weakest stage, then the poison has been overcome or otherwise purged from the character. On a failure, the poison worsens by one step. If this failure is at the most severe step, the character is now dying and must make death saves. Characters do not continue to take HP damage from poisons while dying.

So, now a character is dying. How long do they take to die? That's a narrative question up to the GM and the players, not a mechanical question. In a gritty and dangerous game, that might be it right then and there. The character rolls a death save every few minutes or hours. In a lighter game, perhaps the character only rolls every day or two, long enough for their friends to rush off and find some last minute desperate cure. A successful death save at this point doesn't cure the character, it merely allows them to continue on with the party as they are dying. Whichever choice is more fun for your group, that's how it works.

Adventurer Tier poisons

Blackscale Venom

Distilled from the venom of a small aquatic lizard, this poison is rarely fatal in and of itself, but it causes extreme pain and partial paralysis for some time after being applied making the victim vulnerable in combat.

Initial Effect: 5 ongoing poison damage and -1 to attack rolls and damage after application. Normal save ends.

Mindbite

This alchemical mixture attacks the mind, making it difficult to focus or think very clearly. Victims typically feel symptoms similar to the flu or a bad cold. It is almost never fatal, but tends to linger a long time.

Initial Effect: -1 to MD and -1 to Intelligence and Wisdom for Background checks. Against NPCs, the Background penalties instead apply to attack rolls and PD. The saving throws for Mindbite are a hard (16+) saves.

First Made Save: -1 to MD.

Second Made Save: The poison has been neutralized.



First Failed Save: -1 to MD and -2 to Intelligence and Wisdom for Background checks. Against NPCs, the Background penalties instead apply to attack rolls and PD. Mindbite does not progress further after the first failed save.

Greenthorn

For hundreds of years, this was almost exclusively used by the dark elves, but it's slowly become more available to people elsewhere. Greenthorn kills amazingly quickly and with surprisingly little pain or symptoms. By the time they know they've been poisoned, it's usually too late.

Initial Effect: 3 ongoing damage per level (max 12I) and the target can never have more than 75% of their max HP (round down). If they have more than this, they immediately are brought to that point.

First Made Save: 3 ongoing damage per level (max 12) and the target can never have more than 90% of their max HP (round down)

Second Made Save: The poison has been neutralized.

First Failed Save: 5 ongoing damage per level (max 20) and the target can never have more HP than their staggered value. If they have more than this, they immediately are brought to that point.

Second Failed Save: The target is dying and must begin making death saves.

Champion Tier poisons

Friendsbane

This is an unusual poison in that does no damage in and of itself, but instead influences the behavior and perception of the victim. People dosed with friendsbane go into a berserk frenzy, attacking friend and foe alike in a crazed rage. The victim frequently expires at the end of the rage as their heart gives way or blood vessels in their brain rupture.

Initial Effect: The target is Confused and does +1d4 damage per level on hit. Miss damage is doubled.

First Made Save: The target is Dazed and Hampered.

Second Made Save: The poison has been neutralized.

First Failed Save: The target is Confused and does +1d6 damage per level on hit. Miss damage is doubled and applies to both the target and the victim.

Second Failed Save: The target is dying and must begin making death saves.

Vampire's Kiss

It's said that powerful vampires, blessed with extraordinary dark gifts, have the power to charm the unwilling and make them their servants or even just to feed from them. This concoction emulates that legendary power and is condemned by even the most base and vile of criminals. However, the mages and alchemists who make it can't keep it in stock and sell it for staggering prices which speaks more towards how popular it is. Each vial must be custom made so that the victim is charmed by the poisoner.



Initial Effect: This is exactly like a Charm Person spell as if cast by a 5th level character.

First Made Save: Target is still Charmed, but has a +2 to their next saving throw.

Second Made Save: The poison has been neutralized.

First Failed Save: The target is Charmed and the poisoner has a +2 to any roll made to influence the victim.

Second Failed Save: The target's save to break the charm effect when made to attack themselves or their allies is now a hard save (16+). Vampire's Kiss does not progress further after the second failed save.

Basilisk Blood

Basilisk's blood is considered one of the toxic and acidic substances in existence, so it's no surprise that people have attempted to weaponize it. This is no good for subtle work like poisoning a spoon, as the blood will eat through almost any substance given enough time and it tends to make organic materials like food smoke and develop a texture like gelatin before solidifying altogether. But when something just needs to die screaming, there are few better choices

Initial Effect: 20 ongoing poison damage and the target is Vulnerable. It takes two normal (10+) saves to end this effect.

Epic Tier poisons

Black Omen

This poison is famous or, perhaps more accurately, infamous for the number of people it has slain for purposes of altering lines of succession as well as the many cases of blackmail it has enabled. It's so popular because it is a two-stage poison and only when both stages have been applied does it take lethal effect. This generally defeats tasters or other methods of detecting poisons since the poison is largely harmless until both doses have been taken. The only symptom that the first dose has been taken is a slight weakness and susceptibility to illness for a few days. The only saving grace is that black omen is extremely rare due to the difficulty of creating it.

Initial Effect (1 dose) -1 Con. Unlike other poisons, only time (approximately 7-10 days) and magical antidote effects can remove this from a victim, not saving throws.

Initial Effect (2 doses): Ongoing 30 poison damage and the victim is both Weakened and Vulnerable.

First Made Save: Ongoing 25 poison damage and the victim is Weakened.

Second Made Save: Ongoing 20 poison damage.

Third Made Save: The poison has been neutralized.

First Failed Save: Ongoing 30 poison damage and the victim is Stunned and Vulnerable

Second Failed Save: The target is dying and must begin making death saves.

Deathstalker



This poison's origins are shrouded in mystery. Some claim that it's distilled from the blood of a long dead god, others say that it's the essence of the evil itself. Whatever the origin, deathstalker hasn't been created for hundreds of years. Vials found in ancient tombs and wizards towers are the only source in the current age. But even a single vial can kill hundreds of people, with a single drop being enough to fell the average man within a minute. Unlike many poisons, this almost immediately begins rotting the victim from the inside. Even if the victim lives, they're often crippled with debilitating lingering injuries.

Initial Effect: 40 ongoing necrotic damage, Vulnerable to magical attacks, and the victim has to choose a permanent -1 penalty to one of their attributes. This penalty affects any derived stats (HP, initiative, attack rolls, etc). This penalty can only be reversed with an epic level magical healing ritual, regardless of the current status of the poison.

First Made Save: 30 ongoing necrotic damage and Vulnerable to magical attacks

Second Made Save: 20 ongoing necrotic damage

Third Made Save: The poison has been neutralized.

First Failed Save: 40 ongoing necrotic damage, Vulnerable to magical attacks, and the victim has to choose a second attribute to take a penalty.

Second Failed Save: 40 ongoing necrotic damage, Vulnerable to magical attacks, and the penalty to both attributes increases to -2.

Third Failed Save: The target is dying and must begin making death saves.

Antidotes

Antidotes come in two forms. First is a general antidote which is moderately effective against a wide variety of toxins. Second is the antidote specific to a particular poison. General anti-poison potions are separated by tier and cannot be used against a poison of a higher tier, but they can be used against one of a lower tier with greater effect. Specific antidotes can only be used against that particular poison and are more rare and expensive, but have greater effect than a general anti-toxin.

Adventurer Tier antidotes - 100gp for 1 dose of general, 300gp for 1 dose of specific

- +1 to saving throws with general antidote, +2 with specific antidote
- Only usable against Adventurer Tier poisons

Champion Tier antidotes - 250gp for 1 dose of general, 750 for 1 dose of specific

- +1 to saving throws with general antidote, +2 with specific antidote
- +2 to saving throws against Adventurer Tier poisons.

Epic Tier antidotes - 1000gp for 1 dose of general, 2500 for 1 dose of specific



- +1 to saving throws with general antidote, +2 with specific antidote
- +2 to saving throws against Champion Tier poisons.
- +3 to saving throws against Adventurer Tier poisons



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