

THE MARSIAN MAGICIAN

[*Magus Marsicus*]

Before the rise of Rome, the Marsians [*Marsii*] inhabited strategic mountain passes in central Italia. The Marsians were allies of Rome during the Samnite and Punic Wars and were granted Roman citizenship after staging a minor uprising in the Marsic War. Although the separate nation of Marsi has disappeared, the *Marsii* retain many of their local traditions, including snake magic. Marsian magicians possess potent healing and water spells using snakes and their venom. While most Marsians remain near their ancestral homeland, some magi travel throughout the Imperium as itinerant healers, soothsayers and mystics.

SNAKE MAGIC

Legend maintains that the Marsians are descended from Telegonus, the son of Circe and Ulysses, which accounts for their magical powers. The *Marsii*, however, attribute their abilities as a gift from Angitia, the goddess of snakes and healing. The Marsian magician learns how to charm snakes into a docile slumber. Through their venom, snakes have the power to harm or heal. In the *Aeneid*, Virgil relates how Umbro, a Marsian warrior-priest from Marruvia, has the “gift of soothing vipers and vile-breathing watersnakes by a sung rune or stroking into sleep: he calmed their rabidness and by his skill relieved men bitten by them.”

Marsian magicians perform the Rite of Snakes [*Serpentalia*] in honor of Angitia, Mistress of Serpents, on May 1. The magi solemnly walk through Marsian villages carrying writhing handfuls of poisonous snakes to the shore of Lake Fucinus. At the water’s edge, the Marsian magicians proceed to cover a cult statue of Angitia with the living snakes. In return, the goddess renews her sacred pact with the Marsian people to grant them the spiritual gift of healing.

VENOMOUS SNAKES

Aegyptian Cobra [*Aspis*]

A resident of hot dry climates, such as Aegyptus and the North African provinces. When threatened, it raises itself into the air and spreads its dull black, unmarked hood. Its venom will stop a man’s heart.

Blood Viper [*Haemorrhoids*]

An enormous snake whose venom immobilizes and causes uncontrolled bleeding from all parts of the body. It is said that the creature likes to drink the blood from its victims.

Dust Devil [*Prester*]

An aggressive desert snake not afraid to use its fangs. Its bite causes the skin to turn a bright red, as if the blood were boiling. The body then swells into a bloated mass, producing a horrific death.

Horned Viper [*Cerastes*]

This poisonous snake has jagged markings on its back and hornlike projections above each eye. Relatives include the sand viper [*hammodytes*] and the hawk snake [*cenchris*], which possesses a spotted underbelly that resembles polished marble. The *cenchris* always slithers in a straight path.

Rot Snake [*Seps*]

Deceptively tiny, the *seps* could be the most dangerous snake in the Imperium. Its venom putrefies flesh and bone; as the corruption spreads, the body withers into a sticky black puddle.

Thirsty Snake [*Dipsas*]

While its bite causes little initial pain, the venom of the *dipsas* quickly invades the victim and dries up the body’s moisture. The poison burns deep inside, creating an unquenchable thirst with fatal results.

Turtle Snakes [*Chersydros* and *Chelydrus*]

Amphibious serpents native to North Africa. Often mistaken for submerged turtles, these snakes can be recognized by a telltale trail of bubbles they leave in their wake. Kin to turtle snakes is the river adder [*natrix*] or “polluter of water” which strikes underwater without warning.

LAKE FUCINUS

[*Fucinus Lacus*]

A grove sacred to Angitia called Lucus Angitae is near the Lake Fucinus, a mystical freshwater lake lacking a visible outlet. The lake was known for its sudden and sharp rises and falls in water level (often exceeding 40 feet), resulting in flooding and displacement of local populations. However, resettlement would occur after each flood since the soil is so fertile. Numerous large-scale engineering projects to drain the lake using artificial outlets [*emissaria*] have failed. The drains have managed to stabilize the lake's water level.

The emperor Claudius was fascinated by the peculiar lake and often staged 50-ship *naumachia* with over 19,000 combatants on its waters, despite the protests of the *Marsii*. A silver Triton remains in the center of the lake. The Triton holds a seashell to its mouth; the shell is connected to underground pneumatic pipes and machinery so that it can signal blasts during the naval games.

Because of their link to water, Marsian magicians receive bonus magic points based on the nature and proximity of natural bodies of freshwater:

Body of Water	Bonus MPs
Stream or Pond	1
River or Lake	2
Lake Fucinus	3

Proximity	Bonus MP Multiplier
Within one mile	x1
Within senses	x3
Physical contact	x5

MARSIAN SPELLS

[*Carmina Marsica*]

"You are about to shed many tears, and you will hurry back to me, drawn by extraordinary drugs and even the recitation of Marsian spells will not help you recover your sanity"

- Canidia the *venefica*, from Horace

The Marsians have passed down the following spells as secret lore:

Dew of Angitia

Type: Transform **Power:** 3

Origin: Marsian **Complexity:** 3

Ritual: Mix the venom of a water snake with a secret blend of mild Marsian herbs. Soak a clean cloth in the solution. Mutter the sleepy charm of the Mother of Serpents while squeezing the cloth into the mouth of the poisoned one.

Effect: Creates a potent anti-venom effective against snakebites, stings and deliberate poisonings.

Fucinus' Mirrors

Type: Transform **Power:** 2

Origin: Marsian **Complexity:** 4

Ritual: Stare at your reflection in water cupped in your hands. Let the water trickle slowly from your fingers while imagining the cool, quiet waters of Lake Fucinus.

Effect: Allows the magus to calm others as if he had a temporary Harmony skill rating of 10. This augmented skill lasts for fifteen game turns.

Snake Charm

Type: Bind **Power:** 1

Origin: Marsian **Complexity:** 2

Ritual: Stare at the serpent until you are mimicking its movements. Softly sing the wedding hymn of Angitia. For larger or enraged snakes, stroke the creature's scaly head or belly.

Effect: Calms a snake, rendering it harmless. The snake may be handled without fear until the magus releases his hold on the serpent.

