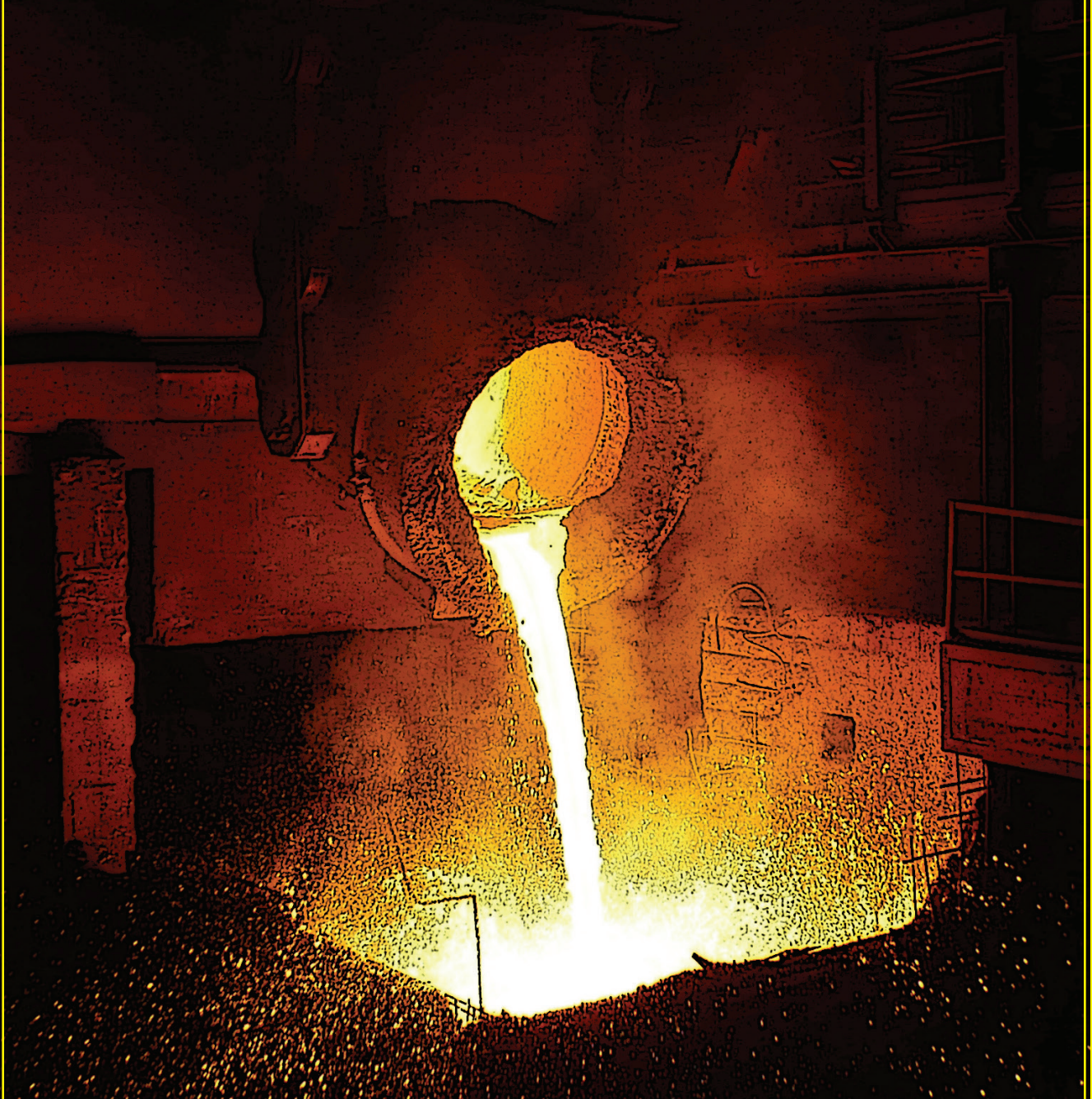


# MATERIALS OF ANCIENT EMPIRES



By Derek Holland & the Skirmisher Game Development Group



**T**he idea of long-lost cultures that were technologically or magically superior to those of the current era of a game setting is fairly common in both fantasy and science fiction. Following are two dozen materials that were developed by ancient societies but which can no longer be created without the assistance of powerful magic or technology.

All stats presented here are for “Basic” OGL games like *Labyrinth Lord* and *Mutant Future* but can be easily converted to any game system, especially d20-based ones. Many of the materials can also fit into modern, fantasy, science-fiction, or post-apocalyptic settings as a storyteller desires.

Prices for someone with the proper resources and abilities to create a certain amount of the materials in question are listed in parentheses, but cost for a third party to purchase such materials might be substantially higher (e.g., twice as much).

### **2D Steel (9,000 gp per square foot)**

More a novelty than a useful material these days, 2D steel has only two dimensions. It is almost impossible to handle it safely without magic and, if anyone does so, they suffer 6d6 points of damage and must save versus death or lose d4 fingers. If a piece hits the ground at an angle, it cuts into the depths of the earth and eventually ends up in the planet’s core. Some have turned small pieces of 2D steel into blades of magical weapons and the base damage from these is multiplied by 10.

### **Ablative Steel (25,000 gp per pound)**

This metal reforms itself after taking damage. Even if turned to gas, it will retake its original shape after the heat or magical effect is gone. Armor made from ablative steel takes damage for its wearer and never has to be repaired. Every time the wearer is hit with physical or energy attacks, reduce damage by four points to a minimum of one. The downside of using ablative steel is that it adheres to other pieces of ablative steel. As soon as they touch, the pieces are effectively glued together. To pull them apart requires *Telekinesis* spells cast at the 11th level or higher or similar magic.

### **Alchemy Stone**

#### **(3,000 gp per gallon affected per day)**

This odd mineral was created to make transformations a bit easier and usually affects water. If placed into water, a typical stone turns the water into acid. If it is left in the acid a full day or is placed into a container of acid, it turns the liquid into a base. If left in the base for a day or placed in a container of base, it turns the liquid into water. Rarer forms of alchemy stones reproduce materials they touch or turn water into specific reagents.

### **Coil Sword (900 gp)**

This was not developed as a weapon but rather as a way of transporting wire. If the grip is squeezed, the sword

extends to 20 feet. The wielder can make attacks on everyone in a line 20 feet long by a half-inch wide, inflicting damage of d12. If attacked, the blade of the sword has an armor class of -2 and ten hit points. If the sword takes 10 or more points of damage, it simply breaks at the point where it received it. Many swords in use today are shorter than 20 feet and thus have reduced range (although their damage remains the same).

### **Copper Siphon (3,000 gp per pound)**

This treated metal draws liquids through its mass and ejects it forcefully. While the siphons were made for fountains and aqueducts, small pieces can nonetheless be turned into weapons. A two-pound chunk the size of a short sword can throw one gallon per round to a range of 50 feet and inflict d4 points of damage to a single target. Much larger pieces, weighing as much as a ton, can be used to destroy drawbridges by drawing water from a moat or other reservoir and usually do 4d6 points of damage out to a range of 500 feet.

### **Endurance Steel (600 gp per pound)**

This metal was used mostly in the form of horseshoes by the culture that created it. It somehow reduces the need for rest by those creatures that are in contact with it, as well as weighing half as much as normal steel. Those wearing endurance steel armor need half as much sleep and can march twice as far before needing rest.

### **Eternal Silver (900,000 gp per ounce)**

Created as a luxury item, eternal silver does not corrode or break. It is always found as jewelry and some spellcasters use it as holy symbols or to create magical items.

### **Flame Mirror (3,000 gp per pound)**

This polished metal reflects all heat directed at it. It was used in building construction but the interiors were either too cold initially or built up enough heat over time

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to cook the inhabitants. A shield of flame mirror gives a +4 to saves versus fire and heat attacks. Flame mirror armor provides immunity but will kill the wearer in an hour or so.

### Homing Glass (300 gp)

This strange transparent material is physically drawn to a specific location, usually the city where it was created. It is almost always found as beads and in sacks of heavy cloth. If freed, the beads move so fast that they are lost. Beyond finding lost cities, homing glass is commonly used as a compass for those who travel in the wilderness or underground.

### Hound Snuff (30 gp per pinch)

A powder that draws canines, hound snuff's most common use these days is to identify werewolves and help combat other canine monsters. It also is used as bait for wolves and other normal canines. Any canine creature, including werewolves in any form, must save versus poison or be drawn to the location a pinch of hound snuff as been employed. A canine will detect snuff and be affected by it at a range of up to 100 feet on a calm day.

### Human Bane (12,000 gp per pound)

Not all ancient empires were friendly to humanity. This mineral was created to kill human graverobbers by emit-

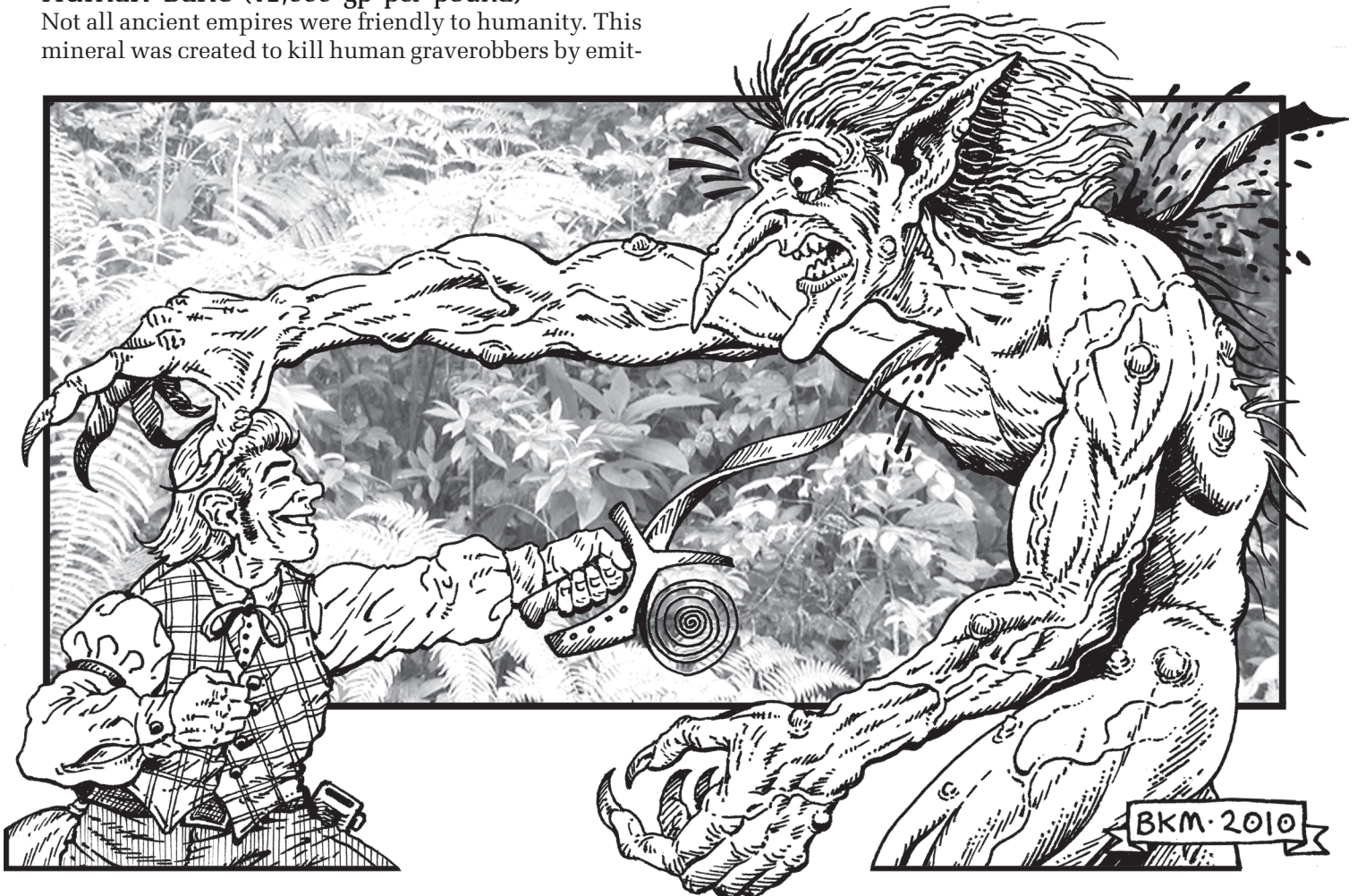
ting radiation or some magical effect. Any human within 100 feet of a pound of human bane takes 3d6 points of damage. A save versus poison reduces this damage by half. This effect is and ongoing and the save must be made every round the human is in range of the effect.

### Light Block (60 gp per cubic foot)

This material is not a material, but rather permanent visual illusions that can be moved by force of will. It is easy to reshape but very difficult to alter its color. To do so, one needs a *Polymorph Other* spell or similar magic. Light blocks can be of any size and can look like just about anything. To move a block, the user must make a save versus wands a +6.

### Lightning Line (600 gp per yard)

A superconductor, lightning line is currently used in defense of locations. If set in conjunction with an electrical spell, it extends the range to however long the line is and can increase the area of effect up to three times normal.



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## Liquid Air (12,000 gp per pound)

A deadly material, liquid air hardens with kinetic energy. It cannot be broken but can be lost through evaporation if allowed to sit for a long time. Weapons made of liquid air do double damage and armor provides a +3 bonus. All items weight 1/10th their standard amount.

## Neptune's Bane (900 gp per pound)

Societies that have access to stones made of Neptune's bane can alter their destiny by redirecting their water resources. The stone repels water, each pound forcing water to stay five feet away. If set correctly, a group of stones can even force a river up and over a river bed rather than be diverted to one side. Underwater explorers can carry Neptune's bane to bring along a bubble of air, which stays fresh for six hours per pound of stone.

## Parrot Glass (60 gp per ounce)

This material soaks up sound like a sponge and releases it six hours later. Only an ounce of parrot glass is needed to collect the sounds of a large room.

## Putty Wood (120 gp per pound)

Almost always found in hot locations, putty wood has an odd reaction to temperature. The warmer it is, the harder the material. At the freezing of water, it is a soft, clay-like material and at 100 degrees it is as hard as steel.

## Salt Stone (1,200 gp)

Not usually carried by adventurers, salt stones were created to prevent soil degradation from irrigation. Each pound takes an hour to draw the salt from an acre of soil or acre-foot of water. It can be used to purify salt water for drinking and thus most ships try to keep a stone or two. If treated correctly, the stones can also release all the salt they have collected. This may be a bad idea for stones discovered in ruins, as they may hold many tons of salt. Each salt stone weighs 10 pounds.

## Spell Sponge (9,000 gp)

Meant to stop magic-using graverobbers, spell sponge is a nasty material that sucks the magic out of living things and sends it to specially-created golems. These golems can be of any type (see the article on golems in this volume for new types that can be used in conjunction with spell sponge). Every 10 minutes a magic user is within 50 feet of a chunk of spell sponge, he must make a save versus spells or lose one random spell. Lost spells end up being used by a golem found within 500 feet. If the golem is destroyed, the spells are still drained and the sponge eventually overloads and explodes upon taking 20 levels of spells, doing 12d6 points of damage to everything within 60 feet. A spell sponge weighs a pound.

## Thirsting Paper (6,000 gp per piece)

This material is found in one of two conditions: used

and unused. If a living creature touches an unused piece, the paper inflicts one point of damage and turns the color of the creature's blood. It is now set for its primary function. If the creature is slain and the body is lost, casting *Raise Dead* on the paper has the normal chances of bringing the dead back to life. The paper is consumed in the casting. If the spell is cast when the creature is still alive, the paper does not react. What makes this material so powerful is that it keeps the blood fresh; it does not matter if the creature has been dead for 10,000 years, the spell will still work.

## Vampire Cloth (3,000 gp per yard)

Hunters like this material if they can afford it, as it drains the color from any object it touches and can thus be used for camouflage. The downside is that the object drained turns white. There are many other uses for vampire cloth, from the silly (parties where they try to steal each others' colors) to the deadly (assassins hiding in plain sight).

## Warp Stone (12,000 gp/60,000 gp)

This mineral bends space and occasionally time. It is used in buildings and dungeons where security is vital. Depending on how they are placed, warp stones can completely confuse a cartographer. For example, a simple hallway that appears to be straight might actually make a 45-degree turn, or a walk that seems like five minutes might really take three hours; a GM is only limited to his imagination in how warp stone changes the topography of a dungeon. Space-warping stones cost 12,000 gp and those that warp space and time cost 60,000 gp.

## X Material Rot (N/A)

Even ancient cultures had their economic wars and this is one result. There are many forms of rot and each turns a specific material, from gold to diamonds to sugar, into mush. It takes less than a minute for the rot to infest and destroy one ton of the target material. Unlike all the other materials here, it costs nothing to make, as the rot reproduces itself. Buying rot is a different story and, as it is banned in almost every nation, a few ounces of rot can cost as much as 10,000 gp.

## Youth Stone (Blue Brick) (3,000 gp per pound)

The ancient empire that made this material did not know the full extent of its power. It is an abnormally strong brick (triple hit points), but has slowly eroded over the centuries. As the particles have entered the soil, they have been taken up by the plant life, and the plants and the animals that eat them have a lifespan that is doubled. As the material is diluted, this amount is likewise reduced. These days, people living in affected areas (as well as the monsters that eat them) live 25 percent longer. A pound of blue brick is enough to double the lifespan of 10,000 people if its power were known.

# MATERIALS OF ANCIENT EMPIRES

BY DEREK HOLLAND & THE SKIRMISHER GAME DEVELOPMENT GROUP,  
WITH ILLUSTRATION BY BRADLEY K. MCDEVITT

## Skirmisher Publishing LLC

499 Mystic Parkway  
Spring Branch, TX 78070

**Email:** [d20@skirmisher.com](mailto:d20@skirmisher.com)

**Website:** <http://www.skirmisher.com>

**d-Infinity Online:** <http://www.d-Infinity.net>



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