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Fat Goblin Games Presents

SIDEBAR #4

Forbidden Knowledge and Corruption

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Forbidden Knowledge

There exist Things-Man-Was-Not-Meant-to-Know. Secular scholars might argue that knowledge, in and of itself, is neutral, but those who have delved the darker mysteries know better. Certain manuscripts contain knowledge so corrosive, that it is toxic to the humanoid mind. From implications of cosmic insignificance to knowledge that such insignificance may be the only thing saving us from eldritch malevolence that simply hasn't noticed us, the further one delves into such grimly esoteric lore, the more such knowledge weighs on the mind. It frays the reader's capacity to interact with their neighbors and slowly transforms them, drawing them inexorably into madness, damnation, or both.

Whenever a reader encounters a book of forbidden lore, the player must declare how detailed an interaction the PC will undertake with the book. Each level of interaction takes a different amount of time, grants a different amount of information, and carries with it a different risk of corruption. A Will save against corruption must be made each time the book is interacted with, regardless of the level of interaction.

Survey (15 minutes) – This level of interaction involves reading the title, any chapter or heading names, and making note of any illustrations or magical script. Surveying a forbidden tome allows an Appraise check to determine its value, identifies any Knowledge checks it may be applicable to (but not the bonus to those checks), and the presence or absence of magic spells within the text, as well as the general themes of the text.

Corruption saves when surveying a forbidden tome are made with a +5 bonus to the save.

Examine (1 hour per 100 pages) – This level of interaction involves spending time examining the text, as well as possibly making some minor notes about significant themes, references to other texts, and subject matter. Reading a forbidden tome grants all of the information gained in a survey, but also reveals the level of bonus the book grants to any skill checks as well as the actual themes of the text. If the reader has access to *read magic*, they may also identify any spells available in the book.

Corruption saves are made with no bonus or penalty to the save when examining a forbidden tome.

Read (8 hours per 50 pages) – This level of interaction involves spending time exploring the text. Referenced persons, places, and things may be researched in other available tomes; extensive notes may be made about the subject matter; and full translations of passages in foreign languages may be produced. Studying a forbidden tome grants all of the information gained from reading, but also grants any circumstance bonus to any Knowledge or similar skill to the reader for 24 hours after completing study. Additionally, any spells discovered in the forbidden tome may be copied into other spellbooks (using the standard rules for copying a spell from one spellbook to another). If the book is a spellbook in its own right, with a preparation ritual, the book must be studied before the preparation ritual may be accessed. In addition, after the first time reading any forbidden tome, you gain the otherworldly insight ability (see below).

Corruption saves when reading a forbidden tome are made with a -5 penalty.

Study (24 hours per 25 pages) – This level of interaction involves spending as much time as needed with a book to fully absorb its knowledge. The reader cross-references when needed, translates the text fully, and adds their own annotations (either in the original text or separately, reader's choice). In addition to the benefits of studying a text, the reader can also consult the book and their notes at any time in the future to gain any circumstance bonuses granted by the text to Knowledge or similar skills. After studying a forbidden tome for the first time, increase your otherworldly insight bonus by the amount set by the book.

Corruption saves when studying a forbidden tome are made with a -10 penalty.

Corruption

It is important to understand that, in metaphysical terms, concepts like Good, Evil, Law, and Chaos are not just ideas - they have presence. They exist in the same way as animals, minerals, and vegetables. In most people, places, and things, they are so diffuse (or mingled together) that their presence is barely noted. In other cases, beings can be composed of the stuff of pure Good, pure Evil, pure Law, and pure Chaos, forming the outsiders like angels, demons, devils, and the like.

For the otherworldly, cosmic horrors of reality, their Evil can act like a cancer in a living being or a toxic miasma in a location. The resulting effect becomes hazardous for those who come into contact with it.

Certain actions, events, or even places can trigger a Corruption Save. A Corruption Save is a Will save against a DC determined by the gamemasters, based on the extant circumstances. In the case of forbidden lore and the tomes that contain it, each book has its own save DC, determined by the amount of forbidden lore and the power of that lore. Creative gamemasters can feel free to use similar Corruption Saves for everything from having haunted dreams fueled by slumbering gods, to the mere presence of the Great Old Ones and their scions. Studying a tome fully increases your otherworldly insight bonus by the listed amount, regardless of if you succeed or fail the save for studying it. Example tomes of cosmic horror are included below.

Forbidden Tome	Corruption DC	Insight Bonus
<i>Necronomicon</i>	40	+5
<i>The King in Yellow</i>	30	+3
<i>Unaussprechliche Kulte</i>	35	+4

If a character passes their Corruption Save, there is no effect. If a character fails a Corruption Save, they gain one additional Corruption Point and increase their Corruption Score by one. Corruption Points can be treated several ways, based around the idea that the dark forces the character has permitted into their soul are now actively working to increase the character's corruption and, eventually, transform them into a minion of the cosmic horrors.

Otherworldly Insight (Ex): You have been exposed to the cosmic horrors of reality, and while it erodes your sanity, it informs all of your thinking as you reinterpret the truth. You gain this ability by either having read a tome of forbidden knowledge, or by having first-hand experience of cosmic horrors like the Great Old Ones and their lesser scions.

You gain a +1 insight bonus to any Knowledge skill check made in relation to the Great Old Ones or other true horrors of the cosmos. At the gamemaster's discretion, this insight bonus can be added to other skill checks, like a character's Sense Motive check to understand a creature's intentions or Craft (alchemy) to attempt to identify an otherworldly being's ichor.

This insight bonus can increase by two means. Any time you are suffering from some form of insanity or madness, you may attempt a single Will save (DC = 10 + total of your current insight bonus) to gain added insights into the true nature of the cosmos and the Great Old Ones. A successful save increases your otherworldly insight bonus by +1. In addition, studying various tomes increases your insight bonus, typically by a set amount depending upon the nature of the tome of forbidden knowledge read.

Unlocking the truth about reality has an unsettling effect on your psyche. Your otherworldly insight bonus acts as a penalty on all Will saves to resist fear-effects or other mind-affecting abilities from an otherworldly source (especially those based on insanity and madness, gamemaster's discretion as to what counts as "otherworldly"). If your game uses optional Sanity rules, reduce your maximum Sanity score by your otherworldly insight bonus. Any magical spells or effects that would reduce or remove this penalty concurrently reduce or remove your insight bonus, effectively removing the forbidden knowledge gained from your mind. You may always voluntarily retain your otherworldly insights if subject to magic that could normally cure it, choosing to revel in your own madness.

Paranoia - Optional Rule: If a creature's otherworldly insight bonus is equal to their overall Will save bonus, they are treated as possessing the shaken fear condition, even if possessing magic items or class features that would negate such a condition. If their otherworldly insight bonus is greater than their Will save bonus, they need to succeed at a Will save (DC 10) or become frightened when faced with any creature of cosmic horror or similar challenge. Note that this means fear causing sources will produce heightened effects on those already subject to lower grade conditions.

Corruption Scores and Using Corruption Points

A number of game mechanic systems exist that can be integrated with Corruption with three examples explained below. Regardless of which system is used, the following rules always apply. When a creature's total Corruption Score is equal to or greater than their character level + Wisdom modifier, they have been "corrupted".

In-game changes in mechanics will vary from gamemaster to gamemaster, but player characters should be turned over into NPCs and many creatures should change their type to native outsider (evil) or aberration, etc. Creatures so corrupted can rarely survive in our reality and take on one negative level every 24 hours until they are either killed or find a Great Old One to bolster their corrupted essence.

A creature's Corruption Score is never reduced by spending a Corruption Point. The only way to gain more Corruption Points is an increase to the Corruption Score. Additionally, every time a creature taps into their corrupted power, regardless of system used, they must make a Will save DC 20 + their current Corruption Score. If the save is successful, their score remains the same. If they fail the save, increase their Corruption Score by one point.

It is left to gamemaster's discretion to determine if any methods exist to remove or reduce a creatures' overall Corruption Score.

Corruption as Hero Points

The simplest way to treat corruption points for a minor benefit to the corrupted creature is to use them as alternate hero points using that system from the *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game: Advanced Player's Guide*.

Corruption against Sanity

In games that use some form of Sanity rules, creatures that have been corrupted have both had their own sanity eroded and are able to destroy the sanity of those they encounter. Reduce the maximum sanity points of any corrupted creature by their Corruption Score, in addition to other penalties from sources like any otherworldly insight bonus they possess. Additionally, as a standard action, a corrupted creature can spend up to half their level in Corruption Points to alter their appearance or otherwise warp reality for one round, inflicting on all witnesses to the action a Sanity check (base DC 10 + 2 per point of corruption used). Creatures that fail their sanity checks lose one point of sanity per point expended by the corrupted creature.

Corruption as Mythic Power

A more powerful means of treating corruption is as a twisted form and source of mythic power, using the rules found in the *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game: Mythic Adventures*. In this case, treat corrupted creatures as 1st tier mythic creatures, with their Corruption Points as their well of mythic power.

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