

IV. Ritual Magic



The system of ritual magic used in Shard differs largely from most rules for magic currently out there in paper RPGs. While many rules systems for magic focus upon a fairly clear understanding of the outcome of casting magic spells, the Shard system attempts to focus upon the ritual surrounding the magic itself, with an emphasis on the magician, their preparations for the magical event, and detailed descriptions of what happens as their magic begins to manifest. Many systems seem to treat the use of magic like the firing of a gun; simply pull the trigger and the effect clearly stated in the rules occurs. Dárdüni ritual magic creates effects throughout the extent of the ritual itself, as part of the direct interaction of the player, and takes the kind of time that precludes it from being used in combat situations. Such rituals are often acted out in the game as a scene for that particular player. Although both the players and the Gamemaster have a general idea of the intentions of any given magical ritual, the GM interprets the effects of each ritual as the player defines it with their own descriptions and dice rolls. As the ritual is played out and the magic begins to manifest in the game, the player may be called upon by the GM to make various additional skill rolls to determine the success or failure of any particular aspect of the ritual. The effects of any given ritual, as well as how that ritual is played out within the game, can be different each time. This not only allows the players to feel they have more involvement in the outcome of the ritual (whether favorable or not), but also helps to create an air of cinematic mystery, which should be at the heart of Dárdüni magic.

In this chapter we will attempt to explain what it means to use ritual magic in the Shard system, the four general Rituals that exist for use with the basic rules, the four general types of magical practitioners, and the fictional theories that describe the mystical realms that seem to surround or connect to the world of Dárdünah. We'll also give "in-game" examples that may help GMs and players incorporate these exciting scenes into their games. Remember that Shard always seeks to emphasize the role-playing aspect of its rules to insure that everyone involved enjoys an exciting cinematic experience!

Being a Sir'hibas

On Dárdūnah, where ritual is of great importance, those who seem to have the talent to create magic from rituals are often held in high regard. Such an individual is called a **sir'hibas** (SEER-hih-boss), meaning “wise-one”; the plural is **sir'hibasi**. Often at an early age these individuals displayed the fact that they possessed a talent for manifesting some supernatural ability or power; perhaps prophetic dreams or waking visions, the ability to heal others by the mere laying-on of their hands, a strange affinity for native animal life, or even the strange way in which their simple desires became reality with very little apparent effort of their own.

Regardless of the caste one may be born into, those who are found to possess this natural talent are often taken aside to be tutored by those who have the knowledge to do so. Jānah not born into the Warrior Caste who are recognized as having such abilities are often taken into the folds of the Temples to be trained as priests, thus conferring upon them the honor of membership in the Priest Caste. It is not unknown for a peasant to possess such talents and be sought after by merchants or even other, more insidious agents. Interestingly, since Outcasts are believed to be cursed by the Devah and hence deserving the lifestyle they are forced to lead, they would never receive the blessings of gifts such as the abilities of a sir'hibas. Therefore, any Outcast seen to display such talents must have acquired them from conspiring with demons from Narákah, and will most likely be feared by peasants and even merchants, and slain out-of-hand by warriors and priests. Such individuals, if discovered in time by their fellow Outcasts, will often be secreted away, spared so that they might offer spiritual guidance to the countless masses who could never turn to the priesthood or set foot in the resplendent temples.

With the exception of those born as Outcastes, most sir'hibasi are easily recognized by the elaborate tattoos, markings, or adornments with which they decorate their bodies and in which, it is said, they store their power. These body-art symbols are usually interwoven with the markings denoting their loyalties to their House and Line (if any), essentially advertising whom they serve, since eventually most **sir'hibasi settle down in the service of some group/individual or another.**

Though most people are aware of the existence of sir'hibasi, they not considered common by any means, there being perhaps a small handful of truly skilled ones (plus their students) in any large city, and usually only one or none at all in small towns and rural settings. Seeking out a sir'hibas would be akin to traveling to see a celebrity, perhaps, with an understanding that their services generally are reserved only for those with whom they are allied, or who are willing to pay some price or special favor.

Seeing several sir'hibasi together in one public place often means that interesting or troublesome things may be afoot, and will no doubt be cause for rumors and other strange tidings among the populace.

Though it is possible to have many abilities and talents beyond merely mystical skills (after all, one's Caste certainly indicates a broad range of possible professions), most sir'hibasi tend to focus upon their specific magical calling throughout their lives. It is rare for a sir'hibas to also be, say, a Weapons Master, or a professional acrobat, but there could always be exceptions. In addition, most sir'hibasi often concentrate their studies within a single range of specialties associated with one of the four types of ritual magic known in the world. Understanding these magical categories is important for anyone hoping to play a sir'hibas.

The Four Types of Ritual Magic

For the purpose of these basic rules, there are four different types of magic that are practiced throughout the world; Healing, Seeing, Sorcery, and Summoning. In general, the works of most **sir'hibasi fall into one of these four categories. As mentioned during Character Creation, it will be important to pick one (or more) of these categories upon which to base the skills of any sir'hibas character you may wish to play.**

Healing

Ritual Healing refers to the arts of mending the mind, body, and sometimes even the spirit, purely with the power of magic. The Healer Sir'hibas (usually referred to simply as “Healers”) are often, though not always, of the Priest Caste. They seem to draw from their very own vitality in order to restore the health of their patients, as can usually be seen by the degree of exhaustion after any particularly demanding ritual. Such acts of magic usually entail meditative chanting, the laying-on of hands, the use of crystals to focus their power, and sometimes even deep trance. During these rituals it is not uncommon to see glowing, golden prāna (PRAH-nah), the radiant essence of the sir'hibas' life force, seem to flow forth from the hands or eyes of the healer, bathing the wounds of the patient in its healing warmth. The ritual commonly performed by Healer Sir'hibasi is often simply known as the **Ritual of Healing.**

Seeing

Ritual Seeing refers to using magical arts to gaze into the past, present and future, to search for things believed long lost or craftily hidden, and even peer into minds and dreams of others. Those

who practice these ancient skills are called Seer Sir'hibasi (or simply "Seers" for short). Working their magic often plunges them into deep meditative trances that can last for scores of minutes or many hours, causing them to seclude themselves in private chambers filled with burning incense and the sounds of humming crystals. Here they invoke dreams through which the Seers catch glimpses of the answers they seek. Sometimes the dreams that carry their visions come unbidden, troubling their sleep with half-formed wisps of prophetic imagery. Often such images are clouded with symbolism that must be deciphered, though a very skillful Seer might be able to call up lucid visions of startling clarity. The ritual commonly performed by Seer Sir'hibasi is often simply known as the **Ritual of Dreamwalking**. Dreamwalking refers to the fact that the sir'hibas somehow peers into, or spiritually enters another dimension known as "The Dream". The Dream, as well as other supernatural locations relevant to Ritual Magic, will be detailed later in this chapter.

Sorcery

Ritual Sorcery attempts to affect the apparent attributes of the world around us, changing, increasing, or diminishing aspects of reality in some way or another. Though forms of meditation and chanting play a major role in the fabrication of such magics, it is highly common to find the Sorcerer Sir'hibas (or simply, "Sorcerer") using small carvings, sculptures, or other such representations of the subject they wish to alter or affect. During ritual, within the mind's eye, the Sorcerer conjures images of that which is to be affected and uses various fabricated components to coax reality toward the desired state. Permanent changes can be made in some cases, and elaborate illusions woven in others. Often, depending on the strength or desire of the individual sir'hibas, the changes wrought upon something, or someone for that matter, will eventually vanish, revealing the truth beneath. There are tales, however, of such alterations lasting for years on end, even surpassing the life of the very Sorcerer who cast them, a blessing or curse upon that which has been affected. The ritual commonly performed by Sorcerer Sir'hibasi is often simply known as the **Ritual of Endowment**, so named because the sorcerer seeks to endow their target with various properties, whether for good or ill.

Summoning

Ritual Summoning refers to any magics used to send one's spiritual will out in an attempt to call forth suthra, weather manifestations, and even supernatural entities from wherever they may be, to cause them to appear before the sir'hibas, and even to give them some level of control over that which was called. Those who can do this are called Summoner Sir'hibasi (simply called "Summoners"), and their art is ancient and often feared. These sir'hibasi can call up swarms of deadly suthra or perhaps shades of the dead, spirits of the

storms and elements, or even chitinous demons from the depths of Narákah. Since the summoner reaches out to clutch the life force in some way in an attempt to bind it to his will, such magic is not only taxing but also potentially dangerous, as it is not always possible to perfectly maintain control of the summoned thing. There can be no doubt, however, that the abilities of a summoner are respected, if not feared, by most jánah. The ritual commonly performed by Summoner Sir'hibasi is appropriately known as the **Ritual of Summoning**.

Basic Mystic Concepts

Before playing a sir'hibas in the Shard system, it's a good thing to understand the basic ideas and theories surrounding the common conceptions about magic and mysticism in the world of Dárdūnah. The world's inhabitant's, the jánah, believe that Dárdūnah is a haven for them, and that they were placed there by the Great Father and the Great Mother long ago during the age when the Devourer, a terrible demonic force of destruction and entropy, chased the Divine Couple across the cosmos in an attempt to consume their beloved Children, the Devah. Afraid for them, the Great Mother and Father found Dárdūnah (which in the ancient texts means literally "Dust No One Weeps For", which lies in the "realm of the Devah's Dreams". Some have described this Dream realm as a vast sea, sometimes called Salán, which is often depicted as the "universe" which holds all the bodies in the heavens. The Divine Couple, in an attempt to hide Dárdūnah from the baleful eyes of the Great Devourer and its terrible hosts of Demons, took from the substance of Salán the colorful "Veils of Dream", with which they, in their infinite wisdom, wove around the entire world. This is the colorful nebulae of the sky that protects the world both night and day, till the very end of time. Beyond these Veils lay the Dream itself, and beyond that, the shining Edge of Heaven (from whence came the Great Mother and Father), and the Swirling Hells of Narákah (where supposedly the Great Devourer lay waiting with his hordes of wicked servants).

But upon the face of the world, the Divine Couple placed their children, the Devah, and used Their power to clothe their children in many forms (all the many varieties of animal people), and poured also Their divine power into the world itself, manifesting it into the many tools that would help the Devah and their children that followed (the jánah) to survive. This power has taken many forms; the essence infused into all crystals, the holy power of spirit found in the duháma (the soul), the spiritual energy of emotion found in laughter, tears, and song, holy mathematics, and of course...ritual magic. Let's take a closer look at some of the basic mystic concepts mentioned above.

The Duháma

The duháma is the Dárdūni name for the spirit or soul, and is considered the thing that sets them apart

from all other living creatures of the world as children of the Devah. The duháma is believed to be able to leave the body of a sir'hibas while in ritual trance and potentially pass into other realms as the ritual takes place. When the body dies, according to most of the ancient holy texts, the duháma escapes, passing beyond the Veils of Dream, to dance for a time with the Devah on the Edge of Heaven. Eventually it may one day be reincarnated back into the Great Cycle of life and death. The duháma is considered to be a gift from the Devah, offspring of the Great Mother and the Great Father, who breathed life and soul into them so long ago. As a gift, it must be carefully guarded by prayers and meditation, the only sure way to protect it from the hungry eyes of the demons that look down from the skies on darkened nights. The people of Dárdūnah believe that the duháma is something that could be trapped or controlled by a being with enough power, and so are careful to always show devotion to their Devah, whom they pray will protect them from such a terrible fate.



Prána

Flowing through the duháma as blood flows through our veins, emanating from the spiritual heart of the Elements, passing through all things both in the waking world and within the Dream, there is a mystical

energy called prána. Sir'hibasi of all kinds know of this energy, the fountain of the life force itself, calling upon it in ritual as well as inscribing tattoos on their bodies designed to help them focus and manipulate it. When visible, it is often seen as liquid golden light (a rare concept indeed on Dárdūnah) emerging from the body or even from the thin air near the sir'hibas engaged in acts of ritual magic. During many healing rituals, prána can sometimes even be seen to flow from the fingers of the healer as it travels across the body of the patient, filling wounds and healing them with its miraculous light. Its very existence is testimony to the power of the Devah, since it is said to come from the living essence of the sir'hibasi themselves. Prána may not always appear in this way, and may seem different if coming from a strange or malignant source. Surely some similar energy must also flow through demons, though of a very different origin, giving them much of their awesome and terrible power.

The Dream

Somewhere between the Real World, the Edge of Heaven, and the void of Narákah, lay the mystic veils of Dream. It is a place of shifting colors within an opalescent sea of scintillating grey mists. Many ancient holy texts speak of this place as being the living dreams of the Devah themselves, while other also refer to it as a part of the Great Sea, Salán, from which all existence flows, and across which the Great Mother and Father fled when escaping the Devourer.

The Dream can be experienced as a region of swirling light and shadows, and can only be reached through portals opened during sleep and ritual trance. Here, the thoughts and desires of all intelligent beings take form as they play out their fears, hopes, desires, and fantasies during slumber, or in the deepest of trances. Because of this many sir'hibasi seek their visions here, looking beyond the boundaries of the Real World, searching for answers that may evade them. Many Magic Rituals seem to tap into, touch upon, or even cause the sir'hibas to enter into the Dream in some way (the most notable being **Dreamwalk**, detailed later). When entering the Dream, the sir'hibas parts the supernatural veils of its substance while sinking deeper into trance. As the Dream enfolds them, the waking world begins to fade, and they may see fleeting images, vortices of color and light, or sinister dark shapes, all depending on their mental state as they begin their journey.

These indistinct forms will begin to take on a more recognizable appearance as the substance of the Dream coalesces, and the will and power of the sir'hibas begins to effect it in various ways.

Somewhere in Dream, it is said, there are secret pathways to the shining Edge of Heaven, as well as

the swirling void of Narákah's Hells. The Dream itself appears boundless, however, as it is formed entirely from the stuff of spirit and imagination. The thoughts of the Devah and their children are the substance from which all things experienced within the Dream come, and can often be manipulated and changed by a sir'hibas whose power is significant. They can make it look and sound however they wish, providing they have the skills necessary to achieve their desired results.

It is known that rival sir'hibasi sometimes meet within the Dream to challenge one another to magical combat. When this happens, the pit their Ritual skills against one another while using their power to shape the stuff of the Dream into many various weapons, strange effects, supernatural attacks, and all manner of amazing manifestations that would never be possible in the "real world". Remember, this is all a battle of minds and spirits, so the only powers that have an effect against other in the Dream are those that match against another caster's Ritual Skill, Will, or Essence. Likewise it is said that a sir'hibas may shape the Dream around them in other, more benign ways, creating wondrous and beautiful environments in which to seek personal solace, or to interact with those who they consider friends. Additionally, movement can seem instantaneous (for all practical purposes), since sir'hibasi can travel with the speed of thought.

Only supernatural entities occupy the Dream. And, generally, all powers used in the Dream only affect a sir'hibas' willpower, mind, and ability to remain in trance, not their physical body, though there are rare exceptions (see *Affecting the Real World*). This, however, does not mean that the Dream cannot be a potentially dangerous place. Powerful beings traverse these mystic paths, some more a part of the Dream than true reality, and use it as a means of viewing all manner of events and people of interest on Dárdūnah. They could be demons, gods, or servants of either, and any of these could be potentially harmful if encountered there. Benevolent and of course neutral entities travel here as well (such as other sir'hibasi, and even spirits of the dead) but it is difficult to tell in the swirling mists just who is friend and who is foe. Just because physical harm seldom occurs while in Dream, doesn't mean the mind or soul could not be controlled, trapped, or even shattered, by a being with enough power and malicious intent. In general, however, the journey the sir'hibasi take while their duhámas travel in the Dream reflects the needs that drew them there, the situations surrounding them, their own mental states, and perhaps the mind of any other jánah with whom they communicate or observe. This place touches not just the dreams of the sir'hibas themselves, but also the dreams of others, making it a very valuable tool for those who would view such things, or even attempt to manipulate them. Remember always, however, that parting the Veils of Dream is like opening the curtains to a window; you may use it to look out, just as others may be using it to look within.

The Web of Life

Those who practice ritual magic eventually come to the understanding that such magics work because all things in existence are interconnected in various ways, thus allowing one's thought, voice, song, and even dreams, to have a sublime affect on the physical and spiritual aspects of the world around us. One of the most profound ways to illustrate this concept is by imagining that every aspect of existence is suspended upon a vast cosmic web. This is the great Web of Life. Every strand of the web is a path to all the other strands. And upon every strand rests the countless aspects of all things living and dead, natural and supernatural, everything that must be dealt with and interacted with, throughout our lives.

Nothing is exempt. Nothing is special. Nothing lives on a strand by itself, unconnected to the rest. Nothing is wasted, and nothing is overlooked by the Devah whom, in their divine wisdom, have made it possible for us to pass along and through this web through our thoughts and dreams, making the connections that allow us to touch and change these things in our rituals. These objects upon the web, moments in time, enemies and friends, dreams, and nightmares, all hang like drops of morning dew, illuminated by the wisdom of the sir'hibas as if by the light of the holy suns.

The strength of the web is the endless spiral that connects all the strands that move outward and away from the omnipotent consciousness of Mahiámbah and Mahitáyah, the Great Mother and Father. And upon this Great Spiral of wisdom, we all move through existence, experiencing, as we go, the intersecting brief flashes of the greater wisdom streaming from the center, and the Mother and Father of us all.

This inter-connectivity can be very important symbolism to include as part of any rituals that deal with summoning and controlling suthra, since the Web of Life touches these creatures, linking them not only as prey and predator, but giving credence to the part they play in the grand scheme of things. Each living thing's purpose is mapped out upon the delicate strands of the Web in some way, and a wise sir'hibas always attempts to understand the patterns found in its intricate traceries. Likewise the paths and moments of the individual lives of the jánah can be found there, each birth a suspended jewel, each death a broken strand. Many Seers conjure such symbolism when seeking answers that even the Dream might obscure. And of course, in Healing as well as in Sorcery, the actual manipulation of the strands of the Web of Life can be used to connect aspects of the various spiritual powers that bind our minds and spirits to our bodies, and to effect powerful changes that are at the heart of these practitioners' various Disciplines.

The Great Cycle

All jánah eventually perish, rendering up their duháma to the will of the Devah and the Great Cycle of life, death, and rebirth. When a soul leaves this mortal

coil to dance at the Edge of Heaven with the Devah, it waits upon the judgment of the Great Mother and Father. If they deem that the jānah was worthy in their eyes, they are eventually allowed to travel back through the Dream, learning lessons from the dreams of the Devah, so that they may be reborn into the world and perhaps blessed by being allowed to become a higher caste at birth. This eternal, circular pattern of Life, Death, and Rebirth is known as the Great Cycle.

Those wretched souls who are found truly wicked, unworthy, and irredeemable in the eyes of the Great Mother and Father are cast forever into the swirling abysses of Narākah to be torn asunder by the demons and foul spirits that dwell there. It is believed that some more powerful souls may actually survive the hells of Narākah, yet remain trapped there, waiting for the day they might find a way to escape their imprisonment and exist outside the Great Cycle, bringing terror to a world filled with the children of those who consigned them to torment. For this reason, few dare challenge the sacred laws governing life and death, though some say that in legend there have been those who sought to bring the dead back to life. These magics are no doubt possible, but such a break in the Great Cycle would surely attract the baleful attention of things beyond the dark edges of Dream, clinging to the cusp of the Swirling Hells. Fools who attempt such tasks are, perhaps unwittingly, giving such foul beings the chance they need to break free from their bonds, to draw wicked breath in the world again.



Demons, Spirits, and Elementals

Within the ranks of the sir'hibasi, there is much debate concerning the nature of the various supernatural powers that exist both upon Dārdūnah and in the Dream. Some claim that all such entities come from the same source and are part of a Universal Duhāma, nether good nor evil, from which even the Devah derive their power. Others claim that there are three distinct types of supernatural beings other than the Devah who dwell both in and out of Dream, and who come from very different sources. Though the truth, perhaps, is somewhere in between, for the sake of understanding it is necessary to illuminate each of these perceived kinds of supernatural entities and their behaviors.

Demons are spiritual entities that, according to most arcane texts, emerge or are summoned from the abysses of Narākah, the Swirling Hells. Narākah is a place that exists beyond this world and outside the edges of the Dream, and can be reached through ancient portals accessed by only the most skilled (or most foolish) of sir'hibasi. Once breached, it may be possible to reach into Narākah to draw forth beings that dwell within it. Most consider such magics to be foul, however, for Narākah is a place of corruption and evil, a punishment to those consigned there, and even spirits of the dead that have been imprisoned in the Swirling Hells are considered demonic, doubtless damned for their impious acts. Such a spirit, called forth from Narākah, might still be considered a demon by most sir'hibasi, regardless of the pleasing form they may take. But other denizens of the black abysses are nothing like the spirits of jānah, having monstrous, insectoid aspects and tastes that are utterly alien and often horrific in the extreme. Entities appearing from Narākah will sometimes clothe themselves in physical form, taking shapes that allow them to interact with the world in ways that provide them amusement, appease their terrible hungers, or fulfill the needs of their summoners. Whether emerging into the Dream or into our reality, demons often possess terrible powers and deadly natural weapons, suited to their infernal purposes, and wise sir'hibasi would do well to avoid dealing with them.

The spirits of the dead are rarely called upon, for to do so is to either tear them away from their joyous dance at the Edge of Heaven, which might bring down their ire, or to draw them forth from their imprisonment in dreaded Narākah, which will surely lead to some terrible mischief. However, there are many stories of spirits that have been, in some way, trapped upon our world, or within Dream, whether by evil events, confusion, fear, or some higher calling. Sometimes it is possible to interact with such spirits, whether for good or ill, and other times one may only be able to observe their actions,

pantomimes of what they did during life. Such spirits can take many forms, from mist or shadow shapes that pass through walls, to animated heaps of root-riddled earth and decaying flesh and bones. Such spirits might have benevolent natures, such as the shades of ancestors seeking to right some ancient wrong, or they may contain some terrible malevolence, such as the *khaujiva*, the “hungry ones”, ghosts who sustain themselves on the essence of the living. It may be possible to free such spirits of that which entraps them in our world or within the Dream, though caution should always be used so that one does not become a victim of the sad misfortunes of their fate.

Of all the supernatural forces native to Dárdūnah and the Dream, the spiritual entities that seem to manifest within the primal forces of nature are perhaps the most mysterious. These are referred to as Elementals by most *sir’hibasi*, and seem to be beyond the religious concepts of good and evil. The forms they take can seem demonic at times, while at other moments they might manifest as a fire with no fuel, or as an impossible shape formed by water that seems to move of its own accord. Their whisperings can sometimes be heard in the wind, speaking no tongue learned by any *jānah*, and their movements can be felt throughout the earth, and seen in the power of crystals. Some sages argue that they are the servants of the *Devah*, and that they exist in all things upon Dárdūnah that are not the *jānah*, placed there by the Great Mother and Father to help prepare the world for the coming of Their children. Others, however, believe that these things have existed here long before the Great Mother and Father ever came, and that the rituals that call and bind them are performed at terrible risk, for such beings are beyond the power of the *Devah* to control. It is well known that, in the area of their influence, they emanate powerful emotions and feelings that seem to cut through all else around them, springing up as if through the hearts of all living things near to where they roam. Regardless of the theories surrounding their strange existence, the mysteries of their true nature have yet to be unraveled.

Affecting the Real World

Many magics in Dárdūnah affect the real world, although rarely in the way that is either instantaneous or lacking subtlety. Outside of the Dream, one rarely sees dramatically instant effects unless you are dealing with already-summoned entities or powers, or the act of actually manifesting the sometimes-visual glowing essence of *prāna*. This is chiefly due to the fact that such magics in Dárdūnah derive their force from the act of ritual, which is an elongated process that rarely lends itself to heat-of-combat flashy special effects or instant gratification.

There are some Rituals, however, such as the sorceries of Endowment that serve to enchant objects and weave illusions, which can have tangible or visible effects on the material world, effects that can sometimes be striking, memorable, and obviously magical. Summoning, too, can have terrifying effects

visible to anyone unfortunate enough to be the target of such magics. Spirits, Elementals, Demons, and even dangerous *suthra*, when commanded by a powerful enough Summoner, can leave a wake of such terror and destructions that the stories of such things can last long beyond the life of the *sir’hibas* responsible. As far as the Dream is concerned, it is possible, although very rare, for a *sir’hibas* to be able to have an affect on real-world objects from within the Dream or to attack someone’s physical body through the Dream.

These types of magic and ritual are very powerful, however, and is mostly reserved for ancient *sir’hibasi* or demon-spirits of incredible malignance. Such arts often represent more of the darker side of Dreamwalking magic, and are mistrusted and feared by most sane *jānah*.

The Game Mechanics for Shard’s Magic System

As with any RPG that has magic as one of its featured elements, the Shard system has a set of rules and recommendations to deal with playing out scenes dealing with ritual magic in the game. These rules, like most others for Shard, revolve around insuring that the cinematic aspect of the roleplaying event is encouraged and maintained. Like the Combat rules, the guidelines for using ritual magic in the world of Dárdūnah, involve the creative descriptions of the player as well as the GM as the dice are rolled and the scene takes shape. The simple rules for magic found here in the *Basic Compendium* exist to provide a general structural framework for almost any ritual a character may attempt, but requires that character’s player to creatively describe aspects of the ritual, and to make choices and decisions based on the GM’s own cinematic narratives and responses.

“That’s sounds a little complex and intimidating! What do you mean exactly? I’m a little confused,...will this actually be fun?”... Because Shard’s system of magic is a bit different from many other RPGs out there, all these concerns are totally understandable, but rest assured that, like Shard’s cinematic style of combat, having this free-form method of ritual magic ensures a richness and variety that’s difficult to achieve with more structured and rigid rule systems. Having a good imagination and a flair for the dramatic are the keys to allowing your character to perform fun and really productive magic rituals in the game. Additionally, creating a cool ambience with good descriptions provides your GM with all sorts of inspiration to help turn your moment in the story’s spotlight into a memorable roleplaying scene.

“Well how does all this work, then?”...you might ask.... Great question. Let’s get right down to it! In Shard’s rules, there are actually two different systems of ritual magic a player can use for their character, a basic system (outlined momentarily in this book), and a more complex system (outlined in the book *Magic and Martial Arts*). The basic and the complex systems actually function in exactly the same way;

- A player decides they wish to have their character be able to perform magic
- They purchase the appropriate Talents and Skills for their character as outlined in the Character Creation chapter of this book
- They choose what type of magic they wish to primarily focus on (which will, in turn, indicate the types of Rituals they will use).
- Each Ritual they choose to use is assigned its own dice-pool as a Skill roll that they must make in order to perform the ritual successfully (rolled at the beginning of the ritual, as well as various times during the ritual to determine the outcome of various events that either the player or the GM might initiate).

These are the simplified mechanics for the basic as well as the complex magic system in Shard, with the only difference between the two being that, **in the basic system provided in this book there are only four different general magic rituals based on the four different types of sir'hibasi** (described earlier), whereas **for the complex system provided in the book *Magic and Martial Arts*, there are a variety of different specialized rituals, each with their own set of Disciples** (similar to Multi-Maneuvers for the Martial Styles of the complex Martial Arts system offered in the same book) that have assigned to them particular powers, properties, and difficulties.

The Basic Rituals

For the purposes of the basic rules covered by this book, and as described in the Character Creation chapter as well as earlier in this chapter, these are the four general Magic Rituals your character may possess:

1. **The Ritual of Healing**- performed, of course, by Healers as a method of magically attempting to heal the mind, body, or spirit. These are some of the least dangerous of the mystic arts, but do seem to be somewhat taxing upon the healer as well as the patient.
2. **The Ritual of Dreamwalking**- performed primarily by Seers as a means of going into a dream-like trance so that omens and visions of the past, present, future can be glimpsed. These are enigmatic, mysterious, and sometimes fearful events, depending on what one might see and have to deal with in the Dream.
3. **The Ritual of Endowment**- performed by Sorcerers as a method of mystically endowing aspects of the world around them with either positive qualities, negative flaws, or illusory traits. This type of magic can have unexpected, surprising, and sometimes even shocking results, even in the case of success, though luckily such effects are rarely long-lasting.
4. **The Ritual of Summoning**- performed by Summoners, obviously, as a means by which to call forth suthra from out of the wild, spirits from beyond death, elemental forces from nature, or even demons

from the pits of Narákah. This is, by far, the most dangerous and fearful type of magic, since summoned beings and the mindless forces of nature can quickly slip from an unlucky summoner's control, often with disastrous effects.

Key Points to Remember

When using (and GMing) magic rituals for Shard, it's important to understand and share certain expectations that need to apply so that effects caused by using free-form, imagination-based rules don't get out-of-hand, allowing imbalance in the game's storyline. To do this I will outline a few Key Points that will hopefully serve to keep things in balance, in perspective, and more importantly, within the realm of the type and feel of magic that would actually exist on the world of Dárdūnah.

- Magic should always be treated as a somewhat miraculous and enigmatic event, even by the sir'hibas performing the magical ritual. Though ritual in Dárdūnah is certainly commonplace, actually visual magical events are not. So in those rare cases where supernatural effects can be seen, they will never be treated as commonplace by those who observe them.

- Performing Magical Rituals takes time, both inside and outside of the game's fiction, and can usually never be done "on the fly", "off the cuff", or in the midst of distracting upheaval (like combat). Unlike many different gaming systems for other RPGs, magic in Shard is "ritual-based", and is assumed to take **at least 30 minutes** of fictional "in-game" time for a character to accomplish. This is due to the fact that before a ritual can commence, there must be a little bit of preparation time taken to gather all the materials used by the sir'hibas who will perform it. Incense must be lit, crystal chimes rung, prayer bowls placed in the lap or upon pillows, meditation beads brought forth, sigils drawn upon the ground, etc. There may be some exceptions to this, such as items created by a Sorcerer that might produce immediate effects, supernatural entities trapped by a Summoner in an object that are suddenly released, the use of special magical crystals that might plunge a Seer into Dream, etc. But these are very rare, and are subject to the whims of the GM. During the ritual itself, the character must have time to achieve a state of deep meditation or trance, and in that state must perform the various operations and disciplines meant to achieve the effects desired. Once this is done, of course, the character must then take the time to reverently clean, or at least stow away, all the valuable and rare tools of their trade. Out of game-time fiction, the player and the GM will need to spend time describing these preparations (at least to some extent), and will most assuredly need to interact as the description, the dice-rolls, and the effects of the ritual begin to play-out.

- The outcome of any particular magical ritual is never certain nor always dependable, even when successful. A good GM will always "spice things up"

a bit when magic is at work, and no two rituals should ever be described exactly alike. Because the magic of Dárdūnah is meant to carry a very large air of mystery and suspense, both the players as well as the GM should seek to describe magical scenes with as many ambience-related words and phrases possible. These rituals are not “fire and forget” events, they are elaborate and engaging scenes where, for a short time, the magical character takes the spotlight as they interact with the GM, who should be presenting unique descriptions to enjoy and unexpected trials that must be overcome.

- The effects of magic should always be a balanced measure of “give and take”, meaning that, not only should the player get out of it what they put into it (time, good descriptions, creativity, etc.), but that fictionally, their character should always feel that for any benefits they might gain from doing a magic ritual, there is always a risk associated with depending on such mystic, unpredictable powers, always the chance that the nature of success is uncertain (regardless of what they roll), failure will have frightening and unexpected results, and botching can lead to true supernatural danger and long-term, story-altering consequences. The best way to act as GM for such events is to assume that, in magic, a character never gets “something for nothing”. There is always a trade, and it could come when least expected. If a player expects to get some amazing benefit from their ritual, then the more exceptional the reward, the more dangerous the ritual should seem, the more difficult it should be to perform it (having the player apply negative dice penalties to their rolls), the more bizarre eventual side-effects may be, the more menacing and fearful the descriptions used when narrating the scene become, etc. Examples of such things will be given later as we provide examples of each of the rituals being played out.

“Well, how **do** these mechanics play out in the game?”... you may wonder. We thought you’d never ask!...

Performing a Ritual

Though magic itself on the world of Dárdūnah should be enigmatic and mysterious, the step-by-step rules for enacting them and role-playing them are not. Regardless of the type of ritual being performed, there are several essential Steps that should transpire, get described to some extent, be played out as dice rolls are made, and then be resolved as the GM decides on the outcomes.

- Step #1: Declare Ritual and Describe Preparations
- Step #2: Initial Rolls and Beginning Descriptions
- Step #3: Manifestation and Required Rolls
- Step #4: Resolution and Conclusion

Step #1: Declare Ritual and Describe Preparations

Before beginning any ritual, you need to pick an appropriate time and place to perform it, and you should then let the GM know what ritual you want to perform, what you wish to accomplish, and that you intend to begin soon. The GM will then let you know if it is appropriate to begin a ritual at that time (and place), and will encourage you to briefly describe any special preparations you wish to make.

A good GM will play off the player’s descriptions, add to them as appropriate, and consider whether such preparations might actually aid in the ritual effort. If the GM decides that a role-playing bonus or penalty is necessary based on these descriptions, they should take that silently into account and generally incorporate that into their descriptions of events as the ritual is played out in the game. There is no need for the GM, at this point, to openly assign any specific dice penalties or bonuses, though they should feel free to let the player know if their preparation description was good.



Step #2: Initial Rolls and Beginning Descriptions

The GM will now have you make your initial Magic Ritual Skill roll to determine if the Ritual gets off to a good start. This is an initial mystic Discipline that all sir'hibasi use to enter into the Ritual itself through meditative trance (the use of this Discipline counts against the total number of Disciplines that a character may attempt between hours of rest. See Step #3 under Discipline Rolls.). You will make the roll using the dice pool of whichever of the four basic Rituals you have that is most appropriate to what you are trying to achieve:

Initial Ritual Roll = (Character's Appropriate Magic Ritual Skill + modifiers, if any)

- **Character's Appropriate Magic Ritual Skill-** Defined as the primary Magic Ritual Skill you choose to use in an attempted act of magic (i.e. the Ritual of Healing if you are attempting to stop a terrible wound from bleeding and return Stamina to a comrade, the Ritual of Dreamwalking if you are trying to go into trance to see visions of the past, etc.).

- **Modifiers-** These could be negative modifiers due to previous wounds taken, negative (or positive) environmental occurrences, or even negatives to dice rolls because of the difficulty or rarity of the magic being attempted. Your GM will specify these.

The basic rule of thumb concerning negative modifiers for Ritual Magic rolls requires the GM to decide if any adverse circumstances warrant a difficulty of -1 (representing slight difficulties or inconveniences) to -6 (representing very rare and difficult magics or incredible inconveniences). Negative modifiers due to environmental difficulties (loud noises, extremes of uncomfortable temperature, pouring rain, etc.) might actually be **added** to negative modifiers caused by trying certain acts of magic (such as using rare or very difficult rituals and magic disciplines). Generally, the Initial roll allowing a character to begin the ritual will have no magic difficulty modifiers, but could certainly be affected by environmental circumstances. As the player attempts more and more difficult feats while in ritual, however, the GM will certainly start considering whether various negative modifiers might apply. It is for the GM to fairly decide upon and set such modifiers before asking a player to make a roll.

Your initial roll will determine if you are able to successfully sink into the trance-like state needed to perform the chosen ritual itself, and the roll's degree of success (the number of successes rolled) will help set the stage for the overall "feeling" of the ritual as it is carried out, as described by the GM. The GM should decide how to describe the first few moments of ritual trance, and attempt to evoke the proper atmosphere of that particular ritual based on how

well that first roll succeeds. This is the "beginning descriptions" part of this Step.

For instance, if the roll resulted in a Botch, the beginnings of the ceremony might be interrupted with disastrous results, or the character might actually enter into the trance, only to have the magic begin going terribly wrong. A failure might simply mean you are unable to enter into deep enough trance due to prevailing circumstance. A nominal success may mean that the ritual begins with a sense of nervous tension and uncertainty, with mixed results no doubt reflected in the final outcome. More and more successes rolled would, of course, seem to indicate a brighter outcome for the ritual, with the GM giving descriptive indications that provide evidence to the player that the powers they are harnessing are flowing smoothly.

Step #3: Manifestation and Required Rolls

At this stage, the GM should transition the initial description into a narration showing you that the magic you are attempting is either starting to manifest or not, based on your initial roll. As you listen to the GM's description, if you notice a moment that seems to require your input, feel free to let the GM know that you wish to intervene by asking if you can change these events in any way by attempting to use your ritual skills to further affect or change the outcome in some creative way. The GM may also pause to ask you to make such a roll, or to make certain Characteristic Rolls, if they think it's necessary.

Discipline Rolls

Attempting to alter the course of a Magic Ritual in any way assumes you are using mystic Disciplines within the ritual, and always requires a roll of your appropriate Magic Ritual skill (based on the Ritual you are currently performing). When making such rolls, you might simply be working through the forces of magic itself in an unopposed fashion, or you may be in contest against the powers of another being or sir'hibas. These are the two different methods of rolling in either circumstance:

Uncontested Discipline Roll = (Character's Appropriate Magic Ritual Skill + modifiers, if any)

This assumes that the only dice modifiers applied to the roll are due to either past Stamina loss the character is still affected by, environmental circumstances that might make the Ritual more difficult in general, or the fact that the thing they are attempting to do is judged as more difficult than normal by the GM.

Contested Discipline Roll = (Character's Appropriate Magic Ritual Skill + Sir'hibas Talent Dice, + modifiers, if any)

This assumes that, in addition to any other modifiers, the character is attempting to match their

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powers against the powers of another being or entity while performing the Discipline. This could mean either a direct confrontation, where the successes are matched against one another in the same way that combat attack and defense rolls are made, or that the character is pitting their powers against magical constructs created by others, such as protective or obscuring Magical Wards or Illusions created by Sorcerers and Seers, in which case they are attempting to defeat successes laid in place previously.

There are several important rules pertaining to using Disciplines while in Ritual:

- Every **different** type of thing you attempt while within Ritual is considered the use of a “unique” Discipline. If you repeat that same type of thing later during that same Ritual, then it’s no longer considered “unique”. This is for the GM to decide.

Example: If a Seer performing the Dreamwalking ritual told the GM they wanted to conjure a vision (peering into the past, present, or future), the first time they initiated this Discipline it would be considered “unique”, however, as they continued to push further into the vision in attempt to get even more information, the GM would require more rolls, but these rolls would simply be a repeat of this same Discipline, and would not necessarily be considered “unique”. If, however, this same Seer found that they had to unravel mystic Wards in order to see beyond the walls of his enemy, then this would be considered the use of another “unique” Discipline.

- Regardless of the number of Rituals performed per day, the character may only perform a number of unique Disciplines, between periods of full rest, based on the sum of their Essence plus their Sir’hibas Talent score. Each unique Discipline performed makes them more and more exhausted, detracting from the total they have left to perform before they are forced to rest fully, though a certain number of hours worth of complete rest restores the ability to perform an equal number of Disciplines. If a character finds they must expend all of their allowed unique Disciplines while within ritual, then they will emerge from that ritual to fall into immediate unconsciousness for 2-12 hours. However, after invoking the power of a Discipline during a Ritual, the character may continue to make Ritual Skill (or other) rolls pertaining to that invoked Discipline without further exhaustion (since repeats of the same Discipline are not considered “unique”, as mentioned earlier).

Example: After having invoked the Discipline allowing you to attack another sir’hibas within the Dream, continuing to roll your Ritual Skill to make further attacks during that same Ritual does not count against the total you may perform before you need to rest.

- Unlike Combat, foes contesting one another during Ritual trance (i.e. while in the realm of Dream or in the case of Wards or other powers created to actually lash out at the sir’hibas to drive them away) do not roll

a number of Actions, nor is there any sense of Initiative. Contesting characters or forces merely roll against one another simultaneously, matching Successes rolled to determine success or failure. The one with the highest number of Successes wins. One may be “attacking” while the other is “defending”, or both might be “attacking” simultaneously. The effects are based on the intent of the sir’hibas or magical being, and what they describe as the Discipline is attempted.

In the end, magical contests of any kind are generally an attempt to either hurl someone out of their Ritual trance (effectively ending their Ritual for them), banishing them in some way, controlling them in some way, or bringing an end to some mystic manifestation or blockade. To do this, the “attacker” must make enough successful “attacks” to deplete either the reserve of Successes attached to some magical construct (such as a Ward or an illusion), or they must deplete their foe’s mystic Stamina (equal to their real-world Stamina, for the purposes of Magic Ritual). Each successful “attack” against something results in a loss of either the thing’s Success reserve (in the case of magical creations such as Wards, which also weakens them slowly, since they have less dice to roll as they become depleted), or the opponent’s spiritual Stamina (which weakens them slowly in ritual trance, and will eventually force them to either leave the Ritual, or succumb to the will of their opponent). In each contested roll, as the Successes are compared to one another, the one with the most Successes wins, and the number of Successes above the opponent’s roll is the number of spiritual Stamina (or stored Successes) the opponent loses. An even number of Successes on either side indicates a draw, with neither party losing anything.

Example: Attackers roll their Ritual Skill dice in a contestable attempt to overcome their opponents’ Defense rolls, adding their Sir’hibas Talent to their dice pool on each attempted roll. The number of successes above the opponent’s roll indicates the number of Stamina Levels they lose. If you force the opponent to zero Stamina, they are driven from the Dream, exhausted and weak, but with no true Stamina loss (though there have been known to be exceptions to this rule, GM’s option). Remnant effects of such an attack, if any, in the waking world, are up to the whim of the GM.

Characteristic Rolls

Another type of roll you may be asked to make during the course of a ritual is a Characteristic Roll. Characteristic Rolls are tests of some base Characteristic value of the player’s character. Such rolls are often called for during the process of rituals, both for the sir’hibas as well as any others who may be affected by the power of the magic. A Characteristic Roll’s dice-pool is calculated as follows:

Characteristic Roll Dice Pool = (Current Characteristic Value divided by 2, then rounded up if necessary)

In Ritual Magic, the two Characteristics that the GM may require you to roll against from time to time would be Essence and Will. It's important for both GMs and players to understand the situations where such rolls might be made, and why these Characteristic are important.

- **Essence Roll**- A base Characteristic Roll of $\frac{1}{2}$ Essence may be called upon from time to time as required by the GM to determine factors concerning Essence or things that might affect a character's Essence. In some cases, the GM may allow a sir'hibas to make an Essence Roll when near the source of a unique, veiled, or powerful magic or magical being, to gain some insight into its presence. The effects of this are totally up to the GM, however, and are never certain or completely revealing. As mentioned earlier, Essence is also important because any Essence lost represents an equal loss to the value of any Skills based upon it until that Essence is regained, including all Magic Ritual skills. In addition, the number of Disciplines that can be attempted between rest periods of productive sleep is limited to the character's Essence Characteristic plus their Sir'hibas talent total; thus, an Essence Decrease would also limit the number of Disciplines available to be performed. The loss of Essence could come from any number of events: the effects of illness, poisons, attacks from supernatural entities or other sir'hibasi, etc.

- **Will Roll**- A base Characteristic Roll of $\frac{1}{2}$ Will may be called upon from time to time as required by the GM usually to determine the outcome of magics that might attempt to control something supernaturally. They often come into play when the ritual attempts to affect control over another being in some way, and are an important part of any summoning magic. The GM may require a sir'hibas to make a Will Roll if either something else is attempting to break **their** will, or if they are attempting to dominate another. Will is important because any loss in that Characteristic represents an equal loss to the value of any Skills based upon it until Will is regained. If Will reaches 0, the character will most like no longer act of their own volition, reacting like an automaton, or falling into a state of glassy-eyed unconsciousness. The loss of Will could come from any number of events: prolonged torture, "brain-washing" techniques, attacks from supernatural entities or other sir'hibasi, etc.

Adding Concentration Talent Dice

Unbroken concentration is essential while performing rituals and must be kept throughout, otherwise failure or worse could be the result. If an interruption occurs during ritual, the player will need to roll their Ritual Skill dice, adding their Concentration Talent dice (if they have this Talent), in order to determine if they successfully maintained their ritual trance. The GM will be the judge of what interruptions would necessitate such a role, but certainly damage taken by the character's physical body during ritual

would merit one. Since concentration is assumed to be an integral part of ritual magic in the first place, adding the Concentration Talent dice are not generally allowed while performing any aspect of the basic ritual itself, though the GM may make exceptions under certain circumstances.

Step #4: Resolution and Conclusion

Eventually you will come to an end of your Ritual, resolving those issues that instigated it (or not), and bringing the Ritual to its conclusion (or having it concluded for you by the GM. This might happen for several different reasons:

- You decide to end the Ritual once you have achieved (or failed to achieve) your objectives. This is, by far, the most elegant way to conclude a Ritual, and should be your goal from the very beginning. Avoid the temptation of "meandering" through the ritual, unless enough of your comrades are a part of it that they can all enjoy participating, or unless the ritual is meant to take awhile, and is being presented in sections, intermingled with the actions of other players outside of the Ritual you are performing. Choose a limited number of things you want to accomplish, enjoy being a part of the magical scene that unfolds, then bring it to a dignified end. If you take too much time, the GM might decide to end it for you in a "less desirable" manner.

- You reach your maximum number of "unique Disciplines for that day (i.e. between periods of full rest). During a busy and eventful game session, you may discover that you have used as many unique Disciplines as you are allowed (the sum of your Essence plus your Sir'hibas Talent score). At this point you must end the Ritual or you will emerge from Ritual trance only to fall immediately unconscious (as described earlier).

- You are hurled from Ritual trance by some opposing force that has depleted your spiritual Stamina. Once this occurs you will find your concentration instantly broken, and you will suddenly awaken from you mystic trance with the Ritual having abruptly come to an end. As noted earlier, the loss of spiritual Stamina doesn't mean you've actually lost any real Stamina. Reaching 0 is merely a gauge to determine when you are hurled from the Ritual. There may be some special exceptions to this rule, and it is up the GM to decide if there are any rare moments when damage taken in Ritual has remnant effects in the "real world".

- The GM decides that the Ritual draws to a close because of some appropriate or shocking event either in trance or outside of trance. You may find yourself "dismissed" by someone with whom you were speaking in the Dream, gently bringing the Ritual to a close, some shocking revelation could end a vision with an awakening "scream", or perhaps, after several attempts at some objective, the rolls simply seem to lack the effect you desire. These are the clues a GM may use to indicate that they wish to bring a Ritual to an end. This

is often done for the sake of story pacing, because the GM wishes to move the game session forward for the sake of other players' time. Fighting against this could cause the GM to get "rough" in their attempts to move the game along, so it's best to take such hints when you recognize them.

Once any of these things happen, and your Ritual is over, if you (as a player) don't feel like you "get" some aspect of what may have just happened, but think that, perhaps, your character might have a better understanding of the events, feel free to ask the GM about it before the scene shifts to the next player(s). The GM may not necessarily want to reveal everything to you, depending on the Ritual itself, but if there are any further clues the GM's willing to give you, you may be allowed to make some Knowledge Skill roll (such as Magic Theory or Ritual Lore, to name a few) to discover more information, or come to some further conclusion based on your character's knowledge.

The GM may also want to describe any further aspects of the Ritual's conclusion, either important things going on immediately afterward, or simply what is entailed in dealing with all the remaining components of the Ritual itself. Players should work with the GM to describe such "cleanup" as necessary, allowing the GM to move smoothly into the next scene of the game.



Ritual Magic Narrative Examples

As mentioned earlier, the four general rituals used in the basic magic system for Shard cover most, if not all, of the types of things that players, who want to have sir'hibasi characters in the game, will want to do. Having read through the previous section presenting all the basic mechanics for performing a ritual, you should now have a general knowledge of what the flow of the rules is like, but what about the nature of the role-playing itself? "What does it 'feel' like to role-play a Magic Ritual during a game?"... That's an important question to address!

In the Combat section of the rules we provided a fairly detailed narrative of combat between two different individuals, as well as the input and descriptions from the GM. For magic, we'd like to attempt the same thing, but in this case, the best way to help you understand the dynamics of magical ritual would be to provide a decent description of **each** of the four general rituals, since they are individually meant to invoke a very different cinematic atmosphere.

An Example of Healing

We shall start with a look into one of the least dangerous types of magic, the mystic arts of a Healer sir'hibas. Though it is essentially less "risky" than many other types of magical rituals, there is always a chance that perils will sometimes arise, as we'll shortly demonstrate. Let's look at our first narrative Magic Ritual example.

Example: Ritual of Healing

This scene follows a dramatic fight between a group of players and a "mad hermit monk" who was said to live in an abandoned temple high in the mountains. Having traveled there with a mystic priest (my Healer sir'hibas baboon character), the goal was to confront the strange monk (rumored to have had a hand in the disappearances of local villagers), discover what villainy may have actually been going on, and help cleanse the temple using holy ceremonies. The group made a grisly discovery, however, since it seemed that the hermit monk had been committing terrible sacrificial murders. The chambers below the temple ruins had become a slaughterhouse filled with the bodies of villagers and unwary travelers! From the sinister shadows the crazed monk (a black adder) emerged, wielding an ancient-looking, chipped crystal dagger that seemed to glow with an inner fire. Terrified, the players did battle with the sarpah monk, who seemed to have an almost supernatural strength and a horribly twisted visage. In the end he was defeated, but in the process one of the party (a female fox Honor Guard) was terribly wounded by the monk's glowing crimson knife, and lay unconscious and bleeding!

Since I am the only sir'hibas in the group (and have been told by the GM that our attempts to bind the fox's wounds seem unable to stop the flow of blood), I let the GM know I want to make a Magic Theory roll (a Skill I possess) to see if my character knows whether the copious bleeding might be due to some terrible enchantment placed on the dead monk's evil-looking crystal blade. With the roll a success, the GM informs me that it is very possible that some dark magics has caused this, and that without a Ritual of Healing she may not have long to live! I quickly tell the other players (in character) that I want them to help me clear the area so that I may begin preparations for a magical ritual that might help save the fox's life. The crystal dagger, I tell them, must have carried a terrible curse that thwarts our efforts to help staunch the flow of her blood, and that nothing less than the holy power of the Devah can help her now.

As the rest of the party begins to clear out space on the rubble-strewn temple chamber according to my character's directions, I tell the GM that I'm going to prepare to cast a Ritual of Healing, describing how I take a stubby piece of yellow chalk from my pack and begin inscribing a mystic circle around the female fox, filling it with symbols of blessing and healing, and another glyph that surrounds me (this time a large triangle, for variety's sake), in which I draw symbols of power and protection. I then tell the GM that I light little cones of incense around the perimeter of these symbols, and take out my crystal "singing bowl" which vibrates with a beautiful tone when I move a special sounding stick around its outer rim. All these items I stated that I carried upon me at the beginning of our mission, because (having done a bit of research into Tibetan monks) these types of things seemed like the proper "tools of my trade"; something a mystic priest like me would have. The GM nods and smiles, apparently liking how I've set up the scene, but then describes that we all hear the distant rumble of thunder, as if a storm is approaching. This completes the first part of the ritual, where I declare the ritual I want to do and describe my preparations, so now it's time to move onto the performance of the ritual itself!

GM: "Alright baboon (assume the GM would be using the character's name here), now that you have settled into the center of your chalk symbol, you begin to sound your meditation bowl, filling the ancient chamber with its soft tones and the humming vibrations of your chanting as you begin to intone the mystic words."

The GM looks around at the rest of the players, getting their attention as he includes them in the description of the scene.

GM: "As the sir'hibas begins to murmur, the rest of you notice that there seems to be a strange chill you can feel in the air, perhaps it is the fact that clouds have begun to gather in the skies above since you entered the temple ruins, and the warm rays of the two suns that had been streaming through the holes in the ceiling above have all but vanished... The rumbling sound of thunder is heard again, this time a little closer."

GM: "Fox, you need to take another level of damage as you continue to bleed."

Fox: "Oh NO!"

GM: "Yep...please mark it off of your Stamina."

Baboon: "I'd like to make my initial roll to begin the ritual. My goal is to gather up the healing energy of Prána from thin air around my hands and use it to try to stop her from bleeding to death."

GM: "OK, make your first roll using your

Healing Ritual dice pool."

Baboon: "This sudden change in the weather is freaking me out! Are there any modifiers I need to know about?"

GM: "Nope, not yet... Go ahead and roll."

As mentioned earlier, here is the formula I need to use to make my first roll for the ritual:

Initial Ritual Roll = (Character's Appropriate Magic Ritual Skill + modifiers, if any)

My baboon Healer has a Magic Ritual (Ritual of Healing) skill of 8 (derived from my Essence of 7, but bought up to an 8 with Story Points a few games back). I am luckily uninjured from the combat, and there are no adverse or advantageous circumstances, so there are no modifiers to my attempt at this time. **I roll my 8d6 and get 4 successes for my initial roll to begin the Ritual.**

GM: "As you all observe, the baboon Healer raises up his free hand away from the vibrating bowl sitting before him and slowly begins moving it toward the unconscious form of the fox. As he continues to intone the holy chant, the very air before him starts to shimmer as a golden aura seems to form around his hand. The baboon's eyes slowly close as he falls deeper into his meditative trance, and the golden light spreads out from his outstretched fingers and begins to cascade down upon the gaping wound in the fox's side. As you watch, the fox's breathing becomes faster, and you can see the blood on her fur seems to actually burn away as the cleansing light of the holy fire pools down into the terrible wound, and the pulsing flow of blood is halted. Outside you all can hear a slight moaning noise as the wind seems to be picking up."

Fox: "Whew! Have I stopped bleeding to death?"

GM: "Yes, you have, but you've still taken a lot of damage from the wound itself. You're now at -3 Stamina from that last point you lost a moment ago, which means you are still unconscious as well. The Healer will need to roll well enough at some point to actually close the wound and get your Stamina above 0. Baboon, what do you want to do next?"

Baboon: "Just like you said, I want to heal the knife-wound itself,...to try to seal it up. What do I need to roll?"

At this point, the ritual has moved into Step #3, where the main effects of the Ritual of Healing begin to manifest as required dice rolls are made by the player (and the GM when necessary).

GM: "OK, having gotten into the ritual and initiated the first steps of Healing by manifesting golden Prána, you will now need to roll your Magic Ritual skill again, but this time there will be some modifiers applied to the roll. You have sunk into deep trance, and as a result of that trance, though your actual eyes have closed, within your mind a type of spiritual sight makes it seem as if the room around you has become vague and misty. Most of the surrounding details have vanished, leaving only you, the body of the fox, and the symbols you drew upon the floor, all of which seem to float strangely within a sea of colorful glowing veils and sparkling vapor. You feel like the room you are in has begun to touch the Dream. The golden light of the Prána that continues to emanate from you flows across the wound as you attempt to heal it. Before you make your healing roll, please make an Essence roll first."

Baboon: "Wait, how do I do that again?"

GM: "Divide the value of your current Essence Characteristic by 2, then round up if necessary."

My Healer character has an Essence of 7, as

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I mentioned before. So, half my Essence (7 divided by 2 = 3.5) rounded up is 4. I roll 4 dice and get 2 successes.

Baboon: "I made a full success!"

GM: "Very well, you notice as you gaze at the wound, there is a distinctive scarlet darkness about it that threatens to diminish the glowing brilliance of the Prána. Your magical sight tells you that the wound is both physical and supernatural, making it even more difficult to heal. Furthermore, as your gaze seems to pass through her body as if it has become translucent, at the heart of the wound there appears to be some strange glittering object burning like a tiny crimson star. Go ahead and roll your Healing Ritual skill dice now but at a modifier of -2 dice to the roll.

Baboon: "What?!? Hold on a second! What's that shining thing inside her wound?!?"

GM: "Well, make a decent roll on this attempt at healing her and perhaps I'll explain... Remember, you're at a -2 for this dice roll..."

The GM smiles secretly as I make my roll; my Healing Ritual Skill of $8 - 2 = 6$ dice I'm able to use. I make the roll and get a 5, 4, 2, 4, 6, and 6. I get to roll the second six again and only roll a 1. Oh well... Still really good!

Baboon: "OK, great! I got 5 successes!"

GM: "Very good! Through your spiritual sight you watch as the glowing Prána flows deep into the wound, slowly knitting her flesh together as it passes, reaching far inside as it finally reaches the tiny scarlet glow at its heart. Fox, since the Recover Table indicates that magical healing lets you recover lost Stamina at the rate of 2 levels per success rolled, since the Healer baboon just rolled 5 successes, you get back 10 levels of Stamina."

Fox: "That's GREAT! I'm back up to 7 Stamina then, does that mean I wake up now?"

GM: "Heh,...well, mark it down on your Character Sheet, but nope, you don't wake up. This isn't over just yet... I need you to make a Will roll!"

The fox's Will is normally a 6, which would mean she would get to roll 3 dice, but because she is below 1/3rd of her Stamina she is at a -2 dice penalty, leaving her only 1d6 to roll. The GM has decided that the foe she is secretly facing (a hellish thing imprisoned in the crystal dagger that wounded her) has 7 dice at its disposal, meaning it gets to make a Will roll of 4. The GM secretly rolls 4 dice, getting 3 successes, and the fox rolls her single die,...a 2. Failure.

Fox: "Uh oh..."

Baboon: "Yeah,..my thought exactly."

GM: "As the rest of you watch from well outside the area of the ritual, the fox's small body begins to shake as if struck by a seizure! The strange golden glow coming from the outstretched hand of the straining baboon seems to be twisted into dark crimson streaks as it enters the writhing wound in her side. Lightning streaks across the sky above, thunder roars through the darkened clouds, and the wind begins to shriek through the crumbling walls of the temple ruins.

GM: "Baboon, through your mystic gaze into what must be the Dream, the moment the healing Prána begins to tug at the crimson ember within her you are give the briefest wisp of a vision! Through the swirling colorful veils of mist a dark form can be seen clutching a ghostly image of the dead monk's red crystal dagger as it cries out in arcane words that are almost painful to hear. In front of this figure a terrible, hulking demonic form manifests raising up its many chitinous appendages in great anger, only to wail in agony and rage as, in a rush of energy, it is drawn

within the dagger itself. The ruby-like blade rises into the air above the body of the fox, and though the vision vanishes, the ghostly dagger, now huge, remains. From the glowing dagger crimson strands of magical force lash out, drawing the Dream-form of the fox up onto her feet like some ghostly marionette. Upon her face there is the same terrible expression that you recall seeing on the mad monk as he attacked you earlier, but here her eyes glow an otherworldly red as she shambles toward you, arms reaching out with clawed hands grasping..."

Fox: "Ahhgh! Is my 'real' body doing that!?"

GM: "No, the rest of you see her body continue to convulse upon the ground as the haunting wind howls through the ancient once-sacred chamber. The sound of it echoes down the hollow halls and deep down the passages to where the corpses of the poor villagers still lay,...almost making it sound as if they are crying out from far below."

Baboon: "It's got control of her somehow! I want to use my magic to break those strings if I can, and to push that thing out of her!"

At this point the GM decides that if the baboon Healer succeeds in doing this, it should resolve the situation and bring conclusion to the entire issue pertaining to the injured fox, thus freeing her from the demon spirit's control. However, such a feat will NOT be easy at all.

GM: "Very well, you must make a final Healing Ritual skill roll, but this time you'll be doing it at -5 to your dice pool."

Baboon: "Minus 5!!! That only leaves me with 3 dice to roll!"

GM: "Yes, but in this circumstance, since you are trying to defeat another being, this is considered a 'Contested' roll, which means you get to add your Sir'hibas Talent Dice to your dice-pool. What is your Sir'hibas Talent?"

Baboon: "A 3! That means I get to roll 6 dice against it."

The baboon Healer rolls his 6 dice, getting 4 successes, and the GM rolls his 7 dice for the demon-spirit, but achieves only 3 successes. Lucky for them all, the baboon's successes completely cancel out the demon's successes, thus severing the bonds formed between it and the fox, breaking its control completely! The GM decides that it's now time to describe the ritual's conclusion.

GM: "As the ghostly form of the fox shambles toward you, ready to strike, you attempt to spiritually lash out at the evil shimmering strings that seem to guide her movements, and as you do so, the glowing triangular symbol you drew surrounding your character seems to spin now, its sharp edges extending and rising into the air as they slash away from you, severing the controlling cords in a flash of white light which seems to engulf the horrible form of the possessed fox, consuming the scarlet energy lodged within her as a terrible demonic roar echoes across the expanse of the Dream.

GM: "The rest of you watch in wonder as the bright golden glow surrounding the shuddering body of the fox upon the ground seems to intensify near the area of the wound, utterly overbearing the darker crimson color that had briefly appeared. Suddenly, from out of the still-closing wound itself a pulsing, glowing red object appears, a scarlet crystal chip that had no-doubt flaked away from the dagger when it stabbed her. As the small crystal shard rises above the fox's body, held aloft by the glowing Prána, the chalk symbols on the ground seem to glow brightly

in a sudden immense flash of lightning directly overhead, the baboon cries out as if in triumph, the small piece of glowing scarlet crystal shatters into a thousand tiny pieces, and a mighty blast of thunder shakes the ruins around you all. As the last echoes rumble away into the distance, the first huge drops of rain begin to fall, leaking through the holes in the ceiling, and beginning to obscure the chalky symbols upon the ground. Shaken by the ordeal, the baboon almost slumps over the fox as the rest of you see that her terrible wound is nearly healed; a slim pink line of slightly-scarred flesh the only clue to what it had been. The fox begins to moan, and her eyes flutter, as she slowly regains consciousness.

GM: "Baboon,...in the dim light of the chamber, your tired eyes catch a brief glimpse of the dead monk's crimson dagger, a reddish glow still barely visible within its depths, laying nearby on the carved stones of the temple floor."

Baboon: "That thing, the dagger that stabbed her,...there is a demon trapped within it. It was using that tiny piece of itself to try to gain control over her...the way it did with the monk. It is a blasphemy against the Devah! We must find a way to destroy it..."



An Example of Dreamwalking

This type of magic is at once the most common type of magical ritual known on Dárdunah, as well as the most mysterious and enigmatic. It can be anything from a simple ritual allowing the sir'hibas to cast bones and little crystals on the floor to read an omen while in trance, to a complete "out-of-body" experience where the spirit

of the sir'hibas passes beyond this world, into a "dream-realm" of strange vistas and alien beings! In this example, we shall attempt to give you a taste of the full range of experience this ritual has to offer.

Example: Ritual of Dreamwalking

This scene takes place in a private meditation chamber of the Seer of the House of Satyár (my old sir'hibas owl character). The Aryah of her house had called upon her earlier in the day to go into Ritual to seek information that might lead to the discovery of an assassin that his informants have heard may be about to make an attempt on the Aryah's life. There has always been "bad blood" between our House of Satyár and the House of Rájyat who is another House from a rival Line in the city my character lives in. If anyone close were to send an assassin, it would be someone from the House of Rájyat. But the real questions are who, why, and more importantly...when. The lord Satyár believes that my character, the owl, may be able to find these answers in Dream. And the only way to do that is to secretly break through the magical wards that no-doubt surround the palace of the lord Rájyat.

The other player characters (those who may be involved in foiling of this dastardly assassination attempt) will be gathering together with me in the chamber in the hopes of somehow taking advantage of what I'm about to do. Perhaps, if I'm lucky enough with my rolls, I'll be able to include them in this vision in some way, thus letting them actually experience what may be very useful clues that could save our lord's life.

As a Seer of our House and Line, and a member of the Sunborn (Noble Caste) myself, I happen to enjoy the honor of having some servants at my beck and call. I ask the GM if there are such servants currently in attendance to my needs, and I'm told that the Aryah has assigned several to me this night to insure that things go smoothly with the attempt of this ritual. It's now time to get this thing started.

Owl: "OK, assuming these servants may have helped in the preparations for my rituals before, I tell them that I need to have them arrange the room to account for the other guests that have come to participate, meanwhile I will make some soothing herbal tea for them using some special herbs that I read about in the *World Guide*."

GM: "Which herbs are those?"

Owl: "It's called the Sadjah plant, and the book says that for use with medicines it's leaves are considered a Level 1 medicine with a calming effect, which means that for rolls dealing with healing and such it usually adds 1d6 to any rolls. Would you let me use this to make a tea that will help calm everybody and make it easier for them to be a part of this ritual? I haven't really tried bringing others into the Dream so that they can see what I see. I'm hoping this may help."

GM: "Alright, that sounds reasonable, and a great way to start a Ritual involving others, kind of like a Japanese tea ceremony! OK, when the time comes, remind me, and I'll let you add +1 die when you attempt to bring them in. However, bringing other people who aren't sir'hibasi into the Dream like this won't be easy as it is, so you may find that this additional die merely serves to offset a Difficulty Factor that I'll be setting."

Owl: "Really! Well...I guess it's good that I'm doing it then! OK, as some of the servants are bringing in comfortable pillows for everyone to sit

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on, I'll have another help me arrange the ritual area with the proper incense and candles and such, with me sitting in the direct center of the room. Once everyone has settled with their tea, I want to begin tracing chalk outlines around me representing Dream symbology, whatever that is. Once finished I'll begin the humming chant that let's me start the Ritual itself."

GM: "Excellent! You all watch as the servants scurry around the room doing the Seer's bidding. She stretches out her snowy-white wings, fanning the smoke of the incense as it swirls around the dim chamber. One by one the servants draw the little silken shades around the glowing jugánu-worm cages hanging at the edges of the room as candles are lit before you, casting long shadows across the intricate tapestries upon the walls. The rich smells of incense and hot herbal tea fills the air around you as you are each handed steaming cups and asked to sit on the cushions that are offered to you. The owl Seer takes her place at the center of the room, inscribes a great spiral around her, interlaced with strange symbols and figures, and begins to softly hum as she closes her eyes and slowly slips into ritual trance."

Step #1 having been completed, Step #2 of the ritual now begins. This ritual, like any other, will require the sir'hibas to make their Initial Roll at this time, followed by the GM's description of the ritual as it begins to manifest (which can be in any number of subtle, creative ways the GM can imagine, as long as it creates an air of suspense and mystery for everyone participating). Making it a little bit different every time makes each ritual somewhat unique, keeps players on their toes, and keeps things interesting.

GM: "Alright owl, it is now time to make your Initial Roll to see how the Ritual of Dreamwalking begins for you. Please roll your Magic Ritual Skill roll for Dreamwalking."

Owl: "OK, I have a Dreamwalking skill of 6 dice. There aren't any modifiers for this, right?"

GM: "Correct. Just make your basic skill roll."

Owl: "Got it! I rolled a 2, 1, 2, 4, 4, and 5. Three successes!"

GM: "Very well owl, please note that this is your first Unique Discipline you have performed today, since you have performed no other ritual earlier. After several minutes you begin to sink deeper into meditation, your eyes closed, the darkness begins to give way to wisps and streamers of light and color that drift and sway to the melody of your chant. Veils of swirling mist seem to draw close around you, and you see a glimmer of brighter colors whirl slowly in a vast spiraling circle, like some immense glittering flower whose petals are about to unfold. As for the rest of you, you slowly begin to drift into a calm and soothing state as the humming sounds of the owl's chants lull you into a meditative daze. One by one your eyes slowly close. Owl, you recognize this vast spiraling form as the colorful Veils of Dream, the shining, ever-changing portal into the Dreamworld itself, and as you approach, you move your great wings before you, parting the glimmering, misty veils with the tips of your feathers, which begin to delicately glow with their first touch of the Other World. As the swirling vapors open before you, you feel yourself being gently pulled in, leaving your body behind as your duhama passes into the Dream. You no longer feel the floor beneath you, nor do you smell the incense or hear the sound of your own chanting voice. Instead of the room, there surrounds you a silver-grey field of endless glittering mists, as if a million tiny gems float scattered in the air. And through this mist strange colorful shapes flit as if

alive. Apparently far away, even though distance seems meaningless here, there are darker forms, reminiscent of far-off mountains or clouds, yet they drift like ships on a silent sea, far too indistinct to guess what they may be."

Owl: "Well,..I take all this in for a moment, then look down at myself. Do I have any kind of body here, a form of some kind?"

GM: "Yes, it seems as if, this time, you appear much as you do in the waking-world, clothing and all, but more translucent and phantom-like."

Owl: "Hmnn. Now I need to bring in the rest, I guess, if I can."

At this point the ritual moves on to Step #3, where the required rolls are made for the continuing manifestation of the ritual's effects.

GM: "Alright, to do this, like most anything else during ritual, you will need to make a Magic Ritual skill roll using your Dreamwalking, of course. This is not a contested roll, since I'm assuming that none of the rest of you are attempting to resist being drawn within the Dream. However, bringing others in, like I mentioned earlier, isn't easy at all, so I'm assigning a difficulty modifier of -3 dice to each roll to bring them in, which I'll allow you to offset by the use of the tea you said you made for them all, making it only a -2. You'll need to roll once for each person. All of these rolls together will count as the use of another single Unique Discipline."

Owl: "Minus 2 dice for each roll!!! What if I don't make it? What happens to them?"

GM: "They will remain in a state of pseudo-trance for the rest of the ritual, but will not experience any of the sights and sounds of those who you succeed in bringing in. Go ahead and roll for each of the other characters individually."

There are five other characters in this case, and so I roll 5 times, once for each of them. The first three are complete successes (meaning I rolled two or more successful dice for each roll), however the last two didn't do so well.

Owl: "Uh oh..."

GM: "What happened?"

Owl: "The first of you three came through just fine, but for you (pointing to the fifth) I failed my roll, which means that you will remain in that blind trance right?"

GM: "Right, but what about the other one?"

Owl: "Weeeelll,..on him (the fourth one, an otter Honor Guard), I Botched; no successes and one 1."

GM: "Oooohh,..OK otter, as you seemed to slip deeper and deeper into a trance-like state the room became darker around you, and full of what now appears to be menacing shadows. You have Haunted as Drawback, don't you?"

Otter: "Uhhh, yeah... My character sometimes sees his father, who the family thinks is dead because he disappeared years ago on a journey through the eastern Uttara Mountains."

GM: "Very well then, otter. You see the silken robes of the owl sir'hibas stir in the whispering shadows, and just as you expect her to reach out and guide you into the vision with them, a frost-blackened, withered hand emerges from the folds of her sleeve whose tips are coated in glistening blood, and the cowl that had covered the features of her face slides back to reveal the face of your lost father, his eyes hollow and vacant, his muzzle drawn back to reveal his many teeth set loose within receding, dead gums! A terrible voice rasps from his throat as you hear the words 'Dooonott

joinnn mmeeeee!'... And you are suddenly shocked into wakefulness, scrambling back away from the circle of your chanting comrades. Though they are luckily not awakened by your sudden, strangled cry, you can only sit back and observe their chanting as their ritual commences without you."

Owl: "Sorry guys, I tried."

GM: "As for the three you succeeded with, they will gain the benefit of being able to see what transpires within the Dream, and you will see them appear near you in the Dream, though you see them merely as glowing spheres of golden light and dancing flame hovering near you among the colorful shimmering veils. To you three, the owl sir'hibas appears as a phantom image of herself, vague and translucent."

Owl: "Now that most of us are here, this is what I want to do. We all feel that these rumors about an attempted assassination of our lord no doubt refer to some plans made within our enemy's House, so I want to attempt to peer into the House of Rájyat at whatever time such a subject may have been discussed most recently to observe these plans."

GM: "You'll need to successfully roll your Dreamwalk Ritual skill roll then, though please modify the roll by -1 die, since this is slightly difficult to do."

Owl: "OK, I got 4 successes!"

GM: "Good! Remember that, then, but before I describe what you may see there, we need to deal with something else first. Those of you who have been brought into the Dream, floating there as you observe the strange environment around you, see the owl spread her wings widely around her, and the misty, shimmering veils seem to change and shift, moving past you as if carried by a high wind, though you feel none. It's as if you are sailing through the Dream without moving, and being carried to a distant location. As the whirling mists change, they also seem to take on strange features that soon become recognizable. Sights, sounds, and even the hints of smells seem to enfold you as the Veils of Dream form what appears to be the very city in which you live, seen as if from high within the air as you all pass over it in vision. And below you now, closer and closer, the spectral image of the House of your enemy becomes apparent. But suddenly you see the owl stiffen, and the Dream takes on a strange violet hue as tiny purple filaments of light appear to bar your way, their intricate patterns intertwining as if to form a living barrier. Owl, you have encountered a mystic Ward that has been placed here to safeguard the privacy of the House. You will need to carefully unravel this Ward so that you may see beyond it. This will be considered a Contested roll, since you will be attempting to affect the magic of another, and is somewhat difficult. Please roll your Dreamwalk Ritual skill roll with the addition of your Sir'hibas Talent Dice, but I need you to modify that total by -2 dice due to the difficulty modifier I've decided to assign in this case."

While my owl rolls her dice, achieving 7 successes, the GM announces that the Ward has 6 successes invested in it (which he rolled at that very moment using the supposed dice-pool of the rival sir'hibas who created it). This means the owl has been only partially successful attempting to unravel the Ward.

Owl: "Uh oh,...what does that mean in this case?"

GM: "While you are able to loosen it enough to see beyond its protection, you are unable to fully dismiss or unravel it, and it won't remain open for long. This attempt may have even alerted the one

who made this Ward to your presence in the Dream! The rest of you watch as the owl begins the difficult task of unweaving just enough of the Ward's intricate glowing sigils to look beyond it."

Owl: "OK, we have to be quick about this. With my 4 earlier successes, what am I able to see?"

GM: "Beyond the shifting, glowing frame opened through the Ward a sparsely-decorated chamber appears, and in it there stands Bintahk, the lynx Weapons Master of the House of Rájyat. Before him kneels a thin, black greyhound whom none of you recognize. All of you hear their faint voices as they echo strangely across the Dream. The lynx Bintahk says in an almost purring voice '...your chance will come when the House of Satyár and the House of Bárathah compete in the Spiral Arena. There will be fewer guards to deal with, and the Aryah's distraction will make him an easy target for you... I take it you have chosen your position?' The greyhound bows his head, replying 'Yes, honored Master, none will look for one such as I within the shadows of Kramah's beloved statue.' The lynx then brings forth a single arrow whose crystal tip appears dipped in the greenest of inks. 'Very well, this shall be your message to our unfortunate friend. Many jánah had to die so that even this small amount of Kyarku-beetle poison could fall into our hands...' The greyhound gingerly takes the arrow from him. "Worry not gracious Master, I never miss."

Owl: "The competition! That's in merely three days!"

GM: "Suddenly, all around you in the Dream a terrible shrieking begins, drowning out the voices in the vision. Please make a roll of your Dreamwalking skill, added to your Sir'hibas Talent dice, at a -1 die penalty. You are now attempting to defend yourself, and those with you from some strange attack within the Dream!"

At this point the GM has decided that my attempts to peer through our enemy's Wards have been discovered, and that some other sir'hibas has arrived in an attempt to stop us. I notice that though I have taken one from my total dice pool, the GM has actually taken two from his own. Apparently he considers attacking in the Dream to be more difficult than defending. I roll 5 successes and he rolls 3. I win this roll! I mark down that this is the fourth Unique Discipline that I have attempted today, which means I have only three more I can attempt before I need to get away. My Essence plus my Sir'hibas Talent is 8, which means that if I use 8 or more Unique Disciplines during this Ritual, I'll fall unconscious for awhile once the ritual ends. I need to be careful.

GM: "If there can truly be said to be a 'ground' here in the Dream, strange, thin crystal-like shards rise up from it and begin surrounding you like the bars of some mystic prison, their razor-sharp edges drawing close around you. You succeeded in defending against this attack, however, so what would you like to happen?"

Owl: "I want to shatter those crystal bars into hundreds of sharp, glowing shards that float and swirl around me. Do I see where this attack came from?"

GM: "Well, the bars shatter by your mystic will and begin whirling around you in a tight vortex, but through them you cannot seem to find any specific spot where the attack may have come from. It seems as if the attacker's location may be hidden by their own magic. If you wish, you may make a Dreamwalk skill roll plus your Sir'hibas Talent, at a -1, to use your mystic sight to see beyond their obscuring veils. This is your fifth Unique Discipline, I believe, leaving you 3 more, correct?"

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Owl: "If I do this, only 2, if I want to remain conscious afterwards. OK, I try to see him, whoever he is."

I roll my dice (at -1) against my attacker, getting 6 successes, and the GM only rolls 4 successes. Hopefully this will give me a target to attack!

GM: Beyond the whirling mists a shadowy figure begins to emerge, slowly resolving itself into the phantom-form of a large white rat with glowing pink eyes. As his robes whirl around him you recognize him as Ayajnah, the old and crafty Seer of your enemy House!"

Owl: "Oh no! I don't have what it takes right now to deal with him! OK, I just want to hurl these swirling shards right at him, and then escape from the Dream with everyone else intact..."

GM: "You'll need to make two more rolls then successfully. First, you are choosing to actually attack him, which means you'll need to make another contested roll of your Ritual skill plus Sir'hibas Talent dice, but this time at a -2. Let's see how that goes before making the second roll. This is another Unique Discipline!"

Owl: "This is getting a little too close for comfort guys! OK, I rolled 7 successes! What'd he get?"

GM: "He has rolled only 4! Very well done owl! The mystic shards fly toward him, and apparently lacerate and tear at his ghostly shape as he cries out in pain and anger! You haven't defeated him enough yet to drive him from the Dream, but you have certainly struck a excellent blow."

Owl: "It doesn't matter, though, we're leaving! Can I make my roll to escape the Dream and end the Ritual?"

GM: "Yes,..merely roll your Ritual Skill roll as you repeat the Discipline you used to enter into the Dream initially, when you parted its veils."

Owl: "OK, whew! I got 3 successes!"

GM: "The rest of you feel the tug of the waking world as your spirits fly from the Dream, and its mysterious veils and mists are left behind. Each of you slowly open your eyes as the owl's strained chanting comes to an end, and you see her slump slightly sideways in exhaustion, as she eyes you all with great concern."

Owl: "Alright, for those who were unable to join us within Dream, I relate what we have seen. Now we know what this assassin looks like, and who, it seems, will be sending him,..but we don't know why."

Otter: "More importantly than that, we know when."

Owl: "Yes,..but unfortunately we were detected as well,..though they have no idea what we may have seen. That wicked rat will surely tell his Master. We must be prepared for their plans to change, and we must immediately warn our lord the Ayah."

An Example of Endowment

The magic of a Sorcerer seeks to manipulate and change the things around them, essentially endowing them with properties either real or illusory, positive or negative. Items might be made to carry various strange properties or subtle powers, places may be protected by various types of Wards, people and creatures may be blessed or cursed with gifts and apparent defects of all kinds, and even the surrounding environments, even the weather itself, could be effected. Most of such magics are never long-lasting, and as a general rule as a GM, when calculating the longevity of



such sorcerous effects, I tend to secretly roll 1d6 twice, the first time to generate a single number as an amount, and the second time to determine if that amount of time is in minutes (1 or 2), hours (3 or 4), or days (5 or 6). Under very special circumstances, or only after a character is considered Heroic in level, I may sometimes even let them spend a Story Point to make such enchantments last even longer. In those cases, the second die instead represents weeks, months, and years. Regardless, I never tell the player exactly how long their magic will last, and instead tell them that they "feel" their magic will last "many hours" or "but a few minutes", or some-such. A great deal of care must be taken by the GM not to allow such things to get silly, out of control, or to imbalance the game. As with any ritual magic for Shard, the idea is still to keep things mysterious and unexpected, and to never allow players to feel like they have the ability to easily make magic items left and right, or that they may simply hurl magical gifts or curses with impunity. The examples of such magics are too numerous to give a brief description here, but we'll attempt to lay out at least a single example that might illustrate several different uses for these "endowments".

Example: Ritual of Endowment

We begin the scene at the secured edges of a vast battlefield, in an encampment of many tents whose silk pennants glitter as they flutter under the glow of the two largest moons. There have long been hostilities at the borders between Tishinia and Gilárhi, and recently a push across the Natha River to expunge Tishini settlers there has led to a series of violent conflicts with heavy casualties on either side. General Háلكar, a powerful tiger, and commander of the Eastern Legions of Tishinia, had been severely wounded in a recent battle. In barbarous regions such as these along the border, there are no priestly mystic healers at our

disposal, but at least the Sunborn doctors and surgeons assigned to the General's command know their trade well, as do I, the fox Maráz, a Sorcerer Sir'hibas from the noble Line of Tháhadhima. This is why, once the grim surgeons have done their deed, and the last of the stitches have been pulled tight across the wound in our General's striped hide, I am called into his tent for a private council.

General Hálkar's injuries, though they no longer threaten his life, have left him terribly weak and unable to endure standing tomorrow, much less riding his war chariot to lead our army into battle. He knows what I am capable of doing for him, though I have no healing hands. And despite the temporary nature of what I will attempt, and of course the risks of failure, the morale of the soldiers is of utmost importance. Not only must our beloved General be able to stand as a symbol of honor and bravery, but the superstitious Gilárhi invaders must cower in fear and misery so that our troops will prevail in tomorrow's coming battle at the Ford of Ingür. The General has faith that I can accomplish this. It's going to be a very long night...

Fox: "Alright, I bow deeply, and depart from the General's presence, calling out to my assistants to prepare our private tent for my ritual. In the mean time I want to go visit the doctors who have been treating General Hálkar so that I may borrow bits and pieces of the herbs and other such medicines they have been using to help remedy his pain and damage. I will also consult some of the General's personal guards, asking for a sample of his favorite wine; the kind he most enjoys before the heat of battle. One of the things I want to try to do is create an elixir, something that I can Endow with the ability to temporarily restore the General's Vigor which I'm sure he must have lost as the results of the surgery performed, of course, with the goal being that he is able to ride tomorrow to inspire his men in battle."

GM: "Very well, are you preparing to do other things also?"

Fox: "Yeah, I want to send one of the camp's runners down to the banks of the river to fetch me a small flask of the waters of the Natha and some of the dirt from its muddy banks. I have plans for these things this evening. And lastly I dip into my own supply of my darkest inks, both black and red, which I set aside in a tiny crystal bowls to be used soon."

GM: "This sounds interesting! Are you planning to do all of this tonight?"

Fox: "Most of this is for tonight, but some of this is for tomorrow if all goes well, when the battle begins."

Having finished gathering my supplies, my character retreats to the privacy of his tent, and sets up all of his usual paraphernalia; the burning incense, his crystal chime, and the low table in front of which he sits, containing the various supplies he just gathered that will act as the focus for the magic of this ritual. The first step of the ritual being complete, I move on to the second and make my Initial Roll.

Fox: "I begin chanting over the herbs and medicines I got from the doctors, slowly placing them in a small crystal bottle, half filled with the wine his guards gave me, as I enter into trance."

GM: "OK, you will need to make your basic Ritual Skill roll using your Ritual of Endowment. This will let you sink into the deep meditative state that will allow you to weave your magics into the concoction you are making. There are no modifiers yet."

My fox is an old hand at such things, and has a Ritual of Endowment score of 10. Rolling all ten dice I get 5 successes, easily slipping deeper into trance

as the magic begins.

GM: "Through the haze of incense smoke you carefully combine the ingredients you have chosen, and you observe the wispy vapors seem to slowly circle above your small table, guided, perhaps, by the gentle movements of your hands. Since you're attempting to invest this with enough energy to contain the Endowments you wish to bestow, your spirit spreads across the room, touching with your humming voice the earth below your body, with your bright amber eyes the glow of the incense charcoal, with your breath the pungent air, and with your touch the nearby waters of the river captured in your ceramic bowl. Finishing your initial chants, you feel the vibrations of all of these energies as they infuse the tiny flask before you, and you detect the faintest reddish glimmer within it."

We are now ready to begin the third step of this ritual as I work to manifest the various qualities I want the philter to have. In this same ritual, I also intend to work other magics, but first let's see how this one goes.

Fox: "Alright, if I can, I want to begin manifesting the Endowment into the fluid itself. What do I need to roll?"

GM: "Before you roll anything I'd like you to state clearly, as if in character, exactly what you want this potion to do for your commander. The phrase you speak, combined with the roll you'll then make of your base Ritual Skill roll, at a -3 difficulty, for the Endowment Ritual, will help me determine how I'll have the magic manifest."

I have to be careful as I speak these words out loud, because the GM will judge them based on a variety of factors, such as how serious I take it, the creativity of the statement, and whether I include everything I really need to have happen. I've got to keep it simple and elegant, otherwise things could get out of hand. I can't be too greedy, and I also can't be too vague. Such statements should always be made from the fictional reference point of the character in-game, and should not refer to specific game rules or statistics, allowing the GM to interpret it as they see fit.

Fox: "May the robust energies of the Elements fill this potion with the power to invigorate the one who drinks it, bestowing upon them, though their wounds be dire, an endurance and stamina such that they may rise up as if renewed, to face their duties and honors, and to be strong and vigorous in the sight of their comrades as well as their enemies."

GM: "Well said! Very well, now roll your base Ritual of Endowment roll at -3 dice due to the difficulty I have assigned."

Fox: "OK, I rolled 4 successes!"

GM: "The swirling smoke from the incense seems suddenly drawn toward the dim glow within the little crystal flask, which flares up briefly, instantly consuming the vapors, and sending an almost shocking sensation through your entire body, causing your fur to stand on end, and your white-tipped tail to bristle behind you. You close your eyes for the briefest moments as you gain a sense of the time that this enchantment may last. What is your Sir'hibas Talent score?"

Fox: "I have 3 points in that Talent..."

As mentioned earlier, here the GM chooses to roll 1d6 to determine a numeric amount of time. Apparently, because he feels that my Talent as a sir'hibas has something to do with it, he adds that number to the number he secretly rolled. He now

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rolls another 1d6 to determine whether that amount is in minutes (1 or 2), hours (3 or 4), or days (5 or 6). The GM then writes this actual amount down to refer to later.

GM: "As you feel the effects of that Discipline fade, you unfortunately recognize that the strength of the magic will allow your desired effects to last but a few minutes."

Fox: "What?!? Oh no! That's not long enough! I need to try to strengthen it somehow, to make the effects more enduring!"

GM: "You may, if you wish, attempt to do so, but it will be even more difficult than the last roll; twice as difficult, in fact, but I'll allow you to add your Sir'hibas Talent dice to the roll, since only experienced sorcerers like yourself could even try it. You'll roll your 10 skill plus your Talent dice (for a total of 13 dice) -6 dice for the difficulty. This will be your third Unique Discipline today, so far..."

Fox: "Oh man! Whew! I made it with two successes."

GM: "Well, that's a basic success. Let me roll again to see how much time this will have added."

The GM rolls 1d6 twice, secretly, once again. This time he will add that amount to the previously-generated amount and keep a note of the new total.

GM: "Ah! Well, now you feel that you have been able to extend the time of this effect to many days! Surely now the General will find that, once he drinks this philter, he can rise up despite his slowly-healing wounds, and lead his soldiers into battle!"

Fox: "What will happen to him as the magic begins to fade?"

GM: "Well, the General will begin to weaken as his vigor returns back to what it is now. It could be swiftly, or it could slowly happen over many hours. But you will begin to feel the magic fade long before his stamina fails him, and you'll be able to warn him, if you can, that its end draws near. If you're worried, you could spend a Story Point, if you'd like it to last longer. If you do, I'll allow the time to be weeks, months, or years instead, though there may be interesting repercussions..."

Fox: "Hmnnn, I don't like the sound of that, or the cost. Nah, I'll just let him know that this apparently renewed vigor is only temporary, and that he has only a few days' time before he should withdraw from the field of battle to truly allow his wounds to heal."

GM: "OK, then. You said there were other things you wanted to accomplish in this ritual as well?"

Fox: "Yeah. I set aside the little bottle full of the enchanted liquid, and now I want to spread the muddy earth and dirt across the table before me. I also take the bowl of river water, and set that beside me too. As I continue to chant again, I bow my head and breathe in the incense smoke, closing my eyes and imagining that I'm far, far above the encampment, and sailing through the clouds on the far side of the river, in enemy territory. I know the General plans to wage tomorrow's battle across the shallow ford, and I want our superstitious enemy to feel as if the Devah have abandoned them, allowing foul weather to turn their

area of approach, and even their current encampment, into a muddy quagmire."

GM: "Oooh...I see. You want to change the weather and call up a rainstorm. This is not an easy task, but certainly within your power. You'll need to make your base Ritual of Endowment roll at a -5 difficulty.

Fox: "OK... Awww! I only rolled one success. That's still a partial success, though, right?"

GM: "Correct, which means that, as you begin to attempt to change the very nature of the night skies above, you feel the difficulty of the task weigh heavily upon you, and too few darkened clouds appear in the sky for any real downpour, though no-doubt some rain will soon begin to fall. If you were hoping to cause your enemies problems with this, you may try again in the hopes of actually making this slight rain create dangerous circumstances for them. This is even more difficult, -6 in fact, but I'll let you add your Sir'hibas Talent to the attempt, since this is once again the type of thing that only an experienced sorcerer could even try. As for the rest of you (addressing the other players), to the east some darker clouds from the mountains have begun to gather since the fox began his rituals. Far away, the twinkling of the enemy's campfires seems to grow hazy as a slight mist creeps up from the distant river's edge. A subdued rumbling of thunder is heard, rolling almost lazily across the sparsely-forested plains."

Fox: "Good, I rolled better this time, and got 4 successes. As I sway in the trance I draw up water in my hands from the bowl, and dribble it across the dirt on the table, making parts of it muddy and sticky. I place my fingers in it as I imagine the legs of our enemy's chinti mounts getting stuck in it, their soldiers tripping and falling. I take some of the black ink and drop it into the water-bowl as well, imagining that their sight becomes more difficult in the mists that rise from the river tomorrow, and I sprinkle black ink onto the dirt as well, imagining it to be holes into which their cannons' wheels will get stuck, and their carts flounder."

GM: "Heh, nice description! I'll take that into account as the Gilārhi soldiers begin to approach. Far off, across the river, the first hints of light rain begin to fall through the cloud-dark skies, like silvery veils caught in the colorful light of the moons that still glow brightly above your own army's location"

Fox: "Well, there's nothing left for me to do at this point, so I'm going to end the current ritual."

GM: "Really? What about the red ink you brought as well?"

Fox: "That's for something later, when the battle is about to begin. But this all went fairly well, and I need to give the General this enchanted philter, and let him know my plans."

I emerge from my ritual, since I have decided that this was its conclusion, several hours after I had begun, according to the GM. I've grown used to the fact that, in game-time, it usually takes about a half-hour to get into ritual in the first place, and usually another fifteen minutes to a half-hour to perform each Discipline.

The GM then allows me to seek out the General once again, provide him with the philter that

will invigorate him for tomorrow's battle, and tell him of the rains I have brought to them that will, by the grace of the Devah, hamper the enemy's efforts to face us in the morning. The GM then role-plays with me for a moment as the General, since he wants to get me to tell him my final ritual plans for the battle itself. Having made a Culture Knowledge roll earlier in the game, pertaining to the people of Gilárhi, I fully understand the somewhat primitive and superstitious ways of their people, especially those sent to fight at their borders. They fully believe that every feature of nature contains a spirit of some kind, and they treat such spirits with fearful respect. Armed with this knowledge I have made my plan.

General: "I desire to drink this draught you have made for me now. There are important matters I wish to discuss with the lesser commanders before tomorrow, and if this will work as you say, then I will have many days before my body becomes weak again."

Fox: "As you wish, my lord, but please take your ease this evening, and give your body more time to heal. My magic will do nothing to strengthen the stitches that the surgeons placed within you."

General: "These are wise words as always, my friend, and I will be cautious, but my mind will be more at ease if I feel the power of your magic sooner than later."

GM: "The haggard tiger sits up painfully from his cot and takes the flask from you, holding up its ruby-red contents to the dim light before drinking it all in one shot. For a brief moment nothing seems to happen. The General breathes deeply then, and a shudder passes over his hugely muscled form as his deep breath seems to catch in his lungs, and his bright yellow eyes snap open in surprise. At that moment he softly cries out as he stretches out his arm before him, claws extended, dropping the crystal bottle to the carpeted ground below. There is an echoing sound like the hiss of slow-burning valah-powder and across the black stripes of his fur a visible sheen, like golden lightning, passes before your very eyes."

General (gasping): "By the Devah! NEVER have I felt such a thing. They will ALL regret having failed to kill me. An enemy shall die by my hand for EVERY stitch I have had to endure this night!"

Fox: "Yes, my lord, no doubt the Devah will grace us with victory... But I beg you to remember, their blessings that I have delivered to you will last for only days, perhaps even more than a week's time, but do not test its limits. I shall feel when it's power begins to wane, and I will come to you, if I can, to warn you when this occurs. You must be away then, no matter what the state of battle. You must be away, for when the magic has gone, you will be as weak and lacking in vigor as you were mere minutes ago. You must then give your body time to heal, or seek a mystic Healer safely within our borders."

General: "Yes, yes... But tell me, what more have you planned for the battle tomorrow? Surely you have devised a plan to drive fear into the foul hearts of these Gilárhi scum!"

Fox: "I have, my lord General. With the coming of False Dawn, as the prayers of the camp's young priests echo across the fields, I will begin my rituals once again. And while you and your soldiers

march to the Ford of Ingür, I will remain behind. But through my arts I will open a window into the Dream, and from there I will look down upon the treacherous, muddy fields across which our enemy must travel, and I will also look upon the dry and solid shores upon which you will stride boldly, and I will deliver unto you two more gifts, if the Devah are kind. The first will be a mighty voice, like Kramah himself, that will reach across the shallow waters of the river and prove to our foes the grave error they have made in challenging you. With this voice you must tell them of the terrible disfavor of the Devah that they have incurred for daring to lay claim to any reaches of land beyond the holy river Natha. Tell them to behold that the spirits of the skies themselves lament their foolish choice. Let your words ring out that the Devah are pleased with our people, as can be seen by the fairness of our skies, and that they desire our enemy to pay for their transgressions. Tell them that you have been told that the Spirit of the River-God knows what terrible price that the Gilárhi, who would dare stand against us, must pay. Then take your great spear, and hurl it into the shallow waters at the bank on the far side, telling them that "This is his answer!" It is then that I will give you my second gift, for I will weave a vast tapestry of illusion that will sweep across the width and breadth of the river, as far as their eyes can see, painting it the color of blood. Their black hearts will be filled with the most terrible dread and fear. And across this blood, THEIR blood, I will watch you ride to victory in the name of glorious Tishinia..."

An Example of Summoning

Of all the magical rituals attempted across the face of the Summoner, none are as rare or as dangerous as those of the Summoner. By calling out across the Dream, through the Web of Life, or into the very heart of the world's essence itself, spirits, demons, suthra of all kinds, and even elemental powers can be summoned forth and potentially controlled to do the bidding of the sir'hibas. The danger, of course lies in the attempt, and having the skill and power to actually keep the destructive and wild forces of such summoned things in check. There are many, many tales of summonings gone terribly wrong. When this happens, many jánah can potentially pay the price, beyond merely the summoner themselves.

For the purposes of standard game-play, attempting to summon any of these entities follows these basic guidelines:

- **Spirits and Demons** - Spirits and Demons seem to come from within or beyond the Dream, though it is not always necessary to enter the Dream to summon them, unless you are choosing to cause them to manifest at a distant location. During the summoning itself, the player must be specific as to why the thing is being summoned, spoken as part of the ritual incantations. Summoned Demons and Spirits have Power Pools (the amount of dice they get to roll to do anything) equal to the number of successes rolled when attempting to summon them. They cause damage when they attack equal to twice that amount, and they have a Stamina based on four-times their Power Pool. They will take on a form that seems to represent the will and desires of the summoner (and the reasons it was summoned). Once

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summoned, they must be subjugated or constrained, using a contested Ritual Skill roll in some way, otherwise they will usually attempt to harm the summoner and those around them. Once they are under control, more Disciplines can be used to command them in various ways. These rolls are also always contested, with the summoner rolling their base Ritual Skill roll plus their Sir'hibas Talent. A Demon or Spirit might even be bound to some location, sealed inside of an object, or even enslaved in some fashion for longer periods of time, though this is quite difficult to accomplish. Bound in this way, it could be released at the sorcerer's leisure, or when certain situation allow it to escape. Once their tasks are complete, it is always wise to dismiss or banish them, since their anger at their captivity will grow, and they remain potentially dangerous as long as they are being kept. Such banishments also require a successful roll against them, though it is possible to "save" such banishment successes in advance to any encounter, so that they may be used outside the constraints of ritual in dire need. When using "saved" banishment successes, you must choose the number you wish to expend (which are then used up whether successful or not), and THEN the Demon or Spirit rolls their Power Pool to see if they can match them. Demons and Spirits, being quite willful, attempt to break their magical subjugations whenever a roll to command them fails. At such times, having such saved banishment successes may mean the difference between life and death for you and those around you.

- **Suthra** - The native insectoid fauna of the world are contacted in Ritual by guiding one's will and desire through the unending strands of the mystic Web of Life. By doing so the various reasons you might need to call upon suthra can be matched with the natural purpose such suthra serve in the grander scheme of things. It is not always necessary to enter the Dream to summon them, unless you are choosing to cause them to manifest at a distant location. During the summoning itself, the player must be specific as to why the thing (or things, since swarms might even be called) is being summoned, spoken as part of the ritual incantations. The needs for such a summoning can take many forms; suthra to

act as the eyes and ears of the summoner, suthra that can carry things, or be used as a mount, suthra that will defend and attack, suthra that might act as a temporary companion or hunter, even suthra that might willingly sacrifice themselves in some way, such as for food. Summoned Suthra have Power Pools (the amount of dice they get to roll to do anything) and other statistics, equal to the amounts indicated in their descriptions within the Bestiary of this book. The specific type of the summoned suthra that will heed the call is completely up to the GM (though they may feel free to take cues from the players), will appear from some nearby habitat appropriate to them (though this may take some time), and will generally represent the will and desires of the summoner (and the reasons it was summoned). Once summoned, they will be generally compliant to the will of the summoner pertaining to the reason they were called. Once they arrive, more rolls of the same Discipline (associated with the specific reason of their calling) can be used to command them in various ways. These rolls are not contested, with the summoner rolling their base Ritual Skill roll. Unless more rolls are made to inspire them to stay, most summoned suthra will return to their natural "wild" state, and will hastily seek to return to their environment. Once their tasks are complete, it is always wise to dismiss them, since their wild natures will eventually overtake the control of the summoning, and they remain potentially dangerous as long as they are being kept. Such dismissals require only a successful roll of the base Ritual of Summoning roll, though it is possible to "save" such dismissal successes in advance to any encounter, so that they may be used outside the constraints of ritual in times of need. Such dismissals can be attempted on any suthra, even those not connected with a summoning, and can cause creatures to flee from your area at your command. The use of only 2 saved successes is required for suthra **already under your control**. When using "saved" dismissal successes against suthra **not already under your control**, you must choose the number you wish to expend (which are then used up whether successful or not), and THEN the Suthra rolls their Power Pool to see if they can match them.



• **Elementals** - Elementals seem to come from a mysterious power that surrounds and infuses the physical reality of the world, the energy that courses through the various crystals and the different forces of nature. There are four elemental manifestations that can be called through this ritual; Vayu the Element of Air, Bhumi the Element of Earth, Jala the Element of Water, and Agni, the Element of Fire. In addition to the raw physical (and metaphysical) powers they possess pertaining to their element, they also seem to emanate and manifest power through emotional states that mirror their nature to some extent, and these emotional states can be felt by anyone near them. Those who are not summoners may actually flee the presence of such things unless the Elemental has been “tamed” and controlled by the summoner. Vayu (Air) for instance, generates a powerful and joyous sense of freedom, and will overwhelm those around it with its desire to remain untamed, tearing at anything it can with strong gusts and violent winds. Bhumi (Earth) radiates a sense of gloom and moody darkness, and will seek to oppress and harm those around it with a strong force of impending doom and crushing fear and trepidation, culminating in its use of its own element to forever smother its victims, unless properly controlled. Jala (Water) projects a sense of cold and chilling contempt and calculating will, and eventually seeks to saturate all near with its deadly embrace, as the air becomes thick and too heavy to breathe, and muscles become filled with a clammy frailty. Agni (Fire) is the ever-hungry one, an all-consuming force that fills its vicinity with its fearful and rapacious need to turn anything that can burn into fuel for itself. It emanates anger and rage when uncontrolled, and desires little more than to turn its surroundings into an inferno. It is not always necessary to enter the Dream to summon Elementals, unless you are choosing to cause them to manifest at a distant location. During the summoning itself, the player must be specific as to which Elemental is being summoned, and why, spoken clearly as part of the ritual incantations. Summoned Elementals have Power Pools (the amount of dice they get to roll to do anything) equal to the number of successes rolled when attempting to summon them. They cause damage when they attack equal to twice that amount, and they have a Stamina based on four-times their Power Pool. They will take on a form that seems to represent the will and desires of the summoner (and the reasons it was summoned), but will always be formed from aspects appropriate to their element. They are beings of chaotic entropy, and once summoned, they must be given order and form, using a contested Ritual Skill roll in some way, otherwise they will violently spin out of control, potentially harming everything around them before dissipating back into nature again. Once they are under control, more Disciplines can be used to command them in various ways. These rolls are also always contested, with the summoner rolling their base Ritual Skill roll plus their Sir’hibas Talent. An Elemental might even be bound to some location, sealed

inside of an object, or even enslaved in some fashion for longer periods of time, though this is quite difficult to accomplish. Bound in this way, it could be released at the sorcerer’s leisure, or even be set to guard an area from intrusion. Once their tasks are complete, it is always wise to disperse them, since their anger at their captivity will grow, and they remain potentially dangerous as long as they are being kept. Such dispersals also require a successful roll against them, though it is possible to “save” such dispersal successes in advance to any encounter, so that they may be used outside the constraints of ritual in dire need. When using “saved” dispersal successes, you must choose the number you wish to expend (which are then used up whether successful or not), and THEN the Elemental rolls their Power Pool to see if they can match them. Elementals are also quite willful, and will attempt to break their magical constraints of order and form whenever a roll to command them fails. As with demons and spirits, having such saved dispersal successes may mean the difference between life and death for you and those around you if an Elemental attempts to do you harm or begins to wildly disperse if it escapes control.

Example: Ritual of Summoning

This scene begins within the fortified walls of the House of Sítasang, of the Royal Line of Ítsah, as our beloved city of Ysuyah in western Visedhárah is besieged by rival Lines from the east. Our beloved Prince of this region was labeled a traitor to the Jade Throne of Benáng, and now the High Prince wishes to cleanse this city of the “traitor” and all Lines and Houses that support him. I am Yarazmún, a lithe female cobra, and a Summoner sir’hibas in noble service to the Aryah Sítasang, and even now I sit in Ritual atop the tallest tower of my lord’s resplendent palace.

For days we watched as the armies of the east battered against our city walls, hoping that our forces could withstand the attacks of the High Prince’s armies. Unfortunately, the forces of the Jade Throne are vast and well-supplied, and eventually the city walls crumble before their might, as the battle raged inward toward the walled Noble’s Circle and the palaces of the individual Lords themselves. In the air above, retreating skyships come under attack as some Houses attempt to flee, and the dull booms of cannon-fire can be heard night and day. Those Houses lucky enough to have the services of a sir’hibas have found ways of defending their walls, but most have taken the opportunity of using such mystic talents to hide their retreat into the skies, and to cover their path with clouds and mist. As such, the clouds seem to have descended into the city itself, just as smoke from the burning city rises up to greet them. My orders are simple, use my magics to hold our enemies at bay long enough for the skyships of my Aryah and his family to escape. Secure my own escape then, if I can, upon the last skyskiff that is leaving. Join the rest of my House, if the Devah are willing. But lastly, insure that nothing is left of our lord’s holdings that the enemy may claim in victory...

I am surrounded atop the tower by braziers full of smoking incense and fluttering strips of parchment covered in holy arcane glyphs that adorn silk cords suspended from brightly-painted poles nearby. This is not the first time that I have used this

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tall tower to perform my rituals, but I am certain that it will be my last. Already I have successfully passed deep into trance (having made my Initial Roll for the ritual), have felt the vibrations of the Web of Life as I sought some form of defense against the multitudes of soldiers below. My call was answered by a terrible biting swarm of Silk Locusts from the southern jungles that not only began to attack the milling warriors below (who had been attempting to break through our great gate), but had also flown high into the skies, bearing down on the enemy ships that had been flocking to this area of the city. As the voracious swarm began to destroy their silken sails and rigging, the sky-ships of our own House, protected by Wards against such harm, were busily starting to beat a hasty retreat into the safety of the obscuring clouds above. To give them more time to do this, I now begin to focus my attentions on the siege engines and cannons of the advancing enemy troops.

Cobra: "Drawing some of my attention away from the Silk Locust Swarm, I now wish to look out at the devastation surrounding the palace walls. DO I see any nearby buildings on fire?"

GM: "Yes, in fact the granaries of a nearby House are burning hideously across the Grand Avenue of the Pious, which leads further into the center of the city, past the temples of the Holy Circle."

Cobra: "Alright,...it is there I wish to fling my thoughts, into the heart of that inferno. I am going to attempt to summon up a manifestation of Agni, the Element of Fire. I have better things than grain that I'd like it to eat!"

GM: "Alright, as you focus your mind upon the burning granary, begin to sense within it what seem to be a strange, vast dancing form, as if enormous limbs of writhing flame flail deep in the heart of the roaring blaze. It is now time to reach into the very center of the fire with your mind, and attune your mystic awareness with its living, spiritual essence. Please roll your Summoning Ritual skill. This first roll will be at no penalty."

My summoner has 9 dice in his Ritual of Summoning skill, and will be rolling them all in an attempt to attune herself to the spirit of Agni. Once this is accomplished I will attempt to call it forth from the burning grain-tower, and hopefully gain control over it. My roll goes really well, with 6 successes!

Cobra: "Great! I want to try to make it begin to manifest as a true elemental now and to make it move toward our palace and the soldiers attacking it!"

GM: "OK, but first things first... You must make it actually begin creating a form for itself outside of the grain silo. You'll need to make your Summoning roll once again, but this time at a -3 difficulty adjustment to your dice pool. However, you may add your Sir'hibas Talent score to the dice-pool if you wish. But remember, whatever successes you roll here, when actually calling it forth, determines the Power Pool of the Elemental, both for its rolls against your enemies AS WELL AS AGAINST YOU..."

Cobra: "Yep,..I'm gonna go for it! 8 dice total to roll! I rolled 6 successes again!"

GM: "At the top of the tower, amidst the fluttering silk ribbons and sacred parchments your body begins to move and sway in the ancient rhythms of the Ritual, a primal dance meant to entice the spirit of the flames. A fierce sensation of unquenchable thirst and ravenous hunger sweeps through your duháma as rage grows within you, surrounding you, enveloping you. Across the Grand Avenue the roaring flames leap and crackle, and whirling streamers of flame delicately twirl and flare out and away from the blaze, licking

down and into the sculptured bushes and trees of the roadside. Sparks whirl through the air there as well, illuminating the area and creating hints of half-formed immense shapes lashing out in all directions."

Here the GM makes several rolls to determine whether the soldiers below, feeling the growing power of the manifesting Elemental, begin to flee in fear from its location near the burning granary. The GM should decide what the general Will of these soldiers might be (certainly no more than 6 or 7 for general troops), and roll half of that rounded up. Failure to roll a full success means that a large number of them will begin to sense the overwhelming emotional emanations of the Elemental, and will choose to run for their lives. The GM should roll several times, perhaps once for every 100 troops or so.

GM: "Ah! Obviously the Elemental is beginning to fully manifest, since you can see that far below, soldiers begin to turn, point, and stare at the strange pyrotechnics forming near the walls of the other House with the burning granary. Many begin to flee in random directions as the terrible spiritual emotions flow through them, the supernatural hunger menacing them as the force of the Elemental becomes more and more maddening. It is now time to try to control it by giving it some form that you wish it to have. You must bring order to its growing chaos before it begins to destroy things around it at random. Already the trees on both sides of the Avenue have burst into flame, and a vast pillar of fire and sparks seems to bake the very earth of the road itself! Very well, to gain control, please roll your Summoning Ritual skill once again, adding your Sir'hibas Talent because this will be contested against the Elemental's Power Pool, but this time the roll is at a -4 difficulty modifier. This means your 9 dice, plus your Talent of 2, minus 4 dice equals 7 dice against the Elemental's 6!"

Cobra: "Whoa! Minus 4!!!! OK, I make 5 successes..."

GM: "Your in luck! The Fire Elemental rolled only 2 successes, meaning that you may now declare its form as you gain control of it."

Had the Elemental matched her roll or gotten better, then it would have spiraled out of control totally, caused some random destruction all around it (including to the summoner and his location), then dissipated back into the natural environment. Had the summoner succeeded by only 1 success better than the Elemental, then the attempt at control wouldn't have been a total failure, but the Elemental would still have begun randomly destroying things around it (though it wouldn't vanish afterward), and the summoner would have to attempt control once again and be fully successful before any Disciplines of command could be attempted.

Cobra: "I want it to take the shape of a vast quadruped, like a terrible beast made of flames, taller than an elephant and horribly fast! It is my intention that its form will allow in to rampage easily through the enemy troops below, burning them as well as their ballista and siege towers. I want to see it ignite their cannon-powder, and turn their mounts to ash!"

GM: "Though the supernatural will of this thing is very strong, your magic seems stronger still, as the form you desire for it begins to manifest. The roar of the inferno seems to come from its own fiery

throat as a terrible head, outfitted with hundreds of writhing tentacles of flame, raises high into the night sky. All around it the very air shimmers with the heat rolling off of the thing in waves, and the clothes of those unfortunates nearby begin to burst into flames. Otherworldly rage blazes from its terrible glowing eyes as the flaming behemoth turns to face you. It's now time to roll once again as you give it the first of your commands. Just as before, you'll be rolling against it, so add your Summoning Ritual skill to your Sir'hibas Talent score, but this time only subtract 2 dice as a modifier, since I'm judging that Elementals are easier to control than they are to summon or give form to their chaos. So...that's your 9 dice to its 6."

Cobra: "That's awesome! And I got 5 successes. Oh wait, two of those were 6s, I get to roll one again. Another success! I got 6 successes total!"

GM: "And the Elemental rolled only 3. OK, what is your first command?"

Cobra: "I'm going to will it to rampage through their midst, igniting everything in its path as it attacks the siege towers that the enemy are using to try to get over our walls! How many of our ships are left on the parade-grounds and in the sky-docks below?"

GM: "A few that you can see. You must continue to give them more time! They aren't in the clear yet, and if the enemy get over the walls, or through the barricades at the front gates, then the ships still on the ground will be at their mercy."

The GM rolls the Fire Elemental's Power Pool of 6 dice to determine how successful it is causing the destruction it has been ordered to begin. There will be nothing the troops below will really be able to do to stop it, so this technically isn't a contested roll. The Elemental scores 3 successes.

GM: "Now, as you have commanded, the hulking fiery monstrosity begins raging through the heart of the soldiers below, plunging into their tall wooden siege towers and scattering burning corpses everywhere! You hear several explosions as some of the powder-kegs for the cannons begin to ignite, and the screams of the dying drift skyward like blessings to your ears... Below you, however, you also hear the battering rams of your enemy assailing the main gates!"

Cobra: "I want to give it another command, then, and I cry out 'Mighty Agni, devour those who attack our main gates!' (rolls the same dice as last time) But...oh NO!! I only got 1 success out of all those dice!!"

GM: "Ah! And the Elemental rolls 3 successes! It fails to heed your command, and continues to destroy everything around it. It will also now attempt to break free of the form and control you have forced upon it. You'll need to make that roll again; the contested roll at a -4, to maintain control!"

Cobra: "OK, I rolled 4 successes..."

GM: "And unfortunately, so did I... You lose control of the destructive forces of Agni, a terrible roaring fills the air, and a searing heat begins rising up from the battlefield below. There is more screaming, and you are forced to back away from the parapet as burning ash and sparks whirl around you. A veritable

vortex of glowing ash and fire continues to tear through the hapless army below. For a brief moment you too are surrounded by roaring heat and flames, but since you have some cover from the crenelated stone balcony I'll say you only take half of the damage this Elemental can cause. You will lose 6 Stamina due to fire damage. Please mark that down. You fall back to the stone roof of the tower, patting the flames out upon your robes. Far below you hear the continued banging of the battering ram against the gates."

The GM now makes a roll to determine if the doors hold or not. He decides that the main gate has a Strength of 4 dice, and the battering ram has a Strength of 3 dice. He rolls 3 successes for the gate, and 2 for the battering ram. The doors hold for now.

Cobra: "Oh no... I crawl to the edge of the parapets to look down upon the battle. Is there any way I can gain control of it again?"

GM: "Unfortunately no, now that it has escaped its imposed form, entropy reclaims it, its order is shattered, and you peek across the burning carnage below to see the final vestiges of the fiery cyclone spin out and begin to fade into the smoke-filled air, scattering sparks and embers as it dies away. It does seem to have caused a great deal of damage in its final display of supernatural hunger and rage, however, and many lay below, dead and dying."

Cobra: "What about the ships, have they all taken off?"

GM: "Only two remain now, from what you can tell. (He rolls his dice again to determine how well the gate is holding up) Suddenly a great crash is heard, and from your vantage you watch as the first of your enemy's army pours into the courtyard through the broken remnants of the main gate! The last two skyships, one a barge, and the other, the skiff that was to carry you to safety, is overrun by the swarming soldiers. You hear cries of agony and dismay far below, and more terrible cries of victory as the last defenses of the palace fail."

Cobra: "Not ALL of the defenses..."

GM: "What do you mean?"

Cobra: "The Amethyst Idol..."

GM: "Ohhhhhh yesssss.... THAT!"

Cobra: "But first, there's something I must do if I'm hoping to get out of here alive... Since you never said that I was forced out of ritual..."

GM: "Well,...actually, you WERE damaged by the Elemental, so it's necessary to roll to see if that broke your concentration enough to end the ritual."

In any such case where concentration could be lost in the midst of a Ritual, the player must roll their base Ritual Skill roll (for whatever ritual they were doing). To this they may add their Concentration Talent dice if they have any. All they need to do is succeed, and they may continue with their ritual unaffected.

Cobra: "Whew! Great...I rolled 4 successes... I now hurl my duháma out across the Web of Life again, seeking a mount of some kind, something that can carry me away from this place through the skies! There's GOT to be something in the city, in some rich lord's abandoned stables or something..."

GM: "Very well, roll your base Summoning

Chapter IV: Bestiary

Ritual score again to see if you locate something like that.”

Cobra: “4 successes. Is it nearby?”

GM: “It’s difficult to tell... You do find what you think you are seeking, but the Web of Life is in great turmoil now as many glowing gems of life that flicker at the intersections of the strands are blinking away now as that life is snuffed out. Entire strands seem to melt away in your mind’s eye as lives are lost by the score all around you. Nonetheless you believe you have touched the life that you need, and now you need to make another roll to call it to you, this time at a -3 difficulty modifier to the roll.”

Cobra: “Whew!! Oh MAN this is getting tense... 2 successes...just enough!”

GM: “It’s gonna be close then! You feel it hear your call, and begin its journey toward you, but now your attention is drawn away as you hear the doors to the palace itself cast aside, and the hordes of the enemy begin sweeping into the interiors of your House!”

Cobra: “It’s time for the Amethyst Idol...”

Many months ago, as tensions arose between our Principality and the Jade Throne. Word brought back from our lord while in council with the Prince confirmed what many of us feared. Eventually the High Prince of the Jade Throne would act against us, seeking to depose our own Prince, and with him all of the Houses and Lines that supported him, including our own.

Our Aryah, being both proud and patriotic, decided that if our House should fall, he wanted no sweet rewards for the invaders. Let them rule from a pile of rubble! And so, my character was given the dire task of creating a deadly trap for those who dared break down the doors of our House. During many long and grueling hours of ritual, a terrible “thing” was called forth from the blackest reaches of the Swirling Hells of Narákah. A chitinous demon of great strength that even I would be hard-pressed to control, though control was the last thing that my Aryah wanted over this abomination. It was assumed, of course, that by the time such a thing would be unleashed, the lord and his family would be safely away, and the walls of our blessed home would be filled with our enemy.

A great deal of time was spent in preparation of this ritual, and with more dice than I usually roll (because of the bonuses given by having spent all that time) I succeeded in calling up a hellish juggernaut which I was barely able to command! Luckily, in case of failure, I had “saved” quite a few banishment successes to use, but I had not needed them. Narrowly keeping its vast anger in check, I had then successfully imprisoned it inside an exquisite statue of the purest violet amethyst, carved into the shape of a wrathful Nagamissa, our beloved patron Devah. It waited, even now, in a niche above the Aryah’s empty throne in the Great Hall.

Below I could hear the sound of our beautiful twin doors being shattered by the cruel blows of the enemy troops, no doubt anticipating their rewards for finally breaching our defenses. There will be only one reward for them. It is time to release the demon.

Cobra: “I call upon thee, Demon Spirit of

the Amethyst Idol! Be free of your crystal prison and destroy our enemies!”

GM: “Far below, in the depths of your lord’s palace, the shattering of a thousand windows is heard, and an otherworldly shrieking roar rises above all other sounds of the embattled city around you. A wave of supernatural fury washes over you, nearly filling your mind with maddening fear! With you being so very close to it, you know that it would seek to destroy you first, if not for the fact that it still remains under your momentary control from when you had imprisoned it. Now full of unholy rage, it begins to lash out at the invaders below, and you feel the entire palace shake and shudder as it vents its anger upon those around it. The enemy soldiers outside the palace continue to advance unwittingly to their bloody fate.”

This particular demon has a Power Pool of 12 dice, because I rolled 12 successes when I first summoned it! This means that any actions it performs it rolls 12 dice to do so (including its attempts to defy my will), it has an armor value of 12, it causes 24 Stamina Levels of damage every time it successfully strikes, and itself has a Stamina of 48. Very deadly indeed! It currently is still under the control of my character, and will remain so until it is able to break free, which it will attempt to do each time I try to give it new commands.

Cobra: “I look into the skies around me. Is there any sign of the suthra I summoned to bear me away from all of this?”

GM: “Please roll your Search skill roll at -3 dice due to the extremely poor visibility in the sky...”

Cobra: “Oh no!! I rolled no successes, and a 1!! I Botched!”

GM: “Unfortunately, then, not only do you see nothing in the skies that hints at your summoned creature being near, but a cascade of burning ash and soot from the fires below drifts across you, momentarily blinding you for (rolls a d6) about half a minute. The palace rumbles dangerously below you as the demon continues its rampage inside, causing you to sway dangerously near the edge of the tower’s balcony.”

Cobra: “Aghhh! I rub my eyes painfully, stepping away from the pediments...”

GM: “As you continue to wipe away the stinging ash, you hear the screams of the troops far below as they apparently begin to flee the palace, away from the destructive forces of the demon.”

Cobra: “No! They must not escape! I command the demon to ravage the heart of their forces; to savagely destroy their fleeing ranks!”

GM: “Please roll your Summoning Ritual roll plus your Sir’hibas Talent dice against the Power Pool of the Demon.”

Cobra: “Alright... I rolled 7 successes.”

GM: “Unfortunately, the Demon has rolled 8. This means that not only does it fail to obey your orders, but you must now attempt to maintain your subjugation of it! Roll your Summoning skill plus Talent again!”

Cobra: “This time I roll... 7 successes AGAIN!”

GM: “And so does the demon, meaning that his roll has cancelled out your successes. Your

attempt to maintain control has failed, and now you feel the focus of the demon's anger and hatred shift completely towards you! There is an awful and triumphant roar that echoes from far below within the palace, and you hear the immense crystal dome of the Great hall shatter at the mighty demon bursts through the ceiling and lands upon the outside walls of the very tower upon which you stand. Its powerful multi-segmented limbs wrap nearly all the way around the tower's circumference. It roars once again as it begins to climb towards you."

Cobra: "No, NO!! Not yet! Still no sign of the summoned mount?"

GM: "None that you can tell... Remember, you are still somewhat blinded by the floating embers."

Cobra: "OK, I have GOT to attempt to subjugate the demon again, then!"

GM: "You can try...but why not just dismiss it and send it back to Narákah?"

Cobra: "Because it has one last task that I swore to my lord I would complete!"

GM: "Ah yes...that's right... Very well, roll your Ritual Skill roll again, including your Talent dice, and I'll roll the Demons Power Pool again."

Cobra: "Man!!! I rolled 7 successes AGAIN! What's with the sevens all of the sudden!!!!"

GM: "Your in luck, then, because this time, it rolled a 5! The demon has been subjugated once again... Just as it reaches the top of the tower, it roars in utter rage and madness, sending a terrible thorny fist smashing down on the carved stones near you as your control over it closes like a slave's manacle."

Cobra: "Thank the Devah! OK, even if my character dies in the process, I can't risk losing control again before I give my final command. I yell out these words; I BID YOU NOW, RETREAT TO THE HEART OF THIS PALACE, AND TEAR IT TO THE GROUND! LEAVE NOTHING FOR MY ENEMY, AND NO STONE OF THIS PLACE STANDING UPON ANOTHER!"

The GM considers the words of this command for a moment, then has me roll my dice again. I make an amazing 9 successes, and the demon merely makes 6. It must obey me, but as it turns its head to do so, its terrible visage twists into an almost jánah-like expression of ugly humor, and in my character mind, the GM says that a simple and yet menacing phrase is spoken by it...; "It shall be as you wish, my mortal master...". It is then that I know I may soon dance at the Edge of Heaven...

Now is the time for the dramatic conclusion to this ritual as the demon launches itself from atop this tower to land half-way down an adjacent one. Through my half-blind gaze I barely discern as, amidst a cascade of stone and rubble it careens down the side of that tower, its many-limbed form leaping again to vanish into the ragged hole of the Great Hall's shattered dome.

GM: "More screaming can be heard from below as any in its wake perish, and many even outside the House are crushed beneath falling masonry. Now impossibly powerful sounds, like thunder, can be heard from deep within the palace itself, and suddenly

everything begins to shake. Nearby, the tower already damaged by the demon's descent begins to crumble and fall, a sickening site from where you stand, as your vision finally fully clears. You are watching your own death approach..."

Cobra: "I whisper silent prayers to Nagamissa, begging her to preserve the sanctity of my immortal duháma, even if my body must now perish..."

GM: "To your left, you see another tower fall, smashing down into the darkness of the Great Hall, utterly destroying the remnants of its once-glorious crystal dome. The stone beneath you shudders and begins to buckle and you are tipped suddenly near the edge of the fractured balcony! The screams of the dying below now pierce your eardrums with a sudden strange clarity..."

Cobra: "Beloved Nagamissa! Save your servant!"

GM: "Unbearably weary, you desperately clutch at the shaking stones of the crenellations at the tower's edge. Suddenly, just as you feel the roof beneath you sickeningly heave and begin to fall away, a keening, chattering noise cuts through the rumbling of the falling tower, and rigid limbs grasp you around your midriff as you feel yourself plucked from disaster and hauled up and into the sky. The buzzing of large wings, and the sight of the bright red mandibles above you are all you need see to recognize that it is a makdi that even now clasps you to its chitinous breast. Far below you, you see the last of the towers of your lord's once-mighty palace fall, and then nothing as you pass into the thick clouds. Only the sounds of distant demonic roars of rage follow you for a moment."

Cobra: "Ohhhh YES!! Thank you , THANK YOU!! Just in time... With the last of my strength I want to reach up and touch its underbelly, giving it a command to carry me up into the clouds and to the ship of my lord..."

GM: "Simply roll your base Ritual Skill roll for Summoning, with no modifiers..."

Cobra: "5 successes!"

GM: "Very well, the whipping winds catch you both for a brief second as the makdi begins to change course, guided, it seems, by the mental image of your lord's vessel, and thoughts of your family. You were right when you said 'the last of your strength', by the way..."

Cobra: "What do you mean?"

GM: "You may not have been counting, but I was... You have used 11 Unique Disciplines throughout these many summonings, exactly as many as will cause you to fall unconscious when you emerge from this ritual. And now that this ritual is coming to a close, you feel an unbearable weariness overtake you, and you fall into the depths of silent, exhausted slumber just as the clouds begin to clear, and your drooping eyes catch momentary sight of skyships sailing high above you. You then slip into darkness."