

# THE CULT OF THE BURIED DEAD



## Mythos and history

As the world was broken and reborn, the phenomena of memory and legacy arose – the ability of the past to affect the future. It came from the first generation of people to die and yet still matter. The true form of the god is literally the physical memorials of the dead, worldwide and throughout time, considered as a crowd or host. It is represented either as a single figure with many spectral forms evident within its form or clothing or as a stone burial marker featuring a distinctive skull.

Drawing upon this force permitted the other young gods to remember the past, to share a purpose, and to learn how to look forward.

Since the dawn of time, the passing generations have added to the ranks of the dead, so their secrets have only increased in number and, in many cases, increased in power. The cult was founded by the living who keep and honor those secrets, representing the legacy of the dead – preventing them from being forgotten, but also protecting them from people who would distort and abuse them. They consider themselves to maintain the memory of the world.

## The nature of the cult

Ideology: knowledge is power, and the cult claims knowledge from the accumulated dead. It is not concerned with spirits but with the social remains, as items, narratives, agreements, and information. Therefore, uniquely among cults, it includes no shamans as an associated practice ... however, its priests create and bind ghosts.

Its practical role in society mostly concerns handling what in modern terms would be called estates. Its deeper activities serve as a truly impressive archive and provide unusually modern education for a Bronze Age culture.

Its followers consider its social benefit to be a true scholarly memory for all of society, disinterested in power and judicious in its choices for what to share. A more cynical view is that the cult makes itself useful to those powerful people who would like certain things to be kept hidden, or who would like to know things that others do not.

Obviously the temple leaders are in constant tension, per interesting thing they know, between keeping it secret vs. using it when it applies. They also regard Truth as fundamentally private, and therefore are not restricted regarding lies.

## Organization

From temple to temple, each appears to operate independently. However, secret channels of information and perhaps even a spy and operative network are said to exist, implying a more coordinated and even sinister web of information gathering and influence.

Within a temple, the resident priest is supreme. However, advanced priests are so detached and even, sometimes, immobile, that leading initiates determine more policy than perhaps they should.

The cult has no specific center of power beyond the site of Awakening shared by all the pantheon, but it includes many holy places where worshippers or supplicants may

In addition to the pantheon's shared holy days, the cult reveres the depth of the winter solstice as a time of reflection and withdrawal, and perhaps to exult in the intensity of its deepest secrets.

### **Lay membership**

The cult is generous with informal and temporary lay membership. Anyone can participate in minor observance and receive some specialized education. To belong, however, one must present significant and private information. As with all the pantheon gods, to belong also means informal lay membership in the other pantheon cults, observed on the shared holy days.

The cult provides education in literacy to anyone, as well as specialized individual tutoring at high cost, especially languages and useful traveling or negotiating information. It teaches battle magic to its belonging lay members, often related to a given task or mission.

### **Initiate membership**

Requirements for initiation include the standard dice roll, [Power + Charisma + money] x5 ÷3, and a ceremony that binds the new initiate to either the library/archivist branch or the investigation/explorer branch of the cult. The cult trains its initiates in Cult Lore, which for the explorer branch concerns old architecture, cultural backgrounds, scripts, evaluate treasure, and social practices regarding death. It also teaches other cults' Lores which they do not appreciate.

Initiates devote their lives to the cult, extremely so. The initiate is subjected to a severe "Forget" spell which does not erase their actual memory of family and friends, but does eliminate the emotional ties with them. They also gain a cult secret which from that point forward is kept entirely within their own mind, reserving Intelligence as if it were a spell. It is buried too deep to recall without effort, so you have to "cast" it like a spell to recall it. To remain initiated, in addition to ordinary duties, they can never reveal the secret, and must bear the responsibility that if they die without returning it to the temple, it will be lost forever.

As a major cult, its priests may teach any battle magic spell, but they specialize in Befuddle, Detect Magic, Detect Undead, Detect Traps, Detection Blank, and Dispel Magic.

### **Rune Lord membership**

A Rune Lord of the cult dedicates themselves to taking action on the basis of secret knowledge, and is even empowered to reveal it in achieving some specific goal. They are universally drawn from the the active, explorer branch of initiate status. Since most such initiates don't live long, and since direct military action isn't an ongoing cult effort, Rune Lords are rare and have no formal part in the temple hierarchy.

Requirements for acceptance include initiate status in the explorer branch, at least 90% in Cult Lore, one weapon, and three practical survival skills, and at least 15 Power, as well as a strong history of providing forbidden or secret information to the cult.

A Rune Lord may not marry or otherwise form emotional ties (friendships and casual romance are allowed). They observe minor dietary and certain clothing restrictions, but are allowed to relax these when traveling. Their benefits are reserved for later development.

### **Rune Priesthood**

A Rune Priest is dedicated to more than secret information: they devote themselves to abstract and even forbidden concepts, usually in terms of making sure no one ever learns them. Requirements for this status include initiate status in good standing, 90% in Cult Lore and in at least one other Cult Lore, at least 18 Power, and a dice roll similar to that for initiation.

They have many restrictions on their time and responsibilities, but most dramatically, they undergo slow petrification into a stone-like form. High Priests are effectively living statues dedicated to the processing of information – or in modern terms, human computers. Their benefits are many but reserved for later development.

As this is a major cult, all standard rune spells are available. They also command Gnomes of all sizes. Cult special rune spells include Seal, Forget, Create Ghost, Bind Ghost, and, of course, many which are unknown to anyone else.

### **Subservient cults**

The cult's Spirit of Reprisal is sent against those who are too free with cult knowledge. It has Power 4d6 and attacks in spirit combat, reducing 1d3 Intelligence on a successful strike, which also removes memories of cult information. Uniquely, it also may defend initiates and runemasters from other cults' spirits, especially in the context of acquiring secrets held by other cults.

Others: it includes a little-known subcult which specializes in creating and binding ghosts.

### **Associated Cults**

The cult is a member of the pantheon, so it is associated with the other included cults. In the myths, its minor gods and heroes often play the role of the one who had a solution or special knowledge at hand all along. The stories are full of the fraught relationship with the truth-worshipping, free-information Hawk Seers, as indicated by their overlapping runic associations, including opposed heroic sagas and reluctant alliances. The Hawk Seers especially disapprove of the Buried Dead's comfort zone concerning the undead.

### **Notes**