

Rouse the Black Wind

Winter Magnitude 160

Performing the Ritual

Performing this ritual takes at least 10 minutes of roleplaying. During the ritual the casters must be in a strong Winter regio. This ritual targets an entire empire, and must be performed at a regio in that empire.

During the performance, the eternal Agramant must be evoked clearly by all contributors using at least *three* of its commonly known names.

This ritual is a curse. A target may only be under any number of curses at a time.

Effects

The ritual draws on the power of Amgranat to curse an entire empire (for example, the Empire, Otkodov, or the Mallum). The target empire is scourged with unpleasant weather, including eerie howling winds that bring unsettling dreams.

Magicians in the area begin to feel increasingly uncomfortable. In some cases they become depressed and lethargic, in others short tempered and aggressive. In rare cases, magicians may become spontaneously subject to the effect of *weakness*.

All mana sites in the target empire provide only half as many mana crystals as they would otherwise produce in the coming season. The ritual may also destroy weak regio, and may damage more powerful regio. It will also have a profound effect on magical creatures causing them to either become lethargic or dangerously aggressive.

The effect lasts until the start of the next Profound Decisions Empire event.

OOOC note

This item is a ritual text.

Any character with the Winter Ritual Lore skill can master this ritual. You must have a free slot or experience point to master a new ritual. After an appropriate period of roleplaying spent studying these pages, it should then be brought to a referee who will add the ritual to those you have mastered. Doing this does not 'use up' the ritual text.

This ritual cannot be learned by other means; it cannot be taught by a character who knows it unless the ritual is added to the body of Imperial Lore by the Conclave.

Ribbon ID: 10857

The Names of Agramant

Agramant is called the Wendigo. Agramant is a mask of the Old God of the Red Hands. The Old God of the Red Hands is a shadow of the howling blackness at the heart of Creation. Hear him! Fear him!

He is the *Devourer of the Fallen*. He is *The Voice of the Pines*.

The Icewalkers call him *Blood-on-the-Snow* and there was a time when they would offer blood to him at the end of winter to thank him for those who had survived, to gain his aid in the hunts to come (oh, how he hunts).

The Mystics called him *The Dream of Famine* and like all names, they knew this to be a metaphor holding a deeper truth (for does he not come to you in your dreams?)

When the Ushka and the Vard met, they shared tales old as their blood of *The Walker of Waste* and *The Whisperer*. Two desperate peoples, they knew his voice well for does he not urge the hungry and the lost to do whatever must be done to survive.

Sometimes he is called *Father-of-Monsters*. His children are monstrous, it is true; but this name honours his gifts that lure the greedy into acts of self-debasement and madness that break their image of themselves, freeing them to become literal or figurative monsters.

The Highborn-from-across-the-ocean call him *The Abominable One*, and say that he is the worst of the eternal. They fear him more than any other, for he teaches that all the trappings of sanity and exactitude with which they surround themselves are nothing more than a fragile curtain of tissue-thin morality. When he moves, when he laughs, when he *breathes*, the curtain is torn and they are forced to see the sky.

The Dawnish call him the *Horned Manticore*; they see him as the mask of Hate but he does not himself Hate. Rather he teaches others to see their Hate not as a shameful secret, not as something to be fought or unmade, but as a source of power to be tapped, forged, made a weapon against their foes. Praise him!

The Harvester of Graves they call him in the Marches, and make an offering of water to him when his name is spoken. They say that to speak his name as a blessing before a meal, or before taking a drink, is to make a greater offering to him of that food, that liquid.

He has other names of course, as many as there are peoples to speak and to fear their own nature. The *Cloak-of-Envy* they call him in Nemoria, and say that he tempts the weak to give in to their desires ...as if Wendigo would waste his time with the weak! It is the *strong* who most often deny their own nature and hide it behind an iron mask of civility. *Breaker-of-Masks* they call him, for he frees those who chain themselves with propriety.

NYAR SHTAH! NYAR GASHANNA!

As the magicians chant the words, their acolytes play discordant music. Bone flutes carved from the long bones of victims tormented to the point of death and beyond, the barely audible wails of their tortured spirits grim accompaniment to the skirling tune. Drums of tattooed leather flayed from the bodies of still-living slaves are beaten, rhythmic asynchronous counterpoint to the flutes and the chanting. The broken spin and twirl and laugh and jump, spinning dancers wrapped in straps of tattered bell-hung cloth.

The starlit sky grows darker as clouds build up. Lightning flashes, closer and closer, stalking the circle where the ritual is performed. The peal of thunder grows louder. A wind rises – chill thin, sharp. A plume forms.

„NYRAR SHTHAN! NYAR GASHANNA! SPEAK OH YOU VOICE-OF-THE-PINES!”

the magicians lay hands on the prisoners. They hack them in the most cruel and despicable fashion; the blood of dozens of men, women, and children wash over the black stones. Blood stolen, blood taken without consent, blood magic perverted and corrupted. Pain and suffering fuelling the plume and the storm and the thin, cold wind.

Strips and chunks of warm meat are cut, devoured with greedy bloodied hands as the tempo of the music rises quickens, louder, faster, stronger, harder, louder, LOUDER until blood bubbles in torn throats and the dancers and the musicians begin to falter, offering their strength to the storm, to the sky, to the bloodied earth, begging for the black wind the wind that scours, offering their pain and their HATRED to the Voice-of-the-Pines.

„NYRAR SHTHAN! NYAR GASHANNA! RISE OH YOU HOWLER-IN-THE-WASTES!”

Beneath the storm wracked sky the wailing begins. It is distant at first. It is not a true sound – it is not external. Each magician, each musician, each dancer, each bleeding victim, each torturer hears it first inside their own heads. It thrums in their bones. It echoes in the quiet places within them. Rising, rising, rising it comes, weeping and wailing.

„NYAR SHTHAN! NYAR GASHANNA! COME TO US, OH YOU HARVESTER-OF-GRAVES!” cries the master, and the cry is echoed.

The drums pound, the pipes keen, the wind rises, rises. As one voice, the magicians and their acolytes howl, howl until their throats burst, howl until they fall to the ground gasping for breath. The Black Wind rises, oh it rises, turning and turning in a widening gyre, the hounds cannot hear the houndmaster. The ceremonies of innocence are drowned, and everywhere the dark conviction grows.

Voicing their hate and their despite, the Black Wind rises and sweeps across the land in a churning spiral. This is the Black Wind, lo, lo the Wind that Devours. The threads of immanence fray and snap. The dread wolves prowl the boundaries of the places of power, snapping, hungry; in the face of weakness they feed and glut themselves on unborn potential.

The cold seeps down from the starlit sky. The hills and the mountains mourn. The red star laughs.

THE DREAM OF THE FIRELIGHT

I raise the bowl to my lips, and drink deep. It is bitter, and warm still from the vein. The drums soothe me, rock me, to my sleep. I dream as I am born - alone, my skin slick with blood. The dream rises around me, embracing me, taking me to the darkness.

A massive furry figure prowls around a circle of firelight. It has an ape-like body, but thin and rangy like a wolf. Its head is that of a monstrous predatory beast, all blazing yellow eyes and spreading horns, and sharp teeth in a thrusting muzzle.

Its eyes glitter with cleverness. It moves with a lithe grace that belies its massive size.

The firelight around which it prowls marks a tiny camp. A few dozen shadowed figures huddle together, clearly afraid of the beast that stalks them. The ring burns steadily, a ring of flame that keeps the beast at bay.

Occasionally, the beast tries to reach through the fire to snatch one of the huddled figures. They recoil from it in terror.

Looking at them I realise that if they are human sized then the thing outside the fire circle is massive, larger than an ox or great bear.

One of the huddled creatures stands up, and approaches the ring of fire and the beast beyond. Her eyes are full of curiosity and wonder. The beast rears up, and reaches across the ring of fire. The flames leap and catch at the fur along its arms, and it roars with pain but does not recoil - and the figure does not cower away. Instead it reaches out and grabs the clawed hand of the great beast.

Flexing its muscles, the beast lifts the figure up, safely out of reach of the flames, and sets her down gently on the ground beyond.

She looks around her, gazing at the distant hills, and the forests, and the great expanse of the stars. She does not look back at the fire, at those crouched within, at the blind safety she has known. She looks to the horizon and without hesitation she walks away from the fire into the glorious, endless, world of night.

OH YOU RED STAR

OH! YOU RED STAR! YOU HARBINGER AND HERALD OF WONDER!
WE SING TO YOU, OH YOU STAR OF THE MORNING AND THE EVENING!
WE SING TO YOU, OH YOU WANDERER IN THE HEAVENS!
WE SING TO YOU, OH YOU PRINCE OF CHAOS AND OF FATE!

WATCH OVER US, LORD OF CHANGE!

GUIDE OUR HANDS, YOU WHO SETS THINGS AWRY!

FREE US FROM THE CHAINS OF COLD CERTAINTY, OF CONFORMITY, OF
STAGNATION!

FREE US FROM THE WISHES OF THOSE WHO HATE THE STRONG!

FREE US TO CAST DOWN THE WEAK THAT THEY NOT DRAG US DOWN!

FREE US, OH YOU HARBINGER OF LIBERTY!

RED STAR! ONE-EYE! WANDERER! CHANGER AND BRINGER OF NEW WAYS!
GRANT US YOUR BLESSED SIGHT THAT WE MAY SEE THE WORLD AS IT IS
BEYOND THE VEIL OF CIVILITY!

WE INVOKE YOUR NAME THAT YOU MAY VISIT DESTRUCTION ON TRADITION!

WE INVOKE YOUR NAME THAT YOU MAY BREAK THE CHAINS OF THE BLIND!

WE INVOKE YOUR NAME THAT YOU MAY UNLEASH UNCERTAINTY INTO THE
WORLD!

OH! YOU RED STAR! YOU HARBINGER AND HERALD OF WONDER!



SURVIVAL

Winter, at its core, shows us that every living creature strives to live, to deny the power of death, To take one more breath, to enjoy one more beat of our hearts. Whatever it takes, mortals lust for life. This is not the primaevial desire for procreation – procreation does not care about individual humans only that humanity continue to exist, in one form or another. Winter takes a different view. In the magic of Winter, each individual is equally important – to a point.

My continued existence, and the continued existence of those I care about, is paramount. You – and your loved ones – can go fuck yourselves for all I care.

Sometimes, for me to survive, you must die. For me to be strong, I must take your strength from you for myself.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with killing and eating your neighbour if it means that you and your family will survive a famine. There is nothing questionable about stealing food to feed yourself, or water, or killing a man during a snowstorm if he will not let you take shelter in his cave.

„You must survive, because this life is all you have“ says the Winter Realm. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the urges that drive the blood of the Winterborn. To one degree or another, all the sovereigns of the wasteland partake of these drives also. The wisdom of Wise Rangara, the pragmatism of Agramant, the stark truth of Kaela, and even the envy at the heart of the Thrice-Cursed all reflect the knowledge of „one life“.

Winter exemplifies both the desire to prolong existence and the absolute certainty that everything must end. It can extend life, to unnatural lengths, but when it does so there is always some flaw in the process that leaves the possibility of destruction. Winter seems not to care how long it takes for something to be destroyed, only that destruction is its ultimate fate. This is not the hasty realm of Spring that barely leaves time for something to die of old age before it is seeking to turn it into compost!

Mortals already have an innate instinct to survive, and the Winter realm can amplify this instinct. This tendency to encourage survival is obvious in enchantments that allow someone to endure potentially lethal injury, at least for a time.

More than any other this magic amplifies the mortal instinct to live – indeed, fascinatingly, a philosopher might argue that the magic works on the same principles as those which cause the formation of ghosts – the need to perform one last vital task before surrendering to the embrace of Death.

A Vision of the Black Stone

YOU seem to stand in a great courtyard, surrounded by immense buildings you cannot quite make out. The sky is dark, but the stars are darker. In the middle of the court stands a crude, black monolith – a lump of black granite hardly touched by artifice.

YOU are drawn to it. You begin to approach, but the closer you come the harder it becomes to put one foot in front of another. A CERTAINTY begins to form within you – you know that there is something terrible behind you and that if you did not turn and look right this second it will devour you. Yet you know that if you look back the stone will be lost forever.

YOU struggle mightily, forcing yourself to approach, to not look back, to not falter. Some trick of perception makes the stone tower both above you, while being barely taller than a man. You labour to breathe. You taste the copper tang of blood. You know that destruction is certain, imminent.

YOU almost surrender, and turn to confront the terror you know is about to strike ...but you are strong. You force yourself to move forward. All sensation of dread vanishes the instant you step into the ring of white stone surrounding the monolith.

It is twice your height, and about as broad across as you are tall. It does not reach to the heavens. It is just a stone, a lonely marker stone.

It is marked with dozens of symbols. You cannot read them; age has weathered and faded most of them. Most but not all.

At the top is a depiction of some desert hound with pointed snout and ears, at rest. Yet it is not one thing – it is also the rune of the bargainer. It is inlaid in gold. Below it to one side is a sinuous fish-like worm inlaid in silver – yet it is also the rune of weakness, that marks the heart's flaw that invites to downfall. Opposite it is the roaring lion inlaid in polished copper, that was also the rune of strength – might without morality, the strength of the guardian and the tyrant.

YOU reach out your hand, and step forward and something shifts beneath you. You look down. You see that what you had thought was a ring of white stone is actually a depression, or a pit, or a shaft, or a well. It is filled to the lip with bleached-white bones.

YOU cannot move. Among the bones are dozens of skulls, some cracked and broken, staring blindly up at you. Stamped onto the forehead of each is the rune of bargains.

YOU look at last behind you, then, and see that the entire great courtyard as far as you can see is a plain of skeletal remains. Your path toward the monolith is clear – marked by broken bones where your heavy tread has cracked the ossuary. The dead are uncountable, and from each empty skull stares the same rune.

YOU look back to the monolith. YOU reach out YOUR hand and touch the rough surface, and blood runs from YOUR fingers.

A great voice, loud enough to echo off the firmament, enough to make you drop almost to your knees among the bones howls from somewhere and nowhere.

„THE BLACK STONE“

And then is silent.

THE FANG

The Fang is the empty belly, the gaping maw, the unspeakable hunger that cannot be sated. The hunger that drives you to steal a loaf of bread. The hunger that drives you to stalk a man and beat him with a rock and take his money pouch so that you may buy bread. The hunger that burns you so that you cannot think save of eating, that becomes the obsession that drives you to stalk the man and beat him with your hands until they are raw and bloody, and wrapped around his neck, strangling his life, and then lower your head, because the need is so intense you cannot wait, cannot remember that money will buy food because all you can think, all you are, is the HUNGER.

Merciless and unforgiving, it represents the unending torture of starvation and embodies the darkest longings of the soul which can never be satisfied. It is the need that drives mortals to atrocities in the desperate pursuit of their goals. It is the empty well into which all wickedness can be cast that devours hope and love and glory and wisdom as easily as hate and malice and envy.

The Fang is the true face of Ambition. Hunger can drive mortals to greatness, and allow them to overcome many obstacles in their path. There is always a price to be paid; sometimes the object of the quest is also its price. The clever and the cunning know that the price must be paid but it need not be paid by the wise. Let others pay. The Fang is also a Dagger, and in that mien it is the truest, oh the sweetest, face of Ambition. Let those who stand between you and your desires feel the cold bite of the Fang and they will trouble your grand designs no more.

Those who can withstand the depths of Winter, those who have learned to ignore the most savage pangs of hunger, those who have felt every fibre of their being starve and weaken but still rise and walk on each morning are transfigured. For these lucky few, the Fang reveals the strength at their core, burning away all that is weak and redundant.

Would you make the magician understand their true power? Take their magic from them. Let them scabble through the dust, let them strike down the weak among their number in the pursuit of precious magic. Test them, challenge them, teach them how far they will go as they yearn for their sweet magic.

The Fang is evoked most often as a curse; it can be used alone or in combination with other runes to cause famine, poverty, cannibalistic urges or insanity.

Some practitioners of the True Power cite its subtler powers; a hunger for knowledge can drive mortals to greatness - so too can the hunger for glory. It is the hunger that drives though. It is the lack that fires the spirit. It is being deprived of the thing you desire that fills you with the certainty that you must have it.

Put the bowl of meat out of the reach of the hungerer and they will surprise themselves with their cunning, with the lengths they will go to to reach the prize they need.

Desire and need, want and need, hunger and need. This is the Fang. This is the face of ambition. This is the bite of the Black Wind.

This is the weapon that hungers for the blood of the enemy.

