

SHAMANS AND SPIRITS

Shamans are almost universally present in communities. Their basic function is to know and maintain the local spirits tied to folk history and geography, and they often preside at and ritualize seasonal and other calendar activities. They vary locally based on whatever subculture and associated skill-set a particular shaman came from, which in turn influences the tendency for shaman training in that area.

Against stereotype, shamans tend to be townfolk, shy of the wilds. The spirits they treat with tend to be "house and field," associated with animals and locations familiar with and in service to human culture. Spiders are a common motif, and many shamans specialize in domestic animal skills too.

In keeping with stereotype, however, they are socially and ritually set apart. Many live in outlying or isolated dwellings, or if not, in buildings which are marked and structured so as to be recognizable and different. Spirits are thought of as a little unpredictable, potentially mischievous, and those who deal with them are appreciated but also considered a bit out-there for doing so. Depending on a shaman's personality, he or she might be considered weird or a bit of a social burden, to the point of mild abuse, or conversely, well-respected for his or depth of knowledge and non-magical contributions.

Shamans do not pose enough challenge to Urhoss, Ord Lindas, or Wendrara to lead to significant danger for them, but they fear the cult of Oome, with good reason.. They resist and defy the cult insofar as it manifests directly in the community, given their association with herbalism and disease treatment via healing spirits. However, they do not dare confront the witch-priests in the wilds, or directly in any way; if they're forced to, they generally lose. The more scholarly or theological shamans maintain the cultural deep knowledge concerning the spirit-goddess Vrisha Himlá, how she was enslaved by Oome, and they are all too aware of the horrid fate awaiting them should they fall into the hands of a witch-lord.

THE GODS

The four cults are associated, sharing a common mythos and generally the same large-scale ideology, but not friendly, and their priests do not consult with one another or act in concert, allowing for individual and local exceptions. Each includes one or more captive gods, advertised as menaces chained by the god for safety and judicious use, but actually a principle or benefit that's been imprisoned and corrupted

Each one is marked internally by complex rivalries and sometimes deadly power-politics among the more active initiates and priests, and none of them features a High Priest possibly because no one claiming such a title could be expected to live very long.

Each considers the whole populace to be laymen, like it or not, with no requirements to join. But those laymen who choose to facilitate the cult's interests, who observe voluntarily and regularly, are considered to belong, with their primary duty being to run interference for the scheduled activities and immediate needs of the initiates.

A person may have layman status in more than one of them, but no overlapping occurs at Initiate or Rune status. Specifically, a layman who belongs to one of the cults is permitted to attend the lay rituals of the others. Typically that involves some material benefit to the participants, as well as required material aid of some kind and the usual contribution of Power.

Initiates effectively comprise secret societies, or perhaps, lodges which reinforce specific ideological preferences and aims in society. They do not display or even reveal their status in ordinary life, but don distinctive garb and undertake dreadful acts in accordance with the scheduled rituals led by priests or high-ranking initiates. Powerful individuals hide it poorly and dare you to say anything.

The schedules and purposes of the rituals comprise the primary frame of action for playing them.

Shared Mythos and History / Before Time – this is left to later play to reveal

- Very much a "when nature and society got it together" myth
- Each one has a myth-cycle concerning subordinating one or more other deities or important entities, tied to shaking-out the power structure among the four

Since Time Began

Metaphysically, the insatiable, entropic void is at the center, and its highly secret cult directly funnels human life and power into it. The underlying principle for Oome, Ord Lindas, and Wendrara is to persist in its presence.

The female goddesses define the parameters of the wild vs. the settled community, and at a personal and social level their cults operate at cross-purposes. However, at a larger scale, they both enable human populations to survive in some ecological context derived from their immediate and local balance of power. Fear of the wild fuels much of the desperation which affords deceptive, ruthless family dynamics their power.

Ord Lindas' role at this level is profound, providing the runic knowledge and framework for them as well as himself – effectively making Rune Priesthood possible. At first glance, he is more directly allied with Wendrara, and in local conflict with the rare Rune Lords of Oome (i.e., the township-organizing warlord vs. the wild lord of the hunt), but without the wild, he would lose a considerable portion of the necessary fear of an external foe which gives him power.

Bluntly, this cosmology and its attendant ritual practices are based firmly on fear: of the void, of permanent death, and of losing one's current investments in life. Urhoss is undeniably present, but as long as the populace fears the diseases and tracklessness of the wild, complies with the deceptions and fear of shame intrinsic to family power struggles, and organizes itself for war based on fear and contempt for enemies, the gods maintain their force and they are not devoured, or not very much, or not just yet.

Life After Death is organized into a common framework, as everything is annihilated by Urhoss, but the three other gods offer the only way to stay around and contribute to the cosmos' continued existence: each provides some distorted form of physical immortality and absorption/sublimation, but nevertheless persistence, of the spirit in a cult-associated form.

They share elementals, called World Spirits, which have customized manifestations based on what's available, but are really the same things – as per RuneQuest, they're alterations of the existing environment rather than creatures.

All of them get the standard Rune metamagic: Extension, Summon Elemental, Dismiss Elemental, Multispell, and Spell Teaching. They can't have the light or spirit runes, although Oome has access to the latter through a subordinate deity. They are all threatened by and seek to eradicate the new godlings of Light.

Oome, the Witch

Runic Association: Darkness, Mobility, Plant



Life After Death: for initiates, the body becomes nutrient for sacred plants, and the spirit gains secular immortality as a forest and/or disease cult spirit.

Nature of the Cult

It is founded on the wild as an inimical place, and the need to propitiate it, and to use its bounty in a state of abject submission. Those who commit more fully learn to use these resources as a means of threat and

punishment upon a community, thereby gaining social power. Those who seek runic level live away from the communities, becoming hermits or even monsters of the wilds, officiating for and influencing the cult's townfolk in a haphazard, emotionally-directed fashion.

it is very easy to be tempted to wield disease rather than to suffer it, or even to cure it; similarly, it's tempting to become part of the hunt, partaking of its violence and excess, rather than merely to practice it as a dangerous job. specific training for specific service, relative protection from illness

Reason for Continued Existence

Oome represents a great deal of society's values and power structure, in the fashion of a reversed negative: the need for a boogeyman, the uses of fear, and disease as a weapon and an environment. Her association with nature is not so much reverent and appreciative, as seeking the maximum advantage through this or that dangerous beast, plant, fungus, or terrain. Although at face value it's disturbing that they traffick with untamed spirits of the wilds and diseases, they also effectively prevent the more powerful entities of this sort from rampaging into human society unchecked.

Social/Political Position and Power

As an organization, the cult does not hold much temporal power, and in the community itself, other gods limit her sway. Local conflicts between the town-based family interests and the wilds-based witch interests are frequent; more rarely, the Huntsmen of Oome clash with the Warchiefs of Ord Lindas, in terms of male authority. In these cases, the main damage falls upon the lay populace. However, at the most general level, the relationship is not especially adversarial, as the other priests value Oome's power check on shamanism. The cult is most literally powerful, within a community, in the absence of the other two social gods – such communities either prosper in a kind of always-sick, never-growing way, or they succumb and become more wilderness.

The Oome cult's real power comes from people getting their families through hard times, being willing to accept chronic and intermittent disease as a fact of life as long as pestilence is kept away. A witch in the woods, and the small meannesses and privileges afforded to those most committed to her, is a small price to pay in the face of devastation.

Particular Likes and Dislikes

Not surprisingly for a deity whose very existence is based on "all against all" it's mostly the latter. Oome cultists wage a vicious, silent, and complicated war with the Stickmen, in the depths of the wilds. Obviously they are in constant strife with shamans, although since the latter typically know they are the weaker in most potential conflict, most Oome cultists are content with cruelty, domination, and torment. The runic adherents loathe the worshippers and activities of Vix Isk, as the latter godling stole the Mobility rune from her and diminished her power in that sphere of activity.

Organization

- Inter-Cult Organization: initiates and belonging laymen of Oome form a secretive subculture in a given location, staking out personal advantages and resources, and not necessarily acting in concert. Their occasional organized activity depends on the details of their local priest, who is highly individualized based on background, which subdivision of the cult he or she specializes in, and whether a runelord is present.
- Intra-Temple Organization: very little exists. The cult is by definition scattered and devoted to the tracklessness and secrecy of the wilds. Insofar as areas of influence overlap, one community of Oome worship will dominate and subsume another.
- Center of Power, Holy Places: to be developed in play

Lay Membership

- Requirements to Belong: All too simple, really – attend fetish-ist, excessive rituals in the wild at designated times, run errands for initiates without questioning them, and generally spy for them on everyone.

- Mundane Benefits: Bluntly, everyone else but cult members will get sick before you do. Laymen don't get anything else special except for access to the cult spells and the guilty pleasures of rituals which violate community standards of decency.
- Skills: Find Plant, Lore: Disease, Lore: Region
- Battle Magic: Glue, Sneeze, Preserve Herbs

Initiate Membership

- Requirements for Initiation: quite horrid and often disfiguring regarding body parts which are customarily hidden by clothing.
- Oome initiates are arrogant, thinking of themselves as realists and despising the somewhat more social ups and downs of Wendrara and Ord Lindas concerns. They also consider themselves the first line of defense against Urhoss, particularly in their command of spirits and their willingness to accept some degree of harm as a means of survival.
- Requirements to Remain Initiated: Significant attention to observance, including ensuring that belonging-laymen attend, and also to recruiting likely youth to the cult. The initiate is responsible to the priest regarding what may be required or decreed to be destroyed or controlled, and oversees all applications of sabotage, disease, secretive acts, and other direct effects of the god within the settled community where the priest cannot and will not go.
- Mundane Benefits: open all listed skills to basic level, +1 Dex. Initiates are knowledgeable about secret ways through terrain others avoid, and the hidden places in there. They gain considerable protection against diseases, sometimes gaining relevant spells or spirits from the priest. They belong to an extensive under-culture of fellow transgressors, sharing a sense of somewhat dirty sin and associated defiance of outward conformity. They wield fear, threats, and minor harm as constant social influence.
- Skills: Brew, Lore: Venom, Treat Disease, Spread Disease
- Spells: demoralize, mobility, detect life, coordination, extinguish, healing, jumping, darkwall, speedart, multimissile

Rune Lord Membership

General Statement: the Rune Lord is the embodiment of active fear in the forest, typically cast as the Wild Huntsman, masters of the stalk and the chase; each Lord considers himself or herself to be "the" Huntsman. They are rare, and when present, the wilds are considered to be haunted – rightly.

- Requirements for Acceptance: at least 90% with Ride, Bow or Lance, Track or Scan, and two other cult skills; Power of 15 or greater
- Restrictions: the Rune Lord may not sleep under a roof, nor drink from a vessel except that made from hide or plant fibers, nor marry.
- Benefits: to be developed in play

Rune Priesthood

General Statement: crones and other weird old people out in the woods;

- Requirements for Acceptance: 90% with Lore: Region and either Lore: Disease or Lore: Spirits; Power of 18 or greater; establishing a regional zone of control relative to shamans, Stickmen, and the godlings of Light;
- Restrictions: a priest cannot enter a town, cultivated fields, or any community built-up further than a few shacks. His or her body modifications are typically too severe to permit ordinary human interactions, and typically priests live deep in the wilds, in weird and horrifying circumstances.
- Benefits: to be developed in play
- Rune Spell Compatibility: see the general description for the gods above
- Cult Special Rune Spells
 - Crack, Venom Bite, Tanglethicket, Accelerate Growth, Create Warrior of Wood, Camouflage, Plant Spy, Chameleon, Darksee, Dark Walk, Affix Darkness

Subservient Cults

- Spirit of Reprisal: captive shaman spirit attack (see below), Pow 4d6 single-roll attack, success results in infection; revisits nightly unless it can be held into combat and defeated
- Hero cult **Qar**: refines the Darkness rune

- Shield of Darkness, Darksee, Blinding, Counter Light, Dark Walk, Affix Darkness, Cancel Light, Create Shadow, Suppress Aether (the weirder and more powerful darkness spells are reserved for a subcult)
- Subordinate deity: **Vrisha Himlá**, runic association of Spirit and Water
 - Battle magic: detect spirit, healing, spirit shield
 - She has the terrifying capacity to enslave shamans and growing/transforming them into tortured trees; Oome's spirit mastery, and its command of disease, are a property of this activity.
 - Requires Lore: Spirits and a distorted, otherwise ineffective version of shamanic training
 - Rune spells: Attack Soul, Drown

Associated Cults

She is associated with the three other gods, and superficial conflicts or hostilities are trivial relative to their interconnectedness. As with the others, she receives the Divine Intervention spell from Urhoss.

She is an enemy of all the godlings of Light.

Miscellaneous Notes

Cult authority is not gendered. Priests are culturally stereotyped, i.e., typically depicted or described, as female, and Lords as male ("Master of the Hunt"), but in practice actual individuals are not expected to, and do not, conform.