

Magic Items for *Masque of the Red Death* Campaign

The Onyx Medallion

by R. Sweeney

One of the plot elements open to exploitation in MOTRD is the fact that magical items created before the Red Death came to Gothic earth are not corrupted by it's nefarious 'web'. This makes finding one of these objects a truly monumental occurrence.

However, just because an item is old and not corrupted by the Red Death doesn't necessarily mean it's safe to use. Take for example my proposed object.. a 'simple' pendant made of Onyx but shaped in a vaguely irregular way. Perhaps at one time, this pendant bore the likeness of some distorted god's face, but now, after time and weathering, it more closely resembles a distorted heart shape (as per biological heart, not valentine.)

Some scholars who study Egyptian monuments have concluded that the sphinx was made by a civilization pre-dating the Egyptians. (The head mounted on the sphinx was added by the Egyptians later according to these scholars... for the body of the sphinx and the head are not constructed of the same type of stone.) For the sake of argument, we will say such a tribe of people existed and that one of them began experimenting with the forces of magic. As with all new disciplines, it is quite possible to make mistakes. This Onyx medallion was such a mistake. The stone could not be destroyed by the magics present at that time, and the other shamans feared shattering it would simply release the evil that was inside unto the world. Rather than risk this, they buried it deep in a secret spot.

Many (MANY) years later, the stone was uncovered and began its terrible influence again.

Powers: Assist with gathering magical energies.

The wearer of the medallion can cannibalize one point of their constitution in return for one spell level of 'energy' with which to cast spells. (The lost constitution is only recovered after a full day of bed rest.) The process is quite painful, however, and the person cannibalizing his own constitution cannot use the magic. Rather, it must be "vested" upon another, who can then cast spells with that power. Because of the medallion's ancient origins, this magic is not tainted by the Red Death and does not result in Powerchecks. The pain the conduit feels is a small price to pay for magic. (Or so it seems.)

Note: It is possible to drain as many points of con as are desired by the wearer. Thus a adept with a 16 con could cannibalize 15 points to give 15 spell levels to an ally during a harsh combat. However, this reduces the wearer's con to 1 and makes them nearly helpless. It is possible to die from draining too much of one's own con. It also takes 15 full days of rest before the victim is back up to his normal con.

The Curse:

In fact, while the Red Death doesn't corrupt the Onyx Medallion's magic, the Onyx medallion is itself corrupt. It slowly weakens the mind, leading its wearer down the path of

delusional madness. The wearer makes a 1% check at the end of each day for each con point drained. (ie, 15% for our previously mentioned adept). If the d% are under this number, the victim is pushed a little farther towards delusional insanity. (Say a 10 point scale before full blown lunacy and -1 wis each time the d% check fails.)

In order to recover, the victim must receive the assistance of trained Psychologists for a period of years equal to the #wis points lost.

Item's use in a plot:

One of the PCs are an Adept who knows about the corrupting effects of magic. Another of the PCs might be a member of a family with a history of insanity. This PC's family has had the Onyx medallion for years and considers it a closely guarded secret. This second adept PC must be made to understand that use of the medallion can cause insanity. If they are willing to play a PC that goes slowly insane, then you can have a lot of fun with the item.

Otherwise, the party meets a NPC with the aforementioned history.

Nickoli is a stage magician / criminal. Appearing like the Charlatain, Nickoli however lacks any true magical skills. He knows prestidigitation, pick pockets, hide in shadows, climb walls, mesmerism, danger sense, and spellcraft. (However, he can't cast spells). He very much would like to be able to cast spells, however, and begins trying to steal museum artifacts he suspects of having occult powers. (Some do, explaining some unusual abilities he displays.)

The PCs are asked/hired/tricked into retrieving an item stolen by Nickoli (they don't know who the thief is, however.) Perhaps the item they are trying to recover belongs to a Qabal with which they are allied. Whatever it is, it is minor in power.

The PCs and Nickoli enter into a sort of dance. For one or two adventures, the PCs and the aforementioned NPC (from whom Nickoli has stolen a family heirloom other than the onyx medallion) try to hunt him down. Some people (not PCs) end up dead, but they only get a passing glimpse of Nickoli - not quite enough to identify him.

The PCs use the spell-power provided by the NPC to escape harm or pick up the trail of Nickoli once they have lost him. Nickoli uses smoke powder and trapdoors to disappear at times, which leads the PCs to assume he is a prestidigitator with no real magical skill other than the items which he has stolen. They begin to follow the 'magic' performers, trying to identify the thief.

While at a circus show, they think they can identify one of the magicians as the shadowy figure they saw fleeing the crime scene before. Sneaking into his trailer, they accidentally set off a spider-trap. Scads of trantulas fall upon the PCs (causing the NPC to freak out). Nickoli escapes but the PCs recover one of the stolen items for a museum and Nickoli is acknowledged as a thief... wanted by the law and unable to practice his magic show.

Nickoli takes revenge by mailing an index finger from one of the PCs family members to them. He demands that the PCs steal the item back for him, and return it to him... or he will kill his hostage.

Enter the PCs debating about stealing the item. Perhaps they do. At some point however, the NPC starts going bonkers for no apparent reason. Talking to himself and at a moment when the

party must be quite (or a socially embarrassing time) starts freaking out about "spiders" which he believes are crawling all over him.

One PC is gravely injured and must go to the hospital. The others watch the nurses take care of their friend when one of the nurses takes out a brass needle and gives the PC an injection... a dose of lethal poison (or nearly so). The nurse turns out to have been hypnotized by Nickoli into using a cursed syringe on the PC.

The syringe is stolen back at some point unless the PCs keep it on their person.

Slowly, over the course of several more adventures, the party begins to realize that the NPC is losing his mind and must be 'hospitalized'. During the investigation by the doctors, the NPC's medallion is noticed. He freaks out and says they can't have it, it's mine... etc... The doctors try to placate him. He starts blabbering that he can't give up his rock cus' his pretty rock is a magic rock and it helps him fight the "bad things." (Insert incoherent stories that the PCs know are true but the doctors assume are delusions.) The doctors sedate their patient and decide that they will have to remove this rock (to which the patient has an unhealthy attachment.)

Of course, there is more freaking out as the patient tries to fight off the doctors and the sedative to keep his rock.

A later scene in the adventures has Nickoli going for this rock. The PCs (somehow unable to reach their NPC friend) hear the NPC friend saying "You're not real... you're not real! The doctors told me... they told me..." etc., at which point they get to witness Nickoli slash their NPC friend to pieces as they get there just in time to see Nickoli use flashpowder and disappear (out a window or some such.)

Now the PCs know that Nickoli is even more dangerous than before because now he has "real magic" at his disposal. (And he hates the PCs for ruining his career.) The NPC isn't dead but is rushed to an emergency ward.

As time goes by, Nickoli gets more dangerous due to his knowledge of magic. He has found a way to use the medallion aggressively: draining a person's constitution against their will, leaving empty corpses behind as he uses his magic. (One way would be to hypnotise victims and tie the medallion around their neck. These victims are locked up in his lair and are drained as he casts spells.) Thus he does not go insane but starts failing his own powerchecks for his evil actions.

Later, of course, it turns out that Nickoli has broken into the hospital and killed the NPC. The PCs only learn about this when Nickoli chides them for how well they look out for their friends... "Why do you bother to stop me? Do you really want to protect the property of those pompous rich fops? You should do better to spend your time protecting your own friends." <insert dropping friend's head in their laps>. "You really shouldn't abandon your friends when there's a madman on the loose..."

PCs eventually "kill" the madman (big explosion but they don't find the body.) The PCs are badly injured and must seek medical attention. Back in the hospital they are relaxing again, when the nurse pulls out a brass needle (see cursed needle from before) and sticks it in one of their arms. As the PC goes into a cataleptic shock, they hear laughing from outside the room and catch the tail end of a black cloak. Pursuing, they see Nickoli (badly burnt) use flashpowder and disappear.

Robert Sweeney

Hanged Man's Noose

By C. Phipps

Note: this item comes from Gothic Earth and is intended to be used in a MotRD campaign.

Appearance:

The Hanged Man's Noose appears as exactly that, a normal hemp rope tied into an executioner's noose. Odd hints at its magical nature include a red diamond appearing somewhere in the weave everytime it is used to execute someone (it now has dozens in and out of the weave).

The noose also gives any wielder who has ever done something violent a sense of something closing around their neck and a distinctly uncomfortable sensation.

Background:

The Hanged Man's Noose was at first a simple noose in the town of Reddiamond, New Mexico sometime around 1873 the town was an infamous den of killers, thieves, and robbers until it was "cleaned" out by a group of bounty hunter's called the Seven (what at bare minimum could be called a Quabal dedicated to bringing justice to all those who evade it-especially those who evade final justice of the dead).

The noose hung 36 men before the true start of its career, the career being the sad hanging of an innocent man named Joseph Clearwater who had the misfortune of being caught around a man murdered by the Seven's mystic Aaron who promptly framed him for the crime. Aaron had become corrupted by the promise of power that the Red Death gives each who do magic on Gothic Earth and had begun to harvest lives from those who lacked legal protection (in this case a native American and a half member of that group).

The trouble was though Mr. Clearwater wasn't quite ready to lay down and have his good name bismirched by the charge of murder and arose. The judge was found dead, the executioner, even the town sheriff (a close friend of the leader of the seven). With help from a little boy the seven discovered the foul necromatic lab of their partner and shot him dead in a hideous gunfight that would go down

into legend exonerating Clearwater's name; the Seven then took the boy as their new seventh and road off into the desert for more adventures but the story doesn't sadly end there.

Aaron had actually been attempting to create a vapulgeist from Mr. Clearwater (and succeeded in that respect) hoping to develop a way to control these nigh invincible undead who seemed to unstoppabley rage across the old west unless revealed as true (or as one shaman did buried under ten thousand tons of rock-imprisoned forever), and create them totally. He was using the noose of the town in that respect

gaurenteeing it was never replaced. His magical experiment was almost done when the Seven dealt with him-the town people when they used their "lucky" rope next time.....never had a chance.

Where the Hanged Man's Noose exists now is up to the Red Death, its Black Quabals, and the DP who could very well reach into time to acquire this odd relic if they so wish.

Powers:

The Hanged Man's Noose has several powers which mark itself as magical and possibly even useful if used sparingly:

Minor Powers:

* The hangman's noose if slipped around a man's neck will tighten itself and act as a rope of strangulation-killing a normal man in seconds. Unlike the time suggests though the victim feels intense agony and dies very painfully.-using it in this manner is call for a powers check.

* The hanged man's noose instinctively knows when blood has been shed by a man and tightens itself if the man holding it has killed before. If the blood was innocent the noose will start to bleed from the diamond on it's weave.

* The hanged man's noose if put around the neck of a vapulgeist will instantly destroy it-it is the only weapon in the multiverse that can send and uncleared vapulgeist soul back to the realm of the dead (it is rather tragic and tends to create REALLY powerful ghosts but I digress not as vapulgeists.). None will survive it's hanging.

Major powers:

The hangman's noose if ever used to hang someone (as opposed to using it's powers of strangulation) will cause the slain to arise in three days as a vapulgeist. No matter whether the subject was innocent or guilty as sin.

These Vapulgeists more importantly to the wielder of the hanged man's noose are completely under the domination of the holder of the noose.

Obeying the letter of the commands of everything the wielder asks there of the hanged man's noose's wielder and furthermore will never attack the wielder.

NOTE: Vapulgeists who are innocent when killed by the noose can be laid to rest by normal means (having their killers admit their innocence and proof of it unearthed) but those who are guilty murderers or criminals are in much much dire straights (or in the cases of the truly guilty in a very good position to avoid eternal damnation). These undead are effectivly immortal and invincible except for their one weakness-the noose which can still destroy them as above. Those who know they are guilty by the way retain much of their intelligence in life and lack their fellow's rage.

Curse:

The Hanged Man's noose is a dangerous item for the vapulgeists (even the mindlessly raging ones) will constantly seek to break free of their torment and the momment the Hanged Man's noose leaves their weilder's possession the geists will know it and take action.

Other curses include the fact that the noose is minorly haunted by the pain that so many innocents have had to endure after being slain by it. Those who keep it in their possession will dream nightly of being hung or torn to shreds by vapulgeists of those they have killed with it (or have killed period or those they have even thought of killing).

Finally many evil geists who having slain their master's and are enjoying the virtual immortality their undead status now grants them (including at least one gunslinger) are notcibly peary about anyone who posseses the noose and want to aquire it to make sure it is never used against them. Usually meaning arranging some accident or threat against it's wielder.

Suggested Means of Destruction:

* The body of a completely exonerated vapulgeist must be burned on a pyre and the noose tossed in. (The noose must have no part in this).

* The weilder of the Hanged Man's noose must judge himself guilty and hang himself with the noose. Upon which it will break and lose all enchantment.

In either case all vapulgeists created by the noose will instantly crumple to dust.

Charles Phipps

CTHULHU AND MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH

by C.D. Nichols

Here's my opinions on whether your characters could shoot various Cthulhoid creatures:

Deep Ones - yes, but only if it hits something vital (otherwise, it's just punching holes in muscle and blubber)

Mi-Go - no, the fungi from Yuggoth are out of phase with most matter in this universe (they can affect it, but it doesn't affect them)

Shoggoth - no. (giant pile of slime, shooting slime is not effective)

Elder Thing - yes.

Cthonian - no. too big, try explosives.

Dhole - are you kidding?

Star-Spawn - see dhole

Hound of Tindalos - maybe.

Ghoul (Pickman's Model) - yes

Dark Young of Shub-Niggurath - probably not. a) it's made of matter from beyond this reality, b) it's too big

Nightgaunt - yes

Sand-Dweller - yes

Hunting Horror - basically, it would be like shooting at a mid-sized dragon who is close friends with a god

Shan - yes and no. You could shoot one or two, then the swarm would dematerialise, fly through your head, rematerialize half way through, causing your head to explode.

Formless Spawn of Tsathoggua - no. living black slime.

Lloigor - no. mental beings, no real body.

Great Race of Yith - Yes, next you get fried with lightning guns or psionics.

Flying Polyp - Yes.

Fire Vampire - No, living flames.

Star Vampire - Yes, if you can shoot something that's invisible.

Rat Thing - Yes.

Dimensional Shambler - Yes. If it stays in this dimension long enough.

Servitor of the Outer Gods - Maybe.

I'll note here that guns are notoriously ineffective against this type of enemy, serving mostly to annoy them. A good cursed grimoire is much better...with heavy madness and horror checks.
MWHAAAAAAAA!

Chris Nichols