

# THE RUNE MARK

## RUNE MARK

In the crumbled ruins of ancient cities, tombs, and crypts where dead kings lie, in the halls of libraries upon tablets of stone and vellum scrolls, echo the secrets of a language spoken of only by gods. In their ruin lie written clues and faint memories of their power and glory, unnoticed by all but a few, passed by as curiosities or riddles best forgotten. Unraveling these carvings come the rune marks, scholars and adventurers driven by a wild lust to know the Language of Creation, to unravel its secrets and master its eldritch might, for with it they open the hidden deeps of the world's mysteries and the treasures of the gods are made bare. With knowledge comes power and with this power they can govern or guide, beguile or dissuade, but more, the runes command a power beyond mortal man, for with its mastery comes a mastery of creation, to reshape the world into one of their own making. The rune marks are craftsmen, artificers of a world of runic magic.

The rune mark derives his power from runes. The runes themselves are glyphs that contain the magic of the Language of Creation, words of power. Through their mastery the rune mark alters the world around him. The ancient languages come to him easily; he masters the tongues of men with all their subtleties. Cultures diverse, great, and small, open to him as if in a book. His mind is ever-bent toward understanding. Early on he masters the forge and the making of tools, potions, elixirs, arms and armor, of how things work, both magical and mundane. He etches a rune upon a blade, drawing flames from the steel. He carves the glyph upon a stone to waste away its strength. He forges items of wonder and imbues them with magic. With these skills he combines use the runes themselves and masters their greater magic potential.

The rune mark's craft requires that he understand the machinations of the temporal world, and the clamor of the spiritual. He can be headstrong at times, for his is a knowledge that harnesses the powers of both worlds, giving him an insight he believes others never attain. He is able to look into the hearts and minds of men, and using an amazing ability to remember nuances, see them for what they are.

Rune marks do not master spells as other magic using classes do; they master runes and the magic within them.

The rune marks do not shy away from combat. They are skilled in the use of most weapons and are able to wear armor. Generally they have no desire to fall upon their swords and sacrifice their lives needlessly. Though they do not fear death, their lusts are for creation, not the end of it. They do not generally call men to arms, and only rarely lead them into battle. They do, however, bend their minds to guiding others in their own rule, and aiding them with advice or understanding through influencing their leaders. Theirs is the power behind the throne and the arm of that power if need should call.

He quests to unravel the secrets of the ancient world, for his own purpose or another's, or the challenge of it. Rune marks come from all walks of life, joined with their brethren through a common desire for knowledge. The rune mark may choose any alignment.



## THE RUNE MARK IN AIHRDE

Most rune marks come from the Paths of Umbra or the subsidiary guild, The White Order. Both guilds trace their origins into the depths of history. The White Order, the older of the two, was founded by Trigal the Mage and was dedicated to the acquisition of Rune Lore. During the long dark of Winter, Trigal, having changed his name to Nulak-Kiz-Din, founded the Paths of Umbra, a guild in the service of the Horned God, Unklar. The Umbrians, as they were called, followed the same paths as the White Order. They ruled at the side of the Horned God and dominated the magi of Aihrde for a thousand years, often occupying positions of wealth and privilege.

The Umbrians suffered much during the Winter Dark Wars, many of their folk being killed and destroyed, and many more driven from their halls and temples into the wilds. This served them in the long run, for most of those who suffered were evil and vile of heart. In the aftermath the guild never fully recovered, with many of its branches going into hiding. In time the guild recovered some of its strength, though many of those who joined later did so for the wealth of knowledge that was theirs to command. Eventually these reconstituted the White Order.

The White Order is a much smaller guild, owing its allegiance to none but the Rune Lore. It is loosely organized, with many small branches in various cities. Its members generally support one another in the acquisition of runes and the knowledge of the ancients. They generally serve one another in small schools, teaching young aspirants. Despite this atmosphere of cooperation, many in the White Order guard their Runes from each other. To gain a Rune can be a difficult and expensive prospect and giving it away to another an act of foolish charity. Oft times they slay one another for knowledge. But in general these are wise folk, and they are reasoned in their dealings with one another.

## PLAYING THE WHITE ORDER

After the Winter Dark, many of the Paths of Umbra returned to their roots and abandoned any desire to bring back the horned god and the long winter. They again refer to themselves as the White Order, and are dedicated more to the acquisition of power and knowledge than to any acts of evil or planar degradation. Their search now is for the rune stones of the Language of Creation, of which the Paths of Umbra are a small part.

The guild is spread far and wide throughout almost all the known kingdoms. In many cases, they built their libraries and halls, which are generally referred to as schools, upon the very foundations of their predecessors, the Paths of Umbra. There is no particular guild master or hierarchal command structure. There is, however, a system of ranks to which the magi adhere. These ranks mark both the power and acquired knowledge of a guild member and are delineated by color and title.

The greatest school of the White Order is Aranowl. It lies upon the Isle of Eleriath, the southernmost island which covers the approaches to the delta along the Ardeen River. This massive complex sits atop a high cliff overlooking the seas to the south.

During the Winter Dark, this edifice served the Lords of Aufstrag as their fortress to overlook the sea and river beyond. Soon after the war, the King of Kayomar seized the castle and decried using it as a fortress, for its walls were too wasted. Eventually, he granted the right of occupation to the White Order. They have occupied it ever since, rebuilding its holds and halls, the outbuildings, and eventually the walls.

It is not used in a warlike capacity. In fact, the White Order has made a gesture to the King of their peaceful intentions by removing the gates surrounding the structure. Aranowl is a university, filled with libraries, laboratories, school rooms, dormitories and the like. At any given time there are between 150-250 rune marks, magi and priests in the complex. Much of the collected wisdom of the world is gathered in this place, for the guild masters here keep in constant contact with other lore masters from all walks of life, both good and evil, by letter and magical means.

Access to the school by non-guild members is common, but expensive. Non-members must pay 25gp a day to scour the shelves and racks for themselves. To have a guild member do it, the costs is 50gp + 5gp per level per day. Those granted access to the libraries gain a +10 to any attributes checks concerning legend lore, history etc etc.

Members of the White Order can be of any alignment. They tend to be chaotic neutral, lawful neutral or neutral. They include rune marks, wizards and priests. They possess tremendous skills in the acquisition of knowledge.

## GUILD TITLES

Rank is designated by an Alb, a tunic, usually worn only during formal occasions\*

- 1 Token (gray alb, sleeveless)
- 2 Ward (gray alb with sleeves)
- 3 Candidate (gray alb, sleeves, waist olive length chasuble)
- 4 Pensioner (blue alb, sleeves, chasuble with blue cap)
- 5 Keeper (blue alb, blue berretta "square" cap)
- 6 Benefactor (blue alb, wide brim added to the blue cap)
- 7 Tutor (lawn sleeves added to the blue alb)
- 8 Seminarian (white Amice added, chasuble becomes white)
- 9 Pedagogue (Mitre staff)
- 10 Mark of the White Order (white alb, over all, no sleeves)
- 11 Knight of the White Order (white alb, with sleeves)
- 12 Lord of the White Order (all above, a pale white color)

\* There are guild members who do not follow the recommended hierarchy. These are generally called Proselytes and are usually found alone in their travels. They are revered by the rest of the order. Proselytes are ideal for characters.

## COMMON SAYINGS & EXPRESSIONS

**MASTERING THE RUNES:** To gain knowledge of and learn how to use the various runic spells.

time heals 2d4 points of damage but only provides enough sustenance for one day.



**OFFERING** (Chr) (Roan ot Hile)

Offering allows the rune mark to give of himself or another willing subject. By carving the rune upon the body it allows the subject to give 1-2 of his HP per level to another.

The rune mark, or the subject, suffers the transferred damage. At 8th level the gift can consist of 1-4 attribute points per week. Any losses the rune mark suffers are healed normally, or in the case of attribute points, 1 per week. Unless used with another rune that allows it, at no point can the recipient of the offering gain more than his normal amount of HP or attribute points.



**OPENING** (Chr) (Roan ot Kast)

This simple rune breaks magical bindings. It affects one bound item. Its duration is immediate.

Once carved, opening breaks wizard locks, hold portals, and similar spells, as well as the binding rune. It can overcome doors held by riddles, etc. The rune mark must make a successful charisma check (CL equal to the level of the spell caster).



**PILLARS** (Chr) (Roan ot Hugin)

Pillars strengthens walls, pillars, battlements, and similar structures, as well as anything that bears weight, from simple canes and walking sticks to posts.

The rune increases the strength and durability of the item on which it is inscribed, effectively doubling its strength. If it is a door with 4 HP, the rune grants it 8. If it is a pillar that can support 1000 pounds, it would hold up 2000 pounds. For every 10 levels of the rune mark, the rune also imparts SR 1 to the item in question, protecting it against magical attacks.



**REDIRECT** (Int) (Roan ot Ahff)

Redirect forces a moving item or person in a different direction. Redirect can affect items that weigh 50 pounds per level of the user. Anything encountering the rune or the item upon which it is inscribed is affected.

The target cannot be made to turn back 180 degrees, but is

rather deflected off its current path. The rune can move things left, right, up, down, etc., up to five feet off target. When used against human or monster targets, the rune forces any charging opponent to veer in the desired direction. Arrows, spears, and the like also move in the desired direction. The rune requires the use of a piece of flint to cast.



**RENDING** (Chr) (Roan ot Burnetu)

Rending tears the target apart. The rune can impact one item, targeting up to one cubic foot per level of the rune mark. Any item upon which rending is inscribed must make a successful strength save (CL equal to the rune mark's level) or break, splinter, or shatter. Large items may only break into a few pieces; fragile items, such as glass, shatter. The rune may be used against almost any target; it can be used in cracking a door, breaking a rock, opening a fissure in the ground, breaking swords, armor, etc. This rune has no vocal form.



**REPULSION** (Chr) (Roan ot Fremstod)

Repulsion creates a repellent field around the desired target. The rune lasts one round per level of the caster after it is activated.

Although used on themselves by the rune masters to move through the outer planes, protecting them from various debris or substances they may encounter, its use is varied. It can be inscribed upon an item, used on a sword or shield, etc. The field creates a perfect circle that expands with time. It extends one foot per round from the target to a maximum of 20 feet. The field can move or repel items 100 pounds or greater +100 pounds per level of the caster. If an item is too large to be repelled, then the target is moved away instead. Any creature able to resist is allowed a strength check. If successful it does not move. The rune is indiscriminate, moving possessions of the rune mark, friends, etc.



**SHIELDING** (Chr) (Roan ot Taraj)

Shielding creates an extra-dimensional space around the body. The rune works on only one person at a time and lasts for one round per level of the rune mark.

The extra-dimensional space shields the caster's body from physical and magical damage by absorbing or redirecting the attack. The shield can absorb 10 HP +1 per level of physical damage on any energy based attack. These include lightning bolt, all fireballs, magic missile, magic arrow, etc. The extra-dimensional space is invisible until struck.

# GOTTLAND-NE



It is often shortened in the vernacular to Gottland, but this is a misnomer, for its rightful name has an altogether different meaning. Named from the Dwarf, Gottland translates to “the Land of Gods” or “The Land Where Gods Rule/Reside”; Ne means “without” or “an absence of”. In the Vulgate or Common Tongues of men, Gottland-Ne translates into “The Land Without Gods” or “Where no God Dwells.”

## OF THE LAND WITHOUT GODS

The Gottland is a broken land of stark hills with little vegetation. To the north and west, it borders the Shadow Mountains. To the east lies the Inner Sea and to the south is the Ington River (called the Deep Flow in the Vulgate). It is best known for the bitterly cold winds which blow off the mountains and through the Kleberock Pass. Here, where the Gottland joins the Moravan Plains to the north, the wind is forever whistling as it coils through the clefts and rocks, mimicking the sounds of the dead. This horrible whistling has given birth to the legends of the walking dead. It is said that those who suffered from the depredations of the Wizard Mongroul, known to the histories as Trigal, but more commonly called Nulak-Kiz-Din and the great, hulking troll lords, are forced to wander the land as the damned. This is borne out in the truth of Dunhollow Wood (see below) which straddles the passes’ southern entry.

It is generally cold in the Gottland. The year round average temperature is about 40 degrees. Winter is harsh. In summer, it rarely gets above 70 degrees. The winters are long, and the springs and summers are short. The temperature begins to drop below freezing in the late autumn and remains there for the better part of the winter.

There is not a great of precipitation in the summer and spring, but the Autumn brings its fare share and winter sees the winds shift, bringing moisture off the Inner Sea. This moisture has nowhere to go as it rolls up the mountain slopes so it deposits great heaps of snow in the plains, making life deadly and travel hazardous.

The better part of the Gottland lies between the Sorgon and Ington Rivers. The plains here are cut by a great rise of hills called the Troll Downs and further north by a ridge called the Beormot, or Mammoth Ridge. The plains themselves are harsh lands. Scrub oaks, stinging nettle weeds, blackberry, pampas grass and other bramble are all that grow there. Water is not scarce and is found in many pools and small streams, but much of it is foul and oily. Those who mark travel across the Gottland do so with difficulty. Many have become lost and died in the trackless wilderness. There is a peculiar madness associated with the land. Many have reported that the hills and broken scrub seem to go on forever, that there is no end to the wastes. Some succumb to a madness they call “Seeing the Elephant.” For some, the land becomes so great in the mind’s eye that it drives men mad. This madness is not fatal, but few are cured from it. Those who are overcome generally die horrible deaths in the lonely wastes of the Gottland.



Strange solitary trees dot the countryside, almost always dead, with scant branches and no leaves. Their gnarled husks and spindly limbs make them appear dead, though they are not entirely so, and they remain firmly rooted to the ground. About their roots small flowers grow; these are reputed to have great powers.

The Gottland is a forsaken land where little grows, but monsters abound. It is as inhospitable a place as the world has ever known.

## TRAVEL

Travel in the Gottland is difficult for there are no proper roads, only wagon tracks that the Halflings have carved out of the landscape in their constant migrations; but there are many broken trails winding through the twisted rock. The trolls from Nacht hound travelers, as do various orc and hobgoblin bandits. Herds of mammoth wander the wastes from the mountains to the Teifsich river in the south; long fanged “saber toothed” cats, dire wolves and and similar beasts hunt them, and do not hesitate to hunt other creatures, man included, as well. Stone giants come down from the mountains to visit their ancestral home on the Mammoth Ridge; and the snows bring frost giants from their kingdoms beyond the winter.

Consult the following charts for average movement rates. These vary with terrain and weather with the months between Summer and Autumn merging until the snow falls. Use these

## MAENLUTH PLAINS

The Maenluth are fertile prairies. They encompass the southern lands of the Gottland and border the Tar-Kiln Forest in the south, and the Mithlon Eves in the west. The many rivers and their tributaries invite hosts of animals and their predators to stalk the deep grasses. Hunting is good, though dangerous. Wolves, bears, and other creatures hunt these grasslands.

There are few towns and villages in the Maenluth. The City of Lynth and Twin Rivers are here in addition to a few frontier communities.

There are, however, several tribes of wild elves. These tribes hunt the prairie, paying heed to no king or lord. They travel in small bands, mounted on small, long-legged, swift horses. The wild elves here use the bow and lance, long sword, and long-hafted axes. They wear no armor, but have a litany of magical charms and spells that give them protection against the ravages of battle. The wild elves trade at Twin Rivers and the City of Lynth. The halflings count them as their friends and many goods are bartered between those two peoples. They have no central organization, though they have an affiliation with the elves of the Mithlon Eves. The Lady of the White Tower calls them friends as well.

## MAIDENSBURG

The town of Maidensburg, built upon the waters of Lake Teifsich, stands a refuge in the wilderness. Long before, during the wild and dangerous years of the Winter Dark Wars, the people who dwelt along the banks of the lake found themselves the targets of repeated raids by both their overlords in the north, and raiders from the lands to south. Abandoned by all, they lived in dismal despair. But one, Cornelius, whose family fell to the blades of orcs, was taken by a dream. In the dream Tefnut, the Hand Maiden of the All Father, came to him and instructed him to swim out upon the lake and wait. So Cornelius did, despite the calls of his comrades that he would surely freeze or drown in the cold waters. He cast aside their doubts and swam out into the frigid waters and there awaited his fate. For hours he floated in the freezing water until at last his strength gave out and he slipped beneath the waves.

As he slipped beneath the waters, his feet set upon a pillar of stone, arresting his motion. Revitalized, he swam about, slipping beneath the waves and discovered a host of giant pillars. Constructed of stones, stacked on top of the other, they proved to be the ancient homes of stone giants, lost to time and the deep waters of the lake. Cornelius returned to his people with the news and they set about constructing a town upon the pillars. With great labor they brought in stone from the Bleached Hills and extended the stones, lifting them a dozen feet above the water. They connected the pillars with stone arches and floors, creating a huge platform upon the lake. This they walled with a 12-foot stone buttress and within they constructed their town. In the town center they left a large circle opening so that the waters were there exposed for all to see. Here Cornelius built an altar to Tefnut and the people named him the Hierophant and he served as their Master Druid until his passage. They called the town Maidensburg in honor Tefnut.

The town has flourished since the Winter Dark Wars. Trade in raw materials, animal pelts, gems and silver comes up from the southwest on the Teifsich River; from the south comes iron ore from the Bleached Hills, and from the north come hides, halfling brews, and the spoils of the Gottland. All these serve to make Maidensburg a wealthy community.

The people here are friendly and welcome strangers and willingly buy and sell their items. It is not unheard of to find some minor magics for sale in the town's merchant quarter. They worship the goddess Tefnut here and in respect for her keep the town clean of debris and filth. All the families have boats; some small, others large and they use them to fish the waters. Two large galleys and several transports help to move their soldiery in time of need.

**TOTAL POPULATION:** 4,000

**HUMAN:** 3,000

**GNOME:** 200 +/-

**HALFLING:** 50 +/-

**DWARF:** 100 +/-

**ELF:** 300 +/-

**GOVERNMENT:** A Council governs the town. The council consists of 4 human oligarchs and one chosen representative of the gnomes, halflings, dwarves and elves. It is headed by the Hierophant — the Master Druid — though he does not have a controlling power.

**MILITARY:** In times of need, the town raises a levy of 450 militiamen and roughly 75 warriors or knights; the dwarves and halflings field a further 150 infantry and the elves about 75 highly skilled bowmen.

**ECONOMY:** The town deals in cross country trade and the river trade. They produce a great deal of fishing. They regularly traffic with the coast and the towns of Most and Ossford.

**RELIGION:** Tefnut, small tower of the Knights of Haven here.

**LANGUAGE:** Vulgate and all.

**MAJOR GUILDS:** There is the merchant guild and Muddles Inc. There are a few elven Vale Knights who dwell here as well as a small contingent of the Knights of Haven.

## MAMMOTH RIDGE “THE BEORMOT”

This wide, low ridge is known by many names. The Halflings call it “Mammoth,” the orcs “Klugtak”, the Northmen the “Beormot”. But it is best known as Mammoth Ridge, for here is where the great Troll Lord, Hasyrick fell to a tusked mammoth that he sought to slay. The ridge stretches from the sea to the mountains, and divides the Gottland in two. There is little wealth here, just some scattered orc and hobgoblin villages and small ramshackle human communities. There are a few farmsteads. Most of the humans who live here are drifters and homeless who have found themselves at the end of the world and at the end of their tether. They are generally rough, but sometimes friendly to strangers.

## DOOST PLAINS (# 15 ON MAP)



his encounter is set for higher-level characters. It involves travel over broad plains that stand between the Shadow Mountains and the Mammoth Ridge. The dwarven Wernher Road officially ends here and there is little trace of it aside from an occasional pylon in the grassy steppes beyond.

The Doost are very flat, covered in thick, rich grass in spring and summer; in fall it turns brown quickly and by winter, snow begins to blanket the region. It is harsh but not unlivable. Many creatures eke a living out of the steppes by shoveling snow aside and chewing at what nutrients remain.

The Plains are home to vast herds of elk that roam the length and breadth of the region. Wolves hunt them, and a recent addition to the arena are growing packs of kimer steppe devils, beasts that haunted the eastern lands but have spread to almost all locales.

The grasslands are wild and dangerous, more for wandering monsters coming from the mountains than anything else. The weather too is harsh, though when the sun is out, travel is pleasant and often uneventful.

### SPOTTED

A clan of halflings have recently moved into the region, traveling from the south, up from the Crowley River region. Following the kimer, they have spent several years capturing and taming these creatures, turning them into mounts. These mounts they in turn sell to the clans to the south or even occasionally into the towns of Oss and Most.

The nature of their business requires that the halflings keep

careful watch on the steppes, in constant look-out for raiders from the mountains, trolls from the south, and whatever crawls from the tundra seeking greener pastures. They always keep a careful eye on the Wernher Road for frost giants.

The scouts range from hill to hill, traveling in bands of three to four. They ride kimer steppe devils, stopping frequently to survey the land. There is always a group watching the road. When the party leaves the shelter of the mountains, traveling onto the plains, the scouts spot them and take cover as best they can. They watch for a great long while until they have determined how many are traveling and roughly how they are armed and armored. This takes several minutes.

Each character in the party who is paying the least bit of attention is allowed a spot check (CL 9).

Like an ocean, the grass shifts and moves, currents of swaying grass bending to the whim of the winds rolling off the mountains behind you. Long leagues of grass lie before you, nestled in the shadow of the mountains. To the south, atop a small hill, a motion catches your attention. All around the hill the grass moves to the wind's beat, but on top of the hill its currents break up, swirling around what at first glance appears to be an outcrop of rock.

**READ ON IF HALFLINGS SPOTTED:** On closer inspection you realized those rocks are figures, mounted figures. Small creatures mounted upon some wolf-like beasts appear to be watching you. They carry spears and wear leather armor and hide-bound shields. Even as you spy them, they turn and melt into the grasses beyond, vanishing behind the hill.