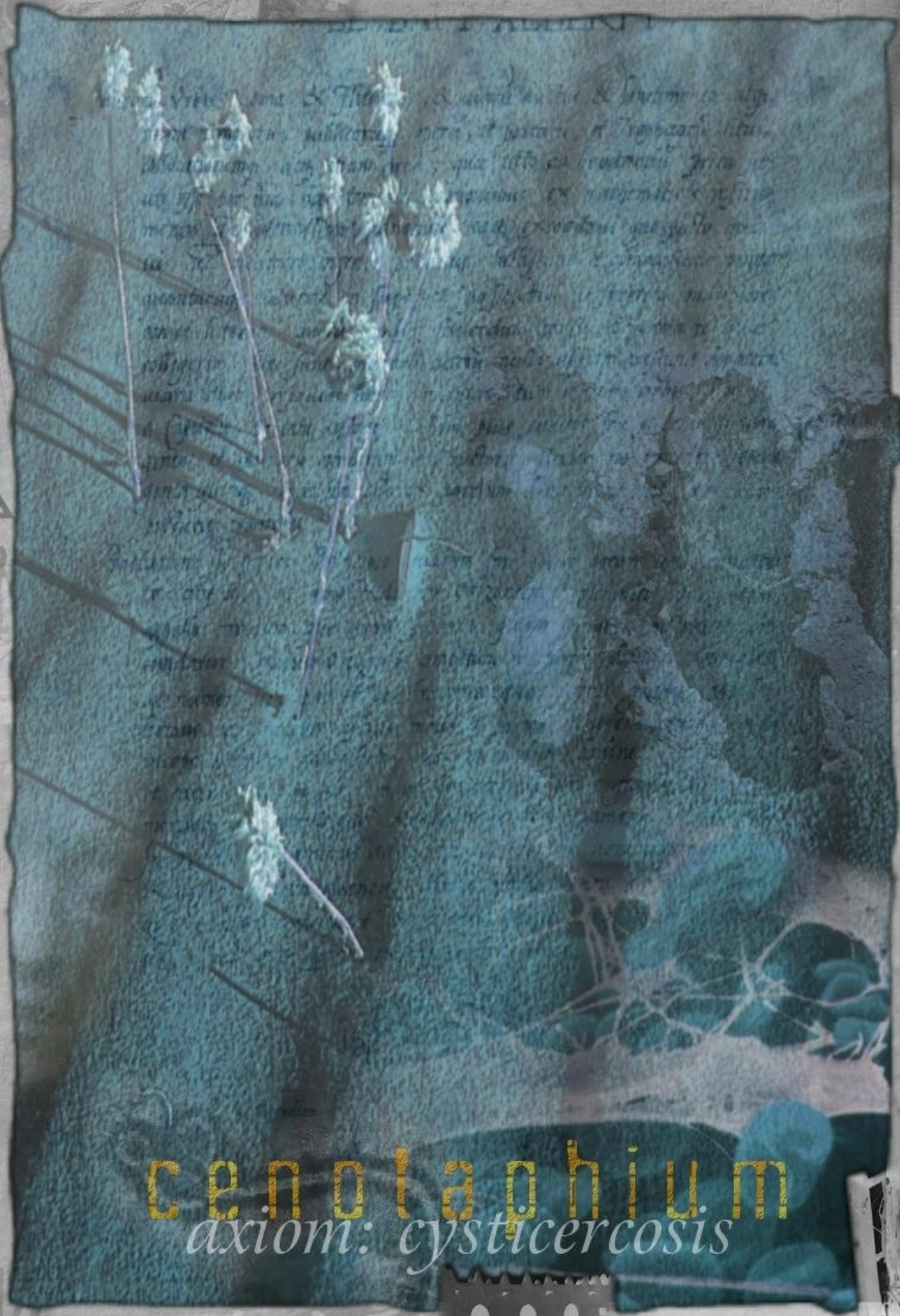


The ABYSS



Cenolaphium
axiom: cysticercosis



The Abyss

CENOTAPHIUM

Issue 2 ~ axiom: cysticercosis

The Abyss presents its third journal, Cenotaphium — Axiom: Cysticercosis, a monthly release from The Abyss. This electronic version of Cenotaphium may be used provided you charge no fee and do not alter its contents or layout. If you wish to distribute this or copies in any other format please contact Jason Just for written permission.

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Recommended for Mature audiences.

www.kult-rpg.org



All future issues of Cenotaphium are on submission basis through The Abyss site in e-mail to the co-ordinators. Art, poetry, and literature will be featured in coming issues. The Abyss welcomes all submissions.

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A Publication from The Abyss
Made for the Kult Roleplaying Game
For Mature Readers

"The Abyss is a not-for-profit worldwide corporation whose aim is to encourage a new publishing company to buy the rights to the Kult role-playing game and bring it back into print. We run an extensive outreach campaign to attract new gamers, and we produce high-quality new material and distribute it for free on the Internet in order to keep gamers interested."

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Death is only the beginning

Blas Rodriguez © 2000

Death to he who walks without awakening; death to him, the mediocre who rots in the dream; Death to the vane idealist and the fatal frantic; Death for he, the one that walks in darkness and searches for a light; poor baby, the only light that he will find is that coming from the Dark Sun.

Death for me, because I believe and doubt; death to he who lives without enjoying and to the one who enjoys without living. Death without pain and with existence, resignation and despair. Spirit's end, slaving it to this illusion.

Welcome with open arms your death, brother. Enjoy it 'cause you shall be back and –if only u know that- you would want to die even faster. Death for you and your senses that tie you. Death to this fantasy and awake to reality. Live in despair and horror, don't let them live you, that's our prison.

Die to rise up to the superior world; don't have hope 'cause it is even worse, let your only hope be that the next time you die will be the last.

Life is gray, there are no light or darkness sources, accept this. Your optimism or pessimism is only a façade for reality. You are the mightiest and a loser, the weaker and still a winner.

Is this hard to accept? Don't worry, someday –after hundreds- you'll learn this and more. Yes, brother, you will learn even if you don't want...

Welcome brother, we missed you.

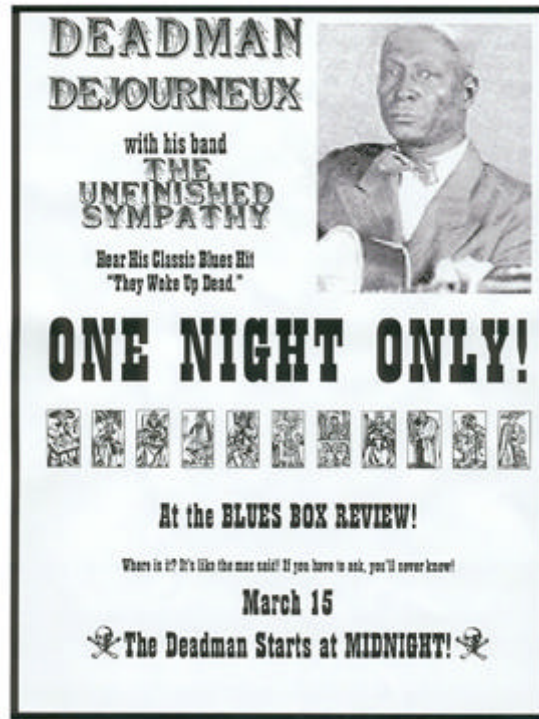


~::~*The Solecist Nurseryman* by Jason Just::~~



Deadman DeJourneux (Bloodsucker Bluesman)

Kit Thornton



(NOTE: The following is an excerpt from *All the Trials of Hell*, a campaign sourcebook currently in development by Kit for *The Abyss*.—*Ed*)

Deadman DeJourneux began life as Ulysses Thibideaux, a minor league blues singer, growing old and alcohol poisoned in the 1930's in Mississippi. He was a good, skilled, untrained musician, but the world is full of good musicians. To get what he desperately wanted – fame, money, and respect, he needed more. He needed more of something. He needed that thing that reaches out to the listener and makes the blues. He needed to make his music reach unshed tears, and touch old scars. He did not have that. Not at all.

Like all Bluesmen, he had heard the old tale about playing at the crossroads. He did not believe it. He did not believe that a black man would appear and tune his guitar, put a claim on his soul, and then give him the talent he sought. But he was by a crossroad near New Orleans, on unseasonably cold day in March, playing in the rain.

Someone came and gave him a gift, and damned him. But it was not the messenger he expected, nor was it the gift he had desired. A tall black man approached him as he played, and spoke.

“You ain’t that good.” The visitor said.

“I know.”

“D’you practice much?”

Ulysses scowled, “Until my fingerboard runs blood. Until I can’t stand it no more.”

“You got a lot of blood in you?” The stranger smiled, showing large, sharp, white teeth.

“I guess much as anybody.” Ulysses’ voice wavered. Something in him was screaming. But he did not flee.



“I guess so. I figure you need more time to practice. Maybe forever.”

Then the vampire struck.

Ulysses Thibideaux was buried in a hurry. He had no money, no family. Three days later, his grave was empty, and his guitar was missing from the pawn shop where the funeral director had hocked it.

Strangely, the change to unlife did give Thibideaux a musical gift. His music was full of the hunger for blood, and the loss of the sunlit life. It was dangerous to hear, and dark. Other Bluesmen got nervous when he was on the stage with them. The curious and the connisseurs of the macabre flocked to see him. They came away disturbed, as if death had touched them, and passed on by.

“Woke Up Dead” – by Deadman DeJourneaux

*I woke up dead this evening
So lonely and so cold inside.
I woke up dead this evening
The coffin lid was close and tight.
I woke up dead this evening
I left my grave and found the night.*

*I woke up dead this evening,
Covered in a stranger's blood.
I woke up dead this evening
Covered in innocent blood.
The hungry pain was on me,
So I dug up through the mud.*

*If you wake up dead this evening
Don't bother to say your prayers.
If you wake up dead this evening
Don't trouble none to say your prayers.
Can't pray away damnation,
Once it takes you unawares.*

While DeJourneaux never became the blues sensation that he had hoped for, he still plays in small, strange blues clubs throughout the south. He has been playing as long as anyone can remember. And he's gotten better.

PCs will find that DeJourneaux is not willing to talk to strangers. He is not at all interested in his fans or admirers. He has been known to say that his relationship with his fans is that of a singing cowboy herding cattle to the slaughterhouse. He does not mingle in vampire society, and is dismissive of them or their power structures.

He is, however, a coward. He was staked by a hunter in the 1960s and nearly destroyed. If credibly threatened with exposure to hunters (or to other powerful vampires!) he may well tell the PCs what he knows. He has the following items of information:



- The blood the PCs woke up drenched in is not their own. It is a message from hell.
- They are “marked” and will stand out like a sore thumb to any “night walkers.” Unless they lose the curse, they’re doomed.
- The man who might be able to help them is a lawyer, Georg Taras. He is also a vampire.
- They must beware any vampire hunters who have “second sight.” They will see the PCs as vampires and attempt to destroy them. Stephen Argent is such a man.

When the PCs arrive at the Blues Box he will watch them intently (he sees the mark on them), trying to assess the potential threat. If the PCs seem threatening, he will attempt to flee after his first set. He WILL sing “Woke Up Dead” while they are there. If they try to follow him backstage, he will hide in the alley outside the stage door, and attack the last PC out the door with his straight razor. After cutting the PCs throat, he will flee with superhuman speed and agility down the alley. He will scale the building as soon as he is out of sight, and wait on the roof to see if the PCs split up to chase him. He will then attack what seems to be the weakest party from ambush, slitting one party member’s throat and fleeing, etc.

If any wounded are left behind he will feed on them, and dispose of them by breaking their necks.

If the PCs are relatively respectful AND subtly threaten exposure AND can do the vampire a small service, he will give them the info above. If they are rude and threatening, he will simply flee. Pray the PCs aren’t foolish enough to follow him.

Due to his pre-undead background, DeJourneaux has the following vulnerabilities:

He will not enter a house if he was not invited in by a family member.

He is not repelled by a crucifix, but a recitation of the Lord’s Prayer, or the presence of a Bible will drive him away.

He will avoid women who know his “True” name (Ulysses). (This information might be discovered by a major library research project or careful computer searching)

Like most vampires, he does not need to eat or drink anything but blood. But if he can be convinced to drink a glass of whiskey (he wants it, but he fears it. It will take a tall order of tempting) he will tell all, then grow angry and attempt to kill everyone in sight in an alcoholic rage.



Dhas Aharma - The Way of Shadowed Peace

Kit Thornton © 2000

"I have the power to cloud men's minds, so they cannot see me."

- Lamont Cranston (aka "The Shadow")

Dhas Aharma is a Tibetan martial art/spiritual discipline involving the avoidance of conflict. Its operations are more metaphysical than physical, using misdirection, odd, uncommon knowledge of geometries, subtle hypnotic technique, and knowledge of human perception and psychology. Its practitioners strive to be "untouched" rather than victorious. The art was developed by practitioners of the ancient Bon religion of Tibet, which has a pantheon of violent, cannibalistic deities. Thus the martial art emphasizes avoidance, concealment, and escape above offensive technique. The only weapon taught is the crooked "sacred stick" of the Lama, which is used (in extreme circumstances) to strike nerve centers in the arms and legs, to trip and entangle, and to block/disarm the opponent's weapons. Dhas Aharma practitioners train in "sight stepping," a technique that allows them to slip out of their opponent's line of sight, using blind spots in the opponent's vision and careful consideration of nearby objects. They also train in escaping holds, locks and bonds. A pair of handcuffs are no obstacle at all to a Dhas master, and the finest wrestling or judo holds will be met with a "melting away" followed by "sight stepping," allowing the Dhas master to escape and seemingly disappear.

A demonstration of this skill was witnessed by Stephen Argent during his first visit to Tibet. A friend of his, a well-respected Lama and Dhas master of indeterminate age, was arrested by the Chinese police. The Lama cooperated, allowing himself to be taken to the ground, bound, cuffed, and led away in a restraining hold by three officers. A moment later, he was gone, leaving the policemen with a handful of rope and a frustrated look. To Argent, standing a block away, it appeared as if the Lama had simply taken off the bonds as if they were a shirt, and stepped, somehow, behind AND beside the policemen, who proceeded to look everywhere but where he was.

For obvious reasons, Dhas practitioners are very difficult to follow, and they make excellent "shadows" if they are trained to follow a subject (Dhas instructors do not teach this skill.) NO Dhas practitioner will be an assassin. To the Dhas way of thinking, attacking is giving away your position and drawing the attention of your attacker. In fact, no Dhas practitioner will strike from shadows, or from "sight stepping." If he does so, he will not be able to use his Dhas skills for twenty four hours to a month, the delicate mental equilibrium necessary to practice these esoteric skill has been disturbed, and will take hours of meditation to recover.

Limitations:

Dhas Aharma is not taught to outsiders unless the circumstances are unusual in the extreme. At least five years of full-time study are necessary to gain the skills, and only esoteric subjects may be studied during that time, preferably in a monastic setting. Under no circumstances will teachers of this art teach it to those with militaristic, violent, or materialistic natures, and the training is incompatible with any other martial art. A practitioner of Dhas Aharma may not possess any other martial art skill. Period.

A Dhas Aharma practitioner will only use direct force against an opponent when one of two things occur: 1) The opponent has not been deceived by the practitioner's "sight stepping," and continues to attack him or 2) The practitioner has revealed himself to his opponent's perception and announced his intention to "correct" him if he does not desist in doing harm. Even then, he must use only the force necessary to allow him, or a person he is protecting, to escape. A Dhas Aharma practitioner will usually NOT intervene in violence involving others, who are usually seen as suffering the consequences of their own karma.



If a Dhas Aharma practitioner kills another human being from concealment of any kind, he loses his skills immediately, and probably permanently unless his instructor, or a high-ranking Lama grants him absolution and works with him for a period of months to years to restore the inner mindset that allows him to practice Dhas Aharma. This absolution will be granted only under the severest circumstances - the practitioner must have genuinely, dedicatedly attempted to avoid the tragic outcome. Most Dhas Aharma practitioners do not know that absolution is even possible.

While a practitioner of Dhas Aharma need not be athletic (the ability to walk at a slow pace is necessary) a practitioner must be at least somewhat talented towards its practice. The practitioner must be of at least high intelligence, and have some aptitude for practical metaphysics.

Because of the nature of Dhas Aharma, all its techniques work best under specific conditions:

Favorable conditions:

- One person to deceive
- Low light or obscuring mist/snow/fog/smoke (add percent of obscuration to success chance)
- Many large objects in immediate area (trees, cargo crates, cars, crowds) (GMs call.)

Unfavorable conditions:

- Several observers (-5% for each additional observer, up to 10.)
- Observers both in front and behind the practitioner (-25%)
- Brightly lit (GMs call. A clever practitioner may describe a way to nullify this problem, or even use it to his advantage)
- Practitioner carrying an object that cannot be easily concealed on his person (
- Practitioner is unaware of additional observers. (-50% to success against the unseen observers.)
- Someone who CAN see the practitioner points him out to others (-20% per ratfink.)
- The observer is a practitioner (-50%, an additional -5% for each level after first.)

Note that “sight stepping” works just as well if the attacker is staring at/concentrating on the practitioner, since the intense attention allows distraction/hypnosis/influence a chance to work.

Note also that a practitioner cannot choose to be seen by some, but not by others. Each person in a position to observe the practitioner gets his own roll to avoid the effect.

Advantages:

A practitioner of Dhas Aharma gains the following skills without additional cost:

- Stealth
- Camouflage
- Escape Artist
- Cane Fighting (does half damage, but doubles defensive bonus)
- Move Silently
- Escapes from all known holds/locks as if he were a practitioner of the martial art that the hold originates from with the Dhas skill used as the skill roll.
- Sight Stepping
- The character may obtain or advance in the “shadowing” skill at half the normal cost.
- The character obtains twice the defensive benefit of actively evading attack.



Every three levels gained in Dhas Aharma will gain an additional level in each of these skills that was used in the campaign. The practitioner may also advance in these skills as normal, but none of them may exceed the practitioner's Dhas Aharma skill.

New Skill: Sight Stepping

The practitioner may attempt to simply “step out” of the perception (including scent, spiritual perception, etc.) of a sentient being. A simple match of practitioner's skill +Power v. Observer's Power applies. If the practitioner succeeds, the target will not be able to perceive the practitioner for a number of rounds equal to the practitioner's skill level unless he touches or attacks them. (note that touching observers may be used as a way to let some know, but not others, of the practitioner's presence.) The practitioner does NOT suffer a penalty to deceive someone who was touching the practitioner at the time of the sight stepping, as long as he breaks contact immediately upon fading from perception.

If the practitioner moves an object within the target's perception, he gains another throw, which may be modified if the object was large, noisy, or something that the target was watching intently.

Note on Lamont Cranston, aka “The Shadow.”

Mr. Cranston practiced a very limited, flawed form of Dhas Aharma in his career as a vigilante. Although he was able to attack from concealment without losing his skills, his psychological makeup gradually deteriorated (his mental balance decayed with each use of the skill) until his unfortunate collapse into murderous paranoid schizophrenia. In addition, his technique was incomplete at best, frequently allowing others to observe his shadow, or hear his movement or breathing. He is currently under the care of the Ohm Rashaska Lamasary in Nepal, where he is believed he will remain, being incurably insane and dangerously violent.

Unfortunately, Mr. Cranston was once sought out by those who would seek to learn Dhas Aharma. Even more unfortunately, he did train several disciples in his flawed art before he was apprehended by the monks of Ohm Rashaska. These disciples have also trained a few disciples, with the art becoming more distorted with each transmission. This has led to a small, but dangerous group of men who have a limited version of the “sight stepping” skill, and use it to further their interests. They will all eventually collapse as Cranston did. Some then find employment by the most dangerous and most corrupted organizations as nearly unstoppable assassins.



~::Factuary by Jason Just::~~