

The Art of Life

The first art of the Tepel is the art of life. It is the art of keeping the spirit from being swallowed by the abyss in the hope that that spirit may one day become strong enough to cross to the far shore.

Be cautious. The art of life should be wielded only when you are sure you know where to strike. Examine the patient. Lay your hands on them. Command them and ensure that they know they must submit to you and acknowledge your sovereignty in this place and time or they risk everything.

Do not be shy. If there is blood in their piss and you do not know of it, how will you know that their kidneys are under siege from a venomous blow? If there is an ache in their bowels, or their stool is loose, and you do not learn of it then how will you guess that the arrow has penetrated deeper than you thought?

Anything may be a clue to help you aim your art. The telltale sweet scent of a venom, the marshrot stench of gangrene, the spicy undertone of the breath that speaks of an infection in the lungs. Question, and feel with your hands, and look with your eyes and your nose. The art of life will leave you soiled and bloody, as when you first drew breath.

The first step is to understand life. You must know all the colours and shapes and textures of a healthy, wholesome orc if you are to guess what has lead that health astray. We first learn our own bodies, and then the bodies of the dead – remembering that they are dead and so beyond help – and then the bodies of the living. There is merit in examining the bodies of the human vermin as well – for their organs, sinews, bone, and blood are similar enough to that of the people that you may hone your art by studying them.

The art of life should be employed judiciously. Even when the sacred herbs are not used, the art of life requires the focus of the Tepel. If I choose to tend this orc's broken arm, I am not tending to the arrow in that orc's gut. If I tend to the venom running through the veins of one orc, I am not staunching the bloody wound of another.

The Tepel must learn where their art is best employed in service to the Buruk Tepel, the clan, and the people. Each orc has only one life, and yet some orc lives are simply not worth preserving. The foolish deserve to be eaten by the abyss; but so too do those whose value is outweighed by the threat they pose.

Likewise, the rash and the foolhardy will take your focus, soak your art like a sponge, and then rush head-first into danger again, meaning that your art was wasted. There is value in the meat and blood of the foolish, but it is not worth wasting your art on preserving them once their usefulness is ended. Spend their lives freely, and do not weep for those who fall in pursuit of your goals.

Allow none save the Buruk Tepel to question how you apply the art of life. It is your art, and your skill, to be wielded as you wish.

The Least Art of Life

The lesser art is the manipulation of the gross physical body. It includes the many methods of tending to an injury so that it does not become sick, and ensuring that the injured live to fight again. It is the cleaning, draining, and sewing of wounds. It is the fixing of what is broken. It is the emptying of what is full, and the filling of what is empty.

It is the slow work, and wherever possible best left to the apprentice, but you must master it to walk the path of the Buruk Tepel. It is the art of most use on the battlefield, where the Tepel stands between the warrior and the abyss.

The Lesser Art of Life

The lesser art is the use of the five sacred herbs to restore strength, preserve life, conquer poison and venom, treat sickness, and mend ruined bone and sinew. The sacred herbs go beyond anything the Tepel can achieve with knife, or needle, or the laying on of hands.

The Greater Art of Life

Growing from knowledge of the body that is the least art, and mastery of the five sacred herbs that is the lesser art, the greater art is the use of the herbs to create potions, philtres and oils. It is the gateway to the path of the Buruk.

Barrowgrass

Barrowgrass is not really a grass, but it grows commonly on and around battlefields, and the name is ancient. Some Buruk Tepel call it *barrowwort* instead.

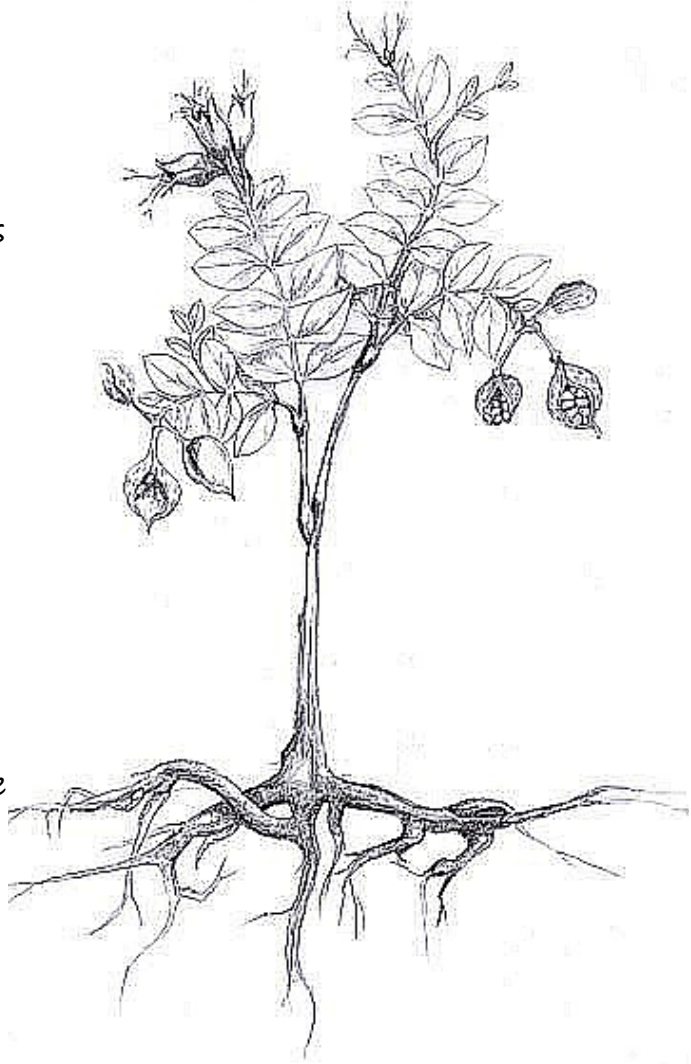
It can grow taller than a child, and its branched stems bear pairs of pale oval leaves.

It flowers in Spring and early Summer, producing seeds in Autumn and Winter, and both the flower-buds and seed-pods alike are collected and crushed to produce a sticky, translucent oil.

It has dominion over the natural processes of the body. The beating of the heart, the flow of blood, even the knitting of torn flesh.

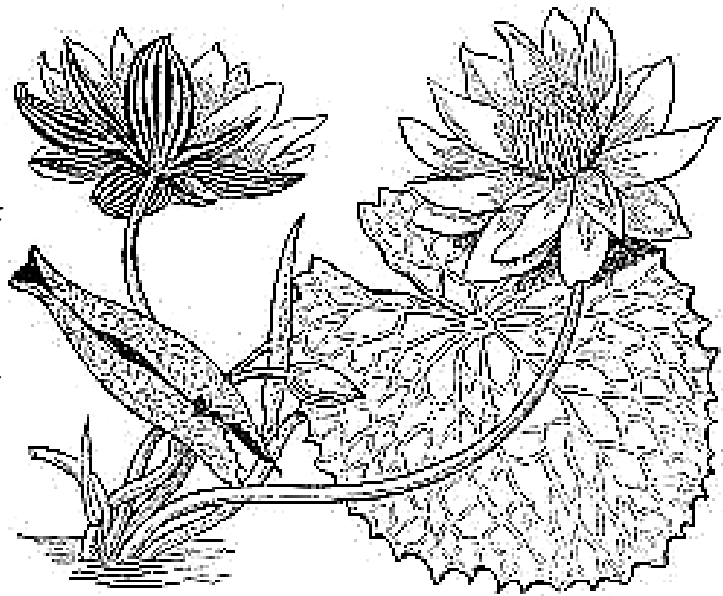
It can be pressed against a serious wound to help seal it – although it treats the symptoms and not the damage. A warrior may take a great blow to the head, fight on with the aid of the Tepel, and then fall into the abyss hours later because some injury to the skull or the brain has gone too long untreated.

Barrowgrass thickens the blood and slows the beating of the heart. Properly prepared it can make the heart so lethargic that it ceases to beat. It is a surprisingly gentle poison – the victim becomes more and more tired until they drift off into a sleep that leads them to the abyss. A victim of barrowgrass poisoning often fails to recognise their danger. Sadly, their companions will often as not notice something is wrong, and few Tepel will fail to identify the signs. The poison itself is quickly purged.



Black Lotus

Everyone knows about the common herbs but only the wisest of the people know of the sixth herb, the herb that rules over all the others. The Buruk Tepel call it the Black Lotus and it is precious beyond price. It is the pinnacle of our Arts, and any Buruk Tepel would drown a thousand warriors in blood for the chance to secure another plant.



The Black Lotus grows only in water, and it is delicate and difficult to raise. It requires near constant tending. It must be protected from insects, and from sickness. The water in which it grows must be neither too cold nor too warm. The soil at the bottom of the lake, in which its roots are planted, must be of the correct consistency.

The roots stretch down into the water, but the leaves float serenely on the surface. Above the leaves rise the flowers – black petals unfolding upwards in numberless ranks to embrace the sun and the moon and the stars. From the single root, many leaves will spread, but unlike the lesser lotus, each plant will produce only a scattering of flowers each year.

Every part of the Black Lotus is edible, and every part can be used to brew a tisane. The tea brewed from the petals clears the mind, while the tea brewed from the leaves purifies the body. We do not brew tea from the seeds – rather, the seeds are the vital source of the power of the Art of the Abyss.

Tended to properly, the Black Lotus is immortal. The Black Lotus tended by the Stone Toad has lived uninterrupted for over three hundred years, and there are many that are much older. They have seen the rise and fall of countless generations of the people. Left untended, the Black Lotus produces seeds only once every hundred years. The art of the Buruk Tepel teaches us to tend the plant carefully, removing the flowers when they bloom, so that the

plant will bring forth its seeds once every year instead.

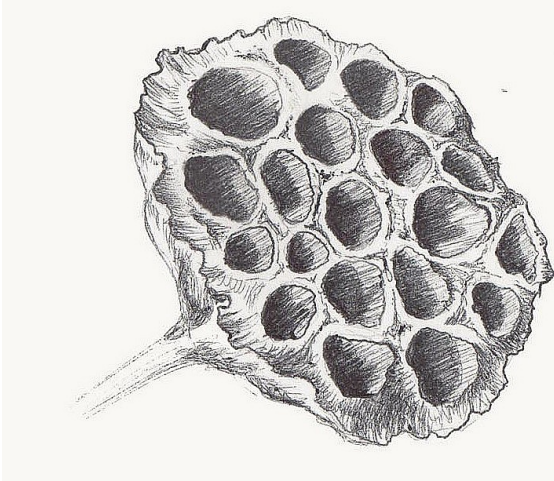
Unfortunately, these seeds are not fertile. No matter how we try, no Buruk Tepel has found a way to quicken the seeds so that a new plant grows. Only the seeds that come after a century has passed can beget a new plant – and harvesting the seeds prevents the flowering of the fertile blossom that will give rise to true seeds. A true seedpod from a Black Lotus is the single thing of most value in the entire world, for from such a seedpod a Buruk Tepel can coax forth another Black Lotus plant.

The lesser seed pods contain many small, bitter seeds. The tea that can be brewed from the ground seeds brings visionary dreams, but if it is consumed in great quantities it will also bring madness, and an agonising death that no amount of bloodroot may ease.

This tea is rarely made, however. The true value of the seeds of the Black Lotus is greater when they are properly prepared – ground, and dried, and used to make Black Lotus powder. This powder can weaken the bonds of the flesh upon the spirit – but not to the point where they are severed entirely (unless that is the will of the Buruk Tepel, of course). There are three uses to which this miraculous powder is put – but only the Buruk Tepel know the secrets of their preparations. Any Buruk Tepel that shared these secrets with the Tepel before they are ready, who wrote them down, or who let them become known by beings outside the people would be hunted to the ends of creation and beyond by their peers. Such a treachery would be too great even for the people to countenance.

Black Lotus powder is used almost solely in preparation for the arts of the Abyss. If there are other arts that use the sacred plant they are a prized secret – but they would have to be potent indeed. Given the constant need for more Black Lotus to brew the *dream gate*, it is hard to see how any lesser use might be viable.

The one exception is the Black Lotus poison for which there is no cure save a second dose of the poison. Even the greatest arts of the *ghulai*, even the greatest power of the spirits of the other realms, cannot keep the spirit within the flesh of one who drinks this poison. It is rarely made, for there are many



easier ways to kill an enemy. It is whispered that this poison condemns the spirit of the victim to be consumed by the howling abyss – no matter how great they may be they will be lost to oblivion forever. It is said even their memory is lost, consumed by the endless hunger of the abyss. I do not believe this myself, but I have never had cause to use

this poison – though I keep a single dose ready to be prepared at a moment's notice in case an enemy among my peers might seek to bring me low.

The most precious use to which the Black Lotus powder is put is the preparation of the *spirit gate*, the greatest of the arts of the Buruk Tepel.

The other people

I think that the other people know of the Black Lotus, but having no Buruk Tepel we can be certain that they do not know how to use it properly.

It is said that the people of the North grow five Black Lotus plants in great dark pools beneath the mountain of their rulers, and that this is the greatest treasure of their Dragons which they do not share with their slaves.

I have spoken with a merchant from the people of the South who said that their people use the Black Lotus to commune with the spirits, but I think that he was lying. If they do have plants, they do not share their knowledge with their servants, keeping it for themselves. They also are not interested in trading it, which seems ill at ease with their other ways.

I know that the people of the West have Black Lotus plants. They grind the seeds up to make a drink ... and share it with all their warriors in an annual ceremony. It is abominable to think of them wasting the seeds in such a way. They claim it brings them a communion with their ancestors that is more profound than we can understand. They are wasteful fools.

If any others know of the Black Lotus, I do not know of them. There are

stories that the *ghulai* have spoken to spirits who are aware of the Black Lotus, but I do not know the truth of it. I know that I have never heard of a *ghulai* gaining knowledge of Black Lotus from the spirits.

Bloodroot

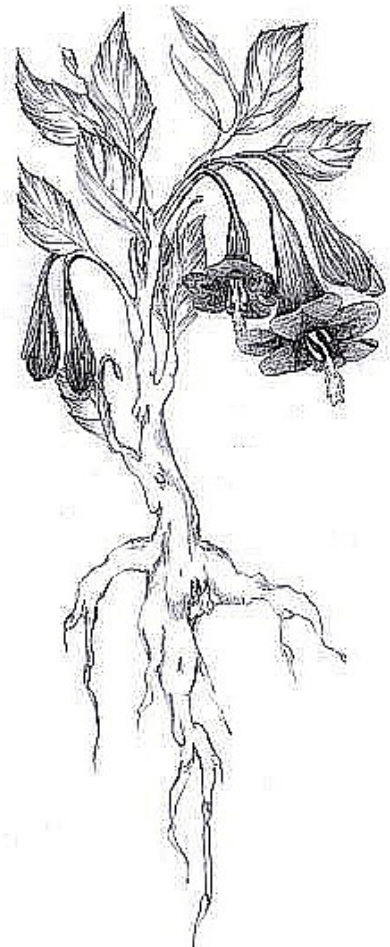
The bell-like flowers of the bloodroot hang heavy like drops of old blood. The leaves are dark and sharp. It grows easily, and will tend to itself as often as not. It cares not about the soil, nor about water or the lack thereof. The best bloodroot is cultivated with blood – animals will do, but the blood of orcs or human vermin is the best. Of all the herbs in my gardens, it is the most prolific. Some *Buruk Tepel* call it the *red weed* in jest.

The flowers are beautiful, but it is the roots that hold its power. They are thick and woody, with a darker skin covering the sweet pale meat within.

Properly prepared bloodroot causes a fever that blows hot and cold by turns, with profuse sweating and dizziness. It thins the blood so any wound bleeds profusely. Yet it is rarely fatal except in the old or those with weak hearts. As always can be healed by *Tepel* or *ghulai* with little difficulty. Yet it is possible to push a victim of bloodroot poisoning to kill themselves; the faster their blood pumps the more the poison infuses their body and with enough effort their heart will crack. Yet it takes a prodigious effort and there is usually little point to doing so beyond amusement or lesson.

Unsurprisingly, bloodroot has dominion over blood, but it also has dominion over venoms and poisons and corruptions of the blood.

The leaves can be ground to make an infusion that is extremely tasty. I have also used the ground petals of the bloodroot flower to flavour jellies and candies – and its strong flavour can



sometimes be used to conceal other flavours. A clever orc never accepts a drink of bloodroot petal tea that they have not prepared themselves.

Barrowgrass and bloodroot complement each other. Where one slows and thickens, the other speeds and thins. Where one causes quietude, the other encourages passion. I have heard some of the younger Tepel, taken with this dichotomy, call them frostwort and fireroot. They are idiots.



Jadeleaf

This plant has brilliant green leaves, covered in tiny hairs. They bruise easily, and release a sticky sap and a strong scent when crushed. Some Tepel claim that the aroma of the leaves is relaxing, but it gives me a headache and causes my eyes to water and my nose to fill with snot. It has tight clumps of pale green flowers. But sadly it is in the leaves that the potency of the herb resides.

Sometimes jadeleaf is prepared as a salve that keeps the skin supple and youthful. I have seen it used occasionally by leatherworkers, who

apply it to the beasts from which soft leather will be harvested. This is wasteful.

Prepared correctly, it causes mild stomach ache, accompanied by listlessness and lethargy, clouding the mind, and bringing feelings of fatalism and sorrow that can last for many hours. It seems to be impossible to provide a fatal dose of this poison however and it is quickly purged by ghulai or Tepel.

It has dominion over the organs of the body – the bowels, the kidneys, the liver, the lungs, and the brain.

Even the dullest warrior knows how to apply jadeleaf to their comrades. We

all learn it with our first lessons of reading, walking, and cunning. It restores the injured, rekindles the will to survive, and even seals wounds.

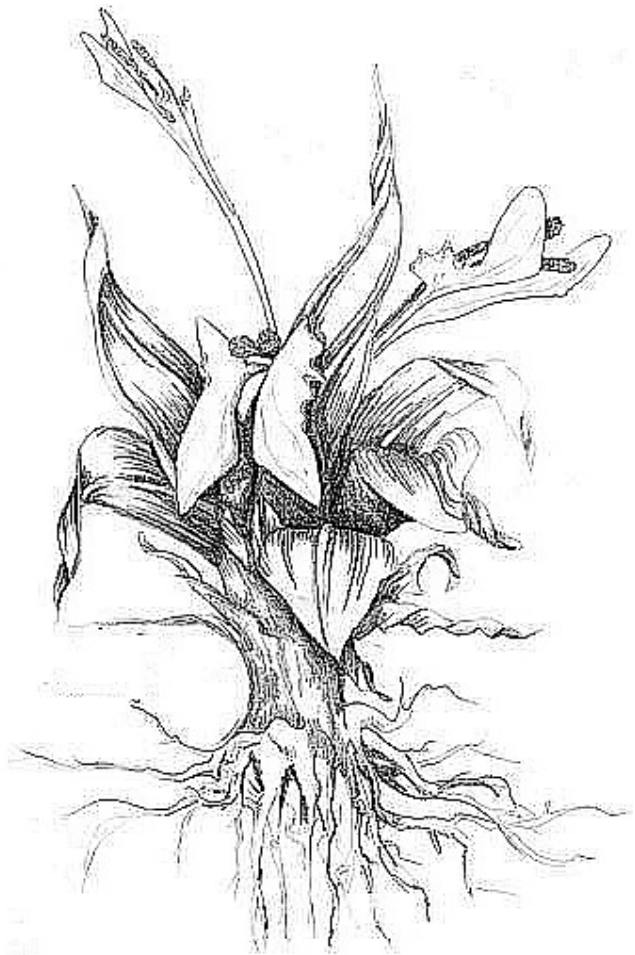
There is never enough jadeleaf to go around. It favours a cooler, drier climate than is easily found in the Mallum – but not so dry as that required by winterbloom nor as warm as that favoured by mothflower. I have heard it grows in great profusion to the west, and the south, in the lands of the human vermin.

Mothflower

This delicate plant has blue flowers that look like moths or butterflies. They trick insects into coming close, alighting on the flowers, to spread their seed. It has thick, green, fleshy leaves.

Both the leaves and the stem produce a thick, sweet sap that dulls pain.

Properly prepared, it can numb the body to the point where the victim becomes unaware of injuries, or of the dangers of over exertion. I have seen a warrior break their own wrist in the throes of mothflower poisoning simply by striking an ill considered powerful blow, and a slave shatter their own spine trying to lift a weight that was beyond their capacity. This reminds us that pain is both a punishment and a warning. As a poison mothflower is of limited use – it is easy to treat and most Tepel are alert to the signs.



Crushed and mixed, the sap from the stems and the leaves allow the Tepel to restore use to a ruined limb, swiftly knitting shattered bone, mangled flesh,

and torn muscles.

It has dominion over the structures of the body – the bones, and the skin, and the ligaments. While it may strengthen and repair them, strength is not always a virtue and if a sufficient dose is used it can reduce mobility potentially to the point of paralysis.

Mothflower is valuable to the Tepel for its use in many potions, but while it prospers in the warmth, it is no friend to water. It does not favour the marshes and the swamps, and must be carefully cultivated or it will sicken and die.

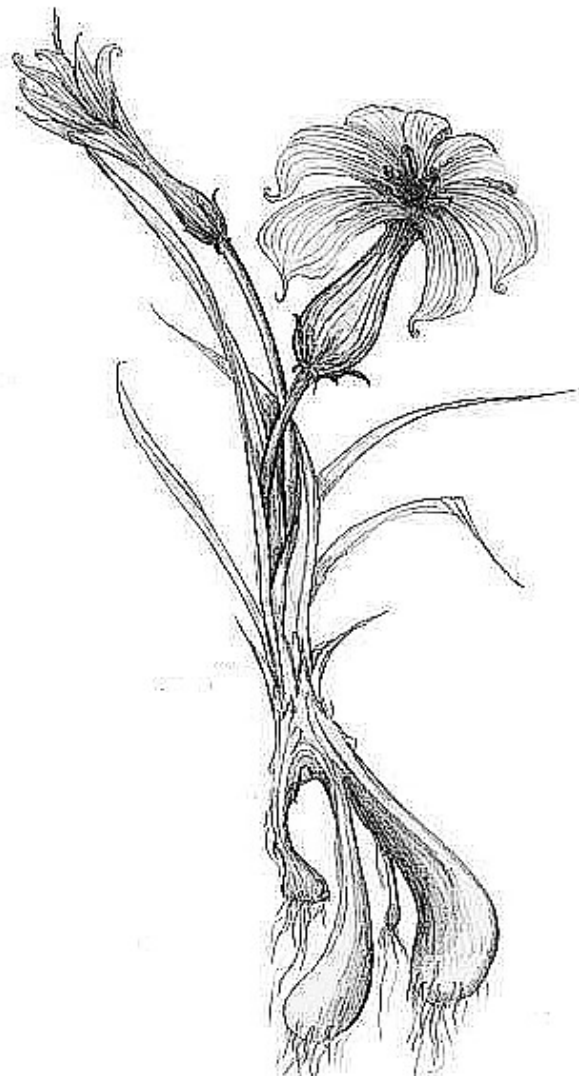
The people of the Southern Shore have mothflower in abundance, and are keen to trade it.

Winterbloom

The winterbloom is not bright or vibrant, it is at odds with many other herbs and plants. Its blossom is gray, dull in colouration. Its leaves and flowers likewise lack colour, appearing washed out or unhealthy. Yet the potency of the winterbloom is not found in the stalks, leaves, and flowers that can be seen but in the woody root that lies beneath the soil.

The bulb is elongated in shape, closer to a squat carrot than a potato or turnip. The people of the north say it is shaped like their rune for wisdom, sacrifice, and punishment.

The root is toxic, causing nausea, vomiting and dizziness if eaten raw. This property can be enhanced with preparation, leading to crippling stomach pains, diarrhoea, excessive thirst, and eventual death. Unfortunately as with many such natural poisons it can



be treated with a simple incantation or a simple preparation of bloodroot.

The foremost property of winterbloom is to remove minor curses, and to restore strength. It can help remove confusion and uncertainty. It can be used to treat several diseases especially those that attack the body and the mind rather than the blood.

It has dominion over the juices and liquids of the body.

It prospers in the cold, and the dry. In the warmth, or the wet, it sickens and dies. The root becomes soft and pulpy, and a soft root is a sign that the plant will be useless to the Tepel.

The life of the herb follows a predictable pattern. It flowers in winter, and in early spring, then dies back and sleeps for the other half of the year. Yet the root remains potent all year round.

Some Buruk Tepel claim that the plant grows most profusely on the grave of someone who has died of treachery. They claim that it grows most freely if a grave contains the corpses both of someone who knows they were betrayed before their deaths, and the one who betrayed them. I think that this is just a story. The plant is hard to cultivate, and this business of graves and treachery seems a distraction from simply having cool, dry conditions.

The Thule trade winterbloom in return for mothflower.

Medicine

There are five potions that every Tepel knows how to prepare. As each potion is mastered, the Tepel gains a scar from their mentor that shows that mastery. Without mastery of these five potions, the Tepel can never become Buruk. The understanding needed to craft all the other wonders of the Tepel arise from these five.

These first five potions are practical because they allow the Tepel to influence others from a distance. Those who are chosen can carry the power of the Tepel with them, and call on it in need – allowing a single Tepel to aid many warriors without needing to place themselves in unnecessary danger.

They allow the art of life to be employed in several places at once, meaning that the Tepel can focus their attention more closely in the places where it is most needed. Yet the Tepel must also take care that those they grant the potions to do not come to expect them, or value them less for the ease with which they are used. Sometimes an example must be made.

It is said that the only reason the Buruk Tepel pass their wisdom to other, that they take the apprentices who will become Tepel at all, is so that they have willing hands to make these potions. As the potion frees the Tepel to focus on what concerns them most, so these apprentices free the Buruk Tepel to focus on the matters that interest them rather than on the business of providing medicines for the het and their warbands.

The knowledge of these potions is universal – the Northern tribe and the tribe of the Southern Shores certainly know how to make them,. So do the human vermin, who stole this lore from the people long ago as they stole so much else.

This is unsurprising, both the theft and the prevalence, because these potions are straightforward preparations of obvious application. They are the distillate of the lesser art of life.

The five quintessential potions are firewrack, bonecrafter's clay, gravestay, sourchill, and woundbinder.

There are other medicinal preparations that build upon the five but are not part of them. The two most common are Tepel's retort, and lifedraught. While few Tepel bother to prepare Tepel's retort, the lifedraught is a miraculous potion of great value that shows the favour of the Buruk Tepel.

Bloodwrack

Red, translucent liquid. Pale particles float in it the thin liquid. Smells hot, spicy. Touched to the tongue, it tingles.

Drunk, it causes pain – the blood catches fire – but the pain unfortunately only lasts a moment or two before fading and taking with it the effects of poisons, venoms, and even some curses that weaken the heart and the blood and hasten death.

Equal measures of bloodroot and barrowgrass.

Bonecrafter's Clay

Blue salve. Unscented. Gritty texture, dries quickly like mud. Do not eat it.

Smearred over a ruined limb, it forms a thick crust that quickly sets and then begins to flake away leaving blood, bone, flesh, and sinew knitted and whole.

A warrior cannot fight without their arm. They cannot move quietly between the trees without the use of both legs. They cannot draw back their bow with broken ribs. The salve restores the ability to fight to one who has been maimed, but has not fallen.

Equal parts mothflower and winterbloom.

Gravestay

Dark blue salve. Gritty, sandy texture. Smells of bruised grass. Brings numbness to the fingertip or tongue.

Rubbed onto the body, numbs pain. The scent helps to clear the mind, apparently, but I have always found it obnoxious. It is quickly absorbed.

It can be used to treat chronic pain, but only the Buruk Tepel and those they favour can benefit from this medicinal property.

A warrior will use this salve to numb the pain of a major injury so that they might continue fighting. As with barrowgrass, there is a risk that the warrior dies when they use this salve as they believe themselves healed when only the symptoms have been addressed.

Equal parts barrowgrass and jadeleaf, mashed and mixed together to create a salve.

Sourchill

Grey, see-through. Smells of winterbloom blossoms. Sour taste – spoiled milk.

Turns the stomach – nausea, chill, dizziness, weakness, incapacity. Effects clear quickly making it useless as a poison but invaluable as a treatment for minor curses that weaken, or constrain the will or the body.

Limited usefulness, rarely requested from the Tepel. A wise Tepel knows there are better potions to prepare and carry. Of some use when dealing with the people of the North.

Equal parts winterbloom and bloodroot.

Woundbinder

Greenish-blue liquid, pale, translucent. Sticky. Smells of fresh water. Tingles the tongue, not unpleasantly.

Drunk, it spreads warmth quickly through the entire body, removing pain, causing sensations of certainty and wholeness.

Restores health, vitality. One of the most popular elixirs of the Tepel's art. It restores those on the brink of death to full strength allowing them to fight on.

Equal parts jadeleaf and mothflower.

Tepel's Resort

Dark red. Foul. Scum floats on the top. Smells vile, tastes viler.

Roils the guts; a poison that causes retching, dizziness, may interfere with balance. Passes quickly making it useless as a poison.

It purges venom and weakness, and can be used to treat cases of mild poisoning and minor curses as well as many diseases.

A little trickier to prepare than either firewrack or souchill, but a little more versatile. Of some value to champions who must face human vermin in battle.

Equal parts mothflower, winterbloom, and bloodroot.

Lifedraught

Clear liquid. Fresh scent, like bruised herbs. Tastes good. Wholesome. Energising.

Drinking it, one feels light-headed, then refreshed and energetic. Gives a rush of certainty, inspires the feeling that nothing is impossible. Focuses the mind.

The concentrated power of the art of life. The paramount healing potion that can completely restore an orc to full strength in moments. It purges venoms and lesser poisons; breaks the effect of minor curses; mends ruined bones; knits sinews, blood vessels, skin, and flesh; repairs damaged organs; suppresses pain; and restores fighting spirit and energy.

Powerful but costly. Much trickier to prepare than any of the lesser potions and salves. Not a potion to waste on the weak or the stupid. It is for the cunning het, the powerful ghulai, the trusted agent. Not the warrior who is easily replaced. Those who carry a mouthful often as not have the favour of a most powerful Tepel - or one of the Buruk themselves.

Three drams of jadeleaf, and one each of the other four common herbs.

The Art of War

The second art of the Tepel is the art of war. All life is a struggle, and the abyss waits at the end. Only through war does an orc become powerful and clever enough to find a way across the howling abyss to the far shore. Every breath we take brings the abyss closer.

Each Tepel faces their own struggle. They must guard against the jealousy of those who are beneath them, and against the malice of their peers, and against the fear of those above them. They must prove their worth to the clan and the people, but must not appear as a threat to those more powerful.

War is the pestle and mortar that refines the spirit of the orc so that it becomes capable of crossing the abyss. The greatest orcs, the most refined, become capable of passage across the abyss at will. These are the ancestors, who serve as guide and judge. Those they deem to have value they will offer aid to. Those they consider to be foolish or weak, they turn their backs upon.

The Tepel helps to refine the orc. The first art teaches the Tepel to keep the howling abyss at bay so that an orc may have time to become refined. The second art teaches the Tepel to take an active hand in that refinement – to become a little like the ancestors themselves by judging who is worthy of their aid and who is not.

The primary art of war is the preparation of potions. The refinement, mixing, and brewing that creates a potion, a salve, or an infusion is like the process that refines a warrior. No warrior ascends to become an ancestor alone – they clamber over the backs of their fellows. Sometimes they receive aid, in expectation that if they become sublime they will return to help in turn those who helped them.

The weak and the foolish are wasted. They are the gunk at the bottom of the bowl when the potion has been refined and poured out. They are worthless. They are the due paid to the abyss. They are nothing. The Tepel must learn to identify the worthless, and use them to prepare the worthy orcs to cross the abyss.

The worst of the worthless are the human vermin. They ape their betters, seeking to steal the secrets and wisdom of the people for their own as they have taken our homelands. Yet they are not without value. Without the humans, the people would only war among themselves. The greed and malice of these vermin is like the fire beneath the pot. It provides the motive force for the refinement of the worthy soul.

Without the humans, the worthy would struggle only against each other, and some would be lost. With them, the worthy can each struggle against a force that will refine them, and more will succeed. It is like the difference between brewing a potion with a single pot on a single fire, and brewing many potions at once with many pots and many fires. In the end it is better to have many chances to prepare the elixir. With only one pot, there is only one potion and it must be refined precisely every time or you will be left with nothing.

The second lesson is the only one that matters; you owe the weak and the foolish nothing. The world is a place of hate, of danger, and of cruelty. The only way to overcome the world is to become more dangerous, and more cruel, than it is.

All orcs die, and without the aid of the ancestors, their spirits are devoured by the howling abyss. The true end of all orc lives is to become strong and clever enough to cross the howling abyss. There is nothing that should not be done in pursuit of this end. Crossing the abyss is the only thing that matters. Honour and heroism, magical lore and obedience, fidelity and ambition – these are distractions from the only thing that matters. Crossing the abyss.

It is easy to fall into line, and to do what other orcs think is “right” or “good”. It is harder, and takes more strength, to do what you know must be done to ensure as many of the True People as possible are worthy to cross the abyss.

The Endless Struggle

There are two potions that are of value to the het which we call The Endless Struggle. They must be employed carefully, however. They grant warriors the power to carry lethal wounds with ease but this great endurance comes at a cost. At their heart, the Endless Struggle creates potions that trade life for life – they are more like poisons than those potions more familiar to the warriors.

Warspice

Deep crimson, spicy flavour and taste, warm to the touch.

Brings warmth, that begins in the belly and spreads quickly through the whole body. Touches the deep rage in the heart of all the people. Urges violence, and calls to mind past wrongs that must be righted with bloodshed.

It grants the ability to endure vicious wounds, but it thins the blood. When the reserve of strength it offers has been depleted, the Abyss yawns. If sunfire has been given to one who is still of value, keep jadeleaf to hand to stave off its hunger or that one may be lost to you.

Beware – the thinning of the blood will react poorly with bloodroot and other similar substances. Seeking to treat that symptom may bring on a potentially fatal seizure.

Give warspice to those warriors whose ability to destroy your enemies is manifest, but who you can afford to lose.

Two drams each of barrowgrass, bloodroot, and jadeleaf; one dram of mothflower.

Corpseskin

A thick dark blue salve, oily to the touch, with a strong scent of fresh meat.

Absorbed quickly into the skin, or the gums. Delivers an immediate burst of pleasant euphoria. Recipient is distanced from pain and discomfort.

The user can endure powerful wounds with ease, but there is a cost. Their sense of self is muted – their ability to fight is not affected but they cannot

draw on the inner fire that is the mark of the true warrior, nor wield magical tools, nor work the arts of the ghulai.

Where it is of most value is with the green recruit, the worthless warrior or the slave. These warriors lose nothing by having their power curtailed, and their value on the battlefield is greatly enhanced by an additional ability to endure blows, and absorb wounds that might otherwise find more valuable fighters

Furthermore, the salve creates an urge to submission, meaning it has some value in restraining the wild of spirit and the unruly. It might be used as a punishment for the foolish – denying them their strengths and sending them to fight is a risky move however. It is at its most useful though when applied to those who are already weak of will, however.

Be cautious with this salve. If its effects are removed too soon they may cause the users heart to still, at least for a moment, and the Abyss to reach for their spirit.

Two drams each of barrowgrass, jadeleaf, and winterbloom; one dram of mothflower.

The Tempered Steel

There are potions that are of value to warriors, but their potency is on the whole weaker than the potions created by the Endless Struggle. We know that the human vermin, who fear the Abyss, have stolen these recipes and make much use of them.

Most Buruk Tepel do not worry about these potions – they are better served as tools for the Tepel to increase their position. No Buruk Tepel would waste time with these potions.

These potions are favoured by warriors who have value, and have learned caution and cunning. They are more difficult to prepare, and more costly, but they are a vital tool for preventing the Abyss from claiming the people before they are prepared to cross to the other side.

There is a rumour that the White Banded Crab clan knew how to make a

potion that was even more potent than Heartcease. This potent elixir required star metal. If the Clans who destroyed White Banded Crab captured this secret, they have kept it to themselves.

Rash

Golden-brown liquid. Smells of strong spirits, and tastes of fruit.

Drinker can shrug off effect of minor wounds. While not powerful, it also inures warriors against fear of death – though it can encourage the foolish to take suicidal risks which is both a good and a bad thing.

One dram each of winterbloom and jadeleaf.

Untouchable

Golden brown liquid. Smells of strong spirits, but tastes sweet. Numbs the skin or the tongue.

Inures the drinker to pain, suppresses weak emotions. Allows the warrior to experience significant injury and continue to fight.

Two drams of mothflower, one dram each of jadeleaf and winterbloom.

Heartcease

Golden brown viscous liquid. Scent of fruit. Flavour of sweat.

Powerful elixir, reducing the impact of sword blows and greatly increasing ability of the drinker to survive battle. Also valuable because it drives warriors to dominate and terrify their foe, especially the human vermin.

Over time the finest warriors are refined to deadly tools that strike down their enemies without regret or hesitation. They learn the truth – that there is nothing that should not be done in the pursuit of victory, or survival.

Three drams of barrowgrass, two drams each of jadeleaf and mothflower, one dram of winterbloom.

The Bonds of the Bridge

These are some of the most powerful preparations of the Buruk Tepel. They are closely part of the Arts of the Abyss, but we count them among the Arts of War because they are primarily of use to those who fight for the people.

Unlike the Eternal Struggle, the Bonds of the Bridge should not be squandered. They are weapons that hone the will of the warrior, but most importantly they connect the warrior to their ancestors. There is risk here, of course, for the ancestors cannot be predicted. Yet, without exception, a warrior who hears the ancestors more clearly fights more keenly.

There are some Buruk Tepel who believe that the precise potion used influences which ancestor is heard. They perform experiments. They try to talk about their findings, but there seems to be little value in this waste of herbs and communion with the ancestors.

The only useful thing they have discovered is something that should have been obvious. These potions are of no value to the human vermin – indeed, they seem simply to make those who are not of the people vomit. It is not possible to administer a lethal dose of these potions to a healthy human, however – or at least the lethal dose is greater than any sane Buruk Tepel would be prepared to waste on a mere human.

Butchers' Gate

Granular red powder, full of sharp fragments that draw blood if rubbed between finger and thumb.

Burn the powder, and inhale the smoke. It burns the nostrils, and fills the warrior with the urge to kill. The orc hears the voice of their ancestors, especially those who urge the slaughter of the foe.

The ancestors guide the drinker, giving their aid, but for the most part it is important to choose warriors who understand that there is a moment to act, and to employ the boon this tonic grants to find and take command of that moment. Two drams of bloodroot, and one dram of jadeleaf

Tukai's Haven

Deep purple powder, crumbles between finger and thumb, smells familiar but unplaceable.

Burnt, or boiled in water, and the smoke or steam inhaled. The user feels a sudden awareness of all the people to whom they are connected, and to the people as a whole. They are strongly aware of the voices of their ancestors, especially those who bind the people together.

The strength this infusion provides grants strength of will, and the ability to wield the powers of those who fight with the ancestors at their side is greatly enhanced.

Three drams of bloodroot, and one dram each of jadeleaf and barrowgrass.

Chikad's Scream

This greasy dark brown resin is difficult to break apart, and smells of cooked meat.

One of the most potent potions of the Art of War. The bridgekeeper grants the power to resist the Abyss. More importantly, it brings with it a profound sense of the presence of the ancestors, watching and judging the actions of the orc who inhales its sweet smoke.

The orc who inhales this infusion can draw on their inner strength to fan the flame of their life, even to the state that they can rise up from grievous wounds ready for one final blow against the foe that has discounted the fallen orc.

Two drams each of barrowgrass and jadeleaf, and one dram of bloodroot.

Pakad's Path

A thick green resin, marked with golden speckles. It crumbles easily between finger and thumb, and smells of spilled blood

The user feels a rush of certainty, profoundly reminded of the destiny of the people to conquer the world through their cunning. The voices of the ancestors

are heard most strongly, urging the warrior to dominate others. It can be a little dangerous in this regard, so be cautious where it is employed.

Interestingly, it kindles feelings of fear in human vermin. Yet it is wrong to use an infusion that might bring one of the people the strength to capture the eyes of the ancestors and cross the abyss merely to terrify vermin.

The ancestors drawn to those who inhale the guided hand are warrior-ancestors. They literally guide the hand of the user, allowing them to wield the weapons of war with great potency. It is most value to one who already has the fire within that lets the ancestors speak to them, but with the aid of this potion they may strike a foe down, maim them with a single strike, or smash their shield or their weapon through the exultant strength of the spirit of the people.

Three drams of bloodroot, two drams each of jadeleaf and barrowgrass, and one dram each of mothflower and winterbloom.

The Spirit of the Fungus

The spirit called Llofir is also called the lord of rot, and the gentle. It brings dissolution; it feeds on the dead and from their flesh shapes new life. It is a creature that arises from the scorpion totem.

While it is interested in the ghulai, it is also a being that seeks out communion with the Tepel and the Buruk. Unlike the other spirits of the scorpion totem, it is deep and subtle. Where the Spider het is cruel, and the Deep Forest is chaotic and unpredictable, the Llofir has the cold heart and steady hand of the greatest Buruk Tepel.

The Llofir can help with the study of herbs, but there is a certain rare boon it offers that is of special interest to the Tepel who master the art of war. Several potions make use of the star metal that falls from the sky from time to time, and is sometimes taken out of the earth. The ghulai greatly value this metal, for it can refine and empower their magic, but it is also of use to the Tepel. The Buruk Tepel in particular are interested in acquiring more of it for just as it refines and empowers magic, so it refines and empowers potions.

However, there is an alternative – for the Tepel at least.

The spirit of the Llofir knows the secret of preparing a substance that the ghulai call the Pollen of Llofir, and the Buruk Tepel call the Fruit of Decay. It can be used in any preparation that might otherwise use the star metal, fulfilling the requirement for that substance. The potions that require star metal are kept as careful secrets – their creation is rarely shared with any who are not Buruk Tepel for obvious reasons. No Buruk Tepel wishes to create more competition for themselves in this arena.

It is also said that certain powerful ghulai steeped in the lore of the twin serpents can prepare something similar to this. They guard the secret of doing so very closely; it is said to require ambergelt and amounts of the sacred herbs. The ritual produces a hard lozenge that can be dissolved in those elixirs that would normally require star metal to grant them power.

The ghulai are particularly interested.

The Art of Death

The third art of the Tepel is the art of death. Many see the ability to preserve life as the most profound of the art of the Tepel – but in truth it is the ability to set the time and manner of a death that is the greater power. As the farmer and the hunter sets the time of the beast's death, so those with true power set the time of the death of human vermin or even of the people.

To take life away is to be like the world, to be pestilence, violence, misadventure, time, given flesh. Even the act of bringing death is not required – to know you hold a life fluttering on your palm is sometimes enough to feel the moment of true power over the existence of another. To send a fool, or better yet a rival, tumbling into the Howling Abyss... it is something that must be experienced to be understood.

Death is powerful, and it is most certain with the use of poison. We divide poisons into three categories. The least poisons are usually natural in origin, and while they may have any number of properties – they come with a weakness. Poisons of such magnitude are easily purged with bloodroot, or with the tricks of the ghulai.

The lesser poisons are carefully prepared and much more dangerous. They can still be treated with the arts of the Tepel, but require more than a simple application of bloodroot or a trick of the ghulai.

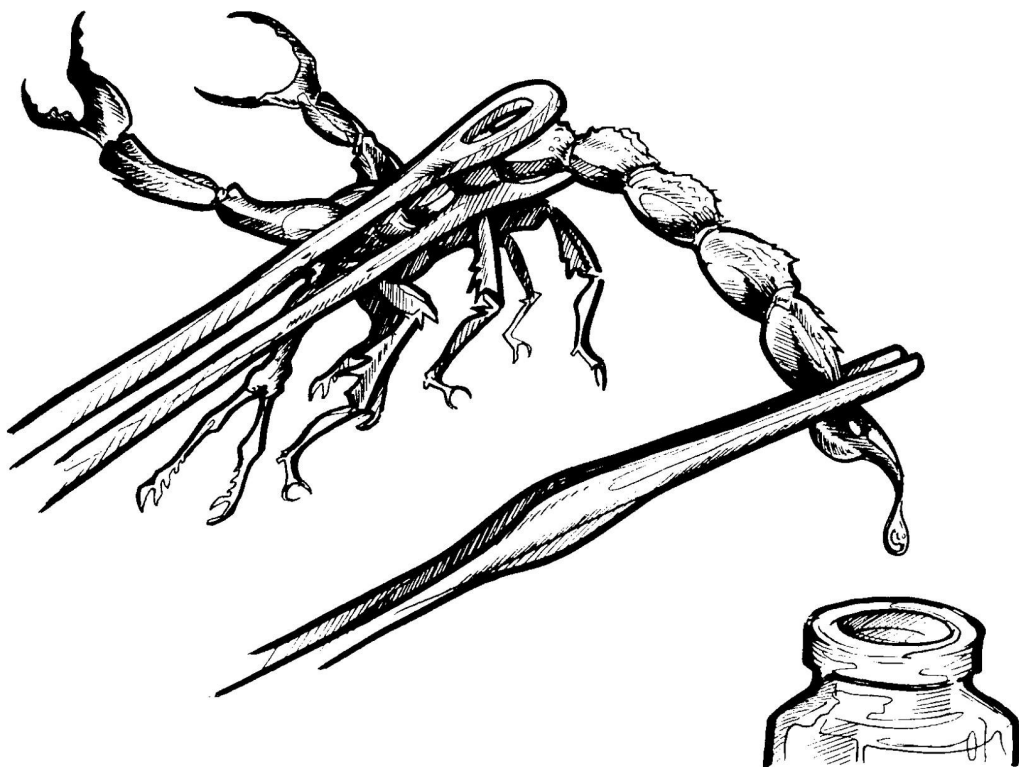
Finally, there are the great poisons. These are prepared with sacred herbs and the recipes for such are carefully guarded. They can be treated only with remedies prepared using the same arts – and if the wrong remedy is applied death is certain. The great poisons are the potent tools of the Buruk Tepel, and their mastery is never shared with any save the absolutely most trusted Tepel.

In this way, one who offends the Buruk Tepel knows with a certainty that the only source of continued life is the very one who has decreed their death. The experience can be a sobering one for the het or the ghulai who considers themselves untouchable, when their blood begins to dribble from their eyes.

There is another component to the arts of death – the preparation of venoms. Venoms differ from poisons because they are much more rarely fatal. Where they excel is in the creation of fear, and in causing those overburdened with mercy to cripple themselves in pursuit of the task of keeping their envenomed comrade alive.

Most often these venoms are applied to blades, and are good for at most a few strikes. Others have greater longevity, but they require introduction into the blood of the target usually through a rent in the skin. A rare few are durable enough to persist for long periods of time and applied to spikes or crocodile-jaw traps to further cripple an intruder.

Another advantage of venom on the battlefield is that even the least competent, green, or foolish warrior can wield an envenomed weapon and, if they can strike a foe, there is a chance that their blow will have a more lasting effect on the ability of that enemies' warband to fight – or even more usefully, restrict their ability to retreat.



Venom

Venoms are dangerous preparations thickened and strengthened and designed to be applied with a weapon, almost always through an open wound.

The venoms weaken the foe and cause them to become afraid. When a foe feels the venom coursing in their veins they know that they stand on the threshold of the abyss – and as often as not they will panic and make mistakes, or flee in disarray to find someone to save them.

All warriors know how to make use of these venoms. The lesser venoms, which are the easiest to prepare and to remove, are durable enough that they can be applied before a battle – but they lose their potency quickly, and it is difficult to ensure that they will take effect even if a solid blow is landed. Examples of the lesser venoms are toadskiss, bloodflood, Llofir's shroud, and even woundfire.

The greater venoms, though, are much more potent – but they are also harder to employ. Swamp Fever, Sweet Blood, and Serpent Tooth must be held ready and swiftly applied to the blade moments before the fateful blow is struck. The common warrior has no patience for the greater venoms. They are the preserve of the cunning and the stealthy.

Some warriors make the mistake of thinking that their blade venoms are enough by themselves to destroy their enemies. These warriors are fools and will froth out their last bloody breath as fools when they fall.

The Buruk Tepel have long searched for a way to thicken these salves so they might be applied to arrows to bring swift death to the enemy. We have not succeeded yet, it seems likely that we never will. But if one did they would be set high in the councils of the people and command much tribute. Likely enough it is an impossible dream – but we cannot risk that some other may discover it before the people do.

Bloodflood, Lesser Venom

Some venoms are quickly lethal. Others take much longer to destroy their victim. While such venoms may not send the victim to the abyss, as the symptoms worsen they become an increasing burden on their warband and will also use up valuable resources and time that could be better spent elsewhere – especially the magic of the ghulai or the focus of the Tepel.

The main component of bloodflood is spittle and fluids from the bloodfeaster bat. The little pests feast on the blood of the living. Wounds caused by their fangs bleed copiously and must be treated carefully – although they take very little at a time and mostly leave their prey unaware of their attentions. That said, their bite can also carry disease with it – especially the frothing madness that drives beasts and orcs alike into a self-destructive frenzy.

Bloodtorrent causes the wound that carries it to keep bleeding. It seems harmless at first but a bandage or poultice quickly soaks through. An orc holds only so much blood, and as it is lost other effects begin to take hold.

After an hour, the victim feels weak, light-headed. They find it hard to apply themselves, or to fight. A few of hours later, they become lethargic such that all exertion is effort. Walking is a challenge. The victim struggles for breath.

After a final hour, the victim tumbles into the abyss as their body no longer holds enough blood in them to keep their spirit within them.

The ghulai and the Tepel can quickly deal with the immediate threat of bloodflood. If it has been left to spread for long enough, there will be lingering effects that will require additional treatment – often a dose of winterbloom applied by a Tepel, to restore strength to the enervated victim.

Bloodtorrent, Greater Venom

As with toadskiss, some Buruk Tepel have a method of preparing this venom that uses shavings of bloodroot, and fluids from the great bat lords that lair in the caves below Undruh Zahni. This venom is more potent than bloodflood, bringing death much more swiftly. The bloodtorrent is often mistaken for bloodflood, but it is considerably harder to treat than the lesser venom.

Llofir's Caress, Lesser Venom

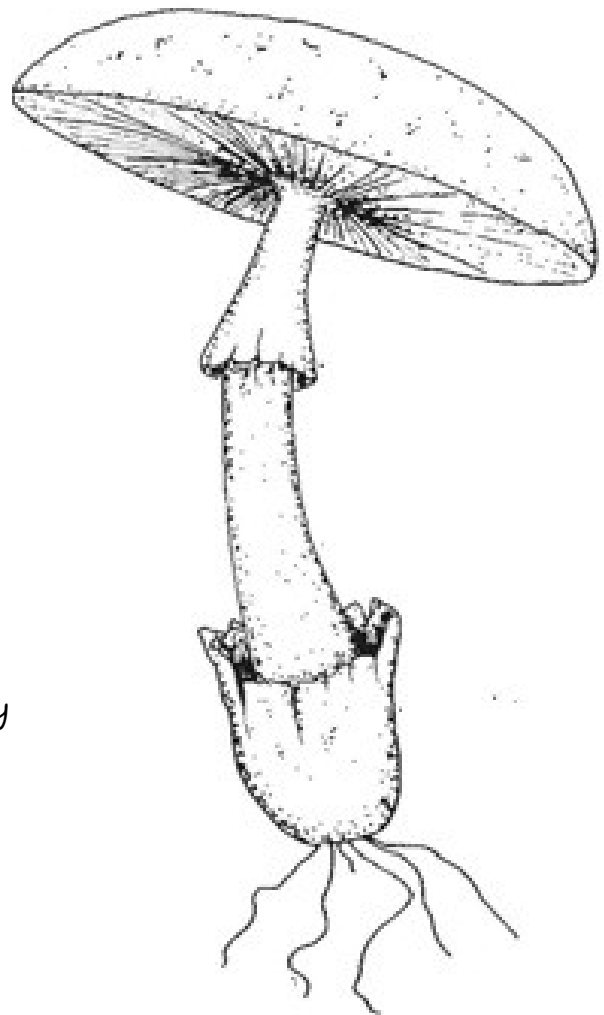
Mushrooms, toadstools, and moulds are favoured by the spirit Llofir. Every true Druj knows that there are varieties of fungus that are lethally potent even without significant preparation. Simply consuming their flesh is enough to cause powerful hallucinations or agonising death. Some produce spores that attack the mind, or the lungs. These spores that can be harnessed by the Buruk Tepel to produce powerful short-lived miasma that choke, or cause the lungs to fill with blood, or cause terrifying visions that drive the weak willed to madness.

Llofir's caress is a venom whose main component is a certain rare mushroom which the Buruk Tepel call the *pale herald*. It is difficult to identify - an unassuming little fungus, pale in colouration, with pale gills and a rounded cap. It is wrapped in a veil, that rises from the base, and often hangs from the cup in tatters. If this veil is removed it is very difficult to recognise it for what it is. If it is eaten, raw or cooked, it causes a swift agonising death.

The venom *Llofir's Caress* requires the flesh of the mushroom be carefully heated and boiled until a thin, grey solution is achieved that must then be repeatedly reduced and thickened.

A wound tainted with *Llofir's caress* itches a little but otherwise appears normal. Within the hour, the victim begins to experience dizziness, nausea, and shortness of breath. Shortly afterwards, the hallucinations begin. Only occasionally at first, but with increasing regularity as the venom runs its course.

After a second hour, the victim suffers headaches, back pain, and blood in the urine. They cannot rest, and their



hallucinations intensity to the point where they cannot tell reality from fantasy. Some become violent. If they are badly hurt, they succumb swiftly to death.

After the third hour, the victim dies convulsing – choking, struggling to breathe, agonized by the collapse of their organs, and screaming at their visions.

The visions suffered by both those envenomed with Llofir's Caress and poisoned by consuming pale herald are vivid, convincing, and terrible. They include the certainty that people are changing into shambling fungus-infested beasts, and a conviction that a pale mould is spreading across every surface – including the body of the victim.

In almost all cases the victim feels haunted or watched by a pale figure in white veils that draws ever closer ... with the final horrified vision seemingly being of the figure reaching out to touch the face of the screaming victim just before their brains shatter and their organs collapse.

If it is identified quickly enough the venom can be treated with magic, or with bloodroot. As the symptoms progress, however, they become increasingly difficult to deal with as the poison has already begun to attack the brain, heart, lungs, kidneys, stomach, intestines, and liver. The lingering effects can be treated with an infusion of jadeleaf administered by a Tepel – without it death is almost certain.

I have also observed that the body of someone who has died from either Llofir's caress or pale herald poisoning rots very quickly – but with no signs of maggots or flies. It is as if the venom continues to attack the corpus even after the spirit has been swallowed by the abyss, turning the fluids of the body against itself and causing it to deliquesce with almost supernatural speed over the course of the next several days.

And of course there are mushrooms, which grow on the flesh of the corpse. I have harvested them several times but they seem to have no particular quality beyond a certain nutty sweetness to their meat that is exceptionally tasty.

Toadslather, Lesser Venom

This venom is mixed from the sap of the black baobab and the secretions of several kinds of toads and frogs. The potency varies with the frog, and some breeds are better than others. I favour the rainbow frog which lives in the marsh forests of the south, but mostly because it is a beautiful creature and I enjoy watching them devour the grubs and worms on which they subsist.

As with most of the lesser venoms, toadslather is slow-acting. It brings paralysis and death. Where the venom has been introduced, the limb quickly becomes unusable, hanging like a lump of stone. The venom then spreads slowly through the body, eventually attacking and killing the victim's lungs.

Within five minutes the victim becomes incapable of physical exertion, and their ability to fight is greatly impeded. They begin to have trouble breathing.

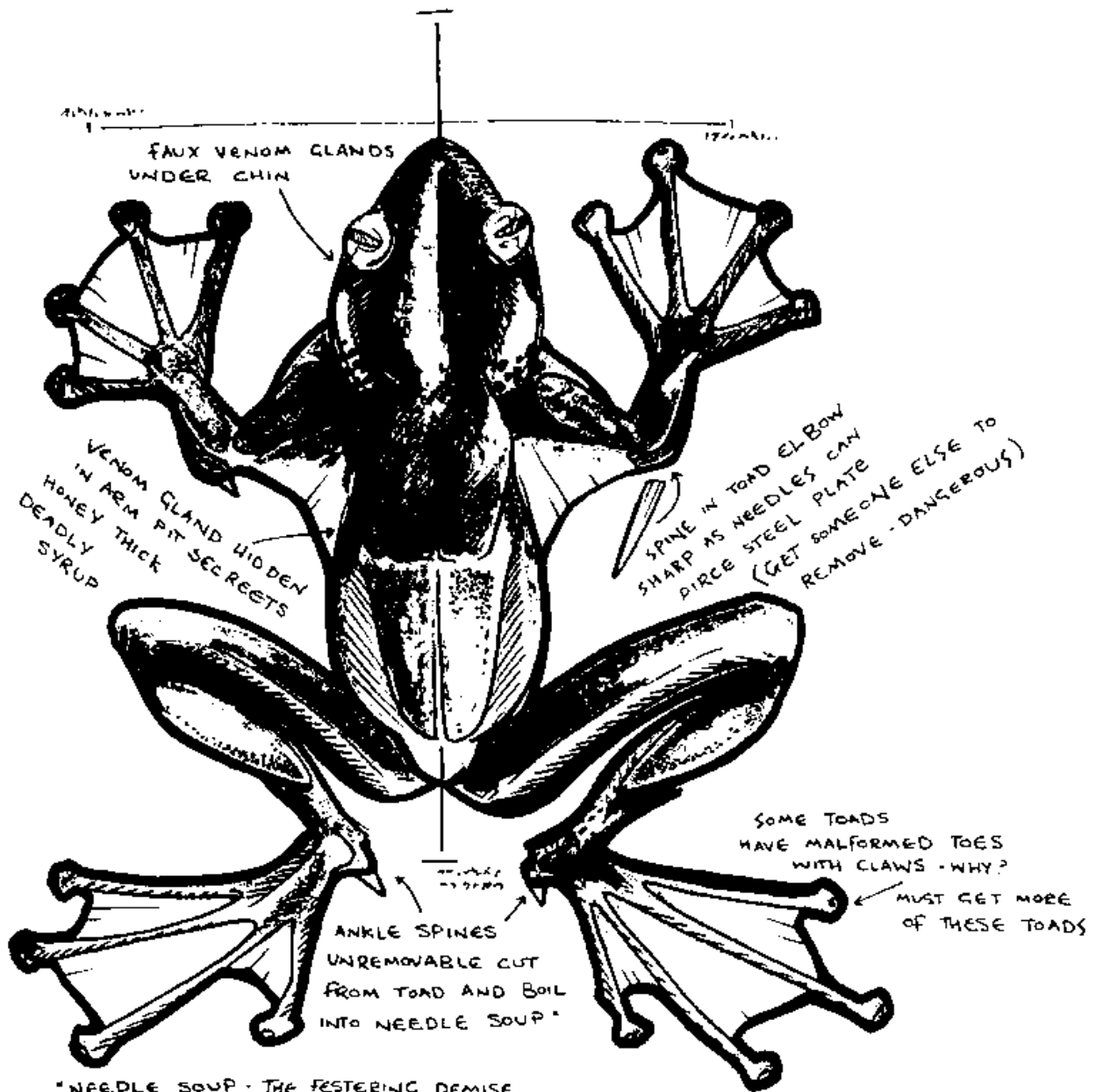
After a further five minutes, the victim invariably collapses. They begin to suffocate. It is not the venom itself that kills them, but the constriction of their lungs. They die desperate for breath, gasping, like fish thrown onto the bank. They remain aware throughout that the abyss yawns before them.

The abyss claims them within a few minutes – longer if they are of particularly healthy constitution. Most orcs die within three minutes or so.

As with many lesser venoms, toadskiss is very easy to treat. While it can take as long as half an hour to kill the victim, its effects mean that if help is not nearby then there is no hope of survival. Indeed, even companions are no proof against toadskiss – within five minutes the victim becomes an increasing burden on their allies, slowing them down and making it even harder to bring them to someone who can prevent their death.

Toadskiss, Greater Venom

Some of the crane clan Tepel know a way to make toadslather much stronger by preparing the venom with juice of winterbloom root and mossflower leaves. They call this venom Toadskiss, and it is much more potent. While it does not kill more swiftly, it is much harder to treat the venom – especially if it is mistaken for the weaker toadslather.



"NEEDLE SOUP - THE FESTERING DEMISE

*2 CUPS OF SUGAR

*1 BOWL OF SOUR MILK

TOAD ANKLE SPINES (AT LEAST 8)

SOAK FOR FOUR DAYS TILL PUNCTANT FOR BEST RESULT
BOIL AND BOTTLE

Woundfire, Lesser Venom

The longfruit plant grows well in warm, damp soil, and is useful not only as a component for the work of the Tepel, but also in more mundane preparations as a seasoning for meat dishes. In its natural state, the juice and seeds of the longfruit itself are extremely hot, burning the soft tissues and especially the eyes if they are introduced to them – even a casual touch can be enough to cause pain and temporary blindness.



Properly prepared and concentrated, the thin strong-smelling oil produced from the seeds is used as the base from which woundfire is prepared along with other plant juices including the sap of the red nettle and in some cases the venom of the rage wasp.

Introduced into a break in the skin, woundfire causes an agonising burning sensation. Even after the wound is sealed, the pain continues and the victim begins to sweat profusely. The pain persists for several hours, but after a third of a day or so it will slowly fade with no lasting ill effects.

The lack of permanent damage is a shame, but it is also interesting. The process of brewing woundfire is simple, and in some cases even an untrained orc can attempt it. To those unfamiliar with the effects, it is indistinguishable from a lethal venom. It may cause the victim to panic, or use up valuable medicines, in treating something that while painful is not even incapacitating.

There are also several more potent venoms with similar effects – indeed in some cases I have heard of woundfire being used along with a lethal venom to trick the Tepel into dismissing the effects as simply a painful wound that will go away by itself in time. Too late, the enemy discovers that the burning sensation caused by the woundfire oil was simply the first of several symptoms that lead inexorably to agonising death.

Swamp Fever, Greater Venom

This is the blade venom that many het think of when venom is mentioned. It taints the blood of the victim, and ensures that they will succumb to their wounds much more readily.

It is easily identified – a stone-gray oily paste, slick to the touch, with a vile taste. Smearred on a weapon it must be used to strike quick blows, but it is adept at finding its way into the body of the victim even if they are armoured.

Two drams winterbloom, one dram each of jadeleaf, mothflower, and barrowgrass.

Sweet Blood, Greater Venom

A sticky salve, the colour of drying blood, smearred on weapons and spears. It steals the strength from a foe, neutralizing enemy champions and ghulai. It is useful up to a point for capturing subjects without killing them.

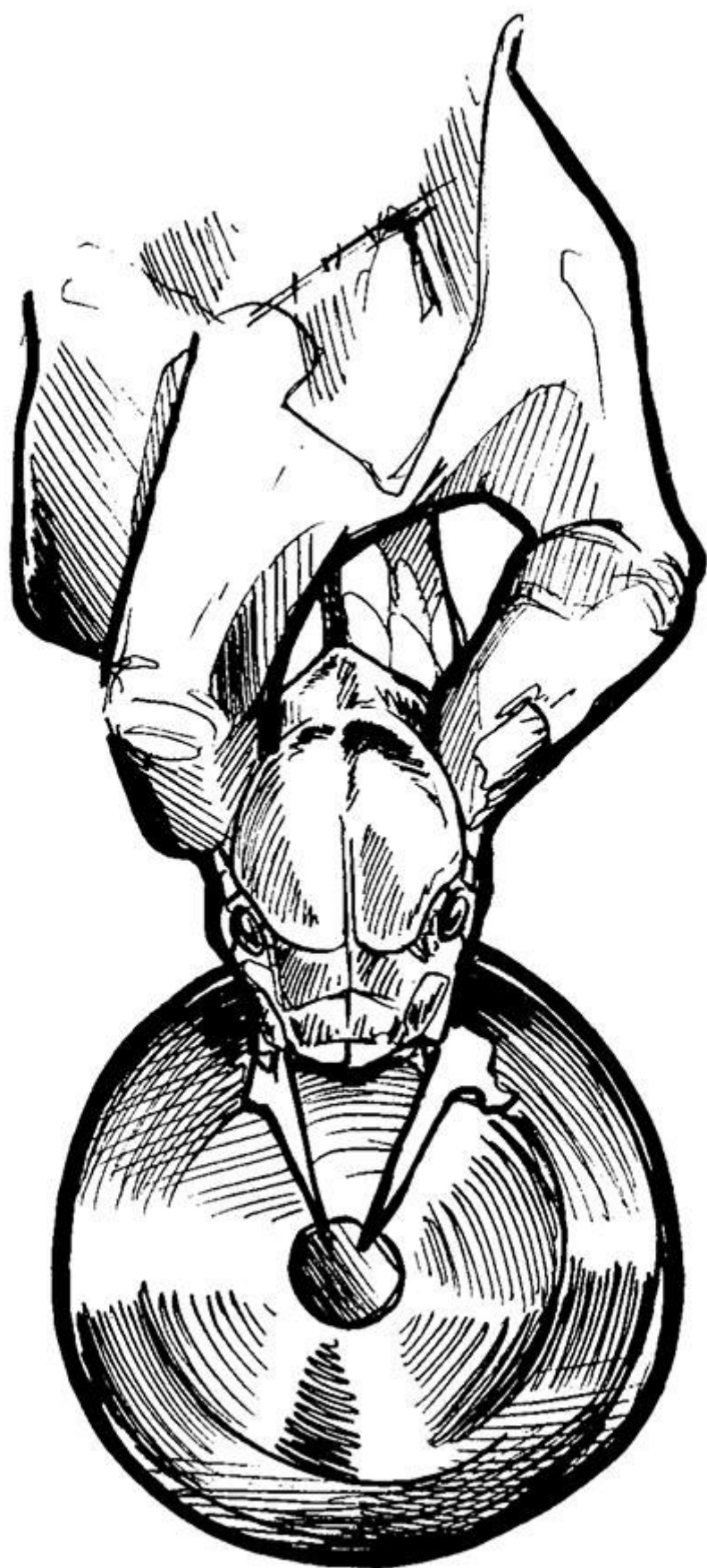
Sweet Blood is much harder to employ than Swamp Fever, because it is so easily wasted. Only the most cunning warrior can make good use of mudhoney, so it should not be entrusted to any lesser servant.

Two drams of bloodroot, one dram each of jadeleaf, mothbloom, and barrowgrass.

Serpent Tooth, Greater Venom

This greenish-yellow salve goes by several names. Each tribe tries to claim it as its own – Waspsting, Toadsweat, Cranesblood, Bloodstinger are all names I have heard used for it by my fellows – but I learnt it as Serpent Tooth and and so that is the name.

Whatever the name, the venom overwhelms the body of a victim and renders them incapable of movement for a short time. It is unfortunately less lethal than true snake venom, but has the advantage that the paralysis it causes strikes almost immediately.



It is superior to mudhoney because it prevents all movement. It does not simply stop a magician casting spells, it prevents them taking any movement at all. It does not simply stop a warrior drawing strength from the ancestors, it stops them striking any blows at all. And it prevents a prized victim running away.

While this venom might appear on the surface to be almost unbelievably powerful, it has two significant drawbacks.

Crucially, it is by no means cheap to brew. It requires more herbs than the other blade venoms, and so to be effective it must be used by someone who can target a key enemy to dispatch with it.

It is also a little risky to use this venom if the prey must be captured alive. I have heard of times when the prey died under the effect of the venom – when the paralysis was too extreme. A few times, they stop being able to breathe (although this is rarely fatal given how short lived the paralysis is), but at other times their hearts simply stop. A Tepel can restart the heart easily enough, but most warriors do not know the secret of doing so and so the prey expires.

The recipe requires three drams of winterbloom, two drams each of jadeleaf and barrowgrass, and one dram of mothflower.



Clan Secrets, Greater Venoms

There are several other venoms, of course. They are kept secret and employed sparingly so that other clans do not learn to recognise them and how to counter them.

One that I have heard of, but never actually observed, is a secret of the spider clan. This venom – *bogwidow oil* – has early symptoms identical to those of the woundfire venom, but the pain continues to intensify until the victim is utterly incapacitated screaming for death. Some victims will throw themselves gladly into the abyss rather than continue to endure the unendurable. After several hours of unspeakable pain, an orcs body burns out leading to sudden, welcome death as heart and brain alike break under the strain. The victim is usually insane long before that happens, of course. I do not know how to prepare this venom and I hope never to encounter it.

Another is a secret of the scorpion clan, which I am told is called *devouring flame*. Again initial symptoms are like woundfire, but the initial wound rapidly discolours. The skin and flesh around the injury begins to rot at an incredible rate – as if the victim were already dead. Other wounds quickly catch the “flesh fire”, and after a short time lesions open on unharmed parts of the body. The victim literally rots to death, eaten alive by their own body, leaving suppurating flesh sloughing from their bones and exposed organs.

This is why the clever Tepel always examines a wound carefully to determine if it is worth their time, and does not take symptoms at face-value until a thorough examination is performed.



Poisons

Poisons are both more intimate and more focused than venoms. Because the victim takes them into their body, they bypass many natural defences. They go to work more quickly, and their results are often more devastating. In some cases, even if the poison is treated there are lingering or even permanent effects.

There are many natural poisons, but they are weak before the arts of the Tepel and the ghulai.

The great poisons – the weapons of the Buruk Tepel – are carefully guarded secrets. Only those who know how to brew the poisons can brew the antidotes – and the application of the wrong antidote invariably proves instantly fatal.

Because the method of making the poisons includes the method of curing the poisons, the Buruk Tepel are very jealous of this lore. Some Buruk Tepel possess secrets of this art that are never shared outside their own clan, for example.

The greater poisons are often fatal because if someone is exposed to them, then it is because they have encouraged the ire of the Buruk Tepel themselves. Few Tepel or ghulai would risk bringing the wrath of their betters on themselves by daring to treat these poisons without permission. For a het or powerful ghulai, having an ally or companion succumb to one of the great poisons is a sure sign that a Buruk Tepel is angry – a warning that if the situation does not improve then someone even more valuable will be next.

Slayer's Mark, Lesser Poison

Tangy, see-through red-brown liquid. Viscous. Scent of bruised fruit.

When drunk, this liquid cripples an enemy. It is reasonably easy to alleviate but can give one the drop on an otherwise powerful practitioner of combat arts or magical tricks.

Symptoms of trust poisoning include agonizing stomach pains, copious sweating, hot fever, throbbing headache, joint ache, enervation, dizziness and

painfully heightened senses that make bright lights or loud noises unbearable. The victim finds it hard to focus, feels weak, and knows that they teeter on the edge of the abyss as their blood flows freely from their body.

The symptoms persist until they are removed. The ghulai can purge the poison, or the Tepel treat it with the sacred herbs, but until it is counteracted the victim is extremely vulnerable and easily slain.

The tricky part of using slayer's mark is getting it into the victim. Sometimes it can be administered as if it were a healing potion, sometimes causing the abyss to immediately claim the victim. Sometimes it is mixed with a drink or food as they are handed to the victim – there have been a few cases where rival families have met and poisoned all the food and drink with slayer's mark before making use of potions or trinkets of their own to take advantage of their guest's weakness.

Brewing slayer's mark requires two drams each of bloodroot and winterbloom, and a dram of mothflower.

Ghulai's Pride, Lesser Poison

A pale green viscous liquid that a heady scent of blossom and spice. It tingles the tongue and the finger.

The poison depletes the power of any magician who ingests it, leaving them unable to work their tricks. Severed from their power, the ghulai must rely on the tricks they have learned from their totems and they are rarely able to use them without careful preparation.

It brings with it a confusion of the mind that some orcs have described as pleasurable – narcotic even – that lasts around ten minutes. The magician will recover their magical abilities if they sleep, so this potion must be administered carefully each morning if a captive is not quickly disposed of.

Some Buruk Tepel will not allow a ghulai to come into their presence save that they have drunk some of this liquid. It is also used to keep human vermin from using any tricks they may have learned, so they can be interrogated with relative safety.

There are stories of a more potent version of this poison that severs the ghulai more profoundly from their power, removing their ability not only to work their incantations but to employ their totem tricks. Indeed, this preparation is on par with the great poisons and cannot easily be purged without an antidote. Yet it is surely no easy task to brew it if it exists so it is likely to be saved for use on the most valuable of enemies – or the most arrogant of ghulai.

The poison requires two drams of mothflower and one dram each of barrowgrass and jadeleaf.

Warfool, Lesser Poison

Golden-brown viscous liquid, glistens in the light. Sweet scent, but bitter taste.

This poison attacks the spirit of the warrior, and clouds their connection to their ancestors. It saps their will to fight and fills them with doubts. Their tongues become thick and they stumble over their words, their blows fall short of their full potential.

The poison is not often used except against the most egregious of enemies. There is some concern that exposure to the poison might permanently sever the bond between an orc and their fellows, or even worse with the ancestors of the True People. It is usually employed on captured warriors of the other tribes to keep them from becoming too uncooperative. It is of limited use when dealing with captured human vermin.

The poison requires two drams of winterbloom, and one dram each of mothflower and barrowgrass.

Bloodwrack, Greater Poison

Bloodmark attacks the lungs, heart, and the blood causing uncontrollable bleeding. The victim begins to rupture and bleed, and the flow of blood does not stop. The abyss claims the victim as their lungs fill with blood, drowning them, or causing their organs to be split and ruined by the collapsing blood vessels.

The first sign of bloodwrack is a temperature and a sudden thirst that quickly gathers strength and becomes a raging fever. The victim coughs blood, and their joints and sinews become swollen and agonising, often with blood from the eyes and nose. The victim dies in agony within half an hour.

The poison requires four drams of bloodroot, three drams of jadeleaf and mothflower.

Brainwrack, Greater Poison

Brainwrack attacks the stomach, kidney, liver and most importantly the brain, causing terrifying hallucinations and then killing the target.

The poison takes effect quickly, assailing the guts and spreading quickly throughout the abdomen and thence through the body to the brain. Dizziness and exhaustion quickly overtake the victim, along with confusion and immobility.

The victim suffers powerful hallucinations and agonizing seizures leading to death.

Brewing the poison requires four drams of winterbloom, and three drams each of jadeleaf and barrowgrass.

Maw of the Abyss, Greater Poison

This poison offers the victim as a sacrifice to the Abyss. It slowly kills them, sapping their will to live as it attacks all the parts of their body and their spirit. When they finally succumb, when their flesh dies, a spirit of the Abyss – a howling hungry horror – rises from the darkness into which they have fallen to inhabit their corpse.

They rise, howling, and seek to slay and devour all those around them. They are implacable, insane, and unliving.

Some Buruk Tepel say that the idea that this spirit comes from the Abyss is insane – by definition there can be nothing that leaves the Abyss. They say instead that the spirit of the orc is not consumed, but driven beyond the edge of madness by a final vision of the endless, devouring maw of that which waits

for us all beyond life. It is their spirit that rises in their cold flesh, no longer an orc but a devouring beast that seeks to still the beating of all hearts around them.

This poison is a true terror, for it promises not only death but annihilation.

It requires three drams each of barrowgrass and mothflower, and two drams each of jadeleaf and winterbloom.

The Lure of Tukai, Greater Poison

There is a spirit that lives beyond life, which some call Tukai. It is said to be an ancestor who was in life a Buruk Tepel, who took the path to the Abyss that we do not tread. Alone of all those who walk that dark road, she returned and more than returned. She is an ancestor, a spirit of utter madness that can be drawn with this poison to seize the body of an orc and scour away their sanity, their cunning, and their very being leaving a vessel of endless, unspeakable fury.

Not all Buruk Tepel believe this story – and we know that the poison works also with human vermin and they cannot hear the voices of their own ancestors, much less those of the True People.

The first symptom is a spreading heat – followed by short temper and rage, and violence, and then a murderous spree that can be ended only by slaying the victim.

This is especially cruel to use on a brave warrior – they lose their minds and then their own companions are forced to pitch them into the waiting Abyss. It can be a valuable object lesson in the price for incurring the ire of the Buruk Tepel.

The poison is not easy to brew, requiring four drams of bloodroot and jadeleaf, and two drams of winterblossom.

Halefog, Antidote

Brainwrack and bloodwrack share an antidote. It is an infusion, a grey resin boiled in water to fill the lungs and then spread through the body. It purges these poisons with coughing fits and copious vomiting that purge the malignant preparations from the body of the victim.

Those cured with this antidote are left weak, and will need further treatment. If the victim is not poisoned, the antidote causes coughing and vomiting that incapacitate the victim who has unwisely attempted to inhale these pale vapours.

Beware – as with any antidote if this is applied to the wrong poison it will cause swift death.

This antidote requires four drams each of bloodroot, winterbloom, and barrowgrass; two drams of jadeleaf; and one dram of mothflower.

Bitterfeast, Antidote

This lumpy red balm is like nothing so much as pieces of meat stewed in their own juices. Indeed, several drops of blood will improve the texture and help it to spread more smoothly.

It is applied to where the skin is thin, especially around the eyes, behind the ears, between the fingers. It will drive away certain dark spirits and serves as an antidote to maw of the abyss and the Lure of Tukai. In the process, it will cause the patient to be attacked by powerful spirits, often leaving them convulsing – but fear not. As long as you have applied the correct antidote, life will be preserved.

If it is administered to one who is not poisoned, then it causes a seizure that can easily result in death, exacerbated by the presence of any other poisons.

The recipe requires four drams each of barrowgrass and mothflower, three drams each of winterbloom and bloodroot, and one dram of jadeleaf.

The Art of the Abyss

The fourth art, the paramount art, is the art of the abyss. There are other worlds beyond the world that an orc can touch with their hand, and see with their eyes.

The ghulai talk of the worlds above, where the great spirits with whom they bargain reside. There are many worlds, and each is held within the belly of one of the great totems – the serpent, the scorpion, the toad, the spider, the crane, and the wasp. These worlds are interesting, but they are the realm of the ghulai; the Tepel do not concern themselves with the worlds of the totems.

The Tepel concern themselves rather with the worlds within and beyond, that are found on the shores of the howling abyss. The abyss exists beyond life, and in the spirit of every orc ever born. It hungers for life. Some Buruk Tepel believe that our spirits come rise the howling abyss, and must return there. Others believe that our spirits come from the world, and that the howling abyss hungers to devour them.

After death, we are devoured and unmade by the abyss that lies beyond life. Some are strong enough to cross the abyss and they are our ancestors, who seek to guide us. Some ancestors are powerful enough that they can carry the spirits of the dead across the abyss, if they are worthy. These are the great ancestors. Each clan is watched over by one of the great ancestors, and the greatest clans are watched over by several.

The great ancestors of the toad clan are Urdgar-of-the-Shadows and Shadmok-the-Patient. They teach us to act with subtlety and cunning, and to move with caution and surety. They inspire our people to build the stone holts, and to wait and watch where others act rashly. They whispered to the het of the Stone Toad, and helped us reclaim Ur Betal, our ancient homelands south of the Great Forest that the vermin call Reikos.

Any orc of the True People might hear Urdgar-of-the-Shadows and Shadmok-the-Patient, but we hear them most clearly and they speak to us most directly. They favour the toad clan above other clans, because we

understand them better than the other clans.

The shaman hear the ancestors most clearly, but they are often distracted by the cacophony of voices of many ancestors. The Tepel can help the shaman to hear Urdgar-of-the-Shadows and Shadmok-the-Patient more clearly, refining their sense of the worlds beyond as we refine the warriors with our preparations.

Yet even the shaman perceive the worlds beyond only dimly. Only the Buruk Tepel really understand the howling abyss, for only they can actually walk the near shores and gaze into the emptiness that lies at the heart of all things.

The Dream Gate

Every Tepel knows that the final test that must be passed to become one of the Buruk Tepel is to uncover and brew the potion that is called the *dream Gate*, or the *empty threshold*. This is the last great art of the True People – the elixir that slows the heart and stills the breath but keeps the spirit safe as it steps beyond the world that can be seen and touched and onto the black rock and coarse sand of the near shore.

Only the Buruk Tepel can stand on the near shore and endure the call of the howling abyss. I will tell you, it is only by a constant act of will that we can resist that call. Once it is felt, it will tug at the spirit forever after, even after you have returned to the world of meat and breath. This is why only the strongest become Buruk Tepel – the weak surrender to the howling abyss, spilling out their life so they may be one with it, lost forever and devoured by the emptiness.

Since only the Buruk Tepel can stand on the near shore, so any who can stand on the near shore must by their nature be Buruk Tepel. Even the ancestors do not stand on the near shore. They pass over the howling abyss, but they do not pause for they are about their own business. In that place they neither mark nor concern themselves with the Buruk Tepel.

The near shore is not a place as your house is a place, or the Mallum is a place. When the Buruk Tepel meet there, we do not see with the eyes of the body but with the eyes of the spirit. I have spoken to other Buruk Tepel and

where I see a stand of dead trees, they see a rocky shore or a ruined hall, or a frog-haunted marsh.

The communion of the Buruk Tepel is the highest expression of our art. It is through our communion that the True People are guided, refined so that they may pass across the howling abyss. It is in our councils that the boundaries are set; that the terms of war between the clans are set out; that the trajectory of the war against the human kine is laid. We are the heart and the spirit of the True People, as the het are the muscles, and the ghulai the breath, and the warriors the blood and bile that flows through the body of the tribe.

Yet we never forget that we are visitors on the near shore, and that the near shore lies on the edge of an annihilation so profound it cannot be encompassed. As I have said, we feel the tug of that place at all times. But there is more.

We all know that there is a direction that we might move that takes us away from the place where we meet. A path that leads down towards the brink of nothingness. It is said that any of us might choose to walk that path, away from the meeting place, and gaze at last upon the final mystery. We might walk from that place to the crumbling edge, and look into the heart of the howling abyss and perhaps even gain a glimpse of the far shores, shining like a star beyond the hungry emptiness.

No Buruk Tepel who has taken that path has ever returned. Their flesh continues to breathe, their hearts to beat, but they are empty. Their spirit is gone.

There are many explanations but I believe that to gaze upon the abyss is to be gazed upon in turn, and no orc who is not already an ancestor can endure that gaze without being unmade.

Yet there are also those who claim that if one can gaze upon the abyss, and comprehend it, then one can pass it easily and come at last to the far shore from which only the ancestors return.



Perhaps one day you who read this will make that journey yourself, and stand beneath the empty sky, and hear the gentle call of the abyss for yourself.

Perhaps.

No Buruk Tepel will record the recipe for the *empty threshold*. It is our most profound art,

and our most profound secret, and there can only be so many Buruk Tepel.

Many of those ghulai who have learned of the *empty threshold* covet it absolutely, but it is not for them. It is said that some have tried to duplicate our exalted art with their magic and they have failed utterly. Failed, and died. This is a profound mystery, not a tawdry trick of mana stones and totem spirits.

The Spirit Gate

I have spoken of the ancestors. Every orc hears them, even those orcs who are not part of the people. They are the ones who have gone before, who have crossed the Howling Abyss and return to speak to us when our blood sings, when our spirits are close to theirs.

The spirit gate is a liquor which is prepared using a dose of Black Lotus powder, carefully combined with doses of each of the other herbs. Like the Dream Gate the precise combination of doses is a secret, shared only with the most trusted Tepel.

The liquor is precious indeed. It is drunk as part of the ceremony of the ancestors, which the Buruk Tepel also teach only to their most trusted apprentices. A single orc is chosen to drink first, and becomes the guide who goes ahead. Two other orcs are chosen also, and between them they finish the rest of the liquor.

As the spirit gate does its work, the mothflower quickly numbs all sensation

until the three orcs fall into a stupor barely distinguishable by death. Their heartbeat slows, their breathing becomes almost undetectably shallow, all the organs of their bodies fall silent. The jadeleaf, the barrowgrass, and the winterbloom work on them, bringing them to the brink of extinction – but keeping them at the very edge.

Their blood becomes sluggish – yet it does not grow cold. The bloodroot keeps it flowing, and keeps it warm, keeping life within them but freeing their spirits to step out and beyond but rather than turn towards the shores of the abyss, instead they turn away, coming instead to meeting places where they may convene with the ancestors..

Travelling in the Abyss

No orc travels alone.

With the power of the spirit gate, the three orcs step from the mortal world into the world within and beyond. They turn away from the edge of the Abyss, so that they do not find the place that the Buruk Tepel visit with the dream gate. They find another place. Often it is a wood. Sometimes it is a battlefield. Sometimes it is a dark place without form.

They do not travel alone. From the spirits of the three orcs, a new entity is drawn. Its nature is a mystery. Many Buruk Tepel have made a study of the creature as best they may, but they have learned little. We think that it is in some way made of the bond between the orcs who travel through the spirit gate. It is the bonds of the people made manifest. It takes the form of a Druj, but it is possible that for orcs of another tribe it might take a different form. If only we had more Black Lotus we might have sufficient to experiment!

I have heard that there have been times when the people of the South have offered tribute in return for a chance to pass through the spirit gate. They kept their secrets when they returned, but the stories I have heard they said that a guide appeared to them also and was one of their people. Perhaps they told the truth but who can say? The people of the South prize their own honesty the way a mad dog eats its own stools.

Our guide leads the people – or their spirits – to the presence of an ancestor.

As they travel, the guide answers questions – but only one from each orc. It might also speak of other things. Its ways are unpredictable, but we have never heard of it lying in answer to a question – why would it lie? It may speak of the ancestors, or ask questions of its own. It is wise to remember that whatever else it is it is one of the people and it is cunning.

The guide leads the three orcs to the presence of an ancestor. I have passed through the spirit gate three times in my life – all before I became Buruk Tepel. The Buruk Tepel do not use the spirit gate – although this is custom rather than law.

The ancestor may be alone, or the shades of other orcs may be present. The first time I passed through the spirit gate I came into the presence of Shadmok-the-Patient, tending the garden of the Stone Toad with two apprentices. My companions and I observed for a little time, and then I plucked up the courage to speak to the Patient one, who took me for another apprentice.

The spirits of the ancestors know us, but they sometimes mistake us for people they knew before they passed across the abyss. They speak, and may answer questions. They offer guidance. They allow us to touch the profound heart of what it means to be of the people. It is an experience like no other, as different to the dream gate as the dream gate is to a sleeping dream.

After a time, the bodies of those who have passed through the spirit gate begin to die. The flesh cannot live without the spirit, not truly. An urgency comes, and the orcs know they must depart the presence of the ancestors. They return through the darkness to their bodies, and wake as if from a dream.

It is difficult to capture in writing the experience of the spirit gate. It is profound, but it is sometimes confusing. The third time I passed the gate I spoke with an ancestor I did not know, my only guidance that of the guide. She was a warrior ancestor, and for a time I feared for my life. I have heard it said that one who is slain while walking as spirit will never return to their body, but I have also heard it said that those killed as spirits awaken to their bodies when their companions return. Some accounts say they awaken on the

verge of death and must be quickly tended.

I think that all three of these stories are true, and that sometimes the spirit dies and sometimes it does not. I urge caution – but all the people know the value of caution.

The Tepel's Gate

These are not as closely guarded secrets as those of the Abyss itself, but there are two preparations which we call the Lesser Gate and the Greater Gate.

Neither uses Black Lotus – a clear indication of their lesser power.

They take the form of infusions, and are intended to be heated in water over a naked flame and the steam inhaled.

The lesser gate opens the door of perception such that the Buruk Tepel can see the true nature and provenance of an object. It is sometimes called the Gate of the Moth, for it requires two drams of mothflower to prepare. It takes the form of a blue, volatile, oily substance that dissolves quickly in hot water.

The greater gate is much more profound. It is an exotic red crumbling substance that smells of dried spices, and when the steam it produces is inhaled it allows the Tepel to enter a trance that lets them peer into the future, and the present, and the past – letting them gain insight that will guide the people toward the best possible future. The greater gate requires two drams of winterbloom, and one dram each of barrowgrass and jadeleaf.

The ghulai

The ghulai consider themselves wise, but truly they are naught but tricksters. Do not mistake – they may be cunning. They may be refined such that they can cross the howling abyss. They might become ancestors, as any of the True People might. Yet they are not truly wise. They dabble in shadows and embers while we look into the darkness, and touch the flame.

I call them tricks, but they are useful tricks. Some ghulai master tricks that let them fight alongside the warriors, scattering the enemies of the True People, or supplementing the more valuable arts of the Tepel with their words and gestures.

The most useful ghulai are those who have made a study of the six great totem spirits and learnt to invoke the blessings and power that come from the worlds above.

The Buruk Tepel study the tricks of the ghulai, and favour those who put their trickery in their service, and in the service of the people.

Of the great totems that the ghulai evoke, three in particular are of interest to the Tepel, and the Buruk.

The tricks of the Twin Serpents

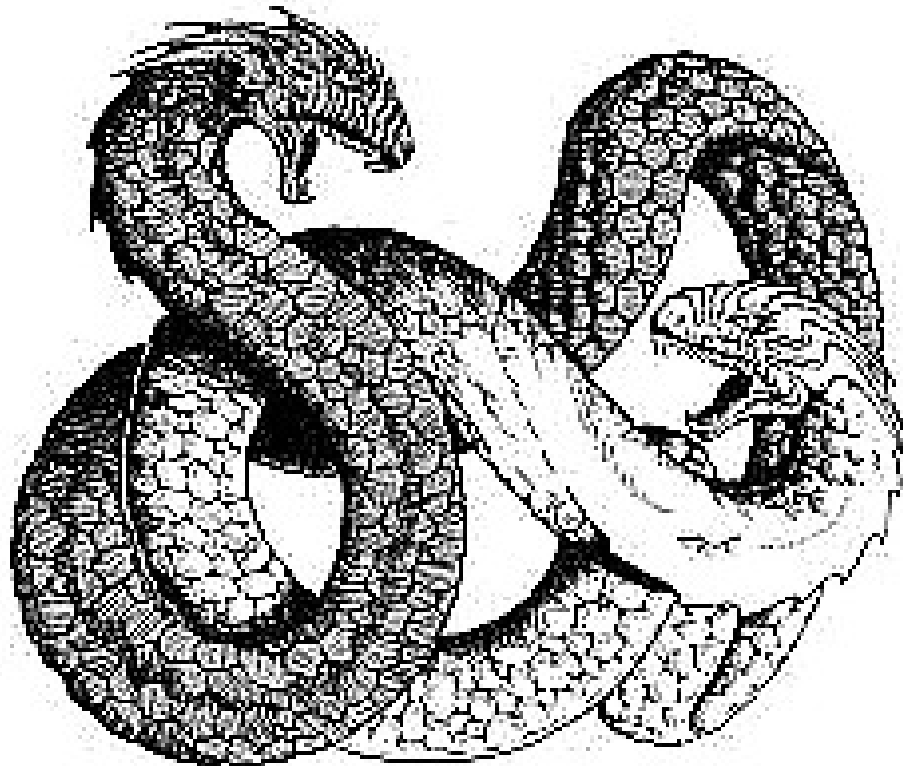
Red serpent is the slitherer, the dancer, the uncoiled. Her scales glitter like embers and whose eyes burn like flames. A rainbow of flame runs along her soft scaled body – red, orange, yellow, crimson, scarlet, gold, amber, copper, and bronze. Each time she sheds her skin she is remade, for she is the essence of transformation.

Ebon Serpent is the coiled one, who waits in the darkness. His scales are smoke, night, and darkness. His eyes are clouds, mist, and fog. He is patient and he is cunning. He moves quietly and cautiously until he is close enough to his prey to strike – or to descend on them from above, wrapping them in his deadly crushing coils.

There are a few secrets of Red Serpent in particular that are useful to the Tepel.

Some of these ghulai who petition the serpent totems for their blessings know a rite that allows them to create a material that the Tepel can use to brew the most powerful potions without the need for star metal. I do not know how this is done, beyond that it requires ambergelt and handfuls of herbs, and the stones of mana that the ghulai prize so much.

The most cunning of the ghulai who wield the power of the serpent totems can create even more marvellous substances. One that is of interest to the Buruk Tepel in particular is a substance that can overcome any poison or disease, no matter how potent it might be. Every Buruk Tepel seeks to possess one of these stones – not out of fear but as a precaution against the jealousy of their rivals and the schemes of their apprentices. These stones are by no means easy to create, and require a measure of star metal, but they are one of the few things of value the ghulai can create that the arts of the Buruk Tepel cannot duplicate.



The tricks of Bone Scorpion

The ghulai who study the ways of Bone Scorpion are the most powerful of the ghulai. Their mastery lets them duplicate some of the arts of the Tepel with their tricks. They can heal and harm, they can bring life and death, as the Tepel do.

One of their tricks in particular is useful to the Tepel – they can sunder and cultivate the potency of the sacred herbs such that a few doses can be stretched to treat many warriors, or make many potions. This rite is of most value to the Tepel, whose stocks of herbs are often limited by the caution or wisdom of the Buruk Tepel.



The tricks of Mud Toad

Mud Toad lurks in the shallows, half buried in the mud. The spines on her back pierce the foot of the unwary, and bring a painful slow death. She watches all things, and judges them. She is spiteful, and cold, and her gaze is an echo of the gaze of the howling abyss.

Those ghulai who seek the mysteries of mud toad master tricks of malediction and cursing. Yet mud toad is also wise, and the best of them learn wisdom by studying her ways.

Every Tepel worth their scars wishes to have a ghulai versed in the lore of mud toad to tend their gardens, for they are keen eyed and ruthless. They will exterminate the vermin that prey on the plants, and uproot the weeds that seek to choke the sacred herbs.

The tricks of Amber Widow

The Amber Widow is a potent totem, full of subtlety and cunning. She appears delicate, but her golden webs are strong as forged steel. She is the most mysterious and esoteric of the totems, and her arts are of little use to the Tepel who deal in flesh and breath.

Many of the ghulai who study Amber Widow consider themselves the equals of the Buruk Tepel, and are ambitious. They make excellent ambassadors to the people of the Southern Shore, or the Northern Wastes – the further away they are sent the better.

The tricks of Sun Crane

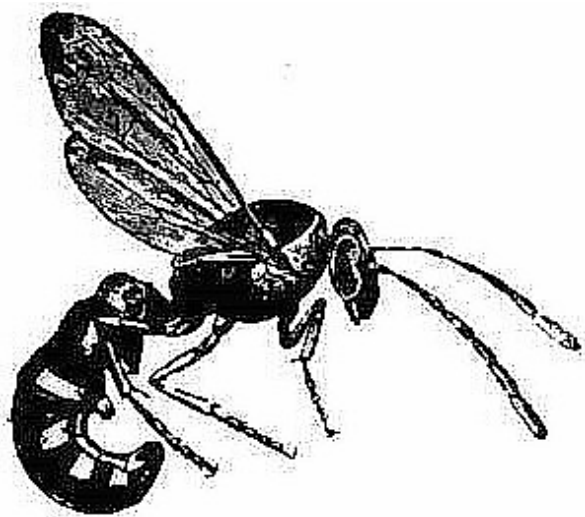
The Sun Crane has the keenest eyes of the totem spirits, and soars on wings of pale light. Her beak is sharp as a razor, and she strikes with great precision.

This totem is among the weakest, but those ghulai who seek her mysteries are not to be underestimated. Their ability to uncover secrets, and discover flaws and weaknesses, is without compare.

Yet they are creatures of division. Their nature is to cleave things apart, to separate them, as their tricks can separate the fruit of the Tepels arts into the sacred herbs that compose it – which is one of their most useful abilities.

It is said that some of them know tricks that can aid a Tepel to make potions more efficiently – to purify a herb so that its potency is greater and a single dram can serve as two for example – and that they know a way to allow one Tepel to share their knowledge with another. Needless to say, many Tepel are suspicious of this story. To share with another is to strengthen them by weakening oneself. The ghulai who seek the power of Sun Crane are not to be trusted for all that they claim to be able to aid the Tepel.





The tricks of Fire Wasp

The fire wasp is a weak totem, an unsubtle spirit of bluster, a posturing totem whose use is in drawing the eye and ire of the enemies of the people so that more cunning warriors may strike from stealth. Fire Wasp appears imposing, but his wings are fragile. The True People know how to exploit his weaknesses, and the weakness of those

who look to him for guidance.

Not many ghulai study his mysteries and those who do are often seen as being little more than warriors with special abilities. They have their value, but their usefulness is to the het and the warriors not to the Tepel. The blessings of fire wasp may make a warrior stronger, but they do little to quell rashness. Such tricks are suited to the people of the West, not the True People.

Dealing with the ghulai

The ghulai are useful, but they tend to be arrogant. They think that their mysteries and tricks make them more important than they are. Yet even they must acknowledge the power of the Tepel.

All ghulai desire power, which is well and good, but their greatest power cannot be wielded without the aid of the Tepel. There are potions that the Tepel can make which allow the ghulai to replenish their ability to wield their tricks, and to draw on the ancestors to perform their rites more often and with greater facility.

The Buruk Tepel do not fear the ghulai. They control access to the powerful potions, which can help the ghulai to achieve their most effective tricks. They employ the arts of life, war, and death to ensure the ghulai do not over-reach themselves.

The promise of the draughts that keep an orc from falling into the abyss, as well as the threat of withdrawing access to the potent elixirs that allow the

ghulai to employ their tricks, and the fear of exile and death at the hands of the Buruk Tepel and the True People who follow them, is more than enough to ensure the ghulai remember their place.

These potions are considered part of the Art of War. There are a large number of them, but the most significant ones are those potions that help in the performance of the rites of the Twin Serpents and the Bone Scorpion which can help to guide the het and the warriors in their destruction of the human vermin.

The Leiou

Every Tepel knows that the human cattle have a preparation that helps them hear the voices of their ancestors more clearly. Yet only the Buruk Tepel truly understand the significance of this substance – or these substances rather. The vermin possess a unique ability to let their ancestors touch the world around them, leaving a spiritual presence that warps and influences the minds and actions of others.

The key to this ability appears to be the preparation they call “the leiou”.

The recent reconquest of Ur Betal has allowed us a unique opportunity to examine this preparation, and to gather information about its properties and how it is made. I should warn you that I found it both frustrating and enlightening in equal part.

The preparation itself is relatively straightforward, using an uncommon but by no means rare product as its base. Wynum is a white sticky sap. The human vermin thicken it and create a chewy lozenge that seems to serve as a mild soporific. Those who sleep under the effect of wynum sap, reportedly do not dream – which is of course interesting in and of itself.

Wynum sap is the base, but there are a number of other substances that are used in the preparation of the leiou,

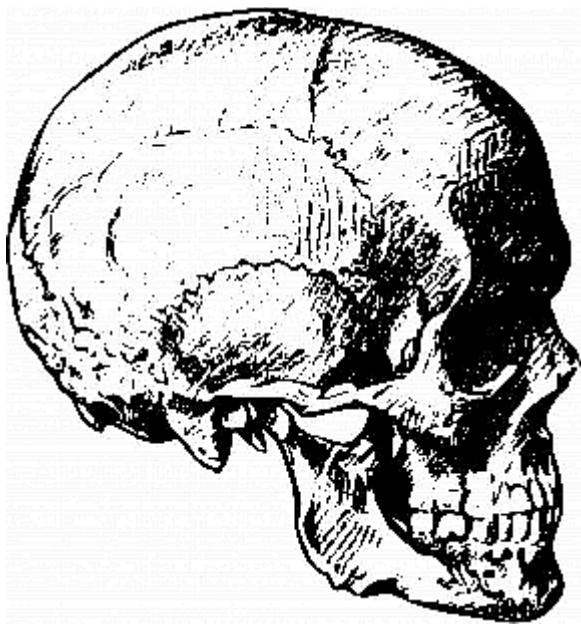
There is a lot of tedious history associated with the discovery and creation of the leiou. I have interrogated some of those who have participated in its manufacture, and read words written by those who have made a more in-depth assessment – but I found it quite irrelevant. The only part of it that seems of value was that the inspiration for its creation was apparently the Nava'ar, and the leiou was the product of a joint effort with the Highborn vermin.



I am unsurprised that the Nava'ar were involved, and I think it is likely that they may have stolen their basic procedures from one of the people. The leiou itself is in its refined state a purple powder. Different vermin use it in different ways. Neat, it is dry enough to be used as an incense – the smoke is taken into the lungs.

They also mix it with oil, with liquids, and more rarely with beast fat to create a cream, or with thickening agents to create a lozenge. It seems that the way it is consumed does not matter.

Under interrogation their priests make all sorts of wild claims – it is very possible that the majority do not understand what they are doing more than a bird beating a snail against a rock understands how to beat metal into the shape of armour. It is equally as likely, the equivalent of their Buruk Tepel may intentionally conceal the truth of leiou's properties from their minions to discourage their ambitions. Either way, I have discounted most of the claims that I have heard – including raucous assertions that there is a third form of wynum, called “the truest leiou” that provides incredible spiritual powers. If such a thing existed, then anyone would give their own skin to acquire a dose.



The properties of the leiou

Leiou is a mild poison, like many narcotics. The human vermin are able to safely process the toxins, however, the people are not. While wynum provides a restful sleep without dreams, the substances added to create the leiou mean that the preparation causes humans to experience vivid, lucid dreams.

Their priests have an ability to use the leiou to guide or influence these dreams as a way to influence the humans who consume it.

As you can imagine, this ability to touch dreams is of great interest. Yet all my interrogations and exploration – and the guarded comments of the other

Buruk Tepel I have discussed it with – indicate that it is extremely limited and there is no sign that the leiou allows vermin to approach the abyss.

This is just as well – imagine if the humans were able to send spies to the shores of the abyss!

For the people, however, leiou acts as a mild emetic. I have observed its use on slaves, and on volunteers, and have even smoked a few small doses myself. The method of application does not seem to matter – exposure to leiou makes the people nauseous, dizzy, uncomfortable, and in some cases vomitous.

Unfortunately, the toxins appear to be part of what gives the leiou its power, and poison and properties are indivisible.

The Stone Toad shaman Téklus helped me with a series of experiments shortly after the capture of the gardens of Urith Barath in which we tried to discover if the leiou had any effect on her ability to hear the ancestors. She was very reticent and I had to apply significant pressure to secure her assistance – she had a superstitious fear that the leiou might silence the voices that guided her. Her fears were groundless – but my experiments were inconclusive. The leiou appeared to neither encourage nor suppress the voices – which is unsurprising. The idea that some narcotic prepared by the humans might be of any interest to those who have gone before us, those who can cross the abyss, is risible.

This leiou clearly unlocks something inside the human vermin, something they can learn to exploit in a way that is fascinating and faintly disturbing. There has been talk from time to time of harnessing the leiou using slaves. I am not of this faction – I find the very idea distasteful. Human ancestors – assuming they even exist – are fit only to be slaves. It is not right for any of the people to respect them, and no matter how useful their little tricks are I have seen nothing that their priests can do that I would find valuable or that could not be replicated with the right mix of herbs and drugs.

The touch of the human ancestors

I took some of the slaves they called priests and persuaded them to demonstrate their tricks. Some of them were surprisingly resistant, and several died rather than do as they were instructed. But a handful seemed

almost over-eager to believe that I was interested in their “Way of Faith”.

They make no secret of the fact that the leiou allows them to control their fellow vermin. They shape their minds with the leiou the way a Buruk Tepel might use drugs to shape the mind of one of their followers. The leiou appears to be easier, but the effects are much less durable and do not linger. They seem to believe their powers to control others come from the boons their ancestors give them.

Their ancestors offer them three boons.

First, they can leave their touch on the world, in the way the people might evoke the Abyss to touch the world during the rites of dominion. This can create a strong feeling in an area, or bound up with an object or a creature. Surprising as it might seem, they can create these feelings in the people as well as in their fellow vermin. They claim also to be able to remove these feelings in the same way although their ability to do so is variable. After some observation and discussion with a few Stone Toad ghulai, it seems that this power is comparable to their ability to focus the power of their totems into a space, or onto a person, to create an influence. Only much more limited.

Second, they can perform some forms of spiritual shaping or alteration. They can change the kinds of influence they can create depending on which ancestors they create a connection to – this was as you can imagine very interesting. They can guide dreams. They can also place an indelible yet invisible brand on a creature that they say only another of their priests can perceive – although I have heard from another studying the leiou that it is quite easy for the people to see these marks using the arts of the Tepel.



Finally, they claim to be able to exert dominion over the spirits of the dead which is extremely interesting. They can drive the influence of the dead away from a person or a thing, and in some cases they can even destroy these spirits. Or so they claim – I saw

no evidence of it. They seemed to think this was a major and significant power, but obviously there was no real opportunity to demonstrate it. Nobody was interested in sacrificing one of the embodied as part of an experiment. Even if they were created from vermin, they were simply too valuable to the fight against the usurpers.

The priests were quick to assure me that their miraculous ceremonies – their tricks – were for humans alone. While the slave orcs of their tribe had accepted the human ancestors in place of their own (another sure sign of their weakness), they were unable to learn the secrets of using the leiou despite all their efforts.

Indeed, they barely seemed capable of explaining how their tricks worked in ways that could be understood. I quickly became tired of them and had them put down – their arrogance became unacceptable. It is clear that they use these drugs to control the rest of their vermin and to try to control the people sworn to their armies.

A use for leiou

One use for leiou has become very apparent. Because it allows the human vermin to connect to the abyss – in a blind, groping way – it has a use to the people that is not immediately obvious. Dosing the human vermin with leiou before they are used in the rites of domination seems to greatly increase the speed with which the power of dread can be raised, the strength of that dread, and the distance to which it spreads. It is as if their experience of the rites is magnified, making it easier for us to use their terror to shape the touch of the abyss on the world.

I have not been involved in the shaping of the embodied crafted in Reikos, but I have heard that the use of the leiou in those rites has also made for more powerful – although more dangerous – creatures. The embodied made from the assassins and warriors of the Highborn vermin seem to retain more of their awareness of who they were while they were alive if they are exposed to the leiou before the rites are begun. While they are more effective in battle – and seem utterly consumed with hatred for those who betrayed and abandoned them – they are also less tractable.

This bonus is not without side-effects however. There are several stories that some of the human vermin who do not describe themselves as priests are able to instinctively use exposure to the leiou to invoke their mewling ancestors, creating unexpected auras that inspire the slaves and make it harder to break them. I have not seen it myself, but one I believe would not lie to me has. It is important that we keep the vermin away from the leiou, and that those who understand its preparation are carefully segregated from the rest of the herd.

Further studies

The leiou is worth further study. If a way could be found to overcome or counteract the nausea it causes in the people, it might be a useful tool. Indeed, one of the Highborn Tepel has told me under interrogation that they use the leiou to make potions of their own that are unknown to the people. She died before she could be persuaded to explain how they are made or what they do.

Finding a way to use the leiou to control the human vermin would be very useful. Even more, the people can feel the touch of the human ancestors as easily as the vermin do, and so mastery of the leiou might be a way to extend the power of the True People over the other orcs.

Also, I am a little concerned that the vermin might find a way to turn the leiou into a weapon to use against the people. It can be burnt as an incense, which means it can effect those who inhale it, and so it could perhaps be used as the basis of a miasma that sickens and incapacitates the people. It is certainly possible to poison one of the people with the leiou although the results – nausea and vomiting – are hardly unique and of limited application.

It might be interesting to find out more about the so-called human ancestors. I find it hard to believe more than a handful of them are cunning enough to have found a way across the abyss, and harder to believe that they have found the way without aid from the people. There are some similarities to some of the rubbish they spout and the dogma of the Western people, or the tricks peddled by the people of the Southern Shore.

I think it is unlikely that the vermin have anything to teach us – though it might be interesting to examine the leiou induced potions they make of course.

The Brackblood Pestilence

The sickness is a development and refinement of the poison known as *ashwater*. Unlike the poison, the pestilence takes several days to kill the victim – but it is contagious and harms only human vermin. The people are left untouched. The recipe for creating the pestilence is a refinement of the *Buruk's Blade* – like the poisons *ashwater* and *gutwreck* it mimics some of the symptoms that may come from drinking befouled water.

There are four stages to the progression of the sickness. A victim passes through the stages one at a time until they are cured or the abyss claims them. It takes around a day for a victim to pass through each stage, killing them in less than a week.

The first day after the pestilence takes hold the victim feels cold and clammy, and the skin on their hands and feet becomes wrinkled. Their mouth is dry, and their bowel movements are voluminous, watery, and clear.

The second day, these symptoms are joined by vomiting and stomach cramps. If they are cut, their blood is thick and viscous. They are lethargic, and find it difficult to apply themselves. This symptom can be addressed with *winterbloom*, or the tricks of the *ghulai*, but returns after an hour or so.

The third day, the symptoms are impossible to ignore. Their soft skin takes on a grey-blue tinge and breathing becomes more difficult. Their blood flows slowly – even a serious wound will take some time to bleed out – but the blood smells foul like rotting fish. Their health deteriorates greatly – any wound may be extremely serious.

On the last day, the body is overwhelmed. Some few of strong will can fight off the sickness and recover, but if they do not then nothing can save them. The abyss grows within their bellies and devours them from within.

There is a hidden danger – a trap – in the sickness. The arts of the apothecary speed the course of the disease. As with the poison from which it has been refined, the wrong antidote represents a deadly mistake.

The worst is *gravestay* which hides the symptoms but causes the disease to

progress. Likewise, a victim beyond the first stage who relies on a potion such as *sourchill* to counter their weakness finds that not only is their strength short-lived, but that the pestilence has moved swiftly on to the next stage with potentially lethal consequences.

Only *bloodwrack* will cure the sickness for one who lacks the will to fight for their lives. Even *Tepel's resort* and *lifedraught* will just progress the pestilence.

Brewing a dose of the *brackblood plague* requires four drams of *winterbloom*, and a dram each of *jadeleaf*, *mothflower*, and *barrowgrass*. The herbs are prepared in a quarter pint of blood – ideally the blood of the human vermin but in a pinch any warm fresh blood will do – simmered and reduced down to create a thick jelly to which a quarter pint of brackish water is added. The mixture is again reduced. Finally, a quarter pint of stale urine is added and the mixture again reduced. The thick, reddish liquid that results is sufficient to infect one of the human vermin with the *brackblood pestilence* and from there it may be spread to others with whom they share water.

With the aid of the *ghulai*, it is possible to spread the pestilence over a much larger area. The trick is that the pestilence breeds and spreads in water. The tricks of those *ghulai* who study the mysteries of *Bone Scorpion* can create a tumultuous downpour that imbeds the pestilence into the rivers, streams, and wells. At the same time, the curse that taints the blood will make the human vermin in an area much more susceptible to illness, helping the *brackblood* sickness to gain a purchase and spread more quickly.

Those same secrets of the *Bone Scorpion* totem that help spread the sickness can be used to cure it, however, a fact that should be carefully concealed. There are tricks that the human vermin might use to purify the waters, and empower them to cleanse the sickness in those who drink them. This is another reason why it is important to kill any human *ghulai* that we can find who might discern this secret.

Ashwater

Cear, odourless, tasteless liquid . Indistinguishable from water.

At first, the victim feels a little nauseous, a little unwell. They may vomit, and

they may become dizzy. After around fifteen minutes, they begin to feel thirsty, a feeling which worsens no matter how much they drink. This is accompanied by stabbing stomach pains, and they will almost certainly vomit at this stage and may soil themselves. Bowel movements are voluminous – to put it mildly – and very watery. Their organs are already beginning to die.

Their breathing is also effected, becoming laboured and difficult. Their blood is viscous and fould smelling – which can have minor positive effects but they are more than counteracted by the agonising pain in the gut and the thirst. It becomes almost impossible for them to concentrate, leaving them weakened and barely able to defend themselves.

After half an hour, enough of their organs have died that they cannot sustain life. They suffer a fatal seizure, and die.

As with all potent poisons of this type, the liquid remains dangerous for only a short time after it is brewed, so it must be imbibed swiftly by the victim.

Four drams of winterbloom, and two drams each of jadeleaf, mothflower, and barrowgrass.

Gutwreck

Clear, odourless, tasteless liquid . Indistinguishable from water.

Shortly after imbibing the poison, the victim begins to feel warm and unwell, as if slightly feverish. After five minutes or so, the thin membranes in their nose will rupture, causing a voluminous nosebleed – this is often enough by itself to induce panic. Their head will begin to ache, and the ache will grow as the poison does its work. They will feel a pain in their guts as if they are being twisted.

After another ten minutes the poison is well about its work. They are unable to move, enervated and feverish. They cannot stand, much less fight or wield their magic. Their insides feel as if they are being turned slowly around a stick, constricting and twisting, and tightening.

After a further fifteen minutes, it is too late. The entrails rupture bloodily, ripping themselves apart and leaving the victim writhing in agony followed by merciful death.

Four drams of bloodroot, and two drams each of barrowgrass, winterbloom, and jadeleaf.

Brackblood

As detailed above. It is a vile tasting liquid that leaves the drinker nauseous – but they are now suffering the Brackblood Pestilence.

Four drams of winterbloom, and a dram each of jadeleaf, mothflower, and barrowgrass.

Deathsleep

A thin, tan salve that smells of slightly spoiled offal.

The antidote to both Ashwater and Gutwrench. It is occasionally mistaken for another poison, with amusing and fatal repercussions. Assuming it is applied correctly, it causes the victim to experience a powerful chill, creeping enervation, and then unconsciousness that lasts at least five minutes. During that time the patient cannot be wakened at all, in a stupor that is sometimes mistaken for death.

After a few minutes though, they recover – assuming that the antidote was not applied to the wrong poison. If it was, they will never recover from their stupor and death is assured.

Regardless, after the antidote does its work, the target is left both envenomed and weakened, although these conditions can be removed in the usual fashion and should not prove an obstacle to the canny Tepel – a Ghulai might even be instructed to remove these lingering symptoms.

The antidote requires five drams each of bloodroot, winterbloom, and jadeleaf.

OOC APPENDIX

This book represents the translation of a herbal belonging to the unnamed Buruk Tepel of the Stone Toad clan – a Druj master apothecary. It contains significant amounts of lore, as well as a number of recipes that can be studied by a character with the Apothecary skill to enable them to make new potions.

There are four specific skills that can be learned from this book – one potion that can be learnt by anyone who already knows the Legacy of Thorns recipe, and three that can be learned by a character who takes the Extra Recipe skill.

Using the Herbal

A character with the Legacy of Thorns skill who has this text in their hands can study the appropriate in-character section and learn to make the Serpent Tooth blade venom. They can have this ability added to their character by taking the book to GOD.

Alternatively, a character can study the appropriate in-character sections of the book and spend an experience point to gain the Extra Recipe skill that covers one of the three sets of potions. It is *not* possible for someone who has the skill to teach it to someone else – all new students must have access to this herbal.

It is not possible to discover the precise mechanical effects of any of these potions without making and then in-character experimenting with them.

Spreading the Lore

The contents of this book may be entered into Imperial Lore.

Individual recipe sets, or the serpent tooth recipe, may be added to Imperial Lore with a Senate motion and 10 Thrones for *each* recipe. Thus to add The Endless Struggle recipe set and the recipe for Serpent Tooth to Imperial lore would require 20 Thrones. Once added to Imperial lore, the recipes would appear on the main wiki and any character would be able to select them without reference to this book.

Alternatively, all three recipe sets and the Serpent Tooth recipe as a set may be added to Imperial Lore with a Senate motion and 25 Thrones.

New Potion

Serpent Tooth

This potion is part of the lore of "Legacy of Thorns". Mastery of that potion set is required to learn to brew this potion, but anyone who has mastered those recipes can learn to make this potion without expending additional experience points by bringing this tome to GOD.

New Recipes

The Endless Struggle

The Endless Struggle is a set of potion recipes that consists of two potions – *Warspice* and *Corpseskin*. Mastery of this set of recipes can be purchased with the Extra Recipes skill, provided the character has access to this herbal.

The Bonds of the Bridge

The bonds of the bridge is a set of potion recipes that consists of four potions – *Butchers' Gate*, *Tukai's Haven*, *Pakad's Path*, and *Chikad's Scream*. Mastery of this set of recipes can be purchased with the Extra Recipes skill, provided the character has access to this document.

The Buruk's Blade

The Buruk's Blade consists of the recipes *Ashwater*, *Gutwreck*, *Brackblood*, and *Deathsleep*. Mastery of this set of recipes can be purchased with the Extra Recipes skill, provided the character has access to this document.