

Kreis: Dark Druidism

Knacks: Choking Spores, Entangling Vine, Out of Season, Stinging Swarm, Veil of Thorns

Apprentice Degree: Green Thumb

Adept Degree: Nature's Child

Master Degree: Wicker Man

Description: Kreis is an extremely rare Sorcery, found only in the isolated Eisen village of Rabensumpf and passed on in the bloodline of the family that has ruled the town for decades. The Sorcery's rituals have been hopelessly intermingled with corrupted teachings of the Objectionist faith, turning the entire village into a cult to an all but forgotten Bargainer power.

On the surface, Kreis appears to be a harmless and even beneficial Sorcery. Its practitioners use obscure rituals to ensure a bountiful harvest, and maintain their powers through similar rituals at sunrise and sunset, and on "holy days" like Midsummer, Midwinter, and the first day of each new season. As a Sorcerer increases in power, the rituals become more elaborate and more gruesome: the most powerful rituals are empowered by human sacrifice.

The powers of Kreis revolve around the natural cycle of life and death—planting, growth, harvest, and especially decay, as well as those natural creatures closely associated with that cycle: worms, ants, bees, and even rats. Sorcerers also develop an affinity for fungi and parasitic creatures like mosquitoes, ticks, and leeches. To ensure that they can use their powers, even when traveling or in the city, Sorcerers are known to carry the trappings of their magic with them: they are seldom without a pocketful of seeds or a pouch of mushroom spores, and some go so far as to infest their own clothing (or bodies) with lice, ticks, leeches, or maggots.

Like any Bargainer's Art, Kreis takes a physical toll on its practitioners, though these changes are less overt than most. The Sorcerer's blood thickens and begins to resemble dark tree sap more than human blood. In addition, his body hair grows coarse and jagged, like the hairs on a fly's leg, though this can be easily disguised by regular shaving (though the hair regrows very quickly, and need to be excised at least twice a day) or with the proper clothing. In addition, the changes in his body render the Sorcerer sterile (however, see the Master level ability, below).

Apprentice (Green Thumb): The earliest gifts of Kreis make a Sorcerer a blessing to any farming village, and indeed, this is how they have wormed their way into peaceful communities to corrupt the locals and find victims for their occasional human sacrifices. Any plant under the Sorcerer's care and "blessed" by his annual rituals yields more grain, fruit, or other product than normal; the increase is equal to 33 percent per Mastery Level. The Sorcerer also gains one Free Raise per Mastery Level to any use of the Flora Knack, or when using the Fauna Knack with respect to vermin (rats, insects, and the like).

Adept (Nature's Child): As an Adept, the Sorcerer's bond with the natural world grows stronger, and it begins to protect him. Thorns never pierce his skin, branches move out of the way to avoid hindering him, and he never suffers from allergies due to pollen. In addition, he is immune to all plant-based poisons. If he is ever lost in the wilderness, he can be assured of finding fruit or nuts to eat, and vines to drink from, as the plants will not let him starve. These abilities do not require any active effort on the part of the Sorcerer, save the regular worship of his pagan "god" through regular rituals.

Master (Wicker Man): The Master of Kreis has access to two gruesome rituals, each empowered by the sacrifice of a human life. Each ritual may be conducted only once per year, and must be enacted on the Summer or Winter Solstice, or the Spring or Autumnal Equinox. The effects of the ritual last until the end of the season, and only one may be in effect at a time. Either ritual involves weaving a life-sized wicker effigy of a human being around a living man or woman, who must be alive and in good health, but

may be restrained or drugged. Once completed (requiring a Panache + Weaving roll against a TN of 20; 30 if the subject is struggling), the Sorcerer has two options.

If the Sorcerer sets fire to the effigy, burning the victim alive, he benefits from increased stamina for the entire season. The Sorcerer is not knocked unconscious when he suffers Dramatic Wounds equal to twice his Resolve. Instead, he may remain active until he suffers Dramatic Wounds equal to three times his Resolve, at which point he collapses, dead. During any season in which the Sorcerer benefits from this ritual, his sterility abates; in fact, he (or she) becomes hyper-fertile, and also acquires the Lecherous Hubris (per the Player's Guide) in addition to any other Arcana he may possess.

If the Sorcerer leaves the victim bound in the effigy without setting it ablaze, beetles, worms, and other vermin will burrow into the wicker frame, consuming the victim alive. His or her spirit will become trapped in the facsimile, becoming a supernatural guardian which looks remarkably like a scarecrow (and is often used in that capacity). The guardian is only active at night, at which time it is considered an Undead Villain (see *Waves of Blood*, pages 103 - 104) with the Claws and Fangs, Demon Eyes, and Skeletal abilities. It has a Rank of 3 in all Traits, and Ranks of 5 in the Ambush, Attack (Dirty Fighting), Footwork, and Shadowing Knacks.

The Knacks

Choking Spores: By spending an Action, the Sorcerer can cause any fungi in the area to suddenly mature, rot, and explode in a cloud of spores that sicken the Sorcerer's opponents, but give him renewed strength. While this Knack refers to fungal spores, it can actually be used on any form of vegetation—normal plants will erupt in a cloud of pollen or mold, as appropriate. Rolling Panache + Choking Spores against a TN of 15 creates a cloud which lasts until the end of the Round in which they are created, and cause one target to lose two Unkept Dice on all Actions he attempts. Conversely, the Sorcerer gains two Unkept Dice on all Actions he attempts. For each Raise the Sorcerer takes on his roll, he can extend the duration of the cloud by one Round or affect an additional target.

Entangling Vine: By spending an Action, the Sorcerer can cause a vine, length of ivy, or similar form of plant life to animate and fight at his side. (A cagey Sorcerer can carry seed pods with him wherever he goes, throw them down and use his Out of Season Knack to force them to sprout and mature, then use this power to gain an animated Henchman no matter where he is.) While the Sorcerer cannot directly control the plant, it has a limited degree of intuition, and will fight its creator's enemies or work to keep its creator safe. The vine is considered a Henchman with Ranks in all Traits equal to the Sorcerer's Rank in this Knack, and Ranks in Climbing (used for Defense at all times), Grapple, and Bear Hug equal to his Mastery Level. The Sorcerer can only animate one vine at a time, and it remains animated until the end of the Scene.

Out of Season: By spending one or more Actions, the Sorcerer can make a Panache + Out of Season roll to cause a single plant or tree to grow, blossom, or even wither. The TN to cause a single plant or tree to go through one season's worth of growth (or decay) is 15. Each additional plant or tree, or each additional season's worth of growth, adds 15 to the TN and requires one additional Action. Thus, making a single apple tree (Fall harvest) sprout, blossom, and generate a season's worth of apples in the middle of Winter would have a TN of 45, and require three Actions. Making an apple tree's fruit rot on the branches and its leaves drop away (as if it were Winter) in Summer has a TN of 30, and requires two Actions.

Stinging Swarm: By spending an Action, the Sorcerer can call a cloud of buzzing, biting, stinging insects to swarm around his body and harass his opponents. While the bugs (typically flies, mosquitos, and other parasitic or carrion-eating creatures) cause no

meaningful damage to attackers, their bites and stings are painful, annoying, and very distracting. After activating this ability, the TN to hit the Sorcerer in melee combat increases by his Mastery Level for each Rank he has in this Knack. The insects remain until the end of the Scene, or until they are dispersed by an open flame, a strong breeze, or by submerging the Sorcerer in water (after which, he may spend another Action to summon another swarm). The Sorcerer may even summon these creatures in winter or while underground, as his magic will awaken the insects from hibernation, or spontaneously grow them from larvae crawling among his clothing (or beneath his skin).

Veil of Thorns: In an area of significant wilderness (per the Game Master's discretion, but swamps, forests, jungles, or even a cornfield should be sufficient), the Sorcerer can make a Panache + Veil of Thorns roll to move (even at full speed) without leaving a trace, as tree limbs, vines, and even individual blades of grass conspire to cover his tracks. The result of this roll becomes the TN to follow the Sorcerer using the Tracking Knack. Furthermore, the Sorcerer can "cover his tracks" with thorny brambles, poison ivy, clouds of stinging insects, or similar inconveniences. For every ten minutes a tracker spends following such a trail, he suffers 1 Die of Flesh Wounds. Each Raise taken on the Sorcerer's roll increases this damage by an additional Unkept Die.

Game Master's Secrets: Kreis is not one of the Bargainer's Arts that were given to the Numan Senate so many centuries ago. It was a gift from one of the original Bargainers to a lowly supernatural servant, who passed it on to humans living in what would eventually become Eisen.

This Sorcery was intended solely for the convenience of its creator, who wanted to ensure that he (or she, or it) would have servants when the Barrier finally fell and the Bargainers returned in force. Accordingly, Kreis does not have a direct effect on the Barrier. Rather, it creates a dormant, corrupt life force within each of its practitioners; at a command from the master, these life forces will awaken, snuffing out the mortal Sorcerers that served as hosts and becoming devoted, plant/human hybrids who are slaves to the master's will. However, on occasion those who practice this Sorcery are called upon by their progenitor to perform various tasks which undermine the integrity of the Barrier in indirect ways, often working alongside (or in service to) some twist of fate created through the use of Sorte magic to do so.