

Mairbh: The Bargainer's Art of Gluttony

Knacks: Animation, Binding, Enervation, Revenance, Separation

Apprentice Degree: Awareness

Adept Degree: Communion

Master Degree: Possession

When Senator Albion Necros died in his bathtub shortly after participating in the Bargain that led to the emergence of Sorcery on Théah, it was generally believed that his Sorcery died with him. For many years, the nature of the power he had received was unknown, though the writings of other Bargaining Senators expressed their regret at losing the ability to “pierce the Veil” and “raise an infinite, unstoppable army” to their cause.

Neither the despondent Senators, nor the parties responsible for their colleague’s death, could have known that the man had paid a visit to a number of his household’s serving girls prior to his ill-fated bath. After the man’s death, pieces of his estate passed on to one heir or another, while his servants either fled to the furthest reaches of the Empire (and to the pagan lands beyond), or were absorbed into the houses of other Senators. No one raised an eyebrow when some of the girls who had served the dead Senator began to show signs of pregnancy, and the newborn children became a part of their new households or otherwise vanished into obscurity. None of the children showed any sign of Sorcerous power, and they (and their descendants) went on to live utterly unremarkable lives.

The forgotten Senator’s legacy remained dormant for hundreds of years, until the Montaigne invasion of Avalon in 1028. Montaigne nobles began to settle in the conquered lands, bringing their servants with them and, forbidden to intermarry within their households, the Montaigne servants pursued relationships with Avalon commoners. One twist of fate followed another, leading to the marriage of an Avalon blacksmith and a Montaigne serving maid who shared a distant, common ancestor—Senator Albion Necros. The union proved to be particularly fruitful: seven children were born, each manifesting an unusual ability to detect spirits and communicate with “na mairbh” (a Cymric term translating as “the Dead,” from which the Sorcery gains its name).

A Mairbh Sorcerer (called a Necromancer by some scholars) can sense the Veil—the division between the physical world and the spirit world—all around him. He knows where and when the Veil is thinnest, and therefore most likely to breach and allow restless spirits to cross over. Eventually, practitioners of Mairbh learn to breach the Veil themselves, reaching through to draw forth energies to power their Sorcery. This is a long, grueling process, however, so a Necromancer does not advance in power as rapidly as most other Sorcerers.

Mairbh Sorcery slowly leeches the color from its practitioners. At first, the Sorcerer’s skin merely loses its hue, fading to an unnatural pallor. Once a Sorcerer has reached Adept level, his hair will begin to fade as well, until it is stark white. Finally, at the level of Master, even the Sorcerer’s eyes will lose their color and fade to black pupils in white irises. Mairbh Sorcerers are also easy to identify by the countless ritual scars that mar their arms, legs, chests, and faces.

Mairbh currently remains extremely rare, practiced by only a handful of Avalon mystics (concentrated primarily in Gaavane), who live as hermits to avoid the gawking stares of the masses. None of them seem to be aware of the origins of their power, attributing it to Sidhe blood (most likely Unseelie) in their ancestry. The low profile they have maintained them has kept them from coming to the attention of any forces that might otherwise wish them harm. Even if one of them is discovered (or if a less prudent Necromancer begins to flaunt his power and make himself known), it will probably take some time for those forces to determine the truth of the matter. Once that happens, however, the isolated mystics will undoubtedly meet a violent end.

Apprentice Degree

At the most basic level of Mastery, a Mairbh Sorcerer can sense the ripples in the Veil that surround a restless spirit. While indoors, the Sorcerer's supernatural senses will reveal the presence of any undead spirits in the same room, whether those spirits are skeletons, mirror ghosts, slugh, or something entirely different, and even if they are hidden, invisible, or otherwise concealed. No roll is necessary to use the ability, and no Actions must be spent; the Sorcerer can sense instinctively whether or not spirits are present. Out of doors, the sorcerer's ability to detect spirits extends to ten yards per Mastery Level, as the overpowering presence of positive life energy overwhelms the negative energies surrounding the spirits, making them harder to sense. At the Game Master's option, particularly powerful sources of negative energy (e.g., the Black Freighter) may be detectable at longer ranges.

Adept Degree

Much as a Porté Sorcerer can tear open a hole in the universe and reach through, a Journeyman in Mairbh has learned to open a small rift in the Veil and call to a spirit, allowing two-way communication. The Necromancer must choose the Wits of the spirit he hopes to reach, as well as the Skills he hopes that spirit will have. A Resolve Roll must be made to successfully open the rift, against a TN of 5 plus the spirit's Wits x 5, plus another 5 for each Skill the spirit possesses beyond the first. Thus, the TN to summon a spirit with Wits 4 and the Scholar and Archaeologist Skills would be 30 (5 + 5 x Wits of 4, + 5 for a second Skill). If this roll fails, the Sorcerer suffers a number of Flesh Wounds equal to the amount by which he failed the roll. He may try again, but each subsequent attempt raises the TN for success by 10.

Once the rift is established, the spirit may speak aloud (but only in its native tongue) or directly to the sorcerer's mind (regardless of language), according to its whim. While flattery or the promise of some sort of reward (or punishment) may make the spirit more agreeable, it is under no compulsion to answer the Sorcerer's questions unless the Sorcerer sacrifices 5 Flesh Wounds for each coerced answer. However, once a spirit has agreed (or been compelled) to speak, the Sorcerer can always determine whether or not it is telling the truth (most spirits are aware of this, and so do not bother trying to deceive a Necromancer).

A spirit may answer any questions about the immediate area where it lived or died automatically: an explorer or long-dead sentry would certainly know if there was a secret door in the vicinity, or where to find the key to open a heavy iron gate. The spirit may also answer questions related to its Skills by making Lore Checks—assume that the spirit has a Rank equal to its Wits in all of a Skill's Basic Knacks, and equal to half its Wits (rounded up) in Advanced Knacks.

If the conversation goes well, the rift can be closed without event. If the spirit refuses to close the rift, it must engage in a contested Wits roll against the Sorcerer to keep it open. Similarly, if the spirit attempts to close the rift before the Sorcerer is finished speaking, it must win a contested Wits roll to cut the sorcerer off.

Master Degree

A Master of Mairbh has developed the ability to tear larger rifts in the Veil: large enough to allow a spirit to lay claim to a physical presence. Since will-o-wisps, mirror ghosts, echoes, and other recognized forms of undead already have physical manifestations, a Sorcerer cannot use this power on them; they have already found a way to penetrate the Veil and establish a presence on Terra, so there is nothing left of them to pass between worlds. Hence, the Sorcerer can only accomplish this feat with spirits that have no physical manifestation.

Since these spirits lack the ability to create a physical presence of their own, they must instead flow into the Sorcerer that drew them to Terra, overwhelming his mortal spirit with the raw emotion that keeps them from passing on to their final rest. To successfully channel a spirit, the Sorcerer must make suffer 10 Flesh Wounds and make a Resolve check against a TN equal to

10 + the spirit's Wits x 5. If the roll fails, the Sorcerer is unable to reach the spirit he is seeking and he suffers a number of Flesh Wounds equal to the amount by which he failed the roll. He may try again, but every subsequent attempt requires the sacrifice of another 10 Flesh Wounds and increases the TN for success by 10. If the roll is successful, the Sorcerer successfully draws the spirit into his own body, with one of the following effects. Additional effects can be channeled, at the cost of one Raise each. The maximum number of effects that may be channeled at any given time is equal to the Wits of either the Necromancer or the spirit (whichever is lower).

- The presence of two spirits within one body gives the Sorcerer extra reserves to draw upon in the face of adversity. He gets one extra Drama die, which will remain until it is spent or until the spirit leaves him. The Sorcerer may gain an additional Drama die for every Raise taken on his success roll, up to the spirit's Rank in Wits.
- If the spirit was a Swordsman in life, the Sorcerer's non-zero Swordsman Knacks are all increased by one, to a maximum of 6. If this gives the Sorcerer sufficient Knacks to raise his Mastery Level, he may make use of his new Mastery Level ability for the duration of the possession.
- Similarly, if the spirit was a Sorcerer, all the Master's Sorcerous Knacks are raised by one for the duration of the possession (as this is a Master ability, it should raise all five Knacks to 6). If the spirit happened to use Mairbh, raising all five Knacks to 6 results in a Mastery Level of 4 for the Sorcerer. However, if the Sorcerer has reached this level through some artificial means (e.g., the use of Yellow Lotus), the bonus Rank is added to the Sorcerer's unadjusted Rank scores, replacing the artificial increase rather than adding to it.
- If the spirit had the Legendary Trait Advantage in life, the Sorcerer's relevant Trait is increased by one for the duration of the possession, to a maximum of 6 (or 7, if the Sorcerer also has a Swordsman School that raises that Trait).
- The Sorcerer has access to any knowledge possessed by the spirit, effectively allowing him to ask unlimited questions which the spirit must answer (as if he had sacrificed five Flesh Wounds while asking a question under the Adept ability). Likewise, the Sorcerer can speak the native language of the spirit, and read and write it if the spirit was literate.

For example, a Necromancer who anticipates running into a strenuous physical challenge may wish to channel the spirit of a great Swordsman with Legendary Brawn and two extra Drama Dice to spend. This spirit must have Wits of Rank 3 or better, making the Sorcerer's TN to channel the spirit a 40 (10 + 5 x the Spirit's Wits of 3, + 5 x 2 extra abilities, + 5 for one extra Drama Die). If this happens to be a spirit he has dealt with in the past (either by allowing it to possess him, or communicating with it via the Adept technique), the Necromancer receives a free Raise on his roll.

While possessed by a spirit, the Sorcerer's Arcana (if he has one) is temporarily suppressed and replaced by the spirit's. (This will always be either a Hubris or a Flaw, as spirits infused with positive energy generally do not linger on the mortal coil.) Because of the overwhelming presence of the spirit, the player cannot cancel the Game Master's activation of the new Arcana. Fate witches who attempt to discern the Sorcerer's Arcana during a possession will perceive the spirit's, not the Sorcerer's. In fact, it will appear as a particularly dark and forbidding image, looming over the Sorcerer. (Villains use the Flaw corresponding to the spirit's Arcana, while heroes use the corresponding Hubris).

The possession will last until both the Sorcerer and the spirit mutually agree to terminate it, or until either manages to end it prematurely. To end the possession without the consent of the other party, the spirit and the Sorcerer must engage in a contested battle of Wits, with the possessing spirit receiving a Free Raise on the roll for every effect the Sorcerer channeled beyond the first, and for each time the Game Master activated its Arcana. Whichever side wins the contested

roll can maintain or end the possession. While a Sorcerer is struggling for control, he can take no other actions (if it is necessary, assume that each contested Wits roll takes one Action).

Sorcerous Knacks

Note that none of the Knacks below costs a Drama Die to use, though most of them require the sacrifice of some number of Flesh Wounds to be activated. If performed during combat or some other circumstance where time is an issue, use of the Animation, Binding, and Revenance Knacks requires a number of consecutive Actions equal to their TN before the action is completed. Any horrible repercussions of stopping a ritual midway through (e.g., being dragged bodily into the spirit world by the gathered forces) are at the discretion of the Game Master.

Unless stated otherwise, when any roll necessary to use the Knacks below fails, the Sorcerer suffers a number of Flesh Wounds equal to the amount by which he failed the roll, and the TN to make another attempt during the same Scene increases by 10. If a Knack required the sacrifice of Flesh Wounds to activate, the same number of Wounds must be sacrificed on every attempt.

Animation: One of the simplest (but most gruesome) arts a Mairbh Sorcerer has at his disposal invests human corpses with the spark of near-life. A single, random spirit can be drawn from the next world and splintered, providing motive force and limited cognizance to one or more dead bodies, turning them into servants or shock troops. The Sorcerer must sacrifice 5 Flesh Wounds and roll Resolve + Animation against a base TN of 10 to animate one corpse as a skeletal brute (as described in *Waves of Blood*, page 82). The skeleton will tear free of any lingering, dead flesh and rise up to follow its creator's orders unquestioningly. It will serve until it is destroyed, or until one month has passed, at which time it collapses into dust and the spirit-fragment animating it dissipates.

Each Raise taken on the Animation roll will animate another corpse, or extend a single skeleton's "life" for another month. (Thus, the TN to animate three skeletons for a total of two months would be 35.) Skeletons which have been created at the same time may be divided into Brute Squads of up to six individuals, and a Sorcerer can control a number of Brute Squads equal to his rank in this Knack. (Additional skeletons may be created, but they will be out of the Sorcerer's control, and may aid him, attack him, or simply wander off without rhyme or reason).

A Necromancer may use this Knack as an Apprentice. Adepts receive one Free Raise and Masters receive two Free Raises when using this Knack.

Binding: In addition to serving as the physical manifestation of a spirit themselves, some Necromancers can channel the spirit into an inanimate object. Although the connection will not be as strong, and the benefits correspondingly reduced, this is the only way a Sorcerer can share the effects of Mairbh with another person. While virtually any inanimate object may be used for the Binding, durable objects (weapons, jewelry, or the like) are most commonly used, as the destruction of the object releases the spirit and ends the magic.

The TN to successfully bind a spirit to an object is equal to 15 + the spirit's Wits x 5. The object to receive the channeled spirit must be present during the ritual. The Sorcerer must sacrifice 10 Flesh Wounds, and rolls Resolve + Binding against whatever TN has been set. If successful, the Sorcerer may enchant the item with one (and only one) of the following effects:

- Whoever possesses the item receives one extra Drama die at the beginning of every Story. If the item is lost or destroyed during the Story, the Drama die is lost.
- If the spirit had the Legendary Trait advantage, and it has been bound into anything wearable, the wearer may add the Sorcerer's Mastery Level to all rolls based on that Trait. For example, a ring created by an Adept Necromancer and containing the spirit of a man with Legendary Brawn would add 2 to all Wound Checks, Damage rolls, Lifting rolls, and the like.

- If the spirit was a Swordsman in life, and it has been channeled into a weapon, the spirit's Rank in Wits may be added to all Attack rolls and Active Defense rolls made with the weapon, as well as to the use of any Swordsman Knacks involving the weapon.
- If the spirit was a Sorcerer in life, and it has been channeled into a piece of jewelry, the spirit's Rank in Wits may be added to any use of his Sorcery Knacks, or any roll needed to use one of his Mastery Level abilities.

If the spirit is bound into an item that already provides some benefit, such as a well-made sword that adds an Unkept die to all rolls made with it, the effects of the craftsmanship and Sorcery are cumulative.

A Necromancer must have reached the Adept level to use this Knack. Masters receive one Free Raise when using this Knack.

Enervation: One of the Necromancer's most feared powers allows him to heal his own injuries at the expense of an unwilling victim. He must inflict 5 Flesh Wounds of damage on himself, then touch the intended victim. This is automatically successful if the victim is immobile or helpless; otherwise, the Necromancer must make a successful Grapple roll.

Once the grapple is initiated, the Sorcerer must roll Resolve + Enervation against a TN of 15. If this roll is unsuccessful, the TN does not increase for future attempts, but the Necromancer suffers damage as usual. If the roll is successful, the Necromancer inflicts a 2k2 attack that acts as if it had been inflicted by a firearm for purposes of inflicting Dramatic Wounds. Each Raise taken on this roll adds an Unkept die to the damage rating of the attack. The Necromancer heals himself of one Dramatic Wound for every Dramatic Wound inflicted by this attack; if no Dramatic Wounds are inflicted, the Necromancer can still heal himself of a number of Flesh Wounds equal to the damage inflicted by the attack.

A Necromancer may also transfer poison or illness to an immobile or grappled victim. This requires the expenditure of 5 Flesh Wounds and a Resolve + Enervation roll against a TN of 20, with the usual penalties for failure (including an increase in TN). If successful, one illness or one dose of poison is transferred to the victim.

A Necromancer must have reached the Adept level to use this Knack. Masters receive one Free Raise when using this Knack.

Revenance: While the Animation Knack relies upon drawing a random spirit from the next world and using it to empower a Sorcerer's creations, the Knack of Revenance allows a Sorcerer to find a specific spirit and forcibly return it to its body. This does not return the deceased to life; rather, it creates an undead creature with its own intelligence and self-determination, and while it will be favorably disposed towards the Sorcerer that brought it from beyond (particularly if they were friends in its previous life), it is not bound to serve him as the skeletal Brutes are.

To use this Knack, the Sorcerer must first determine the form his undead ally will take, using the rules on pages 103-104 of *Waves of Blood*. Note that some of the options presented may be beyond the Sorcerer's control; a body that lost its arm due to cannon fire must be created with the "Missing Limb" option, and any unpreserved corpse more than a week or two old must almost certainly be constructed with the "Skeletal" option. The Sorcerer is subject to the restrictions listed under the Undead Advantage: no more than three options may be selected, and contradictory options are mutually exclusive. Once the total point cost of the Advantage has been determined, the Sorcerer must sacrifice 15 Flesh Wounds and make a Resolve + Revenance roll against a TN equal to the point cost of the Advantage +10. (Thus, a Sorcerer using his Revenance Knack to bring back a trusted lieutenant with the Demon Eyes, Claws and Fangs, and Revolting options has a TN of 31.)

A Necromancer must have reached the level of Master to use the Revenance Knack.

Separation: When a Mairbh Sorcerer opposes an undead spirit of any type (whether it has been channeled by another Sorcerer, or exists by its own merits and strength of will), he relies on the Separation Knack to remove the threat. Separation essentially slams shut the rift between the physical and spiritual worlds that allows a spirit to manifest on Terra. Spirits which have no regular presence in the physical world are banished entirely. Bound items lose their supernatural bonus, a skeletal brute squad animated by Mairbh collapses to lifeless bones, and a Sorcerer possessed by a spirit will return to normal. Other types of disquiet spirits (echoes, the undead crew of the Black Freighter, etc.) lose their ability to manifest for one day, then either reform or inhabit the dead bodies from which they were ejected. (If the body was destroyed while the spirit was absent, it will reform in the same location.)

To successfully banish a spirit, a Sorcerer must spend an Action and make a Resolve + Separation roll against a TN equal to $20 + 5 \times$ the spirit's Wits. (The Sorcerer does not need to sacrifice Flesh Wounds to make the attempt, but he suffers damage normally if the attempt fails.) If successful, the spirit is immediately forced out of the physical world, as described above. If the roll fails, not only does the spirit remain in the physical world, it becomes immediately aware of the attempt and can identify the Sorcerer who made it. (If the spirit is bound in an item, the possessor of that item will receive an instinctive awareness of the same information). Every time a Separation Knack fails, the TN to banish that spirit is increased by 10 until the end of the Scene. A Necromancer rolls one extra Kept Die (+1k1) per Mastery Level when attempting to banish a spirit he, himself, has summoned.

A Necromancer may use this Knack when he is an Apprentice. Adepts receive one Free Raise, and Masters receive two Free Raises, when using this Knack.

Game Master's Notes

Unlike most Bargainer Sorceries, Mairbh does not directly affect the Barrier. Instead, the blood sacrificed (in the form of Flesh Wounds) to empower the magic is drawn through the "other" realm accessed by Porté Sorcerers to the creatures beyond the Barrier, who feed on it to maintain their strength in captivity, preparing for the day the Barrier collapses.

Necromancers traditionally carry ritual daggers to cut themselves open when sacrificing Flesh Wounds (this is automatically successful, and does not require an Action to perform beyond any Actions necessary to invoke the Sorcery itself). However, in a pinch, these Sorcerers can bite or claw themselves open, or draw blood from an existing wound to power their magic. When a roll is failed, the loss of additional Flesh Wounds manifests as goutts of blood erupting from whatever open areas are available on the hapless Sorcerer and disappearing into the air around him.

A Necromancer who increases his Mastery Level to 4 through possession by the spirit of a dead Mairbh Sorcerer receives an extra Free Raise on the use of any of his Mairbh Knacks (in addition to any Free Raises specified in the Knack's description).

As disturbing as they are, it was not the powers listed here that caused the first Necromancer to meet an untimely demise. Rather, it was the lost Knack described below.

Channeling: This Knack allows a Mairbh Sorcerer to circumvent the sacrifice of Flesh Wounds necessary to power his Sorcery by inflicting them on another. The Sorcerer must meet the intended victim's gaze, and win a Contested Roll of his Resolve + Channeling vs. the victim's Resolve. If the victim wins, he fights off the effects of this power, and cannot be targeted again for the rest of the Scene.

If the Sorcerer wins, the victim is utterly mesmerized, and will stand by helplessly as the Sorcerer cuts him open, inflicting whatever Flesh Wounds are necessary to power his Knacks. The Sorcerer himself must still suffer the effects of failed rolls, but the initial sacrifice of Flesh Wounds (or the sacrifice necessary to compel a spirit to answer questions using the Adept ability) can be drawn from the victim.

The Channeling ends when the victim suffers enough Dramatic Wounds to reduce him to unconsciousness. If Channeling is attempted in combat, the Sorcerer must spend an Action to make the attempt. Opponents who wish to actively avoid the Sorcerer's gaze must take an extra Raise on all rolls against the Sorcerer (including Active Defenses).

A Necromancer must have reached the level of Master to use the Channeling Knack.

The Channeling Knack is truly lost to the ages; however, it is possible that descriptions of the Knack may exist in the writings of those alive at the time of the Bargain, and a Necromancer with access to those writings may be able to resurrect the practice.

Obviously, Mairbh is the Bargainer's Art from which the Vestenmannavjar Sympathetic Healer Advantage (*Vendel • Vesten*, p. 100) is descended. Any Necromancer who makes this connection can easily modify the Enervation Knack to replicate the healing effects described in the *Vendel • Vesten* sourcebook, though he may roll Resolve + Enervation when making his roll.

