

We are Hive Mind Games

We are Hive Mind Games, a game production company in Manchester, UK formed to make gaming products that are interesting, fun, and ethically produced.

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How To Use This Zine

Even if you can't define exactly what a curse is, we all know in our guts how a curse feels. They're at the root of age-old folklore, they show up in everything from Studio Ghibli films to the Dark Souls video games, in media the world over. But how do you use a curse and get the most out of it as a narrative tool for a rewarding roleplay experience?

Curses can be used on the tabletop to promote player choice, increase player immersion, and encourage party interaction, both with each other and the world around them.

Contained in these pages is a breakdown of curses. Each section brings into focus a different aspect of curses on the tabletop with at least one example to put into your own games.

A Word Of Warning

When using curses in a tabletop game, you should be aware of tropes that negatively portray various groups and cultures.

Tropes where a curse reinforces bigotry have become thoroughly normalised and are included in every type of media, including major TTRPGs. There are too many examples to list here, but for instance: almost any time a 'voodoo curse' is even mentioned, it reinforces negative stereotypes about the religion and its practitioners.

The harms these tropes inflict spread far and wide and cannot be understated.

We have done our best to write this zine free of these harmful tropes. Regardless, we feel it is important to always draw attention to these issues and for the TTRPG community to be aware of them in order to avoid them.

As collaborative storytellers we believe the community must take an active role in understanding these tropes and removing them from our hobby to create a table where everyone can be welcome to enjoy games together.

Curses and Story Arcs

A long term curse held in an item can make for an engaging narrative arc for a player character. A heroic champion of good slowly falling into corruption after they take up an accursed blade is a staple fantasy trope for good reason!

This works well on the tabletop; because a curse keeps a player invested in the story by being an ever-present force they're constantly reacting to, especially if that curse comes with benefits they want to keep using.

When you're making a curse like this, first imagine a power that a player would enjoy having; this is to tempt them into taking up the curse.

Secondly, decide on a cost that seems obviously bad, but not so bad that the player dismisses it outright.

The fun part of a curse is working with the negatives. You don't want your fun, exciting curse to end up as just a stat bonus.

Finally, decide on an endpoint for that curse, what does a character become at the end of it? You could make this known to them: a fate that they must choose to try to avoid or to embrace. Or disguise it from them: will they deduce the terrible fate before it befalls them?

Every choice they make once they take up the item creates more choices and roleplay opportunities for the party. How the curse manifests, how they react to that, how others react to them, how the wielder changes as a character, everything stems from a well placed curse.

The Northsprite Blade

There is a story of a blade, waiting in a prison of ice, that reaches into the evil at the heart of even the most noble heroes. The being within the blade grasps at ambition, layering honeyed promises of the power to carve through your foes, striking them down with frozen blows that fall like avalanches.

To draw upon this power, its wielder must pay a price to the malicious soul at the heart of the blade. It at first seems harmless, gently coaxing and nudging its wielder. But it burrows ever deeper, blurring the line between advice and order. Driven towards ever more heinous acts, eventually the hero who took up the blade no longer recognises themselves and is left wondering, do they wield the blade, or does it wield them?

Random Power of the Cursed Sword (d6)

- (1) Extra damage dice
- (2) Bonus on rolls to hit
- (3) Bonus to 1 stat
- (4) Attacks deal ice damage
- (5) Can cast a new spell
- (6) Extra attack

Motivations within the Cursed Sword (d6)

- (1) Extra damage dice
- (2) Bonus on rolls to hit
- (3) Bonus to 1 stat
- (4) Attacks deal ice damage
- (5) Can cast a new spell
- (6) Extra attack

Curses For Villains

Antagonists who use curses should use them in a way that reflects their character. You should spend time thinking about who your villain is and what they would want out of a situation to help you put together curses that ooze personality.

If a villain is a conqueror, they may have a more offensive curse to use against players. If they are more cunning and meticulous it may be a curse that lies in wait as a trap to protect their lair.

Similarly, villains may have an aesthetic associated with them: a vampire who decorates everything with bats; a false prophet who steals the iconography of a god etc.

You should ask yourself if there's a way for a curse to behave that reflects them visually, though this will likely be made clear through descriptive language rather than mechanics.

Players understand a villain better if the actions they take reflect their personality, this is also true of villains who use curses!

Everything your antagonist does should show off who they are to the players to create deeper immersion and far more memorable foes.

To celebrate their latest victory, Garvine of the Dales and his companions retired to their favourite tavern. Only to find the atmosphere inside was strange, something thickened the air, filling them all with a sense of euphoria.

After some moments drinking in the heady mix of emotions which bubbled through the establishment, soaking through the patrons, Garvine noticed upon the central table a stein. More than simple wood or metal, it was inscribed with runes of

eternity and never seemed to empty no matter who took from it.

Boldly facing down this new challenge, Garvine drank deep of the amber nectar within and felt all the aches of their adventure flow away. Naturally everyone shared this wonder around, and a single night of celebration became one, two, a week, and then more.

Though they at first felt rested from their libations, they soon became exhausted, unable to stop the merriment, and unable to leave without experiencing an icy pain through their bodies, every hangover come at once. While wracked with shivers and nausea, they still hear the siren call imploring them to just stay, that one more drink couldn't do any harm.

Villain Motivation (d10)

| | Example Curse |
|---|--|
| (1) Control a city | The city gates are cursed to open for entry but never exit. |
| (2) Be left alone | The villain's name cannot be recorded. Attempts to write it slide from the page, attempts to speak it get caught in the throat. |
| (3) Revenge | A specific person is cursed to relive their own death at the hands of the villain every day for eternity. |
| (4) Defend against intruders | People disturbing the villain's lair become objects that decorate it. |
| (5) 'Send a message' to others/show off power | Compelled to go to a public place and scream a message about the villain, locked in place until the curse is broken, or they die. |
| (6) Raise an army | Cursed blades that enforce servitude to the villain. |
| (7) Beloved by the people | People are cursed so that saying negative things about the villain causes pain. |
| (8) Trick and confuse | The objects in a room are cursed to silently rearrange themselves when they are not being observed. |
| (9) Reclaim the world for nature | Curse the ground to be unworkable and any attempt to cultivate or build on it to fail. |
| (10) Be remembered forever | Curse themselves to never fade from memory, causing shades of the villain to haunt those who've met them. |

Subverting Expectations

People who play tabletop games can have very specific expectations of what will be included in a TTRPG and what it means when you draw their attention to something in particular.

Subverting these expectations can create memorable experiences that will stay with your players for years to come and has the bonus effect of making players think more actively about the game and their expectations.

If an opponent curses a character with their dying breath, and you draw attention to it seemingly having some sort of power as they say it, they will of course assume the curse has some effect on them, even if it doesn't.

If you indulge this assumption and remind players of the curse, they'll want to investigate the effect it has and how to get rid of it.

When players' attention is drawn to an event they add importance to it because of the expectations they have of what a TTRPG is. You can use this to create amusing and interesting scenarios driven entirely by the player's own perception of what is going on.

Wakerley's Clogs

These beautifully ornate leather boots are handcrafted and engraved with eldritch decoration. The wearer of the boots feels elated by their fancy new footwear, a deep sense of confidence carrying their words through the air with skill beyond that of the greatest natural born orator.

Over time, however, they also cause fatigue, and even pain. If worn enough they eventually cause that pain after even a few paces. No mage has yet been able to resolve the shooting pain that accompanies every step of the wearer.

This is the burden of the clogs, though no one has yet thought to take them to a cobbler to have a look at the arch support...

Curses for Wrongdoers

It can be tricky to write motivations for villains! What would motivate one who is evil enough to be as a force of nature? A curse of course! A curse given to a villain in their backstory can instantly establish their negative traits and highlight their malicious motivations.

For example, a villain whose main vice is greed may have stolen a priceless treasure, horribly cursing themselves. Surely they'll now behave even more atrociously to get the curse removed!

By pre-establishing the curse on an antagonist you can better understand why they'd act desperately, foolishly, or monstrously evil, especially if the curse is a source of personal anguish or pain.

The Curse of Amakiir Vrynn

Long ago, in a distant place, there was a forest enchanted and protected by a family of Fey. The forest was a wonder of natural beauty, rich valleys and dells bursting forth with leaves of the deepest green, trees laden with fruit and swollen with juice.

It was for this beauty that the forest was invaded. A marauding band of covetous fools, consumed by dreams of wealth, tracked the heir-protector of the forest and cut them down, severing and taking the ivory horn that marked their Fey lineage.

Though thinking their sordid quest complete, the band did not get away without fair payment. By their own impudent greed and desire to own the bounty of nature for themselves, they would find such bounty forever denied to them.

As wine turned to vinegar in their glass, and food turned to ashes in their mouths they realised, too late, what they had brought upon themselves.

They say this group of scavengers still roams the world, denied even the release of death, searching eternally in the vain hope of a way to restore the heir of the forest and break the curse.

Beware any who cross their path, for it is rumoured that they will commit unspeakable evil to do so.

Curses With No Maker

A curse doesn't always have to be an all-consuming epic quest, instead you can add one just to flavour the world, express the natural magic in it, or to create interesting complications for your players.

"Naturally occurring" curses need no specific creator. Perhaps they were caused by an awe-inspiring magical event that has left an imprint on the people who witnessed it, or the land upon which it happened? Or maybe the event was more horrific than awe-inspiring in nature?

Indeed, employing a curse in this way can be used to subvert your players' understanding of the "rules". Under a curse the world can work very differently, and whether specifically cast or naturally occurring, players can't always rely on the same old solutions they have in the past.

Big Bad Jon and The Mortifying Ordeal of Being Known

Tomorrow Jon would sneak into the lord's castle and, in the dead of night, plunge a poison dagger into that very lord's heart, for that was what the contract required.

But tonight? Tonight Jon held court in the tavern, plying his outward facade to its utmost by telling tall tales and holding the crowd to rapt attention, his manufactured smiles and faux kind eyes giving away no hint of his true profession.

But in that moment, in the way that sometimes happens, the universe clicked. Perhaps his facade was too good and became a force unto itself, or maybe the duality within him finally became too much. Maybe the balancing force of the universe simply did as it would.

When he woke up the next day, he put on his disguise and made his way to his target but the strangest thing had happened. Everyone who looked at him, whether they had met him or not, knew Jon and wanted to be his friend.

Everywhere he went Jon was universally loved and recognised. There was no way he could sneak anywhere like this. His plans would have to change...

Cursed Transformation

Many players will have a good idea of how their character looks overall, but might not think about the specifics. By using a curse to draw attention to small parts of a character and transforming them, you can help solidify a more complete and detailed picture of the character.

For instance, hand a character a secretly cursed axe. Over a period of time slowly introduce effects. Small changes at first, like bags under their eyes as they lose sleep, can have just as much effect in forming this image as big changes, like their hair transforming into tentacular growths.

Once a player at your table is driven to think about specific parts of anatomy in detail as they slowly change, they'll retain this mental image of their character forever. If your players can picture their characters more clearly then they'll be more immersed in your world and the game.

"Beware traveller! Look not to the stars, nor to the gifts they bring! For in the inky voids of the night sky live beings whose might is matched only by their hunger. Beware! They will bestow upon you great power only to recast your flesh in their own image, tearing you from your very soul!

Beware!

- Gwyn Valette,
Prophet of
The Blood Star

Random Mutation Area (d20)

- (1) Tongue
- (3-6) Hands
- (7-10) Teeth
- (11-12) Left Arm
- (13) Both Arms
- (14-15) Right Arm
- (16-17) Chest
- (18-19) Eyes
- (20) Face

Random Mutation (d20)

- (1) Splits in two
- (3-6) Grows a layer of chitin
- (7-10) Grows a tentacle
- (11-12) The flesh falls away to reveal bone
- (13) The area is covered in blasphemous tattoos
- (14-15) Changes colour
- (16-17) Fragile quills sprout from the area
- (18-19) Extra eyes appear in the area
- (20) A second face appears

Cursed Locations

Environmental storytelling is an excellent way to invest players in your world.

By drawing attention to parts of the world, rather than explicitly stating information about it, you let the world speak for itself. Your players will become ever more invested as they draw their own conclusions and opinions from the world.

What better way to put environmental storytelling in your game than giving the environment a story of its own?

By cursing a location, say an abandoned manor house with a troubled past, you add further layers to the world itself. Adding more, the difference between a family cursed by villainous rivals or a family cursed by downtrodden peasants is enough to change what your players think about the world you're building and the game they're playing.

Wrapping the history of this locale in a curse also adds in extra plot for players to pursue. This added detail is even more useful if the players already have to visit for their "main" quest! Will they break the curse or just deal with it until they can leave? Will they try and learn more about why this place is the way it is?

If players have the options, they move through the world on their own decisions, their own agency. Even if this is guided by you as the DM, it will mean they engage with the world on a much deeper level.

Cursed Location Feature (1d12)

- (1) Cursed very recently
- (2) Cursed and abandoned
- (3) Cursed and still occupied
- (4) Cursed by someone you know of
- (5) Curse is spreading and taking over more Land
- (6) Cursed by the gods
- (7) Someone is currently trying to break the curse
- (8) Cursed long ago and people keep putting new buildings there
- (9) Cursed by the previous occupants
- (10) Cursed because something terrible happened there
- (11) Curse moves to different locations with the seasons
- (12) Curse can't be broken, only handed on somewhere else

Curses As Traps

You enter a tomb. The corridors are dark, and the inhabitants long dead. You step on a solid looking panel and much to your shock, hear a click. Then it hits you, a curse has befallen you.

Rather than a simple pit trap, or a barrage of poison tipped darts, introducing a curse where there would otherwise be a mundane trap is a great way to add environmental storytelling and variety.

A curse at a location tells you about the people that built it. If people are afraid of the dead rising again: a curse in a tomb might be designed to keep something in rather than you out.

The fact that the people building a dungeon or tomb would set a curse to be triggered on someone, rather than just trying to kill them with spikes, tells you about their motivations as a group, what they find important and what they're willing to do for their cultural values.

Examples of Cursed Tombs From Different Cultures

Cultural Focus (d6)

(1) Reverent of death: The dead are sacred. By trespassing in the halls of the dead you have created a debt that must be repaid. Your soul is tethered to the owner of this tomb; when you die you will be their servant.

(2) Property rights: You become literally hungry for gold. When you see gold you want to eat it, dust, nuggets, bricks, until you've eaten some gold with your meal you're not satisfied.

(3) Fearful of undeath: You are cursed to want to be in the centre of the tomb. You can instinctively find your way through the corridors towards your destination at the heart of the tomb. It is painful for you to move towards the exit.

(4) Justice and punishment: You have disturbed the eternal rest of the dead, now you will know eternal wakefulness and never rest again - no sleep until the curse is broken.

(5) Afraid of disease: You bear the mark of the unclean - a prominent physical mark that identifies you as someone potentially diseased and to be avoided.

(6) Secret burial rites: You cannot be allowed to tell what you've seen of the burial rites. You suffer from amnesia, forgetting how you got here and what you've seen.

Curses On Timers

Adding a little tension to curses, and thus your campaign, can be as simple as putting them on a timer.

A player who knows that a curse is going to kill them horribly in seven days will certainly be tense! Especially as that clock ticks down and the effect of the curse gets larger and harder to deal with.

This tension is made all the worse by its personal nature, this is the player's very own character after all! As fun as “the world will end” is for a plot, something much smaller can have more weight for the players around your table.

Dragged Down

There are devils below us that live for the thrill of the hunt; to simply take a soul down into the flames of damnation is too easy, too fast, too unsatisfying for them.

These creatures instead put a mark on their prey, and make it very, very clear to them that they are being hunted.

Over several days, more and more of these infernal monsters converge on their prey, at the end of seven sunsets their full ferocity is unleashed, dragging the wretched soul into an eternity of torment.

Curse Progression Examples (d10)

- (1) When you fall asleep
- (2) Every 3rd day
- (3) When you hear the tolling of a church bell
- (4) At the Full Moon
- (5) When you are seriously injured
- (6) When you are rude to a person
- (7) When you draw your weapon
- (8) When you take something that doesn't belong to you
- (9) When you attempt to seduce someone
- (10) When you read new knowledge

Involving The Whole Group

If a curse placed on a player is left unchecked, it can consume both the time and the attention of the whole game, to the detriment of other players at the table.

Countering this is a delicate balancing act, you need to consider the wider effects of the curse to ensure it draws in all players equally.

How does a curse that transforms the victim into a hideous beast affect how the party as a whole interacts with the world.

With this in mind, you can design curses that involve other characters or NPCs so that a curse becomes a group activity rather than a solo endeavour.

Jerimiah Storm's Pendant

To wear this pendant is to have the best night's sleep of your life. A deep, dreamless slumber leaving you rested and rejuvenated in a way you've never felt before.

The following day you find yourself spritely and vigorous, bursts of energy spill forth, pushing you to outperform what you thought you were capable of.

However the effects don't stop with you. Those in your immediate proximity are curiously shielded, but further afield folks will have dreams of a strange and terrible monster haunting them. Though unable to relay their dream through sheer indescribable terror, they know it's you and will be gripped by the basest of instincts to destroy the evil that haunts their dreams, and anyone who protects them.

Breaking Curses

When writing an engaging story involving a curse, you can rely on one of the old staples of curses found in fantasy and mythology the world over: breaking a curse with a list of items to hunt down.

When creating your list, be sure that the items are that magical blend of vague and specific that the old stories evoke. Create items that have double, or even triple meanings! This ambiguity lets your players' imaginations run wild.

Nurturing creative solutions from your players, as any good DM has doubtless done at some point, gives you scope to take on and adapt those solutions and pretend they were the plan all along!

These creative solutions fostered within a loosely structured narrative give a clear direction for a group, but don't railroad them. This makes for a game and story that's easy for a GM to direct in chorus with a fulfilling challenge for players.

The Shattering Song

“Fetch me a nut from a dungeon deep
And water from a stone
And white milk from a maiden, that babe ere never known,
Dig me a grave as quickly as you may,
Bury there your blade, for three weeks and one day,
Defend that ground from violent matter,
And cursed bonds will shatter”

- The Shattering Song, ingredients to break an ancient curse on a cadre of knights

Table of Objects Involved in Breaking Curse (d20)

- (1) Wool from a newborn lamb
- (2) An object that is lit without flame
- (3) A splinter from an ancient tree
- (4) Egg of a hen gone wild
- (5) A cup full of sorrows
- (6) A traitor's regret
- (7) A cracked mirror in a single piece
- (8) A doll of the afflicted
- (9) Skull of a penitent
- (10) A shard of a hero
- (11) A winter flower
- (12) A gem to reflect only the moon
- (13) A sharp knife that cannot cut
- (14) An unyielding sole/soul
- (15) A predator's fang
- (16) An emerald scale
- (17) A wheel that will not turn
- (18) An unblinking eye
- (19) Ink from a bird
- (20) A star that shines below the sea

Curses To Build Tension

Every DM has struggled to inject meaning into their plot, to break away from the cycle of "go here, kill that" and of course, curses can help!

The "default plot" of many TTRPGs is to break into the lair of an antagonist and slay them, thus saving the day.

Very often in folklore, however, the evil can only be defeated by undoing their power in some way: just as one might undo a curse!

By formatting the plot around this style of curse breaking, you give the players meaning and implicit understanding of what they're doing, and why.

Our villain is an ancient undead warlord who cursed themselves to gain immortality, but lost their soul in the process.

This warlord is immortal; the players can't just slay them, they need to undo the curse. Questing to find the various "ingredients" to break the curse before the big showdown would be the bulk of this adventure.

By following this concept you create a compelling plot for your players, with clear goals and motivation, that is less of a strain for yourself as a writer: the progression is baked into the concept.

If you create a challenge that seems impossible, by giving the players the hard-earned tools to overcome it, the story creates a much deeper sense of achievement when they win.

Pain in the Ar-tefact

It is said that to defeat the Shadow Within the Mountain, the master of the unholy hordes aligned against us, you must gather four artefacts.

A Weapon forged from starlight to pierce the choking darkness within the heart of its power; A Shield that radiates the warmth of the Earth to resist the chill of the grave; A Map that sees true and changes with the writhing paths that comprise its nest; and a Bell that rings unto heaven, so that the gods themselves may be able to find this soul so long denied to them.

Backstory Curses

When playing a character with a curse in your backstory you need to ask yourself first and foremost: How is this going to make the game fun?

Like any part of a backstory, a curse should be something that motivates your character, as well as full of hooks for a GM to invest you in the story. It should never be something that gets in the way of anyone engaging with the story.

The Von Strayse family is an ancient line of monster hunters. They have allied with mighty emperors and underhanded scoundrels alike in their everlasting, all-consuming quest to purge all monsters from this world.

Generations upon generations of Von Strayses have held a closely guarded secret way of defeating even the most heinous of foes: a curse which focuses the full fury of the Von Strayses against a single target. In exchange, every adult soul in the hunting dynasty is bound to the mortal plane until the fiend is no more.

Over a century ago, a fell monster arose, and a Von Strayse hunter enacted the sacred curse, but they were unable to slay the beast before it claimed their life.

To this day that failure damns every other Von Strayse to restlessness while the creature still hunts.

As a Von Strayse hunter, you have come of age and must do what your forebears could not; slay the monster and free the souls of your family from their ghastly fate.

As a character backstory the Von Strayse Family Curse contains both of our essentials! A rock solid motivation for the character and plenty for a GM to engage with: other Von Strayses affected with the curse, the monster itself, and what exactly happens to the deceased and damned relatives.

This can be utilised as more than just a backstory, mechanics can be added in the form of a "preferred target" bonus that your character gets towards monsters or a certain type, or bonuses to knowledge about curses or beast types.

10 Questions For Cursed Players

Who gave you the curse?

Why did they give you the curse?

Do you know how to break the curse?

Does the curse visually affect you, and how?

Does the curse affect you more than visually, and how?

Does the curse affect how others interact with you?

Does the curse only affect you at certain times/in certain situations?

Have you tried to break the curse before, and what happened?

Do you think you deserve the curse?

Have you lost anything as a result of being cursed?

Curses For Players: Adding Flavour

Sometimes as a player, you want to add some flavour to a role beyond the words on your character sheet. Using a cursed backstory to explain in-game mechanics can give your character more depth, as well as explain how your character gained their skills or powers.

You might be playing a character where the rules say that you can go into a rage for stat bonuses. What if demon blood flowing through your character's veins causes this rage? The dice you roll and the advantages you gain are exactly the same, but it will change how you and others visualise the ability, how your character feels about the ability, and how they react in other situations.

Attaching character driven, in-universe explanations for mechanics via a curse can help you and others understand your character better and add interesting elements to them without any need for new rules.

Curses For Players: Getting Creative

Getting your players involved in curse making, and having them create their own curses to put on enemies can lead to very fun and interesting solutions to encounters.

Creating a curse is not just a quick spell to fling away in combat, but instead is a more long-term, potentially difficult, way to use magic against antagonists.

Players that are stumped by a brawny rival or curtailed by an evil sorcerer may wish to curse them, weakening the brawler's physical strength or confounding the necromancer into being unable to cast incantations.

By giving the power to players to create their own curses, you invite the players to try to exploit the antagonist's weaknesses, to do this they must better understand their enemy and the world they inhabit!

By coming up with their own solutions, finding and exploiting the enemy's weakness and not just using brute force, the players will find their victory all the more rewarding, and their understanding of your world will be deeper for it.

If you're going to be letting players come up with their own curses you can cut a lot of the future effort in writing the 'ingredients' by keeping a generic list that you adapt to the specific scenario.

For example your generic list could be:

Piece of target + item that represents the negative effect + something that symbolises revenge + item to apply curse = curse effect

Example of this formula using the cursed gem from above:

Scales from target dragon + gold from a miser + blood of dragon's victim + gem to focus on = dragon is cursed with greed

Vlara's Beguiling Gem

Pushed back from the lair of the Lord of Dragons, the adventurers realise they had not the strength to defeat the beast in a square fight, its scales were too thick, its mighty fire too ferocious.

Wracking their brains in the tavern they realised the one true weakness of all dragons...

When they returned it was with an enchanted gem the likes of which the Dragon had not seen before. The adventurers had enacted a mighty ritual curse on the gem, focusing the Dragon's avaricious instincts entirely on the once mundane pebble.

The Dragon's mind emptied of thought as it was consumed entirely by the desire to possess the gem.

With the Dragon's attention entirely focussed elsewhere, it left itself open and the adventurers found the weak spots they desperately needed.

Many a monster has fallen victim to a curse that amplifies its own vice.

Modern Curses

Modern settings, or even steampunk settings for that matter, have a different relationship with the magical and mystical to fantasy settings, and how you use a curse should reflect that relationship. Using a curse in such a setting may give players an unexpected and interesting challenge.

When you apply a curse in a modern setting, you should consider the reactions of characters around your players. Are they going to be shocked when strange magical effects begin to plague your characters? Are they going to write it off as something mundane and refuse to believe in them, or do they have their own connection to an eldritch World?

More often than not magic will be more subtle in these settings. Where in a fantasy setting being cursed by a spellcaster might be something almost common, in a modern setting you might be expected to find some more cynicism about magic and fewer resources to use against it.

Thus when using a curse in this setting, players would have to work harder than in a fantasy counterpart.

Because it works against what players expect of the setting, it better works to subvert expectations and create a more interesting challenge for them.

Sci Fi Curses

Science Fiction is a very broad term, and with it comes many ways to get a curse into your sci-fi setting.

For many settings it's a simple case of changing some terminology: "magical transformations" may now be explained by a mutating bio-weapon, or an alien parasite changing the host's body.

If your sci-fi setting involves demons and psychic abilities already, porting over a curse is potentially as simple as changing the word "magic" to "psychic"!

Whether an easy substitution or not, adapting your curses for sci-fi means finding the fantastical elements in the setting and using those to justify the mechanics of the curse, allowing you to reap all the tabletop benefits of a good curse.

Sci fi causes for curses (d10)

- (1) Computer virus
- (2) Alien technology
- (3) Parasite
- (4) Cosmic rays
- (5) Psychic manifestations
- (6) Advances in science gone wrong
- (7) Artificial intelligence
- (8) Magic (if it exists)
- (9) Subliminal messaging
- (10) Unexpected medical side effect

Inspiration

We were inspired by a long history of reading, film, television, and of course gaming, when we wrote *At Your Peril*. Below is a list of some of the pieces we drew from to help you get an idea of how you can come up with an idea for a curse based on all kinds of things.

Some of these works contain the exact harmful tropes we warned against at the start of this zine, Lovecraft is especially and unambiguously racist, but those still sparked something in us to create something fun which isn't. When you recreate aspects of media you're inspired by it's best to use a critical eye to identify issues and pick out what you love about something without taking the issues into what you make. Whatever you bring to your table will be stronger for it, trust us!

- Warcraft 3
- Van Helsing (2004)
- The Dragon Prince
- Beauty And the Beast (1991)
- The Magnus Archives
- Drag Me To Hell (2009)
- Needful Things
- 'The Cthulu Mythos' (H.P Lovecraft and others)
- Pirates of the Caribbean (2003)
- Monster House (2006)
- The Hobbit
- Princess Mononoke (1997)

Credits

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One half of Hive Mind Games, writer, and artist.

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Illustrator, Piercer, Tattoo artist.

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Self-taught artist creating digital paintings and character
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Managing the business half of Hive Mind Games, Writer.