

Stone Lore

Adam Simpson

Hello Mage fans & welcome to Mage the Podcast. The podcast that works hard towards Ascension, so you don't have to. I'm Adam & I'm joined by **Pooka** today as we dig deep in the quarry of Mage lore. As hosts of this podcast, we have mined every topic related to Mage to give you resources for your games but there is a stone we did leave unturned. Listeners have put us under seismic pressure to reveal the hidden gem that shines with such brilliance it distracts the awakened from the path of Ascension. Yes, listeners. It is time to reveal every facet of the most powerful skill in Mage the Ascension: Stone Lore.

Pooka, are you ready to unearth Mage's greatest secret today?

Pooka

The puns just won't stop coming. I mean, I feel like greatest secret is a bold claim, but I won't dispute it. So yes, vehemently yes.

Adam Simpson

Are there any announcements?

Pooka

The only one at present is that people on the Discord have asked for updates on the auction we held in connection with TryItCon 2, TerryCon Edition. As a reminder, this was a charity auction of Terry's vast TTRPG library, to have some books go to community members who would give them loving homes. We did the first round entirely within the TerryCon convention space, then the second round through the Mage the Podcast Discord, and then the third round publicly. So I am pleased to report that as of this recording, the auction has raised over \$13,000 for the Boy Scouts of America, which is likely to increase as we process some larger purchases.

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There's talk of getting a giant check and presenting it at the scout camp where Terry was a counselor, so I'm excited to take part in that. Giant checks feel like a mythic thread. I've never seen one in person, but they certainly seem to be items of power.

So anyway, I guess I can also mention that plans for TryItCon 3 are very tentatively beginning to coalesce from the spawning pool of thought.

So to be continued, eventually.

Adam Simpson

As we roll into today's topic, I can see the complaint letters already. "I was planning a cool Chronicle but now my players are going to use Stone Lore to one-shot the main villain!" Listeners, we kept Stone Lore buried for as long as we could. The volcanic heat from fans became too much so grab your mining helmet & pickaxe because today we're going deep enough to disturb Tolkien's balrogs.

Stone Lore has enough weight behind it to unbalance your games. Not only that, it lays out the most arcane secrets for aspiring mages. Mage books have made vague references about mages digging up the secrets to become gods who rule in the Umbra. — Yep. Stone Lore. I used my contacts to smuggle out of Atlanta, Georgia a sticky note that was stuck underneath the desktop of an intern who helped Mage authors at the end of the 90s type up meeting notes. It was written backwards in an obscure code the gnostics used to protect their deepest insights. After bribing a university professor to translate it, I can share the message. Stone Cold Ascension. The most powerful, most cosmic form of Ascension mages can achieve is whispered among the Oracles. Stone Cold Ascension is the path to godhood & it's impossible without Stone Lore. But before that is even a gleam in a mage's eye, Stone Lore makes monolithic feats of magic crystalize in a mage's palm. Today we are going to sift through the grains until every last nugget of Stone Lore is in your grasp.

Pooka, anything to add before we scale this cliff? It's not too late. I have my notes ready on throw pillows as magical instruments. We could always do that instead.

Pooka

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I mean, I'd be happy to get into throw pillow lore as well. It's an ability of equal if dissimilar potency to stone lore, in my opinion. Similarly couched in extensive myth and legend.

And I feel we will need at some point to cushion that blow, providing listeners with an easy, no frills guide to the subject. But anyway,

Adam Simpson

Touche, sir. Touche.

Pooka

Putting that to one side for the purposes of this recording. Yes, I'm ready. Let's rock. And that is the only bad pun I feel capable of tossing out there from now on because it's early and the coffee hasn't sunk in yet.

Adam Simpson

Today's topic was a suggestion started by Terry. Notes indicate he was thinking of interviewing Anna Urbanek, one of the authors of *Geologists Primer*. That book offers ideas for using the lore of minerals & metals in roleplaying games along with facts about those materials & their uses.

Pooka & I thought it might be fun instead to discuss the book's contents along with related ideas. Stone Lore has become a running joke on our Discord server. The joke started with Terry's humorous mentions over the years about how the Stone Lore skill is overpowered. Terry found it funny because experience points are valuable for players. They carefully consider how to spend them to make their characters more capable. The Stone Lore skill didn't look like it gave a good return for the experience spent. Terry certainly wasn't the only person with that opinion.

Stone Lore first appeared on pg. 29 of *Book of Shadows*. That was a 1st edition book but you have to remember, it was the source of Merits, Flaws & secondary skills for both 1st & 2nd editions. I have said in past episodes the secondary skills must be given some consideration by Storytellers before letting players choose them. Some are quite practical like Cryptography, Poisons, Psychology. Some are meant to reinforce the paradigms or practices of mages like alchemy, astrology, herbalism & theology. Revised Edition didn't mention Stone Lore. Revised Edition

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brought games closer to street level by decreasing the power scale. Stone Lore was too potent for Revised Edition. Mage 20 pg. 284 subsumes Stone Lore, Herbalism & others into the skill Esoterica.

The only place in all the Mage books where we get specifics on this skill is Book of Shadows. The description is brief. “You know the reputed properties of stones & all the magic inherent in them. You may use this knowledge in the creation of Talismans & fetishes & can assist with ritual magick.” End quote. It’s known by new agers, jewelers, alchemists & Dreamspeakers. Suggested specialties are planetary influences & jade carving. Metal lore is mentioned as a part of this skill. There is mention of other mages & even werewolves seeking out experts to advise them on what stones to acquire. Some Mage fans might be confused by this. Where do I find the ritual magic connected to Stone Lore? What penalty is there for using the wrong stones in the hilt of the Wonder I’m making? The authors did a poor job of explaining plant lore, stone lore, astrology & others are only a part of your game if you want that. Rules were not written to support these knowledges. The authors assumed Storytellers would adjust difficulties & mention the need for specific materials if they wanted to use these skills at all. Long story short, if you like Stone Lore, bring it into your games. You’ll need to work out rules on your own. Published Mage rules don’t recognize intrinsic mystic qualities for any material that wasn’t specifically created with Sphere magick. Different mages have different beliefs. Verbena believe rowan wood can protect. Solificati believe sulphur has mystic qualities. However, these are details of paradigms & practices. When Mage was written it was assumed the fans would invent their own details for the particulars of the magic their characters use. If astrology or plant lore doesn’t sound interesting, skip it. Most Mage fans don’t use these skills but we promised you the details & we will deliver. First, we’ll dig into some sources of actual stone lore. What are the details you can use for particulars in your games? Next, we’ll discuss different approaches for incorporating Stone Lore into your games.

Pooka, is your drill ready? Any safety warnings?

Pooka

See, I’d be bad at Stone Lord because I don’t know what the safety warnings should be. Feel like goggles are important, right? And keep all fingers and aura extrusions inside the fleshly vehicle before you proceed with all lapidary experiments. And do not operate the drill while under the influence of time magic.

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Chantry members must wash hands. There we go. And actually, given how often alchemists worked with toxic substances, washing hands was probably both necessary and entirely insufficient.

Adam Simpson

Someone's going to type all that up.

But anyway, before we get into it, though, I do want to zero in a little bit on that notion of secondary abilities and their utility broadly, and distinguishing stone lore as a topic from capital S stone capital L lore as an actual trait with dots. So on the one hand, as you point out, spending points on this, or any other secondary ability, in my opinion, is flavorful for a character, but in almost every case, except for stone lore, I think you're probably better off spending those points elsewhere.

On the other hand, it hardly seems fair that a single knowledge like Esoterica could have all of those bodies of lore just lumped into it, especially one as potent as that of stone. So even if you use the, in M20, the optional well-skilled craftsman system to have a character's knowledge revolve around one topic, the upshot is still that a mage can be argued to know something about all the buckets of stuff that are lumped into it, which strikes me as too broad. You can make the same argument for other traits like that too, like academics. So the choice is therefore left up to the storyteller. Do you allow players to roll these broad abilities for an attempt to engage with anything they don't have the specialty in? Do you bring in secondaries as separate traits?

And this is even without getting into the also optional in M20 professional skills and expert knowledges. For myself, the way I'd probably handle it as an ST is if a player feels that small s, small l, stone lore, is important to their character in some way, I'd offer them the option of spending points on it as its own trait and use the old trick from, I think it was Vampire 2nd Edition, of doing a 50% discount. So you get two dots for the price of one, you spend one freebie point for a dot during character creation, etc.

The trade-off is that while the dots on a player sheet indicate the kinds of stories they want to tell with that character, something so rarefied will likely have proportionally less screen time in and the Chronicle I craft, especially if only one player decides to take it so it can be truly joyous to see a player have that moment of, "I knew this would come in handy" when you have the puzzle that can only be defeated by stone lore. But I want all players to feel like their skills contribute as much

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to the party overall outside of those moments. And I don't want them to feel like they wasted their points.

So like so many things, it's a negotiation between individual storyteller and individual player. I'd also be remiss if I didn't add what the individual levels of stone lore do, according to Book of Shadows.

So, at one dot, you sell birthstones and psychic crystals. At two dots, you can match metals and stones to make amulets for most occasions. Three dots, you know your stones. Other mages come to you to get their rocks. Thank goodness that sentence ends where it does. Four dots. The Garou come to you to get rocks and metals. You talk to stones. Five dots. Not only do you talk to stones, but sometimes they talk back.

You know all the powers of the minerals and can identify the great jewels of legend. I love the idea that with one dot in stone lore, no matter what your Arete is or what Spheres you have, you've got this side hustle selling shiny rocks at the mall or something.

It's like the... In the Changeling supplement *Shadows on the Hill*, there's this one Dreamspeaker who has like, Arete 8, Spirit 5, and rather than conquering the Umbra single-handedly, she spends her time reading tarot cards in her little rent-free beach bungalow.

More dots? You get werewolves knocking on your door wanting wholesale prices, which is like a built-in story hook for storytellers to take advantage of. You put googly eyes on your pet rock, and regardless of whether you have Spirit or Matter, it talks back.

So if that kind of wackiness is your speed, then it doesn't really matter much whether you're maximizing the utility of your point spends with the stone lore trait. You do you. That's my overall point.

Adam Simpson

Good point. Pooka and I did our own reading for this episode. I read *Geologists Primer*, already mentioned. If I had more time, I would read *Jewel* by the Smithsonian Institution, more than 300 pages with loads of photos and lots of stories on famous jewelry. Also, *Gem Lore* by Diane Morgan, which collects legends that focus on gems and magic stones. I did have time for Amulets

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and Superstitions, A.E. Wallace Budge from 1930. Even though it's old, there's a Dover paperback, so it's cheap and easy to find. The author did a good job of collecting bits of lore from ancient sources and historical accounts. Two chapters focused on types of stones. We get tidbits like this. A model of the phallus made of amber was regarded as a most powerful protection against the evil eye and any and every attack of evil spirits.

And won't your friends be impressed?

Pooka

Oh, indeed.

Adam Simpson

Many of the old sources are lists of stones and the benefits they can impart. One keeps you safe from accidents. Another can aid recovery from fever and prevent someone using the evil eye on you. Stones weren't just worn on necklaces or in rings. Some stones were ground up, mixed with water or wine, and swallowed.

We see the 7 stars or planets of the ancients:

The sun was connected to amber, hyacinth, topaz, chrysolite.

The moon to diamond, crystal, opal, beryl, mother-of-pearl.

Mercury to agate, carnelian, chalcedony, sardonyx.

Venus to emerald, some kinds of sapphire.

Mars to ruby, hematite, jasper, blood-stone.

Jupiter to amethyst, turquoise, sapphire, jasper, blue diamond.

Saturn to jet, onyx, obsidian, diamond, black coral.

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Pooka

Sounds like you've taken that monetary alignment specialty in stone lore.

Adam Simpson

Well, next up is Geologist's Primer. This book is drinking from the fire hose. It should have been titled *More than You ever Wanted to Know about Rocks*. The material is more Western and modern. The occasional bits about alchemy were nice. We are given the Western correspondences of the element earth, colors, compass direction, tarot, sweet, shapes, herbs, et cetera.

Ten terms from old times associated with stone or earth will help you focus on the subject. Terms like menhir, dolmen, and obelisk, along with definitions. The majority of the book is taken up by the material descriptions. Stones, metals, and some other materials like ivory get two pages each.

A Storyteller could just read the magical properties header for each material and skip the others to build up a working set of mystic properties for stones and metals. Some highlights, emeralds resist sexuality. They reduce lust, attraction, and desire. That may not sound appealing, but if you're teaching students, keeping their minds on their studies instead of each other is exactly what you want.

Fulgurite is fossilized lightning in sand or dirt. Yes, you can carry some lightning in your pocket. Jet protects from bureaucracy. I need a huge block installed in my office. Pronto.

Alchemists might use saltpeter to make vegetable stone, which is then used in ever-growing gardens. High-quality sapphires can be used in sphere magic to cure bad breath. Hey, don't laugh. How do you think Porthos funded his magical research? Also, sapphires can protect from Mind or Life magic that manipulates your emotions.

You might add one die to the player's roll to resist the effect for each point of quintessence they put into the sapphire. One thing I appreciate about Stone Lore is it helps me think of magic in different categories from the nine Spheres we're all used to.

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Sunstone helps sexual powers and attraction. If you put a sunstone and an emerald in a bag and shake it up, there might be a disaster of hormonal proportions. Hey, you were warned.

Tanzanite is rare and helps mystical awakenings, good for students to gain insights. It may also help those with psychic noumena. Turquoise is good for protection. It is associated with the sky.

It wasn't until 1863 that the world learned jade is actually two different stones, jadeite and nephrite. There are some older Wu Lung who may not believe that. Keep that in mind if you're invited for tea.

Onyx can vibrate when danger is near. The rumor that ecstasics put it in their front trouser pocket and walk into construction sites is false. Who spreads these rumors? Those were some highlights. Remember that when it comes to gems and minerals, names and categories have always been mixed up. The book by the Smithsonian Institution had many mineral names I did not see in Geologist's Primer. Storytellers may need to make rulings to help players. For example, is Peridot its own stone or counted as Olivine?

We get 18 pages of magic items with game stats. Most of these are weak, dull, and many are, to be honest, bad jokes. Magical Correspondences is two pages of topics with a list of stones to associate with each. Could be useful. Astrological Correspondences is four pages of stones with planets, zodiac signs, elements, and deities for each. Might give you ideas. A few pages on sacred geometry would feed nicely into geomancy. Not an exhaustive treatise, but it may be all you need.

In summary, to be used in games for more than one session, the specific benefits of stones needs to be decided by the Storyteller. It doesn't need to be very detailed. Telling your player gold is associated with warmth and the sun, while silver with cold and the moon is enough to get them thinking.

At first I wondered why metal lore was mixed in with stone lore, but I see it now. The two have been mixed for centuries, plus metal is often used to fix stones into jewelry or objects, so the subject so the subjects have always been connected.

This book includes other materials like bone, charcoal, salt, ice, clay. I wish those had been left out. Separating the metals from the stones would have been so helpful.

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So Pooka, did this book offer you any hidden gems?

Pooka

Here's my deep Cultist of Ecstasy thought. Finding gems is a state of mind, both in life and in this text. So thinking about like diamonds and rubies and whatnot, they're precious because they're shiny and colorful and humans have decided they're valuable. But the processes that make things like shale or sulfur are, to my mind, just as cool.

And then with this book, I agree that it could have been called more than you ever wanted to know about rocks, but at least it knows what it what it is. It is a reference book through and through. I admire your chutzpah and reading it cover to cover because I did not have the strength to do that.

Adam Simpson

That took some time.

Pooka

So you can... Yeah, and even though there's this framing device of like the setting agnostic lore and these occasionally cheeky little bits of charm woven through, fundamentally, it still felt like reading through a dictionary or an encyclopedia. I'm much more receptive to doing that when I read random chunks at a time, whether they're things I'm looking up in the context of a game session, i.e. the players have just rolled up three kinds of gem on a treasure table and I want to see what nifty tidbits I can turn that into. Or I come across a stone in some other context and I'm curious to expand my knowledge.

So rather than searching for hidden gems, it was a matter of opening the book, considering the rock on whatever page you open to as something interesting and precious, and then closing it again until the next time.

Adam Simpson

All right.

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Pooka

That whets my appetite more than the opening material about mining practice or Geology 101. Maybe I'll be more into that someday when I'm either playing a character who's a prospector or trying that in real life when I'm thrown back in time to the mid-19th century.

I'll also humblebrag a bit and say, yeah I knew a lot of this already because I'm an informational magpie who constantly has Wikipedia open. So... I also had a much shorter, less fantasy inflected book like this as a kid, where I learned about things like the Mohs hardness scale and the definition of piezoelectricity. I learned the difference between metals and metalloids in chemistry and the difference between menhirs and dolmens from my interest in Celtic culture.

Crystals, I like how comedian Aisling Bee refers to crystals as lady magic. I vibe with that less, but I know birthstones and I know divination methods. So all of that is to say, rather than hidden gems, I can talk about a few things that stuck in my mind when I stumbled across them or surprised me to learn when I was just flipping through random pages or going to my favorite stones. So a few that I wrote down here. Chalk has the note under culinary properties that an addition of chalk to wheat flour is, depending on the area, considered either illegal adulteration of bread or required by law fortification with calcium. When you consider that next to the next section where it talks about its associations with necromancy, you get all kinds of possibilities for like baked goods for the undead. So I'm into that.

Under ivory, I had never heard of tagua nuts before this book, but it's a form of, quote, vegetable ivory derived from a genus of palm in South America. Online, you can look up galleries of some really exquisite little carvings, which I'd recommend checking out because it gives you ideas for amulets and the like.

Lapis Lazuli, which is one of my favorite gems. I have no idea whether the note that it warms up in the presence of lies and deception is based in actual folklore or invented for this book, but I love it almost as much as the stone itself.

And then I knew that sapphires came in colors other than blue. But one of the illustrations is this picture of a rough gem that's like blue and pink. And I thought, oh, I wonder, given that both sapphire and ruby are varieties of the same mineral corundum, I thought, are there sapphire ruby blends out there? And that led me to learn again online about sapphires from Tanzania, which

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commonly have these bands of colors and are often cut to showcase them. Some of them blend blue and purple or red in a way that's led to them being called galaxy gems. So that raises the question going back to the book here. Does such a stone bar the properties of both things that it resembles? Does it have sapphire and ruby properties?

Could be pretty potent. And I have to say, The structure and illustration is half the beauty of this book. Every single entry is a tight two-page spread following the same format of information accompanied by these gorgeous drawings that take up a full page.

I didn't mind the metals and other materials being mixed in because at least everything was alphabetical. But like any organizational principle in this book would have to be a compromise by default because different readers are going to want to quickly or regularly reference different specific things, which I imagine was the motivation for the exhaustive number of appendices that kind of go through everything multiple times from different perspectives. A lot was sacrificed to squeeze all of the practical information for each substance onto one page, and all of it ended up in the appendices.

So if you are not a book nerd who enjoys just diving deep into alchemy and sacred geometry and whatnot, the sections that give an overview of those things are useful.

I'll agree with you, the magic items didn't wow me quite as much. And it's also the case that if you're using this book for an actual game, the availability, significance, or value of a particular material will vary from system to system. On top of which, the magical effects they're paired with here for those items or otherwise, those might be restricted to certain types of character or branches of magic.

If you're just using them for fiction or flavor, though, then they can be inspirational. They're quite brief, though. I'd say you're better served just developing your own items. Yeah.

Adam Simpson

You mentioned another book you read. Tell us about that.

Pooka

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Yeah, so a stark contrast. This is Hedy Jutta's book, *Lapidarium, The Secret Lives of Stones*, which is similar and different at the same time. It covers 60 materials divided into six categories, things like stones and power, sacred stones, etc. And it's overall a much more narrative book. The author is an art historian and takes this perspective that's in a way much less functional. Like there are no tables of correspondences or guides to mining or chemical formulae in here for the most part but each entry has one or more stories or bits of folklore that often make some kind of broader point about the stone and its place in culture or about some abstract aspect of the world or humanity so for example you talked about how emeralds reduce lust according to the geologist's primer.

The *Lapidarium's* entry is instead about Anita del Garo Briones, an 18-year-old Spanish dancer of humble birth who became the Maharani of Kapurtala when the Maharaja, visiting Spain for a royal wedding, became smitten with her at a performance and took her back to India to become his wife.

She received a massive emerald carved into a crescent moon that she referred to in her later life as her talisman, the lucky jewel that was the symbol of this like fairy tale life that she had led.

And over the course of that three-page vignette, the author ties in mentions to how rare emeralds were in the Old World, how Spanish colonization pillaged so many from Aztec and Inca temples that they had to start selling them off to rulers in India.

So it's not all lore in the sense of like, what are some traditional correspondences or magical uses for this jewel, although some of that's in here. It's more about individual stories that tie the stone in question to a particular theme.

So I think it makes a nice compliment to Anna Urbanek's book, because that book is functional in its generalities, whereas this one is very specific and almost poetic in the stories it tells. It has many of the same stones, but also ones like Lingbixi, the scholar stone in China, and how it became known as such, or the Ujaralluk unit, the last entry in the book, a vein of rock in Canada, which might be the oldest on earth.

So I quite enjoyed putting individual entries from each book like side by side and getting a different feel for them. The primer is good for coming up with hooks. The *lapidarium* shows angles you can

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work into a story arc that are embedded less in the overtly mystical and more in the human experience, if that doesn't sound too grandiose.

But I'd recommend it.

Adam Simpson

Yeah, thanks. It does sound interesting. I had not heard about that one before **Pooka** mentioned it to me.

Well, famous stones and some other bits will hold till the end. Let's switch gears to look at stone lore in your games. There is an endless list of gems and minerals. Experts and laymen don't agree on which names to use for stones or even how to categorize them. If they're going to feature in your games, you'll need to make rulings on how to sort out the lists. Also, a lot of stones have so many benefits that they overlap, conflict, and overwhelm you. Probably best to pick a favorite book on stones instead of trying to combine every available list. A question to ask here is, do mages agree on the details of stone lore, or are there many schools of thought?

A First Edition vibe would be mages used Sphere magick long ago to learn the truth. There is one correct body of knowledge for stone lore. Technocrats disregard it. Orphans wish the Traditions would share it more widely.

A Revised Edition vibe would be multiple stone lores divided by regions, magical styles, etc. In Revised Edition, new mages made efforts to find good mentors. A player who gains a three in one of the stone lores would be noticed by a mentor or be allowed to join one of the Traditions.

Stone lore could be a skill that supports a magical style. Mage 20 encourages skill rolls succeed before the Arete roll for effects. The players don't need to read lots of books. It can be assumed the player's character studied the subject, so just make skill rolls during games.

For those playing second edition like me, a skill that supports a magical style could be something the player decided to use or not. If the player asks for a skill check, a botch prevents the effect. If failure raises the difficulty, four successes or more may grant a lower difficulty or more dice in the

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dice pool. When the skill is only one or two dots, there may be some unhappy rolls, but when it hits three or higher, I doubt the player will regret it.

If you want a setting advantage rather than a mechanical one for players, you could say a number of students at a Chantry heard of the player's exploits and ask the player to come and lecture. Teaching at a Chantry will give the player's character prestige and help with gaining a student, ally, or Chantry membership.

I'm teaching your students, so you have to let me use your library!

A legitimate way to handle Stone Lore is to put it in the player's hands. The player can suggest what stones they want to use, how it might help or hinder them at times. A Storyteller should make sure the player doesn't grant himself constant advantages, but if he makes a lot of effort to get just the right stone, an advantage seems appropriate.

Letting stone lore be flavor without an actual skill on the character sheet is fine. I have a hard time building paradigms around skills, but you could imagine the mage believes magic comes from deep in the earth. Stones and metals unearthed have inherent power. Wood and plastics do not. That would explain Nodes, by the way.

I think stone lore applies better to magical practices than paradigms. An alchemist might learn onyx is better for a certain kind of effect. If he uses it, the roll ignores penalties or gets bonuses. Hermetics might have records of which stones affect which spirits when summoning. You summon the Angel of Storms with an emerald in your staff? Guess what? You've been blessed with chastity for three months. Women won't look at you. Lucky you.

Minerals and metals affecting elements when using Forces magic is quite appropriate. Electrocuting Technocrat field agents wearing Primium armor has a difficulty so high you might as well give up. But if you did your homework in the Chantry archives, you'd know a copper-iron alloy is the opposite of Primium, and that brings down the successes needed. A Dreamspeaker might build his Rotes around awakening, for a short time, the spirits within materials. A Dreamspeaker with an old-school mentor can't work with plastic or glass, but stones, metals, bone, and shell, that is covered. Stone lore could be a crucial skill to this mage.

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Pooka

Yeah.

Adam Simpson

When the Storyteller runs a game that focuses on the inherent qualities of materials, especially older ones, stone lore becomes equally useful for all players. A rogue Tradition mage has been causing trouble with a Wonder made of amethyst.

Rumors circulate he has an accomplice with instruments made of agate. Mages everywhere are looting libraries for books on stone lore. The players have already built up a personal library on the subject, so they're ready. They are better equipped than anyone to guess what the third and fourth minerals would be and which ancient faction of mages set this pattern.

This story could turn into a chronicle when mages everywhere realize stone lore is important to umbrood and gives advantages dealing with them. I said the mage rules don't recognize mystic qualities inherent to materials, but we have a way to work around this. When a shaman awakens the spirit of a material or any mage infuses an object with quintessence, you could say that unlocks its mystic qualities. A ruby necklace is ordinary until you put quintessence in it. Then it strengthens and emboldens the wearer as long as the quintessence is still there. If you want to make stone lore a part of your Mage setting, you don't have to break the rules to do it.

If you visit the middle Umbra, you might accidentally find yourself in the Chasm. This realm disrupts magic and sucks the will out of people. Transferring quintessence to a ruby necklace would help it stoke your passions and fight off the Chasm's depression. However, transferring quintessence might get disrupted there. Spirit magic works fine in the Chasm, so awaken the spirit of the ruby necklace instead.

Perhaps each success adds a die to every roll you make to resist the Chasm's negative effects. Mages may have been using the Matter Sphere for years to transform low quality gems and minerals into high quality specimens. This may explain why mages in the first two editions rarely worried about money.

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This is a much lower paradox risk than turning lead into gold. Low quality diamonds are crushed and placed on knife sharpening blocks. High quality diamonds make people rich.

On our Discord server, jquestionmark points out a possible use of skills like stone lore for Hollow Ones, pointing out flaws or just making people doubt in their instruments. “I hope you realize that wand isn't really onyx. Black granite is often mistaken for it.” For the rest of the scene, or day, the other mage can't use the instrument.

The Hollower might even hijack the instrument for a while. “No, child, a colored zircon in a bracelet won't help you block mental attacks like a diamond. But I can use it to slow time. Thanks so much for bringing it for me.” Did I mention Hollow Ones often have a hard time making friends?

Pooka

Aww.

Adam Simpson

Hedge wizards and psychics are too often forgotten. Hedge magic numina has traditions and styles of its own. Thaloun members will study stones with a focus on harmonic qualities. They might use jet for the path of cursing.

Wizards who practice the Aeon Rites might use turquoise for divination or citrine for making lightning strike someone. A group of hedge wizards could focus on geomancy. Stone lore would be vital for their practice. Detailed occult skills like stone lore are probably more appropriate for hedge wizards. Hedge magic is much more concerned with details than Sphere magic.

A druidic or shamanic hedge wizard might not worry about stone lore, but an alchemist might.

Geologists Primer has information for almost every material mentioning how it affects mood and state of mind. This would work great for crystal lore for people with psychic numena. It might add so much flavor to the psychic numina paths that more of your players will roll up psychics.

Stone Lore

When we were preparing for this episode, Pooka mentioned stone lore having possibilities for Sorcerers Crusade games. I can't agree more. Renaissance Europe was a time and place where the lore of stones and metals was more widely known and believed, making it apply to most of the magical practices of mages of that era is a natural fit.

I've been talking about ordinary stones. Doesn't Stone Lore have celebrities? Pooka, can you tell us about the famous stones from history and legend?

Pooka

Oh, so many, just so many. I made a list, so I'll talk about some. So, all right, so we've got things like the Stone of Scone, a symbol of royalty in Scotland since the 13th century, and the seat of monarchs that was pilfered by the English in 1296, but then returned 700 years later. Did a thing in the Sorcerers Crusade one-shot where it was any magic that you did against royalty was vulgar. No matter how minor it was, it counted as vulgar. And I like sort of applying that to this kind of case. It's okay, the mage is sitting on the Stone of Scone, this centuries-old nexus point of royal power.

So like, they're gonna sit there throwing fireballs and anything you try to do to them is going to be vulgar. So something like that.

Similarly, you have the Lia Fail, the Stone of Destiny at Tara in Ireland. It will roar if the true King of Ireland returns and touches it. I've been there, I've seen it. It's just this little post stuck in the ground and I can neither confirm nor deny whether it roared when I touched it.

So... Also in Ireland, you have the Blarney stone, famously reputed to give anyone who kisses it the gift of the gab. So maybe in World of Darkness terms, you get a dot of expression. But in order to kiss it, you have to do this awkward like reverse backbend hanging over a castle wall. So you earn that dot.

You have things like the Koli-Nor diamond and the Hope diamond, both large and beautiful stones said to carry a curse of one kind or another. And that legend has only kind of accrued over time. So modeling that with Spheres, I was thinking if you had like an Entropy 5 effect, I guess pattern locked to the stone itself, it's that mimetic idea of the curse that just gets more and more

Stone Lore

powerful over time until it really is giving bad luck to everybody who handles it. and you wouldn't need to make it a Wonder in order to do that.

In the Old Testament, we have the hoshin, or sacred breastplate, which was worn by the high priest of the Israelites, on the front of which were 12 gemstones of uncertain identity. I also like, there's a note in there that the stones were engraved by Solomon's Shemir, which was either, according to various scholars, either some kind of rare worm-like creature, or itself an incredibly hard stone, but it had the power to etch any substance and impart that substance with power.

So that was kind of a cool thing. Also in the Old Testament, you mentioned one shot with stone or one-shotting your foe and the David and Goliath story that that sling stone is obviously a powerful kind of item to consider. There's a similar sling stone in Irish legend with versus Balor as well.

Then, an individual stone, but in Han Dynasty China, the emperors were buried in what were called yiyi, which were these jade burial suits made of hundreds of little squares of jade all stitched together to make these kind of body fitting shrouds. So a kind of armor that has some kind of spiritual potency could come out of that.

in Australia, the monument Uluru in the center of the country. It's commonly called a monolith, although I don't know if that's geologically correct, but essentially it's just this one massive piece of sandstone sitting in the middle of the desert. Obviously, it's a very deep spiritual place and has been for millennia for the Aboriginal people. So I would caution against just kind of dropping it into a game, but it is an example of a famous stone, in my opinion.

We have the Rosetta Stone, if we want to count that, and being a linguist it is near and dear to my heart, allowing, as it did, the translation of hieroglyphs in the modern era. Maybe even less of a qualifier for this list, but similar, is the Behistun inscription, which led to the decipherment of cuneiform. But it's carved into stone, so I'm going to include it here.

And then last on my list is Servilia's Pearl, a black pearl that was gifted from Julius Caesar to his mistress Servilia, for which he paid something like a billion dollars in today's money, and it's considered the most expensive gem in history.

So the syndicate would have a field day with that one. There are many more we could cover. I remember going to the... what's it called, the Green Vault in Dresden, which is just brimming with

Stone Lore

jewels and art objects carved from precious stones and thinking like any one of these could be the basis of an entire novel, following the story from the item's conception and creation through the history of its ownership. to some event that it catalyzes, highlighting human greed or fascination. Because the thing with stones is they're durable, they're noticeable, and sometimes they're valuable. So they're a good substrate for lore to build up on, whether it's individual to that stone or whether it connects to more general wisdom about planetary correspondences and healing properties or whatever, or both. A simple cameo handed down through seven generations in a single family to me is as worthy of a lore-based story as the Hope Diamond, whether that's in a Mage game or in some other context.

And beyond the individual, types of stones can also tell you a thing or two about the cultures in which they circulate. You have things like betels or betali, sacred meteorites that were believed in ancient times to be houses for the gods.

Ancient Greece had Hermae, these sort of squared pillars that were topped with a bust and had genitalia carved on the front of the otherwise featureless surface, apparently to ward off evil, similar to that amber phallus we're talking about.

I learned from the show *QI* that Christian bishops wore amethyst rings for the de-intoxicating properties. The name literally means not drunk, and it was to remind them that that feeling of drunkenness they felt was from being filled with the Holy Spirit, and certainly not all of the wine they'd just imbibed, transubstantiated, or otherwise.

And even something modern like, I was thinking about the Robert Frost poem, *Mending Wall*, with its famous line, good fences make good neighbors. And that's in reference to the wall that separates the narrator's property from the next. This is in New England, so that wall is just a row of unmortared rough rocks. So that notion of boundary stones is something you see handled in different ways all over the world with different kinds of meanings.

So those beliefs about where particular categories of stone come from or what they should be used for can reveal something about what's valued by whoever spread that wisdom and or mythology.

Stone Lore

From that sorcerer's crusade perspective, I think mages would be the ones who recognize that kind of meta meaning and how the power that gives them over sleep or belief translates into creating mythic threads that they can use. Not that that's absent in and the modern setting.

It's easiest to see with the Syndicate who understand you have this conceptual leap from a collection of elements forming a colorful shiny crystal to the outright greed of the mortals who covet its intent invented value, and therein lies power.

But when you go back to a historical setting when so many more Sleepers were living with so much more uncertainty and they rely on that wisdom of what stones represent along with all of the other phenomena that magic builds upon and manipulates to its advantage, mages get to witness and shape that process of creating meaning at a local scale, helping to define what the lore is for a given stone.

We often talk about alchemy in relation to this, which was in its heyday in the time, or one of its heydays, at least during that era. And we talk about it as this body of fixed and received knowledge, but so much of it was experimentation. So I like the idea that stone lore hermetics are learning now what the Solificati were inventing out of whole cloth 500 years ago.

So there's that connection as well.

Adam Simpson

Well, I have a little to add to the roll call of famous stones. The black stone, probably a meteorite in the Kaaba in Mecca's grand mosque, may be the most famous stone in history.

Pooka

Yeah, yeah.

Adam Simpson

The omphalos is the stone sacred to the Delphi temple in ancient Greece. In the ancient world, people believed in eagle stones. Eagles kept them in their nests to help them hatch their eggs.

Stone Lore

People believed if they could steal one, they could enjoy the mystic benefits for their own children or enjoy success in business.

Lungurium was petrified lynx piss, a yellow stone that was magical and hopefully didn't stink. Legend spoke of lynxes making lungurium deep in the forest and then hiding it under the dirt because lynxes hate people. After hearing this, I'm not very fond of them either.

Qirin is a stone that when placed on a sleeper's chest gives them hallucinations and forces them to answer questions honestly. It is also called the Hopoe stone and sometimes found in the nest of the Hopoe bird. Please use caution with Qirins. They have been known to break up marriages.

In the back of geologists primer, there is a set of tables for randomly creating a invented stone. I got this one. "Sparkle crust is a widespread rock. It usually occurs as mineral inclusions in living beings. Interestingly, it burns in contact with air.

When worn or carried, it will make shadows tangible. Unfortunately, it is extremely brittle." See, in the geologist's primer, there is a sentence written out with these big blanks and every blank is a a roll table. So it turns into that quote. But yeah, basically, I'd like to roll up a few more.

Pooka

Stone libs.

Adam Simpson

Pooka, what was your result?

Pooka

Well, just a brief cool note about the Omphiloid. I seem to recall that there was an Omphilos in multiple places in Greece, not just at Delphi. And while that one was the most venerated, the others were like kind of equally seen as centers of the world without contradicting each other.

Adam Simpson

Stone Lore

Oh, really?

Pooka

So an interesting kind of correspondence thing there. Have to see if I can find that reference. And also...

Adam Simpson

Yeah, it makes me want to read more about it.

Pooka

Yeah, I remember coming across it in some academic reading at some point. But also with the lynx piss, because one of my favorite branches of the werewolf family tree is the qualmi, who are the were-lynxes. What if you get their piss crystallized?

Some shape-changer energy.

Anyway, the thing is, with the random tables, as we talked about with the Never Real Worlds book, I tried this exercise a few times and got some really boring or nonsensical results, so I may have snuck a reroll or two into the mix.

And the best one that came out of that is... Dragon glaze is a legendary metal alloy. It usually occurs as veins in seabeds. Interestingly, it burns in contact with air.

When burnt, it will contact deities. Unfortunately, dragons lay claim to all specimens. So I was pleased that the Burning in Contact with Air, When Burnt, and Dragon's Lay Claim bits all came up together.

Adam Simpson

That's cool. Well, I might use these tables to make unusual stones found near a Node or in a Horizon Realm. Pooka, do you have a favorite mineral?

Stone Lore

Pooka

It's like asking me to choose a favorite child. Blue is my favorite color. So I mentioned lapis lazuli is one of my favorites. Sapphire is also near and dear to my heart. But I also find opal really fascinating, partly from its aqueous nature. And then like the play of color when you get a fire opal just breaks my heart to look at even more than bismuth with its fun, shiny rainbow vibe. When I visited Australia, I spent many a long moment gazing at window displays just filled with the most gorgeous specimens of opal that I will never in my life be able to afford.

And there's also a Walter Scott novel where there's a character who has this weird, like unholy death opal. And the novel was really popular. So it single handedly crashed the opal market or something like that. And I just love stories like that. So yeah, opal is a a favorite as well.

Adam Simpson

I think malachite is just beautiful. I'd love a piece on my desk. It aids physical healing as well as protects from harmful magic. After you die, it prevents you from becoming a wraith and stops necromancers from messing with your remains. You have to keep it dry, though. If it gets wet, copper can leech out and cause trouble. You have to keep an eye on it. But it's so pretty you will anyways.

I had this idea while reading Geologist's Primer. A Horizon Realm is rich in a certain mineral. It takes enchantment very well and can be worked into door handles, hinges, objects of all sorts. Many objects have potent wards or enchantments on them, making a stay in the Horizon Realm always interesting.

Well, listener questions round out our look at stone lore.

JQuestionMark asked, can you give us a quick reference for stone qualities? I'd say drop 15 bucks at Drive-Thru RPG for Geologists Primer, go to the material descriptions section and only read the magical properties headers. It won't take long to compile notes on materials and what they can do magically. Pooka, how would you answer that question?

Pooka

Stone Lore

Yeah, I mean, I'd agree. It's not a bad spend. It's not a bad book. At the same time, I do think if you are working with a specific stone and you're kind of working backwards rather than just searching for general ideas, I think it's easy enough to find similar useful information on Wikipedia.

Adam Simpson

Well, next up, TLWeb asked, what if we treat Stone Lore as a mythic thread instead of a skill? That is one way you could approach it. In Revised Edition, the Storytellers Handbook on page 59 states a mythic thread allows effects to be coincidental that might otherwise be vulgar. Mage's second edition rulebook backs this up on page 182.

Mage 20 rulebook, page 530, gives a minus one to Arete rolls when a mythic thread is being used consciously by a mage. This allows player knowledge of stone lore to be brought into your games without needing to spend experience points on a skill. Pooka, what did you think of that one?

Pooka

Well, one addendum is that M20 does still include the possibility of mythic threads making the vulgar into the coincidental, although I prefer the minus one difficulty. But I'm hard pressed to think of many stones that would do that in an immediate and useful way.

I guess maybe the one shot David and Goliath thing, but is that really reliant on the stone? Yeah. Maybe convincing an opponent that like the effect of a radioactive rock is much more dramatic and movie-like than it actually is, and thereby shedding baleful light and aggravated damage over a group of foes or something. Because generally, if you hold up uranium, it won't kill you immediately. But people think it's, you know...

Adam Simpson

Yeah, I seem to recall that in the David and Goliath story, David collected five stones, used one, and the other four were never mentioned. So maybe there's four stones out there with potent killing power waiting in them.

Pooka

Stone Lore

Oh, I like that.

Adam Simpson

The only problem is they look really, really ordinary. I probably shouldn't drift off topic, but one point that people raise is if David had so much faith he could do it, why did he collect five stones instead of one? And some Bible historians say that in those times, in that part of the world, when someone died in a duel, their brother could step in and say "No no no, it's not over yet. I'm going to finish this and so David may have been stocking up for the brothers that he thought were going to step out of the woodwork but never did. In fact, the Old Testament does give names of the brothers of Goliath so apparently he was not the only big guy out there.

So finally, one more question. Heilong asks what can stone lore be used for in games? Other than Sphere effects, gaining Ascension and getting girls, what can stone lore do for you? Stone Lore plus Perception roll when examining a Wonder in a Chantry's collection. If the Wu Lung made the helmet, why is it using a combination of materials revered by ancient Egyptian alchemy? It was probably made by hermetics of House Hong Lei who know how to pass off precise replicas of historical Chinese Wonders.

The local Hollow Ones won't allow you to visit the club unless you impress them. Roll Stone Lore plus Manipulation to propose a table setting for dinner, cleverly incorporating birthstones into an arrangement that implies which members of their clique have higher status and which have lower status. With five successes, you can make two members argue about which of them is getting snubbed, shifting the focus off you entirely.

Finally, this may not come up too often, but Stone Lore plus Dexterity will save your butt when a Marauder creates a Dance Dance Revolution platform using large square precious stones in a grid pattern. You have to step on the right squares quickly to pass each challenge or you lose your Node, your familiar, and your pants.

Pooka, how might you use Stone Lore in games?

Pooka

Stone Lore

Well, as a former Dance Dance Revolutioner of some repute, I fully support the last one. But yeah, off the top of my head, in a non-magical situation. Perception plus Stone Lord to recognize fake gems, Charisma plus Stone Lord to fast talk the new age shop clerk, Stamina plus Stone Lord to draw inspiration from some story about a boulder to momentarily boost your resilience.

Maybe magic adjacently, you could add it to roles for like building a periapt or a soul gem. It's one of those things where, if you take dots in this, you will find uses for it. But like any other trait, don't let it become the everything trait. And that goes for the Storyteller as well. Make it applicable, but not all purpose, I would say.

Adam Simpson

Good advice. Well, Pooka, any thoughts as we wrap up?

Pooka

I mean, I wish I had more puns about stones that don't veer into like marijuana puns. Yeah, no, I think stone lore is the best thing that's ever happened. And I will fight anyone who says otherwise. I won't, actually.

Adam Simpson

Yeah, I was going to open up the episode with a pun about being stoned and my son said, no, you can't you can't do that. I was like, okay, maybe you're right.

Pooka

Different episode.

Adam Simpson

Different episode.