

RUNE MAGIC

THE GLORANTHAN RUNES

The Runes are symbols which have power inherent in them. They serve as are the building blocks of Glorantha. They are symbols, archetypes, embodiments, and actual matter or energy of the mundane world. Runes originated with the very creation of Glorantha. The Runes are more than just written symbology. When a Rune is written or inscribed, the real power of the magical image is present within it. Repetition of a rune does not weaken it, but strengthens its presence and firm reality in creation. Their precise origin is unknown, and believers in particular runes always insist that theirs was first-made. Tales link the gods of the Celestial Court with the runes, each god embodying a rune. Their interactions led to the births of the Young Gods; these newer deities are often associated with one or more parental runes as a result.

Each rune has myths associated with it. Some have elaborate cycles woven around their stories. All begin with a member of the Celestial Court who owned the rune, and end with the current Greater God who owns it. In these stories the runes are sometimes treated as things, or beings, or abstract powers, or even all three.

The powers of the Core Runes are universally acknowledged. The deities who command those runes are the Greater Gods. Those deities cannot be changed without altering the very fabric of the universe. Such alteration is against the Cosmic Compromise which begat Time, and cannot occur. There are lesser runes, not shown here, and many signs and symbols as well.

RUNE CLASSIFICATIONS

The Runes can be divided into several types. Minaryth the Purple, the great Jonstown Librarian, stated at one time that there were four types of Runes in his Hero Wars period, and we have accepted that as definitive in this article.

According to this division, the Runes fall into the following four classes: Powers, Elements, Forms, and Conditions. Each god has one or more specialties within the forces described by the Runes. These are the areas in which the particular god, and therefore his or her priests, are most effective and versatile. To say that a god is a Fire Rune god, an Illusion god, or whatever, is to say that priests of that god specialize in that area. The specific Runes are described below, by class.

ELEMENTAL RUNES

The Elements are what Glorantha is made of, the raw and lifeless essence, unintelligent and inert except for their primal urges. They are what form the ground you walk on, the air you breathe, and the warmth that you feel. During the Hero Wars period in Dragon Pass, five elements were recognized. Elemental runes cannot normally be combined, although some cults

know secrets whereby one elemental rune has some limited powers over another.

● Darkness

Meaning: *Darkness, cold, underworld*

The most ancient Rune, the First Born, the Waker from the Void, from whom all other Elements were born or descended. Darkness was the first Element to arise out of the primal chaos. Darkness is traditionally most potent against Chaos. The mace and the rock are the weapons of Darkness and lead is its metal. The Darkness Rune is manifested as Subere. Personality Traits: Cruel, cold, secretive

~ Water

Meaning: *Water, fluidity, seas, rivers*

Water was born of Darkness, set to floating over the sprawling sea like a pool surrounded by darkness. As an Element, it is called Son of Darkness, Pathway to the Underworld, and Supporter of the Earth. The whip, the flail, the net and the trident are the weapons of Water and quicksilver is its metal. The Water Rune is manifested as Magasta, King of the Waters.

Personality Traits: Mercurial, capricious

□ Earth

Meaning: *Earth, physical things, agriculture, solidity*

Earth is the third Element, Queen of Life, Mother of Many, Supporter of All. She fills the central portion of the world, both physically and spiritually, and because of this, her surface is the primary manifestation of the physical plane. The ax is the weapon of the Earth Rune and copper is its metal. The Earth Rune is manifested as Ernalda, Queen of the World.

Personality Traits: Pragmatic, prudent, worldly

⊖ Air

Meaning: *Air, breath, violence, weather, storm, wind, Middle Air*

Air is next, though actually Fifth Born, Umath the Son of Earth and Sky, whom he tore apart to make room for himself in the world. He is the Breaker of Laws, Destroyer of Heaven, Father of Fury, Fighter Against Darkness, and Lightbringer. The sword and the bow are the weapons of Air and silver is its metal. The Air Rune is manifested as Orlanth King of the Storms.

Personality Traits: *Passionate, proud, unpredictable, violent*
Incompatible with: the Moon Rune, Chaos Rune

⊙ Fire/Sky

Meaning: *Fire, sky, purity, light, stars, the Sky Dome*

Fire is the fifth Element, and usually the last one accepted in the common world. He is the Crown of the World, the Purity of Station, the Distant One, and the Emperor of the Sky Dome. The Sky is different from Air, for Air separates Earth and Sky. After his defeat by his son, the Sky has been aloof from mankind, although his children remain close. The

spear is the weapon of Fire and gold is its metal. The Fire Rune is manifested as Yelm.

Personality Traits: *Loyal, honest, purity*

POWER RUNES

Said to symbolize the members of the Celestial Court, the Power Runes are unique in that they are formed in mutually antagonistic pairs. There are several other theories about the Power Runes besides this dualistic one, but we know that this theory was popular during the Hero Wars period. Some said that all of the "positive" attributes came first, while the later "negatives" were generated quickly during the War of the Gods. Some other philosophers claimed that there was a gradual step-building pattern among the deities, which follows the established Creative Devolution theories.

Regardless of the truth, it is important to remember that most people, including the magicians of the time, knew very little about these Powers except the rudest beginnings of their spiritual potential. Expressions and Experiences dealing with their inner natures are tasks for the greater deities, and not the races of men. Still, no one would deny that every person knows something of each of these Powers, and may tap them in varying degrees.

III Harmony

Meaning: *Unity, cooperation, healing*

This Rune is said to represent the Divine Harp with which Order was separated from Chaos. It is quite ancient and revered throughout the world. She is the power of Healing and Community. She is now manifested as Chalana Arroy, the goddess of Healing.

Personality Traits: *Forgiving, merciful, peaceful*
Incompatible with: Disorder

I Disorder

Meaning: *Disorder, trickery, trouble*

Some say that Disorder is the First Born of the Powers, and so is the foundation of the universe. The symbol itself is of unknown origin. It is manifested as Eurmál the Trickster.

Personality Traits: *Destructive, reckless, selfish*

Incompatible with: Harmony

X Life

Meaning: *Plenty, Giving, Love, Sex*

This Rune symbolizes the Ancient Cup from which the whole world was poured at the dawn of creation. It is the symbol of growth and life. It is now manifested as Esrola the Uleria, sister of Great Ernalda.

Personality Traits: *Generous, lustful*

Incompatible with: Death

† Death

Meaning: *Death, separation, conflict, endings*

Known to be the First Sword, the immortal and cursed weapon which Humakt used to bring death to the world. He is the unyielding fate of all living

creatures, both mortal and divine. Death is a frightening but necessary agent of eternal change who can be used in a courageous and noble way to preserve the world. He is now manifested as Humakt, the god of Death.

Personality Traits: *Relentless, ruthless, unemotional*

Incompatible with: Life

△ Stasis

Meaning: *Immobility, Unchanging, Solidity*

The various names for this Rune illustrate the ideas behind it. It is clearly connected with the art of alchemy and the dwarfs. They claim that this is the First Rune, for it provided the foundation from which everything else was created, or else provided the foundation of hard laws which were used to overcome the forces of Chaos. This rune is manifested as Mostal the god of the dwarfs.

Personality Traits: *Stubborn, inflexible, exacting*

Incompatible with: Movement

∞ Movement

Meaning: *Mobility, Change, Conflict*

This Rune denotes the ancient wheel of Larnste the Mover and is often called the Larnste Rune. As usual, there are claims for it to be the First Rune, for without it there would have been no growth from Chaos. Change introduced Conflict and Violence into the world, and it is considered to be the sire of Air. It is now manifested by Orlanth the Everchanging.

Personality Traits: *adventurous, dynamic, impulsive, reckless*

Incompatible with: Stasis

Y Truth

Meaning: *Truth, knowledge, writing*

This is a Rune of the ancient, all-seeing sky gods, and is said to represent the torch that the grey ones used to escape from Chaos. Thus, its constancy and order set creation apart from random, unsettled Chaos, and so it is yet another candidate for the First Rune. It is now manifested as Lhankor Mhy, the god of Knowledge.

Personality Traits: *Truthful, observant*

Incompatible with: Illusion

∴ Illusion

Meaning: *Falsehood, concealment, tricks*

Eurmál, the Father of Lies, always claimed that this was the First Rune, for without it there would be none of us to think we ever were. He refused to explain further. This rune is manifested as Eurmál the Trickster.

Personality Traits: *Deceitful, cowardly*

Incompatible with: Truth

FORM RUNES

The Form Runes can be understood as the basic molds which were used by the greatest gods to populate the many niches of the physical plane. A god is often described as being of a particular Power

or Element, and the Form determines how this force is expressed.

Everything has a Form Rune but they are rarely a source of magic powers other than the form itself. For example, all men have the Man Rune (♁) but it simply means that they are men (and not gods, discorporate beings, animals, or plants).

The following Runes depict the most basic of their respective forms.

† Plant

Meaning: *Plant Life*

This Rune is often named Flamal, who is known as the father of vegetation. During his lifetime, there was an intense period of vegetable growth and dominance upon the Surface World, called the Green Age. Thus, this Rune is the symbol of the first life upon Glorantha. Many deities have a connection with the Plant Rune, one being Aldrya, whose religion is a combination of Earth, Plant, and Life.

▽ Beast

Meaning: *Animal Life*

This Rune is also called the Dragon's Eye, and is supposed to represent the armor plate over a dragon's eye. Dragons are thought to be the progenitors of all beasts (at least those with four or more legs), though no one has had the nerve to ask a dragon about it. It is thought to have originally been a dragonewt Rune, and its complexity supports this belief, as does the fact that it is known almost nowhere else in the world except the Hykimi regions at the edge of the world. All beasts have the Beast rune – when a non-beast has this rune, it means that they can potentially take the form of a beast.

Note: Many animals are also associated with other runes. For example alynxes, sheep and bulls are all associated with the Air Rune, cows, geese, pigs and snakes are associated with the Earth Rune, horses and most birds are associated with the Fire/Sky Rune and so on.

EXAMPLE OF A SUB-RUNE

♠ Yinkin Rune

Meaning: *Sensuality, alynxes*

The Yinkin rune is a combination of Air and Beast, for Yinkin is the fecund beast-part of Orlanth. It can be considered a sub-rune of either Air or Beast. Although the rune is unknown amongst the non-Orlanthi, the Yinkin rune is common enough among the Orlanthi to be included here.

Personality Traits: *Lastful, curious, loyal*

♁ Man Rune

Meaning: *Mortal humanoids*

This Rune represents the humanoid shape, and is common among all intelligent humanoid races. Some other races interpret it as "slave" or "food". It is said to represent Grandfather Mortal, about whom

numerous folktales are told; he is also sometimes called simply the Old Man, Progenitor of Races. He fathered many races, built some more, and provided the form for others that were created during the Gods Age.

✂ Spirit Rune

Meaning: *Discorporate beings*

This Rune describes the spirit aspect of the universe. Shamans are always tied to the Spirit Rune, since it is by dealing with the entities of this Form that they gain their power.

Note: People with this rune are predisposed towards spirit magic, even if they are from a theist or wizard culture.

♣ Chaos Rune

Meaning: *Entropy, evil, corruption*

This Rune is descriptive of those who are descended from the forces of entropy. Such creatures are usually bound to some Form, since even Chaos must obey the Laws of Time, but it might be combined with any other Rune, even opposed Powers. Nothing is totally safe from the taint of Chaos. Wakboth the Devil manifests the Chaos Rune.

Note: The Chaos Rune is taboo amongst the Orlanthi and, if awakened during the adulthood initiation rites, will almost certain result in you being killed by your own clan.

CONDITION RUNES

There are three main Condition Runes and many minor Condition Runes. They often modify by showing which aspect of an Element, Power, or Form is served by a deity. The use of such Condition Runes usually masks the true identifying Runes of the deity or individual described, although it may also signify the independence of a hero or magician from religious ties.

♄ Rune Mastery

Meaning: *Leadership, authority, sovereignty*

The all-purpose Rune, Mastery can be used as a symbol of Mastery of Men, Magic, or the Elements. As Master of Men, it describes a hero. As Master of Magic, it symbolizes any deity of cult of reasonable power. As Master of the Elements it denotes a sort of innate intelligence among the physical stuff of the world, or what we commonly know as the Elemental Demons. The exact origins of the Rune are lost, but it is connected with the Dead Gods whose gigantic crowns are still sometimes found among the abandoned peaks of the world. This Rune is manifested as Arachne Solara.

Personality Traits: *Proud, just, authoritative*

℞ Magic

Meaning: *Communication between worlds*

This Rune indicates a connection between men and gods. Almost redundant in this magic-rich world, this Rune describes how a deity or individual deals with the power of another Rune. Since it is impossible to deal with the Runes without magic, it means much. The symbol also has a much deeper meaning, denoting an individual's "personal power".

Note: the Magic Rune is a rare rune and has few divine cults specifically associated with it.

∞ Infinity

Meaning: *infinity, eternity, unbounded*

The Infinity Rune is the mark of the gods, and he who possesses it is almost a god himself. This is not used lightly, as it implies total control of the power flow around the user, making him or her invulnerable to almost all magic, among other abilities. It is characteristic of gods, heroes, and dragons only. Infinity is an uncommon Condition in the world, but is found with understandable regularity wherever dragons are present. It is said that the Ancestral Dragons snatched this from Chaos and based the world upon it.

Communication Rune

Meaning: *Communication, trade, exchange*

The Communication Rune, also called the Issaries Rune, is a unique composite of the Movement and Harmony Runes. It symbolizes language and speech, passage and transit, travel, trade and roads. The God Learners widely popularized this Rune as the symbol of trade, but it is more than just that. It is manifested by Issaries, the god of Communication.

Personality Traits: *Fair dealing, open minded*

∞ Eternal Battle Rune

Meaning: *Anti-Chaos*

The Eternal Battle is a unique rune where all Four Worlds fight Chaos. It was first invoked by Urox and is now his rune. The Eternal Battle still rages in Prax and in the Wastes, with Urox locked forever in combat with Wakboth.

Personality Traits: *Hate Chaos, Berserk Rage, Violence*

⚡ Luck

Meaning: *Fortuity, fate, destiny*

Many legends and tales teach the futility of trying to outmaneuver an inexorable fate that has been foreordained. The rune is little used, except in the Holy Country, where the Masters of Luck and Death proudly display the symbol of the chance they take with every breath.

Personality Traits: *Daredevil, Gambler*

☾ Moon Rune

Meaning: *Illusion, cycles, balance*

The Lunars claim that the Moon is the sixth Element, but this is rarely accepted outside the Lunar Empire. This Rune reappeared in the Third Age, its obvious presence and the power of the Rune in its locale proves its importance. The Moon Rune embraces and includes Chaos and wages a brutal war with Orlanth over control of the Middle Air. The Moon Rune is manifested by Shepelkirt, the Red Goddess.

Note: The Moon Rune is taboo amongst the Orlanthi and, if awakened during the adulthood initiation rites, will almost certainly result in you being killed by your own clan.

Other Runes

Several other runes were known in Dragon Pass in the Hero Wars period, and other runes are known throughout Glorantha. These runes include specializations of the Element Runes, sometimes called sub-elements, such as Shadow, Cold, Heat, and Light. Runes linked to specific creatures, races, cultures, or lands are known, such as the runes associated with Yinkin. Others are similar to the Condition Runes, and may simply represent less universal concepts or symbols. This latter category includes such runes as Communication, Luck, Fate, or Law. Finally, entire Runic systems are known which are beyond the scope of this article to deal with, such as the Celestial symbols used in Dara Happa or the ideograms that spell out the names of the deities of Pelanda. Proper consideration of these runes is not possible at this time.