

This article is the second section of a complete primer in occult swordplay being written by Fenwick Rysen. This section covers the more advanced topics of enchanting a sword as a magickal tool for use in combat. This and other writings on occult swordplay are available publicly at the House Dreamblade occult swordplay website at: <http://www.chaosmatrix.com/dreamblade>
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Magic Sword +1

His body tiring, having made no successful attacks, and small cuts on his arms and legs where the master had struck him, Michael turned to the raw force he called the Primal Chaos and his master called the Liferforce, its energy spilling into him. His sword began to sing, dedicated to the Primal Chaos from the day he had stood over the forge with hammer and anvil, breathing life into its steely being. "Slake your thirst upon the force of Chaos," he whispered to it, and the sword aided his invocation, making it easier to draw in that force and let it flow through him and into the hungry sword. To his magickally attuned eyes, the runes he had etched into the blade glowed red—blood red, the same scarlet brilliance with which he had empowered them. The red glow spread to consume the blade, lanced through with the blacks and whites and greys of the primal chaos. The master, skilled against the relative fumbblings of his student, suddenly found himself retreating before the onslaught of the sword as it took over, its aura spreading through Michael's body, filling him with newfound strength, controlling his strikes and parries with almost inhuman skill.

From the vorpal sword that dispatched the Jaberwock with a *snicker snak* to the legendary powers of the otherworldly *Excalibur*, our myths and legends are filled with stories about magic swords and their wondrous abilities. So much so has the concept of a magic sword enamored us that it penetrates our entire fantasy genre from books to games to movies to children's action figures. These swords make their wielders larger than life, able to fight against incredible odds, the sword granting them powers beyond human reckoning.

Such stories are often dismissed as pure fancy, but behind them lies a certain amount of truth. Most aspiring occult swordsmen will be able to cast minor magicks upon their swords to aid them in combat, but rare is the magician who can empower a sword to possess its wielder or to drain its foe of his lifeforce. Magick swords are powerful because they grant powers normally reserved for the most skilled and dedicated magician to anyone who can pick up a sword and swing it around, much as a powerful talisman can cause magickal effects for those who wear them, even if they do not understand or have the capacity to create that talisman themselves. A magic sword is little more than an elaborately constructed and meticulously enchanted talisman of combat.

Some of these techniques are more difficult to create than others, and all of them possess an upper limit defined only by the ability of the magician enchanting the blade. Creating a magick sword often requires copious amounts of patience, skill, and luck. Not all magicians will be able to create a powerful magickal artifact like *Excalibur*, but even the lowliest magician will find that he is able to enhance a weapon to no small benefit.

As with any new magickal skill you aim to add to your repertoire, you will get better at it with the more practice you have. Because swords can be expensive, the aspiring enchanter of swords can practice with shinai or bokken. While they are not quite as enamoring to work with, they do have the benefit of being both readily available, and relatively cheap.

The powers and possibilities of enchanted swords truly push the limits of what most people accept as achievable through magick, which means that while some of the topics can be discussed in detail, their possible limits and applications far exceed what most people would expect. Keep an open mind, and dedicate much thought to those aspects of magick swords that you believe to be impossible. You may surprise yourself.

Permanent Enchantments

This is one of the simplest techniques that a magician can use to create a magick sword, and yields the widest variety of results, depending on the goal of the magician. Essentially, a permanent enchantment is nothing more than empowering the sword as you would a talisman or a magickal tool for use in a specific task. Enchantments can be combined, adding them to the sword as time goes on. Old enchantments can be renewed, granting them more strength over time. Anything that can be done to a talisman can also be done to a sword. Your own magickal training and your own experiences in creating talismans or other magickal objects will determine your tastes, preferences, and limits in this arena.

Awakened Blades

Perhaps the most common stories of magic swords are those of a blade that possesses an intelligence and cognizance of its own. Like a spirit bound to a talisman, the magician can create an intelligence bound to his

blade. This intelligence can be a created spirit, a spirit that the magician captures and binds to the sword, or in a more animistic vein the magician can simply talk to his sword, imbuing it with the power to become intelligent, and “awaken” it that way. Regardless of the method chosen, an awakened blade has many benefits over a mundane sword.

It’s hard to say exactly what any specific awakened blade will do. As you awaken it or create it, you have full control over how smart it will be, how it will communicate, what skills it has, and how it will influence its wielder. An awakened blade will have an aura like any magickally charged object, and the contact the magician has with the aura, especially during combat as the two auras mingle, allows the sword to influence the magician as much as the magician influences the sword. It’s a two-way street.

Until you have worked with several awakened blades, it is hard to describe just what benefits the sword will give you. The wielder of an awakened blade typically seems to move faster and with greater skill than he does with a regular sword. An awakened blade can also learn, and also seems to be able to impart some of its “knowledge” of fighting to the person who uses it over time. Perhaps most significantly, the most advanced awakened blades act as a powerful spirit bound to the sword, capable of carrying out very complicated magickal tasks at your command, or acting as a guardian spirit that warns you of danger.

Your own views about spirits, aethyric intelligences, enchanted objects, and your personal view of what an awakened blade “should” or “shouldn’t” be will all shape how you create and interact with one. The only way to truly learn the benefits of awakened blades is to create one—and after you do, you will probably never want to use a regular sword again.

Be warned here—if you practice solely with an enchanted blade (awakened or not) you may begin to rely too much on it, and in that critical combat situation when you lose your sword and must take up another blade that isn’t enchanted, you’ll be in real trouble. By all means, practice with enchanted blades, but don’t make a habit of it. Reserve them for those situations where you truly need them.

Always practice creating enchanted blades with your bokken or shinai. They are relatively cheap and just as easy to awaken as a steel blade, allowing you to practice at different techniques and ideas to see what does and doesn’t work before you attempt to awaken a blade you value. While the process of awakening a blade can be reversed, it is neither easy nor fun. Sentient creatures, physical or aethyric, will put up an incredible fight when their life is threatened—that peaceful little bunny rabbit you thought would be so easy to put down suddenly reveals that it, too, has a mean bite and rather nasty claws.

Power Symbols

What each magician considers to be a “power symbol” will vary from person to person. They can be all-encompassing symbols such as the pentagram or very specific symbols such as the planetary glyphs. Magickal alphabets are another great source of power symbols, as are sigils of various sorts. Just as a magician would oftentimes use power symbols on a talisman that he has created, so too can he use them to impart desired forces to his sword.

Historically, it was not uncommon for Vikings to have the entirety of the runic alphabet engraved upon their blade, their belief being that a sword thus marked was imbued with the powers of every rune, the totality of which represented every force in the universe.

Marking a shinai is as simple as sanding off the slight varnish, marking the bamboo with a felt-tip marker, and then pouring some varnish on a cotton rag and wiping this over the sanded area once the symbol has dried. To permanently mark a sword will require that you etch the metal with acid; anyone so inclined would be well advised to read up on metal arts beforehand, or to seek the advice of someone knowledgeable in such skills.

What symbols you choose (if you choose any at all) and how you utilize them are personal choices that will reflect your individual magickal path. How they work and what they do is left as a choice to the skilled magician who enchants the blade.

Blood Magick

That swords are tied to blood should be no surprise. This makes them a wonderful item to use if you are fond of blood magick. How you choose to combine blood magick with your swordplay or enchantments is, once again, only a choice that you can make.

It is not uncommon to blood a newly forged blade (indeed, some stories tell of powerful swords made by their final quenching being made not in water, but by running them through the chest of a hapless slave.) It is also common

to blood a freshly enchanted blade, running the blood over the blade itself, or over any new engravings or features. Some blades supposedly react to contact with their enemies blood, drawing power from it to transfer to their wielder (see the next section on Vampiric Blades).

While you can draw blood to enchant shinai or other blunt practice instruments or weapons, it is probably best when enchanting a real sword to use the edge of that blade itself.

Let your mind be the limit. There is much in the concept of blood magick to explore and apply.

Vampiric Blades

A sword can also be enchanted so that it acts in a vampiric manner to draw off energy from its victim. With the completion of a successful attack, the blade, either through the use of its intelligence (if it has been awakened) or through the use of permanent enchantments, can be made to use that wound as a magickal link from which it draws power. Another type of vampiric enchantment simply relies on contact with the aura of the victim (often using the aura of the enemy blade as a contact point) to draw off energy, much as do human psychic vampires.

What the sword then does with the energy leaves much choice. The energy can be used to empower other magickal effects, to fuel power symbols or permanent enchantments, and can even be used to give power to the wielder—though unless the wielder knows how to process the incoming energy, it can cause disorientation, nausea, and other sundry symptoms that will probably cost you the fight, and may continue to haunt you for some time to come. Repairing such damage to yourself is often harder than repairing the damage you've just caused to the victim.

While the morals of this technique are debatable, it is definitely unwise to use this for extended periods of time on friends and sparring partners that you value, as like any other form of psychic vampirism it can cause permanent or lengthy damage that manifests as depression, apathy, lack of will, and a loss of strength.

Unless you have extended experience with the skills of psychic vampirism, or are blessed to be the student of a teacher who can guide you through those skills, it is best to leave psychic vampirism and vampiric blades alone. There is a reason that the legends and myths of such swords are usually tragic stories. A vampiric blade imbued with an exceptional intelligence and denied "food" for some amount of time can become as dangerous to their wielder as to their foe. Be careful.

Living Steel

Perhaps the most effective way of creating a magickal sword is to forge it yourself. This is a very lengthy and complicated affair that will require that you have access to the proper equipment.

Modern technology gives us the ability to take a piece of steel bar and essentially carve out the shape we want, allowing much more flexibility on the part of the swordsmith—these methods are faster, more accurate, and (most important to the budding occult swordsmith) easier to learn. However...

It has been my experience that swords forged in the old style have an infinite advantage over modern blades in many areas including strength, flexibility, reliability, and even in their inherent magickal power. There may be a biological reason for this, in that while steel normally possesses a microscopic crystalline structure, the act of pounding on it with the hammer and anvil during forging realigns these smaller crystals into larger crystals. This process of realigning the crystals makes the steel stronger and harder, because the borders between the crystals that act as weak points are lessened as the crystals get larger. Blades that have been forged properly begin to approach the level of being a single crystal of steel, and anyone who has ever held such a blade can tell you that there is something special about them. Even those who are not gifted at magick can feel a sort of power humming through such a blade. The metal of such a blade is called "living steel". Many have theorized that the feeling of power they engender is caused by the human bioelectrical system interacting with the single crystal of steel.

I know of only one forge in the world that produces swords of living steel, and the price tag often exceeds that of a small economy car. They are very labor intensive to make, requiring about a month over the forge. The only feasible way that most occult swordsmen will ever possess one is to make it themselves. But before you go to that much trouble, take full advantage of modern methods to practice. You'll learn a lot about what magicks you can work into a blade as you shape it from raw steel.

Advice for those who would make a living steel sword: Sulfur in the fuel of your forge, in any amount, is your worst enemy, with even the most microscopic amounts rapidly contributing to the brittleness of your steel; if you can afford to use pharmaceutical grade charcoal, this will guarantee you the best result. When heating the metal, use

the carbon-rich portion of the flame; over the entire process of forging, this will ensure a soft and flexible steel at the center (so that the sword will not break) and a hard carbon steel on the outside, which ensures a true edge. There are many other benefits to hand-forged swords, but these two alone are enough to make it worth the effort for the serious swordsman.

Happiness is Twin Enchanted Blades

Another common concept of magick swords are those of twin blades, of two swords somehow bound to each other. Whether this is because of their similarities, or because they are diametrically opposed to each other, or simply because the enchanting magician saw fit to work on two blades at once doesn't matter. You can find many uses both in your enchantments as well as in actual combat for twin swords.

I have found it quite useful to keep a pair of training shinai on hand for the purposes of teaching basic swordplay to new students. One of the swords imparts to its user the ability to observe, comprehend, and integrate the defensive techniques he is taught, and its twin for the offensive techniques. If the student needs more work with his defense, I have him practice with the proper sword; if he begins to excel in it and needs more work on his offense, I switch his sword. The student almost never realizes the blade is enchanted, and seems to learn faster than with an identical shinai that has not been enchanted.

Another advantage to twin blades is that by separating dualistic principles, one can build up a charge, so to speak, between the two blades. This is where the "good sword, evil sword" stories come into play. If I'm trying to make a "good" sword, you will only be able to go so far as your limits and skills allow you—but many magicians find that by creating a diametrically opposed blade (in this example, and "evil" sword), they can push those limits, creating a sword that is more "good" than they could have otherwise created. Of course, one need not limit himself to good and evil; any binary force can be used, such as the defensive/offensive training shinai that I use. Paired swords are often stronger than counterparts made individually.

Another interesting technique I have experimented with is a Jacob's Ladder effect when fighting with two swords. A real Jacob's Ladder is an electrical device consisting of two metal rods across which an electrical current will arc, traveling upward until it ends at the top and a new one forms at the bottom. If you've watched any old mad scientist movies, you've seen them before. The same effect can be achieved when fighting with two swords, using them as rods between which you project an arc of energy. The usefulness of this particular technique depends greatly upon your skill in magick. The applications of it are best left to the imagination of the individual magician.

Possession is a Two Way Street

Perhaps the last thing that should be mentioned are blades that possess their owners. In your own practice, you will probably witness it to at least a small and benign degree with awakened swords that impart abilities to their wielders. It is not too great a step further for the skilled magician to bind an intelligence to a blade whose purpose is to possess the owner, much as a magician might conjure up a spirit and send it to possess his foe.

It has been my experience that most people, on the topic of possession, are quick to judge it as bad, evil, or destructive, yet I have found possession to be a two-way street. Just as you can imagine a possessing sword causing its wielder to enter a blood rage where he attacks everything in sight, so too can a sword possess its wielder and create a chivalrous paladin out of him. An infinite array of factors enter into the act of sword-possession, not the least of which include the skill and power of the magician who enchanted the blade, the intelligence of the blade, the personality of the blade, the character and willpower of the wielder, and the situation in which the sword is employed. Often these factors mean that the possession is only partial; it is very rare for anyone to become completely possessed by a blade.

The wise magician will realize the benefits that possession by a sword can offer. The cunning magician will disguise possession in such a subtle way that neither friend nor foe will suspect the sword responsible for certain actions.

Those magicians who can make reliable blades of this sort are rare indeed. Such swords are inevitably the greatest find in the occult swordsman's career—or his worst curse.