Power in a Name

Poisoned Pages for Shadow of the Demon Lord

A true name is a secret word that both grants and expresses the essence of the thing or being it names. True names grant form and reflect identity. Without a name, the creature or object would unravel, returning to the primordial chaos from which the genies made creation. Since true names are so integral to existence, learning a true name grants considerable power over the thing named. Merely speaking the name does nothing, but an investiture of magical energy allows the speaker to call forth the being or thing named, to force it to obey his or her commands, or to destroy the thing named by partly or fully unraveling the name.

The genies spoke the words of power that brought about the universe but recognized the chaos the creative lexicon could wreak on their creation. Thus after making the world, they buried deep the knowledge of the language, erasing virtually all signs of its existence from reality. Thus, most people have no idea what their true names are, let alone that they have them at all. However, despite the genies' efforts, traces of these words have been uncovered over the centuries; syllables, words, and even phrases are spoken aloud by users of magic when they cast spells.

Although well hidden, the existence and power of true names have not been forgotten, and no small effort has been made to uncover them as a result. Discovering a true name is no small feat. Researchers might work their whole lives scouring ancient texts, exploring the vaults of forgotten cities, and communing with dark and alien powers to find but a fragment of the name they seek.

For most, the challenge of tracking down true names proves too great and their efforts prove fruitless. Player characters, however, venture into places others do not dare, confront horrors beyond the ken of most mortal creatures, and, for their efforts, come across all manner of strange and powerful treasures. Every once in a while, they might stumble upon a true name. Will they dare to speak it aloud?

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DISCOVERING TRUE NAMES

True names do not reveal themselves readily. They hide in the world, buried deep in the creature or object to which they belong. To uncover these words of power, one must research the oldest books and scrolls, explore dangerous places, and when all else fails, resort to powerful magic.

Learning a true name does not always mean that knowledge of it will last forever. Each time the name is spoken, there's a chance the memory of that name fades, evaporating like a half-remembered dream. To guard against its loss, namers might record the true name in their research, though they rarely scribble the name on a bookmark or in the margins of a page. Instead, they hide the word in the text. They might use magic to render the writing invisible, weave it into other text, or obfuscate it so that a reader can only make sense of the word with a cypher. Furthermore, writings containing these words tend to be rare and protected. They can be found buried in library vaults or sealed inside ancient chambers guarded by fantastical monsters, traps, and dark magic. People go to great lengths to protect the knowledge they gain, for if the name finds its way to another, the creature named might use the speaker of it to avenge itself on a cruel or demanding master.

As few people in the world are even aware that they have true names, let alone what those names are, the only recourse for discovery is the use of powerful magic, such as *discover true name* spell, described here.

DISCOVER TRUE NAME DIVINATION ATTACK 7

Target One creature or object you can see within medium range

Your vision shifts to see the fundamental building blocks of creation and then returns to normal. If you target a creature, you make a Will attack roll against its Will. If the target's Power is greater than yours, you make the attack roll with 2 banes. On a success, you discover the target's true name and can attempt to learn it at any time before you complete a rest. On a failure, you become stunned for 1 round.

If you targeted an object, you discover its true name and can attempt to learn it.

Attack Roll 20+ You make attack rolls against the target with 1 boon until you complete a rest.

Some creatures, however, have discovered their own names, usually in the hopes of growing their capabilities. Doing so is dangerous, as the knowledge can be plucked from a person's mind. A read minds Telepathy spell (*Demon Lord's Companion*)), for example, could uncover a true name if the target is aware of it and thinking about it when attacked. For this reason, people who learn their true names eventually pluck the memory of the name from their minds and embed it into some physical thing, hiding it in a place where no one would think to look. True names could be stored inside holy relics, chiseled onto the walls of ancient temples, or inscribed on the surface of the world, visible only from high in the sky.

Just as beings have true names, so too do things, though discovering those names tends to be much harder and less worthwhile. Most users of magic rely on the words of power that underpin the spells they learn to achieve the same effects of learning the true name of an ordinary thing. In the case of enchanted objects and relics, the items might reveal their true names to their bearers. This usually happens when an object requires its bearer to speak a word of power to call forth its magic. This word of power is the object's true name. Knowledge of the name remains for as long as the bearer wields or carries the device, and it fades once the object passes from one owner to another.

LEARNING TRUE NAMES

Discovering a true name is but the first step toward being able to speak it and use its power. Until learned, a true name appears to be gibberish, a string of nonsensical characters that fail to stick to memory, the letters dissolving as the eye moves across them. To commit the name to memory and learn it, you must spend time studying it, fighting against the genies' wards to bind the characters to your mind.

To learn a true name you have discovered requires you to concentrate on the name for 1 minute and get a success on an Intellect challenge roll. The named creature's Difficulty might grant boons or impose banes on your roll. Find the creature's Difficulty on the Difficulty by Power table. If your Power score equals the corresponding Power indicated by the creature's Difficulty, you make the roll with no boons or banes. For each point of Power that your score exceeds that indicated by the Difficulty, you make the roll with 1 boon. For each point of Power that your score is under that indicated by the Difficulty, you make the roll with 1 bane.

On a success, a line of tiny writing—the name—appears just under the character's skin or etched onto his or her hide and remains there for as long as the character retains knowledge of the name.

On a failure, you gain 2d6 Insanity and you cannot attempt to learn the name again until your Power score increases by at least 1.

For example, Adelmar the Magician, has Power 1 and stumbles upon the true name of a bogie, a Difficulty 5 devil detailed in *Exquisite Agony*. To make the roll without banes, Adelmar would have to have Power 2, so he makes the Intellect challenge roll with 1 bane. Later, Adelmar comes upon the true name of a nymph, a faerie described in *Terrible Beauty*. The corresponding Power for the nymph's Difficulty is 6, so Adelmar would make the challenge roll with 5 banes.

DIFFICULTY BY POWER

Difficulty	Power	Example Creatures
1	1	Goblin
5	2	Gremlin
10	3	Organ Filch
25	4	Barrow Wight
50	5	Angel (*Exquisite Agony*)
100	6	Unicorn (*Terrible Beauty*)
250	7	Barghest
500	8	Hag
750	9	Incubus/Succubus (*Exquisite Agony*)
1,000+	10	A demon prince (*The Hunger in the Void*)

DEATH AND TRUE NAMES

Death of a creature or the destruction of an object does not remove the knowledge of the true name from your mind; however, it does affect what happens when you attempt to call upon its power. Generally, speaking the true name of a dead creature or destroyed object has no effect other than to reveal the state of the being or thing named. However, if you speak the true name of a dead mortal creature for the purpose of summoning it, the creature appears as normal, except it is a manes if the soul resides in the Underworld, or a lemure if it is in Hell. Summoning a lemure might attract attention from Hell and allow the devil that owns the soul to come with.
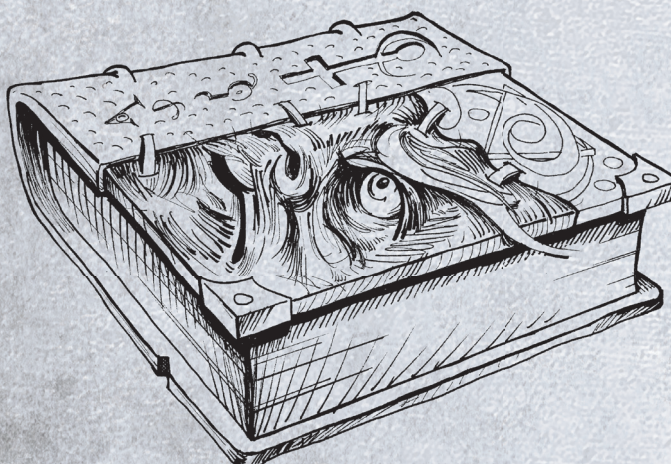
SPEAKING A TRUE NAME

Speaking a true name aloud has no effect unless you invest it with magical power. To do so, you must use an action to expend the casting of a spell you have learned. The casting must be from a spell of the minimum rank required or higher, as shown on the Minimum Spell Rank table.

MINIMUM SPELL RANK

Difficulty	Rank
1	0
5	1
10	2
25	3
50	4
100	5
250	6
500	7
750	8
1,000	9
More than 1000	10

TRUE NAME EFFECTS

Each time you speak a true name and expend a casting, choose one of the following effects.

SUMMON

Choose an open space on a solid surface within short range. Then, make a Will challenge roll. You make the roll with 3 banes. For each rank of the spell you expended that is above the minimum spell rank required, you make the Will challenge roll with 1 boon. On a success, the named creature appears in the target area. On a failure, nothing happens, and the casting is wasted.

When the summoned creature appears, you can use a triggered action to make a Will attack roll against the creature's Will. On a success, the creature becomes compelled for 1 minute. On a failure, the creature cannot be summoned or expelled by speaking its true name until after it completes a rest.

EXPEL

Make a Will attack roll against the Will of one creature that is within short range of you and that you summoned by speaking its true name. On a success, the creature disappears, returning to the spot from which it was summoned. On a failure, you gain 1 Insanity and the creature cannot be summoned or expelled by speaking its true name until after it completes a rest.

UNRAVEL DEFENSES

For 1 minute, you make attack rolls against the creature you named with 2 boons and the creature you named makes challenge rolls to resist your attacks with 2 banes.

PAIN

If the creature you named is within medium range, it becomes impaired and slowed for 1 minute.

DENY POWER

If the creature you named is within medium range, it takes a –1d6 penalty to its Power for 1 minute.

BESTOW MINOR AFFLICTION

If the creature you named is within medium range, choose one of the following afflictions: charmed, deafened, diseased, fatigued, frightened, impaired, poisoned, or slowed. The creature gains that affliction and retains it for 1 minute.

BESTOW MAJOR AFFLICTION

If the creature you named is within medium range, choose one of the following afflictions: blinded, compelled, dazed, or immobilized. The creature gains that affliction and retains it for 1 minute.

UNDO TRUE NAME

If the creature you named is within medium range, gain 1 Corruption and then make a Will attack roll against its Will. On a success, the target takes 10d6 damage and becomes stunned for 1 round. On a failure, you take half the damage and the knowledge of the true name fades from your mind. If the damage would incapacitate you or the target, the unraveling of the true name is complete and erases the incapacitated creature from existence.

NAMER Master Path

More than anyone, namers know there is great power in names, power that gives them ultimate authority over the being or thing named. Some began their careers as scholars, researchers into forbidden things, while others happened upon these words of power, discovering the secret language of the cosmos. The ones who turn their attentions fully to the apprehension and mastery of names become namers, masters of the lexicon.

Namers know several true names, having researched them for specific purposes such as defense, information, and to serve as their agents. Most namers learn, right away, to use their knowledge with caution, as naming creatures can create powerful enemies.

LEVEL 7 NAMER

Attributes Increase three by 1
Characteristics Health +2, Power +1
Languages and Professions You can speak another language or gain a profession.
Learn True Name You learn one true name of a creature whose Difficulty is equivalent to your Power score or less. In addition, each time a path would let you learn a spell, you can instead learn another true name of a creature whose Difficulty is equivalent to your Power score or less.
Hasty Dismissal When a creature you summoned by speaking its true name would be incapacitated, you can use a triggered action to attempt to expel that creature. If you get a success, the creature immediately heals 1 damage and returns to the place from which you summoned it.
Namer's Authority Against creatures you have named, you make attack rolls with 1 boon, and such creatures make challenge rolls to resist your attacks with 1 bane.

LEVEL 10 NAMER

Characteristics Health +2
Learn True Name You learn one true name of a creature whose Difficulty is equivalent to your Power score or less.
Eternal Thralls When a creature you summoned by speaking its true name dies, it disappears and returns to the place from which you summoned it. After you complete a rest, the creature is restored to life and heals 1 damage.