

## Player's Advantage:

# Cramming for Conquest – Methods to Enhance Learning

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In the HackMaster game, learning can be a difficult process, especially for the perennially unintelligent fighters in the group. Of course, in some ways this is natural and Darwinian. On the other hand, skills and studying are such an integral part of the game that magic-users are naturally encouraged to develop new methods to enhance the mind's ability to comprehend and retain challenging material. As a result, a number of methods, both mundane and arcane, are appearing in the halls of the world's most famous centers of learning.

## MUNDANE METHODS

Table HJ24-G: Mundane Learning Enhancements

Item	Cost	Availability		
		Hi	Med	Lo
Aardenswort	1 sp/dose	40	20	10
Coffee	1 gp/day	40	25	5
Notebook	5 gp	70	50	20
Notetaker	5 gp/day	50	30	15
Pragath Tea	2 gp/day	35	20	10
Raagean Slip	10 gp/dose	20	10	5

**Aardenswort:** This common herb is mixed with tobacco and smoked to gain clarity of thought and to enhance focus. It grows throughout temperate regions, especially in areas where farmland and forests are mingled together, as the herb requires shade to grow. Successfully smoking Aardenswort for one day for the duration of training grants a +6-10% bonus to learning attempts for that subject. Aardenswort does not stack with Raagean Slip.

Smoking Aardenswort takes about a turn (10 minutes). When a character smokes, he must succeed at a system shock check to continue. After succeeding 2d4 times, the character need not check for future attempts. Every day of smoking Aardenswort reduces the character's overall life expectancy by 0.25%, about three months for a human or perhaps two-and-a-half years for an elf! Worse still, while smoking and for a week after, the character is 5% more likely to contract a respiratory ailment, provided at least a 1% chance exists. GMs should also apply any smoking penalties from the article Pipes & Pipeweed of Garweeze

World in HackJournal #13, pages 9 to 17.

**Coffee:** Coffee is a strong, but relatively safe stimulant. It is grown in tropical areas, often high in the mountains where temperatures are mildly cool year round. It is usually only highly available in such areas or in major cosmopolitan cities. Drinking coffee from time to time while training grants a 2d4+4% bonus to the character's chance to learn skills or spells. Coffee will not stack with Pragath Tea.

Drinking coffee also reduces his fatigue factor by one on the following day, because he'll probably stay up too late that night. This problem goes away after a month of regular consumption. Coffee also adds 1% to the character's chance to contract disease, provided there is at least a 1% chance. Consuming coffee with Aardenswort or Raagean Slip for a week or more can cause a number of problems: twitching (15% chance - treat as the Nervous Tic flaw, lasting 1d4 weeks), gastric distress (20% chance - -1 to hit for 1 week), and/or exhaustion (15% chance - character cannot adventure or train at all the following week).

**Notebook:** This is a cheap, worn-out book, usually riddled with palimpsests and ripped pages that a character can use to jot down notes, provided he can read and write and has writing implements, usually a charcoal pencil. The character needs a separate book for each class, but the used books can be traded back to the seller for a 10-50% discount on the purchase of a new notebook.

Characters with at least a 51% mastery in a reading/writing skill automatically gain a 1d6+4% bonus to his learning chance for any skill class in which he uses the notebook. Characters with 50% or less mastery gain no benefit if they succeed at two or more reading/writing checks. The notes must be taken in a language that the character can read & write in order for him to gain any benefit. If a character retains his old notebooks, the next time he takes a class in the same skill, he can apply a 5% bonus to his learning chance for each notebook he has for that subject, up to a maximum bonus of 15%. This bonus stacks with the use of a new notebook, but if other students find out about his notebook collection, the character loses one temporal Honor.

**Notetaker:** A notetaker is a trained scribe, often another student, who will use a notebook for the character and will read back the notes after class. Characters who are illiterate or have a poor

green ink (10% chance). A few examples with waterproof ink exist, but these cost at least ten times as much.

**Crimson Cow:** Crimson Cow is a foul-tasting, invigorating potion named after the inn (owned by a retired magic-user) in Abos that first served the drink. A draught of Crimson Cow will allow a character better than normal recall of events in his life from the last  $1d6+2$  days for a period of  $1d6+6$  hours. This effect also grants the character a chance to reroll one failed attempt to learn a single spell or skill if consumed within one day of the failure. Manufacture of Crimson Cow is rumored to require the brain of a Mind Flayer or the ichor of an Intellect Devourer.

**Highland Brew:** Highland Brew is a bubbly, sweet, fruity-tasting potion first developed high in the Praxter Mountains to help dwarven battlemages study their spells in times of war. This stimulating, neon-green concoction has since spread throughout the Eder Sout, becoming popular at wizards' academies and major universities. Highland Brew comes in a small wooden box, containing six one-pint bottles. Instructions are printed (often in Kuraat) on the inside of the lid. All six bottles must be consumed in a four-hour period for the potion to assist learning. Consuming less than six will give the same side effects, but no benefits.

The first benefit of consuming all six bottles is the temporary gift of wakefulness. For the next twelve hours, the character functions as if he has gotten a full night's sleep, allowing a sleep-deprived spellcaster to memorize his spells. Indeed, the character cannot sleep at all until this duration expires. Secondly, for the next twelve hours, the character gains an extra memorization slot for each spell level he can cast. This doesn't increase the number of spells he can cast, it just improves his flexibility. Finally, the potion grants a 25% bonus to learning skills or spells, spell research, or spell-cracking checks that occur during the twelve-hour window. Thus, a character who concludes a skill class or finishes work on a spell during this window will gain this hefty benefit.

The downside of Highland Brew is twofold. First, the character will fall asleep twelve hours after drinking the last bottle. If less than the full six-bottle dose is consumed, the character will fall asleep four hours after his last sip. This sleep lasts  $8+1d8$  hours and is so deep and intense that only imminent risk of death such as drowning or the loss of 50% or more of his

hit points will wake the character. While awake, he suffers a  $-1$  to all his ability scores and will fall asleep again as soon as the danger passes. Once the full duration expires, the character will wake normally with no ill effects. The second downside to Highland Brew is that any character taking even a single sip possesses the Death Wish quirk from the time he first drinks until he passes out from exhaustion. Such characters are prone to extreme-sports-like behavior, such as riding horses up trees and head-butting mountain goats.

**Skolvaar's Skypen:** Skolvaar's Skypen is a modified version of the popular Caaldan's Curious Quill. Like the Quill, it never runs out of ink, though it can write in  $1d4+1$  different colors, a significant enhancement. Unlike the Quill, Skolvaar's Skypen will write on its own, so long as the user remains within 6' of it. If it is held tip-first to a writing surface and its command word is spoken, the Skypen will automatically record the user's thoughts, flipping pages if necessary, until the writing surface is filled or the character grasps the quill again. The Skypen writes in the character's native tongue, using a clear, easily-readable text that grants a  $+10\%$  to reading/writing checks. It also draws diagrams or drawings to illustrate the text with 90% accuracy. Characters who use a Skypen to take notes in class gain a 20% bonus to learn skills, provided they can read the notes afterwards. Those with a 51% or better reading/writing in their native tongue are assumed to be able to read the notes automatically. Skypens cannot transcribe spells. There are no known examples of Skypens with waterproof ink. Such pens might sell for a hundred times the base cost!

**Thinking Cap:** The Thinking Cap appears as some form of magic headgear that is worn atop a character's head while he is studying. The hats often look a bit ridiculous, so they sap a point of base Honor from a character for each week of use. Also, these hats just won't stay in place during a stiff breeze, combat, or other strenuous activity. Regardless of precautions, the hat will always fall off the character's head under these circumstances, costing him a point of base honor (and possibly the cap!) if he forgets to take it off beforehand.

These valuable magical hats increase the character's ability to connect his thoughts and memories and also to form new associative neural pathways. Wearing a Thinking Cap affects a character's Intelligence while the hat is worn, as indicated by Table HJ24-J: Intelligence Modifiers. If a character wears a Thinking