

# THE BLACK AMULET



A NEW MAJOR ARTIFACT  
BY JOHN NEPHEW



**F**rom the *Trav elogue of Aluseba Half-Helm* :  
Twelve winters ago, in the time that Trangusk sat in the place of the Great Shaman, I beheld the infamous Black Amulet. It is a small pouch, made of ancient leather, blackened and cracked by age and decay. It have never seen its contents, nor do I even know if they might be retrieved at all. I can tell you what has been placed within the container. For to gain the powers that the Black Amulet promises, you must first put in it a personal relic — a piece of nail, trimmed from your finger or toe; a lock of your hair; or a bit of your own skin. Then you wear the amulet around your neck on its leather string.

It was worn by a proud warrior of the steppe named Yuriko. He claimed that he had received it as an inheritance from his dying father, and his father had won it from a monstrous goblin chieftain in the eastern swamps. Where that goblin had acquired it, who can say?

I asked a shaman what the legends of the Black Amulet were. She told me that a crafty spirit of the swamps, named Inuruk, created it for his favorite human, a warrior whose name has perhaps justly been forgotten. Inuruk gave the amulet much power to aid his favorite, and through it the warrior became the most powerful man in his village. As tends to be the way of mortals, this man became overly proud, and he boasted not only that he had become the greatest warrior ever of the tribe, but that he had done so through his own skills. Inuruk was offended to have been forgotten in the boasts of his former favorite; never was he credited for the power of the amulet, which had actually won the warrior his stature.

Clever Inuruk made an example of the warrior, by secretly changing the powers of the amulet. He made the man so dependent upon the amulet that without it the mighty warrior was as a youngster who has just entered his manhood; even the powers that the amulet had granted were wryly twisted. The amulet caused people to see the bearer as much greater than he was, and the bearer to perceive himself as being just so great as well. Reality intruded quite harshly: While facing a

terrible monster from the sea, the arrogant man discovered that he was not so strong as he had thought, and that most of the power he had thought the amulet had granted him was but a delusion. Upon his death the people of his village awakened to the knowledge that they, too, had been deceived, and it was necessary that they summon the courage to drive away the sea monster themselves. They did so, and the villagers' cooperation stands as an example for all the generations that have followed. Perhaps it is appropriate that the warrior's name has been forgotten, while his story endures as a testimony against the perils of pride.

The Black Amulet also remains; or at least there was this Black Amulet carried by Yuriko. Yuriko claimed it gave him great powers. He had been a mediocre warrior, but once given the amulet by his father, he rose to prominence in his clan, and his adventures and cleverness became the stuff of stories up and down the seacoast.

Yuriko absolutely refused ever to part with the amulet, even for a moment. He wore it proudly, day and night, even unto his death — a rather foolhardy death, I might add. He had come west, seeking adventure in these lands, for he had heard tales of evils to destroy and treasures to win. He strode to a hobgoblin camp one day, expecting to challenge and slay their best fighter — or, if need be, to destroy their wicked tribe singlehandedly.

Since his body (without the amulet) was found in the garbage left when the hobgoblins moved on, I must conclude that Yuriko overestimated his own prowess. And what could be a more likely cause for his overconfidence than the legendary Black Amulet?

Yuriko was much mourned by his clan, which sent men to collect the remains and return them to the east for burial. I accompanied them, to investigate further the history of the amulet he had praised so highly. The shaman of Yuriko's clan insists that the Black Amulet is no longer an evil thing, because Yuriko's father fulfilled the legend of earning Inuruk's respect in order that the Black Amulet's beneficent powers be restored. I remain unconvinced.

**Game Information:** The Black Amulet is indeed a powerful relic, but an accursed one. When the swamp spirit, Inuruk, created it, he gave it power by trapping within an evil spirit whom he had defeated. The amulet took the power of this evil spirit and used it to give strength and skill to its mortal bearer. When Inuruk's human favorite failed to accord the spirit proper respect and honor, however, he changed the amulet, twisting its nature to the man's disadvantage. This nature remains in place today, and is as follows.

As Aluseba explained, the amulet's powers and effects are gained by placing it within a personal relic. This binds the user's soul to the amulet, somewhat like a *magic jar* spell. This bond is so strong that the wearer is protected from any sort of possession. The negative side, however, is that if the body is slain, the soul is pulled into the amulet forever, preventing the use of any spell such as *raise dead*, *resurrection*, or *reincarnation*. Nothing short of the will of a deity or the destruction of the amulet, not even a *wish*, can counteract this event.

This bonding also makes the bearer very dependent upon the amulet, which must be worn around his neck or be similarly attached to his person. If it is removed, all benefits (except the protection from possession) are lost, and in addition the character functions only as a first level character in his class(es) in all respects. The character's former skills and benefits (as well as any experience gained in the interim) are regained instantly if the amulet is again worn.

Besides its disadvantages, the amulet does confer some benefits, though not as many as

observers perceive. It *seems* that all of the bearer's ability scores are elevated to godlike stature; in fact, they are each raised by two points, but cannot be so raised above 18.

Though the ability score benefit and protection from possession are the amulet's only beneficent powers, the bearer also perceives benefits to his combat skills. All his attacks appear to do maximum damage, all wounds suffered seem only half as bad as they would be (and really are).

Since the amulet contains the soul of every past user, and none have ever been released, one can only speculate as to what would happen if the amulet were destroyed. Most shamans are inclined to believe that the many souls gathered over the amulet's centuries would be released. What powers might such a multitude have? Optimists say they would all be free at last to rest in peace. Perhaps they would be loosed upon the world as tortured ghosts; decayed bodies that had been subjected to unsuccessful attempts at raising the dead might become suddenly reanimated by a returned spirit. In any case, no one is eager to find out. Perhaps it is just as well that the relic has so far proven indestructable. Legend states that to be destroyed, the Black Amulet must be first placed within the skull of its spirit creator, Inuruk.

Legend also states that Inuruk retains the power to restore the amulet to its original condition, in which its now-delusionary effects were real, but he has not yet found a person worthy, honorable and humble enough to bear it.

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