

XUTHAL

W. Jason Peck

Journey to the Dark Corners of the Hyborean World in Conan the Roleplaying Game

Deep in the burning deserts of southern Kush lies the lost city of Xuthal. No chronicle of the modern Hyborian Age makes mention of it and the madness that grips its people makes them largely unaware of everything beyond the city walls. For though Xuthal is still occupied by the descendants of a once mighty race, the people have fallen into the dream deliriums of the black lotus blossom and even they have little perception of this forgotten city in the nameless desert.

Like several other near-mythical ruins of the Hyborian Age, Xuthal is constructed of titanic blocks of green stone that shimmer like glass in the hot sun. However, unlike every other such site, Xuthal still stands and is occupied by descendants of the ancients who must have raised these fantastic structures. Many scholars speculate that such monumental constructions could only have been reared by the Lemurians, a legendary people said to be so far advanced as to make Hyborians seem apes in comparison. Certainly the advanced technologies the current Xuthalans use lends credence to this claim. Unfortunately, though the Xuthalans use the remnants of these technologies, they hardly understand the science that underlies them and they have little or no knowledge of the people whose legacy they exploit. The typical Xuthalan

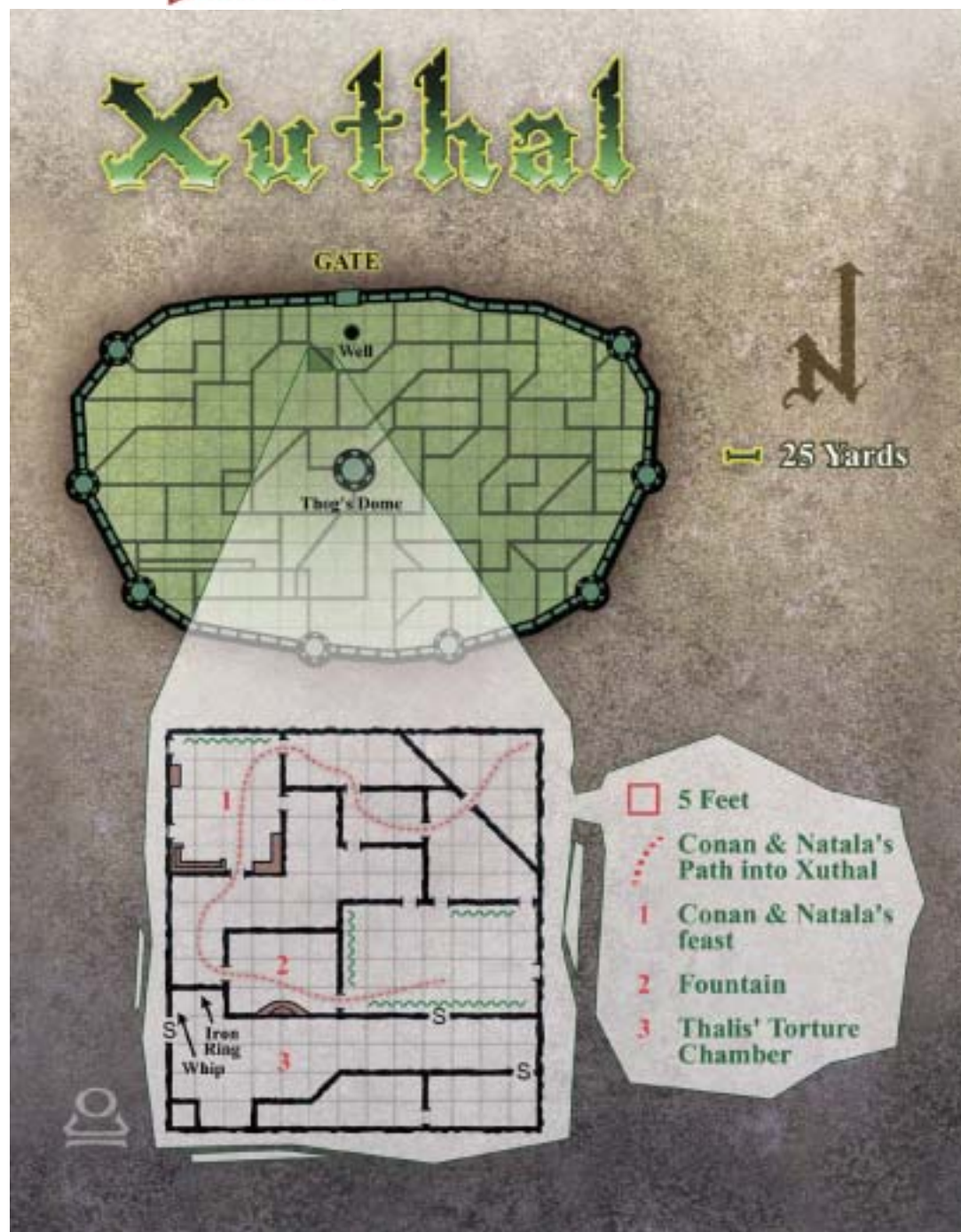


knows only enough to make these advanced technologies work, which is enough to keep the people of Xuthal fed and living in the lap of luxury. All their remaining scientific efforts were turned generations ago to the study of the mysteries of black lotus. Their diligence in these studies was perhaps too successful, as today they are botanical masters – capable of handling the black lotus plant without harm and distilling an assortment of potent drugs from it. Sadly, most of their time is now spent in the death-like sleep these drugs induce, dreaming of the mystical mysteries of the cosmos and remaining unaware that their culture continues to march its way towards extinction.

Using Xuthal in Your Game

Perhaps the most awe-inspiring and wondrous elements of the classic Conan stories are the numerous ruins of bygone eras that he visits during his adventures. In an era so long-removed from our own that it is nothing short of mythical, the monuments to ancient civilisations that Conan explores during the Hyborian Age recall antiquities so old that they seem to predate mankind altogether. If not man, then what alien hands reared these strange stones? It is a mystery that is never fully explained in Robert E. Howard's Conan tales and one that resonates through our own modern psyches in the same way any mention of Atlantis does. There is a pull to ancient things, a draw that calls to us all. However, as Conan often learned, some such sites are best left shrouded in the cloaking mists of history.

This article explores one of the most infamous ruins Conan visits during his adventures – the lost city of Xuthal. The ruin is placed in context within the Hyborian Age and then detailed in



a number of ways – including its position on the continent, the environs in which it is set, its known history, any and all its current denizens, the treasures to be found there and much more. Of course, not everything is predetermined concerning this mysterious place and plenty of room is left to allow individual Games Masters to stamp their own brand of play upon them.

So what are you waiting for? Take a firm grip on your sword pommel and whisper a quick prayer to Mitra, because now we delve deep into the mysteries of the black eons...

Myths and Legends

There are no specific myths that make mention of Xuthal and its strange people circulated beyond its walls. The only legends that would apply are those concerning all the known ruins of green-stoned cities found throughout the continent and even these are meagre in content at best. Most scholars speculate that these were all built by the same forgotten race, or at least related races that sprang from the same original source. Some even go so far as to name this race as the near-mythical Lemurians, though this is far from the accepted theory. The only other 'fact' associated with these unknown builders is that they must have been far more advanced than the peoples of the current era. The cities are too vast in scale, too precisely laid out and too alien in construction to have been made by anything less than a superior civilisation. Even more telling are the locations of these ruins, all situated deep inside a wilderness too far removed from natural resources to have supported even a small populace by any means known to the peoples of the Hyborian Age.

In the event that a Games Master's campaign is set in a time after Conan's visit to Xuthal, then any number of other rumours concerning the city may have leaked to the world at large via Conan

or Natala. Whether such is the case or not, and what the nature of these rumours might be exactly, is left to the Games Master to determine.

A weird, unreal atmosphere hung over all. Traversing this dim, silent palace was like an opium dream. Some of the chambers were unlighted, and these they avoided. Others were bathed in a soft, weird light that seemed to emanate from jewels set in the walls in fantastic design.

Robert E. Howard, The Slithering Shadow

Region and Environment

Xuthal sits astride an oasis in the deep deserts of southern Kush. Surrounded on all sides by a desolate and unforgiving countryside, the city appears long abandoned. Nothing moves in this wasteland and the outlying land lies totally untouched by the hands of man. So brutal is the afternoon sun in this region, often climbing beyond 110 degrees, the city's gleaming walls and shining spires are easy to mistake as a mirage. Yet Xuthal is no trick of the sun and cool apartments and fine foodstuffs can be found within.

A day's march to the south lies a smaller oasis and beyond that begins the broad grasslands that cover much of the southern regions of the Black Kingdoms. No road leads to this oasis from the city. Indeed, no road of any kind makes its way from Xuthal. The city is self-serving and isolated, completely out of touch with the outside world.

FLORA

The region in which Xuthal stands is completely devoid of vegetation. Not even the rugged shrubs and prickly cacti that cling to life elsewhere in these southern deserts can be found within ten miles of the city's glassy walls. So extreme is this desolation that it seems to defy the very natural order of things, and so it does. Any character exposed to this environment for more than two hours and who makes a successful Knowledge (nature) or Survival check (DC 15) can determine that something about this landscape is terribly out of joint. The land is too arid for any desert and the whole situation reeks of the supernatural. In fact, though there is no way for Player Characters to know it, the entire landscape for a distance of ten miles in all directions from Xuthal has been modified by the advanced technologies of the ancients who once built it. All moisture in this prepared region is systematically drawn away via a series of underground aqueducts to be stored in vast cisterns beneath the city. This process augments the oasis waters already found there and ensures there is always plenty to keep the complex machinery housed beneath the city in working order.

Inside Xuthal itself, the only plant-life grown is that of the black lotus plant. These sinister plants are grown in a series of interconnected pits deep beneath the city in such quantity that it easily doubles what could be found in the entire wilds of Kush. Were it not for the advanced technologies used to cultivate and contain the black lotus, the whole city would quickly become saturated in their dream-causing pollens, rendering it inhospitable to human life.

FAUNA

Since there is no vegetation within ten miles of Xuthal, it follows that there is no animal life

either. The food chain in this desolate landscape is utterly broken and so nothing can survive here. The exception to this rule is found only within the walls of Xuthal itself, where a few scant species of creatures do eek a meagre existence. These creatures are for the most part simple pests, such as rats, insects and the spiders that feed on them. There is one creature present though, that is integral to Xuthal's very existence, a strange blue-winged species of wasp. These angry little creatures infest the same pits as the black lotus plants, ensuring they remain pollinated and healthy as they are meant to do. These strange insects are found nowhere else in all Kush or the northern Hyborean continent and were likely brought with the ancients themselves when they arrived here.



History

Xuthal's history is long forgotten, lost even to the people who dwell there now. What little there is to tell must be surmised by a keen observer and is at best speculation. According to Thalís the Stygian, the ancestors of the people who dwell in Xuthal now once hailed from an unknown land in the east. During their wanderings they discovered this oasis in the desert and reared the great green-stoned city of Xuthal over it. What happened afterward and what caused them to devolve into the decadent people who dwell in the city now is uncertain.

For more information regarding Xuthal's history, see the 'Xuthalan' entry in the 'Denizens' section below.

Features of Xuthal

Xuthal is a huge single-structure city fashioned from green stone that shines like glass. Its mighty walls are 30 feet tall and in places topped with spired towers that rise as high as 20 feet more. Consisting of hundreds of interconnected palaces and courtyards spread over multiple levels, the city is a vast sprawl.

The city contains a number of specific features of interest and these are detailed below.

City Overview

Xuthal (city with village level population): conventional (king); 5,000 sp limit; Assets 2,000,000 sp; Population 808; Isolated (99% Xuthalan, 1% Stygian and demonic entity – one of each).

Authority Figures: King (name unknown), 8th level Xuthalan male noble; Thog the Ancient, a demon lord who dwells below the city and is worshipped by the Xuthalans (see the 'Denizens' section below for details).

Important Characters: Thalís the Stygian, displaced 5th level Stygian female noble who seems to be the only person in the city not addicted to *black lotus blossom* (see the 'Denizens' section below for details).

Others: City guards, 2nd level Noble (x100); guard captains, 3rd level Noble (x3); the people, 7th level Noble (x1), 5th level Noble (x2), 4th level Noble (x3), 3rd level Noble (x15), 1st level Noble (x681).

Notes: Xuthal is one huge sprawling palace, with seemingly endless interconnected chambers

and courtyards. Because of this vast space, the sparse population is often few and far between, giving the place the semblance of an eerie ghost town. Despite this, the city is obviously lived in and has none of the deterioration and dilapidation found in other green-stoned cities. It is not uncommon for visitors to encounter chamber after chamber lit by switched-on *radium gems* (see the 'Treasures' section below for details), well-cleaned flagstones and furnishings or even with fully prepared meals laid out on tabletops. The Xuthalan people can sometimes be found wandering alone through these labyrinthine suites, but are more often encountered congregated together feasting, slumbering or enjoying entertainments.

'They manufacture their own food out of the primal elements. They are wonderful scientists, when they are not drugged with their dream-flower. Their ancestors were mental giants, who built this marvelous city in the desert, and though the race became slaves to their curious passions, some of their wonderful knowledge still remains.'

Robert E. Howard, The Slithering Shadow

Technological Advances of Xuthal

Xuthal is a wonder of the Hyborian Age, despite being populated by degenerates half-maddened by lotus dreams. Like most greenstone cities, Xuthal is constructed in a harsh and inhospitable corner of the world where no civilised dwelling

has any business being. It has none of the fundamental trappings of civilisation as most men know them, lacking cultivated fields, sources of trade or any other apparent means of sustaining itself or a populace. Yet here it is. In addition, the basic necessities of life within a city, such as food, water and plumbing are all present and in perfect order, despite the fact that no one among the people ever seems to perform any real work.

How are such things possible? The answer lies in the amazing advanced technologies that the ancient ancestors of the Xuthalans built into the city itself. All the basics of life and more are maintained via vast complexes of machinery buried deep below the city. These machines process and purify water, circulate and clean the air supply and create foodstuffs, clothing, common household supplies and even precious metals from the very elements. Most of these things are performed via some kind of automation that occurs without any input from the populace, while some (such as the manufacture of food and other goods) require the Xuthalans to operate a series of alien-looking devices housed in rune-covered and ornate chambers found below the city. Though these devices require a certain understanding to employ, they are easy to use and take little time. Why these advanced machines still function here and not in other greenstone cities (where they surely must have also once maintained civilisation) is unknown.

In addition to these unseen machines that keep everything in Xuthal functioning, there are a few other examples of advanced technology present in its halls. The most obvious of these and the only one portable are the *radium gems* mounted along the walls of every chamber and corridor. With but a rub of the thumb, these jewels are capable of casting a soft weird light

roughly equivalent to that of a torch. A rub the other direction turns them off. Though these seemingly magical jewels are mounted almost everywhere in the city, they can be pried loose from their mounts and carried as portable light sources. Prying a *radium gem* from its mount requires a pointed tool, such as a knife, and a successful Dexterity check (DC 12). If this check fails by more than five, the gem is damaged and loses its power. For more details concerning *radium gems* see *The Scrolls of Skelos*, Sorcerous Items, Radium Gem.

Gate and Inner Courtyard

Xuthal has but a single wooden gate, 12 feet tall and eight feet wide. It stands closed, but is not barred. Beyond the gate is a broad expanse of paved courtyard bordered on every side by arched doorways that lead into multi-storied edifices built of the same greenish stone as the outer walls. At the centre of the court stands the low curb of a square well, the soft gurgling of moving water drifting from its depths. Strangely, there seems to be no bucket or any other means of drawing up the water, which is some 50 feet below.

It is tradition that one member of the city guard stand watch over the gate at all times (2nd level Xuthalan male noble), though the city has rarely even been visited by outsiders, much less threatened by enemies. Unsurprisingly, the post is dull in the extreme. Coupled with the limited concentration of the Xuthalans, this means that the guard here is more often slumped in the death-like sleep of the black lotus, if he is even present at all, than actually alert and tending to his duties. If such a guard is somehow present and conscious to confront intruders when they enter via the front gate, he is as likely to flee screaming into the chambers of the city as he is

to attack them (50% chance for either reaction). The guard is armed only with an iron short sword.

Wooden Gate: 4 in. thick; Hardness 5; hp 40; Break DC 25; Open automatic. Though closed, the gate is unfastened. Indeed, through there are iron loops for barring the gate, the bar itself is missing.

Palace Chambers

The chambers beyond the archways that border the entrance courtyard are all richly appointed with a vast array of fine tapestries, floor coverings and furnishings. So rich are these decorations that they represent a fortune to most peoples of the world (see the 'Treasures' section below for more details). Most chambers stand empty, though they often show signs of recent occupation, such as prepared food and drink set out, ruffled bed sheets or simply slight impressions upon divans where someone recently rested. Curiously, almost no chamber in the palace is actually furnished with a door, instead being linked to other apartments only by an unfettered archway. The major exception to this are the secret corridors and chambers that run throughout the city (see below), which are always hidden by secret doors.

The palaces of Xuthal are made up of literally hundreds of interconnected chambers spread across five separate levels, three above ground and two below. Each is capable of being illuminated by at least one *radium gem* set into a wall mount, though many are switched off at any given time. There seems to be no rhyme or reason as to whether such a light source is currently lit when first encountered and many illuminated chambers stand completely empty. The Xuthalan population tends to congregate together to perform given activities such as feasting, playing or slumbering the sleep of

the black lotus, so they are mostly encountered as a large group in a series of adjacent chambers. There are always stragglers of course, so it is not impossible to encounter wandering individuals in the seemingly abandoned chambers of the rest of the city.

Secret Corridors and Chambers

Xuthal is riddled with a complex network of secret passages and antechambers that connect every corner of the city. In contrast to the richness of the palace chambers, these hidden ways are starkly utilitarian. Originally constructed to serve as utility access ways between the various sections of the city, the complex fell into general disuse as the populace turned completely towards their rank preoccupations. Often dank and musty, these passages obviously see little use.

In fact, the secret corridors and back ways of Xuthal are feared and shunned by most Xuthalans, who are acutely aware that they are prowled by Thog when it decides to leave its sunken dome to look for sacrifices. Nevertheless, a few of the more bold inhabitants of the city do occasionally make use of them, mostly as short cuts between specific limited areas of the city. The only exception to this is Thalís the Stygian, whose fearless and brazen attitude has prompted her to explore every nook and cranny of this secret network. Believing Thog takes what it wants, when it wants and that there is nothing to be done about it, Thalís has embraced the secret side of Xuthal. This secret knowledge and ability to do what others will not only adds to her feelings of superiority towards



the Xuthalans, who she sees as cowed and weak. She has even set up an ante-chamber within the secret halls with various torture devices and accoutrements so that she may explore some of the more debase pleasures taught to her by the priests of Derketo in Luxur with a chosen few that strike her fancy.

The secret corridors can be accessed by using any number of secret portals hidden throughout the chambers of Xuthal's palaces. These are typically further disguised with wall tapestries (Search check at DC 25 to locate; DC 20 from the secret corridor side or if tapestry is pulled aside). Such secret doors open by simply pushing upon them, though they can be bolted closed from inside the secret passage.

Secret Door: 3 inch thick marble, 6-foot high and 5-foot wide; Hardness 8; hp 45; Open automatic (requires only a shove); Break DC 26 (32 if the bolt is in place); door opens into secret corridors. These secret doors have no handles and are instead operated by simply pushing on them (they revolve around a centre pivot). An iron bolt can be thrown in place to seal these doors, though they rarely are. This bolt is easily slipped from the inside, but must be broken to defeat from the outside.

Lotus Pits

In the deepest reaches of Xuthal's lowest subterranean level lies a series of interconnected vaults. The air of these dark chambers hangs heavily with cloying scents and pungent spores, for here are housed the rows of wide-brimmed pits from which the Xuthalans harvest the black lotus plant, gathering the raw extracts needed to concoct their dream-haunted sleeping drugs. These vaults are always tended by a score or more Xuthalans, all of whom seem more clear of purpose and alert than any encountered elsewhere in the city. It is unclear what exactly protects them from the insidious dangers of the numerous black lotuses present here.

Each of the pits housed in these vaults contains 3-7 black lotus plants (see *Conan the Scrolls of Skelos*, Creatures, Black Lotus for details on these horrific plants). Seemingly oblivious to the tending Xuthalans, swarms of blue-winged wasps also flit from pit to pit and the multi-domed hives that cluster among the crawling vines (see the 'Denizens' section below for details on these insects).

Thog's Sunken Dome

At the centre of Xuthal lies a large paved courtyard similar to that which stands inside the front gate. Rather than a well, however, the centre of this courtyard is occupied by a large dome of gleaming alabaster recessed directly into the stones. This dome is worked with intricate patterns of arcane symbols and spiralling whirls, all sheathed in lapis lazuli and purple gemstones. It measures some 25 feet across and rises to a height of 12 feet at its highest point. No apparent entrance points



pierce this dome.

This is the lair of Thog the Ancient (see the 'Denizens' section below), dread deity of the people of Xuthal. The demon lord spends most of its time in the vast, dark chamber that lies far below the dome, suspended in the black waters

of its fetid pool. Here it lies brooding over the mysteries of the cosmos, stealing forth only occasionally to feast upon the people of Xuthal. Thog typically uses the secret trap that opens on the north side of its dome to leave its lair, though it sometimes chooses to crawl through the network of underwater channels that lead from its pool to pits within the antechambers of Xuthal's secret network (see the 'Secret Corridors and Chambers' section above).

No guards ever stand watch here and it is exceedingly rare to ever encounter a Xuthalan in the vicinity of this dome.

Secret Trap: 8 inch thick alabaster, circular trapdoor 7-foot across; Hardness 8; hp 80; Open DC 20 from within (35 from outside, as there are no handholds and it must be pried open); Break DC 38; trap swivels open to reveal a series of iron bars mounted on the inside of the dome and that drop away into the darkness below. This secret trap has no handholds and must be opened via sheer force alone.

Denizens

Unlike most other ancient cities built of green stone scattered across the continent, Xuthal is still occupied by people. The Xuthalans who dwell here now

are pale reflections of the great people their ancestors once were. While the ancients who founded Xuthal were mental giants capable of feats so awesome as to seem divine in nature, the people who haunt its halls now are unfocused and decadent drug addicts. With access to wondrous knowledge and science and

unburdened by the labours most of humanity requires to survive, they are nevertheless incapable of saving themselves from the horror that shares the city with them – Thog the Ancient. See below for more details on this new Non Player Character race.

In addition to the Xuthalans, there are two others that dwell in the green-stoned halls of the forgotten city. The first is the monstrous demon lord Thog the Ancient whom the Xuthalans pay homage to in the vain hope that it will spare them. Thog is detailed completely latter in this section. The second non-Xuthalan occupant of Xuthal is a haughty and perverse Stygian noblewoman called Thalís the Stygian. Well versed in the wanton rites of the pleasure temples of Derketo in Luxur, Thalís revels in the power that her unique talents afford her among the men of Xuthal. For many, Thalís is the only real thing enticing enough to make them choose to forego the dreams of the black lotus, if even for only a while. Still, she hungers for a powerful man to share her pleasures with, someone strong, primal and less dream addled than those she dwells among now.

The daughter of a king of Luxur, Thalís was kidnapped by a rebel prince while she was but a young girl. At the head of an army of Kushite bowmen, the prince pushed southward into the wilds of Kush seeking a land of his own, dragging Thalís along as a trophy. Like so many before who dared invade the wild lands to the south, the prince and his army perished in the merciless deserts. Before the last man of them died, he put Thalís on a camel and set her on her way. She wandered in delirium until lapsing into unconsciousness. When she awoke, she found herself in Xuthal where she spent the next decade serving as the sexual plaything of the men of Xuthal. It is only her experiences

in the pleasure temples of Derketo that allowed her to endure her time in Xuthal, latter to turn the tables upon her captors using her wanton talents as a means of advancing her station. For more details concerning Thalís and her complete statistics, see *The Road of Kings* sourcebook, Notables of the Hyborian Age, Thalís the Stygian.

Xuthalan Non-Player Character Race

The Xuthalans are a dying race of decadent people who live in the lost city of Xuthal. They are few in number, but they do not seem to notice or care. Indeed, little beyond their desire to experience the dreams of the black lotus and indulge in every pleasure of the flesh penetrates their drug-addicted minds. Maddened by overuse of these potent drugs, they spend most of their waking moments behaving irrational and confused. They seem to have lost all sense of place within a society and instead live only to indulge their own whims and desires – and what they desire the most is to dream the vivid dreams of the black lotus. More than half their lives are spent in the death-like sleep needed to bring these dreams.

The Xuthalans are all that remains of a once proud race that migrated here from the east, though why they did so is lost to antiquity. These people were advanced beyond the imaginings of even the most civilised peoples of the Hyborian Age and it was through the use of their grand technologies that they raised Xuthal amid such a desolate land. These technologies also fed the populace, improved the station of all inhabitants and allowed them to pursue the noble pursuits of science and study. Yet, despite all their advancements, the ancestors of the Xuthalans were ultimately just men – with all

the weaknesses and susceptibilities than come with mortality. Their cultural undoing came in the form of such a tiny, unassuming thing – a black blossom that grew in the jungles south of the city. This blossom comes from a sinister, partially sentient plant known as the black lotus.

The Xuthalans were intrigued by this unique and deadly plant and turned their powerful intellects towards study of its mysteries. In time, they learned that they could distil its potent poisons to manufacture a number of powerful drugs. Though a few of these were quite beneficial, such as a golden wine that provided astounding healing power and prolonged life which they manufactured from a sub-species of lotus plant genetically extracted from the black lotus, most were highly addictive. Unfortunately for Xuthalan culture, the vivid dreams caused by the most popular of these drugs were extraordinarily pleasurable as well. Easily produced via their advanced understanding of herbalism, most of the people became addicted almost immediately. It was a rapid fall from there.

Xuthalans are unquestionably of eastern blood, with soft yellow skin and slight slants to their eyes. Despite this, the rest of their features seem more Hyborian than eastern. Most have black hair and dark brown eyes. Though they show no sign of it, every Xuthalan left in the city is literally thousands of years old. Since the entire race is sterile, were it not for the life-prolonging qualities of their *golden lotus wine*, they would have died out long ago. All Xuthalans wear purple robes of high quality, often decorated with bright jewels sewn into the hems. Many also wear copious amounts of gold and silver jewellery encrusted with glittering gemstones of every hue.

Culture: Completely absorbed by their need

to experience the dreams of the black lotus, the remaining Xuthalans in the city are oblivious to their impending doom as a people. They dread for their own lives and have a vague understanding of their population's decline at the tendrils of Thog, but they are not cognizant of the fact that this ultimately will result in their extinction as a race. Fatalistic, the few that bother to ponder the situation feel that there is nothing they can do about it at any rate. Instead of taking any real action, they have chosen to deify the demon in the hopes that they can assuage its terrible hunger through offerings and prayer. Deep down they realise this is to no avail and so they seek solace in the dreams of the black lotus.

Names: *The Slithering Shadow* mentions no names of actual Xuthalans, as few indeed are even willing to speak with Conan during his visit. The only meaningful exception is Thalís the Stygian, and she of course is Stygian. However, based upon their racial features, Xuthalans are likely descended from the same bloodlines as the Khitans and so may have names similar to those of that culture (see *Conan The Roleplaying Game*, Characters, Khitan). Then again, if 'Thog' is an example of a Xuthalan name, perhaps their names are more simplistic than the typical Khitan name.

Religion: The people of Xuthal worship Thog the Ancient (see below), a demonic entity that has always dwelt at the oasis of Xuthal. None remembers whether this creature was here when their ancestors first came from the east to found the city, or whether they brought it with them from that strange land. It hardly matters either way, as the dread god dwells here now and sometimes slinks among them searching for sacrifices. In fact, the Xuthalans more fear this monster than revere it. For the most part, their

worship is manifested little beyond a hastily murmured prayer that Thog feast on someone else while the speaker slumbers. Thog itself seems indifferent to this reverence. It moves about the city seemingly at random, and if it heeds the prayers of its followers at all, there is no sign of it.

- a +2 racial bonus to all Craft (alchemy), Craft (herbalism) and Knowledge (arcana) checks. Xuthalans are the inheritors of a grand and wondrous science that is beyond the ken of any other civilisation of the Hyborian Age. Though the Xuthalans remember little of how this advanced technology works, such knowledge nevertheless makes them the greatest scientists of the age.
- a +1 racial bonus to all Fortitude saving throws against poisons, except *black lotus blossom* (which they always fail) and *black lotus juice* (which they receive a +4 bonus against). Xuthalans constantly drink, inhale or otherwise expose themselves to various dream-inducing narcotics distilled from the black lotus plant. So prevalent is this behaviour in their culture that they are slumped in death-like slumber, lost to such dreams, at least as often as they are conscious. Continuous exposure to these potent drugs has permanently altered their body chemistry, making them resistant to most poisons, neigh immune to those distilled from the black lotus plant itself and yet so susceptible to the dreaming qualities of *black lotus blossom* as to require only the tracest amounts to induce the desired effect.
- a Added. Xuthalans receive a -2 racial penalty to all Concentration, Listen, Sense Motive and Spot checks. So steeped in the

use of their lotus dream-inducing drugs are the Xuthalans, that they have extremely short attention spans. Reality itself is less real to them than their dreams and they find it difficult to concentrate on anything beyond their next drug session.

- a Lotus Fiends. Xuthalans are completely dependant upon the dreaming-drugs they distil from the black lotus plant. So powerful is this addiction that few among them can go for more than eight hours straight without its use. They will do literally anything to attain and use the drug and no terror is great enough to make them leave their decadent lifestyle. In no way is this more apparent than for the fact that they refuse to abandon Xuthal, despite being preyed upon by a demonic god whom they dread above all else. In fact, it is obvious to any outsiders who speak with any of them for even a short time, that the overindulgence in the lotus dreaming-drug has caused most Xuthalans to suffer from madness (treat as if afflicted with one of the 'Major Insanities' described in *Conan The Roleplaying Game*).

Background Skills: Craft (alchemy), Craft (herbalism), Knowledge (arcana) and Perform (ritual).

Favoured Class: Noble.

Prohibited Classes: Barbarian, Borderer, Nomad and Pirate.

Automatic Languages: Xuthalan.

Bonus Languages: Stygian.

From the black shadows came sounds, incomprehensible and blood freezing. She heard Thalís' voice pleading frenziedly, but no voice answered. There was no sound except the Stygian's panting voice, which suddenly rose to screams of agony, and then broke in hysterical laughter, mingled with sobs. This dwindled to a convulsive panting, and presently this too ceased, and a silence more terrible hovered over the secret corridor.

Robert E. Howard, The Slithering Shadow

THOG THE ANCIENT

Large Outsider (demon)

Hit Dice: 20d8+120 (210 hp)

Initiative: +14 (+2 Dex, +12 Reflex save)

Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares)

Defense Dodge: 26 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +15 natural)

Damage Reduction: 8 (demon lord)

Base Attack/Grapple: +20/+29

Attack: Tentacle slam +24 melee (1d8+5, AP 5)

Full Attack: 2 tentacle slams +24 melee (1d8+5, AP 5) and 2 talons +19 melee (1d8+2, AP 5) and bite +19 melee (2d6+2, AP 8) and spined tail lash +19 melee (1d6+2 plus poison, AP 5)

Space/Reach: 10 ft./10 ft.

Special Attacks: Crushing constriction (2d6+7, AP 10), demonic venom, improved grab, spells

Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, imperceptibility, witchfire transformation

Power Points: 54 (base 50, +4 Wis)

Magical Attack Bonus: +14 (+10 natural, +4 Charisma)

Saves: Fort +20, Ref +14, Will +16

Abilities: Str 21, Dex 14, Con 22, Int 12, Wis 18, Cha 19

Skills: Climb +28, Concentration +29, Hide +23, Intimidate +27, Listen +29, Move Silently +27, Spot +29, Survival +27, Swim +28

Feats: Alertness, Crushing Grip, Great Fortitude, Menacing Aura, Stealthy, Steely Gaze, Track

Environment: The lost city of Xuthal, deep in the deserts of southern Kush

Organisation: Solitary

Advancement: -

Thog the Ancient is the demonic god in flesh that stalks the ancient halls of the lost city of Xuthal. It comes and goes as it pleases, preying upon the fading populace of the once great city. Though the people of Xuthal worship this wicked beast, they fear it more. The thought of Thog stealing through Xuthal's secret ways in search of sacrifices is one of the few things that can shake off the stupor-like lotus haze that most Xuthalans seem to be perpetually experiencing. Despite this, the lotus dream-drugs prove to be stronger even than primal terror, as the people of Xuthal appear incapable of leaving the accursed city.

Thog is a monstrous creature of shadow and mutability. Though obviously large and bulky, it appears indistinct and obscure, even when looked upon directly with a good light source. It is almost as if Thog is impervious to light, appearing only as a blot of black shadow that glides rapidly over the ground. The only detail that stands out with any clarity at all from its cloak of flitting shadows is a huge, misshapen head with a bloated toad-like face. Great pools of murky light stare from this face, each reflecting a cosmic lust alien to mankind.

Combat

Despite the indistinct nature of Thog's appearance, within its cloaking shadows its body is armed with a plethora of bestial weapons. Talons, fangs, needle-like spines and ropey tendrils of writhing flesh all assail opponents who dare resist its terrible hunger. Given the sheer number of these lethal appendages Thog can bring to bear, it is perhaps for the best that its true form is obscured – for surely the mere sight of such an alien monstrosity would be enough to blast the sanity from the most resolute of men.

Crushing Constriction (Ex): On a successful grapple check, Thog deals 2d6+7 crushing damage. It may also use its Crushing Grip feat to alter the specifics of this damage. This attack requires the use of but one of its tentacles (it has two) and does not prevent it from making further attacks with its other modes of attack.

Demonic Venom (Su): The spines of Thog's lashing tail secrete an horrific venom that drives victims mad, sapping their strength, wracking them with excruciating pain and clouding their minds. Injected, Fortitude save (DC 25); initial and secondary damage 1d2 Strength, 1d2 Constitution, 1d2 Wisdom and 1d2 Intelligence.

Improved Grab (Ex): If Thog hits with a tentacle attack, it can start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it gets a hold, it can use its crushing constriction.

Spells (Sp): Thog may cast the following spells as though it were a 20th level scholar. The usual Power Point and other costs apply.

Hypnotism: *Entrance, enslave, hypnotic suggestion, mass hypnotic suggestion, swell, torment*



Necromancy: *Agonising doom, death touch, draw forth the heart*

Prestidigitation: *Conjuring, burst barrier*

Imperceptibility (Su): Thog is constantly surrounded by shifting shadows and its form is impossible to make out clearly. Due to this condition, it is extremely difficult to land a solid blow upon the demon. Thog is always treated as if it were in concealment (20% miss chance against all blows aimed at it, always able to make a Hide check and so forth), even against creatures with darkvision or another means of seeing in total darkness.

Witchfire Transformation (Su): When its hit points are reduced to 25% or less (44 hp or less), Thog may choose to transform itself into a large ball of weird phosphorous radiance as a standard action. So bright is the glow of this form, that any who look upon it must make a successful Reflex saving throw (DC 24) or become blinded for 1d4 rounds. Upon assuming this witchfire form, Thog is treated as incorporeal and has a fly speed of 30 feet with perfect manoeuvrability. Thog is incapable of interacting with the physical world while in its witchfire form (other than to blind those who look upon it) and once so transformed, must remain in this form until resting in the dark waters of its domed lair for a period of one day for every hit point of damage it has suffered.

Treasures

Xuthal is filled with wealth beyond the imaginings of most people of the Hyborian Age. Everywhere one looks are the trappings of opulence – velvet tapestries, satin cushions,

gold friezes, soft glowing *radium gems*, fine furs, golden table settings and much, much more. Even the chambers themselves are decorated with the most brazen displays of wealth, with golden bars over the windows, gold and silver chastening worked into even the simplest furnishings and bright gemstones set in patterns to contrast the golden friezes. Xuthal's people reflect this overabundance of wealth too, wearing the finest silks, gratuitous amounts of gem-encrusted jewellery and smelling sweetly of luxuriant perfumes.

Aside from the staggering display of traditional valuables present in Xuthal, there are treasures even more rich and exotic to be had. The easiest to find is the near ever-present *black lotus wine*. The Xuthalans often drink this beverage to bring on a death-like sleep that carries with it the most vivid and prophetic dreams. *Black lotus blossom*, *black lotus juice*, *black lotus powder* and even *golden lotus juice* can all also be found in large quantities in the city. But perhaps the most valuable thing found in Xuthal is the *golden wine of Xuthal*, a wondrous draught that can both heal horrible wounds and prolong life. This too can be found in generous quantities within the city, though it is the rarest such treasure.

In the Footsteps of Conan

Conan and his slave girl Natala visited Xuthal during the events of *The Slithering Shadow*. Having wandered the desert for days with little food and water, the pair had come to their wits end. Just as Conan was preparing to put his companion out of her misery, he sighted the spires of Xuthal in the distance. The two entered the forgotten city and faced its madness together. They learned of its dreaming citizens and

encountered the beautiful Thalís, who tried but failed to seduce Conan into staying in Xuthal. In turn, Thalís attempted to murder Natala to remove the slave girl as an obstacle to win Conan's affections and instead unleashed the primal fury of his barbarian ancestry. Conan hacked his bloody way through scores of Xuthal's warriors before at last single-handedly battling Thog and driving the demon off in order to save Natala, but not before the monster had carried away Thalís to some nameless doom. Nearly dying from wounds sustained in that epic battle, Conan was healed by a goblet of the *golden wine of Xuthal* that Natala stole for him. Refreshed, Conan led the pair in flight from the insane city.

Unlike most of the legendary ancient ruins Conan visits in Robert Howard's stories, Xuthal is not a ruin at all. Of all the mysterious green-stoned cities found in the Hyborian Age, only Xuthal seems to be both occupied by strange people and still in working order. It is both a throwback to previous epochs as well as a community steeped in the most depraved decadence of Conan's era. Despite its occupants and status as a living community, Xuthal nevertheless has many of the dominant elements found in the other ruins the famous barbarian visits. It is situated in a remote locale far from civilisation, packed with lost treasures and unexplained mysteries, cloaked in an aura of untold antiquity and above all, haunted by a terrible horror left over from previous age. Taken together, these elements mesh to present a fantastic setting whose compelling draw is the very essence of Howard's Conan tales.

Xuthal is the perfect site for an adventure based around the discovery of an ancient culture lost to the world and it is best used in a similar manner to what Howard employs in *The Slithering*

Shadow. Due of its remote location in a desolate land, it is also well-suited to use in an adventure that employs the theme of Player Characters being lost and/or stranded without sustenance. This is exactly what drives Conan to visit Xuthal and is a perfectly reasonable method of drawing Player Characters into an adventure set in the city. Of course, Games Master's need not use the same plot device (last survivors of a decimated army) to explain why the Player Characters are lost in the deserts of southern Kush, as there are plenty of reasons for them to be here that may mesh more readily with the events of their specific campaign.

No matter how Xuthal is used by the Games Master, there are certain things that should be considered before doing so. Above all, Xuthal is loaded with an unbelievable amount of treasure. This kind of wealth can easily make the Player Characters too powerful and permanently unbalance a campaign. Howard himself seems acutely aware of this problem and on numerous occasions created circumstances that forced Conan to decide on a course of action that ultimately results in the wealth slipping through his fingers. Given this, Games Masters should follow Howard's lead and plan beforehand how this situation will be handled. Player Characters should be presented with situations that bring hard choices and terrible consequences. For example, in order to escape with a sack full of unbelievable riches from Xuthal, perhaps one Player Character must decide to pull up the rope (to which the treasure is tied) with which his companions were about to make their escape from Thog. If he does so, his companions will surely face doom at the talons and tentacles of the demon lord. If he instead leaves it and provides assistance, perhaps they can make their escape after all, though the treasure is likely then lost. Whatever the circumstances ultimately

turn out to be, create the situation and then allow the players decide what will be. Whatever they choose, the outcome should be a memorable one to be sure.

The wealth aside, there is also the matter of when an adventure is to be set in Xuthal. Having the Player Characters take the place of Conan for an adventure that recreates the events of *The Slithering Shadow* is completely reasonable. For Games Masters that really wish to create as close a recreation as possible, the slave girl Natala should be added to the Player Characters' party before they begin such an adventure (her statistics can be found in *The Road of Kings*, Notables of the Hyborian Age, Natala, the Brythunian Slave Girl) under whatever circumstances he sees fit. If the Games Master runs a campaign that follows the Conan cannon more closely, Xuthal is still very much a viable adventure site even after Conan's visit. The Xuthalans remain unchanged, though there are far less of them now due to Conan's rampage. In this case, though Thog was defeated, it is strongly suggested that it had merely withdrawn to lick its wounds. If so, it will have had plenty of time to recover and become a menace to the people of Xuthal again. As for Thalís, she is likely slain, devoured by the cosmic hunger of Thog before Conan battles the demon. However, there are disturbing hints in the story that perhaps this was not her ultimate fate, or at least not her only fate. It is possible that Thog had mated with her instead and should the Games Master choose this scenario, there may also be the loathsome offspring of this union to contend with. If so, it is suggested that the Spawn of Dagoth Hill template found in the *Conan The Roleplaying Game* rulebook be used to create this new horror.

