

Mortar Chucks

History does not record the name of the genetic mage who first conceived of the idea of converting the common woodchuck into an area-effect, indirect fire weapon. History would rather like to find out that name, but the mage had apparently (and very wisely) decided to cover his, her, its, or their tracks. While Mortar Chucks are not *quite* death-penalty level necromancy, it's hard to imagine how the things could have been designed and tested without drawing on advanced death magic lore -- which is to say, necromancy that **does** rate the death penalty.

To use: first, catch a woodchuck, or some other mostly herbivorous small mammal. Stuff some previously-made necromantic conversion liquid down the poor thing's throat. Wait until the convulsions end, and the rigid catatonia starts. When foul-smelling gas begins to leak out the other end, the Mortar Chuck is ready. Point it in the general direction of the enemy, and ignite the gas. Range and damage are both roughly equal to the Model 1841 24-pound Coehorn mortar; Mortar Chucks are much lighter, but also much more expensive to fire.

What makes this item so awful is that spells that detect metal, gunpowder, and even necromancy don't bite on Mortar Chucks. Even the necromantic fluid won't register on scans unless the scrying mage is practically on top of the stuff. It's also fairly effective as a magical distraction; the poor beast being used as an explosive device is alive and terrified right up to the final explosion, and the psychic 'scream' the Mortar Chuck emits can bollix up magical scanners fairly well.

Not every realm out there uses Mortar Chucks, and getting caught being the guy who fires off the Chucks is an excellent way to not make it back to a POW camp if captured. But it's not **quite** universally banned. Actually manufacturing the necromantic conversion liquid doesn't require using the life force of anything sentient, and of course woodchucks themselves don't have any civil rights. Still, Mortar Chucks seem almost aggressively designed to be appalling. More than one church has flat-out forbidden the use of them, on the principle that if various Hells were deliberately trying to come up with a nasty weapon of war then they couldn't have done much better than this.

More than one church has excellent corporate instincts.

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