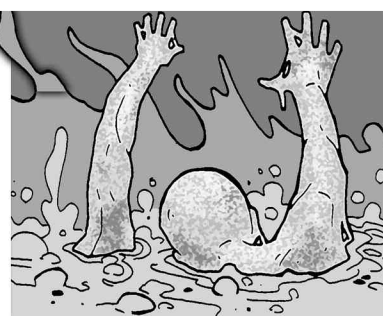


GURPS[®]

Fourth Edition

MAGIC[™]

DEATH SPELLS[™]



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Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the **GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition**. Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

"Avada Kedavra!" Moody roared.

There was a flash of blinding green light and a rushing sound, as though a vast, invisible something was soaring through the air – instantaneously the spider rolled over onto its back, unmarked, but unmistakably dead.

"Not nice," he said calmly. "Not pleasant. And there's no countercurse."

– J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

INTRODUCTION

Magical rituals designed to snuff out life appear often in myth and folklore – so often that “death spells” are among the defining abilities of sorcerers in most cultures. Tales of fantasy adventure uphold this tradition, arming wizards with all manner of killing curses. Murderous magic is an essential weapon in the arsenal of any self-respecting sword-and-sorcery villain.

That last point identifies one of the problems with such magic, however: In adventure fiction, death spells are traditionally the province of *villains*, and only rarely wielded by heroes. Enabling good guys to wipe out evildoers with a gesture removes much of the struggle and risk that make for an engaging story. Moreover, death magic is bereft of the moral benefit of the doubt that other combat spells offer. Heroic casters can claim that, say, fireballs were meant to demoralize or incapacitate (probable outcomes even when playing for keeps) . . . but because death spells *don't work unless they kill*, using them implies homicidal intent better-suited to bad guys.

Such dramatic considerations don't always matter to gamers, a somewhat pragmatic lot whose alter-egos often inhabit black-and-white worlds where evil needs killing. For them, a deadly magical arms race between heroes and villains suggests a different problem: an NPC could end the career of a well-loved PC in an abrupt puff of sorcery. Now *that* is hard to accept! The players of wizards might consider turnabout fair play (they have access to specialized defenses, after all), but others may not agree.

GURPS Magic avoids death spells for all of these reasons. Yet there's no denying that they have a place in tales of fantasy and magic – particularly in hack 'n' slash games where life is cheap, such as *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy*. To forbid such curses is to omit a fixture of a popular genre.

The solution is to make death spells *balanced*. Energy costs and prerequisites ought to be steeper than usual. Victims must receive a fair chance (perhaps *several* chances) to resist, dodge, be cured, or tough it out – and some categories of subjects may be entirely immune. High-powered examples should pose risks to the caster. *GURPS Magic: Death Spells* offers options that satisfy these conditions.

The other major goal here is to provide *variety*. The practical wizard might invest in a single death spell, but fantasy offers countless grisly possibilities – each unique in some way – and magic-wielders pursue many paths. Even the most pragmatic hack 'n' slash spell-slinger will want backup plans for slaughtering foes who have special immunities. And fantasy isn't the only genre with sorcery! The needs of *GURPS Horror* differ from those of *GURPS Fantasy*, and alternate histories featuring folkloric magic are another thing again.

So here are 48 ways to die . . .

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

This supplement requires the *GURPS Basic Set* to use. Except when ignoring spell prerequisites (as with clerical

magic), *GURPS Magic* is necessary, too. Nothing else is essential, but the GM seeking a way to control access to death magic that's more flavor than fiat will find *GURPS Thaumatology: Magical Styles* valuable.

PUBLICATION HISTORY

This is the first edition of *GURPS Magic: Death Spells*. The only material published in earlier works consists of three spells adapted from *GURPS Magical Styles: Dungeon Magic* (Death, Dissipate, and Soul Prison) and two from *GURPS Thaumatology: Magical Styles* (Annihilation and Rift to Hell). All have been altered to make them more generic.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean “Dr. Kromm” Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985, ended up the *GURPS* Line Editor in 1995, and has engineered rules for almost every *GURPS* product since. He developed, edited, or wrote dozens of *GURPS Third Edition* projects between 1995 and 2002. In 2004, he produced the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition* with David Pulver. Since then, he has created *GURPS Powers* (with Phil Masters), *GURPS Martial Arts* (with Peter Dell’Orto), *GURPS Zombies*, and the *GURPS Action, GURPS Dungeon Fantasy, and GURPS Power-Ups* series . . . among many other things. Sean has been a gamer since 1979. His non-gaming interests include cinema, mixology, and Argentine tango. He and his wife, Bonnie, live in Montréal with their cat, Zephyra.

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS A DEATH SPELL?

Before cracking the grim grimoire, it's necessary to define "death spell." The simplest description is that it's magic that – with a *single* casting and as its *primary* goal – has an effect that leaves a living subject dying or fated to die in short order, if not outright dead, destroyed, or even unmade. It may inflict afflictions or wounds, too, but that's incidental. This disqualifies several classes of potentially deadly spells:

Damaging spells. Spells which deal damage or direct injury – e.g., Dehydrate, Fireball, and Frostbite – can certainly kill with sufficiently large or numerous castings. A few even have colorful names that suggest as much: Burning Death, Death-touch, Rotting Death, etc. Yet all inflict harm a few HP at a time. To cause death, they must reduce the victim to -HP by brute force, whereupon the subject has to fail a HT roll – not to resist magic, but to survive grievous wounds. Even if such spells work flawlessly, overcoming whatever defenses affect them (DR, Magic Resistance, and so on), they might fail to *kill*. Thus, they aren't death spells.

Incapacitating spells that endure indefinitely but don't kill. Other spells aim to "take out" the subject in a lasting way without wounding, but don't cause death. Instead, they incapacitate the victim until a specific countermeasure – almost always far cheaper than the Resurrection spell! – reverses the effects. Examples include Entombment (which can undo itself), Flesh to Stone (reversed by Stone to Flesh), and Suspended Animation (terminated by Awaken). None of *these* are death spells, either.

Spells with potentially deadly consequences. Yet other spells are outright lethal under the right circumstances – or perhaps the *wrong* circumstances, if death is accidental – but don't have "kills the target" as their first purpose. Charm is a great example: The caster could order the subject to commit suicide in a way that cannot fail, but that isn't the sole use of Charm. If someone is using Walk on Water to traverse the mythic River of Death, then even Dispel Magic would be deadly if it dunked the traveler. Such magic never qualifies as a death spell.

So what *does* qualify?

FACES OF DEATH

Most genuine death spells fall into a few broad categories. The lethal possibilities offered below are meant as *primary* outcomes. Secondary or cosmetic effects unrelated to killing ought to be incidental, and not in themselves worth the effort of working such dreadful magic. Wizards should have reason to save death spells for subjects they want *dead*.

Magic is a game of exceptions, however. Some spells in Chapter 2 (like Resuscitate, p. 14) don't fit neatly into this scheme. Variety is important, too!

Mortal Conditions

The most "logical" death spells smite subjects with *Mortal Conditions* (p. B429) or *Mortal Wounds* (p. B423). These examples cover a lot of ground:

- *Heart attack* is the usual suspect. This causes death after a short time window (HT/3 minutes) during which a medic *might* be able to save the victim. Below medical TL7, rescue is a lost cause without specialized Healing spells such as Resuscitate (p. 14). Even at high TLs or with magic, resuscitation requires someone with the proper resources to be close by.

- *Mortal wounds* without specific HP injury are almost as deadly. Magic that produces them immediately consigns the subject to making HT rolls every half hour to avoid death. The cure is either *Stabilizing a Mortal Wound* (p. B424) or a Stop Bleeding spell cast at 10 times usual energy cost. Otherwise, the victim dies of severe shock in hours.

- *Coma* is the least-deadly option. It offers a chance to awaken and avoid death; dying takes a day or more; *and* a cheap-and-easy Awaken spell can negate it. To increase its lethality for a death spell, remove the HT roll to awaken (keep the HT rolls to stave off death – many folkloric curses kill slowly!) and/or declare Awaken ineffective. In those cases, saving the victim should be as difficult as stabilizing a mortal wound, calling for surgery or a spell more potent than Awaken (e.g., Remove Curse).

Although countless other possibilities exist, most resemble one of the above options. They differ mostly in what technological or magical treatments can save the patient in the window between affliction and death.

For instance, cardiac arrest (heart attack) is fatal because the heart isn't pumping blood to the brain. Other afflictions that kill in minutes because the brain is receiving no oxygen at all should use similar rules. For example, *respiratory arrest*, where the lungs fail, would use almost identical game mechanics in anything but a TL7+ medical drama. See also *Suffocation* (pp. B436-437).

Afflictions that involve internal bleeding will resemble mortal wounds. This is typical of forms of *stroke* that involve bleeding in the brain. It also fits death spells that cause internal injuries without visible trauma.

If the brain itself fails for some reason, the results will resemble coma. This can stem from other forms of stroke. Indeed, many medical conditions can underlie more than one of these options; e.g., something that blocks neural signals might stop the heart or lungs (heart attack) or cause gradual cerebral shutdown (coma), while nonspecific systemic shock could progress quickly (mortal wounds) or slowly (coma).

The salient feature in all cases is unconsciousness followed by death, unless a rescuer with suitable capabilities acts in a hurry. The latter point might seem to lump such magic in with spells that incapacitate indefinitely until countermeasures reverse them – like Entombment and Flesh to Stone – but there’s a critical difference: the countdown to inevitable death without specialized aid. That’s what makes these things *death* spells!

This kind of magic, like almost any magical affliction, is normally Resisted regardless of means of delivery (Melee, Regular, or even Missile). Subjects who are impervious to the medical problems inflicted – thanks to traits such as Doesn’t Breathe, Immunity, and Injury Tolerance – cannot be affected. The latter constraint makes such spells a balanced option in campaigns with lots of demons, robots, undead, and so on, as wizards can’t simply one-shot everything in their path.

Aggravated Injury

Other death spells cause fatal supernatural trauma that defies rational understanding; perhaps the magic removes the will to live or “unmakes” the target. These inflict HP of injury – like a Deathtouch, Dehydrate, or Frostbite spell – and if this would be enough to kill *on its own* (2×HP in one shot, which would take the victim to -HP even if uninjured), the HT roll to survive at -HP is bypassed and the subject perishes. Such curses deliver potentially lethal wounds *and* momentarily afflict the Fragile (Unnatural) disadvantage (p. B137) to ensure death.

Nastier examples kill if they inflict injury equal to or greater than the subject’s full HP (enough to reduce the target to 0 HP even if uninjured). This works just like the previous case, except that the spell afflicts the victim with an “enhanced” form of Fragile approximately twice as severe as Unnatural. (When translating spells to advantage-based abilities, this disadvantage would be worth -100 points, like the most serious degree of Terminally Ill, in any campaign with physical danger.)

In either case, the spell might be all-or-nothing: Injury is rolled but not inflicted, and used strictly as a basis for comparison; if it wouldn’t reduce the subject to the threshold that triggers death, the victim escapes uninjured. Other magic causes harm that persists even if the target survives. This doesn’t make the latter kind of thing a mere combat spell that chips away at HP – wounding is an incidental effect achieved more cheaply via other spells.

Sometimes, comparison is to a score other than HP (e.g., IQ, HT, Will, or FP), or to double that number instead of to 2×HP. Death occurs if the roll of the dice equals or exceeds *that* target instead. If the spell also inflicts actual injury, however, that still depletes HP.

Most spells in this category are Regular and Resisted, like Body Control and Mind Control spells that inflict disadvantages. This is on top of the “protection” that high HP grant – even if the

subject *fails* to resist, the spell might not roll high enough to kill him. If such a curse is a Melee spell, it’s unlikely to work if it requires the caster to roll to cast and then hit, the target to fail an active defense, the spell to overcome resistance, *and* the injury to exceed a threshold; therefore, it’s fairest if the spell isn’t Resisted but treated like Deathtouch, causing harm if it hits.

These sorts of death spells are balanced in campaigns where the “boss monsters” have many HP, like giants and dragons. Simply giving serious foes significantly more than 10 HP ensures that they won’t be slaughtered by magic calibrated to exterminate human-scale targets.

Natural Causes?

Death spells that cause mortal conditions will look like “natural causes” to a mundane medic, but the *magic* isn’t traceless. Someone who suspects sorcery can divine supernatural evidence via the usual means; e.g., Reconstruct Spell.

Save or Die

Most powerful are Resisted spells where the wages of failed resistance are immediate, outright death – or worse! The best and perhaps only defense is high resistance. These spells are nearly always Regular, making great size a deterrent (a large Size Modifier can result in a prohibitive energy cost), but this alone won’t help against a wizard with lots of energy. Such spells almost inevitably have extraordinary explanations that defy rational medicine, meaning that physiological traits like having no heart or blood rarely matter; what’s important is excellent HT or Will (depending on whether the magic affects body or mind), and Magic Resistance.

Magic like this is hard to keep in check. The GM must think carefully before allowing it, as it will enable wizards to slaughter anyone who stands in their way. If nothing else, make sure that demigods and other essential figures in the campaign possess suitable defenses (see *Stayin’ Alive*, p. 6).

THERE ARE NO NICE COLLEGES

Any college might offer death spells (as Chapter 2 illustrates). Specialists in “whiter” realms – e.g., Food, Healing, and Protection and Warning – are *less* likely to deal in the deadliest of deadly wizardry, but where there’s a homicidal will, there’s a lethal way. Beyond being a source of fitting prerequisites, college has two main influences on such magic.

Aspected Mana

GURPS Fantasy introduces – and *GURPS Thaumatology* expands upon – the notion of “aspected mana” that raises skill and/or mana level when casting *some* kinds of spells while penalizing opposing magic. The affected categories of spells generally correspond to colleges; e.g., fire-aspected mana aids Fire spells while hindering Water spells.

Like all spells, death spells are affected by aspects that bias the local mana toward or away from their parent college. However, two special aspects bear note.

Death-affected mana. Regions with this aspect benefit all death spells, regardless of college – even those in the Healing college.

Life-affected mana. Zones with this aspect hinder all death spells – even those in the Healing college.

Stayin' Alive

GURPS Magic describes almost no death spells because they're so difficult to balance. In a campaign that uses **GURPS Magic: Death Spells**, it's wise to offer defenses.

Resistant to Death Curses

For the purpose of Resistant (pp. B80-81), Death Curses is an "Occasional" category comprising all *supernatural* effects intended to cause death. This includes death spells, direct-damage Necromantic magic (Burning Death, Rotting Death, etc.), and elixirs of Death (**Magic**, p. 215), plus nonmagical equivalents such as Afflictions enhanced with Coma or Heart Attack, when they're chi, divine, psionic, or spirit abilities, or something similar. The resistance bonus adds to whatever roll the possessor must make – usually against HT or Will. This trait represents a strong soul or a superhuman mastery of death, and doesn't affect superscience death rays, ordinary disease or poison, or HT rolls to avoid death from HP loss.

The GM decides what levels to allow. Immunity to Death Curses [10] could be reserved for whatever categories of beings can buy Unkillable, but anyone might have Resistant to Death Curses (+3) [3] or Resistant to Death Curses (+8) [5]. Add Cosmic, +50% to resist the will of death *gods*.

Resistant to Death Spells

Death Spells is a "Rare" subset of Death Curses, implying Resistant to Death Spells (+3) [1], Resistant to Death Spells (+8) [2], and Immunity to Death Spells [5]. Similar restrictions on purchase make sense.

Limited Magic Resistance

"Limited, Only against death magic" is a -75% limitation on Magic Resistance (p. B67). This gives a penalty to enemy spells as well as a bonus to resist. It and Resistant to Death Spells are roughly comparable for the points, but it makes the most sense for a campaign to use one or the other.

Hard to Kill

Hard to Kill (pp. B58-59) *doesn't* generally aid resistance rolls against death spells themselves – though if a death spell leaves the victim rolling against HT to avoid dying (as with mortal wounds or coma), it provides its usual bonus on those rolls. *Exception:* It *does* benefit resistance against spells that cause heart attack or equivalent effects (e.g., respiratory arrest) that offer no HT roll once they occur.

Special Effects

The lethal aspects of death magic reuse a relatively small set of rules. Differentiating between curses and keeping the game interesting involves fine-tuning game-mechanical details,

defining appropriate secondary outcomes, and using evocative imagery. For all of this, there's no better inspiration than the spell's college! Some ideas:

Air: Asphyxia; inflating someone until they explode; turning the victim to air and blowing them away.

Animal: Partial shapeshifting of an organ to a useless form; transforming the subject into small, mindless creatures that scatter.

Body Control: Any mortal condition, inflicted directly!

Communication and Empathy: Possession that fatally separates mind and body; telepathic attacks that destroy the brain.

Earth: Partial petrification of vital organs; total petrification followed by turning the stone to air, dust, or mud that blows or trickles away.

Enchantment: Malefices that kill the subject when destroyed.

Fire: Wholesale save-or-die incineration!

Food: Poison that's fatal if not resisted; Prepare Game perversions that messily turn the victim inside-out.

Gate: Super-accelerated aging; transportation to a plane inimical to life.

Healing: Cures that are "better than the alternative" for the injured or sick, but potentially deadly for a well person (like many real-life medical treatments).

Illusion and Creation: Objects created inside vital organs; phantoms scary enough to cause heart attack.

Knowledge: Knowledge so terrifying it causes heart attack – or of a supernatural truth that kills!

Light and Darkness: Body of shadow snuffed out by a bright flash, or body of light doused in shadow.

Making and Breaking: Shatter, Explode, or Disintegrate variants that can destroy living matter.

Meta-Spells: Curses that cause immediately fatal coincidences; dispelling the cosmic magic of life itself.

Mind Control: Deprivation of the will to live; mindlessness too severe to support life; yet more heart attack-inducing fear.

Movement: Crushing telekinetic forces; teleporting away vital parts.

Necromantic: Destroying souls, draining life force, ripping out organs . . . it all suits the college of death!

Plant: Deadly poisonous plants, pollen, or slime; vital organs turned to wood.

Protection and Warning: Force walls that form inside of or cut through people.

Sound: Concussive effects within the body; words no mortal was meant to hear.

Technological: Energy spells that affect the energy within the body; radiation spells that conjure death rays.

Water: Blood to acid; dehydrating someone and blowing away the dust; drowning; transforming the victim to water that trickles away.

Weather: Heart-attack inducing lightning jolt; turning someone to lightning and grounding them out.

The chosen demise can help determine how the spell kills (*Faces of Death*, pp. 4-5); inspire *Creepy Supernatural Drawbacks* (p. 8); imply other details that influence *Energy Cost* (pp. 7-8); and suggest side effects (on survivors or bystanders) and general color (notably, what state the victim ends up in: corpse, goo, dust, vanished . . .).

VITAL STATISTICS

The write-ups for death spells mostly obey a few basic principles. To see this advice in action, visit Chapter 2. Where those examples deviate from these recommendations, it's to better fit with the rest of their college – an important goal to bear in mind!

Class: Most death spells are Regular spells. Melee and Missile spells can also be balanced, with the adjustments described in *Energy Cost* (below). Area spells, and Special ones subject to *Long-Distance Modifiers* (p. B241), aren't recommended. Death spells should be Resisted, too – every living being will fight to stay alive! The resistance roll might involve IQ, HT, or Will, but removing it is inadvisable.

Difficulty: It's customary for death spells to be “advanced” or “secret” magic, and therefore Very Hard. This isn't essential, however. All else being equal, the greater difficulty amounts to -1 to skill – easily offset by a staff or a step, for a Regular spell.

Prerequisites: Like difficulty, these are arbitrary. That said, Magery 3 will reserve such power for the talented mages it suits best. A chain of at least half a dozen spells is reasonable, too. Before going overboard, consider that the lethal curse basic enough to tempt dabblers and apprentices (often to their lasting regret!) is a common fantasy trope, and that prerequisites impose only weak limits on wizards' capabilities anyway.

The true controls on powerful spells are *casting time* and *energy cost*. Although these can vary widely – **GURPS Magic** ranges all over the map with these stats, for every kind of magic – some concrete guidelines are in order.

Time to Cast

In combat, the *action cost* of a spell's tactical effects might matter more than anything else – even energy cost. A death spell removes one foe from the fight in one casting, so it should be as fast as any other magic that produces that outcome. Compare Daze or Flesh to Stone at two seconds; Arboreal Immurement, Entombment, or Sleep at three; or Evisceration or Plane Shift Other at five. The temptation to lengthen casting time for potent spells is best avoided – nobody as smart as the typical wizard would cast a death spell that takes longer than casting Sleep, taking a Move to reach the victim, and using Attack to slit his throat. Death-dealing wizards should pay in the FP department, not with Concentrate maneuvers! A reasonable casting time is between two and five seconds, set by comparison to the college's other spells; e.g., nasty Necromantic spells are slow and ritualistic, so five seconds (like Evisceration) fits, while Water magic is quick, so lethal workings might take no longer than the two seconds for Dehydrate.

A few one-shot spells are *fast*. Consider Agonize and Total Paralysis, which remove a foe from the action in just one second. That's fine, too, but it ought to raise energy cost a bit; see *Special Benefits* (p. 8).

Conversely, the premise that death magic is intended for combat might not hold in all cases. A deadly version of Suspended Animation (30 seconds) or something akin to Steal Vitality (which kills in *minutes*, but only out of combat) is still a death spell. These slow rituals should cost less energy; see *Special Drawbacks* (p. 8).

Death College?

The sheer number of death spells – and the very existence of death-aspected mana (pp. 5-6) – might tempt the GM to create a separate Death college and declare that every death spell belongs to it. Before doing so, be aware that the resulting college won't be self-contained unless its spells' prerequisites are radically restructured; see **GURPS Thaumatology** and **GURPS Thaumatology: Magical Styles** for advice on accomplishing this. Magery (One College Only, Death), though allowed, won't be a good investment – both because of the many out-of-college prerequisites and because few wizards need more than a handful of ways to kill. The main effect will be that “spells from *N* different colleges” prerequisites are somewhat easier to satisfy.

Energy Cost

Referring to *Faces of Death* (pp. 4-5), here are some recommendations.

Mortal Conditions

Base Cost: 11 energy

Base cost assumes a condition that kills in *hours* to *days*, like mortal wounds or coma. Faster death increases energy cost:

Kills in minutes (like heart attack): +1 energy.

Kills in seconds (like the Evisceration spell): +2 energy.

Base cost assumes that appropriate magical or medical measures delivered within the spell's “survival window” can save the subject. Magically, Instant Restoration reverses Evisceration (see **Magic**, p. 154), Stop Bleeding stabilizes mortal wounds, and Awaken treats coma. Medically, *Stabilizing a Mortal Wound* (p. B424) keeps mortal wounds from killing, while *Resuscitation* (p. B425) counteracts heart attack. Energy cost increases if this is untrue:

Extreme measures needed (e.g., Instant Regeneration at 80 energy, not Instant Restoration at 50; Instant Restoration for 50 energy, not Stop Bleeding for 10; or Remove Curse for 20 energy, not Awaken for 1): +1 energy.

No rescue possible: +2 energy.

Unusual countermeasures *might* affect cost. Treat those that aren't known or obvious (e.g., Flash, not Awaken, lifts a coma, but most medics aren't aware of this, or treatment requires the caster's true name) as “extreme measures”: +1 energy. Strange-but-obvious treatments don't change cost. Trivially easy cures count as special drawbacks (p. 8).

Aggravated Injury

Base Cost: Variable

The base cost for this kind of spell comes in two parts. First, there's the energy cost to afflict the target with the momentary vulnerability that could kill without allowing a HT roll:

Injury must equal or exceed 2×HP (enough to reduce a healthy subject to -HP): 4 energy.

Injury must equal or exceed HP (enough to reduce a healthy subject to 0 HP): 8 energy.

On top of this, there's a *per-die* cost for the injury itself:

Real injury: +2 energy/die.

Injury rolled only for comparison to HP: +1 energy/die.

Whether the spell is Melee, Regular, or Missile, this is *not* damage that must defeat DR, but direct injury that ignores it. Minimum injury per casting is 1d. The maximum varies, but spells that compare injury to HP are best capped at 3d or 4d, while ones that must equal or exceed 2xHP might allow 6d to 8d.

Cost is unchanged for comparison to IQ, HT, Will, FP, or another score besides HP. Regardless of the *basis of comparison*, though, any actual *injury* is to HP.

Save or Die

Base Cost: 13 energy

These spells have a flat base cost, but special benefits and drawbacks often modify this.

Special Benefits

All three spell types may have extra benefits that justify a higher energy cost. Added costs are cumulative. For aggravated injury, they're *per casting*, not *per die*.

- *Affects beings that aren't truly alive*. By definition, death spells slay the living. A few can harm other entities, however.

Conditions apply ("anything with a soul," "anything that contains water," etc.): +1 energy.

Every being (or close enough, like "every IQ 1+ being"): +2 energy.

- *Missile spell, not Regular*. A death spell that works from afar is *extra-nasty*. The skill used to shoot it could be any specialty of Innate Attack (p. B201). +2 energy.

- *No resistance*. A Melee or Missile spell that entitles the subject to an active defense may, if the GM wishes, allow no resistance roll – an *extremely* potent edge! +2 energy.

- *One-second casting time*. A curse that takes one turn to sling is difficult to interrupt and therefore extra-lethal. +1 energy.

Other benefits – like less-than-lethal side effects on bystanders, or lasting sickness for victims magically or medically saved from death – might add +1 or +2 energy.

Special Drawbacks

Likewise, any death spell may have drawbacks that reduce cost. Here, too, costs are cumulative and *per casting* (where applicable).

- *Casting time of 10+ seconds*. Slow spells are hard to use in combat, where death spells are most welcome. -1 energy (the GM may give bigger discounts for minutes or hours).

- *Creepy Supernatural Drawbacks* (below). -1 energy/drawback.

- *Easier resistance*. The spell allows the subject to use the higher of two attributes to resist (e.g., better of HT or Will), inflicts aggravated injury that's compared to the larger of two scores (e.g., greater of HT or HP), grants a bonus to resist, or anything similar. -1 energy.

- *Excludes a large group of living subjects*. A significant number of *ordinary living beings* are exempt. -1 energy (the GM may give bigger discounts for huge groups).

- *Melee spell, not Regular*. Regular spells that require contact also count. -2 energy.

- *Reversible after the fact*. Death spells are meant to be *final* (barring Resurrection). A spell that's reversible for a limited time isn't as powerful. Reversal usually requires a slow, potent spell like Remove Curse cast within minutes to an hour – or a cheaper spell cast *immediately*. -2 energy.

Other drawbacks – such as a particularly onerous ritual or an especially easy "escape clause" – are good for -1 energy apiece.

Creepy Supernatural Drawbacks

Death spells venture into territory customarily claimed by undead, ancestral spirits, demons, and/or gods. In some universes, *Death* is a supernatural entity – one to whom even deities must answer! Then there are karma and impersonal laws of magic, either of which might ensure that black magicians ultimately reap what they sow. Wizards who work death magic tread on dangerous ground. In folklore and fairy tales, they almost inevitably meet a bad end.

This kind of thinking can provide a degree of balance in an RPG, too. The following classes of problems are fairest.

Failure or resistance poses a risk. If the death spell doesn't work, or if it works but doesn't kill its target, there's a chance that the caster will suffer a temporary-but-unpleasant backlash. *Examples*: The spell is a contract with some power that expects to devour the target's life force, and if the subject survives, the wizard must defeat that sinister being in a Quick Contest of Will – or resist the death spell! – or take injury equal to the would-be victim's Will, HP, or HT. Or perhaps it unleashes noxious energies that, if they don't kill,

linger to inflict injury, a Curse spell, or some other inconvenience unless the caster *also* resists the spell.

Killing poses a risk. If the spell kills, the victim's passing may trigger problems for the caster. *Examples*: Those killed can get vengeance from beyond the grave – most likely as undead – if they win a Quick Contest of Will against the wizard's spell, Thaumatology skill, or Will. Or perhaps The Powers That Be disapprove of mortals tinkering with the skein of Fate, and the caster must resist one of the subject's attributes, or the spell itself, or end up with a Curse.

Critical failure causes harm. If the spell critically fails, the outcome is worse than usual for the caster. This is rare enough to rate *permanent* consequences! *Examples*: The caster immediately and permanently loses a level of HT or Magery, or must resist the death spell or be killed by it.

Each such drawback reduces the spell's energy cost by one. No death spell should have more than one or two of these. Ultimately, though, the only limit is the fiendishness of the GM's imagination!

CHAPTER TWO

A GRIM GRIMOIRE

Here are four dozen death spells, two for each of the 24 standard colleges of **GURPS Magic**. A few words on logic, design options, or dramatic feel preface each college's entries, for the benefit of gamers inventing additional spells.

The GM decides what's available, to whom, and on what terms. Wizardly cabals may be reluctant to share such magic! If using **GURPS Thaumatology: Magical Styles**, death spells are most likely *secret* spells exclusive to particular styles.

But enough talk . . . let's cast a deadly spell!

Black magic operates most effectively in preconscious, marginal areas.

– William S. Burroughs

AIR SPELLS

The Air college's death spells most often resemble its standard spells with an implicit limitation removed: "cannot be cast inside a living being."

Embolism (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT

Creates an improbably huge bubble of air *within* the subject's circulatory system. If the target fails to resist, the result is stroke. Treat this as a mortal wound (p. B423): The victim immediately falls unconscious and must roll vs. HT every 30 minutes, with *any* failure meaning death. At TL6+, trauma maintenance can help.

Natural recovery occurs on a critical success on the HT roll. Otherwise, the only cure is TL6+ *brain* surgery or an Instant Restoration spell. A victim who recovers is at -HP or current HP, whichever is worse. Critical failure on the HT roll required after recovering from a mortal wound costs the subject a level of IQ *as well as* the usual level of HT.

Embolism can harm only living, breathing beings that have blood and brains. Doesn't Breathe – or any form of Injury Tolerance that includes No Blood or No Brain – grants immunity. The GM may assess other effects on targets the spell can't kill; e.g., it might act as Great Healing on an air elemental!

Duration: The spell lasts an instant, but the effects are permanent unless reversed via magic or medical care.

Cost: 12.

Time to cast: 3 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Body of Air, and Essential Air.

Steal Breath (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT

Snatches away a living victim's "vital essence" by removing the body's ability to get oxygen to essential systems: collapsing lungs, deoxygenating blood, and so on. Treat as heart attack (p. B429) for most purposes: the subject drops to -FP, falls unconscious, and dies in HT/3 minutes unless resuscitated. However, the arrest is *respiratory*, not *cardiac*, which may affect treatment (GM's option).

Resuscitated victims have the lower of their current HP or 0 HP. Those unconscious for more than two minutes must roll vs. HT to avoid a permanent -1 to IQ, as described for *Suffocation* (pp. B436-437).

This spell affects only breathing, oxygen-dependent life forms. Doesn't Breathe – or any variety of Injury Tolerance that includes No Blood or No Vitals – gives immunity. *Exceptions:* Machines that require oxygen must resist or shut down until restarted. Air elementals and subjects with the Body of Air meta-trait (p. B262) treat Steal Breath as "save or die"; failed resistance means they're instantly *destroyed*.

Duration: The spell lasts an instant, but the effects are permanent unless reversed via magic or medical care.

Cost: 13.

Time to cast: 3 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3 and any seven Air spells, including Devitalize Air.

ANIMAL SPELLS

This college can command dangerous creatures, or grant the caster lethal claws or venom glands, but these tricks aren't true death curses. Genuine animal-themed death spells focus on shapeshifting, transforming victims in ways they can't survive. Such magic affects only living beings that could be construed to be "animals" (regardless of IQ – humans count!), *not* plant-based life, stitched-together golems, or inorganic monsters.

Abominable Alteration (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT or Will

This is a whole class of Partial Shapeshifting variants that affect only one body part *without* preserving scale or function.

The subject might be afflicted with a diminutive insect head with insufficient brainpower to sustain the body, or a massive elephant head that snaps the neck and collapses the spine – or perhaps a vole heart that ruptures under the strain. The cause of death might *technically* be a mortal condition, but this is save-or-die magic.

The subject may resist this spell with the *higher* of HT or Will. Failure means instant death. The corpse left behind is permanently transformed.

Duration: Instantaneous. Death and grotesque transformation are permanent.

Cost: 11.

Time to cast: 10 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Alter Body, and Shapeshift Others for the appropriate animal.

Thousand-Legged Demise (VH)

Regular; Resisted by Will

Briefly transforms the subject into a seething swarm of small, mindless creatures. The magic is highly unstable and doesn't impart a group mind – rather than stay in a cohesive horde, the critters crawl, fly, or swim in all directions. The spell collapses a second later, leaving gobbets of the victim's dead body scattered across a radius equal to his Move (or on interior walls, if contained), with a few surviving creepy-crawlers dining on the carrion.

There's one possible way to save the victim: Someone who casts Vermin Control on the subject *immediately* (on his first turn after Thousand-Legged Demise is cast) may roll a

Quick Contest against the effective skill level of this spell. Victory keeps the swarm in one place, allowing the subject to reform unharmed.

Whatever happens, if transformation occurs, the subject's possessions *aren't* affected and end up on the ground.

Duration: The spell lasts one second. Death is permanent.

Cost: 11. Must affect the entire subject, not just part of it!

Time to cast: 5 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Vermin Control, and any one Shapeshift Others spell.

BODY CONTROL SPELLS

At the GM's option, *any* death spell that directly afflicts a mortal condition might also count as a Body Control spell. Like most Body Control spells, such magic is nearly always limited to *living* beings.

Death (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT

This spell (from *GURPS Magical Styles: Dungeon Magic*) is an attempt to kill the subject outright without the intermediary of disease or injury. If the victim fails to resist, he suffers a heart attack *exactly* as described on p. B429 . . . thus, he *can* be resuscitated if he gets suitable help in time.

This magic can affect only a living being who has both a heart and blood to pump! Targets with any variety of Injury Tolerance that includes No Blood or No Vitals are immune, as are those whose FP score is "N/A."

Sudden Death

GURPS Magic: Death Spells doesn't add much work at the *beginning* of a campaign. The GM already has to review 800+ spells from *GURPS Magic* (plus dozens more scattered across *GURPS* and *Pyramid*), decide what to permit, formulate some originals, consult *GURPS Thaumatology* to adjust prerequisites, and/or use *GURPS Thaumatology: Magical Styles* to divvy up wizardly knowledge. Another 48 spells changes little. The command decisions are deciding whether PCs can start with instant-death abilities, and reviewing such curses' interactions with the traits of important bad guys. The only impact for most characters is that *Stayin' Alive* (p. 6) becomes required reading.

Introducing killer curses into an *ongoing* campaign is serious challenge. All of that planning still needs doing, but retroactively and without hard feelings. Here are a few pointers:

It's only a "twist" the first time. The sudden appearance of death spells can be so cool, it's chilling. After many sessions covering months or years of game time, the PCs might grow so powerful that they don't fear Deathtouch or Fireball, and so celebrated that they are asked to hunt – or deemed worth hunting by! – hitherto secretive groups that wield death magic. The first encounter should be scary, and might even result in a dramatic death – although the GM may want to let the heroes avert this fate with character points (see

GURPS Power-Ups 5: Impulse Buys) or undo it with Resurrection. After that, however, the players may have their characters turtle up or retire if they can't mount a defense or hit back just as hard.

Forewarned is forearmed. If death magic exists, so should defenses against it. These needn't appear simultaneously, but *after* the initial encounter, it's fairest to let the players spend character points to equip the PCs with the advantages in *Stayin' Alive* (p. 6) and/or to learn countermeasures such as the Resuscitate spell (p. 14). The justification might be purely meta-game ("Since I'm introducing death spells, you can buy defenses."), but it's more interesting to work within the story: perhaps exposure to death magic stirs latent defenses, and knowledge of its existence opens new avenues of magical research.

Fighting death with death. If death magic is outlawed, only outlaws will have death magic . . . and formerly good guys *will* turn outlaw if that's what it takes to hit back. It's less disruptive to empower the heroes to give as good as they get *without* turning heel. Again, while this can be a meta-game call, it's more fun to work it into the plot. Guildmasters, grand viziers, or patron deities – realizing that the PCs are polite society's bulwark against evil – might fight fire with fire, letting mages and clerics in on the secret. Wizards may find that witnessing a bona fide death spell gives a big bonus to research it.

Duration: The spell lasts an instant, but the effects are permanent unless reversed via magic or medical care.

Cost: 12.

Time to cast: 3 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Choke, and Deathtouch.

Doomtouch (VH)

Melee

The caster must strike the subject to trigger this spell; hit location is unimportant. If the target fails to defend, roll the spell's dice of effect (from 1d to 8d). Damage Resistance is irrelevant. If the total equals twice or more the victim's HP, the subject dies immediately without any HT or resistance roll! Any lesser result produces *no effect at all*.

Unlike Deathtouch, this spell does *not* affect the undead – only beings that are truly alive.

Cost: 5, plus 1 per die of effect, to a maximum of eight dice.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Deathtouch, and Weaken Blood.

COMMUNICATION AND EMPATHY SPELLS

The best explanation for this college's death spells is that they're curses that destroy the *mind*. As they affect any sapient (IQ 6+) or even any sentient (IQ 1+) entity – living or not – energy cost is a point or two higher than for comparable spells that affect only the living.

Accursed Triangle (VH)

Regular; Resisted by Will

This curse – which affects anything with a “soul” (GM's decision) – causes the caster to swap bodies with the subject, then shifts the caster's mind into a mindless vessel in the environment (stone, tree, or similar), and *then* swaps the caster's consciousness back into his original body while moving the subject's to the object. This is *instantaneous*. The wizard isn't out of body for long enough to suffer ill effects from the round trip.

The subject's body will live indefinitely – as a mindless shell with IQ 0 – if cared for, but the mind dissipates after a mere Will/3 *seconds*, rounded down. While the mind survives, it can use psi abilities, spells it knows well enough to cast without ritual, and so on, although it can perceive nothing and can touch only whatever its vessel is touching. After that time, the victim's consciousness is *gone*.

In theory, magic capable of reuniting a mind and a body, or allowing a mind to enter another body, can save the subject if cast in those Will/3 seconds. However, Possession and Soul Jar take a minute, Permanent Possession requires five minutes, and Exchange Bodies needs an hour. In practice, only high-Will victims with extraordinary skill levels (for time reduction) have much hope. Dispel Possession *won't* work, as the subject isn't possessed!

This spell has an unpleasant drawback: On a critical failure, the would-be subject may place the caster's mind and his own in his choice of the caster's body, his own body, and some random vessel. Most targets imprison their tormentor in an inanimate object, killing the wizard in Will/3 seconds. Some also hijack the caster's body.

Duration: The spell lasts an instant, but the effects are permanent unless reversed in seconds.

Cost: 13.

Time to cast: 10 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3 and Exchange Bodies.

Telepathic Overload (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT or Will

Attempts to directly and fatally overload even the most rudimentary of brains. Thus, this spell is effective against any *physical* IQ 1+ entity! The subject may resist using the *better* of HT (brain) or Will (mind). If the caster wins, roll the spell's dice of effect (from 1d to 4d). Damage Resistance doesn't protect.

If the total on the dice equals or exceeds the target's Will, the brain is burned out, its functions suspended and memories deleted. The victim collapses immediately. The body lives on for HT/3 minutes, but the *person* is gone barring an Instant Restoration spell cast within that window of opportunity.

Regardless of whether the spell kills outright, it inflicts the effect roll as HP of injury. This might still be lethal if it takes the subject to -HP or worse, but a roll lower than Will means the cause of death is ordinary trauma, not a scrambled brain.

Duration: The spell lasts an instant, but the effects are permanent unless reversed via magic.

Cost: 7, plus 2 per die of effect, to a maximum of four dice.

Time to cast: 4 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3 and any 10 Communication and Empathy spells, including Telepathy.

EARTH SPELLS

Most deadly Earth spells are variations on Flesh to Stone, and therefore affect only ordinary living beings.

Dust to Dust (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT

Turns a living subject and all of that person's gear into a fine dust that has no hope of reassembly into its old form. This is functionally equivalent to casting Flesh to Stone and Earth to Air back-to-back – though in one step, so that the victim's allies cannot attempt Stone to Flesh in the interim. Casting time and energy cost reflect this.

Duration: Instantaneous (and irreversible!).

Cost: 13. Must affect the entire subject, not just part of it!

Time to cast: 4 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Earth to Air, and Flesh to Stone.

Heart of Stone (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT

This horrid variant of Partial Petrification turns the subject's *heart* to a lump of rock in his chest. If the victim fails to resist, he suffers a heart attack as described on p. B429 . . . except that resuscitation is impossible. Only a Stone to Flesh or Remove Curse spell cast within HT/3 minutes can negate this effect (and if so, the usual FP and HP losses for a heart attack remain).

This spell can affect only living beings who don't have a variety of Injury Tolerance that includes No Blood or No Vitals.

Duration: The spell lasts an instant, but the effects are permanent unless reversed via magic.

Cost: 13.

Time to cast: 3 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3 and Partial Petrification.

Burial Dress

A common type of death spell is the “Body of” perversion that transforms the subject into something easily dissipated. Examples include Grave Grounding, Shadow-Slay, Snuff Life’s Flame, and Swamp Rot. Most such magic affects 6 lbs. of clothing, too. Only the innermost layer of DR 0 attire is altered, and if this weighs more than 6 lbs., the *caster* specifies what’s affected. Garments beyond this, and jewelry, armor, and other equipment, are unaffected. Exceptions are detailed in individual spell descriptions (e.g., Dissipate).

ENCHANTMENT SPELLS

Enchantments that kill defy much of the advice in Chapter 1. Existing Enchantment spells are a better model. One-shot deals should require *around* 260 energy, like a Spell Stone bearing a save-or-die spell.

Assassin’s Weapon (VH)

Enchantment

Turns a melee weapon or a round of ammunition (e.g., arrow or bullet) into a vehicle of death. Cannot be cast on a missile weapon such as a bow or a gun – only on its ammo.

Any living being hit by an Assassin’s Weapon must resist the item’s Power with HT. Failure means a fatal wound causing immediate death, however improbable; while the weapon blow is the *apparent* cause, forensic spells will reveal the full story. Successful resistance reduces Power by one but leaves the magic intact. The enchantment ends when it kills or reaches Power 0, whichever comes first.

Check for the weapon’s mundane effects (penetration, wounding, etc.) only *after* the resistance roll. An Assassin’s Weapon *can* weaken or exhaust itself against a target who would die of injuries anyway! This enchantment is customarily put on small, concealable weapons, not on those that are sure to kill.

Energy cost to create: 500. *Halve* cost for ammunition that’s certain to be destroyed in one use (e.g., a bullet). The Bane enchantment is often used to reduce energy cost.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Penetrating Weapon, and Puissance.

Mortal Malefice (VH)

Enchantment

Works like the Malefice spell with one deadly exception: Destroying the doll doesn’t inflict Endurance/5 dice of Deathtouch, to a maximum of 3d. Instead, it delivers HP of injury equal to the remaining Endurance, and if this equals or exceeds the victim’s HP score, the subject dies immediately without any HT or resistance roll allowed!

Energy cost to create: 275. The special ingredients cost \$550.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Malefice, and Soul Jar.

FIRE SPELLS

Death spells in the Fire college tend to affect any material subject – living or not – that can burn. This increases energy cost by a point. The GM decides what beings *aren’t* affected, most often creatures of water, earth, stone, or metal.

Cremate (VH)

Melee; Resisted by HT

Incinerates a victim from within, like a fast, one-shot version of Burning Death! The caster must strike the subject to trigger the spell; hit location is irrelevant. If the target fails to resist, roll the spell’s effect dice (from 1d to 8d). A total equal to or greater than 2xHP turns the target into a pillar of flame, slaying him without a HT roll. Even if the spell doesn’t instantly kill, the subject sustains this much injury as if from burning damage.

Victims killed by this spell – whether by its instant-death effect or total injury – leave behind flaming remains. Treat this as ordinary fire (p. B433) that blazes for one minute if not extinguished or fueled. Possessions are unaffected by the magic but likely to burn in the aftermath unless fished out quickly.

Duration: 1 second.

Cost: 3, plus 2 per die of effect, to a maximum of eight dice. Cannot be maintained.

Time to cast: 3 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Burning Touch, Essential Flame, and Fast Fire.

Snuff Life’s Flame (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT

Turns the subject and up to 6 lbs. of clothing to fire – as per the Body of Flames spell – and then snuffs out the flames, destroying the victim. The only defense is to resist (or ward) the spell; the whole affair happens instantly, with an audible “FOOF!” sound, and admits no opportunity to intervene. All that’s left afterward are the subject’s remaining possessions and a scorched spot on the scenery.

Duration: Instantaneous (and irreversible!).

Cost: 14. Must affect the entire subject, not just part of it!

Time to cast: 5 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3 and Body of Flames.

FOOD SPELLS

Lethal Food magic either creates deadly surprises for diners or is optimized for killing food animals. As neither is especially useful against battlefield opponents, the guidelines in Chapter 1 – especially those for energy cost – need creative interpretation.

Butcher (VH)

Regular; Special Resistance

This spell humanely slaughters an animal and then separates the carcass into handy packages (just like the Prepare Game spell). Like many kitchen tools, it’s dangerous if abused.

Subjects with IQ 5 or less resist with HT. Failure means they die painlessly. As the corpse collapses to the ground, it falls into neat piles of meat, hide, bones, guts, and so on.

Subjects with IQ 6+ add (IQ - 5) to their resistance roll: HT+1 at IQ 6, HT+2 at IQ 7, and so on. Average humans, with IQ 10, resist at HT+5 and are *almost* immune. Almost. Unfortunates who fail to resist are butchered like hogs and beyond Resurrection.

Dead bodies can't resist. On them, this is just a costly Prepare Game variant. It's still sometimes used when dressing out creatures so dangerous that nobody wants to take the risk that there's a live one among the carcasses, or where religious law requires it.

This is an inefficient death spell. Cost *and* resistance rise with target IQ. Even against a low-IQ predator, it's too slow to cast while evading teeth and claws. The death effects are more an interesting thaumatological curiosity than a goal pursued by serious combat wizards.

Duration: Instantaneous (and irreversible!).

Cost: 3 or subject's *racial average* IQ, whichever is *higher*. Humans (racial average IQ 10) cost 10 energy to affect. Must affect the entire subject, not just part of it!

Time to cast: 10 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3 and Prepare Game.

Death's Banquet (VH)

Regular; Special Resistance

Introduces *deadly* poison into food. This is a physical toxin that remains indefinitely and can be detected like any poison. Record the caster's effective skill level as a rating of the stuff's lethality; anyone eating the poisoned food must resist that level with HT. This is a roll to resist *poison*, not magic – advantages that work against poison (e.g., Resistant to Poison) provide their usual benefits, but Magic Resistance does nothing!

Failure to resist means the subject suffers injury equal to the dice of effect (from 1d to 8d). If this is 2×HP or more, death occurs without a HT roll. A victim who's poisoned but not killed suffers severe cramps, numbness, and weakness, giving -3 on all dice rolls until *all* lost HP are restored.

If the food is shared, the spell works normally on everyone who partakes but injury is divided by the number of portions; e.g., a meal split four ways does 1/4 injury.

Duration: Instantaneous, but the poison lasts indefinitely until consumed.

Cost: 3, plus 2 per die of effect, to a maximum of eight dice. Cost is *per meal*.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Essential Food, and Poison Food.

GATE SPELLS

At the GM's option, a death spell of *any* college might also be a Gate spell if it can be explained in terms of opening a fissure to a dimension hostile to life, exposing the victim to something deadly – or if it involves demons, death gods, or the afterlife!

Dimensional Dissection (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT or Will

Attempts to send *some* of the subject to another place, time, or plane of existence. The target resists with the *better* of HT (representing structural integrity) or Will (as usual for teleportation-type curses). Failure means random chunks go elsewhere. This is instantly fatal!

This spell can affect anyone with a physical body. Subjects who have the Duplication advantage and an unused Dupe can sacrifice one copy to ensure the survival of the rest. This is *instead of* trying to resist. It costs a Dupe but guarantees survival.

If this spell critically fails, the caster becomes the point of arrival for a Dimensional Dissection spell cast elsewhere in creation. A forceful jet of gore with roughly half the mass of his intended subject blasts him for *dice* of crushing damage equal to the would-be victim's HP/2, rounded *up*. No active defense is possible.

Duration: Instantaneous (and irreversible!).

Cost: 13.

Time to cast: 5 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3 and *one* of Plane Shift Other, Teleport Other, or Timeport Other.

Jason: I heard that! It turned inside out?

Teb: And it exploded.

– *Galaxy Quest*

Underworld Imprisonment (VH)

Regular; Resisted by Will

An interplanar crack opens beneath the subject – who must be atop a solid surface (ground, floor, or similar) – whereupon he must resist or be dragged physically into the Realm of the Dead, along with anything he's carrying. This fissure exists for only an instant, as with the Entombment spell, but the victim isn't interred in Suspended Animation – he's considered *dead* by The Powers That Be, his life stricken from mortal rolls. Brute-force attempts to summon him back will conjure his corpse . . . or, on a critical failure, a hostile ghost or demon!

This spell resembles Rift to Hell (*GURPS Thaumatology: Magical Styles*, p. 36), but isn't identical. Like that spell, it's faster and cheaper than Plane Shift Other because it's intended for combat – and because the subject *must* be on the ground, and there's always a chance that a pious or crafty victim, or one with a Destiny, will negotiate escape with TPTB. It has no limits on who it can affect, but is unpredictable against foes who aren't truly alive, especially those from other dimensions. The details of who can return, and how easily, are campaign-specific, but the possibility is definitely a creepy supernatural drawback (p. 8).

Duration: Permanent, barring the subject somehow negotiating freedom.

Cost: 14.

Time to cast: 3 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3 and at least one Plane Shift Other spell.

HEALING SPELLS

As every doctor knows, that which can heal can harm. This college *does not* include the “reversed” curatives seen in some fantasy worlds, though – that's Body Control or Necromantic magic.

Euthanize

Special

Painlessly kills a living subject without any lingering mortal condition or discernible cause of death. The caster must touch the subject throughout the entire ritual. If the spell works, a recipient who wants to die does; otherwise, resistance is *automatic*. The patient has to be willing in spirit, but there's no requirement to communicate this wish . . . and Euthanize *cannot* distinguish honest desire from the machinations of mental control or lies.

Some thaumatologists claim that Euthanize enables the immortal soul to request entry into the afterlife. Whatever the truth, its inventors made it simple enough for anyone to learn; if wizards needed potent cures as prerequisites, they would just use those instead! While tiring to cast, this spell is preferable to the alternatives in worlds without painless medical options. Some religions might even decree that it's the *only* acceptable option.

Duration: Instantaneous. Subject can be resurrected normally.

Cost: 8.

Time to cast: 1 minute.

Prerequisite: Any of Empathy, Magery 1, Spirit Empathy, or "holy" status.

Resuscitate (VH)

Melee

The caster must touch or strike the subject in the *vitals* (-3) to trigger this spell. On someone who's dying from drowning, asphyxiation, or heart attack – whether the cause is mundane or magical – a successful hit instantly restarts the heart and lungs, reviving the patient and preventing death, but healing no FP or HP. The effects are identical to a successful attempt at *Resuscitation* (p. B425).

On a living person whose heart and lungs are functioning, this spell is dangerous! The magical jolt it delivers can damage vital organs and *stop* the heart. It inflicts 4d of generalized injury; DR has no effect. The victim must make a HT roll at -1 per full 2 HP lost. On a failure, the subject falls unconscious for (20 - HT) minutes, minimum one minute. Failure by 5 or more, or critical failure, results in a heart attack exactly as per p. B429.

Resuscitate is technically a *cure* for some death magic, and doesn't obey most of the guidelines in Chapter 1. However, on a healthy recipient with less than HT 13, it's likely to result in a mortal condition. Thus, it counts as a death spell for the purposes of *Stayin' Alive* (p. 6) and *Aspected Mana* (pp. 5-6).

Duration: Instantaneous.

Cost: 12. One try per dying victim (meaning that someone given a heart attack by this spell can't be injured repeatedly, but *can* be saved by a second casting).

Prerequisites: Magery 2, Awaken, and Stop Spasm.

ILLUSION AND CREATION SPELLS

Death spells in this college fall into two distinct categories: deadly *illusions* resisted by the mind (IQ, Will, or Per) and lethal *creations* resisted by the body (HT). Exceptions that cross these lines are extremely unlikely.

Create Foreign Body (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT

Materializes matter in the manner of Create Object . . . but *inside* the subject's body! As with that spell, the creation requires contact with a living, thinking being. Targets that don't fit this description are immune.

Casters spending this much energy usually opt to obstruct the subject's circulation. If the victim fails to resist with HT, the result is identical to a mortal wound (p. B423): The target instantly falls unconscious and must roll vs. HT every 30 minutes, with *any* failure meaning death. At TL6+, trauma maintenance can help.

Natural recovery occurs only if one of those HT rolls critically succeeds. Otherwise, surgery (roll as if the subject were at -HP), Dispel Creation (at -5 without a way to see the obstruction), or Remove Curse is needed. Neither Counterspell nor Dispel Magic is effective. A victim who recovers is at the lower of -HP or current HP.

The above is the *fastest* this spell can kill. Slower options (like coma) are possible, as are nonlethal ones (e.g., crippled body parts); effects vary, but the cure is identical. The condition – mortal or not – must be one that a penny-sized foreign body could cause. The GM should forbid anything that targets organs the subject lacks: mortal wounds require a heart and blood; coma, a brain; and so on.

Duration: The created object lasts indefinitely while touching a living, thinking being. Thus, it vanishes upon the subject's death, or if surgically removed and set aside.

Cost: 11.

Time to cast: 2 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Body-Reading, and Create Object.

Phantom Killer (VH)

Regular; Resisted by IQ or Per

This Phantom variant can slay anything with a mind (IQ 1+). It creates a specter that's *visible* to everyone but *tangible* to the subject alone. The victim may choose to resist by trying to rationalize away the illusion (IQ) or see through it (Per).

Successful resistance causes the image to melt away harmlessly. A subject who fails to resist is instantly engulfed in a monstrous shadow, conscious but incapacitated. Over the next minute, he can do *nothing* but resist again each second. Victory here doesn't end the curse but merely staves off harm; each loss drains 1 HP. If total injury from this spell (maximum 60 points) ever reaches his full HP score, he's slain. The cause of death could be anything: a man might die of profound shock, a robot may shake itself apart, a spirit could actually be *consumed* by an apparition of pure mana.

Others may attempt to dispel the phantasm using Dispel Illusion (or in theory Remove Curse, though in practice that's too slow). General countermagic – such as Counterspell or Dispel Magic – is *ineffective*. So are attacks on the Phantom Killer or its creator!

This spell is extremely costly because it can incapacitate, injure, and probably kill any foe whose allies can't cast Dispel Illusion – including one that lacks a physical body, like a ghost or an invading telepathic mind.

Duration: 1 minute.

Cost: 25. Cannot be maintained.

Prerequisites: Magery 3 and Phantom.

KNOWLEDGE SPELLS

“Knowledge that kills” is whimsical, and best-suited to campaigns that focus on story, have a mythic setting, or otherwise privilege thoughtful drama. Most such magic affects only living, sapient (IQ 6+) beings, who must resist using wits (IQ), not resolve (Will).

Forbidden Wisdom (VH)

Regular; Resisted by IQ

Reveals a truth that’s forbidden to living, mortal beings by Fate, the gods, or Things Man Was Not Meant To Know. Subjects with IQ 0-5 are immune. An IQ 6+ target must resist with IQ.

Failure to resist means the subject is *unmade*, along with anything carried. This isn’t mere death or even disintegration; it’s erasure from existence by the entities who forbade the knowledge. The only way to restore the victim is to approach and petition those beings.

Successful resistance means the subject is fine and the *caster* glimpses the proscribed wisdom. A wizard is usually smart enough to prepare for this risk, getting an uncontested IQ roll to avoid any ill effects. Any result but critical failure results in no harm; critical failure means *he’s unmade!*

Duration: Instantaneous (and irreversible!).

Cost: 11.

Time to cast: 5 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Recall, and See Secrets.

Vision of Doom (VH)

Regular; Resisted by IQ

Shows the subject (who must be living, mortal, and sapient) the worst possible fate he might face. This is *far* more intense than Death Vision! A malicious, ghastly shade of himself – which knows *exactly* how to “get inside his head” (bypassing Fearlessness, Mind Shield, Unfazeable, etc.) – reveals truths calculated to crack his sanity.

A failed resistance roll leads to panic similar to a roll of 33 on the *Fright Check Table* (pp. B360-361): The victim goes mad and immediately tries to kill himself to avoid the revealed fate, in the most expedient way his environment and resources allow. A knight battling a monster might bare his throat and invite *Instant Death* (p. B423), a gunslinger may “eat a bullet,” and so on. Each failed suicide allows a new resistance roll to break the curse; otherwise, the only way to lift it is to die or receive a Remove Curse spell, though the victim can be knocked out, restrained, or granted a temporary reprieve by Relieve Madness.

Duration: Lasting, until the subject dies, fails at suicide and resists, or is saved by Remove Curse.

Cost: 10.

Time to cast: 3 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3 and Summon Shade.

Resurrection

The magical cure for death is a Resurrection spell or elixir. Either requires a corpse that isn’t missing important pieces (e.g., the brain) or injured to -10×HP. Only some death spells are this respectful:

Leaves corpse that responds to Resurrection: **Assassin’s Weapon, Coma, Create Foreign Body, Death, Death’s Banquet, Dispel Spark, Doomtouch, Dread Curse, Drown, Embolism, Euthanize, Lethal Lightning, Mind-Killer, Mortal Malefice, Murder Blossom, Phantom Killer, Resuscitate, Steal Breath, Stop Impulse, Vision of Doom, and Wail of the Banshee.** *Exception:* Resurrection becomes impossible if the subject hits -10×HP for any reason; e.g., terrible accident caused by Dread Curse, excessive injury from Lethal Lightning, or messy suicide triggered by Vision of Doom.

Leaves corpse suitable for Resurrection after minor procedure: **Abominable Alteration** and **Heart of Stone** require a Remove Curse spell; **Force Guillotine** and **Quarter** call for a Surgery roll; **Reckless Reconstitution** needs a Cleansing spell; and **Zombify** necessitates killing the zombie without reducing it to -10×HP.

Leaves corpse suitable for Resurrection after major procedure: **Disruption** (liquefies vitals/brain) and **Telepathic Overload** (curdles brain) leave a cadaver that’s beyond spells or surgery, but superscience might be able to replace vital parts. Otherwise, treat as “leaves insufficient material to resurrect.”

Leaves goo that can be restored with Remove Curse, but not Resurrection: **Dissipate** and **Swamp Rot.** If the goo

isn’t collected within one minute, treat as “leaves insufficient material to resurrect.”

Leaves insufficient material to resurrect: **Annihilation** (dust), **Black Sphere** (nothing), **Butcher*** (meat), **Cleansing Light** (nothing), **Cremate*** (barbecue), **Destabilization*** (chunks), **Dimensional Dissection*** (fewer chunks), **Dust to Dust** (dust), **Fatal Frequency*** (goo), **Grave Grounding** (nothing), **Shadow-Slay** (nothing), **Snuff Life’s Flame** (soot), and **Thousand-Legged Demise*** (gobs). The immortal soul survives, so the victim may be able to return as a ghost. Spells marked * leave enough organic matter to clone.

Transports victim to afterlife in body and soul, preventing Resurrection: **Underworld Imprisonment.** To get the subject back – intact or as a ghost – talk to the gods.

Leaves intact corpse but destroys soul, preventing Resurrection: **Accursed Triangle** (unless reversed in Will/3 seconds) and **Soul Prison.** These spells are permanent without the intervention of a primordial creator. Both leave a body suitable as an organ donor or a zombie.

Unmake victim’s body and soul, preventing Resurrection: **Forbidden Wisdom.** As the previous category, but doesn’t even leave a body!

These details don’t make death spells harder to learn or more costly to cast (though those that affect the soul have creepy supernatural drawbacks!). Spells that can be reversed by a mere Remove Curse are *easier* to cast, however; see *Energy Cost* (pp. 7-8).

LIGHT AND DARKNESS SPELLS

This college's death spells affect any subject made of matter or energy – living or not – which amounts to “almost anything,” increasing energy cost by *two* points.

Cleansing Light (VH)

Regular

Emit a beam of devastating energy from one hand. Treat this as a melee weapon with a 10-yard reach, not as a ranged attack; use Innate Attack (Beam) to hit. The ray lasts for a minute *or* until it strikes something, whichever comes first. The target may dodge, but block and parry are ineffective; the effects propagate through shields and weapons!

On a hit, DR is likewise ineffective – just roll the spell's effect dice (from 1d to 4d). A result equal to or greater than target HP causes the person or object to flare up in a brief blaze of light and then vanish forever. The victim's possessions are affected with him. Lesser rolls produce no injury.

Everyone who sees a target hit by Cleansing Light is affected by a Flash spell. This includes a victim who survives such an attack, whose HT roll against the flash is at -1 per 2 full points rolled on the effect dice.

This spell is costly, but a canny wizard can cast it *before* hostilities open and start battle with a death ray that lasts until he hits someone. A *powerful* wizard could have two, one lancing from each hand!

Duration: 1 minute or until a target is hit, whichever comes first.

Cost: 12, plus 1 per die of effect, to a maximum of four dice. Cannot be maintained.

Time to cast: 3 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3 and 10 Light and Darkness spells, including Flash, Light Jet, and Sunbolt.

Shadow-Slay (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT or Will

Turns the subject and up to 6 lbs. of clothing into a two-dimensional shadow – much like the Body of Shadow spell – for long enough to erase with magic similar to Remove Shadow. The only defense is to resist, although the victim may do so with the *higher* of HT or Will. Everything is over in an instant; if the subject is fails to resist, he's gone for good, leaving behind his remaining possessions but no body to resurrect.

Duration: Instantaneous (and irreversible!).

Cost: 14. Must affect the entire subject, not just part of it!

Time to cast: 5 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Body of Shadow, and Remove Shadow.

MAKING AND BREAKING SPELLS

Standard Making and Breaking magic cannot affect the living – it's limited to objects. To finesse this, wizards must borrow tricks from other colleges, most often Body Control or

Necromantic. Thus, this college's death spells often have external prerequisites.

Annihilation (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT

This spell – first described in *GURPS Thaumatology: Magical Styles* – instantly and irrevocably disintegrates a living being. If the subject fails to resist, roll the dice of effect (from 1d to 4d) and compare the total to the *larger* of the victim's HT or HP.

If the roll equals or exceeds the target score, the subject is turned to dust. Anything he's carrying falls to the ground. Otherwise, the victim suffers injury equal to the roll of the dice, exactly as if he had been hit with a Deathtouch spell.

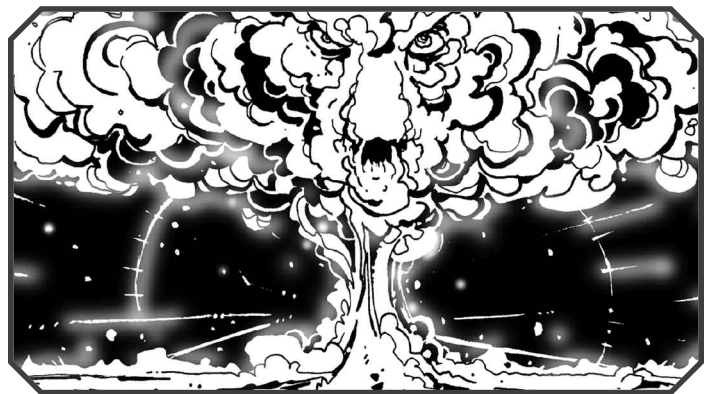
Critical failure with this spell costs the *caster* 1 HT permanently!

Duration: Instantaneous (and irreversible!).

Cost: 6, plus 2 per die of effect, to a maximum of four dice.

Time to cast: 3 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Disintegrate, and either Deathtouch or Steal Vitality.



Destabilization (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT

As Annihilation – including critical failure effects – with one change: If the effect roll exceeds the subject's HT or HP, he doesn't turn to dust but instead flies apart. Everyone within five yards risks being hit by bones, teeth, shards of exoskeleton, or whatever for 1d cutting damage; see *Fragmentation Damage* (pp. B414-415). The GM may make this damage crushing for soft creatures, corrosion for acid slimes, and so on.

Possessions fall to the ground, but roll 1d for clothing or armor. A result greater than the item's DR means it's shredded (destroyed).

Duration: Instantaneous (and irreversible!).

Cost: 8, plus 2 per die of effect, to a maximum of four dice.

Time to cast: 3 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Annihilation, and Explode.

META-SPILLS

Meta-Spells manipulate magic itself, so deadly ones make the most sense in settings where life is magical enough for anti-magic to affect it. However, this is *also* the college of two powerful fate-changers – Bless and Curse – and Fate and Death are often linked.

Dispel Spark (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT or Will

Snuffs the magical spark of life. The subject resists using “will to live,” represented by the *better* of HT or Will. Failure means the victim dies on the spot, leaving whatever remains a natural death would leave.

This spell can also slay beings (re-)animated by *magic*. This includes but isn't limited to constructs and undead produced by the Doppelgänger, Golem, Homunculus, Lich, Simulacrum, Wraith, and Zombie spells. Nonmagically animated entities (e.g., robots) are unaffected.

In most settings, Dispel Spark treads on ground claimed by Higher Powers. Subjects with Power Investiture may add this to their resistance roll (*as well as* Magic Resistance, if they have it). Critical failure with this spell attracts divine justice: The caster must resist his own, unmodified spell level or be the one slain!

Duration: Instantaneous. Subject can be resurrected normally.

Cost: 12.

Time to cast: 5 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Drain Mana, and Remove Aura.

Dread Curse (VH)

Regular; Resisted by Will

Curses the subject – who needn't be alive, only animate – to certain doom. The next success roll the victim fails for *anything* brings deadly disaster! The fatal chain of events doesn't have to be probable, plausible, or especially sensible. The only limit is the GM's imagination, though this should be colored by the failure.

The most common cause of death is a freak accident or a lucky enemy hit that results in mortal wound status or reaching -5×HP against all odds and regardless of protection. There's a world of possibilities: decapitating oneself with a Fast-Draw failure (or even a Survival failure when opening tinned rations), deadly surprise attacks triggered by blown social rolls, spontaneous combustion . . . If the subject is doing nothing that could lead to such an outcome, the culprit may be a mortal condition stemming from an undiagnosed flaw. Failure during physical activity might indicate a heart attack, while a failed mental task could mean stroke inflicting coma or a mortal wound.

Remove Curse *can* lift this spell, but there's a risk: The wizard casting it gets one try only. Any failure counts as failure by *the subject*, producing a lethal backfire. The effects could resemble any of the other death spell in this collection!

This spell is cheap to cast because death *isn't* immediate or predictable, and can be staved off by doing nothing until someone renders aid with Remove Curse.

Duration: Lasting, until the subject fails a dice roll or is saved by Remove Curse.

Cost: 10.

Time to cast: 4 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3 and Curse.

MIND CONTROL SPELLS

The customary way to kill with mental influence is to command someone to do the deed, but it's possible to cut out the

middleman. The limits of Mind Control still apply, meaning that its death spells affect only beings with racial IQ 6+ and free will, a group equivalent in size to “living beings” for the purpose of judging energy cost.

Coma (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT

A lethal escalation of the Sleep spell! Instead of sending the subject to sleep for eight hours, it induces a coma of indefinite length. This works much as described on p. B429, except that the victim receives no HT roll to awaken spontaneously. An Awaken spell or equivalent TL6+ medicine *does* allow a HT roll, but at a basic -6 (exactly as if drugged). Without such intervention, the victim must roll vs. HT every 12 hours until he eventually fails and dies.

Duration: The spell lasts an instant, but the effects are permanent unless reversed via magic or medical care.

Cost: 11.

Time to cast: 3 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Lesser Geas, and Sleep.

Mind-Killer (VH)

Regular; Resisted by Will

Coerces the subject to will his own death. Failure to resist means he suffers the effects of a Sickness spell *and* must roll a Quick Contest of his Will vs. his HT every second (60 times in all). Ties or wins for HT have no special effect, but each victory for Will lowers HT by 1, which favors Will in the *next* Contest. If HT ever reaches 0, the victim gives up and dies on the spot.

Someone who *recognizes* this spell – which might call for a Thaumatology roll, at the GM's option – can treat the subject by reinforcing HT with Vigor and/or lowering Will with Weaken Will (though the latter is ill-advised around a hostile Mind Control mage!). Once Mind-Killer takes hold, however, neither Counterspell nor Dispel Magic can nullify it. Remove Curse *is* effective, if someone can cast it in time.

If the spell ends without killing its victim – whether due to luck or magical aid – the subject returns to full HT and suffers no lasting ill effects.

Duration: 1 minute.

Cost: 13. Cannot be maintained.

Time to cast: 4 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Sickness, and Strengthen Will.

MOVEMENT SPELLS

Death spells in the Movement college traditionally rely on major force of some kind, and thus affect any *material* target, living or not. Such utility adds *two* points to energy cost.

Disruption (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT

Induces intense, chaotic forces *within* the target. If the subject fails to resist, roll the spell's dice of effect (from 1d to 4d) and assess that many HP of injury. Should this harm equal or exceed the victim's HP score, it's immediately fatal regardless of HT or advantages.

Someone slain by Disruption is mangled as if by an internal explosion. Victims who had a brain or vitals can be resurrected only by methods that don't require these things to be intact – but even those without such organs are susceptible to this spell, which works on any material target that isn't Diffuse. Carried items are unaffected, although oozing bodily fluids may ruin some gear.

Duration: Instantaneous (and irreversible!).

Cost: 10, plus 2 per die of effect, to a maximum of four dice.

Time to cast: 3 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3 and any 10 Movement spells, including Manipulate and Undo.

Quarter (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT

Exposes the subject to intense magical forces from *without*. This is an all-or-nothing attempt to pull someone or something apart: Resistance means the target's structural integrity beats the magic, with no lasting ill effects . . . otherwise, the victim ends up in four chunks of roughly equal size.

Most material targets, even Diffuse ones, are instantly killed or wrecked by quartering – though for beings specifically able to survive in fragments, it's no less survivable than any other dissection. Resurrection of a formerly living subject requires someone to stitch together the parts first (a Surgery roll). Machines need Rebuild, not merely Repair, if any part goes missing.

The victim's equipment is mostly left intact, but torso armor, full-body suits, or anything else worn over half or more of the body is doomed. The GM has the final say.

Duration: Instantaneous (and irreversible!).

Cost: 15.

Time to cast: 5 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3 and any 10 Movement spells, including Pull and Repel.

NECROMANTIC SPELLS

GURPS Magic offers one true death spell for this college (Evisceration), plus several that *might* kill (for instance, Pestilence inflicting terminal disease, Soul Jar followed by destroying the "jar," and extended use of Steal Vitality). Here are two more. The GM may rule that any fitting death spell from another college *also* counts as Necromantic.

Soul Prison (VH)

Regular; Resisted by Will

This spell (first seen in **GURPS Magical Styles: Dungeon Magic**) attempts to rip out the subject's *soul*, leaving his body to perish. It can only affect a target who has both a physical body and a genuine soul to separate from it. Spirit entities are immune, as are summoned and created ones; when in doubt, the GM decides. Holy folk *aren't* immune, but may add Power Investiture to their resistance roll.

A subject who fails to resist collapses in a coma. This works much as described on p. B429, but the victim gets no HT roll

to awaken and cannot be roused with the Awaken spell or similar measures – he's soulless, not asleep. He must roll vs. HT every 12 hours until he finally fails and dies.

Soul Prison has one creepy drawback: Victims killed by it get to roll a Quick Contest of Will with the caster at the moment of death. Slain wizards add Magery to Will, while holy folk add Power Investiture. Victory lets them return to haunt their killer as whatever kind of ghostly undead suits their personality (GM's preference).

Duration: Permanent, unless reversed by Remove Curse before the subject dies.

Cost: 12.

Time to cast: 3 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Banish, and Soul Jar.

Zombify (VH)

Special

Infects a living person with a magical disease that kills in minutes and reanimates his corpse as a mindless zombie. The subject must be willing (unlikely!) or totally helpless (e.g., bound or unconscious). The caster has to maintain physical contact throughout the

entire ritual. As with Pestilence, Steal Vitality, and Soul Jar, the victim's defense is "not being subdued by a necromancer" – there's no resistance roll, though Magic Resistance penalizes the success roll.

Once the spell is cast, the subject *will* become a zombie slave – per the Zombie spell – in (HT - 10) minutes, minimum one minute. Resistant to Disease adds to HT, slowing the process, but even Immunity to Disease can't stop it; that advantage merely gives +15 to HT, delaying the inevitable. Throughout the entire transformation, the victim suffers as if stricken by an Agonize spell; if unconscious, this awakens him.

The spell counts as "on" for the caster while the disease runs its course, giving -1 to cast other spells. He can end it (*Canceling Spells*, p. B237) at any time before the victim becomes a zombie, making it a useful form of torture; agony, impending death, and *the threat of becoming a zombie* give +6 to rolls made for coercion, including Interrogation. Terminating the spell an instant before zombification results in simple death.

Zombify can be halted by Cure Disease or Remove Curse before the subject dies. In practice, only casters with exceptional skill levels (for time reduction) rushing to save victims with high effective HT are likely to succeed. Zombify resists Cure Disease just as it would Remove Curse.

In some game worlds, this spell creates *infectious* zombies, and anyone they kill will rise as undead. Such zombies (even "patient zero") are *not* under the caster's control! In other settings, that version coexists with the standard one. For an in-depth exploration of different kinds of zombies and spells for creating them, see **GURPS Zombies**.

Duration: Subject's (HT - 10) minutes, after which the effects become permanent.

Cost: 10. Cannot be maintained.

Time to cast: 1 minute.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Pestilence, and Zombie.

*And lastly, his body
to be quartered and
the quarters set up in
some high and eminent
place, to the view and
detestation of men.*

– Edward Coke
(1603)

PLANT SPELLS

The Plant college already offers a spell that can slay sentient, animate beings: Wither Plant. This is a death spell – ask a walking tree! Below are spells for slaughtering non-vegetable foes.

Murder Blossom (VH)

Regular

Conjures a beautiful flower to hand that belches forth a jet of deadly pollen a second later. There's no way to delay this. To exploit it, the caster's maneuver on the turn after casting the spell must be Attack, All-Out Attack, or Move and Attack. Any other choice dissipates the pollen harmlessly, wasting the spell.

The caster may direct the blast at a one-yard-wide circle – one hex, on a combat map – within four yards. Treat this as *Attacking an Area* (p. B414). Roll against Innate Attack (Beam)+4 to hit, checking for scatter on a miss. (*Exception:* Hitting the wizard's own hex requires no roll, and happens automatically if the caster is stunned, unconscious, or otherwise incapacitated when the blossom erupts.) The only defense allowed is diving for cover (p. B377), and shield DB provides no benefit.

Anyone who fails to escape the area is affected – this is a rare death spell that can kill multiple people. Roll the spell's effect dice (from 1d to 4d) once per victim. Any result equal to or greater than that person's HT indicates a fatal allergic reaction. Treat this as a mortal wound (p. B423): The target instantly falls unconscious and must roll vs. HT every 30 minutes, with *any* failure meaning death. At TL6+, trauma maintenance can help.

Natural recovery occurs on a critical success on the HT roll. Otherwise, the only cure is suitable TL6+ medication or a Neutralize Poison spell, at -5 unless Identify Plant is cast first to determine *what* pollen caused the reaction. Victims who recover are at -2 to DX for 3d seconds afterward, thanks to itching, but suffer no lasting harm.

The deadly pollen is a contact agent that affects any living being without the Sealed advantage (natural or from equipment) and/or Immunity to Metabolic Hazards. Magic Resistance provides no benefit – no magic is cast *on the victim*.

Duration: 1 second.

Cost: 7, plus 1 per die of effect, to a maximum of four dice. Cannot be maintained.

Time to cast: 3 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Create Plant, and Pollen Cloud.

Swamp Rot (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT

Transforms any living subject and up to 6 lbs. of clothing to organic gunk – similar to the Body of Slime spell, but without stabilizing the results. The only defense is to resist (or ward) the spell. The subject's remaining possessions are left floating in a puddle of scum, which may ruin some gear.

“You Can't Kill Me; I'm Already Dead!”

Barring accidents and creepy supernatural drawbacks (p. 8), the subject of a death spell is normally someone besides the caster. Still, a wizard who wants to commit suicide *can* target himself, waiving any resistance roll. A fanatic might do this if losing a battle or facing capture – and if the spell involved is something like Black Sphere (p. 20), it can prevent powerful artifacts from being captured. Such twists are delightfully creepy, especially when they involve magic-workers who are likely to return as undead, a destiny all too common among masters of death magic!

Mind Control magic (e.g., Charm) *can* coerce an enemy magic-user to commit suicide this way, though that's inefficient. If you control your opponent's mind, why not compel him to cast death spells on your *other* adversaries? Death magic is also fussy compared to ordering someone to drink poison, fall on a sword, or similar. Still, it has a certain poetry to it and is hardly the worst abuse of mental control, so there's no reason to forbid it.

In some settings, there may be a simple spell specially for committing suicide – the magical equivalent of a cyanide capsule. This is technically a death spell, though it can kill only the caster, and normally part of the Necromantic college. Here's one possible example.

Suicide

Special

Instantly kills the *caster*. The wizard declares an expenditure of as many FP and HP as desired – usually enough to reach -5xHP, at least. Success means these losses occur instantly and death follows without a HT or resistance roll, as long as the caster is at -HP or worse; reaching -10xHP prevents Resurrection. Failure costs the standard 1 FP (1 HP, if spending only HP) but allows repeated attempts. This spell isn't subject to the penalties in *Burning HP* (p. B237) and *Shock* (p. B419), making it a reliable way for even a sorely wounded magic-user to check out.

The theological ramifications of this spell depend on the setting. It might be considered sinful black magic; neither better nor worse than mundane suicide; or, when granted to a cleric, a very pure death.

Duration: Instantaneous. Subject can be resurrected only if above -10xHP.

Cost: Unlimited, but usually enough to ensure death.

Prerequisite: Magery 1.

This usually means the victim dies messily. However, if *all* the goo can be collected within a minute (doubtful if the subject was standing on anything but hard, dry ground like stone or finished wood), Remove Curse can reverse the effects. This must be cast before the stuff dies, which won't take long in any environment that isn't rich in rotting organic matter. The GM may require daily Biology or Naturalist rolls from the slime's caretaker.

Duration: The spell lasts an instant, but the effects are permanent unless reversed via Remove Curse.

Cost: 11. Must affect the entire subject, not just part of it!

Time to cast: 5 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3 and Body of Slime.

PROTECTION AND WARNING SPELLS

Like Food and Healing spells, Protection and Warning magic require almost perverse creativity to turn lethal. The resulting death spells share two potent traits with the rest of the college: they affect *any* subject (not just the living) and they're fast to cast. This leads to high energy costs.

Black Sphere (VH)

Regular; Special Resistance

Conjures a spherical Utter Dome around *any* physical subject (the target needn't be alive) . . . and then collapses this inward, crushing the victim to a point and sucking him out of material existence!

Most targets resist by moving fast enough to get out – use the higher of DX or *twice* Basic Speed. Someone capable of an active defense involving teleportation (such as the Blink spell, or the Warp advantage at -10) or insubstantiality (e.g., the Phase spell) may choose to rely on that instead; this is a resistance roll using the controlling score, not an active defense roll. Magic Resistance always subtracts from the caster's skill, but it adds only to the subject's DX- or Speed-based resistance.

Failure to resist is instantly lethal for all subjects. No corpse is left to resurrect, and gear is likewise gone for good. This destruction is purely physical; there's no effect on the immortal soul.

Duration: Instantaneous (and irreversible!).

Cost: 15.

Prerequisites: Magery 3 and Utter Dome.

Force Guillotine (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT

Conjures a Force Wall precisely angled to bisect a single, material subject. Resistance means the force blade fails to materialize. Otherwise, the victim is cut in half along any simple plane the caster specifies.

Bisection is immediately lethal to most physical beings (even Diffuse ones!). Entities that can survive being chopped in half suffer whatever effects that would normally have on them. The only targets truly *immune* to this spell are those that could pass through a Force Dome – that is, magical creatures and items.

Resurrection of a formerly living subject requires a Surgery roll to sew together the halves. Complex machines need Rebuild if either part goes missing. As for the target's gear, *magical* equipment is unaffected, but mundane items worn across the specified plane are also bisected.

Duration: Instantaneous (and irreversible!).

Cost: 15.

Prerequisites: Magery 3 and Force Wall.

SOUND SPELLS

This college's death spells tend to exploit either accursed sounds deadly to mortals or shockwaves harmful to *all* targets. Here's an example of each.

Fatal Frequency (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT

Attempts to shake apart the target – which can be anything material – from within. If the subject fails to resist, the spell sets up internal vibrations in the structures that would ordinarily resist damage. To determine the outcome, roll the spell's dice of effect (from 1d to 8d) and compare the total to *twice* the victim's HP.

If the roll equals or exceeds 2xHP, the subject is destroyed: crystalline targets shatter, fleshy ones liquefy, liquid ones atomize, and so on. Resurrection or repair is impossible! Equipment is unaffected, though it might be covered in goo or particulate.

On any lesser roll, the victim is stunned but uninjured. Roll vs. HT every second to recover, at a penalty equal to the number of effect dice (-1 to -8).

Duration: Instantaneous (and irreversible!).

Cost: 6, plus 1 per die of effect, to a maximum of eight dice.

Time to cast: 3 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Concussion, and Sound Jet.

Wail of the Banshee (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT

The caster emits a deadly howl audible to everyone but intended for a specific victim. He must either know the subject's name (a *common* name will do) or be able to both see and point to the target.

For this spell to work, there must be a path from caster to subject through a fluid medium (e.g., air or water) – that is, if the wizard were shouting, it should be audible at the target's location. However, the victim doesn't have to *hear* the wail; considerations such as deafness or earplugs afford no protection. What is important is that the subject be alive, have IQ 6+, and possess none of Supernatural Durability, Unaging, or Unkillable. Thaumalogists claim the sound opens a spiritual portal to the realm of Death.

If the subject fails to resist, he dies on the spot. Apparent cause of death is whatever "natural causes" seem likely to end that person's life – generalized organ failure from great age, unless the GM wants to get specific. Successful resistance means the subject survives unharmed.

Critical failure with this spell afflicts the caster with Cannot Speak (p. B125). Until this is bought off – which requires 15 character points – the wizard can *only* make horrid wailing noises and cannot cast spells known below skill 15 (see *Magic Rituals*, p. B237).

Duration: Instantaneous. Subject can be resurrected normally.

Cost: 11.

Prerequisites: Magery 3 and any 10 Sound spells, including Message.

TECHNOLOGICAL SPELLS

The Radiation sub-college is obviously baneful to the living, while Metal and Plastic magic might allow lethal perversions of Body of Metal and Body of Plastic. It's harder to justify Machine spells and Energy spells that slay the living . . . so here's some help.

Reckless Reconstitution (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT

Causes minuscule bits of inorganic matter in or on a living, organic body to grow into whatever they chipped off of. Accidentally ingested grains of sand, specks of grit in the eye, and inhaled dust particles become boulders; arrow or bullet fragments in forgotten wounds turn into intact projectiles; and so on.

If the subject fails to resist, such growth occurs instantly, resulting in some 200 lbs. of inclusions. This isn't the lingering, preventable death of Create Foreign Body (p. 14) – the body is riddled with *macroscopic* hunks of junk! Even a Homogenous target ruptures catastrophically. Only victims who are somehow Diffuse despite being living and organic are immune. Clothing and armor are ruined by this bursting effect, and the corpse is left with chunks of garbage wedged in it.

Assume that every living being carries around enough stray dirt to be affected, with the exception of those subjected to a full-body Cleansing spell in the past hour. This offers a loophole: Cleansing is the faster spell, and can be cast before a wizard finishes Reckless Reconstitution! Only someone who *knows* about this death spell and makes a Thaumatology roll is likely to recognize it being cast, however.

Duration: The spell lasts an instant, but the created matter is permanent.

Cost: 12.

Time to cast: 12 seconds.

Prerequisite: Rebuild.

Stop Impulse (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT

Works like Stop Power on impulses traveling from the brain to the rest of the body. Thus, it can affect only a living subject who has a brain. Varieties of Injury Tolerance that encompass No Brain grant total immunity.

The effects of failed resistance depend on whether the victim has a heart as well as a brain. If he does, he suffers a heart attack *exactly* as described on p. B429, and can be resuscitated normally if he gets suitable help in time. On a subject without a heart, the only effect is paralysis (also on p. B429).

Unlike most death spells, this one can be maintained. For as long as it is, attempts to resuscitate a heart-attack victim don't merely have to succeed, but must beat the spell in a Quick Contest. A subject without a heart simply remains paralyzed.

Duration: 1 minute, but heart attack or death endures after the spell ends.

Cost: 13 to cast. 7 to maintain.

Time to cast: 3 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Stop Power, and Total Paralysis.

WATER SPELLS

This is an excellent college for death spells, as it can manipulate the life-giving water that makes up the majority of any natural living creature. Such magic usually *depends* on this mode of action, and is ineffective on beings that contain no water.

Dissipate (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT

This spell (adapted from *GURPS Magical Styles: Dungeon Magic*) causes a subject made mostly of water to lose structural integrity, melting to thick fluid. Living beings that require water – humans, elves, tigers, trees, fungi, etc. – are definitely affected, as are flesh golems, water elementals, and rotting undead. Creatures of air, earth, fire, or metal definitely aren't; neither are immaterial spirits. The GM settles corner cases; e.g., he might rule that robots made of "wet nanotech" or "liquid metal" are affected, while classic metal men aren't.

Dissipate amounts to a death spell on anyone it affects. However, Remove Curse can reverse it *if* the victim's residue is collected within a minute. As the residual matter is a liquid, Shape Water is useful here.

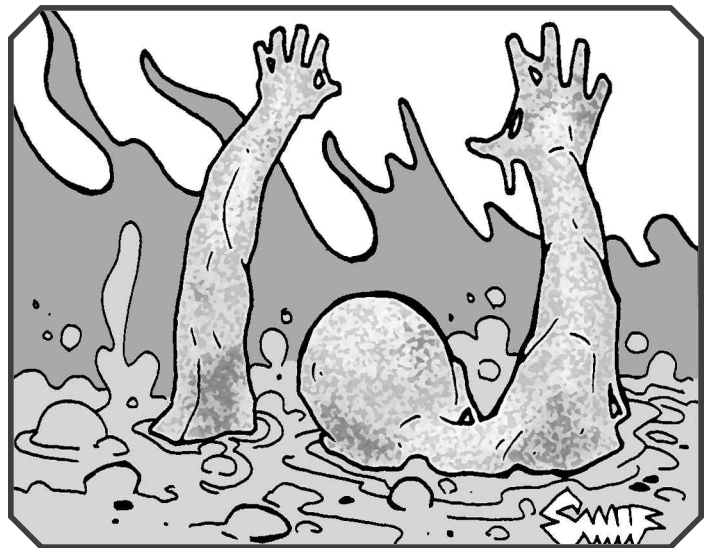
Unlike most death spells that transform the victim, Dissipate doesn't affect even a small amount of clothing – only the subject.

Duration: The spell lasts an instant, but the effects are permanent unless reversed via Remove Curse.

Cost: 12. Must affect the entire subject, not just part of it!

Time to cast: 2 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, plus *either* Body of Water and Earth to Water, or Flesh to Ice and Melt Ice.



Drown (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT

Fills the subject's lungs with water. This works as *Suffocation* (pp. B436-437): The victim loses 1 FP per second. At 0 FP, he must make Will rolls to remain conscious, and loses 1 HP per FP lost. At -FP, he passes out automatically, FP loss stops, and he loses 1 HP per second. Death is certain in four minutes regardless of FP or HP.

Clearing the lungs and resuscitation work as for mundane drowning, except that while the spell endures, rescuers' rolls for these tasks must defeat the spell in a Quick Contest, not merely succeed! Victims revived after more than two minutes of unconsciousness have to roll vs. HT to avoid a permanent -1 to IQ.

This spell affects only living, breathing beings that could drown. Doesn't Breathe gives immunity.

Death and Clerics

In some settings, there are gods who restrict death spells to their servants. This strengthens their temporal powerbase by deterring threats to their temples and worshippers. In other worlds, death magic is a fundamental part of what *all* spellcasters do – though it might be “forbidden black magic” for anyone but holy folk. Not all death spells are equally *appropriate* for clerics, of course.

Spells that poetically revoke the gift of life (**Dispel Spark**, **Dust to Dust**, **Snuff Life’s Flame**, and **Steal Breath**) or commit sinners to the faith’s equivalent of Hell (**Underworld Imprisonment**) are customary. Other magic lacks the symbolism but gets the job done in a straightforward way that befits a divine pronouncement: **Death**, **Doom-touch**, **Wail of the Banshee**, and the like. If clerics are traditionally healers, **Euthanize** and **Resuscitate** will be near-universal, too.

Many other spells suit casters who serve specific categories of deities. Clerics of primordial creators might remove enemies with **Annihilation** or **Black Sphere** – or even *unmake* them via **Forbidden Wisdom**. Servants of Fate may wield **Dread Curse** or **Vision of Doom**. For the forces of Good, **Cleansing Light** is thematic; for the legions of Evil, **Mind-Killer**, **Phantom Killer**, **Shadow-Slay**, and **Zombify**. And if a college matches a divine sphere, its death spells are fitting for representatives of that realm’s rulers;

e.g., **Cremate** for fire cultists, **Dissipate** or **Drown** for sea priests, **Lethal Lightning** for storm worshippers, and **Murder Blossom**, **Swamp Rot**, or **Thousand-Legged Demise** for fantasy druids.

Not *all* death spells befit clerics, however. Materialistic magic with a quasi-medical or -scientific explanation – notably **Coma**, **Create Foreign Body**, **Death’s Banquet**, **Embolism**, **Fatal Frequency**, **Grave Grounding**, **Stop Impulse**, and **Telepathic Overload** – seems better-suited to secular wizardly researchers. This is particularly true of gruesome, unnatural displays of brute force: **Abominable Alteration**, **Butcher**, **Destabilization**, **Dimensional Dissection**, **Disruption**, **Force Guillotine**, **Heart of Stone**, **Quarter**, and **Reckless Reconstitution**. Most gods don’t want mortals toying with souls via **Accursed Triangle** or **Soul Prison**, either. Finally, as blessed relics are customarily awarded rather than mass-produced, Enchantments like **Assassin’s Weapon** and **Mortal Malefice** are unlikely.

In all cases, the sole prerequisite becomes some degree of Power Investiture. Given how potent death magic is, this should be extreme – higher than the three levels normally required when Magery is involved. Power Investiture 4+ is recommended. In *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy*, assume Power Investiture 6 for anything besides Euthanize (PI 1) or Resuscitate (PI 5).

Duration: 4 minutes, but injury, brain damage, death, etc. endure after the spell ends.

Cost: 13. Cannot be maintained.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Breathe Air, and Breathe Water.

Time to cast: 5 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Body of Lightning, and Resist Lightning.

WEATHER SPELLS

Life-ending Weather spells nearly always slay by exploiting the college’s command of lightning, not by conjuring foul weather. Any lightning spell that injures and stuns might have a variant with double energy cost that injures and *kills*, as exemplified by Lethal Lightning (p. 22).

Grave Grounding (VH)

Regular; Resisted by HT

Transforms the subject and up to 6 lbs. of clothing to electricity – as per the Body of Lightning spell – which it instantly and fatally grounds out. This magic can destroy any material being, living or not, but the target *must* be in electrical contact with the ground or a body of water; footwear, pavement, or anything metallic or wet (e.g., the deck of a ship at sea) is no defense, but a non-conducting floor protects completely.

Witnesses without Enhanced Time Sense see the subject vanish in flash. The victim is *gone*, leaving behind possessions not turned to lightning (roll vs. HT for electronic or electrical devices, with failure meaning a short-circuit that requires repairs). Examination will find a branching pattern on the ground, with fulgurites buried beneath it in suitable soil.

Duration: Instantaneous (and irreversible!).

Cost: 14. Must affect the entire subject, not just part of it!

Lethal Lightning (VH)

Missile

Works almost identically to the Lightning spell – including treating metallic armor as DR 1 and behaving as if it has the Surge modifier (p. B105) – but inflicts *lethal* electrical damage (p. B432) affecting the target’s entire body.

Anyone wounded by Lethal Lightning must make a HT roll at -1 per 2 HP of injury. Failure by 1-4 means immediate unconsciousness for (20 - HT) minutes, minimum one minute, and then -2 to DX for another (20 - HT) minutes upon awakening. Failure by 5 or more, or critical failure, results in a heart attack *exactly* as described on p. B429; the victim can be resuscitated if he gets suitable help in time, but will otherwise die.

Unconsciousness and DX penalties affect any living target with a brain; the No Brain, No Head, Homogenous, and Diffuse varieties of Injury Tolerance grant immunity. Heart attack affects only a living being that has a heart – that is, without Injury Tolerance that includes No Vitals. It is possible to be susceptible to one but not the other!

Cost: Any amount up to twice your Magery level per second, for three seconds. The bolt does 1d-1 burning damage per full two points of energy.

Time to cast: 1 to 3 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 3 and Lightning.

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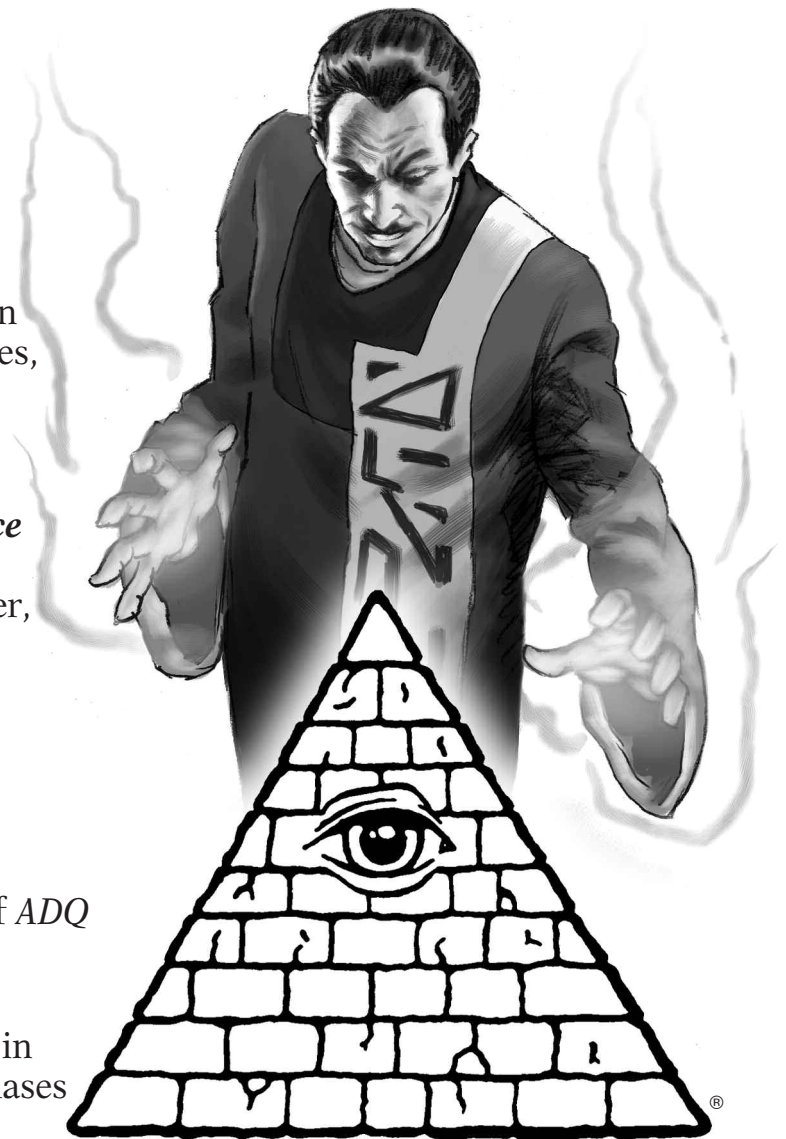
*Sealed with a curse as sharp
as a knife. Doomed is your soul
and damned is your life.*

*– Lord John Whorfin,
in The Adventures of
Buckaroo Banzai Across
the Eighth Dimension*

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